



Danny Alexander

Danny Alexander was born in Strathfield in 1927. After leaving school he served an apprenticeship as a fitter and machinist, went on to the heat treatment of metals, and after that worked at many different jobs, most of them connected with the automotive industry. As well as stints as a mechanic, driver and operations manager in the mobile crane business he has also been a motor mechanic, milk bar proprietor, car salesman, and proprietor of a motor cycle retail business - to name just a few. Danny is married for the second time and now lives at Gorokan, NSW.

Danny's working career has been a somewhat chequered one, and he supplied the following list of jobs he's had as an overview:

<i>1943-47 Automatic Totalisators</i>	<i>Apprentice Fitter & Machinist</i>
<i>1947-48 Eagle & Globe Steel</i>	<i>Heat Treater (metals)</i>
<i>1948-48 York Motors</i>	<i>Motor Mechanic</i>
<i>1948-49 C.C Engineering</i>	<i>Heat Treater (metals)</i>
<i>1949-50 Becks Ford V8</i>	<i>Motor Mechanic</i>
<i>1950-52 Green Point Engineering</i>	<i>Marine Engine Fitter</i>
<i>1952-52 C.C Engineering (again!)</i>	<i>Heat Treater (metals)</i>
<i>1952-53 Milk Bar, Dulwich Hill</i>	<i>Proprietor, self-employed</i>
<i>1953-53 Motor Vehicle Repairs(Mech)</i>	<i>Proprietor, self-employed</i>
<i>1953-57 AWH Motor Repairs (Mech)</i>	<i>Proprietor, self employed</i>
<i>1957-59 Merrie Motors, Yagoona</i>	<i>Salesman, New and Used Cars</i>
<i>1959-60 Robt Dewley VW</i>	<i>Salesman, New and Used Cars</i>
<i>1960-60 Cremer Cars, Burwood</i>	<i>Salesman, New and Used Cars</i>
<i>1960-60 Pacific Motor Auctions</i>	<i>Auctions Representative</i>
<i>1960-65 ABC Crane Service</i>	<i>Mechanic/Crane Driver</i>
<i>1965-65 International Harvester</i>	<i>Motor Mechanic</i>
<i>1965-68 R.M.Campbell Pty Ltd</i>	<i>Service Mgr (Motor Vehicles</i>
<i>1968-72 ABC Crane Service</i>	<i>Mechanic/Driver etc.</i>
<i>1972-80 Simalex Cycles</i>	<i>Proprietor (Motor Cycles).</i>
<i>1980-85 ABC Crane Service</i>	<i>Operations Manager</i>
<i>1985-87 Unemployed. On the dole.</i>	<i>Lawn Mowing etc.</i>
<i>1987-93 TAFE College, Tamworth.</i>	<i>Tool Store Person</i>
<i>1993 Retired to Gorokan.</i>	

Union and Trade Association Memberships:

- 1943-53 AEU Amalgamated Engineering Union*
- 1947-53 ASM American Society for Metals (Int'l Member)*
- 1954-86 IAME Inst. Auto. Mech. Engineers (Full member 32 yrs)*
- 1960-72 FEDFA Federated Engine Drivers'and Firemen's Assoc'n*
- 1986-present PSA(NSW) Public Service Ass'n of NSW (Current Ret'd Mem).*

My paternal grandfather migrated to Australia and set up a watchmaking, clockmaking, and jewellery business in Hunter Street in Sydney - J.D. Alexander and Sons. There was my father - he was the youngest - and he had three elder brothers and they were all part of the business. They performed their own functions within the company - my father was a watchmaker, Uncle Jim was an optometrist and optician, Uncle Frank was an engraver and jeweller, and Uncle Bill was also a watchmaker. Bill was the oldest brother - he died of alcoholic poisoning.

My old man, being the youngest one, was a bit of a wild boy in the early stages of the game. After he met my mother and married her he had a bit too much money for those days - the middle twenties, before the Depression - and he used to live pretty high on the hog and play up a bit. He liked the horses and that sort of thing. I'm not quite sure exactly what happened with the family, but I feel he might have got his hand caught in the till because he was disowned. They chucked him out of the business. He was the black sheep of the family, my old man.

We got hit pretty hard with the Depression, and that's where my first memories go back to. I can put a handle on the date - it was 1930, and that's where my other grandfather came into the picture very prominently in my mind, because my first factual memory was the day that he bought a 1925 Model T Ford - that was the last Model T - off a bloke called Mr Grey. We lived in Stanley Street Burwood at the time, and I can remember it was a Federation home with a red and black tiled path that went down to the picket fence at the front. I can remember my grandfather turning up in this Model T Ford with the bloke he was buying it off, and he called out to my father: "Chris, bring Matey down and we'll take him for a ride around the block," (Matey was his nickname for me). And that's the first real memory that I've got of those things. That grandfather was born on a clipper ship out of Valparaiso. The other grandfather came from Scotland.

I was born in Robert Street, Strathfield in 1927. It was on November 3rd, the day that the *Tahiti* and the *Greycliffe* had a collision in Sydney harbour. (I can't remember that!) (*Laughs*). Basically I spent my childhood years in Concord - at 14 Empire Ave - that's adjacent to what's now the Massey Park golf course. That used to be a mangrove swamp when I was a kid. The canal that runs through the golf course now was dug by unemployed men in the early thirties who were given a five bob a week dole ticket to dig it, and my old man was one of them.

I lived all around that area till I was first married in 1952, when we moved to Croydon Park for a while. Subsequent to that I moved to Bankstown. My first wife died in the mid fifties and I remarried in 1958, and my second wife lived at Bankstown so I went to live there with her. After that we went up to Tamworth and lived there for six years until I retired in 1993.

It often occurs to me that people relate the "good old days" to something that wasn't all that good. You'll hear people talk about how our standard of living has dropped compared to the thirties when we were somewhere about second in the world on the standard of living scale. But of course, people who relate that to you don't realise the difference in the actual standard of living. Our standard of living today is carpets on the floor, television, videos, security, motor car in the garage - the life of Riley. But back in those days there was no such thing as carpets - if you had a lino square you were doing well, ice chest in the kitchen, probably one in twenty people had a motor car. We did, but only because all my family were petrol heads, I suppose.

After 1935 my father took up the life of a swaggie because he couldn't get any work in Sydney and he decided that if he was going to die of starvation he would go to Queensland where at least he'd be warm while he was dying. At the same time, my mother's brother joined the navy. He was out of work. He'd been an apprentice electrician with Warburton Franki in the late twenties but they folded and he was out of work for five years. He eventually managed to get

into the navy as a Petty Officer Electrical Artificer in 1935. That left me the remaining male member of the family - I would have been eight or thereabouts. The neighbours must have thought I was a reasonable sort of a kid and they used to let me cut their grass for them, go and get their groceries for them and do any odd jobs around the place.

I was a pretty canny sort of a young kid and I didn't waste my money, and I managed to save up the astronomical amount of twelve pounds fifteen by 1938, and I bought one of the very first 3-speed *derailleur*-type geared push bikes. It was a *Malvern Star* racer from Bruce Small's in Sydney. From then on I did the neighbourhood odd jobs and that sort of thing right up till the outbreak of war, and continued through really until 1943, when I started work as a fitter and machinist. Plenty of other kids did the same sort of thing. You'd save bottles, too. You got a penny back on a bottle, and 240 pennies made a pound. You certainly learnt the value of money, and I sometimes think it's what has made me a bit mean today - or at least my wife would probably say that I'm a bit of a mean bugger at times. But when it doesn't come easily you think about it a bit before you spend it, basically.

I was a Catholic-educated kid, though that doesn't make me a practising Catholic today, I can assure you. But it was my mother's wishes that I was brought up in The Faith. I first of all went to St Mary's Convent School in Concord, and then I went to Burwood Christian Brothers, from whence I was... I wasn't actually expelled - but my mother was asked by the Head Brother not to send me back. I had the unfortunate habit that if someone hit me I'd hit them back, and they didn't like that sort of thing. From there I went to Lewisham Christian Brothers, but unfortunately my reputation preceded me there and the Head Brother there didn't think much of me either, and he more or less asked that I didn't return. One of my mates in those days was a bloke you would probably have heard of - a bloke called Phil Arantz - the bloke that was thrown out of the police force and has just had his book about it published. (He was an honest copper - that's why he was unloaded by Mr Askin and Commissioner Allen). Phil had already found a niche in the scholastic system of that time at the De La Salle College in Bland Street at Ashfield. It was a different sort of a school to the others - it was a technical high school, and I got enrolled there.

The set-up there was that there were no languages. We didn't learn French and we didn't learn Latin and that suited me down to the ground because I hated the both of them. And there wasn't a great emphasis on the religious side of things. They weren't as sanctimonious and hypocritical as the Christian Brothers were. (I didn't have anything to do with the Marist Brothers, but by reputation if anything they were even worse). I think "Christian Brothers" is a misnomer, actually. They were the most sadistic, cruellest bastards I've ever struck in my life, some of them. They never sexually abused me, don't get me wrong - I must have been too ugly! (*Laughs*). But they used to belt the shit out of me if I did anything wrong, and it was quite acceptable. To get four on each hand was nothing, and if you did something exceptional it was six on each hand, and that put you out of action for the day. And you couldn't show that it hurt. If a kid didn't become pretty tough, his peers took it out on him.

But at the De La Salle College, because it was a technical high school, we had woodwork, metalwork, tech. drawing, business principles, maths I and II and English, and physics and chemistry combined. It was an intelligent sort of a school to go to and I was lucky that I got there at about twelve years of age. They were good blokes, and I got more than a fair go there. In those days, most of the blokes that taught at De La Salle had a trade background. A lot of them had been in it from real life - they didn't go straight there from school days, and they went into it because they wanted to teach people, and they did it pretty well.

Then towards 1943 I think it was, at the peak of the war, we had to go through the manpower controls at that time. I had a bit of a leaning towards metalwork, particularly machining (I was good on a lathe), and I got an apprenticeship with Automatic Totalisators. I didn't really want it - I wanted to join the navy, but you couldn't do what you wanted to do. I had to go for a test in Sydney. It was a test to sort out what you were best suited for and they channelled you in that

direction. It was as a result of that test that I got the apprenticeship. I've still got the original indenture, dated May 1944. It was a five year apprenticeship, and I started working there in 1943. You had to do twelve months before they made you a full apprentice, but that got counted in at the end when you came out as a fully qualified fitter and machinist.

The first three years entailed three nights a week at the Tech. at Ultimo. The day would start at six in the morning. It was a mile walk to the tram, then you got the tram to Burwood Station, then the train from Burwood to Central, then you'd run up to Chalmers Street to where the factory was. The building itself was all bricked up - there was no natural light in it at all. The building's still there - up the top, before you get to Cleveland Street. It was a rough, tough old place then, I can tell you.

We were making parts for *Mosquito* bombers. They were of wooden construction, but everything in the plane was built in different parts of the country and assembled at...I'm not sure but I think it was at Lidcombe. They had what they called a tail weight in it that weighed about sixteen pounds. It was a cast iron weight that went at the back to give the plane balance and stability. It came as a rough casting, and one of the jobs the apprentices had was to grind all the dags off them. You had to stand at a bloody great emery wheel without a guard on it, and no goggles, and no respiration protection or anything - you just stood there and copped the iron dust, and you'd spend the whole day picking these things out of a box and grinding the dags off them.

It was pretty well all production work that we did. Sometimes you'd spend a couple of weeks doing the one thing all the time, which was deadly monotonous and soul-destroying. We started work at seven fifteen - it was nominally a 44 hour week. We'd work through till nine, when the whistle blew and you got ten minutes for morning tea. You had a minute and a half to get from your machine to where you had smoko, and a minute and a half to come back. If you went to the toilet - (the toilets only had half-doors on them so that if you were there a long time they could come and check up on you and make sure you weren't reading the paper or anything) - and if you took more than seven minutes on the toilet the charge hand would want to know if you were crook, and if you were crook you had to get a doctor's certificate because you couldn't spend a long time on the toilet - even if you did have a stomach-ache. You'd go back to work at ten past nine and you'd work through till twelve.

At twelve the whistle would go and you could do what you liked for half an hour, then at twelve thirty you'd hit the button on your machine again. You could buy a pie and things like that, but we usually took our own - especially the kids, because we only got twenty one shillings a week. You worked through the afternoon till seven minutes to five, precisely - (there was no afternoon smoko) - when the whistle went again, and in that seven minutes you cleaned your machine up. You also had a key ring with brass docketts on it. You got ten tool docketts, numbered from one to ten, with your serial number on it. Mine was 103 - I'll never forget it, it was like being in gaol. In the mornings you'd line up and clock on before seven fifteen, and then you'd pick up your tool docketts. When you knocked off in the afternoon you handed your tool docketts in, and if there wasn't ten tool docketts you didn't knock off till you found the tool that you had out of the store and hadn't returned. So you couldn't knock anything off, naturally. You clocked off at five on the knocker.

From there, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights I had to go to the Tech. at Ultimo. I'd go across Railway Square and past the old *Glaciarium* and down Harris Street, and pick up a pie and half a pint of milk on the way. Then you'd do three hours tech. I'd leave there after nine at night and get the train back home again. In the wintertime I never saw the sun for five days a week. We were walled in completely, with incandescent globes over our workplace - though there were floodlights in the ceiling. I liked using the machines, but I detested the environment. As far as I was concerned it was like a gaol term because I really wanted to be in the navy. See, the uncle of mine who was like an older brother was killed early in the war at the battle of

Matapan - he was blown off the *Perth* by strafing from an Italian Stuka while he was running searchlights. Being an impressionable kid, all I wanted to do was go and take vengeance for his death. So the first five years I spent at work was sheer bloody hell as far as I was concerned. I detested it.

On one particular occasion the foreman in the machine shop, a brilliant machinist named Arch Rimoldi - he was an absolutely brilliant tradesman, but a very, very hard man. They put me on this little South Bend lathe - a little benchtop lathe - and they brought me around a kerosene tin full of little silver steel bushes. They were a quarter inch diameter by a quarter inch long with a little shoulder on them, and a sixteenth hole through the middle. These were part of an extrusion machine for making sixteen gauge copper wire, and because of the abrasiveness of the extrusion process these dies wouldn't last long and they used to make them by the thousands. My job was to put a little chamfer on that little sixteenth hole. It had to be precisely the right depth and diameter, and it had to have a mirror finish on it. That's done on a slow speed on the lathe with a special countersinking tool on the tailstock, and it was a pretty precise job and you had to watch it closely. There was 100% test on these things because the wire coming out of them had to be exactly right in size because it was for aircraft wiring looms - the harness where all the wiring comes together.

It took me a fortnight to finish this kerosene tin full of these things. When I'd finished I went over to Arch. He worked on a raised platform with a glass partition around it. I said to him: "Mr Rimoldi, I've finished that job." "OK," he said, "go and stand by your machine." I went over and stood by the machine and Arch came over in his white dustcoat. He stood there and a labourer bloke came along with a railway pushcart - with another tin of these bloody bushes on it! I was about seventeen then, about half-way through my apprenticeship. Rimoldi's standing there looking at me, and when I saw it was more bushes I muttered: "Jesus fucking Christ!" He jumped on me: "Did you swear at me, son?" "No, I didn't, Mr Rimoldi." "Yes you did," he said, "you told me to get fucked!" (which actually I hadn't). There was a hell of a blue over it, and they whipped me up to the Staff Office to a bloke named Dave Stewart who was a real hard Scotsman, and they threatened me with bloody cancellation of my apprenticeship, treason, (joke!) and christ only knows what else! So I did those bushes too. I was on them for about a month altogether. Needless to say, I've got a pretty good idea how to chamfer sixteenth of an inch holes to a mirror finish!

When the war ended Automatic Totes started to get civilian-type work back in - private work to do with the post-war redevelopment of industry in Sydney. They decided to develop a metal heat-treating department. It was only small - about as big as this lounge room - with a couple of relatively small furnaces and salt bath heat treatment liquid furnaces. They employed this bloke Arthur Reardon who had been at General Motors right throughout the war years. He was a bloke in his sixties, and we hit it off immediately - like nobody I'd ever met in my life. I suppose there might have been a bit of the grandfather thing in it, if you like, for want of a better description. But there was just something about this man that was different to anybody else I'd ever struck. There was a sincerity there, and he obviously loved what he was doing. And he was good at it. And he was recognised as being good at it.

Now my academic ability at mathematics wasn't as good as it needed to be to develop toolmaking skills. I couldn't handle trigonometry, and logarithms were a complete mystery to me. I must have missed something basic at school or something, because later on, as I used calculations in other fields that I was actually interested in like the automotive business, I found I could do all sorts of calculations regarding compression ratios and gear ratios and things. But with the engineering I wasn't really motivated, I didn't like it, and I wanted to get out of the bloody place.

Anyway, because I was failing as a fourth year apprentice, to get rid of me out of the normal work force (where I was probably seen as a disruptive element) they put me in the Heat

Treatment Department with this bloke Arthur Reardon, and I was his lackey, if you like. He must have seen some potential in me that I didn't know about. I don't know why he did because by then I was 19, and I was an absolute bloody mug laid out at that time - there's no question about it. I was going bad, I really was. Problems seemed to follow me around. I had a pretty short fuse. I'd done a bit of boxing around the place, and my answer to anyone who annoyed me or hit me was to hit them. It was one of those ridiculous situations where young blokes were a bit more inclined to do that a bit more often in those days - it was a common way to settle a difference of opinion.

So Arthur got me interested in the technicalities and the theory of metal heat treatment. I found it absolutely intriguing. I hadn't realised its importance, and that without it nothing would work. You can't make all those intricate pieces of engineering and expect it to run unless it's been adequately heat treated so that it's hard and won't wear itself out.

Arthur was the first international member of the American Society for Metals, and he got me so interested in it that by the time I was almost out of my apprenticeship he nominated me for membership and I was accepted as a junior member. I understand that there were only three of us in Australia at the time - the other two were both apprentices of Arthur's from earlier times.

Doing something that I found interesting settled me down, and I applied myself to it with diligence. I stopped being a troublemaker - it was the same reason kids make trouble today - boredom - doing something that they don't want to do. But suddenly I had a reason for life and I loved it. It was *interesting*. It was bloody hot and dirty, but the fact that he explained what we were doing and I knew that it was serving a certain purpose... He was on the verge of developing a completely new process to be introduced to Australian industry. It was called Isothermal Heat Treatment.

We were moved into a brand new factory at Meadowbank, on the Parramatta River, and it had everything in it. Arthur and I were on top of the world. I was about to go into my fifth year, and no bullshit, we were working at 120% because we liked what we were doing, and we were doing stuff that had never been done before. We were producing a product without stress, without distortion, without cracking.

Briefly, what happens when a piece of metal is heated to the point where it changes its internal structure - it goes into what's called a state of solid solution. There are various components in the piece of metal, like iron, carbon, manganese, chrome, nickel, cobalt and so on, and every composition of metal has its place within industry to do a certain job. The critical temperature at which these elements combine in the metal varies according to the composition of the particular metal you're dealing with. Take an ordinary metal worker's file. That's straight carbon steel, and it's the hardest form of steel you can get. But as you add other metals to it, its strength and wear resistance improves, but its hardness drops. So a basic thing like a file goes into solid solution at 780 degrees Centigrade. If you go to the other end of the scale to high-speed cobalt steel, it's got a high tungsten content for resistance to wear and heat, and it'll cut at high temperatures. It goes into solid solution at a much higher temperature - around 1050 to 1100 degrees Centigrade. Then it reaches a point of *hysteresis*, where there's a tremendously stressful situation in that piece of steel, and as it cools down the stresses are even greater because the outside cools quicker than the inside, and this is what causes distortion and cracking. The secret that Arthur found out was that there was a critical point which the metallurgists knew about but the practical heat treaters didn't know about. The point about it was, that you didn't have to come back to room temperature. When it reaches that point of change, it changes from a spheroidal form in its molecular structure (like a whole lot of ball bearings stuck together if you look at it under a microscope) and you can actually see it take place. The furnace is red hot, and the block of steel is red hot within it, and it's all the same colour. You watch the temperature going up on the thermocouple, and suddenly the job cools within the furnace. You can see it. It has actually cooled a degree or so within itself as it

changes, and that's the point where it'll harden.

Now in the old days you'd pull it out and quench it in oil, or water - (it's still got to be done that way with some materials) but with these high alloy metals it's possible to bring them down to a point above room temperature - around 450 degrees Centigrade - then hold them at that to let them stabilise. The medium that you quench it in is a hot salt or a controlled atmosphere furnace. So it comes down slowly and changes from what we call Austenite into a form called Martensite, which is a needle-like structure. The form changes from little spheres to little needles that interlock. And when it comes out of the intermediate quench it's soft and malleable - you could actually bend it or straighten it or even hammer it while it's cooling and slowly going hard. And when it gets down to room temperature it's hard and straight and undistorted. So that's what Isothermal Heat Treatment is all about, and we started it at Automatic Totalisators in 1947-48.

The boss there was too stupid to see when blokes were giving their all, and he started to push Arthur in various ways, and Arthur responded by leaving. I was left there as a fully skilled tradesman in that field, but still an indentured apprentice. Arthur didn't want me giving his trade secrets to somebody else (it all came from his ideas that he'd developed over the years, even though they weren't patented) and he wanted to get me out. He had influence and friends in industry, and a friend of his who was the Sales Manager at Eagle and Globe Steel managed to intercede and get me a transfer from Automatic Totes to Eagle and Globe Steel in Styles Street, Leichhardt, where I finished my apprenticeship.

But it was a rough, tough, bad environment. It wasn't a good place. Neville Wran used to say that Balmain boys don't cry, but Balmain boys do a lot of other things! Till I went there I didn't smoke and I didn't drink. Because we were working shift work, at five o'clock we'd get a break from the 3 till 11 shift, and the mob of us would go up to this little rough old pub on the corner and skull five or six schooners in the hour. We were all working at very high temperatures, and we'd be dehydrated. You'd slug 'em down, and for the next hour or so you'd be half pissed, but by eight o'clock you'd have come good again and sweated it out. That was a five day a week arrangement.

Anyway, the job didn't really appeal to me all that much, and they *were* a pretty rough mob, and a mate of mine worked at York Motors, and he knew I was pretty good with mechanical things - especially motor bikes which were my big love at that stage of the game. He got me a job at York Motors, and he knew I was pretty good with mechanical things - especially motor bikes, which were my big love at that stage of the game. He got me a job at York Motors as a trainee motor mechanic, but I was on full pay because there was a shortage of skilled tradesmen at the time. That was the first time I'd ever worked on or driven what I'd call a *good* motor car. I'd driven old cars, and cheap cars, and rattlers, but there I had the opportunity to work on Plymouths, Dodges, De Sotos - they were good cars. The best part about being a motor mechanic, really, is that you can get a clunker come in, do the work on it, and then you get to drive it. It might be a Jaguar, say, and you've got to road test it because you've worked on it. Where else does an ordinary working class bloke get the chance to drive a Jag? Or a top of the line Wolseley or Chrysler? We used to take them down under the Harbour Bridge and have a screech along Hickson Road and maybe sit under the bridge and watch the ferries for five minutes while you have a smoke or whatever. The best part about it was that we weren't far from the Palisades Hotel, and at lunchtime there was always a mob of us would jump into one of these cars and go down to the Palisades and have a couple of schooners at lunchtime.

Anyway, that was a good job, but I was only in it for twelve months because once again Arthur Reardon contacted me. He had moved in as Technical Director at C.C. Engineering in Glebe. He asked me what I was doing and I told him, and he said to me: "Well, I need a good bloke. We're developing this place here in conjunction with a bloke named Victor Gow." He was a brilliant fellow - half Chinese. Made a lot of money later on with a heat treatment plant at

Revesby. Arthur also offered me a hell of a lot more money. York's were only paying the basic award rate, but by working three nights a week overtime at C.C. Engineering on a penalty rate I got around 30% more income. It was a big incentive, particularly for me, because I used to spend a fair bit of money at that stage of the game. I used to buy pretty good clothes and get round to night spots and that sort of business, you know, like Oyster Bill's, Sammy Lee's and Ziggy's.

But when I was introduced to the boss of the welding department there (who had nothing to do with me) it was instant bloody hatred. He didn't like me and I didn't bloody like him. I can't put a handle on why it was like that. I was only introduced to him because we worked on the same floor - he wasn't my boss. In those days I used to go to Angelo de Marco's every fortnight and get my hair styled. (I had hair then!) I had a ducktailed haircut and used to buy my clothes from Sammy Rosner's Stateside Store in William Street. I had new clothes all the time, and it was Ivy League time and all that. You know, the big bands like Kenton, Artie Shaw and dancing at the *Trocadero* with the current girl, then on to *Sammy Lee's* or the *Celebrity Club*. ("If the girl you want to please, take her down to Sammy Lee's" - I spent a fair bit of time there drinking beer from under the table after eight o'clock at six bob a bottle black market price.)

Anyway, this foreman decides he's going to start calling me Pretty Boy, which rubbed me the wrong way a bit. Every time he'd see me he'd sneer it at me. It got to the point where the other blokes were all starting to catch on and laugh about it, and trying to make me look a gig, which you can't afford to have happen at 22 years of age, and I knew that eventually I'd have to fight him. It was held out the back after work with about forty blokes watching. It was a good stoush. I'd had a bit of practice. By that stage of the game I'd been around a few gyms and that and knew how to handle myself. (I didn't use my own name when I was involved in that caper because my mother was against anything like that. I never tried to fight professionally, don't get me wrong. It was just a way of staying fit - hitting the heavy bag and sparring with other blokes who were better than you. It was good fun - the training and the keeping fit).

Eventually I won the fight, and I was a hero. But I felt like a bloody dog. I really did. It was a fight that had been forced on me - that I didn't want. And from that point onwards I never felt right working there and knew I had to get out. I remember Vic Gow came to me the day after the fight and he said to me: "Danny, you shouldn't have fought him. There's an old Chinese proverb you know, which says that to win a fight you also have to lose," and I've thought about it over the years and it's pretty right - because I didn't gain anything really. It might have looked good to the mob, but it did nothing for myself. On the other hand, I could hardly get out of it, because if I'd walked away from it I'd have been a mongrel. You can't back down and crawl away.

Anyhow, that's why I left C.C. Engineering. I wanted to get back into cars, and there was a job advertised at Beck's V8 Ford Reconditioning at Parramatta Road, Concord. Mick Beckingham. A character in his own right. An ex-RAAF bloke who knew his motors. Paid good money. I was working a 54-hour week for him.

We did two engine changes a day. There was myself and another bloke who were actual mechanics, we had an engine fitter who did the precision work like piston fits and that, but we actually assembled the motors and then on a week about basis we did changeovers. The expected change was two a day. Myself and this other mechanic, we also had a junior apprentice helping us. (They weren't indentured apprentices, they were slave labour, actually.) The car would come in with a clunker, we'd pull it out, strip all the component parts off it, get the new short motor, build it up with the new clutch, new gaskets, distributor, whack it all into the car, start it up, and you'd drive it out at twelve o'clock. In the afternoon you'd do another one and it'd drive out at five. It was virtually ten hours a day plus four hours on Saturday mornings. I can't exactly remember how much money I was getting, but it was probably around 22 quid a week when they were paying about twelve quid a week everywhere else. Once again the money angle got me in, because I was spending. That was when I bought a brand-new BSA Special

from Jimmy Eade at Ashfield, because I was into bikes. I was never a champion racer but I loved them and used to do a lot of club stuff.

In those days we'd buy a bike, ride it on the road and go out to a meeting somewhere with your club - Western Suburbs, Wiley Park, Arncliffe, Bankstown - whatever. You'd ride the bike there, get to the meeting early, take off the tail lights, the auxiliary bits and pieces, your battery, and the wiring harness out of the generator, pull the generator off, and by ten o'clock you were ready for the first race. You'd race the bike all day stripped down, and then at four o'clock you'd put it all together again and ride it home. There were only a few blokes had trailers, and they tended to be rich blokes. One bloke was Jackie Forrest, and he later became Australian Champion. (Another bloke I knew was Roy Fletcher who was the first bloke killed at Bathurst after the war - lap thirteen on a Velocette, also number thirteen!) I got out of bikes in 1952 because I got married. I stopped riding competitively at that point.

Anyway, I bought this BSA Special - close-ratio gearbox, only two of them ever came out to Australia - Porky Levy from Leichhardt had the other one. It was very quick - 110 mph. On that bike I got a Gold Star Award with the Arncliffe-Bexley Club. We used to go out on the Heathcote Road where there was a big long straight - about two mile. We'd get there at the crack of dawn and put the electric timing gear up. We'd have to do a run each way and get an average, and I got 110 mph in both directions on that.

We'd have lookouts sitting up on the other side of Dead Man's Hill waiting for the coppers to come out from Liverpool on their outfit, or the other way from Hurstville. They were that far away it didn't matter, but they could hear us. Those days it was all country. If the lookout saw them coming we'd stash the timing gear and hide the bikes in the bush and disappear. They very rarely caught us because they were riding those big old Harley outfits and they weren't that quick. It was good fun. It was terrific, yeah. (I pushed my bike into the bush there at one meeting and I couldn't find it again for about four hours!) We had a couple of fatalities, which was what knocked it on the head eventually. One bloke ran into another bloke who pulled off the side of the road without looking. They were both killed, and that didn't help things, and it all died a natural death. This is around 1950. (I had my first love affair at this time. I didn't marry her, but that's another story for another time. She told me much later that she hadn't wanted to marry me then because she didn't think I'd make old bones! I've proved her wrong!)

But to get back to work. Once again I'm looking for a job because I got sick of being with Beck's, and a job comes up at Green Point Shipbuilding and Engineering on the Parramatta River right next to the punt at Mortlake. (It's now been developed into an ultra super villa and town house area.) Green Point would probably have been the best job I ever had in my life. It was good money, and the mob I worked with were blokes I largely knew because I grew up in Concord, and I knew all the young blokes from around Mortlake and Cabarita. I used to swim at Cabarita Baths, drink at the Palace Hotel at Mortlake, and work down the hill at Green Point.

The Korean War was revving up and we were rebuilding a couple of corvettes - *HMAS Rockhampton* was the one I worked on. I learnt about steam engineering there. We also worked on Fairmiles - they were a sub chaser like the one in *McHale's Navy*. They were a wooden construction and Australia held the world record for the production of Fairmiles during the second world war. Halvorsens were building them too across the other side of the river, but Green Point held the record. (So much for the stories that Australians won't work! That's all bullshit! Australians would be some of the best workers in the world, mate, and they've got more get up and go than most other people, including the Japs.) The Fairmiles had an incredible motor in them. They were Californian-built by Hall-Scott. They were a V16 overhead valve engine about three metres long overall. I think they developed something around a thousand horsepower each at the flywheel. They ran on Avgas, and the Fairmile was a floating bomb - chockablock full of Avgas with petrol engines with spark plugs! Temperatures were hot and heavy and it was very very noisy - very stimulating for a young bloke who likes mechanical things. No hearing protection of course - none at all. That's why I'm a bit deaf now. (It's a

wonder I'm not blinder than I am considering all the time I spent working in bad light. But you don't think about those things when you're young. You just go and do it.)

But when I was working there we were renovating them, not building them. I used to do propeller shaft temperature checks because one of the jobs I did was fitting the bearings up for them. And we did landing barges. It was a good bunch of blokes there, and it was more like a club situation than a workplace, and we had a lot of fun. But we did our work and it was done well. The foreman was a good bloke - a character in his own right - Chicka Ross. We loved working for him because he was such a fair and decent bloke.

By 1952 I'd fallen in love with my first wife and I got married. Once again I get a call from Arthur Reardon with the offer of another job. They were putting in a high-speed steel heat treatment plant. The money was good, and I needed it, because we'd bought a block of land out at Burraneer Bay at Cronulla, and I was in the process of starting to build a house. I went down and saw him, and took the job because it was something new being developed that hadn't been done in Australia before. Three of the biggest immersed electrode liquid controlled furnaces in the southern hemisphere. We called them salt baths, but "salt" is a misnomer. They used a chemical powder that melts at a certain temperature and stays molten without oxidising or disintegrating. They don't boil off. We were specialising in *big* pieces of high-speed steel, which hadn't been done before. For instance, we used to do big broaches - they're a long serrated cutting tool that you pull through to enlarge existing holes. They have to be exact in size so that the resulting hole size is precise, so you couldn't afford to have anything burn off during the heat treatment, which was why they needed this special heat treatment with the controlled chemical baths.

I met a bloke there called Charlie O'Dea. He was an older man than me and was originally one of Arthur's apprentices, and he was resentful of the fact that I got this job. We didn't exactly dislike one another, but we weren't that great mates, put it that way. (I'll come back to Charlie shortly.)

It was a complicated routine to start up the three pots again once they'd been shut down, and we used to do a twelve hour stint of actual heat treating every Wednesday. I used to have to get in there at six in the morning and get the pots re-started and ready to go at seven, and we'd go through till seven that night - after which it'd take me another hour to shut it all down. The nightwatchman used to turn on the switch to start the two lower-temperature pots so that things were under way when I got in at six, but the routine for the high-temperature one was different and I used to have to look after that.

One Wednesday morning I come in as usual, and as usual I go over to check the temperature on the Amp meter. Jesus Christ! The quench temperature was up to buggery - round to the stop, and it was pulling a hell of a lot of amps! The way they were situated, the actual transformer for the low temperature pot was behind the furnace in a corner, and my first instinct was to run in and knock the tap back to bring the amperage down. Just as I put my bloody hand on the tap... up she went! Eleven hundredweight of bloody hot material went straight up and hit the ceiling! It was a twelve foot ceiling. I was lucky, because I was behind the furnace. I was aight across the back, and I had a pair of Yakka overalls on and a big pair of military boots - that was all I had on because it was stinking hot in there. Whether I was knocked over or fell over I don't know, because at that stage I was in a state of shock. The place was full of other blokes, but do you know who came and dragged me out? Charlie O'Dea! There you go.

I was about seven weeks getting over the burns, but I got out of it all OK - only the backs of my hands are a bit wrinkly. After I came out of Prince Alfred the family didn't think much of this new job - particularly my little new wife. She'd had experience in the milk bar trade, and after a lot of thought we decided that it was time for me to get out of that sort of industry. We sold the house that we'd started to build at Burraneer Bay and put our money into a milk bar at Dulwich Hill.

And that's how I got into the milk bar business.

It was next to a picture show in Old Canterbury Road and we had the lock-up shop next to it which incorporated the theatre rights to two lolly boys and another bar in the foyer of the upstairs part. This is just before TV and ten o'clock closing. If there was an Alan Ladd show on the theatre was always full, and we made lots of money. One of the last shows I remember from then was Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven Year Itch*. And do you think I could get away from that bloody shop to nip in and get a look at Marilyn standing over that air vent! No bloody way! We were too busy!

We were going good there. No problems at all apart from the long hours we were working. But we loved it. A husband and wife business. We had casual girls who'd come and work for us in the busy times and the money would roll in. But I'd sold my car at that point, and we lived in a little flatette at Concord. To transport us back and forth I bought a Red Hunter Ariel 500cc motor cycle - a nice little bike. (I bought it off a mate of mine named Billy Bernard. He later became one of the top racing motor boat tuners of all time.) We used to get to the shop round about eight in the morning to get organised, see travellers, and to sell cigarettes to people going to work. Then we'd work through till the movies finished around eleven at night, and after we'd cleaned up we'd get away by round about twelve to go back home to Concord. (You see, this is what pisses me off when I hear people saying that fucking Australians won't work. It's all bullshit! I've worked hard with too many of them and done too much myself. People with their own businesses especially do it all the time. Take a newsagent: that's a dog's life, even though you make big money. Take truckies: Jesus Christ! Driving a Kenworth - that's the dregs! Those blokes are probably doing seventy hours a week! What do they mean, "won't work"?)

But anyway, not to complain about it. We had this job, and we loved it, and we were making money - which was the main thing. And we were all planned up to build another house at Cronulla because we loved the beach. Anyway, we're coming home from work one night down Burwood Road in a drizzle of rain. At the top of the shopping centre there's a pair of headlights coming towards me. The road was wet. All of a sudden the headlights had gone across the front of me and I hit him. A Morris 1000 with a naval lieutenant driving it. I don't know where he'd been, but he honestly believed that cars had right of way over motor bikes, and he thought he could turn in front of me. At least that's what his story was. I went over the top and my wife hit the bloody car, and she had an impressed fracture of the skull and compound fractures to the leg, and she was a mess. Two diggers just back from Korea were walking down the road in their army gear, and they came and lifted the bike off me. As soon as I got the bike off me I went berserko and attacked the bloke because I could see my wife laying on the ground with blood running out of her ears and I wasn't too impressed with that. Anyway, the soldiers hung onto me till the ambulance came. My wife had four inches of femur sticking out through her leg and the angel of an ambo man put a splint on it and took her to Western Suburbs hospital. She was in there for six months. There was no way I could carry on the business on my own and I had to sell it. So that was the milk bar business.

I'd had to sell the business at a loss. Then I bought an old '39 Chev and put all my tools in the back of it. I couldn't take a full time job because Patty never properly recovered and needed a lot of help, and I had to be around at least some of the time during the day. I used to travel mainly the Hume Highway. I'd go into the various car yards and pick up work that way. I was doing all right, and making reasonable money when I met two blokes named Jimmy Williams and Jack Haines. Jimmy was a good spray painter and Jack was a panelbeater, and at that time I suppose you could say that I was a gun mechanic. I could do anything, and I was strong and fit and would have a go at anything. The three of us got together and formed a three-way partnership and called it AWH Motor Repairs. We rented an old Esso garage workshop on the highway at Yagoona from a bloke named Julian Brancourt. He was a giant, this bloke. Seven feet tall would you believe! The family were quite historic round Yagoona.

Anyhow we rented this place, and the business was going pretty good because we were all pretty good at what we were doing. It was the beginning of a good motor repair business. But unfortunately Patty died. She'd never really got over the accident, and to compound matters she was seven months pregnant when she died so I lost the both of them. So I got out of AWH Motor Repairs.

Perhaps the less said about the next twelve months the better. I went berserko. I got on the piss, and spent most of my time down at the bloody Macquarie Hotel at the 'Loo. I had some pretty strange friends, I can tell you. It was bad, but after twelve months I got hold of myself. Being a fairly physical sort of a bloke I started swimming out at Redleaf Pool and playing handball out there with a mob of blokes that I'd got to know. Good blokes. I got off the grog and got really fit, and then I met my present wife. (Saved!) We got married. It was a ready-made family, as she already had two little kids, and they're top kids. So I started helping to train little kids at soccer, and settled into normal family life, and that's when I got into the car sales business.

I worked at Merrie Motors at Yagoona to start with. I'd been doing repair work there and was getting about twenty five quid a week from them that way. At that stage of the game I wasn't that keen on earning a lot of money. I preferred to spend my spare time at the baths at Ramsgate and keeping fit to doing overtime. I'd met Marie, who was to become my second wife, but we hadn't yet married, and we were going out to rock and roll dances. (My era began rock and roll. We think different to the people older than us. We do, you know. We started to think different. We stopped worrying about Britain and all that shit. It was a change.) But Merrie Motors offered me twenty quid a week and a car. You had to work Saturday and Sunday but you got a day and a half off through the week. That suited me. He was a good bloke to work for. He was a wild bloke in his way, and had his own way of doing business. (He never used to open his mail. He used to throw it in the dirt tin. When I asked him why, he said didn't like getting bills and preferred to wait till after he'd been summonsed to pay at the last minute so that his money was earning interest for him.)

Anyway, the bloke who ran Merrie Motors sold out, and I got a job with Robert Dewley VW on North Terrace at Bankstown. I didn't do too good there and I'm not quite sure why. Maybe the VWs were a bit small for the way the market was going. But it was a good job and I liked it.

But then I saw a job advertised at Cremer Car Sales at Burwood, and away I went and applied for it. I met Sam and Harley Cremer. Sam was the owner. Been on the one site for 31 years and owned every stick of furniture and everything on it. An absolute bloody genius car sales person. He only sold perfect second hand cars, as well as prestige new ones. I got the job, and he paid me 25 quid a week with a good motor car 365 days of the year, including petrol, plus commission on any cars I sold.

It was a top job, but Sam was a hard man to work for. Early on in the job I'd had a hell of a time finding a buyer for a Hudson Hornet that had been traded in on a Merc. I'd been running around all day to get it all organised, and by three o'clock that afternoon everything was fixed up - the Benz was sold, the trade-in was gone and the money was in the bank. So Sam immediately sent me up to Auburn to value a Pontiac that someone had who wanted to trade it in on a Benz too. But Sam didn't think the Pontiac was the sort of car he wanted in his yard, and he asked me to place it somewhere else. (I'm pretty sure Sam was giving me this run-around to test me out). I got it all arranged, and I got back to work around five thirty, which was the time we usually knocked off. Sam listened to my report of what I'd done and said to me: "You've done a good day's work, Danny. You've persisted in what you've had to do and you've come up trumps. What I want you to do now is go and sit over there in my secretary's seat with the phone. Here's the phone book. Relax for half an hour and do a bit of cold canvassing with the phone book." Shit! Can you imagine that? Sitting down and ringing somebody out of the blue and trying to sell them a Mercedes? At a time when most people were knocking off? It was a joke! But he was

just trying me out.

I was making plenty of money there. I was selling about one Benz a month and heaps of second hand cars, because he only kept good ones. I bumped into Bill Davidson of Pacific Motor Auctions one day and he asked me why I didn't go with them and start making some real money. Now I can only say that my performance at Cremer's verged on being brilliant - I thought I was good, anyway. I knew that the good reps at Pacific were making extraordinarily good money - I'm talking about a hundred quid a week for the top blokes. They were driving good motor cars, they had the life of Riley, and they were free to roam. You only had to be on site for three auctions a week. The rest of the time you roll. Once you'd done your business the day was yours. It was a good life. So I went back and told Sam I was going to leave, and he told me I was very foolish. He said I'd be no good at Pacific because I couldn't sell a crook motor car - that I didn't have the temperament for that sort of job. Like a fool I ignored him.

So I went to Pacific, and Sam was dead right. I was an absolute bloody disaster. I was no good at the job. Couldn't handle it. It was 1960. Money was a bit tight because there was a squeeze on credit, and I wasn't doing any good at all. We used to have a weekly performance meeting in the sales office where our sales were graphed up on the wall on a chart with expanding elastic lines on it. You could see from it how much each rep was making for the company. I was second lowest. Fred Sutton owned Pacific. He was a big lump of a bloke who used to chop wood for exercise (truly!). He sacked the bloke who was selling less than me, and then turned to me: "Righto, Danny. Your figures aren't much better. You'd better get your arse into gear. What are we paying you now in commission? Twenty five quid a week? And you're driving a pretty good car? Well, I don't think you're hungry enough so I'm dropping your commission to twenty quid a week as from now. There's nothing like a hungry stomach to make a man work. And we'll give you second grade cars from now on and you can work a bit harder when you're out." When he'd finished saying all that I said to him: "Fred. I don't think I've got a future here. I think I'd better go too." He said: "You please yourself." So that's how I left Pacific.

After that I went for a lot of jobs around Sydney in the car game. I'd get on to the shortlist, meet the sales managers and all that, and they seemed to think I'd be the bloke for the job, but I never ended up getting one. I always got a Dear John letter. Years later I met a bloke who'd been the sales manager with Sam Cremer. He said to me: "Danny, the day you left Sam you killed yourself in the car game. Because you thought you'd done a good job for him you used to give him as a reference, didn't you? Well, as soon as anybody rang him up about you he'd bag you."

So I was pretty down in the mouth, and wandering around. I had a couple of mates who had a mobile crane business in Bankstown. I'd worked with one of them at Green Point Shipbuilding and Engineering, and with the other one at Automatic Totalisators, and I used to drop in from time to time and have a bit of a yak with them. They were nice blokes. I told them what had happened, and they offered me a job. "You'll be back in overalls. I know your capabilities as a tradesman." said one, "I'll put you on and we'll teach you the mobile crane business." They were up and going because there was a lot of industrial development out round Bankstown, Milperra, George's Hall in those days. At that time they had seven old back-enders on four wheel drive ex-army Blitz chassis with Ford Mercury engines in them (which I knew a lot about).

So I started with them to learn the crane business. This included mechanical repairs on the trucks, driving cranes if necessary, working as a dogman, a labourer, welder, whatever. They had a comprehensive little workshop that could do just about anything. I got twenty quid a week. There was no overtime available, but there was a periodic bonus. They paid my phone bill, because I had to be available whenever I was wanted. As it turned out I never saw the bonus, but I did get an increase in salary to 24 quid a week. I was in that job for five years, and we got on pretty bloody well, despite the ups and downs that were in the crane business. Although I didn't get a cash bonus, I did get other things - like parts for my car at the right price, and a bit

of free petrol and things like that. And it was only ten minutes from my front door. There were a lot of things in its favour. And I liked the job. It's not the best job I've ever had, but it was good job.

In 1965 I saw a job advertised at International Harvesters for twenty seven pound ten a week. I thought to myself: "Oh shit. I've been here five years, I'll have to give this a go." So I took a day off - called in crook - probably the only day off I took all the time I was there - and went for an interview. I was offered the job, and went back to the crane company to give my notice. The younger of the two partners was Jewish. (Now don't think for one moment that I'm knocking the Jewish race because I'm not. They are very very intelligent people, but they do know the value of a dollar because they came up the hard way. I've got the greatest respect for them.) Anyway, I walked in to the office and told him I was leaving - mainly because of the money. I explained how I really liked just about everything else about the job, but that the extra money was very tempting. I told him that if he put my pay up to 25 quid a week I'd stay there. So help me christ, he grabbed his chest and rolled his eyes as if he was having a heart attack (he was a great actor) and said: "Jesus Christ! I can't do that!" I said: "But it's only 52 quid a year!" He said that if he gave it to me he'd have to give it to everyone else on the payroll. I said I'd keep quiet about it. He said that they'd find out because they always do, and that he couldn't afford it. So I went to International Harvesters at Auburn.

The problem there was that they ran two shifts, and I was on the day shift. I considered myself to be a pretty highly qualified tradesman by this (I was in my late thirties) and the worst part about the job from my point of view was that you started a job but mostly you didn't get to finish it. You'd pull a clutch out of a coal truck, and by four in the afternoon it was ready to go back in but you never finished it - the night shift would come along and put it in. Then the next day you'd be on a different job, say something that was unfinished from the night shift. Though it was good work, top work, there was no overall satisfaction from the job I was doing on the shop floor. They were also getting me to ferry cab and chassis rigs around the metropolitan area, so I was getting a fair bit of freedom, too. But the travelling to and from Bankstown was adding two hours to my day which I wasn't being paid for, and being pretty aware of the almighty dollar myself I couldn't see the mileage in spending time that way.

Another job was advertised in this period - at R.M. Campbell's, the BMC dealers in Bankstown. I went down one Saturday morning and applied for it and got the job. I was supposed to do a sort of introductory training period to learn all about the company and BMC products, then I was to be made Service Manager. When I went to resign from International Harvesters they told me that they had plans for me there and hadn't intended to keep me much longer on the workshop floor there. I didn't know what to do. I finally decided that the travelling to Auburn was too much, and I decided to go to R.M. Campbell's. The service manager at International Harvester told me I was making a big mistake. (That was the second time someone had said that to me. I'm a slow learner!)

At R.M. Campbell's I learnt the product intimately. I did the BMC courses and got their certificates that they wanted me to, and became Service Manager. It wasn't a bad job, but there were problems with the products. Nearly every BMC product leaked oil and the leaks were hard to stop, and they'd keep coming back, and the first person to cop the complaints was the Service Manager. We had to do a lot of free work which made it hard to make the service department profitable, but it did show a profit after a while. It was good because we were involved with racing Cooper S's, and we did all the police patrol pursuit Coopers. The police gave me a special warrant to road test their cars up to 100mph.

One day I was talking to a lady who'd backed her car into her gate post. She'd had a fair bit of trouble with the car, and I'd looked after her service problems for her in the past, and when she backed it into the gate she came to me first up to see if I could help her. When I gave her an estimate of the cost she said that she thought it should be handled under warranty. I explained

that it wasn't a warranty claim, but she couldn't seem to see the difference. We started to get a bit cranky with each other and it was showing. I had the quote book in my hand, and I stormed out to find the panelbeater to get a quote from him. My mind was on the argument and not on what I was doing, and as I stepped off the kerb an HD fucking Holden (the ones with a sharp front mudguard - the first time I saw one I thought: "Christ! I hope I never get hit by one of them!") - hit me fair in the fucking leg and smashed my knee. I wasn't looking - it was my fault. I went up over the windscreen and I'm on the deck unconscious, and when I came to all I could hear was this woman screaming. Anyhow, they got me to Bankstown hospital and patched me up, but there weren't enough beds for me to have one. I had eleven stitches under one eye, a smashed leg with plaster up to the hip, and they sent me out of there at half past five that night on bloody crutches with my pants all ripped to pieces! That's Bankstown hospital for you in the sixties - probably any hospital at that time.

I was back at work within a week, performing my function on crutches. Not for any particular good reason except that I wanted to. The doctor who was looking after me was a car fanatic and when I used to go and see him once a month we'd talk motor cars all the time and he never looked much at my leg. It was in plaster for over six months.

At ABC Cranes in 1968 they were in the process of manufacturing a special-purpose crane. It was on a Bedford KGL chassis with a 5-speed Bedford gearbox, a Perkins engine, and it had to be able to go through an eight foot six factory doorway with the crane folded up. When it's inside it was capable of carrying behind it a load on the hook at the back of the crane of up to six foot high, and the total weight of that object could be up to six tonnes. This was all on a short wheelbase Bedford, which was almost too good to be true. It had a pantograph jib which expanded in two directions, and with all four outriggers on the deck you could drop that six tonnes on the spot, twelve feet away. The jib was made of a titanium alloy. It was the only crane like it in the world, and it was thought up by the older of the partners. He contacted me again and offered me the job of putting the hydraulics in it, and then taking it on the road to develop it for industry. I couldn't knock it back.

But you wouldn't believe this. The week before I was due to take up the job with ABC Cranes I was racing at the Nepean Short Circuit Speedway in the City of Sydney Championships. Half way through Speedway Bend I lose it, crash the bloody bike in a pretty big way, and land on my shoulder and the side of my head. I got back on the bike, fired it up, and finished that lap, and then came back to the pits because the carburettor had been knocked out of skew when I came off and it wasn't running right. In the heat of the moment I wasn't in that much pain, but as soon as I cooled down I got this tremendous pain in my shoulder blade. I didn't bother going to the doctor because I'd had plenty of falls and wasn't worried about it, and in the course of the next week, before I started at ABC Cranes, the pain eased up and I was pretty right - or so I thought. I went in on the Monday morning to start work and the first job I had to do was to put the power steering gear in underneath this new crane. This entails putting a hydraulic ram up on the steering gear underneath the chassis. I got everything into position, got underneath, and as I went to push it up there was a crack!... and my shoulder blade broke in half! Broke the bastard fair in half within an hour of starting work!

ABC Cranes were pretty pissed off about this, naturally, but they did the right thing. They gave me some office work to do. I had to answer the phone and take bookings and that. That's how I got into the office there initially. Between '68 and '72 I operated there as crane driver, general duties, a bit of mechanical work. I put the special-purpose crane into the field, got it accepted by industry, taught a couple of the blokes how to use it properly, and I was also a manager.

When I was still with Campbell's I met a bloke called Guido Simionato who was a BMC automotive engineer at Zetland with top qualifications. (He used to drive BMC cars to destruction, then take the bits and pieces out and X-ray them and redesign the parts to Australian standards.) And he raced motorbikes. A very brave bloke. He was a motocrosse rider.

When we first met I was out of plaster but still on crutches after being hit by the car. We talked motor bikes. He asked me to go and see a race meeting at the old Moorebank track the next weekend, which I did. After the races finished we were having a couple of beers in the pits, and I was eyeing his Velocette "scrambler". At that time most of the bikes racing were British single cylinder machines running a high-compression motor on methanol fuel and lubricated with *Castrol R* vegetable oil. The sound and smell of these at high revs with open exhausts makes the adrenalin pump and the heart beat faster. Guido said: "Would you like to have a ride on it sometime?" I replied: "Hold me bloody crutches and fire her up right now!" I did a few laps and had the Velo sideways on full lock a few times. I was hooked again. Motor bikes are very addictive. This was the start of a thirteen year friendship both in the sport and in business together.

I had a large three-car workshop at the rear of Marie's and my home at Bankstown. Guido and I started repairing and tuning motor bikes there. We worked in the evenings after our normal jobs - two or three nights a week and most Saturdays. On Sundays we either practised riding our bikes fast on the dirt, or engaged in mainly Motor Cycle Club events. We continued in this way until I took the bad fall in 1968.

We were good mates, and we got together and decided in 1971 that if we were going to work as hard as we did for other people, then we may as well do it for ourselves. We had six thousand dollars each spare money, and we fished around and found out that we could get a dealership for Yamahas. Guido was racing a Yamaha YZ250 at that stage of the game, and we got hold of an old abandoned building in Bankstown which belonged to the NRMA. It was a double-fronted shop in Marion Street and we rented it on a four year lease under the conditions that we renovated the building and got it up to council regulations to operate as a motor cycle and repair dealership. Which we did. We opened in January 1972 as Simalex Cycles - a combination of our two names. We operated as a Yamaha dealership initially, but we took on all makes later on.

We made a lot of money. I built a new house at Condell Park with a swimming pool and ducted air conditioning and all the bits and pieces. Guido and his wife used to go back to Italy for a holiday each year and he had a new racing bike every year. We made more money than I'd ever seen in my life. Blokes would come in and give you the cash for a purchase, and often if you offered them a receipt they'd say not to worry about it. No sale on the cash register - you know, the way the butcher works. When was the last time you got a receipt from the butcher? Think about it. But that's only part of the way the system works. In the end it all comes down to a word - you're allowed to *minimise* your tax, but you're not allowed to *avoid* it. We did real good.

But business started to fall off as from around 1975, and then in the next four years two things happened: the lease came up for renewal, (and I could only get a two year lease from the NRMA), and they increased our rent by 200%. After those two years were up they said they would be wanting the building back, which gave us two years to re-establish ourselves somewhere else. Guido went out of the business for a whole stack of reasons we needn't go into here, and I stayed in and eventually sold out on a handshake to a bloke who had no money, but was going to pay me back at \$1000 a month for eighteen months. He paid me for six months - so at least he tried. Unfortunately he had a drug problem. He was actually the Master at Arms for the Gypsy Jokers - a tough motor bike club like the Hell's Angels (which I didn't know at the time).

My mate from ABC Cranes heard that I had the business for sale, and towards the end of 1979 he says to me: "Look mate. What about coming back with me again." I said: "I dunno. D'you think we could stand each other three times in a row?" He said: "I'll tell you what I'll do. We're getting old. Neither me or my partner has any sons. The business has got a limited life and is not going all that well at the moment, and I've got interests now with my cousin in Hong Kong, and I want to involve myself in importing stuff from Asia. I've done all the legwork for this

business and I'm sick of it."

(The business had made a lot of money. The first year that they went into business they paid a lot of tax, but they learned their lesson quick, and from then on that business was a negative profit business. You can put whatever construction you like on that - they were either very bad or very good businessmen. They didn't pay much tax but they always had a new Mercedes, and trips overseas on a regular basis. But their bank balance was just enough, all the time.)

So he went on: "I've had enough of all this. I know you could do it, so why don't you come and take over my function in the business. Call it Operations Manager. To make it worth your while I'll give you so much a week clear and we'll fix up a new car for you on a lease agreement, and we'll give you ten percent of the action. "The action" was all the cash jobs that were done. (I had to pay my own tax, which I did religiously.) For example, with cash jobs, if you wanted a water tank moved on your property and we said it would cost \$160 to do it, we'd ask for cash because we didn't know you, and when you paid you'd get a receipt for the money. But that receipt came out of the second receipt book, which doesn't exist as far as anybody else is concerned, and the \$160 in cash comes back and goes in the safe. So all this cash mounts up, and on the first of every month it was counted, and I was to get 10% of that on top of the rest. That sounded pretty good to me, so I took the job and went to work for them once again.

My first job was to collect unpaid and overdue debts. I pursued this with my usual zeal and with not a little success. Suddenly my 10% was reduced to 5% because they felt they couldn't afford the first figure - not an unusual conclusion for them to arrive at. I had to accept this. I didn't have much alternative except unemployment.

The remaining partner and I worked in a pretty good relationship and the business started to make money again. Over the two year period the turnover actually doubled to an annual gross amount in 1981 to in excess of \$900,000. With what was being stolen off the top it was close to a million dollars.

Then a number of things happened. They closed down the factory operation. They put off staff. Then they put forward the proposition that everyone that worked there, instead of being a paid employee, should be employed as a subcontractor. The proposition that was put to me was that I should register myself as a company, then submit my wage claims to them as an invoice. This would be paid back to me and I would handle my own tax and expenses and become a self-employed person - within the orbit of the company. So I formed a partnership with my wife - J.D. and M.T. Alexander Automotive Engineering Consultants. From that point onwards I submitted invoices and was paid accordingly. I was still getting my five percent.

We had twelve cranes running around. Among my other duties, I was radio operator - two-way. As well, I was receptionist, telephonist, debt-collector (including preparing and serving summonses), did site inspections and quotes, looked after the control and allocation of all crane operations, kept complete records of all crane driver movements, attended to customer inquiries and handled all complaints, maintained staff relations among twelve casual drivers, four dogmen, and two mechanics, and ordered any parts that were necessary.

The day started at six thirty if there weren't any early starts, but if someone had to go out at two in the morning I had to be there to see him off. I'd finish normally at five p.m., or when the last crane arrived back. On Saturdays we'd start at seven and finish at twelve. But the money was good.

I was in the office on my own one day and the phone rang. When I answered it a voice on the other end asked me if we could use some Michelin tyres with tubes and rust bands. I told him we didn't run Michelins because they were too dear. "These wouldn't be," he said, "they're only a hundred bucks each." At that moment the boss walked in, and asked me in sign language

who was on the phone. I motioned to him to shut up. The bloke on the phone said that his company had over-ordered on the tyres, but if we wanted any we had to take the lot. With my hand over the mouthpiece I told the boss about this, and he was keen to do the deal because they were so cheap. I was amazed. "They've got to be fuckin' hot" I said. "I don't care," he said, "I can make money out of 'em." I shook my head in disbelief, and handed him the phone. He talked to the bloke for a bit, then hung up. He said he'd decided to take the risk. "I'm flabbergasted." I said. He told me to get the boys to make a space for them in the workshop. He was to pick them up from the White Bay Terminal the next day. "D'you want a cheque to pay him with?" I asked. "No, he wants cash," he said. I couldn't get over it. "You mean you're going to go to White Bay Terminal with ten thousand bucks in your pocket to meet a bloke that you don't even know?" "Yep. That's right." So help me Christ he was in at half past nine the next morning, went to the Commonwealth Bank and pulled out fucking ten grand and put it in his briefcase. Then he came back to the yard and picked up the truck and drove off.

Now in those days the *Telegraph* used to have a column called *In and About Sydney* or something like that, and this next bit was reported there. Later that morning the phone rang. It was the boss. "You know that bloke with the tyres?" he said, "I think he's crook." "Well, if that's the case," I said, "don't give him the money." "I already have. I met him and gave him the money, and he told me he'd just go and fix up a delivery docket for me, and I'm still in the office here waiting for him to come back. I went to look for him, and the back door that leads onto the back street's open and he's not here." I said: "I don't understand this. You've never given anyone ten cents in your life for nothing, let alone ten thousand dollars." "But it's true," he said. He went from there to the Balmain Police Station and reported it, and they accepted it. And it was written up in the *Telegraph*.

But years before he'd said to me: "There's only one way you'll get your money back for all the insurance you've taken out over the years, and that's to make a claim." What I suspect is that he snookered the ten grand, maybe split it two ways with his other partner (because he didn't make much fuss or seem to be too upset about it), and although I never saw a claim go through my assumption is that he claimed for the loss under the "money in transit" part of his insurance. The insurance company will pay for any money lost in transit, that's why the boss always says to the employee: "If you're coming from the bank with the payroll and someone sticks a shotgun in your belly, give him the fuckin' money!" Because the insurance will pay. Simple as that. Anyhow, that's what I reckoned happened - though I might be wrong. But I might not be.

I stayed with them for a few more years. I had a brand new Ford Laser supplied by the company and the five percent was still coming through. By this they'd decided it wasn't worth manufacturing any more, so the workshop was empty. Like a bloody idiot, I mentioned to them that if I utilised the workshop I might be able to start a motor cycle business there. (Old loves die hard). They said to give it a go and see what I could do.

The boss' son-in-law was out of work. He was a nice young bloke, and I enlisted him to help me organise the workshop, spares, showroom etc. We got on OK and within six months we were making our wages plus a small profit for the crane company. During this period I got some hard-to-get parts for repairs from a small motorcycle wrecking yard at Moorebank owned by two brothers, Brian and Paul Aiken. One of the partners in the crane company had picked them up for me and had therefore made contact with these two blokes. After the first year of operation I was due for holidays and took two weeks off without pay. When I got back I found the Aiken brothers had been given control of the business that I'd set up, and I'd been consigned to the category of "goods and chattels". There was a job for me as a motorcycle mechanic subcontractor if I wanted it, working under the direct control of the Aiken brothers. This was a bit of a come-down for a motorcycle dealer/operations manager/controller of staff and mobile crane movements wasn't it?

I protested long and loud, and eventually got through to my two old mates, the crane company

partners - or so I thought. Both eventually agreed with me that the treatment I was getting by being relegated to a workshop mechanic probably was not really fair, after my accumulated years of service at management level - a total of almost fourteen years. After much discussion on the subject it was mutually decided that I should not be expected to accept the situation and that some alternative should be arranged. This took the form of an exercise involving a special-purpose low-profile crane which had been broken down and out of service for about two years. It was in fact old Number Three - the very crane I'd joined the company in 1968 to finish construction on and initially put into service - that was the time of my broken shoulder blade.

I was given freedom to operate independently on the project - to rebuild where necessary and get it back in service in competition with the more modern vehicles that were now being used by the company's rivals in the machinery handling and placement side of the mobile crane industry. I applied myself to No 3's resurrection, and after new life was breathed into her I got her back on the road again. I felt a sense of achievement and satisfaction with her performance, which left nothing to be desired. She was as good as she was when she was new - in fact, in my opinion she was better.

The next item on the programme was to sell her services back into industry. This entailed an advertising and promotional campaign aimed at all our old customers who had been lost to our more progressive and up-to-date competitors. I was driving the crane on work sites and travelling on the road about thirty hours a week at a charge-out rate for the crane company of forty dollars an hour. That worked out at \$1200 a week gross. I received ten dollars an hour, and attended to my own tax. After all running expenses - an average of two hundred dollars a week - it left \$700 a week profit for the crane company. That's \$36,400 a year I was making for them.

This situation continued until the middle of 1985. The crane and I had a trouble-free run for two years - no mechanical breakdowns and no accidents, despite the fact that I was working solo 90% of the time. I only had the use of a dogman/crane chaser/mate on rare occasions. Old No 3 was going extra well, except that the rear brakes weren't working at all. New wheel cylinders and shoes were needed. I was assured that the money to buy these would be available as soon as possible - an amount of about \$1000. I continued to drive her on the gearbox, which is an extremely hazardous exercise in Sydney's traffic. I was inadvertently running a few red lights daily and was experiencing the odd near miss. She weighed 18 tonnes and didn't have power steering. Top speed was about 75kph and she could be a bit tricky at times. She was about 6 tonne overweight running on two axles. She'd been registered without her counterweight, low fuel, and no oil in her hydraulic tank - a common trick in the mobile crane game. This saves on rego fees, overweight permits and things like that, which comes to quite a considerable number of dollars over the twenty year life expectancy of a mobile crane.

I'd been booked out with No 3 to a job at a factory at Campbelltown early one morning to install some heavy machinery. The job was estimated to last till about ten a.m. From there I was to travel back through the city to Botany - without the back brakes, remember - for more work there in the afternoon. The job took a bit longer than expected and eventually I was heading back towards town about 11 a.m. I was on the freeway and had old No 3 wound up on the governor and she was pulling her top speed of 75 kph with no rear brakes. So what? I could see for miles. I glanced in the rear vision mirror and saw a Kenworth - a tri-axle trailer rig coming up behind me. He was blowing a trace of smoke out of both his stacks, so I knew he was fair dinkum. I moved over to the left and as he drove by he gave me a toot on his air horns: "Thanks, mate." He pulled back in front of me, left flashers going. No sweat. But just as we were lined up again there was blue smoke off his rear trailer wheels. His six duals locked up. (Maxi-brakes are spring-applied and are held free by air pressure. If there's no air pressure the brakes lock on. This bloke had blown the air line between the prime mover and the trailer and the maxis had come on and he'd locked on solid.) He looked like he'd stopped dead. I stood on the brake pedal and pulled left. I clipped the left hand corner of the trailer and went bush. Old No 3 was forward control, and I estimate I missed getting it by about a metre. Luckily the ground was flat.

She stayed upright and eventually stopped about a quarter of a mile down the track from the first skid marks. It was bloody close! The only damage appeared to be a slight graze on the front quarter about waist high. Where I sat in the drivers seat, it would have cut me neatly in two if I'd hit him. So off I went to Botany to finish the day's work.

The next morning I was feeling a bit crook and went to see our local friendly family doctor who checked my general condition and decided that I was suffering from delayed shock from the near miss the previous day and suggested I take a week off to wind down and recover my perspective, which by this was a bit out of whack. I called in at the crane depot on my way home from the doctor and saw the boss of the company - my old mate I'd worked for, and with, for so long. I told him about my visit to the doctor and his advice about taking a week off - no pay, of course. Then I went on to ask him if it'd be possible to get the necessary parts to fix the brake faults on No3, so that I could fit them before I took it back on the road in a week's time.

After I'd finished, he looked a bit thoughtful for a couple of minutes and then he replied: "Well... there's a slight problem, mate. We've had a firm offer from Hunter Valley Cranes for No 3." (This was one of the companies that I'd canvassed and got on our books when No 3 crane first went back on the road.) He went on: "They've offered us eighty grand for her as she stands, and as you know that represents about two years clear profit if we continued to operate her. I think it'd be unwise from an economic point of view for us not to take them up on their offer. You understand, though, that after she's sold we couldn't guarantee your future employment. We're going to get out of the mobile crane business altogether and capitalise our assets and retire from business."

Well, that was that. After forty years of full employment I was unceremoniously sacked - out on the street. And this was done by a bloke who I imagined had a conscience. I should have known better.

But we don't give up, do we? After that we went to Tamworth to live, but before we did I was on the dole. Don't let anybody tell you that it's any good. It was shithouse. You line up every fortnight in a queue, you take your paper up to the counter, you submit it across the counter and if it's all in order and you behave yourself your dole goes through to your bank account. You don't pick up a cheque, like you hear people say. Maybe there's a lot of people robbing the system, but I don't know any. And I didn't.

So we sold out in Sydney, made a bit of money on the house, and moved to Tamworth where we bought a cheaper one. This gave us some capital and I went round and ended up with half a dozen regular clients - doing their gardens and lawns. I did that for a while, then applied to the local TAFE College as a casual part-timer on twenty hours a week. Then in 1990 or '91 the college was expanding, and one of the things they introduced was a facility for aircraft maintenance teaching. At that time Tamworth was a major air centre. East West Airlines was operating from there and there were twenty apprentices from there plus other crop dusters and people like that from around the region, which took it up to thirty. A young bloke from the Air Force was employed as a teacher, and I was offered full time work to take over the Tool Store operation. When they offered it to me I was 63, and I pointed out that I only had two years to go. "That doesn't matter," he said, "we only want you to get it all started and set up."

So I did that. I had somewhere in the vicinity of three quarters of a million dollars worth of equipment in the Store area itself - at the buying-in price which was 50% off retail and no tax. I set it up like a Woolworths or Coles operation where things were pretty easy to find. After that two years I was due for retirement, but the boss said that I didn't have to retire and could stay as long as I liked. So I put in another twelve months and left when I was 66. By then I'd had enough of a country town and wanted to get back to the ocean where I could walk up and down the beach and have a swim - and that's exactly what I'm doing now.

When the Labor government under Whitlam was in power I had the motorcycle shop. Industry was up and going in Australia and kids were getting jobs when they left school, and there weren't many people on the dole. I was making lots of money because these people were my customers. But by the middle of 1976, after Fraser had taken over, I'd had to sack our salesman, and the motor mechanic, and put off our casual help as well. From that point on I could see a continual deterioration in the number of people that were getting work. When I sold up after that and went back into the crane business, most of the work that we were doing was not the installation of machinery but the *removal* of machinery from factories which had been operational for many years. With two I can think of - Victa Lawnmowers and James N. Kirby, I'd helped put the bloody machinery *in* there in the first place! But they didn't have to cut back because the workforce was getting so much money - it was because of the inefficiency of bloody management! If you really look into it you'll find that 90% of the problems come from management. These days the media is full of mismanagement scandals. And over the years, new technology has done away with so many jobs, yet they haven't made any provision for all the people that have been thrown out of work as a result.

I can't say I miss being at work. In the early days we were all hungry for overtime, and there was heaps of it. Some blokes were doing five nights a week, but I only used to do about two or three. Right back when I was working with Arthur Reardon he said to me one day: "I'm going to give you a bit of good advice. Things aren't always going to be good. They might be now, but I've seen it all ways, and I want you to understand that you've got to have your own basic economy. If you base your lifestyle on your basic salary and consider all the cream that you get from overtime as being a bonus, then you'll be all right. But don't spend every penny you get every week, because if you do, when the overtime cuts out you could be in big trouble." That's exactly why so many people are having their houses repossessed these days - even if there's two of them working. I was lucky in that Marie has always worked, and we've always had two wages in the house.

Another thing that Arthur said to me was: "The problem with people that are brought up in industry is that they aren't taught to use their leisure time. What you've got to do is realise that work is not an end-all - you've got to have other things." I've always kept that in mind and I've always had other things in my life besides work, so I don't miss not going to work one little bit. I'm totally happy in retirement.

(Recorded August 29 and September 4, 1995.)

Danny has written about various aspects of his life, mainly for circulation to interested members of his family. As is evident from the foregoing transcript, working with Arthur Reardon had a big influence on him, and the first piece that follows is an extract from an article that he wrote about working with Arthur. The second piece describes some aspects of everyday life in the mobile crane business.

A MAN OF PRINCIPLE

...It was after the end of the war that I first met Arthur Reardon - 1946, to be precise. He had left GMH when he had been directed by the company to transfer to Melbourne, a city which both he and his wife hated after their initial stay there when they first arrived in Australia in 1913.

Arthur had taken the position of metal heat treater with Automatic Totalisators in Chalmers Street, Sydney, where I was employed as an apprentice fitter and machinist, just entering my fourth year of training - a job which I detested. I had fallen foul of every departmental boss and supervisor in the company, and was in fact fast approaching the point where my indentures were due for imminent cancellation. As a last resort the Staff Superintendent, Dave Stewart, had me transferred to Arthur's heat treatment department - the very final chance I had to finish my formal training in the engineering trades.

When Arthur and I met for the first time we immediately hit it off together. He was a tall, skinny, grey-haired old bloke with a twinkle in his eye, and spoke the most perfect English with just a very slight northern accent, with a deep, resonant voice. I don't know what he must have thought of me - a typical mug larrikin, nineteen year-old Aussie lout. He must have been warned by the management. If he had, it made no difference to him - he treated me fairly and decently from the word go. It did not take long for his influence to make itself felt on me.

The first thing he instilled in me was a real interest in what I was doing, workwise. This was a sense of purpose I had not experienced since my later school days when I first started to learn the fundamental skills of wood and metal work, and had been encouraged by a competent teacher in the person of Brother Raymond at the De La Salle College in Ashfield.

My association with Arthur Reardon brought a new dimension into my life. I began to learn the basic facts about practical metallurgy, as applied to the skills of heat treatment. I became an avid student of his. The work could be hot, dirty, and arduous, but my interest in the new discovery of what occurred to metal under the effect of controlled heating and cooling overcame the disadvantages associated with the job.

The workshop we shared was only small, initially, at the old Chalmers Street factory. A new factory was on the drawing board and was scheduled to commence operation in about eighteen months' time. This new facility was to become, for a short time, the most advanced metal heat treatment plant outside the USA in the Pacific Basin, and it was under the control of Arthur S. Reardon, with myself as his understudy.

The old workshop at Chalmers Street was poorly ventilated, badly lit, and extremely hot, even on the coldest of winter days. I hardly noticed these sub-standard conditions as I worked with Arthur and began to absorb some of his knowledge of metals, and the changes brought about in their physical properties as they were subjected to various heating and cooling processes. Most of these hardening and tempering procedures have been known from the earliest times in most countries of the world, the earliest being Egypt, India, Turkey and China...

..."Auto-Totes" was a carry-over metal working factory from the 1930s taking up the ground and first floor of a five-storeyed building. The company was in the process of changing to full-time peace production again when Arthur joined it and I was allocated to work with him. The workshop was badly lit, badly ventilated, and very dirty - typical of pre-second world war industrial factories. In fact, a thoroughly unpleasant place to be. In spite of this, I found working with, and learning from Arthur overcame, to a degree, the bad environment.

When the move to the new factory at Meadowbank was eventually completed, the change was dramatic. Plenty of natural light, good forced ventilation and exhaust fans and all the very latest equipment. It augured well for our future as a team, working together, providing a service of the best and most modern metal heat treatment in the southern hemisphere. This future was not to be realised.

Arthur was a decent and humane person, and provided one did his work consistently and well, he did not feel it necessary to unduly crack the whip. Not so was the case in the person of the

managing director of Auto-Totes - an arsehole of a man who subsequently misappropriated company funds. This bloke was not happy unless all of the staff were working in a lather of sweat whilst he sat in his air-conditioned office, directing - with his young assistant, Murray Riley, who was later to become famous as a disgraced policeman and drug runner, and associate of Australian and American underworld identities.

An efficiency campaign was set up by these two characters, with the object of increasing production across the board by an estimated 20%. Now neither one had ever produced anything as a factory worker, so their idea was pure theory. The boss began to circulate the factory in person, laying it on the foremen and charge-hands to toughen up their attitude towards the workers.

Now there's a lot of truth in the old saying: "You can kill a willing horse." In Arthur's and my case the boss missed the point completely. We liked our work and were already putting in 120% effort. He was not smart enough to notice this fact. The end result was that Arthur resigned, and I got a transfer of indentures to Eagle and Globe Steel Pty Ltd to finish my apprenticeship.

Arthur and I eventually worked together for the last time at C.C. Engineering Pty Ltd at Glebe, with a bloke named Victor Gow, who was a Chinese, and a very smart fellow indeed. He, like myself, learned a lot from Arthur tradewise and economically, plus political and industrial know-how. Unlike me, Vic was smart enough to do something with this knowledge, and opened his own metal heat treatment factory at Marigold Street, Revesby. He subsequently sold out and was a very rich and successful man by the age of fifty - due largely to the principles of Arthur's teaching.

Arthur continued in the trade, actually working for Vic Gow until he was in his mid-seventies, as bright and mentally alert as he had been forty years before. My last meeting with him was in 1970. He was eighty three years of age and was living in a Catholic home for the Aged, "The Little Sisters of the Poor" at Randwick. He was fit and well, and had not lost any of his old sense of humour or goodwill. In fact, such was the strength of Arthur's personality that I felt no effect of the passage of time that had elapsed since our first meeting all those years before.

DRIVING A MOBILE TRUCK CRANE

Mobile crane drivers are a special breed of people. Amongst themselves they talk "Cranese". It has been said that more heavy lifts are done in the pub after work than during the day, and to a certain extent this may be true. During twenty five years of association with these blokes and the industry generally, I must admit that I have not met too many who were not inclined to boast a bit.

This is not said with the object of detracting from these men. It must be pointed out that they lead a solitary life for most of their working day, seated alone in their cabins at the crane controls, being communicated with either by hand or whistle signals, quite often given vaguely by only semi-competent people on the job site. The driver must interpret what is meant, then operate the crane in such a way as to move the load in the correct direction without damaging it or the people nearby. The load can vary in weight and value. Perhaps a good example would be an Americas Cup yacht or the engine off a modern jet aircraft. Not all crane driving is as exotic as that - a lot is just boring, dirty, or dangerous.

Job sites vary for the mobile truck crane driver, though not necessarily on a day-to-day basis. I personally have worked on up to eight different locations spread over the Sydney metropolitan

area during the course of a twelve hour day. Each site a new boss and a different crew - no two exactly the same. One soon learns to be diplomatic and a good operator if he wants to last in that environment. The boss can vary from a sixteen stone, seven foot high truckie to an Italian or Lebanese works foreman who "No speaka da Ing."

Bearing what has been written in mind, it might also be noted that quite often the driver on completion of the job has to cost it, write up an invoice and collect the money on the crane owner's behalf. Too many failures in this latter department leads to a very short life in the mobile crane industry. From my experience all bosses are extremely sensitive in the hip pocket nerve.

Not all the crane driver's work is without humour or interest - in fact many jobs done with a mobile crane can be very rewarding, taking the driver into many interesting and exciting places. I will try to recollect some of the more outstanding things I have witnessed while driving a mobile crane.

The first memory I have is the day Jimmy the Scot almost got killed. Jimmy was one of two new drivers put on by ABC Crane Company - the other answered to the nickname "Grub". Jimmy was driving and Grub was dogman on their first job together at a wet, boggy building site in Smithfield. About ten in the morning Grub directed Jimmy to drive the Mack crane carrier over some ground that was too soft, and it became immovably bogged. I was sent out to salvage the crane with a twenty tonne Thorneycroft - an old crane but a bloody good lifter.

After inspecting the situation we decided that I should get the Thorney as close as possible to the Mack, jib out over her nearside rear corner, lift her rear end clear of the mud and pack under her bogey drive with brick bats and other packing and ballast to enable us to winch her onto firm ground again.

At this point I must explain some of the protocol observed in the crane industry. A certified dogman has control of a lift. A certified crane driver/dogman is the equivalent of a two certificate nursing matron. It takes a brave doctor to clash with one of those, likewise a one ticket crane driver. Grub, when applying for the job, had represented himself as such a qualified person and the boss, while interviewing him, took his word and did not ask to see his credentials. In fact, it turned out that he had none.

Grub took control of the slinging of the Mack, Jimmy the Scot stood on the far side of the bogged crane in my line of sight as I sat at the controls of the Thorney. He conveyed Grub's instructions to me by means of the world wide universal hand signals. I had supplied Grub with a thirty tonne wire sling to do the rigging with, out of our sight. Where he was attaching the sling the bloody fool reeved it, that is, put an eye through an eye forming a slip knot or a hangman's noose. This cuts the strength of the sling by fifty percent, so now we were good for only fifteen tonne. The Thorney's winch was capable of fifty tonne in a straight pull, and as I would be lifting an estimated twenty tonne with the back of the Mack the reeved sling would be badly overloaded.

Jimmy gave me the hook up signal, I applied the winch clutch, and the Mack started to rise out of the bog. Jimmy was standing dead in line with the hook block, which weighed about a quarter of a tonne. Suddenly the reeved sling broke and the hook block, released from the pressure of the lift, took off straight for Jimmy's head. I saw this all in horrible slow motion as I sat powerless at the crane's controls.

It all happened so fast actually that Jimmy did not see any of this - he felt the wind against the side of his head as the quarter tonne of solid steel whistled past him, missing him by a bare couple of inches. Jimmy, coming from the toughest part of Glasgow, wanted to kill Grub, and proceeded to give him a fair sort of a belting on the spot. Sanity eventually prevailed and I conveyed Grub back to the depot, and Jimmy the Scot carried on alone after he and I finally got

the Mack out of the bog.

From the foregoing it can be seen that a good or bad dogman can make or break a lift with a crane. Quite often in the mobile crane hire business a driver would be sent out alone, without the benefit of a dogman of any sort. This practice can result in some bloody hairy experiences for the long-suffering driver. These events usually occur when the load is out of his sight and he is depending on a second or third person to keep him informed as to what the load is doing.

The danger happens when the load gets out of radius. This can best be described to the uninitiated as the see-saw effect - that is, the heavy end controls the behaviour of the contrivance. Now if the crane's load is too heavy, or is too far away from the point of balance, or centre of gravity, the load will take over, taking the crane jib with it and of course turning the crane over - with possible fatal results for the driver or the crew of workers nearby. An experienced driver can usually feel his machine becoming unstable (as we say in the trade, "driving by the seat of his pants") and stop the operation before it is too late. Most modern cranes have a computer warning device which rings a bell and flashes a red light. This occurs at about 85 percent of the tipping load, but most competent drivers will exceed this warning until they sense the instability and then back off. This is called "working to the limit", and is much appreciated by the hirer and the crane owners alike because it gets more work done and therefore increases the profit earned by that unit and driver. All is well until something goes wrong, then the driver cops the flack. Luckily for me I never tipped one over in about twenty years of driving, but I attended a few sites to help pick up the wreckage after one had gone over.

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Big Billy Bernard was sent out on one of the four wheel drive cranes to the sand pits that studded the river banks at Chipping Norton in the early sixties. His job was to lift a motor and pump off one of the sand dredges working on the Georges River. It was Big Billy's first day in that crane, and when he backed up to the river bank he really didn't know what or how much she could lift. However, he laid the jib out dutifully as directed by the bloke standing on the dredge floating on the river about ten metres from the shore. The winch rope hook was soon attached to the motor and pump and the bloke signalled Big Billy to start lifting. Old No 7 seemed to be handling it easy. But everyone had forgotten about the flotation of the barge as it rose in the water. The jib on No 7 slowly took load, then as the motor and pump lifted off the deck the whole lot swung away from the shore and suddenly everything was out of control. The crane stood straight up on her back and completely submerged in the water, taking Big Billy with her.

It was the middle of June and a cold southerly was blowing. Big Billy came to the surface blowing like a bloody great whale, struggled ashore, made his way to the site office and phoned the bad news to the boss, who could only respond by repeating over and over again and again: "But WHY, Big Billy, WHY?"

I went with the boss to Chipping Norton. Big Billy was huddled against the side of the site office with a tarp wrapped around him trying to get warm. "Righto," said the boss, "Let's go and get this fuckin' crane out of the fuckin' river." Big Billy jumped out from under the tarp like he had been shot. We all headed that way, me driving the Mack. When we reached the bank the boss pulled a set of three-legged chains off the back of the Mack and threw them on the ground near where the front of old No 7 just stuck out of the river. "First," he said, "we'll have to get those bastards hooked onto the A frame." Without a word Big Billy picked up the chains (which weighed about thirty kilos) and walked straight back into the river. He went out of sight immediately. It was fifteen feet straight down.

"Shit!" said the boss, ripping off his coat, trousers and shoes. He was a very good swimmer, skin diver and snorkeler, and he dived straight in. In retrospect I am sure he was more worried

about his three-way chains than Big Billy. About thirty seconds later they both surfaced and the boss dragged Big Billy back onto dry land, for the second time that day. He took one look at Big Billy as they stood there dripping wet, and screamed: "Christ All Bloody Mighty! You dropped the fuckin' chains! That's another fifty bloody quid you've cost me to fuckin' day!" As I sat in the Mack watching them I thought they were both going to cry.

Old No 7 was salvaged that day. The boss and I worked on her non-stop for about ten hours and she was back in service the next day.

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The fastest and slowest trip to Melbourne and back ever was done when my son Chris was about eighteen years of age. I had been detailed to bring an uncompleted mobile crane back to Sydney by road. Chris decided to go with me for the experience. We left Mascot on the early business flight in a jet. Chris had not had time for breakfast before we left home, and so decided to have a large thick chocolate milk shake just before we took off. A strong, hot north easterly tail wind was blowing, and that jet really got mobile. As we banked and turned for Melbourne over Botany Bay Chris turned a kind of dull green colour. It was his first flight in an aeroplane. Give him his due though, he managed to hold onto that shake. We broke all previous records Sydney to Melbourne, to the extent that on landing at Tullamarine we came in too fast and bloody nearly ran off the end of the runway. Shits were trumps at that stage.

When we got to the factory the crane was about two hours from being ready for the road, so Chris and I decided we would have a couple of beers at a nearby waterfront pub close to the Yarra. Chris at the time was wearing his hair very long, as were his contemporaries in Sydney. This instantly marked us as strangers in that working class pub. "New around here are you mate?" a bloke standing nearby said to me in a not particularly friendly way. I explained to him that I was a crane driver from Sydney and a member of the FEDFA. "Hey, you blokes," he called out to nobody in particular, "this bloke's a Brovver and this other bloke's his dogman." New friends had been made. On leaving the pub Chris remarked on what a nice, friendly bunch of people they were. I heartily agreed.

As I said before, the crane was not completed. It had no inside engine cover and the big old diesel clattered and banged right next to us as we rattled out of Melbourne on our way back to Sydney. The two foot cooling fan kept us supplied with a constant stream of super-heated air sucked through the radiator. The cabin was designed for one man operation, and Chris just managed to fit behind my seat. We had brought a pump-up pouf with us on the plane for him to sit on. At the moment he was reasonably comfortable - except for the heat, which by now was 38 degrees C. outside in the Melbourne sunshine.

Eighty kilometres out of town at a place called Seymour the air pressure on the brakes went crazy. I spent the rest of the afternoon carrying out emergency repairs while Chris tried to find some shade to get out of the sun. Any romantic ideas he may have had about being a truck driver were quickly being eroded.

We decided to stay at a motel about a mile out of town on the Sydney side. After a shower and a change of clothes we started to walk back towards the local pub for a few beers and a steak for tea. About half way there a bloody great black cloud appeared out of nowhere, a bloody giant flash of lightning, a bloody deafening crash of thunder, and we were submerged in a bloody hail storm. We were wringing bloody wet. What a bloody day! When we got to the pub we were soon bloody wet inside as well.

Next morning, after a good night's sleep we resumed our journey. As I changed up into sixth gear about three hundred metres from the motel I glanced at the oil pressure gauge and was

shocked to see nothing was registering. On stopping and inspecting under the motor I discovered an oil line had come loose at the filter and the contents of the fifty-litre sump had been pumped out onto the side of the road. Luckily I was still in low range and had not gained sufficient speed to get onto the sealed roadway. We walk back to the nearest service station and carry three four-gallon drums of oil back to the crane. I tightened up the loose pipe and we were on our way again at last.

The Hume Highway in Victoria is smooth, flat and straight, and we made Wodonga for lunch. A couple of beers and a pie each and we were on the road again - across the Murray, through Albury and on the goat track in NSW. About five Ks down the track the hammering we were getting exploded Chris' pump-up pouf. Now he had nowhere to sit. I sighted a roadside fruit stall ahead, stopped and procured a wooden fruit case for him to use as a seat. This lasted about another fifty Ks when it too gave up the fight. The combined assault of Chris' weight and the Hume's bumps were too much. It was shattered, and he was seatless again. The heat in the cab, by now in the early afternoon, was once again almost unbearable so Chris chose to sit out the back on the crane turntable over the top of the rear bogie drive. This spot was both precarious and incredibly rough. Each passing semi almost blew him off, and his long hair by now was sticking straight out from his head. No wonder overtaking traffic were tooting their horns, waving, and laughing. They probably thought we were part of a circus, which with the benefit of hindsight I am now inclined to agree.

I could see a big black cloud in the hills ahead, and the next instant we were in a cloudburst. The rear mudguards only covered the back of the crane wheels, and Chris disappeared in a sheet of rain water and road spray. When we came out of the brief storm I could see Chris in the rear view mirror, hanging onto the crane jib. He looked like he had just been swimming in the Bondi sewer outfall fully clothed. He soon dried out in the hot sun that followed the rain. When he did he was a kind of greyish-brown colour all over - the second colour change I had seen him make in two days.

Gundagai was reached late that second day, and when we pulled into the pub just before the town we got some strange and not very friendly looks from the locals who were drinking there. (I wonder why?) The motel on the other side of town did however accept us. Must have been a slow night. After a clean-up and a feed I was ready for bed, and Chris was ready to go out and check out the local talent, which he did. He got back to the motel about eleven o'clock, then I went to sleep.

Wednesday, our third day on the road, saw us away from Gundagai early, heading towards Goulburn, which I hoped to make by lunchtime. The old truck that the new crane was mounted on was the cheapest heavy vehicle the boss could find. It was about a 1946 ERF with an ancient four cylinder Rolls Royce engine. It was fitted with a six-speed gearbox with a two-speed splitter box. This gave it twelve ratios controlled by two manual levers. I needed the lot to keep it mobile. My left arm and leg never stopped. This arrangement gave us a top speed of thirty seven miles per hour on the flat and downhill. Ascending a hill brought us back into low ratio and about three miles per hour. Chris by this time had got his sea legs, so to speak, and spent his day prowling around the back of the crane, which at least gave him some exercise. I just sat, sweated, and fought with the gear levers and clutch pedal.

Leaving Goulburn on the last leg of the trip home we ran into consistent heavy rain. After a while it started to come through the radiator, hit the fan and spray the inside of the cabin, where by now Chris was crouching behind my seat. He may as well have been out the back. The rain eventually slackened, and as we approached Camden two cars which had just passed us in quick succession touched and spun on the road in front of us. We missed them both and carried on to arrive home at seven p.m. - the end of a three day, fairly uneventful run from Melbourne to Sydney. It was enough, however, to convince Chris that pushing a pen is better than pushing a truck.

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The most important person working in a mobile crane hire business is the "Allocator". This bloke can make or break the place. He must be an effective communicator on two-way and CB radios and up to three telephone lines - quite often all at the same time - fair dinkum! You put a couple of phones on hold, and talk to the fleet on two-way radio, speaking to the appropriate driver while everyone else on the band listens in. It doesn't take long to be labelled a goose if you are one. I handled the job for three years with ABC Crane Service. Twelve cranes on the road in metropolitan Sydney five and a half days a week, each vehicle averaging seven hours a day utilisation. As each contact is a different personality, and the radio is shared with as many as four other bases and fleets (not, of course, other mobile crane companies) it is not hard to clash with someone. This must be avoided at all costs, as it is all very public, and the Idiot is soon the subject of every after-work pub or club drinker's conversation who was privy to the *faux pas*. A very stressful job, to say the least. Add to these facts that the boss/owner of the fleet is never satisfied with his company profitability - usually a self-inflicted malady. He inevitably vents his spite on the Allocator, who is close at hand and easy to blame for any breakdown in communications - his fault or not. It is a position which requires one to continually guard one's arse. If this is not done efficiently one will soon become the butt of someone else's mistakes.

In spite of all the foregoing it can be strangely very rewarding, not from a financial point of view, when the Allocator reaches the end of his day and knows he has coped well with all the problems he has had to deal with during the course of that day. A feeling of well-being and satisfaction can envelop him as he realises he has done a difficult job as good as it can be done. It is probably only self-satisfaction, because nobody else would have noticed. It would appear to be a very easy, smooth-running day to the casual observer who had not been involved in the countless instant decisions he had made, without reference to or approval from a superior. He has accepted full responsibility for his actions. There would be no excuses or forgiveness if he had been wrong-footed during that ten hour day. *It's bloody good to know you have been right, isn't it?*

The Allocator must understand the operation and capabilities of all the cranes in his fleet, likewise know and understand his drivers and dogmen. Most of these blokes are pretty tough and worldly-wise and do not suffer a fool gladly or for long. Send them to the wrong or over-capacity job too often and you will soon find yourself looking for a different occupation. Bad news spreads like a bushfire in the mobile crane game.

The telephone is the source of 95 percent of the work for a crane yard. When the phone is answered certain essential information must be gathered by the Allocator:

What is to be lifted, moved, etc.?

What does it weigh?(if known).

How high up has it got to go?

How far away from the crane? (These last two determine length of jib and size of crane.)

Where is the job site?

What is the job site like? (Smooth, rough, wet, dry, hilly, flat, etc.).

Any special gear required?

Agreement on travelling time to and from job site.

Estimate of approximate time on job (to facilitate other bookings for crane).

Approximate cost.

How paid? (cash, cheque, charge. If charge, get Order No or trade refs.)

Starting time on site.

Name of customer and phone no.

It is amazing the number of times this information cannot be got from the bloke, woman, on the other end of the phone. It is then that the long-suffering Allocator has to take a calculated risk. If in doubt about length of jib or size of crane, send biggest available. Nine times out of ten it will do the job. The driver must be forewarned of any lack of information. If a good relationship is maintained between management and staff he will usually be able to see a way out of any problems that may arise. Much of the Allocator's work involves human relations. If he cannot project a feeling of helpfulness and friendship he may as well get out and get another sort of job.

Our radio wavelength was shared with a trucking company, a courier company, a sand and gravel company and a doctors' co-op. A communal sense of friendship grew between the other radio operators and myself, together with the drivers and even the doctor, over the three years I was in the Chair. An almost non-stop conversation would be going all day from all over Sydney about traffic conditions, weather, accidents, and possible work leads - specially from the truckies and couriers. In fact, a continuous flow of helpful information. This situation made the job, for me, worthwhile and worth the effort.

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This tale would not be complete if two characters I knew over the years were not mentioned. They were Paddy the Irishman, known as "Irish", and Dave Cormack, known as "Hundreds and Thousands". They were both good crane drivers - and also alcoholics. Every day saw them arrive at work with horrible hangovers - always on time, but oh, so bloody crook. They suffered the agonies of the damned until they could get to an early opener and down a quick schooner to start their day. There were no breathalysers in those days, and barring accidents, not much chance of being picked up. As they were both good drinkers, the grog did not start to show much before six p.m., when they had usually knocked off anyway. They did, however, become a bit belligerent as the day wore on. Irish had an incredible vocabulary of swear words and could in fact string them together to actually make sense, with only the occasional ordinary word to tie the sentence together. Hundreds and Thousands was not that far behind him.

Perhaps I should explain how Dave got his nickname. If a conversation was going on between a group of drivers and Dave was involved, and somebody claimed to have done something special or clever, Dave would come in with the rejoinder: "What? That? Shit! I've done that, hundreds and thousands of fuckin' times!"

Dave was sent out one day to George's Hall to lift a grand piano into the upstairs lounge room of a new two-storeyed split level house. About half an hour later a frantic phone call from the owner of the piano was received. "Get out here! The crane driver has gone mad! Please come and stop him before he wrecks my piano!"

When I arrived at the job site the piano owner was standing in front of his grand piano, arms outstretched, protecting it from Dave, who was confronting him with a set of rusty steel chains in his hands, and demanding, "Well, do you want the fuckin' thing in your lounge room or don't you? If you do, get out of my way and let me put the fuckin' slings on so I can lift the bastard of a thing up there!" Dave had mislaid his nylon slings and felt packing, and after a couple of extra schooners at lunch, thought he had better get on with the job anyway. Luckily I had the right gear in the service ute, and after a few quiet words with Dave we got the piano slung and safely into the upstairs music room. Never a dull moment!

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Paddy was on the two-way radio. He was moving some machines at a small factory in Padstow.

“Danny,” he said, “This wog bastard wants me to go down the driveway next to his factory and I can’t. It’s too narrow, and he says if I don’t he won’t fuckin’ pay me. You’d better get round here and sort the fuckin’ mongrel out. Now.” “Thanks, Irish,” I thought, “just what I need to make my day.”

When I arrived Paddy was bright red in the face and was lining No 3 up to the driveway which was obviously not wide enough. Before I could say anything, Paddy selected first gear and drove straight at the opening. Away went the six foot paling fence, then three downpipes against the factory wall. Paddy put her in reverse and backed out through the shambles, climbed out of the cab, and triumphantly said to the factory owner, who was standing with his mouth open, “See? I fuckin’ told you it wouldn’t fuckin’ well fit!” The crane company never did get paid for that day’s work. The “wog” (Paddy’s word, not mine) never got paid for his paling fence and downpipes either, so I guess all’s fair in love and business.

Dave’s wife left him, and Paddy’s wife threw him out, so Paddy moved into Dave’s house as the star boarder. From that day onwards they became known as “Darby and Joan” to everybody in the mobile crane game. Paddy walked out of the Bankstown Hotel one Friday night, full as a boot, and straight in front of an approaching car. Poor bloody Irish was DOA at Bankstown Hospital. After a real bad spell on the grog Dave joined AA, and ten years later when last I saw him he was still dry and a different bloke altogether.

I can now look back over the years I spent involved in the mobile truck crane industry as not entirely wasted. I met a lot of special people - drunks, toughs, good blokes, bad blokes, thieves and honourable men - and I suppose these experiences have left me just a little richer, than mere dollars in the bank.
