

THE BOYS

The years quickly passed. Tim turned five and reached school age so a whole new way of life began for us. The school was in the local town of Keith about 25 miles away and the children got there in a big yellow bus. It travelled a circuit route on a bumpy dirt road around the district, stopping at the front gate of every farm to pick up its little passengers.

Margie had already introduced Tim to the idea of school by leaving him at the Kindergarten while she did the shopping with Peter on her hip and Mark asleep in a pram. Now it was time for Tim to move to the Big School.

He was very excited about going in the yellow bus as his friend Mathew was also starting school. Come the first morning Margie dressed him up in his new uniform and we took him down to the front gate with a tiny suitcase containing a sandwich. The bus appeared with Mathew waving out of the window, the door opened and Tim climbed in. What a milestone for Margie, as she watched her little boy drive away into the next stage of his life!



'Peter' stayed home to help on the farm!

Tim's bus was due back at four o'clock so we all went down to the front gate to meet him. One very tired dishevelled little boy fell out of the door and climbed into the car. "What was it like? How did you get on?" All we could get out of him was, "It was good." The poor boy was shattered. The journey was an hour each way and it had been a long hot day.

Fortunately Gertrude had given me some money to have a 10,000-gallon concrete water tank built beside the house to use as a swimming pool. The tank was set about eight feet out from the stone wall that surrounded the house and I had constructed a drawbridge to enable us to walk across to its lip. It consisted of a couple of planks and served as a barrier to accidents as when they were down, it was impossible for the boys to reach the pool.



'Tim and Peter' with their wheelbarrow tyres

The Keith summers were very hot so the pool changed our lives. I got hold of some wheelbarrow inner tubes from the hardware store and had the valves moved to the outside. The tubes just fitted around the boys' chests so they could jump into the seven-foot deep water and bobbed around like corks. They would stay in for ages, come out and warm up, and then run up the gangplank and jump in again. It was an easier way to teach them to swim compared to what my cousin Peter had inflicted on me in the freezing water of the weedy lagoon when I was five!

The pool became a lifeline and as soon as we reached the house Tim changed, slipped into his tube, leapt into the cold water and quickly came back to life. I am not sure the boys would have survived the long hot summer days without that blessed pool.

Every Christmas we would pack up the station wagon and set off to Portsea for a two-week Christmas holiday with the Begg family. It was a nine-hour drive down to the seaside, but as many of our friends drove to Sydney, which was twice as far, we considered ourselves lucky.

When the families went on holiday the farms were left in the charge of the few who were not going away. Across the road opposite our front gate Glen and Nelda Jones lived on their property, Glenelda. Glen milked a cow and we bought our milk from him for all the years they were at Chute. Only

once did we spill the container on the way home, something that taught us to be very careful as after that accident the car smelt of sour milk for weeks. Glen used to check the stock water for us while we were away and when he took his family for a holiday I would do the same for him. It was a very friendly area with everyone helping their neighbour whenever it was needed.

Unfortunately farming in Australia is bedevilled by droughts. In the ten years that we lived on Chute we had three terrible droughts and three near ones. Four good years out of ten is not enough to make ends meet. I shall never forget the anxiety of waiting for the rain when the ewes had already started to lamb. If the rains didn't come I would often be forced to kill the lambs that had been deserted by their mothers because they had no milk. If the sheep got too poor it was impossible to sell them. Once I was forced to get the butcher to come and kill the worst ones so at least I could sell the skins.

Today farmers can collect dead lambs and leave them in a bag at the front gate from where they are collected every evening and then shipped to New Zealand for skinning. The skins are tanned before being sent to China and made into gloves. In my farming days things were a lot less organised.

Our holidays at Portsea were a dream. At first, with only Tim, we would stay with Margie's parents at Rannoch, but as Margie and her brother's wife Mitzi kept producing more children, Pop Begg said, "Enough is enough," and rented a house for us all some way away! Mitzi's Caroline, Kate and Andrew were about the same age as Tim, Peter and Mark and as the cousins all got on very well we had a very happy time together.

Halfway through the morning we would all drive over to Shelley Beach to swim or be taken out by Pop in his fishing boat. Sometimes he would take us out in the middle of Port Philip Bay for picnics on Mud Island, but mainly we would come home to our rented home for lunch and then a siesta before setting out on some kind of adventure in the afternoon.

After Mark's arrival we had so much luggage for the two-week holiday that we had to invest in a trailer for all the baggage so the boys could have the whole of the back of the station wagon to play in. Our holidays by the seaside took some organising and were quite a circus, but they were very happy days, never to be forgotten.

Portsea was the ideal place for a summer holiday for the children but also great fun for the parents. When Pop's boats got steadily bigger and the engines more powerful, he used to take us out water-skiing. It is a fun activity to learn with plenty of spills and laughter.

The old lime-burner's cottage on the cliff had been in Pop's family since 1880 and he and his three brothers had always spent all their summers at Portsea. In those days you could only get from Melbourne across Port Philip Bay to Portsea by paddle steamer. On one famous Christmas Pop's mother proclaimed that as they were all having such a lovely time she thought it unnecessary to return to school so they would stay on until Easter!

Pop liked to fish, had done so all his life so was very good at it and knew all the best places to go. One of these was down at the Rip, the entrance to the Port Philip Bay where the tidal race is very dangerous. It was here that the Yellow Tail liked to hang out and Pop would take us to fish for them. We had to wear leather gloves to protect our hands because otherwise the lines would slice into our flesh as they raced away.

I have never found fishing an enjoyable pastime; however, one day when we were in the Rip I managed to hook a Yellow Tail and get it on board. It was

52 inches long and the most beautiful thing you have ever seen. When we got home Pop sold it to the fish shop after it had been weighed and recorded. It turned out to be the biggest catch of the year and Pop was presented with a gaff as a prize. I have never fished since!



The record 'Yellow Tail' for the year



Tim, Andrew, Caroline, Mark, Peter, and Kate

The farm was no longer a full-time job for me as I had finished building the fences, yards and sheds. The scrub hills had been cleared although they proved to be virtually useless as they were too sandy. I had raked up thousands of tons of stones and mallee roots in an effort to clear the paddocks, so apart from improving the stock there was not a lot left to do. On top of everything else we were having another drought.

Some three years before this time Chooky Newland came into our lives. I was working in the shearing shed one day and heard a car coming down the drive. On stepping outside, I saw a shiny new Land Rover with a neat little man at the wheel, smoking a cigarette. He pulled up, opened the door and jumped out to introduce himself. He was only about five foot tall and looked a bit like a plucked chicken, hence his name.

Mr Newland proceeded to tell me that he had bought a large block of scrub about five miles north of me and he had contracted to have it ploughed and seeded as soon as the rains came. Meanwhile he had nowhere to leave his Land Rover. Would I be interested in housing it in my shed if he allowed me to use it on my own property? I thought this was a great idea as up to then the only way I could take Margie and the boys out to see the farm was on the tractor and trailer, as the pastures were still too stony for a car.

Over the next years we got to know Chooky very well. He would call us from Adelaide to warn us that he was coming to Keith. He always stayed at the hotel, but occasionally Margie would persuade him to have dinner with us. It was during these meals we learnt all about Chooky who, to our surprise, turned out to be a very important man in General Motors and in charge of buying the supplies for the factories.

He had a dry sense of humour and told amazing stories while he chain-smoked Lexingtons cigarettes. He once offered us one each, but we found them so strong that we had to put them out. Chooky always had one hanging between his lips, but this didn't worry us at all because in those days everyone smoked, including ourselves. Pop Begg had once bribed us into giving up for two years so we could buy a car radio, which soon fell to bits because of the rough dirt roads, so we started smoking again!

One day Chooky told us that he had given up smoking himself for five years but had taken it up again during a business trip to Japan. He had intended only to be in there for a couple of days to sign a deal for sheet steel with a Japanese factory, but the Japanese stalled over the deal and then said they wanted to renegotiate the price. At this stage Chooky was so exasperated that he went out and bought a packet of Lexingtons and therefore blamed the Japanese for ruining his health. The sad bit of the story is that it did just that for about four years after we met him he died of lung cancer. I went to see him in hospital and I found him in an oxygen tent looking like an Egyptian mummy. It was awful. I shall always remember him as being one of the gentlest men I have ever met, but somehow a very sad one.

Towards the end of our friendship his property was covered in wonderful pasture, well-fenced and carrying sheep. My responsibility was extended to include doing the rounds of the windmills and checking the troughs to see that the sheep had plenty of water. On one of the days we were out together he turned to me and said, "Are you always going to live here?" The question stopped me in my tracks as I hadn't given it any thought. I answered, "Yes, I love my life here," but the worm had entered the apple and although no thunderbolt struck me, the question never really left me alone.

Looking back to those days and seeing all that has happened to me since, thinking about all the places I have visited and interesting people I have met, puts Chooky's question into perspective. He must have been horrified by my lack of ambition, but then I was living in what I considered to be a Paradise.

One of the problems of living in Paradise is that one is bound to wake up to reality sooner or later. One evening the telephone rang right in the middle of a dinner party. It was my brother Mike to tell me that he had just had a call from Pat to say that our father had died. When everyone had left I told Margie my sad news. A week later I received a letter from my mother. I took it outside and when I had read it I looked out at the paddocks feeling completely at sea and surrounded by totally empty horizons. I cried and then a serene calmness seemed to come over me.

My father had had a heart attack the previous year, but seemed to recover well so the doctors had allowed him to make a trip to Australia. It was then that he had been to stay with us and held Tim on his knee. Now he had gone and would never meet Peter who was about to arrive. My paternal umbilical cord had been cut.



View from Margie's kitchen with cattle grazing

My father died aged 56. Sitting here writing this as I approach 70 makes me extremely conscious of his very short life. I know he had tuberculosis when he was 35 years old and would have died then except for brilliant nursing by my mother, which gave him another 21 years, but 56 is still terribly young. The ironical thing is that in 1936 doctors thought that smoking helped people who had had tuberculosis keep infection at bay. My father had been saved then by having the infected lung collapsed, so his life expectancy could never have been that great, especially as he continued to smoke cigarettes.



The last photograph of 'Bill'

When my brother Pat was next out from England on business he drove up from Melbourne with his wife Ann to visit us for a weekend. I had built a pergola along the front of the house to keep the summer sun off the north-facing windows. This extensive structure needed painting and Pat offered to give me a hand. It was backbreaking work and all up in the air at arm's length. To reach it we had to stand on old tea chests which were not that stable and of course the inevitable happened as Pat got carried away, stepped back into thin air to admire his work and found himself flat on his back covered in white paint. Apart from that we had a wonderful time together and it was the beginning of a close bond between us that had not existed before our father had died.

I decided that we should have a slate terrace under the beautiful white pergola. The truck arrived carrying an enormous load of very large pieces of

slate, most of which needed two men to lift. It was a backbreaking job to unload the truck, but that was just the beginning, as I then had to lay it on my own. It took ages to fill the area with sand and lay out the slate like a giant jigsaw puzzle ready to cement the joints; however, when finished it really looked fantastic and was worth the effort. I was so exhausted I decided that the cementing could wait until I recovered from the exertion of laying it, which proved to be a 'bad mistake'.

On the whole we had a kind climate, and if we had a hot day it was usually followed by a cool night. Occasionally we would get a hot night when we would have to take a cold shower and then lie back on the bed wet, but that only happened when the north wind blew. The slate had been down for about a week when the north wind started to blow with a vengeance. The temperature went up and red sand crept through every window crack and under the doors. The howling banshee blew for about 24 hours before peace and quiet returned and we were able to leave the house. The sheep and cattle must have had an awful time. After inspecting the troughs and making sure the stock had water, I looked around the sheds to see if any iron sheets had been ripped off the roofs. Fortunately everything seemed intact, so I returned home to check out the house.

When I went to look at the slate patio, I couldn't believe what I saw. Each piece of slate was balanced on a tiny pillar of sand, making it look like a whole field of flat-topped mushrooms. The rest of the sand was probably at the South Pole! I have never seen anything so heart-breaking in my life. I would have to remove every slate and start all over again. However, once it was down, one of our great treats was to sit out on the slate terrace with a cold beer and watch the sun go down at the end of the day.



The finished patio

Around about this time I read a book on the life of Yogananda, an Indian Yogi and the founder of the Self-Realisation organisation, which now has its headquarters in Los Angeles. It remains one of the most amazing books that I have ever read and it changed my whole perspective of life. Having religion

rammed down my throat at Rugby had turned me into an atheist. Chapel twice on Sunday and prayers every day put me right off the life hereafter!

This book recorded the life of Yogananda when he was living in India before he moved to America. There had been a popular book written about a Tibetan monk that had caused a stir, but it later transpired that a retired butcher in England had written it! The Yogananda book was quite different. To cut a long story short, what made it believable was the fact that he left instructions that his body was to be exhumed a year after his death. He prophesied that there would be no sign of decomposition, which his followers were to take as proof that what he taught was a new religion and a way to finding a better life. When his body was exhumed there was no sign of decomposition, or at least that is what the book claimed.

I was impressed and wrote away to the Los Angeles headquarters to enrol in the course. When it arrived I started to follow the instructions and practise the techniques that it promised would change my life. What it boiled down to was a system of controlling one's breathing and learning to still the mind. It was very satisfying and I found that sitting comfortably for half an hour every day, concentrating on a spot on my forehead, made me feel good. The end result of the courses would be to *Know Yourself*.

At this stage in my life I did not know that carved over the doorway of the Treasury at the Temple of Delphi is the same inscription: *Know Yourself*.

I have always thought of the time spent at Chute as my real education. I learnt about being a husband, a father, a farmer, a lover of nature and amateur astronomer. I also discovered classical music and books. I became aware of world politics, subscribed to *Time* magazine and read about the problems of the outside world that surrounded our haven of peace.

Every morning I would get up and make a cup of tea for Margie. As I waited for the kettle to boil I would listen to the news on the radio. This is how in 1963, on a November morning, I heard that President Kennedy had been assassinated. I was dumbfounded. I just could not get my mind around the fact that the man who had founded the Peace Corps had been shot from behind in cold blood. It was just unbelievable. The assassination of Kennedy also killed my innocence.

It took several years for TV to reach as far as Keith, and when it came we had to erect a 60-foot high antennae mast. There was only one station and the reception was appalling, yet we still watched in awe through blizzards of snow. Very occasionally it was crystal clear.

With the arrival of Television News my world changed. *Time* magazine had showed us still photographs of how the rest of the world lived, but it was not until we could see moving pictures of what is always Bad News that we were able to compare our way of life with how people in other countries lived. It was an eye opener and completely shattered my cosy dream-like existence.

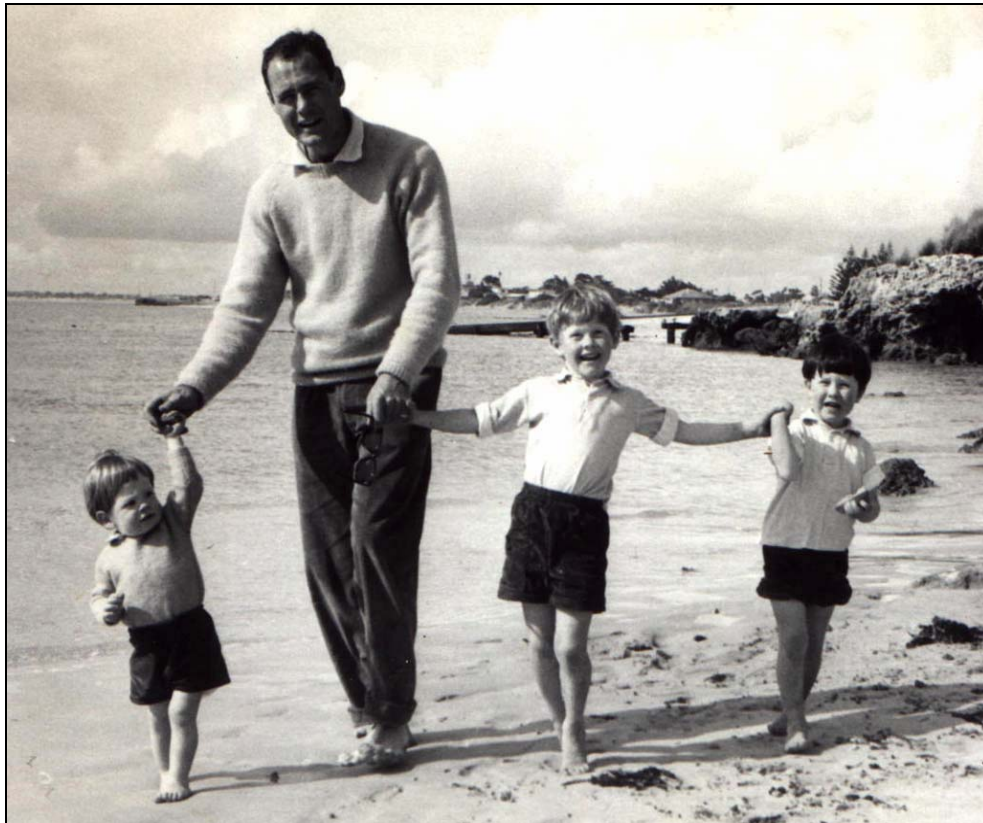
Our social life was quite amazingly active as we were surrounded by a group of wonderful farming friends, all of a similar age as ourselves. We partied continually with the Playfairs, Sangsters, Leakes, Gibsons, Birks, Coles, Easts and many others, giving dinners, playing silly games and dancing in each other's houses while the children slept in the cars outside. Occasionally there was a shearing-shed party and we danced until dawn.

All our friends had children, so there was plenty of maternal back-up for Margie. Birthday parties for the little boys and girls were always very well

attended. Our boys had plenty of playmates. The mothers arranged weekly tennis parties where toddlers staggered around collecting the balls. Every day was full of activity and the months turned into years with alarming rapidity.

The boys were a joy and all completely different characters. Tim had golden red hair and freckles and was always laughing. Peter had black hair, long eyelashes and loved stomping through puddles and would squat down in the middle of them, seemingly unaware that his bottom was in the water! Mark chose the red genes and was a very contented baby.

Apart from our summer holidays at Portsea, all our time was spent on the farm. Because Margie had been brought up as a city girl she was weekend orientated and this meant the five of us having an adventure on Sunday. We would either go to Glen Gowan, our hidden valley, for a picnic or to places like Gip Gip rocks, which was a perfect hideaway place for children to explore. Sometimes we would take them down to Robe, a fishing village about two hours' drive south of the farm. Most of these adventures were done in the winter as summer temperatures made car travel unpleasant and the flies made picnics a nightmare.



Winter picnics on 'Robe Beach'

In the Robe cliff face are several shallow caves so it was always fun to hide silver coins secretly and then tell the boys stories about Long John Silver hiding his treasure in such places. The searches were followed by great shouts of delight when coins were found. These adventures made for a great family togetherness and I suppose were the beginning of all the exploring we did later with the children when we came to live in England. Camping in Scotland, sailing in the Baltic, walking across the Alps, skiing holidays, or scuba diving. I

believe that a sense of adventure is one of the most important lessons parents can give their children.

As the family grew I did as well, because at Chute I was fortunately free to follow any course I wished. Margie and I had been brought up without any knowledge of classical music, so we sent off for a *Reader's Digest* album. It was like entering Aladdin's cave for the first time. The set of long-playing 33 rpm records included popular symphonies by Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Brahms, Handel, Haydn, Grieg, Wagner, Rachmaninov, Liszt, Bach, Chopin, Elgar and Rimsky-Korsakov. Imagine living a lifetime without hearing music composed by such geniuses. Listening to these records for the first time was sheer magic.

The wireless reception was awful in the Ninety Mile Desert and it meant listening with an ear glued to the speaker if you wanted to hear anything, so most evenings Margie and I would read books by the fire. I tried to teach Margie how to play chess but found I didn't have the patience, or she the interest to learn, and as I was never a good speller Scrabble was a non-starter. I learnt to love books and have continued to do so ever since. I don't have a good memory for what I have read but somehow all the information seems to build up into a general understanding of the subject.

Television and the Beatles arrived at the same time. Our black-and-white screen was set into the bookshelf. Now we take no notice of a TV in a room, but in those days it seemed to dominate the room with its Cyclops eye. One of the first things we saw on TV through the snowstorm reception was the heroes' welcome given to the Beatles when they visited Adelaide. We watched the show avidly as their music was all the rage and had been played non-stop when we had danced the night away at the Matron's Ball held in the Keith town hall, under some big red drum lamp shades I had made to liven the place up a bit by turning it into a Red Light District!

I have never been able to read science fiction but love watching it on the screen. The graphics of films like *2001*, *Aliens*, and *Star Wars* I find absolutely riveting. The actual stories usually don't mean much but I find shots of spacecraft orbiting planets send shivers down my spine, as though I am looking into the future. The first science-fiction film I saw on TV was Professor Fred Hoyle's *A for Andromeda*. The story is about a scientist who picks up a signal from outer space that contained a set of instructions on how to build a tank in which the scientists grow an alien eye that wants to take over a body and then rule the world. One day I happened to see a book by Professor Fred Hoyle in a shop and I bought it.

During my life I have been blessed by chance and catching sight of *Frontiers of Astronomy* by Fred Hoyle was one of those special events. I took the book home and discovered the *Universe*.

On my next trip to Melbourne I found a shop that specialised in astronomy and within an hour was the proud owner of a 7½-inch reflector telescope plus a beginner's guide on *How to use it* and *Where to look*. The telescope was a beautiful white enamel tube about three-foot long and stood on a black tripod. I couldn't wait to get back to the farm and set it up. I don't think I have ever been more excited in my life than when I looked through my new telescope for the first time to see Fred Hoyle's universe.

The night skies in the Ninety Mile Desert are among the brightest I have ever seen because there was usually zero pollution in the air. Often at night

Margie and I would take a walk before going to bed and look up at the stars. Then they had meant nothing to me except that they blazed with light, but with my telescope I was now able to look 'in-depth' into the heavens.

Looking through the new telescope at the craters on the moon was breathtaking and I felt that I could almost touch it. I could see the lines of debris radiating out from the impacts that had caused the craters of Copernicus and Tycho. I spent hours gazing at the wonder of the icy cold orb above. It was not the only thing that was icy. After an hour out in the cold desert night air I was also frozen solid.

John Kennedy had promised us that Man would walk on the Moon. Looking at the surface through the telescope it just did not seem possible that this could or would happen. Everyone then felt that if it was achieved it would be Man's greatest triumph when it happened.

I found looking at the Milky Way with binoculars was actually more impressive than through the telescope as there is just so much of it in the Australian sky. It snakes right across the dome of the heavens from side to side like a great white river. No wonder it was so important in Australian Aborigine mythology. By following the twists of the Milky Way it was possible to find my way around the Constellations: Orion's Belt with its giant red sun Betelgeuse; the Pleiades; the Plough; Saturn with its Rings. All the things I had read about in Fred Hoyle's book came alive.

Looking at Betelgeuse is one of the most awe-inspiring things anyone can do because comparing it to our sun is like comparing a 27-foot diameter balloon to a golf ball. It is awesome to think that one day our sun will also be a Red Giant and engulf the Earth.

I found our neighbours, the two small irregular galaxies named the Greater and Lesser Magellanic Clouds. The Aborigines' myth explains them as smoke rising from the campfires of the dead ancestors. They were named in 1520 by Ferdinand Magellan, the first European to circumnavigate the Earth. What a name to conjure with!

By using my beginner's guide, I was able to discover globular clusters made up of 100,000 stars. But my most exciting discovery was when I found Andromeda, the twin of our Milky Way galaxy, the home of Fred Hoyle's *Intelligence* in the TV serial. Andromeda contains 1,000 million stars and is 9,000 million, million miles away. Imagine my excitement at seeing that and thinking about it for the first time.

There are more stars in the universe than grains of sand on the Earth! Astronomers estimated that the number is 70^{22} , or 7 with 22 zeros after it.

70,000,000,000,000,000,000,000

With such a number Scientists say the chances are pretty high of there being other suns with an orbiting planet similar to our Earth and, if so, it could be home to some form of life! I think they are wrong and instead believe that *Homo sapiens* is unique, because if you ran the Earth's history again surely the chances of the climatic sequence that made our evolution possible must also be at least 70^{22} to 1.

We are told that if Jupiter wasn't there to mop up all the asteroids they would bombard Earth instead. We are also told that if the Earth didn't have a Moon exactly the size it is, the climate would be completely different, even

Mars like. Doesn't this mean that we would have to find not only a similar Sun and Solar system, but also an Earth with an exactly a similar history?

The Earth has suffered five major extinctions over the last 500 million years. The worst catastrophe during the last 200,000 years, the time that Modern Man has existed on Earth, was the super-volcano Mt Toba eruption that vomited such vast amounts of ash into the atmosphere that it caused a six-year winter followed by a 1,000-year Ice Age. The eruption occurred at the north-west end of Sumatra 74,000 years ago and, according to some of our leading scientists, reduced the population of Modern Man to 10,000 adults! I am sure I am not the only person who has noted that the epicentre of the 2004 Boxing Day earthquake that caused the 33-foot high Tsunami is within spitting distance of Mt Toba. The wave that hit northern Chile a hundred years ago was estimated to be 60 foot high! The thickness of crust of the earth is equivalent to the skin of a child's balloon! We are sitting on top of a molten time bomb.

There was a recent TV programme that pointed out that eyes have evolved on earth five times in separate species. But isn't that missing the point because they all evolved on our unique planet. I really do believe we are unique, a mere flash in the pan, but of course a very special one!

Scientists may be convinced that the earth is not the only planet in the universe peopled by intelligent creatures, but I am not. They claim that the odds are just too great for us to be unique, but I think they are looking for a needle in a haystack and if they do find a likely candidate they will find even the space in the needle's eye will be completely different. There may be 70^{22} suns out there, a sum greater than the grains of sand on the earth, but let's not forget that *not one of those grains is precisely similar to another!*

When walking with our dog this Christmas morning it was snowing, the giant flakes gently falling like eider duck feathers. I could see millions at any one moment and suddenly realised that although I could see such a vast number at any split second, each flake was an individual and slightly different to the other, although made of exactly the same material, ice water. Multiply the number by all the flakes falling over the whole of Britain! Everything in the universe is unique, including each of us; it is far more likely that we are the First Intelligence to Evolve, *not Johnnies come lately.*

Of course the universe supports Life, Mankind is the proof, but, although we have a very long evolutionary history that stretches over millions of years back to the original bacteria, *Modern Man* only came into existence 200,000 years ago in Africa! We could be the first intelligence rather than the last and we may be the ones destined to colonise the universe.

In 2003 the Institute of Astronomy at Cambridge University was completed. I had met the Astronomer Royal, Sir Martin Rees, when attending the unveiling of my Symbolic Sculptures outside the Isaac Newton Institute with my friends Damon de Laszlo and Robert Hefner III. Damon suggested that it would be nice if the Institute of Astronomy had an edition of my sculpture *Pulse* to match the one Robert had given to the Aspen Centre for Physics in Colorado and asked me to find out what Martin thought.

I wrote a letter and Martin replied that he liked the idea. Imagine my delight when in Cambridge I was told that the Institute of Astronomy was named after Fred Hoyle, the man who introduced me to the universe.

Unfortunately Fred died in 2002, so I was not able to thank him personally for the wonderful gift he gave me all those years ago in the Bush in Australia when I had read *Frontiers of Astronomy*. Ironically he had lived in a

small house near where my sculpture has been placed on the site of the first major telescope in England.



'Pulse', Cambridge Institute of Astronomy

But I am jumping ahead. Because of my Chute telescope I now knew more about Space than conditions on Earth. *Time* magazine was my introduction to the troubled world and reading it made me realise that I had not given much thought to anything outside my own little life.

One of the great legacies of J F Kennedy was the Peace Corps. Nothing like this had ever been suggested before and it was inspiring to read about it in *Time* and to see it working around the world on TV. For the first time in my life I started to think about the fortunate life that we led and the misfortunes of others. What could I do to help? I decided to go to see the organisers of the Australian equivalent of the Peace Corps when next in Melbourne.

I am sure that it was my fault that the meeting between the Director and myself went so badly. I had my own ideas about how I could help without actually going to dig wells in India, but he was only interested in volunteers who were willing to work in the field anywhere he sent them. I left the meeting feeling utterly depressed and set off to walk back into the city, thinking as I went. I have always found that if you want to think something through, the best time to do it is when you are out for a walk. By the time I got back into the city I was feeling better.

As I passed an art shop I happened to see in the window that they were advertising the sale of 50 lb bags of dry clay at half price. I walked in and bought one, some simple wooden modelling tools and a book for beginners. I

paid and asked if they would hold them until I came back with a car in the afternoon.

Capers Restaurant was still our favourite restaurant in Melbourne and whenever we came to town we would try to eat there out in the courtyard under an umbrella. After we had ordered our meal and half a bottle of red wine, Margie asked me how my meeting had gone. I told her that there was no chance of our going to India to dig wells, which she must have been very relieved to hear! I then took a deep breath and said, "I have bought a bag of clay and I am going to start sculpting again."

Soon after getting back to the farm I read the book for beginners and started messing about with the clay, modelling little figures. I have seldom felt happier or so totally absorbed in what I was doing. I was completely intoxicated by the feel of the clay as I worked it in with my fingers.

I am sure that learning how to model with clay is one of the most satisfying things anyone can do. By controlling the speed the clay dries you can take a figurine through stages, going from wet, to pliable, to leathery and then bone dry. By doing this you end up with a clay figure that you can carve with a penknife. After a day's work on the farm it was wonderful to sit on the veranda with Margie and carve my little figures while she supervised the boys' tea.



Carving clay at teatime on the slate with 'Peter and Tim'



My first small clay figure

The next challenge was to do faces in relief. I took photographs of the boys, modelled their profiles in clay and made a plaster mould. By painting soap lather on the inside of the mould before pouring plaster into it, I could separate the negative from the positive quite easily. When the inner plaster was dry, I chipped away the outer mould. The first time I did this was incredibly exciting and the fact that it worked was a miracle. I remember carrying the first completed head up to the house with great pride to show Margie.

Our friends got to hear of what I was up to and asked me to make relief heads of their children, which I guess you could call my first commissions!

The challenge of doing a head in the round became inevitable. Breaking out the cast of the first head was very satisfying, although I found the ears a problem. Later I learnt to give all my children flat ears, or if that was impossible, fill in the space with plaster and carve it out later.

I decided I would have to tackle a whole figure. Mark was about two years old at the time and became my first model. He had a habit of sitting in a kneeling position as he played with his blocks and this was the ideal pose as it did away with legs and raised arms and needed no armature, something that was way out of my reach at this stage.

I completed the figure in clay and took a plaster mould, which I then filled and let dry. With great care I chiselled away the plaster mould and Mark ended up sitting on the tractor-shed bench. When the plaster was bone dry I painted the figure with bronze paint and added a patination of brown oil paint mixed with lacquer. After the lacquer had dried I was able to lightly rub the surface with methylated spirits which allowed the bronze paint to come through in places, making the sculpture look like an old bronze.



Profile heads of our friends' children



Tim, my mother and a self-portrait

Life on the farm was idyllic. The main benefit of living in a democratic society is the freedom that it bestows on its citizens, which in turn enables them to be creative. Margie and I had total freedom and, being self-employed, we could do what we liked when we liked. On the creative side I had the farm to build and I have no hesitation in saying that my fencing was amongst the neatest in the area, as were the sheep and cattle yards. I built the tractor and shearing sheds by myself and added an extension to the house. I loved every

moment of the planning and construction. It had all been quite hard work, but when you are young that is not a problem. The job was finished.



'Mark', my first full plaster cast

The farm had been made possible by a Government policy of allowing people to deduct the cost of land development from their taxes and my father had financed the development of the farm in this way. In theory the farm was now supposed to make money and provide Margie and me with an income to live on. Unfortunately the theory didn't take into account droughts, which are inevitable in Australia, and the farm was not a paying proposition.

But we had three boys to educate. The Keith schools were excellent, but only catered to a certain age. Sooner or later the boys would have to go to a city to finish their education. One of the things we decided was that if we were

to continue as farmers, then it would have to be in a greener area so we decided to look across the Bass Strait to Tasmania as we had been enchanted by the English look of the place on our honeymoon. Again we had the same reaction to the scenery but everyone we met sent their children across the sea to Melbourne to be educated so living there was not going to solve that particular problem. Tasmania was firmly crossed off the list of possibilities.

We returned to Keith thinking that, perhaps, I should stop being a farmer and look for a city job. The more I thought about this the more likely it seemed that it was the only solution to the problem of earning a living. If this was to be the case then before becoming a white-collar worker and committing myself to a lifetime behind a desk, I started to consider taking two years off and indulge myself with sculpture. To justify this choice I thought that perhaps after ten years of continual farming I had earned a break!

One particularly hot north-wind day, fried by the midday sun while working out on a fence line, I suddenly asked myself a question. *Why not move to England, for a couple of years and sculpt?*

The more I thought about the idea the more attractive it became. I drove the tractor home to have lunch in the shade and a break from the heat, having made up my mind to suggest the idea to Margie. When I entered the house I found it was hotter inside than outside. It was a scorcher of a day.

Margie was working in the kitchen and feeling as burnt up as I was. I blurted out, "What about going to England for a couple of years?" Margie replied, "Anything to escape this heat." We talked it over for several days and the more we did so the more excited we both became.

I was 35 years old when we made the decision to sell Chute. I had three wishes. One, I wanted to sculpt; two, I wanted to see the homeland that I had left when I was only 17; three, I wanted to explore Europe. I am sure this last wish was stimulated by a poem called *Letter from Rome* I had just read by an Australian named A D Hope. The poem is about his trip to Italy in search of his roots, having recognised that Europe was the Mother of Western Art.

The poem made me long to see London and Paris again and visit Rome and Athens for the first time. For years I had been reading the history of Europe and books such as Lissner's *The Living Past*. How wonderful it would be to share these places with Margie and also to be able to sculpt full time for two years, maybe even go to an art school and take lessons.

Now that we had made up our minds I decided that the next step should be to tell my mother. From her letters to me I knew that she was worried that since my father's death my two elder brothers, Pat and Mike, both with families to support, had suddenly thrown in their jobs and were looking for new ones. Would a third son doing the same thing be too much for her!

So I sat down to write a letter, spelling out what I wanted to do. I can remember taking a lot of time over the letter, pointing out that the visit would be for two years only and after that we would return to Australia and a job.

I also made clear that we could get a very good price for the farm at the moment so it was the right time to sell even though wool prices were low. But mainly in the letter I stressed that I wanted to find out if I could sculpt. I remember writing, *I feel I have real power in my hands...*

The mail in those days took ten days to reach England. Three weeks after posting my letter we opened the mailbag and out one fell from my mother. I had to read it through twice to take it in, for not only was she in favour of my becoming a sculptor, but said she was not surprised!

She asked me if I had forgotten about the set of chisels she had given me one Christmas. Well, of course I hadn't, but on the other hand I hadn't thought about it for ages. The memory now came flooding back. We always had our Christmas presents in my mother's bedroom while she had her breakfast in bed. I was ten years old and shooting had come into my life. Both my brothers had shotguns and I was longing to have my own. One of the parcels in my pile looked like a gun case being long, wide and flat. *Yes*, I thought, *it must be a gun*, so I left it to the last. Can you imagine my surprise when on opening the case I found a complete set of very sharp wood-carving chisels? I was very disappointed, I can tell you! The chisels were beautiful, all wrapped in green baize, but what was I meant to do with them?

In her letter my mother went on to explain *why* she had given me the chisels. She and her friend Nancy were then going to fortune-tellers, as a lot of people had started to do during the war. Apparently that Christmas they had gone to one who had told her, "Your youngest son will become a sculptor."

Memories flooded back of my mother taking me to the Victoria and Albert Museum during the holidays and insisting that we spend a lot of time in the sculpture galleries. At the time I had supposed that this was because of the drawing lessons she was taking at the time. Apparently there had also been another purpose.

The fortune-teller had been the reason behind her giving me the chisels for Christmas. She went on to say not only was she in favour of my trying to become a sculptor, but had been worried that it had taken so long for me to get around to it!

Well, of course I am quite sure fortune-tellers *cannot* see into the future, in the same way that the people who believe what they read in the newspapers about their birth signs must be nuts. But, I am sure you can understand the boost this gave my desire to become a sculptor. I rang the Land Agent saying that I wished to put the farm on the market.

I then had to tell Margie's parents about our decision to go to England for two years to try my hand at sculpting. Again, I was surprised that all I found was encouragement. I also think that Ken knew that the farm would not support our family and that we would have to move sooner or later.

Having decided to sell the farm we started to look for a buyer. As the season had been a good one for once, we soon found several people who were interested especially as we were prepared to leave some money in the farm at a fair interest rate for the period we were in England, so it would provide us with an income to live on for the two years.

Thinking back to those times I have often wondered at Margie's incredible courage and the support she has given me over the past 35 years in what can only be described as a 'hare-brained scheme'. Luckily, fortune has smiled on me and I have been able to share my extraordinary journey with her.