

LONG SHOTS

Ash Long Media

What Motivated People To Write These Heartfelt Letters?

Back From The Brink

** N. writes: "I can't help materially, Ash, because of my own situation. But I can wish you well as one who came back from the brink. I admire your guts to ask for help. It took me a suicide attempt before I did that."*

'Incredibly Courageous'

** C.W. writes: "You are incredibly courageous and if I had the money I would invest it in a man such as yourself but unfortunately an e-mail is all that I can provide. Good luck to you and your family and I hope you are overwhelmed when you check your bank account."*

Courage And Determination

** V.C. writes: "Ash, I'm just a humble employee with kids, a mortgage, car loan and credit card completely maxed, so unfortunately I'm unable to help with your financial situation. However for what they're worth, I would like to add some words of support: I admire your courage and determination and wish you all the best in overcoming your challenges."*

Open And Honest

** C.O. writes: "Ash, Every week I read your Media Flash with interest. I find it the most up-to-date way of knowing what's going on in the industry and look forward to receiving each edition - in short, I think you do a great job. I find such an open and honest account of your own situation to be inspiring. Although I've never met you and formerly had no knowledge of your situation I really feel empathy for your situation and hope you can pull it back together for yourself and achieve."*

Best Wishes

** C.G. writes: "I just want to tell you how much I feel for you. I wish I could help you financially - but unfortunately can't as I too have been going through the rigours of a corporate failure. I sincerely wish you the best with your endeavours though - and if you give me a call I would be more than happy to offer some suggestions as to how you might monetize what you currently have."*

Great Product

** B. writes: "Hi Ash, You may recall me from your (early) days ... I read the latest news flash. It's a pity you're struggling. Media Flash is a great product, and I recall yourself as a great fella. Unfortunately, my finances are worse than yours, so I can't help there. But I do wish you all the best. Hope to talk, maybe a lunch, sometime? Anyway, all the best."*

A Little Similar

** A. writes: "Do Miracles Still Happen in Australia? I hope so ... If I had any money I would lend you some Ash ... unfortunately I think my life story is a little similar to yours."*

Just Be Strong

** D. writes: "Sorry to hear about your financial problems ... I lost everything in 91, house, marriage, business, the lot. (Name) got the lot and I ended up labouring on building sites, etc. Have got back up now and I am sure you will too. Just be strong."*

True to Life

** C.S. writes: "Ash, Your e-mail has made me upset, I feel inferior not being to help in a way that can actually financially help you. Your words have expressed the frustration, disillusionment, desperation of someone in, to put it mildly, a pickle. These are things that human beings in Melbourne, Australia, the Media, are not supposed to express, but you have. Maybe I mix with the wrong people, but 99 per cent of the time, people put on a face, and let few people go below the exterior, let alone to strangers. When you be yourself, without a false face, you are being true to life. You have done the right thing. You deserve more. With my limited experience, I find your stories in Media Flash informative and entertaining, and I also regard them as lessons in the way things work. Your depth of thought and experience is priceless, and has shaped my perspectives. I thank you for that, I hope there are people who can help out the Ash Long bank so you can continue to shape young people's opinions. I wish you the very best for you and your family. When things are dark, and you feel everyone has abandoned you, you may be surprised at who will reach out. I sincerely hope that you get through this."*

Good Luck

** R.C. writes: "We are very sorry to hear about your troubles, we do appreciate what you're going through on the business side of things being a start up operation ourselves and doing it tough. Good luck in the future and we hope that things pick up for you."*

'Wish I Was Rich'

** A. writes: "Dear Ash, I was very sorry to hear about your predicament. I wish I was rich and could help you out. Best of luck."*

Familiar Story

** R.M. writes: "Ash, I can only offer support, but you have that. Like you I am a small businessman, running on empty, but your story is familiar to me. Good luck raising the cash and I hope to see the phoenix rising from the ashes (no pun intended)."*

Good Luck, Soldier

** S.P. writes: "I don't know what to say. I am appalled to hear of your experiences while fighting the good fight. For my part - I'm a freelance who has precious little financially himself. I feel sad that all I can offer is some sort of sympathy and a wish that a miracle will happen for you. I think you're already on top philosophically and I applaud you for that. 44 is too young to be made to give up. Please keep me informed along the way - I will pass on your e-mail to whoever I think may be able to help. Good luck, soldier."*

Appreciate The Honesty

** D.R. writes: "Can't help, Ash, as my own financial difficulties are very precarious also. But I appreciate your honesty (I have tasted similar bitterness though not quite to the same extent) and I wish you and your wife every success in getting over this latest obstacle. It seems you have managed it in the past and I have a feeling that you will do so again. Regrettably I can only offer you good thoughts but, for what they are worth, they are yours!"*

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'For me.'

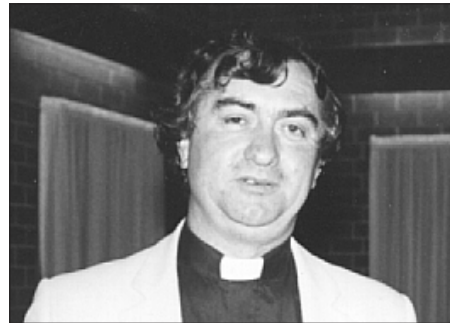
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So, don't mess with me. OK?



■ From Prime Ministers down, VIPs are regular subscribers to Ash Long's controversial weekly writings. PM Bob Hawke and Peter Cleeland pictured with 'The Yea Chronicle'. See Page 129



■ Ash Long has been at the forefront of media in Australia. He was the first Aussie to produce a newspaper using desktop technology. He now owns Australia's leading media industry E-newspaper, 'Media Flash'. See Page 130



■ Catholic Fr Terry Pidoto was one of three small-town clergymen featured in Ash Long's newspapers. The town's Anglican minister was also stood down, as well as de-registered as a GP. Readers were wide-eyed as the paper reported a local Presbyterian Pastor facing family violence charges. Catholic Priest, Fr Pidoto, also a Scout leader, was removed after defending charges. See Page 163



■ Above: Radio man Bruce Mansfield's audience fell from top of the ratings, to the least popular in Australia, after a split with Ash Long. See Page 207

■ At Left: An Ash Long media career highlight was broadcasting back to Australia from the BBC. See Page 204

Foreword

How did I come to appear on national television every week with Bert Newton? Why did I kidnap gay showbiz icon John-Michael Howson ... with his permission?

What made me become the 'whistleblower' on radio-TV star Bruce Mansfield's activities, in the dramatic events that became known as the 'Cash For Comment' inquiry?

Why did I file for bankruptcy, not once but twice? And then ... how did I come to receive mailbags full of support from ordinary Australians?

This book attempts an honest self-appraisal of a rare one-man-band in Australia's demanding but bitchy media industry.

What follows is a thrilling roller-coaster ride through the exhilarating 'highs' and dreadfully depressing 'lows' of a controversial business life in Australia's media.

There have certainly been major career successes. I have been a effective senior executive of a number of major media companies; I ran my own publishing company successfully for a decade, with an array of awards and honours. But, with brutal frankness, there are also been some serious stumbles from a knockabout bloke.

This book is being published in March 2001. It is not an attempt to change the world, or a publishing venture to focus on a talented person. It is an unabashed attempt to raise some capital to fund myself from a financial skirmish from which I have tried to rid myself for the past 17 years. Perhaps we can also have a bit of trade-mark fun along the way.

It's not all circus and bad news. This book also celebrates the thousands of different, fascinating characters who have made my world of 44 years. Hopefully, this is a work in progress. I am trying desperately hard to rebuild a professional life after more knockdowns than most.

Thank you for supporting me by reading this book. Hopefully, you are not holding a loan copy; pay your 50 bucks like everyone else, and lend me a hand! And, by the way, thank you for being part of my life ... one that is never dull!

Ash Long
March, 2001



■ Ash Long won a reputation as 'The Minister For Lunch'. The high-spirited journo hams it up for the press cameras with Sgt. Peter Vass. **See Page 136**



■ Why did Ash's Personal Assistants dress up in Playboy bunny suits? One of the best-ever Secretaries was Pauline Holbery at Leader Newspapers in the early 1980's. Long led the most powerful sales team at Australia's leading newspaper company. **See Page 81**



■ **Left:** Ash Long at the Rotary podium, awarded as a Paul Harris Fellow. **Above Right:** With Bruce Mansfield, Ash appeared weekly on Bert Newton's national television program, Good Morning Australia. Long was the 'whistle blower' in what became known as radio's 'contra for comment' scandal. **See Page 213**

Introduction: 'Chew Like Buggery'

"Start with a bang. End with a bang. Let the middle look after itself."

So goes the writing formula instructed to teenage Ivanhoe Grammar boys by former Gurkha commander Doug Hennessy.

This book is full of bangs: start, middle and finish. *Long Shots* is a high velocity cocktail of successes and failure. In this book, you'll be part of business glory and bankruptcy; experience the kidnapping of a TV star; have a private Hollywood show-for-two by comedian Robin Williams; and live through the real drama as a madman threatens to kill.

You will come with me behind-the-scenes in Australia's media world; live the drama of whistleblowing in the radio cash-for-comment scandal; plus spy on the rise and fall of a range of showbiz personalities.

You will discover who really runs the media, what actually happens in those big corporate takeovers; and discover the bluff and the bluster of Canberra. Plus you will take a first-hand tour of the personality struggles in the corridors of power.

You will mix with me in the company of Prime Ministers and Premiers, face Court, dodge the repo man, and dine with the stars. You will live the adage: "Bite off more than you can chew, and then Chew Like Buggery."

This book is also a story of summoning courage to fight a range of personal and professional battles.

I hope you will find that *Long Shots* is fascinating, name-dropping collection of yarns ... and a zoo of extraordinary people. You'll sip French champagne, share the raucous laughter, and squirm at the inevitable tumbles.

Hold on to your hats ... and welcome to the world of *Long Shots*.

Sam Newman of *The Footy Show* performs a great radio ad, saying: "James Packer tells me never to name-drop." You see by this book's index that I've ignored Sam's advice.

I also ignore the journalist's First Commandment by using the word 'I'. Because this is an autobiography I claim immunity ... the good news is that this book also talks about more than 2000 fascinating people.

I was raised as a shy young Melbourne boy, with a Methodist background ... who grew to corporate success, then twice declared bankrupt. Why?

I was awarded as Victoria's best local reporter, yet at times was slammed in the national press for taking cheap shots at other newsmen.

I worked alongside the brilliant Australian economics journalist Maxwell Newton as he revived Melbourne's *Sunday Observer* with a low formula of 'tits, trots, TV and track; film stars, footy and fantastic events'. I studied the science of his editor John Sorell who took the paper from nowhere to a circulation of 240,000 for a Grand Final. *I printed* every one of them.

I discovered the bluff of press and politics. When Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and Liberal Opposition Leader Bill Snedden toughed it out in the May 1974 election, *I watched* through the night as the headlines changed to 'Killer Gough'; 'Go-Go Gough' and 'Phew!' *I was red-faced* as Max showed his elation when Malcolm Fraser was elected in 1975, with the shocking front-page: "Thank Bloody Christ! Mauler Mal Gives Gough The Big A'.

I worked under different financial role models. Newton was questioned at the Melbourne Press Club about his libel writs adding up to \$42.17 million, with his assets at \$165,000. "What will you do if they succeed?" he was asked. "I'll be left a bit short," came the laconic reply. "And the Bank of New South Wales will be left a bit short too." Other of role models are somewhat richer.

I was privileged to work with Australia's most honourable media family, the Motts ... then failed gloriously as I tried to emulate their efforts. Read how I have been graced with wonderful and similarly honourable mentors including Don and Joy Brown, and Ron and Marilyn Pearce.

I have tried making a success in business for 17 years on my own account. Sometimes that account has been massively overdrawn.

I have experimented with press, radio, TV and books. *I have been part* of the teams responsible for Australian best-selling books, best-rating radio, and appeared live weekly on national TV. *I saved* a company from its million dollar losses - and then left forced out after a bitter episode.

I built up a lucrative nightly TV program, only to sacrifice it to become a whistle-blower on doubtful media practices. A 'paradox', as Gilbert and Sullivan might sing.

All this brought me to my knees - in commercial and personal ways. Just as I was about to face 'Strike Three', *I confessed* all to the world. What happened after that was a miracle. *I'd like you* to learn more about it.

But ... enough about me ... please meet some of my friends.

Gypsy Tales

Friendly gypsies approached James Long in the potato fields of Mount Shannon, Ireland, in 1851, offering to tell his fortune. It seemed like comic fun, with millions of people in Ireland suffering the ravages of the potato famine over the previous two years. The gypsies told James that they saw him “going overseas within three months”.

Long didn't take the prophecy seriously. He lived with his father, James Long Snr., a school teacher, and his mother Eliza. James had been born in 1830 at Lorrha, Borris O'Kane, County Tipperary. As the famine hit, it was the typical Irish family of the 1850's.

The gypsies were correct with their prediction. James Long sailed from Liverpool on the *Hydaspes*, captained by Hugh Stewart, arriving in South Australia on November 27, 1851. The usual route of immigrant ships was non-stop around the Cape of Good Hope. To coin a tune, *It's A Long Way From Tipperary*.

James Long's stay in South Australia was about 2½ years where he was engaged mainly in the bakery business. His last employment in the colony was watching for vessels arriving for the Port of Adelaide. He worked from Semaphore, now a suburb some 15 kms from the city centre. On one occasion he fell asleep, allowing a vessel through - without reporting. He did not wait to be reprimanded and left the job immediately.

James joined a company of bullock teams taking goods to the Ballarat goldfields - as their cook. When he arrived in 1854, he furthered his way to Castlemaine where he stayed on the diggings for 18 months. There were rumours of bushrangers. As a safeguard, James left 80 pounds between a couple of trusses of hay. After the scare, he went to recover the money, but the hay was gone, probably burnt.

James later told that many of the diggers thought the boom days of the fields were going to last forever, but they did not. James Long did not gain a lot of satisfaction from the digging operations. There were those who made a fortune in a few days, and others who toiled for weeks without seeing any 'colour'.

Those who did find success, spent freely. Some even flamed their tobacco with £5 notes. James Long later recalled that he had enjoyed “a fair amount of success” on the goldfields.

"A jovial and talkative man, Long was also an astute businessman who founded a company that continued well into the 20th Century," according to *Ballarat Courier* journalist Peter Mansfield in a nostalgia piece for the newspaper:

"James Long moved to Geelong where he married Miss Olivia Lucas at the United Methodist Free Church. Again he worked as a baker and confectioner in that town before moving to Ballarat in 1862. For a short time he lived in Plank Road.

"The business expanded and in 1864 it was relocated to Victoria and East Streets and remained there for decades. Newspaper reports at the turn of the century focus on the business skills of its founder.

"The manufacture of confectionery has been brought to a fine art and there are few establishments of its kind in Australia where a wider variety and great excellence of candied lollies and dainty biscuits came into being than those of Messrs J. Long and Sons Limited.

"It is now one of the leading manufacturers and biscuit factories in the state. There are now 110 employees and a substantial sum is circulated in wages. The Company has agents in Bendigo, Geelong, Melbourne, Fremantle, Hobart and Brisbane.

"By 1901 it was known as the Victoria Steam Confectionery and Biscuit Factory and was managed by Mr Thomas Long. *The Courier* devoted almost 2000 words to the description of biscuit making (April 16, 1890):

"... the biscuit department is worth a visit. The large travelling oven in which the biscuits are put on square flat tins and which passes along on chains come out with its contents baked and ready for packing at the other end. It is much like a double railway line 40 feet long with gearing to regulate its speed to go fast or slow according to the sort of biscuits passing through the oven. Packing in tins or cases is smartly done by a number of young women.

"In the boiled lolly department the machinery can turn out 6 cwt (hundredweight) an hour. In other departments, they make fruit lozenges, jams, ju-jubes and pie flans. The energy and enterprise of the firm is proverbial."

James Long's first wife, Olivia Lucas, traces her Australian ancestry to a First Fleet convict, Nathaniel Lucas (1764-1818). He was a joiner and carpenter of Red Lion Street, Holborn, London, in July 1784, when he was indicted for

feloniously stealing a number of items: one cotton apron (value, 4 shillings); one towel (two pence); six muslin aprons (12s.); nine muslin handkerchiefs (18s.); three muslin caps (3s.); a muslin shawl (5s.); the property of his neighbour, Mary Davis, spinster.

Nathaniel Lucas was convicted at the Old Bailey, and sentenced to transportation for seven years, sailing in 1787 on the *Scarborough* in the First Fleet. Lucas received a 15-acre grant in 1791; later purchasing 60 acres; and 1802 records show him selling wheat, maize and port worth £450 to the Government. He had several stints as the Master Carpenter for New South Wales, but quarrelled with designer Francis Greenway over designs, with an allegation that Lucas was much addicted to the bottle.

In 1818, Nathaniel Lucas' body was found in the mud of the river at Liverpool: his death was said 'to have proceeded from his own act, owing to mental derangement'.

Do you think this mental condition has a genetic follow-through? Thankfully, my bloodline comes from James Long's second wife, Mary Jane Wilcock!

The Long family celebrates its 150th year in Australia in 2001, carrying a family motto of 'Pious Though Valiant' proudly on its sleeve. You make your own judgement. The dictionary definition of pious: 'devout, religious; hypocritically virtuous, sanctimonious; dutiful.' A fair CV, isn't it?

James Long became one of Victoria's great business leaders. In 1982, with my uncle Alan Long, I co-authored a Long family history, *Nothing Without Labor*.

It was a successful book that detailed the pedigrees of family members. As the comic line goes, I come from a line of long livers. My grandmother's sister, Christina Cock, is Australia's oldest living citizen. She turned 113 on Christmas Day 2000, having been born on Christmas Day 1887 at Gorae, near Portland. I just hope my pancreas holds out that long.



■ **Far Left.** 1851: James Long arrives in Australia, and establishes the Victoria (later Sunshine) Biscuit Company.

■ **Left.** 1915: Albert Fletcher Lawrence marries Honora Lawrence (nee O'Brien). Maternal grandparents.



■ 1860's: James Long establishes Victoria Biscuit Co.



■ 1954: Royal Visit past Lawrence Leathers, Thornbury



■ 1945: Wedding photo of my mum, Marjory Long (nee Lawrence). Married the day before her 21st birthday at Croxton Park Methodist Church to W.O. Il James Long.

Behind Enemy Lines

Jim Long, my father, introduced me to work and my newspaper career, just one week before my 13th birthday. He was no stranger to hard work. James Wilcock Long was born on June 8, 1921, in Numurkah.

His father, Allan (a grocer), and mother Althea (a nurse), had settled in a number of country towns including Bendigo and Koo-Wee-Rup. In the Depression years of the 1930's, he worked in the family grocery business, with his family anonymously dropping food hampers on the doorsteps of the needy. This altruism had a real cost: the Long's lost their grocery stores.

Jim Long started a career selling shoes at Williams The Shoeman, joining the Army, serving in the Middle East, returning to take charge of the Army's Electrical and Mechanical Workshops at Bandiana, near Albury. It was here that he met his sweetheart, Marjory Lawrence, an Army stenographer. They married on February 24, 1945 - a day before my mother's 21st birthday. The rest, as they say, became history.

His post-War career included the family Golden Ray Confectionery business until sugar supplies became scarce, unless one was prepared to pay big prices on the 'black market'. Jim Long refused; perhaps the family motto of 'Pious Though Valiant' was again to the fore.

After night-time accountancy and management studies, Jim became Production Manager of the Standard Motor Company at Port Melbourne, the progenitor of the Toyota works. He later became Director of a major structural Victorian steel company, Great Southern Constructions, and an association with the not-related Harry Long's Central Queensland Fabrications at Rockhampton. A fringe benefit was a North Queensland trip for a nine-year-old Ash.

Jim Long had serious war-related disabilities, including stress and hypertension. He had worked undercover in the Middle East, and had been involved in breaking a German wireless-smuggling operation from Egypt. Unarmed, bullets whistled past him in the gunfire of 'the sting'.

In his words: "We decided one evening to have a night on the town in a cabaret called the 'Kit Kat'. I had been there previously with Verg Curtis, having a good time. When the time came for the playing of the National Anthems, firstly *God Save The King* to which we stood rigidly to attention, then the *Marseillaise*, to which Verg went gracefully waltzing across the

dance floor until he realised the situation. He did not know it was the French National Anthem. Did we have to do some fast talking!

"Eventually we appeased the peeved, which cost us a stack of dough in buying drinks. We were having a quiet drink when a well dressed local brushed our table knocking over one of our drinks, hastily apologising, and insisting upon replacing same. This he did, joined our table, bought the next round, and the next, and we ceased paying for drinks that evening. Our colour patches were, in all probability, a dead giveaway that we were a unit located in Beirut.

"We were asked as to whether we could do him a favour by bringing some parcels up from Egypt, and if so we would be well looked after. In reply to a question as to what was in the parcels, he replied "Hashish".

"We said we'd see what could be done and were given an address to contact him. This was on a tram route that led northwards from the centre of the city. We both twigged that there was something not quite right in this idea. I thought that the traffic of hashish took place from Lebanon to Egypt, and the not the other way. We decided to report the next morning to Capt. Adams, our immediate superior.

"We received confirmation that we were to play along with the scheme, and went to the address given to us on the tram route. We were very surprised when admitted to the Intelligence establishment by the number of personnel who were preparing themselves, mostly in Arab roles, to go into town that night.

"The address to which we were to proceed was an apartment, second storey level, and we were royally treated with eats and drinks. The day came about when I was informed that a clean-up for that night. I was to go as normal to the place, as before, but on this occasion it would be raided by the military. Simultaneously several other points around Beirut would also be raided.

"I asked Capt Adams if I could carry a side arm (revolver) and he said: "No, if you carry one now, and you haven't worn one before, you'll not only give the game away but endanger your life." So I proceeded as before to the apartment of our Lebanese friends. In the past there had always been people coming and going, mostly Gendarmes (police) and all seemed to be armed.

"About 9pm that night there was a whistle blast outside, at which I went for the stairs, followed by a shot from behind, which passed by, aimed at me or not.

“The outcome of all of this was that the so-called parcels of ‘hashish’ were in fact, German radio equipment, ‘transceivers’. The people arrested, so I was told, were high-ranking police officers.” It later turned out that my father had been dealing with two German agents.

How many of these types of stories is Australia losing, as its Anzacs pass away? Jim Long spent his final years as a TPI - Totally and Permanently Incapacitated - due to War Service. No doubt, the torture of pulling out the remains of his dead Army mates, as military tanks were reclaimed from the Middle East battlefields, would torment him forever.

Jim Long's untimely death, too young at 66, came on holidays at Tweed Heads in August 1987. I miss him dearly.



■ James Long (born 1982) with his grandfather Jim Long (1921-1987) at Reservoir (Vic.). Like his grandfather, James joined the Australian Army in 2001.



■ Paternal grandparents Althea and Allan Long, father Jim Long, sister Denise and brother Greg. Taken on a family car trip to the country. The 'big fella' takes centre stage, as usual.



■ Cousins Sue McPhee, Guy Wood, Don McPhee with Ash and Greg Long, and grandparents Bert and Honora Lawrence at the family's Merricks Beach boatshed.
■ **Right:** Driving the new 1959 open-top.



■ Greg, Ash, Jim and Denise Long at East Preston in early 1957. Notice the TV antenna. Dad sold a valuable car to pay my hospital bill and to buy one of those new fangled Astor 17-inch TV sets.



‘A Few Bob, And A Couple Of Drums’

My mother, Marjory, was raised in Thornbury. Her father, Albert Fletcher Lawrence, married the former Honora O'Brien, on January 30, 1915, at All Saints Anglican Church, Preston. They had lived on an acre of land at 36 Regent Street, nearly opposite today's Regent Railway Station, in Melbourne's northern suburbs.

Grandfather Bert Lawrence was born in Bermondsey on September 20, 1892: almost a Cockney, within distance of the Bow Bells of London. He won a scholarship from 1494 candidates to St Olave's and St Saviours Grammar School, and would be plagued by local youths as he made the local walk from Bermondsey to the Grammar School in his uniform. That's a common theme in this book.

About 1908 Bert went with his family to Germany. His father Joseph had been offered a job as manager of a large leather factory owned by the wealthy Mr Hintermeyer, but fled overnight because of difficulties. Once back in London, Bert worked for a leather tanners, but signed for the £4 maiden voyage of the *Demosthenes* in 1911 to Australia.

Bert Lawrence worked as an turner at Till Motor Engineer Co., then A.E. Kane Leather Factory in Lonsdale Street, plus a time at Empire Motors Carriage Works in Clifton Hill.

The family settled in Clarendon Street, Thornbury, with children Albert John (Jack), Charles, Joy, Sylvia, Marjory and Bobby. And a family factory - Lawrence Leathers - was established "with a few bob and a couple of drums". 'Bob' was slang for a shilling, and 'drums' were a wooden type of barrel.

The factory was established with a frontage to hectic High Street, Thornbury, where the cable trams whizzed by. The business was busy during the war years, producing leather goods for the War effort, including government contracts for hat leathers, protective helmets, parachutes, belts, hat bands and satchels. They worked long and hard hours, which must have a genetic carryover.

My aunt, Joy Wood, writes of my great grandfather: "Joseph liked the good life and he started to only work two or three hours a day - generally with a group of men as he liked to oversee the job. Once he was semi-retired

he proceeded to enjoy himself belonging to his Club, going to the races, drinking and treating himself to little luxuries. There is a story that one day he could not get a taxi to come home from the races so he hired a charabanc (a long bodied car with bench seats) and he arrived home sitting alone in style."

Men's fashion habits changed over time, and as more cars came on the roads, fewer men wore hats. My grandfather contracted diabetes, and decided to close the business in 1963, when he was about 71. The land with the factory had become valuable, and business was not as good as it had been.

My mother grew in comfortable family surrounds, and as the youngest child, was spoiled by her father. Mum attended Wales Street Primary School, and Croxton Park Methodist Church at weekends. She attended Preston Girls' High School, before business college, and a job with RACV Insurance before volunteering for Army service when war was declared. It was there that she found a handsome, fit Warrant Officer Jim Long. There's that theme of handsome and fit again!



■ Handsome and fit! A 1964 photo of Mrs Jackman's Grade 2B at Reservoir East State School. 'Rezzy' was so tough, our school motto was 'Where Even The Weak Kids Know How To Fight'. Our footy ground had sharp, big gravel stones. The smart, professional-looking, collar-and-tie bloke in the back row (second from the right) went on to big achievements for a Reservoir boy. He moved into the next postcode!

Reservoir: Where Even The Weak Kids Know How To Fight

Life for the Long Family was in the working-class suburbs of East Preston and Reservoir. My mother had worked prior to marriage, but the social norm of those years was for the wife to stay at home during the day. It certainly offered a family stability.

Ashley Lawrence Long was born on October 19, 1956, at Airlie Hospital, Ivanhoe. I was to be the youngest in a family of my sister Denise, eight years older; and brother Greg, four years my senior. We lived at 42 Rene Street, East Preston, near the Tyler Street tram terminus - 'the end of the line'.

The Longs moved to 29 Acheron Avenue, Reservoir, and that was to be my home until marrying 21 years later. Our cousins Bretton, Craig and Guy Wood lived just around the corner, and all the neighbours' kids played together. At weekends, we would play with more cousins Noel and John Fleming at Heidelberg, or Rob, Sue and Don McPhee at Ivanhoe. We'd see other cousins Joyce and Geoff Lawrence at Merricks. We were a happy gang.

Our uncles were making their way in the business world. Bill Wood was General Manager of Herbert Adams, and Neil McPhee was RACV boss.

They were more financially modest days for our family, and I remember walking to school along the gravel roads, unmade footpaths and vacant blocks to Reservoir East State School - No. 4686. Reservoir East was tough. The footy ground had a floor of coarse gravel stone: none of us ever fell. I used to joke that even the weak kids knew how to fight!

Early day school mates were Alan Bliss, Robert Clark, Terry White, Mark Hindle, Anne Jenkins and Kay Crawford. It was all WASP - White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Our class-mate Enio Guffatelli was the only 'foreigner' in the grade. Kay was the one who inspired me into journalism, when at Grade 3 level, she managed to incorporate a phrase into a school newspaper article: "By the way, my name is Kay." I've been impressed with immersion journalism ever since.

Reservoir East was tough working class. Desiree Duke's father was a wharfie. Deidre Buchanan's old man was the local milkman, delivering bottled milk at dawn with a horse-drawn cart. Next-door neighbour Alan Lindgren was a warder at Pentridge Jail.

'Rezza' might have been tough, but it was certainly an honest upbringing. No-one expected a free ride in N19. Especially the thin kid with spectacles!

Our fondest family Christmas holidays were at Surf Street, Merricks on Western Port Bay. Here at Surf Street was a block of land on the Manly Beach Estate bought by my grandfather in 1926, with a small prefabricated timber home erected for Christmas that year. That home is still in place, restored by my uncle Jack Lawrence, and used by his family. I love it ... it where my heart goes in the toughest times.

Merricks Beach was a safe haven for children. And probably still is. We would swim, hunt the sand dunes, light bonfires, build sand castles, play beach cricket, and enjoy a free and happy childhood.

Sunday mornings in the early 1960's meant Sunday School, and we all religiously (pun) attended classes at Oakhill Methodist Church. One of my teachers was Marilyn Pearce. I showed my early aptitude for the media by running the projector each week with the slides beaming the words of the hymns. *Onward Christian Soldiers, Hear The Pennies Dropping*, I know 'em all!

Thursday evening was Cub and Scout night at the 4th Preston hall that still stands opposite the Olympic Building in Plenty Road. Neighbour Doug McElhinney was one of the leaders. Another neighbour Cyril Crawford drove us to camps. My close mates were brothers Mark, Tim and Harry Jenkins, sons of Dr Harry Jenkins, future Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives. My brother enjoyed Scouts. I hated it, and pulled out by Second Class badge time. Dad enjoyed Scout night: he could pop into the Rose, Shamrock and Thistle Hotel to pick up a 'couple of cold bottles of VB, thanks'.

I was a home body, and even feigned illness, or suffered genuine tonsillitis to take another 'sickie' from School. Dr David Lunn would make house calls from his East Preston surgery, and assure my mother that I was not at death's door. I think she already may have known that.

But staying home meant the privilege of having a hot bread roll delivered by the Oakhill Bakery horse-and-cart, and a hot lunch whilst watching as the day's television transmission started with shows like Tommy Hanlon Junior's *It Could Be You* on GTV-9 and Larry K. Nixon's *Lady For A Day* on HSV-7.

My love for TV swelled when as a five-year-old we visited Channel 9 to be audience members for Norman Swain's *Tarax Show*, also featuring Geoff Corke, Philip Brady and Joff Ellen. At Dorcas Street in South Melbourne,

Happy Hammond would likewise entertain an audience of children for *The Happy Show*. His co-stars included 'Princess Panda' Lisner, Vic Gordon and John D'Arcy.

In the next street block at Reservoir, the green and cream buses plied their way between outer-suburban Epping and East Preston, and I became fascinated with their operations, just like trainspotters. John and Peter Cooper, and Pat Quinn, let me 'work' at their High Street depot, helping Fred Doidge re-fuel the 'units' as they returned from their runs each day.

East Preston and Epping Bus Services Holdings (Vic) Pty Ltd became Reservoir Bus Company under the management of Russell Ward. The fleet services most northern suburbs, and is partners with nearby L.C. Dyson's in other routes, including the East-West line spreading to Broadmeadows. They are also partners in the Melbourne Bus Link group that took over many of the government services once run by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board.

As a teenager, I was an obsessed member of the Bus and Coach Society of Victoria, along with members such as John Masterton, Paul Nicholson, Geoff Mann and Bruce Tilley. Even at age 15, I was a regular contributor to their monthly newsletters, and one school teacher predicted on my confidential school record that I might become a future State Minister for



■ 1962 saw my first day at Reservoir East State School. I preferred to stay home and watch TV.



■ Early days as a protégé of Geelong. Only for a lack of skill and courage, I would have been a star.



■ Posing with my woggle, and ready to Dob-Dob-Dob as a Wolf Cub at 4th Preston Scout Troop.



■ **Champion Nerd of 1968.** First day at Ivanhoe Grammar School, aged 11. The family's EJ Holden station wagon impressed the Ivanhoe toffs!



■ **Mother, Marjory Long (nee Lawrence)**



■ **The defence of Australia was secure** with Army Cadet Ash Long on duty.



■ **Ash, with father Jim, and brother Greg** at a family wedding, 1978.

Start The Presses

From the age of just nine or 10, I knew for certain that my future lay with local newspapers. In the mid-1960's, everybody's exposure to newspapers in Melbourne was to see the familiar grey International trucks deliver the 'Home' editions of *The Herald* to suburban newsagencies.

To a youngster, it was a thrill to watch the trucks, complete with the latest headline posters, charge around busy streets. The *Herald* drivers seemed to thrash one low gear on these trucks. In the city, each truck had an extra young man attached to the open tray section, from which bundles were thrown to vendors at each intersection as the trucks 'ran' red traffic lights.

This was the era of Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies, and Victorian Premier Sir Henry Bolte. It was the time of the 'Six O'Clock Swill', when hotels were forbidden from serving drinkers after 6pm. And it was the time when Victorian voters were whipped into fear by the escape of prisoner Ronald Ryan from Pentridge Jail, his capture, and his hanging.

The *Herald*, led by Sir John Williams, then later edited by John Fitzgerald, was published in editions including 'Home', 'Final', 'Final Extra', and 'Final Extra: Late Shares'. The last Saturday editions had a red stamp declaring 'Football, Last Race'. There was also a 7pm Saturday night *Sporting Globe* that hit Reservoir about 6.45pm with all the VFL footy results for the round, all played at suburban grounds on Saturday afternoons.

Upon reflection, *The Herald* of the early 1960s probably achieved greater, speedier delivery of timely news than the computer-assisted newspapers of the 21st Century. Today's papers are largely non-news papers. Full of entertainment, opinion, with their 'facts' and motives often needing to be viewed with question. We live with new short-attention span commuter papers such as *MX* and *Express*.

My chief wonderment was not with *The Herald*, but with the Monday afternoon delivery of *The Northern Times* to our Mendip Road grocer, Mr Buckingham. My fascination was with how a paper with a Tuesday dateline could appear on a Monday. In those days, there were no supermarkets, and it was the duty of children to 'run the messages' (errands) for the family. For me, this included shopping at Mr 'Nick' Nicholls, the milk bar operator and greengrocer; Mr Rae, the butcher; and Mr Buckingham. My Monday trips home were even faster than usual - as I became the local news breaker!

This applied especially on the day when our Cubs 'Akela', Heather McIntyre, had her wedding photo included in the *Northern Times*, with the portrait including all her charges from the 4th Preston Group outside St John's Church in Toorak. There I was in print! Today, Heather works with her brother, successful Ivanhoe real estate agent, Duncan McIntyre.

The *Northern Times* was published by the Leader Publishing Company, owned and operated by the Mott Family of Northcote. Leader had its origins on Saturday, January 21, 1888, when R. Lemon and the Rev. A.H. 'Henry' Richardson published the first edition of *The Northcote Leader*, from their works in Bay Street, Brighton.

"We ask the forbearance of our readers for the very small amount of local news in the first issue of the *Northcote Leader and Preston Record*," they welcomed. "This owing to our arrangements being yet incomplete. We hope in our next and subsequent issues to present our readers with a full budget of local and district intelligence. Our thanks are freely tendered for the very liberal patronage given and promised, which we shall do our best to merit. Intending subscribers will kindly send their orders to Mr Plant, High Street, Northcote, agent for this journal, who will supply it every Saturday morning." Some local papers have turned full circle.

Within two years, the brothers R.J. and J.S. Whalley - 'who had had experience on two important country newspapers' - had taken over the enterprise, boasting within its masthead: 'Largest Circulation and Best Advertising Medium in the Northern Suburbs. Circulating in Northcote, Preston, Thomastown, Epping, Whittlesea, Fairfield, Heidelberg, Clifton Hill.'

"Prior to the year 1888 Northcote had no local newspaper and the district had to rely upon the service of the Fitzroy *Mercury* and the Collingwood *Observer*," noted the 1933 *Leader* Jubilee Issue.

"Their beginnings were small, the paper having no great circulation and little advertising support. With all the energy and ability they could command the new proprietary set themselves out to improve and popularise the paper, and it was not long before they had the pleasure of seeing their efforts bear fruit, as first the Northcote council, next Preston, and then Epping made the Leader the official organ of their municipalities."

The Mott family purchased the interests of *Leader* on May 1, 1924. The family's Australian dynasty dates back to a dark winter's night in June 1853 when Londoners George Henry Mott and his bride landed at Sandridge

(now Port Melbourne) on the *Elizabeth Wilthen*. He was 22, she 21. Although trained for a legal career, he sought work on *The Argus* newspaper, later transferring to *The Morning Herald*.

Even then the media was like the stage, with journalists moving from business to business. In 1854, George Mott was Editor of the *Mount Alexander Mail* on the Castlemaine goldfields. It is most possible that he mixed with my forebear, James Long, baker, who arrived on those same fields in the same year.

Within another year, George Mott was Editor and part-owner of Beechworth's newspaper, the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, operated today by Hartley Higgins. George Mott also started the now defunct *Federal Standard* at Chiltern. In 1856, Mott crossed the Murray River. The story is that the crossing was made in a bark canoe paddled by a native through two miles of swirling floods. Mott's new paper was to become *The Border Post*, serving Albury's population of 645.

New South Wales Premier Neville Wran gave this description to a special *Border Mail* supplement in May 1978 to celebrate the opening of new presses: "A dissenter-born, a crusader self-inspired, George Mott spent the next dozen years printing papers simultaneously at Albury, Chiltern and Beechworth, arguing the great issues of 19th Century colonial life."

George Mott also worked at *The Spectator* in Hamilton, with five of his sons running papers variously at Bordertown, Port Melbourne, Hawthorn, Flemington, as well as *The Essendon Gazette* and *Kew Mercury*.

The family suffered a reverse in the bank crash of 1893, and several sons went to Western Australia when gold was found there. The sons printed at Coolgardie, starting *The Western Argus* at the new gold rush in Kalgoorlie, and another paper not so well known, *T'Other Sider*. Those reverses can happen to the best of us!

Unable to finance the rapid growth of their other publication, *The Kalgoorlie Miner*, son Decimus and his brother sold out for £2000, returning to Albury in 1903 to compete against *The Daily News* and *Banner*. The fights were difficult with the eventual takeover of *The Daily News* effected. The *Border Morning Mail* was founded as a daily in 1905.

In 1924, the family split, with Hamilton Mott's family remaining at Albury, to continue publishing *The Border Morning Mail*. Legend has it that one of the parties was to move, decided on the flip of a coin.

Decimus (named such, as the tenth child) - with sons George Horace

Mott, Walter Thomas Mott and, later, Robert Reginald Mott - were to embark on another chapter in building an important part of Australia's media mix.

His grandson, John Mott, tells of Decimus Mott having a fierce temper and a demand for accuracy in print. Another grandson, Robert S. Mott, recalls the newspaper layout formula of 'all emphasis and no emphasis'.

Early editions of *The Northcote Leader* had a decidedly tabloid feel. Decimus Mott encouraged a substantial budget of Court stories. An example is the March 29, 1935 edition which carried front-page headlines:

- A Matrimonial Mis-Fit. Some Remarkable Evidence.
Extracts From Letters Read In Court.
- A Take-Down In Firewood.
- Alleged Theft of Ducks. Taken From Darebin Creek. Suspended Sentence Imposed. Man Sent For Trial On Receiving Charge.
- An Unwelcome Visitor. Bench Gives Him A Chance,
And Orders Him Back To Sydney.

To be fair, the 12-page *Leader* had much more in its local news diet: Council reports; notes from local organisations including hospitals, lodges and churches; sports reports; 'social gossip'; even 'The Cobbers' Club' conducted by 'Uncle Phil'.

Advertising rates were listed at 4/- per inch single column per insertion, with classified ads costing 1/- for 14 words.

G.H. Mott became known with his trade-mark lapel rose, and his luxury Daimler sedan. His brother, W.T. Mott became involved in editorial duties, attending Council meetings at night, then typesetting them in hot metal linotype overnight for the next day's papers. He was many years later recognised by Queen Elizabeth II with Imperial Honours for services to journalism. Youngest brother, R.R. Mott, born 1911, joined the family firm after finishing his education at Ivanhoe Grammar School, concentrating on classified advertising, accounts and administration.

The challenge for this Ivanhoe Grammarian, almost 50 years later, of writing for *Leader Newspapers* came in 1974-75. I later was promoted to its management team in 1978. But more of that later.



■ John Mott, Publisher of Melbourne's *Leader Newspapers*, run by his family from 1924 to the mid 1980's.



■ Robert 'R.R.' Mott was Chairman of the *Leader Media Group*, and led an expansion of the group's stable of newspapers across Melbourne.



■ Keith Ostler was one of the *Leader* directors.



■ As a northern suburbs youngster, I was a keen fan of *Leader's* local newspapers. Before long, *Leader* directors David Tomlin and Mark Crampton had me at their table. Pictured at the 1979 Australian Suburban Newspapers' Association awards dinner at Albert Argenti's Receptions, Doncaster.



■ Making news in Leader's 'Heidelberger' local newspaper, front-page, December 4, 1974: 'Mr V.R.C. Brown, headmaster of Ivanhoe Grammar School, and Ashley Long, school captain, of Acheron Av., Reservoir, pictured with a portrait of Mr Brown by Alan Martin.' The paper also featured a local visit by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam.

Extra! Extra! Read All About It!

My first job in newspapers had an auspicious start. I was the only newsboy in Melbourne with a bodyguard. In those days, 'Dad' - Jim Long - encouraged me to drop the bike, on the pretext of me expanding the newspaper distribution round. Instead, he drove me.

I started in 1969 - a week before for my 13th birthday. And I was in business for myself - as I've been ever since!

Gordon Barton, owner of the IPEC Transport Group, started the *Sunday Observer* newspaper, just as Victorian Attorney-General Jack Rossiter legislated to allow sleepy Melbourne to have Sunday bread and newspapers for the first time!

The *Sunday Observer* distribution rounds were largely based on the American system, where the young newsboys and newsgirls are responsible for signing up the subscriptions, keeping the bookwork, collecting the cash, and delivering the goods.

Right from the start - and it hasn't changed - I became involved with the real strugglers of Australia's media industry.

Much to the consternation of his business partner Greg Farrell, Barton spent \$1.5 million to set up presses at 822 Lorimer Street, Fisherman's Bend, near Port Melbourne. Folklore has it that he was immediately refused the home distribution services through the Victorian Authorised Newsagents' Association. The truth is that they ordered 55,000 copies, but Barton wanted 100,000 sales.

Dad encouraged me to give it all a go. I printed sales letters on a screen duplicator and letterboxed them. At age 12 and 13, I door-knocked the area on Saturday afternoons to build sales. It was an early education of the foot in the door, and the importance of closing the sale.

Clients had the choice of early AM or late AM delivery. I soon found the cash-paying clients of rough-and-tumble Crevelli Street were a better business proposition than the more well-heeled credit-savvy householders elsewhere in the suburb.

I even offered the optional service of delivering *The Sporting Globe*, the Saturday night newspaper published by *The Herald*, devoted to a full football round-up. It was a real bonanza when Collingwood won the footy.

It meant buying 'The Pink Paper' at full price from newsagents, making a profit only from the generous Magpie supporters' tips. The sales graph mirrored the successes or failures of the northern suburbs' favourite footy team.

Very soon, I was within the top three newspaper distributors in Melbourne. And very soon, my bodyguard and driver Jim Long was in demand by *Observer* Production Manager Mario Sartori and Distribution Manager Alan Watson to expand his talents on weekends to other distribution areas in Melbourne.

Jim Long's common sense approach to business was much needed at *The Sunday Observer*, and a year later when *Sunday Review* was launched, with Richard Walsh soon to become its Publisher.

Early publicity shots for the *Sunday Observer* attempted to keep upbeat about the challenges being faced by retailers. First audit for the paper for October 1969 to April 1970 showed a nett weekly sale of 98,752 copies. How they achieved that figure, I'll never know!

Printer Garnet Saint did his best on the \$750,000 Goss Urbanite press every Saturday night, but often the papers reached the milk bars by noon Sunday, rather than the scheduled 8am deadline.

This was the era of a highly structured Melbourne Sunday morning, with church, followed by Ron Casey's *World of Sport* on HSV-7, followed by the Sunday Roast and a beer. Football identities Lou Richards and Jack Dyer were the staple diet of a Melbourne Sunday.

Michael Cannon, an intellectual, was first *Sunday Observer* Editor, replaced later by Kevin Childs who was able to assemble a more popular paper in the era of Prime Minister John Grey Gorton, about to be unseated by Billy McMahon.

By October 1970, Gordon Barton was ready to launch a sister newspaper, *The Sunday Review*. Over the coming 10 years, it - largely as *Nation Review* - was to earn a special and influential place in Australian publishing history. Our family had taken over distribution management for much of the northern suburbs: Dad, delivering in his Holden EJ station wagon, with me as runner, and my University student brother Greg Long delivering his areas in a Morris Mini-Minor.

Barton's decision to raise the 12 cent cover price to 15 cents sounded the death knell for the *Sunday Observer*.

Stuart Golding reported in *Jobsons Investment Digest* that 'the hatchet-

men are in at Gordon Barton's Press establishment' which is 'reeling under a heavy financial loss and circulation slide. The January 1971 criticism was generous ... after all, the analysis was being generated by rival publisher Maxwell Newton.

Jobsons reported that MD John Crew had been replaced by former Ezra Norton-associate, David Manuel. 'Barton's erstwhile partner (Greg Farrell) is known to be out of sympathy with the paper and it's leftish political line.' Ipec was said to have lost up to \$24,000 weekly on the paper, with sales said to be down as low as 61,000 copies: 'It had moved from a 64-pager to a 48-pager, and it had three editors in a little over a year.'

Barton's press empire finally fell after he had tried to back-door the long suffering distributors by attempting to set up an independent newsagency system without them. The agents all decided to 'go fishing' on the same weekend.

"The Melbourne newspaper, the *Sunday Observer*, is almost certain to cease publication, and not be published this weekend," reported *The Age*.

"Its editor, Mr Kevin Childs, said last night he had been told this by the managing director of the *Sunday Observer*, Mr John Crew.

"He was also told that Mr Gordon Barton, the chairman of Ipec Australia, the company which launched the newspaper, would be talking to the staff of *The Observer* this morning.

"It was understood that distribution problems would be the cause of the closure. Circulation had fallen to 80,000 from an 'all-time high' of 120,000. The company had been unable to distribute the newspaper through normal outlets.

"It is believed the newspaper has lost its publisher \$1.5 million in the 14 months of publication. Ipec will continue to publish the weekly *Sunday Review* at its Melbourne plant."

Ash Long's education in newspapers continued as our family had a weekend distribution business handling *Nation Review*; football personality Harry Beitzel's *Footy Week*, *Sunday Sport* and *Sunday News*; *The Digger* managed by Terry Cleary; and the Australian edition of *Rolling Stone* started by Michael Frazer.



■ Lifelong friendships were made at Ivanhoe Grammar School. Peter Greenaway was my groomsman in 1978. He is pictured by me at Montmorency with an original Citroën, when collecting cars was a favourite hobby. Today, Peter is a very successful Victorian businessman. He owes that to when we formed the 'Eagle Novelty Company' back in the 1970s.



■ Ivanhoe Grammar has given lifelong links to us. Mernda campus Head, Ian Rule, with James Long, aged 6, in June 1989.



■ School mate Dale Mark looks set to land a punch if I land a kiss for the cameras. Dale later married Roslyn Nichol, my Reservoir East State School buddy.

Little Chicago

Little Chicago was the nickname of the Crevelli Street area of East Preston where I had been assigned to deliver Gordon Barton's new *Sunday Observer* newspapers. The shops of Crevelli Street to this day have metal roller shutter doors across cyclone-fence protected shop windows.

Parked outside were the feared motor-cycle gangs, complete with their gang-embossed leather jackets. They were gangs. I was plain gangly. I had thick black-rimmed spectacles ... and rode the fastest push-bike in Melbourne!

But making newspapers started an adrenalin addiction that continues today.

My East Preston newspaper days were a stark relief to the Ivanhoe Grammar School, where I had just commenced in Grade 6, under Junior School Headmaster Richard Stowell in 1968. I was living a dual life: at the so-called 'posh' school at Ivanhoe, and at home alongside the Housing Commission estate in Reservoir. It proved to be both a tribal juggle and tribal jungle.

Early morning starts were part of going to Ivanhoe. In my first year, I would catch a bus to East Preston, a tram to Thornbury, and another bus to Ivanhoe, where I met up with fellow Ivanhoe Grammar students Tom Arnot, John Metelmann and others. We were all commuting from the working class suburbs, and between us there was no pretence.

Tom and I became close mates. He was popular, and a group of a dozen schoolmates were invited to his Strathmore home to celebrate his 13th birthday - in spectacular style. The weekend included plane flights over the city from Moorabbin to Essendon, ten-pin bowling, and an eye-widening visit to Tikki & John's nightclub restaurant in Exhibition Street.

Tikki & John's was a Melbourne institution featuring artists such as John Newman and Tikki Taylor, Vic Gordon, Terry Norris, Maurie Fields and Val Jellay, Ernie Bourne and Judith Roberts. Margo Clancy, wife of controversial radio man Jackie Clancy, fascinated all the teenagers with her tassal-dance.

But the highlight of the weekend, and the new few weeks was Tom's sister, Joanne. It was puppy love all round: we all fell in love with Jo. She was the first woman I ever went to bed with ... complete with pyjamas and tightly-tied dressing gown ... and her brother!

It was not long after that Tom was involved in a horrible car accident in

his father was killed, as his Dad dived over the teenager to save the boy's life as the car tumbled down an embankment. A group of us in school uniform attended the solemn funeral in Essendon.

Soon after, the entire school was rocked as our Form 1 (Year 7) master, John Marshall, died. For many students, it was their first encounter with the death of someone close.

PHOTO: GREG BARTLEY



■ Prefects of 1974 at Ivanhoe Grammar were not of the usual mould. From left: Roger Crosthwaite, James Hogan, Stephen Cropley, James Scott, Ash Long, Andrew Howarth, Peter Pearce, Bill Crapnell, David Jessup and Chris Lesser. Wisely absent were Stephen Hook, Dick Austin, Roger Haslam and Don McColl.

What's In A Name?

Anyone who calls me 'Ashley', simply doesn't know me. Hearing 'Ashley' reminds me of those badly-printed *Readers' Digest* letters of the 60s: 'Yes, Mr Ashley Long of Reservoir, you have been selected to win our jackpot'. It is just like the false first-named familiarity of computer-generated letters from politicians at election-time.

Geoff Davey of Ivanhoe Grammarians Lodge gets away with calling me 'Ashers'. Newspaperman John Monks addresses me as 'Cash'; and old mate Peter Greenaway reckons I'm 'Clarence'. Geoff Brown, Ivanhoe Grammar's Director of Alumni, and newspaperman Graeme Trainor have special permission to call me 'Ashley'. So do my mother, sister, an aunt and a few cousins.

The one person who can call me anything, and often does, is a young woman who I first laid eyes on, as she hung out of the doorway of a Tait train carriage running express from Clifton Hill to Ivanhoe. I can't claim a lack of class, because I was hanging out of the next door. It was February 1971, we were 14, and we were falling instantly in love. Well, I was anyway!

The pretty young woman was Fleur Tunzi of Lalor, who had just enrolled at Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School, and was travelling there daily on the same train. Fleur's girlfriends were Judith Sutherland, Fiona MacKenzie, Anne Jenkins and Kay Dent. The Ivanhoe Grammar fellas included Sandy Pate, Peter Kadlec, Terry Bramham, Doug Merrett, Greg Weller, Hugh Trehwella, Rhys Watson, Rod Laycock, Tony Stewart and me. We all formed a gang, along the Collingwood Football Club schoolboy recruits Rene Kink and Billy Picken who boarded locally. We had a ball - twice daily.

Teenage courtship included outings to the movies or Luna Park. A special night out was at McClure's Restaurant, where you ordered your meal by a phone at your table. We thought that was pretty special. Other days was a snack at the Classic Restaurant in the Swanston Street area of the City, near Young and Jackson's Hotel, that is now a drug ghetto. For transport, we went by tram or train, or 'botted' a lift with Max Greenaway, Isobell Tunzi or Jim Long.

I planted my first kiss on Fleur Tunzi, on the Number 88 tram on March 24, 1972, at the Gower Street stop. I'm glad I plucked up the courage then ... it was only four stops to the terminus!



■ (Back Row) Godspell Producers Ash Long and James Scott, with (middle row) Lisa Englander, Lynore McWhirter, Debbie Hilliard (later Greenaway) and two assistants. Fleur Tunzi (listed in the 1974 program as 'God's Pal') is in the centre front row, flanked by Amanda Hutchins and my old Reservoir East buddy Roslyn Nichol.



■ Fleur and I win a 1973 squeezing contest at Rosebud beach.



■ Fleur and I in later years with school-mate Anne Jenkins, who married Ian Scott of Yea, a descendant of the famous Purcell family.

Scandal

Scandal was the name that we chose for the 'underground' newspaper for Ivanhoe Grammar School. It was the era of long hair, *Rolling Stone*, the Sunbury Rock Festival, Woodstock, and Pete Steedman's *Broadside* newspaper in Melbourne.

This Reservoir boy, with trade-mark larrikinism, established the newspaper with the assistance of fellow students such as Don McColl, Ken Barlow, Alan Bliss, Dave Masson and Neil James. It started first as a notice-board newsletter for Form 2 (Year 8) students in 1970, with a kindly IGS staff overseer Doug Hennessy.

Scandal started as a 'boy's own' style newspaper in what was then an almost British-style Grammar School. However, *Scandal* quickly ran out of control, at the same rate as did the hormones of its teenage reporting staff.

In early 1972, we produced a 'Bisexual' Edition, with the headline of 'Co-Ed Next Year'. It embarrassed the school, with Level Master 'Doc' Thaddeus Blashki warning me in his thick European accent: "Long, if you are going to run an underground paper, don't put your name on it."

My story was later proved to be right, just 20 years too early. So that's why they call me 'Scoop'!

Scandal became an important link between the boys of Ivanhoe Grammar School, and the girls of the sister school a mile away. Co-education was not on the school's official agenda, but we saw it as a subject that should be firmly on the table.

I bought second-hand Gestetener silk-screen and Fordigraph spirit duplicators to pump out the copy. I was a regular at Norman Bros. stationers at Northland, purchasing wax stencils to type out the pages, and pumping out a liberal quantity of ink on the 'foolscap' duplicator paper. At first, it was undergraduate stuff: reports on form parties at Randall Saw's Eltham 'pad', Chris King's house on Ivanhoe's Boulevard, and 'At Jean and Clive's' - a whirlwind get-together with Greg Wayman's house.

Headmaster 'Jock' Brown justifiably called it 'gutter humour' when we promptly reported on an embarrassing evacuation of toilets at the nearby Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School: 'Toilets Ablaze: IGGS Fire'.

We produced a parody of *The IGS Spectator* school newspaper, calling it *The IGS Dictator*. The authorities were not amused.

Named after Doc. Blashki, Chris Herrod introduced a problem column called 'Dear Dorothy Doc'. Chris also starred in our comic strip, *The Amazing Adventures of Wonder Weasel*, a weekly satire on the life of students and staff. We had a 'Big Ball' Issue, as well as *SMASH*, our own rival paper to confuse the market-place. The duplicated sheets were as widely read as they were poorly printed.

I enjoyed going to HSV-7's Teletheatre in Johnston Street, Fitzroy, to see shows being video-taped. Dan Webb and Andrew Harwood were comperes for the *It's Academic* TV shows featuring Alan Bliss, David Jessup and Alasdair Fairchild from Ivanhoe Grammar.

Chris Herrod and I launched ourselves headlong into our schoolboy media career immediately after an experience at the Sunbury Pop Festival with the *Music Week* paper launched by Ian Oshlack, Shane Nichols and Ray Chamula, as opposition to *Go-Set* fan mag, made famous by Ian 'Molly' Meldrum and Gavan Disney, edited by Ed Nimmervoll. The paper decided to print a special Sunday souvenir edition at the festival staged by GTV-9 lighting director John Fowler "against the advice of my wife and solicitor".

I was 17 and working night-shift at the *Sunday Observer* factory with expert plate-maker Ron Adam (who had served time for making \$10 note plates!), helped print the paper, and then took the newspaper delivery truck into the site (thereby gaining free admission). Chris Herrod and I met by chance inside the Duncan family farm where the festival was being held. For my work I received official Press Pass accreditation. This included access to the Press caravan where Chris and I set up camp ... with free booze.

But our lifelong dedication to the media was when *Marcie Jones and The Cookies*, an attractive female band, used the press van as an impromptu dressing room, *sans* underwear. Chris and I have been devoted fans of the group ever since.

Headmaster VRC 'Jock' Brown was no fool. *Scandal* was by no means politically dangerous, but it did have the power to unite students on causes. Or was it just me?

We had energetic protest marches over school conditions, petitions over the length of our hair, editorials about anything. Mark Jenkins - son of Dr Jenkins - was warned about wearing a badge for the Vietnam War Moratorium, organised by Dr Jim Cairns. I organised stunts including bike ride marathons, concerts and sports events. Brown cleverly had newspaper master Barry Dyball invite me to become Editor of *The IGS Spectator*.

The formerly bland letterpress school newsletter suddenly became a vibrant paper with cartoon strips, lively editorial and photos that was now being read cover-to-cover by staff and students alike.

Then, at the start of 1974, VRC Brown interviewed me for the appointment of Prefect, and canvassed the position of School Captain and Head Prefect. I already been elected Lincoln House Captain by popular vote, but was delighted to vacate this when offered the top job by 'Jock'.

Unfortunately, Jock had to wait some time to make the offer to me: our home phone was engaged for hours as my old Reservoir East State School buddy Roslyn Nichol shared with me her news for the night. She had just become School Captain at Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School. The East Reservoir back-block kids had risen to the top of the toffs.

We had an impressive team of Prefects who still stay in touch more than 25 years later: Vice-Captain Stephen Hook, Kim 'Dick' Austin, Bill Crapnell, Steve Copley, Roger Crosthwaite, Rod Haslam, James Hogan, Andrew Howarth, David Jessup, Chris Lesser, Don McColl, Peter Pearce, James Scott.

1974 was a busy and productive school graduation year. Our group may not have been scholastically brilliant, but they were seriously dedicated to fun.

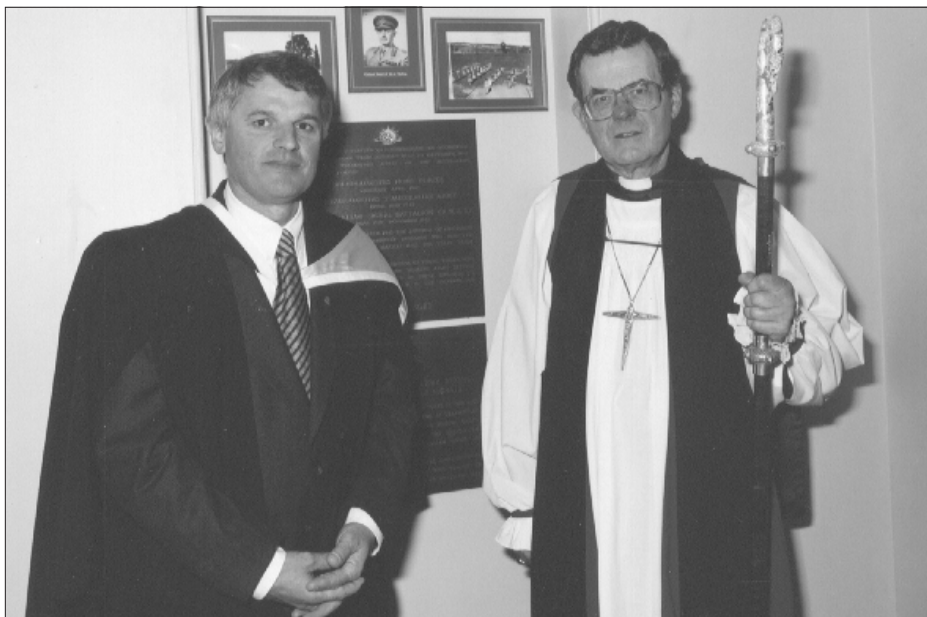
My closest mates were Peter Greenaway and Dale Mark. Pete was a good mate to have: his 18th birthday fell earlier than most of us, which meant he was one of the first to secure a driver's licence. And he had a bright yellow Ford panel van that was the best transport in town. He used it at weekends to cart juke boxes for his father Max's hiring business, so we were all guaranteed entrance to the best pubs around Victoria.

Max was a great pal to all of us: a bit like the 'Rich Dad' in the *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* books. Pete and I followed the example, by registering the 'Eagle Novelty Company' to start off our business lives. We listed ourselves with the Companies Office as 'Agents, Merchants and Traders'. One of our first business ventures was to inspect a pine plantation investment in Queensland that offered free return flights for prospective buyers; of course, we didn't buy, but it was a free holiday for two 18-year-olds in our father's suits and borrowed brief cases. In commemoration of Eagle Novelty Company, Peter presented me with a large crystal eagle on my 40th birthday.

We were a great gang. Fleur and me, Pete Greenaway and Debbie Hilliard, and Dale Mark and Ros Nichol. We all married ... and 'lived happily ever after'.



■ Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Young with IGS Headmaster Rev. Charles Sligo.



■ IGS Principal Rod Fraser with Melbourne Anglican Archbishop Keith Rayner.

Faithful Even Unto Death

Lifetime friendships have emerged from those early Ivanhoe years. Formal contact with Ivanhoe Grammar School these days for me is limited to their patient Company Secretary Suzanne Dunlop and John Dean of the Accounts Department. Although Kristi and James have finished their schooling at IGS, the arrears account slowly diminishes. The School, and these kind people - including Rod Fraser, showed incredible loyalty to me in this way.

As 1974 School Captain, prominent Ivanarian, and Old Ivanhoe Grammarians Council member, I tarnished my VIP status a little. The good times of the 1980's saw me become a prize donor, and have me contribute annually for a 'Golden Hoes' 25-year endowment policy in favour of the School. Organised by AMP agent Graham Symon, it is worth \$142,595 on maturity in 2014. Thankfully, it doesn't include a death clause that makes me more valuable extinct!

Sadly, with my financial crises, the School has pre-paid some of the instalments in my later financially-troubled years. It has been their Accounts Division who have to stick by the School motto: "Fidelis Usque Ad Mortem" - which translated means "Faithful Even Unto Death".

In those earlier and better financial years, Fleur and I were able to enrol Kristi at Ivanhoe Grammar's new Plenty Campus at Mernda, and she became its first female student in 1992. James followed, starting in Grade 5 in 1993. In the circumstances, we deliberately chose a low profile as parents.

Thankfully, we were able to keep a high profile for the reunions of our 'Class of 74', with events held every five years. Our class grew through the changing days of Australia when Gough Whitlam's big-spending social-agenda government took over from the Liberals, who had controlled the nation since 1949, chiefly under Bob Menzies. Ours was a new era of long hair, rock music, anti-establishment, liberal political thought and protest, and challenges to long-standing social behaviours. We were pretty happy to go along with that.

Our Chaplain, the Rev. Phill Cooke, had the duty to explain the finer points of 'Sex Education' to Year 10 students. The students were particularly enthralled with his graphs showing the different sexual peaks of men, as opposed to women.

As parents, we are all now 40-something, and the parenting experiences are similar. Many of us did not feel the need for ongoing education for ourselves, larging living off our wits in the high-flying 80's, and repenting at leisure in the 90's. As we approach 'empty-nester' lifestyles, many find themselves hard hit with the financial rigors of the past decades. Perhaps I have been a role model after all!

That is not to say we have not had our success stories, but the 'Class of 74' was seriously dedicated to enjoyment. We have enjoyed some well-oiled reunions where former teacher and good mate Bill Dodemaide is always honoured. Another teacher Rob Slater also attends.

Our Dux were Mark Connor and Ken Lee: Dr Lee is one of Melbourne's leading heart surgeons; Dr Don McColl is a fabulously popular GP in Rosanna; and our School Vice-Captain of the era, Dr Stephen Hook, fulfils the same role at Shepparton. Bill Cracknell is in dentistry.

Business leaders are aplenty: Gary 'Jack' Dumbrell is arguably our most successful in that arena. He heads the Wynns auto product and services company, Autobarn and other companies. The alumni were gobsmacked with our reunion after-party at his Victorian-style mansion in Hawthorn. His son, Paul Dumbrell, is a first-class motor racing driver.

Even former teacher Ian Crowther joined in the celebrations. His wife, Anne, was the school's receptionist when we all 18-year-old yobbos; we were all in love with her. Gary Dumbrell entertained us all, including his close mates - investor Frank Mohr; Steve Cropley (who married one of the prettiest women in the world) of TJ Board, who recently sold Ron Barassi's Mountainview Hotel in Richmond; and fellow real estate man Noel Crouch of Graeme Love's EJ Love; plus property experts Neil James and Peter Pearce.

Victor Cooley heads the busy Cooley Baking Co. at Cararra on the Gold Coast; James Hogan is General Manager of the large British Midland airline; Eddie Lachowitz became manager of the Lower Plenty Hotel; Hans Van Bloemendaal has his own leading newsagency business in Mount Eliza. Dave Masson leads a prominent lighting company. Mark Dempsey has a busy design business, with associations with the Laura Ashley, and Bed, Bath and Table groups.

Self-employed success stories include Randall Saw and Chris Wood with their excavation companies; Oliver Blaufelder's electronic group; John Stonehouse's bus fleet in Numurkah; Jeff Lee's mushroom farming operation; and Brent Campbell's family timber firm.



■ **Above:** As 'Editor of our 1974 'Ivanarian', and with the expert help of teacher Les Boreham, the Year Book photographs were a little different from the conventional graduation portraits. At back: Barry Schippers, David Masson. Standing, from left: Richard Ballantyne, Sandy Pate, Noel Crouch, Chris Shilton, Peter Greenaway, Geoff Hughes, Mark Dempsey, Robert Kirwan, Alan Bliss, Gary Rimmer, Frank De Maria, Mr Irving Reid, Geoff Catterall, Steven Miles and David Stevenson. Front: Leon Parker, Steve Copley, Peter Pearce, Frank Mohr, James Hogan, Ash Long (with broom), Alasdair Fairchild.



■ **School Captain Long, 1974**



■ More 'Class of 74' colleagues. Top row: Greg Weller, Neil James, John Jury, Hans Van Bloemendaal, Dale Mark, Alan McCoy, Tom Wong, Grant Scale, Doug McCallum, Eddie Lachowitz. Middle Row: John Watson, Bill Crapnell, Barry Schippers, Mark Connor, Rod Haslam, Stuart Bridgman, Robert Greenacre, Robert Ashworth, Stephen Ng. Front Row: Stephen White, Owen Hughes, Ken Barlow, Mr Bob Sanderson, Chris Lesser, Chris Kandiliotis, Philip Weekley.



■ Um, er ... yes, it is true that the school somehow found itself advertised for sale.



■ Above: Our crew has its own team of 'rocket scientists' headed by Mr Dick Dooley. Back row: David Dowell, Paul McMahon, Scott Moir, Roger Crosthwaite, Blair Evans, Chris Herrod, Chris Wood. Middle row: Jeff Lee, Nigel Kelly, John Aldred, Peter Cullum, John Taylor, Peter Dawes, David Jessup, Ken Lee, Greg Wayman, Tim Ingram, James Scott, Bela Rice, Charles Hewitt, Alistair Lockey, Peter Swain. Front row: Peter Choquenot, Greg Bartley, Stephen Hook, Andrew Howarth, Oliver Blaufelder, Don McColl and Dick Austin.



■ A favourite amongst staff and students alike is Bill Dodemaide, who rose to Head of Ivanhoe's Junior School.

Our 'Old Boy' network includes John Aldred runs a farm near Daylesford; Kim 'Dick' Austin does likewise at Kangaroo Ground.

In the arts, Greg Bartley is an award-winning photographer; Dale Mark has been prominent in set design at ABC-TV, Ripponlea; and Tim Armstrong is Technical-Production Director at 3INR-FM radio station at Heidelberg.

Our legal fraternity includes Ken Barlow in Brisbane, Sydney-based Russell Sweet, and Melbourne's Leon Parker. The accountants list has Geoff Catterall and Chris Kandiliotis.

Our educators include Alan Bliss at Melbourne Grammar School (who teaches alongside Fiona MacKenzie), James Scott at RMIT University, and Barry Schippers at Bendigo; and the theologians are the Rev. John Baldock, who was listed in our early *Scandal* editions as trading as JB's Rubber Goods, a code for being our form's condom re-seller.

John Taylor is currently completing his PhD in New Testament studies at Cambridge University. Who would have predicted profoundly religious men from our crew?

From Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School, Fleur's class-mates included fashion designer Jane Lamerton, TV model 'Charlie', with our close friend Ros Nichol who built an impressive veterinary practice in Elwood.



■ The School Captain with Fleur, school librarian Jackie Salkeld and her husband, at Ivanhoe Grammar's 60th anniversary celebrations. Jackie raised eye-brows when she joined our male-only Politics HSC (VCE) class. Jackie and I raised even more eye-brows the next year when we enrolled part-time together at Latrobe University to complete a TV-video production course together. We were 'just good friends'.

The Great Debate

One of the ongoing funniest nights of the year is the Peter Huxley Memorial Comedy Debate, starring characters such as Tim Ferguson from *Don't Forget Your Toothbrush*, and Wilbur Wilde of *Ol '55* and *Ol Skydaddies* fame. Tim likes to think he is the only person who has discovered that if you say my name quickly - 'Schlong' - that it is Hebrew for the male member.

Peter Huxley was a widely-loved English teacher with a sharp wit. He referred to his 'plump, vertically challenged Penguin physique' as a matter of humour, but in his final years a colleague accurately described him 'increasingly towards loneliness and morbidness, and in recent years withdrew into himself and embraced pessimism'.

Peter Huxley's passing in 1996 was accompanied by the tribute that 'robustly happy memories will dwell inside each person who knew him, with his love of English literature, droll humour, ironic observation, provocative argument and repartee'.

The Huxley Debates have been an Ivanhoe Grammar fund-raiser to help financially-challenged students, and became part of the Melbourne Comedy Festival. They are organised by prominent debater Michael Gorton, a nephew of the Prime Minister of the same name. Michael is a partner in the law firm Russell Kennedy, and has an impressive string of community leadership titles including Chairman of the Equal Opportunity Commission.

These were nights certainly not for equal opportunity. It was to squeeze in every insult possible. Gorton and I love the exchanges. I told the audience that Gorton had one night taken me aside ... and left me there. I described him as a man of sincerity, whether he means it or not. And I asked the audience to tell the difference between a catfish and a lawyer. One is a scum-sucking bottom dweller, and the other is a lawyer!

In return, he traced my history as an Ivanhoe Grammar student, an Ivanhoe Grammar School Captain, marrying an Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar pupil, enrolling my daughter and son at Ivanhoe Grammar, and chairing an Ivanhoe Grammar fund-raiser. "Ash, get a life!"

The 1997 inaugural event saw the argument 'That Anything Is Better Than Education!'. One speaker, Barrie Borley, Junior School head, joked that there had never been a *proven* case of paedophilia in his teaching career!

As an introductory remark, I recalled that an empty taxi had arrived at the school, and out stepped one of the speakers, Ian Le Page. I commented that as introductory speaker, he was on stage in embarrassing circumstances: no-one had invited him. One man we should invite to participate in these debates is accomplished TV debater, and Ivanarian, Brett Jones.

1998 saw me describe the debate as a really high class function. I mentioned that I was the only person I hadn't heard of ... the topic was 'That Teachers Are To Blame'. The introduction for Simon Le Plastrier joked that he was part-Irish, part-French. Irish on his mother's side, French by a friend of his father's.

The 1999 event introduced Equal Opportunity Commissioners past and past: Dr Diane Sisley and Moira Rayneo, arguing "That Men Are The Weaker Sex". Moira had an on-stage life-size model of her adversary Jeff Kennett with which she performed some hilarious sight gags.

PHOTO: FRANK ENGLISH



■ In 2000, our speakers gathered to argue "That Men Do It Better". Lecturer Paul Mees, radio personality - lawyer Peter Moon, joined with Australian Children's Television Foundation General Manager Jenny Buckland joined with solicitor Michael Gorton to say they didn't. They were joined by Ivanhoe's Alumni Director Geoff Brown, in a convincing dress-up as the Queen Mother. I am Chairman, trying to harness the humour of Wilbur Wilde.

'Nurse!'

Work has always been important to me. If I wasn't making newspapers, you would find me at age 15 in the aisles of the local Coles New World supermarket in Reservoir or Lalor, stacking shelves. I boasted to Fleur's mother that I had attained a pay rise with the new rank of 'Acting Chief Junior Casual'.

I 'wagged' afternoon classes (played truant) at Ivanhoe Grammar to work in the Richmond printing factory owned by Dern Langlands, earning a massive \$1.50 per hour.

By age 18, a summer job was as delivery driver for Broadway Cellars, the local licensed grocery run by the Weiss family. My job was to unload all the brewery trucks, box by box. These were the days before pallets or forklifts.

My job was also to fill the 'bulk' wines. Instructions were to quickly wash the returned wine flagons in the ancient bath-tub bath 'out the back', and scrape off any former labels with a razor blade. Next step was to put the company hose in a barrel of port, sherry or blend, and syphon the contents (by mouth) into the fresh flagons. Final step before putting the flagon on sale, was to 'clag' on a new Broadway Cellars label.

Today's health laws would not allow these type of procedures in the 21st Century ... would they?

Health procedures were becoming very aware to me. Fleur had completed her nursing training, and had started working at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital in East Melbourne with lifelong friends Jeanette Gazelakis (*nee* Martin) and Christine May Gough. Fleur has a family nursing tradition which is a fine one.

Fleur's mother, the former Isobell Johnson, relates: "As long as I could remember I had wanted to be a nurse and the family cats and dogs were continually being bandaged and forced into being patients. I was most professional with one of Dad's handkerchiefs tied around my head with a red pencilled cross on the front.

"Then I went to High School and discovered journalism and words but it was at the end of the Depression, cadetships were few and far between, usually in the country, poorly paid, and I was a girl.

"My father was always against the nursing idea but when I told him I

a permanent spot with a theatre company as a dancer he suggested I see about nursing. Probably thinking it was the lesser of two evils."

Nurse Johnson trained at the Alfred Hospital, later working at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, and the Austin. The untimely passing of her husband, Fleur's father, Bill Tunzi, in the 1960's, meant the 'Nurse Johnson' title was stay active for many years on. Mrs Tunzi conquered the challenge head-on, raising Fleur and her sister Angela, step-daughter Heather, and an ailing Aunt, Esther Cooper. No time for too many hobbies.

Both Angela and Fleur carried on the nursing traditions. Angela studied at tertiary level, winning the important certificates after very hard study. Fleur chose the role of a State Enrolled Nurse, which she regards as having a closer day-to-day contact with patients. She trained at the Eye and Ear, worked at Yea's Rosebank Extended Care Centre, then returned to East Melbourne in 1995.

Fleur Tunzi and I had a whirlwind courtship. We still do.

We married on Fleur's 21st birthday on February 3, 1978. We hardly had a dollar between us. We were married on a Friday night at St John's Anglican Church. That's St John's in Epping ... not Toorak.

Fleur and I chose a Friday because the reception rates were cheaper at the Summerhill Hotel, East Reservoir. We found out why the rates were so cheap. It was the hottest day in decades, with temperatures well into the 40's. Yet no staff had been rostered to work the bars. Our enterprising guests found their own ways to get a 'chilled refresher' on a hot day.

So much so that one guest, family friend Charlie Fisk, father of bridesmaid Jeanette, broke his foot whilst negotiating the shower in his room!

For our 25th wedding anniversary in 2003, we might do it all over again, and this time the drinks are on us!

But we were very much in love. And money - whilst desirable - wasn't everything to us. We rented a two-bedroom unit at 56 St David Street, Thornbury for a few years.

My service station boss Noel O'Hehir gave us a honeymoon at his holiday units at Wilson's Prom., and we 'won' a Pan Am trip for two to Fiji, starting a life-time love affair with Mana Island, near Nadi.

On a 5 per cent deposit, we then 'bought' our own home at 24 Glen Road, Mitcham in December 1979. Fleur was eight month's pregnant with Kristi. Don't you adore the impeccable timing?



■ **Wedding Day: Feb. 3, 1978, at St John's Church, Epping. Look at those flares!**



■ Parents Marj and Jim Long with their '21 today' birthday boy in 1977.



■ Ash and Fleur Long at Mana Island, Fiji. In 1978, service station owners gave us a honeymoon trip to the resort as a reward for my management of six Melbourne service stations.

*"I was a zombie for weeks. I was literally drugged to the eyeballs.
"The best medicine was the purchase of a Torana car, for \$1100. Suddenly I had wheels of my own, and the nervous exhaustion disappeared in a heartbeat."*



PHOTO: SYLVIA MCPHEE

■ Ash and Fleur Long with Holden Torana, 1975, at the Red Hill South property of Neil and Sylvia McPhee.



■ And removing the bogged Torana from a Hastings 'short-cut': Peter Greenaway with friend Jenny, Fleur and Ash, with Dale Mark.

Newspapers To The Max

Famed Australian newspaperman Maxwell Newton was an awesome influence on my early media career. Jack Matthews, controversial Victoria policeman, told me: "Max is a brilliant man, off the hinges."

Clyde Packer, brother of Australia's richest man Kerry Packer, sums it up this way on his book about Australian expatriates, *No Return Ticket*: "In one decade, he became a newspaper owner, a hopeless drunk, a bankrupt, and, in final desperation, an operator of several sex-for-hire businesses in Melbourne's seedy massage-parlor industry."

Max was born in Perth, the son of a strong Methodist couple, driven to be 'first' at everything. His 'first' in education was to win a scholarship to Perth Modern School where he studied with classmates such as future Treasury chief John Stone, politician John Wheeldon, and Prime Minister Bob Hawke.

Max Newton won two exhibitions taking him to St George's College at the University of Western Australia. He took brilliant advice from a tutor on how to exploit the examination system - learning to think, as well as remember.

It was at exam time that Newton first had problems with drink. Not yet 21, he recalls taking a girl to the Perth riverfront, next remembering walking stark naked, five kilometres away.

He nonetheless succeeded in winning an overseas scholarship, taking him to Cambridge with a two-year £1000 bursary. Newton worked his way to Britain on the SS Otranto, calculating that as a dishwasher, he cleaned more than quarter-of-a-million pieces of crockery. At Cambridge, he behaved: "I did not drink. I did not smoke. I did not fool around."

Maxwell Newton's daughter Sarah wrote a biography which traces Max's recruitment to *The Australian Financial Review* as Editor, the same position he held in founding *The Australian* for Rupert Murdoch in 1964. Yet Max was soon on the outer, quit, and found it impossible to make enough money, so started a weekly newsletter called *Incentive* (soon labelled by *Invective* by journalists).

These expanded as he established other newsletters called *Tariff Week*, *Parliamentary and Legislative Review*, then purchasing a number of newspapers on the South Coast near Canberra: the *Braidwood Dispatch*, *Nowra News*, *Bega*

News, *Milton Ulladulla Chronicle*, *Moruya Examiner* and the *News Leader*. Sarah concludes: "When the *News Leader* was set up with what the locals regarded antagonistically as sharp-talking smoothies from the *Mirror* in Sydney, they viewed Maxwell as a villain incarnate and treated his men with the contempt such places reserve for outsiders."

The really black times were yet to come. Newton was mentally and physically consumed by fear, and the prisoner of drugs, booze and indiscriminate sex. It was during this time that he saw the void in Melbourne with the closure of Barton's *Observer* newspaper, taking over the title for free. Sarah writes that Managing Editor Bob Ferris found John Sorell - "good-looking, stocky, able to drink 30 or 40 pots of beer easily".

Sorell took the paper to circulation heights of 240,000 copies a week, but was frustrated by Newton's erratic behaviour: "Max was having trouble staying off the booze. Once I found him lying flat out on the kitchen floor, drunk, reciting 16th Century poetry. He struck me as a wayward genius."

Likewise, I was working in the press room, and saw the difficulties first-hand as Max drunkedly urinated over the reels of newsprint, ready to print. Max's wild behaviour also extended to his personal expenses, buying a property in Toorak Road to soon become known Melbourne-wide as 'Contra Castle'. Everything inside the place was obtained in exchange for advertising in the *Sunday Observer*.

Cash was always short, and marketing man Jim Marrett was sent out to arrange 'contra'. On one occasion, Jim took possession of some large American cars, in return for full-page ads. He sold the cars to another dealer, and the cash paid the wages bill. Max was constantly seeking cash, grabbing the folding money that accompanied mail orders from readers for products such as R-certificate T-shirts, *Beside Pleasure* ('the magazine you can read with one hand'), *Sexsense*, *Eros* and *Cocksure*. Other subs money came from orders for the *Sweet* and *Scream* pop mags edited by Allan Webster, and the short-lived *National Tattler*, edited by Graham Simpson, then-husband of cabaret singer Samantha Sang.

Ashley McKeon of *The Australian Financial Review* reported in 1976 that Newton traced his liquidity problems back to 1971 when he started publishing *The Observer*. Within a year, circulation had risen above 60,000, with a high of 90,000 (at 20 cents a copy) when Gough Whitlam swept to Prime Ministerial office in the December 1972 Federal Election. A *Midweek Observer* edition, under Sorell, was terminated after just eight weeks, when

Keith MacPherson of The Herald & Weekly Times Ltd and Ranald Macdonald of David Syme & Co Ltd combined to produce the jointly owned *Sunday Press*.

The new paper did not affect sales, but the suburban newspaper printers being used were unable to provide 'secure and specific contracts'. Newton's firms purchased Regal Press from Dern Langlands, creating a severe liquidity problem, simultaneous with black market prices (up to four times more) having to be paid for newsprint. Finances had been arranged in a dodgy deal with Les Smart, accountant for the Co-Operative Farmers & Graziers Direct Meat Supply; Smart ended up in jail for a while.

Max kept on giving me more and more responsibility. He promoted me to supervise production crews in the publishing department. He set me on a project, with Martin Dougherty, soon-to-be Group Managing Director for 'Young Warwick' Fairfax, to turn his Newton Comics division into profit. Max offered me a full-time job to be a 19-year-old general manager of his paper recycling factory. Thankfully I declined. Max's empire was coming apart at every seam.

During this collapse, I conducted a double-page spread interview with Max for the *Farrago* university newspaper, principally about his bid to form the Workers Party with John Singleton. But Newton had a more pressing assignment: to keep his companies afloat.

Christopher Webb in *The National Times*, wrote in 1976: 'Just one of Maxwell Newton's adventures last week came when a crane arrived at his Melbourne office, where the *Sunday Observer* is published.

"Every now and then people come around with a crane to repossess something, in fact that's the last resort of the finance companies - the crane," said Max. "They came round the day before yesterday and I gave them \$9000 to get rid of them."

'Meanwhile Max is living life without credit cards and says it is quite an unusual experience to go into a restaurant and pull out a fistful of cash to pay for a meal. "I think I'll have to trade on a cash basis for some years to come."

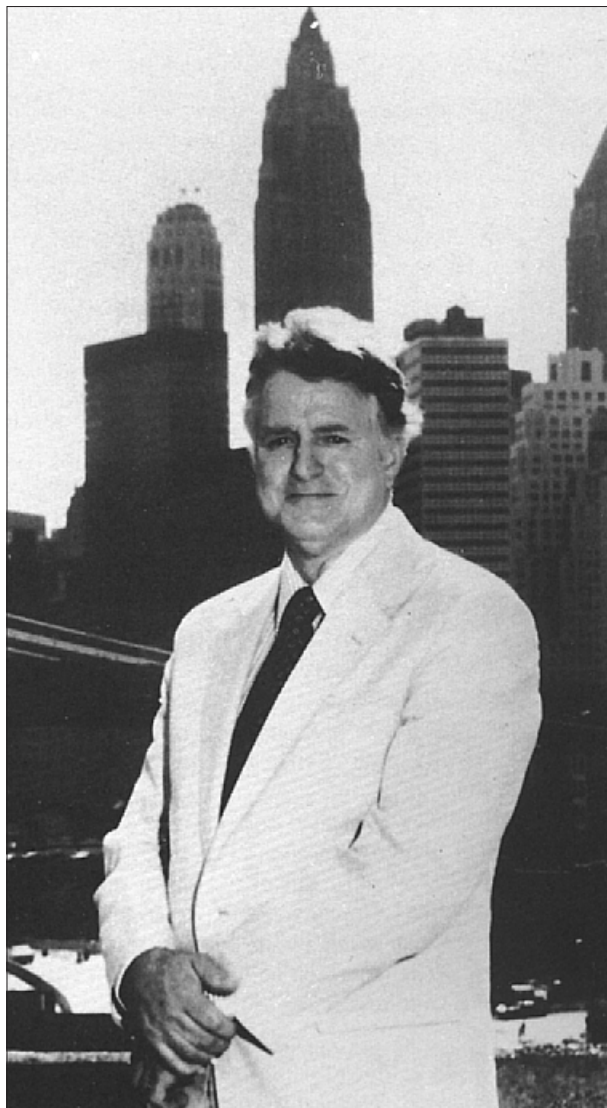
Maxwell Newton died in the United States in July 1990, aged 61. *Australian Financial Review* Editor Peter Robinson said Max's style and drive were the spark of life which shaped his paper and *The Australian* in their early days: "Maxwell Newton brought a scepticism to financial reporting which was rare at the time."



■ This is not me, but nerdy lookalike 'Young Warwick' Fairfax, who gambled his family's fortune on a failed takeover of a company already controlled by them.



■ Max Newton in high-flight, in his Canberra days, running political newsletters. He employed Ash Long at Melbourne's 'Sunday Observer'.



■ Maxwell Newton, my dear friend, pictured in New York, where he again found business success after severe failures in Australia. Rupert Murdoch hired Max as Finance Editor of 'The New York Post'.

In 'The Public Eye'

Crusading journalist Mike C. Ryan put his career on the line in 1976, when he persisted in backing abortionist Dr Bertram Wainer in his fight against claimed corruption in the Victoria Police. I knew the younger members of the Wainer family at school at Ivanhoe.

Ryan, also the publisher of *Fighter* boxing magazine from Toorak offices then jointly held by Beverley Will of *The Green Place*. Mike had worked on *The Age* since 1956 on everything from police rounds to diary columns. Off his own bat, Ryan visited the home of Mr Cairns William Villeneuve-Smith, the barrister appointed by the Victorian Government to make an enquiry into the allegations.

Age Editor Graham Perkin was horrified. Around February 1976, Ryan tendered what must be one of newspaperdom's most concise inter-office memoranda:

Dear Graham
My Resignation
Regards, Michael Ryan

After three days, Ryan asked for his job back. Ryan has spent almost two decades with *The Age*, six years in London alongside fellow pugilism devotees Bryan Membrey and Jack Darmody.

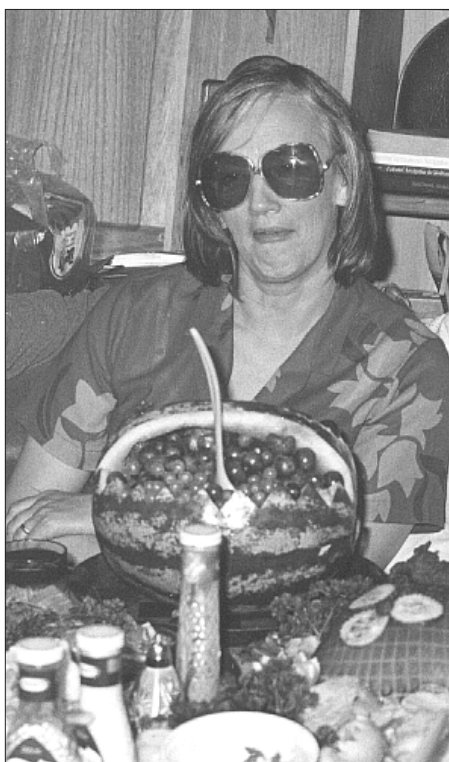
It didn't, and it couldn't, last for long. So Ryan was soon back on the streets to publish his own short-lived paper, *Public Eye*.

The controversial quarterfold was refused as a print job by two Melbourne printers, and reported to be seized by Police at another. *Public Eye* ended coming off Tony Rubinstein's York Press at Abbotsford, home of the *Australian Jewish News*. Like many print jobs of the day, it was printed behind closed doors with 'look-outs' watching for Police seeking to raid the print works. Max Newton employed a similar 'cockatoo' strategy when he published soft-porn mags such as *Kings Cross Whisper*, *Suck* and *Cocksure*.

Ryan enlisted the help of journalist Christopher Forsyth, who told Ryan that I might be able to help with distribution. Ryan was crazily pre-occupied with the project, and even 'cased' Max Newton's plant in Richmond to see if distribution records could be 'obtained'.

Instead, a touch of lateral thinking was handy. Max Newton was facing the end days of his *Sunday Observer*. I simply asked him for the confidential list as a favour, and he obliged. Max ordered his Towart Distribution Company manager Steve Austin to print a full distribution outlet list to me. I converted it in delivery lists, sold it to Ryan for a couple of hundred dollars, and bowed out quickly.

Ryan, a top journalist, later returned to mainstream journalism with stints at Standard Newspapers headed by Julian Clarke, and the *Sunday Press*.



■ 'Lady Mary Montagu' was one of the characters of Melbourne media in the 1970's and 80's. Mary tried to publish 'Nation Review' for a short while, and was the 'Madam Lash' columnist at the 'Sunday Mirror' in 1983.



■ During the mid 1970's, I booked a number of professional acts around Melbourne. One was a young Sydney actor called Garry McDonald who had developed a character called 'Norman Gunston' in the ABC 'Aunty Jack' show. Garry went on to become a Gold Logie TV award winner.

All Washed Up ... At 18

The end of my Ivanhoe Grammar School days sent me into a spin. Literally. Headmaster Victor Brown described me to the 1974 Speech Night at Camberwell Civic Centre as “one of the best School Captains I have ever had”. The unprecedented applause from the 1500 people still echoes; it was a great feeling.

But it was a artificial cocoon as well. The School Captain's position at that time was almost an appointment to staff. There were dozens of ceremonial duties, particularly in a year that saw the retirement of VRC Brown from the Headmastership, after 26 years.

With two weeks to go before Higher School Certificate (now VCE) exam time, level master Nigel Kendall took me aside for a frank talk. My grades were abysmal. Accounting, which he taught, had me coming in at a fast 43 per cent. I didn't know debit from credit. Today's business observers might say that nothing has changed. So for a fortnight, Nige guided me through a speed-learning course.

So did English master Les Boreham (father of top Channel 10 reporter Gareth Boreham, and *The Australian's* Tim Boreham). So did Commercial and Legal Studies teacher Eric Smith. So did Politics man Bernie Gartland. So did Economics tutor Peter Carter. Their super-cram was successful.

I scored an 'A'-grade in Commercial and Legal Studies, two 'B's and two 'C's. Unwisely, as Editor of the school's *Ivanarian* magazine, I included these details in print so there is no opportunity for me now to fudge the results, quarter-of-a-century later.

The results were pleasing, and it gained me the marks necessary to win entrance to the University of Melbourne's Bachelor of Commerce and Economics degree course. My family was jubilant. I could follow my brother Greg, who was completing a Law degree at Melbourne.

However, these were studies for which I had no burning ambition, but my father did! Quarter of a century later, as a parent, I now know the frustrations that the old man must have gone through.

Dad was keen for me to have the privilege of a University education that circumstances denied him. On the other hand, I was burnt out at 18. I was suffering severe loss of balance, horrible stomach cramps, and a nervous exhaustion that saw me rushed to Preston and Northcote Community

Hospital. Doctors prescribed a heavy dose of Valium for this 18-year-old washed-out wreck!

I was a zombie for weeks. I remember (just) walking the mile from Reservoir Station to home, with Fleur guiding me ... but with my eyes shut. I was literally drugged to the eyeballs.

The best medicine was the purchase of a Torana car, for \$1100, underwritten by an ANZ Bank loan guaranteed by my father and mother. Suddenly I had wheels of my own, and the nervous exhaustion disappeared in a heartbeat.

All summer, I drove the beer truck for the local Broadway Cellars licensed grocers. I wasn't a drinker in those days ... ah, the missed opportunities of youth! If I only I knew then what I know now!

By March 1975, University enrolment came and close friends were few. I wasn't motivated for study, and my grades reflected it. Fellow students included Greg Weller and Rhys Watson from IGS days, and Sheree Drever, daughter of a funeral director. Other close friends included Tony Nippard; and Bill Crothers, a former Wesley Collegian, who married another Commerce student, Joanne Cain. Jo is daughter of former Premier John Cain and wife Nancye.

Joan Saunders, former wife of IGS teacher Geoff Saunders, nursed me through accounting. Mary Crooks, now prominent Victorian community advocate, limped me through Economic Geography. Commercial Law tutor Graeme Lowe held most 'tutes' in the convivial surrounds of Naughton's Hotel in Parkville. I would have earned straight A's for a new taste in ale, but no-one could teach me Economics.

I tried Economics 101 for three years in a row. What I didn't understand about economists was that the questions were the same every year, it was the answers that changed!

Life also consisted of a full working schedule at Max Newton's newspaper factory, and as manager at Noel O'Hehir's chain of the newly-introduced self-serve service stations. Fleur and I were happily courting. So my 'extra-curricular' campus activities turned to the University newspaper, *Farrago* - a nursery for future political and media players.

These included Students' Representative Council chief, Michael Danby, now Labor MHR for Melbourne Ports. Lindsay Tanner was a *Farrago* Editor with Peter Russ: Tanner is now a Shadow Federal Minister in Canberra.

Writers on *Farrago* included the talented Alan Attwood with 'Around

The Town', Karen Barrett, Blazenka Brysha, and editors Campbell Smith and Colin Golvan. Attwood joined *The Age*; Barrett was appointed Editor of the *Torch* group in Sydney; Brysha and Smith married; and Golvan became a prominent Melbourne solicitor. We also had a funny restaurant reviewer: his column was 'Eating Out Avec Steve Vizard'. He is now a multi-millionaire media businessman and former *Tonight Live* show host, with an appalling memory for the struggling finances of his fellow University hacks!

A young law student had his lecture essay printed. It was entitled "When No Means Yes - Rape, Consent and The Law." The author's name was Campbell McComas.

Farrago also produced PR practitioner Jenny Grimwade, *Age* writer Louise Carbines, and *Shepparton News* boss Chris McPherson.

I had the *Farrago* media beat, and prepared a weekly 'Media Notes' column that put me in touch with the media players. The column was so popular and accurate that it was syndicated to *Lot's Wife* at Monash University, *Rabelias* at La Trobe, and *Catalyst* at RMIT. Media Notes predicted Les Carlyon's resignation as Editor of *The Age*, was reprimanded by *This Week* producer Pamela Graham about my report on Denis Warner's departure from the program, and broke the news about Sir Eric Pearce's return to the GTV-9 news desk. It was the forerunner to *Media Flash* in 2000 and 2001.

Good friend, Imre Salusinszky, conducted an interview with Federal Treasurer, Dr Jim Cairns, on the very morning that the politician's career came to a close, after his famous liaison with assistant Junie Morosi made national headlines. John Sorell, fresh at Channel Nine from the *Sunday Observer*, followed with a TV special *Of Course I Love Jim Cairns*.

Suddenly I was a political player. ALP chief David Combe was a guest at *Farrago* for an interview, smoking a very long cigar. He was soon made *persona non grata* for dealings with a Russian spy. I took the University's TV cameras to an election rally, amazed at two things: how easy it was with a TV camera to beat security and be alongside soon-to-be-PM Malcolm Fraser, and the mammoth size then of *Sun-News Pictorial* politics reporter Laurie Oakes.

I had tendered for the job of carting the *Farrago* newspaper artwork to Don McPherson's Newsprinters in Shepparton early every Friday, in return for \$30 ... plus the priceless car pass that allowed the Torana to park anywhere on campus.

The political climate was red hot with Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's

dismissal by Governor-General Sir John Kerr on November 11, 1975. I floated the idea of a political analysis newspaper prior to the election, meeting with a young Mark Birrell of the Liberal Party at Melbourne's Federal Hotel to discuss the idea. Birrell, much later, became a senior Upper House Minister in Jeff Kennett's Victorian Government in a career that has only partly blossomed.

University 'radicals' of the day included Michael Spencer, some time later to become Corporate Affairs Manager at steel giant BHP. Activist John Schauble is now Beijing correspondent for *The Age*, and former Farrago writer Stephen Milne became advisor to Prime Minister Bob Hawke.

And Michael Danby owes, or blames, his media technique to a 20-year-old PR-ish Ash Long. Danby was selected to be interviewed by Dan Webb on HSV-7's *This Week* local current affairs program broadcast on Sunday night. Although our politics were quite different, the temptation was too great to resist to manage my first temporary media makeover for this Students' Representative Council leader. Media beckoned us both.

I admit to several hoax newspapers. One was the prank newspaper, *The Uni Star*, which pretended to be a *Truth*-style opposition to *Farrago*. The women's libbers didn't see the joke of our Page 3 girls, and burnt all 5000 of the spoof copies ... along with their bras.

Another hoax, in the middle of high-pitch cramming, featured the headline: 'Examinations Cancelled'. We told how the exam venue, the Exhibition Buildings, had been double booked with a camping show that could not be postponed. Our story highlighted student Simon Whelan (now QC, and *Coodabeen Champion*) planned to hold a hunger strike over the cock-up. A number of higher academics fell for the prank and were not amused when the sting was revealed.

Other university writing colleagues of the day were reviewers Jill Barnard, Andree L'Estrange and Michelle Nayman; and staff reporters included Simon Plant, Vicki Steer, Rus Littleton and Marty Merz.

I applied to 3XY News Editor Paul Syme for a newsreader's job but my audition tape sounded like 'Norman Newscaster' But I was News Director for the University's trial radio station that formed the beginnings of 3RRR-FM. Similarly, I conducted an extensive interview with Ron Moss and Marius Webb at the 2JJ studios (now Triple J) where I quaintly remarked: "Just as much as the minis and ties are the fashion in downtown Sydney, so are caftans and t-shirts to the conforming non-conformists of 2JJ."

As a 20-year-old in 1976-77, with fellow student Peter Trost, I also canvassed the idea of starting a weekly suburban newspaper, *The Northern Star*, in Melbourne's Diamond Valley. Trost was working as Ad Manager for *Farrago*. I obtained printing quotes from Keith Hopkins at the *Latrobe Valley Express*. Keith was father of Brian Hopkins, who controls the fast-growing *Warragul Gazette* newspaper.

I conducted a thorough feasibility study of competing against the *Diamond Valley News* run by the Leader Publishing Co. Andrew Berry, an executive of *The Age*, under instructions from their General Manager Bill Bland, conducted talks about the possibility of David Syme & Co. Ltd joining the project as a 50 per cent partner. But the story of my life: *The Northern Star* never happened, because of a lack of capital. That salvation probably delayed my first bankruptcy by 15 years!



■ Early hopes of a political career were dashed with a rocky record of business successes and failures. Pictured at old Parliament House, Canberra about 1979, I soon discovered there was more power in the media corridors anyway!



■ Kidnapping John Michael Howson was a publicity stunt; he insisted we stop at the 'TV Week' offices for a photo. I caught up with Hollywood-based John at the 2001 opening night for 'Shout: The Legend Of Johnny O'Keefe', which he co-wrote with David Mitchell and Melvyn Morrow.

Still The One

Gatecrashing television's Logies Awards became a hobby for a few years. As a young newspaper reporter, I had started hanging around the publicity departments of Melbourne television stations, particularly those of GTV-9 at Bendigo Street, Richmond. It was unpaid work, but allowed me to have a *National Nine News* Staff decal on my Torana, that also gave me great car parking privileges right around town.

My first exposure to the TV station had been when it conducted an annual *Telethon* for the Yooralla School for Handicapped Children, and I was a nine-year-old collector making my way to collect a tin at the Bendigo Street studios. My father rebuked me, saying that if I was going to collect for anyone it should be the Royal Children's Hospital which saved my life as a baby.

First, Publicity Director Myke Dyer, was to take me under his wing, prior to his tragic drowning. The former Canadian radio man pulled the strings to enable me to undertake double-page interviews with Ernie Sigley. My interview with Ernie was front-page news in Melbourne when John Sorell spotted the story in a *Farrago* skit paper edited by Richard Cooney and Richard Nowak, and headed: 'Ding Dong Clang Bang - Sigley Bugger Shock!'

The headlines may have been a skit, but my candid double-spread interview with Sigley was at a time when he not talking with Melbourne's media. Sorell offered me \$300 for the story, payable in three weekly instalments of \$100. I contacted Myke Dyer who said that Ernie would prefer the interview not be sold. I kept up my end of the bargain with Sigley, but Sorell printed the interview anyway.

It also introduced me to other TV comperes of the day such as Don Lane. My interview with short-time night-time variety host Bob Maumill was headlined 'Is He Really A Bit Sub-Maumill?'

Channel 9 allowed me to regularly attend its Green Room, the bar where variety show guests would relax before and after shows. Sigley's sidekick Denise Drysdale was a friendly ally as I wide-eyed the passing parade of showbiz greats drinking their way through 'The Ark'. 'Ding Dong' was justifiably livid as model Cheryl Rixon flirted her way through her TV appearances. The Page 3 model couldn't hold a microphone, let alone a conversation. Denise, on the other hand, had 'paid her dues', from a schoolgirl in the GTV-9 'ballet'.

'The Ark' was so named after TV legend Graham Kennedy impersonated a crow on air - "F-a-a-a-r-k". I always travelled by taxi to GTV-9 ... they were great nights, followed by even greater nights at the Bridge Hotel in Richmond.

This familiarity with the TV stars allowed me to great victories in the annual University scavenger hunts where huge bonus points were awarded for special finds. I was able to kidnap showbiz glamour man John-Michael Howson, but not before he insisted that we call via the *TV Week* offices for a picture opportunity with photographer Rob Austen!

At that time, John-Michael was hosting a morning radio program on 3UZ. He was working 17 hours a day in preparation. He had started as a country newspaper journalist at *The Sunraysia Daily*, graduating to ATV-0's *Magic Circle Club* with Nancy Cato, then *Adventure Island* at the ABC.

Howson's well-earned stardom came through exposure on *The Mike Walsh Show* on the Ten and Nine Networks. Today, John is a successful writer, based in LA. He rocked Melbourne's gentry when he broke the town's worst-kept secret that he was homosexual. 'Hollywood' continues weekly reports back home with Ernie Sigley and Colette Mann on 3AW, and with Bert Newton on *Good Morning Australia*. He also co-wrote *Shout*, the stage play about the legend of Johnny O'Keefe, promoted by Kevin Jacobsen.

The TV station links also provided some great media contacts for a young reporter. I was able to write about the whirlwind changes being instituted by new News Director, John Sorell. 'The Bear' had taken over an antiquated news operation, where the on-screen titles for each news story were assembled by hand with a clumsy letter-by-letter set-up on a noticeboard.

Sorell had introduced two young Brisbane newsreaders, Peter Hitchener and Arthur Higgins. Hitchener, these days, heads the flagship *National Nine News* in Melbourne. Today, sadly, Higgins is one of the greatest media voices, yet most under-used TV talents, and fills his week with Foxtel sporting assignments, and Rugby League football coverage. He has been given the 6pm-10pm radio shift at 3AK, but for how long?

Sorell also masterminded the handover of the chief newsreader's role from Sir Eric Pearce to Brian Naylor, who had been snared from Ron Casey at HSV-7. Sir Eric also gave me some valuable PR advice: "Never be photographed with a glass." It was advice from someone who had carefully crafted his public image over decades. This didn't include images of alcohol.

The annual Logies presentation were legendary. They had been invented

a circulation-boosting exercise for *TV Week* magazine, founded by Bruce Skeggs in 1957. The magazine was later taken over by Rupert Murdoch's Southdown Press and edited by a range of men who were to become fellow drinkers: Frank Crook, Bob Gordon, Lawrie Masterton and Tony Fawcett. The last I remember of Frank Crook was us dancing a polka at a media party being held in the penthouse at Melbourne's Southern Cross Hotel. To the best of my knowledge, I couldn't dance ... now or then!

In the mid-1970's it was still possible to walk past the Southdown presses in Walsh Street, West Melbourne, and see the after-Logies color covers being printed ... before the Logies! Ideal for bookmakers.

The fascination over Logies proved important to Norman Gunston, played by Gary McDonald, who I had booked for a Uni gig several months earlier. The Gunston character hosted a weekly variety spoof on ABC-TV, with the recurring theme of a Logie win. It was very clever comedy.

The link with McDonald proved valuable when I was part of the set-up of the University's own TV station, RSTV, and promotions were needed. I took the early portable reel-to-reel video camera to the upper-class Dulwich Hill house he shared with wife Diane Craig, and the chooks. I was also made welcome at TV stations in Melbourne and Sydney, recording promotions with Hitchener, Mike Carlton, Roger Climpson and Gunston. Mike Willesee shouted me a Fosters early that February morning in 1976: he was wearing a straw hat, and smoking a huge 12-inch cigar.

Interviews were also filmed with gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson, and actor Jack Nicholson as he promoted *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*.

The TCN-9 tour included a souvenir transmission schedule detailing the tasks for station co-ordinator 'G. Haigh'. Already, booth announcers were a thing of the past; the on-duty announcer's name was listed as 'Cartridge Tape'. It must have been a slow advertising day as the station opened at 6.30am with a half-hour test pattern. The log was full of ads for Packer family interests including the *Australian Women's Weekly*, Golden Press, the AWW Cook Book, *Gregory's Street Directory*, and *The Bulletin*. Things have looked up for the boys from Willoughby since then.

Our Melbourne University station, RSTV, carried 'Eye-Missed-It News with Bruce Genuine', a comic take-off of *Eyewitness News* with Bruce Mansfield. Little did I know I would later become his TV producer 20 years later!



John-Michael Howson shocked Melbourne's gentry when he broke the town's worst-kept secret that he was gay ... John also co-wrote 'Shout', the stage play about the legend of Johnny O'Keefe, promoted by Kevin Jacobsen.

■ Left: Theatrical entrepreneur Kevin Jacobsen at the opening night of 'Shout: The Legend Of The Wild One', 2001.

■ Below: Valerie King (centre), Night Manager at Rockman's Regency Hotel, with Mr and Mrs Max Moore. From 1955 to 1963, Max was Associate and Tour Manager of Lee Gordon, the American showman who promoted Australian tours of Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jnr, Bob Hope, Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, as well as managing Johnny O'Keefe.



Fast Bucks

For just a short while, my lawyer brother Greg and I thought there was a quid to be made of trading in business names. I was working as a manager of Shell and Total service stations in Melbourne owned by Noel and Lorraine O'Hehir. I had heard of a chain in New South Wales called 'Big Owl', so took out business name registrations for 'Big Red Owl Value Mart' in Victoria and other states.

Old school mate Gary Dumbrell was wholesaling auto parts. Today he is a super-successful multi-millionaire with interests including Wynns auto products and controls the Autobarn group. At this stage he was wholesaling auto parts through his Allbrells chain, and I was selling them to service station proprietors in a few states. It seemed a natural extension to offer marketing expertise to the auto dealers as well.

By mid-1978, Peter Dimitri and his Big Owl marketing team led locally by Barri Cristan, had started their recruitment drive for Melbourne operators to promote their 25 new different products each month. But Greg and I owned the names.

We forced the deal, with Dimitri and his crowd paying \$1500 for the transfer of the Victorian business name registrations. But not before dealings had their share of ugliness. It was enough to discourage me from this end of the business.

The financial responsibilities of marriage clicked in quickly, with Fleur and I keen to buy our home as soon as possible. Bayswater Village Shopping Centre, owned by VACC Insurance Company, advertised for a part-time Promotions Manager, after Elaine Forde won a senior job as Manager of the Forest Hill Shopping Centre. I was interviewed by Marketing Manager John Richardson, who I was find out months later was an Ivanhoe Grammarian. People talk about how 'old school ties' were used in those days. I was the last to know!

Property Manager of VACC Insurance Company, Tony Williams, was the best memorandum author I had seen. He had a commanding style which obligated all others with whom he had spoken. I later too became known as a Memo-Meister.

I was quick to institute traders' newsletters, columns in the local papers,

and shopping attractions including a visit by Daryl Somers and Ossie Ostrich handled by Ernie Carroll. Their rate in 1978 was \$1500 for an hour.

When Humphrey B. Bear visited in school holidays, it was me who had the fright of his life when the bear's costume head came off and the dancer itself tried to escape the suit. A wasp had entered the mouth of the fun loving bear!

My promotional efforts at Bayswater Village quickly caught the eye of Leader's Wally Mott and Don Brown. I had put together a powerful handbill for a Bayswater automotive parts company, so Wally took me to a Knox Club lunch and asked me about my intentions for the area. Wally seemed wary of me from that time on. I think he still is!

Soon after the meeting I published *The Bayswater Villager*, a good-looking advertorial-filled newspaper for my tenants at the shopping centre. Then, as they say, I was made an offer I could not refuse.

Don Brown, the MD of Leader's eastern group, Maroondah Associated Newspapers, invited me to join the company ... and said I was welcome to keep my shopping centre consultancy too. But this was not altruism!

At age 21, I was earning \$38,000 from the two jobs, in year 1978. And this brought resentment from plenty, particularly Leader's Advertising Production Manager, Keith Peplar.

I had actually started working at Leader much earlier: in 1974, as a contributor of local news, under Jackie Taylor. Jackie was the mother of a young Ivanhoe Grammar student, and invited me to contribute local news paragraphs for the papers. Soon I was covering the Whittlesea, Preston, Reservoir, Brunswick and Diamond Valley areas, being paid monthly at the princely rate of four cents per published line.

I soon learned how to puff out copy. When I called a church minister to obtain details of their latest social gathering, my question was 'Who attended?'. At four cents a line, each name was worth two cents. Soon, as a 17-year-old schoolboy, I was earning up to \$70 a week, with a typewriter on my lap, and a phone to my ear. The formula was names, names and more names!

To me as a 21-year-old, Leader's Publisher John Mott was the ideal role model for a young newspaper executive. He was born in September 1926, was bred in Oakhill Avenue in Preston, commenced as a newspaper editorial department cadet at age 19, improving his skills with a photographic studies course at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. In 1948 he was

sent on a trip to North America, working as a journalist-news photographer with the *Windsor Daily Star* in Ontario. He followed with a six-month stint at an advertising agency in Detroit. It was long way from his northern suburbs beginnings downunder.

J.H. Mott - the family members were all known by their initials - was thrust into the general management side of 16 newspapers, earlier than he might have preferred, upon the untimely death of his father in 1968. He proved more than equal to the task. His principal piece of advice to me, on the birth of our daughter Kristi, was to use the same attributes as a business manager: "Be predictable. Ensure that people know how you will respond to any set of circumstances."

John's uncle, R.R. Mott, was very much an expansionist. He enthusiastically encouraged staff, and led his executives in the partnership in Waverley Offset Publishing Group, the Progress Press merger, and the development of new printing technologies. He was also a Director of W.L. Simpson Pty Ltd and Licorice Products Pty Ltd.

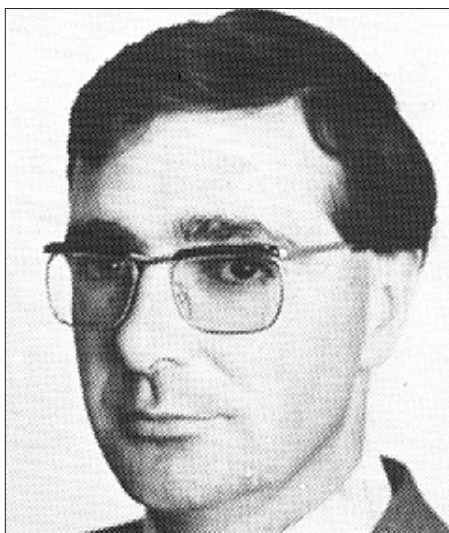
Together, the Motts led many expansions of their group. They had started with the *Northcote Leader*, with a 're-plated' front-page that became the *Preston Post*. That expansion continued with the *Whittlesea Post*, as well as acquisitions of *Coburg Courier* and *Brunswick Sentinel*.

The *Heidelberger* newspaper was launched in November 1958 as a joint venture between John Morgan's *Heidelberg City News* and *Leader*. The front-page editorial heralded 'Heidelberg Has A New Modern Newspaper', boasting itself as a new up-to-date newspaper designed particularly to cater for "the needs and desires of that large selection of the City of Heidelberg which has more recently come to live within its bounds."

The *Heidelberger* was just as much a reactionary move than an innovative one. It was designed to knock out the free-circulating *Heidelberg Mirror*, produced by the publishers of the *Diamond Valley Mirror* and *Outer Eastern Mirror*, named after Melbourne's Outer Eastern Circle railway.

Leader also expanded into the eastern suburbs, with its interests at one time running three opposition groups against each other. At one time, residents saw *News*, *Gazette* and *Mail* papers delivered to their letterboxes - all produced by the same owners!

The *Gazette* group was founded by George Baker, Keith Macpherson and Max Finch, who had been manager of the Jack Taylor-led Hannam's electrical stores. One of the *Gazette's* amazing characters was Barbara



■ Wally Mott, one of the proprietors of Leader Newspapers, was first to meet with me when I started printing my own publications in Melbourne's eastern suburbs.



■ Rob Bradley, manager of Leader's 'Diamond Valley News' weekly, won a determined commercial battle against opposition newspaper, 'Valley Voice'. He later founded the 'Dandenong Leader'.



■ Ian Chambers, Leader's Marketing Manager for a brief time, was often in a party mood. He is pictured with a tolerant Fleur Long, and a 1979 Leader client.

Dewhurst, whose passing was recognised with a double-page spread featuring tributes from R.R. Mott, David Tomlin, Max Finch, former editor Harry Grover and sales manager Jim Dowsley. Other tributes came from ad men Leo Hart and Ted Williams, *Ringwood Mail* stalwart Harald Nicolson, and columnist Pamela Price.

A further expansion into Melbourne's eastern suburbs came with the *Knox and Mountain District Free Press*. It had been started by communist John Bennett, and his wife Nell, in 1946.

The paper won a wide following, with county-style journalism. It meant covering every social function. Much later, Nell would tell me it would mean covering the local dances, to the point of describing the girls' gowns. She told me her 'UpHill and Down Dale' column would describe a girl with the same dress each week: one edition it would be scarlet, next week it would win a fresh coverage as 'a brilliant tomato red'.

The Bennetts ran an impressive fight to have an independent press for more than 30 years. In the end, Nell described the sale to Rupert Murdoch's Cumberland Newspapers with the comment: "We don't want what happened to John Bennett to happen to us." John had died at age 48, probably from the sheer exhaustion of running a weekly newspaper.

The Murdoch-owned *Free Press* went head-to-head with the *Knox News*, led by Don Brown of *Leader*. Brown took his local paper to three editions weekly, with letterbox delivered papers saturating the area every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. He enlisted a top team including ad men John Pritchard, Ian Poke and ad designer Terry Keatch. *Leader* won the fight, acquiring the *Free Press* early in 1978.

Soon after my arrival at *Leader*, I was appointed to make the paper work commercially. My former Northcote editor Kevin Pearman came across to the east to assist. I enjoyed his professionalism. We would enjoy a drink together after hours at 'Daisies' Hotel, East Ringwood. And we did what no other *Leader* combination did. With me as Newspaper Manager, and Kevin as Editor, we would come into the offices on a Saturday, to design the paper together, to give it an extra edge. It was a combination that worked well.

We also worked on a number of community projects and every Thursday night we would attend as fund-raising committee to build the Maroondah Hospital. It was enjoyable, even if just to work alongside one of the PR people, stunning model Beverley Pinder. This fund-raising management

later came in handing in my days on a committee raising more than \$250,000 for Yea Hospital's Accident and Emergency Department.

One of the sideshows each week was when Belgrave's 'White Witch' Kerry Kulkens arrived at the *Free Press* office to lodge her astrology column with journalist Margo Coward. Kerry was often running late and had yet to complete her predictions for the coming week. I joined in with ad reps Pam Stuart and Jill-Anne Jordan to help with the just-on-deadline sooth-saying. We had an amazing success rate ... but the Elvis sightings in the Dandenongs have yet to be confirmed.

I figured it was important to win the support of the community, so I set up a network of 52 'depots' throughout the Dandenongs where readers could leave the contributions in special letterboxes and 'talkback' to their local paper. Likewise, I encouraged a stronger distribution of the paper, and involved the newsboys and girls with their own *Round-Up* newsletter. We had T-shirts, caps and prizes, and filled the Cameo Theatre at Belgrave for a special day out, along with a ride for them on the local Puffing Billy steam train.

An equally impressive newspaper publishing situation nearby was Herb Thomas at the neighboring 4000-circulation *Pakenham Gazette*. Don Brown suggested I could do worse that look at the paper which was one of the first paid weeklies in Victoria to convert to modern offset publication. The paper was expanding through Berwick, and soon to commence an additional home delivered *Berwick News* edition. Today, through the efforts of son Ian Thomas, and grandson Paul Thomas, the small extra paper regularly checks in at 100 pages weekly, complete with a full color 56-page *South Eastern Real Estate News* supplement that goes into 140,000 homes. What was once a small home-town produced paper, is now a giant that has to be printed on *The Canberra Times* presses to meet all its color commitments.

It is edited by Garry Howe, and features writings by former colleagues Jim Mynard and Stuart Chisholm. Paul has now also stretched across the other side of Melbourne with a further 140,000-circulation *North-West Real Estate News*, in direct competition to Fairfax's *Community News*. Whether that extension will prove, long-term, to be a wise 'military' marketing move is yet to be determined. But the family's overall South East Newspapers operations are now not exactly 'small beer'.

A similar local paper - the *Southern Peninsula Local* - was produced by Greg Gibbs, Zoe Sterling and Phil Gannon at Rosebud, following the closure

the *Southern Peninsula Gazette*. Leader decided to close the paid-circulation paper and incorporate it within their *Mornington Peninsula Leader*.

I wasn't the only one in 1978-79 to be looking to expand newspapers in the area. Don Fitzgerald, a Pakenham-based printer, started a small Emerald-based co-operative paper, called *The Trader*, that was to live under various titles including *The Hills Trader* and *The Ranges Trader*, as it changed corporate masks over the coming decades to dodge the creditors.

Don, his wife Gill, and a team which over the years included Keith Peplar, Serena Erich and Jeff Jones, were as close to getting it as right as another local paper operator. In the good times, Don drove his Mercedes Benz coupe, and flew into local football matches by helicopter. In the worst times, Laurie Eastlake held nominal title over the paper, with Don finally parting with his newspaper to Hartley Higgins and Geoff Heyes, for less than \$25,000 and the promise of a job.

Like others, including me in 1994, the job turned out to be short-term. Now Don has returned to a paid job as a printer at Healesville.

One of the finest challenges ever put to the Leader Publishing Company was the weekly *Valley Voice* newspaper founded in the Eltham intelligentsia-belt in 1978.

At a time soon after Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's rise-and-fall, the *Valley Voice* newspaper was founded as a free, weekly local publication with directors including teacher Geoffrey Wells, Australian Democrats-linked Neville Loftus-Hills, Liberal businessman Ian Marsden, ad man Les Schintler and graphic artist Fred Baker. Terrence Henderson was Company Secretary. One of the paper's leading proponents, serial ALP Federal candidate David McKenzie, was later to lose his house from investments backing the enterprise.

They were different times. In 1978-79, Eltham was a political boiling pot. Today it is an iced claret.

Under the editorship of Flowerdale-based Sean Hanrahan, *Valley Voice* was printed under contract on Peter Isaacson's press, for just 70 weeks.

Late into its life, companion publication *Heidelberg Voice* started (and finished) with local MP John Cain enthusing: "I'm delighted to see there's a new voice for the Heidelberg citizens. For too long there's only been one paper. I welcome the new paper." The *Voice* was gone within months, following the applied marketing of Leader's Rob Bradley.



■ Former Victorian Premier John Cain offered his support to the 'Heidelberg Voice' newspaper set up in opposition to Leader Newspapers. Labor Party identity David McKenzie (right) was a prominent investor in the 'Valley Voice' group which lost hundreds of thousands of dollars.



■ Above: Leader editorial men Gavin Clancy and Jack Gavegan, at the old Northcote headquarters.
■ Left: Clever 'Valley Voice' Editor Sean Hanrahan.

Broadly Speaking

A sound example of local newspaper business was when some Leader staffers, Ray Foletta and Bob Grant, joined production man Ian Nankervis, in producing the *Broadmeadows Observer* newspaper.

The 'Broadglen' group, later in partnership in Leader, went on to include the *Essendon Gazette*, *Keilor Messenger* and *The Regional* (a merger of papers from Sunbury, Macedon Ranges, Lancefield and Kyneton). In fact, I think I aspired to do what they had achieved: go out on their own, link again later with Leader, and control their own business destiny.

Ralph Wilson, a 64-year-old English-born journalist was based at Leader's Northcote office, writing for the Coburg and Brunswick papers on a lineage basis. Always alert for fresh copy, he turned his attention to the area north of Coburg just awakening from the sleep of the post-war years - Broadmeadows. The people who should have been reading the Wilson reports were neglected because Leader's *Coburg Courier* distribution stopped short of the Broadmeadows shire boundaries.

Bob Grant, as News Editor of the Leader group, began reporting the events of Broadmeadows Council on Monday nights. In the early morning hours he had to handwrite 'lead' stories from the council meeting and have them available in Tuesday's *Courier*.

It wasn't long before stories from Broadmeadows were taking front-page prominence. Wilson suggested to Leader management that they start a newspaper in Broadmeadows, but it failed to interest a company in the throes of its own rapid expansion.

Wilson and Grant then began discussions with Ray Foletta, who was advertising production manager at Leader and it was agreed that they all put themselves out of a job and "abandon the substance of their careers for the shadow of a newspaper enterprise in Broadmeadows," they recalled in their 21st birthday souvenir of their *Broadmeadows Observer* in April 1977.

Two other Leader people were also recruited for the plunge - Perce Robertson, who was employed on a casual basis for selling tradesmen ads and writing local news items; and George Elliman, an assistant in the advertising department. The trio had a name, expertise, enthusiasm, faith and courage - but definitely no money. However, their severance pay enabled them to spend a couple of weeks selling ads, insisting on clients signing an

order book, which they took to the Glenroy branch of the Commonwealth Bank. They showed the order book proudly to Bank Manager Joe Lonergan, who provided a £400 overdraft for one month.

The first issue 'went to bed' at Standard Newspapers, Cheltenham ... and the rest became history. The *Broadmeadows Observer* expanded, with an *St Albans-Deer Park and Outer Western Suburbs Observer* extra edition. This later became the *Keilor Messenger*.

The company - which became Broadglen Publishing - tried the *Essendon News* against the established *Essendon Gazette*. They lasted five weeks, but had to close because of lack of working capital. Instead, they purchased the *Gazette*!

Next takeover was Eric Boardman's *Sunbury News*, *Lancefield Mercury*, *Gisborne Gazette* and *Romsey Examiner*, to create the *Regional News Gazette*. Later, a 20 per cent share in the *Ballarat News* was purchased.

Other holdings included a photographic store headed by Kevan Evans, stationery and printing businesses, toy shops, and other retail businesses.

The Mott Family at Leader increased links with Broadglen, after becoming printer for the newspapers. Broadglen papers were marketed under the Leader group banner.



■ Above: David Tomlin was a Leader Group Director at Northcote.



■ Right: One of Leader's star graduates was reporter Tracy Grimshaw, who now hosts the Nine Network's 'Today' show.

My Big Break

I was given my chance soon enough as a senior newspaper executive in October 1980 when appointed as Manager of Leader's eight northern newspapers - at the tender age of just 24. I guess I was being groomed for even more senior roles, but did not fully realise it at the time.

Don Brown did me the greatest career favour by sending me to some intensive sales management training with Ragnar Pahlman of the Pahlman Tack organisation. I could never understand why Pahlman's representative, Colin Tozer, looked half-asleep when he made his sales calls. Another sales training firm pitched for the Leader sales team business, and when asked by Brown if their fees were negotiable, the executive fired back: "Yes. Upwards."

Looking back, my senior promotion was a wonderful vote of confidence by the Mott family and their MD Don Brown, but also by other Directors including Mark Crampton, David Tomlin and Keith Ostler. I didn't let them down.

I had responsibility for eight newspapers: the flagship *Northcote Leader*, *City of Preston Post-Times*, *Whittlesea Post*, *Coburg Courier*, *Brunswick Sentinel*, *The Heidelberg*, *Diamond Valley News* and *Doncaster-Templestowe News*.

Straight away, I recruited a new advertising sales team, increasing the concentration of women from zero to half the team. I encouraged each of my personal assistants to stretch their careers: Pauline Holbery became a journalist; Anne Cooksey and Tonina Guerra signed on as talented marketing representatives; and Christine D'Angelo and her husband started a family. There were other loyal office staffers including Mary Orchard.

The sales results went up an average of 26 per cent over each of the next three years. I brought Keith Peplar in as Advertising Production Manager, who had been dispatched to corporate oblivion as layout artist at the *Lillydale and Yarra Valley Express* office. I saved Keith's career a number of times, but I was later to discover the poor value he placed on this loyalty.

My team of journalists under Evan Hannah included talented writers such as Ian Munro, Lynne Cossar, Jan Phyland, photographer Rodger Cummins, as well as the veterans' brigade of Peter MacGeorge and Allen Jones, who retired at age 84.

Robert White, Editor of *The Heidelberg, Doncaster and Templestowe News*

and *Diamond Valley News*, commented that I was the only ad man he had ever seen who worked with a typewriter. Rob - who later joined the Australian Football League as Media Manager - put together a top team too, with one of its members being a young Tracy Grimshaw, who went to compere the *Midday* show with David Reyne, and Nine's *Today* show with Steve Liebmann.

Don Brown recruited Doug Aiton as *Knox News* Editor, and Frank Palmos to lead the 'Leaderman' investigative reporting series.

At Bayswater I had been President of the local Chamber of Commerce. Former aide to Victorian Premier Sir Rupert 'Dick' Hamer, Peter Stirling, was at the shopping centre where I started, and I continued a consultancy role for him and local real estate agent Bob Appleby. My jobs included personal management of a number of shopping centre accounts. I also handled the client account for Jack Taylor's Discount City electrical discount chain, and Clive Savage at Clive Peeters.

I also won the Presidency at the Preston and Reservoir Chamber of Commerce and Industry. With Leader rep Les Worcester, we organised a prize where shoppers and traders could win a trip for two to Fiji, by participating in an advertising campaign ... in the local newspapers, of course! We used a similar scheme across all Leader newspapers, with a jumbo jet of clients heading off to Fiji in our *Sunseekers* promotion, hosted by Graeme and Carol Trainor.

They were busy days at Leader. Not only was I involved in traders' promotions across Melbourne, I was called to be 'Editor-in-Chief' of the group's eight eastern and southern newspapers when journalists called a lengthy strike in the early 1980's over technology issues.

Leader Newspapers was equipped by journalists with ancient typewriters, whose stories were re-typed in Linotype hot metal by tradesmen, then printed by more tradesmen on old presses.

Even after I left Leader, I was a strike breaker, being one of the first modem users to send in editorial copy 'under' their picket lines, by newly-invented fax and modem lines, to keep those presses rolling. Sorry chaps!



■ Some of the Leader team. Back row: Janene Green, Vicki Boucher, Lynne Cossar, Evan Hannah. Centre: Barry Salisbury, Guy Howell, Jacqui, Arthur Preusker, Basil Haslam. Front: Tonina Guerra, Fleur and Ash Long, secretary Pauline Holbery, and Esme Minetti.



■ A junior tennis player called Pat Cash receives the Leader Sports Star of the Year award from me.



■ Former Victorian Premier Sir Rupert 'Dick' Hamer meets my good mate and newspaper colleague Joy Brown.



■ Jim Harris of 'The Advocate' newspaper (Burnie) invited me to be keynote speaker at a seminar for Tasmanian real estate agents headed by Tony Marsden and Geoff Phillips. Advocate ad manager Peter Sproule joins the group.

Leader People

Decades may roll by, but a strong bond was created between the Leader Newspapers family of the 1970s and 1980s. Actually, the strike breaking by executives did as much as anything to build the bonds. The 'suits' worked as laborers on the presses, some of them never having been near the machinery before.

These bonds were most evident with the early passing of Jim Dowsley in the late 1990's. Jim was the popular manager of the *Nunawading Gazette* newspaper, a prominent Lion, and popular football broadcaster and writer for the Eastern District Football League.

A wake was held at Ron and Val Sparnaay's Market Street Tavern to honour Jim's life. Amongst those present were Bill Dobson, now a part-owner of the big Cherry Print firm at Notting Hill; fellow ad men Laurie Gunn and John Jones; Don Brown, John Mott, Keith Peplar, myself ... and many more. All were keen to support Jim's widow Lorna, and journalist son Anthony who delivered a moving family eulogy.

The Leader team was good ... but the company proved the theory of sticking to what it knew best. It was good at publishing existing titles, but did not enjoy a lot of success with new publications.

With the Progress Press - Leader merger, the *Melbourne Woman* magazine was trialled, only to have the name challenged by Kerry Packer's Australian Consolidated Press as having too striking a similiarity to the *Australian Women's Weekly*.

Re-badged as *Melbourne Magazine*, editor Susan Webster put together a slick looking glossy publication, with the advertising team led by Vicki Rowlands, sister of Sue Jones, manager of *The Waverley Gazette*. Regional Manager was Rhonney Bates, and design was put together by Ron Barnett. It failed only because of poor advertising sales. Local representatives were not sufficiently trained to sell their expanded newspaper network, as well as new-style magazine color.

In August 1981, and now as Manager of the eight northern newspapers, I tried another regional effort with the 200,000-circulation *Northern Magazine*. As a sales team, we went to great preparation. I organised a reader promotion, with an eight-day New Zealand trip-for-two to be won. Photographer Ian Stewart, who also doubled as a 3AK mid-dawner, helped with PR shots

aboard an Air New Zealand 747 at Tullamarine featuring an ad rep Guy Howell and an attractive model. I had trained the staff - and the training had paid off with a full log of sales. Yet all this preparation was skittled from under my feet at deadline when Editor Jack Gavegan said he had 'forgot' *Northern Magazine* was being published ... just days before publication.

What started as a detailed, designed and profitable 12-page tabloid monthly magazine across eight papers (a total of 96 pages), ended as an impossibly 'tight' eight-page book of ads, with one major feature: journalist Linley Hartley's touching profile on 'The Pastor from Cummeragunja': Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls.

It was all hands to the pump. I wrote puff, Jo Archer did a feature on the Dandenongs, Leader's Editor-in-Chief Bill Cust thumped out a piece about New Zealand, following his trip there to recruit editorial staff. But he gave it the kiss of death when, not confident on how the magazine would look editorially, refused a by-line.

Instead of claiming his own publication, Bill Cust favored the tag of 'By A Staff Writer'. When the Editor-in-Chief refuses to put his name to a project, you know that publication is dead in the water.

First issues are so important to sell to advertisers. Subsequent issues fell to run-of press four pages, then three pages, then two pages ...

Leader also tried the *City Extra* experiment led by Don Brown. It was a free color publication, years ahead of its time. The paper later went to interests associated with Peter Isaacson, Michael Wilkinson and trucking boss Lindsay Fox. It too failed. Today, it works in an unrelated gloss 48-page publication called *City Weekly*.

Leader did have success with *The Melbourne Leader* project, designed by Don Brown as a consultant, and edited by talented newspaperman Garry Barker. 'Barks' is now an IT writer at *The Age*.

Around 1979 Leader considered a project that would come to fruition with Eric Beecher ten years later. We commissioned a report from the Clemenger-Harvie advertising agency which stated: "We would like to propose a complete re-positioning of the Leader Media Group.

"It is suggested that the paper be produced and positioned as *The Melbourne Weekly* - a paper that deals with local content, advertising news, political scene, etc. in the section that is presently the specific suburban paper.

"A second section would be a color section similar to that included in

the Canadian dailies in the Saturday edition." The title - *Melbourne Weekly* - was trialled by *The Age* for a limited time while as a free circulation paper, which in its dying days appeared as *Melbourne Winners Weekly*.

The next incarnation of *Melbourne Weekly*, by Eric Beecher, managed by Anthony McDonald, has been much more successful.

Marrying the newly merged and different divisions of Leader and Progress was a difficult task. Inter-divisional rivalry made management almost impossible. At one stage I had the job of Group Classified Manager, bringing together the staff of disparate divisions.

In September 1978, Leader's Eastern marketing chief Ian Chambers conducted lengthy negotiations with Knox City Shopping Centre manager Merv Tozer and promotions whiz Geoff Bower for a significant new business contract. Chambers wrote \$16,000 of business for three months at very low rates.

"Before you leap up and down and say it is not enough," wrote Chambers to Progress Press General Manager - Newspapers, Les Griffiths, "I wholeheartedly agree."

Chambers told Griffiths: "Please let me state that I am disturbed that you saw fit to regard my written form of apology sent with information dated September 19 as a platitude. I seldom give apologies," said this master-of-the-memo, "and never platitudes."

"To have an honest attempt at intra-company public relations regarded in that light troubles me. It leaves me with no alternative but to advise the Clemenger agency and the Knox City management that we cannot fulfill the promises we contracted to undertake, and therefore they should look elsewhere for their press advertising requirements."

It goes without saying that Knox City secured their *el cheapo* advertising rate, ... but within a year, both men had left: Chambers to Clemenger; Griffiths to the Western Division of Syme Community Newspapers, then as Footscray Football Club marketing manager.



■ Barry Salisbury is pictured taking over management of Leader Newspapers' eight northern publications from me in September 1983. Two decades later, Barry is still a senior executive with the suburban group.

At The Editor's Desk

With the retirement of Bill Cust as Editor-in-Chief, the Leader Board appointed John Monks to the senior post. Journalist Brett Quine wrote in the 'in-house' journal, *Leader Link*: "It was 'inescapable' that he become a journalist, with his father and other relatives in the field. Even now his wife, eldest daughter and mother-in-law are journalists." The Monks pedigree also included his father, Noel, being one of Sir Keith Murdoch's team of young reporters at Melbourne's *Herald*.

John Monks also had his start at *The Herald* in Melbourne, becoming a reporter for London's *Daily Express*, then working for the *San Francisco News*, before returning to the United Kingdom. He was then dispatched to cover the Congo rebellion before being moved to Salisbury, in Rhodesia. In 10 years as a correspondent in Africa, he witnessed more than 20 wars and revolutions.

John had another role: he carried secret messages between London and Salisbury as Britain tried to reach a settlement with Rhodesian Premier Ian Smith. "There was a lot of personal stress when doing that because I couldn't write what I knew about," he said.

John Monks later became Canberra correspondent for *The Herald*, and Associate Editor for *The Australian*.

The Leader years were not easy for John Monks. He was justly proud of journalistic and news values, but could not reconcile that a free newspaper needs a 70 per cent content, or more, of advertising. He later went on to edit the *Sunday Observer* for Peter Isaacson, *Ink* magazine for Bill Minnis, and authored the biography for Dame Elisabeth Murdoch.

John Monks and I were great mates. He hosted me at the Melbourne Club, we travelled together to interstate conferences of the Australian Suburban Newspapers' Association.

This was a trade association originally formed in the late 1940's and 1950's by industry giants such as Leader's George Mott, Eddie Trait of Standard Newspapers, and Bill Bland of *The Age*.

Its secretariat was provided by Melbourne accountant Keith Everett, then later by daughter Win, who had the handy talent of bringing together warring publishers, and calming the egos of rivals.

At the Thanksgiving Service for her life, held in April 2000 at Surrey

Uniting Church, Peter Isaacson and former ABC radio man Keith Glover paid splendid tribute to Miss Everett's life, which included long service as locum parent for members of the Australian Boys' Choir.

John Monks' wife, Dina, was Editor of the *Frankston Standard - Peninsula Post*, later to come into the Leader stable. Mum-in-law Dolly Parker wrote for the now-extinct *Southern Peninsula Gazette* at Rosebud, and daughters Suzanne and Samantha started local careers, moving to Dulcie Boling's *New Idea*. Son Stephen was also set to follow the family trade.

Monks recalled that whilst in Canberra, Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, heard the John recall the words of father Noel Monks: "My Dad said no son of mine will ever be a journalist."

"He was right, wasn't he?" replied the PM.



■ Fred Olsen with *Leader Newspapers* Editor-in-Chief John Monks at Blackburn.



■ I saved Keith Peplar's newspaper career several times, both at *Leader Newspapers*, then employing him at my publishing company. He is pictured with his partner Serina Erich. I discovered that Keith and I have quite different concepts of loyalty.



■ Above: With *Leader* boss Don Brown and Editor-in-Chief John Monks at one of the Federal Budget breakfasts that we organised for business people throughout Melbourne's suburbs.

■ At left: One of Australia's most remarkable newspaper men, Don Brown. And in my book, one of the people in this world who I admire most.



"I was able to part of this corporate excitement. The Mott Family and Don Brown appointed me as a senior executive, all of us relishing a daily and stimulating challenge for market share. These were the best of times."

Don's Party

For certain, one of the biggest influences on my life, business and private, has been a newspaperman named Don Brown. Born in 1933, Don attended Wesley College, then the University of Melbourne's Commerce faculty.

Don provided a substantially different role model to the heady days of working with the likes of Max Newton. They were no less exciting.

With me aged just 21, he had me as Manager of *Bayswater News*. Within months, I had taken over the *Knox & Mountain District Free Press*. Several months later came the pride of the fleet, the *Knox-Sherbrooke News*.

My roller-coaster management ride took in management of classifieds, distribution, promotions, marketing and even a strike-breaking role as Editor-in-Chief of the eight eastern newspapers in Melbourne.

Don began his career in the newspaper craft as one of Sir Keith Murdoch's team at *The Herald*, Melbourne, in 1952. He joined Rupert Murdoch at *The News*, Adelaide, in 1956, as Finance Editor, working closely with Editor Rohan Rivett.

Brown won promotion in 1958 to become Chief Executive of *The Barrier Miner* and radio station 2BH, Broken Hill. 1961 saw Brown negotiate the purchase of Greg Dickson's *Dandenong Journal* in the first of the stable of Cumberland Newspapers (Vic.) for News Ltd, just as Murdoch led a similar expansion in Sydney.

After 10 years, building a network of 10 newspapers (later purchased by Ranald Macdonald for *The Age*), Brown resigned ... to join Leader, six months later (1971), at the invitation of Publisher John Mott. The following year saw the purchase of Patrick Hegarty's rival News-Ads suburban group; a partnership that eventually became Waverley Offset Publishing Group.

Central to Don Brown's deal for Leader was persuading Hegarty to sell the group's *Waverley Gazette* to Ken Heyes and Charlie Holloway of Progress Press, rather than accept the higher numbers offered by Bill Bland at *The Age*.

He later confided that he saw more opportunity for Leader to benefit down the track with the 'like-minded' Progress Press, than with David Syme & Co Ltd. Leader reaped enormous benefit through its acquisition of *The Knox News* (soon re-badged as *Knox-Sherbrooke News*) with a colossal bonanza

of election advertising following the dismissal of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1975. The *News* was also into headlong competition with Murdoch's *Free Press*, founded post-World War II by the late John Bennett, and continued by his wife Nell.

Brown repeated his earlier strategy of taking *The Dandenong Journal* to bi-weekly publication; at Knox he took the *News* to three times a week (Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays) - with a team of energetic troops. The 'We're Number One' reader surveys featured on Page One ... more to demoralise the *Free Press* staff than anything else. In 1978, Murdoch's group surrendered, selling the *Free Press* to Leader at 'a keen price'.

There was more war to come. Pat Hegarty was selling his printing too cheap to Leader; it sent his group broke. Hegarty tried to save his Waverley Offset Printers by offering it to a consortium of Leader, Progress, Standard Newspapers and Peter Isaacson. Internal manoeuvring developed; and Brown did an just-in-time overnight deal with the creditors' representative, Peter Taylor to form Waverley Offset Publishing Group.

Soon, Brown and Heyes engineered a joint venture for the owners of their respective Leader and Progress Press companies to become Leader Media Group. The merger prospered, but collapsed within a year, with Leader substantially enhanced with a new offset printing line, and the acquisition of the *Waverley Gazette*, *Chadstone Progress* and *Progress Press*.

I was able to be part of this corporate excitement. The Mott Family and Don Brown appointed me as a senior executive, all of us relishing a daily and stimulating challenge for market share. These were the best of times.

Sir Keith MacPherson's Herald & Weekly Times Ltd launched *The Sun Easterly* against our eastern newspapers. We won.

Julian Clarke's Standard Newspapers fought hard, but not well enough, with their *Doncaster Mirror* and *Whitehorse Standard* weeklies. We won.

A gaggle of smaller maverick publishers had their shot at our mastheads - including efforts such as John Gannan's *Mounteasterly*. We won there too.

Pivotal was the Chairmanship of Leader's R.R. Mott; the wisdom of his nephew, Deputy Chairman and Publisher John Mott; the introduction of former H&WT finance man Don Bowman; the sales drive of Graeme Trainor's team; as well as Directors including stalwarts Mark Crampton and David Tomlin; Company Secretary Anthony Mott; Production Director Robert S. Mott; and Commercial Director Walter H. Mott.

Follow The Leader

After the on-again, off-again Leader-Progress merger, Walter Mott Jnr had the unenviable task of re-establishing Leader as a viable commercial printing and distribution company, on knife-edge profit margins, against the Progress Press network, now picked up by Rupert Murdoch's News Limited.

Leader countered with the purchase of Chris Fisher's Westernport Printing, and Brownhall Printing owned by Trevor Brown and Ron Hall. With these acquisitions came heat-set presses, and a modern typesetting and composition business led by John Princen and Fred Olsen.

In my time, other senior people included Classified Manager Joy Brown ('wife of the boss') who also supervised the move to new corporate headquarters at Blackburn. Aged just 20-something, I rose quickly as a Senior Executive, involved to the hilt as a key player and troubleshooter. Don Brown - as Group Managing Director - thrust me in to become the company's *de facto* Marketing Manager, Classifieds Manager, and a Special Projects Manager whose clout and opportunity defied the euphemism.

My 1983 decision to strike out on my own preceded Leader's best times. In 1985, John Mott and Brown spearheaded negotiations, with Sir Keith MacPherson of The Herald & Weekly Times Ltd and Randal MacDonald of *The Age*, to form a Melbourne suburban media colossus.

Macdonald was later absorbed by the Fairfax takeover of *The Age*; MacPherson was replaced by Queensland Newspapers trump John D'Arcy, who grasped the benefits of Brown's proposals by opting for a \$54 million takeover bid of Leader, accepted by shareholders in September 1986.

The takeover proceeded with Gene Swinstead persuaded to become Group General Manager; today he is MD of all News Limited Community Newspapers. Brown's group proposals became unstuck three months later.

Some 15 months later, Murdoch's men told Brown that News Limited didn't want a Board of Directors at Leader - just himself as Chief Executive and his remaining team. Brown's protest that sacking the other remaining working executives as Directors, would gut the ethos and morale of the past 60 years, fell on deaf ears. Brown resigned, spent a year as a Consultant, then went farming at Yea - where, with me as owner of the local *Yea Chronicle* newspaper, we renewed our acquaintance after a six-year lapse.



■ With Kristi Long, about 1981, at the Whittlesea Agricultural Show. I was Manager of eight newspapers including the 'Whittlesea Post'.



■ Fleur Long, with her favourite book-end, at the 2000 Australian Suburban Newspapers' dinner, Crown Casino.



■ Wally Mott, as President of the Whittlesea Agricultural Society.



■ James Long, and Kristi Long, Ivanhoe Grammar School's first female student in 1992.

Space Cadets

A Don Brown-legacy to the industry was his plan to appoint a team of newspaper cadets. Around 1978, this included a squad of about eight young people, each given the opportunity to work in every facet of newspapers, and receive a solid grounding for a media career.

The collection included future newspaper publisher John Gannan; John Haley, who went on to become an advertising industry executive; as did Katrina Morley; and Kaylene Sibbald (now Bowen), who still works at Leader, 22 years later. Talk about loyalty!

John Gannan broke away from Leader only two years into his four-year cadetship. He had learned well, and put up a seriously-competitive Knox-Sherbrooke newspaper, *The Mounteasterly*. It was not a financially easy road for Gannan, and his co-director brother Jim. A number of companies were employed over time to keep the enterprise alive. The negative factor was that the Gannan brothers were prohibited by corporate authorities from becoming company directors for several years.

Around 1989, John Gannan started the fortnightly *Flier* newspaper at Red Hill, later expanding it across the Mornington Peninsula, Frankston, and for a while, Dandenong. He attempted every marketing trick, including a *Sunday Flier* edition. With his accountant of the time, ex-Leader finance boss Malcolm Murdoch, he launched a Melbourne-wide *Sports Flier* newspaper, that looked to the *Truth*, *Sportsman* and *Winning Post* market for racing tips. It depleted rather than helped his resources.

For a while, Gannan did what very many small independent publishers had to do. He faced bankruptcy. The name of the newspaper had a subtle entity change: from *Flier* to *Flyer*. An accountant John Brazatis became owner. John simply worked as Sales Manager.

Out of bankruptcy, in 2000, Gannan sold his *Flyer* newspapers to Neil Collyer, State Manager of Fairfax Community Newspapers, and started as Sales Manager for what has become a 61,000-circulation serious weekly competitor to Leader's *Frankston Standard* and *Mornington Peninsula Leader*, as well as Felix Gander's strong *Independent News Group*.

Don Brown was a dynamite leader. To celebrate his 50th birthday, we organised a *This Is Your Life* style surprise party at his favorite Chateau Wyuna Restaurant in Mount Evelyn, run by Hildegard Kamphausen. I was master

of ceremonies and had pre-taped some TV interviews with the likes of publisher Peter Isaacson, and an emotional phone link with his daughter Mandy in Malaysia.

John Mott paid tribute in a special *Don's Party Times* newspaper run off by my old Regal Press boss, Leader's Print Manager Tom Gardiner.

One of Don Brown's greatest supporters was his Sales Director, Graeme Trainor. The former Brunswick boy was taken aboard as a teenage office boy in the late 1950's by Leader's John Mott, to later have a meteoric rise to the position of Director of the group in 1980. Like all others, Graeme was later unceremoniously removed from senior management by News Limited, after the Murdoch family's takeover of the suburban publishing operation.

The same fate awaited the energetic Broadglen sales manager, Neil Hatty. Graeme Trainor's personable ways were often a much better sales persuader than today's manic concentration on financial budgets, at whatever the cost!

Graeme Trainor started his sales career under the direction of *Coburg Courier* representative Norm Brennan, and 'gun' ad salesman Garry McGuire. G.T's advancement was rapid, taking over the sales management of the Northcote-based weeklies from Brian Goldsworthy, and assembling a team of space salesmen starring Basil Haslam - who had built a reputation in the grocery trade promotions around Melbourne as 'Mr Lucky'.

Graeme also worked alongside the great Kevin King, in charge of all real estate advertising for the burgeoning papers in the fast-growing suburbs. Kevin's son, Martin King, is a leading on-the-road reporter for the Nine Network's *A Current Affair*, hosted by Mike Munro.

Leo Hart and Alan Bayley were an inseparable team on the *East Yarra News*, later assisted by Pam Rule, who went on to become a circulation supervisor for Southdown Press with *TV Week* and *New Idea*. Photographers were led by Ron Grant, and Mike Conway was an effective Credit Manager who had an giant office poster with the word 'Credit?'. Below the headline was the photo of a pig's bum.

Mark Crampton's death in late-2000 hit hard. Mark was Production Director of Leader and described by its Chairman as "one of our longest-serving and most able colleagues". Mark had joined the company as a compositor in 1949, rapidly progressing through the ranks to become chief production executive in 1959. He had retired in 1980, but had suffered ill health over 20 years. His son, Ian, joined Leader in 1977 with a Bachelor of

Engineering, installed its Atex production system, later joining The Age in charge of its information technology areas.

Don Brown would not be ashamed to be remembered as one who was able to make seat-of-the-pants management decisions. When a serious petrol strike crippled Melbourne in the late 1970's, he empowered me a 'Minister Without Portfolio' to do whatever was necessary to keep our delivery trucks and sales representatives on the road.

As a former petrol company man, I knew the track. I investigated fuel supplies around Melbourne. Tankers had been grounded through strike action, so I bought a large number of empty 44-gallon fuel drums from a depot alongside the Tramways Depot at Preston.


In the early hours I had secured a source for the petrol, being loaded into the drums, into a fleet of taxi trucks. We all held our breaths as a passing drunk driver drove out of control towards one of the trucks that had thousands of litres of volatile fuel. The truckie missed by inches ... and the suburb of Carlton owes its continued existence to my stroke of luck.

'Brownie' was full of ideas - some good, some on the wild side. Don and his wife Joy were destined to be special guests at an American newspaper function, and he struck on the idea that it would be good to have Australian beer at the cocktail party.

There could be no better way to forge international business partnerships than with a pallet-load of Fosters, he said. This, of course, was years ahead of John Elliott and Paul Hogan's 'Fosterisation' of the world. It was left to Ash to quickly source a supply. Don even suggested that we lean on the Australian Army or Air Force to fly in a special Hercules cargoload. Thankfully I found a liquor wholesaler who already had the necessary Fosters Export Lager in stock.

They were the best of times. Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser visited our offices, and I was his barman. I had every possible drink in stock, including his favorite red wine. Instead, he simply selected an orange juice. After the PM had gone, we took some hours to diminish the stocks specially purchased for the occasion.

We liked to think we were substantial enough players to make a difference. John Mott and Don Brown led a campaign called 'The Achievers' to foster Australian people and their achievements. Don and I made a TV commercial on primitive 'Beta' video equipment on the floor of my home at Mitcham.



H O E

THE JOURNAL OF THE
OLD IVANHOE GRAMMARIANS

Registered for Posting as a Periodical —
Category 'B'

Come and meet the living legend . . .

RON BARASSI will be our guest speaker at the Old Boys' ANNUAL DINNER to be held at V.F.L. Park on Friday, March 23, 1979.

Already, Old Boys are booking tables for the night of nights, in what is the annual event of Old Ivanhoe Grammarians.

There will be prizes for all, with gift vouchers, free after-shave, and other goodies (the "freebies" alone are enough to entice you).

The Dinner will be held in the Premiers' Room at Waverley, luxurious surroundings with quality service.


With daylight saving, the night will also give people who haven't seen V.F.L. Park, an opportunity to see Melbourne's sports stadium.

Here's what you get for your \$17.50 all up:
All Drinks including spirits, ales, and wines.
Dinner with soup, main course of either beef or spatchcock with sweets and coffee afterwards.

For details call: Bray Cohen — 527 2693 (B.H.), 211 1896 (A.H.). Richard Evans — 435 5348; Ash Long — 480 4242; Eric Tibballs — 88 1180.

Get your group organised now — table bookings are being accepted now.

1979 is the Association's Diamond Anniversary and the Dinner is the highlight of the year . . . make sure you are there.



■ For my record-breaking sales team at Leader Newspapers, Northcote, I insisted on weekly sales meetings, using a book - 'The Coach' - on football genius Ron Barassi, as an inspiration. I booked Barassi, through his personal manager, David Robb, as a guest speaker at the best attended Old Ivanhoe Grammarians' annual dinner, at the 'new' VFL Park. The former Preston Tech. student gently chided the Grammar School 'old boys'. I later saw Barassi on a weekly basis at the Optus TV studios in South Melbourne, when I produced Bruce Mansfield's nightly program. Barassi proved not only to be 'a man's man', and but also a gentleman.

'New Look Morality'

My hunger to earn an extra dollar sometimes had me in hot water. Journalist Bruce Atkinson, sometime Mayor of Nunawading, and now Parliamentarian, had us both in deep trouble in 1981.

Bruce and I had agreed to set up a joint venture, Norman Lawrence and Associates, to include a public relations business, calendar publishing enterprise and a central business district newspaper. The company title came from each of our middle names.

"Until we could determine the possible success of the ventures we had discussed, we decided to register the name under Mr Long's proprietorship only, on the understanding that I would work as a consultant to that business in the short term," Bruce later swore in a Statutory Declaration.

"We considered several business names and other aspects of the registration at one evening meetings and following that meeting a form containing erroneous information which had been discussed (but) not agreed to was inadvertently lodged by me with the Corporate Affairs Office.

"We first became aware of that when a Forest Hill (Shopping Centre) executive queried some of the details on the form with me which I realised should not have appeared on the registration application which we had intended should be lodged. Mr Long subsequently discussed this matter with Officers of the Corporate Affairs Office and rectified the matter."

One difficulty was that, unknown to me, Atkinson had "of my own volition and initiative, issue a letter on the Norman Lawrence and Associates letterhead to certain retailers on the subject of the Forest Hill Shopping Centre proposals for re-development suggesting that it might be in their interests to lodge objections or comments on the proposal".

On discovery, I hightailed it to the Shopping Centre's lawyers, Ralph W. Lloyd & Co, to put the matter straight. I wrote to Jan Wade, then Commissioner of the Corporate Affairs Office, and volunteered a statement to the Det. Sgt. John Ryan of the Victoria Police. I also secured a signed and witnessed statement from Atkinson, confirming that I had not been involved in any way with his exercise. The episode had an extremely bad smell, as far as I was concerned.

Bruce Atkinson's treatment of this matter as a potential electoral liability is interesting. Taking an approach that offence was the best form of defence,

he gave a story to David Wilson of the *Waverley Gazette*, for its front-page of November 17, 1982.

"'New look' morality a by-election issue' was the headline, with Wilson declaring: "Australia's strict new-look political morality, ushered in by bottom of the harbour taxation scheme allegations, will be a feature of the Waverley Province by-election.

"At the weekend, the Liberal candidate, Mr Bruce Atkinson made the first moves by making a frank and detailed statement of his personal business interests to *The Waverley Gazette*.

"Listing proprietorship of six businesses registered with the Victorian Corporate Affairs Office, Mr Atkinson also headed off any possible Labor Party moves against him by revealing that in 1981 one of his employees had lodged an incorrect business name registration form with Corporate Affairs.

"He said that as soon as he noted the error both he and the proprietor of the venture notified the Corporate Affairs Office and the name was cancelled.

"Mr Atkinson said that the business name had been used in conjunction with a letter in a shopping centre re-development issue but as the publishing projects proved impracticable the business name was cancelled and the business associated terminated."



■ Former University and 'Farrago' colleague Simon Plant has 'mixed it' in both newspaper and political circles. He has worked at *Leader*, the *'Herald-Sun'*, *'Age'* and *'Sunday Observer'*, as well as being Press Secretary for then-Victorian Opposition Leader Jeff Kennett. Simon has also worked as a guest curator at the Victorian Museum of Performing Arts. His brother, Andrew, has been a keen theatrical producer, coaching both Kristi and James Long, in their school days.

Much Minding In The Marsh

Bullet-proof! That's how I regarded my own business profile in 1982. I was cock-of-the hoop at Leader Newspapers, as its fast-moving 25-year-old Manager of its eight northern newspapers, and boss of several dozen successful media people.

And, with Leader's permission, I had some high-paying moonlighting consultancies too. There were handbills and print jobs for Bruce Atkinson and Jenny Collette at Centrepoin Mall in Bourke Street, Melbourne. I was an ad consultant, working closely with shopping centre manager Noela Hobson at Northland, plus a range of smaller clients. For a short time, I was earning more than \$100,000 a year.

As if this wasn't enough, I also became Managing Editor of the *Bacchus Marsh-Melton Express* weekly newspaper, owned by ex-Leader staffer Barry Browne. Barry had been a former Ad Manager of Melbourne's *Sun News-Pictorial* - a man recruited by Leader's Ian Chambers to be Manager at the *Knox News* in Boronia.

Barry had soon left Leader, with journalist Ted Price, to take over *The Express*, a century-old weekly paper with paid circulation in country Bacchus Marsh, and free fome-to-home delivery in outer-metropolitan Melton. Barry was in strife: commercially under attack from the *Melton-Bacchus Marsh Mail* owned by *The Age*, and running desperately short on cash, and in-and-out of hospital with his own thirst complications,

So, my Leader gang formed a hit squad. Every Saturday, we would leave the northern suburbs before 7am, and would arrive at the Bacchus Marsh office to earn our own decent part-time quid, and rejuvenate a struggling 16-page paper. Barry's partner, Ted Price, had left to work at *The Ballarat News*; the late Joe Reivers was pursuing his *Telegraph* interests in the Macedon Ranges; and *Express* ownership interests were unclear. Barry had been left on his own with a fair schedule of debt, and little in the way of hope.

Our hit squad comprised Leader Regional Editor Evan Hannah, ad rep Arthur Preusker, and designer Keith Peplar. And, boy, did we hit! We professionally prepared ad submissions each week and sold a storm! We quickly built the paper from a dull letter-press job to a buoyant full-color 36-page paper, printed at the West Web plant in Geelong, run by the Horniblow Brothers. We were on a roll.

Evan Hannah had started his newspaper career at *The Ballarat Courier*, and caught my professional eye as he worked under Doug Hayes at the *Chadstone Progress*. I lobbied Leader management for authority for him to be my Regional Editor for the eight Northcote-based newspapers.

We formed an unlikely Bernstein-and-Woodward combination, when the Manager and Editor combined for a 'By Ash Long and Evan Hannah' by-line to expose a local gang launder proceeds of a mega-dole fraud through local banks. Editor-in-Chief Jack Gavegan wrote: "Ash and Evan, whose revelations about the dole fraud was an outstanding piece of reporting, have probably lit the fuse that could explode ..."

This successful newspaper partnership extended to Bacchus Marsh-Melton where our successes hit firmly against the *Mail* newspaper, established a few years earlier by western suburbs whiz Julie Upson (before forming *The Western Times* with Ron Coleman), edited by Jane Munday (later Victoria Police media chief), and ads sold by *The Age* suburban newspaper team including veteran Alan Patten.

Full-pages were ripe for the plucking. We prepared full-page ad submissions for everyone: real estate agents, car dealers, food stores, anyone who breathed. The final touch was an eight-page 'Emergency Edition' of *The Express*, when the area was ringed with bushfires.

Syme Community Newspapers GM Mike Worner was quickly on the telephone, when he saw that I had hired a helicopter to cover the weekend fires. We had left his paper flat-footed, and he proposed a joint venture that would ensure both titles of continuity, relieve Barry Browne of his week-to-week financial tragedies, and including a 'success fee' for me in the form of a modest \$22,000 time-payment.

Negotiations were tough, but I was able to steer an agreement favorable between Browne's 'Crisp and Sons Pty Ltd', and the Syme group, for the new combined *Mail-Express* newspaper. Revenue, other than for the Syme group's classifieds were to be shared 50-50, with pre-tax net profits to be distributed on a monthly basis, with Syme providing the treasury.

After a final long, boozy negotiation, former Canberra Bureau chief and now executive John Jost signed the agreement for *The Age* in his company's boardroom, which then featured a haunting portrait of its famed Editor Graham Perkin.

Eleven pots of beer later, I was on my way to Geelong to secure the signature of Barry Browne, only to pulled over by Police at the Western

Oval overpass in Footscray. Amazingly, I blew under .05 ... perhaps I had blown too hard all day in negotiations.

The deal was signed, and I had secured a handy \$175-a-week cheque from the deal, to be paid by the joint venture ... only to be ambushed out of it three months later, when I published - with permission - *The Sunday Advertiser* Mothers Day handbill for Albert Peck's Melton Regional Shopping Centre. It was printed at Chris Fisher's Leader Westernport plant at Koo-Wee-Rup. Chris later went on to become boss of *The Argus* print plant at Hawthorn, now headed by Bob Muscat's PMP.

Perhaps I did go a *little* over the top for a handbill: the latest Tattsлото numbers, local news items and race results, TV guide, even a rainfall calendar. Worner and Browne argued this was in direct competition to their joint venture, and my handy extra pay packet stopped immediately.

John Jost smoothed the waters with a few more boozy afternoons, courtesy of *The Age* expense account at Raymond Tsindos' bistro in Bourke Street. I was simultaneously headhunted by John A. O'Brien of Boyden Associates International and offered *The Age* Marketing Manager \$40,000 job to understudy group chief John Paton. I also met with *Age* Personnel Manager John Tidey, who offered Paton's job to Dallas Swinstead of Standard Newspapers.

In 1983, Boyden made a charge to employers of 30 per cent of 'guaranteed starting cash compensation' for their services. I stayed with Leader, but put forward a big-headed joint venture proposal to Leader, supported by its Chairman R.R. Mott, and Deputy Chairman John Mott, but rejected by others. With trademark pout, I quit to strike out on my own. Don Brown, Leader MD, presented me with a farewell print - a Fred McCubbin painting entitled 'Down On His Luck'. Don posted a note on the back that it should perhaps be re-titled 'Why Did I Ever Leave Leader?'

With the turbulent years ahead, this inscription would prove incredibly true!




■ Barry Browne and I go bushfire hunting for the 'Bacchus Marsh Express'



■ Above: Editor Long, with developing journalist's paunch, interviews a bushfire victim at Greendale.

■ Right: Announcement of Editor's job



New Express Editor

Mr Ash Long (pictured) has been appointed to the post of Managing Editor of The Express.

Mr Long said this week that he was "delighted to take responsibility for the editorial coverage in the district's established community newspaper".

"Bacchus Marsh and Melton look to a bright future in 1983 and The Express will continue its role in reporting community news and opinion."

"For 118 years this newspaper has built a reputation for reliable and independent reporting," Mr Long said.

Express publisher Mr Barry Brown said that he was pleased that Mr Long was strengthening his link with Bacchus Marsh and Melton.

"Ash is well known in the Australian community newspaper industry, having established a management consultancy group specialising in media."

Media Mates

I hope I have been able to lend a helping hand to a few of Australia's best media people, as they started their careers. Amongst those early success stories have been Stephen Quartermain, who I first met when he was a Leader cadet reporter, specialising in sport at *Knox News* and the *Ringwood-Croydon Mail*, later moving to 3LO and Ten. Today, he is a regular panellist on *The Panel* with the Working Dog team of Rob Sitch, Jane Kennedy and Santo Cilauro. 'Quarters' is a mate of fellow MMM footyman Eddie McGuire.

Another sports reporter was Tony Kneebone, who has gone on to edit *Winning Post*, a racing form paper established by Fr Joe Giacobbe as a fundraiser for the Doga Foundation. Tony was on staff when one reporter filed a story that was published complete. The item had been carefully crafted to have a large capital letter at the start of each paragraph, with a cryptic message about the Leader group's editor: it spelt out 'K-e-v-i-n P-e-a-r-m-a-n I-s A D-i-c-k-h-e-a-d'. My mate Kev failed to see the humour.

He did see the humour when *Knox News* manager Barry Browne returned from a well-oiled lunch. Barry was a drinker 20 years ago. Leader boss Don Brown was needling him hard for sales figures, and Barry simply told him to 'G-- F-----'. Barry wasn't sure he had made the point, so he rang back his namesake on the direct line with another message: 'You can g-- f----- again!'

Sub-editor Marc Gonsalves went on to become Editor of the *Dandenong Journal*, and is now Group Editorial Business Manager of Michael Hannan's Courier Newspapers in Sydney.

I am wary of nepotism, and was cautious when my distant relative Don Angus was sent to work at the Leader northern offices. I had no need to worry, Don went on to become a successful self-employed businessman in his own right.

Another TV success story has been Mark Gillies, another Ivanhoe Grammarian, who joined *The Herald* afternoon newspaperman, and became an on-the-road reporter with *Seven News*.

More than twenty years on, one of my true riches is an ongoing and outstanding friendship with Don and Joy Brown. They have supported me through my skirmishes. Joy Brown is one of the world's best for birthday presents, once awarding me with a judge's gavel, with the words 'Not Guilty' enscribed.

The Leader Newspapers business model, and their people, had a profound effect on me. With hindsight, I regard the Motts as probably the most honourable Australian media family to which I have had exposure.

Here was a family that ran a successful commercial business, allowing democratic decision-making and part-ownership by its employees. But here also was a family that had a genuine desire to be of use and service to the community.

George Mott was Mayor of the City of Preston. John Mott held various charitable trust leadership positions including one with the Sir Andrew and Lady Fairley Foundation, as well as being a prominent Rotarian. Walter Mott Senior was active in Lions and the Whittlesea Agricultural Society, an interest carried on by his son.

Their executives such as Mark Crampton played a lead role in fostering the Preston and Northcote Community Hospital. In later years, Joy Brown led the 'Hampers of Hope' appeal conducted in association with The Salvation Army, and with Brian White, General Manager of 3AW.

The Mott Family of Melbourne had a desire to print the truth, and to make a better place of the suburbs which they served. Sure there were commercial gains to be enjoyed by this policy, but their ideal of service was a genuine one.

The publishers of today who come close to these ideals are John B. Fairfax of Rural Press Limited, and John Engisch of the Torch Publishing Company based at Bankstown in Sydney. Neil Collyer's Fairfax Community Newspapers in Melbourne, and the Sydney division led by Ian Crowther, are working hard to re-create a similar editorial integrity.

The craft and essence of true community newspapers is being lost. Upon their purchase by the Murdoch family's News Corporation, the Leader papers managed today by Sylvia Bradshaw in Melbourne acquired a much-harder bottom line focus. Certainly, their trading statements have grown magnificently, but their managements of the future will face challenges as readers and smaller advertisers become increasingly disenfranchised, and turn to closer alternatives.

\$54 Million Question

Whilst my departure at Leader caused a minor ripple, there was a tidal wave when the owners decided to leave. None of the Mott family's next generation showed much interest in carrying on a 130-year tradition in Australia's media market-place.

The Mott family decided in the late 1980's to sell their interests, after Don Brown and John Mott had negotiated with John D'Arcy, Chief Executive of The Herald & Weekly Times Ltd, and its chairman John Dahlsen. The \$54 million sale probably exceeded the expectations of some Mott family members, but the holding doubled in price only days later with Sir Ron Brierley's horse-trading of HWT shares.

John Mott said publicly that his family had achieved a fair price, and were happy with the arrangements. Privately, there must have been some questions about the extra \$50 million that passed them by.

John Mott's family pursued conventional share market interests, and he still runs a professional eastern suburbs office to manage the portfolio. He enlists the assistance of former Leader Finance Director, Don Bowman, on a part-time basis to do so. John's earlier community interests included being Secretary of the 'Save The Yarra League'; a greenie before his time.

R.R. Mott was active in Rotary, church affairs at St John's in Heidelberg, as well as on the Councils of Northcote High School and Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School for many years. His sons, Anthony and Robert, pursued private interests; with their cousin, Walter Mott Jnr, continuing his commercial and residential property interests in Whittlesea, as well as investing in the James Yeates printing business that publishes the *Bairnsdale Advertiser* and *East Gippsland News*.

Wally had a short-term interest in Hartley Higgins' North-East Newspapers at Wangaratta, preferring to concentrate on 3NE and Edge-FM radio stations involvements that extend into New South Wales. He is a canny businessman. Two of his daughters have already joined his 'Crystal' group to carry on the Mott dynasty.

Today, the Leader group is part of Rupert Murdoch's worldwide News Corporation group. His early executives taking control were Doug Flynn and Malcolm Colless. Today, Leader is managed in Melbourne by Sylvia Bradshaw. Sylvia is the woman created with creating the 'ICPOTA' character,

that increased the classified advertising levels of *The Age*.

Gene Swinstead takes responsibility for all News Limited Community Newspapers in Australia. Gene was appointed Leader's General Manager in the late 1980's, and has also enjoyed senior News posts including those at Messenger Newspapers in Adelaide, *The Fiji Times* in Suva, as well as being Chief Executive of the Asian-based Star pay-TV operation in Hong Kong and India.

That role has more recently been handled by James Murdoch, son of Rupert. I've thoroughly enjoyed Gene's social company including a late-night marathon session with Roger Baynes Junior of Cadillac Press, and Noel Daniels, in Gene's penthouse at Adelaide's plush Hyatt Hotel. But Swinny is also the consummate commercial poker player. No wonder he is nick-named 'The Taipan'.

Volumes have been written about Rupert Murdoch's humble beginnings, as the son of Herald & Weekly Times Ltd boss, Sir Keith Murdoch. My only meeting with the shirt-sleeved Murdoch was on the staircase of Southdown Press in Latrobe Street, Melbourne, when his company was publishing *The Daily Truth* for a short number of days in 1975 when Melbourne's *Sun News-Pictorial*, *Herald* and *The Age* were knocked out for two months by industrial unrest. He's kicked on since he met me!

Right Regal Days

There was also a cutting edge to newspapers at the other end of the market. Around May 1983, just before leaving *Leader*, I was to re-encounter one of the fascinating characters in my media life: Dern Langlands.

He was by no means a mentor, nor could I admire many of his personal attributes. Yet, for his friends, he had a magical attraction. We became close enough mates, that I was the one chosen to deliver his eulogy.

Dern Geoffrey Stewart Langlands was born on Valentine's Day, 1923, the son of an itinerant alcoholic printer, who towed his family around Victorian country towns as he worked on weekly local newspapers. As the family fortunes varied, Dern and his brother, has their own apprenticeships in towns as various as Kyabram and Corryong.

He later re-called working a day at Mount Gambier on the South Australian border, 'diss-ing' the hand-set type on printed jobs back into type cases. All for the price of a pie.

When World War II came, liked so many others, Dern lied about his age, gaining entry into the Air Force. He first worked with ground crew, then was assigned to fly Spitfires with the RAF. He recalled guarding the niece of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, involved in secret behind-the-lines intelligence operations in Europe. I think he fell for her.

Back from the war, Dern set up Regal Press in Richmond as a small job printing outfit. He joked it was 'Lager' spelt backwards. Young Dern supplemented his earnings as a Friday-night pug at Jimmy Sharman's boxing tents.

As quaint as it may seem, Dern saw his career 'break' as winning the job to print the peanut bags sold at the Saturday afternoon VFL football matches around Melbourne. He used his hand-platin machines, with three people: one to set the bags, one to pedal the press, the other stacking the product. What a bonus when he won the competitor's peanut bag contract as well!

A common story is for media people especially to look the part. When TV star Philip Brady was once out of work, his agent Max Stuart advised him to buy a Mercedes Benz to still look the part of success. Dern Langlands followed the same advice: selling his motor-cycle, replaced with a huge Dodge sedan, even later with a Mercedes Benz 600 and a Rolls Royce.

A look at the Victorian Registrar-General's newspaper files shows Dern Langlands to have developed a large portfolio of newspaper titles as his print business grew: *Foodland Home News*, *The Richmond Leader*, *Postscript Weekender* and *All Sport Weekly*. One paper, *Melbourne Trading Time*, was set up as a competitor to Margaret Falkiner's *Melbourne Trading Post*.

Dern installed modern Goss Community web offset presses at his Richmond factory, built the Belvedere Motel, started engineering works called D.R. Enginnering and Foldin Industries, and created a chain of 'Toyrific' stores. And he bet it all on a project to supply a free daily newspaper - *Postscript* - to Melbourne, also under the title of the *Melbourne Daily Mail*. It involved newspaper men such as Chris Fisher and Evan Hannah Senior. The project was part of his financial undoing.

Six weeks of free papers distributed all over Melbourne by a team of 40 mini-skirted girls in a fleet of orange sedans led to a loss of more than \$800,000. In July 1969, Dern applied to the ANZ Bank for an increase in his company's overdraft 'to meet overdue creditors, provide (working) capital and to enable completion of the motel building'.

Financial advisor Les Smart was a vital link to this much-needed finance. He was a partner in the accountancy firm, Marquand & Co., the administrator of the Co-Operative Farmers and Graziers Direct Meat Supply Ltd. Smart arranged some \$1,291,762 in the Co-Op's funds to be transferred to Langlands' interests in 1972-75.

It was in this time that as a schoolboy, I would play truant from afternoon classes, to work at the Richmond factory for \$1.50-\$2.00 an hour. My first job was to hand collate pre-printed sections of the *Postscript Weekender* and *All Sport Weekly* newspapers, later working as a press hand run by Tom Gardiner, Production Manager Don McAlpine, and engineer Ian Metcalfe.

Langlands probably had every chance of making the business work. At a later State Government inquiry ordered by the Legislative Assembly, led by Alex Chernov of Owen Dixon Chambers, into Langlands' business affairs, Dern was accused of living a 'high life' of 'wine, women and song'. His reply was "I don't sing very well."

Scoundrel Melbourne journalist John 'Somersault' Somerville-Smith sometimes manned the reception desk of Dern's Belvedere Lodge, with guests checking in for a clandestine motel room booking, often wondering how their secret trysts appeared in the *Smith's Weekly* column of Jack Pacholli's *Toorak Times*.

Regal Press had contracts for important and lucrative supermarket handbill work, using a quarter-plate technique, that personalised each Foodland grocery store's publicity.

Maxwell Newton's association with Dern was the undoing. Max bought Regal Press from Dern, defaulting on the \$1.5 million payments, leaving Langlands penniless and bankrupt. "Dern must hate me," Newton later confided to me. He had promised to pay the price over 10 years from March 1974, over 10 years. Max had also been advanced \$724,000 by Smart.

"None of this money (totalling \$2,015,762) was repaid to the Society," Mr Chernov found.

Langlands licked his wounds, but not before making news of his own, reported by Alan Armsden, of his marriage to a 20-year-old 'waif': "A fairytale will come true in Melbourne today when a beautiful waif marries a multi-millionaire old enough to be her father.

"One week ago, voluptuous 20-year-old Sharryn Young was out of work and didn't know where she came from or where she was going. Today after a fantastic whirlwind courtship, she will become the wife of 54-year-old motel owner Dern Langlands."

The story reported that Sharryn was driving Dern's \$108,000 Mercedes Benz, and that he would be giving her a Mercedes-Benz sports car as a wedding present. Groomsman was close mate Len Thompson of the Collingwood Football Club.

Dern retired bankrupt to Queensland, but returned to Melbourne in the early 1980's to manage Royale Press, in old Foy & Gibson buildings in Cambridge Street, Collingwood. With a modest four-unit press manned by Barry Harper, he began to accumulate weekly jobs including John Gannan's *Independent Mouteasterly*, the Lambert family's *Mountain Views* from Healesville, Pacholli's *Toorak Times*, and the 26-week experiment of *Sunday Mirror* headed by businessman Dennis Tiernan and crazy editor Richard L'Estrange in 1983. Lady Mary Montagu was to be prominent with a Melbourne social column called 'Madam Lash'.

I was in my end days at Leader, and assisted in the first week distribution of 70,000 32-page papers across Melbourne, with the assistance of Leader moonlighters John Gray, Arthur Preusker and Keith Peplar. It was another failure ... but we'd given it a go! Tiernan was critical of our efforts, and believed me to be an undercover man for Rupert Murdoch.

I had seen reports of the *Sunday Mirror* launch in March 1983 editions of

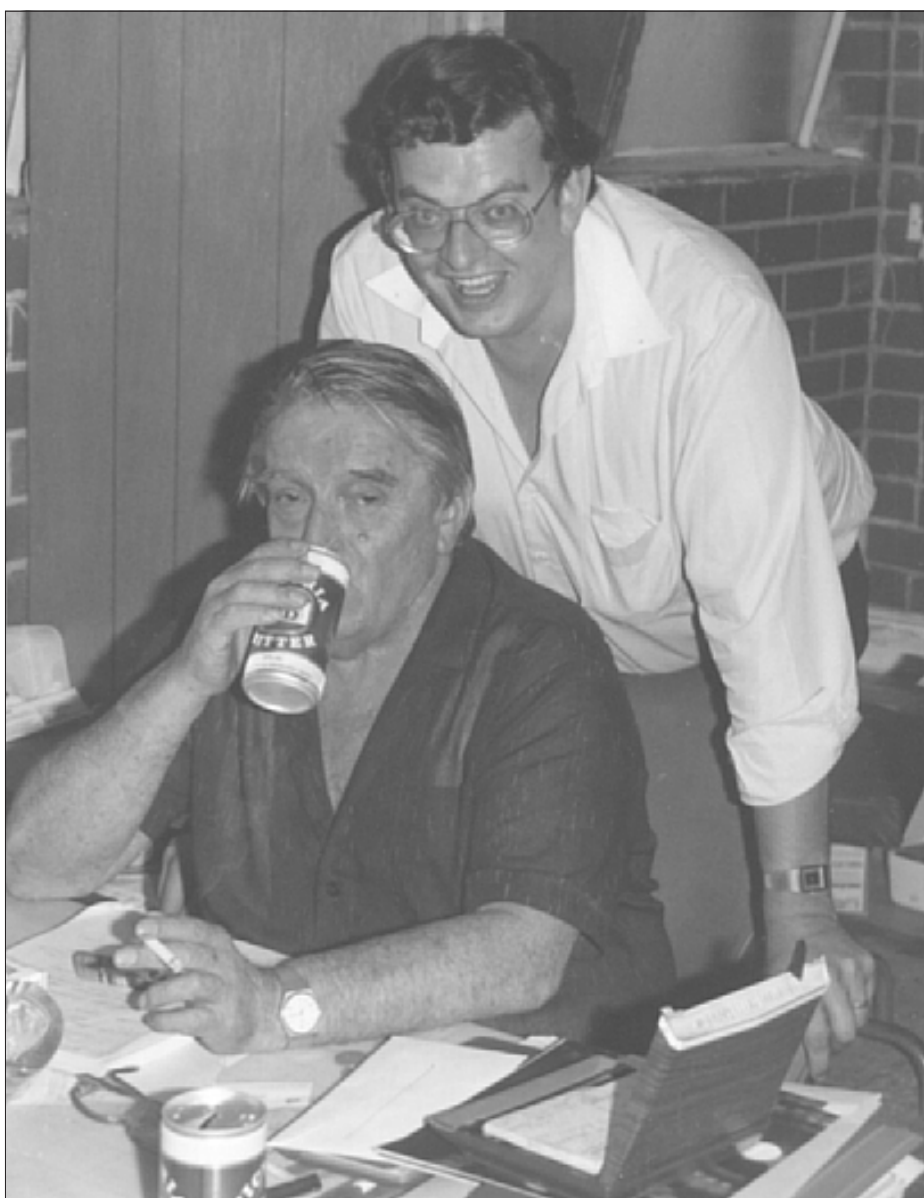
The Age. I called Dern, and found there had been little thought of actually marketing the paper. Tiernan had arranged lucrative massage parlour advertisements, and L'Estrange was relying on a poor emulation of the 'tits, trots, TV and track' formula that John Sorell had invented for Maxwell Newton in the previous decade.

The *Sunday Mirror* failed, but I continued to use Royale Press for my job printing after John Mott had ordered that Leader not deal with me. I even earned a handy weekly commisison from introducing Terry Tayler's *Coastal Telegraph* newspaper as a regular print job.

Royale Press went into liquidation, despite us being an excellent 'cash-with-copy' client. The printing press was under the control of financier Joe Kadane, who put it briefly into the hands of Ron Levin from Conform Press. After his company went broke, Joe offered the \$90,000 press to me - with easy weekly instalments, and 25 per cent interest. No thanks.

The press was purchased by Theo Skalkos for his S & G Rotary Printery and Foreign Language Publications in West Melbourne. As well as my papers, the press was used for his daily *Greek Herald* and weekly *New Country* titles, as well as the Serbo-Croatian *Novosti*, *Spanish Herald* and *Australian Soccer* publications.

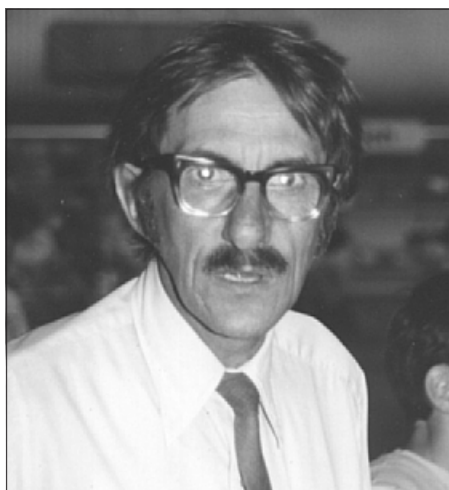
Dern set himself up with a giant sheet fed printing machine in Abbotsford, and the short-lived Weblith Press looked after the printing of our Victorian Media mastheads in their final days. Len Thompson also helped out by publishing large-print books of Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*. But what was about to happen to *My Brilliant Career*?



■ *Dern Langlands with two of his favourite friends*



■ My 1983 'Advertiser' front-page photograph of the 3AW team presenting a cheque at the Macedon Hotel. From left: David Mann, Ray Taylor, David McGee, station technician, Neville Wragg, Bruce Mansfield and Derryn Hinch behind the local publicans, John Blackman, Brian White, Dennis O'Kane, Helen Jackson, Graham Walton and the Rev. Alex Kenworthy, flanked by a banjo player.



■ VMC Director Arthur Preusker



■ Standard Newspapers GM Julian Clarke (now MD of The Herald & Weekly Times Limited) with Syme Community Newspapers boss Mike Worner at an Australian Suburban Newspapers dinner

The Victorian Media Rollercoaster

The financial success of year 1983 had given me the confidence to 'go for broke'. But I should have heeded a warning: that last word proved a doozey.

I was publishing a small weekly paper called *The Advertiser*. It had proved to be a good earner for me. Leo Wings operated the Stan Cash discount furniture and electrical chain from Ashley Street, Maidstone. His ad men were Andy Jackson, and Jim Christidis, who had worked for me as an advertising artist at Leader, Northcote.

Leo took a substantial number of *Advertiser* full-pages every week, largely for the Atari games products popular at the time. The co-operative subsidy money alone from manufacturers would have them paid for these ads, printed for me on the Royale Press Goss Community machine run by Dern Langlands at Collingwood.

One of the early *Advertiser* publicity jobs was for radio station's 3AW Ash Wednesday relief fund-raising headed by its General Manager Brian White. My front-page photo included breakfast top-raters John Blackman and Bruce 'Uncle Roy' Mansfield, their producer Graham Walton, marketer David Mann, morning host Derryn Hinch, Nightline's Rev. Alex Kenworthy, sex show compere Helen Jackson, evening man Ray Taylor, and weekender Neville Wragg.

The Advertiser had encouraged me to strike out on my own. As a 'going away' present, Syme and Leader subsidiary, Broadglen, made a gift to me of their *News-Pix Weekender* title, which they were using as a spoiler against Joe Reivers' *Telegraph* mastheads at Gisborne, Sunbury and Bacchus Marsh.

Part of the deal was to takeover the lease of the Itek typesetting and graphics equipment used at Bacchus Marsh. The lease was \$768 monthly, but my eyes were wide open to the newspaper production capabilities that this gave me. Whilst this was paid to FCA Leasing, the consumables of special photographic papers and chemicals were a different matter.

It was a costly purchase, but the Itek warehouseman had a lucrative scheme going. You could buy half-price for cash at his Clifton Hill warehouse. While he drank long-neck bottles of VB, you could go and serve yourself.

I had left *Leader* in September 1983, and took shared office space with Gordon Barton's Australia Party in Ringwood, opposite commercial printers Rossprint. Within days, Alan Bond had won the America's Cup with the renowned yachting victory ... and I was selling 'We've Won!' A3 souvenir posters by 9am at \$1 apiece.

War hero Peter Isaacson, somewhat-maverick Melbourne suburban newspaper publisher of *The Southern Cross*, had heard of my departure from *Leader*, and offered me the opportunity to package advertorial packages in his weekly editions. In retrospect, it was an opportunity to earn plenty.

Isaacson was quoted to say he was yet to meet an advertising sales person who could actually sell the whole day from 9am to 5pm. He's right. There are many diversions, and the rewards are there for those with a real burning desire.

Renowned newspaperman Mark Day, and partner Owen Thomson, had taken over *Truth* newspaper from Rupert Murdoch, who was anxious to clean his image to ensure a takeover-of-the-time for the Ten Network. Day and Thomson had also taken over *The Clarion* suburban newspaper from John Hennebery, and were keen to see it turn a profit. Upon recommendation from *Leader* Editor-in-Chief John Monks, I took on a three-month \$1400-a-week consultancy to be Advertising Director for the paper, converting it to marginal profitability.

Owen Thomson was a brilliant, crazy, fun-loving thirsty larrikin. On a tour of his *Truth* premises, he introduced me to talented writer Leon Gettler: "This is our token Jew." Leon - now an important business writer at *The Age* - and I have since laughed heartily about that.

Thomson went on national 7.30 *Report* television to apologise for his *Truth* headline reporting the death of Federal Opposition Leader Billy Snedden, whilst having sex in a Rushcutters Bay hotel. "I should not have used 'Snedden Died On The Job'," Owen said shamefully. "I was also taught to use active verbs, it should have been 'Snedden Dies On The Job'."

Working at the *Truth* building had its share of laughs. There was a bloke we called 'Bill The Massage Man'. His job was to collect the ads from the massage parlors that made up a sizeable part of the *Truth* ad schedule. Bill's job was also to pick-up the 'cash with copy', a newspaper business slogan that ensures payment prior to publication. Bill used to look exhausted, and the staff speculated if Bill might have been offered 'contra' from some of his clients.

Truth 'closed' in 2000 after Rob Neely and Fred Scharkosi took over the paper from Gold Medal soft drink king Harry Stamoulos, after sales had plummeted below 10,000 a week. 'The Babe' had once sold more than 400,000 copies a week in its heyday as a racing, brothel and gossip guide.

Scharkosi is publishing a Melbourne-only 32-page *Heartbalm Truth*, largely to keep faith with the brothel advertisers!

At its best, Mal Meikle had been the *Truth's* 'Veritas' TV entertainment writer, and its top journalists had included Hugh Buggy, Neville Penton, Jack Ayling, Brian Hansen and Jack Dyer. Tom Prior was the 'stand-up' reporter at the *Sun News-Pictorial* of the same 'roaring days' era.

My business moves were causing some consternation at Leader. Their telephone marketer Heather Garth came along with me at Victorian Media. Sales people Vern Griffiths, Lorraine Dunlop, Lawrie Lawrenson and Gary Smith all made job enquiries. Leader old-timer Greg Kennedy of *The Chadstone Progress* approached me for a chat, and then told Leader boss John Mott that we were sounding him out to start a new newspaper in Dandenong. John Mott temporarily banned me from doing business with Leader. I was cut off from its presses and advertising columns ... all on a false premise.

Political writer David Wilson and John Monks had put me in touch with the National Party, and for a short time I worked from State Parliament House twice weekly, assembling press releases for leader Peter Ross-Edwards, and Legislative Council members Bill Baxter and David Evans.

It provided a few extra coupla' hundred dollars a week. But, as usual, it was a case of send an invoice and wait for your money. Business was strong but cash-flow was lousy.



■ Money was tight! When the automatic teller issued me with some cash, we thought it worthy of a pic!



■ Editor Long puts the hard questions to Opposition Leader Kennett, 1984.



■ For a while, I edited and typeset the 'Post', owned by Graham Colling (above).



■ 'Funny money' saw me complete a 10-day whistle-stop tour of the US.

Funny Money

Independent publisher John Gannan had left *Leader* to start his own *Mounteasterly* newspaper, based at Ferntree Gully. He had funded this largely by a process known as 'factoring' with a firm known as Burwood Discounts, and its associate, J & I Kadane Pty Ltd.

So, just one month into 'going it alone', I presented myself to factoring company principal Joe Kadane. He explained his factoring process: my Victorian Media business would issue its invoices to customers; he would buy that debt, advancing 70 per cent of its face value. A charge of 4 per cent per month to his company, would apply until the debt was paid by the customer. Then the balance, less Kadane costs, was paid.

When I wanted to fund a 10-day trip for myself to America to study newspaper improvements, Kadane said he was not a money lender, but would be pleased to advance any moneys on any invoices, no questions asked. At his invitation, when I wrote an invoice to my own company at my own address, he instantly provided the advance ... and the interest!

No business should be able to afford the interest rates which effectively totalled an annual rate of 48 per cent or more. It was a mug's game. But factoring was common place in the industry at the time: including with Mardi and Harrie Lambert's *Mountain Views* at Healesville, and Graham Colling's *Yarra Valley Post* at Wandin. Eventually, we all tumbled financially.

Many years later, the Corporate Affairs Office took Magistrates' Court action after my admission that I had written 27 contrived invoices in the finance arrangements with Kadane's. It was a common-place activity of the times, but I shouldn't have fallen for it. I was able to present character references from future Deputy Premier Pat McNamara, Yea Shire President Bill Wilson and CEO Peter Mangan. Don Brown, politician Peter Cleeland and policeman Ken Moore all fronted Court to provide character references.

The Magistrate simply placed me on a good behaviour bond. At least I can therefore prove I was officially well behaved for at least 12 months of my life!

This illusion of ready cash provided a 'high life' for a short time. Early January 1984, with brand new American Express and Diners Club cards, and a wallet full of travellers cheques and cash, I was away for a 10-day

whistle-stop business tour of America, including Hawaii; *The Examiner* at San Francisco; Chicago, just as Rupert Murdoch purchased the business *The Sun-Times*; and as special guest at the Wisconsin Press Association conference at Appleton.

The US trip was all that I wanted from Leader. Had they provided this study trip, I would have stayed with them. I rue the impetuosity of the 26-year-old who resigned from Leader Newspapers, not knowing the template of 20-year financial hardship that was to follow.

Victorian Media's years of 1983-1985 were the eve of film star Paul Hogan and singer Olivia Newton-John making Aussies as the US 'flavour-of-the-month'. It had been my dream to visit America, after watching almost 30 years of it on television. I toured 10 cities in as many days. I drove through mid-west Milwaukee, Dallas and Los Angeles. But my highlight - so I thought - was to be New York.

I arrived at JFK Airport at 6.30pm on a Friday ... and was 'outa there' by 4pm next day on an express train to Washington DC. The death of a drugged woman on the New York footpath, directly in front of me, didn't assist with my feelings for 'The Big Apple'. A police shoot-out on Fifth Avenue, where I was staying at the Hilton, didn't help either. Last straw was the theft of a substantial amount of my cash plucked from my wallet by a very fast, very tough and very tall black thief.

Newspaper Magnate

Victorian Media expanded with vigour throughout 1984 and the early part of 1985. I made arrangements to lease the title of the *Avoca Mail* newspaper from journalists Lindsay Arkley and John Merlo. It did not have the expected monetary returns, so the lease was surrendered after just three months, an option previously negotiated.

We took over the new *Croydon City News* established by local activist and former Mayor David Martin, who had close links to the family of Dame Phyllis Frost. The acquisition bought us more trouble than it was worth.

The Victorian Media company was actually making good money preparing the artwork and design for Graham Colling's *Yarra Valley Post*, and it would have made good sense to stick to what we did best.

Against Leader, we felt it necessary to partner the Croydon newspaper with a Ringwood edition, which we promoted as the *Friday Extra*. Undercapitalised, under-resourced, our small staff made a good fist of it, but we were doomed. We were spending a lot more than what was coming in.

We bought *The Clarion* from Mark Day and Owen Thomson at *Truth*. This inner-suburban paper could work, but not with our meagre resources. Rival publisher Glen Rohan asked in his 'Behind The Times' column of *The Melbourne Times*: "With one Day gone, how Long can it last?"

Today, the question of survival applied for Rohan, Neil Murdoch and partner Shane Higgs with their *Metro News* inner-city experiment. With writers such as Ingrid Svensden and Amanda Hurley, they should be shoe-ins. In February 2001, they are took over *The Melbourne Times*, *Emerald Hill Times* and *City Weekly*, in a reverse takeover from APN News & Media.

Alf Milne came in as a partner to start the *Waverley City News*, but only brought woeful sales results. We struggled with the century-old *Yea Chronicle*, as I quickly learned that the country locals were not happy with it being produced 100-kilometres away at our suburban head office.

And we tried experiments such as the *Sunday News*, and *Valley Voice* in Lilydale and the Yarra Valley. Producing the equivalent of a newspaper a day, we had bitten off much more than we could chew, and were losing money badly and quickly.

I tried valiantly to punch out top-line editorial copy, as well as leading the firm. I was writing the equivalent of a newspaper a day, as well as the

Kadane's invoices! I wrote a powerful open letter to Gracia Baylor, a defeated Liberal MLC, who continued to pontificate loftily. My front-page editorial headlined: 'Gracia, In Case You Forgot, You Lost!'

We worked hard at local political coverage, covering the efforts of a struggling State Opposition Leader Jeff Kennett. And I met for the first time with a brilliant young businessman going places, Frank Hargrave of Skilled Engineering. Frank started cleaning toilets at the Melbourne Baths, after his day electrician's job, building a network of people to work on a temporary or full-time basis. That grew in to a \$100-million plus publicly-listed company, Skilled Engineering. I was soon to meet him again at Yea.

For a short while, Fleur and I had our samplings of Dom Perignon and Veuve Cliquot champagne. But it wasn't based on genuine wealth or earnings. We were destined to soon 'come a cropper'. We had our first real exposure to 'contra', with a Continental Airlines flight to the US, in exchange for newspaper advertising space. It was by no means a high life, but there were a few small treats along the way.

A spectacular event occurred at Los Angeles' Comedy Cafe which traded until 2am. We were still on Australian time, and all the locals had gone home. We were the last guests, and in marched a comedian wearing odd bowling alley shoes. The artist performed an hilarious half-hour comedy routine for the sole two people in his audience. The artist was Robin Williams, star of *Mork and Mindy*, *Popeye*, *Dead Poet's Society* and *Good Morning Vietnam*.

We must have created some perception of success in some quarters. Don Fleming of DFC Equipment and Sales sent a proposal for me to buy a Bandhu 64-page newspaper press for \$281,000. At this stage of VMC's collapse, I would have been hard-pushed for the \$281, let alone the six-figure sum.

A last-minute ray of hope came when Michael Hannan's Federal Publishing announced plans to launch a magazine called *TV Star* nationally. It included inserting the magazine in the full print run of *The Age*. I owned the name and I figured here was a chance for a bright young lad to make a quick quid. But I was brilliantly out-manoeuvred by lawyer Geoff Gronow.

Whilst he was taking me out to lunch, literally, Federal Court hearings were occurring in Sydney to bring the matter to conclusion. Next morning I was on my way to the harbour city, head-spinning and out-negotiated, and all I leveraged was \$5000 and plenty of experience.

Our VMC papers were failing badly, and the lack of sales diminished our reserves. Desperately, I flew to New York in the Easter of 1985, seeking

out Maxwell Newton's advise for financiers who might provide working capital. But it was not a united team at the VMC offices.

I had bought a small souvenir for Fleur at Tiffany's Jewellers, and this brought criticism from partner Alf Milne. Obviously thinking of the film title *Breakfast At Tiffany's*, Milne said I had no business dining out at fancy New York restaurants in the circumstances!

The company was about to bottom. Kadaness put partners Milne, Burnett and Donohue into another struggling business. Joe Kadane approached his accountant friend, Bill Abeyratne, to liquidate Victorian Media, but he declined on the basis that there were insufficient funds even for that task.

The company was later wound up after a Creditor's Petition.
Reasonable try, Victorian Media.

■ *Even the best
bad debt collection
techniques failed to save
Victorian Media.*

*Fleur and I ham it up for
the cameras, but our
financial situation
was grave.*





■ PM Bob Hawke and Peter Cleeland



■ Cleeland MP shows the Cabinet Room



PHOTO: LAURIS COLLINS

■ Veteran 'Yea Chronicle' Editor Tom Dignam with the new boy.

Yea Verily

My 'takeover' of *The Yea Chronicle*, one of Victoria's smallest remaining country newspapers, in April 1984 held some surprises for me. Its owner Tom Dignam made this announcement in the four-page broadsheet of Wednesday, March 28, 1984 under the headline "'The Chronicle' Changes":

"This issue of *The Chronicle* will be the last under the present ownership. The masthead and goodwill have been sold to Victorian Media Corporation Pty Ltd, under the managership of Mr Ash Long. The business will be conducted from the same office, but the paper will be set up and printed (by) more sophisticated methods elsewhere - readers can look forward to a better presented publication with some pictorial content.

"Mr Long is a young and energetic man and promises good service. He has one leg-in in Yea in that he is an ex-Ivanhoe Grammarian. The outgoing proprietor believes he has earned retirement, but with agreed commitments and privileges to wind up, will be around for at least three months."

We took over *The Yea Chronicle* on April 2, 1984, trying to avoid the obvious April Fools Day omen. On changeover, I arriving smartly at the small High Street office, sweeping the entrance as any good shopkeeper does. As one local morning stroller, Alec Hayes, passed by, I extended a cheery hello: "G'day, and how are you today?" The local's reply set the omen: "Shithouse!"

Other Yea-ites were kinder in their welcome. The Purcell family took me under their wing. They had run a general store for 99 years, founded by one of the district's favourite sons, Major Frederick G. Purcell. Bill Purcell and Harold Purcell had been Ivanhoe Grammarians, and had assisted with the school's evacuation to local Beaufort Manor in the War years.

They, their sisters Claire and Jean, and Bill's son, Howard, kept the enterprise going before selling the National Trust-listed store to Alan and Stella Reid. Joan Purcell provided ongoing encouragement to us. Other family members Margaret and Dick Ivey run a busy clothing store in the town. David Purcell, now of Melbourne, is my ever-patient accountant.

The takeover was before Victorian Media's failure, so Victorian Media interests prominent, I gave over the day-to-day running of the office to

Heather Garth, Elizabeth Kisler and Fran Lenne. As the VMC fortunes dwindled, they were forced to pay their wages and office running costs from the petty cash receipts for sales of papers, books and photographs.

By July 1985, our Victorian Media fortunes were ruined. To meet the guarantees, Fleur and I surrendered our cars, and put our home on the market, with proceeds to honour the company's debts, measuring more than \$350,000. *The Yea Chronicle* was our only available life-boat, so we renegotiated with former owner Tom Dignam to personally honour the guarantee in the contract to buy the newspaper, and to pay the outstanding balance to him in weekly payments. It was no easy task with the paper down to 880 circulation a week, and a weekly revenue of just over \$1000.

We also personally paid out existing debts and money owed to staff. With no car of my own, I was forced into driving a rent-a-wreck from Melbourne to Yea, relying on that day's cash sales of papers and photos to pay for the petrol for the 100-km return journey home.

In a handful of years, I had moved from a temporary taste of French champagne dinners at Dennis Gowing's Jackson's Restaurant in Toorak, to a Yea seven-course meal: that's a six-pack and a pie. At that stage I certainly couldn't afford the sauce!

We moved to a remote broken-down \$65-a-week farm house at Murrindindi, near Yea, in August 1985, owned by Bev and Rod Simon. If it was hard for me, the new-found rural isolation, 18-km from town, must have been near impossible for Fleur. Daughter, Kristi, was just five years of age, and travelling by country school bus to Yea Primary School every day. Son James was just three, a great age to explore the wonders of the bush.

Our neighbours were the Hauser family - Peter and Val, Gerard and Helen. In the bush, neighbors meant several miles down the road. Peter, who combined a transport company with his family's farming interest, went on to become a Shire President of Yea, at an important time for the municipality.

Other 'close' neighbours were Helen and Stu Dean, Larry and Yvonne Finch, Geoff and Daphne Osborn. District farmers Jan and David Joyce encouraged me in my publishing efforts. They will never know how much those words meant in those lonely days.

Fleur was home-bound for the first six months in Yea, before I could afford to pay a \$200 deposit, then \$250 weekly, to local car dealer Jim Date, for a beaten-up 1969 Holden Kingswood to return us to two-car family status.

as they either towed or kept the old bombs active for newspaper delivery duty.

Long hours, energy and persistence meant *The Yea Chronicle* became a strong business, burdened however by our decision to honour the Victorian Media debts; they were certainly being met by no others. Our eight-page weekly grew, in size, and circulation. Our vigorous news coverage, especially of Court and Council, brought thousands of new readers, and dozens of extra advertisers. I even orchestrated a photo of then-Prime Minister Bob Hawke reading *The Yea Chronicle*, when he opened MHR Peter Cleeland's new offices in Seymour.

Within 18 months, I had produced a record 80-page centenary souvenir of the paper, printed in five runs of Spiro Polites' Streamline Press at Collingwood. Dad, Mum and sister Denise helped Fleur and me hand-collate the sections of special bumper edition.

But all this growth was at significant personal cost. I was at the point of mental and physical collapse. Dr Philip Bassar had me on three 30mg Serepax mind-numbing tablets a day. I was having CAT-scans for suspected stomach cancer, just to make life a little more interesting.

Thomas Michael Dignam had started at the paper as a Printer's Devil, aged 12, in 1927. He was a son of a district pioneer, attending school locally, marrying locally, and raising nine children locally.

I may as well have been the man from the moon. No-one was forgetting that I had been given the job of sacking a son of Yea: Vincent Dignam, with the Syme-Crisp *Mail-Express* joint venture at Bacchus Marsh, just one year earlier. He also happened to Tom Dignam's son, and didn't let me forget it for our 10 years at the end of the alphabet. No thought that I was sacked too!

Tom Dignam was the local; I was not. He was generally loved by the town; I was the brash newcomer with no cash. He was the classic writer; I was tabloid.

As local pharmacist Gary Pollard later wrote: "Tom is a journalist of the old school. He was obviously taught as a youngster that if you can't say something nice about someone don't say anything at all."

Conversely, I was taught by Maxwell Newton: "There are only two types of journalism - dull journalism and exciting journalism. The true journalism is exciting and decidedly unobjective. True journalism, in my view, is devoted entirely to the revelation of facts which someone does not want revealed.

That is the high point of journalism; it is the real meaning of being a journalist; it is also exciting and is interesting to read."

My first *Yea Chronicle* was printed web-offset from Dern Langlands' press on April 4, 1984. It had crisp computer production with photographs ... producing complaints from long-time *Chronicle* readers that the illustrations were only there to take up space!

As an agent-of-change, I faced Yea's old guard, which put up an admirable defence over the next decade, even including an opposition printing and publishing company for a time. Don Lawson, Adrian Sier, Daryl Callander and others each pumped in thousands of dollars or kind to support *The Muddy Creek Monthly* staffed by Vincent Dignam, Jenny Lawson, Annette Coonan, Rod Canning, Fran Henke, and others. Geoff Ingham of Craftsman Press, had son John provide talented artwork support for my opposition.

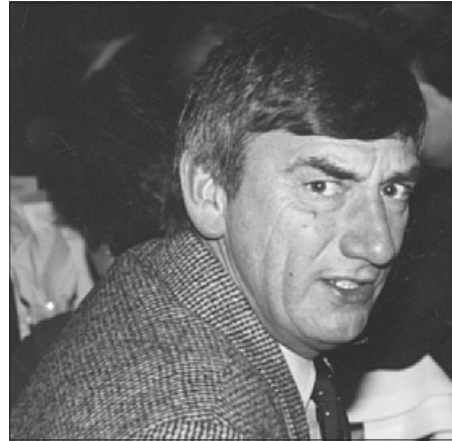
They had registered *The Yea Guardian*, which they said was to be a weekly competitor paper edited by Don Story, now Consultant Editor with *Stock & Land*. Jen Story edits the online farmshed.com.au rural news service. I countered with *The North-East Guardian*. Neither were published. We were all shadow boxing with all our might.

The Muddy Creek Monthly lasted just three editions. I had countered with *The Yea Magazine*.

Generally speaking however, Yea welcomed my new forthright voice. The paper quickly grew from its four-page broadsheet format to weekly editions as large as 48 pages, with full-color photographs.

Circulation climbed from 1100, to an all-time high of 10,000 copies, embracing the new *Kinglake Chronicle* and *Whittlesea Chronicle* areas to the south. We actively went after the advertisers in the *Kinglake Mountain Monthly*, edited by Deidre Hawkins. This growth also gave birth to my new *Seymour Chronicle* and *Nagambie Chronicle* weekly papers, today still continuing under Keith Peplar, as the *Seymour-Nagambie Advertiser*.

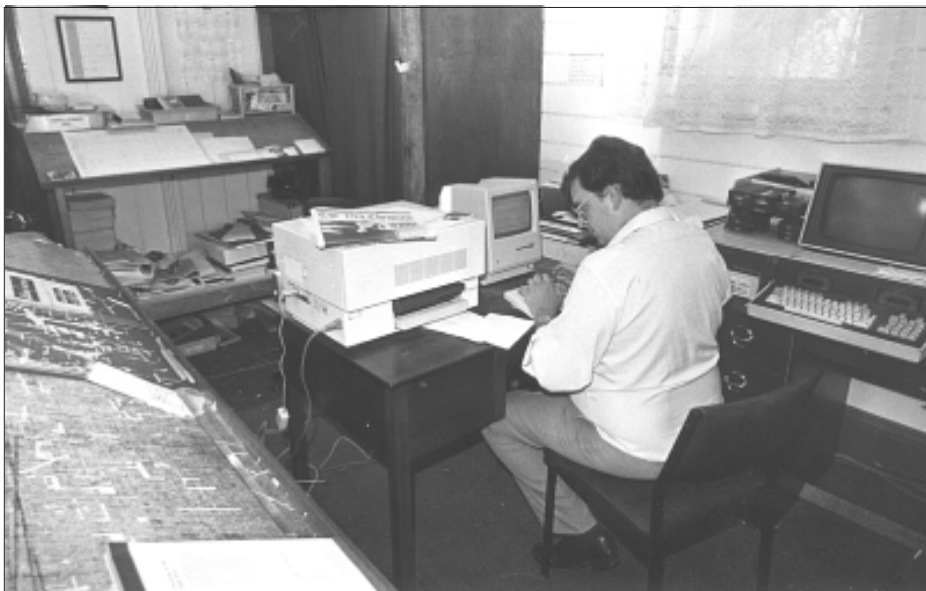
In 1986, I became the Southern Hemisphere's first newspaper owner to use the new desktop publishing revolution, using an Apple Macintosh computer and Laser Writer to compile the paper. I was just pipped at the post for world honors by *The Town Crier* in Wilmington, Massachusetts. *Ink* magazine reported me telling its editor, John Monks: "I didn't have to refer to the instructions very much at all because it really is what they call a very user-friendly system. I now know how to use a mouse, although I kept running off the desk with it at first." How very clever of me.



■ *Left: The salubrious new work place at Yea, after going broke in Melbourne.*

■ *Above: It wasn't long before we scored the ire of Yea Shire President, Cr David Lawson. We won the Best Local Reporting Award in Victoria.*

■ *Below: First to use desktop publishing.*



One of my trademark publishing traits was 'fair dinkum' reporting. That policy applied to Council reporting saw me at odds with the Yea Council; but judged as Winner of the Westpac Award for Local Reporting. We posed for photographs with Victorian Country Press chairman Richard Beks and judge Patrick Tennison, who said: "Very vigourous, but always fair and balanced account of a sudden contentious local issue. All aspects and views were presented clearly and precisely. This paper displayed verve in publishing a special rush-print edition to inform readers, and faced a ban on it proposed by some councillors. Lively, informative journalism at its best."

Local Yea Councillor, Anthony McCarthy, called the award a "travesty". The reality of the place of the award in the world's scheme of things was brought home next year when talented *Leongatha Star* publisher Dorothy Giles won the same award for a series on a rural weed, St John's Wort.

In November 1987, I was stretching my wings, and Maxwell Newton used the new 'facsimile' to write to me from 'MaxNews Financial Network':

"My Dear Ash, How great it was to hear from you after so many years and to observe that my forecasts of your entrepreneurial ability have been borne out. How many papers do you now own? I would love to know.

"I was sick a few years ago. Had a stroke. But have recovered completely except for a very slight limp. Olivia had a heart attack in March, but after quadruple by-pass surgery she is also going great guns.

"I live in Boca Raton in Florida now and send a daily financial column for the *New York Post* and weekly columns for the *Boston Herald*, the *London Times*, *The Australian* and the *South China Morning Post*. I publish a magazine, *Fed Fornightly*, which is a magazine of central banking.

"If you were able to extend your trip to Miami, we could pick you up and you could stay with us here in Boca. You could then take the kids to Disney World in Orlando which is much bigger and better than Disneyland."

Times were looking good again, and we did make a trip to the US, with Christmas in Los Angeles, and a vacation in Hawaii. Yea-born, Toorak-based travel agent Liz Anderson made the arrangements. In a cynical move, I had pre-printed three weeks worth of magazine-style holiday editions, with locally photo-copied A3 sheets inserted with the week's vital news. Old Leader colleagues Joan Alford, Robyn Stanley and Tom Gardiner came to 'baby-sit' our house for three weeks. Tougher times were just around the corner.

From Rags To Riches ... Then Back To Rags Again

For the day-to-day business at Yea, I ran an extremely good business over a decade. Here was a company with no working capital, that had grown from trading at about \$1000 a week, to peaks of \$7000 a week.

We juggled a cashflow, involving us variously printing at Dern Langlands' Royale Press; Theo Skalkos' S & G Rotary Printery; Spiro Politis' Streamline Press; with Ian Metcalfe of Standard Newspapers; twice with the McPherson Media's Shepparton Newspapers, Hartley Higgins' Wangaratta Newspapers, at John B. Fairfax's Rural Press, with Peter Isaacson, then with Bruce Ellen at the *Latrobe Valley Express* partnership.

For us, a rare treat was having a night out in Melbourne, staying at Rockman's Regency Hotel, with accommodation organised by General Manager Alan McLean's PA, Christine Ford, and Night Manager Valerie King. It is a personal boutique hotel where owner Irvin Rockman would sometimes 'bot' a cigarette from Fleur. We number Bar Manager David Sparks as a personal friend!

Travelling around Yea was a killer - 80,000 kilometres in the cars provided by my mate, Holden dealer Neil Beer. At one stage, we even had Norm Cove of Whittlesea Taxis backing up with deliveries. Then when the papers blew out to 10,000 48-page copies, we had sales rep Darrell Skinner drive a hired mini-bus.

Lynn Allan served a brief time managing our office, and Cheryl Fraser sold ads by telephone to clients from Shepparton to Ivanhoe. Petrol seller John Vlamis was pleased to have me as his customer.

The Yea Newsagency's John and Jeannie Handsaker were unhappy when I introduced free distribution of the newspaper in new areas, while Yea people complained they still had to pay a modest cover price. What choice did I have in growing a business?

At Whittlesea, Ray Hart of the local FW Stott real estate agency owned by Peter Dore, was willing to pay for a full-page every week. I had to grab an opportunity for the area, as a rival *Town Crier* - printed by John Over - was also firmly finding its ground. My client was getting results, and was an extremely good payer!.



■ *Footy is the winter institution of country towns. I paid Tom Dignam to continue his lifelong reporting of Yea footy matches, where every player scored a mention.*



■ *No, it's not a misprint. The type is back-to-front deliberately. This was the plaque made from old-fashioned wood type, unveiled by Don Brown at our new offices in Yea, 1988.*

Chronicle Of A Century

The day-to-day events of running a 100-year-old community paper had its funnier moments. Legendary singer John Farnham was visiting town one day. He cleverly chose a day when I was out of town. Fleur, who is a big fan, mustered enormous courage to halt Farnham in the street in front of the newspaper office signage. However, the camera was shaking so nervously that all we had was a very blurred photo. Whispering Jack quickly became Shivering Jack.

Even the machinations of small town politics were rivetting. At one Council election, an elaborate ticket of nine people stood for election, with the preferences calculated mathematically to return a preferred team of four. After an exhaustive count stretching over 24 hours, Ken Olcorn confided to me: "I could have cried. I wasn't supposed to win."

Ken Olcorn went on to become one of the area's best-ever Councillors, and eventually a Deputy Shire President.

In those early days, one local old-timer, Norm Pincott, would ring anonymously to warn me off printing Court stories. But his prominent emphysema breathing patterns would give him away when he'd see me in Yea's High Street just hours later.

Likewise, Ern de Somerville would praise me anonymously in 'keeping the bastards honest'. His typewritten letters were always signed 'Pro Bono Publico'. But in a small town, it's easy to see people putting anonymous letters under a High Street front door.

I enjoyed becoming a Police Reporter. The comic line that accompanies that is that is a journalist made to report to Police once a week.

My first exposure to Police reporting for newspapers was at Preston Court for *The Northern Times* and *The Preston Post*. Young lawyer Dyson Hore-Lacy, later Fitzroy Football Club President, approached the Magistrate, saying: "My name is Hore-Lacy, Your Worship." Quick as anything, the beak replied: "We only use surnames in this court thank you, Mr Lacy."

At Yea, Sgt Ray Sheather took the new Editor under his wing, often tapping on the office window, saying "C'mon Ash, come and have 30 quick beers". Ray Sheather ran a town better than any other cop I have ever seen. His nickname was 'Sheriff' His crew included Peter Abrahams, Ken Moore

and Graeme Broadbent; later to be followed by Sgt Brendan Scully and Sgt Trevor Connell, with teams including Steve Pica and Nigel Belsten. I credit Trevor Connell for almost single-handedly re-educating a town of 1100 people - and four pubs - that it was no longer accepted to participate in drink-driving. He changed a mindset of almost a century.

On one occasion, the 'Sheriff' and I had taken the newspapers to be printed by John Black's crew at Wangaratta Newspapers. It has been a long journey on a hot day. I narrowly beat a Police breath test on the return journey, breathing .05 exactly. The 'Sheriff' stayed silently in the passenger seat.

It was different from the years when Fleur and I had T-shirts made up for the good drinkers of Yea: "Our town is so small we don't have a town drunk ... we just all take turns."

At nearby Alexandra, the Criminal Investigation Branch was headed by Detectives Ian 'Columbo' Welch, Jim Sullivan, and later Det. Sgt Graeme Matthews. It was obvious that as I increased the energetic reporting of Police and Court activities, that I would become good mates with these blokes.

They, likewise, applauded my press coverage as being the best thing to reduce local crime rates. The local 'crims' would happily cop a fine at Court, but wouldn't want their mum to see their names in print.

Mother-in-law Isobell Tunzi, who was staying with us at Yea, was wide-eyed when I landed in a side paddock at home in a Police helicopter, after doing some aerial photography work to promote a safety campaign against speeding. Our kids just shrugged it off as Dad with his copper mates.

There was the same spirit of co-operation at Seymour when I expanded the newspapers there. The existing paper, *The Telegraph*, refused to cover court stories for fear of embarrassing locals. Sen.-Sgt Peter Neylan and Det. Sgt. Doug Dainton offered their full support, and we likewise all became good mates. One of those mateships continues today. Police Prosecutor Stewart Harrison and I are husbands of two Eye and Ear Hospital nurses and we have plenty to drink about when the opportunity arises.

City Links

At Yea, I tried hard to keep city newspaper links. I authored the 'Bush Telegraph' column in the nationally-distributed *Ink* magazine. For a short while, I also edited *The Western News*, a 110,000-circulation weekly experiment by Rick Edwards, with John and Eric Kontek of the Sunshine-based real estate network in Melbourne's outer suburbs. Reporting the Court proceedings of the drug-infested western suburbs made the Yea Court reports look like the *Mickey Mouse Club*!

The Western News closed, but appeared phoenix-like as *The Western Independent*, under the proprietorship of accountant Tony Cerantonio, and manager Sam Vasallo. The paper was purchased by Fairfax in 1998, only to be closed within weeks.

In 1987, I asked Howard Bull of United Communications Services if I could tag along as an observer in a Media Awareness Plan for Victoria's senior business executives. The course was designed to give a media savvy to CEOs, and included briefings by people of the calibre of pollster Gary Morgan of the Roy Morgan Research Institute; Canberra lobbyist Peter Cullen; publisher Peter Isaacson; Trevor Sykes of Australian Business Magazines; economist Dr Neville Norman; and personality Michael Schildberger.

Practical workshops were conducted by Geoff McComas and Alan Stokes, coaching the management participants in television interviewing techniques and handling press interviews.

Others to help were the ABC Senior Industrial Reporter Jock Rankin (Mr Mary Delahunty); GTV-9's David Broadbent; Nine's Director of News John Sorell; Herald & Weekly Times Ltd Circulation Manager Darryl Fedden; Australian Associated Press Group Manager Robin Strathdee; *Herald* Associate Editor Terry McCrann; Jefferson Penberthy of *Time*; columnist Lawrence Money; and *Herald* Editor-in-Chief Eric Beecher.

The papers were growing with circulation extending to Melbourne's outer northern suburbs through a *Whittlesea Chronicle* edition and we qualified for membership of Allied Suburban Newspapers, alongside other independent publishers and their executives including Glen Rohan, Frank Magnabosco at Julie Upson's *Western Times*, Graeme Goodson, Carol Job, Peter Isaacson, and Peter Boyle of the Australian Small Business Association.

Managing Yea's century-old newspaper involved having a great sense of history. Yea's paper was first established in 1885 by Roland Richard Cramer, Michael Lawrence Hickey and Andrew Robinson as *The Yea Telegraph*. The four-page broadsheet included all the doings of a 19th Century pioneering district including mining news, a postal guide (including details of parcels to be claimed), reports from district organisations, many letters to the editor, all seeking progress for the town first known as Muddy Creek.

By 1890, a proud tradition had been started: the newspaper had gone bust, It re-formed phoenix-like the next week as *The Yea Chronicle* under the Editorship of Patrick Galvin. To follow were Edwin Howard Dobson (1896-1900); Norman Dugald Ferguson (1900-1907); Major Frederick George Purcell (1907-1927); Elizabeth Barbara Purcell (1927-1929); William Henry Tomkins (1929-1932); Elizabeth Jane Goodwin Thorley (1932-1934); George Philip Armstrong (1934-1936); James Vincent Gannon (1936); then Thomas Michael Dignam and his brother Edward Leo Dignam, from July 1, 1936.

Even *The Yea Chronicle* had faced its own war when *The Yea Telephone* and *Upper Goulburn Advocate* came to town for a few years in the early part of the century.

Tom wrote my most favored piece of journalism under the headline of 'Unpardonable Actions': "The plate glass window of Williamson's Premier Butchery was smashed on Saturday evening. Senior-Constable Hargreaves picked up a couple of soldiers and dealt with them satisfactorily."

The issue of my days in the Editor's chair was local government amalgamations, and I correctly revealed Premier John Cain's Local Government Commisison's plans to merge Yea and Alexandra Shires. Senior adviser Russell Badham threatened to report us to the Australian Press Council unless we apologised. We didn't apologise. He didn't report us.

My planned newspaper expansion into nearby Alexandra was aborted at the last minute as we heard that former Progress Press colleague Geoff Heyes and sister Jenny Smith were taking over that town's *Standard* newspaper from John and Bert Page. Geoff and Jenny are children of Ken Heyes, one of the 'wheels' at the Progress Press organisation. Our straightforward Court reporting had been a sales bonanza. Detective-Sergeant Ian 'Columbo' Welch said our reporting had done more than anything else to reduce the local crime rate. It didn't harm newspaper sales either!

Relations with neighbouring newspapers were tentative. Leader had

Lillydale & Yarra Valley Express, which celebrated its Centenary with a special feature prepared by Terry Carroll. That paper had been variously published by William Axford; Henry S. Webb and Thomas Oliver; Thomas Oliver and Thomas Bronwell Handley; Thomas Oliver (again); Edward Lincoln; Thomas Oliver (again, again); N.W. Gill and Oliver; Thomas Oliver (yet again); Pettit and Co.; L.W. Coates and E.M.C. Daley; S.C. Grattan and Co.; N.W. Gill; The Elliott Provincial Newspaper Group; and Leader.

At Benalla, we watched as long-time newspaperman Geoff Adams fought a battle with his *Ensign* to fight off a free newcomer, the *Benalla Free Press*. Both papers went for twice-weekly free circulation, and something had to give: the McPherson family's Shepparton Newspapers eventually took over both as a strategic chess-piece in country newspaper marketing. Geoff Adams Jnr started an opposition paper in the Goulburn Valley, and *The Adviser* continues today as a 25,000-circulation free color weekly.

Adams Senior and Junior also ran a free monthly paper at Echuca: *The Advertiser*. They were overloaded with their Shepparton business, and invited me to have a go at running the border paper, based on me paying them a share of the profit. I quickly found that as talented as I thought I was, I couldn't work in Yea and Echuca at the same time.

Today, one of the most talented local newspaper editors is Rohan Aldous of *The Seymour Telegraph*, who presents a colorful diet of local news and sport. In the same ranking is Michael Ray of the *High Country Times* at Mansfield, who competes with a free weekly paper against the *Mansfield Courier* edited by Phil Nolan.

Also nearby is the *Euroa Gazette* run by Helen Donaldson and Paul Rieusset. They are devoted to their local community, and offer an extraordinary, if bland, coverage of their rural area. I am at a loss to know how they make a financial success of it.

Our country press fraternity was in shock when talented young editor Ian Day died in a single-car accident after returning home after midnight, from covering a community event in his *Campaspe News* area at Rochester. His car turned into a fireball when it struck a tree. He left a young family. I sat alongside a shellshocked Ian Purdey, publisher of the *Kyabram Free Press* and *Tatura Guardian*, as he prepared to offer the eulogy.

There were few sounding boards for me. As a one-man band working under incredible editorial and financial pressures, I made a few wrong calls.

Fellow journalist Harvey Blanks, who had held senior overseas media appointments and who had authored *The History of Yea*, offered his thoughts ... which were sometimes a little off-balance themselves!

One Yea Shire Councillor, Steve Fleming, had been found removing gravel from a Council stack in the Kinglake region. He was eventually removed from Council, after a theft charge was found proven. But I had pushed and pushed the story, little recognising that Steve had considerable popularity for his work as a school teacher and community activist in Kinglake.

I had been spurred on by the reporting of the activities of Yea Shire Engineer Stan Kisler. One of my *Yea Chronicle* exposés had been picked in the metro press when Stan decided to bitumenise his own street just prior to his forced retirement. It was a big story for a small town, reported in 'War Is Declared' size headlines.

The trouble wasn't confined to the Yea Council Chamber. I was in strife myself. Fleur and I had already agreed to also re-pay the payments owed by former business partners Arthur and Janice Preusker, facing their own tight circumstances with the Kadane finance company.

Now, two other ex-partners, Alf and Gwenda Milne, were taking Legal Aid-funded Federal Court action against Kadane's, naming me as one of the parties. Stephen Sawyer, a senior partner at Phillips Fox, delegated me to young lawyer Virginia Hickey who guided me through the process of conducting my case, as Legal Aid was curiously not available to me. The case was withdrawn, but not before 'Long QC' had a few days of Rumpole-style activity before Mr Justice Jenkinson.

Local politician Patrick McNamara, later to become Jeff Kennett's Deputy Premier, encouraged me to spread my publishing wings to his home-town of Nagambie. His aims weren't entirely altruistic. Local women Lorraine Gladwin and Lynn Pearce had published the fortnightly *Nagambie Natterings* newsletter but had run out of puff. Would I like to take it over, and start a weekly paper?

I enlisted the services of former Leader colleague Keith Peplar, whose *Main Range Magazine* monthly publication had gone broke. It wasn't long after that Keith suffered a heart attack, no doubt brought on by smoking close to 80-a-day. We had local funeral director Wayne Bamford drop in a business card and tape measure. Keith gave up the fags.

With the *Nagambie Chronicle*, I started what was to become a successful

business that continues 10 years later under Keith's proprietorship. At Nagambie, I was about to replicate the good relations with Police including Sgt Rick Van De Paverd, John West and Peter Hower.

Our top advertising client was Pat's brother, real estate man Denis McNamara. Father John Silvester McNamara continued selling real estate into his late eighties. Pat McNamara and Denis McNamara didn't talk much. There had been some family squabble.

Motor dealers Neil and Jan Beer were regular in taking full-page ads in each of my Yea, Seymour and Nagambie *Chronicle* editions. Motor man Phil Baker was also a regular as he followed his dream to create a dealership. Publican Bill Holman was a strong supporter of local, independent media.

My vigorous coverage of Nagambie's local Goulburn Shire earned readership, against the more bland coverage offered by Beryl Webster of the *Euroa Gazette*. Characters of the Council included 'Fergie' Ewart, rough-and-gruff father of ABC senior reporter Heather Ewart. 'Fergie' would have something heavier than Nescafe in his morning coffee cup as he debated the issues with fellow Councillors Ron Little, John Arthur, and Tom Brodie from the delightfully-named Longwood.

The increasing parade of politicians were predictable. But few were to be seen when I left my seat of influence. There were several exceptions.

Graeme Stoney and Geoff Craige, MLCs for Central Highlands, have maintained a genuine interest in my activities. Peter Cleeland, two-times Labor MHR for McEwen, has been good company and challenging contributor to my media efforts. Fran Bailey less so, but did come to my aid once after being asked in 1999, but I haven't heard from her since.

Politicians did find me popular at election time - especially after I opened the weekly *Seymour Chronicle* in 1991, in what became a very marginal seat. The opening of the Seymour paper was done on a wing and a prayer ... I well remember standing on the print floor of Rural Press, Gisborne, with just \$5 in my pocket as working capital.

But the paper was an instant success. We started with a 40-page, full color first edition. We home-delivered the *Seymour Chronicle* free, where our opposition paper had a cover charge. We won the important Safeway advertising contract, and also led in supporting the Seymour Expo founded by Brendan Hall, Colin Stray and Frank Graham. Just like Bacchus Marsh, my helicopter shots of their event won us their contract.

Major advertisers to sign on were service station operator Ian Aldous,

tyre dealer Ollie Stecher, jeweller Bruce Hall, discount electrical retailer Val Greshner and real estate agent Ian Ridd.

Rival editor Alan Brock asked the local Council to provide for a separate press table for him on the opposite side of the public gallery when my *Seymour Chronicle* came along. In energetic style, we would have Council press reports on the street next morning, covering the activities of representatives such as Shire President Cr Bob Edwards, plus Crs David McCullough and Jim Ure. Jim's wife, Faye, went on to become first woman leader of the new Shire of Mitchell.

When Council amalgamation came along, Sam de Gabrielle proved a 'lens lizard' with an ability to secure local publicity.

The *Seymour Chronicle* was a commercial success, but there was energetic competition from the *Telegraph*, later edited by Rohan Aldous, chaired by Dr Colin Officer, and owned by Chris and Ross McPherson's large Shepparton-based media group. It later failed because I followed the advice of publisher Hartley Higgins to convert the paper to paid circulation. It was a foolish move that lost us circulation and vital advertising revenue. Higgins is now a joint venture partner with the McPherson's in Victoria's north-east.

A State election saw the National Party pitch Rod Henderson against the Liberals' Marie Tehan, who had won the redistributed seat from the Labor Party's Max 'The Black Rat' McDonald. The poll was hard yakka for all, including the press. By polling day, I sent a card of best wishes to each of the candidates, only to be met by a petulant, immature attack by Mrs Tehan.

Marie Tehan called me all the names under the sun, and expected some form of exclusive loyalty to her campaign. She later hand-wrote a letter of apology, but soon repeated an outburst when I truthfully reported that she would soon move her office from Seymour to Whittlesea. She banned her office sending her news releases to the newspaper ... thinking that this punished the newspaper! Childish, as well as bad politics.

The only person that this punished was the next Liberal candidate, Di Rule, who failed to win the 'safe' Liberal seat at the next election.

Similarly at Yea, politicians who didn't want to know me at other times of the year, beat a path to my door. Jim Plowman, sometime Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, cranked up his news release machine at election time. M-a-a-a-t-e!

Plus there was always a tour of visiting politicians. Australian Democrats Janet Powell impressed me as the polliwog with the worst perfume. Conversely,

Lorraine Elliott (first wife of controversial businessman and Carlton Football Club President John Elliott) struck me as one of the most attractive.

Local election day process was always enjoyable. Dick Powell was a Labor Party stalwart forever outside the Yea Shire Hall. And, of course, there were the regulars handing out how-to-vote cards for the Liberals and National Party candidates too. All would pose for press photographs.

The politicians covered a wide area. Mardi Lambert's *Mountain Views* at one stage was trying to cover an area extending from Yea to Belgrave, with Healesville as its capital. It certainly tested the abilities of journalist Kath Gannaway, who passed the test with flying colors. *Mountain Views* fell for the same danger that I had: ignoring its core readership base, looking for greener pastures and revenue sources far afield.

I took my company's expansion too far with an excursion producing *The Kilmore Chronicle* against Jim and Lois Smith's established *Kilmore Free Press*. Jim had news journeyman Bill West on staff, a generally popular 'Dingo Dan' comment column, as well as feature writer Bronwyn Wheatley sharing her time with *The McIvor Times* at Heathcote. We were outdone when Smith combined with *The Telegraph* to win the important and lucrative weekly Safeway pages away from us.



■ For most of our 10 years at Yea, we lived on a rural property just outside the township. We called it 'Longwood' ... then came 'the recession we had to have'.



■ Above: Marie and Jim Tehan, after winning a poll. Then she banned me.



■ Above: Gary Fitzgerald at the 50th birthday party I threw for him.



■ Westpac GM Ray Handley names me as Victoria's Best Local Reporter.

'See You At The Local'

An important part of country town culture was the sessions at 'the local'. Pub culture had been an institution in country towns, but that important fabric of Australia was ripped away with the strict policing of .05 drink-driving laws in the late 1980's and 1990's.

My almost-nightly *Yea Chronicle* research team at Bill Morris' 'Labor In Vein' Hotel at Molesworth included newspaper off-sider Gary Fitzgerald, rabbit catcher Les 'Digger' Franklin, Council worker Paddy Morris (who passed away late 2000), rural worker Tony Mann, school teachers Lawry Hood and Ian Bell, unionist Danny O'Carroll, rural contractor Graham Scott and fisherman Edgar Taverner. It was here where all the problems of the world could be solved ... if only the world had asked!

Actually, a few beers at the local was the best market research that a country journalist could perform. The late Col McClure of *The Corryong Courier* advised me that it should 20 hours in the factory, and 20 in the job. Or was it 40 hours in the pub?

Here was the font of all knowledge, and the quickest way to see if your weekly paper had hit the mark. Today, Col's daughter Cyndie Collins and husband Mark, carry on the business without the need for extra market research. Col has a memorial Rotary Club of Corryong community award.

At Bob Newman's Royal Mail Hotel in Yea, later bought by Alister Borrie, it was easy to get the sports angle with the pub's TAB agency.

Gary Fitzgerald and I were good drinking mates. Over close to a decade, we enjoyed a trip to Tasmania, another to a Mildura conference of Country Press, and another motoring trip to Canberra and Sydney. We took a night out at the Don Burrows Supper Club, where Judy Jacques was performing. We later met up with Judy at the Kinglake Hotel, presenting her with an album of photographs of her in action with jazz pianist Bob Sedergreen ... with whom I'd worked at Leader's Waverley Offset division.

Locals joked that I moved the paper's office at 36 High St to 54 High Street, because it was close to David and Lynn Allen's Grand Central Hotel. Actually the office was next door to Ian Findley's Supermarket, but it had restricted liquor trading hours! Something about newspapers must have rubbed off on Ian's daughter, Katie, who has become a successful local journalist in her own right.

Andrew Kemp took over the 'middle pub', later taking the same 'Grand Central' name to a busy nightclub-style hotel in Wangaratta, in partnership with Yea butcher Greg Tainton who today runs the Tatong Tavern. Yea's 'middle' pub these days is run by Kerry Oliver and Alister Borrie.

Pub culture was big in a country town throughout the 1980's. Our next office move was to 10 High Street, where Bill and Lorraine Johns, then Greg and Maggie Graham, then Rob and Thérèse McGregor, conducted the Country Club Hotel next door. We were so close that I could have organised a refrigerated line of draught beer into where I typeset the paper.

At the Country Club Hotel, it was easy to get the perspective on the local Council. In one corner, Shire laborer Mick 'Tambo' Gillahan would be able to tell all and sundry what was really going on at the Council offices. In the other corner's snug was Shire Engineer Stan Kisler, his loyal deputy Dave Gorman, Planner 'Butsy' McIntosh, and a few hangers-on. For my money, the latest news often came from the laboring department!

Barfly Gilbert John Lawrance always had an ear out for the latest. Truck driver Bill Anderson would always provide some humourous balance. It was fascinating to watch and hear the whispering campaign against local farmer Keith Anderson who was suffering Paterson's Curse on his nearby property. Today he is one of the leading Landcare and Wetlands proponents. Another drinker, Frank Batty, sat quietly, reading *The Australian*, but taking in every word.

Some of my favourite company was Ian Baynes, who became almost like a brother. His cousin Paul often joined us. Ian was a leading member of Yea's Road Rescue squad that would unpeel victims from their wrecks on the three highways surrounding Yea. My job as the newspaper man was to take the forensic photographs for Police. After one particularly gruesome 'fatal', it was Ian Baynes who helped me 'de-brief' with some Vitamin V.

Another social 'powerhouse' in Yea was the Football Club bar at the Recreation Reserve. Mine host was Graeme 'Jack' McMaster, who also published skit magazines featuring the club's identities. Instead of *New Idea*, he called it *No Idea*. And Ash Long's *Yea Chronicle* was a fair target.

The Tigers' club rooms became the weekend winter capital for the district. We had many friends there including Murrindindi neighbours Geoff and Daphne Osborn. Clubman Don McLeish patiently strolled the boundary for years, selling raffle tickets to raise cash for the town's footy warriors. His relative, John McLeish, had been a star Essendon player in the VFL.

Bush Whacked

Life in Yea had a pecking order, almost a caste system. One of the town's doctors, Dr Dorothy Paterson told me that the district basically had four bloodlines: an almost equal mix of Irish Catholic and Scots Presbyterians: the Coonan, Aldous, McLeish and Drysdale families.

Doug Lade of Highlands was a respected farmer and won high rank within the Country Fire Authority. His wife Peg sometimes took life a bit seriously, and once wrote to me that she did not want the activities of the local Probus Club reported in my paper without her written permission.

Leading citizenry include Jack and Margaret Mahon, a couple respected in every way. Margaret was ringed by a tribe of grandchildren on the day she was chosen to run the Olympic flame through the village of Molesworth.

'Newer' resident Harold Harper told me that it took 25 years to become regarded as a 'local'. Peter Ahern and garbage contractor Franc Coppo were amongst the many that ferried the local kids to their daily education.

All rural aspects were an education for me. Some were kindlier teachers than others. Devlin's Bridge farmer Con Hildebrand won a *Stock & Land* farmers' prize, and was proud to show me his cattle operation. Top farmers John Sinclair and Geoff Smith patiently explained their top-line agricultural practices. I was intrigued to watch leading farmer Dougal Drysdale in action at his Box Hill property.

Geoff Gillespie encouraged me ... but he was a Yea farmer with an Ivanhoe Grammar connection. In fact, Geoff's daughter Lynne had secured the undivided attention of juke box man Peter Greenaway and I, who had arrived at her North Balwyn address to pick-up a machine following a Saturday night party. Lynne was unashamedly sunning herself in the back garden sun. The juke box men's eyes were on high beam for the next hour, after fine-figured Lynne good-humoredly greeted us in the briefest of bikinis.

It was once said that the top five people in a country town were its Postmaster, Station Master, Bank Manager, Newspaper Editor, and Church Leader.

At the Yea Post Office, Barry Dallinger kept a stern eye over the postal operations, leading an otherwise happy operation of Australia Post people including Dennis McCarthy and Graeme Agnew. What is it about

some postmasters and newsagents? Perhaps their early hours affect the humour gland. The mood brightened when free enterprise took over and Peter Frawley bought the franchise for the local postal retail business.

The Station Master had long gone at Yea, with the passenger rail closed in 1969, as roads improved and a three hour rail journey replaced by a one hour road trip.

Bank Managers were important. I had three of the best - Pat Lay, Alan Hutchins and Wayne Herring - with a supportive Regional Manager Barry Coughlan. I also had some of the least helpful. The State Bank was sold out to the Commonwealth by Premier Joan Kirner; and Westpac closed its branch.

The Editor and some Church Leaders may well have been questionable?

The hearts of country towns around Australia started to die as the professionals such as accountants and lawyers became visitors from other districts. Tony Williams and Martin Hunt, in association with politician Marie Tehan, had expanded their Mansfield practice, to incorporate the Yea legal firm conducted for decades by Owen Jackson. My accountant, Mark Henry, also took in small practices in the Alexandra and Mansfield district, 100 kilometres away.

Not all Councillors were happy with my energetic pursuit of the truth. One of the difficult reporting jobs was revealing that Shire President Cr Arnie Exton was using Council resources to print some of his re-election material. The job was made harder for the fact that Fleur and I had been wedding guests at his son Charles Exton and Fleur's childhood girlfriend Pat about 10 years earlier. Arnie Exton was thrown out of office for the first time in 27 years, and all his friends over that time were blaming Ash Long.

Arnie's Council colleague Cr Jim Hackett, the general store operator at Kinglake, letter-boxed a 'hate campaign' leaflet proclaiming "Ash Long Intimidates Good Men of Yea". Bush poet Fred Docking similarly circulated a printed poem - Death To *The Chronicle*. The typeface looked similar to that previously used in Yea! Cr Dougal Drysdale publicly labelled me as a 'blow-in', Cr Anthony McCarthy, a powerful Catholic, shunned me.

My reporting was a turning point in Council. It introduced a newer breed, but they too had their enjoyment of power. New Shire President Cr David Lawson also shunned me when we printed a Stu Dean cartoon of Lawson, under the front-page headline 'Sham', revealing some less-than-perfect Shire Presidential paperwork.

David's wife Lois never spoke to me again. What is that they say about clouds and silver?

From the left of politics came opportunities for Ian Bell and Peter Beales, and new opportunities were made for young and enthusiastic Councillors in Ray Hutchinson and Lyn Gunter. Crs Bruce Kindred and Stephen Franz-Ford were unafraid to use my news columns when it suited them.

The life of the country newspaper editor was a bit like compering the *Don Lane Show*. Every week, you had to entertain, be a little funny, add a touch of irony, give away some prizes, throw the camera onto the audience, sing a ballad or two in print, and keep them coming back for more next week.

One of our bigger stories locally when was local woman Allison Nye stood to be a Councillor, and my newspaper revealed she also registered herself under two other names. Ms Nye took the matter to an Appeal Court, and was supported by a former Yea Councillor, Ron Drysdale. I won the case but cheekily asked the Magistrate for costs. He bluntly told me I would have been there anyway to report the case.

The Yea district was also starting to provide a 'Sea Change' mentality for some of Melbourne's finest. Money man John T. Ralph bought rural property, as did advertising genius Lyle Dayman and wife Ro. Lyle had made his way at Monahan, Dayman, Adams in partnership with guru Phillip Adams. One of their early clients was Kevin Dennis Motors, run by Dennis Gowing. Lyle explained to me that he made as much money being paid cash upfront by Gowing for his ads, rather than the conventional 45 days allowed in the media business.

Others to move into the district included Brian Rangott, former Music Director of Graham Kennedy's *In Melbourne Tonight*. The only conducting I saw Brian do was when we were fighting fires together on the back of a Molesworth CFA tanker.

Local teacher Heather de Castella won celebrity status as sister-in-law of marathon runner Rob.

The Yea Picnic Races became a gala event with John Adams of Adams Pest Control being one of the first companies to entertain in a corporate marquee. The town's medicos - Drs Martin Lowe, Dr Morton Rawlin and wife Dr Kay Atkinson; and vet Dr Murray Grant and wife Ruth, were all elected as important Race Club office bearers, making their attendance

obligatory. Real estate man Michael Williams entertained guests at 'Royal Yea', while steward Geoff Purvis patiently explained the intricacies of the track, so I'd get it right in the *Chronicle* newspaper reports.

Country life includes the annual AP&H - Agricultural, Pastoral and Horticultural - Show guided by Elaine and the late Norm White, David Lawrance, artisan Glenda Bullen and many others. It was time for one of photo essays, every year readers would expect a photo of Aubrey and Greg Garlick with their chooks. It was a 'must' to include every single Show result.

A country town runs on volunteer organisations all doing their best for the district. The Freemasons' Lodge was headed by Bob Crockett, and there was a big representation of women in the Country Women's Association branches, Blind Auxiliary and Red Cross.

The pride of the town was its Country Fire Authority units headed by John Benston, Glen Jones, and Ray Allen. A moving firemen's guard of honor was performed at the funeral of Erica Allen, after she died in a terrible road accident that badly injured Ray. One of the tragedies of this accident was that their son, John, an ambulance driver, attended the call.

Ambulance volunteers included father-and-son Graeme and Mark Bruere, assisting full-timers including Mick Lewis and John Morris.

It was all hands to the pump when the town's fire siren blew. Local land owner Pattie Bamford impressed on me the need for 'all good men' to become involved as Country Fire Authority volunteers. Even town butcher Cec Cook would down tools; his job was to direct the town's traffic by flags, to ensure safe passage of the emergency crews across a busy intersection.

The town raised \$50,000 for a road rescue vehicle, when the Government couldn't or wouldn't supply the funds. Ian Baynes and Brian Ward were amongst its chief fund-raisers, none of them seeking public credit.

The fund-raising was all worthwhile when a local farm worker Rob Collins was miraculously rescued when his utility was hit by a mammoth semi-trailer on a wet highway accident. The rescue saved a local's life.

For years, Cheryl O'Halloran ran the local fund-raising for the *Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday Appeal*. Mona Clark did likewise for Red Cross. These people justifiably expected the full backing of the local newspaper, including free advertising space.

The community involvement also involved the district's kids, with Scouts led by Peter Euston and Tina Gorman; local Guides and Brownies leaders including Anita Coonan, and even a lady named Fleur Long.

High School activities were led by Headmaster Bruce Kindred, and the quaintly named Senior Mistress Jenny Kindred (his wife, a pillar of the Anglican Church). In my early days reporting on a High School incident, Deputy Head Mark Mullaly answered the newspaper query with half-a-dozen different witnesses, all on different phone extensions. Like an old American western movie, the town was particularly protective of its own.

The town, as farmers, led by well established men such as Mike Coonan are passionate about conservation and Greening. A group calling themselves Friends of the Yea Railway Station, led by designer Deborah Bennett, went about planting trees and rejuvenating a lazy bit of Crown Land. They even had me on my knees doing the same, doing my bit for the environment.

Every country town has an institution. Yea had Patricia and Tony Carter who ran a milk bar even days a week, with a lot of business 'on the slate'.

Gary Pollard is the town's pharmacist, with his business acumen allowing him to acquire the Bigelow's Pharmacy in Seymour where he completed his training. His parents Ruth and Keith had an earth business, followed by a service station. Others in that field include Chisholm and Shaw, and local couple Bernie and Mary Quinlan.

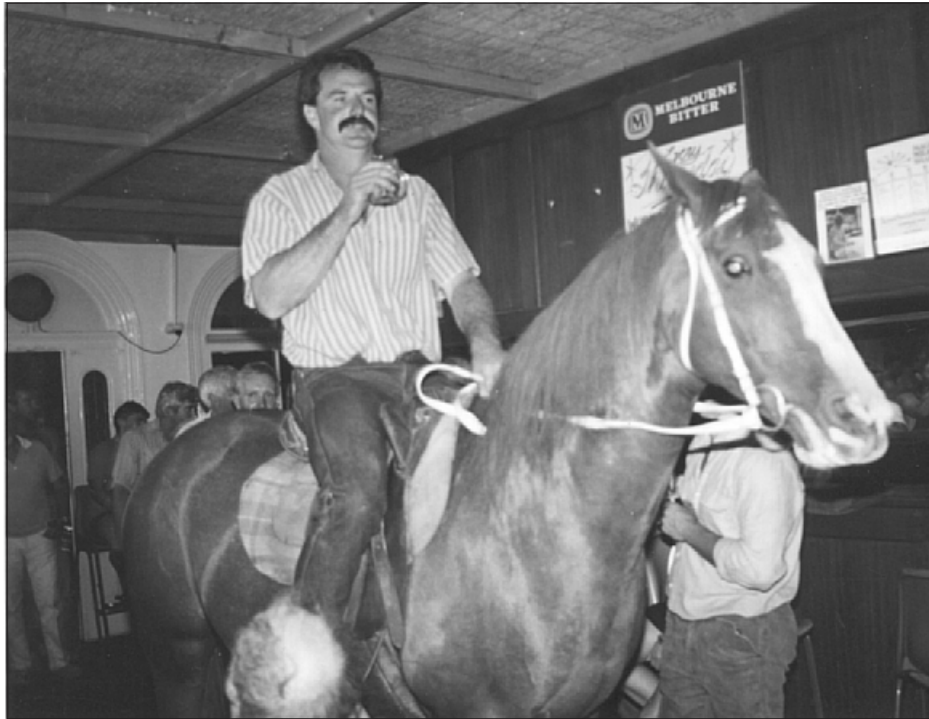
One Greek family - the Vlamis boys: John, Peter and Andrew - had the town's three take-away food businesses. This proved particularly lucrative with the winter buses to the snow. They now own a lot of real estate.

Our local paper counted on all the tradesmen to take an ad, but local ads never amounted to more than \$500 a week. We had to look beyond the town limits to survive. Alan Atkins and Garry Leatham were the top electricians, Ross Armstrong topped the plumbers, as did father-and-son Graeme and Greg Clements

Yea was a 'Model Town' winner and lawn mower engineer Laurence Cassell would advertise, with the reasonable expectation that the community dances organised by wife Lesley would be publicised free in the paper.

One-man businesses abounded: Russell Akers had a successful cleaning operation, and Eddie Andrews built a gardening enterprise after a Shire apprenticeship. We were pleased to support those who supported us.

My favourite job was the annual Saleyards day organised by stock agents Ross Bryant, Jack Slavin, Harry Docking, Peter McKenzie, and Chris Pollard. Truckers like Gordon Buckland would transport stock into the night, as the cockies had their annual drink at the local hotels.



■ Yea stock agent *Bruce Elliott* celebrates the annual cattle sale with a drink for himself and a friend at the Grand Central Hotel.



■ Using a different form of transport, *Gary Fitzgerald* and I used a Benz stretch in Sydney to visit a Country Press function. We are pictured at Bondi Beach.

Lest We Forget

Anzac Day provided an opportunity to show its appreciation to those who had paid the supreme sacrifice. The diggers would march through town, led by pipers Don McLeish and 'Butsy' McIntosh. A variety of RSL dignataries comprising Maurie Spanjer, Col Egan, Norm White and Ed Davies would officiate. The small RSL hall was packed when State President Bruce Ruxton made his way for an old-fashioned 'smoke night'.

The RSL sub-branch had an option of adopting an Army division from nearby Puckapunyal for Anzac Day services. Yea cleverly chose catering, which meant a slap-up feed after the march, just before the two-up games out the back.

You could count on John Monteath, who runs 'Monty's Printing', a returned soldier, who injected a healthy irreverence at the right time.

One Yea RSL President, Ken Moore, made a moving presentation to the town doctor, Charles Hosking, on his retirement. Charles had parachuted behind enemy lines, and was found floating in the Greek seas during World War II. One night, Charles recreated the parachute jumps from the bar of Arthur Sullivan's Railway Hotel.

The good doctor had been drinking 7-ounce glasses of Scotch, ounce-for-ounce with the locals with their glasses of draught beer. After manoeuvres had finished, I walked Charles on a cold, foggy Yea night to the front door of his 'Haletta' residence/surgery. "You best go now," he advised me, as he rang the door bell for his wife, "this could be ugly."

For me, the night had only started. I was due at a Rotary Club committee meeting being held at Daryl Callander's home. Half cut, I was trying to negotiate my way around his back garden in the pitch dark, promptly stepping into his swimming pool, and trapping myself under the pool blanket. For a poor swimmer, it was an instant lesson.

Yea's religion during the winter months was football, against neighboring towns. Tom Dignam, a life member of the local Tigers, continued to report the matches for the paper, always ensuring to mention every player. The football club won amazing loyalty. Larry Finch, one of the local best, played more than 500 games, delighting with taking the field with his son Matt. Larry, a prison warder, died whilst jogging. It was a huge town funeral.

One of the footy club heroes was champion forward David 'Daggas' Aldous, whose efforts were replayed regularly in the front bar of the Royal Mail Hotel. Adrian Evans was a strong contributor to the club.

The town's summer calendar included cricket organised by John Quinlan, John Aldous, Neil Garlick, and Terry Chaplin Yea's Water Tigers Swimming Club received more than its ration of publicity because of a swimming coach called Fleur. There were others too including Lyn and Neville Helmond, Helen Dean and Sandra Hanley. They were able to boast Commonwealth Games medallist and Olympian, Rodney Lawson as a member.

I introduced some rivalry into the district by including the rejuvenated Kinglake Football Club into the pages of the Yea paper. I instituted a 'Chronicle Cup' where Yea and Kinglake would contest a practice match in the pre-season training. One of the impressive 'Lakers' was Nick Trompf, Editor of *The Weekly Times*, and now boss of a Herald & Weekly Times Ltd. specialist publishing division.

Town politics in an Australian country town are just as fascinating. Local MP, Fred Grimwade, President in Victoria's Legislative Council, welcomed me to the town. Liberal Party stalwart Mona Clark won me with her invitation for the Editor to attend a Party function the Green Room at the Country Club. I had visions of a grand country estate in the Yea foothills ... instead it was a empty side bar at an ageing century-old local pub.

It was fun to have the vigorous, honest, name-calling political debates that you can only get in the bush. I lost no time in telling Kinglake that its *Mountain Monthly* newspaper editors Judy Sharp and Jenny Beales were also working at Labor MP Max McDonald's office in nearby Whittlesea.

Farmer Bill Armstrong had pleasure in daubing my office front-door with a spray-painted 'ALP' sign when Labor won an election, and the paper had run an editorial supporting the conservatives.

Local Council faced massive changes and a variety of Town Clerks, later known as Chief Executive Officers, made their way through the Chambers. Peter Mangan was the man of action; yet his actions were being measured against Frank Berkery who had served for decades in a slower country environment prior to faxes, E-mails and photo-copiers.

Old Ivanhoe Grammarian Garry Cecil, since CEO at Upper Murray and Mitchell Shires, won the Yea top job at age 25. The role was later taken on by a former air stewardess, Janice Walsh; latest CEO is Danny Hogan.

Across the road, Water Board volunteers led by Harold Purcell planned the water and sewerage services for a district. Graeme Bryant supplemented his small accountancy and menswear businesses, but being its Secretary.

Building a newspaper in a small country town is not an easy job, especially if you are on a circulation drive when you are stepping on toes. We moved to a house in the Yea township to be closer to the action, leasing the Hill Street property from former Yea Shire Secretary Jim Elvey. We were delighted with a wonderful country neighbour in Peg Chivers. But the whole district claims its Editor as 'public property' - 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They see the Editorship as a calling rather than a concession.

It was important to keep Fleur's work at the Yea Hospital's Rosebank wing completely separate from the paper. We practised a strict rule not to even privately discuss the patients at the Hospital. Fleur won wonderful support from colleagues such as the Directors of Nursing Joan Coles and Lorina Gray, and nursing professionals Sandra Hanley and Barb Fisher.

It was sometimes impossible, however, to split a private life from a professional one. A family friend, Gayle Branch, was close until I was obliged to report a minor traffic court case. There were plenty of similar examples. Where do you draw the line? Early in their careers, the Dignam brothers had been fierce advocates of court reporting in *The Yea Chronicle*, but Tom eliminated such reports completely as he raised his family of nine children.

Country life in Australia is a different existence. You win the reward of close friends, at the cost of everyone knowing all your business. You also must pull your weight when the going gets tough for your neighbours. No metro-only business person will understand how we extended credit to our fellow townsfolk for newspaper advertising when the recession struck. It was our business undoing, as it was for many others who commit to a community life.

Our 'network' included Alan and Lyndie Luckman, whose daughter Kristie was close school friends with our daughter Kristi. Neighbours Greg and Jacinta Barker looked after the grazing property owned by Melbourne transport operator Vic Agosta.

A fun couple were Mal and Lorraine Keeble who operated the local RACV towing service, bought from with Len Harrison. It was with some amusement that the town watched their wars as opponent Peter Trim set up the rival panel beating firm owned by Maria Pangbourne.

When Peter Trim was involved in a traffic incident, local Police Sergeant Trevor Connell brokered a settlement that included Peter taking out a front-page ad in *The Yea Chronicle* with a public apology to the townspeople. Such was the power of country town policing.

Everyone's friends were Bill and Val Wilson. Bill was a popular Shire President, both were involved in community service in Lions, and many other projects. The town welded together when their son Robert died in an awful road accident, followed soon after by the passing of their daughter Karen Dinning. There could no worse tragedy than having your children die before you. When two pass away tragically in the space of several months, it must be the ultimate test.

In 1986, Alexandra men Reg Scott and Roy Fox visited my newspaper office saying they could put me on the right track. They said it would take 'an hour and a half a week'; they were inviting me to become a Charter Member of the Rotary Club of Yea. My first exposure to Rotary had been as a teenager, watching a mate's father, Alan Stewart as District Governor.

Alexandra members including Jack Birtchnell had decided to sponsor the local Yea club. It provided an instant passport for me to meet weekly with the leading businessmen of the district on a social basis.

Engineer Daryl Callander became the Charter President, with a gala night overseen by District Governors Michael Reiner and Leo Gorman. Our Charter Members were doctor Philip Basser, teacher Ian Bell, car dealer Neil Beer, stock agent Ross Bryant, policeman Graeme Broadbent, plumber Graeme Clements, farm manager Tim Dale, hotelier Clarry Davison, electrician David Evans, accountant Gary Fitzgerald, farmers Les Hall and Peter Hauser, piano tuner David Lawson, cattle breeder Don Lawson, sheep breeder Bob Lockhart, stud cattle man Ric Long, farmer John McCormack, machinery dealer Bernie Quinlan, horse breeder Adrian Sier, butcher John Tainton and restaurateur Ray Watson.

Over time, others to join included Shire CEO Peter Mangan and planner Bob Adams, former Canberra Grammar School teacher David Anderson, builder Dick Dashwood, and Police Inspector Peter Beales.

The Club was pleased to recruit Royce Kronborg, a former Preston Rotarian of long standing, and ex-General Manager of Preston and Northcote Community Hospital. Royce and wife Audrey had retired to their 'Happy Valley' property at Flowerdale where bushranger Ned Kelly had once hidden out. The Kronborgs were family friends of my uncle Bill Wood.

We had an excellent range of speakers visit our club. From nearby Bonnie Doon, fellow Rotarian Garry Bernhardt gave us a fascinating yarn about his escape from behind German lines in World War II.

Local school teacher Ian Bell became involved in Rotary, and some of the connections must have been helpful when he stood to become a Councillor of the Shire of Yea.

I performed my stint as Club President in 1993-94, which was a timely combination with my financial collapse, the editorial stint in the Yarra Valley, and the work in Canberra! District Governor Roland Lawrance and wife Merle were supportive. I was pleased when it came time for Flowerdale farmer Norm Berndt to take over as President. My year had been a good fund-raiser for community projects; but Norm tripled that!

Presidents have since included Greg Alexander, Charlie Rattray, Dick Dashwood and Lionel Heres. Two of the best Sergeants-at-Arms, those entrusted with injecting humour in to the meetings, are John Sinclair and John Bett.

I was extremely pleased when my idea for a Rotary Club of Whittlesea came to fruition, after I had left Rotary. One of the prime-movers had been Whittlesea businesswoman Robyn France.

There is no shame in saying that I enjoyed being a big fish in a small pond. Later in Melbourne, I also enjoyed a further stint with the Rotary Club of Rosanna, alongside my friend President Ron Pearce.

Ron and Marilyn Pearce have been one of the most supportive couples in my life. They had been extremely successful in their own business through sheer hard work, and practice a true philanthropy with the object of not being discovered lending a hand to others. Marilyn was awarded life membership of Banyule Community Information, formerly the Citizens' Advice Bureau, for her years of help to those less privileged.

Ron was likewise raised in the tough areas of East Preston, and grew into a self-made success story. He started as a marketing cadet at British Petroleum, had his own oil heating distribution business, and sold a log fire heater manufacturing business to international interests. He is a canny investor, and is involved with many charitable organisations including Hi City Industries for disabled people. Marilyn was my Sunday School teacher at Oakhill Methodist Church in the early 1960's.

When Ron became District Governor of Rotary in 1992-93, I printed his

monthly *DG's Newsletter*. I prepared it newspaper style, and was able to distribute into the hands of every Rotarian in the district which extended from Melbourne to southern New South Wales. Ron and I had an elaborate network to facilitate the exchange of material from Rosanna to Yea before the era of faxes and E-mail.

The Rosanna club had started life in 1986 as the Rotary Club of Heidelberg North, and its charter members included another friend, former District Governor, Brian Bowen. Brian, a former boss of the Renault factory in West Heidelberg, has now moved to the Rotary Club of Diamond Creek.

There had been a selection of very different District Governors in Rotary: the quiet achiever, Maurice Denson from Cobram; the thoughtful Don Haberecht from Nariel, near Corryong; the thorough and friendly Gordon Milne, from Strathmore.

The Rosanna Club was certainly different from the fellowship-based country Rotary that I had known. One Rosanna member, Don Hamilton, is destined for sure to be a future District Governor. A former banker, Don works as an advisor at Bruce Ewan's Selected Financial Securities. He stands in for Ewan as a financial affairs commentator on Doug Aiton's 3AK drive program, and has his own show on the Heidelberg-based 3INR-FM community station. His Rotary career includes a 2001 Group Study Exchange to Brazil, where he leads a group of young Australian men and women on a month-long cultural and professional exchange.

Don also played a major part in assisting when I organised one of my final Rotary duties, before my own business financial affairs claimed my full attentions in 2000. Doug Aiton and Terry Lane agreed to be guest speakers at a club to promote their new book, *The First Century*, published by Michael Wilkinson's Information Australia group. It proved a hit, and saw 80 people attend, the largest to attend a Rosanna meeting for years.

Guest speakers are an important element in Rotary, but I have liked it best when it is the members telling their live stories. I was absolutely humbled when surgeon Ralph Ragazzon showed slides of his humble beginnings as the young son of a migrant family in Carlton. The family had a single room, separated by a blanket for privacy. Today, Ralph is a much respected medico with several practices in Melbourne.

Some of the leaders of the Club have included electrician Brian Summers, metal castings manufacturer Neil Watt, real estate agent Peter Tragardh, former banker Kel Cocking and carpet wholesaler Bill O'Halloran.

A former President Peter Lee died, but with women introduced to Rotary's membership, his place was taken by Dianne Lee, who also carried on the family's engineering business for a number of years.

Other women to join Rosanna Rotary included school principals Jan Shrimpton and Christine Morrison, trainer Linda Gidlund, fashion designer Joy George and property agent Lois Sparke.

Rotary enables many people from different backgrounds to join together socially, but also jointly undertaking community service projects. Former Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School principal John Shilliday, now a school chaplain, and Uniting Church Minister Peter Sanders, mix with the likes of panel beater Noel Henry and importer Ron McLaughlan.

They meet every week at Terry Knape's Robbie Burns Receptions, established by Heidelberg businessman Vic Graham, who also set up Salzburg Lodge. It sees an extraordinary mix of people including tyre dealer Ron Jenkins, plumbing fittings manufacturer Chris Hopkins, footwear retailer Ian McLaughlan, nursing home proprietors George and Marie Rayner, and investor Garry Terdich. A former senior consultant to Premier John Cain, Jack Opie, now a writer, is also a member.

For many, the weekly meetings are an only chance to get away from day-to-day business pressures. Rosanna solicitor Barrie Williams joined the Club back in 1973, when it was first chartered. He has maintained a 100 per cent attendance record over all that time.

Retired technical school teacher Lloyd Peel is one of the club's favourites as he quietly goes about whatever club responsibilities are handed to him. He is a talented writer of weekly club bulletin news stories.

Rotary is having to come to grips with a different view on delivering its community service. Diamond Creek man Robin Chapple is pushing the efforts of the worldwide philanthropic organisation to communicate via the Internet. Others are underscoring that as business leaders, the members need to use the talents and methods that they would in their own businesses, rather than a street stall mentality.

I disagree with newer Rotarians, especially in New South Wales, who are exploiting the fraternity for business networking. They say it fits in perfectly with the object "to encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise" and "the development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service" I sent sales flyers for this book to some Rotarians,



■ Ron Pearce invests me as a Paul Harris Fellow



■ My friend, award-winning author, the late Evan Green (centre) with Adrian Sier and Gary Fitzgerald.



■ Former Rotary District Governor Brian Bowen



■ Norm Berndt followed me as President at Yea

‘No Appearance, Your Worship’

My favorite time each week was Thursday to report the doings of the Seymour Magistrates' Court, managed by registrar Terry Smalley. One of those on the bench was Magistrate Bryan Cosgriff.

On one occasion he heard how a truck driver had been taking little sleep-preventing white pills (amphetamines), but presented a doctor's prescription to claim the drug was for weight-loss. "Stand up, Mr Defendant," came the instruction from the Bench. "Stand up, Mr Long," next said the 'beak', turning to the Press table. "Clerk of Courts, please give this prescription to Mr Long, he needs it more than the defendant."

Another magistrate, John Doherty, who now holds a senior post at Heidelberg Court, had one offender spellbound as he emphathised about his similar upbringing at West Heidelberg. The Magistrate had been able to make something of himself, what about the crim doing the same? The defendant agreed to go forth from that time and lead a blameless life. After Court, I remarked how impressive the story was; the Magistrate confided that he was actually raised in a more middle-class suburb.

At Yea, Magistrate Tony Ellis had the duty of permanently closing the Court. I was presented with the Court's shield for my duties. Yea Court had been the venue for more than a century to settle the disputes of the district. I watched as calm town solicitor Owen Jackson, mixed it with the excitable Rod Ryan of Mansfield, and a who's who of City lawyers.

My enthusiastic court reports led to the paper being nick-named as *The Yea Truth*. So it was with this masthead that we printed a special edition for a function to mark the retirement of Detective Sergeant Ian Welch, otherwise known as 'Columbo' - after the shabbily dressed TV detective played by Peter Falk, who could solve any crime within the show's 60 minutes.

Others to pay tribute to 'Columbo' were partner, Senior Detective Jim Sullivan, and Alexandra publican John O'Brien who installed Welch as a 'Life Member' of the Mount Pleasant Hotel. We had enjoyed many sessions of 'Post Court Analysis', sometimes with Superintendent Tony McDonough, at 'O'Bs' pub.

Similar healthy Press-Police Liaison Committees were similarly established for the efficient conduct of Courts at Yea, Mansfield, Whittlesea and Seymour.



■ Sen. Constables Ken Moore and Nigel Belsten stand guard at 'The Yea Chronicle' office.



■ Magistrate Bryan Cosgriff (seated) with clerk Sharon Elson and Seymour Court registrar Terry Smalley provided plenty of 'copy' every week for my 'Chronicle' newspaper group.



■ When Det. Sgt. Ian 'Columbo' Welch (inset) retired from Alexandra CIB, I produced a skit newspaper - 'The Yea Truth' - which proved a hit at the farewell.

Amen To That!

Tom Dignam asked for only one commitment when he sold the Yea paper to me. His request: not to re-create the religious tensions between Catholics and Protestants that had plagued the rural district earlier in the century. Dignam was a passionate Catholic, and a liberal thinker. I didn't have to create any controversy. Yea's religious leaders could do it all by themselves.

An Old Ivanhoe Grammarian, Fr Peter Williams, rocked the villagers when he resigned his Anglican commision at St Luke's Parish Church, to become a Catholic Priest.

One short-time Presbyterian minister copped a whispering campaign when he faced Seymour Court on allegations that he had physically assaulted his daughters.

The Rev. Stefan Slucki, another Presbyterian minister, who won a measure of popularity, particularly because of his blindness, was a hellfire and brimstone preacher. He ran headlong into strife when he wrote a Christmas message for *The Yea Chronicle*, warning readers that they would only get to God if they believed in Christ. Peter Isaacson wrote a letter to the editor (me) saying that this was news to Jews.

Anglican priest Fr Ross Gilham provided the most unusual story for my newspapers when he was simultaneously stood down as a Church minister, and also as a medical practitioner.

Gilham had been a school master at Geelong Grammar's prestigious Timbertop School where Princes Charles had attended for a year. Gilham had studied at Oxford, and became Rector of the St Luke's Anglican Parish in Yea, with a special dispensation to practise medicine part-time at a Seymour clinic.

Ross was accused in later years of having a pethidine addiction, and it is no secret that he was accused of also having a thirst for some of his time in Yea. Gilham was accused by a fellow Seymour medical practitioner of some sedative prescription irregularities. At the same time, his Bishop stood him down from his Ministry, pending psychological assessment.

Gilham was a supremely intelligent man who I had befriended. Around Christmas 1992, he claimed to have divine revelations delivered to him.

Close to Christmas Eve, an ambulance and Police called to the Gilham house, and Ross asked for me to be present. The ambulance was bound in a straight line for Larundel Psychiatric Hospital at Bundoora, and ambo John Morris wanted me to sign the form to commit Gilham.

It was not until then that I realised how easy it was to commit someone. Given the trust that Ross had invested in a friendship, I found it impossible to sign the commital papers.

Ross asked me to print his side of the story in my papers covering both his Parish, and his medical practice. I honoured the commitment, with the headline: 'Priest Denies Wrong Doing'.

Church elders Bruce Kindred and Doug Zerbe visited my house, urging me not to print the story. (Mrs Patricia Zerbe is sister of Victorian Governor John Landy.) It was Kindred and Zerbe's first and only Anglican Ministry to our home in the 10 years we were in Yea.

Ross Gilham was forced to stay in Larundel longer than he wished. He made appeals to local member Marie Tehan to assist him, but it was to no avail. It was some time before Ross won his freedom. His son later thanked me for my support. Ross was last heard running a licensed grocery, and the 'Ginross' editorial-indexing service, in Torquay.

My *Yea Chronicle* had not sought to create religious controversy. But we did have a duty as a news-paper to publish a Court report about a church leader accused of assault; another Christian leader who was engaging in a public spat with a prominent Jew; plus a third suspended from his post and accused of medical misdoings.

The quadrella arrived when Yea's Catholic priest, Fr Terry Pidoto of Sacred Heart Parish, also a Scoutmaster, was charged by Police, accused of serious offences. Those matters were understood to still be before the County Court when this book went to press in 2001.



■ **Local Catholic priest, Fr Terry Pidoto, with Anglican priest, Rev. Dr Ross Gilham, at a Palm Sunday service. Both were removed from their postings at Yea.**

Yea: End Days

Federal Treasurer Paul Keating sought to 'cool down' Australia's economy with 'the recession we had to have'. My diary for my 34th birthday on October 19, 1990, notes: "We don't want it cooled. We want it boiling hot. Otherwise, we'll all be freezed out."

Perhaps a birthday drink or two had removed the word 'frozen' from my lexicon, but the meaning was abundantly clear. And my prediction was correct too.

Rural business people found their budgets were much tighter, with some unable to pay their advertising bills to our business. Understanding how country life is conducted is impossible for city people. It does mean lending a hand to your neighbor in tough times. And that meant running ads on the slate for many of the district's clients ... to the tune of \$110,000.

With this growing debtors' ledger, and still paying off our giga-guarantees, the decision had to be made in 1993 to sell the newspaper business, to honour our remaining debts. Fleur and I had paid more than 90 per cent of the carry-over from Victorian Media, yet were falling in the final lap. Here was a good business, going at a 'fire sale' price.

I sought out the expert advice of Kenneth Stout, a partner at Ernst and Young (\$271 per hour); who delegated the job to Darren Brown, manager (\$176 per hour); a senior accountant (\$123 per hour); an accountant (\$90 per hour); a trainee accountant (\$70 per hour); and secretary (\$71 per hour). All pre-paid of course. I elected to do most of the typing (unpaid).

Tenders were called for potential purchasers, and the accountants advised that talks were held with 28 parties including Trevor Dainton of the McPherson family's Shepparton Newspapers; and Pat Martin of the Elliott Newspaper Group. Brian McCarthy, soon to become MD of Rural Press, flew in to have a chat. And all the usual suspects did too.

Former publisher Tom Dignam dedicated one of his books to the institution of *The Yea Chronicle*, and such a grand tradition weighed heavily when I heavily discounted the sale price of the masthead to Geoff Heyes of Alexandra Newspapers Pty Ltd, publishers of the neighboring *Alexandra, Eildon and Marysville Standard*. It was my fervent hope that his company would take tender care of the 108-year-old paper and the district that supported it.

Today, *The Yea Chronicle* is a sub-standard paper, despite initial best efforts from journalist Margret Aujard. Averaging just 12 pages, with more than half of it 'lifted' from another area 40 kilometres away, the paper is a long way from our own frenetic activity of assembling 48 pages.

A condition of the sale of the Yea paper was for me to become Managing Editor of *The Upper Yarra Mail*, founded by distant relative Mark Snell, and owned by Heyes and his business partner Hartley Higgins, within 45 days.

I do not admire Heyes and Higgins over their conduct in this matter. They left me out to dry for three months, with the job not becoming available until September 1993, at a time when I desperately needed income. They tried to renegotiate the agreed fee - downwards of course. They argued over already agreed conditions about a car. Even my job title was downgraded to Production Editor.

Here I was, as an award-winning newspaperman, forced to fax my edited pages for their approvals, before going to press. They invested little trust in what had been a mediocre paper. One of the few people to support me during this time was casual Council reporter Mal Gill, now senior reporter at Fairfax Community Newspapers.

Today, the 'Deputy Editor's' job is carried out by the talented Sue Thompson, with whom I worked at Leader. The newspapers are in good editorial hands.

Within six months, I was looking for work elsewhere. I prepared substantial submissions to Julian Swinstead, Managing Director of News Limited Suburban Newspapers, even flying to Parramatta at my own expense to make the pitch. I suggested that I become Leader Newspapers' Marketing Manager in Melbourne. He seemed more interested in displaying a managerial arrogance, and playing with his new remote-control office door.

I likewise made an approach to Neil Collyer at Fairfax Community Newspapers for a Marketing Manager's vacancy. And, through Cliff Stoneman at Dunhill Consulting, I found myself talking to Eric Beecher at Text Media, about becoming Publisher of *The Canberra Weekly*.

It was long way from Yea, in so very many ways.

Capital Idea

This is not a poisoned chalice, but it probably is a tarnished chalice.' So warned Text Media wunderkid, Eric Beecher, when he appointed me as Publisher of *The Canberra Weekly* newspaper in May 1994.

The paper was losing the equivalent of a million dollars a year, and this had to be halted immediately.

Eric's company had formed a joint venture with the Canberra real estate agents who had been publishing *The Community Times*, but even the best efforts saw the new company continue to haemorrhage to the tune of more than \$20,000 a week. *Melbourne Weekly* General Manager Matthew Pearce impressed upon me the need to run the operation on a shoestring. They picked the right man for frugality.

My early efforts as Publisher were frustrated when Eric, and his Sydney director Eddie Thomas, refused to move the paper's Deputy Publisher Trish O'Reilly, who wanted to work out her notice. This was a simple waste of valuable weeks as staff, miffed by my changes and cutbacks, took their greivances to a sympathetic ear.

Worse still Trish and I had to live together ... but not in the Biblical sense! The company had a two-storey town house in Kingston, just metres from the newspaper's office. It was strictly an 'Upstairs, Downstairs' operation with the moody O'Reilly playing 'no speaks' at the home address. I was on a \$92,000 package, plus everything not nailed down. I earned every cent.

But within weeks I was underway. O'Reilly eventually moved back to hometown Taree, before taking on a Sydney job with Text Media. And I could get about the job I was appointed to do. To save on print bills, the 112,000-circulation was cut. I imported Gary Fitzgerald from Yea to institute our own home delivery service, instead of a costly arrangement with Canberra's newsagents, and the Progress Press company. Canberra transport operator Rick Creech helped in the secretive overnight change.

I trimmed costs dramatically, but maintained editorial independence and integrity. For instance, I fired a restaurant reviewer Mary Brander, being paid hundreds weekly to live it up in Canberra's restaurants. If anyone was to do that job, I could think of a big fella closer to home!

And I revved up revenue. A local TV weather man came to me, suggesting we could use his profile to sell space. He had plenty of time to offer during

the day, and it could work well for both him and the newspaper. I didn't have time to implement his suggestion. But I did catch up with him weekly on a friendlier basis, a few years later, at the ATV-10 studios in Melbourne. The man was *Ten News* weather presenter Mike Larkan.

Whilst keeping the newspaper's upmarket integrity intact, I created an editorial-producing division within the marketing wing for ad-vertorials. I recruited talented Canberra journalist Emily Stone for the task.

Within four months the paper was in the black, and the Canberra office was sending small dividend cheques back to the head office treasury headed by Russell Martin and David Davies.

My return to the 'big league' where I knew no-one in town, boosted my self-confidence that I could again 'mix it' in board rooms, this time in the national capital. A significant consulting job for Melbourne lawyer Glenn Hodges into the *Border Mail* company at Albury underscored this confidence.

I was pushing it hard, commuting weekly, making the six-hour drive from Yea to Canberra on Sundays. This gave me a Monday-Thursday week in the national capital, and work in the Melbourne head office on Fridays.

On Saturdays, I was moonlighting, practising the new fangled desktop publishing for Keith Peplar's burgeoning *Seymour-Nagambie Advertiser*. But I had been out of office politics for too long. I believe in open office space, and started tearing down the partitions that turn offices into mini-empires.

My off-the-cuff remark that I wanted to remove the chook houses, was turned around by one to infer I didn't support women in the workplace. At my suggestion, Canberra-based Text Magazines trump Bobbi Mahlab led a female staffers' forum to iron out any perceived problems. There were none.

Bobbi has since gone on to successfully publish *The City News* and *Pymont-Ultimo News* in partnership with Alex Cramb. More than six years later, both have since been very supportive of my *Media Flash* enterprise.

My business fine-tuning in Canberra continued: I played hardball with Canweb Print directors Cec Hodgkinson and Ross Gibson in negotiating refunds, and a much cheaper print price for the next two years. To do this, I ended the cosy pre-press arrangements where we paid up to \$175 per page to Matthew and Penny Learmonth's Parkhouse Publishing, who had free use of our offices and some facilities. Their approach was foreign to me: Parkhouse saw themselves only as 'designers', with much of the work already typed by our staff anyway. The new price at Canweb was \$50 per page.

The crack sales team included Georg Atanasoff, Tom Stokman and Ann Mataczynna. My favourites were the young David Buckmaster and Leslee Piper: by no means the best sales people, but honest and eager.

I was shocked that one woman, Anne Crimmins, was left to do the entire accounting for the Canberra business. She was overwhelmed with work, and collectables were approaching \$500,000 on paper. Here was the cheapest bank in the world; all we had to do was collect it. I quickly recruited Denise Overs and others to handle the many outstanding collections, under the guidance of Gary Fitzgerald and myself.

Gary and I were occasionally able to meet in the national capital for a drink, but our work schedules were heavy. Long-time Canberra political journalist Richard Farmer had Gary and I as his guests in his corporate box at the Bruce Stadium, to follow Mal Meninga and his beloved Canberra Raiders rugby league side. After that, the Raiders received special attention in *The Canberra Weekly*, including a color premiership wrap-around.

Editor Chris Uhlmann had announced that he was moving on, and today conducts the morning program on Canberra's ABC. He was supported by journalists Anthony Mason, son of the prominent Judge; Jillian Bigg-Wither; and Cecilia Burke, formerly of Wangaratta in north-eastern Victoria.

I was lucky to recruit my old friend, Evan Hannah, who had moved on from the Saturdays at Bacchus Marsh, to become Managing Editor of *The Manly Daily*. Hannah signed up with Beecher's Text Media, but I never was able to work with him.

There is no question that I was a very effective Publisher, and gave a general managership that promptly reversed the \$1 million annual haemorrhage. Beecher wanted to fiddle with the formula. He had me present a board room proposal that the recently rejuvenated tabloid be converted to an A4 magazine format. I didn't agree with it. So too, Director Mark Carnegie took Beecher aside and slammed the proposal, soundly criticising me with it. It was an eye-opener in board room tactics with investors.

Was *The Canberra Weekly* meant to work? Some accountants tell me there is more to be made in some grouped companies with a loss-making or tax-loss operation rather than the conventional profitable concern. Beecher was calling me daily for sales figures, and urging cheques back to head office. I am certain he wanted a positive cash-flow and a conventional profit.

One of my favourite films is where Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder in *The Producers*. In the Mel Brooks' movie, hardluck Broadway film producer

Max Bialystock sells 25,000 per cent in a scheme that's certain to flop. It all goes awry when the *Springtime For Hitler* project actually works! But I digress, and I am not suggesting any Text Media ill-doing.

Documents were presented to me to sign as Publisher that the goodwill of the paper was worth \$2.4 million. At that stage, in my opinion it was truthfully worth bugger all - as was later borne out. *The Melbourne Weekly* and *The Sydney Weekly* goodwill figures were being shown in the Text Media Group balance sheet at around \$9 million and \$5 million respectively, and being borrowed against at the National Australia Bank.

I had already had enough 'funny money' episodes for my lifetime, and although in a completely different category, I declined to sign this paperwork. Simultaneously, rightly or wrongly, Text Media accountant David Davies told me that auditors Coopers and Lybrand had demanded a 'Competency To Trade' report.

I was making too many waves in Canberra, upsetting the cosy print arrangements with Canweb. I had negotiated hard, partly with Canweb directors Cec Hodgkinson and Ross Gibson. I had threatened to take the million-dollar print job to Rural Press at North Richmond, near Sydney, headed by Bob Lockyer. Talks about printing were also held with Roger Gorrel at *The Daily Advertiser*, Wagga. This had upset the Canberra interests. I didn't know it, but the end was nigh.

My original agreement had been for a six-month contract from May to November 1994 to provide my services as Publisher for *The Canberra Weekly*. Interestingly, on the final day of that same week, Eric Beecher and Diana Gribble called me for a discussion in Melbourne.

During the preparation of this book, Text Media Chairman Di Gribble wrote to me in December 2000, urging that certain details of that time not be published. It seemed to me to be an extraordinary request from the fearless Australian publisher who had driven McPhee Gribble as a leading independent publishing icon. Suffice to say, as the Americans express it, I felt I had been given a 'bum rap'.

I was so incensed by those 1995 circumstances that I called in Fleur at that time to be my witness to what I regarded as a bizarre end-game. By the end of that November 1994 afternoon, it was obvious there was to be no ongoing association with Text Media. I opted for a quick \$10,000 pay-out and left that afternoon.

Fleur later told me I was literally foaming at the mouth.



■ Above: My 'Canberra Weekly' advertising sales team, 1994.
■ Below: At Old Parliament House, presenting the Westfield Shoppingtown business awards. My 'date' was Leslee Piper.





■ **Top Left:** I would have David Buckmaster on any media sales team. This young man taught me that a sales team is not just about sales. His fresh and humour-filled attitude helped build a successful team.

■ **At Left:** Georg Atanasoff was one of the senior ad managers at 'The Canberra Weekly' and was one of the best I've seen at selling 'distress' space at deadline.

■ **Above Right:** Some of my 'Canberra Weekly' editorial team, led by Chris Uhlmann. Jillian Bigg-Wither, Anthony Mason and Cecilia Burke.

The Advertiser

I was out-of-work, and penniless ... again! Here we were at Christmas 1994, committed to an expensive Melbourne mansion, and 'untouchable' professionally.

No job prospects, with a 14-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son still committed to an aggregate of nine more years of private school education. Those annual bills would average more than \$10,000 annually each.

At one stage, I was cashing bags of five-cent pieces to pay for the household milk and bread.

I was invited to make my way to *The Age* board room for a chat with Managing Director Stuart Simson, but that appointment seemed to be more a fishing expedition about Text Media, than discovering my professional abilities. Leader Newspapers boss Laurie Coghlan offered me a sales representative's job in Canberra. I had done that type of work almost 20 years previously, and it did not interest.

And so began *The Advertiser* local newspaper in Eltham in 1995. Up against one of Leader's strongest and most profitable newspapers, the *Diamond Valley News*, edited by Noeline Egan. I didn't have a 'zac', and rented some computers from Bruce Higgs of Southern Cross Computer Rentals. Six years later, I still deal with him to show my gratitude for backing a battler.

The Advertiser was based on the old local paper formula that I had well practised, and that Keith Peplar had continued with the *Seymour-Nagambie Advertiser*, with the assistance of ad man Vern Johnson, sports writer Peter Liepins, and columnist Herma Duthie.

Newspapers in the Diamond Valley, in Melbourne's green belt, traced their beginnings to *The Evelyn Observer*, started by James Rossiter of Kangaroo Ground in 1873. In 1874, Robert Harris served his apprenticeship on the lively paper, some five years later acquiring an interest: first in partnership and then as owner.

World War I saw the paper move to the new rail head of Hurstbridge, re-naming itself as the *Eltham & Whittlesea Shires Advertiser*, with the business still under Harris' 47-year control under his death in 1921.

The newspaper then entered a period of ownership changes with George Green of *The Heidelberg News*, the Mott family, Herbert Davies and Arthur Brindley. The paper closed in War restrictions of 1942, and did not re-open.

I named my paper as *The Advertiser*, although few locals realised the historical significance. My *Advertiser* newspaper began life just as Jeff Kennett's Victorian Liberal State Government unilaterally sacked the popularly-elected Councillors from 211 local governments, replacing these with their own appointed Commissioners in 78 new Councils.

The Diamond Valley area was to be re-named Nillumbik, and under the aegis of the gentlemanly Chief Commissioner, Don Cordell, whose political activities as Upper Yarra Shire President I had reported at the *Upper Yarra Mail* in 1993-94. He was assisted by lawyer Kevin Abbott, who distanced himself from residents with an unfortunate voter perception of pomposity; and Jean Austin. Kevin is actually a humourous man. In fact, Abbott was vitally concerned about participation of locals, but it just didn't come across.

Don was a personable bloke, accompanied to functions by his intelligent and astute wife Liz Cordell. But the natives were running wild. Former Shire President Robert Marshall was feeling very disenfranchised, and could tap into an established political machine to make life uncomfortable for Shire Chief Executive Officer Barry Rochford and executives.

At one stage, with the assistance of local ALP secretary Mick Blair, Marshall tried to knock off Eltham MP Wayne Phillips in a State Election. Marshall lost, and the same fate met Sigmund Jørgensen of Montsalvat at the next poll, despite a campaign launched by State Opposition Leader John Brumby. Marshall won local office for a while, but lost for the first time in 21 years after a vigorous election campaign.

Kennett's appointees were on the nose. The Premier's politics helped Federal Jaga Jaga MHR Jenny Macklin win office. The Liberals were even less favoured when Jean Austin resigned, and was cynically replaced by the Premier's former Ivanhoe MP Vin Heffernan, who had been beaten for the seat by Labor's Craig Langdon.

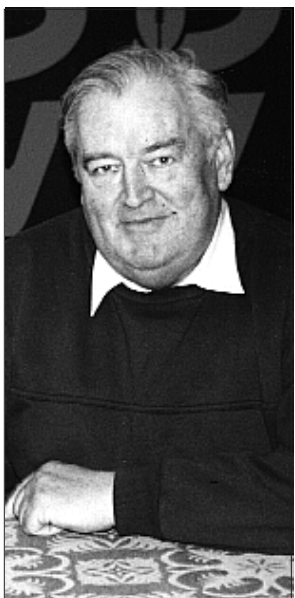
Activist Mark Burns headed the Democratic Nillumbik Association, with a continuing barrage of queries at Council time, until Question Time was abolished. Burns was also co-ordinator of *Diamond Creek News*, which became *Valley Views*. The Commissioners were taking a public savaging, and a letter campaign to local papers was underway by Dr Greg Bailey, Karin Geradts, Linda Laos, Jack Lawson and a team of others. Jock Kyme took it to the extent that he was sued for libel by the Commissioners. The only effect that this had was to galvanise support against Kennett's appointees, who withdrew the Supreme Court action, using public funds to pay Kyme's costs.



■ Stuart Chisholm worked for a short time as an 'Advertiser' reporter. He is being 'briefed' by Nillumbik Shire PR man Ron Smith.



■ Prime Minister John Howard lines up for my 'Advertiser' camera, with McEwen Liberal MHR Fran Bailey, at the Yarra Glen Racing Club.



■ Left: Peter Floyd, Secretary of the Diamond Valley Football League, and Plenty Valley FM identity, was a great help when I established 'The Advertiser' group.

■ Above: Brian Wharton, Barry McCormack and Kim Fuhrmann of the 'Upper Yarra Mail' taught me the finer points of running a 'feeder' newspaper in Melbourne.

I was able to use the high-pitch political fever of the time to promote *The Advertiser*. Roma O'Callaghan had me as a guest on her Plenty Valley FM radio program, and *The Advertiser* formed a link with the station for continuing publicity.

Here was a paper being set up on a working capital of five-cent pieces!

Other activists set themselves up to be elected at the next poll. In the left corner was Sigmund Jørgensen, who had a campaign launched by State Opposition Leader John Brumby. Future Mayor Marg Jennings was direct with me: all she wanted was a fair coverage. Later on, right-wing *Nillumbik First* forces organised a campaign with folk such as Alex Rosovick. I remember Alex better as a fellow console operator at Shell Fairfield Superwash in our 20-something University years.

Nillumbik Council brought in talented PR couple Ron Smith and Shirley Baynes-Smith of Corporate Communications to smooth over the waters with press and public. They did it very well, with the assistance of a skilled Shire Communications Director Justin Napier. Of course, I had known Smith when he was a Greens activist 'Gary Gumnut' in Sherbrooke, and I was Manager of the *Free Press* and *Knox News*. Today, the Smiths run a number of businesses including Countrytowns.com.au, Greenweb and Medialaunch.

Trouble beckoned for a while when Leader Newspapers tried to muzzle me as an opponent press, with their executive team, including General Manager Laurie Coghlan, Marketing Manager Tom Milosevic, and Finance Director John Beer, organising a court action alleging I had breached copyright by publishing ads, on instruction from their clients. This action was settled out of court with the assistance of Peter Haug from Mills Oakley solicitors, but it cost me some thousands that I really did not have.

By October 1996, it was my 40th birthday, and I decided to bill it as my media 'Silver Anniversary'.

This included a grand party, with entertainment provided by comedian friend Mal Meikle: accordianist-minstrel John Ferguson, and organist Gordon McKenzie, who had performed on the TV programs.

Premier Jeff Kennett wrote in a souvenir anniversary: "I congratulate Ash Long for 25 years in the newspaper industry, an industry which saw a determined newsboy at the *Sunday Observer* work his way up the ladder to become Manager of Leader Associated Newspapers, and now Publisher of the *Advertiser* Group.

"I have come into frequent contact with Ash since the early 1980's, where he has covered my visits at various venues. a strong supporter of job creation and growth, Ash becomes involved in the communities in which he works.

"This is Ash's Silver Anniversary, and I not only congratulate him, but also wish him well for another 25 years."

Freshly discharged from bankruptcy, I was keen to have another go. Accountant Greg Kennedy and friend Gary Fitzgerald had given me a good kick along. I had special permission to be in business, as long as my business name had my name included. I made detailed written proposals, with business plans, financial reports and line-by-line projections to Leo Gagic at AGC; Nanette Carruthers at ANZ; Peter Tendan at Bank of Melbourne; Gary Bruhn and Keith Williams at Bendigo Bank; Ken Douglas at Citibank; Donna Moses at Colonial - State Bank of NSW; Simon Pho at Hong Kong Bank of Australia; Bob Crawford at Howard Pacific; Sean O'Brien at ING Mercantile; Grant Hopkinson at Metway Bank; Barry Lincoln at Lincoln Leasing and Finance; Peter Carr at Westpac; as well as at the Trust Bank, Advance Bank; and the Plenty Credit Co-Operative. Eventually, I got the message. My credit rating was so bad that I joked that even my cash bounced!

I even had trouble joining Bartercard, except for the efforts of an old newspaper man, Tom Joiner. Premier Kennett was not as effusive when I wrote to him several months later asking for some assistance to grow *The Advertiser* as a Victorian small business. I had no working capital whatsoever, and was operating on a wing and a prayer.

After helping to publicise Kennett's own small knitting mill business on the front-pages of *The Seymour Chronicle*, and giving liberal publicity in a number of elections, I was hopeful that he would offer some introductions. He had given me his unlisted home phone number, so I was hopeful.

Instead, the cocky Premier, at the height of his political arrogance, bluntly wrote to me that government was not a provider of 'finance of the last resort', and told me not to write to him on business care of his home address again.

Even small business blowhard, Peter Boyle, a member of the Premier's trusted enterprise circle, found it difficult to get help at a time when the conservative government was in power. He was soon to sell his decade-old Post Newspapers group for a fire-sale \$½-million to Fairfax Community Newspapers. For all those years, more recently under the editorial leadership of Charles Jenkinson, he had made the lives of Liberal politicians easier than they would have otherwise been locally.

Many politicians, from both sides of Parliament, were just as comfortable and cocky in their own cosy arrangements. Alex Andrianopoulos in the well-held Labor seat of Mill Park didn't even bother sending out press releases to the locally circulating *Advertiser* newspaper. Now he is Speaker in the Victorian Legislative Assembly!

The same applied for Peter Batchelor in the Labor-forever seat of Thomastown. It is lazy, cynical politics - forgetting that they should act as servants of the public. Batchelor is currently State Minister for Transport.

Quitting, however, wasn't in my lexicon. The *Advertiser* papers grew. In later times I moved the printing of the paper from the *Latrobe Valley Express* at Morwell. My primary activity there had been trying to avoid Production Manager Roger Vivian who collected the cheques for my weekly jobs. Even a week's grace with the print bill made a significant difference to my business cashflow.

I was now printing at Enterprise Web, managed by Mark Waite and Steve Earls, in partnership with Cameron O'Reilly's APN News and Media. As APN's local publisher, Brian Stagman closed the local *Southern Cross* newspapers, and withdrew from the Enterprise agreement, the presses were taken over by Shepparton-based McPherson Media, with Paul McPherson as local manager.

At the City of Whittlesea, Chief Executive Officer Graeme Brennan was more than helpful in me establishing *The Whittlesea Advertiser*. Local Councillors such as Rex Griffin supported the paper with plenty of news leads.

I now had seven editions covering Yea, Whittlesea, Diamond Valley, Heidelberg-Ivanhoe, Preston-Reservoir, Yarra Ranges ... and even a *Peninsula-Western Port Advertiser*, with plenty of news releases from politicians of the like of Liberal Transport Minister Robin Cooper.

Seven newspapers - built from a bag of five-cent pieces. Not bad for a one-man band!



■ *Book-end babes:*
Sigmund Jørgensen and Ash Long

PHOTO: JENNI MITCHELL



■ *Top Left: James Long, 12, features in 'The Advertiser' readership publicity campaign. 1995.*

■ *Top Right: Local businessman Albert Di Pietro became a close friend.*

■ *Left: Bruce Skeggs founded the 31NR-FM 'Inner FM' radio station based at Heidelberg.*

Press Council Stoush

The Australian Press Council is largely a waste of time. It is a body, set up by the major publishers, largely to hose down the vocal minority who feel they have been maltreated by some form of press conspiracy or misbehaviour.

The Australian Press Council is a law unto itself. Its adjudications against newspapers mean precious little. And it holds itself accountable to no-one: there is no way to appeal a decision made by the collected wisdom of the Press Council. As recent Chairman, Professor Dennis Pearce, wrote to me: "The Council is an independent body so there is no-one to whom an appeal can be taken except to the Council."

My laughable experience came when reader Karin Geradts, the local greens ringmistress of the Diamond Valley, lodged her complaint against my four-paragraph *Advertiser* front-page item: '\$5 Levy - Each!'

"All households will pay a \$5 annual levy on their rates - with the cash being paid directly to the local Aboriginal community. That's the \$85,000 idea put by the Wurundjeri Tribe, Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council to last week's Nillumbik Council. 'Elder' Bill Nicholson says the payments would help aboriginal people find self-respect," I reported.

"Nillumbik Council last month initiated a recognition event - called a 'Gayip' - which it believes will assist with reconciliation. Following the Council's 'initiative', the Wurundjeri people are now suggesting that a percentage of rates raised, or a levy on every rate notice, be paid to them."

Inside, I expressed the Editorial Comment, an opinion: "We hate the phrase - but Nillumbik Shire Council looks like being 'sucked in' with the romance of reconciliation with the aboriginal community.

"Not content with a ceremony, an apology and a Gayip ... Elder Bill seems to have adapted his people's wants pretty well to white-man currency ... Good try Bill.

"The Inquiry into the Nillumbik Council already says that there are questions about Councillors coming to grips to what their jobs actually area.

They seem to have forgotten that their role is basically looking after roads and rubbish. Please leave reconciliation to another arena. Our rates money needs better stewardship."

Geradts complained the two pieces were "scandalous, inciteful, hysterical

and offensive to the general public". She was the only complainant.

The Press Council adjudication prepared by the Executive Secretariat headed by Jack Herman noted Ms Geradts "refused to write to the paper to put her views, stating that the editor had, in the past, used her letters as feature articles that merely served to 'perpetuate his 'rag'."

"The article, however, omitted to emphasise to readers that the 'Paying The Rent Concept' was only a submission on which the Shire Council intended to seek community views before responding.

"The article's strident headline, its lead sentence as quoted above and reference to an earlier reconciliation initiative supported by the Shire all created an impression that the rate levy proposal was considerably closer to being adopted than it actually was. To the extent that this lack of balance was potentially misleading to readers, the complaint is upheld."

Twenty-three words in, the article gives the qualification that the Press Council said was missing. Are they blind or stupid?

It's little wonder that the Press Council's Chairman Designate told 3AK's Doug Aiton that he wants a journalist to write the adjudications in future.



■ So-called 'Greens' activist Karin Geradts lodged her complaint about my writings to the Australian Press Council.

■ Conduct more worthy of review was her electoral campaign about 'community and environment' - where she littered the environment with unsightly signs.

Night Lines

In 1996, Bruce Mansfield and Philip Brady advertised on their 3AW *Remember When* program that they would be making a personal appearance at the Diamond Creek Pharmacy, to promote the wares of their magnetic health items advertiser Dick Wicks.

Dick, a former St Kilda footballer, tells the story of his days of alcoholism and pain, after injuring his knee at a Sportsmen's Night with Victorian football legend, Ted Whitten. Dick found medical assistance with magnets, and later went on sell a range of magnetic 'pain relief' products.

I covered the visit for *The Advertiser*, and later met up again soon after with Bruce Mansfield at the Old Ivanhoe Grammarians football, where he was watching his son John play for the team.

Mansfield related to me how he was under siege from listeners asking for copies of poems that he broadcast in the evening *Nightline* program. He listened intently as I told him of the success being enjoyed by Sydney radio man John Laws who was selling 100,000 copies of the editions of his poetry book. The dollar signs appealed to Bruce.

Bruce Mansfield was born the younger son of Stan Mansfield, a wealthy Thornbury printer, of strict Christadelphian values. Mansfield Junior later remarked that his father took on a 'Scrooge-like' persona, even refusing his son an introduction to his bank, when it came time to acquire a family home. Humbug chromosomes.

Bruce Mansfield's stage characters portrayed similar 'tight' traits, which have been a subject of laughter amongst his fellow media performers. Mal Meikle recalls Mansfield scooping up the audience freebies into a briefcase at the tapings of Johnny Young's *Young Talent Time* TV program at ATV-10.

Rather than a conventional personable approach of building bridges, Mansfield prides himself, on air, in building a wall around him 'to deflect the pricks'. In doing so, he became one of the team members sometimes distanced at the radio stations where he worked.

Likewise he was avoided by some of the *Good Morning Australia* producers at Channel 10 when he made his weekly appearances with Bert Newton. And yet I found Bruce could be one of the funniest men I have ever met.

The Mansfield radio career started in 1961 when, at age 17, he won a junior announcer's competition which was accompanied by a £100 prize.

Until that time, Mansfield admits he had been a poor student, briefly at Ivanhoe Grammar, then sent to Macleod High. He worked for a short at retailers Myer and Foys, before looking for a radio career, which started at 3KZ, in the era of General Manager Eddie Balmer, and a stable of announcers including Ron Cadee, Norman Swain, Kevin O'Gorman and Stan Rofe.

Shortly after the early passing of his mother in the early 1960's, Mansfield was sent to relatives in Adelaide. He did not perform National Service. He and his father took a six-month trip overseas in 1964, and it was the mid-60s before fronting the microphone, again at the low-rating 3XY.

Weekends saw booth announcing work at GTV-9, when voiceover men like Bert Newton, Philip Brady, Hal Todd and Peter Smith were on duty to say words like 'Out Now' at the end of *Australian Women's Weekly* commercials. It was during this era that Bruce became accustomed to working along household names like Jack Little and Paul Jennings.

Bruce's talent as a mimic was picked up by *In Melbourne Tonight* producers, and it was in the end-days of Graham Kennedy's national program that he was introduced. He probably became best known as the 'Chinese Superman' with Daryl Somers on *Hey Hey It's Saturday*.

TV station accountant Max Stuart was making the move to Sir Reginald Ansett's new station at Nunawading, ATV-0, and encouraged Bruce to follow suit. Mike Willesee's appointment as News Director, brought an invitation for Mansfield to head the nightly *Eyewitness News*, against Eric Pearce at GTV-9 and Brian Naylor at HSV-7. Annette Allison was soon added as Bruce's co-host.

Just 12 months in, and Michael Schildberger was given the task of News Chief ... and David Johnston was brought in as newsreader. Station Manager Wilf Barker gave Mansfield the option of hosting the *Midday Movie* and doing station promotions, allowing him freedom for outside work, including the Val Morgan cinema ad voice-overs (at \$2 each!) with Rosemary Margan. Today, Margan performs the 'live-read' commercials on her brother-in-law Neil Mitchell's 3AW program. Unfortunately, these days she barely completes a read without a stumble; the metaphor is a blurred newspaper, that Mitchell certainly would never had let onto the streets when he was Editor of Melbourne's *Herald* newspaper.

3AW breakfast man John Blackman asked Mansfield to join him on air, after Bruce was making early morning calls impersonating radio veteran Norman Banks. The Banks family had taken offence, so the the character of

'Uncle Roy' was born, becoming part of Brian White's top stable of 3AW performers in the early 1980's.

Blackman was tempted to jump ship when White was given the job of creating a Sydney-Melbourne 2UE-3AK radio network for Kerry Packer, with stars like John Laws, George Negus, Phillip Adams and Mark Day.

'Blackers' quit the 3AW team, amidst much bitterness from the station's morning presenter Derryn Hinch. It left Mansfield to carry on the morning shift with producer Darren James, until 1989 when GM Mike Peterson shunted the program to be replaced by 'thinking man's' presenter Bill Tuckey.

Bruce joined Alan Bond's 3AK, amongst fellow on-air personalities such as former Democrats leader Don Chipp, author Frank Hardy, and publicist Margaret Fletcher (formerly Margaret St George and Margaret Peacock, and now Margaret Ingram again).

The demise of the Rev. Alex Kenworthy, after allegations by Derryn Hinch of Kenworthy's womanising, saw Philip Brady and Bruce Mansfield join as a team, at the invitation of 3AW's marketing manager David Mann. It was to be the start of a successful nine-year top-rating partnership.

What amazed me was the off-air contempt in which Mansfield held most of his fellow performers ... especially Brady, who he often treated in the same way off-air as the on-air 'second banana' character. If there is one thing that I learned it is that Philip Brady is nobody's fool.

Brady was born in 1939, son of a Mental Hygiene Authority psychiatrist, who also composed popular music. His mother had worked at Allans Music Store, and the family environment was one of privilege, with Phil attending nearby Xavier College, in the company of TV-host-to-be Mike Walsh, Crown Casino owner-in-training Lloyd Williams, and film-TV journalist Jim Murphy.

Philip Brady landed an announcer's job at GTV-9 in 1958, quickly becoming the foil for Graham Kennedy on *In Melbourne Tonight*, then hosting his own shows like *Concentration*, *The Money Makers*, *Password*, *Casino 10* and *Get The Message*.

At some times, TV work was hard to find, so Brady worked as a travel agent with Don Lunn, then as co-host with Paul Cronin on 3AW's Sunday night *Remember When*. Another dry spell saw Phil complete a five-year stint at Easy Listening 97 at Tweed Heads (NSW) on the Gold Coast, before the return to Melbourne radio.



■ John Blackman, at the grand opening of Bruce Mansfield's 'Nostalgia Boutique' at Eaglemont in August 1985.



■ Comedy writer Mike McColl Jones and TV producer Gavin Disney at 'Uncle Roy's' store in 1985.



■ Simon Owens, *Nightline* producer, awarded a \$4000 radio competition prize to his brother-in-law. See Page 211

The Brady-Mansfield partnership saw 'plugs', or contra, turn into an hilarious artform. The pair would mercilessly promote a retailer who had supplied goods or services. Bill Muktar of Choice Dry Cleaners in Kew would be sent up for completing the pair's dry cleaning, right down to the details of the underpant stains.

It was the same brand of comedy that Graham Kennedy had used on *In Melbourne Tonight*. Kew menswear retailer Bob Stewart would receive credits for supplying a new shirt or tie. Bransons Meats would cop a plug if there was a new bone for Phil's beloved dog, Luke. It was funny - and a good free ride.

But it didn't end there. Thanks went to Rockman's Regency Hotel for city parking; John Dee for Bruce's hair cuts; Mr Emilio's for Phil's. Katrina's Kitchen delivered the Brady pre-heated meals; Barb and Os supplied Bruce and his family with feeds at Ivanhoe Tavern. Flowers came from Rose Bouquet Florist in West Heidelberg.

There were some favourites. Moshe Elkman of The Coat Man in Glenhuntly Road, South Caulfield, became a willing butt of Jewish jokes which made his advertisements become even more memorable. Moshe and I had a vigorous exchange of ideas when I privately suggested it was wrong for him to trade on Anzac Day. He said my argument should be with Premier Jeff Kennett who allowed the trading, and that I was welcome to share his overdraft anytime. Oi vey!

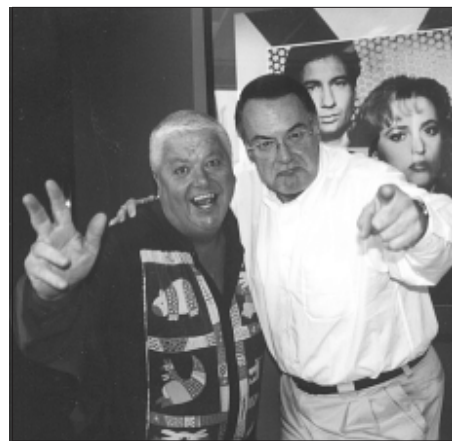
Bruce and Phil were delighted when clever shoe retailer John Gilmour (who doubles as an *Age* weekly columnist) paid them a gratuity in American dollars; they later gave personal appearances at his West Heidelberg retail outlet. On one occasion, a thief broke into Gilmour's office during one of these personal appearances whilst Bruce and Phil were selling cut-price shoes. I tackled the youth as he ran through the store with the loot, but he was more agile than the burly 20-stone PR man.



■ With Bruce Mansfield on the 'Good Morning Australia' set. Episode 1500: 1998



■ Memorabilia collector Rick Milne appeared with Bruce for seven years.



■ On air cleaning goo seller 'Big Kev' hams it up in the 'Green Room'.

‘Well, There You Go’

An upside of the liaison with Bruce Mansfield was being invited by TV legend Bert Newton to appear every week on his Network 10 show, *Good Morning Australia*, where Bruce had performed a weekly memorabilia segment with Rick Milne.

Senior Segment Producer Selena Kayman or relief Producer Jen Brown would gather items from the Chapel Street Bazaar for Bruce to present on air. They rarely received thanks from Mansfield. Meanwhile, I'd do funny sight gags in the background.

It was certainly not Logies Award stuff, but the time at Ten's studios at Como in Melbourne offered me a valuable insight to how television is done. I left the show when there was no pay forthcoming. Everyone else in the building was getting a pay cheque, and I remembered the name that Alexandra publican John O'Brien had given his horse: "Never Undercharge".

Gone were the giant studios of GTV-9 at Bendigo Street. Instead here was a fifth floor studio, not much bigger than a few offices to house *GMA*, *The Panel*, even *Mass For You At Home*.

Musical Director John Foreman provides all the music for the program. He won fame with a composition used for the Sydney Olympics opening ceremony. As coincidences happen, I met him at a Vienna Airport transit lounge, when we were independently travelling across the world.

Executive Producer Leanne Mercer, and before her Peter Ford, would cobble together the visiting overseas artists waiting to promote their concerts and books. Advertorials, costing between \$6000-\$8000 a spot, would pay the way. Bert would perform some of these, until a dodgy bed sheets company sullied his reputation, in a multi-million dollar scam.

The calvacade of local stars was fascinating. Comedian Shane Bourne used word association to remember me: I became 'Arthur Ashe'. Singer Steven Zammit had an impossible stutter off-air, but on-air became the consummate deliverer of speech and diction. Ken James still resembled his teenage character from *Skippy*; now reduced to performing cooking instruction classes at Box Hill Central.

'Big Kev', the cleaning supplies man, was a regular; so was musician Jade Hurley; and I'd chat every fortnight with astrologer Karen Moregold, who records two segments at once, to save on the show's air fares.

Bert would change wardrobe for these segments, to stay in the same clothes organised for the future programs. Polaroid shots of every suit and tie would be taken for each program to ensure continuity. These jobs were often given to the junior producers such as Daniel Goldstein, who had also volunteered for assignments at 3AW to 'pay his dues' in the industry.

The show also had a stable of performers known amongst the producers as 'FOB': 'Friends of Bert'. After Maurie Fields died, Val Jellay was invited to do the show's video reviews. This was a dignified way of Bert being able to give performers a \$300-a-week leg-up performance fee, when they were down on their luck.

One of the charming characters was Bert's mother-in-law, Eunice McGrath. Eunice had been a lovely stage mum to daughter Patti Newton from early days with Brian Naylor at HSV-7's *Swallows Juniors*. When Eun died in late 2000, Bert offered the funeral service eulogy, and Patti sang *One Day At A Time*. Eun was Patti's best friend.

We had a treat when Bert was to be featured as the guest on the Nine Network's *This Is Your Life*, hosted by Mike Munro, taped at the Willoughby studios of TCN-9. (For the record, I was the only one who paid their own air fare!) The surprise was produced by Kate Halliday, with actress Jeannie Little helping with the 'sting'. Bruce Mansfield, Philip Brady and I flew to Sydney - but a question remained with how the pair could be at Channel 9, whilst supposed to be on air with their *Nightline* radio program.

I came up with the idea that it was their 2000th show, so Bruce and Phil pre-recorded links to introduce excerpts taped over the years. We made our way to the MIX-FM studios at Neutral Bay, to do the last two hours of the radio program live to air. In the meantime we had been entertained, pre-taping, in the Nine Network board room alongside Don Lane, Barry Crocker, Toni Lamond and Ugly Dave Gray.

After each *GMA*, we would have a coffee at Cafe Fiori at Como. One day I saw performer Bernard King looking lost, and invited him to join Mansfield and me. This was a bad call. I don't know whether King believed this was an invitation for an assignation with Bruce, but Bernard proceeded to offer the most lurid and disgustingly detailed descriptions of gay sex. I was blowing bubbles into my milk shake.



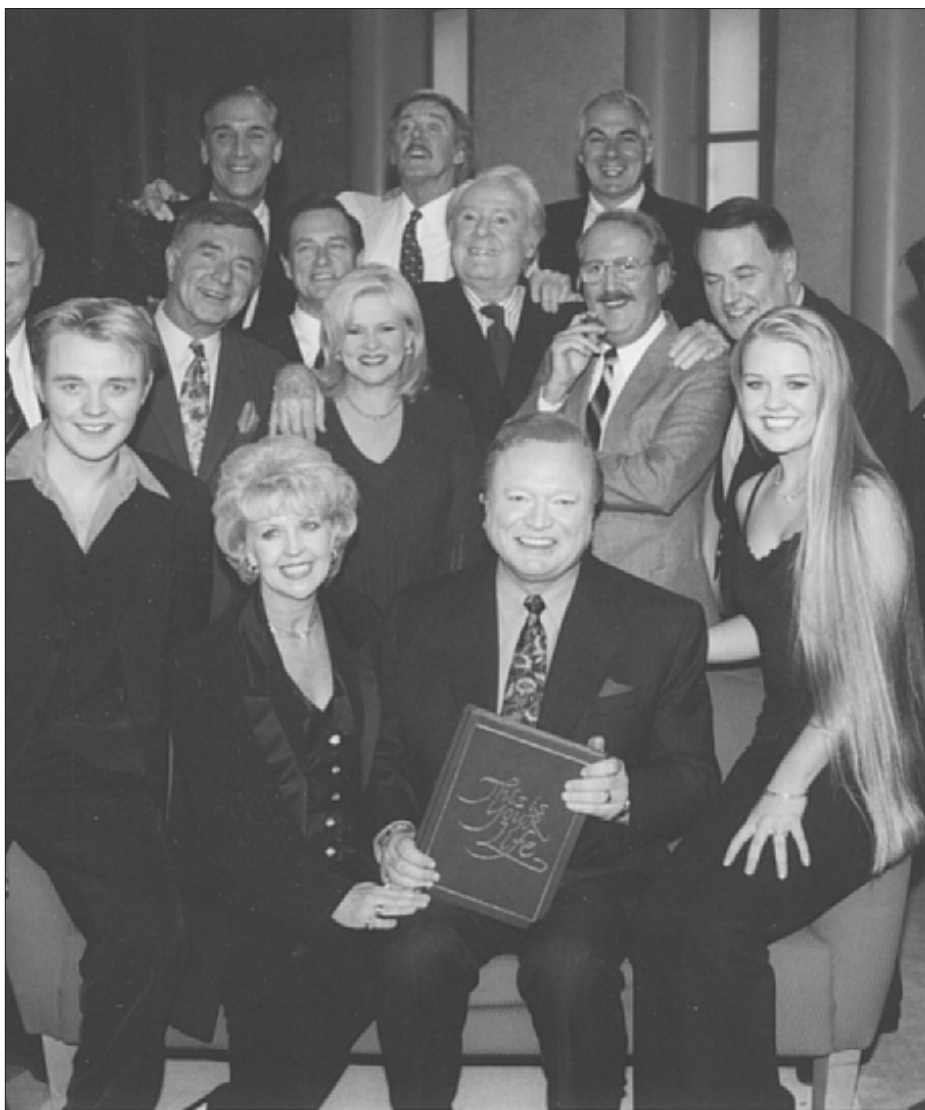
■ With Selena Kayman, former Senior Segment Producer for Bert Newton.



■ With 'Belvedere', Bert Newton's 'GMA' Floor Manager.



■ Bruce Mansfield, Pete Smith, Bert Newton and Philip Brady for 'This Is Your Life'



■ At Bert Newton's 'This Is Your Life', recorded at TCN-9 Willoughby, 1998.
Back Row: Don Lane, Barry Crocker, Shane Bourne. Next Row: Philip Brady, Pete Smith, Colette Mann, Van Johnson, Ugly Dave Gray, Bruce Mansfield.
Front Row: Matthew, Patti, Bert and Lauren Newton.

Bigbadbruce.com

Fresh from the success of the *Nightlines* book, with 8000 copies sold rapidly for \$5 cash per copy, straight into the pockets of Bruce and Phil, Bruce Mansfield was eager for more marketing promotions. And more jobs on the side.

I organised *Mansfield's Melbourne* columns in my *Advertiser* newspapers and other publications. Bruce's nephew, Andrew Mansfield, produced a bigbadbruce.com web-site. Publicity was at fever pitch, with a *Melbourne Weekly* front-page story written by Sue Neales. It all helped to continually increase the radio program ratings.

I compiled a *Nightline* magazine, heavily promoted on 3AW. It was a free publication, available from a statewide network of newsagents, as organised by progressive new-style Victorian Authorised Newsagents Association boss Peter Hunt. It was an instant sell-out.

Mansfield's on-air radio partner, Philip Brady, did not agree with my plans to introduce a modest \$2 cover-price for the magazine. It was growing out of control and the bills had to be paid somehow. So Brady pulled his support. David Mann, station Marketing Manager, was painfully patronising as he described me a station 'groupie': "Surely you allowed for this in your business plan."

The project became known as *Mansfield's Melbourne Magazine*, and was based on the TV program I owned, rather than owing a commercial allegiance to 3AW.

But Bruce wanted more projects. I met with him at his plush Eaglemont home, and he explained that he would love to do a TV show, similar to the daily advertorial regional programs being taped by Ernie Sigley at Ballarat for WIN-TV.

With no television production experience whatsoever, I figured that this made me more than eminently qualified for the task of being an Executive Producer - and so came about more than 500 nightly episodes of the *Mansfield's Melbourne* program.

First call was to Michael Consolo, an executive with Optus, who had recently signed with my *Advertiser* newspaper to sponsor a Nillumbik Sports Achiever of the Year, co-promoted by the Shire of Nillumbik led by CEO Barry Rochford.

True to their trade mark, Optus said 'Yes'. Dr Mark McAuliffe was head of the Opus Local Vision channel, part of the early explosion of pay-TV in Australia. The idea of Channel 50 was to help produce community-based programs, with no charge for studios and facilities, in exchange for programming.

McAuliffe loved my concept: a nightly half-hour where Mansfield could be the face of Optus Local Vision. No money would change hands between us, Mansfield and I would make our revenue through subtle paid advertorials, presented in a newsy style. Optus, of course, had the benefit of Mansfield's nightly radio mentions promised by Bruce.

A weekend's crash course saw a number of volunteers form our TV crew: daughter Kristi Long became an instant Audio Director; her schoolmates Andrew Cameron and Daniel Martin were transformed into skilled floor managers; Steven Gregson and Carl Gooden were instant cameramen.

Claire Halliday, today a noted feature journalist in *Sunday Life* at *The Age*, was our news reader for a short while; and young teenager David Raineri, our Sports Editor. Warwick Smith, a Channel 31 volunteer, helped us work out the intricacies of the Optus equipment. Geoff Costello had new business for his Costel Vision firm as we ordered video tapes of segments for all our commercial customers.

I was also given some valuable advice from one of my *Advertiser* links - Peter Floyd and Alex Walker of the Diamond Valley Football League, who were fellow Channel 31 program providers. They gave me a mighty free kick in production hints.

Mansfield's Melbourne first went to air at 6pm on Monday, February 24, 1997. First guest was one of my media favourites: veteran Melbourne radio and TV man, Dan Webb, who spoke of his new book on Mount Buffalo. Our first commercial client was the enormously successful eastern suburbs real estate agent Philip Webb.

Other guests for the first week included social butterfly Lillian Frank; RSL heavyweight Bruce Ruxton; theatrical entrepreneur Kenn Brodziak told of bringing *The Beatles* to Melbourne; and showbiz soubrette Val Jellay (widow of comedian Maurie Fields) flogged her series of books

On a shoestring budget, *Mansfield's Melbourne* was loosely based on Bert Newton's *Good Morning Australia*, on which Bruce appeared weekly for seven years with collectables salesman Rick Milne. Next night at 3AW I overheard Milne roundly criticising the *Mansfield* show to Brady. Ah, showbiz!

We shared a similar impressive guest roll-call including fashion expert Annette Allison, radio partner Philip Brady, 3KZ stalwart Eddie Balmer, singer Ronnie Burns, and society hairdresser Edward Beale.

It was good television. Actress Julia Blake appeared with Parliamentarian-husband Terry Norris, and their tales extended a three-minute interview out to nine. They could have entertained us for the entire show.

Terry had been a performer at Tikki and John's on my 21st birthday, and performed a hilarious ad lib spot when the birthday cake caught on fire. I've been a fan ever since.

Mid-year, we started to take the cameras out on the road to film on-location 'advertorials'. We filmed a show on the Puffing Billy train at Belgrave, a City Circle tram, and even on a ferris wheel at the Showgrounds.

It also allowed us to bring the program from events such as the Melbourne Cup, Crown Casino openings and even *In Melbourne Tonight* at GTV-9, hosted by Frankie J. Holden and Denise Drysdale. We were also able to include brilliant comedy writer Johnny Ladd, *Prisoner* actress Anne Phelan, and GTV beauty specialist Judy-Anne Stewart.

The Cup episodes saw us include Eddie McGuire, now of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*; former jockey Roy Higgins of Sports 927; and Channel 10 newsreader Mal Walden.

At Crown Casino, a 'first night' saw interviews filmed with cricketer Merv Hughes, footballer Robert Di Pierdomenico, actresses Sigrid Thornton and Debora Lee Furness, plus TV women Sue McIntosh (Jason Donovan's mum) and Jennifer Hansen. You could always count on John Wood - 'Sgt Tom Croydon' of *Blue Heelers* - to be at the opening nights. As they joked, John would attend at the opening of an envelope.

It even saw a TV reunion of Bruce Mansfield with his former 3AW breakfast radio partner, John Blackman. They had not spoken for years. That history repeated itself late 2000.

Other radio identities included Geoff Manion of the 3AW breakfast show, Peter James, and his son Darren James,

Current affairs TV host Jill Singer, fresh from her turbulent *Today Tonight* departure, appeared ... but only on condition that we not speak publicly about her controversial departure from Kerry Stokes' Seven Network.

The TV program had the potential to become a Melbourne institution. We covered the funeral service of early children's host Happy Hammond, attended by fellow artists of the day - Robyn Collins (wife of racecaller Bill)

and Bob Horsfall. Ron Blaskett and Denzil Howson told of their early years at GTV-9. Zig and Zag were lined up as Moomba Kings, but this fell through when Doug McKenzie was left on his own, after Jack Perry confessed to a nasty child assault case.

HSV-7 and 3KZ identity Ron Cadee remembered the first years of television, and singer Shirlene Clancy spoke of the days of the *Sunnyside Up* variety show on Channel 7 hosted by Bill Collins and featuring artists such as Mauire Fields, Syd Heylen and 'Honest John' Gilbert. Shirlene was one of the best equipped entertainers: she arrived at the modest Optus studios, clothed herself, and applied her own make-up. If only they were all like Shirlene!

We didn't have the heard to tell Judith Durham (real name: Judith Cock) of *The Seekers* that her interview 'ate itself' in the video recording machine.

Around us, David Armstrong would tape a weekly variety show. He is of the mould of performer Rove McManus, and although running a successful talent school, would still be a good talent pick-up for a network. The Optus studios were shared with the sports channel, so it was commonplace to share facilities with Australian Football League characters Ron Barassi and Robert Walls.

'Barass' had been a childhood idol of mine. Although I barracked for Geelong, my cousins John and Noel Fleming took their Melbourne allegiance across to Carlton when '31' changed guernseys. Barassi was a man's man, but also a gentleman. I booked him in 1981 as an inspirational speaker at the then princely fee of \$800 for the Old Ivanhoe Grammarians annual dinner. I saw him almost weekly as we finished taping *Mansfield's Melbourne*, and the studios were prepared for his cable-TV sports shows.

Then, all of a sudden, Optus Local Vision shut. I flew to Sydney to try and persuade their executives to move our program to another of their Optus cable channels. To no avail. I was off the air in a rare move for Australian television: the show had prospered, the station was axed!

I struck up negotiations with the manager of Melbourne's Channel 31 community station Richard Hodgman, along with Program Manager Veronica Smith and Presentation Manager Steve Aujard. Within a month, I was writing a \$200 cheque every day to have our program on air Monday-Saturday. We achieved a week-night audience of 90,000, and a Saturday

night viewership of 200,000. The extra 110,000 viewers were not because of anything I did: our show led into the Moonee Valley trots!

We took the television programs 'on the road' during the winter of 1998, when Bruce did not perform a Friday night radio program because of 3AW's football broadcasting commitments. In Victoria, we filmed segments in the snow, at the beach and in the air. There were lucrative personal appearances, always attended by faithful fans such as the delightful Queenie Pierce from Bayswater.

Every Friday, Bruce would stay at his beach shack at Shoreham, armed with a 'Gladstone Bag' full of entertaining videos - on contra, of course. He was horrified when Network Home Video wanted to charge him for rental!

Every alternate Friday, we would fly to an Australian location to film advertorial segments. Straight after the Thursday night radio program, I would book two rooms at the Centra Melbourne Airport hotel, with Dush Velcek. Bruce would offer free mentions of the hotel on the TV program, in exchange for the accommodation.

The success of these 'mentions' - and the bookings level that accompanied it - saw Dush recruited by the new Hilton Hotel at Melbourne Airport, Tullamarine.

Geoff Johnstone at Sheraton Mirage in Port Douglas treated us like kings. So did Michael Zeimer at the Hyatt Regency in Perth; we were able to use the WA visit to do a guest appearance on Graham Mabury's Nightline program on 6PR.

Tracey Elms and manager Michel Koopman installed Bruce in the prestige 'Bruce Suite' at the Hyatt Canberra, and we filmed an additional fun segment with David Ramage at the top Charcoal Restaurant in the national capital.

All this time, Bruce was being superbly well paid in cash by me ... and his radio ratings were on the rise with all the publicity and promotion. I had a small plaque made up for his birthday, engraved 'For Loyalty'.

How wrong could I be!



■ With Bruce and Philip at a book signing of 'Nightlines', 1997.



■ I organised a meeting between Bruce and the Premier in 1999.



■ Regular listeners such as Queenie Pierce (pictured) attended promotions for book signings. Mansfield and Brady cashed in 8000 copies of their book sold.

Death Threats

Some readers may be offended by the language on this page.

Others may be offended by serious threats to kill people.

The breathless voice came across my phone: "I know Mansfield's address. I know Brady's addresss ... he's on my list. I will kill him, and I will get Mansfield and get a lot of pleasure out of doing it.

"Don't treat me as a crank, that this is a crank call. I'll kill the bastards. And you suck up Mansfield's arse, you fucking thing Long ... fucking following him round like a fucking ... as if he's some big mighty fucking hero ... he's a fucking rat ... and I will kill him and his mate, and the time is short for both of them and I'm not joking."

The deathly threats came to my home telephone answering machine late one night March 1998, although I was at 3AW studios at the time. We wasted no time in contacting Detective Jason Rowles of Greensborough CIB, who implemented a Telstra reverse trace, to discover the call came from a public phone in South Melbourne.

The call had followed an earlier one where the same man said: "I want you to know, because I've got cancer and it doesn't worry me, but I've tracked down Brady's address at Kew, and Mansfield's at Shoreham, and I'm going to kill both of them."

To their credit, 3AW General Manager Graham Mott and Marketing Chief David Mann took the threats seriously and arranged for increased security around their performers. On the other hand, I was left to fend for myself!

I earned my stripes as a sleuth when the same man called into the *Nightline* program next month identifying himself as 'Gavin of Chadstone'. I was at the station, recognised the voice, and suggested through Bruce and Phil's headphones that we appeal to the man's greed and award him a prize at Bill Ferg's Lobster Cave in Beaumaris. 'Gavin' swallowed the bait, giving his address at a flat in Emerald Street, South Melbourne.

Very soon, I landed on his front-door step, where he greeted me with me with a "Hello Ash". He acknowledged he made the prize-winning call, commenting that he had seen me at the 3AW Street Party, held just prior to Christmas. Interestingly, the man - Joseph Victor Wilkins - lived just around the corner where Police had detected the origin of the death threat telephone calls.

Jason Rowles enthusiastically investigated the case, even enlisting a South Australian voice specialist who compared the taped death threats with calls made to the radio station.

Under Police advice, we never sent the voucher for the seafood meal. And it was Wilkins' third call to my phone number, chasing his free meal, that helped snare him. He made the call from his home phone, again traced by Police.

It turned out there had also been death and bomb threats at the 3AW Street Party and a personal appearance that we had booked at a pokies outlet at Flinders Street Station. No wonder there were so many Police in appearance ... I had put it down to my publicity skills!

In August 1999, Wilkins, 70, was found guilty by Magistrate Roger Franich of six charges including using a phone to menace and threatening to kill. Two counts of committing a bomb hoax were dismissed.

Steve Butcher of *The Age* reported that the Magistrate said Wilkins had either an inflated belief in his own talents or a 'twisted jealousy' at the radio pair.

Outside Court, Wilkins told Jeremy Kelly of the *Herald Sun* that Mansfield was a poorly educated buffoon, nauseating and for geriatrics. So much for the contrition. In a previous letter to Bruce and Phil, Wilkins said *Nightline's* audience was composed of morons.

"I've got no hate towards them. (But) they are dickheads. I just think they are a bit over the top. An egomaniac sort of thing."

The Court heard that Wilkins, a convicted armed robber, had a number of prior convictions. He received a 12-month suspended jail sentence. The Magistrate said Wilkins had been saved from an immediate jail sentence because of his age, failing health and his recent good record.



■ *Crust-for-comment. Bruce Mansfield had Melbourne restaurateurs well trained for contra. Toppalino's at St Kilda sent in a free pizza every Sunday night in return for on-air 'plugs'.*



■ *3AW promotions guy David Mann*



■ *Mansfield (right) with my friend Mick Kadamani of the Melbourne Oyster Bar.*



■ Richard Frogatt, Lauda Air's Australian GM (left) provided Mansfield and Brady with air travel. They are pictured with publicist Tony Healey.

■ Below: Mansfield took a three-week trip around England with wife Jill, after our BBC broadcasts. He received free air travel, accommodation and a car.



‘This Is The BBC’

Throughout my TV and radio association with Mansfield and Brady from 1996 to the end of 1998, I had wound down my *Advertiser* newspaper activities, to concentrate on the television programs. But everything came to a halt when I was diagnosed with severe diabetes.

The story is a simple, slightly ironic, one. I had given up the booze, but had replaced it with soft drink. I overloaded my body with sugar and my eyesight diminished almost overnight. At a football match at the MCG, with son James, I was having trouble distinguishing the players. I couldn't read the number plate of the cars in front of me, so I couldn't drive. The understandable fears of a brain tumour overtook me. Doctors David Lunn and Alex Harper diagnosed that the pancreas needed a well-earned break.

In December 1998, I was keen to take a short overseas holiday, and discussed this with Bruce Mansfield. He too wanted a vacation, but only on condition that he could somehow keep working!

Bruce has a fear of vacations. He is lost on public holidays when the city closes. Probably more accurately, he subscribes to the theory prominent in showbiz, politics and media circles to ensure you keep your job: “Never go on holidays!”

Ernie Sigley had told how easy it was to organise free air trips to London with British Airways. The afternoon broadcaster met with Bruce and me in the 3AW staff billiard room and given us contacts at the airline.

Similarly, Philip Brady had taken air travel with Lauda Air, organising it through the airline's publicity contractor Tony Healey. The tickets were either upgraded or provided for free, in exchange for media publicity. In Philip's case, as part of the deal he took along a video camera, and showed footage in his *Good Morning Australia* segment with Bert Newton on the 10 Network.

Similarly, producer Leanne Mercer had allowed me to show such spots from the Perth Hyatt, Sheraton Mirage at Port Douglas, the Sebel in Sydney, and the Park Hyatts in Sydney and Canberra. The producers drew the line when my prepared videos always included one of the Qantas jumbo jets where tickets had been provided by airline marketer Annie Dawson.

GMA Senior Segment Producer Selena Kayman gently nudged me with a reminder that it was Ansett, not Qantas, who were sponsors of Bert's program!

Bruce's suggested overseas holiday destination was the UK, flying at the weekends, but broadcasting back at nights Melbourne time. Tony Healey and Richard Froggatt of Lauda Air provided two Amadeus Class return fares; all we had to do was pay a few hundred dollars in airport tax.

We also had a simple radio solution, using the studio facilities in England at BBC Gloucestershire where the *Nightline* program had a weekly cross. 3AW Operations Manager Stephen Beers organised the technical aspects with the BBC's Vernon Harwood, and we obtained permission from AW Promotions and Marketing Manager, David Mann, to fund our way there by contra mentions of the air, hotel, car and other suppliers, on 3AW. We had the official go-ahead.

To raise spending money quickly, I organised for Bruce to do a series of paid advertorials in a late *Night Owl Theatre* movie session we had started at Melbourne's Channel 31. Claire Kendall of Vidz of Oz, a video distributor, organised copies of classic films that were out of copyright, exceeding the 50-year statutory limit.

We included segments with the king of late night TV advertising, furniture king Franco Cozzo of "Norda Melbourne and Foot-is-cray". TV great Ron Blaskett appeared with son Peter Blaskett performing his ventriloquist act with TV identity Gerry Gee. Ron's wife Merle Blaskett was the one woman to star in an *In Melbourne Tonight*, despite claims by others.

Mansfield and I flew out from Melbourne on Friday, January 8, 1999, with a stopover in Sydney, where we took a quick taxi trip to a doctor's surgery in suburban Mascot to obtain some sleeping tablets for the flights. I never cease to be amazed with the ease that doctors hand out the Serepax tablets to disptach people into la-la-land. When we boarded the plane, we had seats 1A and 1B, and I noticed that the passenger comfort kit had everthing to make it a pleasant journey: toothpaste and brush, a comb, sleeping mask ... even a condom!

I was bowled over with their attention to Lauda customer comfort when the stewardess asked "Would you like sex?" I was open-mouthed, and couldn't answer. But I hadn't listened carefully enough. The leggy, blonde Austrian had simply enquired if I would like some white wine: "Would you like Sect?"

Our week in Britain was fantastic. On arrival at Heathrow, we picked-up a pre-arranged Saab through Avis Rent-a-Car, driving it to the Cotswolds where I had arranged accommodation at the historic Cheltenham Park Hotel

We toured the area, with Bruce performing on-the-spot interviews at Shakespeare's Stratford-Upon-Avon and British pubs. We drove to Wales in the West, a Nottinghamshire town called Mansfield, took the train to London, and toured the 'Mother Country'.

We were taken by a new TV program in Britain called *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, hosted by Chris Tarrant. Bruce was so impressed by the show, that he had me send a note to David Leckie, CEO of the Nine Network in Australia, suggesting Mansfield to compere the Aussie show, now MC'd by Eddie McGuire. Bruce's application impressed TCN-9 so much that it didn't even rate a reply.

3AW's David Mann faxed us: "Dear Bruce and Ash, Well it's Tuesday morning Melbourne time, a rather mild day, and my thoughts are with you for what is already shaping up to be a great series of broadcasts.

"The parts of what I've heard of last night's programs were excellent quality, very informative, funny at times, and most significantly very illuminating about that very special part of the world from where you are broadcasting," said the former office boy.

"Bruce, it's very much like the old days with you 'out and about' with your recorder delivering colour pieces expressing the delights of the locals from the local pub, the thoughts from the Mayor of Cheltenham and also the flavour of what's happening in the United Kingdom with all newsworthy matters.

"You sounded extremely bright and refreshed and that surprised me, given the hectic schedule you had from Melbourne to London - obviously you don't suffer from jet lag!

"I look forward to the next four evenings and please pass on my thanks to your BBC Cheltenham Studio's team who are assisting 3AW with this history making broadcast.

"From Management here in Melbourne, we don't take it for granted and realise that this is very much a team effort; not only you and Philip on air but also all the people behind the scenes assisting you with the broadcasts. Keep up the good work!"

This January 12 letter was appreciated by us, and was a salute to the work we put in to some successful history-making radio programs.

After these broadcasts, Mansfield was keen to organise a free three-week 'second honeymoon' trip to London for he and his wife Jill. And that's where he caught himself in trouble. He wanted a first-class journey, but didn't want

to pay a cent for it. He seemed pre-occupied with money, to the point of continually querying bills of his accountant Graham Norman.

I had properly organised the first trip with the permission of 3AW. In return to the airline and other suppliers, I had completed upfront written arrangements. I provided time on TV shows owned by me, which I was entitled to do. Just like when you hear at the end of Glenn Ridge's *Sale Of The Century*, that their artists flew Qantas, or stayed at the Crown Casino Towers. Similarly, I provided free newspaper space in my *Advertiser* and *Mansfield's Melbourne Magazine* publication. Again as proprietor, I was of course entitled to buy, swap or sell space in them as I saw fit.

However, for Bruce's second trip, he asked for my help, giving me permission to offer his comments on 3AW in return for the freebies provided by the suppliers. I was not privy to his contract with 3AW, and I relied on him that he had the station's authority. Bruce told me that Rex Hunt had an arrangement at 3AW, to do his program for no cost, but was entitled to use advertising time in it for his own clients such as K-Mart.

I received no gain from these deals. After my diabetes crisis, I was 'up against it' financially. My re-built business was at standstill. It's hard to produce TV programs when you've lost vision, and are continually fatigued. I was fronting the 'Mansfield' TV programs for Sydney and Brisbane, yet I was still paying Bruce a 50 per cent share. He was doing no work, yet still being paid. Mansfield was aware that I had to declare bankruptcy. In fact, I told him after a Parliament House meeting I'd arranged with Jeff Kennett.

Yet I gave him a hand to make these arrangements, as mates do. He gained two Amadeus Class tickets from the airline, plus a free luxury Mercedes Benz vehicle for the three week junket. I organised free Euro Star first class travel for the London-Paris fast train. And the owner of Borrowdale Gates Manor Hotel in the Lakes district, provided accommodation and meals.

When Bruce and Jill returned from their three-week trip, there was not even a \$5 trinket to say thank you for the hundreds of dollars spent on overseas phone calls and faxes. Not even a postcard to say 'Thanks Mate'.

Bruce was aware that while he was away, I would devote the time to produce his second book, to be sold the same way as the first. He knew that I was counting on it to start to re-build myself, after my financial reverse. It was at a time when I needed support most, that he helped me least.

Soon after Bruce's return on air, we mapped out how we would promote the book. I listened into the radio program to listen to the agreed launch, but

Mansfield said he had changed his mind. He offered a flimsy reply that he was a little worried about mailed copies of the new book getting to customers. Bruce had used me to get him to London and back twice - yet wasn't trusting me to mail envelopes at the local post office.

I'd been used up. So I drew the line there and then. The 'partnership' was over. I had invested weeks of work into the new book. In return, he had let me down badly. As far as I was concerned, it was a hopeless breach of loyalty. I delivered a personal and confidential letter to him via 3AW reception and called it quits.

I saw him one final time in the Channel 10 car park, when I delivered a \$575 cheque for all outstanding balances. A later accounts calculation showed I had overpaid him more than \$8000 during our business association together, when Bruce had benefitted by more than \$100,000.

Later, when a \$1200 cheque arrived at my office for his compering gig for the Melbourne Advent Brass Band concert, I sent it to him straight away by taxi. I used my only dollars available to pay for that cab. I'm glad I didn't hold my breath waiting for an agreed commission from Bruce. Because, of course, it never came.



■ 'Mansfield Bitter'. Not a newspaper headline, but a drop of the doings from the Nottinghamshire town, Mansfield.



■ Yvonne Lawrence was dumped from her popular weekend programs at 3AW, but quickly picked up by revitalised 3AK.



■ 3AW producer (1985) Graham Walton with Bob Claven of Eaglemont Cellars.

‘Talking Melbourne’

I wasn't the only one with whom Mansfield played ‘no speaks’. Midnight-dawn man Keith McGowan and Mansfield barely said a word to each other in my years associated with *Nightline*.

McGowan is a crusty yet splendidly talented radio man, who started his career as a young teenager at 3UZ, then worked at many stations including top of the ratings at 3MP. His career has seen him work in Gippsland, Sydney, Perth and other locations. The midnight to dawn shift followed on from Hal Todd's years at night at 3AK and 3AW. As well as the *Overnighters*, Keith has another name for his show - *The Marble Finders Show*. “If you've lost your marbles, this is the show for you.”

Apart from dozens of callers every hour, McGowan has features such as *The Antiques and Collectables Show* every Friday morning where a sea of callers seek valuations for collectables. His crew includes Warren and Treena Joel from Leonard Joel Auctions, Rick Milne from People's Paraphrenalia, and Ian Armstrong of ‘The Armstrong Collection’.

McGowan's show has won considerable loyalty especially from characters including poetess Veronica Beer, trumpeter ‘Alf From Chelsea’, and a woman, Margaret, who claims to be in touch with UFOs. The program also organises social functions. In 2000, the demand was such that he had to have three different listeners' Christmas parties to accommodate all who wanted to attend.

McGowan has also published a series of books in conjunction with award-winning journalist Andrew Rule of Floradale Press. Andrew is a former 3AW breakfast producer, and also a leading *Sunday Age* reporter. Rule, as a McGowan mate and a Spy column-sitter during Lawrence Money's leave, was able to publicly smooth an messy episode when McGowan split with his former girlfriend, collectables personality Vanessa Crew.

Rule's wife, Di, unsuccessfully stood for the Liberal Party to take over Marie Tehan's state seat of Seymour. Di had also earlier run into controversy when she phoned in to Paul Barber's 3AW drive-time show, identifying herself as ‘Di of Craigieburn’, to question a local Labor candidate. She was caught out badly.

McGowan was often critical of fellow 3AW performers. He termed Bruce and Phil as ‘Goose and Fool’. Peter Cocks performs talented station outside

broadcasts as 'Personality Pete' in association with AW marketing boss David Mann; yet McGowan cruelly dubs him 'Personality By-Pass'. Pete doubles as the communications link man for Victoria's State Emergency Service - an important role at crisis times such as floods and storms.

McGowan is close with Producer Simon Owens, who nicknames him 'Grandpa'; and overnight newsreader Steve Calvert. Outside 3AW, Keith runs the McGowantiques business at Malvern and Camberwell.

His relief weekend host, Alan Pearsall, has had a varied radio career. Pearsall told me he had himself banned from the Crown Casino, because of gambling difficulties.

Other relief host, Adam Joseph, a declared agnostic and sceptic, infuriates the dogmatic AW midnight-dawn audience with his own firm views.

The 3AW links kept me in touch with a calvacade of stars. Leggy singer-dancer Rhonda Birchmore took the *Nightline* hosts off-guard when they interviewed her live, after her Casino showroom debut: "How are you going Rhonda?" they asked. "Red, raw and rooted," yelled Rhonda down the 1278 talkback line.

I met the 3AW sports team led by \$220,000-a-year fisherman and footy caller Rex Hunt, who confided to me he'd rather be fishing on the Goulburn River near Yea. Hunt calls the AFL matches for AW, and a network of other radio stations around Australia. With the departure of Anthony Hudson to the Seven Network, and Sam Newman to join Eddie McGuire's team at 3MMM-FM, Tony Leonard has filled the breach.

Tony was a member of *The Coodabeen Champions* radio show that started on 3RRR-FM featuring Greg Champion, Geoff Richardson, Ian Cover (now a Victorian Upper House Parliamentarian), and my University colleague Simon Whelan QC. I would see football statistician Graeme Bond each week when I attended the *Nightline* programs at the radio station. 'Bondy' was rivalled only by Ray Young who used to provide the statistics for Harry Beitzel's *Footy Week* and *Sunday Sport* publications.

3AW is short on women presenters. Caroline Wilson was afternoon show host for a while (after taking over from Margaret Peacock) but returned to print to become Chief Football Writer for *The Age*.

Ann Gilding, who co-hosts breakfast sessions with Andrew McLaren on sister station Magic 693, is a funny and super-attractive person. Her talent would win it in the major arena, if allowed to be more than the token female.

At 3AK, they could do well to use more rather than less of Kerryn Marlow, who has been reduced to a Sunday afternoon lifestyle program, and answering calls for Mal Garvin's turgid talkback.

In 3AW's 'Southern Cross' news room, Rob Curtain leads a team that has its news bulletins relayed to other metropolitan and country stations in Victoria. I became friends with Ian Nicholls, who now works in Bendigo, and I regard Tony Tardio as one of the state's better radio newsreaders. Peter Maher, head of Rehame, was being groomed as a current affairs host, but has committed more of his time to community welfare activities.

Another successful long-term winning combination had been 3AW's breakfast team of Ross Stevenson and Dean Banks. Stevenson was at Trinity Grammar School, in the same years that I was at Ivanhoe. 'Stevenson' (aka Ross P. Campbell) first started with Dennis Donoghue (aka Dennis Connell) with a program called *Lawyers, Guns and Money* on 3RRR-FM. The names Donoghue and Stevenson came from a legal case, known by every first year legal student. Speaking of legal cases, Donoghue unsuccessfully took 3AW to court in 2000, alleging wrongful dismissal. He lost.

John Burns - 'Sir Lunchalot' - has teamed with Stevenson in 2001.

Working up close with 3AW also showed me the other side. Producer Simon Owens was party to his brother-in-law winning a \$4000 sound system in a talkback competition. Graham Mott declared in print in 1999 that he would make it up to listeners by giving away a similar system in the coming year.

Corporate governance has to be a big issue for Southern Cross Broadcasters, a publicly-listed company chaired by tough, former National Party politician Peter Nixon; and now Geoffrey Crawford-Fish. They have the well-paid CEO Tony Bell and Company Secretary Eddie Chia to ensure this adherence.

Exciting radio man Ric Melbourne taught me, at a long Sandringham Hotel lunch, to put the bitter sides of the 3AW episode behind me: "Ash, it's all right to bury the body. But don't keep exhuming it."



■ *Lauda Air's Aussie GM Richard Froggatt interviewed at 3AW by Phil and Bruce*



■ *Airline chief Niki Lauda with Bruce Mansfield at Crown Casino*

Cash For Comment

The Australian radio industry exploded in 1999 with ABC-TV's *Media Watch* compere Richard Ackland's exposure that banks and major companies were paying large cash fees to Sydney 2UE broadcasters John Laws and Alan Jones to make favourable on-air comments.

Professor David Flint's Australian Broadcasting Authority launched an investigation, that proved the ABA to be a powerless, toothless bureaucratic tiger. The end result was a weak slap-on-the-wrist for the top Sydney station, and improved ratings for both men.

Melbourne's radio industry was not surprised when Melissa Fyfe of *The Age* broke the story in December 1999, that 3AW's Bruce Mansfield had his own miniature version of the Sydney scandal: 'Contra For Comment'.

In a front-page story headlined 'How A DJ Fell Off The Gravy Train', Fyfe detailed Mansfield's freebies list: goods supplied in return for mentions on his 3AW program co-hosted with Philip Brady.

Fyfe detailed how Mansfield and wife, Jill, took the free Lauda Air Amadeus Class return air tickets to England; use of the Avis Mercedes Benz; plus the first-class return tickets on the Euro Star London-Paris express train.

The Age detailed how Ivanhoe real estate agent Chris Dzanovski at Raine and Horne waived agent fees and commission on the sale of Mansfield's Ivanhoe investment flat, in return for free plugs on 3AW. She listed further free products and services including free accommodation at The Borrowdale Gates hotel, in England's Lakes District.

The Age exposed goods received by Mansfield in exchange from contra from Abbotsford Leather; free accommodation at Tullamarine's Centra Airport Hotel, complimentary limousine travel with Norm Cove's VIP Limousines, as well as free rooms at Rockman's Regency, free flowers from Rose Bouquet florists, free meals at Lone Star, Vlado's and Ivanhoe Tavern. Bruce Mansfield had me organise all these freebies for him - most in writing. For free, of course.

However, *The Age* article did, it seems, come as quite a surprise to Mansfield. Within 24 hours he had been sacked by 3AW General Manager Graham Mott, who had told the newspaper: "If he has given free plugs in exchange for personal gain he has breached his contract. If that's what's happened he won't be here with us ... It's as simple as that."

The timing was fascinating. A month earlier, Mott had gone on air with morning host Neil Mitchell, to say in absolute terms, that no 3AW presenter had cash- or contra-for-comment arrangements. If there were any offenders, they would be fired.

Although no longer connected in any way with Mansfield, I asked for urgent appointment with Mott, to warn him of the danger of his absolute comments. He only had to listen to the on-air *Nightline* credits, to hear the contra-arrangements of his night-time hosts. Was 3AW management actually listening to their own station? It was patently obvious to a casual listener there were agreements 'on the side', by a number of his on air personalities.

Mott took my comments seriously enough to request me back urgently next afternoon for a meeting in the Southern Cross Broadcasting board room, also with Chief Executive Tony Bell. Mott's evidence to the ABA Inquiry that followed, indicates that the first he knew of Mansfield's contra conduct was from *The Age* in December 1999 ... a month after our two meetings at his company's offices.

Mansfield was sacked on Christmas Eve, with partner Brady arguing that any concessions he received from Lauda Air were in connection with his spots on Bert Newton's *Good Morning Australia* on Network 10.

Terry Maher, Melbourne correspondent for *The Zeitgeist Gazette*, run by Richard Walsh and David Salter, wrote: "It sounds as though Santa's sleigh had a bad prang outside *The Age*'s Spencer Street offices a few days ago and an interesting load of documents somehow ended up in the lap of media reporter Melissa Fyfe. Somewhere along the line, no doubt as a result of Ms Fyfe's inexorable questioning, 3AW yesterday suspended its 'millionaire presenter' Bruce Mansfield and new life has been breathed into the ruminations of the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

"Bruce and veteran broadcaster Philip Brady have presented the 8pm-midnight *Nightline* show for nine years and along the way created a cult following; it's currently the second-highest rating show in its Melbourne timeslot. But, according to the papers that have fallen off the sleigh, Bruce - who inherited a fortune from his printer father - has been trading freebies for favourable on-air comment. In particular, he and his wife took a three-week trip to England last May and seem to have contra-ed everything, right down to a new suitcase and the limo that took them to the airport.

"If *The Age*'s excellent report is to be believed, the cash-for-comment way of life is now so much an intrinsic part of Bruce's *modus operandi* that

he just rolls into any restaurant for a meal and never expects to see the bill. But a few restaurateurs have begun to jack up. At Heidelberg's Eagle's Nest, mine host Terry Knappe claims "His nickname is freeway."

"The ABA is still pondering what to do about other allegations against 3AW, as well as how to deal with those against Perth's 6PR (Howard Sattler) and Adelaide's 5AD (Jeremy Cordeaux). The suspension of Bruce Baby from the Melbourne station yesterday - and his subsequent sacking, announced today - should help keep radio under the microscope in the millennium to come."

Philip Brady kept his *Nightline* job, until the program was taken over by Derryn Hinch. Hinch was produced by Marina Darling and Paul Dowsley (another Ivanarian). Brady remained as *Remember When* co-host with Paul Cronin, sometimes also filling in for Dennis Walter's *Saturday Night Live*. Hinch was the blowhard mega-rating 3AW morning host, who it is forgotten, resigned at the height of radio ratings to take up a better TV offer from Channel Seven owner Christopher Skase. It would have been better if he had actually been paid by Skase; Hinch is still owed \$600,000.

Hinch had a stint hosting Channel Nine's *Midday* show, ending on the radio scrap pile, trying to resurrect his career as an Adelaide breakfast show host, and then up against John Laws in the Sydney market-place. Hinch, back at 3AW in 2000, at first increased the ratings obtained by "the former tenants" He proved to be a milder broadcaster, but a fascinating raconteur. You would have to include him as a 'Top 10' dinner table guest

Then came the shock news at Christmas 2000 that 3AW was sacking Hinch ... and reinstating Bruce and Phil.

Mansfield and Brady had not spoken since the forced break-up, despite their earlier nine-year on-air partnership. I wrote to Mansfield to wish him well for his new 3AK gig, but there was no reply. In my view, Mansfield - although quite financially wealthy - has squandered rare and valuable friendships.

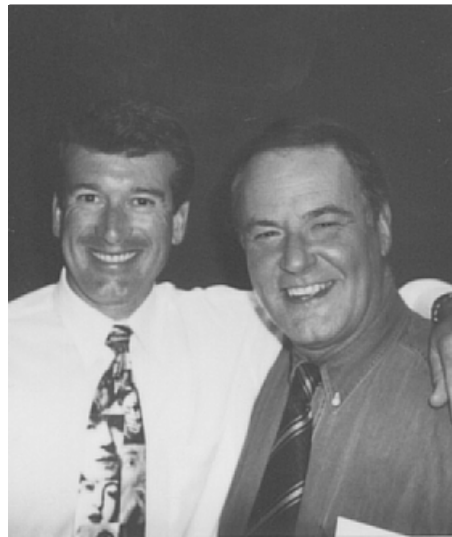
Bruce renewed acquaintances in 2000 with veteran TV comedy writer Mike McColl Jones. Interestingly, Mansfield didn't even crack it for a mention in McColl Jones' first book, *My Funny Friends*. But in another book, *And Now Here's*, Mike concedes a truth: "When you worked with Bruce you were (a) assured of lots of laughs, and (b) there was a distinct chance that he would give you the shits occasionally."



■ Always prepared to lend a hand were Gordon McKenzie and Mal Meikle.



■ Bruce Mansfield hosting 'Mansfield's Melbourne' from the studio at my Melbourne home.



■ Stephen Quartermain is destined for a huge sports broadcasting career.

The Inquiry

At our November 1999 meeting, Southern Cross Broadcasting boss Tony Bell seemed occupied with the question of whether I was going to take my file of information to the Australian Broadcasting Authority Inquiry. I told him that was not my intention, and I kept my word.

Melissa Fyfe of *The Age* broke the story from her own investigations. She telephoned me. Not the other way around. I later wrote to Bruce Mansfield telling him I could have perhaps replied with silence, rather than honesty.

Fyfe was right on the mark, and had done her homework. Armed with facts, she confronted Graham Mott at 3AW. At first, she reported, Mott bullied with a threat to sue the newspaper. But facts are powerful. He later dropped that routine with the newspaper, instead firing Mansfield on Christmas Eve.

The Age had scooped the *Herald Sun* on the Melbourne media story of the year. Old mate, Phil Skeggs, night Chief-of-Staff of the tabloid, made an impassioned plea: could his paper also verify the facts of the story?

Both newspapers made copies of documentation on signed commitment that those files would remain confidential. I do not know how, but this paperwork found its way to the Australian Broadcasting Authority inquiry. I did not speak with anyone from the Authority, before, then or since. They did not call me to their Inquiry.

Yet I am referred to dozens of times, have my correspondence quoted, and seem to have become a 'whistleblower in absentia'. That certainly had a significant commercial cost to me. In Australian business society, there seem to be no rewards for frank disclosure.

The Inquiry was clouded by Raymond Hoser making groundless accusations that 3AW Program Director Steve Price was in the pay of Transurban, Crown Casino and Volvo. Hoser was dead wrong. My observation of Price is that he is an eminently successful broadcaster, who has embraced the theatre of radio, and at no time would entertain any under-the-table deals. Nor would 3AW morning host Neil Mitchell, with a show produced by Clark Forbes.

Price asked the ABA for a public apology, but he said they didn't even bother to reply. Price has since sued Stephen Mayne of *Crikey* for the reproduction of another Hoser defamatory diatribe.

Witnesses examined at the ABA Inquiry included 3AW's Mansfield, Price, Mott and account managers Nigel Brennan and Justin Thompson. Their Managing Director Tony Bell appeared one month later. Also at the Inquiry were Crown Casino chief Lloyd Williams, Marketing GM Jamie Bartels, and Media GM Gary O'Neill. Representing Transurban were MD Kim Edwards, and PR Manager Sarah Baston. Andrew Moore, Dealer Principal of Bilia Hawthorn, was also called.

The report also mentions Melissa Fyfe of *The Age*; SCB solicitor Andrian Anderson of Corrs Chambers Westgarth; Dr Ellen Beerworth, legal advisor for Bilia Hawthorn, with Nikki Foster and Maria Gustafsson from that dealership; Volvo's Jan Eriksson and Russell Turnham; 3AW presenters Derryn Hinch, Rex Hunt, Neil Mitchell, Ross Stevenson, Darren James and Philip Brady; 3AW staffers Sue Chapman, Judy Elleray and Craig Wilson; 6PR boss Shane Healy and his presenter Howard Sattler; 2UE's Alan Jones and John Laws; Henry Guhl of Mitchell & Partners; as well as Alan Oakley, Jo Rush and Chris Nolan of Buchan Communication.

The Inquiry led to certain codes of practices to be introduced to the Australian radio industry from the start of 2001.

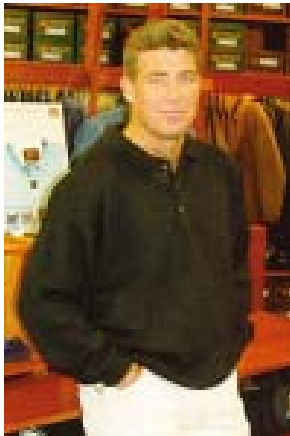
Christmas 2000 also saw the shock announcement of Mansfield and Brady's return to the 3AW airwaves from 2001. I was reminded what 3AW General Manager, Graham Mott, had said exactly a year previously: "Now I hate to say this, but the fact is that the station's integrity, the business of 3AW and Southern Cross is greater than the individual. And if an individual makes a choice to breach their contract and policy, then as sad as it may be, they can't be here."

John Blackman, then-3AK breakfast man, was direct with his reaction: "(Bruce Mansfield's) recent departure from 3AK is a spectacular example of ... (what) we've come to associate with him and the mob down there at Bank Street. After 3AK threw Bruce a lifeline when he was sacked and publicly disgraced by 3AW twelve months ago - this is the gratitude and loyalty he exhibits to my station and our listeners."

"I personally feel betrayed and hope his next stint at 3AW is a miserable one - and it will be when that station's listeners realise what ... he really is - believe me, he'll never change. As my old mate Bill Jacobs once said, 'Leopards never change their spots, they just get bigger'."



Bruce Mansfield and Philip Brady appeared in Rivers Clothing publicity when free clothing was promised to the 3AW on-air personalities.



Gerard Healy, host of 3AW's Sports Today program, and a former Brownlow Medallist, joined in the Rivers promotion where on-air staff lined-up for clothing in exchange for photo endorsements

A Listener's Letter to The Editor, The Age
"If Mansfield has been sacked then every broadcaster involved with the station should be. If Mr Mott really wants us to believe that Mansfield was the only one accepting freebies then he is really yanking someone's chain. If Mott really wants us to believe that he had no idea what was going on, and that the article in The Age absolutely floored him, then he is yanking really hard on that chain. - McK"



"I'm a big man and a big fan of Rivers. Pants, shirts, trousers, jeans, ties and socks fill my wardrobe, and Rivers shampoo is in my bathroom," said AW's Keith McGowan.



Tony Leonard of 3AW at Rivers Clothing



Darren James at Rivers



Even 3AW gardening contributor Tina Crawford modelled the Rivers clothing.



■ Above: Rotary mates - David Evans, Daryl Callander, Brian Bowen, Gary Fitzgerald.

■ Left: Ad man Lyle Dayman at Yea.

■ Below: My good pal from Ivanhoe Grammar, Geoff Brown.



Fair Trading?

After the split with Bruce Mansfield, it was my plan to resume my *Advertiser* local newspapers in earnest. Our radio broadcasting trip to Britain in January 1999 had firmed that resolve: whilst visiting every UK town and village, I was keen to see their local paper, rather than hear their radio, or watch their television.

Newspapers were in my blood, and May 1999 provided the time for my return to them, I figured. My cash resources were virtually zero, but I had successfully risen from that point before.

But I was in for a very rude shock. Whilst scanning an online version of the *Hansard* Parliamentary debates, I discovered an unheard proposal by then-Attorney-General Jan Wade that had the effect of outlawing most small publishers.

I was being legislated out of business!

The new *Fair Trading Act* made it compulsory for small independent publishers like myself to have a signed order from every advertiser before going to press. For every order not in place, there was a \$24,000 penalty. The rule simply did not make sense for a newspaper which had a geographical area spreading from metropolitan Ivanhoe, then 100 kilometres north to country Yea.

It was fanciful to think that my one-man business could personally secure the autograph of every advertiser, in advance, over such a wide area.

Intention of the legislation was good: to wipe out the bogus 'blowers' who produced sham publications, filled with small business ads, sold over the phone. As Fair Trading Director Jane Reynolds admitted to me in a July 1999 letter: "I appreciate that section 27 casts its net widely and that, unfortunately, it catches the reputable as well as the disreputable publishers."

Of course, these Fair Trading rules did not apply to big publishers. Nor did they apply to members of the Victorian Country Press Association, who had cleverly organised an exemption with Government for their members. This was about money and organised capital, not 'fair trading'.

Despite being one of their previous Award winners, I was refused membership of the Country Press Association, after more than three months of their Chief Executive Janice Ray accepting my \$1867 membership dues. It was effectively a closed shop.

I was being denied access to the newspaper craft that I loved. It was fair to conclude that entrenched competitor country press publishers such as Chris McPherson at Shepparton and Hartley Higgins at Wangaratta were not unhappy to see me gone. This was a giant free kick delivered to them by Jeff Kennett's State Liberal Government, the one supposedly backing small business.

I had continued publishing newspapers, under the hope that the Government would grant me one of the exemptions. I thought I had secured support from State and Federal Parliamentarians from both sides of politics: Fran Bailey, McEwen; Harry Jenkins, Scullin; André Haermeyer, Yan Yean; Geoff Craige and Graeme Stoney, Central Highlands; Carlo Furletti and Bill Forwood, Templestowe; Sherryl Garbutt, Bundoora; Ben Hardman, Seymour; and, lastly, Wayne Phillips, Eltham. Phillips had hosted Bruce Mansfield and I at the Parliament House lunch, and showed us the pathetic basement office space that he shares with Rosebud MP Martin Dixon.

It seemed only a small procedural matter that I would be exempted. Dr Robert Dean of the Liberals assured me that I would win an exemption as soon as Parliament could sit again.

Then another dilemma. Premier Jeff Kennett went to the unloseable election in September 1999, only for it to effectively be a dead heat with Labor's Steve Bracks. The death of a politician on polling day, causing the state of Government to be undecided for a month until the Frankston East by-election was decided. Victoria was on hold for another month - and my business was fast slipping away from me.

Steve Bracks took over Government, but passed the buck. New Attorney-General Rob Hulls passed the buck. Local member André Haermeyer passed the buck too - with a written reference. No-one would give me a decision.

Six months after my application for an exemption, I finally secured an appointment with new Fair Trading Minister, Marsha Thomson. I had been given the classic government '*Yes Minister*' run-around by her assistant Damien McDonald. My matter was "on the table", he assured me.

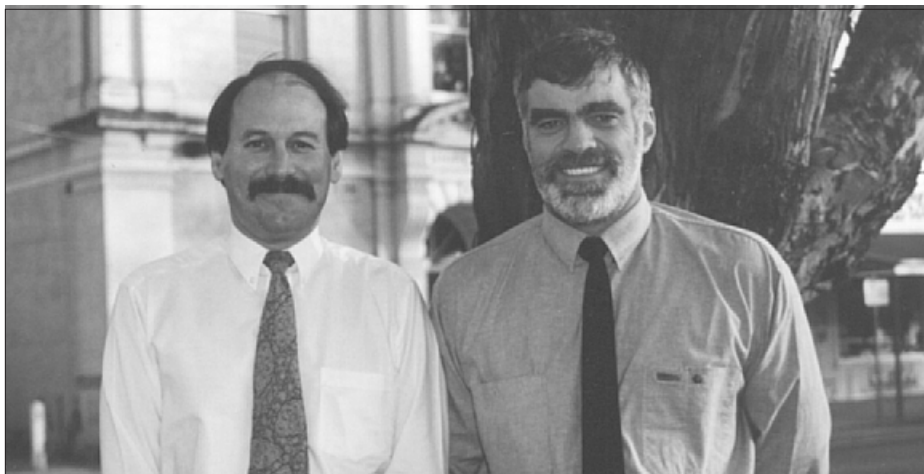
Weeks and weeks later, the result was a pathetic seven-minute appointment, most of which the self-important Minister took a phone call in another office. It took her several more weeks for her to simply say 'No'.

My meagre financial resources were exhausted. I had put my family's livelihood on the line, gambling that a fair decision would be made.

I had lost. I was badly depressed. I seriously considered ending it all.



■ Eltham politician Wayne Phillips made late and hamfisted representations to exempt my newspaper from law introduced by Attorney-General Jan Wade.



■ Politicians Geoff Craige and Graeme Stoney tried to assist me stay in business.



■ *The late Don Cordell, Nillumbik Shire Chief Commissioner, with Michael Consolo, then-Public Affairs Manager for Optus.*



■ *Jan and Neil Beer, great supporters of my newspapers in Yea and Seymour.*

Radio Daze

During this sixth months of financially draining government indecision, I sought career alternatives. I applied for and won the job as General Manager-Elect at Melbourne radio station 3AK. Then suddenly lost it on the eve of joining them. It was an enormous breach by the so-called Christian group that owned the broadcaster.

3AK has been the basket case of Melbourne radio stations. It started on November 29, 1931, but was an unusual broadcaster. The *Listener-In* of 1932 explains: "Twelve months ago some amusement was expressed at the extraordinary schedules of station 3AK, Balwyn, Melbourne. As almost everyone knows now, these are from 11.30pm to 2am, and from 5am to 7am, with extra hours on Saturdays and Sundays. But the once amusing innovation, with the effluxion of time has converted itself to something of a necessity to thousands of listeners.

"Unique in Australia, 3AK provides music suitable for supper parties and late dances, and speeds the early morning worker with a song in his heart, These are services for which many are grateful."

3AK quickly won a reputation through the 1930's as 'The Voice of The Night', and by 1937 the station was conducted from 116 Queen Street, phone W2100. A contemporary press item reported: "Although Melbourne may seem to be rather sleepy when one goes through it in a car in the small hours of the morning, the popularity of the 'Voice of the Night' goes to show that there are many more people awake all night than one may sometimes think."

When World War II came in 1939, all other Melbourne radio stations closed before midnight, with a rendition of *God Save The King*, and an invitation to switch across to the 'all night station'. By 1940, 3AK was often the first with war news, with a 6.45am news service from *The Sun* morning newspaper, and the introduction of overnight BBC news services via long-wave radio.

David Worrall, General Manager of rival station 3DB-3LK, made the position on what he say as the duty of radio broadcasters: "Our duty is plain, our course clear. Whilst we must give out the big news as it occurs, and news summaries at proper intervals, we must not 'load the air with horrid speech', or the public will get the horrors."

The 1954 Royal Visit saw 3AK's 20-year overnight dominance come to a close. Melbourne stations increased their hours to cover the visit of Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh, and in preparation for the 1956 Olympic Games. Melbourne radio historian Clark Sinclair tells me that Bathurst-based 2BS created a problem by using the same 1500 frequency. So Bathurst broadcasted by day, and 3AK at night.

Rod Lever of *Listener In-TV* reported in his Whispering Gallery column: "Executive at one all-night station has put a ban on unauthorised persons dropping in after hours. All sorts of odd characters have been haunting the studios and distracting the announcer." Nothing has changed!

One of the most popular 1950's radio shows was *D24*, put together by Hector Crawford's firm for 3DB, written by Dorothy Crawford and Roland Strong, with dramatisations from Victoria Police files. It was the forerunner of TV productions such as *Consider Your Verdict*, *Homicide*, *Division 4*, *Matlock Police*, *Solo One* and *The Sullivans*. 3AK had an unusual partnership role in *D24*, giving a 1am repeat, of the program that been premiered hours early on 3DB at 8.30pm Tuesdays.

Joyce Newland won a great following as the 'Lonesome Lady' of 3AK. She later went on to become everything from ticket secretary to 'warm-up' lady for Don Lane's GTV-9 variety program. She also wrote TV and radio commercial scripts.

3AK had been founded by the owner of the Akron Tyre Company, hence its callsign. First studios were from the owner's lounge room in the eastern suburbs. Ownership changed from 'the tyre man' to 'the furniture man' who owned the Max Furniture Company, at 17 Grey Street, St Kilda.

Vernon Margetts, a religious man, ran devotional programs smack-bang in the middle of the breakfast program. When one staffer asked him for a pay rise, Margetts said he would refer the request to a greater power. The staff member was later told that Margetts had spoken to the higher office, and the pay increase had not been approved.

3AK's exclusive role as Melbourne's 'All Night Service' came to a close in 1954, when *Listener In* magazine headline '3DB Offered 24-Hour Service'. It converted to daytime broadcasting by introducing a directional antenna, beaming out hillbilly music, followed by an 8am Gospel Session, and an Italian Hour for the 'New Australian Migrants' as they were then called. Would a Program Director today schedule these shows in the important breakfast session?

Station personalities included Clark Sinclair with *Factory Favorites*; Taswegian Stan Rofe; and Victorian Football Association matches described by Alan Forster and Tom Lahiff. Brian Naylor, later to be Melbourne's top TV newsreader, but then as sales representative for a blind company, had a regular spot. 'Uncle Doug' Elliott, also known as 'Kanga', brought his ad segments to 3AK, as well as broadcasting on 3XY, 3UZ and 3KZ, plus running the Doutta Galla Hotel in Flemington, running as Mayor of Essendon, and becoming a State Parliamentarian.

3AK's move to 'big-time' radio came when Sir Frank Packer's Consolidated Press group purchased the business, to be run from his GTV-9 headquarters in Bendigo Street, Richmond. Philip Brady explains it in *Tales From The Scrapbook*, edited by Ian Oshlack.

"At the beginning of 1961, Channel Nine bought 3AK which had previously been a midnight till dawn station, operating from Grey Street, St Kilda. The following April, precisely three years to the day that I started at GTV, we commenced broadcasting from a shaky old caravan by the Channel Nine swimming pool.

"My first taste of radio was doing an afternoon show called *Your Favourites And Mine*. The conditions were relatively primitive. Any time someone climbed into the caravan with a cup of coffee or something, it set off a vibration causing the stylus to jump across the record.

"Despite the early days of 3AK being very amateurish GTV wisely employed all their on air personalities to do a radio shift every day. So our roster was a who's who of television with names such as Bert Newton, Graham Kennedy and Eric Pearce. Anyone who was on the announcing staff or in front of camera would also be expected to do a shift each day as well, and this is how I eventually got into radio."

The programming excursion of Channel Nine stars was brief. Graham Kennedy and Bert Newton presented a daily program for 'The King's' home at Frankston (rumoured to be bought by Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman - before the split). The pace burst when Bert had a public nervous breakdown

Rating winners of the 1960's were 3UZ with their unbeatable line-up of Allan Lappan, Don Rainsford, Jim 'Woody' Wood, Don Lunn and Geoff Haynes. 3AK countered with a line-up of tightly-formatted rock and roll discjockeys including Bill Howie, Lionel Yorke, Malcolm Searle and Grantley Dee, back by American-produced jingles, station IDs, stings and sharps.

Other inclusions were Myke Dyer, who doubled as GTV's Publicity

Director; newsman Tom Jones; journalist Tim Hewat; and announcers Paul Jennings and Pete Smith, who had transferred from his own *Saturday Scoreboard Hit Parade* at ABV-2. Pete Smith is one of the funniest media men in Australia, and more than 40 years later, continues as the voice of GTV-9.

Billing itself as 'Friendly 3AK', *Listener In-TV* reporter Rosemary Rule wrote in November, 1968: "Melbourne's original all-night radio station, 3AK will begin 24 hours broadcasting from Friday night, after 10 years of restricted transmitting hours." The official opening by Bert Newton was televised. Alan Aitken from recruited from West Australia, Gary Mac was brought in from 2BS Bathurst.

By 1971, 3AK introduced its 'Where No Wrinklies Fly' campaign in a bid to score back ratings from 'Much More Music 3XY' which had a line-up of Joe Miller, John O'Donnell, Laurie 'Lobo' Bennett, Dick Starr and Peter Harrison. The AK roster listed 'Baby' John Burgess, Bob Stewart, Ken Sparkes, Barry Mann and Ian Richards. Full-page advertisements were taken in pop magazines such as Michael Gudinski's *Daily Planet*; *Digger*; *Rolling Stone*; and *Go-Set* being run by Gavan Disney, with star columnist Ian 'Molly' Meldrum.

Station schedules of the day include Peter Van, John Jones, Ian Major, Paul Konik and Bill Rule on 3KZ. The *Herald-Sun* station, 3DB, was employing John 'Silver Fox' Eden at breakfast, *Action Line* host Gerald Lyons, backed by Denis Scanlan, Paddy O'Donnell, Jim Slade and Art Ryan.

From studios at 45 Bourke Street, 3UZ were presenting a team of Peter Byrne, Jimmy Hannan, John Vertigan, Don Lunn and Rod Spargo. I won my first radio prize, a 10/- vinyl record of Roy Orbison's *Penny Arcade*, from a phone-in competition conducted by evening DJ Sam Anglesey.

The ABC log saw Peter Evans beginning to rule the breakfast airwaves at 3LO, alongside Kevin Arnett, Geoff Hiscock and Mary Adams. At 3AW's Latrobe Street studios, Geoff Manion started the day, followed by Ormsby Wilkins' *Powerline*, Norman Banks, home hints with Martha Gardener (Zoe Worrall), John Worthy, Billie Karen (Ormsby's wife), Mary Hardy, Peter James and the Rev. Alex Kenworthy with a young panel operator named John Blackman.

3AK's accountants changed the station's direction in June, 1983, with little fanfare, under the banner of 'Beautiful Music'. A small *Green Guide* paragraph noted 'Good Response To AK Change': "The introduction of uninterrupted pleasant music at AK has been well received, to judge from

listener response. The station is playing selected tracks in clusters free of commercials. The format is based on a US programming technique, successfully pre-tested by a Sydney station."

Successful it was. Under General Manager Vern Stone, 3AK rose to the top of the ratings tree. It was economical, popular and very profitable. It also put paid to the complaint that few could tune into the 1503 frequency. The station became lost in the 1980's with Kerry Packer's failed CBC network experiment with personalities including Ernie Sigley, Don Chipp, Don Lane and Mark Day. Then came the Alan Bond takeover; and the sale of the licence to Peter Corso who converted the station to an Italian-Australian format. AK became nick-named 'Radio Titanic'.

The station had a short reprieve in the mid-1990's, when Southern Cross Broadcasting bought the licence but had to surrender it under broadcasting laws. Southern Cross had 3AW and Magic 693 (3EE) in Melbourne. SCB also owned 3MP and 3AK, and was ordered to sell them to comply with regulations that allow an ownership maximum of two stations per capital city. SCB acted cleverly.

SCB sold 3MP to the under-resourced Goulburn Valley Broadcasters led by Andrew Fairley. 3AK went to the Christian community group, Fusion Media, led by radio 'groupie' Mal Garvin and company secretary Michael Cleary. The deal secured the AM-band dominance and profitability of 3AW, whilst complying with broadcasting law. SCB held debenture stock over 3AK, and if there was a default on the generous purchase contract, would have a discretion over its next proprietor.



■ The sign is correct: 'Beware Of Hot Ash'

The Friendly Station?

News came in July 1996 that 3AK had been sold to Fusion Media, a non-denominational Christian services company, with a media profile of feel-good religious messages on many Australian radio stations. Fusion National Director Mal Garvin offered a no-nonsense reminder about AK's future: "It will be expected to make a profit."

Station General Manager Vern Stone spoke a further \$300,000 investment in station equipment. John Blackman was more realistic about the station's shoestring budget: "If you wander around 3AK, you'll find a lot of professional, dedicated and enthusiastic people. There's nothing wrong with the radio station, it's just that we don't have the promotional bucks to tell the world about it."

Writer John Hindle told me in the *Good Morning Australia* 'Green Room' that he was being paid \$100 a shift. Patti Newton was offered a shift, but told there was no cash, but she could have an electric lawn mower instead. Patti reportedly told AK management: "I don't work for lawn mowers."

Greg Evans of TV's *Perfect Match* took over the *Melbourne Magazine* radio spot previously broadcast by the glamorous Annette Allison and ad agency monotone man Peter Lawrence. Rob Hicks presented a Melbourne Afternoon slot; he is a good Producer and was at his best as a newsman with the *Hicks-Owen Report* at 3KZ.

That afternoon time-slot became Bruce Mansfield's program, *Mansfield From Midday*, produced by Nathan Zwar. Bruce was certainly getting no better with his general knowledge. He told listeners in an 'On This Day' segment that the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour (1941), was in retaliation for Hiroshima (which happened in August 1945).

The final AC Nielsen ratings survey for 2000 had Mansfield's ratings drop to 0.4 of the market - the lowest of any show on Australian commercial radio. At best, it meant Bruce's average audience was fewer than 2000 people throughout all Melbourne in any quarter-hour.

Mansfield had once boasted that he would like to take on Ernie Sigley in the Melbourne afternoon radio market, and would score a rating of 20. He had a little way to go.

Doug Aiton brought his 3LO popularity to the Melbourne Drive 4pm-7pm timeslot, using a 'Conversation Not Confrontation' catchphrase against

'shock jock' Steve Price at 3AW. Aiton's ratings have slipped because of the low 'lead-in' figures of the afternoon show. Doug's program is produced by James Tsiavos, Nathan Zwar and Brett de Hoedt.

Ric Melbourne produced his own evening show, after being recruited following an ad in my *Media Flash* E-newspaper. But the program came to a sudden halt in January 2001, when wages cheques bounced. In several weeks, 3AK lost Bruce Mansfield, Ric Melbourne and John Blackman.

Mal Garvin works the 10pm-1am quasi-religious program, and Leigh Drew is the Night Owl *Nightwatch* midnight-dawn presenter. Leigh is building a small popular following but will need to learn from the others who have gone before him. He is collecting cheques from listeners in his own name for social functions. It has the danger of blurring the ground between broadcaster and sponsor.

3AK has the ingredients of a successful radio station. The AM-band in Melbourne still accounts for 41 per cent of listeners, yet a 50 per cent interest in the station sold for something in the order of just \$2.9 million. Paul Thompson of DMG Radio paid \$70 million for a new FM licence in 2000.

With this potentials of 3AK in mind I constructed a thorough business sales plan, and put the proposal to Michael Cleary and Mal Garvin. We met secretly at Rockman's Regency Hotel, exchanged ideas by fax over more than a month, and then came to agreement at a Qantas meeting room at Tullamarine Airport. They negotiated hard on remuneration, promising 'equity allocations', and after hand-shakes, completed the meeting with prayers recited by them both.

My sales plan had ingredients of cash-less newspaper promotion, and a substantial sales program to Melbourne businesses. I guaranteed to bring at least \$250,000 of business annually through my own sales efforts alone.

One of my first calls was to John Blackman, the station's breakfast show presenter. John had ridden the heights of the radio wave in the early 80's when he, and Bruce Mansfield, were top of the ratings with their 3AW show. Blackman was also the invisible voice of the *Hey Hey It's Saturday* TV program hosted by Daryl Somers and Ossie Ostrich.

He had split with Mansfield in an uncomfortable professional divorce. Blackman had told me, that with manager Gavan Disney, he had been able to secure an annual salary from 3AW approaching \$250,000. Mansfield was not keen to pay the 20 per cent commission to an agent, and had lingered on a rate of about \$1100 a week.

Blackman left 3AW in 1986, following General Manager Brian White, who had been given the task of putting together press mogul Kerry Packer's national CBC radio network featuring Blackers, and others ... all failing hopelessly.

Part of the walk-out involved Blackman having to pay-out \$125,000 for the remainder of the 3AW contract, re-paid by 3AK, but challenged in an ugly Federal Court action brought by the Tax Office, which wanted the pay-out treated as taxable income.

In a language that only a Court can provide, the judgement stated: "So far as the Blackman Family Trust was concerned, he said that it was established because of the precarious nature of a career of a radio and television performer; at times the income from it might be considerable but at other times it might be very small. That evidence accords with what is publicly known of the effect of the vagaries and inconstancy of public taste on the earning capacity of such performers."

John Blackman stayed in the radio wilderness for years, taking the early morning gig at 3UZ with Wilbur Wilde, and then accepting the same timeslot at 3AK after Mal Garvin's takeover. John's ratings stayed at about 1.5 per cent of the market, ever since, and he deserved a lot more.

I explained to Blackman that I had approached 3AK Company Secretary Michael Cleary, and knew from the Mansfield TV programs, that there was a wealth of business in Melbourne for personally-voiced ads. I could market these for him, Greg Evans and Doug Aiton, as well as the rest of the team. He was enthusiastic, and a staff memo was circulated that I was joining the station. "It was a done deal," confirmed contributor Dr David Marsh, who appeared on the breakfast program as 'Doctor Death'.

With a pre-occupied Cleary, I met with avuncular Acting Station Manager Jim Hilcke, who promised to help my transition to radio. But the alarm bells sounded when he asked what role I would be playing. Cleary, Garvin and I had agreed in detail that I would understudy Hilcke for three months, to then be appointed General Manager of the station.

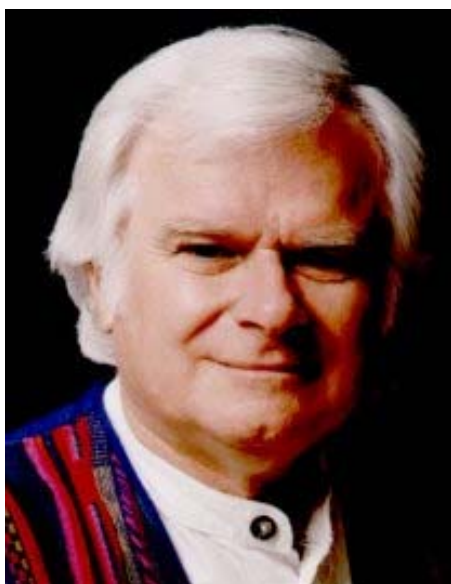
Whilst I was continuing to send detailed business plans, Cleary was delaying with the job contract.

Finally it churned over the fax. Cleary had turned to job into that of 'Senior Executive' answerable to Hilcke and the station's fair-average-quality Sales Manager, Murray Franklin. A corporate organisation having a General Manager reporting to the chief ad seller just didn't make sense.

The small print of Cleary's draft agreement also had me paying some of the station's day-to-day operational expenses including phone and some operational costs! It was laughable.

As we used to say in the newspaper game, I had been 'white-anted'.

It was a ridiculous farce that proved the adage that education is what you get when you read the fine print, and experience is what you get when you don't read it. Early that Saturday night, I called on Cleary at his pathetic low-class East Melbourne motel and told him what I thought about his re-worded contract. My radio career was off the air, 36 hours before it started.



■ **Mal Garvin**, head of Fusion Australia, and Chairman of Melbourne's 3AK, before losing a boardroom struggle which saw 100 per cent control of the radio station go to Perth-based Data and Commerce Limited. Garvin, described by Derryn Hinch as a 'Godbotherer', headed a company that, in its final days, bounced wages cheques to its staff.



■ **Greg Evans**, known best for hosting the Ten Network's 'Perfect Match', was integral to a marketing plan that I devised for 3AK. It involved 'personality selling' for local businesses in Melbourne, with 'live reads' being offered in the programs of John Blackman (breakfast), Evans (mornings) and Doug Aiton (afternoons). I won - and lost - the job!



■ John Blackman, pictured with my 'Yea Chronicle', about 1985. John was an integral part of my 3AK business plan. He is a much-loved Melbourne entertainer.



■ 1999: Was this the end of my media career? I was being legislated out of business.

Deep Depression

Towards the end of 1999, the toll of middle age, diabetes and depression were a dark cloud over my life. No job. No hope. I had lost all self-esteem. I had viewed myself as a leader, who was now bankrupt for the second time, effectively outlawed from my beloved craft of newspapers, and without any business prospects whatsoever.

I unsuccessfully applied for a series of jobs around town. One firm used a test which I recognised as the Dianetics questionnaire formulated by L. Ron Hubbard of the Church of Scientology!

The void of my recently-closed *Advertiser* was quickly taken up by Hartley Higgins and Geoff Heyes with *The Nillumbik Mail*. Colin Brooks and Dale Peters started *The Banyule Observer*. Brooks (an aide of politician of André Haermeyer) soon left. How can Peters (the Banyule Mayor) own the newspaper without there being serious perceived conflicts of interest with local government activities?

These were dark days for me after *The Advertiser* was forced to close. I was drinking heavily. I was sometimes sleeping up to 14 hours a day in a darkened room. I was finding reality very hard to face and seriously contemplated suicide.

Fleur saw me through it. I pleaded my sorrowful case to her. "There is nothing more that I can do," she plainly told me, a perfectly understable response from someone who starts her working day at 4.45am, and doesn't clock into a heavy list of home duties until 6.30pm. Fleur had already fulfilled her bargain of "four worse (years), four poorer (years)". It was reasonably time now for the years of "four better, four richer".

Thankfully, I snapped out of self-destruct mode just in time. But it had certainly been close. Early Sunday School teachings as a five-year-old from Ralph Lee at Oakhill Methodist Church came back to me as if it were yesterday. I submitted to prayer and faith. What do people who have no faith use as their final reserve tank?

I am convinced that there is a living God who does listen to prayer, but with miracles happening only if they can be contributed only to human or natural happenings. Whilst I know I was in the prayers of several, I would have felt better if these people had have spoken directly to me, as well as with 'Head Office'.

Throughout those days, the vital and loyal family contact encouraged by my late Dad, had diminished. I think I certainly did my share of providing family favours in those earlier days. When people required something of Fleur or me, the phone seemed to run hot. Since we now found ourselves facing hard times, many must have believed that we owned an unusual device - a telephone that only rings out. Virtually no-one called.

Some of my extended family members will learn the detail of my trials for the first time in this book. Some may have good attendance records on a Sunday, but I silently questioned where they went as far as I was concerned. When Fleur was struck down by stroke-like symptoms in 2000, losing feeling down one side of her body, not one of the Long family telephoned her. I checked with the operator, our phone numbers remain the same.

Left on my own, I needed to look for new, old or any ways to earn a quid. I thought of returning to the TV programs, but instead of having Bruce Mansfield, hosting them myself. As someone said, I have a good head for radio!

It wasn't going to be easy. I literally did not have the money to buy a \$20 professional video tape.

Nick Grigoriadis of Melbourne's Channel 31 made it clear that my TV programs were not welcome until an old debt from the *Mansfield's Melbourne* days was re-paid in full.

I made approaches to Tom Zelinka and Dave Campbell at Channel 31 Sydney, and Paul Goddard at Brisbane's Briz-31: we were back in business with weekly half-hour TV programs containing 'what's on' advertorial segments, paid by advertisers.

I started by subscribing to the Cumberland local papers in Sydney, and the Quest publications in Brisbane. I would trawl their pages for potential paying advertisers, offering businesses a 30-second promotional spot with me reading their announcement from a studio desk (my home office), and highlighting their contact details on screen. I could sell the spots, but was having great difficulty in collecting the cash.

And I certainly wasn't out of the woods yet. I had a large dispute with Telstra, and was sometimes left without a phone line, as we thrashed out an agreement in which I eventually fought out a \$60,000 credit.

I had no cash for the day-to-day household bread and milk, let alone anything else on the business front. I was forced to sell the old 1981 280SE

Mercedes Benz at a fire sale price. It was valued at less than \$5000, but I had only just paid \$12,500 cash in 25 weekly cash instalments to Bruce Mansfield for the battered old banger.

This left the family only with a 1981 430,000-km Mitsubishi Sigma that Fleur needed to get her to work at Melbourne's Eye and Ear Hospital. We were back to a one-car family, and it was time to serve a self-imposed six-month penance, 'imprisoned' at my home-office at Eltham. Even a more famous one kept his time in the wilderness to 40 days and 40 nights!

By the time a car came available on short-term loan in June 2000, I was wound up like a clockwork doll. I immediately organised trips to paying clients in country Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. The TV programs had successfully filmed accommodation properties over four successive years such as Sheraton Mirage and Club Tropical at Port Douglas.

So I visited the lucrative Far North Queensland seven times in four months to film segments for TV show clients. I was an expert at completing the Cairns-Melbourne drive in two days. I was almost becoming a regular at three-star \$50-a-night motels, and the truckies' roadside stops. Hello to my mates at Shell Gunnedah in mid-west NSW!

I made some excellent friends and visited some wonderful tourism venues. Sometimes I was able to fly, with arrangements completed by Barry Salter from his Meridian travel agency in Rosanna. I first met Barry and his wife June in 1980 when handling their Leader advertisements. Barry has since been presented by Past District Governor Terry Grant as a Rotary Paul Harris Fellow for his work over many years for the Rotary International Travel and Hosting Fellowship. These days I have to keep travel costs to an absolute minimum and have found Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Blue airline as good as any. However, I do avoid their on-board face-painting!

The Channel 31 stations are under-rated. In Brisbane it is estimated that 900,000 viewers watch the station. In Sydney, the AC Nielsen ratings show that 240,000 people watch the station every week. In Melbourne, Max Stuart has been appointed General Manager of Renaissance TV, that intends using the Channel 31 signal during daylight hours to attract the grey market. The project is being undertaken by Prime Life Retirement Villages.

As this book goes to press, I have returned to the studio-based programs for *The Sydney Report* and *The Brisbane Report* ... but with one major difference. It might seem crazy, but until now I would not have contemplated using this 11-word line at the end of a sales pitch to a client by phone. The words

are simply: "Would your company prefer to pay by cheque or credit card?" If they select to pay by cheque, I organise a courier to pick-up their payment next day. If a credit card is preferred, Trevor Long of Candela Enterprises has established an electronic payment system on the Internet, where people's Visa or Mastercard is debited within six seconds. Suddenly, I am building a cash-flow again.

The TV programs are produced at Access Film and Television in Melbourne with a genuine friendly assistance of Jenni Lewis, as well as owners Graham and Jan Denton. Editing is performed there, and titles added to appear on the TVscreen. The tapes are sent to the TV stations by air freight or Express Post, with my payment to them attached. Less than 24 hours later, the programs have been broadcast.

So it appears that I am to be welded to my telephone sales chair for a few years yet!

At a time when I needed it most, Sydney Channel 31 station co-ordinator Filomena Palaric told me four of the most important words:

"We believe in you."

What Comes Around ...

Not long after the 3AK job fell over, I found out some of the reasons why. Cleary and Garvin were out of chips at 3AK. They had run it into the ground, the station was millions in debt, and they had instructed Pricewaterhouse Coopers to find a buyer or major equity partner.

Fiona Byrne of the *Herald Sun* called it a 'fire sale'. Michael Fung of the accountancy company sent out proposals, with Jeff Kennett and Steve Vizard touted as possible buyers. I understand that Vizard actually did reach agreement to take over the station, had stationery printed, and had signed a number of prominent celebrities as on-air presenters. Garvin received incentives from 'parties' who did not want the Vizard deal to go ahead.

The 3AK fire sale commenced in August 1999. Six months later, the station announced that a company called 'Tait Williamson', headed by Melbourne lawyer Greg Flood, would take a 49 per cent interest in the station. Close to 18 months after the 'fire sale' the deal had still to be consummated. Imagine my blood pressure if I been General Manager of that!

Better news came for 3AK in January 2001, with news that Data and Commerce Ltd would pay \$2.9 million for Greg Flood's half-share of the station. Data and Commerce, headed by former Seven Network MD Keith Campbell, also had an option on the other half of the station.

The deal was also to pick up some accumulated debt, said to also be about \$3 million, subject to a 'due diligence' study being made. When it was discovered that the debts were a greater amount, D & C negotiated to obtain the 100 per cent shareholding for the original price. Derryn Hinch led a revolt to the boardroom, demanding that Garvin & Co. finally pay up or else. Garvin sobbed in front of the staff.

Much has been made that Kerry Packer is a minority shareholder in Data and Commerce's parent company, Advent Television. I don't.

It seems that D & C are interested in an entry point for datacasting, and the acquisition of AK at relative bargain prices, allows them this.

Eighteen months should prove whether the AK management are up to delivering the success. If enthusiasm counts for anything - and it does - Greg Flood's drive for the station should give it some success. He has surrendered his legal practice to be full-time Managing Director of the station. Old mate John Jost has joined AK as a Director; that should mean success.



■ With 'Doctor Death' (Dr David Marsh) at *The Fisherman's Grotto*, Feb. 2001.



■ With mate Stewart Harrison, sharing a lobster in the good times.

Media Flash

Early 2000 saw me attempt to form the Australian Institute of Publishers, an organisation of disaffected small publishers to fight for exemption against the *Fair Trading Act*. It didn't work, as most small publishers have continued along, simply ignoring the new law.

I called a meeting of independent publishers, at the Board Room of Rockman's Regency Hotel, and the only participants were Laurie Ryan of *Your Gazette* newspaper at Craigieburn, Ken Weaver of *Senior Scene*, Michael Ray of *High Country Times*, journalist Yvonne Lawrence, and a strange interloper from an unknown publishing company who we never saw again.

Apart from a long lunch at Mick Kadamani's Melbourne Oyster Bar, something good did come from the attempt to form the Institute.

In late December 1999, I had started to send out a weekly *Media Flash* E-mail to these publishers and Parliamentarians, with the view of a creating a public profile, to later employ when putting our case.

Media Flash took on a much wider life of its own, as friends, media people and officials asked for a copy of the newsy note. It grew from 0 to 6400 subscribers in just a year. I unashamedly based it on Philip Luker's *Media Week* newsletter which I couldn't afford as a reader. Their subscriptions start at \$490 a year, and are now edited by James Manning.

As *Media Flash* gained national prominence when I offered a critique on Eric Beecher's Text Media, revealing that, according to its own annual accounts, it was carrying forward an accumulated loss of more than \$6 million. There were red faces as Text Media prepared to raise more than \$20 million through a public float, underwritten by JB Were. Beecher threatened to sue - but didn't.

Actually Text Media Group has many positives. It started as a custom publishing house with shareholders including Beecher, book publisher Diana Gribble, future *Age* Editor Bruce Guthrie and celebrity writer and restaurateur Geoff Slattery. Beecher also recruited a number of successful publishing people over the coming years including Bernard Leser of Conde Naste Publications.

All this notwithstanding, my *Media Flash* articles were vindicated when the initial public offering was put to the Stock Exchange: the \$2 shares have largely traded around half that value.

Media Flash recalled how *Inside Melbourne* publisher Craig Marsh had faced dishonesty charges regarding goods and services worth tens of thousands of dollars, obtained on contra when he was Publisher of *The Melbourne Weekly*. Marsh warned me to “stay well clear of me”, which these days is pretty easy, because his paper has gone out of business.

Paul Barry, then host of the ABC-TV *Media Watch* program, revealed to *Media Flash* the amount of his salary from his *Sydney Morning Herald* work, because I was the only journalist to actually ask. The story was picked up by Amanda Meade, national media writer for *The Australian*.

One of the ongoing Melbourne media stoushes has been at the local level. Felix Gander, Managing Director of the Hastings-based *Independent News*, has been at war with Neil Collyer, State Manager of Fairfax Community Newspapers.

Gander leads a team including veteran ad man Brian Hyde and Editor Tony Murrell. The papers were savaging each other over the circulation merits of their respective publications. Their front-page trade of commercial insults have been faithfully reproduced in *Media Flash*.

I related to Collyer how Don Brown had demoralised opposition *Free Press* troops by running a series of ‘We’re No. 1’ front-page articles in the *Knox News*. Brown won the battle for Leader with this strategy. Collyer has followed suit with circulation verification letters from Ian Jones, State Manager of Salmat Distributors, and Paul Harris, at the Burnie-based Harris Print in Tasmania.

Gander has hit back with strong sales efforts.

Media Flash has followed the fortunes of John Fairfax, under CEO Fred Hilmer, and its mixed fortunes with its f2 Interactive Network that loses more than \$40 million a year. Former *Age* Editor Bruce Guthrie could have afforded a wry smile with circulation struggles at *The Age*.

I could never resolve how Guthrie could be Editor at *The Age*, be a foundation shareholder at *The Melbourne Weekly*, and not have a conflict of interest.

The shock news for 2001 was when Steve Harris suddenly left the Publisher/Editor-in-Chief’s job at *The Age*, after refusing a job swap with *Sydney Morning Herald* top man Greg Hywood.

That seems to be an easy story to follow over the years to come on my electronic media news rounds.

Media commentator Mark Day has also followed the growth of the *Media Flash* column in his weekly national columns. Sometimes complimentary, sometimes not, but usually fair.

There are few online media services in Australia. Steve Ahern founded the successful weekly radio newsletter, AMT Online, at www.amt.org.au, only to be taken by Radiowise when he accepted a position at the Australian Film, TV and Radio School. Michael Gorey has set up an online portal in North-East Victoria, against a similar partnership between Hartley Higgins and Wally Mott.

An important part of my career rehabilitation was provided by my friend, Neil Collyer, of Fairfax Community Newspapers. Neil had already given *Media Flash* some valuable sponsorship, but he will never know how honored I was when his personal assistant, Tracey Mottola, called to invite me to be the Judge of the Australian Suburban Newspapers' Association annual awards.

Just when I thought I was facing the scrap heap, here I was being acknowledged as an industry leader. The invitation was a tonic.

The awards were held in Adelaide, at a hotel built on the site of Rupert Murdoch's afternoon newspaper office, *The News*. I was with familiar company, mixing with industry leaders such as Peter Anthony from Rural Press, Graeme Cutler of News Limited, Tom Milosevic from Adelaide's Messenger Newspapers, Trevor Lewis from Fairfax, Jim Lawrence and Graeme Goodson from Melbourne's *Community News*, as well as Ron Coleman from *The Western Times* and his partner Angela Attair.

I spent a fun after-dinner party with News Limited Community Newspapers boss Gene Swinstead at his Hyatt Adelaide room, upgraded to penthouse. It was nice to feel important again, and in such vibrant company.

Collyer and Mottola doubled the honor later in the year by appointing me National Judge for all papers in Australia. On both occasions it was hard to go past *The Werribee Banner*, of Outer-West Regional Editor Sean Callander, and his team led by Graeme Oldfield, as the winner. The large circulation winner was the *Blacktown Advocate* (NSW), accepted by Nini Laxamana.

Fleur and I attended the black-tie Crown Casino event, sitting alongside one of the primary winners, Ted Manners of *The Sun Weekly* from Gosford, New South Wales. Manners is an odd surname for the man who snored and farted his way through the gala night.



■ *Fairfax Community Newspapers (Vic.)* Editor-in-Chief Trevor Lewis in Adelaide.

Crikey!

Walkley-Award winning journalist Stephen Mayne looked to start his crikey.com.au website, just after my launch of *Media Flash*. Mayne had been a senior business reporter at Melbourne's *Age* and *Herald Sun* as well as a Chief-of-Staff stint at Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*. He was recruited from the Sydney daily to be an advisor to talented Victorian Treasurer Alan Stockdale and Premier Jeff Kennett.

Something badly soured for him working with Government. Mayne spun out, went on the attack: Jeff Kennett's Government was his aim. Mayne was one of the prime sources for the *Today Tonight* TV program exposé on Kennett family investments, that saw presenter Jill Singer collapse on air.

Mayne had been a Singer-suitor for a brief time.

Mayne went on to become the Rear Window columnist for Michael Gill's *Australian Financial Review*, only to rashly quit, nominating for the Victorian State election. Mayne had forgotten one important issue: he didn't qualify as a candidate.

He begged for his job back at *The Fin*, but Gill refused.

So Mayne set up the jeffed.com site, an 18,000-word, tell-all, burn-the-bridges, take-no-prisoners, 'treatise'. He credits himself with much of Kennett's defeat at the polls. The *Crikey* site carries the motto "Bringing Down Governments Since 1999".

Stephen Mayne, with old Ivanhoe school mate Con Christov, and investor Andrew Inwood, put up towards \$100,000 to establish the 'Crikey' web site in 2000, as a front window to another paid site, Shareowner.com.au

For a short while, I allowed Mayne to reproduce my *Media Flash* newsletter on his site. It increased my online exposure, but it was all working against me commercially. Top business journalist Terry Maher and I both contributed, but briefly.

Mayne starting copping legal problems from throughout the industry. As this book goes to press, he lists confrontations with News Limited lawyer Brian Gallagher, Amanda Meade of *The Australian*, Steve Price of 3AW, and others.

Mayne and I were perceived as being in two-step. For me, this turned out to be bad for business. I was consistently told that if I was going to attract paid advertising to *Media Flash*, it was going to be necessary to have a visible

break-up and a public commercial divorce from mad-Mayne.

Luck proved a fortune when Con Christov, who describes himself as the *Crikey* 'gadget man', accidentally published a list of confidential e-mail subscribers, breaking the essential rule of a whistleblowing organisation, promising that it would vouchsafe secrets. So I published the list of 287 e-mail addresses in *Media Flash*, exposing the falsehood that *Crikey* would maintain the secrecy of its 'deep throat' contributors.

Mark Day gave me a public caning in *The Australian*. He said that it was not necessary to publish the list. What rubbish! If in his former role as Publisher of that newspaper, he had an important leaked Government document, it would be senseless to merely report the publication held such a document.

To make the story, it would be necessary to reveal its explosive contents. One *Media Flash* contributor told me not to worry too much about Day's comments. After all, he was once Editor of *Truth*, where editorial judgement was whether to publish photographs containing breasts, pubic hair, or both!

Day doesn't say too much in his columns these days of his days with Owen Thomson, as majority owner of *Truth* and its associated companies. The company went belly-up, with the radio station interests transferred to Geoff Handbury, brother-in-law of Rupert Murdoch.

I decided that as a media commentator trying to re-build my public profile, I would not wish to be accused of covering up my warts-and-all past. So, taking advice from trusted mentors, I crafted all my foibles and failures in *Media Flash*, dutifully and promptly reproduced by Day in *The Australian*. It was the equivalent of receiving a national public notice - for free.

This refreshing honesty had a phenomenal upside. A number of Australia's senior media people have maintained a serious dialogue with me about media issues on a regular basis. *The Age* Publisher and Editor-in-Chief Steve Harris kept a frank exchange with me, as had his Associate Publisher John Allan, Editor Michael Gawenda and Director of Communications Nigel Henham.

I was invited as the only media trade press member to attend *The Age's* launch of the *Melbourne Property Guide*, at the new Westin Hotel. I had travelled by train, expecting to enjoy a few champagnes, and not wanting to drive. That night, I walked to Flinders Street Station for the return journey

but all Eltham line trains had been cancelled because of fires along the tracks. Again, luck proved a fortune. I spotted Yea resident Lance Adams, who is in charge of metro rail drivers. He was taking an empty train through to my stop, so I had the longest personal stretch limo in Melbourne: a six-carriage Met silver express.

Fairfax Community Newspapers boss Neil Collyer was also a strong supporter of *Media Flash*, taking out an annual sponsorship. Tony Ivers of News Limited Community Newspapers also came to the party with his 100 papers expressed to me weekly from all over the nation.

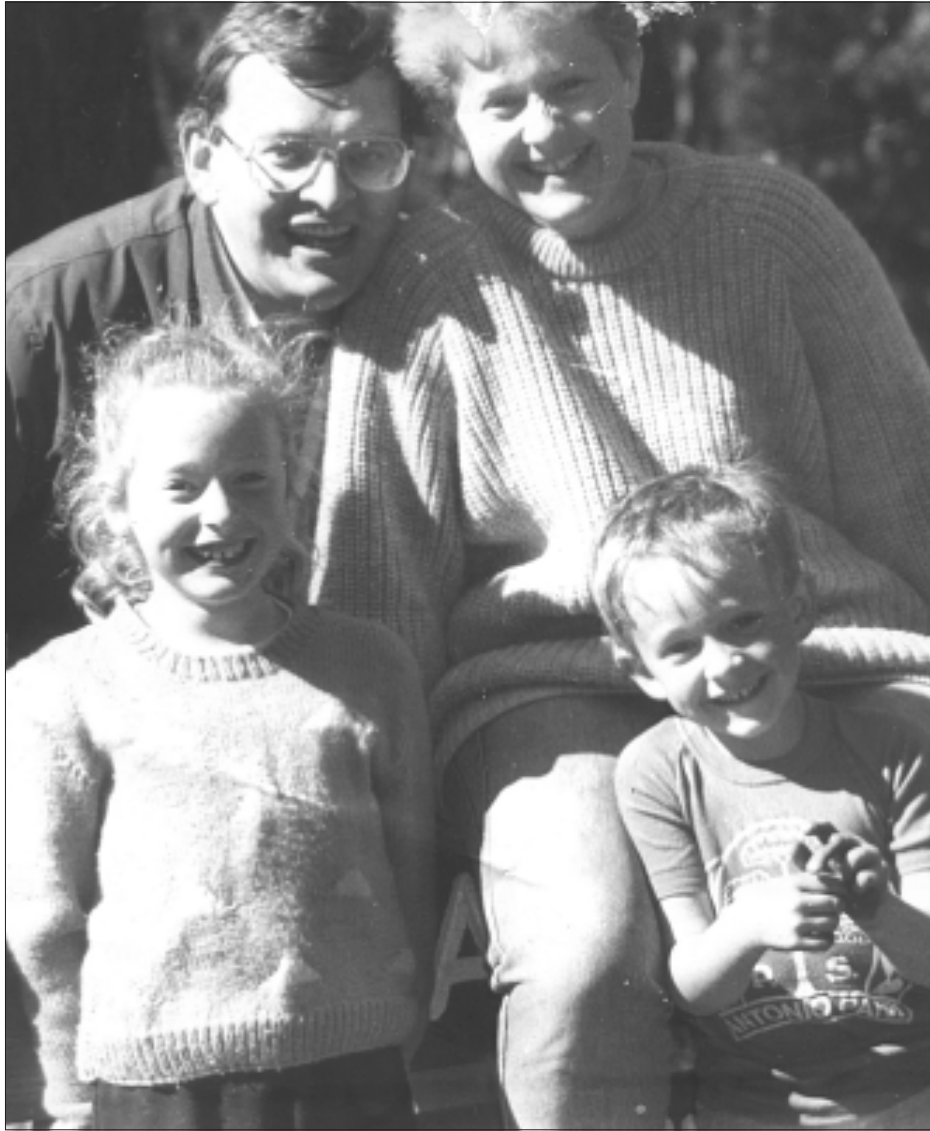
Media Flash continues its free distribution policy. My business model is that free distribution will bring more revenue, than that by a limited distribution with paid subscriptions only. This was proven when former *Nation Review* Publisher Richard Walsh and *Media Watch* producer David Salter set out to establish a paid circulation E-mail daily, *Zeitgeist Gazette*.

ZG failed because subscribers freely handed out their passwords, and many non-subscribers were about to log onto the service without charge. Their project went bust.

In November 2000, I looked like going bust too. So I tried something unusual in Australian publishing history - I told the truth.



■ Former 'Truth' and 'Australian' Publisher Mark Day offers his advice at an ACE radio meeting. Third from left is Andrew Fairley, now boss at 3MP Melbourne.



■ 'Our Gang': Caveat Picnic Ground, Yea, 1985

The Open Letter

Reproduced from *Media Flash*, November 2000

My Most-Important Editorial ... For You

More than 6400 people receive *Media Flash* every week. I prepare it and send it, free of charge, with the aim of presenting to you the latest news within our very competitive media industry, earning a few dollars from the paid advertisements.

It's no fortune, but it is probably one of the few online businesses in the world that actually runs at a small profit!

There will be many of our 6400 who may giggle in delight at what they may regard as what they see in this editorial as an ultimate surrender. Let them mock.

There will be a handful who feel empathy with the very real story being related ... and there will be just a few who will truly know what I'm talking about, and the question that comes with it.

This Question Is For You.

The Truth, The Whole Truth, and Nothing But The Truth

Since *Media Flash* started, I have tried to present the absolute truth about our media craft. This weekly newsletter is about the foibles, successes and failures of the people working within the Australian media - a people who delight in applying the blowtorch to all others.

In providing such full disclosure, I have been obliged to peel the masking layers from my own veneer. In our weekly columns, I've told you about my own business and personal failures.

Shame, Ash, Shame

After leaving a successful senior executive's post at Melbourne's Leader Newspapers in 1983, I went on to be Managing Director at Victorian Media Corporation - a company that failed gloriously just 18 months later.

Put simply, we weren't very good at it. Total debts were more than \$350,000, and of the nine partners, only two (my wife Fleur and me) stayed around to face the music in repaying the debts.

Our company had been encouraged by the money lending operation (charging more than 48 per cent per annum) to furnish 27 dud invoices.

This led me, and only me, to be placed on a 12-month good behavior bond more than a decade ago.

The Recession We Had To Have

In 1985, I voluntarily put our family home and cars up for auction, with all the proceeds going to re-pay the creditors of the company. For the next nine years, Fleur and I each worked seven-days-a-week, to re-pay more than 90 per cent of all the remaining moneys owed.

Then came Paul Keating's 'recession we had to have'.

Only people who have lived in a country district will understand what happened next. We ran a small weekly country newspaper, and ended up funding the many small family tradespeople who could not afford to pay for their ads over the hard times.

We ended up with a town ledger of \$110,000 owing to us ... and no option but to sell a profitable company, with every cent to pay out the remaining debts.

Blowing The Whistle

By 1995, we had returned to Melbourne, to start a small local paper operation.

Within a couple of years, this expanded to TV and radio production ... only to suddenly call it quits as a whistleblower-of-sorts in the 'cash-for-comment' enquiry.

Blowing people out of the water meant blowing ourselves out of the water too. It also meant bankruptcy, and the 'establishment' closing its doors on us.

Our Troubles ... And An Opportunity

The Ash Long bank is now running on empty. In fact, about \$85,000 in debt (including GST). We have a small business - two successful TV programs, this online E-newspaper, and other odd jobs - that have a track record of being quite successful. But, after 17 years in small business, we have simply run out of chips.

One motivational book encourages us: "Don't Keep Your Troubles To Yourself".

And with that faith, but perhaps commercially unwisely, I open myself to you ... warts and all.

Successes

My 30-year media career includes achieving the best, and working with the best. I have been a Senior Executive with a large company.

I have been the successful proprietor of a newspaper company over a 10-year period. I rescued a 112,000-circulation newspaper - which had been losing \$20,000 a week for that company - back it back into profit.

I was named Winner of Victoria's Best Local Reporting Award. I have fostered many careers. For community works, others awarded me with as a Rotary International Paul Harris Fellow.

There are thousands of favors that I now seek to call in.

My Vision: Putting My Difficulties To Work

With all these knocks; having voluntarily sold all our assets; having been Bankrupted by my own application; I still have a faith to practise, encourage and foster honest media in the Australian community.

I am energetic, talented, visionary, able, skilled, loyal, honest and hard-working.

But will that be enough?

A Final Question

I reckon I am a good enough family and community man, keen and eager to do the right thing.

But, at just 44, this week brings with it the danger, of being put on Australia's media scrap-heap forever.

What a waste of a man - and the enormous media experience that accompanies!

So this letter blindly seeks a few good folk to help me with my endeavours.

I am trying to raise \$85,000 - either by repayable loans or gifts - by 5pm this Wednesday. Otherwise I'm being put out of the picture.

I will use these funds to re-pay all outstanding debts and taxes, and get on with the business of honest media. I will re-pay these loans and gifts (whether directly, or to charities) as quickly as I can.

You will receive a receipt promptly.

Will you help me please - if you can?



■ With Fleur, at Ivanhoe Grammar School's 'Millennium Ball' at Crown Casino, Melbourne in 1999.

Thundering Response

The response was thunderous. Diana Carroll, General Manager of Media Monitors in Adelaide, summed it up in her *City Messenger* 'Mediaweek' column: "*Media Flash* is a weekly e-zine published by Ash Long, one of Australia's best known media junkies. Ash may be a great hack but he's sadly not such a great businessman. This week he launched a public appeal via *Media Flash* to raise the tens of thousands of dollars being demanded by his creditors.

"Within days, the money was flooding in to keep his newsy, informative and irreverent electronic newsletter afloat. Sometimes you just have to ask."

Media giant, Geoff Handbury (Rupert Murdoch's brother-in-law), sent me a handwritten fax, indicating that although he could not help me save my business, he wished me well.

Bruce Wolpe, Corporate Affairs Manager for Fairfax, thanked me for my letter to CEO Fred Hilmer. Thanks, but no thanks. His reply was a cold one-liner, it didn't even wish me good luck.

One professional enquiry came from Barrie Parsons, Publisher of the ad industry's *B&T Weekly*. Barrie started his career at 2TM Tamworth, joining Eric Solomon's *B&T* as a junior reporter in 1960. Parsons worked his way through the ranks, also serving the publication during its term under the control of Eric's daughter and son-in-law, Judy and Ian Rolle. For nine years, Barrie worked at David Yaffa's *Ad News* 'trying to kill *B&T*', but later returned to the fold when Thomson Publications sold its interests to the British-owned Reed Information. Phew!

Barrie saw the *Media Flash* mailing list as a valuable commercial commodity, and asked if its sale would assist my financial plight. After such overwhelming reader support, I decided not to go ahead with such a sale, but it did put me in touch with Stan Gyles of Action Direct Marketing, Australia's largest hirer of professional mailing lists. Hopefully, serious pocket money follows.

Michael Ray, who started the *High Country Times* at Mansfield with David Luelf, offered to publish my book. There might just be a sequel to *Long Shots*!

Old school and university colleague, Rhys Watson, was also in touch. Today, he is Toorak-based, and the Financial Controller of a large world cargo organisation. I had known him in his earlier guise as an accountant, a

City of Heidelberg Councillor for six years, a Liberal Party activist and founding Treasurer of the Inner-FM (3INR) radio station, in association with President Bruce Skeggs.

Rhys and his brother Bruce shouted me a friendly lunch at Lynch's. They picked at the bones of my business ideas, then promptly set up their own *Yarra Buzz* online service in the same month. I can cope with that.

Andrew Beecher of IPMG offered me a swag of online sub-editing work. Peter Cullum wanted some news releases.

Old school-mate Hans Van Bloemendaal, now a successful newsagent, e-mailed me: "I read the letter with admiration - it must have been painful to bare your soul. It took balls to do it and therein deserves recognition ... we all make bad choices during our lives and recognition should go to those who put up their hand and accept responsibility for them."

Ivanarian Peter Dawes cheered me up with an encouraging pat on the back.

Stand-in *Sunday Age* 'Spy' columnist Liz Porter decided to have a bit of fun at my expense:

"When Ash, one-time producer and agent of sacked 'contra for comment' 3AW *Nightline* host Bruce Mansfield, found himself \$85,000 in debt, he tried some inventive schemes.

"The PR man, who had up big bills setting up his online weekly newsletter *Media Flash*, invited media people to pay \$2000 to nominate themselves for a media award. When that one didn't fly, he decided to keep things simple and just asked subscribers to his newsletter for donations.

"Incredibly, it worked, with Long claiming that he has now collected more than half his debt. But has millionaire Mansfield, now with shoestring radio station 3AK, let bygones be bygones and coughed up some lucre for his old mate, the former producer of his Channel 31 show *Mansfield's Melbourne*? 'Everyone's chipped in except Bruce,' Long lamented."

But Martin Bartlett bucked me up with the Chekov quotation: "If I had have listened to the dismissals of my critics, I would have ended up drunk in the gutter."

Darlene Richard, who operates the ethics-based Call Centre Integrity in Sydney, commented to a professional colleague about me: "I received an e-mail from him this morning that gave me all kinds of good feelings and

admiration for a true battler almost completely winning his immediate battle ... I believe Ash is one of those rare fellows who 'could sell ice to the eskimos'."

There is a place for honest, hard work in Australia.

Cardboard box corporate giant Richard Pratt has a favourite quotation: "It's amazing, the more money we give away, the more the company makes. Generosity works."

So I can match Richard Pratt's saying: "It seems the more frank and honest that I am, even at personal cost, the more support I receive. Honesty works."

And it is true that every cloud has a silver lining. The rough adult battles made me thank the Reservoir East bullies whose schoolyard brutality taught me a mental toughness greater than theirs, so early in my life.

On reflection, I can thank the Ivanhoe toffs who tried to overpower with their wealth and bluster. It inspired me to successfully prove that the comparatively broke and powerless Reservoir bloke could actually do the leadership job better than them.

The tough episodes of my adult commercial life now allow me to thank the handful of company directors who once voted against a joint venture with me. If they had agreed, they would have sold their business within a handful of years, leaving me stranded. Instead, it set me free to face a majesty of life challenges to which I would never have otherwise been exposed. Their denial actually gave me a fund of unforgettable experiences and achievements.

If the money lenders had not trapped me in their web, charged me their 48 per cent usury, and sent me broke ... I would not have developed a unique business toughness.

Their greed, in fact, gave me a lesson from which I was young enough to recover. And I shed no tears when I heard about their eventual bankruptcy, at an age ... when they were too old.

The banks that rejected my loan applications for sound business plans saved me the cost of their ruthless and unconscionable interest rates and charges. They made me work harder and smarter.

The small-minded jealous countryfolk who set an opposition paper made me produce better award-winning work. Their empty shop was testament.

The tricky publishers who left me hanging and broke for months, only made it easier for me to leave their unhappy enterprise as soon as possible.

Does every cloud have a silver lining? Had I not argued with one company, I could still be living for most of the week in Canberra ... hundreds of kilometres away from my family. And I could be working for a company which has had some shareholders asking for a refund.

What favour did the Government Minister who treated me like a small business microbe, do for me, when I made a personal appeal to her? She made me find a more profitable business. I win.

The radio station that breached its contract to appoint me as its General Manager saved me 18 months of running an impossible loss-making company.

The radio personality who refused my hand of friendship has freed me from a self-centred artificial industry, that tends to reckon you can fool all the people, all the time. You can't ... and neither does he.

I thank that the TV producer who refused to pay me. She actually gave me back 10 per cent of my working week when I quit. It has helped me to meet my budgets, not her.

I even appreciate the lesson provided by the debtors who never paid me. They only served to teach the lesson to never undercharge. They taught me that their integrity does not always necessarily match mine, and gave me permission to unashamedly ask to be paid promptly for my services.

All these were hard-won lessons. Some of them have only just been realised, as I undertake my financial fightback. I do thank the customers who did pay for my services. They taught me that he who serves best, does profits most ... eventually.

And with what I've learned ... that's no *Long Shot*!

I started by shedding 40 pounds. And it's back to early 9.30pm bed-time.

The year 2001 has started with record sales for my company. *Media Flash* is enjoying unprecedented success, with the launch of daily editions. My TV programs are enjoying triple the sales of previous years! Like that great fisherman, Rex Hunt, it's taken me 25 years to become an 'overnight success'.

It is no coincidence that the business boost (or my lift in performance) comes as this book goes to press, and I make a 'clean breast' of my life.

My mate of 30 years, Pete Greenaway, reminds me: 'A Setback is a Setup for a Comeback'. Hold on to your hats ... because I'm making my comeback right now. I'm feeling more positive than ever, as my determination crashes through the sound barrier.

Boy, did you hear that 'bang'?

Appendix 1: 'Persistence'

To those, who like me, are facing their uphill battles in life:
I recommend the words which hang prominently in my office. They are
from remarks made by United States President Calvin Coolidge, 1923-29.

Nothing in the world
can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not;
nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.

Genius will not;
unrewarded genius is almost a proverb

Education will not;
the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence and determination
alone are omnipotent.

The slogan 'press on' has solved
and always will solve the problems of the human race.

Appendix 2

'Keeping The Bastards Honest'

In late November 2000, after my *Media Flash* open letter, Lawrence Gibbons published this piece in his widely-circulating *Sydney City Hub* weekly newspaper. The cover story was titled 'Keeping The Bastards Honest'.

Richard Walsh, co-founder of Oz in the 60's, editor of the *Nation Review* in the 70's and now a trusted alternative media advisor to the *City Hub*, forwarded the latest edition of the media industry newsletter, *Media Flash* to my attention. In it Ash Long, *Media Flash's* editor, publisher and web master was making a zero hour plea entitled 'Do Miracles Still Happen In Australia?'

If he did not raise \$85,000 immediately, his newsletter would go bust.

Each week *Media Flash* (www.mediaflash.com.au) provides free, online insiders' information about Australia's media industry; an industry that is dominated by a handful of multi billion dollar corporations. While Long frantically struggles to keep his head above water, Australia's large media conglomerates are raking in record crops of cash.

Australian-based News Corporation is the largest publicly listed corporation in the land. With almost \$70 billion in assets, the Murdoch owned juggernaut has more market capital than NAB and ANZ combined. Kerry Packer's PBL is a small, local, family owned business by comparison.

But with \$9 billion in assets, PBL is still larger than QANTAS and the NRMA combined. Worth a mere \$3 billion and with just one third the total capital of PBL, the supposedly small, struggling Fairfax organisation has more market capital than the Seven Network (\$1.7 billion) and the Ten Network (\$1 billion) combined. And they call it 'free' speech!

These are the guardians of the public trust; the elite few who decide how the democratically defended right to free speech will make them money. You can count the well-funded keepers of Australia's Fourth Estate on one hand.

As any undergraduate journalism student knows, it is the executives, owners and large shareholders of a few large conservative conglomerates,

which decide what will and what won't be presented as news to the rest of us. In the name of market share and audience and sales and profits, news budgets are continually slashed. And it becomes increasingly impossible for the rest of us to become informed, responsible members of a democratic society.

In flat, matter of fact prose, Ash Long's *Media Flash* describes the internecine wars, the power struggles, the bloodless coups and the bitchy backstabbing bullshit that occurs in the back rooms and the boardrooms of Australia's media organisations. Long's web site does nothing less than chronicle the dying days of mass reach investigative journalism in Australia.

Who were the brave souls among us who fought the good fight, who refused to accept the shrinking news budget at 'our' ABC, who worked at the *Herald* and still had the balls to complain about the insulting, patronising, light and breezy, new, easy to read format? Long turns the investigative gaze of the media onto the media itself. The media industry once believed it was its sacred responsibility to watchdog the practices and abuses of other corporate citizens. Now the industry believes it is its responsibility to deliver profits and that serious news is not profitable.

Who is keeping an eye on the watchdog while it snoozes? The ABC's exceedingly short weekly show *Media Watch* looks more and more like a segment of Bloopers. Fairfax does an excellent job of covering its own businesses dealings. *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian Financial Review* promote their own corporate performance with boundless vigour. If you want to know why Fairfax is really struggling, read a News Ltd publication. Or better yet, read Ash Long's web site.

Ash Long couldn't have chosen a more appropriate week in which to reveal his financial woes as a journalist. This was a sad, sad week for the dying art of journalism in Australia. Ash Long's email followed the resignation of Jeff McMullen of *60 Minutes*, who left Channel Nine after being paid \$350,000 a year by Kerry Packer, proving that the good money is in bad journalism.

On his way out the door he loudly objected to how free the old man had been with his chequebook. Every week for many miserable years, after cashing his cheque from Channel Nine, he complained (like the rest of us) about the editorial integrity of the show. Like Jana Wendt, Jeff went from the ABC to commercial television only to discover what the television viewing public already knew: *60 Minutes* is sensationalistic, unintelligent, tabloid trash.

It was also the week in which the official eulogy for investigative journalism in Australia was delivered by Eric Beecher, Text Media's CEO, at the annual Andrew Olle lecture. Eric Beecher opened and quickly shut *The Eye*, a fortnightly publication that promised to deliver a new breed of Australian journalism.

The first issue of *The Eye* promised to produce: "The kind of journalism that digs underneath and around the edges that reveals interesting and important things about Australia that do not get covered in the millions of words produced each day by the rest of the media." In the end, *The Eye* only succeeded in digging itself an early grave.

The Eye closed because Eric Beecher was either unwilling or unable to continue spending Text Media profits on costly investigative pieces. It is always cheaper to cover events than it is to uncover the news. Fluffy feel good pieces are easier to churn out than critical, engaging prose. And there is more money to be made producing promotional pieces for real estate agents and glossy circulars for grocery stores. In the end real, old-fashioned, kick-em-in-the-guts journalism proved too costly to produce. Eric Beecher killed his favourite son because the little bastard ate too much. Now he was delivering the eulogy.

In the world according to Beecher, no media organisation in Australia big or small will ever again fund serious journalism. According to Beecher we have embarked on a Brave New World in Australian journalism. To paraphrase Sam Goldwyn, "the old days are gone forever."

In Beecher's words: "Journalism and serious media, like many other elements of the best of the 20th century, has been systemically transformed from something that had institutional status into a commodity. The era of the privately-run family dynasties in Australian media is over, and the era of benign governance of the ABC is over. The old-style media barons like Frank Packer, Keith Murdoch, Charles Moses and Warwick Fairfax Senior had real fun as they ruled their empires paternalistically and autocratically, without barely a thought for shareholders or stakeholders or returns on equity. For the Packers and the Fairfaxes, power always seemed more important than money, although they also made sure there was more than enough of the folding stuff available to support their personal lifestyles."

Seen through Beecher's rose coloured glasses, the media barons of yesteryear were benevolent dictators, who never used the power of the press

to protect their own financial interests. Beecher no doubt also believes that politicians were once more noble and that young people used to be better behaved. Unfortunately, free speech has always been controlled by an elite few. In the good old days, media barons broke the news to sell newspapers.

Nowadays newspapers report small, insipid trivial matters with bigger and bolder fonts. They bury the news and wonder why they fail to sell newspapers. Is it any wonder that over the last 25 years, daily newspaper readership in Australia has declined by 38%?

Name another business in Australia that has seen as much erosion as the daily newspaper industry? And yet profits continue to soar. The big bucks are tossed around with boundless stupidity and Eric Beecher wants his share. That a newcomer like Beecher, a journalist turned media entrepreneur, should found an independent media company and throw in the towel on funding a quality journalistic enterprise in less than a year is the only true disappointment. No one who launches a new, credible journalistically serious publication seriously believes that it will become profitable in less than five years.

While there are still a few among us who actually believe an audience for independent, intelligent, irreverent media exists and is capable of making money, Beecher's pessimism is understandable. It is hard to remain optimistic when news of shrinking news budgets becomes commonplace. How can you not grow resigned to the inevitable extinction of 'serious' journalism? We have been transformed into gullible consumers who would rather pour over publicist generated press releases and clip coupons than read the news.

Those of us who still read the 'Ten Minute' *Herald* searching for real news appear to be an ever-shrinking market segment. At the 'quality' end of the media market, Fairfax has learned the same lesson as Eric Beecher: There is more money to be made writing about real estate investments, upmarket cafes and chic home decorating tips than there is in paying an investigative journalist to uncover corruption among political friends, advertisers and financial investors who hold shares in your large media corporation.

The financial analysts and well-paid media consultants argue there are not enough of us to justify producing costly, intelligent, investigative news. Apparently the ignorant masses really do want to read about Nicole Kidman,

whose latest film will be either produced, released or screened by a subsidiary of the same large entertainment conglomerate that conveniently owns either the newspapers or the television stations. Call it vertical integration or call it the loss of critical thought, they don't make news like they used to.

Can investigative journalism survive the transition from gritty newsprint to the, glossy realm of mega media entertainment conglomerates? As Eric Beecher pointed out in his Andrew Olle lecture, when all is said and done, many media corporations are publicly listed corporations. They have responsibilities to their employees and to their shareholders to remain financially viable.

Increasingly they believe that there is not a large enough audience for serious journalism to warrant the expense of operating newsrooms. They think we are incredibly stupid. And the more we continue to read their papers and watch their television shows, the more we prove them right.

Can Ash Long survive, never mind thrive, while pursuing the once noble art of journalism? If he is to do so with limited funds, there is probably no better place for him than an offramp on the Information Super Highway. As Eric Beecher can personally attest after publishing *The Eye*, producing a quality print publication without the resources of a billion-dollar corporation is a horrific endeavour. Perhaps the brave new world of the Internet is one of the last great hopes for free speech in the modern world. Online publishing, unlike its print and broadcast counterparts is a relatively inexpensive endeavour. There are no trees to cut down, no paper products to recycle, no oil based ink chemicals to consume, no expensive government licenses to acquire, no large ticket, high tech cameras and editing machines to operate.

The Internet is public broadcasting at its most democratic level. Now that the hype behind the Internet boom has subsided and the media has gone from talking up Internet investments to bemoaning the fact that no one can possibly make money on the net, it has returned to the hands of those of us who only ever used it as an information source. While the media moguls feed us bullshit in print and attempt to seduce us on the screen, ever increasing numbers of us tune out and log on in search of the news and information for which we are starved. We are no longer passive recipients of infotainment. We are in the driver's seat as we actively search for news and information among the millions of pages that are posted online for free.

And yet even producing an Internet web page costs money. Even an

investigative journalist with the burning passion of a poet and the online technical skills of a computer geek must eat. Watchdogging the watchdog is a full time pursuit. Ash Long amassed \$85,000 worth of debts pursuing his dream. How many among us are brave enough to put everything on the line in pursuit of the truth?

If Ash Long was brave enough to do so, should we not support him? Should we as a society, depend on a few large media conglomerates to provide us with credible and critical information about their own dealings as they invest less resources pursuing the news in order to entertain us mindlessly?

If each *City Hub* reader sent \$10 to Ash Long, he would have a \$750,000 budget with which to build an independent, investigative media company. For the cost of the three beers many of us will drink at the corner pub while complaining about the lack of media diversity in Australia, we could subsidise an alternative media outlet. Needless to say, not every *City Hub* reader will send \$10 to Ash Long. Many of us will not be bothered. But if one in ten readers were to skip the *Herald* for two weeks and instead send \$10 to Ash Long, he would be financially solvent. If enough of us were passionately interested in supporting independent, investigative journalism and in keeping the bastards honest, the media conglomerates might even take notice.

Who knows? Maybe there really is an audience for intelligent, critical, independent journalism in Australia after all.

Ash Long can be contacted at 0417 123 094 or at mediaflash@yahoo.com. Funds can be deposited directly to: Ash Long, Westpac Bank of Melbourne, Eltham, Victoria, 033 031, 199-940.

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My Mum Taught Me To Say 'Thank You'

Readers will see that I often used the Newspaper Editor's term of 'we', when the reference is clearly about one person. I'll rely on Mark Twain's quote: "The only people allowed to use the term 'We' are Royalty, Editors and people with tapeworm."

Thanks to Chris Terry of Blueprint, Melbourne's greatest printers. He has been a great help in publishing this book, unashamedly put together to help fund a financial recovery. Chris and I met at the 'Albertorium' - Nillumbik Cellars run by Albert Di Pietro, who has assisted me in many more ways than a diet of Hahn Light.

Mentors Don and Joy Brown, and Ron and Marilyn Pearce, rushed to my aid when the chips were really down. The Longs would have faced absolute ruin had not these great mates been standing back-stop.

My dear friends, Peter and Deb Greenaway, walked alongside me in those darkest days. They re-ignited the enthusiasm, accompanied by the laughter of good friends.

Accountant David Purcell has been a faithful supporter. He's so good they should have named a loophole after him.

Gary Fitzgerald was a mate and help during the Yea years. He proved there is no such thing as a drinking problem, only drinking opportunities.

We adopted Keith Peplar when his *Main Range Magazine* business fell over. We came to his aid when he suffered a heart attack. We paid him first each week, and ourselves last. We sent Keith and his wife Serena Erich to Fiji as a bonus. Keith inherited our Seymour - Nagambie newspaper without charge, keeping me on the part-time payroll for a short while. He then sacked me with a 15-second message on the answering machine. Thanks for the loyalty, Pep!

Michael Ray of the *High Country Times* newspaper at Mansfield has been an enthusiastic sharer of ideas. Nigel Henham, Director of Communications at *The Age*, has been a strong cheer squad for my online *Media Flash* newsletter. His Fairfax colleague, Neil Crowther, Victorian State Manager of Fairfax Community Newspapers, has also been a faithful professional friend over a decade.

Greg Long helped me with legal advice and support in the very early days. He has been my brother: the closest genetic specimen on Earth to me. Frightening isn't it?

My sister, Denise, and mother, Marjory, have prayed for me. God bless them too.

My late father, Jim, was an honorable confidante, whose wise counsel and mateship I dearly miss.

Enormous strength has been provided without complaint by my wife, Fleur. She's also fun to dance with. Humour and strength are also the hallmarks of daughter Kristi and son James whose rapier wit encourage me to laugh at myself, and not to take myself too seriously.

Thank you to everyone who has bought this book. I appreciate each and every one of you. And thanks to the many who have written or e-mailed me with support.

And Just Finally ...

Les Boreham, my senior English teacher of quarter-of-a-century ago, has corrected some of my promotional leaflet literals and typos. A pretty good effort, seeing that he wasn't even asked.

What People Say About Ash Long and 'Media Flash'

"You have the knack of capturing many hours of bar talk, acres of print space and the reports of scores of flies on media walls in a crisp, entertaining and valuable update that I want to continue receiving at my new address."

- Jim Clarke, Murdoch Magazines

"Congratulations Ash on *Media Flash*. Now that I am semi-retired MF keeps me in touch with what the young media men and women of today are doing. It is apparent that they have to cope with the same editorial, ad sales and circulation problems as I and my contemporaries did in the 1950's through to the 1990's. Some things are different though. Pre-press for example plus low interest rates and the fervent desire of banks to lend money make it much easier for would-be publishing entrepreneurs to start new publications or expand old ones. Best wishes."

- Peter Isaacson

"I'm sold! What a great little info piece! It's important for me to stay in touch with the latest media goss, and you've just made that task a lot easier!"

**- Angela Pogonoski, Communications Planner
AIS Media, Sydney**

"Good morning, have just read *Media Flash*. Love it!"

- Gaye Harrington, Ten Capital

"I can't get through my Monday without a good cup of coffee and my weekly *Media Flash* update - love the gossip and really enjoy finding what is happening across the country in similar businesses and industries. Keep up the good work!"

- Mikyla Thompson, Editor, Weekender, SA

"I would like to subscribe to *Media Flash* please. A friend sent it to me and I think it is excellent."

**- Vickie Smiles,
Business Sunday Program, Channel Nine**

"Love your work. Please put me on your list."

- Tom Raggatt, HWR Media Specialists

"Thanks so much for sending my edition of *Media Flash*. It's been passed around the station for everyone's perusal and I dare say it could provide to be a rather 'popular/must have a look at now!' publication."

- Ivanka Salopek, Win TV

"This looks very informative and entertaining. I'd love to subscribe."

**- Marie Nancarrow, Press and Public Affairs
British Consulate General**

"I'm a journo at *The West Australian* in Perth and just wanted to say that I think *Media Flash* is excellent. A friend in Sydney e-mails it to me each week and I was just wondering if it is possible to subscribe myself?"

- Kristen Watts, *The West Australian*

"Congratulations! You are producing a very useful and insightful media news service. It is proving to be invaluable to me in both my teaching and media commentary work! Well done."

**- Lee Burton, Senior Lecturer in Media,
RMIT; media commentator and analyst**

"As a PR consultancy, Howorth Communications has a keen interest in obtaining any information on the latest media changes. We would like to subscribe to your publication."

- Elizabeth Dawson, Howorth Communications

"I'd love to subscribe to your *Media Flash* newsletter please. Thanks for your time, and keep up the great work."

- Mark Sales, Central Hunter Radio

"Having just seen my first copy of your email mag would you please add me to your email edition list."

**- Heather Craven, Director of Marketing
Audit Bureau of Circulations**

"Congratulations on your excellent publication. It is brief, very newsy and succinct. Best of all, there are no flashing logos to drive readers up the wall. Thanks!"

**- Miriam Brown, Features Editor
Optometrists Association Australia**

"Please may I join up to *Media Flash*? And thanks to Greg Leech on one of our sister titles for letting me in on Australia's best-kept media secret."

**- Steve Carey, Group Publisher
Australian Consolidated Press - Motoring**

"I enjoy reading your *Media Flash* each week - it seems even e-mags/newsletters have a pass-on rate. Please add me to the mailing list so I can receive my own weekly copy."

- Tom Richter, Text Media Group

"With over 20 years experience in mainly print media, advertising and publishing, *Media Flash* is the ideal network supplement one needs to fulfill a healthy diet of Aussie media news, the who's who of our exciting industry today! Keep up the good work."

- Aden Carter, National Sales Manager, Harris Print

"One Monday morning several weeks ago, *Media Flash* just started appearing in my queue of beginning-of-the-week e-mails. I read and thoroughly enjoyed it. Likewise it has been turning up religiously every Monday morning thereafter ... please place me on the free list for evermore."

- Charles A. Luckman, Queensland Freemasons

"Just been told I HAD to sign up (apparently this *Media Flash* is addictive!) I am the publications co-ordinator for Intripd Travel, responsible for all publications, PR and promotions and would love to receive the newsletter."

- Rebecca Scarse, Intrepid Travel

"I'd just like to congratulate you on your *Media Flash* column. It's thorough, and covers a wider scope of media than other outlets. So thanks for giving us such a good read."

- Dan Ziffer, Editor, *Communique*: Text Magazines, for Microsoft

"Thanks for your great newsletter. As a mainly self-taught editor, I find your info-morsels fascinating and incredibly useful."

- **Caroline Gardam, Minni, Qld**

"I would like to subscribe to your newsletter as I find it quite useful for industry knowledge."

- **Robert Grant, Sales Manager, Southern Courier**

"I'm the Advertising Manager for *The Sunday Age* and I would like to subscribe to *Media Flash*."

- **Christine Bell, The Sunday Age**

"I receive *Media Flash*, enjoy it greatly every week and look forward to seeing it thrive and grow."

- **Jed White, Techne-Ventures**

"Congratulations - I've only been a subscriber for about six weeks, but even in that time it's gone from strength to strength. I've also been an avid reader of your job advertisements."

- **David Evans, Journalist, Balmain**

"Terrific publication! Keep up the good work (and goss)!"

- **David Kennedy, Program Mgr, 6KG/HOT FM**

"I have just been e-mailed your *Media Flash* and have enjoyed the read."

- **Tina Large, Lyncroft Consulting Group**

"Just read *Media Flash*, think it's great, would love a free subscription please."

- **Melissa Haigh, Australian Red Cross**

"Just a note to tell you how much we look forward to our weekly fix of media goss and goings on."

- **Anthony Wood, Editor, Armidale Independent**

"I heard on the grapevine you have a great newsletter, can I please be added to the list?"

- **Charles Silvestro, PC Systems Service**

"Congrats on a fabulous product - word of mouth references attesting to the quality and integrity of your content are flying thick and fast!"

- **Jayne Dullard, *The Body Politic***

"Excellent work - keep it going - what a refreshing change from the all too often copied USA approach of mega technology and slick tricks to flog nothing but more crap (and the US global agenda). *Media Flash* is a great model that shows that meaningful content wins."

- **Dan Stojanovich, *Planet***

"Great read. Please put me on the e-mail list."

- **Anthony McDonald, GM, *Melbourne Weekly Magazine***

"I thought that the 'Jest A Moment' piece was one of the funniest things I've ever read. *Media Flash* makes it so easier to come to work on Monday mornings."

- **Doug Cole, Station Manager, KOCV-FM, Texas**

"Gotta say I just love catching up with *Media Flash* each week. It's the first e-mail I open, after I've made a coffee of course, and I don't do anything else until I've finished reading it!"

- **Peter Taylor, MD, 98.9 North West FM**

"*Media Flash* is probably the best industry publication of any I've seen in any format ... it's a balance of 'hard' news, gossip (though not the salacious kind!) and useful information; it's up-to-date; and the subscription price can't be beaten."

- **Rex Widerstrom, Journalist, New Zealand**

"Having pinched a look at your *Media Flash* publication from a colleague bright enough to have subscribed. I would like to receive my very own copy."

- **Chris Rowley, Meat & Livestock Australia**

"A great little industry e-newsletter."

- **Ian Wilson, Australian Council of Social Service**

"I value *Media Flash*."

- Terry Lane, ABC Broadcaster

"Great stuff ... keep it up."

- Richard Broadbridge, Fiji TV, Suva

"I read *Media Flash* from top to bottom every week."

- Nancy Gray, Network Communications

"Looks useful for my students."

- Stephen Quinn, Senior Lecturer in Journalism
Deakin University

"Please add my other e-mail address to your subscription list, so I never miss an issue."

- Les Hams, Leader Newspapers

"Many thanks for some fine entertainment!"

- Sue Blackwell, former Executive Director
Australian Publishers Association

"Please add me to your weekly free e-mail subscription."

- Max Markson, Markson Sparks

"I want to join your impressive list of subscribers."

- Diana Carroll, General Manager
Media Monitors, SA

"I already miss not getting your weekly e-letter. You are making it hard for the likes of *B&T*!"

- Michael Richards, Group Publisher, Courier Newspapers

"Like your *Flash*, Ash ... much meat with a little mash."

- Fergus Maclagan, Mass Media Publicitas

WRITE YOUR BETS IN HERE

One night, an old Editor was frantic when all sports copy had been exhausted.

The deadline had past, and the printers were screaming for the final page.

A large white space remained on the page, so he wrote this simple headline to fill the gap. It went to press - and instead of complaints, became a hit with readers!

Everytime I see a blank page, I pay compliment to the man who filled the page.

And I should know ... I've just completed 304 of them!

By the way, good luck with your Long Shots!