

## WEDDING

December 1st 1958

I was surprised that Margie's parents agreed to their only daughter leaving home and coming to live at Chute with me after their visit, as it was a miracle that their low-slung car hadn't ripped its exhaust pipe off on a rock as they drove up to the house. I was very apprehensive about what their first impressions would be, because although the house was finished and looked wonderful inside, it was still surrounded by a bare white limestone wasteland.

I was so nervous I can't remember anything about the first night's dinner, but everything must have gone well and I presume that Margie must have cooked one of her wonderful meals.

Next morning everyone said that they had slept well and the one bathroom managed to cope with us all! Breakfast was easy as I lived on Ready Mix porridge. Pop Begg smoked baby cigars in those days and caused an outburst of complaint when he left the table and lit up in the sitting room that was also the dining room. He was driven outside where we watched him puff away as he walked up and down the bare limestone wasteland.

When I joined him he asked, "What about building a dry stone wall round the house?" What a brilliant idea and we had millions of rocks on the property so material wasn't a problem, but I had never built a dry stone wall! He then suggested he ask Henry, his Portsea gardener, if he and his wife would like to have a paid holiday in the country and show me what to do. I had met Henry when I had stayed with the Beggs on weekends when we were engaged and had really liked him so was delighted with the idea.

And so it happened. Henry and Joyce came and stayed for a week on their way to see relatives in Adelaide. Together we built the wall around the house from the thousands of stones we collected from the paddocks. Keeping up with Henry was hard work, as he just never stopped.

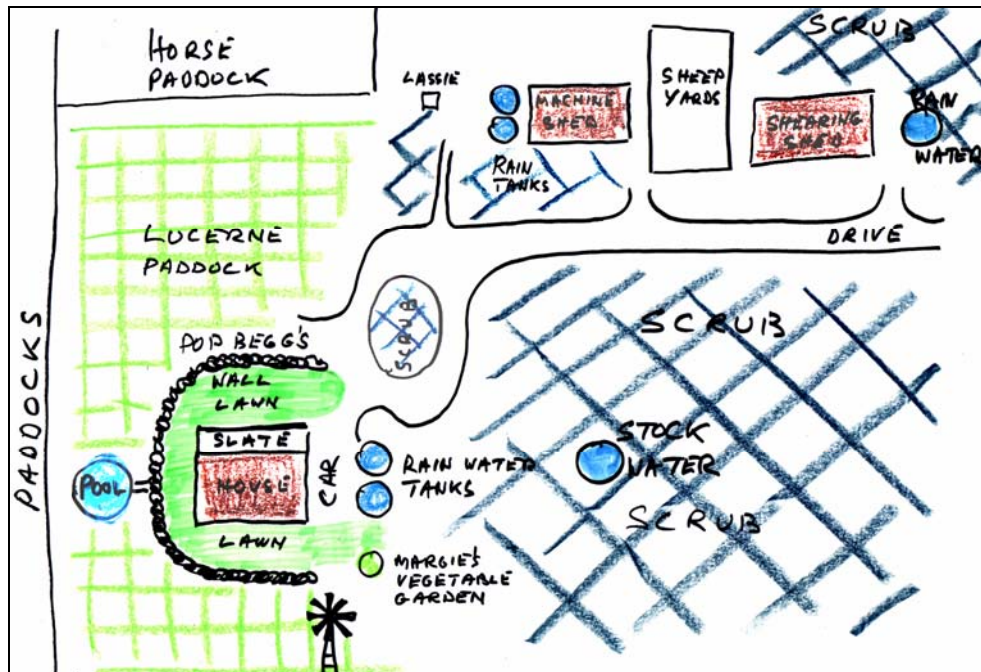
By the time they were due to leave we had finished the wall and it looked wonderful. The following week I arranged for topsoil to be brought in and soon the house was surrounded by an earth plateau rather than bare rock. What a transformation and all thanks to Pop Begg being made to go outside to smoke his cigar!

As we could only use bore water to irrigate the lawn I planted strawberry clover, it being more salt tolerant, although it was still necessary to water at night to keep the evaporation to a minimum. The seed germinated and after a while there were clumps of clover growing all over the place. You could not call it a swath of green, in fact my father said it looked more like a measles infection! Thankfully over the following years the mild infection turned into a heavy rash by adding coarse buffalo grass Pop Begg gave me from Portsea.

Margie discovered she had green fingers like her father and changed our garden into a riot of colour by planting South African daisies, geraniums and many other plants with blue or orange flowers and grey leaves as they didn't seem to mind the fierce midday sun and blistering summer heat.



*Henry's wall and Margie's garden*



*House, first bed and tractor shed, and shearing shed*

The days ticked slowly by and our wedding day got closer. I put in a line and installed a telephone so I was at least able to ring Margie up and chat. She even taught me how to make white sauce on-line! As a bachelor I had reduced my evening meal down to a basic menu of grilled chops, carrots, cauliflower with white sauce and ready-mashed potatoes. Breakfast remained pre-cooked porridge and lunch was a raw carrot sandwich.

My raw carrot sandwiches caused a laugh when my father's godson, Bill Govett, was out from England and came to help with my first shearing. I was very pleased to have him as I had not yet built my own shearing shed and had arranged to use my neighbour's across the Range Road. In theory this was all

going to be very simple as our front gates were opposite, which meant getting the sheep to his shed should be easy.

Shearers are very particular about the time they start and stop work and insist on the sheep being ready when they want them. The logistics of getting everything done to their liking left very little time for anything else. The two shearers would stop for their lunch but Bill and I would have to keep working, getting sheep penned and pressing up the wool into bales, while praying that it wouldn't rain, as they would not shear damp sheep. There was certainly no time for us to sit down and have lunch.

The quickest thing to make in the world is a carrot sandwich. Slice raw carrots, press between bread and butter and then eat. All very simple! Come the first lunch I rushed home and prepared the sandwiches. The look on Bill's face when he opened the sandwich to inspect the filling caused much merriment with the shearers.

Without Bill's help I would not have been able to get the sheep shorn. Thank goodness there were only 300 that first year. By the following year my shearing shed was finished and things went a lot smoother, especially as Margie was then able to make my sandwich as well as provide the shearers with tea and buns and a two-course hot lunch every day. The week of shearing remained one long slog for us both and we were very glad when it was over. On Tim's arrival Margie put her foot down and told the shearers either to bring their own food, or go hungry!



*'Shearing the Rams', Tom Roberts*

City folk only see the glamour of shearing because their knowledge is gathered from paintings like *Shearing the Rams* by Tom Roberts. Shearing 100 sheep a day works out at one every five minutes and is the hardest job in the world. Shearers earn every penny of their wages.

At last it was the end of November and time to go to Melbourne. Tim Emanuel arrived by train to stay with me on my last night at Chute as a



bachelor. I had asked him to be my best man, just as his father had been my father's and vice versa. Three years later I was his best man when he married Sally Manifold. Sally was a friend of Margie's and was to be one of her bridesmaids, which made Tim happy. We drove down to Melbourne together which gave us a chance to catch up, not having seen each other for years.

Tim and I had not really spent that much time together in England as we had gone to different schools, but we did have some adventures together in London, one of which sticks in my mind very clearly. We were about 12 years old when we arranged to meet in Hyde Park by the Serpentine and hire a rowing boat. There is an island in the middle of the lake that before the last war had been surrounded by a spiked iron fence. All the iron fences in London were cut off, including the one around the island, and turned into tanks. All that remained was a notice saying, *Landing Prohibited*.

We rowed to the island and once out of sight of the boathouse, of course headed towards the notice. The bow touched the bank and we both stood up to jump onto the island. As we moved to the bow there was an awful sound of splintering wood and an iron spike came straight through the bottom of the boat, releasing a fountain of water! Leaping back to the stern meant the spike disappeared but water was still pouring in. We jammed a handkerchief in the hole and rowed for our lives round the island and headed for the shore. Never have two boys rowed so hard or run so fast! I have felt guilty about this ever since and whenever I walk past the island nowadays I remember our panic when the spike appeared through the bottom of the boat.



*Margie, Sally, Noel and Sarah*



*Margie, Pop Begg and Helen*

It is probably a terrible thing to say, but I really can't remember much about the events that surrounded December 1st 1958. After a family lunch at my parents' house, Tim and I changed into our morning suits and set off for St John's Church. I must have been in some kind of coma and swept along by the events as they happened. It was all very different to the rehearsal the day before, when it had all seemed like a jolly party!

I do remember standing with Tim at the altar waiting for Margie to arrive on Pop's arm and how radiant she looked as she came up the aisle towards me. I do remember being overawed by the dazzling smile she gave me when she stood beside me. I felt that we were alone in the church and completely unaware of everything else around us.

We spoke our vows and I placed a wedding ring on Margie's finger and we were married. What I did know for absolute certain was that it was going to be the best thing I had ever done and so it has turned out to be. Apart from everything else, like years of joy and laughter and the wonderful happening of being parents, without Margie's encouragement there would be no sculpture story to tell.

Ken and Helen gave us a superb reception at the Australia Hotel and Dennis Farrington's Band provided the music. Margie and I led the dancing, although much to her disappointment I still hadn't mastered the Waltz, so we settled for a Fox Trot.



*Signing the Register*



When it was time for us to leave we did a tour of the tables to say goodbye. On arriving at WS's table, Gertrude asked him to give us *one word of advice*. He looked at me for a moment and then in his deep gravelly voice said, "Concentrate." The photograph below was taken at that moment and says it all! How often have I remembered his advice. Concentration is the key to life and all my mistakes have come from the lack of it at critical times.



*Gertrude, Margie, 'Concentrate!' WS, and John*

Margie threw her bouquet to Sally and Jim drove us to Menzies. What a day for us both! It must be so hard for a girl suddenly to find that instead of being under her father's protection she is the wife of someone whom she really doesn't know, her choice having been based on intuition alone. Our courtship had taken place over a few weekends at Portsea and two visits to Chute to see her future home. I had promised her parents that I would look after her to the best of my ability and this is what I have tried to do for the last 46 years, although in actual fact it is really she who has looked after me.

We awoke to a glorious sunny day and made our way down to the port to catch the ferry across to Tasmania for our honeymoon. My parents had booked a cabin with a little sitting room, so we suddenly felt very grown up and married. We sailed down Port Philip Bay past the two houses at Portsea where we had grown up, but without having met, and out through the Heads into the adventure of a lifetime together.

I had hired a car, which was waiting for us in Launceston and drove down to Hobart to stay for a couple of nights at Wrest Point Hotel. One of the things that I remember most about that week was the fact that we laughed all the time. My parents had very kindly booked us a beautiful suite and filled it with flowers although the bathroom smelt like a public lavatory. I collected the offending green blocks and threw them out of the window, not realising until too late that I should have used paper to protect my hands, as the smell was impossible to wash off. Was this my first lack of concentration? Ever since then Margie and I have laughed whenever we see those terrible green blocks.



The head waiter's name was Charles and he was quite the most pompous man either of us had ever come across. Margie and I only drank red wine in those days, which didn't cause Charles a problem until we ordered half a bottle one night to have with our chicken. "May I point out that Sir has ordered white meat." Our honeymoon catchphrase became, "Charles wouldn't approve", and has remained with us all our lives.

One day we drove out to Port Arthur to see the ruins of the Convict Settlement. The little museum had a display of shackles and other horrible reminders of the cruelty of the times, but also the Prison Register, which we were allowed to look through for family names. We were delighted to find a Robinson who had been deported for drunken and disorderly behaviour, which caused Margie to splutter, "So this is the family I have married into!" We were sure that Charles would not have been surprised. We noticed that quite a few pages had been torn out by families who wished to hide their past!

We drove over the mountains to Zeehan, a mining town on the West Coast, and stayed in the ZC Guest House for a couple of nights. The fumes from the lead smelters had killed every single tree for miles around, leaving the surrounding mountains completely bare, a devastating sight. The manager had arranged for us to ride in one of the ore bins that were pulled up the mountain on a long cable by the bin full of rocks coming down from the mine. We asked what would happen if the cable broke and were assured that they had never had an accident! It was a very unnerving experience, but the view from the top out over the coastline was amazing.

I knew that my father had worked at Zeehan when he was 20 after leaving Cambridge, having been sent there to forget about my mother! At the same time my mother had been sent to stay with her brother Pat in Southern Rhodesia, where he farmed after the Great War. The reason for these drastic removals was that both my mother's mother and father's father were totally opposed to Bill and Nan getting married.

In those days many young men came down from Cambridge University before sitting their final exams, which was probably a good thing, as most had not attended any lectures. May Balls were a very popular pastime and at one of these my father's great friend, Sydney Emanuel, had invited Nan as his partner. She was introduced to Bill and they fell in love. When Nan took Bill home to meet her mother apparently the Colonial Boy did not impress Granny Freeland. This was ridiculous as he had been in England since he was three years old, educated at Harrow for years and then Cambridge.

Bill drove a tiny baby blue Bugatti that Nan told me was not a very good car from a girl's point of view as it was open to the cold and rain. Furthermore my father had to clean the spark plugs often as they used to oil up when driving in traffic. The Bugatti was duly replaced by a Lancia that was the first car ever built with brakes on all four wheels. According to my mother he used to love demonstrating that it could stop quicker than any other make to non-believers by driving at brick walls!

My father told me that he was absolutely terrified of Granny Freeland as she had two very large yellow and blue Macaw parrots tethered to perches either side of the front door of her country house. When guests visited the house they had to run the gauntlet of squeezing between these beasts that screeched and flapped their wings at people they didn't know.



Granny Freeland also had a pet monkey called Jacko that had free range of the house and loved to sneak up on visitors and nip their ankles. Jacko eventually became so aggressive he attacked the postman and my mother was delegated to take him to the London Zoo for adoption. She told me that it was one of the most distressing things she had ever had to do because when she delivered him there he screamed like a child pleading not to be left behind.

WS was equally appalled at Bill's choice, as he was not impressed with the English middle classes, whom he considered to be lazy and effete. The outcome of this expressed horror from both their parents was a year's banishment to either ends of the earth. Luckily there was a proviso. If after a year they still felt the same way about each other they could become engaged, but only if they agreed to wait yet another year before marrying. Thinking about my father's story shows me how lucky Margie and I were to have such fantastic and supportive parents.

I know nothing about Bill's banishment to Tasmania, but having seen Zeehan I don't believe he would have enjoyed his time there, surrounded by some of the ugliest country I have ever seen in my life. The town was originally a convict settlement and the entrance of the harbour was known as *Hell's Gates*. The West Coast of Tasmania has one of the world's highest rainfalls, 120 inches per annum, so he must have always been wet.

Nan fared better as she went to join her bachelor brother Pat on his Soldier Settler's farm. The British Government had a policy of settling the Highlands of Rhodesia with the returned soldiers who had been gassed in the war, so he had been allocated a farm near the town of Bulawayo. Pat had built a primitive bungalow but it was still unfurnished. Granny Freeland decided to send out everything he needed from sheets to plates to a stove all packed into tea chests. I guess that stores like the Army and Navy in London were doing the same thing for people all over the Empire. The tea chests were always of a superior quality so when unpacked they could be made into furniture such as cupboards, tables and square chairs.

Uncle Pat met his little sister at the station with a cart pulled by two mules called *Can't* and *Shan't*. The ride out to the farm took several hours along a bush track, but eventually they reached Pat's mud-brick bungalow. It all sounds a bit like the first tin shed I built to live in at Chute, so I can well imagine what my mother's reaction was on arrival as up to then she had always had breakfast in bed!

Over the next few days the boxes were unpacked and they set about making furniture from them. Included in the shipment were several bolts of cloth and some of this was used for curtains to cover the boxes when they became bedroom cupboards. Nan claimed that she transformed the bungalow into a very pretty house and I am sure she did. The plumbing was primitive. When she banged on the tin wall a native would pour hot water into a basin joined from outside through the wall into the bath inside.

Nan smoked all her life, but as Uncle Pat had damaged lungs he didn't have any cigarettes in the house. This meant he had to send a native into town to collect a new supply each week. My mother told me that she couldn't work out why they tasted so awful until she met the boy running back from the store with them tucked under his armpits!

When the year of exile was over Nan and Bill met again and as their feelings for each other had not changed, a wedding date was set. They went to Devon for their honeymoon, leaving their best man, Syd Emanuel, to deal with

the wedding photographs. He ordered one of each, but the photographer wrote a 2 after the 1 on the order form. They returned to their little house in Ovington Square in Kensington and found the front hall stacked to the ceiling with packages of photographs mostly of people they didn't know!

The family soon outgrew the little house and they moved to Cambridge Square near Marble Arch, where I was born in 1935. These pre-war years must have been great fun for my parents. Bill worked beside WS at the ZC office learning the mining business and every year he would be sent to New York, taking Nan with him.

They used to travel over by ocean liner, leaving the children in the care of Nana, cook and the housemaid. My mother told me wonderful stories about the Prohibition Days and how their friends brewed gin in their baths. During the return voyage she used to spend the time sewing the labels from her old clothes onto the new ones she had bought in New York. She did this when Bill was not looking, as he would have been horrified. Without a doubt, he was one of the most honest men the world has known.

As Granny Freeland lived in Madeira for half the year and her chauffeur had nothing to do in London, Bill and Nan used him and the car. The first ten years of their marriage must have been wonderful, but tragedy struck in late 1935 when Bill contracted tuberculosis and had to have a lung collapsed. It was then that Nan bought Chute Standen and moved to Wiltshire. She built a conservatory where he could recover which he did in time to take part in WWII and England's fight for survival. Probably my father getting TB, forcing the family to sell Cambridge Square, actually saved our lives as the square was blitzed by the Germans. Although all the houses were flattened by the bombs the London plane trees survived and are still there!

Margie and I arrived back in Melbourne from our week in Tasmania and after seeing both our parents drove back to the farm in the Ninety Mile Desert to begin our married life in our own home. Because I worked on the farm our honeymoon continued. Margie's parents had asked us down to Portsea for Christmas and as my parents were staying with WS and Gertrude along the cliff we had a wonderful holiday with plenty of sea, sand and family.

The problem I faced on our first Christmas was what possible present could I give my new wife? I walked down Melbourne's main street looking for inspiration in the windows but all I could see were mannequins dressed in elegant dresses staring blindly out at me. One of them was leaning on a mantelpiece and on the shelf was a red china bull, which for me dominated the whole window.



I walked in and asked a shop girl if the window display was for sale. She assured me that it was, presumably thinking I meant the elegant dress because she was very surprised when I asked the price of the bull. “Oh, I will have to ask about that.” A senior shop assistant arrived, gave me a funny look and then climbed into the window, my having assured her, “Yes, it was the bull I was asking about.” Anyway I bought it and they gift-wrapped it for me and I gave it to Margie for Christmas. It was definitely a surprise! The Red Bull has looked after us ever since and I like to think he was telling me even then that sculpture would be my destiny. All good things come to an end and it was soon time to return to the farm and really start behaving like grown-ups.

Our first summer together was a dream. I don’t think we stopped laughing we were so happy. If the temperature got a bit too hot to bear we used to take an icy cold shower under the fire hydrant by the windmill close to the house. I could fill a 200-gallon fire tank in a matter of minutes from the hydrant as it was fed directly from a 10,000-gallon tank and with the valve fully open it was like standing under Niagara Falls. We used to walk down to the windmill stark naked, that is until one day some unannounced visitors arrived at the house, causing us to hide in the bushes until they left. They were halcyon happy carefree days.



▲  
*'Chute' homestead and fire hydrant windmill*

One of the joys of Chute was Friday’s mailbag that Cliff Leadham left in a 44-gallon petrol drum down at the gate. He collected everyone’s mailbags from the Keith Post Office and stopped at each property along the Black Range Road on his way back to the Willalooka Store and Telephone Exchange which was manned by Mrs Leadham. Years later the Leadhams operated the Willalooka Drive-In cinema that was a delight to our children.

After we had found the key to the padlock, the blue canvas bag would be ceremoniously opened and the contents spilled out onto the floor of the sitting room. It was a very exciting moment and a bit like Christmas every week as we looked for handwritten envelopes and overseas mail. Of course we had our fair share of bills as well, which was always depressing, but usually there would be something exciting. Cliff also brought a *Woman’s Weekly* for Margie that was her only source of city gossip as we had no newspaper. When I began subscribing to *Time* it also came in the bag, along with a fresh loaf of bread!

Our little house was beautifully cool in the summer as long as there wasn't a northerly blowing, but because of the sandy soil when winter set in the temperature got decidedly frosty. We had a large open fire in the sitting room, but even so some evenings it was so cold you would only be warm on whichever side you exposed to the flames. Keeping warm was a bit like toasting bread on a fork, one side at a time. Ever since those days I have been very appreciative of central heating.

There was no mains electrical supply in the area, so we generated our own with the same diesel engine that drove the shearing gear. The engine was operated from a remote control button in the kitchen that could not have been further from our bedside. When we couldn't stand the chill of the sitting room another moment we retired to our blankets. Turning the lights out meant one of us rushing to the kitchen and back before freezing to death, so it wasn't long before I had a set of buttons installed beside the bed! By the time the second winter came we had saved up for an electric blanket. This meant that at least we could get into a warm bed.



### *New rams and new shearing shed*

There was always plenty of work to do on the farm. Margie was able to help me in the yards when necessary and soon learnt that bursting into tears while drafting sheep didn't really help if her husband was yelling at her at the same time as screaming blue-murder at the dog. The City girl became a first class Country girl and I was very proud of her.

The house looked out onto a lucerne paddock that gave a small amount of green relief during the long dry summer months. Beyond that was a small horse paddock for my old grey mare that I called Daisy Roots, because she was so hard to pull up when heading for home. On the way out to work and while inspecting the sheep she behaved like an angel, but as soon as I turned her head for home it was a different story and a firm hand was needed. Margie was longing to ride Daisy Roots so I bought another horse for myself and named him Spot after the white blaze on his forehead.



Tim Emanuel had given Margie a beautiful Australian saddle as a wedding present. She had been thrilled by this totally original gift and was dying to try it out. As a teenager she had taken lessons at Sorrento's Tally Ho! riding school and ridden with her country cousins, but that was many years ago. I hoped that if I rode with her on Spot, Daisy Roots would behave. It was great fun inspecting the sheep together, riding around the paddocks either in the early morning or late afternoon, occasionally disturbing a pair of Bronzewing pigeons, who would fly away with a soft whirring of wings.

Occasionally we would ride back to the house through the hidden valley we had christened Glen Gowan, Margie's second name. We felt as though there was not another person on the planet. Years later Glen Gowan became one of our favourite weekend picnic spots with the three little boys.

When Margie became pregnant we would occasionally go out on horseback for a gentle walk around the stock until one day Daisy Roots sensed that her passenger was apprehensive and bolted. Margie did well to stay on board, but it was a worrying moment and horse riding was banned.

Spot was the cause of a very strange happening. Eight years had passed since my visiting the Angas family as a Roseworthy student and sometimes helping their daughter Sarah move stock on horseback. We had only just bought Spot when Sarah came to stay for a night as she was passing through Keith. It was great to see her again and talk about old times and show her around the farm. As we went past the horse paddock Spot trotted over and Sarah nearly fainted. My Spot was her beloved Tankard that she had sold when she left home!

At the beginning of Margie's pregnancy we were asked by Conway Seymour to his wedding to Sue in Sydney. Conway and I had become friends when I had arrived in Keith, but he had known Margie since their school days. He had proposed to Sue at our front gate on their way home after they had been to dinner. Even though it would be a long drive up to Sydney, we decided that we had to go to the wedding as once we had a baby our travelling days would be seriously curtailed and this might be the last chance of the two of us having a trip alone for many years to come.

The wedding was a fun party and much enjoyed. Being in Sydney also meant that we were able to see Margie's brother, David, and his wife, Mitzi, and my cousin, Peter Baillieu and his wife, Edwina. It had been Peter who had taught me to swim, aged six, by tying a halter round me and throwing me in the lagoon from a raft. He had left the land, gone into the banking world and moved to Sydney. After a wonderful dinner with them Peter suggested that we should go to hear a new singer that everyone was talking about.

Peter and Edwina were obviously well known at the club and were shown to a table near the stage. The act was announced soon after we arrived and a girl started to sing. I had never heard such a voice before and we were all enchanted. The voice of Dionne Warwick has since shared our lives. Her partnership with Bacharach has given the world unbounded musical joy. Whenever I hear her sing on the radio I remember the night we saw her perform and sent shivers down my spine.

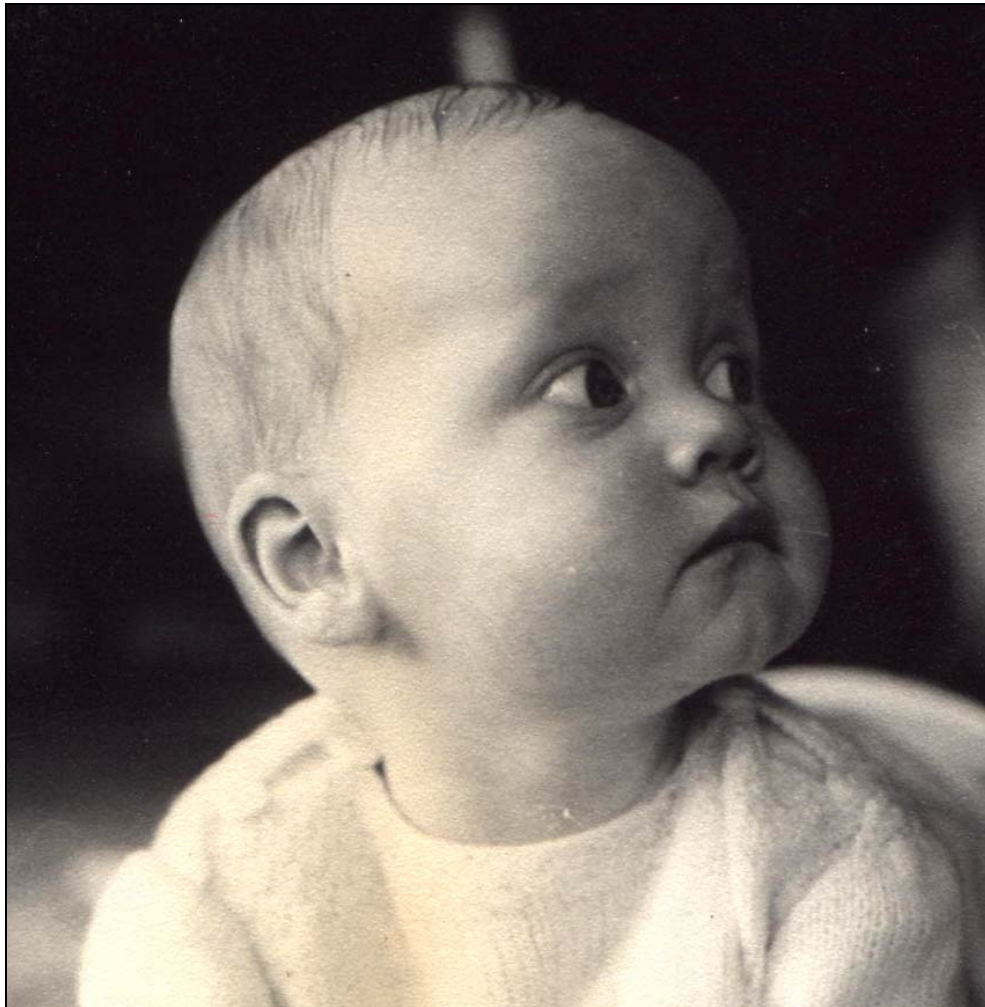
There is another girl who sends shivers down my spine, Jacqueline du Pré. I have a videotape of her playing Elgar's *Cello Concerto*, which nearly moves me to tears every time I see it. The passion and intensity of her playing is unique. Another piece of music which makes my spine tingle is Beethoven's *Violin Sonata No. 5, Spring*. Sitting in the Agecroft studio with Margie on a

summer evening listening to it as we eat our dinner looking out on the floodlit garden is as close to being in Paradise as anyone could desire.

If I were only allowed to choose one piece of classical music by Mozart it would have to be his Concerto for *Harp and Flute*. Alkan's *Barcarolle in G* is another favourite that has given me endless joy as it is without doubt one of the most soothing pieces of music I have listened to.

When Margie was into her eighth month, my parents came to stay for the weekend. We had decided that the baby should be born in Melbourne, so Margie went with them when they left to stay with her parents and await the Big Day. When the time drew near I drove down so I would be able to take her into the hospital. On April 3rd 1960, Timothy William Robinson arrived at St Andrew's hospital with all the church bells ringing because it was Easter Sunday morning.

In those days mothers were encouraged to stay in hospital for ten days after giving birth. When Margie and Tim were discharged we returned to Chute to build a new life around a routine imposed by a seven pound bundle.



*'Tim' at four months*

Now that Margie and I had a child we began to learn the joys of being a family. Life took on a new format that included feeding him by candlelight in the middle of the night. Tim grew at the required rate and although being a rather fussy eater, he was the perfect baby. He occasionally threw his purée on the floor, which was frustrating as Margie had grown the vegetables and spent hours forcing them through a sieve!



*'Four Generations', 1960  
JR 25, Tim 0.5, LB 55 and WS 85*



*Margie, Pop Begg, Tim and Granny B*

My father came to see us before returning to England. We had a brilliant weekend and I took some great photos of him holding Tim while he and the little boy got to know each other. Tim had developed a strong neck by his visit and it was great to see my father holding the little boy as he studied his gentle giant of a grandfather. We didn't have any idea that it would be the last time we would see him. Three months later he had a fatal heart attack, aged only 56.



*'Bill and Tim'*

The following year my mother came to stay and told me about my father's death. He had gone to bed early not feeling well and because she was worried about him she had left the door open between their rooms. She woke hearing my father calling for her and found him in a great deal of pain so immediately called the doctor. When he arrived my mother asked him to give Bill an injection to alleviate the pain, but the doctor refused saying that it could kill him. My mother insisted that he do something and the man rounded on her and asked, "Do you want to kill him?" My father was completely lucid and ordered the doctor not to talk to my mother in that way, pointing out that if it were not for her nursing him when he had had tuberculosis he would have died long ago. He then ordered the doctor to give him an injection, as he knew that he was dying and couldn't stand the pain any longer. The doctor did so and went to wait in the sitting room leaving them together. My father died in his wife's arms.

I tell this story, as I believe that it shows what a wonderful marriage my parents had: one of love, trust and companionship, shared over many years. They had lived through many marvellous early years, his illness, WWII, and had seen their children grow and marry and give them grandchildren. What more can anyone ask? I also tell the story because I admire their bravery more than I can say and I pray that when my time comes, or Margie's, that one of us will have as much courage and be as brave in the face of such an ordeal.

My father's death made his visits to Chute my most precious memory of the friendship that had grown up between us over the last four years of his life. By this time Margie was expecting her second baby, but unfortunately my



father died before Peter arrived. I treasure the memory of Bill holding Tim, as much as the photo I have of him holding me when I was the same age.



*Gamma and Tim*



*“I would like to draw the attention of the Board to the fact that I run this Company and no one should forget it!”*



*A very happy mother with her son*

Tim couldn't be left alone in the house so we used to have him with us when working the sheep in the yards or bumping around on the tractor. He seemed to love everything we did with him and was a very happy little boy.



*Margie and Tim drafting sheep*

A general rethink was necessary when Peter was getting ready to arrive on the scene. To start with there was no way we were all going to get into the VW, so it was traded in for a Holden that had lime-green plastic seats! Going from a VW to a station wagon was like moving into a bus.



*'Peter Lyell', April 1962*

Peter was a completely different child to Tim. Apart from eating everything that was put in front of him, he seldom had wind, would sleep anywhere, and never cried. He also was born in Melbourne and as Margie only ever wanted boys he was a very welcome addition to the family.

One day Margie came back from shopping in Keith with an adorable marmalade kitten, which had been found under the school floor! At first it was never allowed in the house, but used to walk up and down the windowsill outside my office that had become the nursery as my desk was under the window and proved to be the perfect height for the baby's bath! We christened the cat Spike Milligan and he provided great amusement at bath time as he paraded back and forth as Peter tried to focus on him and catch him through the glass with squeals of delight.

One of the problems with Australia is that it has more than its fair share of poisonous snakes. Around the house and sheds I had killed several King Browns, some of them a good six foot long. Margie used to put the playpen outside in the shade of the back veranda on hot days so Peter could be as cool as possible. One day, when she peeked through the window to check up, she saw him laughing at the cat who was behaving very strangely beside the pen. On taking a closer look she saw to her horror a snake moving along the edge of the pen and realised that Spike was trying to shoo it away. Luckily I was working close by and was able to dispatch the snake. Spike became our best friend from that day on and was invited into the house, although he never really felt comfortable inside, preferring to hunt in the Bush.

Lassie, my Border collie sheepdog, didn't really like Spike and pretended he didn't exist. Lassie didn't really like anything about my being married and always made sure that I was between her and Margie or the boys.





### *Spike Milligan and Peter*

When Margie and I got engaged I gave her a golden Labrador puppy. We called her Lady to commemorate our first movie date. This name got changed to Heidi during our engagement, mainly because my future mother-in-law thought Lady was 'too awful'. Luckily we both liked the new name and the dog didn't seem to mind the change. Heidi was a beautifully natured dog and was allowed into the house after we were married. When Tim arrived it was Heidi's turn to have her nose put out of joint as she thought he was very bad news and didn't like taking second place. Fortunately Heidi and Pop Begg had fallen in love with each other and when we suggested that he take her, both man and dog were delighted. Pop changed her name again, this time to Heido!

Nan and Bill had a close friend whom we boys all called Uncle Frederick. The three of them had shared many happy times together over the last twenty years and my parents treated his children as their own and his sons, Peter and Henry, often stayed in our country home when they were on leave during the war. He was a tower of strength to Nan when my father died. Uncle Fred's wife had died only months before Bill, so with full approval of all their children my mother became Mrs Frederick Bowring, although to keep matters simple and separate, my mother merely changed her surname by Deed Poll, but kept it a secret from all except the two eldest sons, Pat and Peter. I didn't find out until years later when Peter wrote a book on his family's history! They made a marvellous couple and the partnership brought both of them much happiness.

The first time I was aware of Uncle Fred was when I sat on his knee aged five years old to see the cinema screen. My mother was about to say goodbye to Mike and me as we were to be evacuated to Australia because of

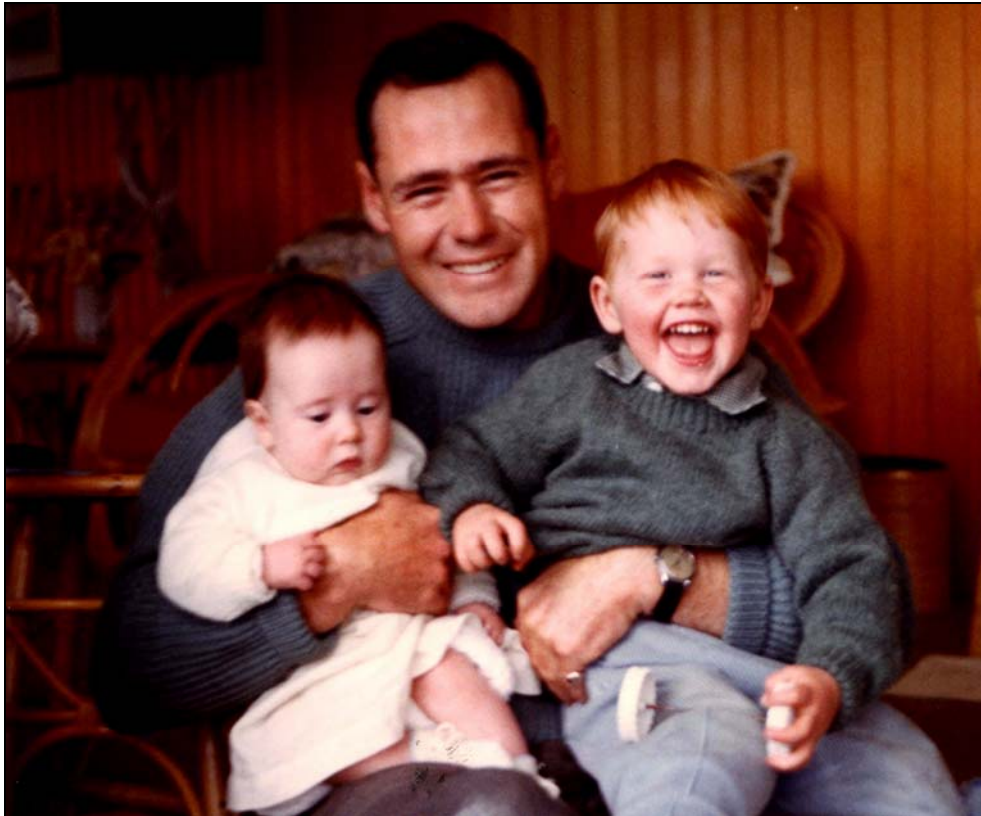


the war. It must have been a terrible time for my mother and as Bill couldn't be there, Uncle Fred must have stepped in and taken us to see *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. I have memories of being terrified by the wicked witch, so I am not sure that it was the right film for me, but then my mother never was a good chooser of films.



*Pop Begg and Heido*

When I was about nine years old she took me to see a Werewolf film in our local cinema in Andover and I spent most of the time hiding under the seat. The outcome of that film was that I became terrified of the dark and afterwards needed a night light in my bedroom for years. I also began to sleep with a dagger under my pillow!



*'Peter Lyell' and 'Timothy William'*

Uncle Fred was Chairman of C T Bowring and Co, which had become a giant insurance business under his guidance. His great-grandfather, Benjamin Bowring, had founded the company as a shipping firm in Nova Scotia. After the war the company was still building cargo ships and when I was 12 years old Uncle Fred very kindly invited me to join him and his colleagues for the sea trials of their new vessel on the Clyde. The adventure began with my going with him to a London railway station to join the other guests on the night express to Glasgow.

I had never been on a night train before and was thrilled to have my own sleeper. I was packed off to bed as soon as we pulled out of the station, but was much too excited to sleep so lay awake listening to the party that was going on in the cabin next to me. We arrived in Glasgow in the morning and immediately went down to the docks to board the new ship. I was handed over to a foreman who was told to take me all over the ship while Uncle Fred and the ship builders had a meeting. Exploring the ship took me right back to when I was eight years old and had sailed back from Australia with Mike and Nana. Lunch was served on board and at the end of the meal Uncle Fred got up and made a speech, ending with a toast, "To the ship, and all that sail in her." He then called on *Wee John* to say a few words. Dying of embarrassment I was forced to my feet and delivered my first public address!

My mother always said that she was saved by having Uncle Fred as a friend at the time of Bill's death. As chairman of the company he had to travel all over the world to inspect what they were insuring and he took my mother with him. One of these trips was to Australia when they came up to see us for a very happy weekend and I got to know my new father-in-law, as I had not seen him since I was 17 and had sailed for Australia in the *Port Napier*.

During the weekend they told us about some of their funnier experiences, a couple of which I always remember when I think of him. One concerned the Golden Gate Bridge of San Francisco and Uncle Fred's desire to be driven over it. Now the one thing that you are definitely not allowed to do on the bridge is stop, but when they were about halfway over he suddenly ordered the driver to do just that.

The driver thinking that his passenger was going to be sick immediately stopped and Uncle Fred hopped out, touched the iron railing and then hopped back into the car again, saying, "Drive on, my good man." My mother asked him what he thought he was doing. Fred replied, "Bowring's insures this bridge and I thought I should check that the structure was sound." They laughed all the way to the hotel, but I am quite sure that the driver thought that they were both utterly mad.

The other story that I shall never forget was the one they told about their visit to an oil field in Venezuela that Bowring's also insured. The field was several hours' drive from the capital in a very dry area of the country. By the time they got there Fred needed a bathroom. Things were pretty primitive at the site and the loo was just a little shed perched over a deep hole. Fred walked over to the shed, went inside and shut the door. Minutes later there was a yell, the door flew open and Fred came bounding out with his trousers around his ankles, just in time to see the shed burst into a ball of fire and completely disappear in flames.

Fred had gone in, sat down, lit a cigarette and then dropped the match down the hole which was full of very dry paper, so moments later he found he was sitting on an inferno. My mother thought that she was going to die of laughter. I wonder if the little shed was insured and the company made a claim!

Life was treating them both very well and they bought a flat on the south coast of England. Every Friday afternoon they would be driven down in their new Rolls Royce that Uncle Fred had told my mother to go and buy. She said that one of the most fun things she had ever done was to walk into the showrooms in Berkley Square, wander around looking at what was on offer and when the salesman came up to her asking if he could help, say, "Yes, I think I would like that one, please."

Every Sunday they would go for a walk along the promenade and on reaching the end would sit in deckchairs for a spell before returning for lunch. One day Fred fell asleep and never woke up. My poor mother was absolutely shattered by his death. Luckily Peter and Pat were in England at the time to give her support. Years later when I was staying with my mother in London, she began to tell me about Fred's death. She ended by saying, "When I get to Heaven I am going to give Bill and Fred a real rocket for leaving me down here all alone for so many years."

I had always admired my mother's strength of character and I think it is fitting to end this bit of the story by recording her own last days. She had always been a cigarette smoker, as had been Bill, so it was inevitable that Pat, Mike and I were also smokers. You may remember when I was about ten I was arrested by the village policeman because he had caught me smoking in the road!

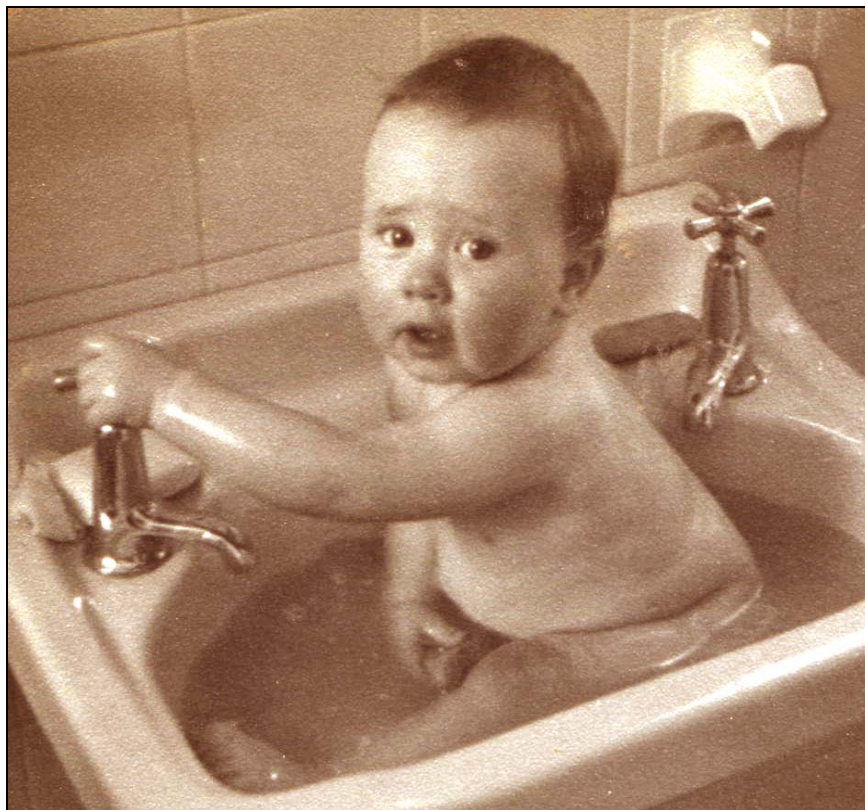
My mother developed a sore throat, which made swallowing very painful. The doctor told her it was only a constriction and that a small operation would fix the problem. I took her to the hospital and when she was



settled in I was very surprised by the strength of her hug as she said goodbye and firmly told me to leave.

During the evening of that day she rang a Healer called Alice, that Margie and I had introduced her to, and asked her to give her strength. My mother died peacefully that night. The doctor told us that the autopsy showed that she had an inoperable cancer of the throat. She had been taking sleeping pills ever since Fred's death and I believe that she had saved a lethal dose and secretly took it that night. I am sure that she knew that she had cancer and she felt it was time to join Bill and Fred. Born in 1904 in the Savoy Hotel with a silver spoon in her mouth, she lived through the horrors of both World Wars; she had lost two husbands whom she dearly loved, but had lived to see her three sons happily married and present her with nine grandchildren. She was content. What more could any of us ask for?

How the world had changed over her lifetime! She and her brother Pat had been two of the first paying passengers to fly from London to Paris after the Great War. The plane was a converted bi-wing bomber and carried only two passengers who sat in front of the pilot wearing leather helmets and goggles in the forward gun turret! They had had to land in a French field to refuel with petrol with a hand pump!



*'Peter' getting ready for his christening*

But back to life on our farm in the Ninety Mile Desert. Comparing those days with the hectic lives that our boys and their families now live shows me that we also have lived in a Golden Age. In the early Sixties our needs were simple and life's pressures minimal. Peter was born in 1962, two years after Tim.

Peter as a baby seemed to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders and took life very seriously indeed whereas his brother Tim thought the whole



thing was a joke. Luckily Peter soon caught on that things were not that bad and by the time he was christened his whole world had become a playground.

In those days we were self-sufficient in most ways. Once a fortnight I would kill a sheep in the shearing shed for meat. My father was always upset by the fact that my sheep dog got to eat the shoulders, as in his opinion that was the sweetest meat. The problem was the sheep would not keep for more than two weeks in our kerosene-burning refrigerator that was temperamental at the best of times as the flame had a tendency to go out unexpectedly. Besides it is hard work to eat a whole sheep in two weeks!



*'Tim and Margie with Peter' aged two months*

I never liked killing sheep and Margie says that I used to go very quiet on the afternoon of the biblical sacrifice. The deed was done in the shearing shed and the carcass allowed to set over night hanging in a cotton bag made from an old bed sheet to keep the flies away. She used to hate my bringing the still-warm liver to the house after the act, but we both loved the delicious meal she would cook with it the following day.

We had the best of all worlds but like everything in life, nothing stays the same. The only thing that is guaranteed in life is Change. Mark arrived in 1964 so Margie had her hands full raising three little boys but also had to help me in the sheep yards.

With three little boys our tiny house began to bulge at the seams so I decided to add a playroom, a guest bedroom and bathroom. The only problem with this plan was that we didn't have any money to employ proper builders, so I had to do the job myself. Margie asked me if I had ever built a house before and I indignantly pointed out that the tractor shed was still standing! She replied that a house was a little different to a shed as it had floors and a ceiling, not to mention proper plumbing!

I took no notice of her acid comment because luckily the west end of our rectangular Mt Gambier house had a solid 22-foot long blank wall. I knew that if I attached a timber frame to the solid wall it would stop the addition falling over. I drew up the plans for a box 22 foot square and ordered the timber for the frame, flooring and sheeting for the walls and roof. I decided that if I could get the outside of the box finished, I could worry about the inside later. Thank goodness we didn't have to get planning permission as it would never have been granted!



*The 'West Wing' starting to take shape!*

Building the extension was one of the most fun things I have ever done. Because of the white ant problem in Australia everything has to be raised up off the ground on posts capped with tin to stop the termites climbing up to eat the house. The ant posts needed to be three feet apart in each direction and I soon had a forest of stakes ready and level to take the floor. To make sure the floors were going to be exactly the same level on both sides of the wall I drilled a hole through from inside the house.



*'Mark Kenneth', March 1964*

The only good thing about living in the Ninety Mile Desert with such a low rainfall is that you know that you are very unlikely to be bothered by rain between November and March. This gave me five months to complete the extension in-between looking after the stock, running the farm and helping my neighbours in emergencies, in the same way as they helped me.

Once the posts were in and level I could then build the walls, put on the rafters, making sure the whole skeleton was firmly attached to the existing house before nailing on the wall covering and roof. I bought two windows and a couple of doors and then cut a hole through from the sitting room wall into the new playroom. A plumber gave me a hand to fit the pipes for a lavatory, shower and basin in the tiny bathroom and hey presto we had a bigger house.

Of course the first thing that had to happen was to throw a party. An electrician had helped with the wiring, but without going all the way to Adelaide it was impossible to get light fittings. Margie had five small terracotta flower pots left over from her garden planting, so I drilled out the holes in the bottom of these and fixed them to the centre of the ceiling in a cluster. I hear the West Wing is still standing after 35 years but I am sure the light fitting has been replaced, which is a pity as it was unique.

Having a family is the most fulfilling thing that can happen to anyone.





*Mark four, Peter six and Tim eight*