

ROSEWORTHY

When my father suggested that I should go to an agricultural college he asked WS for his advice as to how to go about getting me a place in the Victorian one where he had been a student, but this proved to be impossible as there was a long waiting list. Fortunately WS found out from his friend Professor Hedley Marston that there was a place available at the South Australian college near the town of Gawler just north of Adelaide, so it was decided that that was where I should go.

My mother and I flew over to Adelaide and were met at the airport by Hedley in an enormous maroon-coloured American car. The trip to Roseworthy luckily only took about half an hour as the day was stinking hot and the car was extremely fummy. I was full of foreboding, which grew steadily worse when we pulled into an avenue of giant date palms that led to a large red stone building that looked uncommonly similar to Michell House. I had landed back at Rugby!

I learnt later that after leaving me at Roseworthy my mother cried all the way back to the airport. Well, I remember wanting to cry myself when I thought about the next three years I would have to spend at Roseworthy!



Roseworthy Agriculture College

As it happened my time at college turned out to be an amazing experience and one I would not have missed for anything in the world. I was not yet 18 and about to start a new adventure. The lessons learnt on the ship as I worked my passage to Australia stood me in good stead, as I now realised that I had been brought up with a silver spoon in my mouth, but in fact I was a 'nobody'. The ship life had taught me one of the axioms I have followed all my life, *Keep your nose above the water and your head below the bullets*. I immediately realised that this would be a very good policy to follow at Roseworthy. The fact that Fate had other plans was not to be foreseen.

I was put into a three-bedded dormitory, one bed of which was used by Austen De Caux and another by Peter Dunn. They became my firm friends

and we had a great deal of fun together. De Caux's parents owned a sheep station in the semi-desert near Broken Hill. Life there was rough and Austen was a tough nuggety character who liked to bomb around on his old army motorbike. Years later I learnt the tragic news from Peter Dunn that Austen had died from cancer not long after finishing his three years at Roseworthy.

Peter came from a wheat farm on the Eyre Peninsula, which borders the Nullarbor Desert. What a mixture! Two tough Australian characters from the Outback and one privately-educated Pommy schoolboy raised in the Home Counties and the West End of London! These two companions turned my time at Roseworthy College into an unforgettable experience.

Peter Dunn became the Parliamentary Representative of the Eyre Peninsula and was eventually elected Leader of the House of Legislation for South Australia. Years after Roseworthy, he and his wife Heather came to England on official Government business and visited us at Agecroft. I was recovering from a back operation and so had to greet him in my pyjamas, but it was as though we had only just parted, rather than over 40 years ago; but that is what friendship is all about.

In 1952 the college was an old-fashioned farm that still used draft horses to pull carts. Lessons included learning to milk cows, which meant getting up at four thirty in the morning in the pitch dark and wandering around with a torch looking for the brutes out in a paddock, while freezing to death. The college had a winemaking course, but I never tasted the product. When the grapes were harvested they were dumped in a big concrete holding trough and left overnight. In the morning before pressing them they had to chase the possums off the grapes!

I had been at the college for about a month when my father arrived in Adelaide on business, and drove up to see me in a little Ford Prefect car that my brother Mike had used when he was working up at the Broken Hill mines. Mike had crashed it, but it had been repaired and my father gave it to me. I couldn't believe my luck at having my own car. However, there was a problem, I didn't have a licence! Thank goodness in those days it was easy to get a licence in South Australia as you were only required to take a written test on How to Drive! You learnt to drive on your own after you got the licence. I had taken lessons from my mother in England, so luckily did know the basics.

My father had been introduced to Sir Keith and Lady Angas who lived quite close to the college on a beautiful property called Lindsay Park, near the little town of Angaston. They had very kindly asked us both to stay for the night and we drove over to meet these two dear people who agreed to act as my guardians while I was at the college. I drove my father back to Adelaide in the Ford Prefect and then returned to college with my beautiful new battleship-grey baby. The joy of the car was that it gave me and my new friends the freedom of the open road and ability to escape occasionally from the college.

The farm work was mixed with school lessons so it was just like the environment that I had fought so hard to escape from in England. However, our trips to Adelaide for parties became more and more frequent as Peter and Austen had many young female friends from their school days. Life soon took on a whole new aspect!

I often spent the weekend at Lindsay Park with the Angas family and their daughter, Sarah, who was a few years older than me. It was like a second home, the family became my friends, and their house an oasis for me to escape

to. Riding a horse in the hills around the farm with Sarah through some of the prettiest country in Australia was an absolute joy.

The Roseworthy swimming pool was an earth dam full of the most disgusting brown slimy water you can imagine. The college had a water polo team that used to play against other colleges in Adelaide. Thinking it to be a form of escape I volunteered for the team, but only once, as our opponents held us under when the referee was not looking and pulled our trunks off from behind when swimming for the ball. Competitive sports!

I have never much liked competitive sport and was brought up by my mother to believe that the point of playing tennis, golf, ping-pong or cards was to have fun, not to win. It was certainly not my idea of fun to be half drowned in water stinking of chlorine or in liquid mud.

My dislike of competitive sport became very apparent to me at Rugby. Everybody in the school had to enter at least one event at the school's annual athletic competition and pay one shilling for doing so! As I enjoyed the long-distance runs that we were sent on when it was too wet to play games I put my name down for the 1,500 metre heats. When we were halfway through the race and I was running second, I suddenly realised that I could go much faster, so passed the leader and won the race. I confess to being rather pleased with myself when I went up to the master who was recording the names for the next heats. I gave my name and was told that I had not qualified, even though I had won as I was outside the time limit! I went away in disgust and have never competed since in any athletic sport. I do love watching the Olympics, golf tournaments and of course, Wimbledon, but stick to being an armchair participant!

The little Ford Prefect was a joy and was the beginning of my love affair with Ford cars. I must have owned at least eight Ford cars since that first one, all second-hand. We could get five people in at a squeeze for trips into the Gawler cinema. Gawler was a small town in those days and owed its existence to being a railway junction. Lines went north to the wheat country and east into the vineyards of the Borossa Valley. The main street was the Sturt Highway that ran all the way from Adelaide to Sydney via Mildura.

Gawler became a necessary haunt for me after buying some toothpaste at the chemist's one day. The girl behind the counter was a beautiful black-haired doe-like creature, an Audrey Hepburn look-alike, and absolutely enchanting in her white uniform. I was instantly smitten and found that I was in desperate need of a lot of articles from the chemist's. Her name was Rosalyn and she didn't seem to mind serving me, so before I ran out of money I asked her if she would like to come to the local cinema one evening. Luckily she agreed and so began my third romance.

The college dance was coming up and I asked her if she would like to come as my partner. The dance became the best event of the college year as far as I was concerned as Rosalyn was quite the most beautiful girl there and I enjoyed basking in her aura. Not only was she pretty, but she had a good sense of humour and was great fun to be with.

Rosalyn became a part of the gang so I took her to Lindsay Park one day to meet the Angas family. They received us all with what appeared to be open arms, but I learnt later from my mother that Lady A had written to her saying that she did not approve of my girlfriend and that the association should be curtailed immediately! Rosalyn's father worked on the railway line, his job being to hammer spikes into sleepers. He was a nice gentle giant of a man and

when I used to call to collect Rosalyn from her home he and his wife were always friendly and welcoming. They were good salt-of-the-earth Aussies and the type of people I have always preferred to be with.

One day I fell ill, waking up with very sore testicles. Thinking back to the lecture at Rugby about VD and catching a disease from lavatory seats, I knew it wasn't that. I obviously had something else wrong with me so I drove into the hospital and saw the doctor who told me that I needed a course of penicillin, and, much to my relief, that there was nothing wrong that a few days in hospital would not fix. He gave me an injection straight away and told me to go back to college to collect a toothbrush.

Whether it was the injection, or the dirt road out to the college, or I was driving too fast, I don't know, but as I reached the last corner before arriving back at the college gates, a dog ran out in front of me and in trying to avoid it I lost control of the car. The outcome was that I found myself in the back seat and upside down. I climbed out and walked back to the college, rang the local garage and asked them to come and sort the problem out. Thoroughly disgusted with myself, I called a taxi that took me back to hospital to get well.

I was in hospital for about a week, but luckily discharged in time to be Rosalyn's escort at her *Coming Out Dance* in the Gawler Town Hall. In those days these country town dances were very important affairs especially to 18-year-old girls, who wore white wedding dresses and long white gloves for their presentation to the town's Mayor. It was to be the biggest night of Rosalyn's life and I knew that she had been looking forward to the event, had made her own dress, and been practising her curtsy for weeks. She had chosen me as her escort and I was to wear a dinner jacket and black bow tie. In fact I was looking forward to the affair as much as she was.

The week before Rosalyn's big night two of our First Year were punished for a minor infringement of some stupid college rule. The students of each year's intake elected two colleagues to represent them and one of ours was way too big for his boots. He called a meeting and proposed that we should ask the master involved to let our two mates off, and that if the master didn't agree to our demands, we should walk out of the lesson and go on strike. Hard to believe but absolutely true!

Well, of course the master didn't let our mates off, so we walked out and the Principal of the college cancelled all leave for a fortnight, a period that covered Rosalyn's 'Coming Out Dance'. Come the night I slipped out of the college with a small bag containing the dinner jacket I had hired for the evening. I changed at Rosalyn's home and drove to the ball in the Prefect, hoping that there would be no one present from the college.

Rosalyn looked like a bride that evening and was the belle of the ball. There were about ten girls being presented to the Mayor and when the time we were all marshalled into a crocodile at the entrance of the Hall. The band started up and we walked forward as couples so the girls could be presented. Thank goodness we were the last in line so I had time to see what I was meant to do when we got to the rostrum. Rosalyn curtsied to the Mayor and then we all danced around the floor to the applause of the crowd. As we passed the clapping crowd I saw the master whom we had walked out on when we had come out on strike!

It was well into Sunday when I eventually got back to the college having changed into day clothes on the way. Surely the master wouldn't report me after seeing that I was a partner to one of the girls at the most important event

of her life. I was wrong again! It was another leaving Rugby and getting beaten after visiting the swimming pool situation. He must have rushed home and reported me immediately because at breakfast I was told the Principal wished to see me in his office at once. I finished my breakfast while working out what I would say. I realised that I was in deep trouble and that the punishment would probably be the cancellation of all leave for the rest of the year; something I just could not tolerate. After nine months the college atmosphere was boring me to tears and there were still two more years to go. Could I stand that? Perhaps this was the best chance I would ever have of getting out of the place with my honour intact, so I decided that I would resign.

Having come to this conclusion I marched off to the Principal's study, knocked and was called in. "Good morning, Mr McCulloch, I have come to resign from the college. I don't think this place is suited to me." He looked at me and said, "Good, that means I won't have to expel you." It was lucky I had resigned as obviously the intended punishment was to be worse than I thought it would be. *Expulsion!* I had visions of having the buttons stripped from my uniform and sword broken over the knee of the General and being drummed out of the Regiment in front of my fellow officers!

I went upstairs and packed my bag and said goodbye to Peter and Austen and drove away from the college, literally shaking the dust from the soles of my feet. When I think back on all the adventures I had over the next two years that I should have spent in college, undoubtedly it was quite the best thing that I have ever done. I drove away feeling free and also missed the exams that I probably would have failed!

Of course there would be repercussions and I would have to face the music, but I believed that I had done the honourable thing by Rosalyn and had no regrets whatsoever. In my eyes I had behaved like an Officer and a Gentleman, although I did wonder if anyone else would agree with me.

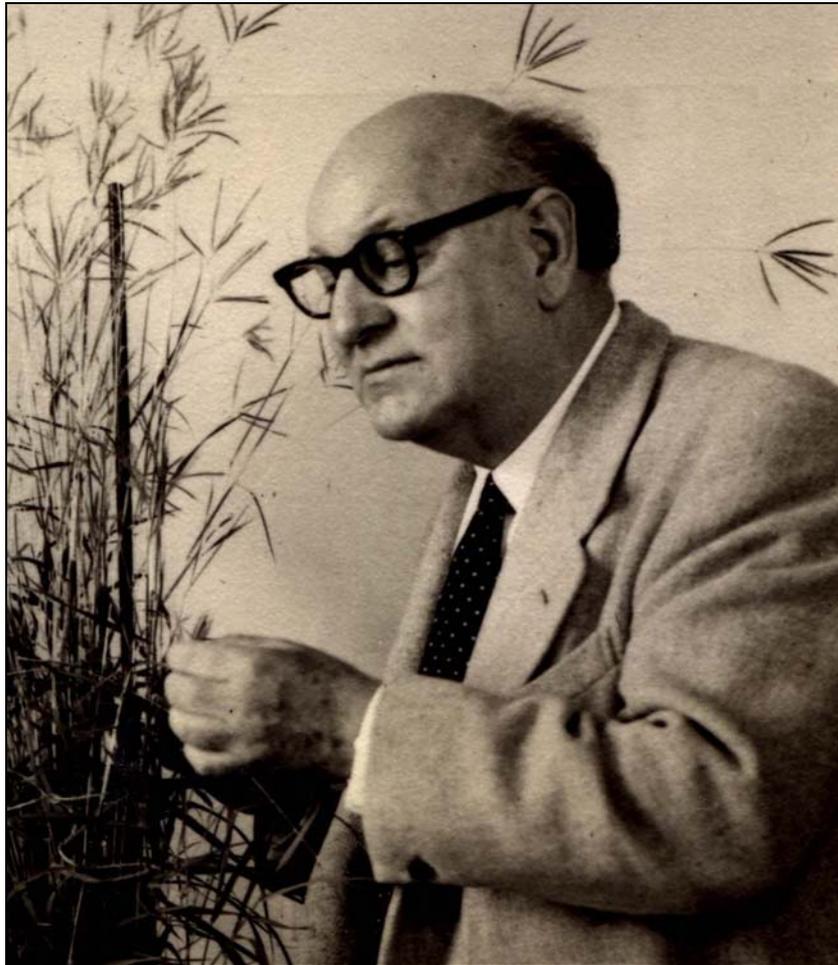
The first person I went to see was Rosalyn. She was of course very upset and blamed herself, but I explained to her that wasn't the case. I told her I was going to have to disappear for a while and had come to say 'goodbye'. Both of us shed tears, but as she was the prettiest girl in town I was quite sure that there would be plenty of Roseworthy students buying more toothpaste than they needed as soon as the news spread that I had left the scene. I heard years later that she married but the relationship hadn't worked out. I hope now she is leading a happy life as she was a really beautiful person, fun to be with, and every time I see Audrey Hepburn in a film, I think of her. She was a fawn. I never saw Rosalyn again after saying goodbye that morning, but I remember her oh so very well.

My next stop was Lindsay Park as an explanation was due to Sir Keith and Lady A as my guardians. I told them the whole story and they both agreed that I had done the right thing going to the ball as Rosalyn's escort. The dear people said that I was welcome to stay with them until the end of the year as it was the haymaking season and they needed an extra pair of hands to bring in the bales and stack them. I really had to work hard for my bread and butter, but loved every moment and learnt a lot.

But, to return to the man who got me into Roseworthy: Professor Hedley Marston. What a wonderful man and what a character! On my trips to Adelaide I would often go and see him at his office at the University of Adelaide. He was Head of the Commonwealth Scientific Institute Research Organisation, or

the CSRIO. He was a brilliant scientist, a Fellow of the Royal Society, specialising in nutrients connected with animal health, especially sheep. He was the inventor of the Cobalt Bullet that stops fibre breaks in wool. Years later, when I was a farmer in the Ninety Mile Desert, I had to shove his bullets down the sheep's throats so he was constantly in my mind when I was doing what was an extremely unpleasant job.

Hedley's office was like an Aladdin's Cave. It was large, like the owner, and his desk was huge, completely covered with stacks of papers. On a wall between two windows was an amazing black and white mural depicting African dancers that he was painting. It was like a giant woodcut. Behind his office was a laboratory and in pens outside were his pet sheep, which always greeted him with welcoming bleats. Whatever went in, came out, or was cut off, was collected and weighed by Hedley.



Professor Hedley Marston

Sometimes Hedley used to invite me to his home for dinner. His house was wall to wall with books. It was a typical one-storey old-fashioned Victorian colonial house with a central corridor running away from the front door with small rooms off it. Either side of the corridor along the floor were stacks of books four feet high. The sitting-room walls were covered with books, as was the study and the dining room and, I am sure, the bedroom as well.

Hedley was a big man, but his wife was tiny and hardly ever spoke. He, on the other hand, never stopped talking, had an infectious giggle and loved telling stories. He had an enormous egg-shaped head and his body was a similar shape. After finishing the meal Hedley used to take me into his study and tell me tales, and what tales they were!

He told me that he was an orphan and had grown up in a boys' institute where he had received a brilliant education. As he did so well at school he was able to sit for the entrance exam for the university when he was very young. He had won a scholarship and met an elderly Professor named Archibald Watson who adopted him as his son. Watson guided Hedley's studies at the university and when he had finished his courses, achieving Distinctions in every subject, took him on as his personal assistant. Towards the end of Watson's life, when he was in his eighties, he taught Hedley to speak a Polynesian dialect saying that it would improve his mind. Once Hedley was fluent, he then taught him to write the language using the Greek alphabet, which the younger man gladly went along with to please his mentor. As it turned out, there was a reason for learning to read and write this secret language, because when Watson died at the age of 91 he left his personal diaries to Hedley, written in, guess what, *Polynesian Greek*! Hedley couldn't show me the diaries of this obviously brilliant and gifted scientist-cum-linguist because they were locked away in a bank vault, but he told me some of the stories and I am positive that they were true.

Australian Encyclopaedia. Archibald Watson was born on July 27th 1849, the son of a sea captain who became a land settler on the upper Murray River. He was educated at Scotch College, Melbourne, and then spent some time in the Pacific Islands as a trader. He was persuaded to follow a scientific career by the noted botanist F von Mueller whom he met in New Guinea. He obtained a medical degree at both the Universities of Göttingen and Paris and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in England. In 1885 he was appointed the first Professor of Medicine at the new University of Adelaide and occupied the chair for 34 years. He retired to live on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait at the very tip of Queensland, dying on July 30th 1940, aged 91.

The main cash crops in Queensland in the second half of the 1800s were sugar cane and cotton. Harvesting these two crops requires a lot of labour, which is why the infamous slave trade triangle came into existence between Bristol, Africa, West Indies and the southern states of America. The same manpower shortage was experienced in Queensland and to solve the problem *Blackbirding* came into being. Blackbirding was the name given to traders who kidnapped natives from the South Sea Islands and brought them back to sell to the Australian plantation owners. The first 67 slaves to be sold made £7 a head and were imported into Queensland in 1863 by the captain of the *Black Dog*. The trade was not made illegal until 1904 by which time over 50,000 natives had been blackbirded, a little talked-about black page of Australian history.

Archibald Watson apparently was an adventurer in his early twenties who wanted to go to sea like his father. It is possible that he knew something about the blackbird trade as he spent some time in the Pacific Islands as a trader, could speak the language and retired to live on Thursday Island. Considering his later illustrious career in Adelaide I am not surprised that he would want to keep his diary secret and what better way than to write them in Polynesian dialect using the Greek alphabet.

Hedley never mentioned blackbirding and only told me the stories that concerned the mines, because of my family's connection to Broken Hill. One in particular was a fascinating tale and I should record it because it is quite amazing. The diaries were kept in Watson's old sea chest and I believe Hedley destroyed them before he died in the Sixties.

The background to the story follows the discovery by the famous explorer, Charles Sturt, of the Barrier Range in the north-west of NSW in 1844. The range is traversed by numerous white quartz reefs, which are associated with gold deposits. These features gave rise to a fruitless gold rush in 1867 that ended in tragedy as no gold was found.

It was not until 1883 that a boundary rider on Mt Gipps Station named Charles Rasp pegged out a 40-acre mining claim that he mistakenly believed to be tin on a *broken hill*, a great iron stone outcrop. He and the manager of the station sank a 100-foot deep shaft and struck a silver vein. The ore samples they sent to Adelaide for assay proved to have 18,000 ounces of silver to the ton. They founded Broken Hill Proprietary in 1885 and by 1952 the value of mineral output from the mines was £335,000,000.

Hedley's story began when bachelor Charlie Rasp became a rich man. His discovery meant that he had to go to Adelaide on business and it was on one of these trips that he met a beautiful 17-year-old German waitress called Agnes who worked in a bakery, (not a chemist like I had!). He fell head over heels in love with the girl the moment he set eyes on her and proposed marriage immediately. But there was a problem; the girl was already engaged to another young man.

Charlie was in despair but, being a resourceful man, he decided that the only thing to do was to get rid of his rival. As murder was out of the question, the solution to the problem was to buy him off! Cash was scarce, but perhaps he could tempt the rival to disappear from the scene if he gave him shares in his new BHP company. He met his rival and they settled on Charlie getting the girl in exchange for some of his shares.

Charlie broke the news to the girl of the departure of her fiancé and then comforted her broken heart, promising to take care of her if she agreed to marry him. They lived a happy life together in great comfort above the city in the Adelaide Hills for 15 years before the hard life in the Outback, which had included digging a 100-foot deep shaft in hard iron stone, took its toll. He died in 1907 leaving Mrs Rasp a very rich widow.

When Agnes had recovered from her loss she decided to visit the land of her parents as she had heard many stories about Germany in her youth and she longed to see the country of their birth. She travelled by sea to Europe reaching Germany in 1913. When she arrived she decided that she would like to marry again but also that she would like to have a title. Agnes let slip at a girls' tea party that it was her intention to marry, and before you could say 'Jack Robinson', she was being courted by an elderly Count, a retired officer in the Imperial German Army. She accepted his proposal and a wedding date was set. The Count then confessed that he was very short of cash and had to settle some debts before the wedding could take place. Agnes was no fool so said she would settle his debts on the day of the wedding.

On the morning of the ceremony she and the Count went to the bank where she transferred a large sum of money into his account before going to

get dressed for the ceremony that would take place later in the day. She arrived at the church and walked up the aisle to be met at the altar by the officer in full military dress uniform. With great ceremony he stepped forward, saluted, drew his revolver and shot his brains out!

Hedley said that Watson's diary went on to tell that Agnes was made of pretty stern stuff and without flinching, *flicked the grey matter from her dress*, and asked if there were any other takers! An army officer stepped forward, also introduced himself as a Count and Agnes left the church as his wife, having insisted on the wedding taking place before settling the new Count's debts. The groom had agreed to this arrangement as long as he was not expected to return to Adelaide with her, which suited the bride as she also wanted to stay.

Fate still had one cruel trick to play on the poor unfortunate baker's waitress. The Great War began the week after Agnes was married so she spent the duration of the war in Germany under house arrest while the Count went back to the army and was killed in the fighting.

After the war Countess Agnes returned to Australia, took up her life again in her old home in the Adelaide Hills and became a recluse, only seeing a very few close friends, one of whom was her doctor, Archibald Watson, who used to take Hedley with him when he went to see her. When she died Watson attended to the Estate as the executor of her will. He went to the bank to check the financial situation and found to his surprise that the account was virtually empty. He returned to the house and with the aid of the servants started to lift the carpets in her bedroom where they found thousands of high denomination notes and hundreds of BHP share certificates. She must also to have slept badly as her mattress was stuffed with money! Countess Agnes had lost her faith in people during her years in Germany.

So ended one of Hedley's stories. I am sure you can imagine my fascination on listening to such a tale when only just 18 years old. Hedley was a marvellous storyteller and I have the fondest memories of the great man. William Dobell did a fabulous portrait of him, which is in the Adelaide Art Gallery. Dobell also painted my grandfather, but WS was so horrified by the portrait he had it locked away in a bank where it stayed until he died!

I met Hedley only once more after my departure from Roseworthy and that was when he and WS drove up from Adelaide to visit me in the Ninety Mile Desert. Margie and I had only just been married and we were very nervous about having two such great men visit us for lunch. Hedley returned to Adelaide after the meal, but at least Margie had a chance of meeting him. I showed WS around the property. I remember complaining to him that the fertiliser came in three bushel bags weighing 186 lbs each and were very heavy to carry. He laughed, telling me not to be a weakling as when he was my age they used four bushel bags! Nowadays nothing can be packed in bags over 50 lbs so I wonder what he would have to say about that! After the tour he had a long siesta and we then put him on the train for Melbourne before Margie and I went off to dance all night at a shearing-shed party with our friends.

Hedley opened my mind to Adaptation. I was thinking about this the other day on my walk before breakfast through the glorious countryside of Somerset. I recalled the giant elm trees that used to grow in every hedgerow 35 years ago when we first came to live here. Standing up to 75 feet high and a good 4 feet in diameter they were spaced out along the lanes at intervals of about 20 yards

or so, all over the countryside. Now there isn't one left. The mighty have been brought low by a microscopic virus carried by a beetle. The Dutch Elm disease shows just how fragile our environment is and how vulnerable to change. All life has to *Adapt*.

After helping bring in the hay at Lindsay Park, I said goodbye to the Angas family. It was time to leave South Australia and I set off to drive the 900 miles to Melbourne in my trusty Ford Prefect. We crossed the Mount Lofty Range and headed towards Bordertown where I intended to stay the night. Before reaching the town there is a wide plain of barren scrubland that stretches for miles and miles. It was right in the middle of this stretch of nothingness that the Prefect decided to die on me.

It had been a boiling hot December afternoon and the needle of the Prefect's temperature gauge had reached the red line and had stayed there while climbing over the Mt Lofty Range. I had decided to push on, freewheeling down the hills, in the hope of limping into the next town. In those days there were no filling stations along the highway. The day might have been very hot but the night was absolutely freezing. I didn't want to leave the car with all my worldly possessions in it, including a rifle, so I decided to sleep the night in the back seat and get towed into town next morning. I don't think I have ever been so cold in my life and it was a truly miserable night. Luckily I had some drinking water and the Angas family had given me a box of chocolates for Christmas, so I didn't go hungry.

Next morning I flagged down a truck and he kindly towed me into Tailem Bend, the next town. I found a garage but as it was Saturday there was no hope of getting spare parts until Monday. I had just enough money to send a telegram to my father asking him to wire me £50 to cover fixing the engine and pay for a room at the local pub. Tailem Bend really was at the end of the world at that time and a more terrible place to be stuck in with or without money you can not imagine. My father telegraphed the money on Monday so the engine was fixed the following day and I was able to leave. For years afterwards, whenever I drove through Tailem Bend on our way to and from Adelaide, I would get the shudders thinking about that weekend.

However, my troubles were not over yet. On arriving in Melbourne I got a rocket from my father for not telephoning to let him know I was all right. My parents had got it into their minds that I had had an accident. I have never forgotten the lesson of how important it is not to leave people guessing. As he firmly pointed out, one can always reverse the telephone charges!

My father had asked his great friend, Syd Emanuel, who owned a vast cattle station in Kimberley in the north-west corner of Western Australia, if I could work there for a year to gain experience. Not only had Uncle Syd agreed to my going to his three million acre station that carried 55,000 breeding cows, but he also gave me an introduction to the owner of a sheep station called Liveringa, where I might possibly find work. I had to wait three months before departing for the North because the Monsoon season happens at Christmas and there would be no point in leaving for Kimberley until the end of March, as the place would be under water.

To fill in the time I enrolled for an electrical welding course because if I were to become a farmer I would need to know how to fix things. I really enjoyed the course and found that I could run a smooth weld.

I also enrolled for flying lessons. I had been for a flight in a Tiger Moth biplane and had become enthralled by the thought of learning to fly. The flight had been from Coffs Harbour into a cattle station near Thora that belonged to a friend of my father, Sam Horden. I had flown in a small plane north from Sydney to Coffs Harbour and then transferred to the Tiger Moth for the last leg over the mountains. I couldn't believe my eyes when the pilot walked me out to the little plane with an open cockpit. The pilot gave me a leather helmet and goggles, strapped me in, plugged in the speaking tube and told me not to touch anything. He then climbed in and a mechanic swung the propeller. Once, twice, *contact*, and then a third time when the engine burst into life. We taxied out and roared off down the runway. The pilot shouted in my ears, "You okay?" I shouted back, "Couldn't be better." I felt like the Red Baron in the Great War! The wind whistled over my head and the joystick wiggled about between my legs. I had never been so exhilarated.

My favourite book as a child had been *Pilot Small* and here I was as my childhood hero. The feelings one experiences in an open plane are so entirely different to those felt in an enclosed one that they cannot be compared. To begin with the land below was mainly neat little squares of banana plantations, but soon their order gave way to mountain ranges and miles of forest. We were flying no more than 1,000 feet above the terrain, so I could see everything as clear as day.



'The Little Aeroplane' by 'Lois Lenski'

"We'll be there in ten minutes," came the pilot's voice from the speaking tube. Blast, it was all going to end too soon! "Can we do some acrobatics like looping the loop?" I shouted back down the tube. "No, not with your case in the back. I'll do a stall turn when we are over the field," he replied. What was a *stall turn*, I wondered? The pilot had climbed steadily since my request and we were now about 3,000 feet above the ground. "Okay, here we go," came the

voice in my ears. We went into a dive to gain speed and then pulling out started going straight up. Just as we were about to stall he flipped the biplane over on the end of its wing and we were nose down and hurtling towards the earth again. What a thrill! We landed and the manager of the station drove out to meet us. I thanked the pilot for the best experience that I had ever had. What a memory! Writing about it has left me quite breathless.

The reason for my flight was not just to amuse me but to collect a car for Sam and drive it back down to Sydney. My childhood friend, Tim Emanuel, arrived from another cattle station and the two of us set off to drive south. When we reached Sydney we were asked to a party where I met a girl, but that is another story.

My memory of the stall turn was the reason I decided to learn to fly while waiting for the Monsoon to end. I found out that I could get lessons at the small grassed Moorabbin Airfield just outside Melbourne so I drove out and enrolled in the course. I never flew solo as I just could not get the knack of landing the damn thing. I loved flying in the Tiger Moth, taking off, stall turning, looping, side slipping; all came to me with relative ease, but I just could not judge the three-point landing and always bounced several times before coming to a halt. Always flying with an instructor meant that I was completely free from any worries about crashing, as when I made a mistake he would take over and straighten up before I took control again. It was a complete joy, but I found out that I was not a natural pilot.

My time was up and I had to leave. I am not sorry I didn't get the knack of flying as my life might have taken a completely different course. I was really hooked and dreamt of becoming a full-time pilot. When I think of the wonderful life I have had, thank goodness I didn't. Years later I was taken up in a hang-glider while skiing in France. I thought that I would be flying like a bird in complete silence. Gliding turned out to be a great disappointment as the noise of the rushing wind completely ruined the sense of freedom I had hoped for. I realised then that most birds lead a very noisy life, apart perhaps from owls and buzzards!

However, I still dream about flying Tiger Moths so have organised for my grandson Sam to go for a flight on his 13th birthday. I can't wait to see his face as he climbs on board and lands again. Boys will be boys!