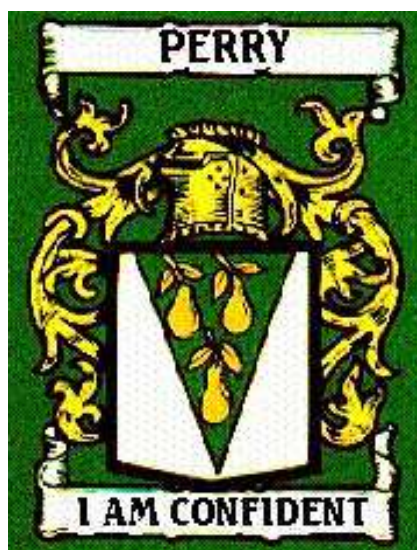


A BACKWARD GLANCE

The Memoirs of Colin Stewart Perry,
a Lad from Liverpool



Index

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
1 In The Beginning – Of Parents & Grandparents	3
2 West Kirby and The Family Circle	7
3 My Early Years	14
4 Australia Bound	24
5 The Glenorie Years – 1952 to 1956	33
6 School Days, School Days, Dear Old Golden Rule Days	50
7 Into The Workforce	57
8 The Glenorie Years – 1957 to 1959	61
9 The Conper Expeditions	71
10 A New Address and a New Job	78
11 Wedding Bells	85
12 Growing a Family	89
13 My Brilliant Career – One	102
14 Our Family Through The Seventies	119
15 From Family To Empty Nesters	129
16 My Brilliant Career – Two	142
17 Into Retirement	158
18 Nine Months In Europe	174
19 To The End Of The Twentieth Century	194
20 Life In The Noughties	208
21 Growing Old Gracefully	228
22 Back to Blighty and Other Wanderings	251
23 Looking Back	271
Appendix	277
Ancestor Tree	

Chapter One

In The Beginning – Of Parents and Grandparents

I came into this world at around six in the afternoon of 21 April 1940, a birth day I would share with Queen Elizabeth the Second among others. My parents later told me of their relief that I didn't appear on the scene a day earlier, which would have been on Adolf Hitler's birthday! I uttered my first cries in a nursing home in Balliol Road, Bootle, a suburb of the great port city of Liverpool on England's north west coast. Sixty five years later my cousins showed me what was almost certainly that same nursing home, which had now become a hospice for geriatric patients; their certainty came from the fact that their own mother was born in the same two storey mansion.

My father, Ronald Krebs Perry, was born on 5 May 1907 at 18 Neville Road, Waterloo, Liverpool, the son of William John Perry and Emily Welding. The unusual name of Krebs appears to have come from William's father, Christian Krebs Perry, and was presumably a family name from some earlier time; I've not been able to trace the Perry family tree beyond Christian. An interesting discrepancy arises here; while all references to Christian refer to the spelling "Krebs", Dad's birth certificate clearly shows the spelling "Krebs". Nanna and Grandad, as I always knew them by as a child, also had a daughter Dorothy Eileen, born in June 1909 – there's some uncertainty about the day - and of whom more later in the story. The Perrys lived in Great Crosby, then an outer and quite genteel suburb of Liverpool, and both Dad and Eileen were educated at the prestigious Merchant Taylors Schools there.

Dad followed his father to sea, working as a ship's steward on the Bibby and Alfred Holt Blue Funnel shipping lines out of Liverpool, an occupation that took him to many parts of the world and involved long absences from home. I still have his Continuous Certificate of Discharge passbook, documenting all the voyages he undertook and the ships on which he served, and it makes for interesting reading. He first went to sea in 1924, at the age of seventeen, on a four month voyage on board the *Lagarto* from Glasgow to the west coast of South America, which presumably took him around Cape Horn. From 1925 to 1928 he was on the Australia run, firstly aboard the *Anchises* and then the *Nestor*. My Uncle Roy Griffiths believes that Dad and his own father, Thomas Griffiths, served together on the same ships during that period. In 1929 he switched to the China run aboard the *Patroclus*, which lasted until 1933. In 1934 it was back to the Australia run aboard the *Nestor*, *Anchises* and *Autolycus* until 1936. Still on the *Autolycus*, he made one trip to the Far East in 1937, then in 1938 and 1939 served on the *Cheshire* on the run to Rangoon, Burma.

He had a break from the sea after that and worked in the Dock Office in Liverpool. His next voyage is shown as being on the *Ascanius* in 1941. By now it was of course wartime and he was officially registered in the British Merchant Marine. Because it was wartime his passbook doesn't show the destination of the voyages, but it has him serving on the *Priam* and *Empire Regent*. I do know that he was on convoys to Canada, South Africa, Australia and the Far East, and in recognition of that service received the 1939-45 Star and War Medal and the Atlantic, Africa, Burma and Pacific Stars. I still have his medals. I don't know whether he ever fired a shot in anger, but in 1943 he qualified as proficient on Hotchkiss, Lewis and Marlin anti-aircraft guns, and he was also qualified as a lifeboat man. He must have had another break from the sea in 1945, but in 1947 he was back on the *Menelaus*, on what I think was the Australia run again, until 1949. I still have a silver cigarette case that his shipmates gave him when he departed from the latter.

On 10 December 1938 Dad married my mother, Doris Tod, at St Matthew's Parish Church in the Liverpool suburb of Bootle, Lancashire, and the reception was held at the Liberal Club Hall in Balliol Road. Dad's address as shown on the marriage certificate was 390 Stanley Road, Liverpool, which was

the address of his mother's confectionery shop in Kirkdale, and my understanding is that after the marriage and through to 1951 they lived constantly with my grandparents, and that around 1941 during the Blitz they all moved from Crosby to the relative safety of 11 Princes Avenue, West Kirby in what was then Cheshire.

I always knew Dad was well educated, very literate and good at making things up from the nonsense rhymes and stories he used to tell me when I was very young. However it was not until going through some old family papers that I realised he was quite a romantic poet as well. I found some love poems he had written to my mother, and they were really very good. One of them, written on the back of a menu from the MV *Cheshire* while away at sea, is worth repeating here:

“Through a misty haze, I seem to see
Two blue eyes that shine with love for me.
Two red lips that seem to ask a kiss.
A wealth of golden hair, to crown all this.
Would this sweet dream but come to life
And I could find, within my arms, MY WIFE”

My mother, Doris, was born on 31 July 1909, the daughter of George Tod Jnr and Rosaline Forrest. A postcard from her mother announcing the birth of Doris to her father, George, who was away from home at the time, suggests that it probably took place at their then home, 68 Penton Street, somewhere in Liverpool, at 1.30pm on a Saturday. Mum was the eldest of seven children, her brothers and sisters being George, Arthur, Alexander (Alec), Rosaline, Alice and Harold. As the eldest child Mum in her teenage years was expected to assume a heavy workload of looking after her siblings, and this and the iron rule of her father caused her to leave home as soon as she was legally able to do so. She served in a number of trades, including as a pastry cook, tailoress, seamstress and furrier, and particularly in the last named one became very expert in the job. All of these stood her in good stead through her life.

My maternal grandfather, George Tod Jnr, was born at 34 Lodge Street, Manchester, Lancashire (now Greater Manchester) on 19 April 1883, the son of George Tod Snr and Elizabeth Waddilove. His mother died before he was eight years old and his father remarried to another Elizabeth, by the name of Gill. After leaving school Grandad Tod took up the trade of lead glazier, but it seems he then had a falling out with his stepmother while his father was away on business, so he left home and made his way to Liverpool, where he joined a ship as a steward. While in Liverpool he lodged with a James Moran, the grandfather of a girl named Rosaline Forrest, who also lived there and would become his wife. George married Rosaline on 2 August 1908 at St Chrysostom's Church, Everton, Lancashire. Grandad Tod was working as a steward on the RMS *Corsician* (sic) when my mother was born. Grandma Tod sent that postcard to him, care of the ship at Canada Dock, Liverpool, to announce the arrival of a "wee lassie". Interestingly, the card was addressed by her to "G Todd", not "Tod".

In 1909 he migrated to the United States, with Grandma Tod and my mother following him some time after April 1910. The family lived for several years in New York before returning to England in 1920, and George, Arthur and Alec were all born there. He firstly found work as a building watchman, then his occupation was shown as Elevator Runner on the birth certificate of son George. The certificate also shows their address as being 402 First Avenue, presumably in Manhattan, although it is certain that Mum went to school in Brooklyn - she was educated at the Knickerbocker Avenue Public School 106 in that Borough. Indeed, the 1920 Census showed George, Rosaline and family residing at 1393 Madison Street, Brooklyn, Kings, New York. His occupation was then shown as Lead Glazier, employed at the Prism Company. George, Rosaline and Mum were all classified as "aliens", as they never took out US

citizenship. The family returned to England later that year on board the SS *Carania* and took up residence in Leeds. It would seem that Grandma Tod was homesick for England and her brothers, and influenced Grandad to return. It would also seem she had second thoughts later, as the family never had it as good money-wise when back in England. In Leeds George worked for two firms as a stained glass artisan. He worked on many large projects in the city and also on the windows of York Minster, including the famous Five Sisters Window. He passed away from pneumonia and a stroke on 19 December 1949 and was cremated at Leeds Crematorium, Lawns Wood.

My maternal grandmother, Rosaline Forrest, was born at 42 Queens Road, Everton, Lancashire on 9 April 1890. Her name on her birth certificate was shown as "Rosalin", although in all subsequent references in Censuses and documents it appears as Rosaline. Interestingly, it appeared on the 1901 Census as "Nolaline"! She lost both her parents in 1907/08 and went to live with her grandfather, James Moran, in Liverpool, while her three brothers were placed in a home. As mentioned earlier, it was there that she met her future husband, George Tod, who was lodging there. I remember her with affection as a small lady with a real zest for life, and after George died she developed a real wanderlust. Grandma Tod died of a heart attack on 10 May 1970 while living at 16 Alexander Crescent, Leeds, and was cremated at the Leeds Crematorium, Lawns Wood, Leeds. Her ashes were strewn in the Garden of Remembrance.

I never knew my Uncle George Tod, as he died in Leeds in 1922 from meningitis following a fall from a tree, but I met all the other Tod brothers and sisters during my boyhood in England.

Stepping back now to my paternal grandparents, William John Perry, or Will as he was known to the rest of the family, was born in Birkenhead in what was then part of Cheshire, between April and June 1878 according to the Register of Births for that year. He was the son of Christian Krebs Perry and Elizabeth Ann Martin, living at 184 Old Chester Road, Rock Ferry. He had an elder sister Phillis and younger sisters Lillian and Florence. Christian Perry was a watchmaker and jeweller, and I can recall my grandfather having quite a collection of watchmaker tools, presumably handed down from his father. By 1891 the family was now residing at 138 Marsh Lane, presumably across the Mersey in Bootle, Liverpool and the 1901 census shows William's occupation as a hairdresser. He married my grandmother some time in the third quarter of 1905; so far I have been unable to track down the actual date.

My paternal grandmother, Emily Welding, was born on 7 February 1883 in Bootle, Liverpool, the daughter of Joseph and Anne Welding. She was one of thirteen children, large families being the order of the day in Victorian times. Four of them, Anne, Cecil, George and Joseph, died in infancy (there's some uncertainty as to whether Cecil and George were actually one and the same person.) The surviving nine, in birth order, were Alice; my grandmother; Lizzie (Bet); Gertrude; Florence (Florrie); Sarah Annie; William; Louisa; and the "baby" of the family, Albert. After leaving school she became a draper's assistant.

By 1912 the family was living in a house at 5 Kimberley Drive, Great Crosby. My Uncle Roy recalls that this was a really large house, situated in what was in those days a very affluent part of Liverpool. As he remembers, it comprised three storeys with numerous fairly substantial rooms, and the lounge at the rear had a very imposing dining table that, with the top leaves removed, revealed a good billiard table. A wide staircase led up to the first floor bedrooms and bathrooms, then a further staircase led to the next floor, which had probably been the servants quarters at some time but was now used for storage. It would seem this house became too big for them and they later moved to a very nice but much smaller semi-detached house, "Alandale", at 22 Esplen Avenue.

In the nineteen twenties both Nanna and her sister Bet had lock-up sweet and tobacco shops in Stanley Road, Kirkdale, Emily's being towards Bankhall near the Commodore Cinema and Bet's some five hundred yards away on the other side of the road. Roy thinks they were run by hired help. Eventually Bet gave hers up, while in the early 1930s Nanna moved over the road to a much larger shop at 390 Stanley Road that had living accommodation in its upper storeys. Her sister Florrie, husband Jack Bell and daughters Maureen and Nona moved in to run the shop for her. She also owned a newsagency at 397a Stanley Road.

Grandad Perry served as a ship's barber on Cunard Line ships, including the *Mauretania*, and after World War II ran a barber shop in Liverpool, I think in James Street down near the Pier Head. It would appear that he was still in the Merchant Marine in the early part of the war, as Uncle Roy, on his way to serve in Persia and Iraq, stopped off in Durban, South Africa and of all people bumped into Grandad there. Grandad was apparently on the SS *Scythia* in the same convoy, and because of his knowledge of Durban showed Roy and his friends the sights, bars and cafés of the city.

Around 1941 my grandparents sold up after one of the houses was affected by bombing and bought the house in West Kirby. I've some uncertainty as to where exactly they were living at the time of the move – Esplen Avenue or Stanley Road – as I was under the impression that they still owned both the Kimberley Drive and Esplen Avenue houses at that time.

Grandad died in March 1962, presumably in West Kirby, while Nanna died in 1971. I never knew any of Grandad Perry's sisters, and Nanna's sisters Alice and Louisa passed away before I was born. It seems her brother William was the "black sheep" of the family, as I can never recollect meeting him at the frequent family gatherings of my childhood. His wife, Kathleen "Kitty" Beaucock, was a Roman Catholic, and it's been suggested that perhaps this was the reason, although I would never have thought of the Welding family as being bigoted in that way.

Chapter Two

West Kirby and The Family Circle

To the best of my knowledge Mum and Dad had lived with Nanna and Grandad Perry ever since they'd married, and this arrangement would remain until they finally emigrated to Australia in 1951/52. As I mentioned earlier, at the outbreak of World War II my grandparents owned two houses in Crosby, one at No. 5 Kimberley Drive and another in Esplin Avenue, and Nanna also ran the sweet shop in Stanley Road. I recall hearing that the latter was destroyed during the Blitz, but this may not be correct. What is known is that one of the houses received structural damage from a nearby bomb, and this prompted them to sell up and move away from Liverpool to avoid the fierce bombing that was taking place in the early years of the War. Consequently as a babe still in arms I moved with my parents and grandparents to the town of West Kirby, on the Wirral Peninsula, in those days also part of Cheshire but now in the County of Merseyside.

West Kirby was, and still is, a genteel seaside town sitting on the mouth of the River Dee and facing across its broad estuary to the Welsh hills of Flintshire. Although only eight miles or so from Liverpool, it escaped all but the occasional stray bomb, and being in a different county the habits and speech of the inhabitants was quite different from that of Liverpool. Consequently as I grew up it was with a Cheshire accent rather than Liverpoolian, traces of which I'm told can still be heard today, especially if I get excited! Originally a fishing village until the Dee silted up, during the early years of the 20th Century it became more and more settled by the wealthy or professional people of Liverpool, escaping the grimness of that city while still having their businesses and workplaces there. As a result there were many fine houses built in West Kirby, especially on the slopes of Grange Hill overlooking the town and river. The town centre comprised three main shopping streets converging on the two railway stations – one the terminus of a steam train line to the county seat, Chester, and the other the terminus of the electrified service to Liverpool. Most of the town lay on the flat land between Grange and Column Hills and the river, and consisted of terraces and semi-detached homes of typically middle class people, and at its southern end was the small and historic "old village". Along the river bank ran an elegant Victorian promenade, lined with fine houses, gardens and the imposing Hydro Hotel, and these overlooked the pride of the town, the Marine Lake.

The Marine Lake is a fairly shallow body of water enclosed by a stone and concrete wall, of several hectares in area, which remains full of water even when the tide recedes into the distance on its ebb. Small sailing dinghies sport on its waters, and in those days a swimming baths occupied part of it; I taught myself to swim there by holding on to the chains that separated it from the main body of the lake and pushing myself off in a nervous dog-paddle, going further each time. A popular pastime was to walk around the Lake on its seawall, an occupation made a little dangerous by its slipperiness and consequently a challenge, especially to the kids of the town. The original marine lake was opened in 1905 but suffered a catastrophic leak in the early 1980s. A new lake was constructed on the site which was wider than previous and allows better sporting opportunities. Since then the lake has become a top windsurfing centre in Britain, with its old facilities modernised and upgraded. Sadly, the beautiful old Hydro Hotel has fallen to the developer's hammer and been replaced by blocks of flats.

A few famous people have lived in, or been associated with, West Kirby. George Mallory, mountaineer, was schooled there. Selwyn Lloyd, former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary and Speaker of the House of Commons, lived there. Glenda Jackson, actress and politician, attended West Kirby Girls High School. Daniel Craig, actor who played James Bond in the 2006 version of *Casino Royale*, attended Hilbre High School in West Kirby. Neither of those schools existed in my day.

My grandparents, parents and I moved into a large semi-detached house at 11 Princes Avenue, a quiet street of, for that time, upmarket houses on the lower slopes of Column Hill. The small enclave of streets of which Princes Avenue was one was separated from the rest of the town by Ashton Park, a large and quite pretty Edwardian park bisected by the Chester railway line, which was to be my playground in those childhood years. A short walk away, past the historic St Bridget's Church, was the Old Village and the *Ring O'Bells*, a lovely old black and white half timbered Tudor style pub and the Perry family's "watering hole". Across the road from the pub was a picturesque thatched cottage, *The Nook*, where in later years lived a friend, Rosemary Cook. Between Princes Avenue and the church was a small field behind a wetstone wall and some old stone farm buildings occupied by a riding school, and with several horses always in the field it seemed a quite bucolic neighbourhood.

I look back with fond memories on the house at Princes Avenue, as do several of my cousins who can remember those days in the 1940s and 1950s when it rang with laughter during the parties and family get-togethers my grandparents liked to host. Although semi-detached, it was a quite large house by any standards. A porch and then a glassed-in vestibule led into the spacious ground floor hallway, with the stairs to the upper floors facing the front door. To the left was the formal lounge and dining room, comfortably furnished and with a bay window in which I would curl up and read for hours. At the end of the hall was another smaller room, which overlooked the back garden and which was used as a second sitting room. In winter, to save on coal, my grandparents would close off the front lounge room and use the back room instead. Around the corner from the hall were the "working" rooms of the house. First came the large kitchen, although no cooking was done there, and in modern parlance it would probably be called a family room. The size of the house can be gauged by the fact that on the wall in the kitchen was one of those devices whereby a bell pushed elsewhere in the house would register on a board, causing a servant to hasten to do the master or mistress' bidding. It no longer worked, but the curiosity and fascination was still there. Next came the larder, where food was stored on cool shelves – there were no refrigerators in most homes in the 1940s – and next to it the scullery, where the crockery was kept and the washing up done. Finally came the kitchenette, where the cooking took place on a big gas stove. Outside was the laundry with its copper – no washing machine either in those days! – and the coal shed occupying a corner of the small back yard.

The first floor of the house, if my memory is correct, contained four bedrooms, a dressing room, a bathroom with a claw foot bath – showers were also unknown in most British homes of that era – and a toilet. Nanna occupied the large bedroom at the front of the house, and Grandad slept in the adjacent converted dressing room – he was a bad snorer! Mum and Dad occupied a room at the side of the house, while I slept in one of two bedrooms at the rear; I recall having to swap rooms for a period when my Aunt Gertie Griffiths, Nanna's sister, and her son, my Uncle Roy, came to live with us from about 1943 until around 1946. From my room at the back of the house were great views across the Dee and the Hilbre Islands to Wales. The top floor of the house, the attic, had a bedroom at the front with an open landing beside it, which I recall at one stage was occupied by Dad's sister Eileen and her husband Gordon on a home visit from India. A room housing the hot water system occupied the roof space at the side of the house, while at the rear a large room with sloping ceiling became my playroom and a storage area for all manner of odds and ends. I recall the attic being a very creepy place at night, and as a small boy wild horses wouldn't drag me up there after dark. Roy, who had his bedroom up there, agrees that it was a bit eerie and he felt cut off from the rest of the house.

Outside the house there was a small front garden which would become my grandmother's pride and joy. A low brick wall with a gate in the middle fronted the garden, which was surrounded on three sides by a privet hedge which in later years would become my responsibility to cut. A short path led to the front door, and there was no lawn, only garden beds in which Nanna grew beautiful roses and peonies, among other flowers. At the back of the house was a slightly larger garden, with a wall at the back, a tall privet

hedge on the higher side and the toolshed on the lower side. The lawn was cut with a hand mower, and a few shrubs and blackcurrant and raspberry canes completed the picture.

So it was in this house that I spent most of my childhood years, in a small family circle of my mother, my grandparents and my father when he was home from his voyages across the world. For the first five of those years England was at war, but given my tender age I can remember almost nothing of it. My clearest recollections were of watching a dogfight one day between a British and a German plane in the skies over West Kirby, and of the air raid shelter the family had set up under the stairs on the ground floor of the house, complete with supplies of water, tinned food and candles, buckets of sand with which to douse incendiary bombs, and those grotesque gas masks everyone was issued with. Thankfully Hitler left us alone and we never had to use it as far as I know. Perhaps my main recollection was the austerity of wartime living, with ration books for everything and being denied of everyday items such as sweets and biscuits. I can clearly remember queuing with Mum each week at the local Council Office for my allocation of orange juice, a small bottle of highly concentrated liquid that I suppose was then mixed with water. This was generally reserved for children to maintain their health with Vitamin C.

When I look back on family life during those years it was one of love and security, despite the grim times. Mum worked for most of those years, and it was Nanna as much as Mum herself who raised me and guided me in the way to behave and to respect other people, always with love and kindness. She was a person who laughed a lot and was never happier than when entertaining family and friends. Nanna was a marvellous cook, especially with pastry, and she and Mum shared the preparation of most of our meals. I can clearly remember sitting on the counter in the kitchenette with her while she whipped up a batch of delicious jam tarts – my favourites – or mixed up a cake and gave me the bowl and spoon to lick. Sunday lunch was always a roast meal, usually lamb or beef, which she cooked while enjoying a “gin and it”, her name for a martini, and when it was beef, cooked rare with the red juices (or bloody gravy as I called it) oozing out, her Yorkshire pudding was something to die for. Mind you, Mum could cook a pretty good one, too! Nanna also made a mean non-alcoholic ginger wine, which she would put together in a huge porcelain bowl and then bottle, and when the adults had their cocktails I would have a glass of ginger wine along with them.

Grandad was a different kind of personality altogether, a rather stern and austere man, and while we got on well together there was not the same warmth that emanated from my grandmother. He was a person of rather fixed ways and habits; for example, every Saturday morning without fail he would walk down to the town centre and the Dee Hotel for a couple of pints. He insisted on making and tending the coal fires we had burning in the grate of whichever sitting room we were using, and was continually piling more coal on or fiddling with the poker, to the despair of Nanna. He was bald as a badger, had a neat little moustache and always wore a topee which rather resembled Hitler’s hair style, although of course we never told him that! It was so much a fixture that some younger members of the family circle never knew about it until much later in their lives. I’ve been told he was a great worrier at any family get-together about people not missing their train home, and would be on about it some two hours before they were ready to depart. Being a barber by trade, Grandad always cut my hair; a routine that I came to dread because of his shaking hands until Nanna, realising the situation, tactfully suggested it was time I visited the local barber shop. Because Dad was away so much it was always Grandad that gave me my weekly pocket money. While he was in no way a substitute for Dad, he was very well read and passed on to me a great deal of general knowledge on a variety of subjects and in many ways was a good role model.

As I said earlier, Mum worked for most of those years, for much of the time as a dressmaker and particularly a furrier, a trade in which she had much experience. For some time she was a waitress at the *Bluebird Café* in the neighbouring town of Hoylake. By then I was old enough to go to Hoylake on my

own and would often call in to see her on the way home from the swimming pool there. The café was also a *patisserie* and the pastrycook seemed to take a liking to me. Cook would take me into her kitchen, where she'd slip me one of the mouth-watering and exquisite looking confections she was conjuring up. Needless to say I visited the place quite often! After her time at the *Bluebird* Mum returned to the fur trade, where she worked for a furrier in Liverpool and was apparently very highly thought of for her skills.

Dad served on ships for much of the time during those years, including on the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board tender *Galatea*, which was a smaller version of the Royal Yacht and mainly used for ferrying VIPs from the ocean liners to Liverpool's Pier Head and other dock projects. At one stage he "swallowed the anchor" and had shore jobs with the Board and with Pearl Assurance, selling life insurance. As a result I saw much less of him than of my mother and grandparents, although being an only child never seemed to have bothered me. I missed him very much during his absences, and when the time came for him to return on shore leave I would be waiting for him at West Kirby station when his train arrived from Liverpool, so that I could be the first one to greet him and ride home with him in a taxi. Long hours at sea and lonely visits to overseas ports caused Dad to drink and smoke more than was wise, habits that would lead to problems later in our lives and ultimately to his untimely death.

This then was the immediate family circle, but it was extended by two of Nanna's sisters and their husbands, who also lived in West Kirby and were in close contact with us. Auntie Annie and Uncle Alec Davidson, and Auntie Bet and Uncle Jack Kendall, lived next door to each other in Gleggside, on the other side of Grange Hill, and we were constantly visiting them or them us. All the adults were inveterate whist and Newmarket players and would get together almost weekly for an evening's cards, following a ritual "forty winks" that got them into the right mood. Auntie Bet had a pianola, so when the cards were at her house I delighted in putting a roll of music in it and pretending I was the world's greatest piano player. My Uncle Roy recalls having done the same thing himself when at Auntie Bet's previous house in Litherland – great minds think alike? Unlike my grandparents, both uncles owned cars and Uncle Jack had in fact owned a taxi company in Liverpool before he retired. I can't recall what kind of a car he had, but Uncle Alec, a superintendent engineer at the Birkenhead docks, had a little grey pre-war Singer and often he and Auntie Annie would take me on Sunday outings across to North Wales in it. I also relished the visits to or by my uncles, as they would always slip a two shilling piece or half crown to me when leaving, and these "uncly tips", as I called them, were a very useful supplement to my pocket money. Like my grandmother, both aunts were sociable and gregarious people, always smiling and laughing, and I was always happy in their company. Uncle Jack had a rather dry sense of humour, while Uncle Alec, although a fairly strict Presbyterian and an elder of the church, was also always ready with a joke. Sadly, after Auntie Annie died he remarried, twice I think, but lost his mental facilities and I believe died in poor circumstances.

Uncle Alec and Auntie Annie had no living children; their only son Kenneth tragically died during World War II. Ken was acting as Second Engineering Officer, Merchant Navy, on board SS *Hatara* when it was lost at sea on 2 October 1941, sunk by a German U-boat while part of a Russian convoy. His name is inscribed on the War Memorial on Grange Hill at West Kirby. Ken's fiancée was a Grace Horsfall, who I remember was a sometime member of the family circle.

Auntie Bet and Uncle Jack were childless, but Auntie Bet had a son from a previous marriage, Douglas Hilton. Her first husband, Douglas Hilton Senior, had enlisted in the Canadian Army and was killed on the Somme on 30 March 1917, three weeks before their son Douglas Junior was born. Uncle Doug was a great friend of my father and was in fact his best man when Dad married Mum. Doug married Mary Peat and they had a daughter Janet. Uncle Doug was a dentist and around 1949 they emigrated to Western Australia, where Doug became the dentist in the little wheat belt town of Katanning. There they had

two more children, Ann and Ian, before moving to Perth. I feel sure that their emigrating to Australia contributed to my own parents considering doing the same thing. Uncle Jack also had a daughter Anne from a previous marriage, who owned a kennels in Ormskirk and raised Jack Russell terriers; Auntie Bet owned one of them, a friendly little fellow named Rex.

Beyond the immediate family circle there was a wider circle of relatives on the Welding side of the family, mostly living in Liverpool. Firstly there was Nanna's sister Florrie and her husband Jack Bell, who as I mentioned earlier lived in Crosby and whose daughter Nona was the girl born in the same nursing home as myself. As a young girl Nona was apparently very close to my mother, and in fact boarded for some time with Annie and Alec during the war years. Nona later married Victor "Bill" Leyland, and from that line sprang a number of Leyland cousins, one of who I now keep in fairly close touch with.

Secondly there was Nanna's other sister Gertrude Griffiths, who was widowed some time before I was born and who lived with us at Princes Avenue for a period. A sad story is told of Auntie Gertie's demise. She died on a bus while travelling to Liverpool from her home on her way to visit Nanna at West Kirby. When the bus arrived at Central Station in Liverpool the conductor tried to wake her, thinking she had fallen asleep, but she had suffered a fatal heart attack. She had a son, Roy, and a daughter Doreen. I can remember Uncle Roy visiting in West Kirby and giving me a ride on his bicycle, although I can't actually remember him living at Princes Avenue. He had also been in the Boys Brigade in his younger days and gave me a lot of the paraphernalia from it. He married Betty Towers and I can recall attending their wedding as a ten year old. They had two children, Stewart and Susan. Doreen married Leslie Jones, and they had a daughter Gillian, a very pretty little girl who even at my tender age I fell in love with, cousin notwithstanding. They lived in Aigburth, in Liverpool, and Uncle Les spent his entire working life at the Meccano/Hornby Trains factory. He always appeared to me to be a rather stern and forbidding sort of person, and seemed to instil in me a certain nervousness when I was in his company, which thankfully was not very often. The dark side of his nature was confirmed to me many years later, when I learned from Gillian and Eric that he had tried hard but unsuccessfully to oppose and then wreck Gillian's marriage.

Finally there was Uncle Albert Welding, the youngest of the Welding siblings, his wife Florrie and their son Geoffrey. They also lived in Crosby, and occasionally Nanna would take me over there to play with Geoffrey, or they would come to Princes Avenue for the many parties and social gatherings there. Albert was a ship's engineer but after World War II worked with divers at the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board. For some of the 1930s Albert and Florrie resided with his sister Alice in her house in Crosby. Albert and Alice were insurance collectors for The Royal Liver Friendly Insurance Society. They shared a large insurance book and Albert would cycle around the Bootle and Litherland areas after work collecting money from their clients and writing the book up that evening. In later years Geoffrey and I would form the closest relationship between any of my cousins.

From memory I can't recall ever meeting another relative on the Perry side of the family, with the exception of course of Aunt Eileen, Uncle Gordon and their son John. Eileen and Gordon had married in 1936, and Gordon was employed by the State Express tobacco company. They owned a house in Hayes, Kent, but for much of the time were based in India, where Gordon was a factory manager and trouble-shooter for his company. As a result, I would only see them when they were back in England on their annual leave periods. John, my only first cousin, was a year older than I was. I guess that while a young child he resided in India with his parents, so I knew little of him in the early years, although I have photographs of him on the beach with me at West Kirby when I was about eighteen months old. In later years John went to boarding school in Taunton, Somerset, and during school holidays would stay with Auntie Annie and Uncle Alec, so I saw more of him then. John and I didn't exactly get along like a house on fire. Being a year older than me, he liked to lord it over me a bit, and also to torment me. Grandad

noticed this, and in one of the only pieces of advice I can ever remember him giving me, he told me that next time John tormented me I should punch him in the nose. This I did, drawing blood and the wrath of Nanna, but Grandad swiftly sprang to my defence and as I was following his instructions nothing much could be said.

So far the account of my family circle has dwelt exclusively on Dad's side of the family, and in fact contact with Mum's family, the Tods, was much more limited as almost all of them lived in Leeds, in Yorkshire. Occasionally Mum and I would go to Leeds to visit them, and at least once Grandma Tod came to stay with us in West Kirby, but generally my memory of them is rather vague. Grandad Tod I recall as a severe and stern man, borne out by Mum's stories of her hard childhood. I saw him so seldom that I never formed any kind of relationship with him, and he passed away in 1949 when I was only nine years old myself. Grandma Tod I remember as a small and kindly lady, but again I saw her so seldom that no clear recollection sticks in my mind, other than rather strangely remembering her taking me to Chester one day when she was staying with us.

Of my Tod uncles and aunts - Arthur and Clara, Alec and Mary, Rosaline and Larry Wilson, Alice and Geoff Philips, and Harold - I also saw very little except on our occasional visits to Leeds. Arthur and Clara lived in Rawdon, on the city's outskirts, in a little terrace cottage and had two boys, Peter and Billie. I can recall the boys taking me to their coal shed and scaring me with an old sheep's skull they'd hidden there; it's strange the recollections one has. Alec and Mary lived in Yeadon, not far from Rawdon, and had four children, Pauline, Clive, Andrea and Celia. I must confess I remember none of them from those times. Pauline married a South African and migrated to that country. Celia was born after I moved to Australia and I don't think I've ever met her. I was to meet Andrea for the first time many years later in 1996.

Rosaline and Larry lived in Leeds - I think quite near to where Nanna and Grandad Tod lived, and also had four children, Stephen, Christine, David and Robert. I remember Mum and I staying in Leeds at one time - I'm not sure with who - and I played with Stephen and Christine quite a lot. Stephen and I got into strife one time for playing on one of the old bomb sites that still existed in those days, and coming home as black as negroes. I also recall dragging his billycart around the streets with him, knocking on doors and asking for any old glass jars, which we would then take around to the pickle factory and sell for a few pennies. At one stage Rosaline and Larry fell on hard times and wrote to Mum asking if she could help out with clothes or household effects. We put some things together and took a trip to Leeds, and my contribution was to sacrifice some of my precious fireworks, lovingly hoarded in anticipation of Guy Fawkes night. I can still remember my feeling of disgust when I found out Stephen had even more fireworks than I did! Christine was tragically killed in a car accident in 1975, while Robert was also born after I left England and I didn't meet him until I stayed with the Wilsons in 1981 while on a visit to England.

Alice and Geoff also lived in Leeds in those days, and had three children - John, Susan and Ray. Again I cannot recall them back in those days; in fact Susan was born only three months before we left England, and Ray not until later on. It wasn't until my 1981 visit that I got to know Susan and Ray, and it was even later, in 1996, when I met John again. Geoff was in the Royal Air Force for many years, and later he and Alice ran a post office agency in Scarborough. He was also a very accomplished pianist and taught the instrument.

Harold was the "baby" of the Tod family and I can vaguely remember him visiting us in West Kirby. He was quite a character and his life story would justify a book of its own. In 1941 at 14 years of age he signed on with the Merchant Marine and trained as a cabin boy aboard an ex-German training ship, the *Viniatric*. He was on the first convoy to Malta after the blockade was established, and served on three

Arctic convoys that brought supplies to Murmansk in Russia. In 1945 he joined the Coldstream Guards and was involved in guard duty at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle, and in 1947 he volunteered for service with the British police in Palestine, serving as a constable in Jaffa and Jerusalem. A year later he was wounded in the arm when acting as a gunner in an armoured car on patrol. His vehicle was hit, exploded and rolled over, killing all the other occupants. Harold was left for dead and rescued by British soldiers, who told him the attack had been made by members of Irgun Tsvai Leumi, a Jewish military group; he still has the bullet taken from his arm. He helped to clean up the aftermath of the blowing up of the King David Hotel on 22 July 1946, killing 91 people and injuring many more. While in Palestine he met a young Israeli army captain, Yitzhak Rabin, who later became Prime Minister of Israel.

In the last British unit to leave Palestine in 1949, he spent two years with the Australian Merchant Marine, moved briefly to Canada, then travelled the world. In 1953 he moved to Washington to take a position as guard with the British Embassy, where he received a diplomatic visa to remain in the USA. Granted a permanent visa, he then joined the US Army. He served five years with the Army, then another seventeen with the US Air Force. During those years he served in Korea, Germany, France, Italy and England. In 1953 he received US citizenship while retaining his British citizenship, and in 1973 retired from the Air Force with the rank of Technical Sergeant. Later, at the age of 64, he even volunteered to serve during the First Gulf War but his offer was declined! Quite a history!

Harold married a Jean Newbold in 1946, and obviously Jean didn't see much of her husband during those early years of marriage. They had a son, Tony, who I've never met. I caught up with Harold again in 1979; he and Jean had lived in Honolulu for some years, and en route to the USA on a business trip I stopped off to visit him. They were in the process of moving back to mainland USA, and Jean had already gone so I never ever met her either.

So these were the family circles in which I spent my early years in England. There were a few other minor players, so to speak, that vaguely come to mind, some of who I really don't know where they fitted in the picture. The Perry/Welding side in particular were a close-knit group, and it was my place in this that was one of the things I really missed when in later life we moved to Australia – but that's getting ahead of the story.

Chapter Three

My Early Years

I can look back on my childhood in West Kirby as a happy time in a loving and secure environment. One seems to remember things that happened fifty or more years ago better than what happened last week, and I have many memories of my time there, the friends I made and the things we got up to.

My first playmate, almost from the time I could walk, was a girl named Jean Maynard. Eddie and Hilda Maynard were great friends of Mum and Dad and lived just around the corner in a large house overlooking Ashton Park. As well as Jean they had a younger son, Alan, who I always remember as being very sickly and unable to play with us, I believe because of a chronic heart defect. It's interesting to note that in later life he overcame that and made a very successful career in academia, becoming a professor at York University. Jean and I grew up together, at least until we went to primary school, and were inseparable. Ashton Park, just across the road, became our playground, and we spent many hours playing there. Not all of it was innocent fun, I'm afraid, as we used to torment the gardeners tending the beautiful rose gardens, and in particular the Park Keeper who we christened "Hitler" because of his stern manner and toothbrush moustache. However there was never any malice in what we did – we were just being mischievous little imps.

Jean and I rather drifted apart once we went our separate ways to school, but still saw quite a lot of each other because of our parents' friendship. We lost contact when I went to Australia, but renewed acquaintance when I visited England in 1979, and we've kept in touch ever since. Jean is now married to Tony Beggs and they live in Meols, a village just a few kilometres from West Kirby.

Ashton Park remained my playground right through the years I lived in West Kirby. It was developed between 1899 and 1906 through the goodwill of a Miss E M Ashton who loaned the land. After her death in 1935 the park passed into public ownership. As mentioned earlier, it was in two parts, bisected by the railway line and joined by a steel footbridge. The northern or Princes Avenue side of the park comprised a large rose garden, a bowling green and an extensive set of lawn tennis courts. Although situated in West Kirby, the courts hosted some major tournaments including the annual Hoylake Open, which in those days was a precursor to Wimbledon and so attracted quite a few of the up and coming names of the day. For that tournament the courts would be surrounded with a high canvas wall, but like any enterprising lad I'd always find a loose part under which I could wriggle and thus watch the tennis or, more often, go searching for empty soft drink bottles which I'd take to the refreshments marquee and claim the threepence deposit on them! Grandad himself was no longer a bowler but liked to watch the game, and I spent quite a few hours with him at the bowling green, quite comfortable in his company..

The southern part of the park was more utilitarian, although it boasted some handsome gardens and shrubberies. Much of it was taken up by a large oval ornamental lake, fairly shallow; there was another bowling green, a children's playground with swings and see-saws, and a large open space used for impromptu games of football or other activities. I spent many hours on the banks of the lake – and on at least one occasion falling into it! – catching tadpoles in a tea strainer attached to the end of a bamboo cane. These I would take home in a glass jar, where I put them in an old tub landscaped with rocks and so on, and fatten them up with cold porridge. I was always disappointed that despite my best efforts, none of them ever reached maturity as frogs.

In September 1945 at the age of five I started my schooling at the West Kirby Preparatory School, a private three-classroom school in an old semi-detached house near the promenade. The headmistress was, appropriately, a Miss Jeannette Todd, and the other teacher a Miss Hazlehurst, who I liked a lot. In

the fashion of the times I was dressed to the nines in white shirt, grey shorts, a tie, long grey socks and a red peaked cap – that much at least I can remember. I seemed to cotton on to the three R's quite readily, and my reports indicate I made very satisfactory progress – probably because I'd long been encouraged in reading, writing and drawing by Mum and Nanna. On sport afternoons we used to play rounders on a nearby field, which I recall as quite good fun. Remarkably, while fossicking through old family papers, I came across two of my old exercise books from those days. I still have my reports from there, which show I always received high marks and with one exception, when I missed the examination through illness, I consistently came first in a class of twelve to fourteen.

After three years at Prep School and at the age of eight it was time to move to primary school. There were two such schools in West Kirby – one public one and a church school at the local St Bridget's church. The public school had a rather doubtful reputation as regards academic record and the behaviour of the children who went there, and it would appear the church school was not judged the best choice by my parents or grandparents, or both, although Jean Maynard was enrolled there. As a result I attended Greasby County Primary School in the village of that name, some five miles and a bus ride away. Looking back, I believe that was a wise decision as I enjoyed very much my years there and thrived academically, as well as making good friends among my fellow pupils. The school was of fairly recent vintage, with modern classrooms set around a quadrangle, a large playground on one side and a grassy sports field on the other. It was set on the fringe of the village, and beyond its fence open fields and woods rolled away, giving it a very rural setting. To get there I caught one of the old green Crosville double decker buses that took me through the back roads and green fields of Newton and Frankby villages to Greasby shops, and then followed a five minute walk to the school.

The headmistress at Greasby was a Miss Jones, a fairly young and very capable lady who commanded respect and some degree of affection from her pupils, and ran a very tight ship. Over the four years I attended I had several teachers, of whom five come to mind. A Mrs Nicholson was my first teacher. There were two male teachers, Mr Owen and Mr Harris, both of whom had good rapport with the class. Miss Hazlehurst from the Preparatory School also appeared there after a while, and I was pleased to once again be in her class. But the teacher who stands foremost in my mind, and who was my teacher for the longest period of time, was Miss Eleanor Shaw, who became Mrs Lowey while I was there. I remember her with great affection; a lady in her fifties, she combined a motherly love of the children in her charge with definite teaching skills, making learning a fun process rather than a necessary chore. I believe I owe Miss Shaw a great debt in the preparation she gave me for later schoolwork and in the academic achievements that I made while there. Jumping ahead a little, in my final year at Greasby I sat an examination for a scholarship to the Birkenhead School, a very prestigious if not to say expensive public school and very much sought after for its academic record and character-building approach to education. I was successful in winning the scholarship, and I believe I owed much to Miss Shaw in doing so. It was with some regret that we had to decline the scholarship as we were moving to Australia!

I also still have my old school reports from Greasby Primary. The first one suggests I was initially shy, but had a great imagination and a great sense of humour! I like to think that at least the latter has stuck with me through the years. All my subsequent marks ranged from good to excellent, especially in subjects like English, spelling, writing and composition. However one report shows my rating for Physical Training as "rather cumbersome" – something I would never deny! I seem to have been consistently second out of about 40 in my class.

If there were any drawbacks or things I didn't like about Greasby as a school, the one that sticks in my mind is the canteen food. In those post-war years in Britain the school system, run by the counties, provided a hot meal to pupils at lunch time. This was intended to compensate for the lack of and cost of fresh food, especially for the poorer people, and to ensure that children had at least one good meal a

day. While the pupils of Greasby Primary hardly fell into the malnutrition category, nevertheless we were provided with a hot lunch. This was prepared in a large canteen across the road from the school, which undoubtedly also serviced other schools in the area, and each lunchtime tubs of food would be brought across to the school's assembly hall and dished out by volunteers. To say the food was not very appetising was, in my opinion, a vast understatement - it was absolutely awful! Tasteless mashed potato was the staple, with vegetables like cabbage and cauliflower to supplement it, usually served up with some mysterious stew or grey and overcooked slices of meat. It was compulsory to have the meal and at first I suffered it, but when I was forced to eat sago pudding, consisting of what I termed frog spawn, my stomach rebelled and I brought it back up in front of the horrified staff. A compromise was reached and I was allowed to bring sandwiches from then on. In all honesty, however, I have to say the treacle pudding was delicious.

It was at Greasby Primary that I made a small circle of friends, a "gang" that would last until I departed for the Antipodes. Most of them came from West Kirby itself, and took the bus with me each day. Probably my best pal was Gerald Kirby, whose parents and grandparents ran Rainford's greengrocer shop in Banks Road. Gerald had a sister, Sylvia, who was a couple of years younger and a bit of a cry-baby, and I confess we sometimes teased her unmercifully. Next was Tony Joy, whose parents owned a sweet shop right next door to Rainford's. Tony was a very good friend to have at a time when sweets were rationed, and although his parents didn't distribute great largesse, there was often a little something offered when I called at the shop to play with him. Next was Barry Clarke, whose parents owned a farm somewhere in Cheshire and who boarded with his grandmother, who owned the local taxi service. The West Kirby taxis in those days were all Rolls Royce limousines, and to ride in one, for example when accompanying Dad from the station, made one feel very important. Finally there were the Porter twins, Noel and Graham, who lived on the Promenade. Beyond that inner circle there were other schoolmates, most of who lived in Greasby and so were only involved during school hours. Names that come to mind are Robert Visser, Robert Medford, Roy Povall and James Dill; I heard from my grandmother that James, always a sickly lad, died from some illness not long after I left for Australia. Greasby was a co-educational school, but the boys and the girls tended to keep to themselves and I made no real friendships with members of the opposite sex there.

In those days before television one made one's own fun, and to us the world – or at least West Kirby – was our oyster. Traffic and security was not a problem in those more innocent days and we were allowed to roam pretty much at large, subject only to rules about how far we could go and what time we had to be home, and they were fairly strictly enforced. As a result we could be found anywhere around West Kirby – down by the Marine Lake, playing on the beach, walking along the rocky shoreline of the Dee, kicking a football around the field in Ashton Park, and so on. However it was Column Hill that was our favourite playground. The hill was quite extensive, consisting of woods in its lower reaches and then large slopes covered with bracken and gorse and with sandstone outcrops. At the summit of the hill stood a tall and handsome sandstone Column, topped with a huge round stone ball, that rose on the brow of the ridge overlooking West Kirby and the Dee. A landmark for miles around and for which the hill was named, it overlooked the neat rows of houses marching down to the Dee, the Marine Lake, the sandbanks out into the distance, the Hilbre islands sitting high and dry at low tide a half mile or so off shore, and the hills of Wales on the other side of the river.

We revelled in playing Cowboys and Indians on the hill, hiding in and crawling through the bracken to ambush each other, madly firing cap pistols. To be shot dead meant being out of the game for a count of a hundred, and there was some awfully fast counting taking place. Then in the late 1940s came the Korean War, so our games switched to war games, with the same rules but now Allies fighting the hated Commies. When I was a little older I bought an old war surplus Morse signalling lamp, and we would take it up on Grange Hill in the evening and signal to the imaginary submarines waiting out in the Dee

ready to land their spies. Another favourite game was a derivative of a paper chase, where one of us would be given a start and disappear in the streets of the town, leaving chalk marks for the others to follow and finally discover one's hiding place.

There were still some remnants and reminders of wartime around West Kirby right up until the 1950s. There was firstly a substantial Royal Air Force station over towards Hoylake, where ground crew were trained, although that was "off limits". On the beach were pyramids of concrete with iron bars set in them, placed there to impede enemy tanks from invading, although these soon disappeared after VE Day. On Black Horse Hill, over near Gleggside, an octagonal concrete "pill box" observation post stood facing out across the Mersey Estuary, placed there to spot enemy shipping. Near the railway station and towards the beach there was a large vacant block of sandy land, in which had been dug a substantial air raid shelter, held up by stout wooden beams. We would often dare each other to enter this, including it as part of our "war games". The site, and the pitch and putt golf course behind it, is now part of a large supermarket and car park.

Another popular amusement in those days would be to go to the pictures, sometimes with the gang and at other times with Mum and Nanna. There was one cinema in West Kirby, the *Tudor*, and two in neighbouring Hoylake, the *Kingsway* and the *Wintergarden*. The *Wintergarden* was a favourite for Saturday afternoon matinees, when we would go along and cheer our favourite heroes like Tarzan, the Lone Ranger, Gene Autry and Hopalong Cassidy, or laugh our heads off at cartoons and the antics of the Three Stooges, Laurel and Hardy and Abbot and Costello. In the evenings we would go to the *Tudor* or take the bus to Hoylake and the *Kingsway*, and usually watch a double feature. Again there was no problem in being allowed out on our own in the evenings, the only restriction being that the films were classified suitable for children. However I must admit that occasionally my pals and I would go to the cinema when an "A" film was showing and get some other adults – usually a young couple – to take our money, buy our tickets and let us go inside with them. Mind you, the films in those days were pretty mild, even the "A" ones! I was usually given a shilling (ten cents) to go to the pictures – eight pence for admission and four pence for a bag of hot chips at the fish and chip shop on the way home, and sometimes as a treat I was allowed to have a piece of fish – another four pence. What fish and chips they were in those days – cooked in old fashioned beef dripping, the fish battered and none of this cholesterol-free polyunsaturated cooking oil nonsense – and I can still taste that cod or hake and chips, liberally doused with salt, splashed with vinegar and eaten out of a screw of newspaper.

Another friend I had for a short while was Nigel Salt. I use the term "friend" rather advisedly, for it seems to me that it was an arranged friendship, by whom I'm not sure but perhaps Nanna. Anyway, once a week I was sent to play with him, and generally we seemed to get along all right. The Salts were a moneyed family and had a huge house bordering Column Hill and facing out over the Dee estuary. They had domestic servants, something I'd never encountered before, a croquet lawn in front of the house, and the granddaddy of all status symbols – a refrigerator that made ice to put in our lemonades! Nigel's father was a very successful Liverpool businessman and bought a castle, Gwrych I think it was called, over in North Wales that he turned into a tourist attraction, catering for day trippers and families. I recall visiting it once when a distant aunt was singing in a Welsh choir there, but in later years I could find no trace of it on any maps. Anyway, I duly played with Nigel for some months but eventually the arrangement must have ended.

In the summer months my friends and I would spend much of our time in the water. At first we swam at the baths in West Kirby's Marine Lake, but I think there was some concern starting to arise about pollution of the water, which was only refreshed when the tide was sufficiently rough to break over the sea wall and which also received run-off from the town's streets. We were then sent to swim at Hoylake Baths, on the seafront there but a self-contained lido with the water filtered and chlorinated. It was a

large pool, quite deep at one end and with high diving towers, and we used to revel in jumping from the highest one and making an enormous splash. This took a fair degree of bravado, as it was a long way down to the water and if you twisted in flight the result on hitting the water could be quite painful. However we seemed to survive and have the time of our lives into the bargain. Mum would buy me a season ticket for unlimited entry, and during the summer holidays I would swim there daily with one or other of my friends. At other times we would play on West Kirby's beach, and occasionally when the tide was way out we would walk across the sands to Little Eye, Big Eye and Hilbre, the string of small islands in the Dee a half mile or so offshore. Because of the dangers afforded by the incoming tide this adventure always required prior approval, and sometimes Mum would take me out there in a pony and trap that a local lady operated. I can still remember those long summer evenings, when it was still light until ten o'clock, and I would be allowed to play in the park until about nine.

We also all had roller skates in those days, and would skate in the park and around the streets of West Kirby, revelling in going down the hills at breakneck speed – somehow we managed never to break our necks. There wasn't much traffic on the roads in those days, but I shudder to imagine what we did then happening in this day and age. We thought we were bullet proof, and I guess we must have been.

November the Fifth, Guy Fawkes or Bonfire Night, was also an eagerly awaited event each year. I would be given some extra money to buy fireworks, and would add to my hoard from my pocket money. Standard, Pains and Brocks were the three big manufacturers, and the fireworks could be bought at toy stores or the local chandlers (now known as a hardware store). I'd keep them in a box under my bed, and every day take them out and lovingly count them, as if one might have disappeared overnight. Most of them were colourful – Roman candles, skyrockets, pinwheels, flower pots and the like, but there were always a few "bungers", or "cannons" as we called them back then. On the big night we would set them off in the back yard or go to one of the bonfires that would be built on vacant land around West Kirby. There was always a Guy on top of the fire, made out of old clothes and stuffed with straw, that had been pulled around the streets in a billycart for the previous weeks while its makers begged "penny for the Guy".

Winter also brings back some pleasant memories. In West Kirby it was usually after Christmas before snow would fall, and each morning I'd look out of the window, hoping to see those soft white flakes descending. When the great day came, and there was enough of the white stuff on the ground, I'd grab my metal sledge and hit the slope of Princes Avenue. It had a fairly steep gradient, so with my friends we'd go to the top and launch ourselves down, with someone at the bottom keeping an eye out for cars coming along the cross street. We'd also go down into Ashton Park and build snowmen by taking a fistful of snow, making a small ball of it and then rolling it around the lawns until it grew to a large enough size for the body. A smaller ball would become the head, then stones and an old scarf and one of granddad's old pipes would complete the work of art. Then there were the snowball fights, which usually developed as "friendlies" at first but as the snowballs grew harder and icier and started to hurt tempers started to fray and friendships were temporarily forgotten. The lake in the park would freeze over, but usually the ice wasn't thick enough to sustain weight so we were warned to keep off it. However I remember one particular winter when it froze so hard that people were skating on it, and I would venture out on the ice and try not to slip and fall hard on my rear end. That same winter it was so cold that ice even formed on the salt water Marine Lake.

When not with my friends, there were still family outings or being on my own, which I was usually quite happy to be. As an only child, I must honestly say I never missed or regretted not having brothers and sisters, and certainly didn't feel deprived by their absence. There were outings into Liverpool with my mother, and my father when he was home from the sea. We would go in to visit the big department stores of Lewis', Bon Marche and Owen Owen's, and have lunch in their cafeterias or at Reece's

restaurant, which I considered very “posh”. I usually had sausages, with ice cream and Melba sauce (also known as strawberry topping) as a sweet. At Christmas time especially going to the city was a real treat. Both stores had Santa’s Grotto’s, something never seen nowadays or at least in Australia. One paid a small amount to queue up and enter a miniature fairyland, usually based on well known children’s tales, with decorations and animated figures, and of course at the end of the Grotto sat Santa on his throne. You sat on his knee, had the obligatory photo taken, and every child received a good quality present (paid for, of course, by the admission price). We would also go to see a pantomime at the *Empire* or *Royal Court* theatres, where I would laugh at the antics of the Dame (always a man), be enthralled by the exploits of the Principal Boy (always a girl) and sing along with the obligatory song. Every year’s offering changed little from that of the previous year, except it would be based on a different story or fairy tale. Other shows I remember seeing were the Billy Cotton Band Show at the *Empire* and an aquatic production at the pool in Southport starring Johnny Weismuller, an Olympic champion who won five gold medals and was one of the stars of the *Tarzan* and *Jungle Jim* movies of the 1930s and 1940s.

Sometimes Mum or Nanna, or both, would take me on the bus to Chester, the historic county seat of Cheshire, where we would wander the narrow streets lined with old black and white Tudor buildings including the famous two storey Rows, then take a pleasure cruise up the River Dee for a few miles. At other times Uncle Alec would cram us into the Singer and take us across into North Wales for a Sunday outing. At other times we would go to Southport for the day, where we would visit the fun fair, stroll through the promenade gardens and walk out along the Victorian wrought iron pier, which stood high and dry for its length when the tide was out. When Dad was home he took me a couple of times to Goodison Park, in Liverpool, to watch his team Everton play in the then English First Division. When I was younger Nanna regularly took me to Hoylake with her when she visited a friend, Mrs Cooper, who lived on the promenade there, and I would play on the beach while the two of them chatted.

Then of course there were holidays. I have vague recollections of one in Wales when I was about three and we stayed in a cottage owned by Uncle Alex’s sister. This was located in a little village called Brynsethmargog, between Ruthin and Conwy. I know there were several of us there, including Uncle Alex and Aunt Annie, and I can remember tramping through a field of cows to get there, but nothing else, although Mum told me that on the way there I was nearly run over by a bus and was just pulled out of harm’s way in the nick of time. The first holiday that I can remember more clearly was one when Mum and I went by train to Glasgow to meet Dad, whose ship was in port on the Clyde and he had a few days leave. We stayed at a boarding house run by a Mrs Gow, and I can remember watching a big parade in the city’s central square, so it would still have been in wartime or perhaps just after the war ended. On the train home I was befriended by some soldiers and one of them offered me a drink from a bottle of lemonade. Before Mum could stop me I took a few swigs, and a few days later I had a severe case of trench mouth, a nasty infection that filled the mouth with sores that had to be swilled with a vile tasting preparation several times a day. Right through my life since then I have been, perhaps subconsciously, very fastidious in wiping anything I eat and drink from.

While I was still very young Mum and I went down to London and stayed with Gordon, Eileen and John, who were home on leave from India, at their home in Hayes. I can’t remember much about it except for going in to the City on an electric train. Mum and I holidayed in Blackpool a couple of times, and I can certainly recall going up the famous Tower, riding the roller coaster at the huge amusement park, eating hard pink coated rock candy with “Blackpool” in red letters running through it, and doing all the usual seaside things. Mum and I also visited Leeds a couple of times, as mentioned earlier. However I can’t remember a holiday where the three of us were together, probably because of Dad’s absences at sea.

I was five years old when World War II ended, but the austerity of the war years continued for quite a while after that, with food and clothes being rationed and luxuries very slowly returning to shop shelves.

We had been a little more fortunate than others during the War, as Dad had been able to purchase canned goods and treats like chocolates in overseas ports of call and bring them back for us. I can remember when, just after the War, he returned from South Africa with a whole carton of Mars Bars, unobtainable in England at that time, which I lovingly eked out for as long as possible. These supplies from overseas unfortunately brought some unpleasantness to the family. In the other half of our semi-detached house lived an eccentric old woman, Gertrude Carter, and Sally, her elderly companion and carer. Sally was fine and we sympathised with the cross she had to bear with Gertrude, who for some reason we had christened Lizzie. Somehow Lizzie got wind of the extra food Dad was bringing, and in her partial insanity she would stand at her front door and yell at us that we were black marketeers, dealing in smuggled goods. This was very embarrassing for my grandparents, but there was little they could do and thankfully after a couple of years Lizzie passed away, and with her death the problem.

Despite Dad's welcome contributions, many of the food items we so take for granted nowadays were simply not available or reappearing very slowly. I can always remember going to our local grocer's store – this was in the days before supermarkets, when everything was kept in bulk and weighed and served over the counter – and exchanging coupons for a few ounces of butter or sugar or tea. The shop actually smelled like a grocer's, with sides of bacon hanging on hooks and sliced to order – in exchange for coupons, of course. Butter came in boxes and pats were cut off to the quantity required, as was cheese, and everything was wrapped in brown paper to put in your string shopping bag. We bought our groceries in two shops – a grocery store in the Crescent, and the Co-op store in Banks Road. The latter, I remember, had that centralised cashier system where the shop assistant put your money in a container and an overhead system of wires took it to the cashier, who would return the change the same way. Staple vegetables, bought from Websters the greengrocer, were generally in good supply, but fruit was strictly limited as apart from apples, pears and berries everything had to be imported. Sweets and ice cream gradually made a comeback and once more Walls or Lyons ice creams could be purchased at interval in the cinemas. The sweets in those days were far more limited than nowadays, of course, but I can recall Mars Bars, Cadbury's blended and dairy milk chocolate, Fry's peppermint cream bars, dolly mixture, liquorice allsorts and sherbet that was sucked out of a paper bag through a hollow liquorice tube. I also remember us receiving a food parcel from Australia, but from whom I couldn't say. Thankfully, rationing had all but disappeared by 1948, and while the range of goods was small compared to what is available today, things could be considered "back to normal".

As a child I had the usual childhood illnesses, including mumps, measles, chicken pox and whooping cough, but generally I was pretty healthy except having a tendency to catch coughs and colds easily. The remedy for those always seemed to be effected by rubbing my chest with Vick's vapour rub – still on sale today – and other products I remember were rose hip syrup, Thermogene "magic" wool and cod liver oil. Doctors Pinkerton and, later, Evans, tended to my ailments. In those days the cure-all for coughs and colds seemed to be to remove the child's tonsils and adenoids, so at around age nine or so I spent a week in nearby Clatterbridge Hospital, waking from the anaesthetic with a very sore throat but very soon sitting up eating ice cream. This would be the first of only three stays in hospital that I have had in my lifetime so far, apart from day surgery and a couple of overnight admissions for minor ear operations. In one incident of horseplay I was pushed over an empty drum on a waste site and suffered strained ligaments, which necessitated my leg being in a splint for a few weeks. In another incident of horseplay I was hit over the left ear with a stick, and my hearing in that ear has been less effective ever since. I also seemed prone to growing wax in my ears and Nanna would make me sit while she syringed them out with what seemed to me a huge metal syringe and soapy water.

Neither my grandparents or parents appeared to be particularly religious, and in my memory never attended church other than for weddings, but when I was six or seven a rather busybody and religious lady who lived across the street, Miss Sandford, talked them into sending me to the local Methodist

Sunday School. After the initial curiosity of involvement in a new activity wore off I rapidly came to detest it and complained loudly, so my attendance ended. However Nanna then insisted that I attend normal Sunday morning services at St Andrew's Church of England in West Kirby; why it was not the nearby St Bridget's I don't really know. I went on my own, and again after the initial curiosity was satisfied I grew to dislike this as an unwelcome chore, and became increasingly cynical about the whole exercise. Once again I was excused from attending, and I've never participated in church services since. Probably these experiences, and later in high school being required to attend seemingly pointless "Scripture" classes by well-meaning but frankly boring and incompetent lay people, turned me away from religion and account in part for my life-long rejection of the concept of spirituality or a supreme Being. Perhaps paradoxically, I admit that I can appreciate and derive much pleasure from the beauty of religious buildings such as churches and cathedrals, and of religious music and works of art, but it's from a strictly secular viewpoint.

I mentioned in an earlier chapter that the extended Perry/Welding family circle was very sociable and loved a party. Often Princes Avenue and the Gleggside houses would be filled with laughter as family members came to visit and to enjoy the social evenings that we had together. If the party happened to be at Auntie Bet's the pianola would come into full swing and everyone would gather around it for a sing-song. However it was the Christmases that really stand out in my mind. Invariably, it seemed, the extended family would gather at Princes Avenue. Nanna and Mum would spend days cooking and putting together a veritable feast, which always included a turkey or sometimes a goose. The front room, usually closed through winter, would be opened up and the dining table set up and groaning with the weight of food, while the Christmas tree would be erected in the back sitting room and decorated by Mum and myself. Everyone would arrive and the feast would begin, with Christmas crackers (bon-bons) and silly paper hats. Later on there would be games such as Charades, or my favourite. "Murders", where everyone would disperse through the house, a "murder" would be committed and then everyone would join in solving it. The only exception to those Christmas lunches I can remember was one year when we went instead to a pub/restaurant called the *Cottage Loaf* at nearby Thurstaston (it still exists). I recall we went there by taxi, with my cousins Geoffrey and Gillian and I hiding on the floor in the back because we exceeded the allowable maximum of passengers. That Christmas Day it was snowing, and I remember how picture-postcard the *Cottage Loaf* looked.

Another event that I remember well was Uncle Alex chartering a charabanc, or at least a large number of seats on one, for the extended family and visiting the famous Illuminations at Blackpool. The whole five or so miles of the promenade there was decorated by coloured lights and light displays, and the Tower, the piers and the famous Blackpool trams were also decorated and lit up. I was allowed to stand on the back of a seat with my head and shoulders through the open sunroof and take in the brilliant scenes as the coach traversed the length of the promenade, a memorable experience indeed.

As I grew older I was allowed to roam more freely around the neighbourhood and would take myself off to Caldy Woods or Thurstaston Hill, or around the old Caldy Village. I would also go into Liverpool for the day on my own. Nowadays it would be almost unheard of for a nine or ten year old boy to go into a big city unaccompanied, but in those days there were not the same security concerns and it was deemed quite safe. I had a few favourite shops I would explore there, particularly the Hobbies model shop with Hornby trains and Dinky toys galore, and the Wizard's Den, a magic shop where I would squander my pocket money. I would also go to New Brighton, the resort town on the tip of the Wirral across the Mersey from Liverpool, visiting the fun fair there, spending pennies in the slot arcade (occasionally sneaking a peep at the "What The Butler Saw" machine) or to roam around the Napoleonic fort and lighthouse or swim at the fine baths. As a result of these excursions I knew the northern Wirral and the city of Liverpool quite well, and when I would return to my boyhood haunts many years later I would know exactly where I was.

I remember Liverpool in those years as a rather dour and grim city, still showing the ravages of the war. Opposite Central Station, where the trains from West Kirby ended, the bombed-out skeleton of Blackler's Department Store stood for many years. There were many other gaps in the central streets where buildings once stood, and this was even more prominent away from the city centre. In the immediate post-war years a ride along the docks on the dockside overhead railway showed many vacant lots and shells of buildings, some of them with their basements still full of water where they'd been flooded to provide firemen with a water supply. Huge areas of the suburbs stood barren, the rubble of bombing cleared away but no rebuilding having taken place. There were extensive slum areas too, grim and blackened terraces with grimy children playing in the streets. Many houses in those years still had no bathrooms or internal toilets. Baths were taken at a local bath house, while toilets were located in an outhouse in the back yard. Mum and I on occasion visited a distant aunt out Bootle way, and I clearly remember that there was one toilet shared by about six houses. The slums were particularly noticeable on the train trip out of the city when we went to Leeds.

The overhead railway rates a mention. Known locally as the Dockers' Umbrella, it had first been proposed in 1852, and construction began in 1889. Work was completed in January 1893 and the line was formally opened on February 4th that year. It was the world's first electric elevated railway and the first to be protected by electric automatic signals. The line stretched from Seaforth Sands to Dingle, a distance of 13 miles. Extensive bomb damage was inflicted during the Blitz but it was quickly repaired to maintain the smooth running of the docks. By 1955 the curved deck plates which supported the track needed replacement and the cost was considered prohibitive. Despite rigorous public protests, the railway closed on December 30th, 1956.

One event that stands out clearly in my mind was on May 3rd, 1950, when I witnessed the launching of the aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal* at Cammell Laird's dockyard in Birkenhead. Uncle Alec, in his superintendent's role, had obtained tickets and I was there in the crowd to see Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, wife of King George VI and later the Queen Mother, launch the mighty ship. The third Royal Navy vessel of that name and the second aircraft carrier, her predecessor had been sunk in the Mediterranean in 1941. It was a memorable moment when the Queen spoke the words "I name this ship *Ark Royal* ... may God bless all who sail in her", the champagne bottle broke across its bows and the mighty vessel, almost imperceptibly at first but then with quickening speed, slid down the well greased slipway and into the murky waters of the Mersey, to resounding cheers from all present.

Of hobbies in those years, I had a few. Like any young boy I was into collecting things – cigarette packets and cards from Turf cigarettes, bus tickets and the like, and stamps. The latter would, after a period of disinterest, become a life-long interest. Dad was a collector and often brought stamps home from countries he visited on the ships, and he started to amass a very good collection, particularly of mint British Empire sets. This collection continued to grow after we moved to Australia, but then I lost interest and he needed beer money, so he sold it to a dealer in Sydney. How I regret that nowadays, as although the stamps were hinged – the normal practice in those days – they would be worth very good money now as well as being a fine collection of the King George VI era. For my eleventh birthday I was given my first camera – a Coronet 12/20 box camera with a ground glass viewing screen that took 120 roll film, and this started me on the road of another life-long hobby.

Apart from hobbies I was an avid reader from an early age, being encouraged in my reading by my parents and grandparents. As well as borrowing books from the school library, I joined another one run by the bookshop in West Kirby and soon made fast progress through Enid Blyton's "Five" and "Adventure" series, to then go on to W E John's "Biggles" books, Richmal Crompton's hilarious "William" series and many others. Comics were also prominent on the reading list – the *Knockout*,

Beano, *Film Fun*, *Radio Fun* and *Eagle* come to mind. Unlike today's comics, they were more like small tabloid newspapers and not only had illustrated cartoon-type strips but also stories and serials. There were also the annuals like "Boys Own", not seen nowadays except as collectors' items in the second hand shops, to add to the reading list. At the age of ten I was also reading the *Liverpool Echo* every night. Like any lad, I also had Meccano and Bayko building sets, and spent free time constructing cranes and trucks and buildings and so on. One thing I never had but always wanted was an electric train set, although I can remember owning an old Hornby "O" gauge clockwork set that I suspect came from Uncle Roy.

Television was very much in its infancy in those days, and certainly we never had one in our family. Not long before we emigrated sets began to appear in shop windows, attracting crowds of onlookers, and "H" shaped antennae sprouted on chimney tops. Apart from the cinema, radio was our entertainment and we would sit around the old radiogram in the back sitting room and listen to programmes such as the soap opera "*Mrs Dale's Diary*"; the comedies like "*ITMA*", "*Tommy Handley*", "*Take It From Here*" and "*Much Binding In The Marsh*"; quizzes like Wilfred ("Give him the money, Barney") Pickles' show; and the thrillers like "*Dick Barton, Special Agent*" – my particular favourite.

It's funny what snippets of memory come back when you sit down and start to write memoirs. I remember that our coal used to be delivered by a Mr Temple, who would drive a horse and cart up Princes Avenue loaded with sacks of the black stuff. Pretty well all fires used coal in those days. Our milkman was a little more sophisticated. He had an electric milk cart dubbed the "Electric Pony", run entirely on batteries, that he let me ride on while he delivered in the surrounding streets. So electric powered vehicles are nothing new – they were in use in the 1950s! In the late 1940s a lamplighter still came riding around the streets on his bike at dusk, switching on the street lights. Although electricity had replaced gas lamps, they still had to be switched on manually until modern technology took over. Reading my Uncle Roy's memoirs also reminded me of the slot machines at the railway station and elsewhere that dispensed bars of chocolate – Fry's and Nestles. One machine that came back to mind was one where you put your penny in, chose letters from a circular dial and pressed words into a length of tinfoil that could later be used as a label – the forerunner of Dymo tape, I guess.

Earlier I mentioned that one of West Kirby's famous names was Selwyn Lloyd. John Selwyn Brooke Lloyd, later Baron Selwyn-Lloyd, was a British Conservative politician who served as a councillor on the local Hoylake Council in 1932-40, and during the Second World War he reached the rank of brigadier and was Deputy Chief of Staff of the British Second Army. He was elected to the House of Commons to represent Wirral in the 1945 general election. Originally a Liberal, he became a member of the "Young Turks" faction of the Conservative Party, and when the Conservatives returned to power under Churchill in 1951, Lloyd served under Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs from 1951 to 1954. He then served as Minister of Supply (1954-1955) and Minister of Defence (1955), before becoming himself Foreign Secretary in the same year. His tenure saw the Suez Crisis, which led to the fall of the Eden government, but he continued to serve as Foreign Secretary under Harold Macmillan.

All this is by way of introduction to another childhood experience I recall. At the time of the 1951 election a very solid campaign was mounted to get Lloyd re-elected, and my grandparents displayed a poster outside the house. My "gang" and myself got caught up in the election fever, and held our own election, complete with ballot box and voting papers that we got all our pals to complete. Needless to say Selwyn Lloyd won our "election" by a landslide, as well as winning the real one handsomely. On election night we sat listening to the radio as the results came in, with Winston Churchill and his Conservatives sweeping the unpopular Attlee Labour government out of power and the Liberals polling so poorly that most of them lost their electoral deposit.

Chapter Four

Australia Bound

It would have been around 1950 that Mum and Dad decided to migrate to Australia. I'm certain that initially it was Dad's idea; he felt post-war Britain was no place to raise a family or offer good prospects, and having seen other parts of the world he considered a move to be in our best interests. I have no idea of Mum's initial thinking, and whether she was keen or not to leave family and friends and set out to make a new life – after all, they were both in their forties by then. However she undoubtedly agreed to make the move, albeit with one caveat and a very reasonable one. Mum was not prepared to leave England only to live in a migrant camp, no matter for how long, and insisted that Dad should go first, find a job and a home, and then Mum and I would follow him. Once the decision was made, Mum certainly entered into a new life with enthusiasm, and years later would be very vitriolic about “whinging Poms” who emigrated to Australia, then complained about everything as not being what they were used to in England.

The choice of where we would go apparently lay between Canada, South Africa and Australia, three countries of which Dad had a reasonable knowledge. I feel the cold climate of Canada would have ruled that country out, especially as Mum had lived in North America when a young girl, so the choice was between South Africa and Australia. To everyone's good fortune, especially mine, Australia won. Looking back, I'm very glad that, given the problems that country went through, and which still exist today, I did not become a South African, although I have always felt positive about Canada.

So it came about that in late 1950 Dad worked his passage out to Australia as a supernumerary cabin steward on the Blue Funnel Line boat *SS Diomed*, arriving in Sydney on 20 December. He immediately had a stroke of luck. One of his passengers was Leslie Crichton-Brown, the retired Managing Director of Edward Lumley & Sons, a major Sydney insurance company and Australian agents for Lloyds of London. A widower, Mr Crichton-Brown, or Mr Brown as we called him, had purchased an orchard property in Glenorie, a small village about forty kilometres to the north west of Sydney, and was looking for someone to work it for him. He offered Dad a job working the orchard and acting as his chauffeur, and Mum a job as his housekeeper. Even better, a cottage would be made available on the property for us to live in! Dad accepted immediately and so the die was cast.

In the meantime, because the English school year ended in July and restarted at the end of August, a problem arose as to my continuing education until we arrived in Australia. I'd finished primary school, and as mentioned earlier we'd been forced with regret to pass up on the scholarship to the Birkenhead School, and additionally there seemed little point in enrolling me in the local Grammar School, to which I'd also won a place. I was therefore given some books and required to study at home, which I did in a rather desultory fashion. It was the norm, in England anyway, to take French in the first year of high school so I was given a French textbook and started to learn the various nouns and verbs of that language - “*la plume de ma tante*” and so on. With no-one else in the household conversant with French, and no teacher to encourage me, I soon came to dislike the chore of learning the language, a dislike that would influence my choice of school on arrival in Australia.

Once we got the word from Dad we commenced the process of applying to emigrate and to start to pack our possessions and household goods in readiness. Mum would be a “Ten Pound Pom”; Australia was in need of people and was subsidising potential migrants their passage out for only ten pounds. As a child, I got an even better deal – I went for free! We had to undergo medical check-ups, and there was a bit of a scare when they found a scar on Mum's lung, the result of a bout of pneumonia in earlier years. The presence of tuberculosis was enough to bar anyone from emigrating to Australia! However she was

finally passed fit. Living with Grandad and Nanna meant that we had no furniture to worry about, but clothing, utensils, household goods and a selection of my precious toys all had to be packed in cases and sent over by freight, with us carrying only what was generally required for the voyage. We couldn't take everything, so there were hard decisions to be made as to what would have to be left behind.

Then began the process of getting around and saying goodbye to family and friends, knowing full well that many of them we would never see again. This included a trip to Leeds to catch up with the Tod side of the family for the last time. I was often asked in later years whether that was a traumatic time for me. In all honesty, it wasn't. While there was a sadness in knowing I was leaving my grandparents, the extended family and of course all my childhood friends, the excitement of an eleven year old anticipating the unknown and a new life in a new country offset that and I looked forward to it with delight, especially given the knowledge about Australia that Dad had imparted before he left.

Finally the letter arrived advising us of our passage and enclosing our tickets, and so in early December 1951 we said our final goodbyes. I remember hugging and kissing Nanna and Grandad and waving to them for the last time as the taxi took us from Princes Avenue to West Kirby station, to start the long train journey down to London. In that city we stayed with the parents of a workmate friend of Mum's for a couple of days, and we visited the Tower of London and a few other sights of the city before making our final train journey, laden with suitcases, out to the port of Tilbury at the mouth of the Thames. There we boarded our home for the next five or so weeks, the 28,000 ton Orient Line's RMS *Orcades*, or *Rockadees* as we were soon to find out. She sailed in the evening, and for an hour before departure the crowd on the dockside grew larger and hundreds of coloured paper streamers began to be thrown in both directions, creating in the end a veritable mass of paper. Although we had no-one to see us off, Mum had bought some streamers and we threw them with the rest. Eventually the ship's horn sounded "all ashore" and soon the gap between us and the dockside began to widen and the streamers to break, with the crowd on both sides cheering and waving last goodbyes, until we slipped out into the Thames estuary and headed for sea.

The *Orcades* was a fairly modern liner, commissioned only a few years earlier, but was built in the days before stabilisers became standard fittings and thus tended to rock and roll in any kind of a sea, which we would soon discover. She had First Class and Third Class accommodation - I don't recall a Second Class but there may well have been one - and as migrants we were of course in Third Class. The sexes were segregated, so Mum found herself in an inside cabin with three other ladies, while I was placed in an inside cabin with six bunks. My cabin mates were a Stanley Schofield and his son Richard, the latter in his late teens, who were bound for Tasmania, and three other boys of similar age to me. One was named Theodore Pask, another was Robert, surname long forgotten, and the third I'm afraid I have forgotten his name completely. The four of us became great mates and were inseparable during the voyage except for shore excursions. We were all reunited with our parents at mealtimes, when we shared a table in the large dining room.

Beyond our very Spartan cabins the *Orcades* was well appointed as far as facilities went, with spacious lounges, bars, recreation areas, a small sea water swimming pool, library and so on. Undoubtedly the First Class facilities would have been miles better, but of course we were never permitted to penetrate that hallowed ground. One drawback was the bathrooms, where the bath and shower water was salt rather than fresh, so we had to buy special soap from the ship's shop and try to create a lather, and we always felt sticky after a bath. Another was the lack of air-conditioning in our cabins, and once we reached the tropics sleeping became very uncomfortable, with the ventilation system not really having much effect. The four of us lads had the run of the Third Class accommodation, and although incurring the wrath of the crew from time to time if we got too noisy or ran about too much, generally we were well behaved.

After leaving Tilbury and passing through the English Channel overnight, the next morning saw us entering the Bay of Biscay, and the full implications of the ship's nickname soon became evident. Always an area of rough seas, the Bay certainly lived up to its reputation. At first we were brave and confident, saying a little bit of rocking wasn't going to bother us, and we ate a hearty breakfast and later in the morning had a cup of bouillon up on deck. However progressively faces began to get greener as the passengers, including us youngsters, started to race to the toilets or head for the railings to throw up into the heaving sea. I don't think Mum was unduly affected, but I certainly was, and by afternoon I was in my bunk wishing for death to quickly overtake me. By the next morning, however, we'd all got our "sea legs" and despite rough weather again later in the voyage we weren't sick again; in fact, I've only been seasick one other time in my whole life, but that's another story.

Once having negotiated the Bay of Biscay, shipboard life settled down into a pattern. Meals became a major event of the day, starting with breakfast in the large communal dining room. During the morning bouillon would be served out on deck, and this soon changed to ice cream as the weather warmed and we approached the Mediterranean Sea. Then would come lunch, served at the table, and again in mid-afternoon there was afternoon tea and cakes or ice cream served on deck. Dinner was the main meal of the day, a more formal meal with table service and a choice of dishes, and then around ten thirty at night a supper of sandwiches was laid out in the various lounges. Being typical boys, we would run from deck to deck to get two or three ice creams, and late in the evening we would leave our cabin and sneak into the lounges to grab some sandwiches. I'd brought my Monopoly set with me in our hand luggage, and the four of us would find a corner in one of the lounges and play for hours. On deck there were games like shuffleboard and quoits to be played, so we were never bored. Mum and the other adults would play cards or just relax and chat in deck chairs out on deck, and pretty much leave us to our own devices.

Our first port of call was Gibraltar, and I can still remember that huge rock looming above me as we came alongside the quay. We were allowed to leave the ship, and I was very much looking forward to my first venture on to foreign soil, but unfortunately it was raining the proverbial cats and dogs and we were soaked to the skin before we even got to the gates of the quay. That was as far as we went – it was just too wet to venture further into the town, and we spent our shore time in Gibraltar in a little café, with the adults drinking brandy and us kids lemonade.

The weather grew warmer as we passed through the Mediterranean and a few days later we reached our second port of call, the Italian city of Naples. My recollections of the city itself are not very clear, although I can remember walking the rather grimy and crowded streets, with many signs of poverty around us, and my first sight of pizza for sale, with little anchovies dotted on it. Strange the things that come back in memory! However I remember much more clearly that we then boarded a coach for an excursion to the ruined city of Pompeii, and of walking around the excavated streets there. I particularly remember one place where the women and children were made to wait outside, and only the men were allowed in. Afterwards we kids begged to know what was in there, but we were told we were too young to understand. It was of course a brothel, and many years later I would see the inside with its pornographic frescoes when we returned to Pompeii on a coach trip of Europe. Before returning to Naples and the ship we had drinks at a café overlooking the ocean, and I remember listening to a marvellous Neapolitan tenor singing to entertain us. Unfortunately the photographs I took there and elsewhere on the voyage were all but ruined by light getting into the exposed film.

The voyage continued through the Mediterranean to the next port of call, Port Said. Unfortunately this was the time of vexed relations between Britain and Egypt regarding the Suez Canal, over which Britain still retained control. As a result passengers were not allowed to leave the ship for security reasons. This

was no deterrent to the local traders, however, who came flocking alongside on the quay and in small boats, offering all kinds of souvenirs. A rope attached to a bucket would be thrown up to a buyer on the deck, the goods placed in the bucket and hauled up, and the required money lowered back down to the trader. I bought a red *fez* hat in this way, which I kept for many years. Leaving Port Said, we then passed down through the Canal, escorted all the way by British soldiers in armed jeeps. This was quite an experience, the large liner taking up most of the available channel, while on each side stretched seemingly endless sandy desert. Eventually the Canal ended and we entered the Red Sea, to set off for our next port, Aden. Here again there were restrictions on going ashore and we were confined to viewing the white buildings and minarets of the city from the deck of the ship.

Then it was out into the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, and somewhere between Aden and Colombo we celebrated Christmas. A few gifts hidden away in luggage were exchanged, and a groaning festive buffet was prepared by the ship's cooks and served at midday on Christmas Day. It was quite a banquet, but unfortunately some of the passengers who had never experienced such a feast through years of hardship could not control themselves and behaved like absolute pigs, eating themselves silly, overloading their plates and leaving the food half eaten and then taking more food from the table and secreting it away for later. Also during this leg of the voyage there was a fancy dress competition, and Mum and the other ladies dressed me up as Mae West and coached me in saying "Come up and see me sometime." However, a prize eluded me.

After many days at sea we finally reached Colombo, capital of Sri Lanka, or Ceylon as it was then called. Here we were able to go ashore at last, and someone arranged for a group of us to go in a taxi to the coastal resort of Mount Lavinia, a very classy enclave just out of the city. There I had my first encounter with a surf beach, and after hiring a body board I was instructed in the rudiments of body surfing by a young Sinhalese, who received a handsome tip for his efforts. I recall it as a very enjoyable afternoon's outing after being cooped up on the ship.

We then turned south on the final leg to the shores of Australia. Along the way we crossed the Equator, the signal for the time honoured celebrations and rituals of "Crossing The Line". King Neptune came aboard and a number of unfortunate passengers – thankfully I wasn't among them – were dragged in front of him, lathered with masses of foam, "shaved" and then tipped into the swimming pool. It was all good fun, and helped to pass the time although I can't remember ever being bored on the trip.

Eventually one morning we woke to see land off our port side, the coast of Western Australia north of Perth, and I remember feeling some disillusionment at what appeared to be a desolate wasteland, with low scrub and a few palm trees all that could be seen – a most inhospitable looking place. However all that changed when we reached the mouth of the Swan River and docked at Fremantle. Strangely I have no memory of that first visit to Perth, other than that we took the train into the city for a few hours. From Perth we sailed east and into the Great Australian Bight. Here the seas were as big and rough as the Bay of Biscay had been, but we were now all seasoned sailors and experienced no discomfort whatever. We docked in Port Adelaide and there I distinctly remember going into the city and visiting the Adelaide Zoo, as Mum reckoned it was my turn to choose what to do on shore. Our next stop was Melbourne, where we spent a couple of days. We docked at either Princes or Station Piers – I don't recall which – in Port Melbourne, right opposite the old Swallows and Ariel's biscuit factory, long since gone. A group of us took the train into the city one day (the train from Port Melbourne has also long since gone!) and I remember a decision was taken to walk back – a long and tiring tramp in the summer heat through South Melbourne, past little shops with cast iron verandas which all seemed to be owned by Greeks and Italians.

So then it was the last short leg to Sydney, and the end of our voyage across the world. The *Orcades* arrived off Sydney Heads at dawn on 21 January 1952, and the sun was just rising as the tugs accompanied us into the famous harbour and we sailed majestically towards the city. I will never forget that morning, with the harbour waters sparkling, a sea of red tiled roofs flowing down to the shore, the cliffs and bush-lined hills and inlets of the North Shore slipping past, and finally the famous and unmistakable shape of the Bridge growing in size ahead of us. I have been on the harbour many times since, but never again did I experience the particular magic of that arrival. Then we were sliding under the Bridge, with all of us certain the masts of the ship were going to strike the underside of it, but of course they didn't and we were soon moving alongside and tying up at Pyrmont's Wharf 13. Then finally, there was Dad on the deck of the wharf building waving at us, and waiting as we descended the gangway and first set foot in our new homeland.



Colin Aged Six Months



**Wedding William John Perry &
Emily Welding, ca 1903**



Eileen Perry, ca 1930



Anne Welding



Joseph Welding



Doris Perry, 1936



Ronald Perry, 1927



**Ronald & Doris Perry,
10 December 1938**



The Welding Siblings, ca 1960



Me, Aged 19 Months



Geoffrey Welding, ca 1953



John Bolitho, Jean Maynard & Myself, ca 1942



John Bolitho, 1958



The Men Of The Family,



Gillian Jones, ca 1948



Rosaline Tod & Children, 1922



George & Rosaline Tod, 1944



Doris Tod, ca 1937



Alexander Tod, 1940s



Arthur Tod, 1940s



Rosaline Tod, ca 1940



Alice Tod, ca 1943



Harold Tod, 1945



11 Princes Avenue - 1951 & 2004



War Memorial



The Beach



**WEST
KIRBY**



Ring O'Bells



**Promen-
ade &
Marine
Lake**

**The
Column**



**St
Bridget's
Church**



Chapter Five

The Glenorie Years – 1952 to 1956

Dad had taken a week's holiday from the orchard and borrowed one of Mr Brown's two vehicles, a dark green Austin A40 utility, so after packing our suitcases into the back we drove across the harbour bridge to Kirribilli, where he had booked us in to the Linton Parva Guest House, with views straight across to Circular Quay and the city. It no longer exists, of course, replaced by one of the many blocks of flats that now crowd that suburb. On the evening of that first day I walked across the bridge and back by myself, admiring the fantastic views from the footpaths on either side.

There we spent the next week while Mum and I became acquainted with Sydney, so different from the Liverpool we had left. Naturally we visited Luna Park, which was very close to where we were staying, and took the tram across the bridge into the city. On one particularly hot day - it was over the old century mark - Dad drove us to Manly and we sat on the beach in front of the long line of in those days majestic Norfolk Island pines. I was soon down in the surf enjoying a swim, and being a reasonably good swimmer made my way out to where several other men and boys were standing and catching waves. There I was, enjoying myself and ducking under the breakers, when suddenly someone came up behind me and grabbed me around the shoulders. Startled, I began to struggle and a man's voice said "Just relax, sonny, I'm a lifesaver". Without realising it I was caught in a rip and being carried out from the beach. The lifesavers brought me to safety and I ran back to Mum and Dad, who said they'd just watched a rescue being carried out. They were startled when I confessed it had been me that had been rescued, and I was thankful they hadn't realised it at the time.

Soon the week's holiday came to an end and we drove out to Glenorie to meet Mr Brown and to see our new home for the first time, the three of us squeezed in on the front bench seat of the utility. The property, *Yallambee*, which I was later told was an aboriginal word for "peaceful place", was located on the Old Northern Road, a mile north of the Glenorie village centre. It comprised some 120 acres, half of which was cleared and under cultivation, with the rest being natural sandstone bushland and gullies on three sides. There were two gates leading off the road and a long U-shaped drive connected them. The nearest gate to Glenorie was in effect the "back gate", and immediately inside it and to the right stood our cottage. A little further on to the right was a cow bail, the home of Sally, the milker, and a small shed, then further down on the left stood a large equipment and packing shed, with an artesian bore and tank on a stand in front of it and a horse paddock behind it that led down into the gully. The drive turned right along the base of the "U" to meet the handsome brick residence occupied by Mr Brown, then swung right again to run past a large dam and so meet the main road once more. The cultivated land was occupied by orchards of citrus trees, mainly Valencia oranges but with some navels and an orchard of lemon trees opposite our cottage. A little further along the main road, past the head of the gully, was another small cleared block where passionfruit were growing along wires strung from posts.

Our cottage was a simple weatherboard affair standing on wooden piers, with a corrugated iron roof, and contained four rooms - a lounge room, a kitchen and two bedrooms. It had originally stood on a block of land some miles further north along the road, but Mr Brown had bought it and had it moved in two pieces to its present site. After re-erection a veranda had been added front and back, and the latter had been partly portioned off to create a bathroom and a toilet. It was simply furnished but comfortable enough, with a Hallstrom's Silent Knight kerosene refrigerator, dresser, table and chairs and an electric stove in the kitchen, a three piece lounge in the lounge room, a double bed and wardrobe in Mum and Dad's bedroom, and a single bed and wardrobe in mine. There were a few more odds and ends of furniture to make it more homely, and Mum soon added touches like curtains to make it more so. In front of the cottage was a disused covered well with a pump that no longer worked, surrounded by a

stout railing. Inside the cottage there was no running water, and the liquid had to be brought up from the main house in buckets until the town water was connected a couple of years later. The bathroom had a chip heater, but with the absence of running water it was simpler for us to take our showers down at the main house, while the toilet was the old "dunny" type that had to be emptied and buried, as there was certainly no night soil service in Glenorie! While far from what we were used to in Princes Avenue, we accepted our new home as being a small price to pay for a desirable change in lifestyle, and if Mum was disappointed, as I am sure she was, she refused to admit it.

The main residence was a much larger and very comfortable house, facing east towards the road some two hundred metres away across the dam and with uninterrupted views to the Blue Mountains from the rear or west side. It was built on ground sloping towards the gully, with lawns and gardens on three sides and the driveway on the fourth or high side. The main floor comprised a large lounge and a partly separate dining room, with next to them on the west side the kitchen and a sunroom where we sat and took our meals. There was a master bedroom with en suite – unusual in the 1950s – and two other bedrooms as well as a large bathroom and separate toilet. At the far end of the house was a wide sleepout room running the width of the building, with flyscreening all round, and off it was a small but very well stocked bar. Mr Brown slept in the sleepout through the warmer months, resorting only to the master bedroom in winter and then full time in later years. Underneath the sleepout, at the lower end of the house, was a double garage and cellar area facing the dam and reached by a sweep off the main drive, and at the rear was a small utility room, used to separate the cream from the milk from Sally, and next to it the laundry which also contained a shower and toilet. The artesian bore near the main shed served as the house's main water supply, but drinking water came from a rainwater tank and a septic tank provided for the sewage. Altogether it was a very comfortable gentleman's residence.

It didn't take me long to explore the rest of the property. Half the main shed was taken up by a platform on which stood a huge electrically operated fruit grader together with benches on which the fruit was packed after being graded, and a stack of the wooden packing cases used in those days before the advent of cardboard and Styrofoam containers. More packing cases were stored in a loft above. The rest of the shed was occupied by a rather ancient red International tractor and various pieces of equipment including a tank cart for watering and spraying, disks for harrowing and so on. I was soon to learn to drive the tractor, well before I learned to drive a car. I made friends with Sally the cow, and while milking her was Dad's responsibility, I learned how to do it and also to operate the separator and obtain the cream from which Mum made butter. There was also an old horse in the paddock, Fanny, once used to pull a dray around the property, but she disappeared from the scene early in the piece. There was also Captain, Dad's dog, an old bitser absolutely dedicated to him, blind in one eye and totally useless but faithful to the last. Over the next few weeks and months I would explore every inch of *Yallambee* and the surrounding bush.

Dad's only help with the upkeep of the property, with the exception of myself at picking time and in school holidays, was an old battler named Jack Hodges. Jack and his family had in fact occupied the cottage before Mr Brown bought it, and now owned a ramshackle hovel on a block of land at Forest Glen, about five miles further north. The Hodges were the quintessential "Aussie battlers", poorly educated and without a penny to their name other than what Jack brought in by working for Mr Brown and probably others in the district. He and his wife, a rather slatternly woman, were barely literate, and their three children – two boys and a girl – were always dressed in hand-me-downs and seemed to have eternally snotty noses. However Jack had a good heart and would always try to help others where he could. He drove an old tray-back Willys light truck which could be heard coming for miles, held together with the good old standby of fencing wire and by some miracle continuing to function mechanically. Captain was originally Jack's dog, and was made to run behind the truck when Jack drove to *Yallambee* to work. Dad was always a softie where dogs were concerned, and obviously Captain recognised he was

on to a good thing and one day refused to follow Jack home, preferring to stay with Dad. Jack had no problem with a change in ownership – it was probably a case of one less mouth to feed – so Captain became Dad’s dog.

Even before I had time to explore my new surroundings, a more immediate and pressing priority had to be attended to – my schooling! It was now past the end of January and the Australian school year had started. I had to attend an interview at the Department of Education in a building in Cumberland Street, just near the tollgates on the harbour bridge; this interview may even have been while we were on holiday at Kirribilli. The purpose of the interview was to place me in a high school, and given my marks and reports from England, and the fact I’d won a scholarship to a prestige school there, the powers that be recommended I go to Parramatta High School, then if perhaps not now a selective school with a proven academic record. However I was obsessed with the feeling that I didn’t want to study French, which would have been compulsory there, and strongly opted for the alternative, which was a technically oriented education at Hornsby Junior Technical School. My will prevailed, perhaps over the better judgement of others, so it was to Hornsby that I was sent. My days there will be covered in the next chapter.

I’ve often wondered in later years whether it was the best decision my parents and I had made for me. For one thing, I wasn’t then and never have been terribly good with my hands. In all probability, if I’d attended Parramatta High I would have ultimately passed the Leaving Certificate with a quite different set of skills, subjects and results that could well have led me on a completely different career path than the one that I ultimately took. Maybe it would have been the law, or medicine, rather than banking and data processing, that became my lifetime occupation. Who knows? Anyway, I’ve no real regrets and I think I can honestly say I was hardly a failure in the career path that I did follow, one that I enjoyed and found fulfilling and rewarding regardless of the occasional ups and downs.

Back to Glenorie. We settled in and I soon made friends with the Peck brothers, Barry and Alan, and Alan Ball. The Pecks lived on the property on the Glenorie side of us, although they later moved into Glenorie proper, and George and Florrie Peck became my parents’ closest friends there. The Balls lived on the other side of us, their property separated by a deep gully. Barry Peck and Alan Ball were both a couple of years older than me, Alan Peck a couple younger, and it was him that became my closest friend. The three of us would roam the bush together, and I recall being horrified when, on the first outing, we descended to a pool on the creek and the two older boys stripped off and swam naked – unheard of behaviour to a callow youth just out from England!

A few days after we arrived at Glenorie Dad said “I’ve got a surprise for you”. Without saying what it was, we drove down to Parramatta Road, Concord and at a shop there I acquired my first and only bicycle. It was as much a necessity as a plaything in Glenorie, and once I learned to ride it the walk to the bus became a thing of the past, and the whole area opened up to me. My having never ridden a bike, Dad gave me a few hints and held it while I took the first tentative turns of the pedals. After that it was a matter of doing it myself; practice makes perfect, as they say. I would lean against the fence surrounding the well outside the cottage, then push myself off and wobble a few metres before losing balance and putting a leg on the ground to stop. After a week or so came the day when all of a sudden I was moving rather unsteadily down the driveway, gathering speed past the cow bail, whizzing past the big shed and then, failing to negotiate the bend in the drive, crashing into a small ornamental pine tree. Unhurt, I got back on and from that moment I could ride a bike!

It’s a well known fact that you can always remember where you were when a major event happened, such as the assassination of President Kennedy or the first moon walk. We’d only been at Glenorie a couple of weeks and were sitting in the lounge of the cottage listening to Bob Dyer’s *Pick a Box* on the

radio, when the show was suddenly cut off and mournful music started to play. About ten minutes later an announcer came on and in sombre tones informed us that King George VI had just passed away.

Not long after we had settled in at Glenorie I received another present. Captain was indisputably Dad's dog, while Mr Brown had at various times a beagle, a black and white wire haired terrier named Whisky (naturally), and a sweet natured desexed kelpie bitch named Bidy. The beagle, given to Mr Brown as an unappreciated gift and who I don't think was ever given a name, was a rotten dog, greedy and lacking any brains or intelligence, and wolfed down just about anything edible. I'm rather ashamed to say that in the end Mr Brown told Dad to take him in the car and dump him in Galston Gorge, which he did. Anyway, I'd always wanted a dog of my own but hadn't been allowed one in England. One day Ron Jones, the travelling salesman who came around the various houses and orchards in his truck, selling everything from clothes to household goods – in olden days he'd have been called a pedlar – brought with him two fat little puppies. They were both from the same litter but definitely had different fathers! One was part kelpie, black and tan with a splash of white, and the other was a typical blue heeler cattle dog. The part kelpie became mine; I called him Pal, after Fatty Finn's dog in the comic strips, and I became devoted to him and him to me. Bluey simply became "ours". Sadly, old Captain outlasted all the others. Pal and Bluey went to untimely deaths on the road, Whisky died of tick bite and Bidy was hit by one of the cars, received a broken pelvis and had to be put down. I remember nursing the poor animal in the car all the way to the nearest vet at Pennant Hills, with her whimpering and howling at every bump. I also acquired, I think from the Pecks, a tame rosella that lived in a cage on the front verandah of the cottage.

A less welcome animal on the orchard, at least to me, became the cat. There had always seemed to be a cat around ever since we arrived at *Yallambee*, and at first they were not a problem and in fact an asset, as they kept the mice and rats under control in the feed shed next to the cow bail. However cats have a habit of producing kittens, and soon the population began to grow and grow. Dad was a real softie as far as cats were concerned and couldn't bear to put them down. As soon as he got out of the utility at night he would be surrounded by the animals, all mewing for the milk that they knew he would be bringing in a bucket. When he was milking Sally they would gather around and he would squirt a stream direct into their mouths. Eventually it became too much, with Mum and myself heartily sick of the animals, so the task fell to me to euthanase the litters as they came – that is, when I could find them. Luckily an old upturned bath near the cottage seemed to be a popular place. I despatched them with a quick blow from the sharp edge of a spade, a task I hated but which simply had to be done. Nowadays I reflect on what toll they must have taken on the wildlife, and how much worse it would have been if they were all allowed to live. Ever since those days I have detested cats generally and refused to have one in our house.

There was one exception to this dislike of the feline species. We had a half Persian named Susie who lived by herself down in Mr Brown's house and who became Mum's pet in particular. She was rather fat and lazy, but with a beautiful long and soft coat and an affectionate nature, and I was quite happy to stroke and play with her. She never threw a litter for several years, but all at once produced a single very large kitten which was also allowed to survive and become a household pet.

Speaking of reproduction, a year or two after I arrived at *Yallambee* I was walking with Alan Peck past the paddock where Sally was housed during the day and noticed her to be in some kind of bother. On closer inspection I exclaimed "Crikey! Sal's got a branch or something sticking out of her backside!" Alan, the country lad, quietly pointed out to the callow English boy beside him that it was in fact the legs of a calf sticking out, and I watched in fascination as she delivered a perfect little fawn calf, who we named Daisy. So came my introduction into the process of animal reproduction, a process that even at the age of thirteen or so had not taxed my thinking before then. After all, even the cats hid themselves

away and mysteriously produced kittens. So far as human reproduction was concerned, that was even more of a closed book. In the fifties parents tended not to easily pass on information about the birds and bees, or if they did, did so with acute embarrassment. My own parents were not forthcoming in the least, Mum leaving it to Dad and Dad shirking the task. I was told there was a book they had that I would be shown when they thought the time was right, and I didn't really know what questions to ask anyway. However natural curiosity took over and sneakily I searched the cottage until I found "the book" in a drawer in their bedroom. It proved to be a weighty textbook tome that seemed to concentrate more on tables outlining the prepotency of stallions than of humans making babies, and I lost interest straight away. Luckily the education authorities were a little more progressive than parents and lectures at school, and of course the "grapevine", exposed me to the real new world that was ahead. Hopefully when it came my turn to pass on the facts of life I was a little more open with my own boys.

I soon grew to love the Australian way of life, and particular the clean air and tranquillity of the bush surrounding *Yallambee*. The people of the district were friendly and always helped each other out when needed. The local store was the central hub of village life, run by Bruce Cooper and his wife and helped by George Cromie. It was a real old-fashioned country store selling everything from biscuits to axes – and the biscuits came from a tin, not in individual packets. Cheese was purchased by cutting a great yellow round to order with a wire, and tasted great. Next door to the store was Charlie Hart's service station, which sold basic petrol that you had to hand pump up from the bowser to a four gallon glass jar on top of the pump, then gravity feed it into the car. Next door again was the Post Office and telephone exchange, where there were no secrets! All telephones were manual and you rang up by turning a handle on the front of your phone and the operator answered, placed your call and, as often as not listened in. Next door to the Post Office was George Deaman's bus depot, and immediately across the road from the store was the Memorial Hall, focal point of the social life of Glenorie. Down the road a little way was the Co-op, a produce store selling most of the needs of the orchardists who made up the bulk of Glenorie's population, and past that was the small Returned Servicemen's League clubhouse.

Social life in Glenorie in the first half of the 1950s revolved mainly around the Memorial Hall and the Club. Pictures were shown in the Hall every Saturday night by Jack and Ida Hand, with the upper side windows wide open on warm summer nights to catch the breeze, and just about every Saturday the three of us would attend, or I would ride my bike down, to pedal furiously home in the darkness. The Returned Serviceman's League (RSL) Club in those days was a very small and plain fibro hall, initially with only a kitchen but a little later, when a liquor licence was granted, a small bar. As a returned serviceman because of his time in the Merchant Navy, Dad became a member while Mum joined the Women's Auxiliary, and although they never sought any office they became pillars of the club in those early days. Once a month square dances would be held, with the same repetitive records being played over and over again and one of the men acting as caller. Once a year the Club members, including Dad, would put on a concert in the Memorial Hall and, if amateurish, it was always popularly received. Dad always wore his medals and marched in the local ANZAC Day March from the Club to the war memorial outside the Memorial Hall. In the early years there the march was led by a local resident, Lieutenant General Gordon Bennett, who in wartime had earned much perhaps undeserved opprobrium from some quarters for his escaping from Singapore at its fall while leaving his troops behind. The story deserves a brief telling.

In December 1941 the Japanese invasion of Malaya began and, along with the rest of the Allied forces under the British General Percival, Bennett's division was soon forced to withdraw to Singapore. On 8 February 1942 the Japanese landed in Singapore, and Percival surrendered to the Japanese. Bennett decided that it was his duty to escape from Singapore rather than surrender. He handed over command of the 8th Division to Brigadier Cecil Callaghan and, with a few junior officers and some local Europeans, commandeered a sampan at gunpoint and crossed the Strait of Malacca to the east coast of Sumatra,

where they transferred to a launch in which they sailed up the Jambi River. They then proceeded on foot to Padang, on the west coast of Sumatra. From there Bennett flew to Java and then to Australia. Bennett's escape was initially regarded as praiseworthy, but Percival, who had never got on with Bennett, accused him of relinquishing his command without permission. A court of enquiry was convened and found that Bennett was not justified in handing over his command, or in leaving Singapore. Veterans of the 8th Division, who were generally loyal to Bennett, protested against this finding, and until his death in 1962 Bennett insisted that he had done the right thing in not surrendering.

Apart from the pictures and the RSL Club, there were always fetes and dances being organised, and in later years an amateur dramatics group was formed – but more of that later. After a while George Deaman began running a Saturday night bus to the Odeon picture theatre in Eastwood, meaning we were seeing first release films instead of the months old stuff that Jack Hand obtained, so after a while the movies in the hall became a thing of the past.

Dad and Mum were kept fairly busy at *Yallambee*, and certainly earned their keep and the additional amount of cash they were paid. I suspect this was considerably less than they were worth. Apart from the help from Jack Hodges, which was part time at best and eventually stopped altogether, Dad had the full time job of tending the property. There was a lot more to it than just sitting back and watching the fruit grow. The orchards had to be disced between the rows of trees using the tractor, then the weeds hand-chipped around the base of each tree with a hoe. Blood and bone fertiliser would be scattered around the trees, and once a year before the fruit had set they had to be sprayed with a solution of white oil and copper sulphate to guard against the voracious fruit fly. The picking season for the citrus tended to start around August and run through until October, which meant fairly full days, and here I would help on weekends and during the September school holidays.

To pick the fruit we'd go out into the orchards with the tractor towing a trailer in which was a supply of wooden packing cases. We would wear a picking apron, a stout apron made of canvas that opened at the bottom but which was clipped closed at the shoulders, so that the picked fruit could be placed into it from the sides. From the ground, or from a ladder, we would then pick the ripe oranges and lemons and place them in the apron until it was bulging. We'd then walk to the trailer, open the bottom of the apron and let the fruit drop into the boxes, careful not to bruise it. Once the trailer was full, we'd return to the packing shed and unload the boxes on the floor next to the grader. It was tiring and sometimes hot and dusty work.

Once we'd picked enough fruit, the next step was to grade and pack it. The electrically driven grader would be started up and the boxes of fruit emptied into it one by one. A conveyor belt carried the fruit along and, according to size, it would roll off the belt into one of a dozen compartments ready for packing. Dad usually did this, placing the fruit in wooden boxes in a predetermined pattern according to size, so that the fruit rose slightly above the top of the box. When each box was filled I would place it in a clamp, put a wooden lid on it and press it down, then nail the lid on. I'd then label the box according to size, the labels being preaddressed to our agent at the Flemington markets, and stack the boxes on the platform ready for collection. That night we would hang a white flag from the road gate as a signal for our carrier, Jim Shore, to come and pick up the fruit. Sometime through the night Jim would arrive, usually unload a supply of empty boxes and take away the full ones. Days later Mr Brown would receive a cheque, but by the time the agent's commission was deducted and he had paid Jim Shore, the return was not great and the property never ran at a profit.

As well as the orchard, Dad tended the gardens around Mr Brown's house. Then there was Sally to milk twice a day and supplies to be obtained from the local store and Co-op, so Dad had his hands full. He also acted as chauffeur when Mr Brown wanted to go somewhere, as he didn't drive. Although retired,

one day a week he went in to the Edward Lumley office in Sydney, probably just to keep an eye on things and catch up with old friends over lunch. Dad would drive him to Beecroft station in the morning, return to Glenorie, then go back to pick him up in the afternoon. Mr Brown was also a keen cricket follower, so when there was a Sheffield Shield match or an Australia-England Test match on in Sydney, Dad would drive him on one or all days of the match to the Sydney Cricket Ground, again returning to pick him up in the afternoon. Of course, the Sydney traffic in those days was nowhere near as heavy or slow as it is now, but even so it was a fair slice out of each day. In later years I would take over the cricket chauffeuring, once I had my driving licence. The Austin A40 utility was kept for orchard use and as our vehicle, while another A40, a beige sedan, was used to convey Mr Brown. Later on the utility was replaced by a Morris Minor 1000 utility, and the sedan by a Renault *Fregate*, which I remember as a very nice car to drive.

Meanwhile, Mum was kept busy looking after the two houses, doing the cooking and washing. Every couple of days she would churn the cream obtained from the milk separator and make butter, and she liked to make jams and preserve fruit and vegetables in glass Fowler jars. She would also in the future become an almost full time mother again, this time to Mr Brown's two grandsons; but I'm jumping ahead of myself there. Mr Brown also liked to entertain, sometimes with guests coming for drinks and lunch, and sometimes for a formal dinner party at night. Mum would prepare the dinner, the favourite one seeming to be *chicken Marengo*, and Dad would don black jacket and tie and act as waiter. She became great friends with Florrie Peck next door, and Florrie made her transition from life in England much easier. A simple country woman, she eased Mum into the local community and helped her adjust to the different way of doing things. Even when she and her husband George had to move out of their rented house and build their own in Glenorie itself, they remained very close and saw a lot of each other.

As for me, it was not all work and school, of course. I had plenty of leisure time and although the "tyranny of distance" kept me confined to Glenorie for most of the time, there was still plenty to do. I loved to roam in the bush around the property, alone or with Alan Peck, and to go for bike rides along the quiet and mostly unsealed roads around the area. The dam on the property became my private swimming pool and I made the most of it on the many hot summer days. Its level varied according to the amount of rain we received each winter, and its bottom sloped from nothing to a depth of a couple of metres. The water was warm in the shallow parts but was perpetually icy cold half a metre below the surface, so I avoided swimming in the deepest part. Later on Mr Brown bought a small wooden dinghy for his grandsons, so I would row them around the dam. When I was fifteen I was given an air rifle for my birthday, on the strict understanding I was not to shoot anything live other than a starling, so no tree in the bush or tin can on a stump became safe!

We bought everyday grocery items at the local store, but every Saturday morning we would drive closer to the city to do our main weekly shopping. In the early years we drove to Chatswood, which even then was a significant shopping centre, although a pale imitation of the mega centre of malls and high rises that it is today, and park in the yard of the Mark Mayne dry cleaning factory while we did our shopping. We would go to the G&G and S R Buttle's, forerunners of today's supermarkets, get our groceries and take them back to the car. In those days, trams ran from the Sydney CBD to Chatswood, so we would then catch a tram in Victoria Avenue and ride it to the city, passing the old Hallstrom Silent Knight refrigerator factory in Willoughby and crossing the harbour bridge on what is now the eastern road lanes. The trams terminated in Wynyard station, and we would walk up George or Castlereagh Streets and go to the matinee at one of Sydney's then many cinemas before taking the tram back to Chatswood. On other occasions we would go the pictures in Chatswood itself, at the now long gone *Arcadia* and *Kings* picture theatres. In later years the shopping venue changed to Parramatta, and after finishing our shopping we'd buy fish and chips in North Parramatta, then drive out to North Rocks and

eat them in the bushland behind Muirfield Golf Course in what is now Barclay Road and Perry Street. So it is that I've been familiar with our present area of residence for over fifty years.

I kept in touch with my paternal grandparents through the years. A couple of times a year I'd write to Nanna, and she would write back to me. I would have been about thirteen when in one of her letters she suggested that I was a little too old now to be calling her "Nanna" and suggested "Gran" would be better, so from then on Gran she became. She used to send me the comics that I'd liked to read in England three or four times a year, rolled up in a bundle and wrapped up in brown paper, and I always looked out eagerly for them. For Christmas and birthdays she would send me a postal order for one English pound, which at the exchange rate in those days gave me twenty five shillings (\$2.50) in Australian money. I'd cash it at the local post office and carefully put the green pound note away for a rainy day, only spending the five bob.

A year or so after we arrived at Glenorie we went away for our first holiday, to the then fashionable seaside resort of The Entrance, on the Central Coast north of Sydney. Jack Hodges looked after milking Sally each day. For whatever reason, Dad didn't get the use of the utility and we had to use public transport. Our next door neighbour, Jack Ball, kindly ran us and our suitcases down to Glenorie in his old T-model banger, where we then caught the bus to Eastwood station. From there we caught the electric train to Hornsby, then changed to a steam train that took us north across the Hawkesbury River to deposit us at Gosford station. From there we caught The Entrance Red Bus the rest of the way. It was quite a journey, and of course coming home was the same, except that we didn't have Jack Ball to meet us at Glenorie and had to walk the mile to *Yallambee* lugging our suitcases with us. The joys of travel when you didn't have a car!

At The Entrance we rented a small fibro cottage for two weeks. It was sparsely furnished and rather dilapidated, and my strongest memory of it was of the mosquitos that would come in through the unscreened windows at night. We sprayed with Mortein and burned mosquito coils without seeming to have much effect. The Entrance in those days was not the glitzy, high rise town it is nowadays, but a rather pleasant place in which to have a seaside holiday. The road from Gosford ran down a hill to the old wooden bridge that crossed the entrance to Tuggerah Lake and was lined with shops, the *Prince Edward* cinema and several halls where "housie" (bingo) was played each night. We would frequent these in the evening, alternating between the ones run by the Ambulance Service, the Catholic Church, the RSL and so on. We never won much, but it was fun. We swam down in the entrance channel, and once hired a rowing boat at Long Jetty and went fishing in the shallow waters of the lake. Dad caught the only fish, a bream about ten centimetres long, which he threw back after I'd photographed him proudly holding it up for the world to see.

That was the first of several holidays that we took at The Entrance; in fact, I can't recall our ever going anywhere else for a holiday! On future occasions we went to a place called Kim's Camp, right on the beach at Toowoona Bay, a surf beach about two kilometres from The Entrance proper. Kim's still exists fifty years on, although it's now a very upmarket and rather expensive resort. Back then it was a collection of wooden huts, reasonably well furnished although far from lavish, lining the beachfront or standing on the sloping hillside behind in an almost rainforest setting. Cars had to be parked at the top of the hill, and a barrow was supplied to wheel your luggage down to the cabins. Even in those days it wasn't cheap, relatively speaking, and attracted a clientele from the quite well to do as well as not so well off people like ourselves. We stayed there in the January or May school holidays and thus saw the same group of fellow guests year after year. These included Max Dupain, the famous photographer; John Gilbert of the John A Gilbert car dealership; Robert Southey, General Manager of the English Musical Industries (EMI) group; and their families. There were also two grazing families from the Orange district, the Beazleys and the Crossings. A permanent resident of Kim's Camp was a Commander de

Burgh, an old "sea dog" and a bit of a rogue who liked to try and entice the ladies to his cabin to "see the view to the lighthouse". However he was very good to children and well liked by everyone despite his eccentricities.

Kim's was owned by a Colonel Hughes-Hallett and was famous, then as now, for its gourmet dining room. All meals were inclusive in the tariff and included morning and afternoon teas. Breakfast was a hot and cold buffet, lunch a tremendous smorgasbord and dinner a multiple choice three course meal served at the table. The food was both plentiful and beautifully cooked and presented, and we gorged ourselves for the two weeks we stayed there. It's funny, but the piece of doggerel at the door of the dining room always sticks in my mind:

*Kids under twelve must not dig and delve
For salads and sweets, but remain in their seats.
Their daddies and mummies will attend to their tummies.
This rule will be found to be socially sound.*

To me Kim's was the ideal place to spend a summer or May school holiday. The beach was right at our doorstep, with a gentle surf rolling in to the protected bay. A milk bar was a short walk away, and a short bus ride took me into The Entrance proper and the cinema. Being regulars, quite a circle of friends grew up and played together, and we all got along very well. On a couple of occasions Mum and Dad were allocated a two-person cabin and I got a diminutive single one for myself, right on the beach at the far end of the Camp, an area known as "Siberia".

Dad wasn't able to take more holidays at first because of the need for Sally to be milked twice each day, effectively tying him down to the place. Jack Hodges' tenure didn't last much past the first year or so, as he became too unreliable, so Dad was stuck with the job. However a couple of years after Daisy the calf was born – she was sold off as a vealer – Mr Brown agreed to sell Sally, and that shackle was released. From then on the job of bringing home the milk each day fell to me. The local "milko" wouldn't deliver past the last house in Glenorie itself, so each morning on the way to catch the bus to school I'd drop an empty billycan off at the Semple house, and each afternoon I'd pick it up full from them and carry it home on my bike.

One incident that stands out clearly in my mind during those early years was watching a plane crash. I was out in the orchard one morning and heard the noise of two planes in the air. This was nothing unusual; they were fighter planes from the Richmond Air Base practising dogfights and normally attracted no attention. However on this occasion I heard one engine cut out and, looking up, saw an aircraft plummeting straight towards the ground and disappearing from sight some kilometres away, crashing into the bush between Glenorie and Arcadia. The news that night reported the fatal crash of a Mustang fighter. Two days later a couple of mates and I rode our bikes down the back lanes of Glenorie as far as we could, then walked through the gullies and dense bush to the crash site. By that time most of the wreckage and the pilot's remains had been taken away, and yellow tape surrounded the site itself. The impact had left a large crater in the ground and started a small bushfire, scorching the area for a few metres around. All that remained of the plane were tiny pieces of shredded aluminium, nuts and bolts and odd scraps of fabric and material, showing how hard the impact must have been.

To make some extra pocket money, sometimes during the winter months when many people came out for a Sunday drive to Wiseman's Ferry I would pick some oranges, lemons and passionfruit and set up a small roadside stall, with some hastily chalked signs along the road in each direction. I never made much, and by agreement half of the proceeds went to Mr Brown, who after all did own the fruit. Enthused by a Yates seed catalogue, I decided it would be fun to create a vegetable patch and grow our

own vegetables, and was allocated an area of ground in the garden of the main house. However I underestimated the amount of work involved, even with the use of the rotary hoe to break up the soil, but persisted to the point where a few lettuce and tomatoes went into the ground. However Mr Brown then decided to landscape the surrounds of the house, of which more a little later, and I saw all my hard work as being futile and promptly dropped the whole project, secretly pleased.

Then there was the rabbit trapping. These were the days before myxomatosis had reduced the rabbit population, and the bunnies used to run wild in the lower part of the orchards. Michael Ball and Barry Peck took me trapping one night and showed me how to set a trap. A slight depression would be scraped in an open area of soil, the peg at the end of the chain of the trap hammered firmly into the ground and the trap carefully opened with the foot and set. A piece of newspaper would then be placed over the open jaws and dirt gently trickled over the trap until it was hidden from sight. The area would then be brushed with a stick to remove all sign of footprints. Anyway, we set several traps and went away, to return later that evening. There were two bunnies in the traps, which Michael quickly despatched by a swift wrench that broke their back, then took home to skin and clean.

I could do that, I thought, and supply some meat for the pot, so Mr Brown paid up for some traps and away I went down to the bottom of the orchard. I carefully set them as I'd been shown, keeping Pal tied up out of harm's way, then that night returned with a torch. There was a rabbit in one of the traps, squealing in pain and terror. I released it and tried to break its back like Michael had done, but didn't have the right knack and in the end had to dispatch the poor creature with the tomahawk I carried. Perhaps I was too soft hearted, but the distress of the animal put me right off and I never went trapping again.

As I mentioned much earlier on, Mr Brown was a widower. He and his wife had three children, one of whom, Barbara, had also passed on. We came to know the remaining son and daughter fairly well. Robert Crichton-Brown succeeded Mr Brown as Managing Director of Lumley's of Lloyds, and eventually managed to snare a knighthood for himself, becoming Sir Robert. He was also a yachtsman of some note and raced his yacht *Balandra* in the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. Bob, as we never called him to his face, was a snob of the first order, a person who had money and let everyone know it. As a result our limited relationship with him was one of politeness and no warmth. His wife, Nonie, was quite different – a friendly person who always went out of her way to speak to us. They had two children, Anthony and Bernice (Bunny), around my age but with whom I had little to do. Anthony went on to succeed his father as MD at Lumley's, making it a three generation position, but from all accounts was not a success as the company was later taken over by another.

The Crichton-Browns had a large home on the North Shore and a hobby farm down in Bowral, in the Southern Highlands, and one of the first day trips away from *Yallambee* was to drive down there with Dad and Mum to deliver some goods. I got a day off school for the occasion. That was the first of several journeys to Bowral over the years; in those days the Hume Highway ran through Camden and over the Razorback Range to Picton, and it was quite a scenic drive. Who else who reads this remembers the Anthony Hordern tree on the south side of the Razorback, a Moreton Bay fig that became the icon of the retailer's motto, *While I Live I'll Grow?* Prophetically, when the tree died so did the Hordern retail empire crumble; rumour had it that the tree was deliberately poisoned!

Mr Brown's surviving daughter, Brenda, was married to a Keith Anderson, who owned the Mark Mayne dry cleaning factory in Chatswood and a string of dry cleaning stores on the North Shore; in fact, in the 1950s it was a very well known trade name in Sydney. Brenda impressed us as a rather eccentric and moody person, not very practical or over endowed with commonsense. Keith was a "hail fellow well met" kind of man, quite friendly but rather indecisive and one of the "old boy" school whose priority in

life seemed to be the golf course rather than the business. That might explain how Mark Mayne disappeared rather rapidly from the scene in the late 1950s. Brenda and Keith lived in Wahroonga and had two adopted boys Edwin Scott (Ted) and Kim.

Some years after we settled at Glenorie Brenda had a severe and debilitating stroke, rendering her completely unable to look after the children, and that's how Mum came to be a part time mother again. Mr Brown asked her if she would take on looking after the two boys, with the help of a nanny, if they came to live at Glenorie, probably only on a temporary basis, and she agreed; "temporary" would in the event become several years. So it was that Ted and Kim came to live in the big house at *Yallambee*. Ted was about nine years younger than me, and Kim two years younger again, so my role was something between being a brother and an uncle to them. I guess we got along pretty well together, although I know there were occasions when I resented the attention they were getting rather than me. However they became part of the family circle, so to speak, with Ted going to the local school – I don't remember if Kim did. They were both bright and cheerful kids, especially Kim. He had bad knock knees and in order to correct them had to wear leg braces for much of the time. Their parents used to come at the weekends and take them on outings or home for the weekend, but that became irregular and it was more often us that would take them out. This was to work to my advantage, as in later years when I had my driving licence, and after they'd returned home, I used to suggest that I pick them up and take them to the beach at weekends – an offer that was usually accepted, to my pleasure.

As agreed, Mr Brown hired nannies to look after the boys with Mum, an arrangement that didn't completely work out. One of them, a Mrs Larkin, was very good and Mum hit it off well with her. A country lady from the Upper Hunter, she was a very motherly person and we all got on famously with her. Unfortunately she was with us for only a year or so. Then there was a Mrs Dubois, a hoity-toity person who expected that her only role was to attend to the children and not, for example, to help in the kitchen or wash up the dishes. She didn't last long! Another one was a complete confidence trickster. She arrived one day and the next morning promptly declared that the conditions were unsuitable, and demanded two weeks pay in lieu of notice. Mr Brown had no choice but to pay, as to keep her on would have caused unpleasantness, which was the exact object of her scam, of course! There were probably a couple of others who I no longer recall, but apart from Mrs Larkin it was really my mother who raised Ted and Kim.

Around 1956 we had a welcome visitor from England, my Auntie Bet. She was on her way to see her daughter in law, Mary Hilton, and family over in Perth and stopped off with us for a few days. We showed her around Sydney and she brought us up to date with what was happening over in England, and it was with some regret that we saw her move on.

I mentioned earlier that Mr Brown decided to have some landscaping done around the main house, and he hired a stonemason named Bert Webb. Bert was with us for almost a year full time, arriving each day in his old round backed Dodge sedan from his home in Wentworthville, and constructed a large paved terrace area at the rear of the house, as well as garden beds and retaining walls, and also paved the driveway in the house area. He quarried the sandstone himself, of which there was plenty to be had as the whole property stood on a sandstone ridge. He found a large outcrop in the bush at the edge of the lower orchard, and would laboriously hammer a steel drill bar into the rock, fill it with explosive and then blast the rock. He certainly knew what he was doing, as the stone he obtained was beautifully straight and symmetrical. He would then finish each piece to the size and shape he wanted, and Dad would convey it to the house on the back of the tractor, which by then was a big blue Fordson Major. Like most country boys, I was driving a tractor long before I got my driver's licence.

Mum had always enjoyed parties and catering for them, and in our later years at Glenorie she organised a couple of Christmas and New Year's Eve functions. One of these, at Christmas 1958, was a roaring success with over a hundred people coming, the other less successful as will be seen. On the occasion of the successful one, Mr Brown obligingly stayed elsewhere for the night and we had the party *al fresco* on the back terrace, where Bert Webb's handiwork had created a large paved space. Friends from the RSL and all over Glenorie came along, Mum did a vast amount of catering, Dad ran the bar and some of the guests helped me look after the barbecue, and a great night was had by all.

The unsuccessful New Year's Eve party was spoiled by a party pooper not unfamiliar to anyone living in the Australian bush – fire! For two or three days smoke had been rising from the network of gullies lying west of the village and over towards the Windsor-Wisemans Ferry road. That afternoon a westerly sprang up, and the fire began rapidly advancing towards the Old Northern Road at Five Mile Forest (now Forest Glen) and the back of orchard properties including *Yallambee*. Around four o'clock the call went out for the bushfire brigade members and all other able bodied men and boys to assemble and head up the road. Dad, while not a formal member of the brigade, had often turned out for them before, and at age sixteen or so I was old enough to shoulder a knapsack spray. Fortunately the fire veered away from the back of *Yallambee* but started to threaten houses at Five Mile Forest, so we all boarded trucks and utilities and sped up there. We stopped at a bend in the road, opposite a gully on the western side and with a weatherboard home on the eastern side, and awaited the flames. When they came, they came at express speed and the Brigade Captain yelled out for us to get out of there quick! We escaped the wall of flame by the skin of our teeth, which roared past us with a terrifying noise and scorching heat, but by some miracle left the house intact. Behind the house was orchards, which slowed the fire's progression right down, and we were then able to go in with the knapsack sprays and quench the spot fires left burning. However the fight was far from over, with other hot spots to attend to and back burning to be done. I went back home and, the party being out of the question now, with some of the wives of the fire-fighters I helped Mum to load the party goodies and drinks into our utility and their cars, and we took it out to them to eat on the roadside as they took a break from their work.

Mr Brown was generous in many ways, but for some reason very grudging about small things. One of these was over the use of the cars, both with Mum and Dad, and later on me when I'd got my licence. Apart from the Saturday shopping trips, they really had to go cap in hand to him to use a vehicle at other times, which really irked them because although he always said yes, it was always with a reluctant "Oh, I suppose so!" or "Oh, all right!", as if they were asking for the world. So it was that when they came into a small windfall – Grandad and Gran Perry sent them a present of a thousand English pounds (twelve hundred and fifty Aussie pounds or \$2500 dollars in today's currency) they decided to buy a car of their own. Bob Robbins, a fellow Pom who owned the Shell station in Dural and who we looked upon as a friend until then, sold them a small Hillman sedan, probably of late 1930s vintage. It proved to be a real "bomb", with little power, often breaking down and with a leaking exhaust system that sent fumes into the back of the car, where of course I was sitting and had to bear the brunt. Eventually they had to give it up as a bad job and disposed of it I know not how. Thankfully Mr Brown became less grudging about using his cars after that episode, and Bob Robbins became *persona non grata* to the Perry family!

Of the windfall, I was given fifty pounds, which was a lot of money in those days. I agonised for a while over whether to buy a brand new Speedwell bicycle with three speed gears and all the bells and whistles. However I was at the stage where I liked to listen to the radio for the hit parades, the nightly serials like *Larry Kent*, *The Tower On the Thames*, *Night Beat* and so on, and the quiz shows like the *Quiz Kids*, Bob Dyer's *Pick a Box* and *Cop The Lot*, and Jack Davey's *Give It a Go*, and I dearly wanted a portable radio of my own. The radio won and I became the proud possessor on an AWA Radiola portable. Now in this day and age of transistors a portable radio would fit in a shirt pocket or be even smaller, but back then it was still the valve era and my "portable" was almost the size of a briefcase,

weighed several kilos and had a battery as big as three cigarette packets put together – definitely a “luggable” rather than a portable. However it was my pride and joy, and I would listen to it at night in my bedroom and take it with me on outings. Later I was to sell it in order to buy my first radiogram.

Then as now, one annual event looked forward to with great anticipation was the Royal Easter Show. For my first one or two I was taken by my parents, but after that I would go with friends. For months before I would save pennies in a big glass jar, and just before show time I would take this in to the Commonwealth Bank in Parramatta and exchange my hoard for notes and coin, which Mum and dad would supplement with a couple of pounds. We would catch George Deaman’s bus to Eastwood, take the train to Central and then usually walk to the Showground, which in those days of course was at Moore Park. The Show back then was rather different in many ways to today’s Shows; smaller, of course, but with different exhibits and less emphasis on spending money. The show bags – called sample bags in those days – were an undoubted attraction that gobbled up some of my capital, but they contained a lot less junk than they do nowadays and represented, in most cases, a genuine bargain when compared to retail prices. The Sweetacres bag containing delights such as Jaffas and Minties was always sought after, as well as others like Lifesavers and Cadbury’s. Sideshow Alley was much smaller, with fewer major rides, but still fun and a place to spend money. I always remember that not far inside the main entrance was an outdoor stand, a catwalk featuring a man who, using a broad brush and some buckets containing different coloured paints, would paint a rapid if rather crude picture on a large sheet of butcher’s paper. He gained some considerable fame in later years. His name? Rolf Harris.

It was the exhibits, however, that differed to today’s show. Of course the livestock was much the same, and we’d tour the horse, cattle, sheep and pig pavilions, pet the animals in the Children’s Zoo, look in on the dogs and cats, and so on. But there were major exhibits and stands featuring manufactured goods and the services provided by government departments, housed in the vast Hall of Industries and Manufacturers’ Pavilion – now part of the Fox film studios. Few of these remain in today’s Show. One of my favourites was the Electricity Commission stand, where a machine heated a six inch nail until it turned white hot and broke into two. On another stand you could press your own souvenir “coin” for that year’s Show. There were also a lot of souvenir giveaways and “collectibles” that would fill up the spaces in our sample bags. Farm machinery was on display, all manner of fascinating tractors and implements, and most of the major car dealers had stands showing off the latest models. The Police Museum was always a “must” to visit, with its sometimes grisly mementos of horrific crimes. So much of today’s Show seems to be devoted to selling, with pavilions and tents full of stalls flogging all kinds of odds and ends. Having said all that, the essence of the Show – the bush on display in the city – was just the same.

We would tramp every inch of the Showground, then wearily take a seat in the main arena and watch the evening’s events. These were much like today’s with a grand parade, trotting races (always a favourite), precision driving and each year a specialty act such as the man riding a motorcycle up a slack wire, or the human cannonball. At the end came the fireworks, then we would wend our way back to the station, catch the train back to Eastwood and the late bus to Glenorie, broke, dog tired but happy.

Another annual event I looked forward to was always “cracker night”, officially the Empire (later Commonwealth) Day celebrations in May. In those days it was quite legal to buy fireworks, so I’d try and keep a little money back from the Royal Show visits to buy some crackers for Empire Night. There was usually a bonfire organised somewhere in the district, but in later years I got to organise our own. I mentioned that on the property there was a block further up the road on which we grew passionfruit, separated by bushland at the head of a gully. This bushland had been partially cleared by felling some trees and then abandoned, but each year there was some regrowth of the felled trees. I would cut down this regrowth and, with copious supplies of other dead wood from the gully and rubbish pieces from the

property, construct a handsome bonfire. On the night we would be joined by several neighbours and have an enjoyable get-together.

There's an interesting and rather sad story about that bushland at the head of the gully. The Old Northern Road, of course, was the original convict built road that carried traffic from Sydney to Newcastle and points north, and just off the road in the bush near where I built the bonfire was a beautifully constructed circular sandstone well, obviously crafted by experienced masons, which would have provided drinking water for the convict gangs and travellers taking the road north. So far as I know, no archaeological body was aware of its existence. The sad part about it was that after Mr Brown sold Yallambee the bushland was razed and four homes built there, and the bulldozers simply filled the well in and obliterated all traces. So do we destroy our heritage!

When I was thirteen, and looking to make some extra money, I got on my bike and went around the orchards looking for a summer holiday job picking fruit. Friends of Mum and Dad from the RSL, Jack and Zoë Williams, took me on so each day except Sunday I would cycle down to their property on Cattai Road. They grew peaches and plums, and I soon learned the difference between a Red Becky and a Blackburn peach. Picking stone fruit was similar to picking citrus, but much more care had to be taken in the handling to avoid bruising the fruit. Jack and I would go out with his tractor and trailer and do the picking, while Zoë would work in the packing shed, boxing it to go to the markets each night. The fruit would be picked slightly on the green side so as to fully ripen only when it reached the shops. The work was hard, and I was paid the princely if fair price of a pound (two dollars) a day for eight full hours of labour. A Scottish lad, Sandy Peebles, joined me on the picking for some time until there was insufficient fruit left to justify both of us working.

The Williams' had a daughter, Maureen, who was a bit of a tomboy, and while I was picking and her father was back at the shed, she would sneak up and throw wind-fallen fruit at me. I'd promptly reciprocate, and once or twice we both incurred the wrath of Jack, but later on we'd laugh about it and remained good friends. Jack himself was a small and wiry man of around sixty who had been in the Navy, was copiously tattooed and had a sailor's vocabulary, although he didn't often use it except when something went wrong. I got on well with both Jack and Zoe, and my work must have pleased them as I picked for them again the following summer, as well as doing some pruning during the May school holidays.

Later on I decided there were easier ways of earning money than picking fruit. I got a job at one of the two G J Coles chain stores that then stood in Church Street, Parramatta. The concept of the chain store has now disappeared, and the Coles name is found only on giant supermarkets, but back in the fifties and earlier both Coles and Woolworths had main street stores that comprised counters all around the walls and in islands, from which were sold all manner of small goods including clothing, household items like crockery, toys, novelties, manchester and haberdashery, confectionery and so on. Sales assistants would stand behind the counters and register the sales, take the money and wrap the goods in brown paper bags – no plastic then! It was hard on the feet, but a lot easier than picking fruit. I started out on the counter, but later on I was asked to work out back in the storerooms, where I would help unload the trucks delivering stock, put it on shelves in the store, then deliver it to the counters when the sales assistants requisitioned it. Again I must have pleased the store manager, Mr Vigar, as I got my job back the following summer and he gave me a reference when the time came to leave school.

That job at Coles also proved to be the source of my first date. A girl named Jan Sharp also had a holiday job there, working on the confectionery counter, and during my second year there I summoned up the courage to ask her out. We went out a couple of times, as I recall to the pictures in the city and to the Zoo, and later on she came out and stayed at Glenorie for the weekend. She had gone to Liverpool Girls

High School, and asked me to a dance there later in the year. I couldn't dance a step (still can't!) and frantically took some lessons at a studio above the old Murrays Department Store in Parramatta. Anyway, I made it to the dance, somehow got around the dance floor a few times, then took Jan back to her parents' house to meet them and stayed the night. Whether it was my lack of dancing skills or for some other reason, not long after I received a "Dear John" letter from her saying she was going with someone else. Although a bit sad, I was far from broken hearted over the way my first "romance" had ended.

I said earlier that Dad was left to work the property virtually on his own once Jack Hodge became a thing of the past, apart from my own brief contribution during holidays. There was one unsuccessful attempt to provide help, which was as comical as it was abortive. Mr Brown was asked if he would take on a White Russian refugee named George as a farm labourer and agreed to do so. The old separator room under the main house was cleaned out and sparsely furnished with a bed, table, chair and cupboard, and George duly moved in. He would have been in his early sixties, spoke barely a word of English and while quite an affable person was hardly much company for anyone. Mum would serve him breakfast and dinner down in his room, while he would eat a sandwich lunch with Dad out on the orchard. From the start his competence and work rate was so low as to be laughable, and apart from using a hoe to chip weeds around the trees he wasn't much use at all! That wasn't the worst of it, however. After a couple of weeks he not unreasonably asked for the weekend away, so Dad ran him down to the bus. On the Sunday night some friend ran him back home, totally and incomprehensibly drunk, and it took him until Tuesday to be fit for work again. This happened again the following weekend, and Dad got in touch with the contact who had sent George to us. The latter sent a White Russian lad, Cyril Molchannof, who coincidentally was in my class at high school, as an interpreter and Dad read the riot act to George, saying that Mr Brown wouldn't tolerate another instance. This seemed to work for a couple of weeks, but then George developed a severe bout of flu and kept to his room for another week, with my Mum feeding him soup. It was obvious the whole thing wasn't going to work, so when he was well enough he was given his marching orders, despite his entreaties to "Meester Boss" to keep him on.

Around the mid 1950s Mum and Dad became friends with two other English couples, although I can't remember now how they would have met up. Ted and Monica Wilson, with their grown son Trevor, ran the café and snack bar that once stood in Parramatta Park overlooking the Parramatta River at what used to be known as "Little Coogee", while Sam and May Brant were in turn friends of the Wilsons and in some business partnership arrangement with them. The Brants would in fact become the closer friends to us of the two couples. People visiting modern day Parramatta Park would find it impossible to imagine that there was once a beautiful sandy beach on the river, near the weir that stands behind what is now Parramatta Stadium, which on the weekend would be thronged by people splashing in the then clean river water and sunbathing on the sandy shore. We would often drive down there on a Sunday ourselves, when Mum would help Monica and May make sandwiches while I would help serve milk shakes and ice creams in the shop. Trevor was a big and rangy young man, with a bad lisp and a profound lack of self confidence which sadly was as much his parents' fault as anybody's.

Those same years were also the time of the famous Redex Reliability car trials around Australia, with notables such as Jack Davey, Jack "Gelignite" Murray and Maitland chemist Ken Tubman, who famously won in an old Peugeot, taking part. In 1955 the Trial started from Parramatta Park instead of the usual venue of Bondi Beach, and Ted Wilson won a contract to run some of the snack bars set up to feed the crowds who were expected to pour in to watch the cars being flagged away. It was a case of "all hands on deck", with Ted recruiting as many helpers as he could, including myself, and stacks of Sargeants pies and bottles of soft drink were stockpiled. Sadly, the crowds never reached the predicted figures and Ted made a loss on the day, but at least I got to see most of the cars.

So far the story of my years at *Yallambee* has been one of mainly positives. However there was a major negative, a problem that started to manifest itself about a year after we went there and worsened over the ensuing years. It involved my father.

As I mentioned earlier, Dad had always been partial to a drink and in the early years of his marriage to Mum this had not appeared to be a problem. A life at sea, and indeed the social mores of the times, would have encouraged drinking and smoking, or at least not discouraged it. The circle of friends that he had in England, which included my uncles Gordon Bolitho and Doug Hilton, were also fond of a pint or two. However at Glenorie things started to go down hill. For a start, Dad wasn't happy in the work he had to do on the orchard. Although he had taken the job because of the benefits it offered in allowing Mum and myself to come out to Australia, we knew he didn't like the work and over time we saw he had come to detest it. Mum therefore was fairly tolerant, but Dad's drinking became worse and he would take to alcohol at every opportunity. When he drove Mr Brown to the station for his weekly trip to Sydney, Dad would then go to the pub before driving back to Glenorie, and more and more when he went back in the afternoon to pick Mr Brown up he would be partly "under the weather". It was the same on our Saturday shopping trips to Parramatta. Dad would disappear to the pub while Mum and I did the shopping, and on the way home we had to stop at the *Bull and Bush* in Baulkham Hills (in those days the nearest pub to Glenorie) for a few more, and also to buy a bottle. Any time we went out would involve a visit to the pub, and usually the purchase of more alcohol to drink back at home.

I have to say Dad was never violent or abusive when drinking. Rather he would become an embarrassment when in company, or an oppressive presence when at home. His speech would become slurred, he would keep repeating himself and would get annoyed if Mum suggested he'd had one too many. We couldn't have a conversation when he was like that, so when we were together there'd be a moody silence. I could make myself scarce during these periods, which were increasing in frequency, but Mum was less able to and had to endure them; they were also a financial drain on their not large income, and so they never had much spare cash although generally we lacked for nothing. The marriage held together, but after a while Mum moved out of the cottage and down into the main house, ostensibly so she could be near to Mr Brown if he needed anything during the night – he was by this time well into his seventies and not a particularly well man – but really because it was too unpleasant to be with Dad.

One of the worst problems with Dad's drinking was, of course, the effect on his driving. Glenorie was not exactly the hub of the universe and to go anywhere, even to visit people in the village, involved a car trip. Then there were the shopping trips and taking Mr Brown to the station and to the cricket. Luckily the traffic was not as heavy in those days, and there was no such thing as a breathalyser or an .05 limit, but we all felt uneasy with Dad at the wheel. Eventually Mum, who had never driven in her life, was forced to take driving lessons and get her driver's licence. After that she did all the driving home after Dad's visits to the pub or to social events involving alcohol, and indeed the car was a boon to her, allowing much more social activity than previously. Dad still drove Mr Brown and thankfully moderated his drinking somewhat on those occasions after Mr Brown had finally told him to get himself under control. In any case, Mr Brown's trips to the city grew more infrequent as he got older, and once I had my own licence I would be the one to take him to the cricket – of which more later.

Despite the drinking, Dad led a charmed life while driving. Only once did he have an accident that involved having too much to drink. There were two other occasions when we were involved in a minor "head to toe" with another car, but on both those occasions Dad was stone cold sober. The drinking accident occurred one night when Dad had been acting as barman for a dinner given by Sir Robert Crichton-Brown at his home on the North Shore. On the way home alone in the utility, just near Oakhill College on the Old Northern Road at Rogans Hill, he left the road and ended up in a ditch some four

metres below, the ute miraculously remaining on its wheels. Dad was completely unhurt and hitched a ride home, and next morning when I passed on the school bus there was the ute sitting forlornly down in the ditch, awaiting a tow truck. Miraculously it was also virtually undamaged. Dad swore he'd merely fallen asleep at the wheel, but we knew better.

Dad's drinking cast a pall on what were otherwise happy and contented teenage years for me. It was an embarrassment to bring friends home to meet him or to stay over when he was in his cups. It was also no longer possible to have meaningful father and son conversations with him, and so I lost out on a lot of the things that a teenager should share with his father. There was no longer a rapport between us, and while deep down I still loved my Dad, my feelings towards him at that time were more of resentment and perhaps an underlying sense of being sorry for him, rather than of affection. More important was the damage that he wrought to himself with his drinking and heavy smoking. Mum always denied that he was an alcoholic, but the plain unvarnished truth is that he was, and it would be his undoing and lead to an early disability and death.

Chapter Six

School Days, School Days, Dear Old Golden Rule Days

Reverting in time in this story, so it was that in the second week of the first term of 1952 I was enrolled at Hornsby Junior Technical School and commenced my high school education. Mum and Dad drove me to Hornsby on the first day to enrol me, and after that I travelled each day by bus. The journey was an education in itself, after the short bus ride I was used to in England. Firstly until I got my bike there was a walk of a mile to George Deaman's bus depot in Glenorie, lugging the Globite school case in which one carried one's books in those days, from where I caught a bus to Dural, five miles towards Sydney. There my fellow pupils and I changed to another bus that took us the remaining twelve or so miles to Hornsby via the Galston Gorge. As its name implies, this is a deep sandstone gorge through which runs Galston Creek on its way to link up with Berowra Creek and so the Hawkesbury River. The road through the gorge is narrow, winding and steep, with the ascent on the Hornsby side involving six hairpin bends, said to be the most acute in New South Wales, on each of which the bus had to enter the bend, then reverse until its tail was almost overhanging the edge of the steep gorge, then complete its turn. In the afternoon we came back the same way, and it was a good hour and a half journey in each direction.

While eventually the novelty wore off, the drive through the gorge each morning was in many ways quite magical,, with the sunlight being left behind and appearing only spasmodically through the trees as we descended through the deep bush, then rattled over the wooden bridge across a side creek and then a concrete one over the main creek. In summer the heat of the day was already rising, and the smell of bushfire smoke often hung in the air. On autumn and spring mornings there would often be mist filling the gorge or hanging in wisps among the trees, and one of the first poems I learned at school in Australia, Henry Kendall's *Bellbirds*, seemed very appropriate to me:

*"Through channels of coolness the echoes are calling,
And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling"*

In those first few days at school I became acquainted with most of the teachers who would see me through the next three years. The headmaster was Alfred Shrubbs, MA – "Alfie" to us boys behind his back – a dapper man, rather balding and with a pencil moustache. We didn't see a lot of him, as he taught only one class. It was the Deputy Headmaster, Tom Holder, who ran the school with an iron rod, a loud voice and a very firm and brusque no-nonsense manner; behind this, however, he was a fair man and a good teacher. I had him for maths during my third year there. Geoffrey English, appropriately, was my English teacher in my final year at Hornsby, another small, rather roly-poly and balding man who reminded me of Friar Tuck, with a good sense of humour and rapport with his pupils. Mr Gunn also taught me English in my first two years there. Mr Lowbridge, and later Col Huett, were the science teachers. "Rudy" Riddett, of more shortly, was the woodwork teacher, and Mr Duncan the metalwork teacher. The latter was in his sixties and long past his use-by date; he would spend most of his class time berating us for what he saw as our bad behaviour, and praising one particular refugee boy – a nice enough lad who was himself very embarrassed by being singled out. Then there was the technical drawing teacher, a pleasant and affable man whose name unfortunately escapes me; a second manual trades teacher, Mr Chambers, a snowy haired Gallipoli veteran; and the music teacher, Lennie Lambert. A couple of others appeared on the scene during my stay there, but generally the teaching population remained steady.

Back to "Rudy" Riddett for the moment. On my first day we had a woodwork class, so I trooped in to the woodwork room with the other boys, for whom of course this was their second lesson. Rudy asked them to get out the job they'd worked on the week before, which was a simple piece of wood that they'd

planed on the face side and edge, and to place their set squares on it. He then went around the benches looking at each boy's work, and as he did so he told about eight of them to stand out in front of the class. Finished, he then took out a cane and proceeded to give each of the boys he had singled out two cuts across the hands. The rest of the class looked on in horror, not knowing what was going on or why, and in my case I was filled with even more dread. Is this what schooling in Australia was all about, was my immediate thought! After he had finished, Rudy addressed the whole class and said "That's a lesson none of you will ever forget – always place the set square against the *face* edge of the timber like I taught you last week!" In fairness to him, he subsequently proved to be a very able, fair and practical teacher.

Despite my misgivings that I'd be treated as an outsider, or a "pommy", I was well received and treated by my fellow students as being no different from anyone else. In particular I was befriended by three boys and we remained a "gang of four" over most of the next three years, until inexplicably there was a falling-out, although I don't think this was of my doing. Johnny "Puddle" Lake, Geoff Stevens and David Coleman became my constant playground companions, but as they all lived in Epping that was as far as our relationship went. There were a few others from Glenorie and Galston who I travelled on the bus with each day, including Harold Shore, son of our local carrier, who became a successful businessman in later years with his own fuel company; Trevor Knight; Max Christie and others. Although Hornsby Junior Technical was a boys-only school (there were few co-ed high schools in those days), Hornsby Home Science School was just across the road so several girls from the Glenorie district also travelled on the bus. I had a teenage crush on a very attractive blonde girl from Galston, Anne Duffy, who used to sit on my knee if the bus became crowded, as it usually did. Ann left school at sixteen and became a model, and she appeared in posters for Kodak film. Beyond the "gang of four" my classmates included Colin Murphy, whose father owned a butcher's shop with the memorable motto "*pleased to meet you with meat to please you*", and who later became a builder; Kevin Stanton, who was tragically killed in a road accident the year after we passed the Intermediate Certificate; Peter Clutton, who became a professional golfer; Bruce Kearsley, who became a Commonwealth Bank manager; Stan Wilson; Bobby Inman; and others too numerous to mention.

One who should be mentioned, however, was an almost namesake called Richard Parry, resulting in a clash of names that sometimes caused confusion with the teachers. Richard was a portly and rather bombastic fellow and something of a railway fanatic; often during lessons in the science room, which had a view of the Hornsby railway yards, he'd pay more attention to the locomotives passing by than of the ministrations of the teacher. He achieved a moment of glory one very hot Saturday when, standing on Epping station, he observed the lines had buckled in the heat and ran along the track to flag down an oncoming train. The story made the Sunday tabloids next day. His father was the manager of the Commonwealth Bank at Condell Park, and Richard followed him into the Bank. The reason I single out Richard is that, when many years later I retired from the Bank myself, Richard was in my department and attended my farewell; in my speech I mentioned he was the person I'd known longer than anyone else in the room.

After school finished each day there'd be a wait of a half hour or so for the bus back through the Gorge to Dural. Dad would give me a shilling each morning with which to buy the two afternoon papers, the *Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*, for four pence each, with four pence left over to buy an ice cream or ice block. We would also kill time by looking lovingly over the new bicycles in the local sports store and pestering the staff of the menswear store for cards and blotters from the *Men of Stamina* series put out by "Stamina Menswear – Tailored From Crusader Cloth". The bus was the only one that ran back to Dural, and to miss it meant a phone call to Glenorie for someone to come and get me, so needless to say I was very careful not to be caught out. Once I was kept in on detention for some transgression, which meant I

missed the bus. This brought a note from my parents asking that if I was to be punished, it was not to be by being kept in after school!

At the end of my first year at Hornsby I recall that there was a School Concert, in which I appeared in a play as the Viking God Thor. From what I remember the play was mediocre, but the experience sparked some interest in me in stage work which would blossom in later years. Apart from the play, the school orchestra was also mediocre, prompting Dad to say he'd never heard a more painful rendition of Schubert's *Midsummer Night's Dream*!

My three years at Hornsby were generally contented ones. I did well at my studies, usually placing high up in the class marks in English, Maths, Social Studies and Science, and also the theory side of the technical subjects, although less so with my practical work. In my first year there I was second in my class of 39, and in my second year came sixth. As I said earlier, I was a "head" person rather than a "hands" person. The one exception was Technical Drawing, which I always did well at. The fact that I'd missed half a year's schooling in England was of no consequence, as I found that the first year's work in English and Mathematics (with the exception of algebra) was for the most part the same work I'd done in my final year of primary school in England. Even the English novel – *Wind in the Willows* – was the same! I got on well with my teachers for the most part – nobody got on with Mr Duncan! – and must have behaved myself reasonably well because I only got the cane twice in three years, in a time when the cane would often be produced for very minor misdemeanours. Once I made some smart remark in Music and incurred the ire of, and two cuts on the hand from, Lennie Lambert. The other time I got similar treatment from Geoff English, but time has erased the memory of the transgression that brought that about.

The thing I liked least about school, and at times came to dread, was the twice weekly Physical Training lessons. I was always on the stout side – one PT teacher in his report diplomatically referred to me as "rather cumbersome" – and found it virtually impossible to carry out some of the exercises we were faced with, especially the vaulting horse. Things were not helped by a couple of rather sadistic PT teachers who seemed to revel in making examples of Richard, myself and a couple of others in front of everybody else. It became a cross I had to bear, but not willingly. School sport, on the other hand, I quite enjoyed. In summer a large group of us would take the train – in those days the old red wooden rattlers - down the North Shore line to Roseville, to be met there by a couple of buses that would run us down to Roseville Baths, on Middle Harbour and next to Roseville Bridge. In the 'fifties the baths stood next to the old low level Roseville Bridge, both of them long gone and the bridge replaced by the present great concrete structure. The baths were simply a partitioned area of the harbour, fenced so that sharks could not enter but otherwise tidal. There we would spend the afternoon just swimming and playing around, with no attempt to organise races. In winter we would walk out to Rofe Park at Hornsby Heights and play softball. In my third year I took up tennis, and we would play at the courts down Edgeworth David Avenue in Waitara. This I especially enjoyed, as it would become a sport that would serve me through my life.

Apart from lessons and sport there were a few school outings that stand out in my mind, although school outings in those days were far less comprehensive and wide-ranging than they are nowadays. The first one I can remember was going to the local cinema in Hornsby to see the film of Queen Elizabeth's Coronation. Later on the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh made a Royal Visit, and we were all taken to the old Sydney Showground, along with children from all over Sydney, and stood in line until the Royal couple, standing in the back of an open Land Rover, passed quickly by. We attended concerts at Sydney Town Hall and the Conservatorium, and went to a couple of movies in the city. The only major outing I can remember was when our class went on a visit to the Newcastle Steelworks, going up by steam train and touring the huge works, marvelling at the blast furnaces and the white hot metal being

drawn and rolled into steel bars. Someone had the bright idea of placing a penny on the railway lines before one of the tank locos came along, and retrieving it as a flat piece of metal, so we all did it. Mr Duncan was the teacher in charge, so of course for the next two weeks all we heard about in Metalwork class was our terrible behaviour. We also visited Warragamba Dam, then under construction, a couple of times.

Well into my third year at Hornsby, as I mentioned earlier, I had a falling out with the other three members of my group. What caused it I don't know – whether it was something I said or did, or some other reason best known to them – but they began to taunt me and torment me. Out of resentment, I guess, this had an effect on my own behaviour and I started to act a bit silly and obnoxious, and obviously this reflected in my relationships with my teachers. Anyway, I was summoned to Alfie Shrubbs' office, and the headmaster proceeded to talk some sense into me, stressing how well I'd done academically and telling me not to jeopardise my chances of a good pass in the forthcoming Intermediate examinations. His was wise counsel, and I immediately cut out the nonsense and decided to ignore the taunts of my erstwhile friends, who soon gave up anyway when they saw they were no longer having an effect on me.

At this time we were receiving career advice as to what to do beyond the Intermediate Certificate. A Careers Advisor gave us a presentation and for some reason the printing industry appealed to me. The prospect of leaving school and earning money was also appealing, probably a natural reaction for any pupil facing the possibility of getting out of school! However wiser council, including my teachers, my parents and Mr Brown, prevailed and I decided I'd continue my studies for the Leaving Certificate. In any case I was still only fourteen years old and below the official age when you could leave school, so I duly sat for the Intermediate and passed all subjects - English, Maths I and II, Combined Physics & Chemistry, Social Studies, Woodwork, Metalwork and Technical Drawing - with flying colours.

I wrote proudly to Grandad and Gran Perry, telling them of my results and detailing the glowing reference that Alfie Shrubbs had given me. They kept the letter and years later Gran sent it back to Mum – I still have it.

So ended my time at Hornsby Junior Technical School. The next question was – where would I go for the last two years of my schooling. At that time Homebush Boys High School was the designated school for boys from the Hills District to attend their Leaving Certificate years, and this would have entailed two buses and a train to and from school each day. However at the beginning of that year, 1955, a new boy's high school, Macquarie, opened up in Parramatta and I was enrolled there. Being a new school, there was only Fourth Year enrolled, so I was in the senior year for two years running! The school was located in fairly old buildings at the corner of Smith and Macquarie Streets, having been part of Parramatta Primary School, and next to the historic Lancer Barracks. During 1956 a new school was built on Kissing Point Road at Rydalmere and the school was relocated there in 1957 – too late for me! However the old school remains, now being part of Arthur Phillip High School.

Late January 1954 therefore saw me join other boys from a wide area of western Sydney on enrolment day at Macquarie. None of my previous schoolmates at Hornsby followed me, as generally the senior high school for that catchment area was the new Normanhurst Boys High School. I soon made a new circle of friends, the two closest of whom became Norman Skellams, who lived in Auburn, and John Rawlinson, who lived in Castle Hill. Coincidentally they were both born in England, although I don't think that influenced our getting together. Norman in particular became a close friend and would often come up and stay at Glenorie on a weekend, or I would stay with his family in Auburn. I lost contact with them both after I finished school, but years later saw that Norman was a columnist on the *Newcastle Morning Herald*. There were four classes of about twenty four boys each in that year, and I was placed in class 4C,

although there was no academic distinction or grading between classes. Over the two years I found my classmates to be a good bunch of guys and we all seemed to get on very well together.

The Headmaster of Macquarie over those two years was William (Bill) Gollan, who gained some notoriety in the Sydney press through his connections with the Communist Party. However he never let his politics reflect in the school and he was a damn good and well respected headmaster, running a tight but harmonious ship. The Deputy Head was a Mr Halloran, a wizened little man resembling a chimpanzee. He would have been well into his sixties and really too old to teach, but had been called back from retirement because of the teacher shortage. My Class Master and English teacher was "Judge" Ferrier, though how he got that name I have no idea. Not given to a great sense of humour, he was none the less a good teacher and sparked his class' interest in English literature and Shakespeare. I took General Mathematics as the compulsory mathematics subject and my teacher was a Mr Lee. Unfortunately for whatever reason I didn't get along with him and this resulted in my losing interest in the subject, which was never a strong point with me anyway although I'd passed Maths I and II at the Intermediate without any trouble. Science was taught by "Dutchy" Ellis, whose background had been the Dutch East Indies and who spoke with a marked accent. He was an affable character and a good teacher, with a sense of humour and the ability to interest his students in the subject. Geography was taught by "Smithy" Smith, a rather colourless character, and I regret I can't recall the name of my Economics teacher. The Librarian was Mrs Baccharini, with whom I got on well and became one of her monitors.

The figure who stands out most in my mind, however, was my Modern History teacher, Elwyn Lynn. He was a very forthright character who made what might have been dull Renaissance and late European history come alive, and always kept us on our toes. He also taught English and Art, the latter not surprisingly because he was already an artist of considerable talent and fame and went on to become a seminal force in contemporary Australian art, respected as an artist, author, critic, and curator. In later years he was recipient of numerous awards including the Wynne Prize in 1988 and an Australia Council Emeritus Award in 1994, and his work is represented in many collections including the National Gallery of Australia and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.

So it was I spent the next two years at Macquarie Boys. I did fairly well academically, usually being in the top five or ten for most subjects, and overall enjoyed my time there. For sport I played soccer in the winter and cricket in the summer; the latter games took place on a ground now occupied by Parramatta Stadium. In Fifth Year I was a member of the school's Hume Barbour Debating Team, debating against teams from Parramatta High and Homebush Boys High among others, but we were unsuccessful in advancing further. I was also a keen member of the Photography Club. I have to admit I wasn't a dedicated student; I would do whatever assignments I was given, but didn't really seek to go further in my quest for knowledge other than being widely read. However I was a "swot" and had the ability, at exam time, to be able to absorb the information from the text and exercise books and complete a decent examination paper. I spent a lot of lunch hours in the library, reading as well as attending to monitor duties, soaking up information from the *Popular Science*, *Popular Mechanics* and *National Geographic* magazines. It was also while at Macquarie that I became interested in classical music, an interest that has increased and endured through the years since. Dad had quite a collection of old 78s of classical music in England, which first sparked my interest, and he encouraged me in later years. I sold my beloved portable radio and bought a Stromberg Carlson table radiogram, and started to spend pocket money on the newfangled LPs.

Travelling to Parramatta each day still required two buses in each direction. In the morning I would take George Deaman's Eastwood bus as far as Rogans Hill, then change to one of the old blue Parramatta Bus Company buses to Parramatta. Coming home, the changeover point was Castle Hill, a place in

those days consisting of a few shops, a cinema and the old RSL Club, a mere shadow of the bustling urban centre it is today. So far as I remember I was the only Glenorie boy going to Macquarie, but on the Glenorie bus there were other mates going to other schools, and on the Parramatta bus a whole new coterie of pals. Those rides to and from school stand out in memory. I'm ashamed to say we used to give the conductor, Kenny "Parrot" Best merry hell, but it was only boyish high jinks. The Parramatta Bus group included John Rawlinson, mentioned earlier; Ross Yuill, who had been affected by polio in his younger days and wore a leg brace; Maria "Mitzi" Geisslinger, a plain and dumpy girl of Austrian parentage but with a lovely character, who went to Parramatta High; and a few others whose names are now lost. One of them, however, I do remember. Jimmy Pegler was a tall, gangly boy with protruding ears, who lived with his widowed mother in an old house on Old Northern Road in Castle Hill. What we didn't know at the time was that Jimmy had a fine singing voice, and a few years later would appear on many TV shows and cut many records as James Pegler.

Another fellow traveller on the bus was Pat Cooper, who lived on the property next door to and on the north of us and formerly owned by Jack Ball, with his father Dan, stepmother Barbara Cummins and stepsister Robina. They had converted the property to a poultry farm, and we bought our eggs from them, having long given up our own chooks. Pat and I had become mates, although not exactly close ones, and would sometimes spend time together on weekends. He was a day student at the Kings School in Parramatta, and a pretty good Rugby fly half. After leaving school he would play First Grade for the Parramatta club, and more than one person has said that Pat would have been Australia's half back if it were not for the fact that he played at the same time as one Ken Catchpole!

While at Macquarie a comedy group in England had taken Australian radio by storm, and every week on the bus we would go through the routines and imitate the characters of that week's *Goon Show*. It's interesting that over fifty years later the Goons can still be heard on ABC radio and have a wide following among Australians. It was also an era when hit parades were dominating the air waves, with disk jockeys like Bob Rogers on 2UE and Tony Withers on 2SM, and rock and roll was just coming into vogue, so we would sing along with all the latest hits. We even had an excursion to the cinema to see the film *Blackboard Jungle*, in which *Rock Around The Clock*, the first classic rock song, was introduced. The early fifties were also years when a flood of books, mainly autobiographical, dealing with the experiences of World War II came out and I would avidly buy and read these and swap with my friends. *Reach for The Sky*; *The Cruel Sea*; *The Naked Island*, *The Great Escape*; and *The Colditz Story* were just some of the titles I remember.

So passed my two years at Macquarie Boys High School, generally good times although I still dreaded those PT lessons! Eventually October 1956 came around and I sat for the all important Leaving Certificate examination, now of course known as the Higher School Certificate. We all had to go to Granville Technical College to sit for the papers, as there was no assembly hall at Macquarie, and after each of them I felt reasonably confident of a pass. The exception was General Mathematics. I had virtually switched off the subject half way through Fifth Year and devoted my study time to the other subjects. On examination day I sat at the desk with the paper in front of me without lifting my pen, and when the statutory hour was up I left the room with the paper untouched. I have never believed to this day that this did me any harm. My arithmetical powers have always been very good and I've never been in a position where I have needed anything more than the basic knowledge of algebra and geometry, even when later involved in computing. The mathematics I'd learned to Intermediate Certificate stage were enough to carry me through life. Not that I'm encouraging anyone who reads this to necessarily follow the same path!

Perhaps retribution for not studying my maths came in a cruel way. On the afternoon of the day when I had walked out of the examination room, back in Glenorie I had gone down the road with Dad in the

utility to pick up something or other. We were stopped outside a mechanic's workshop and my dog Pal was sitting on my knee with the window open. Suddenly a dog across the road started to bark and Pal was off through the window like a flash and straight into the path of a car. He was killed instantly, and through tears I assured the lady driver that there was nothing she could have done to avoid him.

Nowadays it is fashionable for students completing the Higher School Certificate exams to then go away on "Schoolies Week", all too often an orgy of drinking and playing up in such places as the Gold Coast or on P&O cruises. That didn't happen in the 1950s, but I was treated to a week up at Kim's Camp on my own. My schoolmate John Rawlinson was also to holiday with his parents at The Entrance at the same time, so Dad put our bikes in the back of our utility and took them up with us, and each day we would get together and ride or swim or generally "chill out" (although we didn't know that term in those days).

In January 1957 the eagerly awaited results came out – I was waiting at the front gate for the mailman in those times before telephone and Internet result "hot lines" – and received the envelope with sudden fear and misgivings. I found I had received "A"s in English, Modern History, Geography and Economics, and a "B" in Combined Physics and Chemistry. Not only that, I'd topped the school in English and Modern History, and in fact had come 14th in NSW in the Modern History pass level paper. For the first and only time I felt some regret that I hadn't done the extra study and sat for the Honours paper. I'd also matriculated and qualified for University, and also for a Commonwealth Scholarship if I chose University study full time. However that's another story that will come later. My association with Macquarie Boys High ended a few weeks later at Speech Day in the old Civic Theatre in Parramatta, when in front of my proud parents I received the English prize – a copy of Edward Fitzgerald's *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, and the Modern History prize – a copy of *The Father Brown Stories* by G K Chesterton. I still have both on my bookshelf.

Chapter Seven

Into The Workforce

My transition from high school to tertiary education and the workforce also marked my personal development from young teenager to a maturing adolescent, with my social life and activities starting to rapidly broaden and begin to take on some purpose. The time had come for me to either go on to tertiary education, or join the workforce, or both. This milestone required a couple of those decisions that are looked back on in later life and queried as to whether they were the right ones, or whether different decisions may have been better. As mentioned, I'd qualified for a Commonwealth Scholarship and Mr Brown had very generously offered to subsidise my other expenses to attend University full time, so one decision confronting me was whether to accept that very important option.

Another problem facing me was that I still had no clear idea of what I wanted to do in life – a condition not unusual with teenagers finishing school, I've been assured. My involvement as a master of ceremonies and my stage work had created in my thinking the idea of becoming a radio announcer, and that was the "flavour of the month" in my inclinations at the time. I'd also done well in Economics in the Leaving Certificate, so a career in business was not unappealing either.

A third consideration was that I was jaded from study, and the thought of another three or four years of full time study was frankly unattractive. Again, this wasn't unusual, and in later years it became popular for students finishing the Leaving or Higher School certificates to take a year off before resuming studies. However I didn't see that as an option at the time.

In the end I took the decision to decline Mr Brown's offer and to try and pursue my goal of becoming a radio announcer. Mum and Dad were involved in the decision, of course, but wisely left it to me, and I doubt Dad would have been capable of delivering any meaningful advice anyway, given his problems. I decided to approach Amalgamated Wireless Australasia (AWA), which was then Australia's largest communications company and owned a string of radio stations including 2CH in Sydney. Mr Brown was a personal friend of AWA's head, Sir Lionel Hooke, and offered to open a door for me, but I politely declined as I wanted to achieve what I could on my own merits. So it was that I approached AWA's Personnel Office, to be told by the Personnel Officer, Jim Delaney, that at present there were no openings for trainee announcers. However they could offer me a clerk's job, which would place me inside the organisation should a traineeship subsequently become available.

I saw this as a sensible course of action, as AWA was a big organisation and appeared to offer a wide career path, so I accepted and then enrolled at the University of Technology (now the University of New South Wales) in a four year part time Bachelor of Commerce degree course. A couple of weeks later, in January 1957, while swimming in the dam on *Yallambee*, I was called to the telephone and Jim Delaney informed me I had a job, starting Monday next.

I began my fairly short career with AWA on 29 January 1957 in the Recording Department, a set of offices and studios in Clarence Street immediately behind the AWA building itself at 47 York Street. Essentially my first job was as a general clerk and a "gofer". The studios had two purposes. Firstly, several radio shows were recorded live there, including such classic 1950s "soaps" as "*When a Girl Marries*" and "*Doctor Mac*". The actors would come in and record the shows in front of a microphone, complete with sound effects, and the show would be captured to magnetic tape. Unfortunately I wasn't personally privy to these performances, but I did see many of the actors as they passed through. Tapes would also be received from other recording studios around the city for transcription. This process involved copying the sound from tape on to 15" wide vinyl disks that played at half normal LP speed, ie

16 and 2/3 rpm. The "master" disk so produced would in turn be used to produce a number of copies, and it was then my job to distribute these to the various radio stations in the city such as 2GB and 2UW.

The other purpose of the studios was to produce master disks of LP records which were then sent out to the AWA factory in Ashfield for mass production. AWA had its own label, AWA Radiola, but was also the Australian agent for Telefunken records in Germany and RCA in the United States among others. These companies would send master tapes to Australia and we would again record them to vinyl disks, the process being repeated over and over until a technically perfect master was produced. While this was going on the tape could usually be heard through the office, so I got to know many of the LPs before they were on sale in the stores. One that particularly comes to mind was Richard Rodgers's soundtrack to the television series *Victory at Sea*, with the theme of *Under The Southern Cross* (better known as the pop song *No Other Love Have I*), ringing in my ears ever since. After production, sample records would be sent back from the factory for playing in AWA's own radio stations, including 2CH in Sydney, and other stations around the city and it was again part of my job to distribute these.

After a few weeks I was transferred from the recording studios to Recording Accounts in the main building at 47 York Street, where I became an invoice clerk, preparing invoices for the sale of records to music stores throughout Australia. There was a small team of us working on this, overseen by the Accountant, a dapper and pleasant man by the name of Lloyd Collins. Some surnames have long been forgotten, but there were four other clerks. Old Tom was well into his sixties, a pleasant man with whom I got on well. I'd bring lemons in from the orchard for him every week, and we'd share a lottery ticket to which we gave the alternate syndicate names of "Lemons" and "Coltom" – we never won more than a fiver! The other three clerks were a few years older than me. John Goulder was a bit of a bully and stand-over man who made life rather miserable for me for a few weeks until Tom told me to call his bluff; I threatened to report him to Lloyd Collins and he soon backed down. Tony was his close mate, but was quite reasonable to get on with. Ian MacAllister was a rather scatter-brained person, but with a great personality and a fine sense of humour; I would meet him again in later life when we were both parents of children at James Ruse High School. Finally there were the typists, Jan and Pat, and once again I'd meet Pat almost fifty years later when she turned up at Beryl's sewing classes at North Rocks.

Working in the city presented me with a transport problem, in that the last bus home left Eastwood station too early for me to work a nine to five day and still catch it. My first boss in Recording, Phil Hayek, was pretty understanding and let me work part of my lunch hour in turn for leaving at four forty five, but it was obvious this arrangement couldn't be sustained for ever. In any case, attendance at evening classes at University meant travelling home by bus was out of the question. In those days one could get a learner's permit for cars and motorcycles at 16 years and 9 months, so I took a tram out to the Motor Registry at Rosebery in my lunch hour on 21 January and obtained my permits, then through a contact in Glenorie bought a James 100cc two-stroke motorcycle which was promptly christened *Mighty Mouse*. I was able to ride it with "L" plates as soon as I had my permit, so bus travel went by the board. I would ride the bike to Eastwood, where I was able to negotiate with the tyre store near the station to leave it in a little shed at the back of their premises, and then take the train from there as usual.

In February 1957 I commenced my Commerce degree course at the University of Technology. This involved evening classes three times a week, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Those were long days indeed, involving a forty five minute ride to the station, another forty five minute train ride to the city, a full working day, a half hour tram ride to the University, up to three hours of lectures; then the whole journey back home! In addition, one had study and assignments to do in one's "spare" time. The subjects included Accounting Principles, Bookkeeping and Logic, and I confess I could never follow the

logic of Logic! Enrolment in a University sporting club was compulsory, and I resented paying hard earned money to the University Table Tennis Club.

For the first few months I tried hard to encompass the work that my studies entailed, but gradually it was the impracticality of the travel arrangements that brought me to the realisation that it was just not going to work! I began to cut classes, fell behind on assignments and eventually had no option but to cancel the course. On reflection, the path my subsequent career took wasn't harmed by not having a University degree, but in this day and age things are different and the lack of a degree would lock most people out from real advancement in any kind of professional career. However I did recognise that to advance in business I would certainly need some formal qualifications, so instead I subscribed to a correspondence course for an Accounting diploma with the Hemingway Robertson Institute. This was a highly regarded Melbourne-based correspondence college offering courses in a wide range of subjects. For a monthly subscription the institute supplied their own textbooks in the various subjects, with progressive assignments that one completed and sent away to Melbourne for marking. The quality of the courses was very good, and I had no trouble mastering the content and getting good marks for the assignments. The early subject matter was mainly aimed at bookkeeping and accounting practice, and I soon learned that the credit side of the ledger was the side nearest the window, so to speak, and the mysteries of double entry bookkeeping unfolded to me. Later on subjects such as commercial law were introduced and I learned that a tort was not a misspelled pastry. In 1959 I applied to be enrolled on the Register of Candidates for the Australian Society of Accountants and was accepted, although I subsequently never sat for any of the Society's examinations.

One benefit that had arisen from my pursuing the University course, however, was that I was able to avoid doing National Service. Whether this was a good or bad thing depends on one's point of view – many people still feel that three months of National Service did a youth no harm and a lot of good. However I certainly had no real desire to do it and was happy to claim the exemption.

Meanwhile at work I settled down to my routine if unchallenging work as an accounts clerk. The opportunity to become a radio announcer never did open up to me, and although still fascinated by that world – my close proximity to the radio personalities of 2CH kept me very aware of it – I guess I came to realise that there were other fields of endeavour open to me. The desks occupied by my group were on the same floor as the offices of the radio station, although the studios were on the floor above and out of bounds to us, and I got to meet many of the announcers who worked there at the time. One of these was Charles Cousens, a real veteran of radio in Australia in those days. Another was Russ Walkington, who had the breakfast session which he shared with his friend Gerald the Grasshopper. A rather unlikely announcer was David Worrobin. David was actually the building's full time French polisher, responsible for maintaining the furniture in spick and span order. Of European ancestry, David was a small, dark and balding man, always with a cigar alight in his mouth, and an astounding authority on Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. As a result, the French polisher had his own programme, *The Mozart Hour*, on Sundays on 2CH and its sister stations.

The announcer I remember best, however, was a fellow by the name of Reg Grundy. He had already made a name for himself as a boxing commentator, and had now branched out as a quizmaster. He had come up with a radio quiz, *Wheel of Fortune*, in which contestants would answer a series of questions and the winner would then spin a wheel to select a prize. At morning tea each day Reg would come out of his office and sit down with us, then fire a selection of questions at us to gauge how easy or hard they were. Later Reg took *Wheel of Fortune* to television, then in its infancy, and a couple of years later I was a contestant myself on the television show. I received a horror set of questions and literally froze, trying to unsuccessfully guess the right answer, while my competitor got a couple right and won the round. In

later years Reg went on to become famous as a big time producer of quiz shows and a millionaire many times over, and now lives in luxury in the Bahamas.

During my first year at AWA I made a couple of new friends with whom I spent quite a bit of time on weekends. Albert Coquillon was a small, fair-headed and rotund lad, a bit of a braggart and an inveterate liar as I was to find out, but good company and we shared an interest in classical music. His parents were Belgian and owned a boarding house in suburban Hurlstone Park, overlooking the Cooks River, and I would sometimes stay there for the weekend, riding *Mighty Mouse* down from Glenorie. Al McArten was of similar age to myself, a Barnardo boy from England who boarded with Albert and his parents. The three of us would go around together, sometimes into the city to the pictures and other times wandering the parklands around the Cooks River, watching the football games or generally just filling in time. Unfortunately they both smoked, so inevitably I was drawn into the habit through peer pressure, a habit I wasn't able to finally throw off until 1981. As both my parents smoked heavily, there was no pressure for me to stop from that quarter.

About a year after I joined AWA I was transferred to the Purchase Accounts, or Sundry Creditors, group – still in 47 York Street but on another floor. Here my boss was one Sid Watkins, something of a rogue of a fellow who played it hard outside of work despite a very dicky heart but a reasonable person to work for. Apart from myself, the other team members were a Mrs Anderson, a motherly and very placid little woman in her sixties, with whom I got along famously, and Ron Robertson, a man in his fifties who was a real religious zealot and total wowser. I got along with Ron, but it was sometimes like treading in a minefield to avoid offending his sensibilities. The final member of the team was the machinist, Thelma Pugsley, of whom rumour had it that she and Sid had something going outside the workplace. My job was routine enough, matching suppliers' invoices up to their statements and drawing cheques for payment. Despite the routine, I enjoyed the work and the occasional diversion, such as visiting the AWA factory at Ashfield and the AWA Valve factory at Rydalmere. I was friendly with Bill, the building's caretaker, and on a couple of occasions in my lunch hours he took me up to the top of the distinctive tower that stands on the top of 47 York Street. This was modelled on the Eiffel Tower, and back in the 1950s it was the highest point in Sydney except for the pylon lookout on the harbour bridge. A small lift ran up through the structure, and from the platform at the top was a bird's eye view of the whole of Sydney laid out beneath me. I still have some of the photographs I took from there.

However I was gradually coming to realise that despite the company's size, there appeared no clear paths for career advancement and in fact senior positions seemed to be filled by advertising outside, rather than internal promotion.

Chapter Eight

The Glenorie Years – 1957 to 1959

Leaving my working life for the moment, I mentioned earlier that in the Glenorie of the 1950s one made one's own amusement to some extent. While I can't put an exact date on it or chronological sequence to it, my involvement in community activities started to broaden during these years. The RSL Club was the main if only social centre in those days, and the dances and concerts gradually started to involve me more and more. Music for the dances was initially from gramophone records, but then a nucleus of a local Glenorie Band – a rather grandiose term, admittedly – formed around some of the local people. I became part of that nucleus as the compere or master of ceremonies.

Our little group consisted of five people, plus me. On piano was an elderly but very spry and outgoing lady, a Mrs Perks – I never ever did know her first name. Violin was played by Merv Vaisey, the headmaster of the one teacher school at Forest Glen. Vic Bevan, a local driver on Deaman's Buses, played the squeezebox, while a young girl by the name of Marie Stringer played guitar or piano accordion. The drums were played by another young lad, Ron Best; both he and Marie were only eleven years old when the group started. The music produced was certainly unsophisticated but good enough to dance to and enjoyed by the people who came along to the dances. I would announce the dances, and also contributed a couple of songs as fillers in my very untrained voice. I could do a passable interpretation of *Rock Island Line* and *Hillbilly Auctioneer*, with Marie accompanying me on guitar, and during the dances would lead along with old favourites such as *Sweet Violets*. Our fame, if such it could be called, must have spread because we found ourselves playing at dances outside of Glenorie at places like Forest Glen and Dural. In later years the band appeared on the radio station 2UW's *Amateur Hour*, although I was no longer involved at that time.

It was through Marie, however, that my exposure to the world of music grew. A very talented young lady who also played banjo, Marie lived with her parents and brother Billy on an orchard down Cattai Road in Glenorie. Her mother was of Italian background, a rather formidable and domineering lady although she was never anything but friendly with me, while her dad Arthur was the complete opposite in nature, an unsophisticated country man with a quiet manner and completely under her thumb. Poor Billy was rather neglected, all his mother's attention being directed towards Marie, but like his father he was poorly educated and quite happy to work the orchard, which ultimately he inherited many years later. Anyway, over the next two or three years Marie developed a schoolgirl crush on me, which I certainly never tried to discourage, and I became quite fond of her. She was a little more mature than her years suggested and if it hadn't been for the discrepancy in ages our relationship would undoubtedly have blossomed even further, but her mother – quite rightly, I'm sure – wouldn't let her date me while she was still only fourteen. However we still saw a lot of each other, although in the company of others, and even when the schoolgirl ardour cooled we remained good friends.

It was with Marie that I had my first and last try at song writing. I wrote a Country and Western song called *Tell Tale Heart*, pinching the title from a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, which Marie set to music. She sang it a few times at various concerts, but Nashville never came beating at our doors so I didn't persevere.

Marie was a student at the Gallaher School of Music, which had studios on the first floor of the old McIlrath's grocery store at the corner of Church and Darcy Streets in Parramatta, and through her I became involved in their activities. As well as simply teaching music, old Mr Gallagher and his son-in-law "Mac" McGowan also organised concerts for the pupils, and I became the master of ceremonies for those concerts, fronting up in suit and bow tie to announce the numbers and encourage the applause,

and fill in the gaps with a quick joke when necessary. These concerts took us out as far as St Marys and Penrith as well as round the Parramatta and Hills District, and my membership of the group earned me many new friends. It was also to earn me a wife, but that's jumping a little ahead!

At much the same time as my involvement with the Glenorie Band was taking place, another social activity in Glenorie caught me up in its web. Barbara Cummins, our next door neighbour, had some history of drama production and decided to form a local dramatic society, the Glenorie Players. As I'd always been interested in the stage through school plays and the like, when invited to be involved I accepted immediately. So came into being the nucleus of the Players. Among the foundation members were Bob and Joyce Best, the latter a teacher of elocution; Haig Sykes, a man of imposing presence and stature, rather too fond of a drink and completely hen-pecked by his wife Mary; Pat Thompson, a teacher at the Glenorie School; Phyl Semple; Ray Whiteman; and Jean Salisbury. Nell McKinnon was the stage manager and her brother Bob the effects man.

It was never the intention of the Players to put on serious drama, for which as rank amateurs we hardly possessed the talent and for which our target audience would not have been receptive. Instead we concentrated on simple farce, something that was light hearted, easy to act to and which readily raised a laugh from our audiences. Our first production was *Love's A Luxury*, a typical English bedroom farce of the 1930s loaded with mild double entendres, involving two couples who went away together for what was intended to be a naughty weekend but who became faced by all kinds of setbacks – love was indeed a luxury! I played the small part of "Mr Mole" and thoroughly enjoyed learning my lines by rote and the twice weekly rehearsals, and we opened to a packed house in the Glenorie Memorial Hall on 30 June 1956. Despite the occasional fluffed line and quick-thinking ad lib the play was a great success and encouraged us to continue our endeavours. We presented it again later in the year at Dural, Kenthurst, Wisemans Ferry and St Albans.

The St Albans production was quite an experience. For those who do not know it, St Albans is a tiny hamlet in the Macdonald River valley north of Wisemans Ferry, reached by taking the sealed Old Northern Road to Wisemans, the punt across the Hawkesbury River, and a then unsealed road a further thirty or so kilometres up the valley. The logistics of moving the scenery and cast that distance for a one night production was daunting enough to start with, but then it took place in a small hall on the steep hillside above the Macdonald River. To compound things, in those days the electricity supply didn't extend past Wisemans Ferry, so we had to provide our own stage lighting. Ray Whiteman, our resident electrician, did a marvellous job with a trailer full of car batteries and the show went on. An appreciative audience of about fifty people enjoyed the performance, raising funds for the Bush Nursing Association. They put on a supper for us afterwards, then we had to pack everything up again for the long haul back to Glenorie.

Over the next couple of years we put on several more farces. In 1957 it was *The Rotters*, with a growing cast of players. I had the leading man role of "Mr Clugston", requiring me to speak with a broad Lancashire accent, and Marie Stringer played the role of my daughter Estelle. The audience were literally standing in the aisles on opening night, more tickets being sold than seats were available. We went on to again play at St Albans, Dural, Kenthurst and gave a repeat performance at Glenorie. I was made Publicity Officer for the Players and would write my own reviews for the local papers, which was probably cheating a bit as we never had a bad one! That year we also, for the first and last time, tried drama. This was a short play that Barbara Cummins wrote herself, *Letter From Joanna*, that we put on at the same time as *The Rotters*. It was admittedly not a very good play, with the audience laughing when they should have cried and so on and the axe murder at its end being totally unrealistic, so we never tried that again. Some of the Players, including my mother, also appeared in a short sketch, *Five to Five Thirty*, put on as part of a Variety Concert in the Glenorie Hall in December.

In 1958 we presented *Indoor Fireworks*, another farce set in the home of a London actress near Cambridge. Pat Cooper, who I mentioned earlier, and myself played brothers. As usual we went on to present the play in Dural and Kenthurst. For the first time we put on two plays in the same year, and in November *Maiden Ladies* opened with two performances at the Glenorie Hall. A lively comedy dealing with two amorous couples who plan to spend a weekend together at a remote cottage in the English countryside, I once again had the male lead, with Marie Stringer as my fiancée, and Pat Cooper had the even more demanding role of the other leading man. Performances followed at Dural and Kenthurst.

After a year or so of riding *Mighty Mouse*, during which I had a couple of spills but without injury, the weight of a seventeen stone lad riding a little 100cc motorbike caused it inevitably to succumb, and regretfully I sold it for ten pounds to a dealer in Dural. In April 1957 I'd obtained my driver's and motorcycle licences, so I was able to borrow the *Yallambee* utility from time to time on the weekend, and the Glenorie bus schedule had improved so that I was able to revert to taking the bus to Eastwood and back each day. I never had any formal driving lessons; Dad taught me, as was quite usual in those days. The examiner at the Parramatta Motor Registry had a reputation as a hard man who would fail you on the slightest whim, so we packed the motorbike in the back of the utility and Mum drove me over to the Registry at Windsor. We sat in a queue all morning, and just as my turn came the examiner decided it was lunch time and knocked off for an hour, leaving me fuming and Mum counselling patience. On his return, he sat with me while I drove a hundred metres up the street, did a U turn, came back and parked. I then rode the bike the same distance up and back, and bingo! I had my licences. No quiz, no detailed test drive. How things have changed (and for the better, I admit.)

Returning to bus travel brought me into contact with three people who were to be my closest friends over the next few years, would influence my main social activities and would ultimately determine my final career path in life. The Connolly siblings lived in Dural with their parents, Paddy and Ivy, and their elder brother Michael, who was a doctor. Jim Connolly was the second oldest, a lean and fair-haired youth two or three years older than myself, with an impish humour and a knock-about manner that enabled him to readily make friends; there was also the occasional hint of an Irish temper in him, too. Next came Joan, a slim and quite good looking girl about a year younger than Jim, with again a sense of humour and a tendency to burn the candle at both ends in her social life, which occasioned the wrath of her fairly strict Irish Catholic parents. Finally came Peter, a solidly built and rather introspective fellow about my age, with a very dry wit and quite unlike his elder brothers. All three worked in the Commonwealth Bank, and almost from the day we met Jim and Peter started to try and lure me over to the Bank; they finally succeeded, as we will see a little later.

Jim, Peter and myself spent quite a bit of time together. They talked me into joining the Hills District Cricket Club at Dural, and I played with them in the fourth grade for a season. Jim could hold his own as a batsman, while Peter was a medium fast bowler of some success. However I was a complete "bunny" and the despair of our skipper, the veteran Len Best, whose twin sons Len Junior and Dick also played in the team. However I made up the numbers and, if I couldn't play like a cricketer, at least I looked like one in some old flannels handed down by Mr Brown and a white long sleeved shirt. The three of us, together with Joan, sometimes played tennis together at the Glenorie school court on a Sunday, and in the summer, my now having a driver's licence, I would borrow the car from Mr Brown and the four of us would drive down to Newport Beach, picking up Ted and Kim Anderson on the way. By this time the Renault Fregate had given way to a Morris Marshal, a fairly roomy 6-cylinder saloon that easily accommodated the six of us, while the old Austin utility had been replaced by a Morris Minor 1000 utility.

After a while Jim bought a car of his own, one of the original 1952 FJ Holdens, a light blue model, very primitive by today's standards but "Australia's own car" in those days. It had a three gear column shift, with no synchromesh on first gear, requiring a double de-shuffle when changing down from second, and like all Holdens of that era it was very temperamental to start. The three Connollys began to drive to work, leaving me to travel by bus, but we still kept in close contact. Often the three of us and the two Best boys would go to one of the drive-in theatres on a Saturday night. At the time each occupant of a car had to pay, so we'd stop near the drive-in and two of us climb into the boot until safely parked inside the theatre, when the two would emerge under cover of darkness.

Another interesting friend I made while travelling to work on the bus was Harold "Jeff" Jeffries. Jeff was in his sixties, a retired engineer living at Glenhaven who now worked full time on a voluntary basis for the Civilian Maimed and Limbless Association. As well as being a very interesting person to talk to, with a wealth of stories to relate, he was an inventor of some ingenuity and his role at the Association was to come up with ideas and gadgets that would make life easier for disabled people, especially paraplegics and quadriplegics. One example of this was an ingenious arrangement where a cup of tea was positioned in front of the person's mouth on a framework, and the slightest pressure from the patient's fingertip would bring it to the mouth and tilt it so that the patient could drink from it. There were many more such examples, and at one stage Jeff was invited on to the morning program on Channel Seven television to demonstrate his creations. I went around to AWA's showroom and took photographs of him on the television screen.

I mentioned much earlier that Mr Brown was a keen cricket follower, and after I got my driver's licence I started to take him to matches at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Sometimes he would have borrowed a Member's ticket, so he would sit in the Members Stand while I would go and watch from the old Sheridan Stand, while on others occasions we would sit together in the Sheridan. So it was that I developed an interest and liking in the game that has endured through my lifetime. This was a time when New South Wales was particularly strong in the Sheffield Shield competition, captained by Richie Benaud and with such stars as Norman O'Neill, Brian Booth, Neil Harvey, the great fast bowler/batsman Alan Davidson and the like. I can recall many memorable performances, such as O'Neill's brilliant 212 not out in a Shield match, Alan Davidson's consistent magnificent bowling and his innings of fifty odd runs of hard hitting while wicketkeeper Doug Ford, his partner at the other end, scored about three! We also watched the January 1959 Third Ashes Test against England. England's side included such names as Peter May, Colin Cowdrey and Tom Graveney in their batting line-up, and "Fiery" Freddie Truman, Brian Statham, Tony Lock and Jim Laker as their bowlers. Highlights were Norm O'Neill's 77 and Alan Davidson's 71, Colin Cowdrey's 100 not out and Richie Benaud's 5 wickets for 83 in the first innings. That was an era when Shield games attracted many thousands of people, and there was a great atmosphere to cricket at the SCG, with its old scoreboard and intelligent barrackers on The Hill, unlike today's yobboes and "Barmy Army".

In 1958 came the anniversary of my joining AWA, and with it annual leave. I'd never been to the nation's capital city, Canberra, so I decided to take a week's holiday down there, all on my own. This was quite an adventure in itself. I caught the train down and booked in to the Kingston Hotel, and commenced to see the sights, of which there were far fewer in those days than there are now. A must on the list was of course the Australian War Memorial, with its wonders including the Japanese miniature submarine that had launched an attack in Sydney Harbour, and the bomber "G for George". I booked a bus tour of the city that took me out the Cotter Dam, and used the very good local bus service to visit other places like Civic Centre, Parliament House, the National Library, the Institute of Anatomy and so on, and all in all got a very good look at the city. For meals at the hotel I was placed on a table with some journalists from the major newspapers, and their discussions over breakfast and dinner were always interesting, if at times a bit over my head.

So came 1959, which was to be a watershed year for me. For some reason now forgotten the Glenorie Players disbanded; I recall there was quite a deal of dissension between some of the members, and that others dropped out because of other commitments. Whatever the reasons, the Players no longer existed and I missed my involvement there. However I was still very much tied up with the activities of the Gallaher School of Music and its concerts

Jack Gill, father of students Janice and Shirley at Gallaher's, worked at the Goodyear Tyre and Rubber Company at Camellia, near Parramatta, as did one of the tutors, Tom Finlayson. Jack had established a small musical group around his daughters, Tom and a couple of others, including Therese "Tess" Camilleri, who were also at Gallaher's. Early in 1959 a concert was arranged involving that group and other Gallaher's students. The concert was to be held at the little public hall in Greystanes, long ago torn down to make room for houses, and rehearsals took place there. One member of Jack Gill's group was a young lady, an attractive brunette with a warm contralto voice, and thus I came to meet Beryl Moad, whose father also worked at Goodyear's. So I met my soul mate and the love of my life, and over the years we have joked that "we met on the stage, but not the first one out of town". Initially the relationship was one of having a new friend, but then Beryl invited me to her twentieth birthday party in July – she was nine months older than me – at her home in Fairfield, and there I met her parents Frank and Daphne and ten year old sister Susan. From that point on friendship quickly turned to romance, and romance to love, a love we've shared unconditionally ever since.

Beryl was born on 6 July, 1939, in the District Hospital of the NSW country town of Blayney, during a snowstorm! Both her parents came from a country background; the Moad family were farmers who traced their ancestry to an emigrant family from the Shetland Islands in the mid 19th Century, while on her mother's side the Spicer family were descendants of an English convict transported to Australia for petty theft around the same time. Interestingly, when we were later tracing her ancestry while visiting the Shetlands we found the family name was in fact Mouat. My theory is that on arriving in Australia, her Mouat forebear was asked his name, replied in a Scottish accent and was heard by the emigration officer, who was probably semi-literate anyway, as being "Moad". Frank had worked on country properties for most of his life, while Daphne had been in service to a country doctor who had later moved to Sydney.

While Frank was serving in the Australian Army in remote areas of the country during World War II, Beryl and her mother lived with her maternal grandparents in the town of Cessnock, on the Hunter Valley coalfields. On his return from active service the family moved to Sydney, where they lived in North Parramatta before getting a Housing Commission home in Fairfield. Her sister, Susan, was born on 28 August 1949. Beryl was educated at Cessnock South Infants School, North Parramatta Infants School, Villawood Primary School, Fairfield Primary School and Auburn Girls Home Science High School. In her leisure time she was very active in the Marching Girls sport, leading the local Fairfield Bluebirds troupe, and of course with the music group. She had been receiving voice training from the nuns at St Oliver's Convent at Harris Park.

Going steady with Beryl understandably brought about a marked change in my own social life, spending time with her rather than my other circle of friends. However the Connolly boys remained close friends and we still shared our activities, as will be related in the next chapter. Beryl and I started to go to functions and parties together, including various dances and Masonic social events, as Frank was a Mason. Beryl worked in the city as a claims clerk with the Grand United Order of Oddfellows Health Society, or the "GUOOFs", and as I was at that stage still working for AWA in the city we would often meet up at lunchtime. The "tyranny of distance" between Glenorie and Fairfield, and the fact that I lacked ownership of a car, meant that most weekends I'd stay over at Fairfield or Beryl would stay over

at Glenorie – more often the former. Her parents were generous in our use of their car, a pale blue FJ Holden, so on Saturday nights we would usually go out; to a dance or other social event if there was one, or to one of the several drive-in cinemas that existed in Sydney in the fifties and sixties. There were also picnics during the day, or visits to places like Taronga Park Zoo and Luna Park – the usual activities of a courting couple as we soon became. On not a few occasions Beryl's sister Sue tagged along with us.

In November of that year Beryl flew down to Melbourne to stay with family friends Geoff and Marie Downey and to attend the Melbourne Cup. We both missed each other during that brief absence and despite the short time wrote passionate letters to each other. However she obviously had a good time and if I remember rightly backed a winner at the Cup meeting.

The other event of real significance in 1959 was Mr Brown's decision to sell *Yallambee* and buy a house in suburban Bellevue Hill. His decision was understandable, as the property had always run at a loss and in any case he wanted to be closer to his family – his son Sir Robert by then was also living in that area. We were to go with him, which certainly meant an easier time for Dad in particular, whose role would then become principally that of chauffeur and looking after the small garden. However the move wouldn't take place until the following year.

I was invited to share Christmas that year with Beryl and her family at her grandparents house in Cessnock. Frank and Daphne drove up, but because Beryl and I had to work on Christmas Eve, at least in the morning, we caught the afternoon *Newcastle Flyer* up to that city and changed to the old steam train service that ran from Broadmeadows out to Cessnock, an experience in itself with the smoke and smell of coal burning and the clickety-clack of the wheels. Long ago closed, the train line ran past her grandparents' house in South Cessnock and they were out on the verandah watching for us as the train drew in to Cessnock station. Soon I was meeting her grandparents, Henry "Pop" and Henrietta "Grandma" Spicer; Pop Spicer was a paraplegic, paralysed from the waist down, having been knocked off his bicycle some time earlier. I seem to have been readily adopted by them and certainly got the seal of approval from Grandma Spicer. Over Christmas I met more of Beryl's extended family – her Uncle Sammy and Aunt Joan Spicer and their four girls, Lesley Anne, Christine, Diane and Jackie; and her uncle Dick and Aunt Louie Spicer and their sons, twins Alan and John, and Brian. I also met the next door neighbours, Albert "Ab" and Nell Kirk, who were more regarded as family than friends.

For Christmas that year Beryl gave me a budgerigar, a beautiful pale grey bird that I promptly named "Buster", as that was what I called everyone when speaking in knock-about terms. We clipped a wing and he soon became very tame, flying out of his cage and sitting on my or Dad's shoulder.

So ended an eventful year, and even then marriage was a tacit understanding between us, if not yet discussed with family and friends.



With My Pals, 11th Birthday 1951



Extended Welding Family, ca 1964



On Board RMS "Orcades" to Australia, 1952



**Me As
Mae West,
"Orcades",
1952**



The Cottage, Glenorie

**"Captain"
Our
Faithful
Old
Dog**



"Pal", My Very First Dog



The Main House, Glenorie



Hornsby Junior Technical School, 1953



Dad & Myself, ca 1954



Mum & Myself, Toowoon Bay, ca 1954



**Mum & Myself With Auntie
Bet Kendall, Glenorie**



At 17, I Still Had Hair!



**With Peter & Jim Connolly,
"Conper Tasman Expedition", 1960**



**Class 4C,
Macquarie
Boys High,
1955**

WEST KIRBY PREPARATORY SCHOOL
REPORT

NAME Colin Perry YEAR Autumn 1946
CLASS II AGE 6.5

Subject	Mark	Remarks
Arithmetic	27	Excellent a remarkable test paper. E.T.
English	27	Excellent individual interest. E.T.
Geography	27	Excellent shown great interest. E.T.
Modern History	27	Very Good. E.T.
Mathematics	27	Very Good indeed. E.T.
Writing	27	Very Good indeed. E.T.
Reading	27	Excellent work exceptional for age. E.T.
Spelling	27	Excellent shown much promise. E.T.
Language Teaching	27	Very Good, an interested listener. E.T.
Music	27	Very Fair, jerky and voice too low. E.T.
Physical Training	27	Very good indeed. Putting muscles.
Art	27	Very Good, keen interest shown. E.T.
Handwriting	27	Very Good, some talent shown. E.T.
Character	27	One a plodder but work is unswerving. E.T.

Overall Grade: Very Good

Teacher: E. Jeanne MacLeod

HORNBY JUNIOR TECHNICAL SCHOOL

NAME PERRY Colin SERVICE FEES
DATE OF BIRTH 21. 9. 40 In Year 1946 Year 1947 Year 1948
PARENT'S NAME Mr Ronald Perry
ADDRESS Yellowbank Old North Rd Glenora

SUBJECT	Maximum	1st Year 1946		2nd Year 1947		Total	Remarks
		Jan	Nov	Jan	Nov		
English	100	85	87	77	82	76	P
Mathematics I	100			80	86	87	P
Mathematics II	100			80	70	75	P
Elementary Mathematics	100	51	66				
Hand Studies	100	70	81	88	68	77	P
Science	100	82	86	69	82	83	P
*Mindwork - Theory	10	25	39	20	40	42	P
Practical	10	24	24	20	28	24	
*Mindwork - Theory	10	25	32	20	25	27	P
Practical	10	18	19	16	20	18	
Technical Drawing	100	82	90	70	78	80	P
Calligraphy	50	50	50	50	48	50	
Calligraphy	50	22	48		38	30	
Teacher in Charge		35	34	40	42	44	
Days Absent		3	10	25	17	9	
Punctuality		P	P				
General Conduct		5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	

PARENT'S SIGNATURE
Ronald Perry


NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Intermediate Certificate

It is hereby certified that

COLIN STEWART PERRY

of HORNBY JUNIOR TECHNICAL SCHOOL

has satisfactorily followed an approved Secondary Course, covering at least two years, and has reached a standard acceptable to the Board of Secondary School Studies in the following EIGHT subjects—

ENGLISH	SOCIAL STUDIES
MATHEMATICS I	MATHEMATICS II
COMBINED PHYSICS AND CHEMISTRY	WOODWORK
ITALY/WORK	DESCRIPTIVE GEOMETRY AND DRAWING

William MacLeod
Inspector of Schools

William MacLeod
Inspector of Schools

Serial: 24/1000, 1010.

N.B.: This Certificate is given without distinction of sex.

NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

LEAVING CERTIFICATE

Be it known

that COLIN STEWART PERRY
MACQUARIE BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL

has completed at least four years of approved secondary school studies and has satisfied the Examiners in the following subjects

ENGLISH	72
MODERN HISTORY	72
COMBINED PHYSICS AND CHEMISTRY	72
PROGRESSION	72
DESCRIPTIVE GEOMETRY	72

William MacLeod
Director General of Education

William MacLeod
Director of Secondary Education

John Vagg
Inspector of Examinations

Dated at Sydney on the 24 Day of March 1957

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My Schooldays**

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Love's A Luxury
A Farceful Comedy in Three Acts

From the Action
Landscape of an English Cottage in Somerset
Time
The Present

Characters in order of appearance—

MOLLY	PHYLIS SIMPLE
CHARLES PENTWICK	HANG SYKES
BOBBY BENTLEY	BOB BEST
MRS. MOLE	COLIN PERRY
FITZIE FULFERS	PAT THOMPSON
JACK PENTWICK	RAY WHITMAN
MRS. GRAL PENTWICK	JEAN SALISBURY
MRS. HARRIS	JOYCE BEST

Produced—BARBARA CUMMINGS
Music by—Mrs. PERKS MARIE STRINGER
VIC BEVAN MERV VAISEY

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The Glenorie Players
present
"LETTER TO JOANNA"
AN ORIGINAL PLAY
Characters in order of appearance—

MRS. GAUNT	JOYCE BEST
BESS	JOYCE FEATHERSTONE
MR. FLEXINGTON	MRS. EVANS
HUGHES	COLIN PERRY
MATHE	MARGARET EDWARDS

AND

"THE ROTTERS"
A FARCEFUL COMEDY
With the following cast

MR. GURDIGN	COLIN PERRY
MRS. CLARSON	BOB BEST
CHARLES	HANG SYKES
WIRRIE	MARGARET EDWARDS
WIRRIE	MARIE STRINGER
HEBEY	BOB GOOD
WICK	VIC BEVAN
THOMAS	MERTON CUMMINGS

MUSIC BY: MISS PERKS, MRS. FEATHERSTONE, VIC BEVAN, MERV VAISEY and BOB BEST

at the
**Glenorie Memorial
Hall**
SATURDAY, 29th JUNE - 8 p.m.
Doors Open 7 p.m. Admissions 4/-, Children 2/-
Tickets obtainable at Glenorie Group

Playbills From The Glenorie Players

THE GLENORIE PLAYERS
present
"MAIDEN LADIES"
A FARCEFUL COMEDY IN THREE ACTS
By GUY FAULTON and EDWARD F. MOYLE
CAST (in order of appearance)

Timothy Heath	COLIN PERRY
Valerie Ward	MARIE STRINGER
Reginald Hilton-Blake	PAT COOPER
Martingale	VIC BEVAN
Sylvia Baldwin-Carter	HEATHER GARDNER
Mrs. Baldwin-Carter	MARGARET EDWARDS
Eric Baldwin-Carter	RICHARD TERRY
Mrs. Selby	JEAN SALISBURY
Det. Inspector Crutch	HANG SYKES
"Dick" Morgan	KAY WHITMAN

The Play produced by BARBARA CUMMINGS and
NELLIE MCKINNON
on
Friday 14th and Saturday, 15th November
1958
at the
GLENORIE MEMORIAL HALL
at 8 p.m.
BOOKINGS IN ADVANCE WILL ENSURE A SEAT!

THE GLENORIE PLAYERS
present
INDOOR FIREWORKS
A Comedy in Three Acts

CAST

Clay	BOB BEST
Miss Andrew	JEAN WHITNEY
Miss Barry	HEATHER GARDNER
Christine	MARGARET EDWARDS
Taddy	KAY COOPER
Marjory of York	HANG SYKES
Peter	COLIN PERRY
Thomas	RAY EDWARDS
Mrs. Marjory of York	Mrs. PASCOR
The Treasurer	VIC BEVAN

The play produced by BARBARA CUMMINGS
on
FRIDAY & SATURDAY, 14th & 15th NOV, 1958
at the
GLENORIE MEMORIAL HALL
at 8 p.m.
Bookings in advance will ensure a seat!

Chapter Nine

The Conper Expeditions

Jim Connolly's owning a car led to three trips together, two of them for long weekends and the other a more extensive holiday in Tasmania, and the accounts of these deserve a chapter of their own.

The first trip, grandiosely titled the Conper-Best Brisbane Expedition, took place on the Bank Holiday weekend of August 1959 – obviously I must have taken a day's leave from work. Jim and Peter, Len and Dick Best and myself had decided it might be interesting to drive to Brisbane and back in a weekend, sharing the driving and the expenses and camping out "rough" by the side of the road. So it was that at five o'clock in the morning of the Saturday we left Dural, with me at the wheel, having won the toss, and headed out through back roads to Windsor and thence up the Putty Road to Singleton, to pick up the New England Highway there. We made good time, with a couple of driver changes, before running into problems a little south of Singleton. The temperature light came on and we found water leaking from what looked like the head gasket. Peter climbed down a cliff to the creek to obtain two frying pans full of icy water, and we limped into Singleton.

Two hours later, having replaced a leaking welsh plug, we resumed our journey and made rapid progress through Muswellbrook and Aberdeen to Scone, where we refuelled the car and its occupants and had further problems with a broken accelerator spring. This fixed, we continued on and soon after passing through Murrurundi it was my turn to drive again. The change-over of drivers we had down to a fine art. After precisely one hour's driving the current driver would stop the car, no matter where we were, and four doors would fly open. The driver would get into the back seat behind him, the front passenger would slide behind the wheel, the left hand back passenger would get into the front passenger seat and the middle passenger in the back would slide to his left. We were usually able to resume progress within ten seconds, leaving any onlookers agape. Tamworth, Armidale and Guyra fell behind us, and a little north of Llangothlin – "a bastard of a place", according to Jim, who had once spent a freezing night there – we stopped at the roadside, made a fire and cooked a meal of sausages, eggs and tomatoes. We continued on through the night, passing through Glen Innes and Tenterfield to cross into Queensland at Wallangarra, after which the road conditions deteriorated badly. A little north of Warwick we called it a day, rolled out our sleeping bags a little off the road and spent a restless night.

Waking covered with frost, we built a fire and cooked breakfast, then continued on over Cunningham's Gap to reach Brisbane at a quarter past nine on a Sunday morning, after a stop in Ipswich and another stop at a truck terminal in the hope of having a shower, but which proved too expensive for our limited budget. We tried unsuccessfully for showers at Roma Street Station and the YMCA before abandoning the idea and having a look around the city centre, where nothing was open anyway. We decided lunch would be a good idea and, no camp site being evident in the middle of Brisbane, opted for a meal at a restaurant called *Christies*, where we paid exorbitant prices for a terrible meal. We found our way to Mount Coot-tha with considerable difficulty to admire the magnificent view from its summit, then made our way back down to the city to cross the Brisbane River and pick up the Pacific Highway to commence our return journey to Sydney.

We soon reached the resort towns of Southport and Surfers Paradise. In those days Southport was a pleasant but undistinguished place, but Surfers was already becoming a hotch-potch of weird and wonderful buildings of every architectural style under the sun, gaudy with neon and multi-coloured paint and with a less than scenic beach that would pale into insignificance compared to most Sydney beaches. It might be argued that it hasn't changed in the succeeding fifty years! Continuing on, we passed through Coolangatta, re-entered New South Wales at Tweed Heads, then followed the highway

through Murwillumbah and over the twisting, hilly coastal range to Brunswick Heads and Ballina. We bought hamburgers there and drove south to Wardell, where we ate them while waiting for the ferry to take us across the Richmond River – there was no bridge in those days. Across the river we negotiated the long and bumpy stretch to Maclean, stopping at the then fruit fly gate south of Woodburn, with a further ferry crossing of the Clarence River at Harwood Island. Pushing along a now good road south of Grafton the hated temperature light winked red again and we replenished the radiator from a convenient if boggy creek. A little further on, at nine thirty in the evening, we spotted an ideal campsite in a roadside blue metal dump and soon had a fire going before bedding down for the night.

We had planned to rise at five, but it was six when we woke and coaxed the fire back to life to cook breakfast. There I achieved a measure of fame when smoke suddenly started pouring from my right shoe, obviously caused by spontaneous combustion, and I ran around in circles using words not usually found in my vocabulary! Back on the road, we were soon passing through the pretty banana plantation scenery of Coffs Harbour, then running down through the forest, farmland and riverland of Urunga, Nambucca Heads and Macksville. Reaching Kempsey, we spotted a sign “Hot Showers” and at last we were able to scrub off the sweat and grime of two and a half days of travel. We continued on, bypassing Port Macquarie, to Taree and Bulahdelah, south of which the Pacific Highway diverted inland through Booral, the bridge at Karuah having not yet been built. Once again the temperature light glowed, but we found the radiator full and put it down to a lock in the water pump. Thankfully, it was the last time we were to see the light! A very rough stretch of road led us to Raymond Terrace, then it was across the Hunter at Hexham and into Newcastle just in time to encounter the peak hour traffic from the steelworks.

After slow progress to Swansea it was an easy “home run” through Wyong, Gosford and Hornsby, and soon we were passing through Galston Gorge to arrive at Dural at two o'clock on the Tuesday morning. It had been a great trip; in retrospect probably a silly thing to do, driving all that way just to turn around and come back again. However youth had its way; we were great mates and enjoyed our time together on the road and the bonding that came through three days crammed together inside a car. In all we covered 1,266 miles or 2037 kilometres, used approximately 52 gallons or 230 litres of petrol, and the all-up cost of food, fuel, repairs etc to each of us was two pounds nineteen shillings, or five dollars ninety cents!

In subsequent years we have of course traversed the highways between Sydney and Brisbane many times over, but it's interesting to think back and remember what road and driving conditions were like then. The highways were uniformly narrow, with few designated passing lanes, and the surfaces rough, uneven and broken up by the passing of trucks (something that still applies in some cases, I suppose.) They passed through every major town instead of bypassing many of them as they do now, and “freeway” was a word unheard of in those days. As I mentioned, in 1959 the Pacific Highway from Sydney to Brisbane involved two ferry crossings of rivers, and it was not too many years earlier than that when even more ferry crossings were involved.

The second “Conper” venture, the Conper-Martin Forbes Expedition, took place on the Labour Day long weekend in October 1959. This time the expedition members comprised the Connolly brothers, myself and a John Martin, a friend of Jim's who worked at the Commonwealth Bank in North Sydney. The Connollys had a cousin who owned a sheep station, *Evergreen*, on the Lachlan River at Fairholme, between Forbes and Condobolin, and by arrangement we were to travel out there and do some duck-shooting, a pastime certainly new to me.

We left Dural just before lunch time on the Saturday and after picking John Martin up at Rogans Hill we headed out to Windsor and the Bell's Line of Road towards Lithgow. I'd again won the toss and was first

driver, and on the steep climb up Bellbird Hill at Kurrajong Heights I succeeded in stalling the car on the wrong side of the road, with traffic coming both ways and the infernal lack of synchromesh on first gear causing me no end of trouble. However we made it to the top and followed the winding road through Bilpin, where John took over the driving and horrified us with his handling of the Holden, he being used to the gentle touch of a Morris Minor. However we prevailed on him to take it a bit easier and calm returned. A little red sports car passed us at considerable pace, and a few miles further on we passed him at a spot where he had stopped to collect a milepost in the middle of his radiator! The first accident of the day.

Through Lithgow steady rain started to fall, making the Great Western Highway fairly greasy. Soon we sighted the second accident of the day, where on a corner a semi-trailer and a Holden had had an argument. The semi-trailer appeared unscathed, but one side of the Holden was ripped off as clean as a whistle. Police were in attendance, so we didn't stop. Further along the highway a car was sighted sitting upside down in a gully on another bend, and these sights encouraged us to drive carefully in the wet, slippery conditions. Reaching Bathurst in mid afternoon, we stopped for refreshments before continuing on to Orange through countryside that reminded me very much of North Wales, especially the abandoned mine shafts around Lucknow. We made a petrol stop at Orange; the annual Cherry Blossom Festival had commenced that day, but we saw not a skerrick of blossom.

Nine miles out of Orange we encountered our fourth accident of the day and stopped to help. A Holden had apparently taken a slight bend at far too high a speed, hit the dirt edge and rolled a good thirty metres, where it lay on its roof, crushed almost beyond recognition and a complete write-off, with personal possessions scattered everywhere. There had been three people in the front seat; the driver, his young brother and his girlfriend. The girl was lying by the roadside covered by a plastic raincoat and at first appearance seemed to be dead; however she had suffered only shock and abrasions, and possible broken ribs. The driver and his brother appeared unhurt. We made the girl comfortable with blankets from our car until the ambulance arrived, then offered to take the contents of their car to her home in Parkes. All three of the occupants were lucky to be alive, as if anyone had been in the back seat they would surely have been killed.

Sobered by the accident, we continued on our way in growing darkness and steady rain to Parkes, where we stopped at the girl's home and Jim broke the news of the accident to her parents. Luckily they were not given to panic, although curiously her mother simply had to know what her daughter was wearing at the time of the accident! We unloaded the personal effects, then drove into the town centre for a welcome meal of steaks and eggs. By now we were well behind schedule and Jim unsuccessfully tried to contact his cousin at *Evergreen* to say we wouldn't make it that night. At eight thirty we drove the remaining distance to Forbes, arriving there at nine, where Jim located the residence of a friend, Alan Bassett. We were made welcome by the Bassett family in front of a warm fire and chatted while Jim and Peter renewed old acquaintances. They were unable to put us up for the night, so we made our farewells and drove off to cover some of the last remaining distance to *Evergreen*. After some miles along a rough road we began to entertain doubts as to whether we were headed in the right direction, and managed to flag down a car whose driver told us we were on the road to West Wyalong instead of Condobolin. We decided to camp where we were, in the shelter of some trees, but couldn't find a skerrick of dry wood to make a fire so bedded down cold at one o'clock on the Sunday morning.

We were woken abruptly at half light by John Martin, who without a sleeping bag had slept in the car, after deciding the car horn was a good substitute for an alarm clock! We managed to coax a fire out of some damp timber and cooked breakfast, swatting away voracious mosquitos, and just before seven were away again. Retracing the route of the night before, we found the Condobolin road and headed out into the wilds. The road was dirt but in generally good condition as we followed the Lachlan River

through almost dead flat country. After a few miles we branched off on a road known as the Driftway – the reason for the name would become abundantly clear a little further on – past irrigation channels with little water wheels to regulate the flow. About five miles from *Evergreen* we suddenly found out why it was called the Driftway. The erstwhile firm surface gave way to thick, wet, oozing mud and we found ourselves drifting from side to side like a drunken ferryboat. We were all laughing our heads off except driver Jim, who understandably found it less than funny with the steering floating uncontrollably, but he joined in the laughter when Peter got out and went round the back to give the car a push. Jim accelerated and Peter was drenched in a wave of mud from the back wheels. By now the car was a filthy mess, with mud caked under the guards and around the treads of the tyres. John and I got out and put our shoulders to the car in order to keep it in motion; at one stage Jim tried to drive along the grass verge but gave that up as a bad job. Finally we were through, but it was the muddiest stretch of road I have ever seen, before or since.

Eventually we sighted the driveway to *Evergreen*, lined with deep green willows and tall poplars, and were soon after welcomed by Ray and Joan Wilson and seated in their warm kitchen drinking a heavenly cup of tea. After chatting it was time to get down to the business we'd come for, a spot of duck shooting (it was the open season) and Ray made the necessary preparations before we drove out on to the property. *Evergreen* comprised fifteen hundred acres (2550 hectares) of flat riverside land, dotted with tanks and lagoons and with a chain of them running down the centre, and divided into paddocks fenced with strong wire and rabbit-proofed around the perimeter. Ray challenged us to throw a stone across the central lagoons, which were narrow enough, but it proved impossible – there were no stones to be found! The large and pleasant homestead was surrounded by outbuildings including a separate cottage, shearers' quarters and sheds.

The Great Duck Hunt started and we drove out across the central paddock to the lagoon. We'd brought a shotgun with us, while Ray had his own gun and extra ammunition. Peter, John and I acted as beaters at the southern end while Jim and Ray positioned themselves at the northern end. We startled a fair sized flock of ducks towards the guns and shots rang out – Ray had bagged one duck and winged another, which escaped along the ground. We then moved on to another tank, where Jim and Ray, still carrying the guns, crept along its banks, peeped over the top, disturbed another flock and Ray brought two birds down. The ducks floated in the middle of the tank and Peter, who was wearing swimming trunks under his overalls, under protest had to wade out into the icy water to retrieve them. After he had dried off a bit we returned to the original lagoon, and this time Ray and I took the guns. Eventually another flight of ducks came over, the guns roared and Ray again felled a bird. Again it was only winged, and I ran around the lagoon to finally grab it and break its neck.

After a further unsuccessful attempt we plucked the catch and returned to the homestead, where Ray cleaned them, discarding one as unfit to eat. Joan had prepared a huge lunch of soup, roast lamb and vegetables and fruit and cream, of which we made short work. Afterwards we went out shooting again, but rain had started to pour down, making conditions miserable. Ray succeeded in bringing one more duck down at the original lagoon, but otherwise the afternoon's hunting was unsuccessful. However a huge dinner of baked wild duck more than made up for the discomfort of the day. After an evening chatting the four of us settled down in the cosy warmth of the shearers' quarters on spring beds and mattresses for a great night's sleep. The only downside was that the three smokers – Jim didn't smoke – had long run out of cigarettes!

Ray woke us next morning at seven by dragging a broom handle along the corrugated iron wall, and after consuming a huge breakfast we said a reluctant goodbye to our two marvellous hosts. With myself at the wheel we headed back on to the Driftway. The mud had solidified to some extent but the going was still tricky, with the car ending up sideways at one point and requiring a push from the other three.

However we successfully cleared the bad patch and had a good run into Forbes, where we refuelled and thankfully bought cigarettes. The drive to Parkes, taken in darkness two nights before, was very pretty with great purple patches of Paterson's curse adorning the paddocks. In Parkes we drove up to the War Memorial for views over the town before continuing on towards Orange, and at midday stopped, lit a fire and cooked up the last of our supplies for lunch. It was mid afternoon when we reached Orange, where we picked up a hitch-hiker who bought milkshakes for us at Bathurst, following the unspoken rule for all hitch-hikers. A few miles out of Bathurst we were held up at a police road block, where they were searching for an escapee from Bathurst Gaol, and had to dissuade John from making a dash from the car to see what the reaction might be! We passed two more accidents shortly afterwards.

Being the end of a Long Weekend, the traffic was slow all the way to Lithgow and it was dark and raining by the time we were negotiating Bell's Line of Road back to Windsor. By Bilpin I was almost driving by instinct, with oncoming headlights making the road ahead a blur. However we negotiated it safely and near Bilpin passed our final accident, where a VW had got out of control on a long steep descent and crashed into a stone wall.. We were back at Rogans Hill at seven thirty after an enjoyable and very eventful weekend. I'd enjoyed the experience of duck shooting, albeit the few shots I'd fired had been unsuccessful, but felt no strong desire that I wanted to do it again.

The third Conper venture took place in January 1960, when Jim, Peter and myself undertook the Conper Tasman Expedition, a three week trip to Tasmania. We'd been saving towards this for some time, and unlike the first two Conper adventures, where I still have the accounts that I wrote about them, I have to rely on memory and photographs as to where we went and what we saw.

With the Holden, now repainted a stylish two-tone blue, loaded to the gunwales with food and supplies, sleeping bags and changes of clothes we set off down the old Hume Highway towards Melbourne, with stops at Picton, Berrima and Gundagai. It was the first time I'd been south of the Bowral area, so the countryside was new to me and the "Dog On the Tuckerbox" at Gundagai a definite novelty. We were again sleeping "rough" in just sleeping bags without a tent, a reasonable gamble in January weather, and would have spent the night on the roadside somewhere around Albury, although I can't remember exactly where. The next day saw us continue on into Victoria and down through Wangaratta, Benalla and Seymour; in those days, of course, the Hume Freeway was but a distant dream in some planner's eye and the highway took us through all the towns. Jim was familiar with the countryside around Seymour, having done his National Service at Puckapunyal.

We arrived in Melbourne in the late morning of that day and, by prior arrangement, headed immediately to the suburb of Surrey Hills and friends of Beryl's, Geoff and Marie Downie. Geoff was in the Air Force and at work, but Marie made us most welcome and had prepared a huge lunch for us, which was gratefully appreciated. After chatting for a while we thanked her and headed out to the Dandenong Ranges, on the eastern edge of the city. There we looked around the Silvan Reservoir and the little village of Sassafras before finding ourselves a quiet spot to camp among the trees. Disturbed only by a curious echidna that waddled across our campsite, we cooked a light tea over the campfire – nothing more was needed after that lunch – and bedded down for the night.

The following morning we made our way back down into Melbourne and out to Port Melbourne to queue for and board the *Princess of Tasmania*, the roll-on roll-off car ferry that would take us across to the Apple Isle. This was the original *Princess*, a fairly new and well appointed ship. After parking the car we made our way to the upper decks, explored the vessel, and then watched Melbourne recede into the distance as we headed out into Port Phillip Bay. We reached the Heads and the notorious Rip just as darkness was falling, then adjourned to the cafeteria dining room for an evening meal. The overnight crossing to Tasmania was thankfully smooth, although the aircraft-type seats we had booked didn't

offer much in the way of comfort or sleep. We woke as the vessel neared the Tasmanian coast and were on deck as we slowly approached the mouth of the Mersey River and slid down it to dock at Devonport.

Our tour of Tasmania started by exploring the region around Devonport. We visited the impressive Forth Falls on the Mersey and the town of Deloraine, then headed out to Mole Creek to visit the King Solomon and Marakooopa Caves, both very impressive. Driving down a country road we spotted rabbits ahead, so we stopped and Jim got out his rifle and shot one of them. Skinned and cleaned, it made a good campfire meal for us that night. We'd long discussed going to Cradle Mountain and doing at least part of the famous overland walk there, but had reluctantly decided that we were not equipped for it, especially if foul weather blew up, and in any case had limited time to spare, so we gave it a miss. We then headed east to the city of Launceston, where we looked around the city centre and explored the picturesque Basin and Zig Zag Reserve at the Cataract Gorge.

From Launceston we headed directly down the Midland Highway through Campbell Town and Oatlands to Tasmania's capital, Hobart. Jim and Peter had relatives there, living at Sandy Bay in a house looking out across the estuary of the Derwent, so for a few days we enjoyed the luxury of beds instead of sleeping bags out in the open. We explored all round the city, including the attractive Botanic Gardens where we unintentionally strayed into a beautifully landscaped garden overlooked by a handsome stone building until accosted by a gardener, who told us in no uncertain terms to get out of Government House! We visited the Cadbury factory, where we gorged ourselves on free chocolate, and drove over the unique floating bridge, which was later replaced by the Tasman Bridge, to Bellerive on the opposite shore, to watch the annual Regatta. This was a marvellous sight, with the waters of the maritime city absolutely crammed with sailing craft of all kinds. An uncle of Jim and Peter was the Minister for Transport in the Tasmanian Government, so we visited him at his office and were shown over Parliament House. We drove to the top of Mount Wellington on a beautiful clear day to admire the magnificent view over Hobart, the estuary and the surrounding landscape. The people we were staying with owned a small yacht, the *Peanut*, and took us out on the Derwent for a morning's sail. This was a memorable outing, although I had a touch of 'flu and felt a little queasy, with the others accusing me of being seasick! We even had a swim at the Olympic Pool, although the water was a little too cool for comfort for us northerners.

While based in Hobart, we headed out on a day trip to Eaglehawk Neck and Port Arthur, exploring the rugged coast and then the historic ruins of the grim penal settlement. We took another day trip south to Hastings, where we visited the Hastings Cave and Ferneries and swam in the pleasantly warm thermal pools there. Finally we said goodbye to our hosts and headed out of the city to New Norfolk and a stop at the salmon farm at Plenty before following the then partly unsealed Lyell Highway north west into the heart of Tasmania's hydro-electric country. We inspected the huge hydro-electric penstocks at Tarraleah, dropping down the mountainside in a dizzying sweep, then diverted to look at the impressive Clark Dam at Butler's Gorge, holding back the waters of Lake King William. Along that gravel back road we camped for the night by a gurgling stream in the shadow of Mount King William's Saddle.

The next morning we returned to the Lyell Highway and continued on through magnificent mountain scenery and button grass plains towards Queenstown, bypassing Derwent Bridge and Lake St Clair as we would call there on the return journey. The winding descent into Queenstown was memorable – it was like entering a moonscape. Every skerrick of trees and shrubs had been removed to feed the furnaces of the Queenstown smelters, and the toxic fumes from the chimneys had completed the job by destroying the remaining vegetation. It was the worst environmental damage we'd ever seen, although in later years I would find the same area blooming once again. In Queenstown we visited the Mount Lyell Zinc Refining and Smelting Works, but time didn't permit further exploration of this west coast region – we would have liked to have visited the town of Strahan, on Macquarie Harbour, but were

mindful of the number of days remaining before our return ferry. In the 1950s the road north from Queenstown to the coast was still fairly primitive, so we'd already decided to return to Lake St Clair by the same route and accordingly we made our way back over the pass and through the mountains. We camped the night by that lake, enchanted by the views and the wildlife – kangaroos and wallabies – that grazed unconcernedly around us.

Next day we continued along the Lyell Highway back towards Hobart as far as Bronte Park, then turned north on the gravel Marlborough Highway that took us along the banks of the Great Lake, Tasmania's largest natural lake, and back through the Tiers to Deloraine and so on a sealed road to Devonport. From there we headed west along the coastal Bass Highway, making a camp under a pine tree on the shore near the little town of Penguin. The waters of Bass Strait looked inviting on what was a warm summer day, so we changed into swimmers and plunged into the light surf. I don't believe our bodies were even immersed – the water was so cold that we leapt high in the air and quickly retreated to dry land! Next morning we continued west through Burnie and Wynyard to the little port of Stanley, dominated by the distinctive flat-topped hill called The Nut. Nowadays one can scale it by cable car, but we did it the hard way – on foot – to admire the view from the summit. Ferry day was fast approaching, so we quickly made our way back through Devonport and Deloraine to Launceston, and spent our last full day in Tasmania exploring the Tamar River Valley as far as its mouth at Port Dalrymple, returning to Launceston by way of Scottsdale.

The last day dawned and we retraced our steps to Devonport to re-board the *Princess of Tasmania* that afternoon. We'd covered quite a lot of Tasmania in the two weeks or so we'd spent there, although there was a lot more country we could have traversed, given the time. None the less we were very pleased with what we'd achieved. We again had a calm if fairly sleepless crossing and woke to watch the progress of the *Princess* down Port Phillip Bay to the quayside at Port Melbourne once more. We spent the day exploring the city centre, decorated for the annual Moomba Festival, then crossed the Yarra River to visit the Botanical Gardens and the Shrine of Remembrance. That evening we had tickets to see the hit musical *My Fair Lady* at the Princess Theatre, so we scrubbed up and put on our last set of presentable clean clothes, found a parking spot right outside the theatre and thoroughly enjoyed the performance.

Out of the theatre around eleven at night, as ridiculous as it might sound, we jumped into the car and drove home to Sydney! Taking it in turns to drive and sleep, and stopping only to refuel the car and ourselves, we drove through the night to arrive at Beryl's house in Fairfield around midday of the next day. By then we were pretty tired, but it had been a great three weeks shared by three great mates, and I've long looked back on the Conper Tasman Expedition with fond memories. I no longer have a record of the distances we covered, but the total cost of the trip was £116-17-3 (\$233.75) for the three of us, with the single most expensive item being the return ferry fare of £47-15-6 (\$99.55).

Chapter Ten

A New Address and a New Job

The move to Bellevue Hill took place early in 1960, just after my trip to Tasmania, and while it was taking place I stayed with Sam and May Brant, who by then had a mixed business and milk bar near the railway station in Sefton. Our new address was number ten March Street, Bellevue Hill, a fairly modern house of squarish architecture sited on the top of the ridge of the hill, the front facing the street and the back overlooking the harbour towards Manly and the Heads in the distance. The main part of the house was upstairs, with a large verandah making the most of the view. Underneath was a double garage and laundry opening to the side, and then a flat facing the harbour that was occupied by Dad and myself. This comprised a substantial lounge/dining area, kitchenette, bathroom and two bedrooms, of which I occupied the front one and Dad the rear. It was a quite comfortable, bright and airy flat, and close to transport which was important for me to get to work. The house actually sat on a battleaxe block, with another house to the left of and in front of ours, partially blocking the view to the city. On the other side was an older house occupied by a dentist, Guy Lumley and his wife, while immediately across the street was the residence of Sir Alan and Lady Potter, Chairman of the Australian Jockey Club, and their socialite daughter.

We soon settled in to Bellevue Hill, although we never made a circle of friends there, and I continued to work for AWA; it was much easier travelling to the city from there than Glenorie had been. However I was becoming disenchanted with my job prospects at AWA, especially now that marriage was in the offing and I needed to consolidate and progress finance-wise. In order to buy a house some time in the future, Beryl and I had already joined a Starr-Bowkett Society. This was a type of building society with a limited number of members who contributed a fixed amount each pay and went into a monthly ballot, the winner of which would receive a low interest loan that would enable them to put a deposit on a house. However there was always an element of chance about this arrangement whereby winning a ballot could either be too early or too late to be suitable. The Connolly boys had long extolled to me the virtues of the Commonwealth Bank, both in the many avenues for promotion through its vast branch network or in administrative departments and in the access to low interest staff housing loans. Finally I bit the bullet, made the decision that I would never regret, and arranged for an interview with the Bank's Staff Department. I was accepted as a probationer, handed in my resignation at AWA, finished there on 27 May 1960 with some regrets on leaving the people I worked with, and on 1 June reported for duty at my first branch, North Bondi, on the princely salary of £745 (\$1,490) a year.

The branch was a small and fairly modern one, located in Glenayr Avenue, about five minutes from Bondi Beach and next to the Rex Hotel, and an easy and short bus ride from Bellevue Hill. The manager was Maurice Salom, a small and dapper man, rather fussy in manner and definitely one of the old school of bank managers, who had almost nothing to do with his staff. The Accountant, who really ran the branch, was Laurie James, a young and personable fellow who helped me find my feet in my new environment. Teller One was Gary Hennessy, the other clerk/tellers were Michael Matthews and Russell Diggins, and the machinist was Dorothy MacDonald. There may have been a couple of others whose names I no longer recall, and there were always relieving staff members working there from time to time.

Despite being twenty years of age I was definitely the office junior when I started there, charged with filling the inkwells (ballpoint pens came later) and burning the waste paper, which was always kept for a week in case it contained mislaid cheques or banknotes. I started out as a check sheet clerk, recording passbook withdrawals on sheets, receiving sheets of deposits from the tellers, then hand-posting the transactions to the ledgers and balancing the check sheets. From check sheets I graduated to hand

posted cheque account ledgers, writing up transactions from cheques and deposit slips into large loose-leafed ledger pages which in turn had to balance with the machined statements produced by Dorothy. After a few weeks I was trained on the counter by Gary and assumed telling duties as well as ledger keeping, in addition to manning the enquiry counter and learning how to open savings accounts, prepare overseas remittances and the like. In a small branch one soon learned most of the day to day activities of banking, short of the lending side which was always closely controlled by the manager. I found the work interesting and stimulating, and particularly liked the interaction with customers, something that had been lacking in my job at AWA. The Bondi area had a very strong Jewish population and many of our customers were Jews; some very wealthy, others battlers like anyone else, most of them pleasant to get on with but occasionally very arrogant and demanding, which taught me patience when dealing with them. No different to any other ethnic or cultural group, really, including Aussies born in Australia.

In those days banks were open on Saturday morning, which was one drawback to the job. When the doors closed at twelve it was always a rush to balance the tellers, machine up the remittances and get out of the place. The male members of the team, bar Mr Salom, would adjourn next door to the Rex Hotel and have a couple of beers and a game of pool. This was very much indicative of the camaraderie and the feeling of belonging to a family that existed in the Bank in those days. Yes, there were some real "bastards" in the organisation, usually among the older and more senior echelons, but generally speaking wherever I served the staff were friendly, social and supportive of each other. Sadly, things changed in the 1980s and 1990s when the "bottom line" became the focus of management and the old loyalties to staff disappeared.

The Bank tended to move its junior staff around quite frequently, and in February 1961 I was transferred to Waverley branch, still an easy bus ride from Bellevue Hill via Bondi Junction. It was with mixed feelings that I went, as I had enjoyed my time and the people at North Bondi, but I soon settled in to the new office. It was a much older branch, with the manager's residence above the banking chamber, on busy Bronte Road at what was known as Charing Cross. My new manager was Gordon Daly, a personality completely different to Mr Salom. Again one of the "old school" of managers and getting close to retirement, Gordon was very approachable and took a great interest in his staff, with none of the pomposity of my previous manager. While there he paid me what I regarded as a very high compliment by asking me whether I would partner his daughter for her debut. I felt obliged to politely refuse, given that I was going steady with Beryl and more importantly that I couldn't really dance to save my life! Probably Beryl wouldn't have minded, but I had no desire to embarrass Gordon's daughter. Kevin Wallace was the Accountant, again a friendly and very approachable person who inspired the team under him. Doug Lister and Ian Baker were the Examiners, but I confess I can't remember the names of the other staff members other than one of the clerks, Bob Wintle. Bob was a roly-poly Billy-Bunterish sort of lad, about my age, with real psychological problems and we all felt sorry for him. His father was the Secretary-Manager of Souths Juniors Rugby League Club, a premises nicknamed "Wintle's Wonderland", where he spent so much time that he became estranged from his family and the problems Bob was experiencing. A later probationer at the branch was Roland Pisani, who I would meet again years later when I made a visit to North Bondi branch, where he was then the manager.

My duties at Waverley were much the same as they'd been at North Bondi, involving telling and ledger-keeping and of course manning the enquiry counter. The clientele was quite different there, being mainly shopkeepers, small business owners and middle class families. Thankfully Saturday morning opening finished while I was there and it was back to a five day week.

After only five months at Waverley the wheel of fortune turned for me once again and I was transferred to Bondi Beach branch in August 1961. Situated in Hall Street and a very short walk to the surf, this was

a much larger branch than the others I had served in, with a larger staff commensurate with the business it turned over. Again the clientele were mainly Jewish, many of them owning businesses and shops in the area. My new manager was Clarence Vernon Tilley, again one of the "old school" of managers, lacking the pomposity of Maurice Salom and the warmth of Gordon Daly but again fairly aloof from his staff. He retired during my time at Bondi Beach, and was replaced by the ebullient and "man's man" Jim Stevenson. Jim was a good manager and commanded respect from his staff, and when the time came that Beryl and I had found a house to purchase and I approached him about a housing loan before work one day, he had the application ready for me to sign by morning tea time! Tragically, not long after I left the branch, Jim came down from his residence above the branch one morning, opened the strongroom and shot himself in the head. No-one could say why; if there had been some embezzlement or the like committed the Bank wasn't saying. No doubt he had his own demons to have taken such a course of action.

The Accountant at Bondi Beach was Reg Juchau and the Senior Assistants Savings and Trading Bank respectively were Des Agnew and Bill Lumley. Reg was a rather stern and humourless individual who ran a tight ship, Des was quite the opposite with a broad sense of humour and rather laissez faire attitude, while Bill was quiet and very approachable. Bill in fact was the brother of Guy Lumley, the dentist who lived next door to us in Bellevue Hill. There was considerable angst and bickering between Reg and Des, and I rapidly learned what the phrase "office politics" meant. Bill Stracey was the Trading Bank Examiner, while the clerks included Col Merrick, a devil-may-care young man with a penchant for driving his Triumph Herald convertible very fast, and Dick Hedger, a pleasant guy a year or two older than me with a slight stammer, who later left the Bank to become a fireman. The girls on the staff included Jan Monley, the very cool and rather aloof Manager's Typist; Cathy Juchau, Reg's niece; and the vivacious blonde Pat Travers.

Bondi Beach was a mechanised branch, meaning that both savings and cheque account ledgers were machine posted from the vouchers, and cheque sheets were a thing of the past. I therefore learned new skills as a trainee examiner, as well as serving as teller, including Teller One, and working the enquiry counter. The range of business transacted there was also wider, giving me exposure to different types of transactions and procedures. Despite the "office politics", generally speaking the staff got on well together and on "early days" when we would finish work around four or four thirty the male staff, including Jim Stevenson, would adjourn to the Hotel Bondi for a beer before going home. On another "early day" a game of golf was organised at the local Bondi Golf Course, perched high on the cliffs above Ben Buckler and the "highest course in Sydney" because in its middle was the sewage works! This was my first game of golf, and I quite liked it, even though I hacked my way around in something over the hundred for nine holes.. As with the other branches, I enjoyed my time at Bondi Beach and was a little sad to leave when marriage and relocation to the western suburbs brought an end to it.

Having joined the Bank, I switched my correspondence course for the Australian Society of Accountants to that for the Bankers' Institute of Australasia, and in those first couple of years with the Bank I sat for and passed all the intermediate level subjects at one sitting, as much of the subject matter such as English, Economics and Economic Geography I'd already learned at school. Over the next few years I sat for the remaining subjects one by one and made fairly slow progress, as other events tended to crowd study out.

Work aside, the year of 1960 rolled by with Beryl and I going steady and quietly planning and saving for the future. The tyranny of distance between Bellevue Hill still separated us, and as I stopped working in the city when I joined the Bank we were no longer able to meet at lunch time. We continued to spend weekends at each other's home. When at Fairfield we would go to the drive-in or to dances or other social events that might be on. While still not a dancer, I could muddle my way through the Barn Dance,

Gypsy Tap and a couple of other simple steps, although a waltz was always beyond me. When at Bellevue Hill we would go the pictures in the city and for swims at Bondi Beach or Nielsen Park. On several occasions we met up with her cousins, the Deaths, who lived over at Peakhurst, and went to social events in that area. Beryl continued to be involved in the Goodyear Musical and Dramatic Society for a little while, and persuaded me to take part in a revue they were putting on. I went to a few rehearsals, but didn't feel comfortable in the singing and dancing it entailed, so I elected to pull out before I was too deeply involved. The show went on to be a great success, with Marie Stringer also taking part in it.

The big event of 1960, of course, was Beryl's 21st birthday in July. The party was held at the Fairfield Athletic Club clubhouse at Makepeace Oval in Fairfield. There must have been around eighty guests in attendance to help her celebrate: members of her family including Pop and Grandma Spicer, her Uncle Arthur and Aunt Dolly and the Spicer family from Belmont; our parents, of course, and her sister Sue; many of our friends including Jim and Peter Connolly and the group from Gallagher's Music School; the Death family; some of Beryl's workmates; and several from Frank and Daphne's circle of friends from Goodyear's. A band was hired and Ray Eyre, the Moads' next door neighbour, acted as barman. The usual speeches were made and Frank Moad presented her with a wooden key inscribed with the names of all the attendees, a key that he had received at his own 21st. My Mum made and decorated the two tier cake, which was topped with a decoration from Beryl's mother's and father's own 21st birthday cakes, and because sister Sue and I didn't eat fruit cake there was a separate chocolate cake for us to cut! It was a great night, and the next morning a photograph back at her home showed a table groaning with "loot".

Towards the end of the year we were at the drive-in one Saturday night when I finally formalised our relationship by "popping the question". Naturally enough the answer came in the affirmative, something along the lines of "of course I will!" Next morning we broke the news to her parents and asked for their blessing, and then to mine. Everyone seemed pleased, although of course it was long expected. A ring was needed, and Gary Hennessy at North Bondi branch recommended a family jeweller friend, old Mr Hinckley in Castlereagh Street. He looked after us personally – the shop is still there although he would be long gone now – and we chose a nice solitaire diamond in a gold setting. We decided to announce the engagement at Christmas, and told no-one else in the family so it would be a surprise – not even sister Susan. That Christmas Mum and Dad travelled up to Cessnock to share in the announcement. We drove up in the utility – why Mr Brown didn't suggest we take the Morris Marshal I don't know now. I drove with Mum in the front, while Dad sat in the back on the old bus seat we had there, and I can remember him arriving covered with dust from the gravel back roads. So it was that at eight o'clock on Christmas Eve Frank made the announcement, to smiles of pleasure from Pop and Grandma Spicer and the Kirks, and squeals from a delighted Susan. The congratulations were joined by the extended Spicer family the next day.

Even though we'd finally announced our engagement it would still be some time before we tied the knot – we planned it for around April/May 1962 – as there was a lot of saving and getting ready to do.

Just before Christmas we also attended the 21st birthday party of our great friend Tess Camilleri, from the Gallaher's group. Tess was a very accomplished accordionist and guitarist, and taught at Gallaher's as well as taking part in the various concerts. It was a typical Maltese affair, with the tables groaning with food and drink, and everyone had a lot of fun.

The year 1961 unrolled much as 1960 had done, with the same social programme and now the added stimulus of planning for married life together. We saw less of the Connollys, as by now Jim had been transferred to the "bush" down in darkest Canberra. However we kept in touch because I'd already

asked him to be my best man and Peter my groomsman. As it transpired, Jim had started going steady with another Joan – just to complicate things – and their own plans evolved as to getting married at much the same time as us. I was therefore honoured to be asked to in turn be Jim's best man. Beryl and I both started to accumulate the possessions we would need for married life together, and I became a regular customer at Nock and Kirby's hardware store in the city, laying by various tools that I thought I might need. Some of Beryl's friends from work had started to enter into marital bliss during the year, and we attended a couple of weddings.

One of the social engagements I remember from that year was a Car Trial and Gala Day organised by Frank Moad's Masonic Lodge. The car trial was one of those where each entrant car follows a predetermined route, kept secret until the start, and has to correctly answer a number of questions about things seen along the way, such as a particular sign on a particular gate, or a certain building. The route chosen took us out through Dural and Galston, and of course having lived out there for eight years I knew the area like the back of my hand. Needless to say we came home easy winners of the Trial, and luckily the stewards were not called in!

Came April and my own 21st birthday rolled around. Once again the party was held at the Fairfield Athletic Club, with a band hired for the occasion. There was a large roll-up of friends and family, although my family was of course confined to Mum and Dad. Several of our friends from Glenorie were there, including some of my fellow Thespians from the Players; as were Tess Camilleri and the Gills from Gallaher's, the Deaths and their partners, Dolly and Arthur Moad and of course Frank, Daphne and Susan. Jim Connolly was unable to make it, but Peter and "sister Joan" were there, as were Sam and May Brant and friends of theirs whose names I've forgotten. Sam, who was an accomplished comedian and pianist in his own right, acted as Master of Ceremonies. Wayne, the elder son of the Moads' friends Jack and Mildred Hayes in West Wyalong, also came along as he was alone in Sydney studying at University at the time. Once again Mum made the two cakes, and the main one was topped by the same decoration as had appeared on Beryl's. Dad made a thankfully short speech and I received the "key of the door", a carved wooden one like Beryl's and inscribed with the names of the attendees.

My first twelve months with the Bank came up in June and I was eligible for annual leave, so Beryl and I flew to West Wyalong for a holiday, staying with Jack and Mil Hayes and their younger son John. It was the first time I'd flown, in a propeller driven Fokker Friendship, and it was quite an experience to see the patchwork quilt and wizened landscape of New South Wales passing far below me. Jack was the headmaster of the local high school and they lived in the headmaster's residence, a fine old house with deep verandahs. Mil was a keen golfer and took me out for a game or two at the West Wyalong Golf Club, where I had my first encounter with oiled sand greens. I remember it being very cold and frosty overnight, but with beautiful clear days during our stay. We explored the town, became involved in some of the school activities including a debate, and on a Saturday afternoon Jack drove us all to Temora, 68 kilometres south, to watch a Rugby League game between West Wyalong and that town. Towards the end of our stay we all drove out to Lake Cargelligo, 120 kilometres away, where we had a barbecue on the edge of the lake and watched the sun set over the calm waters and dead trees. That was the furthest west I'd been to that stage.

In December Jim Connolly invited us down to Canberra and the Bank's Christmas party there. Because we had no car I suggested to Dick Hedger, my colleague at Bondi Beach branch, that he and his fiancée Jan might like to come, to which he readily agreed. So we all drove down in Dick's car. Joan Connolly moved in with Jim for the night and Beryl and Jan stayed in her room at the Avalon Guest House, while I was found a bed in the Bank's men's dormitory. The party was held in the dining room of the main Canberra branch on London Circuit and was a good one, if a little "wet" with Christmas cheer towards

the end. I have a vivid memory of waking up later that night to see Teller One from Kingston lying on his stomach on his bed with his head in a washbasin, bringing all that "cheer" back up.

With the coming of 1962 the countdown to the wedding was well and truly on, and one priority was to find a house to live in. Where it would be was of course very much dictated by price, with the western suburbs being the more obvious choice and close to where Beryl's parents lived. After scrutinising the Real Estate pages of the Sydney Morning Herald we focused on the Merrylands/Wentworthville area as being in our price range and handy to transport, and took ourselves off one Saturday to find a real estate agent in that area. It took us only that one day to find a suitable house. The agent firstly took us to a property in Centenary Road, South Wentworthville. The house was not bad but the back yard was bisected by a large open stormwater drain. The agent assured us plans were in place to cover it, and eventually it was – several years later! No thanks, we said, so he took us to another property not too far away, in Hampden Road, South Wentworthville. This immediately appealed as, although on the small side, it was in our price range and had a well established garden, and the bus stop to Merrylands station was just around the corner. The asking price was £3450 or \$6900, a paltry price in today's terms but a fair amount of money for a lowly bank clerk in 1962. We paid a small holding deposit and first thing on the Monday morning I was knocking on Jim Stevenson's office door at the bank. The loan was approved a few days later and within a month we were the proud owners of number 112 Hampden Road.

The house was a small fibro cement cottage with tile roof, about five years old, and contained a lounge/dining room, one reasonably large bedroom and a smaller one, a kitchen and a small laundry. The toilet was outside, unsewered with a weekly "night cart" service. The agent assured us sewerage was coming to the area, and so it did – about five years later! The previous owners were a schoolteacher and his family who had been transferred to Mulwala, down on the Murray River. He had been a keen gardener and both front and back gardens were well established, especially the back with an extensive vegetable patch. A large cotoneaster gave shade to the front bedroom of the house, which faced west. At the time Hampden Road was a quiet cul de sac, ending a few doors down from us at a Scout Hall, with a pathway through to Irrigation Road and the bus stop and convenience store, although not long after we moved in the road was continued through, making it a little busier. Despite its small size and lack of sewerage, the house became a much loved and happy home to us through the early years of our marriage.

Buying the house before the wedding took place allowed us to furnish it and make it ready for occupation, although I stopped short of moving in as travel to work at Bondi Beach each day would have been too much. I'd already applied for a transfer to somewhere closer, to take effect when we were married. Beryl's savings bought a bedroom suite, lounge suite and refrigerator from Bebarfalds in the City, Frank and Daphne gave us a lawn mower as a wedding present, my own parents a washing machine and Pop and Grandma Spicer a large glass fronted buffet. I had a few pieces of furniture myself, and we also "inherited" from Frank and Daphne their Namco duralium kitchen suite (which we still have forty five years later), so we were reasonably well furnished. The second bedroom we furnished by going to an auction sale in Granville, where repossessed furniture from Macy's, a large furniture store, was sold. Beryl had also accumulated much in the way of linen and other household goods, and of course the generous wedding presents we received ultimately added to our store of possessions. In particular, Mr Brown gave us a cheque which went towards a sewing machine, and Gran and Grandad in England sent money which bought a vacuum cleaner. We spent a few Saturdays and Sundays getting everything set up, although I was unable to keep up with the back garden and it had become a bit of a wilderness by the time we moved in.

Jim Connolly made a trip up to Sydney from Canberra, and with Peter the three of us went to Rex Simpson tailors in Pitt Street to have matching grey suits made. Jim and Joan had set the date for their

own marriage as being Saturday 12 May, the week after ours, so having the two weddings over consecutive weekends meant the suits could do double duty! They were also cut as business suits so we could use them afterwards at the Bank. Their having set the date so close to ours allowed us to plan our honeymoons, and this meant that Beryl and I could only go somewhere for a week before returning for Jim's wedding. We came up with what we considered a very smart plan. Beryl and I would spend the first week of our honeymoon in Canberra, with the use of Jim's car while we were down there. We would all come back at the end of that week for their ceremony, and then would take a week's joint honeymoon together. This might sound a rather odd thing to do, and probably was, but it actually worked out very well. Together we booked a Halvorsen cruiser on the Hawkesbury River for that second week.

Frank and Daphne had also expressed the wish that an old family friend, the Reverend Edgar Tredinnick of the Roseville Methodist Church, should conduct the service, so one evening Beryl and I travelled to Roseville to meet him, make the necessary arrangements and receive the usual pre-marital counselling.

Everything was proceeding satisfactorily if sometimes hectically, when a cruel blow fell that almost derailed the whole process. Just three or four weeks before the wedding I came home from work one afternoon to find Dad sitting in his chair unable to move and speaking, or trying to speak, totally incoherently. Mr Brown immediately rang a personal doctor friend of his, Rex Money, who came around straight away and immediately had Dad admitted to St Luke's Private Hospital in Darlinghurst. He had suffered a severe stroke that had paralysed him down his right side and severely impacted his speech, although his memory appeared unimpaired. It was, sadly, the inevitable consequence of a lifetime of overindulgence in drink and cigarettes, and could not have come at a worse time for him or us. There was no telling how long he would be in hospital or what the rate of recovery might be, so as a family we agreed that the wedding must go on.

Chapter Eleven

Wedding Bells

And so the big day dawned – 5 May 1962 – and coincidentally Dad's fifty fifth birthday. I awoke to unwrap Beryl's wedding gift that she had left for me – I'd bought and left an opal and gold brooch with her – and my immediate reaction was one of dismay. I opened the package to find a handsome gold wristwatch, but it appeared the hands had fallen off it as there was no connection to the centre staff. It took me a little while to realise that cunningly the "hands" were pointers mounted on discs, the top one of which was transparent, and that the discs rotated around the centre staff. Much relieved, I put it on and wore it with pride and love.

The ceremony was set for three thirty that afternoon at Beryl's church, the Methodist Church at Fairfield, so during the morning Mum and I called in at St Luke's Hospital, Dad still being a patient there, to wish him a happy birthday and for him, as far as he could manage, to wish me all the best for my wedding day. It was a very sad occasion and we'd all hoped that things could have worked out differently, but he was still far too ill to have been let out of hospital for the day. Mum and I then continued on to Hampden Road in the utility to await the arrival of Jim and Joan from Canberra, the arrangement being that Peter would also catch us up there and we'd all change into our wedding gear before proceeding to the church.

One's wedding day is supposed to be the happiest day of one's life, and in retrospect ours was indeed a happy and memorable occasion, but they say that troubles come in threes and they certainly did that day. Dad's absence was of course the first cloud on the horizon, but we had no way of predicting the next two. When Jim failed to turn up at the expected time I began to get a little worried, and when he finally showed up it was in a taxi instead of his car. He and Joan had met with a breakdown while driving up from Canberra, and Joan had stayed with the car and ultimately had returned to Canberra with it, thus missing our big day. In the meantime Jim had hitch-hiked his way to Sydney and caught a cab for the last leg. Now the arrangement had been that Beryl and I would drive his car back to Canberra, spending our wedding night en route in Camden, while he and Joan returned by bus, and here I was about to get married and go on my honeymoon and no longer had transportation. There was only one solution; I immediately got on the telephone to Mr Brown, who was spending the weekend with Sir Robert and Lady Crichton-Brown at their Bowral property, explained the situation and he generously agreed that I could borrow the Morris Marshal for the week. That still left the problem that the car was at Bellevue Hill and I was at South Wentworthville, but we could get around that!

After a sandwich lunch the three of us and Mum made our way over to the church at Fairfield – I guess the Connollys must have taken a cab – and by three fifteen I was standing nervously in the vestry with my Best Man and Groomsman. The church was filling up with family and friends, and I kept glancing at my watch and saying to the others "Surely the minister should be here by now to brief us". In the meantime, of course, Beryl was leaving her home in Fairfield with her father, being congratulated by all the neighbours, and getting into the bridal car. This was owned by a dentist friend of ours, Peter Bullock, and was a beautiful Austin Princess Van Den Plas, and Peter had volunteered the car and his services as chauffeur. Three thirty came and went, and still no minister, and the third problem of the day was now plain to see! By now Beryl was being driven in circles around the streets of Fairfield and waved away from the church each time she passed. Fortunately the organist, who was a member of Beryl's congregation, realised something was amiss and got in contact with the local minister, the Reverend Chapman. He was just getting out of his bath in readiness to conduct a marriage straight after ours, so he hurried to the church and finally about four o'clock Beryl got the signal and the service got under

way. By then, of course, the guests for the wedding after ours were beginning to arrive and bank up, causing quite a traffic jam in the streets of Fairfield.

All the troubles of the day, and my nerves, fell away as I turned and watched my bride make her way down the aisle on the arm of her father, preceded by her bridesmaids, her sister Susan and cousin Christine Spicer, and flower girl Joan (Jackie) Spicer. Beryl wore an embossed brocade gown with a "sweetheart" neckline, while her attendants had matching dresses of apricot, aqua and mauve shot taffeta and white flock nylon, and wore feather headdresses. Around her neck Beryl wore, as the "something old", a beautiful ruby, pearl and gold pendant, an heirloom that my Gran had sent her from England. I'd also received from Grandad his solitaire diamond and gold dress ring, and while we didn't use it in the ceremony I have worn it since that day as a wedding ring. We took our vows to love, honour and cherish, with difficulty I slipped the ring on her finger and we exchanged our first kiss as man and wife. A friend from Goodyear's, tenor Len Lewis, sang while we signed the Register, and we thanked the Reverend Chapman for his filling in at such short notice, to which he replied something along the lines that he couldn't let a girl down on her marriage day. A week afterwards we would receive an abject letter of apology from the Reverend Tredinnick; he had simply written the date down in his diary as 15 May.

Beryl's pendant and wedding ring have interesting backgrounds. My great grandfather, Christian Krebs Perry, was a watchmaker by trade and Beryl recalls my mother saying that he had some involvement in making or designing it. Gran had told Mum that she could have it, but then decided to skip a generation and gave it to Beryl. The ring had in fact been Grandma Spicer's own wedding ring, made from a gold nugget that Pop Spicer had found and which had yielded enough gold to make a second ring and also a brooch now owned by Susan's daughter Raelene.

From the church Beryl and I and the rest of the bridal party were driven back to Hampden Road for photographs, which were taken by a professional from Elton Ward in Parramatta, although Peter also took some slides. Following that we made our way to the reception, which like our 21st parties was held at the Fairfield Athletic Club Hall. It was fully catered for, with a band, and attended by just under eighty guests. From Beryl's family there were her parents and Susan; Pop and Grandma Spicer; her great aunts and uncles Ada Foster, Bella Wheatley, Les and Flo Hill; Gladstone and Mary Hill; Molly and Leo Hay and Emily Hubbard; her aunts and uncles Arthur and Dolly Moad, Charlie Moad, Bonnie and Reg Stacey and family, and Louie Spicer; and Sammy and Joan Spicer and cousins Leslie Anne and Diane. From my family there was of course only Mum. From our circle of friends there were the Death family and their partners, Ab and Nell Kirk from Cessnock, "sister" Joan Connolly and her mother, Peter and Phyllis Bullock and son John, and Sam and May Brant. From Beryl's work came John and Joyce Crisp and Betty Pender, while from the Bank were Dick Hedger and his fiancée Jan Atkinson, and Bill Stracey and his wife. Several of Frank and Daphne's friends were there, including the Byrnes', the Champions, the Herrings, the Naylor's, the Riders, the Fongs, the Duggans, the Stewarts, the Shepherds and Len Lewis, while from the Glenorie days were Ted and Elsie Schwebel and Gladys Mackenzie. There were a few others whose names appear in the attendance book but who we can't identify.

The reception went very well, with a great meal and speeches from Les Hill, Sam Brant, Reg Stacey and Ted Schwebel and probably others, responded to by Jim Connolly and myself. Jim read out a whole sheaf of telegrams, popular in those days, including one from Mr Brown and another from Dad, obviously arranged by Mum. Then came the cutting of the cake, a lovely three tiered affair made and decorated by Mum and topped with an icing church with red cellophane windows, inside of which a small electric light shone out. There was also the by now usual plain cake for Sue and I to cut together. The tables were cleared and the dancing commenced, and somehow I managed a shuffle around the floor for the bridal waltz, my two left feet barely under control. Beryl and I were driven back to her

house to change into our "going away" outfits, and back at the reception she was prevailed upon to sing a couple of numbers with Len Lewis before we started the rounds of saying goodbye to everyone and being showered with kisses and good wishes for our future. In spite of the setbacks it had been a wonderful and memorable day for both of us.

It was far from over, however. We headed back to Bellevue Hill, the best part of an hour's drive, to pick up the Morris Marshal. Beryl recalls we stopped off at the hospital to see Dad and she left her bridal bouquet there, although I honestly can't remember that. In the Marshal we then headed back out through the city and down the Hume Highway towards our planned overnight stop. I'd booked a room at the Country Club Motel a couple of miles south of Camden, and had told them at the time we would be late arrivals, but we hadn't expected to be this late. It must have been around midnight when we arrived, and the motel was in darkness. However stuck to the door of Reception was a note – "Mr & Mrs Perry – key is in door of Unit X". We unpacked the car and, totally exhausted after a long and at times traumatic day, collapsed into each others arms and promptly fell asleep.

The next morning, somewhat refreshed after a night's sleep, we continued on our way south to Canberra. At Picton we stopped and had a quick morning tea with Reg and Bonnie Stacey and family, then at Bowral detoured to the estate of Sir Robert and Lady Crichton-Brown to personally thank Mr Brown for his generosity in coming to the rescue with the Morris Marshal. "Nonno" Crichton-Brown made us particularly welcome; unlike her snobbish husband, she was a very charming and unpretentious lady, and pressed another cup of coffee on us before we resumed our trip. The very comfortable Marshal ate up the miles as we passed through Goulburn, to reach Canberra in the early afternoon. We picked up Jim, who had made his way back earlier that morning, then drove out to check into our accommodation. We'd actually booked a motel in neighbouring Queanbeyan, in NSW, because of the lower prices there, and after checking in were shown to our room. There the fourth problem of the wedding threatened to manifest itself – the room had two single beds. The look on Jim's face said it all! I went back to the office and told them in no uncertain terms that I'd made this booking weeks earlier, that I'd clearly specified a double, and that I was damned if we were going to spend our honeymoon in a single bed. Albeit reluctantly, they gave in and we were shown to a double room.

Our six days in Canberra passed enjoyably, with cool but sunny and pleasant weather throughout, and having the Marshal made it very easy to get around. We visited most of the usual tourist attractions, including the War Memorial and Parliament House, and toured extensively around the city's still growing suburbs, and drove out to Cotter Dam and the Mount Stromlo Observatory for a look at the pretty scenery around there. We spent a full day driving down to Cooma and beyond into the Snowy Mountains and Mount Kosciusko. In 1962 one could actually drive up through Smiggins Holes and Charlotte Pass to the top of the mountain, and we did so, stopping about half a mile short of the summit because the road became very slushy. This brought us to the snow line, and we threw a few friendly snowballs at each other, and I laughed at Beryl trying to navigate the snowy ground in a pair of lightweight summer shoes. On another day we drove out through the country to the little village of Captains Flat, where we paid a visit to one of Beryl's friends who had lived at Fairfield. One evening I attended Jim's "Buck's Party" in a sporting club hall, where I met several of his Canberra colleagues and was careful not to drink too much and invite the attention of the Canberra police on the way back to Queanbeyan.

At the end of the week we travelled back to Sydney in the Marshal, with Jim and Joan back in their little Fiat which was roadworthy again. On the Saturday afternoon was their wedding, so it was back into our suits once more, with myself as best man and Peter Connolly as groomsman. The ceremony took place in a Catholic church in, I think, Cabramatta, and the reception was held at Joan's parents' home in Liverpool. When the time came for the bridal couple to leave for their wedding night destination Jim

found his little Fiat had been lifted and carried by a group of us into an impossible position between two trees on the footpath, which created much laughter and a sheepish grin on his face until we carried it back out to the road. In the meantime Joan had asked Beryl to hold on to their suitcase to keep it safe from tampering fingers, but in the heat of the moment they drove off without it! We guess they must have managed without the contents.

On the Sunday or Monday, I'm not certain which, the four of us met up again, packed the Fiat with clothes and provisions, and drove down to Bobbin Head to pick up our home for the next few days, a 28 foot Halvorsen motor cruiser. These were a familiar sight on the waters of the Hawkesbury and Cowan Creek at that time, beautifully constructed of varnished timber and completely self-contained, lacking only a shower. It was a four berth boat, with two narrow single bunks in the forward cabin and another two in the rear cockpit, which was enclosed by a roof and Perspex sides. We took the cabin, and Jim and Joan the cockpit. After a briefing from the Halvorsen people on how to handle the boat, the rules of the water and where we could or couldn't go, we set off up Cowan Creek on what would be a memorable and enjoyable joint honeymoon together.

We spent the next few days cruising the calm waters of the Hawkesbury River and its tributary creeks and inlets, going upstream as far as Spencer and anchoring for the nights in sheltered little bays and inlets. The girls cooked simple meals in the little galley, while Jim unsuccessfully tried to augment our supplies with fish – he succeeded in landing only a small rainbow coloured specimen which was thrown back as undersized. I don't recall us doing much swimming, as the water was fairly cool in May. Towards the end of our time on the boat we cruised to Broken Bay and down into Pittwater, anchoring off Sand Point at Palm Beach. Rowing ashore in the dinghy, we enquired at the local store as to whether there was the chance of getting a shower anywhere, and were directed to next door where they made a bathroom available to us. Washing off a few days salt felt great and, refreshed, we returned to the boat, explored the opposite shore of Pittwater at Currawong and Great Mackerel Beaches, then cruised around West Head and so back into the Hawkesbury.

All too soon the holiday was finished and we made our way back down Cowan Creek to Bobbin Head, returned the boat to its owners and drove back into civilisation. Jim and Joan dropped us off and headed down to Canberra, leaving us at Hampden Road to start our married life together.

Chapter Twelve

Growing A Family

Over the next few weeks we settled in to 112 Hampden Road, organising the house the way we, or mainly Beryl, wanted, and attacked the encroaching jungle in the back yard. I was due to start work again on Monday 4 June, so we had a week to catch up with our parents and friends and settle back in. Dad by this time was out of hospital and back at Bellevue Hill, but still paralysed and finding it difficult to speak coherently. Some time in that week I manage to sprain an ankle, and on the Monday I had to telephone my new branch and tell them I couldn't make it for a couple of days, which didn't go over too well with the Accountant and drew some lively comment from the staff when I did get there.

The Bank had posted me to St Mary's branch, involving more travel than I would have liked, but one had to accept what one was given. Getting there involved catching a bus to Wentworthville Station, then a train to St Mary's, which took a lot longer than it had from Bellevue Hill to the Eastern Suburbs branches, but was still a lot better than the Glenorie days. It was actually classified as a "country" branch, although Staff Department would have laughed if one claimed to have clocked up country service there. So it was that on Wednesday 6 June – very aptly "D-Day" – I reported to St Mary's. The branch was a fairly modern one, sited in Queen Street just off the Great Western Highway but about ten minutes walk from the station; really it was in the wrong location, away from the main shopping centre. The Manager was S EC (Stan) Jones, a thorough gentleman and a great person to work for, who took a great interest in his staff but was a bit of a worrier and tended to stress if his workload reached a peak. He had in his youth been a more than useful fast bowler for the Mosman club and still had a keen interest in cricket. The Accountant was Ted Dent, an ebullient and rather caustic character and not easy to get to like. A few months after I started there he was transferred to Blacktown and replaced with Bill Patrick, a much more approachable, friendly and practical person. Bill stayed there for a couple of years until he was in turn replaced by David Campbell, a rather quiet individual but a good Accountant to work for, although at times one didn't really know where one stood with him.

The most memorable person at the branch, however, was the Trading Bank Examiner, John Pauling. John was a real "man's man", a great person to work with and also an ambassador for the Bank who had the customers very much on side. John was a great help to me in learning the ropes and developing my banking skills, and I valued him as a friend. He could have gone far in the Bank, but I later learned he had resigned and bought a newsagency in Bathurst. Among the other staff was Graham Bartlett, Teller One and a very good looking young man who unfortunately knew it and was a bit of an egotist; Ron Wilson, who would be on my own staff many years later; Brian Macaulay, a giant of a lad who later played Rugby Union for Parramatta; tall and gangly Peter Carroll; Rick West; Susan McCarthy, one of the machinists who later left and became a nun; and several others whose names don't readily spring to mind. It was a fourteen-hander branch and I soon became a part of a tight knit and harmonious team. In my time there I covered most of the positions except Manager or Accountant but including Teller One, in the end becoming Trading Bank Examiner when John received promotion.

We were finding it a bit difficult to manage without a car, but almost at the same time as I commenced at St Mary's, Mr Brown decided to get rid of the Morris Minor 1000 utility and to replace the Morris Marshal with a Morris Major Elite, as Mum had never been comfortable driving the larger car. He offered the utility to his son, Sir Robert, to use on the Bowral estate and wanted £200 (\$400) for it. Sir Robert declined, and Mum then put the acid on Mr Brown, so to speak, to sell it to us for the same amount. As usual he grumbled then agreed, and although it exhausted the rest of our savings we had ourselves a vehicle. Having driven it for several years I knew exactly what we were getting and that it was in good condition. Frank Moad was no mean engineer and looked after any major work that needed doing,

saving us money in that respect, and although we were to have a few mechanical and rust problems it served us well for a few years. After a while I started to drive it to work most days of the week, leaving it for Beryl to do the shopping and visit her mother once a week. I defrayed the petrol cost by giving Brian Macaulay a lift in return for some petrol money, which suited both of us.

Beryl's birthday was coming up, and knowing she had always wanted a dog I noticed some kennels at Rooty Hill on my way to and from St Mary's. On the weekend of her birthday, and telling her not to ask where we were going, I picked up her sister Susan and we drove out to the kennels and selected an almost purebred cocker spaniel puppy. Beryl was delighted and promptly christened her Rocky, after a dog that her grandparents had once owned. Rocky proved to be an intelligent and affectionate dog and a real member of our small family. In fact she was too intelligent, and could sense without being told or even hearing the word "bath" when we wanted to bath her. She would sneak underneath the house, which was built on low wooden piles, and hide in the far corners where we couldn't reach her. In the end we had to put her on a chain in the morning, well in advance of bath time. She also had one other bad habit. When Mr Brown moved with Mum and Dad to Newport Beach a couple of years later, there was a horse paddock next to the house and on arrival there Rocky would make a beeline for it and roll in the manure before we could stop her. Again the chain and lead had to come into play.

One of the drawbacks of getting married was the fact that Beryl immediately lost her job. It would be highly illegal nowadays under the Discrimination Act, but back in 1962 the Grand United had a "no married women" policy and so she became unemployed. Granted her leaving payment helped towards our limited funds and the buying of the utility, but it meant we were dependent only on my income, which at the time was not very high as a General Classification officer in the Bank. However any question of her looking for another job soon became academic, because within a few weeks we found ourselves in the happy situation of growing another member of the family, I think to the delight of our parents as well as ourselves, although perhaps some more time to get established would have been nice. However we were pleased as punch with the news. Whilst in later years we talked about Beryl getting a job, and in fact she would earn money through casual child minding at home, we adopted a philosophy that our children deserved a full time mother, someone who would be there for them when they came home from school, or were sick. It was not easy managing our finances in the early years, but really we lacked for nothing except luxuries and were rewarded by being young enough to enjoy our family and, in later years, to do our own thing as the children were by then independent and had flown the nest.

One of the luxuries we lacked from the outset was a television set, and on Saturday nights we were invited by Beryl's Uncle Arthur and Aunt Dolly to go over to their house in Harris Park and watch TV with them. They lived in an old semi-detached house in Harris Street, accompanied by a miniature Pomeranian named Trixie; a huge cat, Tiger, that had actually belonging to Susan; and a budgerigar named Georgie that was the best talker that I had ever heard and who could recite whole nursery rhymes. The house had been the Moad family home from way back before World War II and owned by Beryl's grandparents. This arrangement lasted for a while, until Mum came to our rescue. Some time earlier Mr Brown had given her his original black and white Pye receiver that he'd bought when television started in Australia in 1956. Anyway, Mum decided to buy a new set for herself and gave us the Pye, which in turn gave us several years of service before finally expiring.

When we bought the house at Hampden Road it was in generally good condition, but needed a coat of paint on the outside. With the help of Frank I burned off and painted all the exterior woodwork a bright red with a mixture of red lead and linseed oil, prompting one of the neighbours to ask if I was leaving it that way. Frank then enlisted the help of one of his friends, Russell Power, who worked as a painter for the Railways. He told me not to ask where the paint came from, but it was at the right price. We mixed

white semi-gloss paint with a dash of black in a garbage tin – the tin lasted for years because of that and remains in good condition in our shed to this day – and painted the house in battleship grey, with white gloss for the woodwork and black for the guttering, and it looked very handsome indeed.

We were fortunate to have good neighbours in Hampden Road. On the high side of us lived Rance and Mavis Fletcher and their young children. Rance played saxophone in a dance band and frequently practised in their bedroom; luckily he was good enough that hearing him do so was never a bother. Mavis was Australian born but of Indian descent, and her two brothers Bob and Keith Pholi also lived next door. They both worked at the Mayfair smallgoods factory, and on a Friday they would bring home for us a parcel of ham “offcuts” which for the most part were prime slices of ham, at a very low price. On the lower side of us lived Michael and Frances Muscat and their young daughter Joanne. Michael was Maltese born, Frances of Australian stock. We got on well with both sets of neighbours.

We kept in close touch with our families. Frank and Daphne were of course not far away and we would often find ourselves over at Fairfield. My relationship with them was generally very warm, especially with Daphne, who became a second “Mum” to me. Frank was a rather harder person to get close to. He had a habit of tormenting, albeit gently, and wouldn’t let the slightest remark go past without developing some argument, even that black was actually white. As a result I was never fully at ease in his company. This aside, they were very generous to us and I was embraced into the family from well before we were married. If there was the slightest problem with the utility Frank would open the shed, get out his tools and fix it, even once taking the head off and giving it a valve grind and decoke. As for my own parents, they were difficult years because of Dad’s affliction, and although I recall Mum had assistance from nurses coming in to bathe him and tend to his feet, she was very much tied down. The stroke had caused poor circulation to Dad’s feet and they almost became gangrenous, but luckily treatment avoided that. We would drive over to Bellevue Hill every couple of weeks to see them, and once Mum brought Dad over to Wentworthville to stay for a weekend but it wasn’t a success. Dad got great enjoyment out of my bird, Buster, and I hadn’t the heart to take him with us when I left home so he remained at Bellevue Hill.

Returning to my work situation for the moment, not long after I started at St Mary’s the Manager, Stan Jones, came out of his office early one morning shaking like a leaf. He had just received a telephone call, and the caller had told him that he had kidnapped Mrs Jones and Stan was to place a certain amount of money in a certain place if he wanted to see her alive again! John Pauling immediately drove around to Stan’s residence, which was not far away, found Mrs Jones was there and unaware of any drama, and took her to his own house for safety. In the meantime I pocketed a pistol from the teller’s box – in those days bank staff were allowed to be armed, and without a personal licence, when on the counter or on cash escorts – and drove with Stan to Penrith Police Station to report the matter to the detectives. It transpired that it was all a bluff and nothing more was heard from the caller, but it was a sobering experience for all involved.

I settled well into the team at St Mary’s and a few months after starting there I was selected to take a new training course that had been developed for General Classification officers. Held at the Bank’s Training Centre in Goulburn Street in the City, it lasted two weeks and covered many topics of banking that officers like myself would meet in the branches. We were given a written test of our knowledge at the beginning of the course, in which I like the others scored moderately – about 40% - and at the end of the course we were given the exact same test. This time I scored just under 100%, topped the class and received much congratulations on returning to the branch. I must have been doing the right things, as in November 1963 I received my first promotion, to Grade One Clerk.

In the early 1960s St Mary's was the only branch between Blacktown and Penrith, and as a result had a number of schools tied to it for School Banking purposes, located in the rapidly developing residential areas around it such as Mt Druitt and Colyton. For some time it fell to my lot to once a week drive around these schools and collect the deposit money, a task that involved quite a few miles and for which I received a car allowance of sixpence (five cents) a mile. This more than covered the petrol I consumed and went a long way towards my weekly fuel bill. I also had to collect the takings from the Private Agency, located in a haberdashery shop near St Mary's station, but that was done on foot so I got no allowance for it.

There was good social interaction among the staff at St Mary's. At least once a week after work the male staff members would congregate for a few beers round at the Wagon Wheel Hotel, and sometimes on an early day we would go out to Dunheved Golf Course for nine holes of golf. We also played a few cricket matches against Blacktown Branch and Staff Department. These were held out at an oval in Badgery's Creek and were real family picnic days. Stan Jones would revel in these, automatically being elected Captain and setting fields and arranging batting orders commensurate with his First Grade experience.

So 1962 hurried along, with Beryl's figure getting bigger all the time, and I enjoyed the feel of a new life stirring in her. Generally she was well throughout her pregnancy, but a couple of twisted vertebrae in her spine gave her a lot of pain as the baby grew heavier. One event that comes to mind during those months was a theatre party arranged by her friends at the Grand United. The Sadlers Wells Opera Company was visiting Australia and presented Offenbach's *Orpheus In The Underworld* at the old Tivoli Theatre, with June Bronhill in a principal role. It was sung in English and was an uproarious success, with many encores during the show and at final curtain. Certainly it was one of the most memorable theatre performances I've attended, then and since. On a sadder note, during the year we also received news from England of the passing of my Grandad Perry.

Christmas came, which we again celebrated up at Cessnock at her grandparents' home. I recall it being a very hot Christmas – it usually was in Cessnock – and Beryl being troubled by the heat in her advanced state of pregnancy. In late January 1963 our good friend Tess Camilleri got married. Like many Maltese marriages at the time, it was an arranged one, but proved successful and enduring for all that. She was married to a cane farmer from Mackay in Queensland, Joe Grima, who travelled down with his brother Les and seemed very nervous and self-conscious as he stood there in a suit and took the vows; probably a suit was something he rarely wore in Mackay. Tess had four bridesmaids, two flower girls and two page boys, so the bridal party was quite an affair. The ceremony was at the Catholic Church in Wentworthville, and the reception that followed was a typical Maltese affair, with the tables groaning with enough food and drink to feed an army and the guests uproariously convivial. The downside of it was that we would lose a friend, as naturally Tess returned to Mackay with Joe and it would be many years before we would see her again. Subsequently her sister Lily married Joe's brother Les, and both couples lived on and worked the cane farm up there.

We have always said that it was that reception that brought Beryl to her time, and on 6 February, thirteen days ahead of schedule, Graham David Perry came into this world. I think it was fairly early in the morning when Beryl announced we had better hit the road and we drove to the old Fairfield District Hospital, not far from her parents' home. In those days fathers were considered to have no part to play in the birth of their children, so after booking her in it was made clear to me that I could sit and wait outside, and the nurses would tell me when anything developed. I've always regretted that I wasn't able to be with her to give her support and to see my sons born, a privilege that is perfectly normal in this enlightened day and age. Anyway, it was around six that evening when the call came; our family doctor, Tom Deutch, had delivered us a son, who I was allowed to see through the impersonal glass wall of the

nursery. Beryl was tired but fine, and despite the ordeal she'd just been through I'd never seen her looking so radiant and proud as she did at that moment. I went and gave Frank and Daphne the news that Australia had a new cricket captain, and rang my own parents, before returning home to a suddenly lonely house after a long day.

By now Jim and Joan Connolly were living in Melbourne, Jim having been transferred to Bourke Street Melbourne branch, and a couple of days after the birth we received a cheeky telegram from them which simply read "Congratulations! Nine months and one day." While on our joint honeymoon we'd made a 10/- (\$1) bet with each other as to who would be first to produce an offspring, and a few days later again a Golden Jubilee Commonwealth Bank passbook arrived, with a balance of 10/- in it.

After a few days in hospital Beryl brought Graham home and we started to settle into life as a threesome, although for a little while she spent quite a bit of time with her mother, getting a helping hand. Mum and Dad came over to meet the new arrival, and later that month we drove up to Cessnock to show Graham off to his proud great-grandparents and the Kirks. To my recollection, Graham was a good baby who slept well and gave very little trouble, and soon developed into a happy, healthy and chubby little infant, and of course the apple of his father's eye. He was christened on the fifth of May, Dad's birthday and our first wedding anniversary. Jim and Joan came up from Melbourne to be godparents, and brought with them their daughter Ann, who was born about two weeks after Graham. Thus we didn't win the bet by much margin!

It was some time during 1963 that my parents had another change of address. For whatever reason, Mr Brown decided to move from Bellevue Hill and bought a house at Newport Beach. Sitting near the top of the high ridge of Bungan Head that separates Newport Beach from Bungan Beach to the south, it was set in an almost tropical garden and looked directly down on to the beach and north towards Barrenjoey. Like Bellevue Hill, the house was of two storeys, with the main house above and a modern one bedroom flat underneath, with a converted garage providing a second bedroom in which Dad slept. It was an airy and modern house, and quite attractive, although dampness was a problem due to its being set into the hillside. Going to see Mum and Dad on weekends involved a little more travel, but this was offset by the proximity to the beach and the ability to go down for a swim while we were there.

Through friends of Beryl's sister Susan, Terry and Rodney Gammage, we'd joined a group and started to play tennis on Saturday nights, firstly at the Council courts in Fairfield and then at a private court in Canley Vale. Although Beryl had to give it up in the latter stages of her second pregnancy, she resumed playing after our son Russell was born. The group was organised by a lady named Maureen McInerney, and other couples involved were the Edwards', the Mackiesons and Ray and Audrey Gibbons. I also bought a cheap set of clubs and started to play golf about once a month on a Saturday morning with the Gammage brothers, usually at the fairly easy Riverwood course at Georges Hall. I may have remarked before how one remembers where one was at the time of a momentous happening in the world, and I remember we were on the way to golf on Saturday November 23rd, 1963, when we heard about President Kennedy's assassination in Dallas the day before.

It would also have been during that year that my interest in stamp collecting was rekindled. I'm not sure exactly what the catalyst was, but Frank gave me his old stamp album and the petrol company Ampol were giving away packets of stamps with each purchase of fuel. The English stamps on the letters I received from Gran in England also captured my attention. Anyway, I slowly began to build up a world collection, purchasing the occasional packet from Woolworths although it was not a luxury we could afford on a regular basis, and for the first time I rued the day that Dad had sold the collections he and I had worked on in England. Over the next few years my collecting would grow into a real hobby, with my grandmother in England sending over each new issue from there, and as the money situation became a

little less tight I started to buy each new issue for Australia and its territories, and to catch up on some of the back issues.

Around about October of that year I became due for leave from the Bank, so we had a holiday in Blayney, the town where Beryl was born. We stayed with her relatives Jack and Dorothy Toohey and their family on their sheep property a few miles from town on the Barry road. Staying on a farm was a new experience to me, and I took quite an interest in what was going on – activities like tailing and drenching lambs and other animal husbandry tasks. I'd push Graham around the paddocks while I hit a golf ball ahead of me, to the amusement of the Toohey children, and a couple of times played a solitary round at the Blayney golf club. Graham in turn was fascinated by the baby lambs and was happy to hold a bottle and feed them, and also to ride on the tractor. Once I was encouraged to ride a horse, but didn't feel confident and begged off. We were blessed with good weather and had a quite pleasant two weeks out there.

Mum and Dad celebrated their Silver Wedding anniversary that December, and we put on a party for them at our house. Many of the old Glenorie crowd were there – the Schwebels, MacKenzies, Raynors, and Edwards', and also Jack and Zoë Williams and daughter Maureen, who used to throw fruit at me when I was picking for Jack and who had grown to be a quite attractive young lady. Frank and Daphne, Dolly and Arthur and Sam and May Brant were also there, of course. As usual we all spent Christmas at Cessnock. I remember it as being unusually hot, and Graham spent much of his time sitting and playing in a large basin of cold water on the verandah there. He was a real water baby, as indeed both our boys proved to be. By then he was walking and growing fast.

Into 1964 and we were back up at Cessnock for a visit at Easter. In May Peter Connolly finally tied the knot and married his girlfriend Diane, and we went along to the wedding. For our holiday that year we went down to Melbourne to stay with Jim and Joan, and it was a quite eventful trip, although for all the wrong reasons. Frank and Daphne must have had a premonition, as before we left they pressed fifty pounds (\$100) on us, just in case something went wrong. It did, and the problems started even before we had left the house. I tried to put the utility into reverse and it just wouldn't co-operate, although I could get into the forward gears all right. We pushed it out to the road in neutral, and I drove carefully up to a service station on the Great Western Highway. I explained we were about to leave for Melbourne, so they looked at it right away and found the reverse gear selectors had jammed. They effected a temporary repair and warned me not to put the utility into reverse until I'd got it properly fixed.

We set off down the Hume Highway and all went well, except that Graham was very sickly with a cough and cold, and as a result an unhappy little vegemite, as the saying goes. Beryl and I shared the driving, with the non-driver keeping the lad's mind off his woes with constant readings of his favourite book, *Little Little Dog*. We reached Albury around nightfall and spent the night in a motel there, with me careful to park so I didn't have to reverse out the next morning. We set off again, crossed the border into Victoria and continued on our merry way south. We were a few miles north of Wangaratta, at a place called Bowser, when a distinct knocking was heard developing from the engine compartment. Obviously there was a major problem, but I found that by travelling at five miles an hour I could proceed without the noise. So we crawled into Wangaratta, to find it dead on a Sunday morning and of course the Morris dealership closed for the day. We abandoned the utility there, found accommodation at a nearby motel and I tried desperately to contact Jim and Joan. We had arranged for him to meet us at a particular mile peg on the Hume Highway at an agreed time, and of course that arrangement was now out of the window. They didn't have the phone on, and I tried to get a message to him through the police in Melbourne and then a taxi company. Memory now fails me, but I think I was ultimately successful with the latter approach.

Monday came and I was on the doorstep of the Morris dealer when he opened. The problem was found to be the big end bearing and took some hours to fix, a job that ate into our money supply. Finally we were back on the road and without further incident managed to reach the Connolly home in the eastern Melbourne suburb of Heathmont. We spent a week or so there, during which time it seemed to rain ceaselessly for much of the time and was generally damp and depressing weather for the rest of it, worsening Graham's cold. I found a Morris dealer at Box Hill and had the gear selector problem fixed, eating further into Frank and Daphne's fifty quid, for which we were now even more grateful. I managed a rather damp game of golf at Croydon Golf Club, and with Jim, Joan and Ann we visited the Healesville Wildlife Sanctuary, which Graham greatly enjoyed. On another occasion we all journeyed down to Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula, where Jim and Joan did some snorkelling.

The time came to leave, and we set off back to Sydney via the coastal Princes Highway route. This was new ground for both of us, and in those days there was still quite a bit of gravel road around the Victoria/NSW border. We had one stop along the way, and on reaching Burrill Lake we spent a few days with Jim's parents, who had moved there from Sydney. At last we had sunshine and quite a pleasant stay, and from there made it home to Sydney without further mishap.

Another major event of 1964 was the Golden Wedding of Beryl's grandparents, Pop and Grandma Spicer. This was held at their home in Cessnock in October and attended by a wide group of family and friends. I got to meet several members of the extended Spicer family who I'd never seen before. However the major event of the year for me took place in that same month, when the Bank's "Wheel of Fortune" turned once more and I was transferred to Procedures and Research Department in Head Office. John Pauling had always said I was Head Office material and his prophecy had now come true. I said goodbye to my friends at St Mary's branch with genuine regret, as I'd enjoyed my time there and the place held many good memories for me.

On 2 November I took up the position of Branch Procedures Clerk in P&R and substituted a bus and train trip into the city every day for the relative freedom of driving to work. One bonus of course, was that Beryl would now have the use of the car every day. I would catch a bus from the bottom of Hampden Road to Merrylands station and take the train from there to Town Hall station. P&R Department was situated in the Bank's premises at the corner of George and Market Streets, opposite Gowings menswear store and what was then Farmers department store, and I soon adapted back to working in the "big smoke". However I found working in a Head Office department very different from branch life, and a little daunting at first although my immediate colleagues were friendly and welcoming. In a branch the most senior person was of course the manager, who in the branches I'd served in would have typically been at about A+5 or A+6 on the Bank's rather strange promotional scale. At P&R I was surrounded not only by several people of manager level, but others occupying even loftier positions and titles like Sub-Inspector, Assistant Inspector and (gasp) the almost God-like position of Inspector.

The head of P&R, the Inspector, was one RFG (Snow) Pratten, and a less God-like figure would be hard to imagine. He was in his sixties, a florid complexioned man with a visage resembling a bullfrog, and almost universally detested by the lesser mortals in the department. He had a reputation for going on leave or taking the day off when a major decision was to be taken, and seemed to want only to enjoy the fruits of his position until retirement while letting others do the hard yards. Against his wife's wishes he smoked cigarettes, and on the occasions when he knew she was coming to the office he would frantically try to sweep the smoke out of the room. My desk was outside his office and on the many occasions when he ran out of cigarettes he would come out to me (I still smoked then) and say "Boy, give me a cigarette" and pay me threepence for it. I used to joke that Snow paid the deposit on our second home. He retired within the next couple of years and was replaced by Ray Cox, who in his spare

time was a Sheffield Shield and Test cricket umpire of some note. Next in line was the Assistant Inspector, Bob Henderson, also in his sixties and a rather gruff and severe person of the old school who inspired fear rather than affection in his staff. Below that were a number of Sub-Inspectors, most of them a bit younger and more approachable and quite decent people, and below them again were the operatives of the Department – branch procedures officers, researchers and general clerks. My immediate boss was the Chief Clerk, Maurie James, with whom I got on well, and my salary at the time was a princely £14,65 (\$2930) per annum.

My role as a Branch Procedures Clerk was twofold. There were three of us: the senior clerk, Geoff Clissold, another Grade One Clerk, Keith Loughland, and myself. Every three months at Head Office in Martin Place the Bank held a Branch Procedures Committee meeting, attended by senior representatives of Head Office and interstate capital departments and the chairmen of the various Managers' Clubs from around Australia. At these meetings proposals and suggestions for procedural changes in the Bank were put forward for debate and, if considered merited, action. Our role as the BPC clerks was to record the meetings on tape and then write, submit for approval and distribute the Minutes throughout the Bank. Before each meeting we would set up two large and unwieldy Rola tape recorders (one for backup) in the conference room, then sit through the meeting listening and taping the proceedings, taking memory-jogger notes at the same time. Afterwards typists would transcribe the tapes *verbatim* and we would sit down and try to convert the mass of talk into intelligible minutes that reflected the intent of the speaker but cut through the verbiage and counter-verbiage. In doing so we would often argue strongly among ourselves as to the grammatical sense of what we were writing as much as the accuracy of the statements. Once compiled, the Minutes were distributed to the major players for approval and correction before being printed and distributed through the Bank. The meetings themselves were interesting because I got to see, if not in all cases to actually meet, some of the most senior people in the organisation.

The BPC aspect of my job was by no means full time but seasonal, so to speak, and there was plenty else to do. Australia had taken the decision to change to decimal currency in 1966 and I was part of a large team that was preparing for it by amending all the Bank's thousands of forms to reflect dollars and cents, and changing the various Instruction Manuals to replace references to pounds, shillings and pence with the new currency. Much of this work was done on a "cut and paste" basis. Depending on the degree of change to the layout of each form, an existing form would be amended by hand for approval or a completely new form designed. Experienced typists using typewriters with carbon ribbons that gave very precise output would then produce a new form, or the lettering to be superimposed on an existing form. In the latter case we would take a clean proof of an existing form, carefully cut and paste the changes on it, then send it to the Stores and Printing Department for a printing master to be made. A similar cut and paste technique was used for the Instruction Books where there were only minor pages; otherwise the typists would cut a completely new page. Proof reading of these was also part of my job. It was to some degree "hack" work but there was satisfaction in working in a team towards the coming "C-Day". In any case, my career was soon to take an unexpected turn, but that's a story for another chapter.

Transferring to the city didn't quite spell the end of my association with St Mary's branch. The Bank had a practice of sending administration people out to branches on Friday afternoons to help cope with the increase in customers on those days. I was one of those to whom the task fell, and after a couple of visits to Marrickville and Summer Hill I ended up back at St Mary's a few times. Knowing the place so well made it very easy for me, and for the staff there, as I needed no familiarisation with the branch.

Apart from the work aspects, being back in the city had other advantages to it. The Bank had an excellent library in the Head office building and I made good use of this, taking home books for both of

us to read. Then there was the ready availability of the city shops should special purchases be needed. In those days the Bank had cafeterias for the staff at both George and Market Streets and in Head Office, the latter being a more formal dining room. To be sociable I would have lunch with the other team members in the cafeteria, but to save money and in any case not really needing two hot meals a day I'd take a cut lunch from home and eat it there, sometimes accompanied by a bowl of soup or a sweet.

So 1964 drew to a close. Despite some ups and downs it had been a good year, leavened with the joy of a fast growing young son to keep us on our toes. Granted money was tight in those days, with only one income, and sometimes I would lie awake worrying that we had little backup in the way of savings should things go seriously amiss. We had few luxuries – we'd had the phone removed at home so there would be one less bill to pay – but we lacked for none of the important things in life.

Early in 1965 Dr Deutch gave us the happy news that Beryl was expecting again. The rest of the year seemed to proceed uneventfully, although Beryl encountered similar problems with her back during the pregnancy that she had suffered with Graham. It was around late October or early November of that year that we received the news that Pop Spicer had passed away. Beryl rang me at work and asked me to go and find her sister Susan, who at the time was a student at the Sydney Technical College in Ultimo. I found her just as her class ended, broke the news and we took a taxi to her home in Fairfield. Beryl naturally wanted to go to the funeral, but we consulted Doctor Deutch who, in view of Beryl's nearly being full term and of her back problems, strongly advised her not to travel so reluctantly we stayed at home.

At 9.10pm on 26 November Beryl was safely delivered of another boy, Russel Ian. Once again I was excluded from any participation in the birth, and could only view my new son through the impartial glass wall. They came home from hospital on 2 December and now we were a family of four.

Russell seemed to thrive and, like his elder brother, was a bonny bouncing young fellow. He was introduced to his proud grandparents, and I was glad that my father got to see him in the light of what was soon to come. He was christened on 19 December of that year, attended by family and friends and including Grandma Spicer, down from Cessnock for the occasion. The new year came and family life went on. I can always remember the pleasure of coming home from work and walking up from the bus stop. Graham would come running down to meet me, and Russell would be waving from Beryl's arms. I enjoyed fatherhood and playing with my two sons very much.

Valentine's Day, 14 February 1966, was the day that Australia converted to decimal currency, bringing to fruition the work that my team and I had been doing at the Bank. I'll have a lot more to say about C-Day in a later chapter about my career, but the day brought a stroke of bad luck for me. Australia and its Territories issued completely new postage stamps that day, and I was an early arrival at the Philatelic Bureau to buy a complete set at a cost of several dollars, which I put safely in my wallet. Arriving at work, I hung my coat containing the wallet in the cupboard of the office that I shared with two other team members and got to work. At lunch time, retrieving my coat, I found the wallet had gone, as had the wallet of one of my colleagues. We immediately reported it and there was an enquiry, which included in my case a grilling from the Assistant Inspector, Bob Henderson, that left me feeling that I was the culprit rather than the victim! A few days later my colleague, Noel Clark, got his wallet returned *sans* money, it having been found in a rubbish bin in Pitt Street and handed in, but I never saw mine, or my stamps, again.

Around this time I'd applied myself to my Bankers' Institute studies when I could and finally passed my last examination and qualified as Associate of the Institute, with the initials ABIA behind my name to

add to the JP (Justice of the Peace) that I'd acquired while at St Mary's branch. This was in later years upgraded to Senior Associate.

In late March 1966 fate showed its hand in no uncertain terms. Dad suffered another stroke and was taken to Mona Vale Hospital in a coma, and the prognostication of his recovering from it was not good. We drove across to Newport and I accompanied Mum to the hospital to sit by Dad's bedside, although he wouldn't have known we were there.

About the same time we'd decided that with four of us crowding into the front, the little Morris utility had served us well but was no longer a proposition, and we went shopping for a new car. At John A Gilbert's in Parramatta we found what we were looking for, and put a deposit on a three year old Holden EJ station wagon, caramel in colour and in very good condition. The car cost \$1400, and I was also very pleased to receive two hundred pounds (\$400) trade-in for the Morris, exactly what we'd paid Mr Brown for it four years earlier. The bonus paid by the Bank for qualifying for the Banker's Institute also came in handy! I applied for a credit union loan, which was duly granted, and on 1 April, four days after Dad had been admitted to hospital, we picked our new car up and drove across to Newport to see Mum and visit him. We hadn't told her we were getting the new car, and on arrival we hid it out of sight up the next door driveway. When the time came to visit the hospital Mum came outside with us and looked round for the Morris. I drove the Holden down and her face was something to behold, and she said how happy she was for us and that we deserved it.

Unfortunately the joy didn't last long. When we arrived at the hospital and went up to Dad's ward we were met by the sister, who took us aside and quietly told us that Dad had died within the last half hour and that she had rung Mum but we'd already left. Mum handled her grief well, as it was far from unexpected, and we quietly went into his darkened room and said our farewells to him. At the age of not quite fifty nine it was far too young an age to die, but unfortunately he had for the most part brought it on himself. Personally I was greatly saddened by his passing but found it hard to grieve, as the years of partial estrangement through his drinking had deadened much of the love and respect that a child has for its parent. One positive that came out of it, perhaps, is that I've never been more than a very moderate social drinker, apart from a handful of occasions of having a little too much, and have had a lifelong revulsion towards drunkenness and intoxicated people.

Back at the Newport house Beryl was already aware of Dad's passing from the Sister's telephone call. Mum was composed, but asked if I would make all the arrangements for the funeral, which I was more than willing to do. The next day I found an undertaker and made the arrangements, and a few days later Dad was cremated at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium, with his ashes later placed in a niche there as that was what Mum wanted. The service was conducted by a Canon Gunn from Roseville, Mum and Dad not having been churchgoers themselves, and was attended by several friends from Glenorie who performed the RSL's last rites, Beryl's parents, and some of my colleagues from work, which I greatly appreciated.

Life went on after Dad's passing, with Mum coming over to see us every second weekend or so, or us going over to Newport. In those days the Bank had a number of holiday flats in various places around Australia, available to staff at very competitive rates. I'd put my name in for Port Macquarie, and towards the end of the year we were able to take two weeks holiday there. The flats were situated immediately above the branch in Horton Street, and the back yard led immediately to the RSL Club and the fishermen's wharf; this area has since been reclaimed and is now dry land. We had an enjoyable break there, walking down to the little park at the end of the street each afternoon so the kids could play on the swings and see-saw. There were three other families staying in the flats and we made particular friends with one other couple, the Guntons. While the wives cooked tea we men would

adjourn for a couple of cleansing ales at the RSL, with strict instructions as to what time to return. We explored Port Macquarie and its various attractions, with the boys especially liking Fantasy Glades with its fairytale themes, and drove the gravel back roads up to impressive Ellenborough Falls in the hinterland behind the coast.

Other than the work aspects, which I'll cover later, I have no specific recollection of events in the years 1967 through 1969. They were a time when the boys were growing and developing their own personalities, and certainly I loved every moment of family life with them and Beryl. We enjoyed reasonable health through those years, interacted with family and friends, played our tennis on a Saturday night and took part in various social activities. Graham proved to be a particularly quick learner and by the time he was four he was so obviously ready for school that we decided to cheat and put his age up by six months, so that in May 1967 we were able to enrol him in Kindergarten at Ringrose Avenue Public School, a couple of streets away, even though he was only just turned four! His *de facto* birthday thus became 6 August, not 6 February, a fib that we were to maintain for a few years. He took to school like the proverbial duck taking to water, and we never regretted our actions.

Russell was also no slouch and learned to read and write very quickly, although perhaps not as fast as Graham. As he developed and grew older it became apparent that where Graham was a "head" man, Russell was destined to be a "hands" man, far more mechanically and technically minded. Where Graham developed academic brilliance, Russell would develop commonsense. However this was for the future; suffice to say that in those younger days they were both bright, cheerful and intelligent little boys. They loved the water and we invested in a small pool for them to splash around in.

Graham starting school brought him a circle of young friends from around the neighbourhood, one of whom was a youngster named Warren Dowling, and we became quite good friends with his parents, Keith and Roma, who lived around the corner in Northcott Street. Beryl in particular saw a lot of Roma, and they worked together as "mums" at Ringrose School. It was through Roma's sister that we acquired a second dog, a Border collie bitch that we named Shadow, as that was what she became to Beryl. We had her desexed, and she was good company for Rocky and the boys.

We received news in November 1967 of the passing of Beryl's Grandma Spicer in Cessnock and travelled up there for the funeral, which took place at Beresfield Crematorium. In due course the Cessnock house was sold, but the new owners took pride in restoring and maintaining it and even now, thirty years on, it looks a picture.

In early 1969 we took a holiday up the NSW north coast as far as Brunswick Heads, where we stayed in an on-site van in a caravan park. In those days it was a sleepy little seaside town, but the pub was a busy place on a weekend. We swam a lot, explored the hinterland and played housie almost every night. Later that year, in July, we traded in the EJ Holden on a 1967 model, another Holden station wagon.

One event in 1969 that does stand out in my mind was what I called the "Black Weekend". It was at the end of November, and Russell, who had been prone to coughs and colds for most of his young life, was finally sent to have his tonsils out. He was admitted to the Children's Hospital at Camperdown and had the surgery, but being prone to bleeding he didn't come out of the operation particularly well and was still in hospital over the weekend. That same weekend the Bank had its Christmas Club cheque printing run. I was rostered as Duty Programmer on the overnight shift, and while there was no problem with the cheque printing all hell broke loose with the normal cheque account processing; I'll talk about it in more detail in a later chapter. The upshot was I worked 27 hours of direct overtime over that weekend, barely having time to visit Russell and of course unable to give poor Beryl any support. However it worked out

well in the end; I received a commendation for my efforts and was rewarded with a day off on full pay to take Russell home, and the money was pretty good too!

During those years problems began to develop with Frank Moad that were to have a significant effect on our lives. Whether it was a mental illness or something else we never really learned, but his behaviour became erratic, he began gambling heavily and the marriage slowly started to break up. Beryl didn't say much to me about what was going on, but started to spend an increasing amount of time with her mother.

The year of 1970 proved to be eventful in many ways. It started on a happy note, with Beryl's sister Susan marrying her boyfriend Graham Towle in the January. They'd known each other since being in high school together, and Graham worked in local government – at the time I think for Colo Council at Windsor. They bought a house in Fairfield West and we all went over to help clean up the yard and make the place habitable. I took our lawn mower and can remember trying to tackle grass half a metre high with it. At about the same time we had another holiday in Port Macquarie, this time renting a large flat overlooking Town Beach. Mum came along too, the first and only time we holidayed together since I had married. We did all the usual holiday things, and I'd take the boys down on to the beach for a swim before breakfast each morning. One other incident of that year that comes to mind concerns my coming home from work one day covered with chicken pox rash, which I'd caught off Graham. It was rather embarrassing for a grown man to contract the disease, especially since I'd had it as a youngster, and drew much hilarious comment from my workmates. During the year we also learned of the passing away in England of my Grandma Tod, Mum's mother, aged 80.

With Graham and Russell fast growing up and having to share a bedroom, it was becoming evident that we'd outgrown Hampden Road and in the second half of the year we decided to look for a larger home. By this time promotion within the Bank had also meant I was starting to earn a decent salary, and this also affected how much we could borrow on an Officer's Home Advance. I'd always been attracted by the Hills District since living in Glenorie, and this suited Beryl because she didn't want to be too far away from her parents, and especially her mother. I also needed to be close to transport in order to get to the city, and we wanted somewhere near to a school for the boys. I compiled a list of features that we'd want in a house, for example at least three bedrooms, and contacted a real estate agent to value our present home and put it on the market. We started by looking around Baulkham Hills but saw nothing there that we liked that was in our price range, so the next weekend we turned our attention to North Rocks. I'd always fancied that area since the days when with Mum and Dad we did our shopping in Parramatta and drove out there to eat lunch on the way home to Glenorie.

At North Rocks we found another estate agent who took us round a number of houses, all near the village centre and school. At number 13 Jason Place we found what we'd been looking for, a three bedroom brick veneer cottage in a nice garden, with a garage converted to a fourth bedroom, a triple carport and a substantial shed in the back yard. It wasn't sewerred, but had a septic system, as we were not prepared to go back to the old "dunny" days, and in any case the sewer would come in 1976. Like the other houses in that part of the street, a quiet cul-de-sac, it was about five years old and had been a project home built by the large construction company Civil and Civic. About the only thing it lacked was carpeting on the floor. It was five minutes from shops, school and bus stop, and although the kitchen and second and third bedrooms were a little on the small size we decided it was a good buy. We paid a deposit on 27 August, a loan was duly approved and we signed contracts on 13 October. At the same time, we were pleased that Hampden Road also sold quite readily, although the buyer asked for a little time before settlement, and so we were able to settle and move in on Friday 13 November. The coincidence of the three "thirteens" didn't escape notice, and we've always regarded it as a lucky number to us.

The house at Hampden Road sold for \$11,550, compared to the \$6900 we'd paid for it in 1962. The purchase price of Jason Place was \$22,250, which was a fairly hefty sum in those days. We got quotes from various removalists and accepted one from Beynon and Beynon for \$98, doing our own packing. On the day everything was safely transported across to North Rocks, although the purchasers of Hampden Road had a washing machine delivered even before ours had been removed from the laundry, and by that evening we were safe in our new home, albeit surrounded by half unpacked boxes. It was a home that would still be ours nearly forty years later, as I write this.

In 1970 North Rocks was still a semi-rural suburb, almost village-like in some ways. While most of the orchards had by now disappeared, replaced by housing, there were still some areas of open land, especially down Barclay Road, which remained a dead end with vacant land where Muirfield High School was later built. Where Westfield shopping centre now stands was an open paddock, with a scout hall at one end and a garage at the other. There was a general store, a small block of shops and a service station in the village centre, and behind the shops was the primary school. The Deaf and Blind School was already established on North Rocks Road, but New North Rocks Road was closed off at its northern end. Muirfield Golf Club was still surrounded by bush, and the boys, dogs and I would roam it on weekends, looking for and finding many golf balls, for which I paid them five cents a time. There was a back gate to the school, so Graham and Russell could walk there and back without needing to access a main road. Above all, there were still plenty of trees around, and the elevation above the Cumberland Plain meant cooling breezes on hot days. We believed then, and still believe, we made a very good choice of where to live.

While all this house-hunting and settling was taking place things were reaching crisis point between Beryl's parents, with Frank's behaviour becoming intolerable, and matters came to a head just after we'd moved to North Rocks. Beryl's mother, in fear of her safety, asked us over to their house one Saturday. Frank came home from work in a belligerent mood, started ranting and raving, calling me names and wanting to fight me in the back yard, and in the end forced Daphne to leave the house with whatever clothes she was able to put together. We hadn't told him of our move, so there was a safe house to go to, and ultimately she went to stay with Sue and Graham. In the meantime, and with my help, Daphne started proceedings to sue for divorce on the grounds of mental cruelty, firstly through a chamber magistrate and then a barrister. In the meantime Frank was selling off the furniture and other personal effects from the Fairfield house.

An end came to it all in early December. Alerted by neighbours in Hercules Street, who had seen Frank's car parked there for several days but no sign of him, Sue and Graham went over there one night. Sue still had a key, and Graham entered the house to find Frank dead on his bed; he had been there for several days and had taken his own life. Sue rang us at North Rocks, and we left the boys in care of our new next door neighbour and hurried over to Fairfield to console Daphne and do what we could. I alerted the barrister that a divorce was no longer required, and the funeral was held a few days later at Rookwood Crematorium, with Frank's ashes later scattered in the Rose Garden there. In her eulogy, Frank's sister Bonnie said sorrowfully "This was not the Frank we once knew", with which we all agreed.

Beryl didn't say much at the time, but I'm sure her father's passing grieved her considerably. She had always been her father's girl rather than her mother's, especially in her younger days, and despite his change in nature and the estrangement with Daphne she would still have considered herself closer to him. In succeeding years it would be her sister Susan who was closest to Daphne, although we too stayed in constant touch and would have her over for weekends or go to her house to see her, mow the lawn and so on. Not long after Frank's death the Hercules Street properties were resumed by the Housing Commission, and Mum Moad moved to a semi-detached cottage in nearby Villawood.

Chapter Thirteen

My Brilliant Career - One

Leaving the family side of life there for a moment, I'll now concentrate for a while on my career in the Bank and the unforeseen path that it took. While ultimately work and family life can't be wholly separated, it could be confusing if I tried to weave both into the same narrative.

As I mentioned earlier, while working in Procedures and Research Department (P&RD) in 1965 my career took an unexpected turn. By way of background, it needs to be explained that since 1958 the Bank had been researching the use of electronic technology, and in 1961 had established an electronic punched card processing centre in the basement of the George and Market Streets building, grandly titled the Automated Data Processing Centre, or DPC for short. This mainly processed the Bank's payroll and ancillary activities, and cheque reconciliation, and the staff of the Centre were members of P&RD. While this was being carried out another small group within the department, the Electronic Research Group, known as the ERGs, was researching and planning for a full scale computer system. The ERGs were headed by a Sub-Inspector, one Ronald Angus "Hammy" Hamilton. Ron was at the forefront of computer research in Australia, an ex-RAAF engineer who in many ways was years ahead of his time in his thinking and understanding of the benefits that computerisation could bring, and one of the foundation members and mainstays of the Australian Computer Society. Under Hammy the ERG numbers had expanded as the enormity of the task became clearer, and at the time of my joining the Department consisted of a core of himself and six people - Bruce Oswald, Russell Robinson, Ian Hendrie, John Capare, Gordon Smith and Geoff Kiddle, augmented by members of the DPC including its founder and manager, Alan Tarrant. These people brought to the table considerable experience in the various fields of banking, embracing both branches and administration. While Hammy's technical expertise was beyond question, it would seem that he was not seen as the best person to manage an operational computer department, and with this in mind another Sub-Inspector, Ronald Hedley "Ron" Turner, had been brought in and was busily engaged in bringing himself up to speed on computers and technology.

In the second half of 1965 the Bank's Board took the inevitable decision to launch into the computer age and purchase an IBM computer. This was followed by issuing a Circular to all Bank staff inviting volunteers to train as programmers and systems analysts in this exciting new field. Hammy in particular urged me to apply, and so I did. I was interviewed by a panel of three – Hammy, Ron Turner and Roy Ferguson of the Commonwealth Savings Bank, who had chaired the high level Sub-Committee that had carried the recommendation to the Managing Director and the Board. I always remember the two questions that Hammy asked me: "Do you play chess?" and "Can you play the piano?" At least I was able to say yes to the first one! Ron told all the interviewees that we could expect to be in the new EDP Section for two to three years, and not to assume that it would be an easy way to get promotions. I was accepted, and was one of the first six trainees to be taken on board, much to the chagrin of my colleague Keith Loughland, who'd also applied and would follow me a couple of months later.

So it was that a couple of weeks later I was sitting in a conference room with the other five trainees, receiving a two week orientation course from Gordon Smith before being sent to IBM for formal training. The other trainees – Harold Thomsett, Bob Fitzell, Geoff Wellstead, Dan Capanna and Lourie Smit – and I were eternally grateful for Gordon's efforts, as he succeeded in stripping some of the mystique away from what was a totally new and confusing subject to all of us. We started to master the concept of bits and bytes, Boolean logic, core storage, peripheral devices and all the totally baffling jargon of computing before being thrown to the wolves.

Brimming with information, we were then sent on a four week course at IBM's Kent Street headquarters, along with perhaps a half dozen other equally confused trainees from other companies.

Most were around our age, although one was a fairly senior man in his organisation, who kept a fatherly eye on the only girl in the class. The Bank had decided on IBM's new state-of-the-art System 360 computer, but there wasn't one in Sydney at that time, and our instructors proved to be only a few pages ahead of us in the manuals they were teaching us to use. It was extremely hard going, and after the first week or so I was seriously doubting whether I'd made a wise choice. With one exception, the others were in much the same state of mind, but Lourie Smit, a Dutchman who'd come to Australia about the same time as me and was of a similar age, seemed to take to it like the proverbial duck to water. Within two weeks he was challenging the tutors and picking up on their mistakes.

The four weeks ended, and I have to say I was totally confused with the whole thing, and as far as programming was concerned the penny had as yet failed to drop, so to speak. This was reflected in IBM's report back to the Bank, which gave me a "D" marking and said I "was unlikely to become a programmer". The fact that I would go on to fill some of the most senior programming roles in the department was either an indicator of their poor judgement, or a testimonial to my ability; perhaps a little of both. Anyway, I'd performed poorly in basic training, but Ron Turner reassured me. "Never mind, old boy", he said, "we'll make you a systems analyst."

The main thrust of the new EDP Section's work was aimed at converting the Bank's payroll processing from pounds, shillings and pence in punched cards to dollars and cents on computer by "C-Day", the fourteenth of February 1966. We wouldn't have our own computer by then, so the team working on Payroll directed their efforts to getting the system designed and programs written to run on IBM's in-house computers until we got our own. For my part, I was assigned to a small project team of three people to computerise the operations of the Bank's Clearing Department, a centralised system in each State that received customers' cheques from every branch and the other banks, sorted and tabulated them and forward them on to the ledger branch or owning bank. Gordon Smith was the Project Manager, and the other team member was a senior Procedures Officer, Noel Clark. Clearing Department provided a user representative by the name of Pat McCabe, who would become my valued lieutenant much later on in my career. We were located in the old Head Office building at Pitt Street and Martin Place, where the computer centre was in the course of being established.

The Clearing project involved analysing all the workflows in Clearing, then designing a computer system to automate them. The system involved peripheral machines called Reader/Sorters which were rather like an electronic version of the fruit grader I'd used in Glenorie. Batches of cheques, together with control documents, would be fed into the machine at high speed, sorted on information on the MICR code line on each cheque and directed to one of the twenty odd receiving pockets. Three or sometimes four passes of the cheques eventually brought them into branch order and a control tape was produced for attachment and despatch. As part of the process the details of the cheques were captured to the computer for posting to the customers' accounts. Lourie Smit was assigned to write the program for the reader/sorter, building on some very basic IBM software from the USA, and his unique skills as a programmer were immediately apparent.

I worked on this very interesting project for about a year, during which it was successfully launched, but then I was hit by a bombshell! Because of the special skills needed in EDP work, and in order to hold our staff from going to outside industry once they were trained, an EDP allowance over and above Bank salary was to be introduced. However to attract this one had to qualify as a programmer, and a couple of weeks later I was transferred to the Programming group. Over the previous few months I'd succeeded in giving up smoking, but the stress was so great that my first action was to go out and buy a packet of Rothmans Filters. I had to re-learn what I'd been taught at IBM, which was how to use the Assembler language; because we had severe limitations on computer size and memory, all programs had to be written as efficiently as possible. I knuckled down to it, and with a lot of help from my colleagues, to

whom I remain eternally grateful, gradually the penny started to slip and finally dropped through the slot. I became proficient, qualified for the allowance and over the next year or so wrote many programs, increasing in complexity, including some for the Christmas Club and Superannuation applications. The Programming group was located in an annexe in King Street, at the rear of Head Office, and we had a perfect view of the construction of the Sydney Tower, watching as progressively each cylindrical section was lifted into place and the tower grew skywards.

A brief and very simplistic description of how a programmer worked in those days might be of interest here. We'd receive a written specification from a systems analyst, detailing the task to be performed and the parameters surrounding it, such as what files were to be input and output, what reports were to be produced, and the actual calculations and processing that had to be applied to each record by the program. We would then break this down logically by flowcharting the sequence of events, using worksheets and a template with various shapes corresponding with different processes. Once this was done we'd write the code for each of these processes, using pencils and pre-printed coding sheets, and these would be handed to a punch card operator to be punched into cards. The cards would then be fed into the computer, which would output another set of cards in machine language, and this second deck constituted the executable program. This program would then be run on the computer until all the "bugs" were found and corrected and then tested against pre-prepared data. Once everything was proved correct the program would be signed off for live running. In those more relaxed days the programmer would often go into the computer centre and run the tests on the computer himself, so we learned quite a bit about operating the actual equipment. Around this time I also joined the Australian Computer Society as a Member, which at that time required no qualifying examination; being in the industry was sufficient. I was therefore able to add the initials MACS to my title.

There was a great deal of camaraderie in the Programming Section in those days, with everyone helping each other with knotty problems, and also some good natured competition in seeing who could write the most efficient piece of code for a given problem. Once I'd mastered the basics I wrote several informal manuals which were used by others to make the process of coding and job set-up easier. After a fairly long stint in programming I served a term of a few months in the computer centre itself in the role of Job Scheduler. This consisted of knowing what applications and programs had to be run on each particular day, drawing up a schedule showing the order of running and what magnetic file inputs and outputs would be required, and putting the programs in order for execution. It was quite an interesting job, and I learned a lot more about the mainframe equipment, how to operate it, and most importantly how to solve operational problems or create work-arounds while a programmer tackled a problem in the program code itself.

This last function was to be part of my role when I went back from computer operations into what was now known as Systems Development in 1968. A special section known as Programming Standards and Control, or PS&C, had been set up with the responsibility of maintaining programs once they'd been accepted as "live", including debugging them when problems occurred and making further enhancements to them, and also with maintaining the operating system of the computer. The latter required the development of a whole lot of new skills and knowledge, presenting a further challenge to me as I was not really a technically minded person by nature. By this time computer processing started at seven each morning and lasted until midnight and beyond, and in fact soon became a twenty four hour process, which meant that the programmers in PS&C had to work shift work in order that someone always be on hand while "live" work was running. We were located adjacent to the computer centre in the Head Office building to facilitate this.

PS&C was headed by John Capare, one of the former ERGs, a very volatile and unorthodox person, in those days great to work for and who passed on a tremendous amount of knowledge to me. He

encouraged responsibility and initiative in his staff, and his technical knowledge seemed at times to be awesome. He was later succeeded by Ian Hendrie, another of the original ERGs, who was at times a prickly character and not a particular good people manager, often creating a lot of resentment in his staff for the way he treated them, possibly without knowing he was doing it. I have to say, however, that at annual report time he was a very fair marker and certainly helped my career along. Quite a lot of people passed through the group while I was there, and Bob Fitzell, who had been on the initial courses with me, was a member when I joined it. Among those who stand out in mind, however, were Garth Blackman, who later became the guru of on-line technology in the Department; Glenn Beaver; Gerry Davies, who moved to the Brisbane EDP Centre; and Peter Nicholson, who similarly became Duty Programmer in Melbourne. Then there was Peter Edmunds, who years later left and became an Assistant General Manager and Head of Computing at the Bank of Queensland; Peter and Rhonda were, and still are, personal friends of ours and we often catch up with them when in Brisbane. I became quickly known through my initials as "CSP of PSC", a perfect palindrome, until someone spoiled it in a departmental restructure by renaming it Program Control Section. I retaliated by always initialling my memos as:

" C S P
C
S "

It was during this period that the "Black Weekend" I alluded to in an earlier chapter occurred. While on the overnight shift on the Friday night the cheque account processing crashed with a data error in a record. Using debugging techniques I located the problem and wrote a quick little program to correct the data. This ran successfully, cheque account processing was restarted but crashed again with a similar error but in another record. Fixed it, crashed again in another record! This went on through the weekend, as each run took several hours. Finally when things were getting really desperate I was re-examining the printed "dumps" from each abortive run when I discovered a common denominator; the same magnetic tape drive had been used for the output master file of each run. We put that tape drive out of commission, used another one and the job ran perfectly, in time to get the work to the branches on the Monday. IBM were called in and we subsequently found that the tape drive was dropping a "bit" of information when it encountered a long string of zeros followed by a significant character, a situation that was common in the format of the cheque account records. The error was occurring so infrequently that the chance of it happening was in the many millions, but Murphy had struck on each run! However I was hailed as a hero, which I didn't mind in the least!

Another occasion I recall was the Friday before a NSW State Election was being held. I was on the three to eleven shift, which gave me time to go home and have a sleep before we worked on the polls. Wrong! Major problems occurred that night and even after the eleven to seven duty programmer came in it took both of us to get things sorted out. I got home just in time to pick Beryl up and go to the polling booth, and somehow I got through the day and the count of votes the next evening.

It was a truism in the Bank that to really advance, one had to have a sponsor. I was fortunate in having no less than three, the first of whom was Ron Turner. Very early in the piece Ron recognised I had something to give the organisation, and in one of my annual staff reports I remember him saying that I should be "singled out for very rapid advancement". This did happen and I received some very fast promotions through the Bank grades, while at the same time advancing rapidly on the EDP Allowance scale from Assistant Programmer to Principal Programmer. Before reaching the last named grade, I replaced Ian Hendrie as Manager of PCS. By then I'd requested to be released from shift work, to the relief of my family, but my job as Manager was still a very hands-on one. As well as checking and approving program amendments, and sometimes doing them, I was on 24-hour call from my Duty

Programmers if a problem arose that they were unable to solve. On a few occasions I had to go in to the computer centre during the night, and once I was even called off the tennis court to go back in and help solve a crisis. However the experience gave me a very good grounding in managing staff and the organisation of a team.

In March 1973 I was appointed a Project Manager and returned to Systems Development, still based in the Head Office building. At first I was given some existing projects to maintain while I settled in to my new role, but towards the end of the year I was handed a brand new project. The Bank had successfully tendered to operate the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Bank Settlement Plan, a system whereby travel agents sent their airline ticket sales, together with the sales money, to the Bank for capture and processing and the Bank disbursed the funds to the various airlines, charging per transaction but also benefiting from holding the cash on the Short Term Money Market. The system had already been developed in South Africa, and it was thought to be a simple matter for us to install it in Australia. I was to go to that country with an IATA representative who worked for QANTAS, spend a week with the bank operating the system there, Nedbank, and bring the code and documentation back with me. The system was written in the high level language COBOL, so firstly my team members and I had to return to IBM and do a course in that language.

So came the first of many overseas trips I would make for the Bank, this particular one the envy of many of my colleagues. While it was a matter of being in the right place at the right time, as it was for many succeeding ones, I've always counted myself incredibly fortunate that I was given the opportunity to travel so widely, meet so many people, see so many places, and get paid for it! A full account of this and the other trips I did, or at least the social and personal side of them, would take up far too much space here and may be the subject of another book entirely, but suffice to say that in December 1973 I flew to Johannesburg, where I was joined by Sigmund "Siggy" Cimiega from QANTAS, and together we worked for a week at Nedbank, meeting the local IATA people and orientating ourselves with the software. COBOL is an acronym for "Common Business Oriented Language", meaning it should be readily transportable to any computer. Wrong! The IATA software had been written for a Burroughs machine, and we subsequently found we had to rewrite 80% of the code to be compatible on IBM equipment. The documentation was also non-existent apart from code listings, so my team and I completely documented the system, including user manuals. The system itself belonged to IATA and in later years would be provided by them to other countries, but the documentation was owned by us and we on-sold it to defray our own costs. While in Johannesburg I also met Bob Jackson, who had been appointed Plan Manager for IATA in Australia and with whom I would have a close association; when he later came to Australia he lived for a time quite near to us in North Rocks. I also took the opportunity while there for some sightseeing in and around Johannesburg and Pretoria, and found that the South Africa of *apartheid* days was both interesting and rather disquieting.

With the BSP successfully installed and running, in 1974 I was handed my next project. This was the computerisation of the cheque printing process at the Bank's Stores and Printing Department, and involved the acquisition of a mini-computer and the development of software to produce the cheque images and MICR code lines for printing on the specialised printers there. I was introduced to the Controller of Stores, Leo Morrison, a sometimes irascible and dogmatic character nearing retirement, and the Superintendent of Printing, Bill Matthes, who was an undoubted expert in his field and respected throughout the industry. I was to work very closely with Bill over the next couple of years. He and Leo had at times a stormy working relationship, but for some reason I hit it off very well with Leo, whose feedback to Ron Turner did me no harm at all.

The mini-computer and software to run it was to be supplied as a complete package by a company called Troy, based in Santa Ana, California, so after Bill and I had specified in fine detail what our

requirements were the three of us flew out there in October 1974 for a week to negotiate the deal. For their part, they were astounded at the standards of print quality that Bill demanded, as the USA seemed to be unworried by high rejection rates during the capture of cheques. For our part we found that the method of processing we'd specified was for technical reasons totally unsuitable for the mini-computer system, and it looked like we were heading for disaster. One evening we were joined by Barry Pontifex and Russell Thurlow, our friendly competitors from Cheque Printers and Encoders Pty Ltd in Melbourne, who had also arrived on a visit to Troy. We held a business conference to discuss progress to date, and had to acknowledge that things had not gone well, much of our previous work was wasted and a new approach would be needed if Troy were to be of any use to us. Leo particularly was most unhappy, as the project represented his "swan song" for the Bank before retirement and he had put a lot of store in its success.

On a wryly humorous note, Bill and I had decided that in order to have a meaningful meeting we'd keep it "dry" as long as we could. Leo, who liked his scotch, was visibly getting more and more uptight the longer and gloomier the meeting became. Finally he wrenched the top off a bottle of Johnny Walker *Black Label*, threw it across the room and poured himself a stiff drink. The meeting ended soon after! Bill and I worked through that night and by the next morning I'd completely revised our specification and the situation was saved. The final day saw a deal struck, and a grateful Leo told us to take an extra day in Hawaii on the way home. We had also managed to squeeze in visits to Universal Studios and Disneyland during our stay.

Back in Australia my team developed the mainframe programs for the project, while Bill and his team attended to the production aspects. Because of a dearth of testing time on the Sydney computers two of my team, Peter Garwood and Don Loughry, went down to Melbourne for two weeks with me and tested the programs there, achieving a huge amount of throughput. In May 1975 Leo Morrison, Bill Matthes and I flew back to California for final acceptance testing of the system from Troy before it was shipped to Sydney. We started in San Francisco, where I was able to see quite a bit of the city in our spare time, before moving on to Santa Ana. While there Leo and I paid a visit to the 1975 National Computer Conference, America's largest computer fair, which was being held in Anaheim, and the size of which blew my mind. We also visited San Diego on a weekend excursion. In the meantime, IATA had decided to install the Bank Settlement Plan in Mexico, and the London and Mexico Bank there requested that someone come and help orientate them in the system. Consequently, after the Troy system was tested and accepted, Leo and Bill returned to Sydney while I flew down to Mexico City and spent a very interesting week there with the local project team. Most of them spoke reasonable English so communication was not difficult. Again I was able to fit some sightseeing into a busy schedule, and Mexico City was unlike anywhere I'd been before.

Leo had asked me to do some research into computerised printing methodology, so from Mexico City I flew to New York to make some calls there. These took me into New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and I was also able to fit some weekend sightseeing in that took me, among other places, up the Empire State Building and Statue of Liberty. Then it was off to Detroit to briefly visit my friends Donald and Betty Rohn, of whom more later, before returning to Australia. On the final leg from Honolulu I found myself seated next to the Bank's Chief Manager International, Bruce Maitland, and across the aisle from the Managing Director, Bede Callaghan. Then and later I came in for some good-natured chacking from them about my gallivanting in Hawaii while they were hard at work.

The cheque printing system duly arrived from California, was installed and ran very successfully, and I was proud to have been associated with what was the most advanced cheque printing technology in Australia at the time. An amusing incident regarding that installation comes to mind. While in Santa Ana I'd purchased a large model kit of the clipper *Cutty Sark* for Graham, who was into model making. It

was too large to carry home in the aircraft, so I arranged to have it included in the crate when the equipment was shipped out to us. It duly arrived, but when we checked the manifest we were horrified to see, listed, "1 x box Cutty Sark". Bearing in mind that Cutty Sark was also a popular brand of Scotch whisky, I had visions of what Customs might have made of it, but obviously the entry eluded their eagle eyes!

In 1974 the EDP Section of Procedures and Research Department had become EDP Department in its own right, with Ron Turner as Chief Manager, a position he would hold for several more years before his retirement. In that year he asked me to form a Staff Social Club for the Department, which now numbered several hundred people. This I did, and I was elected Chairman, supported by a small but keen Committee. We organised several functions such as monthly TGIF ("Thank Goodness It's Friday") evenings, cricket matches between divisions of the Department, theatre parties, a harbour cruise and other activities, and of course the annual Departmental Christmas Party, which was a major affair requiring a lot of planning and work. I also set up and ran a wine club for a year or so, but this started to involve too much work and the idea was dropped.

On 1 April 1976, being a foundation member of the Department, I attended a dinner at City Tattersall Club celebrating the 10th anniversary of the delivery of our first computer. The guest of honour was the Managing Director, Bede Callaghan, who I'd met for the first time on that flight from Honolulu. In those ten years I had seen the Department grow tremendously from its small beginnings. Snow Pratten, long retired, was also a guest that night.

To this point my projects had been of reasonably moderate size, but late in 1976 Ron Turner selected me to project manage the progressive computerisation of the Bank's International Division. This would prove to be a very large project indeed, encompassing four main strands: International Accounting, NOSTRO Account Reconciliation, Foreign Exchange Dealing and Management Information. It would also expand to include computer processing at some of the Bank's overseas branches, and further down the track the international payments system, S.W.I.F.T. I was introduced to Geoff Johnston, Deputy Chief Manager in International Division, who had overall responsibility for the project from the user side, and Peter McDermott, who would represent the user project team and work closely with me for the next couple of years. I handed over all my existing applications to other project managers so that I could concentrate exclusively on International and formed a new team, with my number two being Bruce Hall, with whom I played tennis each week, and analysts Tony Anderssen, Ross McLennan and Peter Lyons. We started work on International Accounting, which was a large and complex project involving a lot of systems design and requiring hundreds of forms to be modified or introduced, as it affected every branch in the Bank. During the early stages of this Peter and I flew to Wellington in April 1977 for a week to pick the brains of people in the Bank of New Zealand, who had already advanced down the same path. Our host and the executive in charge of the project there was one David Oram, who I would later meet again in New York.

We developed the International Accounting system with a few delays as specifications changed and new ideas surfaced, and it was successfully launched in 1978. In the meantime we'd started work on the NOSTRO Reconciliation system. NOSTRO reconciliation was a very labour intensive task under a manual system, requiring a staff of over thirty in Overseas Department to reconcile the statements of our accounts with overseas banks with the originating transactions. I remember sitting down to think the process through, and virtually specified the logic of the whole system on a scrap of paper. The system was developed and also successfully launched, probably in 1979. In parallel to this, elements of the Management Information system were put in place as well. This left the Foreign Exchange Dealing System, but in the event it was decided that the Dealing Room would be computerised based on

microcomputers rather than using the mainframe and development of this passed to International Division rather than our own department.

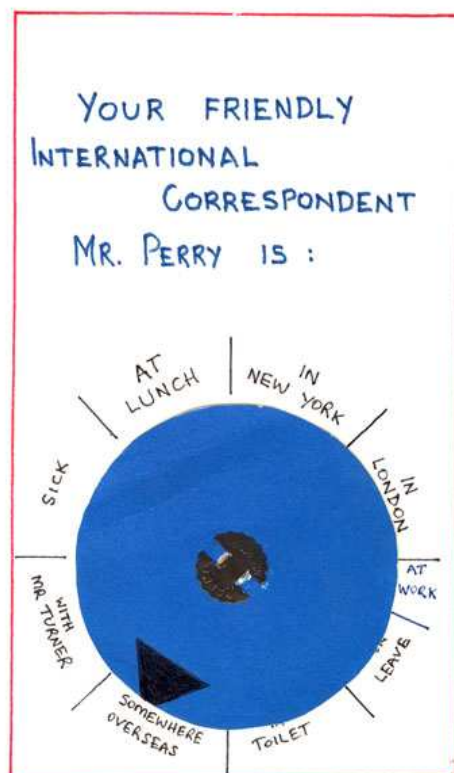
While all this was happening the Bank had been expanding its overseas network and operations, and the need had arisen for international accounting systems in New York and London (the latter already had a mainframe computer for other purposes). However a mainframe system was patently out of the question for New York, and we wanted a system that would be based on mini-computers and be compatible across all overseas branches. With this in mind a representative of International Division, Jim McAnany, and myself flew to New York in January 1978 to do a feasibility study and research software/hardware packages that might do the job for us. This proved a very interesting if sometimes arduous assignment, with many red herrings and frustrations along the way, and we evaluated four systems. We spent a month there, hosted by our New York agent John Wiseheart and his deputies Jim Smith and Col Smith (no relation to each other), and on our return to Australia made a recommendation for a system using an IBM minicomputer and a software system called MIDAS from a company called BIS Software, based in England. I thoroughly enjoyed working in New York and the busy, huge city itself, and the weekends provided time for sightseeing, with John taking us further afield. I think we ate dinner at a different restaurant every night without once repeating ourselves.

The return journey from New York on that occasion warrants mention. Jim had elected to return to Australia via London and visit some friends, so I was on my own. From New York I flew to Los Angeles, where I was confined to the terminal and a rather boring wait before boarding my flight to Honolulu. It was dark when I reached there and caught a courtesy bus to the nearby Holiday Inn, and that was where the bad ending to the trip began! I'd arranged the hotel booking through QANTAS in New York, but because they hadn't taken a deposit off me my room had been re-let and they had no other vacancies! I was not the only one - the woman ahead of me in the queue had the same problem. Threats and cajolment brought no response except to let us use their telephone to call other hotels. This proved useless - every hotel seemed to be booked out! I had no choice but to pick up my bags and return to the airport, where QANTAS were able to provide me with a seat on that night's flight (leaving in six hours time.) I took it and called home, reverse charges, to let the family know I'd be back a day ahead of schedule! After that it was a bit of shopping at the terminal and a long boring wait before boarding the QANTAS 747 for a tiring flight home. I calculated later I was 36 hours in transit from the time I checked out of my New York hotel to the time I walked through our front door.

I continued on with the International projects and in February 1979 returned to New York, unaccompanied by Jim McAnany this time, to supervise the installation of the MIDAS system. I was there for just on three weeks, during which time everything went smoothly as the system was bedded down and procedures for operating it set up. During my stay there I attended a reception for the then Managing Director of the Bank, Vern Christie, and also caught up with Dave Oram and his wife; Dave was now the Bank of New Zealand's New York Agent. From New York I flew to London, where I prepared the groundwork for the installation of the MIDAS system there. I fitted in the usual sightseeing, then after my work was done I took a few days off, rented a car and headed north to catch up with my relatives there, as it was the first time I'd been back to England since I left the country in 1951. I have more to say about this elsewhere.

In September 1980 I also visited the Bank's newly opened branch in Hong Kong to lay the groundwork for installation of MIDAS at that point. This involved a number of discussions with IBM and the local branch of BIS Software, then writing a detailed report and drafting a proposal for consideration by John Koch, the Managing Director of the branch. My time there also gave me ample opportunities to sight-see and get a feel for that fascinating outpost of the mystical Orient, including a couple of coach tours around the island and into the New Territories, and a cruise in a junk on the teeming Aberdeen Harbour.

By this time my team members were prompted to comment on my frequent absences by attaching a device on my office door, which is worthy of reproducing here:



It would have been around this time that I renewed acquaintance with Peter Connolly, when he was transferred in to the Operations wing of the Department. We'd virtually lost track of the Connolly boys over the past few years, with Jim serving mainly interstate or in the NSW country. Jim's marriage with Joan had broken up some time earlier and he'd spent a few days with us while getting his life back in order. He later either remarried or was in a relationship, and we had dinner once with him and his new wife or partner Betty. Anyway, I saw a bit of Peter while he was in Operations, but we were to drift apart again. He became a delegate to the Commonwealth Bank Officers' Association, and later was seconded full time to that body. I'd become a compulsory member of the Association when I joined the Bank, and back in those days it was a gentlemanly body that relied on good relations and negotiations with Bank management to achieve its gains for members. However it increasingly became militant, and finally changed its name to a union. The further I progressed in management roles the more I, and many others at my level, became disenchanted with its militancy and non-co-operation, and although Peter and I never quarrelled over it we almost naturally drifted apart.

As I mentioned earlier, Ron Turner was a real 'sponsor' to me, with recommendations for fast promotion, and in the late 1970s I was appointed an Administrative Assistant. This was a Bank grading that identified people whose record of achievement warranted special recognition, but more importantly recognition that they had the potential to rise to the top layers of the organisation and should be fast-tracked accordingly. I was very proud to be recognised in this way, putting it down to my hard work but also the support I'd been given by my project teams. Ron subsequently retired, I think around the end of the 1970s, and was replaced as Chief Manager by Peter Martin. Peter, like myself, had grown within the Department and after managing the Brisbane computer centre for some years had

returned to Sydney as Manager Operations. He had a completely different management style to Ron and was more of a hands-on type of person. I always remember his advice to me one annual report time; he told me I was too reticent in advancing my own ideas, especially in management discussions, and to "chance my arm" more often. This was good advice that I took to heart and followed in a large way a little later down the track. Recognising the need to set personal goals, as far back as then I'd set my sights on becoming the "number two" of the Department; recognising my own limitations, I never aspired to be its head. It was a goal that would be realised in coming years. In May 1980 I received further promotion to the position of Assistant Manager, Systems Development.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s an international payments system had been developed by a consortium, based in Brussels and known as the Society For World-wide Interbank Financial Transactions (thankfully abbreviated to S.W.I.F.T.) This was a computer-based system, with each bank's central computers being linked to a central node in the United States. The system was being progressively extended to all countries, and in early 1981 representatives of S.W.I.F.T. visited Australia to lay the groundwork for Australia's connection to the system. Following this an Australian Steering Committee was formed, with two representatives from each of the major banks – one from the International department and another from the data processing department. I was the EDP representative, while International Division was represented by John Morgan. Over the ensuing years John and I were to become very close colleagues and lifelong friends. The Committee was initially chaired by the Bank of New South Wales, later known as Westpac, but in later years John assumed the role and went on to become a Board member of S.W.I.F.T. itself, necessitating him spending a lot of time in Brussels and other overseas locations. The S.W.I.F.T. Committee meetings were rotated through the mainland State capitals, except Brisbane, and involved visits to Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth during 1981 and 1982.

The Bank decided on a mainframe connection with S.W.I.F.T., with our branch network on-line to it, and the project fell under my jurisdiction. We adapted a package supplied by IBM and wrote ancillary programs to tie it all in with the other International applications. In September 1981 John Morgan and I went on a major study tour to visit overseas banks who were already using S.W.I.F.T. and in particular the IBM solution, and to attend S.W.I.F.T.'s annual conference, SIBOS '81. We visited banks in Singapore, England, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland, amassing a huge amount of knowledge in the process and making many useful contacts in the banks and at IBM Germany, where their S.W.I.F.T. software was developed.

We started the tour in Singapore, where we had a day sightseeing then visited two banks and met up with the local S.W.I.F.T. representative, who with his wife hosted us to a remarkable seafood buffet dinner at the Singapore Tennis Club. On arrival in London I walked straight through Immigration and Customs on my British passport, while John took an hour to go through on his Australian one. The Bank's travel agency had booked us into no less than the Savoy (we discovered later we were not really entitled to it as being a "world class" hotel) and on arrival found it very "posh", with mainly chauffeur-driven Rolls Royces parked outside. We were ushered to our rooms, which while larger than usual we thought rather old fashioned and a little shabby, especially the ancient plumbing which included a bidet. A minibar was supplied in each room, but to use it required calling (and tipping) a waiter to come and unlock it and serve the drinks. Needless to say, we didn't indulge! The hotel staff all seemed to wear tailcoats and most of the guests appeared to be Arabs. The whole place had an air of faded grandeur and in retrospect we were not really impressed with it, except for the magnificent restaurant overlooking the Thames, feeling it was pretentious, snobbish and vastly overrated.

After bank visits and a visit to our own Bank's London Office, we flew to Brussels for bank visits there, with little time to see anything but the city centre, then flew on to Zurich. There we'd been booked into

the Dolder Grand, on the outskirts, because the good hotels in the city itself were full, and we had every reason to applaud the choice. The hotel was in fact rated among the top ten in the world at that time. It sat like a fairytale palace nestled in the pine woods near the top of the Dolder, the steep hillside behind Lake Zurich, complete with its distinctive "witches hat" central tower, gabled roofs, sunny terraces and beautiful gardens. It even had its own golf course across the road. There was an aura of romance and good living about the place, and while very plush and tasteful it lacked the slickness associated with modern hotels. Over the next few days we made bank visits and were able on the weekend to visit Lucerne and Mount Pilatus and make a memorable journey up the Jungfrau mountain.

Although John had travelled overseas before, this was his first Bank trip and I felt it time he was exposed to some personal development, starting with "how to feel at home in *haute cuisine* hospitality." Consequently we dined one night in style (and at great expense to the Bank) in the dining room of the Dolder Grand, on salmon with fennel, tomato soup, roast veal, gateaux and the head waiter's choice of a magnificent white wine. The service and accoutrements were impeccable and we felt like kings dining among the *creme de la creme* of Zurich society. I'm sure what he learned stood him in great stead in his future role as a Board member of S.W.I.F.T.!

After Zurich we made bank visits in Basel and Bern before moving on to Frankfurt. The morning we left Zurich the nightmare of every traveller finally came true for me! I woke with a start fifteen minutes before our taxi was to arrive to take us to the station! Frantically I dressed, finished packing and just made it, with a shower and shave going by the board, I'm afraid. Frankfurt was booked out because of the huge annual Motor Show so we stayed in Mainz, a train ride away. Over the next few days we made bank visits and had some sessions with IBM, as their S.W.I.F.T. development was based there. We were also able to sneak in a day trip to the picturesque walled town of Rothenberg-ob-der Tauber.

The SIBOS conference was held in Dusseldorf and we travelled there in the most pleasant way possible – by boat along the Rhine to Koblenz, and train from there. SIBOS was an eye-opener to us both in terms of its size, range of topics and speakers and its social programme; several other members of the Australian committee also attended. The official dinner warrants some detailed description. It was held in the city's Stadhalle (State Hall) in the form of a "German Night". On arrival we were greeted outside the building by a brass band and a squad of marching girls, then received carnival hats and went upstairs to the huge lobby to be served with potent brandy alexanders, each with the emblem of S.W.I.F.T. in chocolate floating in them. Nearby a guessing competition to calculate the weight of an immense S.W.I.F.T. cake was being run, while a one man band and a Dixie combo alternately provided music. After a while we moved into the immense main hall and took our seats for the dinner. The place was lavishly decorated with lights, streamers and balloons. On each table stood jugs of beer and bottles of wine, and at each person's place were gifts of a stein and a badge. The food followed shortly, in the form of the largest buffet I had ever seen. There was simply too huge a selection to ever hope to try everything, and what we had was all good. There were hot dishes and cold collations, with many cuisines represented, and I concentrated on sampling the German dishes although I also found the steak *tartare* was very good. While we ate, three bands entertained us in turn, plus a pipe band! Then followed the entertainment program, which lost nothing in comparison with the venue and the meal. A patriotic travelogue film of Germany screened on the high wall was accompanied by the fine voices of a 200-strong mixed choir. A tremendous Spanish female vocalist followed, who sang for half an hour, and there were a number of smaller supporting acts including a whistler. The entertainment didn't end there, however. Adjourning to the lobby, we found a variety of amusements including free instant photographs, a scissor artist, a lightning sketch artist, hoopla, coconut shy, coffee shops, ice cream and cake stalls, and so on and on.

After the conference John flew back to Australia while I spent a weekend in Amsterdam and returned to London to follow up on a few matters involving the MIDAS system and other applications running there. I took a few days leave to catch up with family again, then on the way back to Australia stopped off in Hong Kong to check on the health of the MIDAS system that had been installed there.

Peter Martin retired as Chief Manager in 1982, and the incoming Chief Manager was Len Spencer. Len was an accountant rather than a computer person, although he had set up and headed the EDP Audit section of the Bank's Accounting department, so already had a good working knowledge of EDP. Len was the second sponsor I'd had in the Bank and really moved my career along. On his recommendation I was appointed an Executive Assistant at the end of 1982, equivalent to a grading of Sub Inspector "A" and a higher version of the Administrative Assistant grading I'd held earlier, and a real feather in my cap, so to speak. Looking back, I'd received fourteen promotional grades in eighteen years in the Department, second only to a colleague who had received fifteen, and several of my promotions had been two grades at a time. The colleague, Ken Willett, had joined the Department only a couple of weeks after me and would in fact succeed Len Spencer as General Manager in the years ahead.

By this time advancement had taken me from direct "hands-on" project management to a position that was a *de facto* second in charge of the Systems Development section. I had several project teams reporting to me, including my old International team, now led by Bruce Hall, and I in turn reported to Bob Slater, another veteran of the Department who had joined a couple of weeks behind me. During this period and in following years I was kept busy, not only with day to day work, but through attendance at various seminars and conferences, including the annual Australian Computer Society Conference and IBM's Share/Guide meetings. One seminar I recall was given by a then international guru of data processing, James Martin, who had some very interesting concepts of the industry.

I also attended numerous management training courses over the years, the major one of which, in 1981, was the Bank's Personal Development Course. This was a four week residential course, held at the Bank's Staff College in St Ives, and was conducted annually with eighteen selected officers in attendance. It was aimed squarely at those of us with potential for advancement to senior positions in the Bank, and was very intensive. We were allowed home only once, the weekend in the middle of the course, and were deluged by an array of speakers from banking, industry and academia, as well as undergoing endless training sessions, syndicate discussions and the like. The College was very well appointed, and despite the hard work it was an enjoyable four weeks in which I made several valuable contacts elsewhere in the organisation. Somewhere about this time Systems Development had moved from the Head Office building to Liverpool and Castlereagh Streets, where the main computer centre was now located.

In my new role in Systems Development Len Spencer handed me a couple of special assignments which occupied quite a bit of time and proved very interesting. The first involved setting up a training and development curriculum for the analysts and programmers of the Department. This was undertaken by an outside specialist consultant, Rob Tomsett, well known in the industry at that time for his progressive ideas and the writer of several text books on analysis and project management. While creating the course was his responsibility, I worked very closely with him, my function being to meld our structure and methodologies into his training course and come up with a curriculum suitable for the Bank's particular needs. It was a very successful exercise and laid the basis for the development of further methodologies in the future as the shape of computing and system development evolved with new technology.

The second assignment was to carry out a free ranging investigation into methodologies, techniques and productivity aids for developing EDP systems. This was done in partnership with one of my project

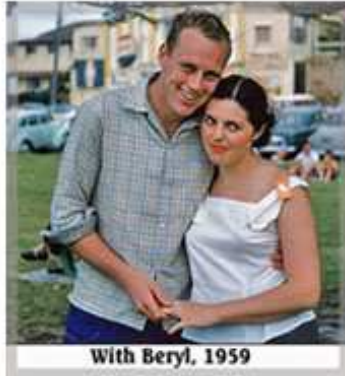
managers, Roy Macumber, and involved a study of some fifty books, documents and seminar notes; and discussions with the data processing staff of fourteen other companies in Sydney and Melbourne, including other banks, airlines and the Sydney Water Board; and attendance at seminars and IBM's Share/Guide conference. At times we found it extremely difficult to resolve in our own minds the conflicts and contradictions that arose in the information we received. The assignment took several weeks and resulted in a very comprehensive document listing some 46 recommendations, many of which were subsequently implemented. One other outcome of the exercise was the friendly relationship that I established with Max Wilkinson, head of computing at the Water Board. In the future we'd often consult each other on various EDP problems, and at one stage I served on a selection panel for the Board to assess several candidates for a position Max was filling in his department.

It was in 1983 that another major milestone was reached in my career in the Bank. The retail banking systems we'd built from 1966 onwards were starting to show signs of age, were running to capacity and were becoming increasingly difficult to modify and enhance, and research was carried out into commercially available "package" systems that might be purchased, rather than developing a new system of our own from scratch. Ian Hendrie, my old boss from PS&C, was given the research task and came up with a likely contender, the Hogan Banking System, an American package produced by a software company in Dallas, Texas. It was decided to do a full scale investigation of Hogan, with the intent of purchasing it if suitable, and chancing my arm, as Peter Martin had advised me to do some years before, I asked Len Spencer to consider me for the position of Manager Hogan Systems.

Len agreed to this, and so I embarked on a major project that would play a prominent role in shaping my career for the next few years. However I will leave the telling of this to a later chapter.



Beryl Aged Six, January 1946



With Beryl, 1959



With Susan Moad, Beryl's Sister, 1959



"Beach Bum". ca 1959



Beryl and Myself, 1961



Col & Beryl at Beryl's 21st Party, 1960



With My Parents at My 21st Party, 1961

Our Wedding Day - 5 May 1962



Bride & Father



The Happy Couple



With Beryl's Parents & My Mother



**On Our Honeymoon,
Hawkesbury River,
May 1962**



Hampden Road, Wentworthville, 1962 - Before & After Painting





Beryl & Graham, February 1963



With Graham & Rocky, February 1963



Our First Dog, "Rocky"



**Parents & Grandparents,
Graham's Christening, 1963**



Proud Parents, Graham's Christening, 1963



With Beryl & Graham, 1964



Beryl With Russell, One Week Old, December 1965



The Four Of Us, February 1966



Christmas, 1970



As "Santa", With Susan Moad, December 1972

"Pepper"



Self in 1981



Christmas 1977

Chapter Fourteen

Our Family Through The Seventies

After the disruption and sadness of Frank' Moad's passing, we settled down to our new life In North Rocks. Over the next few weeks we had carpets and blinds fitted in the house, and an oil heating unit installed which is still working perfectly today. A little later on we purchased an inexpensive above ground swimming pool for the back yard, some three metres in diameter and 750 centimetres deep, in which the boys spent a lot of time in the summer months. I admit I wasn't averse to getting in it myself on a hot summer day!

Christmas 1970 came and went, and 1971 was upon us. In January we headed south for a change on a holiday in Batemans Bay. There we stayed in an on-site caravan in a small park owned by a Mrs Shepherd; it no longer exists, being demolished to make way for the town bypass. It was a pleasant break, with lots of sunshine and swimming for the boys, and we would go to housie nearly every night of the week at the local ambulance station. Mrs Shepherd's husband Jack owned a prawn trawler, and one morning he invited me to go out with him. This was an unexpected surprise and a great experience, but I was a little puzzled that he hadn't asked Beryl along too. I understood when the first thing went wrong and a burst of the utmost profanity rent the air of the Bay. We were out on the water by six thirty, with the sun just risen and the sea bronze in its light, and all the trawlers lined up in a straight line, a gun was fired and each then headed for its favourite spot; this ensured no trawler received an unfair advantage. We hauled the trawl in several times and I helped to separate the prawns from the rest of the catch, most of which was immediately tossed back into the sea. Back on shore we carried the baskets of catch back to the caravan park, where Jack cooked them in the back yard before taking them to the Fishermen's Co-op, leaving a couple of kilos for us to enjoy. We also spent a couple of nights up in Canberra, seeing the sights there before returning home.

In February both the boys started at North Rocks Primary School, Graham going straight into primary classes and Russell into Kindergarten. In Graham's case we were confronted with the problem of having put his age up to get him started at school. We came clean with the North Rocks Principal, Arthur Baillie, and after considering whether to repeat Graham a year he decided to let him proceed without repeating – the right decision as it turned out. We joined the Parents and Citizens Association, and early in the year the Annual General Meeting was held. I was immediately elected – railroaded might be a better term, but I was a willing victim – on to the Maintenance Committee, which involved the occasional foray into the school grounds armed with hammer and nails to repair broken or missing fence palings. The school had a stile on the back fence, leading into a large reserve, and it was an easy walk for the boys each day.

Over the years that the boys were at North Rocks Primary we were both heavily involved in school affairs. Beryl worked in the canteen and on many other volunteer tasks, and in later times ran a Stamp Club for a number of the students. I was elected as one of two delegates from the school to the Hills Area District Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, a body representing all the schools in the district and addressing issues that went beyond the boundaries and interests of an individual school. This involved monthly meetings and attendance at the P&C annual conference, and kept me fairly busy, as I became Secretary of the Council for a number of years. I was also an office bearer at North Rocks, and ultimately was persuaded to stand for President, which I did with some reluctance, as the arrangement was for alternate day and night meetings of the P&C. I was elected on the understanding that I simply couldn't attend day meetings, and that the Vice President would stand in for me on those occasions. My main project while President was to lobby for more permanent buildings at the school. Too many of the classrooms were demountables, not air conditioned, hot in summer and cold in winter,

and the school population was still growing. I wrote long letters to the local MP and the Minister for Education, but the fruits of my endeavours came only after our association with the school had passed.

Each October the school held a fete to raise funds, and a couple of years after we'd moved to North Rocks we suggested running an Art Show in conjunction with it. The idea had great support, but of course it was left to both of us to organise it, with the help of others at fete time. Our first effort saw about thirty paintings on display and for sale, some mediocre but others quite good, and a modest sum was raised from admissions and sales that encouraged us to continue with it. It became a labour of love for us, entailing quite a deal of work in the weeks before and after the fete as well as the fete itself, but we got a lot of personal satisfaction from doing it. We gradually built up a quite large circle of contributing artists and I started a card index system to keep track of them and the works they supplied and sold. We branched out to include craft work, pottery, jewellery and the like, and built it up to the point where we became the largest fund raiser on fete day. Our house would become a repository for hundreds of paintings before the day, and afterwards many of the sold and unsold ones would have to be transported back to be collected or delivered. One side benefit was that we acquired quite a collection of art ourselves, as we usually purchased one or two paintings at each show. Unfortunately, when the boys and ourselves finished at the school, nobody else was willing to take on the task and the Art Show disappeared, although the local Muirfield High school had adopted our ideas and kept their own Art Show going for some years.

Early in 1971 we received the news that my Gran Perry had passed away in West Kirby. After Grandad had died the house at Princes Avenue had been sold and the proceeds used to buy Gran an annuity to provide an income for her, and she had gone to live with Gordon and Eileen Bolitho. On her passing there was little in the way of an estate, but she left a small legacy of a thousand English pounds or so to us. We used it to buy a dining suite for our new home, and also a large aquarium in the lounge room that was an object of some fascination, and very relaxing to watch, although a lot of work to maintain.

The aquarium caused us anxiety one night some years later. We arrived home from an evening out to smell smoke in the house, but after searching couldn't find the cause. To be on the safe side we called the fire brigade and soon after they arrived, lights flashing but thankfully not sounding their siren. They soon located the cause of the smoke; capillary action had caused water to creep back along the power line of the filter and into the power point, burning the wiring. We were a bit embarrassed, but the firemen reassured us that it was better to call them on a false alarm than to sit on the front lawn and see our house burn down.

It was also in 1971 that Mr Brown passed away and the Newport house was put on the market. Mum found accommodation with friends at The Entrance, but as a gesture for her years of devotion to him he left her in his will the sum of \$2,500, all the furniture in the downstairs flat at Newport Beach, and provision for a return ticket by sea back to England. She sailed back over there for several weeks in 1972 and caught up with her brothers and sisters and their families, and also Gordon and Eileen Bolitho. Sadly, by this time Gran Perry had passed away and Mum never got the chance to see her again. Anyway she greatly enjoyed her visit back to her homeland after twenty years, but sailed back saying she could never live over there again after living in Australia.

That same year we also acquired another family member. We'd brought our dog Shadow with us from Wentworthville – sadly we had had to have Rocky put down while still there – and one day Beryl's mother contacted us. A friend where she worked had a son and daughter in law who were moving into a flat and could not keep their pedigree Pembroke corgi. Would we like him? Of course we would, and Pepper joined us. He was a beautiful dog, good with the boys although not tolerating any nonsense and if tormented too far would grab a hand in his jaws and exercise just enough pressure not to hurt but to

say "That's enough". While good with all of us, he well and truly became Beryl's dog and was devoted to her. On one occasion a persistent salesman came to the front door, was told "no thanks" and decided to come round to the back door. Pepper had other ideas, and when he tried to enter Pepper sent him away *sans* part of his trouser leg! We were to lose Shadow a few months later with severe diabetes, resulting in having her put down, so Pepper filled the gap at a good time.

By this time Graham had turned seven and I suggested to him that it was time he started to play a team sport, and we could enrol him in the local soccer club. "Oh no, Dad" he protested, "I want to play rugby!" We enrolled him in the Roselea Junior Rugby Union Club in nearby Carlingford, thus starting a relationship with the Club that lasted several years and during which time we made many new friends. On the first night of training we took him to the Roselea sports ground and introduced him to his new coach, and he started training. The coach lined up a wall of other boys and asked Graham to run straight at them, which he did and burst through them like wet paper. "He'll do me!" said coach. Given he was a tall lad he played front row forward, and took up the game very well. The following year Russell followed him into the Club, also playing front row. Mini Rugby, using a smaller field and simplified rules, had just been introduced so Russell got his grounding through that, but Graham always played the full field game.

Saturday mornings were therefore spoken for every winter, and we could be found on the sidelines of one of the local grounds cheering the boys on, Pepper included. Sometimes it was hard to juggle attendances at matches, when the boys were playing at different grounds and we only had one car, and that's where our new network of friends came in handy. We would swap kids between us, so one week we might see Graham's team play, another week Russell's, and if the timing was right some weeks we would see both games. We made some good friends at Roselea. Prominent among them was John and Jenny Wearne and their boys. John was the son of Doctor Walter Wearne, a retired dentist who at one stage owned a large part of North Rocks and lived in a house in one corner of the Muirfield golf course, the land for which he had donated. Another set of friends in North Rocks were Alan and Shirley Boyd and their kids. The Boyds lived in an old cottage adjacent to Dr Wearne's house and opposite what is now Muirfield High School. Alan had a milk run and kept us supplied with excellent cheese from United Dairies. After the games we would often end up at the Wearnes or the Boyds for coffee and a chat before heading home. Other good friends we made were the Gordons, the Wilsons, the Penprases, the Cramonds, the Ratjens and the hard working Secretary, Frank Murray and his wife Cathy.

John Wearne was a real man's man, albeit afflicted with a bad stammer, and was a foundation member of the Carlingford Rotary Club. At one stage he invited me to come along to their meetings, with a view to joining, and I did attend one dinner but at the time the thought of the time and cost of weekly meetings in addition to all my other commitments didn't appeal. John owned a blue metal quarry at Prospect, and a few years later was tragically killed when the equipment he was driving there rolled over on him. A reserve in Carlingford is named in his memory.

I went along to the Annual General Meeting of the Club and, as usual, found myself elected to the Committee; not that I minded, as without people to actively support them Clubs and P&C associations would never function. Before the following AGM the incumbent President must have given notice of his resignation, and I found myself, against my will, caught up in Club politics. A particular Committee member had been nominated for the position, but a number of other members seemed to be dead set opposed to him and considered he would be a poor choice and cause trouble in the Club if elected. They asked me to stand against him. I didn't really seek the office and personally didn't have a particularly high profile in the Club, but I agreed to stand. Came the AGM and election, and to my surprise the result of the secret ballot was a tie, which meant a second ballot. This time one vote swung from me to him and he was elected. I've never until now disclosed that I was the voter who swung. Feeling I didn't have a

majority, and given my diffidence in standing in the first place, I felt he had more right to the President's chair than I did. In the following ballot I was unanimously elected Vice President. I gave him my full support, but some months later problems did in fact occur, the President was told he no longer had the confidence of the members, and he fell on his sword. As Vice President I automatically assumed the President's chair, and at the next AGM was re-elected in my own right.

Roselea was a reasonably strong Club on the field, and a very well supported Club socially. A number of functions were organised and well attended, but the biggest of these were the mid season and Presentation Day barbecues. The Committee and the ladies would swing into action, as we would be catering for two or three hundred people. Large quantities of steaks, sausages, coleslaw, potato salad, tins of beetroot, tomatoes and onions would be procured from various sources. The Club's large barbecue would be set up and willing helpers cooked the food and prepared the salads. Alan Boyd would bring along a large steel milk container, the kind you'd often see left on the roadside to be picked up from small farms and taken to the dairy, and the cooked meats would be placed in this to keep warm before serving. The cooks always picked out the best steaks for themselves and put them on the bottom of this, so by the time they were ready to eat the meat was mouth-wateringly tender.

The role of President was thankfully not too time-consuming, involving monthly Committee meetings and liaison duties, mainly with the parent Eastwood District Rugby Union, but after a couple of years I was happy to stand down and hand the reins to my deputy, Neville Cramond, who was also the coach of Russell's teams. I remained on the Committee, however, until the boys left the Club in pursuit of other activities. With Secretary Frank Murray I was also the Club's representative in the Carlingford & District Sports Association, and became its Treasurer. This was far from an arduous task, as the main function of the Association was to once a year lobby for a share of Hornsby Council's sports fields in the Carlingford area on behalf of each member club – Roselea Rugby, Roselea Soccer, Roselea Cricket and the Ladies Netball Club. Among other activities I designed the Roselea Club emblem, a stylised kangaroo based loosely on QANTAS' "Flying Kangaroo" logo, superimposed on a set of rugby posts, and although nowadays the club is known as the North Rocks Junior Rugby Club, I see it still uses my emblem.

When the boys reached their teens they wanted to get their referee's tickets, so one evening a week I would drive them to the Eastwood clubhouse for lessons from the District referees. Seeing as how I had to wait there for them, I did the course myself and at the end of it all three of us qualified for our badges. Both the boys went on to referee games instead of playing, which virtually ended our participation in Roselea Club. Graham refereed full field games up to the Under 15s, and once was selected to accompany the District side on a tour down to Melbourne and referee some games there. He also ran the sideline for the lower Grade games. Russell refereed mini-Rugby games, and as for myself, I only ever blew the whistle in one mini game. Quite often on a Saturday afternoon we would go to T G Millner Field at Eastwood to watch the Grade games and cheer on the "Woodies". We also followed Parramatta in the Rugby League, although the boys preferred the South Sydney Rabbitohs, and sometimes of a weekend we would go and cheer Parra on at the old Cumberland Oval, with its broken seating, grassy hill and an atmosphere that perished when they built the new and admittedly far more comfortable stadium. Those were the days when the Thornett brothers were kings and the games were always entertaining, even when we lost.

With the boys now at school, it was a matter of taking our holidays in the January school break. In early 1972 we took a holiday up the NSW coast as far as Brisbane, where we stayed in an on-site van in the northern beachside suburb of Redcliffe, making the most of the beach and also visiting the city of Brisbane and the Lone Pine Sanctuary. We returned via the New England Highway, and I can still remember breaking a fan belt as in baking heat we reached the little town of Deepwater. The local race meeting was on, and we had to wait until the owner of the only service station came home before we

could get the belt replaced and on our way again. I'm not sure now where we went in 1973, but in 1974 we hosted a visit from my young cousin from Perth, Ian Hilton, the son of Mary and the late Douglas Hilton, who had been Dad's best man. Ian was very good company for the boys, and I think he also enjoyed himself. We would explore the bush around North Rocks together, and on one foray we found a magpie with a broken wing, which we brought home and, I think, took to a vet. With Ian, we also took a holiday at the little beach resort of Gerroa, on the coast south of Kiama.

Stepping back a moment, in July 1973 we became an uncle and aunt when Sue and Graham Towle had their first child, Raelene Kay.

Later in 1974, in what would have been the August-September school holidays, we took the boys up to see the snow, which was a completely new experience for them. We'd booked a motel in Cooma, with the intention of making day trips down to the snowfields, and even getting there proved a bit of an adventure in itself. We were nearly to Cooma when we found the Numeralla River, swollen by rains, had overflowed its causeway on the highway and a two hundred metre stretch of water stopped the traffic. We sat in a queue for several hours, watching the water slowly subside until a council truck made the crossing with a line of cars following. The boys revelled in the snow, although they didn't like the wet clothes and boots that resulted from it. Lacking snow boots, they wore their football boots, which proved little protection from the wet stuff. Each night back at the motel we dried the gear off ready for the next day, but it soon got wet again. Anyway, we tobogganed and had snowball fights, toured the district and generally had a good time. Also in that year we traded up our station wagon to a Holden HG model, and just before Christmas we acquired our first credit card – Bankcard – with which we bought bikes for the boys as Christmas presents.

Since Mum had come home from her trip to England she had been living with her friends at The Entrance, but in very cramped and far from satisfactory conditions. She had applied for a Housing Commission pensioner unit, and around this time she was allocated a quite pleasant unit at Wyong, set up on the hill behind the town and facing east. I had helped her buy a car, so she would sometimes come and stay with us for a weekend, or we would drive up to Wyong for the day. She had good neighbours there and, being fiercely independent, she was pleased that she didn't have to depend on us or others to look after her. She took in ironing from the local police sergeant's wife to supplement her pension. Mum had never enjoyed the best of health and was having her ups and downs, but generally got along all right. Her old friends the Wilsons also lived at Wyong, so she saw something of them as well.

Graham finished at North Rocks Primary School that year, and had sat the entrance examination for James Ruse Agricultural High School, a selective school with a very strong reputation for its high achieving students and the work and social ethics that they received exposure to. Graham was accepted, as would Russell be later on, and so began a nine year association with the school. The Headmaster, James Hoskins, was a benevolent dictator much revered by his students and respected by staff and parents alike, and ran a tight but very harmonious ship. At the time Graham started there it was a boys only school, but had become co-educational by the time Russell went there. Agriculture was a compulsory subject, the prime aim of the school being to turn out boys capable of rural oriented careers such as veterinary science, but most of the students ultimately turned to other career streams. Unlike most school principals, Mr Hoskins didn't see a Parents & Citizens Association as necessary, taking the view that if the school needed anything he would approach the parents directly. This system worked very well, but meant that I had far less involvement there than I'd had at North Rocks, it being limited to a couple of working bees each year. A couple of hundred parents would turn up to work on various jobs that needed doing – in my case painting the outdoor seating – during which there would be an enormous morning tea put on by the ladies and a dissertation from the "Boss". Beryl was far more involved than I was, working each week at the canteen.

Graham settled in very well, throwing himself into his studies, in which he got excellent marks throughout, and also entering wholeheartedly into the other activities of the school, including sport and drama. In fact, he once said that he'd be quite content just to do the extracurricular activities and forget about the schoolwork! Naturally enough he played rugby union, the school being very much oriented to that game, and often Beryl was called by the school to pick him up and take him to referee school rugby matches. James Ruse, however, was renowned for the quality of its yearly musical productions under the direction of Mrs Leslie Lino, and both boys enthusiastically took part in these. Being an all boys school, initially Graham found himself cast in female roles in the first two productions, *Half A Sixpence* and *Belle of New York*, and I have to say made a very attractive young lady. Once the girls joined the student body they took over the female roles, but we felt that things were never quite the same. On the academic side, Graham was always up with the top students and seemed to excel at French. For his efforts he was allowed to go on an excursion to Noumea with the boys of the class above him, a real experience at his age. Always a picky eater, the exposure to French cuisine changed his attitude to food entirely, although the threat by his French teacher, Leslie Lino, to send him home if he dared to ask for tomato sauce would have had some influence!

Russell started at James Ruse in 1978, qualifying more on sibling rights rather than academic achievement, and also enthusiastically entered into the school activities. Although no less intelligent, he was a "doer" rather than a thinker and less academically gifted than Graham, so made rather heavy weather of his lessons and marks during his time there, which at times gave us cause for concern. However we recognised that the school had a far higher academic standard than non-selective schools and this had to be taken into account. Both the boys continued with the musicals, Graham reaching his zenith when he took the leading role of Curly in *Oklahoma!* In 1980. His co-star was a girl named Toni Powell, who later joined the Australian Opera. The boys also took part in dramatic productions, Graham in *Mother Courage* and Russell in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth*. Russell also joined the school cadets.

With all these school and sporting activities and involvements going on, family life through those years mainly revolved around our boys and of course my work. As I mentioned earlier, Beryl never went back to work after we married, and we agreed that while the boys were at school she should be there for them when they came home. However to help with the family finances and buy those little extra things, in the 1970s she took up casual child minding, looking after some of the neighbours' children as well as those of her doctor and a teacher couple at James Ruse. In the case of the neighbours' children this meant that they grew up with us as honorary aunt and uncle, and well into the future we would attend their 21sts and weddings as they came along. We'd given up our Saturday tennis nights with moving from Wentworthville, but after a while I started playing with a group from work including Peter Edmunds, who I mentioned had worked with me in Program Control section, Bruce Hall from the International team, and John Farrell, a project manager who had joined EDP a couple of years after me. John's brother in law Eric was also a member of the group. We played one night a week, firstly at Ryde and later at Castle Hill. When some years later this group disbanded I joined a group consisting mainly of neighbours and we played one night a week at North Rocks.

Somewhere around this time we had a visit from Tess and Joe Grima, down from their cane farm in Mackay. Tess had told us they were coming and asked if we could arrange a reunion with some of the old gang. We were able to do so, and had a get together at our home. I forget the full guest list now, but certainly Tom Finlayson was there, and Marie Stringer, now married and with her husband. It was good to get together again, and quite a bit of music was played during the evening.

In 1976 a business trip to Perth put me in touch for the first time with my relatives over there, the Hilton family, although of course we had met Ian when he stayed with us in 1974. I met my Aunt Mary and her daughters Janet and Ann and their current husbands (they both had several over the years!) and children. Janet's husband owned a yacht and one evening all of us went for a memorable twilight sail on the Swan River, watching the sunset and finishing up at the Royal Perth Yacht Club for drinks.

During 1977, my salary and thus borrowing capacity having increased over the years, we made some modest improvements to our house at North Rocks. We doubled the size of the open back patio, removed the above-ground swimming pool and now redundant septic tank and had a screened room built, in which we would spend a lot of time over the years. Fully flyscreened, it was like outdoors living and except in the hottest and coldest weather we would eat breakfast and lunch and generally relax in it. At the same time we had a split system air conditioner installed to cool the lounge dining room and the bedrooms, put an awning over and pebblecreted the floor of the front patio, and put insulation in the ceiling through out the house. The work was covered by the Officers Homes Advance scheme, and I might say at this point that we were very conservative with our borrowing. Many others in the Bank borrowed up to the hilt and had far finer houses than us, but in almost every case both husband and wife worked. We were content to live in a lesser house, but unencumbered with a giant mortgage while at the same time existing on my income only.

In July 1977 we became an aunt and uncle for the second time, with Sue and Graham Towle's second child, Gregory Roy, coming into the world. During the year we also went to see the musical *A Chorus Line*.

In the following year we again traded our car in for a 1976 Holden Kingswood station sedan. It had belonged to the Fire Brigade and was still painted a bright fire engine red. It proved a bit of a lemon, however, in that it was the first model that had pollution control gear, and this had the habit of making the engine cut out without warning, and refuse to start again until it cooled off. Beryl was far from impressed, to say the least, when this happened in peak hour on a busy Friday evening, on the Sydney Harbour Bridge, when she was driving in to meet me in the City. They wanted to tow her off, but she refused, knowing it would start again in a few minutes, which it did. It finally got the better of us, and in February 1980 we traded it in on a brand new Datsun 200B station wagon, the first new car we'd ever owned.

I mentioned in the earlier chapter about my career in the Bank that while in England in early 1979 I'd taken a few days off to go and see my relatives for the first time since I left England in 1951. On the first leg of the trip I'd actually stopped off in Honolulu and stayed a night with my Uncle Harold Tod. He and my Aunt Jean, who I would never meet, were in the process of moving back to mainland USA and Jean had already gone, so Harold was "batching". He had been janitor and caretaker of a rather seedy apartment building at the "wrong end" of Waikiki, a seamy area of brothels and strip joints, and I could understand their desire to get out of the place. Harold met me at the airport when I landed in the morning, and while he recognised me right away I have to admit I didn't recognise him. We had a long chat and a walk around Waikiki, then I flaked out on his lounge for a few hours sleep. I had brought him a bottle of Johnny Walker Black label, and when I woke up I found the bottle three quarters empty and Harold very much the worse for wear. We went to a Polynesian Show that evening and he was quite an embarrassment to me, I'm afraid.

The next morning, with him sobered up and repentant, I hired a car (he had already sold his) and we did a bit of a tour of the island, visiting the mess at Hickam Air Force base where he, being an ex-serviceman, bought me Jim Beam and cigarettes at rock bottom prices. We had lunch in the NCO Club at Bellows Air Force Base and visited the National Memorial Cemetery in the Punchbowl, an extinct

volcano with fine views over the city. Later that night I continued my flight to New York after a pleasant enough reunion, despite the embarrassment of the night before.

Going on now to my leave in England, I rented a car in London and, having got a little lost in the local streets, found my way on to the North Circular Road and so to the M1 Motorway north to my homelands. Driving on the Motorway was a very tense experience until I'd got the hang of things. I'd previously decided my policy should be to keep to the left and sit on a comfortable 50 miles per hour. Wrong! I soon found that if I was to do this I'd have a large truck in front of me, a large truck (blowing its horn) behind me and a large truck alongside me! After a few miles I learned the ropes - keep to the middle or inside lanes and drive at 70-75 mph like everybody else! I adjusted to this fairly easily from then on, but all the same didn't find it the most pleasant way to travel. I headed north through cloudy and very smoggy weather, but with no opportunity anyway to admire the scenery because of the concentration needed for driving. On arrival in the Wirral, driving through Hoylake and West Kirby became quite an emotional experience. The whole place was almost totally unchanged since 1951, only it had grown smaller as I had of course last seen it through the eyes of an eleven year old boy. I had absolutely no problem in finding my way to my aunt and uncle's house on Column Road, even though I'd never been there before, and the Bolithos – Gordon and Eileen - were delighted to see me. A lot of talking, with my cousin John calling to say hello during the evening, occupied the next few hours.

The next day Gordon and Eileen took me over to Crosby, where I was reunited with my great aunt and uncle Albert and Florrie Welding, and their son Geoffrey, who took me for a spin in his pride and joy, a Triumph TR7. Geoff was by now a successful commercial photographer over Manchester way. After lunch there was another reunion, this time with my great aunt Florrie Bell, daughter Nona and her husband Bill Leyland, and their family. While I was pleased to meet up with the two families once more, I felt a little ill at ease as it seemed we no longer had very much in common and conversation, unlike with the Bolithos, didn't come easily. Over the course of the next couple of days I explored West Kirby and Liverpool, re-living so many childhood experiences and with memories flooding back. I called on Eddie and Hilda Maynard. Dad and Mum's best friends from way back, and the next evening I was absolutely delighted when their daughter Jean, my childhood playmate, called in to see me. I also met John Bolitho's wife Elaine and son David for the first time.

From West Kirby I drove over to Yorkshire and the coastal resort of Scarborough for a reunion with my Aunt Alice, Mum's sister, and her husband Geoff. They showed me around the area and the visit proved very enjoyable as we seemed to be closer and to have more in common. It was with regret that I said my goodbyes and made my way back to London over a couple of days, and so home via Singapore to Australia.

Also in 1979 we had a visit from very dear friends of mine, Betty and Donald Rohn from Detroit. How I got to know them is an interesting story. Not long after I joined EDP the two senior members, Ron Turner and Ron Hamilton, were on an overseas trip and were having dinner in a hotel in Detroit. The Rohns were sitting at a nearby table and, hearing the Australian accents, introduced themselves and asked if the two Rons knew anyone in Australia interested in exchanging stamps with Betty. Knowing I was a collector, Ron Turner said he would put me in touch with them on his return, which he did, and so started a pen friend arrangement where I bought and sent Betty the stamps of Australia and its territories, and she in turn sent me American stamps. I visited them on my own trips to the USA, and now they were in Sydney on a cruise on the *Sagafiord*. We showed them around Sydney, visited Old Sydney Town and brought them home for dinner at our house.

On the subject of stamps, over the years I'd become quite a keen collector and was building up some good collections of Australia and her Territories, New Zealand and Great Britain, and of course United

States through Betty Rohn. After Gran Perry died my source of Great Britain stamps dried up and I had to look for a new supplier. I found one in Manfred Junge, who had a shop in the Telstra Arcade just around the corner from the Bank's Liverpool and Castlereagh Streets premises. I started to buy English stamps from him, and then New Zealand, and he helped me immensely in building up the fine collections I have today. Over the years Manfred and his wife Kathy became good friends of ours, and will feature later in the story.

Going back in time a little, however, it was in 1976 that we made a decision and a purchase that would influence the course of, or at least the leisure side of, our lives for many years to come. On previous holidays we'd stayed in on-site caravans, and we'd often wondered what it would be like to own a caravan ourselves. John Farrell, with whom I played tennis, was a keen caravanner and was always talking about caravanning at morning tea and encouraging people to get involved. One day, passing a caravan sales yard in Parramatta, out of curiosity we stopped for a look and were impressed by a Viscount camper trailer on display. This was twelve feet in length and when closed down stood less than the height of a car, but when the roof was raised and the beds at each end extended it opened out into a well appointed eighteen foot caravan, with canvas upper walls and Perspex windows. With it also came a stand-alone annexe that connected to the top of the van to form a breezeway. It was a demonstrator model, having been on show at the Melbourne Caravan Show and brought up to Sydney, and was available for the very reasonable price of \$2800, including the annexe.

We talked it over, I got approval in principle from the Credit Union for a loan, and we decided to buy it. Beryl went back to the yard a couple of days later to find the camper trailer dismantled and on the back of a truck, ready to go back to Melbourne. When she told the dealer she wanted to buy it he was happy enough, but less so the truck driver, who had to unload it and also lost his carrying charge. We had the necessary towbar fitted to our station wagon and picked it up a couple of days later, now the proud owners of a caravan.

That was in August, and on the October Long Weekend we had a shakedown run with it to Budgewoi, on the NSW Central Coast. Jim and Joan Connolly and their family of a girl and two boys joined us, the first time we'd caught up in quite a while; they had their own camping gear which they pitched alongside us. I recall that our boys and theirs didn't exactly see eye to eye, and there was a bit of friction between them over that weekend. A day or so after Christmas Day the four of us set out on a longer holiday which took us down to the Murray at Albury, followed that river before continuing to Adelaide, then drove along the coast to Victoria, up to Ballarat and Wagga, and back to Sydney via Bathurst. It was an enjoyable trip overall, but marred by some extremely hot weather. A few incidents of that trip are worth recalling.

We reached Echuca, on the Murray, and stayed there a few days during which the boys swam unconcerned in the river itself. One afternoon we sat in the shade on the NSW bank, opposite the swimming area, and watched the police search for a young girl who had just gone missing in the water. After about an hour a diver brought her body to the surface, to the obvious distress of her parents. Our boys had watched the whole proceedings, and we used the tragic incident as a lesson in the need to exercise great care when swimming in a river, where weed and snags could hold a person captive until they drowned. Moving along the river to Swan Hill, on New Year's Eve the heat was almost unbearable. We visited the Pioneer Village there in the morning and saw an unforgettable sight – a koala climbed down from a tree and allowed itself to be hosed off by one of the keepers. Back in the caravan park it was so hot that we crawled under the caravan as being the coolest spot. I remarked on the growing bank of cloud developing in the south, and Beryl exclaimed "That's not a cloud – it's a dust storm!" We quickly closed the doors and windows of the van, and minutes later dusty, sifting gloom enveloped us as the storm passed through the caravan park, leaving a coating of fine red dust on everything in its path.

Reaching Adelaide, we explored that city in the heat, and spent a lot of time at the swimming pool near the caravan park. Our discomfort was made worse by the fact that it was over the hundred degrees every day, the caravan sites were tarmac, and the heat just radiated off them.

Thankfully the heat abated somewhat as we headed east through the Coorong to Kingston South East, then through Victoria to Ballarat. We visited Sovereign Hill and judged it one of the best tourist attractions we'd seen, with the boys panning for gold and being excited at finding a few grains. We headed north, with a stop at Wagga, and spent our last night of the holiday at Bathurst, where we arrived to the news of the terrible rail crash at Granville that morning, when over 80 people were killed when a train hit a road bridge, collapsing it on to the carriages.

From then on virtually all our holidays as a family were taken with the caravan, and when the boys "flew the coop" and we became "empty nesters", we continued with the lifestyle; but more of that later. In 1977 we had holidays at Swansea in April and Bathurst in September, and in 1978 stayed in Nambucca Heads in January and Wellington Caves in September. On the latter trip it rained cats and dogs for much of the time, and the Wellington River at the bottom of the caravan park was running a banker. We had Graham's friend Greg McConnell with us on that occasion, and on a day when the sun shone we visited the Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo.

In 1979 we started a run of four years of joining up with the Farrells for the January school holidays. For the first three years we stayed at a caravan park called Sandbar, on Smiths Lake, a little south of Forster. Although there was limited shade and the amenities were tired and overcrowded, it was really an ideal family holiday spot. The park was on the shore of the lake, which was very shallow and therefore safe for young children, and the youngsters would spend hours in the water. A ten minute walk around the edge of the lake took us to the Cellito surf beach, which was unpatrolled but fairly safe for swimming, and there were great walks up and down it, with views south to Seal Rocks and its lighthouse. At the southern end of the beach a scramble over the headland took us to a perfect little secluded beach which we named Pippie Beach because of the abundant shellfish there. The Farrells had with them their daughter Pauline, about the same age as Graham, and younger son Glenn and on at least one occasion their elder daughter Sharon and her boyfriend Dom were also there. Neighbours of the Farrells, Geoff and Audrey Baxter, and their two teenage sons who were also James Ruse students also came along; they had a motor boat and were into water skiing, and our boys had a go at that. In addition there was a family from Beryl's church at North Rocks, Graham and Pam Lowe and their children. Graham had a small sailing dinghy and often took the children out on the water in it.

It was therefore a convivial and sociable little group that met at Sandbar for those three years. In the heat of the day the grown-ups would carry their chairs down to the cool shade of the trees lining the lake shore and read, chat or nap while the younger ones sported in the water or hung around among themselves. At the time extensive sand mining was taking place on the opposite side of the lake, with the hills denuded of vegetation and the hum of machinery working. Years later this area was completely restored and one would never guess it had been mined. In the evening after dinner we'd go down to the water with nets and lanterns and spend hours catching prawns, never in any quantity but enough for a midnight snack at the end. Sandbar was miles from anywhere, down a rough track several kilometres long off the main road, so there were no distractions or anywhere to spend money, other than on ice creams from the general store on site. Every few days we might go into Forster to shop and look around, but otherwise our time would be spent at Sandbar. We still have fond memories of those days.

So passed the first decade of our life at North Rocks, very much devoted to our two boys and life as a family.

Chapter Fifteen

From Family To Empty Nesters

Early in 1981, to earn some extra money, I volunteered as a Census collector for the first and last time. I had for many years worked at elections, Federal, State and Council, to pick up a bit of extra cash, and this job seemed a logical extension to that. I was allocated an area of Pendle Hill and went around dropping off the forms before Census night, then had to make numerous repeat trips to collect them again. It was an interesting experience, meeting some very unusual people in every sense of the word; some were abusive, others illiterate or non English speakers for whom I had to complete the papers. Looking back, the money, after tax, wasn't really worth the effort.

Up to this point both Beryl and I had kept in quite good health, although she had surgery for tendons in her elbow in 1979 and bowel surgery in 1980. One day in June 1981 I was at work and felt quite considerable pain in the abdominal region. I went home early and saw our local doctor, who gave me a rectal examination and immediately sent me over to see a specialist surgeon, Dr Geoff Brooke-Cowden, who confirmed a diagnosis of appendicitis. It was a tennis night, and I barely had time to drop the balls off to Bruce Hall than I found myself being admitted to the Hills Private Hospital for surgery that same night. In the event the problem was a twisted bowel, but the doctor whipped the appendix out anyway. Every cloud has a silver lining, and a spin-off from my spell in hospital proved financially beneficial, but more importantly may well have extended my life expectancy. I'd been a very heavy smoker, going through up to sixty cigarettes a day. At the time, believe it or not, one was allowed to smoke in the lounges of hospitals, so when I was allowed out of bed I picked up my cigarettes to head for the lounge and a quiet smoke. The thought then struck me. "If I light up, I'll probably cough, and if I cough it will hurt like hell! So I'm not going to light up. And if I don't light up now, why should I light up in a week's time". Beryl took my cigarettes and dropped them in a rubbish bin on the way home, and I never smoked again. Granted I had withdrawal symptoms for some weeks, but I put aside what I'd spent on smokes each week and by October we bought our first colour TV set from the accumulated funds.

In September and October 1981 I was overseas for the Bank again on a study tour embracing Europe, and while in England I again took a few days leave to catch up with family there. While in London I went out to Shepparton for a pleasant dinner with Alice and Geoff Phillips, who had moved down there from Scarborough, and also met their son Ray and daughter Sue and their respective spouses. At the end of my business dealings I took the train up to Liverpool and stayed again with the Bolithos, then caught another train to Leeds and stayed a night with my Aunt Rosaline, Mum's sister, her husband Larry Wilson and their family, before making my way back to Australia by way of Manchester and Hong Kong.

Graham sat for the Higher School Certificate examinations in 1981, feeling reasonably confident of a good pass. When we went to Sandbar the following January he stayed behind to await the postman's call with the results, then took the train up to Newcastle, where we met him. As expected, his markings were excellent and brought him his first choice of University placement, a Bachelor of Arts (Communications) degree course at Macquarie University, very convenient for travel from home. He had worked as a trolley boy and then in the deli at the local Coles supermarket and by this time had saved up enough to buy a second hand Holden Torana. A retired Bank manager, C V Clarke, had endowed a fund for the children of Bank staff, administered by the Officer's Association, that offered scholarships for University study. I applied on Graham's behalf and he was awarded one of these; as they were given on merit, it reflected his good marks. This helped with his fees and books throughout his three year course. He started University the following February and took to it as usual like a duck to water.

One problem with giving up smoking was that I put on weight, and I'd always been on the overweight side to start with. One day in 1982 I took ill at work and was taken up to the resident Sister's surgery, where she found my blood pressure was way up. I went home in a taxi, accompanied by a colleague, and immediately saw my doctor. The outcome was a regime of hypertension medication which I would remain on for the rest of my life, but thankfully two enormous risk factors had been eliminated in one case and reduced in the other.

In January 1982 we had a change of venue for our holiday, with the Farrells and ourselves staying at Valla Beach, just north of Nambucca Heads. This was rather different to Sandbar, with a shallow creek replacing the lake and a rickety wooden footbridge crossing it to reach the surf beach. Another project manager from the Bank, Harry Maltman and his wife and family, also joined us there. We didn't find it as enjoyable as Sandbar and Beryl and I were dogged with ailments – she with a mysterious rash which we blamed originally on the rye grass in the caravan park but subsequently turned out to be a gluten intolerance, and me with a bout of 'flu. We also spent a few days on our own at Port Macquarie on the way home.

Apart from the January school holidays, we had short breaks at Mittagong in April 1981, Umina in November of that year, and Canberra and Leura in 1982. We had a change in 1983, staying at Bawley Point on the South Coast for the January holidays, and in Cessnock in April. In October 1982 I went on a business visit to Perth and Beryl came with me, the first time she had accompanied me on a work related trip. Over there we rented a car and spent a few extra days looking around Perth and its environs, and up the coast as far as Yanchep. It was also an opportunity to catch up with my Aunt Mary and my cousins.

We'd been without a dog for a couple of years, our beloved Pepper having succumbed to cancer and been put to sleep, so in 1982 I answered an advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* for corgi pups. We drove over to Eastwood one Sunday morning and after being quizzed at length by the lady breeder to make sure we were the right kind of family, we bought the last male of the litter, a little ball of brown fluff and droopy ears. They'd called him "Winston", but I wanted a Welsh name and he became Morgan, later contracted to "Muggins", "Mr Mugs" or just "Mugs". I nursed him in my lap on the way home and he fell comfortably asleep. We must have bonded right from the start because he became my own shadow, unlike Pepper who was always Beryl's dog, although of course the whole family shared him. After a few weeks he lost his downy coat and his ears stood upright, corgi style. He grew up to be obsessed with balls and sticks, and we taught him many tricks including walking backwards for some distance before we would throw the object for him. As he grew up he had the run of the house and would usually sleep underneath the bed; I would reach out during the night and find his head immediately below my hand.

During 1983 my Chief Manager in EDP, Len Spencer, advertised his second car in a Bank Circular. Frequent nights of overtime and no connecting buses meant that Beryl often had to drive to the station and pick me up at nine o'clock at night or later, so a second car looked like a good idea. I contacted Len, but he had already sold it to his Number two, Noel Clark. Noel now had to dispose of his own second car, so I acquired from him a little Morris 1100 in reasonable condition for a reasonable price. It served me well for a few years, although it had a couple of vices: the gearbox was worn and I had to double declutch to change from top to second gear, and the starter motor had an occasional habit of jamming, meaning fumbling in the dark with a 10mm spanner to unjam it. One night, driving home through Carlingford, I felt a thud and saw one of my front wheels rolling down the street ahead of me. Notwithstanding these problems, it freed me from the dependency on buses home. In December of the same year we traded the Datsun 200B on a 1982 Ford XD Fairmont. Although it meant going back from

a car we'd owned since new to a pre-owned car, the Datsun was underpowered to tow the camper trailer, and the Ford, despite not having power steering, proved a great tow vehicle.

One amusing anecdote I recall from those days when I was still reliant on buses and had to ring Beryl to pick me up if I worked overtime. Around nine at night I rang home and when Beryl answered I said the usual "Hello, dear, I'll be at the station at a quarter to ten", got the reply "Right, see you there" and hung up. I arrived at the station at a quarter to ten, but no Beryl. Ten o'clock came, still no Beryl, so I found a telephone booth and rang home. Beryl answered the phone. "What's the problem that you're not here to meet me?", I asked. "But you didn't ring me", she replied. I had dialled a wrong number, spoken to someone else's wife, and somewhere in Sydney that night she was waiting at a station, furious that her husband hadn't turned up!

Russell sat his Higher School Certificate examinations at the end of 1983 and, much as we expected, received a fairly moderate pass. However it was good enough to qualify him for a course in computing, as he was interested in following my own career path and had shown a good aptitude for electronics. However the course was at the Riverina College of Advanced Education at Wagga Wagga, meaning living away from home. He started there the following February, but before he left we celebrated Graham's 21st birthday with a barbecue party at our home. It was well attended by friends and neighbours and of course our two Mums were there, as well as Sue and Graham Towle and their two children. Following the party Beryl and I took the caravan up to Sandbar for a week, but it wasn't quite the same as it had been when the Farrells were with us. We returned home to collect Russell and his belongings and, with the caravan still attached, took him down to Wagga and settled him in to his on-campus accommodation. After a couple of days there we carried on for a holiday in the Beechworth district before heading for home.

Russell tried his best at Wagga, but found it hard going and difficult to get by on what we could afford to send him over and above what we were paying for his board and food. Later that year, while I was overseas on a Bank trip, he threw it in and returned home, but immediately got a job with the Australia and New Zealand Bank. Following a stint there, he got into the electronics industry, working with my old firm AWA and also for a hi-fi retailer and a car radio retailer. He developed computing skills along the way, and ended up with a friend in a small business called Microtech, designing, assembling and fitting computer boxes for high performance cars, where he remains at the time of writing. By this time he had acquired a motorbike and, while he rode it expertly enough, as parents we were always a bit nervous and would never fall properly asleep at night until we heard the sound of it coming into the driveway.

I mentioned earlier that I'd worked on elections for many years – in fact we both had – and on several occasions had been in charge of a polling booth. There were NSW State Elections in March 1984 and a friend who was the Returning Officer for an Eastern Suburbs seat asked me to run the booth at St Mark's Church Hall, Darling Point. This proved an onerous assignment, involving extra days for the count of votes, and the fact that taxation was now taken out of our earnings turned me off future involvement. On polling day itself it absolutely poured with rain, making control of the booth and the scrutineers standing outside handing out how to vote tickets rather difficult. Beryl was with me and we somehow made it through the day, but vowed it wasn't worth doing again. Among the voters from that prestigious area were the former Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam and wife Margaret, and the well known boxer "Aussie" Joe Bugner.

It would have been some time in the early 1980s that Mum moved from Wyong to Eastwood, having applied for and being on the waiting list for some time for a unit closer to us. I hired a truck and we drove up there to load her furniture and take up her carpet, then installed it her new residence. The unit was a

little older than the one in Wyong and around the same size, but once again she had good neighbours and seemed to be very content there. It was much more convenient to all of us, and I would usually drive across there on a Sunday morning to make sure she was all right, taking Morgan with me for the ride. He loved to go over there, and the other residents always made a fuss of him. Mum's health continued to have its ups and downs, and we arranged for her to be cared for by Beryl's doctor, Lesley McKinley, who looked after her very well. By now I'd sold her car for her, which was a good thing as with age her driving had become a little erratic, and beside which there was very good bus transport almost outside her door.

In 1985 Graham graduated with Honours from Macquarie University as a Bachelor of Arts. He also brought with him from University a fiancée, Michele Whitehouse, who we warmly welcomed into the family circle. Graham soon found a job that made good use of his newly learned communication skills. He was employed by the Caption Centre and his job involved sitting at a console watching television programmes and typing the dialogue into captions for the hearing impaired; the captions would appear on the screen when viewed through modified television sets. The work involved a good knowledge of English and required a very quick interpretation and translation from sound to keyboard, and he seemed to relish the challenges it presented.

We took a short holiday to Queensland's Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast in February 1985, and later that year we went to the Sydney Boat Show and bought ourselves a boat out of Beryl's earnings through child minding. It was a 3 metre Sea-Al runabout, equipped with a 4hp Mariner outboard, that sat on a special rack on top of the station wagon. This allowed us to get out on the water at some of the places we stayed at while caravanning, and proved a very useful asset for many years. The following February we revisited Sandbar and then Nambucca Heads, and at both places the boat got a good wetting; it proved ideal in the sheltered waters of Smiths Lake and the Nambucca River. By this time, of course, neither of the boys holidayed with us any longer and we were finding it increasingly hard work for just the two of us to set up and take down the Viscount camper-trailer. We went to the Sydney Caravan Show in May 1986, looked at what was on offer and subsequently traded the camper trailer in on a Viscount 18 foot pop-top caravan at a cost of \$10,000, less a trade-in of \$2500 on the camper trailer. I was very pleased with the trade-in, as we'd only paid \$2800 for it back in 1976. The new caravan was small enough to tow easily but large enough to be comfortable for two people, and we were to make very good use of it over the ensuing years. In August we took it on a shake-down trip to Wyee Bay, on Lake Macquarie, and in October we had a short break down in Tumut and Canberra.

Donald and Betty Rohn paid another visit to Sydney on the *Sagafjord* that February, and we enjoyed catching up with them again. The three main events of 1986 were yet to come, however. Firstly, Beryl ended some years of "women's troubles" by having a hysterectomy in September. Then in November Russell celebrated his 21st birthday. He was reluctant to have a party, but finally he agreed to a small family function, which I arranged in a private room at the Mandarin Club in the city, of which I was a member. We enjoyed a Chinese banquet and the evening went very well.

The big event, however, was the marriage of Graham and Michele on 10 December. They were married in the Baptist Church in Eastwood, Michele's church, and the service was conducted jointly by Michele's own minister and Laurie Thompson, Graham's minister at North Rocks. Michele made a beautiful bride, Graham a handsome groom, and I must confess I shed a tear or two during the ceremony. Graham's close friend from the James Ruse days, Greg McConnell was his best man and Russell his groomsman. The reception was held in Lane Cove and was well attended by family and friends. By prior arrangement with Michele's parents, they paid for the reception while we took care of the liquor, flowers, printing and bridal car.

After their honeymoon, Graham and Michele rented a flat in Parramatta, then a house in Carlingford, and later on moved in with a friend in North Rocks, just around the corner from us. Graham had always had a calling towards the ministry, having been very active in church affairs right through his time at James Ruse and then at the Uniting Church in North Rocks, and on marrying set out to be ordained as a minister of the Church. Michele had trained as a teacher, so she started teaching and became their breadwinner while Graham gave up his job at the Caption Centre and began full time study at the United Church's college. In 1989 he was fortunate enough to win a scholarship to study in Switzerland, so he and Michele spent much of that year and the next in Europe, taking the opportunity for some travel after the course had finished. In France they caught up with and stayed with my uncle Gordon Bolitho, who had remarried a Frenchwoman after my Aunt Eileen died, and lived in Normandy. In England they stayed with my Aunt Alice and met some of her family even before I did. It was a marvellous opportunity for them, and a great stroke of fortune to be able to travel and get that experience.

By now we were temporarily "empty nesters", with Graham married and Russell electing to try independence and sharing flats with friends, although he did return to the nest for quite a while later, together with his blue heeler dog Raffles. My days were very full at work, but I became quite a keen gardener – Beryl had always been one. I found that working in the garden on weekends and if home early enough during the week was very relaxing after the rigours of the work day, and that I could "turn off" and clear my mind. For some time I collected ferns, but these required a lot of tender loving care and constant watering, and suffered a bit from our absences from home. I then developed an interest in bromeliads, and we put together a very large collection of these tropical plants. I built extensive bush houses in the back yard, and we went along to the shows held by the Australian Bromeliad Society. I also struck up a friendship with an elderly couple, Wally and Joyce Thomas, who ran a bromeliad stall at the Sunday markets in North Rocks, and acquired many plants from them; we would regularly visit their garden and shade houses in Ryde. Bromeliads were good plants in that they could stand a good deal of neglect. While my interest would wane once retired and with other things to occupy our days, even at the time of writing we still have a good selection around our garden.

Another thing we did with regularity during the 1980s was dine out. Just about every Saturday night we would have dinner at our favourite local Chinese restaurant, the *Bronze Lion* at Carlingford. We became so well known there that Victor, the waiter, would automatically place our favourite bottle of wine on the table as soon as we arrived, and "Ringo", the owner, would always come out of the kitchen to chat to us. I joined one of those dine-out schemes where one got a free main course when buying one of equal value, and we would usually eat out once a week using this. Sometimes I'd meet Beryl on the way home from work and go straight to the restaurant we'd chosen; these were mainly in the Northern Suburbs area of Sydney. We continued to be occasional theatregoers, something we'd done over the years, usually trying to get to various musicals when they were playing in Sydney. Among those I can recall were *Man Of La Mancha*, *A Chorus Line*, *Cats* (Beryl's favourite), *Sugar Babies*, *Oklahoma!*, *Annie*, *42nd Street*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Les Miserables* (my favourite)

Having the new caravan allowed us to take regular short breaks as well as an annual holiday. By this time "rostered days off" were an element of working conditions, so over the next few years I would take one or two of these days, add them to a weekend and we'd take off to some reasonably near place for a welcome break. This was particularly valuable in that, while I was eligible for four weeks annual leave, in practice work pressures were allowing me only to take two most of the time, and I was accruing the rest. At least the shorter breaks made up somewhat for not having a longer restful holiday.

The year 1987 passed with no great events taking place, except perhaps the milestone of our 25th wedding anniversary in May. Our sons suggested a quiet family dinner at the *Bronze Lion*. I suspected

that it might be more than that, and sure enough there were a number of friends and neighbours as well as the extended family around the table to greet us. We celebrated twenty five years of happy marriage, and looked forward to at least twenty five more. We spent a bit of money on installing a solar hot water service and new carpets, and took our February holiday on the NSW and Victorian coasts. In September I attended the annual Australian Computer Society Conference, which was held in Melbourne, and for the first time Beryl came along with me. We stayed at the prestigious Windsor Hotel in Spring Street, and I attended the conference sessions while Beryl looked around the city. She accompanied me to the official Conference Dinner, of course, and we dined at a couple of Melbourne's better restaurants on other nights.

So came 1988, and it was to prove an *annus horribilis* to us. It started off positively enough, as I could see the opportunity mid year to take my usual annual leave and some of my accrued leave and have a really decent holiday. We planned to travel to North Queensland and visit our old friend Tess Grima, who we hadn't seen for many years, on her sugar cane farm in Mackay. In addition, Brisbane was hosting the World Exposition *Expo '88* that year, and we planned to attend that while we were away. In that regard, our plans received a very pleasant boost. We'd already bought our tickets, and when my IBM Account Manager at the Bank heard of this he asked if I'd like him to arrange a VIP programme for us, whereby we would have fast entry to the various exhibits. Naturally we said "yes, please", so this was arranged.

1988 was also the Bicentennial of the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney back in 1788, and Sydney was geared up to celebrate. The main festivities were centred around Australia Day, the 26th January, and the city really came alive. Much of the celebrations were centred, not unnaturally, on the Harbour, with the arrival of a large fleet of sailing ships from all over the world that anchored in Darling Harbour and were open for inspection, as well as taking part in a re-enactment of the First Fleet's arrival. The streets were dressed in all manner of flags and bunting, while men in the uniform of soldiers of the period wandered around them; the NRMA motoring organisation held a huge *Motorfest* of vintage and veteran cars; there were street stalls and entertainments everywhere; and generally a carnival atmosphere prevailed. I joined the huge crowd of people packed along the waterfront of Farm Cove to see the magnificent show on the water and watch the arrival by launch of Prince Charles and Lady Diana. Great arches, illuminated at night, lined Macquarie Street; buskers entertained on street corners and in the parks; a grand military parade took place along George Street; and the mighty liner *Queen Elizabeth II* and the British aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* visited (the latter was a later ship than the one I'd seen launched as a boy). Warships from many nations also steamed majestically on the Harbour or were tied up and opened for visitors. Later on there was a huge Air Show at the Richmond Air Force Base that we went along to, with a monstrous Boeing 747 and a Russian Tupolev transport towering above tiny frail Tiger Moths, while aerobatic displays took place overhead and parachutists descended from the heavens.

Shadows were on the horizon, however. For some time my Mum's health had been failing, and despite her fierce spirit of independence and determination to keep looking after herself, it became evident that the time had come when this was no longer possible. It was simply neither practical nor desirable to have her move in with us, so we started looking around for a suitable nursing home, with the deadline of our own holiday departure looming. We were fortunate to find a place for her in the Grand United Nursing Home at Toongabbie, not far from home and with which we were actually familiar due to Beryl's working for the GUOOFs before we were married. Mum was of course very reluctant to go, but we reasoned with her and told her we would keep her unit waiting for her, so that if she was better when we arrived back home she could return to it. In reality, of course, we doubted this would ever happen.

We settled Mum into the Nursing Home, packed the caravan and headed north on 16 July, leaving a detailed itinerary as to where we would be staying and when. We took our time, spending a few days in Port Macquarie, Tweed Heads and Forest Glen on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. On the 21st we

reached Bundaberg, and on checking in to the caravan park there were told there was a telephone message for us. It said "Please ring home" and gave Beryl's mother's number. I rang her straight away, and she said "Oh, Colin. It's your Mum. She's had a stroke." The owners of the park were marvellous. They stored our van on a vacant site and put the contents of our refrigerator into their own, and within an hour we were on our way back to Sydney. We took an inland route, picking up the New England Highway, and after some hard driving and an overnight stop at Toowoomba we were home by the evening of the following day

Mum had been admitted to Westmead Hospital and indeed it seemed she had suffered a stroke. Although not paralysed, her speech and memory were badly affected although it improved over the following days. Tests showed that in fact it hadn't been a stroke as such, although the symptoms were similar, and I've now forgotten what the actual diagnosis was. We visited her constantly over the next few days, encouraging her to talk and remember things. She spent her 79th birthday in the hospital, with the staff very thoughtfully providing a cake for her and she was discharged a couple of days later and went back to the nursing home. This presented me with a dilemma. Should I stay in Sydney, or should we resume our holiday? Work pressures had left me very tired over the past year or so, and I feared for my own health if I didn't get a decent break. I sat down with our family doctor, Doug Penny, and his advice was for us to go back to our holiday but keep in touch and leave our itinerary with him.

We took Doug's advice and headed back up the New England Highway once more on 4 August, overnighing again at Toowoomba and reaching Bundaberg the following day. We had the caravan put on a site, spent a pleasant few days there, checked that Mum was all right and then moved up the coast to Tannum Sands, near Gladstone. Here we departed from our itinerary slightly, staying at a different caravan park to the one I'd planned, so the next morning I rang Dr Penney to check on Mum's progress. The news was bad. He had been trying to contact me through Gladstone police; Mum had gone into a coma, he felt the end was near and we should come home straight away. I contacted the police to let them know I'd got the message, we packed the van and were back on the road again immediately, this time taking the van with us as we'd no idea what the future might now hold. We overnighed at Nanago and Tamworth and were home by lunchtime on the second day after leaving Tannum Sands. On the way I said to Beryl that I hoped Mum would pass away quickly and not linger with no quality of life left.

Mum was still in the Nursing Home, but unconscious. However we sensed she was aware of our presence, although she never spoke or responded to the pressure of my hand. This was Thursday 11th August, and we spent a good deal of time at her bedside over the next couple of days. In the early hours of the morning of Sunday 14th the telephone rang; it was the Sister at the nursing home telling us that they thought the end was near, and that we'd better come in. We arrived there around six and found Mum had been moved into a room of her own; she appeared to be sleeping peacefully but there was the presence of the little rattle in her breathing that presages death. Doug Penney arrived shortly after and confirmed that she had little time left. Around seven we left her side to get a cup of tea in the nearby kitchen, and had no sooner done so than the sister came in and told us Mum was gone. We have always believed that she was waiting until she knew I was with her before letting go of life.

I wept momentarily, then held back my grief for later and kissed her goodbye. Doug Penney was very supportive, pointing out how death could come so peacefully, and of course Beryl was too. Back at home we telephoned Graham and Russell and the other family members, and over the next couple of days I made the necessary funeral arrangements. Mum had never been a churchgoer, but I believe she had a faith of her own, and Beryl's minister, Laurie Thompson, willingly agreed to conduct the service. The funeral was held at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium, and we arranged for two niches to be purchased in the Wall of Remembrance and for Dad's ashes to be transferred to lie next to Mum's.

The funeral over, I allowed myself to grieve, which given my nature I did mainly privately. Understandably I grieved more than I had for Dad, given the circumstances at the time of his death and that twenty two years had elapsed since. I'd loved Mum dearly and would miss her a lot, but as they say, time heals everything. She had not had an easy time from childhood on and had made many personal sacrifices along the way, suffered many disappointments in life and endured indifferent health for much of the time. None the less she had lived life to the full, and for that I was grateful.

We were now faced with the practical reality of cleaning up her pensioner unit for handing back to the Housing Commission, and disposing of her belongings. Some of these went to our boys, while we gave away quite a few things to her neighbours, who were all sorry to hear the news of her passing. The rest of her things were stored at our house for the time being. Her small estate was easily finalised, and in a few days we were ready to salvage what remained of our holiday. The Bank had granted me a few days compassionate leave to add to it, and we calculated that we had enough time remaining to travel up to Mackay, spend a few days there, then return to Brisbane for *Expo'88*. By the 24th August we were on the road again, heading up the New England Highway with the caravan behind us. We made Warwick that night, Rockhampton by lunch time of the following day, and were in Mackay on the 26th. Without ever exceeding the speed limit, it was the furthest and fastest I have ever travelled in that space of time, and I wouldn't like to do it again. We were greeted with open arms by Tess and Joe, and for the first time met their four sons – or three of them, as one was away from home at the time. We were only able to spend five nights there, during which we got shown around the cane farm, learned a lot about sugar and saw something of Mackay.

While we were there we took a boat trip out to Credlin Reef – a great mistake. The seas were rough that day, with three metre swells, and once past Brampton Island and into the open sea I was seasick for the second time in my life. Things got better when we anchored in the calm waters of the reef and I did some snorkelling, but the *mal de mer* returned on the journey back to Mackay. Beryl managed to avoid the seasickness but broke a rib when the boat lurched and threw her against a seat. We couldn't but marvel, however, at a couple of Canadians who wrapped their arms around a pillar near the bar and drank beer the whole way home. Promising to return to Mackay in the not too distant future, we farewelled the Grima family then headed south once more, reaching Brisbane on 4th September. There we set up in a caravan park on the north side of the city and prepared to enjoy *Expo'88*.

We had purchased a four day pass but took five days to see the Expo, with a rest day in the middle. The Brisbane transport arrangements were superb, and we were able to catch a bus outside the caravan park that took us straight to the Expo site on the south side of the Brisbane River, and back each night. On the first morning we were met by a representative of IBM, who checked us in and took us to the IBM Pavilion to show us around and explain our itinerary. What they'd done was prepare a programme covering the four days that would take us to all but a small handful of the pavilions at the Expo. It was very precise in terms of timing, for example we had to be at the back door of the Russian Pavilion at 10.20am, then following this at the back door of the Italian Pavilion at 11.05am. The great advantage of this VIP programme, however, was that we avoided the queues at the main doors of the pavilions; it was not unusual for those queues to be over two hours long for the most popular ones. While our time was therefore limited inside each pavilion, it was sufficient to see what it contained, and over the four days the whole thing went like clockwork. We would never have seen what we saw if we'd been following the public route. IBM had even made dinner reservations for us at night, which were like hen's teeth to obtain normally. Our only regret was that we didn't have enough time to see as much of the other features of the Expo such as the shows and street parades, but one can't have everything! Certainly the experience made up for some of the sadness and stress of the preceding few weeks, and we blessed IBM for their arrangements. On the rest day we saw a little of Brisbane, and on one of the nights we met for

dinner with my old colleague Peter Edmunds, who was now with the Bank of Queensland, and his wife Rhonda.

All good things must come to an end, and we made our way back to Sydney with a few days on the Gold Coast and a couple of overnight stops down the coast. We finished finalising Mum's affairs, and that really saw the end of 1988.

The year 1989 was generally much kinder to us than the previous one. We took a short holiday on the NSW North Coast in February, a shorter one to Mudgee in April, and a longer one to South Australia and the Flinders Ranges in July-August; we hadn't the heart to head back to Queensland that year, after the trials and tribulations of 1988. I also had Bank trips to the USA in April and October.

On the South Australia trip we headed west via Nyngan to Broken Hill, where we spent a few days looking around and visited nearby Silverton. Then followed a long drive across the southern part of South Australia to Port Augusta, where we drew breath for a couple of days before driving up the Stuart Highway to Coober Pedy. We refuelled the car at Glendambo, but didn't realise at the time that from there to Coober Pedy was a slight incline, and we had a headwind. To make it worse, we had the added weight of a couple of hitchhikers in the car! We just made it, with the fuel lamp glowing bright red. Coober Pedy was absolutely fascinating, with its underground homes, businesses, churches and so on. We did a tour on the Rainbow Bus out to the dog fence and the Breakaways and were stunned by the scenery there. We made our way back to Port Augusta once more, then up to Hawker in the Flinders Ranges, which we found fantastic in their rugged grandeur and wild nature. As we only had a two wheel drive car we booked a day tour with a local operator, who took us deep into the wild country. Unfortunately it was a wet morning, and the rain increased through the day. Brian Dobson, the operator, kept a careful watch on the waters in the creeks and in the early afternoon said it was time to get out as the colour rose to a muddy brown. By the time we got back to civilisation the creeks were running a banker.

From the Flinders Ranges we returned to Port Augusta and then followed the shore of Spencer Gulf through Port Germein and Port Pirie to the rugged seascapes of the York Peninsula. We based ourselves at Moonta while we explored the "copper triangle" of the old Cornish mining towns, then moved further south to Edithburg and did a day trip to scenic Cape Spencer. Morgan was with us, and as we couldn't take a dog into the latter National Park we "boarded" him out for the day at a local farm. Was he glad to see us when we returned! Leaving the Peninsula, we explored the wine country of the Clare Valley and then made our way slowly back to Sydney via Berri, Mildura and Griffith. Beryl's 50th birthday fell while we were away so she missed out on a party, unfortunately.

In the middle of June my faithful little Morris 1100 finally succumbed to the years. I jokingly asked Noel Clark for a refund, then sold it to a scrap dealer for "tyre money" of \$20. To replace it I answered an advertisement in the *Herald* and bought a Datsun 200B sedan in reasonable condition.

One significant event of that year took place on 29 May, when I became an Australian citizen, thirty five years after arriving in the country! I'd considered myself an Australian from the day I landed, and in the 1950s and 1960s Australian citizenship bestowed no extra rights over British citizenship, so I'd never worried about naturalising. When the time came to get a passport for my first overseas trip I got a British one. Things changed somewhat during the Whitlam government, when it became necessary to obtain a visa to come back into my own country. I was determined to hold on to my British passport because of the incident in 1981 when I travelled to England with my Australian colleague, John Morgan. Reaching Heathrow Airport, I walked straight through Immigration and Customs on my British passport, then waited for an hour while he negotiated the "All Others" queue! However I was entitled to dual

citizenship, and when the Hawke government encouraged naturalisation I decided I'd do the right thing. I had no desire to make it a high profile event, and simply took part in one of the regular ceremonies held at the Baulkham Hills Shire Council chambers. The Mayor swore us in, with my omitting to say the bit about swearing loyalty to Queen Elizabeth, her heirs and successors (I fancy quite a few others did too!) and I was officially an Aussie.

The other significant event of 1989 was on the 19 September, when I received a promotion to Assistant General Manager, Operations, at the Bank. I'll have more to say about it in a later chapter, but it was a very significant milestone in my life, as I'd realised the goal I'd set of being "Number Two" in the Department, albeit sharing that status with two others. It also brought a substantial salary increase and the very significant benefit of a company car, and a few weeks later I received a brand new Holden Berlina sedan and sold the Datsun.

Reaching the grading of Assistant General Manager really placed our financial status on a firm footing, as although we'd managed reasonably well over the years we hadn't built up any substantial savings, other than equity in the house and superannuation benefits. The grading guaranteed a high income stream from superannuation after I retired, and the additional cash each fortnight enabled some steady saving. Even more importantly, it entitled me to participate in what was known as the Executive Borrowing Scheme, whereby I was allowed to borrow a sum up to three and a half times my annual salary at a low interest rate for virtually any purpose. After deducting the value of our now quite modest home loan I was left with a tidy amount that I could borrow and re-invest. I was entitled to free financial advice from an outside agency and chose Bob Wicht, a senior Taxation Partner at Coopers & Lybrand, Sydney (I later found he had gone to school with Beryl's brother in law, Graham Towle). After consultation with Bob I decided to borrow the full permissible amount and invest it in the short term money market. At the time interest rates were running very high in Australia, and I was able to get about 18% as against my special borrowing rate of about 8%. This yielded a handsome profit, even after paying income tax at a high rate.

In my new status as Head of Operations in EDP Department at the Bank I felt it appropriate that I visit each of our interstate computer centres to meet the staff there and "show the flag", so to speak. I also felt it appropriate that on these occasions Beryl should accompany me officially, so in December we flew to Melbourne and then a couple of weeks later to Brisbane. In each city we spent two days, during which I met with the local State Manager, entertained my senior staff to lunch and held an afternoon drinks party for the general staff, at which I gave a short talk and with Beryl acting as hostess to the female staff. After Christmas we flew to Perth and did the same thing, with Beryl returning direct from there and myself continuing on to Adelaide. In Perth we of course took the opportunity of catching up with the Hilton family again. At the time my cousin Ian was working for a limousine company and he met us at the airport. There were envious glances from fellow passengers as he transported us to our hotel in an enormous stretched limo. We borrowed a Bank car and I took a couple of days leave before getting down to business.

It was only fair that Beryl should benefit from our new financial status, so in 1990 we had our kitchen completely renovated and all the appliances replaced. With the new Berlina company car, to which the Bank had allowed me to fit a towbar at their expense, we no longer needed the Ford station wagon so we traded it in on a little Holden Astra hatchback which became Beryl's car.

In February we took a much needed three weeks holiday down the NSW South Coast as far as Mallacoota Inlet, and in Merimbula found our old friend "Ringo" from the *Bronze Lion* restaurant in Carlingford, who had sold up and moved down there some time before. In July and August we made our postponed trip to North Queensland. We travelled as far as Cairns and Port Douglas, spending some

time in the region, and also stayed with the Grimmas in Mackay. In September the Australian Computer Society Conference was held at Jupiter's Casino on the Gold Coast, and once again Beryl accompanied me. My 50th birthday fell in April and we had a small party of family, friends and neighbours. When Mr Brown had passed away some years earlier Mum had "inherited" a few bottles of wine from his cellar, a 1960 vintage Australian claret, and had passed them on to me. I'd held on to one bottle for a significant event, and decided reaching fifty was significant enough. I opened it around midday, decanted it through muslin and let it breathe until the evening. I shared it with an intimate few, and told Russell that he probably would never again drink a wine that was older than himself. Graham and Michele were in Europe at the time, so missed out on the treat.

The years of 1991 and 1992 passed fairly uneventfully as far as family life was concerned. With my new status at the Bank came inevitably longer hours, and I'd usually rise at five in the morning, go for an hour's walk around the streets of North Rocks, come home and have a shower, then drive in to work. I was usually at my desk by seven thirty, and wouldn't leave before six at night to avoid the peak hour traffic. We continued with our practice of eating out at least once a week, while at the same time I was constantly involved in business lunches, usually as a guest but often hosting them. As a result my weight rose alarmingly and I went on a strict diet for several months, succeeding in losing about four stone. One extra benefit of that new status was that I, and often both of us, was invited to various very enjoyable social functions by the Bank or the suppliers with whom I dealt as part of my job. These included concerts at the Opera House, attendance at the Rugby League Grand Final, special Bank dinners, watching Rugby matches from the Bank's corporate box, watching One Day Cricket matches as a guest of a supplier, tennis at the Entertainment Centre, watching the start of the Sydney-Hobart Yacht Race from the water, and so on. One of our suppliers, Andersen Consulting, always held their Christmas function for our department on a sailing ship on Sydney Harbour, and Beryl was privileged in being invited along to those. On one occasion, in January 1992, one supplier invited us both to watch the Australian Open tennis semi-finals in Melbourne, with flights, accommodation and all expenses paid. I couldn't accept this, as a tender was in progress involving that supplier, but after agreement from the General Manager I compromised by accepting the actual tennis tickets, but combining attendance with a regular business visit to Melbourne at the Bank's own expense.

Beryl was experiencing increasing problems with her hip and knee, due to arthritis, and 1991 saw the beginning of a number of procedures she went through, usually requiring an overnight stop in hospital. She would endure the pain stoically for several more years before finally having joint replacements. Russell, who was back home with us for a while, succeeded in almost writing off his mother's Astra one night – I was overseas in Florida at the time. Luckily he was unhurt after leaving the road at the western end of the Gladesville Bridge, and the car was repairable at a cost.

One day in early 1991 a very severe windstorm hit Sydney, especially the northern suburbs. I was driving home and as I reached the Epping area I could see a lot of tree branches lying on the ground and debris in the gutters. It became worse the closer to home I came, and North Rocks Road was a scene of devastation with half the road closed by branches and foliage everywhere. I reached home to find we had no carport! While I was driving home the full force of the storm had hit. Our neighbour from across the road, Darcy, asked if he could put his car under our carport to protect it from any hail, and no sooner had he done so than the carport roof was lifted off and sheets of aluminium went spinning in all directions, some of it ending in the swimming pool of our neighbours. Luckily nobody was hurt and the cars were undamaged, and insurance replaced the carport for us.

In February 1991 we holidayed at Noosa Heads on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, where we met up with a colleague, Jim O'Ryan of the Bank's Retail Banking Division, and his wife, and spent some pleasant time together. In February and March of 1992 we spent our holidays on the NSW North Coast once

more. Along the way we left the caravan at Hastings Point, near Tweed Heads, and spent a memorable few days at O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse, high in the ranges of the Lamington National Park. We went on several excursions, both on foot and in their minibus, did endless bird watching and I did a couple of the more challenging walks through that rainforest wonderland. Our accommodation was fine, with no television to distract us, and there were no less than seven meals a day served if one could cope with them.

Photography had long been my hobby, but in 1991 I thought I'd try video for a change. Russell had a friend working at Sony and was able to get me a Sony video camera at "mate's rates" and it got a pretty good workout over the next few years. I took video as well as still photos on all our holidays and recorded family life with it, and bought an expensive VCR deck that I could use to edit what I took. The camera took a bit of a beating and in 1993 I purchased a Sharp camera, but this was nowhere near as good as the original Sony. After a while I started to weary at the work involved in editing the tapes, adding commentary and music and producing a final product that tended to be looked at once and then filed away in a drawer, so ultimately I gave video away and concentrated on still photography.

The highlight of 1991 was undoubtedly a Bank trip to the USA and Canada in October. This was special because for the first time Beryl was coming with me, albeit at our own expense. I was entitled to a Business Class fare, but we were faced with Beryl travelling Economy. By a stroke of luck, the Bank's travel agent, Peter Northey, found that Northwest Airlines had a special introductory offer – buy one Business Class fare with an American Express Gold Card, and the person sitting next to you flew free! I immediately applied for the Gold Card, and so she travelled in the pointy end of the plane with me. I'll cover the trip more fully in the chapter on my overseas trips for the Bank, but suffice to say we visited New York, Toronto, Niagara Falls, Detroit (where we stayed with Betty Rohn), and Phoenix, where I attended a conference. I then took some leave, we hired a car and explored northern Arizona, the Grand Canyon and Las Vegas, then finished up in San Diego, San Francisco, Los Angeles and finally Honolulu on the way home. The trip had its ups and downs, the latter mainly being my taking ill in New York and having a forgettable ten days or so with some viral infection.

Some time during that year we drove down to Melbourne and saw the musical *Phantom Of The Opera*, and later in Sydney saw the *Wizard of Oz*. The year ended with our son Graham being ordained as a minister of the Uniting Church in a ceremony at Castle Hill on 11 December. He was then called to the church at Forestville, near Manly and some three quarters of an hour's drive from where we lived, and he and Michele settled into a church-provided house there.

1992 passed busily but uneventfully on the family side, although it was quite a year work-wise. In October I again attended the conference in Phoenix, and again Beryl went with me. This time I paid for an economy fare for her, but one of my colleagues was a director of the Bank's Travel Agency and he persuaded Northwest Airlines to give her a free upgrade to Business Class with me. What's more, she received full frequent flyer points, too! This time we confined ourselves to Arizona, again taking a few days after the conference to do some travel around that State, including a brief sojourn across the border into Mexico.

It was almost the end of the year when the first of two major events occurred. On 26 November our first grandchild, Lauren Esther Whitehouse Perry, was born to Graham and Michele. We were attending a theatre party hosted by one of the Bank's suppliers that night – *Aspects of Love*, the musical was – and knew that events were transpiring but were out of reach. As the show ended I borrowed a mobile phone from another guest and rang Graham at the hospital, to receive the glad tidings of our granddaughter's arrival. Coincidentally she shared the same birth date as our other son, Russell. We went to see the new

arrival at the hospital next morning, taking Mum Moad with us, and made all the appropriate noises of approval over our darling new arrival. So all of a sudden I found myself sleeping with a grandmother!

The second major event happened only a few days later and would change our lives completely – but I'll leave the telling of that for the next chapter

Chapter Sixteen

My Brilliant Career - Two

Returning now to the account of my career in the Commonwealth Bank, in an earlier chapter I mentioned that in late 1983 I'd put my hand up for management of the development of the Hogan Banking System, and that General Manager Len Spencer had agreed. This would prove one of the most major projects that EDP had undertaken to date, and was a radical departure from our existing methodology of usually building systems from scratch (the IATA project mentioned earlier being an exception).

The Hogan Banking System – I'll simply call it Hogan – was the brainchild of one Bernie Hogan, of Dallas, Texas, who devised and built a completely modular banking system that could be easily tailored to meet the requirements of an individual bank – in theory anyway. It employed a “building block” approach – pieces of code that could be selected and cobbled together to build modules of a banking system; the number and range of modules would depend on the needs of the bank that bought the system. The modules that we were interested in were Demand Deposits, Term Deposits, Credit/Debit Cards and Customer Information, but there were others such as Mortgage Lending that we might consider addressing in the future. A wide range of banks, mainly in the USA and Canada, had already purchased the system and set up a Hogan User Group (HUG) to share experiences in the development and operation of the systems.

Before making a final commitment to buying the system it was decided to do some more research by visiting a couple of American banks that had installed the system and attending one of the twice yearly HUG meetings. Consequently in October 1983 Ian Hendrie and myself flew to the USA for that purpose. After a short stay in Los Angeles we started in Phoenix, Arizona, where we visited two banks and met with the President of HUG, who happened to live in that city. We also managed a free day to fly up to the Grand Canyon. We then flew on to Dallas, where the Conference was to be held, and there were joined by Dave Bridges from the Bank's Retail Banking arm, who was looking at the system from the end user's perspective. On checking into our hotel we unexpectedly ran into some representatives from our rival bank in Australia, Westpac, one of whom, Paul Simmons, I knew quite well from the S.W.I.F.T. project; they were over there on a similar mission to ourselves. We had to be very guarded in what we said to each other, to preserve competitive advantage, and so were non-committal about our intentions.

We spent the first day in Dallas at Hogan's headquarters, discussing the system in depth with their marketing and technical managers and negotiating terms for a possible future contract. Next day the Conference began and Ian Hendrie followed a Management stream while Dave and I sat in on the sessions for Deposits and Customer Information – Credit/Debit cards was left until a couple of years later. The sessions were very informative, and many banks were in attendance. We felt reasonably comfortable with what we were hearing about Term Deposits and Customer Information, but some real war stories emerged from delegates about the Demand Deposit system. The problems were not in what the system provided, but ones of capacity and run times, and of major concern to us because our Bank had one of the largest Demand Deposit bases in the world – far larger than most American banks. We discussed this at length between the three of us and decided to watch and wait to see what else we could pick up in this regard. While attending the Conference we managed to see something of Phoenix, and one evening there was an arranged outing to the Texas State Fair. When the Conference ended we spent another half day with the Hogan people before flying back to Sydney, with a break in Honolulu en route

Back in Australia we sat down and compiled our report, and held many discussions over the feasibility of the project and particularly our concerns about the Demand Deposits. We were all reasonably comfortable with our ability to handle the Term Deposits and Customer Information aspects, and finally we decided that with our track record of making things work, and the superior processing equipment the Bank possessed and was already committed to purchase in the future, we could make a go of Demand Deposits. Our optimism would, with the great benefit of hindsight, prove misplaced and although it was by no means my decision alone, it was one of the relatively few ones that I would live to regret. Anyway, a proposal was put to the Executive Committee of the Bank, was approved and contracts were signed with Hogan via their Australian representatives, the software/manpower company Computer Power.

My first task as Manager Hogan Systems was to establish the project teams that would develop the three systems in tandem. In reality there were four teams, the fourth being a group of specialist technicians who had to learn the real nuts and bolts of the code and structure of the package and provide support to the application teams. I worked out the number and skill levels of staff required and put in a bid for the best ones, but needless to say there were many other competing demands and I had to make do with a variation of skill levels, which subsequently caused some delays. The learning curve of mastering the Hogan system was also steeper than anticipated. Hogan was not the kind of system that could be developed in isolation from the end users and handed over as a "turnkey" system, so staff from Retail Banking were also added to the teams.

It was still evident that there'd be a shortfall in strength of numbers in the teams, and that we'd benefit greatly if we could include people who already had Hogan experience, so the decision was taken to employ contractors through Computer Power. The use of contractors would soon become commonplace in the Department, but we pioneered it in Hogan and it proved an interesting exercise in many ways. Obviously there was nobody in Australia with Hogan experience, so Computer Power recruited them from America. The first group of about twelve arrived over a couple of weeks and were settled in, with Computer Power responsible for finding them accommodation, arranging flights and negotiating an hourly rate for each, of which they withheld a portion as their charge. Among that first group was a man who brought his wife and six children, and also Bernie Hogan Junior, son of the founder of Hogan. Bernie was an ex-marine and the politest young man I've ever met, insisting on addressing me as "sir". Generally they settled in well and certainly added value to the project, as did others who followed, although there were a couple of non-performers who we told Computer Power to get rid of. The family man caused a stir one day when he telephoned my project manager from the airport and told him the family couldn't hack it in Australia and were about to board a plane back to the States.

I settled in to the management role, which involved a few new experiences, especially trying to juggle and keep the peace between EDP staff, Retail Banking staff and contractors, all with conflicting ideas on how the projects should be developed. There was some resentment on the part of Bank staff towards the high rates that contractors were receiving, and I had to continually defend the point that the latter received none of the benefits such as sick leave, holiday pay, superannuation and the like that Bank staff enjoyed. It was good experience for me as well, and I enjoyed the challenges of managing the group and maintaining the relationships with Retail Banking and Computer Power. One challenge that remains vividly in mind was the occasion when Len Spencer called me at eight thirty in the morning and asked me if I could give a talk about Hogan to the Managing Director and the Presidents of the State Managers Clubs at nine thirty! I had less than an hour to prepare, and little in the way of presentation material, but I hurriedly cobbled something together and gave my presentation with not a little nervousness. It must have been well received, as I received compliments from the MD and Len.

In April 1984 I again flew to the USA to attend the twice yearly HUG meeting, accompanied by Roger Ross, the Hogan Account Manager from Computer Power. I also took with me my project manager Demand Deposits, Ray Godwin. This time HUG was held in San Diego, and on the flight over by sheer coincidence I was seated next to the Westpac representative Paul Simmons, who I'd met in Dallas, and his colleague. This time there was no secret about each other's intentions and we were able to compare notes freely. At the Conference, by agreement Roger Ross went his separate way while I covered the Management stream and Ray the Demand Deposits. Again the war stories came up about problems with capacity and processing time, which Ray carefully took on board. There were several issues that I wanted to discuss with Hogan executives at the Conference, but Roger and I were unable to corner them so when it ended Ray returned to Australia while Roger and I flew to Dallas. That was Friday, so it was Monday before we could sit down and discuss the issues with the Hogan people. We had a full day's discussions and I flew home the next day, leaving Roger to continue with his own agenda there.

By now we were well into the process of deciding the parameters and features that we required in each of the systems, especially from the end users' points of view, and it was obvious that we needed to have even wider ranging discussions with other banks to learn from their experience and capitalise on their ideas; being USA and Canadian banks, they were in no way in competition with us so we could speak freely with them. Accordingly I put together a team of five Bank people, who would be accompanied by Roger Ross. One Bank person, Graham Bentley, was from EDP Audit and would work independently. Randall Raisin from Retail Banking and I formed one team, and my project manager Customer Information, Tony McRae, teamed with Ross Popplewell, also from Retail. The plan was that the teams would visit various banks and then come together at the October 1984 Dallas HUG Conference.

Roger Ross and I left first and flew to Los Angeles, where Computer Power had arranged for us to interview at least three, and possibly more, potential contractors. I was extremely annoyed to find that one interview had been cancelled, another postponed to Denver, and only one scheduled for LA! We interviewed that person, filled in our time with some sightseeing, then Roger headed for Dallas while I flew to Seattle, where I met up with Randall and Graham. We held meetings with two banks there, then Randall and I flew to Denver, where we had two more bank meetings and I held the postponed interview with the potential contractor. We hired him, and he offered to take us up into the Rockies in his four wheel drive the next day, Saturday, which we accepted with pleasure. From there we flew to Dallas, where we all met up, had discussions with Hogan and attended the HUG Conference. I again sat in on the Management stream while the others covered their particular interests.

From Dallas Tony and Roger Ross went on to do bank visits in New York and New Orleans before returning to Australia, while Randall and I did the same in Toronto and then Buffalo, where Graham caught up with us. We then split up, Randall going to Chicago and then home, and Graham to Cincinnati; I would meet him again in Honolulu. I took a couple of days leave to catch up with my friends Donald and Betty Rohn in Detroit, then headed for Honolulu and a short stopover before going home. I didn't know it at the time, but it would be my last overseas trip for nearly five years.

For the next three years or so we continued on with the task of developing the Hogan systems. Term Deposits and Customer Information were finally launched, with reasonable success, in 1986, and a Debit Card system in 1987. Alas, Demand Deposits continued to flounder without a successful launch, and in 1990 the plug was finally pulled. Looking back over the Hogan exercise, it must be admitted that it was not the overall success that we'd hoped for, especially Demand Deposits. The other systems we introduced worked well and delivered what was wanted, but in hindsight I can't honestly say that developing a package gave us a real benefit over designing and building a system ourselves. Certainly in later years advances in technology increasingly made packaged systems more attractive than "do it yourself" ones, but in the 1980s the industry was really only on the cusp of things to come. It was also a

disappointment to Len Spencer, who had been a keen and key supporter of the project, that he retired without seeing it come to full fruition. Len was succeeded as General Manager by Ken Willett, a return to having the position filled from within the Department.

During the period we were developing Hogan I also still had responsibility for the International and Corporate Banking project teams, albeit I was no longer involved in the day to day issues. Retirements saw an up and coming executive, Brian Morris, promoted into the department as Chief Manager, Systems Development, to whom I reported. We became a team for the next few years and developed a generally good working relationship, although on a couple of occasions his dogmatic approach to certain issues caused me some embarrassment with user departments. In 1985 the two of us were chosen to do a one week management course at the Australian Administrative Staff College in Mount Eliza, out of Melbourne. This was a very prestigious course, and although hard work I for one benefited from it. We flew down to Melbourne on a sleepy Sunday, and at the taxi rank there were at least fifty cabs lined up hoping for a fare. The first one in line didn't accept Cabcharge dockets, so we went to the second and the driver nearly wept for joy on finding he had a fare to Mount Eliza, nearly forty kilometres away.

I was kept busy not only managing the teams reporting to me, but in various other activities and special assignments. I attended various seminars, and the Australian Computer Conferences in Surfers Paradise (1986), Melbourne (1987) and Sydney (1988). We'd outgrown our office space in the Liverpool and Castlereagh Streets building, so had to move to premises above Wynyard Branch. A couple of years later we moved again, to a brand new building at Burwood. This would be one of three buildings in a group that would be established in that suburb, including the main computer centre, and ultimately the whole of the Department would end up there. During 1988 I also found myself relieving in Brian's position quite a bit, while he in turn acted in a higher position, and the extra salary this attracted was most welcome. The experience was also valuable, and it was this plus what I would like to think was a lot of hard work on my part that saw me promoted two grades to Deputy Chief Manager in November 1988.

In early 1989 we received an unexpected invitation via the National Australia Bank. NAB was a member of a common interest group, the International Systems Working Group (ISWG), based in the USA and composed of representatives of banks from around the world, although mostly in North America. These representatives came from both the data processing and international business areas of their banks, and got together twice a year to discuss their international systems and exchange ideas in a practical and non-competitive environment. The group were looking for a second Australian bank to join them, NAB had suggested ourselves, and their representative, Ian Hargreaves, approached us to see if we were interested. We agreed that we were, and the Bank was invited to attend the May ISWG meeting in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to make a presentation and apply for membership.

At first it seemed appropriate that my then Project Manager International, Tony Anderssen, be our delegate, but in discussions with Ian Hargreaves it became clear that the other representatives at ISWG were at senior management level, including department heads. Ken Willett, with the blessing of Corporate and International, therefore decided that I should represent the Bank. I flew down to Melbourne to spend the day with Ian and get a briefing on ISWG and what I needed to present to them, put together my presentation and on 5 May, unhappily our wedding anniversary, was on the plane to Fort Lauderdale. After a short stopover in Orlando I drove the rest of the way, caught up with Ian and was introduced to the other ISWG members. The group met over three and a half days, and I obtained great value from the sessions, although as a novice I could not yet contribute much. However I made my presentation and Commonwealth Bank was accepted with acclaim as a member of ISWG.

I always tried to extract as much value from an overseas trip as possible, so when ISWG finished I flew to Charlotte, North Carolina, for discussions with IBM's Wholesale Banking Group. I was joined there by a couple of members of IBM's Commonwealth Bank team and also one of my project managers, Neville Parkes. The talks occupied a full day, after which we took the long flight home to Australia with the usual short stopover in Honolulu.

Around the middle of 1989 the Assistant General Manager, Operations, Noel Clark - my colleague from way back in the Clearing system days and who sold me the Morris 1100 - retired. His position was declared vacant and temporarily filled by one of the Operations people, and expressions of interest were invited from within the Bank. As I said earlier, that level of position had always been my goal, so I threw my hat into the ring, so to speak. I had the full support of Ken Willett, the General Manager, who effectively became the third "sponsor" I'd had in the Bank. With several others I was interviewed by a panel of three - the Deputy Managing Director, the General Manager, Personnel and Ken himself. I was a little nervous, as it was the first job interview I'd experienced since volunteering for EDP, but I think I made a reasonable showing although I doubted I'd win the position against others ahead of me in seniority, especially as it required a two grade promotion in my case. Behind the scenes, though, Ken was determined to be succeeded by someone within the Department and I know pushed my name hard right up to Managing Director level.

Ken received news that the appointment would be announced on 13 September, and I was a bundle of nerves all through that day. Shortly after three in the afternoon my phone rang and Ken said "You've got it!" Apparently it was a close run thing, and right up to the previous day the decision had gone to an executive in Retail Banking. Ken had gone to the MD and again argued the case for an inside appointment, and another position was hurriedly found for the executive from Retail. I sat back in a daze, then picked up the phone and passed the good news on to Beryl, who also could hardly believe I'd got it. Then followed a procession of well-wishers into my office as the word spread, almost all of them expressing satisfaction that "one of their own" had won. At the same time the Bank's Economist, Elie Agzarian, had similarly been promoted to EDP as Assistant General Manager, Planning & Budget. Brian Morris had earlier been promoted to Assistant General Manager, Systems Development. The promotion was confirmed on 19 September.

So after a run of twenty four years in Systems Development, broken only by a few months as Computer Job Scheduler many years earlier, I found myself on the other side of the fence, so to speak, the Operations arm of Information Services, as the Department was now known. My bailiwick covered the two Sydney computer centres at Head Office and Liverpool and Castlereagh Streets, and the new computer centre to be established at suburban Burwood, as well as interstate computer centres in Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth.

My new grading brought with it the additional benefit of a fully maintained Bank car, so as soon as the promotion was confirmed I put in a request for a Holden Berlina - I had the choice of that or a Ford Fairmont. There was a lead time of some weeks for a new vehicle, so in the interim I rented a Ford Falcon from Thrifty until the Holden arrived. I also had the benefit of a parking place in the basement of the Liverpool and Castlereagh Streets building, so after many years of train travel I now had the advantage (and some of the disadvantages) of driving to work. While I received a Caltex card to cover my petrol purchases, there was no compensation for Harbour bridge tolls so I would drive to the city via Victoria Road and return home over the Bridge, it being toll-free going north. The traffic could be pretty horrific, especially in the mornings and depending on what time I left home.

I had barely time to settle into my new office on the 12th floor of the Liverpool and Castlereagh Street building when I was off overseas again, heading for the October ISWG meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. It

was too late to arrange an alternate delegate, but I was a little sad that my position meant I would no longer be the Bank's representative to the meetings. I met up with Ian Hargreaves on the flight over, and we did a little sightseeing around Phoenix before the meetings began. The sessions and the social arrangements were as good as before, and it was with sadness that I said goodbye to the rest of the delegates and flew back home. I'd actually planned to visit the Tandem computer company in Cupertino, in California's Silicon Valley, before returning to Australia. However the disastrous San Francisco earthquake of that year occurred while I was in Phoenix, and I felt it was better to cancel that part of the trip at short notice! Back at my desk, I completed my report of the proceedings, then started the learning curve of mastering the Operations side of things. I knew most of my executives and many of the staff, and also knew I could rely on them for the day to day running, and on our IBM representatives on technical issues regarding the hardware and operating systems.

As I mentioned earlier, I felt it appropriate that I visit each of our interstate computer centres to meet the staff there and "show the flag", so to speak. In December, with Beryl, I flew to Melbourne and then a couple of weeks later to Brisbane for two nights each, then after Christmas to Perth and Adelaide. I paid courtesy calls on each local State Manager and brought myself up to date on the main issues facing each of the Centres. The managers of the Centres I knew personally, as we'd worked together in Sydney over the years.

I had no sooner visited the interstate Centres than Ken Willett dropped a bombshell. He called me into his office and told me he intended Brian Morris and I exchange positions; that is to say, I would become AGM of Systems Development. I complained bitterly, saying that I had relished the change and challenges that moving to Operations would bring, but he was adamant. I realised that this had been his strategy all along, but obviously he couldn't make the change until the new positions had been established for a few months. So it was that I went back to Systems Development as its head. Despite my disappointment, I could see the sense in Ken's decision, as heading Systems would capitalise the most on my experience, and as things transpired the Operations position would assume a whole new breadth and thrust with the acquisition by the Bank of the State Bank of Victoria – but that's jumping ahead a bit.

Returning to Systems Development immediately imposed an additional burden on me. The General Manager and three AGMs were based in the Liverpool and Castlereagh Streets building, while all my development staff was located at Burwood. This meant that I had to maintain an office in both places and commute between them. I developed a pattern of generally spending three and a half days in the city and the remainder of my time at Burwood, but there were many occasions when I had to vary this. I spent a lot of time in my car between the two offices, and while in the city office I only had telephone and email contact with my line managers. It was a far from satisfactory arrangement and imposed a good deal of extra stress on me, but there was no alternative and I just had to accept it. My time at Burwood was mainly spent in one-on-one meetings and project review sessions with my people, while in the city I would be involved with the management team and meet with vendor representatives.

I was required to deal with quite a number of companies who were selling their services to us, including IBM, NCR and numerous software companies and development shops. I found this aspect of my work quite interesting and rewarding and established some very good working relationships. It also involved me in frequent business lunches, and no week would go by without at least one or two of these; I got to know many restaurants in Sydney and Burwood! However the downside of this was that I put on a great deal of weight – this had been a problem all my life – and I had to go on a fairly strict diet in order to get it down to a reasonable level again. I also spent a good deal of time liaising with the user departments in the Bank, particularly Corporate and International, Group Treasury and Retail Banking. One of the most stressful parts of the job was keeping those departments happy in the face of the individual project

overruns and delays, but none the less we were able to continue delivering high quality systems. While Brian Morris was Chief Manager Application Development he had initiated, with Retail Banking, a major project codenamed *Branch Assist* that would put personal computers in every branch, both on the teller line and in the back office, and this had introduced a whole new technology into the department. We were now in the business of microcomputer development as well as mainframe, and Microsoft and its Windows operating system started to play a big role in our activities. The hardware aspects of microcomputers were given to Brian Morris as being an Operations consideration, but I retained control of the software side.

In May 1990 I was unexpectedly invited by IBM to attend their Data Processing Executive Institute Conference in Hong Kong, so I flew over there to be joined by David Norris, the IBM Account Representative who was their main liaison contact with me. The Meeting commenced on a Tuesday, but I left on the preceding Sunday and did a little sightseeing on the Monday, followed by a courtesy call on and discussions with the management of our Hong Kong branch. The Conference lasted three and a half days, and while the attendees came from all over the world and some of the sessions were interesting I didn't get as much out of it as I would have hoped. The official Conference Dinner was unusual in that no alcoholic beverages were served, possibly because IBM had long been a "dry" company and perhaps the Hong Kong branch was still that way, and the Chinese banquet was frankly bland and boring. The highlight of the social aspects of the trip, however, came when our local branch offered me the use of their junk to take the Australian contingent to the Conference on a night's sail on Hong Kong harbour and a seafood dinner on Lamma Island. It was a marvellous evening and earned the Bank some "brownie points" from the delegates whom I invited along.

September of that year saw me attend the Australian Computer Society Conference at Jupiter's Casino, on the Gold Coast, with Beryl accompanying me, and in November I had a rather unusual experience. IBM invited the management team to inspect their personal computer factory in Wangaratta, Victoria, and flew us down and back in a small jet plane. It was quite different from our usual mode of travel in airliners, and while it flew reasonably quickly there was a far better appreciation of the landscape passing below us.

1991 saw the dawn of two new initiatives that would have a great impact on my job. The first was the planning and commencement of development of a totally new Retail Banking system, which was named *Mainstream*, intended to replace the now aborted Hogan Demand Deposits project. It involved a major team being set up and manned jointly by Information Services and Retail staff, with a senior project manager from each department reporting jointly to myself and my counterpart in Retail Banking. This would consume much of my attention and time.

The second initiative, however, was much greater in significance and terms of workload. The Commonwealth Bank took the decision to merge with the State Bank of Victoria, which really meant the latter being absorbed by us. The impact of this would naturally be felt throughout the Bank, especially in Victoria where branches of both banks would be closed or amalgamated to avoid double representation in each town or suburb. In the case of Information Systems it meant the absorption of the State Bank's IS Department into our own, and our Melbourne computer centre progressively taking on the operations of theirs. Although the official line was to amalgamate and merge the staff of each department, in reality it would mean the running down of the Victorian staff, which for the most part would become redundant. This was a most unpleasant aspect of the whole business. From the Systems Development aspect I was desperately short of manpower in many areas, with over fifty contractors mainly doing work that could be done by trained Bank staff, so I campaigned long and hard to attract the Victorian systems people to come and work in Sydney. Only a handful eventually signed up, the main deterrent being the cost of relocating to Sydney, the higher prices of houses and the unwillingness

to disrupt their families. For Brian Morris in Operations it was more a case of not requiring extra staff, so he was in the position of making the Victorian staff redundant. I was now rather glad I was not in the Operations chair, as I was admittedly softer than Brian when it came to human relations and I think the stress of telling people their career was over would have been very hard on me. I never saw that softness as being a weakness but rather a strength, as many of my staff would later attest to their satisfaction in working for me.

This is not the place to go into the fine details of the State Bank takeover; suffice to say it occupied much of my time. My counterpart in their IS Department, Ray Storey, and myself would meet at least once a month, alternating in Sydney and Melbourne, to monitor and discuss progress so I was often in a plane headed south, usually for an overnight stay. His bank had many good systems and he tried hard to "sell" these to us, but usually the incompatibilities were such that they would not have fitted into our operations. However we did start to adapt the methodologies they had developed to build systems for our own use.

On 1 April 1991 we celebrated 25 years of EDP Department with a lunch at the Bennelong Restaurant at the Sydney Opera House, hosted by Ken Willett. It was to be the last such function he presided over, as shortly afterwards he retired. He wanted to have me appointed as Acting General Manager, which was a tremendous compliment, but I declined, partly because I had no interest in applying for the position, but also that I lacked confidence that I would receive the full co-operation of my fellow AGMs, who would also want to do the relief. The problem was overcome in a roundabout way. John Lindsay, the General Manager of State Bank's IS Department, was appointed Acting General Manager of our department. This was difficult for him, as it meant he had to work in Sydney through the week and fly home to Melbourne for the weekends. However the arrangement proved workable, and I got on very well with John.

Being back in Systems Development, I felt it appropriate to resume my involvement with the ISWG, so in May 1991 I attended the meeting in Fort Lauderdale and also took the opportunity to do some research into other systems matters. I firstly flew to Detroit for a quick visit to Betty Rohn – by this time Donald had sadly passed away – then continued on to Dayton, Ohio for a visit to NCR's headquarters. There I caught up with Alan McLeod, our Account Manager from NCR, and for the next day and a half had very fruitful discussions regarding NCR's personal computers and branch telling equipment. I was shown some of our equipment being assembled, so I took a felt pen and wrote a "Certificate of Inspection" inside one machine. While in Dayton I received the VIP treatment. Alan and I were accommodated at Hawthorn Hill, the magnificent home built by Orville and Wilbur Wright, the aviation pioneers. I slept in Orville's bed and signed the guest book, which boasted such names as Charles Lindbergh, Henry Ford, Alexander Graham Bell and Charles Edison.

After Dayton Alan and I parted company and I flew to Fort Lauderdale for the ISWG meeting, where I was warmly welcomed back by the other delegates. Following the meeting I flew to Seattle for a visit to Microsoft's headquarters at Redmond, where I'd hoped to pick up information on their future directions with Windows; however they were fairly reticent and despite our high standing as a customer I didn't glean much new information. From Seattle I flew to Los Angeles, changed planes and returned to Sydney. Later that year the machine I had "certified" arrived in Sydney and Alan asked me in which branch I would like to have it installed in my presence. I was tempted to say Broome, but instead opted for North Bondi, my first branch when I joined the Bank. To my delight the manager there turned out to be Roland Pisani, who had joined the Bank at Waverley branch while I was there. I duly "commissioned" the machine and Alan took us both out for a very pleasant lunch.

In October I returned to the USA for the ISWG meeting in Phoenix, and as I mentioned earlier this time Beryl came along with me. Again I'd planned other calls as well as attending the meeting, so we firstly headed for New York, a rather long flight as Northwest Airlines' route was Honolulu-Los Angeles-Minneapolis-New York! We arrived in the Big Apple on a Thursday night, and the next day I paid a call at Chemical Bank before visiting our Bank's New York branch, where I was scheduled to do a review of some of their systems procedures. On the Saturday we set out to do some sightseeing, visiting the Wall Street area and the World Trade Center. However over lunch I was suddenly struck by a very debilitating virus and spent most of the weekend in bed, and was still too ill to work at the branch the following Monday. That same afternoon we flew on to Toronto, where we were met by Alan McLeod of NCR and driven out to Waterloo, where NCR had a major factory. I struggled through meetings the following day, then attended a Medical Centre where I had a battery of tests and was assured by the young doctor that I'd live to a hundred – I asked for it in writing! Fortunately the next day saw me on the road to recovery.

Returning to Toronto, we spent a day at Niagara Falls with Alan and I made a call at the Bank of Nova Scotia before we moved on to Detroit, where we caught up with Betty Rohn and I also visited the headquarters of the giant Kmart organisation to obtain information on their use of the high capacity Teradata computers that I was researching. From there we flew to Phoenix for the ISWG meeting, where Beryl was welcomed by the delegates and the couple of other wives that were there. The sessions were as good as ever and the social programme enjoyable, and it was with regret that the meeting ended. We then took a few days leave, rented a car and headed for Las Vegas via the Grand Canyon, before flying down to San Diego where I visited the NCR plant that was responsible for the Teradata computers. Renting another car, we drove north to Los Angeles where we played tourist for a couple of days before flying to San Francisco, where I made a final bank visit and we did some more tourist things. Finally we headed back to Australia with a stopover in Honolulu after a very full and at times eventful month in North America.

During 1991 I received an unexpected invitation. The publishers of a new EDP-related magazine, *Managing Information Systems*, Alistair Gordon and Graeme Philipson, invited me to sit on their editorial board, along with five other people from the Information Technology industry. Our task was to read all articles prior to publication in the magazine, then get together and discuss their relevance, importance and quality. This was quite an interesting assignment, if a bit time consuming, but I enjoyed the exposure to other aspects of data processing. One of the highlights of my time on the board was in early 1992, when the publishers included me in a meeting with Dr Gene Amdahl, one of the world's best known computer designers, to discuss the trends and future challenges of data processing. It was a most absorbing discussion and business breakfast, and led to quite a story in the magazine. I have included an article I later wrote for the magazine as an Appendix.

Another memorable meeting was with the founder of Microsoft and one of the world's richest men, Bill Gates. The Bank was one of Microsoft's largest customers in Australia, and when Bill made a visit to Sydney, Microsoft invited the senior management of our department to a dinner with him. Introductions were made, and we tried to make polite conversation with the great man – the usual pleasantries such as did he enjoy his visits here, what was the weather like in Seattle and so on. We got almost monosyllabic replies, and began to think he was a rather dull character – he certainly came across as a "nerdy" type of person. As soon as computing was mentioned, however, he was off and was soon solving a problem we mentioned on the back of his napkin. He gave us an insight into some of his thinking about the future, and the evening turned out to be both very pleasant and informative. One of his aides later told us that not only was he technically brilliant, but also very astute in his business knowledge and knew everything that was going on in Microsoft around the world. Anyway, in later times I was able to truthfully name drop that I'd had dinner with Bill Gates, which was always good for a conversation starter.

The year 1992 was a very busy one, particularly with the State Bank takeover, and I flew to Melbourne seven times during the year. I was generally enjoying the role of AGM, particularly my dealings with suppliers and software houses, and with managing my own staff, which by now had grown to about 400 people plus fifty contractors. The General Manager position was filled by Peter Andrews from Retail Banking, and John Lindsay returned to Melbourne but flew up every two weeks to take part in a management meeting. I established a good relationship with Peter, who was a no-nonsense sort of person and one who delegated responsibility and expected results. However the satisfaction I obtained from my work was offset to some extent by a growing amount of stress and frustration, particularly in dealing with user departments and also within the management team. The stress factor had been highlighted in a health evaluation that I'd undergone, at the Bank's expense, at the Sanatorium Hospital in Wahroonga in late 1991. My resources were stretched very tightly and there were so many projects going on at once that it was becoming increasingly difficult to meet deadlines, which of course upset the users. The *Mainstream* project in particular started to consume more and more people, and despite the growing use of contractors I had great difficulty in juggling human resources to meet demands. We had hoped that we would recruit a number of trained people from State Bank, but as mentioned earlier they were reluctant to come to Sydney and only a handful took the step. I had a team of around eight executives reporting to me, some of whom were extremely effective but a couple of them fairly ordinary performers, and it was the latter that caused most of my problems. My right hand man was Pat McCabe, who had been our user representative way back in the days of the Clearing application, and he was a great backup and asset to me, although in 1992 he spent much of his time in Melbourne working with the State Bank people. Mid year a new office building was completed at Burwood and the senior management team moved into it from Liverpool and Castlereagh Streets. This was a great boon to me, as my people were now only across the street instead of being across the city.

I'd made it a personal goal to establish a definitive methodology for the building of computer systems, using the various software tools that were emerging on the market and incorporating them into our own practices, and here we were able to make use of what State Bank had already done. However there was some resentment over the resources that were necessarily tied up in doing this work, especially from one member of the senior management team who lacked a background in data processing and refused to accept that things were of necessity done in a different way than in other areas of the Bank. I know that he consistently "white anted" me behind my back, and although I tackled him a number of times about it, it was making my situation difficult. Office politics were also a fact of life, and I admit I was never a good politician and could not always be comfortable in some situations. I had for some time determined that I would retire when I reached 55, the minimum age, so set out to do the very best job that I could until that date was reached.

Because of pressure of work I missed the May 1992 ISWG meeting, sending a deputy instead, but made my mind up to attend the October meeting in Phoenix. Once again Beryl accompanied me, and I confined the trip to the meeting and a few days leave in Arizona without making any other calls. The sessions and social programme were as always constructive and pleasant respectively, and we spent a few days enjoying the beauties of the Arizona countryside, with a quick diversion into Mexico, before returning home. I had no inkling then that it would be the last overseas trip I would make with the Bank.

In 1992 the Bank privatised and floated on the share market, and each Bank staff member was offered a parcel of shares at a reduced price. We were allowed 100 shares each, and the price was set at \$5.41 a share. I took up the full hundred but didn't bother buying more on the market, thinking that it would be simply a "souvenir" we could leave to the grandchildren one day. A year or so later another tranche was offered and I took up some more, about 150 I think, at a slightly higher price, and also arranged for the dividends to be reinvested in more shares. Little did we know that those few shares would grow to be a

major part of our investment portfolio, as at the time of writing this – May 2007 – they were worth around \$56 each!

As I mentioned earlier, we were blessed with our first grandchild, Lauren, on 26 November of that year, and the euphoria of the event was only a few days old when early one afternoon I received a telephone call from Peter Andrews asking me to attend a meeting in his office at four thirty. I responded that I had a previous commitment at Retail Banking, but he insisted that I postpone that as his meeting was more important. At four thirty I knocked on his door and entered, expecting the other members of the senior management team to be present, but Peter was alone. As soon as he asked me to sit down I knew something was about to happen, because unusually he was obviously very nervous and his hands were trembling. He then broke the news to me that for various reasons, mainly the wish to take new directions and introduce new blood into Systems Development, he had decided to take the step of replacing me as AGM, and as there was no other available AGM position in the Bank I was being offered redundancy – the proverbial “golden handshake”.

I sat stunned for the moment, as this was totally unexpected and I was unprepared for it. I admit that in those few seconds a number of emotions hit me. One was a feeling of relief, as I had often in my own mind thought that it would be good to receive such an offer, but another was hurt and bitter disappointment that my years of hard work and loyalty to the Bank were being summarily dismissed. I said as much to Peter, indicating that if my performance had not been considered good enough he should have counselled me long before this moment, and he reassured me that it was not a case of my performance but the need for new directions. I could see he absolutely hated what he was doing, and we discussed the matter calmly and without rancour, if emotionally on my part.

I have never felt resentful towards Peter over what he did that day. I feel sure that forces above him had an influence over the decision, although I could never know for sure. I also have a strong suspicion that the “white-anting” I’d endured from my fellow AGM also had a bearing on the matter, but again I’ll never know. I was wise enough in the ways of the world that this sort of thing happened, and that I could well have been placed in a similar position regarding one of my own executives. I think Beryl was more resentful of what Peter did than I ever was. I could see the positive aspects of taking the package, so to speak, and over the next few days I would resolve to turn the negatives into positives as well. Much later I would learn that my replacement, recruited from outside the Bank, would prove an unmitigated failure, and without appearing vindictive I have no qualms in saying I felt very pleased to hear it!

Peter explained to me that, although I had the right to refuse redundancy, there was simply nowhere else presently in the Bank that I could fit into, and that it would be in my best financial interests to accept the offer. To this end, he had waiting in the next door conference room a senior executive from Personnel Department, who I knew well, and a representative from a management placement firm, DBM Consultants. The financial aspects of the package were shown to me and the options of taking a lump sum or a life pension explained. The Bank would also, at their cost, provide the services of the placement firm in finding me a position elsewhere, should I desire it.

I went home and broke the news to Beryl over a stiff drink, and I think she might have shared my feeling of relief of being rid of the stress and frustrations of work, although also resenting the way I was being discarded. I told Graham and Russell the news, but we otherwise kept it to ourselves until it was officially announced at work. Over the next few days we looked at the financial figures and I decided there was really no need for me to go back to work again as far as money was concerned. My termination pay, properly invested, would be sufficient to live on until I turned fifty five in 1995, after which I would take a Bank pension and receive my superannuation contributions plus interest as a lump sum. Added to that was the fact that I believed in life after work, that I would have gone at age fifty five

anyway, and that in my opinion the earlier one left the stresses of the workforce the longer one might hang around on this earth!

I think Peter Andrews expected me to finish up almost immediately, but there were loose ends that I wanted to tie up as a matter of personal satisfaction, and to his surprise I asked to stay on until just before Christmas, to which he rather reluctantly agreed. I also asked that I break the news to my executives personally at my next fortnightly meeting with them, which was still ten days off, and that until then knowledge would remain only with the senior management team. I found it extremely hard to conceal my pending departure from my colleagues, but came the day of the meeting I abruptly curtailed business at eleven twenty and, close to tears, then informed them that I'd been offered and accepted early retirement and would be leaving the team at Christmas. The unanimous reaction from them was shock and anger, but I immediately asked them to go over to Peter's office where, by arrangement, he would explain the decision to them. Afterwards I took them all out for an unashamedly long and rather wet lunch!

Once word spread I had many people knock on my door or email me, to commiserate with me but also to say how much they'd valued my working with them and particularly the way in which I had managed them, which was very warming to me. I made a final trip to Melbourne to tie up loose ends there, and also wrote to my colleagues at ISWG to say that, with regret, I'd attended my last meeting there and how I treasured the times we'd spent together. I also resigned from the board of *MIS* magazine, much to the disappointment of Alistair and Graeme. At my suggestion they commissioned me to write the article on the changes in data processing over two decades that I mentioned earlier, for which I would receive the sum of \$500 – my only venture into commercial writing.

During the past couple of years I'd enjoyed a close relationship with the firm of Price Waterhouse, who were developing some software for us, and especially with John Quick, who had joined EDP shortly after I'd worked as a programmer and then left for outside industry. When John heard I was taking early retirement the firm made me two job offers. One involved a liaison role with people within the Bank, which I declined outright as I wouldn't have felt comfortable in such a situation. The other was for project management in Thailand, and I gave some thought to this as the idea of working in a foreign country was attractive, given my penchant for travel. However I didn't relish another management job so soon, and declined that also. In later years I would often wonder if I'd done the right thing, and what would have happened if I'd accepted the position, but at the time the thought of retirement leisure was more attractive and I've never really regretted the decision.

On the second last day of my time with the Bank there was a general staff send-off, hosted by Peter. About 150 people came along, most from Systems Development but quite a few from other areas of the Department. Beryl was also invited to share the moment. My erstwhile tennis partner and colleague on the International projects, Bruce Hall, gave the valedictory address, then Peter made a short speech and presented me with an Omega gold watch. This was normally given only on orthodox retirement, but I had made the point strongly to Peter that, given the circumstances, it was the least I deserved. He agreed and convinced the powers that be accordingly. I had a motive for requesting it, and as soon as I received it I walked over to Beryl and gave it to her, saying that she was the one who really deserved it through years of love and support. The staff then presented us with a cordless telephone for our home and a beautiful crystal vase. I made a speech, thanking my people for their support through the years and especially for their comradeship, and wished them well for the future. I ended with the words "I will never forget you", and this was truly meant. I felt genuine emotion at the tributes and good wishes that I received from all present.

The next day, 23 December, Peter Andrews hosted a private lunch for me in the executive dining room. There were twelve of us around the table, including the senior management team, and John Lindsay came up from Melbourne for the occasion. I invited two of my oldest Bank friends, John Morgan from International and John Farrell, and the remainder were representative of my closest colleagues. Peter gave the valedictory address and presented me with a Certificate of Service and letter signed by the Managing Director, David Murray, which is reproduced below. I then responded by looking around the table and one by one speaking of the highlights and memories of my relationship with each person sitting there. After the lunch I packed my briefcase for the last time, said my final goodbyes and drove home at the end of a career spanning thirty three years.

I can't pretend that the manner in which my career ended didn't hurt – it did! Time heals all wounds, and as I said a little earlier I took the attitude of turning the negatives into positives, but I still can't look back on those last days without feeling some hurt and disappointment. The Bank was very generous in its financial settlement, but not quite so generous in some other ways. One of the most hurtful aspects was that, because I didn't retire normally, I was not included in the end of year retired officers function that the Managing Director hosted. Above all things in the Bank I valued the friendships and camaraderie formed over the years, and I was almost totally cut off from this. For many years I rarely met up with any of my erstwhile colleagues bar John Farrell and John Morgan, and it would be much later before I finally joined a "geriatrics" social group that one of my former staff members organised.

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D V Murray
Managing Director

Mr C S Perry
Assistant General Manager
Application Development
Information Services

22 December 1992

Dear Col

I would like to express my thanks for the many years of loyal and dedicated service you have given the Bank whilst in its employ.

Col, over the years you have been involved in many projects and developments with high strategic importance to the Bank. These tasks were often complex, requiring detailed planning, co-ordination of resources and achieving deadlines. You leave us as a man respected for his technical advice and for his contribution to a very important area of the Bank.

On behalf of the Executive Director, senior executives, your colleagues and friends and on my own behalf, I ask you to accept best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely



D V Murray



Commonwealth Bank Branches At Which I Served



IBM System 360 Mainframe Computer Similar to the Bank's Own System (Photograph MOTAT, Auckland)

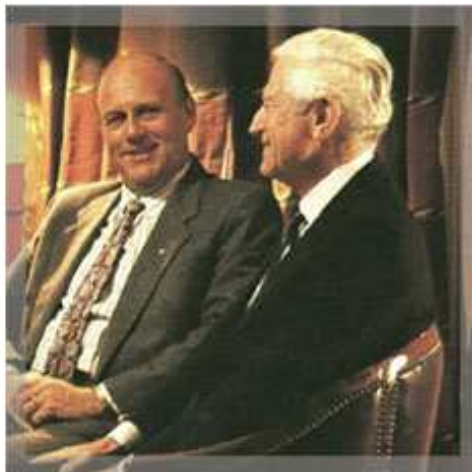
On The Personal Development Course, Commonwealth Bank Staff College, St Ives, 1981



Nine of the "Magnificent Eleven" - Foundation Members of the Bank's Data Processing Department at its 25th Anniversary, 1991



International Systems Working Group, Phoenix, Arizona, 1991



With Gene Amdahl, a Major Player in the Mainframe Computer World, 1992



Member of the "Managing Information Systems" Magazine Editorial Board, 1992



IBM Data Processing Executive Institute Meeting, Hong Kong, May 1990



**The First New Car We Ever Owned -
Our Datsun 200B, 1980**



Graham's Graduation, 1984



Graham & Michele's Wedding, 10 December 1986



**Our Silver Wedding Anniversary,
5 May 1987**



"Morgan"



At The Grand Canyon, 1991



That Stretched Limo, Perth, 1990

Chapter Seventeen

Into Retirement

So there I was, two days before Christmas and out of work! However we could hardly be described as penniless, as in our bank account was more ready cash than I'd ever possessed in my life! We enjoyed Christmas with our new granddaughter as the centre of attention, then settled back to start our retirement years.

Over the previous couple of weeks I'd spent some time organising our finances, and had decided to take the option of leaving my superannuation intact until I turned 55, then taking my contributions plus accrued interest as a lump sum and a life pension, with half the latter flowing on to Beryl should anything happen to me. I could have taken the whole of my super then and there as a lump sum, invested it and lived on the proceeds, but firstly there was a risk factor involved in investing money as an individual, and secondly I didn't want the day to day hassle of managing it. The life pension, which was by far the more attractive option, was calculated as being 38% of my final salary, so it was important that I cashed up my fringe benefits to make that salary as high as possible. I'd already cashed in the amount that I'd borrowed for reinvestment some months earlier, so this only left our reasonably small housing loan and the company car. I solved the first by taking out a commercial loan from the Bank for the amount of the housing loan debt and paying out the housing loan with it. I was able to repay the commercial loan straight after Christmas out of my final payout, so it cost us only a few days interest. I solved the second by paying out the lease on the Berlina for \$11,500 from our savings, and keeping the car.

My final salary payout comprised severance pay totalling 440 days, plus 24 days accrued leave and 395 days long service leave, as I'd never taken any of the latter. In addition there were a few thousand dollars from an interim benefit from my superannuation, and a small insurance policy that I cashed in. The severance pay I rolled over in managed funds with the Bank's Commonwealth Life investment company, less \$30,000 cash which went into our savings account. The invested money, drawn on every three months, would be sufficient to see us through the next two and a half years until my pension became due. The accrued leave and long service leave monies, even after tax, amounted to a tidy sum and after extinguishing our Credit Union and small credit card debts we put this aside to meet what would be the fruition of our retirement plan. I also purchased the personal computer I'd been using – Brian Morris put a price of \$1,000 on it, which on later reflection was a bit high!. On the downside of the financial arrangements was the fact that, because I hadn't retired conventionally, I could no longer belong to the Bank's excellent Health Society, so we transferred to the Grand United fund. In later years the rules changed and I was able to rejoin the Bank fund.

I believe one of the worst things a person or couple can do is retire without a plan of how one is going to spend the rest of one's life. There have been countless stories of people who didn't do this and sat at home bored, their minds becoming inactive; or found they were suddenly in their partner's way; or made a "sea change", sold up and moved somewhere to find they no longer had a circle of friends or family to belong to. As I said much earlier, I'd always planned to retire when I turned 55, so although early retirement was forced upon us we already had a plan in mind. This, simply, revolved around travel, both in Australia and overseas, although Beryl was less keen than I was about the latter. Apart from that, we already had our hobbies – photography and philately in my case, all manner of handicrafts in Beryl's case – and the home and garden to occupy us. We were also both interested in tracing our family histories. When I'd arrived home with the news of my "golden handshake" and we sat down and discussed what might happen, we'd both been adamant that we wouldn't sell up and move. We were very happy in our present home, we had good neighbours, our extended family was not far away, and

we would have our holiday home on wheels. In other words, they would have to carry us out of 13 Jason Place in boxes when the time came.

We didn't rush into an orgy of spending our newly acquired wealth, but we did concentrate on putting our travel plan into action. This revolved around the purchase of a larger caravan and a four wheel drive to tow it with, as we intended to spend a lot of time on the road around Australia and we wanted at least some of the creature comforts of home. The first priority was the four wheel drive, as I knew the delivery times for these were quite long and we'd need to have the vehicle before we took delivery of the caravan. Given the size of van we were contemplating, there were only three real choices of 4WD – a Toyota Land Cruiser, a Nissan Patrol or a Range Rover. We'd looked at these over previous months, but the Land Cruiser seemed to stand out as the best vehicle and we never seriously considered purchasing either of the other two. We went up to Pennant Hills Toyota, had a test drive and liked what we saw, and got a quote from them. We then went to Terry Shields Toyota in Parramatta and got a similar quote, then spent the next two or three weeks playing one off against the other to get the best price. In the end it was a line ball, and we gave Pennant Hills the nod and placed an order. We went for automatic transmission, but I wasn't too happy about the choice of engine. The petrol engine had a poor reputation, but the turbo diesel version was almost \$10,000 dearer, which would have bought a lot of fuel. However this was solved by Toyota having just announced a new generation of petrol engines. We specified automatic transmission, threw in a few extras like air conditioning, bull bar, window tinting and cruise control, and chose a dark green, almost black, paintwork that Beryl liked but wouldn't have been my first choice.

The car issue resolved, we now had to address finding a caravan. Having been caravanners for so many years, we had a pretty good idea of just what we wanted in our retirement van. Basically it would be a full size van, not a pop-top like our present one, with a full en suite bathroom, a full size refrigerator, double bed, full length lounge, plenty of storage space and so on; in short, we were looking for something in excess of twenty feet in length that could be built to our specifications.

At the time there was only one caravan manufacturer in Sydney, Viscount, and their vans were mass produced and fairly ordinary, with little scope for customising. Melbourne was the caravan manufacture centre of Australia, so early in a very hot February we towed our present van down there, set up in a caravan park on the north side of the city and commenced going round the dealerships. We looked at several well known brands and were taken to a couple of factories by the dealers to see the quality that was going into their manufacture. One van particularly attracted us, but it was over 24 feet in length and we decided it was just too big. On the second or third day we ended up at the *World of Caravans* in suburban Bayswater, where four dealers shared the one large site, and in the yard of Canterbury Caravans we were attracted by the Regent brand. We sat down to talk to one of their people, Trevor Baker, and I got the immediate impression that he knew what he was talking about and was not simply a salesman. It turned out that he was also the designer for Regent, which was a small company turning out only three or four vans a week. We told him what we wanted and he went to his filing cabinet and took out a plan of a caravan he had designed for a couple in Torquay that was very close to what we had in mind.

We spent the better part of the next two days talking with Trevor and modifying the plan. Where what we wanted didn't quite suit the plan he would grab a tape measure, take us out to one of the caravans on the forecourt, show us why our idea wouldn't work, and then suggest an alternative. He sent us out to Regent's factory to have a look at the vans being built there, and also to the chassis manufacturer as we wanted a chassis that would withstand rough outback roads. We were all but convinced, but still wanted to see what our van would look like "in the flesh" so to speak. He had no equivalent for sale, but arranged for us to go down to Torquay and look at the van he had designed. The owners made

us most welcome, we liked what we saw, and so the deal was clinched. The cost would be \$30,000, quite a considerable sum then, but we received a very generous trade-in of \$9,400 on the Viscount pop-top. Delivery was scheduled for about eight to ten weeks time. We made a holiday of it going home, taking the Princes Highway and staying in Venus Bay, Port Albert, Bairnsdale, Pambula Beach and Bomaderry.

By early March I was starting to get worried, as the Land Cruiser had still not showed up and I was concerned that the caravan would be ready before we had a vehicle capable of towing it. Pennant Hills Toyota then came back to us, saying that while they still couldn't give a date for our particular vehicle, they had available a plain white one – would we like it instead? We said yes, had some decals put on it to break the plainness, and on 15 March took delivery of our new four wheel drive, surrendering Beryl's little Holden Astra as a trade-in. We loved the Land Cruiser from the start, enjoying the high view from the seats and the car-like comfort. Over the years it would do everything we asked of it, and we found it would pass anything on the highway except a service station. That was its only drawback – the amount of fuel it consumed, and I would often say that there were only two things I missed about work – the people I worked with, and my Caltex card!

Almost immediately we hitched up the Viscount van and spent a few days up at Shoal Bay, on Port Stephens, then back home we attended to a few things around the house. The paling fence on the high side of us needed replacing, and we had to have the carport heightened to accommodate the new caravan. It was a pity we didn't have the foresight to have it done when it was rebuilt after the storm! At the beginning of May we did a one day training course to get to know the capabilities of the Land Cruiser, and how to make it do what it was capable of doing. The course was held on a property on the Wollondilly River, between Mittagong and Wombeyan Caves, so we stayed in a motel at Picton the nights before and after. It was a great day out, with a barbecue lunch laid on, and we were amazed at just what the vehicle could do. We learned how to start, stop, climb and reverse on steep slopes; how to "walk" the car over uneven ground; how to cross rivers through wheel deep water; and many other techniques. The only thing we didn't attempt was driving through mud, as we were due to drive down to Melbourne in two days time and didn't want to be faced with a major car wash first. All in all, the conditions we met on that course were more severe than any we would encounter in our travels, and gave me at least the confidence to tackle off-road driving.

We'd received word from Regent in Melbourne that our caravan was to be commenced around the tenth of May, so on the fourth we left Sydney with the Viscount in tow and made our way down there via Cooma and Bright, arriving on the ninth. We set up in the Big4 caravan park at Coburg, on the north side of Melbourne and over the next few days watched our caravan being built from the chassis up at Regent's Campbellfield factory. Handover day was the fifteenth and the caravan was taken over to Harding's Caravan Services at Bayswater for a final quality check and for the fitting of various accessories. We then went for a test drive with it on the back of the Land Cruiser, the brake controller was adjusted and we towed it across to Canterbury Caravans. There we transferred our goods and chattels over from our faithful Viscount pop-top, handed a cheque to Trevor and the Regent was ours! All in all, the various extras we had added to the van – things like a solar panel, an awning, treatment of the aluminium and upholstery, television set and so on – cost us another \$5400 but we were well pleased with the result. We hadn't proceeded with the air conditioner, as our friends the Farrells had persuaded us that a portable air cooler like the one they'd purchased would do the job just as effectively for far less cost; ultimately this proved to be far from the case.

We very carefully drove a short distance to a nearby caravan park, where we spent the next day and evening repacking our belongings and generally getting familiar with the layout, then headed for home, taking a few days to get there with stops in Bendigo, Moama and Wagga Wagga. The new van towed very well behind the Land Cruiser and I was soon very much at ease pulling it.

We weren't about to let the grass grow under our feet, so after buying some recovery gear for the Land Cruiser we left home on 7th June for a seven weeks trip that would take us up to Queensland and Mackay, then west across to Mount Isa and Tennant Creek, down through Alice Springs and Central Australia to Port Augusta, then home through Broken Hill. As with my overseas trips with the Bank, to give a full account of this and the other trips that we would do in Australia and overseas would take up far too much space here; suffice to say that I'll confine myself to the bare bones of this and later trips we made.

We made our way to Queensland and had a brief stop at Southport, on the Gold Coast, then after a couple of overnight stops spent a week with Tess and Joe Grima on their farm at Mackay, during which we helped their youngest son, Christopher, celebrate his 21st birthday. We continued north to Ayr for a one night stop, then headed west along the Flinders Highway into the cattle country of western Queensland, with overnight stops at the old gold mining town of Charters Towers and the tiny settlement of Julia Creek. Reaching the busy mining town of Mount Isa, we stayed for three days and explored some of its tourist attractions. While in the caravan park in Mount Isa we made a "good morning" acquaintance with a Dutch couple who were touring in a converted Toyota Coaster bus.

Continuing west, we passed through lonely Camooweal, crossed the border and made our way through the vast flatlands of the Barkly Tablelands. We had an overnight stop at a rest area – a first for us – and on reaching the junction with the Stuart Highway at Five Ways we turned south to Tennant Creek. As we arrived at the caravan park we saw the Dutch couple again and waved hello. Continuing south, we stopped to explore the famous Devils Marbles, with an overnight stop at the roadhouse at Wycliffe Well, then continued on to Alice Springs for a stay of eight days. Sure enough, in the caravan park were the Dutch couple, so we decided we'd better introduce ourselves formally. So it was that we met up with Han and Ineke Lammers, who would become our close friends over the next week and indeed over the next few years. They came along with us as we did all the tourist things around Alice, including four wheel drive trips into the Eastern Macdonnells and down to Hermannsburg and Palm Valley. At the end of the eight days they continued south, while we went into the Western Macdonnells and Glen Helen resort, with promises to meet again somewhere "down the road".

We enjoyed the magnificent scenery of Ormiston Gorge, Gosse Bluff and the Western Macdonnells from Glen Helen, then returned to Alice Springs and headed south and west to Kings Canyon, with an overnight stop by the roadside at Palmer River. We stayed three nights at the Canyon, then moved on to Yulara for four nights to explore Ayers Rock (Uluru) and the Olgas. I climbed to the summit of the Rock to prove I could do it, but saw no reason to ever do it again. Continuing south, we visited the opal fields out of Marla, then stopped at Coober Pedy for four nights before moving on to Port Augusta, Broken Hill, Cobar and home.

Either before or after the Central Australian trip – I'm not sure which – the extended family had got together for Lauren's christening at Graham's church at Forestville. The young lady hogged the cameras and seemed to take a great interest in proceedings. With Grandma Moad, four generations were present.

Earlier in the year I'd spent a good deal of time planning our first overseas trip in retirement, to Canada and the United States, and on 17th September we embarked on an eight week adventure. We flew there and back on Northwest again, this time in the back of the plane, but as the tickets cost us nothing we could hardly complain – we'd amassed sufficient frequent flier points with them on previous trips to cover us both. We flew to Vancouver, with changes of planes in Los Angeles and Seattle, and needless to say were pretty tired by the time we arrived at our destination. The next eleven days took us on a

coach tour of Vancouver, then across on the ferry to Victoria and Vancouver Island. There among other things we visited the beautiful Butchart Gardens before driving north the length of the island to Port Hardy, where we boarded a ferry that conveyed us five hundred kilometres through the beautiful but fog-bound Inside Passage to Prince Rupert, on the mainland. From there we toured the heartland of British Columbia and the Rockies, stopping in Prince George, Jasper, Banff and Kamloops and visiting many places along the way. All too soon we were back in Vancouver and the end of the tour. The whole group had been a good one, but we made particular friends of an English couple, John and Betty Cook, a friendship that endures to this day. The four of us went to see *Phantom Of The Opera* together on our last night in Vancouver.

From Vancouver we flew via Seattle to Detroit, where we stayed with Betty Rohn for a few days. In Detroit we rented a car and continued on back into Canada, making our way to Niagara Falls via Stratford and London and the shore of Lake Erie. The next stop was Toronto for a few days, where we saw an excellent performance of *Showboat* at the brand new York Theatre, then we continued east along the Lake Ontario shoreline to Kingston, Ottawa and Montreal. After spending a few days in each place our next destination was the beautiful and historic city of Quebec. The ISWG were having their Fall meeting there for the first time, and I'd deliberately planned our arrival to coincide with it, so we were able to take part in the social programme and of course meet up with all my old friends again.

We headed south from Quebec and back into the USA and the state of Maine. We overnighted in Bar Harbor, then followed the coast south through Camden and Bath, then inland into the White Mountains of New Hampshire. We stayed a night in Manchester, where I unsuccessfully tried to contact my uncle Harold Tod and his wife, but as expected they were away in their motorhome somewhere. Our travels continued into Massachusetts, where we visited the historic American Revolution towns of Concord and Lexington, then continued on into Rhode Island for an overnight stop in Newport. Moving back into Massachusetts we visited the Battleship Cove naval museum in Fall River and the old whaling town of New Bedford before reaching Boston for a stay of three nights.

From Boston we had a long day's drive down the freeway system to Philadelphia, bypassing the great metropolis of New York; after the experience of a few years earlier when I took ill there, Beryl had no desire to revisit the Big Apple. On a very wet day we explored Philadelphia and saw the Liberty Bell, and also visited the little town of New Hope, where I'd been taken during one of my working stays in New York. Our next stop was Washington for three days, far too little time to explore the many sights of that city. Leaving Washington, we made our way across country through Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia and Ohio, with a couple of overnight stops, back to Detroit and Betty Rohn.

We spent a few more days with Betty, then said our goodbyes and flew down to San Diego, where we rented another car, visited the impressive Wild Animal Park and had a pleasant dinner with an ex-IBM employee, Jim Dishun, and his wife; Jim had worked with the Bank for a couple of years and I'd written him a personal reference to help him get work back in the States. The last leg of our travels came as we drove north to Los Angeles, spent the better part of a day at Universal Studios, then drove to the airport for our flight back to Australia. It had been a very intensive but most enjoyable tour around the two countries, and I enjoyed it more because for once I wasn't encumbered by work!

So 1993 and our first year of retirement came to an end, and we certainly had experienced no difficulty in occupying our time. In what spare time there was I'd commenced to build pergolas in the back yard to accommodate and protect the now very large collection of bromeliads we'd amassed, a job I would finish, with Russell's help, the following year. Our much loved dog, Morgan, was of course not impressed by these long absences; thankfully Beryl's sister Sue and husband Graham were able to look

after him. However Mugs' health was deteriorating and there were several visits to the vet, culminating in the loss of his manhood in an attempt to improve his condition.

We had the usual family Christmas, with Lauren now old enough to take some interest in the proceedings and tearing gift parcels open to see what was inside. The year ended when we joined a four wheel drive excursion, run by the people who had given us lessons, which took us through the bush tracks south of Lake Burragorang to the old silver mining ghost town of Yerranderie, where we spent New Year's Eve, returning to Sydney via the Grose River Valley and Oberon. It was an enjoyable trip, generally easy driving but with a bit of interesting off-roading involved. The accommodation at Yerranderie was Spartan but adequate, and the company was good.

The year 1994 began with us going down to Canberra with the caravan for a few days. Our Dutch friends Han and Ineke, having been around Australia since we left them in Alice Springs, were making the capital their last stop before going to Melbourne and shipping their Coaster motorhome over to New Zealand. We joined them there and showed them around the place, including a bit of off-road driving in the mountains behind the city. At the time disastrous bushfires were raging in Sydney, with many homes destroyed, and the day after we arrived we got a phone call from our neighbours to reassure us that everything was all right at home. However a fire had been deliberately lit in the bush near North Rocks and had raced up the gully to a point about three hundred metres from our house, and sparks and embers had been flying towards Jason Place. Son Russell was away at the time, helping a mate whose own home was in danger, so our neighbour's son had stood on our roof with a hose to extinguish any sparks that might fall. That day Canberra itself had no fires but was thick with bushfire smoke that had drifted down from Sydney. At the end of our stay we said goodbye to our friends, with a firm invitation from them to visit them in The Netherlands at some future time.

Sadly, Morgan's condition continued to deteriorate, cancer was identified and in February we had to have him put to sleep, as it was now out of the question to go away and leave him with somebody else.

We allowed the worst of the summer heat to pass, then embarked on our next caravan trip towards the end of February, to the island State of Tasmania. The fares across on the ferry, with a caravan the size of ours, were fairly horrific and it required a stay of some eight weeks to justify the cost; in the event, we found we could easily have stayed there longer. We headed towards Melbourne with overnight stops at Gundagai, Corowa and Kilmore, and from the latter drove to Regent's factory to have a couple of minor faults in the van rectified. We spent two nights in Melbourne, during which we visited the Victorian Caravan Show, then made our way to Port Melbourne and boarded the *Spirit of Tasmania*, a slow and frustrating process due to the lackadaisical approach of the dock workers. The crossing was smooth, but the cabin was small and stuffy and we didn't sleep well.

We started our tour of the island in Devonport, with side trips to places of interest, then it was off to Cradle Mountain for two and a half magic days. I did a half day walk in rather misty and wet conditions around and high above Lake Dove and across the base of Cradle Mountain itself; despite the conditions the scenery was stunning. The following day I took some shorter walks, again in misty rain, but on the morning we were to leave the skies were clear and I hurriedly drove back to Lake Dove for magnificent shots of Cradle Mountain in all its glory. From Cradle Mountain we made Mole Creek our next stop, then continued on via Deloraine and Westbury to Launceston. We explored the city and its surroundings, including the Tamar region and Ben Lomond, finding much of interest to see in that area.

From Launceston we headed to the east coast via Derby to St Helens, where we spent a few days before following the coast down through Bicheno and Triabunna to Port Arthur. From Triabunna we took a ferry across to historic Maria Island for a day's exploration on foot there, while at Port Arthur we

naturally visited the atmospheric ruins of the penal colony. Hobart was our next destination, by way of historic Richmond, and we spent a week based in Tasmania's capital city, taking in the sights and doing several day and half day trips in the surrounding countryside, including the Huon Peninsula, New Norfolk and of course Mount Wellington. While in Hobart we had dinner with Beryl's cousin Ray Stacey, who had been at our wedding, and his wife Nicola. Leaving the city, we headed south to Dover to explore the scenic attractions of that part of the island.

Passing back through Hobart, our next stop was Mount Field National Park, then we continued north, picking up the Lyell Highway and heading through the hydro-electric country to Lake St Claire. We continued on to Queenstown in now fine weather but with quite a bit of mist, making several photo stops along the way. On the steep winding descent into Queenstown I could see that much of the vegetation was returning and the "moonscape" effect of the 1950s was now much softened. We drove down to Strahan for a cruise on Macquarie Harbour and the Gordon River, toured the Mt Lyell Mine and generally explored the very scenic area. Next stop was the old mining town of Zeehan, with its excellent museum, from where we did some side trips to Teepookana, Granville Harbour and Rosebery.

Leaving Zeehan, we headed north towards Burnie and the coast by way of the steep and winding Hellyer Gorge, and here disaster nearly overtook us. A couple of days earlier I had been fiddling under the Land Cruiser's dashboard and had accidentally detached the wire to the electric brake controller, meaning the caravan had no independent brakes. We started to descend the gorge and, entering a right hand bend in second gear at no more than 20kph, we suddenly found the car going slowly sideways, then with a crunch the caravan ploughed into the side of it in a complete jack-knife. We had hit black ice and with no brakes, the caravan tried to overtake the car; fortunately we were heading for the high side of the cutting and not the precipice! We were shaken, but the damage was superficial and I was able to reverse the jack-knife and continue on. Later on, repairs to the caravan cost about \$80, but the car had buckled panels and would cost over \$3000 – luckily covered by insurance. We continued on to Stanley, in the north west corner, then headed east to Burnie.

Our last day came and we drove from Burnie along the coast through the quaintly named Penguin back to Devonport, and so boarded the *Spirit* for the return voyage to Melbourne after a most enjoyable stay in the Apple Isle. The passage across Bass Strait was thankfully reasonably calm again, and next morning we disembarked in Melbourne and without further ado took the Princes Highway and Freeway out of the city and through Gippsland to Bairnsdale, where we stayed two nights and had lunch with old friends Marie and Geoff Downey, who had long since moved there from Melbourne. Continuing on, when we reached Cann River we left the Princes Highway and struck north up into the Monaro uplands and Bombala for an overnight stop. Passing straight through Cooma, and skirting Canberra, we had a final night at Goulburn before arriving home on 1st May after a great ten weeks away.

We had a few weeks at home, during which I completed work on the pergolas and bush houses in the back yard, before our next trip away. Our niece Raelene, Graham and Sue Towle's daughter, had her 21st birthday party on 16 July, which we celebrated with a big party at Northmead Bowling Club – it was just unbelievable how the time had flown since she was a babe in arms!

The very next morning we left on a journey that would take us to Fraser Island and up the Queensland coast as far as Mackay. We had arranged to meet up with John and Norma Farrell and visit the island together, and had rented a flat there in advance, but would travel up independently and meet at Hervey Bay. We had overnight stops at Karuah and Yamba, then spent two nights at Southport on the Gold Coast, and on the first night had dinner with Ken Willett, my old General Manager, and his wife Heather at the Southport Yacht Club. Heather, coincidentally, was the daughter of Bob Henderson, the gruff old Assistant Inspector of my Procedures and Research days at the Bank. The second night we dined at the

home of old friends Don and Annette McAlpine up at Capalaba, in Brisbane; Beryl had looked after their boys during her child-minding days.

After another overnight stop at Gympie we reached the Point Vernon Caravan Park at Hervey Bay, and the Farrells arrived half an hour later. The plan was to leave the Farrell's car and the caravans on site there while we toured Fraser Island in our Land Cruiser, so the next morning, with the Cruiser stacked to the gunwales with the belongings of four people, plus supplies for a week, we drove to River Heads and boarded the barge to take us across the water to Woolgoolba Creek on the island. On arrival we dropped the pressure in the tyres and headed across through the forests to the eastern shore. This was my first real taste of sand driving, although I'd done some in Central Australia, but the good tracks presented no problems and there were plenty of places to pull over when meeting traffic coming the other way. Reaching the eastern shore we turned north and on the hard sand of the beach it was just like driving on a highway, except for slowing down to cross the numerous freshwater creeks running across the beach. We reached our destination, Happy Valley, and settled into our clean and neat flat.

Over the next seven days we thoroughly explored the island, but all good things had to come to an end. We drove back across the island to Kingfisher Bay Resort, from where we caught the barge back to River Heads and so to Hervey Bay. We had the next day there, cleaning the salt and sand from the Land Cruiser, then the four of us drove north to Bundaberg for a few nights. The time came to part, with us continuing north to Mackay and the Farrells heading south and home. We had a long day of driving – some 660 kilometres – to our friends Joe and Tess Grima on their cane farm. We enjoyed a few days in their company, then took an inland route back to Sydney through the Peak Downs to the coal mining towns of Clermont and Capella before reaching Emerald. We had planned a stop there, and found that the annual Gemfest was on at nearby Anakie. We spent a day out there, also visiting the gemfield towns of Sapphire and Rubyvale, exploring the fields, visiting a mine and doing a bit of window shopping at the galleries.

From Emerald we continued south through Springsure, Rolleston and Injune to Roma, then resumed our journey south through sheep and then cotton country and the towns of Surat, St George and Dirranbandi. At Hebel we crossed back into NSW and continued on to the opal mining town of Lightning Ridge for a few days. A final overnight stop at Wellington Caves brought us to the end of our holiday, although by this time I'd stopped using the expression. You can't take "holidays" when you're retired – a holiday from what? I now prefer to call our meanderings around Australia "fact finding missions"!

It was now the middle of August, but we were by no means finished with our travel for the year. Less than a month later we were on the road again, this time to visit the wild and beautiful Flinders Ranges and outback South Australia. Just before we left we purchased a large Engel refrigerator to put in the Land Cruiser, giving us extra cold storage and enabling us to carry fresh food and cold drinks when away from the caravan. At the same time we had an auxiliary battery installed in the vehicle, necessitating a considerable amount of extra wiring under the bonnet to provide power back to the Engel. The significance of this work will be seen later in this narrative.

Leaving Sydney, we headed west over the Blue Mountains and across to distant Broken Hill, with overnight stops at Dubbo and Cobar. We spent a couple of days in the Silver City, then headed into South Australia and the town of Quorn, at the southern end of the Flinders Ranges. Using it as a base we explored the gorges and ruins of the area, did a self drive four wheel drive tour on a private property, and rode the historic Pichi Richi railway. From Quorn we continued north to Hawker across the Willochra Plain and stayed there a few days, exploring that part of the Flinders. Our next stop was a little further north at Rawnsley Park, a cattle station converted to a caravan park and resort a little south of the Pound. From there we did a couple of day trips through some of the most outstanding scenery of

the Central Flinders Ranges, and I walked into the Pound itself as far as the lookout on Wangara Hill, from where a breathtaking view of the Pound could be seen. While staying at Rawnsley Park we made the acquaintance of a couple from Seven Hills in Sydney, Ron and Wendy Haspell, who became our firm friends over the following years. Heading north again through Blinman, we stayed at Angorichina Village, from where we covered the marvellous wild countryside of the Northern Flinders on a number of day trips, then continued north in very dusty conditions to Arkaroola, at the very top of the Ranges, for more days of exploration.

The time came to leave and we headed south again, then turned west at Balcanoona towards the Leigh Creek road. A few kilometres along the track the dashboard lit up and I quickly stopped. We'd broken a fan belt, and had no spare! Some people camping nearby rigged up a temporary one with rope and pantyhose and we got a little further, accompanied by another party in a 4WD, until that one broke. Several spare belts were tried, all the wrong size, so another pair of pantyhose was found and we struggled on. Four pairs later we reached civilisation at Copley, where we thanked out good Samaritans and had a new belt fitted at the service station there. We resumed our journey, heading north past the Leigh Creek coal fields to the outback town of Marree, where we left the caravan on site and set out to drive the well known Oodnadatta Track. This followed the alignment of the old 'Ghan railway to Alice Springs, long since abandoned, and for the next two days we had a fascinating journey, visiting ruined sidings, old bridges, the remains of old railway villages and bubbling mound springs, all set in a wild and arid landscape on the fringe of the Simpson Desert.

We overnighted en route at the fairly primitive but atmospheric pub at tiny William Creek, where aircraft parked in the street outside, and the following night at the equally primitive and less atmospheric pub in Oodnadatta. From there we took a track westward through the Arkaringa Hills and the Painted Desert to Cadney Homestead, on the Stuart Highway, where we turned south to Coober Pedy. There we had a rather expensive night in the Desert Cave Hotel, in an underground room, with the walls and ceiling being the gouged sandstone left by mining and painted with a sealant. With the light turned out we were left in absolute pitch blackness. From Coober Pedy we took another rather rough track eastwards past Lake Cadibarrawirracanna – the longest place name in Australia – back to William Creek and then down the Oodnadatta Track once more to Marree and our caravan. Next day we packed up and headed south to Port Augusta for a couple of nights before making our way to Nuriootpa in the Barossa Valley, where the vineyards of the Valley were a great contrast to the wilderness country we'd experienced over the past few weeks. Two nights in Mildura were followed by overnight stops in Narrandera and Cowra; in the latter we called on Beryl's Uncle Charlie and Aunt Gladys Moad. The final leg to Bathurst and over the Blue Mountains brought us home after a great five week "fact finding mission".

Back at home, we visited the theatre to see a revival of the musical *Cats*, which was very good. Around the same time we'd decided that we didn't really need two vehicles and that the Holden Berlina was sitting there doing nothing while we were travelling, so in December I advertised it in the *Sydney Morning Herald* for \$14,000 or near offer. The day the ad appeared the phone rang at seven, the caller asked a few questions and by eight thirty was on our doorstep. I reduced the price to \$13,400 and had an immediate sale, and inwardly cursed myself as I could probably have sold it for the full price. However we were still well ahead on the deal, having bought it for \$11,500 two years earlier. In the same month Beryl was called up for jury duty in Parramatta – something that never ever happened to me. Her doctor, Lesley McKinley, gave her a certificate stating that back problems would be aggravated by sitting in one position all day, and this was accepted and she was excused from any further call-up. The excuse was genuine, as Beryl was having increasing problems with arthritis in her left hip and knee and was in constant pain and discomfort, especially at night, although she rarely complained.

Our travels for the year were still not over, however. Attracted by an advertisement, I'd booked a one week stay on Lord Howe Island and in early December we flew over there and stayed at the Pine Trees Guest House. The accommodation there was simple but comfortable and the meals excellent; one of our fellow guests was the television personality Andrew Denton. We rented bicycles and explored the few island roads on them, and generally it was a delightful week that we spent there. We did short walks, and I did longer ones; watched the muttonbirds fly in at night; took a cruise around the island; went deep sea fishing and caught a swag of kingfish, some of which we took back to Sydney with us; fed the fish at Ned's Beach; and in my case snorkelled the coral in the lagoon and played a round of golf on the island's tricky little course. An elderly lady was staying at the guest house, having come to the island for the installation of the Catholic priest there. She was unable to ride a bicycle or climb into a minibus, so at her expense we hired the only rental car on the island and drove her around to see the sights. All in all it was a most enjoyable seven days that we spent there, and I'd love to go back some time.

We started off 1995 by going to see a repeat performance of *Cats* at the Theatre Royal, another excellent production which Beryl in particular thoroughly enjoyed. We also had the roof of the house refurbished, leaving it looking like new, and I pensioned off the PC I'd bought from the Bank and invested in a new one. I found I was using the computer a lot for photography, keeping track of finances and many other purposes, and that it was a good way of keeping the old brain active.

The England cricket team were in Australia on an Ashes tour, and I decided to go along to watch one day of play in the Sydney Test. I found myself sitting next to an Englishman, and we started chatting. We discovered we'd both been born in Lancashire and that he was also in banking, with Natwest. He now lived in Rainhill, just to the east of Liverpool. In the course of conversation I mentioned that we planned to visit England in 1996 and I needed to track down some of my cousins in the Liverpool area, as I'd long lost contact with them. He offered to help when he got back to England, and even invited us to stay with him when we got over there. So began a friendship with Des Platt that has endured to this day. True to his word, back in England he perused the telephone directories and found my cousin Geoffrey Welding listed with a photographic studio in Cheshire. Coincidentally, about the same time Geoffrey had somehow found an address for me, so contact was re-established after many years.

In early February it was time to travel again, and we spent just over five weeks touring the NSW south coast and Victoria's Gippsland, getting as far as Melbourne. Once again we'd arranged to meet up with John and Norma Farrell, but we left Sydney ahead of them and had a few days at pretty Huskisson, on Jervis Bay, before moving further south to our rendezvous at Merry Beach, a little north of Batemans Bay. The Farrells joined us, we celebrated Norma's birthday and spent three days there before moving on down to Pambula Beach, from where we covered the Eden and Merimbula districts. We also had dinner at "Ringo's" *Panda* restaurant in Merimbula one evening. Our next stop was pretty Mallacoota Inlet, across the border in Victoria, for a few nights, and then Lakes Entrance for three days.

We parted company with the Farrells at Lakes Entrance, with them returning to Sydney and us continuing on to Melbourne. Our sole purpose for going there was to revisit the Caravan and Camping Show at the Exhibition Buildings, but we also caught up with Trevor Baker and the crew at Canterbury Caravans. The Show was quite good, although I felt not as comprehensive as the 1994 Show. We made a few purchases of camping gear, which was our main objective, but were also attracted by an exhibit for an LP gas conversion firm, who had converted a Land Cruiser similar to ours to LPG. After discussion with the representative, and a couple of hours thought, we decided to go ahead with a gas conversion and made arrangements to return to Melbourne a few days later.

In very hot weather we moved down to Phillip Island, wishing now that we had gone ahead and installed a proper air conditioner in the caravan, as the portable one gave little relief from the heat and humidity.

We explored the many attractions and scenic landscape of the island, including of course the evening fairy penguin parade, which we'd seen back in 1987. On our last day there we returned to suburban Lilydale in Melbourne and had the gas conversion carried out; the company lent us an old "bomb" and we took ourselves up into the Dandenongs while the work was being done. We started our journey back to Sydney, stopping at Traralgon and then, continuing along the Princes Highway, passed through Bairnsdale and Lakes Entrance to stay a couple of days at Orbost, during which time we encountered a problem with the new LPG system and had to return to Nowa Nowa to get it fixed. Further stops at Merimbula and Broulee Beach brought us home after, as always, an enjoyable trip away.

My 55th birthday in April saw my superannuation become available, so it was necessary to do some serious financial planning so that we'd be comfortable, dollar wise, for the rest of our lives. Bob Wicht at Coopers & Lybrand put us on to one of their financial planners, Russell Thomas, and with his advice we drew up a plan of how best to invest our assets. With the lump sum of my contributions plus interest, added to which was the rollover funds remaining from my retirement payout, we had a reasonably tidy sum to invest. Russell advised a spread over five separate managed funds, plus some cash in call accounts and term deposits, and accordingly we invested the monies evenly between Bankers Trust, Potter Warburg (later Merrill Lynch), Barclays, Perpetual and MLC Property, with cash reserves in term deposits and bank accounts, and the Commonwealth Bank shares, which were still at a modest price, rounding out the portfolio. My final cashed out salary on retirement had been just under \$140,000, which gave me an indexed life pension of \$53,000 a year, enough to live on quite comfortably.

We were certainly making the most of our new found freedom and the end of April saw the commencement of a journey of just over four months to the Northern Territory and the Kimberley region of Western Australia. On the first day we drove to Dubbo, and I'd just checked in to the caravan park there when my old boss and mentor, Ron Turner, and his wife Faye arrived in their motorhome. It was the first time I'd seen Ron in many years, so we had a pleasant reunion over a few drinks. We headed out through Narromine to Nyngan, then followed the dead straight Mitchell Highway across the great western plains to the town of Bourke., where we arrived on Show Day. We spent the next day looking around the town, then headed north into Queensland in rainy conditions, with overnight stops in Cunnamulla and Charleville before passing through Blackall and reaching Barcaldine.

Our next stop was Longreach, where we visited the Stockman's Hall of Fame, then Winton, a town crammed with memorabilia of Banjo Paterson's song *Waltzing Matilda*. While there, and accompanied by another couple from the caravan park, Charlie and Joyce Pike, we drove out to Lark Quarry, where the footprints of a dinosaur stampede millions of years earlier could be clearly seen in the rock. In again wet conditions we moved on to Cloncurry, with a stop in the small town of Kynuna, and between Cloncurry and Mount Isa we encountered our first hill since Dubbo! At Mount Isa we caught up again with the Pikes, and also with John and Faye Robinson, a couple we'd met firstly in Barcaldine and again in Longreach. While there we had heavier rear coil springs fitted to the Land Cruiser, which made a great deal of difference to its clearance when loaded down with Engel, camping goods and the like. From Mount Isa our next stop was the rest area at 41 Mile Bore, where we'd overnighted on our previous journey in that part of the country.

Reaching the Stuart Highway at Three Ways, we turned north and with various stops at points of interest reached the tiny settlement of Daly Waters. Continuing up the highway, we made a stop and looked around the tiny town of Larrimah, once the railhead of the Northern Territory Railway, before reaching our next destination, Mataranka. Moving on to Katherine, we spent a few days in that pleasant outback town, a highlight of which was a cruise up the Katherine Gorge. Continuing north, we deviated from the highway to beautiful Edith Falls and stayed a night in the unpowered campsite there. The next stop was Batchelor, once the service town for the now worked-out Rum Jungle uranium mine, but en

route we stopped in Pine Creek and then Adelaide River, where we visited the immaculately maintained War Cemetery. We used Batchelor as the base from which to make two day trips into Litchfield National Park, with its rugged landscapes and beautiful waterfalls. Batchelor behind us, we drove on to Darwin and set up in a caravan park in the outer suburb of Malak. We spent a very hot and humid week in the northern capital, taking in the many sights that the city offered.

On the move again, we headed a little way south out of the city to Berry Springs for a few days. While there Charlie and Joyce Pike once more caught up with us for a couple of days, and we met another couple, Wally and Merle Robinson, with whom we would meet up again further along the road. Leaving Berry Springs behind us, we took a long drive east to Kakadu National Park, where we stayed a few days at Jabiru and then Coinda. We found Kakadu a quite different park to Litchfield, with a more open landscape and only a couple of waterfalls, but with large expanses of billabong and the escarpment of Arnhem Land a constant backdrop to the plains. We took the lower road out of Kakadu back to Pine Creek, where we spent a couple of days before continuing back down the Stuart Highway to Katherine, to spend another two nights, reuniting with the Pikes and Wally and Merle Robinson. Leaving Katherine, we now headed west on the Victoria Highway towards the Western Australia border. Reaching the Victoria River and Gregory National Park before lunchtime, we set up in the rather primitive campsite at the roadhouse and I did a couple of walks around the very rugged and beautiful river valley and escarpment. Next day we continued on through the little town of Timber Creek, with the distinctive boab trees now starting to make an appearance. Reaching the border we stopped for quarantine inspection, then left the highway and drove down to the Lake Argyle Holiday Resort, our base for the next few days. There we took a memorable half day cruise on the waters of the huge man-made lake, stopping at a tiny island in its middle where the unique zebra rock of the area could be picked up. However the highlight of our stay was a full day helicopter excursion to the Bungle Bungles.

We flew the length of the Lake Argyle shoreline, looking down on freshwater crocodiles basking at the water's edge, then across the wetlands and over endless spinifex and grasslands. Our route crossed above the Bow River diamond mines, then the rugged Osmond Range rose before us, a series of uplifted sandstone escarpments rolling southward like huge ocean waves. Ahead of us in the distance emerged a vast plain, and in its centre the unmistakable central massif and beehive formations of the Bungle Bungles, and soon we were flying over the spectacular landscape of weirdly eroded formations with their coloured bands, deep narrow gorges and chasms and dry creek beds. It was a breathtaking sight. We landed at the Bellburn airstrip to refuel and for a comfort stop, then were in the air again, circling once more over the massif before heading back to the Osmond Range. We landed at a beautiful tree lined pool the pilot called Helicopter Springs, as it could be reached only by air or a long hard walk, and there we ate lunch and I had a swim. Back in flight, we headed towards and over the Argyle diamond mine, then followed the Ragged and Carr-Boyd Ranges, the latter with its sheer sandstone cliffs, to pick up the Ord River and so make our way back to the resort after an unforgettable day.

We moved on to Kununurra, "capital" of the Ord River district, where we left the caravan and spent several days camping along the Gibb River Road, with two nights at the well known El Questro Station. On the way back to Kununurra we detoured to the town of Wyndham and its Five Rivers Lookout. The next day, driving down the main street, acrid white smoke started to billow from under the right hand side of the Land Cruiser's bonnet. Quickly pulling to the side of the road, we jumped out, sprung the bonnet catch and, on opening the bonnet, found the electrical wiring from the auxiliary battery well and truly burning. Quick action with pliers to disable both batteries, and a rapid discharge of the fire extinguisher, left us with a mess of white powder, burnt plastic and a sinking feeling. A kind lady gave me a lift to the Toyota dealer, who was also the RAC agent. The car was towed to their premises, where they took one look and sent it on to an auto electrician. To cut a long story short, when we had the auxiliary battery fitted twelve months earlier the wiring had been laid over a sharp edged bracket that

had over time cut through the outer layer and finally caused a short and the fire. It was fortunate it happened in the town and not out in the remote wilderness. I sent a stern letter to the people who did the installation, and eventually we were refunded the cost of the repair.

We were provided with a rental car by our insurance company, and Wally and Merle Robinson, who were also staying at the caravan park, looked after us very well while the Cruiser was being repaired. Once mended, we moved on to Halls Creek for a couple of nights, where we were caught up by the Robinsons and their friends, Ken and Eve Bowden. We didn't know it then, but the Bowdens were to become two of our dearest friends. The six of us travelled to Fitzroy Crossing, where we all took a cruise in Geikie Gorge, and then on to Derby. After a couple of days we left the caravan once more and drove the Gibb River Road from its western end, spending a week camping amid the stunning gorges of the Kimberley. Back at Derby, we continued west to the old pearling port of Broome for a ten day stay, during which we thoroughly explored the town and environs in a most enjoyable stay, as well as watching the Broome Cup horse race. The Bowdens were in the same caravan park, but when we left they were heading west to Perth, while we were retracing our steps back to Katherine.

Leaving Broome with real regret, we commenced our journey back east, as time didn't permit us going "round the block" on this occasion – we already had our next trip booked! We overnighted at a rest area on the Mary River, then left the caravan at the roadhouse in the little Aboriginal settlement of Turkey Creek while we drove in and camped in the Bungle Bungles for a couple of nights, another unforgettable experience. The next stop was Kununurra again, then the little town of Timber Creek for two nights. Reaching Katherine, we stopped there only to do some shopping before heading south on the Stuart Highway for an overnight stop at Larrimah. Reaching Daly Waters, we left the Stuart Highway and turned east on the single lane bitumen Carpentaria Highway, to spend a couple of nights at the Heartbreak Hotel at tiny Cape Crawford. There we visited remote Borroloola and I took a helicopter ride into the Lost City, very similar to the one in Litchfield National Park but more extensive.

From Cape Crawford we took the Tableland Highway south to meet up with the Carpentaria Highway and turned east towards Mount Isa. After overnighting at a rest area at Soudan Station, we drove on through Camooweal to the Isa, stopped there only for fuel and continued on to Cloncurry. A further overnight stop at Hughenden followed, then it was through Charters Towers and we were on the Queensland coast at Alva Beach, near Ayr. We had a couple of nights there before continuing on to Mackay for a week with Joe and Tess Grima. Leaving them, we again took the back road through Moranbah to Clermont, where we stayed a night, then it was on through Emerald to Rubyvale and a couple of days fossicking unsuccessfully for sapphires. A long drive followed through Emerald, Springsure and Rolleston to Moura for an overnight stop, then through Theodore to Chinchilla for another night. The next leg took us east to Dalby, then south to the little town of Texas, just north of the NSW border, for the night. Next day we were back into NSW and made our way to Inverell for a couple of days, then it was a final very wet night in Singleton before we arrived home at the beginning of September after a great eighteen weeks seeing the "real" Australia and missing the Sydney winter.

We were home for six weeks, just long enough to draw breathe, before we were off again on our final trip of the year, this time to New Zealand. We flew Economy Class on QANTAS, but received an upgrade to Business Class on the return flight in an almost empty aircraft. On retirement I'd received an unexpected (and unintentional from the Bank's perspective) retirement benefit from the Bank. During my final working years there executives like myself flew economy class within Australia, but were given free membership of the QANTAS Club so that we had the benefit of the airport lounges when travelling. When I retired the Bank forgot to take my name off the list, and it was 1997 before someone woke up to the fact. So it was that we had the benefit of the Business Class lounge at each end of our trip.

We flew into Auckland and picked up a pre-arranged rental car from Hertz, a Ford Telstra, as we were travelling on a package that include air fares, car hire and accommodation at a chain of motels throughout the country. We spent a few days there seeing the sights, then moved north through kauri country to Paihia, on the lovely Bay of Islands, for a few more days with the highlight being a cruise on the bay out to the Hole In The Rock. We then made our way back down through Auckland to the city of Hamilton for an overnight stop before continuing on to the thermal wonderland of Rotorua, with a visit en route to the rather disappointing Waitomo Caves en route. After exhausting the sights there we continued down through thermal country to Lake Taupo, from which base we visited Tongariro National park and the volcano of Mount Ruapehu. This had erupted only a few weeks earlier, and we were treated to the sight of black snow where ash had settled on its slopes. From Taupo we headed to the east coast and the art deco city of Napier, rebuilt after being almost totally destroyed by an earthquake in 1931. Next we headed south down the spine of the North Island through Hastings, Dannevirke and Palmerston North to the country's capital, Wellington, for a stay of two nights.

Our exploration of the North Island finished, although we'd hardly skimmed the surface of its attractions, we checked the Telstar in and took the ferry across Cook Strait in beautiful weather and amid beautiful scenery to the port of Picton, on the South Island. There Mr Hertz gave us a free upgrade to a brand new Ford Fairmont. We looked around the town and then followed the scenic Queen Charlotte Sound route over the mountains to Havelock and on to the city of Nelson for a very wet two days. Then followed a spectacular day's driving down to the west coast through the rugged Buller Gorge and spectacular mountain scenery. Reaching the coast, we continued south through Greymouth to our destination for the night, Hokitika. With the snow covered Southern Alps now in view we followed the coast south through the gold mining town of Ross to Franz Josef, where not unexpectedly rain was falling – it often does in that part of New Zealand! However I was able to do a walk out to the face of the Franz Josef Glacier before we continued on to Fox Glacier Village for our overnight stop in now clearing weather. Early the next morning we took an unforgettable helicopter flight over the two glaciers and the western slopes of the Alps in glorious sunshine under cloudless skies, but as we took to the road again cloud was forming. I took a walk to the face of the Fox Glacier before we continued south in alternating showers and sunshine, continuing to follow the coast down to Haast, our next overnight stop.

From Haast we turned inland, following the river and then climbing high into the mountains through the spectacular Haast Pass, with snowy peaks looming through the mist all around us. Cloud and mist continued as we reached the top of the Pass and continued east, but on reaching Lake Wanaka the sun burst forth and the weather changed dramatically to blue skies. Many photo stops were made as we followed the road through lake and mountain scenery to Hawea and the town of Lake Wanaka, from where we took a narrow and spectacular back road through the mountains to Queenstown. We stayed there three days, taking a lake cruise and a thrilling jet boat ride and generally exploring the area, before heading south through Kingston and Te Anau for an overnight stop at a motor lodge at Te Anau Downs, on the road to Milford Sound. The next day we drove the spectacular road down to Milford Sound and took a cruise on its waters; while light to moderate rain fell throughout it was spectacular for the waterfalls descending from the peaks, their tops lost in the mist.

We returned to Te Anau Downs for the night, then headed through Te Anau and Gore to the east coast and Dunedin for two nights, visiting the Otago Peninsula while there. Then it was north along the coast to Moeraki and Oamaru, before turning inland and climbing towards the distant Alps and an overnight stop at Omarama. The next day we drove to Twizel and took the road along Lake Pukaki to Mount Cook Village. It was perfect weather and New Zealand's highest mountain emerged absolutely clear. We spent some time in this alpine wonderland before returning to Twizel and continuing north and east through Lake Tekapo, Fairlie and Geraldine to once more reach the coast and so through Ashburton to

Christchurch. This very English city was our last stop, and after a couple of days exploring and visiting its port of Lyttleton we reluctantly gave Mr Hertz his car back at the airport and headed home after a very enjoyable if rather too fast-moving tour of the Shaky Isles.

This brought to an end our travels for 1995, and indeed it was only a few weeks to Christmas. As far as Christmases were concerned we'd now settled into a regular pattern of family gatherings, with Christmas lunch generally alternating between ourselves and Sue and Graham Towle. Graham, Michele and Lauren themselves would alternate between our gathering and Michele's parents; Mum Moad, our Russell and Sue and Graham's Raelene and Greg would of course be included, as would any visitor who happened to be staying. As the years progressed and Sue and Graham moved to a new house not far from us in North Rocks, we eased out of hosting the lunch as they had more room than us to accommodate the numbers, especially when Raelene and Greg married and grandchildren came along.

Around this time we received some bad news from our new friends Ken and Eve Bowden, who we'd met in the Kimberley the previous year. They'd continued on "round the block" to Perth and were making their way back to Melbourne across the Nullarbor. On leaving Balladonia, with Eve driving, a few kilometres down the road their rig overturned. Ken was relatively unscathed but Eve sustained nasty injuries to her leg and was taken by Flying Doctor back to Kalgoorlie. The car and caravan was a write-off, but the main thing was that they were both alive! The accident didn't deter them and when Eve had recovered they would buy a new car and Regent caravan and resume their travels.

Speaking earlier of room in the house, we found we'd reached the situation where our house was not really suited to accommodate us in our retirement activities. It had never been a large house, and because we'd got along on a single income and had been reluctant to take on a large mortgage, we'd never made any extensions other than the screened porch room at the back of the house. At the time Russell was still living with us, occupying the converted garage room, and I was using Graham's old bedroom to house my computer, leaving Beryl with only the dining room table on which to pursue her craft interests. By now she was dabbling in folk art as well as sewing and making teddy bears, of which there was a growing collection. We decided to spend some of our invested funds and engaged an architect to design a leisure room for us that would extend into the back yard from Graham's old bedroom, with access both from that room and from the outside, and which would also embrace a storeroom. She duly produced a satisfactory plan, but we had to place the actual building of the extension on hold for twelve months, as a plan to spend nine months in England and Europe was about to be realised. Around this time we also joined the National Trust, having particularly in mind the discounts that membership would attract at National Trust and English Heritage sites in Britain.

Before leaving for England, however, travel in Australia beckoned again and towards the end of February we took a short caravan trip to Victoria with our friends John and Norma Farrell and Ron and Wendy Haspell. We all left Sydney independently, with Beryl and I heading down to Melbourne for a few days stay with Ken and Eve Bowden at their home in suburban Beaumaris. Their street was very narrow, and try as I might I was unable to reverse the caravan into their driveway because of a gatepost. On the morning we left them, just as we were departing a builder friend of theirs arrived to demolish the gatepost so that we wouldn't have a problem next time! While in Melbourne we also met up with Wally and Merle Robinson from the Kimberley trip.

From Melbourne we travelled up to Lake Eildon for a night, then made our way across country to Corowa, on the Murray River, where the Farrells and Haspells joined us. We used Corowa as a base to visit the wineries of the district and made excursions to Beechworth, the aviation museum at Wangaratta, Milawa and Chiltern. From Corowa we moved on to Castlemaine, from where we visited picturesque Maldon, then moved on again through Maryborough and Ararat to Lake Fyans, in the

shadow of the Grampian Mountains. We explored the beautiful mountain scenery over the next few days, and Ron Haspell and I did a walk in the rugged Wonderland Range. At the end of our stay there we all parted company again and went our separate ways, with ourselves returning home by way of Stawell, St Arnaud, Rushworth and overnight stops at Wangaratta and Goulburn.

While all this was happening Graham and Michele had announced some time previously that Michele was expecting again, and on 22 March 1996 we became the proud grandparents of Michael Julian Wells Perry. Unfortunately with our coming absence we would see little of him in his first year, but that was the price we paid for being the “peripatetic Perrys”. Anyway, we were delighted with the new arrival and pleased we had a pigeon pair of grandkids.

One week later, on 29 March, our niece Raelene married her long time boyfriend Matt Farrugia and of course we attended the wedding. Graham conducted the ceremony, but unfortunately Michele had to miss out. We’d told Raelene and Matt that if they wanted us at the wedding they’d better make sure it happened before we left the country, as we weren’t coming back! They cut it fairly finely! As we wouldn’t be needing it, and to save money towards a deposit on a house of their own, after their honeymoon they moved into our caravan under the carport at Jason Place. As Russell was also living at home at the time, this meant our place wouldn’t be standing empty for nine months.

So came 28 April and our departure for nine months in Europe – but that’s a chapter in itself.

Chapter Eighteen

Nine Months In Europe

How can I fit a narrative of our nine months in Europe into a few pages, or even a whole chapter, in this story? It's well nigh impossible, given that the journal I wrote of the trip runs to 290 pages! What follows, therefore, has to be the briefest description of how we spent those nine months, the people we met and the things that we saw. It would also be the first Beryl met any of my extended family.

We flew out of Sydney on QANTAS after relaxing in the Business Class lounge; I was still an "unofficial" member, which made the long distances we covered on the trip a lot more comfortable. We broke our journey for two nights in busy, bustling Bangkok, where on the first day we visited the stunning Royal Palace and on the second day took a coach excursion into the hinterland, visiting the Floating Markets, the Phra Pathom temple and the Rose Garden tourist complex. Resuming our long flight, we arrived at London Heathrow on the morning of 1 May and were met by my Aunt Alice, Mum's younger sister. With difficulty we crammed our luggage and ourselves into Alice's little Nissan and were transported to her home in the small village of Laleham, just outside Staines in Surrey and not far from the airport. She had moved into a pleasant and modern little terrace house there after my Uncle Geoff died in 1987.

Alice had willingly agreed to let us make our home base with her while in England, which was marvellous for us and very generous on her part. Without the accommodation she and our other relatives and friends provided we could never have stayed in Europe for as long as we did. In the first few days with her we caught up with her daughter Sue – my cousin – and her husband Rick and children Paul, Steve and Lisa, who we were meeting for the first time. We also met her son Ray, his wife Anne and children Tim and Abbie, who again we'd never met. We visited Windsor Castle, Winchester and Hampton Court Palace, and made our first trip into London by train, concentrating on the Westminster area and Buckingham Palace. It was in Winchester Cathedral that one of the most startling coincidences of my life occurred – I mentioned it briefly in Chapter Two. We decided to take a guided tour and while we were waiting I happened to walk over to a Merchant Navy memorial, where in a glass case lay open the Honour Roll of those who died in the Second World War. There on the page in front of me was the name and details of my cousin Kenneth Davidson, who was lost at sea in 1941. To have come all that distance, to walk unplanned into a particular Cathedral, to have found an otherwise unremarkable memorial and to have found the Roll open at that of all pages, was quite an emotional experience!

We then left Alice and spent a few very pleasant days with John and Betty Cook, our friends from the Rockies coach tour, at their home in London's eastern suburbs. From that base they showed us quite a lot of the Kent countryside, including Hastings, Battle, the lovely old town of Rye, and Sissinghurst Castle Garden. At the end of our stay with them – we would return later in the year – we took the train into the city and picked up a car from Mr Hertz. The girl behind the counter was a fellow Australian, and perhaps because of that we received a free upgrade to a brand new Ford Mondeo. We drove back to Laleham, but it was only for one night as the next day we started out on our first major tour of England and Wales.

Heading south west, our first stop was at the megalithic monument of Stonehenge before we made our way through Salisbury, Weymouth and Abbotsbury for our first night's stop in Exeter. The next day saw us explore that city before moving on through Torquay and its excellent Babbacombe Model Village, Paignton and the National Shire Horse Centre in Torr to Plymouth for our second night on the road. Crossing the Tamar River by ferry, we were now in Cornwall and visited the picturesque coastal villages of Looe and Polperro, the port of Falmouth and Penzance before staying for two nights in the delightful little fishing village of Mousehole. From there we explored the "toe" of Cornwall and its many historic

sights and tourist attractions, a ruggedly beautiful part of England. I'd intended to visit Land's End, but it was a privately owned tourist attraction and the admission price was exorbitant, so I contented myself with photographing it from an adjacent hilltop. Now headed north, we passed through Redruth before diverting into Newquay, the surfing capital of Britain. Little did we know then that we'd be spending a lot more time in that area ten years later! Next was the wild and beautiful landscape of Tintagel and its Arthurian legends, then the picturesque village of Boscastle before leaving Cornwall and entering Devon, with an overnight stop at the little fishing village of Clovelly, clinging to the sheer slopes falling to the waters of the Atlantic.

Departing the coast, we drove through the wild open spaces of Exmoor to Dunster and Bridgewater, then spent some time in the small town of Cheddar, with its famous caves and gorge. Skirting the centre of busy Bristol, we found accommodation for the night just short of the Severn Bridge across the Bristol Channel. Next morning we crossed the bridge into Wales and visited Chepstow and Tintern Abbey before making our way through Monmouth and the pleasant Welsh countryside to Welshpool, where we visited Powis Castle before overnighting at a pleasant farmhouse B&B just out of the town. Further progress north brought us through Barmouth to Cardigan Bay and the historic village of Harlech, where we visited the castle. Roughly following the coast, we called at the Italianate resort village of Port-meiron then passed through Porthmadog and Criccieth to meet the Irish Sea and our next destination, Caernarfon. Staying there for three nights, we visited the castle, then took a very wet and windy day trip to Anglesey, Beaumaris and Llanfair (or Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrob-wlllantysiliogogoch to give it the full title!) which was distinguished only by the name on the railway station that made it famous as the longest place name in Wales (and the world?) Believe it or not, my Gran Perry could even pronounce it! On the third day, in much better weather, we took a day trip into Snowdonia, visiting the picturesque towns of Beddgelert, Betws-y-Coed and the Vale of Conwy, and the dreary grey slate mining landscape of Blaenau Ffestiniog. The day climaxed with a descent through the spectacular pass of Llanberis, at the foot of Snowdon, and then a ride on the famous Snowdon Mountain Railway, the only public rack-and-pinion railway in the British Isles. The summit was still closed due to snow, but the train was running as far as Clogwyn Station, about three quarters of the way up. The ride passed through spectacular mountain scenery and at Clogwyn, 779 metres above sea level, we struggled to get out of the carriage doors, such was the strength of the wind. It was astonishingly strong and cold, and we were able to bear only a few minutes of exposure.

From Caernarfon our next stop was Conwy and its castle, then the seaside resort of Llandudno before turning inland to the valley of the Dee and the lovely town of Llangollen for a two night stay. We visited the haunting ruins of Valle Crucis Abbey before taking a day trip to the Flint coast, vaguely familiar from my childhood days, and the towns of Holywell, Prestatyn, Rhuddlan, St Asaph and Ruthin. The final leg of our travels took us for a long day's drive back into England, with a stop in Hereford, and so back to Laleham after a most enjoyable couple of weeks of touring the south west of the country.

We spent only three days back with Alice before we took off on a much longer tour, this time of England and Scotland. From Laleham we headed north to Banbury and Coventry, where we visited the moving ruins of the bombed cathedral sitting next to the modern edifice that replaced it, and the ornately beautiful Guildhall. Moving on, we stopped at the Wedgwood factory near Stoke-on-Trent and the moated Tudor manor house Little Moreton Hall, before an overnight stop with my cousin Geoffrey Welding and his wife Claire at their home in Cheadle Hulme, on the outskirts of Manchester. As I mentioned earlier, we'd managed to re-establish contact with each other and it was great to meet up again; we would stay with them for a longer period later in the year.

Skirting Manchester and Liverpool, we continued north with stops at Morecambe and then Kendal before reaching our destination for the next two nights, the village of Ambleside in the beautiful Lake District. Unfortunately the weather wasn't kind to us, being generally wet as we explored the area,

taking in the lake of Windermere and the Beatrice Potter country around Hawkshead, Coniston, Keswick and Grasmere. A lot more time would have been needed to really see all there was to see, and we earmarked it for a future visit. In heavy rain we left Ambleside, climbed the steep Kirkstone Pass and made our way past Ullswater north to Carlisle, then across the border into Bonnie Scotland and through the valleys of the Esk and Teviot to our overnight stop at the pretty town of Melrose. Next day we made stops in Walkerburn, Innerleithan and Peebles before reaching the Scottish capital of Edinburgh. We spent two nights there, visiting the Castle and the Palace of Holyrood, taking a bus tour of the city and generally exploring its attractions. While there we crossed the Forth Bridge to visit a long-time correspondent friend of Beryl's mother, Jean Watters, her daughter Sheena and son-in-law Tom.

We then moved into Fife and followed the coast towards St Andrews, stopping at several of the little villages along the way, before reaching our next destination, the quaint old fishing port of Pittenweem. A couple of years earlier Beryl's sister Susan's husband, Graham Towle, had visited Scotland on a Rotary exchange and had been hosted by several families, and had arranged for us to also stay with them. The first of these were John and Margaret Williamson, who lived in an old but lovingly renovated house that was reputedly haunted. We stayed with them for five nights, using Pittenweem as a base to do day tours around the Fife and Perthshire area. During our stay we visited St Andrews, Falkland Palace, Blair Atholl, Pitlochry, Dunkeld, Perth, Dundee, Glamis Castle and Scone Palace among many other places.

Moving on from Pittenweem, we crossed the Tay into Dundee and continued to follow the east coast of Scotland through Arbroath to the town of Stonehaven, where we were welcomed by another of Graham's hosts, Bob Philip, and his teenage children Craig and Catriona. We stayed with them for the night, then Bob drove us to nearby Aberdeen Airport and we flew to the Shetland Islands, the northernmost part of the British Isles. At Sumburgh Airport we were met by our hosts Alec and Sheila Webster, another of Graham Towle's billets, and driven to their home in the island's main town, Lerwick. We had a marvellous four days on those remote, treeless and very scenic islands; Alec had rented a car and drove us over much of the Mainland island. As well as exploring Lerwick itself we visited the smaller town of Scalloway, much of West Mainland and also South Mainland, although Beryl missed out on the latter as exhaustion had caught up with her and she spent the day in bed. On our first evening there we were welcomed as guests at a 21st party of a daughter of a friend of the Websters, a real Scottish affair, and had the unusual experience of walking home in daylight at well past midnight!

Beryl's ancestors, the Mouats, had come from the Shetlands in the mid 19th Century so we spent a day with the Websters and their friend Willie Reid exploring the area of North Mainland from which the family had originated. This was wild and unforgiving country, and it was no wonder that the crofters had been driven out, unable to sustain themselves from the harsh conditions. We visited the village of Collafirth, where Beryl's great-great-great grandfather was recorded as having lived before emigrating to Australia, then ended up at the tiny hamlet of Sandvoe, looking in the cemetery there for the grave of her great-great-great grandmother. We couldn't find it, but there were several other Mouat graves that were undoubtedly those of her distant family. A highlight of our stay in the Shetlands was a cruise around the islands of Bressay and Noss in a small converted fishing boat. Although marred slightly by intermittent rain, this was quite an experience as we cruised past Bressay, then crossed a channel and passed the high sheer cliffs and sea caves of Noss. We stopped to view an incredible bird colony on the cliffs, with tens of thousands of guillemots, cormorants, gulls and arctic terns nesting on the sheer rock walls or circling in the air, while Beryl even spotted a couple of puffins. Further on we passed a large seal colony on a small rocky islet before circling Noss and returning to Lerwick after a magical cruise.

All too soon our stay in the Shetlands was over; in retrospect we should have stayed longer, and the Websters were marvellous hosts. They drove us back down to Sumburgh, where we explored the historic ruined Jarlshof Settlement before boarding our flight back to Aberdeen. There we were met

again by Bob Philip, who showed us around the city before returning to Stonehaven. The next day the two of us drove out along the beautiful Dee Valley to visit Balmoral Castle, Braemar and Ballater, while the following day Bob and I inspected Crathes and Drum Castles while Beryl visited a hairdresser and did some shopping in Stonehaven

Farewelling Bob and his children, we set off to cross through hills and glens to Inverness, in the north west of the country. Following the valley of the Don, we made several stops at old castles and other places of interest, climbed high with views to the Cairngorms, then dropped to the valley of the Avon where we ate lunch beside its bubbling waters. We stopped in the little town of Tomintoul, visited one of the famous whisky distilleries at Glenlivet, then made our way through Grantown-on-Spey and Carrbridge to our destination, where we were welcomed by two more of Graham Towle's friends, Brian and Isobel Wilson. From the base of their home we explored Inverness itself, drove down to Loch Ness and the beautiful Glen Affrich (no, we didn't spot Nessie in the Loch's waters!) and also visited Fort George and the battlefield of Culloden Moor.

Leaving Inverness, we then commenced a great anti-clockwise loop that would take us round the north coast of Scotland amid magnificent highland and coastal scenery. We firstly followed the shore of the Cromarty Firth, then drove across country to the Dornoch Firth with a stop in the little town of Dornoch and later a visit to Dunrobin Castle. Continuing along the coast, we reached Wick and toured the Caithness Glass Factory before heading to the furthestmost point of Britain from Lands End, John O'Groats. We admired the rugged coastal scenery and then, price deterring us from an overnight stay at the hotel there, continued on to Thurso, Britain's most northern mainland town. Next day was a kaleidoscope of coast and mountain beauty as we headed west along the top of Scotland, the narrow single lane road often running along the water's edge of the many inlets and lochs. We stopped to inspect the impressive Smoo Cave at Durness and made many photo stops as our direction swung south west until we reached our overnight halt at Ullapool after a memorable day's drive. More great scenery followed the next day as we continued our journey through highlands, lakes and coastal scenery to finally reach the village of Kyle and crossed the fairly new bridge on to the Isle of Skye. Continuing on to the little town of Broadford, we then took a narrow side road to our destination for the next few days, a B&B at Kirkibost on the Strathaird Peninsula. There we were welcomed by the owners, John and Jenny Kubale, who were actually parishioners of our son Graham back in Forestville. They spent the British winter in Australia and the British summer running their B&B in Skye – a marvellous arrangement, we thought.

Over the next three days we explored the lovely Isle of Skye, taking a day tour around the island that took in the town of Portree; visited the town and castle of Dunvegan; took a launch cruise from the village of Elgol to beautiful Loch Coruisk; and attended a Gala or fete at a little village near Kirkibost. We could have spent much more time on Skye, but reluctantly had to move on. We drove to Armadale at the southern end of the island and took a car ferry across to the mainland at Mallaig. Back among lochs, mountains and inlets we made our way to the tiny village of Lochaline and caught another small ferry across to the town of Craignure on the Isle of Mull for a three night stay. We took an afternoon drive up to the main town, Tobermory, for a look around there. The next day was an unforgettable highlight of our wanderings as we drove to Fionnphort and took a cruise on a converted fishing boat to the island of Staffa and its unforgettable Fingal's Cave, made famous by Mendelssohn in his overture of that name. Despite poor weather visiting the cave was a stunning experience, like being in some great natural cathedral with the sea as its floor. Beryl stayed on the boat while I was on the island, and on its top I had a close encounter with quite tame and comical looking puffins. On the return journey we visited the island of Iona and its ancient abbey. The following day we drove around much of Mull, taking in its beautiful scenery and seascapes. Off again, we caught a car ferry from Craignure back to the mainland at Oban, then made our way across country through Taynuilt and Inverary to Torbet, on the shores of

Loch Lomond, just in time to take a cruise on its lovely waters. After an overnight stop we continued on to the historic city of Stirling for another overnight stop and a visit to the Castle, Old Town and the National Wallace Monument.

With the Highlands now behind us we made our way to Glasgow, explored that city for a couple of days and continued on through the Lowlands to Dumfries and the Solway Firth, then headed east in heavy rain to Gretna Green, nowadays less romantic and more of a tourist trap. We overnighted there, then back in England followed Hadrian's Wall, with many stops for exploration, to Hexham and then Durham. The world's a small place; at Durham Castle I met a fellow EDP colleague, Dave Briancourt, on holiday with his wife there. Continuing south, we met the North Sea at Redcar and followed the coast down to Whitby, where we stopped to explore the picturesque town. Our next stop was Irton, just outside Scarborough, at the home of Aunt Alice's friend Jean Turner. Jean hosted us for a couple of nights, and next day we explored the North Yorkshire Moors, rode the Moors railway, stopped in the village of Goathland and saw some filming of the popular TV show *Heartbeat*, and visited lovely Rievaulx Abbey. Our travels resumed, we continued south through Bridlington and Hull to the ancient city of Lincoln, where we visited the Cathedral and Castle. We then set off westwards to Matlock Bath in Derbyshire and a reunion with my cousin John, Aunt Alice's eldest son, his wife Hilary and daughters Katie and Rebecca. The following day they took us for an extensive tour through the lovely Peak District, and the day after that we had time for some more exploration before saying our goodbyes and heading south on the final lap of our journey back to Laleham. It had been a long, sometimes tiring but very enjoyable "grand circle" tour of England and Scotland.

We remained based in Laleham for a week or so, during which time we visited Windsor, saw the musical *Miss Saigon* in the West End, visited the Hampden Court Flower Show with the Cooks and Aunt Alice, did some sightseeing in London and visited the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. However we were soon on the road again, this time on a long roundabout route that would take in England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland. Summer was now upon us and we enjoyed lovely weather as we made our way to the picturesque Cotswolds for a few days there, with a side trip to Stratford upon Avon, before continuing on to Cheltenham and then the attractive city of Bath. Leaving Bath and heading for Wales, we stopped in Bristol to have a look at the SS *Great Britain* in its permanent dock there, and had a brush with royalty. The Queen was visiting a nearby factory and we witnessed her arrival, and after we left the ship and were passing the factory Her Majesty emerged and walked over to the barriers and conversed with the small crowd just near us. We crossed into South Wales, visited Caerlon, Newport and Caerphilly, then stayed a couple of nights at a B&B in the hamlet of Manmoel in the hills above the old mining area of Ebbw Vale. We continued west through the Welsh countryside, with several short stops, to St David's the westernmost town in Wales, where we stayed the night before boarding a car ferry to Ireland from nearby Fishguard.

We landed at Rosslare in light rain – after all, it was Ireland – and made our way through Wexford to Inistioge and Jerpoint Abbey before finding accommodation for the night in the rather dour and grimy town of Waterford. Next morning we visited the impressive Waterford Crystal Factory, then followed the south coast of Ireland to Dungarvan, Youghal, Cobh and Cork. We stayed just outside Cork for two nights at the village of Blarney, where we visited the castle (I had a sore back so didn't try to lean out and kiss the famous Blarney Stone!) and explored in and around Cork. Moving on, we continued along the coast to Clonakilty, Rosscarberry, Glandore and Bantry, then climbed into the Cahra Mountains, from the top of which were fine views into the beautiful vale and lakes of Killarney, our next stopping place. The next day, which was overcast and drizzly, we explored the lovely town and its environs. The day after was planned as a highlight of our time in Ireland, a drive around the beautiful seascapes of the Ring of Kerry. Unfortunately it was blighted by poor weather, with much of the scenery blotted out by rain and mist, but we at least got an impression of how lovely the area would be in better conditions!

The weather started to improve as we left Killarney and headed north to Tralee. Perhaps because of the song *The Rose of Tralee* we expected a pretty town, but disappointingly it was as grey and grotty as most Irish towns. It's the Irish countryside that is the attraction of the country – the towns are something to be generally avoided, especially the larger ones, although Dublin is the exception. We continued on to meet the sea again at Ballybunion, then followed the Atlantic coast north through Ballylongford to Limerick, before heading inland again to Tipperary for a two night stay. From that base we visited Cashel and its famous ruined cathedral atop St Patrick's Rock, returning to Tipperary by way of picturesque Cahir and the lovely Glen of Aherlow. Next we returned to Limerick, visited Bunratty and its castle and excellent Folk Park, then moved on to visit the re-creation of a Bronze Age village at Craggaunowen. Late afternoon found us at the little town of Ennistymon, and after dinner we took a drive to the spectacular soaring Cliffs of Moher, falling sheer to the wild waves of the Atlantic. We revisited them the next morning before continuing up the coast to then turn inland along the shore of Galway Bay. At Ballyvaughan we left the water and climbed into the wild and boulder-littered landscape of The Burren on a circular drive that eventually took us back down to Ballyvaughan once more. We continued along the bay shore to Galway itself, had a quick look at the drab city centre then continued on for an overnight stop at the much more attractive little village of Oughterard.

From Oughterard we headed north into the lovely region of the Connemara, an area of mountains, lakes and forests with bright scarlet fuchsias lining the roadway. We passed through Clifden, stopped at the Connemara National Park Visitor Centre, then followed the banks of Kylemore Lough and through the hills to Killary Harbour and Leehane. The road followed the Erriff River, then descended to the town of Westport, where we stopped to eat lunch, before continuing past Lough Conn to Ballina and finally the town of Sligo for our overnight break. Next day we passed through and stopped in Boyle, Carrick-on-Shannon, Roscommon and Athlone, then visited the romantic ruins of the ancient monastic site of Clonmacnois before continuing to Tullamore. The following morning we visited the Irish National Stud at Kildare and admired the many million-pound racehorses and their foals, a most interesting and enjoyable visit. Back on the road, we made our way through heavy Bank Holiday traffic to the nation's capital, Dublin, and found a B&B there a couple of nights. We spent the next day thoroughly exploring the "fair city", which unlike other Irish cities and towns we found both colourful and cheerful. We took an open top bus tour, then visited many of the tourist sites; our only disappointment was that the queue to see the famous *Book of Kells* at Trinity College was too long for us to wait. At dinner that night I quaffed a pint of Guinness, as it was said that the best Guinness in the world was that drunk in Dublin

The next morning, in heavy rain, we headed north towards the border with Northern Ireland, with stops at the Hill of Tara historic site, the Knowth and Newgrange Passage Graves and the Celtic crosses of Monasterboice. Soon after we crossed the border, unmarked in any way except for a police checkpoint a little way up the road through which we passed without having to stop. We reached the town of Banbridge and found a pleasant farmhouse B&B a few kilometres out in the country, where we made friends with a nine year old Irish girl named Kerry and diverse dogs and ponies. The next morning we drove into Belfast and straight to the Scotland ferry dock. We hadn't allocated any time in Northern Ireland, as it was still a troubled province, although in hindsight we would have had no problems with a stay there. The ferry crossing to Scotland took two hours and was very smooth, landing us at the town of Stranraer.

Back in Bonnie Scotland, we headed north along the shores of Loch Ryan and then through Glen App to reach the Ayr coast. After a stop in the little town of Girvan we did some exploring of the "Robbie Burns" country we were now in, then continued up the coast for an overnight stop in the village of Dunure. After some more exploration of Burns Country in Alloway, we visited Ayr and then made our way to Edinburgh for a two night stop. Our main reason for returning there was to attend the Edinburgh

Tattoo, so after a bit more exploration of the city we enjoyed a great night at the Castle, watching the famous show. Early rain passed before the start and we had excellent if cramped seats facing down the parade ground, and it was an unforgettable experience. From Edinburgh we headed east across the Lowlands to meet the North Sea coast and stopped just over the border in Berwick-upon-Tweed for a look around there. A little further south we crossed a causeway just before it was covered by the tide to visit Holy Isle and the Lindisfarne Priory. The tide had receded by the time we left and resumed our journey down through the Tyneside metroplex without stopping to end up near the little Yorkshire town of Thirsk for the night. Next day we drove to historic York and spent almost a full day visiting its many attractions and walking its narrow lanes, with a visit to the beautiful Cathedral given high priority. Late in the day we continued south and with some difficulty found a B&B near Doncaster, and the next day saw us return to Laleham after a very full trip around four countries of the British Isles.

We spent a few more days with Alice, during which I took a couple of trips into London to explore the City area, Mayfair and the West End, at the same time returning the Ford Mondeo to Mr Hertz. We also went to the theatre to see the excellent production of *Riverdance*; although far from being a dance lover, I was as enthralled as Beryl at the Irish dancing and general staging of the show.

It was now time to start the Continental segment of our nine months in Europe, and on 19 August we said goodbye temporarily to Alice, caught the train to London and took the fast *Eurostar* train under the Channel through the "Chunnel" to France, Belgium and ultimately The Netherlands. The tunnel was something of an anti-climax as it was all dark and there was nothing to see, but the experience of crossing the French countryside at 320 kilometres an hour was something else again. At Brussels we changed to the slower Intercity express that took us across the flat landscape to Amsterdam. Our old friend Han Lammers was waiting to greet us at the station there, and soon we were on our last train of the day, to Lelystad in Flevoland, and a car ride later were greeting Ineke in their pleasant home in the small and modern town of Dronten. It was great to catch up with both of them again.

We spent four very crowded days at Dronten, during which we saw much of Flevoland and the surrounding countryside. Flevoland itself was reclaimed land or *polder* that had once been part of the Zuyder Zee and actually sat a few metres below sea level, protected all round by massive dykes. On one of the days Han drove us to Scheveningen and the marvellous model city of Madurodam, an amazing place representing a picture in miniature of The Netherlands; I'd visited it during my stay in Amsterdam in 1981. On the way back to Dronten we stopped in the nation's capital, The Hague, and visited the Peace Palace there. On another day Han took us across the incredible 27 kilometre long Houtribdijk causeway to the town of Alkmaar, where we witnessed the traditional cheese market, a very colourful event.

On 24 August we hitched up the Lammers' caravan to their Volvo and the four of us drove to the southern Netherlands town of Apeldoorn, where we picked up the campervan that we'd booked from Australia. Unbeknown to us, Han and Ineke had been down to inspect it earlier and had negotiated an upgrade to a larger campervan for the same price, which pleased us no end. Our belongings transferred, we set off in tandem and I soon got the hang of handling the truck-sized vehicle on the "wrong" side of the road. We headed north, skirting the cities of Eindhoven and s'Hertogenbosch, to a farmyard campground in the tiny village of Giersbergen, in an area of ancient inland sand dunes, now well wooded over. That evening we visited the historic town of Heusden, which had been the home of Han's parents and grandparents, for a meal of delicious Dutch *pannakoeken* or pancakes. Next day we continued north, following the channels of the Waal and Maas Rivers, part of the Rhine Delta, and making a stop at Kinderdijk to see the eighteen windmills there. Paralleling the port of Rotterdam, we made camp in a caravan club campsite near the mighty Europoort, the largest port in Europe. On arrival Han took me for a drive around the entrance to the port and the mouth of the delta, then we all drove to

the nearby ancient town of Brielle for a wander around there. The next day we drove to a metro station and took the train into Rotterdam, from where we took a two hour cruise through the massive Europort, a fascinating and mind-boggling journey.

On the way again, we headed south east along the North Sea coast into the province of Zeeland, which consisted entirely of islands in the delta of rivers that run into the sea in the south of Holland. There we made a stop at the mighty Oosterscheldendam, a flood barrier that was one of the world's great engineering achievements. Moving on, we explored the ancient fortified town of Middleburg, then took a car ferry from Vlissingen across the inlet of Wester Schelde to Breskens, in the very southern part of the country. There we broke for the night at a farm campground in the little town of Hoek. These farm campgrounds were common in Europe, essentially being a field with some basic amenities provided – certainly nothing like an Australian caravan park. The next morning we crossed into Belgium and in thick smoggy conditions made our way across that country, bypassing the city of Gent and skirting the capital, Brussels. We were now in the French-speaking Wallonia region, and in heavy rain we made a brief stop in the town of Namur before following the attractive valley of the Meuse River to the mediaeval town of Dinant. Leaving exploration for the next day, we passed through and a few kilometres further on stopped at a farm campground in the village of Anseremme. The rain continued the next day so Han and I drove some distance to visit the reasonably fascinating cave known as the Grotto of Han – no, it wasn't named after him! – near the town of the same name. The day after that, the rain having stopped, we explored Dinant and its impressive *Citadelle* high on a cliff above the Meuse.

We continued roughly south through Belgium, with stops in the towns of Neufchateau and Arlon, before entering the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and spending some time looking around that attractive and atmospheric city, much of it lying on a hilltop looking down on the Old City and the narrow Alzette River. South of Luxembourg, we overnighted at the Kockelscheur Campground, much more like the caravan parks we were familiar with. The next morning saw us join the main *autoroute* and cross the border into France and the lovely region of Alsace-Lorraine, with its sweeping vineyards, tree covered mountains and picturesque chateaus and castles overlooking picture-postcard villages. After a while we left the *autoroute* and followed the *Route des Vins de Alsace*, or the Alsace Wine Route, with stops in the towns and villages along the way. Reaching pretty Molsheim, we made camp there and Beryl and I walked around the little mediaeval town. Next day we followed the *Route* at a leisurely pace, drinking in the lovely landscape and stopping in the little villages – Rosheim, Barr, Eichhoffen and Dambach-la-Ville to name just a few. At the larger town of Ribeauville we stopped for two nights, walked the narrow cobbled streets of the town and the following day explored the Vosges region and the vineyards in the Lammers' Volvo. We visited the imposing castle of Koenigsbourg; the towns of Ste Marie aux-Mines and lovely, mediaeval Kaysersberg, birthplace of philosopher Albert Schweitzer; the National Military Cemetery at Sigolsheim, overlooking the World War II battlefield of Colmar; a large winery at Bennwihr with disappointingly poor wine; and finally the quintessential Alsatian walled village of Riquewihr.

Moving on, we had a short run to Colmar and Mulhouse and had an easy afternoon and night there before crossing the border into Switzerland and making a brief stop in Basel. We crossed the Rhine and continued south through Delemont and found ourselves increasingly in mountain scenery to Biel/Bienne, where we found a campground for the night on the shores of the Bieler See lake and explored the town, the centre of Swiss watchmaking. The next day found us in the capital, Berne, where we split up and Beryl and I strolled the streets and generally explored the lovely city, encircled on three sides by the River Aare. Near where we parked was the bear pit containing the animals that gave the city its name. After lunch followed a memorable drive to Thun and along the shores of the Thuner See to Interlaken, with the peaks of the Bernese Oberland rising ahead of us. At first they looked like clouds on the horizon until their snowy slopes became apparent, and the scenery all the way was breathtaking.

We set up in the very pleasant little Lazy Rancho campground, with an awesome view of the snow-covered peaks of the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau – even more awesome in the setting sun.

We spent two memorable days at Interlaken. On the first we all drove in the Volvo through the Lutschine Gorge to the village of Lauterbrunnen and took the rack and pinion railways up to the village of Murren. Beryl remained there while Han, Ineke and myself took the cable car to the summit of the Schilthorn for achingly beautiful views of the Alps all around us. The next day we split up, and Beryl and I took a cruise on the lovely Lake Brienz down to the town of that name, again amid awesome lake and mountain scenery. Back at Interlaken, we drove out to the unique and awesome Trummelbach Waterfall, which actually descended inside a mountain. Leaving lovely Interlaken with regret we continued our journey, following the southern shore of the Thuner See to Spiez, then climbing into the Alps through the Simmental region and over the Jaun Pass. The descent took us to the picture postcard village of Im Fang, then down a valley to the ancient walled town of Gruyere, famous for the cheese made in the district. After exploring there we continued our descent to a very smoggy Lac Lemane and headed east through Vevey and Montreux – the “Riviera of Switzerland”- to our overnight stop at the small town of Villeneuve. Next morning we explored the nearby Chateau de Chillon, a mediaeval stronghold standing on an islet in the lake.

Leaving Villeneuve, we entered the valley of the River Rhone and steadily climbed among endless vineyards and picturesque villages, surmounted by soaring peaks. We stopped for lunch in the tiny village of St Pierre-de-Clages, then continued up the valley to the lovely town of Sion, where we walked its mediaeval streets and visited the Chateau de Valere high on the hillside overlooking the town. Setting off once more, we followed the Rhone to a campground near the town of Sierre for a two night stay. The next day, in the Volvo, the four of us took a day trip up the Val d’Anniviers into the high country, with the valley of the Rhone dropping behind us. At the village of Zinal Han, Ineke and I took a cable car to the ski station of Sorebois, from which could be seen an awesome panorama of the surrounding peaks and a distant view of the Matterhorn. Back at Zinal, we continued our drive up to the Moiry Dam and glacier, with the peaks of the Grand Cornier towering above, then started the descent, with a stop in the picturesque village of Grimontz, that took us back to Sierre. Next day we continued along the Rhone valley through the Upper Valais region, then climbed high into the Alps up the spectacular Furka Pass, from the top of which were fine views back into the valley and of the Rhone’s source, a series of cascades and waterfalls. The descent from the top of the Pass was rather hair-raising in the campervan, the road narrow and generally without safety barriers, and at the foot we found ourselves in another valley that was the source of the mighty Rhine. Another pass was climbed and descended and we entered the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland for an overnight stop at the town of Disentis/Muster in a campground on the banks of the Upper Rhine.

In abysmal weather we left Disentis and continued east to the town of Chur, where after a brief look around we headed up through the hills and along back roads to reach the Principality of Liechtenstein and its capital, Vaduz, which proved a disappointment in its lack of charm. We didn’t linger long, but headed north, crossed into Austria and with some difficulty located the agreed campground just outside the large town of Feldkirch. The rain persisted next day as we continued north to Bregenz and Lake Constance, then followed the lake shore into Germany and the town of Lindau, built on an island in the lake. Despite the rain, we explored the town, which would have been picturesque in better weather, and visited the Saturday market in the medieval town square. Back on the road, we made our way through the German countryside to the historic town of Fussen, our destination for two nights. Thankfully the weather improved next day as we visited the fantasy Neuschwanstein Castle high on the hill overlooking the town, built by the “Mad King” Ludwig of Bavaria and used as the model for Walt Disney’s castle in Disneyland., then explored the town itself. From Fussen we followed what is known as the *Romantische Strasse* or Romantic Road for the next few days, stopping in the quaint little Bavarian towns and villages

which apart from the modern cars could be frozen in time from four hundred years earlier, including Weiss, with its Rococo interior *Weiskirche*; Landsberg; and the larger town of Augsburg for an overnight stop. Then came a diversion to Giengen am de Brenz for a visit to the Steiff teddy bear factory; followed by a return to the Romantic Road and an overnight stay at quaint Dinkelsbühl. Moving on the next day, we visited the equally romantic village of Feuchtwangen before reaching Rothenburg ob Der Tauber, the mediaeval walled town visited by John Morgan and myself back in 1981. We spent almost the whole day there, wandering its cobbled streets and exploring its old houses, churches and shops, before finally leaving the Romantic Road and settling for the night on the banks of the River Main at Wertheim.

Our grand tour of Europe was almost at an end as next day we followed the *autobahns* through the States of Hessen, Rheinland-Pfalz and Nordrhein-Westphalen, eschewing further sightseeing, and stayed the night on the banks of the Rhine at Cologne. The following day we continued along the *autobahns* to leave Germany and re-enter The Netherlands at Roermond, where we parted with our faithful campervan and, once more in the Volvo with Han and Ineke, covered the remaining distance back to Dronten. In twenty eight days, only six of which had seen bad weather, we'd covered almost three thousand kilometres through nine countries – a marvellous and unforgettable trip.

We stayed with Han and Ineke for another week, mainly for "R&R" – rest and resuscitation - during which we visited the towns of Zwolle and s'Hertogenbosch. Then came the time to say goodbye, albeit only temporarily, as we would return to Dronten at the end of the year. Han and Ineke drove us to Amsterdam and dropped us at our hotel, from which our next trip would start – a Trafalgar coach tour around central Europe. The tour actually started in London, but it would have been pointless to have gone back there, so we'd arranged to pick it up in Amsterdam. Han and I had also planned the campervan trip so we wouldn't duplicate any of the places that the coach tour would visit. We spent the day exploring the city, including a canal cruise, and that evening joined the coach tour. From Amsterdam we drove south to Cologne for a stop at the Cathedral there, then continued down the Rhine to the village of Boppard for a cruise along the river to St Goar. After overnighing in Koblenz we continued down the banks of the Rhine before striking into the mountains of the Black Forest and through that pretty area to enter Switzerland at Schaffhausen and the magnificent Rhine Falls. From there the coach followed main roads and *autobahns* to and through Zurich to our destination for two days, the village of Weggis on the banks of the Vierwald Statter-See near Lucerne.

The next day the coach took us into Lucerne to view the Lion Monument, after which Beryl and some other passengers remained in the city while the rest of us took a lake cruise to the village of Stans, then an ascent of the Stanserhorn mountain by cog railway and cable car. From the summit was an incredibly beautiful 360 degree panorama over the Alps and the lake. We returned to Stans, where we were met by the coach and taken back to Lucerne for some exploration there, after which Beryl and I returned to Weggis by train and bus. Our travels then continued through Switzerland to Liechtenstein and Vaduz and on to Feldkirch in Austria, one of only two points where our route overlapped with the campervan trip. We travelled east through Austria along the *autobahn* through valleys and mountain scenery to reach Innsbruck in heavy rain. We did a little exploring, including the treasure chest store of Swarovski Crystal, and attended a very good concert that evening.

We had occasional glimpses of snow-covered slopes as we left Innsbruck, and the weather improved somewhat as we climbed a steep pass, skirted Garmisch-Partenkirchen and crossed the German border into Bavaria. We made a stop at the village of Oberammergau, home of the celebrated Passion Play, with its houses decorated with all kinds of frescoes, then with the Alps behind us and the sun shining we made our way to Munich. We briefly explored the city centre and joined in the *Oktoberfest* celebrations with a beer at the famous Hofbrauhaus, then once again on the *autobahn* we headed east across the border back into Austria and the lovely city of Salzburg, Mozart's birthplace. We took a walking tour of

the atmospheric old town area, passing the house in which he was born, and in the evening attended a rather pleasant piano recital of his works. The next morning we paid a half day visit to Berchtesgaden and the Eagle's Nest, crossing back into Germany at Obersalzberg. There we left the coach and boarded a bus that took us up the steep and winding road on Mount Kehlstein, passing the snow line as we did. Finally we took a lift inside the mountain to the summit, where Hitler had commissioned a centre at which to entertain important guests. As the mists rolled away below in the valleys the views were absolutely stunning on what had turned out a perfect sunny morning. It was one of the highlights of the whole tour.

Returning to Salzburg, we rejoined the *autobahn* and sped west to the country's capital, romantic Vienna, arriving in the late afternoon. In the evening we drove around the city to view its lights, ride the famous Prater Wheel, the world's largest Ferris wheel, and visit the Imperial Palace. Sadly rain was again with us the next day as we toured Vienna in the morning, visiting the Summer Palace and Belvedere Palace among other sights. The afternoon was free and while Beryl rested I walked much of central Vienna in the rain, fascinated by the legendary city and its ornamentation, and in the evening we attended a concert of Strauss music. Next day saw us in the coach again, heading south on the *autobahn* through the Styrian Alps and the Carinthia region; the *autobahn* changed to an *autostrada* as we crossed into Italy and began a spectacular drive through the Dolomites to eventually emerge on the coastal plains and reach our destination, Venice. The coach boarded a small car ferry that took us through the broad canals to the island of Lido and our hotel. Next day was disappointingly wet again as we crossed to Venice and took a walking tour around the Piazza San Marco and surrounding area, and visited a glass showroom. We then boarded a *vaporetto* for a cruise across the lagoon to the island of Burano and a seafood lunch. The afternoon itinerary was to include a gondola cruise back in Venice, but because of the weather it was cancelled and we were returned to Lido, thus missing out on further exploration of Venice itself. We could have gone across by ferry, but because of the weather we rested instead – a decision I now regret very much.

Leaving Venice the next day, in still dismal weather we headed east along the Adriatic coast across soggy plains and wetlands before climbing into the Appenine Mountains and through pretty countryside to the city of Perugia. There we diverted to Assisi, long associated with St Francis, and visited the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels and the Basilica of St Francis, the latter standing high on a hillside overlooking the lovely old town. Returning to Perugia, we overnighted there before turning south and joining the *Autostrada del Sole*, then followed it down the valley of the Tiber. Bypassing Rome, we made our way to Naples and battled our way through unbelievable traffic to the port area. The plan was to take a hydrofoil to the Isle of Capri, but they were not running because of rough seas so it was decided to visit Pompeii instead and leave Capri until the following day. We spent the afternoon on a fascinating visit to the old ruined city, destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius towering above it back in AD62. A local guide led us on an interesting and absorbing tour, and along the way we got to see inside the brothel I was barred from in 1951! Next morning beautiful weather saw us take the hydrofoil across to picturesque Capri, to find there was a strike on and no minibuses were operating! We managed to take the funicular railway up to the town of Capri, but were unable to go higher to Anacapri on the top of the island. However what we did see was very picturesque and had the flavour of the Mediterranean about it.

Back in Naples we immediately boarded the coach and headed back north along the *autostrada* to the ancient city of Rome. After a rest in our hotel we were taken in the coach on a night tour, the city beautiful with its floodlit buildings, and made a stop to throw coins into the celebrated Trevi Fountain. Next day we did a morning coach tour of Rome, visiting among other things the Catacombs, the Colosseum, the Pantheon and the immense Basilica of St Peter, the largest church in the world and an

unforgettable place. The afternoon was free but unfortunately I was off-colour with a head cold so did no more exploring, again to my eternal regret as there was so much more I would have liked to see.

We were up early next morning, at the insistence of our coach captain, George, and by eight thirty were at the Vatican. This was a good move, as we beat the real crowds! We visited the incredible museum with its many halls of art works, our visit finishing in the awe-inspiring Sistine Chapel. We then boarded the coach, drove through Rome's suburbs and hit the *Austostrade del Sole* north once more. This took us into Tuscany and the attractive city of Florence, where we explored some of its many attractions including the Cathedral, Baptistery and the Piazza San Marco. We overnighted there and next day followed the coastal plains to Pisa, where we stopped to check the inclination of the famous leaning Tower. Continuing, we followed the Italian coast through the hilly region of Liguria, with a glimpse of pretty Portofino and skirting the city of Genoa. The *autostrada* passing through no less than eighty tunnels before crossing the border into France and the French Riviera. We entered the Principality of Monaco and first visited the village of Eze and a perfume showroom, then made our way down into Monte Carlo for a walk around the city's centre, taking in the Casino and Opera House, then after dinner drove through the bright lights of the city back into France and to Nice for a two night stop. The following day we visited the mediaeval and very picturesque village of St-Paul-de-Vence, high in the hills behind Nice, then returned to Nice for free exploration before a coach tour along the winding Grand Corniche to the hilltop village of Eze le Maire and absolutely breathtaking views down on to the Riviera.

On another wet day we left Nice and followed the coast for a brief stop in Cannes on the Cote d'Azur before turning north through the foothills of the Maritime Alps and the Provence region. We stopped in Avignon to view the famous bridge, or what remained of it, then followed the Rhone River north through vineyards and then hills and the towns of Valence and Vienne to the large city of Lyon for our overnight stop. The next day saw us passing through the endless vineyards of the Beaujolais region, with a stop in the historic town of Beaune, regarded as the heart of the French wine industry. Continuing on through pleasant countryside, mid afternoon saw us entering the outskirts of Paris and we were really back into civilisation as the coach threaded its way to our hotel, not far from the Opera House.

I'd never been particularly keen to visit Paris, possessing the Englishman's inbred distaste for most things French, but I have to say that two and a half days in the "city of light" changed my thinking completely. I found the city absolutely enthralling and could have spent a week or more there without any trouble. On the evening of our arrival we were taken on a cruise along the Seine, a magical experience with the bridges illuminated and the lights of the city reflecting on the water, capped by the soaring golden spectacle of the floodlit Eiffel Tower. Then followed a coach trip around the city to see the lights, giving us a wonderful exposure to Paris by night. The next day, on a wet morning, we visited Notre Dame Basilica, followed by another coach tour of Paris. We were then taken out in thankfully improving weather to the stunning Palace of Versailles for a tour through its magnificent apartments. Back in the city, the afternoon was free and while Beryl chose to rest I took a long walk around the centre of the city, including an ascent of the Arc de Triomphe and a walk down the Champs Elysee. That evening we visited a typical nightclub in the Pigalle district for an enjoyable dinner show. The next day, with clear skies for a change, we visited Montmartre and the beautiful Basilica of Sacre Coeur, and then the marvellous Louvre, viewing just a fraction of its many art works including the Mona Lisa and the Venus de Milo. The afternoon was free for a little more exploration on foot, and in the late afternoon we were taken to the Eiffel Tower and transported to the second level for great if hazy views over the city, its lights just coming on. Our stay in Paris ended with an excellent farewell dinner, as the tour would finish next day.

All good things come to an end. Leaving Paris, we continued north on the *autoroute* towards Calais, passing through the pleasant Picardy countryside and the Somme region. Reaching the port, we left the

coach for the last time, loaded our bags on a trolley and embarked on the cross-Channel ferry for the trip to Dover. There we boarded a new coach and were transported along the motorways through Kent to London's Victoria Station. Goodbyes were said all round and we took a local train to Hatton Cross station, to be met by Aunt Alice. It had been a memorable nine weeks in Europe, both touring with the Lammers and on the Trafalgar tour, and we'd thoroughly enjoyed our time over there. However we looked forward to at least a few days of "R&R" after all our travels.

We spent the next eleven days with Alice, generally taking it easy. I made a couple of trips into London to continue my exploration of the city, on the first occasion visiting the National Gallery, British Museum and London Museum of Transport, and on the second occasion the Science Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and Harrods department store.

On the last day of October we were picked up by John Cook to spend two weeks with Betty and himself at their home. In the now greyish days of autumn we did several day trips around Kent together in their car. The first of these took us to the interesting former home of Sir Winston and Lady Churchill, *Chartwell*, and the same evening we drove to Leeds Castle to see the Guy Fawkes Night fireworks; a long cold wait was rewarded by a fairly humdrum exhibition, certainly not a patch on Sydney's New Year's Eve displays. The next outing was to Canterbury, where we visited the great Cathedral and the old town centre. The third outing was to the historic Naval Dockyard at Chatham, a very interesting place, especially the Ropery where ships' hawsers were made using traditional methods. Another very full day was spent at Greenwich, where we visited the famed Observatory, the Palladian mansion Queen's House and the National Maritime Museum; time unfortunately didn't permit an inspection of the clipper *Cutty Sark*. On another day we drove to see the Thames Barrier, the engineering marvel that prevented the flooding of the city by particularly high tides, then returned to Greenwich where we left the car, walked beneath the Thames to the other side, took the Docklands Light Railway to the Tower of London, explored it and finally returned by boat to Greenwich after another very full day. Our final outing with the Cooks was down to the Kent coast, where we visited Folkestone and then Dover, where we spent several hours visiting Dover Castle and the amazing Casemates, tunnels carved into the celebrated white cliffs from Napoleonic times and used as a command post and hospital during World War II.

While staying with the Cooks the four of us went twice into London at night to the theatre, on the first occasion to see Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Sunset Boulevard*, and on the second to see another musical, *Blood Brothers*. The latter was rather different but excellent, sometimes funny and sometimes emotional. On another day Beryl and I took trains and bus to Alexandra Palace to visit the Teddy Bear Fair there, an enormous display of bears and dolls that took Beryl four hours to wander round and see everything. On yet another day, John and Betty having prior engagements, I went into London for another walking tour on which I explored the Southwark and South Bank area, then crossed to Westminster and visited Westminster Abbey, then returned to the south side and the Imperial War Museum.

At the end our stay I took the train into the city and picked up from Mr Hertz a near new Ford Escort – no free upgrade this time – then drove back to pick up Beryl and farewell the Cooks after a very pleasant two weeks with them. We returned to Laleham and the following day left on our next tour, which would combine sightseeing in the Manchester and Leeds region with reunions with family and friends. Heading north, we made our way through Oxfordshire in autumn gloom and mist and up the Severn Valley to Ironbridge, where we did some exploring before joining the motorways up to Cheadle Hulme and the home of Geoffrey and Claire Welding, this time for a stay of a few days. On our second day with them Geoff had arranged a family lunch at a pub in Crosby, Liverpool, inviting as many of Dad's side of the family as possible. For me, at least, it was a great afternoon and a memorable occasion. My Aunt

Doreen, Uncle Roy Griffiths and wife Betty I hadn't seen for forty five years! Elaine Bolitho and her son David, and Bill and Nona Leyland I'd met back in 1979. The Leyland cousins – Keith, Christine and her husband Alan, Robin and Tony, and grandchild Claire, I'd either met then or in some cases had never met before. Really the only ones missing were John Bolitho, who was at that time separated from Elaine and living in the Channel Islands, Roy and Betty's daughter Sue and Doreen's daughter Gillian. We chatted about old times for most of the afternoon, and on the way back to Cheadle Hulme we stopped and caught up with Geoffrey's mother, my Aunt Florrie. Sadly it would be the last time I would see her, Doreen, Nona and Bill.

The next day brought the heaviest frost we'd ever seen, but also a beautifully clear day. The two of us drove up to the Peak District in Derbyshire, the landscape sparkling under the sun. We visited the fashionable spa town of Buxton, then followed the Wye Valley to pretty Ashford in the Water and on to Bakewell for a look around there. From Bakewell we headed north up on to the wild country of the High Peak moors and through that beautiful landscape before making our way back to Cheadle Hulme. That evening we had a visit from my cousin Peter Tod, son of my Uncle Arthur and Aunt Clara, who'd scared me with a sheep's skull all those years back. We chatted for a couple of hours, but really had little in common to talk about after such a long time. The next morning snow fell, a most unusual occurrence for that time of the year in the Manchester area. We'd planned a visit to Chester and went ahead with it, and explored the city with snow falling and slush under our feet. It brought back many memories of childhood visits to me as we walked the streets lined with half timbered Tudor buildings. The snow had disappeared the next morning and we did some local exploring, then decided to drive back to the Peak District to see the effect of the snow there. We followed the same route of two days earlier to Buxton, this time in a snow covered landscape once we'd gained sufficient height, and took many "before and after" photographs.

The following day we said goodbye to Geoffrey and Claire after a pleasant stay and headed west to our next stopping place in Yorkshire near Pontefract. We took a different road through the Peak District than the previous day which took us through the town of Glossop and then into the hills through the area known as High Peak, then down Snake Pass to reach Sheffield. The area was almost treeless and it could have been a landscape in Antarctica under its deep covering of snow. It was an absolutely magical drive, with sheep and cattle scratching around to reach the grass in the fields, wild snow-covered moorland and little snowbound farmhouses sitting among trees that still bore some of the colours of autumn. Leaving the snow behind, we bypassed Sheffield, Rotherham and Doncaster to arrive in late afternoon at the little village of Kirk Smeaton and the home of my cousin George Tod, his wife Jean and daughter Jenny. George was the brother of Peter Tod, and I'd always known him by his first name Billy (as indeed so had Aunt Alice and the rest of the family), but Jean insisted he was now known by his second name of George, and who were we to argue. He was away at work near Birmingham until the weekend, but we were made most welcome by Jean.

The next day, a Friday, we drove to Leeds and after a short look around the city paid a visit to Mum's sister, my Aunt Rosaline, her husband Larry Wilson and son David. Aunt Alice had come up from Laleham and we had a pleasant afternoon and evening talking and filling in some gaps in the family tree. Again sadly, it was the last time I would see Rosaline and Larry.

On the Saturday cousin George had arrived home in the early hours, so he, Jean and ourselves set out in our car for a day in the beautiful Yorkshire Dales. Once through Harrogate patches of snow started to appear and as we penetrated further we again encountered a winter wonderland. We passed through Nidderdale and crossed the moors to lovely Wharfedale, then followed a narrow road barely visible under the snow over the moors to Coverdale. We then crossed Middleham High Moor, descended into Bishopsdale and followed the River Wharfe back to Wharfedale and so through Kettlewell and

Pontefract to Kirk Smeaton after an unforgettable day's drive. The following day Beryl went to church with Jean while George and I took a long walk through the woods and fields to Wentbridge and back. We spent a quiet afternoon during which more snow fell, but it had melted by the next morning. That day we drove to Bradford to visit the National Museum of Photography but found it was closed on a Monday, so instead returned to Leeds, where we visited Kirkstall Abbey and Roundhay Park, two places I'd visited on my childhood trips to the city. In the afternoon we had another family reunion, this time with Mum's brother Alec, his wife Mary, daughter Andrea and her partner David; Aunt Alice also came along. Uncle Alec was by nature a very voluble person and I think had Beryl a little bemused. It was another pleasant afternoon, and once again the last time I'd see my uncle.

The following day we returned to Bradford and visited the excellent Museum, then returned to Kirk Smeaton by a roundabout route that took us through Harrogate and the pretty town of Knaresborough, where I recalled visiting as a child. Next morning we farewelled the Tods and headed south to Nottingham, stopping on the way at Clumber Park and then the Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre, where I took a walk into the remnants of the forest, past ancient gnarled oak trees including the huge Major Oak, estimated at 800 years old. In Nottingham we visited Nottingham Castle and the Museum of Costume and Textiles, then explored the city's ancient centre. Back on the road, we overnights at Northampton before continuing south to Oxford. We spent several hours exploring the University city, yet saw very little of it – it was cloaked in a dense fog that didn't lift the whole time we were there! However we did get a good appreciation of the fine buildings of the various colleges, and the fog finally started to lift as we covered the final distance to Laleham, with a brief stop and walk in Windsor Great Park along the way.

We spent five days back with Aunt Alice, during which we took a day trip down to Portsmouth, where we visited the Royal Dockyard and toured Nelson's flagship HMS *Victory* and the ironclad battleship HMS *Warrior*, looked at some of the huge collection in the Royal Naval Museum and viewed the restored remains of King Henry VIII's flagship the *Mary Rose*, recovered from the English Channel where it sank on its maiden voyage. On another day we drove down to Brighton and Hove to visit the British Teddy Bear Fair at Hove Town Hall and to briefly explore Brighton itself.

Autumn had now given way to winter when we embarked on our last tour of England. We'd accepted an invitation from Des Platt, the friend I'd made at the Test match in Sydney the year before, to stay a few days with him at his home just outside Liverpool, so we headed north up the motorway before diverting into the historic town of Warwick for a look around there, and then to nearby Kenilworth. Both of these places I'd been to on my visit in 1981, but I felt they were worth another look. After that it was a matter of constant driving along the motorways, but we approached Liverpool by way of Cheshire and then the Wirral through my old stamping ground, reaching the city via the Mersey Tunnel. With some time to kill before continuing on to Des' home, we visited St John's Anglican Cathedral and the Pier Head area before driving through the centre of the city amid its Christmas lights, then out to Rainhill for a pleasant reunion with Des, who of course Beryl had never met.

Des had to work the next day, so we drove back into Liverpool and visited the rather unique Roman Catholic Cathedral, known by its shape as the "Pope's wigwam". From there we spent some time at the rejuvenated Albert Dock precinct, visiting the fine Maritime Museum, before driving north through Liverpool's dockland, now sadly mostly disused and neglected, to Bootle and more by accident than design found the street, Balliol Road, in which I was born. Returning to Liverpool, we drove through the city centre with a quick photograph stop before returning to Rainhill. The next day, a Friday, saw Des still working so in thick fog we returned to Liverpool and through the tunnel to Birkenhead for what was planned to be a day of rediscovery (for me) of my old home town. We firstly visited Greasby for a look at my old school, then Thursaston Hill where I took a short walk to the summit before heading for West

Kirby through the lovely little Caldby Village, one of the most picturesque in the Wirral. Next we stopped at Grange Hill and the Column for long remembered views over the Dee estuary to Wales before descending the hill to the *Ring O'Bells* pub, which had been modernised and had lost a little of its charm, although the thatched cottage opposite, *The Nook*, was just as remembered. We visited St Bridget's Church, which strangely I'd never been inside during my years in West Kirby, then went around the corner to look at Ashton Park and 11 Princes Avenue, my old home. The park still had its beautiful rose garden, but the tennis courts were now a sorry sight. The house itself looked much the same, although a bit shabby and with its front garden, my grandmother's pride and joy, a sorry mess.

Driving to West Kirby proper, we spent some time exploring the town, the Promenade area and Gleggside, where my aunts and uncles once lived, then drove around the corner of the Wirral to Hoylake and looked around there. Finally we made our way to the next village, Meols, where I was reunited with Jean Maynard, my old childhood friend, and her husband Tony. We were joined by her father Eddie Maynard, Mum and Dad's great friend – sadly his wife Hilda had passed away some years earlier – and their younger son Nick, and we had a very pleasant dinner with them before driving back to Rainhill after what was for me a full and very nostalgic day.

The next day was a Saturday but unfortunately Des had to work again, so in the morning I drove back into Liverpool to do some more exploring and reminiscing while Beryl caught up with washing. After lunch we visited Speke Hall, a beautiful Tudor manor house. Next morning, with Des now with us, we took a day trip to Blackpool and Southport and explored both resorts, the scenes of more childhood memories for me. Seaside towns in winter aren't the most picturesque places, but it was interesting to see them again. We said goodbye and thank you to Des the next day and set out for the south east of the country, one of the remaining parts we had not yet visited. We headed across country through Cheshire, stopping en route in Knutsford to say goodbye to Geoffrey at his photography studio there, then made our way once again through the Peak District to Chesterfield and Mansfield, then south to Newark-on-Trent and into the flat lands of Lincolnshire. We reached our destination, Kings Lynn in Norfolk, in the late afternoon and after finding a B&B tried without success to contact two friends, Eric and Lorna, who had been on the Canadian coach trip with us in 1993. The next day we drove to Norwich to explore that town, and on returning to Kings Lynn found Eric and Lorna at home, so had a pleasant evening with them.

The following day we briefly looked around the old port town of Kings Lynn, then had morning tea with Eric and Lorna before setting off across the fen country towards Cambridge. We stopped in Ely to visit the great Cathedral there before reaching Cambridge just before darkness, although it was only three o'clock, so we found a B&B and left sightseeing to the following day. Next morning we explored the university city, looking at its many colleges and historic buildings, with a visit to the Kings College Chapel a highlight. Finally we took to the road again and made our way through winter gloom back to Laleham.

So ended our touring of the British Isles, and our remaining days in the country were spent with Aunt Alice. We visited Kingston-on-Thames with her and caught up with our Christmas shopping there. One very frosty morning I drove to Windsor Great Park and took a long walk through it, enjoying the wintry landscape. On our third morning back the three of us drove into London to return the Ford Escort to Mr Hertz, after which we took the Tube to St Paul's Cathedral and while Beryl and Alice attended the service there I explored the immediate area. We headed back to Covent Garden, wandered around the market there and had lunch before returning to Laleham. One evening Beryl and I took the train into the City, looked around Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly at the Christmas illuminations, then saw the musical *Oliver!* In the West End before a little more wandering of the brightly lit streets. On another day I took another exploration trip into London, this time visiting the National Portrait Gallery. Madame Tussaud's

Waxworks and the Royal Mews among other places. On our final trip into the City Beryl and I visited the busy Harrods department store before meeting John and Betty Cook for a final lunch in Chinatown.

The last few days to Christmas passed fairly quietly. Jean Turner came down from Scarborough to stay, and on the 22 December Alice held a pre-Christmas dinner to which came Sue and Rick and Ray and Anne and their respective children, so the family was complete except for John and Hilary and their daughters in Derbyshire, who would be coming down on Boxing Day. Before breakfast on Christmas Day I rang our neighbour in Sydney, Mike Archbold, to complain about the noise coming from the annual Christmas Eve street party back home and to wish all our other neighbours the compliments of the season. In the evening, it being now Christmas Day in Australia, we rang Australia again with Christmas wishes to our family, although we missed Graham and Michele who had already gone to church. Christmas Day had dawned without the snow that we were hoping would make it a "White Christmas", and it was the first Christmas Day we'd spent away from our immediate family. Alice, Jean and Beryl went to the service at the local parish church while I took a walk along the banks of the Thames, then we exchanged presents and enjoyed an excellent Christmas dinner prepared by Alice. Later we had tea over at Sue and Rick's home. Next afternoon, Boxing Day, we all drove down to Ray and Anne's home at Mapledurwell for another family gathering. Sue and Rick and family were there, as was John and daughter Rebecca, but unfortunately his daughter Katie was ill and had stayed home with her mother Hilary, so we missed out on seeing them again.

The next day, our last in England, the snow arrived and I walked around a now white Laleham, although it only lasted on the ground until early afternoon. We finished our packing and despite the fact we'd sent a large amount of belongings, at great postage costs, back to Australia we were still facing four very overweight suitcases. In the evening we went to Sue and Rick's home for a final dinner, joined by John and Rebecca and Rick's parents, and made our final farewells. So came to an end our stay in what was for me the "old country", with a final month ahead of us in The Netherlands and Belgium. Next morning we said our goodbyes and sincere thanks to Aunt Alice, who had been marvellous in putting up with our comings and goings over eight months. Without her hospitality we would never have been able to stay in England for as long as we did. John Phillips ran us to the airport, as he had a larger car able to accommodate our luggage. At check-in nothing was said about our overweight baggage, although in hindsight we wished there had been, as will be seen later.

We flew to Amsterdam on British Airways, and at Schipol Airport were delighted to find Han and Ineke waiting to meet us. We'd actually arranged to take the train to Lelystad and be met there, but with the amount of baggage we had it was a great relief to be met at the airport. Winter had really hit The Netherlands and we drove to Dronten through a frozen and bare landscape, although the snow had disappeared in the south of the country, and all the canals were solid ice. At Dronten quite a bit of snow lay on the ground. For the next two days we didn't leave the Lammers' home, as I was nursing a wretched head code, but then came New Year's Eve. It was a brilliantly sunny day, but proved to be the coldest New Year's Day in Holland in twenty years. In the afternoon we were joined by four of the Lammers' friends and through the evening we feasted on typical Dutch New Year fare. Came midnight we broke out the champagne and went out into the street to join in the traditional letting off of fireworks. It was cold – about minus 12°C – but not unpleasant, and the amount of fireworks filling the darkness was amazing; it was to us a unique New Year's Eve. The next morning, on another cold but fine day, the Lammers took us on a tour around Flevoland so we could see the contrast with the summer landscape. The ice on the lakes and rivers was stunning, with many skaters making the most of the conditions, and the whole landscape sparkled white under the sun. We visited the local caravan campground where the friends of the night before were staying and had lunch with them, cosy in their heated, insulated caravans with snow and ice all round.

The next day we all drove north to the Province of Overijssel, exploring the winter countryside as we went, and the town of Giethoorn, where a major skating event was taking place. The frozen canals there were crowded with skaters and the bright colours of their clothes made a marvellous picture against the snow and ice. On the way home we stopped in the ancient town of Kampen to do some shopping, and we marvelled at the icebound ships in the river there. The next day, which we spent at leisure, it was announced that because the ice was so thick it had been decided to run the *Elfstedentocht*, or Eleven Towns Race, the next day. This was a skating race that literally brought the country to a standstill, and because of thin ice hadn't been run since 1983. While Han, Ineke and Beryl stayed home to watch it on television I took the train into Amsterdam for a day's exploration there. The city was so much different from when I'd seen it in summer; the canals were icebound, the trees bare and unfortunately frozen rubbish lay everywhere, especially the red paper from the fireworks of New Year's Eve. I took an extensive walk around the city, visiting among other sights the Anne Frank House and the flower market, filled with colourful hothouse blooms.

On another cold and sunny day Han and Ineke took us in the car to the huge Hoge Veluwe National Park, a little north of Arnhem. Of over 5500 hectares, the Park consisted of large tracts of deep forest separated by vast areas of open moorland and rolling grasslands, and in the snow it was a starkly beautiful landscape. It encompassed a couple of interesting museums and the handsome St Hubert Hunting Lodge, a fairly modern structure set in formal French gardens and overlooking a frozen pond on which hundreds of people were skating. One of the museums housed one of the best collections of the works of van Gogh in the world. I spent another day back in Amsterdam, doing some more exploration on foot but also visiting the magnificent Rijksmuseum, where the highlight was van Gogh's magnificent painting *The Night Watch*. One Saturday Beryl and I took the train to Rotterdam to visit a Teddy and Doll Fair there, and while Beryl spent hours looking at the Fair I explored the centre of the city, a very modern place as it had been almost totally destroyed by the Germans in World War II. The train trip to and from Rotterdam gave us a good look at the winter landscape of Holland.

After two weeks at Dronten we rented a little Opel Corsa, brand new, and set out for a few days exploration of Belgium. We drove the length of Flevoland and continued south on the motorways, skirting the major cities, then crossed the border into the East Flanders region of Belgium. Our first stop was in the port city of Antwerp, where we visited the magnificent Cathedral of Our Lady and explored the central area of the ancient city. Moving on, we made another stop at the ancient textile town of St Niklaas, named after Santa Claus, before reaching our destination, the lovely old city of Gent, where we left sightseeing to the following day. We walked its ancient streets, visiting St Bavo's Cathedral, the St Nicholas' Church and the grim fortress of s'Gravensteen Castle, and wandered the many cobbled squares surrounded by mediaeval buildings. Next day we moved on the short distance to the equally old and charming city of Bruges, parked the car at our hotel and walked all around the central area. We visited the 13thC Church of Our Lady; St Saviour's Cathedral; the Grand Place; the Bell Tower, where I climbed up 366 steps for a marvellous view over the red rooftops of the old houses; the Basilica of the Holy Blood; and many more of the city's sights. That evening we went to a little restaurant and ate typical Belgian fare, and after finishing our meal the owners insisted we stay and chat and drink with them, so it turned out to be an unexpectedly convivial evening.

I'd planned a visit to the old battlefields of World War I, so the next day we headed further south through the Flanders countryside to the village of Passchendaele, which had been almost totally destroyed in the conflict. There we visited the nearby Tyne Cot Commonwealth War Cemetery with its neat rows of thousands of graves, set in such a peaceful rural landscape that it was hard to believe it'd been a scene of terrible devastation and death. We continued on to the Canadian Memorial and the Polygon Wood cemetery with its Australian Fifth Division Memorial, then visited the small Sanctuary Wood Museum, containing a sad and somewhat ghoulish collection of memorabilia and detritus from

the war, including a section of the trenches that had been preserved. I found the whole morning a very moving experience; Beryl said later that it frankly depressed her, but I'm glad we did it.

We moved on to the town of Ypres and visited the Menin Gate and the totally rebuilt St Martin's Cathedral, then after accidentally driving into France we made our way to Belgium's capital, Brussels. We spent three nights in the city, visiting most of the main tourist sites including the Grand Place, the arcades of Galeries St Hubert, St Michael's Cathedral, the Upper Town, City Museum and of course the *Mannequin Pis*. At a toy shop in the Galeries we bought a soft toy monkey for our new grandson Michael, and this became inseparable from him at bedtime for many years to come. We drove out to the Parc Cinquantenaire and its ceremonial arch, and visited the Atomium in the World's Fair grounds. One evening we attended the unique and historic marionette Theatre Royale de Toone and saw *The Three Musketeers*, a very entertaining show even if was all in French! Having given Brussels a pretty thorough going over, we set off back towards The Netherlands through mainly industrial and developed areas, past the dockland along the River Scheide and back over the Dutch border. Skirting Rotterdam, we visited the town of Delft where we looked around the town centre and visited the Royal Porcelain Factory where the famous blue porcelain was made. From there we followed the motorways back to Flevoland and Dronten through a landscape that had obviously started to thaw out during our absence.

Back with Han and Ineke, we had a day's break then the four of us drove to Lelystad and visited the shipyard where a full size replica of the merchant ship *Batavia* had been constructed and was being fitted out. The original *Batavia* had been wrecked off the coast of Western Australia, and it was intended that the replica be taken to Sydney to be shown during the 2000 Olympic Games. It was a fascinating experience to tour the almost completed ship and watch the artisans at work, and when some years later we boarded her again in Sydney it was with the special knowledge that we'd seen her during her nativity. The day after that Han and Ineke visited his mother in s'Hertogenbosch and dropped us off in the historic city of Utrecht for a day's exploration. We visited St Janskerk and the Domkerk or Cathedral of St Martin, strolled the streets and toured the fascinating and unique Museum of Musical Clocks and Street Organs.

We then rented another Opel Corsa and set off for a two day tour of the Provinces of Friesland and Noord-Holland, to the north of Dronten. The first day was badly marred by thick fog that didn't lift all day, so we saw no scenery and only small patches of the towns and villages in which we stopped. Our route took us through four of the towns featured in the recent skating race – Stavoren, Hindeloopen, Workum and Harlingen – the first three little ports on the canal system with boats moored and looming through the fog. At Harlingen, a larger port on the shores of the Waddensee, we looked around, had lunch then followed the road south to the small town of Wieringerwerf for an overnight stop. Next morning thankfully the fog had gone as we headed west across endless ploughed fields to reach the harbour town of Den Helder, home of the country's main naval base. From there we followed the coastal dunes of the North Sea to Camperduin, Schoorl and Bergen, where we visited the beach, rather desolate in winter, then headed east through Alkmaar and Hoorn to the picturesque port of Enkhuizen. Finally we crossed the long Houtribdijk causeway connecting Noord-Holland to Flevoland at Lelystad, with great blocks of ice spectacularly piled up by the wind-driven waves, and so back to Dronten.

Our last outing in The Netherlands was with Han and Ineke to the Royal Place of Het Loo, set in huge parklands near the town of Apeldoorn. A whole day was spent exploring the Mews, Stables and Palace itself, as well as the two museums and the formal gardens, which despite the wintry conditions and a fog were magnificent in their extent and design.

On 28 January it was time to leave Europe and return home. Han and Ineke drove us to Schiphol Airport and there we said our goodbyes and sincere thanks for being great hosts. We'd enjoyed very much our

winter experience in The Netherlands, and especially Ineke's traditional Dutch cooking! Inside the terminal we checked in to a nasty experience – our baggage was 47 kilograms overweight and we were charged nearly a thousand dollars excess; we wished that we'd been warned on our flight from London to Amsterdam. A short British Airways flight took us to Heathrow, where we relaxed in the Club Lounge until our BA flight to Hong Kong was called. We were stopping over there and after an uneventful flight arrived during the morning. After a nap I obtained two postpacks from the Post Office and we extracted some of the heavier items from our luggage to be mailed to Australia. This worked, as although still overweight we weren't charged with further excess baggage on the final flight home.

We spent two days in Hong Kong, a city I was well familiar with through my previous visits there. We walked around Kowloon; took the Star ferry across to Hong Kong Island and explored the streets and markets of the Central District – the *real* Hong Kong; took a bus tour of the Island and a cruise on Aberdeen Harbour; visited the Stanley Market; and in my case did a lot of walking. However the stopover wasn't really a success, and in hindsight we'd have been better off flying directly home as we were jaded from being away for nine months, and the problems with the baggage hadn't helped. On the evening of the second day we took our final QANTAS flight home, arriving there on the steamy summer morning of 1 February 1997.

Looking back on our sojourn in Europe, I'd enjoyed it immensely and I think Beryl had too, although she was less enamoured of overseas travel than I was. Nine months was a long time to be away, but it had only been in the last couple of weeks, knowing the end was coming, that we started to think about home. It had been tiring at times, but we'd made every post a winner and seen an awful lot of the British Isles and Europe. The fact that we'd covered all four seasons while over there was also a plus. In my case catching up with family and friends, some of whom I wouldn't see again, was also memorable and personally rewarding. While I'm now and always will be a 100% Australian, I left England with the strong feeling that if I had to live there again I could do so quite easily, as long as I had the income to match the high cost of living. However I was still left in no doubt that we lived in the best country in the world!

Chapter Nineteen

To The End Of The Twentieth Century

Back at home, after catching up with family – young Michael, our grandson, was now nearly a year old and we'd missed his baby months – we launched immediately into building the extension to the house that we'd planned before going to Europe.

We engaged a builder friend and former flatmate of Russell, Peter Browne, who lived locally in North Rocks, to do the work for us, subcontracting as necessary, and set out to turn the architect's plan into reality. The first step was to prepare the site, and this involved the removal of a large oak tree on the western side of the house. Years before as a youngster Russell had brought home from a football game a handful of acorns and had been allowed to pot them, and one had developed into a seedling which was planted at the side of the house next to the laneway. Over the years this had developed into a substantial oak tree that had the advantage of shading the side of the house, but also the disadvantage of shedding leaves and acorns in the gutter and cracking the concrete in the laneway. Permission was forthcoming from the Council to remove it, we engaged a professional tree feller and with surprising speed and efficiency down it came; the resultant timber was much prized by him. Over the next three months I watched, and occasionally helped with such things as painting, as a slab was laid, walls and roof erected and the extension took shape. Graham's bedroom became a walk-through "library" with bookshelves and display cases, and his bedroom window became a step-down access door to a spacious new room. Floor to ceiling glass and doors opened out to the back patio, and at the back of the room was a small storeroom. We were very satisfied by the result, and particularly the quality of it.

Over the same period and beyond we spent a lot of time and money acquiring new furniture for the extension and also upgrading a few items in the house itself. A new refrigerator and television were bought for upstairs, the new "studio" was equipped with desk, computer workstation, chairs, lounge and futon, bookshelf, filing cabinet, shelving for the storeroom and so on. Two large bookshelves and two glass-fronted display cases were purchased for the "library", and by the time we had added task lighting and a cork floor our bank balance was considerably diminished. Later in the year we had Peter Browne completely remodel the bathroom as well.

In March we received a letter from a couple in The Netherlands, Albert and Jannie van Gelder. They were casual acquaintances of Han and Ineke, who had given them our names, and their letter asked if we would be able to assist in their purchasing a campervan or motorhome in which they could travel around Australia, much as Han and Ineke had done. Of course we said yes, and over the next three months a series of telexes passed between us as I researched the availability of vehicles on a buy-back basis, answered innumerable questions from them, prepared itineraries and generally did whatever we could to prepare for their arrival. They came out in late June and we met them at the airport, took them to their booked accommodation in Sydney and over the next couple of days escorted them around the dealers while they purchased a campervan. This they parked in our driveway and then stayed with us while they stocked it up. We were able to lend them several items, and others they bought at the local flea market. After a few days they were on their way and we were able to get back to the construction of the extension.

Just after the van Gelders arrived in Sydney they received a very sad telex from The Netherlands. Han Lammers had been admitted to hospital with bowel cancer, in itself not too serious an occurrence, but after the operation severe complications developed and proved fatal, and he had passed away on 25 June. We were shocked and saddened at so unexpectedly losing a great friend, and wrote back to Ineke immediately. A little while later she sent us a copy of the funeral notices. The 1995 trip to Northern

Australia seemed to have been jinxed, as in the same year, 1997, we received word of the deaths of Charlie Pike and Wally Robinson, two others of our fellow travellers, and of course there was the near loss of Ken and Evie Bowden in their accident.

We had a burst of theatre going in the middle of the year, seeing *Beauty and the Beast*, *Porgy and Bess*, *Crazy For You* and *Sweet Charity*. Sometime either that year or the year after we also saw a revival of *My Fair Lady* at the beautifully renovated Capitol Theatre.

Being involved with the extension and then the van Gelder exercise ruled out the usual mid year caravan trip, even though Raelene and Matt had moved out of it just before we returned from Europe. However in September, with the extension behind us, we booked and went on a "Western Wildflowers" coach tour around Western Australia that involved returning to Sydney on the *Indian Pacific* train. We flew to Perth and the following day the tour, run by Australian Scenic, started with a run around the city area, moved on to Fremantle for individual exploration, then returned to Perth for the night. Day Two saw the tour start in earnest as we headed south through Rockingham and Mandurah to Australind and Bunbury, where we made a brief stop, then continued on to Busselton for another stop before reaching our overnight stay at Margaret River. On Day Three we explored the coast down to Cape Leeuwin and Augusta, then headed through forest country to the timber town of Pemberton and a pleasant resort on the shores of Lake Beedelup for our overnight break. Next day we continued to head east to Northcliffe, Walpole, the Valley of the Giants and Denmark, the day finishing in Albany after a visit to the former whaling station there.

From Albany we saw some more of the area and then headed inland to the imposing Stirling Ranges for one of the many wildflower "frolics", as our driver David called them, that we would stop and take during the tour. Carrying on, we crossed the vast wheat belt, made a stop in Ravensthorpe to see the wildflower show there, then continued on to the lovely seaside town of Esperance after a long day on the road. Next morning we toured the area and explored the town before reboarding the coach and heading north through mallee country to Norseman for a stop there before reaching the golden city, Kalgoorlie, for a two night stay. The following day we did a town tour, visiting the Hannan North Tourist Mine, the Goldfields Museum and several more tourist sites, finishing at the famous two-up school – but only to watch! Interestingly our guide at the Mine was a retired miner named Len, and in chatting to him I found he was born and bred in West Kirby, just the other side of the park from where I had lived. A small world! Leaving Kalgoorlie, we stopped in historic Coolgardie for half an hour, not nearly enough time to see much, then had a long drive through the mallee and wheat belt to the distinctive Wave Rock, near the little town of Hyden, where we made our stop for the night. On the road once more, we headed north west towards Perth but firstly detoured to the historic town of York, with its 19th Century buildings and excellent Motor Museum, before descending the Darling Ranges to the city. That evening we had a reunion with my Aunt Mary Hilton, daughter Janet and granddaughter Alison, and son Ian and his wife Kirsten.

The tour continued the next day, this time to cover the area north of Perth. We headed out through Guildford and the Upper Swan Valley and made a brief stop at the little town of Gingin, where in the local cemetery was growing a magnificent mass of wild kangaroo paws. In the afternoon we reached the coastal town of Cervantes and visited the Nambung National Park and the famous Pinnacles, weathered pillars of limestone rising from the sand. Staying close to the coast, we then made our way north to Dongara and Geraldton for our overnight stop. Leaving exploration there until the return trip, we continued on up the North West Coastal Highway, then turned towards the coast for a visit to Kalbarri National Park and the town of the same name. Returning to the highway, we resumed our journey north to the Overlander Roadhouse, then branched off towards Shark Bay, visiting Hamelin Pool and its shell deposits before staying the night at Nanga Bay Resort, a former sheep station. Next morning saw us

continue to Monkey Mia to see the famous dolphins, then after a look around Denham and with a few stops at viewpoints we took the long drive back over the same route to Geraldton.

The following day was the last day of the coach tour as we headed back to Perth, detouring via Moura and the interesting monastery at New Norcia. The next morning we had free time in Perth, then with our fellow passengers we were taken to the railway station and boarded the *Indian Pacific* for our return journey to Sydney. This took three nights and two and a half days and was a great experience, if just a little bit too long to be cooped up inside a railway carriage. The service and meals were good and our compartment reasonably comfortable, but often progress was very slow and there were numerous stops for no apparent reason, interrupting sleep. Crossing the vast plain of the Nullarbor on the longest straight stretch of track in the world was quite an experience, and during a stop at the tiny wayside hamlet of Cook I walked the length of the train; consisting of 29 cars and 700 metres in length, it was claimed to be the longest passenger train in the world at that time. There were short breaks in Kalgoorlie and Adelaide, but apart from that we stayed on the train the whole time, arriving back in Sydney in mid morning after an enjoyable tour with a friendly and sociable group of people.

Our travels for the year were not quite over, as in November we flew to Norfolk Island for a week. We'd bought a package that included flights with Norfolk Jet Express, transfers from the airport, accommodation at the South Pacific Resort including breakfast, evening meals at the hotel and various other venues, and some tours and other attractions. We spent the afternoon of our day of arrival exploring the Burnt Pine shopping area, and the next morning were picked up for a minibus tour that covered much of the Island, including the old convict settle of Kingston, Emily Bay, Cascade Bay, St Barnabas Chapel and the Botanic Gardens. After lunch our rental car, a Honda Civic costing just \$17 a day, was delivered and we spent the afternoon in further exploration. Day Three saw us take a glass bottom boat cruise on Emily Bay, some more exploration and shopping in Burnt Pine. That evening we went on a progressive dinner tour, enjoying a three course meal at three different locations that were also the homes of residents.

The next day we spent the morning touring the Island in the car, and in the afternoon went on a minibus for a conducted tour of the convict settlement at Kingston. In the evening we took in the *Mutiny On the Bounty* show at the outdoor Salty Theatre, put on by local residents. On Day Five I spent the morning on a walk in the National Park while Beryl attacked the shops again, and in the afternoon we went on a rather boring "island culture" tour. The evening was occupied by a forgettable dinner at our hotel, followed by a quite enjoyable *Old Time Music Hall* show. Next morning was one of the highlights of our stay, a ride in a wagon pulled by two Clydesdales out to Steel Point on the Island's east coast; a very relaxed and enjoyable outing. After lunch we returned to Emily Bay, where I did some snorkelling over the coral formations. The evening was spent at a *Sound and Light Show* down at the convict ruins in Kingston. The morning of Day Seven saw us on an interesting off-road tour of part of the Island in a 4WD, and in the afternoon I did some more snorkelling. That evening we were to attend a *Night With the Convicts* at the hotel, but couldn't face up to another bad meal there or dress up as convicts, so we ate out and I enjoyed one of the best steaks I'd had in years! Next day was our last day, so after some more exploring and shopping we dropped the Honda Civic at the airport and flew home after a pleasant enough week on a very attractive Island. We'd certainly go again, but we'd avoid any more meals at the South Pacific Resort!

In December Albert and Jannie van Gelder arrived back in Sydney – a few weeks ahead of schedule as they had become grandparents and were eager to get back to The Netherlands and see their new grandchild. We helped them return the campervan and they stayed with us a couple of days before taking their flight home, and well into the following year we had a flood of correspondence from them, usually in the form of telexes care of the North Rocks Newsagency. And so this brought to an end 1997.

Over the past two or three years, but especially during 1997, Beryl's arthritis in her joints had become progressively worse, especially in her legs, and she spent a great deal of time in pain. Although she rarely if ever complained, she spent many sleepless or disturbed nights and it was obvious that something had to be done about it. After consultation with her orthopaedic surgeon, Dr Bill Walter, it was agreed that without further ado or waiting until she had turned sixty she should have a hip and knee replacement in her right leg. He wouldn't do both operations at the same time, so in January 1998 she entered the Mater Hospital in North Sydney and had a hip replacement, and in June she returned for the knee replacement. She spent several days in hospital on each occasion, with my driving in to visit her each day, and thankfully the new M2 Motorway opened during that period, which made the trip much easier.

Each operation was followed by an intensive period of physiotherapy, at first at the hospital and then at home. The latter comprised mainly hydrotherapy and required a swimming pool. Fortunately Graham Towle was now Superintendent of the Uniting Church's retirement villages and nursing homes, and he arranged access to the heated pool at the Alan Walker Village in Carlingford. Several times a week we would drive down there and Beryl would exercise in the water. Her dedication to the regime of physio paid off, as she made great progress and, while the post-operative pain was there, as she said it was a different kind than the nagging pain she'd endured for so long. She made an excellent recovery, and although walking uphill in particular slows her down she still benefits from having the operations. With the benefit of hindsight she should have had them the previous year, after we'd returned from Europe.

June saw a very pleasant visit from Ken and Eve Bowden. Despite their accident on the Nullarbor they were back into caravanning with a new car and a Regent pop-top van, somewhat smaller than ours. They spent a week with us en route to North Queensland and we had an enjoyable reunion and showed them something of Sydney, although of course they'd been here before. In July we went to see *Showboat* at the new Lyric Theatre at the Star City Casino, and in August took our granddaughter Lauren to see the *Great Moscow Circus*, which she enjoyed as all kids do.

Naturally Beryl's surgery and recovery precluded any travel in the first part of the year, but by September she was sufficiently recovered enough that we could make another trip. This one would prove one of the most memorable of our life – a small boat cruise from Broome to Cairns. The trip started by us flying to Broome via Alice Springs, arriving there in time to watch the Pearl Festival Parade. We'd picked up a rental car at the airport and next day did some sightseeing around the town, a place we were familiar with from our previous visit there. Our second day in Broome was one of those unforgettable ones. We'd booked an all day scenic flight around the Kimberley region, and along with three other passengers and a lady pilot named Tammy we were up in the air by seven in the morning in a six seater Cessna 210 Centurion. We followed a route due east across a very smoky landscape due to a large bushfire that had been accidentally lit and had consumed nearly a million hectares. Bypassing the town of Derby, we picked up and followed the Gibb River Road to touch down at the airstrip at Windjana Gorge, where we were met by a minibus and taken for a short walking tour into the Gorge, with Beryl staying with the bus. Back in the air we crossed the King Leopold Ranges and touched down again at Silent Grove. Beryl was invited to do the rounds with the wife of the Ranger, while the rest of us were taken by minibus to beautiful Bell Gorge for a hot walk and a refreshing swim. We had of course visited and camped at both the gorges during our earlier caravan trip to the Kimberley.

Once more in the air, we took a short flight to Mount Hart Station, where we landed, were shown around and had lunch before taking off once more and flying north to meet the coast. We circled over Talbot Bay and the Horizontal Waterfalls that we would see up close on the cruise itself, then flew over the magnificent seascape of the Buccaneer Archipelago with its many islands and turquoise waters. We made another landing at Cape Leveque and visited the Kooljaman Resort and the beach there. The final

leg of the trip took us south along the coastline of the Dampier Peninsula over Lombadina and Beagle Bay, with a final pass over Cable Beach and Roebuck Bay before landing back at Broome after a memorable day.

Next morning we drove around Broome for a little while before returning the rental car, then after lunch were picked up by a tour bus which collected our fellow cruise passengers from their various hotels and then took a short tour of Broome before depositing us at the wharf to board our cruise boat, the *Coral Princess*. She was a steel catamaran of four decks and having very comfortable accommodation for forty eight passengers, with a lounge, dining room and bar, and was equipped with an aluminium punt, the *Zoë Explorer*, and Zodiac inflatables for shore visits. We settled in, met our fellow passengers and had dinner before settling down for the night. The cruise was actually two cruises in one. During the winter the *Princess* did ten day cruises each way between Broome and Darwin, and at the end of the season did a final ten day cruise from Darwin back to her home base in Cairns. We were booked on that last cruise of the season, and hence were travelling from Broome right round to Cairns on her. The cruise itself started early the next morning when we left Broome and started to follow the coast north, and after a few hours we anchored off West Lacepede Island. Most of us went ashore for a memorable walk among the teeming bird life, with Beryl staying on board with some others for a cruise round the island. Later in the day we were landed on a deserted beach north of Cape Borda for a swim in the warm Indian Ocean.

The following morning we cruised through the islands of the Buccaneer Archipelago, then after lunch boarded the *Explorer* for an exploration of Talbot Bay, ending up at the Horizontal Waterfalls, narrow defiles through which the tides created spectacular rapids or "waterfalls". The *Explorer* navigated one of them then we in turns climbed in to the Zodiacs – Beryl included – and were taken to the very brink of the second one, which was still too dangerous to negotiate. It was a thrilling and unique experience. Next morning we continued east, with stops and landings at Raft Point to see the Aboriginal *Wandjina* figures, and at an unnamed creek infested by crocodiles where I climbed with the others up to a crocodile-free billabong for a refreshing swim. In the evening we were taken for a croc-spotting expedition on the *Explorer*. The following day we continued east, stopping at and walking on Montgomery Reef, an amazing spectacle at low tide with the water pouring off it. Continuing, we sailed into Camden Harbour and explored the ruins of the old settlement there. Next morning we entered the Prince Regent River and spent most of the day exploring there, visiting the beautiful Kings Cascades. The next stop was Prince Frederick Harbour, where a special treat awaited us. Three at a time, we were ferried by helicopters from the beach across the wild country to the awesome Mitchell Falls. Even though the falls were barely running in the Dry season, the scenery was amazing and there was time for a swim in a billabong before being ferried back to the *Princess*. I hadn't realised a swim was possible and hadn't worn swimmers, but that didn't deter me and in the cover of some bushes I entered the water *au naturel*. Beryl did a scenic flight without landing, and then went on a fishing trip in the *Explorer*.

Back aboard, we made our way to the Hunter River and then Careening Bay for exploration aboard the *Explorer*, followed by an excellent barbecue on the shore as the sun set. Next day we landed on Bigge Island to see the art site and *Wandjina* figures there, and the following day saw us in the King George River area, going ashore at Koolama Bay and then Pangali Cove before entering the river proper and following it to where it ended in fifty metre walls over which the waters of the river plunged in the Wet season. The seas were a little rough as we then crossed the 140 nautical miles of the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf to reach the Northern Territory coast near Cape Scott. We spent a little time on the beach before the *Princess* got under way again and headed for Darwin. This completed the first half of the cruise and the Captain's Farewell Dinner was held that night, as some of the passengers were leaving us the next day and new passengers boarding.

We berthed in Darwin the next morning, and after farewelling those leaving we were bussed into the city centre while the *Coral Princess* was refuelled and stores replenished. The bus took us on a bit of a tour, then dropped us at the Smith Street Mall, where we wandered around, shopped and had lunch before returning to the boat. In the afternoon I took a walk around the wharf area and Parliamentary Precinct, and visited the World War II oil storage tunnels. That night a group of us ate fish and chips on the Wharf, a Darwin tradition. We sailed again the following morning, heading north to the Tiwi islands, where we landed at Ngulu on Bathurst Island. We were taken on a minibus tour of the Aboriginal community, which began with a traditional welcoming ceremony and “smoking”, during which Beryl was face painted by the matriarch of the community. We passed through Dundas Strait overnight and in the morning went ashore in Port Essington to explore the remains of the historic failed settlement there. Another beach barbecue followed that night. Next day saw us landed on McCluer Island, and the following day Raragola in the Wessel Islands. Moving on, the next stop was Wigram Island, in the English Companys group, then followed a full day and night at sea crossing the Gulf of Carpentaria, a little rough at first but with the swell abating.

Across the Gulf, we reached Thursday Island in the early morning. We firstly boarded the *Explorer* for a cruise to nearby Hammond Island and a visit to the community there. Back at Thursday Island we had an afternoon bus tour of the town and Green Hill Fort before the *Princess* sailed at three o'clock so that we would reach Cape York and walk to its tip as the sun set, where we drank champagne at the northernmost point of the Australian mainland. We now started to head south down the Queensland coast and in the waters of the Great Barrier Reef. We landed on Forbes Island for great swimming and snorkelling, then overnight continued south to the Flinders Island Group, where we visited the Aboriginal art gallery on Stanley Island. After lunch we reached Davie Reef, anchored and went ashore to look at the teeming colony of sooty terns and boobies – an absolute bedlam of birds, the air black with wheeling bodies and the noise and smell indescribable. Next morning found us at Lizard Island, and in a very full day the passengers did some snorkelling, climbed the dominant hill of Cook's Look, explored some of the island and visited the Australian Museum's Research Station.

The next morning found us not far off Cairns, but we headed back out to sea for a visit to Thetford Reef and more heavenly snorkelling and feeding of the fish. In the afternoon we made our way to Fitzroy Island, where we went ashore to the resort there, did some minor exploration and had a beer at the bar. Back on board, we attended our second Captain's Farewell Party. Next morning, in ironically grey and showery weather, we sailed the last leg to Cairns and said sad farewells to each other after a memorable trip through Northern Australian waters. We walked around Cairns for a few hours before going to the airport and catching our flight home to Sydney via Brisbane. We made some good friends on the *Princess*, in particular Don Strath and partner Jill Arthurs, who lived at Shutehaven in Whitsunday and with whom we would often stay in the future. There was Ralph and Tissie from South Carolina, who I still correspond with by email, their Canadian friends Bruce and Lynn Smith, Roger and Peggy Cundall, the Brancourts and many others.

We made one last trip in 1998; in November we took a car trip around the Central West area of NSW, visiting Bathurst, Hill End, Carcoar, Blayney, Cowra, Orange, the Ophir goldfields, Molong, Dubbo, Dunedoo and Denman. In Blayney we caught up with Jack and Dorothy Toohey, with whom we'd stayed many years earlier, although they now lived in the town and not on the farm.

The year 1999 proved to be a very full one, and started with our taking Lauren to see the pantomime *Snow White* at the Sydney University theatre, which she enjoyed greatly, especially when the seven dwarfs came out and mingled with the crowd after the show. In the same month, January, we saw the marvellous circus show *Saltimbanco* under the big top at Moore Park, and in March saw the smash hit musical *Chicago*!

We'd often talked about experiencing Australia's Far North during the Wet season and had decided to take a short holiday up there, so in mid January we flew to Darwin, where we checked in to a city hotel and picked up a Mitsubishi Magna rental car. Immediately the "Wet" was living up to its name, as there were constant heavy showers for the first couple of days. As expected it was humid, but not excessively so and we had no trouble in getting about; in any case, most places were air conditioned. On our first full day there we looked around the city centre, revisited the Indo-Pacific Marine aquarium and took a drive along the shoreline to Nightcliff.

On the second day we took a full day drive down via Batchelor to Litchfield National Park. There was a great deal of contrast to our previous visit, with tall green grass replacing the dried, straw-like growth of the Dry season. Florence Falls were running fast, although quite a few people were swimming, but I chose the lovely cascades of Buley Rockhole for my swim. I took a very hot circular walk to the Tolmer Falls lookout, then we carried on to Wangi Falls. These were an awesome sight, with twin cataracts plunging a hundred metres or so off the escarpment, and swimming was out of the question because of the force of the water. Returning to Darwin, we were hit by a couple of monsoon deluges, but arrived there under sunny skies. Next day we again spent exploring around the city precincts. We were somewhat disappointed that although huge clouds developed out to sea, there were none of the spectacular thunderstorms we'd hoped to witness.

Leaving Darwin the following morning, we headed east through Humpty Doo to Kakadu National Park, with a stop at the Wetlands Visitor Centre at the Adelaide River. We checked in to the rather down at heel Frontier Holiday Village near the South Alligator River, still an hour's drive from the heart of the Park at Jabiru. We drove there next day, called at the Visitor Centre and then visited Nourlangie Rock and Angbangbang Billabong in very hot conditions. The latter was very different from what it had appeared in the Dry, with many waterbirds crowding its shores and waters. Returning to Jabiru, we drove to the airport and took an hour and a quarter scenic flight over the park and the Arnhem Land escarpment, this being the best and in some cases only way of seeing the landscape in its flooded state. The plane was stiflingly hot, but the flight was well worth it with awesome views of Jim Jim and others falls cascading off the escarpment and the great expanse of flooded wetlands around Ubirr Rock. That evening, back at the Resort, there was a spectacular sound and light display from a dry electric storm raging to the north.

On the following morning we drove quickly back to Jabiru and on to Coinda to take the famous Yellow Water cruise, something we'd done in the Dry in 1995. This was most enjoyable, with the heat and humidity tempered out on the water. The level of the billabong was several metres higher than in the Dry, with the winter landing pontoon submerged. Because of the water level there were no crocodiles to be sighted, but the bird and plant life made up for their absence. We made a few photo stops on the way back to the Resort, and the following day returned to Darwin and checked in to the same hotel. It was extremely hot, and part from a prearranged meeting for a beer with one of the guides from the *Coral Princess* cruise we didn't venture outside until the evening. Next day we flew home after an enjoyable eight days, a little disappointed that we hadn't seen the full fury of the Wet season storms – we were apparently a month or so too early, as they were at their best in February. However we'd appreciated seeing the differences between Wet and Dry, especially in the Litchfield and Kakadu National Parks.

In February we had two welcome visits. My cousin Stewart Griffiths and his wife Jean came out from England on holidays and stayed in Sydney for a few days before moving on to Perth. I'd never actually met him, but we had no trouble identifying them the airport. They stayed in a hotel in the city, but we picked them up and showed them around Sydney and took them home for a meal with us. Stewart had contacted me beforehand asking if I could prearrange two things for them. The first was to climb the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and I joined them on this – an exhilarating experience, as I hadn't done it

before. The other was to arrange a dinner at Doyle's Seafood Restaurant at Watsons Bay, so the four of us dined there, at a footpath table, while the sun set over the city. The ambience was superb. The restaurant had apparently featured on a television programme in Britain and they were eager to replicate the experience of the TV host.

The other visitor, who came at the same time as Stewart and Jean, was our old friend Betty Rohn from Detroit. She arrived as usual on a cruise on the *Sagafjord*, although the ship had been renamed to I forget what. Betty was only here for one day so we showed her around a bit and then took her to dinner at Jordan's Seafood Restaurant at Darling Harbour, where again there was great ambience with the lights of the city blazing across the water.

In March we lost Graham, Michele, Lauren and Michael temporarily. Graham had arranged an exchange with a minister in Kingston, Ontario, Canada so the family flew over there while the Canadian family came out and lived in the Balgowlah Heights house. It was a great experience, especially for the two children. There was still snow around when they arrived over there, and from all accounts they had a great time. Lauren came back with a slight Canadian accent as she had been old enough to go to school there, and in fact she could sing *O Canada* before she learned *Advance Australia Fair*.

In the event their absence had little effect on us, as in the same month we set out for a caravan trip over to Western Australia that wouldn't see us home again until September. We would be accompanied by Ken and Eve Bowden for the first part of the trip, so initially we drove down to Melbourne to meet up with them. By now we were very good friends, despite the distance between our homes, and this trip would cement the relationship even more. Ken was a person who would do anything for anyone, and would stop and engage in conversation with any passer-by and always had a cheery word for everyone, while Eve had a lovely warm personality and a great sense of humour. They never been blessed with children, which was a great pity as I think they would have made marvellous parents. Prior to retirement they'd owned a toy shop and haberdashery business in Beaumaris and then Noble Park, and their crammed garage still held quite a bit of stock from the business. Beryl delighted in going through the huge selection of buttons of all shapes and sizes, while I was fascinated by the collection of Hornby and Triang model locomotives and rolling stock that still sat in the original boxes. They'd built their house many years earlier when Beaumaris was still mainly sandy bush, and because they had no family it had remained a two bedroom house, with the second bedroom used as a utility room.

While in Melbourne we had a security door fitted to the caravan, and also an air conditioner installed on the roof. We'd made provision for this when the caravan was built but hadn't gone ahead with it, but we now felt it would be a very handy thing to have in the heat of the Far North. We also visited a Teddy Bear Fair at Caulfield Racecourse, and Ken and I visited the World Stamp Expo at the Exhibition Centre, where I caught up with my stamp dealer, Manfred Junge, who was down for the occasion. Beryl and I also took a ride on the famous *Puffing Billy* steam train in the Dandenongs, which we'd first ridden many years earlier when Graham was but two years old.

After a few days we started the trip proper, the four of us heading west. As I said earlier, travelling together would cement our relationship even further. It usually fell to me to work out the itinerary and suggest things to see, so I became the "Tour Director", or "TD" for short. Beryl's work with teddy bears brought her the name of Beryl Bear, shortened to "Beebee", and even today Ken still calls her by that name. On the road we used Channel 13 of the UHF radio to communicate between vehicles, and in later years when telephoning each other we'd open the conversation by saying "Channel 13 Sydney (or Melbourne) here". Very early in the trip Eve "kidnapped" several of Beryl's teddies, which she christened The Cousins, and every time we went into their caravan the bears would be lined up at the head of their

bed; it was with great reluctance that she surrendered them when the time came for us to go our separate ways.

We had overnight stops at Horsham and Murray Bridge, bypassed Adelaide by going through the Barossa Valley and Kapunda, then overnights at Clare. Next day we continued on to Port Augusta, the “crossroads of Australia”, to spend a couple of nights there before starting the long trek west to Perth. We headed along the Eyre Highway, passing the now ghost town of Iron Knob and stopping briefly in Kimba before continuing through Kyancutta to the small town of Wudinna. We made our overnight stop there, even though it was still only midday, and in the afternoon visited Mount Wudinna, claimed to be Australia’s second largest monolith after Ayers Rock. We reached Ceduna the next day and spent three nights there, exploring the town and district and buying delicious prawns, oysters and fish. Back on the road, we continued west across a rather barren landscape to the little town of Penong, famous for its windmills. There Ken stayed with the caravans while we unhitched and with Eve drove down to Point Sinclair and Cactus Beach to look around that area; the road turned out to be good enough to have taken the vans down it anyway. Back on the highway, we overnights at the rather nondescript Nundroo Roadhouse, then next morning reached Yalata Roadhouse, which marked the beginning of the vast Nullarbor Plain.

Some people boast that they crossed the Nullarbor in two days or even less, saying there was nothing to see. We took five days, because there was plenty to see if one looked for it. That first day we reached the oasis of the Nullarbor Roadhouse, then over the next few hours made constant stops at the lookouts along the Bunda Cliffs, spectacular sheer drops of a hundred metres to the waters of the Bight and with some stunning coastal scenery. We stopped overnight at the Border Village, then crossed into Western Australia and passed through Eucla, which place we left for the return journey. We descended from the escarpment down the Eucla Pass to the coastal plain and followed the highway, running dead straight and flat across the countryside to Mundrabilla Roadhouse, then made a lunch stop in Madura. We climbed up the escarpment once more and reached Cocklebiddy Roadhouse in the early afternoon for a stop of two nights. Ken and I drove to Cocklebiddy Cave and I climbed down the rock and scree in almost total darkness to the water of what was believed to be the world’s longest water filled cavern. It was quite an eerie and certainly unique experience. Next day we left the caravans at the roadhouse and took the 4WD track down to the coast and the old Eyre Telegraph Station, now a Bird Observatory. We spent an interesting few hours there, exploring around the station, sighting a few birds and chatting with the resident caretakers and some other visitors from Western Australia, who we would meet again in our travels.

We set off again the next day, stopping for morning tea at the Caiguna Roadhouse and at the Caiguna Blowhole before negotiating the longest stretch of straight road in Australia. We reached Balladonia around lunch time, set up for an overnight stop and then, at the suggestion of one of the visitors we’d met at the Bird Observatory, backtracked to Balladonia Station Homestead and viewed the unique art collection there, works painted throughout her lifetime by a local of the area, Amy Crocker. It was places like this that the traveller in a hurry missed out on. Next morning we set off again and completed the fifth day of our Nullarbor crossing at the town of Norseman. There we spent the afternoon exploring the town and the old Dundas Coach Road Heritage Trail, and at “happy hour” that evening caught up once more with the visitors from the Bird Observatory, Robin and Marie Duncan and Brian and Fran Bower.

Passing through vast grasslands and wheat fields, our next stop, well south and on the coast, was the port of Esperance. We stopped there only to do some shopping, then headed east to the tiny town of Condingup and from there south to the coast at remote Duke of Orleans Bay for a five night stay. We’d agreed with the Duncans to meet them there, and the next morning the Bowers also arrived. We spent that day looking around the locality, then next day the eight of us, in two vehicles, took a long and very

slow 4WD trip to the eastern end of the Bight at remote Israelite Bay. It was a very interesting trip, both for the country through which we passed and the ruins of the old settlement at our destination. This was followed by a much needed rest day, in the afternoon of which we all went to watch an Australian Rules football match in Condingup. We all spent the day after in Cape Arid National Park and the surrounding area, enjoying spectacular scenery, discovering many wildflowers and doing some exhilarating four wheel driving in the bush and on the beaches. Our stay over, we said goodbye to the Bowers, who were heading directly home, and the Duncans, Bowdens and ourselves returned to Esperance. There we had a farewell lunch with Robin and Marie before they continued on, while we settled in for a few days stay. The weather next day was perfect, except for a little wind, and we made the most of it on a delightful cruise around the islands and waters of the Archipelago of the Recherche, weathered granite outcrops rising from an azure sea. We saw sea lions, seals and sea eagles, landed on Woody Island and visited the Visitor Centre there, explored some of the island, took a glass bottomed boat ride and generally enjoyed the magnificent seascape of that part of Australia.

Over the next couple of days we looked all around the quite busy port town and toured some of the district including the - in those days - pioneer wind farm just outside town. The constant wind was playing havoc with Beryl's sinuses, so one day she stayed at the caravan while Ken, Eve and myself drove along the 22 kilometre Wylie Beach to Cape le Grand National Park, where we explored the stunning landscape and pristine little bays and beaches, and I climbed to the summit of the distinctive Frenchman Peak for mind blowing views. Our last day in Esperance we took fairly easily, and the day after saw us on the road again for a short run along the coast to Bremer Bay, our next stopping place. There we visited the interesting Wellstead Museum in the historic homestead, explored the rugged Port Henry Peninsula and spent a full day – my 59th birthday - in the Fitzgerald River National Park with its many wildflowers. Moving on once more, our next stop was Albany, where we stayed five days. After exploring the town we all spent a day up in the Stirling Ranges National Park and Mount Barker, and the following day – ANZAC Day – we took a cruise on King George Sound, where the great fleet carrying the Australian Infantry Force had assembled before sailing to Europe during the First World War. The operator of the cruise boat, by long standing tradition, dropped a wreath in the water where the fleet had once anchored. Afterwards we visited the wreath-covered Desert Mounted Corps memorial on the heights of Mount Clarence. On another day we all explored the West Cape Howe and Torndirrup National Parks, with some good four wheel driving and magnificent seascapes. On our last day we visited Porongurup National Park, where I climbed to the summit of Castle Rock, and returned to Mount Barker for some wine tasting.

Leaving Albany, we had a short run to the pretty town of Denmark, looked around the area and had two most enjoyable cruises on the Denmark River and Wilson Inlet, one of them a sunset barbecue cruise on which we were the only passengers. We also took several scenic drives around the district. On the road once more, we visited the Valley of the Giants with its huge trees and took the Treetop Walk that carried us high above the forest floor, before reaching the town of Walpole for a three night stay. After exploring around there we moved on to the timber town of Pemberton, where we inspected the mill, took a forest tour and rode the timber tramway and visited the Warren and D'Entrecasteaux National Parks. Two nights in Manjimup saw us move on through Bridgetown to Balingup, where we met up with two of Ken and Eve's friends, Bill and Gaye Johnson, and had dinner at their home. Passing through Nannup, we then made our way to the coast and Margaret River, setting up in a caravan park in nearby Cowaramup. We spent a couple of days taking in the sights of the district, including the spectacular Lake Cave and the Raptor Centre, then moved on to Busselton. At 28 kilometres this was the shortest day's travel of the trip, or indeed of any trip before or since! While at Busselton we again thoroughly explored that area and caught up with Brian and Fran Bower, who had left us at Orleans Bay and who lived in nearby Dunsborough.

From Busselton we headed north towards Perth, following the West Australian coast. We stopped for a short look around Bunbury then continued on to Mandurah for three nights before reaching Fremantle. We spent a week there, the four of us visiting Rottnest Island and touring Perth and its environs on day or half day trips, sometimes together and sometimes on our own. During our stay we had lunch with my Aunt Mary, sadly the last time we would see her as she passed away in 2003. In the Maritime Museum in Fremantle we inspected the remains of the Dutch East Indiaman *Batavia*, rescued from its last resting place on a reef in the Abrolhos Islands off Geraldton; we had of course been on board her replica while in The Netherlands in 1996. Regretfully, Fremantle was the parting place for the Bowdens and ourselves, as they were heading for Dongara and then returning to Melbourne to keep appointments there, so we bade farewell to them after several enjoyable weeks of travelling together.

Now by ourselves, we headed inland to the town of Northam for three days, from where we also explored York and Toodyay, then returned to the coast at Lancelin. From there we worked our way north along the coast, staying at Cervantes, where we revisited the Nambung National Park and its weird pinnacles formations, and Jurien, before heading back inland across country through the recently flooded town of Moora to the small town of Dalwallinu. There we caught up with a lady who had been on the *Coral Princess* cruise, Thelma Carlhausen. Coincidentally, she had been chatting to Ken and Eve the previous day when they passed through the town. Continuing north on the Great Northern Highway, we left the wheat belt behind and entered the Western Australian outback, stopping briefly at lonely Paynes Find and then spending two nights at the mining town of Mount Magnet. Continuing on, we stopped in the historic town of Cue, overnighted in Meekatharra and finally reached the larger mining centre of Newman for a two night stay. There I did a tour of the huge Mount Whaleback iron ore mine. Our next stop, Tom Price, lay off the highway and deep in the heart of the Pilbara region, and from that base we explored the magnificent red gorges of the Karijini National Park and much of the surrounding countryside including Mount Sheila and Hamersley Gorge. Heading back towards the highway, we spent several more hours in Karijini before reaching it and setting up for two nights at the lonely Auski Roadhouse. From there we did a day trip to the ghost town of Wittenoom, abandoned when the dangers of asbestos and its mining became known.

Our journey north ended at Port Hedland, where we spent a day exploring the port town and then, leaving the caravan on site, drove inland to Marble Bar, recognised as Australia's hottest town in summer, an interesting trip through ruggedly beautiful country. We looked around the town, visited the famous colourful jasper reef that gave the town its name, and stayed the night at a rather down-at-heel motel. Back at Port Hedland, we had a "lay day" and then started our journey west on the North West Coastal Highway, paralleling the northern coast of Western Australia. Our next stop was Roebourne, from where we took a day trip to the Millstream-Chichester National Park, visited the Cape Lambert iron ore facility and explored the ghost town of Cossack. A short drive next day took us to Karratha, a much larger town with little of interest, but we drove to the nearby port of Dampier to view the vast salt works and the North West Shelf Gas Project. Leaving Karratha, we traversed three hundred kilometres of unpopulated country save for a couple of roadhouses, then diverted eighty kilometres to the coast at Onslow. A recent cyclone had badly damaged the town, and there was not a great deal of interest to see during our two days there other than the ruins of Old Onslow township.

Returning to the highway, we continued south west, then once again cut off the highway and back to the coast at Exmouth. This town had been devastated by the cyclone and the damage was still evident, but we spent a most enjoyable seven days there. We explored the area around North Cape and the huge communications base there, I explored and walked in the Cape Range National Park, and we drove down the coast of the Ningaloo Marine Park and took a short cruise on Yardi Creek. We went on a cruise outside the reef for me to swim with the whale sharks – a less than successful venture from my point of view! Clad in wet suits, the swimmers waited until a shark was sighted and at the shout of "Go go go!!"

we all dived in. I was last in and found myself virtually on top of the great fish as it swam past, a wide gaping mouth and a leopard-spotted body leading to a gently swinging tail. Heeding our guide's earlier warning as to not getting too close I moved back, bumped the boat and swallowed seawater which upset my equilibrium somewhat! I tried to follow the others swimming along after the shark, but was disoriented so waited for the boat to catch up with me. However those few seconds were a great thrill, and Beryl had also clearly seen the fish from the deck above. The next day we had an even better experience – we arranged to go up in the spotter plane and had a bird's eye view of the reef and the giant fish in the water below, and the rugged grandeur of the National Park as we returned to the airstrip.

From Exmouth we continued south in unusually heavy rain for the time of year to Coral Bay, an idyllic if crowded little village. The rain didn't last, and that night we celebrated Beryl's sixtieth birthday over dinner, regrettably far from family and friends. At Coral Bay I swam and snorkelled on the marvellous coral reef, we did some four wheel driving along the sandy tracks and took a glass bottomed boat cruise of the reef. One day we went deep sea fishing well out to sea, an enjoyable and very successful day that filled our freezer full of fish. All in all we enjoyed a great week there and were sorry to move on. We rejoined the highway and made our way south across the Tropic of Capricorn to the large port town of Carnarvon, where we spent the next few days. We explored the town, taking a bus tour, and drove north to the coast at Quobba to see the huge king waves crashing against the cliffs. Leaving the caravan, we then took a four day tour with a 4WD operator, Lindsay Orr, to the rugged Kennedy Ranges and Mount Augustus, the largest rock in the world – twice the size of Ayers Rock. We spent the nights at Lindsay's Mount Sandiman Station, and a highlight was being taken out one night by a kangaroo shooter. While visiting Mount Lindsay we got on the wrong side of another visitor, a University professor from Perth, who later tried his best to destroy Lindsay's business, and I became involved in a letter-writing episode trying to put things right. Back at Carnarvon, we were joined for one day by our friends John and Norma Farrell, who were also touring the north west; we would catch up again in a week's time. While in Carnarvon we also had a phone call with bad news from Eve Bowden, back in Melbourne. She had been to a doctor, cancer had been diagnosed and she was to have immediate surgery.

Leaving Carnarvon, we resumed our travels south down the highway, then took the Shark Bay Way across to the coast at the Peron Peninsula and our next destination, Monkey Mia. From there we saw the famous dolphins, took a wet and abortive cruise to see the dugongs that inhabit Shark Bay, visited the town of Denham and took a day trip into Cape Peron National Park with its unbelievably red sandy beaches and cliffs. Returning towards the highway, we stopped at the Nanga Bay Resort and there the Farrells caught up with us. Together we took a long and memorable day trip in the Land Cruiser to Steep Point, the most westerly point of the Australian mainland, for unforgettable views of the mighty Zuytdorp Cliffs and awesome seascapes and blowholes. Moving on, we followed the Farrells to our next stop, Kalbarri, for a stay of a few days during which we explored the Kalbarri National Park and the very scenic coastline, and I took a scenic flight out to the Albrohos Islands, where the original *Batavia* had been wrecked, and saw from the air the wreck site itself, a pale scar in the darker coral. By separate routes the four of us then made our way to Geraldton and Greenough for another few days together. We were now into the wildflower season, so after Greenough we regretfully parted company, with the Farrells heading for Perth and then home, while we headed inland into wildflower country.

With frequent stops to look for flowers, we made our way east to Mullewa for a couple of days, then south through Morawa; Perenjori, with an overnight stop; Wubin (where we closed the huge circle we'd made through the north west); Dalwallinu; Dowerin and Wyalkatchem, with another overnight stop; to meet the Great Eastern Highway at Merredin. There we turned east towards distant Sydney, but there was still a long way to go. We overnighted at Southern Cross, had a look around Coolgardie then stayed a few nights in Kalgoorlie/Boulder. While there we left the van and took a two day trip north to the old

mining towns of Leonora and Gwalia. After Kalgoorlie we overnighted at Norseman before recrossing the Nullarbor, stopping the night at Cocklebidy, Eucla and Nullarbor Roadhouse, from the latter of which we took a drive down to the coast at Head of Bight for some awesome whale watching at close quarters from a clifftop lookout. Once across the Nullarbor we diverted to the little town of Fowlers Bay for one night, then stopped briefly in Ceduna before continuing on to Streaky Bay for four nights, during which we explored the upper part of the Eyre Peninsula.

With Streaky Bay behind us, we were now well and truly on the final run home. Overnight stops at Port Augusta, Broken Hill and Cobar were followed by a deviation through Warren to Gilgandra, then through Dunedoo, Gulgong and Mudgee to Blackheath in the Blue Mountains for our last night on the road. So it was we reached home on 3 September after twenty four weeks and over 25,000 kilometres of enjoyable travel. We'd now been completely around Australia except for the small gap between Broome and Port Hedland, an omission to aim for correcting in coming years.

We were home just in time for the wedding of our nephew Greg Towle to his fiancée Lisa Bracken. We'd agreed that they could then live in our caravan for a few months, to let them get a bit of capital together towards their own house. We weren't planning to use the caravan for a while, so on return from their honeymoon they started living under our carport, just as Greg's sister Raelene and husband Matthew had done in 1996. A few days after the wedding I was suddenly and quite unexpectedly hit by a bout of pneumonia that laid me low for about three weeks. I started to develop what was first thought to be flu, and then a virus, but as I was getting worse rather than better the doctor called for X-rays and blood tests and found I had a nasty dose of pneumonia. In fact at the time I couldn't recall being sicker in my life, and although the symptoms thankfully abated under the attack of penicillin I felt absolutely wretched, with a very painful cough and absolutely no energy – even trying to read the paper was a chore. I was able to avoid hospitalisation, but I wasn't used to being sick and it rather took the wind out of my sails, both literally and figuratively. Anyway, physiotherapy finally put me right again and during October we took Beryl's Mum up to Orange for a Spicer family reunion – Spicer being her name before marriage.

We were far from done with travelling for the year, however, and in late October and early November took a car trip to South Australia for a cruise on the Murray River. En route we stayed in a motel in Beaumaris, Melbourne for a few days and spent time with Ken and Eve Bowden; Eve was still recuperating from her surgery but was in good spirits and reasonable health. We left with a promise to return in a month's time and help them purchase, install and learn to use a personal computer. Our route took us from Melbourne through Hamilton, Casterton and Coleraine to Mount Gambier for a night's stop, then through Beachport, Robe, Kingston South East and the Coorong to Meningie for another night's stop, before reaching Adelaide and the beachside suburb of Glenelg. We spent four nights there, exploring Adelaide city, the Adelaide Hills and Port Adelaide, then called at Hahndorf on our way to Mannum, where we boarded the *Murray Princess*, a four decked Mississippi style stern-wheeler.

The cruise on the Murray lasted five nights and four days and was quite pleasant and leisurely as we sailed upstream as far as the historic little port town of Morgan, with several stops to explore and a few outings on the shore. The accommodation was quite comfortable and the meals good although not outstanding, and too drawn out time-wise, especially at lunchtime. Highlights of the cruise were the birdlife we saw, passing through the Blanchetown Locks, an excursion to Nor-West Bend Station at Morgan, and a visit to the Aboriginal art site at Gnaut Gnaut Conservation Park. The cruise ended back at Mannum, where we retrieved the Land Cruiser and drove via Swan Reach to Mildura for an overnight stop, then continued on through Euston, Balranald and Hay to our final stop in West Wyalong, the town we'd visited many years ago on our first holiday together before we were married.

Keeping our promise, we returned to Melbourne later in November and stayed with the Bowdens for a few days, this time leaving our own caravan at home and sleeping in theirs. I assisted Ken to buy a PC and printer from Harvey Norman, which I then installed and helped Eve master its use, writing a few instructions to help her along. This proved a real asset to her, especially the email facility, and helped make what would be difficult days ahead for her a little brighter. Teaching Eve how to use the computer was quite challenging. However I must have succeeded as she began to send E-mails to us, write letters and "surf" the Internet, as well as playing solitaire on it and looking at the photographs I gave her of our Western Australia trip on a CD. She admitted she was frightened of the machine at first, but as she gained experience she became more comfortable with it.

This brought to an end our travels for the year, and generally it had been a very good and rewarding one, with Beryl especially now reaping the benefits of the hip and knee replacements. However there were shadows on the horizon, but we were yet to see the full implications of them. During November and December Beryl's mother spent some time in hospital with stomach ulcers and a very low blood count and iron deficiency. Medical treatment got her stabilised but she was never really very well after that, and we knew that she had over the past couple of years also suffered a number of "mini-strokes".

Chapter Twenty

Life In The Noughties

The year 2000 began with a whimper and a bang. The whimper came as the much heralded "Y2K" bug refused to manifest itself and the world's computers handled the changeover to a year ending in zeros without the doom and disaster predicted by many. This was not because things had been left to chance, but rather because a huge amount of time and money had been expended worldwide to ensure that computer programs could handle the change. Predictions that planes would fall out of the sky at a minute past midnight proved somewhat fanciful to say the least. The bang, of course, came about because most of the world, quite erroneously, celebrated the beginning of 2000 as the dawning of the new millennium, whereas in fact that wouldn't happen until 2001. However as we were in no position to change the world we celebrated along with all the rest.

For us 2000 started on a bright note, and at the outset we weren't aware that it would be the second *annus horribilis* in our lives. Our big plan for the year was an extended trip to Canada and Alaska, to take place in the May to July period and thus get us out of Sydney while the Olympic Games were on. In this regard I at least was heartily sick of the "hype" that had preceded the Games over the past year or so, and the disruptions to our city that the preparations were causing. Having no interest in the actual events, and with the availability and pricing for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies virtually out of reach, I had no desire whatsoever to be around for the occasion. Anyway, I spent a lot of time in late 1999 and early 2000 planning the Alaska trip and enlisted the help of a travel agent we'd got to know, Doug Rowlinson, to make the numerous bookings. Briefly, the plan was to take two small-ship cruises in Alaskan waters, a rail trip to Denali National Park and Fairbanks and a coach tour into Canada's Yukon, plus some independent travel at each end of the trip. It was an ambitious and costly plan, but Alaska was one overseas place where Beryl was keen to go, and there was no use having money without spending some of it!

At the end of January we headed down to Melbourne again and spent a few days with Ken and Eve, where in my "consultant" role I helped Eve with a few computer problems she was having. We celebrated Ken's 76th birthday while there, joined by their friends Don and Shirley Mackenzie, who by now were in our own circle of friends. However the main purpose of the trip was to spend a few days on King Island, an island in Bass Strait that was part of Tasmania, and famous for its dairy products. We flew over in a light aircraft and stayed in a motel in the main town of Currie, where we rented a Toyota Corolla and over the next few days thoroughly explored the pretty island from top to bottom. On the final day we gorged ourselves on delicious samples of cheese at the King Island Dairy factory before flying back to Melbourne. We spent a couple more days with the Bowdens before making our farewells, with Eve demanding we send her a postcard when we reached Skagway in Alaska, a place that she had longed to visit. We returned to Sydney by the Princes Highway through Gippsland to Bairnsdale, where we caught up with Geoff and Marie Downie, then from Orbost took a road north through Bonang and delegate before returning to the coast at Merimbula for an overnight stop; sadly, our old friend "Ringo" had sold his Chinese restaurant there. A final stop in Nowra, with a visit to the RAAF Museum there, saw us back home via Bowral the following day.

During January Graham, Michele and family had moved from Forestville to Balgowlah Heights, with Graham taking up the ministry at the Balgowlah Uniting Church, and Lauren and Michael stayed with us for a few days while the move was made. Afterwards we visited them in their new home, which had glimpses of the harbour from the back patio. On our own home front, we had the front patio tiled and arranged with niece Raelene's husband Matt to build some new railings to go around it. We saw the musical *Jolson* during February, and in late March we took a trip down to Canberra to see the historic

and beautiful *Book of Kells* on display there – something that we'd missed out on in Dublin four years earlier. Beryl was continuing to be absorbed with her craft work; she had let the folk art painting lapse – possibly because the arthritis in her hands made holding a brush difficult – and was experimenting with various media and doing various kinds of embroidery including quilting and wall hangings – mainly quilting at the time, although in the past twelve months she had spent time on teddy bears, wool embroidery, needlepoint and other activities. She was obviously enjoying it, and was going to courses at the Frill Seekers haberdashery shop at North Rocks once or twice a week, as well as buying a new Husqvarna sewing machine that did all kind of fancy stitches – a complete mystery to me.

It was in April, however, that our lives and those of Sue and Graham and our families would be turned upside down for several months to come. In early April Beryl's mother, or Grandma Moad as she was now universally known, was readmitted to hospital with severe abdominal pains and a battery of tests revealed terminal cancer of the bowel, which had spread to the pancreas and liver. At the time her own doctor only gave her weeks to live, although of course nobody could be sure in this regard. After about ten days she came home to Sue and Graham, on the family's agreement that she would be cared for there until such time as she needed to go into a nursing home for palliative care. However after three days she had to be readmitted for emergency surgery; the doctors had no option but to operate to remove the tumour which was blocking the bowel and causing acute pain. The whole family were at the hospital while this took place, as we were all half expecting she wouldn't make it and the surgeon and anaesthetist were also very careful to explain the dangers, given her age of 83 and the fact she had a past history of minor strokes. In retrospect I think some of us would have been relieved to have lost her then, despite our personal grief, given the pain, discomfort and poor quality of life she would face over the next few months. However she came through very well and astounded the hospital staff in how she bounced back. They and the family got her eating again and ambulatory, and so she was allowed to go home with Sue and Graham once more. While all this was happening we closed her flat down and distributed all her furniture and belongings between Sue's and our homes plus around the grandchildren. I turned sixty on 21 April and spent most of the day shifting furniture.

Beryl was giving back-up to Sue, and arrangements were made for a visiting nurse and our local GP to give palliative care. However after three days Grandma was again rushed back to Westmead Hospital and we nearly lost her a second time. We had a further crisis a couple of days later, being called in to the hospital at 5.30am, but she came through it once more and was placed in the palliative care unit there, in fairly good shape and with her pain well controlled. In May she was moved from Westmead Hospital to Braeside Hospital at Fairfield, where she was reasonably comfortable and fighting hard in the hope that she may be able to go back to Sue and Graham. By this time her granddaughter Raelene and husband Matt were expecting their first child, and we all felt Grandma was determined to hang on long enough to see it. However the cancer continued to spread in the liver and pancreas and the family agreed not to subject her to any further trauma or invasive surgery or diagnostic procedures, but to just let nature take its course. Morphine was keeping her pretty well pain-free, and she was relatively comfortable but could not walk; dementia was looking like creeping in and she had no real quality of life. She was transferred from Braeside to palliative care at the Lottie Stewart Nursing Home at Ermington, which was a lot closer to our homes. Beryl and Sue between them spent the better part of every day with her, with the rest of the family also pitching in but of course having their own lives to lead. It was a difficult time and getting very wearing on all of us, especially Sue, and there was no way of telling how long it would continue.

As all this was happening, obviously our Alaska trip had to be postponed. Doug Rowlinson cancelled all the bookings and asked the tour companies to put everything on hold, on the basis that we'd still do the trip as soon as we could; in this way he hoped to minimise the cancellation fees, but in any case we were fully covered by insurance, thank goodness. I sat down and developed alternate itineraries based on

dates through June, July and August, so that if the end came and we were free to go, then subject to availability of places on the tours we'd be able to kick start the whole thing quickly. We also had to cancel a proposed trip to Cape York, which we'd booked for the end of August. Apart from spending time at the hospital, Beryl immersed herself in her craft work, spending one and a half days a week at classes, which she enjoyed as an outlet. For my part I was spending a day a week exploring parts of Sydney that I hadn't seen for many years, if ever, including several walks around the harbour and on the coast. I also approached my stamp dealer, Manfred Junge, and offered to help him out in his shop, unpaid, one day a week if he would like that. He accepted with pleasure, and thus started a regular weekly routine, interrupted only by our travels, that would last until he moved to Armidale some years later.

During the previous November the *Batavia* replica had arrived from The Netherlands and had been placed on display at the Maritime Museum in Darling Harbour, so in May we paid her visit and trod her now completed decks once more. In a way it was a trifecta – we'd seen the remains of the original ship in Fremantle, stood on the uncompleted replica and now stood aboard the completed vessel. In my case, I'd also flown over the grave of the first *Batavia*. In July we managed a visit to the theatre to see the musical *Pan*. The Olympic Games came and went, and despite my forebodings there wasn't as much disruption to Sydney life as I'd expected. Indeed, the city and its people became very sociable for the duration of the Games, with complete strangers spontaneously chatting to each other on the street and public transport. I went into the city a couple of times to watch the related activities and have to admit the streets were very well decorated and the many overseas visitors were obviously enjoying themselves. The Games, as history has recorded, were an overwhelming success.

Given that cancer had struck down Grandma Moad, and that there was a history of the disease in her family, Beryl wisely had a colonoscopy and a malignant polyp was found and removed, luckily before it had time to do any damage. This led to regular checks over the following years.

The end of Grandma Moad's suffering came on 2 September. It was a Saturday morning; Beryl and Sue were both at hospital, and I was with Graham Towle helping him install a new computer when the phone rang. It was Sue, to tell us Grandma had just slipped away. Both Graham and I experienced a feeling of utter relief; he said he felt a bit ashamed of that emotion, but I reassured him I felt the same way and that it was best for everyone, especially Grandma herself. We hurried to the hospital, where both the girls had taken the event very well, and over the next couple of days the family came together and Graham made the necessary funeral arrangements. The funeral took place at Rookwood Crematorium during the following week, with our son Graham conducting the service and Graham Towle and myself reading the eulogies, and afterwards the extended family and friends gathered at the Towle home for a celebration of her life. Later we scattered her ashes in the rose garden at Rookwood, where Frank Moad's ashes had been scattered twenty years earlier. Sadly she hadn't lived to see her first grandchild, Mitchell, who was born in October. She left us a small legacy with which in the following year we purchased a dining room buffet to match the entertainment unit in our lounge room.

By this time, of course, the Alaska and Cape York trips had both gone by the board but we felt we needed to salvage some kind of a holiday after the ordeals of the past few months. In October we flew down to Tasmania, rented a car and spent two weeks touring the Apple Isle, staying in motels or cabins in caravan parks. Landing at Hobart Airport, we started the tour at Port Arthur and the Tasman Peninsula, followed by a few days in Hobart itself. During those days we drove up Mount Wellington twice, once in clear weather and the second time stopped by snow short of the summit, and toured the area around the city. We also caught up once more with Beryl's cousin Ray Stacey and wife Nicola at their new home, a unit in Battery Point. From Hobart we drove up through New Norfolk into the highlands, stayed at Lake St Clair then continued on to Queenstown and Strahan for a few more days

and exploration of the area, including a cruise on Macquarie Harbour and up the Gordon River. Moving on, we passed through Queenstown and took a back road through glorious scenery to Cradle Mountain for two days of invigorating if tiring walking for me. This was followed by a longish drive back to Hobart via Mole Creek, Deloraine, the Great Lake and Bothwell for one last night. The next day, before flying home to Sydney, we attended the Royal Hobart Show, a pleasant ending to a welcome break.

I'd also purchased a new computer in September – a Gateway model similar to Graham Towle's – and as I already had a good monitor I sold the one that came with the computer to Manfred Junge for something less than its market value. Christmas lunch was held for a change at the home of Greg and Lisa Towle, and we finished an eventful year with a couple of theatre visits – to see *Les Miserables* at the Riverside Theatre, Parramatta, and *Annie* at the Star Theatre at the Casino; in both cases they were shows we'd seen some years earlier.

The year 2001 heralded the true new millennium, but all the celebrations had taken place the previous year. It opened with us on the road once again, departing in late January on a seven week caravan trip to South Australia. We went via Melbourne to catch up with Ken and Eve Bowden, who we hadn't seen for twelve months, and spent a few very hot days with them before heading for South Australia. While there we celebrated Ken's 77th birthday, with Don and Shirley Mackenzie again joining us. We also met another old friend of the Bowdens, Lorna Whelan, of whom there will be more later in the narrative, and Beryl helped her make a teddy bear, much to her delight. From Melbourne we headed out to Ballarat, then took the Glenelg Highway to Hamilton for a very warm overnight stop. Next day we reached Naracoorte with stops in Casterton and Penola, and had a two night stay during which I visited the famous Naracoorte Caves. From there we headed south west across country through Keith and Murray Bridge to the resort town of Victor Harbor for a two night stay, then took a short drive across the Fleurieu Peninsula to the tiny township of Second Valley, on the shores of Gulf St Vincent, where we would leave the caravan while we visited Kangaroo Island.

Next morning we drove to Cape Jarvis and took the car ferry across backstairs Package to Penneshaw, on the Island, then took a drive to the lighthouse at Cape Willoughby on the easternmost point before making our way to the largest town, Kingscote, our base for the next two nights. The following day we did some extensive touring of the town and the eastern end of the island. While having dinner one night we started chatting with an American couple at the next table, Chris Catalone and Wynola Possenti. When asked where they were from, they replied "Fairbanks, Alaska". We told them of our plans to travel to Alaska, and by the end of the evening we had a firm invitation to visit them there and a promise from Chris, who operated a flying school, to fly us, weather permitting, above the Arctic Circle. Next day we drove almost the length of the island, visiting various attractions including the huge colony of Australian sea lions at Seal Bay, before reaching idyllic Hansen Bay for a three night stay in a cabin unit. Quite coincidentally, Graham, Michele and family stayed in the very same place some years later.

Over the next two days we covered the western end of the island, seeing some ruggedly beautiful scenery and visiting among other places Cape Borda, Kelly Hill Caves, Cape de Couedic, the Remarkable Rocks, Wees Bay and the Koala Sanctuary. When the time came to leave Hanson Bay we explored the north coast of the island before returning to Penneshaw and catching the ferry back to the mainland after a pleasant few days on Kangaroo Island. We remained at Second Valley the following day, then headed north, skirting the centre of Adelaide and stopping to explore Port Wakefield, before overnighting at Port Pirie. Continuing on, we stopped briefly in Port Augusta, crossed the head of Spencer Gulf, then drove down its eastern shore to the steel town of Whyalla. We spent two very hot days there, visiting the Maritime Museum and blessing the air-conditioner in the van, then continued south down the Eyre Peninsula to the small town of Cowell for two nights and an exploration of the area. The next stopping place was pretty Tumbly Bay for three nights and more exploration, then on to

the tuna fleet base of Port Lincoln for a five night stay. While there we explored the town, spent a day in the Lincoln National Park, badly ravaged by bushfires three weeks earlier; and did a day tour along the spectacular Whalers Way, with some of the most stunning coastal scenery in Australia. I also took a drive into the 4WD-only Memory Cove Wilderness Area for more awesome coastal views.

Leaving Port Lincoln, we rounded the tip of the Eyre Peninsula and spent two nights at Coffin Bay, during which we drove for some distance into the Coffin Bay National Park until stopped by the roughness of the 4WD track. Headed north now, we followed the shoreline of the Peninsula to an overnight stop at little Elliston, then continued on to Venus Bay. We spent five very pleasant days there, quickly making friends with our neighbours in the caravan park, Ed and Elsa Vandenberg and their Rottweiler, Storm Baby. We would meet up with Ed and Elsa again several times over following years. While at Venus Bay we did the usual exploration, drove up to Streaky Bay and were taken out in a boat to see the pod of dolphins that inhabited the Bay's waters.

Saying goodbye to the Vandenbergs, we left Venus Bay with much regret and headed overland to pick up the Eyre Highway and head back east to Port Augusta for a night's stay, then continued through the Southern Flinders Ranges to Melrose, Gladstone, Jamestown and finally the historic copper mining town of Burra. We spent a day exploring the many relics of the old mining days there, continued east to Morgan, where we'd visited eighteen months earlier on the *Murray Princess*, then followed the Murray River to Renmark and so on to Mildura. We stayed there two nights, taking the opportunity for a long day trip out to the remote and wildly beautiful Mungo National Park and the Walls of China lunette, somewhere I'd wanted to visit for many years. Back on the road, we roughly followed the river again through Red Cliffs, Ouyen and Sea Lake to Swan Hill for a two night stay. Continuing along the river, we crossed it at Echuca, crossed back again at Barmah, recrossed it at Cobram and stopped for the night on the north bank at Barooga. Our homeward route then took us through Jerilderie, Lockhart and the outskirts of Wagga Wagga to Junee overnight, the following day to Cootamundra then across country through Murrumburrah, Harden, Binalong and Yass for a final night at Moss Vale before reaching home after another enjoyable "fact find mission".

The next six weeks were generally spent preparing for our postponed trip to Alaska and Canada. Luckily refunds and insurance had left us only out of pocket for the actual cost of the insurance policy, but with inflation and fluctuations in the exchange rate we found the cost of the trip had risen by something like 15%. However that couldn't be helped and there was no point dwelling on it. I bought a new camera for the trip, a Fujifilm Finepix 4900 digital, which proved an excellent choice and was much admired by people who saw me using it during our travels. It's interesting to note that it cost nearly two thousand dollars, whereas the latest model that I would buy in 2007 cost around seven hundred, such was the decrease in technology costs. We also paid our usual visit to the annual Caravan and Camping Show at Rosehill, where we ordered a roll-out awning for the caravan, to be fitted when we returned from Alaska.

So it was that on 28 April we departed Sydney on a Japan Airlines flight to Vancouver via Narita, Tokyo's airport. We'd chosen JAL because they offered the best Business Class fare, and travelling with them had the advantage of a free stopover in Narita en route. We arrived there that evening local time, stayed at the airport's Nikko Hotel and next day took a free shuttle into Narita City and spent a pleasant few hours exploring the traditional shopping street, Shinshoji Temple and Naritasan Park. Our next flight left that evening, depositing us in Vancouver in mid morning of the same day, having crossed the International Date Line. We picked up a Buick Century from Mr Hertz and drove to our city hotel, then had a bit of a walk around the central city. We spent the next three days looking around the Vancouver area, visiting among other places the central business district and Gastown, Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth Park, the UBC Botanical Gardens, Grouse Mountain, where I took an aerial tram to its snow-

covered summit, Capilano Gorge and the huge Metrocenter Mall; we had, of course, seen some of the city on our previous visit in 1993.

From Vancouver we headed south into the USA and Seattle, following a scenic coastal route through the Skagit River Valley, Oak Harbour and the islands bordering Puget Sound, before crossing back to the mainland on a car ferry. In Seattle we had a full day and most of the following day to look around the city before joining our first cruise, and in that time visited the reasonably good Seattle Zoo, spent some time wandering the streets of the Pioneer Place precinct and visited the very colourful Pike Place Market. In the afternoon of the second day we assembled at Pier 59 on the waterfront, met our fellow passengers on the Cruise West cruise, and were transported to our ship, the *Spirit of Columbia*, at its berth in the freshwater Lake Union. There were only 59 passengers on this cruise, and we'd been upgraded to a deluxe stateroom; the vessel proved very comfortable, with good food and great service from the crew. We sailed around four thirty, following the Lake Union Ship Canal past an amazing variety of boats and ships of all shapes, sizes and ages, then through the locks and into the rather rough waters of the Juan de Fuca Strait.

Next morning we were off the southern end of the San Juan Islands and made our first stop at Friday Harbor, where we had a morning coach tour of the town and up to Roche Harbor at the top of the quite scenic island. In the afternoon we sailed through the San Juan Islands into British Columbia waters, and the next day threaded through the narrow Discovery Passage and into Johnstone Strait, then through Queen Charlotte Strait and across the exposed Queen Charlotte Sound in thankfully calm weather. The next morning saw us in the sheltered waters of the Inside Passage, with thankfully no fog as there had been on our trip in 1993, and the day was spent pleasantly sailing north through the wild and scenic Sounds. Our fourth day on board saw us exploring the beautiful snow-capped mountain enclosed waters of the Misty Fjords National Monument before threading through various channels of what were now Alaskan waters to reach the port of Ketchikan, squeezed between mountains and sea. On dry land again, we spent the afternoon exploring on foot the picturesque town and its central feature, Creek Street, a plank boardwalk built over the creek, formerly the "red light" district and now housing various tourist shops including Dolly's House, the former brothel and now a tourist attraction. Reputedly the wettest town in Alaska, Ketchikan had turned on an afternoon of glorious sunshine for us.

The next morning saw us proceeding up the Wrangell Narrows to dock at the little town of Petersburg. Large cruise ships couldn't enter these waters, so the town was unspoilt by tourism and was a picturesque working and fishing port, with a large cannery and a real pioneer atmosphere in its clapboard buildings, crowded waterfront and generally untidy appearance. The town had Norwegian origins, and we were entertained at a morning tea of Norwegian pastries by children in traditional Norwegian costume. We sailed at lunch time and later in the afternoon reached Le Conte Bay and our first encounter with floating ice, some of it reasonably large bergs but most of it "growlers", "bitty bergs" and mush ice. At the head of the bay we reached the Le Conte Glacier, a magnificent sight, glowing green and blue and framed by the steep mountainsides. The following day we were cruising Peril Strait when Beryl spotted the first bear of the cruise, and the captain obligingly took the *Spirit* closer to the shore for a better look. We threaded our way through various narrow channels and just after lunch reached the town of Sitka, once a Russian settlement before the Alaska Purchase ceded it to the USA. In wet and gloomy weather we were taken on a bus tour of the town, then had free time to wander. While I explored the town further Beryl went to a quilt show and there met a young girl, Alyson Lovett, who had a quilt on show, and her mother Jan. Over the following years many exchanges of quilting material would take place between them.

Day seven of the cruise saw us continuing north and in the afternoon sailing through the magnificent scenery of Tracey Arm, with the floating ice getting thicker as we approached the Little Sawyer and

Sawyer glaciers. At the latter we witnessed the ice “calving”, and even from five hundred metres away the noise and spectacle was tremendous. Overnight we reached the little town of Haines, an unscheduled stop as an elderly passenger had taken ill and had to be flown to Juneau for treatment. As we would be stopping there later the *Spirit* didn't linger and resumed its progress up the Lynn Canal to the frontier town of Skagway. Although very much a tourist town, with huge cruise ships berthing at its wharf, Skagway was still an interesting place and quite atmospheric with its clapboard buildings and “wild west” appearance. As we would be doing a town tour on our return a couple of weeks later, we instead chose a bus tour that took us to the summit of the White Pass, up which the Yukon miners had struggled a century earlier. Unfortunately cloud obscured any views from the top. Back in the town, we explored it on foot and posted that postcard back to Eve Bowden in Melbourne. In mid afternoon the *Spirit* sailed back to Haines, where we did a walking tour of Fort William H Seward and then looked around the small and rather nondescript town.

The next day was spent cruising the waters of Glacier Bay, surrounded by snow capped mountains, and we saw no less than nine glaciers including the very impressive Margerie and Grand Pacific. That evening we moored at Bartlett Cove and on board attended the Captain's Farewell Dinner, as the cruise would end the following day. Next morning saw us sailing up the Gastineaux Channel and we were moored at the wharf in Juneau just after breakfast. The crew lined up on the wharf and we said our goodbyes to them and our fellow passengers after a very enjoyable cruise. We had been the only Australians on board and this had attracted people to us, and as a result we made several friends with whom we would correspond over following years – in particular Ed and Shirley Brown from Missouri, Jim and Bobbie Burson from Texas and Augie and Doris Martinez from California.

Geographically a most unusual State capital, Juneau occupied a slim portion of waterside land with steep snowy peaks soaring above it and residential streets rising into the foothills. We checked into our hotel for a two night stay then by arrangement rang Marinke Job, the niece of our Dutch friends the Van Gelders. She picked us up after lunch and during the afternoon showed us just about as much of Juneau as roads would take us to, including the imposing Mendenhall Glacier and its Visitor Centre, and Douglas Island across the Channel from the city. We had dinner at her home, joined by her husband David, and it was a pleasure to be shown around by a local resident for a change. The next day we spent browsing the city centre itself, which had quite a number of interesting things to see including the Capitol Building and the waterfront precinct. Our stay in Juneau over, next day we took an Alaskan Airlines flight north to Anchorage, Alaska's largest city, for a three night stay.

While in Anchorage we rented a car and took a day trip to the “ghost” town of Portage, eighty kilometres south east of the city, along the shores of Turnagain Arm. Portage had been completely destroyed by earthquake in 1964, but the scenery along the way made the trip worthwhile. We visited the Big Game Alaska wildlife park, where we were able to see close-up animals that we either saw at a distance or not at all during our travels. We also visited the Alyeska Resort and I rode a tram up the side of Alyeska Mountain for good views over Turnagain Arm and the Kenai Peninsula. On another day we visited Thunderbird Falls and the Eklutna Native Village, and of course we explored the city itself, much of it rebuilt after being devastated in the 1964 Good Friday earthquake.

Then began the second cruise of our Alaskan journey, again run by Cruise West. At the hotel we met our new set of fellow passengers, who included three other Australians, Jim and Daphne Field from the Gold Coast, and a younger single man whose name now escapes me. We were transported to the railroad station and took the Alaska Railroad train back down Turnagain Arm to Portage, where we then entered the tunnel that drove through the mountains to the town of Whittier. Four kilometres long and dead straight, it had been built in World War II to allow military supplies, vehicles and personnel to pass between Anchorage and the port at Whittier, and carried both rail and road traffic to the otherwise

landlocked town. Much of the town had laid abandoned since 1968, when its strategic importance had ended, but it still served as a port on Prince William Sound. After a brief bus tour of the town we boarded the *Spirit of Glacier Bay*, smaller than the *Columbia* but with generally the same layout and facilities. The *Spirit of Columbia* had sailed up from Juneau and was also in the port, and we chatted with some of the crew members who were by now old friends.

Sailing out into the Sound, we visited Blackstone Bay and the first of many glaciers we would see over the next few days before anchoring for the night. We spent most of the following day visiting glaciers in College Fiord, Barry Arm and Harriman Fiord. The small size of the ship allowed us to get fairly close to some of the rivers of ice, where often spectacular calving was taking place. We would hear creaks and groans and sounds like thunder, but never knew which direction to look. All of a sudden we would see a huge piece of ice slipping from the glacier's face in a cloud of white ice particles, and a second later hear a loud roar as it hit the water, sending a wave rolling towards us to strike the boat perhaps a couple of minutes later. It was a fascinating experience. Late in the afternoon, while out in the open waters of the Sound, we hove to in the shelter of some small islands. We watched a small boat batter its way towards us through the waves and tie up under the stern, and we all thought it was someone in distress. However the sole figure on board proved to be a lady who, with her husband, ran an oyster farm in these remote parts. She gave a most interesting talk about their activities and shucked and fed everybody (me excepted!) with huge succulent Pacific oysters.

Next day we visited the town of Cordova, a busy fishing port with several large processing factories and no road access. We explored the town, first by bus and then on foot, and visited the small but interesting museum. In the afternoon we took a bus trip out along the Copper River Highway, the only road out of town, to the Sheridan Glacier, Copper River Delta and the Million Dollar Bridge. Seventy seven kilometres from Cordova, the great steel bridge of four spans mounted on concrete piers once carried the railroad across the Copper River, and when the railroad closed plans were put in hand to extend the Copper River Highway to meet the Richardson Highway further north and thus give road access to Cordova. However nature intervened and the 1964 earthquake collapsed the northernmost span. Amid magnificent scenery we walked across the bridge and over its collapsed span, still passable by 4WD, to the opposite bank, from where was a fine view of the face of the Childs Glacier. On the way back to Cordova we stopped to frolic in the deep snow that lined the road, and also saw a moose at close quarters.

On the morning of the next day we visited the oil town of Valdez, where the 1300 kilometre long Alaska Pipeline terminated and huge tankers loaded the black gold for transport south. We toured by bus the rather sterile and charmless company town and visited the fairly interesting museum there, then sailed at lunch time to Columbia Bay and the Columbia Glacier, the second largest tidewater glacier in North America. The next hour was one of stunning beauty as the *Spirit of Glacier Bay* made its way past Heather Island through the ever increasing ice. The water was quite still and there were marvellous reflections of the mountains, particularly of Mount Freemantle, and a view of the mighty glacier itself in the distance. Eventually we were stopped by a solid wall of icebergs still several kilometres from the glacier. Leads opened up into the white, blue and green ice, and every now and then there would be a loud groaning and creaking, and the bergs would part slightly to allow a rush of water and "berg bits" out into the open Bay. A couple of times we spotted bald eagles sitting on top of bergs waiting for fish to appear. Santa hats were produced and everyone had their photographs taken with the ice and glacier as a backdrop, and one of our new friends stripped to his shorts for the occasion (but quickly put them back on again!) It was certainly the highlight of this cruise, and when reluctantly we had to turn our backs on the scene there was much to marvel about during "happy hour" as the ship sailed back out of Columbia Bay.

The following day we returned to Whittier, regretting the end of a most enjoyable cruise, and were conveyed back to Anchorage by coach for the next part of the tour. There we visited the Historical and Fine Arts Museum before returning to the hotel, and during the afternoon were taken by coach to the Alaska Native Heritage Centre for an excellent cultural show and tour of the Centre. Some of our fellow passengers left us that day, including the other Australian couple, Jim and Daphne Field, but next morning the rest of us were joined by a new group as we boarded a coach that took us north to the town of Talkeetna, where we transferred to the Alaska Railroad train that would convey us to Denali National Park. It was a long train, with two engines and many coaches, of which most of the dome cars seemed to be at the rear. Ours was very luxurious, with plenty of spare seats on the upper deck, and the dining room and toilets below. The visibility was excellent, the service from our two young attendants great, and overall it was very comfortable. For the next few hours we admired the Alaskan countryside, much of it covered by snow, and enjoyed an excellent lunch before arriving at Denali station.

We were up at five next morning for what would be a very long day enjoying the sights of Denali National Park. It would take too long to describe here everything we saw and did there; suffice to say there was stunning scenery ranging from green forest to alpine tundra and stark rocky mountains, and all kinds of wildlife was spotted including bears, caribou, Dall sheep, ptarmigan and so on. The scenery around Polychrome Pass was especially magnificent, causing us to forget the discomfort of sitting in a converted school bus on gravel roads. In all we penetrated the Park for some eighty five kilometres from the entrance for an unforgettable day out. Back at Denali we paid a late afternoon visit to the Husky Homestead, where sled dogs were raised and trained – a most enjoyable experience. The day was rounded out by a *Cabin Night* dinner and show.

The following day we boarded a coach and were transported to Fairbanks after too short a stay at Denali. Reaching Fairbanks, we visited the University Museum, then took a cruise on a riverboat down the Chena River, visiting a simulated Athabaskan village. That evening was the farewell dinner for the tour, and the next day we said goodbye to our latest group of new friends after another most enjoyable Cruise West tour and moved to the hotel we'd pre-booked. We spent the day exploring the downtown area of Fairbanks, and had an interesting experience while doing so. It was Memorial Day – the equivalent of Australia's ANZAC Day – and we watched a Memorial Day service at the Veterans Monument. While doing so we were interviewed as Australian visitors for the local Channel 11 television news, with me explaining about ANZAC Day and its traditions, and that evening were able to see ourselves on TV. Next day we caught up with Chris Catalone and Wynola Possenti, the couple we'd met over dinner on Kangaroo Island earlier in the year. True to his word, Chris, who ran the Flight Train flying school in Fairbanks, took us up in his Piper Aztec for a scenic flight. The weather was apparently not too good above the Arctic Circle, so instead Chris took us out over the river system and Denali National Park, and we were rewarded by the awesome sight of Mount McKinley, the highest mountain in North America, rising above the clouds like a great yellow-white island. The flight was a great experience, and it was good to meet up with Chris and Wynola again. We had dinner with them at a restaurant that night, and who should be sitting at the next table but Jim and Daphne Field, who had left the tour at Anchorage.

Next morning it was time to join our third tour, a Gray Line coach tour that would take us to the Yukon area of Canada and back down to Skagway. Included in the itinerary was the Chena River cruise that we had just done, so we had a second bite at that cherry before the coach started its run south east across Alaska. That day's travel was mainly through developed areas and the towns of North Pole and Delta Junction, then through endless spruce forests to the little town of Tok, our overnight stopping place. The next day we traversed vast tracts of wilderness country, with endless spruce forests, mountains and rivers, to arrive in the afternoon at the small outpost town of Eagle on the Yukon River. There we boarded a catamaran for the 160 kilometre cruise upstream to Dawson City, passing from Alaska into

Canada's Yukon Territory. We spent two nights in the atmospheric frontier town with its dirt streets and clapboard buildings, during which we visited the Yukon goldfields where the great gold rush took place and enjoyed the rollicking *Gaslight Follies*.

Back on the coach, we traversed the Yukon Territory in now rainy conditions to the city of Whitehorse for an overnight stop and a very entertaining *Frantic Follies* show. Still in heavy rain, we continued across country, with a stop in the small town of Carcross, until the coach trip ended in the small outpost of Fraser, where we climbed aboard the waiting White Pass and Yukon Railroad train for our descent down the Pass to Skagway. The line climbed to the summit of White Pass through much ice and snow, with lovely blues and greens in small pools of ice water. Unfortunately there was a lot of cloud on the summit and visibility was poor until we were on the other side and descending towards Skagway. The views were memorable despite the cloud, but it would have been nice to see the tops of the mountains and blue skies. The line then twisted and turned as it descended, the lower reaches now free of snow and getting greener the further we went, in contrast to what we'd seen three weeks earlier, to eventually reach the fast flowing Skagway River. Now almost at sea level, the track followed the river bank past the train yards and through Skagway to the depot at the port end of the town. .

We waited briefly while a US Immigration officer carried out a passport check, then disembarked and for the third time said goodbye to our fellow passengers. We spent another night in Skagway, then next afternoon flew to Juneau in a small aircraft, an enjoyable and scenic flight that followed the Lynn Canal, along which we'd cruised a few short weeks before. We overnighted near the airport at Juneau, then flew with Alaskan Airlines to Vancouver, rented a car and took the ferry across to Nanaimo on Vancouver Island. We spent three nights on the Island, driving down to the British Columbia capital, Victoria, and renewing acquaintance with that lovely city where we'd stayed in 1993. This included the almost mandatory visit to the magnificent Butchart Gardens, which was certainly worth the time and effort as we were able to spend more time there than we had on the 1993 coach trip.

All good things must come to an end, so we took the ferry back across to Vancouver and the airport, checked in the car and flew home courtesy of Japan Airlines via Narita. This time there was no free stopover, just a four hour wait between flights, and on Friday 8 June we touched down in Sydney after a memorable and unforgettable seven weeks in Alaska and Canada – the trip of a lifetime!

That wasn't the end of our travels for the year, however. Perhaps in compensation for the previous year, we were off again at the end of July, this time to Queensland with the caravan and with the prime purpose of taking a conducted tour of Cape York. Before that, however, we drove down to Melbourne to see Ken and Eve Bowden, booking into a motel in Beaumaris as Eve's illness had now advanced considerably and staying with them in their caravan was really out of the question. Despite the cancer Evie remained cheerful, showing us the postcard we'd sent from Skagway. She insisted on knitting a jumper for me and had me choose the wool from the huge stockpile she had, so I chose a bright red. Sadly the work would never be finished, and indeed we left Melbourne feeling it would be the last occasion on which we would see her. During June I had a bothersome wisdom tooth extracted under anaesthetic, and we had the awning we'd ordered at the Caravan Show fitted to the caravan. I was able to catch up with processing the photographs we'd taken on the trip and prepared slide shows on compact disks which I sent to many of our fellow passengers from the cruises.

Early one morning in July we had an unexpected telephone call from our Dutch friend Ineke Lammers, with whom we'd toured in Australia and stayed with in The Netherlands. She was on a tour and in Sydney, and because the lady she was travelling with spoke little English and was finding it hard to communicate with people, Ineke had more or less decided not to worry about contacting us. However she had a change of heart. We immediately drove into the city to meet them for some brief sightseeing

and morning tea at Darling Harbour. It was lovely to catch up with her again, albeit so briefly, and she really hadn't changed much since 1996. We found her companion spoke reasonable English, and by speaking slowly ourselves we had no trouble in chatting with her.

The Queensland trip under way, we made our way to Brisbane with stops at Kempsey, Evans Head and the Gold Coast, at the latter doing a day trip to Binna Burra in the Lamington National Park. In Brisbane I took a day to explore the city, and we spent a very pleasant day with our old friends Peter and Rhonda Edmunds, including a cruise round Moreton Bay on their 43 foot cruiser. Moving on, we headed up to the Fraser Coast at Rainbow Beach, where we did some four wheel driving on Cooloola Beach and took a day trip across to Fraser Island on the barge, bringing back memories of an enjoyable holiday there with our friends the Farrells back in 1994. Back on the road again, we explored new territory for us with a stay at Agnes Water, and from the Town of 1770 took an enjoyable day cruise out to Lady Musgrave Island.

Moving on, we made our way to Mackay for a short visit with our friends the Grimas on their cane farm, with a promise to stay for a few more days on our return journey, then continued on to the beautiful Whitsundays and stayed at Airlie Beach for a few days. While there we took a day cruise around the islands, stopping at South Molle Island, Hook Island and the dazzling white sands of Whitehaven Beach – a long, full and very enjoyable day out. While in Airlie Beach we also caught up with our old friends Don Strath and Jill Arthurs, whom we'd met on the *Coral Princess* cruise in 1997. Their home stood high on the hillside above Shute Harbour, with marvellous views across the sheltered waters to the islands of the Whitsundays, and they insisted that next time we came to the Whitsundays we should park the caravan outside their house. Leaving the Whitsundays with some regret, we continued north with overnight stops at Bowen and Ayr. It was at the latter that we received a phone call from Ken Bowden in Melbourne, with the sad news that Eve had passed away early that morning.

It was our wish to attend Evie's funeral and be with Ken, so next morning we continued on to Townsville and booked QANTAS flights to Melbourne for the following day. Leaving the caravan on site in a caravan park and the Cruiser at the airport, we flew down via Brisbane on 22 August, rented a car at Melbourne Airport, drove to suburban Chelsea and booked in to a cabin at the caravan park there, then immediately drove over to Ken's home at Beaumaris and took him to dinner. He was obviously very sad but was taking the loss well, and of course during Evie's battle with cancer he'd had time to come to terms with losing her. The funeral was held the next day at their local Anglican church, the service being conducted by the husband and wife team of Anglican ministers who had tended to Evie so well when she was in hospital following their caravan accident in Western Australia, and who had now moved to Melbourne. Afterwards we drove Ken to the Masonic Homes in South Yarra, where Eve had done volunteer work, and there he left the many floral tributes that had been received. We spent a couple more days in Melbourne, keeping Ken company and meeting several of his friends again, including Don and Shirley McKenzie and Lorna Whelan; the latter lady would play a major role in Ken's future. On 25 August we said goodbye to Ken and flew back up to Townsville to resume our travels, sad in the knowledge that we'd lost a beautiful friend.

Next morning we were on the road again, and after an overnight stop in Ingham reached Cairns and booked in to a caravan park at Lake Placid, on the northern edge of the city, in preparation for our Cape York tour. We'd long decided that, rather than drive the Land Cruiser up the Cape, camping and catering for ourselves, we would let a tour operator have the hassle of driving the rough roads and supplying meals and accommodation. We'd also decided that, rather than covering the same ground twice, we would fly to the top of the Cape and then come back down with the operator, and this proved a very sound move. Again it would take too long here to describe in detail the tour and the things we saw, and I can only give a broad outline of the trip.

On the morning of 29 August we were picked up by a representative of Oz Tours and driven to Cairns airport, where we boarded an Air West flight up to Bamaga. There were smoky views of Cairns after takeoff, then for the next hour and a half or so we enjoyed marvellous if hazy views of coral reefs, atolls and the mainland as we flew north along the coast and over the Great Barrier Reef. The flight path stayed east of the coast until north of Cooktown, with many reefs displayed for us as darker multicoloured patches surrounding the turquoise waters of enclosed lagoons, with yellow patches of sand and the dark green of trees to mark where atolls rose above the surface. We then crossed Capes Bedford and Slattery, and for a while the coast was to our right and the former cattle country of Lakefield National Park below us. From the map I could make out Barrow Point and the prominent peninsula of Cape Melville, then we were over the sea again as we crossed above the Flinders Group of islands. More views of reefs and atolls followed, and we crossed land again over Cape Weymouth, with Portland Roads and Chilli Beach, on which we would walk a few days later, below us. We flew over Cape Grenville and Shelburne Bay, then nearing Bamaga the landscape turned to green with the serpentine olive waters of Jacky Jacky Creek and its many tributaries winding through the jungle clad wetlands of the Jardine River National Park.

We were met at Bamaga and transported to Punsand Bay Lodge, where we met our Oz Tours hosts, Dave and his partner Rita, set up our supplied ex-Army bell tent for the first time and met our fellow passengers over a campfire dinner that night, very good plain food cooked by Rita. Most of the passengers had travelled up with the tour from Cairns, others like ourselves were just arriving, and some others would leave it the next day via Thursday Island. We spent three nights at Punsand Bay, visiting the tip of Cape York and the ruins of the settlement at Somerset and taking an enjoyable but only moderately successful fishing trip. The tour vehicle was a 15-seater Mitsubishi Canter 4WD with a large kitchen trailer towed behind it and proved reasonably comfortable on the rough roads we would encounter. From Punsand Bay we headed south, visiting Seisia and Bamaga then joining the famous Telegraph Track to cross the Jardine River and swim and camp at the beautiful Twin Falls. We then mainly followed the dusty and corrugated Northern and Southern Bypass Roads through the savannah of the Cape, with a detour to the Telegraph Track; most of the latter was too rough and dangerous for the bus and trailer to attempt. We visited the old Moreton Telegraph Station and Batavia Station before heading west across country to the relative civilisation of the mining town of Weipa for our next night's stop. Next day we took a bus tour of the town and the huge bauxite mine, then followed the reasonably good Development Road out of town before heading east to the Wenlock Gold Field and camping near the Wenlock River. We then made for the Iron Range National Park, on the eastern side of the Cape, for a two night stay during which we visited the coast at Portland Roads and Chilli Beach.

Heading south again, we had the interesting experience of losing a wheel off the trailer, finding it in the roadside bush after much searching, and with Dave making temporary bushman repairs until we reached the Archer River Roadhouse. The day's travel took us to a camp just outside the small township of Coen, which we visited next day on the way to Musgrave Telegraph Station and ultimately the huge and scenic Lakefield National Park, with an overnight camp at the Normanby River. We traversed the Park to the Old Laura Homestead then made our way to the coast once more at Cooktown, where we toured the interesting and historic town and camped in the relative comfort of a caravan park there. The final day of the tour saw us take the well known Bloomfield Track down the coast to Ayton, cross the Bloomfield River, then visit to Cape Tribulation before crossing the Daintree River and making our way back to Cairns via Mossman and Port Douglas, to end a very enjoyable experience.

Back in Cairns we had a day of catching up with various chores like unpacking, washing and ironing, and the following day, with Beryl opting not to go, I took an excursion to Kuranda on the escarpment above Cairns, going up by train and returning on the Skyrail cableway. Beryl dropped me at the station in the

morning, and on entering the gift shop there everyone was staring in absolute shock at the television; the date was September 11 and the terrorist attacks in the USA were being revealed to a horrified world.

From Cairns we headed north to Port Douglas for a few days, then spent the next two weeks or so exploring the Atherton Tableland, staying in Mareeba, Chillagoe, Atherton and Innot Hot Springs and visiting the many and varied sights of that district. One highlight was the time we spent in the fascinating little town of Chillagoe, with its limestone caves and marble quarries, because the Centenary of Federation and Pioneer Heritage Festival were being held during our visit. While there we won a prize in a raffle – a day trip for two from Cairns to Green Island – so while in Atherton we drove back down to Cairns and had an enjoyable cruise and day out on the island. From Innot Hot Springs I took a day trip to the amazing Undara Lava Tubes, where conducted tours took me through the fascinating tunnels left by the cooling of lava from a volcanic eruption nearly 200,000 years earlier.

We made our way back to the coast and headed south to stay a few days at Flying Fish Point, near Innisfail, then a few more at Mission Beach. Whilst at the latter I took the ferry out to Dunk Island and spent a pleasant day walking around it. Next stop was for a couple of nights at Lucinda before arriving back in Townsville, where we spent a few days including a day out on Magnetic Island. Moving on, we had a couple of nights in Bowen, then returned to the Whitsundays for one night and this time parked outside Don and Jill's house at Shutehaven, on what I called "the best caravan site in Australia". Reaching Mackay, we spent a pleasant week with Joe and Tess Grima on their cane farm, then had a few days at Kinka Beach, near Yeppoon. Overnight stops at Tannum Sands and Burrum Heads brought us to the Sunshine Coast and Maroochydore, and there we had an unexpected and enforced stay for longer than planned. We'd noticed the engine of the Land Cruiser seemed to be running roughly on the way down, so I immediately sought out a motor workshop. There they conducted a series of tests, which realised my worst fears; the radiator was boiling, although the temperature gauge read normal and there had been no engine warning lights, and this had probably caused the head gasket to blow. The motor would have to be stripped to establish the extent of the problem, which would be a long and costly job – they quoted a week's work, given the need to obtain parts!

I contacted the NRMA, who offered several options of looking after our accommodation and a rental car, or shipping the Land Cruiser back to Sydney. As we had the caravan on site it made most sense to have the repairs done in Maroochydore, so they arranged a Hertz car for us for the following day. The people at the workshop were also extremely helpful, lending us a Mitsubishi van as a "courtesy car" until we received the rental car. During our enforced stay we caught up with Ed and Elsa Vandenberg, who we'd met at Venus Bay earlier in the year, and who at the time lived nearby in Glenfields, and with the use of the Camry rental car spent time exploring around the Sunshine Coast and hinterland. A week after we'd arrived we received the welcome news that the Land Cruiser was ready, and the not so welcome news that the bill was just under \$3000, so we were on our way again.

After an overnight stop at Ballina we reached North Haven, where by arrangement we met up with John and Norma Farrell and had a week together. While there we all had a reunion with our former Bank colleague John Morgan and his wife Rosemary. John of course had accompanied me on the Europe trip to the S.W.I.F.T. meeting in Brussels back in 1981, and we'd enjoyed a close working relationship after that. He was now retired and they had built a fine home in Bonny Hills on the heights overlooking Rainbow Beach. At North Haven our trip ended, and a day's drive saw us back home after another enjoyable few weeks "on the road".

The following year, 2002, also saw us away from home and travelling for much of the time. Once the school holidays and summer heat was over we embarked on our first trip, to New Zealand's South Island. Having amassed sufficient Frequent Flyer points, we splurged on Business Class and on 18 February flew

by QANTAS to Christchurch, where we picked up a car from Mr Hertz and explored that attractive city for a couple of days. However the main aim of our visit was to tour the Island by motorhome, with all the flexibility that mode of travel provided, and we'd pre-booked one. In addition we also wanted to experience the *TranzAlpine* rail crossing to the West Coast, so by arrangement we dropped our luggage at the motorhome depot and the company owner, Ian McKenzie, obligingly drove the motorhome across to Greymouth while we took the train. It was an extremely scenic journey in brilliant sunny weather until we passed through the tunnel under the Southern Alps and emerged on the other side in grey weather. Ian met us at Greymouth station, handed over the motorhome and took the train back to Christchurch, while we started our tour of the South Island.

From Greymouth we headed south down the West Coast to Hokitika, then on to the Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers for overnight stops at each; we had of course followed this same route in 1995. The weather wasn't particularly kind to us, with frequent light to heavy rain, but I managed to walk to the face of both glaciers and indeed at Fox the weather cleared for the duration of my walk. We continued on down the coast, sometimes in sunshine and other times in rain, and at Haast turned inland and scaled the Haast Pass to end the day at a campground on the shores of lovely Lake Wanaka, surrounded by stunning scenery but buffeted by a strong wind. The next day we continued on past scenic Lake Hakea to the town of Wanaka for an overnight stay and exploration of the area. On the way out next morning we visited Puzzling World and the Transport and Toy Museum. The latter housed an absolutely huge collection, indoors and outdoors, of cars, motor bikes, sundry other vehicles, aeroplanes, fire engines and assorted military and mobile machinery, together with an amazing mass of toys, dolls, teddies, money boxes, model cars, model ships and every sort of collectible imaginable. One could have spent days there if one had the time. After traversing more stunning scenery our day ended in Queenstown, where we stayed for two nights, looking round the town and visiting nearby Arrowtown. Again we'd visited there in 1995, so an extended stay was not required.

In pouring rain we headed south along the shores of Lake Wakatipu and through the little townships of Kingston and Garston to Mossburn, then swung west towards the mountains of Fiordland and our destination, the village of Manapouri on the shores of the lake of that name. Next day, thankfully in fine weather, we took a tour to Doubtful Sound. This comprised a boat trip across the lake to West Arm, deep among the Fiordland mountains, where we disembarked and boarded a bus that firstly took us underground down a winding road to the power station hidden in the bowels of the earth. Back on the surface, we crossed the mountains over Wilmot Pass among stunning scenery to Deep Cove on Doubtful Sound itself, where we boarded a larger vessel for a cruise to its mouth. The next few hours were absolutely magic as in glorious sunshine we cruised the waters of the fiord and its various arms, with sheer mountains arising around us, and for a short distance out into the waters of the Tasman Sea. On the way back to Deep Cove the skies clouded and light rain fell, but we'd already seen the Sound at its best.

The following morning we moved on to Te Anau and on a day of alternating sunshine, showers and heavy rain took a cruise across Lake Te Anau to the interesting Caves and Glow-worm Grotto. Back at Te Anau we continued on towards Milford Sound in constant rain, camping for the night alongside a running stream. It was a very cold night, and the next morning the tops of the surrounding peaks were dusted with snow. On our previous visit to Milford Sound in 1995 it had poured with rain, and we hoped that this time we might see it in sunshine. This was not to be, however, and after negotiating the climb and descent through the mountains and the passage through the rather daunting Homer Tunnel, we arrived at Milford in pouring rain. We once again elected to cruise on the *Milford Wanderer*, a smaller cruise boat built along the lines of a traditional trading scow, that was generally avoided by the large coach tours and on which we'd sailed in 1995. Little did we know then that we would spend over a week on board her in 2007, but that's a story for later. The cruise was spectacular despite the rain, with the

high peaks lost in mist and cloud and spectacular waterfalls falling from the rainforest covered heights, once again a marvellous and memorable experience. However we would one day like to do that cruise in fine weather, just so we could say we'd clearly seen the top of Mitre Peak!

Back on land, we made our way back to Te Anau and Manapouri for another overnight stay, headed south through Clifden and Tuatapere to reach the south coast of the Island, then made our way east through magnificent coastal scenery and gale force winds to the town of Riverton for one night, then on to the city of Invercargill. We visited the excellent museum there and explored the city, and also drove down to the small port of Bluff, the southernmost town of the New Zealand mainland, where stood one of those "signposts to everywhere". The next two and a half days were spent traversing one of the most scenic parts of the South Island, the Catlins, with magnificent coastal scenery, rolling inland hills and lovely lakes. We regretted we didn't have more time to spend there and earmarked it for a longer stay at some future time. This brought us up along the east coast to the attractive city of Dunedin. We'd stayed there in 1995, so after revisiting the city centre with its Octagon central square and St Paul's Cathedral, the Edwardian railway station and the Gothic Revival First Church, and then looking over the Otago Museum, we made our way out around the harbour and up the scenic Otago Peninsula to the village of Portobello for an overnight stop.

The following day we had a most unusual experience. On the recommendation of friends back in Sydney we visited an attraction called "Nature's Wonders", a property on the end of the Peninsula with magnificent views around which we were conveyed in an 8x8 wheel drive amphibious vehicle called an Argo. The performance of this was simply incredible; it could go places that no 4WD could go, up and down almost sheer hillsides over the roughest ground, spin on its axis like a jet boat and turn in its own length. We had a thrilling ride around the property, hanging on for dear life while going up and down the hills, taking in the stunning views and visiting a huge seal colony down at the water. It was a great outing and worth every cent of the admission price. We'd also planned to visit the Royal Albatross Centre on Taiaroa Head, but the tours were booked out so instead I took a guided tour of Fort Taiaroa, a defence bastion built into the headland itself, before we made our way back to Dunedin for an overnight stop.

From Dunedin we headed inland and spent a few days exploring Central Otago and the old gold mining towns of Ranfurly, Naseby, St Bathans and Clyde, then headed north up the centre of the Island through Cromwell, the Lindis Pass and Omarama. While taking a photo stop in the pass we were amazed to confront an emu; hardly a New Zealand native, it must have escaped from a farm somewhere! We considered a diversion into Mount Cook Village, but as we'd been there in 1995 and the mountains were clouded over anyway, we continued on to Lake Tekapo and its lovely little Church of the Good Shepherd, for an overnight stop there. Next day we continued north, stopped in Geraldine to visit the extensive Vintage Car Museum there, reached the dead flat expanse of the Canterbury Plain and headed towards Christchurch. Stopping short of the city, we then diverted to the beautiful Banks Peninsula and spent a day and night there, including a cruise on Akaroa Harbour on which we saw pods of Hector's dolphins, the world's smallest oceanic dolphin.

A very scenic drive the next day took us back to Christchurch, where we passed straight through and headed north along the east coast with overnight stops at Gore Bay and Kaikoura. It was a wet day as we travelled from the latter to Blenheim, the road hugging the shoreline in spectacular fashion and with hundreds of seals to be seen on the rocks around Ohau Point. We briefly looked around a rainy Blenheim, then continued on to the pretty port of Picton for our next overnight stop. We were again on a road travelled in 1995 as we headed west to Havelock, overnights at Pelorus Bridge, stopped in the large town of Nelson for a quick look around – we'd stayed there in 1995 – then followed a very scenic route that took us north west along the shores of Tasman Bay. We had an overnight stop in the

attractive beachside village of Kaiteriteri, then continued on to Collingwood, on Golden Bay, from where we took a four wheel drive bus trip to Cape Farewell, the northernmost point of the South Island, and out along the long curving Farewell Spit to the lighthouse at its end. We returned to Kaiteriteri for another night, and on an early walk the next morning I came upon a man a few years older than myself kneeling on the sand and photographing sand patterns. We got talking, exchanged addresses and over the following years Clarrie Brake and his wife Aileen would become our firm friends, firstly by email and then through visits by them to Australia and ourselves back to New Zealand.

From Kaiteriteri we followed a route that took us through the lovely Motueka River valley, then traversed rugged countryside to and through Buller Gorge and the northern Alps to the gold rush town of Reefton for an overnight stay. The next day took us through more awesome mountain scenery to Hanmer Springs, famous for its hot springs and baths. Our stay was nearing an end, as the following day we were back in Christchurch, where we did a little sightseeing before returning the faithful motorhome to its owners, booked in to a hotel near the airport and the morning after, March 26th, caught our flight back to Sydney at the ungodly hour of five thirty am! It had been a great five weeks touring a beautiful country, and we were determined to return there at some future time.

On May 5 we celebrated our fortieth wedding anniversary, forty years of a happy and generally very contented marriage. Like any couple, we'd endured our ups and downs and occasional hurts of each other, but looking back I don't think we ever had a serious argument or falling out in all that time. Anyway, its safe to say we both looked forward to many more years together. I gave Beryl a very nice Swarovski crystal teddy bear and, the day being a Sunday, we celebrated with a relaxed and pleasant lunch at the *Lane Cove River Steak House* in Chatswood. My having drunk wine over lunch, Beryl drove the Land Cruiser home and we were nearly there when the car in front of us, giving no warning, signalled a left hand turn into a driveway and slowed down abruptly. We were not going fast, having just been stopped by traffic lights, but Beryl had no hope of stopping and we hit the back of the car, driving it into a garden wall. Luckily no-one was hurt in either vehicle, although a woman passenger in the car complained of a sore neck. The police were called and the Land Cruiser, having sustained some damage to the front steering assembly, had to be towed away. It was an unfortunate end to what had been a happy day, and in due course Beryl received a "bluey" for negligent driving, a routine occurrence when one car runs into the back of another. We paid the fine and then I wrote to the police, outlining the circumstances and stressing the fault of the other party. I must have hit a sympathetic chord, as the fine was refunded and no record of the incident was recorded against Beryl's driving record.

The grass wouldn't be allowed to grow under our feet, and late May saw us on the road again, this time for a five month caravan trip that would cover much of the Red Centre of Australia and Queensland. For part of the time we would be travelling with old friend Ken Bowden and his new partner Lorna Whelan. We had of course already met Lorna a couple of times, as she was a very old friend of Ken and Evie, going back a long way with them. We learned later from other friends of theirs that Ken had taken Eve's loss very hard, understandably so because of their devotion to each other, and that he was sinking into deep depression. Lorna, widowed for many years herself, came to his rescue and provided the companionship and care that he needed, and while naturally still missing his Evie he had taken on a new lease of life through shared activities and just being together. Lorna was new to caravanning, but she adapted quickly to that aspect of Ken's life.

Anyway, back to the trip. From Sydney we made our way slowly west, stopping in Blayney, Forbes, Lake Cargelligo and Cobar and visiting Cowra and Parkes along the way. Then followed a long haul out to Wilcannia, on the Darling River, and beyond to the opal mining town of White Cliffs. This was new territory to us and our stay there was most interesting as we toured the opal fields and visited the various tourist attractions. From there we moved on to Broken Hill, a journey made interesting by the

corrugated road causing the door of our refrigerator to fall off, with rather messy results! We spent a few days at the Hill, during which we made a day trip to the Menindee Lakes and Kinchega National Park, with the lakes and the Darling badly affected by the drought. We also visited Silverton, a place we'd been to a couple of times before. Broken Hill behind us, we made our way into South Australia, overnighed at Peterborough and visited the extensive *Steamtown* railway museum there, then made our way over back roads to Wilpena Pound, in the heart of the Flinders Ranges.

The Flinders is one of our favourite parts of Australia, with its wild rugged scenery and clear blue skies, although on this occasion we were to encounter quite a bit of cloud and drizzly rain. I took a wet walk into the Pound, seeing it from quite a different aspect, and using it and Hawker as bases we revisited much of the area we'd explored in the past, as well as covering a lot of new ground. Our next stop was Port Augusta, where we spent a day riding the Pichi Richi railway up to Quorn and back, before Ken and Lorna arrived from Melbourne to join up with us. Fine weather finally blessed us as we headed north on the Stuart Highway to Woomera, briefly explored the little town and then continued on to the opal mining town of Roxby Downs and nearby Andamooka opal fields for a couple of days. This was a real eye opener for Lorna, who had never experienced the true outback before. We made our way up to Coober Pedy for another few days, revisiting the stunning scenery of the Breakaways and exploring the opal shops and tourist attractions of the unique town, then continued on with overnight stops at Marla and Erldunda to then head west to Ayers Rock, or Uluru to give it its proper name.

During our stay at Uluru I walked right around the Rock, and also took for the second time the Valley Of The Winds walk at Kata Tjuta, previously known as the Olgas; I rate that as one of the best half day walks in Australia!. The four of us also drove out to the latter one evening to watch the sunset there, just as spectacular as it was at Uluru itself. From there we moved on to Kings Canyon, or rather Watarrka, where I also repeated the walk around the canyon rim, another spectacular hike. Retracing our steps, we overnighed at Erldunda again before reaching Alice Springs We spent several days there, seeing the various sights including the Desert Park, which was new to us, and the four of us did full day trips in the Land Cruiser to Hermannsburg and Palm Valley, and to the Eastern Macdonnell Ranges and Arltunga. It was Show time at the Alice, so we also visited that.

Alice Springs marked the separation point for us, with Ken and Lorna heading back to Melbourne via the Queensland coast as they had to be home by August. It had been enjoyable travelling with them and we would miss their company for the rest of our own travels. We left the Alice ourselves and headed out to Glen Helen in the Western Macdonnells for a few days, visiting Gosse Bluff and Ormiston Gorge among many other places, where at the latter I again did the Pound Rim walk, this time through a landscape blackened by bushfires. Back in Alice Springs, we took a 4WD trip with an operator to Chambers Pillar and Rainbow Valley, two places where we'd never been, before heading north and then west to the remote Gemtree, where we fossicked with some success for zircons and garnets, ending up with nine nice stones that we had cut and posted to us. Continuing north, we overnighed at Wycliffe Well, stopped to see the Devil's Marbles, then continued on to Tennant Creek for a couple of nights. Then followed the long trek east across the Barkly Tableland to the Queensland border and on through Camooweal to Mount Isa

We spent a couple of nights in Mount Isa before continuing east to Cloncurry, where we then turned north towards the Gulf of Carpentaria. This was a part of Australia completely new to us. We overnighed at the Burke and Wills Roadhouse, then struck north west to Gregory Downs and set up camp beside the lovely Gregory River, its waters running absolutely clear and green through pandanus and eucalypts. There we left the caravan and continued west out to the bush resort of Adel's Grove, where we stayed in permanent tent accommodation; in hindsight, the road was good enough that we could have taken the caravan in. There we visited lovely Lawn Hill National Park, an oasis in the dry parched

desert around it, and also took a conducted tour down to the Riversleigh fossil fields. We spent one night back at the Gregory River, then headed north on now unsealed roads to the lonely Gulf town of Burketown. We spent a few days there exploring the area, including a less than succesful fishing trip with an operator out into the waters of the Gulf.

From Burketown we headed east to Normanton along a road distinguished for its corrugations and extremely rough cattle grid crossings. The caravan stood up to the rough going well, but less so the contents. On arriving in Normanton we found that the refrigerator had a broken pipe and had leaked the ammonia coolant, the television had ceased to function, the shower door had come off its mountings and a bottle of cordial had broken and spilled its contents and saturated the floor. We were able to purchase a new television in Normanton, but there was nowhere to get the refrigerator repaired so we arranged for a second Engel car fridge to be sent up from Cairns. All in all, those few hundred kilometres ended up costing us several thousand dollars by the time the refrigerator was repaired back in Sydney. While traversing the road we passed and chatted on the radio with one John Langlois, who was driving a motorhome dubbed *The Snail*. John also stayed in the caravan park at Normanton, and we were to meet him further down the road as well. Over the following years we kept in touch with him and his partner Doris, and still exchange newsletters with each other.

While in Normanton we visited nearby Karumba then, leaving the caravan in the caravan park, we rode the historic and unique *Gulflander* train to Croydon, quite an experience. This was a two day excursion, with an overnight stay at the Croydon pub, returning to Normanton the next day. Our new Engel had arrived by bus from Cairns, so the following day we were back on the road again, using it as a freezer and our existing larger Engel as a refrigerator. Our route took us east, back through Croydon and on to Georgetown for a two night stay, and while there we drove out to unique Cobbold Gorge for a 4WD day trip, on the way totally shredding a tyre on the Cruiser. Moving on, we overnighed at Mount Surprise, where we again caught up with John Langlois, then started to move south, with another overnight at the Bluewater Springs Roadhouse before reaching Charters Towers for a three night stay. Heading for the coast, we diverted to the interesting old mining town of Ravenswood to explore that area

We reached the Queensland coast at Ayr and from then on were on very familiar ground. A couple of nights there saw us move on to the Whitsundays and the "best caravan site in Australia", outside Don and Jill's house in Shutehaven. We spent over a week with them, going out on Don's boat the *Seaspray* one day for a cruise round the islands, and another day the four of us drove up to Dingo Beach and Hydeaway Bay to visit friends of theirs. I also went out to South Molle Island one day and walked around that very scenic gem of the Whitsundays. The time came to move on, and we headed down to Mackay for a stay with the Grima family there. Unfortunately we found Tess Grima in hospital with serious heart problems, which put a bit of a dampener on our stay, but we paid her several visits during our time there. She was of course bitterly disappointed that we had to leave and that she hadn't been able to spend time with us at her home. As the following January would see her and Joe's fortieth wedding anniversary, without her knowing it we made arrangements with her family that we'd fly up for the party and surprise her. We continued south to Rockhampton for a few days, during which we took a day trip out to fascinating Mount Morgan, the old copper mining centre. We also found that the latest production of *Pirates of Penzance*, still starring Jon English and Simon Gallaher, was playing in town, so went to see it and found it just as rollicking and enjoyable as the first time around.

Our next stop was the port of Gladstone, where we took a pleasant cruise of the harbour and looked around the district, then moved on to Bargara Beach, just outside Bundaberg. Next came Hervey Bay for a few days, on one of which we took a whale watching cruise out into the Bay and were rewarded by good sightings of the huge creatures. On another day we drove to Maryborough for a look around that historic city. We moved on to Tewantin, on the Sunshine Coast, for a few days and en route called on

Beryl's distant cousin, Lottie Bell, in Gympie. Lottie had spent a lot of time documenting the Moad family tree, and we spent some time with her discussing it and copying some of her family photographs. During our stay in Tewantin we paid the usual almost obligatory visit to the huge markets at Eumundi and drove out to Kenilworth, where the annual Show happened to be in progress on the day. We took several drives around the district, including a beach drive along Teewah Beach to the Coloured Sands. On one day, returning to the caravan, we found *The Snail* parked near us and John Langlois joined us for another "happy hour". A short drive then took us to Forest Glen for a couple of nights.

We now headed inland to the city of Toowoomba for a few days, where we caught up with Beryl's cousin, Christine Spicer and her husband Bob Bradford. Christine, of course, had been one of Beryl's bridesmaids, and while we were there we also met up with her mother, Joan Spicer, and her sister Diane who was up visiting from Singleton. We had arrived for the last two days of the annual *Carnival of Flowers*, unfortunately missing the Grand Parade and the big Quilt Show, but we toured the public gardens and visited some of the open private gardens, admiring the beautiful displays. We vowed to return some time and see the carnival properly. Saying our goodbyes to the Bradfords, we returned to the coast at Brisbane and stayed for three nights with old friends Peter and Rhonda Edmunds, parking the caravan on the vacant lot next to their canal-side home in Birkdale. On the day we arrived Peter had told us that other guests would be joining us for dinner, and I was delighted to find those guests were old friends and colleagues from the Bank, Ken Willett and wife Heather, and Mike Farrell and wife Barbara. Ken, as mentioned earlier, had been my boss and General Manager of Information Systems prior to his retirement. While with the Edmunds Beryl had a mishap, tripping on a door sill and badly gashing her knee. Peter ran us to Redland Bay Hospital, where five stitches were put in the wound, but further attention was needed during the rest of our journey home.

We moved on to Southport and the Gold Coast for a few nights, where we spent an enjoyable day at the *Seaworld* theme park. We had Sunday brunch at the Kurrewa Surf Club with Jim and Daphne Field, who we'd met on our Alaska trip, and also lunch with Mike and Barbara at their lakeside home in Robina. Home was starting to beckon now as we continued south into New South Wales, with a few stops of short duration as we headed towards Sydney. At Bonny Hills we caught up with old friend and colleague John Morgan for a chat and dinner – his wife Rosemary was in Sydney at the time – and while passing through Taree paid a visit to Angus and Joan Death, Beryl's distant relatives who we hadn't seen since our wedding day nearly forty years earlier. For old times sake we made our last stop the Sandbar caravan park at Smiths Lake, where we'd spent those several summer family holidays with John and Norma Farrell and our kids. It was much as we remembered and had little changed over the years. This brought us back home after an interesting and enjoyable five months on the road, exploring new parts of our great country and revisiting others.

An incident concerning my interest in philately is worth relating. While staying with Don and Jill in Shutehaven, Jill had been sorting through a huge pile of used stamps spread out on a table in their spare room. I browsed through them and discovered a number of mint unhinged Australian stamps, overprinted for the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan at the end of World War II. These had apparently been saved by her father, who had acted as postmaster on the ship on which he had served. I knew they were potentially quite valuable, so took them home with me and showed them to my friend and stamp dealer Manfred Junge. He confirmed their value, I took them to a stamp auction house and to the delight of Jill they sold for well over a thousand dollars. She had insisted I keep a set for my own collection, so I was more than happy with the outcome.

Late in the year we received the sad news from The Netherlands that our Dutch friend Albert van Gelder had passed away after a battle with cancer, and sent our condolences to Janny and her family.

As I mentioned earlier, Beryl was now into quilting in a big way and got wind, I think through an advertisement in a quilting magazine, of a Quilt Retreat to be held in November at O'Reilly's Guesthouse, in the Lamington National Park at the back of Queensland's Gold Coast. We'd spent a memorable few days at O'Reilly's some years earlier, so I had no hesitation in agreeing when she suggested we go. We drove up via the New England Highway, with overnight stops in Singleton and Tenterfield, with the leg between Tenterfield and Canungra opening up new country to us. The Retreat lasted five days, and while Beryl slaved away over a hot sewing machine – we scarcely saw each other except first thing in the morning and for dinner in the evening – I happily filled in my time with guided or solo walks in the beautiful rainforest of the Lamington Plateau. A Quilters Picnic was held on the Saturday down in Canungra, which proved a pleasant interlude. We returned home via back roads through the MacPherson Ranges to Kyogle and Casino, again country new to us, then through Grafton to the coast and so down the Pacific Highway. Despite the long hours and hard work Beryl thoroughly enjoyed the Retreat, and I also relished the stay and the opportunity to revisit a marvellous part of Australia.

That brought to an end our travels for 2002, with Lauren's Australian Girls Choir concert at the Sydney Opera House and the usual family get-together for Christmas bringing the year to an end. December 23 saw the tenth anniversary of my retirement, and it was hard to believe that amount of time had passed and we'd done so much in those ten years. Retired people often remark how they wonder they'd found time to go to work, and we were no exception. Granted there was no longer the stress of having to meet deadlines or get things done quickly, but we were never short of something to do and if we didn't finish what we were doing today, there was always tomorrow. Travel had occupied a huge slice of those years, and we'd seen an enormous amount of Australia and a good deal of the outside world in that time. I look back on it as a great period in our lives, and at the time I know we looked forward to many more years of doing the same things.

Chapter Twenty One

Growing Old Gracefully

So 2003 was upon us. Late the previous year I'd made the necessary arrangements for us to go up to Mackay and surprise Tess and Joe Grima at their fortieth wedding anniversary party late in January. The flights were booked, accommodation reserved for a cabin at a caravan park, and a rental car arranged. The new year was only a few days old when we received a phone call from James, their son, with the sad news that Tess had passed away. It came as no real surprise to us, as she had suffered with a bad heart for many years and as James said, the family had had eighteen years to get used to the idea. None the less we were saddened and distressed to lose one of our oldest and dearest friends. Phone calls were made to change the bookings and we flew up to Mackay two weeks earlier than planned for a funeral instead of an anniversary celebration.

Our travel year started in March with a leisurely three weeks on the coast north of Sydney, revisiting some spots that we hadn't spent any time in for a few years. Our first stop was the lovely Port Stephens area, some two hours from Sydney, where we set up the caravan in a park at Anna Bay, hidden behind the sand dunes and a ten minute walk through them to magnificent surf beaches. We'd often stayed at nearby Shoal Bay when Graham and Russell were young, and although there had been much development in the intervening years it was still a pleasant area to holiday in, or indeed to live in as many people from Sydney and Newcastle had chosen to do. We spent our time relaxing and looking round the district, with myself swimming and taking a few walks, and on one occasion we rode the little ferry across the water to Tea Gardens to explore that little village.

From Port Stephens we drove back towards Sydney to spend a few days in Belmont, an outer suburb of Newcastle. It had been some years since we'd visited that city, and we were pleasantly surprised by the changes for the better that had occurred. The closure of the giant steelworks some years earlier had been a negative from the point of view of employment and commerce, but there had been a great benefit in the reduction in pollution. Together with much clean-up work generally and good planning by the local authorities, Newcastle had shed its mantle of a grimy austere industrial city and was blossoming into an attractive place to live and work. We spent a few days exploring the city and its surroundings, including the string of fine beaches and the picturesque Lake Macquarie to its south, and took the opportunity of catching up with a few people in the area, including our ex-neighbours Rex and Janet Finley; John (the *Snail Driver*) Langlois, who we'd met on our 2002 Queensland trip, and his partner Doris the Navigator; and Beryl's aunt Louie Spicer.

Our last stop was at Umina Beach, on the northern shore of Broken Bay, with the caravan parked a few metres from the water's edge. From there we explored the Gosford and Terrigal district, an old stamping ground from years back, and caught up with Warwick and Joan Forrest, who we'd befriended at Beryl's Quilt Retreat the year before. Back home, we looked back on a pleasant and relaxed trip.

For years I'd wanted to go to China, but Beryl had no such desire and had constantly urged me to go by myself, and finally I bit the bullet and booked a twenty-eight day tour for May with Wendy Wu Tours in Sydney. The main impetus for going when I did was that I wanted to see the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River before they were irrevocably flooded by the giant new dam being constructed on it. Then along came the dreaded SARS epidemic, which effectively closed down the East and nearly cancelled the trip. However I considered the risk of contracting SARS both acceptable and infinitesimal and elected to go.

As it transpired, of the forty one people due to take the tour commencing 26 April, which because of the numbers were to have been split into two groups, only fourteen actually flew to Beijing. The upside of being such a small group was that everyone immediately got to know each other and we all got along famously. To avoid paying a single supplement I'd paired up with David Rudiger, a chap of similar age from Whyalla in South Australia, and this arrangement worked out fairly well. The group adopted the title of "Eddie's Group", after our Chinese guide, and the problems, frustrations and disappointments that we were to face bound us together even closer. We were later informed that we were the last Australian tour group allowed into China, and the last foreign tour group to leave the country – of which more later. Because of the SARS epidemic we found our hotels were often upgraded – frequently we seemed to be the only occupants! – and fourteen people in motor coaches built for forty plus meant lots of room to spread out. The main downside was the perhaps irrational fear of contracting SARS; we were afraid to snuffle or sneeze in case the authorities swooped down on us, and the slightest cough brought anxious looks from the rest of the group. In hindsight, the SARS added to the sense of adventure that we experienced; our temperatures were constantly being checked by doctors, guides, chambermaids, airline hostesses etc, and we were screened by thermal imaging at every airport we passed through. On arrival at one city, Kunming, we boarded our coach and were immediately whisked away to the hospital where each of us underwent blood tests, temperature checks, chest X-rays and a physical examination by a doctor, the last mentioned not being particularly enjoyed by the ladies of the group. We soon decided to "go with the flow" and let the fates decide what might happen to us, where we would end up going and what we would see.

The tour started in the capital, Beijing, and over the next four days we were to see many of the main tourist attractions of the huge city. Our first port of call was the Temple of Heaven complex, a large sprawling park containing a series of beautifully decorated temples and buildings, of which the two outstanding ones were the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests and the Hall of the Vault of Heaven. The park was a pleasant introduction to our stay in China. Our next visit was to the heart of Beijing, Tiananmen Square, scene of the bloody massacre of students in 1989 (incidentally our young guides professed not to know anything about that!) A huge expanse of concrete, almost deserted because of SARS, the world's largest square housed Chairman Mao's mausoleum (unfortunately again because of SARS we weren't allowed to view his mortal remains), together with a variety of monuments, statues of the People's Heroes, garden beds and the huge pagoda-like Southern Gate. The Square was surrounded by huge edifices including the immense Great Hall of the People, the National Museum and the Gate Tower, the main entrance to the Forbidden City.

We then explored the Forbidden City or Imperial Palace itself, a huge complex of halls, palaces, pagodas, courtyards and gardens that had got its title because for over 500 years it was forbidden for the common people to enter, under pain of instant death. Surrounded by a moat, huge stone walls and watch towers, the Palace lay along a north-south axis marked by a centre line. We entered through the huge Meridian Gate and spent some three hours wandering through the beautifully decorated temples and halls, resplendent with red and gilt paint and decorations, and exploring some of the museums housed in minor halls; unfortunately many of these were closed because of the SARS epidemic. Our walk culminated in the enchanting Imperial Gardens, crammed full of landscaped gardens, trees and statuary. The whole place inspired a feeling of awe through its sheer size.

The next day we took a coach ride out along Beijing's freeways and past huge development sites and modern buildings to the adjacent countryside and one of the icons of China, the Great Wall. Stretching six thousand kilometres from east to west across China, it was truly one of the wonders of the world. The stretch we visited, at Juyong Pass, had of course been totally reconstructed for visitors, but nonetheless the sensation of being on and climbing up the Great Wall was one of the highlights of the trip. The steps were steep and worn, uneven in height and width, requiring concentration and frequent stops to catch breath. The absence of people on this usually jam-packed ascent made things much

easier, however. From the watch towers unfolded marvellous views over the jagged mountains over which the Wall snaked, and down into the valley through which ran the freeway and railway line to the north. The air was clear and free from smog, the day sunny and the sheer ambience of the place superb. Back on the coach, we headed towards Beijing before stopping to visit a jade factory and having lunch. We then visited the Changling Tomb of Ming Emperor Yongle and Empress Xu, one of the many such tombs in the area. In an attractive walled complex backed by the mountains, we wandered through various ornate gates, halls and pavilions among attractive trees and gardens. We were amused by the various signs in “Chinglish” around the park, including such gems as “Tourists Stop”, “No Climb or Painting” and “No fight or brawl, no rabble, no feudal fetish and sexy service.....” and so on.

That night Eddie received word that the tourist boats on the Yangtze River were about to stop running through the absence of tourists due to SARS, so it was arranged that we would fly down to the river the next afternoon instead of proceeding to Xi’an and the Terracotta Warriors as originally scheduled. Our last morning in Beijing was therefore spent at the Summer Palace of Empress Cixi. A huge park, China’s largest, it was originally a private imperial garden laid out in 1153 but redeveloped by the Empress in the 1880s; lying on and around Wanshou Hill, it enclosed the huge man-made Kunming Lake. It was a fascinating and beautiful place, its woods and gardens enclosing many halls and pavilions and dominated by the striking Temple of Buddhist Virtue high on the hillside. Despite SARS there were a lot more people in the Summer Palace than we’d seen in other parts of Beijing.

My impression of Beijing was of a vast sprawling city in which tall modern office and residential blocks rose alongside vast new developments and the remains of the old *hutongs*, or substandard housing. One of the pleasures of the visit was the ability to walk among the latter, observing the ordinary people at work and leisure. Many wore masks, most did not, and there was no objection to our presence. A smile was greeted with a smile in return, and children would often come up to us and say “Halloo-oo”. Perhaps the most striking discord with what we had expected was the lack of people in public places, told by the Government to stay at home rather than risk SARS. At every meal the restaurant would be empty apart from ourselves, with serving staff standing around waiting for the chance to do something. Vendors, stall owners and peddlers had no one to sell to, and we felt sorry for the people who relied on tourism for the few *yuan* they could earn.

We flew from Beijing to Wuhan and there boarded a coach for an evening ride through that bustling city and out through the darkened countryside to the Yangtze River and the newly constructed town of Sandouping, skirting the huge construction site of the Three Gorges Dam, with work continuing through the night. It was almost midnight when we reached the mooring place above the dam of our cruise boat, the MV *Sunshine China*, where we were hustled into the dining room for yet another temperature check before being allowed to retire to our cabins for the night. Dawn saw us still moored to the riverbank, and before we sailed we were taken by coach back to the dam site for a tour. To say the project was immense was still an understatement! It consisted of three main structures: the dam itself, 2309 metres long and 185 metres high; a series of locks capable of allowing passage of 10,000 tonne ships; and a power station of twenty six generators. Far from completed, it had reached the stage where its diversion channel was about to be closed and the water level behind it would rise to 135 metres above sea level by mid-June, and 175 metres on completion in 2009. Hence our urgency in seeing the river before the upstream towns and cities were flooded and the landscape dramatically changed for all time.

Returning to the ship, we started our journey up the mighty river. The vessel was a grade higher than the one we’d originally been booked on, and we were told it was the last tourist cruise boat that would sail before the river was flooded. There were twelve other passengers besides “Eddie’s Group”, making a total of twenty six looked after by a crew of over a hundred. Again we felt sorry for the crew, who would be out of work after we docked, and for the craftspeople who had little stalls on board and made

their living selling to the tourists. For the next three days we cruised upstream on the mighty Yangtze, for the first half of the journey passing through the marvellously scenic Three Gorges. Here the river narrowed, sometimes only a hundred metres wide, and sheer cliffs soared to jagged mountain peaks on each side, clothed with trees and with towns, villages and terraces clinging to the slopes where they could. The water was a muddy brown and the current swift. Vessels of all shapes and sizes passed us, from tiny fishing boats to large ferries, hydrofoils and barges carrying every imaginable cargo, as the river was a major highway for China. Everywhere there were signs of activity where whole towns and villages at the water's edge had been demolished and rebuilt higher up above the coming flood level, leaving only stone and rubble. Many new bridges were being constructed, either across the main stream or side gullies up which the mountains could be seen rising to the sky. Over two million people had been relocated, to give some indication of the magnitude of the changes being wrought. The journey was reminiscent of the cruise up the Rhine, or of the Inside Passage to Alaska *sans* pine trees.

Beyond the Three Gorges the landscape flattened out somewhat and the river was wider, with many towns and cities along the banks. Huge stabilisation works were taking place - concrete squares filled with stones, with gangs working laboriously on them breaking the stones to the correct size using hammers and chisels, then laying them into the framework. Much shipbuilding was being carried out, with large boats being built or renovated on the flat banks a little above water level with not the suggestion of a graving dock. Obviously they would float off of their own accord once the water level rose, but many were far from completed and we wondered what would happen when the water rose dramatically in the following month. The landscape was now more one of industry, with factories, quarries and major towns, and the air much more polluted; it was less scenic, but none the less fascinating.

One of the highlights of the passage through the Three Gorges was a side trip up the Shennong Stream. In large canoe-like boats, manned by four oarsmen in the bow using long and rather primitive oars, and another at the stern, together with a steersman with a sweep similar to that used in a surf boat. Another highlight was a visit to the Ghost City of Fengdu. Dating back to the Tang dynasty, the City comprised a series of temples on the top of a steep hill and was reputed to be the place of devils. It was reached by a chairlift up the side of the hill, deeply wooded with trees and bamboo groves and ornamental gardens, although some of the party elected to walk up the many stairs to the summit. I thoroughly enjoyed the cruise on the "Last Boat to Chongqing", which was both relaxing and full of interest. The meals, banquet style with a mixture of Chinese and western cuisine, were good and our cabins comfortable if not luxurious. It was generally agreed that, even if we saw no more on the trip, we could be satisfied we'd seen the Yangtze before it was flooded. All the rest would still be there in the future, but the river would be changed forever.

The cruise ended at the city of Chongqing, from where we were due to fly to Xi'an and see the Terracotta Warriors. However we received the news that the Chinese Government had now closed that city to visitors due to an outbreak of SARS there and we could no longer go! Instead we had an unscheduled day and a half in Chongqing, a large, smoggy and sprawling city that in the event proved quite interesting. Highlights included a visit to the City Zoo to see the pandas, a visit to the City Square to see the people at play, and a marvellous walk through the carefully preserved Old Town precinct of *hutongs*. From Chongqing we flew to the city of Kunming and the encounter with the Chinese medical profession mentioned earlier. The following day we took an all day tour to the Stone Forest, some 120 kilometres south east of the city. The sub-standard road took us through rural countryside, past rice paddies and endless market gardens, orchards and sugar cane fields, and was crowded with the ubiquitous blue trucks loaded with all manner of goods. The "forest" consisted of a huge area of sheer pinnacles of limestone karst, some of them thirty metres or more in height, rising from the wooded countryside and surrounded by trees and lush gardens. Pathways wound through the whole area, sometimes a tight squeeze between the pinnacles, and little pools of green water often lay around their

bases. It was a fascinating place, and the only place like it that I'd seen in Australia would have been Chillagoe in North Queensland.

The next morning we checked out of our hotel and boarded the coach for the five hour journey to the city of Dali, to the west of Kunming. Soon we were passing through mountain country, which interspersed with endless terraced gardens and rice paddies, and everywhere people were planting rice, ploughing the paddies using water buffaloes or generally tending their produce. For the first half of the journey a new freeway under construction was paralleling the reasonably good highway, and this was an amazing sight. For over 200 kilometres there was an endless sequence of mostly manual labour constructing the new road, with gangs breaking stones with hammers and carrying cement and mortar in baskets on their backs to build retaining walls. Their mean little lean-to's and tent living quarters lined the roadside. On reaching Dali, we were stopped by the authorities for yet another temperature check before being allowed to proceed to our hotel.

We spent two nights in Dali New City. Set on the south western tip of Lake Erhai, or Ear Lake, at an altitude of 1900 metres, it was a clean modern place, its streets bustling with people. To the west lay the imposing Cangshan Mountains, the beginning of the Himalayan chain, while other mountains rose in the east beyond the lake. The main inhabitants of the area were the Bai people, a minority group in China and quite a separate race to the Han Chinese. Based in the New City, we made several excursions into the surrounding hinterland, although the scheduled lake cruise was cancelled due to the boats not running because of SARS. The first excursion was to the Dali Ancient City, the original walled city, a mixture of "tourist modern" and "genuine old", with many fine examples of the distinctive Bai architecture. The second excursion, the following day, took us to two Bai villages further up the lake, where we saw the Bai people in their true environment. The villages were not at all touristy, and the street markets were clearly designed for the locals to shop at rather than visitors. It was a great insight into how the people lived and socialised. A third excursion took us through the Three Pagodas Temple, the ancient structures standing within a park of trees, gardens and pools that also contained a large temple and bell tower.

It was while we were in Dali that realisation came that we could go no further. China had closed its borders, both external and internal, to visitors and our guides were unable to take us anywhere else except to an international port of departure. Somehow I was made spokesman for the group, and using a borrowed mobile phone I made a hurried telephone call back to Wendy Wu Travel in Australia and with a certain amount of angst on our part arrangements were made to fly us out of Kunming to Singapore and so to Australia. Returning to Kunming over the same route, we spent the remaining day and a half before our flight further exploring the modern and quite attractive city. All in all it was a pleasant finale to the China trip, marred as it was by its abrupt ending.

I found China absolutely fascinating; quite different from the Western world but at the same time similar in many ways. I half expected a backward country and was amazed at how modern and progressive it really was. Certainly there was poverty to be seen, but everyone seemed to have some kind of a job, even if it was only sweeping the footpath with a straw broom, and the people generally appeared contented and cheerful. Back in Australia I negotiated with Wendy Wu for "Eddie's Group", or most of us anyway, to return to China in May 2004 on a special tour exclusively for ourselves to see the places we'd missed; foremost among those would be the Terracotta Warriors, the Li River cruise and Shanghai. We received a substantial refund for what we'd missed from the travel company and insurance, so were not really out of pocket over the cancellation. I kept in touch with the other members of the group fairly closely over the coming twelve months.

We spent the rest of May and June at home, while I caught up with processing the photos I had taken in China. As with the Alaska trip, I prepared CDs of the photographs and sent them to my fellow

passengers, and these were very well received. I also gave one to Wendy Wu Tours, and later in the year I received a phone call from them asking if they could use some of my photographs in their 2004 China brochure. I readily agreed, and when I received a copy of the brochure I was rather chuffed to see that more than half the photographs in it were mine! I neither sought nor expected any payment for doing this, but just before Christmas Wendy herself came to our house with two very nice bottles of wine for me. I would supply photographs for the brochures for the following two years as well.

Come July it was time for our annual "get out of Sydney for winter" trip. We decided for the third year running to head north to sunny Queensland, visiting a few new places in the inland and then taking our time returning down the coast. We left home on July 1 and made our way out to Coolah in Central NSW, where we had a pleasant few days with Max and Ros Long, fellow passengers on the China trip, on their property there. The days were generally fine and sunny, as they would be throughout the trip, but the nights were bitterly cold until we reached the Queensland coast – so much for missing winter! Continuing north, we stopped in Toowoomba to visit Beryl's cousin Christine and family, then made our way to Kingaroy, Australia's peanut capital; the first time we'd stayed there. A day trip was made to the picturesque Bunya Mountains, a little to the south.

From Kingaroy we continued north through the Burnett district to Cania Gorge, another place new to us, where by arrangement we met up with our long time friends John and Norma Farrell, who were travelling south. A pleasant few days were spent with them, during which we explored the walking trails of the National Park and caught up with each other's recent doings. For a few months Beryl had been suffering, not for the first time, from a "frozen" shoulder and had received treatment for it before we went away. Usually it responded to cortisone injections, but this time they were having no effect. We therefore moved on to Biloela and, leaving the caravan, dashed down to Rockhampton where fortuitously we'd been able to arrange an appointment with a specialist. He gave her another injection, but this subsequently also proved of no benefit.

Moving on, we made our way to the magnificent Carnarvon Gorge, again for the first time. Here Beryl was content to sit and do handiwork while I spent several days walking the trails of this gem of inland Queensland. Walking was comparatively easy on the main track, which was level and well formed as it wound its way through the Gorge, with only the side tracks to various features being a little more taxing. The scenery was beautiful, and my best effort was a walk of 24 kilometres on one day. Although the striking sandstone walls of the Gorge were hidden by the forest until one penetrated well into it, there were magnificent views from a lookout and all manner of interesting side gorges, Aboriginal art galleries and secluded beauty spots to enjoy.

We continued our journey through Central Queensland, passing through Emerald and Sapphire, where we fossicked for the gems with no real success, to then head west to Barcaldine, Longreach and Winton. At Barcaldine we revisited the excellent Australian Workers Heritage Centre, crammed with the history of the working people of Australia albeit with an inevitable Labor and trade union flavour. The highlight of our stay in Barcaldine however, was an all day excursion with local identity Tom Lockie out to the little town of Aramac and beyond to the scenic countryside of Gracevale Station. We visited sites dating back to the days of the pioneers who opened up the countryside; viewed the most extensive Aboriginal art shelter we'd seen anywhere in our travels; enjoyed lunch in the yards of the Station homestead; and generally saw some marvellous and wild sandstone country. All day Tom kept up an incessant flow of anecdotes, snippets of history, tall tales, poems and a seemingly endless supply of jokes. It was certainly one of the best day trips we'd ever been on in our country.

In Longreach we visited the Stockman's Hall of Fame and the QANTAS Founders' Outback Museum, both of them interesting but both rather overpriced, in our opinion, for what they offered. An evening

cruise on the Thomson River, followed by an excellent campfire dinner and entertainment, was the highlight of our stay there. In Winton we revisited the Waltzing Matilda Centre and Qantilda Museum, much improved and extended since our last visit and devoted to the origin of the Aussie "national song" that was written and first sung in the district. We also took a half day drive out to Bladensburg National Park, a former sheep station and a landscape typical of the vast grassy plains and sandstone ridge country of the Queensland outback.

From Winton we headed across country north east to Hughenden, where we spent a day out at Porcupine Gorge. Certainly one of Australia's best kept secrets, this magnificent gorge in the middle of nowhere offered marvellous scenery different in its own way from the many other gorges we'd seen on our travels. Leaving Hughenden, we made our way east to the Queensland coast at Ayr. Beryl's shoulder making no improvement and certainly making travel less than enjoyable, we decided we would accelerate our progress back to Sydney and made an appointment with her specialist, which would bring us home in early September instead of late October as planned. We were now on well familiar ground, so our progress was generally one of catching up with people rather than, with a couple of exceptions, seeing new places. We once again spent a few pleasant days with Don and Jill in Shutehaven, on the best caravan site in Australia, and while there I took the ferry across to Hamilton Island and spent a pleasant day exploring the very resort-oriented holiday haven.

We caught up with the Grima family in Mackay for a few days, but I have to say it wasn't the same without Tess being there. We also had a couple of days with Ed and Elsa Vandenberg, who'd bought a caravan park in Sarina since we'd last met. Nearing Brisbane we diverted to spend a couple of days on Bribie Island, another first-time place for us, and also caught up with Rex and Pam Ramsey, two more fellow travellers on the China trip. Radiator problems near Ballina saw us camped for the night outside the mechanic's workshop in Bangalow after being ignominiously towed, caravan and all, from the highway, but there were no further mishaps before we reached home after a pleasant if foreshortened trip.

Our last trip for the year was a short one. Beryl's Quilt Retreat was being held again, this time at the Couran Cove Resort on South Stradbroke Island on Queensland's Gold Coast. Once again we left the caravan at home and took two days to drive up, stopping overnight at Hallidays Point and Maclean. We left the Land Cruiser at the Runaway Bay Marina and took the ferry across to the Resort, where we were accommodated in a very comfortable suite overlooking the lagoon. Over the next few days Beryl took part in the Retreat while I rented a bicycle to explore the Resort and to ride over to the surf beach each day for a swim. She worked the usual long hours, with us meeting up only for meals, and once again thoroughly enjoyed it. I had no problem in filling in my time swimming, walking, cycling and generally lazing about. On one day I joined a 4WD tour that took us through the bush and then along the eastern beach to the northern end of the island at Jumpinpin Point, which was quite enjoyable. The retreat over, we returned to the mainland and made our way back home with overnight stops at Evans Head and Port Macquarie.

On the whole 2003 had been a reasonably good year for us. Beryl had the worst of it, with her "frozen" shoulder, which was very slowly starting to improve in terms of less pain and more movement. Her specialist said that only time would correct the problem, but he believed the worst was over and it would right itself. Other than that, we were generally in reasonable shape healthwise for a pair of Grey Nomads in their sixties (in my case bald rather than grey!) Because of her shoulder Beryl hadn't done as much quilting during the year as she would have liked, but kept busy with other handiwork requiring a little less physical movement, and of course pottering in the garden. Among other things she made beautifully embroidered cot blankets and the like for the two new nieces who came along during the year – Raelene and Matt had their second child, Gabriella, in March, while Greg and Lisa had their first in August.

And so into 2004. What would be a very full year got into full swing at the end of January, when we spent a week in Melbourne, primarily to attend the 80th birthday party of our dear friend Ken Bowden. Ken was receiving the OBE – “Over Bloody Eighty” – and the party proved to be a great success, held in his garden with well over a hundred friends and relatives along to cheer him on. Even the notorious Melbourne weather did the right thing, after threatening a shower earlier in the day. We left the caravan behind and drove down, staying with our friend and Ken’s new partner Lorna Whelan, and while there did a little bit of sightseeing and caught up with John and Audrey Sutherland, fellow travellers on my China trip the previous year. A couple of weeks later I helped my stamp dealer, Manfred Junge, relocate his business to the New England city of Armidale, thus effectively putting myself on the unemployed list as my one day a week spent working with him was no longer possible. I came to miss very much this weekly trip into the city and the contact with Manfred and his customers; the work was easy and interesting, and I kept abreast of what was happening in the stamp world.

In early March we were delighted to once again have a visit from my cousin Stewart Griffith and wife Jean, out from England. This was the second time they’d been to see us, and although they stayed in a city hotel we took them out for a day’s sightseeing, had dinner together and arranged a night climb of the Harbour Bridge for them.

Later in March we took a three week caravan trip up the North Coast of NSW. This was an area that we’d travelled through and explored many times in the past, but we made this trip different by visiting and staying in many little places that we’d only been to on day visits, or not at all. Taking the benefit of glorious autumn weather, after a first few days of cloud and showers, we stayed in such places as Hawks Nest on Port Stephens, Harrington, Crescent Head, Mylestom, Scotts Head and Dunbogan, little seaside townships for the most part, and used them as bases on which to travel around the adjacent areas. Thus from Hawks Nest we explored the coastline and the Myall Lakes National Park. From Harrington we revisited Taree, where we caught up with Beryl’s relatives Angus and Jean Death; explored the town of Wingham, built like an English village around a large village green or common; revisited Ellenborough Falls, reputedly the highest single drop waterfall in the Southern Hemisphere and where we’d taken our boys when they were still toddlers; and did some dirt road driving in the State Forests.

Moving on to Crescent Head, we’d only just set up when we were nearly washed out by a violent storm that brought rain and wind; this caprice of the weather would be repeated a couple of times during our stay there. Ironically, this would be the last decent rain before what would become another terrible drought year for the east coast of Australia. However between storms we enjoyed fine beach weather and explored the rugged coastline of the area. Moving on to Mylestom, near Coffs Harbour, we explored the pleasant coastal area there and then, leaving the caravan on site, drove up across the Great Dividing Range to the New England city of Armidale, with some sightseeing in spectacular countryside on the way there and back. In Armidale we stayed a couple of nights with my stamp dealer, Manfred, and his wife Kathy in their beautiful 19thC home there. We put in a day helping him get his shop to rights, and also spent some time looking around the city. Returning to Mylestom, we spent some more time in the district before heading south once more towards home, stopping at Scotts Head, from where we did more coastal and forest exploration and visited historic Bowraville and Taylors Arm, where we called in at the famous Pub With No Beer, made famous by the late Reg Lindsay. The final stop was Dunbogan, on beautiful Camden Haven, for a final few days of walking, swimming and enjoying the warm sunshine.

On 1 May I left for what would be the travel highlight of the year for me – my second visit to China. After the visit in 2003 was cut short when the SARS epidemic forced our group to return home with only half our itinerary completed, our travel agent, Wendy Wu, arranged a special trip for the same time this year to go back and see what we’d missed, and eight of us out of the original fourteen signed up for it. I spent quite a bit of time negotiating with Wendy and had some additional stops and sightseeing included. The visit lasted a month for me, and was in four parts. The first part saw four of us doing a separate tour,

visiting the remote and beautiful Nine Villages Valley area. The other four group members joined us for the second part, visiting the places missed in 2003, while the third part saw me doing a tour on my own, with a local guide, of another equally remote and beautiful scenic area. The final part was a few days stopover in Singapore on the way home.

Back to 1 May. The four of us – Charles and Jill Martin from Sydney, Dave Rudiger from Whyalla and myself - overnights in Singapore before flying on to the city of Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, where we were met by our local guide, Rocky. That evening we attended the Sichuan Opera – more of a Chinese vaudeville show – which was very good, commencing with Chinese orchestral music and running through Chinese Opera, slapstick comedy, solo acts and puppetry. The costumes were gorgeous, contributing to a great spectacle of music, colour and light; an auspicious start to our tour.

The next morning we boarded our coach for an early departure to Northern Sichuan, joined by a very friendly English-speaking Japanese businessman and thirty odd Chinese tourists with their own guide and extra drivers, so it was a full coach. For much of the next few days aboard the coach we would be bombarded with the endless Chinese dialogue of their stentorian guide, or loud video music clips on the closed circuit TV, or both at once, over which our own guide could not make himself heard. Ah, the joys of travel! The first day's journey lasted over thirteen hours, taking us via expressways and country roads through a fascinating landscape of plains and mountains, cities, towns and villages. During the afternoon we entered the Tibetan region of Sichuan, which abuts Tibet itself, and climbed a pass through spectacular snow-clad mountains – a winter wonderland to our Australian eyes. Finally around nine we arrived at our destination, the resort town of Jiuzhaigou.

The following day was the highlight of this part of the tour, a day spent exploring the Jiuzhaigou or Nine Villages Valley Scenic Area. A UNESCO Heritage Site, it comprised a Y-shaped valley encompassing nine Tibetan villages, famous for its alpine lakes, waterfalls, forests and snow-covered peaks. Travel in the area was by shuttle bus, which conveyed us non-stop to the top of the valley, and we were then free to make our way back down, boarding and reboarding buses at the many stops along the road. There had been a heavy snowfall overnight, and after passing beautiful lakes and marshes we rose above the snowline into an absolutely magnificent vista of peaks of stark grey stone capped with white, dense cypress forest sparkling white, and the air pure and clear under a sunny blue sky. At the end of the road boardwalks allowed us to explore the forest itself, and women in traditional Tibetan costume posed for photographs. We then started our descent back into the lower reaches of the Area and its many attractions. It would take pages of prose to describe what we saw in the next few hours: vistas of soaring peaks; crystal clear lakes skirted by boardwalks; water meadows through which ran a sparkling stream; exquisite waterfalls including one of the most beautiful I'd ever seen; colourful rhododendrons contrasting with deep green pine and grey karst limestone; and a typical Tibetan village which inevitably was somewhat "touristy". It was an unforgettable day spent in one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world, and we really only skimmed the surface of it!

The day ended with another five hour coach ride deeper into the Northern Sichuan landscape, climbing to a plateau surrounded by snow covered ranges and the little town of Chuan Zhu and another rather bare and austere hotel. However after dinner we attended the nearby Tibetan Opera, again more of a variety show than opera in the Western sense. We were greeted like long-lost friends, draped with white silk scarfs, plied with tea and unusually tasting Tibetan wine, and given dried yak meat to nibble – a new experience! The show was riotous, fascinating and thoroughly enjoyable, encompassing singing, dancing and comedy skits in a very Tibetan flavour with much audience participation, quite different to what we'd experienced in Chengdu, and again with marvellously colourful and ornate costumes.

The next day saw us back in the coach and passing through the magnificent mountain scenery of the Minshan Range, through which Mao Zedong had led the Long March many years earlier. The scenery

was fantastic, and we stopped at the summit of 4576 metre Xueshan Ridge to drink in the sublime views in all directions, dominated by snow-covered Xuebao Peak, nearly 6000 metres high. We descended into the town of Huanglong for our day's visit to the Yellow Dragon Scenic Reserve, another UNESCO Heritage Area. This was a valley rising into the mountains and along which had formed over 3400 calciferous lakes and pools containing water of different hues, waterfalls and calcified rock, once again set amid stunning scenery under a clear blue sky. Taking it steadily because of the 3000-plus metre altitude, we climbed the boardwalk for two kilometres, only half the possible distance but all that time allowed. Disappointingly, however, it was the dry season and only a handful of pools contained water, so much of the effect was lost. However the setting was tremendous, and one could imagine the sheer beauty of the place at the right time.

Back on the coach, we returned over the range to Chuan Zhu for a late lunch, then for several hours drove through the Northern Sichuan landscape once more, following the course of the important Minjiang River. One interesting stop was made at a store that specialised in yak meat in all shapes and ways of presentation – raw, dried, made into confectionery and so on – much to the delight of our Chinese passengers. With night rapidly falling, then commenced one of the most spectacular stretches of road I'd ever traversed, leaving anything I'd seen in Switzerland for dead! It rose high above the river and a lake formed by an earthquake in 1934, cut into and clinging to the sheer walls of the gorge, with innumerable twists and bends as it negotiated its way around side gorges and ravines with barely enough room for two vehicles to pass. Below my window seat was a drop of hundreds of metres to the foaming rapids of the river, rarely with a safety fence. It would have been an exhilarating ride except that the driver drove like a madman, rushing into bends and overtaking other coaches, and for perhaps the only time in my life I was physically afraid on a road. However we survived it, and some hours later made a late arrival at our overnight destination.

The next day was something of an anti-climax as we continued to follow the valley of the Minjiang through a mountainous landscape that gradually turned from wilderness or farming to industrialisation as we neared Chengdu. Leaving the coach, we stopped to view the quite fascinating Dujiangyan Irrigation Scheme, over 2000 years old, before being conveyed by car back to Chengdu, where we did some local sightseeing and visited a brocade factory. More sightseeing in smoggy Chengdu followed the day after, with the highlight being a visit to the Panda Breeding Centre where several of the animals, including some six month old playful cubs, were on display.

The following day we flew to Guilin, where we caught up with the other four party members – Rex and Pam Ramsey from Brisbane and Bob and Lyn Elworthy from Melbourne - and our guide, who turned out to be Eddie, our guide from 2003. This was great, because we'd got along well with him and already trained him in the necessity of making sure that cold beer was on tap everywhere we went! So began the "core" part of the trip. Over the next few days we explored the city, viewing it from the top of the cable car on Raoshan Hill; visiting the sprawling Seven Star Park and zoo; climbing Mount Diecai, a limestone pinnacle, for marvellous if inevitably smoggy views over the city and Li River; enjoying a relaxing one hour foot massage; and visiting the fantastically lit Reed Flute Cave. The only downside to our stay there was that despite best efforts to be careful I came down with the traveller's curse of diarrhoea – probably from food I bought from a street vendor in Chengdu - which restricted my enjoyment somewhat.

It was then time to take a half day cruise down the famous Li River, after the Great Wall and the Terra-cotta Warriors possibly one of the best known landmarks of China. Although a grey and slightly drizzly day, the leisurely trip through a landscape – or riverscape – of those weirdly shaped peaks, pinnacles and hills, was unforgettable, the view changing with every bend in the river. The cruise ended at the town of Yangshuo, where we would spend the night. This was a fascinating town, once again sprawling around the limestone pinnacles and combining the older aspects of China with the tourism that had come with

the river cruises; it was typical backpacker country. We strolled the crowded streets and next morning we were taken out by minibus into the surrounding rural countryside for a close-up look at the real China – little peasant villages, rice paddies and vegetable plots, animals being butchered by the side of the road and so on. This proved one of the most enjoyable excursions of the tour. We were conveyed back to Guilin by minibus, where after a brief visit to the Art Museum we went to the airport for an evening flight to Xi'an.

In Xi'an, of course, the main attraction was the famous Terracotta Warriors, but we also visited the Banpo Neolithic Village; a huge souvenir factory in which replica Warriors among other things were made; and the Huaqing Hot Spring complex, all on the edge of the huge and generally undistinguished city. An amusing incident happened at lunch that day. When we were about to leave we were asked by the waitresses in Chinese whether we wanted to "sing a song", with Eddie translating for us. After looking at each other, we shrugged our shoulders and obliged with a rousing rendition of *On the Road to Gundagai*, and then made the waitresses sing to us, with disapproving stares from their supervisor. Eddie later explained that "singing a song" was their polite way of asking if we wanted to use the washroom!

Most people would know the story of why the Warriors were made and how they were discovered, and seeing them was as unforgettable an experience as we'd expected, and enough to have justified our going back to China to see. To describe the visit would take too long here; sufficient to say the claim of their being the Eighth Wonder of the Ancient World was in my opinion completely justified. We had a memorable dinner and show in the Shaanxi Grand Opera Company Restaurant, the show performed by the famous Tang Dynasty troupe, and this was really excellent. Before leaving Xi'an we also did some more exploration of the city, including the historic Bell and Drum Towers, the impressive History Museum, the City centre and the enormous walls of the ancient city.

Our next stop, after an evening flight, was the city of Hangzhou where we explored the beautiful West Lake in pouring rain and visited a tea village outside the city, where we learned about and sampled some of the green teas grown in the district. Moving on, we visited the historic river village of Wuxhen, preserved as it had been for several centuries and now a major tourist attraction. We then reached Suzhou, a city known as the "Venice Of The Orient" because of its extensive river and canal systems and famous for its traditional Chinese gardens. We explored some of the latter and took a river cruise. From there we continued by minibus through ever more smoggy industrialised landscapes to Shanghai and our hotel overlooking the main railway station. The huge city of 16 million people, perhaps the fastest growing city in the world in terms of economic development, was a real eye-opener, a vast mixture of old and new, and the days we spent there were totally fascinating. The famous Bund, the street of commerce on the west bank of the Huangpu River, was backed by soaring skyscrapers of all kinds of architecture and design, while across the river rose the amazing skyline of the Pudong New Area and the distinctive Oriental Pearl Tower. In contrast were the narrow crowded streets of the Old Town and the old wharves and dockland along the river, and all of this was interlaced by an amazing network of elevated roadways.

Over the next few days we enjoyed many of the highlights of this huge and rather off-putting city. Among other things we visited the Old Town and its beautiful traditional Yuyuan Garden; ascended the Oriental Pearl Tower in Pudong for stunning views from its observation gallery; visited the Jade Buddha temple and the ultra-modern and very well set out Museum of Shanghai; and strolled the equally famous Nanjing Liu, the main shopping street of Shanghai, which despite its reputation we found quite disappointing, just a boring shopping street with mainly clothing and silk stores, expensive boutiques, jewellers, cafes, Kentucky Fried Chicken and MacDonald's outlets, lacking any real colour, ambience or vitality; it could have been a street in any major city in the world. Exploring on early morning walks was also a delight, visiting parks and local markets and strolling through the *hutongs* and local neigh-

bourhoods. Two of the highlights of Shanghai took place at night. At the Great Shanghai Circus we enjoyed a marvellous show with brilliant costumes and lighting and fascinating acts of acrobatics, juggling, illusions and so on. The finale was the Globe of Death, where motorcyclists defied gravity by riding inside a mesh globe. First one rider entered the globe, then two, and finally five – it was absolutely breathtaking! On another memorable evening we enjoyed a cruise on the river. Nearly all the Bund buildings were bathed in golden light, with neon lights and the floodlit rooftops of taller buildings behind. The Pudong side of the river was a blaze of neon and coloured lights, while the Oriental Pearl Tower was bathed in multicolour with twinkling coloured lights on its three “balls”; altogether the whole riverscape was a fantastic sight.

The time came to say a sad farewell to my fellow travellers, and I flew to the city of Changsha to start the third segment of my tour. I was met by my local guide Bui, or Bear as he introduced himself; it was a one-on-one arrangement, with travel in private cars, and apart from the car drivers it was just Bear and myself for the next few days. We did some brief exploration of Changsha, then drove some ninety kilometres through the agricultural countryside to the little village of Shaoshan, birthplace of Mao Zedong, and spent a day visiting the house in which he was born and lived, and various other sites associated with the Great Helmsman. Returning to Changsha, we then visited the modern provincial Museum of Hunan, mainly devoted to relics excavated from the nearby Han Dynasty Tombs. The highlight of these was the layered sarcophagi of Xin Dui, the Marquess of Dai. She had been buried in four of these, one placed inside the other and of which three of the four were on display, the whole then placed in a huge central coffin that I was able to view from above. The most important and astounding exhibit was her body itself, 2000 years old but amazingly not decomposed when discovered, now preserved in fluid with her organs rather bizarrely displayed in glass jars. A truly remarkable sight, her corpse had been wrapped in more than twenty layers of silk and linen, and was so well preserved that modern pathologists could determine she died, aged fifty, suffering from gallstones, TB, arteriosclerosis and bilharzia!

Our next leg was an overnight train journey from Changsha to the scenic area of Zhangjiajie, the latter being the main reason for this third trip. I had a “soft” sleeper in a compartment with four other people, two men and a woman. I fortunately had a lower bunk, as the upper ones would have been very hard to climb into; it was spartan to say the least, but I was able to sleep fairly well despite music from the PA system. I hate to think what a “hard” sleeper would be like! We reached Zhangjiajie City in time for breakfast, then I was then taken on a visit to the city’s No. 1 Middle School. My itinerary had quoted a visit to a rural school, but when taking this up with Bear a couple of days earlier he’d professed ignorance of such a visit. Obviously this day’s visit had been arranged hastily and at short notice. The school was large by Australian standards, with five thousand students aged fourteen to eighteen and three hundred teachers. We were shown over the complex by a teacher, with Bear translating. I asked if I could visit a classroom and some deliberation followed, with a favourable decision eventually forthcoming. This was a highlight of the visit; fifty students said “hel-lo” in unison as I was introduced. I replied *nee har*, said I was from Australia and told them to honour their teachers, work hard so they could get good jobs and make much money so they could visit Australia. Bear translated, but some students understood English and said “welcome to our school”; all gave me a tremendous reception.

From the city we were then driven the twenty five kilometres to the small town of Suoxi, which had grown up as a tourist centre for the Zhangjiajie Scenic Area. That afternoon we visited the most incredible cave I’d seen in my life, the Yellow Dragon. The total length of the cave was over seven kilometres, although not all of this was open to the public, and it was vertically divided into two dry levels and two water levels. It contained in total four waterfalls, thirteen separate halls or chambers, dozens of corridors, nearly a thousand pools and ten thousand stalagmite columns. The tour included a boat ride through the cavern and culminated in the greatest chamber of all, the Grand Hall. The view there was absolutely stunning, far eclipsing anything I’d ever seen before in a cave. Time remained that

afternoon to visit Baofeng Lake, a lake that was the epitome of Chinese landscape painting. We spent the whole of the following two days exploring the Zhangjiajie Scenic Area, a huge area of incredible sandstone karst peaks and columns rising from the dense jungle-covered valleys in all manner of shapes and sizes; sometimes round, sometimes squared off, sometimes breadknife thin, forming or ending in weird and wonderful shapes. Pleasantly exhausted, but entranced by what I'd seen over the past few days, Bear and I were driven back to Zhangjiajie City, where I bade him goodbye and took a very late night plane back to Shanghai.

Next morning I took a subway train to the downtown area and walked around Peoples Park and Nanjing Liu for a couple of hours before bidding goodbye to China and making my way to Shanghai's enormous new Pudong Airport for my afternoon flight to Singapore, arriving in my hotel room late that night. I hadn't visited Singapore since 1981, so had chosen to make a stopover there on my way home. I found it much changed physically, having grown enormously, and of course still very hot, humid and at times wet. I thoroughly explored the downtown area; ate Western food (for a change!) at Boat Quay and the Satay Club; spent the best part of a day on the pleasure island of Sentosa; visited the very good Zoo and the Bird Park; and generally wandered around the city by day and night. A highlight was a visit to the Night Safari in an area adjacent to but separate from the Zoo itself and only open at night. It was certainly a unique experience and one of the best zoo experiences I'd encountered.

So it was back to Sydney after a marvellous month. As was the case in 2003, I found China totally fascinating and a sleeping giant in the process of waking. Places were far more crowded on this occasion, given that SARS was no longer keeping people off the street, so in that respect it seemed more like the China I'd always imagined. Certainly the way of life was totally different to our own, but observing the way other people live is one of the joys of overseas travel.

July saw Beryl's 65th birthday roll around, and we celebrated it at the local Chinese restaurant with the immediate family and a few neighbours and close friends. She got a new beaut sewing machine for her birthday which seemed to do everything but play *Waltzing Matilda*. Then it was time for our annual "Get-Out-Of-Sydney-For-The-Winter" caravan trip to places warmer up north. Like our trip earlier in the year, we covered ground we'd mainly travelled before, but made a point at staying at places that previously we'd bypassed or just visited for an hour or so. We took an inland route at first, stopping in Muswellbrook, Gunnedah, Narrabri and Moree in NSW, then St George, Roma, Miles and Theodore in Queensland before reaching the Queensland coast at Rockhampton. While in Narrabri we visited the very interesting Australia telescope complex, toured the cotton fields of Wee Waa and spent a day exploring the very scenic Mt Kaputar National Park. In Roma, where Australia's first oil was discovered, we visited the Big Rig historical park, and in Miles the very well presented Historical Village – well worth a look at.

We headed to Rockhampton, then made our way as far north as Whitsunday, stopping en route at tiny Clairview, spending a few days as always with our friends the Grimmas in Mackay, and staying a couple of days at Midge Point. Reaching Whitsunday, we spent a lazy week with our good friends Don and Jill – the fourth year in a row we'd enjoyed their hospitality. During that week we spent two nights on South Molle Island, relaxing and where I walked, swam and played a little (very rusty) golf. It was then time to start the long slow journey south to home. We stayed at lovely Cape Hillsborough National Park, then with friends Ed and Elsa at their Tropicana Caravan Park in Sarina, then Clairview again, Gracemere, Benaraby and Agnes Water/Town of 1770. At all of these, of course, we took little half or full day side trips to places of interest. At 1770 – named for the year Captain Cook landed there in search of water – was one of the highlights of the whole trip, a full day excursion to the remote Bustard Head lighthouse in a LARC (or Lighter Amphibious Resupply Cargo vessel) that was equally at home on land or in the water.

Continuing south, we spent some time at Moore Park and Woodgate in the Bundaberg area, then the historical town of Gympie. The beach at Woodgate was marvellous, a long expanse of golden sand on which it was permitted to take the 4WD. While staying there we visited nearby Childers and looked at the newly restored Palace Hotel, destroyed in June 2000 by a deliberately lit fire in which fifteen young back-packers lost their lives. The building now contained a moving and very beautiful memorial to them, well worth taking a look at. At Gympie we explored the nearby Mary Valley, then had a relaxing week at Coolum Beach on the Sunshine Coast before arriving in Brisbane. There we caught up with Rex and Pam Ramsey, fellow China travellers, and their daughter Julie and her family, on whose property we parked the caravan. We also enjoyed a long and pleasant lunch with Peter and Rhonda Edmunds. From Brisbane we ducked inland to Toowoomba, catching up with Beryl's cousin Christine and husband Bob, on this occasion in time to take in the annual Carnival of Flowers parade. Beryl also visited two big quilt shows there, so she was in her element. The parks and gardens were a blaze of colour.

From Toowoomba it was back to the coast and NSW. We had a leisurely week at Pottsville, on the Tweed Coast, doing some sightseeing in the area, then moved on to Red Rock, near Coffs Harbour, and then Camden Haven – one of our favourite spots on the whole NSW coast. There we caught up with another old colleague and friend, John Morgan; unfortunately wife Rosemary was again down in Sydney at the time. Our final stop was Norah Head, on the Central Coast, before arriving back home in early October after a leisurely three months on the road. We'd revisited many places neglected for some years, and also covered quite a deal of new ground into the bargain through day trips.

Our final outing for the year was a three week trip to Canberra and the NSW South Coast during November. The main reason for visiting Canberra was NOT to congratulate Prime Minister John Howard on his recent election win, but to catch up on a couple of visitor attractions that had come into being since our last visit a few years back. These were the National Museum of Australia, and the extensions to the War Memorial. The Museum was interesting enough inside and well worth seeing, with excellent presentation, but the controversial outside architecture certainly left us cold! The extensions to the War Memorial we thought excellent, with so much more on display in the way of aircraft, vehicles and so on, and the Sound and Light Show around the Lancaster bomber "G for George" very well done. From Canberra we went on to Cooma for a couple of days, then headed down to the South Coast and made our way back up to Sydney with stops of a few days at various places. The trip overall was pleasant enough but not the best one we've ever enjoyed. We were both not too well along the way; nothing serious, but enough to mar proceedings. Add to that the strong winds that seemed to blow daily, and the rather indifferent weather, and it was not the best of trips..

So ended another good year generally for the Peripatetic Perrys, with both of us enjoying reasonably good health. Thankfully Beryl had recovered from the "frozen" shoulder that dogged her in 2003, at least pain-wise, although she still had restricted movement from it.

Our 2005 travels started in February with what had become an annual pilgrimage to Beryl's Quilt Retreat, this time held in the hinterland behind Queensland's Gold Coast. Unlike previous years, we took the caravan and made a slightly longer trip out of it, staying en route at the beach resorts of Old Bar near Taree, Nambucca Heads and Tweed Heads. We explored some new ground, renewed acquaintance with places visited before and enjoyed the sun and surf. The retreat itself was held at Coolalinga Lodge, in the hills behind Mudgeeraba, a pleasant and comfortable resort with excellent catering and a great view from our unit. While at the Retreat we left the caravan with our good friends the Burton family on the southern outskirts of Brisbane, at the same time catching up with Julie's parents Rex and Pam Ramsay. As usual Beryl worked her fingers to the bone at the Retreat – an event she enjoyed very much, despite the long hours. This year she tried something different, learning to do freehand machine embroidery and also colour wash quilting. While she was busily engaged, I explored the Gold Coast's

beaches and hinterland, visited the beautiful Springbrook National Park, and caught up with my old Bank colleague, Mike Farrell, and wife Barbara. At the end of the Retreat we returned to the Burton's and the caravan and spent another night there before heading back to Sydney, taking our time and stopping for a few days at Brooms Head, Hat Head and Hawks Nest on the way. The weather was fine, the surf good and generally it was a relaxing and enjoyable couple of weeks on some of Australia's great coastline.

The next episode in my travels came in mid March, when I set out on a 27 day tour of Indochina, taking in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Once again Beryl had elected not to accompany me, so I became a member of a fourteen strong group organised once again by Wendy Wu Tours. We flew on Vietnam Airlines directly to Saigon, or more correctly Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC for short!), an eight and a half hour flight that was uneventful but less than memorable. First impressions were of an immensely crowded city, with thousands of people on low powered motorbikes seething like shoals of fish up and down every street and road with total disregard for any traffic rules. The architecture of the city was also fascinating – an eclectic mixture of run-down post-war concrete edifices, French colonial shops and houses and modern glass and steel office blocks and hotels.

Our four nights in HCMC saw us explore the city, including visits to the impressive Reunification Palace, formerly the Royal Palace; the sprawling Ben Thanh indoor market; the ornate Post Office and Cathedral; a lacquer ware factory; and the War Remnants Museum. On the subject of what the Vietnamese referred to as the American War, there were reminders everywhere of the terrible aggression inflicted on them, but surprisingly there was no animosity shown towards Westerners; the people regarded it as being in the past, and there was a very definite emphasis on peace and brotherhood. In fact the people were extremely friendly; often someone would come up to me smiling and shake my hand, speaking in a totally unintelligible (to me, anyway) language. While in HCMC we took a day trip to My Tho, on the delta mouth of the mighty Mekong River, and took a cruise on its waters. On another day we took a coach trip out into the countryside to the Cu Chi Tunnels, where some of the huge network of tunnels built by the Vietcong had been preserved. We inspected the tunnel system, including crawling through one section on hands and knees (a very claustrophobic experience!), were shown the various living areas, trapdoor entrances and booby traps that inflicted terrible injuries on the American soldiers who ventured into the maze, and watched demonstrations of how munitions and clothing had been manufactured by the Vietcong. On the same outing we visited the Great Temple of Caodaism in Tay Ninh, one of the highlights of the whole tour.

We left HCMC by train, quite an experience in itself but one I'm content not to repeat. The carriage of the *Reunification Express* was fairly basic, with four people to each compartment of a "soft sleeper"; the three of us single men in the party occupied a compartment together. A noisome squat toilet was located at one end of the carriage. The air-conditioning didn't survive the trip, the food served was inedible, the box lunch we'd been given at our hotel was likewise, and at night the bunks were cramped and hot. Thank goodness we were in "first" class! The train departed in the late morning, and after clearing the urban sprawl we passed through open farmland and plantations, dry and arid in seasonal drought, that eventually became semi-desert with mountains in the distance. With nothing else to do it was early to bed and a reasonable night's sleep despite the conditions. In the morning we woke in Central Vietnam and thankfully left the train in the city of Da Nang, a familiar name from the War, but didn't linger there and headed south by coach to the historic town of Hoi An, stopping en route at the equally famous China Beach, where allied troops took their R&R breaks.

Hoi An was a delightful old town, its architecture earning it listing as a UNESCO World Heritage site, and we enjoyed two days there. We took a walking tour of the Old Town, where we roamed the narrow streets, visited old houses and temples, explored the fish and produce markets redolent with the sights, sounds and smells of Indochina, and generally soaked up the atmosphere. We took a leisurely cruise on

the Hoai River and also had a half day excursion out in the country to the ruins of My Son, dating between the 4th and 13th Centuries and once the capital of the ancient Kingdom of Champa. Departing Hoi An, we headed back towards Da Nang and made a stop en route at the village of Non Nuoc, set among five towering marble outcrops rising from the coastal plain and in which a substantial marble carving industry had grown up. We visited a factory where marble was being carved into statuary and sculpture of all shapes and sizes, and watched as tradesman sat laboriously hammering and chiselling great blocks of stone into figures of people. Afterwards several of us climbed one of the peaks to explore its temples and caves and for a great view over the village.

From Non Nuoc we passed through Da Nang without stopping and shortly afterwards the coach climbed up and over the spectacular Hai Van Pass, where a spur of the Truong Song Mountains protruded into the South China Sea. Unfortunately the weather had turned wet and we saw nothing as we crossed the 496 metre high summit and descended to the coast once again. The day's journey ended in Hué, Vietnam's former capital, where we immediately boarded a large and comfortable dragon boat for a cruise in the rain along the Perfume River to the Thien Mu pagoda and its seven storey Thap Phuoc Duyen Tower, one of the most famous structures in Vietnam. The next morning on my walk I witnessed the colourful spectacle of dragon boat races on the river, being held as part of the Reunification Day celebrations, but had my mobile phone stolen while I watched!. Later we were taken on a tour of the Citadel and the Forbidden City, once the home of the Emperor, a huge enclave surrounded by six metre high walls and a moat, two and a half kilometres in length. We also visited the riverside Dong Ba market and that afternoon drove to the Royal Tomb of Emperor Tu Duc, located in a park-like setting, with groves of trees and an extensive ornamental lake, the whole place designed by the Emperor himself before his death as was the custom. The following morning was free time, so I hired a *cyclo*, a three wheeled rickshaw-like bicycle pedalled by a driver, for a one hour tour of the Old City of Hué. The driver had reasonable English and took me round the back streets of the Old City, pointing out various features. It was quite atmospheric, if very run down, and a microcosm of Vietnamese life. The hour cost me two US dollars!

It was time to move on again, so that afternoon we reboarded the *Reunification Express* for yet another overnight trip that took us to Vietnam's capital, Hanoi. At least this time the air-conditioning worked and the carriage had a Western toilet! We arrived in a rainy Hanoi at five in the morning, and after a wait for our hotel rooms to be ready I spent the morning walking and exploring the immediate area of the city; like HCMC it was crowded with people, very much run down and its streets jam-packed with the usual noisy horde of motorbikes, bikes, cars and buses. In the afternoon we visited the historic Temple of Literature and took an absolutely fascinating walking tour of Hanoi's Old Quarter. The walk ended with us all boarding *cyclos* and being conveyed back to the hotel. Next morning we visited the Presidential precinct of Hanoi, set in a much more attractive part of the city with parks, gardens and beautiful French colonial architecture. We started at the Mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh – "Uncle Ho" - filing quietly around the U-shaped gallery inside the box-like concrete building. In the centre lay Ho in his glass sarcophagus, his embalmed body discreetly lit and looking very much at peace. We wandered past the incredibly beautiful Presidential palace with its deep yellow walls and green shuttered windows, toured its spacious grounds and then the huge Ho Chi Minh Museum. A highlight of our stay was an evening visit to the unique Water Puppets theatre.

From Hanoi we were taken by coach to Halong City for a cruise on Halong Bay, renowned for its distinctive limestone pinnacles rising from the water like an aquatic version of China's Li River. Disappointingly we immediately ran into dense fog, but as we cruised this slowly lifted to some degree, giving a ghostly beauty to the peaks and quiet waters with their little floating fishing villages. We visited the marvellously scenic Sung Sot Cave, hidden deep inside one of the peaks, but on leaving the fog closed in again and it was with great difficulty that our cruise boat navigated the waters to eventually locate our destination, Cat Ba Island. We spent the night there, with sleep difficult because of the

festivities taking place outside our hotel. Next morning we explored the little town individually, visiting the market, bustling fishing harbour, resort and swimming beach. Offshore lay a huge floating village, while fishing boats lay jam-packed in the waters beyond it. It was truly a scene typical of Vietnam. In the afternoon we took a fast hydrofoil back to the mainland and the coach to Hanoi, where we overnighed before flying to Laos and its capital, Vientiane. It had been a very interesting two weeks in Vietnam, and while the country didn't quite live up to my expectations the visit was tremendously worthwhile. I would have liked to have seen more of the countryside, but in a short time one can't do everything.

Vientiane was more like a country town than a capital city – very hot and humid and set on the banks of the Mekong River, which was almost dry at that time of year. Our short flight from Hanoi left most of the day free and I took a long walk through the town, visiting several temples or *wats* and the central markets. There was much of interest to see, with charm in the old French colonial architecture, and the pace was relaxed after the hustle and bustle of HCMC and Hanoi. We flew out the next morning – we would return later – to the up-country town of Luang Prabang, a medium sized town set on the banks of the Mekong River, encircled by mountains and with its historical centre straddling a peninsula between that river and the small tributary Nam Khan River. One of the best preserved towns in South East Asia, it had been placed on the World Heritage list in 1995. We toured the impressive Royal Palace, then Wat Xieng Thong, regarded as the most impressive of the over thirty *wats* in the city. Later we attended the very colourful night market. Next morning we were up very early to take part in the daily ritual of giving alms to the monks of the many temples, or *wats*, around the town. A procession of monks and novices in saffron robes, from old men to boys of ten, filed past, the monks placing our offerings of fruit and candy in their bowls to later share among themselves. It was an absorbing and very colourful spectacle.

While in Luang Prabang we took a long leisurely cruise up the Mekong, visiting little villages and mingling with the inhabitants, sampling rice wine, climbing into a cave and generally watching life go by on the river banks. We visited an impressive waterfall by coach, and experienced two very unexpected bonuses. One was a visit to the home of our guide's parents, a simple dwelling behind a shop; the other was attendance at the wedding reception of one of his friends, where we were among a thousand guests! Both of these were unique experiences, seeing first hand some traditional aspects of Laotian life. At the latter the groom and his bride by custom walked around and individually greeted every one of the guests, including ourselves, and offered to each a tot of Johnny Walker Black Label whisky. I made a small presentation to them on behalf of the group.

From Luang Prabang we headed south to our next destination, Vang Vieng, by coach along Highway 13, passing through some of the finest and wildest mountain scenery in South East Asia. We stopped in little mountain villages and saw the Khamou and Hmong people in their homes and at their daily activities, one of the less pleasant ones to Western eyes being cooking a dog over an open fire! Children would immediately congregate around us, smiling and giggling, while the adults stood in their doorways and watched with curiosity. The landscape became even wilder as we passed through sheer limestone peaks to finally reach the fascinating small town of Vang Vieng, on the Nam Song River. Very backward in many ways, the town was becoming an attraction to Western visitors for its stunning scenery, many district caves and white-water rafting on the river. During our enjoyable stay there we explored the streets and little shops of the town, walked to and climbed into one of the caves, and generally absorbed the rural Laotian scene. The highlight, however, was a trip up the scenic river in tiny boats with just a few centimetres of freeboard and propelled by "egg beater" outboard motors, with the boatmen from time to time getting out and pushing us up the shallow rapids.

Leaving Vang Vieng behind with some regret, we continued our coach journey through the mountains and back down to the river plains of the Mekong, and so back to Vientiane, where we completed our stay with a city tour and a visit to a Buddha Park and the Patuxai Arch, which resembled in a smaller way the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. This ended our stay in Laos, and all agreed that it was a lovely little

country and that we would have liked to have seen much more of it. The people, despite corruption and grinding poverty, were friendly and cheerful, and we always felt welcome without being put under pressure to buy – unlike Vietnam!

We flew from Vientiane to Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital, and found ourselves in a big, bustling city once again. On arrival our guide decided we would do the "sad things" first, so we toured the notorious "Killing Fields" where Pol Pot and his regime had committed terrible genocide on the people, and then the grim Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide, where people had been imprisoned and tortured prior to despatch to their death. The sight of the thousands of skulls preserved at the Fields was a sobering and frightening reminder of man's inhumanity to man! The "sad" things behind us, we visited the National Museum, with its enormous collection of artefacts and sculptures; toured the magnificent Royal Palace, the highlights of which were the stunning Throne Hall and Silver Pagoda and the treasures they contained; and took a boat ride around the confluence of the Tonle Sap and Mekong Rivers.

While in Phnom Penh I caught up with and dined with my cousin from England, Keith Leyland, who was passing through and visiting relatives while on his way to Australia to visit me! Together with his cousin Shirley, her husband Mark and children Lisa and Martin, we enjoyed a convivial dinner at the *K West Café*, a very well presented restaurant and bar, obviously favoured by expatriates, near the Royal Palace and offering Western food with a mixture of Asian dishes. I enjoyed a good Aussie steak as a change from Asian food.

From Phnom Penh we were on the last leg of the tour as we flew north to the city of Siem Reap and the famous Temples of Angkor Wat. These were to be the highlight of the trip, and we were not disappointed. Despite the vicious heat and humidity – it was over 40°C each day – and the crowds, touring the huge temple area over the next couple of days was a marvellous experience. Our guide sensibly avoided the hottest part of the day, so we were out early, back to our hotel in the midday heat, and out again late afternoon. Of the many temples we saw, three stood out. The first was Angkor Wat itself, the biggest and most breathtaking of them all and believed to be the largest religious structure in the world. Absolutely huge, towering up from the jungle, with exquisite carvings, it was a majestic symphony in stone! It would take too long to describe it here, but it was everything we'd been led to expect. The second was the Bayon, smaller and more ruined than Angkor Wat but distinguished by its 54 towers decorated with huge and enigmatically smiling faces. The third was Ta Prohm, quite different to the others in that it had been left as it had been discovered, a pile of rubble honeycombed with passages, many blocked off, and slowly being swallowed by the encroaching jungle. Huge trees grew out of the walls, their roots engulfing and strangling the stonework.

By now "templed out", on our last day in Siem Reap we went by coach to the shores of nearby Tonle Sap Lake for a boat tour of the floating fishing village of Chong Khneah. As the lake waters receded during the dry season, the village itself followed them out. The water was very shallow and the colour of milk coffee, necessitating the shallow drafts of the boats and the long shafts of their propellers. The village consisted of myriad floating rafts on which the people lived in the same mean shacks as we'd seen on land, travelling around in small boats. It was a marvellously fascinating insight into the way these itinerant people, many of them Vietnamese, lived.

So ended my visit to Indochina. In summary, it had been a very interesting and rewarding four weeks, albeit tiring and with the heat making for less than enjoyable conditions. One of the highlights was the food – every meal was a banquet and although we encountered some common ones we had an enormous variety of dishes to sample. Some were better than others, of course, but overall the dining was great. Vietnam didn't quite live up to the expectations I'd been given before I left, a feeling that seemed to be shared by other group members. Granted we saw mainly cities, except out of the window of the train, and the two very scenic parts we visited - Hai Van Pass and Halong Bay - were marred by

rain and fog, but overall we didn't get the impression of a beautiful country. Having said that, there was much of interest to see and hear about, not the least being the after effects of the War. Perhaps the highlights were our stay in the smaller town of Hoi An and the cruise around Halong Bay and the stay on Cat Ba Island, where we felt we were seeing the "real" Vietnam.

Laos was a real surprise. With a population of only 5.5 million in a country not much smaller than Vietnam it was far less crowded, and its mountainous terrain was very scenic. The capital, Vientiane, was very hot, but "up country" in Luang Prabang and Vang Vieng it was cooler and very picturesque. It was noticeably poorer than Vietnam, but the people seemed happy with their lot and were again very friendly. With Cambodia, to me the capital, Phnom Penh, was just another city, as frantic as the Vietnam cities had been, although the Royal Palace and Silver Pagoda were marvellous. However when we moved on to Siem Reap and the Temples of Angkor it was a different matter. These were amazing in their extent and incredible workmanship, allowing for the fact they dated from the 8thC, and the sheer bulk of Angkor Wat was awe-inspiring. The country was obviously very poor - there were more beggars there than Vietnam and Laos, and the squalor of living conditions was sickening at times - but the people were again very friendly towards us. The country was also suffering greatly from rampant corruption, with those in power or holding official positions making great wealth at the expense of the rest of the people. Our guides had a lot to say on the subject, although they had to be careful in what they were saying!

A few days after I got home my cousin Keith Leyland, who'd arrived in Sydney ahead of me and had been staying with a friend, came to stay with us for a few days and I certainly enjoyed his company for that time. I took him to see a rugby league match at the Sydney Football Stadium – South Sydney played Penrith – and we spent a day touring the Hunter wineries and another in the Blue Mountains. On another day we explored the northern Sydney beaches and climbed up to the lighthouse at Barrenjoey Head. Keith was captivated by the ambience of Sydney's beaches and at the end of that day wanted to stay on the beach at Dee Why and follow me home by bus. I talked him out of it on the basis of the difficulty getting back to our place by public transport, but instead let him wander off up the beach to just sit by himself and soak up the atmosphere. His stay coincided with my 65th birthday which, like Beryl's the year before, we celebrated at the local Chinese restaurant in the company of family and a few friends, and Keith was a welcome guest.

The next chapter in our year's travels was a four month sojourn with our caravan to the Northern Territory's Top End, also covering quite a bit of NSW and Queensland en route. After one night stops at Wellington Caves and Nyngan, we spent three relaxing days in Bourke. We did a very interesting tour of the orchards and cotton fields, and visited the cotton gin in operation. However the drought had severely cut down on the crops there. We ran into more rain when we reached Cunnamulla; there had been a lot of rain in western Queensland – over ten inches in Charleville – and a couple of rivers had broken their banks. We'd been considering taking back roads through Quilpie and Windorah to Longreach, but the state of the roads and the fact that there were forty kilometres of dirt (ie mud) en route changed our minds. While in Cunnamulla we took a side trip out to the little town of Eulo, home of the annual Lizard Races, an atmospheric place with a date farm where we sampled excellent date wine, dates and figs. In Charleville we visited the National Parks & Wildlife bilby breeding centre. We weren't on an organised tour, and it was daytime and so the nocturnal animals were asleep, but a young ranger very kindly took us through the back door into the "nursery", lit by red light, and took some bilbies out of their hutch for us to see. We weren't able to handle them ourselves, but it was a magic experience to see these beautiful but endangered animals up close. Our next stop was one night in the little town of Tambo, where a small business was thriving making teddy bears from local wool fleeces. Then it was one night in Blackall, where we visited the only remaining wool scour in working order. This was very interesting and informative, and well worth a visit when passing that way.

From this point on we'd visited the area two years earlier, so we did little sightseeing. We bypassed Barcardine completely, had one night in Longreach and spent two nights in Winton, mainly as a break from driving. After Winton we headed west on a back road to the little town of Boulia. The 350 plus kilometres were one of the most scenic drives we'd taken in the bush. Vast rolling black soil plains of Mitchell grass were interspersed with low flat ranges of hills and mesas, the rocks a fiery red, and large areas of ironstone gibbers. We stopped many times for photographs; saw feral camels; had a beer at the pub in tiny Middleton (population 2) and on reaching Cawnpore Lookout in an area of rolling hills and mesas called the Lilleyvale Hills we were so taken by the natural beauty we decided to stay the afternoon and night there, camped by the roadside. I took a walk through the wild spinifex country and watched the sun set and then rise again the next morning – a beautiful sight both times. Next day we continued on to Boulia, a pleasant little town far from anywhere. For a small town Boulia boasted two very good attractions. One was the Min Min Centre, where an excellent series of animated tableaux described, in the words of typical bush characters, the sightings and behaviour of the mysterious lights that appear during the night and have defied explanations. The other was the Stonehouse Museum, a mixture of heritage items and a marvellous collection of dinosaur and other fossils.

From Boulia it was a three hundred kilometre run through more vast open spaces, interspersed with rugged red hills and red-black gibber plains. A short sojourn in the mining city of Mount Isa gave us a bit of a rest from the road and allowed us to restock with the necessary shopping. Back on the road, we headed west towards Camooweal and the Northern Territory border, then for the next five hundred or so kilometres crossed the vast Barkly Tableland, at first open and treeless and then alternating between grassland and savannah scrub. We spent that night in a rest area along with several other vans and motorhomes. We continued on to meet the Stuart Highway and headed north towards distant Darwin. We had a look at the now virtually ghost town of Newcastle Waters, once an important point at the intersection of major stock routes, before reaching the Daly Waters pub around midday. One of the oldest and most atmospheric outback pubs in the Territory, we'd stayed there ten years before and another visit was well worth while. We celebrated Beryl's birthday that night with a great feed of beef and barramundi and some excellent entertainment from a comedian/singer. Our next stop was at Mataranka, for four nights. There we visited the thermal pools at the old homestead, drove out to the beautiful Roper River, and visited the cemetery and site of the old Elsey station homestead. Every day I also went for a swim in the Bitter Springs thermal pools, far nicer and less crowded than the more famous Homestead pools, with the water a pleasant 34° and as clear as crystal.

Leaving Mataranka, it was an easy drive to Katherine, our next stop, where we lingered for five days. Again there was little sight-seeing necessary as we'd already "been there, done that", but we visited the old railway museum; the very comprehensive town museum at the old airfield; historic Springvale Homestead; and a couple of World War II sites outside the town, as well as replenishing the food supplies and attending the annual Show. However the highlight of our stay there, for me anyway, was a full day "safari" tour that I took of Katherine Gorge. I doubt that there can be a more beautiful gorge anywhere in Australia, or in the world for that matter; certainly I've never seen one in our travels. The whole place was absolutely magic and certainly for me a highlight of the trip. Katherine behind us, we continued north through Pine Creek, which we left for the return journey, then detoured to a region known as the Douglas Daly from the two rivers that run through it. We spent the next four nights there, enjoying the relative solitude of the area, one we'd not previously visited. We took half day excursions to the beautiful Daly River and to the Douglas Hot Springs, and I also made a half day excursion to Butterfly Gorge, a beautiful gorge at the end of a fairly rough 4WD track.

And so to Darwin. The city had grown even since our last visit a few years previously, and still impressed me as "Canberra in a tropical setting". We visited the famous sunset market at Mindil Beach and spent our days leisurely exploring the city, also visiting the excellent Aviation Heritage Centre. Perhaps the highlight of our time in Darwin, however, came about through a rather unusual opportunity. Back at

Douglas Daly we'd helped out a soldier, camped there with his family, who'd encountered radiator trouble, and I actually drove him to Adelaide River and back to collect it – a round trip of some 180 kilometres. Kevin was a Lance Corporal in the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, based at Robertson Barracks in Darwin, and he invited us to tour the base while we were there. The base was huge, carved out of the bush and with neat lawns and trees surrounding the various buildings. After showing us over his armoured personnel carrier we donned helmets and he took us in it for a tour of the base. It was a unique experience, bowling along at a moderate pace standing in an armoured car while Kevin fed us a mine of information on what we were seeing.

From Darwin we moved south about sixty kilometres to Berry Springs, where we enjoyed a relaxed week. We spent a day down in beautiful Litchfield National Park, a rugged park with lovely waterfalls and great swimming. Another day was spent at the excellent Territory Wildlife Park, a sort of open range zoo with animals, birds and fish of the Top End on display and a very good raptor show. Yet another day was spent on a drive up the Cox Peninsula to Mandorah, a township immediately across the harbour from Darwin – twenty minutes by ferry and 130 kilometres by road from that city - and the achingly beautiful Harney Beach, deserted except for a group of Aborigines net fishing. The pale blue waters of the Timor Sea lapped on the golden sands, the heat was tempered by a pleasant sea breeze, and once the fishermen moved on we had the place completely to ourselves. It would have been an ideal place to camp and spend a week or three!

Leaving the Darwin area behind, we then drove east out to Kakadu National Park, where we based ourselves at Jabiru to start with and spent the next three days exploring that area of the Park. We firstly drove up to Ubirr Rock and the border crossing of the East Alligator River. At the Rock we toured the various Aboriginal art sites; the art in Kakadu being some of the best to be found in Australia.. We spent almost an hour watching entranced the activities of several saltwater crocodiles as they hunted fish on the rising tide in the East Alligator River, and later we took a cruise on the river itself, operated by local Aborigines. Over the next two days we visited Nourlangie Rock, Anbangbang Billabong and Mamukala Wetlands. We then moved south to Coinda for one night, and next morning took a dawn cruise on the nearby Yellow Waters Billabong, part of the South Alligator River complex. We'd done this well known cruise twice before, first in the Dry season and again in the Wet, but felt it worthwhile doing for a third time. Our next stop was Pine Creek, reached by the southern road from Kakadu so we didn't have to backtrack. An old gold mining town, it boasted several historic buildings and a very good railway museum. We spent a day exploring the Goldfields Loop, taking gravel roads through old gold mining areas in very scenic country, and having lunch at the historic Grove Hill pub and museum.

We were now on our way home, although we planned to take another two months to get there! We headed south down the Stuart Highway, with a one night diversion to lovely Edith Falls, in the Katherine Gorge National Park. The next few days saw one night stands as we passed back through Katherine, Mataranka, Elliott and Tennant Creek, then across the Barkly Tableland to Mount Isa and Cloncurry, then on to Richmond. The dinosaur museum in this town is not to be missed! Then it was on to Charters Towers for one night and so down to the coast at peaceful Alva Beach, Ayr's seaside "suburb" and a breath of sea air after so long in the bush. We had three nights at Alva, not doing very much; I swam and walked on the wide sandy beach. Then it was on the road again down through Bowen to Whitsunday, to end up once more outside our friends Don and Jill's home in Shutehaven, overlooking the islands of the Whitsundays and enjoying what had become our annual million dollar view!

Despite poor weather we had a reasonably pleasant few days at Shutehaven, then moved down the coast to Mackay for our usual stay with our long time friends the Grimas on their sugar cane farm just west of the city. We were now in very familiar territory, having been in this part of the world for the last five years in a row, so there was little sightseeing to be done or things of interest to relate. From Mackay we drove a whole 36 kilometres further south to Sarina, where we enjoyed a relaxed week with friends

Ed and Elsa Vandenberg at their Tropicana Caravan Park. Back on the road, we continued south, made a one night stop at Capricorn Caves just north of Rockhampton, passed through that city as we'd frequently stayed there, and moved on to Tannum Sands, just south of the port city of Gladstone. We'd planned to stay four nights at Tannum Sands, a very pleasant little seaside town (except for the sandflies) but ended up taking ten due to engine trouble with the Land Cruiser, which proved very expensive to fix! However there are worse places in the world to spend that amount of time! We visited friends Stewart and Irene McKenzie in Gladstone, took the repaired vehicle for a run to Seventeen Seventy to test it out on the weekend, and I spent time every day on the beach, acquiring a deepening tan.

After Tannum Sands we moved further down the coast to Tin Can Bay, a little town on a sheltered inlet just south of Fraser Island, and there spent another four relaxing days. We watched the morning dolphin feeding, where two wild Pacific humpback dolphins swim to the shore to be hand-fed by visitors (only one showed up on the day); this was a far more relaxed and intimate encounter than the famous Monkey Mia dolphin encounter, where hundreds of people jostle to look. We enjoyed a relaxing cruise on the Inlet that took us to and along the shores of Fraser Island, and drove to nearby Rainbow Beach to look around there. Next stop was three days in Brisbane, where we caught up with friends Rex and Pam Ramsey, their daughter Julie and her three children. As usual, we parked the caravan on Julie's large outer Brisbane property and spent our time socialising. From Brisbane we moved south to Ballina, where we spent a pleasant seven days despite mixed weather. We visited the huge flea market at nearby Byron Bay, and one day drove up through Lismore to visit friends Art and Jill Mansted, fellow travellers on my Indochina trip, at their property a few kilometres from the "hippie" town of Nimbin. Their nine acres, set on a steep hillside with a die-for view to Mount Warning, was a veritable botanic garden which Art insisted in showing off tree by tree. I was pleasantly surprised to find Paul Owen, another fellow traveller in Indochina, was coincidentally visiting the same day. Sadly, Jill's health had declined significantly and the following January I was to receive a letter from Art saying she had passed away.

Our next stop was Brooms Head, now our favourite spot on the NSW coast, a little township surrounded by National Park with beautiful surf beaches and a caravan park site just metres from the water. There we were joined by our long standing caravan friends John and Norma Farrell, and spent a relaxing five days - albeit marred by almost constant strong winds - walking, swimming or doing nothing. We moved south to Valla Beach, just north of Nambucca Heads, and then to our final stop at North Haven, where we caught up again with a long time colleague and friend, John Morgan; once again we missed seeing his wife, Rosemary, who was down in Sydney.

Our final trip for the year was a brief sojourn down to Melbourne to catch up with long time friends Ken and Lorna. Rather than travel the Hume Highway both ways, and not towing the caravan on this occasion, we chose to go down a scenic route, turning off the highway at Gundagai and heading south through Tumut, Tumbarumba, Corryong, Omeo and Bairnsdale, and then along the Princes Highway to Melbourne. We took two and a half days to do it, passing through some stunning mountain scenery on fine sunny days, and the longer journey was well worth while.

While in Melbourne we took a day trip with Ken and Lorna to Point Nepean, on the tip of the Mornington Peninsula, where we explored the old fortifications and drank in the superb views over the entrance to Port Phillip Bay and the rugged Bass Strait coastline, including Cheviot Beach where the Australian Prime Minister, Harold Holt, drowned back in 1967. We explored some of the bayside towns south of Melbourne and also spent a few hours in the city itself, looking around the Southbank area, Melbourne's answer to Sydney's Darling Harbour, visiting the Aquarium and taking a look at their new pride and joy, Federation Square. We felt this was a great concept, providing facilities for outdoor rallies, entertainment and the like, but frankly thought the architecture atrocious!

During the year we enjoyed the occasional visit to the theatre to see musicals –we saw *The Producers* and a revival of *Fiddler on the Roof* with Topol again the star – both very good. The year also saw, for me, a very significant step in my social life. I'd always said that I only missed two things about my Bank career – the people I'd worked with, and my Caltex petrol card. The latter was just a throw-away line, but I'd genuinely missed the contact with the many friends and colleagues I had encountered during my working years. As I mentioned much earlier, taking the redundancy package instead of retiring normally meant I was excluded from the official retired officer functions that the Bank held, and thus I lost contact with the vast majority of my old colleagues. Apart from John Farrell and occasionally John Morgan, it was only by chance that I might bump into one of them in the street or the local shopping centre. However over the last couple of years I'd heard that one of my old staff members, Billy Shields, had established a "geriatrics" lunch group of retired Information Systems staff who met once a month at various restaurants around Sydney. Because of our travels I'd put off making contact, but eventually I did and attended the group's 2005 Christmas lunch at the Double Bay Sailing Club. This was a most enjoyable event, attended by nearly forty of my former colleagues, and I was very moved by the spontaneous warmth and pleasure with which I was greeted. From that point on I would attend just about every one of the lunches, except of course when we were travelling, and at each one some new "old" face would appear to reawaken memories and facilitate yarning of old times, and I very much looked forward to the first Thursday of each month.

Chapter Twenty Two

Back To Blighty & Other Wanderings

Into 2006, and from the outset things didn't quite go to plan as regards travel. Our first trip away was to have been to Beryl's Quilt Retreat on Queensland's Gold Coast in February, but for a variety of reasons that was unexpectedly cancelled, much to her disappointment, I suspect! Following the Gold Coast excursion, a trip was planned to meet our friends Ed and Elsa Vandenberg by arrangement in Venus Bay, on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula, where we'd first met them. A few days before we were to leave we rang them on their mobile to make sure they'd arrived in Venus Bay safely, only to find they'd been and gone from there and were back in New South Wales. They were most apologetic, having found the caravan park no longer to their liking, but had completely forgotten about the arrangement to meet us there! Thank goodness for that telephone call, as Venus Bay was a long way from Sydney for us to have gone on the proverbial wild goose chase.

We made a hurried change of plan and instead of South Australia spent four pleasant weeks touring the New England region of NSW, an area that had been neglected by us in the past, and taking in Brisbane and the NSW North Coast. We started our journey by heading north through the upper Hunter Valley for an overnight stop in the little town of Merriwa, then next day continued on in hot conditions through Dunedoo and Mendooran to Coonabarabran and on to the very scenic Warrumbungle Mountains, our first projected stop-over. At the campground there we settled on to a shady site among the trees, with copious bird life, kangaroos and emus and a glorious view of the rugged range.

Over the next three fairly hot days I took several walks through the magnificent scenery of the Warrumbungle National Park, including a memorable if enervating twelve kilometre circuit to and around The Breadknife, the most striking formation in the Park and one of many remnants of the ancient volcano that had given birth to the mountains. During our stay we drove back to Coonabarabran for a look around, and also visited the Anglo Australian Observatory on Siding Spring Mountain, with its huge telescope and marvellous views over the Park. We moved on to Lake Keepit State Park for a night then, after passing through busy Tamworth, made our way to the little former gold mining town of Nundle, nestling among the hills on the banks of the Peel River. We spent three nights there, exploring the town with its historic gold rush buildings and the surrounding countryside, replete with old gold-fields amid the forested hills. Nundle was a pleasant spot, very peaceful and a good place to get away from it all. We had a meal at the Peel River Inn on St Patrick's Day, enjoying beef and Guinness pie and me drinking green beer into the bargain.

From Nundle we headed for our next destination, Uralla, detouring via Walcha. Uralla was a town we'd driven through many times but never stayed in, so we spent a couple of days there in now unexpectedly cold, grey and windy weather. Among the town's attractions were an excellent folk museum at McCrossin's Mill, and a tour of the surrounding countryside was also enjoyable. Continuing north from Uralla, we stopped in Armidale for morning tea with Manfred and Kathy Junge, then continued north through Guyra before reaching our next stop, Glen Innes. We then took a back road to visit the old mining town of Emmaville, with its many picturesque old buildings, an interesting Mining Museum and extensive workings where tin and arsenic had been extracted during its boom years. Regaining the highway, we pushed on to Tenterfield for three nights. Having stayed there previously, we spent little time looking around the town and instead explored the nearby National Parks: Girraween, Bald Rock, Boonoo Boonoo and Basket Swamp NP, with some good off-road driving. Our trip north continued, crossing into Queensland and with a pause to explore Stanthorpe before spending one night in Warwick. The following day took us to Munruben, on the south side of Brisbane, through Boonah and

Beaudesert. We spent three nights there, catching up with our friends the Ramseys and their daughter Julie Burton and her family.

Leaving Brisbane, we took a back road south through Beaudesert in pouring rain, intending to make Lismore our next stop. On reaching Kyogle we stopped to explore the town and Beryl, not unusually, found a patchwork shop there. She discovered there was a workshop being held over the following two days, so we made a quick decision to stay there instead. While Beryl did the workshop, which she enjoyed and which made up in part for missing the Gold Coast quilting workshop, and with fine weather returning, I spent one day exploring the beautiful countryside of the Border Ranges National Park and the next day toured extensively, visiting Toonumbar Dam, Lismore, The Channon and the spectacular Protestor Falls in the Nightcap National Park. From Kyogle we continued south to Casino, then east to meet the coast at Woodburn, then a little further south to our now favourite watering hole, Brooms Head. We spent four nights there in rather mixed weather – sunshine, wind and occasional showers – enjoying the peace and solitude, with myself doing daily beach walks and swims.

All too soon it was time to hit the road again, as our time was nearly up and we had to be back home to prepare for our forthcoming trip to England. We made one more overnight stop at Hallidays Point before arriving back at Jason Place after an enjoyable four weeks during which we'd covered quite a lot of country new to us.

In January, before we left for our New England trip, I received word that my old colleague from the Bank's data processing department, Ron Hamilton, had passed away. Ron, as mentioned very early in these writings, had been the person who'd urged me to apply for a programming position when the Bank computerised, and so had a very marked influence on my career. I attended his funeral, meeting up with quite a few old faces that I hadn't seen for many years. Later in the year, while we were travelling in Victoria, I also received word that Ron Turner, my old boss and the man who had more than any other person advanced my career, had also died. I was greatly saddened by these deaths, but none of us are immortal.

During April I received a disturbing letter from Elaine Bolitho, the wife of my cousin John back in England. John and she had been estranged for many years and he'd gone to live in the Channel Islands, and thus we hadn't caught up with him on our 1996 visit to England. During that time he'd become diabetic and had a foot amputated because of gangrene. He eventually went back to Elaine and son David in West Kirby, but in November 2005 had returned to Jersey to visit friends and while there had collapsed and been taken to hospital. He was diagnosed with diabetes again, and on return to West Kirby had lost both his legs above the knee because of gangrene and bad blood circulation, and had also had surgery for severe duodenal ulcers. He was now undergoing physiotherapy and with the support of Elaine and especially David was learning to live as a double amputee. This was terrible news; although we'd never been close and as I mentioned earlier in this narrative had hardly even been friends, it was distressing to hear of his situation. I'd heard from various sources that he'd been a heavy drinker, and couldn't help drawing a parallel between his problems and those of my Dad.

The highlight of our travel year was undoubtedly the nine weeks we spent in England, revisiting family and friends after a gap of ten years and seeing something of that green and pleasant land. Again I can't possibly try to fit into these memoirs everything we saw and did, and will just cover the bare bones of our stay there. We had amassed enough QANTAS Frequent Flyer points to cover our tickets, with Beryl travelling in Business Class and myself down the back of the aircraft, although we would both return in Business Class

Arriving in mid May, our first ten days were spent based with my Aunt Alice at her home in the little village of Laleham, not far from Heathrow Airport. It was great to meet up with her again after ten

years, and also my extended family of cousins. We spent a morning in historic Windsor, and took the train into London for a reunion lunch with our dear friends John and Betty Cook, who we first met on the coach tour in Canada in 1993. On another day we took a walk in Windsor Great Park to see the massed rhododendrons and azaleas – a little past their best but still a beautiful display. The highlight of our first week in England, however, was undoubtedly our visit to the Chelsea Flower Show, the world's biggest. Words are insufficient to give justice to it; I can only say it lived up to its reputation in spades (pun intended!) The centrepiece was the Grand Hall, a marquee larger than a football field, in which were exhibits from commercial nurseries and plant societies containing every conceivable flower, shrub and plant, arranged in massed banks of colour or mini-gardens of greenery dotted with sculpture, fountains and the like. We have never seen so many plants in one place, and the vividness of the colours and the imagination that went into the arrangements were beyond belief.

While based in Laleham we took off on a three day, two night tour of East Sussex and Kent. This took us down to the coast through verdant green fields and leafy woods to Shoreham-by-Sea and then Brighton, where we visited the Royal Pavilion. At the time very strong gales were buffeting the coast, and the waves crashing in on the shingle beach and against the famous Brighton Pier were spectacular to say the least. From Brighton we followed the very scenic coastline through the towns of Newhaven, where the seas were particularly spectacular as they hit the breakwater, and Eastbourne, to then divert to Beachy Head and the spectacular white chalk cliffs that rivalled those at Dover. Our day ended at picturesque Hastings, with its Old Town and distinctive fishing net sheds and fishing boats drawn up on the shingle high above the sea. Our next stop was the historic town of Rye, perched on a hill with its narrow cobbled streets and ancient houses typical of Olde England, then we took back roads down to the coast and more shingle beaches as we made our way to Dungeness and on to the seaside resort of Folkestone, where we spent a couple of hours exploring the town and the Saturday market. At Dover we stopped to look at the harbour then bypassed the town, which we'd visited before, to climb to the top of the famous white cliffs and down to the little village of St Margaret's at Cliffe. There I visited the South Foreland lighthouse, standing sentinel over the treacherous Goodwin Sands, the graveyard of literally hundreds of ships over the centuries. Our day ended at a cosy private hotel in the old town of Deal, where we visited the castle built by Henry VIII. Next morning we continued north up the coast, visiting Sandwich and the seaside towns of Ramsgate, Broadstairs and Margate before heading through the Kent countryside to Canterbury. There we bypassed the town, having seen it and the Cathedral on our last visit. We continued on through the beautiful Kent and Sussex countryside, but heavy rain started and any thoughts of further sightseeing went by the board so we returned to a very wet Laleham after an enjoyable three days in the south east corner of England's green and pleasant land.

After our stay with Alice we moved on to Cornwall, taking three days to get there. The first day saw us travel through the green fields of Hampshire to the little town of Marlborough, and then on to the village of Avebury, where an Iron Age henge similar to Stonehenge but on a much larger scale occupied the landscape – most interesting. Moving on, we ate lunch in the town of Devizes, then visited the village of Lacock and the grand Lacock Abbey, a mediaeval abbey later converted to a manor house. After exploring the lovely old town of Bradford-on-Avon we finished up for the night in grand Georgian Bath, which we'd previously visited in 1996. The next day I took an early morning walk around much of the city centre before we progressed through the countryside to the ancient Devon town of Wells. At nearby Wookey Hole I joined a conducted tour of the famous cave there. The next stop was the town of Glastonbury, where in pouring rain I paid a quick visit to the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey. Our day ended at a motel just outside the city of Exeter. The next morning was spent touring the narrow lanes and byways of Dartmoor, a fascinating open wilderness of bare hills, rocky tors and deep valleys with tiny villages and running streams – a very attractive part of England. Moving into Cornwall, we stopped in the town of Tavistock, then the next stop was at the National Trust's property *Cotehele*, the mediaeval home of the Edgcombe family. Fast roads finally took us to our destination for the next few weeks, the

seaside town of Porth, just outside Newquay, and my cousin Geoffrey and wife Claire, who we'd stayed with in 1996 and with whom I communicated regularly by email. They owned a holiday home on a steep hillside overlooking the surf beach and with a marvellous view across the bay to Newquay.

As if to greet us, the sun came out the afternoon we arrived in Porth and then followed day after day of lovely warm sunshine. Just about every night we ate dinner on the patio, albeit sometimes with heaters going when the sun dipped behind the hill, enjoying the daylight that lasted until ten o'clock at night. The north west coast of Cornwall was spectacular and beautiful, and I took many walks alone and with Geoff and Claire along the cliffs and down on the beaches, where their golden retriever, Jack, revelled in the water. The Cornish countryside was also beautiful, and we explored it extensively over the following three weeks or so. On our second day there we drove by main roads and country lanes to Caerhays Castle, a Scottish baronial manor set in fine gardens and facing the sea on the south coast. From there we continued on to the picturesque little fishing port of Mevagissey and took a small ferry across a rather choppy St Austell Bay to another fishing port, Fowey (pronounced to rhyme with "joy"), once the home of author Daphne du Maurier. The next day we drove to the county seat, Truro, and there took another ferry trip down the River Fal to Falmouth, set on Carrick Roads, the third largest natural harbour in the world after Sydney and Rio de Janeiro, and visited the Maritime Museum there. Back in Truro we visited the large and beautiful Truro Cathedral, of fairly modern (1914) vintage. The following day we explored the nearby town of Newquay, very much a holiday resort town with countless hotels, B&Bs and guest houses, and known as the surfing capital of Britain for its many beaches. The day after that we drove once more to just outside Mevagissey, where up in the hills we visited the Lost Gardens of Heligan. These were once magnificent gardens and parklands surrounding the manorial Heligan House and looking down to the sea, and were at their height around 1900, but during the Great War the estate grounds fell into ruin and decay, and it was only in recent years that the "lost" gardens were rediscovered. The visit would remain one of the highlights of our time in Cornwall.

Our next outing was to Port Isaac, a little way up the coast. This was the epitome of the Cornish fishing village, an exquisite and picture postcard delight to the eye. It was the setting for the television series *Doc Martin*, which we'd watched in Australia, so the scene before us was immediately familiar. On another very full day we explored the Cornish coast down to St Ives, then continued to Levant and stunningly scenic Cape Cornwall, then Lands End, the unique Minack Theatre, and tiny Mousehole, where we'd enjoyed a stay in 1996. Another highlight of Cornwall was a visit to the famous Eden Project. In a disused china clay quarry a huge amount of landscaping was carried out, tremendous quantities of soil were brought in and the erection of two huge biodomes took place. In these structures, consisting of hemispherical networks of steel covered with translucent materials and looking rather like giant golf balls half buried in the earth, were constructed two distinct environments – the Humid Tropics and the Warm Temperate Zones. We can only say it was amazing, to say the least, and should be on everybody's list of "must sees" when they visit England.

One very full day was spent with Geoff and Claire at the Royal Cornwall Show at Wadebridge. We had expected that the Show would be something like Sydney's Royal Easter Show, but we were to find that Sydney's Show was something like Cornwall's! It was absolutely huge! The Showground itself was larger than Sydney's, but apart from the animal pavilions lacked our permanent buildings; instead most of the exhibits were in tents and marquees, many of them very big. The main ring was also square rather than round, with only a small grandstand and definitely lacking Sydney's facilities, and Sideshow Alley was very small in comparison. Beyond that, the Show certainly exceeded the Royal Easter in terms of size and range of exhibits. It was aimed at being a farmers' show above all, so there were huge displays of agricultural equipment, countless hospitality tents for farmers, a huge food hall and many individual stalls selling the excellent quality local produce, and all manner of dealers' stands demonstrating and selling every conceivable item relating to the land. Apart from agriculture, there were extensive car dealers' exhibits with some mouth-watering cars for sale; entertainment venues; a Festival of Cornish

Dance; dozens of takeaway food outlets; displays by ambulance, police, motoring and fire services; stalls selling or publicising every conceivable product or service; and much much more. Something that was missing, however, were the Show Bags of Australian shows!

Still in Cornwall, we toured the Lizard Peninsula, the British mainland's southernmost point, with more stunning coastal scenery. On other occasions we visited Padstow, another atmospheric fishing town and harbour, and visited the stately homes of Trerice, Prideaux Place and Lanhydrock, all of them immensely interesting to tour and set in lovely gardens. We visited the old tin mining town of St Agnes, the ancient town of Bodmin, and drove over bleak but beautiful Bodmin Moor, where we visited and had lunch at the *Jamaica Inn*, made famous by Daphne du Maurier's novel of the same name. We visited the lovely little villages of St Columb Major and St Neot with their old stone buildings and churches, and on our last day in Cornwall we toured the Roseland Peninsula and the ancient port of St Mawes. It was certainly a very full schedule in a very lovely county.

Leaving Cornwall, we headed north to Geoffrey and Claire's home just outside Manchester, taking three days to get there; they had already preceded us by a few days. On the way out of Cornwall we revisited Tintagel, the legendary seat of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and also lovely Boscastle, where there were still many signs of the damage wrought by the disastrous 2004 flood that inundated the village, with buildings continuing to be repaired everywhere. Moving on, we crossed into Devon and visited the seaside resort of Ilfracombe, a charming old Victorian watering hole, where it was Victorian Festival Week, with many people in Victorian dress attending the Mayor's garden party in the seaside gardens, sitting devouring cream teas or standing chatting – a very colourful sight. We over-nighted in the picturesque fishing village of Lynmouth in a B&B overlooking the stream that ran into the tiny harbour, a really beautiful little place. The next day's travels took us further north, with visits to the seaside towns of Minehead, Watchet and Clevedon, then to the ancient city of Gloucester, where we visited the historic docks area on the River Severn and the Cathedral. We continued on to the mediaeval town of Tewkesbury, visited the Abbey Church of St Mary the Virgin, and spent the night at a pleasant farm B&B just outside the town.

The following day we moved on to Worcester, where we briefly explored the city centre and took a very interesting tour of the Royal Worcester Porcelain Factory. Moving on, the next stop was Kidderminster where we visited the West Midlands Safari Park. The day ended at another medieval village, Much Wenlock, where we stayed at the local pub. We found a festival was in progress and a performance of Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* was about to start. We bought tickets, and it proved to be very good "theatre in round", acted by the Shropshire Players wearing authentic costumes in front of an appreciative local audience. Next day we continued our journey north to Shrewsbury, and spent a couple of hours exploring its twisting streets, shops and churches. Shrewsbury saw the last of our sight-seeing en route, and from there we continued on through Cheshire to cousin Geoff and Claire's home in Cheadle Hulme, just outside Manchester, and a happy greeting from Jack the golden retriever.

The next few days were devoted mainly to catching up with the various members of my extended family. We had a reunion evening in a Manchester pub with the Leyland branch, a very convivial affair at which there was much reminiscing and production by my cousins of various photos and memorabilia. With Geoffrey and Claire we then went to my old home town of West Kirby to catch up with the Bolithos over lunch at a pub there. When we arrived John was sitting at the door in his wheelchair, while David had driven back home to pick up Elaine. Looking at John's face, my first reaction was that I was looking at my father, so close was the resemblance! John, expectedly, was very thin and drawn but seemed to be in reasonably good spirits and the lunch went well. David confided in me that things weren't easy and he'd had to sacrifice his own studies in order to look after his parents, which was saddening. We also then travelled to Yeadon in Yorkshire to see my Aunt Mary, my Mum's sister-in-law, her daughter

Andrea and husband David. Mary was then almost ninety years old and sadly, on the day we were to leave England and fly home, we received the news of her passing. In between these family reunions we visited the National Trust estate of Dunham Massey, in Cheshire south east of Manchester. I also spent a day in Manchester on my own, exploring the thriving city that had thrown off its image of the grimy, run down birthplace of the Industrial Revolution and those “dark, satanic mills”.

After a few days with Geoff and Claire we moved on temporarily to spend a few days with my friend Des Platt, who the reader will recall I’d met at a Test match in Sydney in 1995. Arriving at his home in Rainhill, just outside Liverpool, the three of us immediately drove into the city to visit the Albert Dock precinct, a redevelopment of the old dockland along the lines of Sydney’s Darling Harbour. There we visited the excellent Maritime Museum, walked around Pier Head at the side of the Mersey, overlooked by the “three graces” – the beautiful trio of buildings comprising the Liver Building, the Cunard Building and the Mersey Docks & Harbour Board Building; and browsed the Albert Dock generally. All of this brought memories of my boyhood flooding back to me, although the smart new Liverpool was much changed from the dour and seedy post-war city that I once knew. Pier Head was almost unrecognisable from the 1950s, and the old overhead railway on which my Uncle Willie drove the last train was long gone. We then drove under the river through the Mersey Tunnel and visited Port Sunlight. This was founded by millionaire William Hesketh Lever, later Lord Leverhulme, as the site of his huge factory to produce the famous Sunlight soap and many other soap products, and the village around the factory was developed to house its workers. There we toured the streets and visited the centrepiece of the village, the Lady Lever Art Gallery. The Levers had acquired an immense collection of paintings, sculpture, porcelain, furniture and other *objets d’art*, and the collection, now a National Museum of Liverpool, was certainly one of the best we’d ever seen.

On the second day with Des we were joined by his friend Peter Hodson, who would be visiting us in Australia with him at the end of the year, and we drove north to the Yorkshire Dales where the three of us walked the Ingleton Waterfalls Circuit of eight kilometres through some achingly beautiful countryside, despite the return of cloudy weather. The walk took us up a gorge through deep woodland alongside the fast running stream, its waters brown with peat, past waterfalls and then over the hills through fields of sheep to descend another wooded gorge past even more stunning cataracts. Afterwards we took a narrow road through the rolling fields and drystone walls of Kingdale, over the hills and down into beautiful Dentedale, where we spent some time exploring the picturesque little village of Dent, founded back in Norman times. Over the following three days we caught up with family members again and had a pleasant lunch with Jean and Tony Beggs in Meols, on the Wirral Peninsula. Way back in these writings I mentioned that Jean and I’d grown up together from the age of eighteen months until I moved to Australia, and we’d kept in touch over the years. The following day Beryl had a rest day while Des and I drove to North Wales and took a rather wet walk through some lovely rural countryside before exploring the towns of Ruthin and Llangollen. The latter town I remembered from my boyhood trips to Wales, and while still pretty it had become very touristy, to its detriment. However the lovely ruins of the Cistercian Valle Crucis Abbey, just outside the town, were still worth the re-visit to them.

The following day we farewelled Des and set off for three nights in the lovely Lake District under grey and weeping skies, with much concern about the weather as it had rained throughout on our previous visit in 1996. However the skies brightened a little as we headed north, and after arriving at Bowness and our B&B the unbelievable happened – the sun came out! Firstly we visited the Beatrix Potter Exhibition, an attraction featuring a series of tableaux depicting the animal characters made famous in the twenty three books of the authoress, who’d made her home in the Lake District and wrote her children’s stories based on rural life in the district, then took a cruise down beautiful Lake Windermere, At the end of the lake we then took a train ride on the Lakeside and Haverthwaite Railway, in vintage carriages pulled by a steam locomotive, through woodland along the River Leven to Haverthwaite village and back to the Lake for the return cruise to Bowness. Next we spent a memorable day exploring

the northern part of the Lake District, at first leaving the lakes behind and climbing high into the starkly beautiful fells over the Kirkstone Pass, to follow a steep winding descent to lovely Ullswater, a long narrow lake set among steep mountain slopes. From there we headed over to the town of Keswick and followed the shoreline of picturesque Derwent Water down beautiful Borrowdale, passing through tiny villages and deep woodlands. Then followed some of the most stunning scenery of the trip as we climbed a steep, winding and very narrow road up Honister Pass into the high fells. At the top of the Pass stood the extensive Honister slate mine, with an absolutely stunning view down the other side. We returned to Keswick through the lovely little village of Buttermere and explored Keswick before making our way back to Bowness. The next day we concentrated on the southern part of the District, following Windermere to its end, taking a cruise on lovely Coniston Water on the historic old lake steamer *Gondola*, and exploring more of the countryside and the villages of Elterwater, Ambleside and Grasmere, the latter being famous for its associations with the poet William Wordsworth. Reluctantly, we then had to turn our backs on the lovely Lake District and made our way back to Manchester and Cheadle Hulme through the wildly beautiful Yorkshire Dales

Over the next few days we visited lovely Chester, the old city surrounded by high city walls that still bore traces of their Roman construction, the best preserved in England. We'd been there before during a visit in 1996, when the city was blanketed by snow, so this time was a contrast. Of course, I knew the city well from many childhood visits. On another day I visited the viewing area at Manchester Airport to view close-up the second Concorde jet airliner built, G-BOAC. My first impression was how small she looked compared to the Boeing 747 "jumbo" jets. We also made a visit to Tatton Park, just outside Knutsford. Once the home of the rich industrialist Egerton family, the property covered a thousand acres of parkland in which sheep and deer grazed.

We then left Manchester for three days and two nights exploring the lovely Peak District of Derbyshire. Again the weather was kind to us, with sunny although hazy conditions for most of the time. Our first call was at the small and ancient town of Chapel-en-le-Frith, its steep and narrow high street lined with old buildings leading to the oldest part of the town, the cobblestoned market square with stocks and an ancient market cross. From Chapel we drove up into the rolling farmland at the southern border of the High Peak, where I took a conducted tour of Treak Cliff cavern, the first part of which was man-made, where mining for lead and then the local mineral Blue John had taken place over the years. The name Blue John was a corruption of the French description of the mineral, "bleu et jaune", literally blue and yellow, the colours found naturally in it. Moving on, we visited the picturesque villages of Castleford and Hathersage, and then the even more picturesque Eyam, known as the "plague village" because in mediaeval times a plague wiped out most of the hapless inhabitants before being contained. Next came beautiful Bakewell, where everywhere shops were selling the famous Bakewell tarts and other local goodies, and the Wye's waters fell creaming over a weir. Our "home" for the night was a B&B in the Victorian spa town of Matlock Bath where we had a pleasant reunion dinner with my cousin John Phillips, wife Hilary and daughter Rebecca.

The next morning we spent at Chatsworth, the magnificent house and estate of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. For nearly two hours we made our way through the many rooms open to the public, filled with a huge and beautiful collection of art works, sumptuous decorations and fine period furniture. Chatsworth was one of the few places we visited where I felt the hefty admission charge (by Australian standards) was worth the money! The afternoon was spent exploring more of the Peak District and its charming little villages, and in the evening we celebrated Beryl's sixty seventh birthday with a quiet dinner at a local pub in Matlock Bath. Next day saw us return to Manchester via lovely Dovedale, the valley of the River Manifold and historic Georgian Buxton.

We then had a four day stay with my cousin Stewart Griffiths and wife Jean at their home in Ormskirk; Stewart and Jean had of course visited us in Sydney in 1999 and 2004. On the first two days we saw

something of the area and visited one of my childhood haunts, Southport. Not as brash as nearby Blackpool, it had managed to maintain a genteel charm despite its popularity as a seaside resort. The four of us then took a long drive to the lovely old city of York, one of the finest walled towns in England and with Roman heritage. There we spent an hour in the huge and magnificent Minster, a place with some significance to me because, as I mentioned early in these writings, my maternal grandfather had worked on the stained glass windows there, including replacing them with clear glass during World War II. We rode the city's latest attraction, the Yorkshire Eye, a huge Ferris wheel that dominated the skyline, to enjoy great views over the city and the surrounding countryside. Finally we spent well over two hours in the National Railway Museum, a huge place with countless locomotives, rolling stock, equipment, models, memorabilia and so on displayed in two enormous former engine sheds.

On our last day with the Griffiths we visited Blackpool. Brash, colourful, gaudy, tawdry, you either love or hate Blackpool, but to see it is a must and it certainly brought back childhood memories to me. From Blackpool we continued north to the more staid resort of Morecambe, where I had a reunion with my cousin Gillian, who I hadn't seen since 1951, and her husband Eric. Gillian, I have to say, had changed beyond recognition from the pretty little girl that I remembered so well from my early years in England; time is not always kind to us, I'm afraid. Eric was in the final stages of cancer, and sadly not long after we returned to Australia we received news of his passing.

Back at Cheadle Hume we had our last few days with Geoff and Claire, the final one seeing us being taken on a trip to North Wales on a glorious summer's day, as England was now in the grip of a heatwave. We followed motorways and roads to Flint, then ran along the Welsh coast through Colwyn Bay and Conwy before turning inland to Snowdonia and the village of Llanberis, at the foot of Snowdon. We picnicked at the side of an idyllic lake in which Jack revelled. From Llanberis we drove through the spectacular Pass of Llanberis and the Welsh countryside to the lovely little village of Betwys-y-Coed, before a scenic drive over the hills and so back to Manchester. It was a good finale to a very enjoyable stay with them, and we left them with real regret. They had been marvellous hosts in both Cornwall and Manchester, and although we were both weary after eight intensive weeks I was not really ready to go; I could easily have stayed another month, especially in Cornwall!

We had a fast trip down the motorways to London, stopping off for a couple of hours in the university city of Oxford; we'd visited there in 1996 but not really "seen" the place, as there had been a thick fog that lasted all day! Back at Laleham, we spent our last few days in England with Aunt Alice. With Beryl content to stay home out of the continuing heat, I revisited the world's most famous botanical gardens, the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, and spent half a day wandering the many glasshouses, pavilions, formal gardens and open parkland there. We watched the annual ceremony of Swan Marking on the River Thames near Alice's home. This was an ancient custom in which new cygnets were claimed on behalf of the reigning monarch and tagged or "marked". A small flotilla of skiffs, each rowed by two or three men and with a "marker" in colourful uniform seated in the stern, would proceed up the river, accompanied by other boats. When cygnets were sighted they would be caught, checked for health and tagged before release. On our final full day in England I took myself into London on a hot but beautiful day that had the City looking her very best. I wandered the streets around Westminster and Whitehall, then walked through St James' Park to Buckingham Palace where I saw the Household Cavalry ride away in full regalia, continued on to St James' Palace where I watched the Coldstream Guards undergoing an inspection before marching away to the music of their band, also in full regalia. I explored Pall Mall, Piccadilly, Leicester Square, Chinatown and Trafalgar Square, where the newly cleaned Nelson's Column had shed its shroud of nine weeks earlier, then made my way back to the Thames for the highlight of the day, a ride on the London Eye, the world's largest Ferris wheel. I rounded the day off with a cruise along the river to The Tower of London and back, with humorous Cockney commentary pointing

out the various sights. Altogether it was a very full, very tiring but very satisfying end to our travels in Olde England.

Our last day in England proved a stinker, heat wise. The prediction was for an all time record temperature, and while we didn't know whether this had been achieved, it was certainly hot. Driving to Heathrow in the afternoon the outside temperature was being recorded as 35°. We got our packing done early, then spent the rest of the day in the shade outside until the time came to say farewell to Aunt Alice and leave for the airport around four thirty. The British Airways flight itself was very long but comfortable enough, as this time we were both travelling Business Class. On the Singapore-Sydney leg we found we knew our flight attendant – she lived next door to Aunt Alice in London and had left Heathrow on the previous day's flight. We landed in Sydney at the ungodly hour of 5am – the first plane to land because of the overnight curfew – so had a dream run through Immigration and Customs, only to find that our shuttle home didn't arrive until seven! Ah, the joys of long distance travel. So ended a great nine weeks in England, having caught up with family and friends once more and having a good time into the bargain.

Needless to say, we had between us taken many thousands of photographs during our stay in England, and one immediate task on returning home was to edit them and form them into digital albums and slide shows. Because of the quantity of them I'd bought a portable hard disk drive in England on which I'd stored them, but I'd also taken the precaution of backing them up on compact disks. I'd processed about half the photographs, continuing to store the finished items on the portable hard disk, when disaster struck – the hard disk drive broke down and the data became unreadable to my computer. Not to worry, I thought, I still had the back-up CDs. Wrong! As soon as I tried to read back from them I started to encounter read errors, meaning most of the photographs on them were inaccessible as well! Now in a state of mild panic, I was faced with the loss of all our photographs from the trip. Reaching for the Yellow Pages, I located a laboratory in Chatswood that specialised in retrieving data from failed disk drives and at great expense was able to get all but about half a dozen of our precious photographs rescued from oblivion.

Not long after returning from England we found ourselves setting out on the road again for a reasonably short trip to Brisbane and Queensland's Sunshine Coast. While in England we'd received the distressing news from our dear friend Jill in the Whitsundays that she'd been diagnosed with cancer. As she was in Brisbane receiving treatment we decided to head up there and see her. With a couple of overnight stops en route we were soon in Brisbane, with the caravan parked in the yard of Julie Burton's new home on the city's south side.

We stayed a week in Brisbane, spending much of the time with Jill, who was remarkably chipper and positive in mind despite what was a terminal illness. We took her out on day trips to Mount Coot-tha and the Botanic Gardens, and around the Moreton Bay suburbs of Manly and Wellington Point. Jill especially enjoyed the latter, as we bought succulent prawns, avocados and crusty bread along the way and enjoyed an *al fresco* lunch by the bay side, washed down with a bottle of good white. On another day the three of us drove up to Redcliffe and Scarborough and explored that neck of the woods. It had been 1972 when Beryl and I'd last been in Redcliffe, on a holiday when our kids were still very young, and it had certainly changed. We also caught up with Rex and Pam Ramsey, of course, including another lunch at Mount Tamborine and naturally the now mandatory *yum cha* in Sunnybank. From Brisbane we continued north a little way to the Sunshine Coast, establishing ourselves in a caravan park in Tewantin, just outside Noosa Heads. We knew our friends Clarrie and Aileen Brake from New Zealand were staying in Noosa and decided to pay them a surprise visit, and the look on Clarrie's face when we knocked on their apartment door was reward enough. Aileen, of course, we'd never met before.

We spent a pleasant week with the Brakes, picking them up each day and going touring around the Sunshine Coast. We visited the Ginger Factory and Nutworks at Yandina; shopped at the famous Eumundi Market; visited arty-crafty Montville in the hinterland; spent a day four wheel driving on Teewah Beach; and engaged in several other activities. These included watching the Rugby Test between Australia and New Zealand on the TV in their apartment. This was a hotly contested affair, both on the field and in the lounge room, and unfortunately (for us) the Kiwis prevailed! The time came to head for home, and after farewelling Clarrie and Aileen, with a promise to visit them in New Zealand in 2007, we started our journey south. We passed without stopping through Brisbane and the Gold Coast, then spent a couple of nights at Kingscliff, just south of Tweed Heads. The next stop was, predictably, Brooms Head again, where we enjoyed a few more days despite constant strong winds making the otherwise sunny conditions less than pleasant. One final overnight stop at Raymond Terrace saw us back home after a short but pleasant enough interlude. We were pleased to have seen Jill, as we knew it would probably be for the last time, and indeed she would succumb to the cancer early in 2007.

While in Brooms Head I checked my email and found a message saying I had won a new Hewlett Packard laptop. I was naturally suspicious, thinking this was a bit of "spam" – one of those "offers" with a string of conditions attached. It turned out to be genuine, a win in a competition that I didn't even know I was entered in. Trying to get tickets for the sold-out coming cricket Test series against England, I had registered with the Trading Post website and my name had been automatically entered. It wasn't very often that either of us won anything, so it came as a pleasant surprise!

Our final sojourn for the year was a month spent touring the south west coast of Victoria and particularly the immensely scenic Great Ocean Road, an area we hadn't visited for nineteen years. Our route took us down the Hume Highway to Albury, with an overnight stop at Gundagai, then through central Victoria to meet the coast at Portland. En route we had a couple of days in Shepparton, in a nice caravan park on the banks of a lake, and stocked up with soups and other groceries at the factory outlets in a city famous for its canned fruit industry. We also had an overnight stop in historic St Arnaud, an old gold-fields town with many atmospheric old buildings that echoed the wealth of the past.

While in Portland we spent some time exploring the historic seaport, still the largest between Melbourne and Adelaide. The city itself was picturesque, with its many historic bluestone buildings and an old Melbourne cable tram that ran between the lookout in the old water tower and the Motor Museum in the old powerhouse. The latter was one of the best such we'd seen, with many vehicles and motoring memorabilia in immaculate condition and very well presented. While we were there the annual Portland Bay Festival was held, with a street parade, Quilt Show (much to Beryl's pleasure) and Art Show. We also took ourselves west to see some of the magnificently scenic coastline of Cape Nelson and Cape Bridgewater, with rugged cliffs falling to creaming surf and blue green seas and at Cape Bridgewater a unique petrified forest.

After Portland we started heading east along the coast, with our next stop pretty Port Fairy, an old seaport with over fifty of its bluestone buildings classified by the National Trust. We looked around the town and its rugged coastline, including Griffiths Island, reached by a causeway and occupied by a lighthouse and a huge mutton bird colony. We visited nearby Tower Hill, Victoria's first National Park, a crater that was formed 30,000 years earlier in a huge volcanic explosion that created the outer rim. While at Port Fairy we also drove to the nearby city of Warrnambool and visited the gardens of the Fletcher Jones clothing factory, still beautiful even though the factory had long closed, and the attractive waterfront. From Port Fairy we headed to and through Warrnambool to pick up the beginning of the Great Ocean Road itself. This began by running through lush flat dairy country before reaching the coast at the Bay of Islands and the start of some of the most striking coastal scenery anywhere in Australia. The wind howled off the Southern Ocean as we walked to various lookout platforms overlooking the large enclosed bay, hemmed in by worn and eroded tongues of land dotted with sea

caves and scarred by landslides, with rock stacks rising from the reasonably calm waters. Offshore the view was even more dramatic, with great and small yellow-brown stacks rising out of the grey-green water, their bases continually creamed by the waves. The rugged coastline stretched east and west without pause, and despite the grey weather the light was bright and the scene amazing to behold.

Over the next two hours we followed the coast eastwards, stopping at the various lookouts, including the Bay of Martyrs; the Grotto; London Bridge; and The Arch. London Bridge had once been a tongue of land protruding from the cliffs and indeed we'd walked out along it nineteen years earlier. However in 1990 the portion adjoining the land collapsed into the sea, marooning a couple who were on it at the time and who had to be winched off by helicopter. Reaching pretty little Port Campbell, we set up in the caravan park and then left the van and continued east to one of the most famous and scenic features of the Shipwreck Coast, Loch Ard Gorge of shipwreck fame. After one night there we continued east, with a stop at perhaps the most famous feature, the rock stacks known as the Twelve Apostles, as always a magnificent sight. We left the coast behind for a while and headed inland through forest country, climbing high into the Otway Ranges, then descended to the coast once more and pretty Apollo Bay, where we stayed for three nights. Our next stop was the equally pretty little seaside resort of Lorne, reached along a stretch of the Great Ocean Road described as the largest War Memorial in the world, being a memorial to all Victorian soldiers who died in the fighting and constructed mainly using pick and shovel by returned soldiers from the First World War.

Rain persisted through to our next stop, Victoria's second largest city, Geelong. The day after we arrived was the State's coldest day in a decade, with snow in many places and a wind that seemed to blow right off the Antarctic. However we still explored the city, visiting the waterfront, the excellent National Wool Museum and the Ford Heritage Centre, an also excellent collection of Ford vehicles old and new, together with demonstrations of the manufacture and assembly line processes and of the design and testing of cars. The next leg of our travels took us to Melbourne, en route calling at the Royal Australian Air Force Museum at Point Cook. In Melbourne we parked the caravan outside the home of Lorna Whelan and Ken Bowden and spent a pleasant week with them and other friends. During our time there we visited the Melbourne Cricket Ground and took a tour of the mighty stadium, and on another day I spent several hours walking around the city, visiting or revisiting some places including Old Melbourne Gaol, St Paul's Cathedral, Federation Square, the Shrine of Remembrance and the Botanic Gardens among others. This brought our trip to an end, and after overnight stops in Albury and Goulburn we were back home after an enjoyable month on the road, despite some indifferent weather.

The year 2007 started with us hosting two visitors from England – our good friend Des Platt and his mate Peter Hodson. Cricket lovers, they actually arrived just before Christmas, with the intention of seeing the Melbourne and Sydney Test Matches against England. I had secured tickets to the Melbourne game without any problems, but it was with some difficulty and the use of eBay that I was able to get hold of Sydney tickets for them at inflated prices, scarce as hen's teeth as they were. They spent a few days with us before Christmas, during which time I was able to show them something of Sydney – Des of course had been here before – and took them down to Bowral to see the Bradman Museum there. They then rented a car and drove down to Melbourne for the Boxing Day Test, before returning to us on New Year's Eve. The Test series proved a real letdown for them as far as England's performance was concerned, but we showed them around Sydney and we know that, cricket aside, they very much enjoyed their stay with us. I had been able to get a ticket for myself only for the fourth day's play in Sydney, and the match ended after an hour, much to my disappointment! This was the farewell game for Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath, so at least I got to see the ovations they received from the crowds. Des and Peter were particular scathing about the behaviour of the England supporters, the infamous "Barmy Army", whose inane and non-stop chanting spoiled the cricket for everyone else.

Both of them seemed very attracted to our garden, so lush and green compared to an English garden, and also to the bird life it attracted. Peter had his first contact with a surf beach and was soon cracking waves with the best of them – an activity that didn't appeal to Des, though. On their final evening with us we took them to Doyle's seafood restaurant at Watsons Bay, where I had pre-booked a footpath table. Unfortunately the superb ambience was spoiled by a strong wind blowing sand everywhere and the skies were cloudy until just before sunset, but it was a pretty decent one none the less. It was with regret on both parts that we saw them off at the airport, as we had enjoyed their visit too.

Our first sojourn for 2007 was a month spent on the NSW North Coast, for much of the time at our favourite spot, Brooms Head. We actually started out along the New England Highway up to Armidale, so as to catch up with my good friend and stamp dealer Manfred Junge and wife Kathy. From Armidale we continued north to Glen Innes, then took the very scenic Gwydir Highway down through the Gibraltar Range National Park to Grafton, from where we headed north along the Pacific Highway to Maclean and so to Brooms Head. We spent the best part of a fortnight at Brooms, doing the usual things – me beach walking and swimming, Beryl doing handiwork and reading – just "chilling out" as they say. We made a couple of trips into Maclean and Yamba, but otherwise were content to enjoy the peace and quiet of the little seaside township. The stay was marred only by persistent strong winds which made conditions uncomfortable at times. The time came to return south and we spent five nights at Dunbogan, in the pretty Camden Haven region – another of our favourite parts of the coast. Continuing on, our last stop was at Hallidays Point, north of Forster, where by arrangement we caught up with our good friends and past travelling companions Ron and Wendy Haspell. We spent an enjoyable few days there before returning home after a pleasant month away.

I had a nasty bout of viral pneumonia in April which came without warning completely out of left field, as they say. It started as a flu-like illness, although we'd had our annual flu injection only a couple of weeks earlier. I was a little tardy getting to see the doctor, by which time the pneumonia was in full cry and after having X-rays he promptly sent me off to hospital. There I had to be observed and assessed in Casualty before they'd admit me, a rather long process, and by the time they decided to keep me there all the ward beds had gone and I had to stay in casualty overnight. This was like trying to sleep in Sydney's Pitt Street, with the victims of a fight being admitted in the wee small hours not helping. Anyway, next morning I was taken to the ward and spent my 67th birthday there. I was allowed home after a few days, with regular physiotherapy ordered, and the whole thing left me quite a bit knocked up for several weeks afterwards. While they had been doing tests on me prior to admission a slight aberration had been detected in my heartbeat. I'd known of this since the late 1980s, when it had been detected during a stress test but wasn't considered to be of any significance. However as a precaution I had another stress test in late May and again no real problem was detected. This wasn't the end of my health worries, however. Just before the pneumonia hit I'd undergone a routine bowel scan and in May I received a letter saying the result was positive. This led to my having a colonoscopy, but to my relief no serious nasties were found. Beryl, of course, had been regularly undergoing such tests ever since her mother had been diagnosed with bowel cancer.

Our major travel project for the year, however, was a nine week stay in New Zealand, starting in July. It was our third visit to that country – my fourth if you count that business trip to Wellington way back when – and it proved as enjoyable as the previous two. It's a great country, geographically very different to Australia but socially very similar as we have so much in common. We had a brilliant introduction to the South Island as, flying into Christchurch, the Southern Alps lay awesome and magnificent in their clarity below us, a wrinkled landscape of rocky peaks and ranges coated with snow glowing in the sunshine. We spent the initial three weeks with our good friends Clarrie and Aileen Brake at their home

in Ashburton, an hour south of Christchurch. Making the most of very good weather over the first week, we spent our first unforgettable day with them up in the mountains among snowy peaks, frozen lakes and a winter wonderland shining under the sun. A highlight of the day was driving out through magnificent country to the Rangitata River valley and Mount Sunday, the site of *Edoras* in the Lord Of The Rings movie (on another day Clarrie would take me by 4WD right on to the mount.) Although we didn't encounter falling snow during our stay – a little disappointing – there was plenty of it around in the mountains and in sheltered spots in the lower lands.

After that first day Clarrie and I spent a good deal of time exploring the Alps and the area around Ashburton, with my camera almost reaching meltdown, such were the photo opportunities. Beryl was for the most part content to stay with Aileen, who was also very much into craftwork, especially pottery. She taught Beryl the art of felting using lambswool and mohair, and they visited all the fabric and craft shops in the district while Clarrie and I went our way. On one day we drove to Arthurs Pass on a morning when the hoar frost in the bare trees around the lakes was absolutely magical. We drove up to the ski fields on Mount Hutt, visited beautiful Lake Heron and made a before-the-dawn excursion to photograph the first light on the mountain peaks. On another morning he had to go to Christchurch, so I accompanied him and revisited that pleasant city while he was attending to his appointments. We also visited the coast near Ashburton and the local museums. All in all, it was a pretty full three weeks spent in great company, during which I tried to return the kindness by helping them both with various computer projects and problems. The Brakes were marvellous hosts and we were made to feel very welcome. At the end of our stay in Ashburton the four of us drove down to Wanaka for a few days, on the way passing through more grand and unforgettable scenery including Lakes Tekapo and Pukaki, with their backdrop of snowy mountains, and the rugged Lindis Pass.

One of the main motives in our coming back to New Zealand was to take a seven day cruise of the Fiordland wilderness in the far south west of the South Island, and we'd accordingly booked the cruise some months earlier. Saying a temporary goodbye to the Brakes, we left them in Wanaka and took a bus to Queenstown through the scenic Cardrona Valley and over the Crown Range, with marvellous views as we descended the other side of the latter. In Queenstown we had a two hour wait for another bus that took us through more open country down to Te Anau, the only real town in Fiordland and the base for excursions into that remote region. The following week proved to be one of the most amazing and enjoyable imaginable in a region populated only by a few cray fishermen and one or two hunting lodges; for the whole week the only other humans we saw, other than our fellow passengers and crew, were a couple of fishing boats and a husband and wife caretaking one of the lodges.

The region is notorious for its rainfall, the heaviest in the country, and has on average 200 rainy days a year. However we were immensely fortunate in seeing it in torrential rain, moody mistiness, dry but cloudy and brilliant sunshine – in fact, the whole gamut of its weather patterns apart from real gales or blizzards. The first day dawned not too promising, with cloud and showers as we were bussed from Te Anau to the even smaller town of Manapouri, where we boarded a ferry across Lake Manapouri to the power station at West Arm. We then transferred to a bus that took us over the Wilmot Pass and down to Doubtful Sound, where we boarded our home for the next five nights, the *Milford Wanderer*. We cruised down the Sound in a mixture of showers, sunshine and rainbows and out into the Tasman Sea, heading south along the coast. Into Breaksea Sound, we sailed through many islands, saw sea lions on the rocks and were awed by the mountains rising sheer from the water, shrouded in white mist and purple in the late afternoon light. Next morning was gloriously sunny after a cloudy start as we were greeted by a pod of bottle nosed dolphins who rode the bow wave, then sailed the Acheron Passage into Dusky Sound

and spent the next two days exploring its maze of islands and quiet coves and inlets, surrounded by soaring peaks with their tops lightly dusted with snow – absolutely a photographer’s dream. A few showers reminded us that this WAS Fiordland, and on a rather wet shore walk I was entranced by a baby seal. There were strong Fiordland associations with Captain Cook and we visited various sites mentioned in his log.

From Breaksea we went to sea again for a couple of hours, down to Chalky Inlet, under now rather cloudy skies. We spotted our only Fiordland crested penguin, posing on the shore, and later in the day had the awesome experience of meeting a pod of the almost extinct Southern right whales, one of which came right up to the *Wanderer* and Beryl took a marvellous close up photo. The captain had been told there were only about fifteen of the creatures left in the area, but over a couple of hours we sighted between seventeen and nineteen. We were told we were privileged to be among the few people to have witnessed such a sight since whaling decimated the Southern rights in the 1890s! We entered Preservation Inlet and in now cloudy weather landed and walked along a gravel beach for some time. We were now witnessing another Fiordland mood, with the mountains gloomy and grey and the wind picking up. Next morning most of us (Beryl opted out) took a six kilometre walk to a lighthouse along an old dray track, sometimes in sunlight, sometimes in heavy rain and often tramping in oozing black mud – great fun! The wind at the lighthouse almost bowled us off our feet, but the views were worth while.

The final day and a half saw the REAL Fiordland – constant pouring rain and howling winds that whipped the surface of the water into swirling clouds. Great waterfalls appeared from the heights, sometimes blowing horizontally, and rain was falling at times at a rate of one and a half inches per hour! Despite the foul weather we enjoyed this very much as part of the experience, and I even went ashore a couple of times to see historic sites. On the last day there was much uncertainty as to whether the helicopters that were to take us back to civilisation could land and we sailed around the Inlet all morning until the wind died down and a decision was taken to go ahead. Beryl and I were in the first six to fly out; we were taken in pouring rain to the shore, managed to land without getting TOO wet, and then followed a marvellous ride across the rugged bush and rocky coast, with unbelievable sights of rivers and streams pouring into the sea, then finally crossing the mountains in the middle of a blizzard to land safely back in civilisation. What an experience – we loved every minute of it!

After overnighting again at Te Anau a long bus ride took us back through the countryside of the South Island to Ashburton, where we spent a couple more days with Clarrie and Aileen before he drove us up to Christchurch and we picked up our pre-booked motorhome for the rest of our time in New Zealand. We didn’t linger in Christchurch, but immediately headed north and then inland to the resort town of Hanmer Springs for our first night, then made our way further north through more gorgeous scenery back to the coast at Kaikoura. This very scenic seaside town was notable for its whale watching, dolphins and seals, but we only saw the latter during our couple of days there. Rain marred our next leg, following the coast up to Blenheim and Picton. Much of the road ran along the very edge of the shore and was quite spectacular, with one stretch absolutely covered with fur seals. A night in pretty Picton saw us board the ferry across to Wellington early the next morning. We spent two nights in Wellington, where we both visited the excellent Te Papa National Museum, and I spent a whole day exploring the city on my own. In the North Island we aimed to visit some parts we hadn’t seen in 1995, so from Wellington we headed north up the Kapiti Coast and round the shores of South Taranaki Bight to New Plymouth, with overnight stops at the little seaside townships of Foxton Beach and Patea, and a stop in the city of Wanganui to look around there. This was the acclaimed “Surf Coast” of the Island, but it differed significantly from Australia’s surf beaches in that the sand was grey to jet black! After leaving

Patea we began to see, emerging from the clouds, the picture perfect cone of the extinct volcano Taranaki, or Mount Egmont, the snow on its peak resembling icing on a cake.

From New Plymouth we headed inland around the base of the mountain to the town of Stratford, then struck into the heart of the island along the Forgotten Land Highway, an extremely scenic back road through remote farmland, forest and gorge country. This brought us to the timber town of Taumarunui, and after an overnight stop there we continued on to Whakapapa Village, in the Tongariro National Park and at the foot of Mount Ruapehu, one of the three volcanoes in the Park. Ruapehu was still active, and when we visited it in 1995 the snow was still grey-black from an eruption; indeed, it had another minor eruption not long after we got home from this trip! In glorious weather I took the chairlifts up the mountain to the ski fields, and although cloud then closed in the snowscapes above it were unforgettable. Now on ground we had covered in 1995, we moved on to Taupo, the centre of a large thermal region, and we visited several thermal areas including the Wairakei Thermal Valley, the Craters of the Moon and, best of all, Hidden Valley, where the thermal pools and terraces were reached by a short boat trip across a lake. Our next stop was the famous thermal city of Rotorua. We had done most of the "tourist" things on our previous visit, so this time we explored the region around the Rotorua Lakes – Tarawera, Tikatapu, Rotokakahi and Okataina – including a visit to the Buried Village. This was the partly excavated site of the village of Te Wairoa, which had been buried under two metres of volcanic material when nearby Mount Tarawera erupted on 10 June 1886, causing widespread devastation. While in Rotorua we spent a very pleasant day with Bill and Cherry Fowler, fellow passengers from the *Wanderer* cruise, at their lovely home above the waters of Lake Rotoiti.

On new ground again, we headed past lakes and through forest to the Bay of Plenty on the Island's East Coast and the attractive fishing port of Whakatane, where we had a look around before following the coast east for an overnight stop in the little town of Opotiki. The next few days then saw us describe a large anti-clockwise loop around the Eastland region. The first day we headed south and inland through the rugged and very scenic gorge of the Waioeka River, wild and virtually uninhabited country. Lunch-time saw us in the historic city of Gisborne, on Poverty Bay, the latter named by Captain Cook on his voyage of discovery. After looking briefly around the city we then struck north up the coast past attractive surf beaches with golden sand and then inland for some distance, to again reach the coast at Tolaga Bay for an overnight stop. Next day we struck the coast again only once, at the once busy port township of Tokomaru Bay, until we reached little Te Araroa, in the north eastern corner of Eastland. There we took a short side trip to East Cape, the most easterly point of the New Zealand mainland, then headed west across the top of Eastland to our overnight stop at the village of Waihou Bay.

We would seldom be out of sight of the sea as the highway followed the shoreline very closely. However while we saw some stunning scenery along the way, frustratingly the coast was for the most part hidden from view behind private land or by trees along the road itself. Altogether it was an attractive part of New Zealand, but by the end of the day I was very tired through constant steering through bends and changing gears on the narrow winding road. We closed the Eastland loop back at Opotiki, made a quick return visit to Whakatane, then followed the shores of the Bay of Plenty to the seaside township of Matata, where we had a "breather" for two nights before continuing along the coast, in heavy rain, to Te Puke, Mount Maunganui and the rather unlovely port city of Tauranga. We didn't linger, but continued on, skirting inland around the large Tauranga Harbour to the old gold mining town of Waihi, where we took a short diversion into the scenic Karangahake Gorge to see the old mine workings there. Moving on, we made our way to the seaside town of Whangamata, then continued up the eastern coast of the Coromandel Peninsula. The coastline here was among the best that New Zealand had to offer, even though access was once more limited. We again made a couple of diversions, one of which was to

Hahei, where the rugged cliffs and offshore islands around Cathedral Cove were absolutely beautiful, before pressing on around Whitianga Harbour to then head west to the other side of the peninsula and Coromandel township.

The road now took us south along the shores of the Firth of Thames to the town of Thames, then we headed west through fairly uninteresting country to pick up the main Highway 1 and turn north towards Auckland, once again on ground previously travelled. Country soon turned to urban and then suburban areas as we entered New Zealand's largest city, but we stayed on the freeway and continued through, as we would be returning there, to the east coast seaside town of Orewa for the night. Next morning we continued north through the rolling downs country of Northland for a stop at Warkworth and then the city of Whangarei. At the little town of Kawakawa we parked and looked around the town centre, which had some interesting buildings but also boasted some world famous public toilets. The final creation of the late Friedrich Hundertwasser, an Austrian who settled there and became a New Zealand citizen, they were redolent with ceramic columns, curves and spirals, mosaic tiles in all manner of bright colours and designs, a curving roof and roof garden, and embedded old bottles that served as windows – quite a sight to behold! The last leg of our long day's journey took us on a winding and steep climb over and down the coastal ranges to Opua and Pahia, the main tourist town of the Bay of Islands. We had stayed there in 1995, and obviously there had been considerable development since then. On a grey day the Bay lacked the charm we remembered, and the whole place had turned very touristy in appearance. The next day was one of the worst of the entire trip, rainy, grey and miserable. Luckily we'd done the Bay of Islands cruise on our previous visit, so I had a look around the Waitangi Treaty Grounds and that was it. From there we moved on further north, stopping for a look around picturesque Kerikeri then following the scenic road north and west across the top of the North Island to its west coast and the tiny village of Waipapakauri, near the southern end on Ninety Mile Beach.

From there we took a bus tour to Cape Reinga, which is almost but not quite the most northern and western point of the North Island. This trip was another highlight of our stay. We followed Highway 1 up the centre of the long peninsula which ends at the Cape, with a stop at the fascinating Gumdiggers Park, where kauri gum or amber was once extracted from ancient buried kauri logs. The further north we went the better the scenery, and that around the Cape itself was wild, rugged and totally unforgettable. The return journey was down the sands of Ninety Mile Beach itself, very reminiscent of travel on Fraser island. Altogether it was a memorable day out.

Departing Waipapakauri, we started the journey south that would ultimately lead us to Auckland and our flight home. Leaving the main highway, we took scenic back roads down through farmland and forest to eventually cross Hokianga Harbour on a ferry and overnight at the tiny township of Opononi, the centre of more breathtaking coastal scenery. Continuing on, we were now in Kauri country and made many stops to view the enormous and ancient trees, few of which remained after many years of exploitation for their timber. Thankfully some foresight had preserved a large forest of them around Waipoua. We overnighted at the unprepossessing town of Dargaville, then headed back across country to pick up Highway 1 south once again. En route, however, we stopped in the hamlet of Matakohē and the Kauri Museum complex there. We'd visited this in 1995 and considered it more than worthy of a second visit, and we were not to be disappointed. It would without doubt have to be the best rural museum in New Zealand and one of the best we've seen anywhere. At the town of Wellsford we left Highway 1 again and took a scenic route that skirted the shores of the huge Kaipara Harbour, which brought us to the town of Helensville for the night. This left a short run into Auckland the following morning, through thick fog that blocked out any view until we were in the suburbs. In Auckland we visited the Zoo and the Museum of Transportation and Technology, thankfully known as MOTAT for short. Especially nostalgic to me at the latter was a display of computer equipment going back to the 1960s, including an IBM System 360 exactly like the one on which I'd learned computing.

Having been to Auckland before, we weren't too anxious to sight-see but spent a wet day visiting Kerry Tarlton's Underwater World - rather underwhelming - and taking a quick look at the city. The next morning we drove to the airport, surrendered our faithful motorhome and after a long and boring wait - the aircraft being delayed in arriving - we finally boarded our Emirate Airlines flight home. The Boeing 777-300 was fairly full and we had inside seats, but the legroom was better than some airlines we'd flown on, and the entertainment system was all touch screen and hundreds of choices - not that we used it much. The service, however, I considered very impersonal. So ended a very pleasant nine weeks in a great country - nearly as good as Australia! I have to admit I was tired from the driving and ready for a rest, but we would've been quite happy to have taken that rest over there! In those nine weeks we had covered the country pretty comprehensively, complementing the parts we had seen on our 1995 and 2002 visits. Of the two islands, undoubtedly the South Island has the most to offer the visitor, in our opinion anyway, with the best scenery and a more relaxed pace. We fully intend to return one day, especially as we want to do another cruise on the *Milford Wanderer* to Stewart Island, but I doubt we'll be giving a high priority to the North Island in any future visit.

After settling back in at home and keeping a few necessary medical appointments we managed to squeeze in a short break with the caravan on the NSW North Coast. Most of this time was spent, predictably, at Brooms Head and very lazily. It rained for the first four days we were away, but afterwards we had beautiful weather tempered only by the usual winds off the ocean, and as usual we were most loath to return home. When we got back there was a message on our telephone answering machine; my Aunt Alice in England had been trying to get in touch with us. When I rang her back she informed me my Uncle Harold Tod had passed away at his home in Manchester, New Hampshire. This left Alice as the only remaining sibling of my mother.

As for the rest of the year, visits to the theatre to see *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* and *Ying Tong*, attendance at a couple of granddaughter Lauren's Australian Girls Choir concerts, and a few pleasant dinners with our friends, rounded out the social aspects.



Our Retirement "Home"



Butchart Gardens, British Columbia, 1993



Queenstown, NZ, 1995 Mulhouse, France, 1996



With Ineke Lammers, Netherlands, 1996



Ken Davidson's Entry In The Merchant Navy Honour Roll, Winchester, 1996



With The Grandkids, 1997



With Our Land Cruiser, 1995. The Picture Was Used in a Cooper Tires Ad.



Our 40th Anniversary, 2002



The 1996 Reunions

Leylands, Weldings
& Bolithos



The Wilson Family & Alice Phillips



Roy & Betty Griffiths, Nona Leyland



Arthur & Mary Tod & Family



At The Three Gorges Dam, China, 2003



Brisbane, September 2004



Huaqing, China, 2004



Xi'an, China, 2004



New Recruits, Darwin, 2003



With Eric Morecambe, 2006



Leyland Family Reunion, 2006



Stewart & Jean Griffiths, 2006



Bolitho Family Reunion, 2006



Geoff & Claire Welding, 2006



Dinner With "Jack" Welding, 2006



With Our Grandkids, 2005

Chapter Twenty Three

Looking Back

So ends these memoirs, at least for the time being. I certainly hope that at a future date I can add some more chapters to our life story covering the next decade or more; in the meantime it's appropriate to review our lifestyle, look back on a lifetime and perhaps give an insight to some of the philosophies I've developed over those years. I count myself fortunate in having had a great life, much of it spent with my wonderful and much loved wife, and without whom it would have been lonely and unfulfilled. Our marriage has been one of love and companionship, and if the ardour of youth has cooled with advancing years, the devotion and fondness is still there and always will be, even if not always expressed out loud. Marriage is always a partnership, and in our case I believe has been a very successful one. I can't ever remember us having a major falling out, although inevitably there have been the occasional disagreements, hurts and terse moments, which have been quickly forgotten. Generally, looking back over the years, there are very few things that I might have done differently, which I think says it all.

With both Beryl and I nearing our seventies – she a little closer than me! – healthwise we've been pretty fortunate and suffer nothing more than the vagaries of the A.G.E. syndrome to a greater or lesser extent. For my part I've enjoyed very good health and hope to continue to do so over the coming years. Apart from a tonsillectomy as a youngster and an appendicectomy in middle age, I've been able to avoid stays in hospitals other than for day surgery and that recent bout of pneumonia. The main cross I've had to bear over the years has probably been a weight problem, which in turn led to a higher blood pressure than was good for me. I've been blessed (or cursed) with a large frame and always had a tendency to put on weight – I seem only to look at food and the kilojoules go on. A regimen of periodical dieting sheds some weight, but inevitably it creeps back on. I've never been one to eat a great quantity of greens and fruit, and it's a bit late in life to change my diet now. All I can do is be sensible and not over-indulge in the things that aren't good for me. As for the high blood pressure, I've lived with that for many years and medication has successfully kept it under control. Occasionally the weight problem indicates I'm mildly diabetic, but again that hasn't been a problem to date and I'm spared the need for medication or insulin.

A lingering problem I've endured over the years is a condition commonly called "glue ear", where fluid builds up in the inner right ear and I become deaf on that side. The remedy has been to undergo day surgery for the insertion of a tube in the ear, which then allows the fluid to drain and hearing be restored. The solution has lasted for anything from a few months to a few years, but then I get a head cold or something, fluid builds up again and the cycle is repeated. A nuisance, but not life threatening. Another long term problem has been a propensity to develop skin cancers or basal cell carcinomas, a consequence of too much exposure to the sun when a lad. Back in those days there was little awareness of the dangers of skin cancer, and we would run around without a hat or shirt on, with inevitable effect on a fair skin. The damage only manifested itself years later, and for the last fifteen years or so I've had to visit a dermatologist every few months to have the little nasties sprayed or cut out, generally from the top of my head, shoulders and back. Again, a nuisance but not life threatening as long as I don't neglect to have them seen to. So apart from the inevitable aches and pains of a body moving towards its use-by date I don't have too many health worries at all, thank goodness. I still play three or four sets of tennis a week, when at home, both for the exercise and for enjoyment, and try to walk every day, even if it's only to the paper shop in the morning – for that very reason I don't have the *Herald* delivered. Unfortunately the golf courses haven't seen me for a while now and the clubs are gathering dust down in the shed.

Beryl has been less fortunate than myself health-wise, and although there's nothing life-threatening in her ailments she's had to endure a lot of pain and discomfort over the years. The main culprit has been that old foe of the ageing, and especially of women, old Mr Arthur Ritis. I've already mentioned the hip and knee replacements, but it's also affected in particular her fingers, making craft work difficult at times. Surgery has helped in straightening the worst affected digit, but I think that arthritis was the reason she gave up folk art painting through the difficulty of holding the brush. However she's never really complained about her ailments, only the occasional mention of them when they flare up.

We've never had a particularly large circle of close friends, as by nature we tend to keep to ourselves somewhat, but the friends we have are very dear to us. Perhaps the closest to us, particularly as they also live in Sydney, would be John and Norma Farrell and Ron and Wendy Haspell, both of which couples have been mentioned earlier in these memoirs. John, of course, was a work colleague from way back when, and we met Ron and Wendy "on the road" on one of our many caravan trips. The six of us meet regularly for dinner and sometimes to go to the theatre, and for some years now we've made a point of having an annual lunch by rotation at one of our homes. Down in Melbourne we have Ken Bowden and Lorna Whelan, of whom much mention has already been made, while up in Brisbane we keep closely in touch with and sometimes visit Rex and Pam Ramsey, companions on my two China trips. Beyond these there are several other friends who we keep in contact with and with whom friendships have developed through work, travel and social activities. Having lived at the same address since 1970 we are also blessed with good neighbours and, while not in close relationships with them, have a great rapport and a mutual sense of looking out for each other's interests, especially when anyone is away from home. Indeed in the case of two of the families, the Archbolds and Agnews, their children are almost like our own family as Beryl was their carer in their pre-school years while their parents worked.

Because I was an only child, and Beryl has but one sibling, sister Sue, our family circle also tends to be small. Our closest contact, naturally enough, is with our elder son Graham, daughter in law Michele and our beloved grandkids Lauren and Michael. Even so, the fact that they live some forty minutes or more away from us, and that we spend so much time away from home ourselves, means we don't see as much of them as we'd like. Even getting together at weekends is difficult, too; Saturday is usually a busy day for them with sport and other activities, and with Graham being a minister Sunday is very much a working day for him. We try to have the grandkids stay over with us during school holidays, an event we always look forward to. Our younger son Russell tends to live his own life and although he resides in Sydney we don't see much of him, although we know he's always there if we need him, and likewise he knows we're also here for him. Beryl's sister Sue and husband Graham live only two kilometres away and we keep in touch with them regularly, and also with our niece Raelene and nephew Greg and their families.

My own extended family circle remains mainly back in England, although I have cousins in Perth and now another cousin up in Brisbane. I keep in close contact with cousin Geoffrey Welding through email, and we generally exchange messages once or twice a week. To a lesser extent I also keep in touch via email with cousins Keith Leyland and Stewart Griffiths, both of whom have of course visited us in Australia.

On the social side, we tend to live a quiet life nowadays, with occasional excursions to the theatre or cinema and sometimes a meal at a restaurant, although the latter takes place mostly when we're travelling. We're members of three clubs in the area, but use them only for their dining facilities as we've never been ones to go out for a drink or to play the "one arm bandits". I always make sure that I attend the "geriatrics" lunch with my old colleagues while ever we're at home in Sydney.

As far as hobbies are concerned, photography and philately are my main interests. Whenever we travel I take thousands of photographs and afterwards spend weeks going through them, weeding out duplicates and those less interesting or of poorer quality, and editing the ones I want to keep. These I maintain in "albums" on the PC, and I also like to construct slide shows which I burn to DVDs and give to my friends and fellow travellers from the various trips I do. On the stamps side of things, over the years I have built up a pretty comprehensive collection of the issues of Australia, its Territories and Great Britain, which are housed in fairly expensive albums with pre-printed pages and mounts. I also once collected the issues of New Zealand and the United States. I gave up collecting New Zealand because of the plethora of issues coming from that country and the cost of them, and stopped collecting American stamps when the exchange arrangement I had with my friend Betty Rohn in Detroit came to an end. While I collect for pleasure rather than for investment purposes, the collection has become reasonably valuable, especially as my dealer friend Manfred Junge also supplies me with limited edition issues not generally available through the postal service and thus of higher value. A downside of my collecting nowadays, however, is the cost of keeping up with new issues, especially those of Australia and to a lesser extent Great Britain. Australia Post are milking the collector milch cow for all it's worth, not so much through the frequency of issues but rather the variety of different stamps and formats within each issue. For example, a typical issue nowadays might include sheet stamps, a booklet or booklets, miniature sheet, sheetlet, coils and a Prestige Booklet, and it is not unusual to spend fifty dollars or more just on one issue. Great Britain has fewer issues, but releases frequent "generic" sheets and Prestige booklets at a significant cost each time. Often in the philatelic world much regret is expressed over the fact that youngsters no longer collect stamps, and I believe the ridiculous over-issuing and resultant cost is a major factor in this! Perhaps one day the postal administrations may wake up to this, especially as us older collectors gradually shed our mortal coil (or sell our collections), but I won't hold my breath waiting for this to happen.

Apart from those two hobbies I try to keep my intellect sharpened by frequent use of my personal computer, using it to keep track of finances, maintain checklists of my stamp collections, store my photographs, download and store music, maintain email correspondence, surf the Web and for many other purposes. I enjoy listening to music, mainly classical but also lighter music, musical shows and the like, but I detest what's called "pop" or rock music, which as an old fogey I dismiss as just so much noise. Over the years I've built up a fair library of recorded music on vinyl and CD, as well as what I've downloaded from the Web.

Turning to sport, with the advancement of age I take a lesser interest in sport nowadays, although I maintain a keener interest in some areas. Apart from a bit of soccer and cricket when at school, and cricket for one season in my teens, the only sports I've actually played have been tennis and golf. Tennis I still play and enjoy one night a week and, although not as quick of eye or fleet of foot as I once might have been, I can still hold my own within the skill levels of the group with whom I play. I find it's a good way to maintain reasonable fitness as well. Golf I played fairly frequently in my working days, but since retirement games have become few and far between, and at time of writing I haven't swung a club for two or three years. As far as watching sport is concerned, cricket would be the one I like best, both in the full game and the One Day version. I'm not a "cricket tragic" by any stretch of the imagination and really only follow the games in which Australia is involved. I can't say I'm rapt about the Twenty20 version of the game, and feel there's a danger that it will erode the skills and values of "real" cricket. I have to admit it can be entertaining to watch, but I feel it's a case of "bread and circuses", appealing to the lowest common denominator of sport watchers rather than the true *aficionados* of the game. Whether Australia wins or loses a Twenty20 match or competition I consider totally irrelevant in the greater scheme of things.

Of the football codes, I have absolutely no interest in soccer and very little interest in Australian Rules, other than to sometimes watch the Aussie Rules Grand Final. Because our boys played Rugby Union, I still have a keen interest in that game, especially at the international and Super 14 level, although because the latter games are not shown "free to air" on television I rarely get to see one of them. I used to take a keen interest in Rugby League, especially during my working years when we'd often go to see Parramatta play at the old Cumberland Oval. I think the game lost much of its appeal, especially from a local interest and loyalty point of view, through the Super League *fracas* of the 'Eighties, and certainly that had a part to play in my declining interest. I still follow the fortunes of Parramatta and watch the televised matches fairly regularly, but more because they're on rather than through any special interest; Tests and State of Origin matches are an exception and always watched where possible. I no longer bother reading about League in the press either, other than a glance at the occasional article. As far as other sports are concerned, I can watch tennis but wouldn't go out of my way to do so; I enjoy it more as a participant than a spectator. The same applies to golf. Over recent years I've enjoyed watching televised matches of lawn bowls; in fact, I used to say that when I retired I'd take bowls up but have never got around to it and probably it's unlikely now that I ever will. Swimming, athletics, basketball, netball, motor racing and sailing, to name a few other sports, are of no interest whatsoever, while I reckon horse racing is the most boring sport imaginable!

Which brings me to religion and politics. On the matter of religion, as I said much earlier in these writings I have long rejected the concept of spirituality or a supreme Being, a rejection that had its roots in my early teens and grew stronger throughout my life. This rejection I have tended to keep to myself, as I deny nobody the right to have their own religious beliefs, and with certain exceptions to live their life according to them. I have rarely entered into any debate on the subject, preferring to keep my own counsel on the matter, but at the same time have never denied my atheism when it has been necessary to state it, for example on census forms. I was brought up in a family environment that was Christian, although not actively so – any religious teaching, to my recollection, was left to Sunday school, the church and scripture "lessons" at school – but I inherited and was taught a set of values that I believe I have lived up to throughout my life. I've long resented Christianity, or other religions for that matter, claiming those values as their own. I believe there's an inherent goodness in much of mankind and the moral values by which we live can exist without any particular religious affiliation, or with no religious beliefs whatever. I consider myself as falling in that category, and feel I've lived a life of love and respect for others, unfettered by the need to worship a particular deity. I am completely content with my lack of religious beliefs.

Having said all this, I do have some concerns over religion generally and the role it has played and still plays in society. These writings are not the place to get involved in lengthy debate over the subject, but the exceptions I mentioned in the previous paragraph need touching on. I don't believe that people should impose their beliefs and practices on others, particularly in matters political, and over the years we've seen some instances where people, especially politicians, have used their religious beliefs to force on others a situation or standard that may not be acceptable to the wider community, or even desirable. Birth control, euthanasia and stem cell research are just some of these areas where it has happened. These are important issues that should be decided by their value or otherwise to mankind, not according to some religious dogma. Another exception that concerns me is that we teach our children what to believe, in accordance with our own beliefs, but rarely teach them to challenge those beliefs or to think for themselves. For similar reasons I am generally against church-run private schools, particularly as by definition they segregate children from those of other religions and frequently deny them an understanding of the history, dogma and moral standards of other religions. I support a public and secular education system in which, if there is any religious curriculum, it should be of a general and all-embracing nature so that children can learn what each religion represents and make their own decisions as to their own beliefs. Finally there's the threat that religion can impose to the peace and harmony of

the world and the very real dangers that face mankind in the present situation of terrorism and fanaticism that has been engendered by religion. Historically religion has caused many conflicts, mainly through one religion confronting another – Northern Ireland is a recent example of that – but today it's a case of the more fanatical elements of the Islam religion against the rest of the world. We've been assured many times that it's a religion of peace, and certainly the majority of Muslims would be good and peaceful citizens, but I see it as undeniable that it's a religion that inspires hatred, fanaticism and intolerance, whatever its dogma may otherwise state. I'll leave it at that!

Now to politics. While a lad in England my grandparents and parents were very definitely Conservative, and on moving to Australia both Mum and Dad always voted for Bob Menzies and the Liberal party, so I guess it was inevitable that I also grew up under the Liberal persuasion and, when old enough to vote, voted accordingly, although I was flexible with my Senate vote and usually gave it to an intermediate party such as the Australian Democrats, so as to "keep the bastards honest", as its leader Don Chipp famously said. Back in the 1960s and 1970s the Australian Labor Party was very much more to the left than it is at time of writing and, coupled with a healthy dislike of the Trade Union movement and its constant strikes and general bloody-mindedness, this was enough to keep me voting Liberal. I never had any personal involvement in politics, such as joining the party, or any real interest other than the general one of having a government that runs the nation properly and represents the interests of the majority of people. I rejoiced when the short-lived Whitlam Labor government was voted out; accepted the later victory of the Hawke Labor government and indeed supported much of what it set out to achieve; detested the Keating Labor government; and was pleased when the Howard Liberal government won office. However somewhere in the middle of that government's eleven year term I, like many other Australian, began to grow disillusioned with its growing mean-spiritedness, deceitfulness, lack of ideas and, especially, its involvement in the Iraq war. For that reason, in the general election of 2004 for the first time in my life I voted Labor. This was a bad mistake, mainly because its leader mark Latham proved to be a terrible choice and thankfully Labor was defeated. However in the next three years the Liberal government and its leader John Howard became progressively worse, and in 2006 I again voted for change and with pleasure saw the Rudd Labor government elected.

My political outlook is now non-partisan, and my vote will go to the party that I believe has the most to offer the country at a given point in time. I'll watch with interest the progress of the present government, and unless things go terribly wrong will probably vote for them at the next election, as I believe any government really needs two terms to implement its policies. After that, my vote will go to whichever party I feel is the better one at the time.

So I come to the end of my writing of these memoirs and look back on a life that generally has been most enjoyable and fulfilling in terms of family, work and social activity. As I said earlier, there is little I'd change if I had my time over again. I've tried to live up to the standards set for me and by me over the years, and believe I've succeeded pretty well; others must be the best judges of that. I don't for one moment consider my life to have been exceptional in any way, but from a personal perspective I think it's been varied, fulfilling and interesting to look back on. In the work environment the goals I set myself have generally been reached; one can always look back and see that some things could have been done better or alternative decisions made. In the evening of my life I feel no compelling need to prove anything more to myself, and I'm content to now let the years slip by in pleasant retirement, especially in the company of my dear wife, companion and friend of nearly fifty years.

Much of these memoirs have been taken up with accounts of my travels, both on my own and with Beryl. Although I've tried to recount them in a very abridged form, travel has been a very important part of my life, both in my working days and in retirement, and I can only apologise if the reader finds those accounts excessive. I still plan to travel as extensively as I can, both in Australia with Beryl and overseas,

in the latter case on my own when she prefers not to accompany me, as long as good health remains my fortunate lot. I fully intend to remain as active as possible, physically and mentally, and to pursue my hobbies and interests to keep body and brain active. Those activities will certainly be at a slower pace, but that's all right too – there's no hurry to achieve things any more. Above all, I look forward to adding to these memoirs many more times in the years ahead.

Finally I hope that those who read them - probably our children, grandchildren and, I sincerely hope, further generations in the future - will do so with interest and accept them as a record of what Beryl and I have experienced over a span of nearly seventy years, in which the world has changed beyond belief.

North Rocks NSW
January 2008

Appendix

In the last years of my time in the Bank I was invited on to the editorial panel of a new EDP-related magazine, *Managing Information Systems*, and on my retirement I was asked if I would write an article looking back over my 27 years in the computing world and comparing data processing in the 1960s with information technology in the 1990s. The article, which appeared in the **May 1993** issue, is reproduced below in full:

It is interesting - and not a little nostalgic – to look back over the last 30 years or so and compare the differences with the DP world as it is now. Just what was computing like in Australia in 1965? Just how far have we come since those days?

My employer, the Commonwealth of Australia, made the decision early in 1965 to leave the world of electromechanical devices behind and invest in computing. This occurred at a time when a new generation of computers was emerging. We chose to throw in our lot with IBM's revolutionary new System/360 - in May 1965 even IBM Australia itself didn't have one. In those days programmer training was very definitely "hands-off", in a classroom. The tutor was often only a few pages ahead of the class in terms of knowledge, and sometimes people new to computing overtook their teachers after only two weeks.

I was a simple bank clerk, who volunteered for the opportunity to master this new science. It was a bewildering world indeed, and the penny did not readily drop. With time, first as an analyst and then as a programmer, it all started to make sense. Being a bank, our main challenge at that time was to prepare for C-Day, the introduction of decimal currency on 14 February 1966. Those were the days when designing a system and writing conversion programs involved the new concept of "packed pence", or how to convert something based on twenties and twelves into something based on tens. Those were the days when typing skills were quickly honed on devices called card punches and verifiers, the time when one quickly learned to translate hexadecimal into meaningful numbers, and when the cardinal sin was to drop a box of punched cards all over the computer room floor, often with calamitous results. Those were the days when the most important tools in the DPer's bag of tricks were a flowcharting template (remember them?) and an instruction set card displayed prominently in the shirt pocket, along with at least six pencils. A 25-year old analyst commanded the princely salary of £1455 (\$2910) a year.

The first S/360

After using IBM's Kent Street Customer Test Centre for the first few weeks, our own System/360 Model 30 was finally delivered and commissioned on 1 April 1966. This inauspicious date lived up to its reputation when our new system, after being duly installed and signed off as ready to go, crashed on the first program. It didn't take long to find out why - they'd forgotten to install the decimal arithmetic feature.

Gradually it all came together, and an air of self confidence and mystique grew around the DP department. It was very much a closed shop in those days. The end users didn't understand it at all, senior managers were convinced they were doing the right thing but weren't sure why, and the DPer's wanted it kept that way. The systems that were built reflected what the DP people thought the business was all about, or were a one-for-one image of what the existing manual system did. Then those of us in the profession got really sophisticated and combined both those things. Everything was batch, of course: "on-line" was a mystical term even to most computing practitioners.

Systems worked effectively in those days, but perhaps none too efficiently. Given what we had to work with - and at the Commonwealth Bank we were probably typical - this was hardly surprising. Our 360/30 CPU had 32K of core memory (remember those little ferrous doughnuts strung on wire?), of which half was required for the very basic operating system used in those times. The language was Assembler, and programmers vied fiercely with each other to see who could code the same piece of logic using the least number of bytes and even bits. Run times were long, with magnetic tape changes frequent and disk drives less than reliable. Who understands nowadays what a checkpoint restart is, let alone needs to use one? They were common in the 1960s and 1970s.

The graveyard shift

I recall walking into the computer centre on many occasions during the "graveyard" shift. All the room lights would be out, with just the console twinkling like a Christmas tree. The senior operator would be asleep at the console typewriter and the junior operator also asleep, stretched out on top of the bank of 2311 disk drives. The movement of the disk heads when taking a half hourly checkpoint would alert him to the need to change the master file tape volume.

(CPUs weren't quite so reliable, either. I can recall a few mornings when I saw the sun rise through the windows of the IBM Centre after we had gone there for overnight backup.)

Computing was fun in the 1960s. Today you sit at a PC, an intelligent workstation or a remote terminal, perhaps hundreds or even thousands of kilometres from the processing centre itself, with a sophisticated array of tools, code generators, high level compilers, workbenches, and all the other paraphernalia of the modern analyst/programmer. It was a far more hands-on process in the 1960s.

The analyst would present the programmers with a voluminous, highly structured, jargon-ridden and frequently ambiguous requirements specification. From that moment on, the programmer was king. We developed our flowcharts, completed endless pages of coding sheets (with those pencils I mentioned earlier), sent them to the punch girls for punching and verifying, added job control cards, compiled, and tested, tested, tested. If the operators were otherwise occupied, quite often we would go into the computer room and run our own jobs. In this way we learned how to operate the CPU and various peripherals, and to understand how it all worked. Consequently the DPer of the 1960s received a broad base of education that could rarely be emulated in today's far more complex and specialised world.

On-line processing

From those early years equipment began to grow more powerful, more reliable and of course more complex, and recognising this the processes and management began to change. In the late 1960s on-line processing arrived at the Commonwealth Bank, spelling the end for that most unhappy medium, punched paper tape. How many of today's DP practitioners can claim familiarity with PPT? Know how to decipher those punchings? Know how to splice those torn pieces together? Know how to untangle great masses of it without losing precious data? (We found suspending it down the stairwell from the ninth floor a pretty good method). Still echoing in my ears are the profanities of the operator who discovered, in the middle of a long run, a length of tape spliced upside down. No, online was here to stay.

A whole new facet of computing opened up, and the mystique began to fade. In the 1970s new products, languages and technologies emerged to influence what we were doing. In the 1980s computing truly emerged as a profession. But it is those formative years that I remember most

clearly. Perhaps the passage of time has made my glasses rose-tinted, but the 1960s was a time of great challenge, filled with the joy of learning something new. We were setting the rules and practices for the years to come.

Massive changes

Change is inevitable, and so it has been with computing. Few, if any, industries have encountered the degree and rapidity of technological and process change that computing has. This change has generally been positive. The quality of equipment now used, from mainframe to PC, is far superior to that of 1965. So too is the quality of the systems being developed and implemented on today's equipment.

Methodologies, tools and techniques have streamlined the process of building, running and maintaining systems. From the business perspective, DP is now accountable to the CEO and board, and must prove its value to the organisation. End users have assumed their rightful place as the ultimate owners of systems, with the attendant responsibilities. A seemingly endless list of new technologies - the microchip, the laser, imaging, communications - have revolutionised the work of the computing practitioner. These were undreamed of in the 1960s. But it has not really been a revolution. As I look back over those 27 years, the more I am convinced that it has been an evolution. The things that we did in 1965, primitive and amusing as they may seem in retrospect, nevertheless laid the foundation for the processes we take for granted in 1993.

Code is still written, but in a different and more efficient way. Requirements must still be defined, but techniques such as data modelling allow for greater accuracy. The concept of reusable code today was, after all, the concept of the standard subroutine of yesterday.

We crawled, then walked, then ran. In doing so we created the disciplines and the standards by which modern commercial computing operates, and around it all we helped to create the structures and management that brought it all together. We learned as we went and we learned by our mistakes. And we had a lot of fun.

Ancestors of Colin Stewart Perry

