

HOW I ENDED UP IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION

After leaving St Stanislaus College Bathurst in 1957, where I gained an A and 5Bs in my Leaving Certificate, I wanted to secure a job as a Jackeroo on an outback station, a traineeship as a stock & station agent or as a woolclasser. Teaching was the furthest job on my mind at the time. Included in my Leaving Certificate subjects was Wool Classing; the stage one course being held weekly at the Bathurst Technical College, as it was then known.

The teacher was Mr Bob Bridon a wonderful, popular friendly human being. Due to his excellent teaching skill, I was fortunate enough to obtain an 'A' pass, which then allowed me to finish stage 2 at East Sydney Technical College (The former Darlinghurst Gaol), early in 1958. As an aside, I have to admit, as well as attending woolclassing lectures, some of us students spent some time in the nearby Darlinghurst Court House, listening to some of the very interesting criminal cases being conducted there.

After having gained my Woolclassing Diploma, I traipsed around Sydney visiting many wool companies such as Dalgetys, Shute Bell & Badgery, Goldsbrough Mort & Co, Elder Smith and Commonwealth Wool, Farmers & Graziers, but was unable to secure any of the positions listed above.

Nearing impecuniosity and feeling very weary and dejected, I called in at Grazcos shearing company in Young St Sydney, where I was fortunate enough to obtain employment from the manager Mr Gartside, as a shed hand at 'Warrana' Station Coonamble, where there were 40,000 sheep to be shorn by 12 shearers. The job was '***picker up***' which involved picking up fleeces and sweeping up after each sheep was shorn. Even though there were two of us picking up, I have to say the job was somewhat arduous, but fortunately I slept well at night and became very fit!!

The shearing took around 5 weeks and during that time, shearers, shed hands, the cook and his helper, were all located in huts, supplied by the Australian & New Zealand Land Company, owners of the station at the time. Picking up, wasn't the job I particularly relished, because as a qualified wool classer, I would have preferred a job as a classer, but as '*beggars can't be choosers*' as the saying goes, and as

there was a pecking order, I accepted the shed hand position, as the pay was good, and unlike the shearers, we were paid if the shed happened to be closed due to wet weather. Understandably, that particular agreement was not appreciated by the shearers, particularly if there was a long period of wet weather and they were only being fed, without pay. I'm told the situation has since changed, whereby shearers and shed hands now come under the one agreement.

The classer at Warrana station was John Warren a thorough gentleman and an experienced classer who hailed from Dubbo. He gave me some finer tips on the classing of wool, which in those days was classed according to staple length, crimp, fineness and lustre, whereas today, it is classed by microns, about which I must admit, I know very little. The Boss of the Board was Phil Blair who coincidentally, my Dad had taught at Young High School, some years before. I later bought my first vehicle from Phil, namely an FJ Holden ute.

Throughout the remainder of that year and the next year, I worked in various sheds around NSW, carrying out various tasks such as piece picking, wool rolling, pressing, & hut keeping and assisting the cook. During that time, I soon learnt what life was really all about, ie it wasn't all beer and skittles, and I soon developed quickly from being a boy into a man, having mixed with men of all sorts of backgrounds. However, the money was good, so it was not long before I became accustomed to the lifestyle, and I got to enjoy it very much. Although I only worked in the sheds for a relatively short period of time, it did not take me long to realise that there was *LIFE EDUCATION* as well as *ACADEMIC EDUCATION* !!

When the shearing season finished for the year, in order to supplement my income, I worked in the Grazcos wool stores located in Euston Rd and Bourke Rd Alexandria. During this time, I boarded with my wonderful Grandparents Kate & Will Martin who resided at Hurlstone Park. Whilst working in the wool stores, around November 1959, I contracted a bug in my right leg which swelled up to almost double its normal size, and the pain was excruciating.

When oral antibiotics were not taking effect, I was admitted to Lewisham Hospital by the GP Dr Quilty, under the care of a specialist, and placed on a drip. One day, the specialist and Matron visited me to inform me, that as the treatment wasn't working to the specialist's satisfaction, they were going to try another form of antibiotic. As they left the ward and

were still within hearing distance, I happened to overhear the word *'amputation'* obviously taken out of context. This you would understand, placed a shiver down my spine.

I then called for the matron and when she arrived, I told her of my anxiety, whereupon she allayed my fears, informing me that the specialist and she had not been discussing my case, but that of another patient in the hospital. My relief at hearing this, knew no bounds!!

My Grandfather Bill was not happy with what had happened to me, and after I eventually left hospital, he constantly kept at me to get a **'good secure job'** like my father, who at that time, was a language teacher at Bathurst High school.

In order to placate my Grandfather, I applied for a Teachers' College scholarship, hoping that I would not get an interview, as I had come to like the shearing shed life very much. However, to my surprise, I was contacted by the Dept. Education Area Office at Bathurst to come in to be interviewed by Mr Percy Beckenham, the then Western Area Director of Education.

After having been interviewed, Mr Beckenham informed me that he would be recommending me for a Teachers' Scholarship. However, he asked me whether I currently had a job to go to, whereupon I told him that I had been offered a start at a shearing run at *'Moreton Plains'* Station at Enngonia Northwest of Bourke, the following week. He then suggested I accept the offer, as I may not hear back from the Dept. for some time. Taking his advice, I accepted the job as piece picker, and drove out to Moreton Plains in my prized FJ Holden ute

I had only been working there for around ten days when a telegram arrived with the mailman from Bourke. The telegram stated words to the effect **'Scholarship offered Bathurst Teachers' College beginning ?? February 1960. Reply immediately. D Mallay Registrar'** The telegram placed me in a quandary, as I was hoping I would not hear back from the Dept. as I had become accustomed to shed life. I then decided I would reject the offer and tell my Grandfather a white lie that I hadn't been successful with my application.

However, after mentioning the offer I had been made to a seasoned shearer Dave Wall, and that I was going to reject the offer, he looked at me in amazement, stating that he wished he had been made such an offer when he was young, but the Depression had put an end to that,

and he had to accept any type of work that was available at the time, one of which was shearing.

Dave then proceeded to inform me that he had a serious medical condition, and he did not want me to end up like him. Feeling sorry for him, I sympathised with him and asked what the medical condition was, whereupon he retorted words to the effect, '***I have Sheep shit on the brain and I'd hate you to get it, so for heaven's sake accept the offer of a lifetime; if you don't, you will regret it, as there's no future in this industry***'. It was patently obvious Dave was very interested in formal education which he lacked, and often boasted of how proud he was of his son who had become a solicitor.

I must admit even after having listened to Dave, I was still not sure whether I wanted to accept the scholarship, but after a great deal of soul searching, I finally decided to accept it. As the shearing industry has changed over the years, Dave's advice turned out to be quite prophetic.

I must say that both my Grandparents were both elated at hearing the news. However, my Father Tony who had experienced the rigours of teaching over many years prior, was not quite as excited, as were my Grandparents!

Having signed a contract with Grazcos, I had to inform the Boss of the Board an elderly English gentleman namely Mr Mr Arkley-Smith, of my offer and decision, and whether I could be released from the contract I had signed. Like Dave Wall, he was very understanding and supportive, and contacted the Bourke office of Grazcos to obtain a replacement piece picker, which he was able to do, and I was able to be released.

Mr Arkley-Smith had served in WW1 and later in WW2 as an officer. He was a very interesting and obviously a well-educated man who relayed to me some of his exploits, during the time of his army service.

After a replacement had been found, I contacted Mr Mallay at BTC, and accepted the offer of a scholarship. I then drove back to Bathurst and enrolled at the College where I was a day student, and spent two happy years there, making life-long friends, some of whom, I still remain in contact. Some others unfortunately have since gone to God. The rest is history!!

Chris Worthington

81+ years

BTC 1960-61