

*The Great
Deception*

My Life – a Brimming Cup

an autobiography by

Rex Jenkins

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The Promise

The rosebud is longing to open,
Red petals await their display,
But the heavens have frowned on their beauty,
Failing with slighting display.

The sun bids the dark clouds asunder,
The red heart starts beating again,
Then with glory unfolds the wonder it holds,
This promise of love to sustain.

Rex Jenkins – 2012



The author

Preface

When my mind's eye looks back over the years, the realisation of having crammed so many happenings, adventures, professions, affairs, and misdemeanours into 85 years has provided me with such an abundance of material. I may not have enough years left to complete the massive job of compiling all my memories. The creation of a meaningful title that would adequately describe my kaleidoscopic life has proved elusive. However during the process of writing I used the word 'deception', suddenly there was my title! A very dear friend Annabelle, with whom I have shared mutual confidences, during our comparatively brief friendship over the last fourteen years, offered unending encouragement together with valuable and sound advice for which I extend my sincerest love and thanks.

Before commencing, I decided that if I was to write it, I would tell all. I will therefore have to write about subjects of which I am not at all proud (my school days). There will be embarrassment (early childhood)

and moments that I regard as beautiful (my moments of loving). I will handle each subject as I come to it and share with you the secrets of my innermost thoughts. If at the end of this book you declare that you were offended, my question will be “Why did you continue to read?”

Having had no experience in writing a book, I can only tell my story as if you, the reader, and I were sitting together in comfortable chairs as friend to friend and I was telling you everything I could remember.

Before we start, would you like a cup of tea?

There is so much I want to say that I am fearful there will be some accidental omissions. Thinking about writing one's biography is vastly different to actually putting it down. Having made up my mind to tell it all is not conducive to maintaining a flow of interesting prose, you will find I may remember something relevant and have to go back to complete the story. Consequently I have eliminated many of the events in my life of mundane content, and tried on other occasions to add a little humour. The deeper my writing progressed the more obvious it became that I had a complicated task ahead, as many events worth the telling were overlapping. I beg the reader to keep in mind there will be many times I have to leave writing of the present and refer back to a past event to point out a consequence or comparison or provide an answer. One of the reasons I wrote this biography was to contribute my speck of support to the Gay Community. To do so in such a way as to endeavour to gain respect and understanding especially from those who knew little before reading this book and perhaps because of that, are quick to condemn. If readers regard themselves as moral sexually and the contents of this book hard to accept, may I suggest he or she replace in their mind, my experiences with a similar one of theirs (gender being the only difference). Then how could you object if your experience was pleasurable, why should mine not have been? If you do not have any memories with which to make comparisons, then with my experiences, I have been blessed.

I would like to extend to my very good friend, Jeffrey Wilson, whose unwavering assistance in typing my many edited and re-written manuscripts, my heartfelt gratitude. Without his skills my books would never have come to fruition.

Finally, I could not put my pen down without acknowledging my indebtedness to a recently found and dear friend Edith Pillsbury (writer and published author) who, while living and working in America, perused my manuscript diligently adding her comments in the margin revealing to me her knowledge of the intricacies and complexities of writing. I thank her for the unselfish devotion to every page, her advice revealing the amount I have yet to learn, at the same time providing the drive for me to pursue this new found pleasure, writing. With my first draft earning such generous words of encouragement, to you dear Edith I extend my love and respect.

Now after five drafts and as many years I extend a big hug of appreciation to a generous and gracious lady, Virginia Henry, whose guidance with the final editing, stimulating my confidence and providing me with the impetus to step into the spotlight of publishing. I offer my warm hearted gratitude for her contagious, complementary enthusiasm.

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1

The Foundations

I am 100% male. I am 8 years old. I am flying in a horizontal position. It is night, the streets and archways through which I glide are illuminated with coloured rays of light, my long white nightgown flows down to my bare feet, likewise my shiny black hair ripples down my back.

I delight in being there. Everything I see stands out in exaggerated three dimension. My name is Shirley, the pleasure is all enveloping. Each night with my blonde hair resting upon my pillow, in my darkened room, my anticipation to return, lulls me into contented sleep.

By the age of nine my dreams are replaced by a new phenomenon; this mysterious hardening of my penis. My hands slip between the sheets and push it down, gripping it between my thighs; my innocent endeavour to thwart this intrusion upon my night's rest is only conquered by sleep itself.

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There is a saying “ignorance is bliss”, but enlightenment could have replaced ignorance and bliss could have come into play quick and lively.

I decided to tell you this first because I think that the human genes we inherit (a phenomenon over which, until now, we have no control, discounting contraception), show themselves in so many subtle ways. Man’s great leap forward in aeronautics for example, over just 50 years is such a herculean leap. Once man discovers a breakthrough, then progress accelerates and man’s irresistible hunger for knowledge brings about miracles, that some believe are God given, but are simply facts of science.

Consequently, I believe my dreams of being a girl flying amid a fantasia of coloured lights was an activity within the brain part of the gigantic jigsaw of (my) life. As we grow, piece after piece is put into place. The final piece completing the all-encompassing picture when one exhales one’s final breath.

But I digress, let me take you back to the beginning...

From a vertical incision over twelve inches long, I was lifted from my mother, crying and spluttering and (as my father described the scene many years later looking like a withered monkey). That was a reference to me, not my mother! Caesarean birth in 1926 was nothing like today’s.

My mother was a small woman with a gentle nature. I do not remember my mother ever raising her voice. Not a worldly wise woman, her laugh had a pretend sound to it, the words submissive and timid come to mind.

They were a good pair – my parents. My father was quiet, I never saw him excited over anything; jumping for joy was not his style. Maybe he had little joy in his life. I certainly gave him little.

I find it hard to believe people’s claims they can remember when they were born or when they were one or two. My brain must have been a late starter.

This, then, was my beginning. My having been born, beginning. An elder brother was an ectopic pregnancy and died. His intended name was passed on to me.

Perhaps prompted by photographs, I can remember (or do I imagine?) my fourth birthday photographed beside my birthday cake. Another photograph taken by my father, I am squatting in the middle of a deserted dirt road, watching with delight a shingle back lizard lumbering across; I would have been five.

The genius Stephen Sondheim, giant of the American musical theatre, whose musicals were to provide me in my adult years with hours of sheer delight, wrote a song titled “Children Will Listen” (from “Into the Woods”). When my father talked to me about animals, photography, the planets, body organs, War, his non-belief in the words in the Bible, correct English, correct behaviour, I would listen and I would ask questions, thus the seeds were sown. Some took root in my conscious mind, others were buried in my subconscious, the blooming of the flower of revelation happening with maturity.

The memory of my sojourn through “Kinder” days is brief. My grandmother, my father’s mother, we called “Narnie” presumably baby talk for Nanna. Likewise my grandfather was “Farvie”. They bore four children: Ivy, Olive, Harold and my father Claude.

Ivy died of glandular fever at the tender age of fourteen years. Grandfather owned a successful grocery and grain store/shop in High Street, Kew and could well afford to send a photograph of Ivy to Italy to commission a statue in her image, with angel’s wings. This effigy finally being erected over her grave upon a pillar bearing words of love composed by her mother. All this, as well as the graves of her parents stand today in the Kew cemetery Melbourne; their silent sentinel struggling to endure the ravages of time. (page 251)

In 1931, Cotham Road, Kew was used by cars whose speed at 30mph was considered fast, every second vehicle was horse drawn. It was a safe

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run for me to cross this and toddle up to the first house on the right, No. 1 Hillcrest Avenue, Kew, to my grandmother's house for lunch. The Kindergarten only across Cotham Road at number 180 where two giant pine trees that graced the front of this converted private home still stand today (2012).

It was near to going home time. Mothers were arriving to collect their children. I was on my way, via the back of the house, to walk up the side drive to the front gate, when my impressionable mind was distracted by the forlorn cries of a little boy standing in the open doorway of the outside toilet, his short pants still on but both legs covered with his own excrement. Miss Wymond, the principal of this little school delivered the boy to his mother waiting at the front gate and washed her hands of the entire situation.

It is natural for children to be curious particularly regarding things unknown – “Don't open that cupboard...”, “Don't touch that power plug...” In the 1930's “Don't ever...” were frightening words to me being brought up in what was then referred to as a respectable middle-class family.

When I was six, my father was transferred to Ballarat to continue his work for the T & G (Temperance and General Life Insurance). The T & G building stands on the corner of Collins Street and Russell Street Melbourne. (Years later I would spend an 8 year apprenticeship in one of the professional suites working for a dentist, in the dental prosthesis business as a dental mechanic).

Memories of the Ballarat School to which both my sister and I would walk to and from each day are scanty, but here are two ...

All the boys seemed bigger than I. One very tall, we called “Stinky” amused himself and the rest of us smaller boys, by standing back from the tar covered wall, in what was the boy's urinal, and performing his party piece. With a tight grip on the end of his generous foreskin he would urinate, ballooning his foreskin to what we all thought was

bursting point, then suddenly releasing his grip and sending all us ogling spectators screaming and dancing out of the way of the dreaded liquid, much to Stinky's amusement.

After continual rehearsal, I was to be the pride of the school's end of year breakup concert. This angelic blonde seven year old prince was to bravely cut down the bushes that surrounded the castle where the beautiful princess lay asleep, then enter the castle and kiss her, breaking the spell. We would wed and live happily ever after. I remember how thrilled the teacher/producer was with my performance at rehearsal. Alas, like father like son ... my father's acidity of the stomach was, I think, a consequence of his War service. I inherited this propensity. The teacher's joy was plunged into despair, when on the opening night she was informed that dear little Rexie was racked with stomach pains and could not attend. I can only hope that my belief regarding the hereafter is correct, otherwise I'm in for a hiding!

Ballarat memories are not of our home life, for most of my life with my parents was a happy journey through those formative years, sometimes referred to as the "impressionable years". Possibly there is considerable truth in this, for it is only those happenings that were different, that I remember.

"That is what is called an autogyro," my father was saying as we both looked up at the machine flying only about 500ft above our heads. A strange craft with a cigar-shaped body about three times the length of an old "sidecar" often seen attached to motor bikes in those days. The flying machine had its cumbersome rotor twirling around above the head of the pilot, whose position up front of the "cigar" was not unlike someone sitting in the sidecar of a motorbike. I can remember watching him looking about and even down at us. Maybe this was the very happening that planted the seed, for, ever since, I have been fascinated by the principles of aeronautics.

There had been the crash of a light aircraft in a field just outside Ballarat.

A few days later we went for a Sunday drive in the old Plymouth, (Dad's pride and joy). Presently we were at the scene, walking over the rough grassy ground, to the pile of broken pieces that were once a light aircraft. There was a uniformed constable guarding the site. By this time I was into my seventh year. I saw my father stroll over and exchange a few words with the constable, then as we all moved away I saw the policeman pick up a piece of part of the aeroplane and leaning forward tossed this so that it landed flat on the ground near where what would have been the cockpit. A few mumbled words from Dad to Mother aroused my curiosity. "What happened, Dad?" I asked. So as not to be heard by my sister he turned to me, and speaking softly said, "When they removed the dead pilot they missed a piece of bone lying in the grass." Was this another moment when the seed of desire for knowledge was planted? What part of his body was it? Why did he crash? Two of my favourite subjects were being engendered.

My mother had high praise for two men: Bertie Brown, a musical comedy star whom I was later to meet and photograph during my years in musical comedy, and Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith, pioneer air pilot. I was too young to care where it was in Ballarat that he landed, but we all went out to see him and his famous aircraft "The Southern Cross". Sir Charles was born in Hamilton, Brisbane in 1897. He joined up during the 1914-18 War, served in Gallipoli then did duty as a dispatch rider on a motorbike, just as my father had done during the same War. Smithie, as he was affectionately known, was trying to raise money to finance his record breaking attempts, by selling joy rides for ten shillings a trip. We all stood amongst the throng, happy for a glimpse of the famous man. My parents were contemplating taking a ride, but when we two little encumbrances realised our Mummy and Daddy were going to get into that huge thing with those big wings each side and fly away we both had something to say ... "Nnnnnnnooooo!"

"I'll kiss yours if you suck mine." She was probably five, I was as curious as any normal pre-television seven year old. We silently entered the backyard toilet and exposed ourselves to each other. Now this was little

Percy's first public appearance, even if the audience was only my little playmate from across the road. She seemed to have nothing to show me for this daring adventure for after she had closed her lips around Percy's middle then opening them immediately and letting go, we left the closet, not without my feeling mysteriously disappointed.

My sister Betty was in the lounge of the house my father was renting while he did his two years' service in Ballarat. "Close your eyes and open your mouth," I said to her. The trusting little soul did so, presuming her loving little brother would give her a juicy lolly of some sort. Instead I tossed to the back of her throat a nice fat juicy blowfly that I had caught and held by its wings. Like a bee in a bottle it buzzed blindly from cheek to teeth, from teeth to tonsil, from tonsil to tongue, from tongue to freedom. At this point I must take the opportunity to inform the reader (although after that story it may come as a surprise) that I have, or should I say, we have always had an unspoken love for each other. Unbroken by any harsh words up to the writing of these memoirs; she is now 84 years old, two years my junior (the year is 2012).

On the subject of harsh words I can only remember one occasion when my parents ever had an argument. We were going for a Sunday drive as was the custom on occasional weekends, we were all ready, I can see my father now, he was in the bathroom, at the end of the hall tying his neck tie in the mirror on the wall. "You can drive the car out Sylv" (never Sylvia). I remember my father as a quiet man, yet somewhere in his psyche at that moment, for a reason I can only guess at, he became belligerent. This narrative will later refer to only two occasions that I can remember when I too displayed this characteristic. My father had been paying for driving lessons for my mother. Times were never easy financially for my Dad and perhaps his desire to see value for money spent was dominating his reasoning. "No I can't. The driveway is too narrow," my mother pleaded. "Don't be ridiculous!" my father called from the bathroom. A ping pong game of harsh words pursued to the point where Mother's eyes filled with tears. Both Betty and I began to cry. "If you're not going to drive the car out to the street, then we won't be going out at all!", my father decreed; and so we didn't. I appreciate

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now how lucky my sister and I were growing up in a household where, if this was to be the worst occasion of its kind, we were fortunate indeed.

After Father's two years' service at Ballarat we returned to our home at 73 Parkhill Road, Kew, where the pieces of jigsaw continued to add to my picture. The Second World War did not directly affect us children but the need for food rationing and the scarcity of skilled labour, with the threat of attack from the north, made life for the adults a cause for concern. We young folk were unaware just how close to our shores all around our coastline the threat came. While all this concluded in August 1945, so much had been happening during those years. Mothers' sons were dying overseas while I blithely went about my life as a dental mechanic (an essential industry) consequently protected not just by circumstances, but by my parents who spoke very little to my sister and me about the War. My father read the papers from front to back every day. The only time any action on his part indicated he was concerned was when he dug a bomb shelter in the backyard, a grave-like hole large enough for the four of us. Sheets of corrugated iron formed the roof, thank goodness it was never put to use.



School...

While I waited to be admitted to Scotch College, I attended Deepdene State School for twelve months; walking to school each day up Parkhill Road across Normanby Road, up Myrtle Avenue through a "cutting-like" laneway on my way to the school. At this very spot stood an old mansion that would figure in my life many years later.

Half a lifetime later, the owner and his wife, Roger and Allison Cameron, had become close friends. And so it was that was where we stayed (referred to later on page 246). What goes around comes around – it's a small world.



Kingsford Smith's Southern Cross



*My sister
and me
outside our
Ballarat
home*



*My sister
with dolls,
June our
neighbour
and me
reclining
(the signs
were already
there)*

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Apparently I had shown an aptitude for drawing, for when I was leaving at the end of the last term, I can remember my teacher saying how she was going to miss her best artist.

I look back with shame knowing that I whiled away my school years. The sacrifice my parents made to financially provide their son with a college education, and with their daughter attending Methodist Ladies College, the strain on my father must have been considerable. Every day my father would journey out to write life insurance concentrating on farmers, travelling long distances, sometimes writing insurance for sixpence. Hard to believe but in the 1920's to 1930's one could buy a three course meal for a shilling (10 cents). On certain occasions Dad had company. Life insurance necessitated the services of a doctor, as a clean bill of health was part of the criteria for the acquisition of a policy.

My days at Scotch College commenced in the junior school, situated well away from the senior school. A large playing oval, pathways and gardens, and a large building that was the boarders' quarters, were for the day boys "out of bounds". Assembly each morning brought all the boys of the junior school together where groups, categorised by the various classes, lined up surrounded on three sides by the U-shape of the school building and its many class rooms. I can only remember one of the teachers, a female (at least I think she was female, the thick black woollen clothing worn from throat to ankles obliterated any gender) known by the most unlikely name of Miss Goodenough.

It's an unknown entity growing up; there are so many forks in the road. I was not a bad person, but I was developing into a young boy whose character was considerably selfish. Endeavours such as scholastic necessities were chores to be avoided at all costs. (Such high cost not realised until far too late when the penalty was so life crippling).

I should have been studying, instead I was sharing an exciting time with a playmate from down the street, lighting crackers at home in the wash house (outside laundry) and tossing them into the backyard to explode.

Yet my mother scolded me no end and sent my mate packing. My best friends at school were Peter and Ken, in fact my only friends. I would have been twelve. We were to advance to the senior school at the year's end. I was pathetically inexperienced; life was still a childish romp through irresponsibility. It was not until I overheard builders on a construction site use the four letter word, I did not believe grown-ups used such language. My parents never swore. My father's favoured words were "drat it" or "confounded thing" or "struses" (struth!) Thus, I was protected, a peaches and cream little virgin. So much so that when my friend Peter suggested an experiment ... "Come into the toilet and put your thing inside me," I was neither surprised nor shocked; participation was neither consciously sexual nor exciting, just another adventure. "Oh I think I'm going to wee," I whispered. "Oh don't piss in me," he said pulling away. I pointed handsome Percy toward the water, a couple of spasms in the scrotum then nothing. We tried again. My not having any knowledge of the sex act; it seemed futile to pursue this fruitless endeavour. We went into the washroom where ten or so porcelain basins lined the wall. A teacher had just entered; a nice old man in tweed trousers and jacket. "Washing your hands boys?" the question was more an observation. "Good boys, cleanliness is next to Godliness," he said.



A Small Bunch of Flowers ...

I was alighting from the tram in Whitehorse Road, at the top of Cecil Street, on my way home from school. I had hardly stepped to the kerb when upon glancing back I saw a lady, possibly fifty or so, lying on her back having slipped from the tram step and fallen. While the tram moved on, a friend and I accompanied her to her place of residence

near St. Georges Hospital, one block away. She thanked us for being such kind boys and assured us she would be alright. After school the next afternoon, armed with a small bunch of flowers, we thought it would be nice to present her with these plus our best wishes and to see how she was faring after her fall. Our knock on her front door was answered, not by her, but a huge man with massive muscles and shoulders that filled the door frame, spectacular tattoos revealed themselves as he reached to take the flowers from my trembling hand. "What's this for?" his gruff voice sounded puzzled. "The lady that fell off the tram yesterday," came our innocent reply. Timidly, the dear soul appeared in the hallway behind the hulk. "I didn't tell my husband, thank you boys." As we closed the front gate we expected to hear the crack of a whip and female screams!

The importance of saving money was uppermost in my mind. Maybe it was my father's example, subliminally influencing me; I seemed to instinctively know that to be frugal with money was part of making a success of one's life. I certainly started early and in such a small way, it's laughable. On my way to school I had to change trams at the junction from Cotham Road to Glenferrie Road, among the group of shops there, was a newsagent that sold transfers. [The business is still there today.] Sheets of paper upon which were printed colour images, some sheets depicted a variety of articles, others twelve or so scenes about the size of a postage stamp, each of these sheets was approximately six inches square and cost one half penny. Having been given four pence [4 cents] for my lunch which would buy me a sandwich and a cream bun from the school tuckshop, I was able to purchase eight of these sheets. They were so good that when wet would slide off and transfer perfectly, consequently they were popular with all the boys who were happy to pay one penny per sheet earning for me one hundred percent. My four pence became eight pence, a lucrative little business. Don't laugh, it was a start in the right direction, in fact this was the origin of the way I approached life. Always on the ready for ideas, ways to earn money to put into my bank account at the East Kew E.S. & A. Bank.

One Sunday afternoon, while my parents were playing tennis with the

neighbours some distance away, my sister and her playmate (the neighbour's daughter June) got it into their heads that to throw things at me while I dug at the garden with a large four pronged pitch fork, was an hilarious pastime, creeping up behind me to do so. Not to be outdone, I pretended I was unaware that the girls were just behind me ready to pounce, when I got my pounce in first. I suddenly turned and stabbed at the ground with the pitch fork. But it was with a stab of disbelief when upon looking down I saw that a prong of the pitch fork had passed right through June's foot and pinned her to the back lawn. It was most fortunate that the prong passed between the bones and all that was needed was an anti-tetanus injection.



Learning...

My greatest regret in life is that my entire time spent at school was squandered. To learn, to study was not on my agenda. My sister, smiling, complains to this day that our parents were strict with rules she had to obey while I was given free rein. How disappointed my father must have been when my school marks were so poor one year when my position in a class of twenty-nine was twenty-eighth.

I hated school. If I could avoid doing sport, I did. If I could cheat at class, I did. As one teacher put it, I was a dreamer. Another, "You'll be nothing but a paper boy!" Escaping homework, avoiding learning to spell; I thought nothing of the consequences of not learning school lessons; I was seeking knowledge about anything but the three R's. My brain was happy to absorb knowledge about all those other subjects that I chose such as aeroplanes, airships, photography, organs of the body

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and their function, nature, the insect world, snakes, lizards and spiders, walking in a forest, bird life. These are what I dreamed of while the teachers' lips moved.

My father bought me a microscope then, when in my early teens he bought me a series of four books "Illustrated Medical and Health Encyclopaedia". My father, recognising my thirst for photographic knowledge, told me all he knew on developing and printing film. Finally he gave me his own camera, an autographic vest pocket Kodak, a small folding bellows type camera, which supposedly could fit in the vest pocket. He had carried this camera during his War service taking photographs on its 127 size roll film. Oh, how I loved and used that camera. (I still have it. It is a museum piece and after my death would like it to go to the War Museum with my father's name on it).

A curtain of silence seemed to hang between Dad and me, as if there were words there that could not be spoken. Now and again this curtain, like fine opaque gossamer, would dissolve and he would talk, father to son, answering my questions and giving advice. But these moments had their limit, then he would go about his business and the gossamer would return.

Maybe it had been me all along. Was it I that made it difficult for my father to talk to his son? I, too, had grown timid and reserved. I did make half-hearted attempts at homework at times. I remember sitting at the dining room table wrestling with the pretext of studying my homework, where Father was busying himself at what he constantly referred to as his book work, when out of the blue he said, "I think now might be a good time to talk to you about the birds and the bees." I was shocked to think I had to face my father and talk about such private things.

My upbringing was such that I had reached my teens but had never been permitted to see my father nude (certainly not my mother). One of my earlier joys of life was to go fishing with my father, he would row

the hired dinghy into the deep blue waters of our local shoreline (Dromana was one location) where he shared with me the thrill of baiting the hook, holding the hand line so one could sense the touch of the sinker on the sea bed. The catch would nibble at the bait and one could feel the sensation travel up the line, then and only then you must pull on the line, and hook the unsuspecting creature then haul it in, doing your best to lay the line in a neat circle on the floor of the boat whilst the revelation of the “catch” drew near. Wonderful learning – wonderful memories – but hidden among those memories was the image of my father relieving himself over the stern of the boat, making sure that I never saw any part of him but his back.

At home: “No you can’t come in, I’m not dressed.” What was it about private parts, as he used to call them, that brought about the need for such secrecy? Particularly between father and son. Having been brought up aware of this forbidden area, how then, could I be expected to suddenly throw off this cloak of concealment and openly partake in such a conversation? “I know all about the birds and bees,” I said. “Are you sure?” Dad said, still applying himself to his bookwork. “Yes,” I answered. “Okay,” I heard him say and we both escaped and continued in silence.

Consider the picture, a young son educated by his parents that sex was a subject never spoken of, then eventually when the father feels that it is time his son was told, refers to it as “about the birds and bees”. What in the hell have the birds and bees got to do with the male and female sex organs?

Not giving any thought to the consequences later in life, I devised a plan, a way of getting all my spelling correct without having to learn the given words. As we each had our own individual desk at which one would sit; arms upon the top of the desk your book between your hands, pen in right hand. The teacher would call each word one by one up to ten words, giving students time to recall the spelling and write it down. Now here is my shame: I had written each word, printing clearly on a

piece of paper, a piece just large enough to contain the column of words.

This paper I had then placed on the seat between my thighs, a slow pincer movement opening and closing my knees could be executed in such a way that even the boys near to me could not see.

On one occasion the teacher must have noticed my head bowed a little lower than normal. Thinking I had the spelling book on my lap, she casually walked down the aisle, bent over to see under my desktop. Although I had missed out on my big chance to be an actor at seven years old, chopping down the impenetrable hedge around the castle and kissing the beautiful princess, I still prided myself as having great potential. Now was my chance. Even an audience of one this particular moment called for an Oscar winning performance - otherwise the consequences were too dire to contemplate! I looked up at her with a “Yes – what is it?, innocent, wide-eyed angelic expression. She straightened and slowly walked back to the front of the class calling the next word. Not wishing to push my luck, I had to be content with a couple of words spelt incorrectly that day.

Goodness knows what my punishment would have been. Punishment on this occasion avoided, did not prevent fate teaching me a lesson a week or so later. My blue eyes looked up pleadingly, “But I didn’t know.” “Oh yes you did,” said my teacher. “When I asked you how many spelling mistakes you had, you told me three, but you don’t have three, you have six! Three in word spelling and three in dictation.” I was starting to get the feeling I didn’t like this teacher. “Report to Mr. Waller and tell him why I’ve sent you.”

I had been caned by Mr. Waller before (Mr. Waller was the head of the junior school), on both occasions for trespassing into the “out of bounds” area. The first, crossing an oval, second for wandering, kitbag in hand, up the path to the boarders’ quarters where I had discovered there was a large table of freshly cooked raisin buns, a snack for boarders only. There they were, such a warm temptation to which I had given

way several times, and I popped a few in my kitbag for good measure. Luck was not with me on this particular occasion for who should round the corner but Mr. Waller himself. I received one stroke of the cane. If he had caught me filling my bag; talk about warm raisin buns. It would have been a case of raisin red welts on my buns! I smile at the memory of my feelings; how differently my senses would react if I received even one swipe of a cane across my buttocks today. Childhood resilience surprises me.

“Come and see me after school,” the Headmaster instructed, after I had explained my reasons for having to report to him. My wilful imagination when describing him to my mother - this black-gowned obstinate sadistic fat walrus. One strike of the cane on the first occasion, two strikes on the second occasion, now here I am again.

Mr. Waller had answered my knock on his office door. “Come to me at lunch break tomorrow,” he said. Surely after 20 hours of anguishing anticipation he will let me off with a warning. A glimmer of hope was trying to stay alive in my mind. At long last it was “lunch break tomorrow”. I was standing in his office. “You lied about your spelling I hear, this is the third time I have had to punish you, if it happens again you will be expelled!” “Oh hell,” I thought, what would my parents say! He then began what can only be described as a performance. Walking to an old roll top desk at one corner of his office, with a deliberately dramatic action he rolled the top open; then came a moment of contemplation. He was staring down at two sturdy three foot canes lying at the back of this, their cosy place of rest. If I had heard him say, “Time for some fun, my little darlings,” I would not have been surprised. He removed one, gripped its ends in both hands, palms down, he turned to face me as I stared, mesmerised. He flexed the cane as if testing its tensile strength then turning to the desk he replaced it. Either he is going to let me off with a warning or his little peanut hasn’t reached its full erectile potential yet! He picked up the second, tested it, then as if satisfied stepped over to me. “Put your hands on the back of that chair.” I turned away from him and obeyed. I felt his left hand take hold of the part of my coat that hung over covering a little of my behind.

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Folding it back he positioned his feet and swung the first blow. It landed with practiced accuracy.

The sound a cane makes when it is caused to travel through still air then come to an abrupt halt across a thirteen year old's little arse is sickening, to say the least. Particularly if you are the poor sod receiving the rod. It has been said that after the initial shock the human senses do not cut in for about three seconds. These three seconds were generously observed. Then a second blow kissed my arse. I was not informed as to how many blows I was to receive; apparently dear Mr Waller was going to keep that as a lovely surprise!

The whole school must know, the sound was like a stockman cracking his whip at a carnival. Now the third pain cane painted my B.T.M. with agony. Hell, how many more? If the fourth had not been the final one I doubt I would have been able to keep from crying. With tears beginning to sting my eyes I was allowed to leave the office – no further words – just hatred fuelled by the pain rising up into my torso. Had I resolved to learn my spelling, at that point, some good may have resulted, but alas I did not.

A considerable part of the playground including the oval where we were allowed to wander, eat our lunch, chase each other, fight, yell and generally contribute to the display of the exuberance of youth, was surrounded by a tall strong wire mesh fence, similar to those used to surround a tennis court. One lunch hour, having consumed my four penny tuckshop lunch and the four pence profit from that morning's business transactions remaining warm in my pocket, I noticed a group of boys gathered at a part of the fence that bordered a side street, along the other side of which ran a footpath, the road, and the usual suburban houses on the far side. Reaching the group of smirking boys I found myself looking at the reason for their gathering there in the small semi-circle.

On the other side of the fence stood a little boy; hardly more than three years old. He was holding his tiny, and I remember vividly, uncircumcised

penis so that it protruded through the mesh of the fence like the pointed end of a lead pencil; his innocent little face looking at us all while he pleaded, “Suck it – suck it.”

So many times since, I have relived that scene. Dumfounding and accusing images creep into the mind...“Cousin? Grandfather? Uncle? Father? Brother? Neighbour?”

On a lighter side (excuse my flippancy), I imagine that little fellow now as a grown man and wonder if my musings are correct when I guess as to his sexual kinks.

My parents must have had misgivings as to my scholastic achievements. It came about that a psychologist was to visit the school, and for a fee would test pupils with the aim of judging their mental aptitudes, consequently a guide as to their professional pursuits. My report came back, “He will be best occupied in a job using his hands” – big deal! Twelve years of seeds being sown into the vast meadows of my psyche and all I could look forward to each day was a hand job! (They were right, you know).

I end this chapter of my life remembering Stotts Training College. School for boys who just needed that little extra education before entering the workforce.

Why is it that some school teachers adopt strange, sometimes objectionable habits? One, I remember, blew his nose so often he resorted to drying his handkerchief over a Bunsen burner during class. “Go on with your work boys,” he would order, then proceed to light up the Bunsen burner holding the saturated material aloft, the warm air rising would balloon and dry the offensive nose piece, the warm material returning for more saturation.

A more vivid incident occurred when a teenage student attending science class had over-heated a glass flask which exploded, sending fragments of glass in all directions. One piece cut through his trousers,

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severing the main artery in his thigh. I peeped into the classroom minutes later, to see the unfortunate lad on his back on the floor, bare from the waist down, lying in a pool of blood the circumference of a bicycle wheel.

I learned later, that it was the lad himself that had had the presence of mind to shed his trousers and apply a tourniquet while the ambulance was being called, no doubt saving his own life. So admirable I thought, I envied his ability to retain such presence of mind acting with such placidity. I mentally absorbed the lesson, in several small ways putting these valuable attributes to use in years to come.