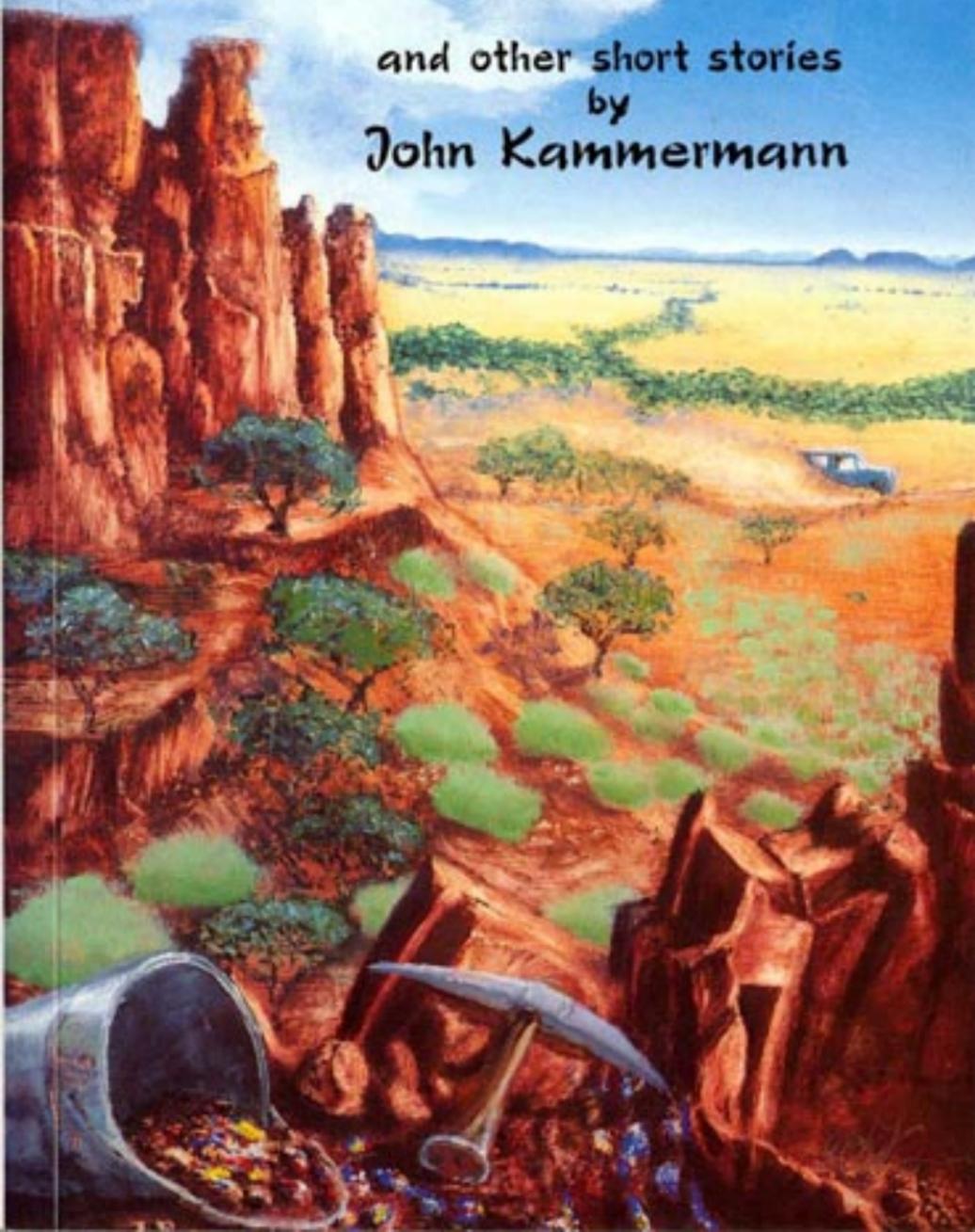


Wild Men, Bread and Pretty Stone

and other short stories
by
John Kammermann



Wild Men, Bread
and Pretty Stone
and other short stories

John Kammermann

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Foreword

It can be an exciting event for a reader to pick up a book by a new writer. By the same token, of course, it can also be a disappointment. Some who have known the author for years will say, ‘What could we expect of him?’ I believe in this case their fears of a dull book will be unfounded. John Kammermann is a man of rich experience of life. A farmer on the West Coast of South Australia who was halted in his life by an unusual encounter with God, who came to understand the depths of the grace of His Son, and then to a zeal for sharing this life-transforming experience, he has much to show us that intrigues and enchants. Having read theology in a College and a Seminary, and having pastored people warmly in a number of places in three Australian States, he discovered to his own surprise that something was trickling from his pen—or computer—and it increased into a steady flow.

This burly West Coast farmer a writer of poetry and short fiction? Never! So you would think, and think wrongly. My own response to his writing was delight. ‘A veritable literary Pro Hart!’ I exclaimed. ‘A genuine bush writer!’ So he is. His stories are delightful and come out of a wealth of experience of life as a farmer, a pastor, a man who has been through all kinds of physical work, and met men and women where they live, but who

has seen life in its humour and pathos. This man of a remarkable wife and no less remarkable children—now mostly full-grown—has much to tell us that will hold our interest.

Are the stories and poems religious? I think not. They flow from a practical down-to-earth faith in the One who turned him around and gave him a new and richer understanding of life. I think you will love his yarns and poems and look for another book.

We certainly commend this one on its way into the hearts of its readers.

Geoffrey Bingham

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Author's **Acknowledgement**

I am thankful for the rich experiences of life and the opportunity to meet and share with so many colourful Australians over the years.

I also appreciate the difficulties and joys of family and community living in this great land. Good things in life have come to us so wonderfully as we have worked together in the outback and the city.

I am especially thankful to Kay and our five children for their readiness and encouragement in taking up our lot together.

To the many friends who have made it possible to publish these stories, I have been blessed by your generosity and love.

J. K.

Note

None of the stories in this book is intended to refer to any one person or character in particular.

Old Charlie Renshaw

Old Charlie was the bane of every admirer of the Tiger Moth Aircraft. He could see one coming from miles away. His delight was to take the 'would-be' joy-riders for the fright, yes, fright was the correct word—it would be the fright of their life. I'll explain what I mean later.

He was an old rascal really, one of Australia's colourful outback men. I first met Charlie up north of Windara, in western outback Queensland in 1975. It was just after Cyclone Tracy had hit Darwin, and just after the wet season of that year. There was a good Wet, and the roads were slowly getting back to a useable state again. I was on a trip up around Cowdillo way, meeting the people of that part, when I met up with the old man. He was in his seventies then.

Charlie was a great talker, and talk he could! He had by accident or by scheme, got himself a really good spot. You see, his house was right by a gate, a gate that everyone going north-west had to go through, and it seemed he was there at the gate every time someone came along. Now in the West, once you had stopped for a yarn, it was inevitable that a conversation would start up lasting for a considerable part of the day. It was often, 'Ow are yer mate? It's a good day, eh?' You hadn't even got through old Charlie's gate yet, and here it was, half the day gone already! Even though you knew what

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would happen and were determined that it wasn't going to, yet somehow you were enticed from your driving position. Once you were out from behind the wheel, the day was as good as done. He had the happy knack of getting you to look at something. One day it would be the tyre on his Toyota; the next it would be the rock that got picked up along a stretch of road the other side of the creek; and so it went on. Then it was 'smoko time'.

As for talking, pick any subject and he could tell you about the biggest, the best; he'd seen the oldest of whatever it was; had an opinion, a view, knew the latest on any invention. He had the answer to life, death and politics; he claimed to be agnostic, a communist and an Australian; he had the latest in medical tricks, was an expert on the cure for cancer; had read about the latest electronic whizz bang and could talk about whatever else you might like to or be foolish enough to try to introduce.

On one of the earlier times I met him, he spent ages showing me how well his finger was healing up. A wild pig had almost chewed the end right off his pointer finger. That reminds me—according to Charlie, the pig wasn't wild, because there are no such things as wild animals. It's all in the way we human beings approach them. The truth, according to him, is that everything is naturally friendly and it's our attitude to animals that causes the whole trouble. This led him onto his pet subject. Natural healing! That was the thing. Out with all the drugs and artificial stuff!

About his finger that was nearly bitten off by a pig—a pig that wasn't wild! He was adamant that natural healing was the only way to go. He spent time telling me in graphic terms how he had saved this part of himself

Old Charlie Renshaw

by actually tapping it constantly on the table until it was back together. He explained how he had tapped it until it went back into place on the bone, and then the blood congealed enough to hold it. This was all that had stopped him from losing it altogether. Then, if it got bumped, he would tap it again until it once more set tight with the blood. He would have convinced almost the entire medical profession except for one thing—his wife.

The only problem Charlie had was his wife, and it was then that she appeared.

Let me tell you a little about her. She was one of those treasures that a man like Charlie did not deserve, did not appreciate. In fact, when he was telling a yarn he did not want her around at all. She was a delightful woman and seemed right out of her place in a situation like this. She was pleasant looking and very short. In fact she came hardly up past Charlie's elbow. But what she lacked in height, she more than made up for in personality and good humour. She was a treasure, away out there in the Downs country. She added an element to the place that was needed somehow and she had the happy knack of destroying the validity of almost every stunt Charlie tried to pull off. She did it so easily, too; that was the way she had. One wink from her, or by telling more of the truth, and his watertight stories just fell apart. And so, right at this particular moment she chose to come onto the veranda with the exclamation, 'It's just as well the doctor left that morphia in the Safety First Box, wasn't it, eh? You'd a been in a right old mess, eh? Probably been pushing up daisies down at the local yard for smellies.' Well, that changed the subject very quickly. Actually, she told me afterwards

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how long Charlie had spent in hospital and it was much longer than he had wanted to remember.

I began to tell you before about the old Tiger Moth. She was kept in the hangar-cum-machinery shed, about half a mile away from the famous gate. It was just close enough to the track so you could see what it was; close enough to attract your interest. At the same time, it was annoying not to be able to tell if it was in good flying order. The discussion at the gate would readily drift towards the hangar and its contents. The very first time I met 'the gate' with Charlie attending his post, we soon got talking about the 'plane. Well, it was not so much about the plane itself, but about a flight in the plane—right there and then! He was keen, very keen. The prospect of a ride in a legendary Moth was exciting. It was attractive, very attractive. I was, by desire, almost won over to go.

But because of time, and an unexplainable something else, I was not convinced that a flight that day was the thing to be doing. Actually it was the 'something else element' that bothered me most. I declined the eager invitation, but promised to make it another time when I was more free time-wise.

That night when I arrived back in town I was very interested in the discussion. I can't honestly explain how it all came about but in casual conversation I made some inquiries about the people from up that way. It was then that I realised that my something else inclination had paid off. My ears pricked up when one man wanted to know, 'Did you meet old Charlie? What did he say to you? Did he get you up in the old Tiger Moth? The last bloke that went up with him couldn't get down fast enough! He does barrel rolls and loops and

Old Charlie Renshaw

really gives you a hell of a hard time. Damn old fool.'

Well, was I saved or not? How lucky was I to have that something else conviction about a flight that day!

I never did go up with him; however I did eventually see what I had missed out on. The following year was the local town's Centenary and, for a treat, Charlie was asked to give an aerobatic demonstration flight over the town. Now this was not as simple to organise as it might sound. For reasons too complex to go into, Charlie had been restricted to flying over his own property.

Somehow, by fair means or other—and that would only be known to the local establishment—permission was granted to him by the authorities who govern the airways to do a half-hour courtesy fly past. Now, a half hour gave him just enough time to fly from his property, down and around the town, and back again!

What a performance he gave when he got to town! He did loops and stall turns. There was smoke, noise, spins, barrel rolls and things that seemed to be nameless. Once it looked as if the pole from the top of the town's water-tower would go. He did his thing, and not just for the half hour that he was allotted either, but for an hour or two. The crowd stood breathless for most of the time. Then a buzz was heard from some of the on-lookers, many of whom, I suspect, had been caught—as I nearly was. It reminded me of my good fortune. They were saying things like, 'Never me, not ever again, not in that, and NOT with him!'

After that, I met up with the old man a number of times at the gate. He was always ready for a willing ear to use. We had, over the time, spent quite a lot of hours in discussion, if you could call it that. More like 'doing time' for me I'd thought. I had listened to his ravings,

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for that describes best what most of them actually were. 'Provokers' I called them. Mind you, there were some good yarns amongst them.

Then one day as I talked with him, the picture cleared. He had some good yarns all right, but eventually I could see something of the real Charlie. Here was an old man who had lived virtually all his life telling others of how he could run things. 'Could' was the operative word. I asked what I thought was a pertinent question.

'What about life, Charlie,' I said, 'I mean real life? Have you ever done anything significant with it? Have you ever helped anyone else other than yourself?'

The eyes sank. There was silence.

For a moment I thought he had misunderstood what I was getting at, and had thought I was only having a go at him. Then, the old man looked my way. It was an unmistakable look. For the first time he looked straight at me and not past me. And he had something to say, 'No. Never. I've been a rebel all my life. I've lived all my life for myself.'

At that moment he was different somehow. The aggressiveness had subsided, and there for the first time I saw the man behind that rough, ageing exterior. A man who in all these years had lived in his self-interests. He had lived only ever for himself, and from himself.

'There is a man, Charlie,' I said quietly, 'who lives for others, and He is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

Now, any other time he would have argued and thrown up some sort of opposition, but not this time. He knew who we were talking about. He knew something of the pain and dryness of being turned in on himself,

Old Charlie Renshaw

and he also knew that this One whom we were talking about, comes for such as us. With this recognition we parted quietly to go our respective ways.

I never saw Charlie again, nor his wife, but I often wonder how he got on. From that day I sensed that he knew he was to be different, and that he would have his ears tuned in for a different voice other than his own. The one voice that, for too many years, he had not been hearing.

Me Truck's Busted, Mate

Me truck's busted, mate,
for she's stickin' in gear.
She'd had a bad bearing,
for about half a year.
I took her to bits,
to fixed her all up,
But she's now worse than ever—
I must've really mucked her up.

Me truck's busted, mate,
and I've took her to bits
To have another look
at what I can fix.
Me wife says it's got to be
something I've done,
'Cause it was OK before I started—
and now she won't run.

Me truck's busted, mate,
and I wouldn't mind so much,
But it's reverse that's the trouble,
and not just the clutch.
Any other gear and
you could give it a miss,

Me Truck's Busted Mate

Slip to the next,
 until it was fixed.
But it's way past a joke,
 when down from the bush,
And you're shopping in town,
 and no one'll push.

Me truck's busted, mate,
 and it's really tough,
When you get to the curb,
 and it won't back enough.
I tell you, fair dinkum,
 it's getting hard on the tyres,
Getting back onto the track—
 especially in front of Myers.

Me truck's busted, mate,
 so we drove it around
To see if the trouble
 could simply be found.
Nothing showed up,
 and she didn't even stop.
It's a worry I tell you—
 it's not the normal lot.

Me truck's busted, mate,
 so I took her to bits
Today in the shed
 to get her all fixed.
Now she's all up on blocks,
 and looking half dead.
I've had a good look,
 down there in the shed.

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Me truck's busted, mate,
yet she's all so neat,
I've had a good look
all around under the seat.
But just at the moment
she's got me real beat,
'Cause I can't seem to see—
what's causing reverse to delete.

Me truck's busted, mate,
I'll have to get her done,
But blessed if I know how,
it's not going to be fun.
I'll even get out the manual
and read it tonight,
To find out why she won't work—
for I'm sure I fixed her all right!

Me truck *was* busted, mate,
but I've now got her all fixed,
A little spring was broke mate,
that holds in all the bits.
This being so, it was easy to see,
it was something else that caused it—
Other than me!

‘She’s One of Yours’

There she was, lying on a bed with a broken hip in the local hospital. She had been there several days when Mark went to visit. Matron informed him that she was Mrs Lenswood from out the Old Bottle Hill mail road way. Mark moved a little closer to see if she was awake, and sure enough, not only awake, but she was very trembly, too.

‘Hello,’ Mark said quietly, ‘How are you?’

‘Oh!’ came a quiet reply, ‘you could never know.’

‘Well, that was possible,’ Mark thought. You see, he had not long arrived in town to take up a new position. Mark was supposed to be ready for almost anything. ‘Try me,’ Mark said quietly, ‘you could find that just telling me could be of some help.’

‘Oh!’ She said again, ‘I’m so afraid, and it is going to get much worse. I can assure you.’

‘How do you mean? Please go on,’ Mark replied, trying to be of some comfort. Mark was new at this, not at all confident, but willing to give it a good chance.

‘Well,’ she said, and then went on to tell him how just the other evening she had fallen and broken her hip.

This, then, accounted for her trembling state and the look of fear. She looked uneasy to say the least. Mark reasoned to himself that by now with the comfort of knowing she was in capable hands, and that she was

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now out of harm's way, she would be able to be a little more at ease. Soon she would surely recognise that the danger was over and at least begin to relax. Mark knew that different people reacted differently to shock and pain. Anyway, what would he know? He had never broken anything, but thought this might be the explanation for her trembly condition. Even so, she still didn't seem to show the slightest signs of relaxing at all.

After some time had passed she said she would have to go to Rockville for further medical help. The thought of this trip appeared to worry her more than anything else. 'Over that road with all this wet,' she kept saying. Then Mark realised that, as the new bloke around these parts, there was need to be cautious. He hadn't even been over that road—the one from here up through Carmint. He had heard that from there, at least, there was a reasonable sealed road for the remainder of the trip on to Rockville. You see, there had been a lot of rain about, and the road was of black soil, across black soil country, and she had this funny notion that there was much more rain to come yet. Now Mark knew that the ambulance men would be reliable, so he dismissed her notions without much more thought.

This area was renowned for its bad roads though. Mark was given a thankyou card once and it read, 'Wundara, the place of Willy-willies, Wool, and Weely Wotten Woads in Wet Weather'. He'd already seen a car bogged on the dirt section, only a few chains from the bitumen and not able to get to it because of the nature of the mud. Unsealed roads in this black soil country were impassable when wet. The mud rolled up around the wheels and totally blocked them from turning. One older person said, 'If you will stick to

"She's One of Yours"

Wundara in the dry weather—it will stick to you in the wet!’

So he was the newcomer to this place and its climate. It was hot and wet and Mark was a long way from his home environment. Now, where he had come from, it was usually hot, or wet, but not both at once. Here he was on the southern edge of the monsoon region. He was right out of his cultural setting. He had been brought up in the country. Distances and heat were no new thing for him. But this monsoon thing was a different lot altogether. He was of the thinking that a cool southern change would spring up at any time. But, it just never came.

He looked again at the patient. He wondered if she was more than a little afraid of the road, and maybe a little afraid of something else! Who could tell? Well, maybe she could. And maybe she would, but not necessarily to him. Mark had never seen the lady before, so she was not likely to break confidence with him too quickly.

There were some strange things for him to get accustomed to. Things like the weather, yes, but even some more down to earth things than the sky and its antics. Take for instance the water supply. There were no hot water systems in this town, although Mark was told there was one at the Hospital, and he thought one in the Doctor’s house. The water came already hot! It came up out of the ground—from the local town bore, and when it reached the surface it was not only pure enough for new-born babies to drink, but it was about a hundred and ninety degrees Fahrenheit. He wasn’t sure what that was in the other, but it was hot. They had a cooling tank in the backyard. As well as this, there were very large

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concrete tanks in each of these Western towns—huge things, that stood so high that you could see them from miles away, sticking up like beacons. Anyway, to get hot water in the mornings, the first one up turned a tap on. As the water came through the pipes the cold water was replaced by hot—if you left it running it would stay hot. They soon found that by the time the toilet had been flushed a number of times it was getting warmer anyway. It was a novelty having a hot flush. Comforting in the winter—but not at all unlike a sauna in the summer. Mark suspected that most of the houses for the eighteen hundred or so population, had a tap running all day. The good thing was that there were no water meters. They were allowed to use as much water as they could get from a half-inch pipe. The cold water came from the cooling tank out the back. Most of the houses had one of these—perched up on a tower. Some had a drum underneath that gave the same effect, and providing there were only small quantities of cold used, the hot water had time to cool down. This was all new to Mark, so he was of a mind ‘to hear the locals out’ for other things that he had to get used to.

He was ready for some reasoning from this local as well, and if she found him approachable, maybe she would open up to him at some stage. Counselling was something Mark felt he had a good deal of flair for, and so he considered it unlikely to get too far the first meeting. He felt reassured that it was OK to take it slowly.

Mark was always humbled when someone shared really personal things with him. Sometimes it had happened and he had not been sure why. Then, there were some things that he thought we ought to keep to ourselves perhaps. There are those rare times though when

"She's One of Yours"

someone gives to another their intimate thoughts. It is so often the 'grotty stuff'—as if it were confession time—and he were God, or something—or the 'stuff' that a particular 'city type' of person thought country people liked to hear. They had the idea that to be earthy, meant to be rough and crude. There are those too, Mark thought, who just enjoy good things, seeing humour in everyday events that have a simple twist to them. He called it being earthy. He would never forget the day he saw a city friend sitting out on his lawn reading a copy of 'Footrot Flats'. She had picked it up at some stage earlier and had seen it as a 'crude country magazine' and quickly put it back amongst the bundle of other magazines. Mark had noticed what had happened. There was a little uneasiness from Lee-Anne, their friend. So both Mark and his wife, Lyn, had explained to her the relationship a farmer has with his dog, and how the cartoon was an insight into the mind of a man from a dog's point of view. It wasn't long before Mark and Lyn were at the window quietly watching Lee-Anne. She was sitting in the middle of their large backyard, giggling away at the dog's antics with his master.

Some of Mark's greatest times of joy had been when a friend shared something good, not just for sharing sake, but things that really mattered—like how they live and cope in situations with dignity and freedom. Mark thought that for the most part he just had muddled on. Maybe that's just how he had needed to 'battle it out' at times—maybe that's the way it is, to the greater part with us all, all the time. But there were times that were rich.

To his surprise Mrs Lenswood began to talk again. Mark now listened with absolute amazement as he was

introduced to a new form of hospital visiting, 'a-la-the-deep-end'. Well, when Mrs Lenswood had finished, Mark did not know who was in need of the most help.

There had been rain, good rain, preceded by lightning, with the normal storm activity. Many fires had been started by the lightning. Now Mark was accustomed to some types of fires, but there are a lot of different types of country that cause fires to do different things. Hills' fires for instance, have a mind all of their own—with gully winds and all that heavy timber. It made him wary. He used to be a member of the Country Fire Service before he had moved from the farm, so he had some limited experience in these areas. They came from flat to undulating farming land. It was altogether different up here. It was long flat downs country where the property owners welcomed some fires. If the paddocks got lit up by lightning a few hours before heavy rain, that was a real advantage. The old Buffle and Mitchell grass got burnt off to the butts. Then, as the rain came, it brought the fresh new growth ensuring good new cattle and sheep feed for months to come.

Well, fires there were, and lots of them! Mrs Lenswood told him they had twenty-seven fires burning all at the same time the night she broke her hip.

Now, old Alf Lenswood was no chicken either, but he had gone off that night to see if he could save some of the fencing, and that was one mean battle. One old man, against twenty-seven fires! This left only her at the station homestead—alone at night. So, one could imagine a mixture of concern for her husband, a little more than concern for her own safety, and a good dose of mild panic as she waited for the rain to start—the latter being the more urgent. The combination of all

"She's One of Yours"

these things had put it into the mind of this spirited lady to climb the free-light tower as a good look-out point. Up she went to find signs of Alf. Things didn't go so well. Not only couldn't she see anything of her life-long partner, but even more tragically, on the way down, in her panic, her foot slipped and she had fallen to the ground. There might have only been the difficult matter of getting to hospital, but, and the 'but' was it—she'd been into other things as well.

She had a history of the 'rain-maker instinct' about her. This dear lady had for years sought rain by various means. She had an aversion to droughts for sure, and she had tried many legitimate and not so legitimate means to get rain out of that blue sky. Mark had seen some country folk do odd things when it didn't rain. He knew that 'the seasons we have—but the power to make it rain we don't seem to have been given'. He had also observed the total lack of appreciation that some townspeople had for the way farmers and graziers were dependent on the rainfall for their livelihood. Their finances were directly in proportion to the right amount of rainfall—the rain coming at the appropriate times for their crops and pastures to produce well—for without this there be no profit—and no ability to live to see out another year. Well, Mrs Lenswood had tried to convince herself that it would rain. She had also prayed for rain. She just couldn't cope with another stretch like the last one. They had just got over one of the worst droughts they could remember. Mark was told of how it had been so dry, for so long, that there were five-year-old children who were born there, who had never seen a proper downpour of rain until this last drought broke. When it did come, they were petrified.

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This time she had used the horse-picture-technique. It had worked before. She told Mark that on other occasions this had worked and within seven days after she had hung the picture there had been rain. She was convinced. 'Always without fail,' she'd said to him, 'and always within seven days.' Why not use it again? They were desperate for rain, and as the old saying went, 'Any means in a dry, desperate situation'.

Now not many people from down south where Mark came from would own up to this sort of thing. But he guessed that the situation called for explanation, and so in this culture, this was how things were. There was an earthiness mixed with the modern and the old cultural elements for getting 'what you needed', 'when you need them' and 'how you will have them'. See, the Cobb and Co coaches had run through these parts about a hundred years ago, so there was a history of tough and ready action. The rain was the need of the month. So it was—'every means to an end'. Down south Mark had known of people who drilled for water, divined for water and sometimes when all that failed a man had to give up. This was a harsh land—beautiful—but hard. There were droughts, floods and fires.

These people had seen the likes of him come and go. One lady, Mark remembered, when he had asked for a commitment to something, and there was a hesitancy in response, had said, 'Oh, we were waiting to see if you were one of those fly-by-night people.' She was probably quite justified then in checking him out. For Mark guessed he would prove to be a fly-by-nighter, only staying a few years, and then off somewhere else.

Getting back to Mrs Lenswood. She had to go by a four-wheel drive ambulance to the city of Rockville and

"She's One of Yours"

she was convinced that there was much more rain coming, and so with pain, incredible pain, and fear, she was not looking forward to this rough trip at all.

Mark recalled how he had made observations about pain and fear and the like. It's an amazing thing to see how we act under certain situations. Take pain for example. 'Pain,' one man said, 'was God's megaphone to a deaf ear.' That had surprised him to begin with. He had also said, 'God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world'—Mark thought that's how the saying went. Then fear, that was another thing altogether. Mark had worked through some deep things. But were there not some things that were so close, up top and obvious, that he was able to miss them?

Well, back to the story about the horse picture. This picture was the one with galloping horses in the storm. Most people would have seen either the exact same print or one similar to it. Mrs Lenswood's picture normally hung on the lounge room wall at the old station homestead. She had to get a chair to get to it. But not any more—well not until she got home from hospital at least. At the time of hearing about it—the picture I mean—it was wrapped up as tightly as it could be. I'm not sure how tight that was, but as tightly as a woman with a freshly broken hip could wrap it!

Mark admired the strength and determination of our inland ladies. She had got herself from the tower, to the picture on the lounge room wall. She had taken it down, and then had got hold of the thickest blanket she could find, and wrapped it up, and then had stuffed it under her bed. Her bed of all places! She had told Mark that

this had been done in some hope of stifling the omen.

Now he thought about this. What a sterling effort. But why? Mark was at a loss, unless the fear of the trip to Rockville was all bundled up in that rug. This had been her sure-fire action to bring rain, and she felt it to have been proved on other occasions. Rain always came seven days after the picture had been turned upside down. I forgot to tell you that the picture must be turned upside down to work. The seven days would be up this coming day—the day planned for the trip.

He could not believe his ears. Then he thought: ‘the fear of being stranded—up there on that road—the fear of the unknown. Yes, this was it too—along with the fears we all know to some degree when confronted by the threat of death.’

Now Mark could remember the Principal at the Bible College expounding for them from the New Testament about the power death holds over a person, and the release God brought to the fearful through His own Son. He called the words to mind from Hebrews 2:14–16:

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself [Jesus] likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham.

Rarely do we see things as clearly as when we are on the platform of pain. Mark thought that pain was linked closely with death. He knew pain was not death. Yet he was astute enough to realise that we rarely get to come to terms with death, and life beyond death, without a lot of help—help, like pain. There seemed to be an extra

"She's One of Yours"

sensitivity given through pain. And here Mark was, with Mrs Lenswood, confronted again with his own life. Not with pictures hanging on walls—but with pictures in his mind—pictures of what he should do to be successful—what would make him perform better. Pictures of an agenda—a schedule. The agenda he had for God. Were his ways really any different to Mrs Lenswood's? At first he was shocked. He couldn't have been like that! As he quieted down inside and as he began to consider these things, they were interrupted by another visitor arriving.

She was a well-meaning friend, but Mark would have liked more time to ponder what he had been seeing. The new arrival said, 'I'm glad you could come. She's one of yours you know. A most faithful worker on the stalls is our Mrs Lenswood. We need all the help we can get, don't we?' The atmosphere of the meeting was instantly changed. Mark didn't want to be dragged away from his thoughts yet. Not into the idea of stalls anyway! When they left, they left together—the other visitor and Mark.

As they were going to the car park, those words kept coming to him, 'She's one of yours'. One of yours—really! Mark wasn't sure that sat well with him. He knew they all belonged to the same denomination, but as for the rest he needed to think that one through.

She was one of his—one of his type. One of those who made some claim to faith in God. One for whom Christ had died and had risen again—to bring her to a glorious new humanity. One whom God the Father had taken account of in His love. One who was called to the obedience of faith, just as he was.

After fifteen years, Mark was given the opportunity

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to make a visit back to the Wundara country. He was excited at the prospects of seeing old faces again. Mark wondered if he would recognise them. Who would remember him? Well, he was surprised—some he did not remember, remembered him! Many had left, some had died. Others that Mark was keen to catch up with just didn't seem to be there at all. Old Alfie Lenswood had passed on, but Mrs Lenswood was there—she was at the Church on Sunday, with the others, and there was a sense of peace in Mark's own heart as he remembered with thankfulness, 'She's one of Yours'.

It Had Just Popped Out

Yvonne was standing at the front door when Andrew first met her. He had seen her shopping in the town, but they had not spoken. She seemed a pleasant younger woman who appeared hesitant at first.

This place had a history of callers. It was a town where the Railway system terminated and only the roads continued on. It was a river town on the edge of the more viable, economic pastoral area. The main river had water all year round, so it had been established quite early in the nation's settlement by Europeans. Queensland was to the north, and the rest of New South Wales to the south, east and west. Callers came seeking help. These were mostly travellers who got caught out due to the huge distances. They were generally short of the basic needs such as fuel, food or money. How people could travel that way Andrew couldn't imagine. There were good facilities in the town—fuel and food stores, caravan parks and motels. Yet he had callers with the most amazing 'stories' seeking help.

Yvonne was a local—Andrew had been in town long enough to pick them out. They were different from the general travellers. You could always pick a visitor in a western town—perhaps their looks, perhaps the way they parked. Andrew had fooled them when he came, because he was already accustomed to this odd parking

procedure. The town they were in prior to this one had the same local system—back-in parking. This had amused him and his wife. Two towns—both with the same quick get-away parking style. They weren't sure why this tradition was adopted, but it did make it easier to leave after shopping. All that was required was for the driver to give-way to the traffic on the right, and you were off. There was one disadvantage though. The left-hand-side mud flap on the vehicles inevitably got torn off as the tyre and the curb came together. Andrew was fussy about his vehicles, and was always careful not to let the rear wheel touch the curb. Cars with the left-hand rear mud flap missing were usually from within this area.

She was local anyway—he could tell. Andrew greeted Yvonne; he realised she was distressed. There had been a bereavement in the family. Her father-in-law had died—a gentleman by the name of Mr Lewis. He had been Eddie's aging father. He had been ill for some time, but rapidly got worse, and had passed away. Yvonne was upset at the loss of this family member.

A good father and father-in-law he'd been—a man who had tried to live an upright life. Andrew gathered he'd been the fortification of the family. Now he was gone, leaving an enormous gap. Yvonne was feeling it already. She seemed gentle, quick to pick up what was going on, and able to sense the coming situation for the family. He sought to be of help to her. 'My whole world is falling apart,' she was saying. 'I think I need psychological help. I think I will go to Sydney.'

Andrew's dilemma was that he had heard some discouraging things about the professional organisations in the city, or 'down in-side', as they referred to it locally.

It Had Just Popped Out

Maybe there was only the one case that had given the others a bad name. He had also wondered if they could deliver help at the level that it was often needed. Shifting things around was all right, but to deal with them was another matter. Yvonne said quite definitely that she would go to Sydney. He thought that not likely—just her straight way of talking—and he would catch up with her again. He did say, though, that if she went to Sydney she may be shocked at the advice she could receive. He suggested that the remedy offered there could be far out—as far out as changing her moral code of life. One other woman had been told she should ‘live around a bit to get rid of the inhibitions she was carrying’. He thought to save Yvonne the expense and the embarrassment of a similar experience. He said to her, ‘Be sure your problem is guilt, old fashioned guilt’—quite convinced about it himself, but a little surprised with the bluntness and forthright way he had come out with it. He had by now dismissed the thought of her going to Sydney.

Well, it was not long before Yvonne went home. She had come—talked—and now she was off.

Several days passed and there was a knock on the door. ‘I’m back,’ she pronounced with an air of ‘I’ve been there—done that—that’s me’.

Andrew was caught off guard a little. ‘Back, back from where?’

She answered, ‘Back from Sydney, I told you I was going to Sydney to see a shrink! And you were right. How did you know what he would say?’ She confessed she was so shocked and scared that she couldn’t get back to Bowman quickly enough. ‘I’m right out of there—it’s just not right,’ she complained. ‘Will you

help me?’ He could see she was a woman of action.

‘There are two conditions,’ he said. ‘One is for you to talk it over with your husband. The other is for you to take seriously the local church.’ This seemed to find acceptance.

She knew a reasonable amount about church—she had been brought up in an Orphanage. It seems her mother was a woman of ‘ill repute’. Yvonne had called her ‘The prostitute of Temple Creek! That was my mother, the local you-know-what’. Temple Creek was an old gold mining town about three hundred kilometres to the West.

She explained how she’d been brought up in an Orphanage. She talked freely about that part of her life for quite some time. She spoke of her experiences and joked about how the Sisters in charge paid her a dollar for every verse of Scripture she could quote off by heart. She’d said it was a good challenge—and she’d made heaps of money that way—she would rise to any challenge they gave her if it had some benefit.

She also recalled days at Temple Creek and how she would be taken out by her mother to look for gold after rain. An old paint brush was used to carefully dust off the surface to reveal the gold. However, it was all put into a glass jar, and that would be the last she’d see of it.

There was a certain spirit about Yvonne. She seemed to want to make good after not so good a start. She was a warm, friendly person, who revived in people a sense of pride that they too belonged to a race of people who had enormous reserves of courage and zeal, with a will to get on with life.

Yvonne had married Eddie, one of Mr Lewis’s sons.

It Had Just Popped Out

The first time Andrew met Eddie, he thought he seemed a bit blunt, but in a nice sort of way—a man who gave the impression he was not about to have the wool pulled over his eyes. Maybe a little mixed up at the time with the confusion and uncertainty of his wife, but a genuine man.

Yvonne had tried to be a good wife to him. She'd had to start from scratch—having brought a lot of baggage with her from Temple Creek, baggage from the environment of her mother's world. Then there was the mixed bag of her life from the Orphanage. She told some stories about that. As helpful as the Orphanage had been, it did not give her the sort of foundation she needed to place a marriage and family upon. She found some of this compensated for in Eddie's family. She liked the thought of feeling secure.

They had just the three children, Richard, Margaret and Brian. Yvonne had battled it out, finding difficulty in coping with it all. They were good children. She had it all, a husband, children and a house. Yet she had begun to detest all of it. It had become boring.

As time went on, Yvonne Lewis came to visit more regularly. She seemed to find friendship with a few of the others. There were studies, but Andrew had used no models or patterns, just the simple truths of human beings living before God—the God of all creation. He expounded how they were able to live freely, the man Jesus making full atonement for them.

Yvonne was real. Andrew liked her frankness and expressions. When she saw something that gave her new insights, she expressed it very clearly. Her insights seemed to take the 'clichés' out of her experience at the Orphanage.

Wild Men, Bread and Pretty Stone

She had a kind of transparency about her and she tended to 'wear her feelings on her sleeve'. She thought Andrew had the ability to know more about her than he did, and she delighted in trying to shock him with stories of things she had done. He let most of it run off 'like water on a duck's back'. Yvonne had often said, 'You can read me like a book, can't you?' Yet he had rarely been aware of this, so was often a little embarrassed.

Things had come to Yvonne more gently and quietly than to some of the others. Some very wonderful things had been happening to her and she was almost unaware of it. She was still very cautious and watchful about what was said. There wasn't much in life that she hadn't seen.

Now, one particular day, she had gone home after a meeting, obviously full of joy and purpose. Eddie, by this time, had got a little curious as to what was going on. You see, she had been neglecting her marital and family obligations. The house was a mess, the kids not being enjoyed at all, and Yvonne had been fed up with the lot, but this had begun to change. Now, we all know that a lived-in house is not tidy, but there is a difference between a lived-in house and a neglected house. Well, Eddie had observed a change was taking place—she had cleaned up the place a bit, and had begun to care for the kids, sewing some clothes for them and now taking pride in them. He was intrigued and a little suspicious. He liked what he was experiencing, too, but he was 'suss' because it had something to do with Andrew.

When she got settled, he asked, 'What's going on with you, are you having an affair with him or something? What is it?'

It Had Just Popped Out

She replied. 'I've just discovered that God is my Father.' It had just popped out.

She sought to explain what that meant—but she couldn't—so left it at that.

There was a silence.

Nothing much more was said. She continued to go to her group and to Church on Sundays. He continued to enjoy the fruit of it all. Once he even drove her, with the children, to the Church. He had not stayed, but had come back again to collect them.

Some time later Andrew was told more of the story. It was often like that, only the essential things are known to begin with. It's good it's that way—for if you knew all the story it probably wouldn't work out.

Apparently it was old Mr Lewis's death that caused it all to come to a head for Yvonne. He used to go to Church once, but had a fall-out with someone. At a point in time he stopped going. He still kept on with his Bible reading, though, until his death. The time prior to death was a difficult one for them all.

The old man was apparently very disturbed. In the last week he got up five times, dressed himself—hat, suit and all—and said that he must be going to see that Judge. Five times he did this. The family could not understand it. He would be helped back to bed again, not having accomplished his mission. He was most adamant that he must see 'that Judge'—an experience he obviously hoped would bring immediate satisfaction and peace to his troubled conscience. She didn't know it then, but what her father-in-law was seeking, she was now discovering.

It had just popped out. 'I've discovered that God is my Father,' she'd said.

I'm Free

I'm free, I'm free,
His love has come to me;
I see, I see,
His love atoned for me.

His Love, His love,
His love has planned for me;
This love, this love,
This love has set me free.

His love, His love,
Floods in by the Spirit;
The Dove has come,
Brings love from above.

What love, what love,
From the Father is love;
All in the Son,
Died as sin for everyone.

What love, what love,
Love in the Only Son;
Father's love,
Now in the Cross has come.

I'm Free

This love, this love,
As He promised to give,
Commands me to love,
So in Him I now live.

I'm free, I'm free,
His Word tells me;
This freedom in the Son,
Freedom for everyone.

Forgiveness has come,
Forgiveness for everyone,
Flooding across our land,
Life in His dear Name.

His Name is Love,
And His Love names me;
I'm free, I'm free,
In His Love for me.

Dianne's Dream

Dianne was sure she could persuade her father to let her get her beautiful, blue boat down from the top of the shed and go for a row in Mrs Smith's dam. She had the greatest desire to take it over to the neighbour's dam—Mrs Smith's dam would be full. It was always full, fuller than hers. Why was it so full and so clean? She could see the banks from their place, and imagined the water with all the little waves catching the light and twinkling in the breeze. It just wasn't fair. Mrs Smith's was so much better than theirs—no mud on the banks—nice green grass right to the edge—all that clear water—and this had tormented her for years.

Ask she did, but the answer was always the same, 'No!' A certain no. A 'maybe', that would have at least given some hope, but it was always 'No'.

Dianne was more than determined—her style was, 'I'll keep at it till you give in'. Well, she did keep at it, and sure enough, it worked—Dad weakened. He was a good father she thought as she went to the top shed, opened the door, climbed the ladder and started to prepare for the great event.

It was heavy going. Why did the boat have to be so darn heavy? The excitement increased. Mrs Smith's dam—what a delightful thought—clear water, lots of it, right up to the boundary fence. Mrs Smith was so lucky

Diane's Dream

having a dam like that. What a marvellous time it was going to be. She struggled with the boat with greater vigour to shorten the time. All that water she would have to explore. It seemed like she had dreamt of this moment for years. She dragged it through the fence, and as she turned, there it was.

She stood utterly dumbfounded. It was almost dry! She couldn't believe her eyes. She walked along a few steps. Her feet sank down in the mud and the slimy stuff oozed all up between her toes. In near exhaustion from dragging the boat all the way up that hill, and with the disappointment of the dam—not any dam, but Mrs Smith's dam, the dam she had dreamed of for so long, the dam her father was so reluctant to let her go to—she turned around to go for home. To her delight there was her dam over there in the valley—full and sparkling in the sunshine. It looked so natural and right, and the grass surrounding it was no illusion, but real. Down she went, taking her little blue boat with her. It had all of a sudden become so light and it just glided across the cow paddock. The launching was a breeze and she could hear the water slapping gently up against the bow. Dianne was at home—in her own dam.

Gordon's Belief

Gordon was somewhat unsettled when Harry met up with him. He'd been sitting on the old verandah squeezing the skin on his Scottish pipes. He had not seemed very impressed with his practice effort for the day, so laid the pipes back in their bag. Lynne was in the kitchen getting the men's morning tea things cleaned up, and both the boys were at their lessons. They had their school by correspondence. Next year they would both be going to boarding school.

'I want to show you something,' he said to Harry, in a more than normally quiet voice. It was as if he didn't want anyone else to hear what he said. Harry was beckoned outside to the yard, and then into the Landcruiser. Gordon started the engine and moved off, with the two men not speaking another word to each other. Harry wondered what it was all about and concluded that he must have wanted to see something close at hand, or, talk about something very private.

They travelled quite quickly to begin with, but slowed down as the road turned into a track, and then slowed even more as the track virtually petered out. Harry wondered where they were going. It had been quiet for so long now that he had the impression that Gordon wanted it that way. He could live with that. Harry hung on tightly over the really rough bits and just

Gordon's Belief

enjoyed the scenery for the rest. A good twenty minutes must have passed. Harry thought, 'There goes my guess, it wasn't something close.' That left the other. What was this strange man up to?

Harry had known Gordon for only a short time. He had called on Harry several times in town to drop off some fresh eggs and meat that he had spare. He thought Gordon was on the upper-crust side of life—reasonably well off. Gordon gave Harry the impression that that was the mark of making it in life.

They had met in an interesting way. Harry and his wife had sat next to Gordon and his at a Debutante Ball. They had made up part of the official party, and had received the Debutantes and their partners on behalf of the community. The officials represented their various fields of interest in the community. Since then, the Fletchers had been invited out to the Rickabys for casual afternoons together. It had been a growing friendship that both seemed to enjoy. There had been times of deep conversation. Gordon was the president of the Cattle-men's Union, Harry a local Minister of the Christian Church. Gordon and Harry both seemed to have their strong views as to how things were with faith.

Harry had felt quite honoured and a little amused lately. Partly because of the official status bestowed on him, and a funny incident that happened at one of the other towns. He would go to the other end of his area about once a month, weather permitting, visiting people on properties, the local school, and to conduct services in the town. The service was usually on a week day due to the distances. It was five hundred and fifty kilometres between towns so he had to plan to be back at the main town of his residence for the Sunday service. One of the

Wild Men, Bread and Pretty Stone

students met Harry at the local store. Malcolm had just come from the school and with great enthusiasm, and with a voice that matched his enthusiasm, yelled out to his mother across the wide road, 'Mum, come and meet my Prime Minister.' The whole street stopped and looked. Harry had an immediate audience. Not sure about wanting to be Prime Minister, however, he gave the lad full marks for his appreciation of him, and the message he carried.

The vehicle crawled up over a newly constructed dam bank. Harry thought, 'At last, so this is it.'

He started to make the movements of getting out from the vehicle to admire the workmanship, when Gordon said, 'No, we aren't stopping here, we aren't there yet.' On they went. Harry thought it all right to talk now. So he made enquiries about the dam, and was given an appropriate answer. Some time later, he could see the destination coming up. There were two fences running together. He could see the strainer post and its struts.

'This must be it,' he thought, 'no gates—no way through here. It must be here somewhere. What could it be? All this way, it must be important. No one would come this far over that track just for a quiet talk.' The suspense was over—the vehicle stopped at the fence right near the corner.

'My Western boundary fence, Harry,' Gordon said. Out they got and walked slowly along the fence line—Harry getting his legs working again after the ride. Then it came out. 'I really believe God exists,' Gordon said. He spoke in a voice that seemed to be on guard for anyone that could be eavesdropping.

'That's good,' replied Harry, with all the enthusiasm

Gordon's Belief

he could muster—thinking to himself, ‘Lord! All this way to hear that. These guys sure drag things out!’

Then Gordon went on, ‘We had a huge fire coming through here many years ago, and it was running the full length of my property. It came right within ten feet of this fence—then there was one hell-of-a-rain-storm that totally put it out. After that no one can tell me God doesn’t exist.’ Harry appreciated what he had said—he had to, because he did not want to walk home. He was also urgent to take him up on his observations. There was every difference between knowing God existed and the knowledge of God. Harry had remembered how he’d been when he first started to think seriously of Christian things and how his friends had been very helpful to him. It’s no small thing to start being honest in these areas. Everything seems so threatening—he had nearly forgotten.

He answered him, ‘The devil believes God exists too Gordon, and he shudders at the thought. God’s intention is for us to come to know Him personally—like He really is. That’s different to the knowledge the devil has of God. He is a rival—a competitor—and his thoughts about God are more couched in terms of protecting what he thinks he’s got away with.’ Gordon was speechless. After some time Harry went on to explain the difference between knowing God exists and knowing God as a person. We can be so self-centred and needs centred, so as to imagine God is just there to fill our needs! The whole world could be going down that track. The knowledge of God is very different.

It was a different trip back to the station homestead.

The thought of knowing God got to Gordon. He started to see what that could entail. Then after some

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hesitancy came out with, ‘Bloody good—eh! Bloody good—eh!’ He kept saying, ‘Who’d a believed it possible. Bloody good—eh! You mean you actually get to know Him? Really different—eh?’ When they got back he made a bee-line to the house, calling out ‘Lynne, Lynne, come and hear what Harry knows, it’s blo—it’s really good.’

Harry wondered a lot about Gordon. He was so much into materialism that something very real would have to break in for this to change. Harry had come out of a background like that. All his life’s decisions and pleasures had been decided on the basis of materialism.

Harry was saddened and a bit shocked to hear that Gordon had died unexpectedly some time later. He couldn’t help it if from time to time the thought of Gordon kept coming to him.

The Prodigal

A son took his inheritance,
And then went out to live,
Thought his old man a hindrance,
So he'd run with what was his.

He went down into Hindley Street,
To where it all happened to be,
And lived it up with the gang,
Really turned on quite a spree.

It was good to get with mates,
And have entertainment as fun,
Fritter away the inheritance
On obscenity and ho hum.

Then as the inheritance ran out
And the squeeze started to bite,
He sought to make the lifestyle
Comfortable and homely and right.

He sometimes thought of home,
Getting the pattern of life
In order to have some comfort,
And beat the bite of his strife.

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What was on his mind, though,
Was the inheritance he couldn't forget,
For it stuck in his memory bank
And made him really think.

As he pondered how it would happen,
He decided it would have to be
The shoulder to the grindstone,
And work to get his destiny.

Then a flash of his father burst in,
And he saw how things had been,
The father had given in abundance,
And had everything neat and clean.

So he started to change his mind,
And then for home he went running,
Until in delight he was embraced
By his father who'd seen him coming.

A new son he was made by the father,
Another inheritance was thrust upon him,
'Have a go at this lot, my son,' he said,
'There's plenty more where that came from!'

The son could not contain this joy,
To be in the presence of him,
And share the richness of home life,
And the knowledge of his father again.

He'd tried to make the slums comfortable—
A copy of all they'd had at home—
But this was totally impossible,
Because of the father's presence alone.

The Prodigal

All things were provided in the father,
But nothing in the far-off land,
All belonged in the presence of the owner,
And could never be separated from him.

The prodigal had an elder brother,
And that's a whole sad story too,
For on the prodigal's return,
With him he'd have nothing to do.

The Father is God in this story,
And mankind the prodigal sons,
All fallen short of the Glory,
The repentant come home to be one.

'My Good One 's Away'

He drove a 1970 ZG Ford Fairlane with a big roobar on the front. He was a man of slight to medium build, pleasant to talk with, always neatly dressed and always early to the meetings. Roger had met him a number of times at the main shopping town, with his well kept car and horse float full of chaff and bags of this and that. There was something about him—nothing at all obnoxious or anything, it was just that he was so neat for a country guy and he seemed to always be alone.

They had fortnightly meetings in the local Catholic Church up his way. Seldom did any Catholics come but it was a way to get the others together. They had talked about meeting in a house, but the consensus was that the small town building was best. 'It was neutral ground,' one of them had said, indicating the competition and rivalry amongst the locals. If the meetings were held in a home, some would not feel free to come—so it was the town building.

As time went on, Roger tried to find a style of teaching that the group felt comfortable with. They were a very diverse lot—great people, these country people, but with a very large range of ages and interests. He had tried conversational styles, then a preachy style—that hadn't gone down all that well. 'A friend we want,' they had said, 'a friend who will tell us what's what.'

'My Good One Is Away'

He next tried sheets of paper with his main points circled in a kind of a cloud, then an arrow to the other points, and so on. This seemed to find acceptance. Roger noticed that when he visited around the area the local refrigerator doors were getting the messages—so he thought he was onto a winner. If his stuff got put up with the rainfall gauging, the dentists' appointments and the football program, it must be what they wanted. At least the bin was not getting all of them.

It was Keith, the Fairlane driver, whom Roger noticed only ever looked at him and never at his sheet. He had done this for several meetings. Not even once did he see him look at it. To start with this had not bothered him—if that was the way he wanted to do it, that was fine. Roger would ask him after the meetings how he was finding the messages and the teaching. The answer was always in the affirmative. He seemed keen. 'Good,' he'd say. This went on for some time. Then one day he frowned as if he was struggling with the session. Roger thought if he would follow the notes while he was going through them, he might find them easier to go over at a later stage. He could go back over the paper, and the issues might come clear for him. At that moment, Roger's ego sprang into action and he said, 'Don't you ever look at your notes? You could find them helpful after. I've set it all out for you to follow.' Keith still looked straight at Roger—Roger wondered what was with this man.

After the meeting he approached Keith. He was about to ask how he was coping with the messages, but before he could say anything, Keith said, 'I am so sorry, I don't read.' Roger felt so small. How could he be so insensitive to Keith's situation? He apologised. 'No, it's

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all my fault,' Keith insisted, 'you weren't to know that.'

It was then that Roger asked him if he could come out to his property to visit. Keith was quite taken that he would come all the way to his place. He was keen to show Roger around. He said he had a lot to see—horses, historic sights and plenty of tea in the pot.

It was several weeks before Roger got out to visit, and when he did he gave Keith the better part of a day—it was a very worthwhile time.

Roger was always thankful of the opportunity to get to know the people of an area. He recalled wondering as he went past a track or a turn-off, who might live there. The thrill, then, was when he eventually found out—it was usually nothing like he'd imagined. He found people interesting. He loved meeting the different ones and hearing their stories—history, stories of hardship and good times. It gave him an idea of the people and their backgrounds. He was always fascinated to find out why they were doing what they were doing.

Keith was no exception. Roger arrived around mid-morning. It was a pleasant day, starting to warm a little, but very pleasant. They started off with a cup of tea. Roger had never used tea as a thirst quencher until he came up north. He was a coffee drinker, but found it too heavy in this climate, so had taken up the local habit. The tea had been good—a bit strong—with plenty of sugar and no milk. Keith lived alone in a neat place—small but adequate. Roger was keen to look around, so when the opportunity came, they took it. He was told by Keith of an outlaw's grave site down over the hill. They decided to walk, and enjoyed talking as they went. Keith had already shown Roger his trophies as they drank their tea. He was impressed. Keith had some very

'My Good One 's Away'

admirable cups and ribbons. He was a rough rider, mostly horses—wild horses, with an occasional steer ride thrown in. As they walked, they passed by the stables and saw his horses—the pride of this man's life. The horses came to the gate to greet Keith. They muzzled their noses into his hand as he affectionately gave them something from his pocket.

Roger and Keith chatted about the different places Keith had ridden, and Roger admired him for his courage and skill. He had tried it a couple of times himself, but thought the ground was a bit too hard for him. He had also tried riding a mechanical bull. It was not the real thing like they had today, he explained to Keith. They had used a forty-four gallon drum with saddle and all attached. It was strung up between three, good strong mallee trees. The idea was that the rider got on it, and then a mate on each cable kept jerking at the appropriate times, giving the effect of an animal bucking. Few could stay on for any length of time. It was so successful that the locals used it for practice before a big event.

They were nearly at the old grave. 'Captain Starlight, the bush ranger, is supposed to be buried here,' Keith said. Just then Roger heard a sound—he heard it again. It was a squeak, an unmistakable squeak, coming from Keith's direction. Keith noticed Roger's look, a look that was just a quick glance really. 'I do apologise, I am sorry,' Keith said, 'it's my artificial leg. I have to use my spare. My good one is away—the knee-joint—it needed servicing.'

Roger stopped walking. 'You ride in rodeos with an artificial leg?' he asked.

'Yes,' came the reply, 'I need to prove myself somehow. I need to be the best at something.'

'Just As If'

There had been a good number at the meeting last night. The 'speaker' had been there again—the speaker who had come as a special guest. People had come from miles away. He knew it was good—you could just feel it was good. He had never heard anything like it. There were people there who didn't usually come to these sort of things. This man who had come was basically a preacher. The meetings were held in the public halls, but it was a religious thing—not like the usual functions that were held there. Why had they all come?—it was worth being there—but why had they come?

Len couldn't help it, he had to tell someone. He knew. He would go and ring a few people around the area. He'd start with Lionel, the President of the club he belonged to. He didn't think he had been yet, but he wasn't sure—there had been so many there—he may have missed him. He would give him a ring anyway, and if he had been there, Len would be keen to find out what he thought.

'No, he had not been—yes, he had heard there was something on—no, he didn't know there had been that many people there—he would consider going, but he was pretty busy.'

Len started at the top, now he could work down his list of people. He'd been a bit nervous about ringing

Lionel, but it was too good for him to miss out on. Almost the whole community had been there.

Where did this list of names come from that he had in his mind—people he knew, people whom he respected, people he looked up to? Did it matter? The names simply came.

It was funny Len thinking of Lionel, because Lionel didn't even believe there was a God, as far as he knew. Yet what if he missed out just because of that?

After he had finished calling the list of names Len went back to his work. He couldn't think of any more to call—no more names came. It was too good to miss out on though. He really spoke powerfully. That speaker really did believe what he said. It was as clear as a bell. Len couldn't actually remember what he had said, that was the funny thing. He said it well though—great preacher. That was what it was—preaching. Preaching like it was real. He could tell a good story too, but it was the preaching. He was a free man as he spoke as well. It just all came out. It was life stuff. It all made sense at the time. It was coming back. It was the truth that lingered, that's what it was, the truth of what he had said—it was all still there.

Len couldn't get it all together to tell anyone exactly what he said, but it was good. He had been able to put it all together for them. There was God—and Jesus who was made—presented as if He were The Man for them—right there and then. And then that Cross—it was that Cross that kept breaking through into his mind. It was that that Lionel should hear. If he heard that he would be different. You couldn't hear of that Cross and be the same. Len had told him on the phone, 'You will hear a man speak—like you never could imagine.' The

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whole thing that he needed to hear was there. It was true and as real as if it were happening right there before them all. This whole crowd of people from all around—all heard it together.

‘This was a religious thing all right, but it was different,’ Len had told them on the phone. He knew it was for all of them, even if they came from out of his council area. It was a new thing, and yet it was as if they knew all along that this was how it would be—new but different.

It was That Cross, and it kept coming to Len at the strangest times. He would just get settled back at work, and it would come again, ‘God is love! God is love!’ It was all there at the Cross—that MAN hanging there—all real and powerfully indescribable. Len knew it was of immense significance for him. He did not have to be told that. He knew it was for him—not only for the man up the road—but for him. There seemed to be no special time of this happening. It just happened and when it did there was such an inflow of intense meaning with it. Len knew this was it! It was settled! Life was different—he couldn’t be the same any more after the revelation of that Cross. That’s what it was—a revelation—the Man and that Cross. Len found himself being flooded with true something—and that something was immediately indescribably good. It was free and freeing—he was free. It was ‘just as if’ he had been freed from all the wrong he had ever been and done. That’s what it was—that’s what had happened.

I Am Justified

I am justified, justified,
Free as can be.
I am justified, justified,
Truly set free.
The Justifier has justified me,
For grace covers all my sin totally.

I am justified, justified,
Free as can be.
I am justified, justified,
Truly set free.
Jesus Himself has destroyed all my sin,
And His Righteousness He has put within.

I am justified, justified,
Free as can be.
I am justified, justified,
Truly set free.
No more am I to be smitten by sin,
For law way is out and righteousness in.

I am justified, justified,
Free as can be.
I am justified, justified,
Truly set free.

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No condemnation it's always to be,
For grace is the answer to living free.

I am justified, justified,
Free as can be.

I am justified, justified,
Truly set free.

Now I delight in the Law of the King,
I'm born of His Love a wonderful thing.

The Birth Pangs

Len could not have foretold what would happen in those next days, but whatever it was he did not want to miss it. He had a mixture of joy and pain, swinging from intense joy to almost physical pain. He felt it was physical yet how could something of love and of the Spirit be so painful? It had been a most unforgettable week with meetings, singing and good preaching and teaching.

Len had come into faith—he no longer had ‘blanks’ where he had to fill in the gaps. He had never heard of half the words used before. A word like ‘justification’ became a word with meaning—a ‘working’ term. Prior to this he had thought, ‘If with all my heart I could somehow get it right, then I would be OK.’ He had tried and tried, and had eventually resigned himself to the fact that his was a hopeless case. So he had turned his attention to other things. It was less painful that way. But to be justified now was different. It was ‘Just-as-if-I-had-never-sinned,’ the Preacher had said. What God had already done, had made him ‘just as if’. Len ‘got that’—he understood it. ‘If the Son sets you free you are free indeed’—he got that too. The truth these words conveyed filled up all the blanks. It was a whole new discussion topic, and it had taken over from football and the weather!

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Although the week had been a normal working week, the newness came pressing through into everyday life. Songs kept coming back to Len—words from new songs learned that week, and some old ones as well. The old ones were as if they were new.

In all this, the Cross kept breaking into his mind. It was as if that Cross were the place central for Love and Judgement. ‘What the Cross cleanses, the Spirit fills,’ the Preacher had said.

The week had been so filled with people coming into new life, Len thought this was the way it must be. There were times of doubt, but as soon as doubt got started, he would be drawn to see the Cross again—instantly knowing he was still justified. God had done it. That was amazing. Len couldn’t get over some of the doubts, not only that of God existing, but doubt as to his being justified. He knew now without doubt that he stood or fell by what Jesus had done on the Cross—‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do’, and ‘It is finished’ was the Word of God.

They had been called to receive the gift of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit—‘the Father’s gift to his children,’ the Preacher had said, helping those still coming to it.

Len knew he had lived ‘as if’ the world were his god, really unsure of anything. He soon saw the power he had been under—a slave to sin, through the power Satan held over a man through guilt. What he hadn’t seen was the ruthless way Satan accused innocent men—the justified. Len soon discovered that because there was now no condemnation, no guilt, Satan would accuse to see if he could rake some up! ‘Accuse innocent people? What a hide!’ Len thought.

The Birth Pangs

During these days forgiveness and new life came to the most unlikely people—it flowed from the Cross. It all had just come to them in the Words somehow.

‘It just comes,’ Len told his mates. ‘It must be like that in real preaching,’ but some thought the preacher a total idiot.

Yet again and again great relief to his conscience would flood in. Len would not have believed he could physically hurt so much. However, despair was kept at bay, because he had already ‘got it’—forgiveness and justification.

Yes, a battle was raging, the battle over ‘camp switching’. He had switched camps. ‘Satan had come back to claim his own,’ said a team member. Len knew all about camps. There is strong jealousy in camps—stronger jealousy between camps! He seemed to be involved in a ‘camp’ and ‘will’ battle. He believed this responsible for a physical encounter with a snake. He was always wary of snakes—this snake he killed. He somehow saw it as a sign of the now defeated ruler of his life. Funny he thought that. The old camp and its Ruler. It didn’t matter anyway. It was done. All of it, up there in the Cross, all of his past, him along with it.

The Preacher had told of ‘a titanic battle fought on the Cross’, and Len had seen it. The Strong man fully armed had been defeated, stripped of his power. The Gift of God had come—Sonship, and it was ‘Free indeed!’ The grace of God flowed to people, bringing repentance with great joy.

Len was told by an older cynical man that it would get him into a lot of trouble—this freedom stuff. He said that law kept us on the straight and narrow! Len told

him he'd be in more trouble if he wasn't 'free indeed'—a 'free' son!

Now, a most powerful battle raged over the changing rule of his life. He knew it was a one-sided rage—a rage of one defeated. Len was in no doubt about that, yet he felt he was being torn in two. At the same time there was incredible joy. Some had said, 'He's coming into new birth.' He didn't understand what they meant, but it was affirmative in tone, so he thought it must have been all right.

An amazing thing happened, resolving what was actually an issue over camps and loyalties—it was to be settled. He saw a visionary-type picture of a very basic and simple power plant that was malfunctioning. There was no light in the globe. He worked through the problems. All the reasons for this failure were eliminated, but still no light.

Then the Cross—but here the flow of justification and life seemed to be withheld. Len worked frantically to rectify the problem. To his great relief it was just the switch—it was in the 'off' position. He saw that the flow of love from the Cross was all there, but it was governed by one simple factor—his will. It was to be involved. It seemed so simple, yet before he could work nothing to right the problem.

Step by step he was taken through a series of 'seeings'. He could hear strong utterances becoming clearer and clearer—'God is Love, God is Love'—until eventually 'he got it'. For the very first time Len knew 'God IS Love!' He had heard the words before, but now he knew the heart of God, His very nature. This came to him—it was twice now that something came to him, 'Just-as-if', and 'God is Love'.

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The glorious truth the Cross held, was a mystery no longer. In that moment Love from the Cross was released to him. The camp battle was over—once and for all. He also knew his battle was just beginning—a battle now, not to get justified, but to live as a justified person. He was one with God, and he knew there could be no ongoing liberty apart from eternal Love surging through his being. Likewise, his own conscience told him there could be no sonship apart from him surging with Eternal Sonship.

He was hooked by this justifying grace and landed good and properly into new sonship—for the gift of sonship has justification by grace, keeping those in faith, secure. What a surprise—the gift of God.

‘Nothing Can Change That’

She remained in her seat after the other children had gone out to their morning program. There had been a bit of a scuffle getting the really little ones out. This seemed to be the ritual each Sunday. Half the congregation would disappear—it was a worry. Some would eventually come back. That was always a relief. He felt sad, too, that perhaps the ones most needing encouragement, and good teaching, were out.

The young girl was still there—the girl who had been away so much lately having chemotherapy. She had come with her parents. A brave step for such a young girl. Harry thought she was about eleven or twelve years old. He would have expected her to go with the others—out with her own age group for comfort, friends and some teaching on her level. Why had she stayed? Harry went to her and indicated the opportunity to go out with the others, but her body language indicated she would prefer to stay. Then she asked in a clear gentle voice, ‘Can I stay?’ Harry had no trouble with that—sure, if she felt more comfortable with her parents, that was fine with him. Then she said, ‘I’d prefer to stay and listen to your sermons.’ Harry never forgot that, and from then on he determined never to talk down to

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children, but to seek to feed the whole flock of God.

After the ministry there was the normal chatter. The girl Kathy, and her parents, went almost straightaway. Sometimes Harry thought the fellowship after was the main feature of the day—everyone got back together again and there was a flow of common talk.

He often went visiting around early in the week. He enjoyed that—going to where people lived. It seemed to help earth his thinking and feelings somehow. Most of these people were 'old established' people, and very traditional at that. It was a very secure dairying area. He was amazed, when at one of the Church anniversaries, he invited several people to share their experiences of life over a period of time, an elderly man shared something of what it had meant for him to live in the area. He spoke for sometime. It was good stuff. He was very entertaining as well as informative. Sheepmen are unpredictable. It's surprising to find those who think they have nothing to say, and then, when they get started, don't stop. Perhaps he should be called predictable—for once he got started he thought it was more like a yarn over the boundary fence. After about three finals, Harry took the risk of another ten minutes, and asked if they had ever had a drought—a year when the season had failed them. 'No,' Roger had said. He could not remember a year when they had not cut hay, meaning that there was always reliable rainfall, ensuring feed all year round for a reliable dairying and sheep industry. Harry was surprised. He had come from a place where over a five-year period, there could be one good year, and then two drought years. Here was a secure area and a very mild climate. Harry thought it had an effect on the people. They were people of a more gentle nature

than some, reflecting something of the character of the area they lived in.

Harry began to visit Kathy, the girl who had stayed in for all the service. He had got to know the whole family, but it was Kathy whom he was to spend time with. He had noticed her listening intently to his messages. Some of the others had as well, but Kathy in particular—you could tell who was listening. It always amused Harry that some people, especially some farming people, would drop off to sleep immediately they sat down for the message. Harry knew country people, loved them, was one of them, and longed to share the good things of faith with them. He knew people who come off the land usually don't work to a clock. They work to the job and the daylight. So, when they stop work, it's either meal time or sleep time. Come Church time, the body and mind begin to relax—relax means sleep and sleep means you don't get disturbed for a while. Harry knew it took an exceptionally good message or a lot of tricks to keep an old farmer from wandering off into sleep. It's almost part of his culture. He'd seen them, in those little churches, away out in the sticks by an old Sugar Gum or similar setting, at a two-thirty service on a warm Sunday afternoon. Hopeless—just hopeless. The Preacher might as well put it down to practice. He had to go through it all though, for if he didn't, the people would feel cheated. One old man called it Sabbath rest. Harry had not dismissed his observation as totally irrelevant. He had thought about the Sabbath rest a lot and knew there was to be Sabbath rest, and there was to be Worship—he just wished they wouldn't combine the two! There had been a bit of an on-going joke over it all. He thought

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there was something about the day of rest, the Sabbath, that people who lived so closely to the soil would get straight. They were a good bunch of people and Harry really did love them, sleepers and all—or were they resting? Harry was thankful the old Church pew was retained! He had sometimes been fearful that someone would suggest a more comfortable seating style.

Most times Harry had visited Kathy, she was indoors. They got to know each other quite quickly, really. She was a delightful young lady. Harry could not help but notice how well she listened and entered into conversation. She did not give the normal eleven-year-old girlish nothingness answers. Now there was absolutely nothing wrong with an eleven-year-old giving an answer—as an eleven-year-old. That was right, and to do other would be wrong, but this was not what got Harry. She had a special, simple but delightful maturity about her. He had not expected this in one so young. No doubt Harry knew she was a bit of a kid. She could play up as good as any but she was different—special—with a warmth and strength of character.

This day she was sitting in the sun. She had been through a rough bit, and she was aware of the nature of her condition. Harry had spent time with her parents, too. A good couple, warm, real, worried and frank. They cared for their kids, bore the burden for the family, and gave Kathy all the comfort and support that any parents could give. Harry felt for them and became very aware of their devotion to her. These were difficult days for them. They wondered if she knew she was dying. Harry sensed Kathy knew more than they knew—and told them so.

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This day, at an appropriate time, he said, 'Kathy, you know you are dying, don't you?'

The answer was immediate and strong. 'Yes—but I'm not sure Mum and Dad want to know I know.'

It was this that brought tears to Harry's eyes and a great lump in his throat. Not because Kathy had known, but because of the strength and the confidence with which she had spoken. He had been with a number of people in their dying moments—but never before with a person who had all their faculties alert and functioning as Kathy did. As they chatted he was aware of the gift of faith she had. She did not have to tell him she was a believer, it was as clear as it could be even without words. There was no question that she was being prepared in life and matured in faith. Harry was always delighted when he saw true faith; it was life—but veiled. It was there, you would know, but you just had to be satisfied with that. He thought of the honour we have—to already have this window of faith. What grace to have life shining through the darkness! It could never be any different other than to have the veil taken away and so see it. They stopped and were quiet for a while.

She looked up at Harry and said, 'Harry, I am afraid to die.' He could understand that—and told her so. A young girl—faced with so much. Even if not from fear, what did one expect? There were a lot of unknowns about dying from our side of things. But he assured her of the faith she already had. 'You are in life now—nothing can change that.' She had been at the services as he had preached. He had shown them the Cross, and the promises of God had been declared. He had listened to this dear one, and as she talked her eyes sparkled at the thought of sins being cleansed as white as snow, and

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there being no condemnation to those whom God the Father had placed in life in His Son. Her sins were made as white as snow.

'My sins!' she had said.

Harry thought about the present situation. Here was a young girl, dying of cancer. It was felt by the medical profession that she only had a matter of weeks to live. Just up the road was an older man, Len, who was also diagnosed as having cancer. The group that met at his house for Bible study had prayed for him. He was commended at his last checkup and told he had made a remarkable turn around. This was unexplainable by the doctors—all they could do was encourage him to continue doing what he was doing. So he did—he prayed with a thankful heart and worshipped God. There was no medical reason why he should be recovering. He made a strong gentle witness to them. He'd had a good life and was in retirement, still with the prospect though, of filling out his three score years and ten.

Harry looked at Kathy, a little unsure of how to put what he needed to say. 'I don't know if you will understand what I am about to say—but I envy you in some ways.'

She asked why. 'Because you are going to get to Glory before me.' He went on to tell her that we all will go through in our own way what she was facing right at this time.

'Kathy, you are facing an experience that I haven't come to yet. I can share with you what I know from the Scriptures, but I have not been through it. But since we are alive to God now, how could going through a dying experience change that? It more than likely will be a bumpy trip through, but one thing we can be absolutely

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sure of—death cannot cover us. We died with Him, and we are raised with Him. As we go through the dying process—as we call it—we will always stay in life. How could any experience change that? If a person is in life—cleansed from every sin when they go through the veil—how could it change that?’

She looked relieved and then said, ‘I’m not afraid to die any more.’

Harry wondered how to communicate with an eleven- or twelve-year-old. To answer his own question—he thought she probably could understand as much as he did, and possibly much more. Life in Christ—now. She seemed to hold the understanding of that very clearly. Then something that a Christian friend had told him once, came back at that moment. It related to the actual experience of going through what we call death. ‘Those watching will see your going out of this life—you will see yourself coming into life.’ She thought that was just a great picture to understand and dwelt on it for some time.

Kathy asked, ‘I can’t understand why this pain.’ Now he had been so used to hearing the old dossiers on God. It went to the tune of—‘Why does God . . . ?’ She was not questioning God’s right to do what He willed, she was more inquiring how pain and suffering related to her preparation time.

‘Well,’ said Harry, ‘God loves you, and because He has your destiny planned, and He is calling you to himself at this time that we think is early, He does a special preparing work for you, so you will not be short on when it comes to the important things.’ It reminded him of a quote, ‘Suffering is the way of glory, and not its cost’. Harry had thought how the word ‘glory’ was

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used. It sometimes meant 'heavy'. If we were being prepared for a heavy weight of glory, here was an answer.

Harry was no Mr 'Fix it', and was aware that a formula, rather than sharing the Gospel, would short-cut the true work of God. He knew the Gospel carried its own work of preparation. She had stayed in to hear Harry's sermons and it was soon very evident she had understanding—more than he thought he had actually brought. He thought about these things as they shared. He was amazed at how the Spirit of Truth takes what is spoken and breaks through the intellect and communicates to the depths a whole body of truth that as yet seemed to have been unvoiced.

It wasn't long before Kathy went to be with the Lord. Those who knew her witnessed a brave and faithful young lady departing this life and entering the presence of the God of Glory. It was a great day. Harry declared these things and the large crowd worshipped and wondered.

The funeral was the biggest the small town had seen. The church was no match for the crowds of friends and relatives who came in honour of Kathy and the God of Glory, so the hall was used as the worship centre. Still the crowd spilled over into the surrounding yard. It was a day for good memories of Kathy, and for honour and praise for the Father who plans for His Family, calls His loved ones, and prepares them for a greater weight of glory.

‘I’ve Got One, Dad’

They had travelled too far that day. It had been hot and they were all tired. They had stopped several times during the day, but with all the heat of the summer days the children were restless. Rob was past caring really. He should have stopped before when there was still time to find a camp spot. Often they would just stop at a good site when they came across one. This day was different. There had been a few good sites but for some reason they didn’t take them.

Eventually they got to the point where a caravan park looked like the only option. Rob was furious. All these natural places and we have to go to a caravan park! It just wasn’t his style. They had travelled a lot really—a lot for a family of seven anyway. They didn’t usually set out as travellers but as they had worked in different areas there were opportunities to visit the local spots. As a family they had taken holidays, sometimes camping awhile as Rob was going to, or coming from, a conference. They had taken the opportunities as they arose and had got to see the bigger part of Queensland, as well as New South Wales, that way.

They came to a turn to the left. It was in the middle of a fair-sized town. The idea was to get to a caravan park here and perhaps stay a day or so. No luck at all—not a single site vacant. So, with no other alternatives,

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Rob swung left at the next intersection in search of a camp site.

'What did that sign say?' No one could read it—it was in the shade, besides, they were all tired and wanting tea and a sleep and not even in that order. It didn't matter, they should not have tried to go so far. Carol was furious—he had done it again. She told him off. Rob explained to her again how he knew he should have stopped before but he hadn't, so that was that. He had gone too far. There was a sign. 'Ovens Valley', it read. Carol looked up the map.

'This goes on for ever,' she complained. It actually went down past Bright. If they could not get a park at the last town, they wouldn't get one down there. She was good at picking things like that. Carol had a good sense of direction and knew the places to avoid—places like heavy tourist areas. They were headed right for one, but at that time mostly unaware of it. The road seemed to go on for eternity.

The children were young at that stage, the eldest was thirteen and the youngest was three. They were good seasoned travellers even then, but this was one trip when they'd had enough. They were shifting States for work reasons. Packing and all the emotions of leaving a place after three and a half years had taken its toll. Then to top-it-all-off, just as they were finishing loading the furniture van and getting the last of their personal things in the caravan, a dust storm hit the town.

It was January—a hot day. Everything was covered in fine, thick bull dust. The red powdery stuff filtered into everything. All they could do was to finish up as quickly as possible, get into the vehicle and drive, hoping they would eventually get free of it. They drove

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slowly for the first twenty kilometres or so and then it cleared.

Rob was used to long driving trips. He actually liked driving—engines and things that make a noise fascinated him—but this day had been too long. They just seemed to drive on and on, almost as if the driver had no power to tell his foot to go for the brake. Well, eventually they had to slow right down to turn to the right and cross a bridge.

‘This is it. I’m not going past here,’ he said.

There was a road again to the right just over the bridge. He swung the car and van around and took it. They followed back along the other side of the river and after a little way came to a caravan park. Rob wandered over towards the office.

‘Do you want it?’ came a loud voice. Rob wasn’t even aware that the man was talking to him. ‘Do you want it?’ came again.

Rob focused his eyes, and then his thought. ‘Are you talking to me?’ Rob couldn’t quite establish what was going on. There were about seven people in a sort of line before him—and the park man was serving him! Well, Rob was of the mind to find out how much it would cost. He was also unaccustomed to parks and fees, not knowing what he would get for his money. He hesitated and then asked about facilities and the general tenor of the place.

The park man said, ‘You wouldn’t start that would you—when there is one site in the whole of this Valley being offered you due to a cancellation. One site, and you want to barter! There are hundreds looking for it. Yes, or no? A man just cancelled out a permanent annual booking—I just put the phone down this second.’

'I've Got One Dad'

Rob said, 'I suppose I'll take it—but just for tonight,' not yet aware of the magnificent offer, thinking he may find something better in the morning. (How long does it take to recognise a provision from the One who gives good gifts?)

They followed the man down through the park to their lot—No 8. It was a powered site by a large shaded area almost on the banks of the Ovens River. They had been directed right into one of the choicest van sites in Victoria but did not appreciate it until the morning. They finished up staying two whole weeks and were wonderfully refreshed.

It was one of the most memorable times they had spent together. Rob was between jobs—and they had come to an unusually beautiful part of Australia, and were thankful and relaxed. The boys were in their element with crystal clear water in the river close by, stones, sand, and free from hassles. The others just seemed content to walk, talk and enjoy the surroundings. It was in this climate that Steve caught the desire to fish. He was a keen lad growing up in a world with many opportunities. He learned most things fast. It was he who took the opportunity to ride a motorbike when his father was trying to teach his more conservative older brother to learn to ride. He was so sure he could ride a Honda 75cc automatic clutched, fold up model—right off—with no preparation whatsoever. He was allowed to try. Now, those familiar with motorbikes would know what a 'pre-pre-learner' with total confidence could accomplish—having never used a hand twist grip throttle before in his life! The scene was the 'high fenced in, ant-bed covered' tennis court at the bottom of the yard. The learner was ready; his father

keen for his five-year-old to learn a lesson hoping it may save him from breaking his little neck at some stage in his exciting life. Well, he mounted, and in a split second that seemed to be for ever, went too hard 'on' with the power. He was thrown back as the bike sped away, and so pulled on more power. Now the high fence down at the far end of the court was in for one-hell-of-a-jarring. It found all the impact of a Honda 75cc's front wheel firmly implanted right into it more than a strain. It fared well though, and served the young contender admirably. Rob reckoned it worthwhile. No major damage to the bike. It only suffered from dust and a good shake up. 'The boy?'—do I hear you say—'What about the boy?' Oh, he was very damaged. Not from the outside mind you, but from the inside—especially around the pride area. He healed quickly and was content to ride on the pillion seat behind his older brother while he went through his learning period. He later learned to ride and became quite good.

While at the river this same spirited boy had been watching the man from next door with great interest. He would leave with a fishing rod about the same time morning and night, be away ten or fifteen minutes, then return with a bag obviously containing something. The rod would be placed carefully at the front of the van and he would disappear inside. Curiosity got the better of the boy—he got closer and closer each time this happened. Then unbeknown to the parents, early one morning a spirited young angler took to the path down through the park. Nothing was known until—at some abnormally early hour there was this phenomenal yelling coming from down by the river.

'I've got one, Dad, I've got one, Dad, come and see,

'I've Got One Dad'

I've got a fish.' He had too, and it was a good sized redfin. From this time on, he took a keen interest in men with rods and fishing bags, especially if they looked like they may have fish in them. As for the quietness and tranquillity of camp sites, that's another matter.

The Reason for the Corrugation

It has never been solved
as to why there should be
So much corrugation on our roads—
this surface wrinkle we see.

There have been suggestions
they're from tyres rumbling along,
Or from air swirling around
and affecting the ground.

But it is obvious to me
that it's all a bluff,
For it's to do with the blokes
ordering the length of the stuff.

For wherever you go,
it's a common complaint,
There is corrugation galore
all over the State.

It's on every road
where the council has been.
Sometimes it's even about
on the streets that are clean.

The Reason for the Corrugation

It's especially bad
on the holiday tracks,
From Eyre Peninsula in the South,
to the Kimberley's outback.

But I tell you the truth,
for the problem is certain,
It has to do with ordering—
all the dirt they put in.

Far too much length
is ordered you see,
And they put it all in
from—generosity.

The crinkles are there
because it won't fit with ease,
So it's not from the tyres
or air currents or breeze.

And the trouble is aggravated
by the metric conversion,
No one knows how much is needed
in all their confusion.

So the length of the order
is the trouble we find,
And no one will waste what's over
and leave it behind.

Now it's all jammed in,
and there is not any doubt
That over-order on length
is why the wrinkles pop out.

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We can't get rid of them,
for they are there from the start,
And not as a result of wheels,
swirling winds or the cart.

So, to solve the problem,
we must re-order the stuff
Using imperial measurement
and not the metric bluff.

The roads must be filled
to lengths nice and neat,
Like filling a bucket
until it's complete.

If we insist on over-length,
there will always be
Ripples on the top
and corrugations we'll see.

A Man with the Word

Ron was sure he had blown every possible area of his life. He had been ravaged time and again by his conscience. His life was in a shambles. He was recovering from an alcoholic problem, his marriage relations had been unworkable, his family had left him, and now his business was headed for financial ruin.

He had already been in hospital on several occasions with severe depression and other ailments. The last time was for a week, and then he had been released as a case that was ‘outside the realms of medical help’.

If only he could get rid of the fear of failure and that dreadful aggravation to his mind. As well as that a voice kept coming to him telling him to go and see the man with the Word.

Ron owned a hotel in the town. It was one of seven—his was the one where the local business people came to drink. The other hotels were where travellers, shearers, truckies and cattlemen from around the area drank. Each drank in their own place. It was a town with a big thirst and many desires and appetites raged. Ron had the cream of the patrons of the town.

The voice kept at him—quietly at first, and then after no response, became louder. He thought it would go away if he ignored it, but it got more insistent.

He was a gentle person—tall and just starting to grey.

Wild Men, Bread and Pretty Stone

He had gone to the inland town to fulfil a dream. He had always wanted to own his own hotel. He had achieved that, but in the process had lost virtually everything else he had, including his health.

He thought going over the road to see the man with the Word a silly thing to do. How could that help? It was what he did though. About one-thirty he excused himself from his employees and crossed the road, walking slowly, then paused for a moment, and then went on again until he arrived outside the door where he had been directed to find the man with the Word.

Many others had come to the same door. Some had not been as casual as Ron. They were on the run from the law. These always wanted to get off the street as quickly as possible to lessen the risk of being seen.

Ron was at the door. He gave a gentle knock, still not sure if he wanted to be heard, or if with the same slow, quiet walk he would turn around and go back to his own place. Should he try harder to suppress the voice, treating it as his imagination?

A man came to the door and greeted him. Something was said about speaking with each other at the hospital. The two men decided they recognised each other. Ron then asked if the man could help him. He said he would try.

Ron started with his predicament over voices. The man invited him into his house—a place to sit as they talked. They sat in the man's study and Ron began again with the voice and how he had been directed here to him.

The man confessed he felt at a loss to be of much help. Ron found it really hard to put a handle on the problem. The only thing clear to him was that he had to

A Man With The Word

see the man with the Word who lived across the road.

The basic introductions were over and they quickly came to a conclusion. There seemed no immediate solution to Ron's dilemma except to take the situation as it was.

The man with the Word told Ron that he had no Word of himself. He offered to pray on his behalf concerning the Word, assuring him it could take a long time for him to get to normal. Ron agreed, for he seemed to be in a mess and had no other options.

So, the man with the Word prayed to the Lord of the Word on his behalf, requesting for him to be renewed as a man in the truth of his being.

After that he felt he should read some of the Word to him. Ron agreed and sat quietly the whole time. Here was the man with the Word reading, at random, Words out of The Word Book.

Ron was very aware of something happening to him.

After the readings of the Word, he said, 'That is as clear as I have been able to think in a long time.' The man assured him that he had the signs of God's Word present with him. The man who read the Word suggested Ron go home to his hotel and not expect 'a miracle' but seek the quiet working of God in his life.

Ron did just that. He went back across the road with the Word in his heart, back to where he had been tormented. To his utter amazement, he walked through the whole building with the true presence of a man with the Word.

The voice was no more, for he was now in good company. No voice nagged at him to go to see the man with the Word, but a quiet assurance had come.

After about three hours, Ron could not keep it to

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himself. He found the barman and said these words to him, 'I am free, I am free. The man with the Word has prayed for me and read the Word to me and I am free.' He literally ran all around the hotel jumping and shouting with joy.

Soon after that, he ran across to the man with the Word. The man saw him coming and his heart sank. He thought surely he would not be running across the road unless there were a problem. Now he was a busy man getting messages from the Word ready and trying to understand the books with all their words.

When Ron arrived, he told him how he was with the Word. He'd walked all through the place and had not lost the feeling. Did that mean no more coming? Could he manage by himself? No. He understood he needed the Word to live, and to be with the Word all the time now.

As the weeks passed, Ron became a regular attender at the Sunday Worship times, and came to the Word groups. He also gave a good witness to the Word in the bar room. He did not hold back His Word. All the locals knew what had happened to him. He said he heard the Word of God read to him, and it had remained to set him free.

They said he had got religion. He said he was with the Word.

Soon, Ron thought he had been a hotel manager long enough, and that it wasn't the place for a man with the Word. Besides, he had done what he had set out to do. So he thought he would sell up.

The man with the Word was dismayed. His advice was for him to stay on a while yet—and not to rush, but to wait for the clear leading of the Word's Spirit. For a

A Man With The Word

man of the Word is led by the Spirit of the Word.

He had one of the best places in the town to hear the Word. The locals drank there at his place and so he should not hurry off.

The man of the Word decided to make a visit to Ron's Bank Manager. He was not at all sure what he might say, but he wanted to see if there was any real reason why Ron should sell up his hotel.

He got halfway through the Manager's door when this word greeted him: 'What technique have you got?' How could you give answer to that? Well, he asked what the manager knew about the Word. A reasonably clear answer came with silence: no knowledge of the Word.

Now, Ron had changed so much since he was with the Word that he had caught the notice of the Bank Manager too. As a man, he had improved so much that his business finances were suffering from the same problem. In the few months since he heard the Word, the business was heading for the top bracket of profitable ventures in town.

Ron's hotel was sought after by others, not because of the Word, but because of the word of money. Money talks, and it got around that business was good in Ron's place. Money is the root of every kind of evil.

He had no need to shift out, but as a man of the Word, he thought it right to do so. It was a good problem to have.

But what of the Word and the work of the Word to the local ears? People would come, people would go, and get only words. It was a good place to be with the Word. Moving would keep the man of the Word from where the word of man was. Revival could take a long

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time, unless—men with the Word were local, and the men with no word become the men with the Word locally.

So the man of the Word said to the Bank Manager, ‘Do you know that at whatever depth a man is entangled in his hearing, The Man of The Word goes to that depth, and deals with his problem of deafness, setting him free to hear Him?’

Now Ron had been a man of a false word, and had been worse off than a man of no word. He had never been an alcoholic—but had heard a word to that effect. He had never heard the Word of marriage, nor had he been free from the love of money which is the root of every kind of evil. Then, as the man with the Word spoke to him the Word of The Man, he knew he was a man, and not an alcoholic. He had caught onto the dependence of alcohol—as a false word.

He was free now as a man to live by the Word of the True Man. Marriage was an idea until the Word came, money, too, was stripped of its evil.

When the Word came, Ron was free to sell his hotel.

Sad for the man of the Word, but he too had to see the Word of The Man was for Ron, for he was now a new man with the Word.

A Powerful Word

It takes the Word of God proclaimed
To reach the hearing of a man,
And cause him to see with ease
The Cross of Christ in saving grace.

No other mode will bring the truth
Of God into a sinner's world,
And break guilt-ridden minds
Of the bondage—of all fallen kinds.

This Word proclaimed is powerful,
And speaks with truth the Life,
Takes away all the sin
And calls, effecting new life.

It is the Father speaking
By His Beloved Son,
Giving new birth to the hearers,
Eternity with Him begun.

This Word of God is calling
To the fallen human race,
In mercy and in power,
To stand as sons in place.

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His purpose is only known
To the hearing clan
Who listen and obey
The voice of this True Man.

To the deaf and the rebellious
This Word is judgement given,
But to those who receive it now
Judgement is the way to heaven.

‘God of Grace and Mercy,
You are our hope and life,
Together with You in Glory
Is hope’s faith above all strife.’

A Cloud of Mystery

Unexplainable phenomena in Australia have mystified people and communities for generations. Some of the wonders I have come across are no exceptions. Take, for instance, the night lights seen so frequently in certain areas of Australia. Add to this the small fish that appear on the ground after a heavy downpour of rain. We have some wonders that are hard to believe. I had heard so many reports about these mysterious events that I knew that there was some truth to them.

We do find cultural and climatic differences strange. The fish seemed to come from the sky, but I could never verify it. They appeared three times in two years. After a very heavy downpour of rain, I saw a boy walking along the street from our house with a glass jar. He was obviously getting something live out of the water in the drain. I ambled up to him and inquired what he was catching, thinking it was tadpoles or something of that variety. In a matter-of-fact way he answered, 'Fish.' I had heard about it from old residents but now my eyes saw it. There were live fish, two to three inches long on the ground.

The 'night light' was unexplainable like that, too. Reports differed so much.

It was reported to have followed and terrorised the locals, as well as the tourists. The yarns came readily

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enough, particularly around camp fires at night or similar suitable surroundings. The Min Min hotel was responsible for a large number of stories. It used to be between Winton and Boulia where Cobb & Co had a horse-changing yard and a cemetery. I noticed that the numbers who had witnessed the sightings increased as I gave favourable appreciation to their first stories. I had declared myself not to be totally unbelieving. This light phenomenon is the local tourist attraction of a town in Western Queensland and it is guarded with great zeal. Many stories are told of the light's antics and the hearer is left to do what he will with the reports. I can remember the day when an official of the town received a letter from a community leader in an interstate town, wanting to lay claim to the same phenomena. The answer was 'No,' because it belonged to them. It was the one community and tourist attraction left that held together the community. Drought, economic decline, distance and a general rural decline had taken their toll.

There have been many attempts to identify these phenomena, yet there is no actual testable way to come to any conclusion. That's the way it is with mysteries.

There have been reports of policemen shooting at it, stockmen abandoning camp and a whole range of variations to assure you, the hearer, that they were valid sightings, often different in nature and location. There was supposed to be one sighting by the door of the Middleton hotel. That could have been a bit of a drain on the local resources—leaving a lot of thirsty patrons!

Now, I was fairly sure there was at least some fire behind the smoke—at least some people seeing something. Exactly what, I couldn't tell. Seeing 'it' did not affect me much one way or the other. However, I was

A Cloud of Mystery

interested in the mind-set of this community, its faith and how one came to a sensible use of what it had and saw. It would be disastrous to base too much emphasis on a mystery and miss the heart and truth of community.

Now we did experience the 'night light' one evening as we were going to a Christmas break-up party at a small country school. It is still a mystery, and it was an enjoyable one. By the way, it was on the way out to a Christmas party and not on the way home, in case you had any mischievous thoughts!

I thought it to be a vehicle with no tail lights in front of us, going in the same direction, when I first spotted the 'light'. Then it moved about very much like a day mirage, only at night. It lifted up, moved to the left of us and then after several minutes disappeared just like a mirage. We enjoyed seeing the 'night light'. This one was named the 'Min Min Light' and it has been claimed by Boulia as its town attraction.

Now, I'd had it in my heart to go to the community of the 'light' for a weekend teaching ministry. I also had a desire to take them a song relevant to their environment. When I saw the light, I knew what I was to do. The words of the song came first and then the tune. It was a tune I had never heard to my knowledge, but I discovered they all knew it. It was a tune to an old cowboy song.

Remember, 'I was interested in the mind-set of this community, its faith and how one came to a sensible use of what it had and saw. It would be disastrous to base too much emphasis on a mystery and miss the heart and truth of community'.

The Boulia Song

Folks say 'God is gone you know,'
others can't be sure.
I tell you He's alive today
and He's Lord for evermore.

Chorus:

*The Min Min light it may be great,
a mystery it's for sure.
The Love of God, it needs no light,
it's around us more and more.*

Take a look and see my friend,
your guilt and fears He bore
Upon the Cross so long ago,
He loves you more and more.

Though the Burke can get so low,
God's love is always here.
The Holy Spirit brings to us
His love and gifts so dear.

There are mums and dads and children, too,
God knows them all by sight.
The Book of Life has room for them
if they'll claim God's love tonight.

The Boulin Song

‘Take the gift of life,’ He says,
‘and you’ll love Me too.’
All along the river bank,
you’ll be singing this song, too.

Blue-Tongues Are Out Again

The blue-tongue is a large stout-bodied Australian lizard of the skink family. There are some living in the storm water drains and in the rocks around our garden. They are relatively harmless and spend time lying in the sun for several hours of the day. They were severely restricted in the last four years due to a small, very quick and knowing toy dog called Mister T.

Mister T was a small Miniature Pinscher who belonged to our daughter. He had more brains than anyone thought could fit into one little head.

The breed has been described this way:

King of the Toy Dogs

General appearance: well balanced, sturdy, compact, elegant, short coupled, smooth-coated toy dog. Naturally well groomed, proud, vigorous and alert.

Characteristics: Precise hackney gait, fearless animation, complete self-possession and spirited presence.

Temperament: Fearless and alert.

They were recognised as a specific breed in Germany in the early nineteenth century where they were known as the Reh Pinscher because of their resemblance to the Reh Deer found in the forests of Germany.

Blue Tongues Are Out Again

He was a 'low maintenance' dog, and that suited us! He also reminded us of a deer. The antics he performed when running through long grass had the action of a deer, and the ways he could look at you were intriguing.

He soon let us see his alertness. From inside the house, and without being able to see the garden, he could tell when the blue-tongue lizards were out and about. He loved the challenge of catching them, and the closer they were to their hiding place, the more he liked it. It obviously annoyed him, knowing there were lizards out there when he was stuck inside. He would pester someone until he was let out for the chase. He had more energy than he could contain, and once out of the door, he would be straight to the end of the piping to prevent the lizard from making its getaway. Then it was for a catch he had perfected to a 'T'. Miniature Pinschers were bred as ratters, and the blue-tongue was as good a challenge as one small dog could get around our home. As the warmer months came around each year, he was ready, and at the hint of a rustle in the shrubs he was off like a shot. Mister T, the shortened version of Mister Tiny, was on the edge of 'go' all the time when it came to some sport.

His name was actually shortened again to 'Mister'. With a name like that, we have had some amusing times. Take for example when he was outside with our daughter, and she called him at the same time as a stranger walked the street in the quiet of the evening. 'Mister, Mister, will you come here!' We've had our private jokes about desperate girls!

This year the blue-tongues are back for one sad reason—Mister T is no longer with us. We are not sure what happened, but he contracted something while he

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was on the farm, for which he couldn't be treated. He became lifeless and went right off his food. Our daughter wondered if he had eaten something too big for him to swallow, but the veterinarian couldn't seem to find anything. Poor Mister T had a very miserable last few weeks. He became so skinny and affected that he had to be 'put down'. Small dogs don't have much reserve when it comes to sickness.

He has left us all with many good memories. He was unlike a lot of toy dogs such as Chihuahuas, who can get possessive over a family and become a nuisance. Mister had the remarkable ability to worm his way into most peoples lives and get them interested in himself and his games. His favourite was running and catching a scrap of sheep skin. The original was a piece of tanned sheep skin that he acquired as a little pup. It was part of his bedding.

He was so small when our daughter first brought him home that he was easily held in her cupped hands. He was the runt of the litter and this made him even more fascinating and precious. The sheep skin was a sort of 'doggie's sookie'. Later, as he grew, the skin got smaller and smaller due to wear and tear, until it had to be replaced. This happened several times during his lifetime. In his game he would go and find the sheep skin, drop it at the feet of a selected player, and then sit until it was thrown. He could be commanded to stay sitting until given the order to retrieve the skin. It was a pleasure to play and he seemed to enjoy the waiting as much as retrieving. There were times when he would be told to reposition himself, for due to his keenness, he would creep ever so slowly towards the skin. When called back, he was quick to take his place lest he miss

Blue Tongues Are Out Again

the command to retrieve the skin. He was quick as a flash to get the skin and go through the motions of a kill. When sufficiently satisfied with the performance, he was on for another round.

His speed the blue-tongues could not match, and once caught he would show them no mercy. Their end was instant and fatal. The poor things did not stand a chance.

Now he is gone, the blue-tongues, too, have decided that he is not around. We see them sunning themselves far out from their havens, seemingly content to take little or no notice of anything.

We all miss Mister T and remember the company, the fun and the 'pestiness' of one smart, little, brown, toy dog.

Their Hearts Sank

It was the summer of 1979 that Andrew and the family decided to head to the coast of New South Wales. They were going to a friend's beach house to relax and to escape from some of the summer heat. They had not been to the Big River Country before and were excited at the prospects. They had heard reports of the beaches, fishing, drives and of a fresh water pool by the ocean.

The pool was just back from the breakers beyond the reach of the sea water. It was the result of a quarry gone wrong. Some years before a company doing excavation had stopped working it, removed their machinery, and over a short period of time the hole had filled with fresh water. When they returned, there it was, a waterhole approximately ninety feet deep. It soon became popular with the surfers. They could rinse off in a fresh water pool right by the breakers after finishing with the salt and sand of the ocean. One side of the pool had a steep cliff and the other, flat rocks, perfect for sun baking and generally relaxing.

Andrew and his family arrived and settled into the beach house. The owners were there as well. They were a lovely couple who had a business in the city, some miles away. They were Di and Jim Jordan who were more friends of Andrew's parents, but had invited Andrew, Bev and their children to share several weeks

Their Hearts Sank

with them. The weather had come in warm and stormy as can happen on the coast during the summer. Swimming was the order of the week and the fresh-water pool sounded ideal for that. The older children, Robin, David and Tony, were already reasonable swimmers but four-year-old Martin was still fully dependent on floaties—a helping aid for flotation that fits on a child's arms. He had never tried swimming without them and so had no experience in natural buoyancy. The children soon discovered the 'blue pool', as it was called, and the older three were in before Andrew and Bev realised. They arrived just in time to see Martin about to jump in.

He was halted in his tracks. 'It's ninety feet deep,' cried Andrew. 'You can't go in there until you can swim without those floaties.'

That was that—Martin promptly ripped the 'floaties' from his arms, climbed to a good vantage point, and before any one realised what was happening jumped right into the pool!

Andrew and Bev watched with parental dread. Their hearts sank with their son as he went under the water. Andrew ran to the edge of the pool, about to jump in for the rescue. Running through his mind were visions of an under-water search for one small half-drowned boy. To his amazement, Martin came to the surface giggling and splashing and as quickly as the first time he climbed out, ran around to the rocks, and did it again! He had no thought that he wouldn't be able to swim. Sinking was not in his intention. As far as Andrew could tell, he simply had no contemplation of anything other than swimming and sharing in all the fun with the others.

That day he learned how to swim, and within a few

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minutes he was with the others up on the highest rocks jumping in and having the time of his life. He enjoyed his new freedom.

As they walked back to the beach house, Andrew and Bev called into the store for drinks for them all. They chose the locally made soft drink called Crocodile Tears. It was blue in colour and was given this name from a tradition that the pool was filled in one night by a crying crocodile.

The Runaway Truck

The delivery truck came
to drop off some gear.
He parked by the office,
then jumped in the rear.

For our parcel he was looking
when the truck rolled back,
And it was soon on its way,
gathering speed down the track.

Headed straight for the big gum,
it became abundantly clear
That the driver couldn't stop it
for he was stuck in the rear.

When viewed from the shed,
his predicament was no mistake,
And like a flash Ian went running,
and jumped on the brake.

The get-away-truck
was captured with haste,
And after it'd been stopped,
out the shaken man—hopped.

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He appeared at the door
with a very white face,
Crushed parcel in hand,
his delivery to place.

And in colourful terms,
told how he'd been saved
From a certain crash,
through the quick action Ian gave.

Next day the same man came,
another delivery to make.
Being caught once by the truck,
no more chances he'd take.

So he parked sideways down by the gum,
and as he climbed in the back
He was heard to say, 'I've got you this time,
you can't take to the track!'

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It's a rare opportunity to accompany an opal buyer on one of his shopping sprees to the bush. Tom thought it an opportunity too good to miss. The weather was warming up and there were already signs of storm clouds in the late afternoon skies. The weather was not likely to break yet, but wary travellers could feel the build-up and knew it was a foolish venturer who took no regard of the signs of the sky when contemplating a trip into flood country. The last thing they thought they needed, was to get 'rained in' several hundred kilometres away from home.

The trip was to take two days, venturing into some of the most desolate country in Australia and doing trade with the most isolated men you could possibly meet. Ron made this trip a few times each year to purchase samples of opal for a local business he ran from his caravan park in town. Tom also suspected he liked to get out of town. He was an interesting man with a history of mining. He had been a stockman before that so a good knowledge of the bush he'd acquired in his thirty-odd years of living in the small towns about. He had a feel for the country and was a good bloke to travel with. He could read the country as a city dweller might read the

people, the houses and the streets of a large city, or like a shopper, familiar with a large Sydney department store like Centre-point, could immediately recognise which level they were on. Ron had a love for the bush. His face would light up as he began to talk of the things he had done and seen. He seemed to get an extra kick when he had checked the supplies for the trip, knowing it meant getting back to the open spaces again. The atmosphere was one of excitement as they checked the vehicle in preparation—it showed his delight and the respect he had for the outback. It was a big country, and it commanded respect. Many had come to grief by taking it all too casually. Tom sensed Ron had learned his lessons well, and knew how to survive without chances. It was the person who took chances in this country who soon came to grief. Just one wrong turn or lack of water could be fatal for a traveller. It was surprising how much fuel you could use getting back—having gone a few hours in the wrong direction.

They had extra fuel on board as well, although they shouldn't need it. The only reason would be if the weather came in, and they had to use four-wheel-drive extensively. More than likely it would be someone else who would get the benefit of their extra fuel. Tom thought of all the times he had met people stranded out along a desolate stretch of road, not having enough fuel to make it into town. He had left his spare jerry cans on a number of occasions with very thankful travellers. They had used them, and then returned the cans, refuelled, to his shed in town. When he had returned some days later—there they would be.

In spite of sinfulness, the dishonouring of mankind and the loss of dignity, streaks of respect turned up—

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glimpses of mankind in the image of God—showing God was not lost from all consciousness. So in spite of the decline in morality we still seem to be aware at least of the image of God, and that image in mankind. It seems that each generation—whilst inheriting the benefits of the sciences and other great forward movements of progress—has to start at the beginning with what we usually call morality. Tom thought there was more to it than that, but on the surface that's how it seemed. He knew the arbitrary nature that some supposed God to have was very unsatisfactory.

In the past the rainbow was sign to Noah of the covenant nature of the Creator—showing Himself to be other than capricious in nature. This rainbow sign from God meant stability of seasons, and sanity of mind, for the generations to come. Tom and Ron had shared these things before. Ron seemed reluctant to hear the point, but Tom thought a good deal about what it meant. He valued that there was to be no more total judgement by flooding. That was what the flood in Noah's day was—judgement by God. God upset the order of the seasons, bringing a destruction upon mankind—except for Noah and his sons. To them he brought judgement in a saving act, keeping them through the ark, and renewing the promise to maintain creation and the rhythm of the seasons. The next time it rained they were to know it was not another flood as judgement, nor salvation through a natural phenomenon. There is great security under the rule of a God who makes covenant—who works by His own plan to redeem.

Tom was amazed we took so little time to follow these things up; the Cross in history being security for all who would be graced—a judgement that a flood or

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any natural disaster could never ever outdo in effect.

Tom and Ron were ready to head down into flood country. Tom took great comfort in these things. Oh, he didn't think for a moment that the covenant God made with Noah meant they wouldn't get 'rained in' or that they were above the possibility of getting drowned. He did, however, have great assurance that God was not capricious, changeable or freakish in nature. He was always dependable according to His steadfast love, securing all the nations who repent and come under His rule.

The men were soon off down through the town, across the Western River system and out onto the narrow track through the black soil country. It was very early in the morning and it seemed to take a few miles for their things to settle into a niche. They had a swag, a stretcher, some light bedding, a food box, water, fuel and various boxes of this and that. They had meat and bread—a lot of bread. The extra, they would give to the miners, who ate more 'roo' meat than was good for them. Tom had seen a number of them in town—sick in hospital. They had not had a good enough diet—or not been careful to eat only young kangaroos. It was the young ones who were usually free from disease—disease like worms. Ron usually took heaps of bread down because he knew how they lived. 'A rough lot, who don't eat proper food,' he'd said. 'Wild men, most of them.' Tom gathered that was the understatement of the year. There came a time when Ron had refused to go down there alone. It was too dangerous. 'There are too many men out there who don't want to be found,' Ron had told him. Tom knew he was on board for much more than companionship or for just a sightseeing trip.

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They passed a small flock of brolgas—large grey birds that migrated to the coast each wet season for breeding. These were among the last about the area, the rest had already gone north. The men watched the sky. It was already showing signs of storm clouds, but both men felt confident it would not rain for a few days yet. As they went, Ron pointed out some of the local spots. There were opal mines behind hills, waterholes for fishing and other points of interest the general traveller was totally unaware of. Earlier they had gone past the monument that marked the beginnings of the Labour Party and the first official shearer's strike, then the turn-off to Old Cork Station. It was a station on the Diamantina River, a station Tom had visited before. He had gone down to see the dinosaur footprints. Ron had been instrumental in opening these up for public viewing. He had followed up the directions of another miner and had found them. That was back when he was a full-time opal miner. Eventually, Dr Mary Wade from Brisbane Museum had come out, and with the Army's help, uncovered a large area of these foot prints—taken a copy by way of a mould—and then placed the mould in the Brisbane museum. Quite a sight they make—foot-prints of an animal about eighteen feet tall! Tom had been there several times and wondered at the large foot prints, along with dozens of smaller ones. They were originally in a low lying area, but time had eroded the surrounding ground until they were left up on the base of a series of small hills. It's in fascinating country—running along what is known as the 'jump-up' area.

It took the biggest part of the day to reach their destination. They wanted to go to the furthestmost point, and then work back, getting back on the home-side of

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the biggest river to camp the night. The next day would be an easy day, hopefully arriving home again before the afternoon build-up of weather—avoiding the heat and the possibility of being caught in a storm.

It seemed strange to actually find men at work with machinery in this area. Ron knew where to find the miners. They were not far from their camp, working on an open-cut style of mine. As soon as the vehicle stopped, the two miners appeared by the camp, as if to denote ownership. Rougher looking men you could scarcely find. Both looked like something out of the pit—untidy, unclothed and battered. They both had facial bruising, and fresh wounds on their bodies. One looked like he had been knifed.

This mine belonged to them—to them who wore nothing but a pair of underpants! Tom felt a strange atmosphere surrounded the place. Ron assured him these two were probably OK, but warned him to watch some of the other camps.

The method of mining was primitive. The men operated with an old D4 Caterpillar dozer, and a small miner's pick. One miner drove the dozer, and carefully dozed a section, cutting about an inch to three inches of soil at a time. The other miner walked around, inspecting what had been turned up, picking it over for signs of colour, looking for it to make up to good opal. He had nothing on his feet and wore no hat or shirt. The ground was so hot from the sun, that it was too hot for even the toughest average person to stand on! Tom was amazed at these guys. Their camp was their old vehicle and a stack of boxes, a few fuel drums and an old tent.

They soon recognised Ron and acknowledged Tom's presence—they seemed wary of Tom being there at

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first. Ron assured them Tom was OK. Tom let Ron get on with his business, a business that was conducted on a barter style. The men sat on the hot ground in a rough circle, bringing out their parcels of coloured stone, one at a time. They had them hidden in various places. They had one lot that they had found the day before. Very pretty stones, consisting of beautiful deep blue and green boulder opal with a good flash of red—their value was three and a half thousand dollars a stone—as is. Ron admired the gems, shuffled his boots in the dirt, scratched his head, and then repeated himself again. ‘Gee, that’s a good stone all right. Come and have a look at this, Tom.’ He let the light shine at an angle getting maximum effect. Ron was a miner at heart, and Tom could see the delight it brought to him, along with the envy—an envy he was unable to hide at the sight of these stones. Tom recognised the glory the miners shared in—a glory in their find. Miners rarely bring out their good stones, but being with Ron was a special occasion. He was as close a friend as these men probably had, as well as a fellow digger of the past—so Tom got to see these men in their moment of glory. He was amazed at how the sight of colour could get so deeply and immediately into a man, and how it revived in them a desire to go into the most arid places in pursuit of more of ‘that colour’. It was as a drug to the men. The sight of colour seemed to take them from the heat of the day and transform them to men of fame and ambition in no time at all.

The tempo of the discussion quickened, the memory seemed stimulated, bringing forth tales of past finds, instantly clouding all the memory of failures, debts and hard times. Miners had been in these areas for at least a

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hundred years—off and on. What spurs a man, and then drives him to pursue such things?

Just a few minutes walk to the east were the remains of a Chinese campsite. Around the turn of the century it is said that up to eight hundred Chinamen lived here and worked the area over for opal. All that remained now to show for it was a heap of old, rusty food tins and other rubbish, a small waterhole, and a few graves with wrought iron fences around them. Men had come and some had got away—many died. A few, perhaps, struck it rich. What a gamble, what a waste. All that for a bit of colour! Tom's thoughts were that close to being out aloud.

After the good opal was packed away, it was down to trade-time for the men. This was the real reason for the trip. Ron was interested in samples, small bottles or jars of opal chips and boulder rocks with small amounts of potch. These were for the tourist trade back at the caravan park. The tourist trade was important as a sideline for Ron. He wanted samples, with just enough colour to catch the tourist's eye! They were cheap, quick cash flow items, that would help tide them over until the full tourist season opened again after the wet season.

He mostly dealt generously with the men, purchasing several hundred dollars worth. They all seemed satisfied after the wheeling and dealing was over, and a more relaxed atmosphere resumed. It got a bit tense at one stage. Ron wanted one of the smaller, green-coloured stones thrown in to make up a parcel. The rougher man of the two had been mostly quiet until then. The two miners had exchanged words in their own lingo for some time. Then disagreement reigned. Tom thought it was to be a fight. Ron had shuffled back several feet.

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Tom went over by their old vehicle. Eventually things calmed down, and trade continued. Ron didn't get his stone.

'What was that about?' Tom asked quietly. Ron just shook his head and stayed silent. Both miners had been over to another camp until late the night before, and on the way home they had crashed into another vehicle. It struck Tom that a crash in the middle of the night was incredible. Such an isolated place and two vehicles crash. It was so isolated that two vehicles in the same area seemed unlikely, but that they crashed together was inconceivable to his mind. It had ended in a horrific fight between these two.

Ron passed bits on to Tom as the others went backwards and forwards to their vehicle getting samples of stone. Who could know how these men thought? Men who seemed to flare up at one minute and the next seemed so calm—calm yet volatile.

Ron knew time didn't allow him to stay longer, and Tom sensed he wanted to be finished with the opal dealing side of things now as quickly as possible.

There was still time to go over to the old waterhole in amongst the hills for a swim—a welcome cool down. The water was freezing cold. As the men relaxed they began to reminisce of a former day's dream—a dream of getting the ultimate colour. There was never any mention of where they had come from, past life styles, family or country heritages. It seemed strange to Tom, for he thought all future with no past, made for an empty future as well. They sat awhile in the shade of the rocks. There was no need to dry off!

Yet it was the opal and its colour that was always the central talking point, talk that consisted of the words

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‘reds, blues, and greens’. It was all that really mattered.

Over to the right, on the top of the range was a natural bridge joining two peaks. It was quite a unique sight, spanning eighty feet or more in length. Tom and Ron enjoyed the last of the cool and then went back to the campsite.

Ron went to his vehicle and brought out about five loaves of bread. He gave them to the miners and said, ‘I thought you boys might like some bread.’ It was received with much appreciation.

‘Bread, for us,’ they said almost together. The two men took the loaves in their rough dirt-stained hands, pulling one loaf in halves. This one they ate and the rest they put in a box under an old tarpaulin.

It was time to head back to the homeward side of the Mayne River. Ron and Tom had ventured well down past Mayneside and they were hoping to get back as far as the old town site of Opalton. The track was rough and it took time to pick their way through the countryside. On the way, they called at several other mines to see men Ron knew. There were numbers of miners like the last lot, sprinkled through this area.

They stopped by a tree and a dozen or so diggings. The first thing they saw was a dog—like a Doberman, big enough to saddle! He was huge—so big that he looked straight in the window of the Toyota without so much as lifting his front feet off the ground. Ron said, ‘Wally is not far away. If Elephant is here—Wally is here.’ Sure enough, one woof from the dog and Wally appeared out of a hole in the ground. He and Ron talked miner’s talk for sometime. It is much the same as any other talk. Tom could see the same trends appearing. ‘Did you find any good stone? How could it be that

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price? The potch didn't make up to anything—and the weather is or is not going to be!

Wally wanted the men to go down his hole and see the vein of opal. He described it as 'the best one I have ever seen'. He wasn't going to bring it up yet—not until the price improved anyway. Ron eventually was talked into going down. Tom had observed Ron's reluctance, so decided to remain on top, at least until the others came back up. Besides, there wasn't really enough room for two, let alone three in the hole at once. Tom could hear the conversation as the men descended the home-made ladder—one at a time.

'I-nebber-ad-two-on-dis-ladder-bifore,' he said, in his very broken English.

Tom could hear Ron's reply. 'I'm getting out—that's it—I've gone far enough if it's not safe!'

Wally persuaded him not to turn back, by saying. 'You-gotto-see-Ron-my-colour.' The men both reached the bottom of the twenty-foot deep hole and by torch light inspected the opal. It sounded all very interesting from Tom's end, up on top—he half wished he could go down.

After the viewing was completed the two men were heard doing the reverse climb—one at a time, due to the constant fall of sand and the odd rock. When they appeared at the top, the two men looked like they had been through a dust storm—dust covered them from head to foot. Ron brushed himself down. Tom asked if it was worth seeing. Ron gave him a confusing answer, saying 'yes' with his mouth, yet shaking his head each time Wally was looking at Tom and not at him. Tom got the message, instantly losing the desire he had to go down.

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It was time to move on again. Ron went to the back of the vehicle and dragged out some more bread. He gave it to his friend. Fresh bread was a rare commodity in these parts.

As they headed on homeward, Ron told of his underground experience. 'I hate going down those miners' holes.' There had been little bits of coloured potch along the opal pipe. That was all. He'd seen it all before. Miners who get something down a hole, and think the world will follow a rainbow to their opal mine.

'A little bit of colour goes to their brain. It was hell down there. I only went down because I knew you were staying up top. I'd never ever come here by myself. God knows, you couldn't trust these guys—most of them would kill you for your bread!' Ron said.

There was a waterhole at Opalton with some of the biggest mosquitoes Tom had ever seen. They had stopped at it on the way down. There were a lot of old diggings and Ron had suggested they spend some time there in the morning light. That was the best light for noodling. Noodling was the art of carefully working through old diggings, finding the opal the miners had missed, or didn't bother to pick up. In the boom days they were mainly looking for the larger opal that was of a size for cutting. It required a keen eye for noodling. It was a thing children were good at—their short distance from the ground and their sharp eyes were a great advantage.

They had arrived just on dark and set up camp quite some distance from the waterhole. Tom wasn't impressed with the weather. It seemed as hot at night as it was during the day. The only difference being—there was no sun! They boiled the billy on an open fire and

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cooked tea early. The rest of the night they spent yarn-ing and swatting mozzies. Ron picked a spot on a dry grassy patch for his swag. Tom didn't own a swag, so he set up his stretcher out where, if there were to be a breeze, he would get full benefit. He discovered that the 'benefits' were not on that night! It was too hot even for a thin sheet, yet without it, he was totally exposed to the mosquitoes. They came at him like choppers on full attack. Tom thought he could hear them leaving the waterhole! The only thing he could do was keep the can of Aerogard handy, and on the go. By the size of some, he wouldn't have been surprised if they had carted him away! They were huge—Tom could actually feel them land. Ron seemed to sleep through it all without a problem. Tom thought it partly due to him being content with the day's purchase—as well as being content to be in the bush again. He'd had a good buy, and they had got back the home-side of the only river that would cause them immediate trouble if it rained. There had been no vehicle troubles—so, what if a few little insects were around.

The next morning saw the two men up early, and making the most of the angle of the morning light for noodling. They were chasing that elusive colour again. There were a few good finds, in spite of the area having been picked over thoroughly. Ron was content with these few bits they found, and the samples purchased at the miner's camp.

Tom wasn't his shiny best after the night life had finished with him. He couldn't get over the noise of a mosquito in full flight during the quiet of the night. Dinosaurs and mosquitoes—what a variety the past had. Tom thought how good it was to only have the smaller

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of these two around now—the mosquito and not the dinosaur. It was said that there is still a full skeleton of a dinosaur laid out here somewhere. The last few seasons had been so good that no one could find it again. Ron pointed out to Tom approximately where it could be. He had looked for it a number of times over the years, but couldn't see anything of it for the grass. He pointed and said, 'There is that big old tree over there—and the hill up there. Between those two points, and that cutting over there, is where it is supposed to be.'

It was an interesting area. Tom had picked up a lot of fossilised leaf material in his wanderings. The full leaves were still very distinct and intact in many of them—leaves from big trees, nothing like the ones there now.

After the last of the opal chips were checked out, it was time to head for home. It had been an uneventful trip as far as incidences were concerned, but for Ron and Tom, a trip that they would not forget.

Tom had met some of the wildest men he had ever come across—all immigrants—probably legal, but who'd be game to ask? They had given their bread to these men who had a deficient diet. They had travelled through pretty country, dotted with ghost gums and red termite mounds—rich with history. They had seen beautifully coloured boulder opal—the prettiest stones one could imagine. They had done it all and not got flooded in, not been eaten by dinosaurs nor carried off by mosquitoes. Wild men, bread and pretty stone, what a combination!

Covenant

God makes a covenant,
Sets out the form,
Calls all the shots,
Gives us the lot.

He said that He would
‘Be God to all men’,
And that they would
‘Be people to Him’.

It is simple to see,
God’s purpose is clear,
Have big family
In fellowship here.

Answer to question,
When asked, ‘How to?’
Is ‘Hear the Gospel,
And believe,
It’s for you.’

Do You Want to Win an Argument?

It was about two-thirty when the telephone rang. Harry could remember, because about that time of the day he always dozed off for a bit of a snooze. Just a few minutes was all he needed and he was right again. He found it better to have a quick sleep and then get on with the task at hand. He was still half asleep, or half awake, depending on your point of view, and now with the telephone in hand and the STD pips sounding for him.

‘Hello’, he said.

The reply came from a woman’s voice, ‘Hello, this is Stephanie, you may not remember me, but I thought you might be able to help me.’ There was some discussion about past meetings, and then Harry recalled who she was. He then had vivid memories of their meetings. She had actually come to his house with a friend several years before, stayed a few days and then headed off again. Harry felt she was on the run, so to speak. Not on the run from the law, or anything like that, but just unable to settle. She gave the impression that she was agitated—at a loose end as the saying goes.

They had talked, or almost argued at times over different things of life—life as it related to the Christian faith. She had a view that Harry felt was not serving her

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at all well, and he sought to help her see some things differently—like between being committed to something, and being drawn into what is true, freely and willingly. He had felt he had lost the cause and could remember wishing her well, and remembered the last parting words coming from her!

It was good, he thought, to hear of people whom he had had contact with, and so listened intently to her as she spoke. She wanted to know if he could tell her where in the Bible she could find some verses telling of the actual experience of the Holy Spirit. Harry knew where there were a number. That was no problem.

He answered her, ‘Do you want to win an argument, or do you want to have the experience?’ The phone went dead. Then after a time Harry said, ‘Are you still there?’

‘Yes,’ came the reply.

‘Are you all right?’ asked Harry.

‘Yes, I am all right, I was just thinking about what you said.’

‘Well, what did you decide?’ Harry asked.

‘Oh, I think I want to win an argument,’ Stephanie said.

With that Harry assured her it was still OK, and proceeded to give her a few verses that she might find helpful. Verses came to his mind readily enough and she seemed pleased.

There were any amount. Harry opened his Bible and read:

Luke 11:13 almost fell open for him. ‘If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’

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John 3:34, 'He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.'

John 16:13, 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.'

Acts 1:5, 'for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'

Acts 2:17, 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.'

Acts 2:38, 'Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

Acts 4:8, 'Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders . . .".'

Acts 4:25, 'it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant: "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things?".'

These verses were a sample of how either the Holy Spirit is promised to be present or is actively present to a believer. She was satisfied and thanked Harry for his time. He wished her well in winning the argument, and they hung up and that was that.

To actually know the presence of the Spirit is a life transforming experience. No Christian is without the Spirit's working in his or her life, and no person can be a real Christian until the Spirit comes and brings the

Don You want To Win An Argument

things of God livingly to them. These things are the Cross, with forgiveness, peace and the joy of the Lord. Harry knew the coming of the Spirit into his own life, so he knew these verses were not just proof texts to win an argument!

Red Sand and Shotguns

The quietness of the afternoon was shattered by a shotgun blast. Allan knew it was a shotgun. He recognised the distinct noise they made. He ran quickly to the back door. There was the scuffle of feet and he caught a glimpse of several young aboriginals as they went scampering around the end of the lane and down the road, vanishing out of sight. Allan went straight to the laneway to look. There was a man's old pushbike, and by it a hessian bag and a bundle of papers. The papers were still neatly wrapped as if they had come straight from the post-office box.

Allan wandered cautiously up the lane with an eye and ear out for the gunman. He was not sure quite what to do. Did he ring the police or did he just forget what had happened and go home? No, he thought he should check it out. Anyway, there were children who played in the lane from time to time. You could not have guns going off all around. There had been other times as well, but this was the first time so close to home.

He found his way into Arnold's—the bike owner's—yard. What did one do in these circumstances?

This was not the first time he had walked up this lane on a mission. Some weeks before they had been disturbed in the middle of the night. Their dog had gone wild when a group of people had walked up the lane.

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However, the next morning as Allan and his wife went out into the garden, they stood in utter disbelief as they viewed what was once a full bed of silver beet. They were stunned at the vacant look of their garden patch. The total garden plot was bare. The red soil was glaring up at them as if to say, 'I'm stripped of all covering and here I am left bare'.

The red soil had been brought in to supplement the river silt. The whole town was built on an old silt bank on a bend of the Darling river. Allan and his boys had carted in some good sandy loam from out of town for the vegie patch. The local soil was a very black-grey colour and the red soil stood out in contrast to it.

This contrast was now the undoing of the vegetable thief. In the morning light it stood out like confetti at the entrance of a church after a wedding. Allan had followed the red trail of dirt up the lane and into a house yard a few blocks up. Then he followed it right up to the side door of the house. What now? He thought about the situation and decided it was their silver beet and he had every right to have it back. After all, stealing a few leaves to get some greens was one thing, pulling up their whole garden, roots and all, was quite another. Or was it?

Allan knocked loudly on the door. There was no reply. He knocked again. He could hear footsteps on the wooden board floor coming towards the door. It opened and there stood a large untidy looking man with a long vegetable knife in his hand.

'What yer want?' he grumbled as he looked down on Allan from the top of the steps. Allan replied in the strongest and most authoritative voice he could muster.

'I am looking for my silver beet.' At this Allan was

met with a total denial of having seen any such thing.

Denial comes in funny ways. Like, 'What's silver beet?' And then, when it is very carefully described, 'Never erd of it.' Allan kept his last card to play a final winning shot. So after all the possible means to get a confession were exhausted, and the man seemed convinced he had evaded being convicted of the theft, for these guys were experts at sharing the neighbourhood things around, Allan pulled out the Joker card.

'Come with me,' Allan said. Allan took him down the lane pointing out every few metres the bright red dirt that had fallen off his silver beet plants. The red trail went all the way, from the garden right up to the big man's side door and then disappeared.

'Where do they go from here?' Allan yelled at the man. 'Disappeared into fresh air, eh.' Allan flashed his win card right under the man's nose? 'I'll tell you where they went. Right through that door!' The man still denied any knowledge of the green vegetables, roots and all.

Allan simmered down somewhat and concluded the investigation with, 'I wouldn't mind if you came and asked if you could have some, but to take the whole lot, roots and all, is total theft. You pass this on to whoever was responsible.'

Allan left the yard rather deflated. There were no signs of repentance, remorse or of the vegetables. 'Thick,' Allan was saying to himself as he went back down the lane. 'Thick, thick as a brick. He could have left the roots so they would grow again. Thick. That's all it is.'

So he never did find out what exactly happened to the vegetables, but from that night, Sammy, their little

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dog went berserk every time anyone from that family walked down the lane past the garden.

He was like a bad conscience to them.

Eventually they changed their course and went out the other end of the lane. It did not alter the dog's verdict of them, though. He could still tell when they were going to town and gave his low growl as much to say, 'I know you are out of your yard. I remember what you did to our garden. Garden thieves.'

Allan was now outside Arnold's door. What should he do? He called out, 'Are you about, Arnold?' Arnold came to the screen door. He was peeling an onion with a huge, long bladed knife. Allan let himself in and proceeded to question Arnold about the shotgun blast. He confessed to the act and didn't see it as a crime, but as defending his property. He had been fleeced before by these aboriginal kids.

To this Allan replied, 'You will get lynched if you kill one. You know that don't you?' Allan realised Arnold was pretty drunk. He was a pensioner through some reason or another. He was not all that old but apparently had some health problem and qualified for a pension. He told Allan how the aboriginal kids would offer to push his bike home from the hotel after he had gone down to get his pension cheque. He could always get it cashed at the pub, buy some booze, and then after he got a skin full he would head for home. The kids had worked out his pattern and then watched for the weekly trips to the post office, then the pub and then followed him home. Part way they would pick him up from the footpath, give the impression they cared for him, offer to push his bike home with him attached, and then

fleece him of his money and goods. They usually waited until they got part way down the lane before they did their deed. It was the standard way for them to get some extra provisions!

Arnold had had enough and had taken the law into his own hands. He was still living with his aging parents, and had an alcoholic problem that flared up periodically. Allan thought it could be as often as once a week! He had helped him home himself on more than one occasion from the lane, so he knew where he lived. He was a bit appalled at the way he treated his parents, ignoring their requests and treating them like dirt, as they say.

Arnold began to sound off about the boys who had fleeced him. He let fly with some disgusting language and Allan just stood there until he was finished. Then in response to Arnold and respect for his parents, Allan looked at Arnold and said, 'You have never obeyed any one, have you. You're a rebel and you'll hang if they catch you shooting at those boys.'

With that Arnold, still with knife in hand, replied, 'Ow dare you talk to me like that?'

Quickly Allan replied, 'I have never come around here preaching to you, and I'm not preaching to you now, but I'm telling you that you're in this mess not just because of the boys. You have never obeyed anyone, not anyone, ever. What's more you are giving these kids the opportunity to steal your stuff!'

With that the knife dropped to the table and Arnold sat down on an old style-kitchen chair. He looked at Allan, tears in his eyes, looking very remorseful. Allan had beaten him, but he doubted that he had helped him.

Remorse was one thing, but real repentance another.

Red Sand And Shotguns

Remorse was getting caught and wishing you weren't. Repentance was a change of mind brought about by seeing things as they really are. Allan knew repentance is primarily a Christian thing. A change of mind about God. God is actually not like anything you could imagine. God is the only True God, so He is the only one like He is. Who then could do the revealing? This is why, 'there is one mediator between God and man, the Man Jesus Christ'.

Simply put, if it were a game, no one else could umpire. No one else can mediate God as Father, Creator or King apart from the Word Incarnate, Jesus, the Son of God.

Like red sand, Allan knew he could point out or prove a lot of faults and troubles, but to change the heart and it's passions was another thing. It is God's prerogative to save a person from their obscenities.

To Love Again

Jesus, our Saviour, came to redeem us,
Take all the guilt and remove all our shame.
Freedom and Lordship belonging together,
Reigning Lord Jesus, in true love you came.

Father of all things, life to the nations,
Mercy and grace bring gift of repentance,
Cause us to love You in the Lord Jesus,
Blessed Creator, all things You have made.

Master of all thing, rules with good judgement,
Your grace so powerful—sweeping across the land—
Wins true affection from sinful man,
Once lost rebels, now delight in Your plan.

Bring in a harvest of Your great glory,
Father of all things, wonderful Your plan.
Live by the True Word of our Great Saviour,
Joy is from Him who is Lord of the Clans.

Holy Lord Jesus, worship Your greatness,
Greatness created from the Father's hand.
Father of Glory, glory You give us,
Delight in Your Presence as redeemed Man.

Red Sand And Shotguns

Creation, the work of Triune Godhead,
Complete by mercy the work of Your hand.
Caught up for ever by the Cross given,
In glory bring the redeemed You've planned.

Gracious Lord Jesus, mercy God gives us,
Glory we now see, the Cross of Great Shame.
Salvation—to know the Cross is Judgement;
Worship You Father, in weakness You came.

By commands of our God love flows again,
Creation's fulfilment, the Father's plan.
Not one thing missing, all He has promised.
Love's great commands are our life springs again.

For His love-acts are all of His living,
Faith to obey Him the gift that He gave.
We, in the Godhead, now serve in true fear,
The gift of this Love, new sonship is here!

How Long Do We Wait?

It was a rather warm day in mid-November. People were beginning to gather at the little building in town. The supper room was a bustle with last minute preparations, and in the church the organist was arranging into order the few pieces of music she had for the wedding service.

The groom and his attendants had just arrived and were practising standing around the altar area. They fussed around with their suits. They actually looked over-dressed for their culture and the climate. They usually wore little more than shorts, thongs and a light T-shirt especially at this time of the year. And so with full dress it made them look uncomfortable, different and out of character. However, this was a very special occasion.

Jimmy, the bridegroom, stood in the middle, and his groomsmen, in an awkward way, straightened his necktie, brushed off his shoulder pads and generally admired the handsome young fellow. They were all part aboriginal boys, off-spring of a combination of tribes and races from the surrounding areas. A lot of confusion reigned about this whole *caste* business. Part white, or is it part black? How are we to live in a modern world when the past can't be retrieved, and when the future hasn't arrived?

How Long Do WE Wait?

At the church people were arriving in a constant stream. The relatives were punctual. Well, most of them, anyway. The bridegroom's father was early, but his mother had not appeared yet. She still had plenty of time, though. Two-thirty was the official time for the ceremony. Weddings were a great occasion and they seemed to draw the best from people, even on hot days. The small building was very nearly filled to capacity. The elderly were fanning themselves, adding some help to the big ceiling fans that were set to full speed in an attempt to give some relief to the crowded room.

A slight hush moved across the place, and then a stir in the crowd indicated that the bride was about to arrive. She certainly wasn't late. She had been warned, or at least urged strongly, not to be too late due to the hot weather. It was difficult for the crowd to sit around unnecessarily in such heat. Fainting spells were not uncommon in these conditions. There were people present who, when confined in a crowd, seemed to go down very easily.

Thunderstorms and heat, along with stifling crowds, were the cause of a number of people falling due to fainting spells. I suppose it is part of the shut-down system we have. One lady was very regular in her spells. Every time it thundered she would faint and end up on the floor. She was so regular at doing this that her neighbour would instinctively go straight over to her house after a storm, let herself in, and get the old dear up off the floor. In later years she would sit on the floor if she thought it might thunder! It saved the pain and bruising of a fall.

The bride arrive and alighted. Of course she looked radiant. All brides look radiant, and why not? They are

Wild Men, Bread and Pretty Stone

about to enter life in a new way. The two becoming the one. The joining of male and female. The beginning of a new relationship called marriage. A leaving of one family and a new unit beginning, hence the saying 'Good leaving makes for good cleaving'.

One newly married man was asked how he found married life. His answer was, 'It's certainly different!' What a wonderful way to start marriage. Not an extension of anything that has gone on before, but launched, and set in the tradition of marriage as stated in the words of the institution:

We stand here in the sight of God, and in the presence of this congregation, to join this man and this woman in holy matrimony; which is an honourable state of life, instituted from the beginning by God himself, signifying to us the spiritual union that is between Christ and his Church.

Yes, she looked a picture. She was attended by her bridesmaids and brought by her father, the one who was able to give her to be wife to this man. The marriage act is clear, giving the new couple the needed authority to be *different*, as the man had said.

There was a pause as one of her family went running up to the front of the church. He singled out the celebrant and requested that he hold the proceedings for a while—the reason being that the bride's mother had not yet arrived. She was still at home getting herself ready.

So, wait they did.

The organist was asked to hold the wedding march.

The bride was halted at the entrance to the church.

The organist played the same set of songs over for the third time, and the minister looked at the bride to confirm that it was her desire to wait for her mother.

And almost in unison the guests inspected the ceiling

How Long Do WE Wait?

fans to see that they were turning as fast as they could. People shuffled in their seats and eventually the minister made his way down to the door.

‘Is she actually coming? How long do we wait?’ he asked.

‘She is coming. She’s just not ready yet. Please wait. I am sure she is coming.’

With that one of the family was sent off at breakneck speed to find the absent mother. Within ten minutes he was back. ‘She’s coming,’ he said, assuring everyone.

They lived close by in terms of distance, but time seemed to be rapidly passing on. By now the organist had stopped playing and said in a loud voice, ‘There is only a certain number of times I can play that.’

The official party had stripped off their coats and ties, saying, ‘We’re not wearing these if nothing is happening.’ So they sat down in the front pews and chatted amongst themselves.

The minister asked the congregation if they would wait for the bride’s mother. The answer was in the affirmative. So, they waited.

The bride and her parents lived on the edge of town, down along the river. It was on the other side of the main part of the town, around the bend from some rocky areas. These rocks were the site of historical fish traps that were made out of piles of stones surrounding natural pools where the surface had been worn away by the water. It was an interesting area of the Barwon River, noted in writings of outback Australia for its uniqueness. It was one of those areas where time seems to be the servant and handmaid of many a casual dweller. Things happen in the time frame of a year rather than a month, and a week—rather than an hour!

Wild Men, Bread and Pretty Stone

So how long does one wait? It was still the same day, but what of the hour?

After one hour and twenty minutes, she came.

An ordinary looking woman, not overly dressed, but casual in her movements, and the family seemed to appreciate her arrival. Little fuss was made as she took her seat.

The official party reformed, coats and ties now abandoned, but all in all, a presentable bunch considering the circumstances. The bridal march was struck up and the grand entrance was made. The ceremony went off well. It was good. Later—but good. The two made their vows to each other and to society, this being witnessed by their family and friends. Then they were duly declared to be ‘Husband and Wife’ by the celebrant. The signing of the register was performed in the official manner and the couple were suitably congratulated and sent on their way to their reception into society.

Marriage is a wonderful calling. It doesn’t mean that we all have to marry, but marriage tells us so much about the true nature of all things—things present and things to come.

The heart of relationships is a mystery. Not mysterious, as in the mystical and funny sort of thinking, but a mystery that is revealed.

Life is gift still. Gift from Him who does all things well.

A nation may be missing the mark totally, but this does not alter the fact that life is of God and it is good.

It is all mystery to us, until faith comes. That’s a mystery in itself—the coming of faith. Paul in the New Testament reminds us of how things are and that true knowing comes to us from God.

How Long Do WE Wait?

How long do we wait? Who of us can answer that question? The sure thing is that God will work all things according to His will for those who trust Him. How wonderfully He has given. What wonderful counsel he gives us. He does all things well. Marriage is from His hand, with counsel for life and death, time and eternity.

The Widow's Joy

The long, hot summer had been blamed for a higher than average death rate. They were mostly the deaths of older people who were caught by the extreme heat. There had been a couple of accidents as well, but the majority of deaths were pensioners—frail, older citizens, who were cared for by Meals on Wheels, and other care groups. There had only been one who had been in hospital as a permanent patient. Senior Citizens' cottages or hospice facilities were not an option here, so the elderly were cared for mostly at home.

Even though the town's people were regular in their funeral attendance, not many went to worship services. The medium-sized church held about a hundred, and it was usually filled to capacity for a funeral, but Sundays were quite different.

The mood seemed always the same, sombre, with a mysterious air about the proceedings. Harry had sensed this from the first funeral he had conducted in the community. It was as if there was a real reluctance to let go, with a subdued and defeated spirit present. Perhaps the funeral service confirmed their worst fears. Death had won the day, yet they'd hoped all along that it might somehow be different.

In his rounds Harry visited a woman who was recently widowed. The conversation got around to how

The Widows Joy

she was managing after the loss of her husband. She answered simply by saying, 'I still have him here in spirit.' Harry thought nothing much of it until Lorinna, the widow, spoke about the belongings of her deceased husband. She had had trouble getting around to clearing up his things, but supposed she would tidy them in good time.

A number of weeks passed—several more funerals and a few local public functions came and went. Harry had seen Lorinna and greeted her. She looked withdrawn. Harry noticed her because he'd had some adjusting to do himself, and wondered how some others adjusted to radical changes. He had been aware of the nature of public life—having people around, public speaking, seeking to meet people's needs, working with children's groups, and so forth. It had all mounted up. He had been aware of his own inadequacies, and had spent time understanding the role he had. Serving others could so easily become a twisted event that ended in serving yourself, spending all your time looking inward to see if you were getting on all right. So he knew that unless he was buoyant in life himself, he was not free in moving out to others at all. It kept him in check.

He'd been invited to go over to Lorinna's for coffee at some stage.

The town was very spread out so he mostly rode a small motorbike around instead of walking or going by car. The bike was great for parking, and economical to run, but it had one disadvantage—dogs. There were a large number of dogs in town. They just roamed around everywhere, dogs of every variety, from the miniature foxie, to pig dogs of the most ferocious nature.

Once when he had ridden his bike across to the next

town to visit, he experienced the worst dog bite he'd had—not that he'd been bitten often but this town was bad for dogs. The town was about a hundred kilometres away, and on arriving he had taken a short cut into the backyard of a family he knew well. Harry propped his bike on its stand, then walked into the garage where the owner Norm and his son Rob were leaning on their Holden ute talking. Harry had walked past the ute, when, without any warning whatsoever, Max the Blue Heeler flew at him, and with jaws like a power vice, latched onto Harry's right leg. Harry didn't have time to defend himself before the dog was back under the ute. The dog's owner just laughed, then gave an apology in the form of an explanation.

'E don't like them motorbikes, 'e don't!'

That may have been so but Harry's leg was not one of 'them bikes'. Harry washed his leg under the cold tap to get the blood to stop, then tied his best, clean handkerchief around it. The dog and his owner looked on. Harry was sure Norm was sorry it had happened, but 'dogs are dogs' he said.

It wasn't long after that episode that some of the local riders took to the dogs in Harry's home town. There had been several times when people on pushbikes had been scared off by dogs, and it was only a matter of time before someone would be seriously hurt. So it became the custom for a few weeks to carry a piece of steel bar across the handlebars of the bikes. This convinced the main offending dogs that riders were not sport for bored pig dogs! Things soon got sorted out. It was radical, but something had to be done.

Lorinna, the widow, had rung again to see when Harry could visit. It all seemed a bit mysterious to him.

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It was not until he entered the house that he realised what was happening. She was now ready for Harry to see her deceased husband's things. Well, she might have been ready for Harry, but Harry certainly wasn't, yet before he could even raise a protest Lorinna had taken charge.

'I've got things tidied up now. You can see the room. It's just as he likes it,' she said.

Harry was ushered to a door, then shown inside the room. It was neat, bed made, wardrobes closed and dressing table set.

'Harry, this is how it will be left, just as it was the night Bill died. I'll use the single room,' she continued, in the tone of voice that defied anyone to argue, or even make one single suggestion.

Harry was stunned. 'Tidy up' he thought meant to tip it out, not set it as it had been for the rest of—who knows how long! She had a problem. He didn't think she had accepted the death of her husband at all. She was hedging around it and putting it off for as long as she could, saying things like, 'I know his spirit is still here', and 'this is his room'.

Just the way she said it was enough for him!

Funerals were to be a regular occurrence during his time in that community. There were times like the one with Lorinna when she had set her heart on her ideas. Getting the belongings of the departed set in order was a big job. It was a community responsibility to dispose of the loved one's body with dignity, but what of the rest? Sure—some things you go on using, or keep, even for sentimental reasons, but not a whole room! And for what purpose? Clinging to the past never adds up to anything but—the past being clung to. And why cling to

it? Unless perhaps it's in the hope of getting it right?

After death no amount of post-marriage sentiment could resurrect a failed marriage nor would it add to a good one.

To be sentimental is to refuse to do what is distasteful, and is to take the easy way out.

Love is strong and dynamic. Love to a sentimentalist is actually very confronting. Confronting perhaps mostly because one could never pay back an act of love. Harry remembered how he never felt at ease if he was indebted to anyone.

As it turned out Lorinna eventually got to clearing out Bill's things, and Harry actually did another inspection. It seemed funny, but it helped Lorinna to realise Bill was not coming back. And she had to get on with living.

She'd had to clean up all the past. She was drawn out of sentimentality.

She then realised she had some really valuable and good memories. Not all of them were pleasant. That didn't seem to bother her now. She saw her marriage to Bill for what it was. There had been good times, but they had battled, fought, argued and hated each other as well. She was the one who actually came to the notion that it probably never was a relationship that had flowered out of love. 'What a waste,' she said. 'I've spent my life in nothing more than sentiment.'

Love is strong, clear, dynamic and directive. It cuts the circular mode of a round-about lifestyle, and sets a person in the direction of love, hope and faith. Love stands true, clear and upright. It gives strong fibre to the soul, and the vertebrae. It comes from God Himself and gives us a destiny in His good glory. What great hope!

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With this in view, being confronted by death was a helpful thing to have happen. To avoid it was pathetic.

Harry had moved States several times, and discovered that each State had different expectations of those who served in various fields. He'd never forget the first time he had had to go with a family to view the dead remains of their mother. It was the first time he had seen a human corpse. Here he was confronted with death and at the same time directing the bereaved family, giving thanks to God on their behalf for the life and memories of this loved one—and still taking it all in himself. Viewing the body sure was a way to come to terms with the fact of death. Nothing academic or clinical in that.

A clinical view is as unreal as the other. It's as if death is like a sickness and, if treated with respect, it will go away. The way we conduct our funerals tells us a lot about how we are coping—especially at some of our cremations, where a pretty decorated casket is lowered, but still left just in sight. The thought of saving people from seeing death is sentimental guff! A real exposure can be so liberating. In an attempt to be kind, it's actually very cruel. We need to know love, and the truth of love. Love bears all things, even in the face of death.

They were interesting days. Harry spent time with a number of widows in town, helping them to actually be widows. He deliberately took time during the funeral services, so that people who mourned had time to do it—mourn, that is. He even rode in the hearse with the undertaker who said that he could not stand emotion.

He kept telling Harry, 'Let's get on with this one, they are getting emotional.' So over the months Harry slowed the proceedings down, asking the driver to go

more slowly during the procession out to the cemetery.

‘We’ve got to give them their time,’ he said to the funeral director on more than one occasion.

Harry noticed fewer widows were coming to the funeral services now. It pleased Harry, but the funeral director didn’t like it at all.

‘People haven’t got respect for the dead like they used to have. I don’t know what the world is coming to, they’re not attending like they did.’ Harry just smiled and was thankful for those who knew they no longer needed to attend all the funeral services.

The community had the usual hospital, doctor, health clinics, church and para-church organisations as well as schools and service facilities. It was very well equipped for its size. Harry was one of a number whom the Matron often called on to go to the hospital when someone was seriously ill, or thought to be close to death. He didn’t mind going, but he did feel he was not of much help sometimes—especially between the hours of 2 and 6 a.m. He found it extremely hard to awaken during those hours. Even just acting intelligently was a strain. He remembered a time when he had tried to place a cup of coffee through a glass partition on a drinks trolley. It had spilled all over the floor. That certainly took their mind off things!

He did get to know the Sisters though. They knew who he was. He was the man who helped people and spilt his coffee all over the floor.

Sometime later he had an opportunity to go further with helping in this area—not spilling his coffee but of ministry to the community. A friend from another area was to come and share in ministry. The week he was able to come just happened to coincide with a monthly

The Widows Joy

luncheon meeting held at the hospital. It was a time when the ministers, doctors, leading health workers and Matron all got together to share a meal and some mutual encouragement. The idea was to get to know the other members of the community who served so that those responsible for each area didn't feel so isolated and alone in the climate of growing vandalism, family breakdowns, bereavement and so forth. They were good gatherings.

Harry had asked the group if it would be appropriate for the visiting speaker to share in the meal and then speak on the subject of death and dying. It was certainly a current topic—not that he just wanted to get onto the current bandwagon. He knew the topic was doing the rounds of the nation, but it was probably a good and timely topic for this group as well. The speaker had even been to America, and he had the latest 'Kubler Rossian' word on the subject. He had sifted through it fairly carefully so it was not just another 'how to' without a heart. He actually was well equipped to open up the subject with such a group.

The meetings had been great times in the past and there was no reason why this one would not be as significant, although they had never had a guest before.

When the time came it started well. During the luncheon there was quite a lot of talk as each met again, and as Arthur, the visitor was introduced. Then after the meal, Arthur spoke for some time, mostly about his own experiences of coming to terms with death and dying. He left openings for discussion after his points, and most joined in freely. Most, that is, except Matron. She seemed uneasy. Harry thought at first she probably had things she needed to be attending to. It can be like that.

Originally the group met at the hospital so that she could attend. She had been very reluctant to be involved in the meetings right from the start. Said she had too much work to do, and she could not leave the hospital for that much time around the middle of the day, so the group asked if they could meet at the hospital. After some hesitation she had agreed, and had actually attended all the meetings.

This day she sat back as Arthur spoke, and seemed to be reclusive. He talked quietly, yet powerfully as a good speaker can, neither overstepping or being too distant from the group with his points—more of a testimony really. The heart of his sharing was how we can all face death. He'd made a few good hearted jokes on behalf of the medical profession—the sort of things that are in-house jokes, but after have a kick-back. He had quietly reminded them that all medical work was secondary to the life and death situation. More a maintenance ministry to people rather than life itself. Cosmetic stuff. He had been quietly and graciously urging them not to avoid the fact of death. It had been a good meeting.

After all things seemed to have been said, it was Matron who started to speak. She spoke in a stumbling fashion, right out of character for her.

'I am . . . so glad of people like you all . . . whom I can call at any time.' She settled herself again and continued to speak. She told of the loss of a child—her child—and how she had never really come to terms with that death at all. 'Death seems so final,' she said. 'I work to keep from having to face it.'

It all came together when she said that no one should have to face what she'd been through. This is why she'd freely used sedatives and made them available to all

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bereaved people. She paused as she said this, then added, 'Actually, I have strongly recommended and encouraged their use for a long time. As I think about it, it may be more for my own comfort as I think over what Arthur has been saying.' She wasn't bitter about seeing what she'd done. In fact she seemed quite relieved. That, too, was a relief to Harry, who felt responsible for the meeting. He was pleased there was a positive response. Then it struck him that he was doing the same thing as Matron. What would he have done in the presence of these professional friends if it had all gone down like a lead balloon? He would look silly and they might have all criticised him. Criticism was as much a threat of death as anything else. As one writer put it:

We defend ourselves against criticism with the same energies that we would use if it were a lion. It's a mortal threat.

Harry could see the effects in the community of this one person. Harry had no doubt at all that she had not induced this fear into others, but had given them the opportunity to sedate the fear they had. He was sure Matron had done what she thought was a good thing.

Death was feared, and Harry knew death would always be feared until a person sees by faith that death is defeated.

A good understanding of life and death is a friend of the whole community, and is especially the 'widow's joy to know'.

Faithful 's He

Faith is a wonderful thing,
The Father's special gift,
It is for all who trust in Him,
And delight by His Word to live.
He joys over His beloved,
And is thrilled to be their God,
Promising things to come
In His beloved Son.

He gives His grace in Jesus
That they might live in hope,
And spend their days in living
In fellowship with God.
This faith is a living thing,
For them it's trust in Him.
He justifies the guilty,
What a dynamic thing.

In God's own written Word,
The Word that comes to them,
Is the Man of God's own heart,
Who is One in will, with Him.
As the Spirit bares this witness

Faithfull 's He

To this—love Trinity of God—
He is, as He has ever been,
Living now, as He always was.

From this relationship of Three,
The creation has been made
In good form and stability,
No better foundations could be laid.
He's not done it as a 'convenient way'
To keep the lid on us,
But God poured out all creation,
As a home and a dwelling place of love.

God is 'Love',
And so a creation that flows from Him
Will have all the characteristics—
Of the Father and the Son.
So rich in everything,
A creation full and free,
And we see the reflection
Of His goodness in all there be.

Plants, animals and man,
Abundant in fruit galore,
Families and clans, animals and things,
Bursting out in every place and more!
It's a sight to see this life
Of animals, fish and plants,
All breeding, with their young,
Even weeds we'd think He's over done!

What a God to give so much,
And then, in blessings, give them more,

Wild Men, Bread and Pretty Stone

Making the point so clear,
Showing He delights in abundance galore.
And as man looks on high,
Thinking scarcely gets past the sky.
Yet add to this, the eternity of space,
Creation—what a mind-boggling place!

Trust God to let it all loose!
He's so generous and unrestrained,
Gives the creation full length of rein.
He rules with joy, supreme and unconfined—
Has humanity crossing the earth,
As if there is no constraint at all,
Yet without His will
Not one sparrow could even fall.

With sciences mean, man seeks to look in,
Only to find the mystery thickens
Until we come to His Word,
And in living faith be quickened.
Sin is such a thing today,
We don't even reckon it right,
But its effects are so complete
That we live totally in the night.

We can depend upon His Word,
And if with faith our reasoning starts—
Reasoning that, without God,
Is like us, groping in the dark—
Then in the Son of God
We see a Man, come just like us,
A man who lives in a relationship,
And so in His Father, rightly trusts.

Faithfull 's He

He offers this same life to us,
Who are dead to God, it's true.
This death he take upon Himself,
And dies for me and you.
So faith sees now what's true—
Sin hides it all from view;
Yet, now by faith, we see what's real,
For life in Jesus is not concealed.

Those in faith are alive in the Son,
An experience that is new.
One that God is gifting
Afresh to me and you.
And when sight breaks in,
Faith will give way,
For what we have by faith
Is really there that way.

Many things, like love,
Are sentimental stuff.
But true Love is known through faith,
The Word of God is plenty enough.

A Green Thistle

Two old Eyre Peninsula farmers were overheard comparing notes after the wheat harvest one year. They were both trying to outdo each other by giving the impression that they were the worst off in the district. They were so accustomed to living that way that it had become part of their culture. They would usually end by one or the other being honest and actually telling the truth of how the season ended. Then when all was revealed and the other realised that they had had a very good harvest, the other would say something like, 'You miserable old sod, and to think I was actually starting to feel sorry for you!' Such a pessimistic outlook on life was the habit of many in my community.

Two men who were not uncharacteristic of the area, were Wheezy, who owned properties called Birdwood and Wocka Woolla, which weren't far from another property called Never Sweat, and Brownie, who owned properties called Dismal Downs, Poverty Corner and Erosion Hill. Both men were able to hold their own when it came to complaining. Wheezy was renowned for moaning about the weather, the crop failure and any other attention grabbing catastrophe that he could drag up. On the other hand, Brownie was well known for his eccentric outlook on life. Both men seemed to want to convince the local population that they were the poorest

A Green Thistle

and most hard done by pair of farmers that God had ever kept alive to torment! If it came up windy, everything would be blown away, except for the mortgage—of which I am sure he never had. And if it rained it was the neighbour who got it all. On the other hand if he did get a good rain across his land, then the disease called rust was bound to develop and be the cause of crop failure.

‘Brownie’ and ‘Wheezy’ were their affectionate nicknames. Many of the men in this district had a nickname and more than likely it meant the opposite to how they really were. For example, Tiny was actually a very large man, and Benty stood tall and straight. They were all a colourful bunch of characters. These two, Brownie and Wheezy, had been in the area for a long time. Not as long as some, and that may account for their antics— if it was in an attempt to get some recognition in the community. Who knows?

Brownie was short and dumpy, with a good crop of dark hair. He moved in a deliberate motion and was always quite polite, dipping his hat in the presence of ladies. He also had a form of humour that was very dry and quite witty.

Wheezy was tall and a much thinner man than Brownie, with a fairer complexion, being no less polite in the presence of the opposite sex. Both men had wives who were very short in stature and were as different in every other way as were their husbands.

Brownie had had quite a bit to do with camels earlier in his farming days, in fact I think he had the only camel team around the area, using them for farm work in the late 1920s. He had tried carting bagged wheat to the siding with them once and tradition has it that it

didn't last very long due to at least one very unfortunate incident.

I have it from a reliable source that a certain Mr Foster had his horses and wagon lined up to the wheat scales and lumping platform, when young Brownie and his camel team came into sight. Foster's horses spotted the camels and clean bolted with the half unloaded wagon. They couldn't be stopped until they were well on their way home. Brownie was told in no uncertain terms what to do with his prize camel team.

He eventually upgraded his transport system to a Blitz truck that he nicknamed Bumpy. As a boy I can remember Bumpy coming into the local wheat siding with its load of bagged wheat, and Brownie at the wheel. He usually had to get underneath with a spanner to change the gears in the gearbox due to a mechanical failure. So at the top of the hill he could be seen selecting the next higher gear for the downhill run, or at the bottom of the gully getting the right gear for the climb up to the top again. Fortunately for him the country was reasonably flat, or it would have been all too much trouble and he would have had to spend his hard earned money to get Bumpy fixed.

Brownie tried pulling the stripper with the camels as well. The stripper was a machine used to strip the heads of grain from the stalk (this may need explanation these days because of connotations in other directions!). A team of horses was usually used to pull it, but having the camels Brownie thought it worth a try. They went quite well until they spotted a green thistle away out in the crop, and off they would go after it. Then they would spot another one, and off again. Nothing Brownie could do would stop them. He could not break them of

A Green Thistle

this habit. You can imagine the crop damage and the loss of revenue from Poverty Corner. A green thistle could mean the loss of quite a few bags of wheat!

These were obviously days of great hardship, experimentation and development that went on amongst some very determined and colourful farmers. Each could hold his own when it came to endurance, hard work and good old country stickability. My Dad first lived on Birdwood—the property that Wheezy came to own—and recalled that it produced its first crop of wheat in 1916.

The process of farming was quite different back then. Water and chaff for the horses were brought up by train from further down the Peninsula and it usually came in time for the stock, but one could not be sure. The early supply of fertiliser was apparently a big disaster and contributed to crop yields being poor. The company who produced it deliberately put far too much sand in the mix and very little of the right ingredients. It wasn't until the government stepped in and stipulated a minimum level of nutrients and so forth that the trouble was rectified and the crops improved. Can you imagine carting tons of fertiliser by train and then by wagon to your property only to find you had brought more sand to an already drifting sandhill? Is it any wonder that some of these old guys insisted on 'trust that is earned', and 'respect that comes with time'? The properties called Dismal Downs and Poverty Corner are next to Erosion Hill! It doesn't take much imagination to see how these places were named from a real or an imagined situation.

We lived in an area that was served by small settlements determined by railway sidings about ten to fifteen kilometres apart. The larger town had the council

Wild Men, Bread and Pretty Stone

offices, the hospital, garages, wheat stacking yards for bagged wheat, churches and manses and so forth. The smaller towns had a hall, post office-cum-shop and fuel agent along with the main purpose for it all—the grain yard and railway siding. They usually included several houses owned by shearers or retired farmers or the like. The telephone system consisted of manual exchanges opening at 8.00 am and closing at 6.00 pm with an hour out for midday dinner. It served the small communities as a communication system in the form of a confessional-cum-sounding board, information centre, fire alarm and an emergency call out. All the local secrets, scandals, accidents and news were very well, and mostly discerningly, shared around. These exchanges were amongst the last things to go as the areas were modernised by the coming of the wheat silos and the sealed roads. This made the way for larger and more competitive shopping centres, and so determined where the community services were to be maintained.

There have been some radical changes in our days. I am careful in using the term, ‘when I was a boy’, for it brings a certain reaction from my own children, yet there are some interesting events to recall. So, when I was a boy, I remember when we had the electric lights installed. It was in about 1952. I am not talking about the 240 volt mains, that came much later—but the home generator system. The engine and battery pack were put under the old straw milking shed and the wiring was strung across pine posts to the house and then tacked across the rafters.

Many houses were primitive in construction due to the economic struggle, and to the government’s policy. Early in the history of the area the government made

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material available for each farmer to build a shed. They were known as government sheds, that is if they were ever built as a shed! They were designed so that the farmer could keep his seed and fertiliser under cover, but the majority of the shed material was used for housing. To begin with they were mostly unlined, and unfloored. I still remember the hessian lining in parts of our house. The dust was thick and the spiders and snakes regular. On a number of occasions there would be a hurried exit from a room on a hot summer's day as a snake went slithering across the lino-covered dirt floor and out through a small hole in the wall on the other side. There was the day when Mum's new stew pan got irreparably dented as it was used as a snake killer. It was never any good again for stewing because the jam would always stick on the dented patch.

The installation of the electric light was a wonderful event and the kerosene lighting was a good thing to be rid of. We all had a lantern hanging by our beds, and on a hot summer night the bugs and moths would swarm around it unbearably.

Yet above all this I can vividly remember when we had a new house built. And the first night's sleep in our new bedroom. It seemed wonderfully strange to have windows that opened properly, and a floor that was flat and made of timber, nicely polished, and cement plastered walls, all clean and white. What memories come flooding in as we recall the past.

Brownie and Wheezy were members of that developing community along with many other colourful characters who made up the social society that was my lot.