

A  
JOURNEY  
THROUGH LIFE

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

and

TRAVELS

of

Donald Edward Clarence Weber

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# A Journey Through Life

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## Introduction

During my lifetime, spanning over 90 years, I have seen many changes, the implementation of the metric system being one of them, so throughout this book I have used currencies, values, measurements etcetera that were in use at the particular time.

There are many events, over my lifespan, that I could relate, and many journeys I have taken; many of these events or journeys required quite a lot of recalling. A Journey Through Life contains only some of those events and journeys. Some of the journeys I have taken many times.

Travel and photography have been two of my main passions, particularly as I could link the two together. Still cameras were my starting point, followed by movie cameras, then, with the advent of new technology, video cameras.

I, like many before me, didn't think I had a story to relate, until, prompted by my partner Gwen Jones, I put pen to paper. I hope the old grey matter has worked proficiently enough to recall all the details accurately. I also hope, in reading this book, that you obtain enough inspiration to cast your fate to the wind, and follow your dreams.

Thanks for your prompting Gwen, and thank you for putting up with me during the challenge.

Thank you Brian Lehne for all your help in the pre-production of this book, and for keeping my mind flowing in the required direction.

I hope you enjoy – A Journey Through Life.

Don Weber



PART I

My Life



# 1

## **My Early Days at Brighton**

I have lived all my life in Victoria, Australia (except for a short stay in Canberra), either in a Melbourne suburb or in West Gippsland. I was born at Brighton on the 12th of May 1915, and named Donald Edward Clarence Weber, the fifth child of Clarence and Louisa Weber. All males in our family were given the name of Clarence in the hope that we would identify with Father, for he was well known throughout Australia and beyond – particularly being noted as a champion wrestler.

It has been said that at my parent's wedding reception, Mother stood up and said she would present to her new husband 10 children; this never did happen. I had three older sisters and one older brother; in order of birth they were: Gladys, Jean, Lois and Bryant. Mother later gave birth to my younger sibling Ian, and then died while giving birth to Ruby. I was only three at the time, so only a couple of things come to mind from those early days. Father took my brother and me into the bedroom to view the body of Mother and to say our last goodbyes to her. Then I was asked to go out and collect the mail. The mailbox was full, and all of the letters had black edges on them.

Our home in Brighton faced William Street and backed on to Durrant Street. It was a large house; being home to our family, plus a cook and a gardener. We teased the cook to get her to chase us; there was no hope of her catching any of us, for she was so heavy in build. The gardener was financing himself through university, and was living with us while Father helped him with his studies; what a great chap he was, he helped me out of many tight situations. We had an orchard and a vegetable garden, then a grass tennis court, a high hedge, then a lucerne patch where our cow grazed – thereby supplying milk for the household. The hedge between the tennis court and the lucerne patch was a great hiding place in times of problems.

In 1920 Father married Mrs Ivy Lavinia (nee Filshie) Mitchell; so all seven of us children had a stepmother. Mrs Mitchell's husband Thomas Mitchell was killed the day after the signing of the armistice. None of us stepchildren thought very much of our new stepmother and referred to her as 'The Old Girl'.

I can remember Father taking me down to the Brighton pier to see the whales in the bay, however, I can't remember my reaction upon seeing them – In later life I have marvelled at them frolicking in the Great Australian Bight. One day, Father called out to my brother and me to come quickly – we had learned that when he called we should respond straight away – and when we arrived Father lifted me up onto the fence to see the first electric train that ran on the Brighton railway line. I didn't understand how a train could go along without any smoke or any visible moving parts. How it did that I was never told, and I now believe Father didn't understand either. I started school at Brighton, but only went there for a short time.

## **Life At Mont Albert**

The family moved from Brighton in 1922, when I was seven, to number 2 Victoria Crescent Mont Albert. We had a big house with a sleep-out right across the back. The view through the sleep-out windows was toward the east and overlooked the Box Hill railway line. The Mont Albert Railway Station is the highest in the Melbourne metropolitan area at 365 feet. The line was still used by steam trains, and on a frosty morning often one could hear the wheels of the trains slipping on the icy railway lines, thereby preventing the trains from traversing the incline. They would then have to reverse back down to Box Hill and try again. At the station there was a footbridge over the railway line, which we used to stand on to breathe in the smoke from the trains; perhaps the smell lingers on to this day, as I am still involved in steam engines; even making small stationary models. I've had much pleasure in viewing and riding steam conveyances in a number of countries. During summer the bush fires could be seen burning up the face of the Dandenong Mountains, creating a brilliant light show at night.

We had a fowl pen and a vegetable garden. Guess who had to grow the crops? We kids of course! We were paid for our results a penny a bunch. However, like the rest of the family I eventually lost interest, and decided to rely on my pocket money for finances; which we received weekly, based on a penny for each year we had lived.

We ended up with 18 people living in our house. There was Father, The Old Girl, her mother and father, her youngest brother, her son, myself and my six siblings, plus a cook and a housemaid, also Father and his new wife added to the

clan, producing three more children – two girls (Shirley and Michele), and one boy (Len); Thereby (in an around-about-way) fulfilling Mother's vow to Father of producing 10 children. With 11 children in the house, obviously, there was a large amount of milk consumed. The milk was delivered in a milk can. The milk supplier was changed quite often, owing to the milk being watered down. It was eventually discovered that the culprit was the opposition supplier. We finally received quality milk when the supplier tied a string around the cap and sealed the ends with wax; he also, on delivery, placed it into a lockable cupboard.

Peter, The Old Girl's son, was 18 months younger than me, and we didn't always get along; mainly because if anything went wrong I was saddled with the blame, regardless of whether it was his fault or mine. I realise now – on reflection – it would have also been a trying time for The Old Girl, with so many people living under the same roof; it was probably a bit much for a young woman. She made the mistake of targeting the stepchildren and mollycoddling her own family; the three oldest girls were her most constant targets. I am sure that Father didn't know just what he had taken on; perhaps the same could be said for The Old Girl. Her mother and father died at the house. Her brother Doug stayed on, and I was pleased as we got along fine. He taught me so much about electrics, for he was in the SEC [The State Electricity Commission] as a controller; he eventually moved out when he married.

I attended the Mont Albert Central School. I had to rise at 6:00am to tend to our horses; one morning our teacher Miss McDonald told us to put our heads down while she spoke to some visitors, I was so tired that when she finished talking



and then called for the class to pay attention I just slept on. At the end of the year all of the children were booked into a college, me being sent to Scotch College, so that was the end of early mornings; except on the weekends when the regimen continued.

I did very well in sports during my first two years in Scotch College finishing up as captain of most of the teams. The next two years were different, for when I asked for a new pair of running spikes I was told I was not going to get them and that I could run in my bare feet. My reaction to this was not to participate in any sport for the next two years. Father asked me about sport, and when I informed him I had entered nothing, because I had no intention of running in bare feet, he just turned around and walked away.

In 1924 Father bought a new Dodge tourer car. To cater for our large family, he had the car cut in half and extended by two feet – now-days, such action would null and void the warranty. The modifications allowed room to sit four across the back seat, four across the centre seat, and three across the front seat, thereby allowing seating for 11 people. It was believed to be the longest private car in Australia, until others copied the concept. Father was very fond of camping so we took every opportunity to get away into the bush, I am sure that this is why I have seen so much of this big country, and am still doing so in my 90s.

Every year we loaded up the car and dad took the whole family for a day out to the snow at Marysville. The road, at the time, was no more than a track with a number of S-bends and to get up there, in the wintertime, and negotiate the hairpin bends was a very difficult climb.

There was a problem with some of the family compacting snow and then throwing it; this practice can be very dangerous, so the culprit received a solid dressing-down from Mum or Dad.

We always left Marysville mid-afternoon, because the lights on the vehicles in those days were very poor indeed and it was dangerous to go through the Black Spur. We skidded round one of the hairpin bends once and nearly went over the edge, but my father was able to save that from happening.

Term holidays were spent at a place named Betheny on the Myers Creek Road at Healesville. I enjoyed fishing, walking and dancing; also the sounds of the whip cracking, also the screeching of the brakes created by the timber jinkers were music to my ears.

One day Father arrived home with a portable wireless; I had never seen such a thing before. It was far too heavy for me to lift, as the batteries were extremely heavy, but it worked well, as long as the batteries were kept up to it. Father was a keen wireless fan, especially as he broadcasted a weekly health talk over 3AR.

## **The Horses – Sandy and Mylady**

Our horse Sandy moved, from Brighton, with us and I will long remember him for the horse that he was. There was a horse-paddock to keep him in and also a stable was built. Father had no trouble riding Sandy, but, being an old drovers horse he was full of cunning where we young ones were concerned. We had a lot of trouble trying to mount him, we usually took him to the lawn and let him feed, after stroking

his neck we would throw our leg over his neck and then he would bring his head up quickly and throw us up on to the saddle, we would then turn around and work at pulling on the reins to get his head up. We then had to use spurs, or give him a good kick in the ribs, to get him to walk; walk was about all he would do.

He also used to expand his lungs when we went to attach a saddle to him, making it impossible to tie the girth strap tight enough; you had to wait until you mounted him, and he breathed out, then get someone to tighten it. For all that he was a lovable beast, and we did have a lot of fun with him.

Father had an uncle who ran horses on a property, called Mundarra, at Tallarook; one of those horses was Mylady, a thoroughbred horse, who Father had decided to purchase. At Christmas time Bryant rode Sandy, while I was driven, to Mundarra, where we were going to spend a month holidaying; we had previously been there for other holidays. When it came time to head for home, which was about 72 miles away, Bryant rode Mylady while I rode Sandy. Bryant was given the job of riding Mylady because I was only ten and considered too young to handle a thoroughbred horse.

We were heading to Kilmore, to stop at a hotel where we were booked in for the night, along with the horses; all pubs in those days had stabling for horses. On the way a bird flew across the face of Mylady, causing her to shy and toss Bryant off. He cut his head, quite badly; we didn't know what to do about the situation, as we had no provisions and there was nobody around. Bryant just had to mount again and ride on to the hotel.

When we reached the hotel, they gave us a meal, after which we went up to our room and went to bed. Unfortunately, owing to Bryant's problem with his head, we had a disturbed night. When we went down to have breakfast the next morning, a maid went into our room to change the bed linen and clean the room. She let out one hell of a scream! As though she had witnessed a murder. Everybody rushed up stairs and found blood all over the pillow and sheets. So they came down and wanted to get a doctor for Bryant. By this time the bleeding had stopped, and Bryant wasn't interested in seeing a doctor; so we went on our way.

When we arrived back home, the news of the accident had preceded us, so everybody was waiting to see how Bryant was. The two horses were stabled for the night, and Bryant and I went up for a bath, and then off to bed.

We now had two horses to look after, and The Old Girl took the greatest delight in getting us up at 6:00am to tend to them. One bonus we did gain, in having Mylady, was, Sandy soon learned to do some of the things that Mylady did; which meant he now moved faster than a walk. Every morning we groomed the horses then took them for an hour's work-out across the paddocks of Mont Albert, where there was a track formed and hurdles set up. After doing a round of the track and a couple of jumps we headed for home to feed them and hose them down.

After changing our clothes we went in for breakfast, gathered our schoolbooks saddled up the horses again and then rode them for about a mile down to Hood Street, where we left them in a rented paddock. We then walked to school, one and a half mile away. After school we retraced our steps

to Hood Street and rode the horses home, where we fed them and bedded them down. Father entered the two horses in gymkhanas all over the state, and he obtained a great thrill out of that, but it didn't thrill me, I saw enough of them while looking after them – horses have their moments but enough was enough.

Once I started college there was not enough time for me to look after the horses so Father decided, first of all to sell Mylady, and later Sandy. We all loved Sandy, so eventually Father found a farmer, who was prepared to foster him and let him graze for as long as he lived. I heard, some years later, that he had died, and it was a bit of a blow to me.