

# IT'S A LONG WAY FROM COLEY

by John Cummings



Wolseley Street, Coley, Reading, England 1944

**The banner picture is courtesy the Imperial War Museum © IWM**

The picture above is priceless as far as I am concerned. I could not believe my luck when I found this picture in the Imperial War Museum © IWM. It shows the street where I lived as a very young boy during WW2 – rows of terrace houses with no front gardens. You can see the milkman having a ciggie by his cart which he had to pull himself. Then there is the green-grocer with his wheelbarrow serving the ladies. I can't be certain but it is possible that the lady with one foot on the road and the other foot on the pavement is my mother.

We lived in the house at the end of the street, the only non-terrace house that had been the Vicarage but had been converted into two flats.

There are two young children playing in the street – David and Roger Bryant. Their grandfather is sitting outside the house and he is keeping an eye on them. He would sit there every day. I was in awe of him and used to call him “old man Bryant”. I was so scared of him that I would cross the road and walk on the other side. He was likely only in his sixties and was probably a very nice man!

Some time ago I created a web site called “My Reading” hoping to make contact with some of my friends from that time. I managed to make contact with quite a few people and I remember asking them if they knew of “old man Bryant” but nobody did so when I found this photo, I immediately put it up on my “My Reading” web site and said – there he is - “old man Bryant”.

## Foreword

As my retirement occupation is genealogy and researching family histories for other people, I am always delighted when I find stories that have been written and kept for posterity. This is my attempt to produce something that future generations might find interesting.

This chronicle is my attempt at recording events that have happened to me in my lifetime for my children and their children and other family members and some close friends. It is my story and not my first wife Patricia's nor my second wife Margaret's story although both feature in this narrative. I may have been married to Patricia for nearly 37 years but I am not qualified to write about her childhood. Maybe one day I might attempt to do so but I would need considerable input and assistance from her brother Jim and sister Anne.

John Cummings  
Anglesea  
3 March 2022



This caricature was drawn for me by my good friend the  
late Geoff "Jeff" Hook.

It's a long way from Coley

## Chapter 1

It's early morning, the sun is shining, and there is just the slightest breeze. I am sitting outside on the upstairs balcony, looking across the treetops. When we first moved in nearly sixteen years ago, we could see the 18th fairway and the green of the local golf club but the trees have since grown and hidden most of that that view. Part of the clubhouse is still in view but not as interesting. Although we live in a coastal town, we have a bush view instead of a sea view which suits me fine as I can see the sea every time I drive down to the local shopping village.



## It's a long way from Coley

In the distance, I can see the old Alcoa chimney stack. Alcoa Australia operated a brown coal mine just outside Anglesea for 46 years but closed it down in August 2015. The coal from the mine was used to generate electricity for their aluminium smelter in Point Henry in nearby Geelong. Alcoa have now ceased operations so I guess that sometime in the foreseeable future, the stack may one day disappear. Many residents in Anglesea were pleased to see Alcoa close the coal mine although it did employ quite a few locals and was very generous in donating to local charities and clubs. We didn't mind because every morning we would have to wipe the thin layer of brown dust off the glass table on our upstairs balcony.

As I sit here and reflect on my life's journey, I am reminded of two books that I have enjoyed reading, both having the same title, one by Albert Facey and the other by Paddy Ashdown, and acknowledge that I too have had "A Fortunate Life", albeit after an inauspicious start.

After the death of my first wife, Patricia, from Multiple System Atrophy, I re-married and moved to Anglesea, a beautiful small town on The Great Ocean Road in Victoria, Australia. The Great Ocean Road is regarded as one of the world's most scenic coastal drives. We are not wealthy but my second wife, Margaret, and I were fortunate that we both had mortgage free houses in Melbourne when we got together, which we sold. Margaret also had a holiday house in Anglesea that she and her first husband Leo had purchased in 1983, the year of the bushfires in Anglesea. Margaret decided to pull down the old holiday house and built a beautiful architect designed house which allows us to entertain our friends comfortably, and to accommodate plenty of family or friends who might wish to stay over. With a bit of luck, we will still have enough left in our superannuation fund to take care of us as we steadily creep forward to our use by dates!

Anglesea is not a big town - about 2,500 permanent residents but this can grow to over 20,000 during the holiday seasons. When we first

## It's a long way from Coley

moved into our new home, we hardly knew anyone in the town, but that changed very quickly once it became known that I was a retired IT professional and could help people who had computer problems. I soon became everybody's friend! In no time, I was working six days a week, often into the evenings. I am now retired – well – sort of!

As I look out across the trees, two King Parrots land on the glass balustrade on our balcony, their vivid colours a joy to watch. The King Parrot is a most beautiful bird, and so friendly. We are able to hand feed them should we so wish, and we used to when we first moved in, but stopped feeding them for two reasons. The first reason was that bird experts advise against feeding birds as it takes away their natural instinct to forage for themselves. And then one year, when the adult King Parrots produced two baby King Parrots, the adult parrots used to "park" the young ones on our balcony all day while they went off doing whatever King Parrots do all day. It seemed that our balcony had become a parrot kindergarten! The young ones were not frightened of us yet would not take food from us. They just sat on the backs of the chairs all day - regularly pooing in large quantities down the back of the chairs. So, we no longer feed the parrots.

There are many other birds in our garden including eastern rosellas, crimson rosellas, currawongs, magpies, wattlebirds, butcher birds, and a host of delightful tiny birds including robins, New Holland honey eaters, pardalotes, etc. And I mustn't forget the kookaburras! Or the Bower birds.

The butcher birds have a delightful sound and it is not uncommon to be awakened by one or more of them perched on the glass balustrade outside our bedroom window as they sing their morning chorus.

But my favourite bird has always been, and I think always will be, the magpie. Our magpies stroll around the garden, front and back, as though they own the place. And I guess, they probably do. They are frightened of no other bird and the only time we hear sounds of

## It's a long way from Coley

discord from them is when another magpie family strays into our garden.

I will never forget when Patricia had become quite disabled, and was wheelchair bound. I would wheel her out into the side garden of our Glen Waverley home in Melbourne and give her a handful of uncooked minced meat and she would hold her hand out and the magpies would carefully feed themselves. Then after I had taken her back inside and put her into her armchair, the male magpie would sit on the timber façade above the window near where she sat and sing its beautiful song. To this day, I am convinced the magpies understood that Patricia was ill. Our house was near a walking track where walkers were often dive-bombed during the magpies mating season but they never attacked me when I walked the track. I'm sure they knew who I was.

As I drink my coffee and reflect, my mind drifts back to my childhood in England and I wonder what might have been if a number of events hadn't happened to change my life. And as I think of those days in Coley, and the people who lived there at the time, I unashamedly think to myself - if only they could see me now.

I've come a long way from Coley.



It's a long way from Coley

## Chapter 2

My mother was Delva Ida Frederika Mutlow and she was born in Hengoed in South Wales in 1918. When World War 2 started, she was living with her mother and stepfather in 47 Lorne Street, West Reading, Berkshire, England within walking distance of the town centre. My mother worked at a photography shop called Jeromes of Reading and I suspect that it was there that she met Leonard Herbert Cummings because his Royal Air Force record stated that he was a photographer.



They married in June 1940 and in the early hours of Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1941, according to my birth certificate, I presented myself on to the world stage, an event that surprisingly is not commemorated in any way! Although I sometimes feel that here in Australia, we ought to celebrate that date because it was on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1986 that the Australia Act commenced which made Australia a sovereign and

It's a long way from Coley

independent federal nation. I think we should change the date of Australia Day to 3<sup>rd</sup> March! My birth certificate states that I was born at 19 Alexandra Road, Barnstaple, North Devon.



Me at 6 months



Me about 2 years old

## It's a long way from Coley

For some reason that for many years I had never fully understood was why my mother was “evacuated” to Barnstaple in North Devon when she was pregnant with me. I do know that it was quite common for pregnant women to be evacuated to safe havens if they were living in areas that were being targeted by the German Air Force. But Reading was hardly damaged at all during the war. The few bombs that were dropped on Reading were thought to have been dropped by German planes fleeing from British fighter planes, getting rid of their load so they could fly faster.

There was a “fairy tale” rumour going around Reading after the war that perhaps Adolf Hitler, who was intent on wiping London off the face of the earth, and he certainly did his best to do so, had his eye on Reading – only 36 miles west of Central London, as an alternative capital. Reading was a hub for two railway systems – the Great Western and the Southern region lines, plus it had good industry connections and airfields.

Probably a fantasy idea!

After I was born, my mother returned to Reading. I don't know exactly when but it was before the end of the war. Leonard was in the Royal Air Force and because of the war, was rarely, if ever, home on leave. I am guessing that I was probably about three years old when we moved into number 106 Wolseley Street, Coley.

It's a long way from Coley



### 106 Wolseley Street, Reading

One thing I do remember is VE Day when I was just 4 years old – 8th May 1945. I remember going out of the front door of my grandparents' house in Lorne Street in Reading and standing by the front gate. The road was filled with trestle tables the length of the road, complete with tablecloths and an assortment of food and drink I had never seen the like of before. They were celebrating the end of WW2 in Europe.

Coley is a suburb of Reading, in the county of Berkshire in England. In the 1940s and 1950s when I lived there, it was generally regarded, possibly unfairly some people thought, as being a slum. There were rows of terrace houses with non-existent front gardens, very much blue collar and working class. But the people who lived there were lovely people, very friendly, always there to help. The house we lived in was the only non-terrace house in our street which was Wolseley Street. It was a two-storey house, the last house in the street next door to St Saviour's Church. It had originally been the vicarage to the church next door and at some stage had been converted into two

## It's a long way from Coley

flats. We had the upstairs flat - one large general purpose room, three bedrooms and a bathroom. I have to say that the house looked much better from the outside than it did on the inside.

I do have memories of people, places, and incidents during the time I lived in Coley, but sadly not very many. But I do remember being baptised a Catholic when I was seven years old.

I had originally been baptised at St Saviour's church next door in Wolseley Street - clearly without Leonard's consent, while he was away in the war. St Saviour's was an Anglican Church - my mother and her family were Anglicans. But when I was 7 years old I was re-baptised in St James Roman Catholic Church adjacent to both the Forbury Gardens and the Reading Gaol. This was at Leonard's insistence as he was a Catholic. I still ponder why he was so insistent that I be baptised a Catholic because I don't remember ever seeing him inside a church again after that day. After that, I went to school at St James School next door to the church.

Over time, I have often pondered those early years in Coley. One thing I was absolutely certain of was that around the time that Leonard was discharged from the Royal Air Force after the end of the war and he moved permanently into 106 Wolseley Street, something terrible happened. I've spent countless hours trying to remember or discover what had happened. I have no doubt that something did happen and life in our family was dysfunctional from that day on. I did have some ideas but no certainty and will return to them later in this story. But one thing I was fairly certain of was that there were periods in my childhood that seem to have been blacked out, almost as though I didn't want to know about the events of that time.

A few years ago, when I started researching my family history, I tried to remember where I started out at school before going to St James, but I was unable to do so. It seemed to me that I must have gone to the local Coley Primary School which was only about a couple of

## It's a long way from Coley

hundred metres away. I asked a friend living in Reading if she would visit the Berkshire Records Office and see what she could find. She emailed me back with a copy of a record that stated that I had indeed attended Coley Primary School for two years prior to transferring to St James Roman Catholic School. Mystery solved but it did nothing for my memory except that I do have vague memories of afternoon naps on a camp bed and being given a bottle of milk to drink each day, part of the free milk scheme introduced after WW2.

I have some memories of St James school but I wish I had more. One of the boys at St James School and later at Reading School with me, Derek (Dez) Maule, also lives here in Australia and we sometimes chat on the phone. His memories of those days were amazing and he could sometimes jog my memory a little bit for me.

Our house at number 106 had quite a large garden with lots of fruit trees - especially apple and cherry trees. The garden, although fenced off with an iron railing fence, was accessible from the driveway and garden of the church next door and it was common for the local lads to hop over the fence and pinch fruit off the trees - scrumping as it was called.

There were a lot of kids my age living in Coley. Most went to the local primary school and some went to St James. Not long ago, I created a web site describing my time in Coley in the hope that I would make contact with some of my old friends. It was slow going but in time, I had a small list of people I knew from those days. I also received an email from a young man who is now living three doors away from where I lived and he said he enjoyed reading my web site. He also commented that the people in Coley were clearly a lot friendlier to each other when I was a lad compared to today. Very sad comment.

There are two main rivers in Reading, the river Thames and the Kennet River and these rivers confluence near Sonning Lock. There is

## It's a long way from Coley

also the Holy Brook which is a channel or rivulet of the Kennet River and it flows through Coley, alongside Brook Street West. It is believed that it was dug by the monks of Reading Abbey during the 12th and 13th centuries. Brook Street West is a five-minute walk away from where I lived and I spent many happy hours fishing in the Holy Brook, for fish such as minnows, gudgeon, chub, dace, roach, pike, perch and even eels.

But there weren't too many happy hours in those days, or perhaps I should say that life for a little boy could have been quite a lot better. I must have been four years old when Leonard came into my life on a permanent basis and it wasn't long before I became confused with what was happening in our lives. Looking back, I now have a much better understanding of what the problem was but there was no way I could have understood at the time.

I have only fond memories of my maternal grandfather. I didn't know at the time but he was in fact my step-grandfather as my grandmother had "divorced" her first husband, Hubert Mutlow and married a Welsh coal miner called John Morgan. But as a child, I was unaware of that. Sadly, John Morgan had contracted silicosis - the coal miner's disease - and died when I was only 6 years old. I do remember being taken to see him in bed - shortly before he died - and recall a weak body with a strong heart beating in it. And that was the first time I heard the word morphine.

When I was born, my mother and her mother wanted to name me Morgan John after my step-grandfather but Leonard would have none of it so I was named John Leonard.

## Chapter 3

Clearly there were good times but I struggle to remember them. There was one occasion when Leonard and my mother went to see a show with a group from the street - I think it was "Paint your Wagon". I remember them coming home all happy and pleased.

The only holiday I remember from my time in Wolseley Street was actually an outing, a group outing of families in the street, a one-day trip to Bognor on the south coast. The coach picked us up outside the church next door early in the morning and returned late in the evening.

Another good memory is when Mr Patterson, who lived downstairs, invited me in to watch the 1953 FA Cup Final on his new television that he had recently acquired. It was the classic match between Blackpool and Bolton that Blackpool won 4 goals to 3 after a stunning comeback engineered by the football wizard Stanley Matthews.

There are a few memories of life in Coley that have stayed with me all these years and the most vivid memory concerned the death of a young boy who was both deaf and dumb. I still remember his name to this day but I think it would be wrong to use it here. He was one of a largish family - a good family by all accounts, but very poor. The father was a strong man who always seemed to me to have a rather serious look on his face.

One day, the young lad was playing with other boys including some of his brothers in the nearby railway yards, when he was struck by a slow moving train and killed - of course, he couldn't hear it. His brothers ran home to tell the father who went down to the railway yards. My memory is seeing the father walking down the middle of the road with a sack slung over his shoulder, which contained the body of his young son, followed by his other sons. And the look on his poor face was even more serious than usual. At this stage I was



## It's a long way from Coley

unaware of what had happened and when I asked someone, and they told me what had happened - it was then I realised what was in the sack.

Then there was Charlie Martin and his horse and cart. He used to go down Wolseley Street and collect vegetable peelings etc and load it on his cart and then take it up to near Coley Recreation ground for his pigs.

Another memory was of the guy who delivered the bread – he had a horse and cart. There was one house in the street that was the horse's favourite so if the bread man got talking to someone for too long, the horse would take off and head towards his favourite house, completely ignoring the calls of the bread man to stop. The house didn't have a front garden so he used to go up to the door and bang his nose on the door. The lady of the house would open the door and give the horse a friendly pat. When the irate bread man caught up, the lady would buy her usual cob loaf, tear off the knob on the top and give it to the horse.

I have memories of street football and cricket, playing marbles and hopscotch, playing football and cricket at The REC (local recreation ground - park), fishing in the Kennet River. As I mentioned earlier, the first two years of school were at Coley Primary which was literally a short walk away. After that I went to St James Roman Catholic School.

It was a bus ride to St James or about a 40-minute walk. Unlike Coley Primary, I do have some memories of St James but nowhere near as many as I should have. I did my first confession, confirmation and communion at St James and I was also an altar boy at the church next door. The priests were Canon Murphy and Father Foley.

There is one vivid memory I have of my time at St James. I was not an outward going boy and repeatedly opted out of any activity that was likely to get me into trouble. I disliked fighting and whenever possible, I would avoid any physical contact. If I did get into a fight I

## It's a long way from Coley

usually lost. But clearly (and I guess sadly) I have a flashpoint and when pushed too far, I will lose it completely. I have only ever "lost" it three times in my life.

There was one particular boy at St James who was an utter bully and was always picking fights with people. He had a go at me one day, but I ignored him. He kept goading me and pushing me around and all of a sudden, I just lost it. My first flashpoint. I turned round and without warning punched him very hard in the face knocking him clean off his feet. Unfortunately for me the headmaster was watching from an upstairs window. We were both summoned to his office and given the cane for fighting.

That was the only time I ever got the cane at any school. The next day, the boy I had punched showed up at school with a super black eye. I was a legend for a few days until the other kids realised it was a fluke hit on my part.

Like many schools, we were divided at school into Houses. I have no idea which house I was in but I do recall a chart on the wall in my classroom which recorded the church attendance of each child by House. Every Monday morning, we would be asked if we had attended Mass the day before. I seem to recall it was a green star for attendance and a red star if you missed.

Leonard would send me off to Mass every Sunday morning - he never went himself - and he would give me threepence or something similar to put on the collection plate. Some Sundays I would skip Mass and spend the threepence on an ice cream or lollies at a shop in St Mary's Butts in the middle of town. Because at that age we were brainwashed into believing in Heaven and Hell and that missing Mass on a Sunday was a mortal sin and confined one to Hell unless one confessed to the priest in the confessional, I would spend the next week in fear in case something happened to me, like being run over by a bus, before I got to Confession the next Saturday afternoon.

## It's a long way from Coley

Fortunately, the teachers thought I was a bright lad and this led me to be in Mrs Fuller's class at St James in my last year at primary school. Mrs Fuller is the first person that I credit with changing my life.

When I was a lad, everyone at age eleven sat the 11 plus exam which assisted in determining which school one went to after primary school. In the town of Reading and surrounding districts, the top 90 boys sitting the 11 plus were offered a place at the local grammar school - Reading School - which was a much sought after school. The top girls went to Kendrick School. After that, the kids were allocated to various other schools depending on their results and aptitude.

In my 11 plus year, four boys from St James, including me, and Dez Maule, went on to Reading School, which was a good result for St James. I have no doubt that the driving force behind that success was Mrs Fuller. She was a very good teacher, very strict but fair.

I lost a bit of time during my last year at primary school through illness which included a stay in the Royal Berkshire Hospital to have my appendix removed. In those days, an appendectomy meant a two week stay in hospital followed by a period of convalescence at home.

Another memory that comes to mind was being discharged from the hospital and there was no-one to take me home. A man visiting the hospital overheard my plight and offered to drive me home and the nurse accepted his offer. It turns out he was a greengrocer and he took me home in his van. He was a proud man and told me that he had started out with nothing but saved his pennies till they became shillings and the shillings became pounds. Eventually he bought his first fruit and vegetable barrow - kept saving his pennies - then bought another barrow. Then he bought a van and he planned to buy more. He probably died a very happy and wealthy man.

I doubt such an offer of a lift home from a stranger would be accepted today.

## It's a long way from Coley

The standout memory of my time in 106 Wolseley Street was when my mother and Leonard had the most awful argument. It was in the main living room and they were standing near the sink shouting at each other. Leonard threw something - I forget what it was - at my mother and she in turn picked up a saucepan which had dirty water in it and poured it all over him. I was trying to make myself invisible in the opposite corner of the room, which didn't work, because all of a sudden he turned round, looked straight at me, pointed his finger at me and said, "it's all his bloody fault - if it wasn't for him, we wouldn't be in this mess".

I would have been 6 or 7 at the time and I had no idea what he meant. I got up and ran out of the room as fast as I could. Later that day, I went looking for my mother and found her in her bedroom, with the door locked. I banged on the door and called out to her but she told me to go away and leave her alone. There was a fairly big keyhole in the door and the key wasn't in it and I could vaguely see what I presumed was my mother on the floor. I tried to force the door, but I wasn't strong enough. After a while, I realised that I could smell gas. My mother had turned the gas fire on but hadn't lit it. I tried again to force the door but couldn't.

I found Leonard downstairs in the back garden and told him what was happening and he said he didn't care. I had to beg him to go in and force the door open. In the end, he did, but I do believe that he only did so because he knew that I would say that I had begged him to do so and he had refused. He went upstairs and with one swift kick, forced the door open. He went into the bedroom, turned off the tap, opened the window, turned round, looked at my mother on the floor, and hurled abuse at her before storming out of the room. I just stood there not knowing what to do. Eventually my mother got up, looked at me, and said that she wished I would leave her alone and mind my own business, and then she slapped me across the face before walking out of the room.

## It's a long way from Coley

To this day, I don't blame her for what she said to me and for slapping me because she suffered more than she ever deserved to. I now know that she made a mistake during a difficult time in her life – during the war – and Leonard made her pay for it in spades. He was incapable of being able to forgive and forget. But I have no doubt looking back over my own life how much I was affected by events of that time. The scars were deep and will always be there but thanks to a number of good friendships I have been able to survive.

## Chapter 4

In 1952 I was offered a place at Reading School. Leonard was not happy about it and initially did not want to accept it. I think the thought of having the additional expense of school uniforms bothered him. But my mother and her mother - my grandmother - dug their heels in and won the day. My grandmother paid for my uniforms and sporting equipment.

When the results came out, my teacher at St James - Mrs Fuller - organised a party for the four of us who were going to Reading School. It was at her home in Tilehurst, a suburb in Reading, and her three children, 2 girls about our age, and a slightly younger son, were also there.

I was to visit her home many times after that. Although she never spoke about it, it is clear that she was aware of the problems in my home life. She took a special interest in me and how I was progressing at school and demonstrated a caring attitude to me that I cherished. Many years later, when I was living in Australia, I went back to England on a visit. I decided to call in and see Mrs Fuller – I checked the telephone directory and saw that there was still an entry for Fuller at her address so rather than ring, I thought I would surprise her. I arrived at the house and rang the bell. Her husband Stan opened the door but didn't recognise me. When I asked if his wife was at home, he told me that she had died just a few days before. The poor man looked so sad. I offered my condolences and said goodbye. I drove off and later pulled over and had a good cry.

I was very excited about going to Reading School and was very proud. But it did affect my relationship with some of the local kids who seemed to have a problem with one of their own going to the grammar school. It is my understanding that there had only been one local boy before me who had gone to Reading School.

## It's a long way from Coley

I don't remember when but sometime late in 1953 or thereabouts we moved away from Coley to the Southcote Council housing estate. It was a brand new Council house and one of the two middle houses in a terrace of 4 houses.

The house had a large living room and dining room combined, a kitchen and three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. Being the eldest and at school with lots of homework, I had the third bedroom to myself. It wasn't big enough for two beds anyway. My three younger brothers had the second bedroom.

Life seemed to settle down for a while - a new house, new neighbours, and a new environment and so on. But it didn't last. One day, Leonard came home to say he had been retrenched from his job as a fitter. He used up all his retrenchment money before he even bothered to look for work.

My mother was not a well woman and one year ended up in hospital and underwent major surgery. I don't remember exactly what the surgery was for but I think she had her gall bladder or an ulcer and her appendix removed at the same time. I do recall she had a huge scar that went down from her chest towards her belly button and then round to her right - like a large "J". But I do remember the day she came home from hospital. Her and Leonard's bedroom was separated from my bedroom by the staircase and the walls were not very soundproof. That first night home, Leonard insisted on having sex with my mother despite her pleading with him not to. I heard her crying, begging him to understand.

I would have been about 14 at the time and when I look back on that incident, I wish I had picked up a cricket bat, gone into their bedroom, and whacked him with it. It's probably well that I didn't as that might have been another flashpoint for me and I probably could have killed him. He was an utter bastard.

## It's a long way from Coley

I do remember very clearly that at one stage while living in Southcote that Leonard became "involved" with one of the neighbours whose husband had been badly hurt in an industrial accident and was hospitalised for several months. My recollection is that he was doing some electrical rewiring which in retrospect I find odd because firstly, he wasn't an electrician, and secondly, the house was only a few years old and the council houses of those days were very well built.

Ironically, when my mother finally decided that she had had enough and walked out on Leonard and me and my 3 brothers, she later filed for divorce on the grounds of desertion by mental cruelty, and she won the day. I still have the newspaper clipping.

As soon as I was old enough, I started doing a paper round. The newsagent was Fred Joel who had a shop on the Bath Road, Reading – better known as the A4. I have always been a morning person so getting up early and being in the shop on time was never a problem for me. And I needed the money because pocket money from Leonard was out of the question. Because I was nearly always first in the shop and first out each morning, I was often asked to do a second round when somebody had failed to turn up. This sometimes made me late for school and resulted in a fair amount of teasing. As well as doing the paper rounds, I also worked on Sundays for Fred Joel collecting the paper money from those who had their papers delivered. I would also take a large holdall bag full of cigarettes and tobacco for people to buy. Fred paid me well for this which was very fortunate as by then I was having to buy all my own clothes except for my school clothes. Plus I was a keen bike rider and maintaining a decent bike was just as expensive then as it is today.



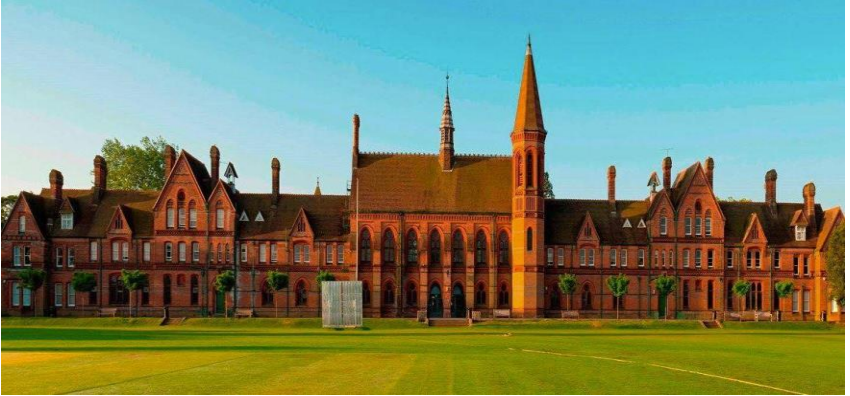
It's a long way from Coley

## Chapter 5

Tuesday 16 September 1952 was the day I started at Reading School with approximately 90 other boys. I look back on my time at that school and acknowledge that it was a life changer for me. I had a natural ability for languages which I probably would never have discovered had I not gone to Reading School. My favourite subjects were French, German and Latin and my favourite masters were the three who taught me those languages. Gwyn "Fanny" Francis taught me French and had the distinction of having played rugby union for Wales, "Fritz" Malpass taught me German and George "Georgie" Vale taught me Latin.



It's a long way from Coley



## Reading School

Reading School is held in high regard across the country. I seem to remember that it was a member of the Headmasters' Conference and although not in the same league as Eton and Harrow, we played cricket and rugby against those schools as well as an annual cricket fixture against an MCC XI.

The school has its share of famous old boys and distinguished scholars and is proud of that and much is made of it by the Old Boys' Association. While it is interesting to read about Major Generals, Bishops and Judges, I do feel that there are many old boys with lesser achievements who deserve recognition but are largely ignored.

For me as a young boy from Coley, Reading School was a great leveller. I mixed with boys from all backgrounds, sons of diplomats, senior clergy, Members of Parliament, Foreign Office officials, etc., as well as boys from ordinary backgrounds like mine. I may have gone to school some days with a hole in my trousers, or holes in my shoes patched up with cardboard inserts from cereal boxes, and I may have sometimes worn school items that had been bought second hand -

## It's a long way from Coley

but I was there, in the same class, on the same sports ground, in the same assembly hall as everyone else. To me, I was their equal.

I loved my time at school but it wasn't easy. My home life was an impediment to serious study. And too often I found myself having to miss school because I had to stay home and either help care for my mother or to look after my brothers. As a young teenager I was able to not only clean the house, but do the washing, ironing and cook a mean roast beef, roast potatoes and Yorkshire pudding. This put me in great stead in later life when I found myself being a Carer again.

I also had a terrible stammer and one of the words that I struggled to utter was my own surname. It wasn't unusual to be mocked by the other boys, but I managed to cope with that. But my worst memory of stammering was when my history teacher – Frank Terry - made fun of me, which was despicable. I was having trouble reading something out in a History class, when the teacher interrupted me and said - "come on Cummings, spit it out". I was humiliated and instead of trying to get the words out, I blurted out clearly "it's alright for the King to stammer". The King at the time was King George VI and he had a terrible stammer. Many years later a film was made of the King and his speech problems called "The King's Speech" starring Geoffrey Rush.

Saying what I said was a mistake. The teacher started to laugh and then said to the class - "Cummings thinks he's like royalty" and everyone joined in the laughter.

If that teacher were still alive today and if I ever met him, he would get some words of wisdom he would rather not hear.

My ambition at school was to go to University and study languages and become a United Nations translator. That wasn't to be as my dysfunctional family situation forced me to leave after 5 years after sitting for my 'O' Levels.

## Chapter 6

I didn't really know what I wanted to do when I left school and somehow I ended up working in the head office of British Rail Western Region above platform 1 on Paddington Station as a sort of cadet manager. I travelled up to London each day so it was a long day. I spent two years working for British Rail and it was during my first year there that I arrived home one evening to discover that my mother had finally had enough and had packed her bags and quit. As I walked in the door, Leonard told me what had happened and asked me whose side was I on. I answered that I certainly wasn't on his side. He gave me my marching orders - one hour to pack what I wanted and never to come back. I left the house with as much as I could pack into two suitcases and as I left, he said - "you're not mine, anyway".

That comment didn't sink in at the time and I took it as a sad ranting of a misguided man whose wife had finally plucked up the courage to leave him.

I found out later that the rest of my possessions - some very precious - were very quickly thrown out.

I stayed with my grandmother for a few days until I managed to find somewhere to stay in London. One of the managers in the office where I worked recommended a lodging house in Ealing Broadway, a short walk from the Ealing Broadway tube station, where he had stayed before he was married and recommended me to the landlady. She had a vacancy and kindly took me in. The cost of the lodging took up most of my weekly wage but it was worth it. It was a small bedsit and I shared a bathroom with the other tenants, but it included breakfast and dinner which was very handy.

I mostly enjoyed my time working at British Rail. There were three of us working as cadets and we got on quite well, although one of the other two was an inveterate practical joker. One of his favourite tricks

## It's a long way from Coley

was to pull the chair away from someone when they were about to sit down. He did this to me on more than one occasion and I repeatedly asked him not to as it was hurting my coccyx. One day he did it again and I hit my flashpoint - for the second time in my life. I hit the floor and I just leapt up and without warning kned him fairly and squarely in his crown jewels. The next day he didn't turn up for work and his mother rang in to say that he was in hospital with testicles the size of a small football. I was hauled up in front of my manager and given a firm dressing down and told that the only reason I wasn't going to be fired was because the guy had confessed to his mother that he had pushed me too far and got what he deserved, and his mother, who I actually knew very well, and fortunately for me, she was very fond of me, passed on her son's comments to our manager.

While I was living in Ealing Broadway, I bought myself a new bike so I could get around at weekends. I decided to get a good quality bike but had to borrow the money to buy it. I don't remember the name of the bike although Claude Butler is a possibility but it was a top brand bike and people often would point to it and say - look - there's a "so and so" bike. One day, the son in law of the lady who ran the lodging house in Ealing Broadway, who was in the insurance field, saw the bike and said I should have it insured and I agreed to meet up with him the following Monday. That weekend I rode the bike to Reading, parked it outside the YMCA and put a chain lock on it. I was only in the YMCA building for a few minutes as I saw someone I knew and said - come and have a look at my new bike. When we got outside it was gone. I remembered that there was a small furniture van nearby when I arrived at the YMCA but it had gone by the time I came back out. I have no doubt it went into the back of that van. I reported it to the police but never saw it again. It isn't fun paying off a loan for something you don't have, especially when you are not earning much in the first place.

## It's a long way from Coley

Eventually I left my job at British Rail and moved back to Reading where I lived with my grandmother for a while until I moved in with an uncle and aunt who ran a lodging house. I had enjoyed working at British Rail but it was never going to be my career.

As a young lad, I always said that I would never be conscripted into National Service and if needs be I would move overseas to avoid it. So it came as a complete surprise to all my friends when I announced that I was joining the Army shortly after it was announced that National Service was to be abolished. It had come to my attention that the Army Intelligence Corps were interested in recruits who wanted to train as linguists. I made enquiries and was told that there was every chance I could become a linguist. BUT there could be no upfront promises. I would have to enlist for a six-year term and undertake the three-month basic training course which included introductions to all forms of Intelligence work.

I decided it was worth the risk as if I succeeded, then it would mean I was getting close to my goal of becoming a translator, and I would put distance between me and my dysfunctional family. Once I was accepted, I had to undergo a security screening test which took three months. While that was happening, I took a couple of short term jobs in Reading, one working for a company that made cement based paint, and the other was in the local Jam Factory.

During this time, I boarded with my aunt and uncle which was convenient but not very enjoyable. My uncle was a long distance lorry driver and certainly knew what was meant by "it fell off the back of a truck". So they were quite comfortably off and because my aunt ran what she considered a small business, they were both a bit up themselves. Other lodgers in her house were always surprised when they discovered I was a nephew as I was treated no differently to anyone else and paid the same weekly tariff that they paid.

## Chapter 7

The day came when I received the letter that I had passed my security clearance and given a date to report to the Intelligence Corps headquarters in Maresfield in Sussex. That was March 1960.

There was a cooling off period - can't remember how long it was - when one could front up to the officer in charge and ask to be released from the military. I came close but decided to persist. The initial basic training of learning how to march and playing with guns – in other words pretending to be a soldier, was pretty boring but I enjoyed doing the various short courses on the various aspects of intelligence work.

My three months training was almost complete and I was beginning to think I wasn't ever going to get the chance to become a linguist when I overheard another soldier saying that there was a notice on the notice board asking for volunteers to learn Chinese Mandarin. I was up to the office like Flynn and there it was - two volunteers wanted to attend a 12 month Chinese Mandarin course at the Joint Services Language School at RAF Tangmere, the former fighter command airbase, just outside Chichester in Sussex.

I put my name on the list and waited to see. I was surprised to find out later that I was the only volunteer so another soldier was shanghaied into going on the course.

As well as doing the basic intelligence training, I was also taught how to fire a rifle, and how to disassemble, clean and reassemble it. I was also taught how to drive. I was taken to a nearby disused airfield and was able to learn the rudiments of driving in a Land Rover without fear of hitting anything or anyone else. Then one day, I was let loose in the middle of Brighton - I was terrified but survived. As well as being taught how to drive, I was also taught how to do an oil change

## It's a long way from Coley

and grease and why it was important to regularly check the tyres, oil and water. I was also taught unarmed combat which I enjoyed because it gave me the sense of maybe being able to defend myself if the occasion ever arose. And I was taught to touch type - well - supposedly. To pass the typing, we had to type a passage within a certain time limit, which wasn't all that hard. Because I had become quite proficient at typing using two fingers on each hand when I was working for British Rail, I bludged a bit on the course knowing I would pass the test anyway. Looking back, I now regret that as I spend a lot of time using a keyboard - I'm not slow, but I would be faster if I were able to touch type.



## RAF Tangmere

I reported to RAF Tangmere in September 1960. There was quite a sizeable language school there teaching Chinese, Russian, Arabic among other languages. There were 12 people on my course, ten Royal Air Force students, myself and the other soldier. What surprised me was that we were only able to apply for the course if we



## It's a long way from Coley

were regular soldiers with a certain amount of time left to serve. It was expected - not unreasonably, that we would complete a three year posting once we finished the course, provided we passed. Yet nine of the ten Air Force students were National Service intake which meant they would only serve 12 months on the job.

When I was studying Chinese Mandarin, we were not allowed to discuss what we would be doing once we were posted to Hong Kong. We were all subjected to the Official Secrets Act and the maximum penalty for disclosing our activities was 14 years' jail. Things have changed since 1960 and it is fairly common knowledge now but I am still reticent to talk about it - just in case. I will say that the civilian equivalent to our organisation was Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) in the UK, Defence Signals Division (DSD) in Australia and the National Security Agency (NSA) in America.

I loved the Mandarin course and did very well. We had a weekly test that we had to pass to continue on so it was quite exacting. Of the 12 students, I was always second - the guy that always came first was a natural and had exceptional hearing when it came to the aural side of it.

I enjoyed my time at RAF Tangmere which was situated in the village of Tangmere just a few miles from Chichester and reasonably close to Brighton, Bognor and Portsmouth. Chichester is an old Roman town full of interesting places.

It's a long way from Coley



The Cross, Chichester, Sussex

It also had plenty of good pubs and coffee shops and other meeting places. If we went into Chichester in the evenings, we usually had to make sure we caught the last bus back around 10.30pm otherwise it was a long walk back to camp especially if one had had a few beers!

I was resting on my bed in the dormitory one night when a couple of guys came into the room all excited. Alan Close and Ian Palmer. They claimed to have been 'picked up' on the bus back to camp by two girls who lived in Berryfield House which was almost opposite the front gate to the camp. The girls invited them in for a coffee and they met the parents - Sheila and Vin Geoghegan. Vin was a doctor and had been a Wing Commander in the Air Force during WW2.

## It's a long way from Coley

The two girls were Deidre who would have been 18 at the time and Patricia - Trish Geoghegan who would have been just 15. I'm not sure quite how it came about but I ended up over at Berryfield House one day. It was the start of a beautiful family friendship. As well as the two girls, there was a younger girl - Julia and two boys - Chris and Michael - always known as Mick. The boys were away at Douai boarding school in Woolhampton, West Berkshire.



Berryfield House

I was always welcome at Berryfield House and the Geoghegans showed me what true family life was. They were a loving family and demonstrated that. This was something that had always been missing from my life. Many years later, when I was back in England on leave, and I was staying with the Geoghegan parents - all the others had either left home or were away at school - they just happened to be

## It's a long way from Coley

moving to a new house. Chris and Mick had rented a van and were busily loading it with furniture when one of them called out to their mother asking where a particular item of furniture was. The reply came back - it's in John's bedroom. The two boys looked at each other and one of the said out loud - that was my bedroom - and this bastard - haven't seen him in years - comes back - and now it's "John's bedroom". We all had a good laugh at that.

Another family I met through the Geoghegans was the O'Donnell family who I had kept in touch with over the years - Anne and Jim. Jim was an anaesthetist in the Army.

I don't think anybody was ever turned away from Berryfield House or hinted at that they should stay away. Sheila and Vin - Sheila especially - seemed to thrive on having young people around them. It wasn't uncommon for Sheila to be in the middle of preparing a Sunday lunch to espy 3 or 4 young men from the camp across the road wandering up the driveway. A few more potatoes and vegetables and the meal fed the extra guys as well.

Sheila did have her favourites and fortunately I was one of them.

It's a long way from Coley



Sheila Geoghegan

## It's a long way from Coley



The Geoghegans circa mid-60s Trish, Deirdre, Vin, Chris, Sheila, Mick  
and Julia

Being in the army and stationed at an air force base had its advantages. There were only two or three of us stationed there so we tended to get left out of any non-language course activities. I remember the time when the camp was practicing for the annual Air Vice Marshall's parade which we were exempted from. It wouldn't have looked right having the occasional khaki uniform among a sea of crab-fat blue uniforms! I was watching one of the rehearsals one day - the camp Warrant Officer was standing in as the Air Vice Marshall and taking the salute as each flight marched past. After one of the

## It's a long way from Coley

flights had marched past the Warrant Officer, one solitary black shoe was left on the ground. After the next flight had marched past, the shoe had disappeared. I don't think the Warrant Officer ever discovered who the perpetrators were!

I acquired my first ever vehicle while at Tangmere. Someone on one of the Russian courses had completed his course and was about to be posted overseas. He had a 1949 Land Rover with a removable hard top which he wanted to sell. He had trouble selling it so at the last minute he dropped his price significantly and I bought it. It was in pretty good nick considering its age and I had a lot of fun with it. If the weather was good, off came the hard top. As I was the only guy on our course with wheels, I became very popular!



My Land Rover

## It's a long way from Coley

The person sitting in the driver's seat is my friend Eric Mival who was also on the Chinese course with me and a friend of his whose name I can't remember

I actually had two cars while at Tangmere, although one didn't belong to me. I was in Reading one weekend and was having a drink at a pub with a few friends when one of them introduced me to a guy I hadn't seen before. I'll call him Charlie although that wasn't his real name. He told me he had lost his licence and needed to go up to London to a party - I can't remember how it transpired, but I ended up driving him up to London - the proviso was that I drove his car and didn't have a drink. He owned a late model red Mark V Jaguar and I discovered on the way to London that he had lost his licence because he had been caught driving over the limit. In fact, he had several convictions for drink driving. In short - he was an alcoholic. I also discovered that he was the son of a well-known atomic scientist and they lived in Virginia Water, a very upmarket part of Surrey. On the way back from London, he made me an offer. If I was prepared to drive him around on weekends, then I could have the car during the week. That way he wouldn't be tempted to drive it. I soon understood why he made the offer because the first time I drove him home I was pulled over by an unmarked police car. Luckily, I was sober and had a legal licence. Charlie said that all the police in the district knew his car well!!

The first time I drove the car back to Tangmere I caused a sensation. Here I was - an army private - and driving the best car in the camp, better than what any of the officers were driving. Didn't go down too well but it didn't bother me as it was all above board.

My popularity stakes rose even higher with the Jaguar.

I had that car for three months by which time Charlie had got his licence back so it was then back to reality and the 1949 Land Rover. But I had a lot of fun with the Jaguar. There was one infamous



## It's a long way from Coley

incident when I was driving down to West Wittering beach and if I recall correctly, you had to drive between two posts to get to the car park.

There were several Geoghegans in the car and one of them commented that the Jaguar was too wide to get between the posts. Nonsense, I said, and drove straight through without slowing down. To this day, the Geoghegans reckon that the posts still have some red paint on them where I clipped the side of the car going through. Utter rubbish, of course.

Looking back on those two cars, I had more success chatting up the birds in my Land Rover than I ever did with the Jaguar!

While I was at Tangmere, I developed terrible stomach pains which absolutely knocked me for six. I would find myself completely doubled over my desk unable to move because of the pain. I reported sick but was told by the Medical Officer that there was nothing wrong with me. He was typical of a lot of military medical officers - not long out of university and granted officer status to become a medical officer. I was ordered to report sick a second time by one of the language instructors - a Sergeant - and was told again that there was nothing wrong with me. When I reported sick a third time, the snotty nosed MO told me that I was nothing but a malingerer and was clearly trying to get out of going to Hong Kong and if I reported sick with stomach pains again, he would put me on a disciplinary charge.

The next weekend I happened to go home to Reading and I decided to ring my former doctor - Dr Taylor - who had been our family doctor for many years. I explained what my problem was with the stomach pains and the attitude of the MO. Dr Taylor asked me when was I scheduled to leave for Hong Kong, and when I replied, "in about two months' time," he said "try and put up with it till then because once you get away from here and your family environment, it will all go away".

## It's a long way from Coley

And he was absolutely right. In all my time in Hong Kong and then in Singapore and Borneo, I knew that I was never going to reside permanently in England again.

Further proof that Dr Taylor was right was when my mother came to live in Australia after her mother, my grandmother, died. She had only been in Melbourne for a few weeks when I became very sick. I developed diarrhoea like I had never known before. It was like passing hot molten lava and it would reduce me to tears each time I went to the toilet. My then GP commented one day that he was seeing too much of me. My response was that I didn't want to see him at all but I had no option. Then I developed massive headaches - always during the evening - and eventually I would be sick and the headache would ease. This happened three nights in a row and on the third night I suffered a massive nosebleed. My wife was so concerned that she rang the GP who came straight out to our house. He thought I was on the verge of having a stroke so arranged for me to be admitted to hospital later that same day. I spent three days in hospital undergoing tests and they could not find anything wrong with me. And I did not suffer any more headaches after the nosebleed. I was discharged after three days with the comment that I should not have been admitted in the first place.

In time my mother could not cope with the hot weather so returned to England and I haven't had any more such attacks of ill health.

Another memory of Tangmere was when one of the other students on our language course – Eric Mival - developed meningitis. He became very ill and was admitted to the hospital in Chichester. Because he also lived in Reading, and because his parents weren't able to visit him on a daily basis, I was asked, along with his girlfriend Andrea, to visit him in hospital each day - he was unconscious for several days and it was thought by the hospital staff that it would be good for him to have friends trying to communicate with him. We had to be gowned up and wear masks and it was a trying time for both

It's a long way from Coley

of us although not as trying as it must have been for Eric, but in time he started to recover and eventually made a full recovery. Sometimes to pass the time we played soccer which was a lot of fun.



Chinese course soccer team



The Wizard!

It's a long way from Coley



And occasionally we had to do guard duty but not very often, thank goodness!

When it came time for me to go to Hong Kong, I didn't leave from Reading - I spent my last day with the Geoghegans at Berryfield House and first thing the next morning I set off for Chichester Station on one of the Geoghegans' bikes with my fully packed kitbag on my back. I left the bike at the station and one of the family collected it later in the day. I then caught the train to London, then on to Gatwick Airport and finally on to a flight to Hong Kong.

It's a long way from Coley

## Chapter 8

### Hong Kong - what a difference from England!!

The unit I joined in Hong Kong - 652 Radio Troop - was situated in Whitfield barracks on Kowloon Road, which was in Kowloon on the mainland, just a short walk from the waterfront where one caught the Star ferry across to the island part of Hong Kong. Our actual place of work was on Mount Tai Mo Shan which was about 1,000 feet above sea level. It was a long, narrow and windy road to the top and the last section was one way only. One had to ring the guard house at the top for permission to enter the one-way section but on more than one occasion we found ourselves fronting another vehicle which meant one vehicle had to reverse back.

The RAF had a radar station on Mount Tai Mo Shan with two huge radar domes and a massive radar scanner. Our unit had a small building which was situated away from the RAF station.



## It's a long way from Coley

I am not going to dwell on my time on Mount Tai Mo Shan but I do have two very vivid memories. Sometimes we were required to work a night shift and usually we did it on our own. Once we were finished for the night, we would set up a camp bed in the middle of the operations room and bed down for the night until the next shift arrived in the morning. One night, I was fast asleep on the camp bed when I woke up suddenly. The neon lights directly above my head were swaying from side to side, very noticeably. I lay there for a while until the lights stopped swaying and pondered to myself that perhaps I had been doing this job for too long and was going round the bend! The next morning, I didn't mention it to the day shift in case they thought I was crackers but then one of the guys said - hey - did you feel the earth tremors last night? There had been a minor earthquake in the colony.

There was another occasion when a couple of us were working the night shift in September 1962 and typhoon Wanda hit Hong Kong. That was scary. In preparation for the typhoon, a thick rope line was set up, firmly fastened to posts between our building and the RAF building where the cook house was so that we could make our way over to have a meal without being blown away!! The morning after typhoon Wanda came through, I was going over to the RAF building when I passed the Land Rover that was parked outside. It apparently contained experimental radar equipment that was being trialled, or something like that, and the vehicle was firmly chained to the ground. This morning, it was minus its bonnet and every skerrick of paint had been removed from the vehicle by the torrential rain.

What was even more amazing was the big radar scanner - I don't remember exactly how big it was only that it was huge and it was both chained and bolted into a large concrete base. The RAF people had named it Amy when it was built and when typhoon Amy came through Hong Kong in 1962, the scanner survived the terrible winds. But typhoon Wanda almost finished Amy off - the next morning we

## It's a long way from Coley

found the scanner on its side and only a single chain had prevented it from disappearing down the mountainside.

Although I enjoyed Hong Kong, the downside for me was that when I was on holiday, I had to take my holidays in Hong Kong because to go anywhere else meant taking a flight out to another country. That was beyond my means as the British Army didn't exactly pay its people very well plus I was on a reduced fortnightly payment anyway as I was paying the mortgage for my mother back in England. So I always stayed in camp and did day trips. Because I was on holiday I was not allowed to eat in the camp canteen so I was given a daily ration allowance. I found eating out in Hong Kong at that time to be reasonably inexpensive and as I had become very fond of curry, I was able to fill myself up with a large curry most days!

A vivid memory of my time in Hong Kong was during 1963 when the colony suffered a drought. The water supply was so low that very strict rationing was enforced and that became gradually more severe as the drought worsened. If my memory serves me rightly, it got to the point where the water supply was only available for four hours every four days so everyone had to store enough water to last them for four days. For those who were not connected to the water supply, such as those who lived in the hillside shacks, they queued up each day at the nearest fire hydrant for an hour each morning and afternoon where they were allowed two buckets of water per person. This was a difficult exercise to police and many fights broke out especially when some poor unfortunate had queued up for an hour or more, collected his two buckets of water, and then someone knocked one of them over.

Of course, in times such as this, the military thrived. Special soap that did not lather when used with saltwater was procured and truckloads of troops were ferried to the beach to wash. When water was available in camp, a junior NCO would be assigned to each shower block for that time. I remember being told when to turn the water

## It's a long way from Coley

on, then given 30 seconds to wet myself, and then being ordered to turn the water off. I would then lather myself and wait to be told when I could turn the water back on again - then I was granted another 30 seconds to rinse myself before being ordered to turn the water off and move out of the shower.

Eventually typhoon Faye hit the colony and the drought was over - literally overnight.

I also remember when typhoon Amy came through - I was looking out across Kowloon Road from the safety of Whitfield Barracks when I spotted a large neon sign travelling horizontally along Kowloon Road - fortunately above head height - very scary.

Before I went to Hong Kong I was susceptible to the occasional bout of tonsillitis - I often wondered why the doctors never took them out. I had two or three bouts of very severe tonsillitis while I was in Hong Kong - so severe that I questioned whether it really was tonsillitis or whether I was suffering from malaria. I would be confined to bed for several days with a raging temperature. But since then I have rarely if ever had tonsillitis and I still have my tonsils!

There is one memory of Hong Kong that I am not proud of. I was friendly with a particular bar owner by the name of Henry, partly because of my knowledge of Mandarin, and also because he had a son studying in Australia. One Chinese New Year he invited me to his New Year's party which he held in his bar - it was closed to the public for the duration of the party. I think I was probably the only non-Chinese person there that night.

The big mistake I made was to drink whiskey instead of beer that night. I ordered a whisky and to my then amusement it came in a beer glass. At some stage I realised that someone had literally topped the glass up - but that didn't bother me as I didn't intend to drink it too quickly. The Chinese have a custom of 干杯 "gānbēi" which means "bottoms up". So if someone calls out another person's name



## It's a long way from Coley

and says "gānbēi" then both raise their glasses and empty them. Not to do so is to lose face. At some stage during the night, Henry stood up, called my name, raised his glass and said "gānbēi". I don't remember how much was in my glass at that moment but I foolishly accepted the toast and slowly emptied my glass to much applause. It was a very stupid thing to do but I wasn't totally stupid because shortly after I decided to go back to barracks which was just as well because no sooner had I got back, when everything went pear shaped. I was violently sick many times and luckily my roommates took control, cleaned me up and put me to bed. They told me the next day that they always thought I was a funny guy but the previous night I had been hilarious!

Towards the end of 1963, I was asked if I would like to go to London and learn Indonesian and then transfer to Singapore. This was because the conflict between Malaysia and Indonesia had erupted - known as Confrontation or "Konfrontasi".

I was quite happy with what I was doing in Hong Kong and still had about nine months left of my 3 year posting, so I asked why they had approached me. The answer was that they were training 6 people in Indonesian and thought it might be a good idea if one of them also had a knowledge of Mandarin.

So off I went to London just before Christmas to attend a 5 week Indonesian language course with 5 other Intelligence Corps guys plus 3 sailors. Yes - 5 weeks!

## Chapter 9

I had learnt French, German and Latin at school plus Chinese Mandarin with the military and did not believe that it was possible to gain a sufficiently working knowledge of Indonesian in 5 weeks. But I was wrong.

Firstly, I discovered that Indonesian - like Mandarin - didn't have the complex syntax structure that the European languages have. Conjugations, declensions and all that sort of thing. People often ask why it is that the new Chinese immigrants speak English in a funny way. My explanation is that they are not talking funny - they are speaking English like they speak Chinese.

For example, I would say that "yesterday I bought a book", and "today I am buying a book" and "tomorrow I will buy a book" - three different forms of the verb. The Chinese don't decline the verb so they say "yesterday I buy book, today I buy book and tomorrow I buy book. And if there is any confusion as to the tense, the Chinese add a suffix at the end of the sentence which indicates whether it is past, present or future. Made a lot of sense to me.

The person who taught us Indonesian was an Indonesia national and I think he was in the UK on some sort of diplomatic posting which I found surprising seeing as the Brits were on the side of the Malays in the Confrontation conflict.

He started off by telling us that once he got to a certain point, he would only speak English when he had to. For example - the Indonesian word for table is "meja" and he would point to a table and say meja. Then he would point to two tables and say meja meja. Then he would point to one of us and say "orang" which means person, then point to two people and say orang orang so we learned from that simple exercise that Indonesians express the plural by doubling the word.

## It's a long way from Coley

The five weeks was pretty full on but we did learn a lot in that time. I was very impressed with the instructor.

I needed somewhere to stay while I was in London and one of the Geoghegans reminded me of one of their friends that I had met some years before. He was a medical student studying at the Middlesex Hospital in London and it was suggested I give him a call, which I did. The student's name was Michael O'Kane - Mike - and he said that he couldn't offer me a bed but I could kip down in the corner of their living room with a sleeping bag.

The house wasn't very far from where I was studying Indonesian so it turned out to be a good move. There were four students sharing the house, all medical students. And boy, could they drink.

I have a couple of good memories of that time. One was when they had all gone down to somewhere in Kent to a 21st birthday party. I was fast asleep on the floor in the corner when they came home in the early hours of the morning. They were a little noisy so sleep was impossible. I recall one of the guys asking the medical student who had driven the car - Roy - why it was that he went through several red lights and then stopped at a green light. Roy's answer was you never knew when someone coming from the left or the right was running a red light.

Another day I was out with Mike in his car when we were near the Tottenham Court Road Police Station. Mike drove a Ford Prefect which was always needing his expert attention to keep on the road. Mike had noticed an abandoned Ford Prefect, same model as his car, somewhere along Tottenham Court Road. It had a wheel missing and the number plates and registration details had been removed. We went into the police station and spoke to the officer behind the desk. Mike referred to the abandoned car which the officer was fully aware of. Mike suggested he might do everyone a favour if he towed it

## It's a long way from Coley

away. The officer stated very clearly that Mike would be breaking the law if he did so. But we felt he said it with a smile on his face.

A few days later we drove back to the Tottenham Court Road - the abandoned car was still there. Mike took the spare wheel from his car and put it on the abandoned car and then attached a tow rope. Mike drove his car and I steered and used the brakes on the abandoned car and it was taken to the Middlesex Hospital car park where over time it was stripped of any useful parts and the rest taken away to the nearest dump.

Yes, we did steal a car but I think we did the local community a favour.

One weekend, Roy lent me his Ford Popular for a trip to Reading. I had just got there when while changing gear - a long metal gear stick - the gear stick came away in my hand! How was I to get back to London? Fortunately, I was able to lodge the gears in third gear and with careful clutch management was able to start the car off. I drove all the way to London in third gear, very slowly and very carefully. I apologised to Roy but he didn't seem to mind and in no time the car had a new gear stick

On completion of the Indonesian course, I then went to Singapore and you would expect that I would have gone straight to work, but no - the nine of us were posted to the language school at Nee Soon barracks to attend another five-week course starting from scratch!

It's a long way from Coley

## Chapter 10

Obviously, we completed the second five week course with a better knowledge of Indonesian because we had already spent five weeks learning the language in London. Apparently somebody wanted to assess both teaching techniques to see which method was the best. We all thought the London course was by far the best but as far as I know all future courses were run at Nee Soon! Only the British military could do this.

After we completed the second five-week course, I was posted to Amoy Quee, a joint Australian and British camp on the Yio Chu Kang Road.



View of the main entrance to Amoy Quee

It's a long way from Coley



### “Bootsie”

I remember Bootsie – he did all our “dhobi” for a modest fee – washed and ironed our uniforms and cleaned our boots and shoes. We all liked him but a few people gave him a hard time but he took it all in his stride, always had a smile on his face.

My actual place of work (CK2) was a very convivial environment and comprised people from the Army, Air Force and Navy as well as civilians from Defence Signals Division Melbourne (DSD) and from the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) in England. There were also a few American and New Zealand civilians. I spent nearly three years working there except for three by three month postings to Kuching in Sarawak and one by three months posting to the island of Labuan which is just off the coast of Brunei. Both Kuching and Labuan were active service postings.

## It's a long way from Coley

At CK2 I was part of a team consisting of two DSD civilians, one Australian Army Officer, Warrant Officer and Corporal, and a British Army Officer. When I arrived there, I was a corporal and later promoted to Sergeant. Because of my Hong Kong experience, I found myself being sort of the de facto team leader although I was the junior in rank. This worked well most of the time but I had to be careful.

I had very little to do with the British Army in Singapore and for all intent and purposes, I was technically seconded to the Australians. I loved working in this environment as I found the Australians to be a lot less formal than the Brits. Most of the Australian military addressed each other by Christian name rather than by rank which I found very enlightening.

There was the time when the Australian Army Officer in our team approached me and suggested that I did not need to address him as "sir" and that I should address him by his Christian name. That was totally fine by me but a few days later, the British Army Captain took me aside and said that I was not to call the Australian Army Officer by his Christian name. I explained to the British Captain that the Australian Officer specifically asked me to use his Christian name, to which the British Captain responded saying – "I don't care - it is an insult to the Queen's commission to not address an officer correctly".

I passed this on to the Australian Officer later and he just smiled and said that was ok but it was Christian names when we were out socialising.

I had been in Singapore less than a year when I was told that I had to return to England for a three months' break. When I argued that I didn't want to go back, I was told that the rules stated that personnel could not serve more than three years in a tropical posting without having a break back in the UK. My time in Hong Kong and Singapore had exceeded three years. The fact that I had spent approximately seven weeks back in England while studying Indonesian didn't count!

## It's a long way from Coley

So off I went -very reluctantly - to spend the next three months in England. When I reported for duty at the Intelligence Corps Headquarters in Maresfield in Sussex, they didn't know what to do with me so told me to clear off and look after myself. So I had a three month holiday.

I don't what it is about me and people who lose their driving licences, but one day while I was having a quiet beer and a chat with my favourite publican, a guy walked in and ordered a drink. He was well known to the publican and I was introduced to him. We started chatting, as you do, and he asked me what I did. When I said I was on a three-month vacation, he said that he was an insurance broker and had recently lost his licence for three months. You guessed it - I ended up being a part time chauffeur for him. He didn't need my services every day and he let me have one of his two cars when I wasn't driving him around. Another bonus was if I drove him to a lunch appointment, he always shouted me lunch. This arrangement worked out very well for both of us.

One time when the insurance broker didn't need me for a few days, for some reason I suddenly became very depressed and I now know, looking back, that it had something to do with being back in my family environment. I was driving along near where I had lived on the Southcote Estate when I suddenly felt very suicidal. I stopped the car and just sat there and thought about it for a long time. Then I drove to the nearest telephone booth and rang Sheila and Vin Geoghegan in Chichester and asked them if I could come and visit for a few days. Their reply was that I was always welcome but at that particular moment there no children at home. They were all either away at school, University or working.

I said that I didn't want to see any of the children but I wanted to see them so off I went to Chichester. They no longer lived in Berryfield House in Tangmere but in a semidetached house in Chichester.



## It's a long way from Coley

I spent nearly a week with them and we talked a lot. Actually I think I did most of the talking and they did what I probably needed most - they listened to me. As well as talking, I took it out on the front garden. Their front garden was a total mess but when I left to go back to Reading it was a garden they could be proud of.

In time my three months passed and I returned to Singapore.

On arrival in Singapore, I was picked up at the airport by Frank Wheeler, one of the British Royal Signals guys. The unit didn't have a driver as such so whenever anyone needed to be transported somewhere, volunteers were called for. There was never a shortage of volunteers.

On the way back to camp, Frank brought me up to date with the local gossip. When I asked him if there were any new people working at CK2, he said there had been a few including two Australian civilian lesbians from DSD in Melbourne. Poor Frank - he was our very own Don Giovanni and was convinced that two females sharing a flat had to be lesbians. Both young ladies eventually married and both were happy marriages - and I married one of them. That lady was Patricia Breen who was on an eighteen-month civilian posting from DSD in Melbourne.

It's a long way from Coley



As I mentioned earlier, during my two stints in Singapore I was posted to Kuching in Sarawak three times and to Labuan on one occasion. All were three month postings and were classified as being on active service. So I have a solitary General Service Medal - GSM with Borneo on the clasp. Our operation in Kuching was under British control.

In Kuching I was based at Camp Sembawang which was occupied mainly by the British Infantry unit - the Green Jackets. Back then, Kuching was unspoilt but the presence of so many British and other troops was going to change the face of Kuching forever. We were located at the end of a longhouse.

It's a long way from Coley



Typical longhouse

It's a long way from Coley



### The longhouse where I lived and worked

The end room was where we worked and the next two rooms were where we slept. It was fairly primitive. We had beds and mosquito nets but very little furniture. The ceilings of the rooms were the homes of the little geckos or chit-chats as we called them so tiny bits of gecko pooh would drop down from time to time. So whenever parachutes were damaged and therefore no longer usable, people would grab them and use them to line the insides of the roofs and walls.

It's a long way from Coley



Typical “sleeping area” – no, it isn’t me!

The shower block only had cold water so we had to shower and shave in cold water.

It's a long way from Coley



5 star ablutions block

And I ate my meals in a mess tin with only a fork and a spoon for most of the time.



Dining Hall or The Mess!



## It's a long way from Coley

A lot of the furniture we had we made ourselves from timber we found around the place. I do remember one day going into the local township to try and find some paint. The first shop I tried didn't sell paint but the shop owner left his shop unattended and took me along the street to where I could buy some paint.

Unfortunately, as with earlier periods of my life, my memory of Kuching is a lot less than I would like it to be. But there are a few memories that will always be with me.

The remainder of the longhouse we were in was occupied by the Green Jackets who regularly went out on patrol in the jungle along the Kalimantan - Indonesian border. They used local Iban and Dayak people as trackers - these people were head-hunters. One day one of the Green Jacket soldiers showed me a photo he had taken of the trackers playing soccer on a makeshift ground. In place of the football was the head of an Indonesian soldier - gruesome.



Iban trackers

It's a long way from Coley



### Dayak trophies at the head-hunter's shrine in Kuching

Another day I was sitting outside our room reading when the guys came back from patrol. They were all unusually quiet which was not like them so clearly something was up. Later, one of them came out and told us that they had lost Ozzie - he was an Australian who had gone to England and joined the Green Jackets and while out on patrol had been shot dead by an Indonesian soldier.

Because we were on active service, we had to take a rifle with us to Kuching. Thank God I never had to use it. On my last trip to Kuching, I was asked to take a "safe hand-bag" with me. This was strapped to



## It's a long way from Coley

my wrist and I could not remove it. Most inconvenient. We flew to Kuching in an RAF Beverley - big pot-bellied aircraft that were able to transport large equipment such as tanks. There were no proper seats and we always sat in the top part of the plane in sling type seats along the sides of the Beverley. It was a four engine propeller aircraft and the story went that they could fly on only one engine if necessary. When I was in Singapore, our camp at Amoy Quee was very close to the RAF base at Seletar and it was very common to hear the RAF pilots doing night training exercises in the Beverleys where they would come into land and then as soon as they touched down, they would take off again. I think it was called "circuits and bumps". On this last visit to Kuching, we encountered engine problems and although I am not totally convinced, we were told that we were flying on only one engine. As we landed, fire engines were racing alongside both sides of the Beverley spraying the wings and engines with foam.



We landed safely but it appears that there were still some concerns so they didn't bother wheeling out the exit steps. As I stood at the exit door, with a kit bag in one hand, a rifle over my shoulder, and the damn "safe hand-bag" in my other hand, the RAF guy in charge told me to jump - when I said I couldn't he gave me a gentle push. I hit the

## It's a long way from Coley

ground on both feet so hard and the pain that went up into my groin was so strong, I was convinced that I would never father children. Fortunately, that wasn't to be the case. News that the incoming Beverley was apparently in trouble had spread and quite a few people had gathered at the airport to see it come in. As I was walking out of the airport building, I passed a couple of guys and overheard one of them say - "it was a waste of time coming out - nothing happened". I decided against saying anything but gave them a filthy look.

If I have problems remembering my time in Kuching, it was even worse for my one and only three months posting to Labuan. I remember that we were not in any camp but worked out of a house and it was run by the Australians. I really only have the one memory of that time.



## It's a long way from Coley

One day, I was going outside the house and there were trestle tables set up in the garden and food and drinks laid out. We had some visitors including at least one senior civilian from Defence Signals Division in Melbourne. When I asked what was happening, I was told it was Melbourne Cup Day so they were having the day off. I was stunned. Having the day off? For a bloody horse race? Didn't these guys know they were on active service? Had anyone told the Indonesians? That was when I started to think that maybe Australia might be a good place to live.

When not on active service and back in Singapore, life outside of work basically involved having a few beers with the lads in downtown Singapore and of course the infamous Bugis Street. That decreased markedly when I started to become friendly with Patricia Breen.

I took Patricia rather by surprise as she had reconciled herself to being a career girl in a job that she absolutely loved and boyfriends and marriage were just not on her radar at that time. Chatting her up at work was never an option so one day I rang her at her flat in Newton Mansions in Gilstead Road to invite her out for a drink, but the phone rang out. I tried several times to no avail. The next day at work, I quietly mentioned to her that I had tried to ring her and she went red in the face and said she was sorry. She had been at an Australian Embassy function a few days earlier and some guy there took an interest in her and asked for her phone number - and she thought it was him ringing so she hid in the toilet till it stopped!

It was an eventful courtship and I often wonder how I eventually ended up marrying her. Most weekends we would do something or go somewhere. Sometimes we would hire a car and drive over the causeway at Johore Baru into Malaysia. We had some good times but it all came a little unstuck when I asked her if she would marry me. This completely threw her and she suffered a minor breakdown so in the end, I suggested we leave it be for a while. Once the pressure was

## It's a long way from Coley

off, she became ok again and some months later I tried again - with the same result. That was why I ended up in Labuan. I thought it might be a good idea to give her complete space as not only were we seeing each other most evenings and weekends, but we sat next to each other at work.

I approached the guy in charge where we worked and asked him if he could fix me up with a stint in Kuching. He looked at me for a while and then said that people only volunteered to go to Borneo once - to get the active service medal which for the Australians entitled them to greatly reduced home mortgage loans. As I had already been there three times, he wanted to know why I wanted to go back. He was a top bloke - a Defence Signals Division civilian by the name of Bill Packer, and I knew both he and his wife were very fond of Patricia, so I told him the story. He said that he couldn't swing a visit to Kuching but could get me to Labuan so it wasn't long before I was on my way there.

The break clearly did Patricia the world of good and although we discussed our possible future, we never talked about actually getting married. As she was getting close to the end of her posting, I discussed the possibility of leaving the Army early and following her to Melbourne. I still had a couple of years to serve but the British Army has a process called "discharge by purchase" where one pays an amount to the Military in return for early discharge. When I received the details of what the cost was plus the cost of getting to Melbourne, I realised that I didn't have sufficient funds. Luckily, Patricia offered to lend me the money which bode well for the future.

So I set about getting my early discharge and arranging my entry into Australia. By this time Patricia had returned to Melbourne. As part of my entry to Australia, I had to have a sponsor, and a job. Fortunately, Bill Packer recommended me to Defence Signals Division in Melbourne and they responded and offered me a job. Then Patricia's former flat mate in Singapore, Jane (Judy) Moorhouse,

## It's a long way from Coley

offered to help and wrote to her parents asking if they would sponsor me. Her father was a well-known academic and he and his wife agreed to sponsor me. So all was done - I just had to wait for the military paperwork to be completed.

Despite the fact that Patricia and I were still very good friends, and she had loaned me the money for me to get an early discharge from the army, I clearly understood that there was no guarantee that she would eventually agree to marry me. But I had made my mind up - life in Australia, married or not to Patricia, had to be a lot better than returning to my family environment in England.

Before I leave my time in Singapore, there are some memories that I would like to share.

At some stage of my time in Singapore, I was the only Brit in the Sergeants' Mess which made for an interesting time. I like to think that I gave as good as I got. There wasn't a television in the Mess so during the Australian Rules Football season, the Aussies used to listen to the games on short wave radio - probably the ABC overseas service. These guys would get quite animated at times, especially when they had a few Fosters' beers inside them. As I had no knowledge of the game, and had never seen it played, I couldn't understand what all the excitement was about.

One day they decided to try and explain the game to me. We play with an oval ball, I was told. Like rugby I said. No was the reply - different shape and better than rugby. The game is played on an oval ground, they said. Oval? was my reply - who plays football on an oval? - that's cricket. Be quiet, I was told. At each end, there are goalposts, they said. I was trying to imagine an oval with ends but I kept that to myself. There are 4 goal posts, they said - 2 main posts with 2 shorter posts each side, and if the ball was kicked between the two centre posts, it was a goal or 6 points. Why 6 points I asked. Shut up and listen was the reply.

## It's a long way from Coley

If the ball went between the outer posts, then that was a "behind" and was worth 1 point. Behind what I asked - and - you mean to say that a player can still miss a goal and be rewarded with a point. They were getting a bit tired of me by this stage.

But in time I managed to sort of understand and be able to visualise this silly game.

The next day I told Patricia that I needed a team to support as everyone else in the Mess had their favourite team. Patricia told me she barracked for St Kilda - not one of the more successful sides - in fact - they had never won a Grand Final, but they were her team.

So I became a St Kilda supporter. The year was 1966 and there I was barracking for a team I didn't know in a game I had never seen played and they won the Grand Final by one point with the last kick of the game. And the guy who scored that point was Barry Breen - no relation to Patricia!!

Once the Australians in the Mess realised that I was serious in wanting to go to Australia and intended to marry Patricia, they started to educate me. They would select certain essential phrases - at least they thought they were essential and would ask me to repeat them. Repeat after me, they would say - things are crook at Tallarook - and I would oblige - usually sending the guys into fits of hysteria.

Eventually my discharge came through, and I got my acceptance from Australia as a sponsored migrant. The night before I left Singapore, I had a few drinks in the Sergeants' Mess and at a sensible time retired to my room as my flight to Australia was at some disgustingly early time.

I hadn't been in bed long, before the door to my room opened and two burly, jovial and tipsy Australian Sergeants stood in the doorway grinning at me. I had visions of perhaps ending up over the balcony! Look guys, I said - I've a plane to catch in a few hours and I need some sleep. One of them looked at the other and said - all this education

It's a long way from Coley

we've given him and he still talks like a Pom. I thought about that for a few seconds and then said - ok guys, you've had your fun, I need my kip so f\*\*k off.

"That's better" was the reply and they turned round, left my room and closed the door behind them.

## Chapter 11

My first port of call was Darwin in the Northern Territory – it was very hot and humid, seemed worse than Singapore! My initial reaction was - what had I let myself in for? It was only a short stop over and off we went to Sydney - that seemed much better and when I finally touched down in Melbourne, I was very happy. That was November 1966.

When Defence Signals Division offered me a job, they told me that my English educational passes did not qualify me for a position in the Public Service Third Division so I would be appointed to a position in the Fourth Division, unless I sat and passed any one Victorian Leaving subject. I picked Commercial Law and Principles and studied it by correspondence in Singapore and I sat for the exam the day after I arrived in Melbourne.

I had to make my way to the Melbourne Exhibition Building in Carlton to sit this exam and I remember this huge hall with hundreds of desks and chairs in it for people to sit their exams. I did the exam and duly passed.

While I was sitting the exam, I noticed a young man sporting a bright red beard and wearing glasses walking up and down the aisles watching the examinees as they wrote. Apparently he was a "bulldog" and the task of a bulldog is to make sure the students don't cheat. As this young guy walked up and down, it occurred to me that he looked very much like Patricia's younger brother Jim who, naturally, I had never met but had seen photos of. After the exam was over, I walked up to this young man and asked him if he was Jim Breen. He looked at me for a moment and then said he was. When I told him I was John Cummings, he looked stunned and all he could do was to blurt out - "but you're English!"



## It's a long way from Coley

When I set out that morning for the Exhibition Building, the weather forecast was for a very hot day so I dressed accordingly in shorts, short sleeve shirt, short socks, etc. By the time I came out of the Exhibition Building there had been a cool change and I froze all the back to where I was staying.

Jane's parents made me very welcome at their home which was a lovely old house directly opposite the Cabrini Hospital in Malvern. Jane's parents were most accommodating. Jane's father was a retired Professor from Melbourne University and was a talented painter and most accomplished wine buff. I had rarely drunk wine before then, just beer and spirits. In the military, one didn't drink wine!!

So the Professor would open a bottle of wine with dinner each evening and would explain to me where it came from, what sort of wine it was and what he thought of it. I think that a lot of what he said went straight over my head but some of it must have stuck because although I am not a wine buff myself now, I do appreciate and enjoy good wine.

I stayed with the Moorhouse family for about a month until I was able to afford and find a flat to move into. My first flat was in Alma Road in St Kilda, walking distance to the Defence Signals Division offices which in those days was in Albert Park Barracks and which was very handy as I could not afford a car at that stage.

I started work at DSD straightaway and renewed my friendship with Patricia who was working in the same section as me. After a few weeks I raised the prospect of getting married again and she consented so I persuaded her that we should announce our engagement immediately and arrange to get married as soon as possible before she started to get the nervous nellys again. Unfortunately, she did suffer some anxiety over it but was able to cope with the aid of a good doctor and appropriate medication. We set the wedding date for May 1967.

## It's a long way from Coley

Despite studying for the requisite Victorian Leaving certificate subject and sitting and passing the exam that was supposed to qualify me for a Third Division position, I was told on my first day at work that they had made a mistake and they could only offer me a Fourth Division position. I had no choice but to accept their offer. But as I settled into my new job, I soon came to realise how much less I was being paid compared with the other people in our team yet I was doing the same work and in some cases, supervising these people. I put up with it for a while until one day, the leader of our group took some holidays and I was asked to stand in for him while he was away. I was informed that if I had been a Third Division appointee, then I would have been eligible for higher duties allowance while I was standing in for the team leader, but as I was a Fourth Division employee, that was not possible.

That basically got right up my nose and I decided there and then that I would start looking for another job, one that would pay me more money as I was still hoping to marry Patricia. But what to do - basically I was a translator and those sorts of jobs were few and far between and didn't pay very well. I browsed through the employment section in the Saturday newspapers and one day I saw an ad for a retail sales representative for Avery Scales, and I thought - I can do that. So I applied for the position.

I was granted an interview but it was an interview with a difference. I was told to be at a particular hotel in Melbourne- the Chevron Hotel in St Kilda Road - at a specific day and time in the evening and that I would be given dinner. When I got there, I discovered I was not alone. In all, there must have been about twenty people present. We were ushered into a room and the staff from Avery Scales gave presentations on how the company operated and what they expected of the sales force and how the sales reps were rewarded. Then dinner arrived and we all enjoyed a rather pleasant meal. Then came the surprise. Each person had to stand up and give a five-minute talk on

## It's a long way from Coley

any subject they liked. I later found out that they did this because they believed that a salesperson must be always able to initiate a conversation with someone else at the drop of a hat. Makes me wonder why they didn't simply hire women!!

I was surprised at how many of the people in the room struggled to talk for the five minutes. When my turn came, I had no problems at all and talked about why I thought learning Chinese was easier than learning European languages - by that I meant learning to speak it, not write it.

They hired two people and I was one of them. So in January 1967 I duly resigned from DSD and joined Avery Scales. The basic pay wasn't fantastic but if I were able to meet the monthly quotas that they expected of their representatives, then the basic pay plus commissions were quite good. And of course the job came with a car. They gave me a 1966 EH Holden station wagon. It was only a few months old and was in good condition. For the first time since I joined the army Intelligence Corps in 1960, I was able to talk about what I did for a living.

After a period of training plus working with a senior sales manager for a couple of weeks, I was let loose. Each sales representative had to spend three weeks in an allocated section of Melbourne plus one week in the country each month. By this stage, Patricia and I were getting close to our wedding day. When the Avery sales manager heard that I was planning to marry a girl from Bright, which is a beautiful small country town in northeast Victoria, located in a valley and surrounded by several mountains that were excellent skiing locations, he allocated me the northeast part of the State. This meant that one week in each month I would try my luck in the country areas northeast of Melbourne. This worked out very well as Patricia would catch the train to Wangaratta after work on the Friday of that week, and I always made sure that my work schedule was such that I always ended up in Wangaratta by the Friday lunchtime. Then I would pick

## It's a long way from Coley

Patricia up from the station in the evening and we would go and stay with her parents in Bright for the weekend.

I had another reason for making sure I was near Wangaratta by the Friday afternoon. I used to like to go to Bailey's vineyard at Taminick near Glen Rowan - Ned Kelly country - and stock up on wine. I remember one day, Mr Bailey senior noticed the scales in the back of my station wagon and asked me if I had a scale for him to weigh carrots. I started off on my well-rehearsed spiel about suitable weighing machines for greengrocers. He let me go on for a while and then broke into a broad grin - no, not those sorts of carrots, he said - carats - as in gold. He had taken me for a ride! He was a good guy - he had a good laugh at my expense and then took me inside for a drink.

Being still very new to Australia, I enjoyed working the country patch and met some very interesting people. My task in getting these country people to accept me was made easier by the fact that my predecessor in the region was terribly English and proud of it which went down like a lead balloon with these nice country people. One amused butcher once told me that my predecessor didn't say "fillet steak" but "fee-ay steak". Although I was from England, I didn't have an obvious accent like my mother, father and brothers had. Nor was it West Country, or Yorkshire, etc. It was non-descript helped by the fact that I had been a translator and of course because I had spent quite a long time with Australians in Hong Kong and Singapore.

I remember ringing Patricia one night when I was away and I thought I would put on an Australian accent and to my surprise, she said - hello Uncle Joe - so nice to hear from you! She said something I won't repeat when she realised it was me, not Uncle Joe. I tried it again the next time I rang her when I was away but it never worked again.

## It's a long way from Coley

One unforgettable memory of my time selling Avery equipment in my country territory was when I had one of the first digital scales that Avery Scales had produced - it was aimed at the butchers - was very accurate but very expensive. I couldn't see myself selling one of these to a country butcher. Well - I was quite wrong there!

My last call for that particular day was a cold call on a butcher in Albury by the name of Rupert, or Rupe as he was known. I was met with the usual indifference awarded to sales reps who wander into a shop trying to persuade the owner to part with a share of his profits in order to upgrade his equipment to something he firmly believed he didn't need. I asked him if I could show him the new butcher's scale and he reluctantly agreed. It was very heavy so he had to help me carry it into the shop. After I went through my presentation, he said that it was a very nice scale, but couldn't justify upgrading to it. So he helped me carry it back out to my station wagon.

By this stage of the afternoon, Rupert was ready to close for the day and asked me if I fancied a beer at his local pub nearby. I thought - why not - and off we went. Several hours later - and many beers and a counter tea as well - and lots of discussions on the merits of weighing equipment, Rupert said to me - ok - let's put this newfangled scale of yours back on my counter and I'll give it a test tomorrow. Which we did - with difficulty. I then had to drive back to the motel where I was staying in Wangaratta which was a good half hour's drive away - I wouldn't do it today but I had no choice then. The next morning, I woke with a serious hangover but had no choice but to get up early and keep a couple of local appointments. After that, I went back to Albury to see how Rupert was going with his new scale.

When I walked into his shop, he greeted me politely and said he would be with me as soon as he had tended to his customers. When the shop was empty of customers, I said to Rupert that I had come to take the scale back. He looked at me and asked - "why?" "Because I got it in here under false pretences", I said. "We were both pissed

last night when we carried it in here". He looked at me and said - you might have been pissed but I wasn't. The scale is staying. We went into the back of the shop and duly completed the necessary paperwork. Was my boss happy when I got back to Melbourne!

The date for our wedding was rapidly approaching but I was still not totally convinced that it would happen. But I had Patricia's parents on my side as they had taken to me and were determined to make sure all went well on the day. The first time I went to Bright to meet my prospective in-laws and other family members, I knew that I was marrying into a good family. The Breen house was on the main road leading into the town centre and backed on to the Ovens River. On that first visit, Patricia's father Patrick - or Paddy as he was better known, asked me if I liked to fish. I said that I used to fish quite a bit when I was a boy but hadn't fished for quite a few years. He said that if I wanted go fishing, early morning was the best time and he took me out the back and showed me where the fishing rods were, then took a spade and stuck it into some soft earth and told me that I could find worms there.

I sensed that this was a challenge so the next morning I duly got up early, dug and found some worms and set off down the back garden towards the river, a river that had some trout but also plenty of redfin. To my amazement and probably good fortune, I managed to catch a decent size trout. Everyone was up and about by the time I got back to the house and I was able to show off my catch. Paddy took it from me, cut the head off and then cleaned and gutted it, and gave it to his wife - my future mother-in-law - Nellie and she pan fried it with a little bit of sherry and I had it for my breakfast. I thought to myself afterwards - I can take this sort of life!

Patricia was the eldest of five children. She started school at Bright but was clearly a gifted student so her parents Paddy and Nelle sent her to Melbourne to complete her schooling at MacRobertson Girls High, still today regarded as one of the best girls' schools in

## It's a long way from Coley

Melbourne. During that time, she stayed at St Anne's Catholic girl's hostel in Carlton. She then went to Melbourne University on an Education Department scholarship where she obtained a BA (Hons) degree. Because of the Education Department scholarship, Patricia was honour bound to teach for three years and she taught first at Benalla High in country Victoria and then at her old school, MacRobertson Girls High.

Friends who knew her at the time and who were also teachers tell me that Patricia was a very good teacher but she hated teaching. Not so much the imparting of knowledge but she hated the classroom discipline - she felt she wasn't strong enough to manage children in a classroom. So as soon as the three years were up, she resigned and joined the Defence Signals Division as a research officer.

Out of sheer interest, she did a course in Indonesian at Melbourne University after which she travelled to Indonesia for a holiday with a student group. Because she could speak Indonesian, Defence Signals Division sent her to Singapore in 1965 on an 18 month posting. Which is how we came to meet.

The day of the wedding 21 May 1967 - eventually arrived and the night before, Nellie said to me - don't worry, she's all right - meaning Patricia. We were married in the local Catholic Church - Our Lady of the Snows. A very apt name for the church. All went well and afterwards we set off for a short honeymoon in Gippsland and Philip Island.

It's a long way from Coley



When Patricia went back to work, she dropped in to see the Security Officer to get a new security pass. When he asked why, she told him she had just got married. He nearly had a fit! "Who did you marry?" he asked. "John Cummings" she replied. "Thank God" said the Security Officer - "you do realise that you were supposed to let us know you were planning to get married because you might have been



## It's a long way from Coley

marrying someone we regarded as a security risk which could have cost you your job"!

Just prior to getting married, I had moved out of the small flat in Alma Road, St Kilda into a better one-bedroom apartment in Ormond, a suburb of Melbourne. It was there that we started our married life.

Patricia became pregnant almost immediately and this caused some amusement and comment among her work colleagues because as the pregnancy advanced, she developed acute oedema - she blossomed and looked as though she was carrying twins at least! When she told people that she wasn't expecting twins, they started to suspect that the reason we seemed to get married so quickly was because she had to. As it happens, the baby was born ten months after our wedding and Patricia's gynaecologist reckoned he was three weeks overdue, and because of that, and because Patricia had a narrow pelvic passage, which the doctor didn't know about at that time, the baby suddenly became distressed and an emergency caesarean section had to be performed.

We didn't know the sex of the baby before the birth so had decided on Patrick if it was a boy and Ruth if it was a girl. Several family members, including, a recalcitrant Scottish aunt who was in fact a lovely woman, made it clear that if we chose Patrick as a boy's name, they would call him Paddy. This didn't please me as I am not a fan of names being either shortened or mucked around with.

Patrick arrived in this world 3 weeks late on St Patrick's Day so I said to the Scottish aunt - there you go, he hung on so he could be born on St Patrick's Day so you are going to have to call him Patrick.

Ironically - 52 years on - all Patrick's friends call him Paddy and he also refers to himself as Paddy.

## Chapter 12

Our one-bedroom apartment was not going to suit having a baby in it so we rented a three-bedroom house just a few streets away in the same suburb, and it was there we took Patrick home after he and Patricia were discharged from hospital. That was in March 1968 - the year we had a terrible flea plague in Melbourne because of the recent drought. We had a cat called Millie - short for "thoroughly modern Millie" and she jumped up on the bed the day after we took Patrick home, presumably to have a look at this 'being' who had usurped her pride of place in the family. We shooed her away and before we knew it, the bed was covered in fleas. I quickly deposited Millie outside in the garden while Patricia took Patrick to the bathroom to make sure there were no fleas on him. Then we sprayed the bedroom, and then rang the pest control people and booked them to come out as soon as possible to de-flea the whole house.

I then rang the Vet and told him what had happened and he said that I had no choice but to purchase a particular animal wash solution, fill a bucket with warm water, add the wash solution, and then get hold of the cat by the scruff of her neck and hold her in the bucket for several minutes and at the same time thoroughly wash her head. He said to make sure I did it properly because I probably wouldn't get another chance. He wasn't wrong there! She wriggled and wriggled and hissed at me the whole time I had hold of her in the bucket and the moment I let go of her, she took off like a rocket and from that day on, she wouldn't come near me.

Until - several months later, Millie had what the vet called a "phantom pregnancy" and she gave birth to a single kitten. She hid outside for days until the kitten was born and she kept it outside in the front garden. One day we heard her scratching and miaowing at the front door and when I opened it, she was sitting there with her dead kitten on the door mat. She didn't object when I picked the kitten up and

## It's a long way from Coley

discovered it had almost certainly been mauled by a dog. I put the kitten down and then picked Millie up and took her inside and gave her some milk. From that day on, she never shied away from me. She later had a litter of four kittens, one of which we kept.

Another story about Millie that is worth recording was when she was still a kitten and still very playful, I used to toss a table tennis ball across the room and she would chase it and go almost demented trying to pick it up, which she couldn't. I couldn't find the table tennis ball one day, so I rolled up a piece of paper and flicked that across the room, with the same result although she could actually pick it up. And then one day, she not only picked it up, but she brought it back to me - I couldn't believe it - I had taught a cat to fetch!!

I stayed with Avery Scales for 18 months and was enjoying the job when I was offered the position of National Sales Manager. This was a good offer and the extra pay was attractive but it meant I would have to travel interstate training and helping other sales representatives. It meant I would be away quite a bit and with a new excitable and asthmatic son at home, I saw that as not a good idea. By this stage, we had organised someone to care for Patrick each day so Patricia could return to work. And then, quite out of the blue, the Personnel Manager at Defence Signals Division approached Patricia at work one day and said that there had been some changes in the employment conditions and that if I wished to return, they could employ me at the position and pay scale they had originally promised me before I left Singapore.

Patricia and I talked this over for a few days and we decided it would be best for all of us if I went back to DSD. So in June 1968 I went back to virtually the same position as when I left and felt quite comfortable. And then - after a few months, I was approached and asked if I would like to learn a new language. This confused me for a moment until I was told it would be a couple of computer programming languages. Being a translator, this appealed to me but

## It's a long way from Coley

I asked why not recruit someone who was already trained as a programmer. The response was - we have tried twice and we had to hire them first and then submit them for a security clearance with the Australian Security Intelligence Agency (ASIO) which meant they sat in a secure room doing crossword puzzles etc. for several weeks till their clearances came through - but they didn't, did they - both failed. So they decided that maybe it was better to train someone within the organisation who already had a significant security clearance status and I was offered the opportunity to be that person.

So I was taught Fortran and the assembly language Compass – Defence Signals Division at that stage had Control Data computers. And that started me off on my computing career which I could see as being of great benefit to me because although I did enjoy the work at Defence Signals Division, it was clearly a "dead man's shoes" organisation. It attracted people who loved their work and the secrecy that was involved and people rarely left the organisation. Whereas computing was in its infancy.

All job vacancies in the Australian Public Service are listed in the Government Gazette and this included the CSIRO - Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation - which is a statutory body rather than a Public Service department. One day I saw a vacancy for a programmer in the CSIRO Head Office in East Melbourne. I saw this as an opportunity to increase my career prospects so I applied for it and after a couple of interviews, I was successful and offered the position. It was explained to me at the interview that the Head Office group was being relocated to Canberra but I was assured that the computer group would stay in Melbourne.

I remember two things from my first day in this new job. My new boss welcomed me to CSIRO and then told me that he had himself been offered an academic position at Monash University and would be leaving CSIRO in a few weeks to take up his new position. That

## It's a long way from Coley

didn't really please me but there was nothing I could do about it. Then his deputy reminded me that during the interview, I was asked why I had wanted to learn computer programming languages. My answer had been that as I found that I could learn languages fairly easily, it seemed like a natural progression to learn a computer language. He said that he had no problem learning programming languages but he was struggling to learn French so in his eyes the opposite wasn't true.

I quickly settled into the East Melbourne office and found myself involved partly in maintaining the CSIRO Finance, Inventory and Personnel systems but primarily in working in a team designing a new payroll system.

Shortly after joining CSIRO in June 1970, our second son Thomas was born. It was Patricia's third pregnancy as she miscarried with the second one. Thomas was very jaundiced so combined with an excitable asthmatic Patrick, we both had our hands full but especially Patricia, who couldn't escape to work like I could.

At that time, I was playing both golf and cricket. I hadn't long taken up golf and was enjoying it and playing on either each Saturday or Sunday whenever I could. I was playing cricket for a local cricket team fourth's side each Saturday or Sunday plus there was cricket practice every Tuesday night followed by a few beers - of course.

I remember coming home from cricket practice one evening and finding a much stressed out wife trying to cope with the two boys. I have to say that she didn't complain or grumble at me but a little message inside my head told me that I was not being fair. I decided to stop playing golf and to also give away the cricket at the end of the season which was not far away at that time. As it happened, giving away the cricket was made easy for me by the cricket team's treatment of me. I played every game for the fourths that season including at least a couple when I didn't want to but did so to avoid them being a player short. That year the fourths were the only team

## It's a long way from Coley

to make the finals so they decided to reinforce the team for the finals by selecting a guy from the first team claiming that he was eligible as he had been selected to play for the fourths when they had a bye.

I was the one that was dropped to make way for him. I was furious. When they rang me up at the start of the next cricket season notifying me of the first practice session, my reply is unprintable.

As I mentioned earlier, my mother came out to Australia and that was shortly after Thomas was born. Her mother - my grandmother died the same day that Thomas was born and other family members thought it would be a good idea for her to go to Australia. Of course, they were wrong.

With the departure of our manager, CSIRO management, in their wisdom, decided to advertise for his replacement overseas. Why they did that beggars belief. I mean - it may have been CSIRO which is a world class scientific research organisation but this position was basically a computer person to oversee a group of five people writing and maintaining administrative programs. Not only were there an abundant supply of capable people in Australia who could do this job, but the former manager's deputy, who was acting in the role once the manager left, was himself more than capable of doing the job. I think maybe back then it "was the thing to do" to recruit people from overseas.

The recruitment process took several months and then once the guy was appointed, he had to sell his house in England and then pack and move to Australia. I hate to think what all this cost the taxpayer. For the sake of propriety, I will call the new manager Fred Smith.

By the time he arrived in Melbourne, the CSIRO Head Office group had relocated to Canberra. He hadn't been in the job for more than a week or two when he called a meeting and informed us that we would also be moving to Canberra as he believed that it made more sense for us to be co-located with the rest of the Head Office group.

## It's a long way from Coley

I was not very happy as I would not have accepted the job in the first place if I had known that I could be compulsorily relocated to Canberra. Patricia and I discussed this move at length and eventually decided that we would give it a go as there were some benefits such as low cost housing opportunities plus if we liked Canberra, then opportunities for advancement within the Public Service were plentiful.

By the time we were ready to move to Canberra, Patricia was pregnant again and we had endured a family tragedy. Patricia's youngest brother John, who everybody thought was a happy go lucky young man without seemingly a care in the world, took his own life one day, just two weeks after he was married. Patricia rang me at work to tell me and her voice was so faint I could hardly hear what she was saying and had to ask her to say it again more than once. When I finally heard what she was trying to tell me, I simply could not believe it.

We know that his death had absolutely nothing to do with his having just been married - far from it. It is my belief that John's profession tipped him over the edge. He was a primary school teacher and was on his second posting. His first posting after graduating was to a single teacher school in country Victoria. He was everything in that job - Principal, teacher, cleaner, electoral supervisor, and so on. The community he was in had a large number of single mothers and he came in for his fair share of attention, which he didn't like. He would often drop in to see his big sister and me on a Friday night - he couldn't get away from the town quick enough every Friday. I have never understood how the Education Department could consider sending a first year teacher to a one teacher country school - such schools should have an experienced teacher in charge.

His second posting was again to a one teacher school not far from Bright and it would seem that his predecessor had been so well liked by the parents in the community that they were unhappy when he

## It's a long way from Coley

was posted away from the town. For some reason, they didn't take to young John and treated him quite indifferently. I believe that unsympathetic environment contributed to John's problems.

I volunteered along with a couple of others to empty the house that he had been renting with his new wife and to package up all their personal belongings. That has to have been one of the hardest things I have ever had to do in my life.

The poor widow that John left behind was a lovely woman and both Patricia and I thought about her often, wondering how she was coping with such a terrible tragedy. Some years later we heard that she had remarried and had started a family. We were so pleased for her. Many years later, when Patricia was very ill, I spoke with John's widow and was again pleased to hear that she was still happily married - she deserved to be.



## Chapter 13

In June 1971 we moved to Canberra and settled into a new Commonwealth rental house in the suburb of Higgins.

So much for Fred's wish for us to be co-located with the rest of the Head Office group. Although there were only six in the group - five really because the former deputy declined the move - there was no room for us in the new Head Office building so we ended up all on our own on the top floor of the AMP building in Civic.

We settled into life in Canberra much more easily than we expected to. It was much easier for me of course as I had the benefit of knowing many work colleagues within the CSIRO Head Office. For Patricia it was more difficult but as she had been a founding member of a book group in Melbourne for many years, one of the first things she did was to enquire about local book club groups in Canberra. She ended up being invited to join a book club that consisted of mainly academic women from the Australian National University. This was right up her street and it led to several friendships.

My main work role in Canberra was continuing on with helping to develop a new payroll system as well as maintaining and running the existing payroll, finance and personnel systems each month. This was in the days of punch cards and paper tape! Although we did have a couple of teletype machines in our office, I spent a lot of time at the CSIRO Division of Computing Research where all the CSIRO computers were housed and maintained. Running programs, whether for routine monthly processing or program development, meant submitting two or three, sometimes even more, boxes of punch cards. Unfortunately - we would frequently see our boxes of cards get to the front of the queue only to experience a card reader error halfway or more through reading the cards. The boxes would then be returned to us so as we could check the cards and then resubmit the job - at

## It's a long way from Coley

the back of the queue again! People today don't know how good they have it!

Working at the Division of Computing Research meant that I got to meet a lot of people from other CSIRO divisions and I formed several friendships that way. One guy I got to know ended up getting transferred to another State and told me he was putting his house in the nearby suburb of Page up for sale and was I interested? By this stage, we had just about enough money to provide a deposit and by buying it directly with no agent involved meant we saved quite a bit of money. So we agreed and bought the house in Page thereby getting in the home ownership stakes for the first time. Similarly, when we eventually returned to Melbourne, one of the guys working for me offered to buy our house before we had engaged an agent, which he did.

Before we left Melbourne, Patricia had started to take driving lessons - with great reluctance as she didn't want to drive, but she realised that it was something she just had to do. I can't remember how many times she sat the driving test before she left Melbourne but it was at least twice, and she failed the first time she sat it in Canberra. Her Canberra driving instructor said after she failed the first time in Canberra that he would get her through the test if it was the last thing he did. Silly thing to say because the way Patricia was going, it may well have been the last thing he did!

But the day came when she finally passed. Then came the task of getting her to drive without me in the passenger seat! Where we lived at that time, she could see the local shopping centre - it was only a small shopping centre with about half a dozen or so shops and she would look down and see if there were any cars in the car park. If the car park was empty, then she would put the two boys in the car and drive down - all of a couple of hundred or so metres! But it was a start.

## It's a long way from Coley

In time she became more confident and although she never believed it herself, she became quite a competent driver.

Shortly after we moved into our first 'mortgage' house in Page, I discovered a guy living in the same street who served with me in the Intelligence Corps in Singapore and Borneo. What a small world we live in!

One of our immediate neighbours in Page, Frank, was a doctor and a general surgeon. I remember one weekend having a beer with him in his back garden. I had had a particularly frustrating week culminating in having had to work all the previous night getting the payroll system through so that people could get paid. When asked what sort of a week I had experienced, I sounded off a bit about faulty card readers and unfair computer queuing processes. After I had finished, he just smiled at me and said - "at least they don't croak on you". Touché!

Then in March 1972, our third child Paul was born. Having already produced two boys we were convinced that we would have a girl this time so we had only chosen a girl's name - Catherine. But the newborn had an appendage and it was several days before we settled on Paul as the name.

In time I tired of working in such a clustered public service environment but Canberra has little opportunity for jobs in the private sector. As well, I was getting more and more frustrated with the behaviour of our boss. He insisted on being called Mister Smith by all his staff including me who was his deputy. He would send me written messages starting off with "Mr Cummings" and ending up with "Mr Smith". When I replied, I started off with "Fred" and ended up with "John". That got right up his nose and he complained to me about it but I simply replied that he wasn't living in the English Midlands anymore, he was living in Australia and we addressed people differently and he should get used to it. But it wasn't just the way he addressed me, it was also his poor management and the most

## It's a long way from Coley

bizarre message he ever sent me was when I ordered some trays to put computer printouts in. When the trays arrived, they were accompanied by a handwritten note from Fred telling me how to label the trays and in which order. Hello?

Eventually Patricia and I decided it would be in our best long term interests to return to Melbourne so I decided to try and find a job in Melbourne as soon as possible.

This pleased Patricia immensely. I began applying for jobs both in the Public Service and the private sector. This wasn't easy as it was quite a long trip to Melbourne for interviews and I couldn't afford to fly down. Then one day, I saw an advertisement in The Melbourne Age for a computer operations manager at the Melbourne Stock Exchange which appealed to me so I applied for it. I duly drove down for the interview and came home feeling I was going to be successful, so I was very disappointed when a few days later a letter arrived thanking me for applying and attending the interview but telling me that I was not the successful applicant.

I kept scanning the jobs ads for Melbourne and kept applying but it seemed as though I would never get anything. Then one Saturday morning, we had all been out shopping and on the way home, I remember telling Patricia that not being able to find a job back in Melbourne was getting me down. In those days there was a Saturday mail delivery and waiting for me in the mailbox was a letter from the Melbourne Stock Exchange asking me to contact them if I was still looking for a new job position. Well - did the gloom and fog lift! I decided rather than ring them on Monday morning that I would front up in person. I had an early night on the Sunday and got up in the middle of the night and drove down to Melbourne. I walked into the Stock Exchange mid-morning and asked to speak to the Personnel Manager. The next thing I was sitting down with him and the Data Processing Manager over a cup of coffee. They explained to me that the person they had originally hired had turned out to be quite

## It's a long way from Coley

unsuitable so he had been dismissed. Because it had literally been a toss-up between him and me at the time, they decided not to re-advertise but to see if I was still interested and available. I think my response was - where do I sign?!

As well as offering me a reasonably well paid and interesting job in a much sought after industry, they also offered to contribute towards my relocation costs to be repaid back to the Stock Exchange on a pro rata basis if I left before two years in the job. I couldn't wait to get back to Canberra to break the news to everyone.

The next morning I submitted my resignation to CSIRO asking for a release date. My manager Fred wasn't at work so I was deprived of the opportunity to see his face as he read my letter. But fate was on my side. Fred was actually away on a live-in course at a conference centre in the Snowy Mountains and he received the news that I had resigned while on that course - ironically focussed on how to manage staff!!

By the time we returned to Melbourne in March 1974, we had spent almost three years in Canberra. We enjoyed it initially although Patricia missed her family and friends. It was good to get back to Melbourne again.

## Chapter 14

We bought a house in Glen Waverley near the former seminary which had been sold to Victoria Police – it was originally known as Corpus Christi but after the police moved in and renamed it the Victoria Police Academy, it became affectionately known as Copper's Christi! I started work at the Stock Exchange in March 1974. As I settled into my new job, I was acutely aware of the difference between working in the public service and private enterprise. Working at the Stock Exchange may have been both interesting and challenging, which it was, but it was also not a sinecure!

I spent four years at the Stock Exchange and enjoyed it immensely and I often wonder what would have happened if the Melbourne and Sydney Exchanges hadn't commenced merger talks in 1977. I was fortunate that I had a good boss, equally good peers and also very good staff working with me and for me. These were the days of "Chalkies" - people - usually guys - writing up on the boards as the Brokers traded shares. One of my responsibilities was for the girls who keyed into the computer system what the Chalkies wrote up on the boards, data that was eventually printed out on the Quotron ticker tape machines in Stockbrokers offices. I remember one day when the girls had been to a chicken and champagne breakfast function before work - I had to give a couple of the girls a taxi voucher each and send them home because they were a little tiddly. They weren't happy but there was no way I could risk the possibility of share prices being input incorrectly. Imagine if a share price trading at \$10.90 suddenly appeared in the system as either \$1.90 or \$100.90!

An amusing recollection of my days at the Stock Exchange concerned car parking. My particular job did not qualify for a parking spot in the building's underground car park but I was able to occasionally park there in my boss's spot when he was away. The cars were parked two

## It's a long way from Coley

to a bay, side by side, but the bays were very generous so one day I suggested to my boss that as I always got to work before he did and left after he had left for the day, why couldn't I park in the space behind the column separating the bay he parked in and the adjoining bay? My second car was a small Mini and fitted easily behind the column. He agreed to give it a try. The first day I parked there behind the column, a couple of chauffeurs who were washing a car stopped what they were doing and when they realised what I was doing, fell into fits of laughter. There was plenty of room for my little Mini and I was allowed to park there permanently.

It was while I was at the Stock Exchange that I received a letter from my mother not long before she died. In this letter she told me that Leonard wasn't my father and that my father's name was Paul Thomas, an Englishman who had gone to America but came back to England during WW2. I read this letter several times and rightly or wrongly I decided I couldn't care less and consigned it the top drawer of my desk at home. I had far more important things to concern myself with at the time.

The two major system implementations while I was at the Stock Exchange were getting all the Stockbrokers on-line to an enquiry system and an automatic bid/match system. There was quite a bit of resistance to the automatic bid match system as the Brokers felt that among other things it deprived them of the feel of the market. But in time, it became accepted and was a great advance for the Broking fraternity.

But all good things seem to inescapably come to an end and the long talked about merger of Melbourne and Sydney exchanges into the Australian Stock Exchange loomed large again. Clearly Sydney was always going to win which meant that the Melbourne operation was going to be greatly reduced. Once it became clear that the merger was going ahead, the inevitable in-fighting began which caused

## It's a long way from Coley

enormous pressure and discomfort for people like me who were not interested in playing such stupid games.

My boss decided to look for greener pastures and I ended up taking over his role until the merger was complete. This added to the pressure as dedicated staff would come to me in private saying they were dismayed by all the political games that were going on.

This had quite an effect on me and I suffered emotionally. Looking back I feel that this was hardly surprising. Less than 4 years before, I was working in a sinecure in Canberra with little responsibility and virtually no risk of being fired. And then – 4 years later – I am responsible for the Stock of Melbourne computer system servicing all the Melbourne stockbrokers. One day, for no reason, I was feeling like crap and I walked out of the building and round the corner to a doctor's practice in Queen's Street and made an appointment to see a doctor later in the afternoon. When I went back later that afternoon, I found myself sitting next to the local Financial Review reporter. When I went in to see the doctor, I found myself whispering and when the doctor asked me why I was whispering, I said that I didn't want the Financial Review reporter outside to know why I was there otherwise he would have a story. A few minutes later I walked out of his surgery with a sick leave certificate stating I needed several weeks break from work.

During that break, Patricia and I discussed our future. Clearly once the merger was finalised, my job would no longer exist. Did I wait till then, hoping for a decent package, or should I look for another job there and then? In the end we decided that we would do what we had often discussed that we might do. We decided that we would take a working holiday in the UK.

A couple of years earlier in 1976, I had taken a 5-week holiday on my own in the UK.



## It's a long way from Coley

I did it basically because I had a sort of identity crisis. Although I was happy living in Australia, I felt that the last time I had left England to go back to Singapore that I wasn't leaving for the last time, that I sort of expected that I would be going back after my posting in Singapore came to an end.

I hadn't really said goodbye to some people and places. And sadly I had lost contact with the one family that had been so good to me, the Geoghegans, which in hindsight was very remiss of me. But the Geoghegans don't give up easily and decided to find me and tracked me down and wrote to me asking how I was. And so I headed off in 1976 to put things right.

I spent a lot of time visiting places that were important to me and also visiting the Geoghegan family in Chichester and both Deirdre (the eldest Geoghegan daughter) and her family in Womersley near Guildford and Patricia (Trish – one of Deirdre's younger sisters) and her family in Scotland. My mother had died in December 1974.

All the Geoghegan progeny had fled the nest by that time so Vin and Sheila were in the process of moving to a new house when I was there. As I mentioned earlier, I became involved in the move.

Before I knew it the five weeks was up and it was time to come home again. But I knew that I would have to one day take Patricia and the boys to England, but the question was how and when? A three to four-week trip would be an expensive waste of our hard earned savings. So when the Stock Exchange drama started unfolding, we took the chance and embarked on the holiday of a lifetime, albeit a working holiday. It took a year to plan. We sold our house to help fund the trip. We settled on a period of 18 months to give us the time to explore England as much as we could while I was working and the boys were in school, and also to have at least one visit to Europe.

Our friends Jane (Judy) and Clive Luckman had recently bought a house in Middle Park which required extensive renovations, which

## It's a long way from Coley

they were planning to do mostly themselves over a protracted period and they offered us the use of a very large room at the front of the house to store all our furniture, which we very gladly accepted.

So on 5 June 1978, with all our furniture stored safely in Middle Park, and our washing machine, fridge, freezer, piano and billiard table all farmed out to friends on loan for them to use, and with the dog, cat and goldfish being cared for by friends and relatives, we set off for England on our venture.

It has to be said that many of our close friends truly believed that we wouldn't come back but that was never an option. At least our friends in Middle Park believed us!

## Chapter 15

We arrived in England on 6 June 1978 - D-Day - very appropriate. We were met at Heathrow Airport by a gathering of the Geoghegan clan and taken to Deirdre and Tony's house in Wonersh, just outside Guildford in Surrey, where we were to stay until we could find somewhere to live.

The boys were quickly enrolled at St Thomas of Canterbury RC School in Merrow, Guildford and I set out looking for somewhere to live and a job.

We found the ideal place to live in Godalming. Ideal because it was only a few minutes away from Wonersh, the school bus for St Thomas of Canterbury was only a short walk away from the house, and it was available fully furnished for 18 months. The owner was in the Foreign Office and was on an 18 month posting to the Philippines. It was perfect. We made an application to rent for the full 18 months but were initially refused on the grounds that I didn't have a UK bank account - I was using my Melbourne National Australia Bank account through the London branch - and also because I didn't have a job. I had plenty of references but they were mostly Australian so were not taken into account. We were very disappointed as it was the ideal house for us.

That Sunday we visited old friends of mine in Farnham, which was not far from Wonersh. They were the O'Donnells - Anne and Jim and their children who were old and close friends of the Geoghegans which was how I came to know them in the first place. Our reason for going to see them was because they were getting ready to go to Germany. Jim was an anaesthetist with the British Army which meant he held a commissioned rank. At that time, he was a Lieutenant Colonel.

During the afternoon, Anne asked how our house hunting was going and we told her about the house in Godalming which we missed out

## It's a long way from Coley

on. Anne suggested we rented their house while they were away, but I declined the offer simply because it was far too big for our needs and the rent they would want would be much more than I could afford to pay each month. "Who is the agent for this house in Godalming?" Anne asked me. "Mays of Woking" I replied. "What a coincidence", Anne replied, "they will be managing our house while we are away. Leave it with me - I'll give them a call in the morning".

The following afternoon, we got a call from the lady at Mays of Woking asking if we would like to call in and see them. We duly turned up the next day and were ushered into a room and asked if we would like tea or coffee. "So, you are friends of Colonel O'Donnell", the lady said. "Very old friends" was my reply. When we left Mays of Woking that day, we had a signed lease for 18 months on 2 Maplehatch Close, Godalming. Perfect. Sometimes it's really not what you know, but who you know!



## It's a long way from Coley

And it wasn't long before I got a job. When I was working at the Stock Exchange of Melbourne, we investigated the possibility of buying a computer system called Datapad. It was designed and built by an English company called Quest Automation and marketed by an agent based in Canberra. It was quite revolutionary and allowed people to print on special pads hooked up to a Data General minicomputer.

The potential was enormous but it simply wasn't fast enough for our requirements at that time.

Before I left Melbourne for England, I had written to Quest Automation in Ferndown in Dorset and included my CV saying that I was looking for work in England for 18 months. They wrote back and said they would be pleased to meet with me when I arrived in the UK.

So shortly after we arrived in England, I made an appointment to see them and travelled down the M27 for an interview. I ended up having two interviews and they offered me a job in customer support where I would be responsible for assisting Datapad customers with their in-house systems.

The pay was reasonable and they gave me a car which was a huge bonus. After a few days I took delivery of a brand new Vauxhall Cavalier which I had the use of till I returned home to Australia. Although it was a fairly long journey from Godalming to Ferndown, it was reasonably quick as it was nearly all on the motorway. But as all my customers were scattered across the country, I was not required to visit Quest on a daily basis - it was far more practical for me to go direct to a customer site from home, plus I was able to work from home when writing reports, etc.

So we settled into 2 Maplehatch Close in Godalming, the boys went to St Thomas of Canterbury School in Guildford and very quickly lost their Australian accents and acquired Surrey accents, and I travelled the country visiting and supporting my customers. Patricia found it a bit difficult at first. She was without a car as we couldn't afford a

## It's a long way from Coley

second car, but even if we could have, she wouldn't have driven in England. But fortunately for us, the house next door to us on the corner with Quartermile Road was occupied by an Australian Naval Attaché and his wife so Patricia had an instant friend and they became good friends. When we first moved in, I noticed that the car in next door's driveway had an Australian sticker on it and I immediately thought – what if this is where Sir John Kerr is living? Thank God it wasn't.

And as she did in Canberra, she looked around at what groups might be worth joining. She found a bible study group that interested her. The members were mainly Anglicans but that didn't bother Patricia. The group was run by a lady by the name of Bronwen Astor formerly Lady (Viscountess) Astor, wife of William, Lord (3rd Viscount) Astor, who made headlines in 1961 when their house Cliveden in Taplow in Buckinghamshire was the scene of a party where Lord (John) Profumo first met Christine Keeler and started a mega scandal.

Bronwen was an interesting lady and Patricia - not one for hobnobbing with the elite classes, found her to be a fascinating lady. Before her marriage to Bill Astor, she had been the muse to Pierre Balmain who described Bronwen as one of the most beautiful women he had ever met. I never met Bronwen but she lived at Tuesley Manor which was quite near to where we were living and I often saw her in and around Godalming. She would have been nearly 50 then and was certainly still a very beautiful woman. She was a convert to Roman Catholicism which was another reason why Patricia found her interesting.

I can't remember if Patricia stayed with the group until we went back to Melbourne - I suspect not because she always felt as if she was a bit of an outsider. The majority of the group members were what one would only describe as upper class and Patricia commented more than once that some of the ladies appeared to find her amusing. That is a shame as Patricia was a very intelligent and thinking lady with a

## It's a long way from Coley

profound sense of social justice and a deep belief in her God. I will always remember one day after Patricia had passed away, I was having lunch with one of her close friends in the Melbourne Book Club group that she had belonged to, and she told me how valuable Patricia was to that group. She commented that several in the group were good at expounding their own theories often at some length, and after several minutes of "often getting nowhere", she would look at Patricia and ask what she thought - and she nearly always delivered a gem, she replied.

But back to the Godalming Bible study group. There was one occasion when I asked how she had gone at the meeting that day, and Patricia said that she was amused when one of the other ladies, who thought that Patricia might be from South Africa, asked her "if she had come from afar"!

Patricia did not have a strong Australian accent - she had what I would term a "cultured" Australian accent - so many struggled to pick where she came from. Certain words, vowels and intonations would give her away. I recall the time when she went into the local bank and asked to withdraw £30. When asked how she would like the money, she replied - in tens please. The teller looked at her in an amused way and said - tins?

No, Patricia replied, standing up high on her toes, and slowly enunciating the word "tens". From that day on she always asked for her cash in fives!

One of the more pleasant memories of our time in England was our connection with the Catholic seminary at St John's in Womersley and our friendship with several of the students there. This came about because Deirdre and Tony Leach had already forged a strong bond with the seminary assisted by the fact that Tony had been a seminarian himself before deciding that a teaching career as a married man was preferable to the celibate life of a priest. It was not

## It's a long way from Coley

uncommon to arrive at the Leach house in Wonersh to find one or more seminarians there, having a respite from the strict demands of the seminary and often looking for a shoulder to lean on. Or a beer to drink. The Leach house was very conveniently located next door to the Wonersh Working Man's Club so Tony would often take the weary seminarians in there for a pint or three.



The Wonersh Working Man's Club with Tony & Deirdre's house on the left

One of the seminarians by the name of Mike Faulds latched on to Patricia and me and was a frequent visitor to 2 Maplehatch Close in Godalming. Many was the time I would arrive home from work and Patricia would say that Mike had rung to have a chat - this meant that he needed a bit of time out so after dinner, I would drive over to the seminary and pick him up and take him out for a few pints of best bitter. Mike did eventually become a priest and served for a while as an RC Chaplain in the Royal Navy but in time, he gave up the priesthood and I understand he married.



## It's a long way from Coley

Not far from where we lived - between Godalming and Wonersh - was a very picturesque village called Bramley which was home to the Bramley Golf Club. We went there a couple of times for lunch and I wished I could join and play golf but could not justify the joining costs seeing as we were only going to be in England for 18 months. But when the club management understood my position, they offered me a deal whereby instead of paying an up front and non-refundable joining fee plus annual subscriptions, they suggested I buy a £100 debenture, fully refundable when I left the club to return to Australia, plus normal subscription fees for the period till we returned home. We had no problem accepting that offer because as well as being able to play golf occasionally, we liked the club for what it offered socially. It was a good place to take friends for a drink or a meal and the delightful couple that ran the catering side of the club, Ray and Daphne, actually lived in a house behind the club so we never found ourselves being pushed out of an evening because they wanted to go home.

Long after we returned home, we exchanged Christmas cards with a letter every year with Ray and Daphne and I often wonder what has happened to them once they left the Golf Club.

I was also fortunate to meet some very pleasant people in one of the local pubs – in particular, The Charterhouse Arms - and joined in with a group of men that met there most Friday evenings and they used to play a game of spoof to decide who bought the next round of drinks.

It's a long way from Coley



### The Charterhouse Arms, Godalming

Spoof is a game where each person has three coins to use and when the game commences, each player presents a closed fist with either 1, 2 or 3 coins - or no coins - in the fist. People take it in turns to guess the total number of coins in all the fists so for example, if there are four players involved then the total number of coins is between zero and 12. When someone guesses correctly, that person drops out of the next round until only one is left and that person buys the next round. Most Fridays there would be between three and eight people playing. The more that played, the harder it became to guess the first score.

## It's a long way from Coley

There were strict rules one of which was that a player could not order a drink that cost more than a half pint of bitter without paying the difference themselves. Another rule was - no cheating - a player could not make a false call. For example, if a player had three coins in his hand, he couldn't call a total of zero, one or two - he had to call at least three or more. There was also a spoof register - they recorded every game played in an exercise book, basically for a bit of fun, and they were able to see who enjoyed the longest winning streak etc. My initial reaction was that spoof could be a bit expensive if one kept losing but in fact, it evened out over time. Although there was a certain skill in playing the game it was after all a game of chance.

We had many visitors from Australia who came to stay with us in Godalming including Patricia's parents Paddy and Nelle who arrived in England from Australia in June 1979 and stayed with us on and off for about three months. They made our place their headquarters while they did short trips on their own as well as trips with us. It was great for Patricia to have her parents with her in England and we certainly had some memorable trips with them. Luckily for us Deirdre and Tony Leach had a Peugeot station wagon that sat eight people - this particular model was known in the UK as the "Catholic" wagon - and they were happy to lend it to us when we wanted to go away with "the oldies" as they were affectionately known. In return, they had the use of our Vauxhall Cavalier.

The most memorable trip with "the oldies" was when we drove up to Scotland and back in August 1979. We spent some time in Alloway with the Barrys - Patricia (Geoghegan) and Eamonn and family but the highlight for Paddy was visiting Poolewe. Paddy was a retired Forestry Officer and had read about the palm trees in Inverewe Garden in Wester Ross near Poolewe - a most unusual occurrence brought about by the Gulf Stream that passed through the area. Our first night in the area, we stayed at Poolewe but hadn't made any advance booking so we enquired at the first place we saw that

## It's a long way from Coley

advertised Bed & Breakfast. The lady looked at the seven of us and said we had no chance of finding a B&B that would cater for seven, but if it was ok with us, she could ring a friend who offered B&B and between them, they could put us up. We said that was fine and she arranged that for us. We got talking to her and when she discovered we were all from Australia, she told us she had a cousin living in Melbourne married to an Australian - she couldn't remember her married name but her maiden name was Mairi Urquhart. Well - we nearly fell over. Paddy said to the lady - we know Mairi - she is married to my brother Angus. That was the precursor to a very pleasant evening of reminiscences.

The next day we set off for Inverewe Gardens to satisfy Paddy's long lost ambition. We found a beautiful tropical oasis at the edge of Loch Ewe. The garden is one of Scotland's most popular botanical attractions with over 2,000 acres managed for conservation.

The garden was created in 1862 by Osgood Mackenzie and is full of colourful, exotic plants from around the world including the most northerly planting of rare Wollemi pines, Himalayan blue poppies, olearia from New Zealand, Tasmanian eucalypts, and rhododendrons from China, Nepal and the Indian subcontinent. They flourish there, despite the northerly latitude, thanks to the warm currents of the Gulf Stream and the foresight of Osgood Mackenzie, who planted over 100 acres of woodland to shelter the garden.

It's a long way from Coley



It's a long way from Coley



After Poolewe, we visited Largs, Greenock, Kirkcudbright (beautiful name pronounced Ker-coo-bree!), Castle Douglas and Loch Ness, not necessarily in that order. One night we stayed at a lovely B&B in Drumnadrochit. Then on to Inverness, Carbridge, and over the top at Tomintool, Braemar, Stirling and Glasgow. And then home via the Lake District.

Another trip that we did with "the Oldies" was to visit a cousin of mine – Carole- in Bradpole near Barnstaple in Devon. She and Mike were a lovely couple and ran a pub in Bradpole. We had visited them before with another visitor from Melbourne and we stayed at their pub on

## It's a long way from Coley

both occasions. The pub had a small bowling alley and the boys had a great time playing bowls. Mike has since sadly passed away but I have re-established contact with Caroline and she told me that she had found someone else in her life which pleased me.



The major trip that we did by ourselves during our time in the UK was when we decided to visit the O'Donnells in Germany. Jim was working at the British Military Hospital in Munster. We borrowed the Leaches' Peugeot wagon again and set off for Dover, across on the Ferry to Calais and then drove through France and Belgium and then to Munster in Germany. We only had a week but we made the most of it, staying with the O'Donnells and catching up with them.

It was the first time I had ever driven on the right hand side of the road, and it was compounded slightly by the fact I was driving an English car with the steering wheel on the right. But I soon got used to it although I nearly had an accident within minutes of leaving the ferry at Calais!

## Chapter 16

For the first few months of my time with Quest, I was primarily on the road visiting customer sites in my role as a customer support officer. This took me to many customers in many towns and cities across England. One of those companies was called MEAL in Reading - I can't for the life of me remember what MEAL stood for except I think the "M" was for Media but I do recall it was in Kings Street and I also remember when I was visiting there one day looking out of an upstairs window, I spotted my father Leonard walking along the road. I watched him till he was out of sight. I was sorely tempted to go out and surprise him but didn't because when he kicked me out, I said I never wanted to see him again.

Then in December 1978, I was transferred to a new team at Quest working on the Micropad project. Micropad was the next stage in the Datapad cycle and was to be a standalone input device, in fact the first ever microprocessor driven device that recognised hand printed characters. This project was carried out in strict secrecy in a separate building. My role in this exciting development was to provide a marketing and customer - end user - perspective to the group because it was recognised that although smart young development engineers had some great ideas, they didn't always provide the customer with what they actually wanted. My input was generally well accepted but not always. I do remember that the original plan for the Micropad was for it to have a single output port connection known as RS232 which was the preferred protocol at that time. I argued that although the protocol known as 'current loop' was slowly being replaced with RS232, that it was going to be many years before current loop disappeared and there were still many large organisations happy to stick with current loop. The development engineers weren't happy with my argument but the group as a whole voted for it so the Micropad was developed with the two output protocols. My belief



## It's a long way from Coley

was reinforced when one of the early purchases of the Micropad was in a large current loop environment.

As well as providing the marketing and customer input to the group, I was given the exciting task of working with the Quest sales executives and creating a list of companies to target for initial sales of the product. Once we had created that list, it was then my job to approach senior management in those companies and appraise them of the new Micropad product and its potential benefits to them. It was a two way street in so far that as well as getting their interest, I could also gauge their opinions on this new product. Before I could engage them in any discussion, I had to get them to agree to sign a confidentiality agreement.

I don't remember all the companies that I signed up to confidentiality agreements but I do remember some of the companies I visited during my time in the UK and they included:

British Airways, Pan Am, New Scotland Yard, Shell, Cable & Wireless, Gulf Air, Hewlett Packard, Rowe & Pitman, Rank Xerox, Powell & Duffryn, Moore Paragon, Ministry of Defence (Didcot), RTITB (Road Industry Transport Training Board), South Trent Water Authority, Central Electricity Research Board (my first current loop user!), Greenshields plus many others. BA and Panam were among the first to buy the Micropad. I still rate my selling the first ever Micropad as one of my career highlights.

In April 1979 I travelled to Bahrain with a couple of guys from Cable & Wireless to give a Micropad presentation to Gulf Air. We travelled first class courtesy of Gulf Air and I remember the seats swivelled round 180 degrees so I was able to sit facing the other two guys while we were in the air. Today it remains as the best flight I have ever taken.

The Micropad presentation went off very smoothly although I don't remember if it ever translated into subsequent orders. But the Cable

## It's a long way from Coley

& Wireless guys gave me some advice before we left England that I have never forgotten. One was that if I had any Marks and Spencers clothing that I would be advised to remove the labels because if I put them in for laundry, they wouldn't come back. M&S being a Jewish company was not apparently popular in Bahrain at that time. Also not popular in Bahrain at that time, according to my two Cable & Wireless friends, were Qantas Australia cabin crew who usually stayed at the same hotel we were going to be staying at. I was advised not to boast about being Australian in the hotel because it is reputed that some of the Qantas cabin staff fraternised with some of the young Bahraini boys there. I don't know but I somehow doubt it was true.

Just before travelling to Bahrain, I went to Brussels in Belgium where Quest had a stand at the then annual COMPEC computer exhibition. Working at any computer exhibition is fairly boring and this one was no exception but I do recall one embarrassing moment for the Quest guy who was working on the stand with me. He fancied himself as being able to speak French fairly well and whenever possible, he would talk to any visitors to our stand in French. One local Belgian visitor listened to my colleague for a while and said - in impeccable English - no offence, but I think we should speak in English as my English is better than your French. Ouch!

A few months before I was due to return home to Melbourne, in June 1979, Quest Automation management asked me if I would like to set up and run a Quest Subsidiary office in Melbourne servicing both Australia and New Zealand. Although Quest had an agent operating out of Canberra, they had other products they were marketing besides the Quest Datapad system and Quest felt that it was time to have a more formal presence in Australia. This was a dream come true for me.

## It's a long way from Coley

Over the next few months the prospect was debated at length and many meetings took place with the National Australia Bank London office in Tokenhouse Yard in London and also with the London offices of the Chartered Accountants Arthur Young (now Ernst & Young) and the Legal firm of MinterEllison.

Then the day came in late September when the Quest Board voted to go ahead with the Australian subsidiary and I was appointed as General Manager. The package deal they offered me included paying the airfares back to Australia for me and my family which was a huge bonus as we were struggling to find the air fares ourselves.

As well as the Datapad and Micropad products, Quest also manufactured Computer-Aided-Design and Manufacturing (CAD/CAM) systems for the printed circuit board manufacturers. Before leaving for Melbourne I was shown round the Quest CAD/CAM facility and given a briefing with the objective of seeing whether they might be able to make a foray into the Australian marketplace.

So on 28 December 1979 we departed from London Heathrow for home. We flew with Malaysian Airlines and landed in Kuala Lumpur the next day for a three-day stopover. We arrived back in Melbourne on 2 January 1980.

The adventure was over.

## Chapter 17

When we returned home, we stayed with family relatives while we found a place to rent and I also found suitable office space to start up Quest Automation Australia Pty Ltd. We settled on the Waverley area which is where we had lived before going away.

We found a very suitable place in Glen Waverley on a one-year lease which was easy walking distance to the railway station and the Glen Shopping Centre. We had written to De La Salle College in Malvern before we left England and had managed to get Patrick enrolled there, so close access to the train was essential whereas the two younger boys went back to their old primary school - St Leonard's - in Glen Waverley which was also within walking distance.

A few days after we moved in, I decided to introduce myself to the neighbours. I knocked on one of the adjoining houses and when the door was opened, the guy looked at me and said - hello John - what brings you here? It was Gerry Maynard who used to run the "Programmer-In-Training" courses at the then Caulfield Institute of Technology and I had attended one of his course's years before. Is it or is it not a small world?!

I then found suitable premises in Prahran to set up and run the Quest Australia operation and in time I hired a secretary/receptionist and later a salesman. The job was actually very demanding and took me to all states of Australia and also to New Zealand. Sadly, sales were disappointingly slow simply because the product was overpriced. I had long discussions with the management back in the UK but they wouldn't budge. My argument was that we should adopt the same policy as HP did with the handheld calculator - put it on the market at a very attractive low price and try and gain fast market share, then start putting the price up. I found it very hard persuading people to

It's a long way from Coley

pay the same price or in some cases, a higher price for a handprint data entry device compared with a keyboard device.

# Those who can write have direct access

By ELIZABETH OWEN

Errors can creep into data each time it is transcribed. Now, a new company, Micro-pad Pty. Ltd, is offering a terminal that allows data to be hand-written directly into a mainframe, eliminating procedures such as typing data and thus lessening chances for error.

Mr. John Cummings, the Australian general manager of the company which is a fully owned subsidiary of the British company, Quest Automation, claims the data entry device is the first of its kind.

He said the device called Micro-pad, gave access to computers to everyone, the only provision being that they could write.

"At present, effective computer usage is restricted to the small percentage of people who can type — less than five per cent of the working population. Anyone who can write can use Micro-pad," he said.

The device is based on a 16-bit microprocessor — Texas Instruments' 990.

Two coated membranes separated by a small air gap form the surface of the pad.

An input document is placed on the flexible top membrane. Writing on the document makes a point contact with the bottom surface.

The contact is converted to XY co-ordinates values by an analogue to digital converter.

The microprocessor tracks the writing, recording the way in which a character is drawn by a pen.

tion was possible. The microprocessor tracks patterns rather than an image.

He said the device interpreted nearly all styling, however untidy or ever size.

Special writing were not necessary: a cursive or ball point pen was adequate. In fact, the device was so sensitive that even a character traced with a finger was registered.

If a character could be recognised a question mark was shown on the single line display at the pad and the character was written.

The recognition accepts full alpha numeric characters and common punctuation characters.

The writing surface was a grid of boxes, 17 lines with 28 positions or in a box the device transmits three characters, the character line number, the character and the data character indicates the special location to the host.

Mr. Cummings said the device could be attached to a mainframe, mini computer or microcomputer.

Seventy Micropad \$3800 each plus sales tax have been installed in Europe. Ten have been installed in Australia.



Mr. Cummings: introducing a device for hand-written data entry.

When the pen lifts off the paper the character is compared to a dictionary in the microprocessor. This dictionary contains most commonly used writing styles.

A digit four can be written with either closed strokes or open ones. Similarly, an eight can be written with a continuous stroke or by joining two circles.

Mr. Cummings said the varia-

From The Australian newspaper

When time permitted, I started evaluating the local marketplace in regard to the Quest CAD/CAM systems and it soon became apparent

that there was quite a bit of potential. I identified a number of promising prospects and rated two of them as being very positive - LM Ericsson and Siemens. Quest sent some CAD/CAM marketing guys out to Melbourne to follow up on my reports and to meet with the prospects that I had identified.

There were several other companies offering printed circuit board design systems so the competition was fairly strong. Not all played the game cleanly and I was portrayed by my competitors as a one-man operation with very little knowledge of the CAD/CAM market. That was true to a degree but the way I operated meant it didn't matter as I always arranged for UK marketing experts to answer any technical questions that were put to me. I never tried to answer myself or pretend that I knew when I didn't.

All of a sudden both LM Ericsson and Siemens suddenly became serious late in 1981. Quest desperately wanted to win at least one of them because they hadn't been able to win any business with either company in Europe. Despite that, I don't think they were confident either of the Australian companies would choose Quest systems and at that time they weren't able to send any marketing guys out to assist.

So this meant lots of late night phone calls and telex machine conversations so I could address the numerous questions being put before me. Fortunately - and this is what the opposition failed to understand, the respective line managers at both LM Ericsson and Siemens were as honest as the day is long. They would not accept air tickets to look at operational systems elsewhere, they were not permitted by company rules and regulations to accept free lunches, theatre tickets, invitations to major sporting events, etc. There was only one way to sell them anything - by being totally honest and above board.

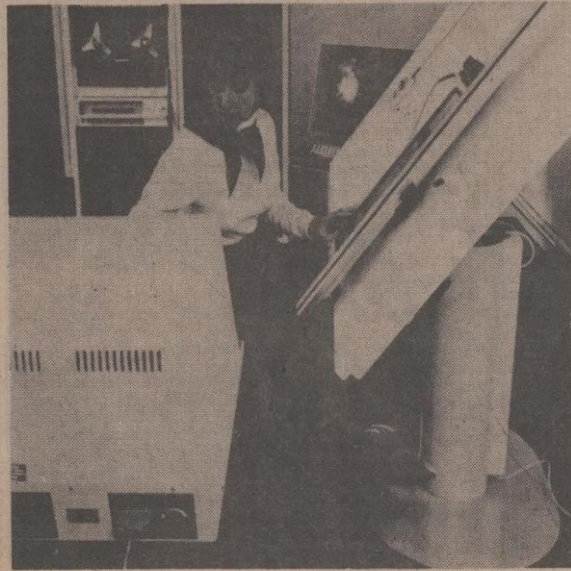
## It's a long way from Coley

The day came just before Christmas when my contact at LM Ericsson rang me to tell me that the Board had approved his submission to purchase a Quest CAD/CAM system. Boy was I over the moon. When I asked him what was the major factor between us and the opposition, his answer was that Quest Australia had come across as 100% trustworthy.

Then a few days later, I got the phone call from my contact at Siemens to say that their Board had made its decision and it had come down to the final and lowest price submitted by me and one other company. Another late night discussion with the people in England and we settled on our best price for Siemens.

The next day, I presented myself to Siemens and delivered my final price. Fortunately it was the best of the two and the order was duly placed.

I had cracked LM Ericsson and Siemens which was something that the UK guys had failed to do.



QUEST'S automated drafting system goes to work in the office

## Quest wins its first Australian orders

QUEST Automation Pty Ltd, which introduced its CAD/CAM equipment to Australia at IFIP 80 in Melbourne, has secured its first orders here.

Quest, like its sister company Micropad Pty Ltd, is part of the UK Quest Group.

The two companies operate from the same Melbourne office headed by John Cummings.

Quest's Q Draft 20 automated drafting system will be installed soon at Siemens Industries' headquarters in Richmond, Victoria.

The system consists of a single station digitiser based on a Data General Nova 3, 10 megabytes of disc, Pertec tape drive, Tektronix 4014 graphics display and a Quest flatbed plotter.

Software includes the Questar automatic routing package and an automatic component insertion and allocation package.

Siemens will use the system for the design of printed circuit boards used in the manufacture of frequency and time division multiplex equipment for Telecom.

Quest's second automated drafting system will go to L.M. Ericsson Pty Ltd at Broadmeadows in Melbourne.

This is a dual station Q Draft 21 system.

Outputs from the system will include post processing to a Trudril 95/4 drilling machine and a Dyna/Fert component insertion machine for DIP and axial lead components.

Ericsson has also purchased a Quest Emma 80 photoplotter, which accepts data from the Q Draft system and produces high quality master artworks on film or photographic glass plate by drawing with a controlled light beam.

Ericsson will use the equipment in the design of printed circuit boards used in the manufacture of electronic communications products.



## It's a long way from Coley

By this stage we had moved to a rented house in Mt Waverley near the Mt Waverley Reserve. Although the house was very suitable, it was crying out for attention. The lady owner - a widow - had only just bought the house as an investment and hadn't had time to clean and repaint the house. When she said that we could rent the house, I offered her a deal. If she would drop the rent by a certain amount per week and provide me with the paint and paint brushes, I would clean up and repaint the house for her. It took her only a few nanoseconds to agree to my offer so the following weekend, with the aid of a couple of friends, the house was transformed.

Bill Dann, husband of Frances, long-time friend of Patricia, offered to help along with Gordon Reid, the UK engineer who had come out from England to maintain the CAD systems at LM Ericcson and Siemens.. The next day at work, he told me to tell Patricia that he loved the curry she cooked the night before and to tell her that it rated 10 out of 10 for afterburn!

I remember shortly after moving in, I was looking at the run down brick wall in the front garden separating our house from the house next door, and also at some privet bushes growing alongside the brick wall. Privet bushes are not a good thing to have when you have two asthmatic children so I started to remove them. The next door neighbour spotted me and came out and introduced himself to me. Seeing me removing the bushes, he asked me if I was going to do anything about the run down wall. When I said it was my intention to remove it, he immediately offered to help! Within no time, both wall and bushes were gone and it looked so much nicer to look at from the street.

A few months after the move to Mt Waverley, I moved the office to an office near the station in the Mt Waverley shopping centre. This made sense as it cut down my travel time and if the UK guys wanted to have a telex "chat" in the evening, then I didn't have far to go!

But all good things come to an end. Although the Quest management back in the UK were delighted with my CAD/CAM sales, they were disappointed with my Micropad results and wanted me to focus more on the Micropad. The problem was that there was a clear division in the UK between the CAD/CAM and Micropad camps. Without the profits from the CAD/CAM group, Quest would never have been able to fund the Micropad development and this was always a bone of contention with the CAD/CAM guys. They felt it was time for payback.

Then I got the phone call one night from my manager telling me that the decision had been taken to recruit a qualified engineer to join the Australian operation and manage the CAD/CAM side of things. He himself wasn't happy with the decision because I think he saw how things were going to pan out. He told me that the CAD/CAM directors (engineers) felt that if an Australian Quest guy with no engineering or CAD/CAM background could achieve what I had achieved, then they could achieve more if they put an engineer in charge.

So they duly recruited a local engineer and he was appointed as the General Manager of Quest Australia with specific responsibility for the CAD/CAM side of things. I was to focus on the Micropad sales and support but was subordinate to the new guy.

To me this was a huge slap in the face and typical of the way that many British companies operated. I decided that after all I had done for them; it was time to move on and maybe find another organisation that understood the meaning of loyalty.

## Chapter 18

It didn't take me long to find another job. My good fortune in the CAD/CAM field had put me in good stead and I was offered the job of CAD/CAM Marketing Manager with Prime Computers of Australia. I had been with Prime less than a year when I heard that Quest Automation UK had gone under and had been taken over in October 1983 by GEC Marconi. Seems like my decision to leave Quest Australia was timely.

The job of CAD/CAM Marketing Manager for Prime was a new role. They had several CAD/CAM software packages that third party companies had developed on their computers including the Cambridge, England based MEDUSA software system. I found the job very satisfying and rewarding. Then one day it was proposed to me by the Managing Director at the time to undertake a study tour looking at overseas Prime installations using CAD/CAM software. This took me to the USA, England, Germany, Sweden and Singapore after which I wrote a report for the Managing Director. I then discovered his interest in my trip. I don't know if the system still exists today but back in the 1980s any company selling computers to government departments had to offset that with some form of return equivalent to a percentage of the sale price - known as the Offsets Program. Prime Computers at that stage were enjoying a very successful run with sales to both Victorian Government and Federal Government Departments and were desperately looking for a way to meet their Offsets obligation.

Using some of the research I had done on my recent trip, they proposed to the Victorian State Government that they and Prime create a facility to assist Victorian companies, with special emphasis on manufacturing, to come to terms with and understand new technology. A couple of the companies I had visited on my overseas

## It's a long way from Coley

trip were similar organisations. The Victorian State Government were very receptive to this idea, and because Prime also had Federal Government offsets to meet, discussions included Federal Government staff as well as CSIRO Division of Manufacturing Technology. After many months of discussion, an agreement was reached to proceed. The company was to be called the Victorian CAD/CAM Centre. Prime Computers and the State Government set it up, Prime provided all the hardware and software, and the State Government committed to paying the running costs for an agreed time. Prime also released me to become the founding General Manager of the company.

The company was duly created and a Board of Directors was formed with representation from State and Federal Government, Prime Computers, Education, Trade Halls Council and manufacturing companies. The people who worked most closely with me in the setting up and then running of the company were John Fields from the Department of Industry, Technology and Resources and Dr Bob Brown from the CSIRO Division of Manufacturing Technology - not the same Dr Bob Brown who later headed up the Australian Greens Party.

We set up in premises in Johnston Street in Fitzroy directly opposite Bob Brown's Division of Manufacturing Technology. We started out offering training courses to teach people the benefits of using CAD/CAM systems and how to use them as well as running seminars directed at industry management.

In time CSIRO decided that Bob Brown's Division of Manufacturing Technology should move to larger and more appropriate premises and CSIRO purchased a suitable acquisition in Preston, north of Melbourne. About this time, it was proposed that the Victorian CAD/CAM Centre be expanded and increase its training programs and seminars.

## It's a long way from Coley

A proposal was eventually presented to the State Government to expand the CAD/CAM Centre into the Advanced Manufacturing Technology Centre - AMTEC and to co-locate it with the Division of Manufacturing Technology on its new Preston site. The objective was to increase the number of training programs and seminars but more importantly to demonstrate what embracing new technology could do for Victorian Industry. So as well as increasing our CAD/CAM drafting and design systems, we acquired a range of robots and machine tools which were located in the CSIRO workshops so we were able to take a potential idea from initial design through to actual manufacture.

Funds were provided by the State Government to build a new purpose built building on CSIRO's land with the agreement that if AMTEC ever moved or ceased trading that the building would be handed over to CSIRO.

We designed the building to include an auditorium for us to hold our seminars but also to demonstrate via video how the machine tools in the CSIRO workshops integrated with our systems.



The AMTEC building in Preston

## It's a long way from Coley

Once we took over and moved into our new building, a formal opening ceremony was arranged. The ceremony took place in the auditorium and we engaged the services of the then ABC TV newsreader Mary Delahunty to act as MC for the evening and the deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources, Robert Fordham, officially opened the new Centre. Two or three of the TV Channels were present. I was very touched when Robert Fordham publicly acknowledged and thanked me for my efforts in getting AMTEC off the ground.



Me with Robert Fordham, Deputy Premier and Minister for  
Industry, Technology and Resources

We had a number of successes at AMTEC but ironically - one of the highlights, was not a manufacturing project. We were approached one day by representatives from Victoria Police and asked if we could help them with a particular project they wanted to do. At the time

## It's a long way from Coley

there was a massive fraud going on involving luxury cars. These cars were being imported from overseas and moved around Australia, often being changed in the process. The criminal fraternity behind this were so sophisticated that the police were generating masses of information cross referencing over multiple volumes while tracking the fraud. In the Law Courts the police found it difficult getting their information across to the judges and magistrates as they were constantly having to refer to multiple documents.

The police wanted to know if was possible to graphically display the information they were producing to make it easier for them to argue their case in court. We ended up training a couple of policemen in how to use a CAD system and rented time out to them on our system. The results were better than anyone expected. The printouts were huge but very revealing. The police prosecutors were easily able to demonstrate the movements of the luxury cars across the country. The success of the project led to a seminar being prepared that I gave to the Victorian Judiciary demonstrating the power of graphically displaying criminal data for use in court cases. The presentation took place one evening and it was only after the event that I realised we had the majority of the State's Judges and Magistrates plus a couple of very senior police officers under the one roof at the same time. And we hadn't considered any form of security!!

But once again, all good things come to an end. The State Government of the day suffered a string of economic disasters including Tricontinental and the State Bank, the National Safety Council and Pyramid Building Society and the big one - the Victorian Economic Development Corporation. All of a sudden State Government money dried up and I was instructed to turn AMTEC into a self-sufficient operation immediately. This was not possible and I argued that as we were about halfway through our plan towards self-funding and reasonably on target that we should be allowed to continue but I was told that the decision was final. And then the

## It's a long way from Coley

penny dropped - they wanted AMTEC closed down as soon as possible. It wasn't long before I was politely informed that I was no longer required and was given one month's notice with one month's salary as a termination payment. That was their reward for all the hard work I had done for them. I had previously indicated to the Department that I could be interested in taking on another start up enterprise if they were looking for someone but by the time they fired me, I knew I would never get involved in any State managed enterprise ever again.

I had a meeting arranged at that time with Corrs Chambers Westgarth, the law firm that looked after AMTEC and I decided I couldn't be bothered so I rang and cancelled it. The partner called back the next day asking why I had cancelled and when I told him, he was stunned. He was even more stunned when I told him what my severance package was. He promised to help me and later in the day, I received a call from one of his peers who specialised in severance situations who offered to help me get a more deserving severance package. When I said that I probably couldn't afford to hire him, he said that part of his recommended package would be that the State Government pays his fee. That was a stroke of good luck because he was able to negotiate a more realistic severance package which as it turns out was needed because it took me three months to find another job. Being sacked from AMTEC didn't help my career prospects initially but in time, it became clear why I was sacked because my replacement at AMTEC was a public servant from the Department of Industry, Technology and Resources and within twelve months, the operation was closed.

It was about time that I joined the Riversdale Golf Club. We were driving along High Street Road in Mt Waverley one day and we were stopped at the traffic lights at the intersection with Huntingdale Road. I looked out across the Riversdale Golf Club on the left and said to Patricia – that looks a lovely course, wouldn't mind playing there!



## It's a long way from Coley

She replied instantly saying – why don't you check it out. After all you gave up golf because of me and boys. When the lights turned green, instead of driving straight ahead, I turned left and then went into the Golf Club entrance. I made initial enquiries at the front desk and came out with an application form, what I needed to do to apply, and the fees.

It wasn't cheap and we discussed it for a while but in the end we both agreed it would be worthwhile. So I completed the forms, got the requisite nominations and references, paid the fees and became a member. One of the best things I ever did and I thoroughly enjoyed both playing the course and the friendly club members, some of whom have become good friends. I started playing off a handicap of 27 and eventually managed to whittle it down to 12.6. I also managed to get my name on the honour boards on two occasions.



Riversdale Golf Club

## Chapter 19

As I said, it took me three months to find another job. I had become disenchanted with managing small companies so I was looking for a change. So I was very pleased when the Melbourne office of Digital Equipment Corporation (known globally as DEC) offered me a job as a Program Manager/Director - managing large projects with key customers.

By this stage, we had moved house again having decided to re-enter the mortgage stakes. We bought a house in Blackburn Road in Mt Waverley. Although it was on a very busy road, we bought it because it was a private sale and the owners, who were retiring to a seaside town in Gippsland, were asking a reasonable price for a quick sale. The owners also took a shine to us and made their decision very quickly. The house was walking distance to the local train station, which was an added bonus as by this time, all three boys were at De La Salle College in Malvern. Plus, there was a bus stop very close to the house. As soon as we could afford it, we paved enough of the front garden to form a turning circle so that people could drive in, turn on to the paved area, reverse back up the driveway and then drive out rather than reversing out.

I quickly settled into my work at DEC and looking back, I think it was a most satisfying time for me work wise. I was no longer the boss of a company but I was working for a company that empowered Program Managers/Project Directors. I worked on several projects starting not surprisingly with a CAD project. The customer was Telstra and I forget the name of the project, but it was to do with tracking their copper infrastructure. Telstra had literally thousands of miles of copper in the ground with very poor records of exactly where it was. The project was to take an existing third party software package and

## It's a long way from Coley

convert it so that all new infrastructure work plus any maintenance work could be digitally recorded.

DEC management were pretty switched on when it came to running major projects with its customers - by major I mean multimillion dollar projects. They would appoint a Program Manager or Project Director to a major project and empower that person with full control of the project and that person had to make regular presentations to the DEC Board of Directors during the life of the project. As well as that, a Board member would be appointed as a mentor to each Program Manager/Project Director. This was a clever move because if any one person or group within the organisation was affecting the final outcome of a project, this would become apparent at the project presentation to the Board and the mentor concerned could step in to assist.

I remember with a large Defence project that I managed where I encountered a major problem that I needed to resolve quickly to avoid missing a milestone that had financial implications for DEC. Looking back, I can see now why DEC were interested in hiring people like me in the first place - having worked in senior management roles such as General Manager of small companies - gave me a good grounding for running large projects. I am not going to elaborate here on what the issue was or how I resolved it, but resolve it I did and the milestone was reached without any financial penalty to DEC. But I fell out big time with the Accounts team in Sydney and they told me that I had overstepped my authority and not to do it again.

A few weeks later, I had to give a presentation to the DEC Board in Sydney followed by a meeting of the various groups involved in the project. I was advised that the Finance people were going to give me a serve at the second meeting so at the Board presentation, I explained how I had managed to meet the key milestone and felt that I had done nothing untoward. The Board agreed. When the

## It's a long way from Coley

presentation was over, I asked my Board mentor to drop into the project meeting afterwards and he agreed.

After the meeting had been going for a while, my Board mentor came into the room and said to the assembled people that he was just going to sit in to see how things were progressing with the project. He didn't say a word but after a while, he got up and said that it seemed to him that the project was running well and was on schedule and then he asked if anyone in the room had any comments to make about the project before he left. The only comments were favourable and when my mentor asked the Finance guys if they had any issues, they said that they didn't. My mentor then took his leave from the meeting.

My next major project after that one was an existing project that had got totally out of control with one of our biggest customers in the Petroleum Industry. When I was assigned to take the project over, we were seriously facing a \$2 million liquidated damages payout for being so far behind schedule. The project was key and was expected to eventually earn DEC in the region of \$20 million.

It didn't take long to ascertain the main problem - the awarding of the project to DEC was not a popular decision with the customer team that had been set up to work with whoever won the contract. So there wasn't a lot of goodwill and trust and this was hindered by the testosterone driven attitude of some of the DEC team working alongside the customer team.

The task appeared hopeless but fate decided to smile on me once again. A new senior executive appeared on the scene - he was a New Zealander and was appointed to the Australian operation on a three year posting. He was also appointed to the Board of Directors. One of his responsibilities was managing the customer group working on our project. Clearly I needed him on my side. Being new he had no baggage plus I found him to be a very smart and decent guy. I

## It's a long way from Coley

discovered early on that he was a keen golfer and bemoaning the fact that he was having difficulty getting into a decent Golf Club because of the waiting periods for new members. This was a golden moment for me.

As I said earlier, I was a member of Riversdale Golf Club in Mt Waverley, the third oldest Golf Club in the country and reckoned by many to be the best of the non-sand belt clubs in Melbourne. It was also the permanent host to the annual Riversdale Cup, the only 4-day amateur golf tournament which attracted players from interstate and overseas.

This new Director was called Nelson I invited him out to Riversdale one day to have a light lunch followed by a game of golf. Over lunch I explained to Nelson that his company could apply for a corporate membership at Riversdale for a fee of only \$3,000 per annum with no joining fee or waiting period. His company could nominate one person as the playing member who would have full playing rights except he couldn't play in the club's board events. In addition, they would be able to advertise free of charge during the annual Riversdale Cup tournament.

Over lunch I also discussed with him my key reservations in regard to the project and what I was trying to do to address them. When we walked down after lunch to the first tee, Nelson turned round to me and said - ok - I accept your comments and what you are trying to do and will help you - but I ask just one thing - lay off our project leader because to me he is invaluable. We then shook hands and enjoyed a pleasant game of golf.

I took advantage of this day and mentioned to Nelson that one of the problems I had was I didn't have my own desk space in his organisation where I could keep things on site. He fixed that for me very quickly as one of his managers had recently left and his office was still vacant. It was on the same floor as Nelson with a rather good

## It's a long way from Coley

view as well. It was a smart move on Nelson's part as his staff began to regard me as virtually one of their own. It also meant that I had somewhere very suitable to meet with any visitors I needed to bring on site. I remember when a very senior DEC Executive from Boston was visiting Australia and asked to come and see me to get a briefing on the project and to meet some of the senior customer people. When he walked into my office, he looked around and at the view and said - how did you manage to get this?

A few weeks later, the company became a corporate member at Riversdale Golf Club and Nelson had his wish. But my main problem was how I was going to manage Nelson's project leader. I had to admit that he was good but he and my project leader both suffered from an oversupply of testosterone!! I had no choice - my guy had to go but who could I replace him with. I sought approval from management, and got it, to recruit someone from outside on a contract basis. And I knew just the person I wanted - if she was available.

I had known Madeleine since my Stock Exchange days and had a healthy regard for her work ability and ethics. Besides being a very intelligent and sensible lady, she had the added bonus of being very attractive - I won't say beautiful in case she ever reads this - wouldn't want her to get a swollen head!! I knew she was working nearby on contract but wasn't sure if she might be available. So I rang her and asked her if I could interest her in a very difficult project management role but one that could be very fulfilling. We met the next day for lunch and she agreed to come on board but wouldn't be able to start for a month which suited me fine.

The previous senior project manager wasn't very pleased when he heard that he was being shifted out of the project to make way for Madeleine. But that was life. I doubt anyone has managed a large and complex project to conclusion without making some enemies

## It's a long way from Coley

along the way. As well as hiring Madeleine, I brought in another outside contractor who I had known for many years who was very experienced in running project management software. Crucial need in our case.

Madeleine hadn't been on the project long before she started to make her presence felt. I recall one day at a group meeting where sparks were literally flying and she called a stop and suggested that she and a couple of the customer project group go across the road to a coffee shop for a private chat. Once the coffees were ordered, she looked at the two guys and smiled and simply said - now come on, let's sort this out the way it should be sorted - sensible discussion between sensible people.

She did this time and again and her secret was - in my mind at least - that many stropky and testosterone driven men simply struggle to confront attractive and intelligent women. Call me a sexist if you wish but as far as I was concerned, I was simply fighting fire with fire.

By this stage, Nelson and I had revisited the project costs and timelines and agreed to a new completion date, and with no liquidated damages.

The project was eventually completed and met the new finish date and everyone was happy. And several months later, DEC awarded me a trip for me and Patricia to Cancun in Mexico. As it happened, DEC UK were holding a series of meetings concerning this particular petroleum company about the same time in the UK so I ended up getting a round world ticket so I could travel to Cancun via America, then go on to the UK returning to Australia via Malaysia. This was a huge bonus for me as Patricia had recently been diagnosed as having Parkinson's Disease and was already showing signs of slowing down. This trip meant that once the meetings in the UK were over, I could take some annual leave and we could visit friends and relatives, and

## It's a long way from Coley

as it happens, this would be the last overseas trip that Patricia would make.

Just before I completed the above project, I managed to get into the Optus Players' Championship Pro-Am event at Kingston Heath Golf Club and I took one of the petroleum company executives along with me. The Professional we played with was Mike Clayton.

My next major project with DEC and also my last project with them was managing their component of the Jindalee Over-The-Horizon radar project. For some reason I never understood, and still don't understand, is why the Federal Government awarded this major contract to Telstra with the Boeing Corporation being a significant sub-contractor. This was a huge project and one that was very difficult to manage. I had worked on projects with Telstra before and had received a number of overtures from them regarding employment possibilities but I was never interested.



## Chapter 20

In early 1995, I was approached by a recruitment agency and asked if I would consider a senior position with Telstra. I agreed to be interviewed by Telstra to see if I might be interested. After a couple of interviews, I was offered the position of National Manager, Infrastructure Projects, based in the Head Office in Melbourne. Looking back, I still don't quite know why I accepted the job, but I did.

I inherited a staff of 75 people based in all states and one of my first tasks was to reduce that number by half. Not an easy task in a company like Telstra and made more difficult by the fact that the guy I replaced was still working in Telstra. He had been popular with his staff and most of them resented the fact that he had been moved out of his role as their manager.

It wasn't long before I had serious regrets about leaving DEC and it didn't help my mental state when Patricia's illness was changed from Parkinson's Disease to Multiple System Atrophy. The culture that I encountered in Telstra was not the culture I was used to. Even today I still believe that most of the people that I had worked with in Telstra were more focussed on their own little empires than they were on Telstra as a whole. But let me say - that did not apply to everybody - but certainly to too many.

I came close to looking for another job almost from the start but I didn't want my CV to show that I had such a short tenure with a large organisation like Telstra. Then I heard on the internal grapevine that IBM Global Services was having serious discussions with Telstra to take over the Telstra IT Group. That gave me hope as the IBM culture, much like DEC and Prime, was where I belonged.

As I said earlier, Patricia was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in the early 1990's and although the discovery was unwelcome, we did think that with proper care and medication, she still had many years

## It's a long way from Coley

to enjoy as it is generally thought that people didn't die from Parkinson's Disease. Her father had been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and he died from a heart attack. But her condition appeared to be worsening more quickly than people with idiopathic Parkinson's Disease normally experienced. I had noticed that she wasn't lifting her feet when she walked, sort of a shuffle. What bothered Patricia most was that her handwriting started to get smaller - no matter how hard she focussed on her writing, it came out small. Thank goodness for computers and keyboards - she soon moved to typing her letters but in time even that started to become a problem.

It was about this time that I decided I ought to do something about the letter that my mother wrote to me just before she died telling me that Leonard wasn't my father. I didn't really know where to start so I asked Clive Luckman, who was very active in the genealogy world, if he could help me. He readily agreed but despite his best efforts, we didn't get anywhere.

I think it was sometime in 1994 that we were told that Patricia almost certainly had Multiple System Atrophy (MSA) and not Parkinson's Disease.

MSA is a brutal illness. It is a progressive degenerative neurological disorder that affects multiple areas of the brain. The areas affected are the basal ganglia, cerebellum and brain stem and they are responsible for movement, balance and body functions such as bladder control. It is rare and very difficult to diagnose. It is thought to affect 4 in every 100,000 people and has a prognosis of between 7 and 12 years. It is not known what causes the illness and there is no cure at this point in time. Very few doctors will actually say for certain that a person has MSA because it is generally believed that the only way right now to know for sure that someone had MSA is to do an autopsy. Even if the symptoms all match exactly, very few doctors would say definitely. The best they are likely to do is say "probably".

## It's a long way from Coley

My understanding of this dreadful illness is that there are three variants. One is known as Shy-Drager Syndrome where sufferers have orthostatic hypotension (blood pressure) and autonomic failure is dominant. A second form is known as Olivo Ponto Cerebellar Atrophy (OPCA) where sufferers have intentional tremor and balance problems and cerebellar signs predominate. The third variant is Striato Nigral Degeneration (SND) where Parkinsonian features predominate such as resting tremor, gait problems, slowed movements, rigidity, etc.

I am not a Neurologist so the above may not be as accurate as I believe and information on MSA may well have been updated since I last stopped reading about it.

Patricia was thought to have the SND form and that was confirmed by autopsy after she died.

By the time she was given the new diagnosis of MSA, she was working as a lexicographer for a company that was developing a computerised English to Indonesian dictionary. She had to take her leave from Defence Signals Directorate when they relocated to Canberra a couple of years earlier. We actually gave serious consideration to Patricia accepting a move to Canberra with DSD as there was a reasonably good chance that I could get a job in Canberra with DEC but in the end - and wisely - we decided we were better off in Melbourne.

Also by this time, we were living in Glen Waverley having decided that the house in Mt Waverley was not suiting a family with three grown up boys. But once the MSA diagnosis was made, it was clear that the location would in time prove to be an issue. I could see that it wouldn't be long before Patricia would not be able to drive anymore and although there was a bus stop nearby, we were not within walking distance of any shops or medical centres.

## It's a long way from Coley

I decided that our priority would be that we needed to be closer to key friends, reasonably close to shops and the medical centre we were registered with, and close to the parish church of St Christopher's in Syndal in Mt Waverley. We also needed a house that had little or very few steps, would be or could easily be converted to being wheelchair friendly, and have a nice low maintenance garden. Not an easy set of priorities. But I did manage to find just the place at 4 Bunker Crescent in Glen Waverley. Looking back now after the event, I reckon it was one of the better decisions I made in my life.

Bunker Crescent and surrounding streets had been developed in the late 1960's on the old Waverley Golf Club course which had sold up and moved further out to Rowville. Our new house was what is termed a merchant builders house - a long house with timber ceilings and a flat roof with an upstairs extension at the back of the house. It had a very small back garden but this was offset by a spacious side garden which was visible from the lounge room, dining room, kitchen and family room.



It's a long way from Coley



## It's a long way from Coley

I made a number of changes including putting a cork tile floor in the kitchen and family room area and had a handyman make access to the garden wheelchair friendly in preparation for when Patricia needed it.

Without doubt, one of the saddest days of my life up to that point was when the day came that we had to have separate beds. The main bedroom was set up for Patricia with a proper hospital bed and the en suite bathroom was professionally adapted for a disabled person. This cost me \$7,600 but that was offset by a government grant of \$4,000.

The upstairs section of the house comprised a bedroom, en suite bathroom and a lounge room and that became my retreat. In time the lounge room became my office.

The day came too when IBM Global Services took over the bulk of the Telstra IT Group including the group that I was responsible for. By that stage, I had reduced the number of staff reporting to me by half as I had been instructed to do and we were actually doing a lot more work. I stayed in that position for a while until moving on to other projects including the Year 2000 or Y2K project.

As Patricia's condition gradually deteriorated, IBM Global Services did the right thing by me. In time, they set me up so that I could work from home. They provided me with a desk, chair, computer equipment, conference phone, etc. Then it became a part time involvement until eventually I was not able to both care for Patricia and hold down a job. So on 30 June 2000, the day before the GST (Goods and Services tax) came into being, I took early retirement. The sad thing about that was because I was on a reasonable salary package with IBMGS, I stood to receive a reasonable pay increase from 1 July 2000 because of the tax cuts brought in to compensate for the GST.

## Chapter 21

I could never have cared for Patricia on my own - the task was too big. I advertised for a live-in housekeeper cum Carer to help me. I hired several people before I found the ideal person, a lady by the name of Colline. She stayed with us for quite a long time till she became sick herself and had to quit. I decided not to hire another live in housekeeper cum Carer but recruited a couple of people to come in on certain days. Luckily Colline offered to come back after a few months and we were both delighted.

I recall that the first person I hired was a lady who was from Chile or somewhere in that part of the world. She was a fervent Catholic and I thought that would be good for Patricia and Patricia quite liked her but in time it became obvious to me that her manic interpretation of the Catholic faith was not a good thing for Patricia. She was also a great fan of Benny Hinn, the global evangelistic minister, and she would record his programs that were on in the middle of the night and watch them the next day. She also sent him money on a regular basis. We had a discussion one day on whether or not God intervened when people prayed to him. I put the following scenario to her. Two families, each with a young child suffering from cancer. Both families prayed to God to spare their child. One died but one survived. I asked her that if God really did spare one of the children, why did he not spare the other whose family had prayed so hard to God. Her answer was that the family whose child had died, had a lesser belief in God than the family whose son had survived. It was then I realised it was time to tell her to pack her bags and move on.

It became quite expensive looking after Patricia but at least I had a superannuation fund I could draw on. I was fortunate that Patricia's brother Jim also offered monthly financial help for his sister – and that was greatly appreciated by both of us.

## It's a long way from Coley

Probably the single most significant beneficial event of that time was when we approached St Christopher's Parish church for help. They had a group of volunteers called the Syndal Helpers. Initially in the early days when Patricia was still mobile, it was simply a case of a volunteer driving Patricia to the shopping centre, or to a medical appointment or the Parkinson's support group. There wasn't an MSA support group so the Parkinson's group was the next best thing. As Patricia's illness developed, this group of volunteers grew to about ten, mostly women, who committed to visiting Patricia for at least two hours a week. One lady in her seventies - Judy - who was the de facto ringleader of the group gave up her Tuesdays to help Patricia. These ladies would give Patricia all the local gossip - crucial for a lady - and would read to her. This was a huge concession by these ladies because one lady would read a couple of chapters one day and then bookmark the book and the next lady would continue on the next day. By the time these ladies picked up the book again, several chapters had been read by the others - must have been very frustrating for them!

These ladies also learned how to do many of the daily caring tasks that I or Colline did including feeding Patricia, making special drinks, emptying catheter bags, giving her medication, and later on administering food and drink via a PEG tube. Basically the only thing they didn't do was administer morphine as that would have been illegal. Only a family member or a qualified nurse was able to administer morphine to a patient in the home. This group of people were fantastic - they saved my sanity if not my life.

Judy came up to me one Tuesday and said that she felt the time had come to try and recruit another helper. She never put out a feeler for volunteers because she quite rightly felt that not everyone would be suitably equipped and suited to help with Patricia. Judy said that she knew of a lady she thought would be perfect. She said - "she is a widow, she lost her husband several years ago to bowel cancer and



## It's a long way from Coley

she cared for him at home right up to the end. I think the time would be right for her now. I know her quite well but my husband Joe knows her even better because they both belong to the same tennis club at St Christopher's."

The following Wednesday the new lady - Margaret - turned up to meet Patricia and she agreed to become part of the group. In time Margaret became Patricia's favourite but that must not be seen as taking anything away from the other ladies. She brought an added value to the group as she was the only person who had been a full time Carer herself and had lost her partner and understood how I was going to feel as well as how Patricia would cope.

I know for certain that Patricia worried about how I would cope and what would happen to me after she had gone. That was one of her remarkable strengths. Again I remember one day when Margaret was visiting Patricia and I was working upstairs. Patricia buzzed me on the intercom system and I went down to see what she wanted. She told me that Margaret had just bought a new computer which was still in the box as she didn't know how to set it up and then suggested that I go round and set it up for her. Margaret was a bit taken aback by this as she hadn't asked Patricia to ask me and she protested that I had enough to do without spending time setting up her computer. Patricia insisted and in the end I went round and set it up for her and gave her some basic computer lessons.

And then one day, I received an invitation in the mail from Carers Australia to attend a special Carers Day afternoon tea party at the Victorian State Government house hosted by the then Governor General. I showed it to Patricia but wasn't really interested in going myself and said so. Patricia and Colline ganged up on me and suggested I go and take Margaret with me. I said no. But they wouldn't give in and it was arranged and when the day came, we both duly went along as we were told to!!

## It's a long way from Coley

I also recall one day saying to Patricia that I found it a bit difficult with her insisting I "become friendly" with Margaret and she just smiled and said that she totally trusted me. Looking back, I am convinced that she was setting me up and Colline was her willing accomplice. You can't trust ladies even one you are married to!

By this time Patricia was quite advanced with little mobility and unable to speak,

Margaret had started to come round every Saturday afternoon in addition to her Wednesday afternoon session and prepare an evening meal for Colline and I plus herself. After that we would move Patricia's hospital bed against the wall and set up a trivial pursuit game with me challenging the three ladies. And I sometimes won!!

Another memory I hold dear was when Patricia knew the answer to a particular question that neither Margaret nor Colline knew but the only way she could communicate was by pointing at her alphabet board. The answer was quite long and Margaret said to me after Patricia had pointed to a few letters - "you know she knows the answer, so why not concede she is right". I refused and both ladies argued that I was being unkind. My reply was that I was only doing what Patricia wanted and I asked Patricia - would she rather I said that I knew she knew an answer instead of letting her painfully point to the letters on the alphabet board - and she shook her head. She was a stubborn lady and had always been slightly OCD - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder - and unfortunately one of her MSA medications had exacerbated this condition. She didn't have a lot of pleasure in her life and I knew that she got a lot of pleasure from getting her trivial pursuit answers across without help.

People living in Victoria suffering from neurological illnesses are blessed with the fact that Bethlehem Hospital exists in this State. It is a public hospital owned and operated by the sisters of the Little

## It's a long way from Coley

Company of Mary. These days it is known as Calvary Health Care Bethlehem.

It provides nursing and other support in the home to patients suffering from progressive neurological conditions. It provides many services including a palliative care service, home respite services, a day care centre and speech pathology. It also has a 42 bed Hospice Inpatient Unit and a 30 bed Neurological Inpatient Unit.

Patricia would go into Bethlehem Hospital every three months or so and I would take a respite care break. On one of those breaks, I went to Torquay to catch up with a lovely lady by the name of Sarie who lived nearby in Jan Juc. Sarie had lost her husband Brian to MSA and I had managed to track her down after seeing his obituary in the newspaper. I asked if we could meet and have lunch and would she be prepared to talk about how MSA had affected Brian? We did in fact meet several times and she was wonderful, confiding in me how MSA had developed with Brian and how they coped. I found out later that those meetings took their toll and Sarie was often very sad for days after our meetings. I can now understand how she must have felt.

After my first respite care trip to Torquay, Margaret asked me where I stayed and I said that I stayed at a Bed & Breakfast place. She told me she had a holiday house in Anglesea, about a twenty-minute drive west of Torquay that wasn't being used much since her husband Leo died and the children had grown up. She said I could stay there if I wished and I took up her offer. I had never been to Anglesea before although I did drive through it once on the way to the iconic Twelve Apostles further along The Great Ocean Road.

The first time I stayed at Margaret's holiday house and stood on the back veranda looking out to bushland and the local golf course, I was hooked on Anglesea. Beautiful beaches, lovely bush views, good quality golf course, to name but a few attractions. I knew then that

## It's a long way from Coley

when it was all over, that I would live in Anglesea. That made me sad for a while as I realised then that I was thinking of what I would be doing once Patricia had passed away and I felt then that I shouldn't be thinking like that.

The day came when I went to Bethlehem Hospital to take Patricia home after a respite care break. I was met by the hospital management and taken to see the neurologist in charge of the hospital. They counselled me and advised me very strongly that the time had come for me to leave Patricia there as they felt that her condition had deteriorated to the point that I was not able to care for her at home.

I did not have to accept their recommendation and didn't want to but I was conscious of what everyone else was saying to me. Colline was clearly tired and was wanting a break plus she had found a new interest in her life. She had caught up with an old boyfriend from the days before she was married and clearly a permanent friendship was on the cards. As well as that, the ladies from the Syndal Helpers were all telling me that they thought that it was time for me to let go, that in their minds, it was time to think of myself.

Although I conceded to the advice from Bethlehem Hospital, I disagreed with their assessment that they could care for Patricia better than I could at home. The setup we had at home with me, Colline and the Syndal Helpers gave Patricia a better quality of life than any hospital ever could, and looking back now at this time, I still maintain that belief.

Being a full time Carer is not an easy task and it does exact a toll on the Carer him or herself. It is not uncommon for Carers to get sick themselves and reach their use by date before the person they are looking after. And many Carers end up with health problems after their caring role is over. In my own situation that certainly was the case.

## It's a long way from Coley

So I agreed that Patricia was to remain in Bethlehem Hospital. There was no point in my asking her what she felt because by that stage her OCD was rampant and she would never have agreed but she had agreed early on in the illness when she was in control that if and when the time came for her to leave home that she would abide by my decision.

I asked to have her bed wheeled into a room where I could talk to her without being disturbed. I fully expected that she would get upset so I had the music therapist waiting outside the door while I told her what had been decided. By this stage of her illness, she was unable to move or talk but she could still cry. I held her hand and told her again that I still loved her but the time had come for her to remain in Bethlehem. She let out the most awful howl which still haunts me today. She cried and cried, not I think because she felt I had given up on her but because she wouldn't see her lovely home again and I guess because she more than likely guessed that the hospital staff thought she wasn't long for this world. The door opened and the music therapist came in and I left them and walked out of the hospital and went home. Has to be one of the lowest days of my life. When I visited the next day, I was told the resident neurologist wanted to see me before I went in to see Patricia. She explained to me that she had met with Patricia earlier that morning and believed that she had got over the shock of the day before and was quite calm and accepting of the situation. When I went in to see her I was relieved to find her in a very relaxed state.

I do think that when the management at Bethlehem Hospital suggested Patricia remain in their care, that they thought that she probably only had about three months to live. But they underestimated her. She was a very determined lady and had a strong heart. It would be another 15 months before she went to her Maker.

## It's a long way from Coley

That meant she spent two Christmases there. The first Christmas I did suggest that it might be nice for Patricia to spend it at home, but I was talked out of that on the grounds that it would very likely unsettle her. The room she was in was quite big and had six beds in it. She had a corner position near a window. Come Christmas, we decorated her corner as much as we could. All the Christmas cards I received at home decorated the walls around her bed. We even had a small artificial Christmas tree. I spent both those last two Christmas days with her and they were special. The saddest thing for me though was how many of the other patients had very few or even no visitors on Christmas Day.

The ward she was in had a number of rooms with four or six beds plus a small number of single rooms. Patients tended to get moved into a single room when the end was imminent. I remember one lovely lady who was in the same room as Patricia and I went in one day, and her bed was empty and made up afresh. When I asked where she was, I was told she had been moved to a single room. I called in and paid a brief visit to her. The next day, she passed away.

The day came when Patricia was moved into a single room. She knew and she was terrified. She always believed that she would conquer her illness and that she would survive it but she knew why she had been moved. I tried to tell her that she had been moved because she was a bit noisy at night and was disturbing the others in the room. But she didn't believe me.

It was a Saturday - 4 January 2004. I was not rostered to visit Patricia that day and played golf at Riversdale Golf Club. Our youngest son Paul did the afternoon visit that day.

I had arranged to have dinner at Margaret's after golf and I had only just arrived at her house when my mobile rang. It was the duty nurse at Bethlehem Hospital informing me that Patricia had passed away. I

## It's a long way from Coley

had had a couple of drinks after golf so Margaret drove me to the hospital where we said our last goodbyes to Patricia.

I thought I was prepared for that day but I realise now that nothing prepares you for the finality of seeing someone you have loved lying there in a lifeless state.

Patricia had insisted that her brain be donated to the Victorian Brain Bank for research into MSA and also to confirm the diagnosis because she wanted the boys to understand that they were not at risk if the MSA diagnosis was proven. The undertakers duly arrived and took Patricia to the Brain Bank that evening. And in due course, I was informed that the autopsy did confirm that she had the Striato Nigral Degeneration form of MSA.

The funeral took place at St Christopher's a few days later to a packed church followed by cremation and then her ashes were placed in a memorial wall in the Bright cemetery - back to the town where she was born.

To this day I still regret leaving Patricia in Bethlehem.

## Chapter 22

It had been nearly four years since I took early retirement from IBM Global Services. They had indicated that I would be welcome back if I ever wanted to return but I doubt they would have been really interested after such a long break. That length of time in the computer world is a long time - the pace of change is frenetic - even CentreLink surprised me by suggesting that I was probably unemployable and offered me the New Start Allowance without me even asking for it. I was 63 years old at this time and certainly in need of some time out so I made the decision that I would not seek permanent employment in the IT Industry. I really didn't think I could cope with the demands of a multinational organisation again - I felt that I was too old and too tired. With a bit of careful management and being able to earn a little helping people with their personal computer problems, I felt I was safe enough. I was also showing signs by then of niggling little health issues.

I actually had no qualms taking the New Start Allowance offered to me by Centrelink. If I had not taken on the role of full time Carer and decided when it all got too hard, to pull the plug and put Patricia into a nursing home, it would have cost the government about \$100,000 to look after her. And on top of that, I estimate that I probably withdrew close to a similar amount from my superannuation fund over the years to help meet the cost of giving Patricia the level of care that she deserved.

By that time, my friendship with Margaret had developed to a point where we both felt that we could "sail off into the sunset" together. We had both been Carers, both went "the extra mile, and a bit more", and both needed a change. I do believe that some people felt that I should not have become as friendly as I did with Margaret while Patricia was still alive, but then it is possible that they didn't understand.



## It's a long way from Coley

I remember confiding to a very close friend of Patricia's over coffee in a café one day, that I was friendly with Margaret around the time that Patricia was permanently ensconced in Bethlehem Hospital, and that I suffered pangs of guilt about this friendship because Patricia was still with us. This friend stopped me fairly and squarely in my tracks saying that it was important that I looked after my own interests as well as Patricia's and that I planned for my future as well as caring for Patricia. She then told me about one of her dear friends in a similar situation to me and how this friend had confided to her that he had someone waiting in the wings once his wife eventually passed away. He said that knowing there was someone out there who cared for him and wanted to share her life with him, gave him the strength to be a better Carer for his poor wife.

Comments like that helped me cope and of course, I still insist that both Patricia and Colline colluded to make sure I did become friendly with Margaret. And to cap it off, I was greatly reassured when I first met Margaret's sister Carmel. Carmel was a Brigidine nun and I was very wary that she might not approve of our friendship – but I was completely wrong there. Carmel and I got on like a house on fire - we discovered that we both fancied ourselves as wordsmiths and loved doing cryptic crosswords. Sadly, she died not long after I got to know her from cancer - far too young.

I have this very deeply entrenched memory of the day when a close friend of mine told me that his wife had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. This was before Patricia became ill. I remember saying to him that I knew how he felt. He didn't say anything to that gratuitous comment. But some years later when I told him about Patricia, his eyes gave him away and I could see the sadness in them. I said to him - do you remember the day you told me about Bettina and I said that I understood? He said that he did. But I didn't, did I was my reply. No - he said - you couldn't have, but you do now.

## It's a long way from Coley

I put it to Margaret one day that the one certainty as far as I was concerned was that I was going to live in Anglesea. There was no negotiation. This was a decision I had made long before we became friends. This was perhaps a bit difficult for her because she had a huge network of friends in Melbourne that was important to her. Plus, although she had owned a holiday house in Anglesea since 1983, she didn't really know anyone in Anglesea.

Common sense prevailed and she knew the opportunity was too good to pass over!! So the decision was made - we would sail off to Anglesea. Margaret made it clear that although she had enjoyed staying in her holiday house over the years, it was not the place where she wanted to live permanently, nor was she even remotely interested in renovating or extending it. So we initially looked at selling the holiday house and buying something in Anglesea that was more suitable to our needs and wishes - well, Margaret's anyway.

We both had houses in Melbourne that were mortgage free and we sold them and rented somewhere till we could move to Anglesea. But we were unable to find what we wanted in Anglesea, or perhaps I should say, that Margaret wanted!! I have to concede that when it comes to evaluating properties, their potential, and what could be done to enhance them, Margaret is the better judge by a country mile. Maybe I am too easily pleased. I sensed she was looking for something special but we couldn't find it. At least certainly not in our price bracket.

We always believed that the idea of building a new house could never be on our agenda as it seemed to be beyond our means. This changed one day when we were talking to Margaret's accountant. He and his father before him had long been connected to Margaret's family, the family business and the family Trust Fund so was completely across all financial matters. He asked Margaret why she was not considering building a new house and when she said we felt we couldn't afford it, he said that we could. "You own the factory that your family business

## It's a long way from Coley

works out of", he said. "When Leo (Margaret's first husband) died, it became yours. It would make sense if the company bought it from you and they owned it. And I happen to know that your boys would be happy with that".

Margaret nearly fell off her chair - she simply had not realised that she owned the factory. When the accountant told her what it was worth, she nearly fell off her chair again!

And then it all came out - Margaret had always wanted to build "something special, something different". And now she had the chance. The artist within her had suddenly awakened!

So the decision was taken to demolish the old holiday house and build a new house on the block. It's a decent size block, big enough to probably put three dwellings on, although that wasn't possible as all the blocks in that area have a caveat on them restricting the blocks to one building per block. The block does not have a sea view but that doesn't concern us as we see the sea view every time we go out. We are located at the top of Anglesea close to where the town meets the bush and have a lovely bush view. In my mind a bush view changes far more than a sea view.

Margaret engaged the services of a local architect to design her dream house. Looking back, we both acknowledge that she ended up with a lovely and special house but it was a lot more than she bargained for. She ended up spending twice her intended budget which made a huge hole in her savings. It took me about twelve months to get over it but we do have a house that lets us entertain in a way we want to.

When we finally moved to Anglesea and moved into our new house, we knew virtually nobody in Anglesea.

It's a long way from Coley



I put a few ads out in the local shops saying that I was available to help people with their computer problems - such as rescuing dead computers, removing viruses, speeding up slow computers, upgrading and buying new computers, offering one-on-one training on certain topics such as Microsoft WORD, EXCEL, etc. It didn't take long before I was working all day and evenings 6 days a week. I went from knowing nobody to knowing a lot of people in a very short time. There would be times when I would be working on someone's computer that I had brought back to my study, and when I was ready to return it, I would say to Margaret, I think you should come with me as I think you would like the lady of the house. That is how she met her closest and best friend in Anglesea, and many other friends.

My interest in helping locals with their computer problems rekindled my interest in pursuing the search for my father.

## Chapter 23

Who was Paul Thomas? I re-read my mother's letter several times and decided that what she had written was plausible in my mind. She had stressed that she hadn't been able to tell me before because she was too embarrassed and thought I would hate her for what had happened. But a casual remark from one of her other children led her to suspect that I actually knew all along that Leonard wasn't my father.

But she was wrong – although Leonard had suggested such when he kicked me out of home, I didn't believe him – I thought it was a desperate throwaway line from a man whose wife had finally plucked up the courage to leave him.

So I commenced my search for this Paul Thomas in earnest. I joined several genealogy related blogs especially ones that dealt with adoptees. I also commenced DNA testing.

During my manual search for the elusive Paul Thomas, I thought I was close to finding him on 3 occasions. But to no avail. I was especially confident the third time and I had some members of this particular Thomas family in America already calling me "cousin". This particular project ended up with me identifying three branches of this Thomas family and nobody in any of the branches knew that the other branches existed. In the end, evidence surfaced that proved I was not of this Thomas family.

Several months later I received a lovely email from one of the family telling me that members from the three branches had gathered together for the first time and had supper one night. At the end of the night, they all raised their glasses and toasted "John Cummings in Australia"! That brought tears to my eyes.

In my manual search for Paul Thomas, I left a plethora of messages on bulletin boards and blogs all over the place. As well as explaining my

## It's a long way from Coley

reasons for wanting to find Paul Thomas, I also added additional data – just in case. This included details of my mother and I always included my email address. One day, I visited the Forest of Dean bulletin board in Gloucestershire, England and left a message. Several days later, I received an email which started with “Hello cousin!”. The lady who sent the email said that we shared the same grandfather but different grandmother. I responded that I didn’t think it was possible but she came back and said – “your mother was a Mutlow and her father was Hubert Ernest Frederick Mutlow and her mother was Ida Valentine Annie Smith. At some stage they separated and went their different ways but as far as I can tell, they never divorced. Hubert went to Neath in Wales and married my grandmother”. I was stunned. I had a grandfather I didn’t know anything about. In her next email, she sent me a photo of him.

In time, several people were advising me that I was too trusting of my mother. People in the adoptees group in particular were telling me that eight or nine times out of ten, when a mother confesses to one of her children that the man who was thought to be the father – wasn’t – and then went on to say who the father was – was lying. Your mother – they said – wanted you to know that Leonard wasn’t your father but was too embarrassed to tell you the truth so she spun an elaborate web of lies that you found plausible.

In the end I had to accept that this was most likely true so that was when I decided to tackle the problem using DNA testing.

There are three types of DNA testing for people looking for ancestors or close relations. Firstly there is the Y-DNA test which is a male test only and only addresses the male line so it is the test to take if you are looking for your father. The likelihood of the test telling you who your father is, is remote but it can match you with males where you both share a match somewhere in the past. The second type of test is the mtDNA test which is a maternal test. Lastly is the most common test

## It's a long way from Coley

of the three which is the autosomal test which is what I call the "cousins" test.

I did the Y-DNA test first at Family Tree DNA which to my knowledge is the only company that offers such a test. The results from my Y-DNA test were quite interesting. No mention of the surname Thomas but the people I was matched with had surnames like McAllister, O'Gara, O'Hara, McKeon, Cummins, O'Hara, O'May and so on. This led me to start thinking that I might be of Irish ancestry. But nothing was pointing me to my objective which was – who might my father be?

One very interesting discovery from my Y-DNA testing was the name O'May. For some reason, I became curious about this match so I contacted the person who owned the match. After several emails, I ended up ringing the lady in Baltimore in America and having a lengthy discussion with her. At one stage I said – you can't test because it is a male test – so who did the test? Cousin John was her reply. Where does he live, I asked? When she replied, I almost fell off my chair. John lives in Anglesea in Australia, she said.

I could feel something crawling up my spine when she said that. I said – I live in Anglesea and we only have a population of about 2,500 – does he really live in Anglesea? She gave me his address. I was stunned.

I have since met with John O'May and he is a delightful character. I personally had not heard of him before but he is a well-known actor and singer. We have had a few meals since and on one occasion we invited him to a party at our house with about 40 people. To my amazement several of the other guests knew who he was and gravitated towards him.

But back to the DNA testing. Not having any luck with the Y-DNA tests, I decided to take the autosomal test and on the advice of the adoptee group, I tested at all three of the major testers, Family tree

## It's a long way from Coley

DNA, 23andme and Ancestry.com. But again I was not having any luck.

Eventually I contacted one of my brothers – this wasn't easy because I had been out of contact with them for a long time and I had been "holding on" to my decision to isolate myself from my family in England. I asked him to test and offered to pay for the test and he agreed. When his results came back to me, I was very confused. I then contacted another brother and persuaded him to test and I paid for it. When his results came back I was even more confused.

It seemed to me looking at their results that Leonard was my father after all – very confusing. I had been working with a highly regarded genealogist in Utah for some time and had a good working relationship with her. I sent her all the DNA results and asked her what she thought of them. Her initial response was that she was also confused so she shared my data with three other genealogists in the USA including probably the most highly regarded genealogist. She finally responded by saying that Leonard was not my father but one of his four brothers certainly was. One of the other three genealogists who looked at my results, someone I was also in email contact with, asked me if she could post the findings on a particular blog site. This is what she said:

*John was looking for a specific person who he thought was his father. Not until he had a half sibling test did we get the surprise of our lives. His half-sibling appeared to be a FULL sibling and it really made us question it. I called in some of the big guns in genetic genealogy to further look at the results and we did an ROH comparison (Runs of Homozygosity) which is a comparison of FIR and HIRs (Fully identical regions vs. Half identical regions). Full siblings will have a relatively large % of FIRs. John and his sibling showed less than usual. At that time I had never seen or dealt with what we refer to as a 3/4 sibling. I have seen a few others since.*



## It's a long way from Coley

*A 3/4 sibling is a half sibling PLUS a 1st cousin. John's father was the brother of the father of his half-sibling. Who knew???*

I have to admit being confused by the technical jargon but I have the highest regard for both these genealogists so I had no qualms accepting their decision.

All of Leonard's brothers had children except for his brother Ken – the youngest of the five Cummings boys. I have tested children of the other three brothers and all have come back as confirmed first cousins. So that means Ken was my father.

I do recall hearing somewhere that Leonard and Ken shared accommodation in Reading at the start of the war. But more importantly I remember quite well that when I was very small, Ken was often around the house and he taught me how to tie up my shoelaces and he made a cardboard clock and taught me how to tell the time. I never saw him again after the war ended and Leonard returned home.

If there was any doubt – when Ken died in 1999, one of my brothers – or should I say half-brothers – cleared his house. When I asked him if Ken had left any photos, he said that the only photos he found were of me and Ken had written the dates they were taken on the back of the photos..

It's a long way from Coley



Ken as a young man



Me as a young man

So that brings me back to where I was born – Barnstaple in Devon. I suspect that my grandmother knew that Ken was my father – I say that because I was visiting her one day when I was about 11 or 12 and was probably telling her about the problems at home when she blurted out – “your mother married the wrong man”. It didn’t make sense to me and I was too young and too polite to question what she had said. I do seem to recall that my grandmother had family somewhere in Devon and I can only surmise that she sent my mother to them while she was pregnant. The address on my birth certificate was 19 Alexandra Road, Barnstaple and it was originally a Workhouse built in 1837. From 1904 on, to protect them from disadvantage later in life, the birth certificates of those born in the workhouse gave its address just as 19 Alexandra Road, Barnstaple. At some stage it became the Barnstaple Public Assistance Institution, and then after the inauguration of the National Health Service in 1948, it became Alexandra Hospital until finally closing in 1978.

I have a copy of the record of my mother’s admittance to 19 Alexandra Road and she was admitted on 2 March 1941. She was not listed as a patient, but as an inmate. I was recorded as having been born on 3 March 1941. There is a saying that it isn’t what you know but who you know. It wasn’t uncommon in the past for birth, death and marriage dates to be fudged in order to save familial embarrassment. I can’t be certain and I will never be able to prove it but I think that my mother was already pregnant when she married Leonard and my grandmother probably knew that Ken was the father. So she shipped my mother off to Devon to stay with friends in case her (my grandmother) friends twigged that my mother had to get married because she was pregnant. And these friends in Devon had some clout with the people running the Public Assistance Institution and some moolah changed hands and an appropriate date was procured. In the end, it doesn’t really matter – I came into this world regardless of events.

## Chapter 24

During my time as a Carer, I started to get niggling little health issues that I foolishly ignored. I now know that it is a common thing among Carers. The constant strain and the pressure that comes with being a Carer, especially when the person being cared for is slowly dying with absolutely no chance of recovery, is enormous.

Looking back I now accept that although I appeared to be coping well at the time, I really wasn't. But I also believe that most male Carers go through this. Men in general don't rally around other men. Women are quite the opposite. While she was being looked after at 4 Bunker Crescent, Patricia had hordes of visitors, mostly women but some men. In all that time I only recall two male friends who rang the doorbell specifically because they had come to see me and how I was coping.

I also remember two comments that were made to me. One friend, who had separated from his sick wife, told me that he admired how I was caring for Patricia. He said that he just couldn't cope with his situation and it was better for his wife that they parted company. Another friend had cared for his wife who was suffering from Alzheimer's Disease for quite a long time before it was inevitable that she go into a nursing home. One day I dropped in unannounced for a chat on my way home from somewhere. After a while, he apologised that he hadn't been in touch with me once Patricia became ill. He said that he found it hard, a man thing.

In the early days of her illness, I did fall into the "why me" trap. I wasn't the one suffering from an insidious and incurable disease yet I was asking myself – why is this happening to me? What am I going to do? And bemoaning the fact that all our wonderful plans for retirement were never going to happen. And I am ashamed to admit that for a while I thought about quitting. But one day I asked myself

## It's a long way from Coley

– what would Patricia do if it was me that had MSA? And I knew the answer was that she would be there till the end. I knew I had to be there till the end as well.

During that period of time as a Carer, I put on a lot of weight. I cooked meals that were easy for me to cook and I did find solace in alcohol. I never drank during the day – thank goodness – but a glass or two of scotch while I was preparing dinner seemed to do wonders for me. And I also enjoyed having red wine with my meal. I came to realise that I could imbibe quite a deal of alcohol without any traces of a hangover. Patricia would buzz me during the night for some reason or other and I would have no problem getting up and seeing what it was she needed done.

The problems I now suffer with my feet started about then but they were minor and only occurred occasionally. I did seek advice from a podiatrist who told me that I had metatarsalgia and gave me some simple orthotics. But it didn't seem to make any difference. And over the years the problem slowly became worse. Then I started getting severe leg cramps at night. My then GP believed that all of this was due to my being on my feet all day, lifting my wife, etc.

After I remarried and relocated to Anglesea, I noticed that the occurrences of my foot pain were still intermittent but more frequent and were affecting both feet. This did not really affect my mobility. I was walking for at least 30 minutes most days at a good pace and playing golf once a week. I actually lost 13 kilos in weight of the 20 kilos I gained as a Carer.

By January 2009 I was in trouble with my feet and legs and not able to walk for any length of time without severe foot pain. I was also getting leg cramps at night more often, sometimes very severe. I was told I had arthritis not Metatarsalgia and that I should take paracetamol and walk through the pain. I was also given several laser acupuncture treatments which did nothing for me.

## It's a long way from Coley

Since then I was told I had arthritis, Metatarsalgia, Plantar Fasciitis, Morton's Neuroma, among other things, and have had two different styles of orthotics prescribed. I have been referred to just about every health professional there is. In the process of trying to find out what was causing my feet pain, I have had my thyroid removed, been diagnosed with Angina, had varicose veins removed from my left leg and had lower back surgery.

Finally after ten years and two months I was told that I have Small Fibre Neuropathy. My neurologist told me that I won't lose any limbs or end up in a wheelchair but – there is no cure. Only pain management.

About a year ago I was told that I had Macular Degeneration in my left eye. I decided that I needed a second opinion and was recently re-diagnosed with Vitelliform Muscular Dystrophy.

Looking back, I wonder if the fact that my maternal grandparents were first cousins has had any impact on their descendants health. My mother did not enjoy good health and died in her mid-fifties from mesenteric thrombosis.

It's a long way from Coley

## Chapter 25

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2021, I joined the octogenarian club – OBE – Over Bloody Eighty!

When I was a little boy, I thought 40 was old and wondered if I would ever reach such an age and here I am celebrating 80. I do find it hard to believe.

My first celebration was on the day when I was taken out to dinner in Anglesea with Margaret and three other friends. A few days later, I celebrated with my family at a restaurant in Hardware Lane in Melbourne and Narelle and Patrick had conjured up the most amazing cake:



It's a long way from Coley

Because of Covid-19 lockdown, it was a few weeks later before I could have my 3<sup>rd</sup> and last celebration hosted by Ian McLeod and Christine Walker. About 30 people turned up and plenty of good food and wine was consumed.



It's a long way from Coley

## Chapter 25

### The Anglesea War Memorial

On Sunday 27 February 2022, The Anglesea and District War Memorial was formally opened. Funds had been raised primarily through the Anglesea War Memorial website which was developed by my granddaughter Claire and her father – my eldest son Patrick – paid Claire to develop the web site and he hosted it pro bono on his company server.

Unlike most War Memorials, it will not only list those from Anglesea and District who died for their country, but also those who served and were fortunate to return.

On the occasion I sported my solitary Borneo Campaign Medal that I was awarded in 1966. It was the first time I had ever worn it and it will be the last time.



It's a long way from Coley



It's a long way from Coley

COLE R H	2
COLE R W	2
COLLEDGE W	2
CONDIE R P	2
COOMBE J L	2
COOPE E R	2
COULSON A R	2
COULSON K H	2
COUTTS A G	2
COWARD M M	2
CROWL J T	1
CULLEN V R	2
CUMMINGS J	6
CUNNINGHAM A J	1
CUTLER G O	1
CUTTS H G	2
CUTTS W C	1

I feel pleased that long after I fall off my perch, that my name will live on in Anglesea as it is included in the list of servicemen and women on one of the name plaques.

It's a long way from Coley

But you have to admit

It's a long way from Coley.



Hoc est finis meae fabula

(That's the end of my story)