

BIOGRAPHY

I was born in Manly. (Pause for audience applause - not a sausage!).

When I was 6 weeks old, the family moved to Jerrys Plains, at that time a land of prickly pear and bare black earth. When I was 2, I woke up one morning to discover that the house had been invaded - I had a sister. When she was 6 weeks old, we moved to Aberdeen, which had a greater population but the same amount of water, which was collected by run-off from the roof.

When I was 4, I was given my first lesson in semantics. I had conducted a simple chemical experiment by adding kerosene to a half-empty glass of Epsom salts which my mother had left on the kitchen table. Upon her return, I was subjected to a cross-examination which I withstood pretty well, or so I thought. My mother then said "come into the bathroom with me, I'll teach you to tell lies".

I felt this was unnecessary because I reckoned I was doing well enough with what I had learned from my 2 year old sister, who had obviously been born with the talent. (In 70 years, she has lost none of her technique). The next few minutes showed that I had misinterpreted my mothers words, having failed to recognise the significance of inflexion on their meaning. I also learned that a razor strop could be used for other purposes than just sharpening razors. Oh dear me. In retrospect, an early introduction to the syndrome.

Next year, I gained another sister but we didn't move because it was considered that her chances of survival were so low.

To celebrate the occasion, I was sent to school. At St Josephs Convent no less. A somewhat ecumenical occasion for the son of an Anglican parson.

Our first lesson must have been the story of Lot's wife which impressed us greatly. The Nun then assured us that if we looked behind while in class, the same would happen to us. Nobody was game to test this assertion as we knew God was watching us and we would be caught.

Being a protestant (and therefore presumed to be highly dangerous), I was put in the front row where I was within striking range of a lead-ballasted crucifix. Consequently, I never found out who was in the class because they were all behind me.

I gather that the crucifix was the standard weapon of self-defence issued to the Nunnery but it was also a versatile attacking device, capable of being used either as a broadsword or as a nulla-nulla merely by changing the grip.

After a year, the Nuns had had enough so I was sent down - to the Public School. The word must have arrived first because the second class teacher refused to have me and I got shoved into third, presumably because that teacher was more robust. By early the following year, I had acquired a young brother and when he was 6 weeks old, we resumed our former practice and moved to the big smoke - to Lambton - where there was electric light and running water and a thing known as a Water Closet. This was living.

Another couple of years, in the company of notables like Teddy Box, who is probably known to at least one person present, and the halcyon days came to an end.

The King died, the world was about to end and at age 10, I found myself in the corridor at NBHS saying "Please Sir, I'm the new boy", and having to wear shoes every day. If I may quote from Gilbert and Sullivan "and that is how you find me now a member of your sly lot".

The rest is history. After a couple more years, the family went back to the bush - to Gundy - so I boarded in Newcastle and commuted at weekends. After 5 years, there came the Leaving Certificate at which I failed to matriculate. It didn't matter all that much because I was still 15, so came back for another go and just managed to scrape through at the end of 1941, by which time the war had really got going and blokes from the previous years were already getting their backsides shot off.

It was necessary to fill in time until I turned 18 so got apprenticed as a draftsman in an engineering firm at Waterloo, boarded at Manly, observed the traffic in the harbour from the ferry on the way to work, went to Tech in the blackout at nighttime and on Saturday mornings, played either football or cricket on Saturday afternoons and spent most of every Sunday in the surf. A fairly typical teenager.

At 18, I joined the RAAF and spent the next 3 years at public expense and thus qualified for post-war training which resulted after a further 4 years in a bit of paper which said "Bachelor of Aeronautical Engineering" (which of course was wrong because by then I was married with 2 kids). Then to prove that I had learned nothing, I went back to the RAAF.

That's enough of Biography - now to the serious bit.