Eric Graham

Born in inner Sydney in 1914, Eric has been a painter, signwriter, glass etcher, trench digger, paymaster and office manager - as well as working as a Baptist Pastor in both honorary and paid capacities for most of his working life. He went blind in one eye in 1977 and lost the sight in the other in 1978, since which time he has been active in promoting a wider understanding of blindness in the general community. He lives now with his second wife in a retirement village on the central coast of NSW.

I was born on the fourth of July 1914. That's why my name is Eric. My mother and father called me Eric because it is the middle of "America" and I was born on America's Independence Day. They were very astute that way. I was born in Crown Street Hospital in Sydney, though I don't like to admit I was born in a Women's Hospital, but things turned out that way. (In my early days people would say they were born in Sydney Stadium because they didn't like being born in a women's hospital!) My parents were living in Redfern. I spent my early days in Redfern - until I was six. It wasn't a bad thing to live in Redfern or Newtown in those days.

When I was young we moved a lot - going to better places all the time - all round Redfern. My father went away to the first war, and when he came back we got a war service home up at Campsie. We didn't stay there long - I don't know why because I was only six at the time - then we moved out to Maroubra Junction. I've been in thirty seven homes in all my life.

When I was seven, I used to be a great scaler of trams down round Maroubra Junction. I lived at my grandmother's place there and slept on the verandah. I

had a cousin about my own age who lived a couple of blocks away, and he and I scaled a tram out to Bunnerong Road to near where the Chinese market gardens were then. We met at about four o'clock in the morning when it was still dark, and we had a carving knife. We were in bare feet, with only trousers and a shirt on. We didn't have any underpants - in those days there was no such thing as underpants - and we went out there and waited for a horse-drawn cart to come along. After a while we heard clop, clop, clop, and along came a cart with a Chinaman sitting up on top, and it was loaded high with cabbages with all ropes around it. We just walked behind it and cut the ropes with the carving knife and all the cabbages came tumbling down. I don't think I've ever run faster in all my life as I did then, back to my grandmother's place and into bed and under the bedclothes. That was a bit of mischief I got up to, but now, if I caught a kid doing that I'd skin him alive - I'd cut off his essentials! (Laughs). These are things you did as kids that if my kid did it I'd tan the hide off him!

The first paid job I had was as a grocery boy when I was 11 years old, delivering on a pushbike. I couldn't get my legs over the bar so I used to ride with them in between. I used to get the orders from the homes, then go back to the grocery shop, put them in a basket, then take them back to the homes and put them out onto the kitchen table. Whilst I was doing that I was also a lolly boy and ice cream boy at the picture show at Campsie. I did that till nine o'clock at night - till interval was over, then you'd go home. So I had two jobs, even while I was going to school.

The Depression affected the family very much. We lived out at Collaroy for eight weeks in a tent on Collaroy Beach, till we came back to Campsie to rented places. I was a teenager and the only one working. My father had lost his job at the Maritime Services Board because of The Depression and I was the breadwinner for the family. If you earned over twenty five shillings a week you didn't get the dole tickets. There were five children in the family, plus my mother and father, and I was the eldest. But I didn't feel as though I was put upon, even though I was never an adolescent. I was a school person, then a worker.

My father was a painter and I learned painting from him. Even when I was only eleven or twelve I used to go on jobs with him. I left school at 14 and took a job doing signwriting and glass embossing. Glass embossing with sandblasting and acid. That was my job in the thirties. I worked up till I was foreman of the place there and left there in 1936 when I was 21. My boss who owned the glass embossing place used to go down about three days a week to Moruya fishing, and he tried to talk me out of going into college. He offered to sign the business over to me and only take a percentage from it, and for a young lad who hadn't had anything and who didn't have much money that was quite a temptation. But I didn't do it.

It was in the thirties that I got the call to be a minister of the gospel. It wasn't a sudden revelation that happened overnight or anything like that. It goes a long way back into my childhood. I just more or less grew up into the Baptist church, and by the time I was in my twenties it was time to start doing something definite about it. So in 1934 I had to go back to school again. I'd been to tech to learn signwriting, but I went back to school for nine months at night to pick up the things I hadn't learned at school - to get the Intermediate to get the qualifications to go to theological college. I passed the exams at the end of those nine months. I had a lot of help from many people with the subjects. I used to go out to Rose Bay to an English teacher at Cranbrook College to teach me what he taught all the boys during the week. I wanted to go into college, but at that stage I couldn't

because I was still needed to help support the family, but my father got his job back again in 1935, and that gave me a clear go. A Church of England curate taught me the first introduction to Greek, then in 1936 I went up to be the pastor of the Cessnock Baptist Church. It was a full time job.

I was one year up at Cessnock, then another four at the Baptist Theological College at Ashfield. (It's out at Marsfield now). In that time I turned from being a tradesman into being an academic. It was a big change, but I was helped. In fact it was a miracle change, because by the time I'd finished college I had become the dux of the college in the fourth year. It just happened that way. Fortunately I have a retentive memory, and that has helped me all through. (And it helps me now with my blindness.) I didn't have any books, and I used to have to either stay up late at night or leave the homework till the next day so I could borrow the textbooks from the chap next door. I had to learn well and win some prizes in the first year so I could get some textbooks for the second year. As I said, I didn't feel put upon having to do it hard like this. It was just what you had to do, and I knew I could do it, so I just went ahead and did it.

The five years I was in college I couldn't get married. There was no accommodation, no money in the Home Mission to pay for a married man, so that was a sacrifice too, because I'd known my first wife from 1931 and that meant that we couldn't get married till I'd finished college, which was not until 1941. Of course now married men can go through college. Many of them have wives who go to work - so they go through by the sweat of their frau!

While we were in college we had a senior student who was a very brainy fellow and he was starting us off with our Hebrew. The first week he gave us a lesson, and when we started the lesson the next week he began by saying, "Now you'll remember last week I told you so-and-so..." and we said to him, "No. We don't remember that. Tell us again." So he did. The next week we did the same to him, and he went mad on us. It was very hard for us to learn Hebrew, and we didn't like this teacher at all, so when he was out one day we got into his room and dismantled his bed. We were putting it up on the roof, and it had to be put out through a window in a top room and then out onto the roof. The fellow who was taking it out through the window didn't realise that there was a skylight behind him and he stepped back on the skylight and his leg went right through it. It cut all his bottom with a big cut and the iron bedstead came back against the window and smashed it to pieces. The whole thing was a fizzer, and he had to be taken to hospital to be stitched up, and we had to explain to the Home Mission Superintendent what we were doing on the roof. He wanted to know were we playing or praying! We had to pay for the window to be fixed up and take the bed back again with our tails between our legs. As a prank it certainly didn't work.

In those days they tended to concentrate on the scholastic and doctrinal side of things - they didn't deal in much detail with the practical side of being a pastor, like how to break bad news or be comforting to someone in distress. They did have a subject called Pastoral Theology, but that didn't cover it very well either - they just had men come in and lecture to us. When I went to Cessnock, before I went into college, I had to struggle with things like my first funeral. You had to work that sort of thing out on the job, with the help of the elders, and the congregation was marvellously patient and prepared to make allowances when you were still green. And while I was at Cessnock I could always go for advice to the man 15 or 20 miles away at Kurri Kurri, who was more experienced than myself. He was the one I used to go to to learn Greek. It wasn't like, say, a young man going out to Broken Hill for his first church. There he'd have 400 miles

between him and the next pastor. They shouldn't send young pastors to remote places like that, but it was done a fair bit at the time.

After I'd been through college I went up to Murwillumbah in 1940. That was my first church as a married man. I was there for just over a year, then Pearl Harbour came. I wanted to be in the forces as a chaplain, but only being a newchum just out of college they didn't take me straightaway. There were no vacancies for chaplains in the army, so I joined up with the YMCA as a welfare officer and went up to New Guinea. I used to hand out socks, and food, and things like that. We'd go with the men on the marches and take them coffee - they used to have this coffee in a tin with condensed milk and we'd heat it up on a big heater. Because I was a minister I doubled as the padre for burying, and solace, and for services that were held. They had a public address system and we'd hold services from the back of the van. We'd put records on and play White Christmas, and Ave Maria and things like that. My job was a combination of the social and the spiritual.

We were at Milne Bay when the Japs landed there - that was the first place that they were repulsed in their push south. Behind Milne Bay there were hills three thousand feet high, and the Mission used to have a place up there. I climbed up there to the Mission place after I'd had malaria and stayed up there for two weeks while they looked after me. I used to talk to the natives, and when we had a communion service there about 300 of them came. There were no European missionaries there - they'd all gone, but there were New Guinean Christians there. They really looked after me.

(Laughs). It was pretty hot when the bombing was going on up there at Milne Bay. There's an old saying that says that the person who says he's not afraid when the bombs are coming down is either a fool or a liar. We're in a slit trench there with the bombs coming down - yet not one person was killed by the bombs that were dropped on Milne Bay. Not one. I came out of that about a year later and after a time they transferred me back to the Sixth Division, to the Atherton Tablelands, where they were training all the people for the push through the islands. I was up there for about eighteen months with the troops till they transferred me down to Williamtown and Rathmines. I went down to do the tests to become air force personnel, but they found I was colour blind, and you can't have that in the Air Force, so I had to stay in my army uniform, even though I was a chaplain. I was at Williamtown on VE Day and spoke at the Baptist Tabernacle at Newcastle.

I set up a room where the men could come for a cup of tea, and there'd be food there that they could buy fairly cheaply - we'd go in to Newcastle and buy stuff wholesale. It was a bit like a drop-in centre. I'd arrange concerts, and dances, and look after visitors who came in from Newcastle - you were the centre of the social life of the place. I was treated as an officer - ate in the officers' mess. And of course you'd have church services, and there were young Christian RAAF fellows and women from the WAAFs who wanted to have Christian Endeavour meetings. There weren't hundreds of them, but there were pockets of them. So you blended the social and the spiritual together. And being close to Newcastle, I was asked to preach in churches a lot in Newcastle on Sundays. I'd take the RAAF personnel in with me in the truck - any of them that wanted to go.

After the war I came back and didn't take up a church. I worked with what was

known as the United Protestant Association, which has children's homes all over NSW. I was Assistant General Manager there for five years. I used to speak at meetings in the night-time and on Sundays in church. After five years I'd worn myself down a bit so I changed tracks altogether and went up to Lawson and took on a job with the council there laying water pipes. I didn't feel at the time that I wanted to take on a church, though I helped the church at Katoomba and used to take services all over the place.

It was a very physical job, laying pipes. I used to use the jackhammer up in the mountains where it's all rock. They didn't pay you to put the jackhammer down - they only paid you for lifting it up! A 95 pound jackhammer. *(Laughs).* I became the leading hand of the gang that I was in, and I also became the secretary of the Municipal, Shire, and Council Branch of the Blue Mountains Shire. I'd never done anything like that before.

Then, suddenly, upheaval came. My wife died in 1954. I had four children at the time. The eldest was twelve, the youngest was nine months old. My parents stayed with me for a few months, and after talking it over with them, the children were taken by my brothers and sisters down in Oyster Bay in Sydney. One was farmed here and one was farmed there, and I stayed with my mother and father, and that went on for a while. Then I met my present wife - and she already had two children from her first marriage. We built a house in Oyster Bay and I went to work with the Maritime Services Board as a painter. I belonged to the Master Painters' Union as well, and I became a leading hand with the maritime services board for five years from 1955 till 1960.

At the same time I was the honorary pastor of the Congregational Church at Oyster Bay. Services were held in a little tin shed to start with, but we worked up to a Sunday school of three hundred and a full congregation in church. I did that for thirteen years, till in 1960 I changed jobs again and went to Inglis Electrics, the television people. They had 500 workers and I was the paymaster there. I did that for four years - till they went into liquidation, then I worked as a paymaster at McPhersons, and then I went to Clark Kilns, the brick people up at Moorbank - I worked there as credit manager. When I was 60 I retired from doing that and went over to Hammondville Nursing Homes out near Holsworthy and I became the office manager there.

Then the minister of the Baptist Church at Liverpool died suddenly, so I went and became the pastor of the Liverpool church. This was 1976. Then there was an urgent call for a man to go out to the church at Broken Hill, so my wife and I and my 14 year old son went out to Broken Hill and I was the pastor there for three years, till I lost my sight. Then after that, in 1980, we came here (to the retirement village). If I hadn't lost my sight I would have stayed on longer at Broken Hill. Things were going well there. As it was I stayed there for two years after I lost my sight because there was a young man came from college and I let him work with me till he got to know the ropes. I had the blind pension so they didn't have to pay me wages, but I stopped there till he'd gained some experience.

Since 1980 I've been helped a lot by an organisation known as the Christian Foundation for the Blind in Melbourne - Peter and Paul Sumner - they helped me a lot to be blind. When I retired, I offered myself to them in an honorary capacity to lead deputations, which took me all over Australia. I had a guide dog for four years that I took with me, and I spoke to more people in those years than I spoke

to people all the rest of my life. They weren't all church people, you understand - they were Rotary, and schools - I'd go up to Cessnock school there and there'd be 800 in the school assembly and for over an hour I was able to hold them - talking to them. I'd talk to them about being blind, and how to treat blind people. The teachers used to love me having the dog because it was so obedient. It would sit there quietly, then I'd take the leash and the harness off and tell it to go round and talk to the children, and the dog would run around amongst all the kids, wagging its tail and that. Then I'd call her back and put the harness and lead back on her and point out to the children how obedient she was and how well she got the job done that she had to do, and how they should be the same way. This would win the teachers over too.

I sent the dog back when the deputation work was over. There are two sides to having a dog. There's the side where it takes you and guides you and helps you and looks after you and everything, but there's the other side too where you've got to toilet it, and groom it, and wash it, and feed it. And I didn't really need it any more since I wasn't doing all that travelling. And the point is in life, when you find you've got no need for something, you should cut it off straightaway and not make a long, drawn-out thing of it. I missed her terribly, of course. I took her down to the guide dog people at North Sydney, and I was sitting with my wife on the station on the way back and I said to her, "If I was a drinking man I'd like to go to the pub and get drunk now." I understand that the dog went to an autistic girl six years old. It was very used to people. (It was used to my sermons, too - used to go to sleep in them!)

Of all the different jobs I've had, I can't say that I've enjoyed one and not others, because I've always been the sort of person that enjoys whatever I'm doing. (I haven't ceased to do that now. Life is wonderful. I'm 81 years old in a couple of weeks, and I take every day now as a bonus - another good day, and I'm still here.) Using the jackhammer might have been hard work, but the other side to it is, you're not juggling problems. Once you put the jackhammer down it's down, and you go home and have a good night's rest. But when you're a pastor you've got problems - other people's problems that you can't share - even with your wife. That used to weigh heavily at times, but you're taught that, finally, it's not your problem - you've got to give the problem to God. But you have to keep the confidences that people tell you, and people tell you very private things. Once you're a pastor (and the word is French for 'shepherd') - once you're that you're always that. I didn't go off the job. If it's within you then it's part of your life. When you go out to work for someone, well that's your job. It's clear cut. But when you're a pastor nobody's your boss. Nobody's checking up on you. You're on an honour system. A minister can be the laziest person in the town, or the busiest. It's what you make of it.

In the thirties, when I was etching the glass, we did the glass work for the War Memorial in Hyde Park. It's amber glass with flames coming up - all sandblasted. I was in charge of doing that work and on one of the panes of glass (the glass came from Belgium, by the way) there's the names of six people eaten into the glass, and my name is one of them.

You could etch glass with fluoric acid, or by sandblasting, where the sand is forced through a gun and eats into the glass. You'd mask it over with a rubber

masking thing that was stuck on, then you'd cut out with a knife what was going to be exposed. With fluoric acid you have to put putty all around it and use lead stuff for a mask. It's pretty toxic stuff, but you didn't use it raw. It's like hydrochloric acid - if you use it raw it just makes a crust and stays like a crust, but if you water it down it eats into the glass. That was a very good paying job, especially just after the Depression, because who else could do it? There were only two or three people in Sydney who could do it. I was never out of work. I reckon that if I wanted to go out to work tomorrow I could get a job.

Because we had the large family (my second wife and I had three more children to add to her two and my four) we didn't get to travel overseas, but in 1978 we were going for six weeks over to England and to the Continent. We had the money, and not the commitment to the family by then. We were to go to Harrogate, and Edinburgh, and Inverness, and Fort William, and to Chester, and Llangothlyn, and Stratford-on-Avon, and to Bournemouth, and to Bude, then back to London. I still know all the places we were going to. We were due to leave on the 23rd of May, and on the 22nd of May, the day before, I lost the sight of my left eye. I'd lost the sight of my right eye eleven months before. A blood vessel burst and the retina detached. (This was the time when I used to refer to myself as a one-eyed Baptist). Now the same thing happened to my right eye as well. The plane that we were to catch to Adelaide, to go over to Perth to get the jumbo jet to England - we got that to Adelaide and I went into hospital.

I was in a two-bed ward, and the chap who was next to me hadn't been to church for twenty years. To this day I can't tell you what I spoke to him about from the Monday to the Friday, (when he went home), but just before he went home he said to me, "I haven't been to church for twenty years, but I'll be there on Sunday, just because of the things you've said to me." That mightn't seem important to some people, but that was a highlight for me.

Later on I had to go back for a further operation on my eye to take the silicone away from behind it, and there was a young fellow there from Mt Gambier who had stolen a car and had a smash in it. The windscreen had cut him about the face and he'd lost the sight of both eyes. He was very morose, and they couldn't do anything with him. The sister came over to me and told me that they couldn't get him to eat, or talk, or anything like that, and she asked me if I thought I might be able to get him to talk if they brought him over in a wheelchair. They brought him over and soon he was talking his head off, and one of the things he said was that I knew what it was all about - being blind. They're the sorts of things that are highlights. I was needed to lose my sight to be able to help those two people. That's only two people. I feel that I've helped others, you know, but they stand out.

Work was work with me. That was what I was taught all the time. And I think I had a sense of responsibility. I think you have to have a plan - you have to work to a plan, otherwise you're just beating against the wind. It's the same thing as when you're working during the daytime digging trenches. The trenches I had to dig for the water pipes in the Blue Mountains had to be a certain depth and a certain width, and there were notches cut into the handle of the long-handled shovels to mark the depth and width required. (After all, you didn't make it wider and deeper than you had to when you're digging through rock!) But in the end, it was a job that had to be done, and we did it well. I was always taught by my father that if there's a job to be done, do it with all your might and do it well. That was the ethic I grew up with, and it didn't matter if you were only digging a trench, it had to be done well. The satisfaction was in when you'd done the job well - whether the

boss comes around to check on you or not.

Work was work, and it was pretty straightforward and serious. People didn't get up to pranks much. You used to hear people talk on building jobs of sending apprentices on silly messages for things like striped paint or a left-handed screwdriver and things like that, but I never did any of that sort of thing because I was taught by my father, who was a tradesman par excellence. He was not only a painter, he was a paperhanger and a grainer and a marbler and a glazier. He was taught in England. He was a signwriter as well.

In those days a painter was one who made their own paint. I learned when I was quite young to be able to mix the paint from white lead into paint. Just before the Depression my father went out on his own and was doing very well as a painter. I used to mix the paint up for him at home and have it ready for him. He had about four men working for him, and they'd come and I'd have a big barrel of paint and put it in their tins to go and paint with. Then I'd have to mix up another batch the next day. You didn't just go to the shop and buy paint then. You had to know what paint you were mixing. You had to know your red lead and how to mix that with water. They say you can't mix water with oil but you do!

We were working with things like red lead, yet we took no safety precautions whatever. Even burning old paint off with a blowlamp the toxic lead fumes would come off and go into your nose. I did that for a few years and it didn't affect me - it hasn't come against me. Things like that affect some people and not others, I think.

When I got married for the second time, my father had retired, and he built our house for us opposite his house when we got married. In the night-time and on weekends I'd work on it with him, and we built the house from May to August. We got married in the May, but my wife and her two children stayed with her mother and father, and I stayed with my mother and father till the house was built and we could get into it in August. Then all the family came together. They all blended in. Nobody ever thought of themselves as step-children or that sort of thing. We came from similar backgrounds, my wife and I, and that helped a lot. One of my grandchildren was seventeen before he knew that his father had step-brothers and step-sisters - not because it was a secret, but because it just wasn't said. They were just like ordinary brothers and sisters. Now we get the family together, and we get fifty or sixty together on Mother's Day and occasions like that. We have no trouble with food - they all know what to bring. I've married all my children, too.

I think the breadth of my experience has given me more tolerance... though my wife says I'm intolerant...*(Pause)* In some ways I've got tolerance, but I haven't got tolerance with people who don't go and do the job. They want the job that they want, where they want it and for how much money they want. But a job's a job's a job's a job. That was what we were taught when we were young. If you have to get up at four o'clock in the morning to get to your job to start at seven then you get up at four o'clock in the morning, and that's all there is about it.

It was always circumstances that made me change jobs. See, I wasn't satisfied just to be a painter - I didn't think I was using my capabilities to the fullest - so I looked around and kept looking till I found the job as paymaster at Inglis Electrics and applied there - and got the job. I'd had some experience at the sort of work

when I was at the United Protestant Association, and although it was a smaller organisation, I used to do the paying of the staff. It was all done manually then, of course. You pick up experience all along the way. When I went to McPhersons, part of the job there was to count how many nuts and bolts had been made that day. They'd bring it up and put it on the scales and they could tell by the weight how many there were. Then you entered that amount into a little machine. At the job interview they asked me would I be able to use the machine and I said I would, but I took a note of the name and number of it and then went down to Castlereagh Street where they sold these things and they gave me a demonstration of how to use the machine, which was just in time for the next morning when I started work. You know, you've got to use your nous a bit.

I suppose the hardest job I had was the five years I spent at the Maritime Services Board as a painter. We painted all the wharves, and did a lot of stage work - the sides of big buildings and things like that. I was a stage hand - I knew how to do the hitch to tie the stage onto the hook. There are always two men on a stage, and each man has to trust the other man that he ties off well. The heights didn't worry me. All my life I've worked on buildings and walked along the top of rooves and things like that - how to walk on tiles - all that. It becomes second nature if you're taught properly.

When I was a young boy my mother and father had me taught elocution - that's the start of my being able to speak correctly. And reciting poems and things like that was where I started to get my retentive memory from. But being able to speak is a talent that I think is given to you from birth. Most young people today gabble - theytalktooquickly - they don't know how to speak.

I've done many jobs, as I've said, but I have to say that I think primarily God called me to be a preacher. But I didn't stay within the church - I took my ministry out into the marketplace. I've found that I've been a little impatient with people who stay doing the one thing - especially staying as a parson. I have a bit of contempt for people who are just parsons but who look down their noses at other people. I'm not painting everybody with the same brush but it is a pitfall that you can fall into. It's an easy job if you want to make it such. Going out into the workplace and working makes it easier for you to preach. I think I was a better preacher for doing that because I knew what those fellows were thinking, I knew how much contempt they had for parsons and for what they were trying to do in a goody-goody way. Another advantage is, that when you're not being paid by the church you can say things that you can't say when you're under the obligation of being paid by them.

The people in the hierarchy of the church are there for the job. Now that's unkind, perhaps, to some of them who are very conscientious I will admit, but it seems as a general rule that the higher a man gets the more he wants to throw his weight around. It's very difficult for a person to have a high position and still be humble. People are like that. It could easily have happened to me. I was a good preacher, and I could have skited about it. But I wasn't trying to prove a point doing it the way I did it. Then there's the other side to it, too, that I must say, which is that God has a plan for these things and I feel that I fitted in to it most times. Things weren't just haphazard as far as I was concerned, with all the things I did - there was a reason for it - and that gives you peace of mind.

During the five years I was a painter with the Maritime Services Board things were hard because of a bad foreman and because the men didn't want you to work too hard in case it showed them up - they were just brush hands who just

wanted to do the work and get home. They weren't conscientious. But when you're paymaster or something like that, it's up to you. I suppose in that regard I do put one job ahead of another, in that I prefer to be left alone to get the job done myself. That's why I found those five years with the MSB so hard - because I was just a cog in the wheel - I didn't have any say, whereas with most of the other jobs that I had I at least had some authority and some say in what went on.

I didn't have much social contact after work with the people I worked with - I got most of my camaraderie from church activities out of working hours. I had plenty of friends and plenty to do after work - there was always something to do. While I was at the Maritime Services Board I had the Congregational Church work to do at Oyster Bay, visiting to do, pastoral work - and my own family and children.

With the large family we couldn't go out on public transport because it was too dear - same as it is today - so we had a second hand 1936 Dodge and all the family would go out in that. We always went out on a Saturday. The older ones tended to look after the younger ones - helping them with things like their shoes and socks and that. From 1960 to 1970, which was the bulk of the time that the kids were growing up, I was working as paymaster at Inglis Electrics, which meant that I got a bit more money than I did at some of the other jobs I've done, and that helped with the big family. Then as the older children grew up they got jobs and they were able to help with the family budget, then they began to get married and leave. But let me make this clear - there were never nine children at home all at the same time. Our eldest daughter was married in '59 and our youngest son was born in '62, by which time the eldest daughter had two children - which made him an uncle twice over when he was born. But there were eight there for a while.

The youngest one is an accountant now. He left school at 15 (with my blessing) and then went to tech, and by the time he was 19 he was an accountant. None of this poncing around and going to university and learning to be lazy. And they *are* lazy! They only have to go to certain lectures, and then they play up when they're supposed to be studying. Why don't they go eight hours a day like when you go to work?

All of my kids are still churchgoers - but not in the church as parsons. They're not all Baptists as I am - they've married different people from other churches - there's Catholic, and Church of England, and Church of Christ, Uniting Church. But it's all the one God. This narrow-minded business is all malarky.

You ask how I feel about the moves to have more women in the church. I'm not too thrilled about that. I've got decided views on many things - like married women working. If they (the women) were doing *only* that - being an ordained minister - then I see nothing wrong with it. But when the wife of a man and a mother of a family... well, in these views I am influenced a lot by the way they do things in the city of Broken Hill. In Broken Hill, married women can't work, and that's wonderful. Look at the advantages: first of all, the men get enough money to keep the home going - plenty of money. The second thing is that the married women are not taking the jobs of the young women leaving school, which is a big thing in Broken Hill because Broken Hill is a long way from anywhere. Another consideration is that you can't serve two masters - you've got to neglect one or the other - the people you're working for, or your home. It also means that every organisation that is in the town has a supply of women who are free to work for it - the CWA, the ambulance, the churches. But let me quickly say that any woman who didn't have a man working for her - the unions would fight tooth and nail to

get her a job. It's not just that they don't like women working. Their saying would be "It's for the needy, but not for the greedy".

You look at most of the women that are working, though, and they're working so that they can have a better car, a bigger house, so they can go on holidays to Fiji, so they can send their kids to university - even if they haven't got brains. See, you shouldn't have to pay to have your kids go to university. The brainy ones should be there, the people of Australia should be paying for them to go there, but the no-hopers - kick 'em out! They should go out and get a job and leave school at fifteen. You'll earn better money as a plumber than you'll earn as a B.A. driving a taxi around.

You hear people saying what a hard world it is for young people to live in these days, what with peer pressure to do this and that. But I have to say that I had to work hard in the Depression years to keep my job. I didn't have feelings of peer pressure, though. And as for the HSC students who have to have their holidays up on the Gold Coast after it's all over because they're all worn out, well - I think that's a whole lot of bunkum! I sat for exams for years, and I wasn't an academic. I reckon they're namby-pambies. But I don't blame the kids, I blame the parents. It's not delinquent kids, it's delinquent parents, because in the seventies they wanted to have everything their own way - you know, they've grown up wanting everything and getting everything.

The material aspects of life were never a worry for me. God provided for all that. Take us at the present moment. What has my wife got in material things as far as money is concerned? Zilch! But my wife and I don't have any worries whatsoever in that regard. We don't have to worry about taxation, about keeping receipts or anything like that, and this is the other side of the equation: we're very thankful to the people of Australia who through their taxes see that people like my wife and I are cared for, fortnight by fortnight, and every night almost we thank God for the provisions made for us by the kindness of the people of Australia. Not the government. I don't care about the government - it's the people of Australia that do that. They don't do it because the government makes them - they're doing it so that the health system can go on, so that the police and the ambulance can go on, and so that the old people can have pensions. People have got to be taught this, and taught not to try to evade their taxes. Taxes didn't come in until 1936. Then it was called the Social Contribution Fund, and sixpence was taken out of your wages. There was income taxation before that, but not for welfare, or for pensions. In Depression times if you didn't have any money, you didn't have any money, did you?

The sore point with me is the money that's wasted on mickey mouse things. Why should secretaries and wives and people from departments go with their Minister on their junkets overseas? They should spend the money on people who are sick, people who are needy and want it. Why shouldn't we have compassion on people like that? But this junketing overseas business... and people like that Agent-General in London spending thousands of dollars on this and that. Give him the sack and put him in gaol! They're the sort of things that we want to scream out about.

I wouldn't say that there was much in the way of political content in the sermons I preached. In the Bible, Paul says that we should pray for those in authority over us, and in the established churches like the Church of England and the Roman Catholics that is done all the time. But in our Baptist church it's extemporaneous prayers, not written prayers, and yet sometimes you might hear such prayers

being said. But I have noted that if it's a Liberal man that's in power, federally or state, they pray for him, but if it's a Labor person you don't hear a sound. They're conservative people and inclined to be a bit money-hungry. Anything that affects their hip-pocket they don't want to have anything to do with. That's the most sensitive nerve in a person's body, the hip-pocket nerve. I say to them that if they think the Labor Party has done such awful things, don't they think they should pray for them all the more?

The average working man in Australia today is much better off than he used to be, and the pensioner is far, far, far better off. Until the Labor Party tied the pension to the CPI pensioners were dependent on the political parties giving a handout when there was an election on. Now it has to be at least 25% of the living wage. Yet somehow the churches seem to think that the Liberals are more Christian than Labor are. Maybe it's because most of the churchgoers are white collar people. They've got money and they want to hang onto it.

The fact that I am a Baptist rather than one of the other denominations is pretty much of an accident, I suppose. When I was a boy my mother and father lived in Campsie and the Baptist Church was down the road. I grew up in that church, so that was it. My life centred around it. I'd go to gymnasium and other things there, and my father was a good singer and was in the choir. When my voice started to break I used to stand next to him in the choir and learnt how to sing the parts.

The painting and signwriting skills that I learned from my father went on into my pastoral work. Quite often churches have to be painted, and signs outside the church had to be done, and I used to that. I've always been a practical man, and if there's work to be done, then I am able to do it.

These days I still take services when someone is sick. I'm asked to fill-in, as a stopgap. Of course I preach differently now, since I can't have notes. I have to have it all in my head. I feel the lack of eye contact with the congregation. People are very respectful and quiet in my sermons because I'm blind, so usually I tell a joke in the middle of my sermon that has nothing to do with the subject I'm preaching about, and when they laugh I say, "Thank goodness you're still there and haven't tiptoed out."

Now as you've probably gathered, I have decided views on quite a few things, and because I haven't been tied up by the fact that the bread that I eat comes from the people that I preach to, I've had a freedom to speak my mind. If they don't like what I say, they don't have to invite me again, but they still do.

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