

## INTRODUCTION

The idea of recording my life's adventures for our grandchildren had been suggested by Granny Margie many times, but was always rejected by me on the grounds that it would take a very long time, involve a lot of hard work and be of little interest to anyone. The first two predictions have turned out to be true, and the third will probably follow suit! However, push came to shove one Christmas when Peter, our middle son, admired the beautiful yellow roses I had bought for Margie to mark our wedding anniversary.

A very long time ago in Melbourne, I telephoned Margie's home. My call was answered by her mother who told me that the girl had a poisoned leg and was very upset about it because she had been confined to bed. She then said, "Why not come over in an hour and cheer her up." When walking to the Beggs' house I happened to pass some yellow roses growing through a fence, and being tidy-minded, quickly pruned a few blooms with my penknife!



*Yellow Roses*

Margie was thrilled with the roses, told me that yellow was her favourite colour and thanked me for buying them for her. Of course this made me feel guilty so I had to confess they were stolen! That sounds a bit like a Jane Austen novel, but ever since that day I have given her a bunch of yellow roses on our wedding anniversary, December the First.

Once persuaded to write my story it soon became obvious that the only way to cope with all the separate tales would be to gather them into ten-year periods, so instead of chapters the text has been divided into *Seven Decades*. The third volume contains an *Epilogue*, in which I try to sum up 'what I have learnt during my life', and closes with a collection of quotes, made by famous people, that I have called *Gathering Flowers*. If you are wise you will turn to these straight away and skip the rest, as they are much more interesting!

As I am bad at remembering when things happened, each *Decade* will be a mix of memories written down as they come to mind, one memory leading to the next, just as throughout my life, one chance encounter has led to another. On looking back over my life, I am forced to agree with Epicurus who wrote: *Life is a fortuitous combination of events*. It has certainly been true in my case!

I was lucky enough to be blessed at birth with some imagination and the ability to use my hands to interpret this gift, but, it was pure 'chance' that led to my becoming a sculptor, and since then 'chance' has played a central role at every twist of the 'fortuitous combination of events' that has shaped my life.

As the number of pages grew, the story took on its own identity and needed a title. I asked my talented niece, Georgina, for the meaning of our family motto, *Qualis ab Incepto*. She said it was a quote from Horace's *Ars Poetica* that translated as, *From the Beginning Onwards*. I thought this was the perfect title for a book about 'Fortuitous Happenings'!

Writing this story turned out to be like sculpting a child. With sculpture you first block out the figure in clay and then spend ages working on the surface, until you decide you can go no further. Writing this story has been a similar experience, because after the text was blocked out, it has taken ages to correct. The main problem has been the discovery that I am illiterate! Fortunately Georgina, Anna Anthony, her mother, Mrs Green, and Margie, have spent hours correcting the text, for which I shall be eternally grateful, as you, the reader, will no doubt be as well! Making these corrections has been an enormous job and without their help I would have given up and burnt the text long ago. If you find mistakes, or the odd typo, I do apologise, but as Cromwell said to the artist painting his portrait, "I am afraid you will have to paint me as you find me, warts and all."

Having written a story, what do you do with it? Sir Thomas More discussed this same problem with Peter Gilles after finishing *Utopia* and wrote:

*To tell you the truth I still haven't made up my mind whether I shall publish it at all. Tastes differ so widely, and some people are so humourless, so uncharitable, that one would probably do far better to relax and enjoy life than worry oneself to death trying to entertain a public... Besides, some readers are so ungrateful that, even if they enjoy a book immensely, they don't feel any affection for the author. They're like rude guests who after a splendid dinner go home stuffed with food, without saying a word of thanks.*

He closes his letter with this request: *Please go on liking me as much as ever – because I like you even more than ever.*

On the eve of our 46th Wedding Anniversary in 2004 the paper was ordered and I managed to cut a finger on the edge of a sample sheet, so sealed the deal with blood! The third book of the trilogy will be delivered to the printers on May 4th 2005, my 70th birthday and released to the invisible public on October 20th, Margie's 70th birthday!

Hopefully, those who read this story of the life Margie and I have shared together will find some amusement, but 'please' remember Sir Thomas More's words and 'go on liking us as much as ever'!