THE HAZARDS OF CIVILIAN LIFE

Contrary to popular belief, life for a private soldier during wartime was comparatively simple. No vital decisions had to be made. No complicated manoeuvres had to be devised. No life-threatening orders had to be given. The ordinary soldier simply obeyed orders. In other words, he did as he was told. Now peace had returned to the world, a soldier immediately resumed control of his own destiny by making decisions for himself.
Such was my responsibility at Claremont railway station on that fateful day in 1945. Many times throughout my post-war life, I have asked myself: What if? What if? What if I had gone with Mrs Reed when she had been there to welcome me home from the war after nearly four years away? After losing her own son during the battle for Singapore, this wonderful woman had summoned all her courage to meet so many returning survivors in order to welcome me home. I could not imagine just how painful it must have been for her. Yet, when I was unexpectedly confronted with a gut-wrenching decision, I chose the other alternative.

When our hospital train pulled in to Claremont station I had no idea what I was going to do, so, not only was I surprised to find Mrs Reed waiting for me, but suddenly I found myself being overwhelmed with embraces from several members of the Beaconsfield family as well. Despite my utter confusion at the time, somehow I managed to write down Mrs Reed's Victoria Park address before being swept away by the other family. Even if there had been some lingering chance of resuming a friendship with my former sweetheart, it turned out to be a forlorn hope when she quietly told me that she had another relationship. However, despite this news, I let my 'first mum' take charge of me, and with that decision, my destiny was sealed.

A few days later, I spent several hours talking with Mrs Reed, going over the events of the Singapore episode that claimed her son, and of the following years in captivity where brutal treatment and terrible diseases had taken the lives of one third of the AIF's 8th Division. In an attempt to soften her loss, I went on to suggest that although her son Ritchie, had died on the battlefield, there was always the possibility that he may have been spared to a far worse fate, either on the Burma Railway or on the infamous Sandakan death march where, out of 2800 British and Australian prisoners of war, only six survived. With the Japanese paying scant attention to the Geneva Red Cross humanitarian conditions, we survivors marvelled in the fact that almost two-thirds of the 8th Division retuned home. The gracious lady listened to my emotional ramblings in silent patience for many minutes before offering a typically unselfish comment to the effect that while she still had two sons and a daughter, many families were left to cope with greater losses than she had to bear. Inevitably, I recalled the unfortunate situation that arose on the day she met the train and explained more fully how the other family came to be there. Again, she put me at ease with her logic and understanding, pointing out that they had been the first to accept me. The most poignant moment came, however, when I pulled out my dirty old wallet, still covered in dried oil stains that bore evidence of the terrible conditions that existed during the battle for Singapore. With emotionally-charged fingers I opened it up to reveal the small wooden boomerang bearing the inscription I GO TO RETURN. Very slowly, Mrs Reed took the small carved piece in her hands to quietly read the three words… Jack from Mum she had had inscribed four years ago before handing it to me on our last leave.

Eventually, the circumstance resolved itself when all we returned men, after three weeks' leave, were required to report daily to a camp at Point Walter, which was much easier to reach from Beaconsfield than from Victoria Park. Naturally, with the war over, all we wanted to do now was to get back into 'civvy' life as soon as possible. However, before we could be let loose back into civilized society, the very important question of our health had to be resolved. Many returning ex-prisoners of war were placed straight into Hollywood Repatriation Hospital to recover from years of starvation and brutality. With skilful care and good food, most of us recovered physically, but many were left to face the future suffering severe psychological trauma for the rest of their lives. A few severe 'nerve' cases were held in a special ward, but the condition now known as 'post traumatic stress disorder' went undiagnosed during those early post-World War II years, leaving many veterans untreated.

Meanwhile, with generous Christmas leave, still on full pay, I wasn't in a rush to get discharged. In fact, I spent a few weeks taking one on one English lessons from a serving school teacher at Point Walter camp. I had always been interested in writing, and already had a short story 'In Wartime Japan' accepted by the *West Australian* newspaper, and as I had managed to keep a diary during the war, I hoped one day to get it published. However, as I had received only primary school education at Fairbridge, I felt I had more to learn on the subject. It was an opportunity too good to pass up, so I stayed on for a few more weeks. Eventually, after five years' service in the Australian army, I took my discharge on 5 February 1946.The challenge now facing the nation was finding jobs for the hundreds of thousands of returning servicemen and women.

To confront this mammoth task, the Government established the 'Commonwealth Rehabilitation Scheme', whereby anyone seeking to learn a trade or occupation was paid to attend one of the schools set up all over the country. I still hadn't decided what course I should take, when I discovered I was eligible for a free trip to visit my closest relative, which gave me the opportunity to hitch a ride on an Air Force Dakota to Adelaide, where I enjoyed three weeks of celebratory reunions with all my Australian family. By the time I arrived back in Perth, I had decided to attend a wool-classing course at a convenient venue, a short bus ride away in North Fremantle. My future seemed to be safely on track.

Until the day I walked into the public bar of the National Hotel, slap-bang in the centre of Fremantle. As I relaxed with a schooner of Swan lager, I good-naturedly mouthed a 'cheers' to a short, grubby, dark-suited old man next to me. This simple pleasure, taken for granted by most patrons over the years, suddenly assumed the status of privilege as I reflected on my recent lengthy period of lost freedom. It seemed that in the future I would automatically embrace the principle that nothing is fully appreciated until one has been deprived of it. From now on, certainly, freedom would be my most treasured companion.

As I savoured this thought, my diminutive neighbour interrupted my reverie by asking in a distinct Scottish accent if I'd care for another 'wee dram'. An invitation of this

magnitude, especially coming from a Scotsman, was definitely an offer not to be missed, so quite unintentionally my quiet drink developed into a minor session. With questions and answers being exchanged at a fair pace, it didn't take long to discover that my new-found companion just happened to be the father of a cornet player in the former Northam Camp Band. Of course I remembered his son, inevitably known as Jock, so, with this relationship confirmed, the old man insisted that I accompany him to Jock's place just a wee tram ride to South Fremantle. Agreeably tempered under the influence of a couple of beers, together with the chance to renew acquaintances with a former band mate, I allowed myself to be escorted to his son's waterfront home. Although the house was ideally situated, I soon discovered that it was a very basic two-bedroomed old brick duplex with a front living room and a rear kitchen with access to a laundry and toilet. However, it was pleasant enough to see Jock again and to meet his petite blonde wife, but I was totally unprepared for what was to come.

From out of a middle room emerged a tall fair girl who gave me a most engaging smile as she was introduced as Jock's daughter. Her beautiful features and delightfully shaped body, quite left me speechless as I stuttered my pleasure to see her. This delightful creature absorbed my total attention. There was no doubt about it; I was instantly smitten. From that day on, I just couldn't keep away from the old duplex house on Marine Parade. Ostensibly, of course, Jock was the excuse, but, to my great delight, his gorgeous-looking daughter seemed more than pleased to see me. With every visit my confidence grew. All through my young life I had been embarrassed to tell a girl that my name was Ramsbottom, but this girl already knew that and yet still greeted me with the affection I craved. At last I felt that I had found a female friend who was genuinely interested in me. As our friendship grew in intensity, any logical assessment of our relationship didn't stand a chance of a hearing.

The reality was that after being plucked from my foster mother's arms at the age of ten, I had known nothing but the discipline of unloved institutional existence, together with the sickening brutality of warfare. So although I had just reached the age of 23, my whole being readily responded to this delightful girl's sexual tutorial as each day we met, she introduced me to greater thrills of discovery which had me wallowing in the delights of passion. Even when I learnt she was only 15, it mattered not, so completely infatuated had I become. In every other way she was a complete woman. I wanted her; she accepted me; I couldn't let her go. I had to marry her.

With the approval of her parents, I proposed and was accepted. There can be no doubting the fact that I played to perfection the role of an innocent and frisky sacrificial lamb galloping readily to the slaughter. She turned 16 on 3 April 1946. We married on the sixth. The Reverend Canon Collick had to contact Fairbridge for my father's name, otherwise the service went off without a hitch. Mens- and Ladieswear shops still had not recovered from the long war years, so I had to settle for a hired dress suit for the wedding, while my wife, revelling at the chance to steal the show, paraded down the aisle in an 'off the shoulder' number that guaranteed her objective of being the sensation of the day. But it wasn't until after the service that she reached her ultimate goal. From the unfathomable depths of her mind, the objective of becoming known as Mrs. Ramsbottom had been a challenge not to be missed.

From the day we moved into a small flat in East Fremantle, the challenges came rolling in. Hardly a day passed without one or more incidents surfacing to dampen the enthusiasm of establishing a happy home-life together. An absence of normal, rational behaviour which infiltrated our first few months of marriage causing minor irritation, gradually grew in intensity until it reached plague proportions. The only previous facets of irrational behaviour I had come up against had been meted out by a cruel, uncivilized enemy during my POW years. During that time I was powerless to fight against it so I had no alternative but to live with it. On returning home, I naturally thought all that treatment

was behind me, consequently, to find myself caught up in another impossible predicament for which I had no answer, left me bewildered and confused. A typical example often occurred when my wife would spend her last £5.00 on a taxi fare, when a tram ride for a few pence would have brought her home.

Thankfully, my wool-classing course had started, which, not only demanded my whole concentration, but sharing the weekdays with a dozen other classmates made life bearable. My wife then took a job in a small childrenswear shop in Fremantle which helped to pay our way. We survived in this manner for a few months until, as part of my training, I was required to spend several weeks away to gain experience with a shearing team. The conditions were most attractive, because in addition to my normal Government allowance of £5.00 a week, I would be paid a roustabout's wages by the shearing contractor. In my absence, my wife would live with her parents, so this development came at a most fortuitous time.

SHEARING IN THE OUTBACK

Sheep stations in Western Australia spread over a huge tract of scrubland several hundred kilometres north of Perth in a region known as the Murchison, with each station occupying many thousands of acres. Station-hands spend several days rounding up the sheep to pen them in sizeable holding paddocks adjoining the shearing shed awaiting the arrival of a shearing team.

I had never been to the Murchison before, so I left Perth thankful for the chance of a marital break, and eager to discover this new adventure into the outback. I joined the rest of the shearing team in Perth and on a September afternoon in 1946, we headed out on the journey north, sprawled over a nondescript collection of supplies, scattered over the tray of the contractor's small truck. About six in the evening we pulled into a suitable off-road strip of land to set up a camp for the night. It was simply a case of organizing a camp-fire around which we enjoyed a hastily prepared meal, washed down with the traditional mug of billy-tea, after which we lay around the fire, indulging ourselves in the pleasant pastime of listening or contributing to the yarns, the jokes, and a selection of varying experiences. Then one by one we scrambled into our sleeping bags to spend the first night under the stars. The following day we passed through the wheatbelt town of Dalwallinu, and on to the lower Murchison towns of Wubin and Payne's Find before turning onto a narrow bush track that led to our first destination of Maroubra station. Here we settled into our quarters, just a short distance from the shearing shed. Tomorrow, the team would swing into action. In the '40s, there was a ritual to the Australian shearing team's activities. The contractor put together a number of shearers; plus an 'expert' whose job it was to keep the operation running smoothly, a wool-presser, a group of shed-hands and a cook. It was the station owner's responsibility to have his sheep yarded and penned in order to keep a continuous flow of animals up to the shearers. The day was divided into four two-hour shifts with a 30-minute break for morning tea after the first shift, an hour for lunch after the second shift, and a further half-hour for afternoon tea after the third shift. The shearers were on a contract payment of so much for each sheep shorn, the shed-hands were on a wage, the presser was on a specified rate of so much per hundredweight of wool pressed plus extra for weighing and branding, while the cook's wage was determined by the contractor who calculated the amount each team member should contribute towards his pay. The contractor also might undertake the most important job of all as the wool-classer.

At 7.30am, at the sound of a gong, each shearer selected a sheep from a pen adjacent to each place of operation called the 'stand', turned it on its rump and dragged it the short distance to his spot. Meanwhile, a diesel engine powered a long-belted shaft from which were attached flexible cables that carried the power to operate the combs. The

shearer placed his animal in a desired position, gave a sharp jab on the floating line that operated the combs, and away he went. A few minutes later, the fleece lay on the floor and while the shearer gave his patient a gentle shove down an exit ramp, a shed-hand gathered the fleece in such a manner that with one outward thrust he skilfully threw it to land over a special slotted table from which the classer was able to quickly discard the inferior fringe pieces. Then, after making a brief testing of the fleece, he rolled it up for the waiting shed-hand to take to the bin of the classer's choice. The product of each bin was then baled by the presser, who finished up with a bale weighing about 150 kilos. After weighing and the identifying branding was done, the bale was stored ready for dispatching. With an experienced team, the whole operation usually ran very smoothly, with a good shearer averaging over 150 sheep a day.

In the 1940s, the 44-hour working week was in vogue, so we worked for four hours on Saturday mornings. The remainder of the day was usually spent doing our washing, so we were left with only one day a week for resting. Because the stations were so isolated, most of the team chose to stay in camp where the main activity seemed to be playing poker. I had learned and played bridge during my years as a POW, but had only a very little experience at playing poker. Yet, with little else on offer for recreation, I joined the school and inevitably found myself no match for the more experienced players. The stakes were higher than I had ever before experienced with the opening play costing as much as two shillings. The more I tried to recoup my losses, the deeper in debt I became. Eventually I finished up in danger of losing half my wages. Although I managed to recover some of my losses, by the time the shed cut out, I owed one man several pounds. But on the very last Sunday, an opportunity presented itself for me to escape my predicament. My creditor, who knew nothing of my former athletic ability, fancied himself as a good runner. I estimated that he was about 25 years older than I, so I challenged him to a race over a hundred yards and I would give him a yard start for every year of our age disparity. With my offer of paying double if I lost or nothing if I won, the terms were too good for him to refuse. Subsequently a track was measured out and the race started with me giving him a 27-yard handicap. While I gradually made up ground on him in the early stage, I soon found the task far more difficult than I had imagined. My opponent refused to let me overtake him, and just as visions of losing my entire wages loomed before me, a few yards short of the finishing line, he stumbled and fell. If nothing else was learnt during my stint with a shearing team, from that day on, I kept well clear of poker schools.

JOHN 'BING' LANE

We were working on our third 'station' when I received a letter from my wife to let me know that she had joined a touring concert party called the 'George Evans Variety Show' doing one-night stands around the country towns. This surprise development left me a bit peeved that I hadn't been back in the metropolitan area where I felt I could have talked my way into joining them. Ever since making the choir in Kobe House and having a stint as the band vocalist in a Manila nightclub, I had fancied myself as a budding Bing Crosby, but being stuck way out back on a sheep station, left me little chance of displaying my talents other than to the captive audience of my fellow workers and to a mob of sheep.

However, at this time, some mystical force must have given the scales of justice a healthy shove my way in the form of a letter from the Government requesting my presence in Perth to submit a report on my treatment as a POW in Kobe. My boss duly drove me to the nearest point of civilization, the solitary building in Payne's Find, which just happened to be a pub, from where, after an overnight stay, I managed to get a lift right into Perth.

I wasted no time in writing my report, but when that was in, I found myself with neither job nor wife, so in a moment of inspiration, I managed to contact my wife's entourage to offer my talents to the group at so modest a fee that made it impossible to

reject. Little did I know that one of the members had just left the party, so my timing had been spot on. A car collected me and with the assumed name of John Lane, I made my stage debut with the crooning of 'Home On The Range' at an auspicious wheatbelt town with the romantic sounding name of Mukinbudin. Three weeks later we finished up at the mid-west port town of Geraldton, where we took our final curtain before the parting of the ways.

ANOTHER REJECTION

On returning to Perth I reluctantly resumed living under my former name of Jack Ramsbottom and survived by working part-time at a couple of woolsheds in Fremantle. By that time too, I had decided that a career in wool-classing would mean long periods away from any home-life we might share, so I was having difficulty in deciding just what direction my life should take. Then by way of compounding my predicament, my wife simply decided one morning to fly off to the North-West port of Broome to work as a barmaid. Just like that. Once again, rejection did nothing for my confidence, although, I suppose, not having to suffer the trauma of arguments could be put down as some sort of a plus. I stumbled along on my own for several weeks until, just as suddenly as she went, my wife turned up on the doorstep with the news that she had returned home to take a job at the Orient Hotel in Fremantle. That was it then. Carry on sergeant-major.

So in an effort to restart my life, I sought guidance from the Repatriation Department. In retrospect, it is obvious now to see that my future should have been in journalism. The facts speak for themselves. From that 1941 day in Adelaide when my cousins gave me my very first camera, it seemed only natural that I should put it to its best possible use by filming every facet of my future life. With that primitive Box-Brownie camera, I took pictures of my close friend Richard Reed and I sharing a pleasant weekend with friends in Adelaide; our host's daughter Pat Marcus and her friend Emmie.
I recorded my battalion's journey on the old Ghan train route to Alice Springs, followed by a three-day trek sitting in the back of three-ton trucks up through the great red centre of Australia to clamber aboard a dilapidated string of cattle trucks at the railway terminus of Birdum. In just a few days the battalion had gone from shivering in the south to frying in the north, a situation that offered a great photo shoot of our boys escaping the heat of the wagons by clambering up on to the canvas awnings. After chugging 300 miles into a half-completed Darwin army camp, I took pictures of us working at the finishing touches to the camp huts and making our bush beds from slim saplings and slivers of bamboo.

Even when the dramatic events of the war delivered us into the all embracing arms of the Japanese hordes that put photography in the suicidal basket, with the brashness of youth, I undertook the considerable challenge of writing up a diary for the duration of the war. Then, three and a half years later, emerging from the trauma of slavery as a wise old man of 22, surely I could have been forgiven if I had abandoned myself to the excesses of celebrating the return of freedom. Yet, some unexplainable force had directed me to perform a sequence of events so that a record of this important segment of history could be recorded. A few nights into our freedom, and under the noses of the dreaded *kempei-tai*, a small group of us crept stealthily back to our former workplace along the Kobe dockside and returned just as stealthily heavily laden with the only currency of value left in war-ravaged Japan… sugar. Among other luxuries, a haversack full of sugar bought me a camera with film with which I recorded the arrival of our Allied rescuers, the air-dropping of supplies, our camp building festooned with flags and the remains of our former burnt-out building of Kobe House. All pictorial records of these historical events now exist in the Australian War Museum in Canberra. Even during an eventful return journey home in late 1945, when several hundred of us spent an impatient three weeks in a Manila holding camp, I took the opportunity to send to the *West Australian* newspaper in Perth two short

articles about my POW experiences. A few weeks later one of them was featured under the heading 'Inside Wartime Japan.' Despite all these achievements, always in the back of my mind lurked the negative thoughts about my institutional childhood with my educational qualification never going beyond primary school, so, when I confronted the Repatriation Department's interviewer, I had neither the confidence nor the skill to argue my case to pursue a career in journalism. So far as he was concerned, after six years of war, the pressure was on to get as many men as possible into the trades of plumbing, bricklaying, carpentering and welding. Inevitably, I finished up being talked into a carpentering course.

For the next six months I trained it from Fremantle to Midland Junction, going through the motions of learning a skill for which I had little interest. By way of a diversion more than a vital concern, I resurrected a relationship with my biological family in Lancashire, writing to both my mother and half-sister, Norah. I had received letters they had sent to Barnardo's asking me to write to them, so I felt it offered a chance to learn something more about my family history. Although there still lurked some resentment over my rejection and being put into Dr Barnardo's Homes as a two-year-old baby, I realised it was time to get on with my life. The problem was that in my craving to find a female partner with whom I could share long-deprived affection and love, I had rushed blindly into the first opportunity that had come along, ignorant of all values that contribute to a successful relationship. Goodness knows, I hadn't made the best of starts, so perhaps I could do with some parental advice for my future. At this time too, I dearly missed the love and guidance of Rosa Nobes, the only real mother in my life, but as I had not heard from her since before the war, I just assumed that she must be dead.

Meanwhile, my wife and I struggled to keep some sort of relationship going, and just as I had resolved that things couldn't get much worse, the unbelievable happened. My wife flew to Sydney with a sugar daddy she had met in the Orient Hotel. Mr Palmer was a businessman who apparently, while staying at the hotel, had developed a relationship with my wife over several weeks without my knowledge, so her abrupt departure left me with more questions than answers. Although our marriage had been a shambles for some time, it was still very much an emotional shock for me to digest the fact that I had been rejected in preference for a man who apparently was in his 60s. Fortunately I had a very good relationship with my parents-in-law who had always been embarrassed by their daughter's behaviour, so they had no hesitation in keeping me informed of her movements. Their support helped me to recover from this somewhat bizarre situation and, after recovering from the initial shock, I set about adapting to my new strife-free, if somewhat lonely, life.

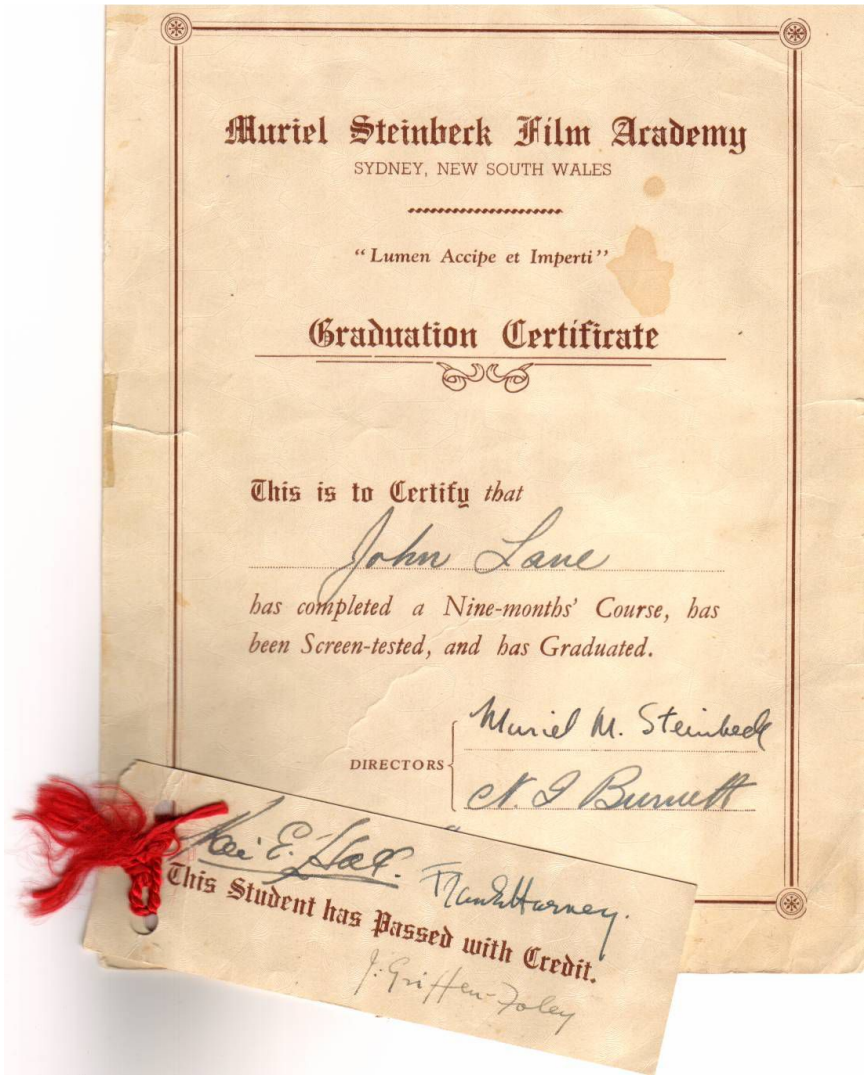
At this time, I decided it was time to give myself a new identity, so, on 12 February 1948, armed with two character references and 2s 6d, I entered the Fremantle Police Station with the name of Jack Ramsbottom, to emerge a few minutes later with a legal document declaring my name to be John Lane.

JOHN LANE (SLOW LEARNER)

Six months later, fortified with a renewed zest for living, I reckoned that, no matter what the circumstances, no bloody old man was going to get away with stealing my wife. So, after accepting an invitation to stay with my old Kobe House mate, Gordon Macdonald, I flew to Sydney to start my campaign. Mac met me at the airport in his own taxi and drove me to his home in the suburb of Hurstville where he lived with his mother. After we spent a few days renewing our old friendship, Mac's mother found me lodgings with an elderly widow near the Kogerah railway station. At that time, too, I knew that Mr Palmer had established my wife in a small womanswear shop on Anzac Parade in Kensington, but before I made any attempt to contact her, I needed to get a job, preferably in the city. In post-war Australia, vacancies in the retail trade were plentiful, so I decided to take a job at

Woolworths in the cosmopolitan district of Kings Cross. It took only a few weeks of course, for the predictable to happen. We resumed our relationship and I moved into the flat adjoining my wife's business. Still possessing the optimism of youth, I talked myself into believing that now she had had her fling, she would be ready to settle back into a normal marriage.Mr Palmer could forfeit the business as reparation for stealing my wife. True, I was a sucker for punishment, but I had no idea of what I was letting myself in for.

Within a few days her mental state deteriorated to such an extent that I had to leave my job to look after her. One day she would be on a high to remain hyperactive for 24 hours, then depression would overtake her, which meant that I had to attend to the customers. Inevitably, the reason lay in the abuse of drugs. Benzadrine inhalers gave her the kicks, and Relaxatabs put her to sleep. In the intervals, we existed on rare bouts of normality. At times the friction became almost unbearable when her craving for drugs drove me to ask my doctor to sign her into a psychiatric hospital. I shall never forget his reply as he spoke sympathetically, 'I wouldn't send a dog there.' Somehow we managed to survive a nine-month film course with the Muriel Steinbeck Film Academy. Muriel Steinbeck was among Australia's leading actresses of the time, having played Ron Randall's wife in the epic film 'Smithy' portraying the life of the famous aviator Sir Charles Kingsford Smith. I had been given yet another Rehab. course in Sydney, this time in singing lessons, so during my screen-test at the completion of the film course, I was filmed crooning into a telephone a few lines of the song 'Je t'endrai.'



MY FILM COURSE CERTIFICATE

The only other item in the plus list during our two-year stay in Sydney was the birth of our first son, Frank Richard Lane on 3 June 1949. Fortunately, I was able to persuade my understanding mother-in-law to come over to look after her daughter and attend the shop, so, between us, we managed to survive until the middle of 1950 when we sold the business and returned to Fremantle. The big question now was work would I do? After having been given three chances by the Rehabilitation Department to slot me back into the workforce, I didn't have the courage to seek further assistance. However, salvation lay in the fact that the Australian Army had recently established the Western Command Band in Perth, so, once again thanking my good fortune for my musical training at Fairbridge Farm as a child, I walked straight in to the position of second trombonist. After years of trauma, I relished the opportunity to literally put some harmony back into my life.

THE REGULAR ARMY REVISITED

Strangely enough, the moment I signed on the dotted line for a term of six years, I was overwhelmed with a sense of comfortable satisfaction. My post-war excursion into civilian life had not produced the fulfilment for which I had hoped. Somehow I had felt cheated. Surely, after scarcely surviving three and a half years of global madness under the euphemism of warfare, civilian life should have brought greater compensatory benefits. Yet, somehow, not only had I been ill-equipped to handle the comparative normality of peace-time living, but my marriage had also lacked the traditional love and affection for which I had craved. Adding to my difficulties was the complete lack of direction my life should take, so now, it seemed, the chance had come for me to make a niche for myself as an army musician. After all, if there was one outstanding qualification for which I could claim to be experienced, it was institutional living.

Post-war army life was a piece of cake. In effect, we bandsmen played the role of public relations for the Australian Defence Force. Naturally, our prime purpose was to participate in military parades, but as there was only a small number of army units in Western Australia at that time, our services were not in great demand. Our best customer was the Special Air Services regiment that had recently been formed, and we always enjoyed attending passing-out parades for this illustrious unit, not only admiring their immaculate drill skills, but enthusiastically playing their regimental tune of 'The Happy Wanderer' for their march-past. We spent most of our time performing at various functions throughout the metropolitan area, usually at weekends, but even if we worked only half a day, we were always given a full day off in lieu during the week. We also visited many country towns to play for a school army cadets' parade. On these occasions we would arrive early enough to put on a concert for the whole school, after which the local Country Women's Association would reciprocate by putting on a magnificent lunch for us. At this time too, during the Korean war years in the '50s, we regularly played before an appreciative audience outside the Perth General Post Office every Friday lunchtime, and as I had now become the Band's vocalist, I felt that, at last, I was achieving something. To augment this growing swell of confidence, was seeing, every Friday, the dapper figure of my old Fairbridge sportsmaster, Mr Con Barratt, standing just below my stage position, face aglow with pleasure, obviously proud of the fact that 'one of his boys' had 'made' it.

If ever I needed this job satisfaction, it was during these years. My wife and I had moved from place to place through those increasingly tempestuous marital times. Since our return to the 'West', she was now managing a babywear shop in Fremantle, so her mother had now taken over the responsibility of looking after young Frank. To complicate the situation, she became pregnant again, with the result that on 14 March 1951, she gave birth to twin boys, Michael and John. I managed to get two weeks' compassionate leave to help over the initial stages, but, inevitably, we had to move back to live with her parents.

Thankfully, my mother-in-law took on this added responsibility without a word of complaint and from that moment on, she effectively devoted her life to raising our three boys. Meanwhile our stormy marriage deteriorated rapidly towards the onslaught of a scale-five cyclone, so, knowing that our children were now in safe hands, I took the only course available to me and cleared out to live in rooms closer to Perth and the Army bandroom. Now, more than ever, I was grateful for the fact that I could concentrate on my career as a musician, with the result that within a year, I had been given the chair of the bass trombone with the rank of Lance-Corporal. I was on the way up.

However, I soon discovered that I couldn't be happy living entirely on my own. I still craved for the affection and love of a woman so I started going to some of the dancing venues around the city. Old-time dancing enjoyed great popularity during the '50s, so once again I had Fairbridge to thank for teaching us these delightful old dances. Inevitably, I soon discovered that there were just as many lonely women as there were men out in the cruel world, and all too quickly I fell for a slim, tall, honey-blonde. So, just as inevitably, as soon as my divorce came through, I married again

Meanwhile, life took on a new meaning for me as a professional musician. The Western Command Band enjoyed a reputation as good as any other army band in the country. In addition, I played soccer for Fremantle City and for the Army. I also made the Army's cricket team for the Inter-Service Games.

Fortunately too, my ex-mother-in-law always welcomed me back to visit my boys, never failing to give me a good-natured reminder whenever she thought the interval between visits was too lengthy. On 24 March 1955 I became a father again with the arrival of another son, Myles. At this time, with the northern suburbs ever expanding, it was decided that we should take advantage of the War Service Homes scheme and build our own home, so after studying all the available home-sites, we settled for a block with a magnificent ocean view, almost on the peak of a hill in north Scarborough. It cost me £165.

Then, taking advantage of the regulations of the day whereby an amateur builder was permitted to build a house not exceeding £3000, I borrowed £2500, registered myself as a 'Provisional Builder,' and put up a presentable brick-and-tile home using contract labour. The building standards were maintained by a building inspector passing each phase before a progress payment could be made, thus releasing enough money to proceed with the next stage. To keep within the tight budget, I saved a lot of money by labouring for the tradesmen and by installing the unique jarrah-timber flooring, resulting in a substantial double-brick dwelling with three bedrooms, a large lounge, kitchen, bathroom and laundry. In keeping with the growing importance of using solar energy, I was able to keep within my budget, even allowing for the cost of installing a solar hot-water system with roof panels. To cap this effort off, I had also incorporated a carport to house my latest acquirement, an old Ford that had been converted into a small utility. Now the proud owner of both a home and a car, I reckoned I had good reason to feel well satisfied with my lot. Another reason for my satisfaction was to know that my new family was now well secured for the coming enforced separation that would whisk the Western Command Band away to Melbourne for the opening ceremony of the 1956 Olympics.

For several weeks before the ‘Games.' the Army Command Band from each state had gathered in Royal Park camp to prepare for the numerous requirements of this great occasion. Not only had we to prepare a presentation for the opening ceremony, but we had to familiarise ourselves with the National Anthem of every participating nation. We also put on a massed-bands performance at the Flemington Racecourse just prior to the running of the famous Melbourne Cup which is held traditionally on the first Tuesday in November. They were indeed exciting times despite the long hot days of foot-slogging and blowing. On the big day itself, the combined Army Bands, each Command decked out in its own distinctive ceremonial uniform, gathered at the assembly area close to the famous Melbourne Cricket Ground where we were pleasantly surprised to be joined by several of our own most successful female athletes. Naturally, this gave me the opportunity to take a happy snap or two, but strangely enough, I failed to get someone to take me with them – an oversight I’ve always regretted.

MEMBERS OF THE NORTHERN COMMAND BAND
RIGHT TO LEFT: BETTY CUTHBERT, SHIRLEY STRICKLAND, MARLENE MATTHEWS

THE OLYMPIC OPENING CEREMONY

Eventually, we bandsmen took up our position on the track that led into the stadium. There are events in my life that have been exciting in the extreme, but I rate the opening of the Melbourne Olympics as the most exciting experience of my life. The senior Drum-major filled his lungs to capacity, then gave the order. 'Massed bands and drums…by the centre. Quiiiick…March'. The executive command had barely spewed from his lungs before it was overpowered by the thunder of the bass-drum accompanied by the rapid-fire rhythm from a battery of side drums. Eight paces later, the massed bands of the Australian Army exploded into a salvo of sound as they swept into the arena to the tune of 'Waltzing Matilda.'

The opening ceremony of the 1956 Olympic Games was under way. Immediately behind the platoon of side drummers came the trombonists at 15 abreast and slap-bang in the middle of them was Lance-Corporal John Lane of the Western Command Band giving his all to shatter the ears of the 100,000 strong audience. This was our opportunity to show the world that the Australian Army musicians had what it takes when it came to ceremonial pageantry. For several weeks past we had tramped the turf of Flemington Racecourse, day after day after day, so that on the 'big day' our opening ceremony performance would be as near perfect as we could get it.

Now the 'big day' had arrived. At long last…this was it. Settling in to our 'game plan,' we swept from north to south, east to west and back again. We quick-marched; slow-marched and counter-marched. We right-wheeled, we left-wheeled, and at strategic intervals we halted to receive the plaudits from the immense crowd. After all, we needed to give our lips a brief rest every now and again. In those days there were no other acts to follow ours. We were all there was. For a full hour we occupied centre stage, sweating profusely in our tight-fitting uniforms as the temperature climbed steadily towards the old 100-degree mark. Eventually we came to our final halt as the Drum Major flung an exaggerated salute in response to the generous applause that crescendoed to a fitting climax. Then, after a brief pause, during which time our numbers divided into three playing groups, the moment for which everyone had been waiting, the march on, arrived.
From our ring-side position, the two resting bands had an unimpeded view of this historical event, while nation after nation marched impressively past the Duke of Edinburgh as he took the salute. Traditionally, on these occasions, the host team is last to march on, so as the centre arena gradually filled to capacity with nations, the tension in the packed stands grew progressively intense until finally, the Australian contingent wheeled on to the running track to an unprecedented roar of welcome. It was one of life's rare momentous occasions.

Throughout the Games, bands were rostered to the various venues for the playing of national anthems and to provide entertainment when required. It was one such occasion that produced my main claim to fame when our band drew the long straw of Main Stadium duty. For some reason during a long period of trackside inactivity, we found ourselves giving the paying customers a marathon concert. Included in our repertoire was the popular musical of the day, 'South Pacific.' While the introduction to 'Some Enchanted Evening' was being played, I placed my trombone on a stand and made my way to the microphone, timing my arrival to sing that evergreen old ballad to the largest audience of my life. I still relish the applause that accompanied me all the way back to my seat.

Another reason to remember that eventful year of 1956 was that I retuned home in time to welcome my only daughter Debra Ann into the world on Boxing Day.

One disenchanted morning (BUT NOT THE ONLY ONE)

By TED BOLWELL

An army lance-corporal stood up on the Olympic main stadium arena today and sang "Some Enchanted Evening" to a somewhat disenchanted crowd.

The soldier was a member of a combined Northern and Western Commands military band which entertained the public during a 3½ hour break between athletic events.

When the soldier finished singing he rejoined the band, took up his trombone and helped play a selection from Kismet.

It included the tune which has the words, "Princes come, Princes go, an hour of pomp and show they know."

It was an apt selection.

The crowd had come and many had gone, because all they got this morning was one hour of pomp and show.

They had only two events to watch — the qualifying trials for the men's shot put and the women's javelin throw.

The events started at 10 a.m. and were both finished in an hour.

Then the crowd faced a 210-minute gap until the next event started at 2.30.

Loud cheers

When the band appeared on the arena after more than an hour there were loud cheers from the bored crowd.

It was announced later over the public address system that bands would entertain the crowds during the luncheon interval on future athletics days.

Today's entertainment was overdue. Crowds have sat for up to 2½ hours watching nothing on the past two days.

Many of the spectators are paying £3/4/ a seat.

The programme for Olympic athletic events crams the afternoons but often makes the mornings drag.

The programme is framed by the International Amateur Athletic Federation and is almost the same at all Olympic Games.

They like it

The reason for the afternoon "loading" was explained today by the deputy arena manager, Mr F. H. Pizzey.

"Athletes prefer to compete in finals during the afternoon, because that is when they feel they give their best."

In effect, the Olympic athletics programmes didn't start properly until 2.30 each day, he said.

Morning sessions merely got rid of qualifying trials.

ME SINGING
AT THE 1956 OLYMPIC GAMES

In 1958 my career took a positive step forward when I was selected to attend an NCOs' course at the Army Apprentices School at Balcombe on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. Although it was of six months' duration, which meant a lengthy separation from my family, it was a necessary requirement in the normal order of advancement up the ladder of promotion. Naturally, this put an extra burden of work on my wife, but when I came home with the rank of corporal and soon settled back into a regular living at home routine, everything returned to normality. The extra income was now a welcome bonus.

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES

Certificate

This is to Certify

That 5/1507 L/CPL LANE J K

Unit WESTERN COMMAND BAND Arm or Service R AUST INF

attended a Course of Instruction at School ARMY SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Title of Course 5/58 ARA BAND NCOs COURSE

Duration 26 weeks From 24 Feb 58 to 11 Aug 58

Aim(s) of Course To train Band NCOs and Bandsmen and qualify them in Subject "B" for promotion

Qualified in Subject "B" for promotion to CPL (Bandsmen)

and was awarded B Classification

Subjects covered by the Course Aural Training, Elementary Harmony, Conducting, Elementary Instrumentation, Methods of Instruction

* Remarks An all round musician of great capability and potential.

Place BALCOMBE

Date AUG 1958

Chief Instructor MAJ

* To include, if applicable, qualifications for promotion obtained, eg. Qualified (Arms 25) etc.

GRADUATION CERTIFICATE FROM THE ARMY SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Just two years later, an anticipated opportunity came my way when I was offered a teaching position on the staff of the School of Music. This was, of course, the natural progression for which I had set my goals. A two-year teaching stint would qualify me for a Unit Bandmaster after which I would undoubtedly be given a Command Band with commissioned rank. Although this invitation meant that as a family, we would have to move to Victoria, it was an inevitable part of pursuing a career in the armed forces and the entire relocation would be done by the Department at their expense, including finding suitable new accommodation. In effect, the move would be to our financial advantage by leasing our own home until we were ready to return to it. To me, the whole development seemed to be almost idyllic, consequently my self-esteem and confidence had never been higher. At last I felt that the once rejected little Pommy bastard was going to make something of himself.

Then in one simple decision my world fell apart. My wife simply refused to make the shift. So far as she was concerned, she was settled in to her new house and she wasn't moving. I could have decided to make the move on my own of course, but, having had one failed marriage behind me, I couldn't endure the thought of risking another failure. For another eight years I put up with a life of mediocrity. The work was pleasant enough with only the minimum of parade-ground duty to be done. While most of our playing took us around the State performing for schools and various festivals, it also meant that I just stagnated. Eventually, in 1966, another invitation to teach at the School of Music came my way, and I accepted it. It came too late to rescue my career, of course, but at least it would give me the opportunity to gain a bit of rank which would qualify me for a higher retirement pension However, although by this time the two children were going to school, my wife very reluctantly condescended to make the move, while, at the same time, very graciously, leaving me the tedious task of compiling the household contents inventory on my own.

During those difficult times television had come to Perth, so I had supplemented my income in my spare time, by working for a small television retailer. I also accepted the offer of playing trombone in one of Perth's premier dance-bands of the day, Ron Moyle's Band of Renown that played Saturday nights in the Embassy Ballroom dressed immaculately in dinner suits. These extra jobs enabled me to make good money. I needed to, because I still had to provide some financial support for my three children of my first marriage. All through those years I could not erase the unpalatable fact that although I had accepted the illegitimate child my wife had conceived during the war years, she refused to accept the three children of my first marriage. Naturally, this attitude filled me with considerable resentment and frustration which only worsened with time.

With tenants installed in our Scarborough home, we were eventually housed in the southern Victorian town of Mornington on the peninsula of the same name and about eight kilometres from the School of Music at Balcombe camp. Although the wardrobes and clothes drawers were prone to mildew in the new concrete house, we quickly settled into the small town of Mornington and eventually spent many enjoyable weekends driving around the numerous scenic spots of the whole peninsula. In addition, our two children settled well into their school and I found teaching young apprentices and Corp trainees a most rewarding experience. Even my wife made friends and finished up enjoying the new environment so much that when the time came to return home, she didn't want to go. So much for the former wasted chance of bygone years. It was far too late to rescue my musical career now. Younger students had seized their opportunity for advancement, leaving no room for an ageing veteran. At 46 years of age, I had no option but to take my family back to the West and look for a new career. And although the serving of 18 post-war years had qualified me for the 'Long Service and Good Conduct Medal,' I had to settle for the comparatively lowly retirement rank of Staff-Sergeant.

After my discharge from the regular army, I was asked to take on the job of Bandmaster to the Western Australian's Citizen's Military Forces band with the rank of Warrant-Officer First Class (WO1). This position promised some measure of satisfaction, but after the disciplined existence of the regulars, I found the part-time army conditions too dissatisfying. The weekly rehearsals were productive enough, but when the band was required for a weekend engagement, I could arrive at the venue to find one or two key players absent, so after a year, I decided to make a clean break from the institutional environment that had enveloped me for most of my life and went selling insurance.

MR LANE, INSURANCE AGENT

It wasn't as if there were no opportunities to continue a music career in civilian life. Government High Schools and Public Schools were always on the lookout for ex-army teachers. In fact, I declined the offer of Music Master of Hale School, one of Perth's finest, but I felt somehow cheated of my potential in that field, so I decided to make a clean break to become the master of my own destiny.

In September 1968 I joined four others who did a two-week instructional course with the well established insurance giant, National Mutual in which we learnt the value and prudence of taking out insurance to provide financial protection against the hazards and disasters that anyone could be confronted with during their lifetime. I had never before given much thought to the subject of insurance except the straightforward savings plan over a designated number of years after which the savings plus interest was payable. This plan also provided money to the next of kin when it was most needed, as in the event of death or total disablement of the person assured. We went on to learn how necessary it was, especially for self-employed people, to have adequate cover for their business, their possessions, loss of income if injured, public liability, and of course a superannuation plan. The responsibility we bore our clients to advise them correctly in all matters was instilled in

us. It all made good sense to me, despite the general questionable reputation many people ascribed to the industry. I soon realized that the widespread lack of knowledge was the main cause for this attitude, so that gave me the impetus to gain the knowledge to make a success of my new profession. Most of my friends, too, including my old schoolmaster of Fairbridge days, thought I was plain crazy, throwing away a prestigious job to go commission-selling, but that only doubled my resolve to succeed.

It became immediately obvious to me that my new work was simply a case of working the law of averages. The more people I interviewed, the better the rate of success, so the sooner I got on with it, the better. I canvassed people at home, tradesmen at their place of work and of course, friends and acquaintances. Because most of my business had to be written at night appointments, I quickly went into flexible time to cater for family needs, but, thanks to my army discipline, this was no problem. For several weeks before my commissions came through, we survived financially on the proceeds of my former television business, which had already paid for a new Holden EH station-wagon, while a total of 20 rental sets guaranteed a survival income.

For five years I persevered with this new existence, trying to organize all facets of my family obligations. My previous two-year absence in Victoria had deprived me of seeing the children of my first marriage, and although I had been able to restore contact with them, my wife still refused to accept them or to let me bring them home. The longer this situation went on, the more confused and bitter I became. Obviously I had no parents to consult; no advice or help in resolving the situation, so the only way to cope was to spend more time working. In the early 1970s a new Government's drive for English migrants had brought a steady stream of new arrivals into a metropolitan reception area, so I concentrated on gaining their patronage by assuming a public relations role. I drove them the scenic route into Perth for a compulsory chest X-ray, I advised them on purchasing cars and home-sites. I even found a few of them jobs. Later on, when they became settled into jobs and new homes, I helped many of them with their first tax returns, invariably resulting in healthy refunds. Naturally not only did I build up a sizeable clientèle, I gained a host of friends. The pleasantries accumulated in this direction compensated somewhat for the lack of love and understanding in my marriage. In this situation, having had one failed marriage resulting in depriving three boys of their father, I resolved to avoid making a similar decision again. But as the years went by I yearned desperately for the companionship of a compatible female partner. Finally, with my two children now working, I abandoned all I had worked for over 20 years of marriage, and once again went in search of happiness. With my age now in the 50s and living alone in temporary accommodation, I frequently questioned my sanity. However, I found a measure of consolation in servicing my growing band of clients, even exploring the possibilities of finding a female friend among those whose marriages had failed. It was all to no avail. Fortunately the relationship with all my children remained favourable, a development that gave me encouragement to keep going, but once again I called upon all my reserves of past experiences to keep me positive. In reflective mode sometimes when alone at night, I relived some of the most harrowing episodes of my existence, questioning the reason for my plight, even arguing the case that there surely must be a reason why I had survived so many war-time close encounters with death.

Then, one Sunday morning while going through the personal columns of the newspaper, I spotted an advertisement that ultimately was to lead to meeting a woman that turned my whole life into an incredible new chapter of experiences.

A CHANGE OF FORTUNE

I'm not sure what woke me up. Perhaps it was arriving at the most crucial stage of my dreaming, or the flight attendant's agreeable voice acknowledging my wife's request for a

cup of tea. Whatever the cause, I took the opportunity to visit the toilet before returning to make myself comfortable in anticipation of reliving the past 28 years of my life. If only I could keep awake to savour fully the pleasantries we had shared; pleasantries made all the more enjoyable because of the complete change of fortune that had embraced us both. A glance at my watch told me that there were almost three hours of flight time left in which to relive the memories of this remarkable era. Time enough to regress.

The *Sunday Times* advertisement caught the eye simply because it stated ‘Computer Matchmaking' long before computers came on the market. Interested people were invited to put answers to a number of questions in order for the principal to calculate the best possible chance of introducing compatible couples. As the principal stated she was not engaged in a commercial venture, but was genuinely interested in helping lonely people, I decided that for the small cost involved, there was little to lose and much to gain. Subsequently I found the lengthy list of questions agreeably sensible, interesting, and personal. A few days later, I received the names and phone numbers of four women. It was the answer to one particular call that attracted my initial interest when a male voice cheekily announced 'Fremantle morgue.' Clearly there was humour in that household so I asked to speak to Ronda. Somewhat relieved to learn that the male voice belonged to one of her two sons, we exchanged basic information and made a date for me to visit her.

Inevitably perhaps, when Ronda admitted me to her sixth-floor apartment in a Fremantle block of flats, who should be waiting in the background, obviously to check out Mummy’s new acquaintance, lurked the 6ft 6in son in full maritime uniform. I didn’t know whether to feel honoured or threatened. Fortunately I must have passed the introductory stage, because, after an obvious five-minute period of scrutiny, Ronda and I were duly left to ourselves. When I had a chance to relax and regain my composure, I found myself in company of an attractive woman a few years younger than I, about my own height, with very fair complexion and a pleasantly coiffured blonde hairstyle. We chatted for an hour or so, exchanging personal histories. I had to tell her of course, about my two failed marriages with a legacy of five adult children and that I was considered to be a successful life underwriter. Ronda explained that she was working as a State Registered Nursing Sister, having done her training at Fremantle Hospital as soon as she had left school, just after the war. She had two sons, the one I had met being a customs officer, the other one, only very slightly shorter, was a cop, so, in effect, she had her own ‘mafia’.' Once again, I wasn’t sure if this information was meant to be intimidating or just plain fact. However, the one thing we had in common was that we were both divorced, so we had no complications in that direction. I drove back to my rented rooms with a simmering feeling of excitement that had been absent from my life for so long. We had agreed to meet at the weekend. The first hurdle had been cleared. Could this be the beginning of a successful marathon?

For our first date we selected a Subiaco restaurant with the wicked name of 'Witches’ Cauldron' that enjoyed the reputation for serving tasty garlic prawns. It was a fortunate decision. We lingered over a pleasant meal, chatting comfortably away, discovering that there was much we shared including the same tastes in both seafood and wine. I hadn’t planned it, but after such an enjoyable meal, it seemed the romantic thing to do was to take a drive into Perth’s famous King’s Park to find a secluded parking spot overlooking the city and expanses of the Swan River. Courting couples had been going through the same routine ever since automobiles were invented and although we started the evening as mere acquaintances, by the time I returned Ronda to her unit in the ‘wee small hours,' we were well qualified to assume the mantle of a ‘courting couple.' It was nearly all too good to be true. From that very first date, everything simply fell into place. It didn’t take long to discover that we shared so many likes and opinions. We enjoyed sport of any kind, shared similar television tastes, travel appealed to us and we were both interested in literature. We even supported the same political party. Most important of all, we were happy together. After struggling through years of trauma, we both

felt that we had enough going for us to start thinking about our future together. For me, the most satisfying aspect of our relationship was the knowledge that, at long last, I had found a woman who understood the perfectly natural craving for genuine affection. But we were sensible enough not to rush into a joint venture. We each bought a property, Ronda chose an idyllic two-bedroom unit on the beach at Scarborough and I bought a four-bedroom house in the then outer northern suburb of Hillarys.

Then when Ronda's holidays came due, we had no hesitation in deciding to spend the month in driving right around Australia in her Vanguard car. If ever an exercise was designed to test a couple's compatibility, it was a trip such as ours. We shared the long daylight hours of driving, disciplining ourselves to make regular refreshment stops and occasional sight-seeing pauses. Wherever possible at night, we pitched our mini tent in caravan parks, taking advantage of the ablution facilities and a greater sense of security. Bypassing the cities of Adelaide and Melbourne we made only a brief stop on the fringe of Sydney to spend a night with a friend. Our next break came with a day at Bullen's Lion Park at Beenleigh near Brisbane where my eldest son Frank worked. Here we shared close encounters with a friendly elephant, a group of feeding lions, and a playful but scarily-strong tiger cub.

ME WITH A PLAYFUL TIGER CUB

As tight as our schedule was, we couldn't drive through Queensland without visiting the popular spots of 'Birdland and 'Marineland' which provided spectacular photo opportunities.

The northern town of Ingham was our next short stay with one of Ronda's nursing mates from Fremantle's training days and here we welcomed the comfort of a proper bed. But all too soon we had to press on up to Cairns where we discovered the existence of two great scenic trips, the first of which was a special tourist train that climbed from the city up the mountain, through the spectacular Barron Falls into Australia's prettiest railway station of Kurunda, resplendent with the most spectacular tropical vegetation. The other delightful trip took us out on a two-hour pleasant cruise to Green Island which is small enough to paddle around in an hour and has a very interesting underwater viewing room. Leaving Queensland's east coast behind, we headed for the mining town of Mt Iza where we were again able to enjoy the luxury of home comforts through the courtesy of Ronda's nephew and his wife. From here our travels took us into Darwin, a town of particular interest to me

as I had last been there with my battalion in 1941 when Japan had entered the Second World War by attacking Pearl Harbor. It had been a frantic effort to erect beach defences for a few days before we were rushed to Singapore in a futile effort to save that island from the Japanese. But Darwin now was a growing modern city whose only threat came from sea creatures and growing numbers of crocodiles.

The remainder of our trek took us through the long lonely main highway into Western Australia, making brief stops at Derby and Broome until we arrived at the comparatively new township of Dampier. Here we took a motel room for a couple days in order to spend some time with Ronda's policeman son. He showed us around the place including a visit to the salt mining company, a method that gives a whole new meaning to mining. On an incoming tide, seawater is trapped into a huge lake abounding in fish of all sizes and species which makes for some spectacular fishing for the few privileged people allowed into the area. The trapped water is then siphoned off into shallow small lakes where evaporation takes place, leaving the salt to be harvested.

By the time we arrived home, we realized that we had successfully survived our initiation test with encouraging signs for our future compatibility, so we settled on living in Ronda's seaside unit. For a whole year we consolidated our relationship, enjoying a mutual interest in current affairs, politics and sport. On a warm summer evening, a short shuffle over a ridge of sand-dune found us cooling off on one of the world's most famous beaches, while much later, we drifted off to sleep to the pleasant lullaby of muted gentle waves plopping rhythmically onto the hard sand. During the football season we seldom missed a State league game, barracking energetically for the South Fremantle team, while during the summer months we were both keen on cricket. With the passing months bringing us closer together, inevitably we recounted episodes of our past lives. These moments brought home to me the significant discovery that at last I had found a woman who seemed genuinely interested in my somewhat unusual past history. When I stated that it had been about 25 years since I had communicated with my sisters in England, Ronda showed a positive concern. Subsequently, she suggested that we should make the effort to take a trip back to the UK. She herself had relatives in Scotland, so if we went back, not only could she introduce me to them, but there was always the possibility of finding some members of my family. I had not previously given serious thought to this prospect, having seemingly been perpetually struggling to find marital happiness, but now, the mere thought of going in search of family with this exciting new woman in my life, filled me with a whole new sense of purpose. Eventually, after exploring the many alternatives, we decided that we would embark on a real trip of adventure by joining the Sundowner travel company's excursion to England by way of the Far East, Japan, across Soviet Russia on the Trans-Siberian Railway, through Europe to Holland where we would catch the ferry to England. We then planned to buy a campervan to live in while we went on what we hoped would be a voyage of discovery.

My position required me to notify all my clients of my intentions, and leave them in the very capable hands of my secretary, Allison, without whom I could not have made the trip. Fortunately, the majority of my clients were former English migrants, who, upon learning of my impending 'back home' visit, immediately loaded me up with pages of addresses of their mums, sisters, aunts and cousins, with invitations to 'just pop in to see 'em, won't you?' Finally, after selling a few assets to get 'cashed up' and paying my superannuation fund a year's premium in advance, together with a final comforting embrace of assurance from Allison, we took off for Singapore early in September 1976 on the first leg of our extraordinary journey.

After meeting the other inter-state members of the party, we continued on together to Hong Kong and Taipei, spending a couple of sightseeing days in each place before arriving at Osaka. From there we caught the 'bullet' train to Yokohama to board the ship for the Soviet Union and after a very rough few days we berthed at the port of Nakhodka,

near Vladivostok. No sooner had we landed than a graphic incident quickly reminded us that democracy was no longer our companion. A giant of a woman customs officer belligerently enquired if I had any literature in my case, particularly, a Bible or newspapers. No, I had no Bible but I did have a Hong Kong newspaper featuring the death of Chairman Mao. Without a moment's hesitation, two monstrous arms emptied the whole contents of my case with frightening rapidity until the suspect newspaper was revealed sitting innocently on the bottom. Then, after the briefest of inspections, and a grunt of dismissal, I was left to tackle the job of repacking.

The Trans-Siberian Railway is one of the great train journeys of the world, so we were all facing this prospect with great anticipation. However, we didn't have long to wait for the next reminder of just where we were. We had been given a tour of the town before being deposited at the railway station where we encountered a couple of locals who readily entered into a conversation of sorts despite the language difficulty. This fraternization lasted only a few minutes when two top-coated burly gentlemen approached from a nearby building and with a swiftness previously seen only in movies, escorted our casual friends away with scarcely an audible word being spoken. There was no doubt about it; we were certainly getting our money's worth. Eventually, our train arrived and, together with Olga, our Russian tour guide, we took over an entire carriage and began our long haul across this huge country.

We met comfort and convenience in our carriage but no beds. Olga explained that the trains were made in East Germany under the war reparations conditions and no beds were needed as we would spend the nights in hotels, boarding the daily service train on the following morning. For three days we journeyed forever westwards through forests of silver birch, interspersed with generous patches of farmland. Along the journey to Moscow we spent the nights in plain but adequate hotels at Khabarovsk, Irkutsk, and Novosibirsk. At each of these cities a waiting coach took us on a tour before we settled into our hotel rooms where the only entertainment was viewing old American Western movies. At Irkutsk a coach took us on a day trip to the nearby beautiful Lake Baikal, reputed to being the world's largest freshwater lake with the purest of sparkling clean water. With meals along the way being plain but adequate, we were pleasantly surprised to find ourselves enjoying such a memorable experience behind the Iron Curtain, although we were not so surprised at having to surrender passports at every hotel stay.

Moscow turned out to be scrupulously clean and well disciplined. The Metro underground stations were spotless. Organised tours took us around the city and of course into Red Square. But their proudest moment was reserved to show us through the Institute of Industrial Achievement, displaying the rocketry that led the race into space. Included in the exhibits was a replica of the dog Laika that held the dubious honour of being the first animal to orbit the earth.

The final tour in the USSR took us by train to Leningrad (now known again as St Petersburg), where we were escorted through the famous Hermitage museum while being given a history lesson about the October revolution. Our few hours of allotted viewing were far too few in which to fully appreciate the extensive range of exhibits in this huge collection, but it still remains as my most memorable event of the tour, closely followed by a visit to the nearby Czar's Summer Palace. On returning to Moscow we had a day in which to spend our American dollars in the special 'berioska' shops available only to foreign tourists, before saying farewell to our pleasant guide, Olga, as she saw us safely aboard our train, complete with passports and on our way to Europe.

However, before we were delivered into the freedom of West Germany, the communist state laid one last memorable imposition on us at the border, by insisting on herding every passenger into the corridor while armed guards undertook a thorough search of each compartment. The fact that our search took place in the middle of the night mattered not one iota; such was the gospel of communism. Consequently, our emergence

into the realm of democratic Europe, brought forth a collective sigh of relief from those of us who travelled on to the Hook of Holland and then by ferry to England.

As I stepped ashore at Harwich, I made a mental note that it had taken me 43 years to return to the land of my birth after I had been placed on the SS Otranto and sent to Australia as a ten-year-old boy. Despite that lengthy absence, I couldn't suppress a subtle nagging quiver of excitement as the train delivered us into the heart of London on that cold autumn night, with the emotion lingering long after Ronda and I shared our first goodnight kiss in an English hotel bedroom.

BACK IN THE 'OLD DART'

Western Australia House in the Strand became our headquarters for the few days we spent in London. Here we could catch up on recent events from Perth newspapers while arranging new banking facilities. We also had to buy a Kombi-type campervan in which we intended to go on an extended tour. Selecting a convenient Volkswagen agency in Baker Street, we wasted no time in checking it out. After inspecting the limited range of vans on offer, we selected their latest new motor-home with the water-cooled engine in the cabin. We had never seen anything like it before and were very impressed with its quality. It was really a light truck which had been fitted out as a home in a Devon workshop, hence its identity as an LT28. It was ideal for our purposes and we finished up living in it for several months before shipping it back to Fremantle.

Leaving London behind, we headed for the South, deciding to take a leisurely scenic drive along the southern coast to Lands End before heading up into Gloucestershire to revisit the idyllic little piece of the Cotswolds that was home to me for the seven happiest years of my childhood. I deliberately restrained the urge to charge immediately westward to my village, choosing the delaying approach in order to savour the mounting pleasure of anticipation the closer we got to our destination. From the 'Last Pub in England' at Lands End we headed north through scenic Cornwall and Devon, taking special care to visit Uncle Tom Cobley's village of Widecombe-In-the-Moor, then on through Somerset and into Gloucestershire. By the time I found myself driving through the hilly town of Stroud, the only way I could contain my growing excitement was to concentrate wholly on my driving so as not to get lost. That way I made the correct turn off the Chalford valley to climb the steep hill into the village of Eastcombe. I was amazed to still identify its tranquil familiarity. Certainly the village had expanded with the additional homes conspicuous in their new white stone. But the heart of Eastcombe had remained pleasantly preserved; the untouched beauty of the old houses, my old school still with its tiny concrete playground, the quadruple-chimneyed manse, the chapel with its bell-tower and clock, obviously long-since stopped, were just as I remembered them. And a little further on, the solitary Lamb Inn with its quaintly smiling signboard lamb, still gazing longingly at the luscious village-green grass. How small that triangular patch of turf seemed to have become since my football playing days when we kids booted tennis balls around in after-school scratch matches.

The village roads too, seemed to have shrunk to mere tracks. So much so, that I decided not to risk taking the motor-home down the steep hill into Bismore. Then, leaving our vehicle in the pub's parking lot, I took Ronda's hand and led her down the track towards the scattered cottages below... By this time, I'm sure Ronda could have felt the emotion in my grip, until we turned the familiar sharp corner of motor-trail days, and there it was. From our vantage point the valley stretched away to the wooded hillsides, and in the middle distance the Nobes' cottage seemed to stand aloof from all the others, yet distinguished by a stand of beech trees among whose young branches I had climbed and played as a child. Now they were a towering backdrop of stately trunks topped with masses of bare branches that seemed almost to touch the grey sky. This had the effect of

making ‘our’ house even smaller than it was, although it looked much the same as I remembered it, tucked snugly into the hillside with one pair of chimney pots partly hidden by an overhanging branch. Two dormer windows protruding from the slate roof and the matching front porch were still intact. After all these years, the only change I could see was the installation of a skylight high in the roof. But below the cottage, the once unspoilt beauty of the meadow had been disfigured by an unsightly row of electric light poles. In my view, the hamlet of Bismore had paid dearly for the advance of progress.

Fortune favoured me on a visit in later years when the closest neighbours, seeing that I was obviously a stranger, invited me in for a cup of tea. Naturally, the whole saga of past events gradually unfolded as I enjoyed Mr and Mrs Brooks’s hospitality. They were so interested to learn that I had come all the way from Australia to rediscover the charm of this very special nook of the Cotswolds that had been my backyard for the seven years I had lived with the Nobes family. To complete the picture, it seemed remarkable luck that I was able to look around my home. Although the exterior appeared untouched, the interior had been almost entirely modernized. A kitchen and toilet had been installed on the ground floor, while the bedroom where once I read my comics by candlelight had now been transformed into a modern bathroom. Down below again, a sizeable side of the house featured a large landscape window to take advantage of the scenic view. Clearly, these historic old Cotswold cottages were now being bought by wealthy people to be modernized and used as relaxing hideaway retreats

On that first visit back with Ronda, grateful to have rediscovered Bismore, we re-climbed the hill into Eastcombe to have a drink at The Lamb. It was a midweek afternoon so it wasn’t surprising to find the long bar empty except for a group of four men playing cards some distance from where we stood sipping our ciders and chatting away to the landlord. I had been recalling the years I had lived with the Nobes down in Bismore where old Sam Nobes used to carry his weekly pint home to wash his bread-and-cheese supper down, when one of the card players wandered over to us to announce in a memorable West Country voice, ‘‘Ere, I know thee; thee be young Jackie Ramsbottom, ain't thee?' To say that I was astonished to find, that, being in the village only a few minutes after an absence of 43 years, someone still recognized me, would be the understatement of all time. Indeed, it was a miracle of no small proportions. The man with the amazing memory turned out to be Bob Bingle, son of the publican during my childhood there. We were kids together in the early '30s which makes his powers of observation and memory all the more remarkable. Meeting Bob out of the blue so to speak is one of those freak chances that may occur only once in a lifetime. In this case, it turned out to be all the luckier because he put us in touch with several people of our generation who still lived in the district. When he gave us the address of his sister Olive, we lost no time in calling on her to be introduced to her husband Dennis and three sons. Subsequently, with Dennis being a WWII aircrew veteran who had served on a British aircraft carrier in the Far East, we immediately bonded in a special friendship that will last for the rest of our lives.

But all too soon we had to move on. Ronda’s relatives lived in the north of Scotland and we were anxious to see them before winter set in. I would be meeting them for the first time, so this whole trip was fast turning into a journey of discovery. As we drove back out of Scotland into England’s north-west, I talked over with Ronda the facts of my earlier brief contact with my mother and two half-sisters. The war years, of course, put an end to our recently established relationship, but with my release from a Japanese prisoner-of- war camp, I quickly contacted them and regular correspondence resumed. However after five or six years our letters grew less frequent until they ceased altogether. Now I didn’t even have their addresses. All I could remember was that my mother (who, I suspected, had probably passed away by this time) and elder sister Barbara had lived in Manchester, while Norah and her family had lived in Blackburn. As Blackburn was the smaller of the two places, we decided that we’d have a far better chance of locating Norah. But with a gap of

25 years since our last letters, I wasn't too optimistic about the outcome. Nevertheless, as we took the road to Blackburn, I could do nothing to quell the growing feeling of excitement that surged through my whole body the closer we drew to our destination. At that stage I had no idea what I would do when we did arrive

We were listening to a programme from the BBC, when the presenter identified its source as Radio Blackburn. And suddenly the solution came to me. What better method of starting our search than soliciting the help of the BBC? The receptionist at the BBC office listened politely as I briefly explained my purpose. My spirits rose as her growing interest turned to enthusiasm, and when she ushered us into the office of a journalist, I was visibly shaking.. Mike Marsh put me immediately at ease. After a friendly greeting he busied himself with a recording machine, explaining the need to tape our conversation for possible broadcasting during his afternoon session. Then with skilful questioning he drew from me the pertinent facts of my life's circumstances that brought me from Australia to Blackburn at the age of 53, in the hope of finding a sister whom I had never met. Three-quarters of an hour later Mike farewelled us at the front office with the assurance that he would edit and play the tape that afternoon, asking any listener who may have information of my sister Norah Barnes to contact the station. He suggested we call back to reception at five pm where we could collect any waiting messages.

It was a day that stays in the memory. Apart from the agony of the long wait for news, winter had arrived with a vengeance, carpeting the streets of Blackburn with a layer of ice that threatened potential disaster with every careful step, so it didn't take us long to conclude that the safest and least stressful way to fill in the waiting period was to take in a movie. We emerged from the cinema into a gloomy evening and slowly retraced our steps to the BBC where we were greeted with the news that Norah's ex-husband had heard the broadcast and had left her address with the station. It was almost unbelievable. To have achieved success within a few hours of arriving in town was beyond my fondest expectation. For a few moments I stood stunned, my eyes riveted on the piece of paper the smiling receptionist held out for me. When I eventually found my voice to thank her profusely, she helped us out further by explaining the way to Norah's place. Once again I thanked the receptionist before we made our excited exit with her ringing good wishes sending us on our way. But when the first wave of excitement subsided a little, we realised it might be too much of a shock for Norah to find two strangers arriving on her doorstep on a bleak winter's night, so we decided to wait until the morning. Being a Saturday we figured, too, we'd have a better chance of finding her home.

When we did eventually muster the courage to operate the knocker, I grasped the knob, gave three loud raps, took a pace back, and waited. After several seconds there was a sound of a turning key before the door opened slowly. I looked at the dressing-gowned woman standing in the doorway, and instinctively knew that for the first time in my life I was staring at my sister. It was obvious she hadn't been out of bed very long and all I could think of was that perhaps we should not have called so early. But already a look of suspicion clouded her face and I knew I'd have to explain who we were, only I'd forgotten how I'd planned to introduce ourselves. In the end I suddenly blurted out, 'Norah, I'm your brother Jack from Australia.' Norah stood there eyeing me over for a long time, obviously struggling to come to terms with this astounding start to her day. For one brief moment I thought she might slam the door in my face. But when she spoke, it came in the broadest of Lancastrian accents. 'Oh! Well you'd better come in then.'

Jack meets Norah and Barbara for the first time .Dec 1976.

In the years that followed, whenever we met, Norah never tired of reminding us of that memorable morning when she thought Ronda and I were trying to put over some sort of confidence job. Now, having made the breakthrough, we spent the next week meeting Norah's complete family of three sons and two daughters with their spouses and offspring. The exception was her youngest son, Stephen, who was still at school. All of a sudden Ronda and I were overwhelmed by a host of ready-made family members. We even let the local newspaper in on the event and they responded by sending out a reporter. The following day Norah and I appeared in the paper happily toasting our historic meeting. But I still had one more objective in mind; to find my elder sister, Barbara. Norah had confirmed that my mother had in fact passed away, as I had suspected. Unfortunately Norah and Barbara had drifted apart over the years. Talk about a fragmented family! Seven years had passed since their last letters to each other. We were left with no alternative but to drive to Barbara's last known address in Manchester and hope for the best. As we had half expected, our run of good fortune in finding Norah seemed to desert us in our early enquiries. No one by the name of Barbara Jarrat lived at the address we had. There was nothing for it but to canvass the whole street. But the street was a long one and we spent a couple of hours' doorknocking without success. It was all very discouraging and we had just about resigned ourselves to failure when our luck changed. With only a handful of houses left to call on, a kindly middle-aged woman opened her door to us with some encouraging information. She knew where Barbara's daughter-in-law lived. She not only helped us find the vital phone number, but insisted that we ring immediately. After a hurried consultation it was decided to let Norah do the talking, so she dialled the number while the rest of us held our breath. A minute later we had the address we were after. Barbara lived in the coastal town of Cleveleys.

But a further week passed before we made the link-up. Cleveleys is a small west-coast town a few miles north of Blackpool, so it was a good two hours' drive from Blackburn. It was an enjoyable trip, full of apprehension and pleasant anticipation, and I had little difficulty in finding Barbara's house. That December Sunday in 1976 turned out to be a day of significant discovery for me. For not only did I find my sister Barbara, but I met what I thought to be my only surviving aunt, Auntie Phyllis, and her two daughters, Dorothy and Renee. It was certainly an historic occasion. At 53 years of age, I had at last been united with my closest living blood relations. Emotion ran a banker that day. My mother had had a brother and four sisters and I was grateful to have been able to at least meet two of them, Phyllis and Harold.

From that memorable week, I kept in touch with them all, making sure I visited them

on several subsequent trips back to the UK. I had left it far too late to see my mother, and it was just as well we made that first trip when we did, as just three years later, while I was in the early stages of making plans to bring Barbara out to Western Australia, news came through that she had died suddenly of a heart attack. She was only 61 years of age. I was deeply saddened by her loss.

Barbara's death served to strengthen my resolve to give Norah a chance to see Fairbridge Farm, the school that had been my home for over five years in the '30s, and had so fortuitously more than adequately prepared me for the rigours of my life that lay ahead. She came in 1983, and loved it so much she didn't want to go home. The day she returned to Blackburn, she started saving for another visit. But it was a trip she was destined never to make. By a cruel twist of fate, a few days before her scheduled flight out she, too, had a heart attack and lingered only a couple of days.

Then only a few months later, my cousin Dorothy wrote with the news that her mother, my Auntie Phyllis, had passed away. I was losing my newly found family all too quickly.

In 1988 I returned yet again to England, mainly to seek information from my personal file at Barnardo's for use in writing my autobiography. During my visit, as always, I spent sometime visiting friends around Eastcombe where I had spent my early childhood.

And quite naturally, after having spent so much effort in locating my Lancashire relatives, I always reserved a few days for my Blackburn tribe, after which I'd pop over to Fleetwood where Dorothy was living. As she was now on her own, I stayed to have lunch with her, and during the meal she came out with some astonishing information. I had told her that having lost both my sisters and Auntie Phyllis, I now felt she was just like another sister to me. She replied quite matter-of-factly. 'But of course, you do have another auntie still alive. Your mother's sister, Muriel, is living down in Cheadle, just south of Manchester. This startling piece of news left me speechless for quite some time. Several questions were racing through my mind. Why had she not spoken of Auntie Muriel before? Does she not realise the importance I attach to my search for my family? Was there friction amongst branches of the family? Could my recent resurrection have brought embarrassment to some of them?

Whatever the reason, whatever the consequences, I knew I couldn't return to Australia without meeting this newly discovered auntie. When I eventually found my voice. I managed to control my concern, not wishing to cause Dorothy unnecessary distress. However, I was soon to find that one discovery inevitably led to others. In answer to my query as to how I could contact my new auntie, Dorothy gave me the phone number of Muriel's eldest daughter Jean, who lived nearby. Jean and her husband worked so I had to wait until the evening to contact them. Introductions and explanations accompanied my phone call of course, but Jean seemed genuinely delighted to hear from me and explained how to get to her mother's place.

Auntie Muriel welcomed me from her wheelchair, arthritis having reduced her to this method of mobility. She talked about my mother guardedly, mentioning her qualities of kindness and gentleness, attributes that had contributed to many of her difficulties. I liked Muriel. She was mentally bright and had a ready wit. I was sorry I could not stay longer with her. But I was fortunate enough to be invited to spend the night at Jean and David's home. It was the start of a whole new chain of events.

For four years we kept in touch hoping that one day in the not-too-distant future the fragmented Ramsbottom clan would all get together in one grand family reunion. The opportunity came when Ronda and I decided to return to the UK for a reunion stemming from my wartime association with the crew of the British aircraft carrier HMS Formidable. She had brought 1200 surviving prisoners of war from Japanese hands back home to Australia.

Once Jean and David received our news they set to work on their master plan. So

successful were they in their telephone campaign that they found it necessary to hire a hall for the occasion. It all came to fruition on the 26 September 1992. Ronda and I walked into the Bramhall Leisure Centre to find over 70 members of the Ramsbottom clan waiting to welcome us into the family. Cousins came from all over the north of England. Two car-loads drove down from Blackburn and one came up from Milton Keynes. Not every relative attended of course, Dorothy wasn't well enough to make the trip, and some were overseas. And sadly, Auntie Muriel had passed on. Yet despite these unfortunate losses, everyone there agreed that it was a most memorable occasion.

Yet strangely, perhaps, throughout the entire night, I sensed no special feelings of emotion. The effort of trying to remember to put names to so many new faces taxed my ailing memory and left me with little time for compensation. It was in the days that followed, after viewing a film David made of the occasion, and looking through the album of family groups compiled by Jean that initiated quiet periods of reflection. I had accomplished what so many Old Fairbridgians had set out to do in their retirement years – to trace their roots in the Old Country, seeking knowledge of the people responsible for their very existence in order to pass on to *their* offspring the origins of their birthright. Yet despite my apparent success, I found that at 70 years of age, the absence of a childhood relationship with any of them had left me with a distinct feeling of remoteness – of a void in my subconscious like a deep well which yields no water.

Jack (now John Lane) and some of his extended family at the Ramsbottom reunion at the Bramhall Leisure Centre near Manchester 26-9-92.

By comparison, I find that my frequent thoughts of Bismore and Eastcombe are synonymous with one of life's most precious gifts - the gift of love.

Although I was naturally pleased at finding so many members of my biological family, still my most treasured memory of all is the love heaped on me by the only mother I knew, my foster mother, Rosa Nobes. From as far back as I can remember, she was the mother who fed me, bathed me, nursed me, comforted me and tucked me into bed with a hug and a goodnight kiss. The amazing capacity of this woman's altruism lay in the fact that she dispensed equal amounts of love and affection to all the children fortunate enough to have been sent to her for fostering by Dr Barnardo's Homes. Sadly, the world war had separated us when I found myself in enemy hands for nearly four years; a separation that

subsequently lengthened into permanency.

Over the years my thoughts periodically dwelt on finding her grave site and erecting some symbol of remembrance of her life. Eventually an opportunity came in 1982 when I returned to Stroud with an invitation to stay with my second family, Olive and Dennis Gardiner. I had two weeks to do what I had to do. For two days I searched the Eastcombe cemetery in vain for the burial places of my foster parents and Auntie Flo. Nearly all the graves lay abandoned beneath years of uncut grass, while grey and melancholy headstones stood in irregular formations like stragglers from a defeated army, frozen in time. Most of the inscriptions were indecipherable, with words barely visible beneath mossy growth. Clearly, If I was going to accomplish my objective, I was going to need help from the locals. In this direction, I had extraordinary good luck in finding Arthur Johnson, the son of the Baptist minister for whom I ran messages as a child. Arthur had grown from the baby I had known into a man as kind and gentle as his father. He also had his father's slight build and intelligent sharp features. It took only a few minutes to know that he had the answer to my problem. After a quick search of the chapel records he took me straight to the lost graves. Then with a few more minutes spent in clearing away the long grass and ivy, uncovered an identifying marker bearing the initials S N (Samuel Nobes). The adjoining grave was Auntie Flo's.

I had previously discussed with a stonemason in Stroud just what I wanted. Now that I was able to confirm the order, he made it his first priority. A few days later the job was completed and he could deliver and install it on the Saturday about four o'clock.
Well before that promised hour came round, I drove up to Eastcombe to wait for the delivery. This was one appointment I was determined not to miss. Positioning myself on the cemetery's low perimeter wall, a friendly skylark suddenly appeared overhead to entertain me by performing an energetic overture while I waited for the main act. Right on time, the stonemason's covered van crawled along the main street and stopped just past the cemetery gates. Two men climbed down to prepare for the final lift. The load was heavy. The headstone looked weighty enough, but to keep it well anchored in the ground, a bulky concrete block had been fixed to its base. For the carry to the gravesite, the two men used a wire cradle suspended from a stout pole. Then, taking the load on their shoulders, they shuffled the 50 metres to the spot that I had selected. Ten minutes later the stone was in position, and after making sure I was satisfied with the placement, they walked respectfully away. I stood alone with my memories.

Now, even the skylark seemed to have sensed the poignancy of the moment, by departing the stage to let me meditate in silence. Slowly and deliberately I read aloud the simple inscription:

IN
MEMORY OF
ROSA AND SAM NOBES
WHOSE LOVE AND KINDNESS GAVE
ME A WONDERFUL CHIDHOOD
THEIR LOVING 'SON' JACK
OUT OF THE PAST

Arthur Johnson had arranged for my foster-brother George to be present too, a happy reunion, so I returned to Perth from that trip partially satisfied with my attempts at recognising the value of love and care bestowed upon me by my foster parents during my all important early childhood years. My big regret, of course, was my failure to contact them immediately after the war, but with their resting place now suitably identifiable, I felt I had done all I could to make sure their presence on this earth would not go unrecognized.

As a coda to this timely action on my part, destiny, fate or whatever its called, suddenly intervened in the form of a letter sent to me from the son of my former foster sister Florence Taylor. She was the Florence Bottomley mentioned in the first chapter of my book *Fairbridge Kid*. Her son, John, had taken his mother on a nostalgic trip back to 'our' old Bismore cottage and had met the same neighbours who had been so helpful to us. They recognized the name Bottomley, so passed on my details. Florence was several years older than I, so as a consequence, had left Mother's care before I had arrived. However, as her work had taken her back to the Cotswolds, it enabled her to visit us at regular intervals. On these memorable occasions she always took me on a day's outing, thoroughly spoiling me in the process. I remember with deep affection how proud of my new big sister I became and of the bonding that grew between us. Imagine my delight then, at receiving this unexpected surprise. Consequently I wasted no time in contacting her at the address given and immediately booked a flight back to see her.

On that memorable trip I visited in her home in Eastbourne another Bismore enthusiast discovered by Muriel Brooks. Muriel Little, née Stephens, was born in the cottage next to us in the wood in 1923, and we must have been to Eastcombe School together though she left the district before I did. We remembered the same friends, and loved the valley in the same way.

My main excitement, though, remained the reunion with my 'big sister' Florence, and after a parting of 63 years I can tell you that emotions erupted when we embraced in a meeting too consuming for words. It became all the more meaningful because the third member of our group, George, had passed away shortly after the meeting at the graveside.

FLORENCE and ME

Florence, now a widow, lived comfortably in a group of self-contained units in the Hampshire town of Odiham. I shared five days of spiritual happiness with her and met several members of her family. Even though we have no blood ties, it was as though I had at last come home as we relived our childhood under the care and love of Rosa and Sam Nobes in their little cottage nestling in the beauty of Bismore's golden valley. We sat reminiscing at night, every night of my short stay. We joked and laughed and cried together as each spark of memory ignited a seemingly endless chain of recollection.

I recalled an unforgettable Singapore day in 1942 when a hundred of us Australian prisoners of war marched along Bukit Timah Road to our job of building a road through the jungle around a reservoir. It was a Sunday, the second Sunday in May. Suddenly, as we drew level with an avenue of low bushes, men darted from the ranks to snatch small sprigs of white blossom to fix them into their shirt pocket buttonhole. Not to be left odd man out, I joined in the brief orgy, not really understanding the significance of the exercise. As I adjusted my spray to my pocket, I asked the chap next to me what it was all about. 'It's Mother's Day, Jack! You must never forget your mother.' I was 19….and I had just discovered my first Mother's Day. 'The real situation at that time,' I remember saying 'was that in reality although I had two mothers, my foster mother was the only one who had given me any love.' We reflected about this for some time while I studied her face. For an 80-year-old she had worn pretty well. Although her once youthful features were hardly recognizable, and her brown hair had matured into a natural deep grey, the eyes still retained much of their sparkle, although at this moment a distinct moist sadness reflected her sombre mood.

While this period of silence hovered around us, I decided that now was the time to share a secret I'd carried around since 1942. I spoke hesitantly, searching for suitable words and struggling to control my emotion at the memory of it all. I told Flo of the horrendous episode that took place on the last day of the battle for Singapore. It happened while our Company sat around eating a rare cooked meal beneath the shelter of a coconut plantation. A Japanese spotter plane approached our position but we paid little attention to its arrival. We had been observed before, but on this occasion we thought we were well hidden. However, no sooner had the plane passed over us, than we were caught in a relentless barrage of mortar bombs. It was too late to move, the bombing was too intense. We could only flatten ourselves on the ground. I had been sitting on the edge of a shallow drain so I flung myself in its slight protection. The bombing went on and on. There was no respite. It was terrifying. I put my hands over my ears to shut out the whining approach and explosion of each mortar bomb. The ground vibrated and shrapnel screamed continuously. I expected each moment to be my last on this Earth. And then it

came, slamming into my back. I didn't know it at the time but it was hard earth. The bomb had exploded almost in my ear. I just groaned, more in fear than in pain. That was when I saw Mum's face. Rosa Nobes. 'I called out to her, Flo. I couldn't stop myself. I cried out just one word….Mother.'

THE AMERICAN CONNECTION

Despite our almost idyllic retirement lifestyle, we still loved to travel abroad, especially visiting relatives and friends in the isolated far north of Scotland and in the Cotswolds of England. Over a period of years, friendships are made with fellow travellers from other countries, and addresses often exchanged. In most cases these acquired relationships lead to no more than an annual Christmas greeting. However, when the opportunity surfaced for a trip to the United States to attend a reunion of their former Prisoners of War in the glamorous city of Las Vegas, the temptation proved to be irresistible. Not only would it give us the opportunity to contact some of our American acquaintances, but it would also give us the chance to call on a couple of the crew members of the B24 Liberator plane on which I flew part of the way home after the war. A further incentive revealed itself when we sat down to plan our schedule. Ronda had relatives in White Rock near Vancouver and in the Toronto suburb of Scarborough whom she had never seen, so it was decided that we would make a special effort to embrace as many people as possible in one extended adventure through both the United States and Canada.

Veterans of all nations enjoy a close relationship based on sharing the exhilaration of surviving lengthy periods of life-threatening experiences. However, due to the close relationship of United States and Australian armed forces in their joint effort to defeat the Japanese in WWII, there exists a special unique bonding between the veterans of both nations, especially those of us who have shared the same prisoner-of-war camps.

Each Allied country has its own ex-POW organization and it is customary for each nation to issue invitations all round to one another's annual reunions. What we didn't know as we booked in to the Las Vegas hotel in which the functions were to be held was that I was the only Australian ex-prisoner of war to accept the invitation. Consequently, upon meeting Mr Harold Page, the American International coordinator on the morning of 25 September, we were introduced to the Executive Committee as Australia's official representatives, and subsequently given the red-carpet treatment by meeting other committee members at an evening cocktail party. Over a period of five days we attended a number of functions including a memorial service at which, together with representatives from New Zealand and Canada, wreaths were placed and the Ode to the Fallen was recited. At 9.00 am on the morning of 29 September, before a gathering of over 2000 ex-prisoners of war at the Union Plaza Hotel, we guests were presented with a magnificent volume of The History of WWII. The reunion came to a fitting finale that night with a magnificent banquet at the Chevard Convention Centre at which final speeches were recorded.

But it wasn't all officialdom. During the week, we took the opportunity to visit the impressive spectacle of the Boulder Dam, followed by the exhilarating experience of a flight through the Grand Canyon. One doesn't visit the desert city of Las Vegas every year of course, so there were other 'musts' we just had to do. Things like sampling a buffet lunch at the famous Caesar's Palace and inspecting the foyer of The Sands. Amongst a galaxy of available entertainment, we eventually selected the Lido at the Stardust Casino and were not disappointed. We even took in a little culture by way of a change, in visiting Ripley's Believe it Or Not Museum, to emerge in a totally confused state.. Bur, despite all the resolutions to the contrary, we inevitably found ourselves exercising our right arms in a repetitive tugging on a handle protruding from countless colourful machines that belched out a continuous cacophony of cadences, otherwise known as 'pokies'

At one establishment called the '4 Queens', while we occupied adjoining machines that unashamedly exhibited inexhaustible appetites, Ronda's machine suddenly erupted into a ferocious frenzy with bells clanging and lights blazing. The impossible had happened. She had struck the jackpot. Incredibly, she had drawn a jack of spades to make a royal routine flush. At odds of 500-1, the rewards could be colossal. When an attendant arrived and sanity was restored, the result turned out to be even more incredible. Ronda had risked a whole nickel on her investment for a return of $25.

After a week of the desert heat, we boarded the coach, happy at the prospect of driving north into the cool of Canada with the invitation to stay a few days with Harold and Virginia Page on the way. Yet another example of American hospitality revealed itself when we pulled in to the Tacoma depot in the state of Washington at 3.45am to find Harold waiting to drive us the 25 miles to their mini ranch near the small town of Buckley. Here we spent a very pleasant few days relaxing and being driven to view some of the scenic delights of the region. On a day-trip to the city of Seattle we were treated to an exhibition of how shipping negotiated a series of locks to reach the inland freshwater lakes. Of greater interest however was to see how salmon, having been denied access to the natural flow of the river, fight their way up a special channel against a strong current, built to assist them make their journey upstream to the place of their birth where they will lay their eggs before dying.

On another day trip, Harold took us 30 miles into the mountains to climb the scenic cone of Mt Ranier. Halfway up, we cleared the mist to reveal the beauty of the autumn tree-covered slope in brilliant sunshine. A couple of days later and Harold drove us back to the bus-stop where we resumed our trip into Canada. Here we were met by Ronda's cousin, Donna, to enjoy her hospitality in the nearby town of White Rock. The following day, Donna's daughter Michelle took us on a tour of the city after calling in at the rail centre to book our train journey to the city of Toronto. It seemed we were to spend the first two nights off the train and into hotels, but an entry in my diary reveals that it cost $247 for a sleeper on nights three and four. Meanwhile, we found Vancouver to be a charming city with a breathtaking walk on a suspension bridge spanning a huge canyon. Michelle also managed to find a parking place in the street that features the amazing sight of the famous steam-driven clock puffing out bursts of steam into the cool atmosphere on its hourly chime. As we witnessed this world-rare spectacle at eleven o'clock, we really got our money's worth.

For the last day of our stay, we made the two-hour ferry trip across to Vancouver Island to visit the Buchart Gardens. This magnificent park was once a huge quarry that has now been transformed into one of the country's most famous attractions, drawing tourists from all over the world. A leisurely inspection of this horticultural wonderland, followed by a pleasant meal at a mock-Tudor pub called the Royal Oak on the fringe of the charming city of Victoria, left both of us deciding that the day's experience was definitely worth a return visit. But we had a train to catch at nine the next morning, which saw us exchanging farewell hugs with our cousins on Vancouver station. In thick fog we headed west on our long haul, waiting anxiously for the mist to lift. Thankfully, it wasn't long before the train climbed into the clear to reveal the unfolding vista of one of the world's most spectacular journeys.

For the greater part of the day, we climbed steadily through the Rockies, alternately clinging tenaciously to a slender track hewn from the hillside, seemingly suspended in space along steel bridges, or being suddenly swallowed up by a fortuitous opening in the all-embracing presence of the mountains. And all the time we were not snaking through tunnels, the ever-present company of an ice-green river swirling its way through and over a tortuous route below us staged a constant opportunity for the obligatory camera shot. Of all the world's beauty spots, there is scarcely a more breathtaking trip to be had than a train ride through the Canadian Rockies.

Almost reluctantly, the mountains faded to more gentle viewing as we passed through Calgary and the intriguingly named town of Medicine Hat. When we left Winnipeg behind, the countryside opened up into a vast forest of stunted, slim-trunked larches, silver-birch and pine trees among countless small lakes, the shores of which were dotted with holiday homes. As we journeyed further eastwards through the vast plains, we readily adjusted to the familiar Australian exercise of advancing our watches the required two hours until on the night of the fourth day we arrived in Toronto to find cousin Robert Burns waiting to drive us to his home in the suburb of Scarborough.

The weekend produced one of life's unlikely coincidences when two Australian Rules football teams met in the final of a competition at the Toronto University Oval. Despite his ignorance of the rules, Bob kindly took me to watch Collingwood beat Hawthorn by 14 points in front of a crowd of 18,000, while Ronda explained the rules to Morag as they watched it on television at home.

Monday found us the recipients of more North American hospitality when we were taken for a scenic drive along the shores of Lake Ontario on the way to savour the spectacle of walking through the tunnels of Niagara Falls dressed in the protective yellow raincoats for the occasion. On returning to Scarborough, we farewelled our cousins to continue our trek by coach to Boston where we were met by more friends who hosted our tour of Cape Cod including the original location of Marconi's first radio transmission to England.

Our next destination was New York to be met by a daughter of a former army mate who welcomed us to her home on Staten Island where she lived with her doctor husband and two children. The following morning we wasted no time to catch the ferry for the 25-minute ride past the Statue of Liberty to Manhattan. With only a limited time in New York, we were determined to make the most of it so we organised a dinner at Sardi's followed by a show at the Wintergarden Theatre to see the musical 'Cats.' In addition, we did what almost every other visitor to that city does and that is to take the elevator ride to the top of the World Trade Center building. We accomplished this after queuing up for an hour, but the view from the top was well worth the wait. We also had a meal in the restaurant. Our next port-of-call was a specially significant one in that, for the first time in 43 years, I would meet a crew member of the Liberator bomber that flew 20 of us ex-POWs from Okinawa to the Philippines after we were liberated in August 1945. The co-pilot of that plane was Lamar Grow who lived in Shamokin, Pennsylvania. He was one of two crew members who still lived at the same address I had recorded in my war diary, so I couldn't do a trip around the States without calling on him and his wife Jean. During the few days we spent with them, they took us on several delightful tours through the countryside of rolling hills, ablaze with rustic autumn shades, and into valleys of isolated farming communities with a distinctive Dutch influence still very much in evidence.

From Shamokin we decided to visit the other crew member of that plane who lived in Charleston, South Carolina. Ed Hamm, of Polish descent, had just graduated from a navigation school when he was posted to the crew of that B24, christened 'Th' Duchess,' but it wasn't his fault that shortly after taking off from Kadena airstrip on Okinawa, the planes, loaded with ex-POWs, flew straight into the path of a typhoon, resulting in one of them crashing into the mountains of Taiwan with the tragic loss of 20 of our mates and the five crew members. Ed took us on an historic tour of the district, pointing out the area where the first settlers landed, now appropriately named 'Charleston Landing', after which we took a ferry to Fort Sumter, reported to be where the civil war started. He also drove us around to where the old aircraft-carrier USS Yorktown is resting in retirement, a veteran of WWII if ever there was one.

After the cold of the Canadian crossing and the coolness of the northern American cities, we now welcomed the warmer weather of South Carolina. In fact, as our Greyhound coach took us south through Orlando, then west into Dunedin, we were

complaining about the heat and decided to stay a couple of days in a Holiday Inn. Here, in the city, we sampled our very first 'Sizzler's meal which we thought was very good value before spending the afternoon enjoying the pleasure of a leisurely stroll through the excellent zoo. In the evening we took the obligatory walk through Bourbon Street sampling the music of numerous jazz groups both along the famous street and in some of the bars. The quality ranged from distinctly professional to amateurish and noisy. There were other acts too. A back massage could be had from one character, while another desperate entertainer attracted an audience by executing a frantic jig routine until a few dollars appeared on his plate, whereupon he immediately disappeared into the nearest bar to deposit his 'takings.' His strategy proved to be contagious because at the end of a hectic night's exhausting ritual, it induced us to retire to our hotel room to relax with a beer while being entertained by John Cleese in 'A Fish Called Wanda.'

Catching a coach early the next day, we travelled through endless swamps and bayous that separated the cities of Baton Rouge and Houston until we arrived in San Antonio where we decided to hole-up for a couple of days. Our decision proved to be a happy one when we discovered the city to be divided by a lazy little river, scarcely deeper than a stream, meandering its way through a host of restaurants displaying an inviting spread of outdoor dining settings. Shady trees enhanced the scenario, completing a picture just begging to be viewed in style from the seat of a small punt.

The city of course is well known for hosting the Alamo site where Major Travis and Davy Crockett, together with 170 defenders of the fort, fought to the death in their struggle for Texan independence from Mexico.

Well rested after our pleasant sojourn in San Antonio, an all-day ride took us through another time zone until we reached the city of Phoenix where another ex-POW American veteran was there to meet us. Once again, the hospitality was embarrassingly generous when Joe and Jane Opalka celebrated Thanksgiving Day by taking us all to a local Kings restaurant for a turkey and fruit mince pie dinner. A couple of days later, Joe took us on a memorable trip through the mountains to the resort city of Flagstaff. Up past the 5000foot level, we emerged into a fantasy snow-covered world which appeared refreshingly exciting after the long flat haul through the American south.

The few days with the Opalkas effectively brought our great North American adventure to a close. There remained only the final days' travel through Palm Springs back to Los Angeles, the last 100 miles of which took our coach four hours to negotiate with the volume of returning traffic after the Thanksgiving holiday period. There remained but one very important engagement to attend on our return flight home. A stopover at the Waikiki hotel was a requirement in order to catch a bus to visit the Pearl Harbor Depot where launches took a continuous flow of visitors out to the site of the infamous attack on the American Pacific Fleet. It is now known as "The Arizona Memorial.'

Standing silently, gazing into the submerged superstructure of the stricken battleship, brought back memories of newsreel of that horrendous slaughter on that fateful December morning in 1941. Expanding my thoughts further, I reflected how this shameful incident brought our two nations closer together in a long and costly struggle to retain our threatened freedom. It was this same camaraderie that sealed our friendship when victory was won and once again we had the USA to thank for delivering thousands of Allied prisoners-of-war from the heart of Japan to a huge staging camp near Manila.

The memories of events during that epic journey home after liberation remain forever fresh in my mind. Extreme emotions usually do, especially when conflicting sequences happen in quick succession. One moment we were still simmering with exhilaration at having survived three and a half years of brutal captivity…..yet in a period of a few brief minutes we were stricken with grief at the loss of 20 of our mates whose lives had been so unjustly snuffed out in one horrendous crash. I had collected the names and addresses of the crew of 'my' B24 on that fateful flight, two of whom I had

visited during a marathon tour of Canada and.America in 1988. On that occasion, Lamar Grow and Ed Hamm had lavished hospitality on my wife and me. So strong had our friendship grown that we had given serious thoughts to attending one of their annual reunions, if only the other three members of their crew could be found. This suggestion was duly acted upon and after a good deal of effort over a couple of years, the three missing crewmen were eventually located. Now all that remained was to arrange a place and time for a most unlikely reunion. Eventually, after a lengthy period of correspondence and several long-distance phone calls, Ronda and I received an invitation to attend the annual reunion of the 22nd Bomb Group in the city of Huntsville, Alabama, in 1994. The convener of the Group, Mr Don Hatch, had booked us in to the Holiday Inn, the venue for the three-day function, which simplified arrangements for us. Soon after our arrival, Don introduced himself to us which gave me the opportunity to explain the significance of our visit and arrange with him the most appropriate occasion at which to explain to the airmen and their partners just what our presence was all about. Meanwhile, I spent several hours lurking in the reception area to meet all five of them with the idea of arranging a suitable time for us to have our picture taken after which we could reminisce about our memorable flight on that September day in 1945.

It wasn't the easiest task I'd ever undertaken to find a quiet place where we could talk without interruption. To start with, each couple had to settle themselves in their respective rooms after which I had to keep in touch in order to let each one know where to meet at a time to suit everyone. With the hotel booked to capacity, it was impossible to find an empty lounge-room anywhere. Eventually we settled in the least occupied room we could find where, after switching on my portable tape recorder, the stories came tumbling out amid healthy competition as each former crew member eagerly added a contribution as memories came flooding back.

'You were the pilot on that flight from Okinawa to Clarke Field on 10 September in '45?' my voice queried Bill Coleman. 'Did you know where we were?' 'Not really,' came the answer. 'I thought we were on course but the typhoon must have blown us 60 miles off course. You couldn't see a thing out there. It was really rough weather. Then a hole in the clouds showed us that we were over mountains.' 'I knew where we should have been,' chimed in Ed Hamm, '8000 feet above water. Hell…we were at 8000 feet and the mountains reached 12-14,000 feet. Another half-hour and we would have been just a grease spot.'

Joe Paire's voice took up the reminiscing in a contemplative tone. 'Yeah, I remember George came round to tell us to keep our 'chutes handy, we might need 'em. He said it's too bad we don't have any for the POWs though.' 'Now you bloody well tell us,' I broke in with mock consternation. But it was Bill Coleman's voice that put the record straight by saying he asked Joe to send an O-O-O (an urgent signal) to Clarke Field to let them know we were over Formosa and for a bearing that would put us back on track.

We chatted away exchanging good-natured banter back and forth for some time as war veterans do when they get together after lengthy periods of isolation. We had all survived at least one, if not several close encounters with disaster during our war service, but generally the reminiscences made light of these experiences, as though an unspoken code of understanding exists to observe the dignified remembrance of the finality of life at more formal occasions. The time for formality of course came on the last day of the reunion at the grand banquet when all the tributes were delivered. I had previously arranged with Don Hatch for me to say a few words on behalf of the Australian prisoners of war. When the appropriate moment arrived, I was introduced to a group of several hundred veterans and their wives. I had made no notes as I knew so well the story I wanted to tell them

I started by saying they must be asking themselves what was an ageing Australian soldier doing at a United States bomber group reunion? I then explained the fact that I

had been one of several thousand Allied POWs who had found themselves in Japan at the war's end and that we had been evacuated mainly by American planes and ships. After we were flown from Japan to Okinawa by a C54 transport plane, because these planes were in huge demand the US decided to use B24 Liberators to take us the rest of the way to Clarke Field. However, shortly after take off from Kadena airstrip on Okinawa, our group of planes flew into a fierce typhoon which blew us 60 miles off course to the west right into the path of the mountains of Formosa, as Taiwan was called then. Tragically one of our planes crashed into the mountains killing all on board. ' Fortunately the plane I was on made it safely to Clarke Field, but before we took off I had got someone to take a group photograph of 20 of us Aussies together with your five crew members. I also got their addresses.'

At this moment in my speech, I deliberately made a lengthy pause in order to add drama to my next announcement. I remember it well. 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I am happy to tell you that, tonight, 49 years after that fateful flight, those five crew members are sitting right here at this banquet., and I would now like to introduce them to you all.

Please stand the pilot of 'th' Duchess,' William E Coleman
Please stand the co-pilot, Lamar T Grow
Please stand the navigator, Edward B Hamm
Please stand the engineer, George S Maloof
Please stand the radio-operator, Joe L Paire. "

One by one, as I introduced them, each man rose to his feet to the accompaniment of generous applause. Clearly the crowd was impressed. When the last of the applause faded away, I addressed them again.

'Ladies and Fellow Veterans, while it is fitting we should celebrate our survival at this time to renew old friendships and to make new ones, please let us not forget the tragic loss of those 20 Australian ex-POWs and. of course, five of your 22nd Bomber Group comrades. I know you will understand if I ask you to stand for a few moments as our token of respect.'

THE 1994 HUNTSVILLE REUNION WITH JOE PAIRE HOLDING THE 1945 EPIC PICTURE

ME WITH THE FIVE AIRCREW OF THE B24 BOMBER THAT FLEW 20 OF US EX-POWS FROM OKINAWA TO CLARKE FIELD IN OCTOBER 1945.
LAMAR GROW (CO-PILOT) WILLIAM COLEMAN (PILOT), JOHN LANE, JOE PAIRE (RADIO OPERATOR) ED HAMM (NAVIGATOR) GEORGE MALOOF (ENGINEER)
THIS WAS TAKEN AT A REUNION OF THE AMERICAN 22ND BOMB GROUP HELD IN HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA, IN 1994

When everyone was standing and silence returned, I acted on impulse and decided to recite the 'Ode to the Fallen.' I moved my lips closer to the microphone desperately striving to keep myself under control as I started,

'They shall grow not old as we who are left grow old. Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, WE WILL REMEMBER THEM. LEST WE FORGET.'

The response was immediate and dramatic. I knew that Americans are reverent and generous at patriotic events, but what overwhelmed us next was just sheer unbridled emotion. As I took Ronda's hand in mine and we walked slowly back to our table, the whole place erupted into a spontaneous and prolonged explosion of applause that lasted until we rejoined our former crew members. It was one of those unforgettable moments that illuminates one's lifetime all too infrequently

LIFE'S UNPREDICTABLE COURSE

Ronda's voice brought me back to reality by demanding in a feigned manner. 'Hey, what do you think you're up to, grabbing me like that?' 'Sorry,' I apologized feebly, gradually regaining consciousness, 'I thought we were somewhere else.' 'Then you'd better come back to earth, we'll be in Osaka in half an hour. Do you want a wee before we get there?'

What a woman was my wife. Without a word from me, she understood my every need. They don't come any better than that. She seemed to have the knack to anticipate all my requirements. There again, having been a registered nurse, it was second nature to her. Once again, I had got lucky. I couldn't help thinking, 'What a handy habit to have.' My medical condition was such that Ronda had to accompany me on every flight I took. She was now my official carer.

Things started to go wrong for me back in '97. At 74 years of age, I was fit, healthy and actively engaged in the Old Fairbridgians Association. My wife and I reckoned no one had it better than we did. The only disturbing thing that invaded our perfect relationship was my whinging to Ronda that something was happening to my golf grip. I was getting weak. In her capacity of ex-nurse, she had me exercising my hands by rolling

a small ball in each palm, but despite my efforts, my golf score-card grew steadily higher. It wasn't until we were enjoying a glass or two of Merlot with our retired surgeon neighbour, when, after listening patiently to my problem, he offered a suggestion for me to see a neurologist.

An appointment was duly made and Ronda accompanied me into the specialist's room where he asked a number of questions before he asked me to take my shirt off. After a brief inspection of my back, he called my wife to his side to point out a series of repetitive muscle twitches. There was no doubt in his diagnosis. I had Motor Neurone Disease. It wasn't until a further series of tests by another Perth neurologist that the diagnosis was confirmed. Furthermore, there was no treatment and no cure. Muscle cramps would grow steadily worse but these could be controlled by taking quinine sulphate tablets. It was explained that the disease develops as the result of a breakdown in the nerves in their journey from the central nervous system in the brain along the spinal cord to all the muscles of the body. Without this nerve stimulation, the muscles gradually wither up and eventually disappear.

The prognosis was that I had three to five years left of my life. Along the way, I could expect to lose control of my arms, my legs, and my bodily functions. I could expect to gradually lose the power of walking, talking, eating and finally, breathing. I listened to this death sentence in a sort of abstract manner, hearing the words yet not associating them with me. This couldn't possibly be me being addressed. Nothing so dramatically final could happen to me. I …who had cheated death from an almost direct mortar bomb explosion, miraculously escaped being blown out of the water by an American submarine, survived the torching of Kobe city during four years of captivity, and then, even after the war, winning the lottery of life by being in the right plane at the wrong moment. Surely I was indestructible. All this talk of having only three to five years left to finish up as a miserable vegetable was not for me. I was only 74 years of age. People live until they're 90 these days. Hey…wait a minute…what's this he's saying? Something about good news? Oh! The good news is that the brain is not affected. Oh…thank you very much. That's better. To me, this was more than just good news. I saw it as a vital clue in my effort to make the most of what life I had left.

When I recovered from the initial sense of the injustice of it all, I settled down to do a bit of thinking. This, I kept to myself, for a very good reason. If I had confided this remarkable fact to my wife, I knew what the comment would be. 'Be careful, you never know, you might discover it to be a whole new rewarding experience.'

That's how it was between us. It had been the same from the very first day we had met. There had been no extravagant expressions of lifelong feelings; we had both long since left the passionate promises of youth far behind. No, from the outset, our relationship had been one of just plain old genuine acts of consideration and practicalities. Mere words of sympathy and despair didn't exist for either of us in a situation such as this. It was her obvious understanding and calm, confident manner that told me I couldn't have been in better hands. Expanding my period of thinking beyond the norm, I recalled that it had been these rare qualities that had brought us together in the first place. With her past nursing experience, she would know exactly what lay ahead, and as she sat quietly beside me on the drive home, the realisation grew that from now on, I would need her more than ever. But amongst the images that intruded into my reflections throughout that silent drive, the one thought that repeatedly surfaced was that of all the good fortune throughout my convoluted life, the events that led to finding this extraordinary woman, were definitely the most fortuitous of all.

Needless to say I did quite a lot of thinking over the next few days. First of all I couldn't find anything dramatic to panic about. For a man of 74 years of age I was in pretty good shape. Apart from the weakness in my hands, mainly my thumbs, which was a bloody nuisance because I had to give up my favourite sport, I couldn't find anything

else wrong with me. Ronda, on the other hand, had a professional image of what lay ahead, so delving into her vast repertoire of practical hints, she advised me, in all sincerity, to start practising to wipe my bottom with my left hand.just in case my right one.became useless. Naturally we decided to join the Motor Neurone Association which gave us access to a monthly social gathering in the Perth headquarters. Here we met an enthusiastic group of volunteers who not only organized the meetings and put out a monthly newsletter, but provided a substantial afternoon tea. It also introduced Ronda and me to the realities of this insidious disease. As the hall gradually filled, some patients were wheeled in by carers, while others, who, like myself had obviously only recently been diagnosed showed few symptoms of the disease. But in the course of conversational exchanges, we discovered the probabilities of what lay ahead.

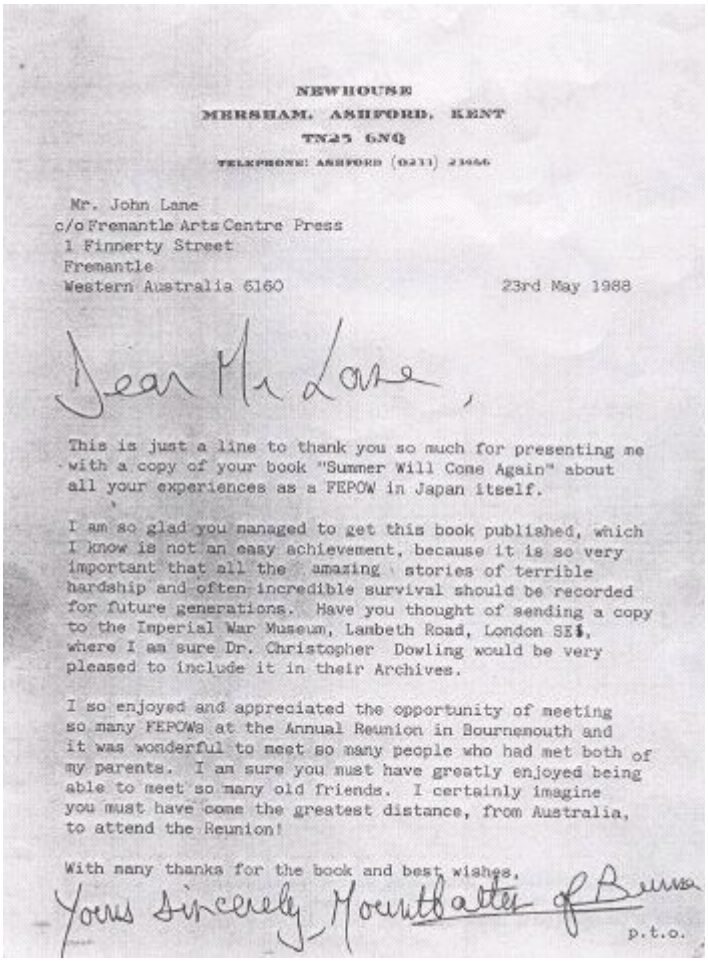
Patients in wheelchairs had already lost their leg muscles. A natural progression would leave their arms powerless, followed by the inability to talk or swallow. Difficulty in breathing would develop until the gradual wasting away of the complete muscular system. The rate of deterioration seemed to be quite an enigma too. No two patients suffered the same so it was impossible to determine just what course the disease took. After attending the social gatherings a couple of years it was rather sobering to see so many new faces replacing the ones that had become familiar, yet two regulars had survived over ten years. I had lived long enough to realize that if there was no known cure, I must interpret my situation as a warning not to waste the rest of my life, but rather use the years left to me to the fullest advantage. Subsequently, I did a mental assessment of my life with a view to sorting out my priorities. Starting with my pluses were the two published books based on my childhood and WWII experiences. With this latter book under my belt, I wasted no time in arranging another visit to attend a reunion of the British Far-Eastern Ex POWs where I could meet some of my old Kobe House mates. So far as I was concerned, I did the obvious thing in contacting Norman Colley at his home in the Mumbles near Swansea, resulting in an enthusiastic invitation to stay with him and his wife Margaret for a few days. Needless to say, after a period of 43 years we didn't waste much time before delving into the past. Indeed, the moment I walked into the living room my gaze focused immediately to the object hanging just above the fireplace. Before I could even get out a gasp of amazement, Norman came good with the explanation. 'Morita's sword, Jack.' 'So it was you who finished up with it!' I exploded in genuine admiration. 'I asked him for it but he wouldn't part with it. So he gave it to you.'

ME DISPLAYING SGT. MORITA'S SWORD

Of course, after that opening salvo, the game was on. We just took it from there. A few days later we joined a coachload of the local group to journey to Bournemouth for the annual POW reunion. On this occasion the guest of honour happened to be Lady Mountbatten, daughter of the famous Commander of the Burma campaign. She readily accepted a copy of my book for which she later sent me a generous letter of thanks and congratulations in helping to publish the facts of WWII.

I had also returned to England to celebrate 50 years of post-war freedom with my Royal Navy friends at a special weekend in Portsmouth, held in recognition of the British Pacific Fleet, which received quite a mauling from Japanese kamikaze pilots. In fact, the aircraft-carrier HMS Formidable had only just been repaired from receiving damage from one of these sacrificial missiles before it picked up several hundred of us Aussie ex-POWs from Manila and returned us to Sydney. It was at one of the Formidable's annual reunions where Ronda and I were guests of honour that we met several crew members. Dennis Edwards is one whom we subsequently visited, and is now a special friend. Another close friend is Roy Stephens who survived the sinking of the battleship King George V and later managed the extraordinary feat of escaping to India.

I had given more of my time to Fairbridge since we built our retirement home in 1983, just 15 minutes' drive from my childhood home. During the1990s the Fairbridge village had deteriorated rapidly, and it was only a joint rescue effort by the Freemasons' Society and the giant Alcoa mining company that saved the historic site from oblivion. The American-based mining company had previously bought the entire Fairbridge property which adjoined its bauxite refinery, but it leases the village back to the Fairbridge Board of Management at a peppercorn rent..



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Mr. John Lane
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23rd May 1988

Dear Mr Lane,

This is just a line to thank you so much for presenting me with a copy of your book "Summer Will Come Again" about all your experiences as a FEPOW in Japan itself.

I am so glad you managed to get this book published, which I know is not an easy achievement, because it is so very important that all the amazing stories of terrible hardship and often incredible survival should be recorded for future generations. Have you thought of sending a copy to the Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1, where I am sure Dr. Christopher Dowling would be very pleased to include it in their Archives.

I so enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity of meeting so many FEPOWs at the Annual Reunion in Bournemouth and it was wonderful to meet so many people who had met both of my parents. I am sure you must have greatly enjoyed being able to meet so many old friends. I certainly imagine you must have come the greatest distance, from Australia, to attend the Reunion!

With many thanks for the book and best wishes,

Yours Sincerely, Mountbatten of Burma

p.t.o.

ME with HMS FORMIDABLE GROUP AT THE REUNION OF THE FORGOTTEN F PACIFIC FLEET

Most of us Old Fairbridgians who had been sent out to the Farm School between the two world wars regarded ourselves as among the most fortunate of all the thousands of child migrants during the 20th century. Unfortunately, some child migrants sent to other institutions had received questionable treatment which had attracted a good deal of unfavourable publicity, some of which tainted the good name of Fairbridge. Therefore, in an effort to put the record straight, I made myself available to speak to all coachloads of visitors about the history and lifestyle of this remarkable achievement. I had become so concerned that the story of heroic sacrifice made by Kingsley and Ruby Fairbridge in establishing the Farm School could be lost over the years, I arranged for the professional filming of my regular feature address, which is now available as an historic record.

In retrospect, that has given me a great deal of satisfaction. But there remains the completion of one other project that I'm working on, before I can be entirely satisfied. It is the building of a replica cottage in which the junior boys of Fairbridge lived from its early beginnings in the 1920s. Most of the Boys' cottages remain in the village and are used as holiday accommodation, but they have all been modified in some way and/or fitted with modern facilities. Subsequently, in order for future generations to see the actual conditions under which we lived, the State Heritage Commission has given me permission to build a 'replica' of an original cottage. This project now gives me a special purpose in life which motivates me to keep going until the job is completed.

Looking back over some of the major decisions I have made in my post-war life, none satisfies me more than that first trip back to England in 1976. Through all these years of discovering my biological family, there emerged one vital fact that had to be confronted, not only in my case, but in most of the other so-called 'orphans' sent to Australia. It is almost always the child that initiates the search for some family member. In my own case, a few relatives had heard a vague talk about 'sometime in the past, someone had been put into an institution and sent overseas,' but then completely forgotten. The fact that I had set out to find my 'roots' culminated in a whole new series of events that affected my whole future, During our initial stay with my sister Norah, we naturally became acquainted with her three sons and two daughters. Her youngest son Stephen Barnes was still a schoolboy who showed much interest in the activities of his newfound uncle Jack. I remember too, the attitude of this young fella, with his healthy business acumen in running his own newspaper round. He quickly became a favourite with us simply because he actually listened to the few words of wisdom we gratuitously

flung his way. Whether he remembered them or not, I can't say, but after finishing his schooling he lost no time in setting out to discover what the world had to offer.

After working his way through the Middle East, 'Barney' spent some time in Israel before moving on through the Far East to wards his Australian destination. When we met him at Perth airport he carried a small overnight bag containing all his worldly possessions. He certainly travelled light. He stayed with us in our suburban home for a couple of weeks, yet within a few days he had found himself three casual part-time jobs. He wasn't afraid of roughing it either. When he decided to move out, he shared a house with several others, contented to bed down on the floor in a sleeping bag. But it wasn't long before he took off for the wheatbelt town of Merredin where he soon found a job on a farm driving a tractor. Clearly, his aim was to get himself a 'bank' to finance his ongoing adventures. Eventually, after managing to overstay his six-month's visa, Barney took off again for the Far East and finished up teaching the English language in Japan where he met and married a Japanese air-hostess who worked for Cathay Pacific Airlines. They then made their home in Hong Kong . With his wife Yuka almost constantly on flying duties, Barney decided to further his own education by undertaking a course in law at the London School of Economics. The sheer economic brilliance of this arrangement can be gauged by the fact that his repeated flying trips from Hong Kong to London, as Yuka's husband, now came at a much reduced cost.

ME AND BARNEY WITH BARNEY'S SISTER JACKIE

With a lawyer's degree under his belt, Barney settled down to do some serious thinking about the direction his future married life and career should take. Ultimately, his decision would have a profound effect on the lives of us all.

In the meantime, Ronda and I had retired to live in a comfortable little cottage we built on the banks of the winding Murray River near the settlement of Ravenswood, a popular and scenic spot about ten kilometres east of the coastal city of Mandurah and four kilometres west of Pinjarra. Each of us still lived life to the full with our daily swim, and our hobbies. We spent many a warm summer evening catching prawns from our jetty, baiting them up with a few handsful of chicken pellets, then scooping them up with a long-handled net. We made occasional dinghy trips out in the spacious Peel Inlet estuary to vary our diet with a feed of delicious blue-Manna crabs. Ronda enjoyed developing her skills in producing a variety of ceramic objects. I brought out my wartime diaries from a bottom drawer and set about putting them together.

For relaxation, I thoroughly enjoyed a weekly game of golf on the excellent Pinjarra course. As I strolled around the fairways, my concentration very often drifted off my game,

back to the days of 1938 when all around me was natural bushland as our group of marauders spent several weeks sawing and chopping the acres of fallen trees that had been donated to feed the wood-fires of Fairbridge.

For many years, I had been conscious of the fact .that in a bottom drawer of a cabinet, lay the odd assortment of papers, notebooks and photos that recorded the story of my wartime experiences. I had fully intended to convert them into a book one day, but over the years I had not gained the confidence to tackle the job. But with retirement came the opportunity to get on with it.. Eventually, my finished story was submitted to the young Fremantle Arts Centre Press publishing house and appeared in the bookshops just in time for the 1987 Anzac Day. As a consequence, the Australian War Museum in Canberra contacted me with the request that would I consider donating my war diaries to them, to which I agreed. The book was published under the title of *Summer Will Come Again.* With this success under my belt, I then settled down to write the story of my childhood which was published in 1990 by the same publishing house simply as *Fairbridge Kid*. It has been reprinted several times and I have received many complimentary letters. Meanwhile, by the late '90s, Barney had established a successful business in Hong Kong, whereby his company arranged visas into China for business people throughout the world. In this connection he was required to travel extensively overseas, so by way of relaxation, he brought Yuka down under for short holidays to sample the local lifestyle. They obviously liked what they saw, because a few years and a couple of baby daughters later, they bought a canal home, complete with jetty, less than a kilometre from our place. Answering my query as to what decided them to migrate to our locality, they both said they'd visited numerous countries over the years, but our little 'neck of the woods' together with a pleasant climate and stable government, made it the ideal place to live and raise a family. Whatever their reason, Ronda and I were delighted to have them living so close, particularly as, by now, Barney and I share almost a father-son relationship, while their two delightful daughters recognize us as 'Grandma' and 'Grandpa.' Ronda and I both warmed to this very comfortable relationship which has really enhanced our retirement years. In addition, an unexpected bonus is the fact that, in his capacity as a graduate in law, Barney has been on the spot to supervise the legal requirements of any totally unexpected developments.

A RETURN TO KOBE

Indeed, it wasn't long before such an event came about when, in August 2003, an email arrived on my screen from a young Japanese woman representing a group of academics living in Kobe The message explained that she was contacting me on behalf of 'The Fact-finding Study Group for the Enforced Labour from China and Korea During WW2 Into the Kobe Port.' In the course of their research they had found my book *Summer Will Come Again* on my website where Barney had put it for a couple of years. Up to that moment, because of the almost complete censorship of their armed forces' involvement in the war in their history books by successive post-war Japanese Governments, very few people in Japan knew about the atrocities their armed forces perpetrated throughout China and the countries subjected to Japanese occupation during those years. This particular group was most surprised to learn that Allied POWs were brought to Kobe and many other Japanese cities as slave labour at that time, so they were very keen to ask my permission to publish my story for the benefit of Japanese readers. I had no objection to this, so after Barney had drawn up the necessary legal document for the publication of 1000 copies, the group had now invited me back to the launching ceremony in March of 2004. Naturally, when they knew about my physical condition, they had been only too happy to pay Ronda's expenses as well. It had been a long flight with several hours' break in Singapore. But now, after an early breakfast, the plane was making its descent into Osaka airport. By prior

arrangement, a wheelchair attendant would be waiting to transport me from the cabin door, through the customs, right to the reception area where, we had been told, a few members of the group would be waiting to welcome us. During the landing and subsequent taxi-ing to a stop, I couldn't stop myself going over the sequence of events on my first visit to Japan in May 1943…sweating away in a crowded hold beneath the iron deck of a slow, old freighter…the sudden scurry of half-naked men being herded down the single ladder into the hold…the frantic shouts of torpedo torpedo…the scramble through possessions to save the most precious...then the silence… the waiting for the torpedo to hit…the sudden shock of gunfire…the expectant expression in men's faces…and still the waiting…the arrival at Moji…lined up on deck…the dysentery test … trousers around the ankles… bending over…the poke up the anus…the indignity…the humorous sheep bleating as we were herded down the ramp…the fog of the disinfection spraying…my first step on Japanese soil… would I ever see Australia again?

Before I realized it, my obliging helper had stopped and was helping me to my feet. The next moment a charming girl introduced herself as Miss Noriko Hirada, all smiles as we shook hands. Of course, of course…she was the girl I had been communicating with over the past few months. With Ronda alongside me, Noriko escorted us into a waiting area straight into a small welcoming group holding a banner. For several seconds I was too surprised to do anything but stare at the wording. The blue lettering on a white background said it all. 'WELCOME Mr John Lane'.

What a difference 61 years makes! This time, they were giving me a hero's welcome!. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. Why not enjoy it, I thought. How sweet it was! While Ronda and I were being helped into the waiting car, our luggage was stowed and we were soon on the motorway to Kobe, 50 kilometres away. It didn't take long to notice that Japan was now a much different country from my war-time image.

American bombers had started the transformation, wiping out almost 50 per cent of its traditional buildings. Now, it seemed, the rebuilt Japan differed very little from other restored war-torn cities with landscapes covered in masses of concrete.

On the eastern fringe of Kobe, our driver managed to find a parking spot just off the highway very close to the Wakinohama building that had been my camp when the war ended. Now, a huge slab of concrete foundation was all that remained of our schoolhouse gaol, from where, in 1945, we had celebrated our freedom by flying our flags.

It seemed strange that it was the only vacant piece of land in the vicinity, and the only way I could identify the site, was by its position in relation to the overhead rail bridge close by. Despite the unfamiliar reconstruction, I couldn't resist the temptation to stare skywards, half expecting to see bundles of parachutes tumbling out of propeller-driven B29s and opening out into a spectacular multi-coloured display of welcome luxuries.

A few minutes after leaving our old campsite, we were being escorted up to our comfortable room in the Kobe Harborland New Otami Hotel which turned out to be distinctly more comfortable than my former accommodation in Kobe House and Wakinohama. In fact, during our brief stay, there was not one barred or shuttered window to be seen anywhere.

The two full days of our visit were a carefully planned mix of visits, functions and rest periods. After lunch in the hotel, we were taken to the former site where Kobe House once stood until it was consumed by fire in the air-raid of 5 June 1945. Once again, the whole district had been rebuilt with nothing recognizable left. Where once we *horyo*s paraded in the streets of Hidashi-Machi and Naka Machi Dori, the only evidence of their existence to be found was their names inscribed on the walls of new buildings.

The main function of course was the book launching ceremony on the afternoon of 13 March at the Kobe Student Youth Centre. This turned out to be a marathon session with other members of the Group making speeches before my turn came around at about 4.00pm.

To be on the safe side, I had previously given a copy of my address to Noriko to look over and she acted as interpreter during the delivery. The ceremony finished with me signing quite a few books for paying customers and all indications were that the function had been a success.

That evening Ronda and I were guests of honour at a marvellous restaurant where we spent two or three hours consuming countless dishes of traditional Japanese food with about 30 other Group members. It was a fitting finale to a memorable occasion, held in a friendly spirit of genuine goodwill. A feature of the spirit in which the launching took place was the fact that, for the whole duration of our visit, the Group had arranged that a doctor should be in attendance. Before the end of the function that night, I made a point of thanking him with a hearty handshake. I have often wondered since, if he has read my book, whether he thought I was comparing him with the mad doctor of Kobe House days.

The following morning several of our hosts accompanied us to Osaka airport to add a final thank-you for our visit and to wish us a pleasant flight home. Amongst our luggage was a gift of ten copies of the Japanese version of my was experiences, illustrating the fact that they were genuinely grateful for our presence at the launching. The last person we embraced was Noriko, who did most of the organizing and all of the interpreting. She is now out dear friend.

KOBE LAUNCH, MARCH 2004

THE CHALLENGE OF A NEW CENTURY

This year of 2005 is quite a significant one in that the 60th anniversary of the end of WW2 will be celebrated. We who are left of that conflict are grateful for the care and support the nation provides for us and for the widows of former veterans. Of significant importance to me however is the fact that, except for a few minute scraps of shrapnel embedded throughout my body, I have no permanent physical problem or lasting traumatic memories to haunt me. It is possible of course that the writing of my wartime experiences has helped to exorcize the gremlins from my subconscious mind. The same could be said in connection with the circumstances of my birth whereby not knowing my father and being abandoned by my mother could have left me with deep emotional scars. Again, the ability to write about a disjointed and fractured childhood may have lessened the chances of my developing into a delinquent. The reality is of course that my childhood and war service became separated by a mere two years of adolescence spent in comparative isolation on a country farm. Perhaps I grew up in an atmosphere where standards of living were vastly different from current attitudes. There had been a world-wide depression, jobs were scarce and wages were low. If we couldn't afford something we put it on lay-by or did without it. Owning a car was a luxury. We considered we were comfortably well off if we had a bicycle. Most people were contented enough despite their frugal existence. Children slept safely enough on the veranda of a house containing two bedrooms, a sleep-out, a family room, a laundry and a single bathroom. People were generally hard-working and honest. They thought nothing of leaving doors unlocked when they went out. Money was left outside the home in a billy for the milkman to collect when he made his early morning delivery. These then were the conditions that existed when we went to war to defend them. Even at Fairbridge we had three meals a day and clean sheets on our beds every week. We had plenty of time for developing sporting skills and a wonderful annual holiday by the seaside. Of course there were rules to follow and if we broke the rules we were punished, simple as that. Mostly we were of average intelligence which brought home to us just how fortunate we were to have been selected to come to the Farm School where we were given the opportunity to make a new life for ourselves. In recent years, we old

Fairbridgians have established a museum in our Club House, where I have told the story of Fairbridge to thousands of visitors. For all that, I never tire telling the story of how Kingsley and Ruby sacrificed their own lives in order to give thousands of kids like me the chance to overcome the stigma of an unaccepted birth. It is a heroic story of how one young man was so appalled at the sight of homeless and hungry kids roaming the streets of London, he abandoned all thoughts of wealth in order to help them. Then when the classically beautiful Ruby fell in love with him, together they overcame huge odds to establish their first farm school in Western Australia. Motivation for my passion comes from the fact that their unselfish dedication has gone largely unrecognised while criminals' and gangsters' exploits have repeatedly featured in full-length movies. I am angered at the injustice. Obviously, I have subconsciously embraced this extraordinary couple as my own idyllic substitute family. No child could have fared better. That is why I felt honoured when asked to represent all former Fairbridge children by giving a short address at the unveiling of a sculpture of a boy and girl, each with a case, acknowledging the considerable contribution made by thousands of child migrants from Britain and Malta to the State of Western Australia. Several hundred people attended the unveiling on the Fremantle wharf in December 2004 near the entrance to the magnificent Maritime Museum. Second of four speakers, I, after paying the customary respects to the officials and the large audience present, went straight into my address.

It has been said that children make the best migrants, and having sailed from England as an emigrant at the age of ten, to arrive at this dockside over 71 years ago, I feel adequately qualified to support this opinion.

Although In recent years there has been some acknowledgement of the bewilderment, sadness, and even scandal that has befallen some children, I am delighted to recall the history of one amazing system that encouraged and enhanced the lives of many children of the Empire: ***The Fairbridge Farm School.***

Established in 1913, Fairbridge Farm near Pinjarra was hailed as a monumental innovation by players and watchers alike.

Of course, it didn't just happen. To translate the idea of Child Emigration into a tangible cottage settlement was a tremendous task. Implementing infrastructure to last over three-quarters of a century was nothing short of miraculous. Along the way there was hardship, disappointment, illness, and sometimes an overwhelming lack of appreciation.

But Kingsley and Ruby Fairbridge had a vision. They saw children growing up with a comprehensive knowledge of farm-work and domestic competencies. Making the picture a reality, some 2000 Fairbridge children learned to live in tolerance as one huge expanding family in a strange new land, developing skills for determining their own future. Rescuing unwanted children from the institutions of Great Britain, the Fairbridge duo had the belief that unless young children were encouraged to think of themselves as people of importance, they would have no reason to feel that their actions mattered and nothing to offer the community.

Mr and Mrs Fairbridge were committed to surrounding their 'child migrants' not with walls, but with ideas, to give them the opportunity to help develop their new adopted country. They wanted Pinjarra to be a starting point not an end point. So it became a place for important beginnings. The Farm School shouted success.

People came, saw, and were conquered by the sense of home, the open-air life-style and the visible bond of affection between the children. Fairbridge School bred success too. Its graduates seeded the families of Western Australians and brought purpose and enterprise to the State.

Fairbridge kids were the products of a revolution in child care that opted for family support and for a shot at excellence. The School in the Scarp not only taught young migrants how to farm, cook and sew, it gave us windows on the world.

We were taught to be courteous, considerate, and to treat our elders with respect. We were advised that before we acquired a position of responsibility, in order for us to dispense discipline, we must first learn to accept it.

Later in life, we realised just how fortunate we were to have been brought up under the code of firm but fair discipline. This instruction proved invaluable when 550 Fairbridgians rallied to the Mother Country's cause at the outbreak of World War II, serving in all branches of Australia's defence forces. Sadly we lost 49 of our brothers in that conflict and another one in the Korean war.

But Fairbridge is still there for all to see. Visitors are often humbled in the realisation that Fairbridge Farm School grew out of the dedication of two people who had no need to bother. Ordinary people who were shocked by the appalling horrors of slum life and the crushing denial of opportunity to thousands of young boys and girls.

How fortunate were we? This notion of giving life and being open to life's gifts is an inheritance treasured by Old Fairbridgians.

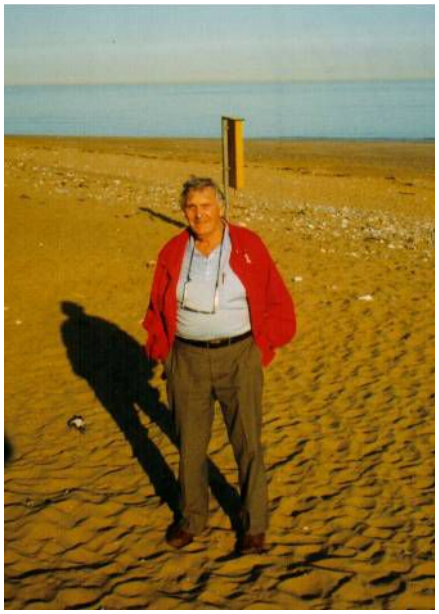
Just like the children not sent to Fairbridge, we remember the hard times, the slender means, and the struggle to make a place for ourselves. But we specially remember with gratitude, our good fortune shared by our family of brothers and sisters, the richness of the tradition, and the comings home.

ME GIVING THE ADDRESS AT THE UNVEILING OF THE CHILD MIGRANTS SCULPTURE, PICTURED IN THE FOREGROUND.

Now in the year of 2005, I have to face the challenge of a debilitating health problem for which there is no cure. It is a situation each one of us has to face sometime, unless of course, a fatal accident decides our fate. This year we WWII survivors celebrate 60 years of life after peace came to the world in 1945. For me, that is 60 years longer than many of my mates who were killed in action or who succumbed to terrible diseases in captivity. I readily admit that I have had more than my share of good fortune. Whether I have used that good fortune profitably is for others to judge. Naturally, I have made many mistakes, but I have read that the only person who never makes a mistake is the person who undertakes to do nothing.

An essential and just innovation has been introduced in recent years where we Old Fairbridgians have been given access to our personal files which goes a long way to revealing the previously unknown facts about our childhood and adolescent lives. In my case, I was both surprised and impressed to learn that my WWII history was relayed back to Dr Barnardo's headquarters in London from where it was sent on to my mother. Not so palatable however, was to discover the truth about my mother's attitude to her three kids. and me in particular. In reading through the letter she sent me when I was 16, I can't help wondering just how sincere were her words. However, in a final judgement, I realise that in the 14 years between putting me into Barnardo's and writing that letter, she had become genuinely remorseful about her earlier behaviour. In any event, I shall be eternally grateful to her for giving me the most precious gift of all... the gift of life.

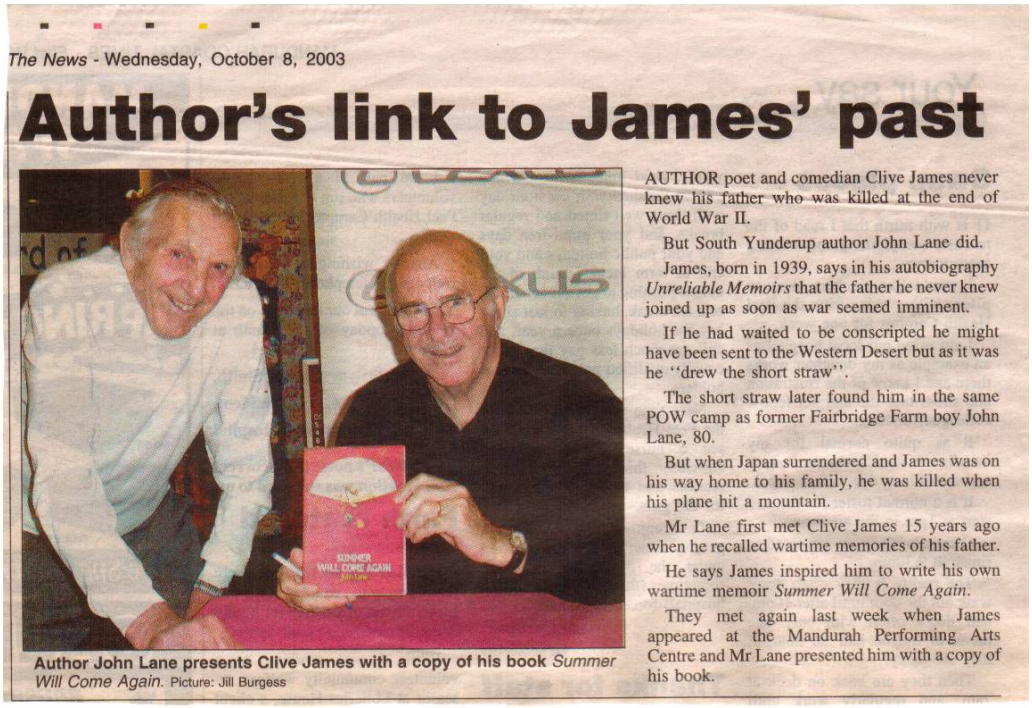
So, as a sort of homage to her and a natural inquisitiveness from me, on my last trip to England, a friend drove me down to Ramsgate, the town of my birth, to view the beach where my mother used to take me to play in the sand.



ME ON THE BEACH AT RAMSGATE

Considering my humble beginnings I have had the pleasure of meeting several distinguished personalities, two of whom were the result of my wartime service. The first of course was Lady Mountbatten at the POW reunion in Bournemouth. Then in 1983, I had the pleasure of meeting Clive James. You will recall that his father Bert survived the war with us in Kobe, only to be tragically killed in a plane crash on the way home. During his visit to Perth I listened to Clive being interviewed at the ABC, after which, acting on impulse, I rang the studios on the off-chance of speaking to him. Fortunately, I was connected to him, and after explaining my reason, his taxi arrived at my Bentley house a few minutes later. For the next hour and a half he listened intently to my story of life in Kobe after which he studied my war diaries and all my photos .He was clearly impressed with what he had seen and urged me strongly to write my story. I have to say that on that day, Clive gave me the confidence to tackle the job of putting it all together. Fremantle Arts Centre Press immediately accepted my manuscript for publication.

I caught up again with Clive in October 2003 when he visited Mandurah on tour.



The News - Wednesday, October 8, 2003

Author's link to James' past

Author John Lane presents Clive James with a copy of his book *Summer Will Come Again*. Picture: Jill Burgess

AUTHOR poet and comedian Clive James never knew his father who was killed at the end of World War II.

But South Yunderup author John Lane did.

James, born in 1939, says in his autobiography *Unreliable Memoirs* that the father he never knew joined up as soon as war seemed imminent.

If he had waited to be conscripted he might have been sent to the Western Desert but as it was he ''drew the short straw''.

The short straw later found him in the same POW camp as former Fairbridge Farm boy John Lane, 80.

But when Japan surrendered and James was on his way home to his family, he was killed when his plane hit a mountain.

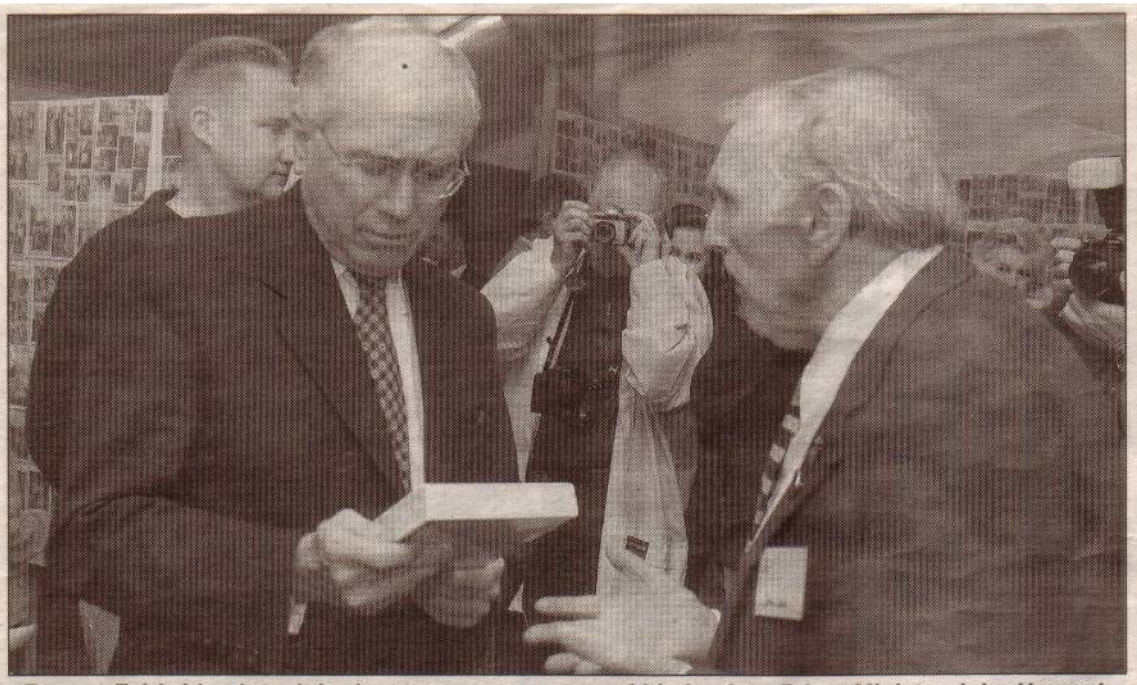
Mr Lane first met Clive James 15 years ago when he recalled wartime memories of his father.

He says James inspired him to write his own wartime memoir *Summer Will Come Again*.

They met again last week when James appeared at the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre and Mr Lane presented him with a copy of his book.

ME WITH CLIVE JAMES courtesy of Mandurah Coastal Times

But perhaps my most memorable occasion was the day I met the Prime Minister of Australia, the Honourable John Howard. On a recent official visit to Fairbridge Village, a sudden downpour caused the PM to be brought into the Old Fairbridgians Clubhouse. We 'old boys' the opportunity to show him through our Museum and I was able to present him with a copy of my book *Fairbridge Kid* in which he showed genuine interest.



Former Fairbridge boy John Lane presents a copy of his book to Prime Minister John Howard.

Tara Heady shakes hands with Mr Howard watched by her father Fairbridge operations environmental manager Garry Heady, mother Kay and brother Luke.

Fairbridge yarn is going places

PRIME Minister John Howard will soon know all about Fairbridge after author and former Fairbridge boy John Lane presented him with a copy of his book *Fairbridge Kid* and a video last week.

The video covers the years since Fairbridge Farm was founded by Kingsley Fairbridge in the 1930s until the present day and will be officially launched by Fairbridge patron and WA Governor Lt Gen. John Sanderson in October.

Mr Howard visited Fairbridge during his visit to the Peel region last week to pen its new wind turbine.

The turbine is expect to deliver significant cost benefits to the village.

In total contrast to the higher profile readers of my Fairbridge story, the most rewarding return from my writings came to me from New Zealand in the form of a moving anonymous letter from a person whose father had also been through Fairbridge It is gratifying to know that I have helped at least one person.

Mr. John Lane,
C/- Fairbridge,
Post Office Box 173
PINJARRA. W.A.

Dear Mr. Lane,

Only weeks ago I met an Australian lady who was to visit WA, drive from Perth south to Albany. I told her my dad had lived at Fairbridge and she offered to call in and then tell me about it. She did indeed call in and bought me your book Fairbridge Kid.

I don't want to tell you who I am (as you will no doubt have known my father) who is now deceased.

I am so glad I read your book, it told me so many things I didn't know, it answered so many questions I had never asked and of course now wish I had. I now know why my dad could never put down roots, why he found it hard to give affection to his kids, why he was so hard on us, why he ran our home like a army camp. Things I hated him for - are now so clear.

My parents took me to Fairbridge once when I was a teenager, but I had no idea of the importance of the place, except that they were married there. My older brothers and sisters had a much better understanding of my fathers "Home".

I will return, even if to bury old ghosts, but I will look at it in a totally different way now, thanks to you.

I can't change the past but I can stop hating my father and let him rest in peace. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Kindest regards,

And what of my achievements? Searching for an appropriate answer to that question, again I leave it for others to judge. In recent years I have not been able to tackle anything too adventurous. My weakening muscles have added considerably to my dear wife's workload. She not only has to comb my hair, she is constantly called upon to do or undo my buttons. But to the control one very necessary function I am clinging desperately. During the early stages of my debilitating illness, Ronda advised me seriously to start practising a tricky operation until I had accomplished it satisfactorily using either hand. Being a good soldier, I can report that with professional coaching and dogged grit, I now feel qualified to ask the Guinness Book of Records to recognize my claim of being the 'First Dinky-Di Pommy Bastard Ambidextrous Bottom Wiper.'

THE END