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## PART THREE

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*Yet here I am in very early 2014, fuelled by boredom, having yet another go. This time I think I'll just write about whatever occurs to me that might be interesting and not worry too much about trying to keep everything in chronological order. But I'll start with a rudimentary timeline to provide some context for what comes later:*

### **Timeline**

Born January 18, 1937 in Louisa Rd, Birchgrove. Moved to Drummoyne when I was going on four years old.

Went to Drummoyne Primary School, then to Fort Street Boys' High. Failed the Leaving Certificate exam in 1954 with only three Bs. Repeated a year, dropped a subject, and passed with two As and 4 Bs.

Worked in several small advertising agencies in Sydney before joining Lintas Pty Ltd, the advertising arm of Unilever as a Junior Account Executive. It was Unilever policy to refund the tuition fees each year of any of their employees who passed a university course.

Enrolled at Sydney University and met Gill Grayson in an English tutorial. We married the next year when I was 23 and she was 21, interrupted our university studies and migrated to Canada.

Got a job as Advertising Manager at the Canada Starch Co in Montreal.

After two years we came back to Australia, and I went back to Lintas as an Account Executive and resumed my part-time studies at Sydney University for an Arts Degree.

By this I'm about 26. Seconded to World Brands (one of Unilever's many companies) for about 18 months as a Brand Manager, flogging Continental soups, Mellah desserts and various other foodstuffs.

Back to Lintas. Promoted to Account Supervisor. Finished my Arts Degree.

In the late 1960s left Lintas to go to UNSW to study sociology, taking on a paper run around Double Bay for three months prior to beginning my studies.

Talked my way into a \$2000 grant from the Myer Foundation to help with living expenses in 1969. Then took an on-campus job as Editor of The Hospitals Yearbook while continuing to study.

Enrolled in a PhD after completing my MA Qualifying degree.

In 1970 I joined the staff of the School of Sociology as a Lecturer, where I stayed for 12+ years.

Our daughter Fiona was born on January 1, 1970.

Went on overseas sabbatical in 1978, studying the bureaucratic obstacles to environmentally-sensitive building practices (my PhD topic).

Fed up with the increasing bureaucratization of universities, I abandoned my PhD unfinished and left UNSW in 1983 to build my own environmentally-sensitive house on land that I had purchased a few years earlier in the hills at the back of the Yarramalong Valley.

Finished the house in about 1990 and spent most of my fifties and sixties painting, drawing,

woodturning, sculpting, playing music and writing.

Re-met Isabelle Fogarty and had an 8 yr relationship with her.

Met Lorraine Banks in 1996. We became best friends and travelled together extensively around Australia by camper trailer as well as overseas. We're still best friends.

Diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2004 when I was 67. My physical capabilities began to crumble due to the effects of anti-androgen medication, and I was no longer able to maintain my house or use my hands much.

At time of writing this I live most of the time with Lorraine at her home at Cooranbong and continue to rack my brains for creative things to do.

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*Now it's time for some rambling, random reminiscences which I've organized in only the roughest chronological order.*

## **The loss of two brothers**

The first thing I want to deal with is the impact on the family of the death of two of Mum's little boys while they were very young (in the early 1940s). First, my young brother Bobby fell ill on a trip with Mum to the city, and was dead within a couple of days. The local GP thought he had diphtheria, which was a scourge at the time, but it turned out that he had golden staph. He was two and a half, and I was going on five. Mum and Dad set about conceiving a replacement, and sometime in the next 18 months another son, Ronnie, was born. Little Ronnie only lasted 3 months. The medicos thought he had whooping cough, and he was put into a ward with other kids who had whooping cough. He ended up catching whooping cough anyway and Mum and Dad had to cope with seeing their second child succumb. (There are some harrowing accounts of what Mum had to go through at the Childrens' Hospital at Camperdown during the 3 months of Ronnie's life in *Mary Bottomley Remembers*, in Drawer One of my website). A letter that Mum wrote to me around 1990 carried the following thoughts about her loss of the two little boys some fifty years before.:

*"It's one of those nights. Please remember when you get this letter I shall be over this sad night and will be feeling OK again.*

*I watched a show on TV tonight that triggered sorrowful memories for me of little Bobbie's death. Isn't it strange how your mind travels back, and you can re-live your time again as if it only happened yesterday? I get sad when I think how I never got to say goodbye to Mum, Dad, or either of my children, and lastly my husband. Everyone says it's better for me, but I know in my heart it was something that I would have liked to do. To just have some stranger tell you "I am sorry to tell you you're little boy is dead. A lovely, happy, perfect child taken from you one night when he needs his Mum because he is sick, taken to a strange place with strange people all dressed in white – what a frightening experience that must be for a little child, and he never saw a loved face again. What thoughts must have gone through his little head. Dad went to the hospital to see him but he wasn't allowed to let Bobbie see him – he had to look through a window that was one of those one-way things. Bobbie was lying in his cot nursing the little Dutch boy doll that I had bought for him the day he took sick...*

*He was a very good little baby, ate what I gave him, and when he finished his dinner while he was in his high chair, he would put his plate on his head for a hat – sometimes he still had dinner in it...*

*The hospital called us on next door's phone for us to go to the hospital. Dad and I were wondering if they wanted our consent to operate or something, never thinking the worst. Dad and I walked from South Street to the Childrens' Hospital, as being wartime you couldn't get a cab. Dad and I were babes in the woods, and never knew we could have*

*had the police take us. We only found that out later. We also walked home and I don't think either of us noticed walking, we were so stunned. We just clung to each other, too shocked even to talk...*

*I didn't cry until about three days later when I came upon his little shoes, and I was able to cry then. Dad bottled it up and just couldn't talk about it...*

*Then, when little Ronnie was put into hospital down in the isolation block where Bobbie had been, right down the back of General Block, wartime, only little blue lights to see where you were going because of blackout regulations...*

*When I went to his ward to feed him I had to pass the little room where Bobby had died. It was a terribly desolate feeling and little children would be crying "Mummy. I want my Mummy". My imagination would work overtime – "Did Bobbie call out for me like that?" and my arms used to cry out to hold him and comfort him. It is no wonder I still have that nightmare after all these years. You get over all the trauma, and then all of a sudden, Click! And you live it all over again...*

*On the 18th of March Ronnie would have turned 43."*

Mum tried yet again to get pregnant -- she really wanted more than one child -- and when I was eight she gave birth to my sister Christine. She must have thought she'd killed a lot of Chinamen, because when Chris was about a year old a sharp-eyed local GP picked up that she had a thyroid deficiency. Had this condition remained unnoticed for much longer Chris's life would have been severely compromised, but she has been able to lead a normal life with the right medication. Nonetheless, I've always thought that Chris was dealt a lousy hand compared to the one I was dealt, and I've always greatly respected her for the way she's handled the many challenges that came her way. When we were both young, eight years is a big gap, but as we've aged the gap doesn't matter as much and we've become quite close.

Chris married an Italian-Australian bloke from Rozelle not long after Gill and I returned from Canada, and bore him three boys. The marriage didn't last, and Chris had her hands full bringing up three spirited young males. When she reached early middle age she picked up with a bloke who was very knowledgeable about matters environmental, and turned out to be the ideal companion to share Chris' interests. Terry and Chris are still together and live in a rainforested property at Killabakh, out of Wingham.

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## **Getting Married**

Gill and I were married in St Stephen's church in Macquarie Street. We'd rented a hire car, and on the way back to Mum and Dad's place in Drummoyne after the service, it had a collision with a garbage truck, but it was only a minor dingle. We had some food and some champers with our parents and a few other rellos, then we changed into casual clothes and drove to a little fibro cottage in the bush at the back of French's Forest drive-in – owned by a colleague from Lintas who loaned it to us as a wedding present -- where about 30 of our friends had gathered to celebrate our nuptials. Driving to a motel at Sylvania in the early hours of the morning I fell victim to a motorcycle speed cop. Perhaps we should have left earlier! From there we drove to Narooma and rented a very ordinary unit for a week for our honeymoon. It rained for the whole week, and we spent most of our time in front of a fire in one of the pubs boning up for university exams which were scheduled for not long after we got back. We weren't exactly ragers.

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## **Soccer**

Best man at our wedding was David Gibb, a long-term mate from high school days. Dave is 100% reliable, conscientious, and I'd trust him with anything. He's been one of my closest friends for more than sixty years. We played together in the Drummoyne Presbyterian



*WB in town*



*Bobby, the day before he died*



*On my wedding day*



*Ballerina Christine*

team in the Protestant Churches comp for several years until Dave moved up to play for Sydney Uni, where he was doing a medical degree. We spent a lot of time together, usually practising for soccer. If we couldn't get down to the oval to kick a proper ball around we'd be honing our skills with a tennis ball. I started my part-time Arts degree the next year and became eligible to play in the Uni soccer team with Dave and I was able to join the team as their goalkeeper.

Brian Thackeray ("Thack" to all who knew him) was studying Pharmacy at Sydney Uni, and he began playing soccer there too. Dave Gibb has remarked that some of the team used to go and have a milkshake after the match, but that after Thack and I joined the team we spearheaded a successful transition to the now time-honoured tradition of going to the pub.

Also on the uni soccer team was Michael Baume, who ended up as an attack dog for the Howard government. We were all having a beer at the Governor Bourke Hotel after a game we had won and I was not long married. Mike sidled up to me at one stage and said: "So now you're married, huh? I've often wondered what it would be like to live with someone. Tell me, do things have to change much, or can you still fart in bed?"

Our marriage had been arranged for some time, and I was disappointed to find that the team's visit to Adelaide to compete in the Intervarsity competition was going to be at the same time as I was on my honeymoon. Nuptials won out and I didn't go. Had I gone, I would have ended up with a University Blue, the way Dave and Thack did.

## **Getting up to mischief**

Another member of the Drummy Pres church team was Paul Wassall, who was probably our best player and who ended up playing for Leichhardt in the State comp for some years. Paul was a practical joker. He'd turn up for a drink with the fellas and with a poker face would proceed to dunk a carrot in his beer, or he'd take out his denture and rinse it in his beer, then put it back in again. Or he'd arrive impeccably dressed in a suit, but with two ties on. One year someone had left a white porcelain dunny on his father's front lawn as a bit of a roast. Paul took it up to the local picture theatre, the Odeon, and left it in the middle of the entrance vestibule just before the feature film ended. The theatre manager was horrified to see this, and he was sprung by the crowd pouring out of the doors as he was staggering away with the dunny in his arms. Before that Paul had left it outside the local milk bar just before pub closing time, and just about every drunk staggering out of the Oxford Hotel a few doors down would stop and sit on it with a big grin on their face.

Paul was studying dentistry, and he had access to the pink plastic stuff they made dentures out of. He fashioned a huge dick out of this substance, complete with a hole going right through it, and he'd go into a public toilet, stand at the urinal, and get this monstrous pink thing out and proceed to pee through it, to the astonishment of anyone standing next to him.

Paul had a mate called John Barraclough, and one day they donned white overalls and began knocking sequentially on the doors of houses in a cul de sac telling people that they would have half an hour to store a supply of water in the bath because they'd be turning off the supply to do some repairs. Half an hour later they went down the street again and turned off the mains taps at peoples' front fence. Apparently little old ladies were still living on their emergency supplies two days later, until someone discovered the plot and alerted the rest of the street

Paul was friendly with a bloke named Bill Jamieson who was away most of the year at Wagga Teachers' College. One Christmas holidays Bill came back home for the holidays and went out on the town. He had apparently had a jar or two too many, and on his way home he ran into the kerb at the intersection of Great North Road and Lyons Road, completely writing off his front suspension in the process. He was unhurt, and Paul enlisted my aid in making a faux street sign on a post on which I carefully lettered "Jamieson Square". We erected it at the intersection one night, and it took Council around a month to notice it and have it removed.



*Aboard the Patris*



*Gill on our way to Europe*



*Dave Gibb*

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## To Europe and London

After Gill and I got married we decided to put our university studies on hold and go overseas. For some reason we both wanted to live in Canada for a while instead of staying in London like most of our friends were doing. We went on a Greek ship, the *Patris* – 16,000 tons of rust and peeling paint. It was the first liner bought by the Chandris line, and had previously been on the London/South Africa run as the *Bloemfontein Castle*. An entry on the Web describes the accommodation on board as “austere”. It was no luxury liner, but we loved it.

Our first experience of the world beyond Australia was when we got to the Suez Canal. We went ashore at Aden and were shocked to learn that it was not uncommon for people there to tie a knot in the arm of their babies to give them a (dubious) advantage in the throng of beggars importuning the tourists. From Aden we were herded onto a bus that took us to Cairo where we wandered around the bazaar district. After some time Gill and I realized that we had no idea where our bus was, and neither of us enjoyed the feeling of being so abjectly lost in such a strange place. When we finally happened across the bus we found that we had delayed it for half an hour and weren't exactly popular.

The *Patris* took us to Piraeus and from there we were taken by bus across Greece to Igoumenitsa, and thence by ferry to Brindisi, on the heel of Italy. From Brindisi we got a train through Europe, and Gill and I hopped off at Versailles for a few days in Paris before going on to London. We did a bit of sightseeing in London, and then girded our loins for the trip by air across the Atlantic to the New World.

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## Canada

We flew to Canada on a Lockheed Constellation prop-jet from London. The flight landed briefly at Gatwick Airport in Scotland. After we'd taken off again a hostess (as they were called in those days) came down the aisle and handed me a parcel. I knew what it was – it was a flute that I had bought duty-free in London. I sauntered down to the toilet and locked myself in, then I undid the package, put the flute together, and had a bit of a tootle for a while in the toot. I'd learned to play in the Drummoyne Primary School Fife band, so I was able to get a sound out of it.

After we'd settled into a tiny apartment in Montreal I decided it was time to get some proper tuition. There was a joke going the rounds at the time about a man who had been accidentally shot in the penis with shotgun pellets. He went to his GP for a referral to a specialist, but the GP had a look at his old fella and said “I think you should go see Herve Baillargeon, he's the principal flautist at the Montreal Symph. He won't be able to fix it, but he'll at least be able to show you how to finger it.” So I rang M. Baillargeon to see if he gave lessons. He did, and I enrolled with him. But I didn't let him do any fingering! I didn't have much money at the time, so I only went to lessons till I was satisfied that I wasn't developing bad fingering habits myself, after which I left and made up my own practice routine.

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I used to come home from work and do an hour's flute practice. When you're practising scales and exercises, the movements go into your preconscious like changing gears in a car, and your mind is left free to roam a bit. One winter's afternoon I was standing by the window practicing, and keeping a weather eye on the windows of the apartments opposite in case I saw something salacious (no such luck) when I suddenly found myself thinking about God, and whether He might exist or not. I'd been a regular churchgoer for most of my life – I even taught Sunday School for a while in my early adolescence, and spent a stint as captain of the Drummoyne Presbyterian soccer team, but all along I'd been troubled by many of the problematic aspects that came with being a believer. I stopped practising and for the first time really entertained the thought “What if there really is no God, and religion

really is no more than the opium of the masses?" The more I thought about it the more it made sense. Many of the anomalies and contradictions of conventional religious thinking simply evaporated. It seemed like a huge intellectual step forward to make sense of the world without a God (or a Yarweh, or an Allah, or Whoever). I realized then that petitioning for help from an imaginary father figure wasn't going to help the world, and that it was up to us to do what we can to make things better. That practice period changed my life forever, and I have remained a staunch atheist ever since.

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Before I went to the job in Montreal I worked at an advertising agency in Toronto for about three months called F.H. Hayhurst and Co. Their biggest account was the Rock City Tobacco Company, and I was given a brand called Sportsman to handle. These were unfiltered and strong, and aimed at the tough guy sporting types. I was never comfortable flogging fags, even though I smoked a pipe and the occasional fag at the time, so I had no compunction about leaving when the much better job offer came from Canada Starch.

Among the secretarial staff there was a youngish English girl of hefty proportions who looked as if she'd just finished school at St Trinians. Something about brothels had come up in the local news at that time, and I'll always remember her remark over morning tea: You know," she said reflectively, "I don't understand why men pay money to go to brothels and have sex with strangers. After all, one has one's friends."

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I met some interesting people in Montreal, and made some friendships that were to last many years. We began to hang out with a bunch of expats – people from England, Sweden, Switzerland, some other Australians, and a few Canadians. We'd club together to rent out of town cottages for weekend fun. In the winter we'd rent a place near Val Morin in the Laurentians and go skiing, and in the summer we had a different place down in Vermont, on the shores of Lake Champlain, where we'd go swimming and boating.

One of the Canadians was a bloke called Jim Hammerton. He was working as a clerk at Air Canada during the day and studying history at Sir George Williams University at night. He used to check into our apartment after lectures sometimes and we'd play chess while Jim lamented the scarcity of his sex life. ("It's alright for you. You're fixed." he was fond of saying.) After he graduated from Sir George Jim got a job in the History Department at LaTrobe Uni and stayed there till he retired a couple of years ago. We still see each other at reasonably regular intervals.

Another bloke who stayed a friend until he died a few years ago was a Winchester-educated Pom named Lionel Varnish. He and irresponsibility were no strangers. He couldn't handle money, was always skint, and couldn't hold a job. And staying in a relationship was beyond him. He was a likeable rogue. He had a brother who was a minister of religion in Adelaide, and Lionel came out to Australia a few times and always looked me up. In Montreal it wasn't at all unusual for me to get a phone call from him about 4 in the afternoon. "G'day. Feel like a quickie on the table?" and if I wasn't particularly busy we'd meet at a downtown pool hall and have a few games of billiards. Lionel was totally disorganized. I went to visit him one time and he had no electricity because he hadn't paid the bill. When I arrived he had the iron immersed in hot water on the gas stove, trying to heat it up enough to press his suit to wear to a job interview that afternoon. But he was an immensely likeable bloke.

Nigel Sitwell was on the fringes of the group we used to hang with. He was a nephew of Dame Edith's. He left to go back to England about six months after we arrived in Canada. Among other things, he used to write book reviews for the *Montreal Gazette*, and when he left to go back he mentioned me to the Book Reviews Editor at the *Gazette* as a possible replacement. The Reviews Editor accepted his recommendation, and I was accepted into the fold. Roughly each week I'd turn up at her book-lined office and browse the shelves of books awaiting review, and pick out any that held out any interest for me. You wrote a review, then got to keep the book, whether the review was published or not. Sometimes she had beautiful coffee-table books which were usually pretty specialized, but that she knew were too restricted in their appeal to publish a review of them. If I lusted after some of

these, such as *The Art Directors' Annual*, all I had to do to keep the book was to send her a typed note of who published it, when, and a brief description of its subject matter. She knew they weren't about to publish reviews of such books but she didn't care – it was one less book gone from her shelves that she didn't have to worry about. Several such expensive and costly books still grace my bookshelves.

Here's an example of one of my published reviews of a book by Ogden Nash, called *Everyone but thee and me*. Rather presumptuously I tried to parody Nash's oddball verse forms:

*Reviewing Ogden Nash's books is something of a chore,  
It's hard to think of something that has not been said before.  
The only word which best describes his verbal haberdashery  
Is Nashery.*

*"Everyone but thee and me" 's the title of this latest  
Ogden Nash collection which, although it's not his greatest,  
Should satisfy all those of you who go for Ogden's style.  
You'll smile.*

*Spoofing with the language is Mr Nash's forte,  
The things he does to rhyme his lines is nothing short of naughty.  
So if this brand of humour suits your literary diet,  
Try it.*

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The Canada Starch Company had been taken over by a US multinational firm called Corn Products not long before I joined them -- even though they had many products that had nothing to do with corn, such as a range of dyes and a long-term local favourite Canadian wax polish. The American new broom swept in, and among other changes moved the advertising manager sideways to head up the Quebec sales force, which was how I came to be the new advertising manager. I was responsible for a total budget of some 20 million dollars for all the products. This doesn't sound much these days, but in the early sixties I thought it was quite an awesome responsibility.

My immediate boss at Canada Starch was the Marketing Manager, a bloke named John Medwell who was a Cambridge graduate. We got on well. At one stage early in my time there he asked to have a look at my Canadian driving licence (though I can't remember the reason he gave, now). When I had applied for the job I said I was 26, though I was really only just 24. When I resigned to go back to Oz after a couple of years we went out for farewell drinks, during which he leaned over and said: "I think there's something you should know about Quebec driving licences, Bill. The last two numbers are the year of your birth." He'd known all along that I was younger than I'd made out, but had chosen not to mention it till I was leaving!

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I have a vivid memory of being on a bus on my way out to Westmount, an upper-class English-speaking suburb of Montreal. I don't remember why I was going there. The windows were iced up in lovely patterns and the atmosphere in the bus was fuggy and over-warm. The bus pulled up at a stop and I scraped a patch of ice off the window and had a look out. All I could see was an awning with icicles hanging down, and written on the front was "Arctic Fur Trading Company". I found myself wondering at the unpredictable vagaries of life, that an unsophisticated kid from Drummoyne could find himself in that situation. I felt a very long way from home.

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I was still working for Canada Starch in late 1962 when the Cuban Missile Crisis came to a head. As the confrontation between Kennedy and Krushchev developed everyone was scared as hell, and people were listening for news updates on tinny trannies in their offices. Some



*Outside the ski cottage at Val Morin*



*The ski cottage in autumn*

Montrealers had decamped to their summer cottages with cars full of canned food, and barely-concealed panic seemed to be the order of the day. I had two assistants, and one of them, Gordie, had a dry sense of humour. He came into my office one day late in October while things were still all up in the air, looking rather concerned. "Bill", he said, with a poker face, "what do you reckon we go out looting tonight?"

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One of Canada Starch's more successful products was called Hellman's Salad Dressing, and the advertising agency that had the Hellman's account was keen to promote it by making a singing commercial for radio. The agency decided that we should go to New York to record the commercial, and suggested that as advertising manager I should go too to oversee how it turned out. Great! Right in the middle of the Cuban Crisis I'm going to New York, the bullseye target should the Soviets decide to attack the US with nuclear weapons and thereby start WWII! I suppose I could have refused to go, but that could have been seen as a bit wussy, and so I bade a tentative farewell to Gill and set off for Dorval airport. I'm winging my way to potential oblivion when once again I found I was musing on those unpredictable vicissitudes of life that could put me in that situation. I felt even further from home.

In the cab to my hotel, to make conversation I asked the cabbie what he thought was going to happen. It was common in those days in New York that cabbies would have a dead cigar forever between their lips, the mouth end all mashed and juicy. "Nah. It won't go anywhere," he wheezed, "them Russkies don't know shit." I found this not exactly reassuring, but why would I think a cabby was an authority on the matter?.

In the recording studio the next morning the musos straggled in and took their place behind their music stands, sporadically chatting through their hangovers. The leader handed out the charts for the commercial and called for a run-through. None of the musicians had clapped eyes on the charts before, but they sight-read their way through an almost blemishless rendition. After a couple of more takes to polish things up a bit, it was all over. Just like that. Having done what they were hired to do, they all just relaxed and played a modern jazz version of the jingle for about ten minutes, all taking solos and cooking like hell. I found out afterwards that most of the musos that had been hired for the gig were sidemen for – wait for it – *Horace Heidt and his Musical Knights*, one of the corniest and most syrupy bands around at the time. I was astonished. And as you will have worked out, I got back to Montreal unscathed.

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The Corn Products takeover had meant that Canada Starch now had an American Vice-President. One morning he called me into his office and pushed across his desk to me an invitation to a packaging conference in Chicago. Because of the labyrinthine nature of company politics, for some reason he thought I should represent the company at the conference. An all expenses paid trip to Chicago was fine with me.

I was walking across the tarmac at O'Hare Airport, and as I entered the terminal building I heard my name being called over the public address system. I was met by an African-American chauffeur in full livery who ushered me into a waiting gleaming black Cadillac. It turned out that of all the delegates at the conference, I had come from farthest away, and the organizers were giving me the full VIP treatment. (Our company used the packaging firm that had organized the conference to design the packaging for several of their products). The limo dropped me at an upmarket circular hotel, and when I went to my room I was worried because it had a queen-sized bed, even though I'd booked a single. I was so naïve. Given the treatment I was getting, I began to worry what other blandishments might have been organized for me that might involve the bed.

That night the conference organizers took me and a couple of other delegates out on the town. First we went to a tiny bar. The bar itself took up half of a long and narrow space, leaving just enough room for a row of about twelve drinkers on bar stools along one side. The barman saw to it that everyone had a drink, then he picked up a guitar and played a bracket of Burl Ives-ish songs. I thought it was great, even though it wasn't exactly my

favourite music. Then we went on to dinner, which was in one of the many restaurants in the original Chicago Playboy Club. After eating we went to another level of the club to listen to some more music. The Bunny waitress came up and asked what I'd have to drink, and her cleavage was level with my eyes. By this I was beginning to feel like my back teeth were getting submerged and the idea of more alcohol wasn't all that attractive, so I blurted out "Nothing for me thanks. I'm just looking."

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The company was about to begin marketing Knorr soups in Canada, and it had been decided that we would begin with a test market operation in Quebec. I used to like going to Quebec. I was especially fond of the huge statue of Christ that welcomed you to the city, with its halo made of a ring of incandescent light bulbs. It's basically a French Canadian city, and I had my first taste of frog's legs there.

I went to Quebec City to launch the test market at a meeting of the entire Quebec sales force. Most of them were French, which meant bilingual, but I got my introductory paragraphs put into French by one of our French staff, and haltingly read them out in my Oz-accented schoolboy French, before reverting to English. I think the salesforce found it all a bit quaint, but it seemed to go down pretty well. I was sharing a hotel room with Jerry Williams, my other assistant, and after the meeting we went out for dinner and on to a rather tatty cabaret sort of thing. At one stage Jerry leaned across to me and whispered "Hey Bill, why is that all the really good-looking girls are with little fat bald guys?" And they were. As I said, I was pretty naïve.

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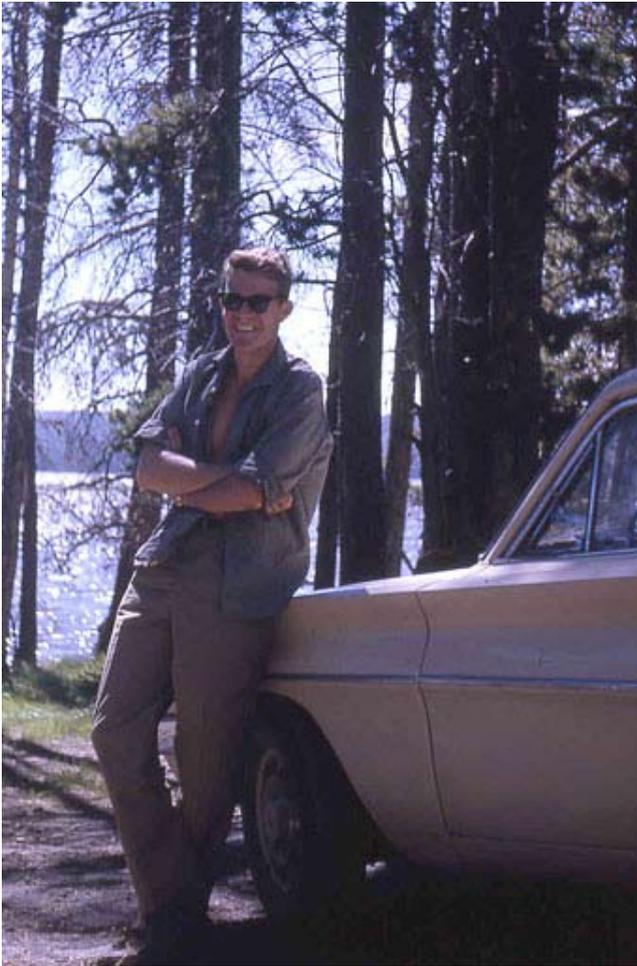
Another new product was added to the Canada Starch range after the Corn Products takeover – a table margarine. I can't even remember its name now – but that's not uncommon these days. The agency handling the advertising for the margarine had come up with an appeal that, baldly put, claimed that if you used this margarine all the time you'd have no worries about cholesterol. I did a bit of research and confirmed that this was not the case. Just changing to our margarine would likely do stuff-all for your cholesterol count – you'd have to make all sorts of major changes to your diet as well, and even then the findings were controversial. Canada Starch management appeared to be quite happy to go with dodgy claim, and the more I thought about it the more it troubled me. So I penned a memo to all concerned outlining the result of my researches and suggesting that as a company we wouldn't want to be identified with shonky advertising practices. My memo had some effect, in that they changed the ads to include a small print note to the effect that the margarine wouldn't be sufficient to cause major changes to cholesterol levels without making other dietary changes as well. But unless you were keen to read every part of the advertisement closely, the unwary consumer was still left with the impression that the margarine could work wonders.

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Montreal was notoriously corrupt. It was usual practice when pulled over by the police to give them your licence along with a \$20 bill. One story that I heard, which was probably apocryphal, was that one motorist handed over a \$50 bill with his licence and the cop gave him change! Another proof of the endemic corruption was the fact that most of the toll collectors on the many bridges of Montreal arrived at work in Cadillacs and other expensive cars that they wouldn't have been able to afford unless they were pocketing a fair proportion of the tolls they collected.

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After we'd been in Canada for twelve months we were both due for holidays, so we hopped a Greyhound bus to Detroit, which was still a functioning city back then. The bus trip was like a real-life experience of "We've all gone to look for America" by Simon and Garfunkel. There were dealers in Detroit who arranged for cars bought there to be delivered to other parts of the States, and we arranged to take an Oldsmobile F85 to Seattle. This was 1962, and the World's Fair was on there, which made accommodation a bit hard to find. We ended



*At Yellowstone on our way to Seattle*



*Gill finishing lunch in Yugoslavia*



*With Mum at Scotts Head when she tried her first joint*

up in a seedy hotel in an unprepossessing part of town for the one night we stayed. As we registered, the check-in clerk said "And will you be wanting the room for all night?" Later in the night the penny dropped as to what sort of hotel it was, and the walls were so thin that the activities in the adjacent rooms made it difficult to get to sleep.

The drive across from Detroit to Seattle was something I'm very glad to have done. We didn't get paid for doing the delivery, but all we had to do was pay for the petrol and oil and we had free use of the quite upmarket car to drive across half of America.

It was a most enjoyable trip, complete with bears, moose, and the geysers of Yellowstone National Park. From Seattle we bussed it up to Vancouver, and flew back to Montreal from there. I have to admit that I don't remember much about the Seattle World Fair.

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## **Back to Europe**

After almost two years in Montreal we decided that it was time to go back to Oz. If we didn't go back home soon we'd probably have decided to stay and make our lives in Canada. We took a liner from New York to Liverpool via Bermuda. We only stopped for a few hours in Bermuda, and I can't remember anything to report about the experience. After we left Bermuda, most of the way we were battling a Force 8 gale, and there were lots of passengers absent from the dinner tables, which had low railings around them to stop the meals sliding off onto the floor, such was the erratic movement of the boat.

I found it exhilarating to be outside in the heavy weather, and it didn't seem too dangerous given that the boat was pitching fore and aft because we were headed directly into the storm. I liked holding on to the railing and looking at the massive seas that we were going through. At one stage, just after I'd left the railing to make my way back inside, a maverick wave hit the boat from the side, and it rolled sideways alarmingly. Quite unintentionally I was suddenly crossing the deck at a run, and I thought the end had come as I was hurled towards the opposite railing. At what seemed the very last moment the ship rolled back the other way, and instead of hurtling downhill I was running uphill. I returned to our cabin to get over the near miss, and didn't venture out onto the deck again while there were big seas running.

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## **By Minivan around Europe**

We docked at Liverpool and were picked up by Ross Peterson and his then wife Marilyn, and went back to London to stay with them at Shepherd's Bush for a few weeks. Ross and I had been Assistant Account Executives at Lintas together, and he and Marilyn had been on the *Patris* with us. I set about buying a Minivan to do the obligatory tour around Europe. The van was secondhand, of course, so I took it to a mechanic to get it overhauled and serviced before The Big Trip. I was somewhat taken aback when he said he couldn't touch it for four weeks. We were rearing to go to Europe, and when I explained this to him and tried to talk him into doing it sooner, he turned to me and spat, "It's all very well for you bloody colonials, but we've had a war here!" This was 1964.

To detail the trip around Europe would be a long and probably tedious disquisition, so I'll settle for a quick outline of the route. We crossed to France, spent some more time in Paris, then went on down to Spain, around the Cote d'Azur (it rained all the time there), then down the Amalfi coast of Italy and across to Brindisi, ferried across to Igoumenitsa again, and then across Greece to Athens. From Athens we headed north through Macedonia, Yugoslavia (as it was then), Austria and Bavaria, to the north of Germany. Then we went up a bit further to Denmark, and headed back through the Netherlands, Belgium and France to London again.

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## **Heading home**

We flew home with Qantas. When we had taken off, a steward came down the aisle and handed me a can of Resch's Lager – without a word, just a conspiratorial wink. I enjoyed the egalitarian and non-obsequious service that you get from Australians, which was a change from much of the forelock-tugging that I had become used to in Europe.

We stopped over for a few days in Delhi, and did the obligatory trip to Agra to see the Taj Mahal. Beautiful construction though it may be, I couldn't get past the contrast between its ostentatious expensiveness and the squalor of the settlements was passed on the way to see it. After Delhi we stopped over at Hong Kong. Gill had picked up a bad case of Delhi Belly in India, and remained quite ill for the rest of the way home.

When we got home to South Street Drummoyne Mum had made my favourite meal for lunch – one that I'd not had at all overseas – bread and banana and passionfruit sprinkled with sugar!

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## **Back to Sydney**

When we got back to Sydney we were able to rent the upper half of a two-storied, lovely old sandstone house at 2 The Point Rd, Woolwich. It had a waterfront situation, lovely views, a swimming pool and a small house to one side of its sweeping lawns that had once been occupied by Robert Louis Stevenson in the late 1880s. It was termite-ridden and run down, though nicely painted on the outside. Dave Gibb and I used it as a workshop to build a Manly Junior sailing boat. (We didn't know anything much about sailing, and when we'd finished it we soon realized that it was much too small to be used by two adults. On one early run we were running before a very stiff breeze between Woolwich Point and Cockatoo Island when the Manly Junior simply dived nose first into the briny and submerged. We had a helluva job swimming it back to land).

The resident landlords turned out to be snobbish and not all that enthusiastic about us as tenants. They had previously spent many years as planters in New Guinea. After I was re-employed by Lintas (see further on) I was chosen, along with other bright young executives (like Ross Peterson) from Australia and Asia to attend a ten-day Marketing Course at a live-in conference facility in the eastern suburbs. I made some friends from among the other attendees from the Pacific Rim and one night that we had free Gill and I invited an Indian bloke called Indra who we both particularly liked back to our digs in Woolwich for a meal. The ex-colonial landlord and his wife actually dared to read us a lecture about black people the next day. Both Gill and I were staggered at the overt racism they betrayed, and left it that we would have to agree to disagree on the matter. We didn't stay there much longer, and moved to a beaut house in Paddington that was owned by the now well-known artist Ken Unsworth and his wife. We couldn't believe our luck. It had a grand piano and lots of Ken's paintings around the walls, not to mention a double garage off the back lane. We parked our red Austin-Healey Sprite in Sutherland Street, (what a pair of trendies we had become) and I swiftly turned the garage into a studio, where I continued to do more paintings and other graphic stuff.

Gill was never all that keen on the Sprite. She said that with the top down it mussed up her hair and it was hard to get out of without showing her underwear. Of course hood down was my preferred mode, and we tended to travel that way in summer. However, on our way home from Uni I have to admit that my fantasies of being cool took a severe battering when Gill would insist on putting up the umbrella at every traffic light when it was raining, no matter how lightly.

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## **Back to work**

Gill got a job as a Librarian in the Department of Adult Education at Sydney Uni, which was in the Mackie Building across Parramatta Rd from the main university campus. There



*The Unsworth house*



*Our house in William Street*



*Inside Unsworths*



*William St back courtyard*

she met and became a staunch friend of Madge Dawson, (an influential leftie and feminist) and developed a profound disrespect for Owen Harries, one of the few academics who was publicly outspoken in favour of the Vietnam War, which was raging at the time.

I took a job with a smallish outfit called Pritchard Wood at Edgecliff. They were an Australian branch of a much bigger advertising agency in London. The Australian branch was headed by one John Bristow, who had previously made a name for himself with Hanson-Rubensohn McCann Erikson, one of Australia's biggest agencies at the time. One afternoon he called me into his office and asked me to cab it to St Leonards and bring his Jaguar XK120 back to the office for him. In this model Jag the position for reverse gear was hard over to the left of the gate, then forward, which was only a push away from first gear. Coming back across the Harbour Bridge the traffic came to a halt, and as it took off again I managed to put the gearstick too far to the left, and began going backwards as I dropped the clutch! I stomped on the brake and just avoided a collision with the car behind me by a hairsbreadth. (Must have been good reflexes from training as a goalkeeper). I think my heart was still racing by the time I got safely to Edgecliff.

What with looking up old workmates from Lintas and Unilever, it was soon common knowledge that I was back in Oz. I think Lintas were a little peeved that I hadn't applied there first for a job, but nonetheless they made me a good offer, which was considerably better than I was on at Pritchard Wood, so I took them up on it.

I was promoted from Account Executive to Account Supervisor, which meant I oversaw the work of several other Account Executives on various accounts. Before long I was further elevated to be the Account Supervisor for all of the Lever Brothers washing powders, which was considered something of a prestigious job by the agency. I didn't find it a particularly appealing job, as the advertising for washing powders was pretty much the apotheosis of banal, repetitive, and uncreative attempts at marketing persuasion. At one time, early on in this job, I asked the Lever Bros executives which brand of soap powder actually did wash the whitest, since it was a claim that they all shared. There was an awkward silence, then a lot of meaningless flapdoodle, and I never managed to get a straightforward answer to what seemed to me to be a pretty reasonable question. Everyone knew that there was bugger-all difference in cleaning power to differentiate the products, but the situation had all the nasty overtones of an unacknowledged conspiracy to deal in bullshit and pretend otherwise. I was becoming increasingly offput by the amount of meretriciousness and deviousness that seemed to be necessary if you were going to make it in a mercantile world. But more of that later.

Gill and I re-enrolled at Sydney Uni to take up our Arts degree studies again. Her job at Adult Education allowed her to pursue an Honours degree in Anthropology, which necessitated attendance at classes during the day, and as I was back at Lintas I was limited to those subjects that offered classes at night. Gill and I graduated the same year – I think it would have been 1968 – she with a first class honours degree in Anthropology and me with a straight BA. By this time it was a forgone conclusion that Gill would go on to do a PhD. She was a formidable scholar, and shared the top of the year with a bloke called Brian Fegan who became a good friend to both of us and an enthusiastic academic competitor for Gill. I used to go skindiving on the northern beaches with facemask and handspear with Feeg and his then wife Lydia on most summer weekends.

While Gill was at Adult Ed I began designing book covers for the Sydney University Press. Looking back, I suspect that I got these commissions because I'd learned how to use Letraset and other techniques to make my presentations pretty closely approximate how they were going to look when printed. I was always hanging out in the Layout and Finished Art departments at Lintas and picked it up there, I suppose. Anyway, I did quite a lot of these book jacket designs and the odd poster for visiting academic speakers.

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It was in 1967 while I was still at Lintas, that one of the copywriters passed on to me a copy of *Poetry Magazine*, a recent addition to the small magazine field in Australia. He pointed me to the following poem by a woman called Lexi MacHugh.

## **Widow Bottomley**

*You must of known Bill Bottomley.  
He had no beliefs nor any heed  
for his remains, more as he'd say  
'Don't pine about the costs, just feed*

*me to the sharks". Well now, it was  
last Monday week he had this fit,  
gaped, spluttered-like, and all the rush  
afforded him no benefit,*

*for when the doctor called he shook  
his head and wrote him dead. Well then  
a minister came hurrying-like  
and on his tail two gentlemen*

*(and downright sinister that was  
to have the mortuary call).  
The postman whistled, neighbours knocked  
to run me constant up the hall;*

*And then the Bottomleys arrived  
and talked themselves emotional –  
then having bawled sufficient-like  
quizzed me about the funeral.*

*'No funeral?' they sort of screamed –  
'Then where is Mr Bottomley?'  
And I 'Where he will do some good  
For folk at university'.*

*They sat there stupid for a while  
(except for aunt who got faint-like),  
then getting fairly riled, they dubbed  
me 'Ghoul' and 'mercenary tike'.*

*But those that took Bill Bottomley  
agreed my reckoning as sound,  
as how would doctors learn our ills  
if all of us lay underground?"*

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I put together a doggerelish response to this poem, and was more than a little surprised to find that it was published in the same magazine two months later. This is how they presented it:

*"Readers of our April issue may recall Lexi MacHugh's "Widow Bottomley". It was sheer coincidence of names that brought Mr Bottomley so close to repeating Robert Graves's famous experience of reading his own obituary in The Times, but he wrote his rejoinder only "after waiting a few weeks to make sure that I was still feeling all right, and that nobody had pointed the bone at me,,,"*

## **Widow Bottomley's Husband Replies**

*To read of someone's death, outlined  
in columns neat, set ragged right,  
Was puzzling for them as saw  
the bloke alive the previous night.*

*But those who knew Bill Bottomley  
(including Bill himself) took pause  
to ponder if in fact he might  
have fallen victim to death's jaws.*

*"Of all the names to choose," thought Bill,  
"to use in verse, who could have known  
that 'Bottomley' she'd pick – with all  
its rectumlinear overtones.*

*"Although, she's right – I've no beliefs,  
no visions of eternity,  
I hadn't planned just yet a while  
on hearing 'em toll bells for me".*

*He thought: "Perhaps I'm really dead!"  
and felt his pulse and pricked his thumb,  
then took assurance from Descartes  
that: cogito et ergo sum."*

I sent a copy of this to my daughter when I came across it recently, and she felt that it was "all very creepy" given that I was an atheist and had willed my cadaver to the University of Newcastle, and to my knowledge was unknown to Lexi MacHugh.

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One weekend in the late 60s Gill and I attended a SAANZ (Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand) Conference at the University of NSW. I can remember someone from New Zealand making the point that the command structure of the Australian Army and the command structure of the Mafia were almost identical in formal, organizational terms. This was quite a revelation to me, and I think that my long term interest in sociology as an academic discipline dates from that conference.

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Meantime I was finding working at Lintas more and more unsatisfying. I became increasingly aware of how much bullshit came with the job. Late one Friday afternoon I went to have a pee. There was another bloke standing at the dual porcelain urinal, and to make polite conversation he said with a sigh: "Ah, gee. Thank Christ that's another week over". I agreed with him, and as I was zipping up I thought about this remark. It hit me that the way things were organized and taken for granted in our society meant that employees were selling the majority of their time to employers, often at jobs they didn't like, and were left with only a couple of days to themselves to do whatever they really wanted to do. From that moment on I resolved to find something more genuinely satisfying to do, and ever since that SAANZ Conference at NSW I'd been increasingly drawn to learning more about sociology.

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## **Goodbye Lintas, Hello UNSW;**

I let this radical idea cook for a week or two, then sought a meeting with the Managing Director to tender my resignation. When I told him that I was going to go to UNSW to study sociology he gave me a smug smile and said, "I think you'll change your mind when I tell you what we've got planned for you. We've decided that you should be the one to head up

our agency operations in Kuala Lumpur.” Of course this didn’t have the effect on me that he assumed it would, and I replied that I wouldn’t find it all that congenial to be sipping gin and tonics in the dying rays of the British Empire, with a troupe of servants to minister to my every need. As far as I was concerned that was something to be transcended, not encouraged.

Later that week I was at a formal advertising campaign presentation in the board room of the agency. I was talking with one of the clients over the obligatory post-presentation drinks and Ken Fowles, a director of the agency who had made his name in the days of radio joined us and said to the client, “Did you know Bill is leaving us? He’s going to become a socialist.” (!)

So I enrolled with the School of Sociology at UNSW to do an MA. I had to do the undergraduate sociology course to honours level to get an MA (Qualifying) degree before I could go on to do postgraduate work. The recently arrived Head of school was Sol Encel, who was relatively young and open to new ideas, and as a result of this I fast-tracked things a bit and fulfilled the MA (Qual) requirements in two years -- in most of my subjects at Distinction or High Distinction level. I also had to write a sub-thesis, and since I had done Indonesian and Malayan studies as one of my majors in my undergraduate degree at Sydney U, I wrote it about the political significance of the PKI (the Indonesian Communist Party) in post-Sukarno Indonesia. I was pretty much left to do this on my own as there was nobody in the School who had any expertise in this area. I was awarded second class honours, first division for this, (colloquially known as Two Ones) which was probably pretty much what it deserved, but I did find it a bit odd that Sol sent it to be marked to the Political Science Department upstairs, who were notoriously conservative, an implacable enemy of Sol’s academic innovations and hated anything to do with the School of Sociology. Nonetheless, my efforts were looked upon sufficiently favourably by the Sociology School that they persuaded me to upgrade my postgraduate enrolment from an MA to a PhD.

Gill’s remuneration at Adult Ed wasn’t exactly princely, and after I left Lintas we began to get a little short of money so I took on a paper run around Double Bay. (Shades of my childhood)! The Sprite didn’t hold very many papers when the issues got big, (still Wednesdays and Saturdays like it always was) but running up and down all those stairs in Double Bay blocks of flats sure got me fit! But after about three months, when Uni classes had started I chucked it in and concentrated on my studies. But we were still short of a bob. I tackled this problem by composing a letter which outlined why I deserved a bit of financial support, and sent a copy to 50 of the richest companies in the phone book. These letters were either studiously ignored or briefly rejected. Except for one. Kenneth Myer of the Myer Foundation must have been impressed by my chutzpah, because he ended up agreeing to fund my PhD to the tune of \$2000, asking only for a copy of my thesis when I had finished it. I think Sol was also a bit impressed that I had managed to provide for myself in this way.

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## **Academic life**

While I was getting my MA Qualifying studies out of the way I took a job on campus with the Department of Hospital Administration. Each year they put together a hefty publication called *The Australian and New Zealand Hospitals Yearbook*, which I was employed to produce. It listed every hospital in Australia and New Zealand, as well as some in Papua New Guinea, and contained all sorts of information about each hospital including data like how many beds, what facilities and specialties they had and so on. The Professor of Hospital Administration was a bit of a maverick Englishman, who enjoyed exaggerating his idiosyncrasies. He knew I was studying sociology and when he hired me he told me that he didn’t care how often or infrequently I turned up to my office in his Department, all he expected was that on October of every year I brought out a new *Hospitals Yearbook*. I brought out three. Years later I happened by chance upon him sitting writing at a table at a pub in Kangaroo Valley. I went over and had a chat. He told me that he had finally convinced the UNSW administration that he was a borderline nut case, and he took early retirement and had begun writing a local history of Kangaroo Valley, which he found more congenial than his employment at UNSW.

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In 1972 the Sociology School found itself with an unexpected extra lecturing position. At the time there was no obvious contender for the job and for some reason there was no time to advertise. Sol suggested to me that I should apply, which I duly did, and I was appointed to the position. This was a surprise leap forward, and I thought all my birthdays had come at once.

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It's one thing to enrol for a PhD, but quite another to come up with a topic that you are interested in and really want to look into. It took me the best part of a year. After a few false starts I finally ended up deciding on a topic which would try to work out why people say they believe certain things, then behave in ways that contradict these beliefs. One of my earlier thesis topics that I had considered was about coal mining, and I had become involved with a group of communist coalminers on the south coast of NSW. I thought that they, as a group, should offer a good opportunity to look into my latest topic. I wanted to investigate why their daily behaviour quite often contradicted what they might be expected to do because of their adherence to communist beliefs. Being card-carrying members of the CPA, I could identify what their formal ideological position was, which would otherwise be fairly difficult to do with people who did not subscribe to such firmly-held beliefs. I got stuck into this using a research technique which was then known as "participant observation". I booked a room for myself at the Mount Kembla pub and used to drink regularly with the miners when they came out of the pit. "Gotta have a piss. Most of us have five schooner bladders". I'd go up to my room after the pub closed and try to make notes of what I felt I had gleaned from these boozy conversations, then drive back to Sydney the next day, usually more than a little hungover.

I spent about eighteen months on this project, did heaps of interviews with communist miners, shared time in the pub with them, went rabbit shooting with them... but in the end I had to abandon the idea because I concluded that we needed to know much more about what constitutes "consciousness" in human beings before I could tackle finding out what explains the gap between belief and behaviour – something that affects all of us. Looking back, I think I'd bitten off more than I could chew. (These and later thorny decisions about thesis topics may seem a bit puzzling to the reader, but if I were to spell them out in all their complexity I'm pretty sure it would bore the hell out of you).

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## **Anti Vietnam protests**

In the early seventies the Vietnam War was in full swing. I used to have dreams about Malcolm Fraser, who was then Minister for the Army, where I would meet him at a social gathering and spit on him. Not like me at all, but my revulsion at what was happening was total. I went to all the anti-war demonstrations. (Mum came along to one of them, but she had to keep it secret from Dad).

When LBJ visited Oz and NSW Premier Robin Askin told his driver to drive over the protestors, at one stage I was up a tree outside the Art Gallery of NSW where LBJ made a speech. A burly police sergeant grabbed my leg and tried to pull me from my perch, so I just let go and landed right on top of him. Then I beat it, fast.

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By 1977 I'd been lecturing in the Sociology School for six years, which meant that I was entitled to a sabbatical year off to pursue my own specific research interests, so, with my own plans to try to build an environmentally friendly dwelling in mind, I changed my PhD topic to "An investigation of bureaucratic obstacles to sustainable housing." I submitted my application for Study Leave, describing how I intended to use the burgeoning examples of "handbuilt houses" on the NSW north coast – a direct result of the Aquarius Festival – as my sociological laboratory. The University administration would have none of this. I suppose it sounded a bit too much like I might have a good time while I was doing it. They

insisted that since the proper title for a sabbatical year of personal research was “Overseas Study Leave”, I had to go overseas to work on my PhD topic. Shit! Men in suits working in a bureaucracy are so often such dolts! There was no way I could convince them that the opportunity to study the counter cultural movement in NSW and their building practices and problems was a perfect opportunity for me and my topic. Nonetheless, I found working on this latest topic much more enjoyable, mainly because it tackled problems happening in the real world rather than being merely an arid academic exercise which researched the lives of people ultimately to aggrandize my own career prospects without doing much for my research subjects.

I was really pissed off at the UNSW administration over this, but I was determined not to let the opportunity of a year’s study leave go down the drain. So I stuck with the same topic, but planned to investigate the obstacles to building sustainable housing in Britain. You had to go “overseas” to get to Britain, so this was OK. I mean...really! (Mind you, from what I’ve heard, the role of the bureaucracy in present-day university affairs is much worse).

So I took a flight to London, where I bought a secondhand Commer van which was to be my home for most of the next twelve months, and took up a secondment to the Department of Alternative Technology at the Open University in Milton Keynes which I had arranged before leaving Australia. The Open University was a radical tertiary education institution, and the Alternative Technology Department was something of a hotbed of academic specialization in just about all matters to do with sustainability. It was just the place for me, given that I had to be overseas, though not as good as my original choice of rural northern NSW would have been.

I spent six months there, living near the Open University in my van in a little overnight parking spot off a pumping substation that I had discovered a few hundred metres from a thatched roof pub, and began making forays all over Britain to interview mainly hippy types who had come up against outmoded ideas when they tried to build sustainably. Towards the end of my stay I was expected to give a paper about my research findings to a seminar of Alt Tech academic staff. This paper is reproduced in *The Dunny Book* on my website on p36 “*A Critique of Housing in Modern Society*”. It’s long, and since it is written in polysyllabic social science jargon (which was the expected mode of discourse), the average reader would probably find it fairly boring. But the ideas contained therein I still stand by.

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After Gill graduated in Anthropology it wasn’t long before she went to Macquarie University as a lecturer in the new anthropology department there which was headed up by Chandra Jayawardena. By the time I was on sabbatical leave she was entitled to six months study leave at the end of the same year, and she and Fiona came over to England and joined me in the van. Gill and I had separated in 1975 when Fi was five, but the split was lacking much in the way of acrimony, and we ended up spending most of the latter part of my sabbatical year together in Greece, where she pursued her research into Greek migrants and I got busy writing up the fruits of my research in Britain.

(Gill went on to have a distinguished career at Macquarie, wrote several academically acclaimed books which contributed much to the understanding of the migrant experience from a Greek perspective, and retired when she was 60 as an Emerita Professor. Tragically, she fell victim to early onset Alzheimer’s not long after her retirement and has been in care at Port Macquarie for some years not far from where Fi now lives and has no idea of the stellar career that she had).

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## **Flute Improvisations**

Not long after the NSW Conservatorium of Music introduced a Jazz Studies program I enrolled in a class with about ten other musos which was taught by Don Burrows and George Golla. As a result of getting to know Don in this class, I took several private lessons with him. This was just before I was to fly to London on my sabbatical, and his remarks about my proficiency on flute had been sufficiently encouraging for me to try to maintain some sort of practice routine, even while en route. My flight to London was diverted to



*Inside C/Nest (slide)*

*At UNSW*

*Milton Keynes pub*

Bangkok for some reason and we had an unexpected 24hrs stopover there. I decided to take a tourist excursion up the klongs (canals) of Bangkok in one of those long, beautifully-proportioned boats that are powered by a recycled car motor at the back with a long propeller shaft. If you've been to Asia you'll recognize the sort of craft I mean, as they are ubiquitous in that part of the world. When travelling, I always carried my flute with me in my shoulder bag wherever I went, to avoid either theft or damage. Our boat stopped at a little jetty, and everyone tramped off to see a local temple, but my attention was caught by two small boys watching us disembark. They were about twelve years old, and one of them was holding a homemade fipple flute – that's the sort that you blow down one end, like a recorder. The others went on to the temple, but I hung back and tried to engage the boys in conversation. I pointed to the flute, then took mine from my bag, and their eyes widened as I put this long silver instrument together. After I'd played a few sounds on it I motioned with my hands that the one with the flute should play something on it. He was a bit reluctant, but after a while played a simple little tune. Luckily his flute was in a key that I could quickly pick up, and soon we were playing together. It wasn't exactly Carnegie Hall material, but given the disparity of our musical traditions it hung together much better than I had anticipated, and we both enjoyed ourselves tremendously. And not a word had been spoken.

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In the latter part of my sabbatical, with Gill and Fi on the Greek island of Hydra, I looked up my very first serious music partner Bill Pownall, who had been living there for quite some years where he was making a decent living as a painter. He and his partner came to lunch at the villa we were renting, which just happened to have a decent guitar hanging on the wall. After having caught up conversationally over lunch, Bill took the guitar down, tuned it, and said, "OK. We've been having a conversation over lunch. Do you feel like having a musical conversation for old time's sake?" I was only too pleased to. We played three or four guitar/flute duets, and all we knew about what we were going to play was an agreed key and an agreed tempo. They were totally freely improvised. A musical conversation indeed! You can listen to two of these improvisations on my website. They are in Drawer Four (Music) titled (predictably enough) *Hydra Conversations*. In the same drawer there is an album titled *Abacus* which also contains some more of my flute work from approximately the same period.

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On another solo trip to SE Asia I was sitting in my room in a backpackers' losman near Kuta beach in Bali noodling on my flute. (I was still trying to practice regularly, and thinking back I was probably playing pretty much at my best. I stopped for a breather and heard the unmistakable sound of another flute coming from a few rooms down the passageway. I took a look out of my door, flute in hand, and there was another bloke looking my way out of his door holding a flute as well. We had a good talk, but didn't play together as he was soon to catch a plane back to Oz.

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On that same trip I flew out from Bali to Singapore. I noticed in the *What's On* magazine in my room that there was a regular jam session with pick-up groups held in the main lounge of the Apollo Hotel every Sunday. The next day was Sunday, so in the afternoon I picked up my flute and headed over to the Apollo. There was a table where you put your name down if you wanted to play, and after listening for a while to what sort of stuff was being played I decided that I might as well give it a go. After about an hour I was called up onstage and found myself playing with a Swedish tenor sax player and four other Chinese musicians. The music of choice was solidly jazz-oriented, so we kicked off with a blues. Things went so well musically that our group stayed onstage for another four numbers. It was a big room, and I certainly got a kick out of being applauded after my solos.

I was winding down with a beer when the saxophone player (his name was Percy) came up to me and pointed to a Chinese businessman in a suit a few tables away. "He really liked our music," he said, "He wants to take us to dinner". So after a few more drinks, Percy and I found ourselves in the back of a black Mercedes which sported a TV set among its

gadgets. We were treated to a banquet at a huge, ritzy restaurant.

It was after midnight when I got back to my hotel, but there was still music being made in the cocktail lounge. I went in and had a bit of a listen. They were a quartet playing sophisticated jazz in a very laid-back groove, and fortified by the glasses of Dutch courage I'd had and buoyed by my success at the Apollo, I brandished my flute and asked if I could sit in with them. Working musos are never keen to have unknowns sit in, and I should have known better. They eventually agreed, but did little to make me feel welcome. When they began the next song they didn't even tell me the name of it, and only barked out the key. Luckily, I was able to rise to this challenge, and when that song was finished they asked me to stay for the rest of the bracket. Two triumphs in the one day! I was beginning to feel a bit like a real pro. I was due to fly out the next afternoon. I visited the Mens' Room before I went to catch the bus to the airport and happened across one of the musos from the group of the night before. He was very friendly, and invited me to join the group again that night. He seemed genuinely disappointed when I told him of my impending flight.

When I was driving all over Britain in my trusty old Commer van (It was hopeless. I even got it bogged on Dartmoor which is renowned for its flatness) at one stage on my peregrinations I spent the night in the van in a parking lot near a huge cavern in the Lakes District. The acoustics in this cave were terrific, and I took my little UNSW tape recorder into the cave after breakfast and did my practice in there. The (not very well) recorded result of this session is also in Drawer 4 of my website, Listen to *Solo flute in a cavern in a slate quarry in the Lakes District of England (1977)*, a track in the album *Faded Sound Photographs*.

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## **The gradual disillusionment**

When I first began lecturing at the School of Sociology I thought it was the best job I ever had. I really enjoyed the experience. It was a small School with a reputation for a radical approach to education. It wasn't unusual for me to have senior seminars under a tree in Centennial Park with a cask of white and some paper cups, and there was a lot of fraternizing with students at various pubs around the Uni. We were encouraged to experiment with our teaching techniques, and the general tenor of the place was one of optimism.

I taught there for 12 years, but in the last few years the tone of the place changed. The School had become considerably bigger, and the enthusiasm and camaraderie which had been such a feature of the earlier years was inevitably diluted by the larger staff numbers. As well, the corporatisation of the university was growing apace as the besuited bean counters intruded more and more into scholastic matters.

I put together a senior-level course which looked at the sociological aspects of what was known then as "the environmental crisis". I was beginning to toy with the idea that I might try to build an environmentally-sensitive house of my own. I went to the Aquarius Festival held at Nimbin in 1973 which was a celebration of alternative thinking and sustainable lifestyles, and the counter-culture was very much making its presence felt. The ideas that were the intellectual currency of the time I found interesting and attractive.

Reading stuff like the following made me re-evaluate what I was doing:

*Most of the research that is funded is one-way research. That is, it is sponsored by those in power to look at those out of power. Those without power do not have the wherewithal to sponsor research into the best way to achieve their ends. So, as long as we think we should help the poor, the disadvantaged, the minority groups, we will probably have to do so without the luxury of bountiful funds. This puts us at a methodological disadvantage, of course, but what sort of research you do, and the direction it aims at, will in the final analysis rest on who you identify with – the zoo keepers or the animals in the cages. My work amongst the communist coalminers definitely fell into this category. My research would do fuck-all to help them – all it would have done would have been to aggrandize my academic career. Furthermore, I was the only one in the School who cared about what was happening to the environment, and although I put together the course on*

*From slides: 3 (2?) C/Nest Hydra*

the sociological aspects of the environmental crisis mentioned earlier, it was treated by other staff as Bill's quaint preoccupation. So I decided to take a deep breath and get myself immersed in reality – to build my own environmentally-sensitive dwelling and try to live the sort of life that I thought was sustainable. (After I'd left, the course was dropped. Nobody in the School gave a shit about the environment).

I was also beginning to see the university life as the glass bead game that it was. My criticisms of academe were bolstered by passages like this:

*Like other professionals in the business world, social science intellectuals organize their world to promote their interests, exchange specialized knowledge and establish contacts among themselves. Social scientists, too, have their professional fraternities. These societies seek to promote the interests of their professional members. These professional fraternities have no coherent political ideology, but this does not mean that they are non-ideological. In fact, they are most ideological in terms of their outlook, interests and privileged position. This combination comprises the ideology of professionalism. It is a subtle ideology which has effects upon their limited role as agents of social change and upon their biased analytical approach. (Robert Buckhout)*

My initial enthusiasm for sociology was ignited when I saw it as an intellectual discipline that was trying to understand the social world in a systematized way, with a view to making it a better place, and it was a bitter pill to swallow when I came to understand that it really wasn't doing this very much at all. In later years, when the fashionable but obfuscatory scholastic stance of postmodernism colonised the discipline and made it even worse, I rejoiced that I was no longer part of the whole sorry enterprise.

I think that ecological rather than sociological, insights have winched us up to a higher level from which to view things – a sort of higher altitude of understanding. When I look at what students of sociology are taught, it seems as though we are talking to them in concepts which have been recently and urgently outmoded. The discussion can no longer be conducted in terms of how property should be divided (which is what the classical social theorists that form such a large part of our academic diet are on about), but a higher level realization that the resources of the planet (the ultimate in property) are distributed incredibly unequally and will have to come to be regarded as common property for the use of all mankind if we are to survive as a species. And as Stanislaw Andreski reminds us: *Mediocrity should be no deterrent to a university career because, combined with lengthy and semi-esoteric training, it ensures a sufficient level of competence to pass for erudition and profundity of thought.*

And finally, this uncompromising barrage from Jan Myrdal: *We, the intellectuals have carefully analysed all the wars before they were declared. But we did not stop them. (And many amongst us became the propagandists of the wars as soon as they were declared). We describe how the poor are plundered by the rich. We live among the rich. We have described the torture and put our names under appeals against the torture, but we did not stop it. Now once more we can analyse the world situation and describe the wars and explain why the many are poor and hungry. But we do no more. We are not the bearers of consciousness. We are the whores of reason.*

This section will hopefully give you a fair idea of where my head was at when I decided to turn my back on academe.

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I met a woman named Ellen Quinn during these years of winding down my expectations. She was a librarian at UTS and she'd become fed up with her job too, and wanted to take refuge in the bush somewhere. We ended up buying adjacent bush blocks in the hills at the back of the Yarralong Valley, and on the weekends I built a little log cabin of vertical saplings on my land. I called my place *Wirrimbirra*, which is an Eora word meaning "to protect or conserve". Ellen resigned her job and lived for a while in a caravan near my cabin while she got organized to build something of her own on her block next door.

I was a bit slower than Ellen to burn my academic bridges, (after all, you don't give up a tenured lectureship lightly) but in the end I did. I'd bought a cute little workers' cottage in Crows Nest when Gill and I split, and Gill and I used to plan our teaching hours so that we could share the parenting of Fiona. I figured that I should be able to survive (just) by living off the rent from Crows Nest, so I chucked the lectureship and went to live in the log cabin while I got on with building my environmentally-sensitive house and trying to live an environmentally-sensible lifestyle. It was a huge change in my life, and what happened thereafter is the subject of Part Four of these notes.

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