SITTING ON THE FENCE

A biography, a memoir, an autobiography, some history, observations, stories, poetry, and a fiction.

By Bim Atkinson

second edition © 2012

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Front Cover

1. The Gunnawarra Homestead in 1947. The photo is by the top line Australian photographer Laurence Le Guay who was at the time working for the Australian Geographic Society with the magazine "Walkabout". In the bottom left corner seated is Robert Emerson Curtis (Bob Curtis) journalist/artist for Walkabout Magazine. Bob was a very well-known Sydney artist and was my Godfather. Standing, looking over his shoulder is Geoff Atkinson – my father.

2. Prior to mustering the horses, if fresh, ready to buck, and not ridden for a while, were ridden in the horse yards prior to going mustering. The men would line the fence to watch the proceedings. Closest to the right in the bottom photo is my father Geoff Atkinson followed to the left by Tommy Murray, Fred Winkleman (the station saddle maker), and Gordon Tooth (Johnny Tooth's son). Gordon was a top rider and bushman like his father. He died not long afterwards. It is believed that he was pushed over the Tully falls by his girlfriend. Nothing proved but his catlike skills and agility suggest he did not just fall and his girlfriend's behaviour after the event was such that it did arouse suspicions. Photo by Laurence Le Guay in 1947 for "Walkabout" magazine.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is one person who has supported me through thick and thin over the years, and to top it off I am very proud to say that she has contributed her memoirs for this book. That person is my mother Delphie Atkinson and I thank her dearly.

I would also like to thank Dr Jonathan King and his most loving wife Jane for their tremendous support over the past 37 years. Indeed this book would still be a twinkle in my eye if had not been for their enduring encouragement. Also for their ability to stay positive under the most devastating and challenging of situations, has totally influenced and centred me into the positive zone.

Without a doubt the *Ravenshoe Writers Group* of which I am a member, needs a big mention for putting up with me for the past seven years, and being forced to sit and listen to my often long-winded pieces for the book. Vera Hepple, Jean Versace, Bonnie Dangard, Gail Kelso, Sue Brine, Cheryl Binsted, Dinah Venitis, and Adrianne Smith have been over these years a major inspiration and guide on a dedicated weekly basis. I would like to thank the group for keeping my feet firmly planted on the ground, and being a sounding board of friends who have swum with me through my ups and downs over this time.

Finally but not least I would like to thank my cousin Lois Westcott for keeping my soul massaged and maintained. Sally and Marcel Wagner for being my inspiration, and my cousin Giles Pickford for his penchant for poetry and his ability to paint words out of dust. His ability in 'plonking' is awe-inspiring. Christine Laskowski, whose indelible love of all things historic has massaged my senses. There are far too many more to mention so please forgive me if your name is not here. You know who you are and I too recognise you. If your name was meant to be here and I have missed it, I know that I will remember it just after the book has come off the printing press.

FOREWORD

When Bim asked me to edit his book of memoirs and short stories, I was delighted to be able to help my good friend, even though I am a *'writer'* and not an *'editor'* as such. However I have *'given it a go',* and hopefully have not passed over too many spelling errors, punctuation marks etc. Therefore if you happen to come across something I've missed I will plead *'inexperience'.*

Although Bim and I have never met, we often talk on the phone or correspond by email. I 'met' Bim in 2010 when we were both involved with Bim's friend Jonathan King, and Jonathan's *Burke and Wills Across Australia Environmental Expedition*.

Bim is a natural storyteller, and his love of Australian bush-life, and the Aboriginal people of this country, shines through his stories. After his encounters with *'swallowmees',* charging bulls and other beasties, dangerous machinery and explosives, together with numerous close-shaves and hair-raising experiences, Bim is lucky to be still with us!

The beauty and vastness of the Australian Outback, is something that has to be seen and experienced to be understood. The old days of outback station life, with its often harsh, cruel, racist, yet wonderful romance has slowly been eroded, so it is wonderful to be able to capture the stories of people like Bim, who have known this pioneering and slowly-disappearing way of life. What resourcefulness and bravery women like Delphie and Glen showed in the face of adversity.

The sexual abuse Bim suffered as a small boy at boarding school, has without doubt had a profound effect on his life, with the damage done to an innocent child's psyche being transferred into adulthood, and affecting all aspects of his life.

Bim's love of culinary delights is glaringly obvious, as he takes us on a gastronomic tour of the world. I must say, that as I was editing one of Bim's descriptions of food, my tastebuds yearned for a piece of bread and honey after Bim's riveting descriptions of the same, until I was compelled to go and make myself a honey sandwich at 11 o'clock at night! However I would be loathe to try some of the other more exotic delicacies he makes note of in his memoirs, such as 'mountain oysters' (*shudder*)!

Well done Bim, and also to all those whose stories appear in your book. You have taken me on a journey through your life, the ups and downs and the in-betweens! To be able to express oneself by the written word and convey to others what you have seen, heard and experienced is a wonderful skill.

Keep up the good word!!

Christine Laskowski May 2012.

INTRODUCTION

In 1998 I applied to get into the *University of Sydney* to do a BHSc. in Rehabilitation Counselling. Whilst waiting to get in, I was in a round-robin of tests at *St Vincent's Hospital* in Darlinghurst. I was seeing a whole range of specialists including a cardiologist and an endocrinologist, relating to a thyrotoxicosis that I had developed from taking my main heart medication *Amiodirone.* I had some long gaps between my appointments and had time to fill in. A friend of mine Jonathan King suggested that perhaps I should consider writing a book. Jonathan and his wife Jane strongly believed that I had a story to tell. And so after many sessions of writers block, and a life of poverty that has had me wriggling like a witchetty grub on a hotplate to distract me from the task, I did finally sit down and start writing. I was told that I would need at least 80,000 words to be taken seriously. Being a two-fingered typist I found that quite daunting, and I think that has possibly slowed my progress with the book. After all a Masters Degree is 100,000 words.

I had a lot of confusion as to what I was going to write about. So much is going on in my head at any given time. I wondered if I might do a family history which I have a big interest in, or might I do an autobiography, and if I did would I mention my fight with the Church over my sexual abuse at school? One thing I do know is that my father has passed on his skill to me as a natural story teller. There is one thing I have learned about life, and that is if you do not know what to do, then what you do is 'start'. Once you start, the natural flow and vision of where you are going just magically seems to fall into place, goal or no goal. This I found happened when I started writing, though I must admit it took until 2010 (twelve years after starting to write), to finally envisage the context and format of my book. As it turned out it would reveal itself to be all of the things I had envisaged at the beginning, plus the biography of my grandmother written by Marie Irvine and my Mother's memoirs. I have broken up my autobiography with stories and observations I have written about. I have also laced through some poetry and stories of some of the Aborigines who I grew up with, as I feel they were never properly recognised. I have also attached to the very end a fictional story just because I can! As I have never published a book before, I can only pray that my format and presentation will keep you, the reader interested, and that you really enjoy reading what I've written. There is so much more I could have put into the book, but perhaps if this one has a good response then I will write another.

IN THE BEGINNING

James Atkinson was born on 2 August 1824 in Armagh, Ireland, the son of Henry Atkinson and Jane Glendenning. There are a great number of James Atkinson's who arrived in Victoria and New South Wales prior to 1860, the year James married Catherine Good in Victoria. However, sorting out which James may have been 'my' ancestor is difficult without extensive and time-consuming research.

James Atkinson – North Queensland Pioneer

However there is one entry which stands out, for a James Atkinson who arrived in New South Wales from Liverpool in May 1856 by the ship *Commodore Perry.* This James was also a native of Armagh, 25 years old (or so he said as if this was 'my' James he would have been 32), and of the *Church of England* faith, who could both read and write.[1] Could this have been 'my' James or simply another of the many James Atkinsons. Often prospective emigrants put their ages down and described themselves as 'agricultural labourers' to make themselves more sought after.

I know very little of our James Atkinson, my great grandfather, and wait eagerly for a book that is being written by a professional researcher Marjory Gilmore which should be available in several years time.

The family had settled at Tower Hill near Koroit where James' relative also named James Atkinson, who was *'a Sydney-based lawyer of Anglo-Irish gentry stock'* had begun acquiring land in the Port Fairy area around 1837.[2]

[1] *New South Wales Government State Records;* 'online' microfilm of ships lists; Reel 2138, [4/4793].
[2] *Ireland's Heritages, Critical Perspectives on Memory and Identity,* Edited by Mark McCarthy (2005).

Colonial Secretary's Office
Sydney, 16th September, 1843

SPECIAL SURVEY

The following description of a Special Survey, made under the Regulations of 6th March, 1841, is published for general information.
At the end of one month from this date, if no objection exist, a Deed of Grant will be prepared in favour of the purchaser.
9. JAMES ATKINSON, 5120, Five thousand one hundred and twenty acres, county unnamed, parish unnamed, at Port Fairy; bounded on the north by a meridional line bearing east three miles; on the east by the River Moyn(e); on the south by the sea coast, extending west two miles, and on the west by a meridional line bearing north three miles 46½ chains.

By His Excellency's Command,
E. DEAS THOMSON.

Above: The Victoria Government Gazette, Gazette no. 78, 19 September 1843, page 1209.
I learned from someone recently, that when Cousin James Atkinson died on 17 December 1864, he left some of his estate to our James. However in the book - *Port Fairy - The First Fifty Years'* by J.W. Powling, it states that all the money, went to Cousin James' son Nick, and his six sisters. The Special Survey was finally sold off in 1885.

The first of James and Catherine Atkinson's children, Elizabeth Catherine Atkinson was born at Tower Hill in December 1860 where her birth was registered in 1861. The family later increased to include three sons Henry John, Robert James, and Joseph Thomas Good. The 1863 diary of Josephine Mary Ann Good of *Rockgrove,* Coachford, County Cork, Ireland notes that James and Kate lived at Koroit at the base of Tower Hill.

An article in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* on 19 November 1947 titled - *Around The Camp Fire* relates the following story:

'There is no name more well-known among Northern Cattlemen than that of Atkinson – pioneers of the Mt Garnet and Ingham districts, where the family hold large pastoral interests today.

The story of the first Atkinson is one typical of many a pioneering tale. Jim Atkinson, like such a number of our great pioneers, was lured to Australia by tales of the Victorian goldfields in the Roaring Fifties. Jim Atkinson was not very successful on the goldfields however, winning just enough gold to buy himself a small pastoral property in Victoria. There he married an Irish lass named Kate Good. Then came that awful day in February 1861, when bushfires ravaged the countryside. Several settlers lost their lives and the Atkinsons' little home was burned to the ground, together with all they possessed. But Jim was not disheartened, and after meeting Ezra Firth, a freestone mason of Geelong,

he knew what to do. The two men became partners and thus was linked two names that will live long in Queensland pioneering history[3]'.

At about that time James read Leichhardt's diary and decided that they would start a new life in North Queensland. It is interesting to note that James Cardon Collins, my great-great grandfather at Rathdowney had been an investor in the Leichhardt expedition and that Governor Philip Gidley King, being married to a Lethbridge, did the translation of the diary when Leichhardt returned from his expedition to *Stroud House* in NSW. It was apparently his wife who did most of the work. This would explain why the Lethbridge family came north. My friend Jonathan King now owns *Stroud House.*

James and Kate departed in mid 1862, and were on the first ship that was sent to settle Port Dennison. They would have taken a flock of sheep on board with them, as I cannot see how the sheep would have survived such a long journey on foot in the timeframe.

In Port Dennison they collected all their stores and the equipment they would need for a journey into the unknown and then teamed up with Ezra Firth. The women and equipment went by boat up the Burdekin River whilst the men followed them up along the bank of the river with the sheep and horses. They eventually pulled into *Firth's Lagoon* at *Greenvale* late in 1862.

The Authors version of events

To confuse you even more I now believe that James Atkinson possibly arrived in 1856 and went to the goldfields where he met Ezra Firth. James managed to get enough money to buy the farm he had at *Tower Hill*. He also worked for his cousin James Atkinson surveying on the special survey of *Belfast (Port Fairy).* He married Kate in the *Zinc Church* at *Woodford* and their first born Elizabeth was born at *Tower Hill*. The address at this stage was *Koroit Cottage, Tower Hill, Belfast, Victoria*. In August or September of 1861 there was a big fire that came through the district decimating *Tower Hill, Koroit,* and *Woodford* inclusive of the *Zinc Church* where they had been married. After reading Leichhardt's diary Ezra Firth and James partnered up and decided to leave the region and head for *North Queensland* to take up land that Leichhardt had described as good grazing country. James set up Kate in their little farmhouse cottage in *Port Fairy* known as *Koroit Cottage* (which I have visited and have a photo of somewhere).

Leaving Kate - James and Ezra set off, possibly by ship to *Brisbane,* and then out to the *Darling Downs* where they bought 5,000 head of sheep and the horses and equipment needed for a pioneering droving trip. They may have employed young Mr Todd at this stage to drive the wagon with all their supplies. The driving of 5,000 sheep to *Firths Lagoon* must have been extremely challenging for them back then. An incredible feat. Once at *Firths Lagoon* they would have started setting up and building a cabin in preparation for the arrival of the women and children. They would have been at *Firths Lagoon* before the Collins family came through with cattle in August 1862.

James returned to *Port Fairy* to get Kate and Elizabeth as stated in Josephine Mary Anne Goods diary (I have a copy of the diary) Kate, Elizabeth and James left *Melbourne* in 1863 travelling on a ship to settle *Port Denison* with all their worldly goods and chattels. Josephine's address for Kate in *Port Denison* was Mrs Atkinson, *Burns Depot, Bowen, Queensland.* Taking all their goods and chattels and whatever stores they needed James, Kate and Elizabeth went by wagon travelling along beside the Burdekin River before breaking away and on up to *Firths Lagoon* getting there perhaps by the middle of 1863.

[3] *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 19 November 1947, page 4.

Henry was born in the *Firths Lagoon* cabin in July 1864 and was delivered by Mr Todd with the aid of Mrs Ezra Firth and one of the Firth daughters as neither Ezra nor James were there at the time. It was after this occasion that the Scott brothers moved them on.

Coming up behind them was William Collins and family who had cattle with them, making them the first cattlemen to settle north of Port Dennison. It was at *Firth's Lagoon* before 13 August 1862, that the Collins Family met up with the Atkinsons and Firths, before moving on to claim *Spring Creek Station.* Whilst at *Firth's Lagoon* young Victor Collins made a connection with Ezra Firth's daughter who was to be his future wife.

Not realising they would have to register the land, they lived at *Firth's Lagoon* until at least July of 1864, because we know that Henry John Atkinson was born there on 7 July 1864. There are several accounts about the birth of Henry. One is that he was born under the dray there. The one account however that I think is the most likely is that he was born in the cabin they had built there. This makes sense because they were planning to stay there, and the first thing one would do in a pioneering situation is to get up some liveable quarters for the wives and children. They were there a good two years before Henry was born. The Scott brothers registered the land calling it the *Valley of Lagoons,* and then went and evicted Firth and Atkinson from *Firth's Lagoon.*

The Rockingham Bay correspondent of the Port Denison Times writes as follows on the 6th instant: - H.M.S.S. Salamander arrived on the 23rd September, and left again on the 24th. Mr Jardine is a passenger by her. Wool continues to arrive from the interior; 50 bales are now at the Herbert, and seven drays more are on their way down. Messrs. Atkinson and Firths drays arrived about a fortnight ago; one dray has just arrived from the Lynd and reports more upon the road. Messrs. Scott and party are out looking for a new road to the north-west, and by last reports with every probability of success; they have already found a track which will save crossing the range into the interior and have a good prospect of being able, by passing through a gorge, to miss the much dreaded Seaview Range.

The Port Denison Times of the 25th instant says: A report has reached us of the destruction by fire of a flock of sheep belonging to Messrs. Firth and Atkinson, of the Albert Downs. It appears that Mr Firth, accompanied only by a black boy, and was travelling with the flock when he perceived the plain in hisrear to be on fire. With great promptness he went to the front and fired the grass, hoping by this means to clear a space on which to drive the sheep. They, however, became frightened, and refused to stir, and it was with the greatest difficulty be was enabled to save about two hundred. We believe this to be the first instance of the kind that has happened in the North.

Above: Empire (Sydney), 6 November 1865 page 3

When the Scott brothers rode in to evict Firth and Atkinson, it must have been incredibly devastating for James and Ezra, because they must have thought they had the pick of the land. It took the Atkinsons almost a century to get the *Valley of Lagoons* back, though they did get eventually get *Firth's Lagoon* (*Greenvale*) back.

They pushed onto *Mount Surprise,* and Ezra Firth took up *Fossilbrook,* and James and Kate settled on *Albert Downs.* The combined parcel of land became known as *Mount Surprise* after an incident where the local Aborigines were going to massacre them. They were warned by an Aboriginal woman they had working for them at the time. They snuck up on the Aborigines who were having a war corroboree at the time and shot over their heads, scaring them out of their wits. Or so the story goes. I think it is more likely that they shot a few of them as there were only a few of the settlers, and many of the Aborigines who would have seen them as intruders to their land. And that is how *Mount Surprise* got its name.

The address I have for Kate Atkinson (taken off Josephine Mary Ann Goods diary of 1863) is:

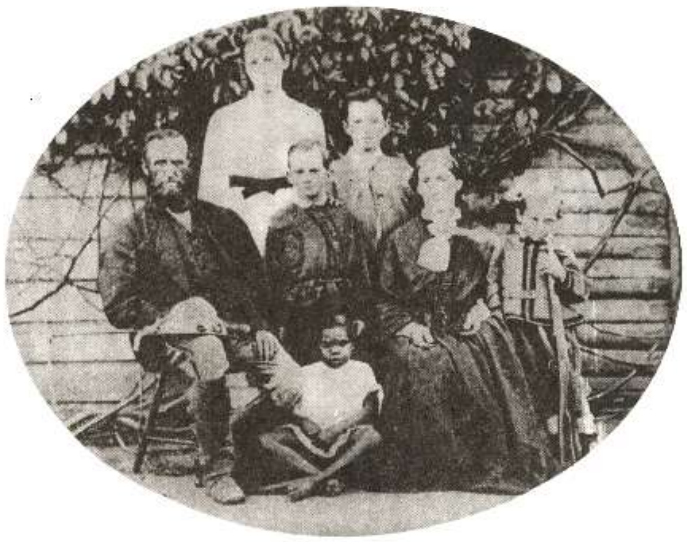
Mrs Atkinson
Albert Downs
Cooks District
Elizabeth Creek
Upper Burdekin
Rockingham Bay
Queensland

It would not have taken them long to realise that they had made a big mistake in bringing sheep to this country, due to the dingoes and spear grass. At the end of 1864 Ezra sent James to get cattle whilst he went and registered the land. James went back to Victoria to get the cattle and drove them all the way back. On his return he found that Ezra had sold his sheep to the miners in the Palmer River. James as one might imagine, was not impressed. The relationship between him and Ezra was straining.

Robert James Atkinson (Bob) was born in December 1866 and my grandfather Thomas Joseph Good Atkinson (Tom) was born on 10 September 1869 at *Albert Downs*.

The real blow came for James and Kate, when they discovered in 1870 that Ezra Firth had registered all of the land under his own name. In those days it took the Lands Department up to seven years to process land registrations. Once again James and Kate discovered that they were not living on their own land and they had been duped by Ezra Firth.

So it was that they moved first to *Herbert Park* at *Abergowrie* (Gaelic for the joining of the rivers. In this case the Stone River and the Herbert River), and then onto to *Farnham* at Ingham. Here they ran some cattle and horses. At the beginning of the 1880's they sold the prime river frontage land at a much inflated price to *Colonial Sugar Refineries (CSR)* who desperately needed a site to set up the sugar processing that also had access to a wharf and boats. In his will James' brother Robert (who died of a brown snake bite in Victoria) left his entire estate to Henry, Bob, and Tom. It was due to these windfalls that they were able to buy *Wairuna* and then the various other properties they acquired. Losing out on *Albert Downs* was probably the best thing that could have ever happened to them as it was very poor country.



JAMES ATKINSON AND FAMILY, 1870's. At back: Elizabeth, daughter; Henry,eldest son. Centre: James Atkinson; Bob; Mrs. Atkinson, with Tom, youngest son, on her left.

MARRIAGES

LYNN – ATKINSON - On the 27th March at St James's Cathedral, Townsville, by the Rev. Canon Tucker, Bryan Lynn of Ingham, to Elizabeth Kate, daughter of James Atkinson, Esq., of Wairuna Station, North Kennedy.

Elizabeth Catherine Atkinson

Above: The Brisbane Courier, 6 April 1894 page 4.

They did well in Ingham, and after the big tick strike of the 1880s and 1890s that sent so many land holders broke, they were able to move up the range and buy *Wairuna* in the 1890s and James died there in 1899.

PROBATES

James Atkinson, formerly of Abergowrie Station, near Cardwell, but lately of Wairuna, near Ingham, grazier, to (Henry John Atkinson. Wairuna, near Ingham, grazier and W. McDowall, Greenvale, near Charters Towers, grazier; estate sworn under £1890.

Above: The Brisbane Courier, 29 August 1899.

DEATHS

ATKINSON – On the 14th March, at Gunnawarra Station, Mt Garnet, N. Queensland, Kate Atkinson, relict of the late James Atkinson, of Port Fairy and Wairuna Station, North Queensland in her 93rd year.

Above: The Argus, (Melbourne), 9 April 1917, page 1.

Atkinson Brothers bought *Gunnawarra* in 1904 and then Tom who had been at *Kangaroo Hills*, moved up there with his wife Glen and their 18 month old firstborn daughter, who sat in front of Glen on the pommel of the saddle on the perilous journey in 1904. Eleanor Kate Atkinson (Nell) was born on 20 June 1902.

Prior to taking over *Gunnawarra* Tom managed the *Valley of Lagoons* for a while. Whilst there he is reputed to have done Australia's longest droving trip when he apparently drove 1,000 head of bullocks from the *Valley of Lagoons* to *Melbourne*. What an undertaking that must have been back in those days!

Cashmere was bought for Bob and *Greenvale* for Henry. In 1915 Henry dissolved his partnership with Atkinson Brothers and took on *Greenvale* for himself. Bob and Tom flipped a coin for country in 1922 when they dissolved their partnership.

Not long after taking over *Gunnawarra* there is a story that needs to be recorded. Apparently *Gunnawarra* ran out of flour and they asked the then owners of the *Valley of Lagoons* if they might be able to buy a bag of flour off them. The *Valley of Lagoons* owners charged them £1,000 for the bag. Back in those days that was a lot of money. However one could not eat money and the stores only came once every 12 months. To keep the flour fresh the whole bag would have been dipped in a barrel of water and then put out in the sun to dry. Due to the density of the flour the water only invaded in about quarter of an inch and when dried formed a wonderful skin around the remaining flour.

Revenge was applied to the *Valley of Lagoons* when a few months later they ran out of horse shoe nails and thus bought a bag of the nails off *Gunnawarra* for £1,000.

They at that stage owned *Olivevale* at Laura as well as a lot of the coastal lands around Ingham and Townsville. Bob won the flip and got the Townsville and Ingham lands with *Cashmere* and *Wairuna*. *Olivevale* was sold off, and Tom who got the raw end of the deal, had my grandmother Glen fuming about his stupidity at doing something on the flip of a coin. Tom got *Gunnawarra* and *St Ronans, Glenharding,* and *Mount Laing* which added up to about 1200 square miles.

Tom and Glen had seven children, with one of them Leo Bruce Atkinson, dying on 30 April 1911 from what the attending doctor thought was diphtheria. When Bruce died the doctor refused to do the service to bury him, because he said he was a non-believer, and Glen was left to perform the service over her own child. Leo Bruce was 3 years and 10 months old.

Glen's second born William Thomas Atkinson (Bill), was born 5 October 1905, followed by Bruce in June 1907, Jessie Glen Atkinson (Jess) 11 March 1912, Nancy Atkinson (Nan) 31 December 1913, Geoffrey Good Atkinson (Geoff) my father, was born at the *Port Douglas Hospital* on 17 June 1917 and Vernon Good Atkinson (Vernon) 29 January 1923.

I did not know any of my grandparents. My paternal grandfather died from an incident with a cow in the homestead cattle yards in 1930. My maternal grandfather died in 1945. My paternal grandmother died not long after I was born in 1955. My maternal grandmother died in England in 1956. The grandparent I heard the most about was my father's mother Jessie Glennie Godschall Johnson (Glen). She was known in the family as *Marmie* and must have been an amazing woman. *Marmie* is now at rest next to her husband Tom in the *Gunnawarra Homestead* graveyard.

The first thing I ever heard about her was that nothing fazed her. In this story *Marmie* had an Aboriginal by the name of *Sambo*, who was of the *Jittabul Tribe* from Ravenshoe, working for her. One day *Sambo* was shoeing a horse. Apparently all the other men were out mustering. The horse bought its hoof down on *Sambo's* big toe taking it right off. *Sambo* ran down to my *Marmie* for help and she told him to go back and get the toe. When he got back he found that a turkey had got hold of the toe. He and *Marmie* chased the turkey all over the flat and eventually got the toe back. *Marmie* washed it under a tap and sowed it back on. *Sambo* apparently had his toe until the day he died.

Sambo Ravenshoe 1921

Glen had one of the first cars in the area – a *1917 Chandler*. When she bought it they had to send a mechanic along with the car to teach her how to fix it. She was taught how to grind the valves etc. They had to clear a bit of land so they could teach her to drive it. Tom was a horseman through and through and reportedly used to sit glued to the passenger seat when it broke down as Glen was the only one who knew how to fix the car.

I know that my father was in total awe of her, and spoke of her constantly through his life long after she had passed on. I think it is important that she be recognised as a very worthy matriarch. She had the utmost respect of the Aborigines and worked tirelessly to see that they were educated and cared for. She also had the respect of the whole district and was known far and wide for her very generous hospitality.

The modesty of this very tough pioneer is awe inspiring as the next chapter will reveal.

Note to the reader: E. Marie Irvine wrote this biography of my grandmother Glen in 1949. Glen was a very modest person and asked that it not be published. It is 57 years since Glen passed on, and I think it is now time to let this story go to the press. I have respected Marie Irvine's writing and have changed nothing more than some spelling and the font. Marie was Glen's cousin on the Cardon Collins side of the family and was also the author of *Certain Worthy Women.*

PREFACE TO GLEN'S STORY

I make no apology for this somewhat sketchy story of the life of Glen Atkinson, Mistress of *Gunnawarra Station,* situated 22 miles from Mt Garnet, North Queensland. The fault lies within her. Like all really great people she was over-modest, and it was well nigh impossible to convince her that anything she had accomplished was worth recording. Indeed, it was only the constant demand of her daughters that resulted in my being permitted to write the story at all. There is, alas so much more which should have been told.

Jessie Glennie Atkinson

I sometimes wonder whether any other woman watched with such intelligent interest, the development of what we loosely call 'The Atherton Tableland' during the last sixty years, and certainly few of its residents have taken a more active part in fostering that progress. Mrs Atkinson had a mind tuned to the future, and was so free from dogmatic prejudice that new policies and methods likely to further the grazing industry received her immediate and sympathetic consideration.

Her almost uncanny intuition as to their value was seldom at fault, and she led rather than followed, in constructive thought. Her fine courage, her amazing resource in the face of difficulties which might well have daunted the less valiant, emerges from her simply in her story, and needs no emphasis here.

Left at the tragic death of her husband, with a large cattle station and two young children on her hands, she attacked with the help of her father who died four years later, the complex business of management with great skill until the time came for her sons to assist her.

She was too, a generous collaborator, giving due thanks to the many good friends who helped her with advice and guidance in those anxious years. In her turn she was to become something of a 'mother' to her district, aiding so many less fortunate than herself.

Of her work on behalf of the Aboriginal people, it is difficult to speak too highly. *Gunnawarra* has been a veritable haven of refuge for many individuals and families, and many a fine citizen has been trained by her ways, firm, wise and kind. For them she fought a life-long battle to assure them of justice, sympathy and better education and training, as well as stricter supervision of their saving.

Of her enterprise, it is only necessary to mention that among her last purchase was a *Geiger Counter*, and plans for a careful search for Radium were made. Shortly after the war there was a bulldozer and scoop digging out dams on *Gunnawarra*, and both irrigation of crops and pasture improvement were being carried into effect.

But after all, it was as the gracious hostess of *Gunnawarra*, with its marvellous hospitality, that she was so widely known. Indeed the Visitors' Book at *Gunnawarra* might well be described as a page out of De Brett, plus a list of scientific, artistic and martial institutions' members.

In conclusion, she was a worthy member of the two old pioneer clans of Collins and Godschall Johnson, and one of whom we are, I think, justly proud.

E. MARIE IRVINE © *GUNNAWARRA* June 1949.

GLEN JOHNSON

(Jessie Glennie Godschall Johnson)

At *Fernleigh Station,* which is not far from the Port of Gladstone, Queensland, there was born on 29 April 1879 a tiny baby girl, the second of a family that was eventually to number ten.

Her mother Mrs William Godschall Johnson, was the second daughter of Mr Carden Collins of *Maroon Station* in the Richmond district by his first wife Mary Glennie, a niece of the Archdeacon Glennie after whom the famous *Glennie School for Girls* was named. Both families came from English county stock, who, for generations had been typical of their British race, and with associations reaching back to the signing of *Magna Carta* on the Collins side, and into the dim mists of the *Wars of the Roses* in the family records of the Johnsons.

Glen Johnson's maternal grandfather had his first introduction to Sydney when the ship, the *Three B's,* on which he was a mid-shipman, caught fire and was utterly destroyed in Farm Cove in 1814.

The new grand-daughter was so small that her grandfather, when she was proudly held up for his inspection, exclaimed that she looked "for all the world like a skinned possum", thereby rousing keen indignation among the circle of feminine relations. For all his unflattering remarks the baby thrived, and in a few months Jessie Glennie Godschall Johnson had developed a decided 'will to live' and was growing into a normal healthy infant.

Not that her struggle to survive was over, for when she was eighteen months old she crawled beneath a hammock in which her father was lying, and while he was in the act of getting out of it, the rope broke and he fell upon his child and narrowly escaped breaking her back. Yet in spite of this new threat to her life, she came to no harm, and today when she has celebrated her 71st birthday, this stately lady herself the mother of six children, is as active of mind and body as many women twenty years her junior.

Shortly after her fourth birthday the family left the station for Brisbane, where at Hamilton, a popular riverside suburb, they lived for some time near their old friends the Blackmans. Later still they settled down in one of the outer suburbs, Coopers' Plains. It was at Hamilton that Glen's active memory first manifested itself. She distinctly recalls hurting her back again, this time scratching it badly while crawling under a fence to visit Judge Chubb's family next door. She also remembers her father taking her on the veranda to see a large comet which she thinks was *Halley's Comet,* and also her father's joke with the Blackman girls when the children had mumps. The girls teased him, and said he would get them, and he said he would not. Next day he sat on the veranda huddled in a chair with red flannel round his throat. When the girls saw him, they danced with glee, and said, "We knew you would get them".

Here, too, she acquired her first governess, Miss Margaret Nosworthy, a sister of Robert Nosworthy, for many years General Manager of the great shipping firm, *Burns Philp and Coy.* Miss Nosworthy was a woman of character, and her teaching left a decided mark upon the minds of her scholars.

Eight years later came the great adventure. Mr Johnson accepted the management of *Stoneleigh,* a large cattle property carrying 15,000 head of cattle situated near Ingham, North Queensland, and he with his wife and family travelled up to the far North.

William Butler Godschall Johnson with Jess at Wairuna

Thereafter for some years, life flowed along as life does in such surroundings. More babies came, and there was much hard work, relieved at intervals by simple pleasures thoroughly enjoyed, and of course, a warm welcome, no fuss, but the cheerful 'take us as we are' which means so much to the visitor and traveller.

And presently there were nine brothers and sisters around the big table and as she grew up, and when Mary her elder sister married when Glen was seventeen, the second daughter became her Mother's right hand and as well, a capable assistant to her father in his cattle work.

About 1895, a friendship which still endures was begun with Eva MacDonnell who had come north to stay with her brother Mr A MacDonnell, a solicitor in Ingham, who later became a K.C. When Mr MacDonnell left for Cairns to start the firm which later was known as *MacDonnell, Harris and Hannam* (a brother Mr H.K.N. MacDonnell still carried on in Cairns), Miss MacDonnell came to *Stoneleigh* to teach the children until she could start nursing training at the *Charters Towers Hospital.* Carden was starting lessons and Earle was a little fellow. Their *Aunty Mac* became *Aunty Mate* - a name she liked and which Glen's children and grandchildren have continued.

A few months before Glen married; she (*Aunty Mate*) began her training. Her first Matronship was at Mt Garnet then a flourishing township. After doing her obstetric course at the *Royal Melbourne Hospital,* she became Matron of the *Cairns Hospital.* The *First World War* came and she served in Egypt, Lemnos, England and France.

It was while helping her father at one of the periodical musters that Glen met her future husband Thomas Joseph Good Atkinson, who was then manager of the *Valley of Lagoons Station.* The meeting was casual however, and it was not until some years later that they met again, and a romance had its birth that was to last them their life long.

After this second meeting, Tom Atkinson developed the habit of dropping in at *Stoneleigh,* and the chief incentive to such visits was clearly the attractions of Miss Glen Johnson. It was equally clear that Miss Johnson was not insensible of the charm of the visitor. Indeed, it is probable that but for an unfortunate accident, their engagement would have shortly been announced. Fate unfortunately intervened, and he who had intended to propose to the lady of his choice, was thrown from his horse and his head so severely injured that for days he lay unconscious, and when at last he struggled back to duty, he had good reason to fear that he had received a permanent brain injury.

Tom and Glen in about 1900

Suffering serious attacks of giddiness and sickness, his feelings at that time must have been something very near despair. How could he ask the girl he loved to link her life with a man threatened with mental trouble!

With a bitter but courageous reality, he reviewed his case and gave his verdict. He therefore remained silent, and Glen, who had come to love him, and had endured weeks of terrible anxiety as he lay ill, was perplexed and hurt when, on his seeming recovery, he did not speak the words she had come to expect. Therefore when her eldest sister and her husband (she had married her first cousin Ralph Johnson) invited her to accompany them to Europe, she was thankful to accept the invitation and to get away and perhaps forget the man who had seemingly no further interest in her. They sailed away on a long visit, and it looked as if the budding romance between her and Tom was to wither and die.

In the following year however, a happier fate was in store for them.

Tom's magnificent constitution slowly but surely overcame his injury. He lost his turns of sick vertigo and was soon again his own vigorous self. He therefore sought the best medical advice procurable, and to his immense joy received a clean bill of health and the assurance that no lasting injury had occurred.

While Miss Johnson was away in England, Tom and Lionel Micklem bought *Kangaroo Hills.* Therefore on her return home all obstacles having been removed, the way was clear for the two young people to take their happiness. The engagement was duly announced, and although the prospective bride had grave doubts about leaving her mother unaided in her task of rearing her family and managing her big household, especially as now another addition to the family was expected, Mrs Johnson herself had no doubts on the subject. Glen's first duty was to the man she had agreed to marry, and she would brook no delays. They were married at *Stoneleigh* by the Rev. Dore Bryant on 18 July, 1901. It was a happy gathering. Her sisters, Maud and Mabel were her bridesmaids and Mr Ernest E.D. White, eldest son of that fine old pioneer, Albert White of *Bluff Downs*, arrived from *Kangaroo Hills* with Tom to support his old friend. Another guest who arrived the day before the wedding was Ernest's sister, Maude, now Mrs Mills of *Panshanger*, Tasmania.

Early on the wedding morning, Tom and Ernest rode away to look at some travelling bullocks. Glen's young brother was so perturbed that he caught his pony and went after them. He thought there would be no wedding breakfast as they were going away. The bride's dress was of traditional white satin, worn with her mother's own veil, and her maids were also in white relieved with touches of pale blue. There was a gathering of about 40 relatives and friends, and with most of these guests to be accommodated under the home roof. The wedding like all such occasions entailed a great deal of work for the bride, her mother and sisters, whose only assistant was a somewhat inefficient Japanese in the kitchen.

Station people however, are not afraid of hard work, and the success of their labours made it very well worthwhile. The ceremony over and the register signed, the party sat down to enjoy toasts and speeches and the very excellent feast before them and the day went very well indeed. Tom and his wife enjoyed an extended honeymoon. They drove to *The Grange* 12 miles away lent by Mrs Stone, and caught the boat next day from Lucinda point to Townsville, and then to Sydney. Later they crossed the Tasman to New Zealand and after a short run through both islands, they returned from Invercargill to Hobart. A little time in the Apple Isle, and they crossed to Victoria and thoroughly enjoyed a trip to Warrnambool where Tom's uncle had a fine property *Ingemira.*

They were back in Melbourne for the cup when *Revenue* was the winner, and a month later arrived back at *Kangaroo Hills*, their first home. They had been away nearly four months. *Kangaroo Hills* belonged at that time to Lionel Micklem and Tom. It was an un-get-at-able spot. All their household goods had to be brought up by wagon from Townsville nearly a hundred miles away. In the winter of the next year Glen was expecting her first baby, which it had been decided should be born in Ingham, where medical and nursing aid was procurable.

As Tom was in the middle of a bullock muster, she set out with her father riding on the long rough journey, staying on the way with her sister, Mrs Ralph Johnson, and on 20 June 1902, her first daughter Eleanor Kate arrived. There was immense family rejoicing over the arrival of the little girl, but the young mother's recovery was slow, so it was fully three months before she felt able to face the long journey home. This time however, Tom was there to look after his wife and baby. They drove the buggy to the foot of the range, and from *Silver Valley*, where in a cottage on the property, Mr and Mrs Johnson (Senior) were living temporarily.

Here Glen enjoyed a week's rest with her parents while Tom hurried home to keep an eye on things there, but he was back in time to take them on the last climb up the steep track going about 30 miles in mountainous country. Up this they toiled, sometimes walking when the pinches were too sharp, Tom carrying his little daughter and her mother walking behind. At last they were home again, and *Kangaroo Hills* seemed a wonderful refuge after their journey. They were really home and there they remained until Nell was 14 months old. Then *Kangaroo Hills* was sold.

By this time, Tom was on the lookout for another property, and before he set out, took his wife and the baby over to *Wairuna*. They rode to *Wairuna* 55 miles away in August, 1903, taking nine pack horses and changes of riding horses. Nell was carried on a pillow in front of the saddle and on one of the packhorses was her pram as top load, the wheels having been taken off and put as top load on another horse.

They camped the night at a creek called Redbank, and Mr Frank Collins, a friend of the Atkinson family who had come to help them, passed many remarks about carrying a pram about and when he put a foot in each wheel in the dark going from his tent to the fire, he swore and said "Whatever do people carry prams for"?

Years afterwards when the same man was manager of *Wairuna,* and was taking home his first baby, he stayed with them at *Gunnawarra* the night. Glen repeated to him some of his remarks of that night when she saw a pram in the buckboard, adding, "You are lucky people being able to take it home all in one piece".

After staying a few days at *Wairuna* with Tom's brother, Henry and his wife Isabel, they went on to *Abergowrie* where Tom's second brother, Bob and his wife, Connie, lived. The Atkinson family were among the first families to take up land in the district.

Mr Atkinson Senior, had come from Port Fairy in Victoria accompanied by his young wife, shortly after the Collins brothers when they, accompanied by two Germans named Koch, were endeavouring to follow the track of Leichhardt the explorer. They missed the line however, and presently found themselves in a terrific tract of basalt country quite useless for grazing, and almost impossible to traverse. Eventually they extricated themselves and got back into the better land and settled down at what is now *Spring Creek* and *Brooklands.*

Incidentally, Leichhardt had gone on past what is now *Meadowbank Station* and Mt Laing (which he christened after one of his party) until he struck the Lynd River which he followed down to its mouth.

It is interesting to recall that at the time the Collins brothers were settling *Spring Creek,* news arrived of a rich gold discovery at Palmer River. Thereupon the two Germans promptly sold out whatever interest they had in the new selection and went off to open a general store on the new gold field.

It was about this time that Mr and Mrs Atkinson with their young daughter Elizabeth, born about 18 months before in Victoria, came to Bowen by boat in about the year 1863. A friend who wished to go into partnership with them had come with them, but finding conditions too hard he decided to return to Victoria. James Atkinson then met a Mr Ezra Firth in Bowen. He wished to take up country too, so they decided to go into partnership. Mr and Mrs Atkinson then left Bowen by spring cart. Reaching the Burdekin, they followed it up and passed what is now *Greenvale Station,* where a grandson, another James Atkinson now lives. A few miles further on they came to a fine lagoon quite close to the Burdekin and this they named *Firth's Lagoon.*

It was here in a dwelling they had built of bush timber and bark, that their eldest son, Henry was born. Although Mr Atkinson was away at the time she was not alone, and a young Englishman in their employ came to her assistance, as his wife was far too frightened to be of any use. Mrs Atkinson was however very strong, and three days after her son was born she was up and baking bread.

In an account published some years ago, the statement is made that they had come by ship to the mouth of the Burdekin River, and travelled up from there and at last has pitched their camp at what they called *Firth's Lagoon,* and here they settled down hoping to make it their home. However Mrs Tom Atkinson had the story of their journey from Bowen from the lips of Mrs James Atkinson, and as that lady had a remarkable memory, we may take it that the first account is correct. At all events they had not been very long at *Firth's Lagoon* when a visitor arrived in the person of Mr Scott, and from this gentleman they learned the unpleasant news that they had inadvertently 'squatted' upon land which was part of the country already selected by the Scott brothers, who had taken up the whole of the present *Valley of Lagoons.*

It must have been a severe shock to Mr and Mrs Atkinson, but there was nothing to be done but pack up and move on. With their small son and daughter, Elizabeth, and it is believed, the Firth's, they set out once more with all their belongings, seeking country further out, and this they found so

unexpectedly that they christened their new home, *Mount Surprise*. It was a valuable discovery. The property lies over the divide on the Gulf waters and about 150 miles from *Firth's Lagoon*. How these first pioneers did travel!

It is a grievous thing that, as these lines are being written, the wife of James Atkinson Senior, is no longer with us to tell of her many adventures. She was herself, the perfect pioneer, and the story as she could have told it of those first years in the almost unexplored wilds, would have made a valuable and thrilling chapter in the history of early settlements.

Kate Atkinson nee Good with Nan

Fear was a thing unknown to her, and one has only to picture ever so dimly the conditions of life in those early days, to realize and admire the initiative, the courage, and the adaptability, she brought to bear upon the task of establishing a household, rearing a family, caring for and encouraging her husband, and acting as nurse and consultant in all the troubles and perplexities that confront the new settler. She died in 1917 at the age of 93 at the home of her son Tom, and lies in the tiny cemetery at *Gunnawarra,* together with that son and a well-loved grandson.

For many years she reigned at *Mount Surprise*; her sons Robert and Tom were born. It is with the life of the third son Tom, the husband of Glen Johnson, that we are chiefly concerned. Suffice it to say that the business acumen of their father was inherited by the rising generation, and so sound was their judgment, and so stoutly did they pursue their grazier activities, that bank managers invariably backed the ventures of the whole family, and presently their name became a power in the land.

Mr James Atkinson left *Mount Surprise* and acquired *Farnham* in 1873. *Farnham* was on the Herbert River about 4 miles from the new township of Ingham. *Abergowrie* was also acquired and then *Wairuna*. Then came one day in April 1899, at the age of 74 that James Atkinson died at *Wairuna* where he was buried. The sons were left to take up the management of the various properties. Like all the first settlers, the men who opened up the Gulf Country had to gain their experience the hard way.

In the first years they experimented with sheep, but there was too much spear grass in that district to leave any hope of prosperity in the wool and mutton business. Therefore like the wise men they were, they lost no time, but cut their losses, got rid of the sheep, and stocked up with cattle, those hardy shorthorns that thrive so well on the highlands.

A nephew of Mrs James Atkinson tells the following story. His Uncle John Good came to Australia about 1840 and was one of the first settlers in the Warrnambool district of Victoria. After securing a property *Ingemira*, he returned to his home land at *Rock Grove* near Cork in Ireland and brought two

of his five sisters back with him to his primitive home in Victoria. A bullock dray was their only conveyance.

One sister soon became Mrs Fraser, (his mother). At *Ingemira*, the sister kept house for their brother and shared with him all the hardships and trials of his pioneering life till that never forgotten day - *Black Thursday* - when everything was burnt to the ground. They made light of their troubles and said they were lucky in saving their lives.

This nephew was born on 1 August, 1854, and remembers his Aunt Kate being married to Mr James Atkinson at his father's farm and they're going to live on a farm between Warrnambool and Port Fairy. Before long, they sold out and went to live in North Queensland. About 1873 on Mr Atkinson's advice, he went to North Queensland also. Mr Atkinson had visited the family in 1866. Mr Todd went back to *Mount Surprise* with him. This man was later murdered by the blacks.

With their original venture, the Atkinson's had been associated with a Mr Firth who now severed his connection with his partners. No record exits of the reason for his departure, but as his decision to sell out coincides with the changeover to cattle, it is possible that a difference of opinion upon the policy to be pursued may have been the deciding factor. These were wonderful times. The virgin lands, almost illimitable in acreage, its possibilities unknown or only vaguely guessed at, were there for the taking, and each man picked as much as he required, and by hard work and courage brought the wilderness into production.

They it was, who laid the solid foundations of national prosperity, and notwithstanding the present day outcry (chiefly from people with neither the courage nor the self-sacrifice of these pioneers) against what they are pleased to call 'land grabbers' and 'usurpers', those hardy men and women have laid us this present generation of Australians, under a debt of gratitude that it would ill become us to forget.

To them, and incidentally to the banks of those times who financed their enterprises, we must realize the credit due in the founding of many of our best herds and flocks. For in those days the banker was far from the rapacious ogre that he is pictured at times. Instead, he was a well-trained official who knew very well indeed, how best to foster industry, and often to act as guide, philosopher and friend.

Tom Atkinson like his brothers was a born cattle man. At the age of 25, he was considered so competent he was offered and accepted the management of the *Valley of Lagoons*, the valuable property then owned by Messrs Fenwick and Ramsay. It adjoined *Wairuna*.

At about the same time, he made the acquaintance of Lionel Micklem (a brother of that fine scholar and cleric Dr Micklem, MA for many years rector of St James Church, Sydney), and a mutual liking developed between them while Micklem was a jackaroo on the *Valley of Lagoons Station.* He had just arrived from England. The result of their friendship was that between them they bought *Kangaroo Hills* from MacDowell. This was about 1898, and considering the calamity that had overtaken the cattle in the previous year, it might have appeared a rash purchase. Sound husbandry however, overcame even that disaster.

The invasion of the *Texas Cattle Tick* into Queensland in 1895, was no doubt brought from across the Northern Territory where a stray buffalo from the herds on Melville Island, had strayed or been brought onto the mainland. Travelling stock once-infected spread the scourge. The results were devastating. Animals became heavily infected and rows of these parasites could be seen on neck, stomach, and legs. High fever supervened with rapid loss of condition, extreme debility and death. Hundreds of thousands of valuable stock were lost, and cattlemen looked on helplessly for a while.

Not for long however, for they were men of action, and soon they were experimenting with means of relief. In this, the veterinary branch of the *Queensland Stock Department* swung into line, while Governments of neighbouring states, fearful of a like visitation, also lent valuable material aid. The general aim was to produce a dip, which while destroying the pest would not harm the cattle. Finally the department suggested a mixture of arsenic, soda and oil, and this proved so successful that deep pits were dug all over the country and filled with the mixture. Crushes and draining yards erected, and very soon the systematic dipping of all stock became a routine duty all over the north, and later the central and some southern portions of the state.

Barrier fences and stringent measures against the importation of stock suspected of infection, plus the colder climate checked the trouble within Queensland and on a line across Central Australia. Nothing to date, not even the highly efficacious DDT dip, has given more than relief for a limited period. That unfortunately is the position to the present day. Even a delegation of trained practical men who at the Government's request went to Texas and studied the trouble at its source, came back to publish the unpalatable fact that the evil had come to stay.

Tom Atkinson, ever in the van of the battle was already waging a successful campaign with a recipe of his own - arsenic, soda and fat. In spite of this serious handicap the cattlemen held on and prospered. The Atkinson brothers had by this time acquired *Cashmere*, and while Glen and her baby were at *Abergowrie*, Bob Atkinson and his family set off to take up residence there. What with children, stock and retainers, furniture and all the gear of station requirements, it was an imposing cavalcade, and the family still laugh as they remember the day the R.J. Atkinson's left *Abergowrie* for *Cashmere*.

While they were busy settling in at *Cashmere*, Tom was still seeking country for a new home of his own. He went first of all, over the Divide and on to the Gulf waters, inspecting portions of such well-known properties as *Victoria* and *Augusta Downs*, and for a while it seemed that this country would be Glen's next home. It was very far out, and the isolation would have been even greater than at *Kangaroo Hills*. She seemed to have been quite unperturbed at the prospect. It was with her, a case of 'wither thou goest'. While the purchase was under consideration, word was received from a bank manager in Townsville that a property, *Gunnawarra* in the Herbert District, had come onto the market through the death of its owner. The place regarded as good cattle country, comprised 600 square miles and adjoined *Cashmere*. Immediately the price and terms could be ascertained, they closed with the offer and *Gunnawarra Homestead*, built in 1878 by one Broad for Scott Brothers, became the permanent home of Tom and his wife.

It is nowadays, something of a museum piece. One of the last of those old slab houses with round uprights and rafters, and in those days a well pitched shingle roof - those lovely shingle roofs that were so sound, so picturesque and, from which drained such water. Why oh why was it necessary to discard them for iron!

It was a fair sized structure even then, with three bedrooms, dining room, store, kitchens and so forth, but it was not by any means a home which Tom considered worthy of the lady of his choice, and he was already dreaming of additions that would afford her further comforts. First of all however, there were weightier matters to be considered. There were at that time three selections on the original run – *Glen Harding, Native Wells, Pretty Plains,* and *GW Swamp,* the latter said to have been so named by Leichhardt after one of his party.

Tom found little difficulty in buying them out. They were in fact less than living areas, but with their acquisitions the value of *Gunnawarra* was materially increased. (*Glen Harding* went to R.J. Atkinson when the Atkinson Brothers dissolved partnership). It became more valuable still a few years later,

when under its new and progressive management, the stock was materially improved through a judicious choice of stud bulls and breeder cows.

In the first year there were so many jobs. Fences needed much repair and new yards had to be built, but at last the house was a first priority, and new bedrooms for themselves and nurseries for the children were provided. It was time too, for the babies were coming along fairly regularly. There were ups and downs of course, wet seasons and dry, variations in price due to world economy, fires and floods, just as there are today. Never- the-less the old home prospered. In 1912 the Atkinson Brothers bought *Olive Vale,* in 1914, *St Ronan's.* The brothers dissolved their partnership in 1916, Tom and Bob remaining in partnership, while Henry took *Greenvale* which they had bought about 1915. Bob and Tom had *Wairuna*, *Mt Laing, Olive Vale* and *Lava Plains* as well as *Gunnawarra*, *Wairuna*, and *Cashmere*. In 1920 they divided (them) up except *Olive Vale,* which was sold just before Tom's death. They bought bullocks from *Olive Vale* every year to fatten on *Cashmere* and *Gunnawarra*.

Perhaps their greatest setback came in 1915, for in the long drought of that year there were terrible losses. Careful management, hard work and stout hearts pulled them through. Not an animal was bogged and died but was skinned, for hides brought a pound each in those days, so the skinning of animals became the chief activity for a long time. It was desperately hard work for everyone. That however is life outback.

When the rains came, Tom went off to *Abingdon Downs* and bought 1,000 head of good breeding cows, and good seasons following, prosperity showed its smiling face once more in a country rich and green with tall grass. They had the need of good times, for there was now a growing family round the big table and the expenses of education had to be met.

Nell the eldest was growing up, and there was Bill, born on 5 October 1905; little Bruce who arrived on 23 June 1907; Jessie on 12 March 1912; Nan as a New Year's gift on 31 December 1913; Geoffrey on 17 June 1917; and lastly Vernon on 24 January 1923. It was a cheery family with only one face missing, for little Bruce for all the care bestowed on him by a devoted mother and nurses, had slipped away to lie in the little cemetery. This was a tragedy as he was a lovely, gentle and a very clever child and full of fun.

Tom had taken possession of *Gunnawarra* in 1903, and Glen had arrived the following January. She was still far from strong when she arrived from *Cashmere* with her baby girl. She also brought with her a half- caste maid Fanny, who for the next 18 years was her trusted maid, looking after successive babies with a devotion that only these Aboriginals can give. Her mistress and her family were her world, and she shared their joys and sorrows, their anxieties and good fortune, as one of themselves. She finally married an emigrant from Holstein and brought up a large family of her own. Her eldest son fought with distinction in the *Second World War* through the Middle East, where after a narrow escape he was preserved to come back covered with honour to his adoring parents.

Glen with Leo Bruce, Tom with Bill, Kate with Nell
(Two ladies at back unknown) at Gunnawarra 1911

In the days when the family were young, Tom was a gallant citizen. He was so strong, 'Cast Iron Tom' they called him. Nothing seemed to tire him. He was a magnificent horseman, and on one occasion rode one of his favourite horses, a mare called *Bracelet*, over a 6 foot stick at the Townsville Show, thereby establishing an Australian record for those days. Good horsemanship did not always prevent accidents unfortunately, and Tom met with disaster on one occasion that might easily have had direful consequences. He was thrown and kicked in the face, and as he lay insensible one of the little black girls went rushing down to the house to find her mistress, to whom she announced, "Oh Missus! Missus! Boss him dead".

A cheerful announcement for his wife, and doubly terrible as she was expecting another baby after three years from the birth of her first girl. Horrified, she set out for the scene of the smash only to be met by the supposedly dead husband very much alive, but with his face streaming with blood from an ugly gash across one cheek. He made light of the whole affair and said, "It would soon heal up". Glen and Matron MacDonnell, who was on holiday at *Gunnawarra*, thought otherwise and their advice prevailing, there was a minor operation. Matron put a number of stitches into the gash while Glen held the edges together. So admirably was the job done that little or no scar remained once it was healed.

Glen with Bill, Nell, Jesse and Nan Gunnawarra Fernery about 1916.

And so life full of work and interest passed year by year, and the growing up of her children, and the hundred and one duties that fell to her lot had little effect upon the appetite for wholesome amusement, and a certain gypsy-like carefree-ness that the chatelaine of this country home possessed. She was

always to bundle her family into the buggy, or latterly, the car, and go off picnicking, to fish in the rivers or gather ferns and the wild things she loved in the scrub. Indeed her enjoyment of race meetings or other station gatherings was such as to give, but little idea of her steadfast courage when trouble was at hand. If I was asked to describe the outstanding characteristic of the heroine of the story, I would I think, sum her up as the possessor of an almost unbelievable calm. This, and patience for she is patient beyond all praise.

She is prompt, determined and authoritative, when the moment demands it, but she seldom raises her voice or loses her temper. Yet her courage, resource and love of adventure are immense. She has not in fact, even a bowing acquaintance with fear, and she possesses to a marked degree another unusual virtue, tolerance. Full of charity and understanding, she is in short, a great citizen, a great friend and a great lady.

And this calm comes surely from her mother and maternal great grandmother Sophia Collins, for her great grandfather Captain Thomas Collins who saw Sydney for the first time as a 'young gentleman' on board the ship, *Three B's* in 1814, was as peppery a customer as one could meet. His wife, however, who in her youth was a belle of Bath, England, and who loved and followed her sailor across the world in 1830, was renowned in the early pioneer days in Brisbane, as one who continually poured the oil of conciliation upon troubled waters, and covered the outbursts of her irascible husband with a smile and good humour.

Geoff and Vernon

Glen's own mother too was placid, so that she also faced storm, and stress of a life of constant change, without any of the strain which a hasty temper lays upon its possessor. As to her patience, Glen was to expend it to its utmost limit to the various natives, men and women who constituted almost the only available help on the stations in those early times. She loved and understood them, and *Gunnawarra* became under her rule, a haven of help and happiness for these primitive people.

Many a dusky maiden who has become a useful and in many cases a valuable and creditable citizen, owes not only her skill, but her education and her excellent morale to this gentle Matriarch who rules

today as she has ruled absolutely for nearly half a century. Today in the council of the estate of which she is Chairman of Directors, her sound advice softly spoken, is respected by her sons and daughters alike.

Vernon in the saddle shed at Gunnawarra.

Left a widow while her two youngest sons were yet school-boys, with all the anxieties of looking after a property carrying 10,000 head of cattle, with momentous decisions to make and the endless detail of management too, she occupies a unique position in the pastoral life of the state. Of her hospitality it is unnecessary to speak. A glance at her Visitors' Book tells its own tale. Therein can be seen the record of an almost uninterrupted stream of visitors. The list includes denizens of Government House, of stately English homes, and travellers from many lands.

Bill Atkinson off to war 1940

Many a member of the Australian Army during the recent war seems to have sought and found rest and recreation at the *Gunnawarra Homestead.* The harassed commander or the simple digger, the aircraft mechanic, the questing sailor or flying ace, the weary doctor or nurse – all were sure of the same warm welcome, and all have borne testimony to their appreciation of this touch of real home atmosphere vouchsafed to them in a wilderness of loneliness, discomfort and danger. An amusing little

story typifies this appreciation. An American commander spent a restful weekend there. On his departure, he said, "I'll never forget you. I asked for one egg and you gave me two".

There were 26,000 men camped on the Tableland during the war. You can see the remains of the huge camp today. Ruined fire places and sheds that were once picture shows, Officers' messes, hospitals, gaols and army canteens, and hundreds of the men quartered there who had the privilege of a visit to the *Gunnawarra Homestead,* are ready to tell you of what it meant to them. The duck shoots, the pig hunts, the dingo chases, the games of tennis, the singsongs in the big dining room and better than all, the real beds, and the unforgettable home-cooked food, as well as many a precious gift of prime meat and garden products to vary the weary monotony of army bread and bully beef.

And not alone the army, drovers, horse and cattle buyers, tourists, parties of anxious travellers rushing some beloved invalid to hospitals at the coast, they all remember the sympathetic help they received at the homestead. The old uneven structure with its wealth of tropical foliage, its summer glory of Bougainvillea and Venusta, its lovely blue Waterlilies in great bowls that decorate every room including the big open air dining lounge, where so many jolly gatherings have taken place. And over all reins this intrepid lady, the tale of whose adventures could supply a succession of high lights to any script writer busy upon an authentic film of country life.

On 11 September 1928 came the first wedding in the family. Nell was married to Afton Westcott who had come to *Gunnawarra* as a jackaroo. Earle Johnson who was then head stockman, considers he was the keenest jackaroo he ever trained. Afton went to various stations for further experience and took his bride to live at the *Valley of Lagoons*. The marriage was the occasion of a large gathering of friends and relatives, many of whom were accommodated at the homestead. Rev. Wilfred Belcher who succeeded Rev. John Feetham as Bishop of North Queensland, officiated at the ceremony.

Nell like her mother before her, had been her mother's and father's right-hand man, so her marriage left a big gap in the family circle not easily filled as Jessie and Nan were still schoolgirls.

The year 1930 brought grievous sorrow to the family, for in that year Tom Atkinson was killed. At the time Nancy was the only daughter at home, as Jess was staying with Nell and Afton on their orange orchard at Lisarow. An accident had forced Afton to give up station work and Tom had advanced the money for him to take over this orchard.

Tom went up to the stock yard to help draft cattle that had been mustered the day before. One cow was charging a lot and had been hard to keep in the mob. This cow was the first to go into the yard where Tom was working the gate. Someone called "Look out"! and he turned and saw the cow coming, but was a split second too late. He said afterwards, he supposed he was not as quick as he used to be. One horn penetrated the thigh but not deeply, the other missed while the middle part of the poll or head caught him against the fence across the back. Vernon then 7 years of age, was sitting on the fence and was the only one who witnessed the accident.

One of the men galloped down to the house and Glen and Nan hurriedly took the car to the stockyard and met Tom walking with help, and looking dreadfully white and drawn. He assured Glen it was not much, and got into the car and sat down. With Nan's help he walked into his room and they dressed the wound.

Vernon seemed to realize how serious it was, for he threw his arms round his mother's neck and said, "Daddy can't get better. You didn't see that cow bump him". Glen begged Tom to let her get a plane, but he said he would be alright and he did not wish to go to hospital. Nan had a job to keep him in bed

and told him the wound would not heal if he walked about. Then he said if Dr Henderson was in Cairns he would like him to come up. Dr Henderson came at once, and again Tom wanted to get up. He was not allowed to do so. Dr Henderson did not think it was anything serious as Tom was so bright and there were no indications of internal injury.

On the next day there seemed to be such indications, so Dr Henderson rang Dr Clarke who came up accompanied by the Matron and necessary instruments - thus prepared to operate. After the operation, Dr Clarke said a huge kidney stone had been smashed and everything indicated that the kidney which had been injured when Tom was in his 20s had not been functioning. Both doctors assured Glen that there would have been little hope if he had consented to fly to Cairns, yet they gave her a gleam of hope for his recovery at first. Dr Clarke said that in all his large practice he had never met a braver man. About 7 am on June 14th, Glen, Nan, and Dr Clarke were in his room when he asked the doctors to join him in a rum and milk. Nan got the milk and Tom directed the making of drinks. They chatted together and then Tom thought he would like a smoke. Nan filled his pipe and the talk went on till suddenly he breathed his last.

Tom had had so many kicks and falls and had always made light of them. He was buried in the little cemetery at *Gunnawarra* beside his mother, and upon Glen now fell the whole responsibility of her growing family and the big cattle station.

It is true that management in those days was simpler, and it was possible as well to acquire an efficient staff. Nevertheless those who know the difficulties of controlling a property of that size, will realize that the task laid upon her was one before which her heart might well quail. That it did not, is yet another proof of the extraordinary quiet courage of this astonishing woman.

Her eldest son Will was in Brisbane at the time of his father's death. Though a good cattleman, he was deeply interested in flying and obtained a pilot's licence. As his interests were thus divided, she decided to get Mr Will Braithwaite as manager, as Tom had considered him one of the best cattlemen in the North. When Will married Violet Hides of Cairns, he was put in charge of *Meadowbank* and lived there. Violet however, died in childbirth a year later. Will broken-hearted, left the North and being a good mechanic, took a position in Brisbane in the motor business. He later married Helen Bryant, an English girl and a Bachelor of Science. After their first son was born, they came to *Gunnawarra* for a while until they bought a small grazing property, *Evelyn* near Ravenshoe. This was sold when Will went overseas with the RAAF and Helen went to Melbourne.

Fortunately for Glen, her husband had been one of those men, alas, all too few who treat their wives as active partners in their businesses. Invariably before making any momentous decision, husband and wife had talked things over. Each however, refrained from unduly forcing their view of the matter. Not infrequently Tom found his final action influenced by the sound reason of his wife.

When therefore she had to take over the sole management of the station she did at least understand the financial position, and had altogether acquired a good deal of the practical knowledge of a grazier's craft.

Her father also was a great help to her in the many perplexities which confront the stock owner – the vagarious of prices, the variety of the seasons, when to buy and when to sell, when to spend and what to keep. Her co-executors were the *Union Trustees* and they and her banker were always ready to advise her.

Lagoon House was built for the Head Stockman as he had four children. A couple of years after Mr Braithwaite became manager he married the cook. He was an old man and did not seem as capable as he had been, so Glen decided to hand over the management to Geoff who had worked as a jackaroo on *Wairuna* and *Spring Creek* for two years.

Lagoon House in Moonlight – note bark roof – Gunnawarra 1935

Glen's youngest brother Earle, who in Tom's opinion was a very capable man with stock and horses, became head stockman. He had been in charge of *St Ronan's* until the bank forced its sale. His wife taught her own son and the Westcott children - the depression having made things too difficult on the orchard at Lisarow, the Westcott's returned to North Queensland and Afton took a position at *Gunnawarra* (as Nell was a partner in the property). When Jess married he took over the books from her.

At the time of Tom's death, Glen had a Chinese cook and gardener who had been with them for 12 years. As he wanted to go back to China and the bank wanted expenses cut to a minimum, Nan took over the cooking. Glen's old friend Matron MacDonnell came to live at *Gunnawarra* when Nan and Jess married, and remained there until 1950 when she went to her sister in Sydney.

Charlie the Chinese cook and gardener 1931

In all her loneliness, and the feeling of desolation that must often have overtaken her, she braced herself to action and in that constant labour found relief. She possessed to a nicety the open mind that is not above learning from others, and an almost uncanny gift of winnowing the grain from the chaff where advice was proffered. Any passing irritation over inefficient service or occasional disloyalty, could not blind her to the many good and faithful servants who meant so much to her. She was quick to show her gratitude, and among her governesses alone, she discovered lifelong friends. They stayed with her for years - valuable and comfortable companions. I think it was her deep love for country life,

her garden and later her handicrafts that carried her through the long years of anxious responsibility until her sons grew to man's estate.

Until then there was little time for grieving. Station books had to be kept, returns made, stores to be ordered for the big establishment. There were the ever-recurring pay days to prepare for, drovers to be engaged, and buyers to interview, all in addition to the care of her family. Yet in spite of death and suffering life must go on, and with the passing years prosperity has come to the house, and his sons are there following the fine example set them of intelligent and progressive husbandry.

To certain people, adventures even when hazardous are the breath of life.....and the subject of this story is one of them. She certainly had her share of excitement. I think she deliberately sought it. There was for instance the time she set out to visit her daughter at *Meadowbank,* thirty miles away. There had been heavy rain that season. Indeed the country had enjoyed splendid summer rains followed by further good falls in July. It was just bad luck that Madam should have to set forth in the utility, with only her black maid as companion on the eve of a severe downfall.

They had travelled only a few miles when the first shower fell, light at first, but getting heavier and finally culminating in such a deluge as only the tropics can produce. It was difficult enough driving the heavy vehicle while they were on a good road and in hard country, but later when they struck the black soil conditions became desperate.

They were on the most indistinct track winding in and out of the timber, and had gone three-quarters of a mile past a lonely wayside hut, when at a fork in the road they took a wrong turning and went plunging into a deep bog. It was impossible to attempt to get the truck out in that fierce downpour without the help of a man, so back they trudged to the hut which was usually occupied by a boundary rider and a black boy.

One can imagine their feelings when they discovered the door fastened and not a soul in sight. It was however a shelter from the storm, and they managed to force the door and went in. It was now getting dark and they decided to remain there till the morning, and had visions of a welcome fire and perhaps some 'grub'. They had very little with them. Alas! Not only was the cupboard bare, but there was no fireplace, only a wretched stove which gave out no heat whatever, and the night was bitterly cold. Mrs Atkinson had not even a rug with her, but Una was better off. She had brought her blankets. All Glen had was a warm dressing gown, and tactfully declining to share Una's blankets, she rolled the gown round her and settled down to endure as best as she could, a night both miserable and seemingly endless.

The dawn came at last and with it a brilliant morning with a severe frost. They were early astir and as no help could be expected, they set about helping themselves as is the habit of the women in the bush. One of the contributing circumstances of their bogging was the fact that before leaving the homestead at *Gunnawarra,* they had loaded sacks of clean sand into the already heavy vehicle intending it as a contribution to a sand pit for the babies of *Meadowbank.* Now it was this loading that was to help them out of their trouble.

First of all however, they had to deal with one of the chains which had slipped from the tyre and wound itself round the axle. Now, no native has any initiative in a crisis like this, so it was Glen who, laying the bags emptied of their sand under the truck, clambered underneath and after half an hour's battle managed to dislodge the chains. Next the sand was flung against the wheels to give the car a grip, and at last with a mighty heave it wrenched itself out of the slush and ran itself once more onto solid ground. It was an exhausting struggle, but they were soon on their way again and arrived in due

course at the station. One may be permitted to wonder what the menfolk at *Meadowbank* thought when they heard the story. There is however, another and more dramatic story on record.

It was in 1933 that Mrs Atkinson decided to take on a couple of women guests and her daughters to visit her sister in law, Mrs Henry Atkinson at *Greenvale*. Henry it will be remembered had been born at *Firth's Lagoon* shortly after the arrival of his parents in the district, so that he was one of the first white children to see the light in that part of the country.

On this occasion, one of her guests was an English woman, a friend of Miss West of the *Frensham School* Mittagong, and Mrs Atkinson was anxious to show her some real Australian sport. They drove across the Burdekin River and had a good run up to the *Valley of Lagoons*, where they spent an enjoyable three days with Mr and Mrs Chapman. From there they went on to *Greenvale*, another thirty odd miles, and here they spent their time shooting, hunting, and fishing, and generally provided their English visitor with a reliable cross section of North Queensland life as it is on the tableland.

Rain commenced while they were there, and it was against Henry Atkinson's advice that they set out on their return, for as he pointed out, the river was already rising, and when this happens on the Burdekin it is a rash man who will prophesy how high it will go. Nor was this all, for the party which also included the Matron of the *Cairns Hospital* received a further warning from Mrs Chapman at the *Valley of Lagoons* where we stayed the night. "You may not get through" they said "and what then"? (Mr Chapman was away).

Glen laughed. "I'll get through somehow", she declared, and the intrepid guests were all for taking the road. They did however borrow an axe and a length of rope in case of trouble. It was a fortunate impulse. The river crossing was about 10 miles from the homestead, and when they arrived the flood was already coming down, and half a dozen other cars were already marooned – some on each side. There was no possible chance of either driving or hauling a car across the water. It was already too deep.

Now amongst the disgruntled assembly was a local road engineer, a council man. Like a very large number of Civil Servants, he was disinclined to do anything out of his usual routine, and appeared completely devoid of any suggestion to cope with the dilemma. He was quite resigned to remain where he was and quite apathetic about making any effort whatever to escape. Not so the chatelaine of *Gunnawarra*! She had no intention of camping out for an indefinite period.

When she consulted him as to the possibility of erecting a temporary bridge, he pooh-poohed the idea as quite ridiculous. He looked a little non-plussed however, when she quietly pointed out that if they did not get across that day, the river would probably rise further in the night and that it very well might remain in flood for a month. They had little food and less camping equipment. Finally in response to her insistence, he admitted somewhat reluctantly, that it might be possible to build some temporary structure. "Well", exclaimed the determined woman, "Let us get busy". If we cut down that tree, (pointing to one conveniently close to the water,) we can float it down against these two, (indicating two others, one on each side of the stream,) and that tree can be tied against those two next ones. We can than cut sapling and tie them across (there is plenty of old wire in that fence) and my girls will help you".

Finally, prodded into action, the engineer took the axe and one man and set to work. Meanwhile the occupants of the other cars, a party of stalwart cane cutters looked on, but evinced no inclination to assist. Mrs Atkinson addressed them. "I don't know whether you intend to stay here for three weeks or a month" she said, "because unless you do, I think you might lend us a hand to make the bridge".

"You don't seem to realize what a long hungry time you may have". The majority continued to smile superciliously, but ultimately one man volunteered to help. Meanwhile Mrs Atkinson's two girls had got into their 'bathers' and soon they were up to their waists in water, guiding the floating logs into position. Thus completed, they and the other women began hauling the saplings which the engineer was cutting and laying them across the two big logs. This at last was too much for the cane cutters, and now a good team of them came forward, and they soon had a very passable bridge. Finally the corduroy decking was in place and sufficiently laced with wire to ensure a tolerable safe roadway. One problem remained.

The bridge which was flush with the ground at the further bank was a good two feet off the near bank, and this had to be negotiated before the cars would be upon the decking. Again the men of the party looked nonplussed. Again the initiative Mrs Atkinson came to the rescue. Somehow she always had a solution. "Look here" she said, "while you have been working, I have been looking around. Up there, (pointing to a ridge) is a long hollow log which has been cut lengthways and forms a trough. If you cut that in half we can lean it up against the bridge on this end, and drive the cars up that". The men looked horrified at the idea.

"Anyway I'll drive mine and if I get up alright, you can follow". But this the engineer would not permit. "If you are determined to go" he said, "l'll drive it for you". No one else volunteered to go. It did look dangerous. The lady was insistent. "It may slip when the car is half way up" he warned her. "No, it won't" retorted the lady. "Some of us can hold it in position". And so with willing hands holding the improvised ramp, the car mounted without mishap and was driven triumphantly to the other side of the swollen stream. The people on the other side cheered, one man fired a shot and one said, "Sydney Harbour Bridge, I am De Groote".

By this time it was getting (towards) dusk, and neither the road engineer nor any of the others was prepared to risk another journey. In spite of Mrs Atkinson's warning that the river might submerge their bridge before the morning, they preferred to remain where they were, and settled down to an uncomfortable night. The *Gunnawarra* party went gaily on to *Cashmere Station* on the Herbert River. They had promised to be there that night. They crossed the river in a boat and arrived for tea at 11pm.

As it happened, the river did not rise enough to matter, and the remaining cars did get over in the morning, but I think the quality of their courage and recourse showed rather dimly against that of our heroine. She had told her brother-in-law that she "would get through somehow" and she made good her boast.

Looking back through the many exciting and often dangerous journeys which she has undertaken, she recalls the complete nightmares she suffered in two expeditions undertaken during the period, when her husband was suffering so acutely from asthma. It was considered imperative by his medical attendant that he should have a course of injections. This necessitated a visit to Herberton once a month. The distance was about fifty miles over a road that was not only rough but boggy in wet weather.

On their first trip, the party consisted of Glen (who was) driving, her husband and her two younger boys and a jackaroo working on the place; they also had a passenger, a man suffering from appendicitis who needed an immediate operation. They camped the first night at *Hot Springs* on the Herbert River. Next morning after a run of about ten miles their troubles began. The differential broke. They were using an elderly 1917 Chandler. The jackaroo and the boy set out to walk a couple of miles to where there was a small post office and a telephone. Here they would call for help. The party in the

car could do nothing but settle themselves down with what patience they could muster until help arrived.

Hour after hour dragged on, with no sign of their messengers or help. They were getting desperate when a half Chinese lad came riding along, and he in turn offered to go after the jackaroo and his mate and find what was delaying them. Somewhat doubtful of the Chinese boy's ability to cope with the situation, Mrs Atkinson finally persuaded him to hire her the horse, and setting off at a smart trot on her very rough mount, she soon arrived at the little post office to find it deserted and locked, while the young lad stood helplessly by. The jackaroo had already walked on again to try and find someone to help.

Mrs Atkinson was in no mood to suffer further delay. She promptly prized open a window, climbed into the mail room and to the telephone. A few minutes and she had the doctor on the line, and consulted him about the appendix case so that the man might get prompt attention upon arrival in Herberton. Then a brief appeal for help in their own dilemma and she rang off. It isn't every woman who can boast that she has broken into a post office and got away with it. Having notified the doctor of their trouble her next business was to find the missing jackaroo, but before she caught up with him, she saw what he had missed, a man camped with a truck. This Good Samaritan agreed to drive back to the disabled Chandler, and pick up the weary occupants. This accomplished and the horse returned to his Chinese master, they made a successful run into Herberton. It is satisfactory to know that the appendix case came through in spite of his adventure.

There were however more troubles ahead of the party from *Gunnawarra* on the way back. They had now with them on the truck a mechanic, one D'Arcy, and carried the necessary spare parts for the repair of their car, and as soon as the Chandler was pronounced to be in good running order off they went on the road home, but they had travelled only a few miles when their help was sought by a man and a boy. The latter had broken his leg just above the knee, and the fracture was complicated. They were awaiting the arrival of an ambulance, and begged the Atkinson's to take them back to meet it. This they immediately agreed to do, and once again the old car was heading for Herberton. At last the ambulance hove into sight and only then having seen the lad made comfortable and loaded into the big car, did they finally set out on the long run home.

At a later date, Mrs Atkinson, who always drove the car, had an even more trying experience. On this occasion they had two of the boys with them, Geoff the elder, and Vernon aged five. On the rough track they broke a spring. There was no hope of immediate repair, so they struggled along to the nearest telephone and engaged the car belonging to a Mr Cook to pick them up. There had been heavy rain, and they were bogged for hours on and off, and anyone who has experienced the exhausting job of getting a car along in boggy country will appreciate their troubles. When at last they arrived at 'Dry River' it was found to be a banker and far too deep to attempt crossing, therefore back they had to go to *Innot Hot Springs.*

To make matters worse, Tom was by this time very ill, so ill in fact that it became imperative to give him an injection, and so agitated was his wife by this time, that without noticing that the youngest boy had put his hand in the doorway, she slammed the door upon the child's thumb. Needless to say the screams of pain that resulted only increased the mother's and father's nerves, and even when the first agony of the crushed thumb had subsided, the little boy was suffering acutely from toothache.

Almost distracted by this time, Mrs Atkinson sought among their luggage for something to relieve the pain. There was nothing, but at last in desperation they heated some candle grease and with this plugged the cavity. The effect was magical. The exclusion of air brought almost instant relief and very

soon the unfortunate child was comfortably asleep. Finally they crept back to her brother's home *Mandalee,* and he drove the party to Ravenshoe where they caught a train for Herberton. Even yet their ill luck pursued them to the railway, for on the drive in they broke a swingle bar and this meant another delay. It was however an easy matter for a man like Earl Johnson, with his unfailing initiative to put this right, and so they caught their train.

Glen must have been well-nigh at breaking point on her arrival. At any rate the doctor realised that such trips were altogether too much for her. He therefore gave her a course of instructions in giving the necessary injections to her husband, providing her with sufficient of the necessary drug to render any more such journeys unnecessary.

Of all these trips which Mrs Atkinson undertook, however, none were as daring as her cross country trip from *Gunnawarra* to Stanthorpe, South Queensland, where her husband was undergoing a course of treatment. On this occasion she travelled a distance of 1000 miles with her children, a governess and a black nursemaid in the car, frequently camping out at night, rigging tents, changing tyres, and driving over roads of incredible vileness. Mr Atkinson had gone down some months previously, accompanied by his eldest daughter. The amount of digitalis which the doctor had been administrating began to affect the patient's heart, and the doctor thereupon wrote to Mrs Atkinson advising her to go down, and to this plan was added that of the husband himself.

Tom did not wish his wife to make the journey by car, as he considered the direct route entailed driving over country altogether unsuitable for a woman, but when did Glen ever consider cross country as risks. She therefore loaded the family, an Aboriginal nurse and governess, plus food and camping gear, a drum of water and petrol tins into the car and off they went.

They were not alone. A Mr Rollinson who had invented and was trying to place on the market an automatic self- sealing tube, had rung up *Gunnawarra* to ask that he and his party which included his wife and others, in all four car loads, might break their journey to Brisbane beneath its hospitable roof. He was of course made welcome. What traveller was not? His arrival was in fact opportune, for Mrs Atkinson immediately asked to join the cavalcade. He was delighted, and so it was arranged.

The journey on which they embarked so light-heartedly was even if they had all the good luck in the world, a terrific undertaking for a woman. She had to be driver, commissariat officer, as well as navigator, and responsible for minor running repairs. Quite apart from the fatigue of driving (and one needs to know some of the North Queensland roads today, in order to even faintly realize what they were like in those days) they had to camp out more than once, and that meant erecting the tent, cooking a meal, getting the children washed, fed, and bedded down before the adults could rest. Next morning all this had to be repeated in reverse before they set out on another long day's trip.

Their route was roughly up the winding river to Hughenden and Winton, through St George and Tallwood to Stanthorpe at least for the *Gunnawarra* party. One of the other cars left them at Mitchell and Mr Rolinson and his party branched off at Winton, thereafter Mrs Atkinson was alone. There were the usual troubles. They bogged badly near St George, and broke a spring before getting to Mitchell, and then there was nothing for it but to camp out.

Just before they bogged however, they saw another car stopped evidently in trouble, and so they pulled up to see if they could help. There was nothing seriously wrong so they went on, and later this car overtook them at the bog and hurried on to St George to send them help. As a result, two cheery lads appeared, and Mrs. Atkinson recalls with gratitude their smiling assistance for which they would

accept no payment whatever. It was all in a day's work helping another in distress. How times have changed!

As no accommodation whatever was obtained in St George these nice lads 'a lovely night' under the stars. With a few mishaps they travelled on until they were between Tallwood and Stanthorpe when they bogged again, 'deep in' this time, but again help was at hand, and a farmer with a sturdy horse soon had them out of their troubles. On arrival in Stanthorpe the party were somewhat disappointed to find that Mr Atkinson and his daughter had gone to Sydney but they were due to return, so the travellers rested thankfully after the long journey of about 1200 miles which had occupied about ten days.

When their father and sister returned the party had composed themselves in his lodging, closing windows and doors that the place might appear empty. Then there was the joyous surprise when Mr Atkinson and Nell came in, and everyone talked their heads off, telling about their adventures and asking him for news. There are not many women who would have undertaken such an expedition, and fewer still that could have had the courage and resource to carry it through.

Incidentally the Atkinson's car was the only one of the original cavalcade to complete the journey. The others for one reason or another broke down and were railed home, really on account of heavy rains setting in. It is a fine tribute to the decency and helpfulness of the outback people, when one recalls that of the many (I was going to say the hair-brained) but let us describe them as fearless, journeying about the tablelands and coasts undertaken by our heroine, that on only one occasion was she so much as alarmed by anyone on those thousands of miles of lonely roads that she had driven, since she drove her first car in the year 1919.

On this occasion, she and her youngest daughter did suffer a rather nerve-wracking experience; now whether the intention of those responsible was evil or not they never discovered. With her daughter's very sick child they had travelled to Millaa Millaa in hopes of seeing Mr Kjellberg at *Beachview,* but that gentleman who so often treated them was not at home. It was already nine o'clock in the evening when they started back to Millaa Millaa, a distance of about 2 miles. A puncture on the way detained them further, and to make matters worse they ran into a thick mist going down the range.

As they were running between Innisfail and Cairns, a large lorry ran up behind them, but instead of forging ahead as it could easily have done, it continued to follow close on their heels. Mrs Collins, who was driving, did not like the look of the men and put on the pace smartly, but the faster she went the closer the lorry followed. Still hoping to shake them off she opened up the car until she was travelling at 60 miles (an hour) on that steep and curving road, swinging around corners and skirting steep embankments in reckless desperation. Still the lorry was at their heels, but at last *Fisher's Creek Hotel* loomed ahead, and here feeling that help was at hand, Mrs Collins pulled in. The lorry, as if foiled of its prey turned into a side road. Whether its occupants were intent upon frightening the two women, or merely innocently following the car is a mystery to this day.

But neither this unpleasant episode nor anything else in the way of delay or danger can wean Mrs Atkinson of her love of the road, and today she thinks nothing of the 75 miles into Cairns over the tortuous strung highway down the range, or a trip to Herberton for a fishing excursion. She has the heart of a lion and the wayward Gypsy love for the stars.

DELPHIE'S MEMOIRS

Taitswell, Mintlaw (1928 – 1935)

The house had eight bedrooms, attic and cellars, a boiler room to heat radiators. There was no electricity but a huge engine (to my young eyes) with lots of dials and knobs which gave us 32 volt lighting. A hand pump outside the kitchen, which gave us good water, but there was water into the kitchen and bathroom. Beyond the old coach-house were stables and feed-sheds and sheds for tack (saddles etc.). About a half acre of vegetable garden, which every morning would see my father in his old army khaki's working away. He grew a wide range of fruit and vegetables, and had sheds full of carrots and potatoes to supply us during the winter. We had lovely blackcurrants, redcurrants, and raspberries, strawberries and gooseberries in season.

Taitswell House, Mintlaw. Scotland

The house sat in about 10 acres of garden, abutting on to what had been an old estate, *Pitfour*. *Pitfour House* was a ruin. At the end of the thirty acres *Pitfour House* sat on was the old chapel. In the thirties when there was so much poverty, I remember poor old tramps dossing down there. In the intense cold of our winters it is amazing how some of them survived. Many would have been veterans of *WW1*. In Aberdeen one frequently saw amputees begging in the streets. Many were double amputees walking on their stumps.

Outside our garden fence one went into the *Pitfour* grounds, and there was a lake with an island in it, where young carthorses were put until ready for breaking in.

One night in about 1931 or 1932, I'd been put to bed in my nursery through adjoining doors that led to my parent's room, and beyond that to another door leading to top of the staircase. The light was always on out here. On this particular night I became aware of a woman's figure in Victorian dress, gliding into my parent's room with a small child holding either hand. I remember feeling frightened and ducking under the bedclothes. When I eventually emerged she was on her way out again through the door to the stairs. I recounted this to my mother in the morning, but she just laughed at me and said I was dreaming. However some years later when we were about to move to England, an historian came to the door and asked my mother if she knew the history of the well. When she replied in the negative the woman told the story of how the inn-keeper's wife (the house had been Coaching Inn in the eighteenth century) had two small daughters, and one day one had fallen into the well whilst getting a drink of water. The mother had tried to save her, but in the melee, both she and the other child were also drowned. So maybe it was not a dream after all!

Delphie with her mother in Taitswell Garden

Most of the year, I was allowed to ride my bicycle up and down the road outside the house. However in the summer there was a fair near a neighbouring village on a site known as *Akey Brae*. The gypsies used to come from all over to attend, and I had to stay inside the grounds when they came past in their colourful horse-drawn caravans and wagons. The story goes they sometimes abducted little girls!

Rabbits abounded in those days and we frequently enjoyed rabbit stew or legs done in breadcrumbs. What used to frighten me when out playing in the beautiful beech woods around us, was when a weasel would catch one of the rabbits, going for the jugular, and the poor old bunny would give a horrible scream as he died.

In the winter time the lake would freeze over and the game of curling was played on it. This was a form of bowls, with flat granite circles of stone with handles in them, with which they were thrown. Of course there was a lot of skating and tobogganing too.

The raft that Lawrence made for Delphie on Pitfour Lake

In the summer, a cousin of mine who was an engineer, constructed for me a paddleboat with drums for floats, mounted with a wooden seat and paddles attached to copper piping. I had a lot of fun with that and it was strong enough to take adults too, so many people enjoyed it.

We were two to three miles from the village where we obtained our supplies, and these would be delivered every week. The groceries came in a pony-trap with Miss Farquhar who owned the store, and the butcher who had a closed cart. A Mrs. Scroggie in a farm up the road would supply us with milk. All fruit and vegetables came out of our own garden.

Once a month or so my parents would go into Aberdeen, having acquired a *Morris Cowley* car when they moved to Scotland. As I got older I was taken in to attend Miss Henry's dancing class, where we learnt Highland dances. We would lunch in the big hotel which impressed me a lot, and where I would be given fizzy lemonade!

When it came to schooling I shared a governess with the children of the Laird, whose property (nearby) was three to four miles away. We all got on well, but the governesses who seemed to change annually, really taught us very little, apart from a litany of the kings, queens and battles of Scotland, and very basic French. They must have tried to teach us mathematics, but if they did it did not penetrate my brain. Many years later when I saw the governess teaching it to my younger children, I recall thinking that even I could have learnt it presented in that way. Fortunately my father supplemented my English by introducing me to a lot of classical authors and reading to me every night. It certainly instilled a love of reading, for which I have been very grateful.

My mother employed two sisters, Clara and Gracie Leslie. Clara was the cook and Gracie the housemaid. Having no brothers or sisters to play with, I spent a lot of time with them in winter evenings. We would hold 'concerts', singing together all the old Scottish songs and some of the contemporary songs of the day. We were great friends and kept in touch all their lives, and I subsequently visited them as an adult in the houses in Aberdeen and the Shetland Islands. Gracie was married to a Shetland Islander, and of course daylight is short for most of the year, so much time is spent knitting beautiful Fair Isle jumpers. She knitted some for my boys, and once when in Brisbane, we were stopped by the floorwalker in *Finney's* store (now David Jones), who was really interested in the jumpers and asked me if the store could procure them. She was disappointed to know that this was not possible.

A dear old lady Mrs Mutch lived in the cottage at the end of our drive (in days past of carriage and horses they would have been there to open the gates). The cottage consisted of two small rooms. She lived in one which had a bed built into the wall, a couple of chairs and a table, and a pot hanging over the peat fire in which she would cook her very simple meals. The other was used by her husband (if and when he visited, which was infrequently). I never saw him or the other room.

I used to go and talk to her by the fire and she would entertain me with old Scottish folk-tales. She had only once been to the village nearby, and Peterhead on the coast, which was ten miles away was too far… let alone Aberdeen thirty miles away. Her life was typical of so many of the older country folk.

The beech woods where I played were once all over parts of Scotland, but cleared I imagine for farming development. The hedgerows were beech hedges with many wildflowers in the summer, such as dog roses, harebells (we called them bluebells in Scotland) and primroses.

Summer lasted all of two days (or so it seemed), and my mother when she bought me summer dresses (both of them), would buy them too long and each summer the hem would be lowered as required after the initial taking-up.

England, and Boarding School

In 1935 my father's health had given some concern, so the house at Taitswell was sold and we moved to the south coast of Sussex to a rather dreary place called Bexhill. Full of hotels and boarding houses, and with a very pebbly beach, it probably only attracted them, as so many of their army friends from India and elsewhere had also retired there. My father joined the local Bridge Club, and my mother made some friends locally and they both tended the garden. It was only about an acre with mainly fruit trees and flowerbeds, but I recall some beautiful tomatoes and scarlet runner beans being harvested too.

Delphie with her father in Aberdeen

At the end of my first term at school I turned 10 years old, and although my parents lived less than a mile away I was a boarder.

The school called *St Christopher's* was part of a group called the *PNEU (Parents National Education Union).* It was run by two elderly sisters who were both highly-educated, and who taught certain subjects aided by two other excellent teachers and a resident mademoiselle. She was supported by an older French woman who taught the seniors once a week. Apart from the normal school subjects, each term we studied a different artist and composer and were taken to galleries and concerts, to support what we were learning. Botany was also a major subject, and each week we'd go into the country to collect specimens, about which we would write and paint in a special notebook when we returned to class.

As there were never more than 20 students in my time, we had virtually individual support and attention and we all enjoyed performing in the school plays, and end of year carol concerts.

Possibly because of the curriculum, we had many interesting students amongst us. I remember in particular Sandra Moisewitch (daughter of pianist Benno), Patsy Ainley, (daughter of actor Sir Henry Ainley), and Lily Lodge (daughter of American actor John Lodge).

When I was due to leave *St Christopher's* to enter *Cheltenham Ladies College*, war was declared during the summer holidays and I recall the impact it had on my parents.

Three years after we arrived in the south, war was declared, which had a considerable impact on my parents. My father had been in the regular army in the *Royal Engineers* and served in the trenches in France. Later on he received the D.S.O. and was mentioned in despatches for the courageous work he did under fire, constructing bridges to permit his men to move rapidly to another theatre of war. (This was recounted to me many years later by one of his sisters. He barely spoke of those years). In 1917 his first wife died in England, which I imagine would have been quite distressing for him.

He was also left with two teenage children, Austin and Valerie. Fortunately he and his wife had both come from large families and there were relatives to step into the breach.

Austin and Valerie

My mother in the meanwhile (who incidentally had met my father in India, where he and her husband were serving before the war), was married to a fellow-Scotsman in the Indian army, and their first child, Archie Robertson Glasgow, was born at the end of July, six weeks before war was declared. He had to leave for France immediately, leaving my mother to pack up and catch a later boat home. On the way through the Suez Canal, word was received that he had been killed in France within a few weeks of arriving. She would have been devastated I'm sure, and relieved to return to her family home west of Aberdeen. Only months later her nineteen year old youngest brother was killed on the Somme, where her older brother was severely wounded and invalided out with an M.C. Her sister who was an ambulance driver on the front was also wounded. But thanks to a diary in her top pocket which deflected the bullet that would have proved fatal, she only received bullet wounds in the leg. The French Government awarded her the *Croix de Guerre* the equivalent of the *Victoria Cross.*

So it was understandable that they were concerned that history should be repeating itself. My mother spent many hours knitting socks and balaclavas for the men involved, and agreed to take some evacuees from the East End of London, where the bombing was heaviest at the time.

Delphie kneeling in centre of shot

Coming back from the theatre (we had an excellent repertory company in Bexhill) one Saturday afternoon, there on the doorstep was a mother with three small children. Amusingly their surname was Want! My mother gave them the dining room, which adjoined the kitchen and the maid's bedroom behind the kitchen, and got them settled in. I fell in love with the baby, who was actually about eighteen months old, but on account of his diet was about nine months in size and capabilities. No wonder, his diet consisted largely of sweetened condensed milk and pickled onions!

The three Want children

The *W.V.S. (Women's Volunteer Service),* which in many ways resembled our *C.W.A.*, collected clothes and other items that the evacuees might need, as many had been bombed out or had to leave everything in a hurry. I remember how astonished we were when she arrived back from visiting the collection point, wearing a fur coat and pushing a very upmarket type of pram, and of course lots of clothes for the children. The young ones were far from house-trained, and when eventually after a couple of months they decided it was too boring on the coast and returned to London, my parents had to have the carpets cleaned and the curtains dry-cleaned, to try to rid the room of the odour.

Archie Robertson Glasgow

By this time I was in high school in Gloucestershire at Cheltenham, where my mother had attended for two years in 1905. For one term some of us were evacuated to the seat of the *Duke of Sutherland* in Shropshire, *Lilleshall Hall*. I do not remember much of our term there, but I know some of us got nits from the housemaids (or so we were told). Anyway, after one term we returned to our allocated houses in Cheltenham, and life resumed as normally as possible.
Whilst Cheltenham was not the subject of direct hits, often the German planes sent to bomb Bristol, which was not far from us, would unload their bombs etc. if they were fleeing from fighter planes. I recall one night a landmine exploding right outside our house, leaving a vast crater in the roadway. Often in the early days they released bombs, which whilst not very damaging, were extraordinarily noisy and intended to frighten the people on the ground. They sounded like large containers of rocks, which rattled and whined their way to the ground.

At Bexhill things were very different. Early on in the bombing my father sustained a severe stroke, and my parents moved to a serviced flat in a beachfront hotel. From there you could hear the English bombers going out every night on their way to Germany, and in the early mornings you could hear them return, and could judge by the numbers how many had not made it home. We often watched the Spitfires tackling the German bombers over the Channel, and were witnesses to those aircraft that were hit first, which spiralled down into the water below. The German aircraft would fly in very low over the coast in order to avoid the radar, and you could see the pilots hopefully before they saw you! One day a friend and I had gone over by train to the next-door town of Eastbourne to do some Christmas shopping. As we walked down the main street a German plane suddenly appeared, machine-gunning everybody as it came. We were lucky as there was a tearoom where we flew in and under the table, and as the plane flew on there was a big ‘boom boom’ as they dropped bombs on the station.

We were lucky to find a bus going to Bexhill and so could get home, but on the way passed along a lane with tree branches meeting overhead as they went ‘rat-a-tat-tat’ on the top of the bus. Almost to a man the passengers ducked to the floor. I guess we were all a bit shaken after the machine-gunning.

By this time (1942) I was training in a children's home in Tunbridge Wells. My ambition was to train in a general hospital, but one had to be nineteen years old to begin. The children's home in peacetime had been a home where nannies were trained, but in wartime we became a home for a variety of children, mainly those bombed out in London. They were aged from six weeks to four years, and many were really traumatized by the events in their lives. Most were quite un-house-trained, and certainly gave us a 'run' for our money! Once a year a very smartly dressed couple representing the *American War Relief Fund* would come and inspect us. On these occasions everything would be spick and span and in its place. I had charge of about eight 3 to 4 year olds, and there was a night nursery as well as a day nursery to clean. I put them in the day nursery whilst I made beds and tidied the night nursery. As I was doing this I heard screams of laughter and shouts of glee. On investigating, I found to my horror that they'd found the coalscuttle and as the quality of the coal was so poor during wartime, and mainly coarse coal-dust or slack as we knew it, they'd picked up handfuls and thrown it over each other and over the nursery in general.

So after bathing them all and putting them in the night nursery, I set to work to clean up the mess in the day nursery. As I returned to the night nursery, there they all were feeding all the winter clothes into the slow combustion stove… ooh-la-la! Eventually all were neat and ready for inspection complete with one rather harassed nurse.

The German planes flew over us on the way to bomb London, and although we did not score many bombs, they sent down a lot of incendiaries and fire-watching became a regular occupation. We had to be at our posts before the sirens stopped wailing, and as this would generally occur around 10.30pm we would be warmly tucked up in bed asleep. We learnt to awaken just before the sirens started, and piled on as many warm clothes as we needed for we were often outside until 2am or later. Somebody would bring us a nice hot mug of cocoa if it were a long raid.

The rising bell would go at 6am and we had to be ready to relieve the night staff before 7am. We had one day off a month and two hours off a day, which did not give us much time for a social life. I remember being hungry a lot of the time, as the food was really poor there. One time before bread was rationed I went and bought a French-stick, as I'd been given some honey by someone and I demolished the entire loaf in my time off. Probably due to the poor nutrition and doubtless lack of hygiene with so many children performing in their beds or their pants, some of us developed hepatitis and I was sent home to my family rather sick and very yellow. Our doctor came in and said under normal circumstances lots of fruit and green vegetables would have been his recommendation, but the only fruit we could access in war-time and then only in season were stone fruit or berries, and green vegetables were hard to come by, so ascorbic acid tablets had to suffice.

Having completed my training in the children's home I had a few months to fill in before I could go on to hospital training, so I worked at a *Rudolf Steiner* home for mainly intellectually handicapped children from toddlers to teenagers. The principal of the home was German, and many of the staff was German and Austrian refugees from Nazi Europe. The children were really loved and well cared-for, and in retrospect I realise Steiner was light-years ahead of the rest of the world in the care of the mentally ill. There was a lot of music and movement and songs some of the staff composed, which the children enjoyed. As they had their own farm, the older boys helped out there and the food was extremely nutritious, with many of the European women being superb cooks, making beautiful brown bread and always plenty of fresh vegetables.

St. Thomas` Hospital (1944 – 1949)

And so began the four happiest years of my single life. In fronting up for the interview with the matron, I clearly recall her looking over her pince-nez at me and remarking in a doubtful tone of voice "It's very hard work you know". In my response of "I'm sure I can handle it", or something similar, I remember thinking of the hours demanded of us at the Children's' Home, and realising if I could handle that, then hospital life would be a push-over.

So as soon as I had turned the mandatory nineteen years old, I fronted up at the hospital to commence my training. The war was still on and the hospital, situated as it was on the river bank across from Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, sustained a couple of direct hits. They had then established three unit sector hospitals in the country, one near Basingstoke and the others in Surrey near Godalming and Woking. My first port of call was in a Manor House near Godalming, where our set (of about eighteen to twenty girls) spent the first two months in the *Preliminary Training School.* There we learnt what it meant to be a Nightingale nurse (the training school at *St Thomas`* having been founded by Florence Nightingale after the *Crimean War*).

Apart from essential nursing techniques we learnt how to deal with patients (who were always right), and how to observe the strict discipline of those times. At the end of our time there we had learnt all the basic essentials of work in the ward and mastered simple routines required to start our life. There, we were also made aware that we were under probation for the first twelve months, and could be dismissed during that period if we did not meet with approval. When we began we had two hours off per day and one day per month, so when three hours off was introduced with a day off per week we thought we were in heaven!

Delphie with her nursing friend Eve Bowen (L)

Our first placement was in the hospital sector near Godalming called *Hydestile.* Here the wards were in a row of army huts, with our living quarters in an old Manor House a few miles away. It was within walking distance of Godalming, but we were bussed to *Hydestile* morning and evening. When we were on night-duty we were in another house a little further away.

Another placement was in a hospital near Woking, which had been made into an army hospital. Here the officers in one ward donated a box in the *Albert Hall,* for the rest of our training for the *Promenade Concert* in the summer. It was a wonderful gift, as with nine or ten seats in the box you could nearly always attend a concert that you really wanted to hear.

There was another sector hospital near Basingstoke but I never actually went there. The next move was up to London, where we lived mainly in the well-equipped nurses home across the road from the hospital.

Life in London was wonderful, even in a battered war-torn city. You could go to a different show every night of the year if you wanted to, and as we were the hospital for the metropolitan police, some of our patients got us entry to a number of interesting buildings not open to the general public, and we did an interesting trip on the river in a patrol boat amongst other things.

Towards the end of the war the Germans sent over their `doodle-bugs`. These were a bit scary when they came over you, as the motor would stop and you could count perhaps up to ten and then there would be a mighty explosion as they hit the ground or buildings underneath them. As the hospital had already had two direct hits when the bombing was at its height (we were directly across the river from the Houses of Parliament), they decided to send us younger ones up to the *Royal Infirmary* in Edinburgh for three to four months over Christmas. The two things I remember most of that time were the icy wind, which met us as we walked down to Princes Street to shop or have a coffee, and the shipment of lemons which arrived. We all rushed out and sent boxfuls to family and friends in England, as we had not seen citrus fruit since before the war!

Back in London life continued as before, and then in 1947 there was a great outbreak of polio. We had whole wards full of the victims, some in iron lungs and others being nursed in the normal way. However when one of us younger ones succumbed and died, they took us off those wards and had mainly fully-trained staff and older nurses working there.

Work in the wards was always interesting and challenging, particularly in the medical wards where patients often stayed for three months or so. In the surgical wards the new sulphur drugs and penicillin were being used automatically in cases of surgery. Very small doses were given then such as 10-20,000u four hourly, was given to everybody who had even an appendectomy.
Because our hospital catered for all Anglican clergy as well as the police, prayers were said in the ward at 8am and 8pm when the shifts overlapped. All the beds had to be made and patients blanket bathed or washed before 8am, and they would all be ready to be bedded down soon after 8pm. As the ward sister swept in at 8am all the nurses dropped to their knees near the door and the sister said the prayers. Again at night this would be repeated as the night staff came on, ready to work through until 8am. We would be on night-duty for three months with three days off every three weeks.

Delphie (R) nursing at St Thomas' Hospital

Over the years we had some interesting patients. Once when I was in charge of a men's surgical ward on night-duty, we had Sir John Gielgud as a patient and I had to get him to drink a glass of water every thirty minutes or so. He took it in good part, although I expect he found it tiresome, and when he was discharged presented me with the first pair of nylon stockings I had ever seen.

When war ended I was working in our country sector *Hydestile.* As it happened I was sick at the time and could not go up to London to share in the celebrations, but it was a relief to all that life might become normal again after five long years.

About this time I became very friendly with one of the doctors when he returned from the war, and he gave me a wonderful few years out and about in London until the time came after my finals in early 1949, when I had decided to visit (operative word `visit`) Australia. We remained friends all his long life. I met his wife and children on visits home and have kept in touch even after he died aged ninety-two. During the course of our lectures at S.T.H., a woman from Australia on a *Churchill Scholarship* had attended some of them, and was telling us about this new gynae/obstetrics hospital in Sydney, and she thought some of us could be interested in applying. She was the matron of *Royal Prince Alfred* just across the road, and seemed very friendly and helpful. So a friend and I volunteered to go, as there was a shortage of places in England due to the fact that understandably, Returned Service people got priority.

However as the time grew nearer, my friend's father became ill and she pulled out, so rather than travel alone I put a notice in the *London Times* offering my services to anyone travelling to Sydney. Quite soon I had a reply from a woman who said she would come up to London from Devonshire to interview me. She was Mrs Helen Stubbs, who had this elderly housekeeper working for her during the war years when she was involved in a lot of community work. Sadly the old lady developed early dementia and she was returning her home to her family in New South Wales. However as the shipping company insisted on a trained person coming with her, I was the lucky one to have my fare paid as payment for the job! Helen and I became very good friends and as the old lady was not really a problem, we would take it in turns to go ashore. We had the wife of a Perth orthopaedic surgeon sharing our cabin, and the two of us went ashore together at Port Said. We hired a horse and sulky (locally known as a 'garrie') and asked the driver to take us into the part of the city not normally frequented by tourists, and it was really an eye-opener, to an untravelled visitor like myself.

The first thing to hit you was the smell - quite a pungent mix of sweat and cooking and whatever else was in the street. Then you noticed the men sitting on the edge of the road, eyes gummed up with glaucoma and infection, begging, and chewing betel nut. Finally from an upper window, bowls of slops being thrown out on to the road beneath. There were the bazaars along the road with goods the locals would buy, and the people running after us trying to sell all sorts of things. Altogether we found it fascinating but got quite a reprimand from the purser of the ship when we returned. He implied that we could have been kidnapped or worse going off the tourist track like that, but we weren't, and I was very glad of the experience!

Life at *King George V* (where I did my obstetrics) was interesting. Because their grant did not extend to building a nurses home, we were accommodated in Nissan huts in the University grounds across the road. There we were consumed by fleas, which I had never experienced in my life before. I don't know why the authorities couldn't do something about it. The next problem was the dire shortage of staff, like one nurse to fifty mothers or fifty babies! It improved over time, but it was never fully-staffed in my time.

The early difficulty I encountered in my early weeks was the fact that nobody bothered to talk to you on your time off. Not knowing anybody else of my own age, I found this difficult to deal with. Anyway after about a month I went up to the recreation room one day, introduced myself and said I'd like to meet with some of them. They responded wonderfully, and there was no problem after that, but I had to make the first move. Very different from how it would have been at *St. Thomas'.*

A Scottish first cousin of mine Philippa Fraser had married an airman who served in the air force, one Grant Lindeman. His father was a skin specialist in Macquarie Street and his second wife was English. He and Anne lived in Vaucluse, and very kindly made their home open to me if I wanted to go for the night in my time off. There I learnt to appreciate the best in Australian wines, which in those days were not dated and he told me that the bulk was sent to France to be bottled under a French label! They were both so hospitable and kind to me, and I met many interesting people dining there from time to time. As the house was on the top of the cliff slope down to Parsley Bay, we often went down there to swim. There I met and became very friendly with Pixie O`Harris, the mother of Rolfe Harris. She was an artist, and I recall her telling me of decorating the walls of the *Children's Hospital*. I never met her son unfortunately!

Towards the end of my time in Sydney, a friend took me to a cocktail party. There I met an elderly woman who was interested in what I was doing, and when I remarked I would love to see more of Australia but did not know anyone in those parts (in those days girls did not head out on their own and backpacking had not been invented) . Her immediate response was "I have just come down from North Queensland where I have been writing a book about a cousin of mine. They love having visitors, so I will get you an invitation"!

This duly came, and as soon as I had completed my training I took off for the north. In those days the aircraft was a DC3 and took ten hours from Sydney to Cairns. On arrival in Cairns where I had been booked into *Hides Hotel,* I found that they had double-booked me, and my room was gone. However they poked me into a room near the kitchens, so at least I had a bed for the night.

Next morning Mrs Glen Atkinson came to pick me up, and asked if I'd mind if we went to Port Douglas for a couple of days as she loved fishing. Of course I was delighted to see somewhere else, and we duly drove up the coast to this quiet little fishing village, where we stayed with two sisters who kept the local store. Their store kept everything from Brussels lace to bolts and fishing tackle and everything in between.

They showed us into our room, which contained one double bed! This was quite normal for N.Q. at the time, but I had never encountered sleeping with someone I had only just met before. However we survived, and apart from the mosquitoes and sandflies which delighted in the new blood offered them, I had a very enjoyable time and my hostess spent a good time with old Hector, the fisherman who was brother to our hostesses.

The journey home took all of six hours then, and the road from Ravenshoe was still dirt. It was very corrugated owing to the timber cutters bringing in railway sleepers and electric light poles all through the daylight hours. There were a number of sawmills operating in Ravenshoe then, and as we approached Rudd's Creek there was one on the banks there too.

As we arrived at *Gunnawarra,* Glen's son Geoff was waiting at the gate to let us through and so began the saga of my life!

***Gunnawarra* (1950 - 1990)**

The *Gunnawarra* that I first knew was a busy working property, with about twenty mouths to feed. Of these, in the homestead were immediate family, Glen Atkinson and sons Geoff and Vernon, and Vernon's wife Anne. Then there was Glen's brother Earle Johnson who was head stockman. Earle's wife Mary was bookkeeper, and their teenage son young Earle was a jackeroo. There were often two other jackeroos and depending on the period, maybe a governess or a white nursemaid. In the men's dining room were other stockmen and in the Aboriginal dining room the dark stockmen, maybe two or three and their wives and children, up to ten all told. A beast was killed every ten days and the bulk of the meat was corned. We only had one kerosene fridge, into which went liver and brains and maybe enough meat for one to two meals. The first night we had liver and thin skirt (the thin meat muscle that was the diaphragm), and of course made all our own bread. There were also pigs and poultry and milking cows, which all had to be fed and cared for.

Geoff Atkinson

The vegetable garden and orchard was two miles away at an ox-bow lake that was affectionately known as the *Big Lagoon,* where Glen had built a two-bedroom cottage and kitchen. There an old fellow Sam Hall lived with his horse and buggy, which he would harness up to come to the house with the produce, required, and usually have meals with the men.

During the war the eldest son Bill Atkinson who was in the air force, came on leave bringing a friend and new wife on their honeymoon. One morning Bill and he were working on the saw-bench and the friend complained of dizziness and feeling unwell. However he seemed all right by next day and during the afternoon said he and his wife were going to the lagoon for a swim. Glen said the household was going too, and for the couple to wait for them down there and not go swimming until the others arrived.

However they decided to start before the house party arrived and sadly they got caught in the water lilies, and he probably had a heart attack in the struggle (the symptoms he'd experienced the day before were most likely a precursor). His wife endeavoured to save him and in the event they both

drowned. Old Sam Hall couldn't swim, and by the time he'd harnessed the horse and got to the homestead for help it was much too late.

Seated at the family table was an English fellow Dennis Hooper-Colsey, who was employed as a tutor for the Aboriginal children. Besides the 3-R`s, he endeavoured to teach them the elements of hygiene, as most of them had limited home backgrounds, many humpies on creek banks or very basic housing. To that end he had toothbrushes and toothpaste to clean their teeth in the morning. He also acquired an old copper and they were encouraged to bring the clothes they had worn the previous day, and he would boil them up as they did school, so that they would have something clean to wear the following day. There was a slight hiccup one day, when their bundle of clothes contained their baby brother's dirty nappies and clothes of mum's too. He discovered that mum said if he was boiling up every day it would save them having to do theirs! An early form of Laundromat maybe?

Delphie preparing for her mustering adventure at Sugarbag

Life was always busy. In those days the cattle had to be dipped every three weeks in a Rucide dip, because of the heavy infestation of the cattle ticks. So there was mustering every day, which started early in the morning when the horses would come into the horse-yards outside the homestead. To hear 70 or so horses galloping up past the house at 6am was a great awakening! The men then picked the ones they would require and the rest would return to the paddock. In those days depending on how far they were mustering, there might be packhorses packed with food and gear, though mainly this was when the team was camping out at further yards. Then came the great day when I was invited to camp with the men at one of these yards, named *Sugarbag* (which was the name of the wild bees` honey found in the forks of trees). Because I was the only female I had a tent a little apart from the open shed where the men rolled out their swags (bed rolls), and all the food was prepared in camp-ovens and billycans over the open fire. At night you would fall asleep with the gentle noise of cattle lowing in the yards, and sit under the stars enjoying a last pannikin of tea before going to bed.

Sadly the day came when I had to return to England. Knowing that I could well return, Geoff had already 'popped the question`, and I still had to decide what to do when I returned to pick up some furniture and other belongings. Added to this my mother was still alive and not terribly well, so there were many decisions to be made.

I flew firstly to Perth and Albany W.A. where an aunt and cousins had settled after the war. I loved W.A. and felt I could even live there if I had to, but it was time to move on. I caught the ship in Perth and settled for the six weeks voyage home. Sitting out on the deck later on, a young man passed who reminded me quite distinctly of the Duke of Windsor. It was quite coincidental the following day that an English girl with whom I'd become friendly, said she had met this Australian grazier Woodie Pearce who was travelling with `the Duke`, only he was a grazier named Tony Chisholm. (When I got to know Tony it transpired that he was in fact a relation of the Duke of Windsor, which thus explained my confusion). Eventually we all joined up and enjoyed the social life on board together. They ended up giving me a 25th birthday party in the middle of the Indian Ocean, and a good time was had by all. When we reached London we went our own ways but kept in touch, of which… more later.

Hinton Charterhouse – Delphie's Mothers home in her final years

After spending time with my mother and her relatives near Bath, I returned to the village of Selbourne in Hampshire where my special nursing friend Eve Bowen lived. At that time though she was in New Zealand visiting her father's relatives in Christchurch, and her mother invited me to stay whilst I was looking for work. This I accomplished and having made enough money for my return fare, set off with all my goods and chattels for Australia. Leaving the bulk of it in Sydney I then went to visit my friend Pam Cecil who was living with Woodie Pearce on his property *Henbury* on the Finke River, south of Alice Springs. I had a most interesting month there, as life was about 50 years behind North Queensland. The Aboriginal population lived in camps and spoke no English. Woodie provided them with meat and tea and sugar, and the ones employed were under a half-caste head stockman who spoke their dialect and supervised all the mustering etc.

Tony Chisholm and his brother who had properties *Napperby* and *Bond Springs*, north of the Alice, called in a few times but we did not visit them. I was very attracted to Tony and may very well have ended up marrying him if it were not for my very strong commitment to Geoff. Some years later he married a Sydney girl, and he wrote with pride of his new baby son Roy. Roy is now a prominent grazier in the Territory and I frequently see his photograph in the rural papers.

Whilst staying at *Henbury* my friend Eve Bowen who was returning home from New Zealand joined us.

As I had found myself a job in Charters Towers in Queensland, Woodie said the girls could drive me up to Mt. Isa from where I could catch the train. Girls were a scarcity in the Territory in those days. We called in to the hotel in Tennant Creek to fill our waterbags, and as we drove away were aware of

a vehicle following us. After a few miles the fellow stopped us and begged us to stay for a dance that night being held in Tennant Creek. When we explained that we had a train to catch he regretfully let us go!

That night we camped on the roadside on the Barkly Highway, but did not sleep very well as we were devoured by ants and various creepy crawlies! The next day we reached Mt. Isa in the late afternoon and checked the car in for a service the following day. Meanwhile we had noticed an attractive camping spot on a creek a few miles out and settled ourselves for an early night's sleep. However, whilst eating our evening meal, we heard `vroom-vroom` as about six motorbikes converged on us and besought us to come into town for a dance! They were very accommodating when they realized how tired we were, and I had the train to catch in the morning, and regretfully turned their machines around and `vroom-vroomed` back into town!

The next morning I boarded the train and said good-bye to the girls, who after they had the vehicle serviced, could head for home.

The journey in the old steam train was over-night, no sleepers of course and because of the heat it was all open to a combination of fresh air and coal dust. At the various stops along the way there would be an exodus of men towards the town, and then before we departed they all returned with pockets bulging with big beer bottles. A stockman who had been working at *Gunnawarra* the previous year, recognised me and came and sat beside me exhaling very beery breath, and it took a while before I could decently move and sit elsewhere.

Finally the day came when we rolled into Charters Towers, where my cousins Jock and Elsa Robinson met me and took me home. Jock was the superintendent of the hospital, and when I had washed the coal dust out of my hair and had a good night's sleep I moved over to the nurse's quarters and was introduced to the staff. The hospital at that time was a series of army huts with no cooling system. On particularly hot days the wardsmen would get on the roof and hose the building down in an effort to make it cooler for the patients. The matron was a kindly local woman who was horrified to find me still working after my shift was officially finished. I assured her I was not looking for overtime, but was interested in the job in hand. However she assured me that she would get into trouble if the board got wind of it, so sadly I had to comply!

Finally after three months it was time to move on, and Geoff arrived to take me to *Gunnawarra* for Christmas. By this time we had decided to get married in the New Year, so it was a Christmas full of fun and planning for the future.

As we had decided to have it at *Gunnawarra* there were arrangements to be organized such as invitations, food and of course the cake!

The cook at the time had cooked in the officers' mess during the war, but was a bit of a shady character just the same. The day he was supposed to make the cake, he was given some rum to put in the fruit. Unfortunately he got his wires crossed and drank the rum and went to sleep in the back of the kitchen, and forgot to finish the cake! However it was all sorted eventually and he made a reasonable job of cooking and icing our wedding-cake. On the morning of the wedding some of us went early to the lagoon in front of the house and picked armfuls of waterlilies to decorate the house. This lagoon was later sadly drained in the effort to make it deeper and thus hold more water. They had scraped the mud-sealing base away, and now it no longer holds water for the majority of the year, and hence no more waterlilies.

At 10am the Bush Brother arrived to take the service. His name was Edward Dams, a very academic 'other worldly' Englishman. They had a short wheelbase Land Rover in those days, and I'd say he had never driven much before, and certainly never on dirt roads. He drove constantly in low gear, which probably did not do the engine much good and also guaranteed that he was frequently late for appointments.

The best man, Geoff's school friend from *All Souls School* in Charters Towers, was Jock Allingham from the property *Fletcher Vale* outside the Towers. He had read medicine in Sydney on leaving school and then joined up in the parachute corps during the war. Now he had returned to run the family property, and flew in a by a small-chartered plane with the flowers and champagne for the wedding breakfast!

Geoff's sister Nan Collins was my matron of honour, with her son Bruce complaining volubly at wearing a kilt for his job as pageboy. In his view Australian men did not wear skirts, and to add insult to injury his mother had forgotten to pack his underpants and he had to wear some of his sister's pants! The same sister Errolly made a delightful little flower girl, and with Earle Johnson to give me away it was very much a family affair.

Delphie's wedding day at Gunnawarra

Then the time came to leave the family and eighty guests, and we departed for the Atherton Tablelands to start our honeymoon. We had a few days at *Lake Barrine Lodge,* which had accommodation upstairs in those days and then on to the Mt. Kooyong near Julatten, where we enjoyed many walks in the hills around.

Returning to *Gunnawarra* required a considerable amount of adjustment, and when the container with my belongings arrived from Sydney there were many 'oohs and aahs` over the things, furniture and otherwise which I had brought from England. However everybody was so kind and welcoming that I did not realize at the time how much there was to learn!
My mother-in-law Glen was especially kind and helpful, and I felt it a privilege to have her as a guiding hand. Having lost her husband Tom in an accident in the yards in 1930 at the height of the

depression, she had really struggled to keep things going, with Geoff and his younger brother Vernon still at boarding school. However because of continual problems within Geoff's chest (he was an asthmatic) he came home towards the end of primary school to help at home. He was often sent on his own to camp at a windmill, where he would pump water for the cattle. He described how scary it was at night when the dingoes came around and disturbed him with their howling. Someone would ride out every few days to bring food supplies, i.e. corned meat and damper and maybe tea and sugar. He recalled that they came out to bring him in on Christmas Day for dinner and then out again to carry on.

Later on he was sent out to *Spring Creek Station* near Einasleigh to jackeroo for his brother-in-law Stan Collins. It was hard work. He had to be up by 3.30am or 4am to get the milkers in, and have the milk in the kitchen by 6am so Stan's father could have his early morning cup of tea! I'm sure his sister Nan kept an eye on him and helped him where she could.

From there he went out to his cousin Ken Atkinson who ran the property *Wairuna* on the Burdekin River. Finally after a few years away he came home to run *Gunnawarra* with the help of Glen and her brother Earle Johnson.

By the time I came on the scene in 1950 he was busy building dams, and providing water supplies in areas away from the rivers. By the end of 1952 I had had our first child, a boy we called Giles after my father's family. It was a difficult period. The station was stretched for finance as they were making substantial payments to the eldest brother Bill who had left the company. Vernon was married to a Sydney girl, and they lived in the cottage near the house, and Vernon having been through *Gatton Agricultural College* was now home as bookkeeper. Earle Johnson and his wife Mary had bought a dairy property called *Melrose* on *Foxwell Road* near Malanda, and moved there with his son young Earle.

Giles as a baby with George Kelly

There were three sets of yards away from the main complex, and the men could be camped out there from between 3 to 4 weeks at a time. They would take a big supply of dried corned meat and plenty of flour, tea and sugar. They also received tinned jam and often tinned or dried fruit. Their packhorses would take all the gear and things for cooking such as camp-ovens and big billycans. Each man had

his own quart-pot on his saddle and his swag would go with the packs. They made the dampers in the camp-ovens once the bread they took for the first day or so cut out.

Late the following year after a hurried trip to Cairns, we suffered a great sadness when a twin boy and girl were born, only to die a day or so later. The local G.P. was away on a fishing trip. He had constantly told me that my dates were wrong and there was nothing unusual in the pregnancy. When his partner had delivered the first baby I suddenly heard him explain "Oh God there's another one"! In those days specialists did not exist in the north and obviously some G.P. `s were more competent than others.
Geoff's Aunt Jessie Johnson, who with her husband Virge, kindly took Giles for the time I spent in hospital which ended up being over a month. During that time he had learned to walk, so I was sad to have missed that milestone.

Later that year my mother came out from England and stayed with us for 18 months. I know she found it a strange life after what she was accustomed to, but as a keen horsewoman she was always interested in seeing that side of the operation. Having broken in horses of her own, she was fascinated to see the men riding theirs within the week, when she would have taken several weeks to do the same job. I daresay hers would have been a lot quieter than theirs would ever be.

Of course the family had their share of accidents and health problems too. On one occasion when Giles was about 12 to 17 months, the men had all ridden out to camp and Geoff was to follow, but had stayed a bit longer to service the generator and ensure that we had all we needed for the next couple of weeks. My mother who was a severe arthritic, was staying with us and we had our faithful Jessie Toorak to help, but when he went there would be just the three of us and little Giles.

As I prepared a meal for Geoff before he left, I heard some piercing screams from out at the back of the kitchen. Geoff and I got there simultaneously to find Giles with his face smothered in something clear and syrupy. I held his head under a tap to wash it off when he suddenly turned blue. Not knowing what he had done I went to call the ambulance only to find it was out on a case. When I went back to Geoff and Giles, Geoff showed me what he had found, an empty tin of caustic soda - something of which I had no experience. I returned to the phone to ring a doctor, but was unable to locate one nearer than Townsville. He gave me directions for first aid and told me to get the child to hospital fast. In the meantime the girl on the exchange in Mt. Garnet regaled me with stories of people she knew who had swallowed caustic soda, or been burnt by it, and from the descriptions 'totally disintegrated' as a result of it. In the event we did the 90 mile journey to hospital, and Giles was put on to penicillin for a week and emerged unscathed, in spite of the dire predictions he might lose his sight.

A few years later when Jeremy was a little boy of seven, we had a university student for the holidays, as at Christmas most of our staff was away. The day she arrived, after having a cup of tea and unpacking, I delegated Jeremy to show her around the place. I had just gone up to have a bath before dinner when I heard the gate click, followed by a heartrending scream. In rushing out, I found Jeremy clutching his hand, on which the tops of two fingers were missing and blood was everywhere.

It transpired that he had gone into a shed where we had a set of iron rollers - like a large old fashioned mangle with the rollers curved to accommodate corrugated iron. These rollers were used to bend the iron when making tanks etc. He had his hand on the roller explaining how it worked, when the stupid girl operated the handle and his fingers fell to the ground.

At that stage the *Royal Flying Doctor* did not have night flying capability, so we had to wait until daylight to take him to Cairns for attention. It was a long night and though we travelled with the detached fingers in saline, the damage was too great to reconnect them.

Of course we had numerous maternity cases. One Aboriginal woman Isobel came and told me she felt uncomfortable and on examination I discovered why. It was late afternoon on a Friday when the children were allowed to stay up to listen to records. I set them up with their evening meal and eight records, and this saw Isobel's baby into the world - a quick dash to change the records over to the other side (the children thought me positively indulgent, and they were onto a good thing). We had Isobel all freshened up and the ambulance there to take her into hospital for a few days.

Another girl Dolly had her day out when Bim was a fortnight old. I'd had to take him back to Cairns as he had developed a tropical fever. Geoff and an English radiographer friend who was staying with us had to cope. Dolly was due to go into town the following week, but her baby thought otherwise. Geoff and Joyce collected tape, scissors and other necessary equipment and set off. However this was February in the middle of the wet season, and the roads were very poor, very boggy, and there were no bridges over the creeks. We always kept vehicles parked on the far side of the main creek for use in emergencies, but there were still others, which they used to carry Dolly across to meet the ambulance on the other side. They finally made it with Dolly intact, but she delivered a beautiful little boy as the ambulance pulled up at the hospital.

Although the police sergeant (who in those days was responsible for their money) would have bought all the clothes she needed for the baby, I had given her some money to buy something special for it. When they finally opened up her case in the hospital to get a nappy and singlet out, they found the case full to the brim with tobacco and matches. Apart from the fact that this proved an inconvenience, it was all the more surprising, because a white station family had brought up Dolly and her brother as their own. She was also a competent cook and did good embroidery. I must admit Dolly gave me several handy hints in the cooking line, and when my mother returned to England, Dolly gave her a little set for her breakfast tray, which she had embroidered during Mum's stay with us.

Geoff, Penny, Delphie with Bim (crouched) and Giles at Pandanus gully in about 1959

We had many interesting coloured girls over the years in the house, and they became part of the family. We had Agnes from the time she left school, and she was a wonderful nurse girl to Penny, and an efficient housemaid too. We were sad when six or seven years after she joined us, she teamed up with one of the Aboriginal stockmen King Costello and moved away. She came to visit me many years later after King had become another casualty of the big pay cheque, and had died as a result of polluted liquor in town. Agnes has become an alcoholic apparently, and her three children had been

removed from her and taken to Rockhampton - so she said. It seemed very sad that someone so good and totally reliable with my children should have been deprived of her own.

Another one we loved was Junee. She arrived rather wild and lost and insecure and had to be taught to shower regularly or the odour became overwhelming. She was not a particularly good housemaid, and found it hard to understand my English, e.g. they don't have mantelpieces which require dusting where she came from. She had a warm infectious smile and seemed just like one of the children when she was reproved for something. She simply dissipated and she would look so anxious and stand on one leg cracking her knuckles one by one, which I found quite disturbing and would put paid to any further reproaches.

Finally one day, we were giving a niece a twenty-first birthday party in our big dining room upstairs, but I had to attend a wedding in Mt. Garnet in the afternoon. I had done all the cooking and preparations, bar decorating the room. There was little in the garden, but as I left to go into town I asked Junee if she could find some branches of something to make the room a little more festive. She had found a variety of fronds of bougainvillea, bushes and other leaves and the room looked really stunning. Following that she always did the flowers for me and any creative arrangement required. She too married and moved away. It was many years later when I was visiting a family member in hospital that I saw her on the other side of the ward. I had a long talk with her and we brought her some flowers on our next visit. A week later she was dead. I will always remember that lovely smile and be glad that I kept her with us because of it.

A few months after her return to England our second son Vivyan Thomas was born, promptly named *Bim-bim* by Giles and later Bim, which he is called to this day, over fifty years later!

Giles and Bim at Gunnawarra in about 1958

In March 1956 I experienced my first cyclone. As the winds intensified Geoff moved us into the low-set slab and shingle homestead, which was built in 1878. It blew and rained about fifteen inches that night, and by midday the following day it had moved on. But others to the west of us were not so fortunate. A property *Huonfels* belonging to the Aplin family on the Etheridge River was flooded. There were two daughters who went and camped on higher ground, but their parents and elderly uncle elected to stay and climbed on the roof to sit it out. But the force of the flood intensified taking the house off its stumps and downstream. Unfortunately it slammed into a tree and split in half, losing the entire family who had been clinging to the roof.

Later that year our daughter Penny was born, and at about that time a 15 year old Aboriginal girl called Agnes came to help me with the children. In the early days her mother Molly was apt to appear unannounced to make sure we were treating her daughter properly. But eventually she was satisfied with the conditions on the station and she ceased to appear. Agnes was a lovely girl and stayed with us for about ten years.

Penny, Giles, and Bim

Towards the end of the decade Geoff severely damaged a finger whilst working in the workshop. This eventually required many weeks of treatment followed by a trip to Brisbane for plastic surgery. We took a house in New Farm for our stay down there, and naturally Agnes came with us. When Geoff went into hospital it was good to have her stay with the children, and when we went to Surfers for the day she loved the beaches. Another time we all went to Lone Pine and I had a nice photo of Agnes holding a koala, which a few years ago I gave to her daughter after her mother died. Every Friday night we'd drop her off at the pictures in Brunswick Street and pick her up at 11pm. I know she enjoyed the outing.

Our son Jeremy was born prematurely in 1960 and did not come home for three months. Eventually the staff told me that he was not gaining weight and I could take him home for a week's trial. Well, he gained 8oz that week and continued in that fashion, so did not have to return to the hospital. But it was very constant work caring for him, as he had never sucked a bottle having been tube-fed whilst there. So much of the first 12 months was spent feeding and caring for him. By the end of that time our accountant looked at me over his spectacles and commented to Geoff that I looked as though I needed a good holiday, so then and there they organized for me to go back to England for a break.

So we set off with Penny aged four years, and Jeremy who turned one year on the day we arrived.

I recall that in Rome I changed them into warm viyella clothes remembering how chilly England could be. Unfortunately, we arrived in the midst of a heat wave, and the cousins who met us by car to take us back to the family home in Somerset, had to pull over once outside London, so we could change the children before they exploded from over-heating!

We enjoyed a wonderful 3 to 4 months with our family near Bath, who made us all welcome and spoilt us rotten. Then in about September I found a farm house in Sussex not far from my old home, and took the children down there to await Geoff and the older boys arrival. I'd always wanted the children to experience an English Christmas, and they certainly had it. The heaviest snowfalls in years blocked the roads and gave the children lots of fun making snowmen and collecting holly and ivy to decorate the house. We had some good friends in the village, and finally when January came we had to decide on schools for the children, with the recommendation from an old friend who was a schools inspector for the church, who gave us the name of a state school in the next village. This proved most successful, the teaching was excellent. In those days the children were given a hot lunch at mid-day, which saved having to cook them a big meal at night.

Before school got under way we got a carer for the two younger ones, and took Giles and Bim with us for a skiing holiday in Austria. Giles took to skiing like a duck to water, far better than either of us, but we all had a good time. When the time came to return home we hired a nanny to look after the children, and organized for an English girl who wanted to travel to bring them out to us in Italy when we were ready to board our ship.

Geoff and I then hired a car, and going across the channel on the ferry we arrived in France and proceeded to Paris as our first stopover. At each service station on the outside of the cities we passed through or stayed at, we would ask the owner to order us a taxi. Then after showing the driver where we wanted to go, we would follow him to our destination. It proved a very successful method of dealing with unknown streets and heavy traffic. We had made bookings at hotels with the travel agents in England, and wound our way through many beautiful and interesting parts of France, visiting Versailles, the battlefields of the Somme, Bordeaux, the Grasse area, which was lovely, and finally landing in Nice. From there we had a fantastic drive over the Alps and into Italy where we arrived in Milan.

A couple of days later the children with their carer arrived by plane, and we then turned back to the coast. There we stayed in Rapallo where we visited my Aunt Carey whose elder daughter Sophie was staying from London, and who helped us with a number of things including the language! From there we embarked on the Italian, Lloyd Trestino ship *Neptunia,* in Genoa and set sail for Australia.

On returning home we found the man we had left in charge Harry Abdy, had done a really excellent job, and as a result had improved our financial situation significantly. So in spite of the major improvements we had to implement in the renewal of our leases, the 60s decade proved a very good one for us.

A very gifted retired teacher Miss Dorothea Stephens from a well-known Brisbane family, came on board as governess, and started the school careers of Bim, Penny and Jeremy.
In 1963 I was pregnant again, and this time I decided to have it at home, as previously I'd had to either farm the other children out or find somebody reliable to look after them.

My doctor gave me permission to go ahead, and I found a nursing friend in Cairns who worked at one of the Aboriginal missions, who said she would be pleased to assist.

In the meanwhile I got all the necessary equipment ready, and concentrated on my exercises so that I would not require an anaesthetic.

Like the best laid plans of mice and men etc., on the day of his birthday when Geoff had had a long day ploughing a paddock, things started to happen. I did not let Geoff know immediately so he could

go to bed and get some rest, but awoke him a few hours later. Of course the nurse was not due for another couple of days, so I called on a niece who was staying and who had done midwifery, to come and help. She did the best the best she could, but obviously had no practice and we had a few complications because of her medicating too early.

However all was well in the end and we welcomed young Christopher into the world the day after Geoff's birthday.

After a year Bim joined his brother Giles at *St. Barnabas Boarding School* in Ravenshoe, but Miss Stephens was with us for nearly ten years, and was a wonderful mentor and support through all sorts of experiences.

In 1967 the weather in March was as was to be expected, very wet. But one weekend when we had the boys and two friends each, and another couple from Atherton going fishing, all staying in the house, we were caught out. Fifteen inches of rain fell on the Saturday night and it just kept raining. As a result all the creeks came up and broke their banks. We had water up to the cottage below the homestead, and Geoff worrying about the cattle, had sent a new Aboriginal man with our old faithful Hector to open the gates so that the cattle could get out.

The creek had risen when they returned to cross back to the homestead and though Hector swam back, the other man Claude could not swim, so elected to go up to the truck left up the hill on the other side, and sit there until the water went down.

Meanwhile Geoff and Colin Lee Long (one of two Atherton visitors), decided to get the rowboat out and go to rescue Claude, as Geoff knew the water could stay up for days if not weeks. They left mid-afternoon and we were busy with numerous other things. Jeremy came into the kitchen and remarked that the boat had wobbled badly. We hoped there was nothing seriously wrong. We did not know what we could do to help. However I did get seriously concerned as darkness fell, and they had not returned until about 7.30pm when a very wet (and) exhausted Geoff walked in and recounted their ordeal. Where Jeremy had observed the 'wobble' Geoff had got washed into the rip where the bridge was, under water and had lost an oar, of course he had no control of the boat in the fierce current with only one oar so they abandoned ship and swam to the bank. They finally persuaded Claude that the two of them could hold on to him as they swam, and off they went. Half way across he got into a panic, and sitting on a stump refused to move. So they returned home and Geoff organized a team to keep lights on him and cooeeing all night in the effort to keep up his spirits.

The following morning the water level had risen and there was no sign of Claude, but about 12 hours later he appeared drenched and looking absolutely exhausted. He had had a terrifying night, washed down with the debris until he came to a fence line and was able to get up on to dry ground and walk home. We gave him a hot shower and some hot soup and put him to bed for a couple of days. Apart from the trauma of the experience he suffered no ill effects, but weeks later when the roads opened, he left on the first mail truck never to return!

The roads to Ravenshoe were closed for 2 to 3 months, as bridges had all been washed away, and there were miles of fencing to be replaced, plus a lot of cattle lost. Out agents headquarters in Brisbane had a big blown-up photograph of cattle caught in the Herbert River. They were hanging by their necks in the forks of trees, and many constituted our *Droughtmaster Stud,* which we lost in the flood.

In the late 1960s there came into our lives two Saibai Island girls from Bamaga, Lily and Rosie. They were marvelous girls and we all became fond of them. They would plait their curly hair up into little short pigtails all over their heads, which we called their 'sputniks'.

They were very different in the way they communicated from the Aboriginal girls. With Rosie in the kitchen and Lily in the house, they could really run things single-handedly, as indeed they did once for three months when I was away in hospital in Brisbane. Lily would write to me and tell me about the barrow-loads of manure she had brought up from the fowl-yard for my garden, or how Rosie had prepared a birthday party for one of the children, or the little things about the boss that she knew I'd be interested in.

Like all Islanders they were very musical, and with a brother on the guitar, they would sing to our guests and us when we had a barbecue in the summer by the pool. They were very happy days for all of us.

Early in the 70s I had to go to Brisbane for cancer surgery and radiation, and as the three youngest children were all at school in Toowoomba at the time, they were able to come down and visit me, which was lovely.

In 1974 I was due to take Jeremy south to attend the *Southport School*. We were staying with my mother's cousin Kitty Robinson, one of the first War brides to come to Australia.

As we drove to the coast it had started raining, and after I'd settled him in school I went to stay with a good friend in Surfers Paradise. She lived in a unit with a high-set garage which was most fortunate as in the morning we looked out on to the street to see the roofs of cars showing under the water! When eventually I could return to Brisbane, the city was still flooded and they were calling for volunteers to help clean up some of the suburban houses as they emerged from the waters.

So with nothing else to do, I borrowed a mop and bucket and broom, went around for my free tetanus shot and drove over to Chelmer to help there. It was pretty horrifying to see the damage done in the homes, and in those days of chipboard furniture, to see what looked like pieces of Wheetbix floating around the rooms. Total devastation, and so sad for the owners, who in many instances had been migrants who had saved hard to build and furnish their houses.

By this time Bim was working in England, and Penny who had been in a secretarial job in the stock-agents *Primac* in Brisbane, decided she wanted to travel too. It was decided that I should go with her to England, so we sat down and put a plan together. To make the trip educational as well as fun, we booked to go to Greece for a few weeks, then Italy for a bit more, and finally make our way through France to England. We had both studied Ancient History at school, so really enjoyed Greece and particularly our cruise around the Greek Islands. I had taken the precaution of having an agent from Thomas Cook meet us at each landfall, but we had one disaster.

From Greece we had gone to Yugoslavia, and from Dubrovnik we travelled in a small coastal steamer up the coast to Ljubljana. Here we were supposed to catch the train to Venice. However still travelling with far too much luggage, we found that we had to cart the stuff over a bridge to another platform. Here we found a train waiting and in my best (guessed at) Italian, I asked a jolly-looking little farmer if this was right for Venezia (Venice). When he smiled and nodded furiously we embarked, and sank back to enjoy our breakfast of a large white bread roll with a huge squeeze of mustard! Eventually we moved off and set up a cracking pace through the Italian countryside. Imagine our dismay when we saw we were passing through Venezia instead of stopping. When we finally pulled up we were in

Padua at about the time Mr. Cook was to meet us in Venice! I finally found an official and explained our predicament, and eventually we were seated in the train back to Venice!

From there we found somebody to assist us, and after a gondola ride into town, we were directed to a very smart hotel where we had to wait for somebody to come and take us to where we were staying. We were feeling rather weary and very grubby by this time, and felt rather awkward as we sat and watched people in evening dress coming and going on their way to dining out or whatever. Finally our guide came and took over the luggage, and took us down to our hotel where we had a good night following a substantial meal, and were ready for the start of our guided tours in the morning.

Generally we found Italy very interesting with many beautiful places to visit. In Rome we had a couple of occasions where we had to bolt for cover as we were being followed by rather unsavoury characters. One was back into our hotel where they followed us right up the steps. When I spoke to the receptionist as to why we had returned so quickly, he merely commented "what else do you expect with a beautiful daughter like yours"?

The city we loved the most was Florence with its beautiful buildings and art galleries, and from there we moved into Tuscany to visit a *Chianina* cattle stud. We had been considering buying some of these cattle for *Gunnawarra*, and they were certainly very impressive, but as you will see later on it never eventuated.

I took Penny over to England where she was working for people who kept hunters, and the horses were her responsibility. After visiting some of my friends and relatives I flew back to Australia in early October, to be met by Geoff with some devastating news. In my absence in June or July a beef depression had descended, and the markets were in a hopeless state, one which in actual fact did not improve for four years. During this time we had no income at all and all our hands had to be dismissed.

Giles had been persuaded to gain some experience and was working in N.S.W. As soon as he knew the situation he came straight home which was a huge help. Bim and Penny were still overseas and the two younger boys were still at boarding school. Eventually Bim and Penny got berths on a ship returning via South Africa, and came home to help keep things going. It was fortunate we had all our own meat, milk, eggs and vegetables, and we also kept turkeys both for our own use and to dress and sell for the Christmas market. It was during this time that I tripped over a hose in the garden and fell, fracturing my spine. It was most inopportune at this time, but after a week or so in the hospital I came home in a brace, which was hot and uncomfortable, but at least I could keep working.

By 1978 we were coming out of the depression, to find the whole herd had been infected with brucellosis, brought in by a neighbour who had come in from interstate. It was a very serious situation and mercifully the Government provided a helicopter and six men, and we another six men, and they mustered every day into the yards. Here the *D.P.I.* took blood tests on all the cattle which Geoff flew to Townsville laboratories and returned with the results the same day, so that the cattle could be turned out if clear, and slaughtered if not (being deposited in a large pit dug outside the yards). This continued for twelve months, and after that we were able to deal with it on our own, although it was five years before we were declared clear.

During this time I was cooking for 25 to 30 head, making bread and butter as well as meals. I had a couple of beehives, which gave us the honey we required, and even tried (unsuccessfully) to make soap too!

Finally we came out of the depression, and at the end of that decade Geoff and I had a holiday, going on a Pacific cruise. It was most enjoyable, but we were both horrified at the number of teenagers travelling on their own, and drinking themselves silly all day and half the night. Finally they became violent and pulled one of the bars to bits and became a thoroughly disruptive influence. So when we called into New Zealand they were all unloaded and sent home!

When we returned home Giles was to be married, and we decided that we should start looking for somewhere else to live so that they could run things themselves. Giles was keen to become a helicopter pilot, as we had discovered how much cheaper mustering became with pilots to bring the cattle in from further out on the run. As he had come home and worked for nothing during the depression years, we decided to pay for his training in Los Angeles, which at that time was cheaper and more comprehensive than the available training in Australia. So after their wedding in Brisbane they took off for the U.S.A. as part of their honeymoon! When their time in L.A. was completed they had a few days up in the snow in Aspen, Colorado.

In the meanwhile we had found a 10 acre block on the hill overlooking the Atherton aerodrome, and set about planning our new home. We were fortunate to find a good builder, and as soon as our plans were passed by council we started building and were able to move in by the early 1980s. The following year our agent persuaded us as members of the *United Graziers Association* to go to conferences held first in Hong Kong and then in Seoul in Korea. It followed in the first months that China was opened to the world. We found Hong Kong quite fascinating and at that time so cheap, that we all did a lot of shopping!
We were taken to various factories turning out both clothing and carpets, and were interested in the lack of modern machinery and in the amount of work still done by hand.

From there we flew to Seoul, which was a very modern city, with still a strong American influence. The locals wore such beautiful colourful outfits and the shops were magnificent. The several factories we visited were well equipped with modern machinery, and they had obviously benefited from the American presence in the country since the war.

After we had travelled through parts of South Korea we were offered the chance of 10 days in China, which we took with about a dozen others.

I was particularly interested having my father's family so involved in the country for over 30 years. When we travelled there people all wore khaki or clothes in navy blue. The contrast after Korea was particularly striking, especially after seeing the beautiful clothing and pottery on display in museums such as the *Summer Palace* in Beijing. As a primary school student having had to research and give a talk on the *Great Wall of China*, it was particularly interesting to visit it, and walk up on it to one of the lookouts. It was so much bigger than I had imagined, we reckoned 6 horses could walk abreast on it. On the train trip to the site we had a very interesting talk with our guides. As guides seem to be everywhere, they were very well educated and interesting people. They confided that they would love to travel overseas, but unless they were doing a further degree elsewhere, were not allowed to leave the country. I hope this has changed for them now nearly 30 years on.

Another city of great interest was Shanghai. We were taken to a school for gifted children who attended classes in their specialty after normal school hours. There we witnessed amazing standards of proficiency in a huge variety of topics, from mathematics, to science to music, to radio, to dance and many others.

On our return to Atherton we continued developing the garden there and planting trees, both native and fruit trees, and the flower beds around the house.

In about 1985 Bim suggested running a tourist operation at *Gunnawarra*, so I returned there with him and we spent six months preparing the house and doing up furniture in readiness for receiving guests. We had people come to photograph the place and write up a brochure, so that we could start advertising. This included a trip as far as Sydney for me with our agent. On the way we visited a variety of travel agents to explain the package we were offering, and also I had one interview on television when we were staying in Sydney.

Because of our itinerary we did not encourage children as guests, only in special circumstances when they were 12 years or over. The plan was for me to give them all breakfast at 8.00 am (having already prepared a picnic lunch) and then Bim would take them out on safari all day. When they returned late afternoon they would have a rest and a shower and we would meet for drinks at about 6.30 pm. We found our Australian guests enjoyed dinner and staying up pretty late. So I personally preferred the overseas visitors who were happy to turn in by 10.00 pm, as I had to be up by 4.30 am or 5.00 am to prepare lunch and breakfast!

When the house emptied at 9.00 am I could then do the rooms, clean the house and start organising dinner, so it was a fairly full-on day for us both! However we both enjoyed it and made some very good friends with whom we are still in touch.

About this time Giles and Sally's eldest child Jesse became ill just as his sister Lucy was born. Sally's mother, who was up here helping her, came to me and asked what I thought, was wrong. To me it appeared to be meningitis, so I took Giles and the little fellow down to Atherton in the evening. The doctor we knew attending him said he thought it was merely a throat infection and seemed puzzled when I pointed out that his head was retracting. Anyway they were kept in overnight and I had to return home as we had guests.

Giles rang at 7.00 am to say Jesse's condition had deteriorated and they were being transferred to I.C.U. in Cairns. There they confirmed it was meningitis and began treatment. However a day or so later Giles rang me to say he thought Jesse could not see. When I asked him what the staff thought he said they claimed he was just dozy with the medication. Anyway I suggested he got straight on to the paediatrician and the next thing we knew he was transferred to Brisbane, and had surgery to put a shunt in his head.
Sally went down but was not allowed in to the ward as she was feeding Lucy and there was worry of infection. Poor old Giles nursed Jesse for nearly three months before they came home, and we all celebrated Christmas soon after.

Only three months later, Sally brought him up to me in the kitchen saying he was ill again. This time we went straight to Brisbane and there he was diagnosed with spina bifida. There was an operation on his spine, but apparently they did not go high enough and after sustaining a third dose of meningitis, he had to return to Brisbane for more surgery. There was great concern for a while as he did not come out of the anaesthetic for 24 hours, but eventually it was all behind us for the time being.

Apart from a couple of other setbacks he has done well and works at home. His hobby for many years has been bull-riding at the rodeos, a very dangerous occupation, but I admired Giles and Sally for supporting this interest. I think he needed to show the world he was as good as any other fellow and he certainly proved it. I am thankful that since he acquired a girlfriend he has not been involved in the rodeo scene quite as much!

Geoff would fly up from Atherton fairly frequently, and the guests would enjoy meeting him and Giles who would call in after dinner, and they could explain life on the station and what their day was like.

In about 1987 Bim met this Sydney girl and they decided they wanted to get married. So I warned her that the business was hard work, and not bringing in buckets of money, but this did not deter her and she seemed genuinely interested. The wedding was arranged in Sydney during the 1988 celebrations, as Bim's friend who was to be best-man, was heavily involved with the *First Fleet* sailing from England and arriving that week.
We all enjoyed a wonderful week with a number of old and new friends, and after they returned home following the honeymoon I left them to it and returned to Atherton.

For a while all went well, but eventually there were some major problems, added to which the 'pilot's strike' intervened, and caused many potential guests to cancel visits. Finally I had to close the operation down, and Bim and Kateena his wife, relocated to Cairns. There Bim worked as a chef for a time, and when Kateena decided she had had enough of life in the north and returned to Sydney, he came home before being accepted into the *William Angliss College* in Melbourne to do a Hospitality course for the next three years.

Towards the end of the decade Geoff had to give up flying and sell his aircraft, and we decided to build a home on land we had purchased beside the Tinaroo Dam. There we built our 'dream home' beside the water, and started developing another garden. The grandchildren would enjoy visiting and trips in our boat. Two of the boys had traps to catch the local red-claw crayfish, and we all enjoyed the swimming.

By the time we moved in during late 1992, Bim had found his way to Blair Atholl in Scotland where he was running a guesthouse. He was keen for us to visit, so in 1993 we set off and enjoyed a wonderful trip. I had an opportunity to visit friends and family in England, and every day when the guests had gone we would set out exploring different parts of Scotland, including a fascinating trip to the Outer Hebrides.

Towards the end of the year we spent a week or two with friends in England and finally flew back to Australia for Christmas.

Some months later it became apparent that Geoff had further chest problems, but it was not until the end of July 1995 that we received the diagnosis of lung cancer. He turned down the offer of radiation treatment in Brisbane, which possibly would have only given temporary relief. So we returned home to Tinaroo and made the most of the time that was left. We had so many friends calling in to say good-bye, and really until the last couple of days he would get dressed and sit in his chair out on the verandah. He eventually slipped away at the end of November.

Christopher and Jacklyn with their first child Remy of a month old, had come to help me (Jackie is a nurse and was a great support) and the rest of the family all joined us towards the end, Bim having returned to Australia by this time.

After a while as I got involved in various activities in Atherton which was ten miles away, I realized that I needed to be nearer to town, so prepared to put the home at Tinaroo on the market. I did not want to give it away, so waited two years before I met the family who really wanted to buy (it) and offered the right price. We ultimately became good friends, but in the event they were only able to stay

a few years as his work entailed travelling to the University in Townsville, and Cairns was more convenient.

I finally settled on a house in suburban Atherton which had a reasonably large garden. I settled on this as Christopher and his young family would need the area for the children to play in. Big mistake! They took a job for two years in a remote area of the Northern Territory managing a cattle property, and then moved to another near the coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria for another two years.
About this time when 3 year old Holly was playing a game with her sister under a table on the veranda, she stood up suddenly and hit the side of her neck on the corner of the table, and came crying in to her mother. Jackie could not see anything so gave it a rub and a kiss and she went out to play. About 20 minutes later there was a piercing scream, and Remy came in to say Holly was unwell. On going outside Jackie found her unconscious on the swing. Christopher was up in the air somewhere, so she called him on the two-way to say that she was now taking her to the doctor in Normanton. There he examined her and said he thought she had had an epileptic episode. Fortunately Jackie was not satisfied, so they were air-lifted to *Mt. Isa Hospital* and from there, after an overnight stay, they were sent on to Townsville where we all gathered.

After 3 to 4 days the consultant decided she should be transferred to Brisbane, so Christopher flew down with her, and Jackie came with her parents and the other children by car. By this time an MRI had been done, and it showed that where she had hit her neck on the table a clot had broken away and lodged in the brain, so she (had) suffered a severe stroke. After many weeks in hospital they were able to return home, and Jackie then put in many hours of physio every day to help Holly recover use of her limbs.

With great assistance from the staff of the *Royal Children's Hospital*, who visited initially every 3 months or so, and more hospital visits for other therapy, Holly has improved enormously.

Sometime after this Christopher bought a business near Rockhampton, and they were there for a number of years. They worked really hard there, but brought it up to scratch and eventually sold out.

Following this he returned to the bush to manage a property owned by a timber group, *Great Southern Plantations.*

It was in rather nice country near Hughenden, and they had been there for 2 to 3 years when they heard through the grapevine that *Great Southern* was going broke. At that point they decided again to go out on their own, and came down to an auction, and for a good price bought an operating avocado farm. As it was to be 3 months before they took over, the previous owner assured them that there would be caretakers to care for the crop which was to be picked in February. When they arrived at the end of the year, it was to find the caretakers had neglected to do the job properly and the trees were looking really sick. Their pick instead of producing 8,000 trays (which represented the annual income), instead produced only 1,300. It has been a really tough year for them, and a big learning curve as well as a lot of sheer hard work. However the place looks really good now and we all have high hopes for the February picking.

Christopher has now gone to do some flying for a company cleaning power lines for a few weeks, and Jackie gets on the tractor to do the regular spraying, whilst the children do all the mowing and weeding.

Two years ago I moved to this unit, when my friends who owned it had to go into care. It is very convenient to everything, and with very nice neighbours I am really enjoying it after the ghastly months of 'downsizing' which preceded the move!

I keep myself occupied with voluntary work in the hospital (Chemo. Unit and elsewhere), and meetings and organizations I am involved with. The present occupation is fighting for a scanner for the hospital. It costs $6,000,000 per year at the moment to send people to Cairns, and some of them have nearly a day's journey to get here. Whilst the government is spending millions on football stadiums and highways around Brisbane, the North is definitely the poor cousin who battles for the most essential facilities.

"I GET SNAKE ON YOU"

It was 1958, and though Australia was enjoying a post war boom, things were very tough in our part of the world. *Gunnawarra*'s heyday had been during the war, when they catered for the thousands of troops training in our area. The so-called boom period of the 50s was for the sheep property owners in the 'Deep South'. The politicians also hung to the south like leeches and gave very little support to Northern Queensland.

We paid enormous council rates. All of this money went south to pay for the flash highways around Brisbane etc. Very little of it ever came back our way. We probably would have been better off if we had had own council, as we did a lot the maintenance on the road as it was.

Gunnawarra had been split between Dad's siblings. My parents were in the process of trying to build up the numbers of cattle in, a now, much depleted herd. To top things off they were paying out to other members of the family and also death duties for my grandparents.

The road to Mt. Garnet was graded once a year. We had a primitive telephone system in the form of a party line. The line was simple enough being 8 gauge fencing wire, strung through insulators that were tied to the trees. We were responsible for maintaining our section of telephone line, which was 20 miles long. Being closest to town if something went wrong on our stretch we had to start the looking for the problem straight away, otherwise we would have four other graziers breathing down our necks. All it took to cut the line was for a puff of wind to break a branch over it. Sometimes it could take several days to find the break or point where the line was earthing.

They were glorious carefree days for a kid. We had so much space and freedom. Apart from my brother and sister, I had the resident Aborigine kids whom I could play with. There was always someone at hand as my parents had a sizeable staff working for the station. My parents had the belief that children were to be seen but not heard, so we tended to hang in more with the staff. My parents worked very long hours.

I used to go up to the dark boys quarters and sit for hours with them around the fire, eating food like snake, goanna, and tripe from the kills. They used to keep a little bamboo pipe for me that they kept stoked up with plug tobacco. I think I did more coughing and spluttering than actually smoking. I can however remember that I enjoyed being with them.

I can still see old Mick Murray (European name and surname) with a boomerang lodged between his feet so he could shave it smooth with an old piece of glass. These fellows had only come out of the bush thirty-five years previously. It must have been hard for them to give up all they knew for our ways. I can still hear the echo of them saying "Boss, thank God we was civilised"! The gathering of food every day must have been very hard. My forebears said that when they arrived in the area, it was in the grips of a severe drought and that the Aborigines were dying everywhere due to starvation. As romantic as we would like to be about the Aboriginal way of life, it must have been very tough being a hunter-gatherer.

One of the earliest memories I have, is being cared for by a wonderful Aboriginal woman called Agnes. I couldn't have been more than three years of age. She was my first nanny and was with us for years. Very little fazed Agnes. She was very patient with us.

There were three of us. My sister Penny would have been two, I would have been all of four, and my older brother Giles would have been six going on seven. Every afternoon Agnes would take Giles and I down to play in the creek which ran in front of the homestead. She would sit up on the bank and patiently watch us as we splashed around in the shallow water and hunted freshwater shrimp. There were also little sandbanks where we would do construction works and dig big holes. Of course we were always in the nudie, as we really didn't need clothes in that climate. We certainly never considered boots until we were in our early twenties.

I can remember one afternoon when Agnes told us that it was time to go home. Of course we were having far too good a time and totally ignored her. When she said, "I get snake on you", we laughed thinking she was joking and again totally ignored her.

As I was to learn years later, the Aborigines had a superb eye for snakes, and when out in the bush with us could point out where every snake was around us. They knew which snakes were safe to pick up and kept well clear of the poisonous ones.

Before we knew it there was Agnes' imposing trunk towering over us. It took a little while for it to sink in, that in her hands was a sleek, writhing, green tree snake of about five feet in length.

It's amazing how fast one can react when the realities of life strike home. Giles has always been dead-scared of snakes and I wasn't too keen on them myself. There must have been absolute terror written on our ashen white faces.

Though Giles was normally a lot faster at running than I was, I know I certainly gave him a run for his money that day. I don't know who won, but my little legs were certainly pumping hard and didn't stop until I was securely wrapped into the folds of the lower half of Mum's dress.

There was Mick Murray's son Tommy, his wife Dolly, and their children Johnny, Arthur, and Belinda. Tommy was born in the area that is now the *Ravenshoe Golf Course*. He was also initiated there. He was the last of the Aborigines to be initiated in our region. Initiation is something that happened to all young Aboriginal men when they reached puberty. It was when they were told the stories of their origins, and learnt the law that was so vital to their existence in such a harsh environment. It was a time for taking vows and learning about their sexuality.

Tommy Murray 1986

In the desert tribes, they cut a hole at the base of the scrotum and packed it with ash so the hole wouldn't heal over. This then was used as a form of male contraception. When you wanted a child you just reached down and put your finger over the hole. To the white man it was known as 'whistle-cock'.

Various parts of their body were slashed with a stone knife. These slashes were packed with ash to make the scar really puff out. Like a sergeants stripes, these markings indicated what role they where to play in society, i.e. basket weaver, boomerang maker, axe maker etc. It was when they were given their totem.

Like a debutante ball it marked the coming of age, and so that one could claim a wife.

Dolly I think, was born on a neighbouring property called *Gleneagle.* She was raised by the owners - the Henry's. She was well-educated, and the most marvellous person. Incredible dignity! I am very proud to have known her.

After the Great War, the Government took up *Gleneagle* as a Soldier Settlement block. It was too small to be viable. The Henry's had swapped my grandparents a fridge for 40 square miles, to make *Gleneagle* a viable proposition. In the same stroke *Gunnawarra* got its first fridge.

This was before gas or kerosene fridges were available, and way before the electrical ones. It was in the days when the best form of refrigeration was blocks of ice from the *Cairns Ice Works*. As it used to take days to get from Cairns to *Gunnawarra* in the tropical heat, it just wasn't a practical method for the station. So when *Gleneagle* offered this new idea of a fridge they jumped at it.

The fridge was a large box with mesh walls on the outer that where packed with charcoal and lined with hessian. On the top there was a water disperser that had a pipe delivering water to it from a water tank on the roof. The water dribbled through the charcoal and kept the hessian liner moist. By way of convection the internal section of the box was kept cooled down enough to allow the butter to stay hard.

After having never had refrigeration in that climate, and having had to live on dry salt beef and damper three times a day, it must have come as a major blessing.

Tommy and Dad had met on *Wairuna*, a cattle station owned by Dad's Uncle Bob and run by Dad's cousin Ken. Dad had just left school and was doing his jackerooing. Dad was 16 and Tommy was 14. They became firm friends.

Around that time there was murder on *Wairuna* of one the local Aborigines called Alec. The year was 1933. A bad Aboriginal who was known by the white folk as 'Wild Jimmy' killed Alec for his kidney fats. (Cannibalism had ceased in the region by 1910. This case was not recognised as cannibalism. It was a tribal thing. If you ate your enemy's kidney fat, it made you a strong and fearsome warrior). It was a practice carried out when killing someone from another tribal group.

Still Wild Jimmy did have a bad reputation, and was not liked that entirely well by the local Aborigines. This may have been due to the fact that he was a coastal Aboriginal. (Hector claims that Wild Jimmy was his father. This would probably mean that his father's Aboriginal name was *Wombinoo* and was King of the tribe that lived between Kirrama and Tully. This tribe was cannibalistic and was highly feared by the fellows who lived in our area). I do think that he was probably rebelling the white invasion.

At the time Alec and Tommy and few others were out repairing a fence (fencing), Wild Jimmy arrived on the scene. In cahoots with some of the station workers, he hit Alec in the head with a nulla-nulla knocking him out and then proceeded to do the operation. Tommy, who was Alex's mate, was no fool and knew that he was probably next on the list.

When Tommy saw his chance he made break for it and ran for his life. They were in hot pursuit. Tommy dived over the edge of a creek bank and pulled himself up under the roots of a tree. His pursuers didn't see this and ran straight pass him. Tommy knew that it wouldn't take long for them to wake up as to what had happened, so he extricated himself from the roots and took off for the homestead. He managed to beat the others there.

When Tommy reached the homestead, there was only Ken's mother in-law Mrs. Lacey at home. He ran into her for help and told her what had happened. Mrs. Lacey grabbed a pistol (which apparently had no bullets) and held up the group at the front gate.

It was a little bit dicey there for a while, as they were adamant that they wanted Tommy. Eventually she managed to talk one of the *Wairuna* employees into coming forward. She got Tommy to get her a pencil and paper. On it she scribbled a note to Bob Atkinson at *Cashmere* (another one of his properties about 50 miles away) explaining what had happened. The *Wairuna* employee couldn't read or write, and therefore couldn't read what the message said. She talked Wild Jimmy and the others into going with him to deliver the note. When Bob Atkinson read the note, he and his men grabbed them and tied them up.

The police were called in from Ravenshoe. They took them back to Ravenshoe to charge them with murder. They locked them all up in the local clink (gaol). It was a stupid thing to do as the gaol had a dirt floor, and during the night they dug a big hole in the floor and escaped. The police didn't bother chasing them.

They did however want Wild Jimmy. He had become notorious due to his cunning and bush skills.

One time the Ingham police went into the Herbert Gorge country looking for his hideout. On the way out of Ingham they pulled in at an Aboriginal camp and hired two Black Trackers. They were determined that they were going to catch him.

The Trackers guided them through some of the roughest terrain in Australia. The rattan (lawyer cane) jungle in that area is particularly thick. After three trying weeks they returned home, tired and beaten. They hadn't found any sign of him at all and were disappointed.

On their return to Ingham they were given hero's welcome, and hearty congratulations from the town committee. To say the least they were very confused by it all. As far as they were aware they hadn't caught anyone.

It took a little while to sink in. They found that one of the trackers was now missing. He had been with them when they rode up the main street and now he was gone. To their astonishment they realized that he was Wild Jimmy. They hadn't even bothered to check to see what he looked like. For three weeks Wild Jimmy had been tracking himself! They never caught him. He was just too clever for them.

In later years he would bring in gold nuggets to the stations and swap them for 'silence', food, and clothing. The locals called it *Wild Jimmy Gold*. It apparently came from somewhere near the head of

Yahmanie Creek on Mt Smoko close to the Herbert Gorge. The terrain is extremely inhospitable and the jungle is very thick. It is still there to this day. However, even if you could find it, you would not be able to mine it. The area is now a World Heritage listed wilderness.

Tommy's son, Johnny Murray, was my very first friend. We used to get up to all sorts of mischief together. Though we don't see much of each other we are still friends today.

Tommy and Dolly raised them well with a good work ethic. Tommy may have been a bit tough with the boys. I know now that they are hurting because of it. It does sadden me to think that it was to white man standards and not their own. Johnny now works on an Aboriginal-run community in the Kimberly region in Western Australia. Belinda works as a teacher's aid at the *Mount Garnet School*. A tremendous achievement considering the odds they were up against.

Arthur stuck to the ringing (stockwork) and worked at *Gunnawarra* and other Atkinson properties over the years. When the employment ran out with the Atkinson's, he moved to properties further west. He went way out of his way to please his white employers. He was the local entertainment and could belt out *Slim Dusty* songs with great ease. In return they would shovel him full of beer. He became an alcoholic and suffered from alcohol-induced epilepsy.

The property owners were frightened by his illness and dumped him in the streets. He and I were very good friends. The last time I saw him he was in deep trouble. Due to not having other work skills he couldn't get a job. He was terribly demotivated and drinking himself to death on the Aboriginal handout. His mother was going spare, and his father by this time had lost his marbles and was in the nursing home at Herberton. I would have done anything to help Arthur. At that stage I had too many problems of my own.

Then there was Bertie Johnson. My great grandfather had found him as a baby, hanging in a dilly bag from the branches of a tree. The tribe had deserted him, probably due to the fact that he wasn't the full quid. He was raised and educated by my grandmother whose maiden name had been Johnson. He was to a certain extent, treated as one of the family. Due to his impairment my grandmother was not totally successful in Bertie's learning. However a certain amount of it did stick.

I can remember once when Dad asked him if he would go to the homestead cattle yards, which were about a mile away, to count the cattle, as Dad was too busy with office work to do it himself.

Bertie returned about an hour later to report to Dad. He said, "Well boss, there is one hundred and eleventy seven". Dad laughed and decided to count them himself. He discovered that Bertie was spot on. He had gone one hundred and ninety, one hundred and tenty, one hundred and eleventy seven. So in real terms he had counted two hundred and seventeen head. Dad never doubted him again.
Bertie a very portly gentleman was a sort of general handyman i.e. he did a little cattle work and mustering, he also helped in the garden and did some milking and other mundane duties. He was a most gentle, loveable and comical character. As children, we totally adored him. He always had time for our pets and us.

Kenneth Jenkins, the author, Bertie, and Penny about 1962

Due to the lack of entertainment in the bush, Dad used to organize entertainment nights in the ballroom to which everybody on the station was invited. Dad was also a keen on movies and had a 16mm cinecamera and projector. (These films were donated to the *National Film and Sound Archives* in 1997). Also commercial movies were brought in for viewing. Dances would also be organised and a little play-acting and singing etc.

On one particular occasion, Bertie, who was dressed up in one of Dads old suits and looked quite the part, was acting as MC and was to introduce a guest who was going to sing. Her name was Mrs Milton Scarf. Bertie used to have trouble getting his tongue around some of the names, and on this occasion he proudly introduced her as 'Mrs Milking Calf' much to the amusement of all present!
On one particular occasion, I think it was before my time, Bertie was helping on a muster (rounding up of the cattle). It was in one of the smaller paddocks on the station (possibly twelve to fifteen thousand acres), and very close to the homestead (around three to four miles away). Bertie was chasing after this 'mickey' bull (unbranded male calf of about six months of age) on horseback at a flat gallop.

The trees can get very thick in some areas, and to stay in unison with your horse, so as to go the same way around the tree as it does, it pays to watch which direction its ears are pointed in. Of course this doesn't always work and mix-ups happen.

In Bertie's case he went to go one way around the tree and the horse went to go the other way. In short they ended up running up the tree. It must have been quite an accident. These sorts of accidents weren't uncommon and sometimes this could happen two three times in a day.

The first thing Dad knew about it was Bertie standing at the office door saying "Boss I have broken my neck". Though Bertie didn't look too well Dad couldn't believe it. As far as he was concerned when one broke their neck they stayed where they were due to either being dead or unable to move. Just to make sure, Bertie was sent to the *Herberton Hospital* for X-rays. Herberton is about eighty miles away and in those days the roads weren't very good. It must have been a sickening experience for him.

The X-rays proved Bertie's prognosis to be correct. There wasn't much that could be done about it and Bertie was sent back to the station to recover. From that day on Bertie had a very stiff neck, and he had to turn his whole body around when he wanted to see something behind himself.

I used to have this English governess who had very poor eyesight, and was so I discovered later, Bulimic. She was forever raiding the fridge late at night and ate very little through the day. Of course in those days eating disorders weren't understood. This would have definitely been the case out in the bush in Far North Queensland. Anyhow, I can remember that she wasn't too popular. Her name was June.

The parents were away and the head stockman Harry Abdy had taken me to Ravenshoe (about fifty miles away), to stay with his family for a few days. On our return, as we drove up the road towards the homestead, we could see a portly black man in the process of ripping his shirt off, tearing up the lawn in full pursuit of a nude lily-white female. The chase came to an abrupt end as June ducked into her room and slammed the door in Bertie's face.

At the same time he spotted us, and came over to us his eyes glowing with excitement. The way he explained the course of events was very funny. Apparently June didn't realize that there would be anybody in cooee of the homestead while the parents were away. Little did she realize that someone had to water the garden and the vegetable patch?

She had decided to take a squatters chair out onto the lawn in front of the homestead and have a totally nude sunbathe. This also meant that she removed her glasses. A big mistake! Bertie was working in the vegetable garden about twenty yards distant, facing the other way. Due to her poor eyesight she couldn't see him. He also didn't realize that there was someone present.
She must have sneezed and Bertie heard it. It must have looked funny - Bertie doing one of his now famous, 180 degree turns. His eyes must have popped out of his head. It was the Aboriginal way for the male to take the female in this fashion. So Bertie decided to give it a spin. June must have got the shock of her life when Bertie came into her range of vision, with such a lusting, drooling look on his face. He was already starting to undo the buttons on his shirt.

Like a big puppy he stood there looking at Harry as if to say, "Gees Boss I gave it my best shot. What a pity I didn't catch her". He exuded the excitement of the chase. Of course this was not seen in any way as bad, though it may have been judged wrong. It may have been a different tale had Bertie caught her. You can bet your bottom dollar that June never again sunbathed nude at *Gunnawarra*.

I used to go up to the dark boys quarters and sit with Bertie for hours. The room was very sparse, the only furniture being two old beds. There was also an apple case and a kerosene box pinned to the wall for a shelf, in which to store possessions. There was not much to be kept in them except for tobacco, pipe, and old *Log Cabin* tins, which were used from everything to storing homemade lead fishing sinkers to being ashtrays. There was also *Peoples Post* or *Pix People* magazines kept there. These were very popular with the workers (many of them having very limited education), due to many pictures and very little writing.

Most possessions were kept in the swags that were rolled out on the beds. These beds though functional weren't that comfortable. They were made of greenhide cowskins stretched across a bed frame. These hides would go rock solid with kinks and all. The swag contained three or four blankets that had seen better days and also a pillow. Clothes and toiletries etc. were neatly arranged under the pillow. There were no sheets. They could be rolled at short notice and usually had two straps to hold them rolled. A lot of fellows used to use their bull straps for this purpose. They were like an instant portable home. They could be laid down anywhere and because they were made of canvas the occupant remained dry even in the biggest of storms. These swags were standard for most of the staff. It was the excepted standard of living, and swags are still used to this very day.

On many occasions I rolled up at Bertie's abode to find him reading the odd book he managed to lay his hands on. It took me many years to realize that Bertie was reading his book upside down and that it was all show. I never said anything because I think he was very proud of his achievement.

Sylvie, Bertie, the Author, and cat. 1961

One day we were coming in from *Sugarbag* (Aboriginal pidgin-English for native beehive due to the honey being packed in little bag like sacks), a mustering camp situated about 15 miles from the homestead. It was quite a long trip, as what we called bush tracks would probably not be recognised by someone who had grown up in the city. These roads were neither graded nor formed. They were little more than two wheel tracks that if driven over enough stopped the grass from growing back.

The trip back to the homestead could take up to 2 hours in the rickety old Landrover, and the road was fairly rough. As a kid, the heat, dust and bumps used to be both tiring and boring. All the way home it would be a whining, "How far to go home now Dad"? We must have driven him to despair. I can still hear Dad singing that old song *I Am Forever Blowing Bubbles.*

When we were about a mile from the homestead, this very stout gentleman looking very much like a policeman in his khaki pith helmet, khaki shorts, and shirt, stepped into the middle of the road. He had big *Mr Plod* style hobnailed boots, and very dark sunglasses. In one hand he held a pencil and notepad. He stood in the middle of the road and raised his great paw, with the palm of his hand facing us indicating for us to stop. The paleness of his palms glared starkly in contrast with the dark brown almost black colour of the skin on his arms.

When Dad pulled up, Bertie proceeded to book him for speeding. The giveaway was the old belt that he used to hitch his pants up with.

This old belt was typical of what most 'bushmen' of the day wore. Sewn on to it was a leather pocketknife pouch, fob watch pouch, and a pouch designed to hold a tin of *Bells* wax matches. Some African safari friend of Dads, had given him the helmet as a present. When Dad had got sick of wearing it he had given it to Bertie.

Bertie was most certainly a character who left an indelible and lasting impression on all our lives He touched us all in so many ways.

When the voting public decided in the referendum of 1972 that these people should have the equal wage, it was genocide. Many Aborigines including Bertie had to be put off, as the stations just couldn't afford to keep them. It was a very sad turning point in their history. The Government built these horrible little settlements outside the country towns not even asking them if it was what they

wanted. A lot of the houses ended up as firewood. Due to the lack of an education in nutrition, and their insatiable taste for sweet things, it wasn't long before they were suffering from malnutrition and diabetes.

Though my father would ration out the occasional nip of rum, it was a very strict rule on the station that there would be no drinking. It was too dangerous when they had to get up very early the following morning and hop on a bucking horse.

When they went into the towns the publicans had an open field day, and ripped them off for every penny they could squeeze out of them. It was disgusting. When alcohol couldn't be found, they would switch to drinking methylated spirits. There were many deaths.

My mother tried very hard to organize the locals in town to find alternative recreation for the underage drinkers. The town's response to say the least was very lethargic.

I am not saying that everything was perfect for the Aborigines in the old system. What I am saying is that the changes came too early. They should have remained on the stations until a better solution could be found for them.

Bertie became just another statistic on death row. With this change came the end of laughter. In our area they are now a very sad, hurt and desperate people – what's left of them.

LIGHTING THE FUSE

My earliest memories I have of my fascination with big explosions, goes back into my dreamtime when as a small child. I can remember staying with friends at Edge Hill in Cairns.

Up in the hill behind the houses was a rainforest-covered gully where I would go with my mates to play. At a certain time of the year the region would be inundated with elephant beetles, and we would collect bucketfuls of them and go dam building. It was a major excursion and we lugged two boards, little shovels, buckets, razorblades, matches, and bags and bags of one penny, and two penny bungers (crackers) up over the brow of the hill and down into the gully on the other side.

I can remember clearing a sight to build the dam and then building a ramp for the dirt to be dumped over. On each side of the ramp was a board which formed a race to guide our dump trucks up to the tip point.

The bungers were used to excavate the dirt needed for the dam. We got the dirt from the bank of the creek. We would poke a series of holes in the dirt with noisy mechanized stick machines and then insert a bunger in each hole. The match brigade would move in and the fuses would be lit as quickly as possible, because as any good bunger-kid knew these fuses were highly unpredictable. With much anticipation we would cover our ears awaiting the explosion.

After the big bang the loosened dirt would be extracted by the shovel brigade, and piled on a heap leading into the race. One of my friends was an expert at removing the wings and hollowing out the backs of the beetles with a razorblade, so they could be used to carry the dirt up the race just like true dump trucks. When they reached the top of the ramp they would topple over the edge of the ramp, dumping out their precious load of dirt at the same time. They would then be taken back to the beginning of the race to repeat the process all over again. After five or six runs they would die and be replaced with a new one. This process of multiple explosions and dump trucks would keep us entertained for hours.

Another really exciting time on my calendar at that age, was *Guy Fawkes Night.* It was a big event on the station, which usually involved my parents putting on a party for the oldies and fireworks for us younguns. We had skyrockets, Roman Candles, Catherine wheels, four-penny, three-penny, tupenny, and one-penny bungers. We had strings of halfpenny bungers and Tom Thumbs. We also had throw downs and sparklers for the meek hearted. The lawn at the front of the homestead was a war zone with bangs, cracks, and whizzes happening everywhere. Skyrockets filled the sky as we went to war. This was not a scene controlled by parents as we had access to all of the above delights and used them at our own discretion.

When it went quiet, to fill in the gaps of excitement we would sneak into the sea of grownups legs, and set off strings of halfpenny bungers and Tom Thumbs, and then stand back with much mirth and glee and watch as the confused grownups jumped and danced in fright.

On one of these occasions a school friend, Greg Shaw, got a little bored and decided to go into the big dining room and set rockets off up the fireplace chimney. Unbeknownst to him, the chimney was not a straight up and down affair, and the rocket only went up a three or four feet before hitting the top of the first section and then falling back down into the fireplace. It then, like a confused, frightened bird, rapidly zoomed off all around the dining room, hitting walls, roof, floor and tables trailing hot sparks, smoke and ash as it wound all over on its wild erratic journey. When the smoke finally cleared it

revealed fire-damaged lace tablecloths, and burnt spots all over the French polished furniture of the room. Greg realizing his dilemma, like the Grey Ghost disappeared into the night.

Another pastime we had when home from *St Barnabas* with our school chums was to have war games down by *Manface Gully*. It was me and my younger and smaller friends versus Giles and his older and much savvier friends. Two sheets of corrugated iron would be set up as a defence line for each team, and boxes of three-penny bungers and toads (which were plentiful and a real curse at the time), would be set up as a supply of ammunition for each team. It was a bit like lobbing grenades at each other. The bungers were put down the toad's throat leaving the fuse out, clear of the mouth and dry.

The trick was to light the fuse and hold it until it burnt down short, before lobbing with the hope it would go off as it got over the heads of the opposition, thus raining bits of toad and guts all over them. Sometimes, no a lot of times, because of the unpredictability of the fuses (they could sometimes burn down the center of the wick without it being visible to the participant), the grenade would go off before it was possible to launch it or just after launching, which would bring squeals of raucous laughter from the opposition as the stunned grenade launcher stood dripping in blood and guts.

Those heady days and the fun we had as young boys, were very sadly curtailed when the 'powers that be' decided to ban crackers. It was the beginning of the end of the real fun for the youth of Queensland. However not to be beaten Giles and I decided to start manufacturing our own explosive toys. We tried Molotov Cocktails and found them very boring so we graduated into the manufacture of bolt bombs and boy what a graduation that was!

All we needed was a nut, two bolts, and scrapings of five Redhead match heads. The workshop was stacked with lots of old nuts and bolts, and the station storeroom had cartons and cartons of matches. To make the bomb all one had to do was screw one bolt halfway through the nut, then put the redhead scrapings into the formed hole and screw the other bolt down onto them. A quick tightening of the bolt, followed by a very slight loosening tweak of the said bolt, left one with a very explosive toy indeed.

We would climb up into the rafters of the old workshop where there were stacks of timber boards, and form a flat section of boards to lie on, and as protection. These bombs needed to hit cement to go off. We had clay sewage pipe sections standing on their ends on the cement. Through a crack in the boards like bombardiers, we would aim the bombs to land inside the pipes. The ensuing and terrifying explosions saw the pipes obliterated, and bits of white-hot bolt shooting off at a flat trajectory into the distance. The bigger the bolt, the bigger the explosion. It was an uncontrollable and very dangerous pastime, and Dad was not impressed at his pipes and bolts being totally destroyed, so it was a pretty short-lived experiment.

It was not long after that that we found a box of aged gelignite, detonators and fuse in the old saddle shed store, and graduated again. Being a little wiser, we took the next experiment out into the bush away from the homestead so as not to be caught again by Dad. This was the beginning of a very short sojourn into what happens to large ant beds (termite mounds), when a stick of gelignite is let off in the base of them.
It was years later that I was to learn, when working as a Powder Monkey's assistant at *Ravenshoe Tin Dredge*, just how lucky we were not to have injured or killed ourselves playing around with old gelignite, detonators and fuse. And that's another story.

Note to the reader: This chapter relates to a very painful event that impacted enormously on my life. I suggest if you would rather not go there, you move onto the next observational story.

IT TOOK ME FIFTY YEARS TO FIND CONTENTMENT, WISDOM AND PEACE

"Have you done your homework Bim"? Jean cheekily asked. 'What a stirrer', I thought. Everyone knows I never do my homework as they know I am working on my book. 'What a good friend she is', I thought. Mind you the same could be said for everyone in our writers group – the *Ravenshoe Writers Group.* We meet once a week, not only to write, but to catch up on each other's news. It is a group that has certainly centred what is important in my life, and for that I will be eternally grateful.

I came back to live in Ravenshoe in 2006 and joined the *Writers Group* straight up. Ravenshoe is a sleepy little town with a population of about a 1,000 people, with the outlying development of *Millstream Estates* adding up to another 1,000 people, and a farming community of about 500 people bringing it to about 2,500 people in the whole area. It is Queensland's highest town, being 3,000 feet above sea level. A cool place to be, in the tropics.

Prior to that, I had dodged the town for many years having been at boarding school here for five years between 1964 and 1968. At that time Ravenshoe was a timber town that supplied the *British Commonwealth* with Red Cedar and many other good rainforest timbers such as Silky Oak, Mahogany, and Queensland Maple etc.

The school no longer exists as a church school as it was then. The church sold it in the early 1980s to prevent a film crew from 60 Minutes headed by Jana Wentd, from coming to do a story on the drink and drug culture of both the teachers and the students. It was closed overnight, and most of the staff was sacked on the spot. The school certainly went to the pot after the Reverend Robert Waddington left. It is now the State High School for Ravenshoe.

I have mixed feelings about *St Barnabas*. It was a school where as children we had many great adventures, and made many enduring school friends. It is a school where we jumped off 50 foot high rocks, into the icy depths of the water that poured down from the *Little Millie Falls* almost every afternoon. If it was not *Little Millie,* then it was off the rocks at a waterfall downstream from *Little Millie* that we knew as the *Army Pool.* It was quite a walk from the school, and as kids it was wonderful to dawdle along on a balmy afternoon to have a swim.

We had a fantastic scout troop run by Brother 'Fiery' Fred. It was probably Fred who made our lives exciting at *St Barnabas.* It was not unusual to be dragged out of bed at two in the morning to go and raid another scout group camped in the jungle. We used to go on fantastic camping trips – I can remember going on a two week camping trip to Coopers Creek just south of Cape Tribulation, and another one week camp at *Collins Weir* on the Walshe River. We should have been called the 'adventure troop'.

We had such freedom, and it was a way of life we can only dream about now, as Occupational Health and Safety, Political Correctness, and Policies and Procedures drive our children's and our lives in a direction, I feel, that is very much to our detriment.

The three school terms a year were long, and only allowed us out to see our parents for one free weekend and two exit Sundays per term. This was made up for however, by the fact that we got 2 weeks off in the May holidays, 4 weeks off for the August holidays and 12 weeks off for the Christmas holidays.

We went to church morning and night. Our little corrugated iron church was a very cold place to be in winter, (temperatures in Ravenshoe have been known to get down to minus 16 degrees celsius). We had a school choir which was compulsory if you were chosen. I was 9 years old and the smallest boy in the school when I, along with Robbie Chong, was made a solo soprano for the choir.

The ceremony was *High Church of England* and the services were sung in Latin. The Sunday morning service was 3 hours long, and the smoke and stench from the incense and candles that invaded our senses had kids fainting everywhere. Of course church was compulsory for the whole school, and if one dodged it and was caught out they were caned heavily by the Reverend Waddington (or the 'Wad' as we called him).

Reverend Robert Waddington was our headmaster. I was absolutely terrified of him. We were caned on our rear from a selection of canes he had in the Teacher's Common Room. He had big thick ones for offences like smoking or bullying, and would give up to 24 cuts for these offences. He had thin, whippy canes for the 6 cuts he gave for walking on the grass in the quadrangle, or the 12 cuts he gave for cheek. To receive the cane, usually the name of the boy was read out at breakfast off a pink slip, which was given to the headmaster by the reporting teacher or house master. When he could, he would call out the names of those to report to his office on the coldest morning he could. The man was a sadist, and I can remember lying paralysed under his office stairs in gut-wrenching pain, for up to hour after the event.

My mother was a director on the school board. As a family we went back to England in 1960 to 1961 to meet Mum's family. Whilst we were there, the School Board asked Mum to vet an applicant for the job of headmaster at *St Barnabas*. That man was the Reverend Robert Waddington. If only she had known then what she knows now!

Before I go any further in this story, I would like to point out that my mother is completely blameless in the story that I am about to tell. If anything, my parents were perhaps a little naïve to the evils that pervade human society. Also they would have still been numbed by the horror of the *Second World War* at this time. They certainly had no real concept of what a paedophile was, and certainly would not have identified a man of such good reference as the Rev. Robert Waddington as being one. I think the same can be said for a lot of people who were around at the time who, had they known, could have done something about it.

When I first went to *St Barnabas* my school marks were at or near the top of the class. By the end of the first year my marks were at the bottom of the class. My marks stayed at the bottom of the class for my remaining nine years at school.

The Wad raped me between my legs, mainly because I was too small to penetrate using *Brillcream* - a hair cream that was fashionable at the time - as a lubricant. Every now and then he would attempt penetration unsuccessfully, and I can remember just how painful it was. I also remember the feeling I had when he ejaculated between my legs.

With the regular caning and regular sexual abuse that I endured from this man for five years I did not stand a chance in life. He kept a photo of me on the dresser in his bedroom and his nickname for me was Pinky. It gives me the shudders just thinking about it. This man had the full support of the *Anglican Diocese of North Queensland*, the Bishop at the time being Bishop Ian Shevill.

It was a good 35 years before I was able to understand the psychology of what had happened to me, and why it had produced so much of the guilt and confusion that I had experienced in my years of growing up. It changed how I communicated with people, and more importantly it changed how I communicated with women. If only I had known then, what I know now, perhaps I could have done something about it. However it was not to be and we only get one shot at life, and at the end of the day we can only try to move on as it is no good crying over spilled milk.

In 1998 I took the Anglican Church to task over the abuse, believing that they would do the right thing with me only to find that they more interested in silencing me and lied to cover the now retired Rev Robert Waddington. This man had gone on to become the *Dean of Manchester Cathedral in England*. He had boasted to my mother that he now had thousands of children under his guidance.

His housekeeper Lucy Mears, who had been my music teacher at *St Barnabas*, told my cousin that he was having many children come to stay with him whilst she was there. This was one of the things that prompted me to do something about him. So I approached the detectives at *Taskforce Argos* in Brisbane to investigate my claims.

The detectives unearthed very little, though enough to get one of the brothers put into prison. The Reverend Waddington had the backing of the church in Britain, and there was not enough energy in the Australian investigation to justify extradition. Only two of his victims were prepared to step forward and be identified, and I can respect their wishes as there is a lot of shame involved in a judgemental society.

Whilst I was in Brisbane the church sent their own investigator, a retired policeman, to interview me. When I told him that the Wad had not been able to penetrate me because I was too small, but that he had constantly tried to do so, and always ended up 'getting off' between my thighs, he said that I did not have a case because I had not been raped. I had to have been penetrated for it to be classified as rape. What a joke!

I naively followed the steps the church recommended I take to resolve the issue, and it dragged on for about eight years. I truly believed the church was there to help. When the reality dawned that the church is just a business and had no interest in my well being, I took the legal route only to find out that I should have gone straight for their jugular at the beginning of my quest.

I did however get a small ex gratia payment, which just means that the church was not publicly going to admit to anything. They had privately admitted to me that my evidence was strong and Archbishop Aspinal did send me an apology. I was however blown away by what he claimed to be an apology, as it was loaded with legal jargon and conditions.

The Ford Enquiry revealed that 48% of Anglican Church clergy have paedophile personalities, and yet the Church has done nothing to rectify this.

Of course it was not only the Wad who had his way with me. There was also Boy number (1) and Boy number (2). (These boys remain un-named for legal reasons.) What a mess hey? Boy number (1) wrapped me up in a big army 'great coat' in the cloak room of Kennedy house. I was terribly claustrophobic and screamed in total terror through the whole horrible event. Boy number (2) was our House Prefect when we were in *John Oliver House*. A house set up for all the little boys of the school. Boy number (2) got me into his bed once everyone was asleep and forced me to comply. He was a real big bully and I was totally petrified of him.

I have had hundreds of hours of counselling and have studied the psychology of what happened to me at university, and yet I find myself still very angry at the Church and know that I will never forgive them. As far as I am concerned the *Anglican Church* is a refuge for the devil, and is an evil institution that should be bought to account.

The ex gratia payment allowed me to put a small down payment on a little cottage in Ravenshoe, where these events had happened all those years ago. On returning to Ravenshoe in 2006 I found most of the ghosts had passed on, and that it was a beautiful little town with much peace and quiet. Within myself I have at last found solace, and have managed to let go most of the confusion and guilt to achieve a certain level of contentment with my life. We only get one life and I plan to enjoy what is left of mine.

PEARLS OF WISDOM

In 1968 whilst still a boarder at St Barnabas, I was invited to go and stay with one of my best school friends, Bruce Filewood and his family on Thursday Island in the Torres Straight, for our three week May holidays.

I can remember being very excited about being on my first holiday away from home by myself. We had a number of boys at *St Barnabas* from Thursday Island. There was our School Captain Mahendra Mendis whose family were Ceylonese Indians originally from Ceylon (Sri Lanka). They ran the corner store at the main crossroad of the township. A great contact to have when it came to buying lollies.

There was Alan Samuel (Sambo to his friends), whose family were local Torres Straight Islanders, and owned a Mother of Pearl trinket-polishing factory on the shore down from the square. They also polished up whole pearl shells. There was Peter Jensen, a Japanese boy whose family worked on pearl rafts around the Torres Straight Islands. There was David Gela, an Islander from one of the outlying islands, whose family was very involved in basketball, the main sport played on the island. There was Peter Ahloy, a boy whose family owned the main general trading store along from the square on the other side the road and along a bit from the picture theatre, and his sister Maude who I knew from social gatherings with *St Barnabas's* sister school *St Mary's* in Herberton.

It was going to be a lot of fun. My host and his family though Islanders, were of mixed race with, I think, some Japanese infused into the mix. This would make sense because Thursday Island used to have a large population of Japanese pearl divers. His mother was very kind to me, though I know his siblings had some issues with me staying there. I know we spent a lot of time visiting our other school chums.

The Mendis' were quite wealthy, and had a large home on the top of the hill up from the Filewood's house. They had a great southern view overlooking the channel to Horn Island. I can remember Bruce and I being invited up there for a lot of evening meals. The Mendis's had come from a family in Ceylon who had owned teahouses. Mahendra's family like him, were very gentle, softly spoken and self-assured people, who knew right from wrong in a very nonjudgmental way. We used to spend hours up there with them.

One morning Sambo came to the door, and asked me if I would like to go and see his family's polishing factory. On the way we dropped into the Mendis's store, and they gave us ice creams and some bags of lollies to take with us. We walked down to the shore and along a narrow, nobly path to a small rambling tin shack that looked as though it had seen better days. The walls, dirt floor and much cluttered benches were covered in a thick film of pearl shell dust. Drums of off-cuts and broken sections of pearl shell spilled out onto the floor all along one wall. The machines looked very old, rickety, and primitive. Sitting on old stumps looking out into the harbour through a large open gap at the front of the building, were three Islander men sitting having a cup of tea. One introduced himself as Sambo's father and the other two were Sambo's cousins.

Off to the left, sitting in a very well used and worn hessian chair, was a very old gentleman with a big grey beard complementing his wrinkled forehead and ancient and very weathered ebony skin. On his balding head he had dusty and tattered faded blue cap. He must have been about 90-something. Sambo introduced him to me as his grandfather. He offered me a seat on a bit of log next to him.

We had a view over three or four pearling luggers tied up at the jetties, as we gazed out over the harbour. He asked me if I was enjoying my stay with the Filewoods. He told me had never been out of the Torres Straights in his entire life, and said he would have liked to have seen Cairns one day because he had heard so much about it, but had never got to go there. He asked me if I knew anything of the area's history. I can remember shaking my mesmerised head in an uncertain 'no'.

Over the next hour or so I was oblivious to the others, who were now back at work cracking, cutting, and polishing pearl shell on these noisy, squeaky, rattling machines. His very soft, slightly weak, monotone voice had me straining to hear his every whisper. He talked of his younger days on the luggers as a pearl diver. He spoke of the bends and of *Strawberry Jams Disease.*

On the front decks of the luggers divers donned the very heavy lead boots, very ungainly sealed rubber suits, and belts around their waists consisting of square blocks of lead weights. Also on this belt was a knife that a diver could use to get out of trouble or to fight the monsters of the deep. The last item to be sealed and bolted onto the heavy suit was a large, round, bronze and brass diving helmet that had a big air hose connected to the back of it. This connection did not have a valve. The hose came off a big reel with winding handles that was set on a pedestal bolted to the deck. Connected to this reel was a compressor run by a small petrol engine.

Also a winch of thin, strong wire rope running off the end of a small swinging boom was connected to a harness on the back of the diver's suit. This was used to lower and raise the diver overboard onto very deep-sea beds, where he could plod along collecting pearl shells with a long pickup stick. The living shells were stored in a net bag hooked to their weight belts. They needed the pickup sticks because it was difficult to bend down in these suits.

If the divers stayed down too long and were pulled up too quickly they would get the bends. Many divers died and the Island's cemetery is testimony to this.

Though not anywhere near as common as the bends, *Strawberry Jams Disease* happened when the compressor failed due to the motor stopping. There were manual winding handles on the compressor to keep the diver in air until he was raised to the surface. Sometimes however, if someone was not being attentive to the dicey air pumping unit, and missed grabbing the handle when the motor conked out, the compressor would be smacked into a very fast spinning reverse, as the suit flattened down at sea bed level due to the enormous pressure of the deep water all around it, thus forcing the poor diver up through the helmet and the unvalved hose, and out through the air intake of the compressor and onto the deck - thus it was known as *Strawberry Jams Disease!*

As a young thirteen-year-old boy I thought this was just 'grouse' as my ears pinned to the old man's every word. Another thing the old man told me was that he had eaten both white man and 'long pork' (Chinaman). He claimed he preferred long pork, as the white man was too salty. Years later I was to visit the Cooktown museum, where the old man's story was affirmed to me. There were many recorded cases of 'long pork' being eaten in the time the old man would have been in the prime of his youth.

On leaving the factory I was given two beautifully polished pearl shells. On this day, to me this old man's words were true pearls of wisdom.

Almost every day we would wander up and see Peter Jensen. Peter's parents were never there so we had the place to ourselves, though I do not remember if we ever went into the upstairs living area of the big old Queenslander. Peter had a big rumpus room under the house where we would sit and drink cordial, soft drinks etc., and nibble on salty plums, dried ginger and listen to music. He also had big piles of comics that had great pictures in them, but sadly were in Japanese so we had to guess what was going on by the drawings. I was fascinated how everything was read up and down the page instead of across like we did at home.

The cinema was in the main street about one hundred yards from where I was staying. As a family we would go down and see a movie on Friday nights. The theatre was a corrugated iron structure with a wood paneled front on to the street. It had a small foyer that led into the theatre. The back half of the theatre was a two-storey affair with an upstairs balcony for the wealthier customers, and had a corrugated iron roof. Those on the ground floor had shelter from storms only if they sat in the back part of the theatre. The front half was open to the stars as was the screen.

The theatre was a big event in town and was packed out very quickly, so we had to get there early to get a good seat and have time to buy the soft drinks, ice-creams, popcorn, fantails, minties, violet crumble bars, jaffas, and salty plums that were the most popular confectioneries sold in the little shop in the foyer. It was an evening we all looked forward to.

Within three or four days of being on the island upon visiting Peter Ahloy at his family's store, I was offered a job to work behind the counter by his parents. I was very limited in money and needed to fill in the hours when I wasn't doing things with my friends. I cannot remember the hours or the pay but I can remember that both were not much. However the kindness of that family will be indelibly stuck in my mind forever. They really looked after me.

This was a general store, and I can remember the seemingly miles of hemp rope in every imaginable size, hanging in big loops or coiled on the floor. There were galvanized iron buckets, anchors of many sizes, hooks, gaff hooks, gleaming diving helmets, diving suits, diving boots, and bins full of lead weights for the diver's belts. There were bins of lead sinkers big and small for fishing, fishing lines of all sizes on large wooden reels, fishing hooks for sharks and gropers, and a mass of different size hooks for fishing, big glass net floats, big wads of fishing net and sailing cloth, oar rollicks, stands of oars leaned against the corrugated iron walls of the of the shop. There were also kerosene lamps, torches, batteries, enamel wash bowls, enamels jugs, tin and enameled panikans, enameled plates, boxes of knives, forks, spoons and chopsticks. There were shelves of tea (both Bushells and Chinese green teas), tins of condensed and powdered milk, matches, fishing knives, cane knives and much, much more.

Behind the counter were a section of Chinese fireworks with many bungers, skyrockets, a variety of bottles of sauce and tins of lychees etc., with lots of Chinese writing on them. There was also a shelf dedicated to tobacco and cigarettes, and another to Chinese powders and mixes for ailments, again covered in Chinese writing.

On the cluttered glass counter were stands of Spearmint and PK chewing gum, a large bottle of gobstoppers, a large bottle of salty plums and another full of dried red ginger. There was a big ornate mechanical till and an account receipt book and exercise books beside it. In the glass cabinet were many precious items including lighters, pipes, and pipe-cleaning kits, pocketknives, watches, alarm clocks, compasses, pens, and sunglasses.

On one occasion not long after I had started there, I was left to mind the counter on my own whilst Mrs. Ahloy went out the back to get something. Not long after she had left, a man stepped in off the street and approached the counter. I was immediately frozen to the spot I was standing on, as firstly I did not really know what to do, but without a doubt the real reason I froze, was that this was the most massive man I had ever seen (actually I have not seen a man as big since). This Islander was at least seven feet and eight inches tall…there was nothing gangly about him as one might expect with a tall man.

Off his massively broad shoulders protruded arms that were at least fourteen inches thick above the elbow. His hands were huge. Eventually I stuttered "was there anything I might be able to do to help him"? He gently looked down and asked me if Mrs. Ahloy was around, and needing no excuse I scooted out the back at lightning speed to get her. Mrs. Ahloy laughed when she realized what was going on, and introduced me to this monster who turned out to be good friend of hers, and a very gentle giant with a really good sense of humour, as I was to learn over the next few weeks that I was there.

One day the Ahloys asked me if I would like to go and check some of their pearl rafts with two New Guinea natives they had working for them. I was over the moon and of course said yes. I had to be up and ready to leave by six the next morning, and I was just so excited as having grown up in the bush I had hardly ever been to sea.

Before I go any further, I need to add that on some nights down on the crossroads between the Mendis's shop and the pub there were massive fights, and because where I was staying was close by, it was a little scary to say the least and the night prior to going out had been a particularly bad one.

The boat was small about 20 feet I think. As we were leaving the harbour and passing pearling luggers, I can remember looking up through the light mist and seeing a big islander sitting on the forward deck of one having a cup of tea. The thing about him that caught my attention, was that he had a very deep cut diagonally across one eye and then down over his lips and he was drinking the tea as if nothing was wrong. He did not even wince when the hot tea came into contact with the ¾ inch deep cut on his lip. I was deeply impressed by this but also partly queasy looking at him do it.

This trip was to be one of the most memorable days I can remember from that period of my life. The New Guinea blokes were great and really wanted to show me around. We went to at least four islands that day checking pearling rafts. We visited a lighthouse on Prince of Wales Island and the lighthouse keeper and his family came to meet us, and took me to see a huge gun left over from the war that was sitting on top of the island. They were so kind to us and gave the men mail and messages to be taken back to T. I. Before we left we did some fishing off the jetty and caught a bucket load of Queen Fish.

One island we visited was uninhabited and I think probably the most beautiful of the ones we visited that day. We had lunch there on the beach under the coconut palms, and talked and talked before we did a little bit more fishing. On the way out to check the pearl raft there, one of the men dove overboard and came up with a big painted cray to add to the bag full of fish I was taking back to my hosts on TI. Those fellows really looked after me and if I could just remember their names I would so much like to thank them. But at that age I was ignorant as to just how great they really were.

Before leaving the Island the Filewoods took me to a farewell party on the beach with about forty others, and we had turtle meat and dugong …both of which I really enjoyed. I can remember a group of island girls doing a dance and singing me a farewell song. They were women from the local church that I attended with the Filewoods every Sunday morning.

This was one of the best holidays I can remember with so many unforgettable people. I know many have probably passed on, but I do often wonder what those who are still alive are doing today. I know those pearling luggers and diving suits have disappeared into the mists of history, but what a memory to have.

BIM ATKINSON © 4 June 2009

THERE IS NOTHING MORE PERMANENT THAN CHANGE (1)

I left the 'Churchie' Anglican Grammar School, Oakland's Parade, East Brisbane where I was boarding, at the beginning of my senior year in 1972, as the headmaster, a Mr Charles (Fred) Fisher, told my parents that they were wasting time and money as I was in total shut down and was learning nothing.

When I got home Dad put me under the head stockman Reg Webb to learn the trade of a cattle station and sent me out to *Sugarbag* mustering camp. Reg was a very good teacher and made a huge impression on me.

MY TIME

Breaking Camp

Awakening to the still dull murmur of morn
Edge of darkness and early light
Thick pouring mist, clawing, smothering the sun
Frost crackles, trees leaning, cold takes its bite.

Camp oven lids clump, stinking carbide lamps clonk
Hobbled chains clank
Night horse snorting, nostrils flare white to stiff bridle
Stubborn eyes full of fight.

Imminent birth of light squeezes in so softly softly a sight
Parting waves of rainbows and green leeks
Screech fresh rallies through the trees.

The curl of the whip sharply slices mist
To a savage crack, blasting hooves
Rapid panicking fright, rips away unawakened night.
Dull thunk of riding boots, cricket clink rolling spurs
Silent apprehensions of a hard day's night
Solid lithe forms, criss cross bullstraps
Revolvers, whips, confident resolve.

Curry and rice breakfast, harsh breathing
Quart pots hot black tea
Dry salted beef, cribs neatly wrapped newspaper
Bundles, saddlebags, tired saddles
Salty stiff saddlecloths, hairy – 10 in all
Riding fences in icicled formation.

Queuing the draft, tight faces grimace
Taut bodies rippling in trembles
Softly crooning "Whoa boy, whoa boy"!
Sliding bridles, gentle rubbing, gentle patting
Saddlecloths
Floating saddles bloated girths, humped walks
Relaxed notch ups more secure.

Short reins whispering whispering
"Whoa boy, Whoa boy"!
Fast gliding boot-searching stirrup
Knee in shoulder, ear and mane in hand
Fluid cartwheel, searching, searching
Stirrup iron.

Reins stretching, drop heels forward
Knees gripped hard under pads
Exploding muscles, swirling, whirling
Jerking, giddy high, giddy low, gallop baulk, gallop baulk
Suck back; fly sideways, flash of spur.

Try-on beat for yet another day
Faithful, loyal, hardy, my old friend
Worn monkey grips, frozen fingers, pained tingles
Few ruffled, all relieved, ready to move.

Sun slips a bath of light over this crystalline landscape
Bush reveals its secrets of – this our day.

Note to the reader: I hope you do not mind a break from my story at this very early stage. I have inserted one of my observational stories of my time growing up and living on *Gunnawarra*. This one is based on *Sugarbag* mustering camp. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

STEPPING INTO THE REAL WORLD

So it was that I came home. For me it was a blessing as I was so unhappy and homesick there. If I had been more aware of my condition and thinking at the time, I would have been wise to have stayed. My parents had given me such an incredible opportunity in sending me there. However this was not to be.

When I got home for the May end of term break, my father put me and a school friend of mine, James Lindley, into the *Sugarbag* mustering camp. I can remember the previous year, standing in the homestead horse yards with our then head stockman Stan Daniels. Stan was telling us, as my father was bringing Reg towards us to be introduced, "Reg looks like a real townie and will probably be useless".

When I got home Dad put me under the head stockman Reg Webb to learn the trade of a cattle station and sent me out to *Sugarbag* mustering camp. Reg was a very good teacher and made a huge impression on me.

How wrong Stan was. Reg was a real character and had the nickname 'Blue' because of his red hair and his fiery temper. Reg also had a terrific and sometimes wicked sense of humour, and a big glint in his eye that kept most of the crew, me included, right on the tips of their toes. He was a man who commanded a lot of respect. One of the things I liked about Reg was that he gave respect to others where it was due. He had an enormous respect for one of our Aboriginal stockmen, a Mr. Hector Fred.

Reg who grew up in Innisfail, had started his 'ringing' (in the northern Australian cattle industry a 'ringer' is a professional stockman) career on *Brunette Downs* in the Northern Territory at the ripe old age of fourteen, and was running one of the mustering camps there by the age of seventeen. He was now thirty-five and getting towards the 'starlight years' of his career. He did not have a bone in his body that had not been broken. He had ridden so many bucking horses, thrown so many wild bulls, run up so many trees, and down many breakaway gullies at flat gallop. He was also a man who loved a beer or two when he hit town and also loved a good fight and boy could he fight!

My school friend James was also to learn a few things. The first lesson was not to annoy Reg with too much backchat. One afternoon Reg threw a very snotty tempered heifer with little horns, each about seven inches long.

To throw a beast one leaps off one's horse at a gallop, and runs up behind it and grabs its tail. The beast in this case being thrown was a heifer. The theory is that the beast will invariably spin around to attack you, and if you pull the tail hard enough towards the beast's oncoming head it will overbalance it and over it will go.

Sounds easy, however if you are not strong enough to hold onto the tail as it comes around to get you, you are in trouble. If you are strong enough to hold onto the tail, but not strong enough to pull the tail towards the beast's head, you end up taking ten footsteps as the beast swings around trying to get you, and again you're in trouble, because you know it's not wise to let go of the tail and you also cannot stop the beast from going in circles.

Well back to Reg who seemed to have no problems throwing the biggest of bulls, and found the throwing of this heifer a picnic in the park. He tied its hind legs together with a hobble strap he had around his waist, then he pulled out his pocket knife – for those of you who are a little squeamish look away now – and pierced a hole through the area of the nose where you see nose rings positioned, got some scrap fencing wire and put one end through the hole he had made with the knife and tied it on. On the other end he tied a handle made from a piece of stick that was lying nearby on the ground.

Reg then called James over, and told him to get off his horse and to give the reins to me to hold. He then got James to grab hold of the makeshift handle, told him that when he let the heifer up he was to pull it towards and into the yard. Reg then untied this fiery little heifer and it got up with looks of total vengeance in its eyes and charged after James, who was by now in top gear.

James did as he was told (we where both more frightened of Reg than we were of the tasks he was asking to carry out), only he did not have to do too much pulling as the heifer was up his backside the whole hundred and fifty yards into the yard. An excellent effort on James' part I thought. I think he also went up a notch or two in Reg's estimation of him.

James was not the only one that Reg was going to educate. I also copped my fair share from him. A good example of this was one day when we had finally yarded the cattle after a biggish muster and I decided to gallop my horse *Silver*, the remaining three quarters of a mile back to the station homestead. I had only gone several hundred yards when Reg caught up with me and pulled me up.

Reg got off his horse and walked over to me, and asked me in a very stern voice what I thought I was doing. He took the bridle in hand and told me to let go of the reins. I thought there must have been something wrong with the bridle as he took it off *Silver*. He then said to me that I must never gallop my horse home after a hard day's work, and that I should have more respect for my horse as it had worked far harder than I had. In saying this he then slapped *Silver* on the rump, and shooed him into a flat gallop towards home with me still on the back.

If given the chance, a horse that has instinctive knowledge of direction, will gallop home from almost anywhere on a station. The closer they get to home the more pushy they become, because they know when they get home they will have the saddle and bridle removed and will be able to get back to the paddock to see their mates. This can be quite dangerous for beginner riders, as the horse will if not checked, attempt to jump gates etc.

In my case I could not check the horse as I had no reins to pull on and *Silver* jumped the night paddock gate (a small paddock next to the homestead where the 'night horse' is kept… a night horse is a horse that is kept close to the house and sometimes hobbled overnight, so they can be caught very early in the morning to be used to round up the horses from the main horse paddock which is also a career for that particular horse).

This jump nearly dislodged me and *Silver* also nearly lost his footing when we hit the other side. I must tell you that I have never been a hero, and that I was totally freaking with fear. I did not have much time to think about things before we were at flat gallop, heading straight for the saddle shed. When we reached it *Silver* went right on in and pulled up with me lying flat on his back because of the flat roof nearly taking my head off!

I shakily hopped off him, got a rope and put it around his neck and led him over to the saddle rail to remove the saddle and saddlecloth. I then got a hose and hosed him down and led him down to the

horse paddock gate, where I gave him a big pat and then let him go. It was a lesson in how to treat a horse that I would never forget.

Sugarbag mustering camp and yards were about sixteen miles from the homestead and the paddock was about a hundred square miles in size (64,000 acres), and due to its mountainous areas and thick forests only ran about a 1,000 head (or at least that was the average number that were mustered over the 10 days allotted to mustering it). When we started helicopter mustering we got 2,700 head of cattle from that paddock in 16 hours of flying time.

The camp consisted of an old corrugated iron shed with a dirt floor containing about eight beds. The bed frames were made from round poles of Cypress Pine. Stretched over the frame to form the mattress area of the bed was green hide. Green hide is a hide that has been salted but has not been tanned. This would have been attached when fresh and allowed to dry. As it dried it shrank and went rock-solid. Due to uneven stretching when putting the hide on the frame, sometimes wrinkles formed and when the hide dried they became a permanent fixture. These beds were better than nothing, though sometimes the ground was more comfortable.

There was a little rickety table made of bush timbers that had an enamel washbasin and a carbide lamp sitting on it. The carbide lamp consisted of a galvanized jug with a unit that sat inside it to hold rocks of calcium carbide. Out of the top of the unit was a tube about nine inches long which had a gas nozzle on the end. The jug would be filled with water and it would leak into the unit and react with the calcium carbide rock and give off a gas (acetylene). A match would be applied to the nozzle and 'bingo' one would have a very bright light.

These lights though good had drawbacks, such as when the nozzle blocked, the lamp could blow up or if too much water got into the unit at any time they could blow up. As it was, a lot of the time excess gas would constantly be bubbling and gurgling out of the unit, and up through the water in the jug just to keep you on your toes. Another drawback was the horrible stench carbide gives off through this process. It was also not wise to light your smoke on these lights as it could rot out one's teeth.

Each day the old used carbide, which was a bluey white powder, would be knocked out of the unit onto a stump a little away from the camp and new rocks would be put in. These rocks were basalt grey-black in colour. The stench still stays with me now, though I do not find anything comforting about that smell. It does however certainly well up memories.

Sugarbag galley and sleeping are area prior to camping (note long grass)

About twenty yards out from the front of the shed, was a very basic galley with a flat iron roof over the top. It was just enough to cover the big fireplace under. Sitting on a grid over the fire were several

camp ovens, and a square five-gallon drum which had originally contained kerosene. It had the top cut out and the sharp edges peened flat. Two holes were punched into the top, one on either side, and number eight wire tied through to make a handle. This was used for boiling up the corn beef. When *Shell* kerosene stopped coming in those tins *Defiance* flour drums replaced them.

Hanging from a rafter of the galley was a row of number eight wire hooks for hanging billys on. The billys we had were made on the station by Darcy Day and came in sets of six. They fitted into one another. The biggest would have been two feet high and about sixteen inches in diameter, and the smallest was about seven inches high and about five inches in diameter. The billys had one side of them that was flat so that when put up against a fire they boiled faster.

Darcy Day at Gunnawarra 1947

Around the shed side perimeter of the galley, were a series of stumps, drums, and old chairs for people to sit on. This was also where most of them sat to eat their meals. On one of the posts of the galley there were a series of wire hooks, which held about fifteen enamel mugs chipped to varying degrees. Bushells tea brewed in the billy was the drink of choice. The other choice was water or *Sunshine* powdered milk. There was no coffee in the camps when I was there in the early seventies, though I do remember that there was camp coffee chicory – a drink that was meant to taste like coffee. I do not remember seeing anyone drinking it.

To the east of the galley about twenty five yards away, was a building – an old style demountable donga made from wood, that had three rooms all facing the galley. The middle room was narrower than the two end rooms and was used as a kitchen. For windows, sections of the walls were hinged up and stopped from dropping by a length of wood.

New Sugarbag hut in 1971.

In it was an old kerosene fridge filled with meat and packets of *Kraft* processed cheese. Along the walls were racks and shelves stacked with all the basic foods such as golden syrup, treacle, tinned margarine, tinned strawberry jam, tinned pine melon and ginger jam, tinned plum jam, tinned raspberry jam, *Keens* curry powder, *Holbrook's Worcestershire Sauce*, *Heinz* tomato sauce, sugar, salt, *Bushells* tea, rice, flour, tinned bully beef, Camp pie, and tinned corned beef, dried fruit including apricots, apple and prunes. mango chutney, pickled onions with birdseye chilies, pickled *Birdseye* chilies, *Uncle Toby's* porridge oats, *Sunshine* powdered milk, *Kellogg's* corn flakes and *Wheetbix*. There were racks filled with onions, potatoes, and *Queensland Blue* pumpkins. There were dried peas and beans.

A big fly-meshed safe (with its legs standing in tins filled with water to keep the ants and termites away) contained cold freshly-cooked corn beef, damper, and loaves of white bread for sandwiches (brown bread, wholemeal bread, and grain bread did not exist in our part of the world then), Brownie Cake for smokos (the North Queensland Brownie is a boiled fruit cake unlike the Brownie of the southern country areas which is a biscuit). Various leftover curries and opened tins of jam etc., which were in there to prevent the ants and flies from carrying them away.

Near the door there was a table with a big wooden chopping board and a series of sharp knives. There was a shelf above with carbide light, boxes of *Greenlight* matches and tins of *Bells* wax matches. Also up on the shelf were two boxes, one containing packets of Bex powder (bluey white in colour) and the other containing packets of *Vincent's Powder* (a light white pink in colour).

A packet of these powders contained ten doses in oblong flat wraps of paper which when opened could be poured directly into the mouth. Due to the men carrying this analgesic with them everywhere it was not practical for them to use when riding touchy horses, so they would fill an old *Log Cabin* tin or the like with the powder, which meant they just had to unscrew the lid and place their tongue directly into the powder to get a dose. The analgesic properties of the aspirin, phenacetin and caffeine in *Bex* and *Vincent's* had most of the men addicted to this stuff, and they would habitually take a dose every hour or so. Little did they know that the phenacetin taken in these large doses was causing widespread kidney disease! It wasn't too much longer after this period of time, that the Government regulated these products and thus today *Bex* and *Vincent's* are no longer products one sees on the shelf.

Under the table there was a cardboard box filled with old newspapers. This table was used for preparation of food, for serving the cooked food, and also for the men to cut their cribs for lunch. A crib usually consisted of several sandwiches, tea and sugar. The sandwiches were generally made using tinned margarine, sliced corned beef, Kraft cheese, homemade mango chutney, tomato sauce, pickles etc. The ringers made their own cribs individually so that they could have it the way they liked it. The sandwiches were wrapped neatly in grease proof paper (if it was available though a lot of time there would only be newspaper), and then a pouch made from newspaper containing the tea and sugar (usually mixed – and again to the taste of the individual) would be wrapped together in a big piece of newspaper, ready to be put in the saddle bag for lunch, out on the muster through the day.

Out in front of the building was a big wooden table with a variety of crockery, including piles of enamel plates, cutlery etc., and a washing-up set up with a big basin. There was no washing up liquid so generally *Sunlight* soap was used with boiling hot water from the galley. Also sitting on the table was carbide light.

Cleanliness was a must in these camps, and a man's personal hygiene was scrupulously judged by their peers as I was to find out. One had a wash every morning and a bath every night, and was never seen near any food without at least washing their hands. It was an unwritten rule that one had a bath before eating dinner in the evening, and everyone would wait until everyone had bathed before eating so that they could all eat together.

Now for you who are not initiated to this lifestyle I can tell you that a bath at *Sugarbag* was not a big tub filled with lovely steaming hot water or a portable shower. It was actually a waterhole (an oxbow lake) about one hundred yards down from the camp towards Rudd's Creek. In winter when the evening temperatures could be as low as zero degrees Celsius, and in the mornings around two or three degrees below zero, the thought of having a bath tended to lose some of its appeal.

It was the morning washes I was having difficulty with. One morning Reg decided it was time I learned to toughen up a bit, and when he came to wake me up at three thirty for breakfast he did so by picking me up by the back of the pants and the back of the shirt, and marching me down through the dark to the waterhole, to where there was a carbide light burning at the base of a tree. He unceremoniously threw me into the water hole, and then told me if I wanted to stay on the camp I was going to have to in future get myself out of my swag in the morning and that I would have to have a wash if I wanted breakfast. I did not sleep in again.

Mind you, I never slept well in a swag that was laid out directly on the floor. Especially in winter when it was so freezing cold. I had obviously had too much of the silver spoon. Breakfast usually consisted of a plate of steaming porridge followed by either curry and rice, or steak and eggs with a slice or two of toasted damper to boot. It was always eased down with copious cups of billy tea. There was never much chatter on these cold mornings as the men huddled around the fire contemplating the day ahead of them.

The poor blighter that had to find the hobbled night horse, catch him, and then round up the horses before breakfast, stopped most of the others from complaining about things because they were the lucky ones who slept in until three thirty. This was a job that was taken in turns by those considered not experienced enough to have earned their stripes. People like me, any jackeroos that might have been on the place at the time, and other lowly beings. We all dreamed of the day we would have ringer status.

Reg was also up at three o'clock to get the fire stoked and breakfast going. It was important to have the food and the hot cups of tea ready, as the men hated having to wait. The way to keeping these men

happy under these conditions was definitely through their stomachs. It was not too much to ask on their part, considering how big some of the days could be and how hard, dangerous, and tiring the work could be. They were grossly underpaid considering their skills. To be a ringer, one had to be a 'jack of all trades'! No demarcation out here let alone unions. Mind you if the stations had paid the wages they deserved they would not have had the work, because most of these properties struggled to survive as it was.

Even though cribs were cut, it was always wise to have a big breakfast. I can still hear my Dad saying, "Eat your breakfast boy! You do not know where your next meal is coming from"! Very wise words from a man who knew what it was like to gallop all day and well into the night to round up the cattle and not get time to eat. When mustering these cattle it could sometimes have you galloping until two or three in the afternoon and you might miss out on having lunch altogether, getting in with the mob of two or three hundred head of cattle at nine or ten o'clock at night. On days like this once we had the cattle settled and heading for home, Reg would send someone such as me to go ahead and prepare dinner.

After breakfast was finished and all the washing up was done, we would all head up to the yards and the horses would be drafted and each man would catch their horse for the day. On these early mornings when it was cold like this, the horses could be nervy and once saddled would enjoy a good buck around the yards. For the good riders it was a lot of fun or just another part of the day's doings.

For riders like me however (I have very poor coordination and tend to be quite nervous in these situations) it could be quite an ordeal. The horses sometimes could give a good little buck or two before settling down. In the meantime the pain could be excruciating from having to grip the monkey with almost frozen and numb fingers. On an Australian stock saddle the 'monkey grip' is a made of a twining of leather and is tied between two 'D' rings that are connected to the saddletree. One end is connected through the side of the pummel and the other end was connected just in front of the kneepads. In an Australian stock saddle, when a horse bucked if you wanted to stay on board you had to put your feet forward toward the shoulder, and when you gripped the monkey it pulled you in to the saddle and locked you behind the kneepads. These saddles were good for 'not so good' riders like me in these situations. There was a drawback however, in that a lot of the time we never used our own saddles and could be quite sore by the end of the day. They were also atrocious a lot of the time on the horses, rubbing big sores onto their withers and backs.

On cold mornings, riding out to the area we were to muster may take an hour or so, and usually it was around this time the sun would start to rise. In these tropical high country regions it only gets really cold if the sky is crystal clear of any cloud, thus the country would be just sparkling which was very beautiful to experience. However, as the sun came up for a wee while the temperature would drop and because one was sitting on a horse, and was unable to get enough exercise to warm up…. bbrrrr!

We all smoked and the tobaccos were tinned fine cuts such as *Log Cabin, Capstan, Havelock,* and *Champion Ruby.* This meant that one learned how to roll the smoke whilst riding along. Though there were still a few diehards using plug tobacco (a solid block of tobacco that one carved with a pocket knife and then rubbed up into a ready rub so as it could be rolled up). When I was young and by the time I got to *Sugarbag* all the tobacco was fine cut, which meant that all you had to do was rub it in the palm of your hand with the heel of your other hand to get into a ready rub so that it could be rolled.

The trick was to lay the reins over ones arm in the inner crease of the elbow so they could still be gripped and pulled if necessary, whilst rubbing the tobacco, and the paper as is still standard, was held in the lips. Some of the more experienced could roll their smoke with one hand. With the hours of

riding between points of activity, lots of smoking was done. No butts were ever thrown, as there were many occasions when the men ran out of tobacco and would have to wait for days sometimes for deliveries from the station homestead. Instead they were extinguished and put in to either the shirt pocket or back into the tin.

When the smokes ran out altogether, it was the gully root we turned to (a porous ventury root off trees growing along the banks of gullies). A very cool and smooth smoke indeed, as long as the stick was six inches or more long. Every time one puffed, a flame would arise from the end of the stick and if it got too short it tended to singe the eyebrows, and the smoke also became quite hot.

We had a two-way radio, that Reg used to communicate most evenings back to the station. On one occasion my Dad and a pilot friend of his, decided they would do an aerial drop of the stores which included things like fresh beef, Dip powder for the cattle dip, and more tobacco for all of us. As organized over the radio, Reg and I rode home early to await the arrival of my father's plane, a 1973 *Cherokee Challenger 180*. His friend David who by this stage was an *Ansett* airline pilot, had been a fighter pilot during the war, and reckoned it would be a piece of cake. They were limited in how low they could get due to the area being covered with lots of big blue gum trees and bloodwoods. On the first run they dropped the meat wrapped in hessian bags, letting it go just as they got over the camp clearing. The upshot of it was that we had to gallop about a thousand yards to find it in through the trees. The bags had split open, so there was sandy meat spread all over the ground when we got to it. Thank heavens it was in sandy country which meant just brushing off the clean sand to be edible.

On the next run they dropped the tobacco and dip. This time they were really accurate, but the hessian bag got caught in the top branches of a 70 foot gum tree right next to the camp. There was no climbing to get it, and it was getting late and apart from the fact that dinner needed preparing and lots of other chores to be done so it was decided to leave it until the next morning to figure out how we were going to get it down.

And so it was the next morning Reg got me to shoot it down, by cutting the eight inch thick branch with a 303 rifle while he and the men went up to the yards and started drafting the cattle that had been bought in the night before. It took about sixty bullets and about two hours to cut the branch. There was much relief when it came down, as they desperately needed the dip up at the yards and there were a few desperate people wanting smokes. I had a pretty bruised shoulder for a few days after that.

The *Asuntol* powder dip made by Bayer Australia would be mixed with water in a bucket and poured in measured amounts into a big plunge dip designed for cattle. The idea of the plunge was so the cattle were forced to jump into the dip, and it meant for a short time they were totally submerged before they reached the ramp at the other end, thus getting rid of all the ticks including the ones in their ears and around their eyes. Ticks were a big problem for the northern cattle industry.

Sugarbag had a lot of thick scrub, hills, creeks, and breakaway gullies. There were many occasions when I was lost though I never got totally bushed. I always managed to find my way home. I have no sense of direction whatsoever on land or sea. I admire real 'bushmen' like my older brother Giles, who can tell you exactly where you are even in the dark of midnight. When jackeroos or new chums got bushed, usually one of the Aboriginal stockmen would be sent out to find them. These were men like Hector Fred or King Costello. King Costello was the best tracker I ever knew, and never had any trouble tracking in the dark. He could track at a full gallop through the daylight hours. An incredible skill!

We usually got back to camp before we noticed anyone missing. A bit of time would be given to see if they would show up. When they didn't the tracker would be sent out. By this time it was usually dark. I do not remember anyone not being found before daylight.

On one occasion a big Brahman type black brindle cleanskin (unbranded and usually means they have escaped all previous musters in their life) bull, with big set of horns sticking straight out and about seven years old, broke from the mob as we neared the yards. Reg yelled at me to go and get it, so I reticently went after it. It was not coming back for anyone. Reg galloped up beside me and yelled for me to throw the bull. It was my worst nightmare. I was terrified at the thought but attempted to put on a good show. When it came to the point of actually leaving the horse at a gallop I just could not do it.

Before I realized what was happening Reg galloped up and kicked me off the horse. I hit the dirt hard and as soon as I was on my feet Reg was up behind me putting his boot into my back and yelling for me to throw the bull. I could see that its tail was twitching back and forward in a revolving motion, which meant that it was watching me. When a bull is not watching, the tail flaps loosely all over the place. I was terrified of what Reg would do to me if I didn't, and in my high heeled RM Williams riding boots I managed to grab the tail before the bull had time to swing around and get me, and swung for all my worth.
In those days I had to sway in a shower to get wet and was very light in weight. The bull spun around to get me and somehow I managed to hang on, though I was taking some mighty big steps. I eventually pulled him up and over he went. I dived on to his hind leg as I had seen many a ringer do, and pulled its tail up between its legs onto the flank. It gave one almighty kick and sent me flying. Reg hopped off and grabbed it while I composed myself. He got me to get the horn saw out of its scabbard on his saddle. He got me to saw off its horns, which meant blood went squirting everywhere, and all over me.

Reg did not tie the bull's hind legs together with a bull strap as was normal practice, instead he showed me how to hold the leg. He then hopped on his horse and told me I was to hold the bull down until he got back with some coaches (these are quiet cattle to calm the bull down and allow for him to go back to the mob). Reg seemed to be away for an eternity and this huge rippling ball of muscle was getting his breath back. By the time they returned with the coaches I was spread eagled over the bull stretched beyond my limitations, which must have brought a smile to those who witnessed it. It takes an especially skilled athlete to do this properly. It was to be my first big bull and my last. Mind you, I was pretty proud of myself for having managed to do what I had done.

Talking about throwing bulls there is another story I feel I must impart to you. It is about a very big 12-year-old cleanskin with whopping big horns, that Reg had tried to throw the day before, and it had got the better of Reg and got a horn in between his legs and chucked him maybe ten feet into the air. One of the men had galloped in and drawn the bull off Reg. He had been trying to throw it in thick scrub, but the trees stopped him from being able to swing enough to drop it over. When he realized that he was not going to be able to throw it, he let go of the tail expecting the bull to keep going. Instead it swung around and hooked him. It always paid off to have backup when doing the bull throwing.

On this particular day Reg partnered me with Donald Johnston whose father was the well known boxer, Bronco Johnston). Donald was a really likable and positive fellow, but was at that age where he thought he was invincible and could do anything. As luck would have it we came upon the bull that Reg had tried to throw the day before. Donald yelled for me to back him up, and off we went at a full gallop after this big bull (much bigger than the one I had thrown and twice as savage). Donald's way of throwing was to grab the bull's tail from the horse and flick it forward before leaving his horse.

On this day as he flicked it forward he sent it tumbling down the steep bank of a breakaway gully. He instantly left his horse and went down after it' expecting the bull to be in a heap at the bottom. To his total horror when he hit the bottom he realized the bull was standing up waiting for him. All I could see was a body going up and down several times, before he managed to latch on to a sapling (small tree) at the top of the bank and haul himself out of harm's way. The bull took off to run another day. Donald though unhurt, was a bit sick and sorry for himself for a few days after that, though his indelible smile always shone through.

THERE IS NOTHING MORE PERMANENT THAN CHANGE (cont'd.)

At the end of that year (1972), Dad organised through George Gorton (our Primaries Stock and Station Agent) for me to go and do my jackerooing. It was where George had done his jackerooing.

Tierawoomba - meaning soft wind in Aborigine lingo - was a cattle station situated just south of Funnel Creek, which was on the old Sarina to Marlborough stretch before the highway was moved onto the coast. The closest town just to our north west was Nebo.

Brian and Sibyl Hughes were my bosses, and their son Peter was head stockman. The overseer was a man called George Laughton. In the house helping their mother with the cooking, housework and gardening were Margaret and Jill Hughes. At the homestead there was a ringer Brian Cox and another one called Ron. Russell Hawkins and I were jackeroos. The station was 300 square miles and had two outstations with their managers and families. One was called *Serum* and the other *Waitara.* I cannot remember the name of the managers.

The station was highly improved with about 8 sets of dipping yards all built with Rosewood rails and perhaps 30 windmills. Rosewood is one of the toughest woods known. You need a blunt axe to cut it, and when burnt it puts out tremendous heat and burns like coal. The numerous paddocks all ran onto a dipping yard. A large percentage of the property was *pulled Brigalow* (two bulldozers with a big chain stretched between them pull over the *Brigalow* trees), that was seeded with *Greenpanic Grass* and a legume *Serataro.* When the *Greenpanic* died back due to lack of nitrogen in the soil, the *Serataro* took over and re-nitrogenised the soil, thus allowing the voracious *Greenpanic* to take over again.

The property ran 12,000 head of cattle. Four thousand of these where a base herd of Herefords and 8,000 head were Brafords. There was a Brahman stud to keep producing Braham Bulls to cross with the Herefords so as to produce more Brafords. Some of the slab-sided Braford bullocks on that pulled Brigalow country were the biggest bullocks I have ever seen.

Due to a real issue with ticks, and the high stocking numbers, old Brian Hughes felt it was safer to keep the cattle dipped to prevent big stock losses due to tick fever. The whole 12,000 head were dipped every three weeks through the year. This meant that we mustered every single day of the year.

I was never much of a horseman, having poor co-ordination and balance. The horses at *Tierawoomba* had a little fire in their veins and bucked every morning, just to remind you they were there. Peter Hughes, who was a very good horseman, told me that when I could learn to ride a bad horse I would only then appreciate a good one. Thus some of my days mustering were extremely stressful and very exhausting, and I spent a lot of time biting the dirt as the horses let me know who was boss.

The musters were short and we always worked the cattle through the yards on the same day they were mustered, and then released them back into the paddock. It was very unlike *Gunnawarra* where we only had 3 sets of dipping yards on 340 square miles, and in the main our paddocks were not connected to our yards, thus the mustering days were long and the cattle could spend several days in the yards. Mind you at *Gunnawarra* we only dipped 2 or 3 times a year, as we had a tick resistant herd of Braham Shorthorn cross cattle with little improved pasture and a lower stocking rate.

After finishing working the cattle we would usually do maintenance jobs such as pulling a windmill or fixing fences. One job I hated was the control of weeds - they mainly being Noogoora Burr and Prickly Pear. I also landed a break from the horse work occasionally and was sent off to Tordon the suckers around the horse paddock. The old metal backpacks leaked like anything and I would spend most of the day in wet Tordon-drenched clothes.

When we got home we had a shower and cleaned up, had perhaps two stubbies of warm beer which we stored under our beds, and then when the bell rang we had tea (the bush peoples name for dinner or the evening meal). On our dining room wall was a hung a saying, *A Hungry Man is an Angry Man*. The Hughes' always put on a brilliant spread for us with such love and attention.

On our weekends off we did our washing. We did not have a washing machine. Instead we had a copper and a ripple board, and did our washing with sunlight soap. The boiling was quite harsh on the jeans and usually the thread gave out on our Levis within 2 or 3 months. Luckily jeans only cost $7 a pair then. My wage was $22 per week. An Akubra hat was $5. A pair of RM Williams riding boots was about $14. Smokes were about 29 cents a pack and *Fourex* stubbies were about $4 per carton. I really enjoyed my time there.

I left *Tierawoomba* halfway through 1974, to go to England to meet up with Mum who was touring Europe with my sister Penny. When I got there Penny was already working with a family in the Mendips in Somerset and Mum met me in London. We spent a month driving around Britain visiting all of Mum's friends and relatives. I then got a job as a farm labourer on a farm just out of Oxford.

My wage there was £20 a week. What a shock it was to discover the difference in the way the English treated their labourers. Though I was living on the farm I had to pay £10 rent and £5 for electricity – that was because I had a hot bath every night. With the rest I covered the food, the running of the little 1963 Cortina I was driving, and a social life I had with the young girls from the neighbouring *Swedish Riding School,* and various family friends we had around the Oxford area.

On weekends I would also at times, go into Oxford and stay with Mandy, the niece of one of my babysitters/companion and friend to my mother Joyce Tildesly. I also used to visit Joyce and her aged husband Huff Windeyer at Hook Norton, just west of Banbury. They had the most adorable little thatched cottage. Joyce could really cook and my memory of the waft of ham being cooked in cider, gammon steak, and the huge plug of cheddar that sat on a side bench in the kitchen just begging to be sampled, is a memory I will take to my grave. Joyce taught me a lot about adapting to life in a new country, and she and Huff were wonderful mentors. Huff was an old retired Aussie farmer from up around Mudgee in NSW and his family had a big law firm in Sydney.

My best friends were Sally and Marcel Wagner at Henley-on-Thames. Sally had been a jillaroo at *Gunnawarra* in the mid 1960s. It was she who had got me the job with John and Anne Bull at *Home Farm* bordering the riding school at Waterstock. Anne Bull was a friend of Caroline Innes of the *Walla Walla Brahman Stud,* a person whom Sally had known in Australia.

I met another very good friend at that time. Mark Beaumont showed me some of the most beautiful parts of England in our quest for a good beer. Marks family lived in Cheltenham. I stayed there on many occasions to recoup from some of the big nights we used to have. Mark had a photography business in Thame, and I used to meet up with him there and we would go and have dinner and a few ales at the *Churchill Arms*, usually with some of the Swedish girls from the riding school. The landlady there took me under her wing, and sewed on buttons for me and made sure I got one or two decent meals a week.

Home Farm was several thousand acres, and we ran 700 head of cattle and grew a large area of wheat. Kale and turnips (swedes) were grown for about 500 head of sheep. We baled 17,000 bales of grass hay which was fed to the cattle with grain during winter, when they were put into sheds. We had a constant turnover of stock that were bought and sold through the well known *Banbury Markets.* The straw from the wheat was used to bed down the cattle every day through the winter. When the winter was over the 'muck' left over from 7 months of bedding down was tractored out to spread back over

the fields, and also a lot was sent off to the factories to have the methane extracted. I can remember being very cold sitting on the tractor ploughing. The cabs had no heating.

I spent Christmas of 1974 in the Mendips with Penny and the family she was working for. Her job was as a babysitter and to look after some hunting horses they had. The night I arrived they asked me if I would stay home and babysit, as they were taking Penny to the annual *Hunt Ball*. I was happy to do that.

As they were leaving Nick said "Bim there is a barrel of cider on the bench in the kitchen. Help yourself". And that is just what I did. On this night I learned the true meaning of the word *Scrumpy*. A West Country farm cider made from apples and apparently the odd rat. Its common local name is *Tanglefoot*, and tourists are limited to 2 pints in the pubs. I had the dry runs for several days afterwards and have not been able to face cider ever since that night.

Over the week leading up to Christmas, Nick and Dianna were excellent hosts. We went beagling for hares with the kids at Glastonbury, visited some of Mum's relations, and went pheasant shooting at *Hinton Charterhouse* with Robin Robertson-Glasgow. At night we went out with the *Young Farmers Group* carol singing and having copious amounts of mulled wine.

On Christmas Eve it snowed heavily, and we had the most traditional English Christmas I have ever experienced with a giant 40lb turkey with all the trimmings. It was just brilliant. Sadly Penny was very homesick at the time and did not really enjoy it. All she wanted to do was go home. The snow just did not impress her.

After Christmas I returned to stay a while with Sally and Marcel and their 2 small children – Bhuti (Damien) and Cosima in Henley-on-Thames. Sally and Marcel were really struggling at that time, though Marcel and I did manage to quaff a few ales at the *Angel-on-the-Bridge* most evenings. Sally and Marcel loved music and Marcel was a tenor opera singer. Sally played the cello.

I had no understanding of classical music then and still do not have any understanding of it today. I was a young man who had been raised on Slim Dusty, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Van Morrison, and Pink Floyd. However if the setting is right, usually when I am in my car travelling, I find classical music and opera a preference to rock music, as it is soothing and not as stressful. However I haven't a clue who wrote it, what it is called, or who is playing or singing it.

I think Marcel's habit of walking around the house singing, probably had a lot to do with my getting a taste for it. Mum had tried to get me inspired by having me listen to Joan Sutherland on the radio in the kitchen at *Gunnawarra*. However I did not find her singing inspirational.

The vibrancy of Sally and Marcel and the full richness of their lives were to make a huge impression on me. The positivity they projected was awe inspiring in the face of diversity. Often I saw them go without meals so the children would have a good lunch at school. Nothing fazed them. Marcel was laying carpets for a living and I think the pennies must have been very short.

I then went on to stay with a cousin of my mother's in Chelsea (London). Sophie taught me a little about good food and good manners. She certainly cooked the nicest pheasant I can ever remember eating. She had also won an ancient (100 or more years old) Stilton cheese from Harrods. Sophie lived only a few blocks from Harrods and used to buy a lot of her food from its food section.

The trouble with Harrods was that it was terribly expensive. You could buy some things down the street for at least half the price. Still the snob factor paid off and all the 'Hooray Henries' and the 'Carolines', the poncy 'Nouveau Riche', or in other words the 'Sloane Rangers', spent their money

there regardless of price. Harrods had the reputation that one could buy anything there if you were prepared to pay for it.

Of course Sophie did not fit into these categories though she did live on Sloane Street. Sophie was the true blue old money, and was not what I would have called snobby. She was the sort of person who treated all the same and was just as at ease talking with the ticket collector or garbage man as she was talking to Lord Snoot. She seemed to know everyone, and was really well-liked in the area. Harrods just happened to be the closest shop and Sophie just happened to be a total foodie.

Sophie got the dried-out dusty cheese and filled it with port, and we left it covered with a tea towel in the fridge for about 2 weeks. The cheese became a softened mush and smelt like a dead horse. It was however just delicious to eat spread on a piece of bread or a biscuit.

OL' STINKY
She was a big dry dusty cheese, wrinkled cracked and thirsty.
100 years old and ripe enough to make me sneeze.
Dressed in ancient grey green mould thicker than my thumb
Her mummified coat embracing her hollowed and echoing plug
As she billowed from the tap her parched lips slurped up the port.
Life re-ignited with burbles, gurgles like a drunken consort.
Over time her bosom heaved with bubbling fingers like living souls
Crawling, stretching, and massaging up her inner sides to reach her destiny.
Dead horse perfume ensuing her ever-moving, tantalizing, gooiness.
To some a putrid vomit of paper machete and to me … Oh drool ye
who do not know the sharp bittersweet complex swamp of her old sock and weep.
I feel my every sense in heavenly oblivion as she passes my lips and
explodes onto my anticipating, yearning taste buds.
Swirling my tongue to every part of my mouth with the tingling
sensations of her every sensuous glow I know I am in the paradise of ecstasy.
BIM ATKINSON © 18 June 2009

It was whilst staying with Sophie I got to meet my Uncle, Mum's half brother Archie Robertson-Glasgow. Sophie and I spent many an evening philosophising until late with him. Archie was a bit of a mystery to me and I never got to see where he lived. Still I did get to experience a little of who he was before he died.

Sophie's son Desmond lived just around the corner in Pont Street. Desmond had come and stayed at *Gunnawarra* in the mid sixties. When Desmond first arrived in Cairns he rang my mother to say he was on his way up to *Gunnawarra* on his motor bike. Mum asked him if he would give another call when he got to Mount Garnet because Rudd's Creek was flooded and they would have to come and get him. Desmond responded by saying "It's okay Delphie I will catch the ferry".

Gunnawarra must have been a real shock to a delicate young gay man from Central London. Still there was not anything he would not try, and the men had him being bucked off bad horses in no time. He even ate a Bush Cockroach (Australia's largest cockroach, the Rhinosaris Cockroach.) in *Lucey's Hotel* in Mount Garnet for a bet of $10.

It was seeing Desmond in his home setting of London that made me realise how big the contrast was between that of where he was now and *Gunnawarra* and to appreciate how brave he was to venture all the way out to the North Queensland outback. I know a lot of my family in North Queensland who would have real difficulty, and would be truly challenged in reversing the situation and going into and experiencing Desmond's world in Central London. Desmond certainly had my respect.

Just around the corner from Sophie's Sloane Street address lived cousins of Mum's who were from the Giles side of the family. They had a townhouse in Sloane Court West. This was Michael and Julia Garbett and their 2 teenagers. Christopher was more my age and Pippa (Philippa) was more Penny's age.

The Garbetts actually lived at Ashford in Kent, but various family members came into London to work, thus the townhouse. At this time I saw a lot of Pippa who was doing her nursing training at *St Thomas' Hospital* where Mum had done her training in the 1940s.

Pippa and I had lot of fun through that time I stayed with Sophie. One evening we were walking up Sloane Street towards Sophie's home, when there in front of me was a person being dragged directly toward us by a fully grown pet Puma. The animal was on a leash and the owner had it out for a walk. When it could it would rapidly surge forward nearly jerking the owner off his feet, and have him taking 20 foot strides until he could regain his composure and pull back the beast on its leash to more of a walk, only to have the powerful cat surge forward again. It was obvious his control of the beast was limited.

Without hesitation I crossed to the other side of the road to let the animal pass without having to confront me. Pippa however did not see my concern, and instead stood there laughing her heart out at my reaction as the beast bore down on her and passed her, dragging the hapless owner behind it.

At that time Harrods was selling big cats to people in London who wanted them as pets. Pippa told me that she knew someone who had a tiger in their unit. They apparently kept it doped up so that it would not attack them. Thank heavens one is no longer allowed to do this.

Sophie, seeing my interest in food and cooking, asked me if I would like to do a chefs apprenticeship at the *Dorchester on Park Lane* (a London hotel). It was just around the corner from us as she said she knew someone there. I said yes, and an initial interview was set up. It was a very promising interview and with Sophie's influence it looked like I might get the apprenticeship.

It was just after that interview that I got a letter from Mum to stay there had been a massive crash in the Australian export beef market, as Britain had joined the *European Economic Community (EEC)* and that it was no longer taking beef from Australia. I was told to get home to help out, or face the consequence of being removed from the family partnership.

Of course I heeded to the call, as did a very relieved Penny. It was a turning point in my life. A point that I now look back on with a little regret. Had I taken that apprenticeship I am sure I would have made a successful career of it, and with a start like the one I was offered I would never have been short of work. However it was not to be.

I had to return to Henley-on-Thames to collect my stuff as Sally and Marcel were looking after it for me. Penny came up from West Country and met me there. I was a little a taken back at the amount of luggage Penny had as we returned to Sophie in London. Mum had taken Penny all over Europe and bought her lots of amazing clothes.

When we got to *Victoria Station* we needed to catch a taxi around to Sophie's place. We piled the entire luggage on the footpath and proceeded to wave down a cab. We had pulled over 3 cabs that then went off again when they saw our entire luggage and realised what a short distance we had to go. Obviously not worth their while with the time it was going to take to load the luggage and then unload it.

I realised that we were going to have to hide the luggage back in the station. This we did and the very next taxi that pulled up I got Penny to get in and hold the door open, whilst I went back and forward

loading the luggage into the cab from the station. The taxi driver had a look of bewilderment on his face as he realised our deception. The luggage filled the entire floor space of the cab, and I had to crawl over the top of it to find a seat. When I unloaded the luggage to form a pile in front of Sophie's and paid off the driver, I could see the relief in his face.

When Mum was staying with Sophie she had got Archie to retrieve her mother's silver cutlery set from the pawnbrokers. She asked Sophie to give it to me to bring back to Australia. It was a 24 settings set of silver in a specially designed canteen. Due to ignorance on my part and lack of space in my luggage, I dumped the canteen and loaded all the set into an old chest that Sophie had given me, as my suitcase was too small to carry everything that I had accrued in my time in England.

So there it was. Our time was up in England and Penny and I had berths on the *SS Australis* that was docked in Southampton, due to steam for Australia via the Canary Islands, Cape Town, Perth, Melbourne, and then onto Sydney. The journey was four weeks long and the ship carried a lot of £25 pommies. These English immigrants had the best cabins up in the top decks of the ship. We poor Australians who had paid £172 (it was a lot cheaper back then to go by ship than it was to fly) were in the dingy cockroach-infested cabins in the bowels of the ship below water level. There were 2,000 passengers on board this *Chandris Line* owned Greek Ship.

When the train arrived at the docks at Southampton, Penny and I saw a big ship and she said "There is our ship". As we got closer I noticed a rusty old ship further up the dock and then realised that it was probably going to be our home for the next four weeks. The ship we had first spotted turned out to be the QE2 much to our disappointment it wasn't to be ours.

On our first night on board I went down to the ball room in search of any talent that might be off the leash. I sat at a table with two very nice young ladies and really hit it off with one. We had a fantastic night and I thought right I am set for the trip. Her name was Belinda Green and unbeknownst to me this gorgeous blonde had been crowned Miss World 1972, and was on her way home from a Miss International contest in London.

The next day when I went to catch up with her, I found her swamped by all these good looking guys and knew my time with her was over. Her friend as it turned out had just been crowned a runner up Miss International and was also swamped, so I left them to it.

I needn't have been worried. The population of the ship must have been about 40% single girls. It was the trip of a life time for a young single male.

About a week into the trip I was standing in a passageway reading something on a notice board, when Penny came by and asked me where something or other was. I responded saying it was in my port. After she had gone the fellow standing next to me said "You must be a Queenslander". I said "Oh why is that"? He said "Well you said 'port' instead of 'suitcase'. Only a Queenslander would do that. Where are you from"? he asked. I told him and we got talking.

We had a lot to talk about, and over the ensuing week, prior to reaching Capetown, Jonathan King introduced me to his wife Jane and their little baby girl Lowanna. We became very firm friends. When they disembarked in Cape Town they said they would catch up with me at *Gunnawarra*. This they did when Jane's mother, Nancy, came out from England for a visit in 1977, and we have been the best of friends ever since.

I met others on that cruise that also became friends, but time, distance, and lifestyle changes have eroded them away.

Penny and I had an enjoyable few weeks through to Sydney, getting off in Perth to visit Mum's cousin Marjory House and her family. It was a very brief visit but very memorable. We were so happy just to see the Australian coast. We were both very relieved when we reached Sydney and made a beeline for Far North Queensland and *Gunnawarra*.

I stayed and worked at home that year, and in 1976 I got a job working on the *Ravenshoe Tin Dredge* which led to getting a job with *Comalco* at Weipa for the last 6 months of the year, as a Trades Assistant. The money was pretty good. We had to go out to work, as the cattle crash meant that my parents could not pay us when we worked at home.

In 1977 I went to Brisbane and tried to redo my senior through adult education at *Kelvin Grove College* but I found it too difficult. I just lacked too many of the basics. To support myself whilst in Brisbane I worked with Bob Hannam in his office furniture repairs business at Commercial Road in Fortitude Valley. His family had been very close friends of the *Gunnawarra* Atkinson's for several generations when they lived at Digger Street in Cairns.

I lived with several old school friends of mine at the time, James Lindley and Paul Macarteny, all over the north side of Brisbane, including at Gap Creek Road, Toowong, Milton, Auchenflower, Red Hill, New Market, Bowen Hills and Clayfield.

I returned home for Christmas and then worked on the *Gunnawarra Centenary* for the celebrations coming up that year. I was carrying a little weight at the time from my stay in Brisbane. A family who was helping out with the period dress were the Thomason's. I was very attracted to their daughter Osla. She bet me that I would not lose my weight for the Centenary, so I got Mum to put me on a diet.

Mum put me on one of her hospital diets, and at the same time I built a race course, railed fences, race callers stand, bar, toilets, revamped Walter Jeffries old dance floor, set up the *Gunnawarra* camp and all, for the re-enactment of the *Gunnawarra* races. It was to be the main event for the Centenary. The *Gunnawarra Races* were a preceder to the Mount Garnet races.

I lost three and a half stone in 4 weeks. I was ecstatic and so was Osla when she saw me again. Little did I know what damage I was doing to myself by dieting this way! Before long the weight started creeping back on again. It was around this time I gave up salt, sugar, cake biscuits and desserts and in the main still do not eat those things to this very day.

We had about 3,000 people attend the Centenary, and Mum wrote a little booklet for it and we sold printed tea towels and tea shirts, embossed leather drink coasters, and badges. The horse races went well and were held on the first day, down at the junction of Rudd's Creek and the Herbert River. On the first night we had a ball on the old racecourse dance floor, and on the second evening the main ball was held in the homestead ball room which had been built to replace the one on the river.

The second day we also had athletics for the kids and a gymkhana. We held these sports events at the homestead, along with rides in a gig we had done up for the event.

The music was provided by a jazz band from Brisbane led by Ian Wells and Milam Hayes. Ian Wells was the head vet for the *DPI* and had just finished an experiment with us, where they supplied hundreds of hours of helicopter mustering to test for brucellosis in three rounds. Milam Hayes was a well known jazz musician and also a medical doctor, who owned the *Jazz Club* at Kangaroo point.

The *Gunnawarra Centenary* was a very successful event, regardless of the fact that some locals had snuck in without paying and thieves stole the sides off the big marquee that we had hired for the event. Half the proceeds of the Centenary went to the *Royal Flying Doctor* and the other half went to the *National Trust.*

King Costello - Gunnawarra Station horse yards 1974

Author lassoing bogged cow to pull from Gunnawarra creek in 1982

Ravenshoe Tin Dredge 1976

Jeremy aged 9 sitting in his jeep.

Christopher Philip Geoffrey Atkinson

Lily and Rosie

Delphie and Geoff on their Chinese tour.

Donald Johnston 1972

The Author in 1972 at the age of 17

Delphie, Geoff, and author at Nebo strip When working at Tierawoomba 1973

Reg Webb in 1972.

Author on his return from England 1975

Nell and Christopher planting tree at Gunnawarra Centenary 1978

Author with Jane, Jonathan and Molly King at Upwey, Melbourne 1983

Angela Manson at Usher Point on the Escape River, Cape York. 1982

Merran, Josephine, and Fraser Samuel Armadale Melbourne 1983

Penny with stack of Sooty Grunter (Black Bream) 1982

Bob and Errolly McFarland, Oxley station 1983

Gunnawarra Homestead from helicopter 1987

Mum with Lois Westcott at Atherton in 2006

Author with Mark Beaumont, Salcombe, England 1992

Jeremy at the Mount Garnet Races 2005

Author with Parents on ferry from the Outer Hebrides in Scotland 1993

Mum and Johnny Murray at my cottage in Ravenshoe 2009

My little Cottage in Ravenshoe 2009

Gunnawarra cow up tree at after Gleneagle Homestead got washed away in 1967 flood.

Ravenshoe Writers Group having lunch at my Cottage 2010

Wooden shingle roof on Gunnawarra Homestead 2009

James, Elizabeth, Bob, Henry, Kate and Tom Atkinson in the 1870s at Herbert Park. Aboriginal girl unknown.

.Marcel Wagner with cousin Jenny Collins 2011

Note to the reader: I hope you do not mind a break from my story. I have inserted another of my observational stories of my time growing up and living on *Gunnawarra*. This one is based on food. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

SPOILT FOR CHOICE, FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD

At around 5:00pm a small pop resounded from the pea rifle (.22 calibre), and the cow, usually a spayed fat cow, dropped like a rock dying instantly. With this as a cue the team went into action. The crush door opened and was swung up against the wall of the killing pen. With all hands on deck the cow was pulled out towards the centre of the pen, its head pointing downhill on the sloped cement. The boss (be it my father, the head stockman, or someone who was proficient at killing) then proceeded to bleed the cow by cutting away the dewlap, and then cutting the main artery just above the heart, allowing the blood to gush out in buckets onto the floor. The tail was grabbed and a foot placed on the cow's rump, allowing its body to be rocked to remove every last ounce of the blood. Someone from the bottom of the food chain like myself or some new chum jackeroo, got the old hose and broom and washed the blood down the drain to the outside of the shed before it could curdle.

The cow was rolled onto its back, and a special support rod was jammed through its skin at one end and placed in a small dent in the cement at the other, so as to allow the cow to remain propped on its back whilst it was skinned and its gut sliced open, its chest and hip bone split open with the large meat cleaver. This allowed for such delectable organs such as the heart, liver, sweetbread (pancreas) and skirt (diaphragm) to be removed. The skirt of fat over the gut was then removed, to be later rendered down as dripping which was used as cooking oil in the kitchen. The head was removed at the base of the skull after the tongue and cheeks were procured, and the brain was taken out.

The bottom half of the legs were removed, and with a slit put in each of the hind legs, to accommodate a wooden beam lowered down on a hand driven winch from the ceiling, the hind legs were stretched apart and held in place by 'u' hooks. The cow was slowly raised into the air, allowing for any final skinning and the removal of its innards. Once the skin and innards had been removed, a proficient axe man then proceeded to split the beast down its spine as it was raised higher and higher. The final cut to finish the split was left until about 5:30 am the following morning, to allow the meat to set and tender stretch before being quartered and hung in the cold room. The hind quarters being halved again so as to tender stretch the porterhouse and the rump, and also stretch the sirloin rib roast in to shape. Our round butchers block, was a section taken from the trunk of a huge blue gum down on the river in the early days. The hide, though generally thrown out with the innards was, if the quality was good enough, kept and stretched over big old buggy wheel rims and scraped clean of fat and selvage, before being salted and allowed to dry. When stiff and cured it was used for making leg ropes (for branding calves), ropes for working with horses, whips, and headbands for hats etc. It was tough stuff and lasted for years. The men who made these items did so usually with just a sharp pocket knife and a good eye, and were craftsmen that were usually held in awe at their skill and plaiting ability.

The innards were taken off and dumped a mile or two into the bush so as not to stink the place out when they aged a little. Invariably the dogs found the cache days later and returned with very stinky bits and pieces, just to let you know how good they were tracking down a feed. Not only did what they bought you stink but they too stunk, as they surely partied in the innards and all that goes with intestines etc. It was enough to make anyone's nose stand on end.

The offal was taken down to the butcher shop and hung out of reach of cats and dogs, the liver and heart being slit at the base to allow the draining of the blood. The brain was put in a bowl of slightly saline water and refrigerated overnight, so that prior to breakfast it could be peeled of its membrane and with the sweetbread it could broken up into portion-sized bites, prior to being egg and bread crumbed for breakfast. Usually it was served (if we had it) with crispy bacon. This delicacy was kept

for the house, as there was not enough to go around everyone. The rest of the station inhabitants usually had a serve of liver, skirt and bacon done in the oven in an onion and tomato gravy that was also highly delicious.

The station breakfast normally consisted of a bowl of porridge (Uncle Toby's Oats) followed by either steak and eggs, curry and rice, homemade sausages baked in the oven with onion and gravy, or whatever was available at the time. Sometimes it was a feed of Black Bream (Sooty Grunter) caught down on the Herbert River. Offal tended always to be eaten on kill mornings, as the fresh meat needed time to set and cool down before being eaten. The older the meat, also meant the more tender it was. It was then followed by copious pieces of toast and homemade marmalade, jam and home-grown honey with copious cups of tea.

When I first went into mustering camps they were still eating dried salt beef. This consisted of lumps of beef that were sat in bins of coarse salt until most of the moisture was removed. This preserved it so that it did not need refrigeration. I can still see a week or mores supply of it sitting on a table in shady spot in the camp and covered with lots of fresh gum leaves. It was brutal stuff. Even the ants and flies could not get their teeth into it.

Every night it would be soaked for several hours, then boiled up for the following day's cut lunches etc. The water needed to be changed at least four times through the process, and it was still as salty as all heck to eat. I can say that I do not have any fond memories of it at all. Having a cold room changed everything and we started making our own corned meat.

Corned meat was something we consumed for lunch every day, and we made it from the Brisket (the chest of the beast) and the Silverside (the inner thigh of the hind quarter). We also corned the cheeks, the tongue, and sometimes the Round as well. We did this by salting the cut of meat with very coarse salt. It then went into the cold room in a barrel for 48 hours to draw out the moisture from the meat.

This moisture was then poured off into a big cooking pot with water and Kwik Cure (Sodium Nitrite) added. It was then brought to the boil and skimmed, and then put back in the cold room to cool off before being poured back over the meat. The liquid was known as brine. The brine was reboiled and skimmed every three or four days, to keep the bacteria at bay until the meat was corned. Hot corned beef with white sauce was something we had for dinner at least once a week and was just delicious.

Our roasts were rolled rib and sirloin roasts. No part of the beast was wasted and the stews, casseroles, braise meats, and curries were memorable with great classics such as steak and kidney pies. The topside was generally used for crumbed steak and stews. Steak came from the rump, fillet, porterhouse, butterfly blade and oyster blade. Other meat and scraps went into mince, sausages, and pressed brawns etc. The bones were either given to the dogs or used for soups, stocks etc. The best stock bones being the neck bones and shins. Depending on the number of staff and visitors at any given time, we usually killed about once a fortnight.

Our dairy came from six Illawarra Shorthorn milking cows that had to be milked twice a day. It was a job I learned to hate with a passion. Getting up at four in the morning to bring the cows into the milking yard was bad enough. If the cows weren't kicking over a bucketful of milk they were lashing ones face with a urine saturated tail. Of course we tied the tails and leg-roped the legs once their heads were locked in the bales, but they still had the cunning to defeat us.

Those with calves held their milk back until you got the calf out of the calf pen to come and butt the daylights out of their udders and get them to finally let the milk down. You then had to drag the thirsty calf off the teat and put it back in the calf pen, and return to the job of milking. By this time the old girl was really stirred.

On one such occasion when I was about 12 years old, one such old dear's calf knocked me face down into his mother's very runny manure, and then bolted out into the yard whilst his mother put one hoof on my back. I swear she lifted the other three hooves off the ground and winded the daylights out of me. My father, who was approaching the yard at this particular time, witnessed me running to a trough still winded and dripping with manure. Not my favourite memory to say the least, though the family made much of it over years with different visitors to get a good laugh.

Mastitis was always an issue for the cows, as were scours for the calves. We put 'streptomycin' into the cow's teat and activated charcoal into the calf's milk to control these issues. Milking by hand certainly makes one's wrists strong. We were very relieved in the early seventies when Dad finally bought a little milking machine that did two cows at once. The milk was strained into an 8 gallon milk can and wheeled on a trolley down to the homestead dairy, where it was combined with the previous evening's milk. It was separated in an electric separator, another great improvement on the old hand driven one. We separated about 10 to 12 gallons of milk per day. I just loved licking the leftover cream from the separator bits and pieces prior to washing up.

That day's cream was kept for cooking, making ice-cream and to pour over the desserts in the evenings. About 2 to 3 gallons of milk per day was also kept back and used by all and sundry to put on their breakfast porridge/cereal, for tea, for drinking, and making various desserts etc. Every morning Mum made 2 to 3 pounds of butter from the cream remaining from the day before. We just did not appreciate how lucky we were.

We always had poddy calves to feed and had an 8 teat calfeterria. The calves did well on separated milk and we also put in an additive called *Dencavite* - a bit like powdered milk. Any milk leftover after all this process was sent down to the pigs who just loved it.

By the mid 1970s the beef recession had sunk in and we no longer had the staff or the people to feed. The milking cows were retired as we switched to buying dried milk in 40 kg bags of both skimmed and full cream milk, which when mixed two to one made a very acceptable milk to drink and cook with. We also had to buy our butter. It never tasted the same and so ended an era. At the time we were glad to be relieved of the milking and time taken to separate etc., but thinking back I certainly miss those beautiful pure products.

When my mother came to the station in the early 1950s, my grandmother taught her how to make bread but by the sixties it was more convenient to get it from the bakery in Mt Garnet. In those years we were raised on white bread. It came out with the mail once a week, and went into the cold room so that it would last the week. Mum used to put a loaf in the AGA stove to freshen it up.

With the advent of the cattle crash in the early 70s, the ensuing cutbacks, and the family going healthy 'brown' everything with the food (no more white bread, white sugar, Cornflakes replaced by homemade muesli....brown, brown, brown), Mum started making wholemeal bread. After a bit of a precarious start and some very solid loaves, through trial and error, Mum turned out bread that proved to be absolutely scrumptious. It was a massive job for my mother feeding everyone this bread. We just did not understand the hours and effort she must have put in making it.

At certain times of the year after rain, the field mushrooms came up and we went out and collected buckets and buckets of them. We took them down to Mum in the kitchen and after cleaning them, she would cut them up and fry them up in butter. She then froze them in portion sized containers so that we could have mushrooms all year round. Those field mushrooms are still my favourites and it's a pity they do not sell them through the shops today.

We had a 400 square meter vegetable garden on the station, which was highly productive due to my mother's green thumb and knowledge of how to build soils. My father had also sold 2 ponies to make the money to cover the whole garden in mesh, which kept the birds out and made it even more productive. We successfully grew Brussels sprouts, strawberries, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, zucchini, various squash, cucumber, silver beet (tropical spinach), French dwarf beans, long beans, peas, broad beans, snow peas, carrots, beetroot, tomatoes, eggplants, celery, comfrey, lettuce, capsicums, parsley, ginger, horseradish, mint, sweet corn, rhubarb, chokos, and rosella for jam. The excess vegetables that could be were blanched and then frozen for use at a later date. At times we had gardeners, or if not we helped out by lugging loads of cattle manure from the cattle yards, but at the end of the day Mum not only orchestrated the whole process but also did most of the work when it came to the garden. It was a huge undertaking on her part.

Queensland Blue pumpkins and watermelons were plentiful, as whenever there was any pile of timber or a pile of dead cattle to be burned, someone invariably threw a handful of pumpkin and watermelon seeds into the resultant ash heap. We used to get wild pie melons from the bush to make pie melon and ginger jam. Up near the old motor shed Dad also had a large patch of sweet potatoes. We did however buy our English potatoes and our onions. They were just too much work to supply the whole station with. I do however seem to remember when I was very young, that English potatoes were just not available in our part of the world.

We had two very old large Common Mango trees around the homestead that also acted as shade trees, we had a Turpentine Mango in front of the kitchen and in the garden we had a Bowen Mango and a Peach Mango. Each mango was delicious in its own right though I must say that I was not very fond of the Turpentine. Probably the best one to eat was the Peach Mango, though I think the best flavour probably came from the Common Mangoes, which were not so popular to eat because they are so stringy. The Common Mango certainly made the best chutney, and we used to make gallons of it every year to go with our daily intake of cold roast beef and corned beef for lunch. We used to feed vehicle loads of mangoes that fell on the ground to the pigs and cows. They were usually knocked down by possums at night or in later years by too many rainbow lorikeets trying to ride one mango to the ground during the day.

We also had a large cumquat tree in the garden that was used for making cumquat jam. We also had lemon, lime, grapefruit, custard apple, bananas, cherry guava, passion fruit (both yellow and purple), Isabella grapes, pomegranates and Cape gooseberries. We also had a very productive Pecan nut tree at the bottom of the garden. About two miles from the homestead we had a lagoon with a cottage beside it. Down there were also the remnants of an old orchard that once supplied the homestead. There we had orange, mandarin, lemon, custard apple, guava, and persimmon trees.

Down on the river we also had native figs and Herbert River cherries. Out in the bush we had Walba berries (native white currants that only came on about every four years and were a favourite of the original inhabitants of the land – the Aborigines), native grapes, and dogs balls. I can remember my mother buying apples. They were huge Granny Smith cooking apples that were very sour to eat straight up. They came out on the mail truck wrapped in tissue and stacked in a pine box. A third of them were rotten by the time we got them.

Every year we went down to what was known as *Lemon Tree Crossing* on the Herbert River, a favourite picnic spot for the family, which had originally been a crossing for traffic going from the south up to Herberton in the horse and buggy days. Someone had thoughtfully planted lemon trees there. They were original rootstock lemons with thick very bumpy skins. The trees were just loaded with them. We picked boxes and boxes of them and took them home to be juiced. The juice was bottled in our Fowlers Vacola set, and boiled up and preserved so that we could have lemon juice all

year round. Mum used to make up a large jug of lemonade every lunchtime, using this very concentrated lemon juice. By adding lots of icy water, some ice, and some sugar one ended up with one of the most deliciously refreshing drinks one could have on a hot day.

We had a large chook yard with about 100 chooks, 150 turkeys, and about 10 or 15 ducks. Eggs were never in short supply. Mind you, they were used a lot in cooking back then. Numerous cakes, biscuits, desserts such as lemon meringue pies (there were usually three or four desserts laid out every night), large jugs of custard, breakfast dishes like omelettes, scrambled, poached, boiled and fried eggs, quiches, and things like crumbed steak required eggs. The egg shells were saved and cooked up in the AGA to dry them out and make them brittle. They were then crunched up and added back into the chook mash to be fed back to the chooks. We would regularly have rooster or a turkey for Sunday dinner. We also ate the odd duck.

Some of Dad's mates at the time included Jim McAuliffe, Barty Gerand, and George Kelly. They regularly came up duck shooting. They went out to the various swamps and shot bag loads of ducks, and always brought some home to have around our dining table and some to take home.

The turkeys however were mainly bred for the Christmas trade and sold to Fred Marsh, a Cairns butcher who used to buy a lot of cattle off us. Fred used to sell turkeys through his butcher shops every Christmas. It was a hell of a job killing, plucking and gutting around 80 or so turkeys every Christmas for Fred. As kids we found turkeys exceptionally hard to pluck. Chooks were bad enough.

My love for turkeys was not great, because when at the age of about six I went down to the chook house and into the turkey's compound to change their water. My mother said when I returned to the kitchen she was deeply disturbed to see that I was dripping all over with blood. The turkeys had decided I was a threat and had attacked me.

In 1927 my grandmother brought Sooty Grunter (known by the locals as Black Bream) and Sleepy Cod up from the Burdekin River to stock the Herbert River, as the only fish in the Herbert at the time was Jungle Perch. She kept them alive overnight in the bathtub at the Mt Garnet hospital, before going through to *Mandalee Station,* her sister's place, where she released them into the Herbert. Unbeknownst to her, the cod did not like the river and eventually all jumped out into the lagoons and waterholes in the district and did very well, though I think the dry years and over-fishing have bought about their demise now.

In front of the homestead was Bells Creek which emptied onto a flat before flowing into the Big Lagoon. Every flood time we went down to the lagoon to where the water was flooding in from Bells Creek and fished. We caught lots of cod and eels to take up for a big feed at the homestead. When I was very young I was fishing there and caught an eel. It was my very first experience of catching an eel, and I panicked thinking it was a snake and took off up the flat. To my angst every time I looked back I could see that it was just behind me and chasing me. After about sixty yards up the flat I realized that I still had hold of the line and that was why it was chasing me. I can still see my father chuckling about it, as he recounted the tale to eager listeners over the dining table many years later.

As kids when there was a fresh flow we went down to the creek below the homestead to an old ford that we called *The Dam*, and caught fish as they jumped up over the wall. The fish were small but delicious and were caught by hand. The main fish we caught was what we called Butter Dew, a small catfish that grew to about six inches long and was a shiny butter gold in colour. Like all catfish they could really sting and it was quite an art to catch these slippery little fellows without being got. We also caught spotted perch there. We lugged our haul up for Mum to cook for us. They were just yummy floured and cooked in a pan with some butter.

One of the great leisure times on the station was fishing. When the station workers had time off, Dad supplied them with a four wheel drive to go down to the river fishing. Invariably my brothers and I went as well until we were old enough to take ourselves. My favourite person to go fishing with was Hector Fred. His ability to catch fish was legendary. I spent days with him on the river. We used to catch turtles, eels, sooty grunter, and spotted perch and cook them on the coals of the fire. It was a very idyllic pastime. Any extra fish and eels were taken back to the homestead for everyone else to get a feed.

We also had friends, who when they came up camping on the place from the coast, would drop in seafood for us. Dad and family members from other stations used to do what they called the Bushies Bash, where they chartered a big boat and went out fishing for a week or more, and returned with enough fish to last a year.

We also ate some oddity foods. As a child I can remember the Aboriginal women down amongst the gum trees along the creek, cutting witchetty grubs (jumbun) out of the tree trunks. These grubs grew to a fat five inches long and about one inch in diameter. They lived on the fresh timber of the blue gums and could be found by looking at about eye level for a hole in the trunk, and a small pile of fresh sawdust at the base of the tree. Sometimes they got a big chrysalis which was broken open and scrambled like an egg. Mum fried the grubs up in butter and made witchetty sandwiches for morning smoko. This was not a regular event as the witchetty season is very short, however when it did happen they were absolutely delicious.

A regular food eaten at the branding pen and on the mustering camps was 'mountain oysters' (calf's testicles). These were pretty good when cooked up on coals from the branding fire, as long as their owners were not too old. I can remember running out of meat at *Sugarbag mustering camp*, and we lived off curried oysters for almost a week. Though Mum refused to cook them up for us at the homestead, I can remember sneaking them down when she was away. I butterflied them, put them in egg and bread crumbs and cooked them up in garlic butter. Really, really nice!

I can remember sitting around the fire with the Aborigines up behind their quarters and eating kangaroo, snake, goanna, and flying fox. I think goanna was my favourite. I also ate tripe with them that they grabbed from the kill. It had just been washed under a tap and thrown on the coals. It wasn't too bad except for the odd bite on a small chunk of manure. I also ate Plain Turkey (Great Plains Bustard) with them, and it was better than the domestic turkeys we had at the homestead. One of the best feeds I ever had was a Jacky Rat (Rufus Bettong), that Hector and I slow cooked in the camp oven on one of our camping trips down on the river.

It wasn't that they did not eat well at home, because we had three dining rooms. One was for the family, jillaroos, jackeroos, and visitors; one was for the white ringers; and one was for the Aborigines. Everyone on the station got fed the same food, and lots of it. There was never a shortage of food.

In later years Mum and I whilst running a tourist business using the homestead, actually got overrun firstly with rabbits and then by Jacky Rats in the garden. So we shot a few to protect our vegetables and flower beds etc. The long and short of it was that the tourists had some quite interesting meals whilst staying with us. This was due to the fact that neither Mum nor I could bear to waste such good food. We believed if we had to shoot them we should at least do them the honour of at least eating them. And of course they were just delicious.

Another delectable food we had on the station was honey. Although we did have native bees (these didn't sting) on the place, their hives were tiny and their honey was very rich. It was very nice but you could only eat tiny amounts of it at any given time.

The bees (though wild) that we got all our honey from were European, being of the English and Italian varieties. The English bees were a lot easier to rob and not anywhere near as savage as the Italian bees were. On saying that, they all still stung like hooey once being stirred up. Whilst out mustering and getting around the station on day to day routine jobs, these wild hives were found in the hollows of blood woods, box trees, gums, and ironbarks. Once located we went out with men like Hector Fred who were game enough to climb up the tree and chop open the hive to rob it.

I picked Hector, because he really knew what he was doing and I have clear memory of him going about 25 feet up a tree that was located about a mile and a half from the homestead. Before climbing up he piled green leaves around the base of the tree and got them really smoking to calm the bees. He then removed his shirt and hat and with a sharp tomahawk, shinned up the tree and cut a hole in the top of the nest and reached in and grabbed a big handful of honey and comb which he proceeded to rub it all over his face, torso, and through his hair. He did this so as to stop the bees from stinging him, or at least that was what he claimed worked for him. I do not know if it worked, as I was not hanging around too close to find out, as the bees were a little stirred by this stage. He then pulled up a 4 gallon bucket on a rope and filled it with honeycomb and lowered it to the ground. He then hauled up another bucket and also filled it. He made sure he left some for the bees and climbed down.

Back at the homestead the honeycomb was hung in mesh to drain the honey out of the comb, and then it was sieved, bottled, and stored. In later years Sam Collins started putting his hives out on the station chasing particular blossoms, and used to always drop us a five gallon drum of honey in for the station. At the end of the day we were never short of honey.

I can tell you that I am very nervous of bees. It goes back to when I was at school at *St Barnabas* in Ravenshoe when I was about 10 years old. Our bee master Brother Peter, sent me down to chip the weeds around the hives. He geared me up with hat, netting, gloves etc, and sent me on my way with a hoe, convincing me not to worry by telling me that bees did not sting after five o'clock. I should have never listened to him.

As I started chipping around the hives the bees came out and covered my head netting in their thousands. I very nervously kept slowly chipping the weeds until my body was almost totally covered in bees. I was to learn later that the whole hived had swarmed onto me. At that stage one got through the net and stung me behind the ear.

It was at that point that panic button number one went off and I dropped the hoe and turned around and ran like crazy, screaming out "help me" towards an old retired naval commander - Commander Birch - who just happened to be about 30 yards away carrying the slops down to the pigs. However the old commander was no fool, and when he realized the situation I was in he threw the slop buckets on the ground and took off in the opposite direction.

That was panic button number two, and at that point I went berserk with fear and ripped off all my protective gear as I ran through fences and over hill and dale to find help. Eventually the bee master caught me and took me up and put me under a hot shower to scold the bees off. I got twenty six stings out of that experience and have never felt comfortable around beehives ever since.

Pork is something I have always enjoyed. Especially if it is a big roast, with lots of delicious snappy and crunchy crackling. On the station it was available to us because we had our own pigs in our own big pigpen. These were not domestic pigs i.e. Tamworth's or Landraces. These were wild pigs we caught as piglets in the bush. They were Captain Cookers I think. They were gorgeous tiny little black darters when we caught them. We had to be fast on our feet as they could run. If they beat you to the long grass they generally got away. When we got them back to the homestead they were wormed before going into the pigpen.

Here we fed them on corn mash, at least five gallons of scraps from the kitchen every day, and any waste fruit such as mangoes. They grew quickly and when they were just right, we picked out one and separated it out from the others into another pen and then shot it. Because we shot so many pigs whilst doing our station rounds on a daily basis, I can remember not being too concerned about killing the beast. I think I might have difficulty now having been removed from it for so long.

We had a place outside the pen where we could hang them up and bleed and gut them. They were quick and easy. We had a bath tub with lots of hot scalding water that we then put them in so as to make it easy to scrape the skin clean of bristly hair. The pig lost its black thin outer skin in this process, and looked much the same as any other pig when finished. The flavour of the pork was very good and when we corned hams of it, it was even more delicious. I say this because the pork that you buy in the supermarkets today is pumped with hormones and antibiotics and is totally tasteless in comparison.

In the station store we kept Heinz tomato sauce, *Holbrook's Worcester Sauce*, *CSR* tins of Golden Syrup and Treacle, *Uncle Toby's Oats*, big tea chests of Bushel's tea, 5 gallon drums of *Defiance* flour (both plain and self raising), 50 pound bags of rice, *Keens* curry powder, Salt, Pepper, Aunt Mary's baking powder, *Sunshine* powdered milk, condensed milk, tins of camp pie, corned beef, spam, bully beef, cans of baked beans, and cans of spaghetti.

In the kitchen store Mum kept all the things needed for making cakes, biscuits, and bread etc. This was inclusive of a variety of spices, dried herbs, seeds, nuts, raisins, currants, dates and other dried fruits. There was also Bicarbonate of Soda, Cream of Tartar, food colourings, essences, and cans of specific things as sardines, anchovies, oysters etc. Bottles of cherries, gherkins etc. glycerine, glucose, arrowroot, corn flour, and packets of glace′ cherries, desiccated coconut, and a seemingly endless list of other goodies needed to run a kitchen.

I know I told you what we ate for breakfast, but I would like to add that in later years we also had choices other than porridge. This included Kellogg's Cornflakes, Wheetbix, and Mum's homemade and highly delicious muesli.

These were all kept in big glass jars to stop them from being attacked by the many cockroaches that we had come in from the bush. As a matter of fact most of our dry goods had to be stored in cockroach proof containers. In the later years the cakes and biscuits were stored in big plastic 'Tupperware' containers.

We in reality ate five meals a day if we were working around the homestead. Breakfast was at 7.00am and we had morning smoko (morning tea) at 10.00am, for which Mum would ring a gong to let us know that it was time to drop what we were doing and come and feast. Each dining room had its own gong and ours was a big old shell left over from the war that hung off a branch of the Turpentine Mango tree in front of the kitchen. The ringers had a smaller shell which hung at the door to their dining room and the Aborigines had a big piece of old spring that hung outside their dining room.

Smoko consisted of a line-up of three or four different types of biscuits, and usually there was also a big boiled fruit cake that we knew as 'Brownie'. It also consisted of fresh scones with whipped fresh cream and homemade rosella jam or pikelets with honey. After about two or three cups of tea and generous amounts of cake and biscuits we went back to work.

The gong would then go again for lunch at 1.00pm. We always had cold corned meat, and cold roast meat for lunch. We also had a salad from the garden and Mum's homemade bread, butter, and home-grown honey and a glass of Mum's lemonade made from the bush lemons. We invariably finished the meal with a cup of tea.

The gong would go again at 4.00pm for afternoon smoko. Here we had the Brownie cake and biscuits but did not have scones or pikelets. We also had copious cups of tea.

At 7.00pm Dad would always have a pre dinner drink – usually a small whisky and Mum would have a sherry. We would sometimes have a soft drink, but usually it was water for us younger ones. Our neighbours the Stralows, were growing peanuts and used to keep us supplied with big bags of them. Mum used to cook these up with salt and we'd eat them like there was no tomorrow. They went very well with pre-dinner drinks. Of course we kept this to our dining room. Alcohol was a no-no amongst the working men, as they did not know in many cases when to pull up, and we could not have men jumping on the back of bucking horses in the mornings with hangovers. The men were used to this and usually made up for it when they hit town.

Dinner was at 7.30pm and everyone on the station was required to have their baths prior to this time and dress up. It was designed to keep up the standards. The men wore jackets to the table.

Dinner being our main meal of the day consisted of rolled rib roast twice a week with roast pumpkin, sweet potatoes, English potatoes, and a green beans, silver beet, or broccoli. On other nights we had one of Mum's brilliant casseroles, stews, or braises. At least once a week we had hot corned silverside or tongue, and of course there was always steak that was served with mash potatoes, mashed pumpkin, greens and if available sweet corn or button squash. Another favourite was oxtail stew or steak and kidney. We also had poultry, fish and other goodies when they came available. For dessert there were a number of baked puddings served with custard and cream, and Mum also made ice cream occasionally. We also had Granny Smith apples that were stuffed with dates and raisins and served with custard. A treat was Mum's frozen mango served with ice-cream and cream.

In the other dining rooms the meal would be followed by more cups of tea. In our dining room we did not do this. We did however, if we had guests, serve good quality coffee (we had friends and cousins in New Guinea who were into coffee plantations) and usually had a port or some other liqueur.

Back then wine was not a drink that was appreciated in the north, and the men would not touch it. However my mother having grown up in Britain and having cousins in Australia in the wine trade, was determined to educate our green palates to the complexities of wine with food. Her cousins kept us supplied with some very nice wines from their private cellars, and I can say I was lucky enough to have grown up with wine on the table for the evening meals. However most of the people around, be it property owners, or workers, thought us strange for drinking it. Mind you as young people it was usually just a splash in the bottom of a glass. Just enough to give us an appreciation of it with food.

THERE IS NOTHING MORE PERMANENT THAN CHANGE (cont'd.)

In 1979 I started a 4 year adult Fitter, Turner, and Machinist apprenticeship with *Comalco* at Weipa. The heat in Weipa just about killed me.

During that time in 1980 I took a quick 3 week tour of Britain with my roommate Phil from the dongas in Weipa. After driving around Britain we split up for about 5 days so that I could go and catch up with the Garbetts, and Phil had things to see and do in London that were of no interest to me.

I stayed with Michael and Julia in their home which was now *Old School House*, Rye, East Sussex. It was a very beautiful old home. Whilst there Pippa visited and took me back to London to meet her boyfriend, who had a really nice little pad in the Holland Park Mews. Steve Stubbs ended up becoming a firm friend. I also met Steve's flatmate Angela Manson, who was renting one of the rooms at the time. Chris Garbett also came over and we had a few tremendous nights on the town. I really liked Angela.

Phil and I met up again as planned and we went for a few days in Paris before getting back to Weipa to start work.

By the end of the 3rd year I had had enough and transferred my trade to *NQA* in Cairns working on the patrol boats they were building at the time for the Australian Navy. Though I found the trades not really my cup of tea, I did make one very good friend at this stage of my life. John Buzacott was my engineering teacher at the *Cairns TAFE.* He was the first person to ever teach maths to me in a way that I understood, and had failed miserably in at school, and here I was getting High Distinctions in it. We are still very firm friends to this day.

Note to the reader: Here is another break from my story. I have inserted another of my stories in. This one is based on an incident that happened to me whilst I was in Weipa. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

FATEFUL JOURNEY

"Bim, we are heading for the bush for the weekend. Do you want to come"? "Yes", I replied. "When are we leaving"? I asked. "Straight away. Grab your swag I have everything else", responded Ross my leading-hand from work.

The month was October and the year was 1980, and I was in my second year as a Fitter, Turner, and Machinist Apprentice with *Comalco* in Weipa. Daytime temperatures were reaching as high as 46 degrees Celsius, and the humidity was in the low 90s. It was heat that I found overbearing and knew I would never get used to it. Drops of sweat poured down my face as I rolled my swag. I enjoyed camping and was looking forward to this weekend of adventure. We were driving up to pick up a vehicle from a beach that had broken down there the week before…. or so I thought… and Ross had a spare wheel and a new battery for the broken down vehicle in the back of his Nissan. I had no idea where we were going. I was in the hands of my leading-hand.

I loaded my swag into Ross's Nissan and piled in, not thinking about either food or water. I thought he would have all that sorted. Going bush, camping and fishing, was something just about everyone did in Weipa in their leisure time as there was little else to do. We pulled into the single men's mess and picked up our weekend picnic box, if nothing else we were not going to starve.

On our way out of town we pulled into Harry's place and picked up Dale. Dale was 16 years old and he and his family were mutual friends of both Ross and I. He too was looking for adventure.

It was 6 o'clock in the evening as we broached the trees and headed north in Ross's monster. Ross had taken out the Nissan engine and replaced it with a big throbbing V8. It was a very noisy machine. We had driven for 2 hours on the bush track before Ross pulled up and said that this was where we turned off, and headed west toward the coast. I looked at the bush we were about to plough through and wondered if Ross's vehicle was up to the challenge, and felt a tinge of regret that I had not bought my Toyota four-wheel drive with its diesel engine and big bull bar. Much more suited to this terrain.

My reservations were confirmed within the first half hour of pushing through the now very thick bush. The engine overheated and we had to stop to let it cool down as the darkness encroached on us. In hindsight it is at this point that we should have turned around and gone home. We had a good torch that allowed us to read the compass, so that we at least knew that we were traveling in the right direction.

We drove all night pushing down many trees as we went. We seemed to stop every 15 minutes to allow the motor to cool and used a lot of water topping up the radiator. It was daylight as we came into the clearing of the creek crossing. Janey Creek is recognized as having the thickest breeding ground for crocodiles in Australia. The crossing was at the very head of this tidal creek, and the creek bed was made of very ominous black, greasy, mangrove mud. Ross being Ross drove straight into it and we were immediately bogged to the gunnels.
We were very tired, so we decided for starters that we would boil the billy and have breakfast before we tried to get the monster out of the bog. The sand flies and mossies were voracious and the flies were very annoying.

As the biting sun started glowering through the treetops, we pulled out Ross's hand winch. I was stunned with disbelief. The cheap little unit he had was a wire rope no thicker than a clothesline. We had to pull a ton and a half of four-wheel drive dead weight out of a very deep mud hole. Within minutes of hooking it up the wire snapped and the unit fell to bits.

Having grown up in the bush and dealt with many a bog, I knew of one way that just might get us out of trouble. Mind you, it required us finding some 8 gauge fencing wire. It is called Spanish Windlass and in the past I had pulled big trucks out of bogs using this method. Luckily for us Ross said he knew where there was an old fence and wandered off to get some wire. He was gone for nearly two hours allowing Dale and I to contemplate our situation.

We also had a little blue heeler pup on board, and I tied him to a tree to prevent him from becoming crocodile bait. I gave him a drink from my hat whilst Dale pulled our swags out of the four-wheel drive and placed them on dry land. The mud was dark and greasy, and with the tide out we had no way of cleaning ourselves. The heat and humidity was overbearing and the mossies and sand flies were taking their toll on our temperaments. We went back and forward to the vehicle, up to our thighs in the sticky stinking ooze lugging tucker boxes etc., to lighten the weight of the very heavy Nissan.

The reader may very well wonder where we might find a fence in this very isolated part of the country. To enlighten you on this query, this area of land we were on was at present part of the *Comalco Bauxite Mining Lease,* however in the past it had been part of a cattle station called *Batavia Downs* which had been duly named due to the landing of the Dutchman, Captain Willem Janz in this region in 1606 in the ship *Duyfken*. Thus there were the odd remains of old fencing to be found in the region.

Ross returned with the required amount of rusty number eight fencing wire, which he found about two miles away. We were lucky that it had been so close. I cut down two large gum saplings and cut one to the length of a fence post, and the other to act as a lever which was longer. We ran the wire from in front of the vehicle and wrapped it around a good size tree that was about 40 yards in front of the four-wheel drive. And then took the wire back to the front of the vehicle and tied both ends securely to the chassis. We dug a hole for the post, which we placed about two thirds along the length of the wire, and beside the wire nearer the tree end and put in the post. We put the thick end of the lever over the wire on one side of the post, and then looped it under the wire on the other side of the post, and walked the lever around the post wrapping the wire around the post in a winch-style fashion. The idea is to walk the lever around the post, taking the wire with it whilst someone sits in the vehicle and slowly turns the wheels to give assistance. The vehicle can only go forward when pressure is applied. This method has pulled many a big truck or a tractor out of a bog, if one applies enough leverage with the length of timber that is to be walked around the post.

For us however, luck was not on our side, as the ground around us had many big trees growing and we soon realized that we did not have the room to apply the leverage. Dale and I spent the day pushing a much shortened lever, and in the heat we exerted much energy for very little movement of the vehicle…it had moved perhaps twelve yards when we bailed up toward the end of the day, totally exhausted and with our sense of humour much depleted. It was just too much for us. The battery in the Nissan had given up the ghost and we were going nowhere in it, that was for sure.

A decision was made that we going to have to walk to the beach. Ross stated that it was only about four miles and that there would be a chance that Dale's father Harry would possibly meet us there in his boat. It sounded pretty good to me.

I asked Ross how much water we had left and he pulled out an old two-litre milk bottle of the liquid gold' [water]. I was stunned that this was all the water we had, but thought if it was only four miles we would be okay. So preparations were made for the journey. We decided to travel as light as we could, so we decided an apple each would see us through until we reached the beach.

The blue heeler pup was shut in the front of the Nissan with a bottle of the brackish tidal water that was laid on its side purposely, slowly dripping water onto the floor. The dog could lick up the moisture so as to not die of thirst whilst we were gone, but could not drink too much as to make him sick.

A wheel for the vehicle we had come to get from the northern side of the Pennyfather River, was strapped to my back. I was also luckier than the others in that I was wearing a pair of overalls, work boots and a hat, and also had the bottle of water tightly clutched in my hand. Ross was wearing work boots, shorts and a sleeveless shirt, and Dale was in similar apparel. They tied a recharged smaller battery (too small a battery for the monstrous V8 engine in the Nissan) for the broken-down vehicle, onto a long skinny length of sapling. Ross had one end of the pole on his shoulder and Dale had the other end on his shoulder. It looked awkward, as John was a lot shorter than Ross. Ross also was carrying a torch as the light was fading, and we had decided to travel at night because it was cooler.

We set off on a compass bearing again, and after about twenty minutes of walking we came across the tail of the remains of a *Lockheed Lightning* that had crashed there during the 2nd World War. There wasn't much left of it, but we found it interesting all the same. Ross and Dale took a good swig of the water and I made my objections about saving the water, but was shouted down that all would be well by morning when we would be meeting Harry at the beach.

I do not think Ross knew very much about the bush and distances, because we walked most of the night. We were in a very hot region in the middle of summer, but as it turned out it was freezing at night and at four o'clock in the morning with all the water now drunk, we pulled up shivering and exhausted and built a big fire and lay down and slept until about 7.00am, waking regularly to stoke the fire. We had walked at least 10 miles with no beach in sight. Ross assured us that we did not have very far to go. Something however told me not to let go of the very empty water bottle, and away we went again.

So on we walked and after about two hours we reached a hideous swamp that we had to cross, that had very nasty thorny whip-like plants growing right through it, which slowed our traveling speed drastically. The other thing that was of course crossing our minds, was that these swamps are known to be packed with crocodiles. Though only about half a mile across it was still very daunting. The other side of the swamp ran straight onto sand dunes that were about three hundred feet high. I sensed that we were very close to our destination of the beach, and being rescued by Harry. I was very glad to get out of that swamp, as I can assure you that I am no hero when it comes to creatures like 'swallowmees' – the local name for crocodiles.

The sun was now beating down with intensity, as we came down off the dunes onto the very desolate beach. It was about 11.00am and there was no one to meet us and we were getting a little thirsty. Ross and Dale stripped off and went for a swim, the mashed blisters from carrying the battery on the sapling very apparent on their shoulders. I decided to be cautious and stayed fully clothed, paddling at the water's edge, boots, hat, overalls and all. They had removed the wheel from my back, which I can assure the reader was a great relief to me. I sunburn very easily, and was also a little worried about the wildlife that is commonly seen in these waters. There were crocodile tracks as far as the eye could see, coming down the dunes from the swamp to the sea. These waters are also packed with sharks, stingers,

sawfish, and the like, and as I say I am no hero when it comes to things like this. The most ferocious things in our big lagoon at *Gunnawarra* are tadpoles with teeth, and one could also drink the water there.

My caution paid off as after about an hour the boys were horribly sunburned, and I got away from the water when I spotted a big Box jellyfish floating about twenty feet from me. I also convinced Ross and Dale to do the same. For anyone to be stung in our situation would have been lethal if not fatal.

At about 2.00pm it was obvious that we were not going to be rescued. It was decided that we should walk down the beach to the other vehicle. Ross promised that it was only about eight miles to the vehicle on the Pennyfather River. We walked and walked, and the boys ended up miles in front of me. I was very thirsty and was putting seawater in the bottom of the milk bottle water bottle, and letting it evaporate up to the lid and sucking tiny drops of distilled hot water off the lid. It was not very satisfying but it did let my mouth get a little moist. The sun was blazing hot, and we could not get off the beach into shade due to those darned swamps behind the sand dunes, which I knew got bigger as we neared the Pennyfather River. The heat in the sand felt as if it was melting my boots to my feet, and so I was forced to walk at the water's edge. The glare was horrific and we had no sunglasses.

I caught up with the boys at about five o'clock. They had found a coconut palm with a coconut under it, and had somehow managed to get it open. They had saved me some of the milk. After getting the wheel off my back I sat down and drank it. It was like the Nectar of the Gods! I was totally exhausted and the boys were in a very depressed mood. One thing I knew was that it was important that we stayed positive, so I kept the conversation between us very light and made lots of jokes. Ross and Dale finally got into the swing of things. It was obvious to us now that our destination was more than eight miles. We decided to camp there for the night.

I was to later find out that the place was called *Flinders Camp*, and that it was the only coconut palm on the beach between Janey Creek and the Pennyfather River. Ross and I collected driftwood for the fire and we found the end of an old dugout canoe, which was a blessing as there was not much burnable timber to be found.

After we got the fire going, Dale broke open the coconut so as we could eat the flesh and get something into our very hungry tummies. Reader let me tell you something I learned from this experience of eating a coconut when hungry and thirsty and with a very dry mouth. What I can tell you is, do not do this if you can help it. If possible find something else to eat. Eating this coconut was the worst experience of eating that I can remember. Eating the coconut flesh was similar to eating dry sand, and the sensation stayed in our mouths for hours afterwards. We were too exhausted to go down to the water's edge, which was about three hundred yards away, to wash our mouths out with seawater. It was a sickening experience.

We sat and talked until it was dark and the cold started to eat into our bones. Unlike the camp of the previous evening, on this beach we had no shelter from the wind. It was to blow constantly all night, and the wind-chill factor made it one of the coldest nights camping I can remember. By midnight I had almost 'dug in' and buried myself under the fire to get warm. Ross and Dale must have frozen. I was very thankful for my overalls. The boys had taken the mickey about me wearing my overalls before we had left the Nissan. I noted they were not taking the mickey now. Still we laughed about it, so as to keep our spirits up. The night seemed to drag on forever but due to total exhaustion we did manage to get some sleep.

We were up and ready to go by 5.00am. Surely it could not be too far to go now. Ross assured me that it was only a few hours walk. The wheel again was tied onto my back as I watched the winces off pain from both Ross and Dale, as they lifted the battery pole back onto their very burnt and blistered shoulders.

By 11.00am Ross and Dale were many miles in front of me, and with the savage bite of the sun and the lack of water I was becoming very dizzy. Then blank…I felt something burning my face…. I had passed out and my face was in the very hot sand. I sat up and tried to remove the wheel, but to no avail. The knot was in the internal section of the rim, and the rope was crisscrossed tightly around my shoulders and across my chest. I felt a bit like a desperate turtle. I got up and started walking again knowing full well that if I stayed there in that torturing sun I could die, a very scary thought indeed. If only there was a shady tree I could pull up and take a bit of a rest under I bemoaned. This was not to be however, and I just had to keep walking.

By 2.00pm I was starting to wonder if I was going to make it. I felt so numb and was having trouble thinking. I was also very giddy, and was no longer walking in a straight line. The glare off the near flat sea was starting to play tricks with my mind, and I seemed to be fainting with a seemingly endless regularity. I could however now see the mouth of the Pennyfather River with its beautiful big shady trees shimmering in the blasting heat. This spurred me on, though it seemed an endless amount of time that it was taking to reach my destination.

Finally at about 4.00pm, I found myself through the blurr of my very wind burnt and very sore eyes, to be only about quarter of a mile from my destination. The feeling was one of total euphoria. I was going to make it. Again I passed out, hitting the deck with my hat skew-whiffed across my head. It was from this very low to the hot sand, blurry unfocussed view that I saw but a few inches in front of my face a beautiful shell…. a baler shell…something I had always wanted. The collector in me got me to sit up and take a more focused view. I picked it up and walked the remaining distance, and then up over the ridge of sand to where the vehicle was parked and the boys were waiting for me.
When the wheel was removed from my back, the relief was so great I could have got onto my knees and thanked the bloke upstairs for letting me survive. However I did not, and instead asked if there was any water. The boys said that there wasn't, but that they had found a can of coke in the glove box. They had kindly left a third of it for me to drink. The coke was very flat and boiling hot as it slid easily down my throat…. it was without a doubt the nicest coke I have ever had the ecstatic pleasure of drinking. I was to find out many years later whilst studying Biomedical Science at the University of Sydney, that we were very lucky that that soft drink did not kill us. Reader I impart this knowledge to you with some level of concern for you who might be as uninformed as I was, though for the life of me I cannot exactly remember the technical details of why that would be so. I can however say without a doubt that if you are ever stranded in the desert without water, whatever you do, do not under any circumstances drink soft drink, because it has been the death of many a poor uninformed blighter in a similar situation.

Then the boys hit me with the bad news, the sea air had got to the battery they had lugged all this way and flattened it, and thus we would be going nowhere in this vehicle either. I was totally shattered. That jolly wheel that I had so tortuously struggled with, had been a whole waste of time, and to top it off we still had no water let alone food. We were all quite giddy from the lack of food and water, plus our exhaustion thus far, only to discover our ordeal was not yet over, which was a little soul destroying to say the least. We knew there was water on the other side of the mouth of the river, as it was one of our regular camping spots and we had dug wells there so as to have a good constant supply.

The hitch was that it was on the other side and at the mouth of the Pennyfather, it was almost 1,000 yards across. There was a big spit of sand going up the middle of the mouth of the river, with the eastern (inland) end of the spit being only about two hundred yards from where we were standing. This channel looked reasonably shallow so in we went. There was a very fast incoming tide that would take us to the inland end of the spit with good speed and safety. We walked to the very furthest western point on the beach, and started this very frightening experience of wading towards the spit, with the plan that we would be swept onto the spit by the almost raging current. I still had my hat, my overalls, my boots, and the water bottle. I had left the baler shell in the vehicle to come home, when they eventually came to pick it up.

I gingerly waded out feeling very wary about this little exercise, and when I was almost at midriff depth and still able to walk, out of nowhere the world exploded in front of me. In that split second I thought I was dead, and in fact should have died of a heart attack. It took a little while to sink into my terrified and now very panic-stricken skull, that I had actually stood on the tail of a giant, and I mean humungous, Manta Ray. He must have been at least 15 feet across. As he had lifted from the bottom to take off, he had taken a big wall of water up with him. He rose in all his glory to about three feet above the surface of the water. I do not know who got the biggest fright, him or me. But I do know that this was no tadpole and it scared the freaking life out of me, and I have no intention of ever letting it happen again in the future, I told you I was no hero. Still in totally numbed shock I was shaking like a cornered mouse with Parkinson's Disease. I felt as though I was chewing my own heart it was thumping so hard.
Slowly my mind switched back to my present situation, and I again zeroed into what I was doing and what I had to do to get to the end of the spit of sand. As the boys came into focus, I realized that they were nearly drowning themselves with laughter at my very obvious reaction. It certainly lightened the moment of our present situation. We let the current carry us and it proved to be easier than I thought. There was really no swimming involved, and I was relieved that the first part of this little adventure was over as we reached the tail end of the spit.

We walked back up the southern side of the spit and prepared for the big swim. I was not very happy about this and was very nervous as having camped on the other side I had watched the big Bronze Whaler sharks cruising back and forth bbrrrr! I seemed however to have no choice, as there was now no going back. Ross dived in and went out about thirty yards with Dale, and I dubiously following. Then disaster struck! Ross had forgotten to tell us that he could not swim and had turned himself into a totally panicked thrashing machine. My mind raced and all I could think of was shoosh! quiet! I could feel the sharks looking at this as an invitation to attack us from underneath, and I felt sick with horror at Ross's very vigorous thrashing.

I finally came to my senses. I think my survival instincts were kicking in to top gear. I had done life saving at *Saint Barnabas School* at Ravenshoe in the Millstream and had achieved my Silver Star. Mind you, that was when I was 13 years of age, so at the age I was now – twenty-six – I had to really rack my brain to remember what I had to do. I threw my hat to John for safekeeping, and swam up behind Ross and as he was still thrashing about I dived down before getting to him (a practice that stops the drowning person from turning around and grabbing at you and drowning both of you). I then swam directly up to his back and wrapped my left arm over his neck, and firmly locked him in a hold over his chest. With my right arm I attempted to punch him in the face, which was very hard, as I had a long wet overall sleeve preventing me from really being able to smack him hard, and I still had that jolly water bottle tightly clenched in my hand. I must have struck him about fifteen times before he finally settled down.

I was exhausted. Mind you with that adrenalin rush I was ‘a little less’ scared. However not that big ‘a less’. We still had to make it to the beach before we reached the point of rock that the tide was hastily carrying us to, and we had a big swim in front of us. So Dale and I latched onto Ross and towed him for all our worth. We knew that if we went past that point we would be flung out into the centre of the river again, and we knew this was ‘swallowme territory’! I could picture those big ugly brutes licking their chops and waiting with gleeful anticipation, and it sent successive jolts of shivers down my spine and made me drag Ross even faster. He was a big man and Dale was tiny in comparison, so it was down to me to do most of the dragging, though I do not think we would have made it without Dale’s excellent and very determined effort.

We made it to the beach by about 20 yards before the rocky point and dragged ourselves up onto the soft white sand. I felt the relief drain the now painful stress out of my body. I had done it and not been eaten! Though still feeling dizzy from thirst I felt a rush of joy that we were now safe, and that all would now be well. Not far from the beach we found a deserted camp with its inhabitants obviously out somewhere for the day. It was a very well established camp and they had a huge esky, which when we opened it was packed with lots of ice and lots of icy cold fourex beer. It took all my powers of persuasion and reasoning to convince the boys out of sculling down a few of the beers. I eventually talked them into sucking the ice for a while. I had seen exhausted and overheated horses in the bush drink too much water and die so I was taking no chances. We filled hats and shirts with ice and wandered back to a shady tree at the beach and sucked to our hearts content, before laying back in the soft cool sand and passing out for a good sleep.

We were rudely awoken by the sound of a man standing over us and asking us what we were doing there. It took some convincing for him to accept that we had swum the mouth of the river, and that we had been on the road since Friday evening. It was now Monday evening and after giving us a meal they drove us back into Weipa.

Once we reached my living quarters we thanked the helpful camper, and then grabbed my four-wheel drive a Toyota Diesel, and drove around to Harry’s place. It was about 9:00pm on the Monday night. Here we dropped Dale off ,and Harry informed us that he had taken his boat up to the mouth of the Pennyfather River and waited half of Saturday for us, before heading back to Weipa. He assumed that we must have gone somewhere else. It was not until the Sunday night when we had not returned that the company was notified that something was wrong, and on the Monday they started a full-blown search for us, apparently aircraft and motorbikes were used. They had found the Nissan from the air, but realized that we were no longer there. They were not sure which direction we had taken and did not find us. We turned up before they could.

Our ordeal was not over. I fueled up the Toyota out of a drum of diesel at Harry’s place, and once again we headed north toward the Nissan. Tracking the off-road section of the Nissan’s journey was easy in the dark, because of all the trees that had been pushed over on our way up on Friday night. Reader I must tell you that if you are ever going to go bush like we did, it is advisable that you do it in a vehicle that has a diesel engine. The truth is that if driven properly they do not overheat in these situations. We made good time and were at the Nissan by about 2.00am. I had five gallons of water in the back. I was not going to be caught again.

The pup was alive and kicking and very pleased to see us. After sorting out the pup, we hitched my power winch cable to the back of Ross’s monster, put a new battery in the Nissan and winched Ross out of the mud. His vehicle still would not start, so I pulled out a good length of chain and hitched the front of the Nissan to the rear of my vehicle and towed Ross home to Weipa, arriving about 9.00am.

Reader I have got to tell you that I was absolutely buggered and went straight to bed and slept all day. I later heard the company was not impressed by our antics, as we had missed two days of work.

On looking on a map later, I figured we had walked a total of twenty-eight miles. No wonder I was so tired. I was amazed that we did it in the time that we did, due to some of the terrain we had been through and the condition we were in.

What did I learn from this experience is never put your life in someone else's hands. When going bush do your own preparation no matter what the person you are going with says, and reader always carry plenty of water, and I mean more than you think you will ever need as you never know what is going to happen.

In that year Angela came out from England, so I took time off work and went for a month's trip up Cape York camping and living off the land. *NQA* was not impressed, but I was finding them really hard to work for, though I did regardless plan to complete my apprenticeship.

Our first stop was *Jowalbinna* outside of Laura. Percy Trezise and his son Steve ran tours to the ancient Aboriginal art galleries. Percy was mainly doing research, and Steve ran the tourist camp several miles from the homestead. The day after Angela and I arrived Mum and Dad flew up in Dad's plane with David and Margaret Hopton to join us. Percy had dated some of the paintings to about 62,000 years. Percy took us to see a number of spots, though without a doubt the most interesting gallery was the *Magnificent Gallery.*

After a few very interesting days with the Trezise's (the Trezise's were very old family friends of the *Gunnawarra* Atkinsons), Angela and I moved on and camped at various spots all the way up the very rough, corrugated, and bulldust-loaded road to the tip of Cape York, visiting Weipa en route, camping on the pristine Jardine River, camping at the very isolated Elliot Point just south of the Escape River and camping at Somerset near the ruins of the Jardine's pioneering home.

On the way back down we camped on another isolated beach just south of Portland Roads called Chillie Beach. There had been a blow the night before we got there, and there were hundreds of dead Painted Crays on the beach and whole lot of weaker ones swimming in the shallows. We lived off camp oven cooked crays and giant 'side plate' sized Blacklip Oysters for a week, before heading south to Cooktown and on to home. Angela and I had a great and very memorable journey, but that was all that came of it. She wanted to live in Britain and I stupidly believed I had a future with *Gunnawarra*.

Having completed my apprenticeship in 1983, I headed south to stay with Angela who was now living in Sydney. She was living in a great waterside pad at Shell Cove, and I spent several glorious weeks with her there and we got to sit up all night and watch the Australians win the America's Cup. It sounded like a war when the Australia II yacht with its secret winged keel crossed the finishing line in the lead. Champagne corks could be heard popping from one end of Sydney Harbor to the other. Angela was returning to England, so I bade her farewell and took a bus out to Hay in Western NSW.

I was off to stay with Bob and Errolly McFarland on *Oxley Station.* They had asked me to come and work there for a while. Oxley is a sheep station on the Lachlan, on the western side of the Hay plain in NSW. My cousin Errolly reminded me so much of her mother, my aunt Nan Collins from *Spring Creek Station,* a lady of great integrity. Bob was also a wonderful man and I really enjoyed visiting Oxley.

Oxley is across the river from the wee town of the same name. It is just up the Lachlan from the reed beds that it empties into. The country is dead flat, treeless, saltbush country with the only trees being on the banks of the rivers. The Hay Plain is one of the flattest, most treeless plains on earth. As Bob reckoned, when one stood on the veranda looking out into the plain, it was like looking over the edge of a big cliff. If one climbed about 20 feet up a windmill on a clear day we could see the tree line of the Murrumbidgee River 30 miles away.

Upstream and just across the river, was a big property called *Tupra* that was managed by very good friends of Bob and Errolly's, Chris and Margy McClelland. *Tupra* was part of Ian McLachlan's group of properties. It ran about 20,000 sheep from memory. We had many memorable social gatherings at both *Tupra* and *Oxley.* They were all such lovely positive people. All so supportive of each other and a perhaps a little more empathetic to the bush people I had grown up with in the north. Definitely one of the happiest periods of my life.

I stayed and worked for them for 6 months, and for about a month of that they were able to get away on a holiday which was a bit of a rarity for them.

Whilst I was there Dad had also asked me if I might see if I could help sell one of the paddocks off *Gunnawarra*. The block of land was known to us as *Micks*. *Micks* was 30 square miles and had been a soldier settler's block from *WW1*. It neighboured onto my Uncle Vernon's *Minnamoolka Station* at GW swamp.

When it was time to go I bade farewell to Bob and Errolly, and moved on to stay with Jonathan and Jane King, who by this stage were now living at St Kilda Avenue, Upwey in the Dandenong Hills on the outskirts of Melbourne. To pay my way I built a fence for Jonathan, babysat the now greater number of children inclusive of Lowanna, Bryony, and Molly, and did the washing up and some of the house work for Jane.

I had arrived there not long after the *Ash Wednesday* fires, and was astounded to see just how devastating it was. I could not believe the stupidity of some people. The fires in that part of the world are horrific and here were people building in breakaway gullies on slopes covered in the most flammable eucalypts and heavy undergrowth, with the trees coming right up to their houses. A big no-no if I ever saw one. They were now building back in these spots having lost their homes in the fires. At home in North Queensland we just do not get fires like these. There is a lot of oil and gas in the flora in the southern area of Australia.

They were extremely busy, as they were organising the *First Fleet Re-enactment* coming up in 1988 for the *Australian Bicentenary*. They planned to sail 11 ships from England to Sydney. At this point they had no ships. A huge undertaking. The phone rang hot from 7.00am until sometimes as late as 12.00 midnight. I had never seen anything like it, and Jane was ripping her hair out at the stress of it and the girls ran wild, throwing everything on the floor as they went. What an amazing woman Jane was to have survived all those crazy years. It took them 10 years to organise the *First Fleet Re-enactment* and they had to fight the Federal Government the whole way. Bob Hawk was dead against it.

I had mentioned to Jonathan that we were trying to sell land. With Jonathan being a journalist, before I could say 'hey presto'! he had me lined up for series of media interviews – a good free form of advertising.

The first was a TV interview and background story with Peter Couchman on *This Day Tonight* at the ABC. It was incredible doing the background for the current affairs program. I had a reporter and a film crew follow me all over Melbourne, and the ABC makeup department decided I needed a hat - a huge big black Stetson that was way too big for my head, so they had to stuff it with newspaper. I was a little embarrassed by it, as hats were not my thing, but I also realised that there was a good bit of free advertising in it and so the show marched on.

I was going into the *Royal Melbourne Hospital* to have a biopsy done, to assess as to why my lungs were so clouded, and the ABC used this to base the story on. The doctors thought it might be asbestos related due to my working with lots of asbestos in Weipa. As it turned out it was actually a hereditary disease called Sarcoidosis and had nothing to do with asbestos.

The second piece of media Jonno (Jonathan) got for me, was a feature story with *The Age* newspaper, that took out the whole of the 3rd page. The journalist really knew his stuff. It was really well done. The third piece was a similar spread in the *Weekend Australian*.

It was all very powerful stuff, and I got a lot of response from it which I referred on to my father. There was one however, that was way out of my league. I had to go and see a Mr Colin Bell of *Bell*

Commodities on the top of his 40 something floor skyscraper. As I sat in his office trying to do my sales pitch, I realised I was out of my depth with this man, who was in partnership with Robert and Janet Holmes a Court at the time, and they had big investments in rural land around Australia. Colin had a big black patch over one eye and spoke in a language I did not understand, talking about the futures market and asked had I considered it. I was flabbergasted and stated that I really was just trying to hock a little paddock off the station. I will give him his due, in that he did not belittle me, and was a very good host, and we did talk for almost an hour about all sorts of things. However at the end of the day he could not help me, and I must say I found that patch quite intimidating.

I said my farewells to Jonno and Jane and moved over to my cousin Merran Samuel. Merran and her two children Fras (Fraser) and Josie (Josephine) lived in Armadale, which is a really nice leafy suburb of inner Melbourne. I had got to know Merran by the way of her researching the Good family and organising a family reunion at *Ingemira*, the Good family home in Western Victoria. I was and am still, very interested in family history, so Merran was a gold mine of information. Merran's great grandmother was my great grandmother's sister. She married a Fraser at Lovatdale in northern Victoria. We became firm friends.

Merran's mother Dame Jean Macnamara, was famous in Australia for her work on poliomyelitis (Polio), and also received notoriety (some of it negative) for introducing myxomatosis to Australia, in order to get control of the exploding rabbit population that was devastating Australian farmers.

I then went to Port Fairy to see where my great grandfather and his young wife Kate (nee Good) had lived. From there I stayed a few days with John and Margaret Good who had helped Merran with the family tree and family research. Margaret was a wealth of knowledge and also gave me a copy of an 1863 diary of one of Kate Good's sisters, who had stayed back in Ireland. It gave their address at *Mount Surprise* and that opened a can of worms.

Back in Melbourne staying with Merran again, I got invited to a *Melbourne Cup Party* at some friends place. There I met this girl Hilary Edwards, a lovely English lass. We were inseparable for about 3 weeks and then when she told me that her ambition was to see a bit of Australia I suggested that she come home with me for Christmas. She said she had a car, so I suggested we drive it up there calling into places like Oxley enroute, which would give her a better tour than any tour company could give her. She agreed and away we went.

By the time we got to the parent's at Atherton I had proposed to her. Though she said yes there was one thing that really worried me about it all. She told me she would live in any city in the world but would not live at *Gunnawarra*. Anyhow I did agree to go to England to meet her family and see where it led us.

Hilary flew home from Cairns after New Year. I was soon to follow in April 1984. However, due to the success of the media response in Melbourne, Dad asked if I might be able to do the same in Hong Kong as he had been advised he might find a buyer there. Again I got onto Jonno to see if he could help. He amazed me by saying that he had an old journo mate there who wrote for the *South China Post* and another contact at the *Evening Standard.* In return he asked me to check out a sailing ship for his *First Fleet re-enactment.* I was to do this enroute to England.

I stayed with John and Debbie Markwell, old family friends from Cairns. John was a computer whiz and had set up all the computers for the *Hong Kong Jockey Club* for whom he was the second in command. The *Hong Kong Jockey Club* was the second biggest company in Hong Kong next to *Jardine Mathieson,* and employed over 50,000 people.

Once I had settled into the *Happy Valley Hong Kong Jockey Club* quarters that overlooked the skyscraper horse stables, John and Debbie introduced me to horse racing Hong Kong style. There were two race courses. The *Happy Valley Course* and a new one at *Sha Tin*. Both courses ran 2 nights of racing on alternate nights. A nights racing in Hong Kong at that time turned over 340 million US dollars for the club. It was the world's richest racing. *The Melbourne Cup* for instance at that time turned over bout 38 million for the cup day.

Of course the club had its own box overlooking the finishing line at both venues. At *Happy Valley* it was on the 3rd floor and at *Sha Tin* it was on the 4th floor. We drove right to the door of the box. The boxes were a real evening out. They served the most amazing food and wine from incredible silver. When one needed to place a bet, one would flick ones fingers for the waiter who would take it for you and get the ticket. When your race came up you just had to step out onto the balcony to watch the race before returning to your table. I doubt I will ever experience anything as lush and luxurious ever again.

When I looked down from the balcony what I saw was a sea of the black hair of 1 million or more Chinese punters. This was apparently the average turn-up for any night's racing. The Chinese were real gamblers. I was to learn this when catching taxis. When I first hopped into the taxi the driver would only speak Chinese because he knew he had a chump on board. However as soon as I gave the *Hong Kong Jockey Club* quarters as my address, he would suddenly and miraculously be able to speak the Queens English, and would be asking what horse was going to win a particular race and did I have any tips. You really had to watch yourself with them, otherwise they would drive you all over Hong Kong to get you to a five minute destination.

I did my interview with the *South China Post* and *The Evening Standard* and was inundated with calls. I was surprised that most of them did not want to meet me at their offices. Rather they would meet at places like the *Jockey Bar* at *Swire House* for lunch and drinks. I was to learn that all business people in the 1980s did their business over a drink and food in Hong Kong. And it was lots of drink.

Later, when I met some of my English friends, they told me of the terror and anxiety they experienced in on days when they had to do company business with the Chinese. It would generally be over lunch and there may have been as many as 16 or 20 of them in total. The Chinese chose the venues and chose the drink of choice, which just happened to be straight brandy. The Chinese could slug it down like lolly water and Hong Kong was one of the world's biggest consumers of brandy.

At these luncheons it was customary for each member to propose a toast and it was customary to skull a whole glass of brandy for each toast. Apparently there would be young English guys passed out everywhere, whilst the Chinese carried on the party. Funnily enough it was the reverse for the Chinese when it came to beer.

I got a lot of response from the newspaper articles, and met up with some very interesting characters but at the end of the day there was only one who could help. His name was Frank Miller. Frank was the biggest arms dealer in Southeast Asia, and was also the biggest importer of beef into Hong Kong.

Frank took me to the markets and showed me the meat that most of his Chinese customers liked. He said that Aussie beef was recognised as crap because it was being cut wrong. He pointed out that New Zealand was doing better because it was cutting the meat into little strips for stir fry etc., rather than trying to sell it as whole rumps, fillets etc.

Frank proposed that we might be interested in setting up a meat works at *Gunnawarra* to produce beef specifically for the Asian markets. He also suggested that he had investors that he would be willing to send in to help us set it up. It was a very good proposal and I put it to the family back at *Gunnawarra*.

Sadly no one could get their head around it and I got a resounding 'NO' from them. I think if we had gone ahead with it we would have all been much better off today.

I explained to Frank that my father was struggling with the banks, and was in big debt due to the fallout of the cattle crash and the hardening of bank policies. We needed to sell the land to get ourselves out of trouble. Frank then proposed to sell the land to the *Sultan of Brunei*. He said he would have to pay the Sultan's aid to ride up to the Sultan in the middle of a polo match and make the offer. The Sultan would just say yes or no. To do this however, the going rate was $20,000 to the aid up front.

We all knew the Sultan, who was one of the world's wealthiest men, had rural holdings in Australia including the well known *Tipperary Station* in the Northern Territory. It was very tempting but at the end of the day the risk that the Sultan might say no at a cost of $20,000 was a bit too intimidating.

The next offer Frank came up with was to get Dad a bridging loan with the *Chase Manhattan Bank* to tide him over the bad times the family business was enduring at *Gunnawarra*. Frank flew a friend of his, a man called Colin Taylor from Singapore, to meet me. Colin was a really nice bloke and agreed that he could help Dad. It would be a month or more before he could get to Australia due to other commitments, but he did finally get there and met up with Dad and Mum and went out to have a look *Gunnawarra*. Colin managed to get Dad a very good deal on the bridging loan and I continued on trying to sell *Micks.*

I was in the Jockey bar toilet having a piddle, when I looked across at the fellow standing next to me at the same time as he looked across at me. To my utter amazement, and to his, it was my very good friend Mark Beaumont from England. I had not seen Mark since the last visit I had had to England in 1980, four years previously. What a wow it was.

In the lounge over a beer I asked Mark what he was doing here and he told me that several years previously he had got a job as a ships photographer on the *Swire-owned* cruise ship, the *Coral Princess* that sailed the seas of Japan.

They had recognised Mark's abilities and he was now the manager of *The China Navigation Co. Ltd,* the cruise shipping division for the *Swire Group. Swire* has its fingers in many pies. It has an international haulage business and it is not unusual to see its trucks on the road in Australia. It also services the oil industry with *Swire Shipping* and the feather in its cap is the Hong Kong based airline *Cathay Pacific.*

After we had caught up a bit, Mark pointed out that he had some more work to do in his office for an hour or so. Of course as we were in the jockey bar in *Swire House,* it meant that he just had to step onto a lift and go up several floors to get there. What a coincidence I thought that we should run into each other this way.

Mark said that if I would wait for him, afterwards we could go and have dinner and then he and another mate were off to see Elton John in concert and that they had a spare ticket and would I like to come. Wheeeeeel! I just could not say no. Whilst he was upstairs I rang my hosts to tell them what had happened and I think they were probably glad to get a night to themselves.

We had a really nice meal (every meal was a nice meal for me in Hong Kong. I was in food heaven). Then we set off to meet up with his friend. Well you could have knocked me off my perch with the slightest of puffs. Mark's friend Hal Herron, turned out to be a classmate from my school days at *Churchie* in Brisbane. Another coincidence in so many hours. Of course Elton John was just brilliant!

Of course Hal had done very well for himself working in the money markets, and was the boss of one here in Hong Kong. The company had its own private junk, and pretty well every weekend for the rest of my stay I was out on it with Hal, Mark, and another couple of very good friends I made at the time, Ivon and Elaine Fellows. There were others but they have since moved on to different pastures.

A day on a junk in Hong Kong was really something. Hal's junk had a crew of seaman and cooks. The food was brilliant. They catered for your every need. The water skiing was pretty good as well, though I found the water a little suspect as we saw the odd bit of raw sewage floating in it every now and then. It made one more determined to stay up when skiing. I certainly lived the high life for a short while there in Hong Kong, mainly due to the excess wealth of my friends at the time.

Whilst I was in Hong Kong, John and Debbie suggested I should do a trip to Macau which was a Portuguese colony and then across the border into China for a day trip to Guangzhou (known to the west as Canton). The ferry to Macau was something to behold. It had 2 Jumbo jet engines jammed on the back of it and carried about 300 passengers, and apparently went over 200 miles an hour. The seats were aircraft seats and the seatbelts were the same. The thing went like the clappers and was as smooth as over the open ocean. It had bars underneath that lifted it clean out of the water so that only 4 bars were slicing through the waves.

Macau was very interesting with its old Portuguese buildings, and its huge 'old world style' gambling halls that were packed with thousands of Chinese from over the border, and tons of cigarette smoke that was so thick it was difficult to see and had my eyes smarting.

The day trip into China was interesting. After crossing the border we visited the Sun Yat Sen monument before going to Guangzhou. My great grandfather Herbert Allen Giles had lived here for many years so I felt a connection. We went to a restaurant for lunch and had snake, though there was no way that I was going to drink its blood. On the way back out from Guangzhou to Macau we called into a small farmhouse, and were invited in to see how the farmer, his wife, and family lived. They were very poor and I really felt that we were invading their space, though I guess they were willing to sacrifice everything for some money.

After that it was back to Macau, and for dinner one of the things I decided to try was *Hundred Year Old Egg*. When it came out I was a bit a taken back. It was a dark emerald green in colour with a lighter shade of green where the yolk was. It was sliced, and had a side accompaniment of sugar and ginger. It not only looked like a rotten egg, it smelled like a rotten egg, and tasted like a rotten egg. Still I will try anything once. Little did I know that I was only meant to have a few slices and I ate the whole thing! I almost threw everything back up and know that I will never willingly eat another one.

Back in Hong Kong I had one of the best experiences with John and Debbie. We went out on the *Hong Kong Jockey Club* junk one weekend, and sailed to an island off Hong Kong. We disembarked and went and watched some Chinese Opera, and then hiked about 12 miles over the mountains in the middle of the island, and down the other side to an open air restaurant on a bay, where John had got the junk to sail around and meet us.

The seafood I had in that restaurant is the best I can ever remember having. The restaurant was a big marquee with no sides or floor (it was a temporary arrangement set up on the grass). It seated about 250 people. In one corner was the kitchen area and there were about 10 big woks at work. One could go and stand beside them and watch the chefs as they swung these giant, glowing hot woks on their swivels, flipping big platter loads of seafood and numerous other goodies high into the air. It was very pretty to watch these magicians as they plied their artistic talent and many years of training and practice.

The heat was immense as the woks were blasted by big gas burners. The woks were a good 4 or 5 feet in diameter. The food seemed to only take seconds to cook before it was flipped out of the wok in a crescendo to land on the big platter, and seconds more before being set down in front of everyone at the table. One thing about the Chinese they love everything being fresh, and most of the seafood etc., would have been alive seconds before being cooked. It was an experience I shall never forget.

It took a very intelligent man like John 16 years to learn to speak Cantonese fluently. Cantonese was the local language that was mostly used in Hong Kong. John and Deb knew every part of Chinese culture when it came to food. Whilst I stayed the 9 weeks with them, we ate at different restaurants almost every night. John and Deb knew them all, and we spent a lot of nights in the shanty towns, judging restaurants by how many rats were crawling up the drain pipes. I was to learn just how many different types of regional food styles there was in Chinese culture. What a wonderful experience it was that they shared with me. I was privileged to have such good hosts for my stay in Hong Kong.

With my time up in Hong Kong it was time to fly on to London. I got a flight with *British Caledonian* direct to London, and bade farewell to John, Debbie, Mark, Ivon and Elaine, and some others who all came out to the airport to see me off. One of the best farewells I can ever remember having. We speeded our way up the tarmac in the dark of night surrounded by a Christmas tree of skyscrapers, lifting off the ground just before we would have spilled of into the bay. *Kai Tak* was certainly an amazing little airport. I got a great photo of all the streaking, coloured lights as we careered down the strip.

FLUID MOTION – SO PRETTY TO WATCH

I was sitting quietly chatting with Vera a few days ago, when she told me that her brother had found a grave up in the *Ravenshoe Cemetery*. She said the name on the grave was that of a King Costello and asked "Did you know him? Do you know anything about him"? As she asked it my head spun and I seemed to fly back in time as a surge of memories came flooding in and I said "Yes I knew him". The mists of time engulfed my thoughts.

In a blur of motion his lithe form seated neatly into the saddle as his mount exploded into action, arching high into the sky, propping and baulking then sucking back. As if one with the horse, he never moved in the saddle, and when the time was right he calmed his tired friend down, softly crooning to it and very gently stroking its neck and shoulders, running his nimble fingers through its mane.

I felt such honour in witnessing one of the greatest roughriders of all time - King Costello. He had worked for the family on and off for a great deal of his life. *Kingee* as he was affectionately known by his work mates, was born in the Coen area of Cape York Peninsular, and thus adopted the name of the station people in that region – the well known Costello family.

By the age of 10 he was working for Atkinson Brothers, who at that time owned *Olive Vale*, a 2,000 square mile cattle station at Laura in Cape York Peninsular, and remembered my father being there at the time with my grandfather for the annual bullock muster aged all of 4 years of age. My father was born in 1917, so this meant that King was born about 1911.

King grew up a multi-skilled bushman, and by the time he was in his 20s he was a very experienced rider, tracker, and cattleman. In his mid 20s King joined the police force as a *Black Tracker*. King was there for about ten years. King told me that his police sergeant, who was a white man, was not a very nice person.

One night King discovered that his sergeant had forcibly taken one of the young Aboriginal girls up into the bush. King tracked them down, snuck up on them, and jabbed his spear into his sergeant's bare buttocks and then disappeared into the night. Sadly however, the wayward, now hobbling policeman, found out who had done it and King was sacked.

When King recounted this story to me, as he did on many occasions, he had a real mischievous glint in his eye, and used to chuckle with such mirth about jabbing the policeman's bottom. It was his favourite story.

King then went on to work for *Lance Skuthorpe's Bucking Show* which was travelling around Australia at that time. King's horsemanship skills were almost equal to those of the great man himself (Lance Skuthorpe was a showman, legendary horseman, and buckjump rider with skills that very few have ever equalled).

Kathryn M Hunter in her *Rough riding: Aboriginal participation in rodeos and travelling shows to the 1950s wrote of King:*
'Several other Aboriginal riders were mentioned in *Hoofs and Horns* for their superior ability. In 1948 King Costello, 'that fine horseman' and 'this smiling Aboriginal': drew the notorious *Mandrake* in the first round of the Open. The big grey had thrown three riders of a travelling rodeo at the *Ingham Show* a few weeks before in a £25 challenge contest, and excitement ran high, as folk waited to see King try conclusions with this mighty bucker. However, *Mandrake* slipped and fell soon after leaving the crush, and King was partnered with *Victory Roll* for his re-ride. I fancy this horse was only ridden

once before … However King proved too good for *Victory Roll* after a great tussle, and rode himself into a ride on *Fantan* in the final 38'.

King came to *Gunnawarra* in 1973. King's horsemanship skills had us all in awe. One day up in the round yard of the homestead horse yards, I saw King ride a horse that was bucking badly whilst he was trying to roll a smoke in one hand, and hanging on to his hat that was being brushed above by the shady Jacaranda tree. He was holding the reins in the same hand as he was using to roll his smoke. He got his smoke rolled and then calmed down the horse.

King also had us in awe of his tracking skills. My father told me that once he and King were in the horse paddock looking for a mare that Dad was concerned about; as it was due to give birth to a foal. As they rode along King said to Dad, "Boss that mare she has had her foal. She has pulled up under a tree two ridges away". Dad said he really had his doubts, but to his amazement it was as King had stated, and they found the mare standing under a tree two ridges away with its foal.

When out mustering, the cattle (which had a surprisingly good sense of smell and good eyesight), would flee as soon as they got a whiff of you, and in many cases long before you actually saw them. King, however, had excellent abilities and would sense they were moving, and would suddenly go into a full gallop and would track them down. His abilities of tracking meant we got a lot more cattle out of a paddock than we normally would, and thus he was worth his weight in gold.

He tried to teach me how to track, but I guess my senses to the environment were not as finely-tuned as his were. He explained to me how he looked at the whole landscape when he tracked. He said that he did not need to look at the ground when he tracked; rather he looked straight ahead and looked for a break in the big picture, which allowed him to read what was happening in front of him for many miles

When we got back to the camp at night with the cattle, we would sometimes discover that a new, usually English, jillaroo, jackeroo, or visitor would be missing. They usually got lost when they were left behind when we had to gallop to catch up with floating cattle near the beginning of the muster. King would be sent out to find them. His job was usually made very easy (he could track in the dark), if the lost soul stayed put, and did not try to find his or her way home. However sometimes the person concerned would have ridden for many miles before King caught up with them, which usually meant he did not get back to camp with them until 3.00am or 4.00am in the morning, which usually meant they would both be exhausted and would have to take a day out to rest.

King always rode tall, and was proud of himself and of his own abilities. He was someone who having grown up in difficult race-related circumstances, had seemed to not let them get him down. What a man he was.
King died in Mount Garnet on 2 January 1982. A very sad day indeed, and an end to such a vibrant life, as that of Mr King Costello. He was buried on 7 January at the Ravenshoe cemetery. Vera interrupted my deep thoughts "Bim ... Bim Do you know anything about him"? "Yes", I responded, "Yes a little".

I arrived in London on a lovely bright spring morning. Hilary was at the Heathrow airport to meet me. I was in a real dilemma, as I knew I was going to call off our engagement because of the fact that Hilary did not want to live at *Gunnawarra*. I just did not know how I was going to tell her, and felt sick to the core because I really did love her.

We met, and I got her to drive me to my friend Steve Stubbs' house in Setterington Road, Fulham near Parsons Green pleading jet lag, and told her I would catch up with her the next day. The next day I got a taxi to her parent's house in Kingston where she introduced me to her parents. At this stage of the game I was very stressed, and was feeling like a wolf in sheep's clothing. I eventually got Hilary out of the house and we went to Richmond Park where I told her that I was calling off the engagement.

It was to be the single biggest mistake of my life, and I regret it to this very day. This had happened due to my father constantly telling me to hang in at *Gunnawarra* because one day part of it would be mine. I was so brainwashed that I missed out on the important things in life. We only get a few shots at it and when they pass us by we seldom ever get another chance.

I settled in with Steve and Simon Wattleworth (Steve's business partner at the time), and another housemate Fiona Morrison (Darling) who was an underwear designer for *Berlei Bra*. Fiona was the general manager of the division which manufactured upmarket lace lingerie called *Janet Reger (UK).* They all worked on cheering me up as I was just plain miserable. Fiona would bring back all the latest designs from work to test on us fellows. All a bit of a hoot really. We seemed to spend a lot of time in a pub called the *Whitehorse* at Parsons Green.

I worked for Steve and Simon for a while, before going to stay with another friend of mine Jonathan Webb. Jonathan was living in Warwick Gardens just off the Kensington High Street with his sister Virginia. They came off farming-land in Worcestershire. Sadly Jonathan was addicted to alcohol, and it was my first experience of seeing a close friend going through the process of losing his faculties. The brain damage was obvious. Jonathan died not long after I got back to Australia. It was incredibly poignant and very sad to lose such a good friend.

Due to Jonathan's ill health, I spent a lot of time with Virginia who had the upstairs flat. We really hit the town at times and she really knew all the best spots. We did the *Notting Hill Gate Festival* which involved 1,000,000 Jamaicans dancing for 3 days in the streets, with a seemingly constant parade of costumes, steel drums and Rastafarians day and night. Every house seemed to have a Rastafarian band playing in the background. There was a Bobby (British police officer) about every 30 yards or so, standing on the footpaths to see that things went smoothly. Besides the Bobby there would be standing little Rastafarians handing out joints of marijuana. It was quite surreal.

Virginia had a really good friend called Caroline Barkes who I really got to like. She was a wonderful person and the three of us had a lot of fun together. Of course on his good days Jonathan and I would do things, and I also introduced him to Steve. Jonathan invited me to go on a shoot on his father's property, but it was not to be as I was due to go to Scotland and stay with Mum's cousin James Fraser and his wife Mouse (Moira), daughters Carey and Katherine at *Tornaveen*, the family home in Deeside, Aberdeenshire. I worked for James whilst I stayed there, doing maintenance jobs around the place through the day like a big job of re-bricking the blast furnace for the heating system for the house, and leak-proofing the hot water tank which was lined with 3 inch thick sheets of lead. Actually

the whole house plumbing was all lead. For a family of genius's, I was really amazed to see so much lead.

Whilst at *Tornaveen* we had a man come to do the art restoration on some of the paintings. It turned out he was the great grandson of my great grandfather's academic arch-enemy Sir Thomas Francis Wade. My great grandfather Herbert Allen Giles, did the first English/Chinese dictionary. Wade opened the chair for oriental languages at *Cambridge University.* Herbert Allen Giles took the seat about four years later and was there for a good thirty years. They had some very well-documented stouches. Of course at the time I didn't know the family history that well and missed the significance of our chance meeting.

I returned to London and went to stay in West Sussex with another *Gunnawarra* visitor who had stayed with us in the 1960s. Elisabeth Abel Smith was the niece of the then *Governor of Queensland,* Sir Henry Abel Smith. Elisabeth (Libbets) by the stage I rolled in, was married with children, and I was there to witness the sticky end of the marriage. Libbets and I stayed firm friends until her passing-on last year.

Whilst there I met a cousin of Libbets, whose husband help me bandy around the block of land that we were trying to sell. He took me to the *Royal Greenjackets Officers Club,* a Military Club in London. I was amazed at the silver on the tables. It was very plush there and again I knew I was out of my league. I had the CEO of *Grosvenor's* who owned the *AA Cattle Company* in Australia, trying to tell me that they never bought anything less than 20,000,000 acres in Australia, which I knew was total bull dung! I met a number of handy contacts there, including a solicitor who had a practice at *Lincolns' Inn.* Though there was a lot of interest, at the end of the day nothing came of it and after that I virtually gave up.

I went and stayed a week with Michael and Julia Garbett down in Rye. They asked if I might go on a day trip to France and down to Boulogne, and buy them a Bleu de Bresse cheese for a dinner party they had planned whilst I was there. I jumped at the chance, and for the huge price of £9 got a bus that ran from Rye leaving at 9.00am in the morning to Dover, then on to the ferry to Calais and a tour down the French coast to Boulogne. I passed a huge statue of Napoleon on top of the cliffs with his back facing England. I think there was a message there! I hopped off in Boulogne, and the rest of the passengers carried on to some huge shopping centre to do some cheap shopping. I went and had a bit of lunch and a yarn in a cafe. As luck would have it, I ran into an English wine importer who also knew his cheeses.

First he took me to get the cheese. Boulogne has the world's largest cheese catacombs, and we went past rows and rows of underground cheeses to find the right one. I could not have done it without him. As I was leaving to catch the bus back to Rye, he suggested I take two cases of wine with me as well. The cheap French wines I had in England were atrocious. He took me into a wine shop, though I did not have a clue what to buy and was looking at the more expensive wines on the shelves. He pulled me up and pointed to some bottles in a bin that were worth about 50p each. I thought he was joking, but he was serious. I took two cases with me and returned to Rye. As I thought the wines would be rubbish, I gave them all away to people I stayed with along the way through Britain, and did not bother to taste any. Big mistake! I had wine connoisseurs all over the country saying it was the best wine they had had in years and where did I get it? I was flabbergasted. The bus arrived back in Rye in time for tea. So different from Australia if one wanted to go abroad.

I was invited to Chris Garbetts wedding in Devon which was a wonderful event, before I moved on to stay with my cousin Lois Westcott who played violin for the *Cardiff Symphony Orchestra* and the

Welsh National Opera. I really enjoyed my stay with Lois. I found her very inspirational and suggested that she meet up with Sally and Marcel Wagner (it took me 20 odd years to finally get together and that only happened by accident). Lois is my father's eldest sister Nell's daughter, and had spent a few years at *Gunnawarra* when she was growing up. We had a lot to talk about and catch up on.

I then hopped it back to London. Steve and Simon had a sailing boat – a 35 foot *Nicholson* which slept seven of us on board. The boat was kept on the River Hamble. The first night we slept at the mouth of the river after a big night out. I got up in the morning with a hangover, so I went up on deck and dived overboard for a dip to freshen up. Well 'Be Jesus and Jiminy Crickets' it was freezing. So cold in fact that my chest was starting to contract, and I was starting to have real difficulty breathing.

One of the fellows who had come on the trip and I had only met the night before, was John Worrall. John was up the mast with a camera asking me to say cheese and smile. Finally I did as he asked and then he came down and helped me on board. It took the girls a good hour of rubbing and massaging to get me warmed up enough to just speak without having my teeth chatter. John and I became firm friends.
It was a wonderful experience as we sailed up and down the south coast of England, and around the Isle of Wight staying at picturesque places like Bosham and up the Beaulieu River to Bucklers Hard. Those 10 days of sailing were one of those life highlights that were right up there with the best days of my life.

Several weeks later John invited me up to Worcester to go canal boating on the River Severn, and then up through the canals of Kidderminster and to the Stourbridge canals for two weeks. We had two narrowboats, and each one housed seven of us. As with the sailing, we pulled in every night to a pub along the way and had a meal and a few drinks. The best fun however was through the balmy summer days winding and shutting lock gates, hiding on little bridges and dousing the other longboat inhabitants with bucketfuls of water. The girls seemed to cop it more than the men.

One morning we came around a corner going through a wood, to find a couple on the bank having a nookie and both were totally naked. To this very day I still smile at that lady's reaction. Instead of covering the obvious bits with clothes, she instead covered her face as if to say, 'Whatever happens I do not want to be recognised'. Of course it gave the guys on board a good chance to have a gork before the couple up and scampered of into the wood. A holiday none of us have ever forgotten.

I then went and stayed with John Brimacomb, a friend of Steve's, in Nottingham and met up with two girls who had visited me at *Gunnawarra.* The one I remember is Shirley Holland. I happened to show Shirley photos of my time in Hong Kong, and when she saw the photo of my old school friend Hal Herron she said to me "What is that little bugger doing there"? I was stunned and said, "How do you know him"? and she said "Oh! He shared the flat here with me up until the middle of last year". Here was another coincidence connected to the coincidences I had had with Mark and Hal in Hong Kong. Groovy hey!

John drove me back to London and I was very surprised at how dry it was. Britain was in a drought. Steve had lined up with his sister and her husband, for me to go and stay with them for their vintage on their small vineyard/winery *Mas Du Cellier* in the south of France at La Haute Galine, St Remy de Provence which is north of Marseilles.

Steve put me on a bus at *Victoria Station* and away I went, arriving in Marseilles 18 hours later. Without a doubt the most uncomfortable bus trip I can ever remember doing. Steve's sister Sally and

her husband James Baring and their two year old daughter Blossom (Aksinia), were there to meet me. As we drove home James showed me the cruise control he had in his car (this was 1984 – why did it take so long to reach Australia)?

Mas Du Cellier was in a stunning location in the Alpilles. St Remy was where Van Gogh had been in the asylum, and is where he painted many of his great works. I can remember at school in Ravenshoe being told that the reason his pencil pines were squiggly was because he was mad. Wheeeel! The pencil pines were squiggly and we had a row of them leading down to the house.

I could have lived there forever. Sally was a brilliant cook, and cooked the best that Provence′ had to offer. The farm produced olives, almonds, grape wine, and lavender. The house was a lovely big old Mediterranean style villa, with a great big stone table set outside under the trees. The grapes were mainly Syrah (Shiraz) and Grenache, and the harvest of the grapes was in full swing when I got there. James had hired a team of Moroccan pickers for the job. The vineyard was only a small one, but we bottled 12,000 bottles and stacked them all in the cellar. The wine-making process was very interesting.

We harvested the almonds and olives while I was there. The olives were sent off to be turned into oil, and some came back to the farm to be used in cooking and oiling up the wine making equipment. The almonds however were a different story. They were shaken off the trees and then put on racks to dry. When dry, the outer skin was removed by hand, and then the nuts were sent off to the factory to be cracked. The cracked nuts were then sent back to us to remove and bag the almond kernels. It was a very monotonous job.

The elephant-dung-looking pressings of grape skins were sent off to be turned into Grappa. Phew! What a drink that was. One of the young English fellows (who was staying with us at the time) and myself, on our time off would take the little *Citroen* 500cc car and go off around the countryside exploring and drinking coffee and grappa. I was always sick at the end of those days, because I found you had to put your foot on the edge of the cup to stir the exceptionally bitter coffee and the grappa was very acidic. Not a good combination.

James and Sally took us on wonderful picnics, and to some really stunning restaurants when they could, accompanied by Blossom who kept us all amused with her constant chatter. I was amazed as to how well she could speak at such a young age.

Back in London Steve took me to lunch with his mother and I said my farewells to a few others including my cousin Celia Stubbs, and then went and stayed on my last night with Jonathan, Virginia, and Caroline at Caroline's place where they had put a spread on for me. It was a very memorable evening and as there was a transport strike on in London, the next day I got up very early and hitchhiked out of London to Sally and Marcel at Henley-on-Thames. That night they delivered me to Heathrow for the long flight home. I flew out of England on the first day of winter and was back in Cairns before I could blink. Jenny and Michael Burt picked me up from the airport and then I slept for 23 hours straight. Jet lag had taken its toll.

The year 1985 was probably the best year of my life at *Gunnawarra.* Penny and her husband Greg were there at the time managing it. In that year they bought *Mick's* from Dad and promptly changed its name to *Weona* (as in 'we own her') and moved out there. I took the dozer out there and cleared the house block, built a dam, and cleared a fence line or two for them. I also helped building the house and trucked a lot of their gear out there for them.

In that same year my good friend John Worrall from England rolled into help and stayed for several months. We had a lot of work on, and bailed a large amount of hay on the Herbert River at *Morecambe,* our next door neighbour's property, owned at that stage by the Stralows. Jonathan Lindley came to work as a jackeroo with Greg. Jonathan was my old school friend, James Lindley's, younger brother and had been staying with his cousin Sue, who is married to my cousin Henry Atkinson at *Lucky Downs* (formerly *Greenvale* before it was split up and sold off). Steve Stubbs rolled in from England as well and learned how to drive the dozer. We also had an English cook Rosemary, and two young fellas from Atherton working for us. We also had a jillaroo with us called Christine Green. It was a good crew and it made for a very pleasant working environment.

That year I took John and Rosemary to *Oak Park Races,* and Gerry and Gillian very kindly put us up in their camp. We all had a lot of fun with Bram Collins copping a dunking in the icy water that year. *Oak Park* is a bush picnic race that was started in the 1880s. It lasts for 5 to 6 days with the races taking place on the Friday and Saturday, while Sunday is recovery day and Monday is pack-up day.

The following year my mother came out of retirement, to help me kick off a tourist venture on the station using the old homestead for our guests accommodation. The *Gunnawarra Homestead* is of slab and shingle construction. It has the last, full wooden shingle roof, left in Australia. The building was put up in 1878 by a Jack Broad. The building is listed with the *National Estate* and *National Trust* and cannot be pulled down as the other local buildings were. We were able to accommodate six guests at a time, so we aimed for the up-market, independent travelers.

It took six months of hard yakka to do up the forlorn-looking homestead. I 'antiqued' heaps of furniture and Mum had an American fellow named Harold, come in and do any major repairs we needed to do to the bedrooms. I painted the place, bought a *Toyota Sahara* eight seater 4 wheel drive and a trailer, to take the visitors around in. I set up the trailer with a big picnic box, table, chairs, toolbox, and a fridge.

We had an all-inclusive price which included collecting and delivering the guests from and to the Cairns or Townsville airports, hotels, etc, all their food, drink, washing etc. We did not have a phone, newspapers or jacuzzis for them. The northern tourist agents and market were not *au fait* with the individualist style set-up like we had. They rather dealt with a more mass market. We had a very difficult start, and we did not know or have the wherewithal to market the place properly. Of course today this market we were in is now catered for in the marketing stakes, where the internet means one necessarily has to use an agent. We only let them use the phone if the situation demanded it. The whole idea was to let them wind down and relax.

They usually arrived around midday, and Mum would greet them with a cool drink before settling them into their rooms etc. We would then have lunch in the fernery. Later I would take them to our big lagoon (an oxbow lake about two miles from the homestead) for a swim. I would keep them there for the whole afternoon winding them down, as most of our guests were highflying American CEOs etc. Mum would organise dinner. I would get them home at about 5.00pm to have their baths etc., and it also gave me time to do the same. I'd then do a few jobs for Mum before opening the bar at 7.00pm for pre-dinner dinks. Dinner would be served at about 8.30pm and it usually consisted of three courses served with good quality wines. Mum of course was an excellent cook and even better hostess. We used what food we could that was produced on the station, though we had to bring in things like cheeses and other dairy products because we had stopped milking cows after the 1974 beef crash.

After dinner, usually at about 11.00pm, we would leave the guests to go off to bed while we cleaned up, washed up, and prepared for another early start in the morning, not usually getting to bed until

around 12.30am. Mum and I would be up at about 5.00am and she would make up the salads, a quiche, while I packed the picnic box and fridge into the trailer, ready for our departure on our daytrips at about 9.00am. I usually took a cup of tea around to the guest's rooms at about 7.30am to wake them up, and to let them know breakfast would be served at 8.00am. We sat the guests down for breakfast in the fernery. It was a very pleasant and relaxing start to the day for them.

I ran one daytrip through the bush to *Pluto Junction* on the Herbert River, teaching flora, fauna, geology and geography and history to my very attentive guests as we went. We always lunched by water where one could have a swim and here I would set up lunch and boil the billy. Wine was usually served with lunch which left them all a little lethargic for the trip back to the homestead. Most of our guests were birdwatchers, and we had over 230 birds they could observe on our place, so apart from pulling up for the flora, and for fauna such as kangaroos, goannas, emus, snakes and many other things, we also pulled into swamps etc. to do some bird watching.

By the time we got home after a round trip through the bush of about 20 miles, they would be sleepy and glad of a good hot shower and a drink. And then the process for Mum and I would start all over again. The next day I would take them on a 50 mile adventure through the bush, and lunch on top of the spectacular *Blencoe Falls* that run into the Herbert Gorge. We had another trip out to *Darcy's Plain* which was perfect for the birdwatchers, and if they stayed longer I would run them out to the *Undara Lava Tubes*, which at that stage my cousin Gerry Collins was just getting going as a tourist venture and at the time had no resort there.

The guests usually stayed 3 to 4 days, and at the end of these sessions Mum and I would be totally pooped and need a holiday ourselves. Mum's job was huge as she had all the beds and rooms to be done on her own, and all the cleaning, which at *Gunnawarra* was an exceptionally big job. The garden and vegetable gardens both had to be maintained and watered, the chooks tended to, and on top of all that she had to prepare the evening meal. They were such big days for both of us.

At the beginning of October in 1986 I put on a weekend event called the *Gunnawarra Moonlight Ball,* which turned out to be a huge amount of work. I hired caterers and two bands from Cairns, *Mangrove Jack*, a folk band, and the *Cairns City Jazz Band.* The 'do' went well, starting Friday evening and finishing Sunday lunch time with cows, pigs and sheep on spits and hangis at various venues around the property, where we knew people were able drive their cars to and swim. We had raft races with flour bombs and things like champagne breakfasts on the banks of the Herbert River. The dances were held on the tennis court and in the big ballroom/dining room. The punters had to camp, and the whole weekend cost $50 which included their food and entertainment, but at the bar if they wanted a drink they had to buy it. We had about 200 turn up and it was a good 'do'. The whole idea was to see if we could coax some of the Cairns locals to come and stay with us as tourists. It was worth a try.

Business stayed slow, but gradually we saw our marketing starting to come to fruition. But by the end of 1987 things had changed, and a girl had come into my life. I asked Kateena to marry me and this allowed Mum to move back to Atherton for a well-deserved rest.

Kateena and I went to watch Jonathan King's *First Fleet* come into Sydney on 26 January 1988 (Australia Day), sitting on a little yacht bobbing up and down on the harbour like a cork, with the rest of the world. Mum and Dad were there as well, we went to the big *First Fleet Ball* held in the Rocks. They were very heady times. My birthday was celebrated on 4 February and the *Gentleman's Dinner* I had, was held at Len Evans' restaurant on 5 February and attended my many old friends, who would possibly not make it to the wedding. This included my Godfather Bob (Robert Emerson Curtis) who

was a well known Sydney artist, and who had done so much for *Gunnawarra* in the 1940s, with his and Laurie Le Guay's articles in the *Walkabout* magazines (Australian Geographic).

Kateena and I were married in Sydney at the old Catholic Church at Hunters Hill, and the reception was at the *Regent Hotel* on 6 February, with Jonathan King as my best man and Jonathan's daughter Charlotte as one of the flower girls. We were back at *Gunnawarra* by 8 February, having had our honeymoon at the *Peppers Resort* in the Hunter valley a week prior to Australia day.

I had never been so glad to get back *Gunnawarra.* I was over cities and big crowds. I had actually hated the fancy wedding. I would have much preferred a quiet little wedding under a big, shady, melaleuca tree on the banks of the Herbert River, with a few good friends who I knew I was going to be able to have time to talk to and the catering done by a good local caterer. The thousands of dollars that were wasted on the wedding would have been much better put to use to help us start our married life. I knew I was in trouble when she started crying because the wedding presents were not up to scratch.
Still we worked hard at it and all things seemed to be going well. We had Mark Beaumont come and give us a visit that year and also Jonathan King. It was a good year and we spent a lot on getting the garden up to scratch. The tourist business though still very slow, was looking promising with *NAB Travel* in Melbourne and the *Sheraton Mirage* in Port Douglas talking about taking us on.

I was elated to find out Kateena was pregnant. However good things do not last and she went and had an abortion behind my back. When I eventually found out I was devastated, and she was claiming it was her body and she could do anything she liked with it. I guess at this point it was the beginning of the end. In February her parents rolled in and put their heads together with mine, and the decision was made to close us down. At the same time my family decided to kick me off *Gunnawarra.* They may as well have cut my heart out. *Gunnawarra* was in my DNA and my blood. It was everything to me. In the 24 years since then I have tried to come to terms with what they did and how they did it, but for the life of me I cannot forgive them and still feel very hollow. What they did and how they did it was extremely brutal. I was 34 years old and had no education or understanding of the world regarding survival.

The only work I could get was cleaning toilets at the *Four Seasons Hotel* in Cairns with a 19 year old female boss who was on a power trip. Kateena hung in long enough to organise the removalists to move her stuff back to Sydney and suicide was on my mind. Richard Ireland came and removed the bottle of whisky from my hand, and then I found Jill Hiddlestone, a counsellor. I think I am the only family member who has recognised the true benefits of being counselled.

It's funny how things change when these sort disasters hit. I lost 80% of my friends and most of my family and here was me thinking they were my friends. The counselling pulled me out of the doldrums and I got a job lugging meat for *Tancred's.* Oh yeah. What is the difference between a pilot and a parrot? Answer: One earns $100,000 a year and the other flies. Several months later I got onto cousin Merran in Melbourne and hopped on a *Deluxe* bus and 56 hours later I was there. Big trip. It was right in the middle of the pilots strike, and tourism was dead in North Queensland. I suppose the *Gunnawarra Homestead Resort* would have gone under at that stage as well anyway.

I booked myself into *William Angliss College* and did a two year hospitality management course and at that stage made another very good friend. John Roy opened my eyes. Prior to finding out John was gay I had told him that the only good gay was a dead one. It was because of my ignorance as to what a paedophile was, and what had happened to me at *St Barnabas*. John showed me his gay world and I

am forever indebted to him for doing that, as was able to bury a big stigma I had about people with different sexual persuasions.

For someone who was as interested in food as I was, Melbourne was a real treat and the *Queen Victoria* and the *Prahran Markets* had me swooning. At the end of 1991 I returned home and put my efforts into finding work. Of course I was too old and they always asked what experience I had. Hundreds and hundreds of resumes must have been binned around that time. I could not even get a single interview.

In September 1992 I gave up and rang Mark Beaumont, who by this stage had his own business in cruise ships. He was fast becoming a man to know if you wanted to buy a cruise ship. His consultancy was worth its weight in gold. Mark never did anything by halves and even drove a sports car called a *Marcos.*

I worked really hard at Jack Gordian's timber mill at Anthill Creek as a docker. It nearly killed me but I did save enough money to get a flight to England. I wanted to get as far away from my nightmare as I possibly could. I ran the agents off one another and eventually got an airfare with *Garuda Indonesia* for $170.

I arrived in London in mid September. I went and stayed with Libbets Abel-Smith and did her gardening, while I figured out how I was going to tackle my life. I eventually got a job at the *Hyatt Lowndes Hotel* just around the corner from where Sophie lived all those years ago. By this stage things had got desperate, and I was living in a shell of a house overlooking the Hammersmith Bridge in the middle of winter. I had no heating. I had a blowup air mattress, sleeping bag, a little gentleman's cooker, and a bath where I could run a cold tap only. I started work at 6.00am as Breakfast Chef, so I had to be up at 4.00am to get there.

The breakfast went all day and I cooked for roughly 160 people in that period. I was also required to set up a big breakfast buffet every morning, make up fresh Bircher Muesli, cook 40 staff lunches and do the prep for the chefs doing the evening meals. They did not pay overtime, and I was averaging a 12 hour day on £4.50 per hour for the first 8 hours only. The Dutch chefs were extremely arrogant and thought Australian chefs were the bottom of the barrel. God knows what they thought of the African porters who were paid the princely sum of £1.80 per hour.

One thing I will say, is that I did learn a lot there. My boss had just won *Chef of the Year* for London. It is a pity they felt they needed to treat non-Dutch people as idiots. It was an expensive place to eat and 2 strips of bacon and 2 fried eggs cost £23.50. Through Christmas I felt sorry for the porters, as they missed out on the staff lunch and were starving. I started slipping them a little breakfast. In January after the Christmas rush I was asked to leave, as they said that they could not afford to keep me on as it was a time of the year when everyone deserted London and went on holiday. I was furious as I had worked so hard. I did get to spend Christmas Eve, Christmas day and Boxing Day with my cousin Mark St Giles and his family at Kingston upon Thames.

As luck would have it I was offered a job in *Anton Mosimann's Dining Club* just around the corner as a comi chef. It was a very exclusive club in Belgrave Square, however I had had enough and rang James Fraser at *Tornaveen* and spent my last £40 on bus fair to Aberdeenshire. I was in a heck of a mess and after staying a few weeks with James and being unsuccessful at getting work, I moved down to Edinburgh to stay with an old *St Barnabas* school friend Leofric Kingsford Smith, his wife Pauline and his family.

Leof took me under wing and introduced me to a group of his friends called the *Corstorphine Group*. In the main they were a mixture of business men who met up every Sunday night for a drink, and had done so for 20 years or more. What a blessing it was for me. Rather than just staying with Leof I was passed around the group, and spent a lot of time with Ricard and Carol Breyer, and Jim and Fiona Bruce and meanwhile I had odd jobs around Edinburgh.

The *Corstorphine Group* belonged to *The Malt Whisky Society of Scotland* and we used to go to the old vaults for the occasional tipple. The group also bought the odd barrel from different distilleries around Scotland. The 10 gallon old wooden barrel we bought from the *Glenfarclas Distillery* was a real eye- opener for me. Jim and I drove up to a friend's house and bottled it into whisky bottles using a bit of garden hose as a siphon. I was the nominated the chief siphoner.
Whew! It was a 25 year old dark malt whisky which was extremely strong. On the first suck of the hose I just about asphyxiated myself. We had over 60 bottles to fill, and my thumb kept getting numb from the evaporating alcohol, freezing it so I had to keep sucking it to warm it up. By the time I had finished I was very tipsy. Thank heavens Jim was driving. I was to learn that a small dram of less than half a finger in a whisky glass was enough, and that then a set percentage of water is added to release the aromas. The amount of water depends on which malt you have. Still it was a day I shall never forget. Of course I think my favourite malt was one we could get at *The Malt Whisky Society*. It was 50 year old *Campbelltown Springbank Malt*, that they had let the angels breathe, escape from the barrel and the resultant thick syrupy red malt had legs that crawled out of the glass to you. It was just delicious.

Ricard sold me a little *Ford Escort* station wagon that was yellow in colour and looked like someone had taken a shotgun to it, as it was peppered with rust. It turned out to be a very reliable car and I drove all over Scotland in it. It also had a great heater, something that was very important to me as we were in the subarctic circle.

Finally I cracked it and got the franchise on a guesthouse in Perthshire. The address was *Woodlands Guesthouse*, St Andrews Crescent, Bridge of Tilt, Blair Atholl. The owner a Gaelic actress, Dolina McLennan who was working on the Hamish Macbeth set at the time, was just brilliant and I stayed there until my heart collapsed at the end of 1993. It was the most inspiring period of my life and I learned to cook well hung pheasant (hung until they were a bright emerald green), wild 7lb salmon, venison, mussels, lobster and a whole array of other Scottish produce.

I served breakfast and dinner to my guests. Breakfast consisted of freshly ground, and freshly baked in my oven, oatmeal bread from the old 400 hundred year old water driven mill up at the other end of the village. I had top line homemade muesli, usually an apricot compote, fresh gooseberries and raspberries from the garden, a top quality Danish yoghurt, cornflakes, Wheetbix, and homemade preserves and marmalade. I also served kippers that had been smoked over oak whisky barrel shavings, bacon and eggs (the bacon cut to the required thickness and smoked onsite from 20 yards up the road at one of Scotland's award winning butchers). I served *Finnon Haddie* (smoked haddock poached in milk with an egg) made from *Abroath Smokies* (a world famous Scottish haddock smoker). I also did whisky-drenched wild mushrooms on toast and of course tea and coffee.

During the day with the guests out, I washed and ironed the sheets. Old Donnie was my gardener and fortunately for me he was also warden of the River Tilt and the River Garry so he managed to keep me supplied with beautiful salmon, pike, etc. His wife Katie helped me do the cleaning and making the beds etc. Donnie had been the gamekeeper for my mother's relation, a Colonel Haig and Katie had been a housekeeper there. Amazingly they remembered Mum when she used to visit there as a child. Donnie and Katie's last job before retiring had been at the *Coleman* (mustard making family) *Estate*

just up the road from Blair Atholl. They were an amazing old couple and we had really nice relationship with them.

One day Katie and I were having a tea break in the kitchen during our morning cleaning regime, when one of the room bells rang. These bells told one which room it was. The occupier of the room had to give the chord quite a jerk to get the bell to ring in the kitchen. We both knew that there should be no one else in the house and I tore off up stairs thinking someone may have broken in. The hairs went up the back of my neck when I realised that the window was shut and that the chord was not moving.

The ghosts were there, but when I got back into the kitchen Katie and I looked at each other and both thought it would be wiser to be in denial.

Sometimes when we got really busy, I would get women from the village to come and take on the regular afternoon ironing of the sheets and help me serve dinner at night. The pay was meant to be £2.50 an hour but I used to give them £3.00, and if they had children I would usually send them home with a couple of Kippers as their poverty was extreme.

The village was feudal with the 'Ho's Ho's' living along the tops of the valley and the peasants at the bottom of the valley. Everything was centered on *Blair Castle* and the *Duke of Atholl*. The *Duke of Atholl* was the only person in Britain allowed to own his own private army. The *Blair Estate* was about 140 square miles and a lot of the villager's worked there for next to nothing. *Blair Castle* is the most visited castle in Scotland.

We of course, were on the *Gordon Estate* at the *Bridge of Tilt* side of town, which was much more of a family affair. As we did not live in Blair Atholl proper, we were not seen as locals.
For dinner I served a set menu. It varied from night to night, depending on what I had available at the time. My starter was either a wild mushroom salad (Chanterelle and Boletus Edulis found in the local woods) or dilled gravilax which I made with excess salmon. I then served a soup that was either my award winning pheasant soup (French soup style), or a Moules Mariniere made from mussels I went to the west coast of the Isle of Lewis to get. My main could be poached Salmon with a creamed cider and sorrel sauce served with a lobster salad and langoustine, or Green Pheasant cooked in red wine, Juniper berries, redcurrant jelly, and the like, or Venison or Smoked Duck breast etc., but only one dish per night. The vegetables were mainly devilled leeks, baked Swedes and thyme potatoes. The salad was usually Cos lettuce, snow peas, tomatoes, carrots, and herbs various from the garden. It was seasonal but so was the guesthouse. I usually made red wine poached pears, or Atholl Brose with brandied wild berries or fresh raspberries and strawberries from the garden served with cream. I was never really good at cooking desserts.

The local corner store would have a bin of very cheap wines every Saturday morning. The cheap Australian wines were just brilliant. They all sold for a £1.70 a bottle. I included a pre-dinner sherry or whisky, a wine over dinner in the overall cost, and it was very successful.

We were placed in the *Which Good Food Guide* for that year at number one for our breakfast and number eighteen for our evening meals. I was the only guesthouse in the area that used whole food and made all the stocks etc. Not bad for a kid who was not a trained chef I thought.

At the end of 1993 my time was up with the guest house, as Dolly wanted to come back. I moved into a friend's bothy (Sheppard's hut) for a while, and to say the least it was freezing after being in the nice warm guesthouse. It was minus 22 degrees celsius at midday. There was a good inch of ice on the inside of my window. It was about this time that my heart really collapsed, and not long after I had

moved down to Leofric's house for Christmas in Edinburgh, that I ended up in *Western General Hospital* and was diagnosed with an alcohol-induced cardiomyopathy – a crook heart. If it were not for Leofric and Pauline it would have been a real lonely Christmas in there. Mind you the fingers of family are long, and out of the blue popped a lovely couple Rob and Daphne Cowie to see me through my boredom. Daphne's mother had visited *Gunnawarra* in my grandmother's time, and in her memoirs had written that it was the most hospitable stay she had ever had anywhere. Daphne had also been at *The Frensham School* at Mittagong in NSW with my cousin Errolly, who now lived on *Oxley Station.* Mum must have told Errolly of my woes and here they were. Rob and Daph ended up being very good friends.

On leaving hospital I needed something to do, so I started searching for a venue to set up a sandwich shop and with the help of the *Corstorphine Group* set up *Wizard of Oz*. This turned into a nightmare, and only survived eight months. I had 3 shifts of staff and we were operating from 7am until 5am - a22 hour day. I had to be there full time, so I never saw my flat at *Leslie Place* in Stockbridge pretty well the whole time I had the shop. Instead I slept on the office floor. I may have still been there if I had had a partner to control the books. In some ways I was very successful. I had cues going up the street at lunchtime, as my shop was on Queensferry Road in the middle of the commercial office district just off Princess Street.

As well as rolls, I sold stuffed potatoes, pizzas and homemade pasta. It was very hard work and devastating when I had to shut it down. At around this time I met Caroline Hahn and she was there to pick up the pieces. We are still firm friends to this day. Caroline is a senior lecturer in veterinary clinical neuroscience at the *Edinburgh University.*

I was once again in a real mess, and I returned home in March 1995. I pleaded with Dad that he might give me a little land around the big lagoon so I could start a bird watching business. This he did and he gave me the lagoon house to live in. I moved out there and worked on settling in. However I was just not physically capable any more, as my heart condition was chronic. It was very primitive as I had no running water or electricity. Whilst there, Dad was diagnosed with lung cancer from years of passive smoking. The cancer was voracious and Dad had passed on by the end of 1995. He was the lynchpin that had held our family together, and after the Will was read, what was left of our dysfunctional family blew apart.

After my father died my brother would not give me security of tenure on the Lagoon project, so I had to walk away from it. In 1996 I went to Seisia just outside of Bamaga on the tip of Cape York cooking, and after six months I moved down to Sydney and lived at Potts Point where I got a job cooking at the *Tilbury Hotel.*

The *Tilbury* was a cabaret house that had connections with the *Sydney Opera House*. We served over 300 people every night, 3 courses 'a la carte' in 2 hours, so that we could be ready for the show to start.

I was the only straight staff member in the building. The owners were gay and all their staff was gay and lesbian. Though they could be really bitchy when the peak pressures were full on in service, they made up for it after hours. It was a real hoot seeing the lifestyle of the gay and lesbians around Surrey Hills. I was a 'sous chef' there, and was expected to be able to cook for 80 people an hour. The best I could do was 67 so eventually I ended up doing the desserts, which as it turned out was really good and they were definitely impressed with my cooking skills.

I enjoyed my job at the *Tilbury*, but I longed for the country so got a job cooking at the *Porte O Call Hotel* at Bowral in the Southern Highlands. On my time off I was a member of a poetry club at Bundanoon. The gig did not last long, and I then went and spent Christmas with an old schoolmate just north of Brisbane. Bob Knowles had been at *St Barnabas* with me, and we had a firm friendship. Bob and Helen gave me a great Christmas and I got to catch up with a lot of other old friends in the region.

In January 1997 Errolly's daughter Fiona was getting married, so I went south again for the wedding at Orange. After the wedding I got a job cooking at the venue. This only lasted a few weeks as they had very poor ventilation in the kitchens and it was over 70 degrees. I was drinking jugs of ice water trying to cool down and ended up in hospital with a cardiac arrest, which I had brought on from drinking too much water.

In emergency the doctors asked if I had ever been *Cardioverted*. I said "yes but you cannot do it to me now because my 'ANR' blood reading is wrong and you will kill me". Their response was, "Well we think you are going to die anyway"! That bought me right back to reality and I thought to myself that I was not going to die for anyone and tried to get out of there. They finally stablilised me, and I ended up in a bed next to a bloke who was doing his nursing degree at the *Charles Sturt University* who suggested that I should give it a try.

Within two hours of getting out of hospital I was sitting in with the head of nursing at CS University getting myself a place in that year's course. I did the degree for a year and a half, but my health kept deteriorating and it was becoming painfully obvious to everyone that my physical abilities were deteriorating (nursing requires a lot of physical ability) I did make one firm friend there and that is Ved Tetheridge. Ved went on to become a top nurse.

Due to my heart problems I had to get to Sydney to *St Vincent's* at Darlinghurst, and the top cardiologist and heart surgeon there. That was Anne Kehoe and she saved my life and put me on a revolutionary heart medication called *Carvedilol*. Whilst going through that process I applied to the *University of Sydney* to do a four year degree of health science in Rehabilitation Counselling. This I did at USyd Health Science campus at Lidcombe. Whilst studying there I caught up with all my Sydney friends which included Leof Kingsford Smith, Jono and Jane King, and Caroline Hahn. There were others but I cannot remember them all. I did however make a very strong friendship with Leof's cousin, Sally Kingsford Smith and her partner Billy.
Whilst studying in Sydney I was asked to be a volunteer at the *Sydney 2000 Olympics*. My job was to work the gate to the *Journalists Village* at Lidcombe, behind the campus where I was studying. I put in 4 solid weeks with my now good friend Kate Austin. There were 20,000 international journalists in the village, and at night when they came back to the village they would be absolutely exhausted and our job was to check their security tags. However we had to do it in a way that left them smiling. It was hard work, but I really enjoyed meeting and getting to know some of these journalists.

I got my degree at the beginning of 2003 from the Vice Chancellor of the university at the main campus. It was all very grand and I took along Mum, and Jonathan and Jane King as my family. Doing the degree had been long and arduous and the one important thing I gained from it was that I could believe in myself. I could believe I was intelligent. I had been taught all my life that I was a dumb idiot. So at the end of the day, even though I never got to make a career out of it I did get some peace of mind. After Mum left to go home, Caroline Hahn paid for me to do 6 weeks intense therapy at the *South Pacific Private Hospital* at Curl Curl on the Northern Beaches of Sydney. The *SPPH* was Hollywood in style and was for the Sydney elite. I was literally locked away from the world. No phone calls and only extremely limited visitations. The group therapy was *CBT* and the psychodrama was *Gestalt*. We did long days from 6.00am until 11.00pm at night doing classes in life skills. I was in

there to see if I could sort out my eating disorder *Love of Food Addiction.* It did help a little, but the main area that it really helped was in the learning of those extremely important life skills that have given me so much contentment in recent years.

I moved to Hendra in Brisbane after leaving the hospital, and got a job at the *Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre* at Wacol as the *ATSI Counsellor.* I had 190 Aborigine clients to deal with. It was very challenging as we had very little support from the prison. We had prisoners from all over the state and I did learn a lot. In the end I had a mini breakdown and resigned.

Towards the end of 2004 I moved back to Atherton to be close to Mum, and got a job working as the *Community Corrections Officer* (probation officer) for the Mareeba district. I was also required to go to court and represent corrections. It was a very challenging job and the majority of my clients were Aboriginals. However starting at such an age on the Government payroll, meant my prospects were not good. After falling over in court and beggering my knee, and then failing to get through a panel interview for my job (I had to reapply for my job after 9 months), I knew I had had enough. I think I suffer from some sort of dyslexia and never could understand a single word they were saying. I also had a real problem with the tens of thousands of policies and procedures and all the regulations. I think at the end of the day the pay was so poor that I could not afford to save anything, though I was leading a very frugal life.

My health was not good and the fight with the church was ongoing, so I decided to bring it to a head and brought in a solicitor. As a result I was able to buy a house and move into Ravenshoe at the beginning of 2006 just after *Cyclone Larry* had given the town a bit of a pounding.

I joined the Ravenshoe writers group and became a member of the *RSL Citizens Auxiliary*. At last I got a sense of belonging and made connection with a few of the people from my past like Dick Jenson the butcher and a few others. The Aborigines told me they would keep an eye on things for me, and I was able to make contact with my oldest friend Johnny Murray who last year was very lucky to survive an horrific helicopter crash.

Since I have been here I have had a number of people come and stay in my little cottage including Lois Westcott, Sally and Marcel Wagner, Giles Pickford, Rosamond Stewart (another cousin), my good friend John Buzacott, Steve Trezise from *Jowalbinna* near Laura (which was part of *Olive Vale Station* all those years ago and was in Glen Atkinson's, my grandmother's name), Greg Shaw and his mum Joan Sanford, and Bob Knowles who sadly passed away last year from a terrible disease called CJD – Mad Cows Disease. I have also had a lot of contact recently from my old friend Virginia Webb. It was very sad to hear towards the end of last year that my old friend Libbets Tremlett (Abel Smith) had passed on. And I have had a lovely visit from my dear friends Maricka and Blair Lamont who will tell you about in my next book.

I also had a visit from Jonathan and Jane King and their now grown-up daughter Charlotte. This was after the re-enactment of the Burke and Wills expedition last year in which Jonathan had asked me to manage the Queensland section. It was whilst doing this expedition that I got to know Christine Laskowski and her wonderful husband Henry. As we speak Christine is editing my book and catching up to me fast so I had better finish up my story and get off the pages so she can edit this bit.

Though struggling with finances, I am now at peace with myself as I come to the end of this tale which I hope to have printed for the family's 150 years in North Queensland celebration in Townsville on the 24 May 2012. Well until next time cheers to you who have made it this far through the book. Until next time; enjoy the remaining stories.

DREDGING TIN

Tin Dredging was a big operation in the Mt Garnet region. Mount Garnet was originally called Smith's Creek, because a fellow called Smith was the first to successfully mine large quantities of tin there. Mount Garnet eventually got its name from a large red rock of ruby tin, which was found up on the mountain, which was mistakenly thought to be Garnet.

Tableland Tin Dredge

They had started dredging tin on Smith's Creek in the mid 1930s. A second dredge was started up on Return Creek, and was to come down as far as the Strathvale boundary (the Kennedy highway), before being stopped by the fact that the Lucy's had the land freeholded, and would not let the dredge pass through. They had already chewed up the *Mount Garnet Racecourse*. A new racecourse was hand-grubbed by the Military in 1943 as a Parade Ground, and is still used as the racetrack today. The Smith Creek dredge closed sometime in the 1940s and was left as scrap, and is the dredge tourists see today. The Return Creek dredge was dismantled and relocated to Nymbool. In the late 1970s it was dismantled and a new dredge was built.

The dredge at Nymbool was over 3,000 tons in weight and worked a 70 feet face, and was known as a pivot dredge, because it had big hydraulic feet that extended below the dredge to the bottom of the pond. The *Tableland Tin Dredging Company* operated the dredge. Finally when it closed in the early 1990s it was dismantled and sold off.

Ravenshoe Tin Dredge

Alluvial Gold Co. Ltd. had a dredge dismantled in New Zealand, and the *Ravenshoe Tin Dredging Co. Ltd.* which was established in 1953, purchased the dredge, which arrived in Queensland in 1954. The dredge was landed in Cairns and railed to Battle Creek, where a new pontoon was constructed and it was rebuilt.

The re-erection of the dredge was completed on the Battle Creek area in 1957 and commenced working upstream until 1962, when it worked south across the highway. The dredge operated 7 days per week, 24 hours per day with a staff of 70 working 4 shifts.

The dredging of Battle Creek finished in 1965, and the dredge was dismantled and a new pontoon was constructed on Nettle Creek, north of the highway. From 1965 to 1992 the dredge worked down Nettle Creek, across the highway, to its present location. It had completed the original area by 1976, after which time the dredge worked the lower reaches of Nettle Creek.

This operation was based at Battle Creek with the development of a small town. The company had its administration offices, tin processing and bagging shed, single persons accommodation and canteen, and housing for married workers.

The *Ravenshoe Tin Dredge* weighed 2,500 tons, worked a 40 feet face, and was powered by electricity bought in from the main grid. It was pulled sideways by two wire cables on each side of the dredge, and pulled forward by a huge wire cable that was about 6 inches in diameter called a 'headline'. An Australian company called *Oakbridge* then owned it.

In March 1976 I applied for a job through a friend of my Father's, Arowa Hay. Arowa was the *GMO* of the *Ravenshoe Tin Dredge.* He gave me a job as a trade assistant and general dogs body. I was accommodated in the single men's quarters at Battle Creek, and was delegated to permanent day shift.

The dredge was located about half a mile downstream from the highway on Nettle creek when I started working there.

For the first month I worked on the dredge itself. I took a while to adapt, as this floating monster screamed and howled all day long as the endless chain of two and a half ton buckets that dredged up the ore, were pulled over a huge hexagonal driving tumbler, like a bicycle chain in a semi-sliding motion that caused the metal, when sliding in metal to metal contact, to howl and screech in a far more effective way than any Hollywood horror movie could devise.

My first job was to sweep and hose down areas, as there was lots of sticky mud splashed everywhere on a constant basis. I occasionally got taken out of my rather boring routine of cleaning, with jobs such as off-siding for the various fitters and boilermakers who maintained the dredge. One job that used to be pretty horrible was off-siding for the boilermakers who patched up leaks and cracks inside the pontoon. I used to get so choked up on the smoke that was given off by electric welding rods, that I would have trouble breathing. The heat in these very confined and claustrophobic spaces was almost unbearable, and worst of all I constantly got my eyes flashed.

I will describe to those who are not familiar with a welding flash, that it is one of the most painful experiences one can have, it is as if someone has poured fine hot sand into your eyes, and usually takes a few hours post-flash to take effect, and continues to give you pain for up to five or six hours before abating. It is caused by not having your eye lens ready and adapted to the right shape to ward of any damage, and happens when a flash is given off without warning, which is often when others are doing the welding.

It was not until I was in Weipa, that I was to learn how to avoid these flashes. The first thing I learned was that if you had safety glasses on, the harmful rays were diverted and secondly, if one did not have safety glasses the answer was to focus in on an object past the point where the flash was coming from. Sadly on the dredge OH&S was still a new thing, and we did not have safety glasses. When in the pontoons it was so dark that adapting one's eyes to the environment was almost impossible, and therefore the flashes were much more magnified.

The water in the dam that the dredge floated on, had to be constantly changed as it would become so dense and soupy with solids that it would physically raise the dredge two or three feet out of the water. They had big pumps pumping in clean water, and the soupy slurry was pumped out into big settling dams. It was not the sort of water one would want to go swimming in.

The endless chain of seventy, twelve cubic meter buckets dropped down to the bottom of the pond. They then ran along the bottom to the digging face, where they started to rise again toward the huge fabricated steel ladder/boom that was angled at approximately forty five degrees and could be winched up or down to control the depth of digging. The big headline pulled the dredge forward into the workface, and the sidelines pulled the dredge from side to side across that face.

These cast manganese steel buckets coming up over the bottom tumbler on the boom were filled with ore, and when they passed over the top hexagonal driving tumbler, the ore was discharged into a hopper and then chuted into a big revolving barrel screen, that was angled downwards at about forty degrees and was about twenty five yards long. It had high velocity sprays spread along the length of its intern, thus washing the fines through the half-inch screen. The courser material including boulders and logs went onto a long adjustable tail conveyor, and poured off the rear end of the dredge and was known as 'tailings'. Many big rocks of tin and big crystals of topaz were seen going out with the tailings but we were never allowed to touch it.

The fines went through onto a bank of pulsating jigs that were situated at right angles to the screen on both sides of the dredge. These jigs were filled with bluestone gravel called 'raglan', over which the watery slurry of fines passed. The pulsating of the unit drew the heavier material (in this case cassiterite – tin) down to the bottom of the raglan, leaving the larger material to pass over the top of the jig. It went down onto a small belt and then a tube, and was then directed onto a sluice and dumped over the rear end of the dredge.

The tin passed down from the jigs into two (one each side of the dredge) bins. One of my jobs was shoveling the tin into buckets ready for transport at the end of each shift back to the processing shed at Battle Creek.

My foreman/supervisor was a wonderful man called Johnny Stone. The Dredge Master was Bert Wessels. Rod Dingwall was the company engineer. Lindsay Francis was the number one electrician. I never got to know any of the winch men who sat up in the tiny control room way up above the bucket ladder bar one. That was Winston. His wife looked after us single men back at Battle Creek. She was chief cook and bottle washer and was a very caring soul and really mothered us.

Whilst still on the dredge I did get to do a hard, hot job that I found interesting. That was the maintenance of the buckets. These big buckets were held in the chain by large pins. The pin had to be removed to take the bucket out onto the deck for repairs. The riveted old lips of the buckets, had to be replaced regularly due to the abrasive eating away of the metal as buckets dug up the ore. The old rivet heads were gas-axed (oxy-acetylene) off and punched out, and the old lip was removed. The area was cleaned and a new lip was put in place. White-hot rivets were then punched in, and my job was to hold the big heavy dolly against the head of these inch diameter rivets, whilst someone with an air-driven hammer unit, forged the rivet-end into a countering head on the other side. It was exhausting work.

Sometimes the pin and bush section were worn and the bucket would have to be removed and replaced with another bucket. The old one would be sent off to the workshops at Battle Creek to be rehabilitated.

After about a month Johnny decided to move me to the shore gang much to my relief. The heat and noise of the dredge was starting to get me down. One of my fellow-workmates on this gang was David Joyce, who at that stage also owned *Green Swamp Station* just outside of Ravenshoe on the Mount Garnet Road. I had also known the property as *Wallabada* when the Turners had owned it in the 1960s.

I spent many a heavy session with him there, downing copious amounts of over proof *Bundaberg Rum,* whilst snacking on pretty hot, eye watering, pickled Birdseye chilies. When we got hungry his fridge was packed with mountain oysters (calf testicles), which we cooked up in butter in a fry pan. They were just delicious as he only kept the tiny sweet ones. We would eat mountains of these things and I never got sick of them.

The French serve these in their restaurants as sweet bread, though it is not real sweetbread as real sweetbread is the pancreas of the cow. It is called this because the cow's pancreas is the organ that is used in the production of insulin. It is due to this sadly, that we cannot get true sweetbread in the butcher's and thus the French have replaced sweetbread with the most delicate of mountain oysters. I love mountain oysters but will kill for true sweetbread…it is outstanding as a delicacy.

On shore I learned how to drive the various bits of machinery, and how to splice an eye into both the three inch steel sidelines and the six-inch headline. I was amazed at how easy it was. Mind you due to the weight of the ropes it was not a one-man job.

It was at this point that the *Australian Workers Union (AWU)* approached me to join, and I naively responded by saying that I was not interested. Little did I know the hornets' nest I would stir! A few days later the dredge stopped operating and I was informed that everyone was on strike. It wasn't until Arowa appeared before me, that I realized the strike was over me not joining the union. Arowa told me I would either have to join or he would have to let me go. This dredge dug enough tin to affect the world tin prices. Stopping it was not a wise move, and so it was that I joined the *AWU* and the dredge started operating again.

I was taught to drive an Atlas excavator that swiveled around and ran on tracks. We used it for digging the fifteen feet deep trenches the sidelines and headline hooked into. A big river gum would be cut down and the rope would be looped around it and connected using a 'D' shackle. A tongue would be cut out of the side of the trench for the rope to come in around the log, and thus it was filled in and buried, and the dredge would be anchored until the next move, which was quite regularly.

After several months of this work, the 'powers that be' decided that it was time I learned how to drive a dozer. I was to work with a character called Percy Stone. He was Johnny Stone's nephew. As it turned out Percy was one of the best men I ever worked with and he taught me one heck of a lot. I am forever grateful to him for that. Mind you he was not a man to muck with after a few beers at the *Hot Springs Pub.* It only took two beers for his personality and behavior to change. He was not one to be around when he was in this frame of mind.

Our job was to clear a pathway for the dredge to come though. This meant we had to push trees down and pile them up and burn them. In the creek some of the big River Gums were too big for the dozers we were using so we also had to blow trees out of the ground with explosives, and so I also became a powder monkey's assistant. Some of the trees were so big, and the banks of the creek so steep, we had to winch them out.

The first work I had with Percy was what was known as 'blue tonguing'. It was very hard work. Percy would reverse the *Caterpillar D6* to the top of the creek bank. I would grab the 'C' hook and the winch cable that came off a winch drum at the rear end of the dozer, and run down the bank with it and hook it around the trunk of a fallen tree. Percy would start winching it up to the top of the creek bank. By the time I got to the top he would be sitting waiting for me to unhitch it so that we could repeat the process all over again with another log. After some of my late night rum-drinking sessions with David Joyce, I used to find this sort of work very challenging. And that was especially the case on hot, muggy days.

I did not get to drive the *Caterpillar D6.* Instead I was taught to drive a *Komatsu D65A.* I really enjoyed driving it…. it gave one such a sense of power. However it was my first experience using a decelerator.
In a car you will find an accelerator, and when you push it down with your foot it increases the revs of the engine and thus the speed of a car. Let your foot off and it slows down. Well due to bouncing all over the place all day, plus the fact of having the increase and decrease of the revs of the engine a lot more regularly because of the constant stopping and going back and forward, a decelerator is used in a dozer. When you push your foot down you slow down the revs of the engine and when you lift your foot up you increase the revs of the engine. Also a dozer has a hand throttle for straight constant runs. A decelerator certainly saved a lot of stress on the calf muscles.

The scary bit after driving the dozer all day was when I hopped into the Nissan to drive home. When I came to a corner and attempted to slow down, I would push the accelerator flat to the floor. I had a few close misses doing this because even with my foot flat to the floor, and my finding myself speeding up I did not seem to register in my brain what was wrong and to lift my foot off the accelerator, and if anything tried to push the accelerator down even further. There were a few occasions where I left the road at high speed as if driving for my life. All I can say is thank heavens for my experience of having grown up on a cattle station where I had started driving at the age of twelve, and my having had the experience of chasing brumbies and pigs through the bush, flat belt in four wheel drives. It probably saved me from running up a tree when leaving the road. It was an eye-opening experience.

Another eye-opening experience was packing three or four cases of gelignite (An-Gel 60) under the roots of a big River Gum, and connecting each tampered lot of jelly with a red plastic cord called *Cordex*, that looked a bit like plastic-coated clothesline. It may have looked like clothesline, but it certainly did not respond to being cut up like clothesline. Because it was a high powered and instantaneous explosive, we had to cut it up with wooden snippers to avoid any sparking. The fellow before me had been sacked for using an axe to cut it…scary!

The reason for using this *Cordex* was because it was an instantaneous explosive. This meant that all the deposits of jelly that we joined with this stuff all went off at once. This was important because if only one pile went off the rest would be wasted, as it would be spread from here to kingdom come without going off, and the tree would not have come down due to the smaller explosion. Once a tree had had a failed blow, it was nearly impossible to knock it down with a second blow due to the loosening of the soil around its base from the initial blast.
Once we had a tree set to blow, Percy would get a detonator cap and connect it to six feet of fuse. It was illegal to make it shorter for safety reasons. This may have seemed excessive but I know I appreciated it. The short wheelbase Nissan we had for this job had no clutch and no brakes, due to obvious issues with company maintenance. It was an experience to drive at the best of times.

We would get our explosives from a magazine up on the side of a hill between Hot Springs and Battle Creek. The back would be packed with up to thirty boxes of jelly. We had a coil of fuse and several boxes of detonators that we kept in the glove box. It was not wise to keep the detonators stored with the jelly in case one of the detonators went off.

Percy would light the fuse whilst I lugged all the remaining makings back to the Nissan. He would never wait until I had got the vehicle started, which used to put the wind up me a bit. Starting this Nissan was something else. I would have to put it in low four-wheel drive and first gear, due to there being no clutch. I would then turn the key and the starter motor would hump the vehicle forward in a kangaroo jumping motion until the vehicle started. Some days the vehicle would have to be pushed because we had worn the battery down by starting it this way. It would not have been pretty if I could have not got it started.

The explosion we set under those trees was big, it was not only designed to knock the tree down. The company also wanted a big enough bang to shatter a layer of basalt twenty feet below. They used to be complaining on the dredge about lumps of wood landing on the roof, and we were up to three quarters of a mile in front of the dredge. It was certainly a big bang.

When it went off it was something to behold, due to most of these big old gums having a termite eaten chimney up the centre of the tree. The explosion would shoot up the centre and blast off the tree top, and then the huge stump looking a bit like a *NASA* rocket launch, would be propelled up to perhaps

fifteen feet above the ground. It was absolutely awesome to watch. On one particular occasion Percy and I having travelled the required distance to feel safe from the blast, were leaning against the jelly packed on the back of the Nissan, waiting for the explosion to happen. It went off with a massive bang and everything was a relief as it had done what we had wanted it to do.

Suddenly we heard a swishing (a bit like the sound a big hunting boomerang makes) above us, and looked up to see a splinter of wood about eighteen inches thick and about three feet long hurtling towards us. It is the fastest Percy and I had ever hit the dirt, and just as we did, it slammed into the gelignite in the back of the vehicle and drove a buckling hole into the floor, before bouncing out onto the ground narrowly missing Percy's leg by mere inches. I do not know about Percy, but I was very nearly piddling my pants. Thank heavens we carried the detonators in the glove box and that the *Cordex* was on the front passenger seat. Fresh gelignite requires a fair detonation to make it go off. We were very lucky that day.

I did this job for a few more months before gaining my dozer driving ticket, and then with the help of Bert Wessels and Johnny Stone, I got a job as a Trade Assistant in Weipa.

‘’LORD CAN YOU SPARE ME A LITTLE RAIN”

The husky, parched *Aaaaaagh! Aaaaaagh!* of an old crow, echoed through the dry air, breaking the still silence of the biting mid-afternoon sun. A shorthorn cow looking more like a bundle of skeletal hunger, wandered dazedly down a dusty cattle pad through the shimmering heat toward the waterhole in search of a drink. The slimy murk of the water now reduced to a shallow, steaming pool in the centre of a lake of treacherous black soil mud. The cow, eyes glazed with haunted thirst, paused briefly at the edge of this hellhole to smell the dying moisture and then preceded into the inevitable trap, first walking and then swimming through the black slime to her golden dream of quenching her retching thirst. She lay in her cool pool, thirst now quenched, to relax her weak and weary old bones for a while and perhaps to dream.

With time passed and her bliss achieved the cow attempted to move. The swill's icy claws gripped her tight, and with each ever-weakened move, even tighter. She struggled for several hours almost drowning several times before realising her dreaded predicament. Now resting from total exhaustion she watched the merciless sun recede, and the freezing mud numbed her tortured body stiff. Too weak to bellow she resigned herself to her murky grave and wretchedly prepared to die.

With the enveloping darkness came the terror of evil noises and hunting eyes. In horror she waited for a pig to rip open her stomach or a dingo to remove her ears and tongue. Then she heard them, the noise growing ever louder, as a big family of wild pigs encroached on to the edge of the swill squealing, chomping, oinking and grunting for space, as they fought the pecking order to get a wallow. Then there was stillness as they caught the whiff of the doomed cow in the middle. With big wriggling snouts pushed up and forward in squeals of delight, they checked the scene for the source of possible food and drooled at what they saw.

The cow was lucky that night as she was too deep in the middle of this deadly soup, and the wise old boar led his harem and noisy children off in search of a better quarry.

The alarm went off at 5.30am. I always found it a little hard getting up early in the morning, as my biological clock tells me that I should go to bed late and I usually do not go to sleep until after midnight. Mind you when the early mornings are constant then I will go to bed early to make sure I get the sleep.

In the summer, breakfast on the station was at 7.00am, and the day had to be prepared prior to breakfast, so it was essential to be up and at it by at least 5.30am. Due to the cattle being very weak from grasses that lacked any nutritional value, and that had been frosted during the winter, in the dry time we did not muster them, and thus did not need to get up as early as we did during the mustering season.

This period of time was dedicated to repairing the miles of fencing, fixing windmills, keeping the water up to the cattle, as most of the small waterholes and swamps had dried up and the cattle relied heavily on the bore water to survive. However there was the odd waterhole that still had water in it, and many of these became death-traps as the mud bogged the cattle and they were often too weak to pull themselves out of the bog, making them a prime target for pigs, dingoes, crows. Of course they more than often drowned, or died of exhaustion and exposure.

We had several creeks that sprung out of the basalt and meandered down the big black soil plains, the most notable being *Gunnawarra Creek,* which ran for a good six or seven miles before it junctioned with *Rudd's Creek.* This creek posed real problems for us in the dry, as it continued to flow at a trickle well into October and thus attracted cattle to its waters. Due to its bottom being black soil and almost bottomless, it was a real death trap in these drier months of the year.
During a drought we ran licks out to the various paddocks, checked the waters, and did the bog run. It used to take three days to cover the entire place, so we saw each individual run about every third day. They were long arduous days as the roads were no more than bush tracks and we had plenty of basalt rock that made the going very slow and hot.

To pull the live and dead cows out of the bogs we used a long hemp rope or chain, hooked to the front of the four-wheel drive and formed a lasso at the other end to put around the cows horns or neck (if they had no horns), and then backed up the four-wheel drive thus pulling the cow out of the bog. This was not the most graceful way to pull a cow out of the bog, and sometimes they did not to seem to appreciate what we were doing for them.

Of course for the cattle already dead …perhaps one or two a day … it did not matter where we hooked onto them as long as we got them out of the water, so that they did not poison it with their rotting carcasses for those strong enough to drink there without getting bogged.

However if they had been in the bog for any length of time, their joints would be frozen and we would have to help them to their feet. It was usually then that they showed you their displeasure by charging you in a snorting, groggy, sort of way, as if to say 'thanks for nothing', and then trot off into the landscape with heads held high to show their haughty indignance.

Sadly there were those that could not get to their feet and were too far gone. Knowing that we would not be back for at least three days, and that they were a prime target for the encroaching wildlife, we used to mercifully put them down. This was done by either putting a 22 slug in their head, at a point that killed them instantly, or as was more often the case a ball peen hammer was used to strike the same spot on the head thus killing them instantly. This point was the meeting point where imaginary lines crossed diagonally between the base of the horns and the eyes. There is a little curl of hair there to let you know the exact spot.

Some of the old timers used to stick a pocket knife in at the base of the spine to severe the spinal cord, but I found it too slow and painful for the beast, and though the old-timers viewed me as a bit of a woos, I preferred the other described methods.

On any given day we could pull as many as ten cattle from the bogs, and out of that we would possibly have put down three or four. Though I found it hard to do, I did become numb to the pain of the thought of doing it, as I knew it had to be done for the beast's sake.
We had points around the property where we knew cattle camped, and if possible it was usually near water so that they would not have to travel too far to eat. With the licks we also put out molasses and urea mixed, which stimulated the cattle to eat the powder dry, nutrition-less grass so that they could get their roughage. We would also drop off bales of hay.

We also set up backscratchers, which were basically several lengths of twisted barbed wire wrapped tightly with strips of hessian, soaked in sump oil that was laced with buffalo fly spray. These were tied at a diagonal angle between two shady trees, so that the higher end suited the bigger cattle and the lower the smaller and younger animals. The cattle loved these and would spend hours around them, taking it in turns to get a back scratch.

When it was going to rain was always constantly in the back of one's mind, and occasionally, though neither spiritual nor religious, I would, through the shimmering mirage and heat of the day, pray for rain.

After a bad drought rain could be a mixed blessing, as the much-weakened cattle could slip over and be unable to get up and thus die. Water when mixed with urea was poisonous to the cattle, so great care had to be taken to keep it dry. We used to have many losses this way. Also cattle could bloat themselves on fresh green pick, thus causing many problems including death.

We usually burned the grass after the first decent storms, and where we had heartleaf growing, the cattle would go for the fresh shoots and thus in many cases die. They never touched it normally.

Note to reader: I wrote this poem at university whilst I was studying indigenous health as a take home exam. It pertains to healing. It starts in the mode of ‘everyone’ is to blame, then goes to ‘they’, then ‘we’, and finally ‘I’ meaning that only I can truly heal myself.

My Mother My Song

The cycle smooth with an ever changing dream
Father-time watched the billowing sailcloths drop
Red white and blue a deception so true
Peels back with lies - the terra nullius bell
First with redcoats then with squatters do bring a genocidal hell
And the religion to justify the nulla in void
Colonies trample the sacred peeling back of our Mother’s skin
Sabred umbilicals with flaying arteries bleeding - the memories,
Disconnected souls, assimilated children play to the Methodists whip
For who are we to judge, blinkered in rows, the kin who came by ship.

Shattered families in scattered formation claw for reunion - the hurt so surreal
The sun blasts away the insecure shadows of Mother’s bloom
Invading populations swell and darken our misery
In once savage, now silent racial slur.
Amber people once gushed - the wound so deep,
The stream slithers its bloody cargo blue green to the sea
Anger flushed to a numb silence,
Stark branches where souls once sung
And rode their ghostly floating leaves back to our Mother’s open hand.
Footprints rotting putrid in a salty glaze
Ships gone now miraging past disasters.

We are what we are - the music has changed
Our tune is grating and the patterns of the plug do not match
As we flail outwards in attempts to tell
That ‘they’ are responsible for our slurred hell of flagons, gunja and shell
That they should fix it with a better mix of domestic violence
That the reality of racism, a silent fungus invading our hollow ruins, alive
The goals overflowing with songs so sad…for it is they who have done this
It is they who must heal with medicine so inept.
Their sterile governments, selling the land with disconnected hands
And flagellate with the heat of public gaze and empty buckets of sand.

As environments crumble our mother bleeds for our reconnection,
To tune a song through our heart to make our shadow strong
And once again spring the leaves of content to our hair
And cool the sun to our Mother’s belly.
To stem the bloodied wounds with lines of honey

In two-way mirrors blurred by mainstream dust I see mother beckoning
Urging us to move on in a rebirth so strong
Past glistening forceps like steel columns so cold
To balance what we were, with what we are, and what we will be
Some of mainstream has jumped with tenuous whispers of sorry
And perhaps they too will sing the tune that lines the soul
Bridging the trust to my individual role

The change I have to make to look within
Be motivated with a clear head and push away the evil swill
Clean the water and ride the tide to the land of milk and honey
Attached to mother's bosom, feeling the family grow
For change I must change and they will follow.

So come my brothers and drink the milk and lick the honey
Lick it to the line, the song, and milk it for the tune
Rebirth your Sisters to sing the healing of wounds now old
Embrace the Mother as a nation strong
If you are going to sing the song - sing it in tune
A family tune, a tune of belonging to this land I love
For you are my Mother and you are my song.

DIFFERENT TUNES

Hector Fred was born in the Murray River region south of Tully, and was the son of *Wombino* (*Wombino* who was designated by the white authorities to be King of the *Kirrama tribe*). Hector always denied that he was *Wombino's* son, instead claiming his father to be 'Wild Jimmy', who was an Aboriginal of some note in the region at the time. The Collins family of *Kirrama Station* where Hector was raised claimed that he was definitely *Wombino's* son. As all concerned have now passed on I guess we will never know, though it is interesting to note that the white bosses really did not know Hector's cultural grouping or history all that well, so there is a good chance that Hector was right.

Hector's land was *Gunnawarra* as this is where the *Kirrama Tribe* did a lot of its hunting…. *Gunnawarra* meaning 'little corroboree/initiation ground and meeting place'. Hector was initiated on *Gunnawarra* during one of the hunting seasons, and was given the spirit of the *Bunga* (turtle), which the area is noted for.

Hector in his younger years at Kirrama

My father told me that as a child he used to be locked in his room during a corroboree, because of the sensitivity of the local Aborigines to white children who tried to sneak up and watch these ceremonies. If he had of been caught he would have definitely been killed. The family graveyard is now on part of that ground and this must have been soul-destroying to these people.

The *Gunnawarra Homestead* was built about 400 yards from the ceremonial ground in 1878, by the recommendation of the local Aborigines, because of its safeness from being flooded. This was borne out by the 1967 floodwaters, which only came within 20 yards of the homestead. By coral dating, the 1967 flood was the biggest flood on the Herbert River in 1,000 years. The river is four miles east of the homestead.

Hector worked as a ringer at *Kirrama, Glen Ruth, (Cashmere), Wairuna, Valley of Lagoons, Minnamoolka, Meadowbank* and *Gunnawarra*. He always came back to *Gunnawarra* to do his hunting and fishing in his time off. It was his home, and he worked for my father from 1958 through to 1979, before going to work at *Glen Ruth* where he finished his career before retiring in 1986.

When I visited Hector for the last time at the *Mount Garnet Aborigine Settlement* in 1995 he was a *Jehovah's Witness* pastor, and was living in a very dilapidated and rotting plywood caravan, with a little corrugated lean-to. Outside of this he had a big fireplace surrounded by wooden stumps for seating, where all his meals were cooked. Scattered around the yard were the remains of beef bones, Jacky Rat (Kangaroo Rat…Rufus Bettong) bones and turtle shells…Hector's favorite tucker (food). Parked beside the caravan was a now very tired old long wheelbase, very faded, yellow, land rover, with a well-used capstan winch prominently attached to the front. Though it might concern some that a retired gentleman of Hector's status, should end up in such squalor, it was of his own choosing.

Please let me impart to you this man's story in my life. Hector had real status. He was the best 'bushman' I ever knew, and taught me everything I will ever know about the bush. His ability with horses and cattle was legendary. In the years I knew Hector he was a portly gentleman. He was a true horse whisperer. On *Gunnawarra* at the time, a worker was given eight horses for his team. Four were worked while the others were spelled. The ringers usually broke in their own horses, and in Hector's case his horses always seemed to know exactly what he wanted of them. In his younger years he had a reputation of being able to hop off a horse while it was bucking, and then had the ability to land back into the saddle while the horse was still bucking.

He was past that now and his horses were all very quiet. Due to a bad back, when he was shoeing he would draw up a stump and sit beside the horse, and have another stump for the horse to put its hoof onto. He had them all trained well. When the others were shoeing their horses they would be kicking and carrying on. However not Hector, who would be calmly sitting down on the job, and his horses would lift their hooves onto the stump as he needed, without him even having to ask them. He could have shod them in a lounge chair.

When mustering Brahman cross cattle in the early seventies beef depression, the cattle became more wild and flighty. I have memories of long hours of galloping trying to catch these cattle in the paddocks. The average sized paddock on the station was about 30,000 acres of thick bush and basalt. Men were thin on the ground, especially experienced ringers. I can still see us all panting with thirst, stressed and had-it, with very few cattle, when a hot tempered voice would exclaim - "Where the hell is Hector"! Then after some more quiet time holding our measly little bunch of cattle, we would hear the distant chorus of a big mob of cattle and then they would eventually come into view. There would be Hector calmly plodding along on his horse, his flailing whip slicing the thick, hot air ending with a resonating thack that could be heard over the chorus of the one or two hundred head of cattle. I cannot stress enough the magic of this man and his ability to save the day.

The actual mustering is only part of the equation, because more often than not driving the cattle home could be quite a job in itself due to us being ten or fifteen miles from the cattle yards, and in some ways our day at this point would really just be beginning. It used to take a while to settle the cattle into the drive. Once away I found this part of cattle work very boring and very tiring. Hector usually took the lead, as he was the only one who truly knew where he was at any given time. These days were long, starting out at perhaps three or four o'clock in the morning, and sometimes not getting home until perhaps nine or ten o'clock at night. When you are not exactly sure where you are through the day, it is even harder at night with a big mob of cattle. Some nights were so dark due to cloud cover, that you could not see the trees and had difficulty telling the difference between rocks and the cattle. If

it were not for Hector's smoke, which shone like a lighthouse in that sort of dark, we would have probably spent many nights riding around in circles. Hector's smoke was our guiding light. No matter how dark it was, Hector always knew the way home to a good hot bath, a good feed and a nice warm bed.

On days off Hector would let me go fishing and camping with him, and it was during these trips that he would impart his valuable bush skills. When it came to feeding ourselves we were spoilt for choice, and Hector knew all the ones that had to do with men's business. We had turtles, eels, sooty grunter (fish), black bream, spotted perch, sleepy cod, freshwater crays, shrimp, goanna, snake, flying fox (fruit bats), Jacky rat (rufus bettong), echidna, wichetty grubs, a whole array of wild ducks and other water fowl. Growing along the river there were also figs, Herbert river cherries, dingoes balls (small double berry), pandanus nuts, and yams. Every single one of the foods was delicious except for the turtles, I found them very muddy and tasteless.
For the foods that needed cooking we would always have a fire going, and these foods were cooked straight in the coals. The turtle would be cooked in its shell. The ducks would go straight on, feathers and all. By not gutting them, the meat would be juicy and tender. It was the same with the fish and the eels. Snakes, goannas and flying foxes had to be skinned, because if you didn't you got a horrible flavour through the meat. The echidnas were wrapped up in mud so that the spines and skin pulled away from the flesh once cooked. When it came to Jacky rats and the like however, a western cooking utensil was used. It was the camp oven (known as Dutch ovens in other countries).

These ovens were used extensively throughout the Australian bush then, and I never went anywhere without one. I still carry one everywhere I go today. The flavour imparted from using the ovens is awesome. There were many wonderful camp ovens in the station storage of all different sizes, age, and shape. There were big billy sets, and there were also *Bedourie* ovens, which were used for making cakes, bread, and scones. Sadly I think most of them where dumped when the station modernized.

The oven I treasure most, is one I pulled out of the *Gunnawarra* chook run, where it was being used as a water dish. It was rather rusty looking, and had a big crack up one side which I cast iron welded. I found a corresponding lid for it in the station dump. It is the old cast iron camp oven made by a foundry called *Metters,* that had foundries in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, and Sydney from 1891 through to 1974, when they sold out to *Email Limited,* and I think my grandfather bought the oven when he bought *Metters Comet Windmills* around the turn of the century (19^{th} - 20^{th}). The walls of the oven are very thin. It once had three legs about 3" long each. They must have cut them off, so the oven would fit in the packsaddles when they went out on mustering camp. Though I do not get the opportunity to sit around the campfires that much these days, I use the oven at home in my stove for specific dishes, and the food still tastes pretty good out of it.

These ovens where usually buried in a hole dug in the ground with hot coals top and bottom, in measured amounts. There is an inverted rim for the coal to sit in on the lid. It takes a bit of practice to know how much coal to use, when considering whether you want your food beautifully cooked, cooked to cinders, or uncooked. When on mustering camp this would be done in the morning before you went, and when you returned in the evening you would have a beautifully cooked meal…. most of the time anyway! We also cooked the dampers in them and that is another story.

Hector was head stockman on *Gunnawarra,* when Dad could not afford one for a period in the 1960s. He should have been head stockman permanently, but white men in those days would not work under an Aboriginal. I think my father had a huge respect for Hector, and was very grateful for when Hector helped him through the tough times of the 1960s.

Dad used to look after the money for the Aborigines who worked on the place in the days when they were under Government 'protection'. Their wages where managed by the local policemen in Mount Garnet. In 1966 Dad discovered that the local police Sgt. had embezzled about $15,000 of Hector's money. Dad was furious and got in contact with the Minister. Two detectives were sent up from Brisbane to investigate. In their investigation they also found the Government department responsible for Aboriginal affairs, had also misplaced $11,000.
To make matters worse, Hector did not get his money back nor did Sgt. get charged. Instead he was transferred to another area and given a slap on the wrist. It was disgusting.

In 1967 my Father took it on himself to help Hector, and offered to build him a home in Mount Garnet, as Hector still had enough money to do that. Dad organized for an architect and a builder. The local policeman organized for Hector to have his money. Hector, who used to be constantly hounded by his relations for money, decided to buy them a Holden utility each, with a promise they would not hound him for any more money.

For himself he bought an old secondhand long wheelbase, yellow Landover, with a capstan winch on the front. He was so proud of this purchase. In doing so he spent all his money, and when the day came for signing for the building of the house, Hector was nowhere to be found and I think my father must have been confused. However the reality is that Hector did not want a house. I think he knew it would not have lasted long, as all of his relatives would have moved in and turned it into firewood. This was quite common in those times. Also I think Hector felt much more at home camping under a gum tree.

I think my father's mistake was that he was dealing with someone who had grown up saying 'yes boss' to everything. When he had asked Hector if he had wanted a house he had said yes. It was not smart for an Aborigine to say 'no' in those times. Dad should have pushed him further to find out what he really wanted. Mind you, the mindset of my father's generation would not have let him do that either.

Hector had a way with snakes, and used to give me snakes for pets to take back to *St Barnabas Boarding School* at Ravenshoe, where I spent five miserable years. I found that having a snake crawling in and out of my shirt and down through the ink well of my school desk, had a tendency of keeping the teachers, who were mainly from England, from belting me over the ears. They would walk up behind you and smack you very hard over the ear. This was to give me major problems with my ears later on, but that is another story. All I can say is thank heavens Hector caught these snakes for me.

Hector had eyes that saw all in the bush, and could sit in the saddle and point out five or six snakes at any given time. I can remember him catching a green tree snake for me to look at. He rode up beside a tree, picked it off the trunk by the middle and it started striking at his face while he calmly stroked its back. Even though it was striking at his face it never bit him, and he knew that as long as he handled it gently it would not bite. It was not long before he had it calm and was handing it to me to hold. He told me to handle it gently and to put it back on the tree as soon as I had finished looking at it, as he said they died if they were handled too much.

Of course Hector would not pick up a poisonous snake like a Taipan or a Brown snake. You have to know what you are doing when handling snakes in the Australian bush, as there are many different ones and over 60% of them can be lethal. Still we used to have a lot of fun with the snakes as they were plentiful. Nothing unusual about finding a snake neatly tucked into your bed when calling it a night. Statistics showed that for every snake we saw at home, we had just stepped over a hundred.

Statistics also pointed out that 87% of snakebites were caused by people either catching or killing snakes. This really was saying that if you leave them alone they would generally leave you alone.

Alcohol was to become a bit of a curse for Hector, and I am sure that the local publicans in Mount Garnet had a big part to play in this. I can remember many occasions where I had to go to town to pick him up after he had a weekend off. He would have spent all his money (Dad used to give him a limited amount as he knew the publicans would be out to fleece him of every penny he had), and would have lost items like his swag, boots, and hat to the many parasites and thieves. He would be very drunk. I would pick him up and get him into the back of the Toyota for the twenty-mile trip home. When he got home he would head for his bed, and usually take two or three days to dry out.

On one such occasion I can remember him ending up passing out on the flat behind the homestead. Somehow he had managed to smuggle a bottle of rum past us and had got into in his room, and then got hungry. He had gone searching for food and had found a lump of corned brisket fat …a favourite food of the working men at the time. When we found Hector he was passed out on the ground in the open sun, with fat and flies all over his face. He was very heavy, and the jillaroo Pam Packer, the head stockman, Reg Webb and I, were the only ones around, so Reg got me to get the wheelbarrow. We put Hector in as gently as we could, and wheeled him the 300 hundred yards back to his quarters, and with much effort carried him up the stairs of the quarters to his bed.

Once we had him safely tucked away on his bed, Reg found the by now half full bottle of *Bundaberg Rum,* and took it down to my father in the homestead. Dad told him to hide it up in the saddle shed in the buggy, because he knew Hector's tracking abilities were too good just to leave it in a kitchen cupboard where he would easily find it (why they didn't pour the rum down the sink I will never know).

Hector awoke to find his bottle of rum missing, and the next day they found him drunk yet again. He had tracked down his bottle of rum…there were no flies on Hector…he was just too good. My father said that alcohol had not been an issue for the Aborigines prior to *World War II* in this area. The American troops plied them with drink through the war years, and once it started it never stopped…. very sad.

One day after he had retired, I started asking Hector questions about the Aboriginal history. My ignorance was obvious and he taught me as much as he could, for he had also been too busy to really know anything too much about his own people. We went on expeditions into the bush around *Kirrama* to *bora rings* (initiation grounds). He showed me the old camps along the Herbert Gorge, and along the edge of the rainforest. Here we found many artifacts, which Hector, took back for his grandchildren to see. He gave me a few grinding stones that I still keep with my small collection of other artifacts.

One day Hector rolled into my place with a present he said he had made me. I was in awe. It was a shield made from figwood from down on the Herbert River. He had decorated it in traditional coloured patterns, and where there was a small hole in the timber, he had painstakingly packed it with bees wax. The rough form would have been done with a tomahawk, and the smoothness would have been etched out with a piece of broken glass. I know this, because when I was younger I used to watch him and the others making hunting and ceremonial boomerangs in a similar manner, around the campfire at the back of the dark boy quarters at *Gunnawarra*.

It was the best present I can ever remember anyone ever giving me. I knew just how much effort and time he had put into making it. Hector who at this stage of his life was suffering from rheumatoid

arthritis, was having difficulty in getting about. I think it was his way of saying thankyou for taking an interest in his people and his culture.

In the mid 1990s whilst studying at Bathurst in NSW, Mum informed me that Hector had rolled into the fire outside his caravan and had been very badly burned, and was not expected to live. He died shortly afterwards. I decided on that day to see if I could not make a difference to the quality of life for his people. Hector died a lonely old man, as his family were too traumatized to be of any assistance, and had spent most of their time hounding him for money and favours. When that ran out they just abandoned him. He had a well-attended funeral, which many members of my family attended, and is buried in the Mount Garnet cemetery. Hector played such a big part in our lives.

Hector was a man who needed little, but he deserved a lot more respect than was passed his way. He had worked very hard for the main part of his life and had little to show for it. When he finally understood just how much he had been underpaid over the years, he was hurt and very angry…. I do not think it was so much the actual dollars, rather it was the fact that he had been undervalued as a person for his incredible skills, his dedicated and very hard work, and his total loyalty to those who had employed him through his working life…he deserved so much, much, more.

Breakfast

Black and cold I crawl,
Dazed to cook for the early mourn,
The Dawn service haunting us all,
With folds of darkness unfurling to gunfire,
The poignant digger's breakfast rolls out
Heads bowed and forlorn, the spark of Anzac
Lights the morning sky
The spirit now in sad memories
With feelings torn from Gallipoli to Afghanistan.

As we eat we remember the dead,
And those tortured by their shattered souls.
Welling tears consoled by slurping hot brews of rum and coffee
We dream of peace and reflect on those who survived
And with rosemary sprigs our senses are heightened
To the rows of medals lest we forget
Calling to all that join our throng
The conversation vigorous amongst mates of old and new
With the last of the buttered toast
A new beginning lights the year ahead
Till with sadness and reflection
And rubbing shoulders with our mates
We meet again.

BIM ATKINSON © 25 April 2010

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A blasting afternoon sun savagely engraves the nose, ears, and neck with scorching intensity. The vicious hot rays, slicing deep into the frying soul. The flat; white; glaring; salt encrusted; claypan, swirls mercilessly around and around through glazed cracked eyes, with mini mirages rippling at every glance. Lips parched and blistered, moan through hard spittle balls for moisture. The swollen tongue is traumatized by the onslaught. Drained, lethargic steps, staggering repetitively, towards the hazy, blistering treeline. A treeline appearing to move further and further away with every step. Confused thoughts seem a dream, as delirium washes and laps the shores of consciousness. The thud of the dragging steps constantly awakening, and preventing the ever-weakening will to slip down into the welcoming slope and the deep void of warm enticing sleep. Of dreams ever washing, washing… at last lying down, the pain now gone. Muffled sounds now silenced to bliss.

Enveloping ocean waves warmly lapping, hushed whispers of distant lilting conversation. Floating feelings of weightlessness wash around and around, as Helen glides along the beach toward me. The gentle breeze flustering her whisps of golden hair to a floating hover. As she draws closer her lithe proportions massage my delirious eyes. The crunching sounds of her every step sending exuberant tingles down my spine. As our eyes connect, her gentle smile ripples up her sparkling face in sensuous dimples.

"Steven… Steven… wake up! Steven…. wake up! Steven it's me Jenny". I felt myself being dragged from the abyss of dreamland, as I could hear the voice of my dearest companion my darling wife, calling me to an ever-loudening awareness. I could feel myself stirring, as the surrounding sounds became a reality. Jenny's tender voice reverberated its relief to me, as she realized I was now drowsily awake. I felt so very weak. Again Jenny's sweet voice came to me. "Steven, I was so worried about you. We have been searching for you for days now. Jack and Eric found you out at Lake Pedder. You are so lucky to be alive my darling. So, so lucky. Steven I was so scared".

"Where am I"? I heard myself hoarsely whisper through my numb tingling lips. The effort to speak sending stabbing jolts of pain into the back of my burning throat. I could hear the muffled whoosh of the overhead fan, as its gentle puffs of breeze tenderly massaged my flushed cheeks. "In the Bourke Clinic", said Jenny, as she mopped my forehead with a cool wet cloth, that sent flowing relief seemingly to the center of my being. I hazily attempted to clear my eyes so as I could open them properly. Jenny was a blur. I was feeling so safe and secure now that Jenny was there by my side, and in relaxing felt myself slipping away to oblivion.

A small sailing boat skimmed its way on its jagged course through the chopped waves, that painted their way to the horizon. Soft billowing clouds glided effortlessly across the crisp, pale, blue sky. A small boy trilled with gleeful laughter, as a little fluffy dog splashed into the shallow surf beside him. His mirth irradiated tinkling sprays of colour through the picturesque scene.

Helen stirred beside me, and I slowly glanced in her direction. Her shapely silhouette against the painted sky cast a shadow, relieving my eyes of the glare of the warm sun. As I turned toward her, Helen reached for the picnic basket. From it she removed a neatly folded checkered tablecloth and fluttered it out on to the beach above our heads in an even spread. She then adjusted the beach umbrella, so as to shade the food as well as us. Helen then pulled out an icy bottle of Chablis in a small ice bucket, and a dozen beautiful plump Tasmanian oysters also on a bed of ice. The clink of two sparkling wine glasses, and a basket of Blue Swimmer crab claws followed this. As if in slow motion I watched her every move, her fine lithe feminine fingers dancing in clinical precision as she laid out the feast.

Our emotions rode high as our chatter and laughter sang and bantered, with the slurp of delectable oysters and crab claws picked clean. As we played the sensuous romantic game of love the 'Nectar of the Gods' flowed, her sparkling green eyes locking mine in deep, exhilarating, and overpowering connection. With gay abandon we kissed and flirted, ending with such deep embrace. With Helen's fine, soft, lips enveloping my every sense, we floated as one through that timeless lazy afternoon, eventually our intense embracing passion dreamily passing us into blissful sleep and light hazy euphoric dreams.

I slowly stirred, as Jenny caringly snuggled closer to me on that crisp white-sheeted hospital bed. My awareness again raised by her soft loving voice. "Darling, oh Darling how do you feel? I am so happy that you have returned". I glanced across in time to catch the emotion-charged tears of joy, gently sliding down my love's gentle face. A face I knew so well with her bright blue eyes massaging the deepest feelings of my love for her. Jenny was everything to me.

We had now been married for nine years and were inseparable. We had a small wheat and barley property down on the Darling River, about one hundred and thirty kilometers south west of Bourke towards Wilcannia. The savage cruelty of the drought in recent years had clawed our financial security to threads, and in doing so had drawn us even closer together. We were a team and could imagine nothing else. I loved her so very, very much.

I was in hospital for two more days before Jenny was allowed to drive me home. On the way home I thought of the frightening experience I had been through, and how lucky I had been. I had driven across the lake to see if I could find any fence posts from the miraged treeline on the other side, not realizing how large the lake was. I almost fatally assumed that due to the big drought, that the lake was bone dry. When I hit the middle of the lake, the four-wheel drive had bogged to its axles. I was totally unprepared, having not even topped up the water bottle I usually carried everywhere with me. As it was an 'off the cuff' decision to check out those trees, I knew Jenny would not have any idea that I was in that part of the property.

I had spent three or four hours trying to dig myself out of trouble and was totally exhausted, when I decided to walk to the tree line. I went that way because I knew my neighbour's homestead was only about ten or twelve kilometers past the treeline. Jack and Eric were two brothers who ran that property and were good friends of ours.

When I did not arrive home that night, Jenny had rung around to find out if anyone had seen me, and it was after that, that the search had started. They scoured the countryside for all the next day, finding me on the following afternoon. I was laid out in the scorching sun, only a few hundred meters from the treeline. Another night and day I probably would not have made it. It sent a shudder up my spine at the thought of the consequences, not only for me, but also for Jenny.

As we drove up to the house we could see a car parked at the front gate, indicating we had a visitor. In that moment Jenny told me we had an old chum of hers, who had come up from Sydney to give us a visit. In all the disruption of the last few days she had forgotten to tell me. Jenny told me it was a friend she hadn't seen since her school days. On arriving at the gate Jenny got out of the car and ran inside to greet her friend, whilst I unloaded the car.

As I got to the gate with the luggage, Jenny and her friend came out of the house and up the garden path. As she drew closer, her shiny golden hair and attractive dimples on her face exuded excitement to my senses. As she drew closer I noted her stunning green eyes and felt a tingle up the back of my neck. Jenny said, "Darling I would like to introduce you to an old school chum of mine. Steven meet Helen"!