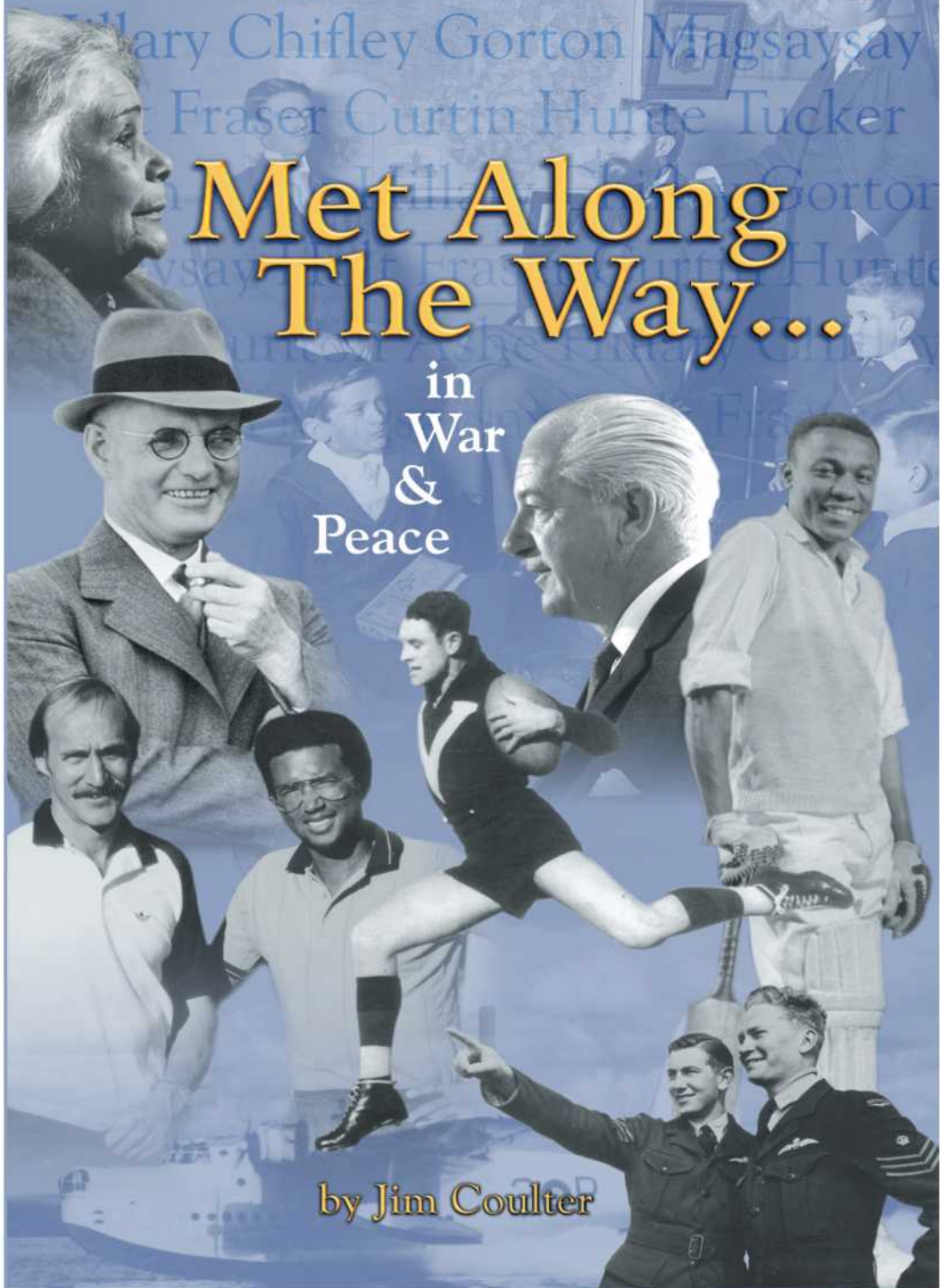


Curtin Hunte Tucker Bunton Ashe  
Hillary Chifley Gorton Magsaysay

# Met Along The Way...

in  
War  
&  
Peace



by Jim Coulter

Met Along  
The Way...



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*To Rita:*

*For the joy of sharing a life where  
we met so many rare souls  
along the way – and the best is yet to be.*

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For the foreword my thanks go to Martin Flanagan, whose writings in *The Age* and in his books so capture the inner values of our land. He was the one person I thought who might be able to make something of “the bag of liquorice all-sorts” manuscript I gave him – at a time when he was in full flight getting out his latest book, *The Game in Time of War*.

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Finally this book could never have been written without the insightful contributions of a family, very honest, but in a nice way. Especial gratitude to our sons Phil and Gordon for their wise counsel and friendship over the years.

## Foreword

Jim Coulter credits me with being partly responsible for him writing this book. We have met only twice, but on the first occasion he told me of his connection with former Fitzroy champion Haydn Bunton and I told him he was a story-teller. Little over a year later, a manuscript arrived at my place telling of a lifetime of such connections with people, both great and famous, whom it has been his lot to intersect with.

Nevertheless, the most interesting person in this book is Jim Coulter and I wish he had written about him more. In effect, the book is a collection of fragments but through them one sees the progress of a modest man who took on moral precepts of the highest order in his youth and then sought to apply them over fifty years of living in the belief that we cannot expect to change the world if we cannot first change ourselves. Frankly, how he succeeded in doing so is beyond me but the evidence of the book is that he did. The result is a person who belies Thoreau's dictum that most men lead lives of quiet desperation and a book that speaks modestly of the place of hope in an uncertain and dangerous world.

*Martin Flanagan*  
*Melbourne*  
*July 2003*

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## **A Prompt From The Past**

On my desk is a photo of the school football team taken in 1940 during our final year at Perth Modern School. There were probably scores of such photos taken across Australia that year. The photo has a special significance for me because four of those ever-so-alive looking teammates of mine did not return from World War II. And there were probably similar losses across the country.

A few years ago my wife, Rita, and I were at the war cemetery at Adelaide River, NT. We found the grave of one of those ex-schoolmates, Flying Officer Ian Ingle, who died as a pilot in the defence of Darwin. "Died aged 21" were the final words on the tombstone. I suppose if I had thought about it I would have realised that he had been about that age. But the finality of that inscription underlined my own good fortune as a survivor – and with it a sense of responsibility towards all those who did not return.

It gave me a certain impetus to write. I was conscious of all those whose life and voice were cut short by the war. And also all those who are now around the age Ian had reached. Perhaps the decisions we had to make were too stark, while today the choices are so varied that it can seem all too confusing.

I wish I had the inner certainty of St Augustine who stated: "I am the sort of man who writes because he has made progress; and makes progress by writing." Personally I can't be sure of my progress, but I am certain that the sacrifice of so many in this my country has not been in vain. While the youth of today are not meant to be judged by yesterday's standards, they often seem to have a touching fascination with the best of what was.

They are generous in their appreciation of past generations. I hope that in what is written here there may be some encouragement for them for all their new tomorrows.

## Chapter 1

### **A Fresh Start**

*“... they did not want me up there”*

“What am I doing here? I don’t drink, I don’t smoke and I play tennis regularly!” I heard myself saying this rather aggressively to the head nurse on the Cardiac Intensive Care ward. Her reply: “You are talking to me. The others have croaked before they got here!”

Well that was a clear cut answer.

A few years down the track when I was getting ready for a stress test my specialist told Mary (the young assistant whom I had not met before): “Jim had a cardiac arrest and we had to do three angioplasties before one of them stuck.”

He went on: “Jim, tell Mary about your out-of-body experience.”

With this encouragement I told what I had experienced during the 17 seconds I was clinically dead. I was in a brightly coloured room with a group of people I had never seen before but felt very much at home with. Then it was made clear to me that I was to go to the most important meeting of my life. When I went through the door there was a sweep of steps that curved away into the distance. And at the bottom of the stairs was what I could only describe as a presence. Shining up through the stairs were shafts of light. I was half way down them and looking forward to the meeting when people began to distract me and to my irritation someone took me by the hand and led me away, with me reacting “don’t they know how important this meeting is?”

Next I was confronted by three people with green masks assuring me, “You are alright now. You are back with us. You are perfectly safe now!”

My reaction was “this is an operating theatre, what am I doing here?” The place I had come from was much more real.

At this point, turning to Mary, my specialist mischievously made the point, “You will note in Jim’s case the stairs were going down!”

I responded: “The basic point is they did not want me up there and the trick for me is to find what God means me to be doing down here – and it’s exactly the same for you!”

Perhaps the predominant emotion on knowing you have almost died is to count your blessings. It was for me starting with my wife at my bedside, with the prospect of going forward hand in hand to fresh enjoyments and adventures.

Highlights of my life came to mind – including memorable people and events. And it is my hope that you too may enjoy getting acquainted with them through the stories that follow including aircraft crashes, sportsmen, prime ministers and Gran’s chooks.

## Chapter 2

### **A Good Innings**

*“We had 17 wonderful years together”*

My mother died aged 39 in Perth, 1930. I was eight years old.

My father’s mother had also died aged 39 in Lismore, NSW in 1892 when he was eight years old.

It was only in later years that I realised it seemed strange that my father and I had been exactly the same age when our mothers had died, and that our mothers should share the same life span.

Dad and I had never discussed this which perhaps is a sign of the reticence customary in earlier days.

Our flat overlooked the Swan River and family walks along the river bank were a feature of Sundays. The only hint of any weakness in Mum was that Dad used to rest his hand on her back whenever we came to an incline.

I was told that Mum “had pleurisy and pneumonia and when the crisis came she did not make it”. I suppose pre-antibiotics that was not an uncommon outcome. It has been a mystery to me that I did not seem to have the right emotions. I felt guilty that I was not grieving like my brother John. In later life I realised that he was seven years older. But my lack of feelings and paucity of memories about my mother is a gap I have often pondered.

The abiding memory is a conversation I had with Dad. Perhaps he was trying to make sense of it for me – perhaps for

himself. But what he said from his heart was: “We had seventeen wonderful years together. We had a good innings.”

From that moment on I was left with an inner assurance that it is not the length of time you have but the quality of that time. While there was no obvious spirituality in our family life then, even at that young age I had a sense that Dad’s comment about Mum’s passing had something special about it.

## Chapter 3

### Relative Hunting

*“...found enough gold to buy two farms”*

“With a name like yours you’re Protestant, not Catholic, Scots, not Irish and your family came here in very unfortunate circumstances. And while I don’t hold it against you, there’s some as would!” This was my welcome in 1966 to Donegal, Ireland, by a local journalist who had heard I was “relative hunting”. My grandfather had set sail from Ireland nearly 100 years before.

It turned out that “the Troubles” which had spanned centuries had destroyed most of the records. The vital link was a photo of the family home which my grandfather had brought with him to Australia. Locals recognised it as the original “Coulter home” which had been copied around the Ballyshannon area. Sadly my grandfather’s family home had been wrecked but I was able to stand in the ruins of the home of my forebears.

The impetuous streak in our family is blamed on my grandfather. The youngest of many sons, he came to New Zealand looking for gold and drew a blank. Then on to New South Wales where he set out with a party heading for “a strike” about 200 miles north west of Sydney.

They came to a large marsh, said to be infested with snakes. While most chose the long way around grandfather and a German companion, headed straight across the marsh. Our family story has it that this piece of derring-do meant that he got a digging rich in gold at a place to be known as Gulgong.

Around this time Cobb and Co. started bringing the mail. One day when Grandad went for his mail, the name McCrea was called out. He instantly recognised the pretty young woman who went out to collect her family's mail. She was the daughter of neighbours back in Donegal who had recently emigrated. Even though she was still a schoolgirl when he left Ireland he had remembered her over the years.

The records show they were the 27th couple to be married in Gulgong in 1872. Grandad found enough gold to buy two farms – one for themselves and one for his in-laws. The farms were outside Inverell. Before long they were in the grip of drought. There was not enough water for both farms so Grandad left his holding to his father-in-law and headed cross country to Lismore where he opened up a store. To get there by wagon was a trek of a couple of hundred miles including mountain trails across the Great Dividing Range which made for hard going for the horses. Listening to my Dad dramatise the scene and you were there as those gallant beasts strained every fibre to get the wagon up and over the crest. “Up Daisy, Up Dolly, Up Beauty, Up Bess!” would ring out round our suburban “Sunday lunch” table as Dad took us back over that fearsome pass. It sounded a bit like the charge of the Light Brigade. Ironically flood was next on the list with Lismore's biggest flood in recorded history washing the store and stock away.

Grandma and Grandad had five sons and as I recounted Grandma was only 39 years old when she died of pneumonia. My father had often spoken of his mother and it was quite touching to find her grave in Lismore's “Veterans' Cemetery”. It somehow shrank the years separating the generations. The inscription on the tombstone was just legible. It read: “To live is Christ; To die is gain.”



*My Dad, with book, and his father and four brothers. They look composed but they have been driven off a farm by drought, been washed out of their store and home by flood and my Grandad had just lost his wife, aged 39. This photo was taken on the eve of their leaving Lismore, NSW, to make a new start in Western Australia. (Circa 1893)*

She was the spiritual inspiration in the family and the local paper in 1892 ran a long story on how before dying she had a vision of the welcome awaiting her aloft. Granddad, described by Dad as “a wild Irishman”, apparently felt he had a little distance to make up. From then on he made sure that he and all the boys went to church twice every Sunday.

Perhaps it was a combination of the flood and Grandma’s death that decided him to chance his arm again. So the Coulters decided to set out for the new found goldfields at Kalgoorlie in Western Australia. Before they launched out there was a family picture taken. There is Granddad with a long black beard, flanked by his five sons aged from about 8 to 16 years-old, formally posing in front of a big map of Australia.

After a series of journeys in five different ships the Coulters arrived in Perth. They had just enough money to rent a room in a cellar, but not long after they all went down with typhoid fever which was sweeping the colony. Kindly neighbours kept them alive with soup.

Grandad never made it to the diggings in Kalgoorlie. He just seemed to run out of puff so it was up to the boys to make a go of it on their own. My father managed to get a job as a delivery boy for McLean Brothers and Rigg, the big hardware people of the day and went on to become assistant to the manager. But perhaps the pioneering streak in him was too strong. He left to become one of those who launched motion pictures in Western Australia. It started as a hobby, but then became a job that took him nation-wide and remained a life-long passion.

## Chapter 4

### Dear Dad

... *permission to use gelignite*

According to an article on the history of the “movies” in Western Australia “A community minded chap, Jack Coulter, attempted to take the movies to the masses in October 1900. He tried to screen films from his hotel room onto the side of the old Taxation Office. In spite of the appreciation of the public, his efforts were frowned on by the constabulary when flickering lights frightened passing horses”. It goes on to record how “magical moving pictures” first came to Perth during the Gold Rush of the 1890’s.

It was 1907 when Dad left the hardware business to launch out full-time into the entertainment industry. By the time of my birth in 1922 he had moved on to the Palladium Theatre in Perth. After a period of managing theatres for Greater Union in Sydney and Newcastle, Dad returned to Perth in 1929 to open up the Capitol Theatre, which to use a current phrase was “state of the art” – latest sound system, deepest carpet, finest marble and the biggest crystal chandelier in Australia.

Dad would assure the patrons: “Every seat in the house is a good seat!” And when pressed for an opinion about a film that I thought was indefensible I was surprised to hear Dad assure the lady: “Well they are paying good money to see it!”

My brother, John, and I were journalists on Perth’s two dailies –he on the afternoon paper, the *Daily News* and me on the morning paper, *The West Australian*. One fine day it happened that we were each assigned to review one of Dad’s films. It was

a “lemon” and while we tried to be gentle, this was clear from what we wrote. Next morning at breakfast Dad was in tragedy mode: “I spent my money educating my sons and now they are stealing the bread out of my mouth.” We took refuge in the fact we had both got scholarships and Dad was eating a bit better than bread!

On one occasion Dad hired an “escapologist” who claimed to be a successor to “the Great Houdini”. He was duly suspended from a flag pole hanging out over William Street in front of the theatre in a straitjacket and chains. After a few jiggles, wriggles and grunts he was free. It was announced this was nothing compared to the feats that would be performed in the theatre in a few days. Over the weekend our Sunday lunch was interrupted by a phone call from the escape artist. It transpired that his contract allowed him to saw through the stage floor. This he had done but was shocked to find that underneath was reinforced concrete a foot thick. He wanted Dad to ring the police and get permission to use gelignite to blast a hole in the concrete.

Dad agreed and muted explosions were heard. We had free seats for the opening night and I dearly wanted to tell all my friends I knew how the disappearing tricks were done. But the performer had the last laugh on me. Despite knowing there was a big hole in the stage there was no way



*Dear Dad – a pioneer  
of motion pictures.*

that I could understand how the young lady “assistant” escaped the knives, saws etc.

Dad had always claimed that if there was ever a hold-up he would not be a hero. One rain-swept night a man came into his office at The Plaza Theatre in a wet raincoat and with a slouch hat pulled down over his brow. In his hand was a gun and it was not long before he was out on Hay Street with the night’s takings. He was captured shortly after and at the Court hearing the detective told how the man had come into my father’s office and said: “Give me the money or I’ll shoot you.” My father asked to take the stand again and simply said: “He did not say a word. I had long ago decided if anyone held me up I would let them have the money.”

Dad would tell how three years later, again late in the evening, the same man in the same hat and coat came into his office. The man came straight to the point. “I told the boys in Fremantle Gaol that the first thing I am going to do when I get out is to thank that theatre manager. You saved me an extra three years’ time by giving evidence that I did not verbally threaten you while having a gun.” As Dad would have it: “I was not terribly scared the first time. I certainly was the second!”

As I left Western Australia to start my spiritual adventures my dear Dad said he regretted that he did not have money with which to help me. But with a slight smile and a twinkle in the eye he said: “Remember a labourer is worthy of his hire; and thou shalt not muzzle the oxen that treadeth the corn.” Unknown to me Dad, who had brought me up as a pagan, had earlier in his life been the superintendent of a Methodist Sunday School and knew the Bible better than I did!

## Chapter 5

### **“Depression” Follows War**

*“...thank God in those hard days  
he had a heart”*

Looking back on the Depression years you can sense a link with the bloodiest war in history. Every Anzac Day the serried ranks of “returned servicemen” marched in their thousands through cheering throngs in Perth’s streets. They filled the Esplanade, first with their silent ranks and then with a poignant rendering of *The Recessional*. I remember viewing it all from the balcony of my father’s Capitol Theatre. It was 1931. I was eight years old and I can still see those marching men parading down St George’s Terrace. I realise now they were 30 to 40 years old and a great many of them were without a job despite the oft-quoted World War I aim of “creating a world fit for heroes”!

I was sheltered from the real cost of the Depression with Dad being a theatre manager. The picture business did well because people turned to the “flicks” to keep their minds off the realities. But when he was about to hire usherettes for the newly constructed Capitol Theatre in 1929 he decided to break fresh ground and hire ushers instead so that men, the “breadwinners” of those days, could have the jobs.

He got to the theatre at 8am. Already the queue of job applicants, three-deep, circled the block. The main theatre had not yet had the seats put in and Dad had put a big table down one end and the men came in from the street and circled round the wall as they waited to be interviewed. Dad told them that every one of them would have the same chance

and they all would be properly interviewed. I think it was almost 8pm before Dad finished. He had about 30 jobs to offer those many hundreds.

Most of those chosen were strikingly trim and dignified in the tailored uniforms Dad had had specially made. There was one exception. Charlie had had an accident on the trans-Australian railway and missed his footing going down between two carriages. He was left with a permanent limp and was "one wing down" across the shoulders. But no one wore his usher's uniform more proudly. No one could have worked harder. My Dad was not a softie, but thank God in those hard days he had a heart.

## Chapter 6

### **The School Bully**

*... his shock that he had produced a coward*

Perhaps the Depression had something to do with it. I can see from school photos that I was grossly over-dressed. Dad had a good paying job and a high proportion of my schoolmates had Dads without a job. In those days I was thought of as “precocious”. Nowadays “smart-ass” would be more appropriate. So it was that at North Perth State School I had few friends and Dad sensing this encouraged me to use “a pass” to bring a classmate to the theatre.

A week later disaster struck. It was in the form of the school bully deciding “my moment had come”. He was about to demonstrate what this meant, enthusiastically egged on by about 20 wild-eyed supporters who hemmed us in a circle. I found myself whispering to him: “I will get you a couple of free passes to my Dad’s theatre.” The effect was dramatic. He lost his enthusiasm for “knocking my block off” and the patrons were very upset that their blood sport had been called off.

Oh, but the day of reckoning took another form. My Dad was a shrewd student of human nature and spotted I was spinning a furphy. When he got the real story I could see his shock that he had produced a coward. He handed over the “passes” but insisted that I took six months of boxing lessons under a coach known as “Deaso”. I can still hear the mantra: “One, two and three, now lead with the left and now a LEFT and a RIGHT!”

But that incident became the thing about which I was most ashamed. It became the spur to the aggressive side of my

nature. My tongue became more spiteful, and I took up football, which I had not played before. I was a “loud mouth” and was always calling for the ball and was determined never to shirk the issue. It may also have led me to high diving. I won the open high dive at Perth Modern School at fourteen competing against boys 3-4 years older.

One day I challenged a fellow student to a fight in the school gymnasium because he would not apologise for causing me to crash my bike. It was the only such organised contest in the school, refereed by a master. It went three rounds and my friends thought I had done well. But it did nothing about “the monkey on my back”. The hidden disgrace of bribing my way out of the earlier confrontation with the school bully remained.

It was only years later when I finally talked about it with a friend that I found myself in tears. I was astonished how deeply ashamed I still was, and realised what a determining factor in my make up it had become. Even after that releasing honesty I still had to guard against the tendency never to back out of a fight. I had to realise that present aggression wasn't the antidote to past cowardice.

## Chapter 7

### **Gran's Chooks**

*... a striking figure, full-breasted into the wind*

They were different countries. The one I left to go to the war and the one that I came back to. For one thing there seemed to be so many more “characters” in pre-war Australia. “One-offs” clear cut in their beliefs and most certainly not politically correct.

My Gran on my mother’s side was such a character. She was born in the Channel Islands where her father was a minister. Of independent cast of mind she took on her father and the Almighty. She told me how having doubted the Biblical claim: “the very hairs of your head are numbered” she would comb her hair vigorously, then look aloft and defiantly demand, “NOW tell me the number!”

Later in life she disagreed with her father on a more fundamental issue. She was attracted to a British army officer and her father disapproved. She was 19 when they married and travelled out to Queensland where he was supposed to manage a brewery. He seemed to like the product more than the job and so they kept moving. They finished up in Perth, by this time with four children, the only daughter being Audrey, my mother to be.

One day he suddenly departed, not before sending Audrey in to a neighbour to borrow “for her mother” a five pound note – a considerable sum in those days. He was never seen again and I grew up with the theory he went off to the Boer War. So Gran started behind scratch with the replacement of that £5 being



*It was Gran's skill as a dressmaker that fed her four children.  
Gran and my mother and her brothers Trevelyn, William and Cecil, left to right.  
(Circa 1905)*

her first commitment. She had been brought up in a somewhat refined setting. But she could sew so she set about making dresses.

Years later I remember her as a striking figure, full-breasted into the wind with a towering hat like a topsail and a feather reaching sky-ward like a pennant. She had style. Her customers must have thought so for she finished up owning “Iron King”, a double storey house facing onto Perth’s Swan River.

With the help of daughter Audrey she ran a boarding house that reflected her character and standards. Dad was one of her “guests”. He obviously had enough flair to capture Audrey’s heart. After their marriage they lived with Gran and her other “guests” and my earliest memories centre around her establishment.

Gran seemed to attract characters. One of those “guests” was a Miss Flora Lewis, short, tubby, a keen gardener who every day rode her bike down Adelaide Terrace to her public service job. My Dad claimed she rode in the centre of the road both ways – “because she was convinced that was the smoothest part of the road”. Miss Grace Sweeney was by comparison, huge. She sang and was into the arts. I was told she was Catholic and Miss Lewis was Jewish. In those days that was enough to explain why they didn’t hit it off.

Gran kept chooks which she sometimes asked me to feed. I can still remember the smell of the bran mash, the grittiness of the crushed sea shells, the dusty smoothness of the wheat and the piles of vegetable scraps that had to be thrown to chooks. I got bored one day and started chasing them around. I was a bit over four and perhaps liked the role-reversal of being bigger than them. But I can still hear Gran thundering: “How would you like a lion to chase you around like that!”

Later in life I had been fixed by Gran's sharp eyes as she probed: "You haven't got God, have you?" It seemed akin to cancer.

Gran went on: "You know how much your mother hated scenes. Well every Saturday morning I sent her to get the family's meat. She loathed having to take it back, so all the way to the butcher's shop she would repeat: "Please God may the meat be right. Please God may the meat be right."

Then, as one producing irrefutable evidence of God's untrustworthiness, my Gran said: "And you know that meat never *was* right!"

## Chapter 8

### **Rose Was Beautiful**

*A relationship so implacable you despair...*

Rose was beautiful indeed. She was young; and she appeared on the scene not all that long after Mum had died. Perhaps I first met her on a picnic. We had an “Overland Tourer” and Dad had all the gear for picnics and was good at them.

Then I realised Dad used to visit Rose at a small house – quite near my primary school in Thomas Street. Soon after that the unsettling questions began, first by my Gran and then others. I was only nine or 10 but I can still remember thinking how sneaky it was to ask me questions about my Dad and his “friend”. Doubtless that I could have developed into an accomplished liar anyway, these probings by prying adults encouraged my skills early. It made me determined never to be tempted to take advantage of kids to try and wheedle information out of them!

It was only after Dad and Rose married that I subconsciously regarded her as a competitor for Dad’s affection – and of course Rose felt the same. In no time misgivings had given way to resentment, then enmity. The passions on both side were palpable. Most of us have experienced a relationship so implacable you despair of anything changing it. I was so desperate that even though I was not a believer I decided to see if God could do something about Rose and me.

My spiritual experience had started at a bush camp held at Easter, 1940, near Mundaring Weir outside of Perth. A group of high school students, several of whom I knew from the football

field or parties, spoke of the change that MRA (Moral Re-Armament) had brought to their lives.

“Where on earth did you get these standards? I’m living the opposite to all of them”. This declaration by me was provoked by hearing that they were trying to live “Absolute honesty, purity, love and unselfishness”. When the man chairing the meeting replied that they actually came from “the Sermon on the Mount” I asked him in which church on Mount Street was the sermon given? (there being a Mount Street in my home city of Perth).

“It was in fact given abroad – quite a long time ago” was the kindly response. He added it was now in print and could be found in the Bible! This led me to look up Matthew 5, 6 and 7. But I only read as far as “and if you look at a woman to lust after her you have already committed the act in your heart”. That was enough; that’s what I thought was meant by absolute purity!

Once asked if I hated my stepmother my evasive reply was that I just felt sorry for her. The reality was quite different. I had a very cruel tongue and on one occasion had really provoked her. She did not have the words with which to reply and finished up hitting me over the head with a vase. The deeper hurt was that I was so frightened that I had dirtied my underpants. My pride was



*Rose when she first came on the scene.*

lacerated. From that flowed a hate that I did not acknowledge because I was embarrassed by its source.

When I met these new friends who seemed convinced that God could change human nature I had said to them: "Change my stepmother and I will be interested." Their reply was: "We didn't meet her, we met you. If you start with yourself the result may be a miracle including your stepmother."

The possibility caught my imagination. I found myself murmuring "God, if there is a God, could you tell me what to do?" I got up earlier in the morning with a piece of paper ready to note down any thoughts that might come. I was dissatisfied with the experiment, but tried again the next morning. Just three words came to my mind and they happened to be the same words I had dismissed the first morning. On the third morning I thought I had better at least write them down mainly to get them out of the way.

Then my MRA friend rang and asked what thoughts God had given me. "None", was my reply. He gently suggested: "Or do you mean none that you think came from God?" I conceded that could be the case and he quietly added: "Well you will never know unless you put them into practice."

The three small words were: "Make your bed."

So I did this for the next few days and was surprised when my Dad said: "Your stepmother wants to know if you have been making your bed because of your new MRA ideas? If so she doesn't care what it's called she wants to know more about it."

Some months before I had said to Rose: "If you are supposed to be my mother I wish you would occasionally cook a decent meal and do something about the state of the home including my room!"

I had forgotten this interchange because we had lots of them. She, however, had not and my doing something that indicated a change of heart had us talking together in an open-hearted way for the first time in years. Rose began to seek God's direction for her life and later it was she who helped my father to a faith.

## Chapter 9

### **Haydn Bunton – “Best and Fairest”**

*“we know how to kick you so  
you never walk again...”*

Haydn Bunton was the only player to win the Brownlow Medal three times as the “best and fairest” player of Australian Rules football in Victoria and then go on to win the Sandover Medal, Western Australia’s best and fairest award three times. He had the perfectly proportioned physique of a Greek god, and looks to match. Brought over to Western Australia in the hope that as captain coach of the Subiaco Football Club he could win them a premiership. In those days all footballers had jobs and my Dad was training Bunton to become a theatre manager. Bunton thought he could return the favour by inviting me to train with his league team.

I was a skinny 17-year-old and I can remember the first night training at Subiaco Oval when a shrill-voiced schoolboy protested: “What’s he doing out there? I can kick a ball further than him!” Bunton was an elite player who had no comprehension that most players did not have half his skills. He thought if you tried you succeeded. Bless him, he told my father that I could easily play league football because I was such a trier. I was realistic enough to know that I did not have the gifts to back up the trying. Perhaps it was his inability to appreciate that “not all geese are swans” that meant he was not a success as a coach.

Subiaco Football Club had also secured the services of high-flying Les Hardeman from Geelong and Clarrie O’Shea from



*Haydn Bunton with the style that won him three  
“Brownlows” in Victoria and three “Sandovers” in WA.*

Photo: Fitzroy Football Club

Carlton who was able to regularly slot his left foot drop kicks through the goals from 60 yards out. They were a trio of Melbourne Cup thoroughbreds who made most of their new teammates look like draught horses. Of course the locals sometimes resented their class. Haydn told me how he was playing in a pre-season game in a country town. The big ruck man of the opposing team aimed a vicious kick at Bunton's leg which he narrowly evaded. He grabbed the ruck man by his jumper and said: "Where I come from we know how to kick people so they never walk again!" "Of course it wasn't true", Haydn told me, adding, "but I never saw that ruck man again!"

What marked him as a player was his perfect balance which he never seemed to lose even when the going got tough. He always appeared unhurried and had that extra bit of time to find a team-mate with his passes – off either foot. While not overly tall he had the timing to throw himself back into a pack and move it enough to take an uncontested mark.

He and I liked to go swimming at Crawley Baths on the Swan River. We spent a good deal of time yarning and improving our tan. One day I told him how I had decided to try and find God's plan for my life. I wondered if he would be embarrassed or even make fun of me. I can remember him propping himself up on his elbow and looking straight into my eyes as he said: "You're a lucky young fella. I wish I had found something like that when I was your age. When I came down from the country to Fitzroy as a young player what I found was that the beer and the girls were freely available." His whole-hearted encouragement was a real lift to me. It also indicated that all the accolades that had come his way had not warped his judgment of what really mattered in life.

## Chapter 10

### **Romance of My Life**

*A rollercoaster ride more risky  
than we had envisaged...*

As I admired the figure Rita Allen cut on the tennis court at Perth Modern School in 1938, little did I think that we would be playing together for some sixty years. My first priority was to find a way of getting to know her as Perth Modern School was co-educational without being “co-mingling”. So the school picnic at the end of the year when we went on a cruise to Garden Island was my big opportunity. However before that time came around I found myself in the next row to Rita in a public exam. During the exam I noticed that she had dropped her eraser so I picked it up. But she motioned for me not to return it in case those overseeing the exam might think we were trying to cheat. Though with her going on to become Head Girl only I would have benefited from any sharing of knowledge!

So I had kept the eraser thinking that by returning it at some later time I could make my mark with a young lady who was fancied by quite a few others. As happens with the best schemes, on the eve of the picnic I found I had lost the eraser. Not being too scrupulous I bought another that looked similar and got a mutual friend to introduce me so I could return it. My, how courtly we were in those days.

Then surprise, surprise I found she lived in the next street to me. So, later when on my bike, I intentionally dropped my hanky so I could go back to where I saw her standing on the corner. Another conversation ensued. I also found out she was

playing tennis with a group of friends so I managed to get myself invited even though tennis wasn't my game. Next move was to wangle a holiday job in one of Perth's big department stores after I discovered Rita was working there.

Our jobs wound up on Christmas Eve so I asked Rita if she would like to walk with me down to my Grandmother's so I could give Gran my Christmas gift. (Gran had told me that at her age all she wanted was a toothbrush, so I had taken her literally!) In the event Rita and I got talking, sitting on the river bank looking across the Swan River until it became obvious that it was too late to visit Gran. But when we went to catch our tram we found the last one – “the rattler” – had gone, so we had to walk the five miles home. It was after midnight and we were less than half way home when Rita saw her father's car proceeding rather briskly into the city. We were shaken. It seemed likely that our relationship which had hardly got started would be embargoed.

Coward that I was, I cannot tell you how relieved I was that Rita said she felt she should deal with her parents alone. So I sneaked off home where Dad asked from his room what time it was and got the reply: “Quite late”. But I did not sleep well. Rita told me the next day that her father was not at home when she went in, only her slightly worried mother. But before Rita had started to explain things her mother told her that her father, an electrician, had got an emergency call that had taken him to the city!

After this incident I was emboldened to ask Rita to my Dad's movies but I felt that I had to explain to her that I did not feel like holding her hand – or any of that sort of stuff! It drew a sharp response from her along the lines of did I think she would welcome it? But I was amazed how quickly our feelings changed. It was not long before these fine sentiments gave way

to grand passions with neither of us giving a backward glance to our original “policy” statements.

So we were 16 when it all started. Dancing lessons at Perth Modern School were one of its more daring innovations. Certainly they were very helpful in bringing us closer together in every way! It was all pretty normal, although I think we were beginning to feel that we were on a roller coaster ride that was a bit more risky than we had envisaged. As time went on Rita became less happy, then rather moody and introverted. She worried that “we were going too far.” I assured her that we were much more modest in our demands than others and that her troubled conscience was based on Victorian standards of morality that were no longer valid.

As Rita’s self confidence fell away she began to doubt whether she actually had what it took to be a teacher, which she had always planned to be. Even reading aloud in class became a nightmare as fear took over. I began to read books on psychology to try and explain away all her doubts. Then one day walking down Perth’s St. George’s Terrace I had a thought from the blue: “Rita’s fear comes from your lust.”

It was almost as if someone had spoken the words. I had never had a thought like it. I quite clinically weighed what was involved. Rita’s fears were very real to me and I had been very



*Rita – the photo I took  
with me to the war.*

concerned about them. Deep down I knew she wasn't the same free-spirited girl as when we first started "going out together" some two years before. On the other point about "lust" I decided that I only had an average amount and I was like anyone else. I guess I dismissed it as an unalterable fact of life.

It was two months after this that I had first encountered MRA and heard about their quite revolutionary aim of seeking to live by absolute moral standards. "Absolute Purity" seemed to jump out in capital letters. My mind immediately went back to the disturbing thought about the link between Rita's fear and my lust. I began to entertain the hope that I could change. By this time I knew that I loved Rita deeply and was prepared to seek a fundamental shift in my way of living if it would help her.

I had no idea of the adventures that lay ahead for both of us.

## Chapter 11

### War and Peace

*The Doves of Peace failed to be  
banished by the Dogs of War...*

Fear has many faces and war brings fear into sharp focus. My greatest secret fear was that in an extreme crisis some weakness of character would be starkly exposed causing me to let others down. Fear of some grave injury such as being badly burnt was greater than that of death itself.

It has been said: “never interrupt someone in the act of war or sex”, that once you are committed to these acts of passion the moment for cool reason has passed. For me it was different. Being involved in the war did not stifle debate, it focussed it. There was a quickening of conscience rather than a stifling.

The challenges of Christianity and war had arrived at the same time. It was 1940 and I was just coming up to 18 years of age. The war had started the previous year. It was our final year at school. Yet most of the boys were not thinking about their future careers but the more immediate issue of what form of war service would be theirs. I do not remember any sense of us being noble. Perhaps there was an acceptance of the inevitability that every 20 years there would be such a war. No great excitement in the atmosphere, more an acknowledgement of what was a given.

However I was keen to follow my brother John into journalism so I pursued the opportunity I was given to get training on *The West Australian*, Perth’s morning paper. This meant that many nights a week I worked at the paper until

past midnight, despite the risk of failing my Leaving exam. This annoyed my headmaster and he was surprised when I managed to pass – so was I!

I had become a “cadet journalist” and was rather unhappy to be assigned at one point to cover a special court for conscientious objectors because some coming before it had been my school mates the previous year. It made me uncomfortable because it focussed the debate going on in my own heart.

I remember well the explosion that was provoked when I told Dad I was seriously wondering if I should declare myself a pacifist. “Was it right for a Christian to kill people?” was the question that kept recurring. The vigour of Dad’s reaction caught me by surprise as his views on most topics were so liberal. Finally I felt that if I could not get clear about being a pacifist I should face the alternative. So I decided to enlist in the RAAF with the idea of becoming a pilot. It was my hope that I would become wholehearted once I committed myself. But strangely all through my training the doves of peace failed to be banished by the dogs of war.

Bayonet practice was very confronting. But the later bombing and gunnery exercises came to be regarded more as tests of skill than specifically designed to make you a more efficient killing machine. You were working so hard to master new skills that you were more concerned about how you were doing compared with the other trainees rather than focussing on the end game.

My spiritual convictions were intended to be kept private. On the other hand service life did not allow for much privacy – such as a lack of doors on the toilets. Before coming into the air force I had reasoned that since I found it easier at home to pray on my knees I should do the same thing in

the services. I had not foreseen when I arrived at Victor Harbor in South Australia to do my initial training that I would be billeted in a tent with six others, all at very close quarters. Nor that there would be a Kalgoorlie miner a few feet away who every night would either swear at me while I prayed or sing bawdy songs at the top of his voice. My other tentmates, embarrassed, would pull the blankets over their heads. Of course the word spread. What I had thought was something between me and God had become public property!

Years later in London at Australia House, when collecting my mail, a pilot who had been part of the same course from those far-off days in Victor Harbor asked me: "Do you still kneel to say your prayers?" He told me that while he had been a convinced Christian he had not wanted his fellow-servicemen to know, and that my action had helped him to live in the open about his faith. It turned out he was now flying transport planes towing gliders. Noting my surprise he told me that in a week's time I would understand. Sure enough a week later at Arnhem in Holland there was a massive drop of paratroopers to try and seize a major bridge to shorten the war. He died attempting to drop supplies to the paratroopers he had ferried in earlier.

## Chapter 12

### **Crashes I Have Known**

*“Thank God you didn’t  
bugger up the plane...”*

“Why don’t you tell them about your wonderful war record, how you crashed three of our planes and did no damage to the enemy at all!” Years after the events, this stage-whispered evaluation by our young son, Phil, at a dinner party in our home, seemed to wryly sum up four years of my life!

It brought back memories of being 19 years old, having just flown solo for the first time in a Tiger Moth from the RAAF airfield at Cunderdin. It was in the flat wheat area of Western Australia, so hot that we had to get up at 4.30am to go flying before the turbulence became too testing for us rookie pilots. My instructor sent me off for my second solo flight with an ever so casual “off you go” doubtless designed to reassure me that it was normal for man to fly.

As the plane took off there was a slight bump but it was so exhilarating to be aloft and to be conscious of the lightness of thermal currents rather than the constraints of gravity. My enjoyment was interrupted by another plane diving at me and then flying alongside me with the pilot, an instructor, pointing in a way that made me think he wanted me to land. But his urgency made me wonder if there might be something wrong with my plane.

I prayed and had the thought to go low enough to see the shadow of my aircraft on the ground. It was the first time I had done any low flying. To go low enough to get a clear outline of

the plane at about 5am was really low flying. But suddenly I saw that my fixed undercarriage Tiger Moth had only one wheel instead of two and I realised what that bump on take-off had signified.

As I approached the airport I found myself saying: “Dear God I don’t know how to land these things with two wheels let alone one. Please land it for me!” Alongside the runway was an ambulance, a fire truck and the commanding officer’s car. Hardly confidence giving and I remember thinking: “typical of the airforce!” While I did my best I was amazed at how long the plane balanced on one wheel, before it tipped forward, broke the propeller and came to a dead stop with total silence.

This was soon broken by the voice of the commanding officer who was noted as a hard case. “Thank God you didn’t bugger up the plane – we have few enough.” And as something of an afterthought: “You are supposed to break your neck if you lose a wheel on one of these. How did you keep it balanced for so long?” I told him that I didn’t know. That I had asked God to land it and I thought he must have done so. You could practically see the CO going through in his mind the Air Force Manual, which was his bible, looking for “God”. I found out later that he had settled on giving me all the credit.

Twin-engined Avro Ansons were our next challenge. They were supposed to fly on one engine in an emergency, but I was to discover this was not necessarily so. Some said our planes had seen service as part of Coastal Command in the UK but they were so “clapped out” that you could not envisage them traversing the globe. Our airfield was at Geraldton, WA, where if all went well we would receive our “wings” – to wear henceforth on the breast of our uniform.

It was on a simple navigational flight where I was the pilot that I noticed the starboard engine began to run roughly.

Soon the revs dropped and then the engine vibrated in such an ominous way that it had to be throttled right back. Then we found that full throttle on the remaining engine merely made our loss of altitude steady rather than precipitate. And the country we could see ever more clearly was about as rough as our dud engine.

Aircraft that are twin-engined protest strongly when made to fly on one. The plane yawed strongly to the right and I could not steer straight as my leg was not strong enough to hold a steady course. There is a rudder trim which engages a strong spring to help in such an emergency and I wound that to the most extreme setting. We had started at a 1000 feet and shortly were at 300, and with a rate of descent that made a collision with the earth imminent. I had been trying to steer a rough course towards our home airfield, but knew that we would finish up miles short. When we had a bare 100ft of altitude straight ahead of us there was the rough runway of our satellite airfield which I had completely forgotten about.

I couldn't believe our luck. We let down our undercarriage and flaps and went straight in. Rather extraordinarily we were also directly into the wind as well as being in line with the runway. We had no height or power to manoeuvre. My composure was tested when I cut off the remaining engine as we drifted down the runway. Suddenly I had to fight against the very powerful spring pulling on the rudder. After a bit my leg gave way, the spring took over and the aircraft went into a tight spin on the ground – known as a “ground loop”, doing itself some damage.

I had a grand total of 65 hours solo flying by the time this second test had come my way. As I mention in the next chapter I had a final crash well before I reached the “operational flying”

stage of my service career. During the war you were aware that a large number of aircrew perished without having any contact with the enemy at all. After the war it was confirmed that over one third of flying fatalities occurred in “training”!



*One of the Sunderlands the author flew on anti-submarine patrols.  
Photo by fellow crew member, Colin Gramp.*

## Chapter 13

### **Fear of Death and Death of Fear**

*They did not seem to have any elastoplast  
for the emotional damage*

In World War II, 4000 Australian aircrew died over occupied Europe with an average age of 23. Death was spoken of in the mock casual slang of the period: “going for a burton”, “getting the chop” or having “bought it”. Death was something you tried to keep out of sight and out of mind – but it was never out of the sub-conscious.

The harsh reality of war kept reaching out to you – such as five huge bombers crashing one after another one night at Holme-on-Spalding Moor, Yorkshire, in the winter of 1943. They had limped back, badly damaged, from a 1000-bomber night raid over Germany. Trying to sleep in a “Nissan Hut” about a 100 metres from the runway used by three squadrons of bombers, I was woken by the grinding, screeching of metal on the concrete runway. Then there was the clamour of the fire engines and ambulances going to the wrecks.

The next morning I needed re-assurance and picked up a Bible, and although I have no recollection of what I read I had the strangest thought which seemed to lodge in the forefront of my mind, namely – “You will be in great danger today, but you will not be afraid.” This provoked an inner debate. I had known danger, but always accompanied by fear. My imagination was such that danger and fear had always gone together. I thought I had enough will power to face fears and “go through with it” – whatever the “it” was.

I was being trained to fly in fog in specially equipped Airspeed Oxfords. The crashes of the night before had been in the worst fog of the war and the morning found it even more dense. Yet our commanding officer was determined to take a plane up, and chose me to go with him. Of course I remembered my waking thought. As we took off the fog seemed impenetrable but suddenly we broke through into brilliant sunshine.

However, coming in to land it was obvious we were going to crash as there was then no technical equipment that could enable a safe landing in such a fog. I found myself wondering what would happen. The answer came in a thought so clear it was as if a voice was repeating it over and over. It was simply: "God has a plan." I was surprised to find myself weighing the options: "Great, but does that mean I will live or die?" Quite out of character I was at peace either way.

While the wing commander concentrated on his instrument flying I peered out hoping to see the lights of the runway. The instruments told us that we were in the centre of the beam but unknown to us it was bent. We were actually 100 feet to the left of the runway. Suddenly I saw a flash of green grass hurtling to meet us. The moment of impact stilled the roar of the engines. There was a grinding and crashing as the plane smashed to pieces followed by overwhelming pressure as it flipped over, pinning us under its weight. Then merciful oblivion.

Twenty minutes later I came to, conscious of aviation fuel dripping on my face, a mouthful of what I thought were broken teeth which turned out to be dirt, and later voices of a rescue party wondering if there was anyone in the plane. We soon put them right. I was upside down with my chest pinned between my thighs, convinced I had broken my back, while the wing commander had suffered a broken arm and nose. Fortunately I

had only ruptured my back muscles and they strapped me up with a foot-wide piece of elastoplast and sent me off on three days rehabilitation leave!

But they did not seem to have any elastoplast for the emotional damage. I was in a great state of delayed shock and talked compulsively, except for when I was being violently ill. This went on hour after hour till the understanding and elderly Vicar I was staying with finally took me to one side. He simply said: "You are in the grip of fear and Jesus alone can help you."

I thanked him, told him I had faced the future and had enough strength of will to continue flying. I then went off to try and sleep. After a troubled night I had the thought: "You are so afraid you do not know how afraid you are!"

I told the Vicar and together we prayed that Christ would be my strength. An hour after I returned to the squadron the authorities had me in a plane with a hood over my eyes so I would have to land the plane in conditions matching the fog in which I had crashed. It was a simple way of finding whether I was emotionally fit enough to entrust others to fly with me. On that flight, and from then on, I knew I needed more than my own strength and skill to do it. Otherwise the demons of fear would have brought on a breakdown referred to as "shell-shock" in WWI and later "battle fatigue" but sometimes less kindly as "lack of intestinal fortitude!"

In a war there are those who conquer their fears and then go on to do something requiring great courage. They really earn their medals. The ones whom no one wanted to fly with were those who acknowledged no fear. Similarly in ordinary life, those who know fear usually have a sensitivity that can be greatly used. Whereas those who have no inner doubts often attract few friends.

## Chapter 14

### **Moment of Decision**

*“I should courtmartial you...”*

I had done training courses at four bases in Australia – in South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria. Then in Britain there was more training in Oxfordshire, Yorkshire and Lancashire. I had learned to go solo on Tiger Moths, Avro Ansons and Airspeed Oxfords and survived a crash on each type!

Life had been so full with present challenges that I tended to keep at arm's length what it was all for. Then unexpectedly, two years down the track, I was alone in an office in London with a Wing Commander, 30-ish (i.e. “very mature”) with quite a few decorations under his wings. “Well we can offer you bombers or Lancasters, Halifaxes, Liberators – or then again bombers,” he said with a forced smile. Of course he was making it clear that with the need to replace the nightly losses of bombers and their crews over Germany he could only offer one choice.

I cleared my throat, realising the moment I had been putting off had arrived. Finally I told him I did not feel I could perform bombing. His response was simple and direct: “Why the hell are you wearing those bloody wings. I should court martial you.” I told him I knew that and apologised for putting him in this spot. Taking a deep breath he asked me what I was prepared to fly. I replied “hospital planes” and then as an after thought: “Coastal Command”. This latter suggestion really caused an outburst punctuated with phrases like “don't think that's a cop out; survivors in the water machine-gunned; frozen

bodies in dinghies". It transpired he had been a pilot in Coastal Command and these were experiences he would never forget. I can still see his anguished face as he wearily waved me out of the room.

A little later I was surprised to find I had been posted to a Sunderland flying boat squadron in Coastal Command. It so happened that in the intervening period I had had a spiritual experience which had freed me in my heart to do any operational duty to which I was assigned.

I have been asked what was this "spiritual experience"? It happened later in the same week that I had met with the Wing Commander I had gone to a friend to talk things over. To my surprise he raised a topic that was in no way on my mind. He asked if I was at peace to have a fiancée in Australia and yet be going out with girls in Britain? While I had wanted to debate the great issues of "war and peace" I had a shrewd feeling that my friend's question was nearer the heart of things.

I realised that initially, back in Perth, God had given me great freedom from the demands of the flesh. Temptation had fallen away from me. But then bit by bit I took things back. "My way" had become more attractive than "His way". Now out of the blue, across in Britain, I had the thought: "The challenge to live purity focussed the primary Cross in your life that originally turned you to God. But later you chose pacifism and all the conflict that entailed as an alternative – a 'secondary Cross'."

This thought brought clarification and resolved the inner conflict and debate. I was really prepared to do anything. Over the years I have often given thanks for that Wing Commander who took a risk and had compassion for a "round peg in a square hole".

## Chapter 15

### **Operations at Last**

*We could expect 50% casualties...*

Finally the moment had come to launch into “operations” against the enemy. All in our Sunderland flying boat squadron in 1944 knew that we would have a front-line role in the D-Day invasion. It would mean that we would be flying within a few miles of the French coast rather than our earlier assignments being thousands of miles out in the Atlantic helping convoys to get through. Our job would be to stop the large numbers of German submarines based on the French Bay of Biscay coast from getting through to attack the ships supplying the beachheads in Normandy.

I was among a sizeable number of aircrew who arrived at No.461 Squadron at Pembroke Dock on the Western tip of Wales just a month before D-Day. It transpired that the reinforcements were in anticipation of heavy casualties to come. As tension mounted the entire squadron was summoned to a big hanger where an Air Marshal was primed to give his “up Guards and at ‘em” speech. It had echoes of Shakespeare’s words: “If we are marked to die, we are enow to do our country loss; and if to live, the fewer men, the greater share of honour!” The Air Marshal made it clear that we could expect 50% casualties because in trying to block the English Channel to the U-boats we would be quite close to the coast and subject to intensive enemy aircraft attack.

But he warmed to his task with the promise that for each one of us who died there would be hundreds of sailors’ and

thousands of soldiers' lives which would be saved. You can imagine whose lives meant more to us! A lot of the squadron went out and got drunk that night. And like so many grim prophecies it never came to pass because nearly all the German aircraft in our area were diverted to attack the invading armies. So from the moment the Germans had to cope with the D-Day landings on June 6, 1944 our squadron casualties actually decreased markedly.

It was on the night of June 9, 1944, that I took off on my first operational flight. I was apprehensive about what lay ahead. Just as I was about to get into the small launch used to take the crew of 12 out to our 25-ton flying boat a letter arrived. It was from a friend, David Grimshaw, who later served as an artillery officer in the British Army in India. He enclosed the hymn: "O Jesus I have promised to serve you to the end, Lord be forever near me my master and my friend" and then going on "I shall not fear the battle if you are by my side" and the further plea "O let me hear you speaking in accents clear and still above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will."

I read and re-read those lines as I waited and felt quietly re-assured.

"Friendly fire" has become a curious phrase to describe being fired on by your own side. In my day we used much more direct language to express our feelings when it happened to us. In fact as we flew across the Channel obviously the Allied navies were every bit as jumpy as we were because we got a warning burst of fire from a British and later an American naval ship despite flashing the right code which was meant to establish that we were "friendly".

Later that night we had picked up a submarine trying to get into the Channel by going at top speed on the surface. But

our bomb door jammed making it impossible to run out our depth charges to drop on the submarine. So we had to call off our attack which was taken over by another aircraft. I later heard it had not returned from that mission.

In fact my engagement with the enemy had been at arm's length. Patrols took us right down the Bay of Biscay as far as Spain and some thousand miles out into the Atlantic looking for submarines. There was a period when we were based in the Shetland Isles and used to patrol off the coast of Norway going up as far as the Arctic Circle and viewing the Northern Lights for the first time. This was along the route taken by the convoys who took supplies to the port of Murmansk on Russia's northern coast. Sometimes as many as a third of ships in these convoys were sunk with frightful casualties in the near freezing waters. In fact we were told that even if our aircraft caught fire, we were to stick with it because we would only last for two minutes if we took to the water!

Victory in Europe – VE Day, May 8, 1945 – found us stranded in Ireland having been diverted to Lough Erne because of bad weather conditions at our home base. We enjoyed lively celebrations at Enniskillen in Northern Ireland. A few days later we went on our final Bay of Biscay patrol. We were warned not to fly over the Isle de Yeu, an island off the coast of France, as there was some doubt whether the German garrison which was still there knew the war was over. Being of an independent cast of mind our crew decided to have a look-see.



*The author at the controls of a Sunderland flying boat, 1944.*

It resulted in us being shot at by the enemy for the first time in our war – three days after it was supposed to have finished!

Flying north from the Isle de Yeu and its unfriendly anti-aircraft fire we came across another island. Again we circled it and were delighted when about 50 young children came out from a school to see what sort of plane it was. When they saw we were friendly they rushed back inside and each came out with a paper tricolor flag that they had obviously made to celebrate the end of the war. We circled them at about 100ft for more than ten minutes as they and their teachers waved and waved. Amongst our tough aircrew I don't think there was a dry eye.

We were so privileged. Although we never talked much about it, all Australians who had come from one side of the world to the other hoping to help free occupied Europe were volunteers. The casualties in aircrew had been as heavy proportionately as those on the Western Front during WWI. But being aloft so few of us saw either the enemy or the people we hoped we were helping to freedom. So those waving tricolors were a precious sight that I can still see through misted eyes as I write.



*The mighty Sunderland carrying the air crew and ground staff  
of the Anzac Squadron, No. 461.*

## Chapter 16

### **God's Greatest Gift**

*... as a result he attempted suicide!*

“You have lost the greatest gift God gives.” This somewhat sobering observation was made by my room-mate when I was on leave in London just after VE-Day. Ken Belden was in the National Fire Service and had survived a dangerous and dirty war especially during the “London blitz”. Talking to him I had made it clear that during the war I had spent one leave trying to get closer to God and the next doing the opposite. It had left me feeling rather lost, so I found his statement provocative, but intriguing. When I asked him what was this gift, I was astonished when he matter-of-factly replied; “a conviction of sin.” Even in those days four letter words were more the go than three letter ones such as “sin” or “God”.

Although I found the thought unpalatable I had the sense I was being thrown a lifeline. Before he left he said, with a twinkle in his eye: “It doesn’t matter greatly what other people think of you. But it is important what God thinks of you. To find out you should pray each day and you may have to keep at it for three months!”

With that he was off to deal with cleaning up London’s rubble, and I was left feeling I had a good deal to clean up myself. Strangely it was almost three months to the day that my prayers were answered. I was in a Brighton hotel taken over by the RAAF and I was waiting for a ship to take me home. It was my birthday. It was early in the morning and thoughts came to me that were so clear it was as if they were spoken. An amazing

number of incidents were recalled to my mind, a few of them events I never wanted to think about again. But there was an extra dimension. It was the painful reality of exactly how my actions had affected others.

I was shattered and felt quite bereft. Previously I had used self pity about how others had hurt me to ward off the cost of my actions. Now I was reminded of someone I had gone to school with and who had come to me in great distress. He had heard I had “found God” and wanted help. A week earlier I may have been able to help, but in the meantime I had done something I knew to be wrong so was living a lie. Still, I repeated to him the spiritual truths that a short while before had been a living experience for me, but were now just empty words. This voice said to me that I had “given stone instead of bread” to my friend and that as a result he had attempted suicide!

I was 13,000 miles from home, and had no idea where my erstwhile friend might be. But on my return I found he had in fact taken a gun and gone out to the coastal sand dunes near Perth intending to shoot himself. I was relieved to discover he had not gone through with it and later had found his own way to God. It confirmed what I had felt that morning back in Brighton, that the thoughts I was given were based on reality.

I had sensed this in that Brighton room and not only thanked Christ but promised to do anything that I could to serve Him.

## Chapter 17

### **John Curtin – Thrust Into Greatness**

*“Adequate to meet not only the tasks of war,  
but also the tasks of peace”*

John Curtin became Prime Minister of Australia just six weeks before the Pacific war erupted with the devastating bombing of Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941. Only months later Darwin was bombed by the same carrier force using over 200 planes but on a much smaller target. There was panic in Darwin and fear throughout the nation.

Curtin made it known that we needed to have our only experienced soldiers – the AIF divisions in the Middle East – returned to help in the defence of Australia. He met strong opposition from Britain. There followed an intense and public battle between a comparative newcomer in Curtin and the most noted warrior for the free world – Winston Churchill. First Churchill tried to keep the Australian troops in the Middle East. Then when they were finally on their way home he tried to have their troopships in the Indian Ocean diverted to Burma, which was just about to be over-run. Curtin stood firm and these battle-tested troops were able to play a decisive part in halting the Japanese who had got to within 70 miles of Papua New Guinea’s capital, Port Moresby.

This public difference with Churchill and Curtin’s turning to the USA for help in the wake of the fall of Singapore was well known in Britain. So his arrival in London for the first time during the war in 1944 was of real interest to the media. One of the headlines proclaimed “I Speak for 7 Million Britishers

Abroad” and Curtin went on to wholeheartedly praise Britain’s heroism in standing alone for so long against the Nazi’s might. His approach drew a great response.



Photo: John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library

*John Curtin as I remember him.*

The following day a fellow Australian pilot, Gordon Wise, and I went down to Australia House to find out if there might be any general occasion to meet him. A rather stuffy bureaucrat made it clear that the PM would be meeting Churchill and the King but left us with the clear impression there was no room for lesser lights. We were on the pavement in the Strand just about to give expression to our feelings about this when a voice behind greeted us. We turned and found it was John Curtin!

He asked our names and it turned out he knew my father. In the case of Gordon, whose father became Premier of WA, Curtin said: "Isn't it amazing. It happens I am carrying a letter from your Dad and have it back at my hotel." So down the Strand we went in his official car. In his recent biography of John Curtin the author David Day quotes my conversation with Curtin where I commented on the public response to the phrase "Seven million Britishers abroad" and Curtin's answer: "It was what I genuinely felt; I felt it to be the truth."

I also took the chance to discuss with Curtin "the Austerity campaign" which he had launched earlier in the war. I told him how some of my more cynical colleagues on *The West Australian* had queried whether ordinary Australians would respond to his call. I asked Mr Curtin what he had felt about challenging Australians to lead a more austere life style in order to help support those at the front line. He said that originally there had been a list of about ten "austerities" but he and his wife Elsie had tried them out in their own kitchen and felt some of them were "too fiddly". He said: "But being convinced that the remaining six measures were simple enough we felt all Australians would want to voluntarily play their part." The campaign had succeeded in enlisting people on the home front.

While in Britain he went to the Moral Re-Armament centre in London to see the wartime revue which had been the

prototype of the morale lifting musical “Battle for Australia” which Curtin had earlier arranged to be shown in 1943 to both Houses of Parliament in Canberra. Day in his biography tells of this initiative in a chapter entitled “Morally and spiritually rearmed”.

Curtin’s abiding passion during his wartime Prime Ministership was that the rigours of war could change the Australian way of life to make it adequate for the challenges of peace. In one of his wartime speeches he summed it up: “The strength of a nation is determined by its people, and so in this hour of peril I call on everyone to examine themselves honestly, and having done so go to their tasks guided by a new conscience... by so doing we shall be a nation which is morally and spiritually rearmed and be adequate to meet not only the tasks of war, but also the tasks of peace.”

He died in office six weeks before final victory came. Many felt he himself was a casualty of the war. Certainly he personally anguished over all those in mortal danger. After he had ordered the 7th Division to undertake the long dangerous voyage through the Indian Ocean where many Japanese submarines were operating he could not sleep. Finally Elsie, his wife, rang from the Lodge to his secretary and friend, Fred McLaughlin, to say that Curtin was locked in his room profoundly distressed. It was well after midnight when McLaughlin arrived at the Lodge. He persuaded the PM to let him into his room and “they just talked and prayed”.

I hope it is not an Australia we have lost – where at a time of national peril the wife of the Prime Minister can include a friend who has the sensitivity to help the Prime Minister take his burdens to a higher authority.

## Chapter 18

### The “Doc” and “That Wave!”

*“No Australian will go hungry  
on any ship I’m on.”*

At the end of the war there was an occupational training scheme designed to equip servicemen for post-war life. Gordon Wise and I had applied to do our six months training with MRA and our request had been granted with the helpful proviso that we were to continue on operational aircrew pay. Later, in Australia, when reporting back on this training, we heard from the Minister for Air, the Hon. Arthur Drakeford, that it had been thought unusual enough to be discussed in Cabinet. Drakeford had quashed the queries saying: “We are already enabling people to get training in California in the production of wine and spirits – this is just another sort of spirit!”

We spent the first three months of our training in the East End of London and were about to go to the USA for another three months to participate in the first major post-war MRA campaign there. Our ship across the Atlantic, the *Isle de France*, was departing from Southampton. It happened that Dr H.V. Evatt, Australia’s Foreign Minister who went on to become Chairman of the Security Council of the United Nations, came up the gang-plank just after I had arrived on board. He immediately noticed my RAAF uniform and asked what impression I had of the ship. My reply was that it would be alright for him but the troops only got two meals a day. His response was typically blunt: “No Australian will go hungry on any ship I am on.” So my friend Gordon Wise and I had lunch every day with Dr and Mrs Evatt in their state-room!

These lunches with “the Doc”, as he was known, were of a mixed nature. One day he was all concern for our welfare and views. The next day conversation was off the menu and what there was of it was one way and terse. However he and I had a bond in that we were both major sea-sick sufferers. He took comfort from me telling him that I had wondered if the air force might strike a medal for me: “as the most airsick pilot in the RAAF.” We were put to the test by an Atlantic gale in the middle of the night. The “Doc” and I were the worse for wear when we met at lunch the next day. We were not much interested in food, but the “Doc” wanted fellowship. Did I remember “that wave” he wanted to know? It was, he said, a “killer wave” that had very nearly turned the ship over. All the waves had seemed very upsetting to me, but the “Doc” pursued his case establishing the life-threatening nature of this particular experience with the same unwavering determination that had been his courtroom style.

A year after the war, back in Australia, we happened to be at a reception together and the “Doc” advanced from across the room. We were still some feet apart when he locked eyes with me and began: “Remember *that wave* that nearly sank the *Isle de France*?”

## Chapter 19

### **After War – What Then?**

*“I would back your hunch  
and give it a go.”*

The Polish pilots I had flown with at one point had annoyed me when they asserted: “You will win your war, but we will lose our country!” I reacted strongly accusing them of cynicism and pointing out that I was just one of thousands who had volunteered to come across to Europe so that countries like theirs could be liberated.

However, their prophecy became fact as a result of the Yalta conference where the “big three” came together at the beginning of 1945 to plan the shape of the post war world. It has been said of the major players at Yalta: “Churchill and Roosevelt had in mind winning the war while Stalin was aiming to win the world.” In any event the conference consigned Eastern Europe and Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia to “the Russian sphere of influence” – i.e. total Soviet control. This encounter with the Polish pilots and what transpired spurred me to wonder if there was a power that could not only change human nature, but also national policies.

That quickened my interest in politicians and our responsibility to give them care and support. “The average man is not looking for something for nothing but for something great to which he can give his all.” This was said just after the war by Harry Truman, the “unexpectedly effective” postwar President of the USA. I inwardly questioned the faith underlying his statement but found myself hoping it was true.

Having met our wartime Prime Minister John Curtin in London while serving in Britain two things about him struck me. You sensed he lived what he talked about and he seemed more interested in you than he was in himself. Then I met his successor Ben Chifley on my return from the war. I was surprised to find myself giving him a lecture on Australia being wonderfully provided for in a material sense but needing moral and spiritual goals. I was honest and said that the thing that was really worrying me was what I should do about it. I told him I had wondered about resigning from my well-paid job as a journalist on *The West Australian* but what held me back was that I was not sure that God could provide for me without a salary. Chifley took his pipe out of his mouth and said: "If I were you young fella I would back your hunch and give it a go!" This encouragement was given with great warmth of eye and conviction.

An hour after we had left his office my friend Gordon Wise and I were fulfilling a wartime pledge that if we survived our time on "operations" our first meal back in Australia would be a meat pie and a milk shake! The milk bar proprietor put on the radio to get the news. The second item told in some detail about the Prime Minister having met two flying officers who said that the country's great need was moral and spiritual rearmament. We felt that Mr Chifley had given out this statement to encourage us on our way.

It was the care of these two Prime Ministers that made me want to care for politicians and since then I have met five other Australian Prime Ministers. Of course, like us all, some politicians have "more of the words than the action". I found it unwise to try and "pick winners" as God often seemed to greatly use some I had rashly judged as being rank outsiders in the spiritual stakes.

## Chapter 20

### **The Man Waiting in the Doorway**

*“... his voice brought back another world”*

The end of war was not the end of my fear. I found myself worrying about how to explain to my bosses on *The West Australian* the spiritual basis of my decision to resign. I had a date with the Chief of Staff who had always been “a character” in my book. His first briefing when I joined the staff at the beginning of 1940 was sprinkled with earthy warnings along these lines: “You may call a man a bastard and he may not sue you; but misspell his name and he certainly will.” When I got to his office – still in uniform because I had not yet been discharged – he announced that one of the top executives was joining us for coffee. This added to my misgivings as I knew that this particular executive was in the habit of using my father’s complimentary tickets to bring his mistress to the movies rather than his wife.

To my surprise the Chief of Staff, Stan Rosier, told me that they regarded my four years in the services as the equivalent of time on the paper and that my salary had been doubled. Then he quite broke out of the completely worldly mould I had him in. He said with a smile: “It has been good to have one completely honest journalist on the staff” and went on: “You have proved your moral ideas work here, but have you ever thought of trying to apply them in a bigger setting?” I was astonished and showed it. He added: “What you don’t know is that in your absence, the apple of my eye, my son Bruce, has become a committed Christian – and maybe a bit of it has rubbed off.” (It transpired that Bruce Rosier became a Rhodes Scholar and went on to become a Bishop in the Anglican Church.)

I told Stan Rosier that in fact I was resigning because out of the blue I had felt an impulse to do something along the lines of his vision for me. He was good enough to say that the job would always be there if I chose to come back.

Later a couple of the top journalists sought me out for a private word. They each had considerable literary talent, but shared a love of the bottle. They habitually used to scoff at anyone who sought to hold to moral standards in the tough world of the press. Individually they told me how glad they were that I had not given in and said how much they wished they could give up the grog. Often criticism is a disguised *crime de coeur*. I have concluded the hard drinking of many journo's is a bluff to hide artistic natures and their sensitivity to criticism.

Earlier in my time on the paper I had been in charge of the photo section. News pictures from around the world were mailed in. There were always included half a dozen of ravishing beauties in what even today would be called "revealing poses". Over the years the hottest items had been pasted onto the walls which were nearly covered from floor to ceiling. It was noticeable how many senior staff just "dropped in" for more than a casual look. I decided the pictures were a distraction to me (and obviously others) so one weekend I cleaned up the walls. The next week had members of the staff, including some in the top echelons, telling me in robust language just how far I had exceeded my authority! (It was never explained who had given authority to those who put the pictures up in the first place.)

The time on the paper had been exciting. I had come to realise that my sticking to moral standards was never in itself going to excite enthusiasm amongst those running the paper. Sometimes I was sent out to report on something outrageous that a public figure reportedly had said. When you got to talk

to the man you were often convinced he had not said it. Sometimes I returned to the office and said there was no story. But then I found it more challenging to seek inspiration as to what might be an alternative story. And down the track many of the people I had not falsely reported helped me to a bigger story. Somebody once said of the media culture: “Anything negative is news; anything positive is propaganda.” I enjoyed the extra challenge of writing positive stories that were good news stories in both senses.

So I left Newspaper House with a mind full of good memories plus quite a few misgivings about the future. I walked down St George’s Terrace bathed in that strong sunlight that I had longed for during Britain’s winters. I was conscious of a man standing in the deep shadow of a door. I could not see his face, but his voice brought back another world separated by four years of war that seemed much longer. He was Joe E. Parsons, the trusted head master of Perth Modern School a school that made us feel so secure – and yet had seen off so many who did not return.

My old head master’s words were to the point: “You remember my son, Ted, who like you was in air crew and as you may know died in Europe. They have just sent me his diary – and he makes it clear that had he survived he wanted to spend his life working for a better world. Would you be prepared to do what he wished to do?”

I had resigned my job just half an hour before, but had already been doubting my step of faith. I told Mr Parsons that I felt God had put him in that doorway to deal with the doubts that seem to follow every major decision. He was a true friend and only a couple of months before he died he wrote me a letter encouraging me in my work with MRA.

As the years have passed since then, some 50 of them, the doubts have gone. They have been replaced by gratitude that I was spared to make a decision for those like his Ted who died believing, that we may live believing.

## Chapter 21

### **The “Enemy” Re-visited**

*... the most decorated serviceman in  
the German forces*

He was standing on the other side of the reception. It was 1948 in war-ravaged Bremen. I had noticed him because he seemed alive and alert. In post war Germany cynicism and nihilism were more to the fore. A German standing next to me must have noted me glancing across the room and sought to background me: “He was the most decorated serviceman in the German forces,” adding “would you like to meet him?”

“Not now” was my evasion, even though my companion told me that this tallish man, in his early thirties, had won the equivalent of two Victoria Crosses. When I asked what he had been doing I found out he had been a U-Boat captain and this confirmed my reticence.

But five minutes later I was conscious of someone who had quietly come over to our side of the room. It was the ex U-Boat captain who in fluent English remarked that my suit was a good one but was not European in cut. When I told him it was Australian he asked if this was my first visit to Europe. My reply led to a follow-up.

“Were you over during the war?”

“Yes.”

“What were you doing?”

“I was a pilot.”

“Over Germany?”

“No.”

“What were you flying?”

“Sunderland flying boats.”

“So glad we have not met before!”

Who said the Germans don't have a sense of humour was my immediate thought, for Sunderlands and other aircraft had been responsible for sinking half the U-Boats the Germans lost in WWII.

I found out later that in the closing period of the war Hitler had a dozen of the most highly decorated German servicemen to a personal audience. He had a final mission for them – to inspire German schoolboys to volunteer for the final violent battles with the Russian forces then overwhelming Germany. The U-Boat commander was one of those who refused Hitler's command. As a result he had been sent on a suicide mission but had managed to survive.

During war all the “goodies” are on one side – yours – and all the “baddies” on the other. Yet here quite by chance you meet a U-Boat captain, part of a submarine fleet that had nearly proved to be the war-winner for Hitler, standing up to the all-powerful Fuhrer – and thereby risking his life.

I left Bremen to spend Easter with a family in Hamburg. I had met the son of the family, Peter Petersen, in a rather unexpected way. I was attending an MRA conference at Caux, in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. It was not long after the war, in 1948, and I had been asked if I minded having a German share the room. I immediately said I had no objection. But I was shaken to find that Petersen, who was my age and had served in the German army on the Eastern Front, had been imprisoned for a year at the hands of the British Army of Occupation. This was because he had criticised their behaviour saying that “if the way they lived was ‘democracy’ the sooner

Hitler came back the better!" Shortly after his release he had recognised a policeman on point duty directing the traffic as one of his former army officers whom he had deeply respected. The ex-officer called him over and said that he had been thinking about Peter. He himself had just been to this place called Caux and he wanted Peter to go. It was his respect for this man which had got Peter there, but he was still full of bitterness and ready to hit back at any criticism.

During four years of active service I had fought against Germany without any real personal animus. But 24 hours after Peter moved in I was ready to start WWII! His arrogance seemed to confirm all the war-time propaganda about Nazis that I had heard but not felt at the time. Now I was amazed at my passion.

Then one lunch time Peter came back to our room deeply shaken. "I came here prepared for every attack that might have been made on my country", he said, "but I was completely unprepared for what that French woman said this morning." He was referring to Madame Irene Laure. She was herself a survivor of the German occupation in Marseilles. Her background of being a community nurse made her transition to being a leader of the resistance movement all the more effective. Her own teenage son had been tortured – it was said so that she would break. She never did, but her legacy from the war was an implacable hatred of the race who had savaged her country and her son.

She had told the conference how she had come to realise that her passion to see Germany destroyed would just perpetuate the history she deplored. Finally she apologised to all the Germans present for this hatred. Peter told me it had made him want to face his, and his country's need, to change.

## From Two Perspectives

I was training at a Yorkshire airfield which was a base for bombers going out every night over Germany. They would rendezvous with other squadrons and then go 1000-strong to one target. One of these was Hamburg. I was personally shaken by how high the aircrew losses were. In my diary I record talking to a rather depressed young air gunner who went missing later that week. I wrote: "he was 19, but a very young 19". I was all of 21 myself!

Then to go to Hamburg in 1948, three years after the war, I was shocked to survey miles and miles of suburbs flattened to the ground. Only when night came did the flickering lights across the bombed-out acres indicate the thousands of families living in the cellars which were all that had survived the fire storms that had decimated the city. My companion in 1948, Peter Petersen, had been home in Hamburg on leave from the Russian front when the heaviest raid took place. He told me how the fires were so enormous they created their own gale-force winds sucking in the oxygen to fuel the inferno. Many fire-fighters and trees were swept into the maelstrom. Peter, who was helping to fight the fires, was only saved because after being blown across the road he hit a high curb and sheltered in the gutter for hours.

A figure was never given for the Hamburg losses, but it is estimated that over 500,000 civilians died as a result of air raids on German cities. Some 60,000 civilians perished in the earlier German attacks on British cities.

And here we were going back to his family in Hamburg. I had been touched to learn about his father. In the 1930's he was a lawyer. He had grown suspicious when Peter and his sister had been invited to join a musical band in their neighbourhood. He doubted the motives of those running it. Later when he realised it was a cover for National Socialism he spoke up. It did not stop Peter and his sister being made leaders in the Hitler Youth movement, but it decimated his business. It was possibly the leadership qualities of his children in the movement which saved him, but he had lived all the Nazi years under suspicion.

Shortly after our arrival Peter told his father that he had "found a new ideology". His father froze and the freeze included me as he associated me with this word "ideology" so hated by him because he linked it with Nazism. Easter came and presents hidden in the garden by "the Easter hare" were a new feature for me. But the highlight was that the family had pooled all their rations for the month to make a dozen biscuits. These were handed around with ceremony by Peter's father and I commented on the beautiful blue china plate they were being served on. He told me it had been a present he had bought for his wife when they were on their honeymoon in Berchtesgaden.

The night before Peter and I left he found the courage to tell his father how much he regretted that his personal decisions had so affected his father's life – and also to be honest about some things he had hidden from his father.

After I had arrived down south in the Ruhr and unpacked my bag, I was surprised to find something wrapped in newspaper. It was the blue Berchtesgaden plate and was Mr Petersen's way of expressing his appreciation of the "new son" he had found.

The blue plate has pride of place in our sitting room.

## Chapter 22

### **Jack Jones' "Hwyl"**

*"if anything happens to our Dadda  
don't you ever come back!"*

I have only been inside Buckingham Palace once. It was for the investiture for "Jack Jones, author". Earlier he had been "Jack Jones, miner" for 26 years. The Depression and unemployment prompted him to write – and write he did with an unquenchable flow. His was a native talent, with the backing of only a sparse education, but polished by being a prize-winning orator at one Welsh Eisteddfod after another. He had the gift of "the hwyl". Described in the dictionary as "divine inspiration in oratory", it is the spark that goes from an orator to an audience and makes them one flesh. Not so much a conduit for ideas; more the creation of an atmosphere.

Anyway, Jack had "hwyl" in spades and he translated it into the written word as he brought to life his people with all their triumphs and tragedies. His series of books had played such a part in encapsulating the life and times of South Wales that he was awarded a CBE. The splendour of the Investiture Hall of Buckingham Palace was so far removed from the cramped cottage that had been his home for years.

My friendship with Jack went back to a period when he was mourning the death of his beloved son, David, who died when he was only 27. Jack found it a bitter pill to swallow that David had survived in WWII "all the enemy could dish up in three campaigns and two landings," but not the misdiagnosis

and wrong treatment of advanced tuberculosis by the Army Medical Corps.

Jack invited me into his home and I felt strange being in the bed so recently his son's. The room had pictures showing Jack's eldest son, Lawrence, as a member of the Balliol rowing crew, having gained a scholarship to Oxford. Lawrence, obviously the gifted one of the four sons, had died at El Alamein, the battle which had marked the turning point of the war in the Middle East in late 1942. Lawrence had been awarded the Military Cross posthumously. That Military Cross and the campaign medals of David were gently laid on the breast of Jack's wife, Laura, before she was buried. I was left with an intimate sense of the pain and sacrifice Britain had absorbed through two horrific wars with only a 20-year pause.

I was welcomed into Jack's home because he was one of a committee who had invited the MRA industrial play, *The Forgotten Factor* to South Wales. In his book *Give me back My Heart*, Jack described how the miners had fought for generations to have the mines nationalised and finally the government had all the pits brought under the authority of the National Coal Board. Jack wrote how disheartened he was that "a year and a half later the 107,000 miners were just as antagonistic to the National Coal Board as they had been to private ownership. So the message of this MRA play was badly needed in our coalfields at this time. The theme of the play was that instead of workers and employers fighting each other to prove one or the other right they should fight together for what is right."

Jack had told me how doubtful he was that the cynicism of the Valleys could be breached. How one religious revival after another had gone from top to bottom of the valleys bringing change to personal morals but did not have a deeper dimension. Much of the communism in the valleys came out

of the frustration that personal change did not go on to social and national change. He doubted that any of the communist leaders would be at the play and then was delighted to be proved wrong. He introduced the play at the Empire Theatre in Tonypany and the huge Workmen's Hall in Treorchy. There was an international chorus who sang before the play. They had composed a special song for Wales and as they reached the final note, the packed audience spontaneously rose to their feet, singing in parts *Cym Rhondda* in response. What emotion!

The initiator of MRA, Frank Buchman invited Jack to America and I accompanied him on the *Queen Mary*. We had hardly arrived in New York when there was a phonecall from Buchman asking Jack to speak at a big occasion in Hollywood, saying that he had arranged for us to fly over to be there in time for it. Jack was petrified. He told of the terror he had felt when as a 12-year-old he had plummeted down in a miners cage into the bowels of the earth. It took years to overcome this horror and "now it's been replaced by a greater fear, that of rocketing up into the sky!"

In the event Jack said that since he believed Frank Buchman was a man of God, he would trust the flight would be all right. But as we taxied out for take-off I could feel it was going to be a near thing. Touchingly he put his hand in mine and I could tell he was reliving that scene of a child desperately seeking the security of his father's hand. It was in fact the only flight Jack ever took. I can still see Jack in that packed auditorium, ramrod straight, eye alight and with an effortless delivery that encompassed everyone back to the last row of the circle. He had the gift of transforming what might have been a speech into the *Hallelujah Chorus*. That Hollywood audience, many of whom were stars in their own right, recognised star quality and rose as one in a standing ovation.

A month later we were in Philadelphia on our way to meet the Executive Director of the Associated Press of America. The city was significant to Jack because he had written the book, *Off to Philadelphia in the Morning*, telling the story of Dr Joseph Parry who went from being a Merthyr miner to a great musician. Suddenly Jack had a pain in the chest. It was such that we had to sit on the curb until it passed. We scrapped the date and made it to the stately Vanderbilt Hotel in New York where the major heart attack happened. "What am I to tell his family?" was my question to the specialist at The New York Hospital. "There is no way of knowing whether he will make it until these next ten days have passed," was the blunt response.

I vividly recalled the farewell scene as we had left his family home in Cardiff. His daughter had said to me with great passion: "If anything happens to our Dadda, don't you ever come back."

I am happy to report that we did come back to a wonderful welcome. Jack made a great recovery. He wrote several more books including *Give Me Back my Heart* which not only dealt with the health dramas he had survived, but also his appreciation of the new spirit that he had seen come to his beloved valleys.

## Chapter 23

### **Very Engaging**

*She sometimes got me and God mixed up!*

“If I’m old enough to die for my country I am old enough to get engaged to be married.” Rita and I were 20 years old. My prospective father-in-law had provoked me to go for the jugular by suggesting that we were “just a couple of kids”. Rita’s Dad for his part had been in his teens when he had enlisted in the AIF. He went on to serve on Gallipoli, and returned from France having been badly wounded in the battle of the Somme. So he acknowledged my point with a sigh and the plea: “Cripes, Jim, give me a bit of time to get used to it.” Six months was the agreement and to the day I came armed with a diamond ring and sealed the deal.

So many young couples in those days got engaged before embarkation. For so many an untimely death meant there was no marriage. Others hoping for the best or perhaps despite fearing the worst got married before war separated them. Photos of radiant young women were carried from one side of the world to the other. These photos were sometimes shown to fellow-servicemen, but more often were privately and frequently viewed with the hope it would not be too long before you returned from some foreign field to embrace your loved one on your native soil.

Like many I returned home after four years service a different man. The fact I had come near to death had its effect. Likewise the deaths of others I was close to. But perhaps it was the realisation that the world would not be

the same again. A sense that I had been spared to do something about that. Rita and I had been united in our plan to build a home at Doubleview, a suburb of Perth so named because the views encompassed city and surf – especially the challenging waves of Scarborough I knew so well. And now I had the sense this dream was not to be.

As soon as I got back to Perth I wasted no time catching a train to Harvey, a country town where Rita was teaching. It was summer and baking hot. The country was browner than my homesick memories in Britain had ever allowed for. And the canvas water bags between the railway carriages were parched dry and swinging stiffly in the hot East wind. It was a strange homecoming and my mouth was dry – though not because of the weather but because I had no idea how I could convey to Rita what had happened to me.

We went out for a picnic lunch and while I was searching for elusive and inadequate words Rita took the initiative. She had something she had to tell me. She felt that God had told her that we weren't ready to get married. It was not that she did not love me; it was more that she felt she needed to get to know God better. Later she was to say that because she had her first real experience of God through me she sometimes got me and God mixed up!

So it was a strange feeling. An occasion we had longed for had become one that we could not handle in our own strength. The apprehension had been eased by knowing that while 13,000 miles apart, we seemed to have both been given the same thought at almost the same time. The difficulty was that we were both still deeply in love. There was no one else. So it certainly wasn't easy. It was just that we both had this sure feeling that we were meant to lay down the dreams we had nurtured during the years of war and have faith about the future.

Over the next year we threw ourselves into our new endeavours. I had resigned my job with *The West Australian* and later, quite separately, Rita took leave from her teaching job to train with MRA. She took responsibility for the publications of MRA, based in Melbourne. Mine was a more mobile role including getting to know some of the Parliamentarians in Melbourne and Canberra.

It has been said that “Nature abhors a vacuum”. Neither Rita nor I were ever to feel conscious of a great void in our lives. First I and then Rita was invited to Europe. It was a continent in ruins. Churchill in his first postwar speech had proclaimed that the next great step in history was to find how to heal the enmity that had persisted over centuries between France and Germany. The speech was given in Zurich and it happened that on the other side of Switzerland a conference centre had just been established to help bring Europe together. A number of Swiss families, grateful for the way their country had been spared during the war, had pooled their savings to buy the once magnificent Caux Palace high above Lake Geneva. Renamed Mountain House, it was a survivor of the Belle Epoque glory days. Rita helped set up the high-domed dining rooms, spacious enough to cater for over 600 and sometimes up to a 1000 people. With my journalistic background I was one of those looking after the media who came from across the world to the conferences which were held there throughout the European summers

Over the next six years I was particularly struck by the new spirit that was generated between the hundreds who came from France and Germany. In those early postwar years Germany was an occupied country and the Army of Occupation helped choose a 200-strong delegation including those they felt might lead a new democratic Germany. Konrad Adenauer, later to become Chancellor of Germany, and his

family were among those who were helped to come to the MRA conference centre.

From France came Robert Schuman, then Foreign Minister. These delegations from Germany and France were able to meet not as enemies, not as politicians straining to sound like statesmen, but as human beings who having known the darkness of the abyss were looking for a light into the future. Churchill had pointed up the need but this historic reshaping of Europe was based on individuals who were themselves prepared to change. This was the foundation of both Adenauer and Schuman having the courage to combine the iron, steel and coal industries of the two nations under the Schuman Plan. This led on to the Common Market and eventually to a unified Europe.

Over this period Rita and I had been invited to participate in campaigns to help this new spirit come to Europe. Rita, who had studied German, was one of a party who took a stage play, *The Forgotten Factor*, into the Ruhr, the heartland of German industry. The play portrayed how a new spirit could come into home and industry.

Some five years after we had broken off our engagement I woke in the middle of the night. I was recovering from 'flu and was staying with a Swiss family at Samaden, near St Moritz. I had a compelling thought that now was the time to get engaged again to Rita. But what about her? When some weeks later we met up again in London, it was a joy to find that she too was ready, willing and eager. And so it was, that more deeply in love and more sure than ever, we launched out together once more. We never felt that those five years were an interruption. Actually we felt a lot of rough edges had been knocked off and that when we married on St Patrick's day in 1951, aged 28, we could immediately, wholeheartedly, fall into step together!

We were married in London but our first years were spent in South Wales on the invitation of miners and steelworkers. *How Green was my Valley*, in both book and film captured something of the heart power of the valleys. Richard Llewellyn the author introduced the reader to a family life where “good food always beat good conversation”. But the dark side was the legacy of class war left behind by harsh times. Visually the valleys were no longer green. Man’s expediency and greed had dumped the acidic slag from the mines indiscriminately snuffing out the lush green. An elderly miner sadly commented on this transformation: “Can you believe when I was a boy a squirrel could go from the top of the valley to the bottom without touching the ground?”

Towards the end of our time there I was surprised to hear through Frank Owens, Editor of *The Daily Mail* that Harry Pollitt the leader of the British Communist Party, had complained that over the previous three years he had lost a fifth of his trained leadership in South Wales to MRA. This caused us to reflect that many of the unionists and shop stewards we befriended, had in fact been life-long communists. It was a sharp learning curve for two middle-class Australians to move from the war of arms to the war of ideas. The cloud-shrouded, drizzle-filled valleys of Wales were a long way from the sunny beaches of Western Australia, but we and our first-born, Philip, rejoiced in the inclusiveness of the warm hearts of South Wales.

## Chapter 24

### **No “Cherry Blossom Bob”**

*“... friendly relations between your country and mine will blossom like the cherry trees”*

It was indeed cherry blossom time in Tokyo but that was the only bright feature in a war-ravaged scene. Japan in 1955 was notable for huge swathes of fire-bombed suburbs and round-the-block queues for jobs. We three Australians were in the office of the Prime Minister, Ichiro Hatoyama, and you could sense that he had been briefed about our background. Les Norman had, for three years, been a Japanese prisoner of war in Changi, Singapore, before going on to become leader of the Liberal Party in the Victorian Parliament. Gil Duthie, Labor Party Whip in the Federal Parliament had lost his brother on the notorious Thailand/Burma railway, and I had been a WWII pilot.

When Les Norman said we wished to say sorry the interpreter was abruptly interrupted. “No, no, no it is I who must apologise to you for all that happened during the war,” said Prime Minister Hatoyama. Norman thanked him, but made it clear that we wanted to apologise not for the war but for what had happened leading up to the war. The Diet, the Japanese Parliament, was at that point controlled by democrats. They went to other democratic countries, including Australia, seeking economic cooperation. But they were cold-shouldered. “We were so insular and pre-occupied we helped set the scene for the militarists assassinating Japanese cabinet ministers and taking over,” said Norman. The Prime Minister was visibly moved.

While Norman and Duthie were of different political parties they had had a shared bitterness towards Japan which they had harboured from the war. In the year prior to coming to Japan they had attended international conferences for MRA where Japanese had asked for forgiveness for the suffering their nation had caused. This encouraged a change of heart. It often happens that those who have been actively engaged in war are the ones who are prepared to take the initiative to see history is not repeated. It was Australian ex-service men and women who raised a sizeable sum of money to buy a car for the work of MRA in Japan.

To meet the Foreign Minister, Mamoru Shigemitsu, was to be reminded of a vignette of history. Immediately after the end of WWII his picture had gone around the world from the deck of the US battleship *Missouri* where he was the main Japanese signatory to the surrender document presented by General Douglas MacArthur. Talking with him you certainly sensed that he knew what war was about. He had lost a leg from a bomb thrown at him when he was consul general in Shanghai during the Japanese occupation. When we met him he said: "Japan's first need is Moral Re-Armament. We cannot trade with Australia or Australia with us in an atmosphere of poisoned relations. For our part we must get rid of this poison from our system. Japan's foreign policy must be based on moral and spiritual values."

It was indicated to us that the Prime Minister of Japan would like us to take back to our Prime Minister a gift of cherry trees. His letter stated in part: "As a gesture of friendship I am presenting these cherry trees as symbols of peace and goodwill and hope you will find a place in your garden for them. It is my earnest wish that mutual prosperity will flourish and that friendly

relations between your good country and mine will flower and bloom as the cherry trees blossom."

Knowing how tough Australia's restrictions on the importation of plants were we moved through the Embassy and our Immigration Department to make sure that the plants were correctly fumigated. After our return to Australia and not long before our appointment to report on our time in Japan, someone from the Prime Minister's department told me confidentially: "Don't think those cherry trees are going to survive." Of course I wanted to know why not and got the reply: "Do you think he wants now to be known as 'cherry blossom Bob'?" (This was in reference to the tag of "pig iron Bob" applied to Mr Menzies immediately before the war because of the contentious export of scrap iron to Japan.)

There was of course no way of confirming this scenario. But at the conclusion of the half-hour interview with Mr Menzies he said that he had been "sorry to hear that the cherry trees had been destroyed by Immigration." One thing that did blossom from that interview was the suggestion made by Duthie that there should be bi-partisan Parliamentary delegations sent to Japan and reciprocal delegations encouraged. Duthie and Norman had been the first bi-partisan but non-Governmental delegation. Within 15 months the first of many official Parliamentary delegations was sent from Canberra to Japan.

## Chapter 25

### **The White Australia Policy**

*Good enough to fight for Australia but the  
wrong coloured skin to live there.*

In Manila during the late fifties I lived with a Filipino family for about six months. Their nephew was staying with the family while he studied law. We had become good friends so I was deeply shaken when one night as we dined alone he quietly asked: "Would you mind telling me in what particular ways you feel superior to me?" It turned out that he and his fellow law students had been studying the "White Australia policy" and he felt the basis of it must lie in a deep-seated superiority. This unexpected confrontation reinforced my desire to try and help change the policy.

It happened that over a 30-year period more than half of the Australians devoting their full time to MRA (totalling more than 70) were stationed in Asian lands and approximately half the money given to MRA in Australia was used to advance programmes in the nations to the north of us. This was before it became almost fashionable for Australians and their government to give a special priority to Asia. Earlier during the Menzies years Asian leaders would comment on how our focus was still Euro-centric.

One of the hottest issues went back to the Labor government of the immediate post-war years. It became known as "the Sergeant Gamboa case" and those of us who worked in the Philippines were constantly being reminded of it. Sgt Gamboa, a Filipino, had fought with the Allied Forces

during WWII and married an Australian during his service. They continued to live in Australia after the war ended. It has been reported that Arthur Calwell, who was Minister for Immigration, and who was competing strongly with Dr. H.V. Evatt, the Foreign Minister, for the future leadership of the Labor Party, sought to embarrass his rival. He publicly said that Dr Evatt should apply the White Australia policy and expel Gamboa. Evatt shrewdly pointed out it was an immigration policy and if anyone should take action it would have to be Calwell. So Sgt Gamboa was expelled by Calwell.

Throughout Asia but especially in the Philippines the line was: “good enough to fight for Australia, but the wrong coloured skin to live there.” It was beside the point to explain that in part it was another case of a bitter internal political feud spilling over to affect our relations with our neighbours.

Some of us who had spent long periods in Asia began raising the White Australia policy with members of our cabinet. It was thought to be a central plank of Government policy. In a country which has a Westminster style of government with cabinet solidarity as a given, you never really know how close a piece of “policy” is to being changed. I remember being part of a group who assembled at *Raheen*, the home of Melbourne’s Catholic Archbishop, to discuss with a think tank of religious and academic leaders how we could be more effective in getting the White Australia policy rescinded. It was only when senior members of Cabinet such as Paul Hasluck and R.G. Casey resigned and spoke out about their frustration at not having had quite the numbers to change the policy that we realised it had not been as set in concrete as we had assumed.

Those of us in MRA had a simple approach. To those we knew in government we suggested that the criteria of our immigration policy should be based on “character not colour”.

We related first hand experiences from our times in Asia to try and make real how Australia was perceived there, not by our enemies, but by people who wanted to be our friends.

One of my friends in the Cabinet was the late Phillip Lynch, then Federal Treasurer and deputy leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party. Out of the blue he rang, I think in 1967, to tell me that I would be pleased to know that the Cabinet had finally scrapped the White Australia policy. I commented I had not seen anything in the press and got the rather droll response that the Government was not all that keen on drawing attention to the matter. I replied that in some countries in Asia it was the only thing they knew about Australia, and that we needed to publicise the change.

Later a statement rescinding the policy was issued. It emphasised that in future “ethnicity would play no part in immigration criteria” and that the character and qualifications of the applicant would be the major considerations. Lynch sent me a copy of this statement with a personal note saying that the cabinet meeting where the case was argued for such a statement being issued was much more fiery than the previous one when the policy was actually rescinded. Initially I was puzzled, but then I realised as a parent that I was much more likely to simply adjust my behaviour following a dispute with one of my sons than fronting up and admitting I had been wrong!

It is hard to evaluate just how big the shift in Australia’s focus from Europe to Asia has been. Before aircrew embarked for service in Europe in WWII we were given a lecture which emphasised how “white” Australians were. “You are 98.6% of British/Irish origins”, emphasised the lecturer. It seemed we needed to establish such impeccable credentials! Now 60 years later we are a nation than can proudly claim cultural links to

over 160 countries from which our citizens have come. As a result of the abolition of the White Australia policy almost one in 20 of our population have been born in Asia.

Recently Rita and I invited Michael MacKellar to dinner. He was Minister for Immigration when waves of “boat people” arrived on our shores in the late ’70s, having survived the hazardous ocean journey from Indochina in open boats. Many felt the response of the Australian populace would reveal whether or not the rescinding of the White Australia policy had been too far ahead of public opinion.

We commented to Michael how successful he had been in enlisting his fellow Australians. His reply was that he had started by trying to imagine how he would feel if his family was in the same predicament as the “boat people” and how much he would hope they would be welcomed. There was bi-partisan support and the efforts of the humanitarian agencies were backed by a warm response from the community at large.

We have always saluted the gallantry shown by those who hit the beaches at Gallipoli. But in the case of the “boat people” there was both the courage of those who landed on our shores and also that of those in leadership whose policies were so welcoming. Accolades for both sides were deserved.

## Chapter 26

### **Frank – Initiator, Enabler**

*“...personally I’m grateful that  
my mind still works.”*

Frank Buchman was often introduced as the initiator of Moral Re-Armament. To me he was a great enabler. He often encouraged people to do what they had dreamt of but certainly not decided on. Germany’s Chancellor Adenauer and France’s Robert Schuman had courageous dreams on how to unite the two nations, but it depended on being able to trust one another. They had never met, but they both knew Frank Buchman, so they each sought him out and accepted his reassurance about the other. Following the successful initiatives to bring France and Germany together the governments of each country decorated Buchman in appreciation of MRA’s part behind the scenes.

My first introduction to him was in the USA en route to Australia after WWII. Before meeting him I thought I had better read his collected speeches so I would be on the right wave length. But when we met he only seemed interested in ordinary things, such as hoping that his memory of an earlier visit to Australia was right and asking if I would appreciate a mid-morning cup of tea and some scones, rather than coffee and cookies. I felt thoroughly at home with him, but perhaps with a reservation that he was too homely to be a leader. Then as we walked into the assembly hall where there were some 300-400 people I asked him what the meeting was going to be about? With a slight twinkle in the eye he turned to me and my

friend Gordon Wise and said: “Oh *you’re* the meeting this morning.” Sight unseen, for he had never met us before and I realised he had made no effort to make an impression himself. His pre-occupation seemed to be to help others be centre stage. After the three months I was with him it struck me that he did not regard MRA as being his property, but God’s. I had hoped that he might have encouraged me to join his work. Instead he waited for me to get a call from God, which led to me making a personal contract which has lasted a lifetime.

The warning: “Beware when all men speak well of you” was not Buchman’s problem. He was controversial, something of a lightning rod. I was made aware of this when working early on in the war on Perth’s morning paper, *The West Australian*. The chief sub-editor barked down the phone: “Bring me a photo of that blackguard Buchman.” I mildly questioned: “You mean Dr. Frank N.D. Buchman?” When I appeared in the sub-editors’ room with the photo, he continued: “You seem to think you know more about the man than I do?” He was surprised when I replied that, while I had never met Buchman, applying his philosophy had transformed my family’s life.

Buchman made his second visit to Australia in 1956. He had come in response to a message I had sent him asking if he had any inspiration for Australia as the country prepared for the 1956 Olympic Games. Among those who joined me in sending the message was Sir Wilfred Kent Hughes, whom Frank had got to know when Kent Hughes was at Oxford University in the ‘20’s. Now he was chairman of the Olympic Games Committee and a Federal Cabinet minister. What I had thought of as a message was treated as if it were an invitation! I later discovered that Frank independently had had the thought that in this period of heightened crisis, with the Cold War at its peak, Australia would be a good place to be based. I was 33 and quite ambitious,

but when I received his cable saying he and a party of 15 were about to come it rather took my breath (and my breakfast!) away.

Quite soon after, the party arrived from Italy on one of the Flotto Lauro ships. I was in his cabin, when in response to somebody's probing question Frank Buchman had replied: "I live for one thing – to make Jesus Christ regnant in the life of every person I meet, including the man who is about to bring me my breakfast." I was conscious this wasn't quite the programme envisaged by some of the men who had joined me in the original message!

Just at this time a number of us had been looking for a suitable place to serve as a Pacific Centre for MRA. We discovered that "Armagh", the Toorak property of Mr and Mrs Cecil McKay, was on the market. When we told Frank of our interest he thought what we were proposing to offer was so low that Mr McKay, who was President of the Associated Chamber of Manufacturers of Australia, would laugh us out of his office. "But if you think God is telling you to do it; you had better do it," he said as he sent us on our way. We were back quite shortly to report that in fact Cecil McKay had burst out laughing before farewelling us.

Some six weeks later, after Buchman and some of his party had been invited to their home, Cecil McKay rang my colleague George Wood to say that he and Mrs McKay wished to give the property to MRA. There was a single proviso – namely that we were not to tell anyone of his gift. I and the other members of the Council of Management of MRA honoured that promise and even our wives did not know the history until Cecil had died and his wife, Marjory, told the full story in the biography she wrote about her husband.

Someone once said to me that it was a pity Frank was an old man when I first met him. I could honestly reply that he never struck me as old. I found his ideas exciting and he always had a bigger vision for me than I had for myself. He had a good mind and a dry sense of humour. I remember an occasion in Rotorua, New Zealand, when an enthusiastic local minister came unannounced to meet him. He almost immediately commented on how Frank's earlier stroke had left him with a "crippled right hand". Before he left he returned to the subject saying it must be an embarrassment for a public man to have this impediment. After he left Frank observed wryly: "He seemed very worried about my hand. Personally I am grateful that *my mind* still works!"

His understanding of Asia was brought home to me when I was reporting one of the conferences at Caux in Switzerland for the world press. The top Buddhist of Burma made a speech favourably comparing Frank Buchman's philosophy with that of the Buddha. I wrote up the story along these lines, but when I read it out to Frank he obviously wasn't impressed, in part because a lot of it was about him. He asked what I thought about the other aspect of the speech where the Buddhist monk had said that MRA was like a great lake, that the rays of the moon on the lake were like the four absolute standards – honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. And that the clear water represented the purity of motive needed to create a new world.

I told Frank with the sureness of youth that I found it rather boring. "Quite so," said Frank, "but out in Asia where they think in terms of pictures they may find it interesting." I re-wrote the story and when the press cuttings came back I found the story had been printed in big and small papers across Asia.

In his later years he returned often to his deeply held conviction about his own country, namely: "America needs an ideology". By this I believe he meant that Americans needed to care for every

other country as they wished to be cared for themselves. Early in the 20th century, when to get to Asia you had to spend weeks on a ship, Frank had extended times in India and China. He was a friend of Mahatma Gandhi, whose non-violent campaign enabled India to gain its independence. Later his grandson, Rajmohan Gandhi, worked alongside Buchman. Sun Yat Sen, the founder of modern day China, recognised that Buchman saw the need to move from personal change to national change and sought his advice on how to deal with corruption. He also had extended periods in Korea and Japan.

Buchman's preoccupation was with the other person and the other nation. He said to me once: "Perhaps the next person to change may find the right way to express what Moral Re-Armament really is." I was a little taken aback as I would have thought that someone who had been used to launch MRA would long ago have discovered what it was. In his mind it was not his property and he thought it probable that God would use a newcomer to bring the fresh illumination always needed.

Buchman was a good listener. He had a gift of drawing out the best from the person he was with. I often came away from a time with him thinking what a good conversation it had been. The truth was that I had probably felt encouraged to venture my hopes and visions. This characteristic was perhaps especially appreciated in the countries of Asia which do not always take to the Western desire to propagate the latest know-how. At a time when the phrase "the ugly American" had some currency, he was an American who was decorated for his work by the governments of Japan, The Philippines and Thailand.

Buchman's challenge, especially to his own country, was "if you want to change the world, the place to start is with yourself and your own nation". Such down to earth wisdom is perhaps even more applicable now that Buchman's nation stands alone as the major super power.

## Chapter 27

### **Ramon Magsaysay's Legacy**

#### *All out friendship or all out fight*

To meet Ramon Magsaysay, an outstanding post-war President of the Philippines, was to sense that he had carried over into his peacetime responsibilities the courage he showed as a leading fighter against the Japanese occupation of his country in WWII. At the time of our meeting, early in 1955, it was said that the Huk guerilla fighters, backed by communist countries, controlled one third of the Philippines by day and two thirds by night!

Magsaysay countered this with a campaign entitled: "All out Friendship or All out Fight". This was proclaimed on posters across the nation together with the picture of hands gripped in fellowship on one side of the poster and clenched fists on the other. The appeal of the communists lay in the historic fact that most of the land was controlled by too few.

Magsaysay not only took on the Huks, but also the feudal-style landowners. He also got the Catholic Church to yield large tracts of land that were not being fully used. He made it clear that those who laid down their arms would be offered land to farm. At the same time, through some of his aides who had begun applying the principles of MRA, he clandestinely met and won over some of the leaders of the Huk rebels. There followed a dramatic improvement in the stability of a nation which many had predicted would self-destruct.

I had met Magsaysay with Gil Duthie and Les Norman when we were on our way to Japan. Magsaysay remarked on the conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, which in 1955 had

brought together the so-called non aligned nations of Asia and Africa and where communist China had played a major role. He said that what was needed now was a conference that would bring together both developed and developing nations. While he was pleased that in his country he had begun to deal with the root causes of communism, he felt that the conference he had in mind could offer something fresh for both communist and non-communist nations. He believed that MRA was equipped to initiate such a conference and that his country would be an ideal site. Later it was decided that the first of these conferences would be held at Baguio, a mountain resort north of Manila. The President was to welcome all the delegates to the conference which was scheduled to open in late March 1957. Sadly Magsaysay was killed in an aircraft crash just ten days before.

This conference was the first post-war international conference where both Japanese and Korean delegates attended together. President Magsaysay before his death had arranged special documentation to enable this to happen as there was no peace treaty at that time between Japan and the Philippines and hence no diplomatic relations. Rita and I were meeting the delegates as they arrived at Manila airport and you could sense tension in both delegations. There had been difficulties too in finding a hotel prepared to give overnight accommodation to the 12 Japanese delegates in view of the hostility still widely felt following Japan's wartime occupation.

Filipinos spoke at the conference chronicling atrocities carried out by the Japanese army. It was also known that one of the Korean delegates, Mrs Sook Park, the first woman to be in the Korean Cabinet, was still nursing her husband as a result of the torture inflicted on him by the Japanese authorities during their 35-year long annexation and occupation. The Japanese

delegates specifically addressed the excesses of these two occupations and unreservedly apologised to Mrs Park.

There had been the “Kuboto declaration”, hated by the Koreans and thought to be official Japanese policy, which stated that the Koreans had actually benefited greatly from the years of occupation. One result of the Bagio conference was that the Japanese delegates persuaded Prime Minister Kishi to publicly renounce the offensive Kuboto declaration.

In the course of the conference the atmosphere had changed dramatically. The Korean delegation began speaking in Japanese in which they were fluent, but which they had refused to acknowledge.

This led to honest discussions over meals where both the Korean and Japanese delegates, who had come with the backing of their governments, decided which policies they would seek to change when they reported back. It was perhaps part of the Magsaysay legacy that the conference he envisaged had enabled such bitter enemies to find the courage to start out on the road to reconciliation.

## Chapter 28

### **Harold – The Risk Taker**

*“Australia part of SE Asia by choice  
and not just geography”*

When Harold Holt died in the wild waters off Portsea in 1967 there was much criticism about the risks he took – that as Prime Minister he braved the notoriously treacherous waves at all. The fact that he had no “security” with him was unbelievable to his friend President Lyndon Johnson who came out for the funeral.

I recalled having once discussed with him the dangers of swimming in the underwater caves in that area which were often snared with kelp. I was amazed that he did not share my apprehension of being trapped in an enclosed space. “I like the excitement – the challenge,” he told me, going on to say that often in Parliament he would practise how long he could hold his breath! I think two minutes was his best.

I commented later to my wife that any young man who had no sense of adventure had a deficiency, but that it was a bit of a worry when a Prime Minister was so addicted to risk-taking. I think it was just that quality that trapped him. However I believe that some of his risk taking, for the benefit of others, has not been fully evaluated.

During his time in office the 1967 referendum was held on Aboriginal reform. It attracted an astonishing 90.8% “Yes” vote enabling the Commonwealth Government to legislate for the Aborigines. He fully supported the dismantling of the White Australia policy which helped to establish a new relationship

with Asia. While he had taken over from Sir Robert Menzies in early '66 he waited until he had won an election in his own right to make his personal policies clear.

His first post-election speech was given when he opened a world conference for MRA in Melbourne in early January 1967. This speech, according to editorials, was the first by an Australian Prime Minister which clearly established that Australia was part of South East Asia “by choice and not just by geography”.

Over lunch I remarked on the number of fresh ideas in his speech. “I actually wrote every word myself,” he said with a laugh. “A very rare occurrence, but this being the holiday period I was able to do it.” He had quoted the Ghanaian official who had pleaded: “Don’t send under-developed people to under-developed countries,” and Holt added: “We mustn’t go into Asia self-righteously selling Western concepts and ways of doing things as the best and only course for those countries who have a history and tradition of thousands of years – older than that from which we draw our beliefs.”

*The Australian* in its editorial the next day stated: “The most encouraging part of his speech concerned his interpretation of stability in the Asian context – a matter he has not touched on before. Stability, he says, does not mean passivity, conservatism or resistance to change which, in themselves, carry the seeds of instability.” It concluded: “This is a considerable advance on past thinking, which has often appeared to allow of no stability other than the stately Western brand... Perhaps the occasion – a moral re-armament conference – had something to do with it, but it was one of his best for a long time.”

Later in the year a group of Pangu Parti leaders, who would lead Papua New Guinea to independence, came to Canberra to

meet Australian leaders. Earlier in Port Moresby they had told Kim Beazley, who became Education Minister in the 1972 Whitlam government, and me that they wanted to meet Australia's leaders on a moral and spiritual rather than a political basis. Harold Holt welcomed them to lunch. Early in the meal they asked him what he thought of the draft document setting out a proposed Constitution for PNG. Holt immediately replied: "I get swamped with documents and I must confess I have not read it. But in a way I am glad because I would like you to lead me through it and highlight the key points." Which they enthusiastically did.

After lunch they met the Leader of the Opposition, Gough Whitlam, and asked him the same question. His reply was to draw their attention to the grey filing cabinet near his door and to tell them that in that cabinet was a special red folder that contained all the important documents he must always take into Parliament. "And that is where your constitutional document is kept."

The Pangu Parti member I was sharing a room with commented before we turned in for the night: "That Holt, he true. That Whitlam fellow, full of bullshit."

It happened that at the lunch with the Prime Minister Senaka Guava, later to become head of the PNG Land Commission, was sitting next to Holt who asked him if the steak was too tough. Senaka said it was delicious. "Then why didn't you eat it?" Holt wanted to know. Senaka replied it was because he had a tooth ache. Immediately after lunch Holt took us up to his office, rang his dentist, asked how his holiday had gone, and then said he had a friend with him who needed some treatment. Within a few minutes Senaka was in the Prime Ministerial Bentley on his way to the dentist.

Later when Holt had the whole party up to The Lodge he and Senaka had a really deep talk. As they parted Senaka said to him: “I want you to know that we greatly respect you for the size of your job and how you try to do it. But also that we will pray that you find God’s way of doing it.” It was a mark of Holt’s humility and genuine sense of need that had him warmly respond: “Thank you so much for that. I do need help. Please keep in touch.”



*With Harold Holt just before he opened a world conference for MRA in Melbourne, 1967.*

Photo: Dennis Mayor

## Chapter 29

### **“I Suppose You Are All Socialists”**

*“... all with blood dripping  
down our chins!”*

“Nareen”, the home of Malcolm and Tamie Fraser, was gracious rather than grand. It was also the homestead of a sprawling property set in the prestigious Western District area of Victoria. Malcolm Fraser, then Federal Minister for Education, had invited Rita and me, Rajmohan Gandhi, author and a grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and Irene Laure, a Socialist MP for Marseilles, for lunch.

Chatting in the lounge before the meal Irene was seated on the couch next to Malcolm’s mother. There was a gap in the conversation and suddenly Mrs Fraser Sr put forward the view that most of the world’s problems could be traced back to socialism. In the silence that followed I thought I had better make it clear that Madame Laure had been the secretary general of all the socialist women of France!

Irene, with a twinkle in her eye, turned to her neighbour and said: “I quite understand your misgivings. My father shared them. He was a big engineer who employed hundreds. It was the conditions endured by the workers that had me join the socialists when I was 16. All my father knew of socialism was that a graphic poster was plastered all over the city picturing a fierce man with a dagger clenched between his teeth, blood dripping down his chin and the single word **Socialist** in red across the poster.”

Tamie, our hostess, breezed into the ensuing hush with sparkling eye and a who-gives-a-hoot declamation: "And I suppose you are all socialists!"

Rajmohan lightheartedly capped the interchange with his mock assertion: "Yes. And all with blood dripping down our chins!"

Malcolm Fraser brought the conversation back to more weighty matters by asking Rajmohan what the feeling in Asia was in the wake of the White Australia policy?

The meal that followed was a delicious vegetarian offering, Tamie having enquired ahead of time what would be best for her guests. Perhaps the highlight was the way that all the children waited at the table with a spirit that spoke of enjoyment rather than duty.

Asked before he left Australia what was his outstanding memory of his time in the country, Rajmohan replied: "The way the Fraser children served. It has left me with a vision of the children of cabinet ministers in India acting with a similar spirit. That would be a revolution indeed."

## Chapter 30

### **The Missing Race**

*... left wondering if once we all had  
such other-worldly gifts*

“I have never met one. But I don’t have anything against them.” These were the defences that came to mind when people I met in Asia probed me about our treatment of the Aborigines. These revealing phrases were never uttered, but they pinpointed for me not just an ignorance but also an indifference.

I could just remember seeing some Aborigines in the slum areas of East Perth, shadowy figures never close enough to focus on and certainly no part of the sun-bright Australia I had inherited and took for granted. What little Australian history was taught told of the ineffectual attempt to round up the few remaining Aborigines in Tasmania. For the rest there were fragmentary mentions of where explorers encountered the original people.

I was uncomfortable that my own attitude closely accorded with the national pattern then of preferring not to know. So I broke my journey in Darwin when returning from one of my sojourns in Asia. I was introduced to a senior man in the Administration who had a great rapport with the Aborigines. I told him that while I had little knowledge I had taken on board certain assumptions about this race I did not know.

“Let’s start there,” he suggested. “Well I gather that they don’t do well in our education system”, I volunteered. “They do as well as any other child in all the early years,” he replied. “It is

only when they are getting into secondary level that the distrust their parents have of our ways has a retarding effect.”

“I have heard they are good with animals, but no good with mechanical things”, I went on. This led to a story about a recent event. Some nomadic Aboriginals had been discovered in very poor shape over near where the borders of WA, SA and the Northern Territory come together. A relief expedition was being organised and the owner of one of the long-established stations was offering his very big semi-trailer. But he wanted to know who would service it. On hearing that it would be a highly trained Aboriginal he threatened to withdraw his offer.

When the party went to his large homestead to pick up the vehicle, the owner made it clear that while the main party could eat in the dining room, the Aboriginal would be given his meal on the verandah. So the whole party had their meal on the verandah! Traversing the very rugged country there were several breakdowns and each time it was the Aboriginal mechanic who found a way of keeping the vehicles going. On their way back to Darwin when they came to the homestead the owner showed the Aboriginal into the rather grand dining room and asked him to sit at the head of the table in the chair brought from England many years before. My mentor left me to draw my own conclusions.

It happened that Rita and I and our teenage son Gordon were house guests of Kim Beazley Sr. when he was Federal Minister for Education. He had invited an Aboriginal elder to come from Darwin to be an adviser. Robert arrived at the Beazley's and was invited to dinner. After Kim had said grace Robert asked him: “Are you associated with MRA?” Beazley, whom he had never met before, replied that he was but why did he ask? Robert said that he had only been down south once before and that had been to Adelaide. His host there was an

architect named Gordon Brown who was also part of MRA and he had said grace in the same way. “You mean the same words?” queried Beazley. “Oh no the words were quite different but the spirit was the same”, he replied with great assurance.

Cyclone Tracy had earlier devastated Darwin with great loss of life. Our Gordon commented that the number of white people killed was well known but he wished to know how many Aboriginals had died. With quiet authority came the reply: “We all knew three days before so we weren’t there to get killed.”

Also at the table with us was a young part-Aboriginal girl who had never been out of big cities. She was in awe of this full blood elder. Finally she asked: “Is it true that you know when a relative has died even if they are far away?” His reply: “Every time. The telegram some days later just confirms what we knew.”

Moree is a refreshing stop-over point on the long drive from Melbourne to Queensland. Its 40 deg.C. artesian bore water pool and high pressure jets are a welcome comfort for travel-tired backs. These days there are many of Italian background who congregate around this mineral water pool while usually there are quite a few Aboriginals in the adjoining Olympic pool. It was not always so. This pool was the focus of a confrontation in 1965 which captured national headlines. The Freedom-Ride Bus, full of Sydney University students, successfully challenged the segregation which had denied Aboriginals entry to the pool. In the vanguard was Charles Perkins, on his way to becoming the first Aboriginal to gain a university degree – incidentally financed from his earnings as a first grade soccer player.

Years later I had my own confrontation with Charlie. We had become good friends, he having earlier sought my advice about having the kidney transplant which so transformed his

life. Charles was by now the Secretary of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and I had just sat down in his office when he exploded. The source of his fury was that we welcomed refugees from Asia when we had done such a pathetic job in relation to meeting the long overdue needs of his people. He addressed me as if I represented all the white do-gooders so quick to pick up every new cause, so slow to face up to what he saw as our “primary responsibility”.

Then his outrage abated and I felt able to tell him about a dream I had had the previous night. The scene was “the pearly gates” and outside there were representatives of all the different phases in Australia’s history. There seemed to be but one question asked: “Did you accept all you were given in that great land just for yourself – or for the benefit of the whole human family?” I went on, “In this dream, Charlie, this question seemed to apply equally to the first Australians, the settlers, the new Australians and the boat people.” Charlie sat the other side of his big desk and started to doodle. After two or three minutes he looked up with that winning warmth of eye he had and we were in step again.

My wife, Rita, and I last met up with Charlie at Uluru (formerly known as Ayers Rock). We had just seen a video spelling out how Uluru had been handed back to the traditional owners who had in turn entered into an arrangement to jointly run the site with a body set up by the Federal Government. Charlie said how achieving this represented the highlight of his career. “You may have noticed,” he said with that slightly wicked twinkle in his eye, “that I got the Governor General to hand over the land titles in a dignified way and not have some grandstanding politician trying to claim the credit.” The shared administration runs so well you wonder if it could be a pattern

of how things are meant to be more generally. Certainly the hundreds who gather each day to witness the coming up and the going down of the sun do so in a hushed reverence akin to the Dawn Service on Anzac Day. You sense it is not only a sacred site for the Aborigines.

Tim Powder was a “black tracker” from Queensland employed by the Victorian police to help find lost people. As a family we got to know him. Over a Christmas dinner he said that he knew that we tried to seek God’s guidance so he felt he could tell us something. “You saw the front page picture about me finding that little boy. The paper said it was my keen eyesight that picked up the tracks. I couldn’t tell the journalists the real story because they would not have understood. There were no tracks to find because hundreds of people had been looking before. So I went off all on my own. Then this picture came clearly to my mind of a little fair-haired boy sitting with his back against an old burnt-out tree with a kidney shaped pool in front of him and a broken mountain behind. I was led and just kept walking until suddenly I could see him with the kidney-shaped pool in front of him and the broken mountain behind.”

As a family we had no doubt this was absolutely real to him and was how it had happened. It left me wondering if once we all had had such other-worldly gifts which we had lost along the way to becoming worldly wise.



*Tim Powder giving our son Gordon his first riding lesson.*

## Chapter 31

### India's Charm and Challenge

*“... you killed Jesus and we killed  
the Mahatma”*

“Teach what you know; and learn what you don’t!” This challenge, somewhere between an invitation and a contract, was offered in 1966 to a group of young Australians and New Zealanders by Rajmohan Gandhi, whose grandfather, Mahatma Gandhi, had been the moving spirit in India achieving Independence. On a visit to Australia, Rajmohan had been impressed by the musical play *Sing Out Australia* that these young people had created. So he asked them to tour India, starting in Bombay. Rita and I helped the party to get together and were somewhat surprised that it finished up being 53, mostly students who had recently finished high school and felt they could take on this venture before going to university.

The budget was daunting. The “big ticket” items related to getting the right equipment to enable us to fly a musical production to India and then have something that was mobile enough to go on the road there. Then a single act of generosity kick-started the whole operation. Mr Frits Philips, then Chairman of the world-wide Philips company, happened to be in Australia. He saw the musical, heard Rajmohan Gandhi’s invitation, and spontaneously volunteered to provide all the sound equipment. He insisted it be the latest and best his company could produce. Ian McMullin, who headed up Spotless, the largest drycleaning company in Australia, took on the cleaning of all the costumes and scenery. And many of our needs were met by such gifts in kind.

But we only had a fraction of the money needed to fly us from Perth to Bombay, so rather in desperation we went to the Department of Civil Aviation with a very long-shot proposal. We asked the Director General would there be any chance of being able to get a special arrangement whereby we fly on one of the immigrant charter planes which always flew back to Britain empty. He replied that would only be possible if what we were doing in India was adjudged by the Department of Foreign Affairs as being in line with Australia's foreign policy. He rang a top official in Canberra to get him to give a ruling.

The official said that Australia's Foreign Minister, Paul Hasluck, had given a major speech at a recent MRA conference outlining Australia's policy in relation to Asia. The head of Civil Aviation said that he had in fact just read the speech. The official asked if our stated objectives were in line with the Minister's speech. On being assured they were, the Canberra man said, "Well you have your answer."

So on the basis of this verbal interchange we got our charter, only having to cover the running costs. Before the party boarded the plane, a sturdy but slow, Bristol Britannia, we were farewelled by Paul Hasluck in Perth. He said he was sure we would not be like some Australians who go to Asia and whose only interest in the local people is to get one of them to use the camera so they can keep in the centre of the picture!

The stopover in Singapore was marked by each of the men in the cast receiving tailor made suits in lightweight drip-dry material – the gift of two expatriate businessmen, Stan Barnes and John Storey. I had flown on ahead with all the measurements. Despite my protestations the Chinese tailor would not believe the dimensions of Phil Jefferys, who had bulked up labouring long and hard on the family property outside Broken Hill. His

proportions accorded to the most solid of rugby forwards and because the tailor could not envisage this, Phil's was the only imperfect fit. More recently when reminiscing about his participation with this party, Kim Beazley, then Leader of the Federal Opposition, told his wife, Susie, that the suit he got in Singapore was the only one that had ever fitted him properly. She was keen to know the name of the tailor!

Bombay was a great shock to our young party. I remember one morning that Kim was in tears. I thought it was because his grandmother, who shared the family home, had recently died. But Kim said no, it was the sight of so many people living on the pavements. "Until now," he said, "I have always believed that a combination of will and brain can tackle any problem. But I now realise that unless we enlist people's hearts we will never deal with the size of need I have seen here." I believe it was a conviction that has remained with him.

Perhaps most Australians have certain apprehensions in going to India. Sights, smells and sounds are all different. One noteworthy quality is a genuine love of country. This winning characteristic seemed to be shared by people of markedly different economic status. You found yourself being helped to see India from a positive perspective. Often you were given great wisdom from people living in simple, even straitened, circumstances.

Some of us were invited to an Indian village perched up on a plateau of the Western Ghats. The village leader, dressed in white home-spun cotton and looking a little like Mahatma Gandhi, indicated he would like me to walk with him. So we set off across the plain, with me keeping quiet because I did not know if he spoke English. Then he said: "Your quicks are good; but our slows are better." It dawned on me that we were talking cricket. He reeled off the names

and initials of every member of the Australian Test side, followed by the Indian players. There was a rather big shift in the conversation when he turned to ask me: "Why do we kill the best people?" While I was pondering this "biggie" he went on: "You killed Jesus and we killed the Mahatma. I wonder why?" You have to love and respect a country that produces characters like that.

The musical we had brought to India was a mixture of great entertainment and real inspiration. It portrayed the hope that change was possible and palatable in a way that meant the younger generation flocked to it. We played to full houses in Bombay, Poona and Madras. Then we had the thought to discontinue our showings in order that the party would be free to answer invitations we had received to work with local people. So smaller parties went to different locations across India to do this. Some of our cast helped in the development of an Indian production entitled *India Arise* which eventually was seen by audiences in many nations.

In going with the party to India I had a firm preconception that we were staying for about six months. In the event all stayed longer, some for even as long as eight or nine years! The cast saw a need and felt they could play a part in doing something about it. There were no "quick fix" solutions so they were prepared to settle in for the long haul. To go back to the original premise: "Teach what you know and learn what you don't", each of us felt that we left India heavily in the debt of its remarkably varied sons and daughters.

## Chapter 32

### **He Certainly Did It His Way**

*“What do you want to do – throw the copper company into the sea?”*

To meet John Gorton was to know that you were meeting a real man. He was a genuine war hero and looked it. He went into the war smoothly handsome and came out with a battered face and a lop-sided but charming grin. It was the result of an horrific crash after being shot down by the Japanese when defending Singapore as a fighter pilot.

Harold Holt’s dramatic and unexpected demise left his party floundering as they searched for a successor. The Acting Prime Minister, John McEwen, leader of the Country Party, made it clear that William McMahon was totally unacceptable. He would not serve under him. He never said why and nobody in the Establishment wanted him to. Yet even though McMahon had substantial backing from the big end of town in Sydney, Gorton, a Senator and not in the House of Representatives where a Prime minister needed to be, was suddenly and enthusiastically backed. In the subsequent by-election he easily won Holt’s vacant seat in the lower House.

The media took off on a roll. In a way reminiscent of John Kennedy in America, John Gorton was presented as a shining knight who came out of the war ready to give peacetime leadership to his country. Soon everybody knew everything about him including how he had married his American wife when they were both getting degrees in Oxford and of their battle to make a go of it on an orchard in Victoria. He was given a

rapturous political honeymoon. All the “big people” thought they had picked a winner. All the “little people” sensed he was one of their own.

But the so-called “money men, mining magnates and media barons” were in for a big surprise. He was not controllable and never had been. Born out of wedlock, he had in his early years known the love of his warm-hearted Irish mother. Then following her death from tuberculosis there was a big shift when his father entrusted him to the control of his wife. She placed him in select boarding schools first at Shore in Sydney and then later at Geelong Grammar in Victoria.

As time went on it dawned on his backers that he was an outspoken nationalist. Some of the many articles written about him after his death underlined that it was he, not Whitlam, who led Australia into the uncharted waters of a stand-alone nationalism. While it was expected of Whitlam, it infuriated those busily engaged in selling off our raw materials to hear Gorton say again and again that he had no intention of presiding over a nation that finished up being a series of empty quarries.

However the cavalcade of criticism that was mounted against him in the same newspapers that had earlier glamourised him as something of a Sir Galahad was not primarily along these lines. Rather than expose their own vested interests they based their attack on moral instead of economic grounds. They suddenly decided he drank too much and had a roving eye. And that these indulgences meant his character was not such as was needed to be a good Prime Minister. But to see the Gortons together you sensed that they had a good marriage. Bettina was something of an academic who produced an Indonesian/Australian dictionary. And I think she knew that



*Rita and I in Rorovana village, Bougainville, with Raphael Bele, MP, and his wife Mary, 1970.*

Photo: Danielle Maillefer

most, perhaps all, of his flirtations took place in conversation and the imagination rather than in someone else's bed.

Larrikin, yes. Maverick, certainly. But he was essentially a good-hearted man (I was enough of a romantic to feel the big heart was bequeathed to him by his Irish mother). He was aware that Australia should launch Papua New Guinea into nationhood and wanted to help that happen in the right way. I first met him when Dirona Abe, a Papuan member of their House of Assembly, wanted me to arrange an appointment with the then Senator Gorton, Federal Minister of Education. Abe outlined the needs of his people and asked for help from Australia. Gorton, rather shrewdly, asked if this help was for the people of Abe's electorate. Abe said what he had asked for was already in place in his electorate but was needed in other parts of the country that were not so fortunate. Gorton, with a warm smile, commended him and granted the request.

Years later the island of Bougainville was suddenly on the front pages across the nation. One of the largest copper mines in the world was under construction. Police action had been launched against the people of Rorovana over land needed for the construction of the port. The front page pictures that appeared across the country on August 16, 1969 showed police manhandling the protesting women of the village and using tear gas and batons. In the wake of this Paul Lapun, an MP for Bougainville and Raphael Bele, the leader of the Rorovanans, flew to Australia looking for justice. Some in the media stated that they were coming to get a High Court injunction to block the development of the mine. When I met them in Sydney they asked me to arrange a meeting with the Prime Minister because they were seeking "a change in policy rather than headlines".

They had barely taken their seats in the Prime Minister's office when John Gorton bluntly asked: "What do you want to do – throw the copper company into the sea?" Lapun replied equally directly: "No. But we feel God put the copper into the ground and we have not found His way to get it out and we would like your help to do this." It may have been a while since God was the centre piece in a conversation with John Gorton. Certainly the suggestion that he could play a part in helping God's way to come about seemed to move him.

When the rather conservative Minister for the Territories, "Ceb" Barnes tried offering the men an incremental increase on the value of the land involved, Gorton turned to him and said: "Ceb, it is no use trying to ante the offer up bit by bit. These men will have to be able to tell their people that there has been a fundamental change of policy or there will be bloodshed". Gorton agreed that the Bougainvilleans should have the right to deal directly with CRA, the copper company, and said to Barnes: "We may think our policy of negotiating on their behalf is designed to protect them from the sharks. But they may do a lot better for themselves than we can do for them." It impressed me that Gorton said all this openly to his cabinet minister. In doing so he was treating the Bougainvilleans as equals – a point they emphasised when they returned to their island.

On his death, sections of the media claimed that because he was born illegitimate he did not fit in easily with the accepted pattern of leadership. Maybe. But perhaps because he knew a lot about not being accepted he knew how to make it clear to Lapun and Bele that they were on equal terms with him and Ceb Barnes. Surely he played a distinctive role in creating the spirit that later saw Independence come to PNG without bloodshed.

## Chapter 33

### **Malcolm's Bigness**

*... of towering stature but with a  
complete lack of small talk*

Television tends to make all politicians look about the same size. It is partly due to the “talking head” syndrome where the camera focuses on the head and shoulders. So it is a surprise when you meet someone like Malcolm Fraser to realise just how big he really is. Some pundits claimed that he was chosen to stand against Gough Whitlam because he was the only one on the conservative side of Parliament who could level with him eye-ball to eye-ball.

To talk with him is to be surprised how wide his interests are. He really is interested in the world and is equally at home in Asia, Africa or the USA. As Prime Minister he startled his critics and fellow party members alike with the vigour with which he pursued the reforms on Aboriginal land rights initiated by the Labor Party. Indeed one of the leading reformers on the Labor side of the house told me that Fraser had been much more bold and generous than they had planned to be.

But some find him a puzzle. He looks patrician and to walk with him over “Nareen”, the big property he owned in the choice Western District of Victoria, was to recall the phrase “to the manor born”. Yet the zeal with which he continues to engage in the reconciliation process particularly concerning “the stolen generations” of the Aboriginal people is totally non-patronising and genuine.

Arrogant was a word that was pinned on him. Being of towering stature and with a complete lack of small talk made him an easy target. But I had an experience which questioned that assessment. I had known him for some years before the occasion when he stood up in Parliament and was brutally honest about why he could not continue to work under the Prime Minister of the day – John Gorton.

It was not a rift that time healed. The differences seemed irreconcilable. It brought division to their party. One felt the country was the loser because both had so much to give.

I found myself praying for both these men – whom I regarded highly. Finally I had the thought to talk it through with Malcolm Fraser. To my surprise when I raised the subject with him he seemed relieved to talk it over rather than take umbrage. He took me through their whole relationship and made it clear why he felt justified in bringing down Gorton along with himself.

But suddenly he stopped and asked me quite directly if I thought he had done the right thing. I made it clear I did not feel qualified to judge. But he persisted. Were there any aspects of his actions that I had doubts about?

Finally I thought to ask him if he had in fact said to Gorton's face what he had said about him in the House. He said he had. I remembered the last sentence: "I do not believe he is fit to hold the great office of Prime Minister and I cannot serve in his Government."

So I asked him if he had also said the last sentence to Gorton before saying it publicly. Fraser immediately replied: "No I did not. Do you think I should apologise?"

My reply was that while I did not feel I should make a judgment I was sure that God could make it clear to him what to do.

I wish I knew what happened next!

But there was another relationship that did take me by surprise. Malcolm Fraser and Gough Whitlam not only shared bigness of physique, they were both “big picture” people. It has been one of the civilised images of Australian public life to see them in latter years sharing the same platform for causes for which they have a common passion. When apartheid held sway in South Africa the leadership there expected the opposition they got from Whitlam, but they were outraged that a so-called conservative like Malcolm Fraser was an even more effective critic.

More recently some American leaders have expressed surprise at his sharp insights into the way globalisation was most likely to benefit the major world player while further marginalising the smaller nations. Malcolm Fraser has no intention of looking for some back-water retirement when there are still big waves to catch — and to make!

## Chapter 34

### **The Wing Commander**

*Flying out on the last plane to  
Broome from Bandung*

“Wing Comander Eric Roberts’ car and driver will come for him at 9am tomorrow.” It was the eve of the Anzac Day march and a similar call was made from Defence Headquarters each year. I would thank the caller, but explain W/Cdr Roberts did not need a car. The officer on the other end of the phone would then say that he knew from the records how old Eric was. At this stage I would volunteer that while he was in his 80’s Eric was still doing 40 press-ups a day and had never used the hot water tap on his shower. So Eric would once again *march* on Anzac Day – rain, hail or shine!

In 1915 Eric had been one of the first 16 to learn to fly in Australia, in a Box Kite aircraft as part of the original Australian Flying Corps. It was in Perth in 1942 that I first met him. Earlier he had got out of Palembang in Sumatra a day before Japanese paratroopers captured the oilfields there. Before that he had been responsible for evacuating the battle-experienced aircrew from Malaya and Singapore. While in Palembang, with communications having completely broken down, he was ordered to take a report on the situation to the headquarters in Bandung. It had been a four hour flight and he had piloted a plane smaller than a Tiger Moth at a thousand feet with the jungle below and the Japanese in control of the air above. Looking back I realise that Eric was 48 at the time, having been invalided out of WWI from the effects of a prolonged period of intense operational flying.

And now he had just succeeded in getting the Australian air force personnel in Indonesia back on planes to Australia before flying out on the last aircraft to reach Broome from Bandung. The day after we met in Perth all the planes re-fuelling in Broome, including several Catalinas and Sunderlands, were bombed by the Japanese with great loss of life. I had already enlisted in the RAAF but was on reserve waiting for planes to be available for our training. To meet Eric in a crumpled and battle-stained uniform en route to RAAF HQ in Melbourne to give a first-hand briefing on the imminent Japanese threat, made the war very real indeed. We next met when I was posted to the UK where he was now Wing Commander in Charge of Personnel, a responsibility that took in 17,000 men from Britain through to the Middle East.

It was many years later, in 1964, when Eric invited us as a family to share his home. Jean, his wife, had died earlier, and we lived together with Eric for over 20 years. He was as adventurous in his peace time activities as he had been in two world wars. He and Jean gave a lot of time to the programme of MRA in the Philippines, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. And later their son Dr Neil Roberts, a lecturer in Maths at the University of PNG, met and married his wife Betty, from the island of Manus. Eric wholeheartedly welcomed Betty into the family.

While being colour-blind in matters of race relations himself this was not so with some of his contemporaries. I remember having pre-dinner drinks on the spacious verandah of his home in Kew when an Air Vice Marshal stated with much conviction: "The worst thing we have done is to hand over PNG to 'the boongs!'" Eric, on his way to dinner, proudly showed the photo of Neil's wedding in Port Moresby. Never a word of censure, but never a backward step.

Eric was an honoured member of the prestigious Naval and Military Club of Melbourne and he liked to entertain guests there. One of his friends was Reg Blow, an Aboriginal leader who was for a time an advisor to the Victorian Government. On one occasion when Reg was coming to lunch there he had brought his friend Alex Jakomis with him. The club president came to our table to make it clear that Aboriginals were welcome, even though it certainly was not an everyday event!

Alex was telling Eric how much the country was changing since the immediate postwar period. Then just out of the AIF he had been taking a boxing troupe, most of whom were Aboriginals, around outback NSW. Speaking a little louder because Eric was a bit hard of hearing, Alex, who was of Greek background himself, went on: "We were out back of Bourke and came to a town late in the afternoon and the only place open was a milk bar run by a Greek. I said we wanted some steak sandwiches and heard him say to his wife in Greek, "they are only Abos, give them the old steak." By this time everyone in the dining room of the club was listening. Alex went on: "I said in Greek to the milk bar proprietor 'do you think that's in line with Greek hospitality?'" Alex recounted how the man screamed out to his wife to give them the best and when we left, said Alex, "we had a box of top sandwiches to last us two days." Eric was oblivious to how distinctive his guests were!

Reg, who at that stage was not a believer, was in hospital and one of the nurses was quite pressing about him coming to a church service in the chapel of the hospital. There were only a handful there and Reg was astonished to find himself propelling the wheelchair forward so he could be prayed for. So on getting out of hospital he thought he had better find out what was involved in actually being a Christian! In line with his traditions

he felt he needed the teaching of an “elder” so the following week he came out to visit Eric. His first question to Eric was: “Do you know when you became a Christian?” Eric, whose own turning to a spiritual life had been both overdue and specific was able to give a definite answer. From then on Reg came out once a week for about two months to sit at the feet of the elder.

Reg and our sons, Phil and Gordon, were proud to be among the pall bearers when Eric died aged 91.

Eric’s grandchildren, Ila, Jean and Eli, have since adopted Rita and me as proxy grandparents. Prayer always meant a lot to him. In the open style house that Neil and Betty had in Lae the girls were intrigued to see Eric on his knees. They stepped through into his bedroom and asked if they could join him. It would be good indeed if every grandchild could take a step towards a faith so naturally.

## Chapter 35

### **Marge Tucker goes to The Lodge**

*“I was here three months before I was born”*

“There’s a track winding back to an old fashioned shack along the road to Gundagai.” I can still hear the lilting voice of Mrs Marge Tucker singing these lines as we neared Gundagai. The song had special significance for Marge as her parents had been married there. Rita and I were driving her up to Canberra where she had been invited to the Prime Minister’s Lodge.

Tamie Fraser, wife of the Prime Minister, had asked Marge and Rita to afternoon tea there so Marge could present her with a copy of her book *If Everyone Cared*. In welcoming her Tamie asked if it was her first visit to Canberra. Marge replied: “Oh no I was here three months before I was born because my Mother was ‘walkabout’ when she was pregnant and camped on Black’s Mountain.” (I know it is listed as Black Mountain but you had the feeling Marge’s sources went back further.)

It was a meeting of hearts. Mrs Fraser and Marge spoke together as if they were old friends. From the photos in the book Mrs Fraser noted one of Edward River. She remarked that this was the area near Deniliquin where her husband’s family had a property and how interested he would be to read the book also.

The book is now in its 10th edition and is a source material for schools. One of the first books by an Aboriginal about their own people, it was certainly the first one where one of the so-called “stolen generations” had written in first hand detail of what the experience had meant. The young Aboriginal girls

were put out as domestics. In some cases the mistresses were vindictive and cruel, so much so that Marge as a teenager tried to take her life with rat poison.

Marge was in her fifties before she had an experience that lifted the burden of those years and freed her from bitterness. It



Photo: Dennis Mayor

*Margaret Tucker, MBE – “there’s a track winding back...”*

came through a simple, but real apology made by Jean Roberts, a descendant of a pioneer Melbourne family. As Marge put it: “She was the first white woman to say sorry to me for the treatment of my race with a sincerity that was real.”

Actually her book was written in the home where I am writing this. She was a friend of the previous owner and used to stay with her. She would get up early in the morning and in a big exercise book would write in long hand, capturing her childhood experiences on the Cummeragunga Aboriginal Reserve. And memories of the elders some of whom could remember, when they were children, seeing the Burke and Wills expedition .

Those who have seen the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* may have winced at the scene where the young girls are forcibly separated by police from their mothers and taken away for “training”. Marge tells of her own experience: “As we hung on to our mother she said fiercely: ‘They are my children and they are not going away with you.’ The policeman, who no doubt was doing his duty, patted his handcuffs which were in a leather case on his belt and which my sister May and I thought was a revolver. ‘Mrs Clements, he said, ‘I will have to use this if you do not let us take these children now.’”

“Thinking that the policeman would shoot Mother because she was trying to stop him we screamed, ‘We’ll go with him Mum, we’ll go.’ I cannot forget any detail of that moment. It stands out as though it were yesterday. I cannot ever see kittens taken from their mother cat without remembering that scene. It is just on sixty years ago.”

So much for the semantics about whether there were “stolen generations”!

## Chapter 36

### **High Noon at Mt Isa**

*The town seemed to be coming back together again...*

To ride with Peter Wood in his open-top MG sports car up Wellington's winding roads was to be reminded of goggle and helmeted Tiger Moth flights in the Air Force. It surprised me that Peter, an accountant at Unilever's head office in New Zealand, wanted to talk about what was happening in Mt Isa, Queensland. The source of 70% of Australia's copper production, Mt Isa had been constantly in the headlines in Australia because of a strike which had closed the mine for seven months. But New Zealand seemed a long way from an isolated strife-torn one industry "company" town. In fact Mt Isa is nearer to Indonesia than any major Australian city.

A few days later Peter again raised the subject of Mt Isa – now for the third time! It seemed to be a pre-occupation. I asked him why? He told me that he had been trying out an experiment of taking time early in the morning to see if God had any thoughts for him and each morning "Mt Isa" had come to mind. Then with a smile he said that there was actually a bit more to it. Namely that part of his savings were in Mt Isa shares and he had come to feel that God wanted him to sell them in order to help finance MRA going in with a group to endeavour to bring some new element into the situation.

I was touched that someone from across the Tasman should be prepared to take such a step to help my country. But I did not feel that I could accept his offer without exploring the

situation on the ground in Mt Isa. It happened that Peter had some leave from his job so we went together. We found a town divided, gripped by both bitterness and fear. Most were rigidly on one side or the other in an industrial dispute that had also divided the labour force. But we discovered enough “neutrals” who welcomed our offer to bring an MRA play which they felt might present a positive alternative. The chairman of the Shire Council was not personally involved in the industrial dispute and encouraged us to make bookings to show the play at the one theatre in town. He felt the town would greatly benefit from a fresh perspective. We had just arrived back in Melbourne when he rang to tell us of the immediate hostility he had encountered from some. The management of the theatre, where all the strike meetings had been held, had been “persuaded” they should no longer make it available.

So we went back to Mt Isa. In the street we bumped into the leader of the strike, Pat Mackie. Of Canadian background, his trademark was a bright red baseball cap. A former all-in wrestler he also wore two “cauliflower ears”. Because I was obviously a stranger to the town he presumed I was “one of them newshawks!” Knowing that he had made the assertion that the play was probably designed “to drive us back to work”, I explained to him that the play was about choices and how change could affect the future. We went on to the social committee, set up to support the strikers who were living off food sent to them by fellow unionists from across Australia. We told them the play was our contribution to the town, that bringing it would take every cent we had so we would arrive dead broke. And because we often found that those who had least were the ones who gave most, we had come to them to ask if they could help us with accommodation. Bless them, many of the cast were invited

into the homes of these workers who had been without income for so long.

Peter Wood's gift started the fund to get the cast and company to Mt Isa. Some of them approached Reg Ansett, the founder of Ansett Airlines. His response was that "you would have to be a bit crazy" to want to go into what had been headlined as one of Australia's most bitter industrial disputes. There had been increasing violence, including a stabbing. In the event Ansett made the charter available with a 50% discount and the stipulation that we had to fly from Adelaide – "because it's the nearest airport to Mt Isa". I checked up on the map and found to my surprise that this was so. It was 1965 and the plane was a DC6 which flew at what proved to be an uncomfortably low altitude. The extreme turbulence coming up from the Simpson Desert and similar country caused a good deal of air sickness in the party of 35. Two of the party who were unfazed by the turbulence and enjoyed the food on offer throughout were Jonathan Lancaster and John Mills. It may have helped that they both planned to be doctors and didn't feel sickness was for them!

The play was presented in a large church hall and was packed out. A taxi driver commented "there were people in that audience that hadn't been together in the same room in months." They included the General Manager of the mine and several of the strike leaders and union officials. Many were curious to know more which led to an outdoor screening of an MRA film entitled *Men of Brazil* which had an industrial setting. It drew hundreds to the central park.

There was a family atmosphere with groups sitting together on rugs enjoying a picnic as the sun set before the film began. Many commented that the town seemed to be coming back together again.

Pat Mackie asked for a showing of the film for the Disputes Committee so following the outdoor screening we took the projection equipment and film straight around to their headquarters. After the showing there was a lively debate led by John McMahon, a communist who had been the main negotiator during the dispute. He wanted to know if we had been giving the same attention to the management as we had to them and was amused when we told him we “had found them every bit as difficult.” His major question was: “Do you agree that the wealth of Australia is meant to benefit Australians, all of them?” Our reply was that we felt the assets of the country were entrusted to us by God for the good of humanity at large and not just Australians. This provoked a vigorous debate amongst members of the Disputes Committee. To my surprise it was the communists who were strongly against the proposition of caring for the whole world. It transpired that the question to us was actually linked to getting us to sign a petition objecting to American ownership of the mine and claiming that the country’s minerals should benefit *only* Australians.

Days later the strike was settled and the cast were the first visitors to be invited down the re-opened mine. *The Courier Mail* of Brisbane commented: “it is perhaps not coincidental that the settlement came a week after the showing of the MRA play”. Another angle came from Sydney’s Cardinal Gilroy. I had earlier consulted him about the wisdom of going into Mt Isa when there was so much violence and he had replied: “You have been invited, we haven’t. You go and I’ll pray.” We went from Mt Isa to show the play in Sydney including a performance at the Genesis Theatre for him. He greeted me with a grin and the claim: “See how effective my prayers were!”

Because the play *We Are Tomorrow* was set in a university the majority of the cast were themselves students though

two of the actors fortuitously were seasoned trade unionists who connected well with their Mt Isa co-workers. It happened that the invitation to Mt Isa focussed what proved to be life decisions for a number of the cast. John Mills decided to put aside his medical course. Instead he was led to a commitment to try and bring change to places of need across the world and he went on to spend 15 of the next 18 years outside Australia. Jonathan Lancaster, his brothers Andrew and David, and Mike Brown of Adelaide, made similar decisions. They finished up being part of the nucleus of the future leadership of MRA in Australia. I don't think any of us at the time realised what a significant journey that trip to "the Isa" started.

But without Peter Wood's generous act from across the Tasman it probably would not have happened.

## Chapter 37

### **The Wharfies' Picnic**

*“... keep your feet on their chest  
until the meeting was over.”*

The first intimation that I was in quite a different world was at the fast food van. It was the Wharfies' picnic held at Bacchus Marsh sports oval. I had been queuing for chips for our party when a big man firmly sidled into the queue just ahead of me. It was done with a practised authoritative manner. The Irish in me bridled and I protested.

With ominous slowness the big one turned seeming bigger as he looked down on me, asking in a menacing tone, “Do you have a problem?” I decided that “not really” was the safe reply. Later someone wised me up. “Don't ever take on the ‘Bomber’ – he was twice runner up for the national heavyweight title.” It seems the “Bomber” was no friend on the waterfront of my host for the day, Jim Beggs. Jim, his wife Tui and their two children lived next door to where we were staying at the time and we had got to know them well. And it was through them that we had met some colourful “rough diamonds” who reminded us of the big-hearted souls we had got to know when in the Welsh mining valleys.

We were about to have our picnic lunch when there was a disturbance in the family group across the grass from us. The husband came back after a heavy session around the keg. The wife protested and after the flurry that followed there was blood running down her cheek, her glasses having been smashed by her husband's blow.

The roast chicken was ignored as the wife grabbed the carving knife. Phil, our older son, who was about 10 years-old, exclaimed in amazement “She’s going to stab him.” As Jim rushed across to get control of the knife I heard myself unconvincingly trying to get my son to believe that she had been going to carve the chicken.

Not only did Jim and Tui stop the violence but they took the couple back to their home to broker a longer-term truce. We in the meantime gathered up all the kids and took them back to our home. Jim and Tui finally returned at 2:30 am. The man had the nickname of “Wobbly” and the Beggs gave them and their family support for years.

I am not sure why “Wobbly”. Some of the nicknames of Jim’s waterfront colleagues were more obvious. “The Judge” because he sat on a case all day. “London Fog” because he was never known to lift. “The Mirror”, a foreman who was always “going to look into it.”

Jim had come to feel that things needed changing on the waterfront and talked it over with Tui. She suggested that if he was serious the place to start was with himself. That meant returning the clock that he had taken from the dashboard of a luxury car when he was unloading it. So some months later he rang up the secretary of the Managing Director of the firm importing the cars. “Is it a personal or business matter?” asked the secretary, to which Jim replied somewhat hesitantly: “a bit of both.” Jim risked his job by admitting what he had done. The Managing Director told Jim that the amount taken from incoming cars was massive and if he would spread the new spirit he had found, that would be restitution enough. The word did spread and the wharfies nicknamed Jim “Daylight Saving” – because he “put the clock back!”

Jim sought inspiration as to what could be done about the deep divisions on the waterfront. He had the thought to apologise to Les Stuart. Les was the leader of the coal workers' section, possibly the toughest group on the docks. While not big, Les was dynamite having been a professional boxer. A passionate Catholic, his way of dealing with Communists was "to knock them out and then keep your feet on his chest until the meeting was over." After Jim had made his peace with Les he asked him if the Communists Les had dealt with got up off the floor "less Communist or more Communist?"

Jim was himself often in danger when the ideological battle turned physical. I met one of those who used to watch Jim's back for him – Harold, an ex stand-over man for illegal baccaract games. I was told: "He may not carry much weight and his fist only ever travels five inches, but you never get up off the floor after he hits you."

Jim and Les started to offer the workforce on the waterfront a positive alternative to the Communist versus anti-Communist divide. They worked on a scheme that would give long-



*Our sons, Gordon and Phil – two observers at the wharfies' picnic.*

term security of employment in return for less stoppages. For years the media had categorised the Australian waterfront as being “Communist controlled”. Then the Communist Party went from presenting a monolithic solidarity to being bitterly divided between “Peking” and “Moscow” factions. This split aided those offering another programme. Eventually Jim’s team won power with Jim becoming national President of the Waterside Workers’ Federation.

## Chapter 38

### **From Tent to Magic Carpet**

*... advice both very wise and very “Indian”*

Many years after we had shared a tent together during our first weeks in the Air Force I bumped into Bob Cotton again in a corridor in Parliament House, Canberra. I found he had become a Senator and was Minister for Civil Aviation. Over coffee in his office I remember laughing when he casually offered to help if I ever needed a charter plane to forward MRA's world wide efforts.

Yet a few years later I was back in his office to discuss a rather daunting proposition that had been raised by a friend Dr Laurie Vogel. Laurie, a “big leaguer”, had suggested a plane should be chartered to take a delegation to the 25th Anniversary Assembly to be held mid-1971 at the MRA conference centre in Caux, Switzerland. Laurie proposed that delegates from various Pacific nations join the plane in Sydney and that we should pick up further groups in Perth, Kuala Lumpur, Bombay, and Teheran before all disembarking in Geneva. Bob Cotton was supportive and arranged for us to meet Captain Ritchie, the General Manager of Qantas. It turned out to be something of a “magic carpet” experience all round.

I was surprised to find that Qantas did not have landing rights for either Bombay or Geneva. They asked if MRA could approach the authorities in these countries to get special permission. Qantas gave me free transport to India to try and negotiate an agreement. It happened that the Director General of India's Civil Aviation authority, based in

New Delhi, was appreciative of what MRA had done in India. He dispatched me to Bombay to the CEO of Air India with advice that seemed to me to be both very wise and very “Indian”. He suggested that I did not seek their approval, but instead get them to agree not to disagree!

So with Jonathan Lancaster, who had been based in Bombay since he had originally arrived with *Sing Out Australia* five years before, I went to the imposing new Air India building overlooking Bombay Harbour. I am sure the view from the CEO’s office was magnificent, but what caught my eye was the decor. A striking purple carpet went under the CEO’s massive desk and then continued straight up the wall behind him to the ceiling. Wall-to-wall carpet had, with typical Indian flair, given way to floor-to-ceiling carpet!

The CEO wanted to be assured that the flight was an initiative of MRA and not Qantas, and if so what was our objective? Once we explained our cause it was agreed that 30 from India could join the flight provided they were not charged a fare. We made the arrangement that those boarding in Bombay could instead contribute towards the building of the Asian Centre for MRA that was being created at Panchgani outside of Poona. We sensed that the devout Parsee faith which motivated the founders of Air India was a help in gaining their support.

Back home in Sydney the Qantas management were pleased and somewhat surprised that permission had been gained to enable one of their planes to break new ground by landing in Bombay and later Geneva. We were also granted special permission to pick up passengers in both Kuala Lumpur and Teheran. The generous terms offered by Qantas meant we could help the Aborigines who came from the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia and also the Papua New Guineans. 121 were in the party which included Members of

Parliament from Australia, Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia, as well as representatives of the Maori Council of New Zealand.

About a week before take-off we discovered we were entitled to all the cargo space in the Boeing 707. So we decided to see if we could get donations of food as a contribution to the conference. It has been said that the more difficult the challenge the better Australians respond. The fact that the deadline was so close seemed to draw out the best from those we approached. Werner Brodbeck, then CEO of White Crow, gave us a ton of tomato products and then another ton of milk products from his connections with Tongala Milk. Berri Fruit Juices Co-Op from South Australia gave a ton of assorted juices. The chairman of the Co-Operative Dried Fruit Sales Pty, Ltd. vigorously queried why they should make a gift to Europe when the Europeans had been so difficult with their limitations on dried fruit exports. When we told him we also had the needs of the delegates from Africa and Asia in mind he laughed and then added “maybe it wouldn’t hurt us to be generous to Europe too!” A ton of choice Australian dried fruit was given.

Malcolm Fraser, as the local Member, approached Borthwick Meatworks of Portland who offered two tons of meat, but the deadline was too tight for the special preparations needed for meat products. All up four and a half tons of “goodies” went into the hold. It was regarded as an example of Australian big-heartedness by the delegates from across the world at the conference. Those boarding the flight in the middle of the night in Teheran had a large Persian rug put in the hold as their contribution to their expenses. It was described as “priceless”, but I never found out how much this meant!

In addition to all the conference sessions there were a great number of personal initiatives. Galurrwuy Yunupingu, then athletically youthful and later to become Australian of the Year, greatly appreciated “kick to kick” sessions using an Aussie Rules ball with David Mills of Melbourne. Kim Beazley Sr., one of the members of Australia’s Parliament who had pioneered legislative changes in relation to the Aboriginal people, took Galurrwuy and Walaymbuma Wunungmurra across Switzerland to meet the executives of the Swiss bauxite operation in the Gove Peninsula. It was an opportunity for representatives of two disparate cultures to begin to understand one another.

Over a breakfast at the conference Yan Celene Uregei, MP from New Caledonia, found himself sitting next to Frits Philips, Chairman of the Philips organisation. He said he wished he could talk face to face with the head of the giant nickel company which operated in New Caledonia in the same way. It was by far the largest employer on the island and there had been a bitter strike in progress for months. To Yan Celene, the head office in Paris had always seemed too far away. Now here he was, much closer, but it was summer time and Paris was practically deserted. However it transpired that Frits Philips knew the member of the Rothschild family who ran the nickel company. A few days later a most fruitful meeting took place where it was possible for the different perspectives of Noumea and Paris to come together.

Raphael Bele, a Bougainville village leader and newly-elected member of the Parliament in Port Moresby, was one of the 33 in the party who were invited to Ireland. He struck a raw nerve when he told leaders of both the Catholic and Protestant communities how, since meeting MRA, he had

acted to stop the traditional system of pay-back killings in his own area. Of course, his audience could identify with the practice!

Another fresh perspective from afar occurred when Canon Huata, WWII chaplain to the Maori battalion, met the implacably anti-Catholic Rev Ian Paisley, MP. He told him how deep was the hate that had come back to him when our charter plane had flown low over Monte Casino in Italy. There the Maori battalion had been all but wiped out by the Germans. Arriving at the conference in Caux he was confronted by the presence of a large number of Germans. He knew he could not continue to cling to his hate, had yielded it and then apologised to them. It was hard to gauge if Ian Paisley drew any parallels but an evaluation of the visit of the delegation was summed up in the headline of a Belfast paper: "Moral Re-Armament: A Platform for Peace".

Gathering people from different nations on to a charter with pick up points spread round the globe was a challenging operation. The arrangements of routing, timing and finance were carried by people continents apart. The enduring memory is of a unity based on a shared commitment. Gratitude too for Bob Cotton, who saw to it that a sense of mateship which started in the constrictions of an Air Force tent reached out to a much wider horizon.

## Chapter 39

### **“Give Up My Mistress?”**

*... with love you can say anything*

Bunny Austin helped England to win the Davis Cup five times. I had watched him move unblinkingly into the fastest serves and angle his return tantalisingly out of reach of a rampaging opponent. So perhaps I should not have been surprised that he was equally daring in conversation. He had included me in a meal he was having with a leading member of parliament. Over soup he casually asked the MP if he had thought any more about a conversation they had had a few days before. Seemingly equally at ease, he replied: “Oh you mean about whether I should give up my mistress?”

He went on to say it would not please his mistress or himself, and he did not think his wife cared either way. In honesty I cannot remember the rest of the conversation. I suppose I was trying to digest how normal the MP seemed to think his situation was. Shortly after this Bunny Austin left Australia and somewhat to my surprise the MP seemed to have a continuing interest in MRA. He used to come and go quite a bit, so taking a risk on one occasion I asked him why he kept coming back? He replied “because those I have met in MRA are the only people I know with the right look in their eye and who keep their friends.”

He later decided to farewell his mistress and some years on there was a rather dramatic epilogue. On a deserted country road he rolled their car and he and his wife finished up in a deep ditch well out of sight. Their injuries involved fractures of

the arms for one and a broken leg for the other. There was no way either of them individually could have made it back to the road. But together they eventually made it. I well remember their sense of achievement and deliverance when I visited them in hospital.

It caused me to reflect on the original dinner table conversation which at the time was a trifle strong for my tender palate. I also recalled a remark that Bunny had made just before he left, after his two years in Australia which he and his family had so much enjoyed. His comment was: "With love, you can say anything; without it, you can say nothing."

## Chapter 40

### **Celebrities Who Become Great**

*“How come I’m so lonely?”*

“Nowadays politicians have no clout with the younger generation; perhaps the only ones who are listened to are ‘celebrities’”. So said a young friend of mine who is blessed with an engaging mixture of idealism and realism. He nominated Bob Geldof and more recently Bono as two entertainment celebrities who had enlisted cross-generational support for the world’s needy.

Of course stardom does not equate with happiness. “If I am a legend, how come I’m so lonely?” This poignant question was uttered by Judy Garland at the height of her fame as an entertainer. John McEnroe, another legend, portrays in his autobiography how becoming a celebrity can be totally self-destroying. He describes how when you reach the top you are automatically accepted into a sort of “global club of celebrities.” It sounds like Garland’s lonely place with those in the club totally fixated on their own achievements and how to keep their pre-eminence. By McEnroe’s account there is little relationship between the size of a star’s ego and the bigness of their perspectives. He makes it clear that for many tennis players their horizons do not extend beyond the dimensions of the court.

The really interesting celebrities are those who do make it to the top then go on to devote their lives to caring for others. Three such people whom I have met come to mind – Arthur Ashe, the first black tennis player to win Wimbledon,

Sir Edmund Hillary, who along with Sherpa Tenzing, was the first to scale Mt Everest and Conrad Hunte, a vice captain of the West Indies Cricket team.

## Chapter 41

### **Arthur Ashe: “Why Me?”**

*Black Power said they would  
cut off his right hand*

“These forms of beauty ... midst the din of town and cities I have owed to them in hours of weariness, sensations sweet felt in the blood and felt along the heart”. Wordsworth’s lines sprang from his love of landscapes but they could apply to those sublime moments in sport that ennobled and endure in the imagination; vignettes that can be recalled to give comfort and to inspire.

Such a moment was Arthur Ashe’s meeting with Jimmy Connors in the men’s final at Wimbledon in 1975. Connors, the arch street-scrapper of the tennis circuit, former player of the tournament and defending champion, had breezed through his matches. Ashe, university graduate, and the first black to reach the final had played a series of five-set cliff-hangers to get there. All the experts picked Connors to win.

The game turned out to be a classic and has been re-played again and again on TV. In my case my memory helps it to be “felt in the blood and along the heart.”

Connors’ power appeared irresistible. Arthur’s returns looked soft by comparison, but they were full of guile. He made Connors generate his own pace and with the striving came the errors. At every break Connors looked more tense while Arthur looked detached – deep in peaceful meditation. He seemed to have a spirit force within him and a great sporting upset became a reality. (Final score line: 6-1, 6-1, 5-7, 6-4.)

I had met Arthur earlier when he and Stan Smith, another Wimbledon winner, came to dinner at Bunny Austin's London home. Bunny, a long time friend to me, had twice made it to the final of Wimbledon without taking the crown.

Later it was Arthur's father at his home in Gum Spring, Virginia, who told me the story of Arthur's beginning. He had been encouraged to play in the State tournament for juniors in Richmond, but the president of the club who had clearcut views on race vetoed his participation at the last minute. Arthur was later invited by the national body to play in the National Junior titles at Forest Hills, New York, where he won. This led on to him being chosen to play Davis Cup for the USA. But Arthur would never acknowledge Richmond as his birthplace because of the earlier discrimination.

Then he was chosen to go to Australia for six weeks including challenging Australia for the Davis Cup. A Richmond banker who had always felt ashamed about the earlier treatment of Arthur let it be known that his secretary would have an envelope in her desk for donations. His plan was to sponsor Arthur's father to accompany his son on the tour. A wide cross-section of Richmond's business community chipped in to send Ashe Sr. and from that time on Arthur acknowledged Richmond as his own. Certainly Richmonders have now claimed Arthur as their own with a statue of him erected on Monument Avenue alongside some of the most revered Southern heroes. He was the first black person to have made it there.

Arthur used his standing in sport to try and bring change in the wider world. He and his friend Stan Smith joined in taking a public stance protesting the tragic death of Steve Biko whilst in the custody of the South African authorities.

Arthur was arrested and handcuffed outside the South African Embassy in Washington, DC.

When he was invited to play in the South African Tennis Championships he made it a condition that he would only go if the laws were changed to make it an unsegregated audience. When he was invited to go again a spokesman for Black Power in the USA said they would cut off his right hand if he went. Notwithstanding the threat Arthur went and this time successfully campaigned that in future black players would be allowed to compete in the tournament. He went further and got all the quarter-finalists to stay on after the titles to play a mini-tournament. They raised \$32,000 to help promote coaching in the black and coloured communities of South Africa.

Arthur and his wife Jeanne were planning to go to India to work with Rajmohan Gandhi in his programme to help “create a clean, strong and united India”. We happened to be staying with Stan and Margie Smith, who had offered to look after the Ashes’ daughter, Camera, when a phonecall came saying the trip had to be postponed. Arthur’s doctors had discovered something that required further tests. It was the beginning of a long, rough road.

Throughout his playing career Stan had a strong personal faith, while Arthur had an inner urge to change what he felt needed changing in the world. Stan was one of a group on the tennis circuit who met to study the Bible. Very much non-pushy, he never intimated to Arthur that it would be good for him to re-visit the truths he learnt at his grandmother’s knee. But one day, during a long spell Arthur had in hospital, Stan sat quietly at his bedside. Finally Arthur said; “I have been reading a book.” After a long pause, Stan inquired: “Did you find it interesting?” Arthur’s quiet response was: “Very.”



*Stan Smith and Arthur Ashe – two Wimbledon winners.*

They both knew one another well enough to know which book they were talking about.

Arthur had the same resilient character both on the court and in life's battles. When congenital heart trouble fore-shortened his career he was philosophical. But when a blood transfusion at the time of his open heart surgery was finally established as being AIDS-infected he was heroic. As he battled the disease in the last years of his life he reached out to fight for change in the world in an even deeper and more effective way. At the press conference where he announced that he had AIDS a journalist asked: "Have you ever said to yourself 'Why me?'" Arthur's answer was: "No. Because I would also have to ask 'Why should a skinny black kid from the wrong side of the tracks win Wimbledon?'"

As someone wrote "he had seldom questioned a call in his playing days and he certainly never questioned his final call."



*Arthur and Jeanne Ashe  
and daughter Camera*

## Chapter 42

### **Hillary – Scaled The Heights and Stayed There**

*“God knows if I will have the  
courage to go on living”*

When I recently asked a wise judge of the New Zealand scene who the best regarded post-war leader was, he replied with great conviction: “Sir Edmund Hillary – he is respected by everyone and he towers above politics.” I remembered well when I first heard the name. It was in 1953 and I was sitting in the stands watching the Coronation in London. The news rippled, then rolled through the massed crowds that Everest had at last been conquered. Suddenly the names Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay were known world-wide.

A few years later I met him at the Hillary family property outside Auckland where he helped run the apiary. He was raw-boned and a bit rough around the edges in conversation. I had remarked that having reached the summit it must have been difficult to take a series of photos around the entire horizon which authenticated the event. “Nothing to it. Just pointed the camera and took the pictures,” he rebutted. A little later I ventured another question wondering if he had got much sleep the night before and got the reply: “How could I? I had to get the camera right!” I concluded that if you are going to scale Everest it helps to be a little contra-suggestible.

Some 37 years later I was at dinner with him in Wellington. It happened to be my birthday and I was given one of his books signed typically unpretentiously “Ed Hillary”.

Hillary from the start shared the glory of their reaching the summit with Tensing Norgay. And he never walked away from Norgay and his people. He and Louise, his dynamic wife, set about building a hospital for Norgay's people up in the highlands of Nepal. Together with their 16-yr-old daughter, Belinda, they planned to spend a year living there in order to complete this project.

He waited at the small airstrip for the Royal Nepal Air Lines plane that was to bring Louise and Belinda. It did not arrive. Hillary eventually learnt the plane had crashed taking off from Kathmandu killing all on board. It devastated him. He wrote to a friend that he and Louise had sometimes discussed death, but always on the assumption that it would be his death on one of his adventures. In his anguish he confessed: "It's easy to die, but God knows if I'll have the courage to go on living." It was another summit to conquer and he knew that he had to complete the hospital both for the 20,000 who lived in the area and in memory of his beloved wife and daughter. Thirteen months later in May 1976 the Prime Minister of Nepal opened the hospital.

Later there followed a long period where he was New Zealand's Ambassador in New Delhi, including a continuing link with Nepal. He has remained a loyal and generous friend to the people of the man who shared the 1953 triumph on Everest. In an age marked by temporary, often self-serving, relationships his stickability and genuine care have made him a fitting representative of a country that has "always punched above its weight" – notably in two world wars where they won the greatest number of bravery awards per population.

## Chapter 43

### **Conrad Hunte – A Star Who Brought Light To Others**

*“Make me one man not two”*

Conrad Hunte’s laugh filled a room. In fact many rooms in many lands. It was an all-inclusive laugh and never at somebody’s expense. Not surprisingly his face was full of laugh lines yet when I first met him it was an anguished face as if marked by a troubled past. He had in fact started life in impoverishment – one of nine children of a plantation worker in the tiny village of Shorey on the island of Barbados. He honed his cricket skills with a bat shaped from a palm frond and a piece of cork covered with rags and bound in twine for a ball.

Now he was in Melbourne as one of the stars of the West Indies cricket team just after he had played a dramatic part in the famous “Tied Test” which had taken place in Brisbane in the summer of 1960-61. I had just heard him speaking on the radio telling how slavery had marked his country. He told how slaves had not been allowed to marry so that multiple couplings would breed more slaves and how this legacy of promiscuity was still bedevilling the present. He was later to write so honestly in his book *Playing to Win* that he felt embarrassed by the praise given to him as a result of his idealistic speeches “because I knew that even as I denounced exploitation of man by man I was exploiting women for my pleasure.”

It happened that I had invited Conrad to see a preview of a film, *The Crowning Experience* which was based on the life of a

great black educator, Mary McCleod Bethune, who was herself the daughter of slave parents. In fact she was the only one of the 17 children in her family to be born free. So effective was her work to bring education to her people that she was the first person of her race to be made an advisor to an American President. In the film there is a scene where she decides to ask God to fully control her life and lead her.

It was this scene which captured Conrad. As we sat in the theatre after the film he openly wondered whether he could make such a decision. Could he too find a fresh direction for his life?

When shortly afterwards he tried the experiment for himself he was reminded of a few points from the past that needed to be put right. These included repaying the West Indies Cricket Board money falsely claimed as tour expenses. The other thought led to great changes in the future which he put this way: "Decide to live by absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, and spend 15 minutes every morning to listen for correction and direction for your life". The directions which he got over the years affected national issues not only in his own country but also many others.

I was alone with Conrad when, aged 67, he died in December, 1999. We had been enjoying a casual hit up on a tennis court at the Collaroy Conference Centre in Sydney, where Conrad was due to give the opening address that night at a conference for Moral Re-Armament. As I reached down to pick up a ball I heard a slight sound behind me and turned to find Conrad had crumpled onto the court. It was a massive heart attack and he never regained consciousness. I had gone through four years of war but this was the first time I had been with someone who suddenly died. It was an even

greater shock because he had not only been a top sportsman but had apparently remained in great shape.

Sir Conrad Hunte was accorded a State funeral in Barbados and there was an 18-page supplement on his life in the main paper. What was perhaps more significant was the evaluation of his life around the world in countries as far apart as Britain, South Africa, India, Fiji and Australia. In *The Australian* Mike Coward recalled how Hunte “announced himself emphatically with 142 on his Test debut and in his third Test scored 260 in a partnership of 446 with Garry Sobers.” He became vice captain of the West Indies team and after 44 Tests finished with an average of 45. He was one of the Wisden cricketers of the year in 1964.

But in all the many obituaries the central theme was as *The Times* of London put it, that after meeting MRA “he decided there and then to devote his cricketing talent to bringing nations closer together”. The *Melbourne Sunday Age* said that Conrad Hunte never regarded cricket as an end in itself and “that is why, in 1968, when he could have been playing Test cricket in the Caribbean he went to England to mediate between the leaders of the Black Power movement and the white establishment to help prevent



*Conrad Hunte – ready for action*

Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' prediction." As Mike Coward wrote: "Hunte was adamant that God's power and not black power was the answer to white power." He tells how Hunte spent seven years in South Africa where he used cricket as a vehicle to reach and teach the dispossessed and disadvantaged as national coach of the United Cricket board of South Africa. Coward concluded: "He will be mourned throughout the international cricket community and far beyond, particularly by many hundreds of children and their parents in the iniquitous townships of South Africa. He gave them hope."

Conrad told me his effectiveness had begun when he finally faced the contradictions in his own life and prayed: "Please God make me one man, not two." God certainly seemed to answer his heartfelt prayer and gave him an enduring passion to care for others.

## Chapter 44

### **Bhav and His Generation**

*He had the enthusiasm of a cocker spaniel*

Some years ago in the USA on our way to stay with Stan Smith, the former Wimbledon winner, Rita remarked she had read in a book of etiquette that it was bad manners to ask a better player to play with you. I asked if she meant that Stan Smith would be inhibited from asking me for a game?

After a couple of days with Stan and his wife, Margie, down at Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, Stan asked me if I would “like to hit a few balls?” I think Stan was intrigued by the fresh, innovative ways I used to get the ball back over the net and asked where I had been coached? He was amazed that I had played so many years without feeling the need for any tuition. It is of course a different culture in the USA where people in their 80’s feel guilty if they are not still going to “classes” to up their expertise in something or other. It happens that Stan, unlike most top sportsmen, is an excellent coach. Most pros find it difficult to get down to the level of the amateur. He did what he could for my game on this and a number of other visits.

Some 20 years ago Rita and I were enlisted to help care for the young people who came from across Australia and from many parts of the world to take part in leadership training courses at the MRA centre. Ours was a mentoring role on a one to one basis. The tennis court in the grounds proved a relaxed setting for fellowship. It happened that many of those who came had never played tennis so I was encouraged to forget George Bernard Shaw’s off-putting comment “He who can does; he who cannot teaches” and start coaching. Those who came from the

Pacific area seemed to pick up a racquet and in one flowing, uninhibited arc make contact with the ball in the centre of the racquet. But many of those who came from Europe, with degrees that proved they were capable of complicated thought, tried so hard that they missed the ball completely.

Bjorn Borg said that one secret of his success was that when practising you never let the ball bounce twice. Bhavesh Patel never needed that injunction. He did not look like an athlete, but once you hit a ball over the net he had the enthusiasm of a cocker spaniel in getting to it every time. Our relationship started coach-and-pupil, but before long I was battling for every point.

Bhav, as I came to know him, was the same about encompassing every point of the philosophy of MRA. He decided he wanted to know all about the initiator so he plunged into Garth Lean's comprehensive biography, *Frank Buchman – a Life*. In a strange way our fellowship off the tennis court was similar to our on-court competitiveness. I, who had known Frank Buchman for many years, found myself being taught by Bhav. Sometimes I would make a broad philosophical observation to be told that Buchman had said it somewhat better – “actually on p.252, I think.” And when I checked up he was right! Finally I told Bhav that he was “now probably the world expert on the philosophy of MRA, so the next step was living it!” Bhav delightedly agreed.

Bhav had a degree in Geology and had worked in a bank. His family had originally come from India but were firmly established in Kenya. Then like tens of thousands were forced on ethnic grounds to move to Britain and start a new life, based in Manchester. Bhav became a supporter of the Manchester City soccer team, rather than the much better endowed Manchester United. In the course of our fellowship

he told me: “What I have found in Oz is a love for my country and a realisation that it is *my* country!” He added he was now prepared if need be to fight for Britain. I was touched. There are probably more people living in a country that is not where they were born than at any time in the world’s history. Are they destined to be rootless – possibly with enough bitterness to be recruited by terrorists? Or will they, like Bhav, volunteer to put down their roots yet again?

Members of Alcoholics Anonymous are humble enough to flatly state “I am an alcoholic” even though they have not indulged for some time. Bhav was intrigued to find that in a similar way I still considered myself a “sinner”. It led to him telling me about the all-pervasive drugs scene at his university. I presumed that when he started re-appraising his life he would focus on the excesses of the drug scene. Not so. It was something in his family life that I would not have thought was centre stage. But putting that relationship right was a turning point, not only for himself, but also for a member of his family. It taught me not to assume where and how some one will make a fresh start. Perhaps the older generation always think they know what the first point of change should be for someone of a younger generation. But God seems to lead each person to a particular incident that for them can open the door to a new life.

I am not sure where Bhav’s life journey will take him. I was astonished to hear that on his return from Australia he had gone to Moldova. I had to go to our National Geographic atlas to establish just where it was. Just East of Romania it was one of the least developed of the nations incorporated into the USSR. Bhav discovered a vibrant people, with a national economy that was anything but, and they have been described as the poorest nation in Europe.

Bhav has over the past few years enabled a series of delegations to go from Moldova to the MRA world conference centre at Caux in Switzerland. Then he has gone back to their country to live alongside them to help them put their new convictions into action. I felt with proteges like Bhav, and scores of young people who have taken similar decisions, Buchman's work in this new century is in good hands.

A friend of mine who was a medical researcher received world recognition for his discovery of how a face that has collapsed on one side as a result of a stroke can be revitalised. Apparently the placement of a live nerve alongside an affected one brings a re-invigoration. Certainly Rita and I have found over the last 20 years fresh vitality by living alongside these "vibrants" of a much younger generation.

## Chapter 45

### **From Enemy To Friend**

*Our relationship was not transformed  
through apologies*

In today's divided world the need for reconciliation is constantly highlighted. If there was an agreed formula you would be tempted to bottle it, even to market it. Yet sometimes I have known the joy of becoming reconciled to "that difficult person", without knowing quite how it happened.

At school Gordon Wise was my worst enemy. But he finished up being best friend, "best man", godfather of one of our sons and namesake to the other. Our relationship was not transformed through apologies, although both of us had plenty for which we could have apologised.

There came a point in our final year at school where we could each sense that the other had experienced a fundamental change of heart. But the decisive factor was a crisis that suddenly confronted both of us. There were some on the staff of our school, including our aggressively non-believing headmaster, who were resolutely against change and tried to make MRA off limits. As a consequence Gordon and I found ourselves thrown together in a fight for the survival of our fledgling faith.

We were grateful to be on the same side and became comrades in arms. This flourished and deepened during our four years of wartime service together as pilots in the RAAF. For over 60 years we have enjoyed such comradeship providing we were jointly aiming at a big enough goal. It is only when we

have settled for something smaller that our quite different characteristics again become irritants.

I have always liked the ceiling-less quality of the injunction: “you are coming to a king; big petitions with you bring”. Similarly such larger than life goals, when shared, can be a vital factor in cementing friendships that last a lifetime.



Photo: Department of Air, 1944

*Author with Gordon Wise (right), London, 1944.*

## Chapter 46

### **Togetherness and Foreverness...**

*I don't know how you guys did it!*

Rita and I have recently celebrated our golden anniversary – 50 years of “togetherness”, hopeful that a good bit of “foreverness” is still to be enjoyed. Scattered memories come to mind.

Though we were only 20 when we were first engaged, Rita already had the kitchen planned. She insisted that it had to have a dash of red – with her mother wryly commenting “and it’s you, Rita, who’ll be the dash of red!” My focus was more on the need for our home to be near a surf beach. We shared a blurry idea that we might have five kids. These notions were conceived casually but hopefully. Then eight years down the track, with a war in between, our London wedding was imminent. It brought with it a sharp shift from theory to reality.

I don’t like “occasions” and had not wanted anything too grand. Yet one way or another we finished up marrying in exclusive Mayfair, which a little earlier had only been a name featured in the higher priced London properties in the “Monopoly” game. The reception had legs of its own, a lot of them, with the final figure topping 300. Even then, sadly and inexplicably, we managed to miss out a couple of good friends.

Then there were the unexpected “extras”. Suddenly we heard a bus had been organised from South Wales where I had been working and the robust-voiced miners beefed up the singing of the hymns. Bill Kitson, the Agent General for Western

Australia, who acted for my father at the wedding, brought along the visiting Premier of Western Australia, Sir Ross McLarty, and Lady McLarty. And a bevy of young ladies from Scandinavia, resplendent in traditional costumes livened up the reception with folk songs and dances.

Finally we were alone. Had I envisaged the moment I suppose I would have hoped to cut a romantic figure. Not so. I had to excuse myself while I went off and was violently ill. High emotions rather than high living I think! Even the honeymoon at Newquay in Cornwall did not get off to a smooth start. On the road from Bristol the front bonnet of our borrowed Morris Minor, travelling at high speed on the winding road, suddenly broke loose and flew up over the windshield. It was a bit like landing a plane in fog as we felt our way to the shoulder of the road to make running repairs.

Each evening we wrote “thankyou” letters for our wedding gifts with the opening words: “We have never been happier in our lives”. Absolutely true ... until we played tennis. Rita had been a better player but my years in the RAAF had improved my game enough for me to beat her. I am ashamed to admit it was done with a bit of a flourish. Words and moods followed, banishing the radiant opening phrase of our letters. Perhaps it was the first time of many where honesty and a sense of humour were needed to save the day.

In those less complicated days there were not columns of advice on the intimacies of married or unmarried togetherness. Probably as a generation we “experimented” less before marriage which perhaps made every aspect of married “togetherness” more special. The words “whom God has joined together” in our wedding service were reassuring and brought another factor into the relationship. There was a satisfaction and confirmation in waiting until marriage. It was not long before, rather to our



*Togetherness ... and  
foreverness.  
Launching out in 1951  
and down the track  
50 years on.*



Photo: Dennis Mayor

surprise, we found that we were “expecting”. Rita joyously, me somewhat apprehensively. I felt I was only just getting used to being a husband and here was a much greater responsibility of becoming a father and needing to provide for a family.

As we were in South Wales we planned that we would have our first child born under the National Health Scheme in a similar way to the mining families we knew. But a good friend, herself a doctor, strongly suggested that Rita, being a long way from home, might be better under a specialist. In the event our Philip was born at King’s College Hospital, London, delivered by Sir John Peel, who we later discovered was the Queen’s gynaecologist!

It turned out to be a labour spread over two days and finally requiring a Caesarean. The assistant said to me: “Any good doctor would have saved your wife, but only very few would have had the skill to also save your son.” We were quite shaken that something we had rather taken for granted had become such a serious matter. How grateful we were for that friend who saw to it that we had the best care available.

It was in Melbourne, nearly four years later, while awaiting the birth of our second son, Gordon, that I found myself wondering if I could possibly love the new arrival in the same way that I did our first. Then a friend wisely assured me: “they bring their own love with them.” So true.

Our sons are quite different. At the reception celebrating Phil’s marriage to Sue, Gordon as best man summed it up rather well: “We are best friends, but we could never live together!” The friendship they have is shared also by their wives, Sue and Suzi – and the Christmasses we enjoy together are as friends, who happen to be family.

Our life as a family has spanned both hemispheres. After coming back to Australia we have been based mainly in Melbourne, but have also spent periods in Western Australia and South Australia. There has been much more mobility than we would have chosen. The various chapters of our lives which have gone into this book convey an outreach to the world. The travel was mainly in response to specific invitations. Both of us being home bodies rather than troubadours we anguished over every move. Quite obviously your care for your own family is the prime charge. But you become aware that to care for them adequately involves a responsibility to also try and care for God's world family. In retrospect we are clear we did not get the balance right every time. But we are so grateful for our sons' resilience, understanding and big-heartedness.

One of our "honorary" grand-daughters Jean Roberts Walker, recently married wrote on hearing of our 50th wedding anniversary: "I don't know how you guys did it." She asked us to pass on any tips we had found helpful along the way. When we tried to sum up 50 years of living together we found our jottings were rather fragmentary:

"sense of humour"

"respect for each other's differences"

"listening deeply to the other"

"readiness to be the first to say sorry when you have a difference"

"dealing quickly with moods and tempers"

"agreeing from the start to be completely honest with each other, about yourself!"

“keeping short accounts – on the whole saying today what is on your mind rather than waiting for tomorrow”

Above all: “ENJOY! ENJOY! ENJOY!”

Perhaps a fundamental in our relationship was that we each had an independent reliance on God. Having sincerely tried to give our lives to Him we had less demands on one another. We have made a practice of beginning each day with a “time of quiet” – listening for any creative thoughts that God may have for us. It was a help that early on I had asked God to deal with my bad temper, while Rita’s moods became a distant memory. We committed ourselves to try and tackle together what was wrong in the world and this helped to put what differences we had into perspective. As the years go by Rita and I find we love one another in *every* way more than we could have imagined at the beginning of our journey.

## Chapter 47

### **And Another Thing...**

#### *Reaching out to “the other”*

In my study there is a framed citation from the French Government thanking me for assisting in the D-Day landing that led to the freeing of France and Europe. Bordering the document are the flags of the 18 nations who were part of the “Allied Forces” who combined in carrying out the operation. The Supreme Commander General Dwight D Eisenhower saw to it that in his high command the responsibilities were shared among these different countries. The building of a team among those nations was his prime concern. The story is told of a US Colonel, about to be repatriated to the USA on disciplinary grounds, asking for a meeting with Eisenhower. “Am I being sent back just because in the bar last night I called that English colonel a bastard?” he asked. Eisenhower replied: “Certainly not. It’s because you called him a British bastard!”

Eisenhower was not into “unilateral” military actions. He seemed to divine the difference between patriotism and nationalism. He believed that it was worth the effort of uniting the patriots of many nations to overcome a common enemy: to put aside the narrow demands of nationalism for the greater good of the whole. Frank Buchman used to warn that “the good can be the enemy of the best.” Maybe in today’s setting that lies in giving exclusive allegiance to what is good for my country rather than seeking the bigger picture of what is best for the human family.

Having lived through most of the 20th century I have one abiding regret. In the world at large and also with my colleagues

in MRA I believe we gravely under-estimated the power of “nationalism”. In earlier years Buchman had said that “materialism was the mother of all isms.” But at that time I think it was probably thought this primarily applied to communism, fascism and capitalism. Nationalism was not sufficiently in focus.

Whereas most of the last century saw the world divided by the Cold War into two power blocs, today sees in the USA one major super-power – so powerful and yet so vulnerable. Once in Washington I happened to meet the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and was a little surprised to hear myself saying to him: “I suppose God alone knows how much a super-power wants to be loved.” The Admiral, built like an American grid-iron player, quietly and wistfully murmured: “You have no idea just how much we do long to be loved.”

We are the only nation to have fought alongside the USA in every war since the start of the 20th century. Australia has earned its right to be regarded as a dependable ally. With that role goes the greater responsibility of being a faithful friend, morally courageous enough to help the USA lay claim to a higher calling reaching beyond “what is in the national interest” to what is in line with that eternal challenge: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”.

The Middle East threatens to trigger a much wider conflict. What is happening there is reminiscent of the worst excesses chronicled in the Old Testament. “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” appear self-perpetuating. Hate piled on hate not only denies peace to the Holy Land, it spreads a corrosive poison across the globe.

Terrorists today are spoken of as being irredeemable. Yet over the centuries there have been many examples of people, apparently given over to evil and ostracized by society, who have found redemption. Some are then marvelously used to bring change to others. For instance slave ship captain John Newton not only found change in his own nature but he was also used to tackle a venal society in which the slave trade was but an aspect of overall corruption. The depth of his change lives on in his classic hymn *Amazing Grace*.

While most of us have not experienced such a night-to-day transformation as Newton did, each of us can play a part by reaching out to “the other”. Fear has gripped the world. We are challenged to turn from fear to faith, as individuals and a people, to reach out in God’s power to embrace “the other”. It is tempting to feel that one person cannot make a difference but Pere Alphonse Gratry’s words are an encouragement: “The world can change if you change. If you become a new person the new world will become possible.”

On my desk there is a reminder of a defining moment in my life. It is a piece of polished wood. On it is a cross and underneath the inscription: “God has a plan”. Made by the ground crew after my near fatal accident back in 1943, the wood is from the propeller of the Airspeed Oxford in which I crashed. The cross is made from its perspex cockpit cover and the words are those that seemed to ring in my ears as I came down in that far-off Yorkshire airfield.

At that moment of danger I was reassured by those words. As we face the trials, even terrors, of today’s world the promise remains the same: GOD HAS A PLAN.







# Met Along The Way...

## in War & Peace



The Author described by friends as “an Irish story teller”, claims that his trustworthy wife, Rita, has certified the contents as “being amongst Jim’s true stories”. A journalist, a WWII pilot, a lifetime sports buff, he has been a friend of a lot of ordinary people who went on to do extraordinary things. These have included several Prime Ministers and a couple of Wimbledon winners. Having survived three aircraft crashes he felt God had saved his life. He decided to give a year to try and do something about the peace – but it has turned out to be a life commitment.

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