CHAPTER 20

RECOLLECTIONS

TEN AUSTRALIANS who were alive in 1939—the oldest, Audrey Blake, then 23, the youngest, Franca Arena, aged two—here look back from the summer of 1985–86 across the years of this book, remembering and reflecting on encounters between self and society.

Eight of the ten are Australian born, three see the country through migrants' eyes. (This adds up to eleven, not ten, because Al Grassby is both native born and immigrant.) All, of course, recall the war. Nearly every one of military age is in uniform: AIF, WAAAF, AWAS. Charles Copeman, waiting to be old enough, hears the headmaster read out the school's casualty lists at assemblies. Gordon Barton's father disappears into Japanese captivity, and his only brother is killed in the RAAF. Franca Arena is a frightened child in Genoa.

Audrey Blake has left state school at the age of fourteen, Kath Walker is already working at thirteen, Beryl Beaurepaire puts in a restless year at the University of Melbourne after Fintona Girls' School and before joining up, Elizabeth Evatt spends twelve years at the Presbyterian Ladies' College Pymble, does law at the University of Sydney, and goes to Harvard Law School. Al Grassby counts thirteen schools in several countries. Gordon Barton goes from what they call in Sydney a Great Public School to the university, where he takes three degrees simultaneously. Allan Ashbolt digests his higher education part-time. Charles Copeman goes to the universities of Queensland and Oxford. Stephen Murray-Smith's parents have difficulty paying for him at Geelong Grammar, and later, after the University of Melbourne, his mother dangles Cambridge as a distraction from marriage.

Families give strength to Charles Copeman and Elizabeth Evatt; Audrey Blake's parents separate; Gordon Barton is brought up by his mother, and Franca Arena by her father, whose heavy hand helps turn her mind to emigration.

Most live in suburbs. A golden recollection of place is set down by Elizabeth Evatt, endowed with urban amenities and close to the beauties of the bush. Out in the country, Al Grassby brings a third pair of arms to a farm near Bowen which is

one of those (mentioned in chapter 5), more than 90 per cent dependent on the labour of familes; and Gordon Barton, urban dweller himself, enables farmers in South Australia to get higher prices for their onions.

Everybody adds to the statistics of overseas travel, first by sea—Audrey Blake returning from Moscow in 1939, Stephen Murray-Smith departing on the *Strathaird* for Tilbury in 1948—then by air, so routinely that only a significant conversation in the sky (Gordon Barton's with Jeff Bate) or a hijack (of Kath Walker) is worth mention.

The relationships with Britain and the United States mapped in chapter 2 are on most minds. Al Grassby and Elizabeth Evatt stand up at the movies for 'God Save the King', President Johnson's visit propels Gordon Barton into politics. The 'nationalistic emotion' defined in chapter 2 as a third theme in our foreign policy is also expressed, in a variety of tones, by contributors conservative and radical and (Stephen Murray-Smith) both. Allan Ashbolt reveals that he wrote words quoted in chapter 2 by an Australian cabinet minister deploring the Americans' bombing of North Vietnam at Christmas 1972.

The account of the press, radio and television in chapter 12 gains particularity, as Elizabeth Evatt listens to ABC and (furtively) commercial radio, reads of criminal adult mysteries in *Truth*, in London discovers the *Guardian*, and deplores most of our television; Allan Ashbolt makes his perilous creative way across the ABC; Franca Arena writes for *La Fiamma*; Gordon Barton tries expensively to establish an alternative press; and Stephen Murray-Smith salvages *Overland* from the Communist party.

Workers and bosses are represented by Audrey Blake and Charles Copeman, the communist functionary and the mining executive each having negative thoughts about the coal strike of 1949; and Elizabeth Evatt brings to industrial relations the perspective of cheerful conciliator.

Memories are vivid of R.G. Menzies' attempt to dissolve the Communist party and Sir John Kerr's dismissal of the Whitlam government. Charles Copeman is disappointed with politicians right and left, and hopes for true leaders; Elizabeth Evatt, daughter of a politician, is disenchanted with politics; Gordon Barton founds a party hospitable to her sentiment. Al Grassby builds a political career as advocate for underprivileged Italian immigrants. Feminism attracts all five women, strongly or mildly, with reservations on the left by Audrey Blake and on the right by Beryl Beaurepaire. Aboriginal politics are incarnate in Kath Walker.

There is no evidence here to challenge the view that Australia is a post-Christian society. For those who mention religion the standard experience is a conventional upbringing within one or other major Christian denomination, followed by a lapsing of practice and an evaporation of concern: Franca Arena, raised and married a Catholic, becomes a celebrant of civil marriages. The urge to believe glows strongest in the agnostic Allan Ashbolt and Audrey Blake, whose anecdote about communism as religion is both a joke and not a joke.

Here and on other matters, these ten Australians are not presented as typical or representative people. Some of their experiences were certainly shared by most Australians; other experiences were the property of small minorities. These stories of the past fifty years are offered primarily in the hope that they will entertain and instruct readers who live through the next fifty.

Franca Arena, 1974.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

FRANCA ARENA

IN 1939 ITALY, my country of birth, was preparing for war. Blissfully unaware of what was happening, I was growing up in Genoa, a beautiful old city with an important port, where I was born on 23 August 1937. The history of my hometown goes back well before the Romans to Etruscan times. In modern times, as a city state, Genoa was one of the great maritime and trading powers of the Mediterranean. Cristoforo Colombo (Christopher Columbus) was a Genovese. It is a beautiful city with all the culture of a long history and a sense of the good life which has made some of the small towns nearby, Portofino and Santa Margherita, very fashionable summer resorts.

My family was an average Italian family. My father Francesco owned a mixed business shop with a large bakery and was working very hard. My mother, Rosita, took care of the family—my father, my sister Silvana (two years my senior) and me—as well as helping my father in the shop.

I have two vivid recollections about my childhood: the war, and the fighting between my father and mother. I believe that what happened to me in those early years, shaped my life, and therefore I feel I must give some background.

Genoa was heavily bombarded, especially during the last years of the war. I can still remember waking up during the night at the sound of bombs exploding. The building would shake, and my sister and I would start screaming. As the bombing intensified, we had to spend entire nights in the bomb shelter. My father would say: 'Don't be afraid. It's nothing; it is only fireworks. They are having a big party somewhere.'

It became great fun to go down to the bomb shelter in my nightie and dressing gown with the neighbours. Then one night the fun ended: when we came out of the shelter, the building opposite our home was on fire and practically destroyed and our own building extensively damaged. What if our home had been destroyed? Where would we go? I felt insecure and afraid, and these feelings were reinforced by the continuous fighting between my mother and my father. I don't know what they were fighting about, but it made me cry a lot. Mother eventually left my father for another man. One has to remember that it was wartime, in Italy, a deeply Catholic country, to understand the consequences of such a happening. It was a very sad time. We had nobody to turn to except father. He was a severe and unhappy man who loved my sister and me deeply, but he was unable to show it. He had many worries.

We were also terrified by the Germans: they hated us Italians for the way they felt we betrayed them. They were nasty, ugly, vindictive. I felt I hated them. I wanted the Americans to arrive. We were all waiting for them. And all the time I longed for my mother. I saw her only occasionally, and there were great, tearful reunions for a few short hours.

The end of the war I still remember vividly. People went mad with joy; they were singing and dancing in the streets. The red flags of the Partisans were everywhere. It was a wonderful day. At last the hated Germans had gone; we were not afraid of them any more. People started getting their revenge. Portraits of Mussolini were burned in the streets, and women who had been friendly to the Germans had their heads shaven. I remember seeing women being dragged away screaming, crying, while others were applauding and laughing.

I knew one of the women who was taken away. She was a customer in our shop. I felt so sorry for her and I wanted to run after her as she was dragged away, but I was too scared. I just stood, petrified, and I remember thinking: 'They are just as bad as the Germans.'

Then the Allied troops arrived, and people gave them a tumultuous welcome. I stood on the side of the road with my father and sister watching them arriving on jeeps and throwing handfuls of candy and chewing gum. My sister and I wanted to pick them up, but my father said it was demeaning and we should not. We did it just the same behind his back, and I can remember the ecstasy of eating those lollies.

Genoa had been one of the few Italian cities to be liberated by the Partisans. The German troops surrendered to the Partisans. All German prisoners were then handed to the Allies. The German soldiers and officers were made to parade through the streets of Genoa. Thousands of them, many merely boys, marched in uniform, without arms, defeated but with their heads held high. I remember feeling so sorry for them, and ashamed of my former hatred for them. I am quite sure that it was in those days that I started my strong opposition to war, to racial prejudice, to divisions between people.

Another vivid memory I have at the end of the war was the first night they lit the lights in the streets. I had never seen street lights before. Because of the bombing there were no lights at all at night, and suddenly one night all the street lights went on. I can never forget the excitement we felt that first night; it seemed that life from then on could be nothing but good.

Instead they were difficult years. I studied hard, helping father, being very unhappy about not having my mother at home. I saw her only a few times, the last time when she met my sister and me to say goodbye. She left in 1948 for Argentina, where she died. I missed her terribly. One day, going to school I saw a woman in the street ahead of me whom I thought was her. 'She has come back', I thought. I ran, calling her. But when I touched her shoulder and she turned around, she was a stranger. Something died inside of me at that moment. I suddenly felt much older than my ten years of age.

My sister and I were very close. My father was strict with us and our only outings were going to church and to the cinema once a week on Sunday afternoon. We had to be home on time, and he did not like us having friends, thinking they could have a bad influence on us.

In the early 1950s my father bought a small Fiat car, and sometimes we would go out on Sunday afternoon to such lovely places as Portofino or Santa Margherita on the Riviera. We enjoyed the outings, but seeing other families together having a good time made me miss my mother even more. Our family was a sad one, and even though I loved my father and my sister, I started to feel I wanted to leave Genoa, to see the world, to enlarge my horizons.

I was good at school, especially in the humanities. I did five years of secondary school and then a one-year course for secretary-managers. I wanted to go to university but my father wanted me to get a good job and then get married. To get a good job in Genoa, especially one with international career prospects, you had to know languages, and I had been studying French and English since the beginning of secondary school. At the time, a few girls from school had gone to England to study, and I started asking my father for the chance to go. He had sold the shop and was doing some consultancy work and investing in the stock exchange. He had made quite a bit of money and he told me he would send me to England. Through the English consulate, we found a college, and off I went on my own to England.

I was so excited and scared. It was 1955 and I was eighteen. I had led a very sheltered life, but I was mature for my age. I was an avid reader and I thought I knew a lot about the world from the books I had read about every conceivable subject. The college my father had approved of was near Peterborough; I stayed there for a term. There were only six girls; four German, one French, and me. I spoke French all the time with a newly found friend called Janine and my French improved a lot, but not my English. I wrote to my father that the college was closing down and that I was being transferred to London, and to send me money there for the next two terms.

I found a college in London, with courses in English, English literature, etc. I studied there for another six months, at the end of which I took the Lower Cambridge examinations for foreigners (Proficiency in English). I loved London; I loved the friendships I made at the college with people from all over the world who had come there to study English. It was my first taste of internationalism.

I knew it would be difficult to go back home, but back I went and saw that little had changed. My sister had met a nice young man who wanted to marry her, and my father was as strict and difficult as ever. I found an interesting job with a Dutch shipping company in their passenger office, but my life was dull and friendless. My father did not approve of me going out and I had to be home as soon as I finished work. My desire to escape my family situation grew stronger. I started writing letters to various American agencies–even to Clair Booth Luce, the first woman American ambassador, who was in Rome. I felt a woman would understand and help me to get to the United States, because that is where I wanted to go. My letter was answered by an official offering a job as a nurse–companion to an elderly lady. I did not accept. I was looking for something interesting and exciting.

The shipping line I was working for owned two ships which travelled to Indonesia regularly, but because of political problems there, the ships changed route and started going to Australia. Because of the need for entry permits and visas into Australia, I started to have a great deal of work with the Australian embassy, which had an office in Genoa. I met a few Australians and told them of my desire to travel and see the world.

The chief migration officer in Genoa, a kind, middle-aged man, asked me if I had ever thought of going to Australia. I could go with an assisted passage, pay only ten English pounds and have only the obligation of staying in Australia for two years, after which I could go anywhere else I wanted to. He told me it would be easy to find a job in Australia and that I would like the country. I had never thought of going to Australia, and I suppose, like most Europeans in those days, all I knew was that it was a huge continent with more kangaroos and sheep than people. I started to read about Australia and to like the idea.

There was, however, the problem of fitting me in a category. As very few single girls were going to Australia, the only category for girls was 'domestic workers'. I

was a very middle-class girl and I could not even consider going to Australia as a domestic. So the category of assistant interpreter was found for me. I made the application to migrate to Australia in 1959. I remember visiting various offices in Genoa to do the necessary paperwork and people asking me incredulously: 'Are you going to Australia? By yourself? All alone? Are you mad?'

I got all the paperwork done in an incredibly short time, the Australian office in Genoa helping me all the way. By March I had my visa, and my date of departure was set for 4 April 1959, from Trieste by the MS *Aurelia*. When I told my father that I was going, there was a minor explosion. But he could see my determination and accepted it and gave me some money, and we went to Trieste to board the ship. My father and sister left after a tearful goodbye, and I went down to the cabin and cried myself to sleep.

People on board felt scared and lonely and were kind to each other, asking for information about Australia. Many of our immigrants came from rural areas, they were very poorly educated and were prepared to do anything to improve their economic situation and to give a better future to their children. Because I could speak English, I felt straight away a duty to help them. There was an education officer of the federal government on board, who asked me to teach English. I found the teaching difficult, but enjoyed it. Being the teacher gave me a protected status on the ship where there were many young men. They kept well away from me, as I could put them in their place in the classroom if they gave me any cheek.

My first impression of Australia was that I had arrived back in England. We landed in Fremantle, and a bus took those who could afford it to Perth to do a sightseeing tour. It was either Saturday or Sunday, there were very few people around but many sporting events going on; bowlers all dressed in white, tennis players, cricketers.

Back on ship, my anxiety increased. What if I did not find a job? What if I fell sick? What if I had a nervous breakdown and was put away never to be found again? I resolved then that I would always have with me two or three pieces of paper with my name and the address of my father and sister in Genoa. We arrived in Melbourne on a rainy morning in May 1959. I was in such a state of anxiety that I can hardly remember anything. The immigration officers told me that I had to go to Bonegilla Migrant Camp. 'Where is it?', I kept on asking. Nobody took any notice.

I had the address of an Italian girl whom I had met at the Australian embassy and who had come to Australia a few months earlier. She had given me her address in a girls' hostel in Sydney, and that is where I wanted to go. But they put us on the train for Bonegilla, close to Albury on the border between New South Wales and Victoria. It was a sad trip; many of the women, especially those with young children, were crying. I felt that, despite my difficulties, I was lucky as I had to worry only about myself. I started to help people with their language difficulties; they relied on me and I felt useful.

They put us in a queue where we were assigned living quarters in huts, and work. Bonegilla was an ex-army camp, set on 600 acres of land, with rows of Nissan huts built by Italian prisoners of war and used as a training camp for Australian soldiers. Since 1947 it had been used for all immigrants except the British, who were housed in suburban hostels. The camp was the largest of its kind, accommodating 10 000 new arrivals. The huts, which were supposed to have a life span of about five years, were used for well over twenty. It was a lonely place, and it had a sign, which nobody had taken down, that said: 'Bonegilla. A Place of No Hope'.

I have little recollection of the following days, except that people were continually asking me to interpret for them. I was given a whole hut on my own,

Above left. Franca Delleplane (left) leaves Trieste for Australia on the Aurelia, *1959, seen off by her sister Silvana. Above. Franca Delleplane and Joe Arena at the altar in Sydney, 29 April 1961. Left. Franca Arena and her twin sons, Adrian and Mark, c1979.*

IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Franca Arena presents Gough Whitlam with the award for Republican of the Decade, at a ceremony in the Great Hall of the University of Sydney, 11 November 1985.

IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

but I was very frightened. I used to sleep with the light on and the wardrobe against the door. 'What have I done? What have I done?' I kept asking myself. 'If my father and my sister could see me . . .' I would cry myself to sleep.

I was offered a job in the office. I refused. I wanted to go to Sydney. They said I had to wait. In the next few days I was even propositioned by a young Italian man who said I looked like his mother and he wanted to marry me. He obviously thought in his loneliness that a wife who spoke English could be useful. I naturally declined but he kept on following me around the camp. I was worried. I asked the people in the office over and over again to send me to Sydney. They agreed in the end, but I had to pay the fare myself.

Franca Arena and her twin sons Adrian (left) and Mark, campaign for Labor, 1974.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

It was in those first few days that my anger towards the injustices of the immigration program was born. How could they? How could they entice hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world, telling them that Australia was wonderful, and then dump them in a place like Bonegilla, with no interpreters, no services, no counselling? It was either sink or swim, and we immigrants had to learn fast to swim. The attitude of the Australian officials was: You are lucky to be here. If you don't like it, lump it. With the benefit of hindsight, I realise that even the Australian authorities did not understand what they were letting themselves in for when they started this huge immigration program.

The people who had the greatest difficulties in coping were the people with a better education, often with professional qualifications, which were not recognised in Australia, and political refugees. People who came from small villages where there was never enough to eat, from rural depressed areas of high unemployment, where even schooling was a luxury, these people had a lot more resilience, from centuries of struggles and humiliation. Australia for them was no better or worse than the place they had just left, but, in those early days in Bonegilla, even they felt cheated. The only jobs being offered were for fruit picking.

I can't remember how long I stayed; was it four or five days or a couple of weeks? All I can remember is walking to the station to get a train to Sydney, where I arrived tired and scared at about 10.30 at night. I still had only one address: the girls' hostel, run by the Methodist Church, in Commonwealth Street, Surry Hills. From Central station I took a taxi; when the taxi driver said, 'Where to, Love?' I felt like crying at his kind and friendly voice. The place was all locked up, but after a bit of banging on the door, they opened up and I explained who I was and asked if the other Italian girl was there. Maria Teresa came down looking sleepy and, even though I had only met her once or twice before, I embraced her as my lifelong friend. I was given a bed in her room, and I slept for the first time in days.

The girls there were mostly country girls doing a course at technical college or at university. Some were working and all were kind and friendly. One of the things that struck me in the first few days, going to the communal showers and taps, was how many of them had false teeth. Such young girls, and so many with dentures. I was told dentists were expensive, and anyway they always advised you to have your teeth taken out if they had cavities. I decided then that no Australian dentist would ever look after my teeth.

There was a job available at Flotta Lauro as secretary to the managing director, but I turned it down. I wanted to work with Australians. But my English was not good enough to compete with Australian girls for interesting office jobs. I finally got a job doing invoices with a firm making pens, but it lasted only from 9 o'clock until lunchtime when I decided not to return. I went back to Flotta Lauro, but the vacancy had been filled. I felt alienated, lonely and insecure. People would ask me: 'And where are you from?' 'Italy,' I would reply with pride and love. And often I would get that superior look and a comment such as: 'Ah, an Eyetie!' It made me

angry and I wanted to tell people about the place I came from—the pride I had in Italian literature, music, painters and sculptors. But in Australia all this counted for nothing, these philistines were only interested in the fact that we had lost the war, that we were immigrants, that we owned fruit shops, that somehow I was responsible for Mussolini.

La Fiamma newspaper was then owned by the Capuchin Fathers, an order of missionary priests who had come here to help Italian immigrants. They were for years the only counselling service that Italian immigrants had, doing what departments of youth and community services, health departments, departments of immigration and ethnic affairs, and social security are now doing. The head of the order was an Italian-American man of incredible energy and talent, and apart from running *La Fiamma* he had also another paper called *La Croce del Sud*. I went to work for him at the papers, firstly as an office clerk, and later doing a radio program called 'The Italian hour', which lasted two to three hours, broadcast by station 2SM and sponsored by *La Fiamma*.

Franca Arena, Kath Walker, Al Grassby, c1980.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

I started making friends in both the Italian and Australian communities, but none of the Australian friends ever invited me home. It was not the done thing in Australia to invite foreigners, and it took years for that to change. The Italian community accepted me straight away. I suppose there was some talk behind my back on how and why a young girl was in Australia on her own, but I was generally made to feel welcome. I was invited by a few Italian families to share a meal with them and, after the food I was given at the hostel—stew, mashed potatoes and tinned peas—Italian food was sheer ecstasy.

I liked Sydney from the start, but there were also a few things I disliked. I liked the natural beauty of the place: the harbour, the little inlets which reminded me so much of the Italian Riviera. And I loved Australian animals. Visiting the zoo, I fell in love with kangaroos and the little joeys, but especially with koalas and wombats. I became an enthusiastic bushwalker. I loved Australia first, before I learned to love the Australian people.

I suppose Commonwealth Street, Surry Hills, was not the most pleasant place to live. Each morning I would walk to George Street to catch the bus to Leichhardt, and at night I would return home the same way. One of the places I learned to loathe first was the Australian pub. In those days they were mostly ugly places done up in tiles that in Italy were not even used any more for toilets. They were dark, smelly and unpleasant. I could not believe, going home at night, how people would run to get to the pub before the six o'clock closing, to fill themselves up for the night. I thought it was one of the most uncivilised sights I had ever seen.

The Australian attitude to drinking was demonstrated to me when I was invited to join *La Fiamma*'s table at a big ball. I was so excited; I had never been to a ball before but I had seen photos in Italian magazines of balls taking place in Italy and I was very proud of myself. I bought myself a short dress with lace appliqué, which was quite nice. I had little money, as I was earning £12 a week, but I was still able to save. The night of the ball, I was picked up and we went to the Trocadero. I was dropped off at the entrance whilst my friend parked the car. People were arriving in long gowns, some very beautiful, some terrible, some with beautiful jewellery, but mostly with fake jewellery and fake furs. But what really struck me were the men; mostly in black tie, with big suitcases or boxes or big bags. What on earth could they be carrying? Grog, I was told. You can't buy liquor at the Trocadero, so you have to take it in yourself. But why can't you buy liquor? These are the laws, I was told.

There were other aspects of Australian life I did not like. As I had most evenings free, I watched a lot of television or listened to radio. I had never been interested

in politics in Italy, but here I started being interested in Australian policies and points of view. But there seemed to be few Australian points of view. For the great part, Australians seemed to be happy to be aping the English—they would talk of taking a trip back home. They had no sense of national pride. It used to upset me. I felt Italian and I felt I could never be an Australian of such British variety. If I had wanted to be English, I would have gone back to England. I liked the English, but I had come to Australia and I wanted to get to know the real Australian ethos. There did not seem to be much in the people I met.

The Australian Britishness was best exemplified by the prime minister, Sir Robert Menzies. I took an immediate dislike to him; he was so pompous, with such patronising manners towards non-English-speaking immigrants. Most European immigrants disliked him, but nobody was game to say anything publicly. Australians did not take kindly to criticism from newcomers, and as most of us could not vote, it did not matter too much anyway.

I started then to feel a great empathy with the original Australians, the Aborigines. I could not believe the injustices that had been done to them. I felt shocked and outraged at what they had had to endure and at what they were still enduring. In years to come I would count among my closest and loved friends some Aboriginal Australians.

Slowly I started making friends. I was teaching Italian at night, and I finally met a lot more Australians of an Anglo-Celtic background. I was teaching at the Casa d'Italia, in Mary Street, just around the corner from the hostel, and it was there that I met my husband, Joe, a young architect. Joe is a third-generation Australian. His grandfather arrived in Australia from Sicily in 1892. His own father was born here, but had gone back to Italy, where he grew up, and then returned to Australia at the age of 22 and married here. Joe, with fair skin and red hair, looked like an Anglo-Celtic Australian and hardly spoke Italian, but he suffered in Australian society because of his family's Italian background, especially during the war. His school experience had been an unhappy one because of his Italian name, even at well-known Catholic schools. I feel that my husband, like many of his generation and generations to follow, has deep scars from the school system which was unable to accept the cultural differences of many of its students. And it was not only the school system, but the whole of society in general.

At that time, it took five years to be able to apply for Australian citizenship. In 1964, five years after my arrival, I got the usual letter from the minister for immigration, asking me to become a British subject. I wrote back, telling him that I was happy to become an Australian citizen but I did not want to be a British subject and that my loyalty and commitment was to the Australian people and not to the Queen of England. He never replied, and I did not become a citizen.

In 1966 my twin boys were born, and I left work and many of the commitments I had undertaken. I was by then doing Italian programs on 2SM, 2KY and 2CH, and writing occasionally for *La Fiamma*, and I was involved in several Italian organisations. I felt all the time an Italian in Australia. But when my boys were born I began to feel I had roots in this country; my sons were Australians, and so was I. That did not mean I had forgotten my origin, but I started to feel I belonged here and, therefore, I should become involved in everything Australian. So, in 1968, when we decided to take a trip to Italy, despite all my objections I became an Australian citizen.

My objections were only related to being a British subject, to swearing allegiance to the Queen. I wanted just to be an Australian. I accepted the humiliation of an oath I did not believe in because that was the law, but, being a member of a democratic society, I resolved then to work to change the law.

In 1968, over nine years after my arrival in Australia as a single, lonely girl, I returned to Italy, a married woman with a husband and twin sons aged eighteen months. It was a happy reunion with family and friends, who accepted me for what I was, without the eternal question: 'And where did you come from?' But as Italy had changed during those nine years, so had I. It was difficult to get used to many things again. I was longing for the carefree, less class conscious, more egalitarian Australian society.

On my return to Australia, I started studying again. I attended various WEA and evening colleges' intensive classes on Australian history and then on the history of our neighbouring Asian countries. I became more and more oriented towards Asia, as I felt it was important to know about our neighbours.

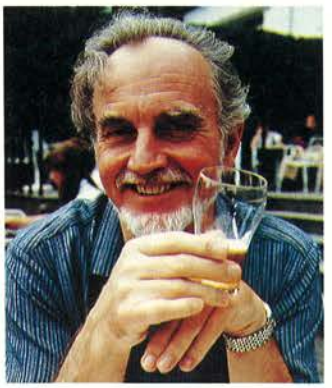
By the end of the 1960s, my children were going to kindergarten and I started writing again for *La Fiamma*. I became involved in organisations connected with the welfare and rights of immigrants and of children in schools. I was attracted by the Labor party's philosophy, but I always felt a dislike for Arthur Calwell, the old-fashioned Labor politician who had said: 'Two Wongs don't make a white.' I could never have joined the ALP while he was leader. But then E.G. Whitlam became leader and, together with Al Grassby, he actually asked us immigrants to be part of the great Australian family.

What interesting and exciting years were to follow! I went to China in 1972 and wrote a series of articles for *La Fiamma*, joined the ALP, worked in dozens of organisations, was a founder of ethnic radio and of the Ethnic Communities Council, and took every opportunity to write to newspapers, politicians and institutions to make the voice of the new Australians heard.

For years I had felt I was an Italian in Australia; now I was feeling more and more committed to my beloved country Australia, the country where my sons were born. I wanted them to grow up in a society that was just, which aspired to good and fine things, where there was a place for music, the arts, diversity; where men and women were allowed to make their contribution, no matter where they came from or what colour their skin was. I knew that there were struggles ahead, but by then I had met Australians from all walks of life, from all ethnic backgrounds, from the Anglo-Celtic to the Aboriginal and Asian, and I knew that I had many friends committed to the same values and ideals.

Now and again I still feel some alienation in this society; I still feel an outsider. Sometimes, especially after a television appearance when I have said something controversial, people still ring me in the middle of the night or write to me anonymously: 'Bloody wog, why don't you go back where you came from.' I know that some people will never accept me as an Australian but that the great majority do. Many, many Australians really do believe in a 'fair go'.

Despite the struggles, the achievements and the defeats, despite the backlash to the many reforms of the last few years, I am convinced that Australia today is a better, happier and more enlightened country than the one in which I landed in 1959. There are, of course, many challenges ahead. As a country we are learning to live together; we are learning to accept that Australia's ethnic and cultural diversity is a national asset. For those who raise the spectre of divided loyalties in a multicultural society there is a simple truth to remember: Australia has been multicultural since the arrival of the first fleet, 99 per cent of us are but recent arrivals.



Allan Ashbolt in retirement, Amsterdam 1980.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

ALLAN ASHBOLT

I WAS SEVENTEEN years of age, an evening student in the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Melbourne and by day trapped in tedious clerical routines at the Navy Department. I had taken this job about the time that Hitler's armies marched into Austria, naively hoping that I would be plunging into the heart of world affairs. Instead, behold me pasting amendments into King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, searching ancient files for administrative precedents, and ordering furniture for Flinders Naval Depot. With the outbreak of war, however, I gained a stronger sense of usefulness and, besides, I knew now I had to stay until I could obtain a release from the department and the permission of my parents (mandatory for anyone under 21) to join the AIF.

Only the AIF would do. I had grown up in the Methodist religion, the Anzac mystique, the culture of British imperialism, and the middle-class ethic of self-improvement. Warrior virtues occupied a key place in this weird web of ideologies. This is not to suggest that my boyhood in the suburb of Caulfield was anything but normal: it revolved around the classroom, street-games, the cricket field, Boy Scouts, Sunday School and the RSL Junior Tennis Club. Our household was neither poor nor prosperous: we owned no car, the piano was our sole symbol of gentility and a library of nineteenth-century essayists and novelists our main source of intellectual sustenance. My mother had been a teacher; my father was a middle-grade public servant. We adhered to the values of the established order. Whenever I rebelled, by 'playing the wag' from school, or pretending to be a Jew (so I could accompany my friend Goldenberg on his lonely exodus from religious instruction), or dodging into Saturdee arvo flicks without paying, I would be sternly brought back into line. At thirteen, I was removed from the state educational system and sent to Caulfield Grammar, in the expectation that it would make me more of a gentleman and, in academic terms, add to my career prospects in accountancy.

Yet my passions and ambitions were focused on the theatre. By 1939 I was already appearing with university groups and the Gregan McMahon Players. Occasional radio engagements had come my way from commercial stations and the ABC. Even when not acting, much of my time outside the Navy Department was spent studying drama, dramatic criticism and stage direction. I also started a diary-cum-notebook. The bias in my reading and writing was towards literature and the theatre, though with diversions into religion and philosophy. I plodded

through the Bible twice, largely in an attempt to reassess the assumptions and beliefs that had so far guided my actions. I absorbed Chesterton, Belloc, Ronald Knox and other Catholic apologists with such effect that, when I later married a Catholic, I was absolved by the bishop of Bathurst from all instruction on the ground that I was already comprehensively informed. Yet I was never able to make the final jump of faith into Catholicism: for all its elaborately constructed intellectuality, there was at the end a chasm of unreason which turned me back.

Except for a streak of anti-authoritarianism, which erupted in wrangles with my elders and betters in the naval bureaucracy, I doubt that in these years I would have been considered the stuff of which good democratic socialists are made. But perhaps the slow metamorphosis began with a notice in the orderly room of an AIF training battalion in April 1942. It called for volunteers with first-class medical fitness, bush experience, horsemanship, initiative, resource and intelligence 'to undertake, in the north of Australia, adventurous duties requiring a high degree of endurance and an ability to act independently'. Other than medical fitness, about my only proven qualification was an ability to act independently; but it was enough, combined with volubility, to get me accepted into the 2/1 North Australia Observer Unit, with the rank of corporal.

The anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner raised this 'bush commando', as he liked to think of it, at the request of the GOC Northern Territory. 'Your role,' said the operational instructions, 'will be to watch for and to report to HQ NT Force, by the quickest means, any landings of the enemy on the Australian coast between Normanton, Queensland, and Yampi Sound, Western Australia.' In the event of strategic withdrawal by the main Australian forces, we were expected to gather information behind enemy lines. The advance party arrived at Katherine in July 1942, and before long about 450 men were scattered across the northern rim of the continent. In support, there were more than 1000 horses, brumbies and donkeys, used mainly for long-range patrolling. The NAOU has been described as 'the largest mounted unit' ever assembled in the Australian army. I would rather say that, with its pack and riding animals, trucks, motorcycles, small ocean-going vessels, wireless telegraph sets and World War I bandoliers (worn diagonally over the chest), it was one of the most unusually equipped. The general level of literacy, numeracy and self-assertiveness was also, I think, unusually high.

The duties, as promised, were 'adventurous' enough, but more importantly, I gained some consciousness of myself as an Australian. It was like a physical coming to terms with the shapes, colours and contours of the land: not a conquest but a bonding. Never again would I see the bush or desert as monotonous, alien and forbidding. And through the novelist Xavier Herbert, a fractious and unruly NAOU sergeant, I got acquainted with a fervid nationalism quite different from the brand of empire loyalism instilled on school parade grounds. But it was the victimisation and pauperisation of the Aborigines, particularly on cattle stations and Christian missions, that really shook me. Although it took some years for the ideas then forming in my mind to cohere, the witnessing of large-scale social, cultural and economic violence was undoubtedly a prime mover in my political evolution. In 1950 I wrote a dozen or so short stories based on my wartime days in the north, and, significantly, the theme of racial prejudice and persecution was predominant.

When the atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima, I had no intimations of thermonuclear doom. Enough in early 1945 that it seemed likely to end the war.

By now the Navy Department had long recalled me, under manpower regulations, to a posting on Garden Island. Immediately after the Japanese surrender, I resigned. For most of the next decade, I worked as actor and drama teacher, film and theatre critic, adult education lecturer and writer, book reviewer and journalist. I even finished my university degree. Financially, freelancing was hazardous. I had married in 1944, and when our daughter was born in 1946 we were caught in the postwar housing scramble, without capital to build or land to build on. Sharing high-rent accommodation with other families became the norm for many years. When debts piled up, I seldom stood on pride and became at various times storeman, house painter, nightwatchman, apple grader, gardener and factory hand. Such jobs were often preferable, I felt, to mouthing asinine dialogue on radio serials like *Simon the Coldheart* and *When a girl marries.* At least the working class ceased to be an abstraction, and I came to understand the grind of non-creative labour. I also learnt not to overvalue myself.

Late in 1945 Peter Finch turned up again. I had spent my last few months of military service with him in the First Australian Army Theatre, where he was a sergeant-instructor. The venture that brought us together was the brain-child of Sydney John Kay, a German Jew of part-Peruvian descent, who tore through our lives like a whirlwind, roaring, laughing, pleading, plotting, spilling over with hopes and fantasies. Possessed, he matched the intensity of that possession with enormous entrepreneurial energy. But 1946 was not the time, nor was Sydney the appropriate scene for what we chose to call the Mercury Theatre. Postwar euphoria, floating on airy notions of an expansion in the arts, was quickly slipping back into prewar neo-colonial conformity. Noel Coward's *Blithe spirit* was at the Royal, J.B. Priestley's *Dangerous corner* at the Minerva: that was the sum of professional theatrical endeavour in Australia's largest metropolis.

How could we have imagined that a few performances of short plays by Lope de Vega, Gogol and Heinrich von Kleist, offered to the public as sample or bait, would attract investment to our undercapitalised firm? We received heaps of critical praise, little money, and survived on John Kay's skill in financial juggling. But not even the huge success in 1948 of the Mercury Mobile Players, touring schools and factories in a fast-moving, commedia dell'arte version of Molière's *The imaginary invalid*, could prevent us from tottering towards insolvency.

The same bleak end was in sight for another brave scheme. In 1944 I had put to Chifley a proposal for using actors then in uniform as the nucleus of a postwar National Theatre. It was one of many representations for a permanent, subsidised theatre company. The English director, Tyrone Guthrie, was brought out in 1949 to advise on how it might be best achieved. He reached the grotesque conclusion that any such company should be formed in England—'not with English actors', he explained to me, 'but with Australian emigres'.

One afternoon in October 1950 I decided that I no longer wanted to be an actor. The realisation had been creeping up on me all winter, during an exhausting tour of Victoria with the barnstorming Irish actor-manager Anew McMaster. Among my friends there seemed to be enormous relief, even subdued jubilation. In particular, Nettie Palmer was well pleased: she had no great opinion of actors as a breed and felt appalled that I should have been gallivanting around the countryside like a gypsy. For my part, there was no sense of loss. I did not, however, entirely shut out theatre and film. In the early 1950s I was concurrently lecturing on these subjects for the WEA, helping to compile a catalogue of historical and documentary films for the NSW Film Council, tutoring discussion groups on drama for Sydney University's Department of Tutorial Classes, and contributing theatre and book reviews to the *Sydney Morning Herald.*

Previously I had worked mainly for small-circulation magazines and had never been involved in a big daily newspaper. The atmosphere at the *SMH* was less cynical than in the tabloid press: even the broadsheet layout conveyed bourgeois–democratic stolidity. Among the journalists, there was a fairly strong institutional loyalty—arising, I think, out of the traditional respect in which upper executive echelons held the craft of writing. There were also, however, signs of institutional schizophrenia, with highly skilled journalists comprising a sort of liberal intelligentsia, hard-nosed money managers (often ex-journalists) obsessively pursuing sales and advertising revenue, and a board presumably anxious to maintain both profits and the stability of the society from which it derived those profits.

As in any media institution, there was a value system that predetermined the limits of impartiality. I was never allowed, for instance, to cover productions by the New Theatre, because of its links with the Communist Party of Australia. Such restrictions were fairly commonplace during the first cold war. I kept to my own political pace without doctrinal hooks, weights or attachments. Although anti-racist, anti-colonialist and anti-war, I was socialist only in the loose sense of voting for the ALP and favouring centralist, interventionist socioeconomic policies. The cornerstone of my political attitudes was an ineradicable belief in freedom of speech, enquiry, association and publication. Consequently, the anti-communist offensive of the 1950s, with its attempts to ban the CPA, suppress heretical ideas and drive the devils from our midst, only edged me further to the left. I could not go along with worshipful devotion to the Soviet Union, but neither was I willing to adopt a regressive, quasi-religious, crypto-fascist view of the world as divided between good and evil, light and dark, Us and Them.

In mid-1954 I joined the ABC as an adult education producer, arranging, editing and chairing discussion programs. Quickly I became adept at balancing one hand against the other hand. Because the ceiling of political tolerance was very low, perhaps we did well to keep alive some spirit of dispute and contention. Yet we may have been smothering serious intellectual exploration. The two-sided formal debate was usually conducted with stopwatch exactitude and rigidity; the several-sided conversation often sounded like a gabble of jargon or an incoherent clash of personalities. I experimented with various approaches, but never really solved the problem until I came back to it in the 1970s. The result was *Lateline*, which abandoned the pretence that democratic broadcasting is best served by banging two or three heads together and hoping sparks will fly. Indeed, by 1957 I was turning to documentary modes of investigation. A study of black–white relationships in Moree came out of this phase, and so did a far too discreet television report on South Africa.

When appointed in the following year as news and talks representative in New York, I had no presentiment that it would shake me out politically and compel me to reassemble all the pieces. Being fairly well read in American literature and reasonably familiar with American drama and film, I thought I was culturally prepared for American life. I was not. The contradictions in US society were too stark and obtrusive, and at the heart of it all was the contradiction between rhetoric and reality. The oppression of the blacks, the neglect of the poor and the bland rapacity of the financial–mercantile class jolted me. There were in America elements of greed and violence which, when set against the professed liberalism of its legislators, the humane traditions of its educators and the moral insights of its reformist judges, gave me a distinct feeling of dislocation. Nor could I find any

Allan Ashbolt, 1942.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Allan Ashbolt's North Australia Observer Unit, c1942.
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

Allan Ashbolt wearing an RSL badge, 1945.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Allan Ashbolt, actor in Molière's The imaginary invalid, *with Mercury Mobile Players, 1948. From left, Al Thomas, Peter Finch, Allan Ashbolt.*
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Allan Ashbolt, ABC troublemaker, as seen in the Age, *Melbourne, 30 Mar 1967. 'Swinger Talbot' is Talbot Duckmanton, ABC general manager.*

crumb of comfort in US conduct internationally, as Cuba was threatened, the Congo destabilised and Vietnam made ready for slaughter.

If I had cared less about what was happening on the ground in America, I might perhaps have been able to disguise my real opinions in the clichés and standard quasi-diplomatic language of play-it-safe foreign correspondents. But although I tried to keep a tight rein on myself, I suppose the caring showed. 'I think you've been getting away from us,' said Wally Hamilton, the controller of news, when he visited me in 1960. He invited me to make a film on US–Canadian economic and cultural connections. But since one partner in the production company was a subsidiary of Westinghouse, I could hardly envisage much opportunity for interpretative freedom. Instead, I applied for a promotion to head office in Sydney. On my return, I remembered that Vance Palmer, in a letter to me several months before his death, had expressed the hope that 'some day' I would 'do a book' about America. I collected all the scripts of my broadcasts and, on that skeletal basis, wrote *An American experience.*

At this point, I should emphasise that my gradual shift from right to left of the political spectrum, from religio-cultural orthodoxy to historical materialism, from bourgeois conservatism to democratic socialism, has never been a purely intellectual process. It has come about through the direct impact on my personality of both public and private events. I have seldom found much motivation for individual change in theoretical tracts and texts; on the whole, I seem to have picked up theory only in response to a practical problem that worried or disturbed me. Not until I saw racism in the Northern Territory did I begin to enquire into its origins. Not until I saw, in America, the manifestations of capitalism writ large did I begin to read Marx with genuine comprehension. And the imbroglio over my *Four corners* story on the Returned Services League in August–September 1963, as well as answering the very questions I raised in the program, confirmed my already hardening view of how institutional and pressure-group power flowed from civil society to political society, then back again.

As the reporter and executive producer, I planned not a detailed historical analysis of the RSL but rather a critical questioning of its special relationship to government, its peculiar influence in shaping the national ethos and its claim to stand outside and above party politics. When the program was first televised on 31 August, the chairman (Dr James Darling) thought it 'quite balanced', and so did the vice-chairman and two other commissioners. But after a week of public brawls and backstage intrigues, their resolve began to crumble. Menzies returned from a visit to New Guinea on 8 September. Next day a letter was delivered to him from the acting president of the RSL, alleging a 'trend' in *Four corners* since I had been put in charge of it. This 'trend' had earlier been identified by B.A. Santamaria's *News-Weekly* as 'lopsidedness to the left'—which meant, in plain terms, a lack of proper lopsidedness to the right. Furthermore, Menzies' staff had been poring over transcripts of previous programs for evidence of this 'trend'. The real sticking-point was that topics like the nuclear arms race, the exploitation of apprentice jockeys, the self-interested complaints of retail traders against the growing practice of discounting, the achievements of New South Wales Aborigines in co-operative farming, and the absurdities of commonwealth book censorship were just not on the agenda for democratic discussion in 1963. Menzies expressed his irritation. I was exiled, and when I re-emerged as executive producer the following year my name was omitted from the weekly roll of credits. After a bizarre clash with management towards the end of 1964, over its attempts to suppress a program on capital punishment, I found myself in effect forever barred from *Four corners.*

The commissioners tried to defuse me as a program-maker. In early 1966,

commissioner Arthur Lowndes explained to Richard Krygier, operational chief of the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom, that the ABC's governing body was well aware of the 'delicate problem' I presented. The best short-term solution, they believed, was 'quarantine action'. Eventually I was isolated in a backwater of television, with a vague title (head of special projects) and a sphere of responsibility limited to arts, crafts and oddments. These years of quarantine, from 1966 to 1969, were creatively rather barren, though enlivened by a long stint as industrial advocate for the senior officers. What sustained me was active engagement in political protest, agitation, criticism and exposition. In February 1966 the Nazi Party, with backing from Young Liberal and Democratic Labor Party zealots, attempted to break up a public meeting on Vietnam. I was there and got involved. From that moment I could no longer distance myself from politics, especially the politics of the Vietnam War. Taking a stand against the war seemed important not only in itself but as an assertion of democratic rights. Political democracy is a fragile thing, too easily diminished or extinguished in the name of the national interest or under the guise of safeguarding national unity. What fundamentally concerned me now was that so few voices were lifted in anger at what I called 'the present incongruous, indecent and inhumane spectacle of the mightiest, most awesome military state in history trying to pulverise and obliterate a tiny band of Asian peasants'.

I became a kind of circuit speaker on anti-war platforms, addressing crowds of between a few hundred and a few thousand. Practically nothing of what was actually said at these rallies and marches got reported in the daily press; coverage was confined to noting the event, estimating the attendance (usually by borrowing deliberately underestimated police figures) and commenting briefly on the demeanour and behaviour of the people. The ABC followed the same tight-lipped procedure: dissenting views on the war, unless delivered in circumstances controlled by the ABC (for example, news commentaries) were seldom treated as deserving of serious analysis. It was not the media's finest hour. The defeat of Labor in the 1966 federal election was interpreted as a pro-war vote; and this set the context for most news reporting during the next three years. Yet the anti-war movement was at this time circumspect in tactics and respectable in composition —a middle-class, middle-aged phenomenon. The Ex-Services Human Rights Association, which I helped to form, was made up mainly of World War II veterans, with a few from World War I and even the Boer War. By mid-1970, however, the emphasis in the movement had swung from words to demonstrations, and youth had taken over the action. So I slipped into the background, and put together another book—*An Australian experience: words from the Vietnam years.*

Around mid-1969 the *New Statesman* asked me if I would do occasional pieces on Australian politics. I needed little urging. In somewhat ironical conjunction, Talbot Duckmanton asked me if I would like to move from television to radio, as head of spoken word. The commissioners pondered the risk of giving me a title that could suggest I was responsible for every word spoken on the ABC and, while appointing me to the job, prudently renamed it director of radio special projects. The organised left of the ALP asked me if I would run for the Senate, but I backed out—partly because there was some doubt as to whether I had been in the party long enough to be eligible. A bit later I ran for a House of Representatives preselection contest, though less out of parliamentary ambition than to maintain my right to free expression. This was under challenge from ABC management, who had instructed me to stop writing for the *New Statesman.* I found that I had little talent for vote-scrounging and that electoral politics, as practised in Australia, was not my scene.

Although often beleaguered in the ABC, I never felt misplaced. But I must

admit to occasionally doubting its capacity as an instrument of enlightenment. In 1970, as various programs from the special projects department were censored on either political or 'moral' grounds, I began to wonder if it could ever discard its prim, prune-faced decorum. The emanations of fear and anxiety coming via memoranda from Broadcast House were almost palpable.

Over the next few years I gathered together a few bright young producers enthusiastic about rejuvenating radio—changing its solemn sound, making it a vehicle for intellectual discovery. At the same time, they were trying to revivify the staff union so that it could carry some responsibility for all working conditions—not only rates of pay and hours of labour, but the allocation of resources and the quality of productions. Curious myths and legends have grown up about this period: in particular, it has been claimed that I was encouraging a 'Marxist ethos' throughout the organisation. The situation, however, was not quite so highly charged.

In essence, I wanted to widen the frame of reference in talks and discussions, to produce programs not merely reflecting political opinion in Australia but charting the direction of political winds in the rest of the world. I hoped that the staff union would be used to built up a collective responsibility for standards. I sought out producers who were willing to take creative risks and make independent judgments. I considered that control over program content should be exercised by producers at the work-points, not by administrators and policy-framers. I believed in fostering the growth of a national consciousness, but also that Australia had been too insular for too long. I believed in publicly funded broadcasting, but also that the ABC's ideological ties with powerful forces in political society and key institutions in civil society had been too close for too long. Predominantly, the ABC had always represented the values of the ruling class and the aspirations of the middle class. I was aiming for democratisation.

When some of my producers proposed near the end of 1972 that we should embark on a nightly discussion program, I reacted initially with scepticism. The conventional mechanism for discussion was a trap which simply shut off the exchange and exploration of ideas. So in *Lateline* we set about trying to free discussion from its seemingly fixed restraints. Technologically, we often linked various centres around the world, thus stimulating in speakers and audiences alike a sense of space beyond studio walls. Intellectually, we often brought together thinkers who were more sympathetic than antagonistic towards one another, thus enabling discourse to be conducted in a common mode. Perhaps the distinctive characteristic of *Lateline* was that most of its participants themselves stood at the forefront of movements for social and cultural change. *Lateline* was intentionally radical, constantly on the lookout for breakers of new ground. It matched the tearaway mood of 1973, as Labor leapt into government, but we were determined that it should not stay on air for more than a few years. To have turned it into an institutional fixture would have betrayed its very purpose.

During the Whitlam interregnum, I was fairly active politically—but within the ALP more than within the government as such. I wrote some articles and speeches for Tom Uren (including his blast at President Nixon, condemning the bombing of Hanoi at Christmas 1972), settled an incipient ABC strike with the assistance of Bob Hawke, consulted with Jim Cairns and a team of his advisers at Kirribilli House, and as a member of the arts and media policy committee attended the terrible Terrigal conference of February 1975, when the government was already disintegrating and in full retreat from the goals of 1972. Whitlam's original policies were devised in a period of economic expansion and, as I once said, 'his kind of socialism could succeed only when capitalism was succeeding'. He was unable to

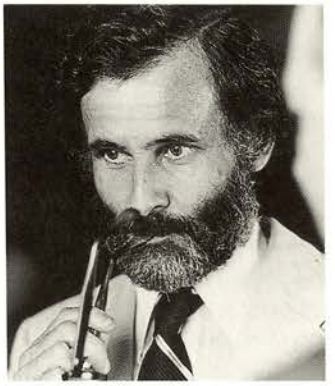
cope with the contraction which occurred in 1974; and it was this failure, as much as the ruthlessness of coalition strategists, that demoralised the government.

I went to Canberra in December 1975 to help prepare speeches for the party's final television appeal to the electorate, where all the leading luminaries of the ex-government would be present. For some crazy reason, it took the form of a Nurembergish candlelight ceremony on the lawns opposite Parliament House, and as I was walking back afterwards, Xavier Herbert loomed eerily before me. 'This is the moment,' he said. 'Soon we will know whether we are really a nation.' But I was fast losing heart and hope: only a few days before I had stood on the hustings in Martin Place and seen the blank, switched-off faces of the passers-by, oblivious to our arguments. Whitlam had missed his chance to rouse the nation's conscience when he failed to defy Kerr.

One of the few useful reforms pushed through at the Terrigal conference was approval (against Whitlam's opposition in committee and on the floor) for the appointment of a staff-elected commissioner to the ABC. And in 1976 the staff certainly needed him, as the Fraser government mounted its assault on the organisation. To counter the Labor rump on the commission, Sir Henry Bland was installed as chairman. Despite his proven bureaucratic ability in marshalling labour and military resources for the Menzies, Holt and Gorton regimes, he misjudged the way power can be exercised in such a singular institution as the ABC. I never met him, yet believed from the moment he moved into the chair that sooner or later we would clash. He was frankly of the opinion that I 'should have been taken on years ago'. In the battle over Professor Manning Clark's 1976 Boyer Lectures I had the distinct feeling, never erased by time, that essentially I was fighting Bland.

The battle got under way when the assistant general manager for radio sent me a memorandum demanding to see Clark's scripts before recording. The wording implied that Australia's best-known historian could be an embarrassment because of his strong anti-Kerr views. I refused to hand over the scripts, explaining that, in dealing with a Boyer lecturer, I considered myself responsible only to the general manager (abroad at the time), who had issued the invitation on behalf of the commission. I knew that, among all the slush at the ABC, there were still some decent traditions of behaviour, and so was not surprised when ultimately the commission supported my stand. For me, however, it was virtually the last hurrah. Warned by doctors that high blood pressure would no longer allow me to live in the crisis-ridden manner to which I was accustomed, I chose to retire from the ABC and, shortly afterwards, the *New Statesman*.

Looking back, I have reason to be grateful for many things—the humour and tolerance of my parents, the stimulus and support of friends, the comradeship of broadcasters, trade unionists and peace activists, the vitality of my children and grandchildren. I have also been fortunate in my marriages—to Jeanne Liddy (d 1979), who turned me towards political radicalism, then to Anne Schlebaum, who reawakened in me uses of the imagination which I was tending to forget. Yet looking around Australia today, I feel increasingly concerned about the deceit, hypocrisy and self-serving careerism embedded in conventional politics, the chaos of an economy fuelled by market speculation, the fragmentation of social relationships and alienation of a festering underclass, and the ominous signs of cultural decay, especially in mass advertising, information and entertainment. In my lecturing and writing, these are the sort of problems, along with the threat of nuclear catastrophe, which now preoccupy me. I remain a socialist, while acknowledging that authentic socialism, with human creativity and compassion at its core, has yet to be developed. I stick by Gramsci's creed: pessimism of the intellect; optimism of the will.



GORDON BARTON

Gordon Barton as seen by Lord Snowdon, c1977.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

I ARRIVED in Sydney as a small boy on a sunny day in January 1939 on Burns Philps' motor vessel *Merkur*. I was not, strictly speaking, a migrant, my Dutch mother having married an Australian in Java, where I was born in 1929. This unlikely meeting of a schoolteacher from Holland and a pearl fisherman from Queensland resulted in a marriage which lasted their lifetime. Two sons were born: Basil in 1921 and myself in 1929.

In our early years my mother undertook our education, with the assistance of Blackfriars Street correspondence school. Having seven household servants, as was customary for a European household in the Indies at that time, she had the time for it. I did not see a great deal of Basil as he had gone off to boarding school in Sydney when he was nine.

In 1939 I too was nine and off I sailed with my mother to become a boarder at the Sydney Church of England Grammar School for Boys—'Shore'. I was used to privacy, gentility, and a considerable amount of personal independence. I was suddenly forced into an environment that was intrusive, rough, arrogant and authoritarian. I didn't like wearing a uniform or being told to do things without being given a reason. I also missed my parents.

My brother was by this time at the University of Sydney. Our relationship became close and was the one redeeming feature of my introduction to Australia. His was the voice of conscience. 'Our parents are not rich, and they have made sacrifices to give us the best education. Don't let them down.'

My father, concerned that if the Japanese entered the war the Dutch East Indies might not be safe, sent my mother to Australia. We rented a pretty little house in Mosman near the water. While my mother wrestled for the first time with housework and made camouflage nets in her spare moments, I dug an air-raid shelter in the backyard.

Nineteen forty-two was a disastrous year for our family. Until April 1942, as the war came closer my father wrote weekly. In April he wrote: 'The Japs are expected at any time. I have volunteered for the army. I will write again when I can.' It was three years before we heard anything further.

The monthly remittances on which we lived also stopped. Although we had never been rich I don't think it had ever occurred to any of us to be seriously concerned about money. It did now. My brother, by now nineteen and a flight-sergeant in the RAAF, sent his fortnightly pay to my mother untouched. It

wasn't much. We went to live in a boarding house, where home was now one room, one bed and a gas ring. I got to know a new world of impoverished divorcees, widows, transients and pensioners. Things were bad, but I thought we could cope until they got better. They got worse.

Religion had never been important in our lives. It was odd, therefore, when the local minister made a formal call on mother. He had a telegram from Basil's squadron leader which said: 'I regret to inform you that your son, Flight-Sergeant Andrew Basil Barton, is missing after an operational exercise. I will advise you when I receive further information.' No further information came, but we received a small parcel containing his personal belongings.

With Basil's disappearance our small income almost disappeared. I was able to continue at Shore on the basis of a scholarship organised by the school. The RAAF awarded mother a dependant's pension amounting to some 15s per fortnight—not enough to pay our rent. She obtained a position as a live-in housekeeper in return for bed and board for the two of us and achieved a small cash income by giving language lessons in the evening.

Mother later found a job with the army as a letter censor, while continuing to teach languages at night. I made small amounts at the weekends as a gardener and cleaner. We eventually had enough income to rent a flat. 'Daddy and Basil will have a home to come back to,' said my mother hopefully. Basil's plane had vanished at sea, and my mother refused to believe that he had not somehow survived. As the next few years passed this dream faded. My father did return at the end of the war, but his health was wrecked and he was to spend years in hospital or at home in bed ill.

Further progress, my mother said, depended on me. I thought to myself fiercely: 'I will work harder than anyone has ever worked and become rich so that none of us will have to worry about money again.'

I did work hard. I won a scholarship to the University of Sydney, and chose arts/law because that, I was told, was the high road to success. After my nine years of conventional and uninspired schooling the university was like the promised land. I read Plato and Homer, which were prescribed, by day, and Dostoevsky and Herodotus, which were not, by night. I went to political meetings, became a reporter on *Honi Soit*, and attended numerous parties. Life was accelerating at a dizzy pace. I developed a taste for argument, claret and sex. After reading Bernard Shaw I came to the view that God was not remote, benign, or impotent—or even necessary—and that religion has more to do with human frailty than divine superiority. My mother was horrified by this development but convinced it would pass off, like the 'flu. It didn't.

Politics had not been regarded as a subject suitable for critical thought at Shore. I assumed that like religion it was not an area in which options could be exercised. It was expected that a gentleman would defend his king, country, honour and property (his family was considered part of that). The political party that stood for all this was the United Australia Party led by Robert Menzies. To us young gentlemen at Shore the Labor party was about as serious an alternative as conversion to Islam.

With my newly sceptical attitude to religion I felt no sympathy for the Platonic or Hegelian views of the divinity or supremacy of the state. I also remembered refugees I had met in 1939 on the ship that brought my mother and me to Sydney. It seemed to me overly innocent to believe in either the wisdom or goodness of any government. I was grateful for the suggestion from John Anderson, the professor of philosophy, that the practical antidote to the corruption of power is pluralism: the division of power into smaller competing parts.

In the area of sociology, in which Anderson had relatively little interest, I discovered two other teachers. One was Sorel, a nineteenth-century French syndicalist; the other was Joseph Schumpeter, professor of economics at Harvard, and author of *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*, who had described the capitalist process as a 'gale of creative destruction' in which the economic environment was constantly changed by waves of innovation created by entrepreneurs. I had already been a part-time businessman since school days, through necessity rather than by inclination, and this continued, for the same reasons, while I was at university. I decided to become an entrepreneur, on the example of an unusually prosperous philosophy student I had met in Melbourne at a student congress. He owned and drove a tip-truck. I put a down payment on a semitrailer and in the boom days of 1950 found plenty of work: drums of petrol from the Clyde refinery to Williamstown, steel pipes from Newcastle to Melbourne.

In addition to the arts/law course for which I had my scholarship I enrolled in economics as an evening student, paying the lecture fees myself. I wanted to know more about this romantic, perhaps profitable, 'gale of creative destruction'. I found a permanent driver for my truck and completed a course in typing and shorthand so that I could better cope with my new load of lectures and essays. Also I obtained a well-paid sinecure with the dignified title of clerk associate and clerk of arraigns at the Supreme Court, which allowed time off for legal lectures. And I began to take an interest in student politics.

I became president of the Liberal Club, largest of the university political clubs and, a little later, of the university branch of the Liberal party. Francis James was a vice-president. I began to develop notions of a political career.

However, events then occurring in far-off places were to have a critical bearing on my political fortunes. In the USA, Senator Joseph McCarthy, through the House Un-American Activities Committee, had launched a witchhunt against communist 'subversion'. Conscious of political advantage, I thought, rather than of a threat of a revolution engineered by Australia's miniscule Communist party, Robert Menzies, now prime minister, proposed the Communist party dissolution bill to dissolve the party, confiscate its assets and make it unlawful to attempt to re-create, be a member of, or support any similar or sympathetic organisation in the future. This draconian measure shocked me. I was certainly unsympathetic to the communists, but for precisely the sort of attitudes and behaviour that I saw embodied in the bill. My mind boggled in contemplation of a new Australian era of thought police, purge trials and political concentration camps. I knew that to say what I thought of his bill would end my career with the Liberal party. But I also began to wonder if these were people whose company I wanted to keep.

I said what I thought: that the bill was opportunistic, pernicious and contrary to liberal democratic principles. I said it privately, in print, and in speeches and debates. Fortunately others were prepared to say it too, although very few from the party that claimed custody of the Liberal tradition.

The bill was passed by parliament, but to my surprise, declared to be unconstitutional by an almost unanimous ruling of the High Court. Menzies was unabashed. To bypass the High Court he proposed a constitutional amendment to authorise his bill. This also I opposed, convinced that if it was passed the very many Australians who had fought and died in the recent war against fascism would have done so in vain. Feelings ran high. Many friends dissociated themselves from me. I developed new relationships with former ideological opponents, notably Jim Staples, then one of the pitifully few stalwarts of the dreaded Australian Communist party. This was the beginning of a long association which I found as personally rewarding as from time to time it was politically embarassing.

The amendment failed to pass, owing as much to the conservatism as the common sense of the voters. And that was the end of Menzies' monstrous bill.

My reward came in the form of a resolution, proposed by Francis James at a crowded meeting of the University Liberal Party Branch. The branch no longer had confidence in me as its president. The motion failed by one vote. Shortly afterwards I resigned as a member of the Liberal party. I became politically homeless. I was about to commence my fourth and final year of law by day and economics by night, and there was still the necessity to earn money. I managed all three requirements and in 1951 graduated BA, LLB, BEc.

After a short hilarious stint as clerk to an eccentric solicitor (he was later declared insane) I decided that the law was not for me, and set my small sail in Schumpeter's perennial gale. The trucking business was at a low ebb, because of a recession and hence, to protect railwaymen's jobs, a strict enforcement of the 'transport co-ordination' acts which prohibited 'unfair' competition with the state railways. This last was defined as any competitive journey of more than 50 miles. I brought the faithful truck out of mothballs and operated it in 'unfair' competition with the railways whenever a consignment could be found that would stand the permit fee. More often there were clandestine journeys by night and by circuitous routes. I also went into the produce business, particularly bringing onions from Mt Gambier to the Sydney markets.

The business was forbidden by three authorities: by the South Australian Onion Board because they feared that this trade would drive the price of onions up, by the Victorian and NSW Onion Boards because they feared that it would bring the price down, and by the railways who wanted to carry all onions, legal or not. My enterprise was a boon to the South Australian onion growers, who received more than the price fixed by their Onion Board, and to the NSW buyers who bought superior South Australian onions more cheaply than their Onion Board sold its poorer local onions. It was also profitable for me and had all the romance and risk of a bootlegging operation. In 1954 the Privy Council upheld an appeal from the High Court in the test case of Hughes and Vale and declared that the harassment by the railways of their road competitors was illegal. This was followed by Barton's case in which the court ordered the government to refund all the fees and penalties that had been illegally charged to me.

With my partner, Greg Farrell, I was developing a new transport business, called IPEC (Interstate Parcel Express Company), for door to door delivery of urgent freight—which until then, indirectly protected by the railway monopoly, had been the preserve of the airlines. Most deliveries between adjacent states could be made overnight. But we had difficulty offering a similar service on the longer routes between non-adjacent states. So in 1963 we made a plan to use aircraft to carry such freight.

However, just as I had already found that the state governments' surface transport policy had as its object the protection of their railways from competition, now I found that the administration of federal transport policy was largely determined by the interests of the two airlines, the publicly owned TAA, and the private Ansett. Common fares, schedules and standards of service were agreed between the airlines. This cosy arrangement—ostensibly, as usual, in the public interest—was protected by the power of the director-general of civil aviation to withhold licences to import aircraft or to operate them.

Nevertheless, on the grounds that we were not aspiring to be an airline but merely to carry our own freight more efficiently, we put to the director-general our plan to operate five DC-4 freighter aircraft which, with all our trucks, would enable us to give an overnight service between all states. The director-general

Gordon Barton and mother, Circular Quay, Sydney, c1940.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Gordon Barton as pupil at Sydney Church of England Grammar School ('Shore'), c1945.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Gordon Barton with his first truck, c1950.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Gordon, Yvonne and Cindy Barton on holiday on the south coast of New South Wales, c1966.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

replied that the market was already adequately served by the two airlines and no new permits would be issued. We claimed in the High Court that the director-general was unlawfully restricting our right under section 92 of the constitution, which says 'trade, ... commerce and enterprise among the States ... shall be absolutely free'. By a three–two majority the full bench upheld our right to an interstate operating licence for the DC-4 aircraft, and ordered the director-general to issue one. But the court upheld the right of the commonwealth to refuse import licences under its customs powers, irrespective of the consequential effects on any applicant in respect of his rights under section 92.

IPEC's first aircraft, an Armstrong Whitworth Argosy formerly flown by British Empire Airways, c1967.

Because there were no heavy transport aircraft available in Australia, it was of no use now to have a licence to operate them. We sought leave to appeal to the Privy Council—asking for an order requiring the director-general to issue the import licence. However, on the eve of our new appearance in London the Menzies government stipulated that the power to issue import licences for aircraft would no longer be exercised by the director-general of aviation, but by the controller of customs. The regulation had immediate effect. Our appeal was thrown into confusion.

I was very angry. I went to Canberra and told Menzies why and said I believed that the Senate should, and would, reject it. The Senate did indeed throw out his regulation a few days later. It was one of Menzies' few parliamentary defeats, and he never forgave me for it.

The appeal to the Privy Council was reinstated but not granted. We took our case to the press, parliament and the public, all of whom were sympathetic. But the airline lobby was powerful. More than ten years were to pass before our import licence was reluctantly issued.

In 1947 I had met Yvonne Hand, then 17 and a fellow student at the university. In 1957 we were married. In 1962 we had a daughter we called Cindy and moved to a house designed for us by Peter Muller in Castle Cove. I started to be less obsessive about working and took up family life as a serious occupation. We even found a Japanese houseboy, Masaki Ueshima, and built a Japanese garden. On Christmas day 1965 Vonnie developed a bad headache. Seven days later she was operated on for a malignant cerebral tumor. After six weeks of distressing, sometimes frightening treatment her condition improved.

In mid-February 1966, then 36, I retired as managing director of Ipec, and Vonnie and Cindy and I set out on a grand tour of the far east (as Australians are wont to call their far north). The first stop was to be Manila to stay with two old friends and to visit author John Kelso, of External Affairs, representing Australia in the Philippines.

It was a night flight, and one of our fellow passengers was Jeff Bate, Liberal MHR for Wollondilly whom I had met ten years before during the fight against the airline monopoly. Bate lectured me on the threat of communism in southeast Asia—especially Indo-China. 'They've already invaded South Vietnam,' he said. 'Malaya will be next.' I discussed all this with John Kelso. He generally agreed with Bate's view and supported the strategy of the Australian government, which was to try to 'draw in' the USA. There was much support for US involvement in the Vietnamese war in the Philippines, and in Hong Kong and Taiwan, as I found—but more for commercial than political reasons, I suspected.

On our return to Australia I took the time to study the history of the war in Indo-China. The official US and Australian version was that the communist state of North Vietnam, with the assistance of China, had invaded the democratic state of South Vietnam, which had sought assistance from the US and its allies. To me historical facts seemed to be very different. It was a war, I thought, we should be

glad to be out of. Yet the Australian government had already sent a battalion of soldiers.

The dubious justification was that if we did not support the Americans they would become discouraged and withdraw leaving the way open to the Vietnamese, and presumably their Chinese allies, to come down the Malay archipelago and eventually to Australia. Or less simply, that once Vietnam fell to communism, Malaya and Thailand and Indonesia would also fall by operation of the 'domino' theory. 'Better to fight there than here' was the slogan. But opposition to the war was growing.

In an effort to demonstrate Australian solidarity with the USA and to stir patriotic feeling, the government invited the US president, Lyndon Baines Johnson, to visit Australia in 1966. Since the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor and its aftermath the American alliance had been as sacrosanct as motherhood. Yet, I thought, it would be a great pity if Lyndon Johnson returned home with the feeling that Australians were unanimously enthusiastic about his war.

Gordon Barton as seen by Michael Leunig, employed on his Sunday Observer, *c1970.*

I thought of writing him a letter. But I could not be sure it would reach him. On the other hand it would be difficult for the president not to notice such a letter if it was published prominently in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on the morning of his arrival. In this form it might also give a lot of Australians reason to think again about their own position. I booked space for a full-page advertisement for the issue of 22 October 1966, without indicating what it contents would be. It was published in full.

At Castle Cove the phone rang at 5 am. It rang continuously until I took it off the hook that night. The same thing happened next day, and the next. Sackfuls of letters started to arrive, and reporters, and others. I was gratified to know that I hadn't wasted my time or my money, but I was not prepared for an invasion of my home, and I was still concerned for my wife's health. My friend Jerry Gutman solved the problem by inviting us to stay with him secretly in Canberra.

When we returned a week later the phone was still ringing, and there was a mountain of mail, most of it saying 'we agree with you; what should we do?' I felt some responsibility but knew that I was in no position to run a crusade.

I lifted the phone to what seemed the millionth caller. He was a stranger named John Crew. He had heard of my problem. 'Don't worry about a thing, dear boy,' said Crew. 'We'll help.' He and his partner, Ken Cook, were television and film producers; very pleasant and competent people. They had a small staff and office. They answered the phone, and the letters, and provided a screen between my family and my apparently numerous public sympathisers. They also suggested that it would be a pity to allow this enthusiasm to go to waste.

An election had been called by Harold Holt, who had succeeded Menzies as prime minister early in 1966, timed to capitalise on President Johnson's visit. Francis James, from whom I had not heard since the days of the anti-communist bill, rang with a suggestion. Why not offer candidates for election on an anti-war ticket? (His views about the Liberal party had much changed over the years.) I agreed. We had about a month to find candidates and organise a campaign.

The government's liked to label critics of its foreign policy as hippies and communists. We were determined to frustrate such attacks. The political campaign took the name of 'Liberal Reform'. Candidates were vetted for political respectability. Suits and ties were in, beards were out. I appointed an executive committee of myself, Ken Thomas (founder and chairman of the TNT transport group) and Gary Richardson (the rotary lawn mower inventor), all self-made millionaires. None of our candidates was elected, but we had succeeded in making it respectable, even fashionable, to question the government's policy in Vietnam.

Having created this tiger I found it hard to dismount. The organisation grew, and developed its own personality. It attracted better people than I was used to meeting in political life, willing to contribute time, effort and ideas. Delighted and flattered, I could only respond by increasing my own involvement, encouraged by Vonnie who had always been more of an idealist than I. Amazingly, for a time her health improved, and in 1967 she became pregnant. Our son Geoffrey was born late that year. I had begun to feel expansive and self-confident again. I decided to start a new commercial organisation, a sort of investment bank, which would also help to fund an increasingly expensive political organisation. We became involved in new business activities, acquiring interests in hotels and casinos, among other things, and even bought the publishing firm of Angus and Robertson.

Vonnie died in 1969. That, and reduced involvement in the transport company, made me more dependant on the distractions which these new activities provided. I enjoyed the mental exercise and the power to influence events in so many different fields.

It had long been my view that there was room in Australia for a more radical and stimulating style of journalism than was generally available. Moreover Melbourne had no Sunday newspaper. I asked John Crew to start one. The result was the *Sunday Observer*. The newsagents, under the control of newspaper groups, refused to open on Sundays to distribute the new paper. Selling through milk bars and other available outlets the circulation eventually reached 120 000, but this was not enough to pay. I had the bright idea of distributing the *Observer* with the milk on Sunday mornings. The milk companies were agreeable. The Transport Workers' Union, however, was not. So I put what I thought was an irresistible proposal to Bob Hawke, then secretary of the ACTU. If he could persuade the union to co-operate, the ACTU could have a half interest in the *Observer* and use its presses, if it wished, to produce a daily paper. Hawke agreed that it was an attractive idea, and said that he would talk to the union. Nothing came of it. I assumed that the TWU had rejected the proposal. It was a wasted opportunity.

Meanwhile because our press was largely idle, I started a second paper, the *Sunday Review* (later to incorporate *Nation* and to be renamed *Nation Review*) and in due course asked Richard Walsh to be its editor. I had heard of Walsh in connection with *Oz* magazine and thought that Australia needed an iconoclast of his unusual talent. With all their problems the newspapers were a source of great satisfaction.

The war in Vietnam escalated. John Crew discovered that a photographic report of the massacre of the inhabitants of the Vietnamese village of My Lai by a US military unit had been extensively published in the USA where it had caused an outcry. The photographs had not been published by Australian newspapers. We smuggled the negatives into Australia and printed them as a special supplement to the *Observer*. The photographs were horrifying. Occasionally the *Observer* would print pieces by the Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett who reported the war from the Vietnamese side. These were biased in a way that infuriated the government, and others, although many official reports were no less biased the other way.

The Melbourne *Herald* called Burchett a traitor. He tried to return to Australia to issue a writ for defamation but his Australian passport had been stolen and the government had warned all airlines flying into Australia that Burchett was persona non grata. UTA flew him as far as New Caledonia but under official pressure refused to take him to Sydney. Burchett's lawyer, Frank Galbally QC, asked for my assistance. What he wanted, I think, was an editorial. I thought I should go further. It was wrong for the government to be trying to keep a fourth-generation

Australian citizen out of his own country because he did not have a passport, even if—especially if—his political views and activities were not approved of by the government. I chartered a twin-engined light aircraft, had it fitted with auxiliary fuel tanks, and sent it to New Caledonia to bring Burchett back. It was a risky trip, but Burchett was landed safely in Brisbane a few days later.

Meanwhile the anti-war political organisation triggered by Lyndon Johnson's visit had become by 1969 the Australia Party, with branches in most electorates. The party's supporters were interested in domestic policy too, and this soon extended to such areas as education, ecology, civil rights, decentralisation and economic development. The Australia Party's policy was a blueprint for modern liberalism.

The party made large demands on my time. I attended executive meetings, inaugural meetings and conventions all over the country. I was also in demand as spokesman and made frequent appearances on TV, on campuses and at Rotary meetings, professional bases and church groups. Election times were especially frenetic. The results, by usual standards, were not spectacular. Until 1974, despite attracting some 300 000 votes or as much as twelve per cent in middle-class electorates, no AP candidate was elected. However, the activities of the party, and the allocation of preferences to Gough Whitlam's Labor party, contributed greatly to Whitlam's victory in 1972, and again in 1974. Gratifyingly, Whitlam withdrew the last Australian troops from Vietnam.

In my view Australian culture and politics had clung for too long to the stereotypes of the past. Australians were haunted by their atavistic memories of threats from Russia, China and Japan, and of protection from Britain. The natural successor to Britain as protector was the USA which had demonstrated its willingness (albeit for its own reasons) and its capacity in the Pacific war of 1942–45. It was, in the light of hindsight, extraordinarily ambitious to try to change deeply entrenched attitudes in a few years. Nor did the AP fit into the usual Left–Right spectrum. Ultimately, it was not rational defence of the status quo that resisted the reformism of the new movement, but tradition, perceived self-interest, apathy and ignorance.

Although the AP was a failure in purely electoral terms it had succeeded in raising issues ignored by other parties, in offering alternatives that were new and challenging, and in involving many able and idealistic people in a constructive political commitment. It was this, in the final analysis, that I had to be happy with. It was also some small consolation that Australia's disgraceful role in the Vietnamese struggle for independence, counter-productive as it was in almost every other way, was in the end responsible for a wave of some of the best immigrants Australia has ever received.

I had spent seven exhausting years on the AP, and more than a million dollars. Not by nature a political animal, I was being forced to behave like one, and I was not enjoying it. I didn't want to equivocate and make false promises if that was the price of political success. I wondered if I could be honest with myself, as well fair to my supporters. I was sensitive also to the damage being done to the AP by snide suggestions that it was a rich man's toy. In 1974 I resigned as national convenor. A year or so later the organisation adopted Don Chipp as its leader, along with the new name Australian Democrats. I had no objection to this. Chipp had courageously and effectively opposed censorship while minister for customs. He was accused of being a populist. Not such a bad thing, I thought. The party has enough idealists. It needs voters.

For the second time in my life I turned away from politics and back to my commercial interests. But these, I found, were being run enthusiastically by people

who seemed more competent to do so than I was. I felt like a cigar store Indian.

I was flattered to be appointed to the Sydney University Senate, but found I was expected here also to be a rubber stamp. More significantly I became involved in the establishment of a pre-term abortion clinic in Sydney. I had heard gruesome stories from my friend Godfrey Oettle, a forensic officer, who had often had to perform autopsies on the victims of backyard abortionists. The better illegal clinics survived by paying protection money to the police and were very expensive. Reform of the law was politically impossible. It seemed to me that here was a good case for bypassing it. The clinic was set up with the assistance of several old AP colleagues, of Rodney Shearman, professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at the University of Sydney, and Clyde Packer of the media family. It was soon carrying out several hundred competent abortions a week. It provided psychological counselling and birth control education in an effort to reduce the increasing demand for its services. The police wisely made no attempt to interfere. I soon became redundant and retired from the board.

I was still looking for something to do. While thinking about the difficulty still occasioned by the two-airline policy in respect of traffic to Tasmania, I hit on the idea of using fast small container vessels between Westernport in Victoria and Devonport in Tasmania. I had the ships designed by Warwick Hood to make the journey in less than twelve hours. Loading and unloading was to be by computer-controlled cranes at high speed. The ships were designed to be operated like modern aircraft, with a crew of no more than five. I called the proposed new service the 'Tiger Line'. The idea appealed to everybody concerned except the Union Steamship Company, which enjoyed a monopoly of the service from Melbourne to Hobart, and the Seamen's Union. The Tasmanian government deferred the scheme indefinitely.

In other areas there were financial complications. The *Observer*, and to a lesser extent *Nation Review*, had proved to be a financial haemorrhage, as had a number of our diversifications around that time. I was forced to end my involvement with the press and publishing. My efforts to do something new, interesting and useful in Australia seemed to be forever frustrated.

Now fate intervened again, this time more kindly. I met Mary Ellen who was to become my wife and to alter my priorities and habits entirely. With our children we took holidays abroad. The summer of 1978 found us in Europe. We loved Europe for its diversity, its tolerance and the beauty of its countryside and cities. For us also it was a virginal and challenging environment. Perhaps, we thought, we could start a new life here. We did.

By 1979 Mary Ellen and I were living in a twelfth-century castle in the country my mother had left 60 years before. (I was sad my mother was not to know it. She had died in 1975.) We bought a bankrupt Dutch transport company and embarked on the project of providing an overnight door-to-door delivery service all over Europe. Astonishingly no one had done it before. The children went to school in Switzerland. It was an adventure for everyone. Our project had been realised, but we are still there.

Australia, where so many of my battles have been fought, seems far away. Sometimes it seems that I lost most of the battles. But not, I think the important ones. I was privileged to take an active part in two of Australia's testing times: the years of the anti-communist bill and the years of the war in Vietnam. In many lesser contests, won or lost, nobody can say that I did not try. I enjoyed doing it. Perhaps one day I will return to try again.

Beryl Beaurepaire.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

BERYL BEAUREPAIRE

I TURNED SIXTEEN in September 1939. I remember very clearly Sunday evening, the 3rd of that month, when we found we were at war. I, with my family (mother, father, sister and great-aunt), were toasting crumpets in front of the fire, and I'm sure we did not realise what was ahead of us. I was at Fintona Girls' School in Balwyn. School for the rest of the year was no different, except that we all started knitting balaclavas and socks, and we all knew friends and relatives who had joined up.

My father, who had been too young for the 1914–18 war, but too old for active service in 1939, joined the air force as an equipment officer. During my last year at school, I was taking special French conversation lessons from a Frenchwoman, Madame Utz. I had a lesson the day Paris fell. We both spent the hour in tears, instead of rehearsing my recitation to take place at the Alliance Française the next week. I went to the University of Melbourne, where I failed first-year Science. My mind was not on the job, as I had decided that as soon as I was eighteen, I would join the WAAAF (Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force). I was continually critical of my male student friends. I felt they were 'hiding under the cloak of academia' and not joining up. In fact it was surprising that boys who had been officers in their school cadet corps suddenly became conscientious objectors. But the University of Melbourne students were very divided regarding support for the participation of Australia in the war. It seemed so far away. Then, as now, university students were regarded in the community as 'lefties'. Thinking back, our worst lefties would now be almost right wing.

The cafeteria was the centre of the university. Coffee for threepence, State Express cigarettes (I did not smoke) at ninepence for ten, and a really good cafeteria lunch for about a shilling. My pocket money was two pounds per week. This had to cover fares, food and extra activities.

I was fortunate in my WAAAF days, as I had the pleasure of serving under some wonderful leaders: Dr Margaret (now Dame Margaret) Blackwood, Doris Carter, Audrey Herring (now Craig), just to name a few, and our own DWAAAF, Claire Stevenson. My time in the WAAAF was important in consolidating my concern for equal opportunity for women. My headmistress, Miss M.E. Cunningham, had started me on this track, as she used to tell us there were no bars to what we could achieve if we worked hard enough. The women in the services were really treated as cheap labour, paid less than our male counterparts: we were required to have better qualifications than the men to be considered for courses and promotion.

The 'rookie' weeks were a rude awakening. Some of the time was spent at the old Working Men's College, now the site of the Angliss Food School. While there we had air-raid drill—bells rang any time in the night and out we ran, down four flights of stairs and over to the trenches in the gardens opposite. I met many girls from different backgrounds, and of different occupations—in my flight there was a former prostitute—the first I'd come across! When finally I managed to persuade the male chauvinists of the meteorological section that I could manage to do the forecasting officers' course, I found the man sitting next to me had only passed his merit (year 8, I think) whereas I had passed my matriculation. The war ended before we finished our course, so expected arguments about postings did not occur.

I spent about a year at No 1 Operation Training Unit at East Sale as a meteorological observer. The WAAAF were not permitted to go up in aircraft. However, our section head, Flt-Lt Bryan Rofe, sent us up whenever he wanted some further cloud information, etc. This caused some problems with the WAAAF administration oficer. It was at East Sale that I came to appreciate the Salvation Army—Captain and Mrs D. Adams were there, they were virtually Mum and Dad to many lonely, lost girls. But when people used to ask, do you enjoy being a WAAAF, it was difficult to answer. I suppose I had as pleasant a war as one could have, but living away from home I found the conditions rather awful. I was promoted to sergeant fairly early in my time at Sale. It was amazing how much better the food tasted, accompanied by a glass of beer!

I was fortunate, in that I did not lose anyone near and dear to me, and my husband (then my fiance) survived the RAAF. The immediate postwar years had problems: trying to buy a home; babies; food and petrol rationing; and difficulties of settling in to what we hoped would be a normal family suburban life. Many of our men friends had joined up at eighteen, become officers, and now they had to try to find a job. There were not enough positions for pilots in the commercial airlines and of course almost no positions for gunners, observers, etc. Many tried to undertake new careers and study, but it was a difficult time of adjustment. My husband went to night school two nights a week for seven years, as did many other ex-servicemen. The majority of ex-servicewomen seemed to be content at first to be full-time home-makers and mothers, though those who were not married did take up some offers of extra training. Many couples who had been married before the war found living together again very difficult.

I soon became bored with the home scene, but because of family pressure I was only able to take up voluntary work, attend some cookery courses, and other such activities. My life changed dramatically when my father-in-law, Sir Frank Beaurepaire, died in May 1956. My husband had in his early thirties to assume an important role in business (particularly in Olympic Consolidated Industries) and in the community. It was necessary, and my choice, to support him and his activities. Our sons were at a school near our home, which was a help as we had many commitments day and night.

Travel overseas and interstate was regular for business reasons. The first overseas trip was in 1952 when we travelled extensively, particularly in areas of Germany around Cologne, which had been badly bombed. England was still suffering greatly from the bombing, and still had food rationing. I remember going to a relative's house for dinner—fish and chips. My husband asked for pepper, but they didn't have any: it wasn't available during the war, and she hadn't bothered to get it afterwards. The English food then was dreadful, there was no flavour to anything.

I continued to support my husband in his activities; he was lord mayor of Melbourne in 1965–67—years that gave me an opportunity to meet many wonderful people. I again had the discrimination against women brought to my

Beryl Bedggood after receiving her WAAF commission, 1944.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Beryl Beaurepaire after becoming lady mayoress of Melbourne, 1965.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Beryl Beaurepaire as state vice-president of the Liberal party in Victoria, a position she has held since 1976.
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notice. Madame Yvonne Petrement was the French consul in Melbourne, but, oh dear, she was a woman, so could not attend the lord mayor's dinner: she had to dine with the 'wives'. I did my utmost to upset some of those conventions, but the mood of the council was not supportive of change.

My husband was a member of the Melbourne City Council for nineteen years from 1956. For the people of Victoria these were years of growth and prosperity. The Melbourne City Council was the hub of Melbourne social life. Receptions were held for visiting dignitaries, prominent sportsmen, and for ratepayers, many giving the lord mayor of the day an opportunity to say thank you to those who were giving their time to the community. Also, much money was raised for charity by the Lady Mayoress's Committee of the Lord Mayor's Fund.

Melbourne had become a sophisticated, cosmopolitan city; this change was probably started by the 1956 Olympic Games and has continued with the arrival of so many people from other countries.

I had always been interested in politics, and after our term of office at the Town Hall was completed, Sir Robert Menzies and Sir Henry Bolte suggested I should stand for office in the Liberal party. This I did and with their support was elected to the Victorian executive committee—and I'm still there, though now it has a different name.

We now turn to the years in which I 'did my own thing', to use a modern term. Whilst the Liberal party by philosophy gave equal opportunity and rights to women, I realised that in practice this was not so: one only had to look at the few women holding parliamentary seats. I was elected chairman of the federal women's committee of the Liberal party in 1973. Billy Snedden was the leader of the opposition, a man who was always prepared to listen to me regarding the changing roles of women.

In 1975, International Women's Year, as chairman of the federal women's committee I attended the Women and Politics Conference in Canberra. That conference, organised by the women's adviser to Mr Whitlam, Miss Elizabeth Reid, was completely ridiculed by the press; they reported only trivia, such as a woman wearing a man's suit as the invitation to the prime minister's party said 'lounge suit'. I believe that conference was extremely worth while. Many women 'came out of the woodwork' and decided to get involved in community activities, to stand for local government and state parliament. Aboriginal and migrant women learnt how to network and lobby governments. At that conference, Malcolm Fraser, recently elected leader of the Liberal party, promised me that when he became prime minister, he would do something about an 'advisory body' re women. It was accepted that the job had been too big for one person, that Elizabeth Reid had been given an impossible task, and that a group would be better than one person.

Fraser won the election. However, governments make promises but are slow to implement action. But after much badgering, a working party of four was elected from representatives of women's organisations to make a recommendation to the government. I was elected by representatives of *all* political parties to that working party. We tried to ascertain what Australian women wanted.

This was a beginning of the equal opportunity struggle. As an example, when I conducted an Open House meeting in Mount Isa, the Country Women's Association (about twenty women) and one man (a priest) came. The priest was upset because the mines management sacked women on marriage, and so his flock were not getting married until the girl was about eight months pregnant! My husband was dining with the mine's executives; they had forbidden their wives to attend my meeting.

The Fraser government accepted the recommendation that a National Women's Advisory Council should be set up. I was honoured by being asked to be the first convenor in July 1978. I believe we did a great deal to improve the situation for women: Australian women who were full-time home-makers, those who combined a mother's role with a career, and those whose career was their main interest. I hope, too, we made life easier for many disadvantaged women, such as migrant and Aboriginal women, as we made many recommendations to government which were accepted. During the years I was convenor of the National Women's Advisory Council I had many times of frustration, and abuse from some organisations such as Women Who Want to be Women.

In 1981 I was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire. In 1983 the Fraser government offered me, as an ex-servicewoman, a three-year term on the Council of the Australian War Memorial, and in 1985 the Hawke government renewed the appointment. Then in September 1985 I had the pleasure of being elected chairman by my fellow councillors, becoming the first woman to fill this position.

The years between 1975 and 1985 have been a period of change for women. There may be some things I don't like: I deplore breakdowns in families, as I believe a traditional family is best for bringing up children; however, I do not believe that any woman should be tied to an unhappy marriage because she can't afford financially to leave it.

I have a perhaps old-fashioned philosophy about the number of single parents who need government support. Did the mothers really want these children? If so, then they deserve support—but were they accidents? I believe governments should support contraceptive advice to secondary school students (male and female), and I hope by the time this is published condom machines will be in secondary schools. Everyone dislikes abortion; prevention is better than cure!

Looking back at Australian life since 1939, as a woman I believe much has been achieved, we are no longer regarded as second-class citizens as far as finance, business and politics are concerned, but there is still a great need for education of the male population to understand that we too have brains and intellect and should be given opportunities for excellence. We should not need to have 'Woman of the Year' awards—nor have the press exclaim when a female jockey wins a race.

Beryl Beaurepaire as convenor of the National Women's Advisory Council, with R.J. Ellicott, minister for women's affairs, representing Australia at the United Nations conference to mark the mid-point of the Decade for Women in Copenhagen, 1980.
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Audrey Blake, 1982.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

AUDREY BLAKE

In 1939 I had recently returned with my husband Jack and our two-year-old daughter Jan from a year in Moscow. Jack had represented the Communist Party of Australia on the Comintern, and I had represented the Australian Young Communist League on the Young Communist International. Our time away had been spent studying, attending meetings and writing articles for the Russian press and the working-class press at home.

I joined the communist movement when quite young. My parents weren't political at all except in the working-class way of voting Labor. But my father, a sheet metal worker at the South Melbourne Gas Works, belonged to his trade union. He told me: 'Australian workers don't need political parties, all we need is our union.' I came to disagree with him on this because when I was about thirteen, and still at school, the father of two schoolmates, a socialist, invited the three of us to hear a speaker on Russia. We went to the meeting, and I thought it was marvellous. For me, the die was cast.

I left school the next year and got a job with a catering firm, scrubbing cupboards in the morning and serving behind the counter in the afternoon. Kids of fourteen could get jobs because they were very poorly paid. When I was fifteen I joined the Young Communist League (YCL), and became secretary of the youth section of the Friends of the Soviet Union. We had Saturday night dances in a converted warehouse. There were big slogans, 'Defend the Soviet Union', and tables with Soviet magazines. I was working at the Hotel Australia, and the management said they knew I was a communist and I had either to give it up or be dismissed. I was a cheeky young woman, seventeen by this time, and I said, 'Would you give up your religion for your job?' They said it wasn't the same, and I got the sack. This was 1933, during the depression. I did what most of my unemployed friends did—worked full time for the YCL without pay. My parents had separated, and my mother's wages kept the lot of us children.

Jack and I got married in April 1934 in the Registry Office, had a beer, then Jack went off to speak in Red Square (Bridport Street, Albert Park), and I went to speak at the South Melbourne Unemployed Workers Movement. Jack and I both worked as full-time functionaries, he for the party and I for the YCL.

A year after our return from Moscow the war broke out. The party had been the main anti-fascist force, and when the war started we began to organise support. We were wary of the danger of the war being turned against the Soviet Union.

The Soviet pact with Germany is still a matter for argument among communists. When it happened the party all over the world wanted a negotiated peace. I think this was a mistake. We should have been able to express our support for the Soviet Union and the reasons for the pact, but still take our own position on the war. It was difficult: the attacks on us were fierce, and the Menzies government banned both the party and the YCL in 1940.

The party was banned first. Jack had to go 'underground'. We were raided at home the night the party was banned, and a plainclothes man was posted outside. When the YCL was banned I had to go underground too. We had known we were going to be outlawed, so we were prepared—we had our own underground presses. I went to a safe house with Jan. Then they raided the place where I was staying and asked, 'Is the Blake child here?' That scared me, I thought they might take her from us. I got word to Jack. Jan was sent to school as a boarder under another name. So she just disappeared as far as the authorities were concerned. She was far too young to go to boarding school. Children of party functionaries learned to cope, but they suffered. Jan certainly did. That she survived it all so well is due entirely to her own strength of character.

The Soviet Union's entry into the war and Churchill's commitment to a genuine Allied war effort meant the end of the phoney war. Jack came out into the open and went on a speaking tour in most states, demanding that the Communist party's legality be returned. It was, in December 1942. Meanwhile in the youth organisation we had called a meeting of all our members and inaugurated a new organisation—the Eureka Youth League. We established the new EYL in all states, and I was elected national secretary. We'd been organising the young workers on issues of wages, conditions and the need to form youth sections of trade unions. Now we had to ask them to work, really work, because coal was needed, everything was needed. That's never easy with people working in rotten jobs. Usually workers want to do a decent job because they value the respect of their workmates and they don't appreciate bludgers. On the other hand, they are rarely enthusiastic about work—most jobs are boring. Because of the labour shortage, it was a time when the whip of unemployment wasn't effective, nor was the threat of the sack. Absenteeism was a problem.

We opened a program called the shop brigader's campaign in many factories, mines and so on. It was a success, earning a commendation from the prime minister. We proposed that factories should adopt platoons in the army. The EYL established the Friends of the Services, with Nancy Marks as head, to take responsibility for these activities. They would collect for parcels—food and sweets, and send these with letters, leaflets and books. We had members in the army, air force and navy, and through them, with the help of the Friends of the Services, a useful influence. It's always difficult to work in the armed forces, but this was a people's war and our popular methods were effective.

The EYL also initiated the apprentices' movement in 1943. The chief organiser was Julie Dye. Apprentices had to do three, sometimes four, evenings at technical school a week, after working all day. Their wages were tiny, so often they couldn't eat before going to night school. Their failure rate was high. Our Carlton branch organised a discussion with our apprentice members and some of their friends, and formed the Melbourne Apprentices Committee, which launched a movement for day classes at tech for apprentices. They issued a call to a meeting and booked a hall which seated 100. But 2000 came, so they marched to the Trades Hall. That was the beginning of a splendid mass movement. Youth enquiries were held in a number of suburbs, the commissioners hearing the evidence being local mayors, trade union leaders and representative citizens. Apprentices elected representatives

Above left. Audrey Blake, national secretary of the Eureka Youth League, in Melbourne headquarters, 1942. Above right. Audrey Blake in action for the Eureka Youth League, at a wartime rally to demand 'a new deal for youth'.
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Audrey Blake in 1952, year of the Australian Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship and of her retirement from the Eureka Youth League.
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Audrey Blake with grandsons Ricky (left) and David Sandblom.
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Audrey Blake and Joan Goodwin in a still from the 1984 film Red Matildas.
YARRA BANKS FILM PTY LTD

from their workplace to give evidence. Apprentices weren't permitted to strike; the prohibition was contained in the indentures. But now, the first strikes of apprentices took place, supported by tradesmen and the trade unions. This illustrates the fact that it's no good saying to the trade unions 'you should organise the unemployed, the women, the youth'. First you get together a group of people concerned and start organising yourself, then you go to the trade unions, and they always come good.

Another wartime campaign the EYL initiated was for the right to play sport on Sunday. You actually could not play sport on Sundays, and because on Saturdays the big teams had the grounds and sports fields, the young workers couldn't play on the only day they were allowed. We organised demonstrations through the cities with young people dressed in neck-to-knee costumes and so on. Our banners said we wanted Sunday sport and modern sporting conditions. We worked to establish Sunday sports committees in various suburbs, to which trade unions and other groups sent delegates. There'd be a campaign in, say, Brunswick, for a referendum on the matter. Laurie Carmichael was one of the leaders of that campaign; at the time he was state president of the EYL. Gradually a real movement for Sunday sport developed, and the issue was won. Once the empty sports fields could be used on Sundays it meant a growth of amateur sport.

There were great weaknesses, and many problems, but through it all the youth league developed and grew. The attacks on the league date from about 1944. This was mainly the period of the Groupers, the early days of the National Civic Council. There was violence against league branches, so much so that there was a trade-union-supported deputation to the police. The reactionaries felt the Japanese menace was over and the war was coming to an end, and they were ready once again to go for us. They were very hostile, an important reason being that they knew the Soviet Union had established itself. Whereas during the war you could feel out there a wider support for us, from 1944 the situation was difficult. It became more difficult once the war was over.

The EYL remained active throughout the cold war period. Together with other youth groups, we organised a youth trek to Canberra in 1949. After an extensive national drive, a 125-strong delegation representing organisations with a total membership of 200 000 arrived in Captain's Flat where the community billeted us in their homes overnight. Some of the delegates hitched, some came by bike, some by train. When we got to Canberra, most of the MPs wouldn't see us. We went to various embassies and stated our views on questions of war and peace. This united effort really angered and alarmed the reactionaries, and it received prominent newspaper coverage right across the country of the 'Red Dupes' sort.

The Communist party made mistakes in its industrial policy after the war and especially in the coal strike of 1949. The workers' wages had been held down during the war; while we were fighting fascism there weren't going to be wages struggles. With peace, the Labor government wanted this to continue. But there was a pent-up feeling among the workers—they'd worked their guts out during the war, nobody had had anything, we'd been rationed for some foods and clothes. So the party together with other militants led the struggle to break that restraint on wages, and succeeded. But we overestimated the position of the working class and also our own position. We were pushed very hard by reaction, and the Labor party were not helping, and we made sectarian mistakes. The Chifley Labor government had set out to break the coal strike. The party was important in the leadership of the strike because it was important in the union and in the pits. The time came when the strike wasn't going to be won—the Chifley government had mobilised against it and were going to send in the troops. You've got to know in

Jubilee medal presented to Audrey Blake by the secretary of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR commemorating 'Forty years since victory in the anti-fascist war 1941–1945'. The citation says: 'For distinguished service as National Secretary of the Eureka Youth League in support of the war effort in Australia and in support of a second front in Europe.'
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a strike when it's time to go back. You don't just stay out forever. You have to know when you are getting to the stage when the workers can't hold out any longer. The party should have counselled the workers to go back earlier. It's not easy: it can be betrayal going back too early, and it can be defeat going back too late.

In the campaign against the Communist party dissolution bill and the referendum, everyone was involved—meetings, leafletting, paste ups. It was a magnificent struggle, and it defeated the bill. That was tremendous, coming out of the cold war—no, not coming out of it, being in the middle of it. We had Evatt with us but all the right of the Labor party against, and the rest intimidated. Our people worked themselves to the bone.

Then there was the Australian Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship (Sydney 1952) which Menzies threatened to smash. It was a great success. This was my last major activity with the Eureka Youth League. At 35 it was time for me to retire, and at the 1952 EYL congress after the Youth Carnival, I did so.

For two years my main responsibility was youth affairs for the central committee of the party. Then in 1954 the party decided I should work full time on cultural affairs for the central committee and on organising with the New South Wales state committee. I agreed to do so, despite strong disagreements stemming from the 'consolidation' events of that year, when the blame for the mistakes made in the cold war years of the late 1940s and early 1950s was laid solely with two comrades, Jack Blake and Jack Henry. (As a 1981 commission of the national committee of the CPA later put it, 'Comrade Jack Blake, and in a somewhat different way comrade Audrey Blake, were in fact victims of an inner party struggle which was taking place at the time.')

Audrey and Jack Blake at a peace march on the anniversary of Hiroshima's atom bomb, Sydney 1981.
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In my new position I did a few speaking tours for the state committee—country towns, railway workshops, dam sites, and so on. It was at this time that I became ill and was off work for more than a year. After I recovered I resigned from full-time party work and from all my positions, but not from the party. Soon after, in 1956, came the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and I entirely disapproved of the way the Australian party leadership responded. The only way was to lead the Marxist forces of the working class through this, not to pretend it wasn't there. This was the position Jack took. They didn't agree. He resigned all his positions and had much serious illness. It was a terrible time.

To keep us both I got a job in a shop in 1957. It wasn't easy to get one. It wasn't yet the affluent society, and I had no work record, but did have a communist record. Our daughter married the same year and left home. We wanted to be good grandparents. We got four granchildren fairly rapidly and they gave us a great deal of joy. I worked in the shop for six years. Pay for shop assistants was very small; this was before equal pay and before any decent rises. I was getting £11 a week and we could just live. After this I worked as a publisher's editor for a year, then in a warehouse for twelve years. I liked the warehouse much better than the shop because it was a big place, there were a lot of workers and I got on well with them.

While I was working at the warehouse, I resigned from the party. The year was 1966, ten years after the twentieth congress of the CPSU, and I resigned because of the Australian party's leadership's continuing failure to take heed of the lessons of that congress for the world communist movement. What was involved was a critique, in theory and practice, of all that is encapsulated in the term 'Stalinism'. Jack did not resign, and is still a rank and file member. I've done a few things for the party since, taking a speakers' class, attending a history conference, and so on. For about five years I was a member of the editorial board of the journal *Outlook*, run by Helen Palmer. The members were people who had been expelled from the Communist party or had left it, plus a group of academics. Jack was given a

scholarship by the journals *Outlook* and *Arena* (a Marxist journal) jointly. They established a fund to give him two years off work. He wrote *Revolution from within.* Some of the workers at the warehouse read Jack's book. This was the time of the Vietnam War, during the upsurge of the youth when many ordinary workers thought the students were peculiar, especially when they said 'Fuck the war'—workers hated that.

Jack got a medical pension, and about a year later, I applied for and was granted a wife's pension. I'd been working for about twenty years since I had left my work as a functionary. I was glad to leave work. The next year, on turning 60, I got an age pension. I wanted to write.

During the 1970s I went to women's conferences—on Marxism and feminism, women and labour history. I was delighted with these and learned a lot from them, and they also seemed pleased to hear about past experiences. The women's movement is a wonderful experience for old women like myself and other old communists who have had a very active life and done almost everything that we probably would have done had there been a women's liberation movement in our time. But the women's movement opened up a new dimension. At the same time, where we were able to get on well with working-class women, they needed our help. The women's movement has attracted more young educated women, often with tertiary education. They are not middle class so much as a new workforce; otherwise you have to say there's an enormous middle class and a tiny working class, and the terms lose meaning. I don't think the young women are terribly good yet about knowing how to approach the lower levels of working women.

Many of them tend to see stalinism as though it describes the whole experience of the old left-wing movement. They see it simplistically as manipulative and sexist because so much of the old leadership was male. They are sceptical of organisation, and don't take to questions of ordinary people and mass work in our sense so easily, whereas our starting point was mass work—how do we work amongst people who don't think as we do? They tend to think that is an elitist position.

Women's liberation will only fully grow in a fully developed socialist society, but the process has to begin now, because if you achieve socialism without getting some way along on the cultural questions, the road is so much harder and longer. From the point of view of living one's own life, the more one does now the richer one's life is because intimate relationships and working relationships are fuller, more deeply satisfying. It's no good putting it all off. Whether we live in late capitalism for a long time, or in early socialism, the thing is to really live your life. You struggle and you have a great goal, great ideals and practical aims—something that gives direction to life, otherwise it can be trivialised. I've never found life trivial. I've found it hard, tragic at times, but I'm 69 now and I think life's tremendous.

Audrey and Jack Blake at Gatwick airport, London, en route to Moscow as tourists, 1982.
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CHARLES COPEMAN

Charles Copeman as chairman of Bellambi Coal, c1979.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

IN 1939 I was a nine-year-old boy living in the Queensland seaport of Gladstone. My father earned a secure income as head teacher of the local state school. Most of our acquaintances had very little money. They worked hard and lived frugally.

Our part of rural Australia did not seem to suffer too severely from the great depression of the 1930s. The daily challenge of 'making ends meet' was ever present, but I wonder whether it was much more anxious a time than it had been for most people before the depression. Our strict family upbringing reflected the fact that all possible resources were to be devoted to the education of a large family, assisted by scholarships and bursaries to the best schools we could afford.

My father's formal schooling ended at the age of twelve. My mother was one of nine children left fatherless by the 1918 influenza epidemic. Our parents were therefore doubly determined that all five of us should achieve through education the means to secure careers. I do not consider that I was so much a child of the depression years as a child of a family in which priorities were set very clearly—to be up with the best!

From Gladstone in 1939 ships carried horses to the Indian Army and tinned meat to the world. The first commercial flying boats landed on their long journeys between Southampton and Sydney. However, beyond our peaceful Australian backwater, nations were already in tumult. The big boys in the house next door joined the militia, and the dark clouds of impending conflict in Europe struck fear in the hearts of people who had scarcely recovered from the losses of family and friends in World War I. Often in my childhood I heard such words as: 'of course she never really got over losing both her sons at Gallipoli', or 'he was badly gassed on the western front and hasn't been able to do anything since he returned'. To my memory these oft-recounted horrors of that hideous war, and the apprehension of yet another war, outweighed any concern about what we would today call 'the state of the economy'.

In the north of Australia we grew up conscious of the 'yellow peril'—the fear of eventual domination by Chinese hordes. Even within our small country towns the willingness of the Chinese to work ceaselessly and save every penny they earned was regarded with fear and envy. In the late 1930s this fear had become confused by the interminable and inconclusive Japanese invasion of China. We weren't sure whom to fear most.

From 1939 we passed into the long nightmare of World War II, with brothers, cousins and uncles gone from our midst and life dislocated if not devastated for their families. The sensitive child overheard that most heart-rending of all family debates between the father of a young family, kept against his wishes in training duties away from the firing line by a compassionate commander, telling his still teenage nephews to complete their education as engineers and doctors before going into the war—pleading that he at least had a family to fight for! They all went. It was the young father who never returned—missing, presumed dead.

The Friday morning assemblies at which the heavy-hearted headmaster read out the school's list of killed, missing and wounded; the eternal waiting for the fateful telegram: these are lasting memories of war for those of us who believed that our turn must come, and needed to know how to acquit ourselves when it did. Can you wonder that some of us have found it hard to countenance the views of those who in more recent times have confused our desire for realistic preparation for defence, with an ideological predisposition towards war?

Nor could we then understand why in the aftermath of that war, when there was the opportunity to get on with building our country, we should have years of crippling strikes—when in 1949 a popular prime minister, coming himself from the trade union movement, had to set soldiers to work to restore essential services.

After the war, within our family all resources were again devoted to education to catch up the lost years. There was the unspoken ambition to show that we could improve our lot from generation to generation; from subsistence farmer to senior public servant to the freedom of the professions. It is a common story of Australian families, too often disregarded by those who have not known the discipline to try.

For me the mineral resources of our country were to provide the challenge to become a mining engineer—the most exacting task I could imagine. However, that postwar period of bitter industrial strife, against a population that had consistently elected governments representative of the union movement, had left me deeply perplexed. How were we to develop this wonderful potential, if our governments were so impotent and our people so disunited?

I hoped to find answers through further study of philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford, but the leadership of postwar Britain was too caught up with the political acts of dissolving the empire to give heed to the harsh realities of the world marketplace. Success in war had confirmed in economists and politicians the belief that western democracies could be planned to achieve lasting prosperity and full employment, secure in their ideological truth. Now, even 40 years later, the reasons for their failures are only grudgingly acknowledged by a few. The Germans and Japanese could not afford such illusions. I had to look for that reality by myself, back in the world of business.

Oxford did provide me with some prized compensations. Greatest of all was to experience the generosity of spirit of the naturally conservative British towards their Australian cousins. After all, my tutors had only a few years before faced death alongside my brothers! And there were memorable incidents in the conflict of cultures. The agony of social envy in the remark to me, the Australian—'you're lucky, you're classless'—from the able son of the village greengrocer who had battled his way to Oxford. He could not know of my grandfather, the educated English remittance man, and his desolate years clearing prickly pear scrub on the Cooyar Range!

Then there was the lad from Western Australia (a Rhodes Scholar like myself, enjoying the far-sighted generosity of Cecil Rhodes) with whom I trained to fly in the University Air Squadron, until one day he confessed to me that 'they found out I couldn't see'. Today I cannot share his vision of Australia, but he has sought,

and undertaken, the awesome responsibility of leading our country.

From Oxford I was resolved to find out why so much of what we did in the mining industry in Australia was adopted from North America. It was to be a rude awakening from the smug security of student life: there is no place much more 'classless' than a mine bunkhouse in northern Quebec in the first snow flurries of winter, without even the price of a newspaper in one's pocket!

However, another passenger on the ship to Canada was to be my bride, forging a trans-Atlantic dimension to our lives which has kept me conscious of Australia's cultural and economic isolation—and of our sometimes barely tolerable insularity. The Australia to which we travelled in 1957 was still coming to terms with the Labor party split, the result of the unsuccessful attempt by some courageous patriots to draw that party away from the sinister influence of those who would willingly destroy the nation in deference to a foreign power and ideology. Australia, under the Menzies government, was only beginning to discover its freedom from prolonged wartime controls and postwar doctrinaire policies. It was to take several more years and the resurgence of the Japanese economy for Australia to gain the confidence to undertake the major developments of the 1960s.

I started at Broken Hill to learn the nuts and bolts of the Australian mining industry, commencing as a miner, privileged to have experienced the acquaintance of a wonderful diversity of people around the world.

The next twelve years of our lives were subject to rapid change as increasing opportunities were offered to me—thirteen different postal addresses and three young children in those years—in Australia, Britain and Iran. In my whole life three years had been the longest period spent in one place. There seemed never to be time to settle down to come to grips with the answers to the more enduring questions. I wanted to get back to Australia, where the mining industry was translating potential into reality. Some good people in Sydney gave me the opportunity to recover my Australian perspective, again with a British company, so that my story of 'Australians from 1939' could recommence with continuity 30 years later, in 1969.

It was at the time of the Clarrie O'Shea case, with Mr Justice John Kerr obliged to rule on a trumped-up industrial dispute which he knew justice could not win. O'Shea sent to gaol would be made a martyr. If he were not sent to gaol, the penal sanctions of industrial law would lose their force. Then the lad who couldn't see to fly at Oxford became president of the ACTU. An indulgent Arbitration Commission gave him a charmed existence.

It was a turning point in Australia after the previous twenty years of steady progress. Through the polemics of a perverse view of Australian social history an ugly mood of divisiveness was encouraged, which has led to nearly two decades of increasing defiance of justice under the law by the trade union movement. After the years overseas I was appalled to find how Australian business leaders shrugged their shoulders or—worse—were taken in. In the mineral industry I could not understand why we were leaving so much of the initiative to our principal customers—the Japanese. As an example, why could we not put our iron ore and our coal together in Australia to make the steel for those emerging Asian markets?

We lost the confidence to control our own industrial and commercial destinies. Those same shrugged shoulders and bemused—and even amused—businessmen nightly watching the televised threatening, hectoring, abusing and ranting—would not stand up to the power structures of Australian trade unions that had destroyed our transport competitiveness and held to ransom any major developments we could and should have made. So often I had the feeling that even our business leaders did not believe in the economic system that had built the nation.

Above left. Charles Copeman as a Cub, Gladstone, Qld, December 1938, just before his ninth birthday. Above right. Copeman in the family, 1940. He is the youngest of five children and (left) at Brisbane Church of England Grammar School, c1945. Right. Copeman as winner of Queensland's Rhodes Scholarship, his passport to Oxford, 1952.

IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Charles Copeman (on extreme right) as captain of boats, Balliol College, Oxford, 1955.

IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Such solid economic achievements as had been made in the 1960s were soon obscured by the sensational collapse of the highly speculative section of the sharemarket in the early 1970s, providing the excuse for the anti-investment depredations of the Whitlam years. By any economic measure Australia lost ground severely and, for many industries, irrecoverably. Australia was left with a legacy of high inflation, high interest rates, increasing unemployment and devastated manufacturing industries. Most of all, in the years 1968 to 1975 and onwards, those who had sought to divide the nation had done their work very thoroughly indeed.

In that climate of economic disruption and social division I worked at restoring to viability a number of Australian mines rendered unprofitable by the combination of increasing wage costs, overmanning, an overvalued currency, and depressed world commodity markets. It was unfortunate that so often a solution could only be achieved by drastically reducing the number of people employed. The other causes were beyond the control of a management intent on saving both assets and jobs from the scrap heap.

My involvement in these rescue operations led me to take a more active role in the industrial relations scene. Eventually as president of the Australian Mines and Metals Association I saw at first hand the complex interaction of the many bureaucracies which have grown up around Australia's unique and suffocating arbitration system—the web of tribunals, government departments, trade unions and, most complex of all, employers' associations.

At first I could not comprehend the incredible contrast between the harsh realities of job destruction occurring daily in the workplaces of Australia, and the ritualistic mumbo jumbo of the so-called national wage determinations which caused the job destruction but were couched in such lofty macroeconomic terms. Then I discovered a French definition of macroeconomics which included the telling phrase 'ignoring the circumstances of individual businesses'. The scales fell from my eyes! Somehow the sum of the parts could be less than the whole? Even as the size of the parts diminished!

At about the same time I was asked to join the council of the Australian National University in Canberra. My enthusiasm to renew contact with the academic world was soon dampened by my inability to come to terms with the decision-making processes of such institutions. Again the contrast between the harsh realities of businesses under siege in the international marketplace, and anti-business sentiments abounding in politics and academia, could not be accommodated with the patience required for the petulant posturing of pampered students engaged in unproductive pursuits. In my own student days most of my fellows had just survived a world war. We were all so pleased to be alive, and exhilarated to have even quite rudimentary facilities in which to learn. I still am!

In the business world we know that life is a competitive struggle in which there will be winners and losers. The winners can emerge from the most obscure origins, in every aspect of life, within our open democratic society. Education can provide the surest means to self-improvement. If business is free to pursue the economic means, then the social ends desired by the community can follow. It is simply a matter of degree.

The recurring concern in this story of Australians from 1939 is the distinction between competition and conflict—the conflict induced by the continued emphasis on divisions, real or purported, within the people. As an Australian born and bred, with no remarkable opportunity in the wider community deriving from family or fortune, but with parents and teachers who conveyed a clear lesson of the precious value of leadership in life, I believe that our country deserves much

better than to have this present cynical and often bitter example of divisiveness from our elected representatives. It is an example that is antagonistic to those principles of character and morality which throughout history have been fundamental to raising the quality of human society.

From my experience of life in countries as diverse as the United States, Britain, Japan and Iran, I do not accept that Australia is so racked with class divisions and social injustices as it is portrayed to be by those who follow the path to political power by fomenting division and discord. For those people then to assert that their mission is to bring together a divided nation through consensus and accord is to compound the felony.

As Australians we are conscious of the slow rate of evolution of the social structure of British life. However, we ought to be even more conscious of the unique contributions that Britain has made to democracy and freedom—modified and developed in the formerly British countries in North America and Australasia. My own experience of life in so foreign a country as Iran, long before the present terror, showed me vividly the polarisation of such a society between the mass of the people and those few possessed of power and wealth.

In Australia we can so easily lose sight of the contribution to the stable progress of our society made by having a large proportion of well-educated people who find goals for their lives in their professional and business opportunities within a free-enterprise environment. The United States, for all its well-publicised problems of race and violence, illustrates this depth of motivation to achieve better standards of life, without the nation being so polarised by the blatant pursuit of naked political power. Postwar Japan combines a remarkable unity of identity with a motivation to achieve, the economic consequences of which are there for all to see.

I believe that the people of Australia, if the relevant questions are put to them fully and honestly, know what is in their best and enduring interests. Unfortunately it takes a long time for some to read the signs of degeneration—as at present in the rates of currency depreciation, inflation, interest, and most unfortunate of all, youth unemployment—that measure of the failure to 'educate' in its fullest meaning, 'to lead out of'. Those parents and teachers who understand this meaning will in turn inspire true leaders for our country—people who will lead us out of the present debilitating divisiveness.

Charles Copeman, chief executive Peko-Wallsend, 1984.

Since writing this account it has become my responsibility once again to find a way to rescue a large mining enterprise from the crippling grasp of unbridled union power—this time at Robe River in the Pilbara.

The actions that were taken—first of all in abruptly dismissing the senior management and declaring an end to all restrictive work practices—then in dismissing the entire award workforce of 1160 people in the face of manifest industrial commission support for the unions, captured attention throughout Australia.

Despite fierce union disruption for several months, management became free to exercise its proper responsibility to manage firmly and fairly. The Robe River incident has taken its place in the record of recent successful events to curb union power in this needlessly-divided nation.

Justice Elizabeth Evatt, as chief justice of the Family Court of Australia, addresses the National Press Club, 1980.
NATIONAL LIBRARY

ELIZABETH EVATT

I WAS BORN in 1933 into a professional family, in which the aspiration was to succeed. We lived on Sydney's upper north shore in a colonial-style mansion at Wahroonga, built to my mother's specifications in about 1940. Everything was provided for us—space, books, music, radios, a car, bicycles, indoor plumbing, heating.

We were happy as children. My mother had almost sole responsibility for our care and upbringing, and for managing the house. She could do all the jobs in the home and mend anything. Dad was a member of state parliament, and a busy cabinet minister, but he had time to take us riding on our bikes, or to the beach, to read the comics with us, play cricket or drive us to the station. He was always up at dawn, and we were woken by the sound of him shovelling the coke for the Aga stove.

Wahroonga was sparsely populated in the early 1940s. There were open spaces, fields with wheat or sheep, paddocks with a horse or a cow or simply scrub and blackberries, chooks in the backyards. We walked through the bush, avoiding snakes, to get fresh cream and eggs from a little farm two streets away.

On summer Sundays Dad drove us to Newport beach to burn our skins, despite beach umbrellas and canvas igloos, Kwik-tan, hats and shirts. We rode rubber surfboards, collected cuttlefish and ate McNiven's Neapolitan ice creams. On Saturday afternoons my brother and I always wanted to go to the pictures; sometimes we were allowed to go. This meant a train ride to Hornsby or Gordon, and a box of Jaffas or Minties or Fantales. We liked war movies, English comedies, musicals, newsreels, cartoons, and (when we could get them) serials such as Flash Gordon.

Although we lived in a city, we felt close to the real Australia, which we knew was the outback or the bush. A few minutes' bike ride from home was Wahroonga lookout, and the Ku-ring-gai reserve. Scrambling down the rocks and pushing through the bushes, in the shimmering heat, with the smell of the bush, the sound of cicadas and the rustling of lizards or snakes, it could be a thousand miles from anywhere. We explored places where no-one had ever been before; and you could still be home for tea.

My life was passed in the closed circle of home, family and school. I seldom went over the bridge to the city, and vast areas of Sydney were unknown to me. Dad's

electorate was Hurstville, so we knew about that, but we weren't always keen about going to functions there. Apart from school and holidays, I spent most of my time in and around home, often alone, reading, listening to the radio, doing little wood-carvings, or developing and printing photographs in a homemade darkroom. I never felt isolated or lonely amidst the family.

We listened to the radio all the time. Even dinner revolved around the 7 o'clock news. At weekends Dad always had music on the radio or gramophone. We children preferred other things—the children's session on 2FC with Elizabeth and Mac. We joined the Argonauts, to row with Jason. But our real favourites were First Light Fraser, the forbidden Mrs 'Obbs (sponsored by Bonnington's Irish Moss, made of petrol oxymel of carrageen, found only on the west coast of Ireland), Jack Davey, Bob Dyer, The Amateur Hour, Calling the Stars, Much Binding in the Marsh and, later, the Goons. Mo (Roy Rene) was a favourite of all the family. We children were as devoted to the Hit Parade as the current generation is to Countdown. I listened to all the plays on the ABC, the Lux radio theatre, sport, especially cricket, but also football, racing and wrestling.

The war dominated our lives as children. There were coupons, rationing, and the blackout; we kept everything, paper and string especially, a habit that dies hard. There was the constant news of war, over the radio and in the newspapers. We saw the young men in uniform, not much older than us, who would have to go and fight, and some would be killed. We gave money to the Red Cross, sewed up bundles for Britain, practised air-raid alerts, dug trenches and played commandos and war games. We did not know why there was a war, but we knew that one day we would win.

Our lives were comfortable, we had loving parents, and we wanted for nothing. But my father was a minister in a Labor government, and we were encouraged to believe in socialist ideals. We had no contact, as he once had, with poverty or deprivation. Nor did we know anything about the 6 o'clock swill. There were no pubs between Pymble and Hornsby, there was nowhere to buy beer or wine, and they were never in our house. There were paradoxes in our sheltered position, which I did not fully understand, but which I felt, sometimes keenly, in encounters at school. Not only was our home in the heartland of conservatism (the federal seat of Bradfield), but my school life of twelve years was spent in the sheltered cloisters of the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Pymble, a school that reflected the conservative values of the successful and the aspiring middle classes. In such an environment, to be identified with the Labor party and to support socialist policies was to be different, whether the difference arose from family loyalty or from conviction. That sense of being an outsider stayed with me for a very long time.

At school we were encouraged to achieve. Sport was the king: hockey, netball, tennis, cricket, athletics, swimming. I did not excel at any of these, although I enjoyed them all, running, jumping and hitting at balls. At home I rode my bike for miles around the Wahroonga area, and played table tennis for hours on end, but I could not do well at school sports and never got into any teams.

Luckily, I had another option—playing in the school orchestra. I was learning to play the piano; but when Dad developed a passion for music, he wanted me to learn the clarinet and my sister the oboe. He also insisted that I try the double bass, because he had got to know an Italian double bass player in the symphony orchestra, called Mr Ricci Bitti. He used to come to give me lessons; I struggled vainly with *Carnival in Venice*, which sounds quite different on a double bass. One Sunday, the Ricci Bittis came to our house and made a great dish of tortellini for us, starting from the basic ingredients. My mother was disconcerted at the amount of time and effort involved, but it was a new experience. Until then, spaghetti

either came from tins or was cooked in tomato soup. Being in the orchestra was one of the best parts of school. I did not continue with music studies, but the pleasure of music has remained. Years later when I joined the peoples' choir to sing some of the choruses of Handel's *Messiah* in the Opera House the old pleasure returned.

Our headmistress, Miss Knox, was a firm and dominating woman, whom I held in awe. Every morning in school assembly we sang hymns and listened to her read passages from the Bible. My mother had been brought up among Baptists and my father had been a choir boy at Milson's Point Anglican church. He had a deep interest in St Paul and used to buy any books about him, and also many copies of the Bible in English, German, French and Italian. Nevertheless, my family had no particular religious beliefs, and I did not develop any from exposure to religion at school. But I liked singing hymns, and the stories were interesting, even though they seemed to be directed to salvation, the resurrection and eternal life, which I could not accept, then or now. I can't recall any attempt being made to link the preachings and parables of Jesus Christ with standards of behaviour and morality separate from the goal of eternal salvation. Dorothy L. Sayers' radio play, *The man born to be king*, was my first inkling that the ideas in the New Testament belonged to and were about real living people.

Apart from the orchestra and the games I enjoyed, there is little of school I want to remember. We were fed a diet of English literature, English and European history, Latin and French and the sciences. Australian history, if any, was convicts, explorers, gold and federation, and we read very little Australian literature. I probably read more works by French and Latin writers at school than by Australians. I had a few good friends, but on the whole I was glad to leave.

Everyone, at home and at school, expected that I would go to university. Most girls in my class did. The choice of law was my father's. He wanted us all to study law. My brother had enrolled in arts first, but Dad wanted me to skip arts and go straight to law. This I did, though it was contrary to the advice from the university (there was only one). Later I regretted this decision, which left many gaps in my knowledge and experience.

After twelve years at a girls' school, it was a new experience to be in the environment of law school, where all the teachers and most of the students were men. The handful of women students were segregated into a small women's common room, where we toasted cheese on the gas radiator, discussed the meaning of life (1950s style) and developed lasting friendships. Lectures were in the early morning and late afternoon, to suit the needs of students who were articled clerks. The five o'clock lecture always finished at about ten to six. Immediately most of the male students stampeded down the stairs and around the corner to the pub, to beat the six o'clock closing time.

As Dad would not hear of my doing articles, because he wanted me to go to the Bar, I had a lot of time to occupy during the day. Even when all the assignments were done, and all the cases and texts read and summarised, there was still time to go to the pictures once or twice a week with a friend. There were splendid cinemas then—not just the State and the Regent, but also the Prince Edward, where the lady organist came up through the floor, the St James, and many others that have now gone—the Mayfair, the Liberty, the Savoy.

I devoted myself fairly intensively to legal studies, and found some parts not without interest, such as English legal and constitutional history, jurisprudence and international law. Jurisprudence, especially, helped me to see what law was about. For this I thank the late Professor Julius Stone, whose death in 1985 ended an era. With few exceptions, the teaching of law in those days was unconcerned with the

social impact of law or with the issues of law reform. Students and even teachers found the law of divorce interesting, mostly because of the revealing details of people's lives reported in the cases. The great law reform movement of the 1960s and 1970s had not yet happened. I completed my studies, winning the University Medal, and was admitted to the Bar in 1955, but I was not yet a lawyer.

The view of politics we absorbed as children was that conservative values run strongly through the Australian people; the universal desire to preserve and improve standards of living is tempered by a suspicion of socialism, seen by many as a threat to material progress. After the war standards of living were rising, and the American way of life was spreading. New inventions, new appliances, kept arriving daily. The ballpoint pen, sticky tape, penicillin, fibreglass, washing machines, dishwashers, automatic toasters, long-playing records. Australia had its very own car. One day we might even have that wonder of wonders, television.

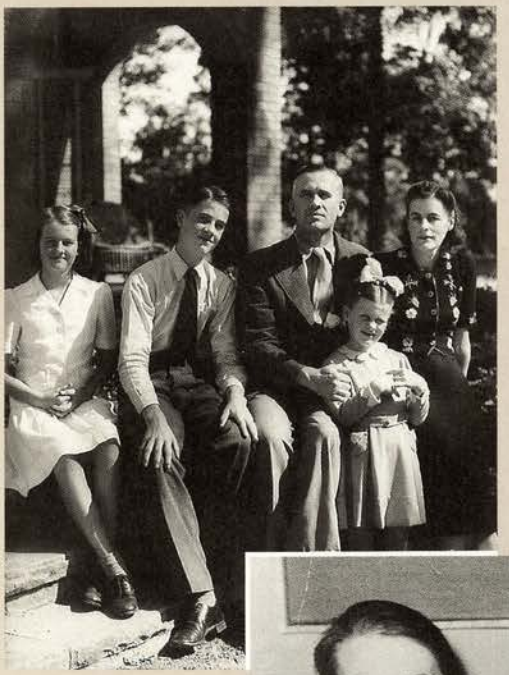
But it was the McCarthy era. Fear of communism and of its influence in the trade unions was gathering force. The Russians, our former allies, had become a threat. The cold war had its effects even in Australia. The peace movement was not respectable. The word 'peace' was a communist plot. My father had to relinquish membership of the Australian Russian Friendship Society. Looking back, the paranoia of one side seems well matched by the naiveté of the other. But at the time our family was too caught up in events for me to take an objective stance; something of a siege mentality was developed. This was the Menzies era, when Dr H.V. Evatt led the fight against the Communist Party Dissolution Act and against the referendum that would have given it validity. By now family loyalty was backed up by conviction and belief in the ideal of freedom of speech and freedom of thought. In the result, the desire for a free society had not quite been extinguished.

Then came the Petrov affair, and ultimately the Labor party split. All these events were a part of my life, though I was never directly involved in politics. I left Australia in 1955, before their full effects had taken their toll, with an aversion for political life which has never left me. Principles too often seem obscured by the polarisation process and by the demands of image and presentation.

I went to Harvard Law School for a year of postgraduate study, arranged by Professor Julius Stone. The program at Harvard attracted young lawyers from every country, male and female (mainly male) of every race, colour and creed. Israelis, Arabs, Indians and Pakistanis, Guatemalans, Japanese, Turks. We studied, and we talked together in the graduates' commonroom. The experience of living in America, though mainly limited to Harvard and Boston, was mind-expanding. It was towards the end of the McCarthy era, and just at the beginning of the civil rights movement. Some of us went on a holiday trip to the south at Christmas. There we saw the ugly face of racism, symbolised by toilets marked 'men' 'women' and 'blacks'. I had not been aware of anything like that in Australia.

I lived in London for seventeen years, starting in South Kensington. After my marriage in 1960 and the birth of our son in 1962, we bought a family home at Sydenham Hill. I practised at the Bar for some years, then I was an editor of the *International and comparative law quarterly.*

In 1968 I went to work at the Law Commission. Those were the heady days of law reform, and family law, to which I was assigned, was one of the fast-moving areas. It was a new field for me. From my team leaders, the chairman, Sir Leslie



Left.
Elizabeth Evatt (on left) with her parents, her brother Clive and her sister Penelope, 1945.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Below.
Elizabeth Evatt, with her husband Robert Southan and children Richard and Anne, 1972.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Justice Evatt chairs the Royal Commission on Human Rights, 1974; with fellow commissioners Archbishop Arnott and Anne Deveson.
AUSTRALIAN INFORMATION SERVICE

(now Lord) Scarman and Professor Jim Gower, I learned how legal skills could be used to further social ideals. I loved it. England had reformed its divorce law in a way that introduced irretrievable breakdown as the main ground of divorce, while preserving the old fault-based grounds. My immediate task was to develop an issues paper on family property law. The women's movement, there as here, wanted property to be shared on the basis of equal rights, not of judicial discretion. The question was whether sharing should be confined to all property or only to the home, and whether it should apply during or at the end of a marriage. These questions were not finally resolved when I left to return to Australia in 1973, and are still not settled.

For all those expatriate years, from 1955 to 1973, I knew little of what was happening in Australia. The London press yielded only the cricket results, the election results, the mining boom, the election of the Whitlam government and the occasional disaster, such as the bush fires and the death of Prime Minister Holt. I was visiting London, at Christmas 1974, when I saw the television reports of the Darwin cyclone and the collapse of the Hobart bridge. My mother wrote to me every week with family news and press clippings, and my parents visited London nearly every year and stayed with us. I used to go to Australia House to vote in the federal elections. I made four short trips to Sydney in all the time I was away. Like all Australians who go to Europe I noticed on my visits here the brightness of the sky and the quality of the light.

But what was it to be Australian? When I was young, our heroes were the Anzacs, the diggers of two wars, and great sportsmen. My father was a devotee of cricket, and he took me to the first test match series after the war, to see and meet Don Bradman, Sid Barnes, Ray Lindwall and Keith Miller. I became a cricket fan, I kept a vast book of cricket press cuttings, I made tiny wooden models of the players. I listened to all the broadcasts in Australia and tried to keep awake for the English broadcasts. Dad used to ask 'what's the score?' as he didn't dare to listen, in case it might bring bad luck. He even told us to pray for rain, if it was going very badly. Cricketers were heroes then, as long as they won. That much doesn't seem to have changed.

Then there were the tennis heroes, Frank Sedgman and Ken McGregor, and later the young 'tennis twins', Lew Hoad and Ken Rosewall, whose breathtaking victory in the Davis Cup we heard on the radio, point by point. There were the Olympic medal winners, such as Marjorie Jackson, Dawn Fraser and Herb Elliott. We Australians love our winners, and seem, even now, far less forgiving to our losers than the British (who, let's face it, have had more practice).

This adulation of sporting heroes seems to me to be part of the uncertainty about our identity as Australians. You can readily identify with an Australian winner. Perhaps it was the only alternative to the myth we absorbed when young—that the *real* Australia was the outback, that it was a man's country, and that the *real* Australians wore broad-brimmed hats and looked like Chips Rafferty. Neither of these myths could readily be reconciled with the realities of life in Australia's big cities or with the shock of instant recognition when I first heard Barry Humphries as Sandy Stone in 1959 in the record 'Wild life in suburbia'.

Another myth was that Australians were one people, of British origin, still calling England home. In accordance with the myth, the few Aborigines remaining in Australia were romantic and noble tribal people, untouched by European civilisation. I don't know where these ideas came from. We were taught nothing in school about Aboriginal culture, legends or art. Of the urban Aborigines and fringe dwellers we were unaware. We did not know about the slaughter, the brutalities, about the children taken away from families, or about the years of

neglect. In the 1960s, when I did some research in London for a paper on international law and the settlement of Australia, I started to be aware of the truth.

When I was a child, Australians were loyal subjects of His Majesty King George VI, and we all stood up for the royal anthem on every formal occasion, even at the end of the pictures. An aunt of mine used to stand even when the royal anthem was played on the radio to close the day's broadcasting. In the 1940s and early 1950s, we rushed to see first newsreels of the royal wedding, and later the newsreels and colour film of the coronation. Devotion to the royal family reached its high-water mark during the visit to Australia of Queen Elizabeth II, the first by a reigning monarch.

England seemed to be much more relaxed about the monarchy—it could even be criticised. Living in London, it appeared to me strange and unreal that Australia should retain so many legal and constitutional ties with a country in which little was known about us and the way we lived, and that our court decisions could go on appeal to the privy council.

In April 1973 I returned to live again in Wahroonga, only half a mile from my former home, right on the edge of the bush. The house we went to was the first built by architect Harry Seidler, who married my sister in 1958. His mother had lived there till her death, and we all knew the house. It was good to be close to the bush and to smell the eucalyptus, despite the funnelweb spiders, the snakes, and the threat of bushfires up the gully.

Life was very busy. I travelled frequently to all the capital cities. There wasn't much time for other activities. I tried sailing for a while. But conditions were very different here from in England, where for ten years I had sailed as a member of the Royal Corinthian Yacht Club. The Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club, which I asked to join, would not accept women as members unless they were related to a male member. I never told them that my grandfather had been one of their flag officers in years gone by. I took up gardening, and I still like to grow basil and other herbs. When we moved to Paddington in 1980, I did a lot of painting and other renovating jobs, and learned how to do tiling and bricklaying, and to use all the power tools. I still enjoy these things.

I was brought back to Australia on a wave of change, when Gough Whitlam appointed me as a deputy president of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (now the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission). I joined the commission in time to attend the farewell to Sir Richard Kirby, the retiring president. Later I got to know him and to hold him in affectionate regard, when we worked together in the H.V. Evatt Memorial Foundation, of which he was president.

The new president of the commission was Sir John Moore, a man for whom I have the greatest admiration as a leader and as a conciliator. He and his colleagues helped me to learn about the workings of industry and the mechanisms of industrial disputes. I got to know and respect many leaders of the unions and employers' organisations. I travelled the length and breadth of Australia to see meat works, canning factories, timber mills, building sites, power stations. I acquired some of the arts of handling apparently insoluble and potentially explosive issues, and learned about the hard processes of bargaining, negotiating, conciliation, cajoling and decision-making, which all go into the resolution of industrial conflict. Two years of concentrated effort helped me to gain a new viewpoint on Australia,

to become aware of the complexity of its society and of the vested interests on both sides of industry.

If the Arbitration Commission was about sharing the economic cake between the workers and the employers, the Royal Commission on Human Relationships was concerned with the quality of life of those who have no unions to speak for them. My fellow commissioners, Felix Arnott and Anne Deveson, have become lifelong friends. Together we investigated and talked about the values of Australian society. Our agenda included education for human relationships, sexuality and fertility, contraception and abortion, teenage pregnancies, pressures on the family, violence and child abuse, single parents, homeless youth, equality issues affecting women, migrants, Aborigines, the handicapped.

The report of the commission reproduces only a fraction of the thousands of submissions, but it reflects the diversity of views and values about Australian society. They revealed many areas in which there was a need for services, help and information, and a need to educate the public conscience, so that Australia might not remain a nation divided between the haves and the have nots. The treatment of the report by the government of the day was nothing short of scandalous.

I regarded the Family Law Act, passed in 1975, as enlightened and progressive. It excluded the element of matrimonial misconduct or fault completely from the law of divorce, which had not been possible in England. It provided for a real Family Court, which would provide counselling and conciliation services to its clients, as well as deciding disputed matters.

I was appointed the first chief judge of the Family Court of Australia when the royal commission was less than half-way through its term. I accepted the opportunity to apply social idealism to family breakdown—to encourage the spirit of reconciliation, to believe that parents would, if given the chance, put their children's interests above their own. The law would not be used to allocate blame and fault or to punish, but would have a new purpose, that of applying principles of fairness and justice to people undergoing the misfortune of a broken marriage. The message may take a long time to learn, but if it can be learned, then perhaps it can be transferred into other areas of human conflict.

The Family Court has been attended by much controversy and criticism, and there have been serious acts of violence against judges and the court. A judge, David Opas, was murdered in 1980. After three bombing incidents in 1984 in which two judges were injured and the wife of one, Pearl Watson, killed, I wanted to set up a practical memorial, which would reflect the ideals and policies that I have been working for, and which would help to make them understood and accessible to the whole community. I took the initiative of establishing the Pearl Watson Foundation, with the aim of developing projects for community information and education about marriage, marriage breakdown and separation, about counselling, conciliation and other family law services. The foundation began its work in Parramatta in February 1986.

When I first returned it seemed that Australian cities had turned into cosmopolitan centres of cultural diversity, and that a spirit of egalitarianism embraced men and women and all nationalities and races. Closer inspection showed that much of this was illusion. The cities straggle; the air is polluted with fumes, the sea with sewage, the shops with consumer goods. Most of the television programs people watch are banal. The position of women has not changed as much as in England. The arrival of the Vietnamese at a time of high unemployment revived old patterns of racism and intolerance. Yet there are grounds for hope. More and more people realise that our resources are limited, and that our tendency to use and destroy at will must be held in check. Opportunities for theatre, music and the

arts have increased vastly since the 1950s, and the small screen offers also the Special Broadcasting Service. The hard work of the women's movement is beginning to have its effects. In 1984 I was elected on Australia's nomination as a member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. Awareness of issues affecting Aborigines has increased significantly. The peace movement attracts people of all backgrounds and political persuasions.

My impressions of Australia were formed during a childhood and youth in this country which came to an end in 1955, and since my return here in 1973. The past thirteen years have been a time to test the myths and prejudices which had taken root in my mind about Australia against the reality I now find. If my more recent views differ from those of former years, this may be as much due to changes in me as to changes in Australia or in Australians.

AL GRASSBY

Al Grassby, 1984. Photograph by Mathew Maliel.

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT event in the history of Australia since federation was undoubtedly the post-World War II migration program. I had the privilege of being part of that scheme in a unique way. Although Australia was the country of my birth and the country I had identified with to the age of 21, I returned to Australia as a migrant after an absence spanning almost all my school days.

I was born in New Farm, Brisbane, in 1926. My mother was a migrant girl of Irish parents who arrived in Queensland in 1922. She married my father in Townsville in 1925; his father had arrived from Spain via Chile. My parents moved soon after my birth to Newcastle, New South Wales. We subsequently moved again to Sydney, where we lived in Booth Street, Balmain. Then in 1932 the family left Australia and I was not to return for fifteen years. Our travels took us to the Sudan, Italy, France, Spain, England and Scotland. My father could be described as a wandering engineer in his good days, a wandering boiler-maker in his struggling days, and occasionally a businessman. I never lived anywhere more than a year at a time, and my education spanned more than thirteen different schools. My life as a gypsy wanderer may be thought useful in preparing a future minister for immigration in a multicultural society, but it was often hard on a little boy.

It was unique that a future Australian minister for immigration should return to his own country as a migrant. It came about this way. My father was killed in World War II in an air-raid, and my mother and I were not able to leave Britain because Australians at that time had the status of British subjects, with no right of exit during the war. This meant that I completed my education in England, began a journalistic career there and also served for a time in the British army. My opportunity to return to Australia came in July 1948. I was nominated by my aunt, Elizabeth Wheeler, of Bowen, Queensland. I was duly processed as a ten-pound 'English' immigrant and sailed on the migrant ship *Ormonde*. I shared a cabin with four others. The conversation was mostly war reminiscences. The only other major topic was what Australia would be like. There was daily speculation about the opportunities for work and advancement and what kind of place had produced the soldiers and airmen that these immigrants had met during their service in World War II. There was a tremendous respect for Australian servicemen, based on their independent attitude and their record of service.

On the morning we arrived in Australia I rose with the dawn to see the coastline of Western Australia for the first time. As we pulled alongside the wharf in

Fremantle the differences became immediately apparent to these English immigrants. The local men wore hats with wide brims; they looked tanned. An exploration of the streets showed shops full of food, sweets, chocolates, things that had been rationed or had not been available at all in the United Kingdom during the war years. There was an air of sunny affluence.

I left the ship at Melbourne and flew to Griffith, New South Wales, for a brief visit with my cousin, Evelyn Cassidy, the daughter of my aunt who had nominated me. She was married to the acting officer in charge of the CSIRO irrigation research laboratories at Griffith, later to become the CSIRO's national division of irrigation. I flew by a DC-3 of Australian National Airlines. It was my first experience of a civilian airline, and during the course of the flight it was discovered that the Griffith airport was flooded and we had to land at the neighbouring town of Narrandera, of which I had never heard. I was anxious to catch a glimpse of the town but we landed in a great red paddock which had a small hut for a terminal building and no town in sight. We piled into taxis and drove the 100 kilometres to Griffith. The taxi driver wore an army greatcoat. I learned quickly that old uniforms were worn regularly in the country as working clothes.

At Griffith I stayed overnight with my cousin, then returned to the *Ormonde* in Melbourne to continue the voyage to Sydney. From there I went by train to Brisbane, my destination. The Queensland contingent of migrants filled most of that night train.

On arrival in Brisbane we went to the migrant centre at Kangaroo Point where our sponsors were waiting for us. Those who had no sponsor were provided with hostel accommodation by the government. My aunt, whom I hadn't seen since I was a small boy, was waiting for me. The final formalities occurred next day at the migrant centre. The Good Neighbour Council of Queensland organised a welcome party at which speeches were made about the new life the new country offered to the migrants who had just arrived. I stayed in Brisbane with my aunt, visiting family connections, and then went north with her by train to Bowen, to Langside, the family farm. Langside was a fruit farm producing tomatoes and tropical fruits such as mangoes, pawpaws and pineapples. Only a part of the farm was actually being worked. My uncle and my cousin Frank were the entire labour force. Frank had a cattle lease up on the Don River: he bought and fattened cattle there and sold them to the meat works at Murinda. I would rise early with the family, and pick tomatoes or do whatever was on the agenda for the day. Frank, who was unmarried and in his late twenties, was a well-known figure in Bowen. He was known for his show horses, for his prowess in rodeos as a pick-up man and as an amateur boxer. His circle of friends included farmers, young accountants and railway workers. I was impressed by the easy camaraderie but dismayed by the lifestyle.

After work we would drive into Bowen with the boys. This would involve going into several different pubs. Friday and Saturday were the dance nights, and there was an extra effort made to present the best face because those were the nights when we were supposed to meet girls. The drill was to go to the dance, survey the scene and immediately repair to the nearest pub. Some hours later, we would return to engage in some dancing but inevitably we all seemed to end up as a group of six or eight males going to yet another pub and the girls would have gone home.

Frank took me to his barber. The shop was plastered with pictures of Karl Marx, Lenin, Stalin and slogans such as 'Workers of the World Unite'. The barber was in fact an office holder of the local Communist party. At that time the member for Bowen was Fred Paterson, the only communist ever elected to a parliament in

Australia. Frank's knowledge of politics was nil, and my uncle was deeply conservative, but he liked the barber and this was where he went. Hair cutting involved a bunsen burner and a metal comb; it was with a great deal of trepidation that I took my place in the chair and pleaded with him not to give me one of those army haircuts. He looked at me and said, 'I know what you want. You want one of those southern haircuts', and he gave me a very acceptable trim.

My uncle generously offered me an acreage of the unused land to establish my own farm. He said he would provide all the farm machinery and that he and Frank would work to help me get established. I gave serious consideration to this suggestion but decided to resume my career as a journalist, having in the meantime had an offer from CSIRO at Griffith to become a specialist officer of information there. I accepted. I borrowed £10 from Frank for the fares and began a career in Griffith which was to take me to the state and federal parliaments.

I had returned with a vision of Australia that was quite unshakeable. My vision derived from the wartime speeches of John Curtin and my parents' belief that Australia had emerged from the war as a strong independent country. This vision coloured my conversation and drew from my cousin's husband, Neville Cassidy, the comment: 'You see Australia as it is in your mind but not as it is in reality'.

He was right. As I explored Griffith society I was overwhelmed to find how British it was. Conversations were punctuated with references to 'home' (England) often by people who had never been there. The British national anthem 'God save the King' was played at the drop of a hat. It was even sung at weddings. My mother used to relate that after she arrived in Bowen in the 1920s she went to a wedding where the very first toast was to the King. She was so surprised that she asked, in what must have been a loud voice, 'Why, is he paying for it?' And my aunt said, 'Shush, that's what they do here.' It came as a shock to me that nearly 30 years later they were still doing the same thing. The preoccupation with the British anthem reached incredible lengths. I recall an English orchestra coming to Griffith led by a distinguished composer, who followed the British custom by not playing it. Letters to the paper suggested that they were all communists.

The census required Australians to describe themselves as 'British subjects'. This was the official description of the entire population. It was not until 1949 that there was such a thing as Australian citizenship. Yet my dreams of an independent Australia were not totally demolished. The Chifley government brought in an Australian Citizenship Act and appointed William McKell as governor-general. The Griffith scene was a great contrast to Bowen. Bowen, a much older town, had a long settled population, including English, Irish and Russians, Danes and Finns. The British settlers who comprised about half the population of the Griffith district were a varied lot but a much more recent mix than the people of Bowen. The area had been settled by returned soldiers of World War I and then by civilian settlers as the old diggers died or left the district. The rest of the population were 'Italians', including people from Yugoslavia and Spain, while a small Greek contingent spoke Italian as well as English.

I began to work at the CSIRO, which had brought people together from all over Australia and the world. I enjoyed my job, which was to translate research results into language that the farmer could understand. The research station was the headquarters of a joint federal–state experiment in agricultural extension which subsequently led to reforms in every state in Australia in which farm advice was offered to primary producers. I had a knowledge of Spanish, and it was also decided that I should try to extend the communication network to farmers of Italian origin. I was sent for a year to Italy, to acquire the language properly, and worked there under United Nations auspices in the Italian ministry of agriculture and forests.

Al Grassby as lance-corporal in the British army, 1945.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Below.
Al Grassby became Australia's first commissioner for community relations with the proclamation of the Racial Discrimination Act on 31 October 1975. He is seen here with a representative group of students.
AUSTRALIAN INFORMATION SERVICE

Al Grassby, MP for the Riverina and minister for immigration, in his 'Riverina rig' —his idea of what a national Australian dress should be like. Sydney Morning Herald, *5 Jan 1974.*

The Italian settlers at that time lived on farms or in small leased plots on which they grew vegetables. There was only one Italian business house in the whole of Griffith. I discovered that every public position was occupied by settlers of British origin. The social life of the town was entirely British. The contrast between British and Italian may be illustrated by the weddings I attended from time to time. The British-style weddings would involve a church service in the morning, a 'wedding breakfast' about lunchtime in a hall where the Country Women's Association ladies would provide a soggy salad, and there would be a barrel of beer on the verandah unless it happened to be a Methodist or Baptist wedding. The men would gather around the keg; there would be two or three perfunctory dances, and then the formal speeches. As soon as the couple could decently change their clothes and disappear they would do so, and as soon as the men could get away they would rush off. The weddings were over by the end of the afternoon.

An Italian wedding would also be celebrated in the morning; there would be an afternoon function at which there would be some preliminary drinking and eating, and there would be a feast involving four or five courses that evening. The celebrations included singing or dancing, with the bride and groom taking part until the early hours of the morning. There would be a small interval for sleep, and the party would begin again about lunchtime next day. If the happy couple disappeared at the end of the second day that was early enough, for the occasions were fun in the spirit of a *festa*.

This contrast in social life was duplicated at every point of the society. The great bulk of the Italian population was Catholic, but the somewhat severe Irish Catholic church did not attract them, and so they brought in the Cappucine Fathers to build churches in the little towns surrounding Griffith, and they would sing there with gusto the traditional hymns of Italy. In contrast the Irish church was presided over by Father Robert O'Dea, an Irish pioneer priest who had put up a tent to claim the church's block of land and had to fight in the main street of Griffith in the 1920s when bigotry was rife. His church was typical of the traditions of the Irish people, and the only singing he ever encouraged was Hail Glorious St Patrick.

The same apartheid was reflected in the administration of Griffith. The shire council was composed of settlers of British origin; likewise the hospital board and the major co-operatives. This one-sided concentration of authority was also reflected in the extension groups which had been established to bring farmers together to pool their knowledge and also to receive help from the researchers dedicated to bringing about improvements in irrigation and agriculture.

The programs that were launched and with which I was associated included, for the first time, material printed in two languages, Italian and English; it included the introduction of radio sessions in Italian which not only presented technical information to the farmers but also brought music and culture. It was decided to form a continental music club. The name 'continental' was chosen because to call it Italian would have attracted the ire of the bigots of the local RSL; to call it a cultural organisation would have attracted the suspicion of the conservative politicians in the area for whom culture was suspect as a left-wing phenomenon. In fact the club was dedicated not only to producing radio programs but also to holding functions and to introducing Italian films to the area for the first time. The purpose of the functions was to provide a gathering place with music and dancing for the young immigrants who were pouring into the town, particularly from Italy, and also to invite the leaders of the British-style organisations to mix with the Italians in a completely different atmosphere.

The impact of the programs went right across the communities, and thanks to the dedication of a group associated with the CSIRO Agricultural Extension Service the old apartheid began to break down. It became accepted that the Griffith Producers Co-operative and the Hospital Board had to more truly represent the people of the district, and later even the shire president has been of Italian origin. It was a source of pride to me as president of the Good Neighbour Council of the area and secretary of the Australian Labor Party that Griffith was beginning to be regarded as one of the best-integrated towns in Australia.

Politically, the scene in Griffith in the 1950s and 1960s was traditionally Australian. The Australian Labor Party was confronted by the Country party. The ALP consisted, for the most part, of workers in various service industries, some tradesmen and many small farmers. When I joined the Griffith branch of the ALP the president was a veteran who had been associated with the party all his 60 years and was a small farmer; the secretary was a postal employee; and the font of wisdom was a railway employee in the best tradition of Ben Chifley. The branch was not heavy on philosophy or ideology; it dealt with mundane matters of land settlement, prices and tariffs, traffic lights and garbage collection.

The Country party was made up for the most part of the more prosperous farmers and the bank managers of the district and their staffs. Following the defeat of the federal Labor government in 1949 the banks which had played a key role in that election continued their involvement: on election day the manager of the Bank of New South Wales would roster staff to assist the anti-Labor candidates. He and his wife would see to it that they had tea and refreshments.

My interest in the labour movement was partly an interest in ending discrimination. At that time Australians of Italian origin were not even permitted to ballot for houses in the town and the State Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission was attempting to prevent them from buying more farms in the area. The commission was defeated in the courts on this issue, but it took a resolution of the Griffith branch of the ALP to change the policy.

I had always had a lively interest in Aboriginal people, about whom I had read a great deal while still in England. On settling in Griffith I found there was a reserve known as the Three Way Bridge Reserve. At that time it was nothing more than a great brothel, catering for the Saturday night drunks who, for a small sum or a few flagons of wine, could buy women of any age. The area contained the most exploited and degraded people I had seen in any of my travels on any continent. It was horrible, yet it was ignored totally by the town residents. I tried, through the local ALP branch, to raise consciousness about it and sent a report to the *Sydney Morning Herald* about the health, illiteracy, degradation and squalor in which the people lived. When a reporter rang me for independent confirmation, I gave him the names of the shire president, the government medical officer, leading members of the Chamber of Commerce, and a local doctor. He rang me back to say the shire president had denied seeing any Aboriginal people for a long time; the government medical officer said that there was no health problem; the president of the Chamber of Commerce said that Aborigines were no problem to the town—he hadn't encountered any and he didn't know any. The only voice of truth was the doctor who said that ill-health was rampant throughout the Aboriginal community, that the child mortality rate was disastrous, and the conditions were the worst of any people in the world. He used to treat them free, but at night because he couldn't have it known that he was treating Aboriginal people. But he did not want his name associated with the report, and the story died.

My branch of the ALP had more than 350 members, 50 per cent Italian and 50 per cent non-Italian, and it represented a particularly powerful force in local politics. When George Enticknap, our local member of the New South Wales parliament, retired, I won preselection and went on to win the seat of Murrumbidgee in 1965. That was against the tide of the time. In New South Wales the Labor government had been in power for 24 years, had grown tired and lacked lustre, although Jack Renshaw was a fine leader. They lost to Robin Askin.

I succeeded George Enticknap with great pride. I would leave on Monday mornings by train to go down to the parliament which sat Tuesdays to Thursdays, returning on Friday. Parliament to me was a tremendous revelation because there were all the great men of the Labor government that I had admired and served. The old parliament in Macquarie Street was a ramshackle building with winding corridors and offices which were totally inadequate. I shared an office with six others. I also had to share a secretary with four others and had to make an appointment to see her to get any work done. It was a primitive parliament in terms of facilities. Premier Joe Cahill was primarily to blame. Joe was a deeply religious man who felt that a member of parliament should feel that he was there to suffer and to serve, very much like a monk or a priest.

Political life introduced me to one part of the community which I hadn't known very well: the half of the Italian community who had been born or had their origins in the province of Calabria in southern Italy. Calabria is the poorest Italian province; it has been exploited for more than 4000 years by the northerners and people from other countries, who have denuded the land of cover and trees, leaving a rocky province and a people who experienced occupation, exploitation, and grinding poverty. They began coming to Griffith from the 1920s. They had a

strong sense of identity and cohesion; the families worked together as a community. One of the most saintly people I have ever met was Peter Callipari, a bootmaker, who was the spokesman for the community: he had studied to be a priest and was literate. He maintained his priestly role and became the voice of the community. My active campaigner was John Zirilli, who introduced me to this community. He said to me, 'The Calabresi will give you loyalty as long as you give them loyalty. They will expect you not only to deal with political matters of the day but they will want you to be part of their struggles, their sorrows and their joys.' It proved to be true. No community was ever more loyal, more dedicated or more generous in its friendship.

Eventually, in an atmosphere of crisis in the countryside with wheat quotas and irrigation restriction and falling prices, I transferred from state to federal parliament. This represented a great personal gamble. I resigned from my state seat and campaigned in Riverina which had not been held by Labor for 24 years. It meant exploring far beyond the boundaries of the state seat of Murrumbidgee in the closest settlement areas. It meant going into the sheep and wheat farming areas, the isolated places.

The highlight of the campaign was a debate between the then deputy prime minister, Doug Anthony, and myself in the RSL hall in Griffith. There was standing room only in the hall and hundreds listened outside. The subject was the government's wheat growing restrictions. It represented a high-water mark in political interest. It set a seal on a new approach to politics which I had developed. For the whole of the century politicians had harangued the people from street corners or in bare halls as hot as Hades in summer and cold as death in winter. I determined to change this and used Yoogali Club at Griffith to bring people together to be entertained; to eat and drink and then listen to speeches. The 1972 campaign saw the largest country rally with Gough Whitlam. More than 3000 people inside and 2000 people in the grounds heard the team of volunteer entertainers led by Bobby Limb, shared the hundreds of donated chickens and gallons of red and white wine of the area, and the speeches. It set a new standard for political gatherings.

Canberra was a place I had known in 1949 when, as a young junior journalist with Australian United Press, I saw the last days of the Chifley government. The ministers of the day were a varied bunch: John Dedman with his clipped Scots accent and dandy cuff links; Evatt, the irascible judge; the urbane Joe Armstrong; fiery Eddie Ward; and above them all, 'Chif', and his pipe. I used to see him walk to his office from the Hotel Kurrajong where I would, twenty years later, stay myself as a member of parliament. He was brilliant in his subject-handling and like a father in dispensing advice. Canberra had three suburbs and about 30 000 people—half of them migrants from Europe and England crowded into huge migrant hostels. The common language of the suburb of Kingston for Saturday morning shopping was German. There was one restaurant, the Blue Moon Cafe, with steak and eggs as the main attraction. Canberra was a series of villages strung together by street lights. My return to Canberra twenty years later saw a city that rapidly expanded to a quarter of a million people, more restaurants per head than London or Paris, and a parliament that was also beginning to change.

Nearly 40 years after my return home I see Australia closer to my vision of the 1940s than it has ever been—I no longer stand for an imperial anthem; hear people pretending to be English when neither they nor their ancestors were ever there; and, above all, in political debate, I can say proudly, 'I am a republican of Spanish and Irish background' without causing a riot or provoking an arrest under the Crimes Act.

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

Stephen Murray-Smith at Geelong Grammar School, 1940.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Top.
Stephen Murray-Smith 1981.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

IN 1939 I was still at Geelong Grammar School, aged sixteen, not enjoying the place very much, but beginning to feel my way into the system and to get it to respond to me. The cable had arrived the previous year informing my father that the Indian Army was mechanising and that there would be no more orders for remounts: the end of a long involvement, spanning several generations, of my family with what was an important political and economic relationship for Australia. It meant the collapse of family fortunes, a new uncertainty on top of the uncertainty of the approaching war, and most immediately the inability of my parents to pay school fees.

J.R. Darling, the headmaster, said that it didn't matter; in any case Grandpa came to the rescue. I had two more years at school, a hard fifth-form year working for matriculation in three languages, three maths and three histories—a fairly standard stint at the time, I suppose—and a more relaxed, more interesting and academically more disappointing year in the 'upper sixth'. I was a book-worm who had not yet worked out how to use books as instruments (that was to be a long time coming), a humanist who responded to the humanity and concerns of Darling when he shambled in from his adjacent office to argue with us and to provoke, and to the social angers of the young teacher Russel Ward over suppers. But I was directionless.

Minor establishment posts came my way: a cadet lieutenancy, house librarian, house prefect, producer and lead in *Henry V*, secretary of the Public Affairs Society. J.C. Nield, later founder of Koornong School, stirred the social consciences of some of us by taking us, during vacations, to the appalling slums of the day, to prisons, 'garden cities' and factory production lines. Soon the school's first war casualties were coming through. There was no social optimism and there was no social program. The values of the section of society for which the school existed did not appeal to me, though the values of the school did. My parents had struggled to elevate me securely into the middle classes, conscious as they were—my mother especially—that, perched on a Toorak hill though they might be, lower middle-class origins (a Glasgow haberdasher, a Cheltenham baker, a Melbourne publican) were not far behind. So: something of the education of a gentleman; little in the way of family 'prospects' to support it; a stirring of social concerns, which the school could awaken but not develop; no professional or 'landed' background to offer support and patronage; and the war, now upon us. It was not a happy time.

All the issues were too big for me. But at least, as my mother often said, I had had 'the best education money can buy'; as important as that education, perhaps more important in retrospect, I had acquired some of the instincts for survival. Chief among these was a romantic temperament, easing the bleakness of the problems and the future while it compounded them. After an unhappy and uninteresting year at the University of Melbourne in 1941, on the last day of that year I became VX69849.

Where then did a young man stand in relation to his own country in 1941? This young man was caught at another crossroads: on the one hand conscious of a historical Australia of immigration, of poverty (those struggling relations on the land at Melton; near a hundred years of hard work had left them with a tumbledown farmhouse and erosion gulleys across their bare land) and of struggle upwards, of hope and of achievement. My grandfather, Steve Margrett, the unlettered boy from the shop in High Street, Cheltenham (his heroes Fred Archer the jockey and, later, another Gloucestershire immigrant, Adam Lindsay Gordon), who arrived on the Melbourne wharves in 1879 with a shilling in his pocket; now a wealthy man with a reputation for honesty and horsemanship across the Indian subcontinent, with a substantial Toorak house and a book in which the cheques came three to a page. My father, before the Great War a Scottish shop assistant in Selfridge's, now—or until recently—that legendary figure the thousand-a-year man, not that he ever ceased to struggle and worry. This new land had been good to them, though Grandpa despised it.

So we were still colonists, and how could we not be when I once stayed with Aunt Lily in her Ascot Vale cottage with the dunny down the back, Aunt Lily who was born at sea on her way to Melbourne in 1857, and I knew another aunt who was born in a tent in Swanston Street? Yet we were also Australians. My mother and her mother, both Australian-born, were in many attitudes very Australian: resilient, adaptive, tough, alert, wary and even in some ways—I can now see—democratic. These middle-class Melburnians had created by this time a remarkable culture; 'Marvellous Melbourne' in the speculative sense had disappeared in the 1890s, but strong roots of another kind had been put down, and the growth and strengths and weaknesses of the new Australian bourgeoisie were also marvellous. In doing so they had sucked much out of the working-class Australia they had once been so close too.

There was no ideological Australia I could relate to. Not yet. Manning Clark and Russel Ward had flashed across my path, but the ideology of Geelong Grammar School and the University of Melbourne was not Australian then, and maybe not now. Vance and Nettie Palmer might as well have been on another planet, rather than just two suburbs away.

Then came the army and a new look at Australia: underfed boys from Footscray, toothless youths from the Queensland canefields, some sinewy, irreverent types who two generations earlier would have been found in the larrikin gangs and who made good NCOs. Many of my fellows in the private ranks of our independent company had spent too long out of school and knocking about the back streets and the bars. I wondered why I, the fat boy from a public school, could run further and faster than any of them. Years later I realised that I had been better fed and watered, and better exercised. They weren't romantics like me though, these kids. They were shrewd, they lived for the day—it had been all they had to live for—and they made better soldiers than I.

The war came and went. Like others before me in other upheavals, I survived. I shot at Japanese without compunction, but that is about as far as my Australianness went. I had respect for the Europeans and their culture, which I had begun to

penetrate, and I had respect too for the Americans—the Coral Sea battle very directly and immediately saved my life—but perhaps I was the first in my family to accept, without thinking about it, that, if Australia were not my home, then there was no other. Though perhaps my mother did too.

What was lacking was not only a sense of purpose but a sense of place. The two are closely connected, which is why the contemporary development of the environmental and local history movements have been so important nationally. I was born and brought up in historically sterile surroundings, Toorak in the throes of subdivision, the only reminders of the past the MELBOURNE IV milepost I passed on the way home from school, opposite St John's Church, and the mock-Tudor shops the architect R.B. Hamilton, father of my close friends Jim and Rob, was building in Toorak 'village'. I went to school on the blasted basalt plains of Corio. Then, when financial stringency forced us out of Toorak and down the bay to Mount Eliza, again it was virgin land—though in fact there were scattered around some grand old mansions dating from the boom times hiding away behind their gatehouses. I would have been far less rootless had I been brought up in the Footscrays from which my army comrades came, or had the family stayed the wrong side of the Yarra a generation before. To be middle class in Australia *was* to be historically *déraciné*.

Certainly I did not begin to feel myself truly 'belonging' until I went back to university in 1945, and found myself an urban dweller surrounded by a rich metropolitan culture. Even now the meaning of this would have eluded me without student politics and the host of friends that brought, exciting friends, friends who spoke foreign languages at home, friends who had come through the state-school system, friends who had heard of Eisenstein, 'Jelly Roll' Morton, the four insurgent generals and Picasso. And then there were Max Crawford and Manning Clark talking about this fellow Joseph Furphy and this woman Henry Handel Richardson. Suddenly things started to fall into place.

Like many of the issues we found, and the solutions we decided on, the role itself was timelessly European—the radical student disowning his own advantages. Nothing like it had been seen in Australian university life before, however. Prewar students wore hats (if women) and ties (if men) to lectures at 'the Shop'; there were of course radicals among them, but they tended to end up in the university lake. Prewar students were cadets of the ruling class. We, whether we drew inspiration from Lenin or William Henry Beveridge, saw ourselves as forming the new society from within the framework of the old. But there was so much to be done! Here the students (and teachers) from European backgrounds performed the role of mini-gurus, breathing an air of sophisticated analysis and actually able to sing the Carmagnole with the right French pronunciation. We were lucky that, at least for the students in the humanities, the spirit of the times was with us (or at least we were convinced that it was) and our elders were indulgent. Studies were important—or at least the Communist party said they were—but the real work lay in the future. Probably a thousand students at Melbourne University in the immediate postwar years were caught up to some extent in this euphoria.

Perhaps those who were *really* going to influence the future were, as ever, those laying foundations for solid, conservative professional careers. Certainly many of those who chose the communist path led themselves into a wilderness, but even their social-democratic colleagues from those years eschewed vulgar political involvements, moving into academic life or orthodox careers, and leaving parliamentary goals to the next generation of radicals. Yet the influence that those heady days had on so many did penetrate into and influence the future of Australian society. Those who have constructed in the past 20 years the interven-

tionist and 'caring' governments, those who have turned to overlooked corners of injustice, were, unknown to themselves, building on ground already tilled.

Right, Australia 1948. Well, where to now? My ASIO file says that my wife and I left Australia in 1948 to manage a Soviet collective farm, information which, if true, would account for the present problems of Soviet agriculture. We left Australia early in 1948 partly, it is true, to approach closer to the heartlands of revolution; partly because it was one way out of family difficulties caused by our marriage; but largely because we had been internationalised enough to know we ought to see something of the world, a world inadequately encapsulated in a Melbourne BA degree. We travelled on the *Straithaird* in tourist class, drinking with the more democratically-minded of the 1948 Australian test team. A group of us formed a mad, bohemian enclave on the ship and enjoyed ourselves and each other enormously. The others were, in Albert Tucker's phrase, 'refugees from Australian culture'. Nita and I thought of ourselves as emissaries from the New World to the Old. Besides, we were members of the greatest and most exhilarating of international clubs; so we left our mates behind in Colombo, while we went off to meet Pieter Keuneman and the leaders of the Ceylon Communist Party, and in Bombay where we ate our first chupatties with A.S.H. Chari and were introduced by him to Dange, the leader of the Indian Communist Party; and in the Suez Canal I almost mustered up enough courage to shout 'Paix aux Vietnam' at a troopship of French conscripts crawling past us on their way east.

So we landed at Tilbury with £40. We taught in desperate London schools; we hitchhiked right around the two kingdoms through a glorious summer, learning of the generosity of the English and Scots; we led a proper life as London radicals, going to the right meetings and demonstrations; I even broadcast on the BBC. It was still wartime London, rationing and ruins, and our eyes were turned east. It was too hard to get to Russia; I failed to get a job in West Germany because, I suspect, of security intervention; so we joined the Australian colony in Prague in 1949, almost at the dawn of the new regime which had come to power in 1948.

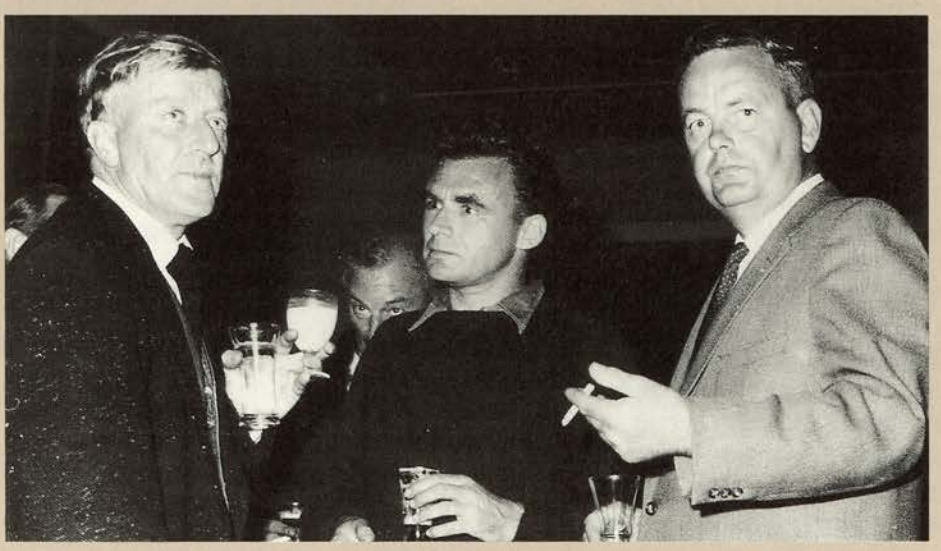
Once again I stood on the bridge between colonial and modern Australia; as a member of the first AIF unit in New Guinea we saw the very last of the 'time-before'; and now we were witness to the communist take-over of a bourgeois democratic republic. John Fisher was there, son of an Australian prime minister, and Alexander Werth, and Max Nicholson who had been a flashing and stylish presence around the University of Melbourne: and none of these were happy with what they knew and what they sensed. A professor of the Charles University took me solemnly aside and told me that there were evil days ahead but that 'pravda vitezný', truth will win, the Czechoslovak national motto; but even he did not see how long that was going to take.

We believed, though, that there was popular support for the new regime; we believed that social reform was necessary, and that it was now being accomplished; we believed that major transformations were necessarily untidy and often unjust, but that they were not as unjust as the societies that preceded them. In all of this we were, at least in part, justified, as we were in our respect for the Soviet Union's sufferings and its major part in the defeat of fascism. I regret the silliness and the naivety into which we were led after 1945; I do not regret the idealism, the hope that change for the better in human affairs was possible on a planned and accelerated basis, the belief that the purpose of existence was not individual advancement but group betterment. I am sorry for those who did not and who do not feel these things. I remain implacably opposed to the self-indulgence of beautiful and successful people who preen themselves on those qualities. I detest the 'Sydney' tradition of individual fulfilment and hedonism. I am proud to be a

Right.
Stephen Murray-Smith 1942, studio photograph in Melbourne.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Stephen Murray-Smith 1942, snapshot by a comrade in an independent company near Wau, New Guinea.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Left.
Stephen Murray-Smith at Stratford-on-Avon, on the way to Prague, 1948.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION



Stephen Murray-Smith, editor of Overland, *with Hal Porter (left) and Ian Turner, Adelaide Film Festival 1962.*
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Melbourne man: better to be one of Manning Clark's 'intellectual bullies' and constitutional improvers than a person more in love with his or her car than his country. I regard my years in the Communist party, from 1945 until 1958, as important, not perhaps for their achievement but because I was there, and because they taught me more quickly than I could otherwise have learnt of the vanity of human desires and ambitions. I am delighted to wear that campaign ribbon.

Many fine young people of our own age, the Czech friends we made and came to love, and who still remain close to us, felt—though occasionally apprehensive—the same as we did. Then there was an Australian colony in Prague, again of our own age and experience: Noel Ebbels, whose integrity, compassion and decency were visible at a dozen paces; Ken and Moira Tolhurst; Ken and Beth Gott; Rod Adamson; there were others too. Most of these worked in the International Union of Students. I worked in Telepress, an international newsagency inspired and supported by the new regime, part of the empire, I believe, of Geminder, and when he died on the gallows of Pankrac prison in those terrible internecine murders promoted by Stalin and carried out by his miserable myrmidons throughout eastern Europe, Telepress died with him. By then Nita and I were out of the country, and well out of it. 'I wonder if I should have had him arrested after all,' thoughtfully remarked my boss to a Czech friend of mine, after I had farewelled her and left her office.

But Prague wove a net round our hearts that was never loosened. In human history it may almost be called the apotheosis of Place, if one finds the concept of Place interesting. It was, and is, one of the great human constructs. The exile of many of the great Czechs and Slovaks of our times from their own Place, not only Prague but their magnificent country, is a cruel fate indeed. I can understand those who temporised and stayed. It was a new lesson in history to me, this unity between history and people and their place. A paradigm, perhaps, of the unity I was hoping for in human affairs. The rending of this unity by the foolishness, wickedness and ignorance of man is the bitterness I learnt from these years of 'total commitment'.

And so home after three years, our cabins searched during the voyage by ASIO representatives, an ASIO man detailed to stand by while our luggage was inspected at Station Pier. Reconciliations with families, and for the first time I discovered that my mother had an Australian accent; unfortunately I told her so. A job teaching at Essendon High School; again security was watching. And soon the anti-communist referendum, frenzies of letter-boxing and suburban political work; and the realisation, when that referendum was lost, that what the radicals said (but did not believe), that the People were wise, was true. The belief in this has ever since got me into hot water with the Left, and I sometimes think I am the Last True Democrat. Doc Evatt got Dinny Lovegrove, Victorian ALP numbers man, to point out to me in precise terms that the vast majority of Labor politicians, state and federal, in fact voted YES.

But I was soon pulled out of teaching for higher duties: while we had been away the Australian Peace Council had been formed, out of the Dean of Canterbury and some 'progressive' clergymen, by the Communist party. It was the era of the Korean War and of American superiority in atomic weapons. The Russians needed to mobilise world support.

But like the Communist party itself, it really wasn't so simple. It was not necessary to wait until 'Dr Strangelove' or the antics of the CIA in Chile to come to the conclusion that world peace and happiness are no more safe in American hands (if you like) than in Soviet. (Note to quick readers: this is not the same as saying that there is nothing to choose between the Americans and the Russians.) If there is a need for a people's peace movement in *all* countries, and if we can only

start with our own, and if one will wait until doomsday before the fat cats of the Labor party will move on an issue so far removed from their superannuation payments, then someone has to act. The peace movement in Australia of my time reached out to, and was influenced by, thousands and tens of thousands who had hardly heard of the Communist party. Yes, there was a CP 'command', but there were also many distinguished men and women of courage in Australian society who dared to sup with the devil, and knew very well what they were doing and why. Chief among these, and in the titular leadership of the Peace Council, were those remarkable wearers of the cloth Alf Dickie, a Presbyterian and subsequently Moderator, Frank Hartley, a great-hearted Methodist, and Victor James, a wily Welsh Unitarian.

Stephen Murray-Smith drawn by Louis Kahan, 1980.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

I was national organising secretary of the Peace Council for about six years. It was mass work, and interesting mass work much of the time. Perhaps it was six years that might have been better spent. Our pay was miserable, and we had to raise it ourselves: the only way to survive with two young children was to have a second job at night, and for me that meant arriving home at 1.30 am and leaving again at eight. There were solid achievements that stand out, such as the 'Hiroshima Panels' exhibition which aroused an enormous national response, the great anti-Bomb petitions, and there were a few 'rewards': one was a major overseas trip to a peace meeting in Berlin, followed by a return home via Prague, Warsaw, Moscow and Peking. Ironically, by this time I was probably being kept under surveillance at least by two security organisations, ASIO and the KGB; and probably one of the bravest, or perhaps most foolhardy, things I did was to express 'revisionist' dissent, repeatedly and at the highest levels I could reach, within the Soviet official apparatus. My protests in Moscow at the anti-Semitic performances of the famous Obratsov puppet theatre brought down on me there the heavy weight of official disapproval.

In Moscow I met, through the good offices of Ralph Parker, renegade *Times* correspondent, survivors of the Soviet concentration camps, now being released: among them Len Winnacott, leader of the Invergordon naval mutiny. In Peking I met Mao, but again got into trouble, this time for telling the head of the Communist party international section, over what I presume was a tax-deductible lunch in Peking's Mongolian Mutton restaurant, that as secretary of the Australian peace movement I thought that Australians *would* regard an invasion of Taiwan as aggression. Over another meal, this time of Peking duck, Wilfred Burchett implored me to tell the Australian party that a plot was far advanced within the Vietnam party to 'liquidate' Ho Chi Minh and General Giap, and to invite their intervention.

When I returned to Australia I had a pretty good idea of what had been going on in the turbulent communist world since Stalin's death, and I reported back on these matters to a deluded party leadership. They laughed. I was beginning to realise that most people 'up there', whether in government or universities or the Communist party, were not particularly intelligent, even when they had a reputation for being clever. The process of getting 'up there' and staying 'up there' suppressed intelligence.

In truth the Communist party leadership did not understand, did not trust and was always unhappy with the middle-class 'front' workers it needed for its mass campaigns outside the union movement. A party devoted to the suppression of ideas, it could not begin to handle people who worked with ideas: a common enough problem among organisations. Parallel with mass work in the peace movement, party intellectuals had developed in the 1950s work that was for its time, and in contrast with what had gone before, highly sophisticated: in literature,

theatre, film and dance, for a start. People like my friend Ian Turner and myself were naturally drawn to these areas. We wanted others to understand the continuum of time and place that we had worked hard to establish for ourselves. From an active grouping of Melbourne radical writers, including Frank Hardy, Eric Lambert and David Martin, came not only 'broad work' within such organisations as the Fellowship of Australian Writers but also specific initiatives, including the Australasian Book Society (Ian Turner its secretary) and the magazine *Overland*, launched in 1954. I edited it then and I still do.

It was in these 'cultural' areas that the seeds of trouble lay, rather than in relatively uncontroversial areas such as trade union campaigns and the peace movement. Unrest was growing at the ineptitude of party leadership prior to the 'secret speech' of Krushchev at the twentieth congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, but that speech established our case, and two years of extremely bitter infighting ensued. It ended in 1958 after the Soviet invasion of Hungary, with the exodus of Ian Turner and of a number of others from the Communist party, including myself. The party made light of the matter at the time: 'probably security agents and better off without them in any case'. In fact these events, we can now see, marked the beginning of the end of the Communist party as a significant political component in the Australian scene.

This is not to overemphasise our own importance, which may not have been large. It is to say that these events symbolised the inability of the Australian Communist party to adapt to new and necessary challenges. Maybe many of us wasted the 1950s, and a crucial period of our own lives, in 'piss-pot' politics. It was a period, though, in which many of us saw, and perhaps with some justification, that the only chance of building a movement of national reform and renewal was through the CPA. Many years later I offended many by suggesting, at a conference on the history of the CPA, that it had always been diversionary and 'objectively' (a word we loved in the CP) an agent of reaction. In other words, without the CP, and with the employment of the talents it attracted in less sectarian fields, Australian democracy would have been healthier and Mr Menzies less invincible.

The god that failed? Yes, in a way, and some of our comrades sought solace in scientology or the Catholic Church. Others of us had been tempered and toughened and had learnt a lot. We lost the Australasian Book Society to the Stalinists but kept *Overland*, remembering that the last battle of all will be fought between the communists and the ex-communists, 'Australia's largest political party', as Rupert Lockwood calls us. (Sadly for that prognostication, the communists are quite a pleasant lot these days, with many good things to say which no-one will listen to.)

Stephen Murray-Smith at Erith Island, Bass Strait, 1984.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

I was lucky. I had to leave the Peace Council, of course, but I picked up a job in white-collar unionism, the Victorian Teachers' Union, which then represented all state-employed teachers. It was pleasant and quite interesting work; I was even told a future lay ahead for me in it. I went back to the university at night and completed another degree; that led to an offer to take up a research fellowship in the history of technical education in Australia.

I was a beneficiary of Sputnik—the Russians had rewarded me after all! I was supposed to find out why technical education in Australia was in a bloody mess. No-one had bothered before: we were getting by. What looked like a dull old plod became a fascinating intellectual exercise, a study not so much in technology as in

the history of the grafting of ideas in Australia. It all had to be done from the start. No bibliographies were available; educationists were not interested, and neither were historians or economists. They still aren't. But I think I found most of the answers, and they were not what people expected. As it happened, after the Martin report of 1965 the technical colleges of Australia were upgraded, but not—as the universities arranged—at any threat to the superiority of the universities in higher education. As so often, in the name of equality we reimposed a class system, and at the same time we confirmed our client relationship in the developed world and helped to create the crises of the 1980s. Another example of the self-imposed isolation of Australian radicalism.

It was a great pleasure to be self-employed, so to speak, and to be wresting a meaning from intractable material. It was a new excursion into place and its meaning; I amassed a great amount of detail that deepened my perspective on Australia, at the same time as I had to try to order and discipline that detail in some ideological sense. Certainly the Marxist debates I was familiar with helped, though not necessarily in a predictable way; so did the communist training that industry and technology was of the essence of society, and that paradoxically so was ideology. My desire to be part of the creative process in my own society, to be myself building its meaning, was what attracted me to the editing of *Overland.* Now, through my own discipline, history, that drive was extended and made more satisfying, though not of course without frequent travail and despair.

I had been given a second chance in the lucky country and had bought myself back into academic life. It was only in the 1960s that a man of 40, with a modest academic record, could have done so. From 1966 I was formally part of the staff of the University of Melbourne, in the low-status area of education it is true, but part of a company of like-minded scholars in the history of education, led by A.G. Austin, who together almost created that discipline or subdiscipline in Australia, and whom the university cynically allowed to be dispersed at the same time that it was applying for funds to develop 'centres of excellence'.

My quest for 'settings', and for Place as a means to understanding, was not yet over, however. I had been moved by a student archaeological expedition to Flinders Island in Bass Strait, led by Dermot Casey, in 1946; and deeply stirred by stumbling over an undisturbed Aboriginal campsite of 7000 years ago while I was there. I never forgot the islands of Bass Strait, then as now remote and wonderful places, happily disregarded by the second-hand Europeans pullulating timidly on the nearby continental shores. In the hard repatriation days of the early 1960s some of us established a new connection with those islands, a connection never broken. In time came two new deepenings. One was a close association, perhaps not easy for those of my kind to achieve, with the fishermen, light-keepers and farmers of Bass Strait. I learnt a respect and humility from the association which made some apology for the dirigism of the vanguard party. The second was a developing interest in the part-Aborigines of Bass Strait and their descent from sealers and Tasmanian Aborigines of a hundred years before. This led to twenty years of research into the area, to the further realisation that some of the questions could be answered only by looking at parallel communities elsewhere, and then to the realisation that the history of these communities, looked at together, could suggest many questions and answers about human social behaviour which might be applicable on a wider scale. Besides, Cape Barren Island and St Kilda and Tristan da Cunha and Pitcairn Island were marvellously interesting places in any case.

I have enjoyed my teaching at the University of Melbourne, and I believe my students have also. I believe I had an immense advantage over many academics in having spent half my working life in the army, in journalism, in 'mass work' and

in unionism. I saw that the privileges a university offered needed to be earned by being as good an academic as possible, but equally demanded an active citizenship, for the privileges were offered not by the university but by citizens, and often citizens without privilege.

I had by now served in four authoritarian institutions in which I found it psychologically more satisfying to analyse and oppose the authoritarianism than to become part of it. The four institutions were boarding school, army, Communist party and university. I came to see, too, that opposition to authoritarianism, whenever it took an institutional form, itself became authoritarian. A Labor party, for instance, when in government suppresses educational research which does not suit its purpose, believing (unlike my Czech professor friend) that truth can successfully be buried and that it is in any case bad for people. The same government, mindless of its own history, seeks to compile a national register of its people and to allocate everyone a number, thus putting us in the same category as those who support an existence in the microbe-laden atmosphere of Europe. A spineless Australian citizenry, ruled from Canberra's cloud-cuckoo-land, accepts for instance a metrication dispensed with lies, the illusion of 'progress' replacing real social reform. Few bothered to look behind the smokescreen. Again, a government proposal to abandon a manned presence at our important ocean lighthouses around an already inadequately supervised Australian coastline presented an issue which was manageable and worth fighting.

Just as I had come to realise that personal charity to others was something we had overlooked in the Communist party, with our eyes on a red star, so I came to realise that an effective democracy meant an alert citizenry rather than a Labor party victory at every election. I became interested, partly through observation of the education industry and the self-interest of academics, in the noxious influence in Australian society of professional groupings, formal and informal, and of the swindle they were jointly and severally perpetrating on their own society. I did not resign my political interests when I dropped my party card. I believe I retained and developed these.

For all this, the most important part of my life was not the public part. By marrying my wife, a Jew and migrant, I gained entry into a new Australia, of all the bridges I stood on in my life the most significant in what it led to. My children taught me new humilities and gave me new delights. My home and my books have been my bunker. A number of friends of great importance to me have died before their time, including Ian Turner and Fred Williams. I miss their wisdom and their understanding. I notice as I grow older that our great 'anti-discrimination' society achieves part of its aims by discriminating against the old: 'Why do you print material by Manning Clark and Judith Wright in *Overland*, instead of by the young?' an ABC interviewer asked me recently, and I'm told the New South Wales anti-discrimination board has a ruling that no-one over 65 may sit on it.

Old age will bring new summonses.

KATH WALKER

Kath Walker c1975.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

IN 1939 I was nineteen and worked as a domestic for a family at Ashgrove in Brisbane headed by a prominent solicitor of the time. I had been doing such jobs since I started at the age of thirteen on two shillings and sixpence a week. Before that I had spent my childhood on Stradbroke Island in Moreton Bay, or as my people the Noonuccals used to say, Minjerribah in Quandamooka. My father worked there for the government, as ganger of an Aboriginal workforce which helped to build roads, load and unload the supply ships, and carry out all the menial tasks around the island. For this work he received a small wage and rations to feed his seven children. I was the third-eldest daughter. I was always off by myself when I was a kid, searching out the sea worms and coral and shells that fascinated me. My mother used to call me 'the wandering Jew' because of my daydreaming, and my brothers and sisters would gang up on me because I wasn't trapping my share of the tucker.

I married my husband Bruce Raymond Walker in 1942. He was riding a wave of success as a bantamweight boxer. I hated boxing, still do, and I just couldn't understand it at all. In my ignorance I said to him one day, 'you blackfellas make me sick, that's all you want to do, get into a ring with a whitefella and pummel each other.' He said, 'you take a look at the bloody laws in this country, woman, the only place you can legally hit a white man is in the ring.' He was so right, of course; there were a lot of Aboriginal boxers fighting around that time.

It may seem strange, but the war years, as bad as they were, were really good for Aboriginal people in one sense because you could get training in skills through the armed services that you couldn't get through the public workforce. There was nothing open to you, so many people got their training through the war years in the services. That was the only place you could get it. I was in the Australian Women's Army Service from 1941 to 1944 and became a fully qualified stenographer and telephonist, which of course was really helpful after the war.

I suppose my political career really began one Friday in 1943 when I went to buy the weekend meat for my husband and me. We were living at Stones Corner in Brisbane then, and in those days the butcher would wrap everything up in newspaper. We would always read this paper, the *Guardian*, and this day we came across an article called 'Mailbag'. The article was complaining about a store in Bundaberg that had a sign in the window saying 'We serve whites only'. Well, we thought it was really good that a paper printed this; so I decided to follow it up and

went down to the phone box, looked up the *Guardian*'s number and called them about the article. The lady at the other end said the paper was a publication of the Communist Party of Australia. I asked her what her party's politics were about Aboriginal people, and she answered me by citing article 1 of the *Declaration of human rights.*

You see, in those days, Aboriginal people just didn't vote, and even if they did, they had to choose between Liberal, Labor, and Country parties in Queensland, who all had racist politics. At least the Communist party said that they believed in racial equality. So Bruce and I joined the Communist party, as I think many people concerned about racism in that time did.

I took all of the courses in politics that they offered. I mentioned again the article I had read about the the store window sign in Bundaberg, so they flew me up there when they were planning a protest outside the place. They had located a local Aboriginal war veteran who had won all these decorations for bravery in World War I, which he wore with much pride. He went into the store in full uniform with a white couple from the party posing as customers, who pretended that they hadn't made up their minds on buying anything. This forced the shop assistant to address the Aboriginal man, and he said, 'I am sorry, we serve whites here only.' Well, after the manager came out and repeated this the white couple told them who they were, and the Communist party held a successful rally outside the store, forcing them to take down the sign.

This was really my first experience with any kind of political demonstration, and I was very glad for it and very impressed at the pressure it brought to bear. Previously I had tried to do something for my people by uniting them through the sports field. I was really interested in sports and was not bad at swimming and ball games. I had represented Queensland in a game like cricket where the bowler can throw and the batter has to run with every ball. But this was not enough. I had to get into a field where some change would occur, and politics was the only way I could do this.

In those days, Aboriginal people didn't draw attention to themselves at all. It was the most you could do to appear inconspicuous and make your day as smooth as possible. The younger generation is so lucky to have our land rights flag and have that fiercely proud identification. I'm glad that I was part of re-creating that identity for them. We didn't, you see; we had to take what we could get because all avenues for improving your lot were closed to Aboriginal people. So we took up the domestic, blue-collar and sports field.

Bruce and I went our separate ways, he loved to go walkabout. He was a happy-go-lucky and carefree man. I found it hard to leave my beloved homelands, the Moreton Bay area, and I wanted to do other things like have children for one and help improve the lot of my people. My first son, Dennis Bruce, was born in 1946, and my second son, Vivian Charles was born in 1953.

Finding my way on a pension with two kids was not easy, as it still isn't. I worked for a time for Sir Raphael and Lady Phyllis Cilento who lived near me at Annerley. I grew especially fond of Nan, Phyllis Cilento's aged mother, who was very crotchety to everyone except me. She was a grand old lady. The Cilentos treated me like one of the family really, and I remember the brilliance of all of the children, Diane, David, Ruth, Carl, Margaret and Raff. I was their sort of confidante. I got interested in painting and sculpture through Margaret.

In the 1960s the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, or FCAATSI as it was known, was formed as part of a national push by Aborigines for a better deal for Aborigines. There were a lot of dedicated white people with us in Queensland also. We had no money, and in those days we just

relied on donations and got the word around through sympathetic organisations and clubs.

I began writing short stories for Dennis and Vivian and had quite a collection when I met up with members of the Realist Writers Group in Brisbane. Rodney Hall, John Manifold and Bill Sutton were insistent that I publish some of my early poetry. At the same time I met up with Kathy and Bob Cochrane through the Queensland State Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, the Queensland faction of the FCAATSI movement. I was secretary of this organisation and an executive member of the Queensland Aboriginal Advancement League, another civil rights group with a big Labor party membership.

FCAATSI appointed a representative from each state to go before the then prime minister, Sir Robert Menzies, to plead the case for national referendum on black rights. It was really terrible then, there were two clauses in the Australian constitution that we wanted changed: we wanted the commonwealth to make laws for Aborigines; and we weren't considered at this time to be even citizens, as Aborigines were not included in the national census. There was also the concern of our people dying like flies from poisonous alcoholic mixtures and malnutrition.

The representatives to go before the prime minister were Ted Penny from West Australia, Dexter Daniels from the Northern Territory, Faith Bandler from New South Wales, Doug Nicholls from Victoria and Joe McGuinness and myself from Queensland. We knew from the start we were up against it, because Menzies had vowed that he would never bring another referendum before the Australian people after he lost trying to outlaw political communism in this country.

At the meeting with Menzies, I started talking about the 'white man's poison' and the fact that Aboriginal people did not have the right to enter a hotel. We said to him that by not reviewing this law he was upholding the dealings of the unscrupulous white people who were selling these lethal mixtures to Aboriginal communities. They called it 'white lady' in Western Australia and 'goom' in Queensland. It was a mixture of boot polish, methylated spirits and wine. They would charge £20 for a bottle of it.

Dexter said to Menzies, 'Why do you keep us away from white people? They're not all bad, why do you keep good people away from us?' Menzies just smiled at that.

Anyway, after we put our case forward, he said it was time for a cup of tea. We were directed into another room where attendants all dressed in white coats were standing around a big table set up for afternoon tea. Menzies said, 'I think its about time for a bit of white man's poison'. Well, Faith and I were the only drinkers in the mob. The men were all teetotallers. He asked all the men what they would like to drink, and they all ordered soft drink. Faith looked at me and I looked at Faith because we could see that he was anxious to have a drink. So we both ordered a sherry. When we did, he looked really relieved. I think if we hadn't ordered alcohol, protocol would have demanded that he go without. When he served me my sherry I said, 'Do you know, Minister, that where I come from, you can be gaoled for supplying alcohol to an Aborigine?'

When I said that, the waiters started laughing and he turned on them and glared at them and they stopped. He must have been put off guard because he just puffed himself up and beat himself on the chest and said in a loud voice, 'I'm the boss here.' He then poured himself a middy of scotch with a splash of soda water. I could't believe the size of this drink. He must have noticed my surprise because he glanced over and said under his bushy eyebrows, 'My doctor has ordered me on to one drink a day, and this is it'.

Kath Walker c1940.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Kath Walker c1947 (above) and in 1957 (right).
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

Kath Walker with young people at Moongalba, c1972.
IN PRIVATE POSSESSION

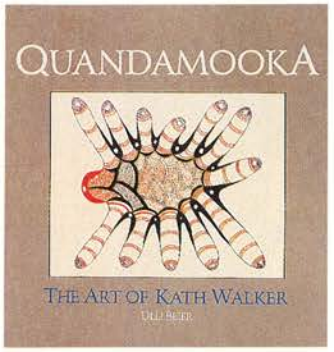
Menzies said that he would think about this referendum we were asking for about the Aborigines. He was very polite and cordial all the way with us, but we knew that little if anything would come of this meeting. He saw us out, offered us the use of his personal Man Friday and the government cars, and wished us good luck as we walked down the stairs. Needless to say, nothing came out of that meeting—it was Harold Holt who sanctioned the referendum of 1967.

When I asked Mr Holt what he thought about the referendum he said:

> You realise I have just taken this job and I am walking in a big shadow. Wait until the shadow gets a bit smaller, then I might do something about it.

Eventually he called us back and said to us: 'If you can get a unanimous YES from the House of Representatives and the Senate, I'll put the referendum on.' No other race in Australia had ever been asked to do that, but we were! So we had to knock at every door in the House of Representatives and the Senate. And do you know how many doors there are!

Although we won the referendum, we were hoodwinked. We had assumed that the federal government would make use of its powers to take legislation out of the hands of the state governments, because we had so many different laws: each



Quandamooka, the art of Kath Walker, *published for an exhibition of her drawings, 1985.*

state had its own legislation. The federal government had been given a clear mandate to act on behalf of the Aboriginals—but they didn't want to upset Queensland, so they wriggled out of it. It was very disillusioning.

After the referendum, I came out strongly against what I considered to be a washing of the hands of Aboriginal affairs by the Australian people, who had simply eased their consciences with the overwhelming 'Yes' vote. It seemed to me that the public could have carried this commitment through to all levels of Aboriginal affairs and remove some longstanding thorns in black Australia's side.

I wrote my first book of poems, *We are going*, in the mid-1960s, and Mary Gilmore and James Devaney were constant sources of encouragement and strength for me during this time. The book was published by Jacaranda in 1964, and many poems reflect my personal feelings about past and present treatments of my people in this country. As a balance I wrote and published the second book, *The dawn is at hand*, in 1966.

In 1969 I was Australian delegate to the World Council of Churches consultation on racism in London.

By the early 1970s I was beginning to get my perspectives a little clearer about a lot of things in general, but especially about living in the city. My two sons had flown the coop, and there was a great yearning inside me to rid myself of the material objects that had prevented me for so long from getting back to the natural art of my youth. I had been on so many committees and platforms that I was mentally and physically exhausted. Strangely enough, in 1970 I was awarded the British Empire Medal.

I sold the house where I was living in Holland Park in Brisbane, bought a car and went walkabout for a while before coming back to Stradbroke Island and re-establishing Moongalba at the old mission site.

Moongalba was a wise man of my tribe, the Noonuccal, who had a special place on the island where he would meditate and try to solve the problems of his people. When the missionaries came to Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island), they told the Noonuccals to give up their 'pagan ways' and settle in one place. The Noonuccals chose 'Moongalba Sitting Down Place', and so do I.

I started Moongalba as an educational and cultural centre where people can come and learn about traditional Aboriginal living. Over the past fifteen years there have been more than 25 000 children and adults of all races and cultures coming to visit and learn about the Aboriginal ways. I am very very proud of that. For many of the young Aboriginal and Island children from the cities, it is their first experience of the natural life of their ancestors, and for people of other races, it is an insight into an ancient and oh so wise culture.

By 1972 Moongalba was on the way with a lot of help from students at the University of Queensland who helped me put up showers, toilets, gunyas and fireplaces. I always say that to people: it was the many university students such as Ralph Loveday and Julianne Schwenke who believed in Moongalba and helped me establish it. Judith Wright kept up a supply of money donated to the children who came to Moongalba. She too believed in what I was doing in re-establishing the grass roots. My own people didn't even help me on that point, the university students deserve all the credit for that.

I wrote another book in 1972 of memories about my childhood called *Stradbroke dreamtime*. In 1981 I wrote a children's book called *Father Sky, Mother Earth*, where I feel that I break through into the young children's appreciation of art. I illustrated it also, and the story is about how Father Sky and Mother Earth created the world and all the plant and animal tribes who lived in harmony before the human tribe came to destroy all their beautiful work. It is highly conservationist really, and to

be perfectly honest, I would rather talk to wise and beautiful children than mentally constipated adults any day.

In 1972 I was guest lecturer at the University of the South Pacific and a couple of years later served as official Australian envoy at the International Writers' Conference in Malaysia in 1974. In 1975 I was a guest of the government of Papua New Guinea at their Festival of Arts, and after a visit to Nigeria, serving as senior advisor to the Australian contingent in preparation for the Second World Black Festival of Arts, I attended that festival when it was held in Nigeria in 1976 as senior advisor.

On 23 November 1974 while returning from Nigeria, the plane I was on was hijacked out of Dubai and flown to Tunis. I was on the plane for three days before being released. The cold-blooded murder of the West German banker on that plane brought home to me the terrible situation of world affairs and man's inhumanity to man. I had accepted as fact that I would die on that plane, although I still had hope and reflected on all the things I had experienced in my lifetime. I suppose I did what one would call an analysis of my life actions. I gave myself full marks for the many things I had done and achieved, but on one aspect I felt I had failed dismally: I was really short on tolerance. I promised myself then and there that should I get out of the sticky situation of the hijack, I would work harder at being more tolerant. I have done that, but I still have a long way to go before I give myself full marks.

Kath Walker as Eva in Bruce Beresford's film The fringe dwellers, *the official Australian entry at the Cannes Film Festival, 1986. Photograph by Robert McFarlane.*
FRINGE DWELLERS PRODUCTIONS PTY LTD

In 1979 I toured the United States lecturing on Aboriginal affairs. For six months I was poet in residence at the Bloomfield University of Pennsylvania on a Fulbright scholarship and Myer travel grant. While in America I was chosen for the Black Hall Of Fame International Acting Award for the documentary film on my work at Moongalba, 'Shadow Sister'. I received the award in San Francisco.

In 1981, I was nominated for Queenslander of the Year, with other people including Grant Kenny. I went to the awards, and it was like time made a full circle. Lady Phyllis Cilento was also nominated and unanimously won it.

In 1984 I was sent to China as Australian cultural delegate with Professor Manning Clark, the noted historian, Mrs Caroline Schirer of the Queensland Cultural Centre, Dr Eric Tan, a West Australian surgeon of Chinese descent, and Mr Rob Adams from the Australia Council. China seemed so familiar to me and I wrote a lot when I was there. I will try to return there one day. The spirit of my Mother of Life, my Rainbow Serpent, surrounds China.

In a lot of ways, 1985 was a truly satisfying year. I was given both the Queensland and the National Aboriginal of the Year Award by the National Aboriginal Day of Observance Committee. I am very proud of these awards because they come from my own people. They are very special gifts.

Also in 1985 I completed acting in the film *The fringe dwellers* for the movie director, Bruce Beresford. And there was an exhibition of my drawings in Sydney, which was very successful thanks to the assistance of Ulli and Georgina Eeier.

I have decided to step back from the political arena now and let the younger ones do it. I want to immerse myself in artwork. As far as politics go, I can only hope that the young ones in the forefront of the movement will take time to remember the people who planted the seeds that grew into the trees from which they now pick the fruit.

I predict, as I and others have predicted since the 1940s, that there will be much trouble towards the end of this century in this country, not only from Aboriginal people over broken promises on land rights and lack of economic independence, but from all the have-nots who find themselves destitute in a rich land at the hands of far too few who have too much.

The cover photograph from John Meredith's Folk songs of Australia *shows Fred Holland of Mudgee, aged 88 when this photograph was taken in 1957, holding a concertina purchased in 1906.*