

WHEN EVERY BUBBLE

HAD A RAINBOW



by R. P. Riley

*My son asked me what it was
like when I was a little boy,
so I decided to write him a
few poems and stories.*

I hope you enjoy them!

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BEFORE YOU CAME ALONG

5

A bachelor's life is easy,
or so the saying goes,
Well, here's a real-life story,
from one who really knows.

Before we both were married,
and you became my wife,
I had no real ambition,
no purpose in my life.



Life was just a whirlpool, confusion all around,
A ship lost on the ocean, with no hope of being found.

The days were always empty, the nights were long and cold,
I was reaching out for something, with nothing there to hold.

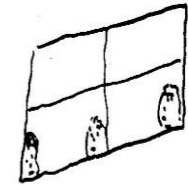
Well, everyone needs someone, I've stated that before,
Our love is growing stronger, each day I love you more.

And as long as we're together, our love can never die,
So, let's grow old together, together – you and I.

BOOZA'S DAY

6

We went up to the local hall,
the attraction there to see,
Was a group of young marching girls,
with skirts above their knees.



Their teacher wasn't keen on us,
to joke and play about,
Told us to do something useful,
or perhaps become a scout.



Then she took the girls outside,
quickly closed the door,
We interpreted her actions,
as a declaration of war.



Now our dog's name was Booza, his eyes as black as coal,
Whenever he saw a cat, he quickly lost control.



We caught a large tom cat,
then poked him through the door,
We all looked through the window,
and this is what we saw.

Girls ran in all directions, as the cat raced around the Hall,
The pair were going fast, they even ran into a wall.

Then there came the finish, when it was our delight to see,
The cat ran up the teacher's slacks, just like she was a tree!

The girls won't repeat the awful words, that their instructress said,
As the cat sat there hissing, perched upon her head.

When they opened the doors up, we were far away,
Bragging to our other mates, how Booza made our day.

FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL

7

Mummy shed a little tear, as she fumbled with the comb,
It was the first time her little boy, had to leave their little home.

Then she dried them with a hankie, and dressed up rather neat,
She held her head up high, as we tramped off down the street.

We met Miss Evans, as we walked along the road,
Her body stuffed with tea cakes, 'till she looked just like a toad.

She said I was rather charming, a very neat looking little boy,
And poked and pushed and fondled me, like I was a flamin' toy!

We went into the school hall and talked until the time had passed.
Then I was taken to the teacher and introduced to the class.

The kids were unhappy, And sobbing here and there,
And to be locked up like a prisoner,
It was more than I could bear.

So when the open window, came into my sight,
I quickly scrambled though it and ran with all my might.

At first I was rather frightened,
but then it seemed real fun,
I knew nothing of reading and writing, but I sure knew how to run!

But my short little pudgy legs, got heavier as I went,
And when they caught up with me, my breath was nearly spent.

They were really nice about it, and they coaxed me back to stay,
Yet they seemed a little bothered, you see, I'd wasted half their day!



GO TO THE COUNTRY, THEY SAY

8

I am out here in the country,
My family far away.

No one to speak to,
That is how I spend my day.

The log trucks go roaring past,
The ground shakes all around,

No one to take me to town.
They say, "Go to the country,

The place is nice and quiet".
But you get really bored,

When there is no one else in sight.

HATS OFF TO A LOCAL GROUP

At our local hall, there's a group that gathers there,
They are called the Community Association, (I just say the ones
that care)

They struggle to keep the village going, sometimes through a rough
patch or two,
Yet they seem to raise the money, so they can make it through.

With a pioneering spirit, that is how they carry on,
When all the show-ponies are finished, and the Politian's have
gone.

So to them I take my hat off, and have one thing left to say,
Keep on doing what you are doing, in the good old Aussie way.

HIDDEN SECRETS

9

The final leaves of autumn
Red, orange and gold
Fall on the first blanket of snow.
The trees are hunched, haggled and bare.
The twilight brings on feeling
Of death and despair.
But deep within
Below the gnarled surface of the bark
Lies a heart pulsating
Waiting for the first warm breath of spring.
That will send the spark of life
Racing up the trunk along the limbs
Showering the branches with green jade
And red shoots and leaves
That will burst into blossoms then flowers
As spring opens its eyes once more.

JOLLY

10

It was the Swimming Carnival, all local champs were there,
With big and brawny chests, covered with a tiny bit of hair.

One competitor's name was Jolly, the comedian of the school,
Always full of bubbling fun, and he always played the fool.

The swimming events were over, and the diving was the last,
Jolly climbed the ladder, turned, and waved to all the class.

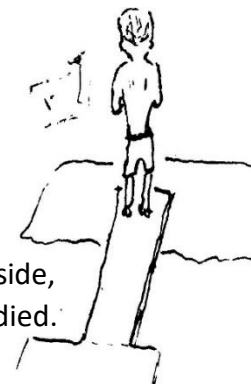
His body small and pipe-like, it had never seen a tan,
And we all stood in wonder, at this gallant little man.

To throw himself into that pool, took all the courage he could
muster,
But when he hit the water, it was a giant belly buster!!

The water went all over the Sports Master's
New uniform, and trickled down his feet,
The Headmaster was soaking wet, as he sat upon his seat.

The teachers looked real angry,
their faces taught and grim,
But this soon turned to stark horror, you see,
Jolly couldn't swim!

Two boys jumped in and dragged him to the side,
And there he lay all still, we all thought he'd died.



But then he raised his little head, and gave a little grin,
Then blurted out real cheeky-like, 'Did that one flamin' win!?'
Now champs may come and records go, in the Annuals of our
school, The thing I'll always remember, is when Jolly hit the pool!!

LADY IN THE CHAIR

11

If you go down to the old mill,
You will find a volunteer waiting there,
People simply call her,
The lady in the chair.

She will tell you of the gold rush,
Of the people long ago,
Who made it over the mountain,
Through the heat and snow.

And when the gold ran out,
Some stayed and made their stand,
And raised the Golden Fleece,
That bought prosperity to our land.

If you make a donation,
She will show you in with pride,
All the treasurers of the past,
That are waiting just inside.

Now if the mill lasts a hundred years,
And people seek memories there,
I hope this will stir the memory,
Of the lady in the chair.



LAST WISH

12

Let me blow along the beaches of this beautiful southern land,
Where the sunny golden wattles touch the sands.

Let me blow between the gum trees by the gentle waterfall,
May I travel through the valleys large and small.

Then I'll rise onto the plateau where the mist is cold and fresh,
As mighty Kosciusko shadows all.

Send me down the mountains through the waratahs I know,
And I carry the scent of gum trees as I go.

I'll move across to the plains till I meet the desert sands,
Where the scorching desert twister's start to blow.

Then as I start to die raise me to the sky,
So I can look on our great land that lies below.

LOST HERITAGE

13

There were hours of curiosity in every bush,
The caterpillars, beetles and ants,
Colours, the smells, shapes and sounds,
The texture of the bark, the leaves and grasses.
I whiled away the hours in bliss,
And to me the clear freshness of it all,
Gave me the strength of a thousand giants.
Hungry, scratched and bitten, I wandered happily,
Through the Australian bush,
King of all I surveyed,
Not knowing it would soon be gone.

MUM

14

To raise six children in the depression, it really took great skill,
With bread and milk and dripping, our small tummies she would fill.

And Mum would sew up hand-me-downs, to keep out winters chill.

And then came the war, the men they had to go,
To ladies with big families, it served a bitter blow.

Mum became our air raid warden, and worried about the war,
Bandaged all our injuries, and saw we never swore.

Thank God Mum was lucky, for on the chocolate wheel,
Mum often won a chicken, so we didn't have to steal.



Then the war was over, Dad came home at last,
We thought the worst was over, that the bad times they had passed.

But Dad he had been wounded, in a very short time he died,
And Mum to keep our spirits up, her grief she had to hide.

My little brother became sick and died, Mum never faulted in her care,
Working even harder, despite her greying hair.



Mum will never be rich or famous, for what was hers was ours to share,
You see, my Mum's true-blue Aussie, and these days that is quite rare.

MY BIG BROTHER

15

He is the one
That caught the bait,
He got into trouble
If we came home late.

He'd pick me up
And walk along,
Tell me a joke,
Or sing me a song.

He taught me poetry,
Reciting with zest,
Paterson, Lawson
And the rest.

He has left in my heart
An empty space,
Because no one
Can ever replace –

My big brother.



MY MATE RUFFLES - THE DOG

16

He tried to come to school,
But the teacher smacked my mate,
So he leaned very quickly,
To stay outside the school gate.

At lunchtime he would sit up,
Just waiting to be fed,
My friend would laugh and play with him,
And pat him on the head.

He sat outside the gate,
And regarded it as his domain,
And on any other dog that came near,
He would inflict terrible pain.

At night he slept in the park,
And sometimes in the rain,
For no one ever caught him,
To put him on the chain.

Ruffles had the freedom spirit,
You could see it in his eyes,
And though he was just a mongrel,
With us kids he took first prize.

Me with my second-hand britches,
With two patches newly sewed,
I swung a rusty billy can,
As I wandered down the road.

The destination, a small water hole,
At the end of Gannon's Creek,
With a hundred large tadpoles,
Is the quarry that I seek.

The tea strainer with coarse netting,
My idea, you know,
It held the large tadpoles,
And the small ones it let go.

Arriving at the water hole,
And with a little bit of luck,
I thought I'd have a swift capture,
Like my hero, Mr. Buck.

I couldn't understand it,
It was just down near those logs,
Where I'd seen a hundred tadpoles,
But now all I see, is frogs!



On to the field ran young Michael, His features firmly set,
He looked like a little Sampson, Though he wasn't teacher's pet.

And when the ball was passed out to him, He thundered across the line,
With all the kids he didn't knock over, Still clinging on behind.

One of the other team punched him, a thing you should never do,
And as his tooth went flying, he knew he'd made a blue.

Then the whole team rushed at him, they came at Michael in a bunch,
All that Mick could think of, was to stay in there and punch.

And though it was really hurting,
he gave better than he got,
One by one they went crying from the field,
as he punched up the whole lot.

Then the Ref sent him off the field,
as there came the cries of shame,
Michael could not understand it, as he thought it all part of the game.

The coach said, 'I'll have to bar you, for turning on such a bad show',

Michael said, 'Yes – I should have left a couple, so my mates could have a go!'

And now the Under Seven's team, is missing one small chap,
Yet I don't think they'll find Mick's equal, to fill the vacant gap!



Grab a branch, and pull it back,
Then the kid behind you, would receive a mighty whack!

We'd wait 'til the girls were coming,
On the ant bed we would run,
Hide behind the bushes –
So we could see the fun.



They would bite them on the ankles,
they'd scream and jump and dance,
When they bent down to pick them off, we'd often see their pants.

Then down the hill at a gallop, to the store that sold the sweets,
Mum would give us some pennies, to buy some tasty treats.

If we had no money, its then we'd ring the bell,
When we saw the shopkeeper coming, its then we'd run like hell.

We would turn up in the playground, with spiders, snakes and
frogs,

Tamper with the fire, by putting gunpowder on the logs.

Epsom salts in the bubblers, we thought that was rather neat,
Put all the kids all in the toilet, fighting for a seat!

The day that I was leaving, I heard a teacher say,
'The year I spent with young Riley, is the reason that I am grey!'

When I got on the freeway, I then picked up the pace,
Some cars went flashing past me, like they were in a bl--dy race.

When I faulted at the tollgate someone said,
"You think your funny",
As I fumbled in my pocket,
trying to find some money.

And then at last I was off again, I thought the car was going well,
Till a car went flashing past me, like a bat let out of hell.

I turned on the radio,
the music was so bad,
I quickly changed the station,
and got a teenage pimple ad.

When I finally got to work, I found parking that was great,
As I walked down the hill, I said to my old mate:

"Tomorrow I won't get up early,
in my bed I'll stay,
For me there will be no traffic,
I'm retiring today".

ONE TONNERS

21

Yes, I drive a one tonner, I am a farming man of course,
It's a little b***** wonder, that replaced the cart and horse.

They have no fancy paintwork, mag wheels and all the rest,
Yet for farmers work and transport, you'll find they are the best.

You'll find them in the paddocks, when harvesters are about,
Loaded up with fodder, in case we have a drought.

We load them up with water, when the country's getting dry,
And the farmers pray for rain, their eyes glued to the sky.

Mine is a great help to me, when I have to do my work,
For farming isn't easy, there isn't any lurk.

We load them up with wood, for the fireside at night,
Where the kids will do their homework, when it's burning bright.

You'll find them from Perth to Sydney, from Adelaide to Darwin, too,
Even down in Hobart, you will find they have a few.

I take my hat off to the one tonners, and I really think they're grand,
They bring prosperity to our nation, as they roll across the land.



PIGEON RACING

22

It's the last race of the season, Gympie and Bundaberg on the same weekend.

We settle down near the loft, me and my best friend.

The weather report is not real good, and skies are rather grey.
They say when they release them, 'You may not get birds today'.

We talk about the boys at the pigeon club, at last we laughed and scoffed,
When we bought Father Riley down, to bless the flamin' loft!

And we wonder if we will get the blue chequer,
Or maybe the old red hen,
It might be young Harrison,
And he won't go in again.



And now it's almost five o'clock,
The excuses start to come,
And when we can't work it out,
We blame it all on Mum.

Then the pigeons turn their heads skyward,
And you give a little sigh,
As your birds come spearing downward,
Like a bullet from the sky.

And you say, 'Hey, Dad, we got one', you feel the pangs of pride,
He nearly takes the door off, as he dashes from inside.

I make a remark on Gympie, and how it's far away,
But Dad yells, 'Forget about Gympie son, it's Bundaberg on the day!'

And now we can talk about the race, for years and years, you see,
Because Dad and I are pigeon flyers, and I guess we'll always be.

They called them air raid shelters,
And they were spread throughout the towns,
There was a very large one,
In the local school grounds.

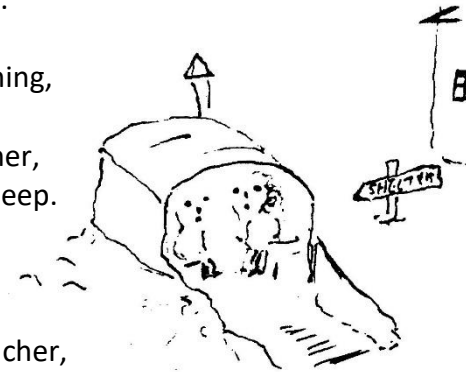
And in case of air raids,
We'd be drilled in what to do,
So just to have a little fun,
I tried to trick a kid or two.

I said, 'The Japs are coming,
That we'd have to move real fast',
It must have sounded convincing,
As I marched in half the class.

There was a little bit of moaning,
As the mud was ankle deep,
And they huddled in the corner,
Like a bunch of frightened sheep.

But I had a disbeliever,
And soon he ventured out,
He went and brought the teacher,
Who gave me an awful clout.

He said I'd be remembered
As the boy whose heart was really cold,
Yet all there is, is laughter,
Whenever this story's told!



You would see her in the ward at night,
In her hand a tiny light.

How it shone, how it gleamed
As patients slept, as patients dreamed.

She would wake us in the early morn,
Her hands were nice and soft and warm.

She'd check our progress and our sheets,
See we were washed from head to feet.

Sometimes she would stop and smile,
And sometimes she would talk awhile.

We all felt safe and never bored,
When Sister Hennessey walked the ward.

SOMETHING MAY HAPPEN

25

The town is quiet, its old buildings well-kept and trees dot the landscape.

In the distance there is a noise that slowly increases until there is a noise like thunder.

A cattle truck flashes past in a whirl of dust and slowly disappears into the distance.

Smoke curls from a small house.

In a pensioner's prison, she sits there by the fire with the treasures of the past and shuffles the family photos.

No one around, no transport, same old thing on the TV over and over again.

She sighs, remembering when the town was up and rushing – people used to dance, the pub overflowing with men, the fighting, the activity.

Now it sits there, another treasure of the past.

Tired old hands stir the fire.

'Ah, well, perhaps tomorrow...'

STEVENS PARK

26

It's a small park in a county village.

In it there is a wall that has brass plaques
dedicated to the settlers of the past and their ancestors.

Not far from this wall is a War Memorial,
surrounded by a semi-circle of rosemary.

There is a weir in the park.

Platypus play on the surface in the morning,
while coloured parrots decorate the trees along the banks.

And as the sun rises on this ANZAC morning, and my grandchildren
run

across the well-kept lawns, I feel the spirit of Australia surrounding
me.

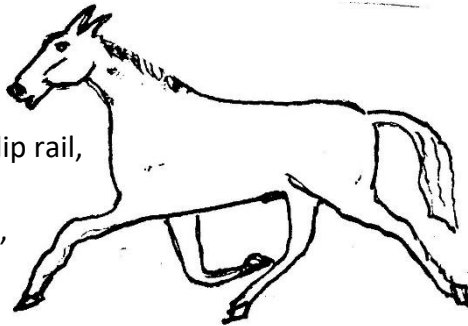
My stomach tightens, my old back straightens and I feel proud to be
Australian.

I found a horse on the road,
And being a good boy scout,
I thought I'd find where he'd come from,
And see how he'd got out.

He wouldn't go real straight at first,
He ran this way then ran that,
So to get him going where I wanted,
I had to spook him with my hat.

He looked just like a jumper,
That's how I thought he'd got out,
Took him to a corral nearby,
That I'd recently heard about.

I quickly pulled down the top slip rail,
How quickly he rushed in!
You could see he was so happy,
Nearly jumping out of his skin.



He frolicked with the other horses,
And then to my delight,
They all got so excited,
They had a little fight.

The next day I found what had really happened,
As it went around the town,
All the baker's mares were pregnant,
And Murphy's stallion had been found!

I said, 'You work on the local tip,
you must find that boring, mate'.

He said, 'No, I have my own library,
and I really think it's great!'

'Every type of book and magazine
on the tip you will find.

Here I improve my knowledge.
That is how I fill the time'.

'There is "*Gardening*", "*Vogue*" and "*National Geographic*"
up there on the stack.

I have to get to those Encyclopaedias
before the fire burns them black'.

So next time you go to the tip,
if you look you will find,

Not a Council worker,
but another Einstein.

THE LITTLE FISHERMAN

29

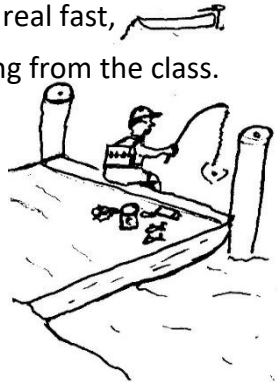
It was time to go to school, so I headed out real slow,
For I wasn't really a scholar, but a fisherman, you know.

The day was fine with clear blue sky, the saltwater fresh to smell,
So, I thought I'd do some fishing, before they rang the bell.

The mackerel and the pilchards, found my bait a tasty treat,
Soon I had a good half dozen, flapping around my feet.

Now when you're having fun, the time it goes real fast,
All the kids were at assembly, and I was missing from the class.

Now all headmasters have those prying eyes,
and it didn't take long to see,
A small boy sitting on the wharf,
Oh, why did it have to be me?!



He sent the big boys to get me, so I thought I'd have a go,
But I was in Kindergarten and didn't land a blow.

They marched me through the playground, in front of all the
school,

I was promptly given punishment and made to look the fool.

Looking back on the occasion, the thing I really hate,
It wasn't the harsh punishment, they wasted half me bait!

TIANANMEN SQUARE

30

I turned on my television,
To find Tiananmen Square,
With a large column of tanks
All cold and bare.

Then from nowhere came a Chinese man
No weapons had he in his hand.
He came to protest the
Suppression of his land.

To prove a point, to make a stand
But the column of tanks turned away,
Denying him the chance
To have his say.

He jumped on the lead tank and cried,
'Come on if you dare.
I speak of freedom,
On Tiananmen Square'.

No shot he fired,
Nor flag unfurled,
As his cry for freedom
Flashed around the world.

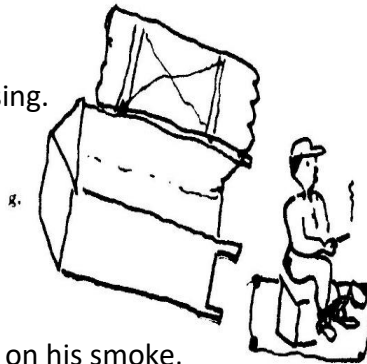


I remember we had a small toilet at school, that sat upon a hill
To be naughty, we called it a dunny, because it gave us a little thrill.

Little Wally was a quiet kid,
who liked the forbidden smoke,
We often wondered while he was in the dunny,
why we heard him spit and choke.

The back of the toilet faced downhill,
so we couldn't see a thing,
He would leave the door wide open,
to sun himself and sometimes even sing.

One day a big gust of wind,
Blew the toilet clean away,
To reveal what he was doing,
On that lovely summer's day.



Sitting there like King Arthur, puffing on his smoke,
I was so doubled up with laughter, I thought I'd flamin' choke!

Then he stumbled across the playground,
with his trousers 'round his knees,
With him trying hard to pull them up,
singlet waving in the breeze.

Young Wally headed straight for home,
I knew he felt the fool,
Because it took him a whole week,
before he ventured back to school.

There is an impressive Teacher's College, now sitting on that hill,
Yet, when I look, all I see is Wally, I guess I always will.

When Dad's greyhound had a litter, the runt was drowned as a rule.

He and Mum would argue for hours, as she thought it rather cruel.

I was only little, when I saw him drowning one,
He said he was only washing it, then he put it in the sun.

He mumbled something to himself, and then he went inside.
To me my Dad was a hero, so I never thought he'd lied.

I discovered that he'd missed some,
So I thought I'd help him out,
But they didn't like the water,
As I pushed them in and out.



When Dad came out and saw me, his face it turned bright red,
He paddled me on the bottom and sent me straight to bed.

They all survived the ordeal, even the tiny runt pup,
Who always caught the rabbit, before the sun was really up.

Now Dad won many races, but put a frown on every face,
When he showed the dogs a bucket, before they'd start the race.

Now other trainers tried it,
But their dogs just wouldn't run,
They asked, 'Why do only your dogs do it?'
Dad answered, 'Ask my son!'



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"Let's Talk"

(Published in Muller's Newsletter)

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I would open the old iron gate and wander down the old, cracked path. At the end of the path was an old foot scraper and the verandah with its lattice stark bare, apart from a few patches of paint of different colours, clinging to it with the fortitude of an old tree on a wind-swept mountain.

Standing on the verandah was an old divan showing bare wood, having long since lost its fabric cover. Sitting on it would be Grandfather with his old, wrinkled boots which he polished every morning, dressed in an old blue suit complete with baggy pants, with a waist coat under a suit coat nearly worn through at the shoulders.

His neck was like brown polished leather. He had a striking face that seemed to have a great deal of wisdom about it, a droopy grey moustache, and a somewhat smallish nose that had seen many violent battles.

Being so small I could see something in his eyes that grownups could not see, for though they were partially closed most of the time, looking up, I could see a sparkle still dancing in them after eighty years. He looked at me and it seemed to draw the good times back to him, and we were as one.

He would sit on the verandah with a clay pipe and with his pocketknife he would carve tobacco off a large black plug, put it into the pipe and firm it down. Then, from his pocket he would take out a fob watch on a chain. Attached near the watch was a small magnifying glass that folded into a protective case. He would open it up, turn it to the sun and in a short time, the tobacco in the pipe would start to smoke. Then his cheeks would go in and out as he sucked it to get it going.

About this time, I would take out my “pipe” which he had made me out of a large gum nut and start sucking away too. We would share a drink of ginger beer out of a large demaggon and a bag of boiled lollies. He would tell me of his father, and how he was chased out of England by soldiers with bayonets for getting loom workers eight shillings a week.

He went to America and crossed to California. He was a dentist, a part time doctor, and later took up photography.

Then he crossed to Australia to go the gold fields during the gold rush. He travelled all over the country in a wagon using his camera to record his journey. He talked of the bushranger that got away, not from the police but from his camera as they shared a campfire, although he didn’t know this at the time.

He told me of his father who as a dentist would give his patients laughing gas, and of the great bursts of laughter coming from his tent as the gas took its effect on the patients.

Grandfather would go down to Sydney Harbour and see the clipper ships unload their barrels and cargo onto the wharf. About this time, he took up fishing, which would to be his life-long hobby. He had a very large ledger into which he pasted all the newspaper clippings of large sharks and fish over the last forty years and told me endless stories about fishing.

Although I don’t smoke, every time I pass a tobacconist, which themselves are becoming quite scarce, or when I look into my grandson’s face, like a flash flood, many memories and a great deal of joy come surging back.

And I know how Grandfather felt ...

Abdull was a Filipino of Indian extract. He was small in stature with dark ringlets of hair. Out of his dark, attractive face shone his white teeth, giving you a warm feeling like hot coals on a frosty night. He had a surging and out-going enthusiasm of life, which was infectious to all.

As he walked along the water's edge, small children jumped up and down in the cool waves that bashed against the shore. Every now and then he would move his body in his new stiff pants, occasionally tripping in his new shoes that stuck to his feet like limpets. Though longing to join the children he could not stop. He had to hurry for he was about to start his first job in the General Store.

Arriving at the store he found the Storekeeper to be an old Indian gentleman, who having wanted to improve his store had recently attended a sales convention on the mainland. He proceeded to tell Abdull that his store was the neatest and tidiest and best kept on the island. He said Abdull would have a great future if he stuck with him. He must be neat and tidy and courteous to all the customers, pointing out that it took a great art to sell things to customers. He told him that he was to push the new lines and be sure that the customer knew all about them. When they were finished making their choice, he was to ask them if there was anything else they wanted and suggest they should buy more of something for it might go out of stock soon, to really sell the customer the goods.

Abdull was there for a week, and the Storekeeper continually prompted and encouraged him to be a better salesman. One day the boss left Abdull in the store alone. Before he left, he told Abdull to make sure he does a good job and to sell as much as he can.

With the first three customers that came in, Abdull did a roaring trade. He sold them a little bit more than they needed and they bought a little bit more than they should have bought.

He was quite pleased with himself.

The fourth customer, a large six-foot Melanesian gentleman, asked Abdull for some soap. He was going to see his sweetheart and wanted to wash his hair and make himself smell nice and look attractive. Abdull hadn't sold soap before and he didn't know where it was located. Rushing up and down the store he kept saying, 'Wait a minute. Wait a minute. We've got soap here somewhere'. He dashed around and finally found a box of soap under the counter. He commenced to tell the man this soap would be lovely and he would smell nice. He said that his girlfriend would be very pleased with him, and he would be sure to make an impression on her. Telling the man it was quite cheap, he sold him two cakes, and the man left feeling quite pleased with himself.

A day or two later, Abdull was standing in the shop when the Melanesian chap returned. His face was furious as he grabbed Abdull across the counter. He picked him up and shook him and shook him! He had Abdull by the throat and his little eyes bulged out of his head and his feet dangled. Abdull tried to speak to the man, but his throat gurgled, and Abdull thought he was going to perish!

Finally, the Melanesian man came out of his rage and started talking, 'That soap. That soap you sold me. I put it on my hair. Look!' taking off his cap he revealed a bald head. Abdull had sold him depilatory soap which removes hair from ladies' underarms. Now Abdull saw the fury in the man's eyes and tried to calm him down by saying, 'You look better that way anyway', but the big man was not impressed. He told Abdull if his hair did not regrow, he would sue the store! His hair did grow back, however.

Abdull learned from this experience. He now runs a men's toiletry shop on the Gold Coast, where he specialises in mens hair pieces!

We lived in Caringbah, three miles from Cronulla, surrounded by farmland.

My big brother would help me over the fences on the way to school and watched me as I went through the bush in case there was a snake on the track as we had no shoes on.

In the evening as the sun went down, we would sit on the verandah looking out across the paddocks.

Then there was the mangrove swamp. The swans in their “V” shaped squadrons would come close and then pass overhead and disappear into the distance.

As the sun faded, Dad would tell us of *“The Man From Snowy River”* and *“The Man From Ironbark”* and other poems and stories.

When it was dark we could see over the mangroves across the Georges River. There were the lights of the city of Sydney, growing and flickering like embers in a fire.

It gave me something to dream about, for on rare occasions I had been there, to see Don Bradman play at the cricket ground, to watch the mini cars at the Speedway, to ride the Big Dipper at Luna Park, and to look in the very large department stores at Christmas time with a wonderland of toys.

Then it was time to go to bed, and with the sound of bulls bellowing, crickets chirping and cicadas drumming, I would drift off to sleep.

Charlie’s eyelids were stuck together with sleep. He poked at them with his knuckle and used his index finger to free them. Although still quite sticky, they popped open to reveal the park, grey and cold. He moved and the sheets of newspaper covering his body slipped silently to the ground.

Then he felt stiffness and pain, a bonus from sleeping on the park bench all night. He managed somehow to sit up, then scratched his head. He looked down at the paper at his feet and gave a slight grin. It read, “RECORD PROFITS ON THE STOCK MARKET”.

The path beneath his feet stretched out like a long black whip. It started out wide at first and finished like a small black thread as it touched the road. He started down the path. He hadn’t progressed very far when he stopped and looked down. Then without raising his head he looked forward, left and right and turned and looked behind. There was no one there.

On the path in front of him was a wallet, half open with more money than Charlie had ever seen, with hundred-dollar bills poking out. His eyes were transfixed and his mouth open as he bent down and picked it up.

A feeling swept through Charlie, one he had never felt before – GREED. But something deep inside said, ‘NO!’, so he decided to find the owner. Opening the wallet, he found a letter addressed to J. Birmingham, 6 Macquarie Street.

Now that was just down the road. When he arrived at that address, he told Mr. Birmingham’s secretary of the find. She said she would

give it to him, but Charlie said he would rather give it to him, himself.

So Mr. Birmingham was summoned. He was a little taken aback when he saw Charlie's appearance and said if he was down on his luck, he would have been tempted to keep it. Charlie said, 'So was I', and Mr. Birmingham laughed. 'You are truly an honest chap and honesty must be rewarded. What do you want?' Charlie replied, 'Two dollars for a cup of coffee, please'. Mr. Birmingham said, 'Two dollars? You only want two dollars when there is \$4000 in the wallet? Look, Charlie, here is two dollars for the coffee and a thousand dollars for you honesty'.

Charlie poked at his clothing and said, 'Where will I put it because my pockets are full of holes'. Mr. Birmingham chuckled. 'Let me put it in the bank for you'. Charlie said, 'Could you put it into the stocks for me, Brent Gold Mining?' Mr. Birmingham said, 'Charlie, what would you know about stocks?' 'I've been sleeping under the financial pages for thirty years!', replied Charlie. Mr. Birmingham laughed so much he had to sit down.

A few years later he no longer laughed at Charlie for Charlie became a very rich man, and so did Mr. Birmingham.

On the stock market his identity remained a mystery, only Mr. Birmingham knew who Charlie was. People often wondered why Mr. Birmingham would take a paper down to the old man in the park and talk with him for hours.

Meanwhile, the two of them became richer and richer and Charlie would chuckle to himself as he lay on the bench in the park as people going past would say, 'Look at that poor old man!'

Down on my luck, I tried to enter the Cathedral in my dull, soiled clothes.

I was told I must be clean to fit in and I must pay homage to my superiors before I could see the colours and the beauty of the leadlight domes.

I couldn't understand it – I thought the gift of worship was free.

Disillusioned, I wandered off into the park, only to find I had been right all along, for when I laid down in the sun it gave me a comfortable and warm feeling.

I close my eyes and when I opened them, before my eyes were all the colours and frames with the light shining through them in a kaleidoscope of colours.

At first I thought that I was dreaming, then I moved and they rose higher and higher into the air.

A butterfly had landed on my nose.

Its small interior framework, not weighed down by lead, not fixed in one place, floated off into the sunlight carrying God's beauty throughout the world.

I paid homage, and no man saw it.

Young Tim had been on holidays for three weeks now on the river, in a boat shed. There were four other boys from the same private school, bigger than him. The sun was shining as he made his way down to the wharf. The tide was still running in but within the hour it would change.

On the end of the wharf there was only one peg to tie the boat to. In order to tie your boat there, you had to win the boat race, which was always staged for when the tide was right. The boys would row up the river to the old castle and then, when the tide changed, they would start their race down the river. The first one down the river to the wharf would tie their boat to what they called number one peg and would be considered as the winner. The losers, however, had to drag their boats all the way up the slipway by themselves.



Young Tim had never won the race. With two normal sized rowing boats, it meant that two big boys would go in each of them, and all that was left was *Jill*. She was a small boat, not a dingy but a precise replica of the larger ones and very, very light. Tim loved her, for being so small he could easily handle her.

He had also made a new friend, a very old fisherman named Huey.

The two larger boats started up the river. Meanwhile, Tim pushed and pushed. Finally, *Jill* slipped into the water. Today she was a little heavier for Huey had added a little improvement to her, for Tim.

Tim was away from the wharf now and pushed strongly on the oars and he knew he couldn't catch the bigger boats. By the time he came close to the shore, the big boys had landed there and were throwing

pebbles and nuts at him as he tried to come ashore. There was no real malice as they never really hit him. After twenty minutes the tide began to ebb and all the boys prepared their fishing lines.

They took out mash and sprinkled it on the water as berley.

The water was now quite smooth and then a number of tiny swirls told him the garfish were there. Five lines flew out from the shore. They were greased so they would float on the water. The garfish fed just below the surface. Tim caught his share even though he couldn't throw his line as far as the bigger boys. He wanted to catch more than them so he waited a little longer.

The other boys pushed their boats out just when the tide started to turn. The race was on!

By the time Tim had pushed off they were twenty boat lengths ahead. Tim didn't follow, remembering what Huey had said. He rowed straight out into the middle of the river, where the current was the strongest and would take him straight to the wharf. Then, from the bottom of the boat, he pulled a small sail. It was Huey's new invention.

The current pushed him slowly towards the boat shed. The two larger boats were a long way in front. Just as Huey had predicted, there was a puff of wind from the south and it started to freshen. *Jill's* bow dipped into the water and they started to move on a little faster and faster. Soon she picked up more speed, slipping through the water with ease. Tim popped in the small tiller Huey had made for him and began to gain on the bigger boats. They were about halfway when he drew level.

The bigger boys tried harder, and for a moment, they pulled a little

ahead, but then slipped back. A smile broke out on Tim's face as he arrived at the wharf and put the rope on number one peg.

On the wharf, old Huey threw his hat in the air and his youth rushed back just for a moment as he danced a little jig around the wharf. The bigger boys finally arrived and the biggest of them rushed at Tim.

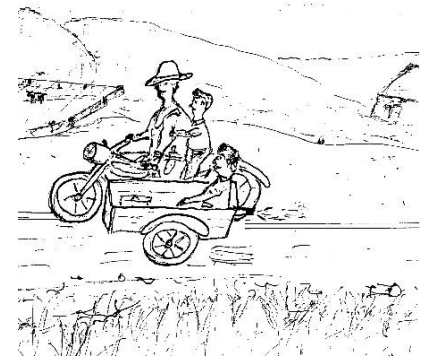
His hand shot out, but he only roughed up Tim's hair, patted him on the back, and then threw Tim up on his shoulders. As they walked up to the boat shed Tim turned around and looked back down the wharf.

The sun was setting and its rays struck the water, and there, at the end of the wharf was an old man and a little boat silhouetted in gold.

The air was clear as crystal, and the sun had just popped over the horizon. Its beams fanned out and struck a large white cloud. In the almost clear blue sky, it hung there like a huge orange on a parachute. I was full of excitement as my mate had asked me to go rabbiting with his father. We were going to take two ferrets and I had never been ferreting with him before. I arrived at my mates place and he introduced me to his father, Mr. MacLaren. He was a tall gangly looking man with a male smell about him. He had a deep voice and a mysterious laugh. He loped around in a disorganised and yet somehow effective manner, yet beneath the facade, I felt when called upon, he could muster a great deal of strength.

His motorbike was an old ex-army Harley Davidson, painted black all over, the only paint he could find at the time. The large parts were polished as was the framework. The rest of the bike was covered in a thick layer of dirt, as he only polished the parts that stood out. On the side was a large black box that looked more like a coffin than a side car, in which Billy sat, surrounded by rabbit traps, nets, the ferrets and cartons of beer.

Mr. MacLaren stood beside the bike dressed in motorcycle boots that were wool lined, and an ex-army pair of shorts that hung down just below his knees. He wore a blue singlet and a hat pulled down around his ears, a webbed belt and an old butcher's knife in a homemade sheath. Jumping onto the bike, he kick started it and told me to get on the back, and away we went.



He rode the bike with his head held high, gripping the handlebars like he was in a race. To him it was an immaculate machine, more elegant than a Rolls Royce. When we would stop at a crossing, his mood would change and the motorbike would gurggle and crackle.

When the lights changed, he would rev the machine, lean forward, clench his teeth, then with a sparkle in his eye, would let the clutch out. The bike would splutter and lurch forward and in a cloud of black smoke, off we would go. After thirty miles we left the paved road and headed down a dusty track for about ten miles. The bike rattled and shook violently, then Mr. MacLaren yelled, 'This will do'. We came to a roaring halt and unloaded the sidecar, mostly Mr. McLaren's beer!

Next we scrambled through a fence and had only gone about a hundred yards when we found a rabbit warren. We set the nets out and put Ernie the ferret down one of the holes. I asked Billy why we didn't put Mabel down as well. Billy said his Dad had worked out that Ernie was a great lover and if he stayed down the burrow too long, he would wave Mabel at one of the entrances and Ernie would come rushing straight out. We waited for a little while, then Mr. MacLaren put his ear to the ground. There was a rumbling noise then he said, 'Come here'. Three rabbits popped the nets and another jumped out a pothole near me and raced down the paddock.

Every time we caught another rabbit, Mr. MacLaren would celebrate by having another beer. When it came time to go home, Mr. MacLaren had had too many and could hardly stand up. He said to me, 'Son, you will have to drive', and put me on the bike. I looked like a pimple on a pumpkin. My legs dangled and they wouldn't even touch the pedals. It was decided Mr. MacLaren would sit on the bike, steering and working the pedals, whilst I worked the gear handle. Off we went. I was only twelve years old so as we hurtled down the road, I didn't know whether to be frightened or excited. There seemed to be a feeling of comradeship in the madness of it all.

We rattled along the yellow ribbons stretched along the road. Mr. MacLaren was drunk and the motorbike had sprung a leak in the gasket. A small blue flame shot out continually and as MacLaren

relaxed his leg inward, it would burn him and he would let out a stream of bad language like I had never heard before.

With the bike in this condition, we knew we could not stop because it would not start again. Then, to add to all the confusion there came a scream from the sidecar. The ferret had got out and latched onto Billy's backside, and he was jumping around and screaming in pain. Somehow we managed to get the ferret back in its box as we continued to ride on. Then Mr. MacLaren started to go to sleep. We decided to sing to him to keep him awake, and chose, "*Take Me Out To The Ball Game*". When we got to the part that said, "*we don't care if we never get back*", he said, 'You'll never get back with me', let out a stream of loud, guttural laughter, and the bike swerved backwards and forwards across the road.

He finally headed the bike down the main road and into our suburb, until we came to his street. He threw the bike around the corner on two wheels and the sidecar came off the road. Boxes, dead rabbits and nets flew in all directions as we came to a stop outside his house. Mr. MacLaren laughed loudly, 'Did you enjoy yourselves boys?' Before we could answer, from the footpath came a voice, small but sharp as a whip. It was Mrs. MacLaren. 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You could have killed them'. She went on and on. Mr. MacLaren would make three of her in size, yet he stood there with his head bowed, like a naughty little boy. I felt sorry for him and said, 'We were alright, Mrs. MacLaren', but she wouldn't have any of it. She took us inside and gave us a cup of tea and some hot scones, while she went on and on at Mr. MacLaren.

Finally, I went home. Billy said it took a lot of sweet talk and a bunch of flowers before his Mum would forgive his Dad. As for me, I'll always remember when we went rabbiting. I've had a ride in a Porsche and I've had a ride in a Rolls Royce, too, yet I never enjoyed a ride half as much as I did with Mr. MacLaren on his old Harley Davidson!

We said goodbye to Mum, dressed in our stamina grey suits, always bought too large for extra wear. Off we went down the dusty road towards the picture theatre. We stopped at the milk bar wanting to spend our pence on a bag of Smith's Crisps and an ice cream. Looking up at the Jaffa's and Fantails that we could not afford, we dreamed we had a box of Winning Posts or Old God Chocolates, the ultimate treasurer. Someone eventually peered over the counter to serve us.

Then we went into the theatre and made our way to the front stalls. My big brother folded up the seat behind me as I sat down. I hit the floor with a loud bang, much to everyone's amusement except mine. Then the lights dimmed and the film began. Stars and Stripes and American Eagles. There was stirring music and we all started to stomp our feet. From the back of the picture theatre, the usher's lights flashed on. The beam wandered along the front row of seats and the noise stopped. The light went out and the film on. It was about American fighter pilots. There was a hero and his two mates. The villain was Tokyo Joe, a Japanese fighter pilot. He smiled gleefully as he shot down all the young, inexperienced pilots. I hated him and I clenched my fists and waited for the hero to catch up with him.

The air raid siren started outside and everybody cursed – not another air raid drill! Then the floor and the walls shook from the roar of the large gunfire. I had never heard a real gun before. The lights went out and the people ran towards the entrance, where they were stopped by the air raid warden who said, 'You must stay inside'.

One man pointed out that the Cronulla picture theatre sat on a hill and was very, very white and the largest target for miles, yet we were not allowed to leave. The manager came on stage saying, 'Everyone be CALM', as the torch in his hands shook furiously. There

we sat, three little boys, with a sea of grown-ups blocking the entrance.

After a long and very frightening time, the guns had stopped and we were allowed to go home. Our journey home was our fastest ever. Mum was just as pleased to see us, as we were to see her. The next day we heard that three Japanese submarines had been sunk in Sydney Harbour. The loud gunfire that we heard was a 9.2 shore battery.

As I walked to school, my mate Barry rushed past me and said, 'There's a torpedo boat coming up the bay!'

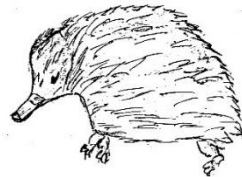
I didn't go, but stood there, wondering where my Dad was, for now I knew the War WAS NO LONGER IN THE THEATRE.



Smiggins walked across the paddock to where the small rabbits played outside their burrow, but they would not play with him. They said he was slow and ugly and spikey as well. He tried to play with the possum children, but they said the same thing too. They laughed and made fun of him, poor Smiggins.

It was late in the afternoon when he saw the small rabbits try unsuccessfully to make a Christmas tree. He wished he could have one too. He knew he walked in a waddling fashion but he could not help that for that is how echidna's walk. He was struggling up the hill when he tripped and rolled back down it. The rabbits looked and laughed loudly. He rolled into a very dark area just under the trees and disrupted a whole bunch of sleeping flies. As they flew out of the bushes, a bird swooped down and tried to catch them. Smiggins said, 'Quickly hide in my spikes, the bird will not get you', and they did. They all settled down and went to sleep.

As Smiggins left the bushes, a large spider's web fell across his back. The sun was going down as he got to the top of the hill. He was very tired so he walked up to a large log, ate a few ants and went to sleep. As he slept, a heavy dew settled on the spider's web that was still on his back, and a bright star came out and settled into the sky above his head. When Smiggins awoke, he looked down. There on the ground below him were all the small animals of the bush, looking up at him and singing. When he asked what was going on, one small bunny said, 'You are truly beautiful'. 'Me, beautiful?', said Smiggins. 'Yes', they all called out.



Then they explained what had happened. The flies had woken up. They were fireflies. They then darted about under the web that was covered in dew drops. That looked like ice crystals, and with the stars above, he looked like a living Christmas tree. From that night on he was known and loved by all the animals of the bush.

When I was eleven years old, me and my friend left the school grounds and went down to the shop.

When we returned, the teacher was very angry. We should not have left the school grounds without permission, as we could have put ourselves in danger, so she kept us after school.

The teacher told us of bad people who could have done bad things to us if we were by ourselves.

When she let us out of school, I waited for someone to pick us up. When no one came, I started to walk home.

That's when I saw a large silver car with blackened windows parked on the other side of the road.

As I walked it made a U-turn and started to follow me down the road. I wasn't really frightened as there were cars parked in the gutter on my side of the road, so it couldn't stop.

I looked ahead to where there was a large space where no cars were parked. I then remembered there was a foot lane just past that point that led to the next street. The car couldn't follow me there.

When I arrived at the space, I ran as fast as I could to the foot lane. I ran all the way down the lane, almost to the end where I stopped and waited.

No one came. I breathed a sigh of relief, picked up my school bag and walked onto the footpath in the next street.

The silver car pulled up in front of me! The door flew open!

Then my dad shouted, 'How do you like our new car?'

Tess and Jim played noughts and crosses in the dust on the road with two sticks as they waited for the school bus on the Burraga Road. They were two games each by the time the bus stopped in a cloud of red dust. They climbed aboard and started toward the back of the bus. Rusty Byers closed his eyes and made an ugly face at Tess. The other kids threw rolled up pieces of paper, however, this did not worry them, for it was all part of the ritual and it would be their turn when someone got on at the next stop.

The bus started and rumbled on down the road, but it hadn't proceeded very far when it lurched sideways and a loud "BANG" came from the front wheel. The kids called out in chorus, 'BLOWOUT!' the driver stopped the bus, though it shook quite a lot. He got out and had a look, then said, 'Someone get something to put under the back wheel'.

Jim said, 'Isn't this great, Tess, we'll be late for school! And we can see who wins noughts and crosses. First let's get that big piece of clay over there to put under the wheel – it looks like a big rock inside it'. They started to lift it and found it to be very heavy. Just then Rusty yelled out, 'I've found a fence post!', and he put it under the back wheel.

The bus driver had started changing the wheel, when swooping from the sky came two magpies, just missing the bus driver's bald head! All the girls screamed and ran for the bus, as Jim and Rusty took up two sticks and started to slash at the birds. They looked like two knights as they flayed the air with gigantic strokes, and stood their ground heroically until the driver had changed the wheel. Then when they all got back on the bus he drove them to school.

The next afternoon, Tess and Jim took their horse out of the yard for a ride – they only had a rope to steer it, and two bags as a saddle.

They had heard their father say, that with his newly broken arm he would miss most of the shearing that year. It would be a very lean year and he may even have to sell the kids horse, so Tess and Jim thought they would ride it as much as possible before it was taken away.

They rode along the side of the road in silence until Jim spotted a large dead fox just up ahead. He said, 'Dad can skin this and make some money'. Tess replied, 'It smells and I don't want to have anything to do with it!' However, Jim jumped off and put the fox into one of the bags they had been sitting on, and then back onto the horse. But the bag kept slipping off. Then he remembered that large piece of clay that was up ahead on the road. He put the lump of clay into the other bag, then tried tied the bags together at the top and slung one over each side of the horse. On the way home it rained very heavily, and when they arrived home they didn't take the bags off the horse. They went inside and told their dad to have a look in the bag on the horse – there's a surprise in it!

After he went outside, there was a short pause and then: 'YAHOO, YAHOO!' This yelling was coming from the shed, and was followed by, 'You bloody beauty!' As they all went outside, it came again, 'Bloody beauty!' Mum called, 'Stop that swearing!' The children couldn't see what was going on around the corner of the shed, so they asked, 'Do you like it?' 'Do I like it?', said their father as he came out of the shed and thrust out his hand, holding a huge nugget of gold bigger than his fist, wet clay dripping off it. His eyes sparkled and his face glowed like the early sunrise!

And now, years later, I think every stone on the Burraga Road has been turned over a thousand times.

Or has it? Hang on! Wait a minute! What's that?! STOP THE BUS!!!

I was talking to a post mistress, she said, “Lonely not for me, for I have the world passing through my Post Office every day. Large and small parcels of all shapes, sizes and colours, stimulate my curiosity.

And in those letters in those pigeon-holes there are dreams, successes and failures. In my imagination, become a library of life, an ever-flowing river of clues to what and who and how we shape our lives.

I wonder in those letters what secrets are hidden. That one comes from the Hawaiian Islands. Does it bring stories of trade, winds and crystal-clear waters, something I have never seen?

The highly scented envelope. Is it from a first love? Or a fleeting case of infidelity? Is that shaky handwriting from the very young or the very old?

Good news of a lottery win, the birth of a new child, what lies within?

Sadness or joy? The greasy thumb prints on the letter from the garage, next to the grandeur of a letter from the Queen for a hundredth birthday.

I have tourists come to see my post office for eighty years, with its rich brown timbers, cleverly carved by hand. Sometimes I look at the desk with many scratches and pieces of wood missing. They remind me of the customers, big and small. I may have scolded the mishap. This interlude may be interrupted by a shearer who walked all over the state, looking for a letter only to find it’s waiting here”.

As I look at the people as they open their mail, I see more face expressions than you would see in any theatre. Who knows, someday I may get a letter and be able to look inside.

When I opened my eyes it was morning. I looked at the bed in which we slept. The pillowcases were made with white flour sacks. The sheets were made out of rough calico because there was a war and everything was rationed. I put one of my two shirts on and short pants which were held up by an old pair of braces.

I opened the wooden door which ran out onto the back verandah. I walked down the back to the toilet and my feet were freezing cold. I only had one pair of shoes and they were to be kept for going to school and special occasions.

It was my turn to milk the goat. She was easy to catch as she was on a long chain. She was white with a small beard hanging from her face. Her eyes were yellow and her pupils looked like two black lines casually painted on. The milk was warm so I squirted a little into my mouth.

After a short time I was finished. I went up to the house and into the kitchen where Mum had the fuel stove going which soon became my close companion. The fire crackled and I didn’t feel as bad about getting up as I did yesterday.

Today was a special day. It was the first juvenile surf team appearance on the beach. I had trained for weeks. I had the best attendance and won the pool race. I answered all the questions and the team agreed that I should be the belt man. I would save the drowning man when we staged a mob rescue in front of all the town. At the last moment, the Shire’s President’s son got the job. He always got things whether he entered them or not. I said goodbye to Mum and grabbed my costume and towel. I went off to my mates place. When he saw me he said, ‘I thought you wouldn’t come”. I

said, 'I'm still in the team and in the club and I can march along behind. Besides, I wouldn't miss it for quids'.

It was about 2 o'clock when all the surf officials and the townspeople gathered around to see the demonstration. The President had naturally bought his son a brand-new set of costumes today. One of the officials handed the surf wheel to him with much ceremony. It was only one third the size of a normal wheel yet painted with all the right colours and emblems of the club. The team picked up the wheel and stuck it down at the edge of the water. The boy to be rescued plunged into the water and swum out about 100 yards, then started to tread water.

The gun was fired and the team rushed forward. The President's son jumped into the belt while the team played out the line. The linesman dashed into the water. It only came up to his ankles when the line came to a sudden halt. There he stood, looking quite ridiculous. Everybody on the beach started to laugh, me most of all.

Meanwhile, the boy in the surf become distressed. He could see the young beltman would not venture into the surf any further without a line on him and all the grownups were fully clothed.

I dashed into the surf. I was born just above the beach and could swim like a fish. I grabbed the boy who was larger than me and swum back to the shore. There was much clapping and cheering.

After it was all over my instructor pulled me aside and said, 'I wonder how that rope got so short?' I just gave him a cheeky grin and said, 'Maybe you didn't dry it properly and it shrank'. Before he could ask me another question, I turned and was in full flight down the golden beach and on my way home.

I remember seeing Uncle Bill when I was about four years old. He sat around all the time and had large brown eyes that seemed to go right through you to infinity. He would say, 'Hello, how are you?' and that's about all. I didn't think he liked kids very much.

Uncle Bill had a very deep voice and when he laughed, it sounded like thunder. The teacups on the table would shake. To tell you the truth, I was a little frightened of him.

After a couple of years of going to his place, I noticed that he wouldn't stay inside. He would get up and walk in a very shaking manner down to the garage, where he would stay, and not come out. He always appeared to be aggravated or grumpy. As I grew bigger, I thought he went down there to get away from us kids, or to perhaps, drink. Most of us kids didn't think very much of him.

When I was about eight years old I saw him come out of the garage with a beautifully carved racing car. My brother was still with me at the time and we asked him for it. He said nothing and went back into the garage.

When we told our Aunty what a stingy old cow he was, Aunty said, 'Let me tell you about your Uncle Bill. Your Uncle Bill only has one leg and a lot of other health problems. That is why he sits around a lot and walks funny. He is always in pain and he doesn't carry a sunny smile. About that racing car, come with me'.

Aunty took us down to the side of the garage. She put a box under the window and we looked through. I couldn't believe what I saw! There was Uncle Bill one leg missing, sitting in a chair. He looked tired. We watched him for a short time. On the floor and the shelves in the garage were hundreds of handmade toys, all brightly painted. With a small saw, sandpaper and chisels Uncle Bill worked with great skill to produce a small train.

Then Auntie put her finger to her mouth and said, 'It's a secret, you mustn't tell anyone'. When we went inside, the first thing that I said was, 'What is he going to do with all those toys? Why is he making them?' Auntie smiled softly and said, 'We haven't any small boys or girls of our own, a lot of boys and girls don't have any fathers, so he makes the toys to give to the Red Cross and they see that the children get them at Christmas time. He sits down to work eight to ten hours a day making them for next Christmas'.

When Christmas came around again, I looked in my stocking and there were a lot of handmade toys and a large racing car. Then I knew for me and hundreds of other small children, he wasn't just Uncle Bill, he was SANTA CLAUS!

UNCLE BILL 2

I went around to Uncle Bill's and ran down the driveway to the garage. I opened the door, only to find it empty and no Uncle Bill. Auntie came out and said Uncle Bill had died. I started to cry.

To my surprise Auntie said, 'You must not be selfish', then gave me one of her soft smiles saying, 'God took Uncle Bill to Heaven where he is now making toys for the children there. When he is not making them, he runs and plays with the children, for he is no longer sick. He has a new leg and is very happy'.

'You know he had a deep voice, so when you hear a deep rumbling in the clouds, that's him laughing, for he has made billycars for the children and he loves to see them race down the rainbows. You should be happy for him, for it's his turn to play. And you will see him again, for when you use your imagination, or when you dream, he will be there. And who knows, you may even write a story about it'.

Uncle Ron was a small, slightly built man, yet he had a spark of life running through him that kept him in perpetual motion. He just seemed to glide around tidying up the small park or beach, for this was his job – Cronulla Beach Inspector – and he was there for twenty-seven years. He had a small shed just back from the beach in which he administered first aid, gave out information and kept the flags and other equipment for the beach. Also, he had a collection of towels, surf boards, glasses, false teeth and heaps of other items, but Uncle didn't gain out of other people's misfortune.

I remember a lady coming back to the beach looking for a shoe she had lost. After four years Uncle Ron still had it sitting on one of the shelves. She was so pleased. I would sit and wonder, as this small man would wade into the water then dive in. From that moment, he would slide through the water like a seal and I had never seen anyone swim with such ease as Uncle Ron.

One day a very big man did not swim between the flags on the beach and was little drunk, too. Uncle raced in and dragged him out, pumped a little water out of him and in a short time had him standing on his feet again. He was a little embarrassed by all the attention so he turned on Uncle, picking him up and shaking him, saying he should mind his own business, that he was quite OK. Then he put him down and as soon as Uncle Ron's feet touched the sand, he flew into action. Something the bigger man had not expected was the punch that landed under his heart, causing him to lean forward in pain. Uncle hit him with a left hook followed by a right cross.

The big man's eyes glazed over and he fell like a giant tree. By the time he came round, Uncle Ron was standing over him and he said, 'If you want to come to my beach, swim between the flags and behave yourself my boy'. Then the man's wife turned up, called him a drunken lout and made him apologise to Uncle. While the big man was the best pub brawler in the district, Uncle's authority was never challenged again.

Terry stopped and looked at the sign on the shop. It read, "*Giant Bubble Pipe, with free Bubble Liquid*".

His two friends by this time were peering over his shoulder. Terry said, 'Great, I'm getting one!' his friend said, 'You haven't any money'. 'I'll get some', said Terry, 'but I will have to be quick. They have sold one already'. Terry asked around 'till he was given a job of painting a fence, two coats. He worked after school for two days finishing almost at dusk. It was winter and he had caught a cold, however, this didn't stop him completing the work.

On Friday he told his two mates to meet him the next day at the shop. It was to be a surprise.

The next day his cold was worse so he had to keep taking his hankie out to blow his nose, but nothing was going to stop him getting to the shop. When he arrived he found he had lost his money. It must have fallen out when he took his hankie out.

He ran along the path, back to his home, and told his mum what had happened. Then he ran all the way back, looking all the time.

When Terry told his mates they said, 'We've been tricked!', and went off, leaving Terry alone.

He wandered home, miserable with his cold, and very unhappy.

When dinner time came around his mother said, 'Come on son, sit and eat something'. Terry sat down and looked at the dinner in front of him and said, 'Sausages, we always have chicken on Saturday'. His mother said, 'We had extra expenses this week', at which his brother and sister laughed out loud. 'WHAT extra expenses?', cried Terry. His brother and sister giggled again, for there from behind his

mother's back came a large box. On it was written, "*Super Large Bubble Pipe*".

For a moment Terry's face went blank, then his eyes widened and he cracked a smile from ear to ear. 'Gee, thanks, Mum' he finally said, at the same time scooping up the bubble pipe and running out onto the verandah. He put the liquid into the pipe and started to blow.

Bubbles cascaded out.

Hundreds of small delicate spheres danced on the light breeze, and when the sun's rays touched them, he could see that every bubble had a rainbow.

When he was a little boy he would play down near the wharf in Sydney and watch the great clipper ships unload their cargo and barrels onto the wharf. He would play in the Tank Stream tunnels all made of colourful sandstone and lay in his bed at night listening to the fine carriages squeal and the horse's hooves on the cobblestones as they went to the taverns and the dance halls.

When the sun rose in the morning he would be awakened by the thunder of large draft horses as they pulled their heavy loads to market, coaxed often with bad language.

He would tell me that when he had time off school he would go with his father on a covered wagon, off to the goldfields and country towns where his father would pull teeth. Sometimes he would use laughing gas on the patients and grandfather would hear them laughing.

His father was also a lithographer and a photographer. He would take photographs of weddings, birthday parties and social gatherings.

Grandfather was very proud of his father. As a small boy, he found it very exciting, for when traveling the road he would sit on the front seat next to his father, who kept a 44 Colt under the cushion that he sat on and a large Bowie knife under his coat.

Grandfather would look behind when he heard a horseman, for it was his job to look out for bushrangers while his father drove the team. He found it sometimes frightening and sometimes fun as he would, on rare occasion, say to his father that he saw a bad looking character. His father would stop and put his hand on the 44 Colt

under the cushion until the stranger had passed by. On one occasion he saw his father grin and he boxed his ears so grandfather didn't do it again.

Sometimes the large snakes or kangaroos would startle the horses and they would start to run, however, his father had a very strong hand and a temper to match, so he soon had them under control.

He would see a swagman dressed in every type of old clothing and sometimes, on their feet, they would have a mixture of old boots, skins or even wooden clogs. Wearing hats and headgear of a thousand kinds, some of these swagmen had teeth, some did not.

He would see bare fist fights in the camps or outside on the roadside inns. There were mongrel dogs of many breeds, horses, donkeys, bullock teams and he once saw one man's cart drawn by a very large pig. People slept in tents, bark huts or maybe just had a large bit of bark over their head as a shelter.

He didn't know that history was walking past him and his father's camera!

Poet's Corner

"Let's Talk"

(Muller's Newsletter)

If a team is not doing well,
it doesn't give the game away,
They muster brains and courage,
and get out there and play.

When the other team scores,
they take it on the chin,
For nothing's ever easy,
if you're playing for the win.

And among the team at Muller's,
I know there is no quitter,
Whether they're working in the office,
or as a tooler or a fitter

When the market's down,
and morale is getting low,
That's not the time to falter,
it's the time to have a go!

WHERE DO THE PRODUCTS GO?

67

Well, they cool people in the desert,
heat them in the snow,
We can have one in our car,
wherever we may go.

Some go into tall buildings,
some go underground,
You may find them in a country pub,
in any little town.

They put them in containers,
that travel overseas,
To keep the products perfect,
wherever they may be.

Who knows, in the future,
we may send them to the stars,
To keep the little green men,
comfortable on Mars.

WHY THE GOOSE?

68

Like the Goose we follow,
Our seasons come and go,
And we like to keep the competition,
Far behind and far below.

The Goose he has high standards,
His timing is sublime,
He never gets there early,
Always just in time.

He knows if you want to be the leader,
You always have to try,
Or the competition,
Will quickly pass you by.

When he's flying he is thinking,
And he really has to strive,
For if he doesn't meet the challenge,
He just will not survive.

So keep our standards high,
And we will make it through,
Remember the future of our journey,
"Depends on me and you".