

NO LONGER DOWN UNDER



No LONGER

DOWN UNDER

AUSTRALIANS CREATING CHANGE

MIKE BROWN



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Remembering Peter Howard

The fire has not gone out...

it's still burning.

Dedicated to Adam and Anjali

and to their generation

who keep it burning in so many creative ways.

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Preface

*'Everybody thinks of changing humanity
and nobody thinks of changing himself'*
Leo Tolstoy

BETWEEN THE COLLAPSE of the Third Reich and the Japanese surrender, I joined the opening chorus of bawls that became the baby-boom. As William Blake put it:

*My mother groaned, my father wept;
into the dangerous world I leapt.*

A perilous and exciting age it was, and has become more so. My awareness of it started in the Sixties – a decade which began with a bang and ended with an ominous rumble. Fired by JFK idealism, 'Peter Paul and Mary' protesting, Civil Rights activism and a determination not to be frozen in by the Cold War, we postwar baby-boomers wakened to our age of political and social consciousness. With youthful arrogance we sought to grab history by the throat and change it.

Or so it seemed to me, as I finished high school, had a brief spell in university and then plunged out into an unsuspecting world. I was convinced that Australia, my country of birth, had some greater purpose than booze, bets and bikinis. While many of my friends were gorging themselves on pulp fiction, I was ploughing through serious political stuff, trying to understand revolution in Latin America, South-East Asia and

Africa. The vision and rhetoric of an English writer, Peter Howard, hooked me. Howard, early in the Sixties, voiced a challenge for American university students: that they could be part of a process of 'modernising man' (no correct gender language then). We had become technological giants but remained moral and spiritual pygmies, proclaimed Howard; we could span the stars and probe the oceans, but we were still run by the same basic fears, hates and lusts as the cave man. Our survival depended on a revolution to 'modernise' the character and behaviour of the human race to match our technological achievements.

By the time I got to America in 1965, the fire that burned in Peter Howard's guts had consumed him – he collapsed and died mid-stream of an exhausting speaking tour through North and South America. But the young crowd he inspired burned on. And within weeks of my arrival I was in the middle of a conference they had organised on Mackinac Island in the Michigan Great Lakes, and was swept up in the 'Sing-Out' movement they were creating – musical revues expressing some of Howard's themes.

It was gung-ho all the way, glowing with enthusiasm for the universal era of brotherhood we could see coming to birth. Thousands of young people became involved, belting out such positive themes as 'Freedom isn't free' and 'Up with people' on stages from inner-city Harlem to the Hollywood Bowl. In old Greyhound buses we criss-crossed America, a dozen times or more, setting up our lighting towers and loud speakers in college football stadiums, army bases, conference rooms in downtown hotels... even a 'showboat' barge at Cape Cod.

Then for two years in Los Angeles, with a bunch of inexperienced enthusiasts, I pumped out a newsprint tabloid we unabashedly called *Tomorrow's American News*, hawking it along Hollywood Boulevard until we were chased away by

motor-cycle cops. In our minds it was unstoppable, the inevitable progress of history...

By the end of the decade, five years later, it was my turn to be burnt out. I still talked the language of hope, but it clanged hollow on the hard floor of reality. And not only I. The blood-drenched debacle of Vietnam brought down the JFK-style idealism as dramatically as Kennedy himself was felled. The sweat and sacrifice of the Vietnam vets went unsung, except in the bitter praise of protest songs. Martin Luther King Jnr., too, was cut down in a hail of bullets. The tide of civil rights which achieved so much stirred up a dangerous rip tide of uncivil wrongs. America's inner cities went up in flames. Hopeful dreams which began the decade became hallucinations, as drugs seeped into the life-blood of the Sixties generation.

I retreated back to Australia... to the drylands around the River Murray where dark-green fruit orchards cling like parasites to red shifting sands, fed by the life-blood of Australia's longest river. Here on our family fruit orchard, I tried to regain some semblance of stability by picking over apricot trees through the withering heat of the day, and by picking over my values and beliefs in the cool of night.

A different perspective began to form – revealing itself on one of those vibrant Outback nights when the stars vie for space in a moonless sky. Even while focussing on some dark infinity, a feeble flicker beyond the starry clusters made itself known, travelling eons of light years from a sun which – who knows – might have been blown into oblivion long before *homo sapiens* first staggered across the crust of our planet. What did it all mean? Was I just a random part of it all, a bunch of molecules shaped by DNA and the environment I had been born into, scratching my way forward among (what was then) five billion other people? Was the Christian faith and definition of existence that I had been raised with just a load of

sentimental hogwash; and the great causes I had given myself for just scrubbed-up gimmickry? Or was there some vast design which I might yet dimly perceive – some destiny to be discerned and pursued, some meaning to unravel and enrich? I was desperate to know. For if there was no purpose, then 'doing my own thing' and getting as much pleasure out of it as possible was all that mattered.

But if, on the other hand, there was some infinite evolving design behind it all, some universal loving Creative Intelligence shaping our intended destinies, then fulfilment lay in finding my place in it. And that demanded a deeper, more mature search than I had recklessly and arrogantly thrown myself into before.

Through midnight hours I hung on the brink of despair. Perhaps there was nothing after all, except the here and now; and our human propensity for self-delusion? Perhaps I should capitulate to the baser gut-level instincts of my human nature and tough life out, extracting whatever passing happiness I could from it?

About four a.m. that night, as the universe swung slowly above me and the fine warm dust filtered between my toes, some deeper answers formed. No, not quite answers... but directions. Intuitively I sensed some link between that vast infinity above me and my existence among a sea of humanity, some great Creative Intelligence binding it together. And yes, though the Sixties had been full of brash assumptions, we had not been wrong to believe that each of us – puny individuals that we are – could have some meaningful part in advancing human civilisation. To abdicate responsibility was to let human history slide downwards into the vortex of self-genocidal nihilism. We were not made to end our story in a warring Malthusian nightmare on a consumer-exhausted planet. So that night – though many answers were still beyond me – I made a new resolve: God so help me, I would be a participant, not a spectator.

In some ways it was a feeble new beginning. Yet affirmations came and have continued to come in the years since, not so much through theories learned or concepts explored but through the living medium of people; people I have chanced upon, whose lives have spoken meaning and purpose.

Most of these unconscious mentors have been Australians, compassionate and committed people who have left their mark on some vital issue of their day. They were, and still are, important to me. For having spent almost two decades overseas, I have needed to discover an Australia not caught in clichés – the bronzed hedonists lolling on golden beaches, or the 'she'll-be-right' boozers good-naturedly indifferent to the woes of humanity. And discover them I did. Perhaps we Australians are too easily trapped by such clichés. As someone scrawled across a Sydney subway wall: 'The problem with Australia is apathy'; to which another added: 'Who cares?' Like many wits, they were only half right. There are plenty in Australia who *do* care. And plenty of 'Aussie battlers' who get involved.

Like most places, we also have no shortage of bitches and whingers; and professional commentators who pump out analysis of society's ills. If you could feed the world on analysis, billions would suffer from obesity.



No, it was people and their unarguable experience that spoke to me, not ideologies or doctrines, philosophies or theories. And that is why this book is about people – because all of us want to see something worked out in reality, rather than merely on paper. Ideas are debatable; experience is infectious. Those whose stories are told in the following chapters are not particularly exceptional – there must be thousands of others – but their ordinariness is their strength. Their lives are within reach of most of us. None of them are saints. In fact, they are usually more ready to cite their failings than their successes. Yet,

consciously or unconsciously, they have tried in their own ways to assist the evolution of human history, to play some part in turning the world right side up here in 'down-under' Australia.

Some of my unconscious mentors, though certainly not all, are into their last laps in life, puffing a bit but still jogging on. A few have finished their journeys in the years since I first wrote about them. Their values and experiences speak to me now as much as when they were living – almost more so, since memories of them bring back echoes of the promises I made myself at the moment of their passing.

For us baby-boomers, such people cannot be simply cloned. Nor would they want us to do so. The circumstances and issues of our times are different. But they do present a challenge: for they have spent their lives consistently creating inroads of change. And, though they came from different political and economic backgrounds, each held some vision for Australia, for the world, which was bigger than their portion of it.

Many I write about – but again, not all – found their philosophy of change through MRA, or Moral Re-Armament, an informal international network which was forged in the cauldron of World War II and which has worked since to generate an active demonstration of 'remaking the world' through moral and spiritual transformation in people, in their relationships, attitudes and behaviour. The role of MRA in various issues and international conflicts has at times been over-rated; at other times, under-valued. But its impact on a wide range of people is unarguable. Myself included. For MRA nurtured my vision of societal change in the Sixties.

Now under the name 'Initiatives of Change', it has continued to be part of my framework of action. *MRA-Initiatives of Change* speaks for a quality of life and commitment, not an organisation with a creed seeking adherents. So while many stories I tell are from that framework, there are others whose experiences are no less

relevant or challenging.

Each of the people whose stories I tell has, or had, specific commitments they worked at. That has been important for me, too. For whatever part of the world I have found myself in, and whatever the issue that has engaged my concern, defining some focused commitment has helped me get a handle on the processes of change. And with that comes a sense of direction to counter the lostness this globalised information-swamped age inflicts upon us.

Later in life, in the last two decades, that sense of direction took a turning. It came unexpectedly, an unsought calling out of the blue. Or rather, out of the red Australian outback. It opened up new tracks for my journey which I sketch out in the last part of this book. Some may regard this passion for reconciliation in Australia as a 'cause', just one issue in contemporary Australia. For me it is far more than that. It is something which defines the very stuff of who we are as a people, our national being. At the same time, it meshes into something universal – the conflict between ageless unsee-able qualities which make us human and the powerful forces of technology, economic growth and material reality which can diminish our humanity.

But first, let me start with those 'unconscious mentors' who rescued me from my Sixties burn-out. Like charity, the most powerful mentoring begins at home. With one's own parents. So I start there. And while it is difficult to write objectively about one's parents, their story has been told to me as much by others as by what they have said themselves...

*Living justly
or
just living*

*'Many people leave their footprints in the sands of time;
some great souls... and others great heels'
my Sunday school teacher*

ONE

A 'do-er' of what others say can't be done

EXTRAORDINARY HOW THAT which you most revere in someone can also be what you most fear.

My father, for instance. At his Memorial Service two weeks after he died in France, people could not stop marvelling at his 'prodigious energy, drive and determination'. Each had a story to tell: some part of his life building hospitals, starting community organisations, helping struggling Asian students, battling boards and committees, picking tons of apricots in blistering heat, getting money out of governments or sweating away with Indian workers at his last building project near Bombay.

Yet when it came to building a backyard aviary that drive and energy could be fearsome. One Saturday afternoon at our home near Adelaide Dad was both architect and builder – and we kids, conscripted labourers. We had little clue what we were doing when we drilled holes here or banged in nails there. Just did what we were told. When the nails bent double – as they invariably did – Dad would take the hammer and attack them ferociously. And when inevitably they bent again or the wood split, Dad would utter such a fierce 'damn' (the only

swear word he ever used) that we kids felt we were somehow guilty. (I never understood why we'd use hardwood jarrah for odd-jobs. Only now I realise how he hated to see off-cuts of that precious timber thrown away on building site rubbish heaps.)

Anyway by night-fall the damned bird cage was finally standing and was redeemed with a hurried baptism of toothpaste-green paint (probably also a remnant from some hospital-building job) just as Mum was calling out that dinner was getting cold. It stood there for years as the budgerigars bred in profusion till their over-population provoked internecine warfare and a Burmese Buddhist friend convinced us of the blessings their release would bring. So while Dad cut back the wire, we watched ceremoniously as budgie squadrons zoomed off exuberantly... probably to merciful death.

The Burmese mining engineer was just one of many exotic friends my parents had. I must have been barely 10 years old when I boasted to school-mates that we had a real Communist in our home. (Paul Kurowski was, in fact, a man of gentle and humane passion who had been expelled from the Party after 25 year's struggle in the German Ruhr because he dared question the final outcome of the class struggle in a nuclear age.) Then there was a wizened old Chief Walking Buffalo, replete with braids and horned-buffalo headgear, who arrived with one of his Stoney Nakota braves from Western Canada. Into our home came black South Africans, a Japanese ambassador, a Swedish bishop, stars of the West Indies cricket team and a throng of Malaysian students celebrating their independence day.

Not all were exotic. My parents had the habit of taking in various needy souls, some of whom were incorporated as 'helpers' into the family as each of us five kids appeared: a recovering alcoholic, a woman just out of prison on parole and an unemployed wanderer. A family of four came to live with us for a year in the postwar years when they could not find

housing. Our red-brick family home in the Adelaide Hills had several additions to accommodate the growing 'family', giving expression to my father's architectural creativity. Local church and community groups often met in our large living room. And Dad seemed to consider charred lamb chops and tennis parties around our self-built tennis court as the ultimate social mixer.

Looking back I only now begin to understand how this parade of humanity shaped our world view. For one thing we grew up expecting to connect with other cultures. Distant countries were made real by those at our dining table. But something else as well. Though my parents' faults were as plain to me as parental failings are to any adolescent, we somehow sensed that their lives were lived for more than their own comfort or satisfaction.

Instinctively we got the idea there was a job to be done – and done with vigour and determination – whether in the local community, in Australia, or in the world. That the job meant somehow engaging with other people, not politically, but in their lives and relationships, through addressing their gut concerns and values, involving their work and well-being. It seemed obvious that people of all creeds and colours, famous or unknown, wealthy or poor, were equally part of the process. Such idealism, and the people and activity that inevitably surrounded it, to us was just normal life.

In many ways our childhood in our local Adelaide Hills community of Belair – then a fast-growing suburb fuelled by the postwar baby boom – could not have been happier. We lived on bush-covered slopes, a neighbourhood of young families with dogs, chooks and the cow in the next-door block. One of my early memories is of the sheer joy of us kids packed into our old convertible Morris, setting off with buckets and hooks to go blackberrying in the nearby National Park. We all had to whistle or sing to ensure that more blackberries were going into our buckets than into our mouths.

Common needs bound the community together. During the War years Dad organised a bus service to the city; and had become a founding member of the local fire-fighting service. Then, as children graduated from prams and play-pens, a kindergarten was needed; Dad and Mum were among the volunteers who got together and built one on the back of the local Methodist church, where Dad was also a lay preacher. Money was raised for a community centre, designed by Dad. Locals wanted a community hospital and Dad was approached for architectural help. A large old home came on the market. Within three weeks a team of 30 residents visited every home in the district and, with a Pound for Pound government subsidy, raised enough to buy the property. Alterations and equipping the hospital took another massive effort. Dad was chairman of the hospital board for the first 12 years. Our weekends, more often than not, were occupied with swarms of men and wheelbarrows on 'working-bees'; or with fundraising fetes recycling piles of 'trash and treasure', cake stalls with the inevitable lamingtons.

Dad's architectural practice, launched in the early postwar years, flourished during those boom years of the Fifties. His office hummed with a workload of schools, churches, 'old-folks homes' for the aged and a string of country hospitals which sprang up through resident initiatives, just as our local hospital had grown. As much as constructing community buildings, they were building communities. Plans and specifications were often strewn across the living room till late into the night. Phone calls from contractors would start early in the morning.

But the torrent of energy could be hard to live with. Mum rarely gave the impression of being harassed – though with five growing children and a revolving door for guests, she had plenty cause for being so. 'I'll never know how she coped,' murmured our local Minister. Truth to tell she struggled often under the shadow of his high-profile action and recognition. In

the style of the times Dad was unquestionably head of the home. But Mum was its heart. And head and heart can make difficult demands on each other.

We kids felt the demands, too. As we reached our teenage years Dad's organising authority was confronted by a measure of adolescent rebellion. We had our own ideas about what we wanted to achieve.

A turning point came after my brothers and I had been to a summer camp, south of Melbourne. It was one of those programs that combined lots of plunging into surf with wading into some pretty heavy questions about our inner lives and attitudes. Dad and Mum came to pick us up and listened to our final wrap-up meeting. There, my younger brother felt moved to admit in front of them how he resented and sometimes feared the hard parental discipline. What we revered, we also feared.

Dad's response to his 13 year-old son's admission was unprecedented. Something cracked inside the old man. It was almost as traumatic for us as it was for him. Our normally self-assured father tried to speak but collapsed in emotion. Then, as someone drove us away, he began sobbing like a child, pouring out memories of his own painful teenage years. It was a revelation to us, his children, hearing it for the first time...



Gordon Brown, my father, was barely 10 years-old when his parents moved their family from a leafy suburb of Adelaide to take over a small orchard of irrigated fruit-trees on the River Murray near Waikerie. They had little experience and a heavy debt. Their 11 acre orchard of apricots, peaches and grapes no doubt looked wonderful. Before the canning industry was established, the fruit had to be dried and shipped to England. Prices were unstable and their crop that first year did not even pay for packing and shipping. For several years they 'lived off

the land', consuming only what they could grow, hunt or fish. Both my grandparents had come from first generation settler stock in South Australia, as had my mother's forebears. Grandfather Brown had married 'the girl next door' – though they lived 150 kilometres apart on the Nullarbor Plain. He had been a telegraphist at Eucla and cycled across the desert to Nullarbor Station to court 'Queenie' Craig, an elegant young woman who had been to finishing school in Adelaide.

Archie, my grandfather, was evidently a sociable character, a keen sportsman and an artist. Though I never knew him, a charcoal self-portrait reveals a thin young man with a stylish bushy moustache and a gleam in his eye. But his financial struggles and the sweat of establishing the orchard broke his health and he collapsed with tuberculosis when Dad was 16.

It was a pivotal point in Dad's life. He had won a scholarship to finish his schooling at Prince Alfred College, a boarding school in the city – and etched in his mind for years to come was the picture of his ailing father on a one-horse dray among the peach trees, weeping as he broke the news that they could neither afford to send my father to boarding school nor spare him from the orchard.

Within two years Brown senior was dead, at the age of 51; the final collapse came while playing a cricket match in century heat in the mistaken belief that his TB had passed. 'I missed him more than I can tell,' Dad said many years later. Grandma Brown had resisted the move to the orchard but then was left with it – and a young family of four to raise. As the eldest son Dad worked the property during daylight hours and studied late into the night by kerosene lamp. A neighbour had introduced him to a correspondence course in architecture. Using hard-bound volumes purchased from London, he stubbornly pursued the career his father had always wanted for him. It bred a hard-driving ambition and a determination to succeed.

In 1928 the economic downturn had already begun when, as

a self-educated 21 year-old, Dad arrived in Adelaide chasing his dream of architecture. Days of knocking on doors brought only disappointments. Someone suggested an architect called McMichael. Not expecting much, he knocked on one last door. McMichael had lost his own son some years before. He took Dad on more for compassionate reasons than on account of his meagre architectural 'qualifications'. Within a few years the Depression set in, building work slumped and McMichael could no longer employ him.

Dad was again out looking for work: pruning suburban fruit trees and doing casual commercial art for shopkeepers. His life – like many others of that period – was significantly shaped by the Great Depression. Hard work was more than a necessity; it was a virtue, the way life should be lived. In 1938, as commerce picked up, McMichael took him back to work on plans for an imposing head office building for the Savings Bank of South Australia (now Bank SA) which still stands today in King William Street. It was Dad's first professional break. It was while he was struggling to find his place in the work force that Dad met the two people who most impacted his life.

One was the woman he married. Mum was born into a farming family on Yorke Peninsula, as Grandpa Pointon's record of her birth in his diary made clear: 'Started binding, middle paddock. Two widths. Throwing sheaves back to cut more. Joe Sparrow came out for me. Had been to Minlaton for a nurse. Mary (my grandmother) bad. 12.30 all over. Baby girl arrived. Afternoon came back out to paddock to work. Very clear day. Westerly...' Though raised among horses and sheep, Mum appears in old sepia photographs as a glamorous young thing with city sophistication; snapshots show her surrounded by admiring males.

Photos of Dad by contrast portray an earnest young man in action. 'I was cautious and stiff,' he wrote in his later years. 'I found freedom in individual effort like study, drawing and cricket.' Keen to prove himself, he found acceptance in a major

suburban church and took leadership in its programs. In fact Dad and Mum met at a Christian convention in Brisbane – love at first sight, they claimed, as they crossed a road and were nearly run down by a tram. Mum was only 18 and her parents wisely did not allow the marriage till three years later.

The other person who fundamentally made an impact on them both during those three years of waiting was a rambunctious British comedian in the popular Gilbert and Sullivan theatre of the day, Ivan Menzies. Apart from the various roles he played on stage, Menzies in real life had undergone a character transformation through the Oxford Group, a Christian movement which grew out of Oxford University which later evolved into 'Moral Re-Armament', or 'MRA' as it has become known. Dad had picked up a book on the Oxford Group and was intrigued enough to contact Menzies when the D'Oyley Carte Theatre Company came through Adelaide. His account of their meeting gives a taste of Menzies' unorthodox approach:

'It was a Sunday morning, with a hot north wind blowing. I called for him in my car – an old Morris convertible with the hood down – and drove to the seaside where we began to walk up and down the beach. We were complete strangers but Ivan began to tell me many things that were deep in his life. I was superintendent of a large Sunday School and a lay preacher. But for a man to be as frank as Ivan took me by surprise. What shook me was that the things he talked about applied to me also. There was something about him, his sincerity and obvious care for me as a person that I had never quite come across before.

'We drove to the city around midday. I pulled up my open car in front of his hotel on North Terrace, one of Adelaide's main thoroughfares. Streams of people were walking past. Ivan suddenly said, "Now you have told me some of the things where you want life to change. We can't do this without God's

help. Would you like to pray with me?"

"What," I exclaimed, "here in the street with everybody passing?" He said calmly, "Why not?" and immediately put his head down and started to pray. I cocked an eye to see if anybody was watching and then joined in. It was there that I first committed myself to God without reserve.' That night Dad went to his young fiancee and, with some trepidation, told her those areas of private shame which he had confessed to Menzies. Far from damaging their relationship, it brought to it a basis of honesty.

Much later, after decades of full and furious living, Dad described that encounter with Menzies as a turning point: 'Life began for me when I found the reality of listening to the inner voice of God in my being. I had believed in God but it did not make much difference. The Holy Spirit took over from the driving force of ambition. I could say: "I am here to serve – not my will, but Thine be done." '

That remained the choice before him through much of his life – a choice between a bulldozer determination to achieve; and a humble search for God's direction in the spirit of that prayer with Menzies. It was a process in which Mum played an unseen but vital part, often bringing the gift of feeling to the high pressure agenda of plans and priorities. The insecurity and privations of his early life would never easily be relinquished. Like many who came through the Depression, his ambition came from wanting to give us, his children, what his own father had not been able to provide.



So a generation after the traumatic experience of his father's death, for Dad to hear his 13 year-old son's reaction to the very ambition that had generated success and security went to the core of his being. The bitterness, recognised for what it was, ebbed away with his tears. Though his energy was no less, it

was moulded by a more open and selfless spirit than the spirit of high achievement. And that affected everything Dad did. In his own words: 'I began to think in terms of putting my business at God's disposal to bring change in the world around me. New and practical applications of seeking God's will began to emerge.'

He started looking at the welfare of his growing office staff. Already he had taken on several draughtsmen who had come to him, struggling for a livelihood – a Yugoslav refugee, several Asian students. But staff numbers went up and down with the construction jobs in hand. In league with other employer architects Dad launched a SA Practising Architects' Association and established a system of exchanging staff between various firms, depending on work loads, while maintaining wages and benefits. It opened the way to standardising wages and conditions in the profession and led to the formation of a state-wide union of draughtsmen. Brown & Davies (now Brown Falconer Group) was among the first architectural companies to start a superannuation fund and profit-sharing scheme for their staff.

At the end of his working life he was made a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia. The citation recognised his 'services to the architectural profession... his pioneering contribution to health care and care of the aged... and the development of hospitals and welfare organisations'. Some 60 hospitals, aged-care and nursing homes were designed by his firm, many in country communities. Beyond professional requirements Dad gave hours of his own time on boards of various institutions, helping them raise funds for building work and creating the management infrastructure.

'Gordon was a "do-er" and he put his money where his mouth was to do what others said could not be done,' said the Rev Kyle Waters, a colleague on several management boards of the projects designed by my father's firm. 'The secret of his productivity... was that he waited on the Lord for guidance,

sorting out his priorities.' Or as Dad's local minister, Jim Murton, put it: 'His daily quiet time was the powerhouse of his day and life.'

In Darwin during one of those morning 'quiet-times' Dad sat looking across the harbour. He was there to finalise the design for the United Memorial Church, the first church to bring together Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians, before the national 'Uniting Church in Australia' came into being. Two thoughts formed in his mind: one concerned the still-evident hostility towards Japanese for their country's war-time role and the other the size of the A-frame steel girders which in his design would rise 15 metres from the ground to span the exterior of the building. He felt uneasy about the specifications of those girders. Rev Norman Pearse, minister at that time, remembers him saying emphatically: 'We must build to withstand winds of 160 miles per hour' (250 km per hour). The church elders were worried about the escalating costs. Darwin had never encountered cyclones of those dimensions. But Dad was adamant. The conviction to strengthen the structure had come during his prayer time, he argued, and the main girders embedded in rock would symbolise the risen Christ emerging from the tomb. How could any churchman resist? Fourteen years later, in 1974, when Cyclone Tracy flattened most of Darwin, that United Church stood untouched – except for water damage and broken windows.

Darwin had been all but flattened once before – by Japanese bombs during World War II. The church was planned as a Memorial to those servicemen who died and was to be built on the site of the American war-time headquarters. While Dad was in Darwin planning it, a salvage operation of allied ships, sunk during that attack, was being carried out by a Japanese company. The operation was doing nothing to salvage relationships with Japan however. Along with all else Dad was also president of the Australian-Asian Association in Adelaide.

As such he had got to know Japan's ambassador to Canberra. That morning, looking across the harbour, Dad's second thought was that the time had come 'to turn swords into ploughshares'. Inspiration dawned. He would ask Ambassador Narita if his government would give brass from those salvaged ships to make a cross for the new church. The Japanese government in fact did far more, providing fine bronze crosses for the chancel, the communion table and at the end of each pew. A Japanese churchman, whom Rev Pearce had met, linked his church in Kyoto with the vision, sending embroidered silk altar cloths.

In July 1960 a Lincoln bomber flew overhead as a ceremonial guard of Army, Navy and Air Force personnel welcomed Dame Pattie Menzies, wife of the Prime Minister, who came to open the church. External Affairs Minister Sir Paul Hasluck and officers of the RSL (Returned Servicemen's League) sat alongside the Japanese Ambassador who declared that the gifts were 'a symbol of our pledge that there shall never again be war between us'.

That was 1960. Even then Australians were wary of Asians in general and Japanese in particular. The Communist threat loomed large, adding another dimension to the 'White Australia' neurosis many Australians have had of 'the yellow peril' to the north. In that atmosphere Mum and Dad, with a group of friends, first turned their minds and energies to building relationships with our Asian neighbours. From the late Fifties the Asian-Australian Association lobbied successfully for the introduction of Japanese and Indonesian language-education into state school curriculum, hosted Asian diplomats and supported the personal welfare of Asian students in Australia. On several occasions my parents left us school-age kids in the care of some friend while attending conferences in the Philippines, Japan, Thailand and Malaysia. They made a point of tracking down the families of Asian students studying in Australia.

Mum applied herself to learning Asian cooking and the smell of exotic foods wafted through our home as guests of many races were made welcome. Their visitors' book carried signatures of guests from 53 countries over a 30 year period. One of them who stayed with us for several years was the now popular singer Kamahl. An impecunious architectural student from Malaysia, Kamahl had turned up at Dad's office looking for work. He was singing at several night-clubs but having difficulties with his studies. While living in a small cabin on our property he switched to studying music at Adelaide University's Conservatorium. We remember watching excitedly on a black and white screen as he made his first television appearance. 'I have always been grateful for the shelter given me at the Brown home,' said Kamahl during a tour in Adelaide some years later. 'The ideals Gordon lived for are hard to reach; but something rubbed off.'

With his Asian interests Dad naturally responded to the invitation of a grandson of Mahatma Gandhi to come to India and advise on a possible site some 240 kilometres from Mumbai for a conference-training centre for MRA, the same network of people which 30 years before had so impacted both my parents. Rajmohan Gandhi, an Indian writer whose commitment to social change drew much from his grandfather, had met my father some years earlier on a visit to Australia. Dad arrived at the rough rocky site, 1300 metres up in the Western Ghats, and immediately began sketching out ideas for its design.

It was the first of 14 trips to India, made at his own expense and often with Mum, during the development of 'Asia Plateau' – a modern conference facility with a theatre, meeting rooms, accommodation for 300 people and lush gardens overlooking a magnificent deep valley. Over the past three decades thousands have gone through Asia Plateau, from village farmers to political leaders, from lowly factory workers to heads of multi-national corporations. An estimated 32,000 people

contributed to its cost, others giving their time and labour. Dad's partners and office staff also gave their services without charge. He considered it the pinnacle of his career.

On one of these Indian visits Dad had his first heart attack. Indian medical treatment was excellent and he recovered well. Though he cut back on his work-load he resisted all suggestions that he should retire. Then, a few years later, he quite suddenly reversed himself and announced – without even consulting my mother – that the time had come to quit so that they both could be more available to connect with the network of friends across Asia and to go wherever they were most needed.

For Mum the prospect of spending long stretches away from 'Craigpoint' (our home in Belair) during what could have been their quieter years did not come easily. 'I will miss the refuge of Craigpoint,' she wrote in her daily journal as they were setting out on another overseas journey soon afterwards. Then she copied down, as she often used to, some verses from her daily readings: 'Do not be afraid... Sell all your belongings and give the money to the poor. Provide for yourselves purses that don't wear out... For your heart will always be where your riches are.' Then, as if to reassure the ghost of her cautious farming father, she added: 'P.S. We do not intend to *sell* but to *let* our assets.'

In fact Dad and Mum were exceedingly generous with their assets, supporting not just the centre in India but many other causes, too. As Mum once said, the architectural practice had been 'a little gold mine; but we haven't buried it all.' In contrast to Dad's drive for financial security early in life, in retirement he and Mum lived in a two-bedroom unit, relying on very modest investments and a government pension.

Dad was 79 when they set off once again to India and Europe, somewhat reluctantly. 'I find it hard to contemplate going again, leaving the easy routine we have fitted into,' he noted during his morning meditation. 'God can put new

strength into me if I ask for it.' During that three-month visit to the conference centre in India, Dad started most days at 7.30 in the workshop with the Indian staff, checking the maintenance and construction work – fixing 1700 metres of ceiling battens, building a large underground water-tank and helping two of the Indian workers who lived in neighbouring villages to construct their own homes.

Just a few months later those same Indian workers, wearing their best turbans and saris, crowded into one of the conference rooms to honour Dad's memory with prayers and bhajans, having heard of his final heart attack in France where he had gone to visit my brother and his family.

'I find that the picture of him that most stays with me is as God's labourer,' wrote Rajmohan Gandhi. 'Bent over a desk with a pencil, on top of a shaky ladder with a hammer, brisk over a plot of land with a measuring tape, that was Gordon. The phrase "the dignity of labor" does not do justice to his spirit as he toiled. Even "joy of labor" does not convey it. Each exertion of his seemed an act of devotion, the purer for being unselfconscious. It was as if he was forever constructing a new world designed by the Great Architect to whom he had given his life.'

Such a task, of course, is never done, never wholly achieved. Yet when the final whistle blew for Gordon Brown, he was ready for it – the contract was fulfilled, his part of the job done. I know, for I was at his bedside during those last days of his life in France. Though convalescing from two heart attacks he had been determined to help my brother with renovations to his house, drilling holes in a concrete slab. Crazy! Yet that was Dad.

In his notebook alongside his bed he had written and then underlined words from St Francis: 'Those who die to self are already living in Eternity.' Watching his unconscious form connected to life-support systems, I felt he was indeed already there. In a break from the vigil we kept with my mother, I

wandered out into the woods outside the hospital and, sitting on a bench damp with recent rain, I jotted down my feelings:

*The wind rises in a single lowing breath
and stirs a thousand leaves fresh with rain.*

*And though it follows some trans-global plan
which meteorological minds might understand,
to the mind of one observer
the wind rises and blows where it will.*

*So too my father's spirit rises even now;
above the trauma-wrenched frame of blood, nerve and muscle.
Though yet it lingers in this weakened dwelling,
across the globe it already stirs a thousand souls
of friends, to whom he brought a spark of God...
a precious essence of the joy of life itself.*



As often happens with sons of high-achieving fathers, my relationship with Dad was not without its problems. Yet undeniably that turning point – when my father's hard-driving ambition was shattered by the simple honesty of my teenage younger-brother – brought a new understanding between us. It began a more equal relationship, making it possible to seek his friendship through the turbulent teenage years. That friendship matured, happily, with time. A friendship, I would like to think, like that which he so bitterly missed with his own father. Who knows: could it have been part of the healing for those early years?

My relationship with my mother deepened even more in the 14 years that she survived my father. She taught us all the gift of hospitality and of conversation. 'The best times were when the five of us arrived home from school to sit round the table, eating bread or scones with jam while Mum would listen to all we had been doing,' remembers my sister Helen. 'No doubt that's where we all became good talkers.'

Alone in her unit at a retirement village after Dad's going, Mum continued her ever-welcoming hospitality. She made space for all sorts of people, of many nationalities. Walking around neighbourhood streets she noticed two African children playing in a front garden. Never backward in coming forward Mum asked where they were from. Within minutes she was sitting on a chair in the empty living room of a rented home, surrounded by an extended Eritrean refugee family who had just moved in. It was the only chair in the house. They had virtually nothing. Overnight Mum became a one-person relief agency, phoning friends and family to gather furniture and household goods, setting them up for health treatment and education, lobbying (successfully) to get a job for one of the men. They called her 'grandmother'. And so she was to many.

Mum was not without her fears. But over a lifetime, she had learned – and practised, day by day – to step consciously, prayerfully, out of her fears onto the bridge of faith which leads from fear to active caring. She was an encourager who tried to help others walk that bridge. She had a way of conveying it to each person who came to her door; and many did. 'So glad to see you,' she would say as she opened up. 'I'm just having a cuppa...'

Those endless cups of tea... there's no hard evidence from the vacillating advice given by medical researchers to support tea as a cure for cancer. But undoubtedly my mother's 21 years of courageously living with cancer were sustained by copious 'cuppas' and by people who brought meaning to her days. In return she conveyed a great sense of gratitude, not only for what she *had* been given in life but for what was being given to her every day.

During Christmas 2001 I returned home from overseas to spend a month with her and others of the family. My younger brother Spencer came from France. As he wrote two months later, after her passing, 'I would have swum, ridden, walked, crawled every metre for even five minutes to see my Mum so

grateful, so confident, so full of faith.' On our daily visits we reviewed one decade of her life at a time – giving thanks for the good memories, re-living the struggles and tough times, and putting to rest any lingering regrets. She was gratefully at peace when I left her, returning – as she wanted me to – to India where I was coordinating a leadership development program. We kept in touch every few days by phone, she relishing the messages from Indian friends she knew. I was in the Naga hills of North East India where so many carry a burden of grief for the underground war that has carried away many loved ones, when the news was given to me. She had gone. I could only feel a great ray of gratitude.

My parents were foremost among my 'mentors' on the journey to make some difference in the world. And with them, a wide network of friends who shared their world view and passion.

But first I must introduce the other person who has significantly impacted who I am and the 'road less travelled' that I took. My fellow nomad on the journey, my wife...

TWO

Jean and my genes

*'Twas just the way you said it: 'I love you, y'know'...
Your words hung on in silence and blended with the scene
of the mellow tones of evening, lying lush in brown and green;
the moon, pale and waiting, in the dying daylight sky,
that tall and handsome oak tree, etched dark and proud and high;
And I wanted most to tell you, but I couldn't say it then,
that 'I love you, too, y'know Jean, with all I have and am.'*

I AM NOT NORMALLY GIVEN to writing poetry. But there comes a spring-time in every young man's life when he takes leave of his senses and his thoughts turn to love. In the worst cases, to poetry as well.

Our way of getting married had a touch of the bizarre from the start. We had met four years before in India – though Jean doesn't remember it. Six months later we had worked together for some time, on a weekly publication in London – though there was nothing romantic going on. Then, out of the blue three years later, with not a word between us in the interim, I wrote asking her to marry me. And within 24 hours of swinging from bemusement to debating if this was her best chance, she sent a telegram saying, 'Yes'.

But I am jumping ahead...

That earlier period, after my return from America as a burnt-out Sixties idealist, left me digging for my roots of faith and looking for some clearer routes towards practical participation in the world's changing order. God, or the 'Universal Creative Loving Intelligence' as I saw him then, had me in searching mode. But I was pretty unstable, emotionally and spiritually; and looking for solace. I tended to fall in love with every girl who walked around the corner.

By a series of quirky coincidences or divine interventions (however you see them), I linked up with a group of young Europeans on a similar search in India. That's when I first had a meal with Jean. But there were many of us in the group, and I made no impression.

Six months later our group joined a conference for reconciliation and social transformation at Caux, the MRA international conference centre in Switzerland. And there, two Northern Irish trade unionists – one Protestant and the other Catholic – asked some of us from Australia and the Pacific to come to help them in their troubled province. They were intrigued by Papua New Guineans in our group who had broken the pattern of 'pay-back' murders between their villages; and by the experience of Canon Wi Huata, a hefty Maori priest who, back in Europe for the first time since World War II, had struggled to forgive Germans at the conference for the horrors he had witnessed as padre of the Maori Battalion 27 years earlier.

Looking back, it was a 'mission impossible' – to promote a peace process just when the Irish season of sectarian marches and heavy-handed British military action had tensions flaring. The day we landed in Belfast, in July 1971, the British government introduced internment without trial. All hell broke loose. Our public program in Belfast was cancelled and we were split up, sent in various directions. A young Catholic from Bougainville and I spent the next weeks in the comparative safety of a farmhouse in County Armagh, making

occasional forays to meet mayors, churchmen and educators in nearby towns. I must have come across as an awfully thick-skinned Australian colonial, totally ignorant of Irish history. After two weeks of getting nowhere, I was convinced that the situation was hopeless. The Irish would fight it out forever. And what was more, the 'God' they all called on could not help them as long as they remained so utterly addicted to their bloody history.

Nor for that matter, I concluded, could God help me either. The Almighty may be able to pull off healing and justice with some people in some situations; but not through me, not in Northern Ireland, at least. I strode round the streets of Belfast one afternoon, angrily arguing with myself. This experience had tipped the balance for me. It was the end of the road for my altruistic efforts of trying to promote the processes of justice and peace in the world. I was ready to get on the next plane to Australia and to forget it all.

It sometimes takes a rock bottom experience to bring a break-through. Within a day or so our group had re-assembled at a Cistercian monastery. Still wincing at my failures, I was awed by the simple faith, humble devotion and apparent joy of these 'brothers'. The grey-haired monk serving us tea turned out to be the abbot. These men had remained faithful to their disciplines of prayer and self-supporting farm work, some of them for 30 years. I could not stick it out for two weeks. Though raised with a Protestant anti-Catholic bias, joining those monks for vespers that evening got to me.

Something broke inside. I guess it was pride. I was still hooked on my Sixties principle of 'doing your own thing', of changing the world 'my way'. The passion of Christ – strung up for his stand of unconditional love against self-righteous arrogance and power-driven inhumanity – was a different way of working altogether. His bloodshed and brokenness penetrated deeper to the reality of the Irish tragedy and to the trauma of every blood-besmirched people around the world,

because it held out for something better. It demonstrated what true compassion and integrity cost. It was a passion that left my superficial obsession with personal satisfaction in shambles, in the dust where it belonged.

As I drove off into the darkness that night, through British Army check points and feuding Irish communities, something was nailed within me. I resolved to be a disciple – for three years at least, just like Christ's disciples who went on the road with him, learning as they went what his passion was all about.

Reflecting on what it might mean, one thing gelled – for three years I should abandon my private heart-throb of getting married and finding a successful career. These were my escape clauses, my private fantasies whenever the road got bumpy. So a few weeks later, when Jean and I were put in the same office to produce a newsletter, I played it straight. Just as well. She was, to use her own words, 'a passionate women's libber' and viewed the male species with a healthy distrust.

For whatever reason my relationship with Jean then held nothing more romantic than eating fish and chips in 'Bluebottle', her blue Mini Minor, on the way to a printer to check proofs. And before I knew it, I was on my way back to India to work on a weekly news-magazine, edited by Rajmohan Gandhi, the same Indian who got my father working on the MRA centre south of Mumbai.

India has its own special psychological and spiritual chemistry. As I plunged into the sweat of challenging work there on the magazine and in Mumbai slum communities, I forgot all about Jean, or marriage for that matter. Some years later a friend asked if I had any romantic attachments; I told him I expected to remain a brahmacharya – single, celibate, devoted to the cause. But the chemistry was still working. Sometime around three years after the monastic challenge, I was bumping down a mountain road in Western India in a state transport bus, packed with a sample of that great majority of India's population who don't own cars. Maybe it was the

close encounter with domesticated husbands, wives and assorted kids on an Indian bus that provoked some latent yearning within me. But out of the recesses of my mind, out of the rubble of past memories, I began to picture Jean – and my heart brimmed with, not just respect, but love for her. For most of the six hour journey, I was transported to a state of uncommon bliss.

My God, where did that come from? Since meditation had become part of my daily habit as a 'disciple', I asked my God where, indeed, it had arisen. It was a gift, God's spirit within seemed to assure me, that's all. And don't rush it. The timing will be equally clear.

Little did I know that at that very moment, Easter 1974 in England, Jean was working through the painful reflexes of her adolescent years that had turned her against men – and was experiencing the start of a 'new journey of wholeness', as she wrote later. And with it, a never-before sense of anticipation about getting married, without having any clue who to.

Interesting how some of life's best gifts come in surprise packages unsought. It was as if my karma took over. It just happened. True, I spent a month or so distracted by feelings of disloyalty at not marrying an Australian, by fears over whether I was worthy enough and all that. I also quietly checked with a third party in Britain to be sure Jean was still single and available. But then one evening, not many months later, there I was sitting on a bench on the Mumbai sea-front with some elderly Parsee gentlemen looking over my shoulder, penning out six pages of my feelings and hopes to Mary Jean McAll, someone I barely knew, and suggesting that we share the rest of our lives together.

The letter got stuck in the British mail Christmas rush, which didn't do much for my nerves. Jean was with her older sister when she finally opened it, handing over each page as she finished it to her sister. It's always been a bit like that with the McAll clan – I married not just Jean but her parents, her sister

and three brothers, various in-laws, nieces and nephews, aunts and uncles, and a complex family history in China, Scotland and all over the place. Half way through my letter Jean evidently got the giggles. Then wasn't sure she could remember what I looked like. And finally, she went to bed worried about giving up her distinctive Scottish 'McAll' family name for an Aussie named... 'Brown!!?'

But she said 'yes', anyway. In fact, the telegram stuffed into my hand next day at the magazine office read, 'Yes, with all my heart.'

In the cool of that January Indian evening, I went to a small chapel on Malabar Hill overlooking Mumbai and, alone in silence, read through a traditional communion liturgy, renewing the prime loyalties that my discipleship had developed and giving thanks for this surprise gift. And then went off to phone Jean...

She had never been short of something to say, as I remembered. But between the static on the line, she managed only a few phrases and various emotional sniffs. She tells me now that I hung up after a minute or two with an awkward, 'Shall we keep in touch?'

Well we have, pretty much, for 27 years so far. For the first few months it was by airmail. Both being writers we scrawled out volumes of our personal histories, feelings, struggles and hopes. Then nearly six months later, our strange courtship after-the-fact began in person, not unlike a traditional Indian wedding in which the veil between the bride and groom is removed for the first time part-way through the ceremony. In our case we had a few weeks together cleaning up the McAll family garden and digging brambles out of the 'tennis court' where our wedding reception was to be held. And escaping, when we could, for some long walks in the New Forest which surrounds their home in southern England, writing a poem or two in the process.



It had all the elements of a picture-book English country wedding. The marriage service in a 13th century weathered stone church under dark oak beams; the bridal party in long floral dresses and red-rose bouquets, the groomsmen in grey morning suits and stylish top hats; pigs and ponies meandering across the road from the church; guests walking through the New Forest to the McAll's Tudor-style home (once the residence of author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle); a reception under a canopy of beech and oak trees on the court where Doyle and H G Wells played tennis; a three-tiered wedding cake pierced with the ceremonial sword of Jean's ex-Navy grandfather... and so on. Along with the McAll clan and Jean's friends were a good number of my family and friends from Australia, including my brother and best-man, Dean, later a Liberal South Australian premier.

One memory remains vivid beyond all these. I 'took the plunge' in more ways than one that day. With precision and secrecy Jean and I had plotted our departure from the reception – we would row a boat up the small river which runs through their property, run across the field opposite, be picked up by a waiting car and speed to where her 'Bluebottle' was already loaded with our luggage behind the locked doors of a neighbour's barn.

I had fixed a few honeymoon cars in my time, sometimes wiring the brake lights and horn together which makes for a noisy departure. Now the moment of retribution had come. A 'union' of groomsmen and other mischief-makers formed to uncover and subvert our plot. All was quiet as guests waved us farewell in stately fashion. Then, as our boat neared its mooring on the other side, two guys in World War II tin hats, waving Union Jacks, plunged into the river and pushed our boat from the bank. Wrestling with one I was dragged in head-first. And surfaced to see my newly-wed, beating the helmeted head of the other with an oar, wood splintering in all directions.

Drenched but not bowed, I pulled the boat to the bank, grabbed my wife and set off squelching across the field on our way to a Hebridean honeymoon on the west coast of Scotland. But the image of my newly-wed beating hell out of her assailant – all in good fun – has stayed with me ever since!



Nature or nurture – what shapes us? Our innate cultural inheritance and values, or how we react to our environment? My genes, or my Jean?

I can hardly be an objective judge. But without a doubt my fellow nomad has utterly changed the journey of my life and who I am – without once resorting to swinging an oar. Though at times the learning process may have brought her perilously close to it.

Our return to India came at a time of political emergency. Indira Gandhi had imposed censorship and locked up many of her opponents. For our Indian colleagues it was time of fear and tension. Some risked arrest and imprisonment in their struggle for human rights by confronting the cover up of corruption and the inhumanity of government actions. Our magazine repeatedly faced legal action threatening its closure. Others friends in our network, fearing the consequences of such resistance, devoted themselves to the basic work of human and community development, rejecting anything which bordered on political protest. Tensions grew between friends.

Jean, who knew many of them from her previous stay in India, set about cheering everyone up. She organised parties on any excuse she could find and got us all laughing. She discovered an unknown beach north of Mumbai and led us all out there one Sunday. Who would ever dream of doing Scottish dancing to cassette-tape music under palm trees on a beach with an audience of bemused Indian onlookers? Jean did.

As well as the magazine work in which Jean was also engaged,

we both were involved in running a series of seminars on 'Creative leadership for industry', aimed at empowering workers and middle management to address the living and working conditions of Mumbai's 250,000 textile workers. Many lived in crowded 'chawls', serried rows of dank tenements, one family per room with shared toilets. What for me was a grim struggle was, for Jean, a challenge – a chance to connect with people at the point of their gut-level concerns. She went beyond my earnest program-oriented approach and simply made friends with these workers and their families. Somehow she managed to keep centred on the spirit-connection with people.

Jean responds to people's suffering far more sensitively and patiently than I do. Her experience of feeling the injustices against women, and her 'liberation' from the bitterness which that often brings, has made her value a different perspective. She still maintains her feminism, her insistence on the equal rights of women. But 'as the bandwagon of rights rolls on its way – whether human rights, women's rights, civil rights or the rights of whales,' she wrote in 1991, 'gratitude is the victim that falls most frequently beneath its wheels.' She likes to quote French philosopher Gabriel Marcel: 'Gratitude is the insurance of the soul against the powers of darkness.'

Most incredible to me is that she seems grateful at being hitched to me, though I think she got the rougher deal. Thinking back to those first days of our marriage, I guess I was still focused on my ascetic mindset. I tended to see my work and commitment as a hard road of self-sacrificing obedience, perhaps part of the 'work ethic' inherited from my father's genes. But it had become distorted, polluted by a tinge – often a whinge – of masochism. Even in my adolescence I had cast myself as a battler, struggling with an unfair work load, punishing myself with dark days of doubting and self-criticism. Crudely, I suppose it was a device for attracting sympathy. With Jean it was an utter switch-off. Within our first weeks

together she slammed a taxi door in the middle of Mumbai traffic and stormed off, preferring to walk than to endure my grumbles. She once threatened to put on my tombstone: 'His path through life was lined with regrets.'

I can still get afflicted. But gradually I have learned to recognise my moods for what they are, and to find 'space for grace' in my relationship with her... and with myself. When events and work to be done have demanded it of us, she has stuck with me through the heavy slog. But when my Protestant work-ethic takes over, and I am wedded to some task on the computer late into the night or over weekends, she has not-too-gently reminded me that I'm also married to her and father of a family. Countering my complaints about the never-ending tasks (most of which are self-inflicted), she teased me by proposing a new epitaph: 'It took a lot longer than he thought.'

Someone once asked her what her epitaph would be. Cheekily she replied: 'In life, they had such a hard time keeping her down that, in death, she shall surely rise.'

That could have turned out a sick joke once in India. Jean and I had prided ourselves as being hardened India-wallahs. We could survive anything. Then on a trip to an industrial town in eastern India Jean picked up a Hepatitis infection. Indians tend to regard Hep A like a bad case of 'flu. Her doctor, a good friend who had not treated a white-skinned patient before, would arrive at her bedroom door and break into laughter at Jean's vivid yellow hue. But after a week or so the condition had not improved. Nor did the specialist laugh when we both walked into his consulting room. Her situation was 'out of control', he said, shaking his head after his examination. In 20 minutes she was in a hospital bed on a drip – and stayed there for most of a month. Fearing cross-infection, our son Adam (born in the same hospital two years before) was kept away from her.

Five years into our marriage, that illness brought us to a decision to return to Australia.



Like many Aussie expats, I viewed my homeland with a large dose of romantic nostalgia tinged with a measure of disgust over our indifference to how most of the world lives. To tell you the truth, after 15 years of wandering round various parts of the globe, I hardly felt Australian. I had sometimes argued that you cannot understand your own country until you get out of it. I still do. But stay away too long, and your understanding becomes static. I sensed a challenge: that if our commitment to social change meant anything it needed to be grounded in Australian soil.

Our return, in fact, brought a whole new range of challenges – or adventures, as Jean would see them. Practically penniless, we lived on a care-taker basis in the homes of generous friends in Canberra. In due course our daughter Anjali – Indian-named – was born in the Canberra Royal. Half an hour after her birth Adam, then three, was allowed to hold her in his arms. He looked up and said, 'Can we take it home?' We did, another bundle of discovery. When still in kindergarten, someone asked Anjali if she wanted to be a lady when she grew up? 'No,' she replied, 'I want to be like my mummy.' God help her, it must be in the genes!

These were years of rediscovering our 'home', Australia, in the broadest sense. But there were other discoveries, too. Including that of parenthood. As unsalaried voluntary workers, supported by faithful friends, our kids were dressed in hand-me-downs and garage sale bargains. Jean's weekly adrenalin rush came with Adam's Saturday morning soccer games; and her sense of theatre, through Anjali's early introduction to dance and ballet. Without a trace of 'whingeing Pom' syndrome, Jean relished in a pro-active sort of way just being part of Australian communities. Wherever we went she joined women's sharing groups, and started them if they didn't exist. In Canberra it was the 'Listening Ladies'. In Adelaide as

part of 'the Bird Collective' she delved into Jungian psychology until late into the night. The 'Women's Meeting Place', which she helped organise through our local council, provided a space for lonely women – it went beyond the sublime to the ridiculous through a pantomime Jean wrote featuring 'Salmonella and the Ugly Blisters' who were plagued by a 'wicked Step Smother' and rescued by the 'Furry Clodhopper'. It's never all serious or profound with Jean.

Australia's physical environment – and the threats to it – became alive for us as we explored Canberra's environs, camping on weekends on the Murrumbidgee or at Thredbo Diggings where we got hooked on wombat-watching. It was there that Adam first encountered the thrill of going downhill over snow, an addiction that has never left him. We would learn more, after two years in Canberra, through another of Jean's unorthodox adventures: the 'Caravan Cavalcade'. Her vision was a 'community on the road' in caravans, moving through rural Australia, listening to what the country and its people were saying, and supporting those working for healing and change. Any community is a microcosm of Australia, was her idea; and any community could tackle the problems of Australia rather than waiting for government.

A grand vision. But how? I remember one clear Canberra morning, sitting alone in our Holden station-wagon into which we had poured most of our savings, asking myself were we dreaming? Seems like that's often been the way in our marriage: Jean comes up with the visions, and I struggle with the detail of how to make them happen.

Through talking it up and through an unexpected loan from friends in our Canberra church, we bought a second-hand caravan and set it up for travel. Towing it, we found, was rather like having a house on your back. So we nicknamed it 'Murtle the Turtle'. Someone gave us a card captioned, 'The turtle only makes progress when it sticks its neck out .' So we did. And others began to join us, mainly young people. A

surgeon loaned us another caravan, and ultimately came along with his wife for part of the time. More vans materialised. Over six months altogether 60 people were part of our amorphous mobile community, trekking 16,000 kilometres around five States. We went where we were invited, or where we were given introductions, sharing all our resources and decision-making, working voluntarily in the communities we landed in, listening and talking with those who would meet us. And hundreds did – from a self-confessed 'professional dole bludger' to Federal MPs, from a district dog-catcher to union leaders in Broken Hill, from youth groups to elderly nursing home patients, from Aboriginal activists to conservative soldier-settler farmers. What we found would take another chapter. But it reinforced our convictions for growth and social change through grassroots community and families.

Adam started his schooling by correspondence during those travels. And Anjali, a snowy-haired highly-mobile one year-old when we left Canberra, probably developed her wander-lust from the experience. After seven different homes (including the caravan) in ten years of marriage, my parents suggested we move back to the family home in the Adelaide Hills, which they would leave, settling for a smaller unit instead.

Generous as it was, the proposition seemed improbable. We had little resources and no steady income. But it came as an answer to our prayers. Jean's psychiatrist father in the UK advanced some of our inheritance, enabling us to buy the shares my brothers and sisters held in the family property. And so we moved 'home' to Belair, with a mountain of that attitude of 'gratitude' which Jean talks about. We have stayed there, when we are there, ever since. For our life continues to be somewhat peripatetic. After one spell of several years in America, Adam – then a teenager – walked back into the old home saying, 'Can we stay here till we die?'

But life is rarely that settled. As well as community initiatives in and around Adelaide, and marriage preparation

courses that Jean has helped to conduct through Anglicare, we both regularly assist with programs in Melbourne for young people which affirm that 'Life Matters' and which help them shape their values in a fast-changing world. Then there have been ventures like a study tour in India which we conducted for 28 young people – another of Jean's 'impossible' visions which had us interacting with street-kids under a railway bridge in Mumbai and trying to grasp the social/environmental impact of the vast Narmada dam project in Gujarat.

Most years one or both of us are involved in the annual conferences at Caux, the MRA centre in Switzerland, which have people from around the earth wrestling with issues like healing the wounds of history, creating an 'honest conversation' on racism and tackling corruption. Then in 2002, we took off for a 10-month program through various Asian countries leaving our home to the care of Adam and Anjali, both in university.

Ventures like this are likely to continue. Paying for them is always a challenge – and often ends up a miracle. We have been supported over the years by the generosity of our families and of many friends, some giving to us directly and some via MRA, which itself is funded through contributions.

In this age of globalisation the temptation is to mistake mobility for action; or information for wisdom. We seem too satisfied with virtual reality created by virtual relationships between virtual friends. If anything concerns Jean it is getting to the depth of human experience and feeling, and to the depth of what makes societies the way they are. It is like one of those 3-D pictures, she says, which at first glance seem to be nothing more than brightly coloured patterns. But the trick is to see beyond the surface image and to find another world – figures, animals, maybe a hidden message. To do that, she points out, you have to relax, to let go of your focus while keeping your concentration. Suddenly the 'magic' image stands out.

That 'magic' doesn't always work on me! No doubt, her quest for depth in our relationship has at times created tensions. Aussie males don't always want to be probed. But, over the years, Jean and I have learned a greater intimacy through making space and opportunity for depth in each other; and valuing it. 'Deep speaks to deep...' The disciplines of our spiritual lives, of sharing the intimate thoughts of our personal meditations and confessions, has given us a way to hear at a deeper level.

I'm not always very good at it, nor very patient; particularly when Jean is reconstructing some profound realisation arrived at in her morning 'quiet time' or from some insightful book she's just read, right at the moment when I am restless to leave the conversation and get on with the day – or am mentally already half way there in detailing the task ahead of me. Easier than a 3-D image, my blank 'listening' face gives me away. She knows when she is not getting through. But over a quarter of a century or more, some of the 'magic' has done its deepening work, anyway, and accumulated somewhere in my subconscious capital of thoughts and feelings.

In this search something undoubtedly has been passed on through her McAll family genes. Her very conception (Jean doesn't mind telling you) was extraordinary. During the late 1930s her parents, both doctors, had served at an isolated mission hospital in China, caught between warring Chinese armies and the invading Japanese. But then they were swept up, along with thousands of Westerners, into a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in Shanghai. Jean's start to life, her mother remembers, came after four years of struggling to survive in that camp and it arrived like 'a telegram from God' promising that there was a future. Rescued only months later and back in Britain, her mother gave birth to Jean in Edinburgh. And then continued to work as a GP, raising five children in the process, while Ken McAll – too weakened by the ordeal to continue surgery – took up psychiatry.

An unorthodox psychiatrist he was, rejecting the over-reliance on medication in the psychiatric profession at that time. Setting up his own nursing unit at the rambling Conan Doyle home in southern England, he developed his treatment of the 'possession syndrome', spelt out in his book, *Healing the Family Tree*. Controversial but proven effective for scores of hopeless cases who have beaten a path to his door, it has had wide-spread application, not just for individual patients but for families and communities where disorders continue generation after generation. Inevitably, it has added another dimension to our work for personal and social healing.

So Jean's quest for depth deepens many in the process. And our relationship as well. Love? Yes, oodles of it. But ours has rarely been the romance of candlelit dinners with violins in the background. My attempts to get Jean out for a moonlight walk have only succeeded when we had to take out the rubbish. Often, the times we have felt most in love have been when together we have put aside our personal preoccupations and self-centred concerns, and tried to reach out to care for someone else's situation. Our lives have been sustained with many such moments.

From his prison cell Dietrich Boenhoffer wrote to a niece who was getting married: 'It is not your love that sustains marriage but, from now on, marriage that sustains your love.' How sad, then, when marriage is devalued. I believe in it simply because, for all of us, the heart longs for life-lasting, unconditional, unfathomable love. It is the motive force of Creation: a dynamic, true force between people as real as the force of gravity. Sure, we see so much of love's sickly sentimental heresy. But even that is witness to our great insatiable thirst for 'the real thing'. We were born with that capacity for unpolluted love – our Original Blessing. We were born, no less, with a capacity for its polluted opposite – hating, hurting, greedy indifference; and, even worse, self-seeking, manipulative, abusive 'love'. Grace is the empowering of that

Original Blessing in us and the disempowering of that Original Sin. It's our choice. For God is pro-choice and gives us the fundamental right to be in charge of our own destinies, our own loving or hating.

Marriage and family provide the most basic space for the intimate down-to-earth labour of working out the life-long implications of that unconditional love. And, as I see it, we need focused intentional relationships with those we choose and those we give birth to, in order to disempower the distortions of love in our character and to empower what is true and right. Inevitably, with such close encounters, the differences in our upbringings and behavioural formation collide. Jean and my genes often conflict. We can try to avoid the pain of those collisions, or learn to tread carefully around our wounding habits and traits, grievances or prejudices. But then, love will not deepen in the process. In our experience pain, tears, hurt pride, shouting, listening, helping, labouring, resting, trying (sometimes being very trying) and sticking at it are all part of the process.

Jean once suggested three basic attitudes that one can adopt in marriage – back to back, where you pursue separate development; face to face, where you are absorbed or enmeshed in each other and in family; or side by side, a partnership in response to some calling, some movement in the same direction.

God knows, we've been back to back at times, face to face at others. But some challenge has always been there to draw us forward, side by side.

Lasting values & changing systems

*'Puny individuals, bundles of corruptible impulses, daring to think
of the needs of the earth? Can anything be more absurd?*

Nothing can be more relevant'

Rajmohan Gandhi

THREE

A farmer outstanding in his field

AMONG MY PARENTS' FRIENDS - 'comrades', one would almost have to call them - politics and backgrounds varied greatly. Some were well-known figures; others, unrecognised 'nobodies'. Some were successful at making money; others, always struggling. Some were vocal and well-educated while others were laconic, though their living spoke volumes.

An intriguing web of shared understanding seemed to exist between them. They supported and challenged each other. And they held a somewhat crazy vision of 'remaking the world'. For them it was not crazy but a logical choice, a necessary commitment. Two World Wars had savaged the world they had been born into. Obviously something new had to be created. Their formative years had been rooted in the humus of the Great Depression and it sprouted the growth of a will to survive, a resolute work ethic that in the boom years of the Fifties at last could begin to bear fruit.

Not everyone was bothered with trying to create a new world of course. Many of their generation just got on with the business of living, making the most of the boom. Among my parents and their friends, though, it was a conscious and serious choice.

What held them together was not only the need, and the possibility, of some engagement in 'remaking the world' but an

even deeper tap root – their belief, borne out of personal experience, that change and healing could come within and between nations, just as it had in their own lives and living, through a spiritual and moral dynamic sustained by the Spirit of God.

In many ways theirs was a more audacious vision than the idealism which mounted like a wave for my generation in the Sixties. For it was founded in hope of a world they wanted to create; while ours floundered for the most part in reaction to a world we rejected.

Through my growing up, but more so in recent years, these friends gave me something like a bunch of keys, each opening a different door, a different quality, needed on the complex journey towards credible social change.

My parents' friendships included many women, of course. But I have to confess that it was Dad's male friends who had a greater impact on my emerging manhood, even after our return from India. If Dad and his friends shaped the pattern of my 'doing', only now do I realise how much Mum fundamentally influenced my 'being', my spirit. That 'feeling' side of life became increasingly important for my father in the years before his death. Expressing it was often awkward – as it is for many Australian males. Of course, bits of each were there in the other – a yin-yang of Dad's search for spiritual responsiveness and Mum's for practical action to help people in need. Over the years they merged somewhat, into a poker-dot blend of spirit and action, of intuitive feeling and getting-on-with-it pragmatism.

Among their varied network of friends my parents always had an empathy with those who lived off the land. Like Max, a dairy-farmer from Victor Harbor, south of Adelaide. Jean and I had first met Max in India, welcoming him and his daughter Mary-Anne to our flat during Christmas 1978. So Max was one of the first people we linked up with on our return. He became a friend and mentor.



Madras airport at 2.30 am... for years dairy farmer Max Gale got out of bed at that unearthly hour to start his milk delivery run in Victor Harbor. Yet this time his delivery vehicle was not an old truck but a DC10; and his produce was not milk, but a consignment of high-quality dairy cattle.

Australia's farmers are a diminishing breed. Like all of them, Max was – forgive the pun – a man out-standing in his field. Except none of them do much standing around. They know the meaning of hard work. For Max, it meant milking 100 or more cows twice a day for 25 years, running a stud herd and a mob of sheep. It used to be said that Australia 'rode on the sheep's back'. More accurately we rode on the farmers' hard sweat, work – and yes, tears.

Now they face not only drought and flood, but also the hard realities of over-subsidised world competition. And many a good farmer, bred and born on the land, has walked off his property, financially busted and bitterly broken.

Max Gale came to the land rather than being bred on it. The event that most shaped his life took place when Max was eleven. His father had a milk-run in suburban Adelaide. For years Max's father Alby had done his milk-run with his horses and cart, and his horses knew the run as well as Alby. Max's father loved his horses, and his carts were immaculate gleaming showpieces. 'If a job's worth doing, it's worth doing well', Max remembered his father saying. However, it was the war years and manpower was in short supply. Alby Gale's employees had enlisted. So he bought himself a new buckboard utility from Claridge Motors, which enabled him to complete his round without hired help. Young Max would join him on weekends.

One Saturday morning, Max was to go for a dental appointment. So Alby let him sleep-in rather than help on the final milk-run of the morning. At around six o'clock, Max heard his father return home as usual to reload his buckboard with milk, telling his wife he would be back in a couple of

hours. He didn't return. Later that morning Max looked out of the window to see his uncles walking up the path and knew immediately they were bearers of bad news. Alby had waited at a level crossing for a local train to pass, but didn't see the Melbourne Express coming in the opposite direction. Unfortunately his new buckboard didn't have the same intuitive sense of danger as his faithful horses.

'For years I found it hard to come to grips with my father's death,' said Max. The family rallied around and kept the milk business going, being the only source of family income. Max would be up in the early hours of the morning doing a round before going to school. Then, at 15, he left school to work in one of his Uncle Joe's many grocery shops. By the age of 23 Max was managing the shop, and a year later bought the business. Before long Max was building a bigger shop, using second-hand bricks which he cleaned off, one by one, after a full day's work in the shop.

But his one cherished dream – which had been his father's as well – was to live and work on the land. During a well-earned holiday at Port Elliot one summer, sitting on a rock watching the ocean swell crash against granite boulders, Max heard a voice inside him say: 'You've got to get out of that shop and onto the land.' Max reckoned it was as clear a word as God was ever going to give him.

By then he was married to Aileen, a double certificate nurse, and they had four children. So during their beach holiday, the family took the chance to visit the two farm properties that were on the market in the Victor Harbor area at that time. Selling their grocery business and moving into a new venture would be a risk. But scraping together all they could, they took the plunge and put a deposit on 100 acres of undulating land, with 20 crossbred milking cows, at Back Valley, just 10 kilometres from Victor Harbor.

When their first milk cheque arrived, after their move to the country, Max and Aileen looked at each other and asked:

'How are we going to bring up four children on this?' Aileen began taking night duty shifts at the local District Hospital, and Max found employment during the day at the local cheese factory. Then Max turned to what he knew best – the retail business and milk rounds. He purchased a small local milk run which rapidly expanded from 60 gallons per day to 200. Max was the first to introduce milk cartons in the district, and before long was also selling cream, flavoured milk and orange juice to local homes, caravan parks and shops. He also worked to improve the quality of his milking herd, establishing his Marapana Farm Jersey Stud.

'For 10 years on that farm we worked terribly hard,' Max remembered. He would be out of bed at 2.30 am to start the morning milk deliveries, and Aileen would be up at 6 am to help a young employee do the morning milking – often after night duty at the hospital. In the afternoon the milk had to be cartoned and the cows milked again. And in summer an extra milk delivery was made to meet local demands from holiday-makers who crowded into Victor Harbor. The Gale kids grew up believing life and hard work were synonymous. But Max knew he couldn't keep up the pace for ever. He was keen to buy some more land so that he could sell the milk round and concentrate more on improving his land and his quality herd of stud cattle.

A neighbour on the other side of the Back Valley road had a large sheep property. He used to come down of an evening to get his daily supply of fresh milk, often stopping for a chat, leaning on the top rail while milking was in progress. After a number of years he decided to sell his Back Valley property and asked Max if he would like first option before it went to public auction. It was a large and lush property, stretching over rolling green hills spotted by large gum trees, and with good natural water. Max couldn't let this opportunity pass him by. So once again the Gales scraped together all they could, consulted the bank and a local lawyer, and bought the

large property. By subdividing some of his new land into 100 acre blocks and selling them off, mostly to local farmers, Max managed to retain nearly 600 acres for himself. But not without another 10 more years of relentless hard work. In its heyday Pondyong (as it is now called) carried over 200 head of stud Jersey cattle, with 100 milkers at any one time. Max's study was lined with ribbons won by his stud Jersey cattle at the local agricultural shows as well as the Royal Adelaide Show.

But something else emerged in Max over the years, besides his ambition to make a success of life on the land. It is hard to put into words. At milking time one would see him, a short wiry figure dressed in khaki overalls, sleeves rolled up above his elbows, a bounce in his step despite the gumboots, and a floppy towelling-hat over wispy silver hair lining a sun-reddened face. In Max there was no trace of that bitter complaining edge which hardship has bred into some. One feels a humbler gentler air in him – as though life is some great privilege, and the hard work just part of a grateful repayment for it. It was a yearning to share his success with others less fortunate than himself.

The same feeling is shared within the family. Aileen gives you all the warm assurances of a nursing sister and mother. But between the Gales, more is understood without conversation than because of it. Like many farmers they have an unspoken understanding, a shared pride in what their sweat and perseverance have created on the land – and on an deeper level, what the land has offered them. 'I can appreciate how Aboriginal people identify with the land,' said Max. 'After 25 years it becomes part of you. I remember driving into this Valley after two months in India and knowing I had come home. There is a sense of affinity, of stewardship, that you've been given this bit of creation to try to develop the best you can.'

So how did Max and his plane load of cows get to India?

One of Max's daughters, Mary-Anne, was one of the first females to study at Roseworthy Agricultural College in the 1970s. After graduating one of her fellow students, with whom she shared a concern for Third World development, wrote to her from Bangladesh. He was working there on a cattle-breeding program and three of their best beasts had died of disease. He wrote to Mary-Anne asking if Max knew of anyone who could help by sending some replacement breeding cattle. It was a challenge too tempting for the Gales to resist. But they soon found that shipping three cattle on their own was an uneconomic proposition. You might as well ship 30, or even more.

At the time Max was president of the Mount Compass Cattle Club and a member of the Australian Jersey Breeders' Society. He had long wanted to stimulate his fellow-farmers to think of Third World needs. Now he had his chance. He put before them the idea of airlifting a large number of quality cattle to South Asia. As with most organisations, getting such an ambitious scheme 'off the ground' rested squarely on the shoulders of the bloke who proposed it. Max spent many evenings and weekends talking up the project to farmers' groups, church people, Rotary clubs and the like. He raised \$10,000 to buy the best genetic quality breeding cattle for the airlift. Max did not want their give-aways. The South Australian branch of the Jersey Breeders' Society came to the party and subsidised half the price of each cow purchased for the project.

Max hoped to ship and place the cattle through the charitable organisation 'For Those Who Have Less', the same organisation which employed Mary-Anne's colleague who had written from Bangladesh. The organisation had been established in Victoria by another ambitious and energetic man, Len Reid. As it happened Len was flying back from India with the problem of finding the cattle he needed for four breeding programs right at the time when Max's letter arrived

on his desk in Victoria with the firm offer of 75 stud Jersey cattle. They had not yet met but wasted no time doing so. Len came straight to the point: he could manage to get together another 90 dairy cattle from his sources in Victoria. But what they needed was a good cattleman to fly with the herd to India and to settle the cattle in once they arrived. Would Max do it?

Mary-Anne by that time was on the other side of the continent, teaching in the Aboriginal community of Milingimbi in Arnhem Land. When Max wrote to her asking if she could go with him to India, she replied without hesitation - her bags were packed and ready. Her brother Peter, at that time a youth worker with the Uniting Church in Adelaide, agreed to come home and run the farm for two months. But other problems delayed their departure. An application to the Australian government, to underwrite the cost of air transport for the cattle, was turned down. Perplexed, Len Reid sent a message to his organisation's office in New Delhi, stating the shipment would be delayed indefinitely. As luck would have it a West German farmer happened to be in the office when the message came through. Grasping the urgency of the situation he got in touch straight away with his sources in the Federal Republic of Germany. In four weeks they raised the \$80,000 needed for the airlift.

Arrangements were made to have the cattle railed to Melbourne and loaded into their charter jet. Just two weeks before Christmas 1978, the cattle set off for India with Max and Mary-Anne as 'flight attendants'.

The cross-breeding programs to benefit from this shipment were all local Indian initiatives, such as the highly acclaimed Airey Milk Colony in Mumbai, which began by taking cattle off the streets to be properly managed and bred free of disease. Because the airlifted cattle were exotic to India, there were some initial losses. But within the first ten years the 165 cows and six bulls produced a scattered herd of 1,000 purebred cattle, plus a much larger number of crossbred progeny producing

five times as much as milk as the local average. The shipment formed a significant contribution to what was then known as 'Operation Milk Flood'. Its aim was for India to head towards self-sufficiency in whole milk and dairy products. It also sought to establish an infrastructure that included breeding through artificial insemination programs and the establishment of sophisticated milk-processing plants.

For Max the shipment of cows was just a beginning. While unloading some of the cattle at 2.30 am at Madras airport a Catholic aid worker, who was there to greet the consignment of cattle, suggested he should later contact a colleague of his, Sister Theodore. After overseeing the safe arrival of their cattle to all four designated projects Max and Mary-Anne returned to Madras and called on Sister Theodore. Despite her 30 years in India, there was something of the determined 'Aussie battler', mixed with a strong Christian vocation, in this indomitable nun. Sister Theodore had resigned her position as secretary to the Bishop to try to meet the immediate and urgent needs that she saw amongst handicapped children living on the streets in India. With stunted arms or skeletal legs, sometimes blind and mostly filthy, these needy children can be seen on most Indian city streets begging for their survival.

Tradition has it that Saint Thomas, the so-called 'doubter' amongst Christ's disciples, brought Christianity to South India nearly 2000 years ago. It was on Saint Thomas day that Sister Theodore had taken possession of a swampy block of land on the outskirts of Madras. She had hopes of establishing a home for her homeless and handicapped urchins. When Max went to visit the land Sister had somehow got some of the land drained and filled, and had established a small building. 'I could see there were huge problems confronting her,' said Max. 'If anyone needed help, she did.'

While bumping through the crowded Madras streets in a three-wheel auto rickshaw, dodging bullock carts and swarms of bicycles, Max spotted a young crippled girl literally pulling

herself along the street on her almost raw knees. Max yelled out to the rickshaw driver to stop. He elbowed his way back through the crowd and got a reticent shopkeeper to translate while he talked to the girl. Didn't she have a *bundi board* to assist her in getting around? (A *bundi board* was a crude Indian version of a modern-day skateboard. Max had seen them being used to great affect by some of Sister Theodore's handicapped children.) Impulsively Max promised to bring her one if she came back to this same spot tomorrow. As the shopkeeper translated his promise, Max saw delight dawning over her strained face. 'That was the moment I decided to do something for the handicapped in India,' Max said later.

More than two decades have passed since that incident. Sister Theodore now has a complex of buildings and sheltered workshops, known as 'Mithra', on that drained swamp land. An extensive 'family' of disabled Indian children have found shelter, medical help, newly learnt skills, dignity and love at Mithra. A small farm with a dairy, chicken shed and vegetable garden also thrive at Mithra as well as workshops for carpentry, steel-work, weaving and mat-making. Children who come into Sister Theodore's care are medically rehabilitated and then trained in a trade so that they can later function independently as young adults.

Max never rested in his efforts to support Mithra, plus various projects in India and other developing countries. On his return from India Max formed the charitable organisation 'Australind Children's Fund Inc.', with the specific aim of helping children in the Third World. A firm principle was that all money raised or donated for Australind would go to overseas children in need. Max soon inspired a network of generous givers and volunteers in the district of Victor Harbor, and even further afield, to work tirelessly for Australind.

In the first two decades since Max first went to India, Australind had \$250,000 go through its books supporting various projects for children in India, but also providing

emergency relief in numerous countries such as Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Turkey, Somalia and North Korea. Not a cent has been spent on administrative or other costs incurred by Australind's many dedicated members, except for inescapable bank charges and now the GST. The return trip made by Max to India to check on the cattle and Mithra, and further trips made by Peter and Max's second daughter Kathryn, have all been at their own expense.



Something of Max's father lingered on in him. The sitting room where we chatted over a cup of tea had an oil painting hanging on the wall of a team of Clydesdale horses at work. Out in the paddocks there was a team of massive Clydesdale, Max's pride and joy. He had bred three of them himself and broken them into harness to pull the drays and carts that he lovingly restored over the years. But Max even had to share his hobby. He often welcomed groups of school children for a 'day on the farm', and entertained them with a ride on the horse-drawn dray. Since 1994, together with his Australind volunteers, he ran biennial 'farm fairs', opening his farm to the public. Pony rides, cart rides, shearing and horse-shoeing demonstrations and stalls raised thousands of dollars for Australind.

Aboriginal artefacts line several shelves in the Gale's living room, accompanied by striking photographs taken by Kathryn of Aboriginal children. Both daughters worked as teacher-linguists, developing literature and curriculum materials for bilingual programs in Aboriginal schools in the 'Top End' and Central Australia.

Their involvement in Aboriginal affairs is hardly surprising. Before they moved to the farm, Max and Aileen had adopted Paul, a six month old Aboriginal baby. They were told by the babies home in Adelaide that Paul had been given up for

adoption by his mother in Alice Springs. The Gales have loved him and raised him as their own. Paul grew to be taller and stronger-built than any of his adoptive family, bearing the stature of his ancestors. But also some of their tragedy. The full extent of that tragedy only became clear as the truth of assimilation policies have been revealed after Paul returned to his people, with the encouragement of the Gales, and heard the truth of his forced removal years before.

For Max it was a double pain. As a family, though acting out of compassion, they had unwittingly participated in an inhumane system based on racial bias. Max felt compelled to write to Prime Minister Howard, pleading with him to apologise to the 'Stolen Generations'. He agonised as he read the bureaucratic reply from the PM's office, coldly refusing his request.

As we spoke Max's grief did not stop with his family. With a lump in his throat he asked what more he could have done for a young girl he knew who had suicided. 'Should I have made the time to contact her, and talk with her?' he muttered. Then his concerns moved elsewhere – was there some new development effort in India, or elsewhere, needing support? The letters on his desk revealed a wide range of projects absorbing his action and concern.

'Why do you do it?' I asked him.

Max's weathered face broke into an embarrassed grin. 'I reckon one of the "gifts of the Spirit" that's a bit overlooked is compassion. Perhaps I've been given some of that.'



On 26 August 1998, I found myself joining Max's family and friends in a final farewell to him. Each of us took a handful of earth, brought from his beloved dairy farm, and dropped it on his coffin. Max had collapsed quite suddenly, at 68, two weeks after he was diagnosed as having lymphoma. At his funeral Mary-Anne

told us about Max's amazingly cheerful and positive attitude. While waiting in a wheelchair outside the hospital, ready for his next oncologist appointment, he grinned at a young man sitting next to him, also wheelchair bound, and joked 'We're all revved up and nowhere to go!'

Now he has gone. But his influence lives on.

What did his life demonstrate? What impact did one blue-eyed farmer from Back Valley really have on the gigantic challenges of India? Forever optimistic, Max would have been the first to remind us that from little things, big things grow. If Max's 165 cows bred 1,000 high-yielding cattle within 10 years, how many four-legged progeny of Max's initiative are walking around India today?

Likewise, the milk of human kindness spawns its own progeny in a thousand unquantifiable ways. Compassion is only one key. But without compassion authenticated in the day-to-day actions of those who work for change, all the programs, policies, dollars and expertise in the world will not touch the problems we face.

'Not suffering, but love is on the increase,' Mother Teresa used to argue. Max was part of that increase.

FOUR

War vets go to Tokyo with koalas

RUNNING BESIDE OUR UNSETTLING HISTORY of European colonisation of Aboriginal lands and mistreatment of Aboriginal people is the uneasy relationship we have with that mass of humanity to our north. Trade, travel and communications in our globalised world have established a new reality, not all of it welcome. While the old 'White Australia' has gone for ever, restless ghosts of the past – from the Burma railway to the Ballarat goldfields – still trouble our national psyche and distort our politics.

For many Japan is a focus of this unease. And while some Australians may fiercely deny that the prime minister or government should say 'sorry' to Aboriginal people for past wrongs, some have at the same time made repeated demands that present day Japanese leaders should apologise for what their predecessors did in World War II.

Have the Japanese ever asked for forgiveness? Well, yes, some actually have. The first time was in response to an approach by some unknown soldiers, ex-servicemen and women who had felt the wounds of war personally. As a matter of fact many Japanese and Australians – including some in the RSL

(Returned Servicemen's League) – have honourably sought to heal the wounds between the two nations; some of them within a decade of that horrible war.

When Japanese Ambassador Narita came to our home for dinner, for instance, and later presented bronze crosses at the United Church in Darwin, his actions were adding some small impetus to a consistent policy and process, working towards mutual respect.

Some of those I write about in this chapter I have not known intimately. But their stories form part of a legacy which shaped my world view. Elsie, with whom the story starts, believed enough in the continuing task of 'bridge-building' to have used some of her inheritance to provide financial support for several of us voluntary workers who shared her commitment. Our debt to her is multi-dimensional.



On the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, barely a kilometre from Federal Parliament, a row of Japanese cherry trees is flourishing – a gift from the Japanese government 'on the occasion of the visit of Prime Minister Ohira to Australia, January 1980,' according to a small bronze plaque on the site.

The cherry trees go almost unnoticed midst the hurly-burly of politics and tourist traffic of Canberra. Why shouldn't they? Japan's prime trading relationship with Australia is accepted without question. And what could be a more appropriate symbol of friendship than cherry trees?

But once before, in 1955, when Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama offered a gift of twelve cherry trees the reaction was markedly different. Japan had no Embassy in Australia then. Post-war trade had resumed; but that was in spite of considerable hostility and suspicion towards all things Japanese, inflamed by raw memories of the walking skeletons

who returned from the hell of Japanese prison camps and of the thousands who never did return.

Hatoyama's offer was made to four Australian ex-servicemen who met him in Japan on a private goodwill mission. He asked them to deliver the trees with a note for Prime Minister Bob Menzies delicately expressing his 'earnest wish that friendly relations between your good country and mine will flower and bloom as the cherry trees blossom'. Before leaving Tokyo the Australians sent a message to Allan Griffith, a junior member of Menzies' staff whom they knew, seeking a reaction to the offer. When Griffith passed on the offer to his superior in the PM's department, it provoked an angry response: 'Have they taken leave of their senses? How can the PM accept a gift like that?' (Griffith's story follows in the next chapter).

The trees were brought back, nevertheless, and quietly destroyed, probably by Customs. If they did not take root in Australia, something of a new relationship between Australia and Japan had – through that visit and through the persistent work of a small number of Australian ex-servicemen and women who planted seeds of healing when wounds were still festering. Theirs is a story almost as unknown as those cherry trees.

For Sydney-sider Elsie Campbell and her family, those wounds began in 1942. It was a dark year for all Australians. With the fall of Singapore thousands of British and Australian servicemen were taken prisoner. The Japanese forces continued sweeping down with terrifying speed to Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and right to the northern shores of Australia. It took the combined might and sacrifice of the ANZAC and US forces to turn them back.

The first blow for the Campbell family came in February with news that *HMAS Perth* was sunk, with Elsie's youngest brother Max on board. For six months they had no word of him. Many had died in action. Then to their great relief, the Red Cross brought news that he was among the *Perth*'s

survivors who were assigned to a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in Thailand, near the bridge over the River Kwai. Only later did they learn that Max and tens of thousands of other prisoners were toiling like slaves, hacking their way through the jungle to build the infamous Burma railroad. It cost one human life for every sleeper laid, so the reckoning goes.

Whatever comfort they got knowing Max was alive was shattered a few months later with the news that Elsie's other brother, Doug, had been accidentally killed while preparing for El Alamein. For two years the only solace the Campbells had was a rare post-card with a few lines from Max.

Elsie herself was in uniform, a volunteer in the Australian Women's Army. A good athlete, she became an officer in the recreation program. It was through an Army colleague in Perth that she gleaned the first real news of Max and got a glimpse of the hell that POWs were enduring. Despite the horrifying conditions on the Burma railroad, 10,000 prison camp survivors had been decreed 'fit' enough to be transported to Japan to work in labor-starved factories. An Australian seaman, Arthur Bancroft, had been with Max Campbell and 1,300 POWs, crammed into the holds of a Japanese freighter when it was torpedoed in late 1944 while trying to run the American blockade of Japan. Bancroft was among the 900 prisoners rescued by American submarines. Max Campbell was not.

Elsie's father had been able to come to terms with the death of his son, Doug. But he walked out of the house without a word when Elsie passed on the news from Bancroft, and did not return till late at night. Then their hopes were boosted when a Japanese radio broadcast named Max as one of 136 prisoners picked up by Japanese vessels and transported to Japan. It was a vain hope. Three months of hard labor on starvation rations in a bitter Japanese winter took their toll on Able Seaman Max Campbell. When American forces liberated 540 British and 66 Australian surviving prisoners in Japan half a year later, Campbell was not among them.

Mr Campbell's grieving – like that of many Australians – turned to anger and then to hatred against a whole nation. These were feelings that time alone could not hope to heal.

In 1949, two years before the Peace Treaty with Japan was signed, Elsie had to make her own peace. She had gone to Switzerland, to a re-fitted old hotel in the mountain village of Caux in which MRA had begun holding annual conferences. She was drawn by an international assembly of people who were working to restore relations between people as well as between governments after the devastation of war. 'Peace is not an idea but people becoming different,' was their approach.

By the time Elsie Campbell arrived in 1949 thousands of French, British and Germans had begun to forge their own peace through these personal encounters. Elsie had believed in what was happening at Caux enough to resign her job with the National Fitness Council, invest in the long journey to Europe and to join the program there for several months. What she had not anticipated, however, was the presence of several Japanese already in Caux. When a speaker suggested everyone from the Pacific region come to the platform, Elsie turned and walked out. It was too much – to stand alongside Japanese would be disloyal to her family.

As she turned her back on the conference hall a woman from Burma, who knew what Japanese occupation was like, confronted her in the corridor: 'Elsie, you have come all this way to try and make things better in the world. Surely you are not going to give up so easily?' Elsie was struck dumb. Her Burmese friend looked her in the eye and, with a bluntness that the moment demanded, suggested they pray together. Elsie could not resist. In a moment it was done. The Pacific group were still gathering on the platform – Elsie hurried to join them. As fate would have it she found herself standing right next to a Japanese girl and her parents. They spoke to each other. Acting on some inner impulse Elsie asked her if she would like to play tennis. A friendship began.

Within a few days Elsie's interaction with Japanese people moved to another level when a plane-load of 76 arrived from Tokyo, including Members of the Japanese Diet, the Governors of seven prefectures (provinces) and the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Such a distinguished group had not been out of Japan since the War, and came with the endorsement of General Douglas MacArthur.

Elsie was asked if she would join a group to make arrangements for their visit. Japanese food was carefully prepared. A Japanese flag was flying, alongside those of other nations – under American occupation their flag could not be flown in their homeland. She watched the faces of these Japanese as they arrived and were greeted by an international crowd aiming to make them feel welcomed 'back into the family of nations'. A union leader from Osaka told the assembly: 'Our nation... has caused enormous suffering. When we left Tokyo we fully expected to be treated as enemies... but we were overwhelmed by the warmth of the welcome we received.'

Elsie noted also the careful planning that had gone into their program. There were meetings with French and Germans who had worked through their animosity to find forgiveness, and with political leaders who were struggling to rebuild their ruined countries. They heard from managers and shop-floor workers who were addressing class conflicts. One of the Diet Members in the group was Yasuhiro Nakasone who, 33 years later, became Japan's Prime Minister. 'The Japanese representatives who heard these witnesses had many doubts and conflicts,' Nakasone wrote to a Japanese paper. 'However, the ice in the Japanese hearts was melted by the international harmony in this great current of world history moving through America and Europe.'

As they left Caux the Mayor of Hiroshima presented his hosts with a small wooden cross carved from a tree that had withstood the atom blast in his city. 'The one dream and hope

left to our surviving citizens is to re-establish our city as a pattern for peace,' he said, describing the vision he was to implement in his city.

The Japanese returned home via America. In Washington, DC, they set a precedent by appearing in both houses of Congress. On both occasions their senior spokesmen publicly apologised, saying they were 'sincerely sorry for Japan's big mistake... We ask your forgiveness and help.' The *New York Times* in an editorial commented: 'For a moment one could see out of the present darkness into years when all men may be brothers.' That was early 1950.



Sitting in the gallery of the US Congress, a visiting Australian Parliamentary delegation heard that Japanese apology 'in the most intense silence I have ever encountered... It was history being made,' as one of them put it. Among them was Les Norman who had served with the battle-scarred 8th Division before spending most of the War in Singapore's Changi jail. 'They were the first Japanese I had met since the POW camps five and a half years before,' said Norman. 'I was stunned to hear them admitting that they had been responsible for the sufferings and hatred of the Pacific war. When I discovered that they had all been at Caux I decided to go there myself to investigate the answer they had found.'

In December 1954, four years after that apology in the US Congress, another Federal MP Gil Duthie was 'deeply moved by the scope, the power, the challenge' of an MRA-organised conference he attended in Washington, DC. Duthie told the assembly that what he had heard had convinced him 'it is important to think more about the next generation than the next election.' A Tasmanian Labor Party member Duthie survived 12 elections as it happened, serving 29 years in Federal Parliament and becoming Chief Whip of the Australian Labor

Party. A Methodist Minister, Duthie had been attracted to MRA's emphasis that Christianity has to be lived out in business, education, in parliaments and national affairs; and that 'practical Christianity through changed lives could change situations, decisions and nations.'

Like Elsie Campbell, Duthie had lost his brother Stanley, in 1943 working on the Burma railway. And like Elsie he was confronted by his meeting with Japanese at that Washington conference. He knew what his Christianity taught on forgiveness. Gathering courage he made a public apology to a Japanese Senator for the 'years of bitterness' over his brother's death. The Senator responded by inviting Duthie and Jim Coulter, an ex-RAAF pilot who had made the trip to Washington with Duthie, to visit Japan.

Back in Australia Duthie and Coulter sought the counsel of their friends and decided to accept the invitation. 'I was overawed by such an assignment,' wrote Duthie. 'Had the invitation come earlier, I could not have accepted it because of my twisted attitudes to that country.'

Many ex-Servicemen contributed to finance the trip. They also collected funds to buy a car for the use of MRA people working in Japan on their program of human reconstruction. Elsie Campbell went to Tasmania to be with Jennie Duthie and their two daughters while Gil was in Japan.

In March 1955, two months after returning from Washington, Duthie and Coulter were on their way to Tokyo. They were joined by Les Norman, the ex-Changi prisoner-of-war who had heard the Japanese apology in the American Congress. While Duthie was a Labor Member, Norman had been Liberal Party leader in the Victorian State Parliament. In Japan they met up with a fourth Australian ex-serviceman, Stan Shepherd (who was then working with MRA in Japan and whose story comes later). Their Japanese hosts put them to work during 'two weeks of constant motion', according to Duthie's diary. The range of people they

met reads like a Japanese *Who's Who* – the Finance and Foreign Ministers, parliamentarians of all major parties, the head of the new Defence Forces, the Chief Justice, the chairmen of the National Railways and of Japan Airlines, the governors of major banks and directors of Japan's big industrial houses like Mitsui and Sumitomo, as well as leaders of huge and powerful unions.

Within a day of their arrival, they were escorted into the office of Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama, an elderly gentleman of Japanese politics who fixed his gaze on the Australians through large round glasses. Duthie and his party opened the interview by saying they wished to apologise. Immediately the word was translated Hatoyama interrupted, saying it was he who should be apologising. The Australians were not just being diplomatic. They were not apologising for anything during the War years, they said, but for what happened during the period leading up to war. Australia's policies of narrow self-interest in denying Japan trade in the 1930s had helped cause the reaction which brought Japan's militarists to power at a time when moderates were desperate for economic cooperation with other democracies. For this they were sincerely sorry.

In recent times Japanese have shown a particular fascination for koalas. The Australians presented Hatoyama with possibly one of the first koalas to become domiciled in Japan – albeit a stuffed toy koala. Hatoyama placed it on his large Prime Ministerial desk and said it would be kept there as symbol of their new friendship.

Japan was, even then, buying 80 per cent of its wool from Australia, perhaps a more substantial symbol of the growing friendship than koalas. Undeniably the need of trade has been the engine to forge the peace-time relationship between the two countries. But this was 1955 and trade was more a matter of survival than of friendship. The Australians introduced a new element. As one senior Japanese MP told them at one

meeting: 'I fought against Australians and tonight I apologise to these Australians who have come so far to see us. I am happier in what these men have bought us than in any economic aid Australia could have given.'

Such sentiments went beyond Japanese politeness. These people were struggling with the reconstruction of a ruined country. In one interview two Socialist union leaders talked with Duthie and his companions though they would not talk to each other; their rivalry had seriously split their four million membership. Duthie spoke frankly of the political and ideological forces which at that moment were splitting his Australian Labor Party. As a fellow socialist Duthie said it was 'wishful thinking to imagine that a new heaven and a new earth would necessarily come from changing the economic system'. What good was it blaming the Capitalists 'if the same raw forces of greed, selfish cunning and prejudice were allowed to wreck socialism in the new Japan?' he asked. The common need was for 'the ideology of a change of heart'.

Of all their encounters, the one that touched Duthie most was a meeting with 30 war widows. In most cases their husbands had been executed after war crimes trials. 'We are despised by many Japanese because our husbands were declared war criminals,' said their spokesperson, telling of their struggle to survive. 'We will never forget your visit today.' Duthie, the Christian minister, spoke of God's love for them and His power to help rebuild their lives. Many Japanese had shared their spiritual discoveries with a frankness that was a revelation to the Reverend Duthie. 'Christ is universal but the way Christianity is lived is often less than that,' he told their new friends at the end of their visit.

'We said our goodbyes with much sadness,' records Duthie. 'Our lives had been enriched by a God-given experience among people wanting to be accepted... and desperately needing a spiritual renaissance in their long haul back from stark militarism, devastating defeat and colossal material losses.' It

was, he wrote in his autobiography, the most rewarding experience of his three decades in politics.

Back in Australia the three were given ten minutes with Prime Minister Bob Menzies, which stretched to thirty. They handed him Hatoyama's letter with the offer of the cherry trees. And Duthie presented several recommendations, suggesting an on-going interchange of union leaders, business people, parliamentarians and students to sustain the building of bridges. Within 15 months the first official Australian parliamentary delegation made a goodwill visit to Japan. A few months later Menzies himself went, the first Australian Prime Minister to visit after the War. The fact that Duthie, a Labor Party whip, had been first to go to Japan helped remove the government's approach to Japan from party partisan attack.

If Duthie, Norman and Coulter had done nothing else, they were ahead of the pack. Perhaps, in retrospect, it appears reasonable that Australian MPs should have been nurturing relations with the future economic giant of Asia. But the tensions that surrounded the Australian visit of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi barely two years later indicate just how far ahead of the pack they were.



By 1957 Japan's industrial production was already outstripping pre-war records. Prime Minister Kishi decided to visit Asian and Pacific countries to expand the urgently-needed overseas markets. But many of these potential trading partners had not yet signed the peace treaty with Japan, let alone formed any commercial agreements. Two Japanese women – including one who had translated for the three Australians – went to Kishi to warn him that it was unrealistic to talk trade without first trying to break through the bitterness caused by Japan's past.

Australia was the last and longest visit of Kishi's nine-nation tour. Even before he arrived a storm hit the headlines over his

wish to lay a wreath at the Stone of Remembrance at the Australian War Memorial. Ex-servicemen from the 8th Division bitterly opposed a Japanese Prime Minister going to the War Memorial. But Sir George Holland, national president of the Returned Servicemen's League (RSL), refused to go along with the protests. Just months before RSL policy had shifted to affirming the need for better relations. 'Far from protesting such action we would consider an omission of the wreath-laying ceremony... a virtual insult to our war dead,' he said. And Brigadier 'Black Jack' Galleghan, former commander of the Australian Infantry in Changi POW camp, argued that 'if we suspect every motive we are surely sowing the seeds of future enmity'.

Yet with all that, a hostile crowd of 200 greeted Mr Kishi when he first arrived in Sydney. 'Put him on the Burma Road,' called out one man, who had been there. Security was exceptionally tight and Kishi was moved from his car to the hotel 'almost at a run', reported the *Sydney Morning Herald*. New South Wales Premier Cahill pointedly chose not to attend a State luncheon in Government House, sticking to his schedule of turning over the first sod of earth at a new suburban water-pumping station instead.

Menzies, who had been in Japan only six months earlier, handled the visit carefully. Significantly during his four days in Canberra Kishi was a guest of Governor-General Sir William Slim, military commander of the Burma campaign. The wreath-laying ceremony passed without serious incident – there was one silent dignified protester. But the climax was a luncheon in Kishi's honour at Parliament House attended by 250 MPs, senior civil servants and leading citizens. Though several Members of Parliament boycotted it, four of the MPs who did attend had been POWs under the Japanese.

Now, nearly 50 years later, it may be hard to imagine the atmosphere at that luncheon. 'There is something I am acutely conscious of standing here in these surroundings,' said Kishi,

the lead story of *The Canberra Times* reported. 'It is over 12 years since hostilities ceased... But notwithstanding that passage of time it is my official duty, and my personal desire, to express to the people of Australia our heartfelt sorrow for what occurred in the War.'

The apology, said the *Sydney Morning Herald* in its editorial, was made 'not abjectly but firmly - and with the full knowledge that millions would doubt his sincerity'.

Recognising both the difficulty and the necessity of his apology, the 'Japanese Prime Minister has done what he can' to cure the wounds of war, wrote the *Herald*.

On his arrival back in Tokyo Kishi himself highlighted that luncheon; and some months later wrote that 'I have myself experienced the power of honest apology... We need the statesmanship of the humble heart in order to bring sanity and peace in the affairs of men.'

Yes, trade figured in the visit. Kishi and Menzies both expressed satisfaction at the trade agreement subsequently signed. Kishi argued that Australia's imports of Japanese goods were pegged way below the value of its exports to Japan, and that 'mass unemployment and starvation cannot sustain the growth of democracy'. Decades later Japan cannot complain of starvation and unemployment; and the balance of trade is still in Australia's favour.

Prime Minister Menzies in his welcome speech at Parliament House had struck a note that in retrospect was prophetic if not ironic:

'Japan's destiny is not to be a mere cog in someone else's machine. It is to be a great power in a community of great powers... You have an important part to play, first in the Pacific and in the world and we believe that will be played in friendship with Australia and New Zealand.'



Not all Australians, of course, shared Menzies' forward-looking perspective. The feelings of an elderly woman standing on the steps of the Melbourne Town Hall protesting against Mr Kishi as he arrived are as understandable today as they were then – her son had been killed, along with 366 'Australian boys', all prisoners in Rabaul. But those sentiments contrast with the courageous actions of Australians like Elsie Campbell who, with her father, wrote to Mr Kishi thanking him for his visit.

Mr Campbell would not have been able to write that letter if healing had been a matter of time alone. Time, in fact, had hardened him. He had resisted Elsie's involvement with MRA friends in trying to create bridges of reconciliation. As a successful businessman, he was upset when she gave up a paying job to devote her time to that process. But despite himself, on a visit to Elsie in Melbourne he warmed to the hospitality of some of Elsie's MRA friends in the home where they were staying. He even offered to support their efforts with a modest gift.

The ex-serviceman to whom he handed over his cheque thanked him gratefully, but replied with a soul-searching question: could the money be used to support those Japanese working with MRA to rebuild a moral and spiritual basis for their country?

For Mr Campbell it was his moment of truth. He could no longer say 'no' – and told Elsie as they drove away that he 'felt better than he had for a long time'. The comment was doubly significant: he had cancer, and knew it. Shortly after he and Elsie wrote their letter to Mr Kishi, he died.

Almost 40 years after Max Campbell was taken prisoner, Elsie and her niece stood at his grave-side in the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Yokohama. It was a pilgrimage Elsie had long wanted to make. As they placed their tribute of white chrysanthemums on the grave, three Japanese women who had escorted them to the Cemetery waited in the

background. After a while they too approached, reverently making their own traditional offering of fruits and sweets. But then, going beyond custom, they knelt on the ground and proceeded to conduct a Japanese tea ceremony.

Some time later Elsie, back in Australia, received a letter from another Japanese friend describing her visit to the Yokohama cemetery:

'The sky was deep blue and the Australian trees looked magnificent. It was a quiet, lovely day. I noticed your brother's age - 23, and the date of his death - 20 February 1945. And when I saw the dates on the other stones, I understood and wept. As I stood there I asked your brother and all the other young men there, for forgiveness.'

The writer was Miss Tone Kimura, who had been a young translator with the Japanese delegation to Switzerland, so many years before. Elsie had shared a room with her in Caux. The letter continued: 'I worked for the Allied Forces after Japan's defeat as court interpreter for the War Crimes Trials. The trials I was assigned to were of people who had committed individual crimes, especially in our POW camps. So although I do not know the details concerning your brother, I could well imagine what he and the others there had gone through.'

After the trials, Miss Kimura - now Mrs Hirai - worked for 25 years with MRA in Japan and overseas. 'It was my international childhood, the hardships during the war years and Japan's surrender, which prompted me to dedicate my life to the cause of peace - a word which is now too lightly used. It has been with a great sense of satisfaction and gratitude that last year I was able to get my Master's Degree in International Relations from one of the most well-known universities in Japan. I mean to use it well.'

Perhaps Prime Minister Menzies' vision, after all, was more prophetic than ironic: Japan's role in creating peace in the world and Asia is yet to be fulfilled, and it needs to be done 'in friendship with Australia'. Koalas cannot feed on cherry trees.

But, as old Mr Hatoyama knew, friendship can blossom with both. With the help of forgiveness.

FIVE

No 'Yes Minister' man

THAT'S ALL VERY WELL, one might say, personal apologies plus trade pressures may have shifted relations with Japan. But how does one shift policies when there is no economic or political imperative? How to bring peace when the politics perpetuate conflict; or change the structures of a country when vested interests and popular opinion line up to keep them as they are? The next two chapters relate the stories of two Australians who tried to do just that, from two arms of government – first the public service, and then parliament.

Allan Griffith served 30 years in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, advising six Prime Ministers on foreign affairs, helping to shape and implement policies on issues as diverse as decolonisation in Southern Africa to preserving the Great Barrier Reef, from trade with Japan to creating a Common Fund for Third World commodities.

In those first years in Canberra after our return from India, Jean and I were neighbours of the Griffiths and spent time on weekends chewing over national and international affairs. Looking back, I think he knocked the stuffing out of some of my superficial theories and trite judgements about Australia and the world that I had formed after nearly two decades overseas. When Bob Hawke succeeded Fraser at the Lodge, Griffith left

government service and, with his wife Mary, moved to Melbourne. For a year they generously allowed us – with our two young children, and still without a home of our own – to house-sit their Curtin residence. Allan continued for some months as consultant in foreign affairs and would fly in for days at a time to stay with us.

He was nothing like our idea of a career bureaucrat. Certainly not a 'Yes Minister' man.

'It is impossible to paint Griffith in the dreary colours of a senior public servant,' wrote Sydney Morning Herald columnist Peter Bowers. 'In a profession that prides itself on anonymity and conformity Griffo, as he is usually referred to, is a character, an individualist. A crumpled dumpy figure, he is an untidy dresser with an immaculately tidy intellect.'

That intellect defied description. I remember one hot Saturday afternoon with Allan watching a Test Match on television with the sound turned off ('Who needs some commentator endlessly telling you what's obvious?') while a Verdi opera reverberated off the walls. Allan, with shorts and T-shirt gracing his ample figure, was scanning policy briefing papers strewn across the lounge floor. And in between sporadic action on the screen and numerous cups of tea was making incisive one-liner comments on a range of issues of national importance. He could be caustic, but never savage, even privately. He kept us entertained with his irreverent parodies of conventional political wisdom, chuckling as though amused by the whole business of government. Then suddenly he would become deadly serious on some issue that really mattered, asking me what I thought, and expecting me to offer a well-informed, considered opinion.

Griffith made his mark as a public servant – 'his fingerprints' were on some major international agreements, wrote a member of Fraser's staff. He continued to do so for two decades after leaving the Department of Prime Minister, working away with an un-retiring passion for a different paradigm to govern the

way the world settles its wars and conflicts. His ultimate contribution was a scholarly study written 'to extend the frontiers of understanding of peace-building diplomacy'. It was published four days after Griffith died of cancer, in November 1998. It was a passion which had begun in him half a century before, as a young man in uniform – in the middle of perhaps the greatest conflict in history.



Somewhere in the jungles of Borneo, young Allan Griffith started studying algebra. Why would a school drop-out from the back-blocks of Queensland's Bungle Mountains take to studying algebra with World War II still raging around him? Life expectancy in the Pacific theatre, where Griffith had served three years as a RAAF wireless operator, was not considered very high. Of his five closest friends only two survived. By the time of their landing in Borneo, with Japanese forces in retreat, Griffith decided his chances of survival had improved somewhat and that he should 'acquire a bit more learning'.

He had not got much learning up to that point. Born in Toogoolawah in the Queensland bush, he was the youngest of eight children of a butcher who supplied meat to timber-cutters felling the giant bunya pine in the upper Brisbane Valley. His early education was at a one-teacher school in a nearby saw-milling town called Jimna, where his father was a pioneer union activist in the meat industry. 'We were very poor,' said Griffith, 'but we generally had potatoes to eat, unlike some others who ate bunya nuts because they couldn't afford potatoes.'

His schooling took a leap forward when he won a scholarship to 'Churchie', Brisbane's prestigious Church of England Grammar School. But he did not fit with sons of the social set and left as soon as he could. Returning to the bush, he

milked cows and harvested wheat on the Darling Downs, worked with a plumber and then helped at the local grocery store in Jimna. Until War came...

Young Griffith was no doubt marked by his father's unionist instincts. Though an enlisted man in the ranks, he argued that it was a mistake to commit an Australian division to rooting the Japanese out of Bougainville – with horrific casualties – while MacArthur was pursuing his island hopping strategy further North. 'I thought the people running the show at the political level were fighting the wrong kind of battle,' he said. 'A very elementary idea formed: that if I ever got through this thing I would have to take responsibility for what my nation does and that I'd have some say in it.' And so he got hold of textbooks and in between the action started studying. By War's end he had matriculated.

Griffith applied for Australia's first course in political science, at Melbourne University. It fitted with his idea of 'having a say' in the affairs of government. He graduated with second class honours in international relations and law, and had his sights set on political journalism. But Sir Fredric Eggleston, a respected elder of Australian politics who had written one of the political science textbooks, spotted him as likely talent for the public service. Eggleston wrote to Prime Minister Bob Menzies and to head of the PM's department recommending Griffith.



For three decades Allan Griffith served in the PM's office – and then, for another decade, engaged in international issues on his own terms at the United Nations in New York, in Paris, Phnom Penh and elsewhere. Then, once again, Griffith decided to 'get a bit more learning'. This time it was not in the jungles of Borneo but at Oriel College, Oxford. Griffith's M.Litt. thesis, which was completed in 1992, was a detailed

comparison of the peace negotiations and settlements in Zimbabwe and Namibia – and won him an Oxford University prize in the area of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. 'On numerous occasions he engaged the attention of our company in the Senior Common Room in Oriel with his burning passion for peace-making among peoples and nations,' wrote Professor Ernest Nicholson, Provost of Oriel at that time. 'But he also taught us how arduous and non-stop is the quest for peace.'

Not bad for a butcher's son from a one-teacher school in the Queensland bush.

His Oxford dissertation provided the basis for a wider study, published through New Cherwell Press, titled *Conflict and Resolution – Peace-building through the ballot box in Zimbabwe, Namibia and Cambodia*. Griffith had been involved in all three situations. As Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's chief foreign affairs adviser, he had acted as his emissary helping to lay the foundations for the Commonwealth agreements which established the Lancaster House talks and ended Rhodesia's civil war. He was an official observer at the election which brought the transition to a new nation, Zimbabwe. Then in 1989 he and Mary were in Namibia when the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435 (the framework for a peaceful settlement) was in its early stages. Four months later he was invited to Paris by some of the Cambodian parties involved in peace talks to end 20 years of war in their country. Griffith found the Cambodians largely unaware of the UN process under way in Namibia, although it was a parallel situation. The Cambodian leaders seemed unconvinced by his arguments that a Namibia-type engagement by the UN could work in their conflict. But ultimately that approach was adopted under the United Nations plan which brought the transition. Throughout the process Griffith helped the Cambodians give edge to their strategy for peace.

The common feature of all three settlements, writes Griffith in his book, was a 'transitional system' which temporarily displaced a discredited government, opening the way for a ceasefire and 'the implementation of agreed arrangements of legitimisation'. Or, as the cover blurb puts it, building 'formulas for settlement where... the ballot box displaces the gun and the mine-field... It is the stuff of creating a world where the culture of peace replaces the horror of war.'

That was what interested Lt Gen John Sanderson who launched the book in Melbourne two months after Griffith's death. Sanderson had been commander of UN forces in Cambodia and was Chief of the Australian Army, 1995-98. Surveying the 'brutalising reality that confronts us in places like the Congo, Rwanda, Kosovo, Bougainville', the General found himself 'humbled' and 'optimistic' reading Griffith's book because of the way he establishes 'a coherent and cohesive case for international diplomacy to pursue reconciliation'.

At the Oxford launch Robert O'Neill, the Chichele Professor of History of War, called it 'a splendid book from a remarkable mind... Allan's central thesis in the book is that open democracy will provide legitimacy out of which can come order and good government.'

Professor O'Neill, who is an Australian, first got to know Griffith through the open forums of the Australian Institute of International Affairs in Canberra. Unlike many public servants who would 'shelter behind their desks and not venture out to debate with people... Allan never minded. He always gave as good as he got'. According to O'Neill, Griffith did not make a lot of friends in the Public Service. 'Because he was fearless and put his own stamp on things, a lot of other people in Foreign Affairs in Canberra thought Allan was someone who had to be contained.' Griffith would vet submissions from the Department of Foreign Affairs before they went to Cabinet and would sometimes write caustic notes on them, which the

PM would then pick up and use as ammunition himself. O'Neill talks rather colourfully of the public service being 'full of power-hungry monsters who stalk the corridors with long knives'. The fact that Griffith survived 30 years 'indicates that he kept the confidence of the prime ministers' he served under.

'It reflects a bloke not clawing for promotion,' said Kim Beazley, Leader of the Opposition at the time he launched the book in Canberra. 'He was prepared to sacrifice opportunities (for promotions) in other departments in order to ensure that the views he had were being infused in the mind of the Prime Minister of the day.' Beazley argued this was distinctive to Griffith: 'Allan always wanted to make sure that his view was being inserted into the process' even if it meant that 'he put his head into a place where it could be kicked off, and kept it there quite routinely.'

Perhaps Griffith's 'passion' for peace-building was learned the hard way... in the public service! Or even earlier...



Griffith's first taste of political battles began soon after World War II, virtually on his first day at Melbourne University. Walking into the Student Union he picked up *Farrago*, the university newspaper. His eye fell on some headlines describing Stalin as a great leader whose policies would be good for Australia.

'We didn't go to war to come back to this,' was his gut reaction. 'The fight against fascism and military dictatorships had been very strong in my generation.'

He began linking up with others 'of democratic conviction', and together they contested elections for the Student Representative Council (SRC). Their aim was that 'every philosophic view' should have a fair go among the student body. Griffith, with an admirable touch of political realism, ran with the slogan 'If you don't vote for me, I won't get on.'

Get on he did, along with a number of his friends. He was appointed co-editor of *Farrago* with Lindsay Thompson, who later became Premier of Victoria, and with historian-in-the-making Geoffrey Blainey as sports editor.

Griffith also found support amongst a group of students who were developing moral and spiritual convictions through MRA. They would meet often in the flat of a young faculty member, poet Michael Thwaites. One in that group, a science student called Mary Ramsay, was there because she had been intrigued by a book called *Innocent Men*. Her mother had borrowed it from the library thinking it was a detective story. Mary, an avid reader, found instead that it was a racy account of people who had day-to-day experiences of being led by God.

Mary's family were all staunch Presbyterians which, Mary says, didn't stop you sinning, just enjoying it. She was scared of making any serious commitment to God, thinking it meant becoming a missionary or something of the like. However, the notion that 'God had a creative plan for my life which I could follow step by step appealed to me because it meant that I didn't have to worry about whether I would succeed and whether I would get married.'

Some years later, Mary did get married – to Allan. But there seems to have been little romantic attachment during the years at Melbourne University. If anything they were too busy as a group getting involved in undergraduate life to be absorbed in each other. Mary's family, dubious at first about her new-found convictions, joked that MRA stood for 'Mary's Reckless Adventure'.

To the independent-minded young Allan Griffith, the concept that you could have 'an intelligent relationship with a spiritual authority beyond human concepts and that you could actually co-operate with the Almighty in finding life's purpose made more sense than a lot of religion'.

After graduation Mary went into teaching, a career she followed throughout life. Allan, mentored by Sir Fredric

Eggleston, went to Canberra to work for Prime Minister Menzies.

Menzies, as Griffith remembers him, was an aloof person with 'a core of Australianism' in him. An able administrator he chose his top public servants well. 'Stand them up on their hind legs and they would tell you where they thought Australia ought to be heading,' commented Griffith. Menzies did not seem to care what political views they held. He was more interested in their integrity and specialist skills. He saw the public service 'as a resource to be husbanded, not threatened or attacked', said Griffith.

No-one was assigned to international affairs 'when Griffith joined the staff. He dug in, studying issues like the decolonisation of Malaya and the emerging conflict in Indo-China. Despite his obvious loyalty to Britain, Menzies deliberately began to shift the focus of foreign policy towards Asia, noted Griffith. Before that could happen, a more enlightened immigration policy was essential. One of Menzies' cabinet, Harold Holt, as Immigration Minister begun the process. As Prime Minister, Holt took a leap forward by expunging the racially-based White Australia Policy from the statute books. The swing towards new alignments was dramatic. At times too much so. Griffith was aghast when Holt pronounced his 'All the way with LBJ' policy of unquestioned support for President Johnson's America: 'The situation was much more complicated than that.'

Under Prime Ministers John Gorton and William McMahon, Griffith rose to seniority in the department. But he was on the outer during the government of Gough Whitlam, who brought his own inner circle of advisers with him and who saw Griffith as tainted by years of service to Liberal Prime Ministers.

During an official trip Whitlam and Griffith talked at length, waiting for their plane at Kuala Lumpur airport. Whitlam evidently warmed to Griffith who, for his part,

regarded Whitlam as someone who had 'a vision for Australia – and if you've got leaders with vision the rest will follow.' One person who did *not* follow Whitlam's vision was the conservative Queensland premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, who regarded Canberra's 'interference' in his State's affairs with suspicion and hostility. On such sensitive issues as mineral exploration of the Barrier Reef and its treatment of Aboriginal communities, Griffith became Canberra's emissary in Brisbane. A native-born Queenslander, he was at least given a hearing.

He applied his mind to the border dispute between Queensland and Papua New Guinea to its north, a country which was about to become independent. Queensland claimed the Torres Strait Islands and all hell would break loose if they were forced to surrender that claim. Whitlam laid the groundwork to take the dispute to the International Court of Justice but Griffith saw that a Court ruling could leave both parties aggrieved. When government changed and Malcolm Fraser moved into the Lodge, Griffith convinced him to go for a negotiated settlement. It took Griffith a year of bargaining before the parties agreed to an environmentally-protected zone shared by the traditional peoples in the Torres Strait.

Bjelke-Petersen christened Griffith 'Canberra's Ambassador to Queensland'. When the treaty was finally signed, Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock sent Griffith a copy with a note: 'Its successful conclusion owes much to your efforts.'

'A trouble shooter with a silencer. Griffith never goes off bang,' wrote *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Peter Bowers in 1982. 'Part of his negotiating strength is that he manages to get on with people who can't get on with each other.'



But Griffith was much more than a trouble-shooter. As his Oxford thesis showed, his interest was the design of principled foreign policy and the formulation of agreements to implement

those principles. Yet he was realistic enough to see that it was never that simple. He quoted Henry Kissinger's observation that, in making major international decisions, you only ever have a small portion of the information you need, but the decision has to be taken anyway. 'Good politicians need good intuition,' said Kissinger. 'The decision-maker doesn't have the advantage of the historian.'

For Griffith it was more than intuition. It was linked with personal beliefs which inevitably 'affect your judgement'. At the heart of his belief system was the idea that, while you may be in the hands of forces which are unknowable, that can be 'matched by the confidence that what is unknowable to you may be knowable to a greater mind than yours: to the mind of God.' The Christian faith, he said in that *Sydney Morning Herald* interview, 'gives you a sane reference point in a tumultuous world.'

Whether intuition or faith, for Griffith that meant being attentive to the concerns of people and details as much as the big picture. Whether in personal matters or in an international crisis, 'important turning points are often at the margins'. He believed that small things often tip big matters either towards disaster or towards success. Once the dynamic of a hopeful trend is established, other factors come to light to support that dynamic. 'So one has to be sensitive to perceive what is happening at the margins and what can effect that fine balance.'

When Griffith spoke of his life and work in the PM's department, it was full of such incidents – small details apparently at the margins of events which were instrumental in swinging the outcome of national or international issues. He could anticipate the arguments, sense the atmospherics and then with a few words come out with a constructive analysis of what it was all about. 'Griffith's importance to (Prime Minister) Fraser is that he can take a rough idea, produced instinctively by Fraser, and turn it into reasoned policy,

projecting Australia to the world with an Australian perspective,' wrote Bowers in the *Sydney Morning Herald* interview.

Economic justice for millions in the developing world increasingly absorbed Griffith at the height of his career under Malcolm Fraser. 'The North-South dialogue was just being shaped and there was a spirit of confrontation in the United Nations over the exploitation of Third World resources,' Griffith remembered. 'Australia had to decide whether to take a Western view which poured cold water on the social/economic Third World claims or try to create a diplomatic environment which would sustain interdependence.' Whitlam's foreign policy had been sensitive to Third World needs, creating an expectation that Australia would be fair and independently minded. Fraser recognised the importance of this and took it further. In 1978, under Fraser, Australia was the first Western nation to break with the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) in its opposition to the creation of a Common Fund to stabilise prices of Third World commodities – a benchmark commitment to the South.

The North-South dialogue drew Fraser and Griffith into one other major issue in the late Seventies: the civil war in the rebellious British colony of Rhodesia. By 1978 some 90,000 combatants were under arms both inside Rhodesia and in the 'front-line' black African states. Casualties – which reached 25,000 dead by the end of the war – were rapidly mounting. Successive attempts to bring peace over four years had failed.

In December of that year Fraser and his advisers were in Jamaica with Prime Minister Michael Manley and other Third World leaders, discussing the Common Fund for primary products. In the process Fraser developed a working relationship with black Commonwealth leaders – like Manley and President Obasanjo of Nigeria – and was sensitised to their concerns over the Rhodesian crisis.

Six months later Margaret Thatcher swept into power in Britain, promising to recognise the 'Internal Settlement', a government led by a black African, Bishop Muzowera, but effectively under the control of former Prime Minister Ian Smith and the white Rhodesians. Fraser realised that would provoke only more opposition from the black African leaders, particularly those in the 'front-line States' where guerilla forces were based. It would prolong the bloody six-year war.

Griffith was still negotiating the Torres Strait border issue with Queensland's Premier Bjelke-Petersen when he was told to come to a Sunday-evening meeting at the PM's Lodge to discuss Rhodesia. On his way into Church that morning, Griffith bumped into the British High Commissioner getting out of his car. Griffith asked if his government was about to make a decision on the Rhodesia question. 'Yes, and if you have anything to say, you'd better say it quickly,' was the High Commissioner's reply.

That evening Griffith reported this advice to Fraser who wasted no time. He immediately dispatched Griffith and a senior Foreign Affairs official to London to try to stay the Thatcher government's hand. They arrived 10 days after Thatcher had taken office.

The critical developments which brought Zimbabwe to independence less than a year later are well documented, including the detailed account in Griffith's book. When Griffith talked about them, however, he would point to those 'turning points at the margins' which helped swing the impetus towards constructive change – such as his unexpected encounter with the British High Commissioner that morning. Then there was an unofficial meeting he had soon after arriving in London before he was received by Lord Carrington, Thatcher's Foreign Minister. Griffith's MRA friends took him to a London suburban home to hear from Byron Hove, a black Rhodesian politician from Muzorewa's party. Hove had been 'joint' Minister of Justice in the Internal

Settlement but had just quit, disillusioned. Griffith could not have hoped for a better briefing.

Another such 'marginal' event was a dinner with an Oxford professor of international law whom Griffith had first met back in sunny Queensland where the professor had been called to give legal advice on the Torres Strait border issue. Over dinner the professor spelt out for Griffith the precise legal basis under which Rhodesia could be returned to colonial status under a British governor, thus allowing the UN sanctions to be disengaged and an election to be held. Griffith relayed these terms to Fraser. The formula was later applied.

In the lead up to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Lusaka which followed in August 1979, Fraser sent his emissaries around Africa to argue that Thatcher could be brought round and that there was still sufficient political will among Lord Carrington and his supporters to push for a settlement based on majority rule. Arriving in Nigeria, Griffith was surprised by the warm welcome he received from President Obasanjo, who remembered being entertained in the Griffith home years before, during a visit to Canberra as a young military officer. 'I had to look back through my address book to make sure this was the same man,' Griffith said with a chuckle. Another 'marginal' event having its unforeseen impact.

The Western media forecast that the conference would be a disaster. But something of 'the Commonwealth magic' worked – primed by a flag-flying Royal visit of Queen Elizabeth to Tanzania and Zambia on the eve of the conference.

Guerilla leader Joshua Nkomo, in his book, credited the Australians and Jamaicans with persuading Thatcher to support the majority-rule approach. Whatever the truth of it, a critical moment was reached one Sunday night at the end of the conference during an Aussie barbecue hosted by Fraser. A committee, including Fraser, had been working all weekend on a communique with a nine-point formula to end the war.

Somehow it got leaked to the Australian media *before* the barbecue, in time for them to get the story into their Monday morning papers. The British press were furious at being scooped. Mrs Thatcher turned up at the barbecue in 'some state of distress', recorded Griffith. More than lamb chops would be grilled, it seemed. Malcolm Fraser was coy about it later: there were 'no objections at the end of the discussion'. With the details out and most heads of government determined to make it hold, there was no going back – an agreement was reached providing the basis for the Lancaster House talks and a settlement. 'I suppose it was an historic barbecue,' Fraser concluded coolly.

The rest, indeed, is history.



And a tragic history it has been for independent Zimbabwe. Twenty years later, a productive agricultural nation has degenerated into a state of misrule, starvation and violence. But at the time Griffith believed its example of transition to black majority rule, combined with Namibia's independence from South Africa, helped encourage South Africa to 'venture down the path... of reconciliation and forgiveness'.

Despite Australia's own 'black history' and struggle for reconciliation, Griffith often argued that it had a contribution to make in the world which the ordinary Australian underestimates. He rejected the 'chronic whinge of a section of the Australian electorate' who complain that its leaders should not be 'grand-standing' overseas but concentrating more on problems at home. Australians have been too absorbed in a 'belly-button-watching focus on their identity' when we should be more concerned with 'our contribution to a better world'. Before an audience at Melbourne University, he mapped out the great issues of reversing environmental destruction and developing a world economy which advances the Third World.

'The question for Australians is whether we are going to, be a caring nation or a selfish nation,' he continued. 'Every human being has the capacity to listen to the voice of conscience on the deepest issues confronting them.'

He believed passionately that young Australians are capable of responding to such important ideals. The Griffiths' own three daughters have responded in their own ways, one of them innovating successful approaches for long-term unemployed in Victoria.

'Young people are disillusioned because they feel the system is not magnanimous enough to take account of the human crisis which they instinctively feel is upon them. Too many leadership decisions are presented just in terms of hard-nosed economic argument,' he argued in the mid-Eighties, anticipating by 15 years the reaction many young people have to globalisation. 'That view is becoming increasingly outdated. Care for the environment is not a matter of sentimentality but of a perceptive concern that all of us on earth may sink together... The options are narrowing between irresponsibility and responsibility.'



It is a mark of his commitment that, after years of being shunted around the world at the behest of his political masters, Allan spent most of his retirement years also living out of suitcases, moving between Oxford, New York, Melbourne, various capitals in Africa, Phnom Penh... and so on. Mary, having quit teaching, travelled with him, bringing her listening skills, unpretentious warm-heartedness and wealth of good common sense. She laboured many hours on their laptop, assisting his research and writing reports.

They were active contributors to a series of annual meetings in Switzerland to support 'An Agenda for Reconciliation' for people from 'regions of crisis'. Convened at the MRA

conference centre at Caux near Geneva, those dialogues have opened up trust-building initiatives for the Horn of Africa and with parties from the Balkans conflict. Individuals and groups at the heart of the Irish peace process and of bridge-building initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians have been part of this ongoing dialogue.

In this sensitive area of work, where viewpoints and agendas often clash, not all went smoothly. The Griffiths experienced many disappointments, seeing opportunities for healing missed or undercut when some of those working with them for reconciliation ended up in conflict themselves. Yet that is the reality of human nature. Reconciliation, if it is to have any substance beyond pious platitudes and political posturing, will by definition be painful and difficult to achieve. Whether between individuals, between ethnic groups or between nations; or with one's own family...

At his funeral Megan, the Griffiths' youngest daughter, spoke of her teenage years as 'fairly tumultuous', and her relationship with her father most difficult of all. 'I often found him stubborn and unwilling to listen. He probably felt the same about me. Dad's dislike of the majority of my friends didn't help our relationship.' They connected, somewhat more meaningfully in Oxford when Megan was doing her 'backpacking thing'.

It was while Megan was labouring on her doctoral thesis, back in their Templestowe home in Melbourne, that the chance came to rebuild the relationship. 'It wasn't easy,' said Megan. 'But I learned to appreciate Dad a lot more and criticise him a lot less.' Returning home late in the evenings from Monash University, she would sit on the end of her parents' bed, catching up on the day's events. And often joined their prayers that ended their day. Through a long winter of writing her thesis Megan was warmed by her father, day after day, chopping wood and lighting a fire for her.

'Two nights before he died,' Megan continued, 'I asked him what advice he'd like to give me about my future – a big move for me as I had long rejected Dad's input. For about an hour he spoke about his life, and how God had directed his steps to provide opportunities to contribute to world affairs. He told me that I should not be in a hurry but take time and enjoy life.'

'Next morning I was in my somewhat sour morning mood as I went downstairs. He was there with a huge grin on his face. "Have you got anything to say to me?" he asked.'

'I didn't. Then, realising it was a leading question, I asked him, "What would you like to say to me?"'

'"I love you," he replied – the words every child longs to hear from their parents, especially the difficult ones. Twenty-four hours later he died.'



'There is an intimacy to life which you cannot dissociate from your official life,' Griffith once confided. For him it was the confidence 'that what is unknowable to you may be knowable to a greater Mind than yours'. A confidence that small events at the margins, small seeds of change and hope, may yet swing the dynamic towards healing.

SIX

A politician learns to walk humbly

WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN built much rich symbolism into his design of Canberra. Perhaps some unintended. The new Parliament Building opened on Capital Hill in 1988. Burley Griffin's vision was that 'the people' would remain supreme on that site, with parliament a little lower. In the new building that vision was translated into public galleries and lawn-covered walkways spanning the new Parliament House's roof – from which the Australian people 'look down' on their politicians. And the streets of his carefully planned suburbs go round and round, mostly ending up in cul-de-sacs. All very symbolic of the processes of government!

We knock our politicians and public servants. But we still need them. And a good many at least entered the fray with sincere intentions.

One was Kim Beazley, Senior. (His son, more recently a Labor Party leader, can be left for others to write about).

I remember driving the senior Dr Beazley from Canberra airport on one of those circular routes beside Lake Burley Griffin with our three year-old son singing loudly in the back seat:

*'The grand old Duke of York
He had ten thousand men
He marched 'em up to the top of the hill
and marched 'em down again...'*

Beazley, with all the authority of his long Parliamentary career, swivelled round from the front seat and tried to educate Adam to the fact that the Duke of York had led the English army against the French in 1794 and that his ineffective role in the campaign had been derisively caricatured in the nursery rhyme. Adam took no notice, and sang all the more loudly, whereupon the former Minister for Education enlightened me instead.

Beazley's sense of history informed the issues he sought to address in the present. And if the 'system' – that nebulous blend of laws, structures, attitudes and vested interests – shifted some degree under the sustained impact of Beazley's efforts and convictions, then it was partly because he took a longer perspective than the polls and a humbler view than what he alone could do. But it was not always so...



'It's alright to be arrogant as long as you've got something to be arrogant about,' said the wife of one of Beazley's colleagues in the Whitlam Labor government, defending her husband. Arrogance seems to be an occupational hazard of political life. The media, of course, treat it as the spice that saves political reporting from total boredom; and we the public, whatever our protestations, are entertained by the blood sport of our 'pollies' having a vicious swipe at each other.

Kim Edward Beazley, you might say, had 'something' to be arrogant about. At the end of his 32 years in Parliament, the Melbourne *Herald* wrote that he was 'beyond any dispute one of the best Members of Parliament Australia has ever had.' *The Age* said he was 'a brilliant debater' and political columnist Peter Hastings of *The Australian* wrote: 'He has always had intellectual force and clarity. He is undoubtedly Labor's – and probably Parliament's – greatest orator.'

Beazley's upbringing provided what was needed for a classic Labor poverty-to-power political career. His childhood memories

in the working class suburb of South Fremantle include images of yellow quarantine flags on houses hit by 'Spanish flu' or bubonic plague. Two of his eight brothers and sisters died at an early age. 'Pigeon pie' and rabbit were frequent diet.

Yet the fact they lived in poverty hardly impinged on the consciousness of young Beazley. He recalls being somewhat amazed when in 1927 his primary school teacher announced that the Duke and Duchess of York (not the one who marched up the hill) would be visiting the area, and all children *must* wear shoes so their Royal Highnesses might not be disquieted by any signs of poverty amongst their subjects. To young Kim, both notions were barely comprehensible: why should shoes impress Royalty? They had always gone to school bare-footed. And 'poverty' was just the way the Beazleys and their neighbours lived. Nevertheless, on the day Royalty came, all bare-footed schoolchildren were relegated to flag-waving from the back lines.

'Our family was held together by my mother,' recalls Kim. His father had switched from being secretary of the Church of Christ to secretary of the local race club, much to his mother's alarm. 'The Shamrock Hotel was his ruin,' she complained. She battled for education (Kim remembers trips to the Fremantle Literary Institute at an early age). She was active in such areas of social reform as the Children's Protection Society (child abuse was an issue then as now) and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Her steadfast attendance at the local Church of Christ meant that Kim, at the tender age of 12, came forward for baptism.

A few years later Kim Beazley got the break he needed – entrance to study at Perth Modern School. Much later, as Minister for Education, he had cause to remember that Perth Modern was the only non-fee-paying high school in the city during his childhood and that only seven per cent of his contemporaries across Australia finished high school. Beazley finished at Perth Modern – as did Prime Minister Bob Hawke,

Governor-General Sir Paul Hasluck, political adviser H C 'Nugget' Coombs and singer Rolf Harris.

Beazley professes to not being consciously ambitious. 'I never intended going into Parliament... It was an accident really.' Trained as a teacher he pursued his love of history and became a tutor at the University of Western Australia and vice-president of the WA teachers' union. His involvement in the Labor Party was natural, given all this background. When John Curtin, Australia's legendary Labor Prime Minister died unexpectedly, Beazley agreed half-willingly to seek party endorsement in the resulting by-election and was surprised when he won.

Without ever having met Curtin, Beazley took the great man's seat in Canberra as Member for Fremantle at the age of 28, the youngest Member in the House. Ambitious or not, he was neither passive nor very humble. Alan Reid, doyenne of Australia's political journalists, wrote that young Beazley had come 'riding out of the West... full of reforming zeal'; and that his 'lecturing Parliament in a hectoring, sneering tone .. earned him almost universal dislike'. He was soon known around the House derisively as 'the Student Prince'.

That was a very different Kim Beazley from the one who bowed out of Parliament three decades later, a man whose grace and principles won him such admiration. Before Beazley rose to make his last speech on the floor of the House of Representatives, Speaker Sir Billy Snedden, a member of the opposing party, paid tribute to him as 'a fine parliamentarian and a great Australian'.

In a crowd Kim, a tall figure, is easy to pick out. Betty, his wife, was an athlete, a national record-holder for the half-mile for ten years. She approaches people with natural grace and effervescent warmth. Kim's lumbering frame belies the agility of his powers of debate. A true intellectual athlete, he excels in many fields besides politics. History is a passion and the Beazley mind readily digs out some historical detail to

reinforce the point he is making. Talk about cricket and he bowls up facts about past Test matches. In full flight he may quote whole sections of a play by George Bernard Shaw or poems from Wordsworth or Browning. As his three children grew, the Beazley family table became a forum for intellectual parrying – a training ground for Kim Beazley junior.

Yet there is nothing haughty about Kim's physical or mental bearing. He suffers fools if not gladly then at least graciously. In fact, a respect for another person's genuinely-held convictions is one of Kim's qualities.



The fact is that early in Kim Beazley's political career something happened that humbled him as a politician. Beazley travelled to London as one of ten MPs selected to attend the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

Intrigued by the ideas of Moral Re-Armament, Beazley had decided to spend a week on his way home to Australia at an MRA international conference in Caux, Switzerland. Instead of a week he stayed for two, three... finally seven weeks. 'I had to admit that what I saw at Caux was far more significant for the peace and sanity of the world than anything being done at that time in Australian politics,' he says. Caux is a mountainside village, surrounded by stunning alpine scenery, high above Lake Geneva. Soon after the War a number of Swiss had pooled their life savings and purchased a large hotel there, and with volunteers from many nations had worked to restore the near-derelict buildings in the belief that Europe needed a neutral meeting place where former enemies could find reconciliation and strength for the task of reconstruction. In 1946 'Mountain House' in Caux had opened as a world conference centre for MRA.

Beazley's historian's interest was caught by the reconciliation shaping between arch enemies, France and

Germany, still raw from the wounds of war. French resistance leaders and German Marxists were finding a common moral ground for reconstruction, which flowed on to those in the political arena. French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman was at Caux that same summer and Konrad Adenauer (before becoming German Chancellor) had been there earlier. Both men, through their shared beliefs, had come to trust one another and were promoting the 'healing of nations', as Beazley put it.

Impressed as Beazley was, he soon discovered that the healing process involved personal changes in people's attitudes and relationships – his own included. As Beazley said: 'MRA is the ultimate in realism, for it suggests a simple experiment anybody can try – searching for God's leading, testing any thoughts that come against absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, and carrying into practice those thoughts which meet these standards.'

That was not just politician's rhetoric. A British Labor Party friend and a South African Rhodes Scholar sat Beazley down at Caux and suggested he should take time alone, to seek God's guidance, having 'nothing to prove, nothing to justify and nothing to gain for yourself.'

'What a shockingly subversive thing to say to someone in politics!' remembers Beazley with a chuckle. 'I had been proving just how right I was at every election; justifying everything we had ever done; and gaining political power for myself was the minimum I must do.'

But the young 'Student Prince' MP was challenged. He realised that what was involved was 'no cheap subscribing to principles but restitution which is costly to our pride,' he told those at the Caux conference. 'You can never understand MRA by sitting back and trying to comprehend it intellectually. There must be a decisive act... a turning of the will. For me a chain reaction was started off by sitting down and writing a letter of honesty to my wife.'

For Betty Beazley, back home in Perth, that letter must have come as something of a bombshell. 'Some things in that letter I already knew,' she says. 'Some I had guessed; but some I did not know. I had a wonderful sense of relief and trust after reading it.'

Similar letters were written to his sister and brother, and to his secretary. While disentangling 'a web of deceit' in his personal life, Beazley found he was tackling a web in his political life. He reflected on his father's drinking problem and regretted that he had 'given him no friendship of any kind' before his death. He had treated two parliamentary colleagues who had alcohol problems with superiority and contempt. More apologies followed.

God seemed to be challenging basic motives: political ambition, self-will and pride. He realised that his university education had made him aloof from the working class, from his roots. His constituency was the port of Fremantle and every Friday when he was in town, Beazley would go to the 'pick-up' where waterside workers (or 'lumpers' as he knew them from childhood years) would get job allocations for the coming week. Beazley, notebook in hand, would move among the crowd, hearing complaints, offering what help he could. Yet he never wanted to know them socially or to have them in his home.

Then came a tough thought for a politician, which he noted down: that he had 'formed the habit of not being absolutely accurate in political statements'. As he told the conference in Switzerland, 'I have always congratulated myself that my campaign speeches were objective. I objectively analysed the government's mistakes, but never their virtues. I have come to realise that this is one of the most mischievous forms of lying in politics.'

Honesty in politics? Before he left Switzerland Beazley decided that he must 'concern myself daily with the challenge of how to live' out God's will, to turn the searchlight of

absolute honesty on to my motives, and to try to see the world with the clarity of absolute purity... and absolute love.'

Hardly usual language for a politician. In Australia the shock waves were soon being felt.

Betty Beazley was delighted. 'He arrived home and was so different. All I could say to my mother was "Hasn't Kim changed?" He had always been a thoughtful person but so thoughtful that he never knew who was passing by! But his approach to people – his eyes, his voice – were different. I wanted to learn from him what it was all about; and he being a good teacher took me through it good and proper.' His change affected their relationship. Often left home alone with three young children, Betty had found that by the time Kim returned from Canberra at the end of a fortnight she had had enough. 'He would get a blast as he walked in the door. By the end of the weekend we were just about talking again. I had seen many marriage breakups in political life. His new approach showed me the possibilities of change.'

Back in Canberra after his mountain-top experiences, Beazley found his parliamentary colleagues did not warm so easily to his new found convictions – if anything they triggered an explosion. Canberra correspondent for the *Brisbane Telegraph* remarked on the 'political dynamite that might be set off by Mr Beazley's practical sincerity' and continued, 'No one with even a slight working knowledge of politics could fail to delight in the confusion that could result from even one of our politicians resolving to be absolutely honest.'

But his Labor Party colleagues were *not* delighted. While reporting to Prime Minister Robert Menzies on his overseas trip, Beazley had evidently passed on some concerns he held about Communist sympathisers within the Labor Party. He believed they posed a national security risk. Though Beazley denied that was the main reason for seeing Menzies, word of it got out. 'Beazley is supposed to have impugned to Menzies the trustworthiness of certain members of Evatt's personal staff,'

reported Perth's *Sunday Times*. And Alan Reid wrote in *The Sun*, October 1953: 'Facing the prospect of political destruction at this moment is young Kim Beazley. Powerful, office-hungry individuals fear that his idealism and his current determination to pursue the truth, whatever the price, could cost the Labor Party the next election. The story they are assiduously and effectively peddling is, "Beazley has lost his balance." So the word has gone out, "Destroy him".'

Cold War ideological issues were already driving a wedge between conservative Catholics and the militant left-wing of the Australian Labor Party based in the union movement. At the disastrous 1955 ALP conference in Hobart, Beazley and others walked out, splitting the Party. 'My biggest mistake,' he says, looking back. The divided ALP was effectively kept out of power for almost two decades. Beazley's opponents in the Party held it against him for years.

But they did not destroy him. He survived 32 years in Parliament, on retirement its longest serving member. He was elected Vice-President of the ALP, a member of its national executive, and was twice Minister for Education in a Labor government. Many have said that, but for MRA, Beazley could have got the top job. 'The Coronation was his ruination,' quipped Gough Whitlam, in oblique reference to the trip which took Beazley to Caux. And Bob Hawke, next Labor PM after Whitlam, told Kim Jnr's biographer that if Beazley Snr 'hadn't got diverted from politics by MRA he could have, and *should* have, got the leadership of the Party. He was a better orator and intellect than Whitlam.' For his part Beazley himself seemed more intent on what he could achieve outside of the Party ranks rather than gaining leadership within it.

Before he left Parliament, the Australian National University awarded Beazley an honorary Doctorate, citing his contribution in education and Aboriginal affairs. The Whitlam government had swept into power in 1972 with the promise of reform – and education was one area targeted. The three years

of Beazley's Ministry are now regarded as 'the honeymoon period of education financing'. Gough Whitlam himself would later claim that his government's reforms in education amounted to 'the most enduring single achievement of my government'. As the *West Australian* summed up, tertiary education was made completely free and enrolments in technical education nearly doubled; Federal grants to schools increased six-fold; a scholarship scheme was established for the disabled and for children in isolated areas; existing study grants were extended to every Aboriginal high-school and tertiary level student. Overall education spending rose from 4.8 per cent of Gross Domestic Product to 6.2 per cent.

Beazley's greatest contribution, the ANU citation continued, 'was not the expenditure of money but the healing of an ulcer that has festered in our society for close to 200 years. Sectarian bitterness, which has focused on schools and their funding... was dealt a death blow by needs-based funding which Mr Beazley introduced.'

The introduction of Commonwealth aid to church-run schools was perhaps the most controversial issue of his Ministry. Before the legislation finally passed, Beazley was stricken with exhaustion. *The Australian* quoted him from his hospital bed, 'For 20 years I've waited to become a Minister so that I could implement what I believed since I was a boy... equal opportunity (to education).'

It was in Aboriginal education, however, that some of the most radical and rapid changes came. During the first days of dramatic executive action in December 1972, Whitlam called in Beazley to discuss the education portfolio. That morning, as every morning, the Beazleys had spent their first hour between 6 am and 7 am seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. During that time he had written down what was, for him, an important principle: 'To deny a people an education in their own language is to treat them as a conquered people, and we have always treated Aborigines as a conquered people.' Then

he added a line of action: 'Arrange for Aborigines to choose the language of Aboriginal schools, with English as a second language.'

At 3 pm, during his appointment with Whitlam, he repeated these thoughts using the same words. Whitlam accepted the suggestion instantly. Two hours later on national news, the Prime Minister announced as government policy a program of bilingual education for Aboriginal children.

Until that day funding could not be given to schools that taught using an Aboriginal language, rather than English. By the time Beazley left his Ministry, education was being given in 22 Aboriginal languages. Mission teachers and linguists in the Summer Institute of Linguistics cooperated to create books in some of the 138 languages spoken in the Northern Territory, which was then under Commonwealth jurisdiction. Aboriginal parents became involved in school policy, leading to the introduction of adult education for Aboriginal people.

Appalled by reports of widespread malnutrition amongst Aboriginal children, Beazley wrote a note to Whitlam with some of the facts – 'the starkest letter I've ever received,' said the Prime Minister. Without delay a program was set up with other Federal and State ministers to tackle the disasters of leprosy, yaws, hookworm, trachoma, alcoholism and malnutrition. Aboriginal health is still a national disgrace but a beginning was made through those initiatives.



Beazley's contribution was not limited to his years in government. As the ANU citation underlined: 'It has become popular over the last years to recognise... the injustices that have been done to Aboriginal people. But over the last half-century this was far from popular. In that time few people have done as much, and none have done more, than Kim Beazley has to bring about that change in attitude.'

It began during that same visit to Switzerland in 1953. Beazley had already got Aboriginal land rights onto the Labor Party platform in 1951; and in August 1952 made the first speech ever given on the issue in the House of Representatives. But it was in Caux that 'the subject ignited for me as a vital issue.' At that point Aborigines had no civil and voting rights. They lived in appalling conditions, mostly in white-administered reserves in complete subjection. They did not own one acre of land. Few white Australians cared – at best they were seen as a primitive dying race; at worst, they were regarded as sub-human.

As part of his search in Switzerland 'to live out God's will', one thought stuck in his mind: 'If you live absolute purity you will be used towards the rehabilitation of the Australian Aboriginal race.' Purity, he saw, was 'the alternative to living for self-gratification, which kills intelligent care for others'. Without seeing all the implications, he felt instinctively that land ownership was the key.

'If Aborigines are not acknowledged as owning land, they will negotiate from a position of weakness,' he noted down in one of his morning meditations. These thoughts set the direction for Beazley's next years in politics.

In 1953 the Beazleys began by inviting Aboriginal people into their home in Perth, 'for breakfast, lunch and dinner,' said Betty. Kim credits his wife for that idea. Aboriginal personalities – like the late poet/ playwright Jack Davis and community spokesman Ken Colbung – became firm friends.

'Two things characterise Australia's race relations in the past: an absence of gentleness and an absence of listening. We always knew!' Beazley told a conference at Melbourne University. The humbled politician was learning.

'It was only when I began to take a special interest in Aboriginal affairs that I realised the extent of their deprivation. They are a people of dignity, a very gentle people in many ways.'

Beazley began to look for opportunities to advance their cause, to help right a historical wrong. In 1961, as part of a Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Voting Rights, he travelled 32,000 kilometres and heard from 364 witnesses. 'It was an eye-opener,' said Beazley. It revealed not only the oratory and intelligence of many Aboriginal witnesses, some with the help of interpreters, but also the dogmatism of some white witnesses opposing equal rights, including some well-intentioned bishops. The committee's recommendation of voting rights for Aboriginal people was accepted by Parliament, paving the way for the historic 1967 Referendum which gave the Commonwealth responsibility for Aboriginal affairs and ensuring full citizenship rights for every Aboriginal person. Introduced by Liberal Prime Minister Harold Holt, it belongs 'to a rather special phase of Australian conscience and consciousness', wrote Beazley.



'Restoring the dignity' of Aboriginal people was – and still is – a long and sometimes complex process. If that 1961 Select Committee was a turning point in the struggle for Indigenous voting rights, then the struggle of the people of Yirrkala during 1962-63 was key to gaining land rights.

Located on the tip of Arnhem Land Reserve on the far north coast, Yirrkala was then administered by missionaries of the Methodist Church. Like many reserves the land was considered virtually worthless – until bauxite was discovered and a French/ Swiss consortium began negotiations with the government to develop the resources. By the time the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land heard about it, the consortium had made plans to establish a town for 3,000 people, to open a port and build an ore treatment plant. A large area of land was being excised from the reserve for the development. Mission superintendent was the Rev Edgar

Wells. In his book *Reward and Punishment in Arnhem Land*, Rev Wells described how the local people faced an emergency because of 'the secretive and politically motivated contrivance by which mining companies avoid public debate until arrangements within the business community are agreed on'.

In May 1963, from the Opposition benches, Beazley introduced a motion in the House of Representatives calling for recognition of Aboriginal land title and requesting genuine consultation with the people of Yirrkala. At first there was little response along the corridors of power.

During a Parliamentary break Beazley, in his capacity as Chairman of the Labor Party's Committee on Aboriginals, went to Yirrkala with Labor colleague Gordon Bryant (who, a decade later, became Minister for Aboriginal Affairs under Whitlam). Bauxite mining involves razing large areas of land surface. The Aboriginal people Beazley and Bryant met feared the destruction of their hunting grounds and fishing areas, as well as pollution of water supplies. But there was a deeper fear – the destruction of their spiritual heritage.

The Rev Wells explained the spiritual associations which tribal people had with particular areas of land. Their belief, for instance, that the Creator earth spirit enters a pregnant woman – and the tradition in some areas that the child will be named by some feature of the earth observed by the mother. Galarrwuy Yunupingu, one of the young men Beazley met on that trip (later chair of the Northern Land Council) is named after 'horizon at sea rock', a name given him before his birth. Upon death, the Creator spirit returns to the earth. So where, asked the tribal elders, would their spirits go if the land was destroyed?

Non-Indigenous Australia has adopted Aboriginal 'Dreamtime' heritage as being culturally fashionable. But in 1963, remembers Beazley, 'there was a persistent tendency to belittle the spiritual and mythological significance of the land to the Yirrkala people.' By comparison, argues Beazley with a

touch of irony, our white Australian claim to Australia is hardly less 'mystical' in the eyes of Aborigines – based as it is 'on proclamations by Captain Cook and Governor Philip that King George III "by the grace of God" owned it all'. Our claim to land was supported 'only by greater firepower'.

In his book superintendent Wells describes how he found the two politicians one morning after breakfast in the church 'engaged in a serious religious conversation... about freshly painted Aboriginal art boards and what they meant within the Aboriginal cultural system. It was here in the sanctuary that Mr Beazley had what he described as a "guided" inspiration... "Make a bark petition," he advised his Aboriginal friends. "A petition (to Canberra) surrounded with an Aboriginal painting will be irresistible."

'Mr Beazley gave the Aborigines the essential preamble for the petition to Canberra... A small group of Aborigines struggled valiantly with the wording... Meanwhile senior artists were at work on the bark boards on which the petition was to be glued...' Mrs Wells was asked to type it; and a mission teacher reluctantly agreed to explain some of the complex concepts.

Despite such minimal non-Aboriginal involvement, within weeks angry accusations were flying around that it was all the work of 'Southern stirrers' and 'do-gooders'. Even 'the Communist influence' was seen to be involved. The Rev Wells was ultimately forced to resign by his own Mission Board, ostensibly because of his part in 'arousing the natives'. But, as Beazley said, Aboriginal people were just as entitled to petition Parliament as any mining executives or pastoralists.

Petitions normally do not arouse much interest. This one did. Still today it is preserved in Parliament House for public viewing. Presented in the Yolgnu Matha language and translated into English, the petition asked that the House appoint a Select Committee, 'accompanied by competent interpreters, to hear the views of the Yirrkala people before

permitting the excision of this land'. From the Opposition benches Beazley presented the petition to Parliament, moving that the Select Committee be formed and stressing that this was 'not a party question... It is not a question of the Government being on trial.. This Parliament (is) on trial.'

Then something rare in Australian politics happened: Paul Hasluck, the responsible Minister, rose and immediately accepted the motion from the Opposition. 'I've only known this to happen once in 32 years,' said Beazley. Within a week a Select Committee was named, including Beazley, and were soon holding hearings in Yirrkala accompanied by the media. Their findings, presented at the end of 1963, were 'a tremendous advance in political thinking,' wrote one newspaper.

Mining ultimately went ahead at Yirrkala, with guarantees that sacred sites and hunting areas would not be violated and with considerable royalties paid to Aboriginal people. But a principle had been established. 'Never again will any agency or Government body be able to acquire land... without consulting tribes of the area,' wrote the Rev Edgar Wells in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*. 'The success of the Aboriginal people in achieving the right to be heard in defence of their own spiritual land values... altered forever the balance of power in Aboriginal Affairs.'

The Yirrkala case opened the door for Aboriginal repossession of tribal lands. 'We will legislate to give Land Rights,' promised Gough Whitlam in 1972. Within two months of becoming Prime Minister, Whitlam appointed Mr Justice Woodward as Aboriginal Land Rights Commissioner whose recommendations were accepted in legislation introduced by Labor in 1975, but passed and extended by the Fraser Liberal government in 1976. From not owning an acre, Aboriginal people gained freehold title to 643,000 square kms, an area two and a half times the size of Great Britain.

In Beazley's view the Australian government was not 'giving away' anything. It was simply justice. Despite the ongoing

controversy surrounding Native Title; a historical wrong had gone some way to being righted – and as Beazley wrote at that conference in Switzerland, Aborigines could 'negotiate from a position of strength'.

Social change often brings a backlash. 'There is a philosophy in Australia that anything done for me is "justice"; anything done for anyone else is a "handout",' observed Beazley. As Education Minister he faced hostile public meetings, particularly critical of funding for Aboriginal students: 'It was useless to point out the facts at these meetings. It takes a moral force to break the pattern of resentment and prejudice.' Undoubtedly Beazley's facing of his own prejudices in Switzerland helped him find that 'moral force'.

'What a poor reward it would have been for the nation if Kim had pursued the cause of personal power during those years in Opposition, because it was as much in Opposition as in government that he brought progress and healing,' commented a senior adviser in the Prime Minister's department when Beazley left politics in 1978. 'Great issues, such as the welfare of Aboriginal people and the preparation of Papua New Guinea for independence, were brought into focus from the Opposition side of Parliament.'

Beazley spent 28 of his 32 years in Parliament in what, he once despaired, was 'Her Majesty's permanent Opposition'. A year before Australians voted the Whitlam Labor government to power, Beazley told a conference in India: 'I have come to believe the true function of an Opposition is to out-think the government at the point of its successes. Only then can alternative policies be framed and social advance take place.' Nearly three decades in Opposition had shown him that 'the question of motive is the key to social advance... If your motive is power, you will most likely distort the truth. If your motive is the truth, you will be fit for power.'



Beazley's experiences with Aboriginal people naturally led him into that other great process of political change in the Sixties and Seventies – the ending of Australia's colonial relationship with Papua New Guinea.

Under a United Nations' mandate Australia was charged to prepare PNG's 700 tribes for nationhood. But in 1961 when Beazley first went there to look at educational needs, he found 'expatriate' plantation owners and administration officials resisting decolonisation with all their powers. In a hangover of history they saw PNG as a buffer zone between Australia and the 'yellow peril' of Asian invasion.

As he did with Aboriginal people, Beazley went to listen to the people themselves.

On a second visit he found himself in a home with the future leaders of the Pangu Party who were leading the drive towards independence. Beazley offered to help arrange meetings for them with the Australian leadership. Within a few months they were in Canberra to take up his offer. Though still on the Opposition benches Beazley set up meetings with the Minister of External Territories responsible for Papua New Guinea – 'a conservative gentleman to his fingertips', Charles Edward Barnes – with Prime Minister Harold Holt and with ALP leader Gough Whitlam.

Land rights became the clash point in the last years of Australian rule – particularly in the Gazelle Peninsula. Land and dignity seemed synonymous. Beazley made three trips into the area as Labor Party spokesman on Papua New Guinea, one with Whitlam. With the land issue still on the boil, a telegram from Beazley to the leaders of the Mataungan movement on the Gazelle Peninsula helped diffuse a flashpoint when 1000 Mataungans, armed with machetes, faced troops armed with automatic rifles. As promised, the Labor government, as soon as they were elected, enacted self-government.



After three stormy years in power, the Whitlam government was dismissed in 1975... and then thrashed at the polls. The following year as details of the 'Iraqi loans scandal' surfaced, Beazley – who had been kept in the dark – resigned from the shadow Cabinet. 'A man who will not silence his conscience,' was the front page headline in *The Age*.

Two years later he retired from Parliament. His final speech before a full House highlighted the 'assumptions' which underlay his education ministry: 'The needs of every child must be met... Every child is meant to be a temple of the Holy Spirit...' Most of us are understandably cynical about the influence of God and conscience in politics. The conventional political wisdom is they do not mix: those who stick to scruples will be taken for a ride. Beazley disagrees, and survived a third of a century in Parliament to prove it. 'If you are devoted to God's guidance and to absolute love, your political environment is not strewn with corpses. The fact that you are not lethal but gracious makes a big difference,' he said during an interview in Canberra in 1982.

That grace did not come automatically: there was a struggle involved – a struggle which has continued through his lifetime, to give supremacy to the mind of God over the 'intellectual force' which could make him appear aloof. It was, one might say, a struggle of heart and spirit over intellect.

'The most practical point in politics is that there is an intellect, God's intellect, beyond the perception and self-interest of man,' he said in his last year in Parliament.

Beazley's own life spells it out. The experience of Caux 'took the strain out of striving', as he once said. It humbled his political ambitions and redirected his prime loyalties. Morning by morning he and Betty consciously turned to 'seeking the kingdom of God'. And though the 'kingdom' of political power eluded them for 28 years, he was instrumental in 'adding justice' to the cause of Aborigines, the people of Papua New Guinea and disadvantaged children. The brief period of

political power simply took further what he had already worked for.

It has continued – whether leading a far-reaching 'Inquiry into Education' for the WA State government or helping to shape a 'code of ethics' for Parliamentary debate. Serving on the board of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies or speaking on family and community issues for the Australian Family Association. In New Delhi Beazley shared the platform with an Indian Prime Minister speaking on democratic reform. In North America he assisted Native Americans and the Inuit (Eskimos) on Aboriginal land rights issues. In South Africa he spoke in support of black educators and those 'building bridges of trust' between races.

Through it all, says the bare-footed boy from Fremantle, 'there is sanity from the Holy Spirit beyond human ideas of justice.'

'The thoughts of God, given primacy in the life of a man, bring to the innermost motives the virtue of mercy, and with it the cure for hatred that can turn the tide of history. This is the essence of intelligent statesmanship.'

SEVEN

King of the wharfies

IT'S ONE THING to reach for high moral principles in the formation of national or international policy, one might say (though others would say there's not much evidence of it in practice). It's another to work out such principles in the rough and tumble of everyday economic survival where most people live. And isn't that – rather than in the rarefied atmosphere of capital cities like Canberra – where the future is decided anyway?

What can one person do? Powerful forces of our global marketplace have altered forever the way business and industry operate. Has the world grown beyond the point where any of us can in reality contribute to the way things are – or rather, to the way things should be?

One bloke, one thoroughly Australian worker, speaks hugely to me even as the old order he was part of is restructured or deleted. From the time when I was bundled into a car as a teenager by my father and his friends in Adelaide to drive through the night for a meeting in a shed on the Melbourne waterfront, something about this man speaks as much to the future as to the past.



There was clearly only one reason why he did it. Jim Beggs wanted to work on the Melbourne waterfront simply because of 'the money'. He had heard that a wharfie (docker, longshoreman or whatever-else you call them) gets 'the wages of the Prime Minister and half the cargo'.

Australia's Prime Minister when Beggs started on the waterfront – conservative Bob Menzies (later Sir Robert, Knight of the Empire, Order of the Garter) – was clearly less enamoured by the waterside industry. At his height of power in the Fifties he claimed that another recession would never get past the shores of Australia because the wharfies were too lazy to unload it. The country was blighted with two pests, he said: wharfies and rabbits.

Between 1951 when Beggs applied for the job as a green 21 year-old and his retirement 41 years later, the number of wharfies working the docks had dropped as dramatically as the rabbit population: from 27,500 to 5,000. It has continued to drop even further. Today a handful of men turn a container ship around in 30 hours, work which 100 men took two weeks to complete in the old days. All you needed then, quips Beggs, 'was a hook, a strong arm and a pack of cards'. It was physical work and the men were tough. A vicious strike in 1928 had left a heritage of hatred, dividing the union; barbed wire separated some of the working areas. Conflicts at times were so bitter that some men finished up, quite literally, 'on the bottom of the harbour'.

'The only time you read about the wharfies was when they were on strike or pilfering something,' remembers Beggs. In one year their union paid so many fines for illegal strikes that a wharfie in the industrial court once yelled to the judge: 'Could we get a discount, Your Honour; we come here so often?'

Young Beggs had a 'flame', a girl he had just become engaged to. He had first set eyes on Tui when they were both 12 years old, at Fairfield State School – and had flicked a folded bit of paper across the classroom onto her desk, asking her to

the pictures on Saturday afternoon. She refused, knowing her father wouldn't even consider it. Six years later, after a church-hall dance, they began dating. They were engaged by the time Jim was talking of going onto the docks. But Tui was not very keen on the job. She came from a business family and did not want to be married to a wharfie. They had put down a deposit on a block of land with a one-room cabin in North Balwyn, a developing Melbourne suburb dubbed 'mortgage hill' by its residents. Here they would create the home of their dreams. Tui had a job as a stenographer, 'the thing for a girl to do in those days.' Jim had been working since he was 15 in the shop-fitting business. But they knew they needed more money if they were to build a house. Just for a couple of years, they told themselves, Jim would earn what he could on the docks.

At that stage the waterfront still ran on a system of casual labor. 'When you got to work in the morning there would be about 2,500 wharfies milling around waiting for a job,' remembers Jim. 'Sometimes you would wait for hours and get just 12 shillings and sixpence attendance money.' Beggs was attracted to shift work because it gave him time to start building his house during daylight hours. His initiation was three midnight shifts, unloading about 5,000 tons of potatoes. And during those three nights he earned more than twice the weekly pay of his previous job.

When Tui turned 21 she and Jim married, and moved into their tiny one-roomed 'bungalow'. It was a struggle. The insecurity of casual work and uncertain pay 'has a terrible effect on you,' says Tui. 'We saved for timber, we saved for bricks, we saved to do the wiring.' The waterfront job did not seem to be all it was cracked up to be. 'You were lucky to get two or three days' work a week at that time,' says Jim. 'It was day-work today, midnight shift tomorrow, twilight shift the next. It put a lot of strain on us as a young couple.'

Jim was hammering panel-boards on his new wood-frame house one evening when a helpful outside light was switched

on next door. A new neighbour had just moved in. It happened several times, each time giving light for Jim to work a bit later. Then one Saturday a bald head appeared above the fence and its owner introduced himself as Tom Uren.

'The wife's called "Flo" – she never stops talking!' Cackling laughter.

Jim thanked him for leaving the light on and cautiously introduced himself. He dreaded being asked what his work was. 'When people found out I was a wharfie, they'd either think I was a Communist or they'd want to lock up the family silver,' remembers Jim. Inevitably neighbour Tom asked the question.

Putting on a brave face Jim replied: 'I'm one of those blokes you read about – I'm a wharfie.'

'Oh, that's where I work too,' replied Tom, cheerfully. Jim was suspicious: he knew the house next door was worth a good bit and had been featured in *Home Beautiful*. Then it came out that Tom was an accountant, the financial adviser to a stevedoring company which was one of the toughest employers on the docks. What luck, thought Beggs, to move next door to a boss!

But Uren chatted on, saying that the problem was 'fellows in management like me who have made profit our main aim and have created bitterness in the workers'. That caught Beggs' interest. But not as much as when Uren told him how he had given up his top-paid job with a well-known transport company because he disagreed on principle with his managing director's treatment of his employees.

Sensing Jim's embarrassment about being a wharfie, Tom asked outright: 'Do you want to see the waterfront different?'

'Of course,' replied Jim. They had just been through a punishing three-week strike and Jim reckoned it would take 18 months to catch up financially. No-one in their right mind was happy with that. Nor with all the fights and bickering which went with it.

'Well, y'know the place it's got to start,' countered Tom. Jim could think of plenty of others who were responsible – the shipowners and the like. But Tom persisted, 'If you want the waterside to be different, it's got to start with yourself.'

Looking back now Jim accepts that 'blaming has never solved any problems.' But back then during that backyard exchange, it was a new thought. 'In my industry if something goes wrong we naturally blame the employer who blames the wharfies. And the government blames both of us.' With little education, Jim felt 'useless' to do anything to change the situation.

Across the fence Tom suddenly asked Jim if he believed in God? Jim's Irish Protestant parents had got him to church every Sunday. It had meant something to him then. His Bible class teacher had warned Jim against going to work on the wharves: 'You'll lose your faith down amongst those scoundrels,' said the teacher. There was no doubt that five years on the waterfront had had their effect. Jim answered tentatively, 'Yes, I think I still believe in God.'

'Well, y'know,' said Tom, 'God has a purpose for every living soul. Give him a chance and he'll show it to you.'

Jim went inside and told Tui of the extraordinary conversation he had just had. Their friendship grew, not only with Tom and Flo but with others the Urens knew through MRA who took the same approach: that ordinary people could be part of changing what was wrong. Tui remembers being invited next door for a Christmas party and carols being sung. 'We were out here away from our families and didn't know anyone in the area,' says Tui. 'We were very shy and had no confidence. But they made you feel you were worth something.'

Living in their cramped 'bungalow' with the uncertainties of shift work and casual pay, with baby Karen and another child on the way, some of the romance of married life together had worn a bit thin. 'While our marriage wasn't heading for

the divorce courts, I wasn't very sensitive to Tui,' Jim says ruefully. 'I had this Irish attitude of walking away and sulking, whereas Tui liked to have things out in the open.' Occasionally they fought 'like Kilkenny cats'. But through the Urens' friendship Jim and Tui found the courage to talk about things they were ashamed of and had hidden from each other.

These changes on the home front gave Jim 'a sense of freedom' as he kick-started his noisy motor-bike each day and set off for the docks. He wondered how things could possibly change there. 'I had no intention of becoming a union official. I just wanted to see what I could do in a constructive way with the fellas I worked with.'

The 'fellas' in Jim's gang were a rough hard-working mob but they had a great sense of humour. One was nicknamed 'The Judge' because of his tendency to come to work and sit on a case all day; another was known as 'Glass Arms', too fragile to lift; and then there was 'Hydraulic Jack' who would 'lift' anything given half a chance.

Pilfering was an accepted part of the job. Unloading cans of pineapple on a hot day, one of the gang asked Jim if he would keep watch for him while he nipped into the hold for a feed of the forbidden fruit. Jim stood up to him: 'You do what you like. But I'm not into that sort of caper any more.' Much to Jim's embarrassment, the comment was overheard – and the rest of the gang pressured Beggs to say what had happened to him. Beggs tried to explain that he wanted to become more responsible for what happened in the industry. He had run into a group known as MRA and, as a result, he was trying to live his Christianity a bit more seriously. His mates scoffed, 'Beggsie's gone religious.' Only one fellow, a hatchman, yelled some support from the deck above: 'Don't listen to them, Jim. You stick with it.' He later told Jim an alcoholic friend of his had been cured through MRA.

The incident got Beggs thinking more about the pilfering that went on. Tom, the accountant next door, had mentioned

that he had lost business because he refused to put in false tax-returns on behalf of clients. According to Tom, facing things honestly was the first step if you were going to find God's purposes for your life. This bothered Jim. He knew he had nicked a good bit of cargo in his time. Going straight now did not seem to be enough. On his conscience was a clock he had pinched out of a car he had unloaded from a ship. Somehow he could not get past the notion that he should return it, as an act of restitution. Finally he fronted up to the manager of the stevedoring company concerned, put the clock on his desk and apologised for pinching it. 'The manager couldn't believe it,' remembers Jim. 'He told me it was the first time a wharfie had returned a stolen item.'

As it happened Jim had been asked to speak at his local church. He and Tui were finding their way back to a faith and Jim decided to tell this respectable Sunday congregation what he had done in making restitution. He had no idea there was a 'journo' in the congregation. Right out of the blue next day, the Melbourne *Sun* published an item about wharfie Jim Beggs returning a stolen clock. Before he knew it the story had gone all over the Port of Melbourne. From then on Beggs was known as 'Daylight Saving', the bloke who put the clock back.

Not long after it dawned on Jim that thieving had stopped in his gang: 'We decided that pilfering was anti-union.' He and Tui began to get to know individuals in the gang socially, meeting their wives and families. Gang 59 got a reputation for its team spirit.

Beggs was beginning to feel he could affect what happened, though being responsible went against the grain. 'If this country has got a problem, it's apathy,' he says. 'Those first five years on the waterfront I was one of the apathetic majority in the trade unions of this country.' He had quickly become disillusioned at the first union meetings he attended. 'I saw those stop-work meetings being turned into political football matches between the Left and the Right. When I stayed long

enough to cast a vote, I would look around to see where the majority voted and my hand crept up with them. Of course, that soon kills the conscience.'

Disgusted, he often took off out the side door and, on one occasion, went duck-shooting instead. 'I thought I was one of the good blokes – raising a family, building a home, going to church – but I was good for nothing because I hadn't got involved.'

Now he wanted to. A challenge loomed – would he offer himself as a 'job delegate'? When a ship berthed some 150 men (in those days) would go onto the vessel to start the job. The first thing they did was to nominate or elect a 'delegate' to be their spokesman while that ship was in port. Any complaints or communication with the bosses went through the delegate. Normally only the politically or ideologically motivated union die-hards would accept the job. Jim plucked up his courage and started offering himself. To his surprise his gang supported him.

Looking back years later he says: 'You don't think you are making history, but the decisions you make can affect a lot. Big doors swing on little hinges. I had no idea they were going to affect the waterfront.'

Another decision had unforeseen consequences. With the Urens' help Jim and Tui had begun experimenting together with the idea that you could bring your problems to God to find some direction on how to handle them. It meant getting up extra early before the morning shift to listen for that inner voice, which seemed to bring results when you listened.

Through this mode of thinking, Jim got the gut feeling that he needed to face up and apologise to a leading Catholic on the docks: Les Stuart, a nuggetty ex-flyweight boxer, 'five-foot-three and seven stone in a wet overcoat'. Stuart was unofficial leader of the 'coalies', the blokes who handled coal, and was nicknamed 'The Washing Machine' because of his reputation as an agitator. Beggs respected Stuart's skills as a

soap-box orator and a cunning negotiator. But he was intensely prejudiced against Stuart's Catholicism. It went back to his Irish father, an ardent Orangeman and Lodge member who back in Ireland had carried a hand-gun. He raised young Jim on stories of the vile acts he accused the Catholics of committing. Beggs had voted with the Communists on the docks for years not because he agreed with them but because they formed the main opposition to the Catholics.

In what was long referred to as 'Beggsie's God, Queen and Country speech', Beggs apologised to Stuart. He said as Christians they ought to be working together.

At Jim's invitation Les came with some of his 'coalies' to meet the Urens and some of their MRA friends. At the end of the evening Les rose to make his contribution. It was the first time, he said, that he had been in company where they talked of God but hadn't felt ostracised as a Catholic. He decided it was about time to go to Confession again. With a touch of humour Stuart – a militant anti-Communist – told how he had been known to knock-out a Communist or two during union fracas, but he'd come to realise they were still Communist when they came round again. Then he announced he would go and talk with Charlie Young, the Communist secretary of the Melbourne branch of the union, man to man. And he would rejoin the Australian Labor Party, which was split at that time with Catholics on the outer.

Jim's team of like-minded friends in the Port grew, coming from different factions. On the other side from Stuart was a Communist Party member, Les O'Shannessey, who had begun worrying that the class war would inevitably bring a nuclear war. He said Jim had shown him 'a new way'. Fed up with the extremist politics which dominated the union, Beggs considered for the first time standing for a union post. He ran as a middle-of-the-road independent; and nearly got elected.

In October 1961 the national General Secretary of the union, Jim Healey, suddenly died after being in control for 27

years. A well-known Communist Party member Healey had given strong leadership and had welded wharfies in 60 ports around the country into one Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF). The media reckoned that only another Communist could replace him. Just before he died Healey had won re-election by 16,500 votes to 4,000. The challenge galvanised something among Beggs and his wharfie friends. Why should it go far Left again? A Labor Party man, Charlie Fitzgibbon, was put up from the rank and file members. Beggs and crew, though they had no funds nor political machine behind them, became the nucleus of Fitzgibbon's support in the Port of Melbourne.

It was 'a miraculous five-week campaign done in an atmosphere I have not seen since,' remembers Beggs. Night after night they met in a little pub off King's Way, planning and reviewing their strategy. They adopted as a motto: 'Not Left, not Right, but straight.' Election campaigns had always been dirty work, using smears and dubious tactics. Funds were collected on pay-day, the various parties trailing the pay-cart as it travelled round the docks, collecting from wharfies who would support their cause. The rivalry was fierce.

One particular day Beggs and his crew were collecting contributions when they flew past the opposition's car, broken down by the side of the road. A cheer went up in Beggs' car. But the driver, an old 'coalie', slammed on the brakes and backed up: 'You three hop out and let three of their blokes in,' he ordered the men in the back of the car. 'If we're going to win this election, we want to do it fair dinkum.' A few weeks later one of the men they had picked up that day was handing out 'how-to-vote' cards for Fitzgibbon at the election booth. Many like him completely swung over.

Fitzgibbon told them he was bound to lose in Sydney but could pick up a good many of the smaller ports. If he could break even in Melbourne, the second largest port, he had an outside chance of winning. In fact he won by 400 votes in

Melbourne, almost exactly the margin he won by nationally.

During the 24 years he was General Secretary of the WWF, Charlie Fitzgibbon 'took us from the brink of anarchy back to the centre of the road and changed the waterfront,' according to Beggs. Tony Street, Minister for Labour in a conservative government, said that prior to 1968 waterside workers were responsible for 21 per cent of industrial man-hours lost in Australia; by 1982, they were causing only three per cent of the loss. Permanent secure employment replaced the hated casual system. For the first 17 years after Fitzgibbon introduced the contract system, not an hour was lost striking for wage agreements. Working conditions were transformed, mechanisation and productivity agreements were struck.

'I take it back to that apology to Les Stuart' (the Irish Catholic ex-boxer) 'and to those days when we began to form that inexperienced but committed team of wharfies on the Melbourne waterfront,' says Beggs.



Waterfront reform seems a perennial challenge – or headache, in some people's view. Back when Fitzgibbon was elected as national leader, Beggs knew their commitment had just begun. The following year they put up a ticket of candidates at elections for the Melbourne branch. Les Stuart won as President but was the only one in the team elected. During the politically turbulent years of the Sixties, there were plenty of ups and downs. In 1965 Beggs won the senior Vice-President's post. In 1971 Les Stuart quit because of ill-health. A bitter election campaign followed in which Beggs gained the presidency.

The elected executive of 17 was composed of five different factions. As Jim was setting out for his first day in office, Tui asked him if he was going to be 'the sixth point of view on that

executive?' Before Jim got on his motor-bike, they thought out two principles: 'Not to take sides, and to treat the executive as family.' A couple of hostile members of the executive stuck their heads through his office doorway that first morning saying, in effect, 'Well, you got elected, but stick to Federation policy and keep your morals to yourself.' Primed by Tui, Jim kept his Irish temper in check and thanked his union brother for 'giving me some friendly advice'.

Now and then Tui would come into the office and meet the executive and staff. 'After a while we felt ashamed that we had been so critical of some of them.' Before long Jim and Tui found the sense of family extended beyond the executive to all the members of the union. Their own family bore the brunt of answering phones at all hours, often in the middle of meal-times. 'I learned not to react when the phone rang,' says Tui, 'because twice it was women whose husbands had been killed on the docks. It became a commitment to care.'

At the end of his first year, the Union had a Christmas party for the executive and their wives. One of Jim's oldest opponents, a Beijing-line Communist, invited the Beggs over to sit with him and his wife. 'For eight of the nine years I've been on this executive, I hated the job because of the back-stabbing that went on,' he told them. 'But the last 12 months I've never enjoyed my job so much.' At the next election this man was 'on the stump' telling people that if they did not vote for Beggs they were stark raving mad.

Beggs was re-elected with the highest majority up till then and held the post for 21 years uninterrupted. Then in 1985 he became President of the Waterside Workers' Federation for the whole country. 'King of the wharfies,' headlined the Melbourne *Herald-Sun*.

During his years as Federal president Beggs visited 40 ports outside Australia, from Rio to Rotterdam, Bombay to Beirut. It was an education. When some of his members found an empty pay packet in a ship hold showing that longshoremen in

Canada got paid twice as much as Australian wharfies, he pointed out that their brother-wharfies in Papua New Guinea got one-fifth the Australian rates. Through their affiliation with the International Transport Federation, the WWF assisted over one million seamen on international 'flags of convenience' ships in improving their working conditions and pay to the standards set down by the International Labor Organisation.

Within Australia it is no secret that one group traditionally hostile to the wharfies has been the farmers. All too often they have seen their valuable export orders and competitive edge evaporate because of industrial action, labor costs and poor logistical management on the waterfront. When relations were at their worst, Beggs and two colleagues headed north out of Melbourne to meet an association of fruit-growers in the major production area around Shepparton.

'The atmosphere was so thick you could cut it with a knife,' remembers Beggs, the first time they met. 'No-one cracked a smile.' By the end of the day they were working together, identifying and sorting out the problems. One farmer stuck out a fist and said, 'I never thought I'd see the day when I'd shake the hand of a wharfie.' In one year exports from the Shepparton area quadrupled.

Over years that dialogue developed into a working relationship with primary producers in an effort to keep them exporting and using the port. For years Beggs served on a government export advisory body for perishable commodities. He was not afraid to put pressure on his own members as well as management to get produce moving.

But the biggest battles came as the waterfront came face to face with radical restructuring. Many of the industrial problems were a result of the multiplicity of unions - 27 of them. A handful of workers from any one of these unions could bring a whole port to a standstill, and often did. The Labor government of Bob Hawke, with support from the WWF and ACTU (Australian Council of Trade Unions),

introduced legislation to bring reform and rationalisation. Over three years and hundreds of meetings, the WWF executive members sat down with management to systematically remove over 600 'work practices', many of them perks given by stevedoring management to buy peace. These practices had made industrial relations a nightmare. 'Getting the wharfies to work' was the cover story of the *Business Review Weekly* in 1990, featuring the government's initiative to 'straighten out... the rort-ridden waterfront trade system that costs Australia \$1 billion a year'. The *BRW* highlighted enterprise employment deals and joint venture operations which, in the experience of one meat exporter, improved loading times by 20-25 per cent.

Productivity became the hot issue. Beggs and the union leadership accepted the challenge and took flak from their own members. At the same time Beggs held management responsible. In his view many in management lacked the nerve or imagination to confront the issues and to manage change, preferring instead to rely on arbitration or to simply cave in. When one company wanted to close an unprofitable dock, Beggs' team proposed an incentive scheme which abolished some old-established perks and wasteful work-practices. It was tried and productivity rose 300 per cent.

Forty-one years after Beggs first picked up his hook and walked onto a dock, one consolidated Maritime Union of Australia was formed, incorporating 27 unions. Their agenda stressed multi-skilling, training, career-path planning for all workers and wages geared to productivity.

It was the climax of Beggs' leadership on the waterfront, his crowning achievement. But even as the consolidated union Beggs had worked so hard for was coming to birth, his leadership was being ruthlessly undercut by various power groups, manoeuvring for control of the new body. In October 1992, the ground cut beneath him, he retired as the last elected national president of the Waterside Workers' Federation before that name passed quietly into the history books. Accepting a

package offered as part of the government's restructuring, Beggs himself joined those leaving the waterfront, earlier than planned. Some of the new national leadership were only too glad to see him go. They played a different game. The *Daily Commercial News*, referred to as the 'shipping bible', commented that the departure of Beggs and his general-secretary, Archie Arceri, meant the 'waterfront reform process has lost its two best advocates.'

Within months of their leaving, a major national strike by the new Maritime Union – in which the more militant former Seamen's Union members had begun to push their agenda – broke the record of years of strike-free wage negotiations. Their action cost the country millions of dollars, forcing the Keating government to intervene. The docks have been anything but peaceful since.

Beggs, for his part, defends the 'quiet revolution' which transformed conditions and efficiency over the past 30 years. At the same time he is the first to admit that entrenched interests still blight the industry. More structural change will be needed.

But when Beggs talks about the waterfront, it is not agreements and statistics that he quotes but people and their attitudes. That is where changes are still most needed – on both sides. 'One of the fears I have for the union movement today is that we have lost our goals,' he told a conference in Melbourne in 1982. 'Some of the founders of the union movement talked of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. Today some still want shorter working weeks, bigger pay packets, and less responsibility. That's another form of materialism, the very thing we as trade unionists condemned in those who were against us in the early years.'

There is no longer any room, in Beggs view, for using the waterfront industry to further political or ideological interests. 'Unless we learn to find a consensus with those we traditionally put on the other side of the fence, we have lost

the battle to build the new society that our union movement was formed for.'

Fundamentally that new society depends less on ideologies and policies than it does on the moral strengths and energy of individuals to bring change, he argues. 'I have to remind myself that it wasn't by accident that I landed into that job. God put me down on the waterfront. When I remember how I was one of that apathetic majority, I know there is always something I can do to bring change, starting with myself.'

Caroline Jones interviewed Beggs for her ABC program, *The Search for Meaning*. 'Many people today feel rather powerless,' she concluded. 'Your way of life suggests that as an individual I do have some power to make a difference.'

'I'm absolutely convinced of that,' replied Beggs. 'I am an ordinary person, with not much education. But history is made up of individuals who have turned the tide and most of them have been ordinary people. I say to people who ask, God has a plan for your life. You may not be meant to become a leader of your profession. But if you try that experiment my wife and I made 35 years ago, you will have that peace of heart which is more important than wealth and power. And you will never know the effect you have.'



Beggs' story, of course, will have its critics and doubters – those who never had a good word to say for anything on the Australian waterfront. They point to statistics which show handling rates in Asia and elsewhere apparently outstripping those of Australian ports.

During a break from digging his back garden at Balwyn, Jim digs into a file and hands me a letter. 'Here, mate, have a look at this.' It is from Peter Strang of Strang Patrick Stevedoring, dated June 1992, four months before Beggs was given the shove. Attached to it is a chart showing terminal productivity

in 22 ports around the world; the Port of Melbourne came third. 'We appreciate the contribution your members have made to producing this result,' wrote Strang.

Six years later the same company, as Patrick Stevedores under the control of Chris Corrigan, took on the closed-shop power of the Maritime Union. With help from the Howard government, Corrigan introduced non-union Dubai-trained labor, protected by balaclava-clad security guards and Rottweilers. The Melbourne waterfront saw the worst pitched industrial battles for decades. When it ended both sides claimed victory. Patrick's boss Corrigan and Industry Minister Peter Reith boasted that it was the biggest breakthrough in 40 years. Half of Patrick's 1400 workforce took redundancies and left the waterfront. On the other side 'unionism hasn't had such a boost for years,' observed *The Age*, saying wharfies were 'recast as the valiant defenders of worker power.'

Having saved his company some \$40 million a year on labor costs and increased its value on the stock exchange, Corrigan, as a principle shareholder, was reckoned to be personally \$3.4 million richer. Why not, some might ask? Beggs, at the start, admitted he had gone onto the waterfront for one reason only: the money. But the difference was what happened to him during the years he was there – the 'restructuring' of his core motives which made his leadership effective.

When he returned that clock he had stolen from the cargo, Beggs' mates dubbed him 'Daylight Savings Jim', for 'putting the clock back'. Which often struck me as odd, for Daylight Savings is when you put the clock forward. Perhaps it was prophetic, after all. For Beggs in fact helped move the clock forward, through his 'daylight' honesty and his keen sense of responsibility. Without such values our highly-competitive, deregulated, globalised style of enterprise will leave more and more people steadily sinking to the 'bottom of the harbour'.

EIGHT

An honest cop

HE ALWAYS DID WANT EVIDENCE – whether corruption in Queensland or the migratory patterns of birds from Siberia, whether psychological influences on cancer patients or the rehabilitation of victims of violent crime, someone's say-so was never enough. Which, I suppose, was to be expected given that Ray Whitrod has been a commissioner of police three times over. He holds a MA in Sociology, on top of several degrees and an honorary Doctorate of Laws from Australian National University. Not good enough for Whitrod; at 84, he was surrounded by labelled boxes of papers lining the shelves of his study, plugging away at his doctoral thesis on why some men beat the odds against prostate cancer.

Even in matters philosophical and spiritual, he has the annoying habit of wanting to see some empirical evidence, of delving with his detective's mind for some unseen angle or dragging out the one bit of the argument swept under the carpet – as I discovered during our weekly lunches after our return to Adelaide from Canberra. Whitrod's intellectual honesty is never vicious. It is as courteous as it is blunt. If he is tough on others, he is tougher on himself: Ask him how he is and he will answer, 'Oh, about 4.5 this week,' then quantifying the components of his life which make up the rating. You'd think that after all

these years as a Baptist he'd have come across the doctrine of grace. God's not in the business of making up for sloppiness, I suspect he would say.

Honesty is not just a personal fetish. It is a 'prime virtue' for anyone who enters the police force. 'If you can't trust a policeman's word, then confidence in society collapses,' he argues. More than keeping your nose clean, avoiding crime and not telling lies, honesty is Whitrod's operating system. The arbiter of conscience applied in daily living. As he told the 'Advertiser' in Adelaide: 'The active pursuit of truth is a liberating and progressive force for society.' So how progressive does that make our society?

Let's get back to the evidence: the record of Raymond Wells Whitrod's own actions...



'When supercop Ray Whitrod came to town in April 1970, it should have been a trouble-free era for the Queensland police force. Nothing could have been further from the truth,' wrote the police reporter in Brisbane's *Sunday Sun*, reviewing Whitrod's seven-year battle to expose corruption. 'From the moment Mr Whitrod became police commissioner he was under siege from within. He never had a chance.'

The journalist's style may be somewhat colourful; but the facts were essentially accurate. Whitrod had come to Queensland's top police job with excellent credentials.

He had been the first Commissioner of Australia's Commonwealth Police. At the time of his appointment he was head of the 3,000 police of pre-independent Papua New Guinea. He had served in intelligence and with the Royal Australian Air Force and had more academic qualifications than any other policeman in the country. Even then he was known as an 'honest cop', the sort that the Queensland cabinet were looking for, it could be cynically said, to give their force a clean image.

Two major obstacles presented themselves on Whitrod's first day as Queensland Commissioner. The old brigade of the police union publicly poured scorn on Whitrod's plans to change promotion procedures. Known as 'the Green Mafia' because of their Irish background, the union's executive had powerful political friends including State Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen, a former police minister. Whitrod suffered their 'implacable hostility' to every reform he tried to introduce. He was regarded as a 'Mexican', an import from 'south of the border'.

The second obstacle became evident when a senior officer took Whitrod aside and warned him of serious corruption in the detective branch of the force. The allegations were repeated the next day by another senior constable. The two officers claimed Whitrod's predecessor had recruited three detectives to act as 'bagmen' and they were collecting bribes in excess of half a million dollars each year through an extensive police protection racket. Known as 'the rat-pack' they operated under the cover of the Vice Squad, collecting from illegal bookmakers and the prostitution industry.

Whitrod now says that his main mistake in Queensland was to try to move too fast. But it took him 18 months before he could find officers trustworthy and courageous enough to form a Crime Investigation Unit (CIU), in order to break through the 'blue curtain' of police solidarity and uncover the 'bent coppers'. His driver on that first day was one of Whitrod's recruits. The union, of course, staunchly opposed the CIU's work, branding anyone who cooperated with them as 'police spies'.

Two more years passed before the CIU could land any solid evidence. A prostitute who had fled to Sydney agreed to come back to Queensland to give evidence, though she believed she would be killed if she did. Her information led to one of the 'rat pack' being charged. Despite tight security, tragically, she was found dead only days before the hearing – from what was

said to be a suicide by drug overdose. Another key witness died in a car accident; others backed out. One policeman ready to testify cracked under the pressure and had to be invalidated out of the force as a neurotic. Though Whitrod's team brought 23 cases against serving policemen to court, not one reached a successful conviction.

Whitrod had the backing of the Police Minister but a series of critical decisions he had made were countermanded by State Cabinet. Maintaining that his oath of office had been to uphold the law of the land, not to the government of the day, he tried to go direct to Premier Bjelke-Petersen. He was refused an interview.

The issue came to a head when Cabinet ignored the Commissioner's recommendation for his deputy and appointed instead an unknown grade 2 inspector, Terence Lewis. Some years earlier Whitrod, suspecting that Lewis was one of the 'rat-pack', had banished him to the country town of Charleville. But Lewis had a 'charmed life' with the Queensland Cabinet, it seemed, and they promoted him past 112 of his colleagues and 16 officers in spite of the unresolved allegation of corruption against him.

It was the last straw: Whitrod resigned, at great personal financial cost. Terry Lewis (later *Sir* Terence) went up one more notch and took Whitrod's place at the top of the force – until he was sacked by the Cabinet during the Fitzgerald Inquiry 12 years later.

Whitrod has sometimes been criticised for resigning on high moral principle rather than sticking it out. But he believed he had no option – he could not compromise the independence of the police force in the face of political interference. Had he stayed on, his deputy Lewis, with the Premier's backing, would have been effectively in control while Whitrod would have been seen an honest frontman at the top of a force riddled with corruption.

A failure? Not in the eyes of Neil Doorley, police reporter

on the Brisbane *Courier Mail*. 'Despite an over-riding shadow of corruption and union sniping, Mr Whitrod modernised the force in his seven years,' concluded Doorley. Besides far-reaching administrative restructuring, Whitrod started a police academy, introduced 320 women into the force, dramatically cut response time to emergency calls, and established an outside auditor to stop manipulation of statistics. Of the 41 reforms that Whitrod recommended, only one was not accepted – promotions by merit.

Clearly Whitrod's investigations and subsequent resignation triggered the media probes and public consciousness which made the Fitzgerald Inquiry a political necessity. As *The Australian* commented years later, 'Whitrod was one of the first crusaders who fought the corruption seen by many as endemic in Queensland's power structure... His resignation sparked a fierce debate over corruption in the police force and government.'

During the Inquiry Whitrod was called back to Brisbane, 12 years after he left, to give evidence. As the Melbourne *Herald* put it, 'to testify to a people grateful to him now for the sacrifices and enemies made in speaking out against the corruption he knew existed in the Queensland police force.' In the event Whitrod's evidence really only confirmed the depressing facts that already had come to light: evidence so damaging that, long before its findings were presented, the once-unrivalled state Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was forced to resign and his National Party was soundly defeated after 32 years in power. Police chief Lewis was found guilty on 15 counts and sentenced to 14 years' jail, stripped of his knighthood. Among the policemen convicted was one inspector who personally collected \$180,000 in bribes.

One part of Whitrod's testimony typified the man. He told how during his first Christmas in Brisbane two truck loads of gifts were delivered to his home. Some of the gifts he returned to the senders; on others he switched the labels and sent them

to third parties. 'The problem did not occur again,' he admitted with a grin.

Whitrod's appearance at the Inquiry could have been a self-righteous vindication of his role. There was none of it. Under cross examination by his former deputy, Terence Lewis, the 73 year-old Whitrod missed one of Lewis's quietly spoken questions. 'What was that, Terry?' said Whitrod, leaning forward to hear.

An ABC radio interviewer asked him if he still had any old enmity, any scores to settle. 'There are some people you may never be friends with, but at least you feel yourself that you've done your share in either standing up for a principle or apologising if you've been too hasty in your judgement,' replied Whitrod. 'I can't think of anybody that I feel I need to take the olive branch to...'

As Ray Whitrod concluded his testimony before the Fitzgerald Inquiry and stepped down from the stand, a voice in the crowded public gallery called, 'Aren't we going to clap?'



Plenty of applause has, of course, come his way. And he doesn't like it. If he has a fault, it is his tendency to see only his faults. But the awards and honours are part of the evidence; they filled one wall of his home. 'The family put them up,' he says coyly. Among them was a Companion in the Order of Australia, 1987.

'Had you remained in Queensland you would have been knighted,' said a handwritten note from Justice Michael Kirby, then president of the NSW Court of Appeal. 'But better by far to sleep at night with a clear conscience – and to enjoy such widespread admiration and affection as you do.' A former SA governor, Sir Walter Crocker, wrote that there are 'not many lives stamped with the variety and the quality of output you have given over the years...'

Then there were back-handed compliments from people such as Denis Walker, a radical Aboriginal who saw himself as Minister for Defence of the Black Panther movement, defending his people against 'the pigs'. Walker admitted in an interview with Ward McNally that 'not all police are pigs. There's the Queensland Commissioner of Police (Whitrod), for example. Basically he seems a decent bloke. I think he'd like to see us getting a better go... Given a fair chance he could do a lot of good for everyone. But of course... the pigs won't let him.'

In fact Whitrod received many letters of support from policemen in the ranks. 'Ray was a "straight shooter" if ever there was one,' one of them wrote to a newspaper. 'Let us not be depressed at the extent of corruption brought to light by the Fitzgerald Inquiry, but let us take heart that we have men and women who are prepared to stand up and be counted, often under serious threat.' (For some time in Queensland Whitrod slept with a revolver under his pillow.)

The authors of *Australian Policing*, which was published in 1989 after two-decades of research, dedicated their work to Whitrod – 'a catalyst for many of the major changes which are now occurring in so many areas of policing around the nation'.

What would be your proudest achievement, asked Caroline Jones on ABC Radio?

'My proudest moment,' answered Whitrod without hesitation, 'was getting married... I've had a very understanding wife and understanding kids, and home's been the reinforcement and replenishment place.' In Queensland, Mavis Whitrod put up with threatening middle-of-the-night phone calls, an ambulance being sent to her front door and a truck-load of gravel dumped to block the driveway. She never cracked. Something in their relationship worked.

Even when he was under siege, a newspaper photo shows him in full polished-brass regalia laughing unceremoniously with his gaping Whitrod grin. 'I have a wonderful feeling, talking to you, that I'm talking to a happy person,' said

Caroline Jones, at the end of her interview. Whitrod bounced back: 'Well, I get that feeling from you too.'



Ray Whitrod grew up in the industrial West end of Adelaide. One of his first memories was the factory whistle, calling his father to work. It was the family time-keeper. His parents scraped together what they could to send Ray and his brother through high school, and to join the Boy Scouts, a movement Ray served most of his life. 'My father was the most unselfish man I know. He sacrificed so I could learn the violin! It was really dreadful,' says Whitrod with a chuckle. Jobs were scarce in the early 1930s and young Ray failed to get the high marks needed to enter training for his chosen career of teaching. Instead he went up the River Murray picking fruit; but scurried back to Adelaide when told that the SA Police were taking in a batch of cadets for training. With 600 applicants Whitrod was among the 30 selected.

About this time some of Whitrod's basic principles were being shaped. Though raised a Baptist he was 'unhappy with the Christianity being practised around the place'. Someone said he should see Ivan Menzies, the same Gilbert and Sullivan actor who influenced my father. Menzies had been a great hit with audiences, a bubbly character, but a temperamental artist. Backstage one night, he told Whitrod that his marriage had been saved from the brink of disaster through the Oxford Group and their insistence on absolute moral standards. Ray responded to this practical approach to Christian living. He remembers sitting in silence at the Adelaide police depot before starting work – as Menzies had suggested he do – trying to ask God how his life might need to be different. Absolute values niggled him and, characteristically, he saw that action was necessary. Wearing his police uniform he fronted up to the manager of a local bookshop to pay for books he had, to put it

bluntly, shop-lifted. Other acts of restitution followed, insignificant in themselves but fundamental for Whitrod's career.

(Years later in Queensland he discovered that his opponents had quietly sent one of their henchmen down to Adelaide to see if they could find any skeleton in Whitrod's cupboard to use as blackmail. 'It's a fairly common practice,' says Whitrod. 'Luckily I'd cleared up all my debts.')

At the age of 21, fresh out of training, Whitrod found his principles being tested in a detective unit where he was regarded as a mixed blessing. Nurturing criminal informants while turning a blind eye to their operations was common practice even then. Whitrod started doing detective work his way, 'not by cooperating with the criminal system but by breaking with it' and by 'sheer hard work'. He got results. The commendations fuelled his rapid rise.

World War II interrupted his police service while he served as a RAAF navigator on Catalinas, escorting convoys in the Arctic. Then in the Cold War years that followed, Whitrod was asked to help set up ASIO (the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation). The 'Big Powers' wanted to tighten up on the security of the intelligence they shared with their allies. Whitrod accepted the job and the family moved to Canberra. A colleague in ASIO remembers Whitrod gently chiding him on using the office phone for personal calls without paying for them (hardly the scruples we expect in the murky world of clandestine operations). Four years later Whitrod was sent to direct the run-down Commonwealth Investigation Service, the fore-runner of the Commonwealth Police Force. In fact, he drafted the legislation which brought the Commonwealth Police Force into being. And then became its first Commissioner.

As well as all this, plus raising a young family and leading a local Scout troop, Whitrod went back to study three nights a week, gaining a Diploma of Public Administration which he

extended to an Economics degree, and then an MA in Sociology at the Australian National University. Turning 50 Commissioner Whitrod then swapped his uniform for a cap and gown for a year in Cambridge, completing a Diploma of Criminology. Mavis's teaching paid the bills; no grants were available then for police officers to study. At that time Whitrod was the only police commissioner in Australia with a university degree.

From Canberra Whitrod went on to Papua New Guinea in January 1969. The country – with its multitude of tribes scattered over far-flung islands and jungle-clad mountains – was awakening to the coming independence. Whitrod's term there, leading a 3,000 strong Police Force, seems not to have been an easy one. Within months of his arrival he was faced with an ugly situation where a multinational mining company needed the land of native Bougainvilleans for their huge copper mining operation. It was a conflict which has grown ever since, developing into full-scale war on Bougainville and an attempted secessionist movement. At that time Bougainville was still under Australia's control and the Administration gave the order to send a squad of armed police to take the land by force if necessary. Whitrod felt the police were 'not in the business of shooting people for their land' and went to the Territory's Administrator, David Hay, to diplomatically put the point. Hay rejected Whitrod's advice, weakening his position.

A week later Whitrod had a phone call asking him to take on the Queensland police force. Barely a year after coming to Papua New Guinea, Whitrod left to take on the toughest assignment of all.



After 42 years of police work, the abrupt end of his police career in Queensland was a blow. Moving back to his family

home in Adelaide, he told *The Advertiser* he felt frustrated – not broken, defeated or even disillusioned, just 'frustrated'. He wanted to go fishing. Or to study Siberian migratory birds in the South Australian salt marshes, a hobby developed while accompanying Prince Philip on dawn bird-watching expeditions around Canberra.

When he hung up his uniform for the last time, Ray possibly smarted that a newspaper described him as an 'overweight top cop'. So at 68 he took up early-morning jogging and lost 28 kilos – in preparation for the Adelaide marathon. For the record, he came first in his age class in the 42 kilometre race and later ran the Canberra marathon with his grand-daughter. Twenty years later he has paid for this adventure with arthritis and hip replacement operations.

But then Whitrod was faced with another call to duty which he couldn't refuse. It came from the parents of the victims of 'the Truro murders'. The skeletons of several teenage girls had been found in a field outside Adelaide. They were victims of two men, both out on parole, who had picked girls off the streets then violently raped and murdered them. The trauma suffered by the parents, brothers and sisters was horrendous. 'We're so grateful that you are doing something to help the victims of crime,' said one of the mothers during a phone call to Whitrod. At that point, Whitrod *had not* intended to *do* anything. A newspaper had quoted his comment, made in a public meeting some days earlier, on the \$750,000 being spent to counsel prisoners. Whitrod had asked, what was being done to compensate the members of the public who were victims of crime?

When confronted in that phone call by one such victim Whitrod could not turn a blind eye. He and Mavis invited the woman, with several other parents of those murdered, to their home 'for a cup of tea and scones'. As the Whitrods listened to their suffering two things happened. First, Ray's eyes were opened: 'Like all policemen I'd seen plenty of victims. We

would run into their homes, get details of the crime and then go off to chase the criminals. I suddenly realised that I had never considered the effects, particularly the psychological effects, on the victim.'

Secondly, Ray noticed that the victims seemed to get a lot of help from each other. There was an empathy between them which they complained was lacking with some social workers. They decided to start 'a little self-help group' that Sunday afternoon.

From the start Ray knew it was squarely in his lap. 'Except for my first application to join the police cadets, I never applied for any job. They had always been offered to me, presented as a challenge. This one came with all the hallmarks of a similar call to duty.' The fishing rod and binoculars stayed in the cupboard.



The 'little self-help group' grew to an organisation with a paying membership of 1700 families, as well as influential political, legal and social-work figures. Called Victims of Crime Service (VOCS), its backbone was volunteers who have suffered from violent crime themselves. There was Judy who was confronted by the mutilated body of her murdered 18 year-old son; Marion, mother of two, sexually assaulted in her own home; John, stabbed seven times by an intruder. These volunteers provided support and counselling to other victims, and offered themselves as 'court companions' during stressful trials.

When VOCS was first formed in 1979, some professional counsellors were full of dire warnings about victims assisting victims. Now there is considerable clinical evidence to support the benefits of that approach. Ray noticed another process in operation: 'Pain tends to make you centred on your own suffering. When your attention is diverted to someone with

more recent injury, it helps you overcome your own feelings and become part of the healing process.'

Whitrod was not satisfied to stop there. Structural change was needed. VOCS became active in lobbying for legislative reform of the criminal justice system in order to give justice to all. It was a process of 'restoring the balance to the scales of justice', as one member put it.

An unrelenting detective Whitrod researched international developments, and in 1979 attended a conference in Germany where he became a founding member of the World Society of Victimology. During the six years he served on its executive, the Society defined a set of principles safeguarding the rights of victims and had them successfully placed on the agenda of a United Nations Congress in Milan. This was the first time victims had been recognised in a UN forum. Whitrod was part of the Australian delegation to this Congress in which Chris Sumner, former Attorney General in South Australia, proposed the resolution. Whitrod was one of the drafters of the 'Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice Relating to Victims of Crime and the Abuse of Power', ultimately passed by the UN General Assembly in 1985.

Sumner returned to his state Parliament and introduced a similar set of 17 principles which addressed victims' rights and their treatment. 'There is a whole new move starting in South Australia, new to Australia and new to the world, about where the victim has a role in the criminal justice system,' claimed Whitrod in *The Advertiser*. The SA Police Force may have been the first in the world to have a special branch dedicated to pursuing the rights of victims of violent crime and to review the way police treat them. Every state in Australia now has legislation giving compensation to victims. Some, like South Australia, raise the needed revenue through a five per cent surcharge on fines.

For its first 10 years VOCS was supported almost entirely by membership fees. The Whitrod home phone was the

after-hours emergency number for victims desperately needing help, sometimes in the middle of the night. But now government grants and levies have enabled the agency to grow into a fully professional 'Victim Support Service', the only one operating on this basis in Australia. Volunteers still play a role in the organisation, complementing the work of professional counsellors.

The image of the tough super-cop who cracked down on rowdy student demonstrations in Brisbane somehow does not match with that of a grandfatherly figure quietly counselling a teenage rape victim. Yet that is Ray, a man whose pursuit of justice has brought him many enemies, including some in power structures, and yet whose humanity and compassion have won him a whole tribe of genuine friends. But that doesn't make him soft. He is tough on himself and those under him in his pursuit of ethical principles; and yet generous to a fault in seeing the other person's point of view or respecting their beliefs.



Whistle-blowers are an honourable breed. They do not just whistle in the wind. They can bring down business tycoons, politicians and financial institutions. But more honourable still are those who set a standard to which the wise and honest can aspire.

'I'm opposed to the mediocre society we've got into,' said Whitrod in an interview with *The Advertiser* sometime after his retirement. 'We need the right people (in public life) because there's a shortage of them. How to inspire them is the problem. It ought to be due to some internal push that you go out and do something for society... We seem to have lost it.'

Whitrod would reject any suggestion that his life has provided that needed inspiration for other Australians. Cut the eulogies, he would say. I just did my duty. 'Someone said "Be

ye perfect..." I know it's unattainable but that's the sort of ideal I've set for myself,' he once said on ABC radio.

That was his 'inner push'. Yet the evidence coming from churches and Christians doesn't particularly impress him. 'Christians have become too concerned with repairing what's wrong,' he crackled over the phone to me recently. 'That's part of it. But God is *Creator*. Not just the fixer of things.'

Back in Queensland Whitrod chose a fellow called Murphy for a particular task. Though Murphy was regarded as one of the anti-Whitrod 'green Mafia', Ray thought he had 'a lot of potential'. Whitrod told him to pick his own team and tackle the problem of road deaths from drunken driving in 'Fortitude Valley', where all the sly grog, brothels and illegal casino rackets operated. 'Murphy's Marauders' were so successful they cut the annual death toll from 76 to 2 within four years.

With Whitrod's 'key' of integrity, the Murphy's of this world can be put to good work and Murphy's law can be amended.



Whitrod, Beazley, Beggs... the tendency is to use the evidence to show what one person can achieve. But none of them try to prove that. Their individual actions may have been critical at some point in tipping the balance, but were only effective in partnership with others.

The critical question is, how does one build that partnership of committed people? So often the best of schemes flounder for the lack of teamwork among those involved because of 'personality clashes and power struggles which cause the group to self-destruct', as one grassroots community activist in Brisbane's West End puts it.

Yet the very process of bringing people together, of working through the realities of human nature in relationships to build effective teamwork, is a good base-line experience for any

attempt to change the way the world operates. Anyone who wants to see unity and cooperation needs to model it in their own organisation or party.

Among those who have given us some clues in this process are two men, between my generation and my father's, who showed me the potential of such relationships – not talking about them, but living them. For them every relationship has the potential to advance human growth and justice.

NINE

Bluey and an Aussie stirrer

SOMEONE said 'She'll be right' could be the famous last words of a dying breed of Australians. If they are, then it is probably the generation who survived World War II who are that dying breed. Honourably, for the phrase once conveyed not so much casualness as a determination to beat the survival odds.

Of Australia's population of seven million during World War II, one million served in uniform – most of them overseas, most of them volunteers. Some, like Allan Griffith and Ray Whitrod, beat the odds and came back asking themselves, in various ways, a basic question: if we were ready to make such sacrifices during war, what is required of us during peace?

For two ex-RAAF aircrew, the question has never left them.

On the face of it Jim Coulter and Stan Shepherd had a lot in common. They both came from Western Australia and both served on Squadron 461 Coastal Command hunting down German U-boats in the North Atlantic. At War's end both put aside their chosen careers and gave themselves to getting things 'right' in a world which longed for peace but was steadily being drawn into a Cold War. Both worked at various times in Germany and Japan, and later in Australia, contributing to the action of MRA. And both developed a commitment to live by

Christian faith and principles having come from backgrounds of no belief whatsoever.

One other thing they held in common: the gift of making friends. Not just friends who share the same interests. In fact, the people they have known are about as different a bunch as you could put together – Marxists, sportsmen, prime ministers, teenagers, businessmen, surgeons and actors. Their friendships have meant something special to those involved, many lasting a lifetime. They are friendships which draw strength and meaning from the tasks they engaged in together, a valued teamwork. For years, every Monday morning, Stan Shepherd had breakfast with wharfie leader Jim Beggs sharing the challenge of his work. Through trying periods of his political life Kim Beazley Snr would discuss his most personal concerns with Jim Coulter. The independent intellect of public servant Allan Griffith could be generous but could also inflict demolishing one-liners. Coulter knew Griffith well, and reckoned that with 'absolute love you could say anything'. Their friendship was salted by realism about their own foibles and failures. When two young Laotian exiles (in the next chapter) didn't know if their parents were dead or alive, it was Stan Shepherd and his wife who stuck by them as friends. Both Coulter and Shepherd went with Gil Duthie and Les Norman on their mission of forgiveness to Prime Minister Hatoyama in Japan. And both, over the years, have given me the sort of friendship which expected more of me than I asked of myself.

But in other ways, the two men were utterly different.



Jim Coulter is a stirrer, probably due to the Irishness of grandfather Coulter who came from County Donegal. The old man had made a fortune digging gold in New South Wales, bought two farms then lost them both through drought and floods (and his wife as well). So he crossed the continent with

his five sons to the Kalgoorlie goldfields to try his luck again. Jim's father found a more reliable income through the silver screen, establishing the first cinema in Perth. He was still theatre managing at 76. As a result Jim got to see an immense number of movies, 'most of which did me more good than harm'.

Jim gained entry into Perth Modern School (as did Kim Beazley Snr.) where he fell for the head girl who some years later married him. Jim never stops referring to Rita as 'my better half' and there's probably as much truth as humility in that. Jim's other passion at Perth Modern was sport. Even today, after three angioplasties, he plays a spirited game of tennis, giving a running commentary as he goes. As a member of the school's First 18 football team he admits he was 'an absolute loudmouth'. His father sent him to boxing lessons to toughen him up, which they did admirably. At 18 he was rebellious and ambitious, already working nights as a trainee-reporter on the *West Australian*. He soon developed a journo's cynicism.

Stan Shepherd, by contrast, was a lonely 'Barnardo boy' – an 'orphan of the Empire' who had come to Western Australia as a 10 year-old, with a tag tied around his neck giving his name and destination. A red-head, his workmates later on in life called him 'Bluey'.

Born in an Oxford workhouse for 'paupers and unmarried mothers', he had little memory of his early years with his mother, who was a bottle-filler in a mineral-water business. By the time Stan was four she couldn't cope and admitted Stan to a Barnardo home in East London. He remembers his mother coming to see him there once, along with his little sister Maisie.

One of the Barnardo's inspectors suggested Stan could be sent to Australia. When Stan was moved to a larger Barnardo's home with 700 children, his mother reluctantly agreed. It would be 'the best for him'. Before he and 22 others were

shipped off to Australia, his mother gave him a little toy case. He kept it for years.

The Kingsley Fairbridge Farm School was at Pinjarra, 86 kilometres south-east of Perth. It had some 300 children housed in cottages with corrugated iron roofs and chicken wire half-way down one side. 'Good healthy fresh air to sleep in,' said Stan with a wry smile. Cold showers each morning and farm work in bare feet were part of the regime. The cottage mother was 'a decent woman'; life was 'tough but fair'. Stan enjoyed the farm work, even getting up at four to milk the cows. It was good preparation for his first job, at 15, clearing land for a citrus farm, starting 5.30 am seven days a week. One Sunday morning after milking he got on his bike and cycled 25 miles to apply for a job in Bunning Brothers joinery (now a hardware chain). He started as an apprentice joiner-carpenter.

It was 1941 and young men were going to War. At 18 Stan joined the Army but was sent back to Bunnings to do priority 'defence' construction. He heard that aircrew were needed, so studied on his own for nine months and managed to pass an RAAF entrance exam. 'I thought it might get me a chance to go to Britain and find out more about my family.' Having trained as a wireless/ air-gunner, he eventually found himself with 8000 troops sailing across the Atlantic into Scotland. And from there to his base in Brighton.

The life-expectancy of an airgunner in combat was rated in minutes. 'Before I went into action I wanted to meet my mother and sister,' Stan resolved. He sent them a telegram. Back came the reply: 'Arriving on the 4.43 train tomorrow.' In a state of 'high anxiety' he waited at the station as a tall blonde stepped out of the crowd and kissed him saying 'Hello Stanley.' It was Maisie, his sister. 'As we walked the streets of Brighton she told me I had a step-brother I didn't know about.' Two weeks later Stan got leave and went to London to meet his mother and his four year-old half-brother. The father of the boy was living with them in a tenement home, and had

another wife and family somewhere else. His mother did her best to make Stan welcome, but reality was a shattering blow. 'I lay awake that night while the air raid sirens howled, thinking how I would help my sister come to Australia and leave all this behind.'

Stan survived the War, physically; but barely, emotionally. The shame he felt about his origins and of his own failures in relationships loomed even larger in his mind than did the fear of being shot down. He craved love. Not finding it with family, he went through a series of relationships, and got engaged to a girl in Blackpool. He returned to Australia, promising to set up a home for her on 'soldier settler' land. Over months he wrote hundreds of letters arranging to bring both his fiancée and his sister, Maisie, to Australia. He put money down for their passages. But the shipping company informed him his fiancée didn't show up for the berth he had booked for her. Adding to his pain, Maisie, at the last moment, also decided not to come. 'I was devastated. The bottom dropped out of my life.'



Jim Coulter's war-time challenges took him in a very different direction.

The first challenge came when learning to fly. On his second solo flight up in a Tiger Moth, Jim noticed his instructor in another plane kept diving past him. With the wind in his face and his stomach in his throat, Jim realised that his instructor, without any radio communication, was not giving a brilliant display of aeronautics but trying to tell him something was wrong. Confirmation came rather forcefully as Jim flew low over the runway and looked at his shadow cast by the early morning sun. His Tiger Moth had only one wheel left on which to land. That strange thud during take-off must have been the other one collapsing. As further confirmation, the

ambulance, fire-engine and Station Commander's car were lined up Air Force parade style on the edge of the runway as a welcoming committee.

Jim was not only learning to fly but had been trying to learn something about how to get a working communication going with his Maker – a process which was suddenly enhanced by the prospect of crash landing. 'Dear God, I don't know how to land this thing even on two wheels, you must land it for me,' he gasped as he came down. It was a faultless one point landing till the wing dug in, the propeller broke and the aircraft spun round.

Station Commander Brierley seemed pleased as he approached: 'I'm damned glad you didn't wreck the plane. We've got so few left.' Then as an afterthought, 'and I don't know how you did it without flipping and breaking your neck.' Coulter reckoned he hadn't – God had.

Jim had been raised '100 per cent pagan'. He had begun to believe in something like God because of an incident some time earlier during peace-time. In the case of Jim's step-mother Rose Murphy, 'peace-time' was hardly the term. Jim had never got on with her. Shortly after his own mother died, when Jim was nine, his father had brought Rose home. An early wartime cartoon sketch of Jim shows him in uniform with a scowl on his brow and an impish grin across his mouth. Rose had got a good bit of Jim's critical lip. Things had come to a head – Jim's head – when Rose smashed a vase across it. She had been provoked by a supercilious remark Jim had made about her lack of manners. Jim retreated, his pride as much in pieces as the vase.

Yet Rose and that vase were the unlikely instruments used to break open Jim's first honest look at things internal, and eternal. A friend was going to a weekend Student Christian camp and asked Jim to go with him 'to protect him'. It was a washout... till the last day when some of those Jim had played football with arrived and related how the Almighty had turned

their lives around. They talked about aiming to live such qualities as love and honesty. Jim stuck out his lip and asked where such high moral concepts might be defined. 'The Sermon on the Mount,' was the reply. Jim, religiously illiterate, was no wiser. Someone explained that they were given a long time ago and were readily available in print. So Jim opened a Bible for the first time.

Jim's face must have given him away. The simplicity of Christ's challenges and promises really intrigued him – especially the phrase, 'the pure in heart shall see God'. Jim wasn't satisfied with what he saw of his life. Nor was his heart very pure for that matter. Before long he was sitting with a friend in an empty church, awkwardly confessing what most troubled him – including the unholy war of Rose's. Could a miracle really be possible in that relationship? 'So we prayed, for the gift of love to come into our home,' he remembers. 'And it happened Rose did not become different but I could not help loving her. Even when she walked out on my father for two years, my love for her remained and was undiminished until the day she died.'

What initially impressed Rose was that 18 year-old Jim began making his bed. It led to their first real heart-to-heart talk. When Jim went off to the War a year later she started praying to God to keep him alive.

He needed it. He flew in support of D-Day and had a couple of other crash landings before Hitler surrendered. The last was the most testing of Jim's nerve and faith. A pea-souper hung over most of Britain. Six aircraft returning from action had crashed on landing during the night. Jim had heard each of them crumple up. It was enough to drive any pilot to his knees. A clear quiet thought reassured him: 'You will be in great danger, but will not fear.' In the briefing room later that morning, the instructor seemed determined someone should learn the finer points of instrument flying, and Jim knew in the pit of his stomach it would be him. Theirs was the only

aircraft flying that day in Britain in the fog. 'We never should have been up there,' Jim remembers ruefully.

They got up OK. Reaching the sunshine Jim noticed the veteran instructor appeared critical of everything. Jim lost his temper and gave him a bit of lip about unnecessarily risking their lives. But as they headed down, knowing he might be closer than ever to meeting his Maker, Jim repented, turned and apologised to the instructor, adding that he would be praying for him. Jim saw the ground coming at them and didn't know whether they would live or die... but in that instant realised he had no fear, just as he had been told that morning. When Jim regained consciousness it was on Terra Firma, with the instructor lying still out cold at his feet with nothing worse than a broken arm. Nothing was left of the plane. The two ambulances sent to recover them got lost in the fog.

Not even that close encounter brought Jim down to earth, so to speak, as much as an incident on his return to Australia at War's end. Jim and another airman, Gordon Wise, were returning together on a troopship bound for Sydney. Coulter and Wise had knocked around together at Perth Modern School, both playing football and starting in journalism. They had also gone into the RAAF together, the same squadron. Conscious of having survived when others hadn't, they were discussing what they had learnt. For both of them the challenges of life and death had taught them to depend on obeying the inner promptings of prayer and conscience, day by day. Would they continue to obey in peacetime when others were just wanting to get back to 'life as normal'?

At the back of Jim's mind was an uncomfortable hunch that he should forego his journalist's job on the *West Australian* and give a year to join forces with his friends in MRA. He had flown with Polish airmen and felt keenly they had been betrayed by the Yalta conference. 'If I had been willing to risk everything in a War that didn't achieve lasting results,' Jim had

told himself, 'then I'd better take the opportunity to do something about the world situation or we'd find history repeating itself.' Some wars have to be fought. But there's no morality in war, he had come to realise. War represented the failure of morality. Some new basis had to be built. 'If you sweat more in time of peace, you bleed less in time of war,' he believed. As their ship neared Sydney Coulter wondered if there were any Australians who would understand what on earth he was talking about.

Their first night in Sydney found Wise and Coulter talking till late to a stranger who had called at the home of their host. He seemed to understand. 'You'd better meet the Prime Minister,' said the stranger who turned out to be Fred MacLachlan, personal secretary to Labor PM Ben Chifley.

By 11 am next morning Coulter was telling Chifley with all the authority of a young man in uniform about the moral and spiritual goals that Australia needed. Chifley seemed to take it all on board. Then came an awkward pause. And Coulter blurted out what was really troubling him – whether he should give a year to work with MRA. The only problem was no-one in MRA gets any salary, admitted Coulter, and he had a job waiting for him back in WA. Pulling a pipe out of his Prime Ministerial mouth Chifley looked directly at Coulter: 'If I were you, young fella, I'd back your hunch and give it a go.'

Wise and Coulter had promised each other that if they survived the War, they would indulge together in an Aussie meat pie and milkshake at the first opportunity. Just hours after being in the PM's office they dived into a milk bar. The radio was on. Third item on the midday news was an account of two young airmen calling on the Prime Minister saying Australia needed a moral ideology. The meat pies were not to blame for lumps in their throats! Chifley had been alone with them. He must have issued the press release himself to send them a message of support.

Back home in Perth, Jim went to his newspaper and resigned.

As he left the office, still wondering whether he had done the right thing, a voice called out to him in the street. It was his old headmaster. His son had died during the War in aircrew, he told Jim. 'I've just got his diary in which he says that if he survived he wanted to give himself to Christian work. I've been asking myself if there would be someone like you who would be prepared to do what Ted had promised.'

Jim had all the confirmation he needed. The Prime Minister, and then his headmaster. It seemed like enlisting all over again. And others were enlisting with him...



Postwar life for 'Bluey' Shepherd held no such visions. He had run away from Western Australia to avoid a relationship with a woman who threatened to kill herself if he married someone else. He found a job in a shop-fitting business in Melbourne but work seemed a drudgery. He resented those who seemed to have it better. A sullen hopelessness took hold.

He missed the comradeship he had shared with aircrew during the War. During his lunch break in Collins Street one day, he bumped into Coulter's friend Gordon Wise who had been a pilot in the same squadron. Stan detected an enviable confidence in him and asked him what he was doing in Melbourne. Wise told him how he and Coulter had both started working with MRA. 'We've won the war, now we've got to win the peace,' was his answer.

Gordon Wise spoke with conviction and Stan was impressed with his openness and honesty. They agreed to meet for lunch some days later.

'I somehow felt I could trust Gordon and was honest with him about my situation,' Stan remembered. 'I found it very hard. I began to see that my search for affection had really been the driving force of my life. But my possessiveness had ruined so many relationships. All my life I had judged my mother, but

I was really behaving no differently than she had.'

Like Jim Coulter, Stan had not come from a religious background. It meant nothing to him. But he did know that he wanted life to be different. And something in Gordon Wise's friendship and example made him feel it was possible. It was a leap of faith. After several long talks together, the two ex-airmen got onto their knees and prayed for God, or whoever was up there, to 'be the boss' and make life different. 'It was like a stone lifted off my back,' said Stan. It empowered him to take practical steps towards making that difference – fronting up to his boss about stuff he'd pinched at work, putting his heart into his work and doing a full day's work (even though the foreman regularly turned up late). In the most difficult area of all, relationships, he began to sense 'an unseen hand, offering to rescue me from the entanglements of my weaknesses'. He found the courage to break from the web of possessiveness.



Maybe that's what we call 'grace' – not a free ride of bypassing our failures, but an act of empowerment that comes in a moment of honest acknowledgement of the truth, and the simple acceptance of forgiveness.

Maybe that's what true friendships are for – to nurture each other's growth and to be instruments of mutual transformation. In just the way that Gordon Wise met Stan Shepherd in the depths of his blues and gave him a way out, so Shepherd and Coulter began giving friendship to others. Instead of craving affection, Stan began to see how he could find affection for each person he met.

Over the months Stan developed a gut feeling that he should quit his job and spend more time with MRA. He told one of his new friends, who said he'd had a similar thought but had been waiting for Stan to say it. It was another leap of faith

but one that Stan readily took. He sold his motorbike, cashed in his savings and stepped out into a new life. Within a year he was in Germany, befriending those who had been the 'enemy' during the War.



Stan was overawed by the grimness of postwar Germany. He went initially for a weekend but stayed for five years. One year he lived in the industrial city Gelsenkirchen; over 60 per cent of it had been destroyed, bombed out. In 1949 the hard work of reconstruction was under way but the signs of a nation defeated were everywhere. Especially in people.

He linked up with 15 other men who were there coordinating the action of MRA. They worked as a team. Some became Stan's life-long friends. One was Leif Hovelsen, a young Norwegian who had been betrayed by a fellow member of the Resistance and was repeatedly threatened with execution during months of interrogation under the Gestapo. And Geoffrey, a fluent German-speaking son of a British colonial officer, who put aside his promising civil service career for the cause of rebuilding Europe. Then there was Duncan, a stocky Scottish shipyard worker. They worked to support an increasing number of Germans who were taking responsibility for healing their scarred nation – people like Peter Petersen, who had been wounded in the final German retreat, was imprisoned by the British and later became a member of parliament.

Their strategy at that time, said Stan, was two-fold: to get a cross-section of Germans out to the annual summer conferences which MRA organised in their international centre in Caux, Switzerland; and to take groups of Germans to countries with whom they had been at war, as a sort of shock-therapy reconciliation process.

The effect of this 'outside exposure' on Germans, wrestling not just with economic and material reconstruction but also

with the guilt of what their nation had done, is hard to qualify, much less to quantify. Nearly 50 years later the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies published a study on peacemaking (*Religion the missing dimension of statecraft*, Oxford University Press, 1994). Their research into MRA's work in Europe showed that between 1946 and 1950 a total of 3,113 Germans went to the MRA conferences in Caux – 'a fair proportion of the entire (West) German elite'. They included 85 MPs, 400 trade unionists, 210 industrialists and 160 media people. In Caux they interacted with people from other parts of Europe, including thousands of French citizens.

On the second strategy, in the five years after Stan arrived, 26 German delegations went to countries which had been at war with or occupied by Germany. Some were large, such as a group of coal miners who went round the world. Others, like the group Stan accompanied to Denmark and Sweden in 1953, were just a handful. In that group Stan was billeted in a room with a cantankerous Marxist coal miner, sent and paid for by his company. 'What's happened to Mackowiak?' said someone in his coal mine after they returned. 'He is a different man.'

Marxists were, in fact, among the closest friends Stan and his colleagues made. At one MRA conference in Switzerland, the Minister-President of North-Rhine Westphalia had appealed for help in the Ruhr. It was the centre for 80 per cent of Germany's heavy industry and had 160 coal mines. So they focused their efforts in the Ruhr, setting up a base in Düsseldorf. The US was pouring billions of dollars into Europe through Marshall Aid. The Allies wanted to set up 'Works Councils' in every mine and industry in a drive towards democratisation. But as Stan and his friends soon discovered, the Works Councils were dominated by hardcore Communist Party members. A Comintern document in 1948 had predicted that the Ruhr would be the centre for 'mass struggle in Germany'.

From their Düsseldorf base the MRA team went to factories and mines, day after day, for meetings with the Works Councils. These often lasted for hours. The Party men were seasoned ideologues. Many had been persecuted by the Nazis, some of them in concentration camps. They would argue fiercely the inevitability of the class struggle while their visitors argued that a 'dialectic' between good and evil was crucial for a postwar world to survive. The Party men were not readily convinced. But some of them began to accept that the logical conclusion of class war in an atomic age was an all consuming holocaust. More than that, it was the power of simple friendship that got through to them after years of suffering. Night after night the miners and their families would be visited in their homes.

Max Bladeck, chairman of Works Councils in five coalmines, was one of them. And Paul Kurowski, an aggressive ideologist responsible for training functionaries. Both had been Communists since the 1920s. And both had been fundamentally impacted by their visit to Caux in 1949, when 1200 Germans attended the summer conferences. The results of those conferences, and the fierce ideological struggle that followed back in Germany, have been documented by Stan's Norwegian friend, Leif Hovelsen, in his book *Out of the Evil Night*. In a word Kurowski concluded that 'the basic theories of Marxism' had become outmoded. He had seen class enemies find a dramatic change of attitude. And Bladeck who had believed that 'every capitalist is a fascist at heart' discovered 'an ideology which does not set one man against another but shows how a man may make enemies into friends.'

They needed all the friends they could get when this 'dangerous revisionism' hit the Party strongholds back in Germany. The struggle went on for months through the winter of 1949/ 1950. Bladeck and Kurowski were expelled from the Party. A steady stream of comrades left with them. Leif Hovelsen and his team went night after night to their

homes to give them support. Stan remembered a note being pushed under Kurowski's door as they talked with him: 'We warned you, traitor.' In two years Communist Party representation on the Ruhr works councils dropped from 72 per cent to 25 per cent.

Significantly, many senior managers from German industries were also finding a change of motivation through the conferences in Caux. The new dialectic helped to develop a 'growth of trust' – as one leader of 27,000 miners put it – between unionists and managers; and that opened the way for the introduction of *Mitbestimmung* (the 'co-determination' law which in 1951 became the foundation of industrial democracy in Germany).

That story, too, obviously has many more details.

One wonders what Stan Shepherd said in those long nights of discussions with miners and managers in the Ruhr. Not much, probably. 'Bluey' Shepherd may have been a shop steward on his shop-fitting job back in Melbourne. But he was no theoretician and never had a lot to say. His friendship was communicated a different way, more with a twinkle in his eye and some thoughtful act of caring.

When Stan did contribute, it was with a thought-out one-liner or challenging vision, delivered with passion and clarity. Then it was the other party's turn to be reduced to silence, pondering the implications. Never were so many friendships owed to so few words!

His own painful childhood and working-class origins were part of the unspoken identification with those suffering in Germany. 'Everyone has their heartache,' he used to say. 'You are what you choose to be. If you've decided to be bitter, to see yourself as a victim, that's what you'll be. If you choose not to be blackmailed by your past, you can help people move from being victims to victors.' Stan learned it the hard way. 'Never let your handicaps get the better of you and cheat you out of your God-given destiny.'

His mother had taught him that 'every relationship has to be built'. Not that she ever said so. But Stan learned it through the exercise of patience with and caring for her. After his first change of heart in Melbourne he began to see his mother differently. Instead of blaming her, he began to consider what she must have gone through. One of nine children, she had lost her own mother while still in childhood. By the age of 14 she was working as a domestic servant in a London home. Her life had always been a struggle.

Every Sunday for decades Stan wrote to her though he got few replies. And whenever he could, he visited her in Britain. On one visit in 1966 she told him for the first time who his father was – the manager of the factory where she worked as a 19 year-old. The aching void, represented by that empty space on his birth certificate, was at last filled... a little anyway. He recognised her hidden guilt at having abandoned him as a child, and began to find a love for her. Again in 1981 Stan went every day for a month to spend time with her in her nursing home. 'You look more like your dad every day,' she said. On the last day he prayed with her, then left to return to Australia. Three years later she died.

'In many ways my early life has helped me to understand the many people I have worked with,' said Stan. 'God calls an ordinary person. I haven't got the name "Shepherd" for nothing.'

After Germany it was two years in Japan. And then two more in the Philippines. Then India for 13 years. And a host of other places.

In the Philippines, in '58-'59, he and his former RAAF friend, Gordon Wise, teamed up to help build human bridges of friendship between Japan and its former enemies in Asia. They had government backing for an 'Asian assembly' which was to be attended by high-level delegations from Korean, Taiwan and Japan. They needed secretarial help so they cabled Australian friends.

When Aileen Brown (my father's sister, a trained secretary) arrived in Manila, she stepped off her plane onto a red carpet and a military band played 'Waltzing Matilda'. It had been laid on for Army generals arriving for a top-brass SEATO meeting. But Aunt Aileen got off the plane first. Stan was there to help her with her baggage. And guess what? A year later they got married. At last Stan had found his soul-mate.

Their love for each other has done much to heal the scars of the past. 'It's a rich gift to have a partner in all you do and to feel that you've married the right person,' said Stan after 40 years. There's a whole tribe of people who consider the Shepherds among their most trusted friends.



So what was 'stirrer' Coulter doing all this time? His adventures and the friends he made could fill another book. To mention, briefly, just a couple...

Conrad Hunte was opening batsman for the celebrated West Indian cricket team which toured Australia in 1960. Highlight of that tour was the Brisbane Test, first and only tied Test Match in the history of cricket. After five days of play, two balls before the end with only three runs to go, Australian Ian Meckiff hooked what looked like the winning four. But the ball was stopped short of the boundary by Hunte who heaved it 80 metres into the wicket keeper's glove, taking another crucial Australian wicket. Breathless moments later, on the last ball of the game, West Indian Joe Solomon fielded a drive at mid-on and felled the wickets as the two remaining Australian batsmen were going for the single run which would have won the game. Both teams scored 737 runs. 'The Greatest Test Match... ever played,' enthused the correspondent for *Wisden Cricketers' Almanac*.

But Conrad Hunte's 'greatest test', to use his own words, came through something 'more profound than anything we

encountered on the field' during that tour. Captain Frank Worrell had urged his team to build good relations with the Australian public. So they accepted various speaking dates.

Before a Sunday afternoon church audience in Adelaide, Hunte traced the history of the West Indies from its painful origins in the slave trade to its approaching independence. He also paid tribute to the Christian missionaries. It was broadcast nationally, and Hunte received a flood of appreciative letters. This did not please him, as he admitted later. For the letters sharpened a sense of his own hypocrisy: 'I had used cricket for fame and fortune, and treated God as a convenience to suit my whim and fancy... I was doing nothing, just nothing, to help the poor of the world.'

Hunte had grown up in poverty, one of nine children of a plantation labourer. Alone, in some despair, Hunte had wept and prayed to be 'shown what to do'. But he had little hope that his prayer would be answered. 'I put on a bold front to hide the emptiness within, and plunged deeper into cricket.'

A couple of weeks later, during the final Test in Melbourne, there waiting to see him in his hotel lobby was an Australian called Jim Coulter. Having heard Hunte's talk Coulter wanted him to see a film, *The Crowning Experience*. It told the true story of Mary McLeod Bethune who was born of slave parents and rose to become founder of the first university for black Americans. Hunte agreed to go at close of play on the last day of the Test.

The film 'riveted' Hunte, for 'it seemed to point the way out of my failures and frustrations'. He invited Coulter for breakfast in his hotel room next morning. The scene in *The Crowning Experience* which had most hooked Hunte was when Bethune and a friend had sat in silence, listening for any intuitive whisper that God might give to their waiting hearts and minds. Hunte was a practising Christian and had often prayed to God; but never thought of listening. He asked Coulter was it possible?

'Why not?' Coulter replied. 'As a matter of fact I was listening this morning and had some thoughts for you.' Hunte was intrigued. What were they?

Coulter obliged, pulling out a notebook in which he'd written them down: 'God has chosen Hunte. He feels this himself. He will find God's plan for his life if he takes time to listen every morning.'

It was, perhaps, a bit of a body-liner for only his third meeting with a visiting international star. But Hunte took it squarely on his bat. His response to that blunt personal vision guided the path of his life for decades after. It steadied him through the ups and downs of his cricket career (such as when he was bypassed as Vice-Captain and Gary Sobers was made captain in 1964). It prompted his early retirement from first class cricket in 1967 in order to devote himself to a campaign of racial reconciliation in British cities at a time when white racism and Black Power were confronting each other. It shaped his marriage to Patricia, an American television presenter. And it led them to South Africa where, for eight years, Conrad coached promising young cricketers in the black townships like Soweto.

Through it all his friendship with Jim deepened – a friendship which had lots of energy and humour (Conrad's infectious laugh could drive a six through any heavy discussion), but also challenging, almost to the point of being aggressive with each other.

Back at the start of it, through listening for God's leading, Hunte had decided to front up and be honest with the West Indian Cricket Board of Control about some money he had cheated on his expenses during a Pakistani tour of the West Indies. The amount was trifling compared to the big money paid by corrupt bookmakers in recent cricket scandals. Yet he paid it back. Hunte's action was not lost on his team-mates. 'That man, Conrad, I've never seen a man happy like Conrad's happy,' bowler Wes Hall told Coulter on a later Australian

tour. 'But Conrad, he went too far. He told the Board of Control he was sorry he'd cheated them of money... Now that was a bad thing to do 'cos now they think we've *all* done it!' More roars of laughter.

Jim recalled the incident when Conrad Hunte came back to Australia on his last visit, in 1999, to open an MRA conference on 'Building Community' in Sydney. Arriving on the day of his keynote talk, Conrad joined Jim on the tennis court for a friendly hit-up. After only a few rallies Hunte suddenly collapsed with a massive coronary.

Jim was with him as the ambulance took him to hospital – and alongside him as he died.



Then there was Jim's friend, Paul Lapun, president of the 'Napidakoe Navitu' association representing 63 village groups on the Pacific island of Bougainville. Jim first met him when Lapun came to Sydney, seeking a High Court injunction against the multinational mining giant, Conzinc Riotinto (CRA) which was starting work on what was to become the world's largest open-cut copper mine.

This was 1969, well before the bloody civil war on Bougainville which has cost some 15,000 lives. The seeds of that tragedy were being sown even then. Pre-independent Papua New Guinea (PNG) was still under the administration of the Australian government, who simply requisitioned whatever land was needed for the mine's development. The villagers watched in horror as American and Australian engineers carved a multi-million dollar road up to the mine site, leaving a gaping wound across their mountainside.

Their resistance came to a head when bulldozers, backed up by 100 riot police using tear gas, moved villagers off their land near the village of Rorovana. 'Bloody thugs, Australia's shame,' headlined the Sydney *Sun*. And the *South Pacific Post*,

PNG's main paper, screamed: 'The (Australian) Administration is stealing from us.'

Coulter had been alerted to Lapun's arrival in Sydney by Talbot Lovering, a public solicitor acting for the Bougainville people. Lovering, who had met Coulter through MRA, bumped into Lapun at the airstrip on the island and thought that Lapun might need a supportive friend in a strange land. Jim tracked Lapun down in a 'crummy hotel' into which he had been deposited, along with his offsider, a burly land-owner by the name of Raphael Bele. Sensing they were unhappy he offered to arrange alternative accommodation, an offer readily accepted. Within a short time they were comfortably settled in the home of an architect Coulter knew on Sydney's North Shore.

Away from the bevy of lawyers, journalists and activists who had besieged them at the airport, Lapun and Bele began to talk. Coulter did not try to suggest what they should do; rather he opened up space for them. 'Nobody could tell us what was right except God Himself,' said Lapun, a Catholic and ex-seminarian. 'We sat to have guidance from God together.' Lapun's feeling was that, instead of 'making newspaper headlines', they should try to find a solution. Rather than go to the High Court, they should first try to meet the head of the mining company, the Prime Minister, and the Minister for External Territories responsible for administering Papua New Guinea.

Over the next two days Coulter talked his way into dates with all three men and stuck with his new friends through the interviews. He remembers Lapun telling CRA's chief, Sir Maurice Mawby, 'We don't want money. Land is like our skin. You wouldn't expect us to sell our skin, would you?' Mawby got the point and agreed to direct negotiations with the people, if the PM gave his approval. Coulter got on the phone to his friend, Allan Griffith, in Canberra. Next day they were ushered in to meet Prime Minister John Gorton. 'Let's be

clear,' said the PM, 'you want a High Court injunction to toss the company into the sea. Is that it?'

Lapun, the ex-seminarian, patiently explained: 'No, our feeling is that God put the copper into the ground; we haven't found His way of getting it out yet.' Coulter found himself explaining Lapun's words for Gorton who was having trouble grasping what they were saying. It was probably a long time since God had been brought so directly to the notice of the Prime Minister, he mused. Gorton's face softened as he began to understand the vision of these indigenous leaders.

The PM called in Minister of Territories 'CEB' Barnes, the third man on their list. Trying to help, Barnes offered \$10 more per acre on top of the \$105 already proposed. Gorton countered: 'Look here, CEB, it's no good trying to up them \$10 a pop. They need to be able to go back and say that we've actually changed our policies; because if they don't, there'll be bloodshed.' Gorton agreed to direct negotiations with CRA.

A new policy was under way. But the challenge, as Lapun told Barnes, was 'to convince my people. I am only their spokesman.' It was no easy task. They returned to Rorovana, the centre of the dispute. A few days later Coulter arrived with an appointed independent lawyer and accountant to support them in their negotiations with the company. Days of angry exchanges raised the temperature and had Coulter wondering if they would get out alive. Coulter's role was not that of a negotiator but to support his friend, Paul Lapun, in his aim of 'not seeking headlines but a solution'. For a moment, something like trust was re-established.

A settlement was reached, but just with the Rorovana villagers – leasing their land as part of the port site for 40 years, rather than selling it, and at \$1,000 an acre, 10 times what the Australian government had originally offered for outright purchase.

That lease, of course, never ran its 40 years. Two decades later the Bougainville Revolutionary Army dynamited mining

facilities and CRA closed operations, which up till then had accounted for 40 per cent of Papua New Guinea's export trade. Secessionists took up arms and blood flowed.

In December 1989 Sir Paul Lapun was again in Sydney with Coulter at an MRA conference, where he presented a 'memorandum' on the civil war that was sweeping his homeland. Once again he declared, 'God put the copper in the ground and He can show us the right way of getting it out again.' That was the way, argued Sir Paul, to address the ongoing grievances of his people. Fish and animals were dying from pollution of the river; the open cut mine was seen as a huge hole that had suddenly appeared in the ground in a way which had never been explained to the landowners; and the PNG Army were 'behaving badly' by shooting men and raping women. 'The forgotten factor is that people must be considered first and continuously.'

A failed hope? It took another decade of death and destruction before anything like peace was negotiated between PNG's government under Prime Minister Sir Makere Morauta and various Bougainville leaders including significantly, the women of the island. The suffering had been immense. Lapun himself was badly assaulted in his home after being falsely accused of accepting a substantial gift from a visiting Australian Parliamentary delegation in 1994.

Can peaceful life on Bougainville ever be restored? Just as Stan Shepherd and Jim Coulter witnessed in Germany and Japan, the price of peace is a long and sustained struggle to build trust where there is none, for forgiveness to penetrate through cycles of hatred and arrogance, and for reconstruction to be carried forward by committed and selfless people. Some are still striving for it in Bougainville despite the odds.

They need whatever help they can get. And that's what friends are for.



So why is the key to friendship so important?

Because at the heart of all the big issues, all the great movements of history – whether Cold War tensions in Germany or globalisation today, whether in the heady professional sports circuit or the struggle for meaning among young people, whether in Third World development or big power politics – there are people, individuals, bundles of fears and feelings, hopes and shame. Most of us need true friends to help work through this personal stuff. Getting past these inner hurdles can bring a sense of liberation, a new confidence and direction which impacts on the larger issues we are involved in. Kurowski on industrial democracy, Hunte on tackling racial conflict, Lapun on the rights of his unprotected people...

The key of friendship opens a door to an even greater longing in our fragmented modern world – the search for community. We go now to Sydney to a refugee family who had to build it from scratch.

TEN

Out of the fire into the mixing pot

THE VERY WORD 'COMMUNITY' seems to have a lot of warm-fuzzies associated with it: acceptance, cooperation, safe-space, belonging, tolerance... All things we need. Some would say, all things our world and age are forcing us to learn. From both sides of the globalisation barricades – from blue-blood capitalists to the greenest ecologists – the idea of all of humanity becoming one interdependent global community has become something of a mantra.

In the late 1960s Apollo astronauts said they saw earth as the 'one blue sphere' in the hostile desert of space. But come a bit closer and spaceship earth ain't such a friendly place. For most of the six billion passengers, this shrinking communications-wired world is one of hostile take-overs (military and economic), high-tech terrorism, refugees without borders and widening inequalities. In Los Angeles, Rio de Janeiro or Johannesburg, 'community' can be a life-threatening place. We talk fondly of a 'global village' – but millions live in villages which are racked by AIDs or by the virus of dis-integrating 'progress' against which there is no cultural immunity.

Yet for all that, modern communication systems and mobility have engendered a global consciousness among us and the

possibility – if not the promise – of becoming more truly one community. We know as never before that ultimately our survival depends on it.

Nowhere is this diverse and struggling human family more obvious than in the world's mega-cities. More than half of all people on earth live in cities.

Australian cities reflect the reality of one of the most multicultural societies in the world. Sydney's second most widely-spoken language is Arabic. The SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) has radio and television programs, every week, in over 60 languages. Since World War II our population has more than doubled from 7.5 to 19 million, and 6 million – one third of all Australians – have come as immigrants. Such an influx, wrote Dean Aitken when he was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra, has moved Australia from being 'a constipated Anglo-Celtic colony to being an effervescent multicultural society'. The opening ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympics gave a taste of that diverse and vibrant reality.

So have these recent 'migrants' brought us any closer to realising 'global community' on this ancient and once isolated continent? The experiences of two refugee families, from Laos and Lebanon, bring us closer not only to their reality but to the reality of Australia as it is becoming.



Within the shadow of the Sydney Harbour Bridge (well, almost) is a small electronics repair shop, a few doors from the Neutral Bay ferry landing. Inside it is lined on all sides with VCRs, audio systems and TVs, from floor to ceiling. But there's always room, the owner insists, for a chair in the corner.

Chanthanith Chittasy arrived in Australia in 1975 at the end of the Vietnam war, a refugee from occupied Laos. With \$5 in his pocket, a rusty screwdriver and an old multimeter, he

went looking for work. He got it in a factory: long hours of hard labour with no future. He enrolled for an electronics course, studying full-time for three years and waiting in a restaurant at night. Now married to Ramphay, with three sons, 'Nith' runs a flourishing business along with his Chinese off-sider.

The chair in the corner is important. Nith invites his customers from Sydney's better-off North Shore suburbs to sit down. Often the conversation goes way beyond fixing their electronics gadgets to the more serious breakdowns in their lives. 'I know there's always work to catch up on,' he says. 'But people need someone to listen. Marriage difficulties, study headaches, job problems... sometimes I just unplug the phone to give my full attention. Of course money is important; but money will come. People are more important.'

Called out to a luxurious apartment, he was told an appliance had to be fixed because his client was moving. Nith inquired why? Divorce, said the lady. 'Can you please tell me,' Nith asked politely, 'we are just a young married couple and want to learn. What went wrong?' They were into it. 'My husband made a lot of money but was never at home. I need a father for my children...' And so on. Nith realised the complaints had a familiar ring and made up his mind not to work on Saturdays but to go to his son's soccer games instead. 'You have to just keep your mouth shut and learn.'

At the home of an elderly woman, Nith did the repair job in half an hour and was about to leave. The customer had been whingeing about things that were wrong in Australia. Nith told her about his father's struggle to survive in a prison-labour camp, and of his own escape as a refugee. The conversation went on for two hours. 'Are you sure that's enough?' said the woman when he presented the bill. 'What can an old woman like me do to help the community?' she asked. 'Lots of things,' suggested Nith, 'such as Meals on Wheels, like my in-laws do.'

His in-laws, Tianethone and Viengxay Chantharasy, have

worked for Lane Cove's Meals on Wheels Service for years; as well as doing voluntary work with the Refugee Council of Australia and Neighbourhood Watch. 'If we don't have a loving heart for old people we destroy ourselves,' said Tianethone, who is well into retirement years himself. 'It is most rewarding. The elderly people welcome us with a radiant smile when we deliver hot food to them.' A reporter from the Lane Cove *Village Observer* asked them why they do it? 'It lifts up our souls. As Buddhists, we are seeking a life based on tolerance, honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. The secret is to start with ourselves and not blame others. We have left hatred behind.'

Or as he told Carline Jones on ABC radio: 'As new Australians, we want to contribute to the well-being of this country.'

For the Chantharasys and their family it is a choice they have made: to do good in reply to evil, not to return hatred for hatred but compassion instead. More than simply a Buddhist principle, it is their way of getting beyond the cycle of hatred and greed which, in their view, destroyed their beloved Laos.

Tianethone was once Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in his country. He had diplomatic postings to Washington, Canberra and, in the early seventies, was Lao Ambassador to India. Now in exile he remains the Senior Representative of the Party of Government of Vientiane, which was the co-signatory of the 1973 Agreement for National Reconciliation with the 'Patriotic Forces', or Pathet Lao.

Two years after that agreement, the communist Pathet Lao took control of the government of national unity in which Chantharasy was a minister. As Vietnamese tanks rolled into the capital, Chantharasy and his wife were tipped off by a student they had befriended, one of the Pathet Lao cadre. Just 15 minutes before troops arrived to arrest him, Tianethone and his family left everything and took a boat across the Mekong into Thailand. Half their family of six daughters and a son

were already overseas. In pain and with deep sorrow they made their way to Paris where the family was reunited.



How to understand what it means to be a refugee? And what it is to become an Australian? I am invited to dinner at the Chantharasy's modest Lane Cove home. Only some of the family are there, but enough to fill the living room. Rothay Abhay, the oldest daughter, and Outama, her husband, have two children (13 year-old daughter Orada tells me her best school-friend is Swedish, others Armenian or Indian, and 'half the school' are Muslims). Chanthanith and Ramphay are there with three sons. So is Siry, the youngest daughter, and Wes Jones, her red-headed husband of Welsh extraction, both working in management positions. Another daughter in Canberra is married to a Croatian. After a gracious buffet meal the grandchildren go to another room and the family gathers to answer my questions.



'I was so attached to my country and didn't want to leave,' says Tianethone sadly. 'Nobody wants to be a refugee. I regard it as an experience of significant personal growth. I can feel the sufferings of others who have gone through this and more.'

Mrs Chantharasy explains, with a Buddhist truth: 'We are very lucky because if you don't go through pain and suffering, you don't grow. If you don't suffer, you don't understand life... And if you don't listen to the whisper of forgiveness, you might hear the scream of hate, of war.'

Of course not all refugees see it that way. Nor all Australians. Many who come from situations of hardship and war try to 'hide the pain' with hard work, with material comforts, admits Rothay. But theirs is a façade which tries to

cover the loss. 'I feel part of the Australian way of life with work, a family, a mortgage,' says her husband, Outama. 'But I'm still Lao. If there is the right opportunity I will go back.' Rothay, however, feels 'we can wait forever. Though my heart is in Laos there is something special here in Australia which is unique and worth caring for. We can all come out better because all of us are going through change – the original inhabitants and those of us who have since arrived.'

It sounds somewhat vague. Change in what way? What sort of pain?

'We who have come from other countries need to reach out and share our stories of suffering. Often I think that if I do, I will get hurt. But that's my problem. There are different degrees of suffering but everyone suffers. We must not be afraid to feel one another's pain,' Rothay answers.

Outama joins in: 'Refugees have to change the idea that they are victims. True, they may have been victims of atrocities in their homelands but they shouldn't go on feeling victimised all the time in Australia. It's not easy to change this mentality, particularly when people of different colours have been subject to domination over many centuries.' (He means domination by white people, but is too polite to say so). 'We are in the process of creating a nation with all our differences. We don't like to lose our identity in that melting pot... If you can keep your identity and yet be part of everybody, that is a great thing. But the moment we talk about "our identity" as something better than others, we close the bridge to other people.'

Speaking of bridges, Rothay and many members of her extended family were among the 250,000 who crossed Sydney Harbour Bridge in May 2000, in a massive 'Walk for Reconciliation'. As a member of the Lane Cove 'Residents for Reconciliation' group, she felt that day was important: 'Marching across the bridge, I looked back over my shoulder and found myself being surrounded by a sea of people sharing the same hope. It was truly magical. I felt a powerful spirit of

unity amongst us and it reaffirmed my conviction that we cannot build a future without healing the past. We *all* need healing, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike.'

But for Rothay and Outama the process of building bridges – of making reconciliation work – takes more than a mass movement of public support. It is a daily process; and necessarily, a painful one. Like on the train to work each morning, says Rothay: 'When I sit next to someone and the person moves away, or I am blatantly stared at, it hurts. Maybe I'm oversensitive, but the message I get is "You're not welcome." I was brought up in a family where character mattered; not colour.'

One day at work, a client pointed at her and demanded, 'Why is that girl there. She's not Australian.' Rothay was on the verge of tears. Luckily, a colleague stood up for her, pointing out that Rothay had earned her position through sheer hard work. 'I love Australia. This shouldn't happen,' said Rothay with passion. 'For a long time after that I just shut my heart.' But then, during one of her train journeys, a key thought came to her: 'Are you going to be part of the problem or part of the solution? You can be blocked by bitterness or you can keep your heart open. Pick yourself up inside.'

Siry, her youngest sister, speaks with equal feeling: 'I cringe when someone talks to me louder and slower than normal, or when people assume I know all the good Asian restaurants.' During Pauline Hanson's One Nation campaign she suddenly felt very conspicuous in the streets. But 'the challenge is to move out, rather than sitting back and saying, "They'll never understand me. It's beyond them. They're so right, so arrogant, so Australian..." If you take that attitude, it becomes a mirror image of theirs.' Siry worked in film production in Hong Kong for some years. She says she 'couldn't wait to get back to Australia. With all the challenges for multiculturalism, this is still a beautiful place to be. I think compassion is something we all have to work at.' She values going each year

with her husband, Wes, to the dawn service on Anzac Day, holding a candle and singing the anthem with 'coyish pride'.

Tianethone adds his conclusion: 'It's so human to say, "This is my country. Why are these people coming?" I felt the same towards the French colonialists. But the greater the discrimination, the more compassion and sharing are needed.'

So for this Lao-Australian family the exercise of compassion and the experience of suffering are both part of Australia's 'growing up'. Those who have suffered most can help the healing of Australia's historical wounds.

Earlier in 2000, before the Harbour Bridge walk, a smaller less noticed walk took place in Sydney's stately Phuoc Hue Temple, centre for the Vietnamese Buddhist community. Smaller, but no less significant for reconciliation and healing. Accompanied by gongs and incense, young girls carrying lilies led a procession of the saffron-robed monks from the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Lao communities. Conflicts between these three countries lie deep in history, and were made all the more raw by the 'Vietnam war'. For the first time, a collaborative effort between the three exiled communities brought them together to pray for peace. 'The countries of Indo-China have experienced untold suffering,' said the Most Venerable Phuoc Hue, President of the Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation of Australia and New Zealand. 'So we should pray for peace and promote it in Australia.'

Representing the Lao community, Mr Chantharasy underlined the significance of the ceremony: 'Our decision to work together is in itself an exceptional achievement. History has shown that those who are powerless have deep strength, and that violence cannot overcome the power of the spirit. All of us here can make a difference through our new attitude. By being here... we want to break the chain of hatred and revenge.'

Reflecting the Buddhist belief in reincarnation, he said that the spirits of those who died through war and hatred will go

on causing anguish and enmity unless released. 'We are here because we believe in the power of prayer,' Tianethone told the packed pagoda. 'We need to pray for the millions who have died and for the salvation of souls that are lost. Without a proper ceremony these souls will continue to haunt, divide and cling to hatred and revenge.' So they prayed. At similar events in Melbourne, monks representing countries from the region also joined in prayers for forgiveness.



Does hope never die? After years in exile, these refugees cling to the belief that 'a new Laos will be born in Australia'. One meets Burmese, Somalis, El Salvadorans, Tibetans and many others with similar hopes.

For the Chantharasy family, it is not so much a political alternative but a moral force that is needed to save their jewel of a country. 'Most refugees, if given the opportunity, would still want to serve their country,' said Tianethone. 'But without a moral foundation we would have a Laos still divided. Unity, not revenge, is needed – the current of forgiveness.'

Ramphay tries to put into words 'why we lost our country?' It is 'too easy' to blame the communists, the Vietnamese, she says. It was the weaknesses of people that destroyed Laos: the jealousy, fear, bitterness, greed, the addictions... But the same things, she found, have undercut their sense of community in Australia. 'The struggle between good and evil did not stop in 1975. It has continued wherever the refugees are.'

The answers they see are, first of all, intensely personal: the Buddhist path of self-purification. 'I have found a solid connection with my inner life,' Ramphay said at a conference in 1999. 'I have found the more I look inside my conscience, the more I find peace. On a daily basis I have to be on guard that these three things should not enter my heart – resentment,

greed and fear. To hold that as my personal responsibility.'

She told how these answers have been expressed in action. From the early years of their marriage, she and Nith actively drew together the young people of the Lao community. All of them have been 'bombarded by the wealth of this country,' said Ramphay. 'We came to a point where we realised enough is enough. We decided to seek calmness instead, by helping, by giving.'

Together they raised money for the Red Cross and for the temple in Sydney's western suburbs. Dividing up the work, they shared the preparations for weddings in the community, which could involve as many as 1,000 people. Still they call their friends to the temple 'just to give one or two hours' - cleaning toilets, fixing leaky taps, arranging some flowers. 'I may clean my house a thousand times and have a sense of emptiness; but to go to the temple and do one little chore like that, I have a sense of belonging.' A sense of community, she might have said.

'Each of us have a unique gift,' Ramphay continued. 'We need to express our uniqueness in our contribution. Through working as a team, trust comes.'

Tianethone takes the process one step further, to the family. He quotes Confucius; 'To put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order. To put our families in order, we must first cultivate our personal life. To cultivate our personal life we must first set our hearts straight.' Time and again he and Viengxay refer back to the early years of their marriage when he was an ambitious young government officer immersed in the social whirl in Laos, leaving her alone with the children. At an MRA conference in America he began to realise the suffering he had caused her. He wrote an eight-page letter asking her forgiveness. 'An Asian man does not find it easy to apologise,' he admits. It was a small price to pay for the joy that came into their relationship and for the strength it gave them as they faced adversity as refugees.

A generation later, Ramphay and Nith had to work through the same issues. In 1975 Nith had escaped across the Mekong with machine gun fire rattling in his ears. After three months in a Thai refugee camp he received word that his mother was apparently dying and that as her only son he should return. Risking arrest, possibly death, he went back to Vientiane to find out that she had been taken to Northern Laos to be cared for by his uncle. When he finally reached her she did not recognise him. Opening her eyes she moaned, 'My son... he's gone... no more.' He stayed by her side for a week. Then word came from the camps that he had been accepted for settlement in Australia. He was in turmoil. His uncle who was a monk went into deep meditation and emerged urging him to go: 'I will look after your mother. You are the only one who can save the family. Go!'

Nith tells the gripping story of his second escape, in broad daylight, walking past the armed border guard with another uncle who had stamped papers which allowed him to cross the border. But Nith had no papers; and no-one asked him for them. 'I felt somehow protected. Nothing was planned. I was terrified but I don't know what came over me. I simply walked behind my uncle to the boat. No shouts, no gunfire. The following morning in the camp a bus came and took us to Bangkok.'

Karma? The Divine? The whole process – from personal freedom to community building in Australia to restoring peace to Laos – is beyond human planning in the eyes of Nith and his Chantharasy relatives. Soon after his marriage to Ramphay in Australia, he received word that his mother had miraculously recovered and was in Thailand with his sisters. Through the Australian family reunion program, he was able, in time, to bring them to live in Sydney.

But the reunion was incomplete. Nith's parents had divorced when he was still a young boy and he had grown up not knowing his father. Despite all she suffered Nith's mother

would say to him, 'No matter what he has done, he is still your father.' A former military officer, his father had been imprisoned for 13 years in a communist re-education camp. Then, 20 years after Nith came to Australia, he received a phone call from America where his father had gone to join his second wife and children, having been released from prison. He asked Nith to come and meet him.

It was the sort of agonising decision children from broken families everywhere have to face. Nith spent many days pondering and concluded that, of all the things he wanted to do in life, he just wanted to be able to call his father 'Dad'. Taking out huge loans, he and Ramphay bought air tickets to go with their three sons and see him.

The meeting was difficult and painful. For three days Nith could not break the ice. Then, encouraged by his stepbrother, Nith opened up: 'I am here to express what has been blocking my heart for a very long time and I would like to know if I still have any part in your life?' In reply his father spoke sadly of his regrets and failures, and asked for forgiveness. They talked. 'Today we should start a new family. Our bad Karma should cease now,' said his father as they hugged each other for the first time.

Whether you're looking to rebuild a family, a neighbourhood or the global community, there's not much hope of it in today's world without such intentional acts of forgiveness and change. It is the essence of healing communities.



Lebanon, 1975... the community that Naim Melhem was experiencing was anything but healing.

In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, the delicate political balance which held Lebanon together had collapsed and tensions had exploded into full-scale civil war between

Israeli-backed Christian Phalangists and Syrian-backed Muslims and Druze. Large parts of this once prosperous country were, quite literally, demolished in the process. Naim's family, one of four Christian families in an apartment block of Muslim families in northern Tripoli, was inevitably drawn into the conflict. While kids played together in the streets, their parents became increasingly divided. Some families fled for fear of their lives. At the age of 14 Naim remembers going with his brothers to distribute Red Cross food parcels to families hemmed in by the fighting. 'Kids were used because they didn't carry ID cards and weren't attached to any group,' explains Naim. 'I longed to live in a community where we could exist with mutual respect between us and our Muslim brothers and sisters.'

Twenty years later Naim found himself working in just such a community. Not handing out relief parcels, but as Mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong, handing out citizenship certificates to 1400 people from around the world. With more than half its population born overseas, Greater Dandenong is the most multicultural city in the state of Victoria. 'We have residents here from 140 different nations – that's nearly every country on earth,' exclaims Naim proudly. Yet, far from being a ghetto of communal conflict and unemployment, Dandenong is centre to 40 per cent of Victoria's manufacturing industry. Its *Diversity Action Plan* is highly-acclaimed for its delivery of services to all groups and its active support for a community made up of great ethnic differences.

'Greater Dandenong is learning the lessons,' Mayor Melhem told a conference on 'Building Community' in Sydney, on the eve of the new Millennium. 'It is learning the lessons that will help us become a model of the global village for the world to come.' Behind the exuberance of such mayoral statements, real substance has been created. But it has not come without ongoing challenges and lots of hard work.

Back in the mid-seventies, as the war in Lebanon escalated,

the Australian government opened its doors to its growing tide of refugees. A Christian Orthodox priest and a Muslim Imam were flown from Melbourne, particularly to assist relatives of Lebanese Australians get to safety. Naim's grandparents and uncles sponsored his family. Within 54 days of lodging their application with Australian Immigration, the entire family, including six sons and two daughters, were on a flight to Melbourne. 'I didn't think I would ever go back to Lebanon,' said Naim. 'Australia was the farthest away we could go.'

Their first impressions were of empty, clean and green streets... and incredible silence. But they had little time to relish it. The first day after arrival Naim and his brothers were taken to job interviews. Monday, four days later, he began work in Clayton, the city next to Dandenong, making television sets in a Philips Electrical factory. 'Mine is a story common to many migrants,' he says. 'The early years were challenging. But we worked hard, and after a few years began to build a successful business.' It was a fish and chip shop.

Did they experience discrimination in those early years? 'No, no, not at all,' Naim answers cheerily. 'On occasions some people called us "wogs" but we didn't feel unwelcome!' Once, before they owned a car, they were walking home along those 'empty streets' after work when someone in a passing vehicle hurled eggs and abuse at Naim and his brothers. He cracks up telling the story, barely able to get it out through his laughter. 'We had no idea what was the reason... My brother... hit by an egg said, "Why didn't they warn us... before throwing their eggs away?"'

Within five years the combined Melhem family sold the fish and chippery, paid off immigration debts to their uncle, built three homes, bought cars and established a wholesale business. And they became Australian citizens. 'It was one of the proudest moments in my life,' remembers Naim, 'standing in the local town hall and thinking how far we had come since those days in Lebanon'. Another five years on, he returned to

Lebanon and married Susan, a childhood friend, proudly bringing her back to his new home in Australia.

Naim's first taste of community work began when their daughter, Salma, entered kindergarten. All parents were called to a meeting. 'I remember the principal saying this kindergarten belongs to the government, but it needs parents to run it.' A few volunteered for the committee; but not Naim. 'Come on, put your hands up,' urged the teacher. So Naim did. And found himself not only on the committee but its chairperson. 'I began to understand the political system... Anyone can nominate; you don't have to be the son of the rich man or politician like in Lebanon,' says Naim. 'I thought that was great.'

To start with, 'understanding the political system' seemed mainly to be helping with endless sausage sizzles and working bees. But gradually Naim began to feel that he could 'make a difference' in the local community. 'Life had been good to us. I made a decision to put something back into the community.'

He needed that decision. Community service often demands the ability to stick at it through hard times – through suffering. The Melhem's daughter, Salma, had drawn Naim into community service. Her tragic accident, at the age of 8, deepened it. Naim recounts the details as though reliving them...

It was a hot Friday evening and the extended family had come round for a pool party: 17 kids splashing and laughing. Inside the women prepared sandwiches. After a while the boys headed across the road to a sausage sizzle, Salma setting off after them. Naim was watching the seven o'clock news when yells from his nephews brought him running to the front door. Dashing out into the street he saw Salma lying on the road, knocked down on a pedestrian crossing. He fell to his knees beside her listening for a heartbeat but was unable to hear anything over the frantic wailing of the driver involved in the accident. The ambulance arrived and sped them away. After

three hours of numbed waiting in a hospital reception room, a doctor appeared, unable to break the news. There was no hope. Naim remembers going in and seeing Salma lying lifeless, and asking, 'Is that all? Couldn't you use her eyes or something to help others?' He almost mumbled the question.

Next day they were surrounded by family and the Lebanese community, all offering condolences. The phone rang. The Donor Tissue Bank, prompted by Naim's comment at the hospital, told him of another 9 year-old girl whose life was threatened because of a failed heart valve. Naim and Susan agreed without hesitation. It was the first organ donation in the Arab community ever recorded in Victoria. Salma's heart was given in a lifesaving operation. The word spread among those coming to the home for condolences. A number of others in the Arab community have since registered their names as potential donors.

Through the shock and pain of those days two priests stayed with him, making all necessary arrangements. Naim is more a man of action than contemplation. But at the core of who he is, the Antioch Orthodox Church plays a big part, along with his community vision. 'I help them because they helped me so much at the time I needed them,' he says.



That sense of a debt owed, of gratitude, motivated him as he got more and more involved in the issues of Greater Dandenong. He joined the Labor Party. In 1993 he stood as an Australian Labor Party candidate for City Council and was elected.

Local government, at that stage, was going through something of a revolution. In 1994 the Kennett State government sacked all municipal councillors and appointed commissioners to rationalise 212 councils into 78. In Naim's region the amalgamation joined two very different cities, Springvale and Dandenong (plus other suburbs) into one City

of Greater Dandenong, on the south-eastern edge of metropolitan Melbourne. Dandenong, a busy regional market centre, was well-settled with many older waves of migrants. Springvale, on the other hand, was a centre for new arrivals and had strong networks of welfare agencies for new and emerging communities.

'I saw my role as helping to build a new community identity out of these two cities,' said Naim after his 1997 re-election onto the new reconstituted Council. 'We wanted to create a city that was both economically vibrant, and one that had a strong sense of community and partnerships. Some people said it would never work. But five years down the track we are managing to prove them wrong.'

So how did they do it? 'The reason is simple. It's all about people,' says Naim, with no hint of political banality. He's a true believer. 'It comes with teamwork, consultation, building partnerships, understanding, caring and a real community spirit.'

The answers pop out like phrases on a Power Point presentation. Every progressive city embraces such values. But how to translate them into reality?

For Councillor Melhem, the learning process began with time spent in the municipality's Community Aid and Advice Bureau, listening to the concerns of new 'migrants' who were flooding in from Iraq, Bosnia, Croatia, the Balkans. Many of them were housed at a large immigration hostel then in operation in Springvale. The stories he heard echoed his own experience as a refugee. 'I saw this as my opportunity to continue a tradition where newly-arrived people were welcomed, assisted and valued for the contribution they would make.'

The process was not automatic, as Naim knew from his own experience. 'Coming to live in a new country with different languages, different cultures and different beliefs teaches people to respect difference. If I wanted to be part of this community, I had no option but to understand and

recognise that Australians did things differently from us.' But that did not mean a melting pot of assimilation. 'I had to learn that we are all different, and that making value judgements about "what is right and wrong" should come from within... not from what a particular dominant culture believes.'

So he sees Australia as a 'mixing pot' instead, full of diversity valued for its own sake. 'We are moving away from the Old World idea that ethnic groups, disabled people or those from Aboriginal backgrounds are the ones who are different - to a position which acknowledges that we are *all* different, regardless of race, ability, gender or other factors. We are working towards an understanding that "difference" is what makes a community, not "sameness". If everyone thought the same then there would be no change, no progress. Difference means that the community has an immense range of skills, attitudes and beliefs, which helps in building partnerships. We embrace this concept and celebrate it.'

Greater Dandenong's *Diversity Action Plan* is a creation of the Access and Equity Committee which he chaired. Primarily the Plan sets out to ensure services are available, equally, to all groups in the community. It recognises that the *way* the City delivers services, makes plans and communicates decisions is as important as those services, plans and decisions are in themselves. Secondly, the Plan provides a framework for all issues regulated by legislation on diversity - gender, race, colour, ability, age, marital and parental status, sexual preference and political beliefs.

How does it work in reality? A Vietnamese-Australian social worker, who served on Victoria's Multicultural Commission, believes the Dandenong's approach is both visionary and practical. She points to its English-as-a-second-language program, made available in the City's libraries, where migrants can book time in computer rooms to learn English from a CD-ROM at their own pace. And to the City's instant translation system via telephone providing

support in the seven most common languages for residents dealing with Council and related services.

Perhaps most groundbreaking, however, is the Interfaith Network, the brainchild of one of the Council staff members. Created in 1988 at a time of growing racial tension, this was arguably the first multifaith network of its kind in Australia. The Interfaith Network meets in Council rooms with a Council member present and is assisted by a paid Council officer. Even after 10 years, it operates as an active partnership between Council and the faith communities in the region, bringing 'a religious perspective' to Council decisions. Each week a member of the Network – Sikh, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Ba'hai, whatever – takes a turn at opening Council meetings with a prayer from his or her tradition.

When Pauline Hanson and her 'One Nation' party came to Dandenong in 1997, the Interfaith Network brought people together in a peaceful counter demonstration. In 1999, when the Kosovo war inflamed relations between local Albanian Muslims and Serbian Christians, the Interfaith Network called an urgent meeting with the Serbian Orthodox priest and the Kosovar Imam. Together they issued a statement calling for calm. Hostile graffiti being sprayed on walls each night was removed immediately next morning by Council workers. The problem soon stopped.

The Interfaith Network, like some 200 other non-profit groups, benefits from the City's generous 'Community Grants' scheme, the largest in Victoria and equal to five per cent of its rate revenue. The aim is to form partnerships in community service delivery.

'Partnerships' is another of those buzz words for community-builders. The test of such partnerships comes at times of crisis. Just one such moment came during November 1999, in the last months of Naim's year-long term as Mayor. He was attending one of the monthly breakfasts he had initiated with Dandenong's business people. During the

introductory remarks the point was made that Victoria's new Labor Premier, Steve Bracks, came from a Lebanese background like Mayor Melhem. 'In that case,' someone interjected, 'could the Mayor do something to stop the loss of Dandenong's rolling stock industry to a multinational company?'

At the end of the breakfast Melhem made his way between the tables to get more details from the woman who asked the question. She told him that the new State Labor government was due to sign off on a privatisation deal with National Express, a foreign-controlled operator, to run and manage Melbourne's extensive public transport system. At risk in the Dandenong region was a 100 year-old rolling stock industry, because the \$1.8 billion contracts to supply new trains and trams would likely go offshore, to Siemens Auto, a major shareholder in National Express. This would mean the loss of up to 17,000 existing and new jobs.

Mayor Melhem went immediately to the CEO of Council to discuss what could be done. This was a serious challenge – globalisation on their doorstep. The contract, negotiated by the previous Kennett government, was due to be signed on 24 December, just weeks away. Immediately they asked for appointments with the new Premier and Ministers of Industries and Transport. Taking business leaders with them, Naim and his CEO began lobbying the 22 members of State and Federal parliaments who represented the region. 'I can tell you all my mayoral duties dropped out and this became my business, day and night, until I finished my term,' said Naim. And even beyond his term...

Former Premier Kennett had given public assurances that 40 per cent of the rolling stock contract would be awarded to Australian industries. But Naim and his team found that not a single clause of the proposed contract referred to it. The newly-elected Bracks' government backed off, postponing closing the deal for a month. Melhem helped drive a hectic

four-week campaign to save as many of the 17,000 jobs as possible. Part of the problem was the wide range of companies, unions and government bodies involved. The 20 subcontractors and 60 suppliers in the industry had never acted in any coordinated way before. Now their survival depended on it. A 'Rolling Stock Alliance' formed, pulling together all the manufacturers and suppliers, plus tram and train employer groups, unions, public transport users' groups and the City of Greater Dandenong.

They blitzed the media, generating 45 press articles, 92 radio news grabs and interviews, and seven evening television news reports. They convened a major public forum and lobbied politicians and Ministers concerned. Mayors across the State sent letters of support.

Naim first heard the outcome through a congratulatory call from National Express itself. The campaigners did not get all they hoped for. But the contract locked in a minimum 40 per cent local content in all new trains and 20 per cent in all new trams. Just as significant, though, was the new 'strategic alliance' which had formed between the manufacturing industry, subcontractors and suppliers in the south-eastern region – an alliance which is now helping them to bid on future contracts and to improve export opportunities. Globalisation is getting a run for its money in Melbourne's suburbs.



Building and sustaining community takes something more than strategic partnerships, political muscle and diversity plans. In Naim's case it is a vision to serve, mixed with a tinge of ambition.

Most days Naim still opens the family milk bar at 5.30 am, goes on to his civic responsibilities mid-morning and then, up to three nights a week, serves on the board of 'Southern

Health' managing a \$450 million budget which funds six public hospitals, five community health centres and six aged care homes. It is somewhat different from his first days on the kindergarten committee.

Yet he has even bigger visions. He talks with the Lebanese community about ways that their experience in Australia might help their country of birth. 'I would like to see respect for people of different religions, whether in Dandenong or Beirut,' he confides quietly. 'Building community is all about recognising that difference is both local and global. And that by negotiating ways around this difference, we will reach a common understanding and peace. It is about what we share, rather than blaming our differences for our tension and despair. It is about recognising that the world is coming closer together, and that we must open our minds and our hearts to our neighbours... whether they live across the road, across the country, or across the other side of the planet. Everyone can make a difference.'

'I look back at that young boy in Lebanon and see how far we have come in such a short time – and it gives me the greatest sense of hope for the future.'

ELEVEN

Writing wrongs

'LET JUSTICE FLOW LIKE A MIGHTY RIVER', thundered the Jewish prophet Amos 2800 years ago, on the same patch of dirt where Palestinians and Israelis hurl bombs and bullets for justice today.

'In 'relaxed' and 'lucky' Australia the cry of justice is still heard, though more often muffled by the roar of a footy crowd or the babble of the stock market. As Rothay Chantharasy said, we'd rather have 'a barbie'. Like our mighty River Murray, justice starts off, sometimes at least, with a clear bubbly spring of ideas in the moral high-country. But then gets pretty muddy as it rolls on its way – siphoned off by commercial compromise, polluted by the effluent of rapacious consumerism, salinated by swamps of self-righteousness and hypocrisy, chlorinated by selective media treatments, and finally left to dribble from its mouth with turgid political half-truths into an ocean of indifference.

In America, 1992, I remember sitting with an interracial group, watching live television coverage of a Los Angeles district court virtually acquitting the four white policemen who had been video-taped bashing the black driver of a car – the incident which provoked the 1992 LA 'uprising'. Two African-American women, sitting near me, complained with withering

bitterness: 'There's no justice any more. It's just-us.' It was a moment of no neutrality. To defensively say I was just an Australian visitor was to be a wimp.

True justice knows no borders. Yet it withers to nothing when its only concern is 'just us'. On the other hand, a Scandinavian once explained to me that curious inverse law where well-off people are all the more indignant about injustice the further they are from it. We can fume about the Amazon even while polluting the Murray.

It is one of those areas where one has to 'think globally and act locally'. In other words, the only sure ground from which to demand justice in the world is to model it in one's own relationships, attitudes, dealings and values. For we all tend to suffer from that myopia whereby we cannot see our own contribution to injustice. Sometimes, it takes raw contact with those who view us as being participants in an unfair system to begin to lift that selective blindness. And we guard against those sort of encounters.

But often the encounter comes unsought – in a simple story that penetrates our blind side and prods some forgotten nerve of conscience or compassion. And there, in a moment, we can be touched by a crying need of justice...



After the first dozen or more of her 41 books for children and teenagers, Christobel Mattingley would still be asked, 'But when are you going to write a proper book?'

Such comments would make her bristle; the inference being that many of her books were short and therefore not 'proper books'. But more serious, in Christobel's view, was the implied suggestion that children are not 'proper people'.

In fact the 'proper book' she is best known for is a 350 page history of South Australia in the words of Aboriginal people, called *Survival in our Own Land*. Yet that book, researched and

co-edited with Ken Hampton, is the one that some politicians and literary critics seemed to find most 'improper', to the point that they made publication difficult. But that saga comes later.

All of Christobel's stories are born, consciously at least, 'in the now... Some event, image, person, place or word will spark a reaction. And I know immediately, "There's a story in that".' The story may develop with a childhood memory, long forgotten. But those moments of recognition are the spark – 'a response to life... a spontaneous combustion igniting the deep peat of subconscious memory'. Her first book, *The Picnic Dog* (published in 1970, after seven rejections), was written for her own three young children when their dog Piccolo was run over.

On the day her father was thought to be dying Christobel walked on Brighton Jetty, near Adelaide, remembering how fearful she had been 35 years earlier as a small girl on that same jetty, peering through the cracks between the planks at heaving waves below. That moment gave birth to a 75,000 word book, *The Jetty*, about a boy's secret fears. Born into the Adelaide suburb of Brighton, she had lived the first eight years of her life 'within sound of the sea'. It was during the Depression and her father, who was an engineer, had been laid off work and had contracted tuberculosis.

One day Christobel's mother found her younger daughter crouching wide-eyed under a hedge. Asked what she was doing, Christobel replied that she was pretending to be poor. 'You don't have to pretend,' said her mother. 'We *are*.' They lived on vegetable stew and the scrag end of mutton. Christobel's 'special causes' of social justice and aid to developing nations were spawned in those early years. (In 1963 she and her husband founded Community Aid Abroad in South Australia.)

Those early childhood years were rich in memories and rich in books. It was a family joke how many times Christobel had read *The Swiss Family Robinson*. Her father started her on the

classics, somewhat early, but that stood her in good stead when she studied Goethe and Schiller in German at university six years later.

In 1961 the Mattingleys bought a century-old stone cottage with its own little windmill down the coast south of Brighton, where they spent holidays. Her story about overcoming fears, *Windmill at Magpie Creek*, was written after her daughter was swooped upon by territorial magpies. (It was runner up in the 1972 Australian 'Children's Book of the Year Award'.) Only later did Christobel realise that, as a seven year-old near that same spot, she herself had been attacked by swooping magpies.

When seven, she also remembers hearing on their polished-wood 'wireless' that war had broken out in Europe. Disturbed by the stories of refugees, Christobel packed her treasures in a little case and kept them under her bed in readiness to move.

Move they did, but not as refugees. Her father's health and fortunes improved when he was selected as the construction engineer for the first road bridge across the Hawkesbury River, north of Sydney. The family's move to New South Wales was daunting for eight year-old Christobel – particularly as it involved her entry, along with her sister, into Presbyterian Ladies' College, Pymble, 'a magnificent school with a high reputation'.

Christobel was dark-haired, brown-eyed and shy, while her older sister Margaret was blonde, blue-eyed, outgoing, always laughing and ever-popular. 'She was always ready with words,' Christobel told an ABC interviewer. 'There never seemed anything left for me to say.' Christobel attributes her writing ability partly to that difficulty.

But Christobel also had another sister, and another reason for writing. Her twin sister died at birth. 'I often wonder if that was one of the circumstances that turned me into a writer – always reaching out to people I will never know, trying to share my response to life...' When it came to writing about

Aboriginal people and their 'deep loss of families', she found an empathy drawn from her own hidden loss.

And there was one more sister, one more loss. After the Hawkesbury River bridge was finished, her father was offered a new job in Tasmania. On the long drive from Sydney to Hobart, Christobel's mother suffered a miscarriage. At 13 Christobel had been keenly anticipating that younger sister. Her grief surfaced in her second adolescent novel, *Southerly Bluster*. The first, *New Patches for Old*, was also drawn from those 'turbulent years', trying to find her confidence at that Sydney school and again at two new schools in Hobart.

Christobel met her husband-to-be at university, where he was a student and teacher of European history. As an RAAF pilot based in England during World War II, David Mattingley had survived 23 bombing sorties over Germany – the last of which ended with him, drenched in his own blood from his fractured skull, wounded knee and right hand, struggling to bring the crew of his badly damaged Lancaster back to England. He landed the aircraft safely at home base, and collapsed – spending the next couple of years in hospital recovering. And was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for valour.

Because of David's love of England, he and Christobel returned there after marriage, both taking teaching jobs for some time. They then moved to South Australia where David taught at Prince Alfred College (PAC). He retired from there 33 years later as history master, a much-loved Mr Chips sort of character. Christobel started a new library at PAC; then worked at a teachers' college, 'teaching the teachers' about the value of books. But writing remained her creative outlet. When a magnificent gum tree near their Burnside home was about to be removed by council, she campaigned for its preservation. It took 16 local Year 4 children holding hands to encircle its huge girth. The tree was saved and *The Battle of the Galah Trees* took root as a story.

And so with title after title – experience, imagination, feelings, indignation, hope and action, all drawn together and emerging in a story.

Christobel was at first surprised when people asked her where she got her stories. 'Don't they see, aren't they really listening?... Life's all a story. Every person we meet is a story, every place we go.' Some suggested she must have a wonderful imagination. 'Imagination is just another way of rearranging the facts, building with blocks of experience,' she wrote in 1994. 'It wasn't until my stories had been published... that I really began to understand that a story, if written with integrity, has its own truth, even if it is a creation of imagination.'

In 1951, for instance, in her first job – with the Department of Immigration – she was mixing with the influx of displaced persons from postwar Europe. These people brought stories of disrupted lives and personal tragedy, such as she had never known. She listened. Twenty years later, during a visit to Europe, Christobel and David took their three children to the home of Anne Frank in Amsterdam. On her next trip to Europe strangers in cafes and trains revealed more wartime experiences. Back in Australia, Christobel discovered that the illustrator of another of her books had grown up as a refugee in southern Germany during the War. All these 'blocks of experience' melded into *The Angel with a Mouth Organ*, a remarkable Christmas story told through the eyes of one refugee child. (In 1986, it was a Parents' Choice Book in the USA.)

Something of a child's objective innocence speaks through many of Christobel's stories. A childlike telling it like it is. Injustice and suffering are laid bare in the raw facts of a child's experience, without the heavy burden of moral rhetoric or bitter recriminations, without arguments over political or historical context. And, most wonderfully, with a child's capacity to hope.

An interviewer asked Christobel if writing children's stories

was a way of investing in their future. 'I write for children because I am what you'd call a child within. I relate very strongly to children and the stories that are everywhere in childhood when the world is so full of discovery.' On Margaret Throsby's ABC radio program, she answered another of those are-you-a-children's-author questions. 'I am an author.. with a double audience. I write for that wonderful enthusiasm, passion and honesty of children; but also for discerning adults who screen children's books at every level.'

Masses of letters come to her, from children and adults. She treasures one from a boy who said that a book of hers had helped him to be brave when his father died. And another, from an adult who said another book had brought her back from the point of suicide. She is thrilled when a youngster says hers was the first book he read right through. 'If children at an early age find fulfilment in books, you've given them something very special.'

Her first books were written for her own three children. And they have continued to influence her writing, even as adults. When Rosemary was on a scholarship in Japan, reading Nobel Prize literature in its original Japanese, the Mattingleys flew to spend Christmas with her. They went to Nagasaki where trees festooned with origami paper cranes, the symbol for peace, marked the epicentre of the 1945 atomic bomb blast. It was Christmas Day. That night, sitting in her youth hostel bunk, *The Miracle Tree* was born. It tells the story of a Japanese woman, scorched by atomic radiation, who had spent her life in seclusion, writing her vision of a world reborn after the holocaust.

Stephen, the youngest Mattingley, a graduate in both law and science, spends every opportunity bush walking in Tasmania's wilderness areas. In 1991 he enlisted his parents as volunteers in a survey aimed at preserving the endangered small orange-bellied parrot in a remote part of the South West, now a World Heritage area. The survey was the initiative of

the 'guardian of the South West', Deny King, who at 81 was already a legend in his own lifetime. King, with failing eyesight, was also struggling to write his memoirs. He asked Christobel's help, but died before she could give it. Ten years later, Christobel's biography of him was published as *King of the Wilderness*.

Japan, Tasmania and then Europe... the Mattingleys had to travel to keep up with their family. In 1992 they went to stay with their older son, Chris, who was working for an international company in Vienna. 'Ethnic cleansing' in the Balkans had just begun, though the world barely realised it. Refugees were fleeing for their lives. Within days of their arrival Chris housed a family from Sarajevo for three weeks in his Vienna apartment. One of the family had been a consultant to his company. Christobel was taken with seven-year-old Asmir. 'He was so grave, solemn, wise, so old beyond his years. His seriousness and responsibility went to my heart.'

The Mattingleys heard first-hand the incredible story of Asmir's escape. He and his mother, grandmother and baby brother had fled along blood-slippery streets in Sarajevo to board the last mercy flight out to Belgrade for women and children. And then their unforgettable drive with his aunt and Serbian uncle across three borders to Vienna. Asmir missed his father unbearably, and had nightmares about him and that terrible war.

Christobel had agonies of her own in Vienna – back injuries immobilised her with pain and she landed in a hospital for an emergency operation. Coming out of anaesthesia, all she could think of was Asmir and how his story 'cried out to be told'. She stood by her bed for 10-minute stretches over the next ten weeks, writing the story which was flooding into her mind. It was finished before she and David left Austria.

'*No Gun for Asmir* is an important book, a story told not tragically, nor grimly, but simply, with compassion and great perception,' wrote the Australian Multicultural Book Review.

In 1994 it received a high commendation in the Australian Human Rights Awards. It has been translated into German, Italian, Spanish, Basque and Portuguese.

But far more important recognition came from hundreds of Australian schoolchildren who began reading it in their classrooms, identifying with the fears and hopes of one refugee family in Austria. Letters started pouring into the Mattingley home, asking what was happening to Asmir and his family. Many were sent on to Asmir.

Ervin, ten years-old: 'It's so sad how Asmir was torn from his father... I only heard about that war when it was on the news three years ago and I didn't understand a single thing. You were right when you mentioned what Asmir's father said, "War doesn't make sense." I couldn't believe that people could be so evil back then.'

Sandra, same class: 'Whenever I read the book I feel as if I'm actually there, sharing the pain, panic and fear... I can see the dead postman, the bombs and the beautiful horses. I can smell the awful smell of Sarajevo burning.'

Joshua, also ten: 'No book has ever made me cry. *No Gun for Asmir* came close. I swear, tears came to my eyes when I read chapter 16...'

Michael: 'If everyone read this book I think there would be a lot less conflict in the world.'

From England, Bethany, aged 12: 'I read your book last January. It really made me think about how lucky I am. I felt so strongly about this I wrote to (British PM) John Major saying the government isn't doing enough towards peace in other countries. We cannot stand back because... in the long run children of the world have to live with it.'

Rubin: 'I hope one day I manage to publish a book that will bring the whole world together.'

And Cameron: 'I think you are a great author... I'm hoping to become a writer when I grow up. I would rate this book a perfect ten-out-of-ten. Well, gotta go, bye.'

Schools asked Christobel to come and speak. It became a unique alliance between author and schoolchildren to support Asmir's family half way round the world, and to rescue Muris, his father, who was still trapped in Bosnia. Children in one school sent a class photo and letters to Muris to encourage him. Ironically, after two years, it was the book itself which influenced officials in Sarajevo, Zagreb and Vienna to allow Muris to leave. Chris phoned from Vienna with the news, and within four days Christobel and David were on a plane to join them. 'When a teacher told the children that I couldn't come to (speak at) their school because I was on my way to Vienna – and that Muris was out – the classroom erupted in cheers and applause,' Christobel remembers.

During their three months in Vienna another story was shaping. Two stories, in fact: that of a refugee family trying to survive in a country of asylum, and of Muris' escape from war in Sarajevo. Muris felt a responsibility to tell the world 'what it is really like'. The family was delighted as, chapter by chapter, the sequels of *No Gun for Asmir* took shape – *Asmir in Vienna* and *Escape from Sarajevo*.

Kimberley, aged 13, wrote: 'I have borrowed each book from the library at least five times... I would like to raise money for Asmir and his family to come to visit us in Australia. My mum said they can stay at my home for as long as they like.'

The family, as it happened, went elsewhere. A year after that reunion in Vienna, Muris and his family were accepted for resettlement in the USA. Three days later Christobel was receiving an Honorary Doctorate from the University of South Australia and speaking to graduating students. 'Writers are makers of shoes which enable readers to walk a while along someone else's path,' said Dr Mattingley. 'Whether it is saving a single tree or one refugee, or whether it is the more complex environmental, moral or social justice issues which confront us, each voice counts – locally, nationally, globally.' Some

people had said to her, 'But it's just one family.' But through that one family, Dr Mattingley continued, 'children and adults across the world have donned Asmir's shoes and walked the agonisingly rugged path of refugees. The vicarious sharing has... created a new perception of war and activated a will to work for peace.'

Ever conscious of her critics Christobel reacted when someone suggested she got her doctorate 'the easy way'. Producing 43 books, with as many rejections from publishers as rewards, could never be described as 'easy'. And the six year battle to publish the most important of them all nearly finished her writing career, and health as well...



Once again, the seeds came from childhood; but the story was born in the 'now'. Or, as the Aboriginal Australians who asked for Christobel's help to present their history might put it, the story goes back 40,000 years to their Creation ancestors but has to be told in terms of physical, cultural and spiritual survival today.

As a child Christobel always had a fascination with the original inhabitants of this land. She was born close to a sacred site, the beginning of the trail of Tjilbruke, 'Dreaming' ancestor of the Kurna people. Not that she was aware of that as a child. Frank Dalby Davison's *Children of the Dark People*, however, did make a big impression on her at a young age; and Mrs Aeneas Gunn's *Little Black Princess*. She read them over and over. In Sydney she saved her threepence pocket-money and bought a vocabulary of Aboriginal language at the Museum. She would take it to bed, reciting 'all these mellifluous names' with their wonderful meanings. And on her way to school on the North Shore Line, the names of suburbs reinforced her sense of Aboriginal presence - Wahroonga, Warrawee, Turramurra... On the Hawkesbury River, near her

father's bridge construction, Aboriginal rock carvings in the sandstone cliff had been fenced off. She would sit in a nearby cave and look out over the river, wondering what it would be like to be an Aboriginal person.

In 1975, by then an established author, she was asked by the Literature Board of Australia to give school and community lecture tours through outback and Aboriginal communities in Queensland. At first she was concerned that 'much of my writing for children was a product of white, middle-class society.' But she made a wonderful discovery: 'What amazing listeners Aboriginal people are. And the quality of their listening is quite dynamic.' They know and respect the power of a story.

Hope Valley, Lockhart River, Ernabella, Hermannsburg, Pitjantjatjara lands, Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, the Kimberleys, Derby, Port Hedland, Bathurst Island... successive lecture tours criss-crossed Australia.

Some other discoveries she made were not so wonderful: the dispossession of culture, the imposition of white bureaucracy, the blatant racism ('We've got 48 nationalities in this town, but it's closed to Aborigines,' boasted one outback headmaster), the blindness of many European Australians to 'the Aboriginal presence in the land', the overwhelming impact of Western values, and much more.

Christobel admits she was often angry. In Koonibba, SA, schoolchildren were being rehearsed to sing 'What can we do with a drunken sailor?' When she arrived in Aurukun, Queensland, on a beautiful day everyone 'on the mission' was crammed in a big hall watching some fifth-rate American movie. 'I found it appalling.'

Nevertheless, those tours brought the enrichment of many encounters: sitting for half a day with women under a tree at Kununurra, being shown the 'dingo dreaming' by Old Bulla, discovering the 'most amazing mural of three Wandjina figures' representing the Trinity in a church at Mowanjum

near Derby, meditating by unspoilt rock paintings in Kakadu – 'the most incredible spiritual experience of my life'.

So after all this, when Christobel was asked in 1983 to be a researcher and editor for the first Aboriginal history told by Aboriginal people themselves, you'd think she would have jumped at it. She didn't. For she knew the pitfalls of the publishing world. And, even more, she was painfully aware of the resentment caused when Aboriginal people gave their stories and heritage to white academics and anthropologists who used them to advance their careers and positions.

The request had come from the chairperson of an Aboriginal Executive Committee set up to coordinate Indigenous input into South Australia's 'Sesquicentennial' celebrations in 1986. Despite her initial refusal, the Committee persisted. Consulting a number of trusted friends Christobel finally accepted the appointment, determined in her own mind that their material 'would remain always theirs... and I would not Europeanise it.' She had experience in writing, oral history and publishing which she could put at the disposal of Aboriginal people. 'I could be a channel for them to say what they wanted to say; and to build a bridge between our two worlds.'

If only it had been that simple. From the start it went badly. Two Aboriginal women whom she respected, had opposed her appointment, saying she was too 'white middle-class'. Hearing of their opposition she offered to resign immediately. The committee refused to accept her resignation. But later her strongest supporters dropped off the committee, absorbed with other battles. In fact, that committee seemed continually to be dissolving and reforming itself. Hostility also came from others, white and black, who thought they should have got the position. A series of oral workshops were set up by other people in the State's Aboriginal centres – but were poorly prepared and key people were often left out. Christobel got blamed.

Two breakthroughs kept her going. At Point Pearce, a former mission and community on Yorke Peninsula, she was introduced to an adult education group by two white lecturers. Again, all the shutters were down, an atmosphere of hostility rather than sharing. After lunch, she found a dozen people sitting round a table. Conversation stopped as she walked in. She pulled out her latest book, *Brave with Ben*, outlining the story of a little boy finding courage through a friendly dog. It worked a miracle. A woman got up: 'I've got something to show you.' She disappeared for half an hour. Just when Christobel was giving up, she reappeared with a tape recorder. 'I've got a tape here from my son... He's in jail... This tape has his poems and the story how he went to jail.' His voice told a tragic tale: how he had got a scholarship to Scotch College in Adelaide, how the taunting he copped as a 14 year-old from the sons of wealthy landowners in the boarding house drove him to fighting and alcohol, how he was expelled, brought back, expelled again. How he woke up one day in prison, having seriously injured a mentally disabled man in a drunken fight. The man later died and Gundy was charged with murder. On his tape, Gundy recited several of his poems, including the lines:

*The watch house is bad,
and smelly as hell, 'Don't play up here nigger,
Or you'll be put into a padded cell.
They can make you sore,
All battered and blue,
And what you're in there for, brother,
You haven't a clue.
The cops are stupid,
And their laws the same,
For understanding they lack.
And they'll break you.
Because you're... BLACK.*

© Gundy Graham (used with permission)

It was the first time anyone outside the family had heard the tape. Christobel sat there, poleaxed by the power of the story and poems, tears running down her face. She asked if she could use his story. Gundy later agreed, when Christobel went to see him in Adelaide Gaol.

But few others trusted her with their stories at that point. Some told her of incidents in their lives, but did not want them used – fearing the pain of 'going public' or that their material would be exploited. Others wanted to write their own books, some time. One man, working in a government department, had experienced sexual abuse in a children's home but was unwilling to reveal it as his boss had been the perpetrator.

Christobel found productive work, however, among two huge archive boxes in the SA Museum. Piles of photographs revealed many poignant images. Many of them appear among the 300 photographs in *Survival in Our Own Land*, as the book was called when it was finally published. Each image was worth a thousand words of testimony. On one page, 10 proud hunters, chained by the neck, captioned 'Prisoners in the 1880s'. On another, a white-whiskered old man in European three-piece suit, captioned with a white-man's description: 'The death of King Tommy, 1887... From what was known by the man's urbanity and kindness, his rule must have been a kind one... With him ends the line of kings belonging to his tribe.' Then 10 young 'State children', scrubbed up and dressed as whites, removed from their families under the 1899 'Children's Protection Act' – a mixture of bewilderment and grief speaking from their eyes.

The photos also served as a door-opener for Aboriginal people who, gradually, began entrusting her with their experiences. 'It was very painful for them to share, but at the same time cathartic.' Someone, at last, was listening.

A woman from Murray Bridge sent Christobel a tape, telling of her removal as a newly-born baby from her family. A few days later she was in hospital receiving psychiatric

treatment. Two of her friends phoned Christobel, accusing her of sending the woman over the edge. Christobel immediately went to the hospital. Rather than hostility, she found the beginning of an enduring friendship.

A white-haired elder, normally gentle and approachable, became flushed and angry, stamping his feet in fury in the Mattingley living room as he re-lived a childhood humiliation inflicted by the housemother of an institution where he and Aboriginal children were kept.

A proud Adnyamathanha man, his face taut with torment, described to Christobel how missionaries had stopped his father performing the ceremonies – initiation secrets, rightfully his, now lost forever.

A retired teacher refused at first to say a word of her story. Then, during four hours under the wisteria in the Adelaide Botanical Gardens, she let it out in an anguished flood, tears rolling down her face, voice trembling. When she received the typed transcript, she told Christobel later, she had been within an inch of tearing it to shreds rather than have her agony exposed.

The work consumed Christobel, seven days a week, often 16 hours a day. Three rooms of the Mattingley home were taken over with archival and current material. As the work continued way beyond the initial year's contract, and Christobel worked unpaid with no end in sight, they realised the project was encroaching upon their personal lives. David, still teaching European history, might have been threatened by Christobel laying bare the ugly side of that history. But he gave her unflinching support throughout.

At times Christobel was overwhelmed by anger, pain, grief and depression. She remembers, after an appointment with her doctor, leaving his surgery and going into his garden, weeping uncontrollably. An hour went by and her doctor came out, saying, 'I want to do something I have never done with a patient before. I want to pray with you.' They stood under a

tree and did so. Despite the support of some wonderful Aboriginal friends, she often felt alienated from her own society. She clung to St Paul's words: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'

If working with Aboriginal people was traumatic, the frustrating deceptions, lack of commitment, bureaucratic obfuscation and, ultimately, political hostility from the white stakeholders in the publication were even harder to bear. *Survival in Our Own Land* was due to be published for the State's 150th celebrations in 1986 by the then government-owned Wakefield Press. Christobel and her committee could never pin them down to a contract. Still hoping to hit the deadline, she delivered the manuscript to Wakefield in April 1985. And then left with David on his already postponed long-service leave to Britain, requesting proofs to be sent to her there. Nothing came. On return four months later, all that was waiting for Christobel was a highly-critical 'reader's report' prepared by a senior anthropologist in the SA Museum. The Aboriginal Executive Committee rejected the criticisms. Publication was stalemated but Christobel continued working on the manuscript, researching and gathering more stories.

Then Christobel got her strongest answer to prayer. She went to share her bewilderment with one of the original members of the Executive Committee who had dropped out through ill health. Ken Hampton had been a sprinter, South Australia's first Aboriginal Justice of the Peace, a recipient of the Order of Australia award for his work with prisoners. In December of that year he was ordained an Anglican priest.

When Ken heard Christobel's long saga of setbacks – of suspicion and rumours among the Aboriginal community, of manipulation and resistance from white bureaucrats and politicians – he confided, 'Every day's like that for us, Christobel.' Recognising the critical stage the book had reached Ken Hampton made an offer: 'If you would allow me to stand beside you as the Aboriginal co-editor, we can stand

back to back. I'll take it from my people and you'll have to take it from your people.' At last, here was the needed partnership. Ken turned the editorial style of the book around, to a genuine Aboriginal perspective of the previous 150 years of settlement. The English terms 'Aboriginal' and 'white men' were changed to local Indigenous terms, 'Nunga' and 'Goonya'; and the text recast, told in the first person, which Christobel had felt was inappropriate when she was editing it alone.

But Ken had his own challenges, having survived nine heart attacks. 'I knew God still had something for me to do,' he told Christobel. He was listed for a heart transplant.

1986 was to be the year of publication. Months went by without contracts, and with endless typesetting and publication delays. Though her token \$17,000 per annum editor's payment was temporarily resumed, Christobel ended up doing much of the publisher's work herself – proof-reading it nine times over, sweating through complex page designs, working out detailed indexes. Then the publisher 'lost' the page proofs for six weeks.

At one point it seemed the Mattingleys themselves could be sued by some of the Aboriginal community who feared that copyright of their sensitive stories would remain with the government. Ken and others remained solid.

But then came the biggest blow of all. Without consultation or any prior notice, the State government sold off Wakefield Press to a private company – and the rights to their publication with it. The Aboriginal committee and Christobel were outraged. This was their one chance to put their material on the record, on their terms. The new owner (not the current owner of Wakefield Press) had little experience in book publishing and, it seemed, even less interest in getting the book finished. Christobel went to discuss it with him and ended up in a confrontation. He backed off and did nothing. Still no contract.

Despite Ken's precarious health they stuck at it, writing letters, speaking out. Two thick files of newspaper cuttings tell the story. 'It is ethnocide,' Rev Hampton wrote to *The Advertiser*, 'a prime example of insensitivity... This is the first time Aboriginal history is being told by Aboriginal people... The giving away of this book is like the taking away of the land.' Some Nunga contributors went to the limit to remain positive. Nancy Barnes, who had been removed from her family as a child, wrote to the press: 'This book has been a costly exercise for many. But it is necessary that we can give this volume to the people of SA with love, trusting (that) you as a people will accept it... It is the only means of healing, by reconciliation and forgiveness of the past.'

The committee and Christobel sought appointments with the Premier and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. But it was almost as if the 'Aboriginal history project' the State had at first been ready to support had become an item too hot to handle. No-one would give them a date. Questions in Parliament were turned around to blame the editors. For Nungas, it was the old story – the victim gets blamed for their dilemma. 'In the early days they fed Christians to the lions. Now we are fed to the government,' quipped Rev Hampton in the Uniting Church *New Times*.

In July 1986 Premier John Bannon, at a ceremony during the annual Indigenous 'NAIDOC' celebrations, waved page proofs and promised it would be out 'in a few weeks'. Yet still it languished with many fundamental issues over the rights to the material unresolved. Ken Hampton was too ill to go on. The Adelaide *News* ran his last public statement under the headline, 'Book last fight for ailing priest.' A prayer vigil was called for him a few weeks later. By then he was too weak for a transplant, had one been available. A week later he was dead. A didgeridoo played a lament as hundreds of mourners filed into St Peter's Anglican Cathedral, where the Rev Hampton had been ordained less than a year before. Archbishop Desmond

Tutu sent a tribute. Prisoners in Yatala jail held their own memorial service.

Whether or not the burden of that struggle contributed to his dying, without a doubt his death provoked the commitment to see the publication through. Suddenly everyone seemed to be saying, 'We've got to save Kenny's book.' His brother, Ted Hampton, picked up the bundle. Several missing members of the committee rejoined. Outstanding issues on Aboriginal rights to future editions and copyright over their own material still had to be battled through with the government, bureaucrats and Wakefield Press. As well as proof-reading and publication headaches, the mammoth task of compiling five different indexes – with 7,000 entries in one of them alone – fell on Christobel.

Another eight months later, the first edition of 3,000 copies was released. 'It was an absolutely electric launch attended by 500 people,' remembers Christobel. Many politicians, Federal and State, rolled up. 'I watched the change in people's faces (as) they realised the anger, passion and grief in Aboriginal people that this book represents.'

The Mattingleys shifted over a ton of the books, 1,000 copies, through their living room, making sure everyone who gave a testimony got a personal copy. It sold out in three weeks after the launch and was on Adelaide's best-seller list all that time. Christobel negotiated a second edition through Hodder & Stoughton, and again had to supervise its publication. Two more editions have followed, which she also instigated and saw through production.



Reviews and accolades followed, of course. The *Weekend Australian* called it 'a landmark publication' and, on the front page of its magazine section, printed photos and text from the book under the headline, 'A State's shame – despairing work

shows the dark side of history in what was to be a model colony.' Historian Henry Reynolds, writing in *The Australian*, called it 'one of the most substantial contributions to the burgeoning black historiography... The wait has been worth it.'

'No danger of this gathering dust,' wrote the *Australian Journal of Social Sciences* reviewer, comparing it to other official histories. It contains an 'extraordinary wealth of primary source material (which) should attract the attention of professional researchers... This is state of the art.'

Only Mudrooroo Narogin, reviewing it for the *Melbourne Age*, could say he found it 'a joy to read. This is a told history. Told in the sense that people speak and write for themselves wherever possible... It is human in its concerns and in letting the facts speak for themselves. There is no pointing the finger, or blame, or guilt... History lives and breathes in its pages.'

The most important 'reviews', naturally, came from South Australia's Nungas. Christobel found their response overwhelming. Many traced family connections through the book. One man, seriously ill in hospital, took the book in his arms and, without opening it, held it like a baby. Saying nothing, his eyes flooded with tears. One of the women who opposed her at the beginning came up and apologised.



After eight long years of labour and stress, Christobel was left drained and exhausted. She really thought she might never write again, and told herself, 'Well, it doesn't matter. This is the most important thing I've ever done.' But in 1992 she was filling her supermarket trolley, looking for school lunch items to contribute to her Church's regular collection of groceries for needy families. That night, she woke with the title of a book and its first paragraph in her head. *The Sack*, published in 1993, is the story of a young boy coping with his father being

out of work. Again it provoked letters from schoolchildren, asking if the 'dad' ever got a job again. The sequel *Work Wanted* finally has him back at work. And so was Christobel. 'I felt it was God's way of saying He hadn't finished with me yet.' In fact the trilogy starting with *No Gun for Asmir* came next.

A story, shaped by the Aboriginal communities she saw on those lecture tours and had written 13 years earlier, was published in 1990 as *Tucker's Mob*. It has since been translated into four South Australian Aboriginal languages. And then, a new phase, writing biographies of two extraordinary personalities in Tasmania. One cannot turn off the flow of ideas, the 'response to life'...



Writing about justice and human need, of course, has its pitfalls. In two areas at least Christobel would have betrayed the Aboriginal contributors had she yielded: on the ownership/ copyright of their material, and on the quality of the production. She knew a shoddy publication would once again be dismissed by mainstream critics as less than professionally credible. From the start she had set out believing the publication itself – from its researching and writing through to its presentation and marketing – had to be a demonstration of the justice that had long been denied.

History, as someone said, is the propaganda of the victor. It takes something of a campaigner to break through accepted history to a deeper reality.

'Why are you always so intense?' her mother used to say to her as a child. Her writing illustrates her answer: 'You have to experience the feelings – alienation, loneliness, joy, fear – to give them words, to give them life.' Ringing in her spirit was Ken Hampton's comment to her, that she was simply experiencing what Nungas live with every day. As Hampton

himself told a reporter, 'She has been able to see through our eyes the effects of *Goonya* authoritarianism upon us as a people. She has become one of us.'

Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his Nobel Prize for Literature acceptance speech (a speech the Soviet authorities refused to let him deliver) wrote on a similar theme. Writers cannot content themselves 'with reading to the world our bitter observations from the sidelines, on how the human race is hopelessly corrupted.' The writer cannot escape, said Solzhenitsyn. 'He is an accomplice in all the evil that is committed in his own country and by his own people. If the tanks of his country's army have bloodied the streets of another country's capital city, then those brown stains are splattered forever over the face of the writer... And if his young fellow-countrymen happily declare the superiority of decadence over honest toil, if they give themselves over to drugs or seize hostages, then the evil stink of it all is mixed with the writer's breath.'

Yet Solzhenitsyn could see a victory. It is a victory in which Christobel Mattingley and generations of writers also share. 'There is a simple step a simple courageous man can take,' Solzhenitsyn concluded, 'not to take part in the lie... Writers and artists can defeat the lie... And once the lie is shattered the nakedness of violence is revealed in all its repulsiveness. Violence becomes senile and collapses.'



What lies do we take part in?

Back at the beginning of our journey of discovery, only months after we had returned from India in 1981, Jean and I sat under a huge gum tree by Pichi Richi Creek in the Flinders Ranges north of Adelaide. With us was Nancy Barnes, a local Nunga woman who five years later became one of the battlers to get 'Survival in Our Own Land' published. In her gentle voice, trembling at times with emotion, she revealed parts of her life-story to us, long before it appeared in the pages of that

book. We were shamed by our ignorance of the injustices inflicted on people like her, our contemporary Australians. It seemed so simple and clear then that stories like hers must be told – that only much 'writing wrongs', much telling it like it is and was, could uncover the lie and let anything like justice begin to flow in this land.

Across Pichi Richi Creek, shrouded by tall grass, were the stone foundations of a shearing shed built by my Brown great-great-uncles in 1850. It was a symbol of the hidden history shrouded in my family's past. We had come to the Flinders Ranges on a camping trip. I wanted to show off 'the outback' to my British wife, and to dig up some of my early family history. We dug up far more than we bargained for...

*Old roots
&
new routes*

*'All who are hostages of the past must transform themselves
into new men and women'*

Nelson Mandela

TWELVE

Sorrow at sundown

THE YEAR WAS 1852. In the fledgling colony of South Australia, barely 16 years old, the police station at Mt Remarkable was the northern-most outpost of white man's law and order, 150 miles (as it was then) from Adelaide. 'The Mount' is remarkable only in that it is higher and more rugged in an uninviting sort of way than the rounded hills which rise like baker's dough to the more populated south. It stands as the first sentinel of the Flinders Ranges, described by the explorer of that name as a chain 'of high rocky mountains'. From Mt Remarkable they snake north 300 kilometres into the interior, marked by craggy ridges and spectacular rock faces.

If the Mount was hardly remarkable, the police station which bore its name was even less so. In 1852 it stood – only with the help of running repairs, it would seem from one history book – a 'gum slab hut, measuring 26 foot by 16 with a chimney of slabs cased with stone and a bark roof... erected at the cost of 20 Pounds'. Nothing remains of it today. It was replaced a few years later by a fine stone colonial courthouse, cell block, stable and police quarters – now used as a local museum full of memorabilia and relics of the town's hard beginnings.

Left out front by the roadside is a symbol of that early period – a metre-wide, two-metres long trunk of a tough river gum, neatly hollowed out with an adze to form a horse trough. Even today it brims with crystal clear water from the creek which runs along the base of Mount Remarkable.

Might it have been at this very trough that a rider left his steaming horse on a cold September evening in 1852 after a day's frantic ride? The rider wasted no time telling his news to Constable John Phillips, the lone officer policing those thousands of square miles. With due decorum Constable Phillips dispatched a note to his Commissioner in Adelaide before he and the rider took fresh mounts and set out into the night:

Mt Remarkable,

September 20, 1852, 5 o'clock pm

To A. Tolmer Esq.,

Commissioner of Police, Adelaide.

I have the honour to inform you that one of the Mr Browns (John) has just arrived here to say that the natives have murdered one of the brothers yesterday. I start immediately and have the honour to forward you this that you may take what steps should seem to you necessary.

John Phillips, P.C.

The rider, John Brown, was my great great uncle, the eldest son of a family of ten who had arrived in South Australia from England in 1841. By 1848 the Brown farm, on productive lands south of Adelaide, had become well established but limited for a family of growing young men. Two of the brothers while still teenagers teamed up with an ex-convict from Tasmania. And for two months they drove 2,000 head of sheep north into the untamed virgin bush, 70 kilometres beyond Mt Remarkable. Few white men were in the area; no white women. It was a rough life for Thomas and Robert Brown. The sheep had to be shepherded in large flocks by day and

penned at night. The native grasses on their vast 150 square-kilometre lease multiplied their flock and by 1851 they were managing 10,000 sheep. But then the Victorian gold rush swept away whatever casual labor was available in the area. Desperate for help the Browns sent an urgent message to their father. John the eldest son was sent north; and, reluctantly, their mother allowed her 17 year-old James to go as well.

Within three months James was dead.



I was ignorant of this family history, as Jean and I camped with our two year-old Adam within sight of Mt Remarkable, soon after our return from India. But the events of those times dramatically unfolded for us the following day when we drove into the sleepy country town of Quorn, built on the land the Brown brothers had earlier occupied. A few generations seem a long time in Australian history. Yet, whenever I return to that land, my heart beats faster like the pounding hooves of two horses as Constable Phillips and John Brown as they galloped along the creek bank where we had pitched our tent, just outside Mt Remarkable.



It had been 'a beautifully bright starlit sky, but moonless,' penned the second brother, Thomas Brown, in his account written years later, describing that night when he and a shepherd searched for his missing brother. In early morning the mists they came upon his body – naked, mutilated beyond recognition, arms and neck broken, stomach gouged open. Thomas' horse refused to go near it. The 300 sheep James had been shepherding were gone and a bloodstained waddy (club) lay nearby. The shepherd hand, John McCrorey, was sent out with a cart to retrieve the remains while John Brown set off without delay to the police outpost in Mt Remarkable.

Within 24 hours of setting off John Brown returned to the sheep station at Mt Arden with Constable Phillips, soon after dawn. A rough coffin had been made for James. Settlers from nearby properties joined the Browns round the grave for the committal. 'Their blood was up. Each man stood with his horses reins on his arm,' wrote Thomas in his account. 'Almost before the first shovel of earth had been put upon the grave, every man was in the saddle and I led them to the tragic spot from whence we picked up and followed the tracks of the sheep leading us directly West.' As they rode away, an old hand from nearby Wooldunga Station yelled an angry benediction over the grave of James Brown: 'The government can't hang you for what you're gonna do.'

Seventeen well-armed men camped that night on the topmost ridge of the Flinders Ranges. In the setting sun they could see a crease across the grass on the plain to the Northwest, the path of the fleeing Aboriginal group driving a flock of sheep. Next morning the descent down narrow gullies thick with porcupine grass was slow and difficult. Reaching the bottom of the range, the party galloped six miles across the grassy plain till the tracks were lost on stony ground dotted with saltbush. Ironically, it was the two Aboriginal 'black-trackers' – brought along for the purpose – who led the party forward. Frustrated but determined, the men camped a second night, not realising till next day that they were barely a mile from their quarry. During the night their horses wandered back along their tracks, delaying their start. But by midmorning the pursuers finally found the abandoned sheep... and a 'crowd of Blacks', fleeing in terror towards some dense mulga scrub.

The pursuit was hot, reported Thomas. 'A cry was raised, "Cut them off who can." But at our best Long Tom Coffin and three others succeeded in cutting off only the men in all their war paint as they lagged behind to cover the retreat of women and children.' The tribesmen climbed up between the ramparts

of a rocky outcrop to make their stand, as the four horsemen galloped round behind them, firing to block any possible escape...

What happened on that desolate slope may never be accurately known. A year later, when Police Commissioner Tolmer directed Matthew Moorhouse, the colony's 'Protector of Aborigines', to go north to investigate, two of the party refused to make an oath on a Bible before they gave testimony. Policeman Phillips testified that as he attempted to arrest the tribesmen, a boomerang knocked one of the party from his horse and spears were thrown, prompting a barrage of rifle shots. Phillips reported four Aborigines were killed. Others said the same.

But the fight had lasted till midday, possibly as long as two hours, Thomas wrote many years later. Had the wandering horses not delayed their departure that morning, there would have been 'indiscriminate slaughter and... I fear the whole tribe might have been exterminated.' Thomas conscientiously states that 'none were killed but as were afterwards proved as being the actual murderers'.

'The actual murderers?' How could they have known?

Somewhat casually he continues describing how, after the 'excitement of the chase and fight... we made a cursory examination of the results and started back'. Perhaps closer to tragedy was Melaia, alias Jacky the black-tracker. After being cautioned 'to speak the truth', he told Moorhouse he knew two of the dead men: Ngarpalta and Pirilialta, both of whom had taken 'a young wife last winter'. Melaia and others in the party reported a few broken sentences of these doomed tribesmen who had but a few years contact with the invading white settlers. 'Come on you white buggers,' yelled one as he pelted them with stones. 'Black fellow got no butter; white fellow plenty butter,' yelled another. 'Only one white fellow tumble down' (meaning only white man had been killed). 'White fellow bloody rogue and bloody liar.'

Those voices were silenced. But their echoes linger on, posing questions. James Brown had been castrated, his testicles stuffed in his mouth. Some settlers boasted of their conquest of 'black velvet', the Aboriginal women. Had young James been among them? Or was he paying the price for others' actions? The Brown's lease was defined by creeks and water holes, camping grounds of the nomads. Native game had fled those watering places. And sheep were easy game. Those tribesmen could scarcely foresee the impact of white civilisation on their ancient way of life. But a few years of settler contact was all that was needed to give them a taste of it. The land of their ancestors – which embraced all that was their way of life, their spirit, culture, unbroken over eons – was being swept away from them in a few traumatic seasons.

Melaia told Moorhouse that three women and two children in the group had fled to the safety of the mulga shrub. On our camping trip local historians told us how they found Aboriginal graves in the area which they believed to be the scene of the confrontation: skeletons with knees under the chin – buried Aboriginal style – and a small arc of stones protecting the deceased from the wind. No-one would recognise it as a war cemetery. Yet that's what it was. And out on that forlorn rocky ridge, the moans of those young mourning widows mingle with the lonely whistle of wind...



It had all been unknown history till we drove into Quorn that day on our camping trip. I had considered myself sympathetic to the cause of Aboriginal people and agreed, in a general way, that the record of white settlement was a cruel one. But I reckoned it was not my business. It was remote, and should be left alone. Today's realities were what mattered.

How could I say so any longer? If that tough independent settler past was part of my heritage, was this not also? I had

never talked with an Aboriginal, person to person. What was their side of the story? Was that not as much part of our history as what was handed to us by our forebears?

Watching an old dark man stumble into one of those long-verandah pubs that line the main street of Quorn, I knew that I had to find out. I followed him through the swinging frosted-glass doors. He avoided my gaze as I started speaking and glanced nervously at a group of men the other end of the bar. All conversation stopped. With a shaky finger he pointed outside and suggested I talk to his nephew who knew more than he did.

I crossed the broad street to where a younger Aboriginal man sat in a battered old Hillman car, two shy-eyed children with sun-bleached hair watching me from the back seat. Speaking with a confidence I did not feel, I introduced myself and began asking questions about the Aboriginal history of the area. There was no hint of hostility in his full dark face. 'Why do you want to know,' he asked? I could hide it no longer. I blurted out bits of my family history that we had stumbled across in a book on the Flinders Ranges and in council records just the day before. And, confessing my shame and deep sorrow, I told of the skeletons I had discovered in my family past.

The car-door creaked and the heavily-built Aboriginal man clambered out. Counting on his fingers, he named several relatives who had died at the hands of whites. His life had been 'beaten by drink and bitterness'. But Jesus had taken it all away, he said, reaching out for my shoulder with a hefty stockman's hand. 'God has forgiven me and He's forgiven you too.' Our eyes met. Jean and our young Adam joined us from our car parked across the street. And in the next moment, we were praying together in that sun-baked street for forgiveness for what our people had done to each other.

Then he was gone... even before I knew his name. Only some time later when I traced him to his home in Broken Hill

– from where he would trek across the Outback, caring for his black brothers – did I discover that Pastor Ken McKenzie was son of one of the last initiated men in the Adnyamathanha tribe of the northern Flinders Ranges.

Only some years later, when I joined the Aboriginal study tour of the Adnyamathanha – following their ancient nomadic path through the dramatic Brachina Gorge carved by the Arkaroos (the two giant Dreamtime serpents) – could I catch a mere glimpse of the landscape as they saw it.

Only when we pitched our tents at their last tribal campground at Mt Serle did I sense a fragment of the utter bewilderment they must have felt as the lifestyle of generations was forcibly brought to an end.

Only when we sat in a creek-bed, stilled in reverential silence before sacred carvings etched on a red rock-face, did my mind even start to comprehend that for at least 20,000 years Aboriginal elders had sat among these same stones in what we, for a mere 200 years, have called 'the Flinders Ranges'.

Yet after that first encounter with Ken McKenzie, Jean and I knew our attitudes could never be the same again.

Later that day, using the records of a local historian, we tracked down the approximate site where James Brown's broken bones had been laid. For an hour in the stillness of evening, we searched vainly through bushes and thick grass for some pile of stones that might mark his grave. Then, as the hum of a passing car faded into the distance, we stood by Stoney Creek remembering him, praying for the release of his spirit... and that of the tribesmen who died with him. Gum leaves, glistening in the light of a dying western sky, dripped like tears into a still pool of golden water. We knew sorrow that sundown; but we also knew from our encounter earlier in the day that the guilt did not have to hang on our shoulders.

Musing over our camp fires in the nights that followed, as we penetrated further north into those ranges of mythological Adnyamathanha ancestors, the awareness grew of what had

happened to us that day in Quorn. And we realised it was indicative of what could happen in Australia, or of what needed to happen. A moment of reckoning was being revealed. But how could we make sure it would be a healing and restoring process as it had for us, not a destructive one?

How could we take it beyond mere passing sentiment about the past in order to heal, and to impact, the living tragedy of the present?

How could the attitudes and values embedded in generations of actions and responses – the construct of our history which has become so much part of who we are – how could they ever be re-opened and re-written?

How could the fact of unequal possession, the equations of unequal power, ever be redressed? Can the cards stacked against Indigenous Australians in the structures of our society ever be dealt out with a fresh hand?

How could a culture shattered into fragments in a museum case – the preserve of anthropologists and a remnant generation of 'elders' – be ever again valued for what it was? Are we doomed to simply package it as a consumable for tourists and our national ego or, at best, make a fashionable art form of it?

How could the appalling Third World statistics among Australia's Indigenous population which map a tragedy of ill-health, life expectancy, prison rates, substandard housing, unemployment, addiction be reversed? How could we ever give realistic content to the idea of justice?



The questions rattle on and on... Like the echoes of a rock tumbling down the sides of some eternal chasm. In some ways their complexity and urgency have increased with time and participation. The simplistic answers have been overtaken by experience. On the other hand we had started asking them in earnest. And that has meant some further steps have always revealed themselves.

Nowadays, some complain that if you start saying 'sorry', where will it ever end? It doesn't. As the years have rolled by since our encounter with Ken McKenzie and my family's past, we can look back and see that my halting apology was an incredibly meaningful beginning.

Our own nomadic journey of discovery had begun.

And in the process of unearthing these old roots of family history, and the experiences of my 'unconscious mentors' who struggled with the issues of their generation, we were being given some new routes to explore towards social transformation and healing in Australia today.

Aboriginal people, those at the sharp end of injustice, would be our teachers.

THIRTEEN

Free at last

Across the highway from the spot where we had searched for the grave of my murdered great-great-uncle was an inauspicious looking farmhouse, surrounded by a fly-wire enclosed verandah. After sunset Jean and I made our way along the dirt track to it. The barking of dogs brought the farmer to his door. Shouting at them to shut-up, he switched on a light and led us into his kitchen. Patiently he heard us out as we related our discoveries of the murder of James Brown in 1852, of the massacre of Aboriginal tribesmen and of our search for more details. He knew. With others in the town he had made efforts, using local records, to locate the grave of James Brown and his shepherd's hut, but without success. The closest they had got was a stone well, uncovered during road works outside the farmer's front gate. Possibly that was the well referred to in records of the Brown family property?

He paused and shifted the conversation. Did we know that his farmhouse had once been 'Colebrook Home', an institution for Aboriginal children taken from their families earlier in the century? Lois O'Donoghue was one of them, he said. Even then in 1981, she was well-known for her achievements on behalf of her people. A few years later she was appointed inaugural chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission,

holding the highest position for any Aboriginal in Australia. She had lived in this home, said the farmer, right where we sat.

A month or so later we made an appointment with Lowitja (her traditional name which she now uses) O'Donoghue in her Canberra office, where she was directing Aboriginal Hostels Limited. We told her what we had unearthed in Quorn on the very ground she had walked as a child, and of its impact on us. I remember her listening with a knowing smile, as if to say, 'Yes, you've found something important but still have much to learn.'

How true that was and still is. For not only were we largely ignorant of our country's history, we hardly knew any Aboriginal people. On more than a superficial level, at least.

Earlier that same year, before we left India, we had hosted a couple of Aboriginal men one evening at our Mumbai flat. They had come for an international 'Dialogue on Development' organised by MRA. With a certain pride I had sat in the front row of the conference to hear Reg Blow, an Aboriginal community worker from Dandenong, Victoria, deliver his paper. The pride didn't last.

It was not a political speech. If anything, it was fairly balanced and restrained. But as Reg went on, outlining the human devastation caused during the 200 years of our European colonisation, a niggardly voice rose within me arguing defensively against this litany of my nation's sins. When Reg had finished we were asked to reflect for a few moments on what had been said. Into my mind came a picture of Aboriginal spears and artefacts hanging on the wall of my parents' home. I had no idea what they represented. All I knew was that my grandfather, working as a telegraphist at Eucla on the Nullarbor Plain, had been given them by Aboriginal people. But as to my ancestors' contact with Aboriginal people, I was clueless. It was that moment of realising my ignorance which set me on the search, after our return home, and uncovered the family skeletons in the Flinders Ranges.

So naturally, after our return to Australia, we tracked down Reg Blow and his wife, Walda, at their home in Dandenong. We found their lives contained a modern saga. In 1984 we were in Walda's country, the ancestral home of the Yorta Yorta along the River Murray in northern Victoria. There we had an unforgettable encounter with an Aboriginal elder, Margaret Tucker, whose story and qualities, along with those of our friends Reg and Walda Blow, made a powerful impact on us both.



Something was not right at the barbecue, though at first glance it was what an Aussie 'barbie' was all about – chops sizzling over small fires, kids kicking a football, beer tinnies coming out of the 'esky', groups scattered under gum trees lining a River Murray lagoon. Many of the party had just been to church in a country town in northern Victoria: solid dairy-farming families whose hard work and self-reliance are almost a trade mark.

Yet there was an undercurrent of grievance. Being handed around was a petition to the Victorian government aimed at blocking State legislation which could prevent the land they were sitting on – the Barmah State forest – being used for cattle grazing. 'Greenies' were half the problem. But more ire was reserved for the Aboriginal community just around a bend of the River whose claims on the land were seen as a threat to the local grazing industry. It was one thing for Aboriginal Land Rights to be established in the vast open stretches of northern Australia; but now a 'socialist' government in Melbourne was threatening the livelihood of hard-pressed farmers with similar legislation.

Apparently unaware of the subterranean tensions, an Aboriginal woman sat on a folding aluminium chair in the midst of them. Her large frame was diminished with her 70 years. Her sentences were often broken, incomplete. She

greeted the few who came to speak to her with warmth. But most of the time she sat lost in thought, almost not there. Ironically, the barbecue was in her honour.

Margaret Tucker (or 'Aunty Marge' to those who knew her) was 'up from Melbourne' on probably the last visit of her life to this land where she was born. An elder of the Ulupna people, her tribal name was Lilardia.

She had been invited by a high school teacher in nearby Numurkah who, had he not been the trusted friend of many locals, might have been regarded as a 'stirrer'. When chops had been thoroughly chewed, he called the 60 or so present into a semicircle around Mrs Tucker. Her opening words could hardly have been more politically astute. Yet she spoke them with a sincerity that could not have been calculated.

'I love this land as you all do. It means so much to me...'

Her words hung for a moment, as she rocked slightly in her chair and scanned the faces of those sitting on the ground before her. Framed by white wispy hair, her face spoke volumes even before any more words were uttered. Broad rounded cheeks gleamed with the rich brown of her race, like polished stones in a clear stream. As memories welled up within her, her large brown eyes brimmed with joy. Or was it tears? 'Oh how we loved to fish and hunt wild duck right on this lagoon, we children... and those wonderful campfires by the River. They were happy days then and we *pang pang gooks* (children) spent much of our time looking for witchetty grubs, quandong, the sweet chewy gum from the trees and pollies from mistletoe.' The memories flowed: goanna oil was 'a mighty cure' for colds and boiled stinging nettles a cure for festering sores. In those days the Forest swarmed with bird-life: swans, heron, emu and quail, ibis, egret and, the Ulupna's totem, brolga.

Then, in mid-sentence, that rich-lustre of her skin clouded, as if those stones had been taken from the water and dried dull grey. Any joy in her eyes vanished. Just a mile or two down

the River, she told us, 'a policeman and Mr Hill, the headmaster, came into the schoolroom.' She spoke slowly, pausing between vivid images of that day in the Moonahculla Aboriginal reserve when she was 13. 'I looked out the window and started to cry. There were 40 to 50 of our people standing silently, grieving for us. Then Mr Hill demanded that I and two other girls leave immediately with the police to be taken to the Cootamundra Domestic Training Centre for Aboriginal Girls.'

Three girls, including Marge's sister, were removed from the community that day. Her father was away shearing, unable to protest. Her mother, on 'domestic duties' at a homestead in nearby Deniliquin, ran two kilometres when she heard the news and followed them to the police station. 'My poor old mother... I heard years later how after watching us go out of her life, she wandered away from the police station along the road leading out of town. They found her next day, moaning and crying. Uncle heard sounds and thought it was an animal in pain. She was half demented and ill. They gave her water and tried to feed her, but she couldn't eat... She slowly got better. But for weeks she wouldn't let Geraldine (a younger sister) out of her sight. And at the sight of a policeman's white helmet coming round the bend of the river she would grab her little girl and escape into the bush, as did all the Aboriginal people who had children.

'I often wonder how many black children were taken like that,' said Marge.

Except for a few brief supervised visits, neither Marge nor her sister saw their parents during the next nine years. 'We were trained as servants in white people's homes. I grew to feel that a drudge was all I was good for.' She was kept by a series of families in suburban Sydney. Some treated her reasonably well; others, used and abused her. Her legs still bore scars from the beatings she was given, she said. Desperately lonely, sometimes starved into submission, she had twice tried to run

away. She told those farming families how, once, she had taken 'Ratsack' poison to end it all... but had vomited it up.

Her eyes flashed with fire: 'Often I felt I would like to "kidney-fat" someone, as my people long ago used to say when they were angry.'

Then, just as suddenly, the spring of anger subsided and that face etched with memories relaxed. The cheeks regained their lustre. 'We have all been hurt,' she said gently, 'but we have learned from our suffering and mistakes. And we are still learning as we are still making mistakes. Whatever colour you are – black, brown or brindle – right is right and wrong is wrong. If I'm wrong, please tell me.'

No-one had anything to tell her. Those at the barbecue left without any confrontation. The editor of the local *Numurkah Leader* published a full-page interview with Margaret Tucker, calling her 'a great human being... the embodiment of sincere humility. It is a tangible feeling which slowly envelopes you as you talk with her.'

Many have responded to her in similar ways. Once entertained to tea by a Prime Minister's wife at the Lodge, she was asked – with a touch of patronage – whether this was her first visit to Canberra. 'Oh no,' answered Marge enthusiastically. 'I was here three months before I was born. Yes, my mother was pregnant with me when she was on "walkabout" with my people at Black Mountain...' (just across Lake Burley Griffin from the PM's Lodge) 'and, did you know, that's why they call it "Black Mountain" because the blacks used to camp there?' The Prime Minister's wife did not know. And became noticeably less patronising.

In 1958, with amazing grace for one whose life bore the scars of colonisation, Marge stood before the Governor of Victoria and was awarded an Member of the British Empire.

Some younger Aboriginal activists may have regarded Marge Tucker and her contemporaries as too pliable, affected by years of enforced submission. But her generation suffered

and struggled as much as any. Indeed, across Australia, there is a veritable tribe of warriors who advanced the cause of their people when they themselves had no voice, no legal rights. Pastor Doug Nichols, for instance, who rose to become Governor of South Australia, had been taken away from his family in Cummeragunga as Marge Tucker was. The fact that so many emerged with qualities of leadership and courage is testimony to their strength of character, not a vindication of the system. A much greater number of broken men and women tragically did not make it. Their bitter heritage fuels the ongoing social dysfunction of many more today.

Marge Tucker, for her part, had respect and vision for today's generation. 'Young Aborigines have taught me a lot. They have great courage and can give to our country in many ways. Some of us are afraid to open our mouths and others who do are "radicals",' she told a national conference in Sydney.

She is too modest to say so but, at an early age, Marge herself was regarded as a 'radical'. In Melbourne, where she lived with her infant daughter during the War years working in a rope factory, she had joined the first Aboriginal organisation formed in Victoria – the Aborigines Advancement League – and became its treasurer. 'We had very little money, so I didn't have much to do as treasurer,' Marge used to say with a chuckle. A new generation of white managers was then in charge of Aboriginal 'Settlements' like Cummeragunga, many of them autocratic and arrogant.

'They were desperate days,' wrote Marge in her autobiography *If Everyone Cared*. Aboriginal men had fought alongside white Australians during the War but returned home to the old discrimination, unable to get jobs. The white Settlement managers regarded them with suspicion and hostility. Marge's cousin, Jack Patten, had served with the AIF in the Middle East. But when he returned to Cummeragunga at the request of its residents, he was branded a 'black bastard' and was barred by the manager.

In protest the residents walked en masse off the reserve, crossing the border into Victoria and camping on their old tribal grounds at Barmah forest. Through their action they denied themselves the dole, their only means of survival. Down in Melbourne, Marge and friends 'walked our shoe leather thin, cadging food' for the protesters from managers of city markets. Then, packing it all into the taxi of a man Marge had 'sucked up to', they drove north to feed the 'striking Aborigines'.

The years of struggle in the cause of her people forged in her a different militancy. 'Every day I wonder why we Aborigines cannot get through to the thinking of governments and administrators,' she wrote in her book. 'Then I realise it is because we have no clear-cut answers. Bitterness clouds our mission, often splitting us into little groups working against each other.'

'I'd like to "do the wild corroboree" when I feel angry, but this anger diminishes when I try to understand and care for people... I don't forget what has happened since Captain Cook landed in Australia. But what is the use of remembering with bitterness? I say let Captain Cook rest...

'We may not forget; but we can forgive. Call it what you like but deep in my heart I do believe in the Holy Spirit – the Good Spirit, that has neither hate, bitterness, class or creed. It is not the colour of one's skin that matters, it is character.'

'A lot of years have been wasted but with a new spirit, our people who have lost all could learn to live straight and give something to the whole of humanity... We need to put aside our grievances and think positively how to put right what is wrong in Australia today, to forgive past mistakes and to create a leadership that can help Australia help the world. We can do it together. Think bigger from our hearts.'

Margaret Tucker spent her last years in a nursing home in Shepparton, not quite in this world. Her spirit and mind, perhaps, were already mingling with her spirit ancestors

exploring her Dreaming, running free among the ibis and brolga on the sparkling waters of her childhood. She died in 1996.



A generation after Marge Tucker's early childhood at Cummeragunga, Walda Blow tasted her own portion of bitter experiences. But is also sustained by the vision and endurance of Marge and her contemporaries. 'No one can take their place,' says Walda, remembering her elders. 'They handled their lives in a very dignified way. Part of their religion was no bitterness.'

Walda was born at Echuca hospital. Aboriginal women, in those days, gave birth on the back verandah. Five months later, her mother died of tuberculosis, at the age of 29. Someone told Walda, years later, how humiliated they felt seeing Walda's father and brothers riding with the coffin on the back of the old Cummeragunga Mission truck on the way to the graveyard. 'My Dad never mentioned it,' said Walda. 'I never heard him say a nasty word about anyone.'

The little school at Cummeragunga, from which Marge Tucker and her sister had been taken, only went to Grade 3 in Walda's day. Walda and her brothers were being raised by their grandparents and 'luckily, they kept us together'. Children were still being taken by the hated Aborigines Protection Board. Walda's father worked as a shearer which gave him the means to sustain his family. 'Those were the days when the government owned us,' remembers Walda. 'Aboriginal people were never allowed to make their own decisions. We were forbidden to speak our own language, to take part in our culture, to live in towns – though some lived as fringe dwellers. Cummeragunga was under a government manager, and we had to get permission to come on the Reserve or go off.

'It broke the spirit of the Aboriginal men; but it made the women very strong, spiritually and politically... I'm not talking about 200 years ago because I lived through it.'

Walda and some other children got the chance to go to a nearby school, off the Reserve. 'We were reminded every day that we were the scum of the earth. Do you see why we couldn't get out of school quick enough?' Walda stuck at it through sixth grade. When she was 16, she went to Melbourne looking for work – in factories and later, in nursing.

'I was very shy,' comments Walda, speaking even now in a soft voice. 'I never thought I had any rights at all. If you treat people with disrespect you don't get any back. So I had no respect for white people. I kept to my side of the fence.'

'You must take into consideration that the Referendum that gave us the right to be counted as people didn't take place till 1967,' says Walda, her voice rising just a little. 'I was 25 by that time, a married woman who didn't have a voice. You hear so much about black deaths in custody: blacks have been dying in prisons for 200 years. Only now they have to be counted.'

Central in her experience was the deaths of her two brothers. Her younger brother, Roy, killed himself drunk-driving. 'He had no purpose.' The death of her older brother, Barney, at the age of 46 affected her even more. As a 15 year-old he had left Cummeragunga with a travelling boxing troupe. 'He was born with it in him,' says Walda. By the age of 17 he had won his Golden Gloves. And before reaching 21, became Australian flyweight champion in a fight at Festival Hall in Melbourne. 'We used to see pictures of Barney in the newspaper. He was famous. But we felt very sad because we knew a lot of his fighting was sheer frustration. And yet he was a gentleman.'

When his boxing career was through, Barney returned to the district – and, like his brother, died of drink with no purpose. 'It was nine years before I could talk about it. I loved my brothers very much,' says Walda quietly. 'They were both men of great dignity but were treated like dirt. The day before Barney died, he told me he hated this world.'

'I was a young mother with four children at the time.'

Changes were starting to happen in Australia. It made me feel, by God, I'm going to work hard for the next generation. What I want to see is that my kids are accepted.'

But that was years later. Tired of working in Melbourne Walda and her cousin, barely in their twenties, had made a trip up to Queensland which was unusual for two young Aboriginal women in those pre-Referendum days. There she met Reg. Even today Reg is an impressive muscular figure with a shock of thick hair, a glint in his eye and a handsome moustache above a broad grin which stretches almost to the extremities of his bushy sideburns. Walda must have been wowed...



As Reg Blow himself admits, 'I was sorta different.' For one thing he didn't come under the Aborigines Protection Act which in Queensland was 'really horrific'. His father had Maori in him and was excluded from the Act. And so was his mother as she had a French grandfather, who was the part-owner of a sugar plantation and who used Aboriginal woman for his pleasure. Reg talks about it quite dispassionately – the Aboriginal men worked the plantations and the Aboriginal women did housework or whatever was demanded of them.

From an early age Reg had jobs, which also made him different. He grew up in Rockhampton, the second youngest of seven children. His father had been a seaman and worked his way up to a Masters' ticket, captaining a tugboat on the river. Reg earned his first money splicing ropes. Then, at the age of 14, he left school 'because that seemed to be the general trend in those days. I wanted to work.' And work he has, at all sorts of jobs: a brickies' labourer, a foundry worker and laying railway tracks in blistering heat all the way to Mt Isa (mostly with Torres Strait Islanders since others who came couldn't

take the heat). Later, down south in Melbourne, Reg had a 'mind-numbing job at General Motors which any monkey could do', and then became a truck-driver, a social worker and even a public servant!

His life has been marked by major changes, mostly for the better. The first was when he was about 18. 'Up till then I was a city kid hanging around the Aboriginal section of town. My sister and her Italian husband were share-farming 10 acres near Goondiwindi on the New South Wales/ Queensland border, and asked me to help them grow tobacco. I was in trouble with the law so shot off to the bush. I thoroughly hated the first months and was dead scared of snakes,' he says with a laugh. After a year, his sister and brother-in-law left and Reg took over their share. 'They were my best years really. The traders and bank manager respected me. I employed Aboriginals who were good workers... when you had them.' But after a couple of years of hard work, Reg was bored with 'being single and responsible'. So he bought a 1959 Holden station-wagon and took off to work for wages with the railways.

Reg's cars were instrumental in ending his 'single' phase. Back in Brisbane in his latest vehicle, a flashy two-toner Ford Customliner, Reg drove his brother to a date with a new girlfriend, who turned out to be Walda's cousin. In the bargain Reg got to meet Walda. By then he was a shift worker in a flour mill. 'We went together for a while and, very soon, got married. I'd been knocking around a long time and was sick of the free and easy life.'

Walda didn't like Queensland so pressed Reg to come south. But Reg found Victoria hard to take. With his broad grin he likes to tell Melburnians: 'I know the trauma of being uprooted and transplanted. Instead of having a beautiful day one day and a perfect one the next, here in Victoria the weather is miserable one day and terrible the next!'

Ironically, in 'liberal' Victoria, for the first time Reg could not get a regular job. All their money and the car had gone on

the wedding and getting to Echuca. 'It almost killed me,' he remembers. 'I've always worked; and here I couldn't even support my wife. I've never been on the dole in my life – except once, and then when I got my cheque I was so ashamed of it that I never went back for another.' For a while they picked fruit near Shepparton, living in a caravan on the orchard. Finally, Reg hitched a ride into town, bought a car for \$60 and, when the picking season ended, drove to the Melbourne suburb of Dandenong where they were put up by Walda's cousin. With only \$10 in his pocket Reg landed a job next day, driving a front-end loader. They lived in a rented caravan for 18 months until they were able to get a Housing Commission house. Reg worked three jobs at once, including driving a semitrailer for Victoria Gas & Fuel. He was elected union delegate for the Dandenong area.

It was a time of heightened political consciousness for Aboriginal people, just before the 1967 Referendum. Many younger 'Kooris' (Indigenous people) were coming to Melbourne looking for work, particularly to Dandenong, and staying with relatives. These families got together and applied for a grant to purchase a hostel for the boys. Their plans became public with a newspaper headline, 'Blacks moving to Dandenong West'. Typically, the story was blown way out of proportion.

The State government purchased a hostel and Walda was appointed manager for 11 young men between 15 and 25 years old. The Blow family, with four young children of their own, moved in. Reg continued his job with Gas & Fuel, hoping to give an example of regular work. *Gunai Lodge*, as it was called, not only helped the young men but brought another change to Reg's life. 'Giving guidance to these young men who were so vulnerable turned me around. Suddenly I had become the father figure in the hostel.' They faced plenty of battles. Reg remembers hearing a man across the road swearing loudly at what Reg thought was the dog. But looking out the window,

Reg realised the neighbour was calling his son a 'Black b.....' Reg charged over and chased him into his house, yelling at him to come out. 'They got the message,' he grins. Reg had once been in the boxing ring himself.

The same group of families formed the Dandenong and District Aborigines Cooperative, set up an office and began to tackle other issues concerning the Aboriginal community. A State-owned camp reserved for Aboriginal people, in Walda's 'country' not far from Shepparton, was about to be closed. Walda and Reg joined the protest. Reg became one of the board of managers and, 10 years later, president of what became 'Camp Jungai', a race relations camp for schoolchildren of all backgrounds. Other positions followed, including president of the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League and the Aboriginal Child Care Agency; and secretary of the South Eastern Aboriginal Land Council.

Not everything worked. When a health crisis was reported in the Gippsland Lake Tyers reserve, the Dandenong group set up a meeting, chartered a small plane and flew down after work, believing they could help. They were told to 'get back where you came from'. It was a lesson he's never forgotten – 'offering help to people from a position of power puts them down and elevates those giving the help'. So they turned their attention to doing something about health issues on their front doorstep, in Melbourne. Reg was appointed to a government Interim Committee to set up the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service.

The Blows' lives were becoming busier than ever. Reluctantly, Reg asked for leave without pay for 12 months from his high-paying Gas & Fuel job – and never went back to it. He was employed as administrator with the Dandenong Aboriginal Co-op and a research assistant at the Monash Aboriginal Research Centre. The early 1970s saw a burst of action in Aboriginal Affairs: 'Money started to flow. And that's when problems started to set in,' says Reg, with a tinge

of sadness. As Walda puts it: 'We come from a culture of caring and sharing, and when we were oppressed we looked after each other. But mixed in with the white population, Aboriginal people became fragmented and divided.'

Reg had always had white friends but they were superficial 'drinking friends' who would look the other way if they met you in the street. In Dandenong Reg and Walda got to know people from MRA, friends of 'Aunty' Marge Tucker. Reg remembers meeting a young Papua New Guinean called Amos. And Lorna, a nursing sister; Ron, a university student; and Eric, a retired airforce pilot. 'They had a genuineness about them,' says Reg. The Blows began joining seminars and conferences run by MRA people in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane – and in 1977 Reg travelled to New Zealand, meeting Maoris and North American Indians. Then in 1981, to India.

'I went to India expecting to see poverty and was not disappointed. It is all there, magnified by 800 (now 1,000) million people,' Reg said on return. 'But the spirit of the people and their determination to survive overcame these negatives. If you think you have problems, I would recommend India as a country to visit.' Reg was impressed by the progress in cooperative agriculture at the village level. He and two Australian friends met Mother Teresa at her orphanage in Calcutta. 'It makes one feel very humble to realise the faith that lady had.'

A second trip seven years later linked Reg with African-Americans tracing the route of Mahatma Gandhi's 'Salt March' through Gujarat. These experiences, said Reg, deepened his sense of compassion – 'of putting yourself in another person's shoes' – and gave him an appreciation of non-violent social change, which was the heart of Gandhi's philosophy.

These values were sorely tested in the heat of Aboriginal politics – and also in white politics, for that matter. Reg was elbowed out of the Dandenong Co-operative where he had

done so much foundation work. He found work instead as the Adviser to the Victorian government Minister for Aboriginal Affairs who, at that time, was Jeff Kennett. When the Liberals were replaced by the Cain government, Reg became manager of the Aboriginal Affairs Unit in the Premier's department. He survived the turbulent years when Victorian Land Rights legislation was being debated, through the State's 150th anniversary celebrations and the lead up to the Bicentennial.

Then as Reg puts it, 'I got out of step with a new Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and was moved sideways, seconded to the Office of Corrections. It was a kick in the belly.' Reg told himself he would be better off without the government job; that he could make a million bucks in tourist development instead. But his interactions with people in India and with his MRA friends gave him second thoughts: 'No, this is what it's all about. Put the problem before God,' he told himself.

He did, and was struck by the thought that he must 'turn negatives to positives'. It went against the grain. 'I am a stubborn sort of person. Until I could get rid of that hurt and bitterness, I was in limbo.' Swallowing his pride Reg took himself to the Office of Corrections to see what the job being offered him was all about.

'I find it ironic that I end up working in a system that has oppressed my people since European settlement,' said Reg in 1987, a year before 'Black deaths in custody' hit the headlines. It did not take him long to discover that his new job was thrusting him into a nerve issue in the country. With vastly higher prison rates among Aboriginal communities than any other group, Reg was quick to grasp the tragedy of lives wasted in incarceration. Young offenders, he saw, were simply continuing the dependency on institutionalised existence that they had grown up with. What could change that pattern at the point of entry into the prison system? How, in the spirit of self-determination, could the Aboriginal community become involved? Was there some way of reinstating some of the

leadership systems that Aboriginal people operated prior to settlement?

After months of consultation around the State, the concept emerged of Aboriginal Community Justice Panels. The first was set up in Echuca. 'The best thing I have seen in 10 years in the police force in Echuca,' said Senior Sergeant Ian Herauville, when interviewed about the scheme by *The Age* of Melbourne. 'It has generated greater trust and, more importantly, helped significantly to reduce Aboriginal arrests.' In one year alone, reported *The Age*, the scheme saved the State of Victoria \$625,000 in prison costs.

Led by Norm Hodge, eight members of the Echuca Aboriginal Cooperative served voluntarily on the panel. Each was on call 24 hours a day for a week at a time, advising in the initial interview when charges are laid and at court hearings. Under the panel member's guidance, offenders often received community service orders and counselling. The panels, still operating in Victoria, work with police to review procedures, develop jail education and supervise post-release vocational training programs. 'It's bloody hard work,' said Norm Hodge, after developing the scheme in Echuca.

Meanwhile, after years of managing the Dandenong hostel, Walda had returned to college to further her own education. And then was selected as Aboriginal liaison officer with the Victorian Synod of the Uniting Church. Her task was 'to be a bridge-builder', to visit local congregations and break down barriers. She was at the forefront of seeing through Synod's pledge to transfer six properties to Aboriginal communities – a hostel for Aboriginal university students in Geelong, for instance; a 'keeping place' for artefacts in Ballarat; and a building for the Aboriginal Cooperative to run a kindergarten in Echuca.

Three months after she entered the job in 1985, the national Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress was formed and Walda became its treasurer. At that point the Uniting

Church had only three ordained Indigenous ministers in Australia. During the eight years she spent with the Church, 30 more were ordained. At Nungalinga College in Darwin, Aboriginal people are learning in their own languages a Christian theology developed with the help of Aboriginal elders.

'It really points out that if Aboriginal people had been treated with respect from the start, all of Australia would have benefited,' argues Walda. 'God didn't come here 200 years ago.'

That really is the bottom line of all that the Blows have worked for: not just to end the plight of their people and to turn around the indifference of many white Australians, but to see Aboriginal Australians contributing their full rich potential in the land which bore their race for 60,000 years. 'It's a different perspective than simply fighting for one's rights,' said Walda.

The battle against prejudice and discrimination, of course, has to continue. Once asked by a visiting African ambassador if discrimination still exists in Australia, Reg said he felt it every morning he gets on the train to work. 'The seat next to me is the last to go.' But every morning he decides it is not going to make him bitter, not going to hold him back.

It was in India that he realised there was a different way of fighting. Talking with Indigenous leaders from other countries, he said: 'By caring for our oppressors we give them a chance to change. But if we feed their race hate or indifference to us, then it will only allow them to justify their attitudes to us. In my own work I try to implement trust between people and groups. Trust is not the same as gullibility - to trust people takes strength.'

'The fabric of Aboriginal society today is in tatters,' he wrote in 1988. 'We are being sucked into a way of life that has no spiritual values, where moral principles take second place to materialistic pursuits. We need to rebuild our communities on rock solid cultural foundations.'



Some time later his own life reached yet another 'radical turning point' which opened the way for a discovery of his 'Aboriginal spirituality'. It happened in hospital.

Reg had collapsed from overwork with double pneumonia and severe stomach cramps, and was rushed into an operating theatre. 'I felt so vulnerable – me, who had always regarded myself as indestructible!' An Aboriginal pastor paid him a visit during his recovery and introduced a nurse that he knew. The nurse, assuming Reg was a Christian, asked him about his relationship to God. Reg hedged awkwardly around the question. But that night he had a vivid dream in which an ancient Aboriginal elder, painted ceremonially, was telling him the secrets of life. Reg woke suddenly, feeling euphoric but unable to remember the words that had been told him.

Next day, seemingly unconnected, another sister came by with a wheelchair asking patients if they wanted to go to a chapel service. Almost impulsively Reg said 'yes'. And found himself with just three people and a local pastor, asking to be led into a relationship with the God he barely knew.

Reg remains as earthy and real as ever. 'Good people are still good and nasty people still nasty. The old doubts still come. But if I get stressed out, I just take it to the Lord,' he says with more of a chuckle than piety. Yet his life has found a new root. Surrounded by family and friends Reg was baptised by an Aboriginal pastor in the River Murray, not far from Cummeragunga.

Cummeragunga is still Walda's spiritual home. She has had to make her own journey beyond the bitterness and humiliation associated with her early years in that area. That inner journey, Walda believes, is vital for the liberation of Indigenous people. 'The dispossession of land, the loss of culture and independence are some of the things which take away one's dignity and self-respect. Before any healing can come in

Australia, Aboriginal people have to be reconciled with themselves, with the things which have caused their hurt. A deeply ingrained bitterness in my community shows itself in the refusal to play the game according to the norms of this society. It is going to take a long time to heal these things and healing is so desperately needed,' she wrote in *For A Change*, an international magazine.

One evening, many years after she and Reg had moved to Melbourne, she was back at the gate of the Cummeragunga cemetery. Here lay so many of her people – her mother, two brothers and her father. She sat for a time by his headstone, remembering being with him as he died. So often visits to the cemetery had made her feel 'caught up in the things Barney had suffered. It was like twine wrapped around my heart.' This evening was different. As she paused at the cemetery gate and looked back, she was filled with a sense of the peacefulness of the scene, the late evening light bathing the stately silent gum trees along the River. 'I knew they were free. Free at last... no longer trapped by the things that caused their suffering.'

And neither is Walda.

FOURTEEN

Signposts on the road to reconciliation

WHERE DID AUSTRALIA'S RECONCILIATION movement come from? And, more important, where is it heading?

Different people will give you different answers. A torrent of articles, books and speeches have fuelled the national debate which, for over a decade, has entered into parliaments and pubs, pulpits and schools, media forums and street demonstrations. Sometimes it seems to have brought a shaft of understanding, a moment of possible healing. At other times the reconciliation journey has dragged on, apparently getting nowhere. And through it all we hear the deeply troubling and stubbornly proud voices of Indigenous Australians, whose lives and place in this country hang on the outcome.

The journey is not over. Reconciliation is far from 'achieved'. It is still evolving. In this last chapter I attempt to outline some elements of it, some of the signposts that have become evident to two non-Indigenous travellers on the way. For just as my various 'mentors', whose stories I have told, applied themselves to bring change in particular areas of their postwar world, Jean and I have over the last 20 years been drawn into that elusive quest for real reconciliation in Australia.



If it is to mean anything, reconciliation has to involve relationships. You can't be reconciled to someone you don't know. Getting to know Aboriginal people, we found, took a lot of listening which we non-Aboriginal Australians are not particularly good at. As Kim Beazley Snr put it, Australia's relationship with her Indigenous people has been marked by 'an absence of listening... We always knew.' So *listening relationships* became the first, most basic signpost on our journey.

Listening to 'Aunty Marge' Tucker, or to Reg and Walda Blow, took us into another world. The reality of their backgrounds and the huge barriers they had overcome spoke volumes. Yet, to some extent, they spoke our language. Through courage, faith and quiet determination, they had 'succeeded' in making their mark in areas recognised by wider society. But what about those struggling on the edge of survival, those long-term unemployed, those in prisons, beaten, angry, without hope? Could we listen to and learn anything from them?

On a trip to Broken Hill we tracked down Ken McKenzie, the Adnyamathanha man whose forgiving attitude towards my family history in the Flinders Ranges had set us on this journey. Standing on the footpath outside a small corrugated iron church one Sunday night, one of his Nunga congregation (Trev, we'll call him) approached me. 'I am a house burglar,' said Trev, matter-of-factly when I asked what he did. Well-built, dark and with a wicked grin, he told me how he had survived on the streets of Adelaide with the help of a bike chain, back-door drug deals and trading stolen goods through 'adult bookshops'. He had come to Broken Hill on the run from the 'coppers' across the border in South Australia. But the life of dodging the law was getting to him. Knowing he had 'stuffed up' his life, Trev had taken the chance to talk with

Pastor Ken and decided 'to give God a go'. He wanted to go straight for the sake of his partner and his kid; but was bothered by the thought that he should hand himself in. What should he do, he asked me?

I can't even remember what I said. It seemed more important to find out what Trev thought he should do.

Trev did three months inside and survived, despite some weeks in the 'dog-yard' where homosexuals and violent crims were kept. When his trial came up, a character reference from a Minister got him out on an 18-month suspended sentence with community service – which he did in Murray Bridge. And that is where I next caught up with him some time later. During his prison stint Trev had kept his promise to God, but then found life on the outside tough going.

Sitting in his Housing Trust home one day, I realised how quickly we judge those who turn away from destructive substance abuse but then find it difficult to maintain going straight. Though the life of a crim and a hustler was behind him, Trev found it virtually impossible to get a job. I had to bite my tongue and resist the temptation to give advice from the moral high-ground. Listening to Trev and a number of other friends like him gave us a glimpse of the structural and societal cards that are stacked against them – and the way a long history of disadvantage tends to program many of them for failure. Listening meant the deepening of understanding for us and an opening for them.

An hour's drive south-east of Murray Bridge is Camp Coorong – or '*Camp Coorong Race-Relations, Recreation and Cultural Education Centre*', to give its full name. It lies near the head of the Coorong, a 100-kilometre channel of water which runs parallel to the Southern Ocean coast and provides a sanctuary for birds migrating from half way round the world. And people, too, have come from all over the world people to Camp Coorong to listen and understand. A Japanese newspaper publisher turned up in a limousine. A young

African came with a group of students. Some 2,000 school-children each year pour through the place, some on day trips, others staying overnight in the bunk-houses. University and church groups book out weekends. They watch videos of Ngarrindjeri heritage and examine artefacts in its 'regional' museum. They go on an 'interpretive walk', learning about 'bush tucker' and natural medicines. And they get hands-on experience in the traditional art of basket weaving.

What communicates most clearly, however – to those prepared to hear the nuances of the stories being told and the people telling them – is that this place has been created and built, against huge odds, through a process of Indigenous 'self-determination'. Camp Coorong is run by Tom and Ellen Trevorrow and a small group of Ngarrindjeri families who, only a few decades ago, were living in squalid fringe-camps made with hessian bags, bits of tin and whatever else they could scrounge. So everything they pass on is drawn from their own experience and from that of the Ngarrindjeri people, whose heartland lies around the Coorong and the lakes at the mouth of the Murray River.

Ask about the pre-1967 Referendum days of assimilation and they can show you the 'Three-mile camp' where they lived on the edge of a swamp, outside the town of Meningie. They may tell you how their two year-old brother was taken from one of these camps 'by Welfare' and not seen again for 12 years. Or how their people were only allowed into town on Tuesdays to pick up rations: flour, tea and sugar.

Try to find out about local history and the Coorong is full of it. As early as 1820, well before colonisation, the crews of whaling and sealing boats came ashore, taking Ngarrindjeri women as slaves to keep at their camps on Kangaroo Island. Venereal disease decimated the Ngarrindjeri in the decades that followed.

Inquire about heritage and you will hear the stories of their creation ancestor Ngurunderi whose trail is evident in features

of that land. Anthropologists regard Camp Coorong as the centre of cultural revival. The Trevorrows were at the heart of the long struggle to stop construction of a bridge to Hindmarsh Island (known by the Ngarrindjeri as 'Kumarangk', the word for 'fertility'). Situated virtually at the mouth of the River Murray Kumarangk holds sacred beliefs, they believe, which are crucial for both men and women concerning the creation of life. It is an area rich in archaeological sites, many of them damaged. More would be destroyed by the bridge and ensuing development, they argued. The tortuous dispute went through seven Federal and State Inquiries, endless court cases and appeals, until Federal parliament passed a special act to remove all obstacles to construction of the bridge. It grievously wounded the Ngarrindjeri.

Want to find out about economic development and the Trevorrows will tell of the jobs they did back in the 'Protection days' – digging drains, shearing, labouring on the railways – and then point to the large number of young Ngarrindjeri doing 'CDEP' work-for-the-dole programs today. Most of the buildings of Camp Coorong have been built with Ngarrindjeri labour. Further down the Coorong, Tom's older brother George has established an eco-tourism centre, staffed by young Ngarrindjeri who are getting building trades and tourism certificates in the process. 'We've been tied too long to the welfare wheels. That's why we *must* get on our feet as a people, educationally and economically,' says George.

From the early 1980s, when Camp Coorong was just a dream, Jean and I would go to listen and learn. And sometimes to help on some work project. We often joined George and Tom, with their extended families, for their Wednesday fellowship evenings when they encouraged each other in the spiritual renewal which had brought them out of anger and alcohol. Leading that fellowship were Robert and Hilda Day, who also grew up in the camps and whose lives had been

turned around through a Maori pastor, Keith Mildon. As we listened to the complex challenges, we were again tempted in our 'whitefella' way to give advice. At times we tried to organise some action to support them. But an important part of listening, we found, was accepting that we do not 'always know' and our idea of 'helping' can be disempowering. And if that created in us a sense of powerlessness, that was also part of the learning experience.

Through it all we began to give recognition to Indigenous Australians – and to feel what those at the margins have had to contend with. And still do.



Recognition became the second signpost on our journey.

'We're not asking for much,' I remember Walda Blow saying back in 1988. 'All we want is recognition.' Not recognition of something that has passed into history. But acknowledgement of a living people, of human beings facing unequal challenges today, with a living culture and living languages still under threat. Tom Trevorrow winces when he sees signs put up by National Parks and Wildlife along the Coorong which recognise that 'this *was* the traditional country of the Ngarrindjeri people.' It still is, says Tom. 'We're still here.'

Ever since the High Court ruling on the 'Mabo' case overturned our European myth of 'Terra Nullius' – an 'empty land' which Britain had colonised – recognition of 'prior Indigenous ownership' has steadily gained acceptance. Public forums, here in Adelaide for instance, often start with recognition that this is 'the traditional country of the Kaurna people'.

Yet so many of the facts of our history still lie uncovered or unaccepted. Revealing them is not easy. Until confronted with the truth of my family's history in the Flinders Ranges my

attitude had been one of general acknowledgement that Aboriginal people had got a rough deal. What a difference it made to walk on the land where blood was spilt, where my ancestors had been part of the struggle. What an eye-opener it was to read an Aboriginal account of the English settlement of Sydney from 1788 through the research of Indigenous writer Eric Willmot in his historical novel *Pemulwuy* – the Eora warrior who, unlike his cousin Bennelong, waged a guerilla war against the invaders, pinning them to their settlements till disease wiped out his forces.

Each Anzac Day we recognise with reverence the 60,000 who never returned from the 1914-18 War, and those who died in World War II and in Korea. Fifteen years after the Vietnam war we finally recognised those who fought in that 'dirty war' with a belated 'Welcome Home' parade for 30,000 vets through the streets of Sydney. Two hundred years have gone by and we have yet to recognise the many thousands of Indigenous people who fell on Australian soil, lost in a hopeless war to defend the land they loved. At the 'going down of the sun and in the morning', could we remember them?

At one sunset and one frosty morning in Canberra we *did* remember them. It was 1988, Australia's Bicentennial Year, and Prime Minister Bob Hawke had refused to have prayers said at the opening of the new Parliament House building. So Christian leaders called on people across the country to come and pray, two days before Queen Elizabeth was officially to cut the ribbon. Some 35,000 converged on the capital. And pray we did, for 18 hours at a stretch. At the head of a long procession, winding its way round State Circle, black and white Christian leaders carried a wooden Cross, made from the rails of a cattle yard in Myall Creek in northern New South Wales. In that cattle yard, exactly 150 years earlier in 1838, settlers had penned up 28 Aboriginal women and children and massacred them.

'We carry this Cross in shame,' said the Catholic Bishop of

Canberra, Patrick Power. 'A nation has no future if it cannot face the past.' As that stark, stained wooden Cross was stuck in the lawn in front of Parliament House, Aboriginal people throughout the crowd lit small gum-leaf fires for the traditional purification with smoke. Then they turned and offered each of us a paper-cup communion with the 'living water' of Christ's reconciliation.

'There can be no national reconciliation without national repentance,' said Pastor Ben Mason, an Aboriginal leader from the Western desert. Bunched around four large candles through a frigid Canberra night we prayed for repentance and forgiveness, for justice and right-living in this land – until dawn splashed the sky blood red above the War Memorial.

'Repentance'.... an unpopular word. It conjures up images of morbid guilt-tripping. Yet in Australia's Bicentennial Year, national repentance seemed an inescapable third signpost. What we had experienced in uncovering my family's past in the Flinders Ranges had convinced us that repentance was quite different from a guilt trip. We experienced it as a liberation – a liberation from denied truth and hidden guilt, and from all the distorted attitudes which undermine any possibility of new relationships. Sure, it meant being sorry. And saying so. Not so much for what our ancestors had done but more particularly for our own attitudes and values which mirrored those of the past – and for the continuing maltreatment of Aboriginal people. As columnist Phillip Adams wrote during that 1988 anniversary: 'I'm not suggesting that we should feel endless guilt for the sins of our forefathers. Instead we should feel guilty about our own sins.'

Nearly 10 years later, social commentator Hugh Mackay echoed the same point at the 1997 Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne. Citing some of the shocking indicators of Indigenous prison rates, poor health and unemployment, he said: 'We ought to be ashamed. Not so much about past injustices, but because we hold to core values of mateship,

egalitarianism and a fair go. And... none of these apply to Aboriginal people.'



Through recognition, listening and repentance, our friendships grew. And we began to look for things we could do together to move forward the cause of reconciliation. *Partnerships* became a natural next stage of the journey. But partnerships in which listening, recognition and a change of heart were still vital ingredients.

On Australia Day 1996, our local Mitcham Council convened a residents' meeting to consult on various issues including 'national reconciliation'. It seemed a somewhat theoretical exercise to me, all in the realm of what the government in Canberra should do. From the back row I stood up and asked what Mitcham Council would do to recognise the Aboriginal heritage of *our* local area, the Adelaide Hills. What, for instance, could be done to recognise the site of Colebrook Home?

Over a cup of tea afterwards, the Mayor asked me what I knew about Colebrook. Not much, I said. It had been a 'home' for Aboriginal kids in our neighbourhood and I remembered playing cricket against some of them. The home in Eden Hills had been bulldozed and the site was vacant. Out of sight, out of mind. The Mayor promised that if I could contact some of the former Colebrook residents, Council would support a reunion on the site.

How ironic that the original Colebrook Home, established in Quorn only metres from where my murdered great-great-uncle was buried, had been moved in 1943 to my own backyard in the Adelaide Hills, and now was beckoning me again. Something of that unhealed history would not let me rest.

Just at that time I discovered a local 'reconciliation group' was operating in our district. It was one of hundreds of 'study

circles' formed across Australia to work through material supplied by the national Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. I went to one of their meetings and found the Blackwood Reconciliation Group consisted of a dozen committed members who got together to chew over the issues, sometimes with an Indigenous friend. They immediately agreed to the idea of working towards a Colebrook reunion and suggested putting a plaque on the site to recognise the Home that had once been in our community.

It took us months to track down some of the former Colebrook residents. One of them, Yami Lester, I knew was regional commissioner in ATSIC (the elected Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission). He gave me several names. But it took even longer to establish enough trust for any of them to visit the Colebrook site with us. They had not been back in 30 years. Most wept just walking onto the site. Others refused to come near the place. One woman spewed out a stream of abuse in Pitjantjatjara. For her it was a cursed place. Could we make it a sacred place, a place of healing, we asked?

A year after the idea was first floated at that Council meeting, about 20 of us – locals and ex-Colebrook residents – met on the site one Sunday afternoon to talk about a possible reunion of former residents and the wider community. After some hesitation we decided to go ahead and fixed the day for Sunday, the 1st of June, at the end of Reconciliation Week, 1997.

We had heard that a national Reconciliation Convention was scheduled that week in Melbourne. But we had no idea that on Tuesday 26 May, a report of a national Inquiry into 'the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families' would be released at that Convention. The Inquiry had been conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. And their report, titled *Bringing Them Home*, contained 670 pages detailing the government policies of assimilation and quoting horrific

testimonies of Indigenous children and families torn apart by those policies. It hit Australia like a bomb exploding. The Leader of the Opposition at the time, Kim Beazley Jnr., broke down in Parliament when reading some passages from these testimonies.

On Saturday, four days later, we put up the tent we had borrowed from a local Scout troop and camped overnight with some of the former Colebrook residents with whom we had planned the event. Late into the night, around a camp fire, the Colebrook *'tjiti tjuta'* ('all the children' in Pitjantjatjara) swapped yarns, laughing and crying.

Sunday was cool but sunny. Someone hoisted an Aboriginal flag from a tree. Mitcham Council, true to their word, had backed the event and, besides paying for a plaque and a rock to mount it on, had supplied 400 sausages for a barbecue. We had planned for 200-300 people. But according to one television news report, a crowd of 1500 turned up. The sausages and a barbecued kangaroo disappeared in no time. No one seemed put out.

Locals entered into the spirit of reconciliation – talking around the campfires, looking at historical photos of Colebrook, joining dances led by two traditional men. Many had come looking for Aboriginal kids they had gone to school with.

ATSIC Commissioner Yami Lester flew down for the day. He told the crowd how he had been brought to Colebrook from the desert as a teenager, blinded by dust from the Maralinga A-bomb tests in 1957. He began naming the boys who looked after him at the home but he broke down and wept – all his friends from that time were dead. Lowitja O'Donoghue had also been a teenager in that home. She and her sisters had been given responsibility for looking after the 'babies', infants brought into the home. Some of these 'babies' were standing alongside Dr O'Donoghue. Turning to them she said, 'Let us turn our anger and frustration into positive acts of reconciliation. We can forgive, but never forget the sorrow of

our mothers.' Then, on behalf of them all, she unveiled the plaque and read its message:

'Let everyone who comes to this place know they are on Aboriginal land, the site of what was once Colebrook Training Home where, between 1943 and 1972, some 350 Aboriginal children lived, isolated from their families and the beloved land of their ancestors...'

As the sun went down and a television crew took off in their helicopter, people drifted away. Lowitja and the Colebrook *tjitji tjuta* joined a few locals around the campfire to sing an old Colebrook mission chorus as the Aboriginal flag was lowered.

We knew we could not leave it there. A bucket had been passed around and about \$2,000 had been collected to establish a permanent memorial on the site. We began meeting, every few weeks, in a room at the SA Museum with former Colebrook residents to plan what a memorial might look like. Most often those planning sessions turned into times of listening and recognition, of hearing the real-life stories that had long been submerged or repressed.

We heard from Avis, a one-week old baby when she was brought to Colebrook. At Colebrook the children were supervised by two much-loved white women. 'We were like a big family,' says Avis. They protected and loved each other. But when Sisters Rutter and Hyde left, other superintendents came and the abuse started. After one episode Avis ran away, was brought back and beaten. Forced to learn Bible verses before breakfast, Avis rebelled – and starved instead. One day, she secretly collected all the Bibles and burned them on a bonfire. Her crime was discovered and a 'proper' thrashing followed, which left her permanently scarred. Nicknamed 'Wild Dog', she spent much of her life in various institutions, including prisons. When Jean first went to the Aboriginal hostel where Avis worked and asked her about her life, she

spewed it out with pain and anger. After about three hours Avis said, 'You're the first person who didn't say after five minutes, "Oh, you have to forgive".' Avis plunged into the process of creating the memorial as her way to healing. She has shared her story with thousands of school students, whose letters she has kept and valued.

Then we heard from Raymond, who at the age of six or seven was taken straight from a nomadic life-style in the State's far north to be sent to Colebrook. He remembers looking out of the train at the Maree railway station and hearing his grandmother and parents wailing. During the first weeks at Colebrook Raymond would cry, too, for his family far away. 'I didn't understand what was happening around me.' Three years later, after the '67 Referendum, he was sent home. But the experience was enough to make him 'full of hatred'. He turned to drink. In a small town in outback Queensland where he was picked on by the local sergeant, Raymond fire-bombed the police station and court house. Sentenced to solitary confinement in Brisbane's Boggo Road Jail, he tried to hang himself. But the cord broke. After months of bitter despair he was visited in prison by a Christian ex-criminal. Raymond responded by screaming out his curses – but was suddenly confronted by a vision of Christ appearing before him. The experience gave him a reason for living. But the 'turning point' for his healing came, he said, some years after his release – during that Colebrook reunion when he returned to the site of his dislocation.

Every time we met, more would be revealed. Muriel did not see her mother until 32 years after she was removed. The children had been told that their families did not want to keep them. But when she did return Muriel learned that her family had wailed 'every morning as the sun came up' for 37 years for the children taken from them.

'Who can imagine what a mother went through?' asked Muriel. 'But you have to forgive.'

Doris had been taken as a baby by Welfare officers from the hospital in Murray Bridge when her mother died in childbirth. Her distraught father and family had no idea where she had been placed and could not recover her when they did find out.

Sid, disabled by poliomyelitis, had been shunted from institution to institution, separated from his family...

The stories went on and on.

Gradually we began to sketch out, with the help of Indigenous artists and Silvio Apponyi, a well-known local sculptor, what the memorial might look like. A year after our first Colebrook reunion, 2000 people came again to the site to see the unveiling of the 'Fountain of tears', 25 tons of granite boulders into which Silvio had carved six grieving faces of Aboriginal people. Water from an empty bronze 'coolamon' on top of the boulders washes the faces. But the life-experiences we heard in the process of planning the memorial had already built something else in us. As I told the crowd that day, 'This is much more than a memorial of stone and bronze. It is a living memorial of new relationships between Aboriginal people and this community, between us as Australians and our past.'

Another year later, after numerous fund-raising events and applications for grants, we had enough to complete the final statue: a life-sized bronze of a 'Grieving Mother' looking down at her empty hands. 'Today is a day to honour our mothers,' Muriel began, as she hosted the event. 'We will never fully understand their grief – the empty space in their hearts, their arms, their unfulfilled expectations, watching that child grow.' Then, turning to her Colebrook brothers and sisters, she said: 'We have wept many tears. But we should let our mourning turn to joy knowing not one of us was a mistake. Our lives were ordained by a God of love and justice. The suffering we have endured has made us a strong people, a courageous people, a people of compassion.'

All of us involved gained from that strength. Healing, we realised, was needed not just by the victims of a cruel system.

We non-Indigenous residents also needed healing – of our ignorance and indifference, and of the prejudice they spawned.

The work of creating a 'living memorial of new relationships' goes on, among the Colebrook *tjitji tjuta* and the Blackwood Reconciliation Group and among thousands of visitors who come to the site, day after day, throughout the year. Often a bouquet of flowers is left in the hands of the Grieving Mother. School students come for campfire story-telling sessions. Church groups, political leaders, senior citizens and many others visit. Afghan refugees brought by an Aboriginal friend fell on their knees around the statue, praying for their families. It has become a sacred place, instead of cursed – a place of pilgrimage.



The further we went down the road the more we realised that our journey was part of our nation's journey. It was not just a personal thing.

Some who resist 'reconciliation' feel it is a political agenda. They argue that what happened to Aboriginal children through being removed from their families had nothing to do with politics. It was the excesses of some people in the system – a system which, in their eyes, was intended for the children's best welfare anyway.

Obviously, the abuses committed against the Colebrook children were not legislated by any government policy. Nor was the slaughter of Aboriginal tribesmen by my ancestors in the Flinders Ranges. Nor were the countless undocumented acts of personal bigotry visited upon Indigenous people over 200 years or those being inflicted today. But the legislative regime of colonisation undoubtedly created a climate for those tragic frontier wars and the taking of land. And laws which justified the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents in the name of welfare opened the way for the wholesale

abuses which followed. In South Australia, for instance, the 'Aborigines Act of 1911' made the Chief Protector of Aborigines legal guardian over 'every Aboriginal and half-caste child' at birth, until the age of 21, 'notwithstanding that any such child has a parent or other relative living'. Its provisions remained in force till 1962. So if reconciliation is a person-to-person process to address the divisions between people, it is no less a process of addressing the racism and bias built into systems and laws.

As we took this 'road less travelled' – joining more and more Australians already on it – we inevitably began to interact with the political agendas and systems of our country.

The 1997 Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne met at 'a moment of truth for this nation,' in the words of its Aboriginal chair, Patrick Dodson, the 'father of reconciliation'. Cheryl Kernot, then leader of the Democrat Party, struck a similar note: 'We have... a clear stark nation-defining choice. Either we take a real shot at being a harmonious, inclusive and fair society or we become a totally divided one with inherent racial tensions and protracted court actions.'

At that moment the momentum of populist politics was taking Australia towards divisions and tensions. The rise of the 'One Nation' party, and the emergence of the 'race debate' on issues of immigration, multiculturalism, Indigenous rights and relations with Asia was at that time, in early 1997, polarising Australia.

In its media coverage the Convention will be remembered for the refusal of Prime Minister John Howard to say 'sorry' for past injustices. Sitting in that packed convention hall I noticed the hush as he came within an inch of it, personally expressing his 'deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who have suffered injustices under the practices of past generations'. But he dodged any hint of government responsibility. And, in his next breath, launched his attack

against those he accused of pushing a 'black-armband version of history', banging his fist on the podium. The hush was broken. A roar of protest went up. Many stood and turned their backs.

For the 2000 of us who took part, that confrontation was just one incident in three days rich with commitment and vision. Far more significant was the leadership shown by Governor-General Sir William Deane, by Patrick Dodson and by a host of public figures in the arts, media, business and sporting worlds, speaking more directly about reconciliation than ever before. We were inspired by video clips showing evidence of reconciliation initiatives springing up across the country. We stood and applauded a crowd of 'elders', black and white, who 30 years before had pioneered the 1967 Referendum, returning citizenship rights to Indigenous people. Faith Bandler, one of its leaders, challenged all of us 'to mobilise the forces and renew this nation'.

Renewal did indeed seem possible during those days of powerful thought and feeling. As I wrote for the Convention report, 'We saw with one breathtaking glimpse... this renewal would not come as part of some political debate but, as in 1967, through a genuine grassroots people's movement – through finding our consciences, our humanity. Most wonderfully, it is already happening.'

The *people's movement* had become another signpost on the journey.

In the harsh light of the economic and political battles of the world outside the Convention Centre, however, the momentum of that renewal seemed far from assured. Patrick Dodson argued that reconciliation depended on two 'extremely important issues' then in the national debate – the need of a national apology, and the effective implementation of Native Title legislation.

On the first, the Federal government not only refused to say sorry for the removal of children but dragged its feet in

responding to the *Bringing Them Home* report. A national apology was but one of the 54 recommendations; others spelt out far-reaching measures to enable access to records, promote healing among families and communities, and reduce the number of Aboriginal children still being removed from families for welfare reasons today. Finally, in December 1997, the government pledged \$64 million in response to one third of the Report's recommendations. Two years later only \$13 million of that amount had been applied to where it was needed. The chance for genuine social and personal healing was being lost.

On the second issue, the government effectively wound back the provisions for claiming Native Title framed in the earlier Keating legislation. The pressures of the conservative vote in 'the bush' had a telling effect.

Patrick Dodson's term as chair of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was coming to an end. He had staked his future with the Council on getting solid government commitments in these two areas. Canberra would not flinch. Dodson was dispatched back to the Kimberleys, and replaced as chair by Evelyn Scott.

Australians can be very contra-suggestible. When the Howard government during its first days in office cut \$400 million dollars off the ATSIC budget, an Aboriginal friend turned up at our local Blackwood Reconciliation Group meeting, downhearted and dejected. 'What's the point?' he moaned. 'Reconciliation is finished.' To which one young woman in our group shot back: 'Bugger the government; we're gonna do it anyway.' Paradoxically, the government's undermining of reconciliation was all the encouragement an Aussie people's movement needed.

Two grassroots organisations emerged, focusing on the two areas Dodson had highlighted. Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) supported Indigenous leaders in their quest for just native title. Using a 'Sea of hands' - 150,000 coloured cut-out hands, each signed by someone supporting

Native Title – they stuck them in the lawns of Parliament House and later at events all round the country. The other, a National Sorry Day Committee, came together in January 1998 to organise the first Sorry Day on 26 May, a year after the tabling of the *Bringing Them Home* report. John Bond, my colleague in MRA based in Canberra, became its secretary. He phoned me to see what could be done in South Australia.



Over the next months something amazing stirred within the country. On 26 May 1998, hundreds of events took place in communities, churches, schools and government offices. The small *ad hoc* committee we formed in Adelaide tried to keep track of the 30 or 40 initiatives in the Adelaide metropolitan area, while focusing our efforts to organise a lunchtime rally in Victoria Square in the heart of our city.

Someone in Sydney had come up with the idea of 'Sorry Books' – blank bound books which anyone could sign, with a statement of apology for the removal of Indigenous children printed on the first page. ANTaR and the Sorry Day Committee began producing hundreds of them. Those who couldn't get hold of one produced their own. They were asked for in all sorts of places. Raymond Finn, the ex-Colebrook resident who tried to burn down a court house in Queensland, watched as my politician brother, Dean, signed a Sorry Book in SA's Parliament House. 'Sorry to me is about liberation and healing,' said Raymond on the TV news coverage. 'It's a liberation which heals me as an Indigenous person, and it's also liberating the person who is saying sorry.' As Premier, my brother Dean had moved a formal motion of apology in the State Parliament of South Australia. Formal apologies followed in all State Parliaments, in Magistrates' courts, local councils, Church synods and many other organisations.

Nearly a million Australians signed 'Sorry Books'. Many

wrote messages in them: 'I'm a mother. I can't imagine the grief of losing my daughters... No matter what their intentions were, I'm sorry. Sally.'

'As a migrant "new Australian", I am sorry for the original dispossession, the dishonesty... genocide and assimilation. Celia.'

Then in a schoolboy's scrawl: 'Sorry... from my heart and soul. Ben'.

With that momentum the National Sorry Day Committee began engaging with politicians on both sides of Parliament to move forward the implementation of the recommendations contained in the *Bringing Them Home* report. It was not lobbying or pressure tactics so much as appealing to their consciences and humanity.

In August that year Audrey Kinnear, one of the Committee, went to Switzerland, to an international 'Agenda for Reconciliation' conference at the MRA centre in Caux. 'For years I didn't know where I belonged,' she told that international audience. She had been taken from her family as a four-year old. 'Institutionalisation has a profound effect on one's identity. Sometimes I wished I was a full-blood Aboriginal. Other times I wished I was white. Those two were accepted. But we were half-caste - we didn't belong anywhere. When I started to connect with my family again... they helped me to heal. They accepted and understood. National Sorry Day was the final thing in my healing because it gave recognition to my pain.'

Other members of the stolen generations felt the same. Now that the wound had been opened, it could begin to heal. At the next meeting of the Sorry Day Committee, the idea emerged of a 'Journey of Healing' in which the whole community could play a part. The elders of the Mutitjulu people at Uluru (otherwise known as 'Ayers Rock') agreed the 'Journey' should start there, right at the heart of Australia. They, too, had lost children from their community through

the policies of assimilation. In early May 1999 representatives of the 'stolen generations' from each State and Territory, along with non-Indigenous 'ambassadors', converged on Uluru for two days of ceremony. They were handed *timpilypa* – ceremonial music sticks, a pair for each State or Territory, each painted with symbols representing the 'Journey of Healing'.

Back in Adelaide our State's music sticks were carried at the head of a crowd of a thousand people on a 'Journey of Healing' between five public sites, each representing past history and today's realities. It started at the Old Adelaide Jail, for instance, where the tragedy of incarceration was re-enacted. Then moved to the banks of the River Torrens, where in 1839, the first Aboriginal school had been established by two German Lutheran missionaries, teaching local Kurna children in their own tongue. Then onto the steps of Parliament House where people of the 48 language groups in South Australia were recognised in a roll call. The journey ended in Victoria Square where the Lord Mayor placed the music sticks into an empty coolamon, symbolising bringing the children back 'home' to the cradle of their families.

The symbolic journeys of the sticks continued through the following year. Then in May 2000, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation climaxed its 10 year mandate with the 'Corroboree 2000' event in the Sydney Opera House. There three sets of music sticks were passed across the stage – between rows of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, each committed to the 'Journey' – and then placed by three white men (including former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser) into a coolamon at the feet of two Indigenous mothers. That huge crowd was moved onto its feet as Aboriginal artists, Johnny Huckle and Helen Moran, sang the theme song:

*Come join the journey, journey of healing,
Let the spirit guide us, hand in hand.
Let's walk together, into the future,
the time has come to make a stand...*

Next day we did walk together, at least a quarter of a million of us, on a massive Reconciliation Walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge.

As our group in the National Sorry Day Committee moved up an approach ramp, a huge cry swept through that river of humanity. People were looking up into the sky. A small privately-chartered plane was skywriting the word 'SORRY' right above Kirribilli, the PM's Sydney residence. 'The people's apology' headlined *The Australian* across the top of its front page, over a half page photo of the crowds with flags and banners on the Bridge.

One Aboriginal woman from Lithgow had refused an invitation to walk with the National Sorry Day Committee because we held a banner saying: 'Journey of Healing'. Angrily, she had phoned John Bond, the Committee secretary, some days before the Walk and had told him how, at 16, she had been raped by the father of a family to whom she was sent as a domestic servant. 'There is no possibility of healing for me,' she had said. Walking alone, she made her own way onto the Bridge holding a sign, 'I am not a myth'.

At that moment when 'Sorry' was written in the sky she looked up; and then at the thousands of people walking with her. 'Tears began to pour down my face,' she told John on the phone, a couple of days later. 'I know at last I'm not alone... I have been angry for years. Now I don't have to live with that anger. Something has happened to me; I am different. I feel at peace.' She became convinced of the 'Journey of Healing', travelling to Canberra with her husband to share her experiences with politicians in their offices.

An even larger walk of 400,000 people followed in Melbourne, and other walks across bridges in Canberra, Brisbane, Perth, Hobart and Adelaide. Then in a host of country towns including Coburg, Alice Springs, Lismore and Bega. An estimated one million were all 'walking together' for reconciliation.

In 1992, a poll showed 48 per cent of Australians supported reconciliation. In 2000, it was 80 per cent.



The symbolic, *the ceremonial*, can be powerful, especially when one million voters are involved. We all felt it at that unforgettable moment when Aboriginal athlete Cathy Freeman lit the flame at the opening of the 2000 Sydney Olympics. And then, a few days later, when she ran into the history books, carrying both Aboriginal and Australian flags after winning her gold medal in the 400 metres. She gave us a symbol, wrote *The Australian* in its editorial, showing that 'reconciliation does not mean assimilation. We can be a nation which values its differences.'

The ceremonial can penetrate to where our consciences are touched. But then the process needs to go further. Who could not excuse Aboriginal people, still living in degradation and despair, for sometimes believing that much of our ceremonial reconciliation is little more than white-fella 'feel good' business?

Saying 'sorry' is meaningless without practical restitution. *Delivering just and sustainable solutions to Indigenous disadvantage* is a clear signpost, which demands action. The problem is we have too often tried the 'action' of restitution alone. With our fixation on material and political solutions, we have poured billions of dollars and piles of legislation into Aboriginal health, welfare and education. But without basic change in attitudes and relationships, these 'guilt payments' only generate more cynicism and bitterness on one side, and back-lash reaction on the other.

The social indicators are part of our national shame. At the turn of the millennium, the Bureau of Statistics' figures showed that more than half of all Aboriginal men die under the age of 50; and Aboriginal babies are twice as likely to die at birth as

non-Indigenous babies. Indigenous people are 14 times more likely to be imprisoned than others; and a shocking 40 per cent of the juvenile offenders in detention were Indigenous. And so on, through housing, employment, education.

Against this continuing Australian tragedy, one can point to the billions that have been spent. Clearly, some of it has been wasted. What is not so clear is who wasted it. The danger is that we end up blaming the victims, the so-called 'Aboriginal industry', though few would dare use that politically-incorrect term. Our Ngarrindjeri friend, George Trevorrow, has no such inhibitions: 'We are an industry. We keep a lot of white people employed on good salaries. And the figures get smaller and smaller by the time any money reaches Aboriginal communities,' he says. He longs to see his people off 'the welfare kick', arguing that 'we gotta make our own dollar, create our own positions'. That is why he is so proud of the eco-tourism business established and run by Ngarrindjeri people on the Coorong.

Our own first-hand experience with dozens of people employed in government and non-government organisations that seek to address Aboriginal disadvantage is that their lives speak with commitment and integrity. And they work hard, for real outcomes. There are many we could describe, at length, detailing their work. People like Louie, a Narungga ex-heroin addict who went 'cold turkey' in prison and then stomped around the countryside, providing drug and alcohol education for Aboriginal communities. Like Ron, a Queenslander, who beavers away in ATSIIC to get 'mainstream' agencies into workable partnerships to provide services. Like Dean, a theological student, who risked his family home in the legal battle for justice on the Hindmarsh Island bridge issue. Like Liz, a strong Ngarrindjeri woman, who risks her neck to protect children from domestic violence. Like Howard and Rob, two brothers from a western NSW farming community who, with their wives, have devoted their

careers to sustaining Indigenous languages. Like Shirley, an Aboriginal campaigner since the 1967 Referendum, who instead of retiring goes out with a Catholic Ministries' van late on Friday nights picking up street-kids. And so on...

If those who criticise Aboriginal funding showed a fraction of the commitment to reconciliation and justice that these people do, we'd be a lot closer to solving the problems still blighting Indigenous communities.



Being focused on these real and complex problems, however, hides a danger. Most of us Australians, I suspect, are not even aware of it. It is not so much another signpost as a realisation we come to: that the reason for our being on the journey has changed – it is taking us towards a different destination.

This dawned on me at a significant moment. It was in 1988 – 26 January, to be exact. Jean and I were sitting with several hundred people in an Adelaide public square at an Australia Day ceremony. It was the Bicentennial, two hundred years to the day after British soldiers first raised a Union Jack in Botany Bay. Elsewhere Indigenous Australians celebrated it as 'Survival Day'. At this official Bicentennial celebration the speaker was a 'survivor' – Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue. 'Each one of us, regardless of colour or country of birth, has been endowed with a special gift,' she said. 'To say that what anyone has to offer is less valuable because his skin is black or his English is broken is a crime against humanity. We in Australia have been guilty of this crime.'

Despite all the friendships we had found with Aboriginal People, a querulous voice still argued inside me. Was it true, I asked myself? Were we denying the 'special gift' Aboriginal people had to bring to this country? Here we sat surrounded by the shiny skyline of Adelaide built in the few generations since our ancestor's bullock carts first rode over this soil. What

could these descendants of an ancient race have to offer our advanced technological society, beyond their art and cultural icons?

Even though I believed in reconciliation, something of that instinctive white superiority in me still clung to the idea that we were the 'advanced' people, and that reconciliation was really about '*helping* Aboriginal people'. And then I realised: our biggest problem is that we non-Indigenous Australians have always wanted to somehow fix 'the Aboriginal problem'. Whereas the problem is something far bigger, something quite different – it's an 'Australian problem', it's all of us.

In that moment I think I caught a glimpse of what Lowitja was getting at. The struggle in this country is not between black and white. It is more a struggle within ourselves – something we cannot quite come to grips with, but cannot quite let go. Something in our past which haunts us, as well as that which makes us proud. It goes beyond the struggle to face the cruel beginnings of our nation. Beyond even struggling with the shame of injustices today. It is a struggle to face our core attitudes and values – to face the cocky Aussie self-righteousness hiding our insecurity and our obsession with having 'a good time' which often leaves us emotionally homeless, binge-dwellers in spiritual shanties surrounded by our electronic idols.

Reconciliation is our struggle as Australians for something deeper – a profounder self-truth, a more honest identity.

Perhaps what Aboriginal Australians could help us find is the dignity of being a forgiven people. Forgiven by each other, yes; but even more, before our own consciences.

Lowitja O'Donoghue's fellow battler, Charlie Perkins, did as much as anyone to focus the plight of Aboriginal people, starting with his 'Freedom Ride' in the Sixties. In 1982 he told a bevy of bishops that his people 'could give this nation the fundamental element it lacks – a soul'. At a reception in Canberra, I reminded him of the remark. He looked me up and

down for a moment to see if I was dinkum and then explained that he was not referring just to the spiritual heritage of Aboriginal people. The 'special gift' was more than culture. It was, according to Perkins, that in the struggle to do what is right by Indigenous people, all of us Australians will find our soul.

That, to me, is reconciliation. Going far enough, deep enough, within us and through our whole society. At the end of the day the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this country may be its greatest asset in finding our way towards that truly just society.

The public reconciliation process in Australia may have lost some momentum since 2000, when a million Australians of many races walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge and bridges in other cities. But, whatever its highs and lows, we still need to go through the process fully, just to bring some peace and healing between us in this land – let alone if we wish to make any contribution to peace in the world. For millions seek reconciliation simply to survive: in Rwanda, Kosovo, Ambon, Sudan, Kashmir, the Middle East... The list is endless, and includes the racial divides of American cities, the sectarian scars of Ireland and the troubling ethnic tensions in most Western societies.

Reconciliation is a worldwide need. And the question for Australia, as I see it, is whether we are going to be a society that only adds to the fears, prejudices and conflicts? Or can we be a people at peace within ourselves, healing our divisions, caring for our environment, deepening our sense of who we are and the values that make us truly human?

The journey has begun. The journey must go on.

Epilogue

'It's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness'

Chinese proverb

Epilogue

DOWN UNDER NO LONGER... disillusionment, cynicism, whingeing blame are inadequate, indeed unworthy end-game responses for the Sixties generation. A betrayal of our youthful hope and idealism. They deserve our offspring's mocking judgement.

We ageing baby-boomers need hope and vision. But most of all, we need to walk the talk. To live our ideals. Gandhi was once asked by a journalist for his 'message'. He answered simply: 'My life is my message.'

What's the message of our lives?

The wonderful thing is that it is never too late. We can re-find both our nerve for challenging what's wrong in the world and our hope of making a difference to it. Hope, as demonstrated by the stories and people in this book, is generated whenever we take some step towards making a difference, even in ourselves. It is rekindled the moment we face one fragment of our own hypocrisy or failure, and find the grace to forgive the wasted years, the litany of damaged relationships and careless hurts. Hope becomes real as soon as we go beyond blaming people and 'the system' for what's wrong in the world, and accept instead *our* responsibility for it. It is a by-product of change expressed in action.

So where to start? The issues of conscience still crowd in upon us, even as I write – the post-September 11th 'war on terrorism' which threatens to replace the Cold War with a hot one against religious extremists; the inhumane treatment of asylum seekers; the failures to turn around the ravenous consumption of our stressed environment; the terrifying chasm between those of us in affluence symbolised by CEOs on US\$10 million a year while one billion people are trying to survive on less than US \$1 a day; the culture of violence and abuse in our schools, streets and homes ... and so on. There is no shortage of challenges to engage in. And they are all big enough to demand the creative commitment not just of us baby-boomers but of Generations X, Y, Z... and whoever else is to come.

Perhaps, however, we first need to reclaim our bearings, our individual and collective principles for living. For somewhere in the values-anarchy that we invented for ourselves in the Sixties we lost the compass. But the magnetic lines of force are still there. Each of us still has that innate hunger for what is ultimately true and just, for finding a love that is lasting and unconditional. Many in this book chose to shape their motives and behaviour using working principles of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. These may seem somewhat conservative, somewhat restrictive, to our value-free way of thinking. But compared to the private hell millions live with – compared to the social disasters spawned by everything from domestic violence fed by deadening addictions to systemic greed and corruption – such principles are truly radical. And in our dangerous wonderful world they can be survival values, powerfully civilising guides.

How we actually apply such principles – what we *do* as a result of any honest introspection – determines whether the potential for something new in our lives is realised or is wasted. Whether hope is born, or dies. My 'unconscious mentors' faced that choice, each in their own way, and did something about it.

Those whose lives have brushed across these pages found that their experience of personal transformation naturally led on to some calling which gave them a sense of direction and new energy.

Could this be a late discovery for us Sixties baby-boomers? Could the energy for social transformation in the 21st century come from liberating the moral momentum within people whose lives, like Mahatma Gandhi's, bear the 'message' of transformation and commitment?

Many have made sincere efforts, sitting down in protest and standing up for rights, mobilising grassroots support for community action. But in the process many have also grown cynical, finding that the old virus of self-interest persists in people and systems – and, truth to tell, in us as well. After decades of thickening our waistlines and social consciences, we find ourselves part of the systems and values we once deplored.



Yet whenever any of us takes some honest step of individual transformation and transmits it to others, that action reverses the ebb tide of will and energy. We can continue with fresh courage and consistency to pursue the possibilities we long to make real. Our particular 'road less travelled' becomes a daily journey of exploration. But what guides us on it?

For Jean and me – and many of these, our mentors and co-workers – the only chance we have of finding and following our true calling in action has been, paradoxically, through inaction: being still, silent, waiting. That approach is in direct contradiction to the 'activism' of the Sixties and much of our lives since. But what a relief! For the worst addiction our generation got hooked on was over-busyness. We have built our self-worth on it, measured our social status by it and kidded ourselves that it is proof of our 'fulfilment'. Ask anyone how they are these days and most likely they will tell

you how busy they are. The pressures of our highly-competitive, fast-track, outcomes-driven working lives only multiply this addictive busyness. Even our coping mechanisms – time-out for recreation, social life, travel, culture – add to the cramming of our calendars. And while we secretly despair of the shallowness of this frenetic living, we are pumped up by its adrenalin.

So, practically, how do we create a sane alternative life-style? For ourselves and for many we know it has meant *making* time – an hour or so, each day – to find 'space for grace and reflection for direction'. Time to read, ponder, question ourselves and our motives; to resolve in the cool light of a new day the tensions and hurts inflicted on us and by us during the day before. It means purposefully digging through the mulch of frustrated hopes and worries to find again the true ground of our being. And to respond to that intuitive leading, the inner voice of conscience and compassion.

For Jean and me, followers in the way of Christ, it is an act of prayer, of listening for the leading of the Spirit. 'Submission of the will,' as Muslims put it. Practising mindfulness, as Buddhists advocate. 'Silence,' wrote Gandhi midst the turmoil of his struggle for independence, 'has now become both a physical and spiritual necessity for me... In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light; and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness.'

Over the years this 'quiet time' has become for us a sacred space of discovery rather than a religious duty or driven discipline.

Yes, at times, it is a dark space in which one wrestles with the doubts, fears and insecurities that creep upon our spirits like savage beasts in the night. But even these wild instincts can encounter something different in this silent meeting place of the soul. Confronted by the greater grief of this suffering world, their self-absorbing claims dissolve into a deeper yearning – to be active agents of compassionate justice and

healing renewal. And in responding to that call, one clear step out of the darkness can open before us, beckoning us towards another person's need. At other times that sacred space is filled with the vibrant wonder of life; of joyful singing with the sunlight glistening off gum leaves on a dew-dappled morning, when a freshly-given thought has formed with such clarity that the day becomes charged with its creative purpose.

Each of us can reclaim the possibility of our contribution to a just and caring global community and to making it happen here in Australia. Or wherever we are. It never was just a question of political will. More fundamentally it involves regenerating the will and spirit in each one of us. And that is our own individual here-and-now responsibility.

It is our own choice – the choice of being no longer down under.

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