

This Could Be Serious

By Julius Grafton

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This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

MA15+

Rude bits

Massive fails

Splatter

(+ Absinthe)

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Acknowledgements

Foreword. By Gary Jackson

How Do You Solve a Problem Like Julius?

"You'll be lucky to get a job driving a garbage truck, Grafton," was the career prediction from headmaster Herbert Harris at Vacluse Boys High, expelling the troublemaking fourteen-year-old in a fit of pique. The punishment might seem a little harsh considering what Julius had done—or so the legend goes. But many legends may be apocryphal. I'll let you be the judge.

Having spent his bus fare on lunch, Julius walked eight kilometres all the way home, wearing his school uniform for the last time and wondering where he'd go from there. He didn't dare tell his parents—as usual they weren't there anyway—and in any case he knew he would just get more shit and no help from them. *Home* was a grimy Church Manse with flaking paint on a busy thoroughfare in East Sydney's dirtiest, seamiest red light district, as unhappy and unloving an environment as you can imagine. The house next door was a brothel, and so were many others in the neighbourhood.

"I knew I was an outsider. Until I snagged my first girlfriend at eighteen, I felt unloved, even by my parents. I hated authority, including theirs. I grew up toughened. I was a fighter. At primary school, my stupid classmates called me 'Julie,' so I hit them—but that didn't improve things. My third-class teacher called me 'Cassius' for a joke, after Cassius Clay, and so my reputation grew. Yes, I was a brawling fighter, but only because I had to be. It's not how I am by nature. I could have gone either way—I grew up in a dark place, yet luckily for me, somehow I saw beyond that. I knew that whatever happened to me was going to be on my shoulders."

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With Kings Cross as a backyard, street-smartness was inevitable. At fourteen, Julius knew his way around and had done so for years, possessing a voracious curiosity, an enquiring intellect and a thirst to find out more about the adult world. He confidently came and went as he pleased in the clubs, illegal casinos, cafes and restaurants. He was fascinated by what he saw and felt a strong urge to get closer to what went on backstage ... the lights, the music, and the magic.

"Suddenly all the barriers I had been fighting against all my life came down. It was just a matter of walking in and making friends with roadies, technicians and cast. They had time for me and answered all my questions. I waited for someone to throw me out, but no one did. For the first time in my life I felt the joyful release that comes with being happy."

Life throws curve balls all the time. I'd like to say that, having found his career passion, Julius was offered a prestigious, highly paid job in stage production, met a girl, fell in love, married his life partner early and found an enduring bliss together. But that's not what happened. However, Fate at least made sure he got a start. A junior job on a newspaper and so embarked on a journey not just in journalism, but in print production and the publishing game. Julius figured out early on that if you were going to do something, you may as well do it full-on and properly, whatever the cost and risk of failure—or not at all. That attitude brought Julius much success, and some failure too.

In these pages, Julius tells you everything that happened ...

* Gary Jackson is an author, creative and brother of whom Julius describes as: "The World's Greatest Sound Engineer", Bruce Jackson. Bruce smashed his way from Rose Bay to Vegas, and became the go-to guy for Elvis, Springsteen, Streisand and many

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more. The Jackson boys went through the same brutal boys' high school as Julius. Later, they developed many common threads in a small and connected creative live sound and lighting community.

Introduction: Because

When former Chisel roadie Gerry Georgettis took his life in dramatic style early 2006, media from around the world picked up the story. How could a seemingly placid, stable theatre manager go suddenly crazy and burn down a car dealership in Miami—and then hang himself in a cramped United Airlines toilet? What darkness existed in this man's heart?

Gerry's brother Joe summed up at the funeral. "He liked beauty, and he liked the beast."

How does the music industry affect those who serve? Not the stars on stage. The people who make it all happen. In the background. Rarely seen and often unsung.

Tour veteran Michael Lippold put it this way. "A call from my older brother has helped put things into perspective; he pointed out that we 'roadies' are different to the norm, somewhat like the Vietnam vets, damaged by their experiences, some physical, some mental, some both. The vets have done something about it—and it is time that we did the same for our 'brothers'."

So what was it like, through the halcyon days of the Australian music industry, when guys like Michael and Gerry rose up? Gerry went on to tour manage Bon Jovi and work with the elite. Michael worked for Midnight Oil around the world. I did the highways, the back alleys, and saw Australia driving the truck full of band equipment.

This is the story of a 1950s kid from the toxic slum of Darlinghurst. The roadie mindset is mine, and my journey took me through several cycles of affluence, notoriety and bust—for over six decades. I travelled the road for a career in music, events and media, where I work today.

Strap in, this could be serious.

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Chapter 1: I was a Roadie

The “Flxible” Clipper coach roared up to Campbelltown Civic Centre, the bus leaving a trail of black smoke. Built in the late 1950s, these American long-distance coaches were used by Ansett around Australia, and AC/DC had purchased a well-travelled version for use as a tour bus. The band’s gear was in the back, and a roller door was installed at the side in front of the rear engine compartment. It was 1975.

The Flxible part of the Clipper name wasn't a typo, there was a trademark issue that resulted in the strange name. The coach was a thing of awe with a swept rear end below a big air intake scoop. The AC/DC bus carried the band, backline, and a smallish PA system.

The crew was accustomed to working fast, since the band was on board—there was never any waiting around for the group to roll up. Bon Scott would leer out the windows at girls, waving a bottle of Red Label, and with a fag hanging out of his mouth. The coach was handy at the end of a gig for the band to retire into while the crew loaded it.

Back then, no one thought about consequences, and I think there were few. The parade of gorgeous young—and some were too young—women were essentially competing to get laid. We assisted them in their endeavours.

Sex, dope, and rock n’ roll all equalled teenage heaven. That’s what was on the cover of the Daddy Cool album, and those were primary drivers in our lives. The free love, drop-out movement from California hit Australia in 1971, and we were all of that era. People would get naked, and get stoned, without much prompting at all.

Our lives were flipped upside down. The rest of the world was

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mostly straight and conservative, TV was slowly transitioning from black and white to colour, and it wasn't that long ago that *square* people wore hair cream and danced under fluoro lights to cheesy pop groups wearing badges that said 'I like Swipe'. We had long hair. We were anti-establishment. We were in the rock industry.

We got arrested.

Literally everyone smoked dope, pot, ganja, weed, cannabis, bonges, joints and spliffs. Sometimes all at once. LSD and acid were prevalent. Heroin wasn't on the scene, neither was cocaine. Alcohol was part of the mix, but most gigs were in halls that weren't licensed.

There were some disothèque venues that programmed bands, and towards the end of the decade the pubs started to open up in a big way as audiences grew up, coming out of the schools and community halls.

The police were very interested in long-haired hippy rock-types, and would routinely pull us over and search us. There were no breathalysers so we were more prone to drink-driving. Sydney to Melbourne required a bottle of Southern Comfort. We had just escaped the National draft, which Whitlam abolished a few years earlier. Soldiers returned from Vietnam were pilloried as murderers and didn't go to rock gigs.

Sex was happening everywhere. The worst thing that could happen was you got venereal disease and had to visit the Blue Light Clinic to deal with the riot in your underwear—thanks to Billy Thorpe for that quote. The pill had liberated women and the media was full of free love and desire. *Number 96* was a TV soap that featured women taking off their clothes in every episode. If you couldn't get laid, it was because you were too afraid to ask.

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Guys virtually did just that: see a girl at a gig, sidle up and suggest a walk outside. Code: have sex.

Girls didn't think of themselves as groupies. They would simply try and do anything to get close to their idols. Crews were well placed as intermediaries. Pants down, transaction, introduction, and a motel room number.

After load out, of course.

On the road we would pull into a town, circumnavigate the main street, and back up to the rear of the hall. There was always a hall attendant to open up, and usually the place smelled of fresh floor polish. The timber floor was all pristine, and there was usually a plaque above the stage commemorating the fallen.

By the end of the night we would be in some fluoro-lit fibro motel room with a ceiling fan and a breakfast hatch on the wall, keeping the rest of the place awake with booze and girls, yelling and smoking. Sometimes an enraged father would arrive with a couple of uncles, looking for Darlene, Debbie or Donna. Sometimes we would get run out of town by the police.

Some of the bigger bands played extremely hot gigs packed with thousands of punters. There were no controls on venues, no noise laws, and no reason to cool down a hot crowd who would drink more. Press reports had some rock stars needing oxygen side-stage. We carried a tank alright, but it wasn't oxygen, it was nitrous oxide. You could buy it anywhere they sold industrial gas, no questions asked. We bought CO2 gas for our Genie foggers and pneumatic lighting stands. So adding on a cylinder of nitrous was easy. If they asked, we said it was for the caterer, since they used it to whip cream. Sucking a face full of that stuff gave you a rush, but it also knocked you out. I had a balloon full one night after a gig and woke up after hitting the floor. I was being tenderly ministered

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by a girl—her care extended beyond a bandaid.

Some girls respond well to blood, it seems.

We were primitive. But the conditions were too. Air conditioning wasn't common. Deodorant was Uncle Sam, or Brut 33. The truck was petrol-engined with four on the floor. Power brakes were a luxury, power steering very optional. The truck cabin had a vinyl bench seat, no heater, no radio, and no air vents.

Phones were made of Bakelite and phone numbers had six digits. To call interstate or overseas you needed an operator. Air tickets were crazy expensive, and exactly the same price on TAA or Ansett. Even the flights left at the same time—Australia had a two-airlines system that was totally regulated. Two competing DC9s would take off from somewhere ridiculous, like Proserpine, and land at the same time in Brisbane.

There were no faxes, we used telex machines that fed out typed telegram-style messages—or we sent a telegram, and presumably some kid on a bike would deliver them. The last telegram I ever got was from a girl. “I hate your guts,” it read.

We wore denim, and tee-shirts, and running shoes. Our long hair was greasy and the food was too. McDonalds had just opened at Yagoona in Sydney, and Kentucky Fried, as it was known back then, had been going a while. Fast food was usually made by a Greek guy in a blue coat at a suburban takeaway and washed down with a milkshake.

At the gig there was no three-phase power, which is the safe way to run lots of electrical equipment. We scrounged single circuits from around the place, running long leads. Soon we needed more. The Miniset 10 dimmer and the new Jands dimmer needed three-phase, so we made our own single-phase to three-phase adaptors. But to get real power, you needed to tap into the

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switchboard at the gig. We did it live, with the master switch on, screwing bare wires into the back of the porcelain fuse holders.

There was no FM radio, only AM with the radio station names printed on the tuner dial. 2SM, 3XY ... those radio stations had immense power, and the DJs would routinely turn up at gigs in their tight denim flairs and walk out with a gorgeous woman. We wore platform shoes, men had perms. We all had too much hair, everywhere.

Bands would be paid maybe eighty bucks as a support act through to a couple of hundred bucks for a headline show. Crew got about ten dollars a night each. The Sydney Harbour Bridge toll was twenty cents.

Legends were born, but some were killed off early.

Safety was not a concept. There were a series of road accidents, the most horrible involved two Swanee crew members whose truck ran off the Hume Highway and burned down to the wheel hubs.

Because we were ready and willing to drive overnight after a gig, usually fuelled by drugs and booze, we were more prone to dying. It helped if the band paid for the drugs and booze—somehow that seemed an honourable arrangement. Death seemed less fatal then than it does now.

It was ridiculously easy to smash the car, truck, or van. My Kombi came to an early end on the Bulli Pass when I ran into a truck. I remember the random thought at the moment of impact, *Gee, the truck is inside the Kombi, on the passenger seat*. I could reach over and touch the side. I walked away, not scratched, covered in glittering windscreen shards and soaked from the rain.

One night my Ford F350 truck ran off the road and, as it careened out of control, brushed an overhanging tree branch. I had been asleep behind the wheel, and the branch gave me enough of a

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wakeup to somehow bring the thing under control and not hit anything.

I found out how a rental car will spin out of control. I did it once on the Pacific Highway, and once on the New England Highway. Somehow there was a break in the oncoming traffic both times. I also found out that those speed advisory signs on corners actually make sense. I overshot a corner—and again there was fortunately a break in the oncoming traffic.

Fall off a tall ladder and not break any bones? Get hit over the head with a steel bar and just bleed without brain damage? Maybe I *was* brain damaged.

Then heroin *did* become a thing and there was a rash of deaths associated with the drug as people miscalculated doses. For all who died, there were just as many lives wrecked or simply left behind.

A lot of brains were fried by drugs, plenty became alcoholics, and some people were taken out back and bashed senseless by uncles or fathers or bouncers or gangs. A bashing was seen as something routine and I don't remember anyone afraid of being charged with assault. You were judged by how you handled yourself, how you handled your liquor or alcohol, and how many women you laid.

Those of us who established families left our beloved at home to become rock and roll widows, expected to be happy with the occasional phone call. Some crew burned the relationship candle at both ends; free love meant no responsibility. Women with women. Wives with mates. Mates with wives. Men with men. Nothing was going too far.

Insidiously there were underage girls everywhere, and no one seemed to go to jail for carnal knowledge when birthdays were

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revealed. There was a totally alien and almost surreal attitude to morality which we've dramatically reprogrammed since.

There was no responsibility for *anything*.

Like when some genius at Hertz decided to "corner the music industry", and they hired us Falcon wagons and trucks at a flat rate with no insurance excess and a no-fault replacement scheme. We put two new wagons into wrecker yards on one trip to Queensland, yelling at the Hertz chick when we were forced to await a replacement for two hours in Kempsey.

For a while we blew things up, until it got ugly and someone got killed.

I experimented with gunpowder. If you mixed in some magnesium powder it got brighter. But then I discovered a fireworks company would sell flash powder over the counter, so I was typically carrying a kilo of grey powder in my attaché case.

We had flash pots and strips of roof gutter filled with a trail of powder. If we didn't have igniters, a camera flash bulb would do it. We had twelve-volt power supplies and a firing board, and too much fun. Sometimes the band got more than they bargained for. We didn't care.

The music industry grew at a staggering rate through to the first half of the 1980s. Bands could and did sell hundreds of thousands of vinyl albums and singles, promoters and managers could and did skim plenty of money off the gullible. If you're drunk and stoned, it's hard to count banknotes.

The audiences were bedazzled by the emerging colour TV, and Countdown came along. But cinema sound was basic and movies couldn't compete with the loud ballsy sound we produced. We had big bottom end and sizzling highs, and our lighting rigs were bright. We were technicolor in a monochrome world.

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There seemed to be no stopping the music business.

By the end of the decade, halls were giving way to beer barns and pubs that crammed in 1,500 punters. When The Angels and Cold Chisel toured, the door gross could be over \$10,000 in cash.

The highways always had a band truck passing by. We used to spot the other crews, meet them at roadhouses, and stop when they broke down. By the early eighties we were all driving five-tonne Isuzu pantechs, and soon eight-tonners. Still with no air conditioning, still with vinyl seats. I remember the summer heat in Queensland, windows open, sweat dripping out of my shorts onto my thongs. Bare-chested. Swigging Fosters down the highway. A cassette tape of Little River Band playing. My girlfriend chucked a banana milkshake out the window and it blew right back in. The back of the truck—hot as hell. Inside the gig, stale beer smell, sweat, puke, de-odour gas on sticky pub carpets. Gaff tape on everything, sharp staples from hastily hung stage rags. Innocently yelling "hang the blacks"—the backdrop—and getting into a fight with a table full of aboriginals in a beer garden.

Big and packed venues like the Playroom on the Gold Coast, Bombay Rock, and the Bondi Lifesaver, small and packed venues like the Manzil Room or the Khardoma Café. Strange pubs in country towns, little bowling clubs whose secretary managers had been stitched up by a booking agency into believing that paying \$8000 for a band on a Tuesday would save the place.

There was a lot of cash changing hands. I was always pushing a drug dealer out of the way to get paid by the tour manager. Some people fabricated some wild stories about why and how money had disappeared. Lies and more lies, promises and unreality. Just show me the money.

It was still the cash era, before electronic banking, before

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computers or internets, no emails, no GST, no mandatory reporting if you deposited twenty grand cash at the bank. Mainly the cash was kept out of the bank and dished up in one and two dollar bills stuffed into the attaché case that was *de rigueur* back then.

The rip-offs were routine, the cheque often bounced, and hollow promises were thick on the ground. There were bikers, fires, fists and guns. Hookers and dealers, groupies and managers, record company staff who really thought they wrote the songs, and booking agents who lied for a living. Dope diesel and degradation. Then there were the rock stars.

Amongst the struggles, drugs, fatigue, violence and the egos, there were some people who were complete utter bastards, who practiced the art of duplicity and who just didn't care about others. A few still work in the industry and are well-avoided by those who remember—most of the rest are dead.

I smelled the turning point in 1984 and got off the road, a road that peaked with Whispering Jack shifting twenty-four platinum records several years later. Somehow we faded as our audience grew up and had kids.

AIDS and random breath-testing took the fun out. Bolivian marching powder—cocaine—and speed made people crazy. How would you feel? You're tired, jaded, trying to do your gig, and a guy is yelling spittle into your face for no reason, or trying to take a swing at you? Telling you that you can't do this or that, turn the PA down, just being ridiculous. Refusing to load out after the gig—the list goes on. I remember them all. Sometimes the best response was a microphone stand over the head. Take a nap, sunshine.

I carry enough scars, enough broken teeth, and like most old roadies I have a back injury that flares up when it is cold. And I'm

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half deaf, with a liver that's suffered more than most.

We fought, we struggled against the authorities, we exceeded our limits, and we had a burning passion for the music. Ours was a generation with a big gap between us and the confused pre-war generation who parented us. These weren't the good old days at all, really; these were bad times with flashes of brilliance.

I used to cringe when someone called me a roadie. Now I'm proud of it.

You should have seen that damned Clipper coach ...

Chapter 2: The Smell of Fire

I grew up in the slum of East Sydney with the smell of leaking gas and excrement in the back lanes only overpowered by the exhausts of endless old cars and trucks grinding up Palmer Street and turning into Stanley Street. That was the route south from the Cahill Expressway and the wharves at Woolloomooloo. The traffic went twenty-four hours a day until the Eastern Distributor tunnels came along in the nineties and transformed everything.

We lived in a crumbling sandstone church house with a leaky roof. Pots and pans for drips and mould were my world. Black dust coated everything. I had mouth ulcers and sty-eyes in my primary school years from malnutrition and lack of basic sanitation.

“*Sit* at that table and eat that banana,” Mum would yell at me. I hated banana, and peas. We were fed dry stale multigrain bread, and honey not sugar. The rice was brown, the meat was streaked with fat, and the potatoes were mashed with too much milk and no salt.

Born to English parents in 1957, my childhood featured a lot of stony silences in between bitter arguments and the odd thrown china crockery. Suffice to say they split in acrimony in 1963.

My father moved to a large terrace in Woomera Avenue, Potts Point, where he sublet the rooms, slumlord style. He fancied himself as a Bohemian. His friends were folk singers and artists. I found them smelly, boring self-indulgent twats. His double room had wooden statues from an adventure he once had in New Guinea. A reel-to-reel tape recorder and his Bolex camera were in pride of place—the props supporting his conviction of his brilliance as a film director.

In truth, Dad led the Film Unit for the Sydney Water Board. He directed short promotional films covering exciting developments at

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Warragamba Dam, or a new road—since the unit was loaned out to other State Government departments. But in his bachelor pad, he was Dennis Stafford Grafton, Film Director—and supposedly a very talented abstract painter.

With some sense of duty I would go visit him after school, and one day let myself in when I found the front door was open. I was with Theo, my Greek mate. We were ransacking Dad's pad and looking for something to eat when Theo spotted the Sony reel-to-reel.

“Whatta is dat?” he asked in his thick Greek accent.

“Oh, Dad has his weird tribal stuff, songs, and other stuff on there”, I said, while a brilliant idea formed. “I know, let's record our *own* song.”

With that, Theo and I sung a few ditties and made some cool tribal chanting—it ran maybe four minutes until we got bored. We were banging on the native drums he had nearby. Then I rewound the tape and helpfully left it cued and ready for Dad to enjoy.

It transpired that Dad attracted some gullible girl up to his room to see his art, and decided to flip the mood to romantic with some tribal soundtrack. About thirty seconds into the real thing our melodic masterpiece sprung from the speaker. I'm guessing it didn't work out for him, as he was most unhappy. Hopefully, she laughed her arse off.

My parents were miserable people by default and blamed post-war Britain from where they'd fled on a ten quid fare. Disdainful of Australian English, they corrected me as often as they could, which led me to broaden my natural-born Australian accent by way of innocent defiance.

It turned out they variously didn't want children. It was either Mum's fault or Dad's fault, depending on the outpouring. The

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absence of affection was normal to me until I saw how other people touched, jostled, and kissed their children. I was oblivious to what I hadn't seen or experienced.

Heffron Park was the only patch of grass nearby. Only years later I was old enough to walk to Hyde Park. Crown Street Public School was set in an ocean of asphalt, baking hot in summer. Trees were inconvenient in the 1960s, and you didn't need a permit to cut them down. Sydney City Council didn't allow street trees—now there are 29,000 of them.

It's hard to imagine today that Sydney Harbour smelled really, really bad. Dead cats, rubbish, oil, sewerage, and every kind of flotsam bobbed about. No one wanted to live by the water near the wharves, and upstream in Balmain raw pollution was pumped and dumped.

The smell of fire was a constant. People burned coal for heat, incinerated rubbish in forty-four gallon drums, and set fire to the occasional tyre for God-knows what reason. The biggest smell of all could be a burning house or factory, and in the sixties there were a lot of those before smoke detectors and modern fire regulations.

I loved a fire. I would chase the fire engines on my old Malvern Star pushbike, and one quiet ANZAC day happened upon one of the most awesome fires in Sydney's history. An abandoned five-story department store on the corner of Oxford and Riley streets was burning. The Buckingham's fire is still in the Fire Brigade's training manuals, and one grainy press photo I found online shows a crowd across the road, with a boy in front standing in a loop of fire hoses. That was me.

I grew up with smells.

Chapter 3: Fists and Fumes

My earliest memories were a little cottage at Pymble, up in the northern suburbs, amongst the trees with a little stormwater creek out the back. But that idyll ended the day we moved to Crown Street and into a grotty third-floor flat of an old block above a Maltese cake shop that was the front for a betting ring. An old wooden wardrobe smelled of mothballs. Inside the door someone had drawn a simple house in chalk, with flames. It scared me, so I kept the door shut. I was scared of the dark too.

From that third floor I could see the old Water Board complex over the road, where men with Globite cases would enter at 7:00 a.m. and bundy on for a day in the workshops. Then later at nine o'clock the white-collar workers would file into the grim office building. My dad was one of them.

I was enrolled at a pre-school around the back lane, where the visiting nurse decided I had knocked knees and directed Mum to get leg-irons fitted. I clunked around in these contraptions which had leather straps. The front and the back were hinged, and my little legs were locked in to them.

At least I was toilet trained, happy not to be the kid who filled his pants and got slapped for it after they wiped him down in full view of everyone. The smell of shit was so common. The homeless drunks would squat in the doorways in the back alley, or on a vacant block nearby overrun with sticky weeds that left pungent prickles in my woollen jumper.

Something happened with a paper boy and Dad. Stern people were coming and going, and he was looking flushed and guilty. Mum fought more with him, and she started to invite men over for tea when he was at work. One man had a cleric's collar, and she introduced him as Reverend Cole.

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We knew no uncles, aunties, or grandparents. Mum and Dad never talked about their families. Instead they talked about the great London fog that almost brought down Churchill, and about their happier days in Sweden where they worked in theatre together painting scenery.

Every other day we would go to Oxford Street to buy food. Where today it has restaurants and nightclubs, it was then a high street of Greek grocers, butchers, and with fruit and veg barrows either side. On Saturdays there was a raffle with a Catherine wheel, evidently a legal form of gambling at a time when there were but two government-run lotteries, the Opera House lottery and a smaller edition.

Upstairs near Taylor Square was an SP bookie den with a couple of lookouts at the door to yell out when the police raided. The Greek travel agent had exotic brochures of cruises and airlines, and places that were vividly coloured, at a time when I just remember everything was grey.

Mum spent a bit of time selecting brochures, and it turned out she had a secret. The brochures would be part of it, a journey that would in a few short years almost destroy my life.

The Thorley family was next door. Ron Thorley was a professional wrestler who was strangely gentle and reeked of Vicks VapoRub. They were civil, but we were a family that didn't make friends easily. It was probably because of my parents, who saw themselves as culturally and intellectually above the Australian unwashed. But I sometimes played with their daughter, Reika.

There was a day when some older children took Reika and me into that vacant block down a path through the urban weeds, stepping around those piles of shit. We were almost four, but we

knew what was "dirty". A packing case was open at the top and on one side, and just big enough for us to sit facing each other.

"Now pull off your pants," a girl said. "Put your penis in her vagina." It seemed strange—yet somehow I knew what she meant, but we didn't know how to do it. We looked at our genitals, we looked at each other. We shrugged.

A council worker on the corner of the lane won the lottery, so our occasional rides on the back of his maintenance truck ceased when he moved away. Aside from the green and yellow buses, we would walk everywhere else—and that was to and from the shops. That was it.

Heffron Park was about three blocks up and we would beg to go there. Most of the time I was barefoot, and broken glass and dog shit was a constant problem. Not to mention trying to avoid that older girl and her gang of bullies.

Eventually I started school just a few doors up at Crown Street Public, an imposing 18th century monolith with black bitumen playgrounds and brick shelters. Our kindergarten class would line up with Years One and Two for the morning milk issue, a quarter-pint bottle that had been delivered much earlier and left sitting in the sun in wire crates. The milk monitors—a revered job because you could escape the scrutiny of the teachers and avoid consuming the milk—would hand you the bottle and the teachers would yell, "*Drink.*"

The occasional milk strike gave relief. Like much of industrial Sydney at the time, the Milk and Ice Carters and Dairymens Employee's Union would walk off the job with little provocation, much to the chagrin of the Amalgamated Milk Vendors Association.

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Australia in the 1960s was a regulated regime of rules, rituals, and red tape. The Cold War was raging with headlines about ‘The Reds’ and ‘Secret Weapons’. There wasn’t much space for diversity, equity wasn’t in the lexicon, and if you wanted a Thai meal you needed to catch a boat to Thailand.

In my classroom, Miss Campbell wore a pleated skirt, blouse, stockings in summer, and sensible shoes. There wasn’t any laughter, but we did get to sing. For some reason I was plucked out of my seat, made to stand before the rest of them and sing ‘Jumbo the Elephant’ as a solo. It’s my first recollection of humiliation. Many more would follow.

I was a wanderer, eternally curious like most little children. One day, with a running nose and off sick, I explored the lanes behind the school. A teacher spotted me from the playground and angrily swooped, grasping my little arm hard and dragging me into the office.

“Why are you not at school?” she barked.

I stammered, short of words, breathless in fear and confusion. The janitor walked me home and left me at the back gate. This was well above their duty of care, at a time when children were more of a procedural annoyance than a joy.

My troubled start to school life paled compared to the turmoil at home, where one evening Mother announced we were moving, but without Dad. Their marriage had sputtered to a halt after the struggles of life got too hard for them. Mum had revealed an affair with the—very married—Reverend Cole, now Dad knew about it, and the reverend was going to set us up in a new place.

It seemed like a very long distance to walk to school. We were now down at Palmer Street, Darlinghurst, and it was four blocks up the hill to Oxford Street, then two more blocks to the school.

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The house was enormous—an 1850's sandstone-terraced mansion next to the church and with three levels. Thanks to the reverend, it was ours for a peppercorn rent. It had been used as a men's shelter, had old metal-framed beds in many rooms, and a harmonium.

Right next door was a boarding house that later would become a huge brothel. On the corner lived David Smith, an urchin slightly older than myself who resided with his screeching mother, younger brother, and blue-collar dad who never wore anything except a blue singlet and shorts, ever. They were assiduously snubbed by Mum who would assume the haughty pose on any accidental encounter.

All the residents were migrants and blue-collar workers, wharfies, delivery drivers, and labourers. Across Stanley Street was one of many Greek corner stores, staffed eighteen hours a day by a mature-aged couple wearing light blue uniforms. These stores were universally dark, with the sound of old refrigerators labouring and the smell of olives. The lollies were in jars along the front of the counter and sold by quantity, placed in little white paper bags.

Instead of supermarkets there was a store on every block, including one almost opposite which Mum insisted we boycott and she never explained why.

Mum had set up a weaving studio. Her weaving commissions kept us alive. She became an artist of note.

Chapter 4: End of Days

Everything happened in the 1960s. We went from mono to stereo, monochrome to colour, lo-fi to hi-fi, and we went to the moon. Rock and pop were invented off swing and jazz. We went from valve to solid state. The pill changed so much. People awoke after the austerity of the post-war decade.

Folk singers and artists smoking joints are rather dull people when you're aged eleven. One dude called Juan took particular delight in prophecies of destruction. He told me about a 1959 movie called "On The Beach". I'll let Wikipedia fill you in:

"In early 1964 (five years in the future), in the months following World War III, the conflict has devastated the entirety of the Northern Hemisphere, killing all humans after polluting the atmosphere with nuclear fallout. Air currents are slowly carrying the fallout south; the only areas still habitable are in the far reaches of the Southern Hemisphere.

"Australian survivors detect an incomprehensible Morse code signal coming from the presumed-dead West Coast of the United States. The American nuclear submarine, USS Sawfish, now under Royal Australian Navy command, is ordered to sail north and make contact with the sender of the Morse signal.

"The Australian government arranges for its citizens to receive suicide pills or prepared injections so they may end their lives quickly before there is prolonged suffering from radiation sickness."

We were freshly reminded of the Cuban Missile Crisis which came very close to exactly the scenario above. Juan had a new horror story for me the following week. This was my introduction to germ warfare which, Juan assured me, was more likely to kill us

than The Bomb. It was really, really scary to hear. Again, I'll plagiarise Wikipedia for this one:

“Following World War II, the United States biological warfare program progressed into an effective, military-driven research and production program, covered in controversy and secrecy. Production of US biological warfare agents went from "factory-level to laboratory-level". Throughout the cold war, the United States and the Soviet Union would combine to produce enough biological weapons to kill everyone on Earth.”

He came back a while later with a catalogue of terror: anthrax, tularemia, brucellosis, Q-fever, VEE, and botulism. Staphylococcal enterotoxin B, smallpox, EEE and WEE, AHF, Hantavirus, BHF, Lassa fever, Coronavirus (!), melioidosis, plague, yellow fever, psittacosis, typhus, dengue fever, Rift Valley fever (RVF), CHIKV, Newcastle disease, bird flu, and the toxin ricin. He detailed how we could expect to die from most of them.

Dude should have hung around and become an ice cook. He sure did know his chemistry.

The thing that registered in my impressionable mind, as Simon and Garfunkel warbled away on the stereo, was that Juan was *enjoying* my fear and discomfort as he droned on, pulling on his smelly joint. Mother wasn't concerned, children could endure anything and indeed we were being exposed to everything.

Growing up with a sense of doom and annihilation was tempered by wiser voices saying, "Plan for the worst, hope for the best." But all this talk really did affect my young life.

When I married my first wife, Caroline, we had emergency plans. If her daughter, Sarah, was at school, who would grab her, and where would we meet if the balloon went up? No mobile

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phones, remember. At that stage we'd bought a country property, so there was a loose plan to go there. But nothing looked secure.

It took the collapse of the Soviet Union and the apparent end of the Cold War to make me feel like this world was more secure. I went through recessions, 9/11, the GFC and then all of a sudden in early January 2020 I read about the Corona Virus. I started buying extra groceries, on the quiet, and told my adult daughter to do the same. When the panic buying started, we were done. I quietly reinforced the security around the house, and kept the fuel tank full in the car.

Our various millennial children were hit hard by the chaos of the shutdown in 2020—they had not lived through anything that foretold of this and were bewildered and frightened. I'm pretty sure that it will happen again.

Chapter 5: Lighting a Strip Show is Deadly Boring

The stripper slinks on, raunchy music plays at full blast, lights follow the action.

Watching the people watching the *strippers* is conversely interesting, but becomes dull once your senses are attuned to the fundamentals. The place is grungy, worn, and smells of sweat, perfume, Old Spice, cigarette smoke, and male lust.

The audience is usually pre-loaded but keep drinking anyway. They start by ogling, which is the *phwoah* moment, then they just latched their eyes on the girl. She has a three-minute routine that starts in lingerie and ends in almost nothing. By the end she has rotated around the guys and collected some cash. Rinse and repeat.

The bouncers are titanic sides of beef. Some are off-duty bikers, others just bad guys looking for biff. Two work inside the room, intimidating the men who try to get handsy with the girls, and throwing the odd one out. There were no real rules around crowd management; it was whatever you could get away with.

Kings Cross in Sydney was a kind of sanitised sleazy when I was a boy, trying to get inside. Clubs like Pink Pussycat tried to look sophisticated on the outside. By the time I was lighting stuff, the facades had aged but not as bad as the people inside. Some of the guys still had Brylcreemed hair, although that slicked-back thing was on the wane.

My first shift as a lighting operator was fairly interesting since I hadn't seen a strip show, ever. But I knew this kind of scene. I was on first-name terms with the hookers at the brothel next door to our place in Palmer Street. A few years earlier I'd become useful to them when they were raided by 21 Division, who were notorious for shaking down the girls for bribes. I'd found a girl quaking in terror in our outside dunny, and I opened up the church next door

as an escape route for her.

The thick makeup and cheap perfume did little to detract attention from the main attractions, and at the strip club it was all laid out. Half the girls were hardened drug-users, the other half more down on their luck. They were all innocents at first, but not for long. They all shared a form of camaraderie, forged out of the monotony, morosity, and tedium. I got to know Saffron Drawers, Sodomous Sally, and Pamela Spudcakes. I gave Venereal Denise a wide berth.

From routine stripping, the career path for the girls ran to the adult peep show downstairs, performing some form of perversion in a room surrounded by individual booths with glass windows. It was a whole new set of smells, mostly disinfectant, but also sweat and desperation. The girls would lounge on a shag carpet podium, dressed in not much, and when a guy put a coin in the slot, his window cover would rise. The girls would approach the glass and start to dance.

After a couple more coins, and some gymnastics that revealed more than even a gynaecologist wants to see, the guys would usually be primed to step into a private 'performance space' for some one-on-one. Those sessions in a grotty, dim room with suspicious splatters everywhere presumably were all-in. There were no bouncers to call for help, and security cameras had not been invented.

After each guy left the peep booth, a worker would emerge from the end office and quickly mop out the booth. And no doubt pick up the discarded paper tissues. The mop bucket was filled with a mix of turgid water and cheap disinfectant. It had the effect of spreading the floor slop into slurry. Your shoes would stick slightly with each step. The booth walls were not cleaned, it

seemed. They glistened with congealed, alarming streaks in various stages of decay. The sperm count would have broken the Guinness Book of Records, if anyone cared to try and measure it.

One night, Vladimir the lead bouncer sidled past the lighting booth and told me something in his tortured English. "Jules, you should have the look downstairs, guy. This girl, she from Germany, it is to see, of like think you don't see. For true." That piqued my interest, so in the break I went down.

She must have been in a circus. She had a rather large dildo, and was very busy ingesting it when I popped my coin. It was quite the scene—where previously in a tent show a gleaming sword had—perhaps—gone down the hatch, in its place was the biggest fake shlong possible, and sure enough, she was making it all go away.

It wasn't clear who owned the place, but the presence of Abe Saffron, 'Mr Sin' was felt. He was everywhere and nowhere, using front people like Todor 'the torch' Maksimovich and Dawn O'Donnell. Dawn is credited as the architect of Gay Oxford Street, and she sure did run a few clubs.

Such was the scene at the house of titillation. I hated it all, the money was rubbish, and I had better things to light. I moved down the road to light an underground drag show. They were way more fun.

Dawn's influence on the gay scene was everywhere. A bit later I was working for Roger Barratt who had a love/hate relationship with Dawn. We put a lighting system into Jools Nightclub on Crown Street and, true to form, the cheques from Dawn were either slow or bounced. Roger decided he'd had enough and sent me down to pull out the system.

I brushed past the receptionist on a Tuesday afternoon with my twelve-foot stepladder and climbed up over the dance floor to

unhitch the sixteen-inch mirrorball from its motor. At that precise moment, an enraged Dawn ran into the venue yelling at me to get out or else. She reached the ladder and started shaking it violently while I was holding onto the top of the mirrorball for tenuous support. The attack abruptly ended with an announced phone call, clearly more important than ridding her club of the infidel. I packed up the equipment as fast as possible and got out of there, the ladder shoved in the back of the van with the door open as I zoomed off to a few blocks away where it was safe to secure everything and tie the ladder to the roof racks. It's fair to say Dawn terrified me.

It was a smart thing that we grabbed out our gear. Because a bunch of Dawn's clubs had mysterious fires over the next few years. None of our equipment was in them.

Chapter 6: Fuck You, Harris

I didn't like school, and school didn't like me. My school education crashed to a halt the day in 1972 Mr. H.K. Harris expelled my spotty face—and the rest of me—from Vaucluse Boys High School. It wasn't a happy relationship. Probably, one of us had to go. I thought he was over-reacting a little.

Earlier, Harris had zeroed in on me at assembly because I had greasy, long hair. Most of the guys at VBHS were descendants of the Holocaust generation who'd suffered terribly in the war. The boys were a turbulent mob.

I was clearly hippy scum. Harris dished up a few strokes from his ever-present cane. He would get excited and have trouble with his 'H'. Maybe that's why he was called "H.K". His middle name was Keith, so maybe the H was for horrible?

I got legal and had Mum write a letter requiring I not be caned. It served to annoy him somewhat. Next time, when the geography teacher pulled me out to the front of class for a couple of strokes, I kept my hands in my pockets and said, "You can't do this." It caused a problem in the ranks, as I'd done it in front of the other students. Really, I didn't give a living shit about the pain. It was a matter of principle. Me *versus* the principal.

The school had a malevolent vibe. After sport you were required to strip naked for a shower in 'the block', which had cold water showers in one long room. Johnstone, the sports master, was clearly a pervert. He would stand tall, bald, and leering at the door as we ran through the freezing water, clutching our shrivelled genitals.

They had strange rituals, these teachers. Miss Pumpkins was one of the young pretty ones, and being a boys' high school she quickly became very popular. It was not her real name, but

everyone called her that—rather obviously, because she had big tits. She caused a sensation by walking into our shower shed one day. Everyone doubled down on their genital claspings except for Morris, who cracked an immediate and impressive boner.

By then I was obsessed with naked women. I'd snuck in backstage at the Kings Cross Metro Theatre and enjoyed the second half of the rock musical, *Hair*. The part where they have no gear on. I envied the tall, blond lighting dude, not realising he was an alumni of my horrible high school. It was the famous Bruce Jackson.

Later I would hear a lot more about Bruce, in the loft in the hall, where I had somehow become a junior gofer for John Levine, the sixth form technician. John showed me the pirate radio control panel that Bruce Jackson and Phil Story had made a few years earlier. Pirate radio was a thing. These guys somehow fooled Harris and managed to operate this clandestine radio broadcast from the upper reaches of the hall loft, out of sight.

It would still be a couple of years until I connected *that* Bruce Jackson with Jands, Australia's largest rock and roll production company where he was the 'J' and Phil Story was the S—in JandS, get it? And in a life-is-strange case of serendipity, I became friends with the guy who was, without any doubt, the greatest live sound engineer in the world. Just ask Elvis (RIP) and Bruce Springsteen. Or Babs Streisand. Bruce passed away in 2011, and I am honoured to have written the foreword in the book about his times, written by his brother, Gary, who in turn has penned the foreword to this book.

Empowered by my nocturnal sneakiness and success at the Metro Theatre, I tried to get into the Pink Pussycat which I knew was *not* a place containing furry animals. The big goon down the

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alley caught me and was going to give me a couple of tender touch-ups, except I smiled and said, "Hey, that was a good attempt, right?"

All of which had nothing to do with me getting expelled.

The anti-conscription movement called the 'Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam' was holding large protest marches, and the boys and I were pasting up posters to promote the next one. Using glue made from flour and water, six of us slapped up half a dozen posters around the school late one night. The guy with me decided the principal's window was an excellent target, so we set about the task. I slopped on the paste in haste and turned to let him apply the poster. Problem was, he had disappeared—and in his place was a security guard who apprehended me and drove me home to an appreciative mother.

So Mr. Harris gave me my marching orders after a brief lecture, the nub of which was his warning, "Grafton, you'll never even get a job driving a garbage truck." He was correct. And I was delighted as I walked out the front entrance onto Laguna Street. Mum was half supportive, and half mad at me.

Set free at the tender age of fourteen years and nine months I saw out the year at a fabulous experimental school in Paddington called Guriganya, which is Aboriginal for 'decisions made while using bong.' The founders had the best intentions: they wanted a school that was free, free of rules, free of history, and free of shoes. Wear your long hair out, and pay in cash.

Along with about thirty other lost souls I became the class of 1972, and what a year that was. The collective had long and hazy meetings, and even managed to have one without the restrictions of clothing. There were the parents, of course, and some of them even managed to prey on the kids my age. One of the female parents

tried to have sex with the boys. Including me. But I was sheltered by one of the other mothers when that particular woman came searching for me. That frustrated me, since I was ready for whatever it was, even while unsure about any of the mechanics. And she was damn attractive too, in tight denim and with braless tits straining against her shirt. I so wanted to do the bad stuff, touch her—anything.

Access denied, unfortunately.

I saw her next door in the milk bar, buying schoolboys milkshakes and trying to entice them upstairs. Some went up there, grinning. It was the era of that stuff. A mate's family were actors, and his little sister Beanie was encouraged at the age of fifteen to sleep with one of their adult friends. One of my mum's boarders, a peaches-and-cream English woman, early twenties and very buxom, would sit my younger brother on her lap and encourage him to fondle her bosom. That upset me badly—not the morality. Because it wasn't *me*.

The lack of structure became frustrating for all but the seven-year-olds, who just ran feral up and down Oxford Street. My small group of teenage colleagues were too cool for that. We just wandered around, trying to like, arrange concerts, man. We did get one or two off the ground. And we helped out at others, at Paddington Town Hall, and the Cellblock Theatre.

The best part of that was silk-screening the posters at the Uni of Sydney Art Workshop. We went there late at night, and a nice hippy would show us how to make a psychedelic poster and use day-glow ink. We would print all night and walk home before dawn, across the bottom end of town, through Victoria Park, and across Central. We went past a donut factory in Surry Hills, and sometimes scored a couple.

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Naturally we also went out on poster runs to distribute the finished product, and we used wallpaper paste to slap *our* posters over the top of the organised posters on building hoardings. Then two really heavy undercover policemen slapped us around and told us that the real Bill Posters was paying them to leave him alone, and to arrest us.

Otherwise it was boring, walking around the inner city at night. Being without shoes was bad—cuts, cold and dog poo. People tried to beat us up, or worse.

The ethos of the counter-culture was to tune in and drop out, or something. Where were our parents? Out screwing around, getting stoned, or enjoying their so-called freedom?

I hit fifteen years old and went and got a job as a copy boy for News Limited.

FOOTNOTE: It is only a legend that I painted ‘Fuck You Harris’ on the principal’s window. I didn’t. I was busted before I had a chance.

Chapter 7: Sid and Lorna

I'm not certain where, but at age fourteen, I met Sid. A shy and gentle man with flowing red hair, his wife Lorna was a bob-haired brunette with a mean, pinched nose and a petulant child called Neil who was maybe five years old. They lived in an old terrace a couple of blocks from Mum's house in Darlington. Sid was a TV repair dude.

My thing was to seek male role models, because my dad wasn't one. Earlier I'd befriended Eddie van der Madden at the Arts Factory, where he drove the psychedelic lightshow.

Eddie was an on-again, off-again kind of role model as he suffered what I later came to recognise as crippling depression. Some days my knock at his door at the huge boarding house atop the rock at the corner of Liverpool and Bourke Street would stir him from his dirty sheets, and he would stumble to the door in his grungy underwear. I guess my optimistic inquisitiveness distracted him from his demons as he would attempt to engage with me.

The business of seeking role models was fraught. Several wasted hippies came and went, being hair-brained concepts workshopped and then dismissed—by me—as crazy. We all wanted to recreate the now shut Arts Factory which, run by Johnny Allen in some kind of collective, was a fucking awesome place of bands, dope, and dancing chicks without bras. I already had priorities.

Accepting such people into my life—albeit often temporarily—sometimes made me a little careless. A year or so before I woke up to rock music, a guy sidled up on the street and asked me where the Sydney Opera House was being built. He had slicked-back hair, was a little paunchy, and smelled off. Like oil. Like he had come out of a ship's engine room. He said that he was new to town,

and if I showed him down to the Opera House he'd pay me five bucks. Woah. That was a king's ransom. I was the man.

We did the walk and talk for maybe forty-five minutes and circumnavigated the Opera House building site. He needed a wizz and headed towards the mens toilet that is now the Oyster Bar on the Circular Quay side of the Opera House.

"Just come stand inside and make sure no one comes in," he said. Sure enough, he whipped out his semi-erect dick and started jacking himself off, looking straight at me.

I did the *I don't care* shrug, turned away, and then ran off. Mum was horrified.

"He could have hurt you," she said.

"Well *I'm* sad, because I really wanted that five dollars," I told her.

Sid made me an oscilloscope from an old—even for then—black-and-white box valve television set with a sixteen-inch screen. I painted the cabinet red and stencilled "Zapco Lightshow" on it. I made my own stencil with a Stanley knife and a carton, and I found a can of white spray paint in Mum's understairs cupboard.

The TV had a cheap inbuilt piezo mic that Sid scrounged from unclaimed repairs from his shop. It would convert what it heard into an oscillating pattern. Interesting for a minute, then not. But it was another no-cost item of inventory for my fledgling lightshow company that was built on no money and a whole lot of dreams.

Lorna became anti-social one day when I called around to sit and listen to Sid's Pink Floyd album. She started to become hostile, saying to Sid that this wasn't right.

"Why do you see this boy?" she hissed. "I know what you're doing."

He blushed the same colour as his hair.

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"You better not come again," he said to me, looking sad.

Chapter 8: The Random Times of Margaret Grafton

This is about my mother, a private and complex person, who tried to dance to her own soundtrack and died suddenly and alone one cold, August night in 2004. She was tucked into a small, single bed in a loft suspended above a draughty garage. The place had an improvised wood fuel stove.

The loft had been patched and cleared of mould, and was slightly warmer than the floor below. A steep ladder was the access. There was an outdoor toilet in the yard, up some mossy brick steps, the way almost blocked by reaching tendrils of damp plants and creepers.

Mum had improvised the space—that's what she liked to do. Improvise without half-hearted explanations of, "This will do us," or without apology or promise that one day it would be improved. There was no remorse or reflection, or any ambition to make a better home—the space was what the space was. She was always content in her spaces.

The inner city then provided plenty of unwanted places for someone who prefers to live simply. Mum had a line of them: like the unused roof office in my warehouse near Taylor Square. She'd climb two stories down to use the dark, damp staff toilet, and shower with a hand-held spray from an old Zip heater I found somewhere.

At her wake a guy sought me out to say how she'd rented a garage in a share house, and then she'd started to complain that his student friends were too loud. He was there, at the funeral, showing his respects and confused still at the contradictions.

The rollup kind of tells the story of a life—my mother's life.

Brother George, my uncle, came over from New Zealand to attend the funeral. He wasn't coming, then he did, pacemaker

checked and working—at least until I saw him off the next day. He had the unmistakable shadows of resemblance to my mother that only those who are related can see. And the insights into her life that started in a loveless pre-war England.

Mum was raised by her nan, because her mum died in childbirth. Can a child feel guilt aside from detachment? Her dad was aloof and absent. The other brother, Ken, was the coldest human I have ever met, the one time I did.

Ken lived in Birmingham in a large manor house. His wife Audrey was born deaf, so the constant noise of her doing things, like making lunch and yelling at the Bassett hound took a little getting used to. Like George, I could also see some of Mum in Ken, but even she was offended by his coldness and proper, clipped manner of speech. He clearly thought I was some sort of inconvenience, an uncivilised child from the colonies who had the audacity to invite himself and his family to lunch.

The greatest triumph in Mum's life was her work. She wove her tapestries, and throughout my childhood had commissions from law courts and public buildings. Eventually heraldic tapestry faded as an art form, and so did her motivation and money.

She did a doctorate in Greek Philosophy.

The dark side of my mother was a lack of intimacy, of any connection, and a real abiding dislike of men—incongruous for a mother of three boys.

I think she was cheated out of true love by her great romance with Douglas Cole. He may have hurt her more than she deserved, although to have an affair with a married church reverend, especially one with six children of his own, is certainly chancing the wrath of any god.

The affair triggered major, life-changing events for me.

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But the worst episode is one that lives on every day for my brother, Tim.

Chapter 9: Little Boys Alone

The accident was on Monday, July 19, 1965. My little brother, Tim, was aged six and in Grade One at school. I was aged eight and in Grade Three.

The report from St Vincent's Hospital read, "The heavy overcoat on patient 15344 saved his life. The young boy was admitted after being run over by a car."

Tim was under the care and supervision of his brother at the time. That was me.

It wasn't a car—it was a one-tonne Hertz van. Our intersection was a busy black spot. That day we were sitting on the doorstep at Palmer Street. We were locked out.

I walked Tim home every day from school. It was a considerable distance, crossing major roads. Now, we were waiting for the unreliable babysitter arranged by my unreliable father.

This bleak cold Monday afternoon—it had snowed in the mountains—I perched on my upended school bag. Heavy traffic came off the Harbour Bridge and up Palmer Street in those days. It was three lanes becoming two, and a dangerous intersection.

That was when a van ran out of control and up onto the footpath over the top of us.

I jumped out of the way, vaulting off my bag. Tim didn't have a chance.

The van ground along the stone wall and came to a halt in a cloud of smoke.

Tim was laying across the step, still wearing his heavy woollen coat, blood trickling out of the corner of his mouth. I ran at the driver, yelling at him and trying to hit him. A crowd of people materialised, shouting different things. A lady tried to comfort me,

but I was attempting to drag Tim upright, telling him to wake up so we could go inside.

An ambulance arrived, and a police car.

The police took me to St. Vincent's where, I was told, I couldn't go into the emergency room.

The report said, "On arrival he was semi-comatose, pale and shocked. While in casualty his condition deteriorated, he became more shocked. His abdomen became rigid and bowel sounds disappeared. Emergency operation was given after a blood transfusion."

Someone bought me a strawberry-flavoured milk. I took a sip and almost threw up.

Dad arrived, in a terrible state.

Next morning we had a phone call via the shop over the road as we had no phone. Dad took off up the hill, almost running, me dragged along, him mumbling and muttering. Tim had died on the operating table—and been revived. Still, they wanted to give him his last rites.

He had lost a kidney, some of his liver, had a ruptured spleen, stomach damage, a broken leg and—we already knew—was deaf in one ear. He smelled sick, looked sick, and was surrounded by worried doctors and nurses. He had tubes coming out of his little body and couldn't stop vomiting.

He had three more operations and spent three months in hospital.

This was the selfish 60s, as far as my family was concerned. Mum had run away on a vacation to Europe with the not-so-reverend Douglas Cole. She was away for two months at least, or so it was planned. By then, she had already divorced Dad, and he lived over the hill at Potts Point.

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Someone needed to care for us two boys, and Mum had managed to arrange that Dad moved into Palmer Street. He had a job at the time, and he needed to get a baby sitter. A lady who always smelled of booze was to meet us at home after school.

Mum was in Greece and took a message at the hotel. Dad called back on a payphone, on a really bad line and with a limited number of two-shilling coins. They connected, and she got an idea that one or both her children were involved in an accident, condition unknown.

Twenty-four hours later they spoke again, and she heard about Tim.

Decades later, she told me a few years before she died that she went into shock, and then hid. She said she'd waited a week before coming home. She was matter-of-fact—Mum was in denial, and then didn't *want* to come home. Tim was crying for his mum every hour. Dad didn't know what to do, how to comfort him, or me.

Recently I found her passport and to my horror saw it was an entire month after the accident that she returned.

Eventually life became a routine of hospital visits.

When Tim was released, Mum took him to an island owned by a friend of hers off Mackay. They stayed there for several weeks so Tim could convalesce, and so Mum could drink and screw Andrew, the sailor.

Forever after that, my little brother was weak and prone to sickness.

As for me, when my parents died I went through an angry phase over each of them. For leaving us, and for not managing our recovery. They didn't talk about it. They just got on with their selfish lives and left us boys to fend for ourselves emotionally—and often practically as well, living in our slum.

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The trauma of the accident and its aftermath stuck with me until my psychologist finally unpacked it—almost fifty years later.

Chapter 10: Napoleon Reef

Napoleon Reef is to most people a signpost plonked on a pole along the Great Western Highway twenty kilometres east of Bathurst. Not many people know what it is, or why it was called that. I can tell you, the place is named after a *gold* reef that was discovered whenever the gold rush happened. Apparently hundreds of half-crazy men fell on the place and frantically dug holes. There are thousands of those holes left over. On the hill to the north of Little's Access Road is a more organized mine site with some deep shafts and the wreckage of an old boiler. There is crushed quartz everywhere. When I was a kid, there were still old bottles and cans lying around.

If you look long enough, you can see how the mines were arranged. I've got a map in my mind from all those investigations when I was a boy. A boy who wondered how it all worked, and how the people lived.

The Reef, as I call it, sits at the base of Mount Ovens, a long and dominant ridge line that peaks at about 1,200 metres. Driving out of Bathurst towards Sydney, the mountain is in plain view to the left of the highway. The village of Yetholme is near the highway pass that takes the road up to Williams Springs. These days there's a really ugly roadhouse up there.

Most people think the Blue Mountains stop when you descend Victoria Pass or Scenic Hill at Lithgow. But that's a valley, the same valley that wraps around behind Katoomba and winds its way east to the Sydney Water System. The bottom of that valley is defined by the Coxs River. On the way west out of Lithgow you pass the dam that holds most of the river back for power station cooling. A small release regulates what was once a wild river full of trout and platypus.

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Travelling west you climb to Mount Lambie, and then spend about thirty kilometres driving above a thousand metres. This is the highest road between the Snowy Mountains and Armidale. It'll snow there usually about six days a year, and sometimes as late as mid-September.

The first time I went to Napoleon Reef was in 1967 before my youngest brother was born. My mum was in the peak of her affair with the reverend. They purchased the property at the very end of Little's Access Road, a two-acre plot with an old miner's cottage, on the eastern side of Green Swamp Creek. I later owned the property from 1983 until 1991.

Douglas Cole had become the Moderator of the church for a year, and he lived at Crows Nest, in the Church Manse. The place at Napoleon Reef was purchased for a few hundred pounds from someone he met through the church. I think Mum and Cole planned to use it as a retreat.

The first time I went there, we flew on a Douglas DC3. There were bush fires across the mountains, and the flight landed at Bathurst Airport at breakfast time. My brother and I had been plonked on the aircraft in Sydney by our father, who by then had been divorced from Mum for a few years. I don't know what arrangements they had other than my brother and I were staying with our father for a few days, and then Dad abruptly put us on the plane at a crazy early hour.

When we landed at Bathurst, there was no one there to meet us. We became tearful little boys, and the airline staff called the police. The sergeant took us home and spent hours trying to trace Mum and Cole without any info to go on. Dad had no phone—our upbringing featured no phone, no TV ... and break out the violins: no extended family.

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Meanwhile, the sergeant's wife introduced us to Corn Flakes and white sugar.

It was the second time in my life we'd had been traumatically exposed to alien food stuff. We had an upbringing that's best characterised as "macro-biotic poverty meets English village stingy". Bread for us was very wholemeal, the more grain the better, and considered stale only when it turned green. In the 1960s this meant chewy, dry and dull. Sugar? No way—but we had honey. We drank full cream milk and never went near sweets or soft drinks.

So the sergeant's wife had corrupted us with breakfast cereal and sugar. The time before was when we were shipped to some Church Camp at Blackheath and abandoned there for a weekend. They gave us white bread with jam on it. I'd thought that was sensational.

I suspect that trip was the precursor to the acquisition of The Reef. I heard years later, in court when Mum took on Cole's estate for a greater share for my brother, that she and Cole had journeyed out west as part of his greater church role as moderator. They somehow contrived a way for her to be there. It was probably a crazy thing to do.

Eventually Mum and Cole turned up to meet the next flight, which must have been around midday, and the connection was made. Mum was ropeable, and the sergeant dressed her down. She claimed Dad made the mistake. We were used to blame and anger, and just relieved to be in Cole's Holden, headed out to see this place in the bush.

This was the first day in my life I had been out of the city and into the countryside.

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My childhood slum days were at the tail end of the post-war period, before convenience stores and the rapid modernisation of everything that occurred later in the twentieth century—and certainly before we started to see such marvels in our neighbourhood. In our street all the houses were regarded as crappy old terraces, the iceman still delivered blocks for those older folk with ice boxes instead of fridges, and the council still had horse-drawn garbage collection—remnants of a bygone era. Elsewhere, the gentrification of the inner city had started with the housing commission shipping people out to the new experimental gulags at Mount Druitt and Green Valley.

From the bedroom window of our house in Palmer Street I could see endless coal trucks and traffic winding around the corner from the Woolloomooloo wharves. Because there were no stop signs, or indeed hardly any modern form of traffic control, there were smashes every few days. Not many people wore seat belts. I saw some horrible sights.

The bedroom window also gave me a terrific view of Chapel Lane, where men would line up to visit the working girls. There was the occasional stabbing, and at least every few months some house would be torched. I didn't understand until much later why it was that sometimes men would drive slowly past where I was playing, holding up a ten quid note and looking expectantly at me.

No one ever warned me about stranger-danger. But then again, I had no male role model other than Cole and my very preoccupied father, who at that time lived over near the Balmain Wharves. Another grim inner-city landscape that I became familiar with.

Just while I'm railing on about the injustice of circumstance, imagine if all the schools in your area featured not a blade of grass. We played on black asphalt.

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Can you hate where you were brought up? If you don't know of anything better? I didn't hate it, but I sure as hell knew there was a lot more to the world than we had.

Chapter 11: Happy Times in a Bleak Childhood

The miner's cottage was at the very end of three kilometres of dirt road. It sat on a rise at one side of the little property. Down the hill about twenty-five metres was a cluster of fruit trees growing through a hen house. Blackberry was entwined amongst it all, so you couldn't go inside. Whoever had lived in the shack had thrown food scraps to the chooks, thus the trees.

There was a long-drop toilet with a canvas flap as a door.

One end of the cottage had an open fire place in a small room. There was one pokey little window on the boundary side. This small room opened onto a longer space which had a woodfire stove that was half-rusted out.

At the end of the room was a cast-iron double bunk. There was no running water and two single tanks outside, one quite rusty too.

I loved it straight away.

I was terrified of the stars at night.

And without the stars, it was pitch-black.

The place came with an old grey horse called Suzy, who was shy.

Across the creek in a property that my mum named Genotdell—after she bought it later on—was an old guy called Allan, who was best described as a grubby old farmhand. He was sociable and would come over when we were there for a cuppa. He kept an eye on the place and presumably made sure Suzy was okay.

Allan had a collie on a chain who never got walked. Allan shot food and killed snakes, leaving them on an ants nest. He taught me to walk with a stick and to bang the ground every couple of paces to scare the snakes away.

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A pattern emerged where we would go to The Reef every school holidays, and sometimes at Easter. My youngest brother, Daniel, was born—the love child of Mum and Cole, and possibly sired in the cottage. Mum had a big run of government commissions for as many as eight heraldic tapestries for the law courts. So she got a car, a Mini Moke, and we would all make the trip and absolutely freeze. There was no heater. If it rained, the soft canopy would drip and leak. We were stacked in on top of our stuff with a box of fruit between us in the back. Daniel rode in a basinet which was somehow seat-belted across the floor. There were no back seats, but she had two lap belts installed.

It breaks my heart now to think how hard it must have been for Mum. She filled an enamel wash bowl for us to bathe in. Fifteen metres from the door, on uneven rocky ground—everywhere you went there was crushed quartz, because the miners had smashed every rock they could find—the toilet's "long" drop was rather shallow, and the slab had been jacked by a tree root so it was angled. The canvas flap of a door fronted a tin shed. It was sensationally horrible, not to mention utterly freezing or baking hot.

Arriving at The Reef, the first thing was to unpack the car, running and whooping with excitement. We would scamper around and get the firewood, and light it up.

Then, we had to stand very quietly while Mum tried to light the gas fridge. She had to put a wick, soaked in methylated spirits, up a slot at the side and heat the valve, which would open with a *click*. Once the click was heard, she had to move the wick down under the opening to the burner. The valve being open, the burner could be lit. Then she needed to squint through the opening to see those little blue flames that meant the fridge was going.

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Because the fridge was near the door, the wind would blow it out. We developed a habit of putting our hands over the top of the vent to check if heat was coming out. If it was hot, it was working.

Once the fridge was lit, Tim and I would bolt down to check the creek. We would follow a path that wound down to a place on the embankment where Allan had built a rough ladder. Down we would go and savour the running water.

One afternoon an old Holden clattered up to our dead end and four mean-looking young guys climbed out. Mum went out, hands on hips, and in her usual unfriendly way demanded to know what they wanted.

"We want to hunt in the forest," one of them said.

"You can't. I hold the lease," she told them. I walked out the door, looked at the guys, and yelled back into the house, "Dad! Bring the gun!"

It was an outstanding act of bluff and risk, and as they drove off Mum was furious.

"There is no dad, and there is no gun. That was stupid. You could have got us into trouble."

That night I couldn't sleep in my old bunk bed, despite the hot brick from the fire wrapped in an old towel. I kept hearing a car coming down the track. To get us. I had that same horror for years, knowing I was the man of the house and having nothing other than guile and cunning to use as a defence.

At some stage Mum and Cole got worried about old Allan across the creek, because he'd been suckered by a Dutch builder called Theill who got him drunk and made him sign over the title to his place. Allan mustn't have been totally zonked out, because there was some kind of covenant that allowed him to live there afterwards.

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Apparently as soon as the deal was signed, Theill rounded on Allan and became a bitter enemy. Despite this, Theill built a large extension to live in onto Allan's old one-room house, but with no door through to Allan's area.

Allan lived in squalor, and Theill was a strange, ageing builder who drove that most impractical of cars, a VW bug. They lived in battling hillbilly mode, and Allan was heartbroken because he'd thought Theill was a friend. Being sociable, Allan really just wanted company. Instead, he got a war.

Cole negotiated to buy Theill out, but it required some duplicity.

Theill was led to believe that my mum wanted to buy the place, to live there. By this stage I was about sixteen, so we had been going there for seven years or more. Theill and Allan had been co-joined enemies for at least four years. Under the ruse, Theill sold up, and somehow Cole and Mum broke the news to Allan. Of course, poor old Allan, who by then was profoundly deaf and squinting through enormously thick glasses, thought that the devil was moving out, and my mum was moving in. Things weren't exactly improving.

He was devastated and didn't last much longer. By this stage he had advanced to *drinking* metho, rather than just using it to light any fridges, and it doesn't take too long to lose your life that way.

Cole and Mum had periods apart that grew, and finally when Daniel was about nine they split for good. Mum got the properties—the miner's shack property and Genotdell—from Cole as a kind of settlement.

She did try living up there for a year or so with Dan, when I was about nineteen. That was after a traumatic exit from the Manse in

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Palmer Street, an argument which, when I look back, was probably related to the settlement with Cole.

Mum had some experiments with growing Lucerne, and ploughing, and ran her art studio from the shed for a while. She embraced the bohemian life. She was a true contrarian, always taking the opposite view and digging in.

She was enrolled in a doctorate of Greek philosophy at Sydney Uni, and I guess she found the distance bothering.

Unlike the road now, the old highway was a two-lane twisty thing from Lithgow and it took nearly a serious four hours in her Mini Moke from Sydney.

Some of Mum's man-hating female suffragette friends would go visit her up there, but in the end she rented out Genotdell and moved back to Sydney into a rundown place at Glebe. Mum preferred leaky old places, or maybe that's all she could afford.

Part of Mum's character made living in a place like Napoleon Reef impossible. She fought with anyone who she decided was "sexist", so any male over the age of twelve was a probable chauvinist pig. Especially me. Later in my teens she made a raid on my bedroom atop the Manse. I came home from a gig to find my collection of Playboy magazines had been censored. With a thick, black marker pen. The girls now had beards, devil horns, and their important features were blocked out.

Eventually she realised that if she sold Genotdell and The Reef, then she could put a deposit on a house in East Sydney—can you believe it—and decided to do just that. I found myself the only one really visiting The Reef and the old cottage, which was falling into pretty bad disrepair.

My new wife Caroline and I decided we loved it, and bought it for about \$18,500 from Mum in 1983. We did some basic repairs

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and went there on and off, but with no real drive. Because we were building a business together we had little time, and we had a daughter, Jess, in 1986 which slowed us down still more.

So much for the outdoor life, away from the city and in the countryside.

Chapter 12: In My Shoes. Oh Please ...

Jack Stafford is my father's *nom de plume*. He was Dennis Grafton, and most of this chapter is verbatim extracts from the book of his life called, somewhat poetically, *In My Shoes*. He dictated the book in his final decade after a stroke sent him blind. The book arrived in a jumbo mail bag, 200 spiral-bound A4 pages. It quickly reveals his failings.

His first job, he was aged fifteen at a merchant called Biscombs in Wolverhampton. In the charcoal store he was shovelling the stuff into sacks held by the apprentice.

"He kept baiting me until I lost my temper. I have been told later in life that I have difficulty in that, but there is a certain boiling point that comes on. I hit him on the head with the shovel."

His book then skips some years forward and he describes his ten quid migration to Australia on P&O Strathaird with passengers, "Generally speaking, carpenters, plumbers and tradesmen of that kind. I found the passengers very boring. I had no attraction to sport and the conversation was very limited, because they had no interest in the things that interested me."

"I got into a conversation with a couple of girls, they turned out to be Catholics," he wrote. "I pointed out that Asia was overpopulated and needed birth control. They complained to the Catholic priest and he came and berated me. To my amazement the Baptist clergyman came and did the same thing. I had to keep to myself."

"Fortunately my boring cabin mate had become quite ill so I had the cabin to myself from there on. I was able to practice my recorder and read my book."

Eventually landing in Sydney, he cast his experienced eye over the place.

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"This was a quiet backwater where the police raided art galleries and Lady Chatterley's Lover was censored." Then he gets to the chapter called, 'The Swinging 60s'. This is where my memories all kicked in, as I was born in 1957.

"I found a head tenancy of a terrace house in Woomera Avenue, Potts Point. The head tenant collects from each tenant the full rent." He wrote about the many and varied people going through the house, and then comments in passing about being in the army in the Second World War. That's the first I'd heard of that.

He found work at Pagewood Film Studio, designing sets.

"One member of the consortium brought in his scene painter, so that contrary to my best interests, when the program went to air, sub-standard settings were credited to me."

Meanwhile he was on retainer at the Tivoli, an iconic music theatre in Sydney, but someone wanted to hire him to design a set at the Capitol Theatre nearby. Due to some hard-to-follow sequence—the book has some lumpy text—he got fired by the Tivoli and didn't get hired by the Capitol. He says then that the Pagewood Studio set up a company called, 'Jack Stafford Stage Craft'.

"I didn't have much confidence that it would succeed."

This apparently stems from advising the NSW Education Department's drama section on the correct design of multi-purpose school halls—advice which they didn't follow. Indeed his subsequent article in *Architecture in Australia* entitled, 'Dual Purpose Halls and Stages' was run without his by-line.

The Elizabethan Theatre Trust's supervisor of staging, "Like most people working in the theatre in Australia, didn't have a great understanding of theatre craft." Jack Stafford apparently wasn't savvy with the concept of winning friends and influencing people.

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Somehow he pulled off a project that was a twenty-one minute film on the history of Venice, as told through a large series of litho prints that he obtained. It took a strangling three years to get to TV on the ABC, and he says it's in the National Film Archive. I remember it, a strange monochrome montage of images, and at the end, oddly, they rather dramatically burned an etching of an old schooner. They held a match to it, on camera.

“One day I saw an advertisement for a job as a film editor with the Sydney Water Board. I was the only applicant who could show a film. I worked in the Department of Photography, supervised by a little man who was a devout Christian. The pay I received was only slightly more than a water meter reader, but the job offered me a sinecure.”

Dad wrote that this was a happy time for him, as it enabled his painting in a style he called, ‘Automatism—I could detach myself in a certain way as I release these sensations, without taking drugs or anything of that sort.’ He wrote much of the styles of art and I saw him painting sometimes, in a happy space.

Suddenly Ania turns up in the book—his second wife, my step mother, now frail and living alone down at Bundanoon. No explanation for her arrival, but of course I know the history. Dad was the great intellectual, or at least clearly this is how he saw himself, and she was the shy daughter of Polish Jews chased by the Nazis during the war. Her dad was killed, she arrived here with her mum, and Ania found work as a librarian where she met Dad.

They bought a house in Balmain, opposite the container wharf on Vincent Street. Soon he talks about the ground-floor tenants, and the cottage tenants out the back. Dad was always a landlord. One day someone broke into his top-floor apartment.

“All the power points had been removed. The bed was

completely torn apart. It must have been the Drug Squad, so we didn't even report it to the police."

I think by this stage that Dad's mind was unravelling. He had been pensioned out of the Water Board after staging several 'performances' to convince them the job had sent him mad. One involved a period staying at Chelmsford Mental Hospital where maybe he was exposed to electro-convulsive therapy.

He'd worked seven years at the Water Board and left with no friends. I remember his fury at that Christian 'little man' boss, and his disdain for almost everything and everyone else.

Those Balmain years had him involved in residents' action groups, and those organisations did indeed save a lot of the suburb that he says was set to be razed and redeveloped. He would write unsolicited scripts and screenplays. I remember one for *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo*. They didn't buy it.

There was page upon page of excruciating detail about ideas, projects, scripts, and futile pitches to unlikely people. It culminated in some considerable confusion between my father and the Australian Film Commission, which believed that Michael Bentine had signed on for a film based on the book by Arthur Kessler called, *The Lotus and the Robot*, set in Bombay. Bentine's agent even flew to Sydney and checked into the Hilton, expecting to sign a contract.

"I was terribly embarrassed that this poor man had spent money on a fruitless expedition."

And so those are just a few of the words of my father in his rambling 200-page book. He's been dead for fifteen years now. He wrote of the things he was passionate about and left out those that he wasn't.

They included my mother, which perhaps makes some sense,

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and his children, being my brother and myself.

That makes perfect sense.

We didn't exist.

Chapter 13: Zapco Lightshow

In 1973 there were two kinds of lighting. Stage lighting in the theatre, or psychedelic lighting. Neither camp spoke with the other. The latter attracted me.

Roger Foley from Ellis D. Fogg was the big major pioneer and innovator in establishing the lightshow phenomena in Sydney. He lived a block from me and had a companion named Madam Lash. Yes, she did.

Ellis D. Fogg was doing university balls with imported equipment. Roger discovered the fledgling J & S Research Electronics in Rose Bay and had them make some strobes and colour organs. Bruce Jackson and Phil Story did that, and more, making big improvements and innovations. Bruce and Phil held stock that Roger hired and returned the next day. One bleary Sunday morning Roger said, "Your name is too long to write on a cheque. You should shorten it to JANDS." Actually he said he preferred JandS, but they went with JANDS.

JANDS started hiring in competition with Roger. There was room for both and they co-existed harmoniously as the market for lightshows grew and the idea caught on. The JANDS business boomed and provided cash to fund the research ... in Phil's case into lighting and in Bruce's case into sound, and he developed some enormously powerful solid state amps at a time when electronics were changing over from valve technology. Bruce also designed and had made, by Gil McPherson, speakers to carry the power. Bruce was responsible for many proprietary intellectual property innovations, some still in use today, valuable enough back then to encase the workings in indestructible plastic resin compounds so no one could copy the design.

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Roger Foley at Ellis D. Fogg was, and is, an artist. Bruce came at it from a technical point of view, incidentally an artist but more of a technical innovator.

That was all happening as I woke up to this stuff. I was a few years younger than these guys.

The first time I went to a venue and saw a band, it was at The Arts Factory, the hippy gig in a warehouse in Sydney's Goulburn Street, a few blocks up from Chequers Nightclub.

Most seminal bands from the era played at the Factory. Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs, Bakery, Madder Lake, Company Cain (get it?), Tully, Taman Shud, the 69'ers (really), the La De Da's, Spectrum, SCRA, Harvest, the Battersea Heroes, Captain Matchbox Whoopie Band, Chain ... the list goes on.

Everything at the Arts Factory was run on contemporary hippy principles. Things were airily debated with lots of *maaan*, *cool*, and other cosmic punctuations. Hippies were called 'heads' back then.

Everything worked on the premise of lots of talk and no real action. The Arts Factory was really the embodiment of an alternative movement which was about five years behind San Francisco and London.

The lighting system at the Factory comprised one Pattern 23 profile spot for the stage, twelve four-foot UV tubes for the crowd, and a cyclorama—a white backdrop stretched tight on a frame—with lots of projected things.

Projection was everything. Eddie van der Madden oversaw it all.

From a scaffold tower at the rear of the warehouse, at least three and sometimes five overhead projectors were operated by serious hippies. Two Pyrex dishes were used, one slightly larger than the

other. Liquid dies, one oil-based, one water-based, were poured into the first dish, filling it one-third full.

The second dish was held in both hands and lowered into the first. At the appropriate depth, it would squish the dies, and being different in origin, they wouldn't combine. Moving the dish produced mesmerising swirling patterns, projected onto the cyclorama.

After a while, the colours got dull or the combination got boring, so the liquid was thrown into a bucket. Being a collective, no one was empowered to empty them. Sometimes a whole bucket load would be kicked over and dribble through the scaffold onto the stoned hippies underneath.

Eddie wasn't terribly interested in the overhead projectors. Other hippies would operate these, fuelled by lengthy spliffs of Acapulco Gold or, best of all, tabs of Brown Acid. Maybe both.

Eddie was an inventor. His projections were 'De Machines' as he called them, which he made in his squalid rooms in a boarding house. Some of Eddie's machines were very simple. For example, he removed the heat filter from a slide projector and let it slowly melt a hand-coloured slide.

Another simple idea: Eddie made a disc out of Polaroid plastic. Then he put a static slide of Polaroid into the gate of the slide projector. The slide was covered in random bits of clear standard sticky tape. When the Polaroid disk was rotated through the gate, just in front of the static slide, it made for this weird polarising rainbow hued effect.

After a while the machines got more complex. Eddie had three prisms on a record turntable in front of some projectors. They threw twisted, distorted images through the venue. Presumably the hippies, who were usually reclined on pillows on old ratty Persian

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carpets, changed the dose of whatever they were on to coincide with the lightshow.

Hugh and Bani McSpeddon had a similar lightshow operation in Melbourne at the T. F. Much More Ballroom. I never did find out who or what the T. F. was.

I guess the most intriguing thing about the lightshow at the Factory was how the band was just a part of the whole experience. Doug Parkinson or Billy Thorpe, or anyone famous at the time, would just do the gig, lit with the one feeble spot, while the weirdness was projected on the screen and even all over the band.

That was how it was done in the early seventies. Bands didn't carry lighting—the promoter of a dance or concert would hire the lightshow. I was gearing up to be *the* lightshow. On March 1st, 1973, the day after I left News, I registered the business name Zapco Lightshow. All I needed now was—ah, some equipment. Oh, and a means of transport, since I didn't get my license until 1974.

The Certificate of Registration for Zapco Lightshow was framed and hung above my old desk at home. I was fifteen. I'd already accumulated some lights: a slide projector, black light, and built a mirror ball with little one-inch-square mirror tiles that came on a cloth backing sheet so you could decorate a really trendy bar. Coloured Par 38 lamps were five bucks each at Radio House. I bought a Jands three-channel chaser and a feeble strobe that Ian Eastman built for me.

For five dollars I would come and do a lightshow. The price went up to fifteen dollars once I had some colour wheels and Strand Pattern 23 spotlights. Transport was a problem, so I networked anyone with a car.

Back then, Jands, Ellis D Fogg, Vibe Lightshows, and Mac

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Enterprises were the main players. Unicorn Lighting, Access, Foxglove and a bunch more hovered on the edges. Krazy Maze appeared a little later with the first Par 64 stage light. Have a look at any concert footage from the eighties and see the myriad of hung lights—they're Par 64s. There were heaps of us looking for work. We did weddings, parties, suburban and school dances.

How does an ambitious fifteen-year-old from a dirt-poor family accumulate capital for expansion? Very hard. I worked as a cleaner in Sydney Wide Discount Store, starting at 7:00 a.m. and polishing the floor for three hours. Try doing that while working nights. I had a crush on Amanda the ticket writer. I would gaze lovingly as she wrote up a sale ticket: "Mens Pyjamas, Save 21c! Reduced to 78c".

Her floor gleamed better than any other, yet she ignored me. Until I saw her looking at me in the mirror. I was promoted to leading hand by old Sid, the supervisor. I had Jesus, a South American bible basher, and Yolena from somewhere slavic with a thick accent. They mopped and wiped. I drove the polishing machine.

Slowly as the pay came through I'd buy more lights. I got a part-time job helping out in the hire department at Strand Electric, where the lovely Rob Nichols taught me about customer service and strict standards. It also meant I had a good hire discount, so I could get what I needed when I needed it.

I sent flyers to agents and venues, and one of them landed on the desk at J.O.K. Entertainment, where one Johnny O'Keefe called me and demanded a meeting. If he was surprised at the spotty-faced kid that arrived he didn't show it, and he hired me to light his daughter's birthday party. The glitterati were all there, and J.O.K. himself did a set during which he insisted that the strobe

remain on. I think he was doing pills.

Somehow I scored a gig lighting a professional play called *The Cakeman*. It was directed by Brian Syron in collaboration with Bob Maza, and written in 1974 by Robert Merritt from Erambie Aborigines' Reserve, Cowra. The play was run in a converted warehouse in Redfern. With help from a Richard Pilbrow book, and Rob Nichols at Strand, I managed to do a decent job.

Another unusual gig was a season at the Sydney Easter Show, lighting a stage that promoted a children's magazine. It was a double-header with a rock band, but the star was Tommy the Sea Lion. He wasn't pleasant to work with, and you gotta love that fish smell.

Once I was seventeen, I could drive and do things like deliver telephone books—a three-week contract for the entire East Sydney region. Just me, my Kombi van, and twenty-four hours in each day. I did it, and I still have the contract with the Post Master at Darlinghurst: \$1,300 was a fortune in 1975.

The lightshow biz was built on packages. At the time in 1974 a strange guy named Phil Cullen had a business blandly named Mac Enterprises. It ran out of his mum's house, and she was the receptionist and took phone bookings. While she was very sweet and pleasant, Phil was not. He was barking mad.

Mac did packages from fifteen dollars, while mine started at thirty bucks. For that I would deliver two colour wheels—one ran at 15RPM, the other at 40RPM—each on a 500 watt Strand Electric Pattern 23 profile spot. These were on a T-stand either side of stage, and were primary stage lights. On the other side of each T-stand was another Pattern 23, loaded with an iris-diaphragm, and aimed out and up onto a sixteen-inch mirror ball.

Along the front of the stage were three floodlights, each a

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Strand Pattern 137 with a 300 watt lamp. These were plugged into a three-channel chaser. Two ultra-violet fluorescent tubes were aimed at the crowd to exaggerate those white teeth and fabrics.

On each side of the band's PA was a police or a fire rotating beacon. Pointing at a wall somewhere was an effects projector with either a liquid wheel, or a kinetic effect. One twin strobe, and one BVI Thermo Fogger, completed the inventory. It was all plugged into a switchboard, which had two or three mains inputs and twelve switched outputs.

An operator—that was me—would switch all this stuff on and off in some kind of sympathy with the music. For example, the colour wheel motors were switched so I could stop on a given colour. The chaser would be sped up and slowed down. Everything would go to black when the strobe came on. It was very satisfying work.

I got to know a lot of the bands, some containing dudes who would go on to play in the biggest bands in the land in the coming golden days of the rock industry. I got to ogle a lot of gorgeous chicks who were desperate to lay hands on the bands. I got to go outside with some of those girls too, leaving the lightshow in automatic mode for a brief tryst in a dark corner.

The madness at Mac Enterprises obsessed me. Phil bought a brand new town house at Canley Vale and turned it into a lighting warehouse. His vans were in and out of there all night. It must have driven the neighbours insane. He worked cheaper than anyone, which ultimately led to his downfall. But mostly he just did nutty things. One was to turn off every set of traffic lights, using a stolen master key, in York Street at 5:00 a.m., on a Monday morning, just in time to disrupt the traffic on Sydney Harbour Bridge. The CCTV caught him, and in court he claimed it

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was a protest because the lights were not sequenced correctly.

More insidiously, he would prank-call people's homes in the early hours and tell relatives some family member had died. He called my mum at 1:00 a.m. and told her I was on heroin. Phil told outrageous stories that were pure fantasy, which sometimes made a lot of trouble.

To staff his super-cheap lightshows, he hired young school guys—aged from fourteen—as operators. It was weird, it was creepy, and it was just the way things could be in the mid-1970s.

I had larger packages too, adding more of everything, until I got some real concert lighting equipment in 1975, being gear that Deep Purple had imported when they toured.

From there it all went swimmingly. I toured with bands, drove trucks, blew things up, and after a spell being mentored by the late and great lighting designer Roger Barratt, I moved into audio.

The really cool thing is that there are still fifteen-year-olds getting the buzz from concerts, and there's really nothing stopping them from doing what I did. All you need is a business name, a card, and a pile of tenacity, drive, and energy. Not to mention self-belief, good luck, and being prepared to forego fun and teenage pursuits in exchange for a dream.

A dream that became the business that I still run today.

Chapter 14: Blowing Shit Up

Gerry Georgettis stumbled through the smoke and chaos, and pried my frozen finger from the 'FIRE' button. My deafened ears heard my brain screaming at me, *I've blown up a gig*. Whimpers and moans slowly became audible.

That night in December 1975, at Paddington Town Hall, would be my moment of notoriety. The band were Sebastian Hardie, and their progressive, symphonic rock would go on to chart well in Germany—after Toivo Pilt got his hearing back. After that night he was minus two eardrums.

The promoter had hired my biggest lightshow package with added pyrotechnics, and the night had gone so well. Towards the end of the set, the Hardies were building to an enormous crescendo which, on the last note, would culminate in a pair of magnificent flash-pot detonations either side of stage, placed on the upstairs concrete railing. My creative mind wanted *only* the big end.

Instead of flash powder, I'd somehow been sold something made for the devil. I never found out what that nightmare powder actually was, because in the avalanche of investigations it was taken from me. As was my Public Liability Insurance, which the AMP Society rep' gleefully tore up in my face, chanting various conditions, terms, and sub-sections I'd violated.

The explosion was all noise and smoke, and when it cleared, Toivo and the boys were not in a great way. As they slowly picked themselves up and dusted off, the sirens started coming and the audience staggered out to fresh air. There was broken glass, flashing lights, and a very pissed-off promoter.

Gerry the roadie saw the humour in it all after he realized none of the gear was damaged. The Town Hall still has a chunk of concrete missing to this day.

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Gerry would have his own conflagration decades later after quitting as Bon Jovi's tour manager. He doused a Ford dealership in Miami with gasoline and chucked a cigarette in through the smashed plate glass window. That small act of defiance was over his new SUV which he felt had fraudulent terms inserted in the contract. So he returned it, right through that window. After being bailed and facing five years in the joint, he fled home to Melbourne, but cut the trip short by hanging himself in a United Airlines toilet.

But in 1975 everyone recovered and got on with life. The Hardie's record company wrote me a nice letter to advise me that should Toivo not get his hearing back, I might like to prepare for being sued for his lost, potential world-wide earnings. After I told them the insurer had walked away, they lost interest. I paid the promoter a couple of hundred dollars for 'restitution', although I'm not sure for what, exactly.

Howard & Sons Pyrotechnics at Box Hill didn't care at all. I'd always marvelled at the crew out there, most of who were missing fingers. They also had a three-legged dog.

I kept using like a pyro-junkie does, but swapped to AAA gunpowder, fired using a Box-Brownie flashbulb on a twelve-volt line. A little magnesium mixed in made for a satisfying flash. We built a pyro control box, all fancy with warning lights, a real key switch, and an enormous EXPLODE HERE label above the big red blast button.

Touring with Simon Gallaher, Herbal Dave and I flew to Brisbane for a show, the control box in our carry-on. The airport security dude pulled us up.

"You can't take *this* onboard," he said.

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However, he'd only discovered a screwdriver, totally missing the alarming control box. At least we'd be purchasing the gunpowder in Brisbane, knowing we couldn't carry *that* on an aircraft in 1983.

Everything tended to go wrong touring with Simon. Once, the new fog machine malfunctioned and wouldn't turn off. As the intro music sounded, the curtain opened and this huge cloud of smoke rolled out and descended on the audience. No one could see a thing.

Another episode was when Simon decided to do his entrance—from the orchestra pit at a theatre. Except it failed to rise as he started to sing 'One Voice'. It went like this:

"Just one voice, singing in the darkness" ... then we heard, "Up, up."

"All it takes is one voice ... up. Singing so they hear what's on your mind ..." He was sounding breathless now.

Then clunk. He'd found an extension ladder under the stage, and the top of it appeared out of the pit, startling the people in the first row.

"And when you look around you'll find ... (Pant pant) There's more than one voice ..." Then he appeared, climbing out to applause. The guy was a hell of a showman.

Another time he had a theatrical sign that spelled out 'Simon' in giant polystyrene letters, mounted on a black timber frame. The S in Simon was a stylised treble clef. As he banged away at the grand piano in the opener, the sign was flown down and jerked to an abrupt stop, dislodging the S, which fell on the startled keyboard player. Then the 'N' came down on the drummer. The remaining sign announced 'IMO'—and everyone died laughing.

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But back to the pyrotechnics. I had a few more near-misses. One awesome blast was where the lighting trog misunderstood the cue and shot the charge just as the guitarist ran almost over the top. And there was the 'Geeza Rock 'n' Roll Show' which had an opener where a phone box was centre stage. The intro voice was like in *Mission Impossible*. 'Your mission is to rock Australia. This tape will self-destruct in five seconds ...' Then BLAM! The box flew apart, and the guitarist in his silver lame jumpsuit ran out with his hair on fire, and his jumpsuit covered in powder burns.

When I went off the road in 1984, after a solid decade of flashes, bangs, and flaming guttering along the front of the stage, I was finally over blowing shit up. Besides, it wasn't too long after that gun laws made things a lot harder.

I doubt you can buy gunpowder so easily now.

Chapter 15: Tax evasion. The Barratt Way!

Roger Barratt was my hero and mentor. When I first met him in 1976, Rob at Strand suggested I talk to Roger about looking after Roger's lights. Roger was full-time with Opera Australia, lighting all their shows and tours, and he also owned a growing stable of theatre luminaries. We devised a deal where I would store and maintain them, and if I hired them out we would split the revenue.

Overnight I took in about sixty lights, which meant I had a competitive rental business to Strand—where I still worked part-time. Such was the nature of 'co-opertition'. Roger kept buying lights.

We lit shows together, and he taught me about efficiency. One trick he had was to put one 5,000 watt fresnel at each end of a FOH bar, shaped with barn doors so they just blasted the stage.

"You use them as a gentle overlay," he said. "When you need that little something or you have a few annoying shadows to fill, fade them up."

While generally hilarious and gregarious, Roger had what I came to think of as 'gay moods' when he would go very, very dark. One erupted after we lit a charity show at the Kings Cross Metro Theatre. The glad-handlers and champagne set descended on the stage at the end and stayed there. We had to pack up, and they wouldn't get out of the damned way. He went *off* like nothing I'd seen, and they all scattered.

At the start of 1977 we realised I was doing more with him than not, and the rewards were not properly worked out. He proposed he buy me out of Zapco, so he ended up owning everything, and I ended up paying off my various loans and with a bit left in the bank. I went on salary of \$150 a week—nearly \$900 in today's money—plus a company Hi-ace van.

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We leased a small warehouse in Harris Street, Ultimo, and Barratt Lighting took off. He kept the opera job for another year, and then bought half of a firm called Theatrecraft from an old gay couple who'd retired. It was an immaculate business that installed counterweights and theatre drapes.

Moving into the Theatrecraft building in Myrtle Street, Chippendale, I was allocated an area of about a quarter of the ground-floor warehouse. Roger's new business partner was Peter Ross from Strand Electric, and immediate tensions arose between them—such that the Theatrecraft staff was also aloof towards Roger and my small team.

It taught me about compromise. We would sometimes need some temporary space to lay out a rig as we assembled it. Lighting production is specific in that it has a very high number of parts. For one light, you need to pick a hook-clamp, colour frame, barn door or iris, plus a power lead. Then there's a huge list of colour gels required—we had a range of Lee Filters that contained about 100 colours, and each light had a different-sized gel cut-out.

Once laid out, we tested each light using a cable attached to a 2,000 watt dimmer so it ran at about half power and didn't freak out the cold lamp filaments. For each given type of lamp, we then packed a spare globe. All our globes had our secret mark etched on the metal base, since some hirers swapped out their dead globes for our good ones.

After a while I noticed some of our three-phase cables were shrinking too. The bastard hirers were cutting a few metres off and rewiring the plug. I started weighing them in and out.

The Theatrecraft crew were either in the warehouse assembling their systems, or out installing them. I grew adept at using their space when they were out, and bartering for it when they were in.

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Generally they were a pack of pricks to me, but I knew it came down from Peter Ross who still hadn't forgiven me for a huge kick in the balls I dished out at Strand a few years beforehand. Some people ...

Barratt Lighting took off in a big way because Roger was full-time devoted to it, and he had sensational contacts. One was a guy we called 'Festival Hall', otherwise known as Stephen Hall, an older gay guy—of course—who was anointed by Sydney Council to run the Festival of Sydney. This featured an enormous opening concert on the steps of the Sydney Opera House.

The lighting contract was worth so much that Roger purchased a sixty-channel Strand STM dimmer system, which was priced about the same as a house in Balmain. He sold an investment property to buy this system, which was at the time the largest rental dimmer system in the land.

We spent three days setting up the 1977 show, where I worked alongside Wally Sloss and John 'Wendy' Weston, still mates today. Roger kept us all moving, and then introduced us to the Godzilla of all colour-changing systems—a counterweighted steel monster that was plonked by a crane in front of both enormous banks of the Opera House sail lights. These were an array of about twenty-four discharge floodlights that would be considered quite primitive today and are no longer there.

We finished off the enormous rig—almost 120 lights—with half a mile of colour festoon strung up. Two Super-Trouper carbon arc followspots were rented off Ron Blackmore.

The festival was a gold mine even though it pissed rain for a week and we set up, then pulled down various outdoor rigs around town, knowing the shows would never happen. Always, Festival

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Hall knew a pilot who said there was some blue cloud somewhere, so we would set them up and pull them down ... Wet, wet, wet.

Barratt Lighting went exponential. We moved into a warehouse next door, and we started to distribute and sell products made by Rock Industries, owned by the very clever Richard White, who today is the founder and CEO of WiseTech Global, one of Australia's largest tech stocks. Richard went on to buy into Jands, after co-CEO Eric Robinson died.

By the time 1980 rolled around, I was getting restless and enjoying Roger's company a lot less. He was a bit tight with the money, and often Richard would need to put on a bit of a begging show every Friday to collect what was rightfully due to him. I didn't like that.

Bookkeeping at Barratt Lighting was done on a Kalamazoo system, which was still a traditional hand-written ledger, but with the dubious innovation—the "system"—that thanks to self-carbonating layers of all the required accounting books, an entry only needed to be written once. On some systems you needed to lean on the pen like you were cutting a birthday cake made of rubber to ensure the lowest copies were imprinted. For our system, an invoice was written at the point of transaction which was either a hire or a sale. Those multi-form documents were printed on the self-carbonating paper and created into little forms to be distributed to the various bean-counting departments.

Except Mr. Barratt ordered the forms *without* serial numbers. He had several, sequential stamping gizmos instead—any child of the last century will remember the ubiquitous stamp and stamp pad. Roger devised an ingenious tax evasion scheme where every transaction would be assessed prior to banking.

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Here's how it worked: a sale or hire was done in one of three possible types—cash, cheque or account. Roger would afterwards rifle through the various completed forms before sending the deposit off to the bank, and with the corresponding matching pile of transaction forms to the bookkeepers.

However, *cash* transactions would be judiciously scrutinised and those deemed tax office required—you always needed to include a few—would get a stamp from that glorious stamping machine. He had one for sales and one for hires.

Those non-required transactions—the good ones—would disappear into the vortex and not have a number applied. Yep, they were ‘The Sludge Fund’. They would be transferred from the transaction till to the trouser till. There were some magnificent contributions to the fund accumulated by Roger via this system.

It was entirely outside the knowledge of the team; they had no idea and didn't need to know. I loved the guy—he was my leader, mentor, and occasionally my worst nightmare.

Roger hired a bookkeeper named Leena who had a dodgy jailbird boyfriend called ‘Lockie’. I'd hired a colour TV from Grace Brothers for Leena, because she had no credit rating. When I resigned to start my own touring production company I asked Leena to bring back the TV—since we wouldn't be in close proximity, and I was already tired of asking her for the rental money each fortnight.

Such is the way of things, this put her nose out of joint, and Lockie came over to give me a dust-up. We biffed it out in the toilet block at Barratt Lighting, and I got away without too much damage given he was a complete thug. He got a few good ones in, and my snout was a little tender for days.

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To be fair, I found Lockie could be useful. A few months earlier it was all smiles with Lockie. I had a client who ran up a big bill and point-blank refused to pay. I commissioned Lockie to pay him a visit. He got a couple of business colleagues called Terry Tough and The Accountant together, they drove out to Gladesville, and when the guy looked through the peephole he naturally freaked out and took flight out the back door—right into the tender embrace of Terry.

Invited inside, Terry walked up and down punching his fist into his hand and looking normal—he frightened anyone he met just by looking normal. A complete psychopath, with ‘LOVE’ tattooed on one fist and ‘HATE’ on the other, he was on strict instructions from me not to hurt the guy. He didn’t need to, because after The Accountant—a nerdy weasel in a cheap suit and who was more accustomed to counting cash from drug deals—read out the particulars, the guy was very ready to accompany the team to the Bank of NSW and withdraw the requisite \$8,300.

They returned to our office triumphantly, thumped down the cash, and The Accountant pulled back their 25% commission. They took the whole \$2,075 to a long lunch and then to the *A Touch of Class* bordello where I’m sure the girls were quaking in their stilettos lest Terry chose them. He hired three.

Despite the success, Roger didn’t really approve and it put a lot of space into our relationship. But we reunited some years later before he suddenly fell ill with leukaemia. I visited him in St. Vincents, and he died a week later.

I was gutted.

Chapter 16: Starting Again

Leaving Barratt Lighting was messy given Roger was away lighting shows a lot, and I'd been running the place. I eased out and tallied up my commissions from selling all that Rock Industries equipment that past year. It was \$12,000 and that was going to be enough to set up a touring production.

Eighteen months earlier I'd started to mix sound for my mate, Glen Bolton's, band, Top Kat. They were a covers band with a Friday night residency at the Chatswood Charles hotel—my local. He was building their PA system up, and some of the electronics he built from kits. Between us we discovered what worked as he bought more gear.

I learned now to mix a band—a really enjoyable journey for me. Glen and I had watched at close quarters how fast the band business was expanding across Australia, fuelled by Countdown, colour TV, and social change. It was growing fast; Glen was being asked to hire his PA for other bands, and there was a looming shortage of production.

I'd bought a truck, an Orange F350, to lug Glenn's PA which had outgrown the Transit Van. With the truck on time payments, I reasoned I could put together a viable system using that commission money I was owed. However, Roger and I had even stopped talking. He had this brittle edge and I had a youthful arrogance. Oil and water.

My fear was Roger would put me on a drip-feed for the twelve grand. So I hatched a plan that I'm ashamed to repeat, but ... well, it happened. I ordered the equipment I needed on the various Barratt Lighting accounts. Unknown to Roger, Barratt Lighting was moving into audio. The suppliers, like Jands, thought this was

a wonderful expansion and they provisioned me at the best trade prices.

Over three weeks I assembled the disparate pile of equipment, put each delivery into the truck, and garaged it at home. On D-Day I wrote Roger a letter, reconciling the invoices against my commission and blithely saying he should press ahead with Barratt Audio, since I'd done all the opening orders and set it all up. I even included an example hire pricelist and inventory.

Apparently he didn't respond well to all this, but reasoned I was entitled to the bucks and I'd taken them as goods in kind, along with some lights. Would I do it again? Not that way.

But I was ready to roll.

It took me three weeks to put it all together, wiring cables, soldering rack panels, building roadcases, and loading speakers into cabinets. I was a little short on big brands so I went long on bottom end. My secret weapon was the pair of Concert W bins I got from Jands. Personally built from 18mm ply by Robert Young, who doubled as their accountant, these beasts were five feet long, three feet high, and three feet deep. With 2 x 15" JBL 2205 drivers installed, they produced that satisfying gut-punching bottom end that was so in-trend back then.

I put an advert in the music street rag, appearing with about twenty others, and the phone rang. A dude was having a twenty-first birthday with a band, in the back yard down in Wollongong. It was the first outing for the PA—and it delivered in spades.

Soon we were working two nights a week. Then we had a couple of double bookings and Caroline started calling some of the other operators to offload the jobs but still keep the bands coming back to her. She was beyond brilliant at this—a really good phone

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manner, genuinely personable, and liked by all. Before she knew it, she was a broker, charging the other operators a fee per show.

Because a lot of the other PA suppliers were just lazy, or sometimes displaced musicians whose band had broken up, leaving them with hire-purchase payments, they were happy for her to book their gigs. A lot of them stopped advertising. Our advert became The PA Agency, and a *lot* of work came to us. Of course, we would cherry-pick the best of it, and keep me working seven days and nights a week—literally. A lunch time uni concert was common, and considered cream. An ethnic festival was too, because we charged more for those.

Such was the avalanche of work that we had guys calling us to enter the industry. I would send them to Neil Smith, the secondhand trader, who would sell them what they needed—and what he needed to *shift*. One guy was so stupid. He bought an old green Leyland removals truck that looked like a harbour ferry and went so slow it was insane. Smithy stitched him up with the worst pile of trash. And yet, people hired it.

Our system expanded, prices went up, we got a bigger truck, and then a second. All our earnings went back in. More money made more money. It grew and grew, and I worked my arse off.

Until the end of the road.

Chapter 17: I Started a Riot.

Well, it wasn't me alone. A bloke known as Grub had a lot to do with it. I collected him and the bass player from a band called Littlewing at their place in Five Dock. We loaded their stage gear into my Ford F350, and the PA and lights in the production truck, and we drove the three hours out west over the mountains to Bathurst.

It was the beginning of my 'PA for Hire' business—and almost the end.

It was Easter Saturday, April 5, 1980, and we were headed to Mount Panorama where the annual bike races had been held since 1932—with a few war years off in between. In recent years the weekend had started to become a bit of a confrontation between the riders and the police, who had built a compound up the mountain to better base their control over the horde.

Grub was a convivial guy and the trip was easy. We got there around 4:00 p.m. and set up on a square cement slab beside a brick fast food store that dished up chips and chicko rolls. It closed soon after we arrived. I got Grub and his mate to help me stack the ACT Concert W, and a 4560 and horn PA on each side of the stage, then parked the Ford about fifteen metres off to one side. I would mix from inside the pantech to avoid the weather and crowd.

My new concert wedges were lined up along in front of the mike stands.

Suddenly a commotion erupted from the stage, which was really only at ground level. Seriously bad words were flying towards Grub, who was standing looking crestfallen. He had forgotten to load his traps case in Sydney. Except he swore I had done it. A traps case holds all the essential hardware for assembling the drum

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kit. We had no cymbal stands, kick pedal, drum seat or hi hat stand. These were obviously essential for a rockin' boogie band.

A posse of riders were assembled by Damien, the head-shed from the MRA (Motorbike Rider's Association) who ran the races. They took off for town to try to round up some traps. They returned after fifty minutes, unable to bribe, swindle, hire, or steal some traps. An emergency meeting decided that Grub would charter a light aircraft and fly to Sydney. A Harley roared off to the airport with Grub on the back.

Years later I was learning to fly at Bathurst Airport and I mentioned this to Jerry Trevor-Jones, the senior instructor. He chuckled and remembered charging the hapless Grub a pretty penny for the instrument-rated night flight to Bankstown and return.

Meanwhile things were getting a trifle unruly up on the mountain. The riders had grown bored with the regular donuts and wheelies, farking around on their bikes. They were now into serious beer ingestion, standing around the stage and yelling for music. I hit 'play' on the cassette player and Little River Band rent the air.

"Poofa music, play some fuckin' Doors!" they yelled out.

I heard them.

Damien ran up with 'The Best of the Doors', I threw it on and hit play. Half an hour later, it ran out.

"More!" they yelled, and I turned it over.

Every time it ran out, I flipped it and turned it up. After several hours of this, the riders were by now pissing where they stood. Damian addressed them through my PA.

"Youse know this band gear is worth some coin, so don't piss on it."

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Instead they just turned the other way and pissed on someone else.

I was very grateful.

Then a rider lobbed a rock into the police compound. More followed. A response was assured.

The riot squad kitted up inside their barricade and ran out in a flying V formation, scattering the riders. A few copped some baton whacks, one across the snout. The police retreated and the mob fired up. They started chucking everything they could find over the fence.

Things got bad, and they started kicking down the brick cafe wall.

Soon large lumps of masonry were being launched into the compound along with some frozen Chicko Rolls as well. The chocolates were all consumed. The tea urn sailed over the wall too.

The police came out again, more rolling melees happened, punches and kicks were flailing, blood was shed. The Channel Seven news car was rolled over and set alight. More police arrived at the mountain, the access road shut behind them.

At the stage, it was close to ground zero. Crap was everywhere, dust was billowing. The Doors were playing at 120db. Eight Par Cans lit the stage. Around fifty bikers remained, drinking and getting down to the tape. It was freaking cold.

Suddenly through the dust, cold haze and the chaos, lit by flashing blue police lights, a vision appeared. Grub staggered towards the stage, covered in thistles, traps aloft on his shoulders, jeans ripped from the barbed wire fences he'd scaled on his run from the bottom of the mountain through the paddocks to the stage. It was like the beach scene from *Chariots of Fire*, minus the beach and the sprinting.

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Exhausted from the journey, he stumbled onto the drum carpet and assembled his kit.

The band counted in the first song, and once that boogie hit the air the riot stopped. The car fires burned out. A happy smell of beer, burnt rubber, and piss roiled around the hill.

The riders had a rockin' good time, the band wasn't permitted a break, and many hours later they finally managed to end the gig around 3:00 a.m.

I packed up and we drove into the sunrise, relieved to get out of there.

** Thanks to Mark 'Chops' Lambourn for the memories. He was there, albeit rolling around on the ground with Damien's hot girlfriend behind the truck. He doesn't remember her name. He's lucky to have survived.*

Chapter 18: Gary Didn't Glitter

Gary Glitter is today better known as inmate Paul Gadd and is doing hard time in a UK jail for child sexual abuse. But in the early eighties he was on the revival trail and became the first significant overseas act for a local promoter who'd scheduled a run of the east coast of Australia. Glitter had been a major act in the early 1970s and remained a kind of glam rock icon, earning great money, until he overstepped the mark and became a convicted paedophile in the late 1990s. This story doesn't condone what he's done, and he has seen the inside of courts and jails in the UK, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

My production company won the contract to supply sound, lighting, staging, crewing, and trucking to the tour. We were happy to do it. I'd seen Glitter at the peak of his Glittermania period and it was insane. My crew featured a young and enthusiastic Jon Pope who today is a seasoned tour manager on the world stage. Three other guys involved were Yoda on lights, Pete on monitors, and Keg on beer—and myself on front of house mixing.

Day One was a production rehearsal at the Manly Vale Hotel, and the band arrived jet-lagged and very unhappy at the arrangements thus far. The backline, which we had collected from several rental shops, was not to their liking, neither was Keg, the pseudo-backline tech.

After some considerable messing about we had the CS70 synth working. Yamaha didn't sell too many of these analogue monsters, and we were fast working out why. The Marshall stack, the bass rig, and the double drum kit were all moved around to suit the whims of the band, with the drummer on a riser stage right and the keys on another riser stage left.

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Gary and his tour manager arrived; the TM walked in with bouffant hair and Gary had a brunette stage wig in place. The TM immediately pissed me off by yelling incomprehensible cockney stuff in relation to some stairs. It appeared we hadn't been informed that Gary needed a flight of four stairs downstage centre from which to do an entrance.

Eventually on this long, difficult day, we had hired some stairs, made the stage work the right way, and done a rehearsal. The band were all the same—English, of course, pop stars ... arguably, and universally difficult. The most amiable was an old guy—let's call him Brian—who looked like someone's missing uncle. It transpired he played bass sax and he rejected my Sennheiser 441 microphone, the best thing I had, in favour of an old Shure 565SD he produced from his bag and which he shoved down the bell. Strangely, it sounded great. When Brian put on his stage suit, slicked back his hair, and applied the sunglasses, the old guy looked the real deal.

Yoda made the show look fantastic—really, you couldn't go wrong with lights or the front of house sound, it was a treat. I mixed the tour and loved what I could do with a stack of concert W bins and that Glitter Band sound. I've never since had a kick drum and a floor tom sounding so big. The shows were sell-outs and very exciting. Glitter was the master of the pose, a true showman.

The band sound was awesome with that bass sax, the analogue synth, and a thing called the Star Guitar which was star-shaped with some kind of distortion circuit onboard and played by Gerry Shephard. If you hear any of the old Glitter tracks, you'll know what I mean. The drummer had the hardest floor tom hit ever.

For his part Gary wanted some vocal doubling at about 150 milliseconds, and miles more foldback than we could generate. We

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had a 4560 bin and a horn each side of stage, meaning a lot of firepower, and still he wasn't happy. I told the crew that nothing would make him happy and to grin and bear it.

Gary had his son travelling with him, and it was a few gigs later when Gary Glitter junior went missing. The lad had been plucked out of private school in the UK and hauled along with his notorious dad. He was given to us as our follow spot operator, and then didn't arrive for the show at a venue called Selinas. The Tour Manager called through, requiring we pull a replacement spot op' out of thin air, and now the TM was having a deep and meaningful with the guy.

The op told us later, "He said to be ready to go to black, if the wig falls off."

Behind the scenes there was concern about junior, who had been hijacked by some groupies and hadn't surfaced since. A search party went to the Manzil Room to collect intelligence—and didn't return. We were actually impressed and in joyful shock and awe at the calibre of groupies attending to this tour. They were thick on the ground, and very happy. Gary appeared to be very busy with them.

We did a sell-out show at Selinas, a 2000-capacity beer barn in Coogee. The lights went down, and I hit the intro cassette which was a slow-building heart beat. Boom-boom. Boom-boom. Boom-boom. It was the count-in for the opener, "Rock and Roll, Part 1". But nothing happened. I scanned the mixing console—the output meters definitely showed output ... fuck. Then I realised the mute buttons were down. It was a rented console and I wasn't 100% up to speed. Out go the mutes and BOOM-BOOM slammed through the room. The band kicked in, the gig was a smasher.

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Backstage, Mr. Glitter was in a good mood. "How'd you time that?" he asked. "Brilliant way to start it!"

But the quiet achiever on the road was the old sax player, Brian. He was sitting having a relaxing beer while the Hoodoo Gurus did the support act one night. Keg and I sat down for a chat and Brian asked if we wanted to look at his snapshots. Thinking they would be of kids and home I said yes, and he happily pulled a sheaf of Polaroid shots out of his pocket.

He adjusted his glasses and flipped the first picture over, smiling. Shot one was a girl we had noted the previous gig, only in this photo she was minus the tight leather mini and fishnets. Matter of fact, she was minus anything at all except bright pink lippy, and she was on top of a pool table. Certain billiards accoutrements were being modelled in a manner the maker never imagined.

The Polaroid collection triggered recent memories of the best, most beautiful babes at each of the previous gigs, and in every case Brian was the star or co-star in a series of debauched pictures that would *not* pass through customs. Sometimes the drummer was there too, but wow—what an operator. Maybe it was the bass sax?

This tour was groupie city. Go figure.

Meantime the drug consumption was running high, some local support staff appeared to be facilitating whatever the visitors wanted, and behaviour was variable. I guess I could say this about every second tour, then and now. I saw a rap artist and posse at play recently, and had a flashback to Gary and his entourage.

Our foldback issues had become acute, more so since Gary required a bouncer be positioned each side of stage, and the boneheads tended to stand in front of the sidefill, arms crossed, looking mean and fast getting deaf.

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When we rolled up to Macquarie Uni for a gig in the student union bar we knew we had a problem, since the four damned stairs were too high on the stage, or the ceiling was too low. Choose one. Sure enough, when the TM arrived with the act, he called the gig off, referencing the contract which clearly stated minimum stage size and height clearance. We marvelled at this contract document never before seen by us. It had all sorts of provisions in there, things we hadn't known about, and things we weren't doing. Riders that Gary wasn't getting. The promoter was spinning away, mouth flapping, "Blah, blah, blah," noises coming out.

Now I knew we had a problem, because the place was jam-packed and no one was telling the students the show was over. The Gurus were grinding away, and the time came for the changeover, which looked like being a load-out. The yelling and threats and carry-on backstage between the promoter, the uni rep, and the TM had resulted in the brilliant decision to put the Glitter Band on the stage—minus Mister Glitter, who decamped with the TM in the general direction of Kings Cross.

This all went down very badly, and we basically hung on and hoped for the best while the Glitter Band was bottled off the stage. It was a small scale riot, medium scale if you include a uniformed security guard plus his Alsatian on a leash being dangled off the balcony by his ankles. Poor mutt nearly choked. The load-out featured more broken glass than any gig I've ever done. We were lucky to get out intact.

Thereafter our arrival for load-in usually featured a delay while the hastily hired local carpenters finished improvising stage extensions. We were impressed at how the TM was holding the promoter to the contract, and agog at how much the extra stage work was costing. The worst of it was in Wagga, where the stage

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extension was built on milk crates. The TM rolled up and torture-tested it by jumping really hard all over, like on an imaginary pogo stick. He had a confused, tormented look on his face. We put it down to the drugs.

One of the Melbourne gigs, the temporary stage floor gave way and the bass player badly twisted his leg. Of course it was Keg's fault, because he was the closest chump.

So many stupid things were happening on this tour, and some of them were my fault. That's if you include the truck breaking down, or running out of fuel. Both of the above were not my direct, personal fault, but any production problem came back to me, because I was charging one lump sum for the whole package. The running out of fuel situation was just insanity on the part of the driver, who *had* been told by me to refuel. With the breakdown and empty petrol tank, we were late for those two load-ins, so two sound checks didn't happen. This was not well received.

It was hit-and-miss with one of those gigs since the truck breakdown happened at 2:30 a.m. in Albury, and we needed to wait outside Hertz until daytime to get another, then get down the Hume to the gig in Melbourne.

Getting the money from the promoter wasn't easy either. I wouldn't start the tour until the promoter banked the first week's money in my accountant's trust fund, and getting subsequent money provided a challenge too.

I wasn't there, but I guess the postscript was epitomised by the last show of the tour, where at the end the TM and the Gary were left waiting in the dressing room, since the limousine, the promoter, and the driver had vaporized. They were forced to make other arrangements and get back to the Sebel in the crew car.

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By then I'd already bailed out, cancelling my involvement in that last leg. I'd simply had enough—enough of the craziness, enough of the promoter, enough of the TM, enough of the Glitter entourage, and enough of the whole mad, drugged, sex-crazed insanity. I gave notice, helped the promoter find another crew and production, and then helped those guys by doing a truck crossover of rented backline and bits.

There are some things you do for money, and there are some things you do for fun. I could mix fun and money together with work, and I still do. But there are times to cut and run, when your principles are compromised. Things just got beyond a joke. For the record I didn't see, or even suspect, anything of the sort that put Gary in a UK slammer a decade later.

Like I said, I'd just had enough. The glitter had lost its shine.

Chapter 19: Shtiferish Eyngl? Moi?

I'd spent four years touring the eastern states, driving my truck as far north as Cairns and west to Adelaide. By 1984 I was ready to stop. The monotonous routine, late nights and thick audience cigarette smoke wore me down. Caroline and I put the word out—we were looking to buy an established production hire business. I wanted to take the next step and continue on what I had going when I managed Barratt Lighting.

Fairly quickly an offer materialised to partner with Rod Salmon in a Brisbane company called Harvey Theatrical Lighting. It was long-established and run with great efficiency by Bruce Harvey who'd then sold it to an Adelaide entrepreneur named Tony Cochrane. Interestingly, Cochrane went on to form V8 Supercars and became very successful; Salmon similarly became a pub baron and is today a major property investor.

We flew to Brisbane to look at Cochrane's lighting business, which was abysmal. Two sales guys were reading the Courier Mail sports pages with their feet on the desk. The place was messy, no one loved it. We knew we could turn it around. However, the deal fizzled out, and we were in two minds about relocating anyway.

Salmon came up with another acquisition, this time one he had made, a lighting rental business called Wazza Lighting, so named after its founder, Warren. It was in an old ground floor warehouse in Campbell Street, Surry Hills, right near Taylor Square. I knew it, as I'd collected and toured various lighting rigs that some of my client bands hired. It was a tidy little operation with two guys running it.

We bought in, 50/50 with Rod, using a simple formula. We did a stock-take of all the Wazza equipment, and then compared it to our inventory which by that time was loaded in two trucks as

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touring production. The two lists matched in approximate value, so we had a zero dollar investment in cash terms. We moved in, painted the joint, and changed the name to Graftons.

Rod was across town running his Lightmoves business and expanding interstate. His young rental manager was Tony Davies who now owns Chameleon Touring with his brother Greg. Chameleon is the largest lighting production house in the southern hemisphere today.

Rod's vision for Graftons was that we'd hire and buy everything from Lightmoves. We decided this wasn't *our* vision fairly quickly, and we were also strong on audio which, of course, Lightmoves didn't do. Offering a consistent sound and lighting service with driveway hire, sales, and installations proved a fast winner and we expanded and *kept* expanding.

Between us we had the right partnership; Caroline driving the finances, me the direction. Before long we grew so big we took the factory next door, first the ground floor, then the top floor. We were collecting staff and, I'm proud to say, attracted the best people in the biz. Through our doors went over fifty people, some of whom are now major talents across the production industry worldwide.

Our second year we sold an insane amount of new sound and lighting equipment, feeding the booming entertainment industry. Our rental business swallowed up anything we invested in, and our only brake on wider expansion was the difficult credit markets of 1985. This turned for us when the banking industry was deregulated and suddenly we had banks knocking on our door. Pretty well every dollar we could borrow would buy equipment for rental, or stock for sale. All the things we bought would generate more rentals and more sales. It was insane.

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The bank manager encouraged us to buy our first home, in West Lindfield, for \$120,000. He fixed up a dual mortgage with the deposit component loaned separately and secured by a floating charge over the company assets.

Once we hit 1986 things were charging ahead, revenues were rising, staff were added, agencies acquired. We were exclusive distributors of LSC (dimming equipment), Selecon (NZ-made stage lighting) and Renkus Heinz (loudspeakers systems) in NSW, and soon we added a Jands dealership. We had everything anyone wanted except for Yamaha, which was resident across town at Michael White's Sound on Stage, and Bose which was with Mark Taylor's SLATS.

By mid-year the Australian dollar had crashed, so sales slowed down. By way of example, in 1985 we'd sold more Soundcraft mixing consoles from the UK than anyone, with a new twenty-four-channel console listed at \$5,900. Six months later the list price was \$9,800. The jewel in our portfolio was a product called the Renkus Heinz Smart System, which was a poor man's Meyer MSL-3 alternative. The MSL-3 was a very expensive, compact (for the times) speaker cabinet with a processor that produced superior results. Selling speaker systems is a great business if you have exclusive distribution, because operators don't mix and match brands. If you sell eight speakers today, chances are you'll sell the same dude another eight when they expand.

Renkus Heinz had borrowed some of the Meyer ideas and come up with their simpler, cheaper alternative. A Sydney loudspeaker factory called Etone had acquired a license to make the speaker boxes locally, installing Renkus Heinz high-frequency drivers and badging their fairly basic Sydney-built speakers with the RH logo. The processors were imported from Renkus Heinz.

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This gave us a huge price advantage, and the marketing soon claimed "Australia's top-selling processor-controlled system". Because it was. It also worked really well—until you opened up the throttle and the processor squashed the dynamic range. This is still a problem for any sound system, so it wasn't particular to ours. Our marketing claims that the system was fool proof were soon tested by the consumer watchdog after an irate service technician complained. His complaint was upheld, and we had a rap over the knuckles.

We had problems with the amplifier range we'd been buying for some years from a New Zealand factory called ZPE. The importer in Melbourne wasn't giving us the volume discounts I thought I deserved, so I decided to build my own amplifiers. Thus Australian Monitor was born.

We were still expanding like crazy. Suddenly the Sydney Water Board put up 'No Standing' signs where previously our customers had parked outside. Enquiries revealed they planned to dig up the entire curbside lane to replace the sewer. *This* threatened our business more than anyone can imagine—a sound and lighting company has a lot of black boxes coming in and going out, all day. With no parking available?

We were renting these two old warehouses on Campbell Street from a classic Jewish rag trader named Michael Bertram. He owned the entire block of fourteen properties. Between our two warehouses were two derelict houses. These were variously populated by squatters, vagrants—and Hessian man. Hessian man was a terrifying apparition dressed entirely in old, stained and very smelly hessian. He had long black toenails. One day he came in and silently purchased a roll of gaff tape. We used an entire can of Glenn 20 after he left.

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Bertram was very, very open to a discussion regarding the lack of parking. He suggested—at my prompts—that I lease the two houses on the corner, demolish them, and use the site as a car park. We quickly came to terms. Great minds schemed alike.

Four days later at 6:00 a.m. on a Saturday two low-loaders pulled up, and two large tracked Kato machines clanked and rolled off. Driven by Tongans, they woke the various denizens of the two houses by knocking on the front door, and the back door—by using the excavator buckets. Pretty quickly, like rats jumping off a burning barge, the places were emptied out. A quick safety check—by me, with a torch, an iron bar and holding my nose—gave the all-clear, and *bang*. Off it went.

Clouds of dust blew over Taylor Square. Around 7:30 a.m. a council ranger screeched up and started yelling at the operators, who shouted back in Tongan and kept going. By now the two houses were a huge pile of rubble, and the machines were trying to sort out a most amazing structure at the back which faced the rear street, opposite Brett Whitley's studio. He was a regular wanderer on the street, in the depths of his best creative phase—and totally on the gank.

It was a solid brick, rectangular structure with a flat concrete roof. I'd walked past this thing on the way home from school for many years and wondered what on earth it contained.

Turns out it was a World War Two bomb shelter with a maze of walls inside. The Tongans smashed away at it for the rest of the day, and by sunset we had what looked like a direct hit on London during the war. It took three more days to cart it all away, and then I ordered twenty tonnes of crushed granite and a roller. Our new car park opened for business the following Monday.

Bertram came around to check it out.

"Oi vey," he sighed. "What have you done to my heritage-listed bomb shelter, shtiferish eyngl?" (Naughty boy.) We both laughed, co-conspirators at a time when you could get away with anything. I'd paid the Tongans ten grand in cash.

Later in 1986 I partnered with one of my happy Smart System customers, Lindsay Hall, to establish a secondhand business. At that time a high volume of used audio equipment was traded by Neil 'Smithy' Smith who operated on a consignment basis. He would take your amp, or speaker or mixer, agree a price, sell it, and pay you minus his commission. Only thing was, he would wait for you to call to see if it was sold before settling.

Lindsay and I figured a better system for everyone was for us to operate as a secondhand dealer and buy things outright, then sell them. We had the money to do it, and Lindsay had the right personality to negotiate both ends of the transactions. Problem was that once we got running, we developed a reputation as hard-nose traders, and that wasn't sitting right with me.

Lindsay also had a bunch of touring production clients, most notably the late Jon English who did incredibly well everywhere he played. We partnered up by combining our audio equipment, and for a while Graftons Sound—now totally separate from Graftons Lighting next door—was headed into concert production.

Ultimately, the partnership didn't work out. In early '87 Lindsay took all his equipment and clients, and soon joined with Chris Kennedy to form A1 Audio which had a difficult couple of years, but was the forerunner of Norwest Productions—after Lindsay left—and *that* was a major success.

Meanwhile, our staff newsletter had assumed a strange form. "WORK EXPERIENCE", it read. "As a result of last week's meeting, negotiations are well underway for a school girl with

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much larger breasts ...” It got worse, with discussions around the (then scary) AIDS epidemic and the need to wear condoms while serving customers. You can’t even *think* that stuff these days.

At some point in 1987 Bertram dropped in again and suggested I buy the fourteen properties for \$1.1 million. I actually did get bank approval, then in one of those revolving door moments decided against it. He sold the whole lot for 10 million a decade later.

Australian Monitor was gobbling cash, so I sold Graftons Lighting in 1987 to Garth Tanswell who ran Herkes, an electrical wholesaler specialising in lamps and supplies for theatre. He had bought that firm from the family of old Mr. Herkes, who pretty well died on the job, hunched over his Kalamazoo ledger. Sadly I also sold the Graftons name, and it still today sits in front of a small and mediocre version of Graftons Lighting that Garth has hung on to.

Then I took on an investor who could see potential in Australian Monitor, and ended up with a half share of my own business. The end was getting closer—mortgage rates were edging towards 17%, the 1980s had descended into Mad Men, Mad Money, Bad Money and the music industry was awash with cocaine.

Chapter 20: Failure is Best Done Large

Australian Monitor was my first big failure. It lives on today as a brand and started as simply the best power amplifier in the world. Back in 1985 my audio company Graftons struggled to buy a high-powered amplifier that was reliable. When a power amplifier misbehaves it usually destroys whatever speakers are plugged into it. Those repair bills were, and are, expensive.

Casting my gaze I found a young designer, Stuart Mclean, who is quite brilliant. He'd designed some equipment for a rogue named Hans Overeem who always seemed to surface in different places. One Friday afternoon in the late 1970s Hans turned up at my lighting company and politely asked if I could cash a cheque because he wouldn't get to the bank in time. That's a hundred bucks I never saw again after the cheque bounced.

Stuart did a design on paper, and we ordered machines and equipment to make the prototype. This was not cheap. Time was ticking and soon I ran out of enthusiasm as the bills mounted. Caroline and I had a week off with Sarah, then aged eight, and when we returned I had resolved to terminate the project.

Awaiting my return was a prototype AM1600, dual-channel, 800-watt power amplifier. It was so beautiful, and so powerful, I was re-energised. We invested in a pair of large aluminium extrusions, hired people, built amplifiers, and sold them around the world. I ran out of money, put an advert in the Financial Review, and had six people call me.

One was an Asian investment fund. In broken chinglish the young upstart asked me three questions and sneered that it sounded rubbish. Next was a consultant whose wealthy offshore client needed a visa, so if I would be so kind as to write a letter of invitation, right away, then he may invest. Very funny. No.

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And then Hymie Meyerson called. The South African accent comes across a little harsh when you're not used to it, and the back story sounded unpleasant. Hymie explained he was retired and that he had made his fortunes with a plastics company back home. The labour was cheap and plentiful, he told me, but the "bloody blacks" stirred up all that apartheid rubbish and ruined everything. It took him forever to get all his Rand out of the country. Despite this somewhat galling first impression, I met up with him.

This older guy came in wearing bowling whites with a heavy gold chain. He had glasses, was fit, average height, and bushy eyebrows. He had reasonable charisma and was clearly intelligent. He asked the right questions, looked at the product, and at the small assembly line out back. He wanted to know export potential.

On that I had confidence—after all, Australia was enjoying a Crocodile Dundee boost, our dollar was at the right end of the USA exchange rate at \$0.66, and of course ours was the best amplifier in the world according to that oracle of international audio, one Julius Grafton.

Hymie produced four hundred grand from a vehicle called The Blue Eyes Trust in Vienna. But only after protracted and comprehensive due diligence conducted by Lionel Krupp, a fellow Jewish South African and an accountant. Lionel and I sat for a whole weekend day at his pad in St. Ives and built a most impressive spreadsheet on Lotus Notes. He taught me about cash-flow forecasting with different scales of sales and assembly times to find a sweet spot we both agreed upon. A sweet spot that seemed easy—build and sell twenty amplifiers a week.

They bought fifty percent of the audio company, and Lionel was installed as company accountant. Caroline didn't like them, and chose to stay home and nurse Jess, who was just over one year

old. We'd had a nanny for the first year and while she was terrific, Cas wanted the right connection. Since Lionel would take on the headaches, she was free to go.

One day months later, Lionel's wife escorted a group of relatives through the factory, which we'd by then relocated to Gladesville.

"I can smell the money!" one of them exulted. I took a whiff, I could only smell solder.

Things were kind of okay for a while.

Cultural differences can be enlightening. The first order of business for a Jewish South African is to review all supply agreements, leases, wages, and costs. Wherever possible, switch suppliers to a like-minded Jewish South African. In principle I was okay to do this where there was a demonstrable saving and a benefit attached. I've never bought wholly on price—I favour relationships and mutual trust, and the addition of value. Lionel had no problem with that either. His position was that any Jewish South African would bring greater *everything* to a transaction.

They sure did. A straightforward supply quote becomes a game of shells, obstruction, confusion, variations, provisions, terms, conditions and endless verbiage. After many hours of frustrating negotiations, using a simple calculator would prove that the new deal offered was usually *inferior* to the old one.

Still, I became quite fond of these guys and was invited to the *Bris* for Hymie's grandson at a unit overlooking Bondi Beach. Not having a suitable encyclopaedia, and with the world-wide web not even a figment of anyone's dream, I was not to know that the brit milah ('bris') is a Jewish religious male circumcision ceremony performed by a mohel ("circumciser") on the eighth day of the

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infant's life. The rabbi was looking suspiciously at me a lot, which made me very, very nervous.

In 1987 we took Australian Monitor to the world, booking an exhibit at the Audio Engineering Society Convention in New York City. I boarded a Continental DC10 and flew to Honolulu, with service to JFK. I was travelling heavy with one complete AM1600 amplifier in a carton weighing 33kg, and a few more boxes of display stuff including five hundred brochures. Getting that lot out of customs without a carnet or paperwork took every ounce of jetlagged confusion I could muster, along with a lot of "g'days" and "ripper, ocker" dumb Aussie posturing. It did the trick, the guy grew weary and waved me in.

Arriving late in the evening, my taxi took me to the Hotel Carter, just off Times Square on 43rd. I wrestled my assortment of cartons and bags into the foyer.

Hymie had an eye for a bargain, and Hotel Carter fitted the bill. I knew I was in for it when the flight attendant's face fell after I told him where I was staying. He advised 'extreme care', and on arrival I knew this was true when I saw the so-called reception desk. Behind the bars, the guy looked like an extra in a murder movie. He had a nice Smith & Wesson 45 beside him on the desk. Tourists were rare, as this twenty-four-level hovel was permanent home to a subclass of interesting people I passed on the stairs when the various elevators didn't arrive.

My room was fairly horrible even by roadie standard, and the bathroom plumbing was both complicated and musical. Clangs, bangs, whistling noises, and the odd rattle resonated through the walls with the noise of many TV sets, moaning, shouting, and children crying.

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The smell was like someone had locked the Manzil Room up for five years, leaving a couple of dead rats to decompose, and then briefly sprayed some Glen 20 at it. I tossed out five ciggie stubs and found half a chicken drumstick under the frayed chair. One of the three lamps worked. Typical of the USA at the time, there was no fridge or any other facilities.

Unable to sleep I hustled myself to a sleazy bar on Times Square which back then was populated by porn theatres and camera shops. A couple of beers helped me get towards sleeping time. A hooker that looked like a transvestite tried to sell me a good time. Two loitering Puerto Ricans offered me drugs. I got back to my hotel intact and snuggled into the valley in the old mattress, and tried to imagine what had happened, right there in that room, over the decades.

Up early, I was consulting a map to find the Australian Consulate office on 45th. I'd called around my contacts in Sydney and got in touch with someone high up in whatever Austrade was then called. They'd sent a telex to New York requesting assistance in locating my certain, required peculiarity. I needed something I was sure did not exist anywhere in New York except possibly at the consulate. And they did indeed agree to loan me one.

On arrival I was shown into a nondescript meeting room and left waiting for quite a while. An unimpressed and grouchy Australian public servant came in and proffered a loan agreement. I was to return the goods in a condition as received, five days hence before midday. I undertook to keep the goods with me, in my immediate presence, twenty-four hours a day. I was not to loan, leave, or lock it up unaccompanied by myself. Sign here and here. I'll bring it out for you.

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I left with one complete, genuine stuffed koala named Kevin. It was my key to every level of New York society and had I been single, Kevin would have seen his charms put to very good use, because I was totally a chick magnet with him sitting next to me at the bar. Kev had many drinks bought for him, and I was obliged to drink them for him.

Arriving at the Hilton on 6th, I hustled Kevin and my cartons in, skirting the Teamsters and the Porters and the Dressers and all the ticket clippers I had been warned about who would charge me hundreds to haul my marsupial and boxes a couple of yards.

Unfurling my poster and throwing my black cloth over a plinth I had hired at vast expense, I set up my display. All that was missing was the 2,000 watt fresnel light that Stuart had explained I should rent. Kev and I took a taxi downtown and hired one on a short tripod from a film rental shop. Back at the stand, I finished the display.

Stuart had calculated that the AM1600 amplifier would power the 110v, 2,000 watt light. All we had to do was shove music from my new Sony Discman into the input, and the LED display would show the music playin, while the light pulsed to the beat. It worked a treat.

With the light and the koala, my Akubra hat, and some extra displayed Vegemite jars, we were set.

Hymie arrived that night and told me he would show me how to deal with the Times Square camera shops and get a bargain. We *didn't* get a bargain. Hymie got a lot of shouting—from *and* at him—and seemed to derive a deep-seated pleasure from the drawn-out procedure. Later on, I noticed a camera priced the same at Macys.

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I sold six amplifiers to Radio Tuku Oi from Helsinki, Finland, on the first day—while Hymie was at lunch. He was very happy and made some sales to various Americans. Three long exhausting days later we pulled it all down and I took Kev back to his boring fake gumtree branch in the consulate. We exchanged sad farewells, and I lamented with him on my considerable strength of character resisting all those New York chicks attracted by his steely gaze and soft, soft fur. He sighed, and wished me fair travels, and asked me to look up his cousin Kelvin in Taree.

Hymie flew off to Tel Aviv to rendezvous with his mistress who was, it transpired, the reason why he needed to half-own an export company—so he had reasons to travel and get away from his wife Gertie, who was somewhat of a handful. She would park the Merc across our loading dock and sound the horn, yelling ‘HYMIE! HYMIE!’ until he would come out. One alarming day she rang in hysterics, Hymie was missing in action, and a Huntsman spider had arrived in the new apartment at Dover Heights.

"Send a boy over straight away to kill it," she told me.

"Sorry Gertie, you're in Australia now, we don't send boys," I said.

In New York, I boarded a United Airlines flight to Los Angeles to hook up with Hymie's son, Barry. I wanted to secure an agency for a loudspeaker line from Renkus Heinz that I had been reselling in NSW for several years. It was a funny arrangement and typical of the times—a Sydney importer stood between me and the source. All the importer sales were to me anyway. I just wanted to cut the pointless middle man out.

Barry was a Tom Selleck type of guy, tall and good-looking with an apartment at Venice Beach, and not much to do other than

chase women. He took me to Chasen's, a restaurant frequented by entertainers. We settled into a cubicle and Barry scanned the bar for action.

Across from us three Japanese tourists, two women and a man, succumbed to jetlag and cocktails and who-knows what, and slumped asleep onto the table. Bizarrely the Maitre D' summoned several bus-boys, who carried them out without fuss or fanfare.

Ending the meal, I peeled off far too many greenbacks and we went back to the beach, disappointing Barry with me being a married, business-minded guy not inclined to party on with whatever Barry could pick up along the way. He was truly living a dull life with little meaning, and I'm sure he thought exactly the same of me.

Harro Heinz gave me short shrift, and he had no intention of ditching his agent in Sydney, clearly not believing I was his sole customer. The agent had obviously embellished matters and knew I would try this on. I advised Harro that Australian Monitor could and would make its own loudspeaker systems if he didn't come across. He didn't, and we eventually did.

In normal circumstances you'd fly home from Los Angeles via Hawaii or NZ. Back then there were no non-stops. But Paul Hogan had done such a job promoting Australia with Crocodile Dundee that a boom was on and flights were full. I had to fly the other way. Over to New York, then on the oldest, most terrifying Pan Am 747 one could ever imagine. A truly dreadful night passed fitfully and I landed at dawn in Zurich.

After checking in and standing for an hour under a hot shower, I ventured out and soaked up the orderly, elegant old world. Mid-morning I walked into the UBS Bank at Bahnhofstrasse and opened a Swiss bank account.

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With Hymie as a business partner, heavy bank debt, and having met too many dodgy characters lately, I was becoming somewhat strategic about supporting my family. I figured having a ‘back door’ bank may come in handy. The UBS gentleman was every part the parody of a Swiss banker, oozing discretion and barely concealing disappointment at my paltry opening deposit. But it was true—to operate the account, all you did was call them in Zurich, and quote The Numbers.

The number was something like 0076 2011 6238 5295 7, containing the country-specific details of the account number. The bank identifier is 00762 and the account number in this example is 011623852957. Don’t bother trying—I closed it years ago, unused.

I had an interesting night at The UFO Club watching a silver jump-suited band, and flew out the next morning on a Swissair DC10, bound for Hong Kong via Karachi. Touching down in dusty Pakistan at dawn, we were kept onboard while we refuelled. Commandos with machine guns stood around the tarmac. The smoky smells of the sub-continent wafted into the cabin. Landing in Hong Kong at the old Kai Tak International Airport was every bit as interesting and dramatic as any of the YouTube videos. You literally fly final and do a ninety-degree turn around a couple of high-rises, and slew the thing in.

Another night in another tourist class hotel, and next afternoon it was on Cathay Pacific for an overnight flight home. That remains the most exhausting and horrendous economy class set of flights I’ve ever experienced, and all of it was done before frequent flyer miles became a thing.

We did indeed launch a range of loudspeakers. The F500 had dual fifteen inch drivers with the top having a dual concentric horn arrangement. We sourced the components from another speaker

manufacturer and quickly killed the Renkus Heinz business in Australia. Harro and I never spoke again, despite crossing paths at many tradeshow in the decades since.

Ironically the tendrils of that whole affair touched me recently when Renkus Heinz were the very first firm to commit to my USA ENTECH Roadshow—before reneging and not signing the contract. Whether that had anything to do with 1987, I have no idea.

Australian Monitor was a good honest enterprise, Stuart had Greg Hicks as his foreman, and a crew of dedicated assemblers. Parts came in, amplifiers went out. We struggled to get to twenty units a week. The losses mounted. Hymie tipped in more money, using a bank device called a Letter of Credit (LOC), tied to short sixty or ninety-day terms. When each term ended, you repaid it or took out a new one at the prevailing interest rate. Here's how it worked: he would sell twenty amplifiers to his own entity in the USA or Europe. That entity would establish a letter of credit. The bank would advance us funds against the LOC.

By this time, which was 1988, we were banking with ANZ. The area manager dealing with us was Bill Bricknell, a career banker. He had Hymie's measure. With three short-term LOCs in his vault, he called me in.

"What's the plan, Julius?"

"Bill, I'm out for the count," I replied.

"Brian, leave the room," he told his assistant. I knew a thing of deep knowledge was coming.

"Julius, here is the thing. You want out. I have your property at Napoleons Reef and your home at Lindfield. I will release the country property to you now—it has no real value to us. I'll hold Lindfield until Hymie is sorted."

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That sounded reasonable. The magic was about to appear.

“Hymie will do anything to save face,” he continued. “I know these types. I hold his three letters of credit. I can call them in anytime, and then the company goes into administration.”

By which he meant that we, or he, appointed an outside insolvency practitioner. More likely Bill would do it.

“You have power,” Bill said. This was extremely unusual clarity from a career banker. “I know you and Caroline, and I know your situation, plus I know Hymie. Here’s what you do ...”

With that, a strategy was laid out that resulted in my signing an undated letter, addressed to himself at ANZ Bank HQ. The letter gave Bill the power to appoint external administrators to the company. He could activate the letter anytime. I had put myself into his hands, but to be realistic that’s where the power sat the whole time.

Bill went on to give Hymie his druthers. The wily old banker knew what he was doing. The next day he explained to Hymie that Julius was exiting the share register. The theatrics were entertaining, or so I was led to believe in the retelling, and to no avail. The reality was ANZ held my property and Hymie’s LOC’s so they had cover. The blistering phone call from Hymie from a phone box outside the bank was world class—he was not happy. But it was decided. Bill would give me two-thirds of the sale price of Lindfield, and Hymie would roll over his LOCs indefinitely.

Everyone saved face—and arse. I sold Lindfield without grief as we were already ensconced up at Napoleon Reef. I’d sold my lighting company to Garth Tanswell, from Herkes Electrical, and the proceeds were tucked out of harm’s way in a family trust. I was exposed to the residual guarantee of many finance leases running

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years into the future over Australian Monitor, but I knew Hymie would never let it fail.

It was time for rural Julius. January 1989, I was out bush. I'd had enough of mad money and the crazy business time, Jess was almost three, and Sarah was ready for high school. House loans were at seventeen percent, inflation was ten percent. The business climate was truly insane and I'd had enough of the production industry, road crew, audio equipment, lights, and the whole nine yards.

Essentially, I retired.

Hymie would go on to run Australian Monitor for some years, and then sell the remains to Audio Telex Communications. They had been building small amplifiers and associated audio gear under their own brand, and they had the smarts to make Australian Monitor sensible. Which they did—and sometime later they were taken over by Hills Limited. The era of sensibility ended when Hills hired a guy called Ted Pretty. He destroyed any value the brand still possessed, and eventually Hills flogged off their audio products to Ambertech.

Where Australian Monitor remains to this day.

Chapter 21: Going Bush

I was on the road with bands in '83 and '84, and used to stop at the little cottage at Napoleon Reef, even if only for an hour.

What always hit me about the place is that once you turn the motor off, an amazing stillness descended on you. Then you notice the clean, clear cool air that altitude provides. The smell of wattle, of eucalyptus, dust, and of heated stones in summer.

Every time I went there, I found the thoughts and the stresses of life would wash off.

By January 1988 I was seriously fatigued from eight years of business and had a new appreciation that there is more to life—the kind of thoughts a besotted dad has when he looks into the eyes of his new daughter. I'd endured some tough circumstances in the businesses, particularly with those Jewish South African business partners—and the ANZ bank was owed a neat million.

I sat down just after New Year's Eve and watched a Peter Weir movie called *The Mosquito Coast* where Harrison Ford takes his family from urban USA to some remote jungle somewhere and builds a new life from scratch.

I became Harrison Ford.

On the Australia Day long weekend in 1988, while all of Australia was focused on the long boats and the bi-centennial celebrations, I was up at the The Reef with my brother Dan, re-roofing the cottage. We arrived at first light and threw ourselves into it. We worked through the heat, and at the end of the day dunked ourselves into that beloved creek to wash the sweat and grime off.

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I renovated and put in windows. Found another wood-fuelled cooking stove to replace the rusted-out one. Put in a basic kitchen. And decided to move.

Caroline was fully supportive, she too had put up with enough of the business, the pressures, and life at West Lindfield. Our plan was to see out the 1988 school year in Sydney and move the family at year's end. Sarah would finish Year Six before we left.

Through the year I was planning the move. Almost every weekend we were up at The Reef, working hard on the cottage since we would be living in it full-time while we built a new house.

There had already been some history with Evans Shire Council in regards to the cottage. In 1986 I had hired a builder from Sunny Corner to extend and renovate, and his plans were rejected for two reasons. First, there was 'no legal access', meaning that although the track leading up to the property ran through crown land, it was not a gazetted road. Second, the shire regarded the cottage as a non-complying structure and wanted it demolished.

Naturally I took them to the Land and Environment Court and had a day in Bathurst Court with a barrister beating the shire over the head.

When the judgement eventually arrived it was a hollow victory. We won the right to keep the place, but still needed legal access. Any renovation would need to comply with building codes ... you can guess the rest.

Knowing all that, in early 1988 I set about having the track gazetted, requiring a survey, payment of fees, forms, and endless waiting for ministers and things. I kept ringing the factotum in the Lands Office in Orange, and had a small measure of comfort in being told that the formalities would happen in time.

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However, I needed that legal access before I could lodge building plans to build the new house that we considered essential for our family life in the bush. I had been to see the shire, and although they were less than fond of me, they had a new building inspector who was a decent human. We talked about what could be done, and I found plans of a place from Blue Mountain Log Homes at Medlow Bath. The kit price was \$18,000.

Sometime mid-winter in that year we got our road, and I put building plans to the shire which were approved in a record, short six weeks.

Green is for go.

In October I got a dozer in and levelled the house site. We laid the slab—badly—for the garage. The cement went off very fast. We did the pour and made the big mistake of stopping for lunch before finishing it off. That garage floor was lumpy, and probably still is. The garage was a cheap steel kit affair which we built over one weekend. I resolved to never buy anything cheap again.

I needed the garage as a store, and so I could make a temporary bedroom at the back for my father and mother-in-law when they came to help build.

I put in two 5000-gallon tanks and got a fire pump so I could pump water out of the creek into the tanks, and then top up another tank further up the hill every week or so which would give me gravity-fed pressure back to the house. There was no talk of water licenses back then, and I just took what I needed every month.

We made a temporary shower on a pallet alongside the garage, and we were set. I put an order in with the electrical utility for power and was quoted a long wait. I got the power just before we moved, but we were okay without it anyway—we had a new gas

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fridge, plus good Primus pressure lamps. I had a generator for my power tools.

In late October the Blue Mountains Log Home was delivered. It was touted as a 'kit', which meant eighteen tonnes of cyprus pine plus some Colourbond sheeting for the roof. They kindly supplied a sixteen-page 'manual', which quickly became known as The Book Of Lies.

As soon as school finished in December, we were out of Lindfield. I held off putting the house on the market so we could leave our furniture in there. We loaded everything into our van and made the big move. We were all really excited.

Building began.

Chapter 22: Building a House

Caroline's dad, Frank Fitzmaurice, was my mentor and supervisor. He was a retired builder and came down for two weeks at a time from Tea Gardens to help out. We put up a right angle of two strips of timber to define one corner of the house. Frank rejected Pythagoras' theory because it involved math.

"Get me a piece of rope three metres long, another one four metres, and a third at five metres. Now we join 'em up—see? We have a right angle."

Then we made a string grid and had a backhoe dig out the pier holes. Then we hand-mixed and poured a cement pad into the bottom of each one.

He showed me how to build a pier from concrete masonry blocks and left me to do the other forty-seven while he went away with his wife, Monica.

With the piers up and level, we put the bearers and joists on top. This was hard work in summer. Then we laid the tongue and groove floor. It needed to be clamped together, as each long strip had slight variations of straightness. Dan and I got pretty good at it after a few days. Every nail needed a hole drilled first, since cyprus pine is fairly brittle. It's a great timber coming from natural forests north of Narrabri, resistant to white ants and termites. At least, the idea is they don't like the flavour. It has a unique smell when you cut and work with it. The whole house was made from it.

The house plan was fairly straight forward, three bedrooms, bathroom and laundry, with an open kitchen and dining room. It has a gable roof, which was easy to build. The problem was that the manual didn't give anywhere near enough detail. We overcame that by driving up to Medlow Bath to actually *look* at how the demo home was put together.

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We covered the new floor in plastic to keep it dry and got a real carpenter—a strange German—to come and make the wall frames on site. He spent the week with us, the hottest week of the whole project, and we stood all the frames up and inserted the windows and doors.

The next step was to put the roof beams in place. The house featured exposed beams, so the two by four cyprus lengths needed to span up to the ridge beam, which was put in place first. Dan and I did this, and Frank asked me to phone him when we were done.

“Make sure you call me, I have to show you how to align the frame,” he said very insistently. Sure enough, he came up and showed us that despite our efforts with spirit levels, by dropping a plumb bob (the oldest tool in the world) we could see we were about an inch and a half out of level, meaning not straight.

“Gosh, how do we fix that?” I said, although I think the actual language was a little more basic. I had in mind some rope and a four-wheel-drive, and a huge accident involving miscalculated acceleration.

Frank had the classic old builder's solution to every problem, and this one looked easy. He got a five metre length of cyprus and nailed one end to the top of the corner wall plate. Then he bent the cyprus, adding tension, and nailed the bottom to the floor. Now there was a bowed length of wood, applying tension in the direction we wanted the frame to move. Looking at the plumb bob, he simply pulled up on the bent beam, straightening it slowly, and sure enough the whole frame groaned and shifted.

Once square, we put some temporary props in place and set about roofing. We repeated the floor process, this time adding tongue and groove above the roof beams to create that lovely exposed timber look. Naturally there were another 10,000 holes to

drill and nails to hammer in. A week later, we had a roof ready for insulation and Colorbond sheeting.

Around about then I made my first reasonably decent mistake and ran all the electrical wires through the roof and the frames. It had to be done then so the roof could go on. I had—and have—basic electrical skills. But I should have given the job to a pro, because later on I would need the thing signed off. More on that later.

Once roofed, we started on the cladding, which was also fiddly since the place was clad with oversized weatherboards which were made to look like half-milled logs. They were heavy, and not very flexible. And of course every damn nail needed a hole drilled first ...

There comes a point in every job called ‘lock up stage’, and we were about there in late February.

The final part of building that house ran through until April 1989. I made another mistake and did all the plumbing. I’d already put in the septic system, aided by the building inspector who told me what he wanted. He gave me some diagrams, and the backhoe guy knew what to dig, and where.

Because I’d plumbed up the four-inch poly pipes for the septic, I thought I could bend, cut, solder and fit the one-inch copper pipes for the water in the house. After all, it wasn’t exactly a high pressure installation, it was gravity fed from the tank up the hill. I spent a week teaching myself how to do it with pre-soldered joints. The guy at the hardware must have laughed every time I left, but he was strangely poker-faced while I was there every day, buying extra bits which I could not name. My little drawings probably went into a scrapbook of tool-fool big laughs.

The best—or worst—moment was when I had installed the

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bath, and the hot water heater, and I commissioned the very first bath. Caroline and I settled into the tub, glass of wine each, with candles burning. She tilted her head back, towards the taps, and heard a strange, remote dripping noise. *Inside* the wall cavity ...

The plumber doubled over with laughter when he inspected my work, which needed to be accessed behind some already plastered walls.

Which I had to cut open.

After they had been painted.

It cost me about \$2,000 for his work to redo it all. Likewise the electrician charged me stacks extra for trying to circumvent his trade. Who knew if you put a roof screw through the light cable what could happen? It was strange.

When the place was kind of finished, we went to Lindfield and loaded our furniture into a rental truck. That marked the end of my Sydney days, or so I thought. As we drove the truck down Victoria Pass, a glorious late autumn sunset welcomed us to our new lives.

Life after building consisted of finishing things, which seemed to take forever. You tend to down tools and not want to start again. We went to Europe for a month and left the kids with the in-laws, who stayed at the property to care for them. By that stage Jess was three and Sarah twelve—she was in Year Seven at Kelso High.

We adapted to the routine of country life. Caroline got a job at an accountancy firm in Bathurst, and I stayed at home with Jess. I had a few things to do, but nothing particular, and needed to adapt to being a house dad. It wasn't easy. I would await the telltale dust plume of my wife arriving home, have the gin and tonic ready for her, and she would stomp in cursing her boss and throw the briefcase on the couch.

Then she would chastise me for not folding the clothes the right

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way, or for not having the ironing up to date.

Chapter 23: The Battling Hillbillies

Now a resident at Napoleon Reef, I started to collect snippets of life from around the district.

There are a lot of small parcels of land scattered through the western slopes. They can attract URs (urban refugees), some for sea change reasons, others because the land is cheap and you can live on the dole out there. The third camp are ordinary country folk who work somewhere nearby.

To find the URs you generally need not look far beyond the rusty sheds, old caravans, and wrecked cars littering the yard in front of a decrepit house. There are usually dogs, goats, and sometimes pigs wandering about.

Because of defamation laws I am compelled to change the names of the guilty.

Let's start with Mr. and Mrs. Thurlgood, or the 'T' family. Six teenage kids, I think—hard to tell, because they all looked the same. Mr T was an older father, upright and stiff, with a clipped delivery. Mrs. T was rotund and pink-faced. They had leased a three-bedroom house up at Hillview Estate, a kilometre from The Reef.

It appears the T family were cult members, and the kids didn't do anything except make trouble for people.

My trouble started one sunny afternoon when my little daughter was playing innocently in a sandpit with a neighbour. A big bang up behind the cottage drew us all out and running. A cloud of blue smoke showed it was more of a bomb than a shotgun blast.

We found two old BMX bikes half-hidden behind a tree stump a kilometre down the track, and we got information that took us to the T household. Mrs. T answered the door, but wouldn't open the

flyscreen. She looked impassively at us as my neighbour factually asserted that we thought one of her T boys had been involved in 'an incident'. Mrs. T said that was not possible, and shut the door on us.

The kid grapevine reported that a T boy was infatuated with my thirteen-year-old step daughter, Sarah, and that this was his form of calling card—a pipe bomb.

Six months later he tried another approach. I saw him coming down from the mountain, and he had a ten-inch bowie knife strapped to his skinny waist. His face was pale with a kind of man-boy facial fuzz decorated with pimples. A film of sweat across his brow promised an unhealthy body odour. But it was the wriggling and squealing contents of his sack that caught my attention most, especially when he dumped a baby feral pig on my lawn.

I told him that Sarah would not be receiving his gift, and that he was lucky the pig's mother hadn't killed him—as I'm scanning the tree line for a stampeding pissed-off swine.

Thereafter he kind of stalked us. For example we would go to the fire shed BBQ on Friday night, and Junior T would blast past at about 120kph on his trail bike, scattering mums and frightened kids. He would hide down the track, and when he saw us coming home, he would ride in front at a snail's pace.

Somehow I didn't retaliate, and the last I saw of Junior T was one day driving along the highway. He was piloting his dad's old Holden at about 60kph in a 100kph zone, and with a Highway Patrol car behind him unable to overtake. He was locked on to the rear vision mirror, snarling at them.

Then there was his little mate, let's call him Bob. His mum was a deserted wife. Bob was every bit as bad as the T boy, but with the added dimension that he hit kids on the school bus.

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Someone broke into a neighbour's home one night and stole a gun. We suspected T boy and Bob, but what can you do?

The weird part of all this, or maybe it's not so weird, is that a few years later, Junior T ran off with Bob's mum—who was in her fifties. Junior was pushing eighteen at the time. It was that kind of place.

Kids were a minority when it came to troubled souls.

There were at least four crazy, mad and bad men out there in my time.

One lived on an access road to the council dam, and he decided to deny access to a young family down the track through 'his land'. His new gate was padlocked and it was tough luck, he didn't care. They hadn't done a thing to warrant this. The police and the council all took the path of least resistance, and the matter dragged through the courts. The family were forced to use a back track and walk a kilometre, then wade across the creek. That went on for a year or more.

Mad padlock guy decided he hated another neighbour who I affectionately called Bull, because that's what he looked like. Bull wore grey King Gee shorts and a short-sleeved shirt, no matter how cold it was. And it gets mighty, bitey frigid cold out there. Bull felt no pain. He and Padlock had a shootout, and both got arrested. Another feud was born.

Further along, I met a neighbour who arrived hurling abuse because I had cut 'his' fence, which it turns out was an old fence on some Crown land acres I had leased next to mine. This guy ran cattle in there, on my land—I wouldn't have cared, but I didn't know. The fence would not have kept his beef enclosed anyhow, and his approach was to yell and swear, so my response was to ignore him.

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Very close to me was a Vietnam veteran who'd visited me early on, before my plans went in to council, to say quite honestly that he was out there for peace and quiet, and that my intentions to move into the area would disturb him. I felt some compassion and undertook to buy his property—Genotdel, that he'd bought from my mum. We shook on it, I got a bank valuation, and he changed his mind. He spent his days doing weird things. One day he drove his Mad Max-styled bush-basher into his shed—through the wall. Maybe he couldn't find the door?

Out in the rural areas word tends to travel about people, especially when you have a few village gossips at work. I learned things I would rather not know, like that the husband of a girl I had once liked—I liked her inside a dark mine tunnel for a short while, when I was a teenager—was a serial thug called 'clocker', because he would clock you one. Avoid *that* guy.

There was another reputed cult family up at Hillview. Apparently they baptised people in their dam. Well, we need more folk like that, so I made friends with the guy on a bushfire callout. He was a gentleman. Funny how some people just label church people 'cult'. I've had that thrown at me too—I'm a church guy.

There were bushfire brigade politics. A local captain got himself voted down at a heated meeting because he tried to have a nice family prosecuted for burning off without a permit. They had a BBQ one cold, still, spring night, and burned a bulldozed pile of old timber from land clearing. Half the brigade was there socially, but the captain called a meeting to censure them. I moved a motion to have him removed, and he quit. It transpired some people say he almost incinerated half the brigade members at a fire one time, when he ordered them to stand on a ridge and fight a blaze that was roaring up the mountain at them.

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Fortunately, they declined to obey.

Chapter 24: The Lure of the Air

I always wanted to fly a plane, so when I moved to the bush in 1989 I got the chance. I had the money to learn and probably ultimately burned a hundred thousand dollars on the hobby over the dozen years I held the license. All up I did about 350 hours in the pilot's seat.

The flight school had Cessna 172 four-seat single-engine light aircraft. These are high wing, fixed-undercarriage workhorses. You can load two adults, two kids, some bags and enough fuel to fly about four hours. They do 110 knots, a knot being a nautical mile. A hundred nautical miles is 185kms as the crow flies, a straight line that is always shorter than any road. In one hour you do around 200kms, which from Sydney would put you in Orange—a four hour drive. Generally that aircraft covers the same distance in one hour as four hours in a car.

Flying relatively simple aircraft such as these you are unpressurised, so your maximum altitude is below ten thousand feet. Aviation uses imperial measurement—feet, nautical miles, and gallons, along with Greenwich Mean Time. Every flight plan is worked back to GMT, which is basically the time in London. It means you're always thinking, *if it's 10:00 a.m. in Sydney, it's midnight GMT*—and then adjusting *that* for our daylight saving time.

You don't need to buy a plane, since they are commonly available for hire. The good news is the hourly rate is based on taco time, so you only pay as you fly. The rule of thumb for 'away' trips is the owner wants two or three hours a day, and that's easy to do with the distances in Australia. More powerful, larger single-engine aircraft come with six seats, retractable undercarriage, six-cylinder engines, and fly at 160 knots.

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People think of aircraft flying as very regulated, which it is, but it is surprising how much freedom you can have in a light aircraft. For example, departing Sydney from Bankstown, all you need to do is hop on the radio and get clearance to enter a runway and take off. The tower doesn't need to have a flight plan, so they don't know where you're going. Once airborne, you are quickly out of the airport airspace, and provided you fly in one of the 'lanes' of departure, all you need to do is stay underneath the controlled airspace 'steps'.

Leaving Bankstown you climb to 1,500 feet until you leave the airport area, when you can then go to 2,500 feet. Near Penrith the step jumps up to 4,500 feet and rises to 8,500 over Katoomba. You always need to know 'lowest safe altitude', and that mountainous places like Katoomba are already 3,337 feet in elevation. Altitude is always above sea level, not ground elevation.

There is a tremendous sense of freedom in this. If you want to, you can be invisible by not using a transponder and thus any random radar trace of you will not have an identity. Underneath or outside of controlled airspace, nothing is usually monitored or followed. The complete sense of a free world came to me some years into my flying when we stopped at a homestead for an overnight stay.

The property owner had a nice hanger just off his dirt strip. He flew his Cessna 182 to and from Dubbo for shopping trips—without ever holding a license. The guy was sly and cunning, he knew when a ramp inspection might happen, and made sure he wasn't around when it did. The C182 was properly maintained and registered. You don't skimp on that. Every 1,000 hours you recondition the propeller. One engine means one chance, so no one cuts corners.

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You could—and people do—run illicit freight into and out of the country, flying low and visual. You'd need something with longer legs than a light aircraft, although anything is possible. Coast Watch certainly does monitor the airspace, although it occurred to me more than once that everything is slow on a Sunday. I had several cross-country trips that were planned to fly around restricted military airbases such as Williamstown RAAF, but on approach I discovered the tower empty and the space open, so I could fly through. Memo to anyone wanting to invade Australia—do it on a Sunday.

Having someone with me such as my daughter Jess, who sat in the right-hand seat for all my great adventure flights across the country, meant I always planned responsibly, lodged the plan by phone before departure, gave a SAR (search and rescue) time, and carried extra EPIRBs with one always attached to the kid. I hired a satellite phone for the big trips, and we used high frequency radio which reached about half the country. Regular flight-control radio covers the coast and cities. We had first aid, spare food, water, torches—and emergency beer. For me.

Australia by light aircraft is eye candy. The sense of great space and the endless deserts struck me with awe. Sydney by night is something else. When I got night-rated, I did some joy flights such as up the northern lane to Hornsby, turned right for Palm Beach, then down the coast to Sydney Heads. One night Sydney Centre accepted a flight plan revision to fly up the harbour at 1,500 feet. There was nothing in the air, and it was like we were all alone but with a million lights under us.

With the right planning, good weather, and good company, there is no better way to see Australia.

Chapter 25: A License to Learn

I was freshly minted as an unrestricted private pilot in April 1991.

As Chief Instructor Jerry Trevor-Jones shook my hand, he said the immortal words that haunt me today.

“This isn't a license to fly. It's a license to keep on learning.”

Jerry's advice rang true within a few months.

June 30, 1991, dawned cold and cloudy. I'd risen earlier and received a weather fax from the call-back service. Having a printed weather forecast was essential for me. I was flying my family to Queensland to escape the mountain winter; we were packed, and excited. Weather would be the only thing stopping me.

I was forty-four, Caroline was with me, along with Sarah who was thirteen and Jess was four.

Brimming with confidence I loaded us into the Cessna, having weighed everything and planned where to stash what. The tanks held 150 litres which clearly took our take-off weight over limits. That gave me a little over five hours safe flying time, which I could reduce a little. So I fuelled for less to get the weight right.

I guess my reasoning was that I had a long runway, cold air which makes for a shorter take-off, and safe weather to the west as the cloud cover was reported as thinning out in that direction.

The clouds at Bathurst were six octas, which means six-eighths overcast. Not a good start, but they were 1,500 feet over the airport, itself at 2,400 feet elevation. Bathurst is fairly high for an Australian airport.

Planning to fly to Lismore for fuel, the track took me slightly east of Mudgee, and the clouds thickened. I was licensed for Visual Flight Rules, which meant I had to be at least a thousand feet *below* cloud, or two kilometres away from clouds at my level.

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I couldn't fly over the top of cloud unless I could see the ground through the gaps.

I took off *knowing* there were clouds around the mountain ranges.

Sure enough, the clouds came down over Coolah. I was compressed between cloud and terrain, and I should turn back. Instead I punched up through the clouds, because I could see the layer was thin. I also knew it was clear ten miles further west, assuming the weather forecast was actually correct.

Cloud climbs were practiced in training as 'under the hood', where they put a kind of blinker cap on so you could only see the instruments. Then they had you do straight climbs and descents. Any turning was prohibited, because the combination of turn and climb was exponentially harder to control.

Once I burst through into sunlight, I adjusted track northwest to take us away from the clouds.

Once in a stable cruise at about 8,000 feet, I replanned the route on my charts. This was before the age of GPS. All navigation was visual, with the track drawn in pencil on a chart and progress measured using time intervals. Landmarks should come under the nose of the plane on time, and if delayed that means a head-wind. If we're off-track and the landmark is to the left or right, then we had a crosswind.

Being freshly trained, I was proficient enough with navigation, and the flight track and planning was all happening perfectly well. Eventually we arrived at Lismore, having tracked via Gunnedah, Armidale, and Grafton. The cloud was behind us.

We landed after four hours, one of my longest flight legs. I was down to reserve fuel—not ideal—and had planned to stop earlier if we burned more than expected. I taxied direct to the toilet block.

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Next leg, after sandwiches and thermos tea, was to Coolangatta, which is in controlled air space. I got clearances and managed to land and vacate the runway in between a Qantas and an Ansett passenger jets. My training had taken me through Canberra airport a few times, so this wasn't an issue.

After fuel, we flew a long leg which included Moreton Bay. We were in the light aircraft lane, but near Peel Island a huge black mess of rain sat in our way. I put the nose of the aircraft inside to have a look and didn't like what I *couldn't* see. We looped back and I got clearance from Brisbane Centre to track in towards Wynnum. They vectored me low over the bay, under the Brisbane Airport traffic and away from the weather.

We flew over Bundaberg and landed at Gladstone for fuel.

At this stage, I planned to stay on Great Keppel Island a few days, which is eighty kilometres from Gladstone. I stopped on the island and refuelled, as always preparing the plane for leaving *before* we spent some welcome time in the warmer sunshine.

Several days later, relaxed and happy, as I got ready for our departure, I studied the airstrip data for Great Keppel again. It was 700 metres long, which was on the short side, but I could get airborne from that with my load.

The runway at Keppel has quite a slope up to the south. I pondered this. I'd watched the windsocks, showing a reasonable wind from the south whipping down the runway. I did the calculations based on the forecast wind—fifteen knots—and added a fudge factor. I put the published slope data into the calculation too. It should be tight, but fine.

I was taking off to the south, into the wind, which is what I was trained to do. But the takeoff roll, *up* that slope and with a legal full load, was slower than I liked. I had an abort point picked out

about two-thirds up the runway, and hit that point at about forty-five knots—well short of the sixty-three knots I needed. Still, I pressed on and at the end of the runway left the ground with an immediate stall horn sounding in the cabin.

I hadn't had *that* before. I was at a shade under sixty knots, but the wind at the crest of the hill was playing tricks. Instinctively I pushed the nose down, and we flew over the top of the hill at about ten feet off the deck. Luckily there were no obstacles, and I could disappear off the end of the island and fly level over the rocks and ocean until I had enough speed to climb.

Slowly.

Belatedly, I realised that I should have taken off with a tail wind, down that hill, and at enormous speed.

I'll be honest, I was freaked out. We refuelled at Emerald, stopped at Long Reach, navigated across the wastelands to Charleville, and got more juice there.

The weather again closed in as I headed towards the mountain ranges, forcing me to stop for the night at Narrabri, where we took a taxi to a motel for the night. Next day was slightly better, but again clouds hung low over the Warrumbungle Ranges, so I had to go low and track west over the Pilliga forest until I crossed the Coonamble road. Then I followed that to Dubbo.

Clouds sat to the east, and we had to *go* east to get home. Over Wellington it was nasty, so I flew back to Dubbo for another night in a motel. The next day was clear enough, and on July 14th we returned home.

Looking back, I could have done many things during that flight better. The lesson I learned—as Jerry had told me—was that yes, I still had a lot to learn despite having that license. An ethos I could apply to everything else in life too.

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Chapter 26: Leaving the Bush

Life revolved around the kids, the bush fire shed social BBQ on Friday night run by old Burt—the village gossip, and the property. We always had bits to do. But things grew boring for me.

For the first time in my life I searched high and low for a paid job, and hit reality on day one when the guy at the Commonwealth Employment Service asked me what qualifications I had. He struggled to categorise me, and settled for truck driver. They had zero work on the books in any case. A stubborn, local bus operator refused me a job driving one of his buses because I didn't drink at his pub—in other words, I was a blow-in. An outsider.

So I spent months looking for an established business to buy and settled on Banjo's Café in the main shopping mall. I paid \$100,000 for the leasehold in 1990, and became the proprietor. It meant opening at 7:30 a.m. and closing at 5:00 p.m. I had some short and sharp lessons in running a food business, including dealing with the council ordinance inspector who took acute interest in the business once I started there.

Just after I took over Banjos, I got a contract to work in Sydney two days a week running the Jands company magazine, CHANNELS, and so I convinced Caroline to leave the accountancy firm and run Banjos. Despite being very unhappy at the accountancy firm, she managed to be even more unhappy at the café.

As 1991 rolled around, Jess started at kindergarten at Raglan Primary school. Sarah was in Year Nine. School didn't work too well for us this year, and we were starting to grow weary of the limits of rural life. My Sydney contract looked like it could expand, and I was stimulated by it.

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In late winter, as the last snowfall melted, we went to the O'Connell Hotel, a trip which we enjoyed as it was dirt roads almost all the way there and very "country". Still, while we were there, Caroline and I decided that we would sell up and leave at the end of the school year.

Mid-October, I ran a large display advert with a photo of the property in the Western Advocate. The open-house hours were just one, 11:00 a.m. to midday. Four cars came down the hill, and the first people through the door, the Bayliss family, bought the place for \$150,000.

In December we left, and I didn't look back or return for fourteen years.

My first few years back in Sydney were characterised by a kind of homesickness, where Jess and I would go to find some bush somewhere and look mournfully at the trees, remembering our times, throwing stones in the creek. We would chat about the past, about Stripey the hero rooster, Goldy the horse, and about the yabbies in the creek.

I left a piece of me at Napoleon Reef, and I think it took me a very long time to get over leaving.

I went back in May 2005. I had been out west on business, and I had run into Memory Saunders, a neighbour. Memory told me all about the recent history in Napoleon Reef, and I decided to cold-call at the property.

Melinda Phillips met me with her new baby Kaitland in her arms. Melinda was warm and welcoming, and showed me around the place which had been expanded somewhat. Mel told me they were the third owners since us, and they'd bought the place from a guy who came after the Bayliss family. Both the previous guy *and*

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the Bayliss couple had seen their marriages fail at The Reef. By then my marriage had failed too, in 2000—nine years after I left.

Mel told me they paid around \$200,000 for the place in 2002, which was an absolute bargain.

I was stoked to see that what I had built was all still there, most of it in original state.

I was saddened by how dry the property had become; the creek hadn't flowed for years except when it rained. There is obviously a real change in the weather patterns, since all my recollections are that the creek always had water in it, even if it stopped actually flowing. Sometime later, Mel emailed me and told me the local lore was that it was actually the new crop of hobby farmers on the next ridge who had all pumped the water table so low that the creek wouldn't flow.

Mel and her partner have a bore on the property, and the water is hard and corrosive. In my time, I had unlimited spring water, straight from the creek into my tanks. Tea has never tasted the same—that water had its own taste.

There's a season for everything, and I think now that our times at Napoleon Reef were the best of times.

But I moved along, and I've gone full circle to close the remaining tendrils of yearning.

Chapter 27: Move to Austin?

I'd been editor and running Channels Magazine for Jands for a year when I moved back to Sydney. Before then, I was driving down from the bush to the company HQ near Sydney Airport very early each Monday, and staying with Shirley Coleman on Monday nights, then returning home late on Tuesdays.

Years earlier when I first got together with Caroline, we lived on Fullers Road, Chatswood. Sarah was four, and we started looking for a baby sitter. Ruth Coleman came along, aged fifteen. Her mum, Shirley, became a close friend.

The Jands gig was those two days a week, and it quickly got me reconnected with the sound and lighting production industry. When we left Napoleon Reef, we bought Caroline's former family home from her parents at Hermington Street, Epping. Towards the end of 1992, I was getting ready to leave Jands to start Connections Magazine when I had a call from Austin, Texas.

Would I be travelling to the big lighting industry convention, LDI, in Dallas that October? Turns out I was. Would I be able to come down to Austin to meet with the boss of High End Systems, Richard Belliveau? Certainly.

I'd interviewed one of his key guys, Bob Schacherl, at the Rimini Disco Trade Fair a few months earlier and written an article about a feud between their firm and the Italian manufacturer, Clay Paky. Pio Nahum from Clay Paky had told me that the Texans were copying his products. It was a great article in that it became a talking point across the global entertainment lighting industry which, even now, is a boutique niche world with a lot of passionate, creative people.

At that trade fair Nahum had told me, "Our company had our products distributed by this big competitor of ours in Texas. We

have (been) taken advantage (of) from this situation by them developing products that are copies of our products, and by using our product to create their own market. What we have done is completely different. What Clay Paky has done. We have realised, and we must admit, this American company is a very important in this field, and it is not easy to make a petition against them.”

Then I walked over to the High End Systems stand and told Schacherl that the Italians claimed he was copying their product. Did he refute that?

He said, “Absolutely. We’ve built our business on a very professional image, a background of high quality dealers, and they rely on us to be one hundred percent truthful. The knowledge we impart to our dealers is completely accurate.”

It went on and on with the Italians getting worked up, and I would quote them, then with Schacherl denying everything. The problem was that the Texan Intellabeam *was* a lot like the Italian Golden Scan.

Somewhat intrigued by the approach to attend the LDI convention, I flew in to Austin and checked in to the Hilton. Next morning I was picked up by Richard Belliveau, who I knew had a reputation for weird—he had been known to cross-dress. I hopped in his Mustang and we roared off. He was preoccupied with the climate control, which had flipped from Fahrenheit to Celcius—which confuses the fuck out of all Americans.

Belliveau took me through the factory. He was the principal designer and he knew the nuts and guts of everything they made. I was less than interested in lens ratios and halide discharge lamp colour temperatures, but I made all the correct noises.

He dropped me off with the marketing lady who took me on a tour of the town. This was all before any discussions about actually

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why I was there, and it was like she knew what this was all about—and assumed I knew. I figured I was going to get a job offer. She was sweet, talking about picnic spots by the lake and schools.

At lunch Belliveau made an offer. He had been impressed with my article and my writing, and he wanted his company magazine sexed up. It was a typical dull cheer squad company magazine, boring as bat shit—*his* description.

Then came the awkward meeting with the editor of that magazine. I had no idea what *he* knew, and he looked a bit unsure why I was there. We talked about the company, the ethos, the people, and the history. I liked them.

Later Belliveau finessed the deal in his office, with a microwave oven dinging a few minutes after I walked in. He ate a mid-afternoon Thai takeout, and I formed the idea—from the pile of used takeout containers—he may have had something strange going on when it came to his diet, or let's say his dietary supplements. He was slim, but muscled up. Still, being used to strange people, I was quite relaxed.

Next day the editor guy drove us both up to Dallas for LDI, stopping at a roadhouse for his favourite dish—chicken fried steak. It was horrible.

Three long days and nights followed, moving around the tradeshow meeting industry firms and people, collecting magazine material and photos. I mixed with the High End guys a fair bit, and made a few friends including the lovely Richard Cadena.

Back in Sydney, Caroline and I weighed up the deal. We were both keen to do it. Jess was six years old and would at least cope with the move, while Sarah who was fifteen would prefer to stay with a relative in Australia. We were okay with that. But the sticking point was that while I'd get a visa sponsored by High End,

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Caroline wouldn't be able to work. That, plus the merits of bringing up a child in Texas led me to decline the deal.

Instead, I negotiated an exit from Jands, and we started Connections Magazine in early 1993.

Chapter 28: The ENTECH Era

Starting Connections Magazine, we soon realised there was a gap in the market for a trade show that served the *entertainment technology* market of audio, lighting, video and staging. Earlier trade shows in Australia had been specific to music equipment, broadcast and several highly specialised pro audio events.

ENTECH was launched a year out—it takes a solid year to sell a trade show—as a one-hall, three-day tradeshow. Not only did it sell out, we were paid in advance. This struck me as a wonderful thing. The next show was two years later, in 1996, and it grew another seventy-five percent. We got ambitious and announced the 1997 show would be in Melbourne. That show was hard to deliver in another state, but it grew some more. Then 1998 saw us back at Darling Harbour—and the beginnings of an exhibitor rebellion were brewing.

They were all spending more and more on larger stands as the technology advances were fuelling more and more sales. But it seemed unsustainable to me, and if we kept alternating the venue annually—which was something being considered at the time—we could become unpopular. As we had a thriving magazine business serving the same client exhibitors, popularity was a state of balance. At this point, sadly, the seeds of destruction were sown between Caroline and myself. We had different ideas—she was a powerhouse in the business and she started to compete with me. I enrolled at Macquarie Graduate School of Management. Then she enrolled too.

Things got strained at home.

The 2000 show was run out at the new Olympic Park Showgrounds. It was our largest so far.

Our twenty-year marriage imploded a few months later. It was

gut-wrenching for everyone, a terrible time.

Caroline decided to stay in the business and run the 2002 event, this time back at Darling Harbour, and we hired Caroline an assistant, Louise Brooks, who came from the motor trade. The 2002 show was tense and difficult to manage, and Cas decided to sell out to me. Louise would manage the 2004 event, and she set about doing a good job on presales.

One day Lou took a call from a guy who insisted on talking to me, and she pushed back. That was how we worked back then—I didn't want to talk to just anyone, I was insanely busy editing a monthly magazine. The guy left his details, saying he was the founder of an exhibition company called Exhibitions & Trade Fairs, or ETF. He told me he wanted to buy ENTECH. I was up for that since I no longer had the heart to keep going, not the least being because the exhibitors would spend two days setting up, three days on the show floor, and the sixth day hating on me as they battled to pull it all out.

They would complain to me about all the services I didn't control—like, the electricians were late, the riggers were too slow. They had a dozen stagehands sitting around waiting for a truck stuck in the queue. The car parking was a rip-off. The venue wanted to charge them four bucks a cup for the *supply* of coffee on their stand, and charge them labour as well. It was widely thought that service providers like furniture rental, the shell-scheme stand builder, and the carpet layer, were all kicking back to exhibition organisers—meaning us.

The exhibitors thought I was clipping their ticket from all those suppliers, and of course I wasn't.

The ETF guys looked at the books and came up with a deal. We would co-run the 2004 event during which they would get the

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measure of it. Then Louise would work for them selling and running future ENTECH shows. The joint management worked great for me, because ETF had vast buying power. All those suppliers and the registration system company were all suddenly billing way less. In fact, it had me scratching my head why I had been paying so much, for so little. The decreased costs were split, so my sell price went up.

Lou set up shop with ETF and delivered their 2006 show. Then she left them and went to Singapore. ETF hadn't put her on a contract, and hadn't looked after her. Because the next show was in 2008, seemingly years away, they didn't bother thinking about replacing her. They made mistake after mistake. Then they called me to see whether she might return, and I gave them Lou's contact details with a very clear direction; contract her, and look after her properly.

Lou came back, did the 2008, and left again when they treated her like a blonde. She walked right over to my nemesis media competitor, Alchemedia, and started a show called Integrate. It soon ate ENTECH's breakfast and lunch as that show lurched from manager to manager, shrinking each outing.

Louise later sold Integrate to one of the big multinational trade show conglomerates. It does well—or it did. As I write this, the August 2020 show wasn't run due to the pandemic.

I put my toe back in the water and launched CX Roadshow in 2012. One morning in 2015 Tony Chamberlain from Staging Connections, which by then controlled ETF, called me and suggested I make an offer for the remains of ENTECH. I bought it back for 1.5 cents in the dollar, gaining an email list of 22,000 names.

Renamed ENTECH Roadshow, our annual event grew fifteen

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percent year in, year out, until the 2020 tour was cut short. We see it coming back, trimmed down to the Eastern states without SA or WA in 2021. Whether it ever gets back to five states is unclear.

Chapter 29: A Very British Matter

Back in 1997 ENTECH had caught the attention of P&O Events, which at that time ran the huge PLASA trade show in London. They figured ENTECH could become PLASA Australia, and eventually they would spread the brand to Asia. They came knocking at our door.

Really, Caroline and I had set up ENTECH as a PLASA clone because the Australian entertainment technology industry wanted it. We had easy pre-sales since almost all our advertisers were interested.

As the 1996 event came to the end of the third and final day at Darling Harbour, we announced the next show would be in Melbourne at the new Convention Centre in 1997. We would then bring the show back to Sydney in 1998. As it had now become an annual event, P&O made its move, schmoozing us to sell to them. Caroline would be hired on contract as the inaugural CEO of P&O Events Australasia.

Provided they liked the look of the 1997 event in Melbourne, the deal would be signed shortly after. We had a draft contract to sell, and Caroline had an outline of an employment contract. We were set to cash out, I would continue to run our magazine company, and she would be the big wheel working for P&O Events.

The draft proposal was very lucrative. It all hinged on how they felt about the Melbourne event. The CEO flew in, First Class on British Airways. He had a hyphenated surname, and an old school tie. His sharp eye measured up the show in its opening day—it looked right, the trade were there in great numbers, the atmosphere was upbeat.

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On the second night he loved the unique character of the ENTECH Awards with 400 industry folk jammed in the Plaza Ballroom in town. Seated at our table of ten, the lighting director for a very, very major British band was there too. Mr Hyphen's eyes went saucer-shaped when the LD turned to my PA, Amanda, and enquired about group sex.

"I need a couple of girls like you," he said. "Can you get some friends and I'll supply the coke?"

Hyphen was thus distracted and less aware of the chain of technical failures happening in front of his eyes—at the awards dinner for the technical production industry, no less. These somehow seemed funny, more so because the well-juiced host, one very humorous John Blackman, made fun of them. For instance, we had the wrong sound company. Somehow we'd contracted a similarly-named company to the professional one and ended up with a drunken sound engineer.

The Pioneer video wall malfunctioned and went to blue screen. The first singer walked out to sing over her backing track and the sound guy rolled the wrong cue. The live band only did five songs, but everyone was on the dance floor when John Blackman announced the first award.

"And the winner is ... (envelope opened) ... CLS Truss!"

The crowd went crazy. "Truss! Truss! Truss!" they chanted.

Endless awards followed and the booze flowed fast and furious. Hyphen was very happy, even when a guy at the next table started acting inappropriately with a woman, and I decided to go and deck him—I was restrained by more sensible people.

Really, the evening was a fuster-cluck of monumental proportions.

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Hyphen leaned over to Caroline and said, "I do believe we have a deal, my dear girl."

But all was not well in the ENTECH camp.

A few weeks after Melbourne we invited our clients to a function to explain the new, yearly alternating ENTECH—one year in Sydney, the next year in Melbourne or Brisbane. We soon had feedback, before we had actually announced anything, that a group of exhibitors were planning a revolt. They didn't want or need that annual schedule.

Several hours before the launch, I realised we could be in trouble and had word that Rod Salmon of Lightmoves fame, and who'd partnered us in the original Graftons business—and often a particularly voluble exhibitor—would interject our announcement and challenge us in front of everyone about the schedule. It was suddenly clear to me that we were over-stretching, and that we risked the whole empire. We decided to do 1998, which was already contracted, then skip 1999.

Everything was fine again with the clients, but with the show remaining at every second year, P&O were not impressed, and they said they would re-price the acquisition. It didn't really matter, because we had also gone cold on the deal with them.

We were fast seeing how big corporations worked, so we walked away.

Chapter 30: Running BHP is Easy. Right?

In 1998 I did that Post Graduate Diploma of Management at Macquarie Graduate School of Management. This was six units of a sixteen-unit MBA—Masters of Business Administration. The MBA was, and is, a post graduate qualification valued in the upper echelons of the corporate world.

I was forty-one years old and had been running my own businesses since I was fifteen, making me an expert in everything. I read the Australian Financial Review, which meant I figured I was as good as, or better than, the boring suit-types who managed things like BHP. What could they know that I hadn't learned at the school of hard knocks?

The management school was a modern low-slung cluster of 1980's buildings nested in the expansive grounds behind the mainstream university. It had a campus kind of vibe, a basic canteen, and was populated by hundreds of younger executive types hungry for a step up. My first subject was Accounting for Management.

This was how they described it.

“This unit equips managers with the skills and tools to construct, analyse, interpret and act upon the accounting and financial information produced within a business. This discussion and analysis begins with the three financial statements targeted at external users: the Profit and Loss Statement, the Balance Sheet, and the Statement of Cash Flows. The unit then proceeds into the analysis, interpretation, and the use of management accounting information for the purpose of managerial decision making. Real life complexities in the decision making process are highlighted.”

I chose this as it was, for me, the hardest potential unit. My management understanding of accounting was based on the bank

balance. When there was disposable cash on hand, I'd spend it. When there wasn't, I'd go looking for more. That somewhat primitive approach had made trouble for me, but at the time Caroline was managing the money, so she carried the burdens.

Dr. Ernestine Gross was a good lecturer, and the text book seemed okay in Lesson One—of ten. That was a three-hour lecture, with a break. I did the homework, it came back ticked. Second week, the same. Third week, a puzzled professor called me aside to ask why I'd produced homework on Treatment of Dividend Imputations? Strangely I had the advanced version of the text book, which did the basics in chapters one and two before wandering off into the arcane. Much amusement—not.

I bumbled and fumbled through and was saved at the end by the good professor calling a Sunday 'make-good' workshop, "For those of you who feel you need help to pass the exam." To my horror, most of the class turned up. Dr. Gross asked me to be the board-scribe for a sample set of double entry book-keeping and suddenly, marker in hand, the light went on in my kinetic brain.

My exam pass was fifty-one percent, which was enough.

Over the following fourteen months I did Marketing Management with a lecherous old guy who, with the impunity of the era, rampantly hit on young female students. Then Human Resource Management for which I scored a 'B' pass. Advertising and Promotion Management was boring for me, as was Technology Management, which was behind the times. The best subject of all was Intro to Conflict Management and Resolution, which was fairly hilarious, but which also taught me to re-frame the words around a conflict until certain the conflicted party had the whole picture.

In the advertising unit we formed a syndicate of students tasked

to analyse the promotion of a brand, and eight of us chose the upcoming Subway franchise chain. Eight is a difficult number and we were locked in disagreement until the quiet guy in the corner stood and did a structure tree on the whiteboard and then sat down again. He turned into the reason a lot of us passed, as the group work was worth twenty-five percent of the whole subject mark.

This was where the system failed, because you could have a clever student stuck in a dysfunctional syndicate of low-achievers and have *his* subject mark pulled down. I saw a lot of long hours in these groups, and I saw some very overworked people stretched between massive hours at work somewhere in that corporate world, and too many hours at Macquarie. Some hooked up as well, which was strange to see.

Through the months I came to know myself better, and my limitations, quickly remembering what I'd discovered getting my pilot's license through a correspondence course—and that is that I wasn't taught how to *learn*. Speaking with successful professionals like doctors and lawyers, who continually have refresher training, they learn to anticipate what's required of them and *focus on passing the course*, which isn't quite the same thing as learning stuff. I was more of a sponge for the things I found interesting, and a wall of ignorance of the other bits.

I graduated and sometimes still call on the experience, like knowing how to measure the components and outputs of a business, and how to read and interpret a balance sheet.

A decade earlier, the Private Pilot License Course was another matter. Three subjects: Aircraft Systems, Navigation, and Meteorology all seemed straight forward, but were not, especially learned from the Cessna Correspondence Course. I really struggled and sat two of the three exams twice for a total of five mind-

bending exams.

Later I needed a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, which for me was a five-day course at a Community College. It was easy enough, but required endless assignments and submissions, a forewarning of the blizzard of paperwork that accompanies any Vocational Training course in Australia.

Maybe those boring suit-types running BHP *do* have a clue what they're doing?

Chapter 31: Back in the Cockpit

Since the near-disastrous trip to Queensland as a freshly minted pilot, seven years had transpired.

It was time for the first really big trip, planned by Jess and myself. She was aged eleven and super-keen to be my co-pilot. We did everything together back then: she was like a friendly puppy dog, always at my side, metaphorical tail wagging.

We hired a Beechcraft B36 high performance single-engine aircraft, because it was a kick-arse plane. You could cruise at 160 knots per hour, which means you'd travel almost 300km in a straight line each hour "on the clock". It had retractable gear and a constant-speed propeller, which required adjustment for best angle of attack whenever the phase of flight changed.

I'd achieved a night rating, which meant I could fly visually at night, and the rating came with ten or so hours of instrument flying practice, which gave me even more confidence.

June 26th, 1998, we packed and loaded at Bankstown, which is actually Australia's busiest airport with three runways in simultaneous use. With just two of us, the six-seat aircraft could be fuelled to the max and fly a lot longer and farther.

We had plenty of stuff—tools, spare booze, and two portable EPIRBS. If we crash-landed, the distress beacons would transmit on 121.5 MHz. All aircraft, especially commercial airliners, monitor that frequency all the time. Many aviators have been rescued following a report from an airliner.

With pre-flight checks done, load secured, and after-engine start checks (control surfaces, instruments, fuel tanks, propeller pitch and radios) all completed, we got clearance and lined up on runway 11L. Powering up, the three-blade prop and big-six engine threw us down the runway.

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Pulling the nose up and rotating, the cockpit door suddenly burst open with a rush of noise and all the charts flew everywhere. It was abruptly a deafening chaos, not to mention scary as hell.

I did what the training says and flew the mission. Aviate, navigate, communicate is the mantra and I remained calm. As did Jess, amazingly since the cockpit door was on her side, and she was looking through the gap at Milperra Road, 1,000 feet below.

The airflow was disrupted by the door being open. Climbing at eighty-five knots, we were doing almost 160kph and the door was about 90mm open.

I called the tower with a PAN message—PAN means a semi-important situation, "Possible Assistance Needed" which is different to a MAYDAY—and flew a circuit to land on the same runway. Pulling off to a taxi bay, we tried to shut the door. It resisted many efforts, and then latched.

After stopping at Roma for fuel, we had another door-opening episode on take-off, and once we landed and fixed it, we then hopped over to Carnarvon National Park for a couple of nights. The Gorge was worth seeing. The park guide had suggested landing at Ingelara strip, which is a grass runway within a cattle property.

After two days of trekking and having fun in the Gorge, we returned to find the Beechcraft absolutely surrounded by fucking huge cattle. It took Jess and I about twenty crazy minutes to chase them far enough away.

They had smeared the sides of the aircraft with dung, but worse had bent the pitot tube, which is essential for airspeed instruments, and one aileron—the hinged wing surface that allows the aircraft to turn. The leading edge was bent upwards from a bunch of cows rubbing their itchy arses on the thing.

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I bent everything approximately correctly, and we took off down the bumpy grass strip, eyes wide for wandering beef. On rotation, the aircraft pulled to the left, so clearly I hadn't done a good enough job. Plus I had low airspeed indication. That's bad.

Landing again, dodging one errant cow, I finessed the bending of the aileron, and dug crap out of the pitot tube. Mumbling and muttering the whole time.

We took off again and headed for Mount Isa, via Longreach. It was almost enough to turn me vegetarian.

Spending the night in the mining town, Mount Isa, was fairly ordinary. It was a very bland place. The next morning I was appalled to see low cloud, in fact it was hanging over the top of the mine smoke stack. The refueller said he had never seen it that low. The stack is 150 metres tall, which is less than 500 feet.

Cloud at five hundred feet means flying is impossible. Visual flight rules (VFR) specify that flights must be at least 1,000 feet *under* cloud.

This was a major bother, as we had a lot of flying to do that day. Pacing around didn't make the cloud lift. I called the refueller in Borroloola up at the Gulf. His wife answered.

"How is the weather there?" I asked.

"Glorious," she said. That's what I wanted to hear.

I figured we could fly low out of Isa, as there are no obstructions, and I had a new GPS that had earned my respect the previous few flights. I was still flying with charts and computations, and using the GPS to validate ground speed and drift from crosswinds. I never stopped flying this way. Relying on one device is dangerous.

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There was no control tower to do us in, so off we went, following the road out of Isa to the northwest. It was low, gloomy, and bumpy.

Eventually the cloud stabilised at about 2,000 feet, but we wanted clear air for cruising, so we punched through the layer and headed up to 8,000 feet and sat up there until top of descent at Borroloola, almost five hours out of Isa. But all I could see was a carpet of cloud under us. We'd had the cloud since Isa.

I descended to 2,000 feet above ground (AGL) over the cloud tops and approached what I figured was the location of the airstrip. But I still couldn't see down, and so we couldn't proceed. I needed to enter the circuit, the approach pattern for the airstrip, at 1,500 feet. When the clouds are close to the ground—and these were at circuit height—it's madness to descend into them. I learned early in flight training, "Clouds have rocks in them."

I pulled the chart to plot the distance and heading to our only alternate, which was an Aboriginal mission about seventy miles away that didn't have fuel or obvious guest accommodation. Or beer. We would be stuck there, eating yummy native tucker until we could pay someone to haul a 200-litre drum and a hand pump from Borroloola, which could take days. The idea made me shudder.

At least I had a satellite phone for that contingency.

Suddenly the clouds parted, and there was the runway.

When he heard us land, the refueller wandered over from his house nearby.

"Your wife told me the weather was glorious," I said with a hint of frustration.

"Yer mite, it's the fuckin' dry season, so any rain is fuckin' glorious don't yer reckon?"

Perhaps we should have stayed in Mount Isa an extra night.

By now we'd jammed the cockpit door shut permanently and were clambering over the seats to enter and deplane via the rear coach doors. The B36 has two doors, both on the starboard side. The pilot position is on the port side—all planes are left-hand drive.

From Borroloola we flew to Jabiru, the town on the border of Arnhem Land which is a vast aboriginal reserve about 500km east of Darwin. We fuelled up again, and took off for Davidson's Arnhem Land Safari Lodge at Mount Borradaile. Located within Arnhem Land, Max Davidson had obtained a lease from the traditional owners many years earlier.

He clearly had a special affinity with the place. It's a 700 square kilometre reserve centred on the mystical Mount Borradaile and the massive lagoon that sits under it. When we were there, Max had a lucrative sideline in hunting trips with mostly European tourists paying him a motza to shoot pigs or whatever. That part of the business appears to have closed these days.

Words can't describe the landscape and the wildlife. It seems to be the most densely populated part of the world—not including humans—with every kind of water bird, crocodile and creature possible. At sunset what looks like a million magpie geese take off, a classic icon for the Northern Territory. Who knows where they go? It is really, really good there in the dry season, and we visited in early July. Don't leave it too late in the season, because many of the water holes dry up.

The hidden rock art and relics from the traditional people informs a vivid and sad story. This is the best rock art in Australia, and some of it tells of European explorers well before Cook. The tribe there had contact with Makassan trepangers (traders) from the

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southwest corner of Sulawesi (Indonesia). Remnants and pictures in the caves prove it.

It's eerie in the caves. The tribe somehow put the corpses of their recently deceased up a tree for the birds to feed from, then later took the skeletal remains and wrapped them in paperbark before interring them in the caverns. Some of them still rest in rock crevices in the caves. You can hear their ghostly voices distant in the depths, if you stand still long enough.

The tribe eventually succumbed to the lure of the missionaries at Gunbalanya—Oenpelli as it was then known. They walked off the land for a soft life, and soon many died as they couldn't cope with white man food and diseases.

The walking tracks through paperbark forests and hidden billabongs are blissful.

At night, in our (supplied) tent/cabin, we heard the howling of dingos at the full moon. I highly recommend this place, because it connects you with the ancient land like nowhere else.

A one-hour flight north took us out of Arnhem Land and into Midjari, on Vashion Head. We stayed at Seven Spirits Bay for a couple of nights, then headed to Darwin via Jabiru for fuel.

We had a night in Darwin in the best hotel we could find. Room service and a regular bathtub cannot be beaten. Then it was off to Ayers Rock—Uluru now—with an early departure from the confusing taxiway system at Darwin, sent on our way by a gruff and unhelpful clearance from the tower.

Tennant Creek was our fuel stop on what was a very long flying day.

Eventually in the late afternoon we arrived, landed at Uluru, and on opening the door were greeted by the largest and most annoying swarm of flies I've ever met. We got a shuttle bus over to the

overpriced resort, climbed the rock the next day—before the ridiculous, politically correct ban on climbing came to be—and vowed never to return.

Home time and we punched through scattered cloud and set the autopilot for Birdsville. Much desert passed under the nose, and I took a couple of power naps while Jess monitored the flight. We refuelled, had lunch, and plugged the heading for Bourke into the autopilot.

Out of Bourke the clouds built up, and we got underneath only to run into a wall of clag near Warren. We landed, got a taxi to a motel, and the next day flew in the clear to Bankstown, via Dubbo.

That journey had been our first real look at the GAFA. Only once before we had a glimpse of it, when we'd been in the cockpit of a Lauda Air 777 returning from Europe. My pilot ID card made it easy to visit the flight deck in those days.

As we entered Australian airspace over Broome, the Australian pilot, Kev said, "There it is, the GAFA."

First Officer Fritz looked quizzical. "GAFA? Vot is GAFA?"

"The Great Australian Fuck All, son," said Kev.

"Ya," said Fritz, nodding in approval, repeating his newly learned acronym. "GAFA. GAFA."

We were so happy with that trip, we talked Caroline into coming on our next one, during which we stopped at Ross River Station, which is about sixty kilometres northeast of Alice Springs.

The following morning at dawn we untied the aircraft and did the pre-flight inspections. I checked all moving surfaces, inspected the undercarriage, drained some fuel to check for water in the tank—even though it hadn't rained—and made sure the pitot tube was free of bug mash.

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We were right to go, so we taxied carefully to the very end of the strip, looking for pot holes or rocks on the way that might cause the nose to dip. A propeller strike, however slight, means grounding until it's inspected. A hairline crack spells disaster when it's spinning at 2,000 rpm in flight. I used every metre of every runway, every time, because if you have an engine failure on takeoff, you have a better chance if there is some unused runway beneath you.

We punched up and headed northwest to our fuel stop at hell on earth, Yuendumu.

This is one of the larger remote aboriginal communities. We landed behind a flying doctor King Air. The refueller was a grizzled old white guy, with an equally grizzled old black dude in overalls and no shoes doing the pumping from 200-litre drums.

The Flying Doctor pilot told us his was the scheduled morning evacuation flight, his doctor and nurse would soon appear from town in a troopie (Land cruiser) with one or two bash and slash victims headed for hospital in Alice Springs. That town had troubles.

We took off, and as soon as I lifted the nose, POP! The front storage compartment lid sprang open, upsetting the airflow and making a roaring noise.

"Tell Mum to stay calm, we'll land and fix it," I yelled to Jess over the headset. She took hers off and repeated the instruction to our freaked-out passenger down the back.

I banked left so the compartment was tilted up and flew a low loop over the town, noting a horde of indigenous dudes waving to us from the dusty footy oval.

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On landing I was relieved to discover the emergency grog was all there and we hadn't dumped any on the town or its inhabitants. What a way to die, sconded by a stubbie of VB in a dry community.

Secured, we thus headed for Kununurra, way up on the top corner of Western Australia. This was a long flight leg, notable as we flew over Lake Argyle, Australia's largest man-made lake which is the centre of the Ord River irrigation scheme. It's easy to see the potential of the Ord, with Kununurra a thriving centre of agriculture in an otherwise empty land.

We didn't take on a full fuel load, because we needed to land light at the Diamond Coast.

This is what they say, on the Far Away Bay website:

"The Location is 280kms northwest of Kununurra. Faraway Bay is a soul-enriching hideaway on Western Australia's remote and spectacular Kimberley coastline—otherwise known as Australia's Diamond Coast. Accessible only by air, a maximum of just sixteen guests share this isolated and immaculate wilderness in secluded cliff-top cabins, with uninterrupted views of the Timor Sea. So guests experience a true authentic Kimberley adventure in a personalised exclusive retreat like no other."

It's all true. Host Bruce Ellison met us at the dirt strip and took us down to the cliff top eco resort, which has eight little cabins overlooking the ocean.

A dining room and bar with a little pool is the hub.

We settled down for some drinking, as you do, and Bruce pointed out the little billabong just behind the beach, not far away and down the cliff.

"See those crocodile tracks?" he said.

We sure did.

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"Well, that big old salty is a crafty bugger. He chewed the water line so we lost water and I looked down there to see a geyser where the black plastic agricultural pipe was busted. Had to wait three hours for him to wander off before we could fix it ..."

Next day, they took us by boat to King George Falls which is way up the King George River. The coast around these parts is not surveyed, so not too many yachts or boats dare to come in. It truly is the most remote place I've been.

After Far Away Bay we flew east for hours, headed for Arnhem Land again. Twenty-five nautical miles out of Jabiru I put us into a cruise descent, throttling back from 2200 to 1800 rpm using the propeller pitch control, and adjusted the throttle manifold pressure to match.

We made visual with the runway at this fairly busy general aviation airport. It's the hub of the region and serves the uranium mine nearby. Charter flights come and go, often taking cashed-up tribal elders to Darwin to gamble community money at the casino.

I did a flyover at 1,500 feet and joined the circuit at 1,000 feet from the "dead" side after putting out a call on the radio. I'd done an inbound call earlier and been listening to see who was where.

"Traffic Jabiru, Juliet India Yankee joining circuit crosswind, Jabiru."

I dropped RPM and put out some flap, did my checklists, put more flap out and throttled back a little more. As I turned final I was a little low, below 500 feet, so I kept the RPM high and lined up before dropping engine speed again.

BANG!

The plane was shaking violently.

We were running rough, and I needed more power. I decided to forego the radio call for final approach because I was too busy.

Rule 1: aviate. Rule 2: navigate. Rule 3: communicate. I was now in sensory overload and working by the book, which is what you're trained to do.

Always fly the mission to the plan.

I pushed the pitch forward and was rewarded with exactly nothing more than I had, which was a badly degraded engine and the piano keys of the runway higher than I wanted them to be in the windscreen. We were headed for the swamp at the beginning of the runway, and it was presumably full of things that eat people.

I pulled back more than I should, and the stall warning went from bleeping to non-stop screeching, and I sweated that the margin between a stall warning and an actual stall, where the plane drops vertically, was sufficient. I just squeaked over the threshold and landed hard, engine banging, farting and popping. I switched off everything, especially the fuel, as we ground to a messy halt in the middle of the active runway.

"Get out girls," I yelled, but they were already on the way. I've never seen such a fast exit.

We stood in the blistering sun beside the runway, looking at the disabled aircraft which had fuel dribbling out of the bottom of the engine compartment.

The air charter guys ran over and helped me push the aircraft to the apron. We opened the cowl and the guy whistled. One of the fuel injection lines was adrift, having lost its bolts somewhere in cruise. The venturi effect had held it all together until I throttled down, whereupon the fuel line went wild and sprayed Avgas all over the hot engine for the final half a minute.

We probably should have caught fire on final.

Clearly we weren't going anywhere. I called the aircraft owner in Sydney and told her the news, plus where her plane was located.

She sounded despondent and undertook to get a mechanic over from Darwin "ASAP". He would have to fly himself in and out, with tools and parts. A big dollar cost for the owner.

We were due at Davidson's Safari Camp and I didn't really want to hang around Jabiru. So I did what you must be prepared to do when partaking of this ultra-expensive hobby called aviation. I chartered another plane.

The charter mob at Jabiru quoted me an obscene amount knowing we were stranded, and we loaded their Cessna 210 and debunked for the fifty-minute run over to the Davidson's. We spent a few days there, then the charter guy took us up to Seven Spirit Bay at the tip of the Cobourg Peninsula.

This was about 300km east of Darwin, and above the traditional lands that form most of Arnhem Land. There really is nothing much up there. The Seven Spirit Bay eco resort was built by some idealistic European architects, as the legend has it, who were not acquainted with the local termites.

Unfortunately, it was all made of wood.

Having battled the elements and the vermin, they ran out of money. The place has had several owners since and I'd bet no one has or ever will make a profit up there. But it is divine.

This is what they say about the place:

"Seven Spirit Bay is one of the most remote wilderness lodges in the world. Situated in Garig Gunak Barlu National Park on the Cobourg Peninsula in Arnhem Land, Seven Spirit Bay's stunning location is legendary. It is closer to Indonesia than it is to most Australian cities. Guests arrive at the Seven Spirit Bay Wilderness Lodge by a chartered plane to luxuriate in upmarket accommodation while enjoying the unique bird, marine and wild life and tropical environment of the Coburg Peninsula."

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The highlight is a tour of Fort Victoria at Port Essington, a "forsaken settlement" (1838-1849) and the ruins are still accessible today. This was the folly of the early settlers who tried to get established, only to die of malaria and starvation.

The stupid poms built a village with stone fireplaces. The local aboriginals must have been amused to see soldiers in full dress uniform strutting around, planting English gardens in the sauna of the top-end wet season.

On July 7 we were picked up by the charter pilot and flew to Jabiru to be re-acquainted with the now repaired aircraft.

Then we flew to Darwin and put Caroline onto a Qantas flight to Singapore, Business Class of course, which was always the plan. She looked happy as she waved goodbye. Jess and I would continue alone.

Next day we did the long haul to Broome, via Kununurra for fuel. It was a day of flying, with a lot of bouncing around the afternoon thermals. I can't imagine what it's like in the summer wet season up there. The winter dry was bad enough.

Broome was fairly busy, and like most other airports so far (other than Alice, Darwin and Bankstown) it had no control tower. You listen out on the area frequency before you arrive to gain a mental picture of who is doing what. You also monitor the CTAF (Common Traffic Advisory Frequency) for aircraft leaving or departing the airport you're headed for.

We entered the pattern behind a Qantas 737, landed and tied down in the civil aircraft area. A taxi took us to Cable Beach Intercontinental Hotel, and we had an excellent daddy-daughter time for a few days.

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Then we hired a car and drove an hour down to Eco Beach Resort. Eco Beach is well worth a look. It was flattened by a cyclone after we were there, but is now rebuilt.

Before dawn on July 12 we packed up and drove back to Broome. We had some food and a thermos from the resort people, and took off in the first light. We climbed and set a heading for Patjarr Community, a fairly amazing and confronting, isolated place.

In the mid 1960s the Pintubi people from the Patjarr were moved from their Gibson Desert Homelands by the State Government and the Federal Weapons Research Establishment, and made to move in with the surrounding communities. With other desert people, they were relocated to protect them from death or injury from the "blue streak" rocket debris, which fell over a vast area of Central Australia during the rocket research programmes of the 1960s and 1970s.

It was the only logical fuel stop on the way to Alice Springs that fitted with our range and airspeed. After we crossed the Canning Stock Route, we saw no signs of civilisation for several hours. It was disconcerting. I knew we would be okay if we had to do a forced landing, as the terrain was mostly sand dunes and I had emergency everything on board—including some left over grog.

We eventually spotted the little community and overflew to get the administrator's attention.

When we landed, he drove up in his white Hilux, followed by what looked like several punk cars from a Mad Max movie. One car was driven only in reverse gear. Most had no glass, many no doors. All were loaded with locals. They pulled up in a cloud of dust fifty metres away and just stared at us. It was outright weird.

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"Umm, why does that car have no bonnet but a rope over the engine bay?" I asked the admin guy as he filled the tanks.

"That's because they think the bonnet holds the engine in, so the rope is there to hold the engine in. By the way, don't let your daughter look to the east. That's a burial ground, and if they see her look at it, they will want to poke her eyes out ..."

He invited us down to his compound to buy some artifacts, and as we drove up, someone had set a little fire against his steel security door.

"They're trying to burn me down," he said. Nice. Luckily, steel doesn't burn.

Apparently the Pintubi people are remarkable desert survivors, and it's said the old women 'gins' can dig feral cats out of their burrows and kill them for food. That's tough.

We loaded up and took off for Alice Springs.

The deserts change all the time and a lot of wild flowers were out following the wet season.

We landed at Alice Springs at dusk and took a taxi to the motel. I didn't know it, but the next day would be my most challenging day of aviation.

We left Alice at 4:00 a.m., doing a night departure. Toggling a radio frequency three times turned on the runway lights. We had fuelled up the night before. It was cold and quiet on the hard stand, no one was around.

We lined up on the big strip and pushed the throttle to the wall. As soon as we rotated, I was on instruments until we were in cruise.

Night flying is utterly awesome.

The gorgeous dawn came, and some hours later we landed at Birdsville for fuel and breakfast. Now full of everything, especially

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a big Birdsville Hotel brekky, we took off for Bourke. An hour out of Bourke we encountered some cloud that quickly went to 8/8 octas. I was on top, and took note of where the cloud had started.

I knew Bourke was at a low elevation, on the Darling River, and the only obstruction was a radio tower. That meant my lowest safe altitude was a comfortable 1,000 feet above ground level, and that presumed I was going to descend through clouds—contrary to the visual flight rules.

My discontent grew by the minute as we approached Bourke, with no let-up and just clouds below us. A carpet of grey without a break. I was getting quite disturbed, but hid this from the happy young lady next to me.

Jess was the best co-pilot, sorting and handing me the WAC charts (maps) and local area charts, along with frequency charts and the ERSA—En Route Supplement, a book of airfield information. Flying requires a *lot* of paperwork and organisation.

My alternate airport was Cobar, and I had maybe enough fuel to get there.

Over Bourke, full of unease, I let down into the cloud. There was no one around on any frequency, so I put out a radio call and just prayed. Had some cowboy decided to also do what I was doing without broadcasting intentions, we may well have met in that cloud.

At lowest safe altitude I looked up from the instruments and had no visibility at all.

I had no choice, I had to climb back up and abort all ideas of landing at Bourke.

I came out of the clouds, and set course to Cobar. *Fly the plan*, I told myself. I got onto the area frequency and asked if anyone had a weather report for Cobar.

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A guy flying a charter said, "Yer, eight-eights to the ground." Meaning it was worse than Bourke.

My heart sunk. Jess was sitting contentedly next to me, trusting me with all her heart.

I turned towards Dubbo, knowing we had less than seventy minutes of fuel left, and two hours flying time to get there.

What choices did I have? At Bourke, I should have turned west again and found the cloud edge, slipped under and done a precautionary landing on a road. If I could find one without power lines. If the cloud hadn't built up farther to the west. If, if, if ...

Now it was too late.

I flew on to oblivion, keeping my daughter's spirits up as I did. Ever see the movie *Life is Beautiful* where the guy convinces his little boy the Jewish concentration camp they're in is just a big joke? Are you a parent? You know how I felt.

Nyngan was coming up somewhere below, and there was a community airstrip there, so I resolved to do another descent into cloud to the lowest safe altitude. What did I have to lose? I grabbed the ERSA from Jess and looked at the WAC chart to find obstructions. I calculated a lowest safe altitude for Nyngan and was on descent when the clouds suddenly opened up to show me the runway.

Just like at Boroloola. We were saved.

Do you see some divine intervention here? Jess has grown up to become an ordained church minister.

In 2005 I came up for another biennial flight review, did the theory exam, and decided on the spot not to take the flight test. I hung up my wings, reasoning I'd done all I wanted to do.

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I don't regret it. Contributing to my decision, I wasn't flying enough anyway. The legal minimums were three take-off and landings per three months.

I wasn't keeping up with regular stints in the cockpit, I hadn't flown nights for a few years, and besides, I felt my life was moving on.

Chapter 32: Training is the Future

Training is the future, I thought absently through the horror as the second jet smashed into the World Trade Centre. I was recently married for the second time and now had four young girls to look after—Janelle’s three, and my Jess.

At that 9/11 moment I was in a rented townhouse in Narwee, a satellite of the troubled suburbs just as the gang wars were taking off in southwest Sydney. Gunfire could be heard on occasion. Hot Commodores roared and blatted around corners with fully sick boyz hanging out the windows. Something wasn’t right in this corner of society, but we were living in it while my house at Epping gained several new bedrooms and the girls saw out the school year.

It’s bolted onto my psyche that I’m always looking for another business idea, a ‘Plan B’, and that terrible September day in 2001 I knew my media company would take a huge hit because the world had changed overnight. Sure enough, the faxes started coming later that week, advertising plans were shelved, and even my ENTECH Tradeshow was getting cancellations.

Marketing is one of the first things that get cut when a seismic event rolls along like 9/11, or later, the Global Financial Crisis. Not knowing how deep or different the post-9/11 downturn would be, I was postulating on what I could do that was new and different. Training looked like the right thing.

I thought about Tom Misner who owned School of Audio Education, better known as SAE. He advertised in my magazine and would call from time to time to try and drum up coverage. His chain of colleges was clearly doing well; and his graduates weren’t. They would turn up at the dwindling collection of recording studios across the land with their freshly printed qualifications and

get laughed out the gate. Tom's shtick was to play on the impressionable young mind and sway them with an easy pathway to glory.

But back to the dark year of 2001. A few weeks after the attack, I was at a dinner for a now defunct audio association where the peculiar people that are sound engineers—geek meets creative—talk bit rates and latency. I have clients who cultivate their own clients in this clique, so at that time I was networking more frenetically than usual to shore up the business as the world oscillated and the USA invaded Afghanistan.

One very good friend mentioned my training aspirations to a guy who worked in a TAFE college which provided audio courses. We compared Tom Misner stories, drank more beer, and decided I could run a short audio course in one of the many semester breaks at his college. A winning strategy, since downtime was, and is, the scourge of Australian education. Your average university year has as few as twenty-six contact weeks. Enormous campuses sit empty for months at a time.

This TAFE seemed fairly progressive, the facilities were adequate to good, and the audio training staff was real-world. Now I just needed to meet management to discuss this venture, and make sure that at the top of the audio department everyone was happy.

My editor at the time was John Grimshaw, who has a magnificent mind and, as it turned out, is a first-rate trainer. We both enrolled in 'train the trainer' courses, where we quickly learned the horrible acronym soup that sloshes everywhere in the vocational training world. The AQTF was the Australian Quality Training Framework, for example. An inordinate amount of our course was learning this framework of training and assessment,

qualification mapping, levels and elements, competencies and benchmarks.

Bewildered and somewhat confused we emerged to design our five-day course, Audio Basics, which was mapped out by our TAFE mates against three of their course components. Anyone successfully completing our training would get two testamurs—our beautiful statement of attainment, and a TAFE one.

To launch this glittering new enterprise we requisitioned a huge stand at the biggest tradeshow in the business—ENTECH 2002, running over three long days at the Darling Harbour Convention Centre. This prime real estate would normally sell for \$50,000, but since I owned ENTECH I charged myself zero. TAFE came on board with a virtual recording studio, equipment, trainers, musicians, and a whole lot of brand power.

With my magazine fully behind me, I caused an outbreak of interest and we sold out our debut course which we ran over one of the winter breaks at the TAFE. A flunky from the Ivory Tower walked over and inducted our thirty eager trainees at the start of day one, handing around TAFE forms which our people all filled in. Clutching the requisite paperwork, the office dweller marched back to the luxury tower and was never seen again.

A week later I sent the TAFE a cheque for twenty-five percent of the proceeds, money they would not otherwise enjoy, and everyone was happy. We planned a second course for the next holiday break, and that one sold almost as well. We were on our way.

Then we got TAFE'd. Our main contact was put on leave for some misdemeanour relating to our course and a most obnoxious woman bureaucrat entered the scene. She was very Scottish, and straight away reminded me of Mrs Doubtfire—except absolutely

nothing was funny. To get my audience with this senior manager I first was summoned to a meeting with a stern masculine woman in a corner suite in the tower. She did at least arrange tea in China cups and saucers, with stale Arnotts Assorted biscuits. Then she launched into a smothering word volcano of byzantine TAFE-talk, and ended with a fabulous new—to my ears—catch-cry.

“We are in a new era here at TAFE, where we enjoy co-opertition.”

Great, I thought, I can work with this. “Okay, everything seems fine to me, how do we progress and stage our next course?”

I would need to talk to the boss lady upstairs. *She* was humourless, dour, and clearly not interested in anything outside of a box called routine and especially not interested in whatever irregular things had been happening in her audio division. Without saying so she effectively told me to disappear myself, and that’s exactly what I did.

Meeting with John and trying to dissect where things sat, we concluded the only pathway was to become a Registered Training Organisation and open our own college. It must have been the right idea—Tom Misner had cancelled all advertising in our magazine. If he felt threatened, we were on a good thing.

If only I knew what the next nine years would bring.

John Grimshaw and I joined the committee at CREATE Australia who were charged with upgrading the CUE93 training package. Naively I thought a training package was just that—a nicely bundled course that you cracked open and delivered. Far from it. These frameworks are written in blather, typed on tables, and infested with arcane and silly buzzwords. A package that when you open it, something strange leaps out.

Worse still, the committee we were on was populated almost

entirely by mid-level functionaries from the Education Department and TAFE. Career paper-pushers without a shred of charisma or humour. The meetings were structured to deliver the outcome the leader required, and actual industry input—like, from us—was to be ironed out, if not eliminated.

I saw this ‘committee’ approach used time and again, and some years later the department decided to upgrade the vocational training offered to senior high school students. It had been done at Certificate Two level, and they wanted to move it up to Certificate Three. At that time a small but effective traineeship system existed where an employer, like an audio visual provider, could hire anyone into a formal traineeship, gain some government assistance money, and by partnering with Julius Events College supply both on-the-job and college training. At the end of the year the trainee was awarded a Certificate Three.

Offering high school kids a Certificate Three, trained at a school with well-intentioned teachers and crap equipment, meant that hundreds of the best candidates for a traineeship were thrust into the employment market. Where the employers wouldn't hire them—because according to TAFE they *weren't* eligible for a traineeship. It was insane. And at a committee meeting to ‘discuss and consult’ with the industry, we were all shut down by another faceless drone who was seeking only the outcome the department had already decided upon. We went from forty trainees a year to zero. The industry today suffers a chronic skills shortage.

Anyway, in 2003 CUE 03 was eventually born, and with it came our application to register our training organisation. It was approved after some modifications. To deliver the qualifications, *we* needed to hold equivalent qualifications, which was no problem for John but of some concern for me. I had a post-graduate

diploma of management, which only slightly mapped against a few elements.

Somehow I found a lovely guy at a TAFE in Victoria who did a skills assessment, sat me through two exams, and issued me with a Certificate IV in Sound, and another one in Lighting. He bent all the rules and stepped through minefields to do it. It was again a wakeup call about training—the TAFEs all said they were there to recognise prior learning and current competencies, but they would do anything and everything to avoid actually doing just that. We had people contact us time and time again for what we called Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) and Recognised Current Competencies (RCC), unable to get it anywhere else, and we would do the work. Because that was what we were supposed to do.

It turns out that starting a Registered Training Organisation is a lot easier than actually running one.

By 2005 things were not working out for Janelle and I, and she moved out with her girls. Jess left home to board with her pastor's family. We had all lived together exactly four years.

The college was central to my life, and it was consuming me. The media company was limping along in parallel, and one moment I'd be dealing with a college issue, the next a magazine deadline. Now I was also single and looking around for another relationship, which was also distracting.

Just a few months later I met Karen, and around a year after Janelle moved out, Karen and I set up house with her two boys. Another year on, Karen became my third wife.

The college then faced re-accreditation, three years after we'd started. Two bland humorless career education department flunkies presented their badly dressed selves at our registration area, signed

in, and spent two long days in our boardroom pulling us apart.

During the second day I'd had enough and gave them a rousing rendition of 'Julius has the shits'. It's a fairly ordinary diatribe, but completely believable, with no subtitles required. I flushed them out. Flustered, they bumbled and blurted that as we were a 'for profit' college, their role was to protect 'their' TAFE. That underlying ethos emerged more than once—we had no friends in the Department of Education which, in NSW, is one of the largest on earth.

Our bureaucratic horrors became much worse in 2009 when we faced a four-year re-accreditation audit. In marched two dour, plain, antagonistic seat-warmers who were openly hostile, patronising, and clear in their agenda. They breached us on no less than two hundred and nine things, many of which we'd proven in audit, but regardless this was an exercise in bastardry, fuelled not by student complaints or by misconduct—simply because they hated us.

Fortunately, we had prepared for months for this day, with two lovely consultants spending a day a week updating our manuals, processes, and arcane things like our Version Control System. The piles of paperwork were stacked, we all arrived at 5:00 a.m. One of my guys was gripped with flu, but he was there, with Andy McKenzie our training manager, Monique Wilson, the college manager, lead trainer Jimmy den Ouden, the consultants, and myself.

When those auditors walked in we adopted best match form, accommodated them in comfort, got their coffee, and let them do what they do. They would query a standard, we would produce paperwork. This exhausting charade went all day, and then they pulled stumps and advised us they wouldn't be able to continue the

next day due to scheduling. We were thrown into a void.

Eventually those two hundred breaches were whittled down to ninety-eight, and again I'd had enough. We had been provisionally re-registered, pretty much at the discretion of the Director of VETAB, the hideous Vocational Education Training Advisory Board division of the NSW Government Department of Education. The director could nuke us at any moment while breaches existed.

The breaches were variously technical and often wrong, because the auditors did a shabby job documenting the enormous audit table. We were on the nose with the System. The system, in our opinion, was a condom on the penis of progress.

Our accreditation standards were exactly the same as a TAFE, which hosted hundreds of courses and employed more than enough compliance staff, and yet TAFE would always face favourable audits by their peers from the same department. We had to accept this dirge, this impost, this inequity, if we were to continue.

Being disposed as I am, I took those pathetic plebs to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal where the outgoing Director of VETAB was required to attend to defend the equity of our audit. It was a glorious day, because the Tribunal Member had sat at this show before and was plainly pissed with the script.

He asked the director, "Can VETAB review Mr. Grafton's complaint and revisit these breaches?"

That was news to me it could even be requested.

The director droned, "Well, yes we could, but Mr. Grafton has not asked us to do so."

My response was obvious. The Member read my body language.

On the way out, the horrible director hissed at me, "You got the audit you paid for, and the audit you deserved."

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

The matter was stood over, we sent the box of paperwork, and VETAB lifted the breaches. We were re-registered in full until 2013.

Then VET FEE HELP came to pass—that's only part acronym, being Vocational Education and Training Fee Help, where a college like ours could sign a student and get a pre-payment of the student's fees from the Federal Government, uncapped. And yep, we could—if we signed on—start to charge a bucket more than fifteen grand a year. We could in theory charge, say, twenty grand a semester, or forty grand a year. The government didn't place any limits on the fees we wanted to charge.

It prompted an influx of gimlet-eyed, cunning-faced college owners at the VET FEE HELP briefing meetings. These sly shysters had rushed out and created new Registered Training Organisations specifically to harvest dumb, gullible, and incapable students who would, in exchange for promises and inducements, sign up for a diploma course they had zero chance of completing—and the government would pay the tab.

I sensed catastrophe. No kidding, there were dozens of greedy new operators entering the industry. The resultant rorts topped \$1.2 *billion*. As I'd been at war with VETAB for a while, I'd set up an anonymous email account called VETAB OUTRAGE and started collecting stories from other RTOs. I was assisted in my endeavours by an incompetent pleb at VETAB who forgot to BCC when sending a group email to every college operator in NSW. I thus had nearly fifteen hundred email addresses, and they in turn all started to get emails from the mysterious VETAB OUTRAGE guy. That would be me.

I was flabbergasted to get several replies from some of the new shonky operators a couple of years after VET FEE HELP started.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

These charlatans had come into conflict with VETAB for the very obvious reason that they had gone from zero turnover to tens of millions, and more. Without any resulting horde of graduates qualified in anything. No one was teaching anybody anything—at least, not with any genuine intentions.

Without anyone checking, the Federal Government had automatically dished out untold fees as these new colleges enrolled countless drones that they recruited outside of Centrelink offices and similar career centres. Now the shonky guys were emailing me, asking to workshop how to deter or defeat their audits. I'm happy to confess I gave them very bad advice.

It was 2010 and I was headed to another annual cut-off determined by the following year's enrolments. It was the middle of November when I held a board meeting—with myself since I owned it all—to decide whether to carry on another year. I would know that I could meet the running costs of the thing if I had enough signed and deposited enrolments.

On November 15, 2010, we didn't have sufficient enrolments—most probably due to most of the competition now having VET FEE HELP.

So I shut everything down. I paid all the creditors, and terminated the staff. I defaulted on all the operating leases and bank finance, maxed out my American Express, and went gracelessly bankrupt in my own name. I hung on to my job at CX Magazine which by then was being operated by a family member, and eventually emerged from what can best be described as the financial and personal wilderness.

What happened to all those student deposits? My self-managed superannuation is what happened. I wrote cheques to each and every one of them, along with a heartfelt letter apologising for the

closure which would clearly mess up their planning. With all matters settled, I faced a reckoning with the Australian Tax Office which, at the time, was looking for a trustee of a self-managed super fund to string up. I would be the perfect candidate. I could go to jail.

I got divorced again, moved into a rental that my very good friend arranged—bankrupts can't rent—and then discovered I had prostate cancer.

Footnote: The Tax Office eventually slapped me with a wet lettuce after realising that I had not taken a cent out for any reason other than student refunds. They had me pen an 'enforceable undertaking' that I would never again self-manage a super fund.

Chapter 33: A Particular Shame

Bankruptcy carries a stigma. That's why I kept mine on the quiet. Unlike many it was controlled and limited to banks, finance companies, and utilities at my college. The underlying companies didn't go into administration, there were no trade creditors, and staff entitlements were sorted out. The whole saga followed a script devised by my lawyer, Ross McGlynn.

A year after the Global Financial Crisis, Karen—wife number three, if you don't remember—and I bought our dream home in Wahroonga, a leafy suburb twenty-five kilometres north of Sydney city. It was a split-level home on a hillside, set deep in a long block overlooking rainforest. The previous owners spent a decade landscaping with native grass trees around monstrous old red gums that towered thirty metres. A little pond and waterfall was home to a water dragon.

Wildlife was incredibly abundant—echidnas, wallabies, goannas, snakes and bush turkeys, with resident kookaburras and flocks of galahs. Migratory birds would call through, and every season was distinct. It was a happy home mostly, with two dogs and Karen's boys growing up with me. I was stepdad to them for eight years.

We got a mortgage off the back of my college business and the media firm trading quite well in 2008. Immediately I went to see Ross McGlynn who'd been introduced to me by a mate who had restructured his business. Ross had a good grasp on the risks. One bad year and I could be insolvent. He devised a scheme to protect the magazine asset. We transferred the title into a shelf company, registered in the name of my brother, and kept publishing 'under license' within the existing media structure.

I entered 2009 to find good growth in the businesses. Albeit the

college never made money, and it was slowly pulling the media company down, but revenues were growing. That's a classic business bind—cash-flow is good, but profit is poor. In 2010 the numbers went down, and at the end of the year I faced closure. Another trip to Ross produced The Plan.

Because the magazine was protected, we just changed the publishing entity over and I became an employee. The college company would just stop. Its debts were almost all underwritten by me, so the banks and finance companies would come after yours truly eventually. We stopped paying in December—and waited.

In the meantime, Ross wanted Karen to save up some serious money because ultimately, when I went bankrupt, she would have to cut a deal with my trustee over my equity in the house.

"It's quite simple," he told me. "You pay her 'housekeeping' money every week, she saves it up, so she has the money to negotiate with."

Ross mapped it out. After that December, it would take the institutions about six months to start to sue me. I'd go bankrupt in July, and the trustee would take 'quite a while' to move on to negotiate with Karen. Which gave us nine to twelve months to accumulate funds.

This was all seemingly solid and I had no real choices. I went home to tell her I was closing the college, and she went into 'we will lose the house' shock. A natural reaction. I was insisting we wouldn't, and I was already hurting deep in my ego about shutting the college. Tough times, and a tough conversation with my wife.

"What about all the nuisance calls I'll get from the collection agencies?" I asked Ross.

"Simple," he said again—he made everything simple. "Set up a ring tone of nothing and set as default. Then select all your friends

and allocate them an actual ring tone. Turn off vibrate. Your phone will be very busy, but you'll be undisturbed."

It worked a treat. A few collectors turned up at the property, but when I said I was declaring bankruptcy they lost interest. I self-declared on July 1st, 2011, and peace descended. Two months later my trustee announced himself and invited me in for an interrogation. Pre-armed by Ross, I sailed though. The trustee had a good idea that I wasn't hiding anything—because I wasn't. I handed over my passport, and left in my crappy clunker car that I'd bought from a hairdresser for \$1,900.

Four months after that, almost a year since closing the college, the trustee wrote to Karen asking her to decide whether to buy my equity from the trustee or sell the house. Using Ross's script, she engaged with them and eventually they sent a valuer around. Ross encouraged her to be totally honest, so she told the guy the tale of woe.

We didn't like his valuation, so we got our own. Then the trustee arranged a third, and we agreed to average all three. Then Ross engaged in some further negotiations, and after a month we had a number. Karen took a bank cheque to the trustee, and walked away sole owner.

But how did we pay the mortgage? Someone else did. Things were sorted out over time. We settled into a new life, and into work for me that was completely focused on media, which strengthened and improved again.

But time ran out on the marriage in 2013. I moved to Balmain, and eventually we—well, Karen—sold the house. When my bankruptcy ended, Karen gifted me my share of the proceeds. She didn't have to. We were divorced, after all.

She is a good human.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

Chapter 34: The Misner Factor

The book, *The Misner Factor: The Official History of the SAE Institute* is what's written on the tin; it's the 'official history' of the guy who started the School of Audio Engineering forty years ago and made millions milking impressionable students with stars in their eyes. The book is hard to find, which is probably a good thing, because it defames a score of people across the world. It was self-published by Tom Misner, a now ageing, overweight and rich guy of Austrian descent who lives at Byron Bay.

The book was such great reading that I read it straight through, all 270 pages in eight hours. Publishers usually sanitise books, concerned they'll get their arses kicked in court, but this one went for the jugular.

I wrote about the book, a kind of literary review, in my *CX Magazine* at the time. I'd discovered years earlier that Misner loved getting press. Good press, bad press, any press. He had a Trump-like ego, and I realised he would never sue *me* for defamation because to do so he would be cross-examined under oath. So I just wrote what I saw, and it still rings true now.

In the opening pages, one of SAE's first teachers is described—and named—by Tom as “a large girl, a lesbian—big and butch. I guess you'd have to call her a typical stereotype dyke.” He then praises her teaching ability.

In part this is what made the book so readable. It is a blow-by-blow account of the way Misner scammed, charmed, bumbled and bullied his way through the early days, establishing the world's largest chain of audio schools. Misner delivers his account via a writer called Robert Alexander, a British audio journalist who has also worked at SAE at some stage.

The book spans the early 1970s and through until 2002, and it

was released at the official opening of the greatest studio audio education campus on the planet, SAE Bryon Bay. The complex was built under the personal direction of Misner, who is a control freak.

If you ever crossed Tom Misner, then you're right there in print. A bewildering array of people drift in and out of the book, and some of their sins are serious—like theft, drug dealing, and fraud. Others, like Martin Cass, who owns JMC Academy, are just guilty of having the audacity to compete with The Tom.

There are a couple of present and former Australian audio equipment distributors who are painted less than attractively. One allegedly once wrote a rubber cheque to pay for advertising in Tom's magazine at the time, called *Australian Sound and Recording*. The magazine and its yearbook are trumpeted in the book as the only publications of their kind in the 1980s, overlooking the more successful *Sonics* magazine and yearbook that ran fourteen years until my *Connections* magazine hobbled it in 1993.

Another distributor had the temerity to pull loaned equipment out of SAE and instead support JMC, which is why Tom says that even today there is almost no Tascam equipment in any SAE studio, worldwide.

Still on the subject of dealing with equipment distributors, there's a great chapter about the alleged ineptitude of the people working for Ampex in the early days who, says Tom, loaned him two multi-track machines worth over \$40,000, which is equal to about a quarter of a million of today's dollars, and then forgot to ask for any money. Two years later, he claims to have paid them \$3,000.

Tom was by then exacting some kind of campaign against the

equipment distributors who, he editorialised in his magazine—alongside advertisements for their products—were doing nothing to assist in lifting the punitive tariffs that were in place, ostensibly to protect local manufacturers. He pointed out there *were* no local manufacturers, which was true aside from makers of small, specialised equipment like ARX.

An Adelaide-based importer allegedly took \$65,000 from Tom for a console with automation, and *didn't* deliver the automation. Tom names the guy, and goes a lot further with a personal description that is searing of the man's character and seriously defamatory. Tom was well aware the guy wouldn't sue—because importer was dead by then.

But you can excuse Tom for the bias in the book being skewed his way, because obviously it's *his* book. Alexander digs around, like any journalist should, and details fairly accurately a kind of 'anti-Tom' society that operated at the upper echelons of the recording industry in Australia. There's a last laugh element, because Tom has prevailed in spectacular style while most of his critics have either lost their minds, their jobs, or had their studio purchased. By Tom.

The book isn't all about vengeance though; the characters appear as part of the landscape of the times, and in an industry that was peppered with shonky people. Back in the 1980s it was easier to be a rotten person in business, and Tom wasn't alone in enduring the ebb and flow of fortune. He doesn't come out smelling of roses either and tells in all honesty how he became acquainted with the tax laws in Australia, courtesy of a snap audit by a Mr. Cox from the tax office.

More than a few times there are deals abruptly terminated, because the other party misrepresented some aspect. It emerges

that Tom says he is good for a handshake deal, as long as the other party doesn't try to change the rules.

The personal observations in the book are certainly not politically correct. Sharon Quin was the wife of long-serving SAE Brisbane manager, Michael Quin. We learn she had a cute arse, and a special kind of wiggle when she walked. She went on to be an outstanding manager of the London SAE after her marriage ended.

A Sydney staffer is fired for being, as Tom describes it, a 'fat, lazy cow!' Someone else is robustly referred to as 'fuckwit'. No doubt Alexander had also established this guy was deceased and thus unable to take legal action against Misner, who was amongst the 200 richest men in Australia and worth one billion dollars by his own estimation at the time. He sold SAE to Navitas for under \$200 million a few years later.

SAE had seen its fair share of duplicity with a series of staff fired—and named in the book—for dipping into the till. Most serious was the theft of \$80,000 in cash from the safe in 1988. Once again, the suspect is named in the book.

The book details the pathway the organisation took from very casual and almost ad-hoc teaching and record-keeping, up to university standards. European operations manager, Rudi Grieme, was like most SAE staff a former student. The organisation finds teachers amongst the best students, and then finds managers amongst the best teachers. Rudi wanted to enrol at the new Munich school in 1986.

"So I came down to Munich in late July 1986, found the school and went in," recounts Rudi. "It was in a run-down building that didn't look very nice. I went upstairs for what I thought would be an interview or entry exam, and that was the first time I saw Tom.

He was sitting in a room and lying back on a chair with one arm behind the back of his head, the other on the table. He had no shoes on, and dirty socks, and he was playing with a gold credit card between his teeth."

The story gets better:

"Tom didn't even bother to show me around, he just said, 'Okay, you want to do the course, here is the registration form, where's the money?' So I said to him, 'What about the entry exam?'

"'Oh yeah, the entry exam. No problem,' he says. So he opens a drawer and took out a Walkman, a piece of paper, and hands it to me saying, 'Ten minutes, okay?' When it was complete I handed it back to Tom, who glanced at it and said, 'It's fine, you're accepted. Now where's the money?'"

It's plain that back then SAE didn't have many, or sometimes any, standards at all. It seemed the organisation took perhaps years longer than it should have to get up to scratch because of Tom's drive to expand, rather than to manage the detail. He resisted formal and proper management, and course structuring, until it was almost too late. That aspect is probably ancient history now, which makes the honest telling in the book possible.

Amongst the roll-out of new SAE colleges there were more than a few setbacks, and the LA franchise was amongst the greatest debacles. A wealthy woman (named in the book of course) assured Tom she had all the right connections to get the school accredited in the USA and, of course, it didn't happen.

However, students were already enrolled and were being trained at the time. So SAE did a midnight runner with manager Iain Everington and his crew stripping the place bare. Tom then relocated the sixteen students to any SAE property anywhere in the world they wanted, at his cost, the book says.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

There is great mirth and a sense of achievement with the recounting of the now infamous purchase of Studio 301 in Sydney, where Tom says he enticed the unknowing 301 staff over to his facility with promises of food and drink, then told them his greatest regret was not naming *his* place Studio 301.

"They all go 'too bad, huh' and then I tell them I just bought 301."

Another couple of names pop into the narrative, one of whom is a 301 staffer he described as being fired for asking for a salary three times what she's worth.

Perhaps the saddest aspect of the book is the treatment of Tom's second wife, Katrina. She's portrayed as a snob who married Tom for money, yet is the mother of two of his children, who he admits to loving greatly. Doubtless they've read Tom's views on their mother in the years since.

Indeed, in the closing pages of the book, Tom counts simply *meeting* Katrina as one of his greatest regrets.

The book ends on a high with details of his relationship with Janette, with whom he is father to daughter, Yasmin. They all live in languid splendour in a house on a hilltop overlooking the ocean at Bryon Bay, and Misner is described by Alexander as being more relaxed than he's ever been.

Tom probably wanted the book to be an honest rendition of his life and times, but instead it was sometimes turned into a vicious score-settler by Alexander, who is either too clumsy to understand what he has done, or maybe he's too influenced by his UK homeland tabloid media. Perhaps he just gave up and completely submitted himself to Tom's strong character. As such, the book might well be remembered for all the wrong reasons.

More ominously, I suspect Misner knew that he was flaming,

defaming and libelling his enemies, and just told Alexander not to worry. This theory was virtually the spin that Misner put to me at his SAE Byron Bay opening night bash where five hundred people were flown in from around the world. I thought I would do the right thing and warn Misner that the book was dangerously defamatory. At least he still had a chance to recall it, since the first copies were only those sitting on the five hundred chairs at the dinner that night.

I pushed through the crowd of fawning European SAE staff, local identities, imported studio celebrities, and grovelling flunkies to tell Tom he had a legal problem with the book.

"Yeah, I defamed people. Especially my ex-wife!" he chortled.

I guess that's *official* too.

Chapter 35: The Recording Studio

My college was located in Rydalmere, just east of Parramatta, in a converted warehouse. It had a suitable fit-out with offices, computer room, cafe space, class rooms upstairs, and a reasonably large performance area with rigging points, black curtains, and air conditioning.

In our early years the business grew well and we found trainers, one of whom, called Rob, had a small recording studio at Blacktown where he ran his own courses. He was outwardly nice, with the extra years on the planet giving him a shock of white hair. We decided to join forces—I'd give him space rent-free on the ground floor, he could fit it out, operate his commercial studio, and train our students in there, all in exchange for hourly training rates.

It developed into a really cool space with an oddball collection of Snoopy toys to soften the visual of all the audio gear, and we had several years of happy co-existence.

The studio wasn't setting the world on fire as a commercial venture for Rob, and the modules he could teach were being cut back as the curriculum evolved through changes to the training package. A couple of years passed and we hit the end of 2008 with Rob's teaching roster for 2009 at almost zero. He had become increasingly difficult behind my back, and I had complaints of rages and disharmony. He wasn't in any mood to change anything and seemed to deeply resent his own lack of success.

We closed down for Christmas, and when we re-opened in the first week of January I walked through turning on lights, and unlocked the studio door. I reached for the light switch there, fumbled around, and my hand felt only bare wires. As my eyes adjusted to the gloom I could see ... nothing.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

The place was stripped bare. Furniture, equipment, finishes, and even the two large sheets of eight millimetre glass that formed the studio window were all gone. And that glass belonged to *me*. I was speechless.

Jimmy and Andy, my full-time trainer guys, arrived and we all looked at each other with our mouths open. Jimmy started laughing, because Rob had left *one* light fitting, possibly in haste. He had unscrewed even every power point. It was a ‘screw you’ message to me.

We stopped laughing when it occurred to us that Rob still had the fucking *keys*. I eventually had him return them, which became an angry confrontation in the lobby. I vented, he vented. He virtually frothed at the mouth and raged his version of deceit and injustice, and roared off in his crappy little car, trying to leave rubber but only managing to leave a visual of a really angry old man losing his shit.

Never to be heard of again.

He’d enjoyed five years rent-free, paying zero towards utilities—or the coffee bill.

It certainly did screw me over. I had a full-time class starting in three weeks and no recording studio. They’d all seen it at open days, it was in the brochure. And here it was, a stripped-out hulk.

We dreamed up some credible story as close to truth as possible for the students, who arrived on Day One full of excitement and hope. It kind of fitted, really. Our job was to moderate all their optimism into reality and dilute the disillusion that inevitably kicked in when they realised they were in a vocational education course that required competency assessments—and a lot of them. They weren't there to just have fun in a room full of cool recording gear.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

Jimmy did what he does best, and he re-imagined that studio into something much more suitable and aligned to our technical course—it became a TV control room. It was patched to the performance space so we could train in proper commercial video production. While he figured out the design and spec's, I found a really helpful guy, Patrick Sproule at Charles Sturt University, down at Wagga Wagga. They had the best TV production degree in the country, and through his exceptional co-operation he and I managed to map a bunch of my diploma into some of his differently designed modules.

We acquired a lot of equipment, did a lot of deals, and Jimmy fitted the place out magnificently. By mid-year it was up and running, and the 2010 diploma course suddenly had a university extension welded on. Any of our graduates could move to Wagga and enrol in Year Two of their degree. It was a stunning improvement, and several of the 2010 students did indeed do so.

But time had run out for my college.

Chapter 36: That Fun Gland is Over-rated

In late 2013, at age fifty-six, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and in January 2014 had a robotic removal of that gland. Sounds clinical, doesn't it?

I was losing my freaking *mind* when I first found out. After the doctor told me, I went down in the lift with an armful of paperwork. I walked outside and slumped onto a low brick wall. I called my girlfriend.

"Do you want to be alone?" she asked.

"Hell no. Come over, we need to get badly drunk."

I have a family history of prostate cancer so I had been checked each November. In 2013 I went early, the blood test PSA was 4.2 (average is around 2.0) and my GP suggested waiting six weeks as her DRE (digital rectal examination) may have angered the prostate. In any case, she advised, it may have been an inflammation that would settle.

Several years earlier I'd returned a very high PSA of twenty-four and my doctor referred me to a urologist who, after a DRE, determined I probably had prostatitis, which is an infection. This jived with me feeling 'off' around the time of the blood test. He prescribed antibiotics and the PSA did indeed drop back to normal.

Knowing that it was possible I just had an infection again helped my mindset.

But by late November my PSA was still elevated and I was referred to a urologist in Sydney, Associate Professor Manish Patel. He did a more thorough DRE using the American method, different in that I bent over his bench, whereas all my GP examinations were lying sideways. At this stage I stress that

DRE's do not hurt at all. But it still involves a gloved finger up your chutney chute. Which does worry a lot of guys.

He discerned softness on one side, which was hardly conclusive. He suggested an MRI scan, which carries a cost of about \$400 in Australia. That produced an image showing a hazy mass occupying eighty percent of the prostate. A biopsy was booked quickly, and I paid extra for a general anaesthetic. My doc said it was like having a canoe shoved up your arse. Nothing I've read anywhere says that being awake for *that* is a good idea. The cost was another \$400. Thank you, health insurance.

The biopsy was fast, I was unconscious for less than an hour, and at midday went home feeling tender. I pissed blood for a few days, and had a reduction in blood presence in my ejaculate. This ranged from full blood several days later, to almost zero in three weeks. I was using my prostate as much as possible, celebrating it.

Several days after the biopsy Dr. Patel confirmed that of the twelve samples removed, eight were cancerous and it was rated seven on the Gleeson scale, or semi-aggressive. It took me five seconds to agree to have the prostate removed. We had to wait three weeks because it was Christmas, and the operation was scheduled for January 10, 2014. Some Christmas that was.

The low point was a bone scan a few days after diagnosis to rule out any cancer breakouts. That was a nervous wait, and it came back clear. Had there been a breakout, I had resolved to die happy and not go out in a blizzard of chemo and radiation. No kidding—I *was* resolved. I have friends I've buried because of this, and had another one at that time in a hospice. He died a week after I was cured by the removal of the prostate gland.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

This is a fatal disease if men don't act fast. Don't be lulled by the reports of slow growth, and had I not acted fast I would be facing a very early death.

This might be all fairly tedious reading, and sure, skip ahead if you glaze over. But if you're a bloke aged in your forties or more, you just might appreciate a warts 'n' all account of what *you* might be in for. And what you can do to help yourself.

Dr. Patel introduced me to his support crew. I was booked with a principal sports physiotherapist, Sean Mungovan, at his practice at Westmead Private Physiotherapy Services. He is a fairly intense, fit guy in his thirties who hammered the realities of his experience in this field. He did an ultrasound of my pelvic contraction function.

That involves putting on a baggy pair of silk boxing shorts. I guess he took them home and washed them after, 'cos he then lubed up an ultrasound probe, had me lift my tackle, and he slid the thing under the ball sack. Concentrating on the screen, he moved the thing incrementally and said, "Clench." Eventually he found the spot where he could see how the pelvic muscle was responding.

This was the Eldorado moment for me, as I'd had at least eighteen months of solid Pilates classes under my belt, and I knew what a pelvic contraction was, despite not bothering too much about it during my Pilates classes. I'd stepped up to four classes a week some months earlier, loving the flexibility and the gentle nature of the exercise. Pilates had already given me the flexibility of a young man, and I felt fit and vital as a consequence.

I was dating a new girlfriend who was a personal trainer, and I figured that dating her meant being and staying fit—in body and mind—and Pilates was that pass card. I'd met her in October, and it was in December I was diagnosed.

Dr. Patel was open to my questions about recovery. I didn't want to be incontinent. Most importantly I really didn't want to be impotent. He suggested as much *stimulation* as possible, pre-operation. I took his advice on board.

Sean had me doing a lot of pelvic floor contraction exercises. His first session culminated in giving me a brown shopping bag loaded with incontinence pads, at a net cost of sixty bucks. It was a powerful whack on the head to say, "Hey, every man is incontinent after the operation." He had a plastic anatomy toy on his desk and gave me the whole chapter and verse on what would happen.

I went back and had several exercise sessions, all based on pelvic floor exercises. I was doing them in bed, I was doing them in the car, and I was told to walk 12,000 paces a day. A Smartphone app helped me achieve this.

Although mine was a short treatment period, I listened to Sean and did what he said. It did impact on my work hours. I had time off, and I also had money put aside for treatment. These are essential elements to the outcome.

Interestingly, I have met men since who were not referred to a physiotherapist at all. Many had not had a proper discussion with their urologist about impotence either.

There is no standard approach to pre-operative care, or indeed post-operative care.

So what does the prostate actually do? This is a layman description. It is a gland through which runs the urethra. The prostate makes semen, which is mixed with sperm at the time of ejaculation. A two-way valve switches the urethra from the bladder, to the delivery pipe for the sperm and semen mix.

Without a prostate, you still manufacture sperm, but it has nowhere to go. Removing the prostate has the identical effect of

having a vasectomy. I'd had one of those, so I was shooting blanks anyway. In other words, I was producing semen minus sperm.

The vasectomy had zero effect on sex or orgasm. Having the *prostate* removed means no ejaculation, but you still have an orgasm. Minus the mess. I found out later this is enormously popular with women. And the one woman I have been with ever since.

On January 10 I checked in, and within an hour was out of it. The operation was performed 'robotic' with a Da Vinci machine. The anaesthetist had called a day earlier to negotiate his account—around \$2000—and the hospital, Macquarie Uni, had me in for a pre-op consult earlier. That was helpful. The specialist nurse showed me the catheter and bag system that I would wear for a week after the operation.

The operation takes around four hours—it's not a short procedure. I had six small incisions, with no external stitches. I woke up feeling normal.

Because the cancer was entirely inside the gland, Professor Patel could rummage around in there and hopefully preserve the layer of erectile nerves. He told me later they were *invigorated* and *active*. I'm not sure this is discernible or true, but it was psychologically helpful.

That same operation day I walked up some stairs in hospital. The hospital physio put a giant tick on my chart and I didn't see her again.

The one big discomfort was the gas. They inflate your gut, and it's very uncomfortable when you stand and walk, but in your *shoulders*. Like being hung on a hook from each shoulder. Laying back down fixes it. Knowing about it would've helped too—except they forgot to tell me, so I was confused why I hurt so much.

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I was released within forty-eight hours. The pain was only paracetamol threshold. Just six days after the operation I was unwired from the post-op hardware—a catheter, with a bag strapped to my leg—and I discovered to my immense joy that I was *not* incontinent. Far from it, and all the mental prep work the physios had done was thankfully wasted. I was operating entirely normally.

While wearing the catheter and bag, I would visit the pub for some essential hydration. Being summer, the bag was strapped to my leg under my shorts. I went to the urinal, pulled the leg of my shorts up, and released the drain valve. A guy who came in saw just the rush of urine from the bottom of my shorts, and assumed I had an enormous penis.

Word spread. Women started smiling at me. I enjoyed the fame, but I couldn't exploit it. The feeling of an unresponsive penis is like the lack of hope. The days of waking up with an erection were just a memory.

When the catheter came out (it doesn't hurt at all) the nurse whacked a pad in my underpants and said, "Every man is incontinent after this."

Not me.

Next day, Dr. Patel called to advise me the pathology showed *all* the cancer was contained in the removed gland, and there were no breakouts. I did a mental cartwheel.

I went back to work on Day Five after the op for a few hours. On Day Six, I did my usual journalistic work from my kitchen table. And I was down to the pub every day for a beer or three as well. After a week there were no more daytime sleeps.

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You *are* weakened, and need to recover. Physical exercise isn't possible other than some gentle swimming, which I recommend, and walking.

Dr. Patel ordered me to do it—so I did it. I became a porn connoisseur. Tasteful always, and strictly in the name of recovery. I enjoyed the work of Little Oral Annie, a truly talented artiste; skilled in ‘the disappearing’.

Just days after, I had sensations, and a few weeks on I was almost halfway there with an erection, which was very encouraging. I had my first orgasm—alone, still practicing the doctors' orders to maintain a lot of stimulation. That was a milestone. At that point no one had told me you could still orgasm, so it was a big *moment*.

My girlfriend the PT dumped me late February, which wasn't unexpected. Apparently, something was missing in our relationship. No kidding?

In April I was confident enough to start dating again and discovered being upfront about my condition helped build trust. It also opened up some often funny stories about men who can't get it up in normal daily life. I found a girlfriend who was happy to see how my condition could be improved with the assistance of fine food and wine. Music and candles all helped too.

By about October I felt almost fully recovered.

My whole urological system was different, but good different. For the first few weeks I had cramps if I waited too long to piss. They went away. The urine flow was awesome, and I could have had a pissing competition with a twelve-year-old and probably win. But I don't think that's ever a good idea.

A prior year of Pilates really helped my recovery. Please do consider this form of exercise; with its focus on core and pelvic

contraction. Most men think it is girly, but once I started, I fast got back to how I felt as a young man. Many guys tell me it cures aches, pains and sore backs too.

I had the robotic removal in a private hospital. Don't wait for the public system to schedule you with a specialist down the track that does the old-fashioned, full operation—you'll be munted.

I got this monster affliction just *before* it went berserk. It came on *fast*, within twelve months of my previous clear PSA and DRE.

I'm the luckiest guy alive. Total out-of-pocket costs were about fourteen grand. Just pay for it. Borrow the bucks if need be. I'm told you can hassle your Super fund in Australia for an advance. Do it.

There's a lot of confusion around the prostate topic. Most prostate cancers grow slow. Mine didn't. Men assume you can defer or delay treatment, or even diagnosis. Don't.

The PSA number is not a diagnosis, it is just a marker. How high can the PSA go? I knew a guy, terminally ill with the cancer throughout his body, whose PSA was *seven hundred*. He had never had it checked, because he was always well and didn't need to visit a doctor.

That was also the fate of my well-loved, number one lawyer, Ross McGlynn, whose help and counsel I desperately miss.

My friend Zoe is a neuro psychologist, who is by profession fascinated with the pathways from the brain. She did a lot of research for me. She asked me a few months after the operation whether anyone in the treatment chain asked me how I was. I was surprised on reflection that no one ever did. There is a treatment gap there, where men less resilient and less supported than I could be left alone and in distress.

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As I write this it's over six years hence, and the monitoring stopped after five years. I still have the PSA test each year with my medical check-up, the number remains 'unreadable'.

I'm alive and happy, and the fun hasn't stopped even without that pesky gland.

Chapter 37: Internet Dating

Yep, we're going *there*.

Internet dating was new, seemed a bit naughty, and also carried a stigma when, at the tender age of forty-four, I re-entered the dating game in June 2000 after my long marriage to Caroline collapsed. I was a bit like Austin Powers when they defrosted him from the groovy-baby days. I didn't know what to do, say, or how to act.

But due to being handy with the written word, and after some experimentation with my photos, I hit my stride and decided that websites like RSVP had something to offer. I settled on some principles early on, and stuck to them throughout that season. These include not talking too much about my ex-wife, and that the purpose of early dates is not to try luring anyone—or *be* lured—into the sack. Importantly I always wanted to know their real name, and told them who I was so they could Google me. I guess if you have bad stuff on the web, you probably shouldn't?

What was I looking for? So many women asked me that. I could say for sure it was a relationship, not a fling. Honesty and intelligence were mandatory, as was non-smoking and no illicit drugs. I didn't care if they had kids—most women aged over forty did—and I preferred any potential partners be not too much younger or older than me. I had to see something I liked—and that's so subjective. For instance, a lady astride a motorbike does nothing for me, but on a horse, I'm on. Other than that, I was open-minded.

I learned quickly that a coffee during the day, or a drink in the early evening, is as far as a first meet should ever go, because it gives you an out. Sometimes I'd reinforce that in the invitation as an assurance—and that invitation only came during or after a

phone call. You can get a genuine picture of someone to who you've been emailing when you actually talk. This is important, because some people have someone else doing their emailing.

Many times, on those phone calls, after a while I'd decide we didn't click and I'd bail out by saying something polite like, "Hey, this has been fun. Thanks for talking with me."

With some I'd go straight in. "Would you like to catch up sometime soon?"

I always asked them what area suits them, and they would often nominate a place that was nowhere near their normal hangouts to avoid witnesses. Of course, sometimes I'd misread everything, and they could be quite blunt in the rejection, which you learn comes with the turf.

One lesson was to not let things go on too long before that first meeting, because they get a distorted view or form a story about you that can be hard for them to reconcile when they're sitting a few feet away, inhaling my secret cologne. I remember one lady who ticked every box both on the RSVP website, in her emails, and on the phone. I was pretty excited to meet this one, but she had to go to Chicago for a week. During which we emailed a lot.

When she finally walked into the bar I saw she was quite tall—I'm average height—and *she* realised immediately, judging by her reaction, that I wasn't what she wanted me to be. It was quite a rapid cooling off by us both, over just one drink, and it caught me flat-footed.

Another wore a red dress, and that's a bit of a sign of a lack of experience, I think. She was plainly quite anxious to find a guy who she thought was me. She had over-relied on my Christian faith and came quoting verse—which I don't. After adjusting the tone and settling in with that one glass of wine, she kind of opened her

gates of loneliness and desire, and I had to move things down fast. I carefully chose my words.

“You know, Denise, this is really fun. You’re clearly a very nice person, and I hope I am too. I’m just going to enjoy our drink here and then I have to go.” With that, she threw the wine down her throat, stood and gathered her bag, and left gulping tears back.

DonnaDayz63 arranged to meet ManWhoWrites at a dark bar in Crows Nest one winter weekday evening. She was late, and I had a beer half done. Good first impressions, and I liked her fragrance, but I don’t always ask what it is because that can be too much, too soon. She told me she worked for the tax office. That always goes over well, doesn’t it?

Pretty quickly, something was off. There was no back story other than vague references to growing up in Melbourne. I just couldn’t peek inside her very nicely made-up visage, and she wasn’t going to let me.

Then this. “You’re making me uncomfortable ...”

I floundered for words and came up with, “And I’m probing too much, please forgive me.” I changed the subject to overseas travel.

We talked a bit more, and then I wound it up. She seemed relieved, stood and we walked out together.

“Do you need a taxi?” I asked.

I hailed one, opened the door for her, and as she moved to get in she turned and planted a big kiss right on my lips. I was shocked, closed the door, and watched frozen as the cab drove up the street and saw the lights go over the rise and disappear.

My phone buzzed. *That was beautiful, let’s do it again.*

Not likely. Something in that kiss made me realise that Donna was, in fact, Donald.

There were some other memorable fails.

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A David Jones ‘Lady in Black’ arrived direct from work, so ancient and so blithe about her online lies, saying, “If I put the real photo and age you wouldn’t be here now. Let me show you photos of my apartment at Darling Point ...” Which, to be clear, she was using as a bait. As in, I have a nice apartment. It comes included with the deal.

Or the lady, again somewhat different to her profile, who commented as I ordered a second beer, “You like to chug them down then, do you?”

And the next *I’m different from all the others* person walking up to my table at a Newtown pub and saying, “Oh, you wear a cross. I don’t do religion.” Before walking away.

Finally, the mystery. A woman walked up as I chatted to my date at a pub and said, “So *you’re* Julius, why didn’t you reply to me?” Then she just as abruptly left. I never did figure *that* one out.

Then there’s that old chestnut where your date intentionally gets you drunk and throws herself at you. It happened to me, I’m ashamed to say, and she cunningly used Absinthe as her weapon of destruction. I drink beer and wine, hardly ever spirits. But the Absinthe bar served only that. It’s the kind of drink that sounds harmless, even culinary and medicinal when you read the ingredients. Yeah, right. *It is evil*. And once I’d ingested three—okay, maybe four—I was totally munted.

She got a taxi and took me home, and it was literally messy. Here’s a thing. I can’t climax when I’m drunk unless something wild goes down. So I remember standing above her on the mattress and finishing proceedings, flailing the goods manually as she attempted shelter, hands over her head, laughing and shrieking, “Not in my hair!”

I have no idea what or why *that* was. Absinthe, be damned.

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Fresh off the separation with wife number three, Karen, I'd unearthed an Italian lady lawyer in Birchgrove—let's be discreet and call her "Contessa". Really, I was punching above my weight with this one. Thus started six months of mainly good times, we were harmonious and loved up.

Then things went weird fast. Like flipping a switch. She got argumentative and didn't appreciate my humour. Contessa told me off a few times about how I was acting in front of her friends. It had become quite bizarre at times. And I had no idea why she changed so much, other than assuming she'd been hiding inside herself.

Seeing a life of bliss wasn't anywhere on the horizon, and also considering she came as a package with two teenage girls and a fat mortgage, I took the honourable way out and broke off as nicely as possible. A few nights later we met for a de-brief drink at the Riverview Pub, had a nice hour, and left happy after a kiss.

What happened next left me riddled with shame. As we left, she opened her phone and commented that her friend, Fiona, had left a lot of urgent text messages. Fiona was down at The Cottage, would I like to go along and join them? I said no, went home, turned off the phone and went to bed.

Next morning, POW! Streams of texts and emails. Turns out Fiona had met *her* friend Carole for a drink and, comparing notes as you apparently do, mentioned to Carole that Contessa was seeing this bloke called Julius.

Carole said, "Hey, that's a unique name. I had a date with a Julius once ..."

A quick consult of the website confirmed that this "Julius" was one and the same—that's me—and it revealed that my meet-up with Carole, which was hardly what you'd call a date, occurred

during the early weeks of my seeing Contessa. I had been exposed as filthy, two-timing scoundrel and Fiona had felt it her responsibility to warn Contessa of my dastardly behaviour.

Contessa had the case all figured out, except she was wrong—mostly. Carole and I *did* indeed meet up many months earlier when Contessa had previously shown me the door right when I moved into Birchgrove. Contessa had gone wobbly on everything and closed down all communications. She was a bit freaked out I was no longer in Wahroonga, and I was only two blocks away. What I considered convenient, she figured was more like stalking.

That confrontation felt like the end, and prompted a new start and a morning coffee with a Carole from RSVP in full daylight in Balmain. I honestly figured Contessa and I were done at the time. It was all over.

When Fiona, Carole *and* Contessa all compared notes at The Cottage (thank God I didn't go), I was a player, a cheater and a liar.

Things went batshit ballistic. She demanded I turn over her keys and whatever else I had, and I texted sure, *I'll leave them on the porch.*

She replied, *NO. FACE ME LIKE A MAN.*

So I did. She stood at her car and gave me a stream that no doubt entertained the neighbours. It was a good show. I took it all, including the observation that Christians are not to be relied upon.

Her departing line said it all. "And to think I was going to take you *back.*"

Indeed.

I did feel some regret. My perspective afterwards was that we could have worked out, but for that accommodation shift that made Contessa uncomfortable. And the Carole thing? It was dynamic at the time, and it was early days. Perhaps it was a poor choice by me

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to jump back on that RSVP bike so soon after leaving Contessa, but that's what I did. That's what you do.

Get back on the internet dating bike. Life's too short.

Chapter 38: Do Pheromones Smell?

It was a nondescript Friday night in the city of light. The peak hour slowed as the eating hour ascended.

I sat in the tasting room pondering a darkening Rose Bay and occasional fleck of rain, a winter breeze finding its way up the cracks in the pier. Up a few steps the fine dining room was half full, and on my right the door opened.

Alice stepped in, looking relaxed, and smiled as she handed her overcoat to the concierge. Her long brown hair hung free and shone in the careful light. The smile worked the left side of her mouth, opening to show the full form of her lips. This was a beautiful woman.

She ordered a Craigellachie Single Malt Scotch Whisky. "Not too many rocks, and some water on the side." I drank a Chardonnay. We clinked glasses and I struggled to look into her eyes, eyes that would melt any man with blood in his veins.

Sitting alongside we chose some seafood, tiny taster portions starting with two oysters and some salmon sashimi each. Alice stirred the Wasabi into the soy after checking with me. Her baby clams arrived and she attacked them with vigour, using the shell as a spoon and noisily slurping each one.

She said, "I'm going to Beijing—up on Friday night and out Sunday to connect with my Sydney flight." Alice was doing a week of work in Macau where her multinational had business.

As she spoke, her voice was musical and modulated, with little accent for an Australian.

She was animated, her eyelashes and lips dancing tantalisingly. She was dressed in jeans that framed her petite body perfectly. A low-cut top decorated her breasts, presented for view. This was one

seriously desirable woman, looking nowhere near her forty-four years.

"The company has been good to me," she continued, explaining how her boss had called her to a meeting when she had been there just three months. "I thought I was going to get fired—he was so serious. Then he said he had deep feelings for me, and he was not going to stop having them. I was angry, but he kept working on me, month after month, and then we ended up together. His wife left him, and the company sacked him—the CEO. He spiralled, out of control, depression. Then his wife staged a comeback."

Alice had a guilt-edged career with conglomerates, having worked for a couple of the toughest, and been head-hunted into progressively more senior jobs. She had the endurance and the energy to make everything she wanted happen. An unwelcome sexual predator was not new to her, but the hiatus she faced was confusing. Another job was under negotiation.

"Let's walk down to the Rose Bay Hotel for a nightcap," Alice suggested when we were finished with our nine little plates and wine. I paid for dinner, and we walked along the tide wall, a light smattering of rain falling.

Alice produced a slim reefer and lit up, inhaling deeply. I declined, and we strolled arm-in-arm a while, in no particular hurry. She told me that her ex-husband was busted trying to haul a hundred pounds of hash across the Kansas state line, and she had spent what was left of the marriage and their money getting him out of a Southern jail.

"I smoke maybe four times a week," she explained.

A man and his dog were at the stairs, preparing to board a runabout.

"There's Bob and Shirley Temple," Alice said.

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Shirley the Border Collie sat on my testing command, and then hopped up to let me rub her head. She had affectionate eyes and a knowing stance. Alice and Bob exchanged greetings: he had been up all night watching the soccer. Alice told me, as we walked away, that she had dated Bob a few times. It seemed incongruous, but she liked boats. Indeed a retired American was bringing his boat to collect her the next day.

At the pub she had a Stella, a refreshing beer to finish the night, she said. I had a Port.

"I'm headed home now," she smiled, and of course I offered to come as well. "I'm emotionally unavailable at the present," she said, as I caressed her shoulders and felt her hand. She called her driver.

Elie the limo driver arrived. Alice had offered to pay for my trip home, so we would drop her off first on the side of the bay where she lived, at the end of a straight and narrow street. Elie jumped out to open the door for Alice to get in—in the front seat. He was dignified and European, and uniformed. They chatted about the meal while I sat silent in the back.

I got out to hug her goodbye, glancing a kiss on her cheek, more pheromones unleashed by her up-close scent. Her perfume had put me on the edge of excitement all night, now I was almost convulsing.

Elie drove me back, and when I got out he told me to look after Alice. But I never saw her again.

Chapter 39: Ah Yes, the Spring Thing

Yep, in one warm October Sunday of what I call my *dating disaster* era, I had the epic—a double.

I first had a drink date with The Personal Trainer, and then dinner with The Retired Ballerina. Yes, I know, I said before you should never have dinner on a first meet, but she was in, I figured, a new echelon. It was a heady rush of fragrant loveliness, and then came The Next Date.

A second date doesn't mean you're going exclusive. You can do it with two at once, or so I believed. Ballet Girl had most of my attention early in this week—I mean, this was exotic. She'd been one of Harry M. Miller's consorts and that's top drawer. He gave her a Porsche 911 as a go-away present at the end. She turned that into her own apartment. I was keen to get into that—the apartment, I mean ...

Miss PT was busy too. I think she was still auditioning for whatever, or whoever the fuck she was looking for. Me, I had no idea. Ballet Girl wanted a man with tools—to fix her dishwasher and a bedroom door, and so I booked her for Thursday dinner at Beppi's. Of all places. The so old-school joint that the old Packer liked.

I rolled out my secret wingman weapon, Elie the limo driver. Yes, *that* Elie who I met through Miss Rose Bay. He picked up Retired Ballerina and buttered her up about how amazeballs was me. Oh, if only I'd heard this piffle. I hasten to add, that was *his* idea, and I wouldn't ask anyone to do that. He just knew how the planet turns, and perhaps figured this was a handy tip-extender too. He would be right on that.

Ballet Girl was sure ready for romance, and we had the full deal at the silver service joint, until Elie texted me.

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Hey! You are on the wrong bus. This is not for you, Mr. Julius.

You see, Elie was a *very* handy sidekick. Previously he had delivered some sensational background to the (too young) lady lawyer I dated from Coffs who'd flown down and got well dined some weeks earlier. From her, he'd discovered that a young child and other back-story was possibly a barrier to, umm, good future living.

He said, "Julius, Julius! You have been with all the girls who have children. Brother, you know that you have take them all as your own?"

Well yes, but every package deal is a deal. Hell, my package comes with wine, and the need to endlessly talk about random stuff. I'm sure I can be pain to live with too.

But I heeded his advice. When I dropped Ballet Girl home and walked her to the door with Elie fretting in the idling A8, I'd figured she needed more domestic repairs than I was ready to do and, as she shockingly told me, mid-slobber on the doorstep, a boob job reversal operation as well. Too much info. I pulled the plug.

On to the PT, and she was difficult. Really nice, saucy, and fun—and then not nice, sour, and boring. A relationship on high rotation for four solid months. Just when I'd had enough, I also entered the Prostate Cancer distractions and she hung in there long enough to help me through, and I really appreciated that. But wait, there *was* four months of PT. And that means there was a whole lot more I didn't appreciate.

PT really did my head in. Like totally. I grew to love her over time, as is inevitable, but she did everything possible to also wreck those feelings. So we had an on-off, up-down, all about thing.

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Example—she would text me for sleep-overs, staying maybe four nights in a row until she ran out of clothes. Then disappear.

My prostate cancer diagnosis really capped things, she went on-off to the extent we broke up before New Year, and then she came *back* in January. After the operation, like I said it was unexpected, but she left with dignity and I never saw, or heard from her again. And that's a shame. Some people run, hide, and move on.

I'd planned and booked a few days in Tasmania with PT, which she cancelled by email on Christmas Eve, offering to refund me the airfare. That was it for me, and I didn't want to go but packed my bag and headed down anyway. I booked a tent at Falls Festival, impulsively, and had one uncomfortable night out there. I don't do tents anymore.

I felt so out of place with ten thousand millennials who all looked at me like I was a spooky stalker. Six or eight tiny ten-dollar thimbles of wine, and one bad burger later, I was over that cold, crappy night.

Leaving Marion Bay I headed for Launceston, and at my breakfast cafe stop I decided to see if it was possible to snag a date for that very night—New Year's Eve. I put a posting up that was specific to Launceston and New Years Eve, and drove out of mobile range.

Stopping an hour later for fuel, I was amazed to find three offers awaiting me. What the heck is going on in Launceston? I narrowed the field, and Suzanne agreed to meet at 7:00 p.m. in a bar.

We had an awesome night, got fairly munted (me more than she) and blagged our way into the Riverside party just in time for midnight. Then we couldn't find a taxi. She offered to drive me, in my Hertz rental, to my hotel.

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Decorum the key, she dropped me off and went home, presumably sober enough to drive, but to be honest I was happily drunk and didn't think about it too hard. I slept like a log, the 5:00 a.m. alarm shook me into the New Year, and I gathered my stuff to catch the 8:00 a.m. flight out. Leaving the room and heading down to reception to call a cab, I remembered, *I have a Hertz car.*

Where on earth *is* it? Oh no ...

Luckily Suzanne was already on the way to collect me, having extracted all my travel plans. What a good sort she was. Afterwards, she even offered to come to Sydney and care for me for a few days after my operation.

Next came Xanadu, my white Rhodesian girl, very tall. Very fun! She operated an art-related business across the hill, so it was a rare local relationship. She was wearing a coloured jacket, we met for a drink, and had ten. Next day it was on. Quite a few nice nights followed, I met her daughters, and went out with her friends.

At Day Fourteen I was cooking dinner at my place when she dredged up the 9/11 conspiracy theory, followed by the faked moon landing. You know that internal warning buzzer noise? It was going off, loud and clear.

I agreed to disagree, we had dinner, drinks, and the usual nocturnal proclivities. Next day, she texted me the fuck-off, followed by many emojis and gifs of demons and weird stuff. I had to ask her to desist.

That afternoon at the William Wallace pub, a bloke we called The Sailor ambled over and asked, "Where is blondie?" I told him the story.

"You're lucky, son," he said. His mate had been a guy she'd mentioned in dark tones. When he ended things, she didn't. One day she broke in, to 'retrieve' contested property and ended up

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charged and with an added AVO. That's not avocado, that's an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order —note the word "violence".

I'd dodged a bullet.

Then, I finally met Kate.

Chapter 40: Marooned in Death Valley

A warm winter June day in Sydney and I'm headed to the USA. I leave my bushland Wahroonga home at 10:30 a.m. and get to Burns Road, and realise I didn't print the e-Ticket. I turn the cab around, go back, and of course the home Mac takes forever and we have just one sheet of paper in the printer. I get to Turramurra station late.

A change at Central, and I get the wrong airport line train. Who knew? Some of them go via Redfern all the way to Macarthur, and *not* to the airport. Get off at Redfern. The airport ticket refuses to scan. I hassle my way out of Redfern, try to get taxi. Not easy.

Check in late. Discover, courtesy of check-in chick, that a colleague, Sol Meshugener, has somehow slimed an upgrade and is sitting next to me in premium economy, in what was supposed to be a blocked out, empty seat.

Now I do like Sol, otherwise known as Shug, but only in digestible chunks. He's a friend.

I find Shug in the lounge, acting all chaotic and busy because he's rewriting his CX contributions. He's making loud calls and being all important.

I interrupt his cell phone ranting. "Sol, the flight is on final call." He's telling someone he is super-late for his flight and he has to know *now* some factoid that could be left out of the story.

"It's okay, they'll call us." He waves his hands towards the lounge reception people.

"I don't like keeping three hundred people waiting," I say, and we depart. Sure enough, halfway to the gate they page Sol Meshugener and Julius Grafton. How freaking embarrassing.

"Hurry, you're the last to board," the gate agent says.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

"But they didn't call us in the lounge," says Shug.

I should have strangled him on the aerobridge, but no. And the best—or worst—was yet to come.

The Premium Economy cabin was completely full, as was economy. Two days before, I saw the seat plan was only half full in PE. So Virgin Australia plainly oversold economy—as airlines do—and then selectively moved up Gold and Platinum flyers. It transpired that Shug had told them on the phone he was flying with *me*, so they moved him up to sit with me, and then upgraded a bunch of Platinum flyers—like me—from PE into Business. They figured Shug and I would be happier together in Premium Economy, whereas if he hadn't linked us in the reservation system, I would have been upgraded to Business luxury and Shug would have stayed behind out the back where he belonged.

But wait, it gets better ...

I have two carry-on bags. Shug has about 200 kilos of crap, with his own little trolley. And a jacket. It's way too much and takes forever to stuff into the various overhead lockers which are already full.

At this moment I realise during the night that I forgot to pack trousers. I have a pair on. I contemplate Malcolm Fraser, and even a Y-front run to Vegas.

Despite the Shug-induced tribulations, I'm still reasonably sanguine as we eat our meal, even though Shug engages the flight attendant in long-winded and vacuous talk about crap while the poor guy is trying to serve the cabin. My little request for something gets lost as Shug overwhelms the airspace.

I somehow survive the night.

Exiting at LAX, we're given a Purple Express Card to get into, presumably, a fast queue at the Delta terminal.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

Strangely, the card is collected again at the head of the immigration crush, with no fast queue. We line up. Four dudes processing three hundred passengers. Like a bad Bali arrival.

Then they open the VIP queue—and we're not in it. So Shug is punking out.

Eventually we get through after ninety minutes.

Go to Hertz, get a Ford Mustang Convertible, and drive out of LA proper.

I'm hungry, but Shug is driving. He says IHOP have free wi-fi that doesn't block the SMTP port for his email, whereas McDonalds does. So I agree to stop at IHOP. There are none. By now I'm so hungry and thirsty—I gave Shug the hot breakfast at 4:00 a.m. on the plane, because I can't stomach sausage and fried potato that early, if ever. He rejected the sausage. But he's bloated, while I'm wasting away to a mere shadow. He has a bottle of water, I don't.

Eventually I figure out he's intentionally missing freeway exits in the vain hope of an IHOP.

We see one. The sign says turn right at Fred Hopper drive. We take the next exit and turn right, only to see a row of crap places. I *insist* we stop, anywhere, so I can hydrate and eat *something*.

It causes a bit of drama—and a near-homicide. But we eat, and leave.

Now, I'm driving. Control at last.

Shug decides to retreat into the safety of the Cubit (a metaphysical or fourth dimensional crazy-little-spaceship that works the trade routes between Uranus and Venus without a reliable schedule), otherwise known as his 'tech zone', so he unpacks a massive pile of cables, chargers, dongles, converters,

mysterious small electronic devices, an iPhone, iPad and Blackberry.

All this is on his lap, the floor, and in the door pocket. Of the lime green, almost new, Ford Mustang convertible. At least the roof is up.

About now I notice it's 108 degrees outside, according to the car.

Then I blow up the car. Well, it breaks down—it wasn't my fault. It only decided to switch to Sport Mode, and the auto locked into top gear. This is sixth gear, too long for most freeway activity.

We grind to a halt. The car is dead. A computer transmission failure, and it won't even start. Hot air comes out the air conditioner.

Shug is halfway through a long and heated call to ATT about his prepaid USA sim card that has been shoved into the iPhone 4S. He's instructing Abby from the Denver call centre that he *must* get some package added on to something. I sit in the driver's seat and wonder when he'll get hot, and I see we're on the right, northbound shoulder of the interstate with thousands of trucks and cars whizzing by.

I unwind a window to draw attention to our plight—and to survive the heat.

Shug swings into action. He calls Hertz and gives them a reservation contract number that he found in the glovebox. The call centre drops him after ten minutes, because the contract number is wrong, we guess. He calls again with the correct paperwork, retrieved from myself. They undertake to call back, a flurry of calls eventuates, the temp climbs to 110 degrees, and we're given a four hour timeline.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

We attempt some repairs and move around the cabin to avoid direct sunlight, the windows open. The first call to Hertz was at 3:15 p.m., we're rescued at 5:00 p.m. ahead of schedule by Dennis from Barstow.

His tow truck saves us, and he explains that due the altitude and Death Valley nature of the desert, a lot of folk break down. It was completely barren, and there wasn't even a tree to shelter under. We were munted by the heat.

I climb into the void behind the tow truck seats, because Shug is less able to do so. Uncomfortably perched on my bag, I watch the cactus display as the truck grinds away up the slope from our breakdown purgatory. We change to second gear—and a fucking truck stop gas station swims into view just 400 metres from where we were stuck.

Air conditioned. Beer. Toilets. I start to cry.

We get to Vegas at sunset, dump the wreck in the Hertz lot and hassle with them for a refund, status unknown.

I check myself and Shug into junior suites at Hilton, and he asks where and when should we meet for dinner.

He looks hurt when I tell him, "See you at 9:00 a.m. in the lobby."

Chapter 41: My Media Life

When I was ten years old, I published my own newspaper. The Balmain and Darlinghurst Eye was a kids-eye view of the monochrome, dirty streets of those slums in the 1960s, where cut-throat razors were sharp and American GIs on R&R breaks roamed both drunk and high on LSD. We lived in that hovel next to the brothel, being almost destitute children of our fucking parents—who were estranged artists or away pursuing randy church ministers—and whose heritage dictated that children should be seen and not heard.

The Eye attracted attention. A Daily Mirror journalist wrote it up as a curiosity piece, and I was a minor celebrity for a day and a half. A photocopier company APECO sponsored me, thinking I'd push out a couple of editions—single sheet, printed both sides, circulation twenty-five—and lose interest. A year and a half later I kept coming in, on first-name terms with the staff.

My school commissioned me to publish a school newspaper, The Crown. It sounds regal, but so named because, you'll recall, the school was Crown Street Public. I was in Year Six. The Principal and I went around the corner and sat in the office of Theo Papadopoulos, of the Greek Weekly, to negotiate a print run of 500 copies. I was in the big time.

Funnily enough, Theo's building went on to become the HQ of Graftons Sound fifteen years later, and my desk was exactly where old man Papadopoulos had sat that day.

Back in those dull days of 1969 I was half-educated, my maths and geography were on par, and my grammar and history weren't. For some reason the Principal allowed me to type all my stories and have the printer shoot them direct to film, and then onto plates. The resulting inaugural A3-sized, four-page Term Two edition

received mixed reviews, most focusing on my remarkable spelling errors and misplaced apostrophes. The next two issues were ruthlessly subbed.

At high school my interest in the “fourth estate”—as journalism was so called to emphasise the independence of the press—waxed and waned. I become more interested in girls, and rock and roll. But when I was chucked out of high school, and after that short stint at the hippy Guriganya school, I got the job as a copy boy at News Limited and worked the morning shift on the Daily Mirror, an afternoon tabloid.

They put me in the copyboy office. There were two old clerks who dispatched us to all four corners of the complex whenever someone needed a boy. Once, I got sent up to the roof to wait in the rain for the helicopter—until I realised it was just an induction trick.

My least favourite place was the typesetting hall, which was hot, loud, and staffed by tradies who hated everyone. My most favourite place where I spent much of my time was the typing pool.

I thought the career path made sense—I wanted to be a journalist. But the copyboy route meant a spell in the sports department, and those journalists were very blokey and more interested in cricket bats than Pulitzers, and not exactly inspiring. Plus the writers enjoyed making life hell for copyboys.

One boy who looked a bit private school ended up on the executive floor, which was notable due to air conditioning—amazing for the era—and plush carpet. He was like a kept cat or a pampered poodle, and the only one of us to wear a tie.

I loved the typing pool girls, and they sort of liked me—a little. Up to eight of them sat four a side of a central conveyer onto

which they would chuck each forme. A flack would call in and dictate a story from a public phone. The girls wore Bakelite headsets and typed each paragraph onto a continual feed forme set which comprised four different coloured sheets with three sets of carbon paper. Each forme was perforated, so they would tear it off and chuck it on the belt.

Little Julius would assemble each story in piles. Each forme had a code at the top and a number so the dopey copyboy could get it right. Within two minutes my fingers were black with carbon paper, which needed to be cleaned off to avoid too many smudges on the formes. When complete, the four different-coloured piles of the same story were stapled together and I would *run* them to the sub desk, the editor, the news desk, and the archive desk. Then back to find a pile more stacking up.

There were generally three or four girls working, but if something huge happened, all eight places were filled, and a second boy came on to run the stories out. These things happened on my shifts in 1972 (as reported in Wikipedia):

15 November—First aircraft hijacking in Australia. Ansett Airlines Flight 232 from Adelaide to Alice Springs with twenty-eight passengers and a crew of four. Followed by gun battle at Alice Springs Airport.

1 December—Belinda Green is crowned Miss World in London, becoming the second Australian winner of this pageant. Australia won the two most important beauty contests in this year. (I went down to the photo library to check her out. Hubba-hubba!)

2 December—1972 Australian federal election: The Labor Party led by Gough Whitlam defeats the Liberal/Country Coalition Government led by Prime Minister William McMahon.

Consequently, Whitlam becomes the first Labor Prime Minister of Australia since the defeat of Ben Chifley in 1949.

One day Thomas, the too-tall senior copyboy, pulled a prank on me by calling Rosie, the lead stenographer, during his tea break from the canteen phone and feeding me a dumb story. It went something like;

GRAVEDIGGERS STRIKE

The New South Wales Alumni of Gravediggers have walked off the job at Rookwood Cemetery today. Head digger Clarry Dirtwater told The Mirror that the men had a bone to pick.

“The situation is grave”, he said... and so it went for five paragraphs of bad puns.

Little Julius put it together and ran it out to the desks. Three minutes later, Monkey Man the lead sub editor burst through the barn doors and yelled at me, “Who did this *shit*?” Rosie was laughing her arse off.

The routine at the Daily Mirror went like this; morning shift started at 5:00 a.m. First edition went to press at 9:15 a.m., and the reporters all retired to the pub for a few. Refuelled they would work up the Final Edition by 11.30 a.m., and the Late Final Extra by 1:00 p.m. If some manure hit a fan somewhere they would keep going. The ‘Stop Press!’ bell had everyone in the building—except the denizens of mahogany row—on high alert. It happened infrequently because it added a lot of cost to the operation.

It was amazing how fast the whole thing came together, and it instilled a value into me that I hold dearly today. *The show must go on* came later when I branched off into lighting, and adding the *just do it now* ethos of the newspaper gave me a real drive for deadlines.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

The pathway to cadet involved a period of character building in the Sports Department where some serious hazing went on. I watched with looming terror the soul destruction dished out on senior copyboys to break them or make them. The survivors inevitably became cadets, tasked to the obituary desk or on secondment to the gardening page.

Rock and roll beckoned, and I quit the newspaper in 1973. I was off and running, doing psychedelic lightshows, lighting bands, theatre, fashion parades and that memorable Easter Show working alongside Tommy the Sea Lion.

In the late 1970s I was running Barratt Lighting, and I started writing a page called 'SHINE ON' for the industry magazine called *SONICS*.

After four years of touring production I opened Graftons Sound and Lighting and I published a lot of company newsletters. I built on what I learned at Barratt Lighting about marketing. Be clear, make value offers, and follow through. Keep it simple.

In 1989 I 'retired' burned out, had that sabbatical out under a mountain near Bathurst and built the family log cabin. In the winter of 1990 I was doing sound for a band from out west who won a place in the Yamaha Band Competition, and we did the rehearsals at Selina's on a Saturday afternoon. With time to kill, on a whim I went to a music equipment tradeshow at the old Sydney Showgrounds and ran into Peter Twartz from Jands.

He said that by chance he'd just been talking about me with Paul Mulholland, the Jands CEO, who in turn had a conversation with Phil Tripp, the top music industry publicist at that time. Tripp had said Jands had so much going on they should publish their own magazine. Paul liked the idea, Peter said he should find and talk to me.

So that's how the fibres of an idea were knitted together. I was highly interested and enthusiastic, and hounded Paul until he hired me on contract to publish a Jands company magazine. It was called *Channels*, and over two years it became a monster, growing from eight black and white pages, to sixty-four pages with some in full colour. The tide turned when I started selling advertising—to Jands' competitors. Paul was all for it, some in Jands weren't.

Channels got too big for a company magazine and I approached Paul to negotiate an exit to publish my own magazine. He embraced the idea, which was a massive relief, and sold me the mailing list from *Channels* so we had a running start.

Chapter 42: Media Mogul

Connections first appeared in February 1993 as a monthly magazine and it took off. We were running well over \$60,000 worth of ads each edition, and almost every importer and distributor in the business was on board. We hit fifty percent advertising ratio and literally couldn't take any more. It was wildly profitable.

Pretty soon the seed was sown for ENTECH, which came along in October 1994.

Connections grew and grew, hitting a hundred pages a month. It was a partnership between Caroline, who sold the adverts, and myself running editorial. It was very labour intensive because we were in the first generation of desktop publishing and needed every photo scanned to film. The four-colour printing of the time also needed film—four sets, one each for cyan, magenta, yellow and black—CMYC. The film sets were 'imposed' eight pages to view, as the magazine was printed on enormous A2 sheets of paper. From film, the printer then produced the plates.

Email and the world-wide web came along, and things changed for the better. Desktop scanners became more affordable, but those mid-1990 years provided a lot of technical challenges too. One of them was file transfers. We would load the files onto a Jazz drive (and later a Magneto Optical cartridge), and take them across town to the reprographics house.

Those guys transformed our Pagemaker files into plate-ready film. This took about three working days and cost north of \$7,000 an edition. That was just the film cost. The printer then made plates and ran the presses for 10,000 copies. We trucked 7,000 to a newsagent distributor, and then bulk-mailed 3,000 to our subscribers. Print and film cost over twenty grand a month.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

To get the time cycle down we did our own mail bagging and sorting the very same day—or night, really—of delivery from the printer. Seventy-five cartons of magazines, almost a tonne, were bagged in a recyclable paper mailing bag and usually we added an insert of some kind. The mail labels were in postcode ranges, and the postcode sorting that Australia Post required was complicated. Each postcode region had a separate regulation Australia Post tub.

The bagging and sorting was done by a crew controlled by our dear friend, Ruth McKinnon. She would rope in nine or ten people, and we would pay them all including a stop for pizza halfway through the process, which often finished after 10:00 p.m.

Next morning I'd load all the tubs into a rental van and drive them to the Australia Post depot, where time-consuming paperwork would be done and an eye-watering payment made. 'Print Post' was relatively fast in that ancient era, compared to the snail mail our magazine endures today.

The printer would return the film sets to us, and our advertising art co-ordinator would strip out all the adverts so we could re-use them to save the advertiser the cost of film duplication if they wanted to repeat an advert.

I was doing most of the layout using Pagemaker on the Mac, and then had Cat Strom do her own layouts for the Lighting section. We worked well together. In the office we had a bookkeeper three days a week, an office manager, junior, the advertising art co-ordinator, and a cadet journalist. It was hard work.

When year 2000 came along everything changed as the partnership broke down. Cat Strom left. Caroline sold out to me, and I took on the advertising sales for a few years until Steve James came along. In 2002 we rebranded as *CX Magazine* and

changed the frequency to bi-monthly. This was because I was consumed in the horrendously complicated world of running the Registered Training Organisation, which seemed like a good idea at the time.

The demand was there to lift the frequency to eight editions a year, which meant a magazine every six weeks, and that's clunky. The printing firm bought a digital-direct press so we could skip the film reprographics process, which cut three days out of the production cycle.

Seizing on the three days of time saved, we ditched the DIY mail bagging and sent the work to a mailing house which sometimes took longer than contracted. One memorable month, we tried a sheltered workshop (so-called at the time) and not only was the mailing delayed a week, but readers were calling to report food remnants from frosted donuts and the like in the bags.

In 2004 I sold ENTECH to ETF, investing the money back into the college.

Through the mid-2000s CX struggled as I was so distracted by the college. It burned me up to have my passion for media dampened by the horrors of accredited training compliance. Eventually the college fizzled out and I did an orderly shutdown at the end of 2010. Moving in to new premises at Chatswood, I found myself emotionally depleted and exhausted in January 2011. To get the February edition up, I had to find the edge again. The college had sent me personally broke, I had a crappy second-hand car, a marriage in trouble, two boys, and two dogs to feed. I was depressed—and I don't do depressed.

Jimmy Den Ouden and Steve James rallied around me and lifted me up. I took a cheap flight at 6:00 a.m. to Melbourne to visit my neglected advertising clients. Peter Troy and Graeme Stevenson in

particular both encouraged and backed me, as did others. I was back! Cat Strom returned and added her unique angle to our media. Things slowly got better. Graeme suggested the concept for what would become the CX Summer Roadshow, and I started planning that for February 2012.

The roadshow took off, then in 2013 my third marriage collapsed and I had to go rent somewhere, which led me back to a very different Balmain.

In 2015 I bought ENTECH back from ETF, rebranded the roadshow, and added another one called SECTECH, which was a partnership. CX found an editor in early 2018 when Jason Allen took on the challenge.

Jason was given total autonomy over the media in 2018, and by the end of 2019 I wanted out, so I sold the business to Jason. Kate and I got busy with ENTECH in Australia and NZ, and SECTECH. I also ran my advisory firm, Julius Partners.

Reflecting back over almost thirty years of publishing isn't just a sentimental journey. It's a welcome reminder and confirmation of what I've achieved. I loved most of it, even though sometimes I made bad calls and picked the wrong fights. I grew so much through all this. My passion for the common man and social equity found a great outlet, and I'm sure that I helped lift professional standards in our industry.

Chapter 43: I Don't Do Interviews

This is a story about a back-room operator who is one of the most successful and respected managers in the global music industry. Yet most people don't know who he is. These days his act is a huge-selling female performer in terms of live concerts in Australia, and that of course is Alecia Moore, a.k.a. Pink.

Roger Davies is her manager and mentor. He only manages artists that listen to him, and when they do their career takes off like a space shuttle. You can see Roger at Pink gigs, quietly observing proceedings and ruling gently over what is an extraordinary money machine.

I knew Roger when he was a humble roadie for a band called Company Caine around Sydney. Cocaine, get it?

Roger was incongruous—*Go Set* magazine noted that for a 'Head' or prog-rock hippy band, its roadie looked like a rock star in his leather jacket. He drove their Transit van and hauled the column PA, setting up all the backline and doing everything. In those days the roadie really was all things—booking hotels and collecting the fee. I saw him carefully count out the eighty dollars performance fee at The Arts Factory, all in one and two-dollar notes, back in 1971.

He didn't wait too long to hit his stride. Shortly after that he emerged as manager of Sherbet, and wrote the book on how to market and tour a pop band through the 1970s.

Roger is also a nice human, very rare in the cutthroat world of music management. I was at a Pink show on the Funhouse tour, talking to the monitor dude in the catering tent. Roger walked in and said hello.

The monitor guy said, "Hey Roger, here's the sponsorship contract from (brand S) wireless."

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

Roger glanced through it and said, "This looks fair. What do you think?"

In other words, he trusts people who earn his respect.

It may come as a surprise to some, but this Australian working out of LA and London is or was personal manager to Janet Jackson, Tina Turner, Joe Cocker, Tony Joe White and Sade. Arguably, he's the most successful Australian in the global music business.

I had a chance meeting with Roger at a Janet Jackson show. I'd been hauled before him to clarify my purpose in being there, a journalist-free zone. As a trade magazine writer doing a story on the video equipment, not the actual performance, I was viewed as a benign threat. But still, the rules were—no insight on Janet, no questions about the Jackson family, no speculation.

In a room full of Janet's people, Roger Davies exuded quiet authority.

"I'd like to interview you," I said. "People are curious."

He looked up, deadpan. "I don't do interviews."

Two days later he called out of the blue. "I'm being pursued by all kinds of media wanting stories. I've checked you out, and I'll talk to you. But it has to be today."

I was happy to drop out of my deadline frenzy. It required a hasty trip over the Harbour Bridge into the city, then the valet at Sheraton on the Park sniffed at my unwashed Nissan as I threw him a buck to park it. Janet Jackson fans sat in the deep chairs in the foyer, trying to look incognito with their Janet caps on. School girls walked hesitatingly to the reception desk to lodge bunches of flowers for their idol. It was surreal.

On the 17th level Roger was at home in a suite where the phone rang non-stop and messages are shoved under the door. He called a

halt to the phone, and we sat facing each other in the afternoon light. His manner was charming and his physical presence relaxed. It's clear before we even start that personal style is a big factor in his success. He is also, by the way, a tall handsome guy.

"With Sherbet I was like the sixth member of the band. I loved the image thing, everything was stylised." Before managing this landmark Australian band, Roger was a frustrated bass player, road manager, then office boy for Chuggie and Gudinski at Consolidated Rock. That was around 1972.

Sherbet broke all the conventions and pioneered much that is great today. They were first to use stage lighting, toured places rock and pop had never been before, started their own record company, and dominated the music industry through the 1970s. Then they went overseas.

"We went overseas in '76 and were lucky to have a hit with 'Howzat', but it never quite happened. We'd have to keep coming back home to make money. It got to New Years Eve '79 and we sat down and decided to have a break. I thought I'd have a shot at going overseas. I had no idea what I would do, but I packed everything and took my secretary to Los Angeles. I figured I had enough money to last a year. I was twenty-six, and I didn't want to wait."

Talking about it, there is a suggestion that perhaps Roger was afraid he would fail in the eyes of some in Australia. "When I left I never thought I'd come back. When I first went overseas and would return, I'd feel some animosity. Maybe some managers thought I was going to rip off their acts and take them overseas."

Far from it, because after a slow start managing Steve Kipner and still trying to break Sherbet in the USA—now named

Highway—Roger got a call from Lee Cramer, who managed Olivia Newton-John. He was also her boyfriend at the time.

"He said they'd like me to come and work for them. I was working out of the front room of my flat with my girlfriend, making clothes to support us. I didn't have a green card, but Lee said I could have an office and a secretary, and I could keep trying to get my projects going too. He said they couldn't pay me any money. But they would petition for my green card.

"I'd been there a month and Olivia and Lee split on a personal level, which meant he was still the manager, but I became the meat in the sandwich—he'd tell me to tell her things, as the messenger boy. I hardly knew her and a month later I'm sitting on a plane next to her going to Europe to record Xanadu with Jeff Lynn in Germany.

"During the first year with Olivia and Lee, we were doing this TV show called Hollywood Nights, and Tina Turner made a cameo appearance. Lee was going out with one of Tina's dancers at the time, and she said, 'You should meet Tina, she's looking for a manager.' She came in and Lee said okay, we'll manage her."

These were awkward days. Lee and Olivia weren't talking. One gets the impression Roger became a support system for Olivia.

"I was almost controlling her life. It was so one-on-one Olivia would ring up and say, 'What will I wear?'"

But the tension between Olivia and Lee came to head one day and she fired Lee.

"She asked me to manage her, which I'd virtually been doing."

Roger took over Tina Turner too, paying Lee an override for a couple of years. Did Lee threaten to break Roger's legs?

"Not quite," he answered. Plainly, Roger manages situations as well as artists.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

"At that stage Steve Kipner had written a song called 'Physical' which I wanted Tina to record but she didn't like it. I said to Olivia, 'You should record this,' and she said, 'Really?'"

"She cut her hair. It was a very daring and experimental time for her. We went to England and she was really freaked-out on the plane. I felt convinced it was a great record. She said to me that if it didn't work and she got a lot of bad publicity, she would never go back to America. It was the biggest record she ever had. Then we had a really good run for seven years."

The business relationship came to an end.

"Olivia got married and pregnant, and Tina's career took off. We did *Private Dancer* which sold twelve million. It was good timing. Olivia wasn't working too much and she got involved in *Koala Blue*, the clothing shops, which was something I had no expertise in. I think the clothing business is far more sleazy than the music business, and I wasn't involved.

"Tina had become so popular it was really demanding on me, and Olivia had lost the desire to work, and I told her she didn't need me anymore. It was a sad parting, because I adore her and she's a great person.

"Tina and I were on this big roll. We had five years where we didn't stop."

Roger had taken Tina Turner from TV Game shows where she eked out a living after giving up everything in her messy divorce from Ike, back into the rock halls. Tina Turner as you know her now owes very much to Roger's direction.

By this time the cynics back in Australia were prepared to concede that Roger, 'That Sherbet boy' as one called him, did in fact have a handle on his job.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

"I used to be very embarrassed by it, embarrassed that I was rich—because I started with nothing. I'd feel guilty I owned a house in the south of France and a house in England, and a house in LA—and then I thought, 'I've worked really hard for all this, no one gave it all to me.'"

It took a few years to settle into the American way.

"They don't want to upset you, because they may need you again. They won't say they hate something; rather they always have an excuse. I can't stand bullshit—don't give me song and dance, just tell me how it is. For a long time in America no one had heard of me. I was managing Olivia Newton-John, but I didn't get into the Hollywood dinners thing just getting the job done. It worked in my favour, because there was a certain mystique about me."

The Roger Davies magic only works with an artist who is prepared to trust and listen to what is said. Mick Jagger doesn't fit this mould, as Roger found this out for himself.

"After a Live Aid performance in Philadelphia where Tina and Mick performed, he asked me to work for him on his solo album, which I did for a year. I really liked it, but it was frustrating because I was more a consultant."

I observed that Mick Jagger has got an incredible grasp of business.

"Yes, the Rolling Stones are brilliant the way he does it, but he doesn't have a grasp on his solo career. I think now he and Keith are getting on a lot better than ever. It's better for Mick to concentrate on the Stones. Mick listens to a lot of people rather than one person, and in terms of his solo career became indecisive."

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

Joe Cocker was another solo artist whose career had been improved by our Roger.

"Joe had been special guest on a lot of Tina's outdoor festivals in Europe, because he's very popular there, so I'd see him socially from time to time. I went and saw him at the Greek Theatre in LA, because three guys in Tina's band were playing with Joe while Tina was off the road."

"I really enjoyed the show, and two days later I got a call. Joe had been managed by Michael Laing for fifteen years, and I guess they hadn't got on. I always make it a point not to go after an act who already has a manager, though."

Janet Jackson was an interesting situation, because Roger had managed her earlier in her career, then they split, and now he's back in charge. Roger explained the turn of events.

"The Control album had been very successful, the Rhythm Nation album hadn't been released, and she hadn't really had management apart from her father. They needed someone to launch the album and, as they hadn't toured, I set up a tour. It was a two-year project, the album sold eight million, and the tour was hugely successful. Then I resigned. About four months ago she asked me to take her on again, so we're doing this tour through Asia, Europe and South Africa."

I'm curious about the expectation this time around.

"It's a mutual option. I wasn't sure I would want to carry on afterwards. I said at the time I would set up the tour, so here we are. I've got Tina making an album in August, then doing a very big tour next year, so I'm keeping my options open."

Business is business, but dealing with creative people is an art form.

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"There's a knack to this. When you have to tell an artist some bad news you can't just go and say, 'Hey your record just died'. You need to say, 'We've sold out this concert here or done that,' and then break it to them gently. Otherwise they'll want to go and slash their wrists. I've seen other managers be too direct with their artists."

"I'm concentrating on my acts working in Europe and on a global level, whereas a lot of American businessmen don't realise the rest of the world exists. Although they're starting to now. I've got an office in LA and London, and four people working for me, two girls in each office. My form of management is much more personal management than some. There are some management companies that manage twenty acts. They're not personal managers. If all my acts worked at once I'd be in a lot of trouble, but I've got Sade and Tina taking a year off, Janet and Joe Cocker are on the road. I can deal with both.

"I don't think there's any big secret in how to manage an act. The fundamentals are to keep it all together, keep them sane. At this stage I've got no interest in managing groups with four or five personalities. I'd rather deal with a solo artist, and for some reason I've nearly always managed women. I only have women work for me too."

Roger lives in Sherman Oakes, in LA.

"I'm engaged. I've been going out with this girl for eighteen months and I like to think this relationship is going somewhere. I want to have a family eventually.

"Some managers deal with their artist's finances, I refuse to. It's much better for artists and creative people to have their own independent lawyers and accountants. I don't sign cheques,

because anyone could accuse me of ripping them off. If I see they're spending money like crazy, I'll certainly tell them."

I asked if he thought Australian music had had its run internationally?

"I only get to come back once a year to see my mother in Melbourne. My observation is there seems to be a real rut and nothing's changing. The acts that were big from the '80s—INXS, Reyne, Midnight Oil, Barnsey—they're all starting to fade, and I don't see anything new coming up that will blow all of Europe away. The state of radio here doesn't encourage local talent."

Then this question—and remember the interview was done in 1992.

Do you see the record companies overseas floating in a sea of back catalogue releases for CD profitability?

"Yes, the music industry is healthy overseas, although the back catalogue has been supporting them for five years. Still, acts come up like Pearl Jam and sell a lot of records. Record sales are up, from what I can gather."

How are the record companies to deal with today?

"The biggest nightmare for a record company is an act that doesn't have management. A lot of promoters can tell you a problem is that overseas an act can happen overnight, and their manager is a school buddy. He's had no experience, and he doesn't know what he's doing. So close to it, he can't be objective, and when you don't know what you're doing, the common reaction is to say no. There are some giant acts now, I can't name them, and they can't confirm anything. The best thing that helped me in the US was managing a big act here. It's the same there, just on a bigger scale. When I first went there I was in awe of American managers. I thought they must be so smart—geniuses, in fact. Then I realised

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it was all experience. If I hadn't been a roadie, worked for Chuggie and Gudinski, done Sherbet, I couldn't have done it."

Where are the challenges now?

"Well I've *had* my midlife crisis. I went to England, I wanted to settle down and have children immediately, and I was working too hard and it wasn't meant to happen."

How well do you sleep?

"I'd like to sleep more. I often lie in bed and worry."

What's next?

"There's another major act wants to talk to me about management. I've got to be careful, because I only want to manage people I like, people I can invite into my home. My style only works if people listen to me."

What do you do for recreation?

"I play cricket every Saturday in LA when I'm there."

Will you ever come back to Australia to live?

"Now I realise what a great country this is. And I will come back one day. Coming here with Janet Jackson, they've fallen in love with the place. I say 'this is as good as it gets', because once the tour goes into Asia and then onto the buses in Europe, where it will be winter, it's downhill all the way."

"This is the greatest place to start a tour in the world. We went to Brisbane, we rehearsed, the people were friendly, and at a technical level everything is so well organised. We had our harbour cruise last night, and Janet Jackson is sitting there looking at the sun setting over the harbour, and she sighs and says, 'Yes, I could live here.'"

Chapter 44: Evicted and Shunned

"Come through the garage," Michael yelled. A jumble of tools, suitcases, clothes and cartons were strewn about. I picked my way through a pile of spanners that clattered over the concrete.

He was squatting in the shade next to the pool, smoking a roll-your-own, looking pale and nervous. Aged around thirty, Michael was between gigs and had spent the previous month engaged in a furious social media war against his former employer.

I was there ostensibly to talk about that, but more so because I was worried about his state of mind. Others were posting small bites of support on his page, but there seemed to be a line where no one wanted to cross and do anything. He was clearly damaged goods and rattling a lot of people.

The story fell out of his mouth, hit the ground, and reverberated chaotically. Photos of apparently unsafe rigging at a venue on his phone, screen shots of emails and posts, accusations, threats, and claims he was being stalked by security agents. One had stopped in the alleyway beside his room the day before and was looking in, he said.

But I soon discovered amidst the outpouring that I had accidentally arrived to witness his eviction. The guy saw us from the upstairs window and rushed down. Swarthy, well built, middle-aged.

"I can't help you," his landlord George said forcefully, standing over us. "You never listen to anyone. You can't help yourself. This is to help you. You have to go *now*."

Later, George came to me as I waited for my ride on the street.

He said, "Look, please don't think badly of me. I've rented rooms to guys who need help for twenty years. There'll be another

one here later. It's not about the money, even though he hasn't paid rent for months. It's about him not wanting to help himself."

After realising the work disputes were entirely matters between Michael and his ex-employer, I'd turned the conversation to what was happening now, and what he would do next. Other than stuffing everything into his car, he had no plan. Did he have fuel in the tank?

"Yes, it's full."

Did he have money for food?

"Yes, some."

I told him about the charity Support Act, how it can help people in need who have been working full time in the entertainment industry for over five years. He qualified. We opened their website on my phone and did the online application together. It was comprehensive and I worried that someone like Michael wouldn't have the energy or be in the right mindset to complete the whole application.

Later on, Lindy Morrison rang me to check on the application because I was listed as an industry referee. She explained how some in need just call, and it's all done over the phone.

"Do you have family?" I asked Michael.

"Brother and father, that's it," he replied, looking sadly into the distance.

"Have you asked them for help?"

"No. My brother is no good anyway."

"What about your dad?"

Silence.

Eventually I convinced him he had nothing to lose, and I made the call. A gruff Scottish accent answered.

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“And who exactly are *you*?” he barked.

“I’m someone who helps people in need,” I stammered. “And Michael is about to be evicted. Is there anything you can do to help him?”

“No. He doesn’t listen to anyone. I cannot help him.”

The next day the dad was on the phone to me again.

“Do you realize he turned up here, his car full of everything, and he expects me to help him?” he said, annoyed. “He cannot stay. Tell him. Tell him he has to go.”

“It’s your son, your family,” I said. He hung up, even more angry.

That night Michael messaged me and said Support Act had come to the rescue. I didn’t know the details. A few weeks later he was back on Facebook, slandering his ex-employer and complaining he couldn’t sleep.

I hoped Michael would get the help he needed, so his head could come back together. Then he would pick up the pieces and get back to work, using his rigging ticket or his truck license to snag some gigs with people he hadn’t pissed off.

It’s a story about mental health. The ex-employer seemed to be doing everything right, from what I could glean from the slew of emails I read. Michael just fell off the planet, for reasons unclear, and lacked the willpower to do anything about it.

The rest was inevitable. This is just one short story of many lives. The entertainment industry doesn’t provide security or help for its people.

It is the last place I’d want my kids to work.

Chapter 45: AJ Maddah

In my media I reported the intriguing ebb and flow of festival promoter, Arash ‘AJ’ Maddah—our favourite Iranian/Australian.

CX chased the Soundwave Festival slow payment story for a while, with creditors like Show Freight owed bucketloads for supplying services for the 2014 national tour. Soundwave sold reasonably well, but ended on a sour note with claims that suppliers were paid late, if at all.

So an email from AJ was hardly surprising. I didn’t expect a legal letter, although as ever I enjoy those. They get filed in the cabinet, with gold or silver stars on the top, rating the efforts of the legal profession. We have some awesome efforts from Collins or Philip Street. The law firms out in the ‘burbs just don’t have the same twist of phrase. That machinegun delivery of hard core demands like: ‘You have caused our client material damages and we demand immediate relief as follows ...’ And a list of laughable demands that usually include leaving our first-born on a level crossing at midnight, with a sack of gold bullion.

Anyway, AJ wasn’t that silly. He was just annoyed.

“Hey fuckwit. How am I lying low? Or was that your pathetic attempt to get interest in your failing shit-rag?”

As emails go, pretty close to a love letter, I thought.

Which took me to the point of this "pathetic attempt to get interest in" my (then) strangely profitable media company. Something that had me focused at the time, as major and minor media firms everywhere struggled with the serpent of change and fought declining revenues.

So I dialled up the grapevine and was told things.

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Prior to Big Day Out in 2014, AJ totally sacked the excellent touring logistics firm, ATS Logistics, because two of their trucks had gotten stuck in floods during 2013. That resulted in Garbage missing their Sydney set at Soundwave 2013.

ATS were mortified. These things happen on tours, albeit rarely. AJ was, quote, "frothing at the mouth" and ATS had grave concerns that their account may not be paid. AJ tweeted that fifty-six trucks had made it safely through the floods. The Festival was staged, Garbage did a side show, and ATS were paid.

But they were sacked from Big Day Out and Soundwave 2014. Show Freight came on board, and was left sweating over the \$1 million owed.

Also sacked were Norwest Productions, the second major audio supplier in Australia, and who normally had little to do with AJ's work. Typically JPJ Audio is his primary supplier, and they delegated minor stages to regional suppliers, many of whom had not been paid either. But Soundwave being huge, and the summer being busy, even JPJ couldn't fill every requirement. So Norwest toured a system—after receiving payment in advance. This could indicate they knew something no one else did. Naturally, requiring a couple of hundred grand up front led to some angry commentary, with AJ quoted as saying he would never use the firm again.

Big Day Out didn't return. As AJ's partners, C3 Events weren't interested.

Chapter 46: Bruce Jackson Dies In a Plane Crash

I counted Bruce as a friend, and this was a sad story to write, early in 2011.

Despite being of 1978 vintage, the Mooney M20J airplane was in excellent order when it crashed without obvious reason. Stranger still was the location: six miles from Furnace Creek in Death Valley.

Aged sixty-one and in perfect health, the Australian-born audio engineer and inventor had spent the Christmas break in his apartment at Marina Del Ray, seaside in Los Angeles. He lived most of the year at Watson's Bay in Sydney.

Each year Bruce, his wife Terri, and their daughter Brianna would leave Australia when school broke up to reconnect and stay in touch with American friends. Terri was from the US, and they met early in the 1990s when she was PA to Marty Erlichman, manager of Barbra Streisand. Bruce had been coaxed into doing sound for the notoriously difficult diva.

His plane crashed sometime after 2:30 p.m. local time. No one knew he was missing. No one knew he was there.

A whole day passed. Then on Monday morning at 8:30 a.m. a ranger drove along a dirt track on a ridge-line and by chance spotted the wreckage. It took several hours to hike through the dense brush and over volcanic rocks. They found a single-engine aircraft and the remains of the pilot. His wallet gave up a name.

Bruce had intended to return home to Sydney days earlier with Terri. He had been up to San Francisco to visit the head office of Dolby, for whom he worked in Sydney. But he had some business that required paperwork, which was delayed, so he stayed on a few days while the family went back to Sydney.

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He had a couple of phone interviews with a journalist from Back Streets, a Bruce Springsteen fan site. Bruce Jackson had mixed for The Boss across his glory years, and famously had been Elvis's sound guy before that. His aviation passion had started when he took the controls of the converted airliner that Elvis used to fly around in.

Late in the week, Bruce made a dinner date with Ernie Farhat, a realtor who had become a friend over the years. They were to meet that Saturday night.

Saturday, January 29, wasn't as warm as it gets in LA in winter, but the minimum of 11 degrees Celsius was great for flying. Lower temperatures mean less turbulence. Bruce kept his Mooney at Santa Monica and flew it each time he was in town, at least three times each year.

With thousands of hours experience, and a personality that was rooted in perfectionism, Bruce was a flawless aviator with no incident history. Earlier in January he had flown the plane up to Santa Barbara to visit Dolby.

He decided on a whim to fly up to Furnace Creek, alone and without filing a flight plan. This wasn't irresponsible by Bruce—it was little more than a quick hop. Nothing for a man of Bruce's experience and competence at the controls. If you worked the rulebook out of Santa Monica, it was a flight you could do easily in less than two hours.

Private aviation in Los Angeles is an acquired taste. There are over one dozen airports, including three large commercial ones. It's the most densely flown airspace in the world with the Sierra Nevada Mountains forming a barrier to the east that's too high to fly over without oxygen.

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Although Bruce had an instrument rating, he was out of time and would need a check flight if he were to fly on instrument rules. The weather was clear, so a flight under visual flight rules was easy.

He listened to the flight advisory on the radio, and then requested taxi clearance. When cleared to take off, he followed the assigned heading and climbed to 3,500 feet whereupon he was given a further clearance and a transponder code so that he could be tracked on radar.

Radar tracking ended fifty-five minutes later when the plane went through the mountain pass, and eventually he joined the circuit at Furnace Creek and landed 230 feet below sea level. Up there in winter it was cold, just over one degree Celsius that morning, but by midday it had reached ten degrees.

Bruce loved Furnace Creek and had spoken of building a house out there. He made two calls—one to Ernie to firm up the dinner that night, and his last call was to Terri at 2:15 p.m. local.

Everything was normal. He took off, raised the wheels, reduced the manifold pressure, adjusted the RPM, and retracted the ten degrees of take-off flaps needed to deal with the short runway. Someone saw him depart and turn to climb out of the valley. His plane passed out of sight, and the engine noise faded against the silent desert. Just three minutes later he was dead.

The next day Terri was worried, as was Bruce's best friend and Dolby workmate, David McGrath. It was not like Bruce to disappear. Ernie had waited a while, and then dined alone on Saturday night. There was no one at the apartment to raise the alarm when Bruce didn't arrive home.

There was no flight plan filed, and no SAR (search and rescue) time had been lodged. If a flight misses a SAR time, a caution

period kicks in and several hours on, a search is planned. But no one searched, because the paperwork hadn't been done—that quick hop, right?

Later Monday in Sydney, Terri was at work and in touch with David each hour. By Tuesday he had called everyone he could think of, including the NTSB—the National Transport Safety Bureau in the USA. They were polite but not forthcoming.

A Dolby HR person in the USA told David to have Terri notify the Santa Monica police that he was missing, because that was where he had departed. David and Terri were less certain, but the Dolby staffer called again an hour later and insisted it happen. They knew how the system worked—and not long after reporting Bruce missing, the police called Terri back and told her there had been a plane crash.

It seemed undeniable, but there was still a small degree of doubt. It quickly sunk away, leaving Terri alone at home. Bruce's sister and brother-in-law, and then David and his wife, rushed over.

The cause of the accident remains a mystery. The world lost a major talent—a revered live sound engineer, the best of the best, and a prolific inventor with dozens of ground-breaking designs to his name.

Bruce crossed paths with me and countless others over the decades, and he always had time to stop, talk and listen. He affectionately called my magazine 'libel pulp'.

His brother Gary went on to document Bruce's career in his beautiful book, Bruce Jackson: On the road with Elvis. Gary helped me edit this book.

Chapter 47: Caroline Mary Fitzmaurice

My first wife, Caroline Fitzmaurice, died aged fifty-nine from brain cancer.

Caroline was the chick on the dance floor at a gig.

Her first husband, Colin Ford, did sound for a band and she danced. It was 1975, and she wore flowers in her hair.

I did lights for the band. We became friends

In 1976 that young hippy couple, Caroline and Colin, had little Sarah Jane Ford. Caz was euphoric about motherhood. She was nineteen.

In 1980 her time with Colin was over and I fell for Caz. Literally—I fell over late at night in a state, and passed out. She tended my bleeding head.

Caz and Sarah Jane moved in, and I had an instant family. She scrubbed the bathtub and got rid of Tara, my Afghan Hound, who buried bones in the bean bag.

We started the sound and lighting production company together. I taught her to drive. Caz booked the gigs and soon she started an agency so that we got the best shows, and the guys she managed got the rest. Little Sarah Jane, who we called "SJ", was in the middle of our world.

It was the early 1980s, the cold war was real, and we had contingency plans if the 'balloon' went up. We seriously talked about how we could all survive as a family in the nuclear winter.

We bought the property from Mum with that miners cottage near Bathurst and had some crazy cold weekends out there under the mountain. SJ and her cousin, Nicky, had hot bricks wrapped in towels to warm their beds. Rick Astley and Crowded House tapes were on our battery-powered boom box.

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At Chatswood our neighbour Ruth became SJ's baby sitter. We swam in their pool in between work. Ruth became Caroline's best friend.

Over four years our touring production business boomed. We had a strong work ethic. We got married at home, and it rained. Caroline's dad walked her four paces down the hall and gave her away. Her whole extended family—she is second youngest of six—was there.

I hated leaving the girls when I was on tour, and I would drive home overnight wherever possible. I had so many late nights, landing in bed at four or five in the morning, and getting up again at eight o'clock to see Sarah off to school.

We kicked goals. We built that serious and lucrative business together. In 1984 we moved into Taylor Square and started Graftons Sound and Lighting.

Every year we were together we expanded our business, because we were extremely effective and powerful business partners. We worked well together, she in charge of money, me on the front line.

We started Australian Monitor and sunk all our profits in. It needed more money so we sold parts of the business. We took on Jewish South African partners. Caroline's Irish Catholic nature clashed with them, I was in the middle. We had thirty staff.

Our only child together, Jessica Anne, was conceived on a yacht bobbing off a Whitsunday island. She was born eight weeks premature in 1986, weighing 1,580 grams, and our focus shifted. She thrived and came home after four weeks in neonatal intensive care.

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In 1989 we sold up and had the sea change—moving to the bush. Caroline's mum and dad came and helped build our dream home. SJ started high school out there, and Jess started kindy.

Caz started a career as a book keeper and enjoyed being her own woman. She was successful, working for an accountant in town.

Back in Sydney in the early 1990s we started the media company and lived out an amazing decade. It was the union of us that did it. The sum of the parts. We together carved a new future again and reaped the rewards.

We started ENTECH in 1993 and it was very much Caroline's baby. She sold all the space and drove the deals. It took off.

We were wealthy, successful—and a bit conceited. We travelled the world.

Caz was well known. Our world was fast money, fast deals, and fast booze. Together we had power. We were bathed by the light of our glory. We sure did burn some relationships. At times, I no longer even liked myself.

People need to grow old together, but we grew apart.

Caroline was an attractive, gregarious, generous and funny woman.

She kept a tidy house with strong family values. Her family mattered to her. She worshipped her father, Frank Fitzmaurice, and he helped us so very much.

Frank was a World War Two hero, captured and imprisoned, then shipped to Japan. The allies torpedoed the prison ship and he floated for a day while sharks ate his mates. Another Japanese boat collected him, and they took him to work at Mitsubishi as a war slave. Later, Frank survived the nuclear bombing at Nagasaki.

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Our Jess was his ‘perfect dozen’ grandkid and had the same birthmark on her arm as he did.

In 2000, I split with Caroline after twenty years together.

I always loved her spirit. Her drive. Those family values.

Caroline was a leader, a deal maker, and a hard worker. She and I brought out the best, and sometimes the worst, in each other. When we separated, I offered her any deal she wanted—keep the half share, take the media company, buy me out, but I regardless expected her to take ENTECH. She more than deserved it.

She walked away with the right money and I respected that. It was all fair and reasonable.

Caroline left the industry she knew so well, and started again as a well established woman.

Just two years before she died, she married the love of her life, Phil, in Thailand. My son-in-law, Nathan, was the minister, and our grandkids were there. She welcomed me into her home for the first time. The happiest days of her life stretched ahead, but very suddenly one day she shut down and slipped into confusion.

Brain cancer is a dreadful beast. Phil cared for Caroline every day of her remaining life, helpless and alone at night with his beloved as she mumbled and stumbled in a terrible darkness of her own. The brain slowly and cruelly denied her functions at random and erased her memories until she was just a breathing shell.

I ached and despaired for Phil, for Ruth, Sarah, the family, and my Jess—as they were tortured by this dreadful ordeal in the middle of winter.

Caroline stopped eating and drinking. Eventually the breath left her, and she grew cold. Caroline Fitzmaurice, the chick on the dance floor at a gig, died surrounded by her family at home.

Chapter 48: Suits and Tech Collide

I wrote about the symptoms of the chaos that occurs when big business goes where it should not.

Guitar Centre in the USA was a golden example. Raped and pillaged by vulture fund Bain Capital, the massive music store chain never made a return on the US\$2 billion paid. The suits never understood if you trample on guitarist staff, they will go find another gig—and the customers can always find another place to buy a guitar.

Thirty years ago Rank Industries, a UK-based conglomerate, was in the middle of wrecking an esteemed lighting manufacturer called Strand Electric. They had bought the hundred-year-old firm, steeped in London theatre traditions, in the late 1960s.

Through the 1970s the Rank suits went out of their way to dislodge and disenfranchise Strand staff, customers, and the theatre industry. Rank introduced layers of management and processes that were totally at odds with Strand.

Previously a customer would ring to order a light, and call it by what it was. "I'll have a Pattern 45, please," they would say. Thanks to Rank, a call centre drone somewhere deep in the bowels of a Rank subsidiary would require its product code: 2003008. The Pattern 45 had become a seven digit number.

Rank had its grubby fingers in many pies, including manufacturing colour TV sets in Sydney.

Not content with upending the Strand diaspora, the Rank suits started importing pro audio equipment into Australia and had built a reasonable suite of brands by the mid 1980s. Across town was Klarion Enterprises, a large privately owned distribution company run by Brian Horman.

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Deciding to retire, Horman sold Klarion to Rank, spawning what was sometimes jokingly referred to as Klank. Immediate problems arose that were exactly akin to what long-suffering Strand staff had endured. Brand confusion was rampant with what seemed like an entire constellation of mixing consoles thrown together, like Allen & Heath, Soundcraft and Soundtracs (the precursor to Digico) all offered by the same conflicted sales reps.

The audio industry pushed back, opening up opportunities for other importers like Jands and new start-ups like AR Audio Engineering (now TAG).

Rank Electronics, as it was then known, was flogged off to Abe Goldberg's Linter Group, which soon found infamy through a 'bottom of the harbour' scheme. A disgruntled manager peeled off some of the Rank brands and started his own import firm called Hyphon.

In 1987 the whole thing crashed—including Hyphon—and from the ashes arose Amber Technology, now a major audio distributor, and Bytecrafft, which is now PRG Australia. There were perambulations and variations, but that's the potted history of Rank Electronics in Australia—an epic failure.

The pattern continued. In 1984 the publicly traded Samuelson Group in the UK had taken over Zenith Lighting, Rainbow Lighting, and Theatre Projects. They changed their name to Samuelson Concert Productions PLC.

In 1985 they bought Jands Concert Productions, the Sydney-based market leader. It was an interesting era. JCP head Eric Robinson moved to London to organise the diverse cluster of businesses. At the time, they had an A-list of touring acts like Bruce Springsteen and Tina Turner.

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His Australian heritage obvious, Eric galvanised the London public company suits. An anecdote from the time had Eric inspecting a warehouse where he discovered a vintage Rolls Royce gleaming away under the highbay lights. "Get that fucking thing out of here," he's rumoured to have yelled. The chairman, who owned the excellent conveyance, was not impressed.

Frustrations mounted and Eric returned to Australia. Eventually Samuelsons realised they had no idea, and that a personalised services business like live production needed personalised persons prepared to provide service. Who knew?

They put the business up for sale, and Jands purchased the JCP business back in 1992—for half the price they were paid for it. They'd banked \$7 million, then paid \$3.5 million to buy it all back.

Then there was bit of faint lineage from the Rank era, because Brian Horman's daughter Fiona retained a family business, from the sale of Klarion, called Regency Recordings, which was later acquired by post-production firm AAV.

Before the Global Financial Crisis, AAV Limited was riding the share market as a public company and raising easy cash from investors. Then Staging Connections, the largest corporate AV provider in Australia, was rolled into AAV in 2003 for around \$36 million, paid in cash and shares. Staging at that time was a national cluster of partner firms controlled by management in Sydney.

"We are a world-wide event services business," the then-CEO Michael Gardner said in 2006. He had just announced the acquisition of fifty-one percent of Gearhouse South Africa by Staging Connections Group Limited, which by then AAV had become named.

Staging Connections went on a mind-bending strategy of growth through acquisition, ending up owning Bytecraft,

Exhibitions Trade Fairs (who by then had bought ENTECH from me), and a slew of offshore firms. Six acquisitions were made in seven months. At one point they were talking to almost everyone who ran a business and had a pulse. They were even mad enough to seriously contemplate buying my Julius Events College—and would have, had we been prepared to sell. Except they typically paid little in cash and issued shares as payment for purchase, and I knew their share values were vulnerable.

Gardner lasted three years at Staging, during which amazing money was paid out, most significantly the \$42.5 million Bytecrafft deal. For that, Staging Connections got a well managed stage lighting company whose staff was completely allergic to the idea of synergies with Staging Connections. While Staging Connections did lighting, it was nowhere near the scale or level that Bytecrafft achieved.

Management at Bytecrafft adroitly resisted head office ideas, directives, entreaties, orders and offers, and preserved their company culture. Bytecrafft was eventually sold to PRG in 2011 for between \$9 and \$15 million, depending on how you read the numbers.

Gardner left a share price smashed down to almost nothing, and Tony Chamberlain was hired to sort out the mess.

Nine years later the Staging Connections omelette was unscrambled with the sale of the remaining core Staging Connections business to PSAV, a United States-based supplier of event technology services within the hotel, resort and conference centre industry.

The voyage cost the shareholders a staggering amount.

Here's another: in 2005 The Brackenbury Group headed by Tim Mason and John Helm bought Allens Music, Australia's oldest

chain of music stores. Mason and Helm were accomplished retailers, and initially the business worked well, until it merged with music chain Billy Hyde in 2010.

Hyde came with associated firms. Music Link was a growing importer of equipment which was trading well. The Stage Systems company (known as Billy Hyde Stage Systems) was also part of the package.

The Hyde owners wanted out. Investment mob Crescent Capital had also bought into Hyde and Music Link, and they wanted cash.

Once everything was merged together it was known as The Australian Music Group. The venture had twenty-eight stores, and in no time at all it sailed into difficult economic circumstances in 2011. The Australian dollar was rising and consumers took to the internet to buy offshore. Retail was hurting.

A white knight known as Revere Capital popped up and injected funds into the group in 2011, and then called in the loan in 2012. The chain was put into receivership and commenced a very long sell down of stock. The 500 staff were poorly informed and badly treated, and many suffered a terrible Christmas.

Eventually the Stage Systems business was sold to AJ Maddah, that mercurial Persian promoter behind the once successful Soundwave Festival. Some stores and the trading names were sold to Con Gallin who heads Gibson Australia. Music Link was closed down.

But I've saved the best for last. In 2005 Australian industrial firm Hills Industries purchased Audio Telex Communications for around \$35 million. ATC was Australia's largest distributor of professional audio, managed spectacularly by the founders, Rod Craig, Roy Morgan and Alan Clarke.

ATC was joined into Hills, and then Hills CEO David Simmons decided to let his new SVL (Sound, Video, Lighting) division get on with things. Run by Rod Craig's son, Stuart Craig, it certainly did, building a strong project focus.

When Simmons retired, the CFO Graham Twartz stepped up and continued to understand SVL and leave it to make excellent profits. Turnover headed over \$60 million a year, more than half of that from the high margin Crestron distribution.

Hills' share price hit an all-time high of \$A6.72, which had the company valued at well over \$A1 billion.

In 2012 the building industry was in downturn after the GFC and parts of Hills were exposed. The board replaced Twartz with Ted Pretty, whose main claim to fame was a \$1 billion write-down at Telstra where he championed the acquisition of Pacific Century Cyberworks—which then tanked.

Ted set about reorganising Hills and issued a directive to all divisions to cut overheads by ten percent effective immediately. The SVL division was outperforming the rest, but it suddenly had to slash and burn. The effects were immediate—on the busiest week ever, the warehouse couldn't fulfil all the orders due to staff shortages.

Many highly skilled long-term SVL staff were laid off. Sometime later, SVL chief Stuart Craig departed, only to turn up as region manager for Crestron. That clock was ticking.

Don McConnell was one brand manager shown the door in a round of 'right-sizing'. He promptly set up his own distribution firm and didn't have to wait too long for some of the Hills brands he had handled to call him. Now his Audio Brands Australia is a fast-growing firm, handling prestige products like Meyer Sound, Mipro and FBT.

Exactly the same thing happened at the Hills NZ outpost. Marcel Reinen was also shown the door after nearly twenty years. He set up Pacific AV, which mirrors Audio Brands Australia—and couldn't be happier.

Meanwhile, Ted Pretty at Hills leased an expensive city office and set up a centralised call centre. Whereas before an SVL client could call and speak to someone familiar to place an order, suddenly they were talking to people with no idea.

The SVL name disappeared as Hills merged everything together. Non-tech parts of the conglomerate were sold off, as was much of the real estate. Debt was paid down.

SVL staff was relentlessly pruned with the highest-paid fired first. The same thing was happening over in the Security tech side of Hills—good staff would be sacked or walk out, and go straight to work for the competition.

Initially the share market loved it. Ted Pretty had a narrative about a fresh new Australian technology company with innovation centres and new ways to do business. Back-end operations like warehousing and customer support were merged together, and the controversial call centre was established to centralize all customer support.

Strangely, in 2014, Ted then acquired another distribution firm, Audio Products Group, for \$A15 million. APG was very well managed and owned by Ken Dwyer. The immediate problem with this was that many brands already handled by the SVL part of Hills clashed with the brands that Ted was bolting on with APG.

APG departing owner Ken Dwyer *had* prepared a road map for the merged business, but it was ignored. It's not known if it ever was shown to the board.

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A long and relentless series of brands were lost, often the stronger ones. Each exiting brand found a home at an SVL competitor.

At this point in time, SVL was returning between \$A6 and \$8 million in profits, but with the disorganisation this was plummeting.

Hills also owned Australian Monitor, which I founded. It had become the 'house brand' of audio products acquired with Audio Telex Communications.

At the same time, Crestron, the star brand in the SVL stable, set up its own operation in Australia—led by Stuart Craig, former SVL boss and son of founder Rod Craig (I hope you're keeping up with this, I'll be asking questions later). Stuart was well regarded across the industry. Crestron represented as much as \$30 million in business, which hurt Hills when it departed.

The wheels fell off Hills when Ted Pretty was suddenly 'disappeared' and the board announced a five-million-dollar impairment to cover "due diligence expenses for acquisitions that would not proceed". It appears Ted had been racking up the travel bill negotiating to buy offshore firms.

Ted had an interesting demeanour, and he said in an interview that he was now Ted 2.0, since Ted 1.0 was ... ah, a little obsolete. Of his days as a senior executive at Telstra, he told The Australian newspaper he had a temper.

"I did a culture change program for the staff and I used to keep a sheet of paper that had a red side and a green side. And when I felt that I was going to lose it, I would turn it over to green and just remember to calm down," he said.

The article says he was an ambitious deal-maker who was big on ideas, but poor on execution. He's credited with one of the

largest *bad* deals in Australian corporate history, an alliance with Richard Li's Pacific Century CyberWorks in Hong Kong that cost Telstra A\$3.5 billion.

The day Ted left, a former Hills staffer Daniel Edwards wrote an opinion piece in the Adelaide Independent News.

"Dear Ted Pretty, I am sorry to hear that you lost your job. During your employment with Hills you took a company that was turning over \$1.1 billion dollars (down) to \$400 million.

"I was on the often-delayed phone call that told the team we no longer had a job. Myself and two other colleagues missed a work anniversary by three weeks that would've seen us receive another week's severance pay, but you and your manager of 'people, performance and culture' made it clear that you would not pay that extra week despite our dedication and blood, sweat and tears that we put into the company. The whole team had a terrible Christmas.

"You probably do not even know me, but I was the employee who asked you the questions that you had trouble answering, and who you ridiculed for being respectful and calling you Mr Pretty."

The scorecard at the end: Hills spent \$35 million on Audio Telex, and \$15 million on Audio Products Group, for a total of \$50 million. They sold the remnants of the audio visual business to Amber Technology for \$5.5 million.

History will repeat itself, of course. Eventually another large company or vulture fund will try its hand at something it doesn't understand. Then another chapter will be added to this story. Those engineers of chaos, those captains of industry, will slip away with golden handshakes, while displaced staff will suffer stress, loss, and sometimes personal ruin.

Chapter 49: My Story of Eric

Eric Robinson was the notorious boss of JPJ Audio, Australia's longest established concert audio company. It was born as Jands Concert Productions after Eric, his brother Ed, and the Mulholland brothers bought the Jands business from the late Bruce Jackson and Philip Storey, and who had named the firm J and S. In November 1970, Jands was a manufacturer of lighting and sound, and it supplied psychedelic lightshows and primitive column PA systems to anyone who had a buck.

Eric and Paul pushed hard and fought battles, sometimes with each other, but mainly with the forces against the fledgling rock music scene. Back then the 'establishment' was very straight-laced, and long-haired hippies were viewed as draft dodgers, drug abusers, and daughter violators. We embraced that perspective.

Getting Jands into shape and form took guts, a hell of a lot of work, and smarts. Eric had the deal-making drive, Paul had the engineering skills, and between them it became a force that continues unrivalled to this day.

My mentor in 1974 at Strand Electric lighting hire in Artarmon, where I had a part-time job, was Robert Nichols, a darling of a man and as gay as a row of tents. He taught me about customer service, organisation, and rigid protocols. His was the tightest ship, the tidiest lighting warehouse I've ever seen, and a busy place I loved working in. He spoke glowingly of 'the Jands boys', but also cautioned that they were rock and roll people, and we were theatre people. Oil and water, at that time.

I got to know David Mulholland, Paul's younger brother, when he came in to buy colour filters or the occasional rental. He was dark and handsome, and drove a Volvo which was upmarket at the time. He would sun himself beside the pool at the Parmelia Hilton

in Perth while touring Australia, quite the glamorous life to my young eyes.

One day, Rob suggested I take a followspot gig for Jands at the lavish opening party for Westfield Parramatta. I turned up at 8:00 a.m. on the Sunday, helped set up the lights, and drove a followspot for the show which featured Eddie Fisher. I got home about midnight.

A week later, when my cheque arrived, it was only about sixty percent of the going rate and Rob suggested I join the relevant union (now the Media Entertainment Arts Alliance) and seek redress. I followed his directions, they collected the balance from Jands, and my name was mud. Except I didn't know that until much later.

Jands did Sunbury '74, and Deep Purple brought in twenty steel Par 64 cans on two frames of ten. Wired together with lovely asbestos cables. The Par 64 'par can' became the workhorse of the concert industry as they were far, far more durable and brighter than any namby-pamby Strand theatre luminaire. Jands had them copied by a local metalwork factory called Model Engineering. Then they flogged off the twenty cans, frames and two cases. I bought them for \$1,050 in 1976.

Arriving at the Jands factory in Marrickville, Eric greeted me. An imposing tall, charismatic and strong man, he glowered at me and unleashed an unexpected volley of profanities. I had a sufficiently thick hide to take this on and gave him a return shot about not paying people properly. That sealed it. Transaction done, he told me to go and have sex. With myself.

Thereafter he set about making anything difficult wherever possible, just for me. I took that on board. Life went on. Plenty of

others reported similar behaviour, so I knew there was the favoured, and the others—and I'd joined the ranks of 'others'.

Ian Messner was on the opposite side. He tells us:

"I got to know the three Robinson sons fairly well and I remember commenting to their mum on how different I thought the younger two were from Eric. I found Eric to be quite overbearing at times, whereas his younger brothers were laconic and always good-natured.

"She replied, 'Don't be fooled, Eric's a little Teddy Bear inside.' I took that comment on board and came to realise that there were two sides to Eric. He could hold long-standing grudges and be brutal in his business dealings, but he was also capable of random acts of kindness and consideration for others.

"I can recall one instance of this that occurred to me personally. In late 1993, Jands was contracted to supply production and staff for the *Gladiator* TV Series. I was made technical director and responsible for the design and manufacture of all the various games and sets required. Christmas was approaching and there was a pretty tight timeframe. I went to the UK to view their sets, get basic design drawings, and attend some meetings.

"It meant that I would not be home for Christmas, and unfortunately earlier that month my wife Jenny's mother had passed away, meaning that Jen would be sadly alone during the festive season.

"Without any prompting and totally out of the blue, Eric provided Jenny with a return airfare to the UK so that we could spend Christmas together."

Being on Eric's hit list never stopped me doing business with the *other* Jands—it was two separate firms—one of which Paul headed and was a formidable supplier of their own manufactured

audio and lighting products, and increasingly an agency for everything everyone needed. Eric was still omnipresent, and I watched from afar and took on all the stories about his successes and failures. I'd never, and would never, operate the kind of 'take no prisoners' management he was infamous for—firing people and telling them they would never work in the industry again—and following through.

Then I'd gone bush and left it all behind. But on the dusty track to Curraweena at Napoleon Reef, a chance encounter led me back into Eric's orbit.

My friend, Gus Dennis, was in a band out there in the west, playing the clubs and dives every weekend, full of farm boys, miners, and their chicks (an apt description for 1990) when his band scored a place in the Yamaha Battle of the Bands in Sydney. We went down, and lo and behold, Eric was doing what he did best, 'adding value' to a production gig by selling himself on as a production/stage manager. He ran it tight, threatening and then actually chucking a hapless band out of the competition. It improved the technical rehearsal timings when everyone realised he was every part the hard guy.

It was in the break between the tech run-thru in the afternoon, and the comp that night, when we went to the Showgrounds in Moore Park to check out the Australian Music Industry Show, and I walked onto the Jands Electronics stand to chat to my old friend, Peter Twartz.

As you'll recall, long story short, I became the editor of Channels, the Jands company magazine, and it took off like a rocket.

At the start, Paul said we should go to Samuelsons to let Eric know what was going on. Samuelsons was now what had been

Jands Concert Productions, which Eric and Paul had sold for \$7 million a few years earlier. Eric still ran it.

Paul and I drove over to the old Aristocrat poker machine factory and HQ in Kent Road (where all of Jands is now rebuilt and relocated) and we marched up to Eric's office to announce the new magazine venture.

"Wait here," Paul said, so I reclined in the reception area outside and listened as Eric laid out his extreme displeasure at the whole idea and the choice of editor in particular. I was laughing as Paul returned and we retreated.

"That went well," Paul said.

It was necessary to get some level of input from Samuelsons, so a suitable informer was selected from the ranks, and I met this nameless dude in a coffee shop and sorted out a system of reporting that would remain under the radar of The Golden Wing Lounge—which was what Eric's office was then dubbed.

I did that two years with Jands, and then left to start *Connections Magazine* to capitalise on my experience.

It was a dangerous time. Stories abound about anyone who crossed Jands. Retribution was almost guaranteed, but Paul's instincts swung to backing us, and Jands became our best client.

From then on, Eric played a cat-and-mouse game where, if he saw me at one of 'his' shows, he'd berate me a bit, call me 'Weasel', and it all became kind of like the Looney Tunes sheep dog and the coyote who would clock off at the end of the day and walk away together.

Towards the end of Eric's life, at a Chameleon Christmas party, he came up, shook hands, and said nothing was personal, and I wholeheartedly agreed. Just before he died—a victim of prostate

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cancer—he received a major award at the Helpmann Awards and appeared on stage, gaunt and emaciated.

We bumped into each other, and true to form, he said, "Weasel! What are *you* doing here? This is for professionals." Before smiling and shaking my hand.

I was unaware in the moment, but it was the same night Caroline died of a brain tumour, and two worlds had collided for the final time.

Eric was awarded an OAM, the Order of Australia, after his death. He truly was one of the great pioneers of the technical production industry not just in Australia, but across the world.

Chapter 50: Bonkers

"Incandescent with rage," caught my eye in the 24 point, capitalised, bold red type that ran on and on across the email. My media crime? I had conflated the (now failed) music store chain, Billy Hydes, with the (now failed) importer, Music Link. So what that they were commonly owned, he claimed? The seriously hot-headed manager who emailed me really did need his blood pressure meds.

The year 2020 marked thirty years of publishing, and over that time I'd collected around thirty-two legal letters. Each and every one was generated at moderate to high cost by lawyers who know how to milk the system, with the intention of silencing or punishing me. After a while, my journalist mates appraised me of the tactics and the responses. The etiquette and tricks of lawfare that are shared around. And wow, they work a treat.

Here's the rulebook. First, check the credentials of the law firm. If it's a Collins Street or Philips Street mainstream practice, then be on guard. Your average suburban law practice? Go to town. In every case, get really familiar with the signee. Shoot them an email to say hello. Make sure that email contains no more than one line of information. Send a second, third, fourth and fifth.

Next morning rinse and repeat. There are several responses you'll receive, one of which is a cease and desist letter, the other is an email block. But don't stop, keep it going. The reason why is that ninety-nine percent of law firms charge by the six-minute block. They do it because many tasks take less than six minutes, or twelve, or eighteen and so on. In this way, the billable hours can and usually do exceed the hours actually spent on behalf of the client.

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A diligent law firm will charge that pesky aggrieved client for opening and reading each and every of your emails. This way the costs start to pile up, and at a minimum of \$300 an hour (suburban firm) and up to \$1,000 an hour (top practitioner), and with simple math telling you a six-minute block is ten percent of an hour, it gets really funny.

Next thing to do is to do nothing. Never ever appoint a defamation lawyer unless you're most definitely going to see the inside of the Supreme Court. Lawyers love dealing with other lawyers and detest dealing with the opponents of their client, like me. They will insist you appoint counsel, and in doing so open up twenty opportunities for more emails from you.

The one time I knew I was in trouble was when a writ arrived at the door, served by a tennis mum type—who was just the messenger—requiring I produce my sorry arse at the NSW Supreme Court three weeks hence. I consulted with Phil Tripp, who was at the top of his powers back in the mid 1990s. He advised me to attend and represent *myself* for as many directions hearings as possible.

I did indeed do this, to the chagrin of the other side. The judge wasn't impressed either and demanded I get representation. Figuring the thing was getting somewhat serious, I hired Gilbert & Tobin, the top guns in defamation. They filibustered a while and the other side got cold feet about their costs. The thing sat on the court list for two years and was eventually no-billed.

The plaintiff was another publisher, Noel Crabbe, who had a street rag called, *On The Street*. *The Australian Financial Review* had reported that Crabbe's operating company had gone down, and I duly repeated the news with its faint relevance to the music industry. It turned out the AFR had it slightly, technically wrong,

and Crabbe went after me instead of Fairfax. He probably figured I'd cave in and settle, whereas Fairfax would defend it with a Queens Counsel and a flock of suits. It cost him a heck of a lot more than I paid Gilbert & Tobin.

It can be unpredictable, this publishing caper. You very rarely get a thank you, and when the balloon goes up, people get aggrieved so very fast. The advent of email was beaut for expressing wounded pride—when I started out, everything came by fax which required the additional process of printing stuff and shoving it into the machine. By the time they'd found and entered your fax number, many of the letters probably never did get sent.

And the things people get pissed over? We miss a name in a story. We spell it wrong. We edit out puffery and hagiographic praise, or ignore an "important" press release. We're told we are biased—one complaint of bias ran for decades, rising and falling like a slow ocean swell.

Some legal letters never come even though you're expecting them. For more than fifteen years I wrote of the remarkable conduct of Dr. Tom Misner when he owned the odious School of Audio Education, but he never bit. Really, I knew he wouldn't, because he wouldn't like the resulting close scrutiny.

Other letters are pretty much anticipated and I'd count down from publication to the inevitable. These usually come as a result of my expose of some dodgy business practice, or the substitution of products with knock-off Chinese equipment pretending to be a big brand. More than several shady characters have been outed in my pages and for a few years I was careful about hiding where I lived.

Some unhappy folks regard legal letters as far too subtle for airing their grievances.

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Chapter 51: Darkness Be My (Purple) Pain

This is essentially an article I wrote after which, when it was published, a whole lot of my protected sources were hassled by the artist's people. It's symbolic of the crazy of the creative. Sadly the artist—and the warped architect of the show named in the story—have both shuffled off this mortal coil.

Cursory research would reveal that Prince's "Welcome 2 Australia" tour in 2012 was not to be performed "in the round" at all. Rather it was performed on the signature Symbol stage which pointed to the short end of the arena.

Prince and his ensemble thus worked with most of the audience *behind* them. I sat in this dead zone, in the cheap seats with Karen, having been only willing to spend only \$170 each. What looked like a row or two of \$99 seats were way up in the gods, price leaders so the adverts could say "from \$99."

The earlier set lists from his US tour should have also rung alarm bells—unknown and obscure tunes from the many releases by this enigmatic, secretive and brilliant musician. Every show had a totally different list, and the number of encores ranged from one reappearance to four, each performing anywhere between one and eleven songs. Eclectic or just hectic?

It's the sheer indulgent wank factor of an artist who can do no wrong that leaves you either on the same page and a devoted fan—or outside in the cold after quitting in disgust.

"Worst gig we've ever been to," muttered an early departee midway through the extended encores, which seemed to occupy the show from about seventy minutes onwards.

The Symbol stage stands high enough for a short person to stand underneath, and Prince has his own elevator for entrances. LED lighting along the outlines of the stage give the lighting

director a tool to work with, along with an LED screen that was folded around the grand piano stage left.

On the opposite end of the stage a scaffolding tower housed the Muse, DJ, or musical director—it's unsure exactly who, or what they do up there. This little edifice has its own LED screens on two sides, and lights up sometimes.

The whole *show* only lights up sometimes. The rest of the time it's puzzlingly dark with whole parts of songs performed with no lighting.

At first I thought there was an outbreak of incompetence at the lighting desk, or a technical failure—especially as at the show's late start we had house lights off and then five long minutes of nothing at all except ushers rushing about in the dark trying to seat people in the gloom. The sweep of a flashlight anywhere near the stage would prompt the crowd into excitement. Slow hand claps finally led to a show commencement, still with not much in the way of lighting for a while.

Prince was a control freak performer who had no *real* set list and boasted in media of having over two hundred songs and being able to lengthen them at a whim.

“Roughly 200-300 songs with variations for each of them,” he told Nui Te Koha from News Limited. “For example, based upon the crowd response any song can be lengthened or shortened with a simple cue. Raspberry Beret’s second verse and bridge can be added if the audience sings loud enough. Also depending upon the diversity of the crowd, we can quickly segue into Cool, The Time’s theme song.”

In reality the gig was a jam session, and what happened with the lights was either incredibly clever of the lighting director, or they were always racing to catch up. I got the impression the random

selection of songs from the stage meant the LD was spinning the cue wheel so fast it seized up.

Three backup singers and two dancers, nominally known as The Twinz, appeared and disappeared. The Twinz apparently were raised in Australia and go by the surname of McLean. They were described as being associated with (the artist known as) Prince for some years, and also reported as appreciating the no swearing, no drinking, no bad things vibe—the guns-for-hire Australian road crew were advised not to swear within earshot of the artist.

Between numbers, a Prince Sign appeared on the video screens with a lightning effect, and a synth pad of fake thunder rumbled away. This appeared to be the cover for Prince making his mind up about what was next. We saw this a lot—a *lot*.

Around song number four—or medley number four—Prince introduced Cassandra O’Neal on keyboards. This was during another dark and gloomy minimalist lighting phase, and about five seconds later a single followspot drunkenly probed around the stage, settling on the grand piano what seemed about half a kilometre from the rest of the band. That’s it for Cassandra, who remained otherwise unseen.

Regaining composure, or working to The Plan, the LD managed to catch a Princely command for, "Light the crowd." Which allowed our retinas to digest the surroundings for a while. The very next such command, several numbers later, resulted in no reaction from the lighting department. The darkness was maintained.

So this was all very clever stuff ... or was it?

Working behind contracts, non-disclosure agreements, and layers of legality, the Prince machine maintains secrecy about the torments and frustrations of its workers. I couldn't confirm all the rumours we heard about the tour, despite shipping the article to the

main operative, tour director, and lighting designer, the improbably-named Demfis Fyssicopulos, before publication for comment. He replied that he could not comment.

Reports from the US had the main carpenter quitting once the set was loaded for Australia, and the guitar tech departing the tour early on. For many years Prince had a reputation amongst crew as an artist for whom continuity of employment was not guaranteed.

The guitar tech on the first Sydney gig had a nightmare scenario, trying to keep up with what was next. Marcus Teague wrote in an excellent piece on thevine.com, “A suited tech shoves a long pedal board out onto the stage at the singer’s feet. Prince stomps on something with no audible result. He fiddles with pedals, the stagehand comes out, jiggles things around and it’s still not happening. Prince tries again, gets a guitar hum in response and tosses his axe high through the air in disgust. The poor tech catches it and then drags the pedal board back into the depths for an inspection. So we miss out on guitar histrionics at the end of ‘1999’.”

“My band is tighter than a mosquito’s arse,” Prince declared on stage, along with multiple reminders that “this is real music, played by real people.” In fact there was a lot of declaration from the stage, and a lot of ‘moments’, but no real show *per se*.

While we couldn’t complain about the musical integrity of the show, or the sound, a look at the CX archives brought back a scenario from twenty years prior, the last time we did a Prince live story in Sydney. That Diamond and Pearls tour was a proper concert with a beginning, middle and defined end. This W2A tour was anything but.

Back in 1992, while sitting and chatting to David Natale, the Clair Brothers engineer for the Prince tour, another sound engineer

from the USA suddenly appeared at the mix position, straight off a flight from LA. It was an awkward moment, since Natale wasn't advised the new guy was coming. Through the gig, the newcomer sat making notes. It seemed like someone in Prince command central had demanded a new engineer, but left the incumbent in the dark.

Which is where we found ourselves, twenty years later on.

With around \$17 million box office and a probable \$3 million in merchandise, (hoody jackets at \$100 and T-Shirts at \$50) there is no doubt the tour was a great financial success. The A-list entourage including the Tour Director, DJ, Twinz, Prince, Security, Manager, and an entity referred to as 'model/dancer', all got back on the jet and flew off in a cone of secrecy.

The B-list band and US crew caught a commercial flight home.

The C-list Australian ring-ins went back to their lives, shaking their heads at the carnival and chaos that surrounds an artist who operated wholly on his own level.

Genius or jerk? Prince's untimely passing has painted him in a kinder light, but at the time ...

Chapter 52: USA Moonshot

When I started my working life as a psychedelic lightshow vendor I quickly slipped into the lifestyle called ‘rock band crazy’, but I passed on the drugs. The first time a bearded hippy offered me a toke of a joint I asked The Question.

"How much does that cost?"

Being brought up in all that abject poverty that included malnutrition, lack of shoes, and plenty of stale multigrain bread, I knew the value of a dollar. Because I had none. I was also somewhat funny about taking something without giving in return, so I declined for the simple reason that I couldn't repay the favour.

So I bypassed drugs, although I did discover alcohol and formed a close intimate relationship with the bottle. Luckily I can switch it off, and generally I'm considered a happy drunk.

The lifestyle of rock and roll was where I was, despite also lighting theatre and less sexy performances. Don't forget my gig with Sammy the Sealion. He had a bad attitude and ingested an enormous amount of mackerel. The handler would arrive in his old Bedford van, put the cage onto a trolley, and haul the pissed-off creature backstage. Then he went back and unloaded *five* big metal eskies filled to the brim with various undersized and unwanted dead fish. I spent an hour wiping fish guts off my floor cables after every show.

What I really wanted was to tour the United States. I knew it wouldn't happen while I wasn't directly aligned with any one band. The choice was to work *for* a band, or be the supplier of lights and services. I was in the latter camp.

Signing on to work for a band was easy—you just needed a pulse, and a lot of energy. Teeth were optional, and brains weren't required most of the time either. A fair few roadies were running

away from something or someone, which is why most had nicknames like Fish or Keg, or Saucy. A stint in jail was regarded with respect. All transactions were in cash.

Plenty of crew were strung along by managers promising they would be on the overseas tour—and then they weren't. The broken promises of rock and roll are many and varied. The ubiquitous "the cheque is in the mail" topped the list. But plenty of my mates did get on the DC-10 or the 747 and disappear for months on end. I was green with envy.

Then in 2017 I got my tour of the USA, albeit of a very different kind.

I went to a Shure product launch with two days of visiting iconic venues like Soldier's Field and the outdoor theatre at Millennial Park. They put us up in the Chicago Athletic Club, a stunningly restored old building, and kept us media well fed and watered. Shure is a great host.

Sitting on a bus headed to Navy Pier I chatted with the guy next to me. We both ran media firms, and his was based in North Carolina. We clicked talking about common media issues; and about our families. His name was Brian Blackmore. Two months later I ran into him in the press room at the Audio Engineering Society Convention in New York. I told him about ENTECH Roadshow, suggested he could do it in the USA, and that I would help him. For no fee. I just wanted to help the guy out and get the pleasure of seeing my idea writ large.

At that stage I'd been editor of *CX Magazine* and its predecessors most of twenty-seven years. Weekly email news deadlines and the eleven monthly magazine deadlines each year was my world.

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A month after the New York meeting, Brian emailed proposing we do ENTECH in the USA as a partnership. After a conference call I booked a flight for the following week via Tokyo to freezing Chicago, with a connection to Charlotte, and landed there late in the day. Next morning we looked at available venues.

This was the start of my USA "tour", since we were on the road across the southeast, checking out venues.

It quickly became evident that the large Hilton ballroom was out due to the minimum catering spend. All the hotel chains work the same—if the ballroom rent is \$10,000, the minimum spend is over \$20,000. Plus they angle for hirers to pre-buy a lot of hotel rooms.

Over at the Charlotte Convention Centre things were much more reasonable. They're state-funded to get people into the city, so their rates were much more palatable. We scoped out the spaces, the power, and the loading docks. I won't book a show into a venue without walking through the dock—I've had too many rude surprises in the past.

It seemed we were on the way. We had dinner, and next day drove three hours down to Knoxville, Tennessee. The town was too small, but the convention centre was enormous. Brian explained each city was the centre of an area and you needed to consider what was going on within a fifty-mile radius.

Our road trip next took us to Birmingham Jefferson Convention Complex in Alabama, again suitable for our needs and more viable than Knoxville. We had chosen this part of the USA because Brian reasoned that we could do a four-city roadshow between territories more likely served by one or two reps. He educated me on the very complex structures of his clients, equipment manufacturers, and resellers, to whom we would pitch the roadshow concept.

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The following day we drove into Atlanta, Georgia, which is a large city. It has three significant convention centres, and the new one near the airport looked great, but Brian was worried it was too far out of town. We found a privately operated centre called Cobb Galleria which was better for us. It had a semi-high minimum spend, but as I explained to Brian, one larger spend in a run of four venues is normal.

Finally we flew to Brian's hometown of Raleigh, North Carolina, for the weekend. Early Monday we drove five hours northeast to Richmond, Virginia, ninety miles south of Washington. With a population of 1.2 million, it fitted and would be our starting city. The convention centre was again perfect.

Having been to five cities, the southern hospitality was evident, the countryside was magnificent, and the whole project was taking shape. It was late December 2017, and I flew home over the top of the world, watching Siberia pass under my cubicle on JAL as we chased the day. A second bottle of wine put everything into hazy perspective.

Getting four venues in four cities in a line on the correct dates isn't as easy as it sounds. We'd rejected Knoxville and settled on the other four. The contracts arrived and I paid the deposits on two, Brian paid the others. We'd incorporated ENTECH Roadshow LLC in Texas. I prepared the prospectus ahead of the NAMM trade show in January.

To get the show formatted and on sale had required a lot of long phone conferences with Brian's sales team to get their heads around the product. These conference calls were big on distracting detail, but essential to building trust and confidence.

At NAMM several big names committed to the tour scheduled for August 2018. As we rolled towards our Australian ENTECH in

February 2018, I was unsettled. Brian flew out and joined us on the second date in Melbourne.

"The problem is we don't have enough time," I told Brian as we sat around my desk. We talked at length about the sales we had, and the sales we didn't. To make it work we needed at least eighteen confirmed exhibitors.

The next round of selling opportunities was in May, at the NAMM tradeshow in Vegas. My strategy was to quietly dump the existing August show and to flip those four dates a year forward to August 2019. Then we would add on four new dates in another territory in April 2020. That gave us a solid year to sell the first tour.

Given it was now February, we needed to go see some more cities and venues, and we needed to do that before May. Kate and I had a trip to Cuba planned for April, so we extended. After a week in sunny Havana we flew north and landed in chilly Minneapolis where an unseasonal spring storm had dumped a lot of snow a few days earlier.

Brian couldn't join us because of a family situation, so we bumbled around using Google Maps. Kate is a nervous passenger at the best of times, and with me on the wrong side of the road it was ... character-forming.

After visiting both venues in Minneapolis, we drove down to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Next day we did the rinse and repeat, choosing the convention centre downtown. We were finding these venues most suitable, but having difficulties understanding the demarcation between staff. For example, in some places only Teamsters could unload the trucks, and IATSE stagehands had to manoeuvre the road cases from the loading dock. Then there were the Decorators who did furniture and drapery.

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So far we were in "right-to-work" cities. This refers to state laws that prohibit union security agreements between companies and labour unions. And yet we were still dealing with demarcations that don't exist in Australia.

After leaving Milwaukee we drove an easy two hours to Chicago to have lunch with Gene, who had come on as our fourth commissioned sales rep, and as he was outside Brian's company we needed to touch base and get to know him. He appreciated the interactions and had a lot of questions. He grasped our concept faster than Brian's team, who were more conditioned to selling magazine advertising than event space.

We talked about whether we could ever do an ENTECH in Chicago, where a "Collective Bargaining Freedom Act" prohibited local right-to-work ordinances. Like New York, Vegas, and some other large cities, we would be forced to comply with union demands. I called Navy Pier, which is quite the largest wharf ever and contains a convention centre, to get the rundown.

As always the venue dude was very polite and informative. I was forming the impression the level of professionalism in venue managements in the USA is a touch ahead of Australia where we have had some abysmal experiences. The guidebook at Navy Pier spelled out the problems.

An event there requires you interact with the local union divisions, namely the Carpenters Local #10, Decorators Local #17, Electricians Local #134, IATSE Stagehand Local #2, and—wait for it—IATSE Projectionist & Video Technicians Local #110. Naturally those good ol' Teamsters (Local #727) would be only too happy to do the trucks.

Here's where it got even trickier: the Stagehands work a four-hour minimum call, as do the Teamsters, *but* as soon as you go one

minute over four hours, you pay six hours. I was guessing every truck got difficult until four hours clocked over.

I made a spreadsheet. Typical Australian loader crew hours for an ENTECH are around eighty per venue. Chicago hours would be more like triple that, and at a higher hourly cost since you had to engage via a broker.

Not encouraging.

Next stop was St. Louis, almost five hours drive. There is a magnificent events space in the old railway station there, but we settled on a commercial convention centre at Saint Charles, a suburb down the freeway. It had oodles of free parking and the price wasn't too extreme.

A fairly lengthy drive of another five hours took us to Indianapolis where we saw the downtown convention centre, and then the State Fairgrounds. These historical grounds are all over the USA, not dissimilar to our large city showgrounds. At the classic old office building we met a lady called La Shanta.

"Why aren't you both beautiful," she gushed. "Ahh mean, just look at y'all."

This was prompted by Kate's penchant for Camilla fashions and clothes (or her "Camilla problem" as her daughter, Steph, jokes) and she often generates reactions in the USA where the brand is known but not very available. We tend to stand out—I can be known to dress loud too. La Shanta's full Oprah, over-the-top unabashed word tsunami didn't stop for a full minute. Of course, we loved it,

We flew home on Air New Zealand out of Houston, always a good trip on that mighty Kiwi airline. We sat together for dinner in the air, me on the little foot stool at the end of Kate's cubicle, and the crew were only too obliging. The tray table is large enough.

We gave the wine list a good nudge and slept a lot of the long night.

With the southeast rescheduled for August 2019, we now had April 2019 in the Mid-West. Two tours in one offering, and the sales team had a year to sell it. Everything felt just right.

A few weeks later we were back for NAB, the huge broadcast convention in Vegas. Over five days, Kate would support Brian's team while I went on to Music Messe in Frankfurt. We had a day together before NAB and decided to get business cards printed. The Staples store turned out to be on the edge of the city limits, a convenient fifty-dollar Uber ride away. We had dinner with Brian and his team.

I flew to LAX and joined a Lufthansa flight, upstairs in a 747-800 for the first time. Two days in Frankfurt and I was back on a flight to connect with Kate in Vegas. We came back on Air NZ again.

At this stage we had a few big-name exhibitors, and a lot of interest mixed with curiosity. The vagaries of the USA compared with Australia were emerging. For starters there was not one decision-maker. A person in the marketing team for a manufacturer would 'progress' the decision through the sales team, then up the line. When someone said—as many did—"We will do this" what they meant was, "We will consider this."

We had plenty of contracts issued, but the completion rate was poor. It wasn't through lack of trying—our sales team went hard, inspired by the twenty percent commissions that were worth as much as US\$4,000 a pop. And yet, the responses sounded right, the climate felt right.

I was back again in June, a solo trip and this time for Infocomm, the huge audio visual convention again in Vegas. I was getting fed

up with The Venetian Hotel, and Vegas in general. I decided to drive from LAX, so when I landed I hauled myself to the airport Hilton for an early dinner and a few hours sleep. Waking naturally at 1:00 a.m., I drove off down a strangely busy freeway. It was a boring six-hour drive, stopping at Walmart on the edge of Vegas—to buy an electric kettle. I always travel with a tea-making kit, as real tea is hard to get in the USA. Somehow I'd lost the kettle on the last run.

Then it was straight to Infocomm, and by the time I walked in I'd been awake ten hours. It was a very long day.

Gene let me accompany him as he did the unsolicited sales calls. We would walk along, and I'd suggest a likely brand that had been shown in our Australian or New Zealand events, and he'd bowl up and do the hustle. It was unnerving at first, but I got his groove. He was straight up, "Good afternoon, I'm looking for your marketing person." Always polite, the Americans would direct him, or give him a business card. When he did get face-time with a marketing person, he would deliver the pitch.

"I'm Gene and I'm representing the ENTECH Roadshow USA. This is the Australian creator of ENTECH, Julius Grafton. I'd like to explain a little of what this is, and ..." So it ran for about four minutes.

Interestingly the Americans were all attentive. They asked realistic questions. Some said it wasn't in their planning. The sheer scale of marketing in the USA was spread out for us like a vast corn field. One representative said she had seventy-two separate events on her calendar for 2018 already.

Flying home I started to get doubts. We scheduled a sales conference for August, in New York, which was the most convenient location as everyone lived in different places.

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We took the Qantas flight to New York, via the horrible LAX where you queue for a long time and get hassled by the indifferent, at best, or angry—usually—TSA agents. Our specific visa class meant we couldn't use the automated passport machines, so we were always held up.

We'd scheduled the meeting at a Fairfield Inn by Marriot, in Queens near JFK, so we spent the night and had the meeting next day in a little meeting room that cost us precisely nothing—for reasons I don't understand to this day. The people running that little tourist-class hotel, in the bad part of town, were delightful.

The meeting went well, and the team seemed engaged and energised. I mapped out the following year's strategy so they could see the potential, and then had a small revelation. Six people in the room, and none of them could do the math about what the commission might look like.

I did a table on the whiteboard, showing potential sales across five separate roadshow tours in 2020 that I was planning. All we had to do was sell the 2019 events sufficiently, then we would take off exponentially. When I wrote the dollar figures on the board, they all lit up. It surprised me, but since then I've noticed a lot of smart people who can't do math.

The five-tour strategy was very much alive, and we would next tour the main eastern cities of Canada to schedule one of the five. Mid-West and the southeast were known and could be planned because we had them on sale for 2019 already. A possible run down from Seattle was on the cards, as was a deep dive into the Megalopolis—the huge metropolitan area over 500 miles long stretching from Boston in the north to Washington, DC in the south.

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That tour would be in deep worker's union territory and would come last so we would have had six previous tours of experience and be better equipped to deal with the hassles. And the cost.

Kate and I went to Vancouver and did the trip down to Seattle and Portland to see those venues. We then flew to Quebec to meet Brian and do the road trip to Toronto. We hit Montreal, and Ottawa, typically visiting two or three convention centres in each city. We short-listed the four we needed.

Qantas took us home, disappointing us with patchy service in Business Class. We always get consistent good service on Virgin Australia, Virgin Atlantic, Air NZ, Singapore Airlines and almost all the European long haul flights. In contrast, all the USA airlines have inconsistent crew always.

While on the topic, we flew on Asiana the previous year from Frankfurt to Seoul in First Class—an upgrade—and then to Sydney in Business. On that flight we were denied a third glass of wine. Not because we were drunk, loud, or rude. Because they have a *policy* of some kind. Never again.

We had around eleven exhibitors signed up for a pair of tours in 2019, and we needed another eight at least to break even. But that wouldn't fund the five tours I had planned for 2020. Our business model wasn't working—but we had some time left to run.

The final Vegas convention for 2018 was LDI, the big stage lighting show. I flew there on Virgin Australia and again walked around with Gene. I started to hear the same words from many of the American manufacturers. They were saying, "We *are* interested, but we'll sit 2019 out and see how you go." It was like they had all discussed ENTECH beforehand and decided to block us.

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I met Kate in Berlin where she'd been supporting Steph at the world championships for Aerobic Gymnastics, where Steph came fourth. (Steph took silver in 2019, and retired from the sport at the tender age of 22.)

Clearly we had a sales problem. We had major brands covering audio and video, but no lighting firms. We hit on a new strategy.

I'd heard of a guy in London who was incredibly connected across the lighting manufacturers. He agreed to lead our team and do a last-ditch campaign across the lighting firms to get the sales we needed. We scheduled a sales conference for late January at the big NAMM convention in Anaheim, near LA.

Sadly the sales never eventuated, and we decided to cancel everything in early January 2019. At that point, Kate and I had exhausted the funds we put aside for the project, and being pragmatic, when you hit the end, it really is just that.

Everyone got paid up, and Brian wound down the USA company. We were collectively out a few hundred grand each.

While disappointed, we were also relieved since the calendar for 2019 was a shocker for us. There was no margin for error, the workload looked phenomenal, and there were many unknowns. Had it all worked out, the 2020 schedule was just insane. We would have been in the USA for most of the year.

We'd talked it through time and time again, and reasoned that we were taking a risk with our health and sanity. The potential rewards *were* vast, if we could do this for five years and cash out. Having now lived through a very different 2019 to the one we had planned, I'm glad things ended like that.

I felt terrible for Brian. We met in Savannah, Georgia, in June 2019 for a post-mortem and windup meeting, and had a lovely couple of days with him and his wife, Dee. We remain firm friends

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and planned a project for 2021 based on one of Brian's events in the USA. We'll try to run an Australian version, and slowly recoup our ENTECH losses.

Considering what's happened in the world during 2020, that decision to look ahead to 2021 ... well, it's kind of serendipitous, isn't it?

Chapter 53: Covid Hindsight Reveals a Disaster

Averted

With the advent of Covid 19, the complete shutdown of events and entertainment gutted everyone we know and made things a bit woolly for us. But not as much as if the five years plan in the United States was rolling along. It would have decimated us very, very badly. Here's how.

In 2018 we planned two roadshow tours in 2019, with four or five in 2020. Each tour is four cities over two weeks. Plainly these would have been disrupted utterly with the pandemic and postponed at least twelve months. The business model was based on prepayments, which is how my trade show and then my roadshows have rolled since 1994. I've been entrusted with other people's money, paid in advance, for over twenty-five years. Fortunately that money is in honest hands.

The USA plan was that we would be prepaid for each tour, and then use the profit component to fund the next tour. With prepayments, in theory you find yourself hitting profit well before the event. So in effect you're able to take the profit out before you've actually delivered anything. That was, in my mind, an extremely awesome business model.

Our first April 2019 tour would hit profit at about fifteen sales, and the August tour was on sale at the same time. Some firms signed on for both. We reasoned that should the first one do well, everything would then cascade. But the prospect of a break-even roadshow, or slightly better or worse, hung heavy. Even if the first one just fell over the line, the second tour may, or more likely not, do well.

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With all that we would be paying deposits for four or five tours at up to twenty venues for 2020. The risk would be spreading like a web. We would be a marginal proposition as opposed to a monstrous success. The upside on the planning was \$10 million dollars profit over five years—US dollars. For us. Then we would sell hot back to our partner for a multiple of four, a modest \$40 million. That's over \$50 million Aussie bucks! That's why we took the risk.

With all that happening in mid-2018 we became mindful of a potential problem in our 'hood. The state government announced a road tunnel under the harbour, near our home. They would dredge up 200 years of polluted harbour floor, barge it to White Bay wharf, and dry it all out ahead of trucking it away. Problem was, our bedroom window is about two hundred metres from the wharf.

So we got ahead of the problem and decided to sell. We painted the house, decluttered and themed it, and left it with the agent while we went to the USA. We had mortgage approval for two million so we could buy a freaking monster mansion over the hill.

But the market crashed, and we resolved to stay.

You can see the revolving door of fate, or the faith-filled paradigm of life—call it what you will. Here's what would have happened if we didn't pull the plug on the USA Moonshot in January 2019.

We could have had a two million dollar mortgage during the Covid 19 crisis. We would have had a lot of exhibitor funds in our hands, some of which would have been spent on future venues and marketing. The USA sales team were to be paid twenty percent of every dollar that came in, so that money isn't recoverable. Nor should it be—they earned the sale, they should be paid. As it was,

the cancelled project at January 2019 saw the sales team paid for what we had received. So they were looked after.

No matter how I do the what-ifs, Covid 19 would have killed the USA Moonshot with bad downstream reputational damage for our partner and us. As they say, it's a blessing in disguise that the project failed on the launch pad. The emotional and physical energy involved in dealing with the slow-motion collapse of ENTECH USA would be beyond belief.

We can no longer take prepayments the same way we did. Exhibitor clients in part don't have the money, and more importantly, we shouldn't rely on the scheme the way we did for almost three decades. We can, and have, reset our plans.

Things change.

Chapter 54: I Have a Problem with the Video

This is a slice of craziness for you. Part of the 2020 crazy, the shoot-yourself-in-the foot madness of the strange year. And some music industry madness. Here you have a story that confirms my condition—I trust too many people—or I trust the ones I shouldn't.

In my sixty-three-year-old naïveté I went *back*, right back. To music. I cut a deal with an apparently reliable music industry "senior flamboyant Latin American lady" who had a bad run with some shows in Sydney. She did do style. She did do "the look". She has got "that thing", if you go for the bling, like the Mercedes convertible her compliant property developer husband toy-boy bought her.

Somehow we connected via an old mate of mine who was her music director, and I decided to do some shows. That rich husband I met just once. He builds petrol stations in the outback. He is of the cuddly teddy bear vibe thing—her description. They met at some function where he was with his bank manager. He spotted her and sent over a bottle of Tatt. He went on the pursuit. She fell. It's a nice story. We liked them a lot.

Later, in dispute with us, he became like The Terminator, because he attacked and wouldn't give up. He went into meltdown on the concrete and reformed into another version, just as nasty. Not so shiny.

Here's what happened.

I love live shows.

Over a few years Kate and I have had half a dozen gigs in our backyard in Balmain. We built a deck which is actually a stage and put bands there. The neighbours are strangely compliant. Probably because we warn them with a letterbox drop, and limit the show times to two sets.

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Jimmy Den Ouden always brought his latest PA, which is awesome. We did a full band mix, with subs, of whatever we had. Like, Dianna Rouvas, and Prinnie Stephens, and Stylus (a '70s band signed to Motown). Paul Christie's band carved up a night here too. All seriously good musicians, and all paid to play because we could.

It was all about sharing joy, we had Stanly the party chef do the food, and asked people to bring drinks. Each show cost us, but we enjoyed the sharing.

So we figured the step into music promotion was a thing we could do. With ease.

Becoming partners with our new lady friend—my idea—we spent several months building a pair of shows. One was an Earth Wind and Fire tribute, the other a Nile Rogers show.

Then it turned to custard suddenly one day when she turned on the music director, a guy I've known for forty years.

They had a "personal" dispute of some kind—for fuck's sake—but each assured me that it would not affect the project. Then, a day or so later, she didn't like 'her' band playing for free at a Bush Fire charity show.

She texted the MD:

What is the purpose to have the show at Lazy?

Why has my name has not been acknowledged?

We don't need exposure at this club.

So give me a valid reason for this, because the Nile show belongs and is registered to me.

The MD replied:

It's a charity. It was scheduled a long time ago. You knew about it, Julius knew about it. Nothing has changed.

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The show is not presented by you therefore there is not that credit. It's a fundraiser for Fire Relief.

If you want me to include "appearing courtesy of (you)" I can do that.

There are so many artists that credits are difficult, but that can be done.

Her:

Sorry but I don't do charities. Corporate is my aim.

Using our group for that?

Sorry I don't agree.

We are not a charity group.

This is just so embarrassing.

I have lost so much money on this project.

Not happy with this craziness.

The only charity I do is for pets and old people.

Don't care about all the other artists.

That's their business.

This exchange led to the MD emailing the roster of musicians to say they couldn't appear at the charity show, because she had denied permission. That email hit my Inbox as I was on morning break driving for Community Transport. That's a volunteer thing I do every Thursday, to make myself feel better about travelling the world in five-star comfort.

Some weeks earlier I'd had a phone conference with the lady and her builder husband to discuss my frustrations about the musicians' availability. I'd put up a whole series of weekend dates many months in the future only to discover some of the band were booked solid almost every week. It was a discussion about building

loyalty and relationships with creative people, and now here she was, smashing everything into the ground.

Before entering this now-crazy partnership I'd struck a deal with the sensational Hindley Street Country Club from Adelaide to be their rep—for the uninitiated, the HSCC is an awesome show band. Alongside of dealing with the lady and rehearsing the two shows, I booked HSCC into two Sydney club dates some months away. I invited the lady onboard as a fifty percent investor to spread my risk. Bringing a ten-piece band up from Adelaide isn't cheap.

The week before the messaging madness I negotiated a date for the two shows together—EWF and Nile—one set each, and repackaged them into a format that the clubs liked. I had a video made, which relied heavily on one song that the lady had the band record in a studio—before I came along—at a cost of \$4,000. That was the kind of decision-making she was engaged with. The video was ready to go, but in a further text message to the MD she started criticising the music mix.

I pulled out of the partnership with the lady immediately, telling the musicians the charity show messages were nothing to do with me and that I didn't do business like that. The lady's husband went into that meltdown. He emailed:

“(We) and you were in discussions to take the HSCC touring Australia, New Zealand, Asia and the USA, in particular Las Vegas Nevada where (the lady) has strong connections within the music industry and in fact had introduced Con Delo (HSCC) to Mr (name redacted) in Las Vegas, an active promoter and great contact to have”

Las Vegas? Discussions? Two nightclubs in Sydney is hardly a world-wide tour. This fantasy simply didn't happen—something

was *not* right (like effective communication) between the lady, at home alone with three pampered poodles, and the husband, out on site somewhere in a construction hut. The email continued:

“You have conducted yourself like a common thief and stolen our IP, our skill and expertise, our time, our money and our right to a profit, when all we did was trust you and back your dream of bringing the HSCC to NSW. Do not confuse my politeness for weakness.”

By now we were down the rabbit hole with Alice in Wonderland. Each long and violent email got a restrained and respectful response from me. But they kept on coming.

“You are hereby put on notice that if you fail to respond to me by the deadline or put some constructive thought into resolving our dispute, I will be left with no alternative but to;

- a) Ruin you and your so called reputation,*
- b) Take all action available to me to STOP the NSW shows,*
- c) Write to HSCC telling them we are in dispute and they will have no right to perform in NSW without (us),*
- d) Write to South's Juniors telling them we are in dispute and disrupting and cancelling the event,*
- e) Instruct my entertainment lawyers to sue you, your companies and Kate McKenzie for the damages you have caused,*
- f) Make our dispute public on all social media avenues and notifying all of your partners and events you are involved in of your irrational behaviour ...*

They were looking for ten thousand dollars in "damages", because I walked away from the partnership. They were particularly obsessed with the half-share of the two Sydney shows for HSCC which I had said we could still do with them.

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In fact, the Covid-19 crisis was in full flight and the two shows were cancelled anyway. But they didn't believe me.

To date you have re-branded the show under your social media advertising without our permission or consultation. Today the Club is still advertising the event correctly as (our presented) show. Quite a number of people we know have bought tickets to this event because (we) were presenting the show, the Club is representing the event correctly and HSCC, and you had no right to make such changes without consulting us first and we have been damaged as a result of those actions.

They firmly believed that people had bought concert tickets simply because it was presented by their unknown promotion company.

Then they emailed Con Delo at Hindley Street Country Club directly, a long and defamatory rant that probably confused the heck out of him. Then this to me:

On this basis, you are hereby put on notice that (we) will do everything within our power and to the letter of the law that will stop Grafton or any related entity from promoting any HSCC Shows in NSW without the involvement of (us) or Grafton reaching an amicable settlement with (us).

I hadn't been responding to this torrent of vitriol as quickly as I normally would, since I was running around the hellscape of the pandemic with my hair on fire trying to sort out our businesses. I'd innocently put off reconciling the last bunch of expenses that they had sent me, thinking I owed them money, simply because I thought they'd be cool about waiting, given the circumstances. Now, to put this ridiculous matter to bed, I opened up the invoices. It turned out we had reimbursed them months ago—they were re-claiming. In fact, they owed *us* a couple hundred dollars.

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I sent them a final response, adding a note that I'd invested a couple of thousand in marketing the HSCC shows in NSW and they had contributed zero. But regardless, since the shows were cancelled, there was no partnership. Any further communications could go to my lawyer.

What really went wrong? It was a bitter and unnecessary battle of egos and miscommunication that started with a personal dispute between a rich man's bored wife and a musical director, and ended with me battling an enraged Lebanese builder by email.

All because I made a bad judgement call and offered my trust to people who don't deserve any such respect.

Chapter 55: Falling From a Great Height

The 2020 pandemic hit hard and fast. We struggled to get our ENTECH Roadshow out on the road as travel restrictions started and shutdowns loomed. It was really nerve-racking. We did Perth, Adelaide and Sydney, then watched over the middle weekend of March as gatherings were limited to 500 people.

Monday morning we prepared to fly to Melbourne for the Tuesday show. We had messages, emails and calls from exhibitors and trade—some were pulling out. Soon it became a solid flow. The venue called, they were angling for us to cancel, and when I said we would only cancel with a full refund they quickly agreed.

Just after lunch we were shut down. Three shows done, two not, and four semi-trailers in Melbourne full of gear. A lot of exhibitor staff in the air, many more already in Melbourne. The Brisbane venue confirmed they couldn't host the event, and soon the restrictions increased further.

That's a crisis for you. We had to make a response. We workshopped in our basement office, Kate and I comparing scenarios. The glaring problem was that with sixty percent of the tour delivered, we didn't have the other forty percent of the money sitting around for refunds. Later that week we issued credit notes to all the exhibitors, which seemed to go down okay.

No income. Our following two roadshows in May and July were pushed forwards a year. No work. We shut the business down. We raided all the hollow logs and gathered what cash we had to wait for whatever happened next. I dusted off my HR license, had an hour-long induction drive on the ATS Rock Box, a 12 ton DAF. I applied with all the bus transport firms as I have a heavy bus licence. Kate put herself on the casual teacher relief list.

Someone commented on my somewhat brazen and now potentially bad-looking previous predilection for sharing social media posts featuring luxury travel. It's true. I did it. Lock me up, Your Honour, and throw away that key.

That's how I fly. And have done since my last long economy trip to Italy down the back of the Jumbo in 1991 with a hundred people smoking. I never smoked. And I never flew cattle-class again.

However, I do have a strange excuse for all that decadence. So to try redeeming myself on social media, I decided on a post to explain how it all came about.

I wrote, "Amongst this carnage, a rare sliver of good news. We're. Set. Free!"

"You see, our travel posts on Facebook are quite at odds with our humble lifestyle in the small 120-year-old terrace. We have a dead rat behind the cheap kitchen cupboard just now. Our neighbour is Stinky Pete. It's not what you think.

"No, the answer to the travel problem lay with Aunt Ethel's estate. Lord Francis Smyth-Williams (RIP), the executor, was a beast.

"He upheld the provisions, to wit: *'The bequeathing from the estate inter-alia is to be used solely for the purpose of distinctive travel offshore from the birthplace of the beneficiary and only for said beneficiary and a direct spouse by way of marriage. The bequest has no monetary value bar for the direct payment for travel at a class above carriage and accommodations of according ...'*" Blah Blah Blah.

And of course the matter was sheaved in secrecy and silence: I signed a gag order larger in magnitude than the one Crown hit me with two years ago.

“But I can tell you about this now.

“You see, Ethel was the dowager of the late Keith Sufferon Grafton, a shallow, callow and cruel man who held her in virtual poverty, providing only household services and delivering several lousy pasty children who are my miserable distant cousins. Beseeched by her husband on his death bed to maintain the meagre, she resolved instead to squander the estate in the grandest of manners, with herself denied the luxuries.

“So it was forced upon me, friends, and I took the only choice you can face: to travel, or to stay home.

“Cousin Meredith, daughter of Lady Plymouth, related by marriage somehow, did challenge this in the High Court of Justice in London but failed. Her silk argued the provisions with some illuminating precedents that frankly I won’t bore you with. So we kept drawing down.

“Anyhow, it’s over. Seems like one of the trustees has trousered the balance after Lord Francis snuffed it last year, caught in flagrante delicto with a kitchen boy, when his heart stopped abruptly. The defibrillator battery was flat. No one bothered with CPR, such was the affection of his house staff who watched the twitching until it stopped, and uncorked the Bolly to toast his departure before the undertaker arrived.

“Our most recent trip became an embarrassment when the trust-issued Titanium Amex was seized by the hotel desk clerk in Malta, and we had to pay the balance on Kate’s pre-paid Visa. Caviar is overrated anyhow.

“See you in steerage.”

That seemed to assuage the knockers. Clearly our future travel plans lie a long way away, and probably extend no further than a road trip to Port Macquarie.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

Chapter 56: Thigh is Okay

My daughter Jess had been married barely a month when Nathan called me.

“Mate, I need a hand. I know your daughter has been bought up on the finest cuts and the fanciest of restaurants. Can you help me convince her that chicken thigh is edible?”

We laughed then, and still do fifteen years later. I’m deadily proud of the selfless, loving church minister Jess is today, and I’m also delighted she lived through one of my prosperous times. It’s a long way from today’s straightened circumstances where I’m driving a bus to pay the mortgage.

Which reminds me of our greatest excess, the famous 1997 “Bust the Amex” First Class round-the-world trip.

That was First Class to New York, where we saw the new sensation on Broadway *The Lion King*, next night it was dinner at Windows On The World up the top of the World Trade Centre. Then we saw the breakout hit *Rent*.

A nice First Class flight to London, where I was woken in our suite at The Savoy at 4:00 a.m. by a call from Amex to check it really was me clocking up all those charges. Can’t really complain, I guess. Over to Le Meurice in Paris where we woke to snow on the gables, the December morning clear and crisp.

On to see my uncle in Spain, and a couple of nights on La Rambla in Barcelona, then we took ourselves on a self-tour to see La Sagrada Familia basilica and let Jess run free in Ciutadella Park—which was not such a great idea, since it seemed to be full of prostitutes in broad daylight, and curb-crawling guys. Charming.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

Then a long drive down to Alicante in a brand new Peugeot that conveniently lost its mind on the motorway, blowing smoke and losing power. We clunked into a village where, at the roundabout in the middle of town, the confounded car tried to take off in a death run, I flipped it into neutral as the diesel tried to do 4,000 rpm resulting in a massive cloud of smoke. I turned off the ignition, but it kept running. I pulled the key out of the ignition, and through a gap in the massive smoke cloud see two angry policemen. Then the car let out a huge bang and died. It was very theatrical.

Four hours waiting at the Hertz office and then we had another marvel of French engineering for the rest of the drive down.

Christmas Day dawned with a Santa sack full of stuff that the wide eyed eleven-year-old *knew* had not been in our baggage. She didn't know it cost me \$300 to Fedex the stuff to the hotel.

A strange Christmas lunch with my cousin, who was clearly in her last days of marriage to her detached Spanish husband, sullen and uncommunicative. Their child was unruly and unloved, or perhaps neglected, and he climbed the tree outside and tried to piss on Jess from up high. We had an afternoon outing to a theme park, as the Spanish didn't really do Christmas. I had that horrible feeling when you've eaten far too much and you're on a ride with your kid—and you want to chuck up.

We had our days with the family, and drove to Madrid, up the arid hills over the spartan land. Our hotel had a pool and every Australian kid loves a swim. Even when it's decidedly cool. By now we were ready to fly home, and we boarded a Singapore Airlines 747 and were the only passengers up front in First Class.

In true form, a Singapore Girl sat on each of Jess's armrests and tried to keep her entertained. It was pathetically patronising, but I

was well into my second serve of caviar so I was happy. We had that flight and the one out of Singapore all to ourselves as we concluded the great Amex card-flogging trip. The bill arrived a week later: \$60,000. And that didn't include the flights. We'd paid for them earlier.

Feast and famine stalks the entrepreneur, seasons vary, and fortune waxes and wanes. Growing up in poverty means you know the bottom and can take the lows. Abundant money worries me, and I seem almost addicted to success, and then determined to see the next slump turn around.

The pandemic of 2020 came at me slowly as I watched the news in January, and I started to talk to Kate about what it could mean. I went through some emotions, battling the feeling of failure that I'd felt almost ten years earlier when I shut my college. I reasoned this catastrophe was bigger than anyone and that the only way to come out the other side was to be positive and to work to the plan.

And Kate cooks a mean chicken thigh casserole.

Chapter 57: Get a Job, Julius

Staying at home in the pandemic was fun for us, because we had some cash stashed away, and because aside from loving each other we also *like* to spend time together. So we developed a routine. I woke Kate with the tray of tea; with the blind raised to watch the dawn over White Bay. In Pyrmont are a line of eighteen-story unit towers, one faces the other at such an angle that when the first east-facing block catches the sun, it reflects into the west-facing windows on the block next door. So we see a preview.

We read the news online, did some emails (as they diminish), posted some socials. Then get up, put on the workout gear, and walked up the hill over Gladstone Park to get coffee. Come back, sat in the park, and watched the people and the dogs and the *au pairs*. We have a large battalion of exotic *au pairs*—either that or the Balmain finance industry executives are marrying very young and very Euro.

Back home, we worked out on the floor for six minutes to get the stretch on, then it was over to the forest. Strange but true, Birrung Park has pockets of grey gum and then a cut-out down some stairs where some old industrial tanks were once installed. Now it's a level grass playing area about eighty metres in diameter with a circular wall on three sides and a fence overlooking the bay on the other. Perfect for ball games.

One morning we'd shoot basketball, kick the AFL ball, and have a session passing the rugby ball. The alternate morning we'd run up the stairs—twenty metal ones on the north side, and fourteen wide paved stairs on the south. Kate can do twelve to fourteen, I'm stuffed after ten.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

A day of reading, one or two Netflix shows, then we would make a fire in our outdoor fire box, have happy hour, play a board game or cards, and cook dinner.

We did that seven weeks straight—until we got a job.

I'd applied for every heavy truck job advertised and got zero responses—probably due to my obvious age. But bus driving is another matter. They value maturity, and I'd had three years experience in my volunteer bus driver gig for Community Transport. That tickled the recruiters, they thought I was great.

The processes were similar. Apply. Recruiter calls. Sets up a Zoom interview. Make sure my laptop is elevated to eye level, acoustics and lighting in the kitchen are correct. Wear a white shirt. Set the laptop away so it gets me down to mid-torso and I'm not right in there. All that is calibration. Same usual pattern—they ask you to describe how you sorted out a difficult work situation. How you apply safety? Whether you have any holidays booked. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?

Some had video or Zoom role play, where you are goaded into responses. In one example the video role play asks you the same question three times to see if you lose your mind. After those, they usually had a one-on-one interview by Zoom or Microsoft Teams with more of the same. I had two face-to-face meetings in offices, with two guys. I sent my Working with Children Check number, Police report (zero interactions); driving history (current to within a month); Bus Driver Authority card, License image, a selfie with me holding my license, and twice had to do the same medical at a clinic.

Two of them had an external reference check service, which required my two referees endure a twenty-five-minute online process.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

Then four bus job offers arrived on the same Friday. One was permanent-part time, twenty-one hours guaranteed over five days, with some possibly split shifts. And they said there are usually more hours. Downside is a forty-five-minute commute each way, and I can't continue my part-time community bus gig.

Next job was shuttle bus, starting 1:00 a.m. until 5:00 a.m. near Central. New machines. Literally ten minutes away. With optional extra day shifts nearby. With possible coach charter work, suited to my engaging personality, wit, and—hey, I always like to hog the microphone, right? A captive audience for my awesome dad jokes. Grateful tourists flinging lucrative tips at me. Delusions growing by the minute.

There was the driver job out at South Granville, and images of me running a school bus charter to Friday sport with fifty lads from Lakemba flashed through my mind. The final one was for State Transit down at Brookvale.

So I had an open mind. I got up at midnight on Monday and went to Central Station to stalk the shuttle bus at 1:00 a.m. Found it, followed it, and realised bugger-all rail workers were actually using it. Around and around on empty streets—boring. I used the rest of the pre-dawn outing to drive to Brookvale to see what kind of fleet they ran up at that depot. I stopped on the way at the deserted marina at The Spit to eat a banana. One huge white millionaire gin-palace was lit up like an aircraft carrier, presumably with white-uniformed, beautiful, perfectly formed young crew onboard, asleep.

I pondered waking them with some kind of helpful prank, like maybe just casting off their moorings, but maturity prevailed. I ate the banana and chucked the skin at the white orgy palace. It fell way short, plopping into the middle harbour. I drove on, inspected

the boneyard of clapped-out blue buses, and crossed the Brookvale job off.

The rest of Monday I felt like rubbish after the early start, and reading the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement I realised those back-of-the-clock hours were worth a princely \$34.00 an hour, casual. Fuck that! I signed up for the permanent-part time gig, starting date one week hence.

Talking about Enterprise Bargaining Agreements, the EBA offered a flat rate, no matter what time of day. Think about that for a minute. Because the casual rate is a few cents above award, they claim they meet the BOOT. (Better off overall test). Sure.

I think I know how they do this. They present a "current"—or maybe a dodgy—roster that shows that more than ninety percent of hours are daytime. Then they send the rate up 0.83c an hour for everyone, which matches the (previous) penalty rate component. Then when the EBA is signed, they stack on the penalty shifts.

Better off overall test? Like hell.

Chapter 58: A Bus Driver

The brick single-story building had two vending machines at the door. One is full of energy drinks, the other snacks. The guys and girls all carry weight—starting work at 4:45 a.m. means no morning workout and some shifts run over nine hours, so you're beyond exhausted at the end.

Inside, every wall surface is loaded with clipboards, one for each route, called Batt Boards. No one knows what that means, but everyone must find the board for the shift after signing in with your driver number. We're all wearing the uniform—SHIRT Long Sleeve, 87R (42"); PANTS Regular 87R (34"); Jumper. Black-topped enclosed shoes. Tie. They didn't give me a tie at first.

Up the corridor from the ready room are four offices facing the yard. A large one has Operations, or Ops. Three work stations have screens, phones, and two-way radios. One or two stressed, serious people sit there taking phone calls from Joe Public.

"My bus didn't come."

"The driver sneezed."

"Your bus almost ran me off the road—what kind of fuckwits do you employ?"

The radio continually drones.

"Shift 89 to M16 ... Come in 89."

"M16, I have a lost child on board, wrong bus."

Then follows a chicken dance of calls to mum, calls to school, radio ping-pong, redirections, delays. Amplified with breakdowns, broken rear vision mirrors (common), traffic delays, late running reports, and sick drivers to replace. Buses are dispatched to replace others; a glow-worm map of real time positions snakes and

oscillates as 160 buses crawl around the region and into the heart of the city.

Drivers stream in and out, carrying lunch coolers and that Batt Board which has a laminated day-plan for the shift. It shows the departure time from the depot, the first stop, and then the timings on a route. Typically a route is about an hour. On time performance (OTP) is everything. It means we must be in 'the bubble', never more than one minute early *into* a timing point—usually halfway down the route—and not over four minutes and fifty-eight seconds late to go through a stop.

If we're all looking the same—overweight, mature-aged, somewhat jaded—then we kind of end up talking the same too. We're institutionalised. We're worker drones. We comply, or we try to; our managers sweat the details. There are forms and procedures, and the Standard Operational Procedures book that we learn on Day Two has 148 pages. It has contemporary business fudges, like the page on "References". It advises that when we depart or are departed (fired), the company will not give us a reference. It will supply a separation form that states what role we performed, and from when until when. It goes on to say that individuals, if approached, will not comment on our performance. It is a binding, obedient legal tool to ensure the company avoids the risk of a legal action—from us—if it tells a future bus line that we are incompetent or dangerous. It would be a relief if you're fired, but it doesn't serve the needs of society.

Getting out of the depot is a challenge. Day Two of training, I'm hurried onto the MAN low-deck bus by the senior driver who is anxious to get out a few minutes early. Training is about getting used to the length of the bus. As a heavy truck driver blessed with years on the road driving an eight-ton band truck, I'm cool with the

synergy between man and machine, but need time to adjust to sitting two metres in front of the steering axle. In a regular truck, you sit on top of it. So I'm in this overhang, which puts the drive axle further back from me.

I need the forty hours of training to get used to the routes, each with an array of back streets, roundabouts, and 'got-cha' road quirks like a huge dip outside a Caltex to drain the road, which if attacked at 60kph in a bus is guaranteed to propel all fifty seated and twenty standing passengers through the roof. The resulting orgy of tangled commuters would make the front page of the paper.

This day it's 5:00 a.m. I'm later than planned as I walk into the steamy depot and blend in with the same-same clones. The login is 5:05 a.m. The trainer is bustling.

He says, "Let's go."

So without me even having a leak or calibrating my brain. I follow him out there in the pissing rain and hop on board.

Now he says, "We're gunna have to back up to get this out."

I said, "Righto."

I put my Driver Authority Card into the display slot, strap in, turn on the electrics, parking lights, hit the auto start (these things have computerised everything) and check the air pressure. Look in the left and right mirror, and at the reversing video. The camera is at the top of the back, looking down, so it sees about two metres of road looking from above—nothing like the perspective you get from a car camera. I start to reverse and go back one and a half metres. He says we need to go back further and I say okay. I resume reversing, then suddenly the video screen goes blank. I look in the rear vision mirror and the bus stops dead. I say that we

have hit the bus behind. It was so subtle, we were inching along, and there was no sensation of impact.

I toggle the door, he hops out and runs back, and sure enough we have nudged into the bus—and applied enough pressure on the most forward component, the windscreen wipers, to crack that huge expensive windscreen. Any crack or stone chip renders a bus non-roadworthy. It's pulled off line for maintenance to install a new screen. I figure about now my career is more complicated, as I probably will get a separation form showing I started one week and left the next.

At the end of the shift we fill out the incident report and I write it straight. The training driver glances anxiously over my shoulder as I describe what happened. We take it to the head trainer, who reads it and grunts at the guy.

“Why didn’t you get out and direct Julius back?”

He mutters. I tell the boss that it will never happen again, and apologise.

It appears I’m off the hook. I win some respect as I’ve taken full responsibility without mentioning the supervising trainer in the report, whereas I really was directed badly. Because I was under direction, the reversing issue wasn’t handled the way I would do it if alone. When there's no one to direct you, the thing to do is to eyeball the available distance and to estimate as you inch back.

I take home the roster for next week. Monday, more route training, Tuesday and Wednesday, charter training—with a batch of routes to plan over the weekend as ‘homework’. Thursday and Friday, more routes, this time on nine-hour work shifts. Those will fatigue me, so I start to think about how to manage them.

All for thirty bucks an hour.

Chapter 59: Pay the Dues

You shouldn't expect it at my age and with my life's experience, but I rolled up late for a sign-in. Only three minutes late, but that's 180 seconds beyond the point where my card was marked, and I needed to deal with the consequences.

I was in Week Three of my Sydney bus driver training, which involved driving with passengers, and under the supervision of a senior driver. They put us with one driver for two days, then next another two days and a different driver, then next again. This way we got a variety of driver supervision.

This was a Monday, and the guy was Russell. I woke at 3:30 a.m. for the 5:15 a.m. sign-in as planned, but didn't cross-check my roster so I thought it was 5:45 a.m. When I got in the car, I realised in utter horror I would be late,

I phoned operations. It's a grim 24/7 office overlooking the yard where two hundred buses live. The op's people are our supervisors, yet they get paid less than we do. They're like a stage manager with every kind of problem coming at them through the door from the driver room, down the radio from the fleet, or on the phone. I told the guy I'm a trainee, attached to Russell, and I'd be late, and I could meet him at the first stop—which was within an industrial park about two kilometres away.

"Come in, see me," he barked and hung up.

Great. I rolled up and streaked into the yard. At op's, the guy told me Russell should still be in the yard. He got on the radio to check, but no response. Giving me the bus number, I roamed in my hi-vis looking for it. The yard guy tells me it left.

Back to op's. He was truly over me by now, disdained jowls hanging.

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“I’ll get you to the first stop.” He called over the radio for any bus leaving. One replied it’s headed the right way. “Drop driver at industrial estate.”

He turned to me. “Find 3290 at the front of the yard.”

I rushed out and located it, jumped on to see the driver thoroughly confused, so I briefed him. The expression he gave me was plain—fucking trainee, late.

At the first stop, where my bus should leave at 5:30 a.m., it’s now thirty seconds after the appointed time and no bus. I got out anyway, it was dark and cold, and I stood there.

I rang op’s. “Trainee at industrial park, bus departed.”

He replied, “Wait at other side of road and Russell will return.”

Yeah, in like ninety minutes. I wandered the dark streets and found a Bunnings opening at 6:00 a.m. I walked around the aisles, admiring some tools. *I’m a tool.*

After looking at the Google map, I figured that I can walk back on the big divided road. It will be a few minutes shorter and avoid the hill. Starting off, I saw three company buses laid over ahead. Sydney buses run to a timetable, obviously, and if a bus is early it waits off somewhere before next the stop. I needed to walk past these three buses, but this would surely provoke considerable chatter. As in, “We have a company driver wandering along the highway in hi-vis and uniform. Is he okay?”

So instead of that shit-storm, I retreated the way I came and high-tailed it the long way back to the bus stop, racing the clock and pounding the hill in the cold, pre-dawn. I rued my decision not to pack a thermos, or an umbrella, or a jacket. Still, I was holding together and found the stop.

Russell rolled up, stopped, and glared at me. Two days of him and I stretched ahead, but it worked out fine and he turned out to

be a great trainer—I complimented him on that at the debrief. Then a couple of days later, I had another trainer and I was driving the same shift. Here's what I discovered:

We hit the industrial estate at 5:30 a.m. and roll fifty metres down the hill to stand off until 5:35 a.m. Why? Because the run is over-timed and leaving at 5:30 a.m. means we hit the next timing point far too early. So, my takeout is that Russell punished me for being late—op's told him his trainee was late, so he left the yard early. He didn't answer op's on the radio. Then he left the stop on time *knowing* I was right behind him. He didn't wait those five minutes and must have pulled in somewhere further down the route to dawdle.

Essentially Russell was an arsehole. And I took it on the chin. Because I was late.

Chris was a more amusing trainer. We did a long day, and the final trip with me behind the wheel was after doing three loops. A loop is a trip that starts at the station, goes out through the nearby 'burb, and routes back to the station. Halfway through, you increment the destination display up one so that on the way out it says, "Burb Loop" and on the way back it says "Station".

We finished looping and set up to go to another place, pulled up, loaded the passengers, and took off. I radioed in the load because we were in the restricted pandemic era, and after completing the call Chris sidled up to the cockpit.

He said, "You just said the wrong destination ... Oh shit. We're showing the wrong route, and we just loaded all these passengers."

He quickly figured most of them would get out before the route did a Y towards the end, and those still on board were advised to hop off and catch the correct bus just behind us. To add to the chaos, I missed the turnoff—which in a bus requires very careful

navigation to get you on the right track, because the things don't reverse in traffic very well.

When I graduated from route training, I found it way harder than I imagined. Navigating a wide bus around road lanes with next to no clearance, across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and through the city is character-forming. The split shifts were a killer—leaving home at 6:30 a.m., home at 10:30 a.m., again at five o'clock in the afternoon—after a forty-five-minute drive to the depot—and home by nine ... all for four-and-a-half hours pay.

First day out of training I drove ten hours, with two breaks added on, and arrived home shattered. Next day I went off-route, missing a turn and putting the bus into a valley from which I eventually emerged, driving in the wrong direction until I saw another of our buses—coming the other, correct, way.

A couple more incidents later and I'll admit that I lost my nerve. I resigned after just six weeks as a bus driver.

To be honest, an enormous weight lifted off my shoulders.

Chapter 60: Hindley Street Country Club

Hindley Street Country Club is a unique music project from Adelaide. Kate and I started representing them as agents for Australia and NZ (other than in South Australia) after seeing their only live show in 2019 at the Thebarton Theatre in Adelaide.

They're a band originally born on Facebook that play what they call "Thinking man's pop". When I stumbled onto their Facebook page in early 2019 they had more than a million song plays. At that time, seventy-five musicians had appeared at some time across ninety songs.

Back in the old days of 2017, Darren Mullan and Constantine Delo were, respectively, a studio operator and a bass-playing arranger. Due to their inherent talent and business savvy they both enjoyed a career in the smallest of our mainland state capitals.

"You hear in music circles about DRAB-elaide, SAD-elaide, and BAD-elaide," Darren said. "And if you're any good, you gotta leave town."

But strangely many didn't. Adelaide has a population of 1.3 million these days, and it's produced a heavy roster of major acts. Today there is an army of super-talented musicians living right there, on Saint Vincent Gulf, in a town where you can watch a sunset over the water.

HSCC aims to post one song a week, on Facebook and YouTube. These get shared and viewed a *lot*, and the word spreads across the globe.

The guys have a great dynamic. I first interviewed them on a Monday afternoon at the start of winter in Darren's studio, Adelaide Recording Studios. It's a simple but vibey working space with thirty-two inputs and a studio rack of stuff—Logic, MOTU, Steinberg.

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There's something about wired people. These guys have bounce, charisma and vigour.

It was in 2017 that Darren and Con first posted a bunch of songs under the Hindley Street Country Club moniker. Anyone who knows Adelaide will know there is nothing upmarket about Hindley Street—it's a gritty avenue of bars and strip clubs. Shannon Noll was arrested outside a club there a few years back and put it into further notoriety.

Because Con and all of his cohort had, and still do, play in cover bands up and down that street, they penned the name for the fun of the *opposite* connotation to "upmarket". It localises the project into Adelaide, since a lot of Australia knows that damn street. It is to Adelaide what St. Kilda is to Melbourne, and Kings Cross *was* to Sydney. (Before that state government decided to shut down the entire nightlife.)

For the first year, they shot everything on one camera in Darren's studio, working on a one day, one song a week, regime.

The clips caught my eye because of the one camera simplicity, the musicianship, and the great and consistent mix. Simple consistency is often missing when people try to do multi-camera shoots and edit various takes.

Towards the end of 2018 they moved out to a location with the Chaka Khan cover, "I'm Every Woman" and uploaded the result. Shot at the Palais Hotel, on a lovely sunny day, the sight of Sarah Lloyd backed by Melissa McCaig and Pina Del Re absolutely ignited social media.

The tech was again surprisingly simple. Darren engaged Peadar McBride as camera operator. Peadar owns a Soundcraft Ui24, a very handy twenty-two-input audio mixing system designed by

Melbourne's Danny Olesh. The Ui24 is the backbone of the HSCC live shoot.

"The Ui24 is the only thing that can do it," Darren says. "Everything goes in the one box, we use an iPad, and the twenty-two inputs with all the takes and tracks recorded onto a USB stick. When we shoot on location, you can't hear the singer. We use in-ears for the singers—and the musicians can't hear the singers. They focus on the groove. When you shoot live, you must not amplify the vocals. You don't want the spill. I trigger the kick drum. And Con plays bass through a Gallien-Krueger 600-watt amp with a four by ten box."

"Bass must be loud," Con says. "The drummer uses sticks—we feel every hit. Triggering the kick gets rid of the fluff when I use a digital kick, and that's instantly the HSCC sound."

So about that song?

"The song comes first, before the performer. A common feature is the songs appeal to our generation. They come from before kids and mortgages. Thinking man's pop. Blue-eyed soul," says Con, who arranges the music.

"The songs need to have strong lyrics," says Darren.

Darren says he is unusual as he doesn't do gigs, but Con does, and he gets a lot of people pitching at them. "There's so many people, so many songs, not everyone can get a song."

Con says, "A lot of people send stuff to me now, and some get pissed off because they can't get on, but it doesn't reflect bad on us. And a lot of people want to do a video, but then they don't work so well on camera."

Darren chimes in, "Red light syndrome—freaks some at the 'Go, Record' phase."

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

Con explains, “On the shoot day I ask them to listen to the original song then disregard it. We build it on the day. I come in and know how I want the song to sound, but it is a beautiful collective.”

Darren adds, “This is old school recording, we’re doing it live, all together, and it’s a benefit not hearing the singer.”

This defies conventional logic, but if you live in Adelaide you get used to working by a rule book that is perfectly SA Proud.

“I like that the musicians are a bit on edge,” says Con. “And the last person to learn the song is Darren, because he’s setting up. It’s not sink or swim, but we never do more than six or seven takes.”

Darren says, “We record more audio takes than we film. I’ll record all of them, but film maybe three. It’s hard to use pitch correction, so if someone hits a bad note and I’ve recorded the lot, especially the early takes when the vocal is strong, I can grab a part.”

Con says, “I knew things had changed when we recorded ‘Ride Like the Wind’, by Christopher Cross. We changed the chords—it wasn’t true to the original, it came out how we did it. As validation, Christopher Cross wrote to us and said it was great. We re-interpret. That’s what we do. Barry Gibb heard our version of ‘How Deep is your Love’. The guys from Player, John Waite, they’re all hearing us.”

So now there are almost 140 songs online, with more than forty million views; and more than 130 musicians have appeared. They’re getting tour offers from around the world, and they’re desperate for the travel bans to finish. In mid-2020 they started pioneering live concert feeds into the USA, from a warehouse in Adelaide at 11:00 a.m. on a Sunday—Saturday evening in the US.

What is in that water in Adelaide?

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

Chapter 61: The End of the Beginning—or the Beginning of the End?

It's September 2020 and I'm in our little loft looking out at White Bay on a sunny spring morning. Kate has returned to fulltime classroom teaching at a large and diverse inner western Sydney school. I'm disconnected from the dirge that was the route bus driver job. I started back at my favourite Community Transport bus company as a casual, driving the twenty-seat Coaster bus carrying wise and witty old ladies to and from the shops, or on outings.

It's a very far cry from that AC/DC Flxible Clipper coach with a drunken Bon Scott leering out the windows, but who knows? Maybe some of my passengers saw the inside of *that* bus too?

Kate and I work in the same suburb, so I wake at 4:00 a.m., make a tea tray, and we lay reading papers and socials. At six o'clock we grab a coffee and go to the gym. By 7:30 a.m. we're off to work, usually starting at eight.

About Kate McKenzie. I didn't say but we met in May 2014 – an internet coffee date on the raw healing weeks of my Prostate Cancer journey. A coffee before our kids Saturday sport – and a lock-in!

Community Transport also includes independent travel, taking people to and from medical appointments. It is unrushed, nuanced work—and I love it. I earn a couple of hundred bucks a week which keeps me in beer. On my off days I do the housework and volunteer at a community food pantry which is ultra-busy feeding people in this time of crazy pandemic.

We restarted ENTECH, selling spaces on the scaled-down, three-city roadshow happening in March 2021. Dropping Adelaide and Perth for a year brings the costs down and helps our battered

customers. It also reduces our profits, and we've had to put the exhibitor money in trust so we can do cash refunds if we get another lockdown.

Luckily we were able to restructure and survive this. Once the tour is done we should have enough profit to fund our wages for the year, then rebuild the roadshow over time, sufficient to pay off our mortgage and live happily ever after.

I should also wrap up regarding my brother Tim, who was almost killed in that Darlington disaster. He founded a software company called 'RentalPoint' which allocates thousands of bits of equipment to jobs, on a date in time. It has kept him and his lovely wife Gemma and three kids, in clover for decades. I'm proud of him. Other brother Dan similarly scrimped and saved his way to being our asset rich brother, with a neat creative musical streak. So we all worked out.

There are some hurdles ahead, but they look more like bumps than mountains. Our kids are all healthy and happy, and so are we.

Acknowledgements

My life was like the train in *Snow Piercer*, zooming non-stop around the world with a cast of weirdos. But it hit the wall of pandemic—I was miraculously unscathed, aside from losing my wallet. They're rebuilding the train, but it's slow and it'll not zoom around the planet next time. Rather it will proceed in a more orderly fashion and stop at red lights.

There is an empty stillness since I gave this book its final push. I've collected chapters, pieces, articles, and been diarising for many years—the gift as a writer one I cherish. The internet democratised writing and gave everyone a platform. I grew an audience of which you're cherished part, since you're reading this epilogue.

I spent twenty-nine years publishing and often editing my commercial magazine, *CX*. Sometimes it was properly proofed, mostly by my right-hand guy, Steve James, who has long suffered my lack of schooling and abuse of the apostrophe. For a while Mike Emerson took the sub-editor role and he was brilliant. Sadly the commercial reality of time and money saw him off—the time pressure on a monthly print magazine is something you don't know until you are in the vicelike jaws of the deadline.

This book evolved at its own pace, quite unlike a magazine since I had no deadline, and towards the end Gary Jackson, Steve Devine and Mike read the draft and made countless contributions and corrections. I deeply appreciate their time and commitment. Then I needed an audio book narrator, and Graeme Hague came along. He needed to edit the text so it would read properly, and along the way he did a deep edit that really improved the manuscript.

I'll keep on writing, (not sure about what), since it's been my thing since someone threw out a typewriter that I fixed up and put in my bedroom at age nine. I couldn't buy a new ribbon, so I kept going until the words were really faint, and our boarder Jackie felt sorry for me and liberated another one from her work.

A few years back I helped Gary assemble his gorgeous book, *Bruce Jackson: on the road with Elvis*. He asked me to write a foreword and I was surprised and delighted to see a second one, opposite mine, by Bruce Springsteen.

At the time Stuart Coupe was publishing his best seller, *Roadies*. I'd had a nice morning with him that became a chapter, and reading it, I reflected on how guarded—almost boring—I came across. I was the dull chapter in a book full of exploding characters. This book will hopefully address that.

Stuart also showed me his editing system which involves printing the whole thing on paper and reading it through. Doing that really did help this book along, and led to deleting about forty pages which improved the reading. He gave me valuable distribution and publishing advice for this book.

Why do (older) people write their stories? Humans use stories to learn and entertain, so hopefully a little of those may happen. For me, I'm keen for my descendants, or anyone investigating their lives, to pin some of the chaos down. I've enjoyed tremendous highs and massive fails, but maintained a sense of humour and, I hope, healthy self-deprecation.

I know I'll miss this quiet pastime, usually sitting near Kate in our old terrace in Balmain with a dog snuggled next to me. The more sensible chapters were written in bed with the morning tea pot steaming. The crazy ones at night came with wine. A lovely glass of 2014 *The Architect Chardonnay* went into my MacBook

and wiped out an early draft of this book. Redoing it made it better. Still, *back up* your work.

Finally I hope my gravestone will carry the motto I've run with since the comic John Blackman first applied it to my world. He was about to host the first, and only, ENTECH Awards in Melbourne in 1997. After scanning the lengthy running order, he ordered the first of several bottles of *Krug Grande Cuvee*.

"What can possibly go wrong?" he declared. Of course, everything hilariously did.

Shalom.

ABOUT CREW CARE

A quick acknowledgement of CrewCare—an organisation of experienced men and women in the entertainment industry wanting to improve the care for all workers in the production and allied industries.

CrewCare is all about supporting technical and backstage personnel and their loved ones, those who work or have worked in the Australian live music and entertainment scenes.

The pressure and demands of the entertainment industry can be intense, particularly on live production crew. It is an industry that functions on time constraints and performance under pressure. Working under such demanding conditions can sometimes have huge repercussions, not just on individuals, but partners, families and friends as well.

A not-for-profit organisation, CrewCare organises the national Roady4Roadies events. The CrewCare team includes some of the most experienced figures in the Australian live production world and associated music industry areas.

This Could Be Serious: Julius Grafton

Proudly partnering with Support Act, CrewCare raises money and awareness whilst looking after the welfare of all Australian professional production workers. CrewCare directs all donations and fundraised monies through the Support Act Roadies Fund, ensuring that crew have access to ongoing vital crisis relief and mental health services.

If you have contributed to the production of live music entertainment in Australia, Crewcare is here for you.

CrewCare is a voluntary organisation that relies on memberships to ensure all fundraising efforts are directed to Support Act and meet their intended purpose. Supporters are also encouraged to join ... <https://crewcare.org.au/membership>