



‘ GUISEPPE ’

Miss-spelled at birth but you before I has been his philosophy!



**The memoirs of Joe Rotondella,
along with some fishy tales of family, friends and escapades. A life well lived!
As related to Julie Fedele and Bill Booth, who have compiled a biography of an
interesting and well known Fremantle identity.**

The Title

The honour of selecting the title for this biography was given to me to choose and after you have read the content of Joe's memoirs you will realise how apt the title is.

After both Julie Fedele and I had listened to a thousand of Joe's life stories, there was a theme of generosity, help and caring for others that had become evident.

Admittedly, Joe has been lucky in his life and has acquired wealth along the way. But wealth can be measured in many ways; it is how you use it that counts.

There are many people who will read these memoirs, both here and in many other countries and only they will know the true generosity of this man and the impact that it has had on their lives.

Twenty Six years ago, in December 1988 in an interview in a Community Newspaper article, Joe is quoted "If I do retire I would get in to some charitable work and it would be total involvement". Joe has never retired yet and has been true to his word, both here in Australia and his love of his adopted country, Myanmar.

Bill Booth

Total involvement, that's Joe Rotondella

He's a man about town, was expelled from Christian Brothers years ago and has been immortalised in verse by his staff.

Free People

The poem is quite lengthy, beautifully printed and hanging in a prominent location in Guisepe's executive office.

Joe, as he prefers to be known, denies the man about town image, though the ready laughter says he doesn't mind it.

He is also somewhat surprised that he is best known for having been expelled from college when he was 13.

As he explains it, he was very good at school.

He had his own way of doing things, usually completing work in 10 minutes and then he would quietly go about his own business, like reading a comic.

"It worked quite well with most of the teachers, but there was this one teacher who couldn't handle it and he started belting the hell out of me, so I started wagging school," Joe said

"Eventually I was expelled."

His day started at 4am when he handed out bait at the co-op his father had helped to start, then school, then down to the fish market.

Joe was born in Collie Street, the second of eight children and the first son.

By the time he left school his father had decided he was a bit of a reprobate.

"I got into a spot of mischief and Dad sent me to sea in the crayboats to straighten me out.

"I was 17 then and I didn't leave the boats until I was 31 or 32."

He finally came ashore because he owned five boats of his own and had to run the business from an office.

Today Joe deals in property of all kinds.

He has just sold the old woolstores building to Robert Holmes a Court and he has bought the old Anchorage works to develop a marina.

one of the best fishermen ever in Australia.

"I have tried to quit working three times, but each time I have come back stronger.

"I envy people who can stop just like that, I wish I could be like them.

"If I do retire I would get into some charitable work and it would be total involvement."

Total involvement seems to sum Joe up nicely.

By HELEN AYERS

pursue his fishing in comfort.

One of the nicest things about Joe is his complete lack of pretension and his disarming honesty.

He freely admits to having a lot of money but as he puts it, he's "never bunged on side about being wealthy".

"I started in the era when everything was booming," he said.

"It's a lot different now — most of the excitement has gone out of the industry.

"There were a lot of characters about on and off the ocean and I guess I am one of the residuals.

"I have been told I am



Joe Rotondella — "If I do retire I would get into some charitable work and it would be total involvement."

"Never bunged on side about being wealthy"

"If I do retire I would get into some charitable work and it would be total involvement."

13th December 1988

Dedications

This life story is dedicated to my mother and father, Michele and Marta Rotondella who migrated to Australia from Molfetta in Italy, not so much for themselves but to provide a better future for their children and our future generations. Also, I dedicate this story to the Fremantle Italian community and in particular the fishing fraternity. My admiration is for those who migrated from many countries, from all over the world, to commence a new life in this the 'Lucky Country' Australia. I am a proud Australian and am so thankful for my heritage and the opportunities and wonderful life that this country has provided for me and my family.

Joe Rotondella

This biography has been written and compiled by

Julie Fedele and Bill Booth

(compiled from extensive interviews over many months
conducted by both Julie Fedele and Bill Booth)

Acknowledgements

The Rotondella and Fedele families.

Maria Sardi for her tireless and cheerful support and assistance.

Marta Fishing Co Staff: Don DeCeglie, Geoff Fry,
Sharon Cilliers and Bill Booth

Myanmar Staff: Nilar Win-Maung and Aung Lwin (Alwin)

Julia Crosetta and Helen Separovich for their written assistance.

Everyone who has provided stories and photos.

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INTRODUCTION BY BILL BOOTH

I too have always called Fremantle home and have also lived through the many changes that have taken place in Joe's and my home town over the past 70 plus years. Although our lives took different paths over these many years, it is amazing how similar our memories of Fremantle are. Through business and generally living in the area, we knew many of the same people; many of whom are mentioned in these memoirs. I too am one of the many people that Joe has helped to get their life back on track after a major illness by getting me back in to the real estate game after my retirement. It is not always about wealth. It is about caring and having the ability to give someone a purpose, which I respect. Joe had dealt with me on a number of deals during my real estate days and thought I may be able to help with his land at the Port Coogee development. I thought maybe a year! I'm still here 5 years plus down the track. This association has been much more than dealing with the Port Coogee land and has developed in to a great and sometimes "volatile" friendship. My involvement with helping to bring these memoirs to finality has been a very satisfying accomplishment to both him and I and he gave me the honour of choosing the title for this biography. The title relates to the fact that at birth the registrar, incorrectly misspelled Joe's name on the birth certificate. 'Giuseppe' instead of 'Giuseppe'. When reading the following biography, you will become aware of how his life changed along the way from him being a bit of a spirited child and teenager to a person who now enjoys having the ability to give back. I thought the 'U' before 'I' summed my experience of this man perfectly!

There are certain defining moments in the passage of a life that guide a person one direction or another. **The 'U' before 'I'** in the misspelling of his name to me became significant. You will see, in the following tale, that a chance meeting with a Fremantle casual acquaintance, who was prepared to help him, has had a profound bearing on how he changed his philosophy of life. By putting 'YOU' before 'I', is now a defining part of his life. Admittedly, he has been very lucky in attaining a position of financial independence that allows him to fulfil his goals in being able to give back. You will see in the story, that it has taken a lot of hard work, years of absence away from his family and friends, both in relation to fishing, prawning and pearl farming and the long hours of time away from home, undertaking the lengthy business negotiations for the disposal of eleven large prawning trawlers internationally, during difficult times in remote and often dangerous locations around the world such as Yemen, Iran and Sierra Leone. It has been a colourful life and there is not a minute he says he would change. There has been some terrible sadness but there has also been a lot of joy and tons of good friends, good people and good luck.

He has said that he would have liked to help the indigenous people of Australia more and did attempt to do so on a number of occasions; trying to become involved. He cites numerous examples where the remoteness of the Aboriginal people has made it an almost impossible task for him to resolve in a meaningful way.

The country of Myanmar has re-entered the world in recent years and Joe has found that he is in a position to help so many at a minimal cost that it would in Australia and has chosen to concentrate his charitable interests there for the past 20 years. He has been able to achieve so much in facilitating changes to education, housing and health issues that would have been financially unachievable in dealing with indigenous issues back in Australia. He feels he has made the right decision but given time, the cause of the Aboriginal peoples is an area He would like to revisit. It is an area that needs a lot of dedicated people to become involved, whereas with the help of a few, both here in Australia and in Yangon, he has been able to see remarkable advances in such a short time.

Joe has related this autobiography in his 77th year and hopes that his story will continue on for a few more years yet. There have been a few attempts to get a few facts down about his life and adventures on previous occasions but to no avail. In getting these few pages finalized, he has achieved one of his goals. It would take a thousand pages to relate all the episodes that have filled his life. Every time he thinks he's finished, another story pops in to his head but he seems to have gotten the bones of the skeleton together. He might flesh it out a bit later.

The important thing for him was to ensure that his grandchildren and future generations would know who their forefather was and know the story as it happened, rather than hearsay. The rest of his life; he will dedicate to his various charitable interests in Myanmar, Cambodia and other third world countries, as that is what he has been planning for years. With the assistance of many others, he now has the infrastructure in place with the orphanages, land acquisition and building programs to fulfil his philanthropic ambitions.

Whether you read this now or years after his passing, it has been a rewarding experience for him to get his life in to words and to relive the wonderful experiences that have been the rich tapestry of his life. It has always been his belief that everyone has a story. Some people think that they are just an average person but

when it comes to relating your past, it's amazing the dramas, adventures and joys that have become part of a life well lived. The thought of ever putting his story and of those family members, friends and experiences in writing had never really occurred to him until his sister Mary suggested that he should do something about it and from there it has now become a reality.

His niece Julie who had volunteered for the assignment has spent numerous hours with family, friends, staff members and business associates and also with Joe to weave what is a considerable account of the joys, experiences and hardships of his life. All of those who have contributed have woven what Joe considers to be an accurate account of what he now sees as a wonderful legacy to leave for his family, friends and for those who are interested in the story of someone who has always had a positive approach to life, an ability to accept help and the desire to succeed. He judges his life to have been successful due to the fact that he has now achieved his ambition by acquiring the wealth that has enabled him to help those in need. He is now able to provide an education for those in orphanages in Yangon, help the disabled, build housing for the poor and provide the financial assistance for those in need of eye disease operations, throughout Myanmar. Currently his projects provide funds to save the eyesight of 40 people per month and he is aiming to increase this every year.

Joe realised from early on that you can't do everything by yourself. You need other people. You need their help. To listen to their advice. To accept their friendship and reciprocate in kind when the opportunity arises. He feels that by having achieved this goal, which he has set himself when he was comparatively young, was to get himself in to a financial position to be able to help others. There are so many people who have contributed to help him achieve this goal, both here in Australia and overseas, who are too numerous to mention. Without their help along the way, He says he would never have been able to realize many of the wonderful achievements he has been able to set in to action. The phrase 'Success is not how much money you have. Real success is what good you can do with your wealth for humanity in need'. His belief has always been from an early age that there are some things that you can't do by yourself and the many people and the experiences he has related to in his memoirs, irrespective of how they may have turned out, are testimony to a very colourful and wonderful life, not a moment of which he says he would wish to change.

When you join all the facets together, there has been both humour and sadness. There have been business setbacks as well as some great successes. Overall he feels he has landed on his feet more often than not because he has always chosen an extremely excellent Accountant, an extraordinary Lawyer, wise business associates and a supportive wife and family. His philosophy is that you always get what you pay for. He has always found that the least costly thing in business, is to pay for the best in their chosen fields, especially in law.

Joey, who was a bit of a Fremantle larrikin knockabout and high school dropout, now feels he has achieved, in his lifetime, a wonderful family, numerous friends, business associates and the financial freedom to fulfill a lifelong dream. He is fortunately now in the financial position to undertake projects, with the assistance of others, to alleviate the hardships of the underprivileged, blind, disabled and orphaned in his second home of Myanmar (Burma), a country and its' people that he now cherishes and loves after twenty years of business investments and temporary living in Yangon.

He says that when you are born as far back as 1937 you realize that the world has changed immensely and that you yourself have actually lived through the most amazing progress in the history of the world. You are actually part of that history. He realizes now that he has lived through major wars, the first moon landing, the internet, DNA technology and the emergence of Australia as a major player on the world stage, something undreamed of back in the days of 'The Depression' and the year of his birth.

He has always surrounded himself with positive people and has been very lucky with his business partners and staff who have worked for him in both Australia, Myanmar, Indonesia and Yemen. Right up until current times he has every confidence in those who look after his interests on both continents during his absences. Who would have believed that his life would have taken such an amazing turnaround from his early formative years and his early departure from a formal education.

Joe is very appreciative of those that have found the time to collate all the information that has been gathered and to provide factual and sometime humorous events that have occurred along the way. He is thankful to all those who have contributed and above all hopes his family and future generations will gain some insight in to the wonderful adventure that has been his life.

Bill Booth

Sea Mistress

The sea is a demanding mistress, she will not be taken for granted.
Those who travel on her wavy skirts must obey or reside forever in the depths of her soul.
She does not show favoritism as the smallest craft to the largest ship must comply with her will.

She can afford safe passage from one land to another, calmly ignoring
the presence of the vessels that sail across her.
Then on the whim of the wind she can show her fury and the journey can be a ride
through a watery hell.

This lady has the strength to make even the largest vessels whine and plead for her mercy.
Struggling to ride her fierce waves many a ship has submitted to her will and
buried their bow into her belly taking down all aboard.

Then as if a warning to others she spits the occasional ship onto the shores.
The ghostly remains of a boat that once sailed her waters and fell into her ill favor.
Whipped and beaten its remains are taken by its mistress to lay ravaged against some rocky coral.

She has taken the treasures of kings and queens and still held ransom
the ships and crews of those who offered it up to her.
Then at other times she hears the whispered pleas of the poorest sailor and permits
his return to shore.
Sometimes tossing his thirsty body in her brine for days teasing him with her offer of refreshment.

This mistress can also lie perfectly still for days holding captive a clipper ship when the
winds refuse to fill its sails. Then she becomes a desert that offers no oasis, no shelter from
the sun and the ship seems bound to her surface as if sinking in her wet sands with each attempt to
move onward.

She can strike her waves like a mighty whip that crashes down on the decks of ships.
Some seemingly coming out of the heavens their height so immense.
The size of her being always reminds the sailor that he is but a ripple on her body and if he fails to
heed her commands she will consume him.

Why then do men sail upon her waves? Is it that she is beautiful and
draws men to her rocking them with her breathing motion?
Can it be her calming affect as she carries them from one shore to another lifting,
stroking and lapping the sides of their ships?
Is it the challenge to be ridden that she tosses out that men must accept and try to meet?

The sea is a mystery mistress and will never be fully understood by man.
She remains always in control and those that ride her waves must always respect her.
Knowing that her soul is too deep for man to conquer and at best he lies a supplicated servant to
her wishes.

Words by © Cheryl C. Helynck
Reflection series 1998

'If he can ride a bicycle, so can I'

Growing up during the mid 1900s in Fremantle, Western Australia the town where I still live today, my youth was simple but good. Still, it was popular opinion, especially among the local Italian community that I would get nowhere in life. "That bloody Joe Rotondella, he's a real no-hoper." I have to admit the odds certainly were stacked against me; I was born into a poor Italian immigrant family and early on we faced numerous hardships and at least one tragedy. All things considered, it's not surprising that I started out as a cheeky kid who got kicked out of school in the 1940s and moved onto becoming one of Fremantle's infamous teenage reprobates in the 1950s. To the outside world, my life appeared to be heading down the tube. So it probably came as a surprise to many that I grew into a successful person both personally and professionally and somehow managed to navigate my way into success, and by success, I don't just mean into financial success but more so into becoming a fairly decent person.

Many things have contributed to my success across the rock lobster, prawning and pearling industries, both in Australia and overseas, as well as in real estate, and most importantly, charity.

Was it opportunity, an accident or a struggle? Of course luck comes into it for me. More than anything, my success was a result of many key defining moments that happened in my life. It involved people who I came across whose lives have changed mine and whose lives I sometimes in turn changed. You can't do it alone. I've come from a place where I've needed to feel okay about accepting help. That in turn has allowed me to see the importance of not being too proud to accept help but also the importance of giving help. That is my belief. I hope that people take away this message from my story. Many things today are possible for most people, especially with the opportunities available with the advances in both technology and the internet. Secondly, you can't do it alone. Don't be afraid to accept help. Where you can, help others. The importance of both giving and receiving help is tantamount. No man is an island. The key ingredient to my success is very simple: I always knew that I would succeed. From as early as I can remember, I believed in myself. And that has always been a constant belief in my life.

My philosophy in life was that if somebody could ride a bicycle, so could I. In life; If somebody could do something, so could I. But, you can't do it alone!

The arrival of Dean my first grandchild in the late 1990s was really the impetus for me to start thinking about writing my memoirs. It's possible that by the time they're old enough to want to find out about my life, I might not be around to tell them the story. Being a prominent Fremantle businessman, I've had a lot of good press and some not so pleasant press. I can assure you, there are those people who don't always agree with me. Thankfully the people that respect, love and appreciate me and know that I am a good man make up in droves for the those that may disagree. I don't want my grandchildren to be fed a pack of lies about me. I want them to hear my story straight from the horse's mouth. I hope that my story makes them proud to be my grandchildren. I also hope that I can inspire them and others, to follow their dreams, no matter what obstacles they feel may lie in their way.

I want my future generations to be proud of me and I hope they and people in general who read this story can take a lesson out of what I've done in my life, both right and wrong. To be inspired to have the courage to follow their dream, because I believe in Australia and similar countries, where most things are possible for most people.

Wherever you are and whatever place or time you are in, with the right attitude you can overcome things and you can succeed. So it really does matter whether people believe in you, but if you believe in yourself then you're halfway there.

How then, did I end up as the man I am today? No-one stumbles their way into being successful but with good luck and surrounding yourself with good people and associates you can be successful in both a personal and business sense and I am proud of my achievements.

There are many things that have happened to me in my life that just went click like that, flicked a switch and it changed my whole being. How did I get to this place in my life? It's defining moments, people skills, not education, accepting help, believing in myself. Because, if you are humble enough to allow yourself to accept help, then one day you may find yourself in a position to be the helper. As they say, a smile can brighten your day and helps make the world go round. That is what I have worked towards my whole life.

On many, many occasions during my life, people have said to me, "You should write your memoirs," but until now I've never had any real desire to do it. It didn't matter to me; I am who I am, and that's all there is to it. The significant difference between then and now is that now, I have grandchildren. I see them looking up at me in admiration, for who I am now, but they don't know who I was, and how I came to be the person I am today.

The first thing, and what is clear in my mind right now, is where I am today. Where I am today is at a place that I want to be. I have the liberty to do whatever I want. I've got people around me who I'm happy to work with. I'm comfortable financially and I know what I'm doing and I'm going to keep doing it. I have achieved enough wealth for my family to be able to live more than comfortably but more importantly I have enough surplus funds that allowed me, over the past 20 years, to be a part-time philanthropist, helping other people through my charity work, especially the poor and the disabled, in both Burma and Cambodia. I've worked hard to get to this place in my life and now I have the ability to continue.

If you set your mind to achieve things in life. If you work at it, then you should be able to achieve it and that is what I am doing now. I am so fortunate to have been able to acquire sufficient wealth that enables me now to be living my dream, giving me the ability to help those less fortunate. The best feelings and rewards I have ever received in this life is this ability to help others and to upgrade their lives.

I really don't regret a lot of things in my life but of course we can all recriminate. Maybe I should have stayed at school or spent more time studying. There were certain subjects, such as geography, history and science that I thought were useless to my future. Now that I have travelled and worked in the elements I have changed my mind in this regard and I realize now how important these subjects and all other aspects of learning are.

Do I have regrets? I regret smacking my children. We may all have our backtracking history and ponder what may have been but in reality I have few regrets in the way my life has turned out. My point being, is that I am aware that I may have been a bit of a reprobate who wagged school but I have succeeded because of my own endeavours, my self-belief and the help and advice of many talented associates and partners and my willingness to make sacrifices to reach where I am today.

For me, there has been no greater feeling or reward than knowing that you have the ability to personally finance a charity that saves 40 people a month from blindness through your financial intervention. To know that your philanthropy can help those in such dire need and to actually know that you can be responsible for the saving the sight and lives of so many in need and having the facility to finance the work of others. They are the real heroes. Those who have the ability to contribute their time and service to the disadvantaged in these poorer countries are to be admired. I have been greatly encouraged by the efforts of one of Australia's greatest heroes, Fred Hollows who has inspired me to seek ways to help the poor, uneducated and disadvantaged of Myanmar (Burma) and in particular, financing surgical procedures to save many from losing their sight and reducing death from preventable diseases.

Series of Defining Moments

In my life there have been a number of defining moments that have had a great impact on me, one way or another.

When I went to Camp Eden, which is a Queensland health retreat that deals with many aspects of health, including nutrition, exercise and the mind. During one of the group sessions, one of the seminar papers posed the question "Discover who you are"? I thought. What a load of rubbish. I felt that this part of the programme did not relate to me. There were questions like "Who are you"? "What are you"? When they looked at the papers that they had given me, the presenter said, "You've written nothing down". I replied, "No. I knew who I was before I came in here". "I know who I am now". "And I know who I'm going to be tomorrow. In retrospect, when I look at those same questions, they have a new meaning.

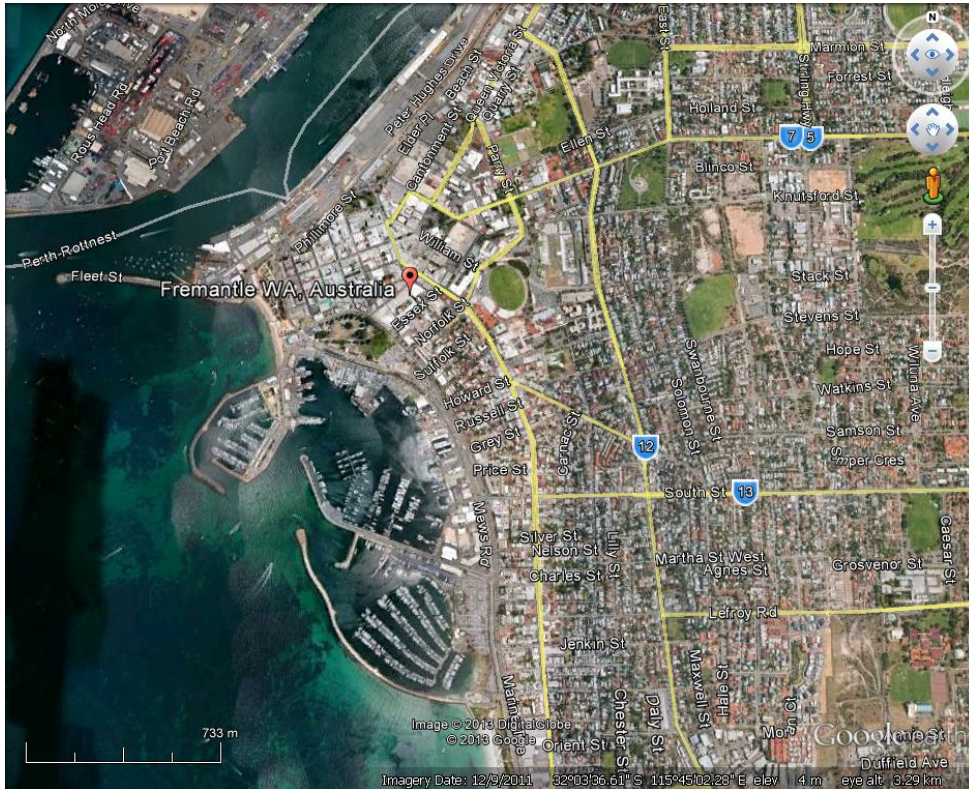
Whilst compiling these memoirs, It prompts me to ask myself the same questions. I now have started to really look at myself through the eyes of others and what you are now seeing is something that you didn't previously realize about yourself. You've never really had to look at your life from any other point of view. I have since revisited those questions and analysed myself. It now makes you think about how other people may perceive you. It does make you see yourself differently. It probably doesn't change you in any way but it makes you understand something about yourself that is obvious from other peoples' observations and perspective.

I think that I am now discovering a little more about myself, on the basis of what other people think or feel. I know I am different to most people. I think that is what my friend Blue Bulling meant when he was interviewed for these memoirs when he said that I am one of a kind. Well I certainly don't think I'm one of a kind but I certainly don't believe that I am part of the mainstream society. I have my views and I'll express my views at any given time and I know that I'll do things in a unique way. I'll do things at the orphanages in Myanmar that I have become involved with. My way! I just have my own beliefs about it. I have spent years in these countries and I have witnessed the deprivation that exists. I just think more about humans as humans, not numbers or whether they're an academic or a beggar. So as a consequence of that, when I go into an orphanage, I see individuals. I just believe that everybody is different. Everybody has and is an individual character and personality. They all have a story to tell. Hence, once you've got this generalization of running things, and I never want to interfere with this... I don't know whether that's the right way but it's my way. I wanted to do something for these children, something that I believed was needed, something that was lacking.

Even though I think that the orphanage was a very well managed and run institution. That's when you start to think, why do I have this drive and way of striving to get things done? I am definitely totally away from the mainstream in my line of thinking. People have said I'm lucky? You make your own luck. You just have to give out the message that you can become a reasonable contributor in this world and if you are dedicated and put your mind to it. Take advice from others, accept the help offered and you will succeed. My philosophy in life has always been. If they can do it then so can I. I always say, "If he can ride a bicycle, then so can I".

This is my story. It both begins and ends with one bicycle.

Map of Fremantle, Western Australia



Map of Western Australia



Wading in Shallows: The Early Years 1937 - 1951

The Line in the Sand

From Italy to Little Italy

Enemy Aliens

The Cheeky One

The Three Foot High Paper Boy

The Favourite Sister

Business Lessons 101

A One Way Ticket to Kalgoorlie

Fremantle Boy at Fremantle Boys

Fremantle Fishermans Co-op

The Last Prank Call

Shanghaied!

The Bantam Funeral

When Everything Changed

Saving the 'Nico'

The Line in the Sand

When I was three years old my cousin Leo “Lally” Mezzina worked at the Fremantle Fish Supply. This was the fish shop next to the “Black Cat” barber shop on Market Street and owned by the Paino family. Almost every day, Lally hopped on a bike and rode down Collie Street, where I lived, on his way to the fishing boat harbour to collect freshly caught fish from the fishermen. I’d wait for him out the front of our house. He would throw me into the cane basket on the front of the bike and off we’d go. At the harbour, I’d hop out and watch while Lally loaded up the bike basket with fish. If there was enough space, he’d throw me back in. Over time, the fishermen grew fond of me. “Oh, you’ve got your little ‘Dhufish’ in the basket with you today.” That’s a nickname that has stuck with me till this very day.

If the basket was too full, I’d follow Lally on foot, trailing his bike all the way back from the harbour, across the rail line and home. As I grew older, I came to know the rail line as “the line in the sand”. On the sea side of the line, were the fishermen. On the shore side, there were the others. This is a story about those who lived, loved and lost on the sea side.

I believed and still do, that most fishermen, like farmers, are honest, hard-working and really great people. I have tested this theory in many of the countries I have visited and my evaluation of these hard working people has always been the same. The fishermen, their families and friends were always friendly towards me and I always felt welcome in their company and their homes. Not to say that other professions were not the same but these were the people I knew. Like any occupation there are those that are not so good among them but on average I find them to be great contributors and honest workers.

There were unique situations where about 5% were the “baddies” and we all knew who they were. Still to this day I will trust most fishermen I know on the strength of a handshake. That’s why all fishermen and their family and friends go to heaven, as Peter (“The Fisherman”) is at the “Pearly Gates” and they all have a ‘Gold Pass’. On the other side of the “line” the people were different. Not bad: Just different. I had been raised among the Italian community and the fishing fraternity and when it came to dealing with the “others” I treaded carefully in both business and friendship.

From Italy to Little Italy



Joe's father, Michele Rotondella, Born Molfetta, Italy
Joe's mother, Marta Ciccolella, Born Molfetta, Italy

My parents were born in the early 1900s in Molfetta. My father, Michele Rotondella, worked as a seaman throughout Europe and my mother, Marta Ciccolella, was a seamstress.

It was 1928 when my father left Molfetta, the small fishing village where he was born in Italy's south, and travelled to the port of Naples to board the passenger ship "Orsova". When he was 28 years old, Michele was bound for Australia, with a plan to follow his Uncle Saverio to the quiet coastal town of Fremantle, in the country's west. He arrived on the 1st of May – just one of the first wave of Italian immigrants to settle in Australia after World War I. During those first few years in Fremantle, Michele worked with his Zio (uncle) Saverio, fishing along the Western Australian coast, often working away from home for long stretches at a time.

In time, Michele's brother Nicola and half-uncle and aunty, Michele and Vittoria also migrated to Fremantle. But While my father established himself in the Fremantle fishing industry, his fiancé, Marta Ciccolella who worked as a seamstress, stayed behind in Molfetta. They kept in touch by exchanging wildly romantic postcards. It took Michele six years to convince Marta to join him in Australia. In June 1934 they finally married by proxy and Marta arrived in Australia in December. By then, Michele had rented a home in Collie Street, just a few doors down from his uncle, in preparation for her arrival.



Michele and Marta's proxy wedding.
Michele was represented by his brother, Nicola Rotondella, on the far right.
Family friends served as witnesses

Despite the fact that my father was working away from home at sea on fishing boats for much of the year, my parents managed to produce three children within four years. We were all born at home in Collie Street; my sister Lucia (“Lucy”) was the first to be born, in 1935. I came along a little over a year later, on January 10th, 1937. My parents named me Giuseppe but on my birth certificate, my name is misspelled as *Guiseppe*. I can assure it has caused me a ton of problems throughout my life when dealing with official documentation. My sister Grazia (‘Gracie’) arrived 17 months after me. Our mother Marta was left in charge of the home, children and family finances. She was an excellent homemaker and a very smart woman.

Our Collie Street home was the first in a set of three semi-detached houses that sat in a row. It was a tiny place with two bedrooms, a kitchen and a washhouse/laundry out the back. The front door was right on the edge of the footpath and it led straight into the main bedroom, which was just big enough for a double bed and a wardrobe. That led into the smallest of bedrooms where all of the kids slept. There was just enough space for two single beds and a ‘cascia, a trunk my mum had brought from Italy to store all her belongings. I don’t know how we all found room to sleep in there. In the kitchen, a tiny angled room, we had a primus wood stove, a table, a few chairs and another ‘cascia’ where we kept all the linen. Linoleum covered the wood floor but it was tattered and chipped – all ripped up, with half of it missing.

There was no running water inside the house. Before bed, we had a quick cold water wash under the tap on the verandah. We bathed properly once a week in a small, galvanised steel tub in the washhouse, separated from the verandah by a curtain. We filled up the tub with water and left it out in the sun for a while so the water would warm up a little. Mum did the washing on a scrubbing board placed over a tub made out of a half wine keg. We had an outhouse and a shed in the backyard. We grew our own fruit trees (peach) and vegetables and also kept chooks.

We knew all the people who lived on our street. My dad’s Uncle (‘Zio’) Saverio and his family, which had increased considerably since migrating to Australia, lived a few doors down from us on Collie Street. They also owned the house behind them, on Nairn Street, where their married daughters, Connie Mezzina and Philomena De Ceglie, lived with their husbands and kids. The Tombolini family lived beside us in the middle house of the three semi-detached houses. Mr and Mrs Tombolini were our neighbours.

As I was often giving him a hard time, sometimes he would come toward me, threateningly, as if to tell me off, but he had to retreat because he’d cop a rock in the head from me. I drove him mad. In the last of the three attached houses lived a German lady. Behind all three of our backyards in Collie Street was a large open area that extended into Nairn Street, the next street over. Directly to our left, on the corner of Collie and Market Street, lived an Australian lady and her son who we nicknamed Basher. The poor kid had Downs Syndrome and he liked taking his clothes off in public and running down the street in the nick. We thought it was funny so we didn’t discourage him; Poor kid. Next to them, on the corner of Market and Nairn Streets, was a boarding house for single Yugoslav men.

Across the road, where the Millenium Cinema is now located, was a service station and next door lived the Sigari family on a huge block that went right through to Essex Street on the other side. The Sigaris kept chooks and my sisters and I often helped Mr Sigari pluck feathers off the dead chooks. In return he gave us the giblets and other off-cuts to take home for mum to cook.

In those days, most houses in Fremantle were owned by Australians. Over time the majority of Aussies sold up to buy new houses on large blocks in the suburbs. The Italians tended to buy or rent properties in Fremantle, within walking distance to the Fishing Boat Harbour, as most of them were working in the fishing industry and they rarely drove. Neither of my parents ever held a driver’s licence and our family never owned a car. So Fremantle became a hub for the Italian community. Like a ‘Little Italy’. Back in those days though, Fremantle was a quiet town with hardly any traffic at all.

Enemy Aliens

Like many other Italian immigrants, my father was sympathetic to the fascist ideals, though not necessarily the political practices of Mussolini's government at the time. When World War II began in 1939, Italy was part of Hitler's Axis Powers. My father and other male Italian immigrants were regarded as 'enemy aliens' as far as the Australian government was concerned and were considered a threat. They virtually became prisoners of war and were interned. Firstly, they were held in Fremantle and then at camps on Rottnest Island and at Harvey in the south west. My father was later transferred to Loveday in South Australia where he spent the majority of his internment. We visited him in Harvey a couple of times before he was sent to Loveday. The only thing I can really remember about that is the drive there. We were cramped onto the back tray of a utility truck with a heap of other families. The country road was a little bumpy in parts and Mrs Salvemini, a friend of my mothers, fell off the back of the utility but she was okay and wasn't badly hurt.

During the war, my mother worked from home sewing buttonholes for a local tailor. She earned three pence per buttonhole. We also received two pound, eight shillings per week through Social Security. Those years must have been extremely tough for my mother. She had not long left her entire family in Italy and had come to what must have seemed like a desert island. Although she grew close to some of my father's cousins, she did not have one blood relative in Australia and she could barely speak a word of English. Next thing she knew, she had three young children on her hands and her husband had been sent away for God knows how long. She was reliant on the kindness of others and her own strength and resourcefulness, to survive and having to look after my two sisters and me.



Lucy, Gracie, Marta and Joe during the internment years

I don't remember anything about the war, but apparently at one point there was quite a bit of fear that Fremantle was a possible target of attack from the 'Japs'. Some friends of my parents, Mr and Mrs De Ludicibus, invited us to live with them temporarily in Bibra Lake (a few kilometres inland from Fremantle) until the threat was over. We lived with them for eight months before moving back in to Collie Street.

In October 1943, the Italian army defected from the Axis powers and joined the Allied forces, and at that point the Australian government slowly started to release the Italians interned in camps around the country. My father returned to us in 1944 with not one bad word to say about his Australian captors. On the contrary, he had a lot of respect for them and had become great mates with several of the guards, his first real Australian friends. According to my father, he and his fellow internees had nothing to complain about; they were fed three meals a day, they were allowed to make their own liquor and they were given plenty of free time to play soccer out on the wide expanse of grass in the camp.

Thinking about it, life in internment was probably easier in a lot of ways than the life my father led back at home, working away at sea, fighting the wind and rain and darkness, struggling to provide for his growing family, and being separated from us for much of the time anyway. All of the

interned Italians felt the same, returning with stories similar to my father's experience. No-one complained and my father's glowing impression of the Australians is what sticks in my mind, and it earned them a lot of respect in my eyes and to this day I am proud to call myself an Aussie, albeit with an Italian background.

The war finally ended in 1945, with Fremantle remaining unscathed. Evidently the 'Japs' were not coming. Encouraged by my mother and in partnership with a rather wealthy Italian, a Mr Tomba, my father bought his first boat. The 'St George', with money (100 Pounds) my mother had saved while he was interned. There were no jetty moorings for the fishing boats in those days. 'St George' was anchored in the fishing boat harbor around the spot where 'Little Creatures' Brewery now stands today. The crew had to row a dinghy to and from the 'St George' so that they could board the boat to go fishing around and beyond Rottnest Island for Dhufish, Snapper and Whiting.

The Cheeky One

One of my earliest memories is getting separated from my mum in a store. By the time we found each other, I was angry. “You cheeky girl... You cheeky girl...” I repeated over and over again. It was me who was cheeky. Actually, I was *very* cheeky, up to mischief most of the time. When my father became interned, my mum had sent me off to “First Bubs”, which was a kindergarten at St Joseph’s Primary School in Parry Street in Fremantle, a year earlier than most; I guess she had enough troubles to worry about without having me to deal with as well. I’m short to start with, so I was younger and much smaller than all the other kids in the school. It turns out that I was just as cheeky at school as I was at home and the teacher struggled to handle me. It wasn’t long before I was booted up to the next class - “Second Bubs” and is it any surprise that I was kicked out of *that* class for the same reason? As a consequence of this, I started Year One a couple of years early at the local Christian Brothers College (CBC) in Ellen Street. The school was run by priests. They certainly had their work cut out for them.



CBC sporting activity - Joe is at the top of the right hand side pyramid

School days started early. Mum made breakfast for us every morning; milky tea and buttered bread in an enamel tin bowl. I walked to school with my sisters. After school we played on the street with all the other neighbourhood children until it was time for dinner. We were never loaded with a whole pile of homework like kids appear to be nowadays. Besides my sisters and me the majority of children in our area, our De Ceglie cousins, the Germinario and Turtur kids, and some Aussie kids who lived on Nairn Street, one street over. The street was our playground. We made our own fun, and a lot of noise. We ran up and down the street playing soccer and throwing balls against the big wall. I clearly remember making hockey sticks by shaping wood with a saw.

One particular woman who lived on Nairn Street was always telling us to shut up. We nicknamed her Mrs Headache and took no notice of her. Sometimes she called the cops to complain. When the cops rolled up, all the other kids would mysteriously disappear. I was the leader of the bunch and I was stubborn and proud. I would stand in the middle of the street with my arms by my side, just waiting. The cops would come along, grab me by the ear and take me home. “Look after this little prick, will ya?” they’d say to my mum. She always got very upset: “Oh my God, what a disgrace! I came here from Italy with a good reputation and here you are, bringing disrepute to our family!” Inevitably, I’d get a whack or two.

Mum was a very loving person but she was also old-fashioned and disciplined us quite harshly. She used part of an old broomstick as a rolling pin for making fresh pasta but that was also her weapon as well. One time, my mum hit me on the head with the broomstick and I ended up needing stitches. I’ve still got the scar. She was so upset about what she’d done. I don’t blame my mum for hitting me. If I had a kid anywhere near as cheeky as me, I probably would have killed him. You don’t study to become a parent, and sometimes parents make mistakes. Anyhow, most of the time, mum and I got along really well. She knew how to con me into helping her around the house. I’d sweep the floor for her and help her make the bed. And as I grew older, I decided there was no fun in being belted by my mum and I eventually lost a little of that early defiance.

During the summer, I was often found down at the beach with my mates, swimming and fishing for squid, octopus, crabs and other critters. Much of the Fremantle Fishing Boat Harbour that exists today is reclaimed land. Apart from a few spits of land like the North and South Mole (the breakwater entrances to the main port of Fremantle) the shoreline started not far beyond the railway line, just past Esplanade Park. Out on the South Mole there was a wood yard and wooden box factory; cardboard wasn't around in those days. Odd bits of wood went down a chute into the water and floated ashore at the beaches on the southern side of the park. When we were young, we would collect timber at the beach and carry it home on a homemade cart that was sometimes so overloaded it was almost too heavy to move. Our parents always appreciated this because it meant they didn't have to spend precious money on wood for the stove and fireplace.

No matter where we were or what we were doing, we had to be home for dinner or else we would be in big trouble. If pasta was on the menu, the father would do the taste test. When he was away it was my job. When the pasta was 'al dente', firm to the bite, it was ready. It was the man's job to pour the heavy pot of pasta into the 'scolapasta' (colander) to drain the water. On hot summer evenings many of the Italian families in the area would meet at the Esplanade Park after dinner, just across from the beach. We'd stay at the park until late, eating watermelon and playing soccer. This was our social outlet. Attending weddings was another main source of entertainment. We were a close-knit community. In many ways this was a good thing but it also meant that everyone knew everyone else's business and any interesting gossip spread all over town like wildfire.

We were a poor family but I didn't ever consider us to be lacking in anything. Whatever there was to eat, we ate. Anything else, we just did without. We had patches in our pants and we each owned only one pair of shoes and one pair of sandals. That was just something we accepted. There were others around who had more money than us but that didn't mean anything to us; there was no such thing as 'keeping up with the Joneses'. I would not change anything about my childhood. Life was good.



Joe and sister Lucy on her first communion day

The Three Foot High Paper Boy

'You can succeed'

Where ambition is concerned, I've always been much more like my mother than my father. To that end, I was only eight years old when I got my first job, selling the "Daily News" down at the Fremantle Harbour. You actually had to be 12 years old to have a licence to sell newspapers. Inspectors hung about the place checking that all the kids selling papers were over 12 years old and were licenced. Truancy inspectors also sniffed around looking for kids wagging school. I'd never been afraid to push the boundaries and see what I could get away with and since I really wanted to work with 'the big kids', I saw no good reason not to give it a go. On my first day I positioned myself on the bridge behind the railway station that connects the town to the wharf and waited for the wharfies and dockers to walk over the bridge at the end of the working day. I must have been about three feet tall; so small, I could barely carry all the bloody papers.

I only lasted a day or two before an inspector caught me and put a quick end to my burgeoning career as a paper boy but that was long enough for me to get a small taste of the working life. I loved it. From then on, I knew that I would succeed at whatever I chose to do for a job and in my mind it was a done deal that I would one day become a millionaire. I wasn't motivated by a desire to be rich, powerful or 'the best' at anything. And having the money to help others wasn't my motivation either, though nowadays I know that having money means you can do a hell of a lot of good in the world if you choose to dish out your money wisely. 'Becoming a millionaire' just seemed to be an achievement worth striving for, a good challenge. As I grew older, my confidence that one day I would achieve my goal of becoming a millionaire remained steadfast, though it was certainly a goal I kept to myself, as I didn't share these thoughts with anyone. Whilst I wholeheartedly believed that I would succeed, I also knew that you shouldn't count your chickens before they hatch. If that sounds like a paradox, it probably is. I guess I've always been a walking contradiction of sorts.

The Favourite Sister *'Thank heaven for little girls'*

After having been separated for so long during the war, it was no wonder Mum fell pregnant with a post-war so-called 'baby boomer' pretty much right after my father got released from internment. In August 1945 my sisters and I were sent off to the pictures while Mum gave birth at home with the help of a midwife. We arrived home to find Maria Vittoria ('Mary') had arrived. Another sister!

I never had any brothers at this stage but in 1946, a brother finally appeared with the arrival of Saverio ("Sammy"). My mother had two more pregnancies over the next couple of years but suffered from kidney problems and also (what is now known as) pre-eclampsia and ended up losing both children to miscarriage. Pre-eclampsia is a problem with blood pressure. I remember that her legs would swell up. Today, the condition is easily managed by modern medical treatments but back in those days, there was a minimal understanding of the condition and little to no available treatment, so it presented as a real risk during pregnancies.

I'm not sure exactly how far along in the pregnancies she actually got but with the second she must have gotten pretty close to full-term, because when she miscarried that time, she almost died herself. She was saved by the midwife, Dr Dorothea Parker, who firmly told my mother, "You *cannot* have any more children. It would be life threatening."



The Rotondella family in the late 40s
From left: Lucy, Joe, Michele, Mary, Marta & Gracie
(Sam was asleep when this photo was taken)



Joe and Mary

With my father working away much of the year, Sammy and I were now well and truly surrounded by girls. I loved them all dearly of course but I'd joke around and say "This place *stinks* of girls!" Though I thought the world of my little sister Mary, she just would not warm to me. My mum told me, "It's because she hears what you say about how this place stinks of girls." Aha! Like any other obstacle I have encountered in my life, I saw this as nothing more than a challenge to overcome. It became my goal to win Mary over and I lavished attention upon her. She was a hard nut to crack, that Mary. Eventually I gained her trust and she returned my affection. It all turned into a bit of a game.

"Give us a kiss, Mary?" "No!" "Oh please?? I'll give you some chocolate!"

By then, Mary had become my favourite sister. Still is. I enjoyed spoiling her with chocolates and other treats. Later on I had the pleasure of presenting her with her first bike. I painted it yellow and as was the fashion, used wax smoke to turn the yellow paint black in places.

I could afford to spend money on these little presents because when I was eleven, I'd started selling papers down at the wharf again. I was still too young to get a licence but I got around that by working for an older kid named Joe Depane who sort of subcontracted me to sell on his behalf. He had the best round in Fremantle because it included all the offices and businesses, so we knew we were guaranteed to sell at least 174 papers per day. He also left school early and started working in the fishing industry and gave me his good round free of charge.

Business Lessons 101

'You have to spend money to make money'

In the afternoons I was selling the papers at the wharf, along with, now, copies of "Man Magazine", which was full of pictures of women in bikinis. Nothing too revealing in those days! I worked that job on the weekends also, selling souvenirs, toys and streamers to people boarding or disembarking the passenger ships down at Victoria Quay behind the Fremantle train station. When I first started my business, I sold these extra little trinkets and streamers on a commission basis through 'Somes' news-agency" (the same way I sold the papers) but it later occurred to me that I could cut out 'the middle man' by purchasing the streamers from a local store (like Coles or 'Woolies') at around half the price that they cost through 'Somes', hence making double the profit but at no extra cost to the consumer. That was one of my first lessons in how to run a smart and savvy business.

I'd settled down a bit at this stage and was coping pretty well with school. If I finished my work early during class, I'd quietly take a comic out of my desk and start to read. I usually managed to get away with this because I was becoming good at my schoolwork and able to work quickly. My teachers didn't seem to mind; I'd grown out of most of my early cheekiness by now and I wasn't causing them too much grief. I was fairly happy at school. But that all changed when one of my teachers, *Brother Doyle*, got a bee in his bonnet. And the bee was me.

A One Way Ticket to Kalgoorlie

'Thou shalt not lie'

The students had nicknamed him Killer Doyle. I'm convinced he was a racist because, no matter which student had caused a disturbance, he always seemed to blame one of the Italian or Yugoslav kids. I was one of his major targets. He really had it in for me and on a regular basis. He started to blame me for misdeeds I'd had absolutely nothing to do with.

One day, in trouble yet again for another student's misdemeanor, I was called to the front of the class. Brother Doyle told me to put out my hand, ready for the leather strap. I refused.

He repeated, "Put out your hand!" "No."

He tried to grab my hand and as he did, I kicked him; I ran out of the classroom and off the school grounds. I managed to wag school for six days before a note was sent home to my parents to notify them of my absence. When my mother read the note, I got a beating with the broomstick handle. I didn't tell Mum the reason I'd wagged. I don't know why.

Mum didn't 'dob me in'. Instead, she wrote a note to the school explaining I had been absent due to sickness. I went to school the next day and gave the note to Brother Doyle. He saw the note for what it was. Complete bulldust and took me straight up to the Headmaster, Brother Quilligan, telling him that I'd wagged school and then lied about it. Right then and there I told Brother Quilligan that I believed Brother Doyle was a straight-out bloody racist. I said, "No matter who makes trouble, it's me or one of the other Italians or Yugoslavs who gets whacked." Brother Doyle denied my claims and Brother Quilligan brushed us both off and sent us back to class.

Within an hour of being back in the classroom, Brother Doyle called me up to the front of the class. Once again, he asked me to put out my hand and once again, I refused. He was a real sadist and used a layered leather strap which was sewn together and appeared to enjoy the brutality of the situation. There was no way I was going to be dominated by this bastard. I'd done nothing wrong! He reached for my hand, so this time I kicked him and punched him in the guts and I ran out of the school for the second time. Brother Doyle sent two kids after me. They caught up with me but because we were friends they didn't stop me from running away; instead they returned to the class and pretended they hadn't been able to catch me.

I didn't go back to school the next day, nor the day after that. I spent my days selling papers at the wharf. Each night I would come home as late as possible. Before going inside, I would listen at the door, hoping to God that I wouldn't hear any sign of my mother having received word from the school. I got away with wagging for thirteen days in a row before the school contacted my parents. Luckily my father was away fishing in Sharks Bay and Carnarvon.

When my mum received the letter from the school, she sent my sisters, Gracie and Lucy, to find me. I was down at "Somes Newsagency" in High Street.

"Mum wants to see you at home," one of my sisters said.

"Am I in trouble for wagging school?" I asked. "Yes," they both answered, in unison!

I knew that I was in deep, *deep*, trouble. The memory of the beating my mum had given me was still fresh when she found out I'd been wagging for six days the first time. What would she do to me now she knew I'd wagged school for 13 days? I'd be killed! I didn't plan on sticking around to see if my calculations were correct.

I told my sisters to tell mum I would be home shortly. Once they'd left, I quickly sold as much as I could of my paper round to the other paper boys. Then I took off down to the train station and bought a train ticket to Kalgoorlie. Don't ask me why I chose Kalgoorlie because I really have no idea; I just knew that I needed to get the hell out of Fremantle. There was a problem though; the next train to Kalgoorlie was not due to leave for another week! In the meantime, I decided to hide from my parents by losing myself in the big city, so I caught the local train to Perth. I made friends with some street kids and found out the best places to sleep, where to find food and all the rest of it.

One day, a taxi driver saw me walking along and he stopped the car and offered me a lift to wherever I was headed. I accepted his offer but he drove me straight to the cop shop in Fremantle! When we got there the officer asked me, "Where do you live?" I gave him a fake address and we drove over there immediately. A woman answered the door. The cop asked, "Is this your son?" "No???"

The cop dragged me back to the cop shop and started to ask more questions. I refused to tell him my name. "Ok then, if you won't tell us who you are, we will ring up Nick Rotondella."

My dad's cousin, Nick "Boxer" Rotondella, was a top Western Australian flyweight boxer who competed under the name of Young Sylvester. He was locally famous; everyone in Fremantle knew him and he knew everyone and everything about them. So the cop knew there was a good chance that he would be able to identify me. Maybe they'd also noticed the family resemblance between us. I knew that if they took me to Nick, I was a goner. So I pretended to give up and tell them my real address. It was another fake address, this time belonging to the Zaza's, a Molfettese family ("Molfies") who were friends of my parents and I was also mates with their two sons. When we got to the house, I quickly spoke to the mother of the family in the Molfettese dialect, begging her not to give me up to the cops. "Please tell the cop that I belong to you. I don't want to go home and startle my mum with the cops." She agreed. When the cop asked if I was her son, she said, "Yes. Boy, come here!" I walked over to her and she gave me a few whacks, just for effect. The cops left and the woman said, "Now you go straight home!" I promised I would, but of course, I didn't. I took off again, back up to the city. Later, Mr Zaza, who lived close by, discovered my deceit and my mother was very upset when she found out.

A few days later I sneaked into the Metro cinema in Perth to see a movie starring Robert Taylor and some blonde chick. At that time, there was only one "Molfie" couple living in the city who could possibly have recognized me. Nick Rotondella's sister, Susanna Rotondella, and her husband Giovanni, an importer of ceramic religious Italian statues. Of course, it just so happened that they were in the cinema that night. I knew when I was beat; it was time to surrender.

When Susie saw me, she grabbed hold of me. She immediately went to a pay phone and rang her brother Nick to let him know that they had found me. Both Susie and Giovanni were aware of my earlier capture and escape from the ZaZa's and were determined to keep a tight grip on me until Nick arrived with his van to pick me up. Between them they bundled me in to the van and Nick drove me straight home to my anxious mother. As we sped through the dark streets, I quickly formulated a plan designed to dodge my mother's wrath. We arrived at home and walked straight through the front door. That was when I developed a convenient case of amnesia. "I don't know where I am! What's happened to me?" I cried. I claimed I'd bumped my head and had no idea what was going on or where I'd been. I was treading on very thin ice. Rather miraculously, my mum was so relieved to see me that she was quite happy to buy my lie. Instead of laying into me, she showered me with hugs and kisses, put me to bed and made me custard. I was extra lucky because my dad was out at sea and by the time he found out what had happened the storm had well and truly blown over. When my mother told my father, she requested him not to punish me, so he just kicked one of the kitchen chairs a little and that was done with it.

Later that night, I sat at the kitchen table with a mug of warm milk and thought about what I had done. I felt so guilty for lying to my mother. It struck me that this whole saga had started because of just one lie. The lie I'd told by not being honest with my parents about why I'd wagged school the first time around. That very first lie had caused all sorts of trouble, because when you choose to lie, you have to tell more lies to cover up for the first lie. Each lie leads to another lie and that leads to another, and another. If you want to be a good liar, you really have to have a bloody good memory! I decided, right then and there, at twelve years of age, that I would never, ever again, tell a lie. I'll be quite clear; I'm talking about *real* lies. I'm certainly not claiming to never tell little white lies. Everyone tells 'porkies' every now and again; especially in the selling business, sometimes it's simply being polite. Like, when a woman asks you what you think of her new hairstyle and you bulldust to them that it looks lovely, even if you think it actually looks like a rat's nest.

Fremantle Boy at Fremantle Boys

'Somebody has to be the Prime Minister and somebody has to collect the garbage'

It was a good thing that I'd learnt an important life lesson but the consequence of my action was that I was expelled from CBC. It was right in the middle of the 1950 school year. My parents hastily enrolled me at Fremantle Boys' School the public school on Adelaide Street. The old school buildings now house the Film & Television Institute and Clancy's Fish Pub. The double storey building next door was the Princess May Girls' School. Currently the building is leased by the Harbour Theatre. The two schools were separated by a tall dividing wall. Girls on one side, boys on the other. There was a large gap in the wall in one spot, which meant we were able to spy on each other.

I was initially placed in the bottom level at Fremantle Boys' but I soon found we were studying schoolwork I had learnt at CBC *years* before, so it didn't take long for me to move up to the top level. Fremantle Boys' focused on developing students' trade skills. We spent two days a week (broken up into four *half* days) training in practical subjects like mechanical drawing, carpentry, tinsmithing and blacksmithing. These classes were held away from the main campus at what is now John Curtin College of the Arts on East Street. So there were two full days every week where we were not studying the core subjects; 'the three Rs' (as they used to call them) 'readin', 'ritin' and 'rithmetic'. And that didn't account for travelling time between the campuses. At the time, I thought the school was a bit behind in the subjects that I had been doing when I was at Christian Brothers. In hindsight, that was a very naïve perception, as Fremantle Boys' played a key role in the education of kids who do not have the desire to pursue a professional career. The public school system gave students a much wider choice and for those who wished to pursue a more technical career they were given the opportunity.

It was also when I was in my early teens that I designed a new kind of 'squid jig', a lure for catching squid. At that time, squid jigs were being imported into Australia from Sicily and they were made out of cork, needles and a stick. The needles were sharp and would rust quickly. You had to attach a piece of lead to it because it was too bloody light. "Geez," I thought. "There's got to be a better way than this." I took a butcher's stick, copper wire and safety pins, soldered the whole lot together and bent them over. Instead of loading it with bait, I used silver paper from out of a cigarette packet. It worked a treat. I made a whole bunch of the new jigs and sold them to all my friends. Within four years squid jigs, just like the one I had invented were being made in Sicily and Japan and were now being sold in Australia by Helco!

It was from the skills learnt at Fremantle Boys Technical School where I was taught carpentry, Blacksmithing, tinsmithing and geometrical drawing which were part of our curriculum, that enabled me to design the "Squid Jig". As I always say, "Somebody has to be the Prime Minister and somebody has to be able to take up the trades that make the world go round." It takes all types. I know that now.

My father had by this time sold the "St George" and in partnership with Bert Smith, a local horse trainer, built his first boat, the 'Aurora Australis'. Almost every penny we had was put towards the debt my father had incurred building the new boat. My dad was actually a very good singer and actor. He performed in theatre and musical shows with the Italian Club which was just around the corner from our home. A couple of times he even dressed and sang a female part and legend has it he fooled many of those in the audience. My parents attended a handful of operas at His Majesty's Theatre in Perth, sometimes taking my sister Lucy with them. These were extremely rare events; usually their entertainment would be a picnic at the park, or a cousin's wedding in the Fremantle town hall. Left up to my dad, we might have been allowed more luxury items or excursions, because he liked to have a good time. It was Mum who held the purse strings and she held them very tightly indeed. She made all our clothes, including our coats and jackets. Though she found fish and chips to be absolutely delicious, she never bought them, because she considered this to be spoiling herself. Apart from the radiogram that sat in the corner of the kitchen, my mother rarely allowed herself, or the rest of us, any luxuries. She bought a radiogram for my father because he loved to listen to opera and had a small collection of long playing opera records.

Fremantle Fishermans Co-op

When I arrived back home after my short stint on the streets with 'amnesia', I got a job at the Co-op handing out bait for the commercial fishermen between 3am and 4am every morning until about 7.00am as I'd lost my main source of income; the paper round. I'd finished up selling my round to buy the unused train ticket to Kalgoorlie.

The boats would unload and sell their daily catch of fish. In an effort to secure fairer fish prices, a group of fishermen, including my father, had established the Co-op in 1947. They established premises in a specially constructed wood and corrugated iron building between Bathers Beach and the old fishing boat harbour, at what was then at the very end of Mews Road. I'd wake up at three o'clock in the morning and walk down to the Co-op to hand out bait to the fishermen before the boats left the harbour. Then I would walk home, clean myself up as much as I could and then go to school, in all likelihood still smelling of fish. At that stage I was actually making more money than my father.

So I had now found myself some before and after-school work at the Fremantle Fisherman's Co-op, which paid the fishermen, processed the fish (storing it in a freezer) and sold fresh and frozen fish, both wholesale and retail, all from the same premises. I helped out across the board but mostly, I worked in the retail sale of fish.

So I was a pretty entrepreneurial type of kid and I was definitely a busy boy, working both before and after school. Luckily we hardly ever got homework, because on the rare occasions that we did, I never had time to complete it at home. Instead, I'd somehow squeeze it in between assembly and the start of class.

I loved working at the Co-op and being a 'people-person', enjoyed interacting with the public. I was good at my job and I looked after my customers. Some short people curse at the fact that they are short but it has never bothered me. In fact, I've found that being short has usually worked to my advantage. I found that people wanted to be served by me and I always made a lot of tips. Most of the money I earned went straight to my mother. Sometimes I would keep some of my tips and surprise my mum with fish and chips. She deserved a little bit of luxury every now and again.

In those years, children weren't allowed to leave school until the year after they turned 14. My 14th birthday fell in January 1951 and although I was theoretically obliged to spend that year at school the principal, the teacher and myself got together before the next school year began and agreed that we were just wasting each other's time and that it would be most 'advantageous' to all concerned if I left school. This worked for me. I'd only been at Fremantle Boys' for one and a half years but I was more than ready to take off. By that time, I had been out in the workforce part-time for years anyway. After that, I started working fulltime in the retail section of the Co-op, marketing and selling the fish.

The boats were bringing in large catches of herring in season which they caught in their nets and the Co-op was handling red snapper packed in ice from trucks sent down from the boats in Shark Bay and also the daily catches of whiting, dhufish and other species sold direct to distributors and retailed. There was always something new happening and plenty to do. They added a little coffee bar and a fish and chip shop. I'll always remember that the first Coca Cola was sold at the Co-op and Sunday trading at the Co-op was always a big day for sales.

The Last Prank Call

I had a heap of fun working at the Co-op. During the day, there was lots of work to do but in the evenings the other boys and I found ways to be a bit mischievous. We made a lot of prank calls. Sometimes we'd order a taxi to the wharf for an imaginary person and then we'd watch the taxi cruise down Cliff Street from our vantage point, on their way to the wharf. One of our pranks was to call a local hamburger joint that was open late and just before knock off time we would put in a false order for a dozen hamburgers. Of course no-one would turn up to pick up the order. We would rock up a bit later after putting a few measly coins together, probably enough for about 2 burgers and present the Macedonian shopkeeper with our measly offering. Usually, he would take pity on us and give all three or four of us a hamburger each in order to offload the burgers from the caller who had not turned up. We repeated this with other cafes on a number of occasions.

Most of our pranks were harmless but every now and again, we made some pretty obscene phone calls. Sometimes we'd choose a young woman who we would repeatedly make calls to, during which we would flirt outrageously over the phone. We were only having a bit of fun and usually the women thought it was funny too and played along. Occasionally though, they felt harassed and reported us to the cops. Once this happened a few times the cops put two-and-two together and realised the women were all reporting about the same prank caller. There was no way to trace calls back then, so instead the cops asked the women to play along and the next time it happened, agree to meet us at a neutral location. The cops' plan was to send a 'plant' (a female cop) to the location instead while they watched from afar and waited for us to appear, so they could pounce. While we were watching from our vantage point a blue Studebaker drove slowly down Marine Terrace alongside the park and then turned up Cliff Street towards the West End. Undercover cops. Then we saw the 'plant'.

We rode past the 'plant' and also past the cops lying in wait and we just kept on riding! It was hard to believe; a real live stakeout, just for us. Our little game with the cops repeated itself a couple more times. It was great entertainment for us. That is, until the time it landed us in major trouble.

For quite some time, a young guy that worked with me had been regularly calling one particular woman who actually happened to be married. Their conversations were gradually getting smuttier. The woman was right into it, she was really enjoying herself. Eventually though, her husband came home during one of the calls and caught her out. To get herself off the hook, she pretended the phone calls had only just started and called the police to report the caller for harassment. Just like all the other times the police planned a stakeout. The next time the guy called the woman agreed to meet him down near the public toilets at the Esplanade Park. He chose that spot because we could see it from the Co-op and as the time of the agreed rendezvous drew near, we were watching closely from our vantage point. A blue Studebaker police car drove slowly down Marine Terrace alongside the park and then turned up Cliff Street towards the West End. Undercover cops. Then we saw the 'plant'.

We hopped on our bikes and rode down to check things out from a bit closer. As we drew nearer, I 'accidentally' flicked off my bike chain with my foot, which gave us all a reason to stop. I fixed my bike chain, watching the cops and the plant out of the corners of our eyes. The cops had the whole place surrounded. It was pretty intense. We decided to leave before things got risky. I went home, as my shift at the Co-op was over for the day.

Unbeknown to me the young guy who'd been making the phone calls made out like he was going home too but he doubled back and continued to spy on the cops. He walked down to the corner of Cliff Street and pretended to be checking the time on the big clock that hung at the wharf entrance, even though it was nearly 300 metres away. He was standing there, trying to tell the time in the dark and he must have just looked suspicious, because all of a sudden, he was grabbed by undercover cops, the same ones we'd seen driving up Cliff Street in the blue Studebaker. The cops accused him of being the person responsible for the prank calls. He was so scared that he confessed.

Not much later, there was a knock on our door. I was already dressed for bed. I answered the door to the cops.

“Joe Rotondella?”

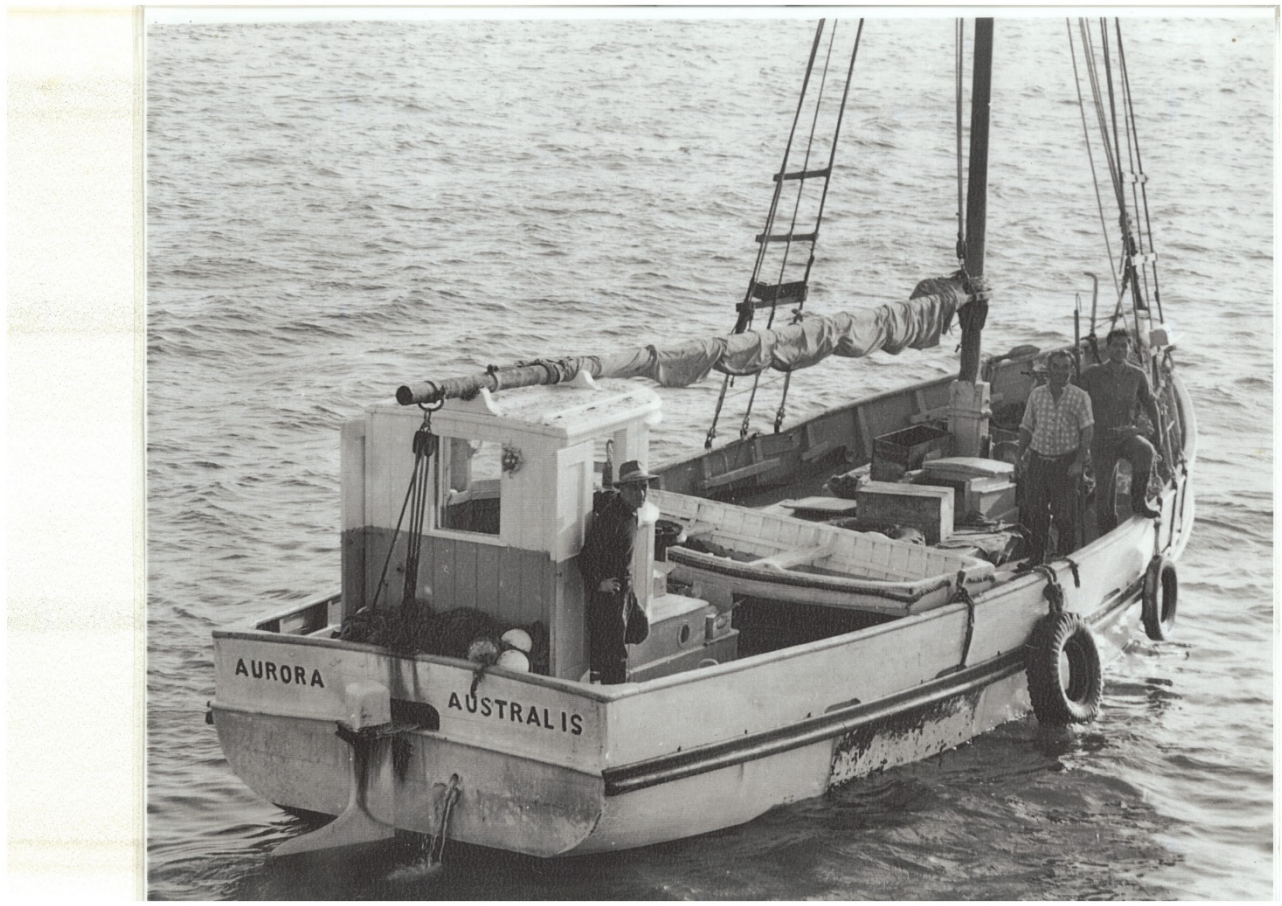
“Yes?”

“Get dressed. We’re taking you down to the station for questioning.”

As I was being led out of the house by the cops, my father delivered a “rabbit killer” blow to the back of my neck and I fell in the cop’s arms.

They took me down to the station. The guy who’d made the calls was there too. The cops started grilling us both. I told them I had nothing to do with it. Well, that was technically the truth, since it hadn’t been me that had made those particular calls. Somehow we talked our way out of trouble. The woman and her husband decided not to lay charges and neither did PMG, the phone company (now Telstra). We were very lucky to get out of that one.

I did have a history of childhood misdemeanors but this was the last straw for my old man. He decided to take me to sea with him, where he could keep a strict eye on me. I guess he hoped the hard work and sea air might straighten me out. Despite my protests, I was virtually shanghaied onto my father’s boat the “Aurora Australis”.



Shanghaied!

I really didn't want to become a fisherman. I'd been out to sea with my father a couple of times. Once on the "St George" and I remember feeling like I was going to *die* from the petrol fumes of the engine. On both occasions, I was seasick. "This ain't the life for me!" I had decided after those experiences. Besides, back then the crayfishermen were making very little money. Don't get me wrong, I have always loved the sea and I did love recreational fishing in a dinghy (small 12 ft. boat) for fish and squid for our families consumption and to sell for pocket money; I just didn't enjoy feeling sick and having to work in the dark. I was desperate to stay at the Co-op, because at the time, I believed that was my destiny and where I would find the success I was striving for. Nevertheless, I ended up working on the boat as a deckhand for the next five or so years in the rock lobster industry.

With the arrival of a small group of Portuguese immigrants, mostly fishermen from the island of Madeira, who had brought with them a ton of skill and knowledge about crayfishing. The industry had just started to take off. My relationship with Fremantle's Portuguese community dates all the way back to those days. When they first arrived, I sneaked onto their boat and nicked their rods. Later, I discovered they were barely making ends meet. I got a fit of the "guilts" and eventually returned their rods. We became friends. They didn't eat very well, often boiling fish and eating it just like that. I took some stores of flour and olive oil from home and gave it to them to keep on the boat, hoping that their dinners might become a little more palatable in the future. I have forged some great business relationships and friendships with the Portuguese fishing community and still have many friends from those early days.

I found working on the "Aurora" frustrating. At that time, there were few restrictions imposed on fishermen; successful crayfishing required some skill but the most important factors were long hours and hard work. So my line of thinking was that we should work harder and longer than the others to achieve a better result. My father was a very knowledgeable fisherman and I believe he had the potential to become one of the most successful crayfishermen *in Western Australia*. He had little drive and hence did the minimum required to get by. Whenever a breath of the famous "Fremantle Doctor" sea breeze came along, my father would wrap it up for the day and head to shore, even if we'd only managed to pull half of our 90 odd pots. We should have had larger catches, because we usually caught more crays *per pot* than some of the other boats. The others, including our friendly rivals aboard the "Neptune", stayed out for longer, pulled more pots and stuffed their cray tanks to almost beyond capacity, so we were consistently outdone, in terms of pure numbers. That bugged me *so much*.

It was then that I realised how competitive I was. I knew I eventually needed to get out on my own and start doing things *my way*. I set myself some goals: deciding that I would achieve great things in the rock lobster industry by building up a fleet of boats and doing things differently to everyone else. It would take a few years before I had the means, the know-how and the right timing to put my plans into action but I'd planted the seed. In the meantime, there were other lessons to be learned.

The Bantam Funeral

Our family had always kept chooks in the backyard, for eggs and for meat. As a young teen, I also bred both pigeons and bantams. Mostly for sport, though the bantams lay good eggs too. I was aware that there were bantams running wild out the back of the Watsonia small goods' factory in Spearwood, just a few miles south of Fremantle. I would ride out to Spearwood either on my bike or catch the bus and return home with the bantam chicks stuffed down my shirt.

I kept the bantams in the backyard in a cage that I had built myself out of tin and netting. I named the bantams after myself and my brothers and sisters; it was the rooster that was named Joey, of course! Boys from across the neighbourhood would gather in the backyard of our Collie Street home for regular bantam fights the outcome of which it is rumoured I sometimes rigged.

In the spring, bantam chicks were invariably found running all over the yard. One time, my little sister Mary was stepping over a chick but it moved just as she was putting her foot down, so she accidentally stepped on it and killed it. Mary was absolutely distraught. We gave the chick a funeral. I put the bantam in a box, placed it on a cart and led a procession of my brothers, sisters, neighbourhood friends and the chick to a burial site in the backyard. I buried the bantam while everyone cried; apparently I told them they had to. My poor little sister was bawling her eyes out.

It was sad that the bantam chick died, but the event was hardly life-changing. Our next experience of death, on the other hand, changed everything.



The bantams

When Everything Changed

In 1951, despite Doctor Parker's warnings, my mum fell pregnant again. Throughout the whole pregnancy, Mum had the odd feeling that neither she nor the child would survive the birth. Mum was still doing a lot of dressmaking. She made several articles of baby clothes in preparation for the new arrival but with each new pair of booties or little nightie, she would hold it up and say, "I just can't imagine the baby wearing this." She began to dish out instructions to us three eldest kids; things she wanted us to do in the event that her premonition was true. Lucy and Gracie already helped a lot with keeping the house tidy and taking care of Mary and Sammy, so most of Mum's instructions were about how to manage the family finances. We'd managed to pay off the "Aurora" by then and Mum was now saving to buy a house.

Mum was due to give birth in early January 1952. When she was almost full term, Doctor Parker suggested to my parents that the labour be induced, in an effort to keep tight control over the delivery and avoid any complications that might arise as a result of my mother's condition. My parents were very apprehensive but back in those days, people were not equipped with the knowledge or power to exercise much control over those kinds of decisions, so they agreed.

On the third day of the new year, Mum was due to be admitted to Hillcrest Hospital in North Fremantle, she and I had a minor argument. I don't remember what it was about but in a typical 15-year-old huff, I took off to see "Quo Vadis" at the pictures; a big budget movie about the Roman Empire starring Robert Taylor and Deborah Kerr. By the time I got home, Mum had left for the hospital by taxi. As she was leaving the house she had cried, "You're taking me to the slaughterhouse! I'm going to die!" Her last words before she left the house were, "I have a feeling I won't be coming back here." I felt terrible that we'd had a bit of a blue and even worse about the fact that I hadn't been at home to support my mum when she left for hospital, so when I discovered she'd forgotten to take her blue and red tartan dressing gown to the hospital I decided to ride my bike up to the hospital and take her the gown.

That night, we opened up our hearts to each other, more than ever before. "Joe, I'm going to die," Mum said. I tried my best to reassure her. "Mum, you're not going to die. You're going to be alright." She made me promise to be kind to my sisters and never bash them up again. I gave her my word and I stuck to it. I sat there with Mum for a long time.

The next day, January 4th, my father and I were down at the fishing boat harbour. I saw some policemen walking towards us. As soon as I saw them I knew my mum was dead. I didn't wait to be told by the police. I just jumped on my bike and rode hell for leather straight up to the hospital. I was the first one there. I rushed up the stairs and apparently smashed my way through a plate of glass in my rush to get inside. I just wanted to see my mum but the hospital staff grabbed me and hung onto me and wouldn't let me into her room. The rest of the family arrived; driven to the hospital by friends and neighbours. My father pushed his way into the room where my mother's body lay, yelling that Doctor Parker had killed his wife.

My memory of the rest of that day and the days that immediately followed, is one big blur. I felt like I was just drifting. My sister Lucy remembers a lot more than I do. According to Lucy the nurses took my father into one room and us kids into another, where they explained what had happened. Early that morning they had given my mother the injection to bring on the labour. Half a minute later, she had a reaction to the injection and her heart swelled to three times its normal size. She began to say a novena to St Anne the protector of pregnant women. She died praying. Doctor Parker and the nurses tried to revive her for a full half hour but their efforts were unsuccessful. The baby, a girl had died too.

Saving the 'Nico'

I was still working on the "Australis" after my mother had passed away when an amazing incident happened whilst I was serving my "sentence of captivity" and future career on my father's boat. It was in the September of 1953 when I was 16 and we were anchored just off a place that we called Little Island, after pulling our pots. Little Island is located just off Whitfords Beach, which is situated just a little north of Fremantle. It was a safe anchorage but there were a lot of reefs around the place but many of the fishermen, who knew it, used it as an overnight mooring to get an early start the next day.

When we woke to get started the next morning, about 4.30am, we were surprised to see that there was a large cargo ship in a place that it ought not to be. It had landed in shallow water and had somehow managed to jump a whole pile of reefs to get inside there, close to the beach.

Along the West Australian coastline there is geological formation that is described as the 5 fathom bank and then there's a drop off which leads to the deeper waters. There were numerous clumps of reef, scattered in that part of the coastline and in that particular spot.

We immediately made our way over to the floundering cargo vessel to see if we could be of any assistance, even though communication with the Greek and other nationalities crew was proving to be a little difficult in getting our message of help across.

They were atop a reef that was acting as a bit of a buffer sponge with its abundant weed growth and when the tide rose they had managed to slide off in to the water, which was barely sufficient to enable them to float. There had apparently been minor damage to the hull and propeller but they would still need to be navigated out of there and they would need to be shown the passage by someone who knew the area well; someone who could lead them back in to the deeper waters.

There were a number of little reefs scattered, maybe 30 or 40 or even more and many larger reefs that would need to be navigated around. The situation was serious and the ship was in urgent need of being guided through the maze of reefs, as soon as possible, prior to the sea breeze coming in (Fremantle Doctor).

As there was no great use of radios in those days on fishing vessels and we did our best to communicate with the captain and his crew, with a lot of hand gestures and yelling that they should follow us out through the only passage that would enable them to reach the deeper water, away from the reefs. My father was fairly conversant with the area and with the aid of our echo sounders and local knowledge, we commenced to lead the "Nico" out along a passage that would take the "Aurora Australis" and the "Nico" even closer to the shore a path that the "Nico" wouldn't normally have chosen. In fact that was the only way of leading a vessel of this size back in to the deeper waters. We both moved very slowly, as we made our way forward through the treacherous reefs.

The "Nico" kept a fair distance behind us so that they could line up where they would have to turn, because their craft was substantially bigger than ours. When my father turned to go out, he had to go a short way and do another couple of tacks, zigzagging our way out of there, finding the known depths that were between 5 and 10 fathoms to accommodate the "Nico's" draft. The vessel didn't draw 30 feet, even though it was laden with some cargo and was fitted out with derricks and old style cargo winches.

Slowly we made our way out to sea and led them quite a fair distance out in to the deeper water until they were then able to sort themselves out with their own navigational equipment. Once they were in safe waters and out of harms way and danger, they were able to work out their own location and head for Fremantle.

We then went about our normal business and decided to come ashore having lost a considerable amount of time. It would have been futile to go out and pull our pots as we already had the previous days catch on board, in the well. So we made our way back to Fremantle and unloaded our catch.

Just as a matter of courtesy, my father and the crew members of the “Aurora Australis” went to Fremantle harbour to visit the “Nico”, which had made its way safely back to port. This would only be considered a natural thing for us to do, considering the circumstances and the role the “Aurora Australis” had played in saving the cargo ship from potentially being shipwrecked. We were invited on board and all that my father wanted to do was have a friendly chat over a cup of tea or a beer. He wasn't after anything; not even the lost days fishing. But insurers and boat owners are instructed to never admit liability, so they were very guarded in what they were both doing and saying during our visit. They were polite and it seemed that we were only there for a short while before we were ushered off.

We were pretty well ignored and at no time were thanks forthcoming. It wasn't a very amicable meeting, as you would have believed that they would have been appreciative of the part we had played in saving the ship from potential wreck. There is no doubt in my mind that it would have been shipwrecked. It is doubtful that they would have been able to get out of the predicament that they had got themselves in to, as they would possibly have tried to head straight out to deeper water, further compromising the vessel among the scattered reefs. Not knowing the area well they would have headed in to the worst clump of reefs and would have been stuck fast. In my opinion they got out of the problem due our assistance and guiding them through a safe passage.

My father was very annoyed by the way he had been treated by the captain and the crew of the “Nico”, as he lived by the unwritten law of seafarers going to the aid of other vessels in distress. The story had gotten in to the newspapers (refer attached) and of the near miss that had occurred off the WA coastline. Some prominent lawyers approached my father, advising him that they would like to take on the case for salvage rights on a no cost basis and a percentage of any cash settlement. If we had actually placed a rope on the “Nico” we would have had a claim against the vessel and a great portion of the cargo and the ship itself. The lawyers advised my father that under international law we had a claim to at least 50% of the value of the cargo, or even more.

My father was a pretty placid type of guy and it took a bit of convincing for him to agree. They finally got him to accept for them to take on the case on a ‘no cure no pay’ basis. There would be no costs involved to my father at all. They would be picking up the costs of transporting us to the Supreme Court in Australia and all legal costs. I think history was made at that particular time, because although the vessel was not going to move out of port, as they were undertaking underwater repairs and the ship had to be arrested to stop it from eventually leaving until the case was heard. In those days the modus operandi would have been to nail a warrant to the mast. Hence, the boat was seized and placed under arrest.

There was quite a lot of publicity about this incident at the time. When the time arrived for us to go to court, the opposing legal team went through the witness list, they realised that I was the youngest and was still only 16 and believed that I might be the best to target and the easiest to crack. So they had me on the stand for a long time, maybe for about 3 hours and of course, I found it all very simple for me. It wasn't rocket science! Being young, you notice a lot of things about an event and I was very clear on what had happened and what I had witnessed. I just had explain what had happened and going over it again and again.

Even though the lawyers at the time, and still do, try to divert you away from the actual occurrence and try to trap you in to agreeing with a statement. “Do you think the colour was blue”? When in fact, it may have been green or whatever and they keep throwing these questions at you. As I have noted since becoming older, many witnesses I have seen in court, over the years tend to agree with the lawyers questions by replying “Well it may have been, you know” so that they are seen to be a co-operative witness, when in fact they are destroying their own credibility. When I was asked the question, whatever it was, I gave the answer as I had witnessed it. I would say “No it wasn't that way, this is the way it was”. So I learnt at a very early age that if they ask a question, you answer the question.

I don't believe I slipped up but if I had done so, I would have openly admitted that I had made a mistake. I thought I had done well for my young age. It held no fear for me to be in a court room. The judges and lawyers in their wigs, a whole team of them and the surroundings never phased me at all. It was my first experience in a courtroom and when I got up there and frankly when I look back on it, I'd say that it created a bit of interest in me in the manner in which people were questioned as witnesses and I regarded the whole experience as a great learning curve for my later years.

At the end of the day there was an international jurisdiction query regarding the whole incident. The judge found in our favour but only on the basis of what he was able to award without any question. He found that we had saved the ship and that we were liable for compensation. Potentially this case had to be decided by the actual amount of the claim and would have to be decided by another court. So in his decision, he left it open for an appeal to go to a higher court. The judge gave an opinion that clearly awarded against the "Nico" and that by awarding a sum, it could have been challenged to increase the monetary sum awarded. The lawyers advised that the challenge would more than likely be successful and left us with the opportunity of proceeding with it.

Now by the end of all this, my father was not very enthused about what had happened. It had been a rather scary and daunting experience for my father and many of the crew. For me it had been a great experience. To me it was just other people, who wore wigs, asking other people questions. All you had to do was answer! So my father really didn't want to continue and steadfastly declined to proceed. The lawyers pleaded with him to take it further, because they believed the reward would be substantial. They believed that the door had deliberately been left open by the judge to enable us to claim up to 50% of the value of the cargo, which would have been quite considerable. I don't remember the figure estimated at the time but it was a staggering amount back in the 1950's.

My father had made a decision that the whole thing had never been about money or reward. To him it was the unwritten law of the sea. When a fellow seaman is in trouble, if he is a friend or an enemy, you went to their assistance and that is exactly what we did. We didn't go to their assistance for a monetary payout. We went to their assistance because that's the way it was and still is, especially in the fishing industry. You can have all the rivalry in the world but even if your rival is in trouble, you drop what you are doing and go to help. That was the doctrine of my father's philosophy and he didn't want to take the case against "Nico" any further.

I can't remember the payout. I think it was about 4,000 pounds or 5,000 pounds; it may have been more. All of the crew got about 1,000 pounds each and the lawyers took their cut. The lawyers were disappointed that my father had decided not to proceed. His main intention was to uphold the protocol of the law of the sea. As he and the crew had seen it, if it had been another fishing boat in a similar predicament and we had to tow it away from danger, we'd just take a rope and tow it out to sea and it would just sail off with a wave and thank you. Just a thank you and maybe a coffee or, if inclined, a couple of beers afterwards is all that is needed. It didn't matter that you'd lost a day of fishing, in respect of coming to the aid of a fellow seafarer. That was the way it was at the time and I would dare to say that the majority of the fishing fraternity are still of the same opinion.

One interesting point is this. When the captain and the crew were requested to swear on the bible in court, they refused on religious grounds. It was a Greek owned ship which had been registered in Liberia, which is a flag of convenience and the crew could have been from anywhere in the world. Similar to ships that are registered in Panama where you pay a lot less money for registration. We did save the "Nico". We had to zigzag our way through a hazardous and pretty well unknown course. I must admit that the "Nico" went very well in the way that they followed the "Aurora Australis" and navigated their way out. At various times they had to stop and reverse and do a tight turn because pathway out it was too narrow and restricted and they had to have a number of goes before they could proceed further. We took them out to sea and towards Fremantle. It was the way my father was snubbed that he didn't appreciate. The lawyers came on to the scene and it was only that they convinced him to proceed without any cost to him that the case went any further.

The court action only lasted a few days and there was no need for either the captain or the crew of the "Nico" to lie as there would have been numerous witnesses, because in those days Whitfords Beach was a haven for squatters, who would have witnessed the whole drama. It was a pretty simple open and shut case.

I found the whole procedure fairly simple and it had all been quite an adventure for my young age. I had faced my first encounter with the law in court and frankly I enjoyed it. My attitude towards going to court against anybody for anything is before you do, is to try and settle it outside. If anybody ever got in to the situation that took me in to the courtroom then that would be their decision, not mine. I learned a lot from the whole "Nico" experience and have learnt that a little kindness and goodwill engendered by the whole unwritten law of the sea could have saved a lot of people a whole lot of trouble.



SHIP FREES HERSELF ON REEF NEAR FREMANTLE

The Liberian-registered freighter *Nico*, which went aground on a reef 15 miles north of Fremantle early yesterday morning, had a remarkable escape in managing to free herself two hours later.

She was a light ship, and the tide assisted her in her efforts to get clear.

The 7,025-ton vessel proceeded to Fremantle under her own steam and berthed at North Wharf yesterday afternoon.

Marine surveyors immediately boarded her and made a preliminary inspection to find out the extent of the damage.

Water was found in the port hold of No. 1 hold, and the double-bottom tanks under Nos. 1 and 2 holds and under the engine-room were making water.

Although the ship's pumps were working continuously, they were unable to cope with the intake.

However, this does not mean that the *Nico* is likely to make water in her holds, as the double-bottom tanks are used to carry either oil or water.

Water, of course, seeps through, should any stress have occurred anywhere.

It is believed that two of the *Nico's* propeller blades are badly bent.

This morning, Mr. Hilary Malone, a Fremantle diver, will go down and inspect the under-water damage.

A thorough inspection of the ship is being made by Mr. W. G. Davies, Lloyd's surveyor at the port.

4 a.m. Crash
Bound from Gladstone, South Australia, to Fremantle to load bulk wheat for the United Kingdom, the *Nico* went aground on a reef off Little Island, Whitford's Beach, at four o'clock yesterday morning.

There was a scattered light drizzle along the coast at the time, with light to moderate south-west to south winds and slight seas.

Little Island is 8 ft. above sea level, with a line of reefs extending about 11 to two miles from the mainland between this island and Trigg Island to the southward.

The vessel was steaming at ten knots and is believed to have struck the reef twice.

A member of the crew said yesterday that the *Nico* started violently when she went aground.

The engines were put full astern repeatedly to try to ease the ship off, and, with the help of the tide, these efforts were successful.

When news of the mishap was received at Fremantle, in a brief message to the ship's agent, preparations were immediately made to go to her assistance.

It was then learnt that she had cleared the reef and was steaming for Gage Roads.

Greek Seaman
The *Nico*, which has a Greek crew, is under the command of Capt. E. Koutsoukos.

Yesterday he received a mishap report to his owners.

The *Nico*, which is managed by a British firm, is one of the few ships under Liberian registry which have entered Fremantle.

Liberia is the "Black Republic" on the west coast of Africa.

Built in Newcastle in 1945, the *Nico* was first named the *Empire Merley*, and then successively, the *Lower Grange* and the *London Trader*.

As the freighter was nursed up the harbour by two tugs yesterday afternoon, a tattered ensign of the Liberian republic flew from her stern.

Ministers Turned Down Offer For Wheat Poll

CANBERRA, Wed.—State Ministers for Agriculture had unanimously vetoed a Federal Government offer to hold a poll of growers on wheat stabilisation in July, the Minister for Commerce and Agriculture (Mr. McEwen) said tonight.

The State Ministers had declared that it was "none of the Federal Government's business," said Mr. McEwen.

He was answering a question in the House of Representatives by Mr. Hamilton (C.P., W.A.), who pointed out that the Victorian Premier (Mr. Cain) had called for a poll of growers on stabilisation.

Mr. Hamilton asked whose function it was to conduct such a poll.

Mr. McEwen said that if Mr. Cain wanted a poll there was nothing to keep him from holding one.

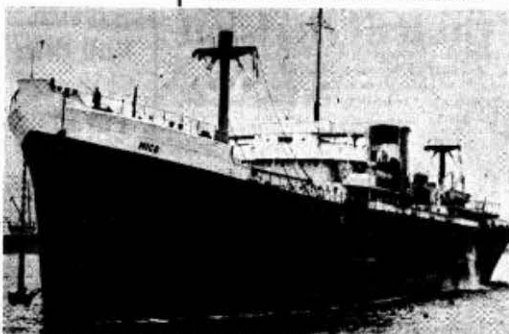
It was the declared policy of his Government.

"It is just trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the wheat-growers," he said.

Mr. McEwen told Mr. Leslie (C.P., W.A.) that if no new plan were agreed to, the £20,000,000 fund used in the stabilisation plan would be returned to growers.

"However they would not necessarily get the money 'on condition,' he said.

NICO REACHES PORT AFTER EARLY MORNING MISHAP



The *Nico* (top), which ran aground off Whitford's Beach early yesterday, is shown here before berthing at Fremantle in the afternoon. Below left, the ship's second officer, Mr. Lewis Van Dyke, who was on watch when the ship went aground. Below right, Mr. W. G. Davies, Lloyd's surveyor, inspects the hull of the ship for damage.

Council Will See Forests Papers

The Legislative Council yesterday voted that all files and papers relating to the calling of applications for the position of Conservator of Forests be laid on the table of the House for 14 days.

On a division, the affirmative vote was 14 to 8.

The motion for the tabling of the papers was moved on Tuesday by Mr. Murray (L.C.).

Resuming the debate yesterday, the Chief Secretary (Mr. Fraser) said that applications for the position of Conservator of Forests closed on September 3 and were now being considered by the Public Service Commission.

It would be highly improper if the papers were laid on the table at present.

Their tabling would set a dangerous precedent.

The matter, about which there seemed to be a lot of anxiety, had been raised in the Legislative Assembly.

There the Minister for Housing (Mr. Graham) had said that he was not prepared to table the papers, but he had offered any member who wished to see them the opportunity of doing so in his office.

Not one member had availed himself of the opportunity; this was still true.

There was nothing to be done.

"No Accusation"
Mr. Fraser said there was nothing to say that the present conservator (Dr. T. N. Stootie) would not be reappointed.

Mr. Murray was quite at liberty to see the file.

Some members seemed to be keen on getting publicity out of the matter, but about protecting the conservator.

Mr. Graham had not made one accusation against the conservator.

After having been peppered with questions in the Legislative Assembly, he had given some information about the conservator taken from the statements of his predecessor (Mr. Wild) that were on file.

Mr. Murray said that Mr. Fraser had said that if his motion were successful, the applications for the position of conservator would be tabled.

That was not so.

Egypt Alleges A Traitorous Plot

CAIRO, Wed.—Strict security measures were imposed in Cairo today after an announcement by the Prime Minister (General Naguib) that traitors to his regime would be "treated rough."

Soldiers guarded key buildings and armoured cars were posted near the British and American embassies.

The Government last night proclaimed a state of emergency throughout Cairo.

The explanation given was that the Government had uncovered a plot by a foreign Power to overthrow the Naguib regime.

The foreign Power, which was accused of plotting with Egyptian traitors, was not named.

The allegation of a subversive plot was made by the Minister for National Guidance, Mr. Saleh Salem, at a "liberation rally" of 60,000 Egyptians in Republican Square, Cairo.

He said a special court composed of officers of the Naguib junta would be formed to bring to immediate trial those accused of engaging in activities against the national interest.

Mr. Salem said the Government had a document showing a close alliance between "the foreign imperialist enemy and traitorous, reactionary elements in Egypt."

Lumpers Seek Life Pension Of £8 A Week

CANBERRA, Wed.—Waterside workers, who a few days ago were defying the Government at Bowen when troops were brought in, met the Minister for Labour (Mr. Holt) today.

Led by the general secretary of the Waterside Workers' Federation (Mr. J. Henley) they asked for a pension of £8 a week for life on retirement.

Two bus-loads of waterside workers arrived in Canberra, but only five joined Mr. Mealy in the deputation to Mr. Holt.

Other watersiders spent the time interviewing their local members.

Mr. Holt had refused to receive any deputation which tried to make a demonstration, but today's gathering in the Minister's office gave no trouble.

Mr. Holt promised to consider the proposal when the Secretary of the Department of Labour (Mr. Bland) returned from about.

Two Banks Set Terms For Hospital Loan

Late last year the Commonwealth Bank declined to make a loan of £100,000 to the Hospital Board of W.A. to assist the quick completion of the hospital building programme, the Chief Secretary (Mr. Fraser) told Mr. Hoare (L.C.) in the Legislative Council yesterday.

Eight months ago, Mr. Fraser said, the Bank of New South Wales agreed to make £300,000 to be repaid within four years—available for the completion of the Royal Perth Hospital.

The proposal declined by the Commonwealth Bank was for repayment over a period of ten years.

However, the Commonwealth Bank readily agreed to supply funds on the terms asked by the Bank of New South Wales.

Radio Site Is Sought For Albany Area

CANBERRA, Wed.—Inquiries about a suitable site for a national broadcasting station at Albany were being made by officers of the Broadcasting Control Board, the Postmaster-General (Mr. Anthony) said in the House of Representatives today.

He said that it was essential to have a site which would give a good service to country districts as well as Albany.

Mr. Anthony was replying to Mr. Freeth (Lib., W.A.).

Nulsen Refuses To Interfere In Raffles Deal

Declining to interfere in any proposed transfer of licence for the Raffles Hotel, Canning Bridge, the Minister for Justice (Mr. Nulsen) yesterday said that no doubt the Liquor Court would investigate the matter.

Mr. Nulsen was answering Mr. Oldfield (L.C., Maylands) in the Legislative Assembly.

He said that he had no jurisdiction on the transfer of liquor licences.

A person by the name of Abe Saffron was entirely unknown to him.

Mr. Oldfield had asked whether a person named Abe Saffron, who had visited the State recently in negotiations for the hotel, was connected with the management of the company which proposed to take over the hotel.

Mr. Nulsen told Mr. Sherman (Lib., Fremantle) that he did not know whether Abe Saffron was connected with the management of the company which proposed to take over the hotel.

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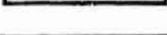
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STYLED IN LOS ANGELES

In the Deep End 1952 - 1960

What Happened Next

The Horseshoe Nail

Losing the Plot

New Kids on the Block

Fremantle Fonz

Chook

The Travelling Salesman

Malcolm Street

Not Keeping My Mouth Shut

Sputnik

Gambling Dens

Lancelin's 'Pot Burglar'

There, but for the Grace of God, go I

What Happened Next

Mum's funeral was held a few days later. Again, I remember very little about it. Lucy tells me, that unlike the rest of the family, who were still in shock and somewhat reserved about expressing their devastation, I was very vocal at the funeral and bared my soul for all and everyone to see.

Apparently I collapsed. After the funeral, a wake was held at our house, organised by Boxer Nick and his brother Frank, my father's cousins.

My father blamed Doctor Dorothea Parker for my mother's death and planned to sue her and the hospital for negligence. With a lawsuit on her hands, an upset and fearful Dorothea took off to the Eastern States for a while. My father was true to his word and a coronial inquest was held two months later but my mother's death was deemed accidental and the hospital staff were cleared of any negligence. My mother's death certificate states that she died of respiratory failure caused by toxemias of pregnancy, high blood pressure, kidney failure and the surgical induction for pregnancy.

My thoughts were stained with blood. With revenge on my mind, I vowed that I would one day kill Doctor Parker. This was the first time and last time in my entire life that I have ever harboured any thought of revenge against anyone. Thankfully for both me and Doctor Parker, those feelings were fleeting and subsided once I'd had the time to think rationally about what had happened to my mother. Here were the rational facts, at least, as I saw them: Mum was 45 years of age.

Compounded by her health issues, those were fairly fragile conditions under which to fall pregnant. Doctor Parker had saved her life once before and warned her not to fall pregnant again. Mum knew that. My father knew it too. If she hadn't been pregnant, she would not have died. It's as simple as that. One unheeded piece of advice triggered a chain of events that ultimately led to tragedy. Just like the story of the horseshoe nail.

The Horseshoe Nail

When I was at school, I learnt an old folk story that has stuck with me through my whole life.

There once was a fortress, surrounded by a moat, high on an English hill. One road up was the same road down. Guards stood lookout at the bottom of the hill. They saw the enemy approach from afar. A horseback messenger was sent up the hill to deliver a message to the King and the townsfolk. The message was this: "Draw up the bridge and find your sword! The time has come to fight a battle!" Halfway up, the horse stumbled, for one of his horseshoes held a nail that was bent. The horse fell; the rider too; the message was undelivered. With the gates open wide, the enemy descended upon the fortress and the kingdom was defeated. "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" is what the King did cry.

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost;
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost;
For want of a horse, the rider was lost;
For want of a rider, the battle was lost;
For want of a battle a kingdom was lost;
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

I still quote this proverb today, when I need to regain a little perspective of a situation. From little things, big things grow. The small things in life can also create the biggest problems!

That folk story helped me back then and still helps me today to deal with many situations when I feel the need to regain a little perspective. When you can't see the forest for the trees.

I learnt something at school, and I have used this all my life. You've got to go back to the source. You've got to really analyse things properly. You've got to look at all sides. Don't listen when other people say, Oh well he did this and he did that, because a lot of it is either misinterpretation or hearsay. You've got to thoroughly investigate things.

So when people are going down the wrong track. You say "Come back here". Let's get back to the horseshoe nail, and let's start from there. Don't keep lumbering away at what you're doing. If you remember it, you'll remember it always. I would often quote the poem during my business life because I think it gets the message through. You just don't debate where you're at or anything. For want of a nail, the shoe was lost.

When my mother passed away it was the most painful thing to ever happen to me in my life. It made me understand the pain that others go through. It made me think deeply about people. It made me have an understanding of people's pain. Another consequence of that, my father had never laid a hand on us and yet I believe that he lost it for a couple of years. So then unfortunately you begin to understand that people under stress, do change.

When your mum passes away you find things happen in your life which are life-changing in the manner in which you operate. It's amazing how, at the age of 15, within a year, how much you have grown up, after losing your mum. You have this sense of pain that you have gone through. You have this understanding of what it means to other people. You have the understanding of how precious life and health is. There are so many things that happen that you really become mature in a lot of ways. I was the last one to talk to my mum. Before she passed away our father had never ever laid a hand on us. Unfortunately that changed.

Losing the Plot

Mum was only 45 years old when she died and I was almost 15. Losing my mother was the single most defining moment of my life. The pain and agony of the loss lingered for the next 40 years as I drifted through my grief and it's only been recently that I've had the emotional strength to talk about her without breaking down.

My mother's death has had a complex effect on our family. Without a matriarch to hold us together, no matter what life threw at us, we somehow held together, sometimes we drew apart, in a myriad of convolutions. Initially, it brought my sisters, Sammy and I closer together.

After my mother died, my dad really lost the plot for a while. It took him a long time to let go and to come to grips with the fact that she was gone. I think, as much as he tried to blame Doctor Parker for her death, he knew she should have not been pregnant again in the first place. Though he never admitted to it, I really do believe that my father bore an immense amount of guilt and sadly, it was his children that paid the price for his own regrets.

He told us repeatedly that we had made life difficult for our mum with our misbehavior, even up to her last days on earth and whilst he never laid a hand on the youngest two, Gracie, Lucy and I bore the brunt of his frustrations. Whenever my father would step towards the girls menacingly to punish them, I would move between them and cop the beating instead. I never once hit him back, because of our Italian upbringing and I felt sorry for him. I knew he was distraught over losing my mother and he was just looking for a way to vent his pain. We all were. Problem is, back then there were few means available for us to work through our grief. Visiting a counselor was not a consideration; it simply wasn't the 'done thing' to work through one's grief by wallowing in self-pity or talking about your feelings; especially men! The attitude was, just get back up and get on with it.

By and large, that's what we all tried to do. We really had no choice. My father and I had a family to provide for and my sisters had the house and the little ones to care for. I had made up my mind to leave home but I wouldn't go until Lucy and Gracie were married and out of the house themselves. Once my father remarried he got somewhat back on the straight and narrow but I still felt that it was my job to be around to protect Lucy and Gracie, just in case.

My sisters and I were very protective of Mary and Sammy, who were only six and five when our mother died. They were still babies really. I'm still protective of Mary. When we attend funerals; it takes us right back to our mother's burial and we become very emotional. Somehow we always seek each other out when we are at the cemetery and walk away from the burial site together. It's a comfort to both of us.

For convenience and in order to get some extra sleep I started to sleep on the boat so I didn't have to get up early and then have to walk down to the Fishing Boat Harbour. It wasn't long after this that we moved into the new house at 18 Essex Street.

New Kids on the Block

Our Zia (Aunty) Mietta, married to our father's brother, Nicola, was always the life of the party, and she was a kind and beautiful soul. It was to Mietta that my father turned for help in his search for a new wife to take care of his five children. Mietta had soon arranged for him to correspond with an old friend of hers back in Italy. Rosa Tedesco who lived in Barletta, a town very close to Molfetta. Rosa was 28 at the time and 20 years my father's junior. From the other side of the world, she agreed to take on a house full of stepchildren without even meeting him first. They married by proxy in December 1952, less than a year after my mother died.

Early the next year we all moved to 18 Essex Street, just one street over from Collie Street. My father had bought the home with the savings my mother had diligently stashed away just for that purpose. Rosa arrived that winter, much to the indignation of Lucy, Gracie and I, who of course were completely incensed by the idea that someone could ever replace our mother, least of all someone that was barely ten years older than we were. We sure gave Rosa a hard time, the poor thing. We continually played pranks on her, and though she tried her best to ignore these pranks and befriend us, in return for her efforts she received nothing but cheek and belligerence.



Rosa, Mary, Dad & Sammy



Gracie with baby Lucrezia, Mary, Rosa & Sammy

It took us a long time but eventually we each settled into our own relationship with Rosa that felt somewhat comfortable. Rosa became close to Sammy, though, none of the rest of us shared a relationship with Rosa that could be described as resembling that of a mother and child; indeed, we struggled to even develop a stepmother-stepchild relationship. Instead, we became friends, and in time, Rosa became part of the furniture. Though we sometimes still played pranks on her, they were now mostly in good humour and Rosa took them in the same spirit.

Before long, Rosa and my father started having children of their own. Lucrezia was the first to come along, in 1954, followed soon after by Raffaele ('Ralph') in 1956. Our youngest half-sister, named after my mother, Marta, arrived a little later, in 1960. Mary and Sammy grew up with our half-siblings and naturally developed a close relationship with them. It was natural that Rosa loved her own children in a completely different way to how she loved her stepchildren. It was a few years before I was able to develop much affection for my three youngest siblings. It's not that I was jealous or didn't care about them; it's just that I wasn't around the house very much, so opportunities to make a connection were somewhat limited.

When I was much older, I felt quite guilty about how I had treated Rosa earlier on. Being our stepmother must have been a really difficult task for her and I'm sure that must have put a certain amount of strain on my father's relationship with her too. As the years passed, I'd eventually grown rather fond of Rosa and the kids. I also realised I had a lot to thank Rosa for. Not only did she stoically put up with my atrocious behaviour but she was a good and a loving wife for my father. By the time he died, they'd shared 35 years together; that's almost double the 18 years my father was married to my mother. After my father passed, I became quite protective of both Rosa as well as my little sister Marta, who lived with her and I did as much as I could to make sure they were both taken care of in the way my father would have wished.

Fremantle Fonz

At 19 I decided that I would officially leave home but not until Lucy and Gracie were married and out of the house themselves. Once my father remarried he somewhat got back on the straight and narrow but I still felt that it was my job to protect Lucy and Gracie, just in case.

I'd only just started to settle down from my cheeky youngster days when my mother died. Though her death forced me into doing some fast growing up in some areas, I found other ways to regress into my former rebel self. Although I kept my promise never to bash into my sisters again, all other bets were off. This resurgence of delinquency lasted through to the end of my late teens. Mum was the one who had the biggest influence over my behaviour and with her gone and my father away most of the time the responsibility of reining me in, a big ask, fell mostly to my sisters.

At the time, I was best buddies with Gennaro "Jerry" Fedele who had recently migrated from a small Italian village near Naples. His younger brother Giovanni ("Johnny") later followed. The Fedele brothers were part of the post war wave of single young Italian men who migrated to Fremantle in the 1950s under government labour agreements. This group of migrants were hard-working but at the same time, they liked to live for the moment, just as they had back in Italy. They had no reason to think about being sensible and saving money because they probably believed they would never be able to afford to buy a house anyway. They brought their free and easy larrikin attitude to Fremantle and livened up the place. I connected with these guys because we had a lot in common. I was a bit of a hard-working larrikin myself.

Jerry and I were locally famous, both for being troublemakers and for being wildly popular with the girls. Jerry had a motorbike and the girls went gaga for both him and Johnny. The three of us were treated a bit like "The Fonz" in Happy Days. The Mocerino brothers (Sam and Ralph) and my cousin, also named Joe Rotondella, were also part of our gang. We spent much of our spare time gallivanting around Fremantle having a good time and creating a good deal of havoc along the way. Trouble seemed to follow us around.

Our main hang out was "Orlando's" on Market Street, a couple of doors down from the Newcastle Hotel (now Newport Hotel). We also spent a lot of our time playing pool at the billiard room we knew as 'Four Corners'; so-named because it inhabited one corner of the four way intersection at High Street and Market Street. On Saturday nights there was usually a dance to go to, either at the footy club or otherwise at Wrightsons, the dance studio in "Victoria Hall" on High Street where we took dance lessons during the week. Of course, we only did that as a way to hook up with girls at these dances. Sometimes we'd set off crackers on the dance floor and once we almost blew a door out of the wall.

On Sundays, there was little else to do around Fremantle, so my cousin Joe and I would rock up outside the Fremantle Town Hall to watch the Salvation Army band play and we'd march behind them as they made their way back to conduct their weekly services. We'd sit up the back and listen to their service. We would talk to one another in our Italian dialect and really get some humour out of the situation. We were in fits of laughter at the things that went on. "Oh, I've seen the Lord!" and "I've seen the light!" and all that bulldust. I mean, we were totally ridiculing them but because we spoke to each other in our own lingo the parishioners had no idea. At the end of the service, they would come over and politely thank us for coming. That was our Sunday entertainment. Although, in attending the Salvation Army services each week, albeit for our own entertainment, I became aware of the good Christian work, dedication to the needy and the sincerity of these people. It was probably from this early experience that I developed the desire to help the poor if ever I became able to do so.

At this stage I had a handful of misdemeanors under my belt and I was sent to court for swearing in the street and for being drunk and disorderly. When I had to appear in court, out of the blue, one of the local Salvation Army officers turned up at the courtroom and took it upon himself to stand up and say some kind words about me in my defense, telling the magistrate that I was such a good boy because I went to their services regularly. Because of the excellent and unexpected character reference, I only copped a minor fine. The magistrate let me go but the offence showed on my record, as I was underage. I guess I should have “seen the light” after that!

Another time, I got done for urinating in the street, and another time Jerry and I were once fingerprinted and thrown into the lock up overnight for trying to pick a fight with some guy at “Orlando’s”. The cops certainly didn’t like us very much. With all that was going on, I never lost total sight of my future ambitions and career plans but in those days, like most teenagers, all I really wanted to do was have a bloody good time.

Chook

‘Ask and ye shall receive. Knock and the door shall open’

In 1956, my sister Lucy married Michele “Mike” Signorile, an immigrant from the Italian coastal town of Brindisi. Mike had come out on the ship with Jerry, who by this time was dating my sister Gracie. Both Lucy and Gracie married around the middle of that year and moved from our family home on Essex Street into a big house on Malcolm Street, up the hill towards East Fremantle. Johnny and Ralph, who were both single, lived with them too.



Joe with sister Lucy on her wedding day, 1956

One afternoon towards the end of that year, I was at Esplanade Park mucking about and playing soccer with some friends when someone tackled me and I injured my knee. I stumbled home to ask Dad if I could borrow some money to catch a taxi to an Italian physiotherapist that I knew was good. He refused to give me any money so I decided to try to walk to Malcolm Street, with the thought that one of my sisters might lend me some money.

I started walking. I was in absolute agony and was dragging my leg, barely able to walk. I got to the corner of Queen Street and Adelaide Street, in the centre of town and hobbled across the road, towards the bus stop in front of the old tobacconist’s (where the “Target” store is now). At the bus stop stood Chook, a tall, blonde, Aussie larrikin who I knew vaguely from around the place. Chook saw me struggling.

“What’s the problem, Joe?” he asked.

I told him my knee had been injured and I was heading to my sisters’ to ask for some money so that I could get myself into a taxi to see the physiotherapist. Chook listened. Then he pulled some money out of his pocket and counted it.

“Right,” he said. “I’ve got just enough money to get you to Malcolm Street and then get myself home.”

“Don’t be stupid Chook. Thanks very much, but I’ll be right.”

But he wouldn’t take no for an answer, shoving me into the next taxi that came along. Because the driveway at my sisters’ place was steep, Chook made sure the taxi driver stopped right up the top so that I didn’t have far to walk.

I stumbled inside my sisters’ house and asked my brother-in-law for a lift to the physiotherapist and a loan of “ten bob” for the fee. The physio put my knee right and strapped it up. I got Jerry to drop me off at home and I went straight to bed without seeing or speaking to anyone.

I’ve never forgotten that day. Chook and I weren’t friends; he was just a random acquaintance from around town that I sort of knew and would sometimes say hello to. We’d never hung out together and there was no real relationship between us. Chook certainly was not rich but at a time when I was really in need, he was willing to take everything he had in his hand to help me out. He only had about five shillings on him and he blew the whole lot of that to put me in to a taxi. If he had no money, I reckon he probably would have carried me to Malcolm Street! What a decent, selfless human being.

Chook's selfless deed changed me in a profound way. The gratitude I felt towards him was so immense that I decided that one day, as soon as I was financially able to, I would be the one dishing out help. I wanted to make a difference in other people's lives. I wanted to put a smile on people's faces. Chook's one generous act was the catalyst for every generous act that I have ever done in my life since that day. I've never been more inspired by the human race than I was on that day.

That day, I learnt the power of giving. But there was more. I guess I'd always been a bit stubborn and proud; had I not been in a desperate enough situation to accept Chook's help, God only knows what might have happened to me that day. So, I had also learnt that you should never be too proud to ask for, or accept help. As they say, "Ask and ye shall receive. Knock and the door shall open".

The Travelling Salesman

'He who convinced against his will is of the same opinion still'

It was the off-season when I did my knee in. My father and I still had work to do, mending pots and making other preparations for the new season which was due to start in November. The next morning, my father woke me up for work.

“Get up.” “I can’t work today. I can barely stand up.”

“You hurt yourself mucking around. You’re coming to work.” “I can’t.”

My dad’s response was to lay into me while I was still in bed. While he was beating me, I fell off the bed. He left me on the ground with my leg stuck up in the air and took off to work. I thought, “Well, this is it. End of story. Ciao.” I put on the one suit and the one good pair of shoes that I owned and limped out of the house with no intention of returning. At 19 years of age, I was the first person in Fremantle’s Molfettese community to leave home before he was married. That was something Molfettese people just didn’t do.

I moved into the Malcolm Street house with my sisters and the others and I shared a room with both Johnny and Ralph. It was a great house, really huge and we even had an icebox, which was a luxury. Ralph gave me a bit of money to help tide me over while I couldn’t work. His generosity touched me almost as much as Chook’s. When my father discovered I’d left home, he was remorseful and asked me to come home but I refused. My knee sorted itself out after a few days rest but there were more troubles on the way, as not long afterwards I experienced my first asthma attack. I realised then that I’d been suffering from breathing problems since my mum had passed away but this was my first full-blown attack. Stress had obviously gotten the better of me.

That season (1956/57) I found work with Johnny at the Co-op, processing crays. By then, the Co-op building I’d worked in as a kid had been demolished and a new brick building had been constructed in its place. The building that still stands there today, though it is now leased by other businesses, as the Co-op has since moved on to other premises. During the season I also worked a short stint of about ten weeks aboard a crayfish processing mother ship named the ‘Phoenix’.



Joe and Johnny with nephews
Mino and Ge, 1957



Joe

Meanwhile, my asthma was getting worse. It took me more than an hour and a half to walk home from work, a distance of less than three kilometres, because I had to stop and catch my breath every four or five steps. Back then, there were no fancy asthma medications and not much scientific understanding about the condition and I was really sick. So from a person who’d been physically fit his whole life and almost never taken a sick day, here I was all of a sudden wasting away with asthma. The season was almost over and I would soon be without work and with my asthma, I was virtually unemployable, so it wasn’t a matter of what I wanted to do; it was more about working out what the hell I still could do.

At that time, there was a large retail store called “John Allen’s” on Canning Highway in South Perth. They sold everything; all kinds of merchandise. I used to see “Allen’s” salesmen go around the place selling the stuff door-to-door and I thought maybe I could do that too. So I became a door-to-door salesman. I started out by selling clothing but instead of selling on behalf of Allen’s or another outlet, I decided to go straight to the supplier. I had a meeting with the people at “Goode Durrant’s” and they said, “Yes, you can buy wholesale from here. Where’s your shop?” “I don’t have a shop.”

“Oh, well we can’t sell to anybody just off the street. If you had a shop, we could sell our clothes to you.”

So I went out and rented one of the shops along Canning Highway in East Fremantle, near where “Captain Fremantle” Motor Lodge used to be. I think the shop number was 33. I painted the outside and got a couple of mannequins from somewhere, put some clothes over them and stuck them in the window. I had no intention of using the shop but I went back to “Good Durrant’s” and said, “Well, I’ve got the shop now!” and then they were happy to sell me their stock.

Back then, there was a mark-up of between 100% to even 1,000% on some items; the stores really had to charge a lot of money to make a profit. I didn’t have the same kind of overhead costs and because I was able to buy stock at the wholesale price the same as the retailers, I could give people a discount and still make a good profit. I would browse around ‘Bousfields’ or ‘Warrens’ which were both well known menswear retailers in Fremantle and I’d check out the retail prices and then sell the same thing at half or even a third of the price.

I sold directly from the back of my little Ford Prefect Ute, which I had done up very nicely, with a sheet of plywood on the bottom and some cream vinyl over the top. I drove around the suburbs of Fremantle in my Ute and let people know in advance what stock I had and when I would be in their area next. My customers mostly bought regular lines of clothing. They bought items such as Jeans, shirts, singlets and undies, so I just stuck to the basics and was soon doing very well.

I was making enough money just from selling clothing lines but I decided to expand my business, because I found my customers were mainly Italians from Molfetta and Sicily who were organising a dowry for a daughter or son who was about to be married. I started branching off into all kinds of other products, like bed sheets, pots and pans, tables and chairs; all the gear you need to furnish a house. I specifically chose stock that I knew Italians bought.

I found out that “Winterbottom’s”, a car repair company, was bringing in a whole pile of products and sending people out on the road to sell them, so I started getting some of my stock from them on consignment. I was doing very well at my business. I was making ten times the amount I could have earned fishing or anywhere else. One day, I went out on the road with one of the “Winterbottom’s” sales people to do some training. He knew all the tricks of the trade and at many of the houses he managed to sell things to women who I didn’t think really wanted to buy them. I wanted to be really good at my job but I realised that, to be super successful in sales, I had to convince people to buy things that they didn’t really want.

I soon realized that this was a business philosophy for sales people making their product sound like their idea. When I look back I really enjoyed the time I spent learning. I see a lot of the qualities that I learned and how it rubbed off on me because I’d think, well, if I wanted someone to do something and I wanted them to feel that they wanted to do it, you’d pick the people that you thought would want to do it, as opposed to having to convince them. “A man who is convinced against his will is of the same opinion still”.

Malcolm Street

I was really lucky to have the support of my Malcolm Street family when I left home with my injured knee and then to have also developed asthma. While I'd been working at the Co-op and selling clothes, I'd been visiting doctors, both traditional and alternative, in an attempt to learn as much as I could about my condition and get it under some control. Someone recommended an Iridologist to me, who examined me and advised me that I had bronchial asthma. He gave me a formula for a broth made out of green leafy vegetables that I should take that would help improve my breathing. My sister Gracie often made the juice for me, simmering the vegetables for hours, with care taken never to bring them to the boil. They needed to be simmered for so long that, once the juice was made, there was absolutely no point eating the vegetables because there was no goodness left in them. She made about a gallon of this juice at a time. It smelt really bad but tasted okay. For a while, I drank the juice every day, in an attempt to get my asthma under some control. It helped me a lot and my breathing started to improve, though my asthma was still bad for a number of years and has reappeared at different times in my life, particularly when I'm under some kind of stress. I recommended this Iridologist to others and they never fail to mention it to me, thanking me for the recommendation.

My asthma seemed to be worse in the winter than it was in the summer and I believed I now had it under a fair degree of control. I decided to have another go at working at sea, taking a deckhand job in Geraldton on a crayboat called "Lupa" with Vince Orlando. Back then the Western Australian crayfish season ran from November 15th to August 15th. The season opens with the 'whites', which are found in the shallow waters until around mid-January, which is the point when the crayfishermen move their pots out to the deep. I agreed to come up and work on "Lupa" just during the rest of the whites season, as I wasn't sure how I would go back at sea with my asthma.

The night before I left for Geraldton, I was at home packing and I had an argument with Johnny and lost my sense of control with my breathing, triggering an asthma attack. I boarded a bus the next day anyway, which took 8 hours to travel from Perth to Geraldton and started work on the "Lupa". I had only been there a matter of days before I was hospitalized with severe asthma. I was alone and not very healthy. I didn't stay till the end of the season after the whites and I moved back to Fremantle, and Malcolm Street, in February.

Not Keeping My Mouth Shut

Meanwhile, the footy season had begun. For years, a group of local young men had been playing footy down at the Esplanade Park on weekends, just for fun. In 1958, they finally got the idea to form some sort of organised team and Saint Patrick's Football Club (St Pat's) was born. My mate, Terry Camarda, was somehow involved and that first year, he asked me along to one of the club meetings at St Pat's Primary School because the team wanted me to get on board.

I wasn't keen but I went along to the meeting anyhow and discovered that the club plan was in dire need of some kind of organisation. I tried to keep my mouth shut but as always, that proved impossible. I told the boys, "You're running around like a chook with its head cut off and you have no idea where you're going. You're never going to get this off the ground without some organization. The first thing you need to do is to form a committee and each member of the committee needs to serve a different function."

The next thing I knew, I was the Founder and President of the St Pat's Football Club committee.

I made it very clear that I would only stay on the committee for one year. Since it was already halfway through the season, we only played social and charity games that year but it was clear that we had quite a strong and talented team on our hands.



Joe watching on as the St Pat's footy team take instructions from the coach



St Patrick's Football Club, Premiers 1959. Joe, who was the President and founder, is fourth from the left in the second row from the front.

The next year, St Pat's Football Club entered the district league competition. I stood right on the sidelines during the game. It's hardly surprising that I was always very vocal with my thoughts about where to move players and I got in the coach's ear a little. I like to think my tips paid off. In any case, we won the 1959 premiership and our photo was put on display in the camera shop on Market Street. I left the committee after that but continued to support the team, who went on from strength to strength.

We were not regarded as the best team in the competition. We were about fifth. The winning became legendary later on when St Pat's won many more Grand Finals, beating what were regarded as much better teams because, if St Pat's got in to a Grand Final, they were always confident of winning on the day!

Sputnik

My brother-in-law Jerry and I still were the best of mates and were like two peas in a pod. In our earlier days we'd been two of Fremantle's biggest troublemakers. Now a few years down the track, our bad boy ways had been tamed a little by time. I'd grown up a little and so had Jerry. After a few years of living in Australia many of the Italian immigrants had realised that if they worked hard they could actually own their own house one day, so they somewhat changed their habits and started thinking about the future. Don't get me wrong; we were still larrikins who liked to have a laugh and stir people up but we were also hard-working, determined and ambitious.

When I'd gotten back from Geraldton I'd taken a deckhand job aboard the 'Clare' in Safety Bay with Robert 'Pooley' Poole as the skipper. It was while I was working on the "Clare" that Jerry and I decided to go into partnership and build a plywood boat with a novel, 'torpedo' design similar to PT patrol boats that we had seen. That would give the boat about 200 horsepower and allow it to travel at around 15 knots, which was faster than any of the other boats of the same size.

Boat speed is all to do with weight and displacement. When you're pushing a boat along in the water, you need a particular amount of speed for the bow of the boat to rise out of the water and plane. It's a bit like the momentum you build up to be able to water-ski. You can't ski if you're only travelling half a knot. The more the bow rises, it planes, less of the boat that is in the water, less friction is created and as a consequence, the boat travels faster. The faster the boat could travel, the faster it could reach the deep water grounds, where there were better catches of crays.

I finished up the season with Pooley and Jerry and I put our plan into action with the intention of launching our new boat in time for the start of the new season in November. Realising that we didn't have enough money between the two of us to get this thing off the ground, we somehow convinced Jerry's little brother Johnny into going into business with us. We had the boat built by a local and talented boat builder, Drago Sombrailo and named her 'Sputnik', after the satellite that had been sent into space by the Russians in 1957.

I should have been excited, I'd just built my first boat. Instead, I found myself incredibly frustrated. You see, the special design of the boat was the very reason we had gone into business together but over the course of the building process, "Sputnik's" design had somehow metamorphosed into resembling a plank boat with a 120HP secondhand Penta engine. We found her to be highly maneuverable but she was only able to travel at a maximum of about 11 knots. That was still fairly fast but it certainly wasn't what we had set out to do; we had hoped to be the first ones to ever build a 32-40 foot crayfishing boat that could travel at 15 knots. In the end, it was Theo Kailis who in future years achieved that vision.



Sputnik

We launched “Sputnik” in time for the start of the 1958/59 season and headed out on her maiden season with Jerry as skipper and myself and Johnny as deckhands, starting at the fishing grounds at Whitford’s Beach halfway between Fremantle and Yanchep, before moving down to the grounds at Safety Bay. By then, the cracks in our partnership were already beginning to show.

I think we had all assumed we would be an outrageously successful team because, independently, we were three excellent workers. We knew where and how to get good crays and lots of them by following good catching crayboats. Jerry was an excellent skipper and Johnny and I were both hardworking and determined “deckies”. In the chain of command, Jerry was the boss and we obeyed! The fatal flaw in our partnership was that we were often butting heads over decisions. It didn’t help that I liked to stir Johnny whenever I got the chance. I couldn’t help it; he was so easy to fire up! With three volatile personalities on board, our working relationship became quickly strained. Nothing too serious; it was enough to create the kind of friction and tension that made the work unenjoyable. Because, we co-owned the boat and of course, we were all still living together at Malcolm Street.



‘Joe aboard “Sputnik”

About four months into the season, we pulled all our pots on board and were moving from Safety Bay to the Lancelin grounds but the weather turned bad so we decided to turn back and pull into Fremantle. A disagreement of some sort took place and that was the last straw for me; I decided I’d had enough and was moving on. We arrived in Fremantle around 11pm and tied up at the small catwalk jetty at the fishmarket, with all the pots stacked on board.

The next morning, Johnny and Jerry arrived back at the jetty around 7am to find that “Sputnik” had sunk! The mooring lines were slack and her deck had sunk to just below the water level. The fire brigade was called and “Sputnik” was pulled out of the water and her engine removed. She took about two weeks to repair and then Johnny and Jerry took off for Lancelin, as planned.

I needed a bit of space so I moved out of Malcolm Street and into a boarding house on Barnett Street, near my old school, CBC. The three of us patched things up between us pretty quickly though and Jerry and I were soon best of mates again; at least, for a while. Our failed partnership presented a steep learning curve but that’s what it was, an opportunity to learn; no harm done. We were young and inexperienced and I enjoyed getting on Johnny’s nerves.

The Fedele brothers continued to work “Sputnik” for another season or two and then we sold the boat and split the profits.

Johnny, Jerry and Joe



Gambling Dens

‘Undercover Cops at the Vastese Club / Green Cockatoo’

It was the early 1960s and my friends and I were knocking about at “The Vastese Club”, which was an illegal gambling joint on the corner of High and Henry Streets, in Fremantle, which was situated upstairs above an old photography shop. It was mainly geared up with assorted card tables such as Poker, Rummy, Manila and snooker tables and was mainly frequented by Fremantle fishermen and a mixed nationalities and Aussies; many of whom had a bit of a chequered history.

Many of the Fremantle undercover cops would often turn up and make it look like they were on the take but actually, I’m sure they used the club as an avenue for information about recent crimes that had taken place. It was a bit like “Starsky & Hutch”, where they blended in well with the gambling fraternity. The cops had to look as if they were doing something about us every once in a while, so they tolerated the club’s existence, mainly to keep the least admirable half of our clientele in check.

The petty criminal element seemed to enjoy hanging out together in pool halls or illegal gambling haunts. We always complied with the rules and I think it was a bit of a two way street, with many petty crimes being solved due to the information that they had gained at the club. I always admired the Fremantle cops, as I realized it was an effective way of keeping tabs on who had pulled the last job around Fremantle or the outlying areas. They passed themselves off as one of the boys and gained a lot of confidence from those on the fringe, with either a lot, or a little valuable information.

Whenever the time for a raid rolled around, they’d inform the owner that they would be coming and he would in turn inform all the higher profile, more respectable regular big players, who would make themselves scarce. The owner should have been charged for running a common gaming club because he was the one who had to do all the running around paying the bail funds. He would have to get a Justice of the Peace to sign a release to get everyone out of jail, as that was the rules of club.

Therefore, someone was chosen to be ‘The runner of the club’. That person would stay in the club and let the cops charge him with running the joint. The owner was never the ‘Person’ charged. My time as that ‘Person’ rolled around soon enough. There were a few Italians in the lockup at the time, so when the cops raided and the owner asked, “Who will take the rap as to who was running the game?” I was happy to put my hand up and volunteer because I wasn’t put in the lockup with the other 50 or so people and because I also had the ability to speak Italian, I became the interpreter.

In those days, what happened if a copper arrests you for any offence, you were fingerprinted. For minor offences they are allowed to hold you for no more than four hours. For bail to be executed at that time of night a Justice of the Peace needs to come in and sign it. Within that time the owner had gotten the Justice of the Peace and the bail was paid by him, so everyone was released. I was unaware at the time that putting my hand up for running a gaming club, it would be recorded as a criminal offence.

When they were fingerprinting everyone who’d been nabbed, I thought I would have a bit of fun. There was a picture on the wall at the lockup and I would say to them, “Now there’s a camera up there behind the picture”. I’d have a piece of cardboard with the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and hold it up to my chest and say “Look up there and they will take a picture of you”. You’d get the occasional “Oh my God I’m being photographed and fingerprinted”. I’d turn them around and pretend to take a picture of them from different angles and say “At least you can smile”

The coppers went along with the joke and tell me I was going to get them in the shit the way I was carrying on. After the first time I treated it as a bit of a joke and good fun and really enjoyed the company of the Fremantle cops. Here they are the gamblers who’d been nabbed, all sitting around in the lockup and here’s Joe sitting out with the coppers having a cup of tea etc. It all seemed like fun until I realized much later that it was put on my record! The cops in Fremantle were in reality an honest bunch and often my opinion varied as to whether the odd one was a bit “sus” to admiring the way they went about their work. On the whole I think the undercover guys that I knew were a great bunch and I think there were many burglaries and petty crimes solved as a result of our “strange” relationship.

In between the lobster seasons I would spend my time at the clubs. The “Vastese” and “The Green Cockatoo”, which was a two storey building located on the corner of Nairn and Market Streets, close to the area of my childhood. It was previously a boarding house that had been renovated in to a night club which was unprofitable and didn’t work out too well and it was then turned in to a gambling club with tables upstairs and slot machines downstairs. “The Green Cockatoo” was run by a Jewish guy and two ex-prostitutes all aged in their 50s. They were shutting down at 7.30pm every night and as a result, the business was only pulling in around a measly \$500 profit a week. “This joint should be earning a lot more than *that*,” I thought. It was the off-season and I was in need of some extra cash, so the next time I saw the owner, I said to him, “Why don’t I take it over for you after around 7.30pm and we’ll keep it open for you, late at night?”

I realized that our regular gamblers and new punters would be going to other venues that remained open at night, so why not cater for the clientele. He agreed that this was a good idea and my mate Mario Zaza and I started running the place for him. Within less than two months, we had started to turn over a tremendous amount of money. Up to \$20,000 a week profit, which was a lot of money in those days.

We had a nice little setup going for us and the owner also had the aforementioned relationship with the cops and the undercover guys, who should have been arresting people for gambling but were using the place as a great source of information. They had decided to turn a blind eye because of this and I think they secretly actually enjoyed having a bit of a gamble themselves. They’d often come in to gamble, under the guise of surveillance. I think the boss used to tolerate a few of their losses but it was all in the name of co-operation and goodwill and it all seemed to work out well for everyone, all round. That’s the way things were done in Fremantle in those days. Even the cops were more tolerant of small card games and were great with us as long as there was no trouble.

One day a mob of ‘leatheries’ came into the club wearing tight jeans and black leather jackets. Even their women were pretty rough. One of the chicks grabbed a long neck bottle of beer, opened it with her teeth and down it went; glug-glug-glug. I thought, “Shit, there’s going be trouble here.” Mario was busy making a sandwich. In a fake Southern American accent, one of the ‘leatheries’ asked him, “Could you lend me that knife? I wanna *scratch mah back*.” I immediately went upstairs and rung up the cops. “Look, we’ve got a mob of ‘leatheries’ here and I think there’s going to be some strife.” The cops came down to our joint and wandered in. The ‘leatheries’ thought they were going to get done for gambling, so they took off and as soon as they’d left we closed up. As we were leaving, we heard this almighty bang. The ‘leatheries’ had driven around to High Street and one of their cars had driven into the other and they’d become wedged together!

Lancelin's Pot Burglar *'There, but for the Grace of God, go I'*

By then it was 1959/60 and I was skipping the "Anna" up in Lancelin. Many of the smaller boats threw their pots very close to shore. The crayfishermen would head out at around 7am to pull the pots and make their daily catch. Some days I would beat them to it. Before sunrise and armed with a spotlight, I'd head out on my little boat, pull any pot that I could find, and nick the crays to add to my own catch later in the day. I never knew whose pot I was pulling; at the time it didn't matter and I'm not making any excuses for my behavior.

One afternoon in Lancelin, I saw an older man walking along the sidewalk pushing a pram in which sat a little girl. I recognised the man. He was the father of a guy who owned one of the cray boats whose pots I'd just pulled that morning. I was shocked when I noticed that the little girl was a paraplegic. I realised that the man pushing the pram was her grandfather, which meant that the crayfisherman was her father. I looked at that child and realised that she was one of the victims of my early morning pilfering, because my actions were, effectively, depriving that child of money that her family needed for her treatment or God knows what else.

I started to wonder about the other people whose pots I was pulling. What financial position they were all in? Maybe they had sick children too, or were in debt. I began to question myself: Why are you doing this? Why are you stealing? Is it the thrill of doing something mischievous? I knew I had to get a hold of myself, because what I was doing was just plain bad, especially as I was using the money for my own entertainment and I didn't really need it. After that, I never touched another boats pots unless it was in retaliation for when I was absolutely certain that someone had pulled mine. And when that did happen, I always let them know what I'd done. I felt that was the polite thing to do.

Around that same time, I had another life changing experience. And again, it was triggered by a chance encounter with someone who's type of person I was determined *not* to become. When I was a young guy I drank quite a bit. Most of my friends did the same. It was nothing unusual and I didn't consider myself to have a drinking problem. One afternoon me and my mates were walking through the Esplanade Park when I noticed a homeless man sitting on a park bench. I guess he was about 35 years old; unshaven, with a long ginger beard. I'd seen him around before. My friends and I called him a 'hobo' and sometimes made fun of him behind his back. That *afternoon* he was drinking Coca Cola mixed with mentholated spirits.

I don't know how or why it happened but we started chatting. I asked him how he had gotten himself into this situation. He told me his marriage had broken up and he hadn't been able to cope and so he had turned to drink, developed mental problems as a result and ended up living on the street, having lost everything he'd ever worked toward. I remarked that he was drinking himself to death. His answer was "I Know". I looked at that guy and I thought, "There, but for the grace of God, go I," deciding right then and there that I would never allow myself to follow that same path. From then on, I still enjoyed a drink from time to time but I drank sparingly; The hangovers were not worth it! These days I'm almost a teetotaler. Maybe we change, Maybe not!

Meeting that man made me think about how we are shaped by life's defining moments, because the loss of this man's marriage had triggered his whole life to unravel. It was just like the story of the horseshoe nail. It's ironic, hearing this man talk about how his one defining moment had changed him; This had become one of my own defining moments.

Learning to Swim 1960 - 1965

Another Marta

Fishing for Coral

Night and Day

A Place of Our Own

Pebbles

Joe & Joann

Mark

Bitter and Sweet

My Sisters

Another Marta

The 'Marta' which was named after my mother, was the first boat that I built and owned 100%. At the time, in the early 60s, Western Australian built boats which tended to have huge round steel bilges. The "Marta" was an exception. From having watched "McHales Navy" on TV, I knew what I wanted in a boat. Nobody had ever built a steel crayboat, only steel trawlers with round bilges. Some Dutch people named VerBoon built the "Marta" out at their Osborne Park premises. I was the first to skipper her, as did others, including my brother in law Johnny, my brother Sammy, my cousin John De Ceglie and friends Don Marchesani and Mario Zaza. It was able to travel at 10 knots. Out of the "Marta" came the future design for trawlers. That's a 48 foot version of an up to 92 foot boat which created a lot more deck space. All of these trawlers were built along the same design as the "Marta", from then on; Building vessels with flat steel rather than having to roll the steel or bend it.

I skippered the "Marta" on her maiden voyage in 1960/61, working the grounds near Jurien Bay just north of Lancelin. My friend Mario Zaza took over skippering her from me and then my brother in law Johnny skippered her for the next three years. My brother Sam then took over from him. Every skipper did well on the "Marta". She was the kind of boat that succeeded no matter what we did. She just had a good spirit. I got very attached to her. As the years went by, I'd look at her and know that her use-by-date should have been many years before and realistically I should have gotten rid of her. But it took years before I could bring myself to do it. I knew that if I ever did sell her I would have to use the money for something really special so that I could say, "That replaced the "Marta". In fact, I used the money from the sale to buy our block on the river at Blackwall Reach, in Bicton, an outer Fremantle suburb, which we used to build our first new home. "Marta" was later onsold to someone in Darwin and I heard that when they did a drill test on her, there was only one small defect that required fixing.

The first year that I skippered the "Marta", was around the time the Fisheries Department were making a pile of changes to the regulations. They were limiting the number of pots the fishermen could licence and making a ruling that any undersized crayfish (under 3 inches long) had to be thrown back. Every boat had to buy a bronze metal gauge so that they could measure their crays to make sure they were adhering to the rules. Ross Fisheries had a small crayfish processing factory running in Jurien Bay but they were flying most of the crayfish down to Perth for processing.

Unbeknown to us, the Fisheries Department 'caught' me for 14 days running for catching undersized crays but they didn't bother to tell us until the 14th day. I guess maybe they thought that way they could slap us with a bigger fine at the end. On the 14th day the inspector came to see us when we went ashore. He said we'd been caught for catching undersized crays 14 days in a row. I said, "Measure the crays with our guage". He did and he found that the crays were not undersize. So these 'standardised' bronze gauges turned out to be not so standard and accurate after all. We ended up having to go to court against the Fisheries Department several times to prove ourselves. On the second appearance it became evident that many of the new laws required changing. To this end the Fisheries Department asked if our lawyer could assist their lawyer so that he could point out all the loopholes we'd found so that they could reshape the regulations to be more watertight when laying charges in the future.

Fishing for Coral



Coral and Joe at the fish market in 1958

I first met Coral down at the fish market in 1958. At the time she was working at Charlie Carters, a supermarket on Adelaide Street and after we had married she became close friends with my sisters, Lucy and Gracie. They often hung out together down at the beach and at the river. One time Coral even saved Gracie from drowning. My sisters had never learnt to swim well because when we were kids the Italian girls didn't spend time at the beach like the rest of us; they were not afforded the same kind of freedoms as Australian girls.

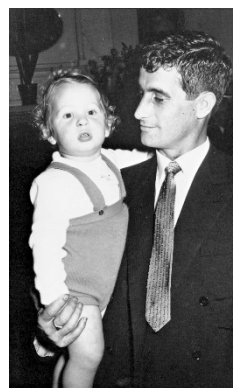
We got married at St Patrick's Cathedral. Gracie and Lucy had bought some cakes and sandwiches from Culley's Tea Shop on High Street and we had a small reception back at Essex Street.

Coral had saved a few bucks from working at Charlie Carters and I was still working, and between us with what I was making out of fishing, we got by.

That year I built and skippered the Flaming Star, fishing again out of the grounds at Jurien Bay, while Mario Zaza took over the 'Marta'.



Joe aboard Flaming Star, 1961/62 season



Joe with son Joe Jnr, June 1963

On March 9th 1962, Coral gave birth to a boy, at King Edward Hospital. Coral named our son Giuseppe, just like me; Joe for short.

Night and Day

It was hard in those early days, as Coral was only a teenager and as yet I wasn't really over my rebellious years, even though I was officially an adult at the age of 23. We supported one another and I realized that I felt very comfortable with her. We got along well and she'd learnt to cook in the Italian way from my sisters. She was actually a good cook and homemaker. Still is.

Coral and I were as different as night and day. At first she tried hard to get involved with my interests, like football but she couldn't put up with the tough physical contacts for long. We had two more children Marta in November 1964 and Mark 6 years later in January 1970, so Coral had her hands full as a mother. A role she relished and was born to fill. She had her yoga, her Spanish classes and line dancing. Those were never arguments in our house and the deal would've been the same no matter whom I had married. Unfortunately, due to my future business interests and long absences away in the pearling industry overseas and the long periods away from home fishing, we have decided to part ways but I will always look back positively on our early days when everything worked and it worked well.

The Early Years - A Place of Our Own

After Joe was born we moved in to a tiny rental on Arundel Street, just south of central Fremantle, next door to a liquor store. Coral organised the whole thing because I was away fishing. We didn't have much money or many possessions so when I arrived home to our new place to discover that we now had a bedroom suite, kitchenette and some table and chairs, I was somewhat puzzled. "Oh shit, where'd all this come from?" I asked.

It turns out that Coral had secretly saved up some money and had purchased some of the furniture. Coral's parents and my dad had also bought some for us as a gift. They were now pleased we had married and her parents had patched things up with Coral. Our new little place was nice and comfortable and for a while it was just the three of us, Coral, me and our new son.

It wasn't too long before my little brother Sammy rocked up. He was around 16 by then and had been working on the boat with my father and they'd had a disagreement and Sammy had left home. It's not easy to work on a boat with your father. I'd been there and done that. My father and I didn't work well together on the boat. He was too hard on me and I think it was the same with Sammy. So although Sammy and I had never been very close, I was able to sympathize with him. Sammy lived with us for the next seven years and in that time, we became close.

I skippered the "Flaming Star" for the rest of that season and the next. In the early 60's I sold "Flaming Star" to Nick Marchesani and retook the "Marta" with Mario De Jesus as my deckhand. In the 1964/65 season I worked at the Freshwater Point cray grounds, 20 nautical miles south of Dongara which was to become our grounds for the 'whites' until I ceased fishing altogether. My other brother in law Johnny was skippering the "Tuna".



Joe, Joe Jnr and Coral aboard the Marta, Blessing of the Fleet day, October 1962

Pebbles

Now with my own boat, I officially registered my business, Marta Fishing Co at the end of 1964 and on 25th November I became a father again to a baby girl. I was working away in Jurien when she was born so I sent a telegram to Coral saying “Congratulations on the birth of your baby daughter,” which seems ridiculous when you consider how involved fathers are in the birth of their children today, but it is a sign of the times we were in. Back then, the delivery room was no place for a man. It was our responsibility to continue to provide for the family and if that meant being away for important occasions, well so be it. That’s just how it was.

Just like my company and my boat, we named our daughter Marta, after my mother. She grew into a cute tiny thing with wispy blonde hair. I was besotted with her and have been ever since. I would tell her that I went to heaven and picked her out especially, and that I was Fred Flintstone and she was my Pebbles. That was her nickname for years and she thought it was wonderful. Whenever I got home Marta would rush to the door to greet me. When Coral wanted Marta to eat something she knew she didn’t like, she’d put it on my plate, because Marta ate anything, provided she was allowed to take it from my plate.

When Marta was small, I worked hard to gain her confidence, because I had made up my mind years before, that if I ever had a daughter, I wanted her to feel completely comfortable about coming to me with any problem, be it big or small. That realisation had hit me one winter night, when I was still a young reprobate, kicking around at Orlando’s Coffee Bar in South Terrace. A teenage girl that I knew from around town approached me in the bar. She was stressed. She told me she was pregnant and needed my help. She wanted to abort the child and I talked her out of considering it.

I took her home to her parents after first talking to them on the phone, letting them know that their daughter was pregnant and was afraid to let them know. Why she came to me, I don’t know. But it hit me right then; this girl felt more comfortable seeking advice from a reprobate in Fremantle, than she did seeking advice from her own parents. How sad is that? I didn’t want that for my daughter. I don’t ever want her to be in that position. I want her to know that she can come to me with any problem, and I would stand by her no matter what the consequences.

So I worked at gaining her trust. I’ve never actually told her this. Once she was about four years old, I would pose questions to her that I knew she had the answer to.

“Marta, could you help me? I’ve forgotten what $2 + 2$ is.” “Oh Dad, that’s 4.” And so on.

As she grew older, I would tell her, “If I ever need help, I want to be able to come to you, and I’d like you to be able to do the same.” The years went by and I continued to ask for her help with problems and questions that I had simply manufactured. As far as I know the message I was trying to convey got through to her. Certainly, if she ever had any problems over the years, most times, she would discuss it with me. I loved Marta more than anyone and still do.

Marta and I haven’t always gotten along, but today, we have a strong and healthy relationship. Through thick, though thin, through fights, through whatever, she has remained my favourite person in the whole entire world and the most important person in my life. She always will be. I am so proud of the woman she has become.



Joe with Joe Jnr. and
Marta, Yanchep 1966

Joe & Joann

Joe Junior was our first born; a son born on March 9th 1962, an event I have referred to earlier in my story. Coral named him Giuseppe, just like me; Joe for short. He was a great young boy as a kid. He was very easy to get along with and he really enjoyed his own company. You could put him in to a sand pit and he would just stay there for hours, without causing any fuss or problems.

When he left school he was very enthusiastic about computers and wanted to get in to the information technology area of employment. I thought this was a great thing, as there are all kinds of different people in the world, all with different aspirations and I could see he was keen to take this on as his career.

He started off doing some work experience and eventual employment with a business associate of ours, John Dorrington, at a company called Clayco, who did a lot of work for Atlantic. Joe proved to be quite exceptional and feedback from his employers was that he was performing extremely well and had an excellent grip on IT procedures. Joe had always been a very methodical young man and never let anything slip through, which was extremely important in this field of work.

He remained with Clayco for a while and then decided to branch out on his own, working from home. He had a few select clients, including a number from interstate and has done very well out of it. He works alone and this has saved him the pressure of dealing with staff issues. He originally had staff but found he was spending most of his time looking after staff matters rather than being involved in the industry and the career he so desired and enjoyed. This has worked out well for both Joe and his clients.

Sometimes working from home can be a bit testy, trying to work with young family around but it seems to have worked out well for him and he is very content on the way things have worked out.

Prior to going in to business, he met a young lady named Joann. Due to my long spells away from home with business and the pearl farm in Myanmar, she was a person I never got to know very well in the early days. Over the years I have come to be quite fond of Joann and she is a great partner for my son Joe and has matured in to a nice extremely intelligent and talented young woman.

They have two wonderful children; both great kids. I will refer to them later on in my story. Dean was the first to be born and he was the first grandchild to be born in to either side of the family. Erin came along two years later and both have been a great blessing, particularly for Coral. With the tragedies that had occurred in Coral's life, with the passing of her brothers, her parents and a nephew the children were a Godsend for her.

I had always felt a bit awkward with little babies less than one years of age and when Dean was born, Coral was always trying to get me to pose for pictures with young Dean. I had always preferred little girls to boys. But once I got to hold him, I got connected and we have been buddies ever since. Dean thought the sun shone out of both of us. I deliberately spent a lot of time with him and gave him a lot of attention and he understands that he is number one in my book.

The union of Joe and Joann has brought to both Coral and I, a joy and fulfillment to a great part of our lives and I am thankful that they have given us two such wonderful grandkids. I am very happy for Joe and Joann, as I feel they have developed in to a great little family unit and seem very satisfied with their life together.

Mark

Mark was an outgoing young boy who was full of confidence that was derived from spending a lot of time with his older sister, Marta. She doted on him and still does to this day. As I have previously mentioned, she is someone I love more than my own life. She was wonderful with him and I felt as they grew older their closeness would diminish.

The difference in age between them is six years and I always thought that once she turns 14 and he is only 8 she will have different ideas but their closeness and bond still exists and actually flourished.

They live very close to one another in Coogee, as do Joe and Joann and still enjoy quality time with one another. They enjoy outings to the movies and dinner at restaurants and share many confidences together.

When Marta went away, he was virtually left on his own. He became very quiet as a young man and has been very affectionate towards his mother and would always be around visiting her.

All I'd get was a "Hi Dad!" on the way in and a "Bye Dad" on the way out with a big smile on his face. After he'd spent an hour or so chatting away to Coral in the kitchen.

I guess the words that have never been said shows you that these are words that that were not needed, how we felt about each other.

Mark wanted to do things his way and he has been very successful. He has gone on to become a schoolteacher in computers, of which I am very proud.

When he finally decides to settle down and marry, that woman will have an extremely good husband. Everyone who speaks of him, are complimentary of him as a person and also as a man, which is all one could ask.

All my children have become successful and both I and Coral are justly proud of their achievements.

Bitter and Sweet

With only 17 months between us, I grew up very close to my sister Gracie. She was a feisty kid, spirited and tough. Before our mum died, we would play fight all the time. I'd give her a whack and she'd whack me back. A left-hander, she gave as good as she got. Her punches bloody hurt! Really hurt, but of course I had to make out that they didn't. We had a lot of fun together.

Gracie, Lucy and I have a shared history: losing our mother young, living through the rough time with our father, coping with a new, very good stepmother. Then Gracie got married, to one of my best mates, and she then became my protector, taking me in when I was at my lowest point in health.

We lived with one another for two years. She took care of me when I was sick. I was a cheeky bugger. I'd go out drinking and come home drunk and struggling to breathe and I'd beg her to make the vegetable juice concoction for me, which she willingly did.

Once my wild days were over, we were still close, even after I was no longer living at Malcolm Street. I dropped round to visit Gracie during the day quite often, especially after they had moved out and were living in Oakover Street, in East Fremantle. We'd have a cuppa and a chit chat. She'd tell me the latest about her neighbor; Mrs Bray, who she was friends with but who she'd get a bit shirty with sometimes. No one could ever tell Gracie anything, but I could. "Come on. Look at things from Mrs Bray's perspective." I'd say and she agreed.

When I went on my first overseas trip, I brought Gracie back a souvenir from Mombasa, a country I had visited on the way to Seychelles. I loved Gracie very much, you know. Still do. We've never had an argument. But not one spoken word has passed between us since January 30, 1970.

I remember the day well. It was the same day Coral was in hospital having our third child, a boy. The irony is that nothing at all actually happened between Gracie and I; the falling out was between myself and her husband Jerry. I'm not prepared to rehash the details of the incident here but the upshot is that Jerry stopped talking to me and Gracie was left with no option but to show loyalty towards her husband and follow his lead. So now I had another son, who we named Mark, but I had lost a sister so things were somewhat bittersweet.

It's terrible how things work out sometimes. I have a little sister named Gracie. We lived through so much together. We were very good friends and we never had an argument. But we haven't spoken for over 40 years. Isn't that silly? But I guess that's life. We may have lost our relationship but I haven't lost that shared history, and I haven't lost my love and affection for her.

As for Jerry, I've never held any anger towards him. We were the best of friends for a long time and we had a lot of fun together when we were young. I've lost count of the number of times a "Napolitano" (Neopolitan) song comes on the radio and I start singing away, then realise that the reason I know the words is because it's one of the countless songs Jerry taught me all those years ago when we were the best of mates. We really did get along like a house on fire. Perhaps that was the problem; too much fire. But I will always remember those Neopolitan songs he taught me, as I enjoyed them so much.

The situation with Jerry and Gracie had me down for a while but with a new son to buoy my spirits and lots of other family and friends around for company, I got right back on that bicycle of life. The following years were filled with many fantastic family nights at our Ingram Street house. My sisters Lucy and Mary and their husbands and kids spent many a day at our home. Coral would make supper and then we'd have tea and biscuits and we'd play records and have a sing-a-long which we even recorded. Johnny was famous for singing "Delilah". I loved those nights. I never wanted them to end.

I am happy to say Jerry and Gracie now have a wonderful and sharing life together.

My Sisters

In the early years, I was always close to my sisters due to the bond we shared after our mother had passed away. We relied and depended on one another. The two girls had to run the home and I became the de-facto man of the house. Dad was away fishing and also deeply depressed at the loss of his wife. Sammy was still a toddler, as was Mary and we three pretty well had to run the household.

I was only fifteen at the time and we all became very close during this sad period of our lives, as we too had lost a loved and treasured mother. Lucy was only one year older at 16 and Gracie a year younger at 14. Although not very young children at the time, we took on a lot of shared responsibility in order to keep things running.

There are so many things that a mother does for you, that we had all probably taken for granted. This the three girls found out after our mother had died. Although I am very fond of all my kin, it was the hardship and special friendship we four shared during this difficult time. All three of my sisters were very supportive of me and I of them.

When I look back and see the trail of failed marriages and divorces among the many friends and associates that have entered my life, I take special satisfaction in the fact that all three of my sisters have married good men. All three have married Italians born in Italy.

Lucy married Mick Signorile, who came from Brindisi, a port city in southern Italy and Mary and Gracie married two brothers who came from Naples. The two boys, who were my friends, Jerry and Johnny Fedele had grown up during the second world war and had witnessed some horrific atrocities inflicted on their close family members. A mine had exploded killing close relatives, so they had been born in to trying times and had already gone through a bit by the time they had arrived in Australia.

When they came over from Italy, I got an understanding of why Italians were so easy going and happy. In their own country they had lived from day to day and enjoyed every moment, not giving a lot of thought to tomorrow. Back in Italy at the time, there had not been a lot of belief in saving up for a house or an apartment. The chance of achieving such a goal in Naples during the war years seemed an unattainable dream, so they just got on with enjoying life. But along the way they became Aussie Italians and realized, if they worked hard enough, they did have an opportunity to own their own home.

Not only that, they began to realize that they could have title to a home on a quarter of an acre block. In Italy, anyone who had a quarter of an acre would have been considered upper middle class. So their attitude in respect to socializing changed. They still had a good time but they balanced their lives with saving a little along the way.

When they came over to Australia from Italy after the war, they had the same “live for today” attitude and were great fun to be with. I went out in their company many times and we became great friends. I will always remember the Neopolitan songs they brought with them and I learnt all the words. These are great memories and whenever we were all together at parties or BBQ's the accordion or the guitar would come out and Mick, Jerry, Johnny and I would sing to our hearts content.

Even today when I hear these songs on a disc or on the radio, I sing along, remembering all the words as though it was only yesterday. I think immediately of when I was with these guys in their younger days. They grew up. They got married. They changed! These songs help me remember all the good times with Jerry and how hard he worked and basically that he is a tough but good human being.

Mary's husband Johnny was, I believe, one of the greats in the lobster industry. He worked hard and he was innovative in a number of ways and always caught well. He will always be a legend in our lifetime but unfortunately, as time goes by, the people who regarded him as such, get old and pass on. Jerry was also a legendary catcher in the industry.

The new and younger population in the fishing industry are not aware of his history but he is and was, an excellent fisherman. I am happy that I was the one who gave him the opportunity of taking over one of the boats and proving himself and he did. No one ever did as well in the lobster industry as he did.

His older brother Jerry and I were great mates. We used to knock around together and have a ball and even wound up in the can together. The cops kept us there for a little while to sober up because we were always a little bit more than tipsy! He was a good man. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, we had a fall out in later years with me being the innocent bystander through another party and we haven't had a lot to do with one another in a number of years.

But this certainly does not take away the fact that I believe that he was and is a good man. I have nothing but admiration for him. He retired early and he spends so much time with my younger sister Gracie. They take off travelling in a caravan and go grape and cherry picking together. He keeps himself very healthy and he and Gracie I see as a very close couple, which makes me extremely happy.

Mick Signorile who was married to Lucy, my older sister, provided well for his family. He was a welder who made a variety of things including gates etc. He also became a fisherman and he achieved enough financially to put all his kids through a good education and they all have done okay. Two of his boys in fact have both become excellent tradesmen and own their own successful business.

I am grateful at this stage of my life, looking back; I believe that all my sisters have married good men. Whether they themselves measure their success this way, I measure all of their marriages as having been good.

I also had two half-sisters from my father's second marriage, Lucrezia and Marta and also a half-brother Ralph. Lucrezia married Mick DePinto and you would never find a nicer guy. He is a lovely man. The youngest sister Marta has been a wonderful companion to my stepmother. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on how you're looking at it, Marta has never married although she did have opportunities but she seems to be content with her life now. In fact, she even says she's got freedom and is as free as a bird; that's her positive outlook. So in a nutshell, in my eyes they have all married good men or are content with their lot, which makes me happy. There may be a newsflash on Marta soon!

Teaching Others to Swim 1965 – 1970

Crayfishing in the Indian Ocean

Teaching ‘Cappo’

‘Lakanuki’

The Adventures of Serge and the Gang

Eye Opener

Back to Sea on ‘Slaven’

Breaking the Lobster Carting Monopoly between the
Abrohlos Group of Islands and Geraldton

‘Rotondella Island’

The Stainless Steel Man

The ‘Ross Antionetta’

Surprise!

It Started With a ‘Claytons’ Punch

The Last Time

Crayfishing in the Indian Ocean

I have always been fascinated by how things have changed so much, from when I was a youngster. I always believed in watching what others did, not necessarily in the area of fishing but in all industries. I learned a lot from this. Some pioneers would go out prospecting and become very wealthy, whereas others, maybe 5% or 10% would do it the hard way. I thought “Why re-invent the wheel”?

By watching what others did, whether it be for the design of a gear box, vehicle transmissions or a technology in box factories, you could always learn something and apply it to your way of thinking. I would look at what was successful in our fishing industry and look at what wasn't. I would take note of how things were done differently and adapt, where applicable, to our current procedures.

You only need to go in to a Bunnings store and see how different tools and gadgets have improved without having to go out and re-invent the whole process. I would always be looking for ways to improve, rather than follow in the way that it had always been done before. The WA crayfishing industry had always concentrated in the waters close to the coast.

I became aware that they were catching crayfish in deep water off the coast in South Africa, out in the Indian Ocean. So I thought “why can't I”? I moved out in to the deeper waters and I became very successful. When the boats were coming in around Christmas, I would come in with a lot more crays than most of the others and it was assumed that I must be pulling others pots, which was far from the truth.

There was a gentleman named Bernard Bowen who became the Director of Fisheries and whom, I have always regarded as an absolute genius. I say this because of the success in the way he managed the Fisheries Department. He was a person who did it all. He didn't sit back and wait for biologist reports; he got out there and did the research himself. He was one of those rare administrative officers who got out there and studied the whole process. I got to know him very well and he would often wait for my catch, as it was different to everybody else's and he wanted to do the research whilst he was a biologist.

The deep water crayfish were pinkish from the coral and he would do the research himself without the need for a biologist report. He combined it all and it was very unusual to find an administrative man from Fisheries who was so aware of the workings at the fishing boat level. I will always regard him as one of the greats in the Western Australian fishing industry along with the likes of Theo Kailis and M G Kailis who are more widely known personalities.

I have always been a believer in research as I could only see it as being more helpful in our industry. I became a friend of a man named Eric Barker who did a lot of research in the crayfishing industry out at Watermans Bay and he would send out the various reports to me each year.

Crayfish go through a variety of stages and change of location and I found this research information to be very accurate and after a cycle of movement around the ocean they would finally settle in an area. A crayfish shell doesn't grow and as part of their life cycle they will shed the old shell and grow a new one.

Fisheries would send out divers to check on this life cycle and all this information was available. During this shedding cycle the crayfish were soft and were easy targets. So it wasn't a matter of science. It was a matter of common sense to use the research information that was available.

Fishermen are a very unique breed of people but in all they are fantastic people in many ways. They don't like bureaucrats. They don't believe in them. I did! I became very good at what I was doing because of the scientific research and the results that were being provided to me.

So much money was being spent up at Watermans Bay and I wasn't aware of anyone else in the industry who was doing the same as me and there were a lot of really good fishermen in the industry. Here I was a young man of 19 or 20 taking over a boat and going out fishing, saying I want to learn from my life's experience. I wanted to learn from technology and research and I was successful because of that. Not because I was the great "Joe" but because I followed a simple, what you may call, a policy and eventually fishermen are starting to realise its value.

I did a lot of funny things myself and in most cases it worked. I would use whale oil along with the normal bait. If you used the "right" bait the crays would just jump in to your pots. It was dangerous for them to come out foraging for food during the day but at night they would head for the "closest restaurant" so you had to entice them with the right menu!

Crayfishing was a pretty rough profession in those days. I had an international crew who couldn't understand why I wasn't pulling everybody else's pots. "Isn't that what you do when nobody else is here"? I was averaging 20 sized crays per pot and as an example I pulled up 4 pots belonging to other fishermen, which only contained an average of 4 per pot. Then I would put them back. Why would I take 12 from their 4 pots when I was getting 20 full sized crays from my own and the same next day?

Coming in to the industry at such a young age, I respected the old ways and learnt from them not to duplicate mistakes but I was never really accepting of these old ways and could always see a way of doing things a bit better. We have had some excellent research done in the Western Australian fishing industry and like most industries, technology and ongoing research is now an important factor in the day to day operation.

Teaching Cappo

During the 1965 prawning season, I was contracted by Michael Kailis to take on the management of a prawn processing company up at Exmouth Gulf as the MG Kailis' company was getting their product rejected at times. I'd never actually processed a prawn in my life but was willing to give it a go. One of my workers was a young man by the name of Peter Cappelluti, just 16 years old at the time when I first met him. I had met him before as Peter used to knock around Fremantle with my brother Sammy when they were both kids.

His family lived on Suffolk St one street over from where we lived in Essex Street. I often found myself chasing him out of the "Green Cockatoo" because he was underage. I liked Peter and I saw he had a lot of potential, so I took him under my wing and taught him as much as I could about processing, people management and life in general. Even though there was a big age difference, Peter ('Cappo') and I became the best of mates and we really whipped Exmouth Processing Factory in to shape.

As part of the contract, we were involved in the building of a land based factory in Exmouth Gulf to process prawns. I made Peter the head processor, an area where he became extremely skillful both as a processor and a negotiator, because whatever he did was always fantastic. He should have won a gold medal. I actually think he deserved many gold medals! We took a fairly ordinary product to an absolute top class result, which would be competitive with any similar process today, without any of the modern technology that is currently available.

Peter and I, with a little ingenuity and the valuable assistance of an inspector from the Department of Primary Industry, who had worked in the North, we sorted things out. It was such a great learning experience for us all. As I have always believed, you can't do these things alone and we once again introduced new methods to create a top product.

Like I had done with many people in the past, I just throw them in at the deep end; Get them to do something that they've never done before and just say "Go and do it"! I was proud of what I had achieved with Peter. I got a kid of 17 and put him in to a responsible job and he succeeded. He was a very talented person in the way he dealt with things. He got things done and he knew how to talk with people. He always wanted to be the best, to deliver a good product and that's what we had done!

Between us, we came up with the best product that was ever processed in that factory. We changed the configuration of the packaging process and adopted a colour coding system and a cube design for the box packaging, retaining the same volume but making the product much more manageable. We changed so many things and we seemed to get everything right. We hit the jackpot every time. We changed it from a cumbersome production to a process that was perfect and still to this day I've never seen anything yet as good as the shrimp product that, between the two of us we had produced and improved.

That was 50 years ago and still to this day the shrimp product is equal in presentation to anything similar today but obviously from a marketing point of view the packaging and promotion is far more in advance of those days. It was all to do with picking up an idea here and there. I had never processed a prawn in my life. But the thing that it brought home to me is that it was at that time that I realized that "Cappo" had become, in my opinion, one of the best processors that had ever processed shrimp, got the best results and got the best recoveries and packaging.

The following year, I had just returned from the Seychelles where I had been doing research on lobster for UNESCO (United Nations) in Rome for Theo Kailis in relation to the Islands. I'd heard that Theo Kailis was having some trouble with his staff aboard the "Lakanuki" (aka "Ross Endeavour") which was also in Exmouth Gulf. Peter was already on the boat and I advised Theo that, based on my earlier experience with Peter, between the two of us we may be able to sort out his problems and Theo agreed to give us a go. I had brought the "Lakanuki" over from Cairns as a prawn processing vessel and had appointed Peter as the head processor. By this time 'Cappo' and I had forged a strong bond between the two of us and we worked really well together.

We took an ordinary cost negative process to an absolute top class cost effective product with the same staff and with no extra equipment. As a result, 'Cappo' could show with pride what he had achieved. When you think of the age that he did it and I wasn't much older. I was only about ten years older at the time and as a result, I have always thought Peter to be a very intelligent and talented human being. When we worked as a team, what we set out to do, we did. I used to say to Peter, I want this building vacated and every stitch out of here by tomorrow morning and he'd get it done. In those days, I would use any tactic, to get things done to achieve a good result. If it was urgent, otherwise I would leave it to Peter and I could always rely on a good result. I had molded a teenager by "giving him a go" and I believe to this day that he is still one of the best processors of prawns and lobster that has ever worked on this coast.

Lakanuki

Over about a 17 year period I worked on and off for Theo Kailis of Ross Fisheries, collaborating on a number of projects. Whenever Theo had an important job that needed doing, he'd give it to me to do. If he had a problem, he'd just ask me to fix it. We had a great relationship.

In Feb 1966, Ross Fisheries had purchased the 'Lakanuki', a fairly large freezer boat which was based in Cairns. Theo hired me to deliver her from Cairns to Fremantle as the agent's representative, along with other qualified sea captains. It was lucky that I was there because the other two captains were as blind as bats. She wasn't a fast boat; It took us a long time to get to Fremantle, 11 weeks, where the boat was refitted as a prawn trawler and sent up to Exmouth Gulf for the prawning season. Theo renamed the boat "Ross Endeavour", though that name never really stuck. To me, she's still the "Lakanuki".



Joe on the Lakanuki delivery, 1966



Joe aboard the Lakanuki

The Adventures of Serge and the Gang

My asthma was playing up again. I had taken the year off. Well, off fishing, not work. Now with the responsibility of a wife and two young kids, I decided not to go to sea during the 1965/1966 season and worked on shore with Serge, for Ross Fisheries.

In the mid '1960's, Ross, a major food company, which was located in Grimsby, England, bought Theo Kailis' company and renamed it Ross Fisheries. Once the prawning season was over I headed back down to Fremantle and took a job managing the jetty for Ross Fisheries/Markwell Theo Kailis' company, weighing, processing and delivering crays. My 12 year old cousin Sergio "Serge" De Ceglie helped me out during his school holidays. He was another fantastic worker. Sometimes I'd have errands to run and I would leave him in charge for most of the day. He was left with the responsibility of paying the fishermen for their crays from a locked fridge in the office, where we kept the money.

Once the last boat was in for the day and the last fisherman had been paid, Serge would join me on the delivery runs. We drove the crays up to West Perth in a small Dodge utility to be processed. Serge's mates would hang around down at the jetty and help us load the car full of crays.

Sometimes it took two trips before all the crays were delivered, so often we wouldn't finish work until 2am. I dropped him back home at the De Ceglie family home on Bellevue Terrace. His parents (my dad's cousin Philomena and her husband Giuseppe) liked and trusted me, so they didn't mind too much. It was on these trips that Serge learnt how to drive.

Even though Serge is 16 years younger than me, we got along extremely well. He and I turned a shed on the wharf into a clubhouse for him and his mates and gutted and painted it. I put in new carpet, a gas stove and a couple of fridges. During the school holidays, about 10 to 15 of Serge's mates would come and hang out in the clubhouse but they'd also help us out. We called it "The Adventures". It was so popular that they'd even rush down after school to help out. They'd collect mussels from the other side of the fish market and have a big cook-up in the shed. I'd send one of them down to the fish and chip shop with two pounds to buy food for everyone. We organised boxing matches either on the jetty or on one of the boats. Often the Sgherza twins, Raymond and Jerry went head to head. You couldn't get a more even match than that. The kids had a great time and so did I. It was like a big party every day. I was Serge's hero.

The jetty used to be different in those days than it is now. There was one "mole"(breakwater) going out with all these little sheds on the end. There were a Mobil Oil and Shell sheds where they used to sell fuel and the Fisherman's Co-op had a little shed where they used to weigh the crayfish. Ross Fisheries' had one on the very end of the jetty and Serge was running all the depots for me selling the fuel. He was effectively taking home 3 pay packets. One from Ross Fisheries. One from Mobil and another from Shell. Not bad for a 12 year old.

I trusted serge and his mates. I left him with cash to pay the fishermen. "Where am I going to put this"? He'd ask. "Just put it in the fridge", because we had a lock on it. Once again; Knowing who to trust; Throwing people in the deep end. Serge would weigh the crays. I would come back for the first load. Each trip he and his mates would load up the car. When last boat had come in, Serge would come join me on the deliveries.

I managed the jetty for most of that season. It was during this period that I had left for the Seychelles and Serge continued working there for another year after I left. After that he started crayfishing with his dad and we didn't see much of each other until he was 19, when he developed cancer of the leg and unfortunately had to have it amputated. After he lost his leg to cancer he commenced working for me in a boat brokerage capacity.

I needed some time away from the sea. During the off season I worked out at Woodman Point Quarantine Station.

Eye Opener

In the same year, Markwell Fisheries had a contract from the Food & Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, in Rome. They were selected to do a rock lobster survey in the Seychelles Islands with the world's top curator of crustacean, Dr Ray W. George. I was asked to help out. It was to be my very first overseas trip. On my way to the Seychelles, I visited Mombasa in Kenya and also India and Singapore.

That was when I first had my eyes opened to real poverty. People were in total despair. Children were begging on the street with nowhere to go, nowhere to sleep. For a long time, since that day when Chook had helped me out with the taxi fare, I had always tried to help those less fortunate than myself, in my own backyard because I had never forgotten how that felt and I wanted to make other people feel the way that I did, back then.

This early experience overseas made me aware of the extreme poverty in other countries. I guess I always knew it existed but now I had seen it with my own eyes the reality of their situation hit home and hard. I wanted to help these people. I vowed that one day, when I had the financial means to do something about it. I would endeavor to help the poor in a significant way. In the meantime, I continued to do whatever I could to help out in whatever small ways I could manage. Whenever I had the opportunity to help, I felt a hell of a lot better about it. I felt really good about it!



Joe with Dr Ray W. George in Seychelles, April 1966

Back to Sea on Slaven

After sorting out the problems on the 'Lakanuki', I got back in to seafaring. I moved onto skippering the 'Slaven', a freezer boat I partly owned with Theo Kailis for two years. I had not previously skippered a freezer processing boat but the 'Slaven' was one and I had gained processing experience over the past two years. From November to about March (the 'whites' season) we'd start fishing from Freshwater Point near Dongara and make our way down the West Australian coast, past Jurien Bay and Lancelin, following the migration of the crays. After the 'whites' were over, we'd head across to the Abrolhos Islands (just off Geraldton), the location of the famous "Batavia" mutiny, where we'd fish for crays until about May/June. After my experiences in Exmouth Gulf, I decided to try my hand with prawning, so after the cray season I'd then head up to Exmouth Gulf for the prawn season on the 'Slaven'.

'Cappo' was keen as mustard to be one of my deckhands onboard the "Slaven", so he lied to me and told me he could cook. On our first night in Dongara, he nicked off to the local deli to buy some roast chickens for dinner and it was then that I learnt he couldn't cook to save his life. I didn't mind too much; I was happy to have him aboard. But without a decent cook, come dinnertime we would often lob up at the "Marta", which my brother-in-law Johnny was skippering at the time, because one of his deckhands, Charlie "Mickey Mouse" Retta, was, unlike "Cappo". An excellent cook!

Rivalries, usually friendly, with other boats that were fishing in the area, kept us motivated to catch as many crays as we could to stay on top of the 'competition'. We enjoyed the challenge but the job was tough. We worked long hours. Hard hours and we were away from our families for long stretches at a time. Though the competition gave us a reason to keep going when things got difficult, it's ironic that we relied on the camaraderie of those who we were competing to keep us going and from feeling lonely or going troppo! There was a strong sense of mateship among the Fremantle crayfishermen who were working away from home, particularly the Italians, Portuguese and Yugoslavs.

We did it really hard. People from normal walks of life can appreciate the deprivation we faced, spending months at a time away from our family and friends. The hardships we faced on those long periods away, was a difficult time. Unlike others, we were never there for holiday festivities or days at the beach with our family and loved ones over the summer holidays. The 17 years that I put in at sea were like four bloody lifetimes as someone who worked hard. It's not easy. It's bloody hard work! Especially when you are the skipper, you've got the responsibility of the crew's lives in your hands.

They may not be skilled in a lot of areas and it can be dangerous work. Crew can range from being mediocre to very good or even geniuses and I must say I have had good luck; I always had the best, in my days at sea. You would work to the point of exhaustion. That's why I used to say, I need "Cappo". People like him and many others like him. To me they were made of stainless steel. What drives these people. They're so strong and determined, with unlimited energy and focus. They used to stay up for so long and work past exhaustion. I think these people are a very rare breed!

I was pretty much over fishing by now, though I did another year after that. I convinced Johnny Fedele to finish the season on the "Marta" early so that he could take over from me for a period of five weeks. He was reluctant because he was trying to get 100,000 pounds two years in a row and he was only a few pounds short but I convinced him to finish the season early, at the end of April and come work for me while I flew down to Perth because I was still unwell.

Sometime later, "The Nook", one of the smaller Abrolhos Islands, was officially named "Rotondella Island" by the Fisheries Department and as recognition for the work I had done in the area and also the fact that I'd helped sort out the situation with the carting situation and I was a bit of a legend. The honour was presented to me by the Director of Fisheries but that's another story.

Breaking the Lobster Carting Monopoly between the Abrohlos Group of Islands and Geraldton

Theo Kailis, the Managing Director of Markwell Ross Fisheries (a subsidiary of the British Ross Group) sometimes, if he had a problem he at times used me as a 'go to guy' and with a little good planning and bluff, we managed to sort out some problems. Before I launch into my tale, let me state that the three processors I relate to in this chapter and all the other processors, including the managers, were reputable, respectful and honest people and contributed greatly to the success of the Western Australian fishing industry.

For many years I acted at times as Theo's trouble-shooter. We became great friends and business partners. He was a man I admired greatly, working together on and off for over 17 years. Our relationship sure stood the test of time, enduring until Theo passed away in 2010.

One such problem that Theo had, was that the Markwell Ross Group were severely disadvantaged by **not being able** to buy lobster from the Abrolhos Islands. This was due to a close knit cartel of the three processors and the lobster carrier boats that delivered the lobster catch from the Abrolhos Islands to the port of Geraldton. Together Theo Kailis and I planned a strategy to break the stranglehold of the existing cartel. I was crayfishing on the fishing boat 'Slaven' which I normally did until the end of April and it was my intention to go straight up to Exmouth for the season, trawling for prawns, so I said to Theo, "I'll go to the Abrolhos and endeavour to sort out the problem and then I will continue on further up the coast to Exmouth.

The 'A' and 'B' size and colour of the lobsters that were caught in the Abrolhos were valuable and were highly sort after by international buyers, especially the lucrative Japanese market. Hence, giving the three Geraldton processing companies an advantage to lock out any competition, especially processors from the metropolitan area.

Markwell Ross Fisheries and I were equal partners in a 60 foot freezer vessel called 'Slaven' that had the necessary 'A' and 'B' licences to fish in the Abrolhos Islands; 'A' being the Abrolhos Islands and 'B' the Geraldton areas. I intended to fish for lobsters in an area and anchorage at NORTH ISLAND which was located in the northern most area of the Abrolhos group.

I was fully aware that the carrier boats only handled and carted the catches for the three major processors in Geraldton and that they openly refused to cart lobster for any other buyer (processor). These carrier vessels, at the peak catches, would come out each day and take lobsters back to shore for distribution to the 3 processors, in accordance with the agreement that had been arranged between them.

The strategy was commenced by me initially, corresponding with the company who owned the carrier boat collecting lobster from NORTH ISLAND to cart my catch to Geraldton. In the correspondence **I did not advise** him whom we would be selling the lobster to. Consequently, I received written agreement to cart our crays from North Island to Geraldton.

On the first day when I was up there on the 'Slaven', I went out and caught a fairly hefty catch of approximately 30 plus bags and the carrier boat had no trouble taking them in to shore. I belatedly advised the Captain after loading all the crays on to his boat "by the way, I am consigning these crays to Markwell Ross Fisheries". The Skipper was surprised but had no option other than to deliver this load in accordance with our correspondence.

The next day however, it was a different story and the skipper on the carrier boat refused to take my catch, advising me that his vessel had been loaded to full capacity and could not take any of my crays. I commented that I could observe that the vessel was not fully loaded and accused him of refusing to take the crays on the grounds that they were destined to Markwell Ross Fisheries. I advised him, by refusing to load the catch on these grounds would be breach of one of the regulations of the Trade Practices Act.

I produced a copy of the written advice from the owners of the carrier boat advising me that my crays would be carted from North Island in to Geraldton. “What you are doing is against the Trade Practices Act. Theo Kailis is a half share in the boat and there is no reason why my catch can’t be taken”. “Your boat is not overloaded and you’ve got tonnes of capacity and there is no logical or safety reasons or space that you could not take my catch”. “I want you to give me something in writing, advising me that I can’t give my crays to Markwell Ross Fisheries”. To which, of course he refused.

We returned to anchor in the North Island anchorage with the lobsters still in our tanks, as the ‘Slaven’ had a large storage facility and we had the capacity to fish for a few more days.

Whilst at anchor, one of the local skipper operators (named Bill), who was a part owner of the carrier boat, came aboard and apologised to me for what was happening. I had to remind him that they were all fishermen, like myself and we all had to earn a living and I wasn’t doing anything wrong. I was in a position that I was contractually obliged to give my crays to Markwell Ross Fisheries as they owned half the boat, (of course this was part of the strategy).

I repeated my advice to Bill the part owner of the carrier boat that they were in breach of the Trade Practices Act and that I was prepared to deploy other strategies, which I was not prepared to disclose at that time. I advised that the situation was serious and potentially creating problems for fishermen in the whole of the Abrolhos area, as I then added: “You either cart my crayfish and any other cray catching vessel legitimately operating to Markwell Ross and to all legitimate companies or I’ll stop the carting operation at all the Abrolhos Islands”. When he asked: “How are you going to do that?” I said, “You know me well enough that if I say I’m going to do something, I am able to deliver”. “If I say I can stop you, you can rest assured I am able to legitimately do so!”

This statement sparked Bill into action and he explained that the policy was not that of the owners of the carrier boats. Not surprisingly, he was sympathetic and advised that the carrier boats were acting under the instructions of the processors and that the carriers were not the policy makers. He also told me that some of the fishermen on the island did not agree with the cartel but they were also in an awkward position. A meeting was held on the island by some of the other shareholders of the carrier vessel and they then contacted some of the other investors by radio; (our radio was on the same frequency and we overheard the conversation); they were merely advising about the situation.

Subsequently, we were advised that some senior members of the CARTEL processors were coming to North Island by sea plane to meet with me. When they arrived we had a meeting on the vessel ‘Slaven’.

At the meeting there were some of the local skippers, processing representatives and the carrier boat representatives, there was quite a number of people. Once they’d settled themselves down on the back deck, we discussed the breaking of their cartel stranglehold or stopping their operation completely. They tried to appease me by suggesting that they were willing to cart the ‘Slaven’s’ crayfish only until the end of the season. I declined their offer and suggested that they lift the cartels monopoly and allow Markwell Ross Fisheries and others to compete in the buying of lobsters from other vessels the same as Markwell Ross Fisheries was purchasing lobster in the ‘B’ zone from vessels operating in North Island. I commented that “Markwell Ross Fisheries is competing with you elsewhere, why not here”. There was no response!

IT WAS TIME TO PLAY MY TRUMP CARD.

“I’ll tell you where you are exposed and that is: Firstly, your carrier boats do not have proper commercial certification to carry and potentially would not be able to be certificated. Secondly, your carrier vessels do not have stability certificates or the required indication of the necessary painted load lines. Thirdly, your captains do not hold the necessary master certificates and last but not least your engineers do not carry the necessary commercial certificates”.

There were no unions involved in the fishing and processing industries at the time. I advised them that in addition to the time lost, as well as the necessity for all the masters and engineers of commercial vessels need to all be unionised by the powerful militant Seaman's Union, there would be associated costs which would be far greater than the existing scenario. It was obvious to all that historically the unions were to be avoided at all costs for fear of the unions expanding in to the crews and process worker areas.

There we were, on the back deck of the 'Slaven', with all present. Most of those in attendance were in favour of the cartel being stopped, as there were only the 3 processors who were actually being advantaged by the monopoly. The opinions of the owners of the carrier boats and those of the local fishermen were expressed and the majority agreed that the use by date of the cartel was well and truly over. They overwhelmingly voted for our proposal, for it to be stopped. It must be said that the strategy I applied was the main catalyst for a friendly agreement by all, including the processors.

Hence, all realised that it was time that this cartel became obsolete and the meeting finished on a friendly basis. All it needed was someone to stir the pot, as it was something the majority agreed with. The carriers and the fishermen just didn't want to "rock the boat" and front up to the processors. It needed an outsider like me to complete the assignment. I had the greatest respect for all three of the processors and still do to this day, it was just that they were in a great commercial position and were simply acting in the best interests of their shareholders and the last thing they needed was this little five foot 3inch terror from down south, stirring the pot!

We gave them the advice they required on how to move forward so that all of the deficiencies of their operation could be rectified and regulated. There were issues such as certification and masters tickets etc. These could be addressed in the usual fishing industry operational way and do it with all concerned parties on the basis of co-operation.

The processors had realised that their use by date of the cartel had come and gone.

There was no room left for them to argue further and it was mutually conceded that it was time that this cartel stranglehold backed away. The processors had to now take a long look at the situation that had been created by excluding other companies from the market. The fishermen, fishing licences and the owners of the vessels actually agreed that by bringing in other companies the competition would be healthy and this would create a much better environment.

Then Mr Rotondella reported back to Theo Kailis to tidy up the paperwork and reported "mission accomplished" and the job is completed with 100% satisfaction all round.

I thought "well the job's done" and soon after, I handed the vessel over to Dick Walters (a very intelligent man) to finish the season. I then prepared myself for my next mission, which was to go prawn trawling with the 'Slaven' in the Exmouth Gulf.

This certainly wasn't something that was achieved by the little Joe the "go to guy" alone, as a majority of the carriers and the fishermen just needed that catalyst to stir the pot but I will always relish the role I had to play in the whole adventure and the resounding result achieved.

‘Rotondella Island’

I'd been fishing around the Geraldton area for quite a while and had become quite well known and someone of prominence, not just in the Geraldton fishing community. Also, I was becoming a bit of a legend out of Fremantle, with some of the different ideas I had introduced in to the industry. It was because of this that I had an island named after me. **Rotondella Island** up in the Abrolhos.

There were a lot of little islands off the coast, west of Geraldton which were all part of the Houtman Abrolhos Islands group. There were six of these small little outcrops that made up the Pelseart group which up until now had only been given numbers, like Island No.2 or No.3 etc.

The Geographic Names Committee, a Government Department in Perth, are responsible for naming the places in Western Australia and there are 3,747 islands located off the coast of Western Australia, so they needed a little help in getting them named correctly. They approached the Department of Fisheries in Perth to supply some nominations of persons within the fishing industry who would qualify for the naming of the six un-named islands in the Pelseart Group.

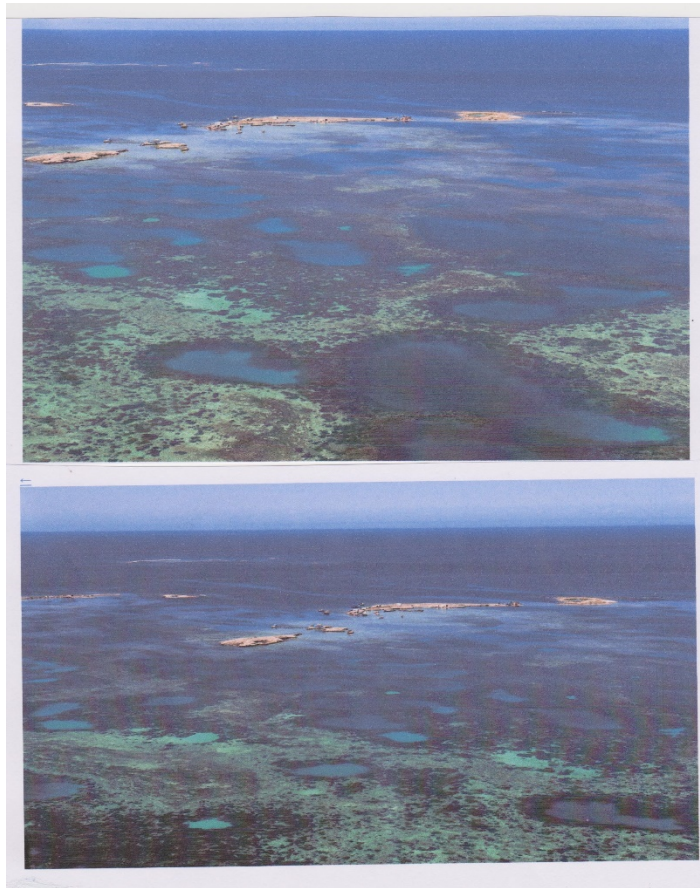
They in turn handed the ‘problem’ of selecting the names of some prominent Geraldton personalities to the Department of Fisheries in Geraldton, preferably identities from the local fishing industry or from those who had some previous historical exposure to the island group.

There was fierce competition between the Geraldton and Fremantle fishing industry and I had spent a lot of times fishing in both camps. They thought that they had better not show too much bias and I had become pretty well known and had become someone of prominence in the Geraldton area. So somewhere along the way, my name got thrown in to the hat and the next thing I know, I am the namesake of this little flat island outcrop off the coast of Western Australia.

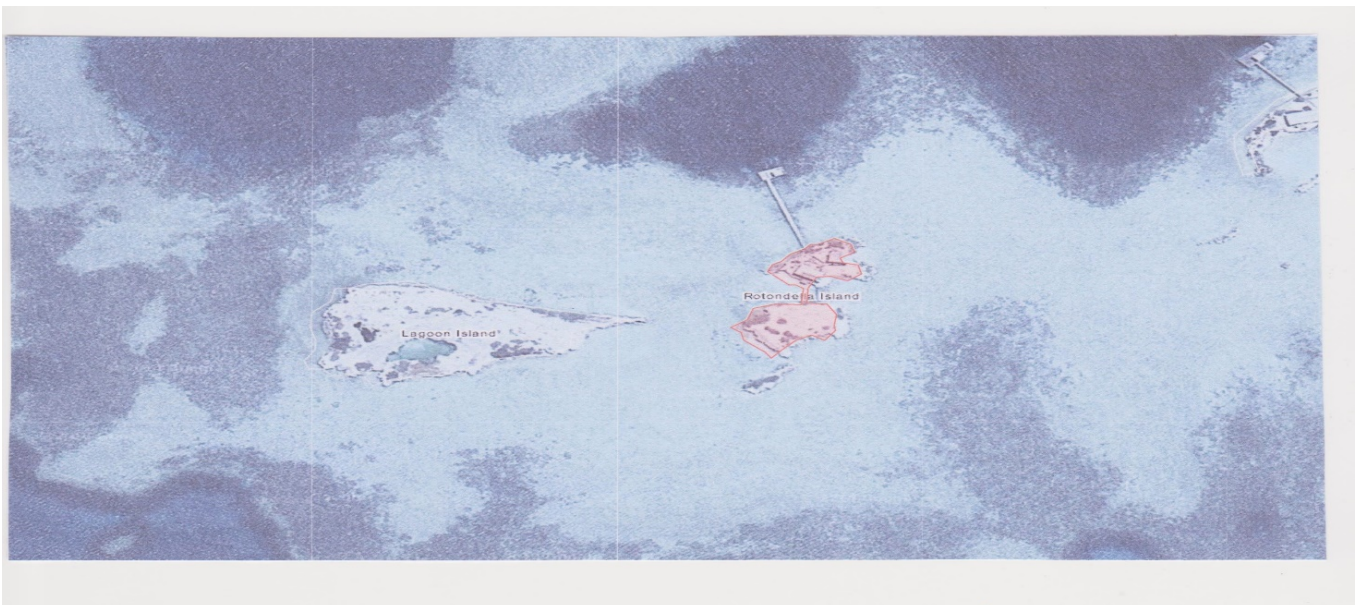
There were many prominent persons in the Geraldton area both in the fishing industry and also many more well known local identities, who I would have believed to have taken precedence over me. Obviously they didn't want to push a local bias too much and I was probably a good choice as I had put feet in the water in both the Fremantle and Geraldton areas and had made a bit of a name for myself in both locations.

The description of Rotondella Island reads as such: It is a tract of land, smaller than a continent, surrounded by water at high water in the country of Australia. Its centre lies at a latitude of -28.8715500 and a longitude of 113.9976000 and it has an elevation of -9999 metres above sea level. Its currency is the Dollar (AUD).

Albeit an honour to have an island bearing my name, I have decided to not relocate there in case the tide comes in!



Lagoon Island RHS Rotondella Island and Jackson Island (long) Abrolhos Islands



The Stainless Steel Man

The following year I took the “Slaven” again, following the same route. Johnny was still skippering the ‘Antionetta’ and going from strength to strength. For two years running he’d been the top dog of all the boats, even though he was competing with boats that had more pots than the ‘Antionetta’ and could travel faster. At the beginning of this season, it was still “whites” season when Johnny made the strange decision to shift into the deep a bit early. I joked over the radio, “Fedele, you stuffed up! You won’t get a hat trick! You won’t be top boat three times!”

“You want a bet?” Johnny barked back over the radio with the usual Fedele good humour and fire.

“Yep. I bet you a car. You catch 100,000 pounds this season, and I’ll buy you a car.”

Of course, if he won the bet, it was a win for both of us, because I owned the “Marta”. So it was all about incentives and rewarding my staff. Besides, Johnny had earned so much for me on the “Marta” he had paid the boat off several times. I owed him a lot.

He ended up winning the bet. By then he already had one child, my nephew John and my niece Angela was born the day after he finished the season. So after the season had ended he bought what I guess he thought was a suitable family car, a cream Holden station wagon.

Johnny Fedele was one of the best fishermen that I ever knew in all the years I was in the business. He was a fantastic skipper and a natural talent with an extremely high energy level. He hardly ever got any sleep and would work harder than anyone else. He was what I describe as “Stainless Steel”. When he went in to the big league, he proved that he was not just the best but had the physical and mental attributes to do what only a few others could. When you had Johnny Fedele skippering one of your boats, you didn’t have to do anything, because he was such a skilled fisherman. There were other good skippers but they had an interest in the boat. It was unique to have a guy in that position. He was such a rare skipper and was in great demand.

The 'Ross Antonietta'

I built the biggest bondwood boat sometime in 1968 with a renowned and talented local boat builder, Drago Sombrailo,. The boat was designed and built with a large square deck to maximise space. If you were looking at it from above the deck it would have looked a little like an aircraft carrier. I asked my brother-in-law, Johnny Fedele to name and skipper the boat, on the condition that he named it after his mother. It was called "Antonietta" but officially, the boat's name was "Ross Antonietta". I wanted to have a really big reception, with the biggest and best launching ever. An event with 100's of guests and dignitaries and a succulent seafood banquet and lavish affair in a large marquee.

Of course this was going to cost money. So I had a thought and spoke to the manager of Ross Fisheries and suggested that we add the word "Ross" to "Antonietta" (Ross Fisheries had 12 vessels, all with the name "Ross" EG:"Ross Australia"). I convinced Theo Kailis that he could get some good publicity from having the biggest bondwood boat if he paid for all the festivities. And he did! Hence the name "Ross Antonietta"

Johnny Fedele skippered her in 68/69 and 69/70 then did scallops. Then he was going to buy the "Antionetta" but later he decided against owning a boat. My brother Sammy took "Antonietta" and Dominic Marchesani took the "Marta". My brother Sam skippered the Antonietta in 1970. With "Cappo" and other crew on board and he later bought his own boat

Surprise!

Back in mid 1964 and Coral and I had moved from Arundel Street to her mother's house at 6 Solomon Street, which was unoccupied at the time. We were paying very little rent but I was happy there. However, the place needed a lot of modernizing, particularly in the kitchen and bathroom area. I offered to pay for the renovations but Coral's family weren't comfortable with that and thought we would be better off putting the money towards a new home for ourselves. It was now 1968 and we were still there.

Once again in 1969, I asked Coral again to do the renovations to the place but her mother refused to discuss it, due to her worry about our financial situation. One Saturday, in fact, on the same day that her mother had refused to discuss the renovations, I got talking to a real estate agent and set up an appointment to meet him at his office the following day, which was a Sunday. "Take me to the nearest house you've got for sale," I said when I arrived. He took me to a house on Ingram Street in Hamilton Hill. It was brand spanking new, built by a company called Stati. It was lovely and the price was good. "Do you want to see anything else?" he asked. "Nope, this will do. I'll see what my wife thinks and let you know." I didn't mention anything to Coral right away, because I wanted to surprise her.

On Sunday afternoons Coral and I would often take the kids for a drive. Sometimes we'd buy fish and chips and eat them at a park or on the beach. That afternoon we got in the car for our drive and I drove straight to the house. I got lost trying to find my way but we stumbled across it eventually. The lawn and gardens hadn't been put in yet but there was a path leading up to the house. I parked the car, hopped out and entered the front yard. Peeking inside the window, I said, "This looks like a nice place."

"We better get out of here," Coral said. She didn't have a clue what I was doing and she was worried we'd get caught trespassing. "Let's have a look around first," I said. The real estate agent had left the key in the meter box for me. I opened the door. "Come on in," I told her. Coral didn't know what was going on. "No, we really shouldn't."

"Come on, just for a minute!"

I convinced Coral to take a quick look inside. She thought it was lovely. I asked her, "Well, what do you reckon? Would you like to live here?" "Of course", she said "I would be rapt to live there". Neither of us had lived in a new house, ever. So I told her to go see the real estate bloke and sign the deal. So that's how we ended up with a place of our own.

It Started With a Claytons Punch

My favourite West Australian Football League team is South Fremantle “Bulldogs”. The supporters were and still are a pretty passionate mob. I first met Mal “Brownny” Brown in 1969. He was coaching East Perth Footy Club at the time. They were one of the traditional enemies of the South Fremantle “Bulldogs”. The rivalry has carried on to the present day. There were sometimes brawls between the two clubs, and between the supporters.

Brownny was actually a Bulldogs supporter but East Perth Football Club gave him a high school football scholarship to Scotch College so he was obligated to play there. He had a bit of a temper, just like me.

Anyway, this one day, Mal was coaching East Perth from the bench near the spectators at Fremantle Oval at a game between South Fremantle and East Perth, who were the two opposing teams on the day. I of course was putting in my ten cents worth when Mal grabbed me by my shirtfront and threw a punch at me and missed; I believe on purpose!

That week, I had received a welding flash which had affected my right eye, which was extremely red. As a bit of a joke, I thought I will have a go here, as quite a few people had witnessed the altercation between Mal and myself. I went to the doctors and got a medical report, convincing the doctor it was a scratched eye caused by a fingernail from the “punch”. I registered a complaint with the East Perth Football Club, advising them that I intended to report the matter to the police and to sue Mal Brown.

There was a bit of concern at East Perth and next thing I received a call from Hec Stempel, a committee member and a fine gentleman, requesting me not to take it any further. I carried on with the ruse with actually having no intention of taking it any further. Next thing Mal’s mother gives me a ring, pleading as only a mother will, advising me of her sons great qualities but admitting to his volatile personality. I advised his mum that I was only 5 foot 3 inches and of poor health and suggested that if a big tough guy like Mal had punched her husband, would this be a bad thing; She agreed!

I made her aware that I did not intend to take any further action on the matter and requested her not to say anything to Mal as he needed to be taught a lesson. She agreed with that also! That was our little secret.

Next thing Mal contacts me himself and invites me to lunch. His shout!

I met him at East Perth Club for lunch, together with 8 of the star players of the time. These were players that I had a lot of respect for, due to their abilities as footballers on the field; it was a very pleasant and entertaining lunch. We later moved to another table, just the two of us, for a chat and I advised him that I would not take the matter any further but I did not disclose to him that he had not made contact with me with the punch that had started the whole incident.

I discovered during that meeting Mal was certainly not the type of person that he was portrayed as, in the news. I totally changed my opinion of Mal brown on that day, as I found him to be a very intelligent and a respectful person, both as a person and as a footballer. Mal Brown certainly was not the “mug” he portrayed himself to be at times. He confided in me that the “idiot” things that he did on and off the field, were part of his plan to be controversial, so that life after football, it would give him a chance to be involved in the media; which he did! Mal’s statement was. ‘If I don’t get my name in the paper, whether it be for some controversial action or spectacular outburst. It gave them something to write or talk about the next day, in the papers or on the TV news’.

So he often performed a few of these “actions” that made the news, particularly when he played for Richmond, in Melbourne. In a game against Carlton, he single handedly took on the Carlton boys, flattening about eight of their players, standing toe to toe, throwing and connecting numerous punches. This television footage is regularly shown to this day. No other footballer, past or present, will ever come close to such an on field encounter.

Later in life Mal and I had business dealings, which he managed. We became associated both in business and also as great friends, both of which were successful. It highlighted to me his highly principled business ethics.

It was not until at my 60th birthday, which was a “Roast” and Mal was invited as a guest “Roaster”, as he was an excellent speaker. It was on this occasion that I revealed to him the conspiracy between his mother and myself, going back about 20 years.

Mal always reckoned that the South Fremantle supporters used to throw all sorts of things at him as he was walking off the ground, eggs, and even billiard balls. Maybe he deserved it! Or was it all part of the act!!

Mal was responsible for the indigenous footballers having great dignity and respect, for themselves as confident human beings. He was remarkable in how he achieved such great results when Stephen Michael and Nicky Winmar and others would confidently address 300 -400 people with their humour and storytelling (probably inherited from him) which was both hilarious and outstanding. Mal was a big part of this development but of course the players themselves deserved a lot of the credit. They took on the challenges and conquered them with distinction.

Mal and I have since become really good mates.

The Last Time

By 1970, I owned five boats and I had spent 17 years at sea, which felt like about four bloody lifetimes. It was time to start managing Marta Fishing from onshore. I built an impressive brick showroom, warehouse and offices at 1 Mews Road, right on the Fremantle Fishing Boat Harbour waterfront and set about sorting out offices and what-not.

June 1970 was the last time I skippered a boat, when I delivered the “Slaven” to Carnarvon for my new venture in scalloping. My other boats came along too and we travelled to Carnarvon as a fleet. Johnny was on the “Antonietta” and Sammy on the “Marta”. A pleasure boat called “Dorrie Anne” that was travelling the same way became part of our fleet too; safety in numbers. At one point the ‘Dorrie Anne’ got a chain caught in her propellor’ and Sammy finished up towing her with the ‘Marta’.

We travelled up to Carnarvon via what we called the South Passage. We’d never taken that route north and we ran into a storm. There were breakers everywhere and we literally surfed our way up the passage; it was a pretty hairy ride. We all helped each other out with our troubles. It took us three days from Fremantle to get to Carnarvon. When we got there, another skipper took over the “Slaven”, while I made arrangements for the processing and the sale of the saucer scallops. The boats caught heaps of scallops and then returned to Fremantle within a couple of months. My network discovered scallops (like the Shell petrol insignia) in abundance in Cockburn Sound, so I decided to bring “Antionetta” and the other boats back from Carnarvon to Fremantle and we caught huge quantities of scallops in the waters close by. Johnny was all set to buy the “Antonietta” in time for the 1970/71 crayfishing season, but our deal fell through and he left his post as skipper and moved on to one of Jerry’s boats.

Building an Empire on the Sea 1970 - 1986

Serge

Trial and Error

Penny

The Mighty Chasseur

Rioli

Life at “Stinky Alley”

My Adopted Family

The Order Book

Boom Time for the Three Musketeers

Super Bug

A Wake-Up Call

Black Monday

When It Rains, It Pours

The Western Australian Fishing Industry

Serge

It was good to be onshore. Especially since my footy team, South Fremantle had won the Grand Final that year! I was also following a local footy team which 'Cappo' had been coaching and a few of the boys, who were the sons of the local fishermen, asked me to become involved and asked me to attend a couple of meetings in order to get things started. Right from the outset I told them that I didn't want to get involved with any committee.

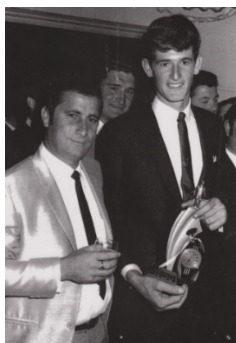
My father had been on the committee of the Fremantle Fishermen's Co-op for a while and he was never in a great mood after the meetings. However, I went to the meeting and a priest and up to 40 young lads from 16 to 20 years old were there. The meeting progressed without very much being achieved and then, I opened my big mouth and suggested that they should form a committee and give it the task of forming the club. The boys all wanted me to head up the club as its president and founder. I said I would but only for a short while, until they get themselves organized. Therefore I became the founder of the "St Pat's Football Club" which won a premiership in its first year of competition. I canvassed a number of older gentlemen to take over from me so that I could retire.

Eventually I got to hand over the reins and the club, in later years, went on to win many premierships in different competitions. Years later the club got in to financial difficulties, so I returned as president and I and others got the St Pat's club back in to being financially secure again within two seasons. After that, I retired once more!

There were many young kids that I knew who were playing for the team. South Port, a new footy club was made up of the young brigade of the older St Pat's players and had come about as a result of the sons of all these crayfishermen who weren't good enough to get a game with the St Pat's team. St Pat's drew players from everywhere and South Port wanted to start up their own club and there were about 20 or 30 boys who used to have games down at the Esplanade Park. They really wanted to start up their own club as an offshoot from St Pat's (like Dockers is to the Eagles). I would stand on the boundary line and help "Cappo" make the various coaching moves as the play progressed. He's always telling me about the time he should have listened to me.

We were playing a derby against St Pat's, at Hilton Park on Bruce Lee Oval, and I told "Cappo" to move Peter Zachariah off John Regan, a St Pat's player. He says he should have listened! It was a great district football competition and St Pats' won many premierships. It gave all the Sicilians, Italians and all the other guys who wanted to play football a great interest and it was an enjoyable time that I look back on, in my life.

My cousin Serge won the Fairest and Best award in 1971 in the whole Association. He had such promise as a footy player. It wasn't long after this that it was discovered during a doctor's visit with the flu that he complained about having a sore knee while he was there and was sent for an xray. It was discovered that he had a cancerous tumour and the leg required amputation; He was only 20 years old.



Joe with Serge, winner of Fairest & Best Award for local football club Southern Port, 1971

I had a lot of time for Serge. I'll never forget walking into his parent's house after he had lost his leg. His family was really in despair with what had happened to their son and brother. They were making plans about how they could all each contribute funds for Serge's living expenses. I may have been a bit out of line but I butted in and said, "No, stop! Serge is not a cripple and you're not going to turn him into one. He's still got one leg and he's going to live a life just the same as everybody else. He's going to come and work for me." My announcement may have been a bit out of line but they accepted my decision.

I had always been close to my De Ceglie cousins from the old Fremantle days, even though there was an age difference between us. Serge's brother Don (Donato) also began working for me, for a season, around this time as the skipper of the "Heather Flower", a freezer boat working in Esperance for the processing of abalone collected by the divers. Prior to this he was at sea crayfishing as Engineer of a family freezer boat called the "St Gerard" which he left and became a shareholder of an Engineering firm, servicing crayboats and prawn trawlers. He sold his shareholding in 1998 and took about 3 years off. Don was a workaholic and wasn't happy being retired. I called on Don to help me out with a refit in Samarang for about 6 weeks.

In 2001 he commenced working for me at my Mews Road premises for an agreed period of six months. He's still with me fourteen years later and has been a really valuable contributor to our group. He has proven to be a valuable asset and is a jack-of-all-trades. No job is too hard for Don and any task requested is completed professionally and with negligible fuss. He carries numerous titles within our group including being an amateur chiropractor for me when the need arises.

Saving Serge

'Saving Serge' was a joke, although out of the tragedy many a time I would spin a tale on how he lost his leg.

The tale would be that Serge was swimming and a shark bit his leg off. I courageously swam out to save Serge with a knife in my mouth and I had to kill the shark to get the leg back. I managed with help to kill the shark and get Serge back to shore, but unfortunately I couldn't save the leg.

I would quickly show my ulcer operation scar and say that the shark had also bitten me. The people would remark with admiration what a hero I was, and say what courage, my reply was when your friend is in trouble you don't think of the danger, you just do what you have to do and help them.

There are many other stories, one being I would kick his wooden leg in the presence of children and they would think what a cruel man I was kicking this man's leg, of course Serge felt no pain as it was his wooden leg I was kicking. Serge himself has played many pranks. One time he buried his wooden leg half in the sand at the beach and made a mound of sand and people came along asking was there someone else under there.

Serge got on with his life and was a very courageous man. One of the most rewarding decisions of my life was employing Serge as he was very good at his job. We developed a lifelong friendship and I love him and all his family, they are wonderful caring people.

Serge and others will feature more in the addendum to this Biography.

Trial and Error

We were buying, refitting and selling a number of boats and also buying and selling craypot licences. I was relying on my instincts, my people skills, my willingness to take a risk and my ability to trust and rely on myself to get me through. Over time, I had talented people around me. In time, I started a brokerage business, still at my Mews Road premises. It was called Consolidated Marine Developments Pty Ltd (CMD), in partnership with Theo Kailis.

Serge started working for me in a full time capacity, performing lighter duties at first until he was back on his feet with the prosthetic leg that he eventually had fitted. I showed him the ropes and had him working in all the ventures that we were undertaking in the new business. Originally I had him working for me, mainly in the crayfishing side of the companies. Eventually, I placed him as the manager of Consolidated Marine Brokers (CMB) which was an offshoot of CMD. We were dealing in the selling and buying of boats and crayfish pot licences, which at the time could only be transferred by freezer boats entire licences. This was eventually changed to include all licences. CMB was started for the purpose of arranging these deals. After 4/5 years of him managing the company for me, I eventually formed a partnership with Serge in the running of the new company.

When we first started, a single pot licence sold for approximately \$200. These have now risen to be approximately \$30,000 a pot. Serge was very successful in this venture and I eventually transferred the total interest of CMB over to him. Even though we were no longer partners and he was running the company, we would still meet up with each other for an hour or so for a cup of coffee and a chat every day before the working day began. We only ceased meeting regularly in 2013, as we had moved our offices from Mews Road to an office in Parry Street, in Fremantle and Serge commenced working his business from home. Serge and I, along with my old fishing mates, still regularly meet at our office on Saturday mornings and occasionally Serge will drop in early on some week days, visits I always look forward to and enjoy.

By the time we were in the new house in Ingram Street, where we stayed for more than 25 years we were well and truly in to the 1970's. I'd spent the majority of the decade building up my business interests in collaboration with business partners, particularly Theo Kailis, Dick Verboon and Serge. I probably had between 10 or 20 companies by now. These companies ranged from boat and pot licences, to buying, refitting, selling boats, selling bait, catching abalone and skins and hocks for cray bait. We were even running a pet food company; "Snoopy Pet Foods", in Coogee. Serge, "Cappo" and my brother Sam ran that company for about six months. We made dog biscuits. They contained Vitamin E which is supposed to be an aphrodisiac for dogs. The biscuits were meant to contain 2 ounces of Vitamin E but apparently "Cappo" would put in 10. We closed that business down after about six months of operation and Theo commenced to use the premises for the first successful live lobster tanks for export of live crays.

It was during the 70s that my buddies and I started meeting at the Mews Road offices on Saturday mornings for what we called the "Football Review/Forum". Essentially, it was a catch up over coffee to discuss the relevant issues between the East Fremantle "Sharks" supporters, being my De Ceglie cousins (Serge, Don and their brothers) and Mario de Jesus and the "Bulldogs" supporters, being myself alone, even though my second team was East Fremantle. It was rare, as most East and South supporters are very "one eyed" when it came to these two teams. But I was different, because I wanted to barrack for a team in the finals and East Fremantle was constantly in the finals and won more Grand Finals than any other club. Even to this day we still catch up early on Saturday mornings, though over the years our conversations have progressed substantially and today we cover all kinds of topics, solving the world problems!

As the 70s drew to a close, I'd built up an empire of 13 boats. Both crayboats and trawlers. Some we'd bought just for resale. I'd do them up; Some, I'd never even set eyes on. Buy them; work them for a couple of years solid. I could have kept going. I would have ended up with 50 boats but for me, it's the thrill of a challenge, getting into something new, learning about different places, people, industries, so I decided to leave the crayfishing industry and move into something new. It was time for a new challenge.

Penny

Back when we living in Ingram Street in Hamilton Hill, we had, by default, adopted a a dog named Penny from a Kiwi couple who lived a few doors up from us. Both of them worked full time during the day and the dog wandered over to our place because the kids were keeping her company. She was virtually our dog. We used to feed her and do everything for her. I visited the couple and told them, "Look, if you ever move house, we'd be happy to buy Penny." One day, that's exactly what happened; they came over to our house and said, "We're moving house. You can have Penny." She was a great little dog but had no discipline and would chase cars on the road. We'd previously lost a dog before because he'd gotten run over by a car, so we tried to train this one so that we didn't lose her too.

In 1972 I bought a block at auction at 26 Blackwall Reach in Bicton. There was an old house on the block. I didn't really intend buying the place; I just went down to the auction for a sticky beak. Coral said, "Don't come back having bought that house," which of course, I did. I got it for a very cheap price; about a quarter of what it was actually worth, right on the foreshore of the river. It was such a stroke of luck that I was there. We put our Ingram Street house on the market and although the market in that area was down, the house sold pretty quickly, because I was not fussy about the price. So the next thing you know, we're living on Blackwall Reach in a bloody dump, because the house was old and falling to pieces.

Mark was two when we moved in to the Blackwall Reach home. He was a quick kid. One of those kids who would just escape in a flash if you didn't keep a watchful eye on him. One time, we found him right up on the bloody cliff behind our house. The infamous Blackwall "Blackies" Reach where all the teenagers liked to go jumping off the cliff.

One day, when we were still living at the Ingram Street house, somehow Mark found himself in the middle of the street unattended. Penny kept crossing the street on both sides of him, protecting him from cars. A car eventually stopped and brought Mark inside. The second time, the bread delivery truck was parked in the driveway of our neighbours house. The driver was about to hop in her car and back out of the driveway but Penny was running behind the vehicle and running up to the driveway and barking. Somehow, Mark had gotten 'loose' again and plopped himself down on the driveway right behind the bread van!

Were it not for Penny the driver would have backed out right over him. So we all got pretty attached to Penny. I remember when she was run over, it was on a Saturday and Coral could not accept that the poor dog was dead. We took her to the Vets but being a Saturday, they were closed. Coral sat with the dog on her lap, wrapped in a towel, as we drove in the car to the Vets. She was very upset and we eventually drove Penny to her mothers' place and buried her in the back yard. We had one other dog called Bobby, he was my favourite. We both used to sit and watch the TV together. He was also run over and the crying and grief caused by this was enough for us to decide there and then that there would be no more dogs. The sadness was too much for me and the family to handle.

We lived in the old Blackwall Reach house for a couple of years before we decided to bowl it over and build a new house. The house took two years to build, and in the meantime we rented in Suffolk Street in Fremantle, two streets over from Essex Street and the area I knew so well from my childhood days. Mark started school while we were there and all 3 kids went to Bicton Primary School in preparation for our move back to Blackwall Reach. When the house was finally finished we moved back in and stayed there for the next 25 years.

The Mighty Chasseur

By the late 1970's I'd built up CMD to a fleet of about 13 vessels; mostly crayboats. Some of our boats I'd never even laid eyes on; we'd buy them, refit them, work them for a couple of years and sell them. I guess I could have stayed in the crayfish game but something was driving me to look beyond crayfishing and see what else I could achieve in the fishing industry. I was ready to move on to the next challenge, the next chapter of my career. I knew it would be more difficult because it was uncharted territory but that was where I had to go. I had to take the next step.

Encouraged by our early successes in prawning in Exmouth Gulf and the improvements I'd been able to make to the prawn processing industry, I started to think that my next move might be to explore opportunities in Queensland's Gulf of Carpentaria, where the Northern Prawn industry was starting to flourish and I knew just the man to help me.

I'd met John "Foggs" Foggin years earlier during my days aboard the "Slaven", working as a deckhand for Fremantle based skipper Henry Ott aboard another of Theo's trawlers, "Ross Empress". The 1970s had seen Foggs grow into a fine skipper in Carnarvon and in the Gulf of Carpentaria and he was a man who I admired. I wanted him on board my team, so I sent my brother Sammy to the Oddfellows "Oddies" Hotel where "Foggs" hung out, to deliver a message, asking him to come and see me the next day. The result of that meeting was that "Foggs" agreed to come on board as my business partner and as the skipper. We'd found other business partners; John Cullity of Cullity Timbers and another shareholder and formed a partnership called Medusa Fisheries. So we each had a 25% share.

We built the magnificent 85 foot prawn trawler, "Chasseur", down at John Albin's yard. "Chasseur" was the first fishing trawler in the whole world fitted with a Kort nozzle, which I was really excited about. A Kort Nozzle is a ducted propellor with a non-rotating nozzle traditionally used on tugs to improve their towing power and propeller efficiency. I had extensively researched it and could see how it would work in our area. I was pretty good at adapting others ideas in those days.

You use these ideas when you can see how others have used them successfully. I have never been afraid or too proud to say "I did it the wrong way and I'm going to fix it". I would always have a go at something new. Credibility is everything and being honest and true to oneself is also everything. I don't wish to take credit for the success of the "Chasseur"; It was someone else's idea that we adapted it to a prawn trawler and it worked. It should have happened years before!

We immediately had an advantage over the other trawlers because we had fitted the "Chasseur" with a Kort nozzle. When I first saw a tug that had a Kort nozzle, I wrote away to the company that manufactured them because I wanted to put one on the "Marta" to increase her speed, but I was informed that the Kort nozzle principle was for towing, not for speed and as "Marta" was able to travel without the nozzle, I quickly abandoned that. "Chasseur" was the first fishing trawler in the whole world fitted with a Kort nozzle. I was really excited about her and her Kort Nozzle. It wasn't a technology that I'd invented, but I was the first one to apply it to prawning trawlers and in my opinion, it should have been done years ago.

Firstly, It saved fuel, was 25% more efficient, hence 25% less power required and secondly we could catch a lot more prawns and process them. Before we entered the Northern Prawn industry the trawlers in the area had not been able to catch 6000 pounds of prawns a day for more than four days running without collapsing with the weight of the work. We build the "Chasseur" with the capacity of taking aboard 13000 pounds at once. With our increased towing speed from the Kort Nozzle, I thought we could do two lots on both per day, because you can catch them alright. But I hadn't factored in the time to empty and close the freezer bags etc. But what we did find was that we could do 13000 pounds + another 8000 pounds (21000) one day and the next day we could do the initial 13000 pounds and then 5000 pounds (18000). So that meant that over 4 days that was 78000 pounds compared to the 24000 pounds that the boats had been pulling in previously.

A third change I brought to the area was the way the prawns were packed. We changed the box. Threw away the old methods and showed them how they could pack these things with the minimum of fuss. I designed the boxes so that you only needed to use one piece fully made up. I made them stop weighing them on the spot because it took longer to do that, as opposed to weighing them in the boxes. I just got a matchbox, put two ends on it, and that's it. So you pour them in, you don't weigh them first, you weigh them in palettes later. You just get approximate weights but that was okay.



“Chasseur”

If I was Theo Kailis troubleshooter, then “Cappo” was mine. I employed “Cappo” as a quality controller deckhand aboard “Chasseur”, to train the crew in the prawn processing techniques that we had developed during our time together in Exmouth Gulf. Before we were ready to hit the water, he helped set up the offices in Cairns along with Jan Chitty. I nabbed another great guy named Blue Bulling, fresh from Groote Island, who was originally the chief engineer for Kailis in Exmouth, for the trawlers and the processing plant. He was in control of the homesteads and accommodation for the fishermen and personnel etc. He virtually ran a small township. He was involved at Groote Island in a prawning project that had ceased to operate. He worked on getting the boats organised in Karumba in Queensland the port which they were working out of.

Blue had had enough of the prawning industry. His plan was to go to Peaceful Island, throw a fishing line in the water, tied to his big toe and relax. He had amassed sufficient funds to finance this lifestyle for quite a while. He was coming to Cairns to deliver a boat to us, as his last duty. I was waiting for him at the Cairns wharf. I made him an attractive offer and assured him it would be stress free and he'd have time to relax. He agreed! I was happy I had convinced him to join us and he was probably the best “all rounder” in the business.

He then moved to Cairns and worked in the office with Jan, once the boats were up and running and “Cappo” was still on board. Blue was the Engineer and Fleet Manager and got the boats ready and once that was completed he went in to the office as the General Manager, a position he held for 15 years. He was extremely talented in all aspects of both the vessels and the prawning industry.

Just before the 1980s hit we entered the Northern Prawn industry with a bang with “Chasseur” and other trawlers. “Chasseur” immediately had an advantage over the others. Because of her Kort nozzle, she was able to trawl faster than the other trawlers and therefore she was more efficient and able to catch more prawns.

With ‘Foggs’ as skipper and ‘Cappo’ as quality controller and some great deck crew, we gradually built up our fleet to by 6. 4 managed by Blue and 2 managed ‘Foggs’ and we were doing very well. By that time, we'd sorted out the offices and although the trawlers were working out of Karumba, our main base was in Cairns, from where we organised our crew changes, sent stores to the boats and got them refueled and unloaded.

In 1974, when John Foggin was on the “Chasseur” they caught and processed 1,000,000 pounds of prawns, a record not yet broken. However, because of the buyback reducing the fleet to only 55 boats, I expect someone will surpass this number.

The fishing season was all year round but we’d do a quick and intensive refit over the Christmas period. The refit was probably the most stressful time of the year. We were always lean and mean in terms of staff, not quite a skeleton staff but not an abundance of people, so we had to know and be prepared to do and develop skills in more than one area.

A syndicate comprising Theo Kailis, the Verboons, John Foggin and myself purchased “FV Courageous” which had been built by Australian Shipbuilding Industries. It was a 90 foot research vessel which was leased to the Commonwealth government agency, CSIRO. “Courageous” had conducted research all around Australia.

We later started a 4 boat operation with Medusa Fisheries and Markwell Fisheries. A company owned by Amital Ltd. the Australian “Coca Cola” distributor. John and I bought out their share and worked the company quite profitably. John and I later purchased Markwells’ 50% and formed a company called Markwell Fishing, which was extremely profitable. We eventually sold to Atlantic Ltd the public company that we formed in 1986 to embark in to real estate developments. We built a 9 storey office development in St George’s Terrace in Perth, a large shopping complex in Kalamunda and an office complex in Cairns, in Northern Queensland. Then we had the stock market crash etc. etc.

Because of our great team and our hard work and innovations, we absolutely cleaned up in the Gulf of Carpentaria, where we remained and were successful for over ten years. At one point, we owned and operated 22 trawlers and licences. Of course, the 1980s business “boom” helped. Business was good and so was life.



With Coral at nephew Mino’s 21st, 1978

Rioli

We continued to purchase and build more trawlers to add to the fleet, which at one point reached 22 boats and licences. We built one of these trawlers and I named it “Rioli”, after my favourite football player, Maurice Rioli, who played in the WA Football League, firstly for South Fremantle ‘Bulldogs’ and later for Richmond ‘Tigers’.

The trawler was christened by a priest who blessed the vessel and we had a huge party in Fremantle which was attended by a heap of our family and friends, including Maurice Rioli with his wife and family. Mal Brown was there too; he jokes that I took the christening as seriously as I would the christening of a child. And he’s not far wrong; I felt very proud. “Rioli” was a champion player, one of the best of his time. Being an Indigenous Australian, he had a hugely positive impact on the cultural attitude towards Aboriginal players who followed in his wake. I was working overseas in Myanmar (Burma) when Maurice Rioli died of a heart attack in 2010.

I’d spent the 16 years prior to that trying to decide what kind of charity work I would do when the time came. I really wanted to help the Australian Indigenous community. I have enormous respect for Aboriginal people and their culture and I wondered what I could do to help free them from the injustices that they continue to suffer in their own country. I had seen so many ventures and programs fail to make any difference in this area. These were programs organised and run by people who understood the issues faced by the Aboriginal people and their culture, far more than I did. I really didn’t think that I could make much of a worthwhile difference.. So I decided to focus my efforts elsewhere, somewhere that I could really make a difference. I will always support aboriginal charitable causes when a project needs some help.

Life at Stinky Alley

With our fishing fleet looking good the early 1980s was when I started to build up my property portfolio. People have always called me a risk taker. I agree! I do believe though that my risks are calculated. Often, my business moves appear to make no sense to others, who can see no short term financial gain. To them, these decisions appear to be 'risks' but more often than not, I have taken that 'risk' because I have a sound reason to believe that the venture will be successful in the long term. I have put money and faith into projects that other business owners wouldn't touch with a ten foot pole, because I have believed that the project will eventually be a success.

Purchasing the Old Anchorage Abattoir was one of my calculated risks. This coastal strip, just south of Fremantle on Cockburn Road in Coogee, was badly contaminated and eroded. Whenever anyone drove past that part of the coast, they had to hold their breath to dodge the smell. So much so that some people called the area "Stinky Alley". Everyone thought I was crazy to buy a rotting piece of land, but I was thinking ahead. The land would prove to be significant one day; I just knew it. Logically, it made sense to me that one day all of Perth's coastal communities would somehow need to link up. And I knew that the Cockburn Council and community as a whole, wanted to clean up the noxious trade on the coast and develop the land into something the community could use. Development of the land would happen eventually, even if it took 20 years to get the ball rolling and if you want to be a long term investor, you've got to have both foresight and patience.

It was a lot of money back in the 1980's but an eventual \$375,000 investment buying the "Anchorage" started the ball rolling. I later purchased any land that was available in the area. The industry servicing the abattoirs was not very good so the land and the buildings were sold off and I purchased them for a total cost of \$1.8m. I realized there was an opportunity to make a good profit down the track even though, at the time it was regarded as noxious land and the nearby residents and Councillors had been trying to get the industry out of the area for quite a while. I had placed offers for different land lots that came up tender, for sale or auction as I could see my vision of waterfront development coming to fruition. As soon as my purchases got rid of the noxious industries along Cockburn Road, it wasn't long before suburbs like Coogee became very popular with many lots offering ocean and island views and eventually the area began attracted high prices.

A lot of these businesses were dying industries like tanneries, skins and wool and the residents in the area had been trying to get them to move out for years. I could see a lot of value due to the fact that this was all waterfront land and would be very valuable in future years. I finished up buying up to 18 hectares in the end and only being 6 kilometres from Fremantle and 1.5 k's from Cockburn Waters, seemed to me to be fairly practical. I don't think it was that I thought I was a genius. If you looked at all that vacant land out there, something was surely going to happen. If you had gone up in a helicopter in those days and took a look at a fair chunk of the Perth metropolitan area within a 10 kilometre radius, there were a lot of market gardens out there and it only seemed to make sense to me that they would all eventually link up. The Anchorage site had 500 metres of waterfront land so you could see that it had a very great future potential.

At the same time as buying the land in Coogee from Elders in 1983, I also bought the two Elders wool store buildings. I didn't want or need the wool stores but the seller made my purchase of another large area of Coogee conditional on me also buying the two buildings. This turned out to be a lucky purchase. I purchased a few properties which were good investments.

In the meantime, "Australia II" had just won the "America's Cup" in Newport in the USA, under the sponsorship of Alan "Bondy" Bond and the directorship of Warren Jones with a crew including Fremantle's John Longley. Warren Jones and I had gone to school together back at Fremantle Boys' and I was a huge supporter of the sailing team. The boys needed somewhere to work on the yacht, so I leased the Mews Road premises to them. The deal we struck was, if they managed to defend the 1987 title, which was to be held right here in Fremantle, they would buy the lease for the building from me. To make way for "Bondy's" team, we relocated the Marta Fishing Company to one of the Anchorage office premises in Coogee.

It took a while for us to get the offices done up properly, so for a little while, it was just me, Julia Crosetta and another employee, Anna “Sangenini” Carmichael, down at Anchorage. Everyone else remained at Mews Road in the meantime. Julia and I were spoiled by Anna who often cooked up a big squid lunch for the three of us. Eventually, the rest of my employees joined us at Anchorage. We sometimes communicated by “walkie talkie” for fun; we had one in the office and I had one in my car and every morning, I’d radio through to the office as I was coming over the Ocean Road hill; “I’m on my way down, put the kettle on!”

My Adopted Family

The 1980's were a fantastic time for me and my employees. Because of the worldwide financial "boom", business was flourishing and it was a busy time for me, my company and my employees and we hired some additional staff. On the first day of the 1982/83 crayfishing season, 22 year old Julia Crosetta began working for my company as an accounts clerk. She was young, naïve, and absolutely petrified of me, she thought she'd stepped into a madhouse. All she could hear were loud hostile voices coming from next room.

She almost didn't get hired because her father held a senior position at the Fisheries Department and when I was advised that Julia was the best applicant but not recommended due to her fathers position, I thought, why should a person be judged by her parents employment role. I finished up giving her the job rather than discriminate for such a paltry reason. She only worked here for a little while before she went home saying "I'm not going back there! The guys a lunatic"; Meaning me! When I asked her how she was enjoying the job she said "I must tell you I'm not impressed with the swearing"

Julia was an excellent worker and before long, when my current receptionist Anna needed to take some leave to go on her honeymoon, I promoted her to the position as my Personal Assistant, as well as the role of my personal secretary. Apparently Anna gave her some tips before she left: "Just keep your mouth shut and do whatever Mr Rotondella says." Once she'd lost a little of her fear, she gathered up the courage to open her mouth a little.

One day I asked her, "So Julia, how are you enjoying the work?" and she questioned me on the motives behind the 'colourful language' I was prone to using at the office, that is my incessant swearing. She thought it was disgusting. "Julia, it's not that my language is colourful, it's just that the walls are too thin!" was my apparent reply, as Julia still reminds me. She's never forgotten that. She had told her aunty that she was frightened of me and that I swore all the time and she didn't want to go back. She had come from a Real Estate company where everyone had been so calm, quiet and polite. When she started with us she was trying to balance a hundred different duties every day. She lasted over 20 years! She became my favourite; still is!

During the 1980's I had some great female employees working for me at both Fremantle and Coogee. In 1980 I interviewed Edel Conroy who had been talked in to applying for the job by my friend John Dorrington with whom she'd previously worked for 10 years.

I have been very lucky with the wonderful staff that I have worked with over the many years since I gave up fishing. They have become my "adopted family" and once they start they remain for years. Once they got used to me and my, let's say "personality" we have all become the greatest of friends even to this day.

In the mid 1980s I hired two more young women who over the years have become two of my dearest friends and pillars of strength. Maria Sardi who was only 21 when she started working for me in October 1983 and Helen Separovic (then Helen Pensa) who started working for me in June 1985. Helen was also only 21, a country girl from Broken Hill in NSW. She was employed by us, which was her first job in the 'big city'. She started as a clerical assistant to Edel Conroy down at Anchorage in Coogee. I think she didn't know what hit her when she rocked up to this derelict old building in the middle of a wasteland. She probably thought she was about to be murdered. She made her brother-in-law come to the interview with her. Before she met me, the other staff apparently warned her that I was "little bit loud."

They were actually fun times down at Coogee and it was just like one great family working together. Martin King was the Accountant and Steve Myerhoff worked the office. My friend John Dorrington occupied an office downstairs and my son Joe who was working with John at his computer company, Clayco Computers.

I worked my staff hard and they gave me 100% plus more. But I also looked after them. Julia and Helen never fail to remind me about one particular time in the mid 1980's at tax time at the end of financial year. It was the June 30th and we were all working overtime to get everything sorted. At the time we had a deal going with a pine plantations venture with a friend, Grey Warburton. When Julia and Helen knocked off for the day, I put them on call. I told them, "Don't do anything. I might have to call you to come in and type up some agreements." Helen stayed at Julia's that night and I called them in at 3am. We needed to get everything in to the department to get it all stamped. They were up all night typing documents. We all went into the tax department the next day and I had to be the squeaky wheel again.

Not only did the staff work hard but we all became quite good friends. They were rewarded financially but the greatest reward was our friendship. My staff became my family. They became my adopted family. I did have some problems with my temper though. Still do! I lose my temper over minor things. Major problems I don't! I just work out the best way to remedy a problem and achieve the best possible result.

Over the years, my staff have gone back and forth, especially the ladies. They take off to get married and have babies but then they come back. The men, they take off to pursue other projects but many come back and forth, just like a family. Julia, Maria, Helen (20 years till 1995), 'Cappo', Don and Serge have always been there. I don't burn my bridges. I don't hold a grudge. I have a temper and I can flare up and it does scare people that are new in our office, but five minutes later, the anger is gone and everything is back to normal. There is not one bone of revenge in my body, which is probably very un-Italian! I love all my staff and consider them to be family. My relationships with my female staff, most of whom have been working for me on and off since they were in their early twenties has helped me to understand my daughter and has helped in our relationship. They've helped to organize fantastic parties for me. They organized my 50th birthday surprise and my 60th roast at the Fremantle Sailing Club.

Helen had taught me that you should never judge a book by its cover. At first, I didn't understand her. I actually didn't think she was that intelligent. It wasn't until later, when I started working closely with her that I got to know her better, I realized just how smart she was. In fact, she is one of the most intelligent women I know. She is just so smart.

The Order Book

As I have mentioned before, sometimes I have trouble controlling my temper and I'd get angry over the smallest bloody things. It often scared the girls that worked for me and I've had to do a lot of quick talking over the years to apologise and convince them not to quit. Before the girls got to know me, this would sometimes scare them. I liked to have things done in a certain way. I think I had worked too long out at sea with only the crew for company!

When we moved to Anchorage we bought some nice new furniture, including a brand new reception desk. Shortly after the move, one of the girls lost our new order book. I was so annoyed that, right in front of them, I drilled a hole in the brand new reception desk and then drilled another hole in the new order book. I got some rope and tied the two things together. "You'll never lose the book now," I told them. They simply couldn't believe it, but I think I got my point across.

My staff will tell you that I blow up over nothing; I still do. I still find it hard to control. I try my best and feel that I have gotten better at controlling my temper over the years. Whilst my mouth was hurling abuse, my brain was telling my mouth to shut up but my mouth refused to respond positively. I wish I could control it completely.

By now, I should have learnt how. I just get angry over the smallest things and then I get angry with myself about getting angry in the first place! I must be good at apologizing though, because I've had a number of staff walk out on me and I've always managed to convince them to come back. Many of my staff are boomerangs, especially the women. But my temper is something I'm constantly working on to control. In the old days I sometimes didn't always speak nicely to my staff. It's not an excuse but back in the days when I had 22 boats, sometimes I didn't have time to listen. I just needed people to get straight to the point and answer my questions and do the work. Sometimes I do things differently to most people and it frustrates me when people don't trust my judgement and question the way I do things, because I have a bigger plan that sometimes they can't see. Sometimes, in order to make someone understand something, I ask them to get in the car with me. Firstly I say, "have a look at that door, what do you see". "Look out the window, what do you see"? I want to demonstrate to them how we can see things differently.

I would often take them up to the Fremantle Monument. "Okay, now what can you see? Look at that". So you broaden your horizons. Take a step back out of it. Don't become too involved and look at things in a way that you overlook everything. In such a way that you don't miss anything and you'll see a lot more. It's just like; when someone says you can't see the forest for the trees. When you're away at sea, there is nothing to distract you. I have always looked at the big picture and sometimes it was difficult to get the point across. I need to place on the record that my temper has improved and is now less than 2% of the current picture. The other 98% of the time I'm a lot more easy to work with. I was always using the carrot (not the stick) the good relationships overshadowed the tantrums.

Boom Time for the Three Musketeers

'Happy, happy, happy'

At Anchorage, Julia and I were working quite closely with my cousin Serge. We had to work really hard and really long hours, to keep up with business. The three of us just clicked. We called ourselves The Three Musketeers, and somewhere along the line, we became the best of friends. Still are. I was affectionately known as "Rocky" or "Rock" for short after the Sylvester Stallone character who was a major celebrity of the time. Julia and I would often meet up with Serge at his boat brokerage adjacent to the Mews Road office and we'd take off to the "Capri" restaurant or to the casino for a couple of hours. Serge later actually moved out to the Anchorage office and ran his brokerage business from out there.

Those years were just fabulous. The three of us worked hard and we lived it up just as hard. We had a wonderful time, almost every single day. Funny things would happen that would make us laugh till it hurts. When I think back, I wonder what the hell we were laughing about but at the time, it was always seemed hilarious. We went out for lunch to the Roma or the Capri Restaurant at least two or three times a week till we started to put on weight and decided we had to stop. We went to the casino at night. People looking at our relationship from the outside just didn't understand and there were some jealousies.

We were a little insensitive to these complaints at the time, though in hindsight, of course they make a lot of sense. I wish upon every human being in this world the kind of friendship that Serge, Julia and I share. Ours is a friendship that, come what may, will never ever die.

I became very close to Julia, her family and friends over that time. I have always become involved with my staff's families and in many cases have been able to help out if required.

One day after lunch at the "Roma" we were walking back to work along High Street and Serge who was trying to give up smoking, bought some chewing tobacco. As usual I was talking and not paying much attention to what was going on. Serge said to me "Here have some of this". I took it and started chewing it. "What the hell have you given me"?! Here I was in the middle of High Street swearing my head off, spitting out the foul tasting chewing tobacco.

Another time, I was at lunch with Julia and Serge and I was standing in a dividing doorway, in view of all the patrons, between the two parts of the restaurant, talking with a friend named Richard Longley, for about 10 minutes, after we had finished lunch. Now for those who know the Longley family, the view may have looked quite amusing. One of Richard's sons Luc, played basketball for the Chicago Bulls and like his father, would have reached an altitude of near on 7 feet or 210 centimetres, approximately, on the metric scale.

Julia mentioned that she had been embarrassed for me, having a short stature, as I am only 5foot 3 inches (157 centimetres approximately) in height. To her and others the sight may have looked quite amusing seeing us standing together. I replied to her that I had never been concerned about the fact that I was short. In fact, I saw it as a positive. Like most people I loved kids and I found that my size had always been a benefit as I always gained instant acceptance from them. I could walk up to a kid who was fishing and could open up an immediate conversation with them about what they were catching etc. with absolute ease.

I also always found that I seemed to appeal to the motherly instinct of most women, irrespective of their age. Julie asked me that if I had a choice, would I choose to be taller. My response was, I would only like my arms to be a bit longer so that I can scratch my back a bit easier. Also, being shorter doesn't go astray when you are flying in economy on an airplane and in many other areas!

In my later years when discussing with people who had a problem with being short, I showed them with my hand next to my eye. "I measure people from the eyes upwards, (in other words their intelligence) not from the top of the head down" and also with what is in his or her heart. This is a retort I often used when I saw people who had a problem with being short. One man actually told me that after me using that statement it actually changed his future perception of himself.

Of course, we three have supported each other through tragic times too; the loss of parents and friends. My wife Coral had four tragic deaths of her brothers and a nephew. My staff were a constant support and comfort to me during these times of sadness. We've also had our share of tough times too. But overall, we were a happy bunch and that was our working motto: "Happy, happy, happy". The relationships that I made with my staff in the 80s have endured through to this very day. Julia worked for me on and off until 2005 and Helen until 2004 on a part time basis. Since 2005, when Julia left, Maria has been my personal secretary. She knows me like the back of her hand and these days she's my right hand woman. Maria is another one that has stayed with me on and off for 30 years. She left to have her family and when the time was right she resumed where she had left off.

Superbug

In the late 80s I heard about an innovative method of extracting gold from sulphide rock, which is found deep within a goldmine. Gold found in sulphide is actually locked into the rock and isn't able to be processed as easily as gold found in other kinds of rock such as quartz. The most efficient way of extracting gold trapped in sulphide is to burn off the sulphide to release the gold but Australia was the only country in the world that extracted gold from sulphide in this way because the atmospheric by-product of the burning process is highly poisonous for the environment.

At the cutting edge of microbiology research, Professor Barrett and another of the worlds' leading biologists from King's College in Cambridge were developing a much more environmentally friendly option: gold bioleaching, a process which extracts gold trapped in sulphides using 'superbugs' which derive their energy by eating the sulphides and in doing so, release the gold.

We negotiated a partnership with the professors at King's College and set up a temporary laboratory at one of the Anchorage offices. Another scientific researcher was sent over from the UK to oversee the gold bioleaching experiments. I was part of the design team. It was an absolutely fascinating project to be a part of. The bugs reproduced by splitting. We'd start with a jar full of superbugs and within a very short space of time, we'd end up with a roomful. They just kept splitting and splitting and splitting and then eventually they got stuck into the sulphides. I saw the little beggars at work under a microscope and it reminded me of an Italian eating spaghetti, just chomping away.

One night, Julia and I took the professors out for dinner to discuss how the research was progressing. They explained that they were now trying to perfect the formula. "We've only managed to successfully extract 85% of the gold using the superbugs," "We're working on figuring out how to extract the remaining 15%." Now, in my opinion, there are times when perfectionism is necessary and there are times when perfectionism just gets in the way of completing a job. In many cases, trying to achieve a perfect result is simply not good business sense. In this case, it was more efficient to be happy with the 85% extraction rate that had already been achieved, because trying to find a way to extract the last 15% was proving to be more of a drain on time, energy and resources than it had been to work out how to extract the first 85%.

I realised then that nothing was ever going to change the fact that the biologists and I had completely different motivations; I was looking at things from an economic perspective and they were looking at things from purely a research and development perspective. So after three years of experiments into gold bioleaching, I decided it was in my company's best interest to sell half my interest to Paragon Resources. We later sold the whole company and it is still operating today using the bug technology. In every business relationship, you always have to make sure you know where to find the exit sign, so that when it's time to get out, it's not hard to do.

A Wake-Up Call *‘Prevention is better than cure’*

My cousin Serge says that, where my health is concerned, I live by the mantra, “prevention is better than cure,” and that’s probably true. I’m curious about my body and how it works and I like to get my health tested regularly and try out different therapies. I’m probably a bit of a hypochondriac and I once went to a doctor who said that I had “imaginitis”. I have a massage once a week with my masseuse Christine, who’s been with me since late 1987. I’ve also been getting Chelation for at least ten years. Chelation is a medical procedure that was originally developed to remove lead from the system of people who’d been exposed to leaded paint and petrol. In doing so, they discovered that a lot of people who had blood flow problems were having better circulation. So they adapted it for other conditions. I use it to maintain general health. A drip is inserted into my arm and the toxins are removed from my body.

The massage and the Chelation keep me in reasonably good health but the reason I am alive today is due mostly to the special care I receive at work and at home. My current employees, Maria and Don, make sure I eat regularly at work and continue to take my vitamins and health tonics. And on the home front, when we were together, Coral was very dedicated to my health regimen, even after 50 years of marriage. She is a confident, capable, busy woman, with a very active life. That is one thing that I appreciate of our 51 years together, she always looked after me with a great dedication. The great thing about Coral is that she always made an interesting life for herself once the children had moved away. She had her Spanish lessons, line dancing and yoga etc. but she would always make sure she was home before I’d get home from work and there’d be a meal every single night. I’d tell her not to bother but she wouldn’t listen. She spoiled me and spoiled me rotten. She truly was dedicated to nurturing me and keeping me healthy.

I believe it is the early days I spent learning to manage my asthma condition which triggered a life-long curiosity in learning about my own health. Over the course of my life, my preoccupation with my health has baffled some and amused others. I’ve been called a hypochondriac more times than I can begin to count, particularly during the 80s, when Serge and Julia were constantly giving me a hard time about my asthma because they reckon they’d never seen me have an attack. As the years passed, medical advancements have made dealing with my asthma a lot easier. Now that I know my triggers I can try to avoid them and I have my asthma puffer on hand in case of an attack. In my later years, I’ve battled lower back problems, sleep apnea and headaches.

In the mid 80s though, my biggest problem was that I was regularly suffering from really bad chest cramps. It was during a time that I was going through a lot of stress. We’d built up an empire of 22 boats and I was busy all the time. I didn’t eat regular meals and ran on adrenaline but in the mean time my body was falling apart. A lot of the time I’d have these cramps at work. I’d be in absolute agony, doubled over on the floor of the office. Julia was genuinely concerned but Serge thought it was hysterical and he’d tease me and say that one day they’d have to send for the undertaker to take me away. I didn’t know what was wrong with me but I trusted my instincts that this was not a heart problem. Coral disagreed. She was really worried about me and believed that one day I would have a heart attack, especially since, at the time, I was a heavy smoker.

One time I started having the chest cramp pains while I was driving. I called Coral from the car on the phone and said, “I’m having the chest pains again. It’s not a heart attack and I want to prove it to you. I’m on my way home. When I get there, I want you to drive me to the hospital so they can put my heart on a monitor.” By the time I got home I was almost in a foetal position; how I had driven the car that far, I really don’t know.

Coral drove me to the emergency department at the hospital where they hooked me up to a whole heap of machines. The doctor looked at the monitors and his face betrayed concern. “There’s a problem with your heart,” he told me. Coral gasped, but my response was firm. “No, there’s a problem with your machine. Try a different machine.” They must have thought I was nuts! I insisted. “Try another machine. There’s nothing wrong with me. The machine is defective.”

Eventually, they did as I asked, just to appease me. When I was hooked up to the new machine, the doctor looked embarrassed. The first machine was broken; there was nothing wrong with my heart! I didn't want to think about how many people might have been issued with a misdiagnosis because of that faulty machine. Coral was pleased that my heart was okay but whatever was wrong with me still had everyone stumped. I was sent home without any answers and continued to suffer with regular cramps.

Coral and I were at a charity function held in the grand master ballroom at the University of Western Australia near the city. I remember that a lot of the art belonging to Robert Holmes à Court (a celebrated arts patron and philanthropist) was on show. We were sitting at the same table as Kerry Stokes who was WA's richest man at the time. Right there at the table, I started having the chest cramps. Kerry's wife took one look at me and said, "You don't look too good." "I don't feel too good," I replied.

I got up and walked outside with the assistance of a friend and I put myself in the usual foetal position that seemed to help with the pain. Someone alerted the organizers and all of a sudden over the microphone I hear, "Is there a doctor in the house? Is there a doctor in the house?" Next thing I knew, a doctor was kneeling over me. He put me on my back, which was the worst thing he could have done to me because it virtually cut off my blood supply. I passed out for a while; I'm not sure how long. According to Coral, my face went grey and I had no pulse. Then I heard the doctor say, "I can feel a pulse". Meanwhile, an ambulance had been called. I was taken to Hollywood Hospital around the corner. They hooked me up to a variety of machines and kept me under observation for a while. They still couldn't work out what was wrong with me and again I went home without any answers.

It was my masseuse, Christine, who worked out the health problem. One day I had an attack of the cramps in the middle of a massage. She cancelled her next few appointments to help me through it. And in asking questions about what I'd been doing that day, she worked out that I had an allergy to Codeine. You see, what had been happening is that when I'd get any pain, headache or backache, I'd take Panadeine. The packet dosage advises to take two but I'd take four, often on an empty stomach. The cramps would appear and I'd take another couple of Panadeine. After that, if I had any cramps, Julia would say, "We'll give you water, not Panadeine" and the problem subsided but was still continuing to cramp.

I had a wakeup call in 1987. I was at a function when I passed out, lost my pulse and actually died. I decided from that moment I would change my life and commenced looking after my health. Coral and I went to a health retreat at a place in Queensland called "Camp Eden". The day we left Perth, I decided to give up smoking. We were at the Perth Airport, about to board our flight. I smoked one last cigarette, screwed up the packet, threw it unceremoniously into the rubbish, and said goodbye to smoking forever.

At 'Camp Eden', they have all these people that try to motivate you. I wasn't very cooperative. The motivational people really had their work cut out for them. They were all gung ho and it was their job to encourage and push me to do things and I just couldn't give a damn. I don't do things someone else's way, I do them my way. One day this American girl tried to get me to climb up a hill. I pulled her aside and said, "I'm not going to do it". If you have to lie, just lie. Tell them I don't feel too well. Coral will go instead. The next day, I went, and the American girl walked beside me the whole way and we had a good chat. Since that time we've been on a few more health retreats. "Camp Eden" morphed into "Golden Door" in response to peoples' complaints about it being too stringent and was much less strict. They took away a lot of the silly discipline. I also went on one with my daughter a few years later and have become a lot more accepting of the lessons learned than I was back in those days.

I think I started focusing on my health just in time. Because by the end of that year, I had a lot more stress about to head my way.

Black Monday

The 1987 “America’s Cup” was held in Fremantle just after the New Year.

Warren Jones approached me to see whether there was a possibility of using my premises at 1 Mews Road, Fremantle as the headquarters for the 1987 America’s Cup Challenge. I agreed and subsequently moved my office from 1 Mews Road to the Anchorage premises which I had refurbished. 1 Mews Road was then leased to the America’s Cup Challenge and they operated from there for the duration of the race.

The Western Australian committee that were preparing for the cup races made space available and gave numerous facilities to the people who were going to challenge the cup, coming from a number of countries.

Virtually overnight the “town” transformed from a sleepy little fishing village and cargo ship port for grain and bulk cargoes, into a happening, cosmopolitan city. Fremantle was on the world map. Things were looking good and with the 80s boom still going strong, things were looking really positive for Atlantic.

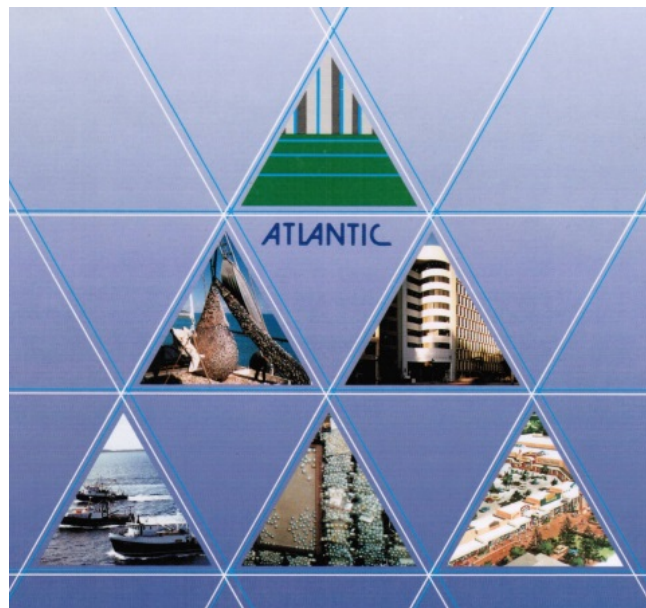
With my fishing fleet continuing to grow and my business ventures expanding, I decided to consolidate part of my fishing operations with my property and share investments. I decided to enter the public arena by floating a public company, which were very popular during the 80s. In June 1987, with a float of \$5 million, Atlantic Limited was listed as a Public Company on the Australian Stock Exchange.

Steve, Edel, Maria and most of the rest of my staff moved from the Anchorage office to new premises in the Perth CBD (at 250 Adelaide Terrace). Julia, Helen and I continued working from Anchorage to oversee the day-to-day running of my other companies, which included property investments, fishing licenses and other personal business ventures.

My move into the public sector was achieved according to a careful plan; building up a number of companies over several years which I knew could easily be bundled together and sold off in groups. Becoming a shareholder in Atlantic meant taking a step back and relinquishing much of my control over the business. We each had our shares and we could do with them as we pleased.

My intention was to semi-retire, with two goals in mind: I wanted to build a pleasure boat and enjoy fishing trips with family and friends and I wanted to contribute to worthwhile charitable organizations, which I had been dreaming about doing since the day Chook lent me the money for the taxi. I had not intended to go out and try any more ventures to make money. I saw Port Coogee and other projects that I was involved with as things that just needed to be tidied up. That was my plan and so far everything was moving along smoothly, according to plan.

Atlantic initially did well on the stock market. But the company soon became entangled in the expansion of the Kalamunda Shopping Centre, in a suburb in the Perth hills area and this venture did not go well. Atlantic began to lose money at a steady rate. I jumped back onboard as *Chairman/Executive Director* to help get Atlantic back on its feet, moving to the city office with my remaining staff. I was confident I could sort out the mess within a couple of years and then get on with achieving my retirement goals. Then, on October 19th, 1987 the stock market crashed, on the day that will be forever known in history as ‘Black Monday’. Suddenly, we were *all* in trouble and I was right back in the thick of things.



Atlantic Limited Logo from the Annual Report

The modern Global Financial Crisis (GFC) we are now facing is indeed a huge problem, but the crash of '87 had a more far reaching effect than the GFC in Australia because the world was simply not prepared for a recession the way they are today. Subsequent to the 1987 crisis, the business world have organized themselves in such a way that would somewhat protect them in the event of another recession.

'Getting Atlantic right' didn't turn out to be a two year project like I had hoped. In fact, it took *20 years* to sort things out, as it wasn't until 2007 that, with the company now in a comfortable position, I finally resigned my position as *Chairman/Executive Director* and sold Atlantic to new investors and Atlantic continues as a public listed company in mining. Becoming re-involved with Atlantic was not good on my part. My decision to take control cost me 20 years of time that could have been spent on other goals. Then again, there's no way of knowing that what I believed was the right decision at the time. That's all that any of us can ever be expected to do.

When It Rains, It Pours *'It takes two to tango'*

The stock market was not the only thing that crashed on “Black Monday”. My father died at Fremantle Hospital on that same day, after a lengthy battle with cancer. Coral and I sat across from my sister Mary and her husband Johnny as the funeral car drove past 18 Essex Street, where my father had lived, as is Italian tradition. The wake was held afterwards at the family home. I clearly remember our daughter Marta flying down to Perth from Parabadoo, where she had her first teaching assignment, for the funeral.

Over the years my father had copped a fair amount of criticism for not being overly affectionate with his children. He was a hard man to get close to. It upset me to hear people speak of him this way; particularly family members. He and I were certainly not close but I never saw this as something that was purely his fault. After all, the cultivation of a relationship is a two-way street. My father was a traditional Italian who revealed his emotions; it was not in his nature or upbringing to lavish affection upon his children. So whenever any of my relatives went off on one of these rants, I defended my father for all it was worth. “Well what have you done about it?” I would say. “If you really crave a relationship with him, do something about it. It takes two to tango.”

The night before my mum died, she'd told me when my father was working away, I was the head of the family and now that he'd died, I felt a certain responsibility to keep my family together. But for some of us, my father's battle with cancer had brought certain old resentments bubbling to the surface. The day he died was the last time my sister Lucy and I spoke for many, many years. When we were kids, my sister Lucy and I vowed that when we became adults, we wouldn't do any of the silly things we saw our elders doing. Like, we resolved never to force our kids to eat pasta fagioli (pasta with beans) and we swore that we would never get into any petty arguments with each other. Yet, here we were, following the same pattern.

On the other hand and though none of us had been particularly close to my father, his death pulled some of us closer together, as we realised how precious and fleeting life really is. One of the biggest events on our family calendar was Christmas. During the 80s, Christmas Day lunch was shared by the immediate family and then we rotated homes to meet up on Christmas Night. My family often played host for this occasion at our Bicton home. In the great Aussie tradition, everyone would “bring a plate” to share. Coral was famous for her delicious desserts. I remember these occasions with great affection as a lot of the issues that lay beneath were forgotten for that moment in time.

The Western Australian Fishing Industry

At heart, I will always be known as a fisherman, no matter where life has taken me, or still will take me. I never overestimated myself or underestimated myself. As I have stated earlier. "If someone can ride a bike, so can I".

Fishing for me was a way of life that I had been born in to. Like most fishermen in those days, I was uneducated. I had left school at 14, as many others had in the fishing industry and life had been kind of mapped out for me. I realised, even then, that education is a very important asset to acquire. It is particularly important in the area that you wish to work. It is not much good wanting to be a rocket scientist and learning all about it if you intend to go fishing.

So I applied myself to being a student when I went fishing. My teachers were the administrators and the management of the Fisheries Department. I believe they did an extraordinary job of a balancing act of taking the lobster industry to where it is today. I feel there is still work to be done from a financial point of view but they have managed to achieve a state of sustainability in the industry.

Credit has to go to people such as the recent Minister for Fisheries the Hon. Norman Moore, who recently retired in April 2013. There have been many Ministers who have contributed over the many years of my involvement with fishing and have earned my respect for the contribution they have made.

I have always found it quite interesting that many people in the industry used to knock the bureaucrats. Yet, all of the people that I had dealings with, from Fisheries, Marine & Harbours, those tending to the radios and those in the Planning Department of the government, were all hard working decent people. What I saw over the many years, was a lot of dedicated people, devoting their lives to a particular area of government. In many cases, some public servants spent their whole working life in these specific areas. They had to be respected and I found the greatest respect I could give them was to ask them for help in order to be good at what I was doing. They were my teachers.

While most others were knocking them and calling them bludgers, I always found this to be far from the truth. I learned so much from those in the various departments with whom I was involved and have nothing but the utmost respect for those who have helped and advised me. I am sure that things have not changed much since my days of involvement and there is so much to be learned. All you need to do is ask!

I don't think the Public Service gets the due recognition it deserves. I have found the cudors that go to the Department of Fisheries to be negligible and less than one percent. In my opinion they do an excellent job and perform at over 95%. I've always found this to be unfair but there will always be knockers.

Storms over Atlantic: Staying Afloat 1987 - 2007

The 1987 'America's Cup' Challenge

The HM Bark 'Endeavour' Replica

A Real Pearler

Pearling in Indonesia/Malaysia

Meeting Jennie

Bus Wheels and Dodgy Deals

*Madagascar

*Iran

*Sierra Leone

*Tanzania

*Saudi

*Yemen - War Games

Discovering Burma

Becoming Pop

18 Essex Street

Port Coogee Now!

My Life, My Way

The 1987 'America's Cup' Challenge

In 1983 Alan Bond, a well known Perth businessman and his team had done the impossible and won the "America's Cup" in Newport Rhode Island and this gave Australia the right to contest the next competition in their home country. Of course Alan, being a Fremantle boy, who had done well, insisted that the rematch occur in his home town of Fremantle in Western Australia. The logistics of this of course would be amazing because this feat of winning the world's most elusive sporting prize had, at that time, probably been the greatest sporting achievement in Australia's sporting history.

One of the now famous crew was Warren Jones, an old school buddy of mine from my "Fremantle Boys High School" days and he along with John Longley another "Australia II" crew member from the Newport success, approached me to see if they could set up camp in my Mews Road office and warehouse at the Fishing Boat Harbour in Fremantle. This was a quality brick building with offices and a jetty right on the doorstep of "Challenger Harbour" which was designated as the venue for the "Cup" challengers. This building was designated as the "Australia II" contender's base for the 1987 "America's Cup".

I was quite impressed with what the Bond team had achieved and thought that they had done a lot for Australia and when they approached me about the use of the building, I was more than happy to make it all happen. Warren and John were impressed with the opportunities offered by the building, as it was right on the water's edge, had a jetty already in place and had the capacity for sail lofts and lifting frames etc. that would suit the challenge project perfectly for Alan Bond's "Australia II" challenge. I organised a nominal lease for them, with the option, that if they were successful in their challenge, they could buy the building and the ground lease from me to support any future challenge; they thought it was a fantastic offer. Unfortunately, history records that they never won the challenge, which went back to the US with Dennis Connor's "Stars & Stripes 87" but this certainly wasn't to be the end of their use for the Mews Road building.

The "America's Cup" put Fremantle on centre stage worldwide for a number of exciting weeks in that summer of 1987 and there were dignitaries and visitors from every corner of the world which turned Perth and particularly Fremantle, in to the party capital of the world for the duration of the event. **Unfortunately we lost the cup, only one challenge in Fremantle.**

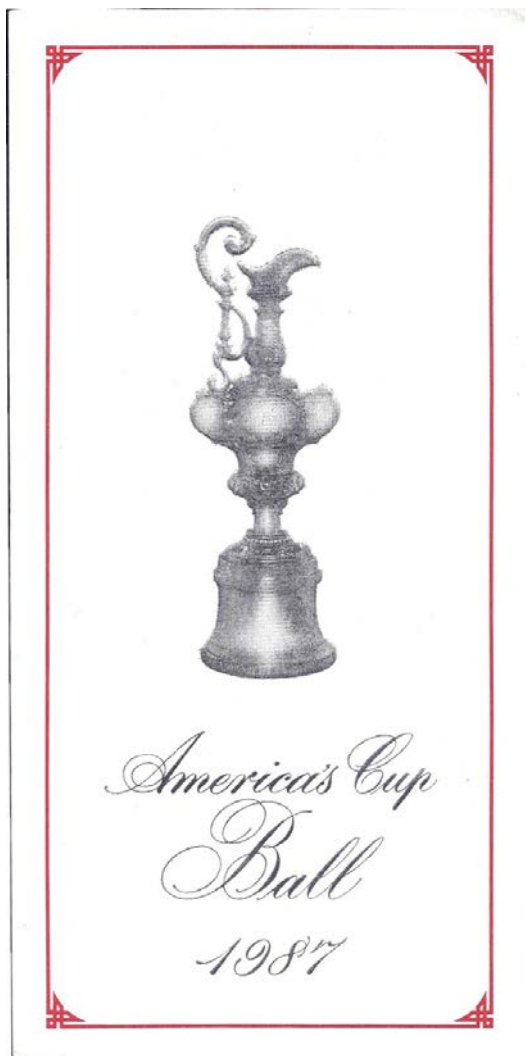
There were 13 challenges from six countries from all over the world, including Italy and New Zealand and Australia itself mounted 4 other challenges. The most well known of these being Kevin Parry, another Perth businessman who was the finance behind "Taskforce 87" which contested with "Kookaburra III" in the elimination series the others being from both Sydney and Adelaide. The event attracted visitors from all over the world and each event attracted thousands of spectators who covered the rocky embankments of "Challenger Harbour" to witness the start of all the elimination series events and the ultimate final challenge between "Australia II" and "Stars & Stripes 87" which the American's eventually won.

The "America's Cup" challenge in Fremantle was historically the impetus that changed my fabulous little fishing port and harbour town in to what has now become one of Western Australia's top tourist attractions. When the word got out that the "Cup" was coming to town, everybody seemed to get in on the act. Buildings were repainted and refurbished and underneath all the tired old shopfronts and backstreets the community found that they had one of the most well preserved "Edwardian" style cities in the world. Fremantle changed from a quiet little town that rarely entertained a tourist, in to one of the top venues for visitors in the state.

At this stage I had bought the large wool stores in Cantonment Street which were prime real estate. I eventually sold these buildings to Robert Holmes a Court who was a fairly well known financial entrepreneur of the period. At this stage though, they were still mine and the organisers were looking for somewhere unique to hold the "America's Cup" ball and there was really nowhere big enough to accommodate the numbers who were expected to attend. Because of my involvement with some of the leading personalities involved, I offered the buildings as a venue for them to hold the event.

At that time, it was regarded as a fairly spectacular event, of its kind in Australia's history. All three floors had been converted in to massive ballrooms. There were 4 of Australia's top bands playing throughout the building and the guest list spelt out like the who's who of politics, sport and entertainment. There were 2 prime ministers and leading commentators like Walter Winchell from American TV. The organisers, led by Ms Mary Martini, a leading socialite organiser of the era, had really excelled themselves with what they had done to bring this magnificent event to fruition in what were virtually rundown buildings, which had passed their use by date. They had decorated every post in the building with local flora and fauna and the whole venue was furnished with large ice carvings. They had really put a great effort in to turning the whole place in to one spectacular setting for the magnificent "America's Cup" Ball.

I am still in awe of what Bondy and his magnificent crew achieved back there in Newport in 1983 and the wonderful impact it is still having on Fremantle: My hometown! The city of Fremantle was thrust in to the worlds glare for a 6 month period of sporting history, turning it in to a tourism destination and a trendy residential address, in its own right. It had always been known as the port that catered to the growing financial hub of Perth which was also beginning to grow in its own stature due to the mining boom and a growing number of successful financial entrepreneurs.



The HM Bark ‘Endeavour’ Replica

After the “America’s Cup” was over, John Longley was over in Sardinia with the 12 Metre World Championships when Alan Bond contacted him and asked if he was interested in becoming involved in the building of the Bark “Endeavour” replica. This was to be an exact replica of Captain Cook’s vessel that he captained on his discovery of Australia. The National Museum had approached Alan and advised him that they were developing the Darling Harbour precinct which would contain a Maritime Museum and they were looking for backers to build the replica of the “Endeavour”. All they wanted to do was build a prop type vessel to tow back and forth across Sydney Harbour. Bond was having none of it and if it was going to be built it was going to be done properly.

As they were still in the Mews Road building, Alan said we’ll build it there and then sail it around to Sydney. It was the 1980’s and anything and everything was possible. John Longley was sent off to the UK to study the plans of the ship and find out what he could about the original vessel. It was all go and they had to secure the rights to the lease of my Mews Road property with which I had given them the option to purchase both the ground lease and the improvements if they were successful in retaining the “America’s Cup”.

When they approached me with the whole concept of the project, I was excited. “It sounds terrific let’s do it”. I sold them the lease rights and the building and the ‘replica’ project was up and running. There wasn’t a lot of time running on the lease of both the land and water area, so between us we got the term extended for 18 years and actually picked up an extra water area which was required for the project. The building from then on was known as the “Endeavour Building”.

Once they got the approvals for the lease extension they had to get a quality building designed that would be strong enough to provide the heavy lifting which would be required. John Longley’s brother Richard, who is a well known Fremantle architect, was given the design project and with Alan Bond’s insistence it was to be designed to be strong enough to handle any future “Cup” challenges that might come Fremantle’s way.

By September 1988 the building was completed and the “Endeavour” project was ready to begin. I took a keen interest in this project and was possibly a bit emotionally attached to the “Endeavour” shed in Mews Road because it had been such an important part of my life and I was keen to have been involved in some small way with the historic events that were taking place there.

Unfortunately, during the project the whole Bond empire famously went belly up and his company Dalhold Investments, which held the lease of 1 Mews Road was one of the casualties. The “Endeavour” project was still incomplete and John Longley was determined to finish the replica with as many volunteers as he could muster. The volunteers maintained the incomplete vessel until the HM Bark “Endeavour” Foundation was established as a charitable trust in 1991.

The next thing they did was pay all the bills they could with little or no money in the coffers and started running tours of the incomplete replica in order to create some kind of cash flow. Next thing the receiver’s moved in, telling John that they are going to have to sell the Mews Road lease. It would have to be sold with the incomplete replica in place and that whoever bought it would have to put up with the “Endeavour” project until it was completed.

Next thing, I get a call from John Longley asking if I would like to take back the lease and buy the building improvements. I said I might be interested and then set about getting the funds together to make it all work. There was no way I was not going to let this dedicated work come to an end when so much heart and soul had been poured in to the project. It actually turned out to be a good deal all round. I paid a lot less than what I had sold it for and had an extra 15 or 16 years extended on the lease. The main positive in it all was that the project could come to a satisfactory conclusion for all.

I negotiated a minimal lease for them for the improvements and they just picked up the ground lease which was due to the Marine and Harbours Department. I know that they were happy with whatever we negotiated.

It took another three years to complete the project and with a load of volunteers, a ton of support and the involvement of a wealthy Scottish gentlemen named Weller, who did all but underwrite the project, it was finally completed. The Government knew Mr Weller had the ability to back himself and allowed the “Endeavour” dream to be finished.

It had taken 6 years to complete what Alan Bond had assumed would be an 18 month build and I will always admire the men who sacrificed so much of their time and abilities to complete the task. It is recognised worldwide as one of the best sailing ship replicas ever built and I have such great respect for all the people I became involved with during that time and thoroughly enjoyed the small part I contributed to get it to completion.

The HM Bark “Endeavour” was launched at the end of 1993 and completed in early 1994. After sea trials, it was sailed from Fremantle to Sydney, where she arrived at the end of 1994. Since this time it has recreated Cook’s voyage along the east coast of Australia and circumnavigated the world and visited many of the world’s major ports. This is a project that I and all West Australians should be justifiably proud of and also of the tenacity of those who fought hard to complete it and the generosity of thought of people like Alan Bond who had the forethought to build it.



A Real Pearler

I could never understand why anyone would be willing to pay so much money for a strand of pearls. You realize however the effort and research that goes in to their cultivation the first time you become involved with the initial harvest and it is quite an emotional thing. It is like seeing a baby being born. When the first shell, bearing a pearl is opened, you see this shiny, round, glistening white or gold pearl and it sometimes brings a tear to the eye of even the toughest of men. The closest I had come to working with anything even remotely related to a pearl was back in the 70s when one of my first companies was involved with fishing for abalone shell in Esperance.

When making our way to the Gulf of Carpentaria from Fremantle, we used to go past the thriving south sea pearling industry that had been established in Broome. I had been curious about what was going on there, so I did some research and learnt about how pearls were formed, both naturally in the wild and how they are cultured on farms. What I found was not only that the process of formation is fascinating but also that pearls are the only living gem, which makes them extremely unique.

Later, Atlantic Pearls bought a pearl farm in Broome at Doubtful Bay with a 15,000 wild shell quota harvested from the seabed, from Darrella Holdings. I wanted to increase our quota by way of hatchery technology and we became the first hatchery to be given an extra quota of 50,000 shell. So I made the decision to build the hatchery at Port Smith. I was committed and confident that we would succeed and I believed it was worth taking the risk. I installed Paddy Arbuthnot as the manager and he actually constructed the hatchery from scratch.

At that time the Fisheries Department of Western Australia were funding two marine biologists who were researching the possibility of establishing pearl hatchery technology for the species *Pinctada Maxima* pearl, commonly known as the South Sea Pearls. We were co-operating with the Government biologists, then the Fisheries Department decided to cut the funding and we took on one of them to work for us. As I have previously stated, I follow and watch what other people are doing and we were quite interested in what these biologists out at the end of the jetty, were achieving. In my opinion they were having a level of success and I felt that eventually there needed to be a breakthrough from rearing the oysters in tanks and putting them out in to the ocean. Somewhere there was a huge loss of spat oysters. You could have a billion oysters in a tank and by the time you were finished you were lucky if 100 survived.

I didn't think it was going to be a great big thing, because there were no hatcheries and there were no nutrients out in the ocean. It was all just free flowing and they were producing sustainably every year. I realized that the methodology had to be looked in to and changed. So we looked at what the biologists were doing and introduced a few new processes, particularly on how to increase the brood stock etc.

An oyster is a filter feeder, dragging in water, it takes out the nutrients it requires and it spits out the residual. If a foreign body, such as gritty material enters the oyster the oyster tries to eliminate it but if it can't. It protects itself from damage by coating the foreign body in nacre (mother of pearl). The nacre builds up in a concentric circle upon circle and in time, a pearl is formed.

The pearling industry started with naturally formed pearls collected from inside oysters found in the wild. Pearlery firstly hunted for pearls only in the shallows. Later, they started diving for them out in the deep, firstly by 'naked diving', without a suit, and later with a suit. These were the heavy helmeted diving suits, with lead weights, that were fed by air from the vessel above.

Natural pearls from the wild are extremely valuable but with time, it made sense that pearlery would begin to consider how they might cultivate pearls and make the discovery less about luck and more about technique. So the idea of pearl farms was born.



Pearl farms were selected areas of the ocean which were considered rich in the nutrients needed for growing healthy oysters and having the required tidal movement. The right temperature and the right amount of food, etc. etc. etc. Good stock were selected from the wild and the oysters were bred and raised on a large floating raft capable of holding 3,000 shell that had been harvested from the wild and placed in panels of eight shell that had been seeded with a nuclei.

The oysters were maintained and the barnacles on the shell cleaned by pearl farm boat crew and then moved from one raft to another to better accommodate their growing needs. Once the oyster was two or three years old the pearl farmers artificially implanted a bead of nacre into the gonads of the oyster, along with a piece of mantle. The nacre bead is made from a Mississippi of a muscle that is almost identical in its composition to a pearl, except for lustre.

Part of the process is that there are special x-ray machines, that once you insert the bead, along with the antibiotics, the oyster will sometimes spit it out. The shell would try and get rid of the foreign body and was somewhat successful. It takes two years to grow out and the shell would be retrieved and cleaned and x-rayed and if there was a pearl, we would put them back out on the bottom of the ocean. The use of the x-ray became extremely critical in ensuring sustained production.

Japan was the leader in pearl farming grow-out methods of the famous Akoya (made famous by Mikimoto Pearls). The CEO of Paspaley Pearls, (Nick Paspaley) who was the head of the major pearl farming company in Broome, went to Japan and adopted their methods and completely revolutionized the pearling industry in Western Australia. He returned to Australia and made major contributions to the pearling industry in Broome by the introduction of the Japanese methods. Experience also showed that the technique of growing pearls under a raft was leading to a high mortality rate because if one oyster caught a virus, most of the others under the raft did also. What they learnt from the Japanese was to separate them onto long lines so that they were much less likely to infect each other.

Now it was the 80s and hatchery technology was just emerging in Australia. The idea behind a hatchery is to collect good brood stock from the wild and to breed their larvae in a hatchery; a building constructed right near the ocean that draws salt water which flows through. The larvae will then float around for a few weeks and attach themselves to something and become what is known as attached spat. At some point they are then removed and placed into the wild into oyster beds or bags, and raised there until they are old enough to have the mantle mussel and bead of nacre implanted and then they are put back into the farms in the ocean, on the lines, where the pearl is given time to grow.

In the meantime you have to clean the shell. The advantage of breeding in a hatchery is that you can somewhat predict and control the amount of pearls you will get and you get more pearls so to increase output. Also to control elements such as food, temperature and keep oysters free from infection so you are more likely to end up with a living and healthy oyster. Also, it is clearer to see what kinds of oysters are likely to be the healthiest and also produce the pearls of highest value, and these oysters can be reinserted, sometimes twice.

After learning about the formation and farming of pearls, I could finally see their value. Having conquered the prawning industry in the Gulf of Carpentaria, I was ready for my next challenge which I decided was to crack the hatchery code for the South Sea pearl.

Together with Paddy Arbuthnot, another ex-fisherman, Atlantic Limited formed a partnership with the government funded biologists and we worked closely with them on developing the technology. The biologists' problem was that the oyster larvae would develop to a certain stage and then die. They had not been able to achieve what is called 'grow out'. I believed we could eventually succeed. The biologists and Paddy co-operated with one another and exchanged results of the tests that they had individually conducted. I took a look at their data which showed rates of mortality and other statistics.

From what I could see, they had unwittingly succeeded in raising around 10% of the oyster larvae to a certain point, albeit young, age. I told Paddy, "They have succeeded. They just don't seem to know it." What I soon realized, was that their success had escaped their attention because they weren't thinking economically; they were looking for perfection. In the research laboratory, 10% is a small number of spat, because the lab didn't house high numbers of brood stock in general. But once you translate those numbers into an actual hatchery for business, 10% becomes a substantial amount if you increase the brood stock numbers and increase the hatchery tank capability. It was the gold-leaching perfectionism problem all over again!

Once we had convinced the biologists of their relative success, Paddy and I hired our own employee to work with them. This increased their motivation. Then we made our first suggestion for improvement: "Why don't we put the spat out into the wild earlier and see what happens? Out in the ocean, there is no hatchery; some of the larvae lives and some die. "Let's see what happens." So we did. Predictably the weak died and the strong survived but we found that the rate of survival was higher than what it would have been had they been kept in the hatchery the whole time.

Once the larvae are born, they float around for a couple of weeks before they are mature enough to attach themselves to something, at which point they became spat. From there they'd go on to develop shells. Once there is a whole pile of attached spat, which we called collectors, they are cut off and grown out in stages. At the biologists' hatchery on the Broome jetty the larvae were attaching themselves to Perspex glass. So when it came time to cut them off, the pearl farmers working at the hatchery had to individually cut each spat off. That was where they were encountering their first mortalities. I found this method baffling and said to Paddy, "For Christ's sake, why are they doing it that way?" "Well what would you do?" he asked.

I picked up a sheet of paper and folded it over and over into a concertina shape. I said to Paddy, "Imagine this is a piece of plastic. The larvae attaches to one of the concertina edges and then when it's time to move the spat, you just cut the plastic. You never have to actually touch the spat. Or you could unravel a piece of rope and get the larvae to attach themselves to that. Then you just have to cut the nylon rope around the animal, instead of the animal itself" So we tried both of those techniques and introduced them successfully to our farm.

When the hatchery would be successful, I thought it's time to get out of Australia, as we would not be able to compete with the low cost countries. Pearling is a very labour intensive industry and it is sad to see that Australia can no longer be competitive. Australia was once the number one pearl producing nation in the world. They produced beautiful pearls but it is hard for the industry to survive due to the low wage structure in the developing countries.

Pearling in Indonesia / Malaysia

From Broome, we went to Indonesia and took our hatchery knowledge where we were again successful but I didn't like the lay of the land and I felt very uneasy with the whole government system and the culture. There was racial unrest among the Indians and the Chinese so we departed from Indonesia to go to Malaysia on the island of Langkawi, which was the province of the ruling President of Malaysia, President Mahathir.

On behalf of Atlantic Limited, a publicly listed company, I had planned to establish a pearl farm in Malaysia, as they had adopted a British system of business and law there. I felt comfortable with the Malaysians and we were well received but we struck a hurdle there and decided to move on to Burma. We were a humorous group which included a Singaporean/Australian named Mohammad Kassim, an Irishman Paddy Arbuthnot and me. I never laughed so much in my life as I had being with this crew. Mohammad and Paddy had the most unbelievable sense of humour.

Mohammed Kassim

Mohammed was honest and very intelligent, a great man with utmost confidence, a religious and caring man. Nothing was too much for Mohammed to handle. He was born to succeed and was very successful. I am proud to have met Mohammad and call him my friend. Amongst his many friends in Malaysia were Malaysian Princes and Ministers. One evening we dined at the Princes house. I imported live crayfish from Australia which Mohammed cooked. We dined on gold place mats and with gold cutlery. The house had a gold stairway with gold palms. When you are in the presence of Mohammed you feel a sense of excitement around him all the time, a fun person to be with, very influential with a fantastic wife and daughter.

Mohammed and I had business interests which he managed and gave me financial success. We both shared the principle of charity and caring for others. To this day he continues to be a very generous caring person and over the years we have continued to advise each other.

We made further in-roads, by experimenting with certain factors involved in the development of the spat into an oyster. Other changes we made were seeing if there was a relationship between the days they were moved and the mortality rates. We learned when it was the best time to move the spat from one package to another as they grew larger. So it was just a matter of trial and error. It was a slow process but you learned to do things when conditions were favourable without unnecessarily putting stress on the spat. You experimented so that you picked the right time and the right conditions.

We also chose grounds in the wild that were not too overpopulated. One of the mistakes the biologists had made was to place the farms in ocean locations that provided a great deal of plankton food for the oyster. Of course the oyster needs food but there's only so much goodness the animal can take in at once. It's like if you were to go to a Roman Banquet; once you're full, you're full, regardless of how much food is left over. But the more food in an area the many more competing species inhabit the area and some, such as barnacles, become a hindrance to the oyster. Also, these over-resourced areas tended to be in sunny, shallow waters but these are the same places that have a lot of tidal movements. We chose deeper waters for our farm, making sure that they were resourced but not over-resourced. So not only was there less competition for the food but there was also less movement and less sand and dust around which was liable to damage the animal.

We worked on developing the hatchery technology in Broome for around two and a half years and we had success; however, I knew that Bob Rose (one of the Biologists) was planning to spread the technology internationally. Pearling is a very labour intensive industry, as once the oysters are out on the lines the farmers are constantly working to maintain their farm by cleaning their shells with cleaning machines.

Australia's progressive labour laws and occupational health and safety standards, along with the continued late 1980's recession, would have made it impossible for us to compete with an international market. We would have had to spend an awful lot of money first. I've always been a risk-taker and the old saying, "You have to spend money to make money," has been a business philosophy I've adopted many times. But this was one time that the money simply was not there and the risk was far too great; Atlantic was still not in good shape. We made a swift business move, moving out of Australia's pearling industry by selling our farm to the Kailis Group of Companies in 1991 and took our hatchery success overseas to Burma.

Mohammed and Paddy will feature more in the addendum to this Biography.

Meeting Jennie

It's always been in my nature to become friends with my employees and to adopt their friends as mine. This was never truer than in the case of my employee and best friend, Julia. During the 80s, Serge and I became close to all of Julia's friends, particularly Wendy, Judy and Jenny. We regularly visited the casino together and shared countless lunch dates at local restaurants where Serge and I would sit there listening to a whole heap of women rabbit on about different things. We were mostly observers; they ran the show; but we really enjoyed their company and hearing about their lives. We have virtually watched them all grow up, from the time they were all single through to becoming wives and now, devoted mothers.

One day in the mid1990s, a woman Jennie was on the hunt to find her biological father, having been adopted out as a baby. She had managed to contact and meet both her biological brother and her mother but when she asked her mother for her father's name, her mother would not tell her. All she would say is that he is "a prominent local businessman." She had refused to name the father but had given her a clipping of a photo from a local community newspaper without a name or story attached. She researched it and found that it was part of an article in the "Fremantle Gazette" and discovered my identity.

Julia's friend advised her of what had occurred and requested her to advise me of the situation and asked would I be prepared to accept a phone call from Jennie; I agreed.

Not too long after, I received a call from Jennie. She wanted to meet me. I advised Coral. Joe and Mark were indifferent, Marta was upset. She said "Dad, all these years, I thought I was the only woman who could call you Dad". This revelation had upset the person I loved most in the world.

Soon after, I met Jennie for the first time. We agreed to a DNA test which acknowledged a positive result. We got along well. She told her brother about me and I met him also. My relationship with her brother did not flourish and we are currently out of contact. But I still see Jennie a few times a year. I have met her family; she has three sons. Jennie and I don't have a father-daughter relationship. But we're friends and that's good.

Bus Wheels and Dodgy Deals

By the early 1990s, Atlantic Fisheries had sold half its fleet and we were only operating 11 trawlers in the Gulf. The prawning boom in the Gulf of Carpentaria was coming to a premature end, with stocks rapidly dwindling as a result of overfishing. At the time I was a member of the Northern Prawn Fishery Management Advisory Committee (NORMAC). In an attempt to address the problem of overfishing, I and other members convinced NORMAC to approach the federal government with a proposal for a government boat licence buyback scheme. This would encourage the companies to sell their licences and offices and move out of the area. The government was receptive to the idea and it was implemented.

Having sold our licences to the government and to Raptis & Sons (who are one of the largest prawning processors in the Gulf of Carpentaria), we now we had to decide what to do with the 11 boats. Atlantic was still in trouble and the bank was putting pressure on the company to sell its assets. In the end we were left with virtually no choice but to sell our boats. We initially sold three within Australia and four to a Madagascan company. That left us with four boats which totaled a combined value of \$6 million. I had ambitions to take the remainder of the fleet abroad along with the developments that had been made in prawn processing that we had pioneered over our 15 or so years of operation in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

We set the wheels in motion and I met up with Blue Bulling in Iran to sell the boats to the Iranians, where we managed to sell the four trawlers in one hit. It was virtually a done deal and then at the last moment the exchange rate changed and it fell through. “Cappo” and I went to Tanzania and met with the fisheries department but they were slow to act, so we moved onto the then named Republic of Yemen (now Yemen) to try our luck. The following stories tell the tale:-

MADAGASCAR

A broker named Graeme Stewart had found a buyer for some of our Australian Trawlers, which were located in Cairns. Graeme and I met with this man whose surname was “Mignon”, who we later referred to, from then on, as “Filet Mignon”. We sold him 4 boats, at what was a reasonable price. We all travelled down to Sydney where my “fantastic” lawyer, David Maloney, worked through till 3.00am in the morning for 2 days in a row, with “Filet Mignon’s” legal representatives to get the deal formalized. We concluded the sale of the 4 M G Kailis built boats, which turned out to be a very successful deal.

With our modifications to the 4 vessels, they fished successfully in Madagascar for 4 years without any maintenance being required and after 5 years they were still in quite good condition, as both M G Kailis and ASI were extremely good steel boat builders. We were left with 4 boats:

IRAN

Iran was the first country that I had come across, that their currency was not hard cash and could not be traded internationally. Because of this the official Iranian rate against the US Dollar favoured the government fishing company, to the point where they were paying only US\$285,000 to purchase 4 vessels for US\$6,000,000. During our time in Iran the government had changed the rate of currency and the deal fell through.

Iran was a country which defies people’s perceived ideas. Most people imagine it to be hot and treeless but in reality the city of Teheran is located in a very green and snow covered mountainous terrain. A lot of this perception is how Iran is often portrayed on television and in news articles; I had always imagined it to be this way. I was in Iran with Blue Bulling to sell the trawlers at a time after the Shah of Iran had been deposed and exiled from the country. There was still evidence of those days when Teheran had been a charming and cosmopolitan city frequented by rich and famous celebrities who visited the popular ski resorts. Things had changed dramatically since then.

You could see the remnants of nightclubs and resorts, of a time when alcohol was readily available. This Teheran was under the control of the Islamic doctrines of the Ayatollah Khomeini, a vastly different and sombre period to that of the previous ruling party. The Shah had been on friendly terms with the US and there was still a great resentment by the people towards the USA, due to the support they had given to Iraq, which had resulted in the death of approximately a million Iranians.

We had managed to negotiate with a delegation of Iranian Directors of the government fishing company for the purchase of the 4 boats, as a parcel, for the amount of US\$1,250,000 nett, with the Iranians paying for the transport and we signed a legal purchase agreement with them. The prawning grounds of Iran were abundant with prawns and it was a good market for boat sales.

Some observations that I will always remember of this visit is that most cars appeared to be damaged to the point where Blue and I would have a competition to “Spot the undamaged car”. The taxi drivers were such that when you asked them to drive more carefully, to a point where you were fearful that your life was in danger, there was little that they could do, as the roads were so slippery from the ice melting and the frozen road surfaces. After a while you held on for dear life and went with the flow!

Another thing I remember quite vividly during my time there, was the car manufacturing undertaken in Iran. It appeared that 95% of the vehicles on the road were Hillmans, albeit with minor changes to appear a little different.

Of course the sale fell through due to dollar fluctuations and we moved on to Sierra Leone. By the time we finally departed Iran, we were left with very anti US and western feeling from the Iranian population, who despised the involvement of western countries in the eight year war with Iraq; particularly the USA. It was not a comfortable place to be.

SIERRA LEONE

We then moved on to Sierra Leone and we were staying at a hotel that wasn't too flash. The power was only on for a couple of hours each day. One day, there was a tropical storm, so Blue decided to have a bath on the front balcony of his hotel room, where the rain was pouring off the roof. A housemaid walked in on him and started screaming. Yeah, Blue was certainly a character, that's for sure. We travelled well together. We had a particularly mischievous time sightseeing in Sierra Leone. Blue would encourage the locals to climb the coconut trees and pick the coconuts for us, so that we could drink the milk.

It wasn't all fun and games though. In fact, it was in Sierra Leone that I learnt a pretty significant lesson about poverty and charity. We were travelling on a mini-bus through a town. We had an African guide who we had nicknamed Nobby, because he looked like an electrician we knew back in Perth called Nobby Clark. There was a group of children begging in the street, screaming and yelling at us for money. I threw a handful of notes out of the window of the vehicle. The kids went scrambling and all started fighting over it.

Nobby had to stop the bus and hop off to break up the fight. When he got back on the bus he didn't mince words when he told me that I should never do that again, because those kids were very poor and would fight each other for that money. That was a very important lesson for me to learn. Once again, we failed to put together any deals in Sierra Leone, as we had a letter of intent that the World Bank required. They needed a proposal from my Accountant and he deliberately failed to supply the required World Banks' request.

TANZANIA

I and Simon Tiller, who worked with me at the time, went to Tanzania to commence a prawning operation. It was a great opportunity, as it was a good port to operate from with good catches. We were welcomed by the deputy Prime Minister and later on by the Prime Minister himself. Trying to get the operation up and running though, was becoming too lengthy, so I subsequently looked elsewhere.

SAUDI

We then began negotiations with Saudi Arabia. It wasn't that long ago, maybe 45 years ago, that Saudi Arabia was just a desert. Then they struck oil and suddenly they were among the richest countries in the world. When you went to Saudi the rules are such that your visa applies to having dealings with only one company or 2 or more, if stated and they were the only ones you could deal with, while you were there. The industries were in the main monopolies and also, in most instances the Royal family had an interest in the companies. So there were certainly opportunities that we felt we might be able to tap into; One of those opportunities was being able to sell 4 boats to the Chief of Police.

We negotiated with him and completed the deal while I was still in Australia. Blue went over to do the logistics prior to delivery but they started to change the rules over the next 4 days. Blue advised me what was going on and said to me, "If you can do a better job, you get over here"! So I did! I flew over immediately and got the deal sorted on the first day and said to Blue "Piece of piss"! He said wait until tomorrow. Sure enough the rules started to change again. The Chief of Police had a professional architect who was receiving 20% of the deal, negotiating on his behalf. He was the one that kept changing the rules. So Blue and I decided on a strategy to divide and rule so I got stuck in to the Chief and I told him I was moving on and tearing up the contract. He threatened to have me arrested at the airport if I tried to leave. I showed him a photo of the Crown Prince and told him I was off to Jeddah Riyadh to sell the boats to him and that he'd wind up behind bars rather than me. He finished up offering me an armoured escort to the airport, which I didn't accept.

We met with the King of Saudi's son the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, in the capital, Jeddah Riyadh and managed to convince him that it was in his country's interest to commence pearling operations in Saudi Arabia. That meeting resulted in a deal to sell the 4 boats to the royal family and because we had the blessing of the Crown Prince we sold another 9 boats to extremely wealthy people. The contracts were signed. Then Saddam Hussein attacked Kuwait. Another highly profitable deal had fallen through.

YEMEN

We ended up back in Yemen. We were mostly oblivious to the fact that a lot of the areas we were travelling through were fraught with civil war and that we were in a certain amount of danger. I do remember one incident in Yemen when I wondered if it was all worthwhile. I was in a hotel lobby, about to head out to a meeting; it was unbearably hot. I'd just eaten an awful meal and I felt quite ill. There was a group of children begging just outside the hotel, waiting to swamp me. I could see a utility truck constantly driving back and forth up and down the road with a small army of six or seven soldiers on the back. I was aware that it was an everyday occurrence that civilians and tourists were being kidnapped and held for ransom.

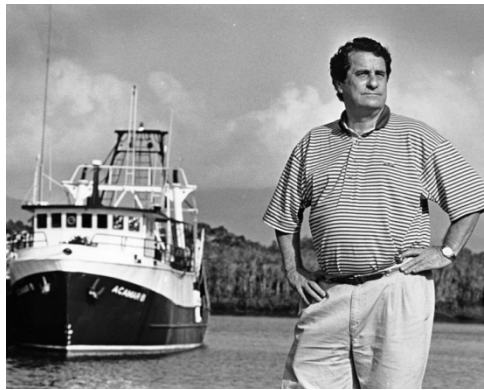
A soldier walked into the hotel toting a machine gun. I looked at him and wondered, "What the hell am I doing here? Do I really need to be here?" The answer came to me almost immediately. I asked myself, "Well, what would you rather be doing? Would you rather be working in the same place every day? Do you want to get up in the morning and go to work, go home, get up in the morning and go back to work, every day doing much the same thing?" I needed challenges and a different environment. So the answer was no; I would not do the same thing every day.

As well as enjoying taking on new business challenges, I also enjoyed travelling to all of these new and exotic places, meeting people from all over the world, finding out about different cultures and diverse living styles. It was definitely worth all the hassle but the travelling was tiring.

Our negotiations in Yemen finally brought us some success. There hadn't been much of a fishing industry in Yemen for the past few years before that, because of political tensions between subversive divisions within the country but the government was keen to rebuild the industry and granted us the sole rights to prawning in the area. We teamed up with the Yemeni Government and some private Yemeni business people and formed the Red Sea Company, of which Atlantic Limited owned approximately a third.

Back in Queensland, ‘Cappo’, ‘Foggs’ and I put the four trawlers into an intensive refit period. The vessels had been well maintained but there was a bit of work needed to be completed in a short period of time. We needed to fit EPIRB’s (Satellite Navigation Systems) and modifications to suit the Yemen conditions. The trawlers were finally delivered to Yemen in September 1993, with “Cappo” managing the prawning operations in the Red Sea.

The prawns were prolific and the cost of labour and fuel was low and we were fairly close to the European market and it was easy to manage. Yemen worked in our favour, as we sold the prawns for US dollars, a currency which was always sought after. You had to be a good trader and we were actually getting our fuel for as little as 10 cents a gallon due to payment in US dollars. Our persistence had finally paid off and it looked like we were in for good times with good profits. We’d only been operating there for 20 months when civil war broke out. Now what?!



Joe with prawn trawler ‘Acamar’ in the photo that appeared in The Cairns Post, September 1993.

Yemen -War Games

Our business plan had been to expand our fleet into anything up to 20 vessels, with the long-term vision of eventually drawing a profit for Atlantic of around \$10 to \$15 million per year. We'd only been operating with our original fleet of four vessels for twenty months when civil war broke out in Yemen in May 1994. We managed to get three of the boats out of the country to Djibouti but the fourth boat and "Cappo", were still right in the thick of it.

The Yemini became concerned that possibly we may get out of the country because there were four boats involved and they didn't want to lose what we had already built up. So they were virtually holding "Cappo" as a hostage. He was under surveillance 24 hours a day. He had previously had a similar experience in Iran where he actually had been imprisoned.

What we had to do was create a ploy. The Yemeni partners wanted to hold Peter hostage because they wanted us to sit out the war and then recommence prawning. We had 4 boats there and three of them were already in Djibouti, a country situated on the Horn of Africa. I pulled the fourth one in and said to them. "There's no point in unloading here. We'll fuel up and with your permission take the fourth boat to Djibouti, unload the product and stay over there until the war was over". And they agreed! That put them off guard.

What we had done was devise a plan and with communications between me and "Cappo" in our Italian dialect, we formed a strategy of convincing our Yemeni business associates in to having the confidence that we were not going to take off. I took a risk and bought the fourth boat in to Hadada, a port in Yemen.

The boat had \$250,000 worth of prawns on board. Because of the war, it was agreed by our Yemeni partners, that to unload the boats in Yemen would not have been practical, so I suggested we unload the boat in Djibouti. They agreed and we fueled up the boat and headed for Djibouti. This strategy instilled the confidence and trust, that we were working with them and that we would continue to be working with them, if and when the war finished.

It gave us time to talk with the British Consulate and while they were distracted with our continual negotiations from Australia, 'Cappo', with the help of one of his Yemeni crew got himself to the airport and was evacuated out to London. After it all settled down I told 'Cappo' he should take a few months off.

'Cappo' had made us aware that he was safe by telex and radio telephone from London. He says he never felt that he was alone and always felt like he had our support. Our relationship was such that he knew I would move heaven and earth to ensure he was safe and that we would get him out of there somehow. I was up all night and day and I wouldn't rest until I knew he was okay. He knew I was going to be there for him.

Communication was difficult with radio and telex which were the only modes of contact available with our Yemen office. So I tracked down a telex machine in Australia and established contact. After a couple of days of intense research we finally got him evacuated out of Yemen and he was taken to London through an evacuation system that had been put in place for the English foreign nationals caught up in the Yemeni unrest.

These are the type of adventures that you go through and you think. We were just fortunate. When you look back in retrospect how fortunate we were to locate a company in Mews Road, in Fremantle, that had a telex which gave us the opportunity to negotiate our way out of it all and to have the ability to communicate with 'Cappo' so that he was always aware that help was on the way. I later had a Telex installed in our office in order to be able to make future communications to countries where they were still in usage.

'Cappo' had been virtually trapped in a war zone. It's amazing what you can achieve when the necessity arises. I stayed in that office 24/7 until I was sure that we had got him out of there. It took about 2 days, I think but he knew that if I was on the job it would be his best chance and he'd be out of there in no time. He knew I'd leave no stone unturned until I could find a way and he knew how I worked and this time we worked together.

Amidst all the drama of selling off the remaining boats, I had leased out the Mews Road property to the "Endeavour" replica syndicate in order to rebuild a replica of Captain James Cook's exploratory vessel which is credited with being the founding vessel connected with the birth of Australia as a nation. They had created a large void in order to build the square rig ship. It was launched in October 1993 with the property vacant. After the sale of Atlantic Fisheries assets we moved back in to the Fremantle property. I had a lot on my plate.

I eventually sold the last 4 boats in Indonesia but that's another story!

Discovering Burma

I contacted Jim Sheridan, an old Fremantle friend and business associate who was working out of Burma, who convinced me of the opportunities it offered. I originally went there because Theo Kailis was already involved up there with prawning, so I knew it was a lucrative place to get into. We finally got our licences, so I headed off to Myanmar where we prawned for a couple of years.

'Cappo' joined us again a few months later, after we had started there, after taking a few months off. 'Cappo' worked for us for approximately one and a half years and then he left for a while. We saw that there was an opportunity to sell the boats to Indonesia. We had done our figures and it was better for us to sell them as licensed.

The boats remained in Indonesia for around 3 years. We had four boats there until around the start of the new millennium, when we did an extensive refit in Semarang and sold them off. We were now looking at the pearling industry.

Burma was once the pearl capital of the world, it went down to negligible on the world stage once the country had become nationalized. We knew we were going to be successful, due to the lower costs and the quality of the pearls. The cost of pearl farming in Australia would eventually become prohibitive; that's why we went to Burma. I had gone to Indonesia first and then I had heard about the golden pearls in Burma and that's why I wanted to go there.

They already had small pearl farms operating there. It's a very labour intensive industry and very boring work. To get a pearl farm going properly, you need about 7 to 10 years. Selecting the brood stock and getting the place set up properly. In Burma we eventually moved from prawning to pearling, developing a pearl hatchery on Pearl Island for the Myanmar Government. As a result the Myanmar Pearl Industry has emerged as a producer of the world famous Golden pearls and advanced hatchery technology.

Indonesia and the Philippines both grow the golden pearl but the percentage per harvest is way below the return harvested in Myanmar. The quality of the pearls farmed in Myanmar range from gold through to a dark gold colour and silver with some pink. Golden pearls produced in other countries are only 1 to 2% in Australia and Indonesia and approximately 5% in the Philippines but it is well known that some were dyed, so pearl buyers are wary of the Philippine "Gold".

If you try to achieve a greater return from say 1,000 pearls any more than 100 a significant number are yellow and are not of good quality.

I stuck with Burma because I could see that eventually all of this opportunity was going to happen there. Golden pearls were very rare in other countries. So that's why we went there, because of the golden pearls. Even though we knew it was going to be hard working with the government, due to the sanctions and there isolation from the rest of the world.

The processes of getting anywhere or getting anything done in Myanmar, is a long and tedious process. When making any proposals to the Myanmar Pearling Enterprise and the Trade Council, it requires a mountain of paperwork, with each of the 26 Cabinet Members all requiring 10 copies.

Becoming Pop

I never had much affection for boys but I just love every girl that's been put on this earth, from the age of two to the age of 100. There's a lot to like about women. They are gentle, beautiful creatures.

Now, when my grandson, Dean Michael, was born in 1998, he was the first grandchild on both sides of the family. Whenever we went to a family function he'd be handed around all over the place, like pass the parcel. But to me, he was just any other little boy. I guess I thought it was nice that I had a grandson but that was about it. Coral would say to me, "You know, that kid looks at you, and he's wondering, 'Why doesn't he hold me like everybody else does?'"

She would always place Dean in my arms and take a whole heap of photos of me holding him just so that there was evidence that I loved this kid.

I really can't explain my feelings. I felt happy for my wife, that after so much tragedy, Coral got so much joy out of Dean. She was just over the moon to have become his nanna. She used to take Dean to Gymbakids and do all sorts of activities with him. She'd tell me all about Dean, but most of the time I just switched off and didn't listen. I thought it was such a wonderful thing to happen to her and to be honest, part of the reason I was so non-committal with my feelings towards the kid was because I thought, "That's her thing. Let her enjoy it."

On Sundays, Coral goes around to our children's houses to pick up their ironing. She then gets a professional franchise to do the ironing, then picks it up and then Coral delivers the clothes back to their houses. It's really just an excuse for her to make contact with them. Sometimes she asks me to go around there with her. Anyway, this one particular Sunday, I went with her. We arrived at our son's house and Dean was there, of course. Coral had a camera in the car and said "I'm going to get the camera and take a picture". So she placed him in my arms as per usual and here I am waiting for her to get the camera. I began mucking around and making silly noises and all of a sudden, Dean smiled at me. Well... we finally made a connection. Dean was 14 months at the time. Yep, it was a whole 14 months before I really took any notice of him. And I felt good about that. I connected with this kid.

The next Sunday, I thought, I hope she asks me to go with her to the kids' house. She did. "You coming?"

"Yeah!"

Now, before I get on with the story, I have to mention that Dean thought the sun shone out of Coral. He was absolutely rapt in her. Apart from his parents, Coral was 'Number One'. So anyway, when we got to my son, Joe's, house, I walked into the house behind Coral. Well, Dean came along and went up to Coral, and then he peeked around her, looking for me! Well, that was it for me; I fell in love with my grandson right there and then. That moment was the clincher. And from that day forward we have had a fantastic relationship. My relationship with my grandson changed me. I never cared much for boys before that. But today, I feel love and appreciation for all children, whether they be male or female.

Two years later, Dean's little sister, Erin Louise, came along. Well, being the youngest child, I was concerned that she'd be spoiled and that all the attention would move away from Dean on to her. It was important to me to keep my relationship with Dean exactly the way that it was, so I dedicated myself to ensuring that I stuck with him all the time, no matter what happened. He accepted this; he knew that I was his pal and 'the other one' stuck with Coral, and that was that.

This might sound harsh, but you've got to understand. I felt that Dean needed special attention and Erin didn't. Dean is a gorgeous kid but he's quiet, shy. Erin has always been full of confidence. She's a mischievous little thing, full of spirit and adventure. I believed that it was vitally important for Dean to know that there was someone out there who considered him to be 'Number One'.

Now, I didn't realise it at first, but this affected Erin and she rebelled. Dean and I would muck around, giggle, laugh, and carry on all the time and she wanted to be part of that, to join in with us, so she used to interfere with our games. At our place, we had a table tennis table with train tracks set up on it. We built a track for each of the kids but Erin would purposely play on his track. I'd tell her, "Erin, go on the other one, love" but she'd deliberately try to play on Dean's. I'd get her by the hand and lead her out of the room: "Out you go!"

"Nanna! Nanna!" she'd run off calling to Coral. Other times, when I was playing card games on the computer, she'd turn off the power at the switch and, as we say in Italian, 'scappa' escape!

Joann, my daughter-in-law, told me, "It's because she is being affected by your relationship with Dean". I didn't understand how that could possibly be true. Everybody else was placing Erin as a priority and she was well looked after. Coral smothered her, in fact. Joann said, "Well, she's got it with you. You look after Dean; everything you do is for Dean. 'Dean' this, 'Dean' that". I sat back and it dawned on me that Joann was right.

Once I realised what was happening, I made an effort to make sure Erin and I became good mates too. We are very similar. We actually think alike. We get on the phone and yak away about silly things, make funny noises, all that kind of stuff. She's older now and still a real go-getter. Coral and I have taken the kids to Club Med in Bali for holidays. They have great activities for kids. Erin always jumps straight on the trapeze. That's her, a bit of a daredevil! She has no fear; she's just full of excitement, concentration and determination. She'll tackle anything, that girl.

What I did to Erin earlier on wasn't right. I did it because I really wanted to emphasise to Dean, or over emphasise, if anything the fact that he was loved and special and important. But now he can handle it and today he knows that no matter what he does, he has his Pop's unconditional love. They both do. I'll do anything I can to make them happy.

Family and others have persistently told me that I should write my memoirs. In fact it is a project that I have started on two previous occasions and they have never proceeded, due to my lack of availability, with me being continually away overseas, to get it completed. When my sister Mary suggested her daughter Julie take up the project; I agreed!

The arrival of my grandchildren was the impetus for me to start thinking about writing my memoirs. It's possible that by the time they're old enough to want to find out about my life, I might not be around to tell them the story. Being a prominent Fremantle businessman, I've had a lot of good press and some not so good. There are many people who may dislike me. Thankfully, the people that love me and appreciate me and know that I am a good man make up in droves for the people that disagree. I don't want my grandchildren to be fed a pack of lies about me. I want them to hear my story straight from the horse's mouth. Well, straight from the "Dhufish's" mouth, in this case.

I hope that my story makes them proud to be my grandchildren. And I hope that I can inspire them and others, to follow their dreams, no matter what obstacles lie in their way.

18 Essex Street

My stepmother Rosa and sister Marta had decided they no longer wanted to live at the house at 18 Essex Street in the middle of Fremantle anymore, which was so close to the late night entertainment precinct. They were sick of the noise and the Saturday night trouble; sick of people urinating in their front garden on their way from “Metros” nightclub to the other club across the park. So Rosa and Marta were soon set up in a new unit in Hamilton Hill. That left us with the problem of what to do with the house.

As executor of my father’s will, it was my responsibility to negotiate an agreement between all eight of my father’s children regarding whether and for how much, we should sell the place. This was a mammoth task, considering the divisions that existed within our fractured family. Money sure does have the capacity to tear some families apart and what ensued was one hurdle after another. Any, All and Sundry had opinions!

I had a lot on my plate as I was still trying to sort out both Atlantic and Port Coogee and this was yet another stress that I simply did not need. After a while, I just didn’t have the time, energy or patience to continue, so I hired Bill Booth to work on the house negotiations on my behalf. Billy Boy saved me just when I was ready to give up. He’s a Fremantle boy too, and remembers me as one of ‘the big kids’ from when he was just a tiny tacker riding his bike around the place. I didn’t know Bill back then.

The first I heard of him was in the late 90s when, in his role as a real estate agent at Port City Real Estate he had managed to sell the property next door to 18 Essex Street for a phenomenal amount; almost double what No. 18 had been valued at.

It took until 2000 but thanks to Bill’s efforts, an agreement was finally negotiated the house sold and the profits split. It was such a load off my mind. And in a surprising twist, though my brother Sam stopped talking to me at some point during the negotiations, my sister Lucy and I resumed contact for the first time since the day our father had died. I’ve got a relationship with Lucy now that’s better than it’s been for a long, long time. It’s almost like those ten years had never happened.

Port Coogee Now! *‘The squeaky wheel gets the oil’*

When Marta was young, she sometimes helped out at the office during her school holidays. She did this for several years. I often left the office and went for long drives during the day, just for something to do. Marta would keep me company and we'd chat about different things. She says she remembers one particular drive, when she was about 12 years old, when we drove all the way down the coast from Mindarie, which is north of Perth to Coogee. Apparently I started nattering on about my vision for the coast and how I firmly believed that eventually all of those coastal patches of land would link up.

In the early 1990's I had commenced negotiations and discussions in developing the land on Cockburn Road that I had purchased in 1983. I'd had a unique vision for the development of the land into "Port Catherine", a marina with canals. As the land was deemed contaminated, this had involved dealing with the State Government and relevant authorities. It quickly proved to be a time consuming and frustrating task.

I still had a lot on my plate with Atlantic, so I had employed Ron Warren, a consultant in property development, to work on this project. Ron was specifically chosen for the job because he was instrumental in the building of the Fremantle Sailing Club despite much opposition. I became involved with a number of companies who wished to develop the property, such as Clough Engineering and Fini Homes. None of these attempted collaborations came to fruition and by 1995, we were back at square one.

With me busy in Burma, my consultant team, headed by Peter Crook who continued to work towards selling and developing the coastal land in Coogee. Finally, in 1997, I negotiated a deal with Australand Holdings, an Australian-wide company. Peter had done most of the official ground work which made it quite easy for me to conclude the deal. He was ably backed by a support team of my long standing lawyer and friend, David Maloney and my excellent staff, notably Helen, Serge and Julie. The deal was successfully finalised, though the contract went through several variations over the next few years.

The community at Coogee were divided on their feelings about the project. A majority of the residents were enthusiastic or totally indifferent about the land being developed into canals. A small, but very vocal and active group, were opposed to the proposed development and they dedicated themselves toward putting a spanner in the works for the project to proceed. With support from colleagues, family and friends, I played a key role in the "Port Coogee Now" campaign, which was instrumental in gathering community support and lobbying for government approval.

"The squeaky wheel gets the oil" and I guess "Port Coogee Now" must have been just that much squeakier than the opposition, because finally, in 2005, the Western Australian government approved Australand's plans for development and became unconditional. Operations to prepare the area for building began in 2006 and the first house was completed in 2009. I originally owned 20 blocks at Port Coogee, with some earmarked for my own plans which included the dream, at the time, to build a waterfront luxury apartment for our retirement and to provide three waterfront blocks to my children.

In 2009, I convinced Bill Booth to come on board to manage the sale of my surplus blocks at Port Coogee, in consultation with my accountant, Geoff Fry, who has been with me since the early 90s. Bill was reluctant to take on the job because he was planning on retiring but he agreed to come back for a short time. Four years later, Billy Boy is still working for me. He just can't seem to get rid of me! No, the truth is that whenever Bill says he's ready to leave, I talk him out of it. Since he's been on the job, he's managed to sell, transfer or subdivide 16 of the lots and he's still working on the remaining 6. The Global Financial Crisis hasn't made it any easier to sell high end properties but somehow we've just managed to stay ahead of the game. There is no urgency to sell the remaining Lots as we have plans in the pipeline to keep the better Lots for building or personal use. Bill has moved on to various roles within the group and manages the property acquisitions portfolio, sub divisions, sales and my philanthropic charity projects in Myanmar.

These days, Bill is one of my greatest mates. We disagree regularly, and the rest of the office have to put up with us swearing our heads off at each other till we're black and blue in the face, calling each other all the names under the sun. Bill says we're like an old married couple. Afterwards, everything goes back to normal. I might have a quick temper, but once I've blown my top, it's over. I don't know how to hold a grudge. Neither does Bill.

Bill's sidekick and my right-hand man is Donato "Don" De Ceglie, who is my cousin and Serge's brother. Don has been working for me on and off since the 70s when he worked on my boat, "Heather Flower", fishing for abalone in Esperance. During the season he worked on boats with his brother John but in the off season, he would come and do small stints of work with me for extra cash. He'd do the maintenance and refit on the boats. Later he moved off the boats and bought a partnership in a company called Hamilton Engineering.

After a few years in the engineering game, Don started working for me full-time 12 years ago, which is around the time we sold the prawn trawlers that we were operating in Indonesia. He flew over to Samarang to complete the refit on the prawn trawlers. Since then he has worked as a jack-of-all-trades for my private companies. He's basically our Operations Manager and troubleshooter but he does whatever needs doing. Don plays an invaluable role in our organization and has worn a variety of hats during the years he has spent here. There is no job, large or small that he won't take on and you can guarantee it will be done perfectly and professionally. He even came to Burma with me while we were overseeing the building of the new offices and on the prawn farm at EBay. His fishing and engineering skills were invaluable. He has been particularly helpful in the advice that he has given to my Burmese staff in relation to the building of the low cost housing projects that I have undertaken as part of my charity projects that I have commenced in recent years. His main role now is providing the maintenance required on the properties at Port Coogee and other properties in the company's portfolio.

Marta says that when she and I took that drive down the coast when she was 12 years old and I blabbered on about my visions, she thought I was absolutely out of my mind, stark raving mad but then she sat back and watched as, over the years, everything I'd said came to fruition. I think that's when she realised that it was quite possible her dad might know a thing or two.

My Life, My Way *'This is my life, I did it my way'*

In May 2006, my stepmother Rosa died from bowel cancer and complications. I still hate funerals. The only thing I don't mind about going to a funeral is that I can usually guarantee that I will get to see my sister Gracie. I often find myself watching her from a distance. Sometimes I try to catch her eye, but she never meets my gaze.

It was in mid 2009, when I heard through the grapevine that my brother Sam had developed pulmonary fibrosis, a serious lung condition. I was concerned but it wasn't until I actually saw Sam at a funeral not long after that I realised the extent and reality of his illness and condition. Sam was so obviously sick; rake thin and struggling to breathe. He looked like a much older man. I was shocked. I looked at him and I knew what he was going to do. I said the words in my head, "I think he's going to die." As I was looking at him, thinking that terrible thought, our eyes locked. Usually when that happened, he would turn away, just like Gracie. This time, he never turned away, not for the whole time I was looking at him. For the first time in years, some kind of connection passed between us.

I decided I wanted to help him somehow but I didn't want him to know the help had come from me because he has always been a proud man and I wasn't sure he would accept my help. Seeing how hard it had been for him to walk to the burial site at the funeral, I thought maybe I could buy him a mobility scooter or something that he could get around in, to help with his mobility troubles. I asked Serge to do some investigating for me, because Serge had been on good terms with Sam and his family all these years.

But there wasn't enough time. Within weeks, Sam had died, after contracting pneumonia from a day out fishing. I was working in Burma when it happened. When I found out, I was grief stricken and returned home as soon as it was possible. The rosary and viewing was held a few nights after Sam died. Serge and Don accompanied me into the chapel to see Sam's body. When I saw Sam lying in the coffin I just fell apart. The feeling of pain and regret was immense. One of Sam's sons, my nephew Stephen, came into the chapel and comforted me. I was so touched that he did that.

Sam's cremation and wake was held the next day. I was somewhat more composed. At the wake, I talked with Sam's wife, Sue and his children, Daniel and Stephen and their families. They filled me in on what Sam's life had been like since we'd been out of contact. What I discovered was that Sam had lived a happy life. He was surrounded by supportive friends and had a great marriage with Sue and a very close relationship with his boys and their families. I was pleased to know that my brother had been happy.

Billy Joel had been one of Sam's favourite singers and the ceremony was littered with his songs, including the song *My Life* which is about living your life the way you want to live it, regardless of what anyone else thinks or says. It's kind of similar to the message in Frank Sinatra's *My Way*, which people always joke, is the song that describes me most perfectly. My little brother Sammy and I were more similar than I'd realised.

Over the Rainbow - a Pot of Pearls 2007 - 2014

Nilar

The A\$100,000 “Pajero”

My Staff In Myanmar

Charity

Bella (Italian for Beautiful)

The “Lucky Country”

Beyond the Sea: Epilogue

Nilar

‘A smile makes the world go round. A Pearl called Nilar’

Nilar Win Maung started working for me in the mid 1990s. I first met her because her sister “Cutie” was then working for me. “Cutie” happened to mention that her little sister Nilar didn’t own a watch, so I bought her one. Then one evening we went out for dinner at the Royal Western restaurant on the lake and Cutie had brought her young sister along. Nilar had just finished her degree at Yangon University. I asked her, “What are you doing now you have finished your degree?” She said, “I’m playing karate.” I could see that she was a smart young thing with a lot of potential. I needed someone to come and work at the office because her sister was intending to go on maternity leave. “Can you help me? Just for three months.” She agreed. It has turned out a bit longer than three months.

Nilar worked for me for the next 15 or so years until she left to marry in 2010. Since that time, she has given birth to a beautiful little daughter who she named Min Honey. During the time she had worked for me, Nilar had worked her way up to the position of manager at Myanmar Pearls. I made the decisions and she carries them out by proxy. She is now my business partner in real estate.



Joe with Nilar’s daughter Min Honey

Just like we have “Mothers Day” in Australia and in other western countries and we like to spoil our mothers on that day. In the early days of her working for me, I would invite Nilar and some of her friends, who she used to be at school with, out to a flash hotel. A fancy restaurant like this is something that their generation would never aspire to going to. Not that they would have wished to even go there as it was not in their line of thought. Just as we liked to spoil our mothers, I just wanted to spoil Nilar for all the excellent work she had done for me. I would tell her to invite 8 or 10 of her friends and they would all be giggling over nothing and they would all go for the cheapest thing on the menu.

I would just tell the waiter to bring over the menu and would get Nilar to translate it for me. Then I’d order a pile of stuff and when it got to the table it was worth about 5 times their monthly wages and they certainly didn’t want to waste it. So it was my way of introducing Nilar and her friends to a more lavish lifestyle.

You have to be extremely careful of how you introduce them to this better quality of life, because all people have pride. There are some people you can’t do this for without hurting their pride, so you have to be careful how, when and to whom you can do this. So in taking these young people out to somewhere quite lavish, you have to make sure they are not placed in a compromising position and that they were dressed adequately and not feeling self-conscious. So you had to make sure that they were all thrilled to bits by the occasion and that, on occasions, all of their mothers were there also and that they were proud of their daughters working for an international company and being held in such high esteem by their employer.

Nilar was always concerned that these outings cost a lot of money but if you were to speak with Nilar nowadays and ask her “What is money?” she’d reply “Is only paper sir!” Nevertheless, I have always been careful in how I reward my Burmese staff due to the element of pride that exists within their culture. I have been there so long now that I have no such problem but in the early days it was a difficult area to navigate. You don’t ever want them to feel that they owe you anything. It is just something that I like to do and it has been as rewarding for me as it has been for them. It has made my life much more enjoyable, while I have spent my many years in Myanmar. I have been able to socialize and bring a lot of enjoyment to a lot of wonderful people who would, in their philosophy, never have been able to experience that such a world existed.

When Nilar first started working for me in Yangon. She was working under my then General Manager Julian Lockwood and Marshall Thompson. I got on extremely well with Nilar and she enjoyed working with me when I was up in Yangon and she preferred it when I was up there, managing the Yangon company. Her duties were fairly basic when she started as a bookkeeper and some of her extra duties would be to tally the fishing vessel loads when they came in to port. She then advanced up through the ranks in the company as a receptionist and stores control.

About this time I was starting the pearl operation out at Escape Island (E Bay). She was offered the position of interpreter out at E Bay and accepted. She stayed on the island for 4 months before heading back to Yangon where she took up a position with another West Australian; Grey Warburton who was my business partner in Atlantic Limited. She actually went back to Australia and worked for him in Bridgetown, a town in the south west of Western Australia, for about a year, which she regarded as a good move, as it would enable her to earn enough to buy an apartment when she returned to Yangon. After a year in Australia she was homesick for Yangon and returned and commenced working for me full time.

When Nilar first commenced with our company, she was very nervous at first but over the years she has become a very confident and efficient business partner. In our dealings, she has had to deal with Government Ministers, a variety of foreign Embassies, high profile business tycoons, as well as the day to day running of our mutual business interests in Myanmar. She has acted as my interpreter at many high profile functions, having to address large crowds with high ranking guests in the capital of Myanmar, Naypyidaw. This is a far cry from the shy but clever young woman who first came to work for me so many years before. In the early days, if she found things a bit too difficult to deal with, I would push her and strive to give her the confidence to take things on. I would say “Nilar, you can do it” and encourage her the whole way. I am so proud of Nilar and regard her as my Burmese daughter. She is now one of my closest friends, respected business partner and associate. Who would have thought that all those years ago that the “real” Golden Pearl of Myanmar that I went to Burma for, would turn out to be Nilar! I enjoy being part of people’s success; especially Nilars’.

Socializing is something that I have always enjoyed and an experience that I don’t seem to get involved in when I am back in Australia. When Coral and I were together, our only outings seemed to only be family affairs or weddings etc. Coral has not enjoyed great health with her arthritis and socializing, as we were getting older, was never a part of our lives. The Burmese love Australians; There were very few westerners in Burma and I was invited to so many weddings and was seated at the VIP table. The bride and groom would make a special effort to come to my table, it was almost like I was a trophy guest.

My time in Myanmar reminds me of the old days in Cairns, albeit we were much younger in those days. We’d just hop in a car and head out, without any specific goal in mind and end up having a great night out on the town. It must be something to do with the tropical atmosphere! In Yangon I always felt and feel there is something to do. The embassies always seemed to be having functions and even going out for a meal at a hotel always seems to develop in to a social occasion. There always appears to be friends around. It’s a totally different way of life.

The people fuss over you and make you feel special with “Mr R” this and “Mr R” that, all the time. Why wouldn’t you be happy up there? I was very lucky, because at the time, a West Australian friend of mine, Jim Sheridan had a company in Yangon buying and selling prawns and had a lot of contact with the various embassies so there was always a function going on and we always got an invite.”Cappo” was also working for me at the time, so we were never short of something to do. Jim held three prawn, lobster, squid and fish barbecues and invited the various embassy, ambassadors and staff and other people who entertained a lot, so he was always assured of in excess of 100 invites.

Jim was a man who also came from Fremantle and we knew a lot of the same people back home but had never actually met, until Yangon. He was a very outgoing type and as a youngster had been a drummer in a band which had been quite successful in the early 60’s. He had this amazing knack of being able to pick up languages and could converse in Italian, Yugoslav and a variety of other languages and was even quite adept at Burmese. Neither of us were big drinkers and we were in well with all the expats from the various embassies and assured them all of the best quality seafood deliveries, due to our contacts with those involved in the industry. Jim helped me a lot and is a good man and we are great friends to this day.

People ask me how do I get to meet such great people. I don’t plan it. It just happens. All I can say I have been very lucky and have met some really wonderful folk along the way. I can genuinely say that my time in Myanmar has been a wonderful period in my life and meeting up with people like Nilar, Jim and the many, many others both in business and socially, has been one of my life’s greatest joys.

The \$100,000 Pajero

When I first went to Myanmar the exchange rate was 100 Kyats (pronounced Chats) to the US\$1. The official rate was 6 Kyats to the US\$1. When the Burmese gained their independence from Britain they retained and kept most of the British Law that had previously applied. But just to show a little bit of a protest they changed from driving on the left hand side of the road to the right. Only because it was probably different to the British way!

Many of the cars that are imported in to Myanmar are equipped with both left and right hand steering which accounts for more than a little mayhem on the roads. If you are following a bus or wider style vehicle, you need a passenger riding shotgun to act as lookout, to enable you to pull out in to the passing lane. Without one, you could be in for a long stop and start drive in heavy traffic. But! Somehow it all seems to work.

In my years in Burma and since independence from Britain, they seem to have somehow made this country work without being able to import during the sanctions. The Kyats went as high as 1,500 to the US\$1 and the rate was all over the place.

When the British left they had all these strangely valued denominational notes in their currency, like K90, K45 , K35 and K15 and very few coins.

Subsequently the government changed all that and advised those holding old money that they had 3-6 months to change to the new decimal currency (EG:K10) but they had to be able to explain where it had come from. These denominations started as high as 100K but have now later become K500, K1,000, K5,000 and recently a K10,000 has been introduced.

There was still good reason to be careful though and those working the cash economy and cash black market faced huge penalties and jail time, if caught. The change to the financial structure caused millions of dollars to be wiped off the market. In the end they found that it was easier to comply and they were just better off, paying the relevant taxation.

When the notes settled down to sensibly high denominational notes, which began at K100 then to K500 and eventually K1,000, I bought a car. I decided on a Mitsubishi 4 wheel drive "Pajero", which I could have bought in Australia for approximately A\$15,000. In Myanmar it cost the equivalent of approximately US\$100,000 when paid for in Kyats. This was when the exchange rate was approximately K500 to US\$1. I had to buy the vehicle all in cash, as no cheques were acceptable. The highest denominator note available was K500 and there weren't many of those around! By the time we scraped up the cash to pay for the car we had approximately 200,000 pieces of paper to complete the transaction. (see photo).



Paying for the Pajero in cash

My Staff in Myanmar

Nilar was only one of numerous people I have grown very fond of in the many years spent in this wonderful country of Myanmar. I have had very loyal staff and many I have got to know as friends. They were all such good people. Myanmar is a very poor country which is now emerging in to the rest of the world and I feel proud that I have changed the life of more than a thousand. It is nothing to do with “Mr Joe” being charitable.

They would not have achieved anything had they not put the effort in. It was more about teaching them to believe in themselves and adopt a discipline of saving. Many of these people would never have thought that one day they would own their own home. They would live from day to day, spending what they earned as they could see no escape from a life of poverty which had been the way it always had been and they accepted this as their future lot.

What I wanted for them was to achieve a level of financial independence and to not be dragged back in to the ways of the past where everything had to be shared and no-one progressed. Teach them that it was alright to put money in the bank and to save and provide for the future. It was okay to tell a little fib that you were broke rather than waste your savings on day to day unnecessary spending. Sometimes you tell the truth; If not, it is better to say nothing!

I am currently putting my efforts in to education, and ensuring that some of the younger staff are getting a tuition in what I regard are the most important requirements for the Burmese today; The English language, Computer Technology and to be honest in their dealings. The Buddhist religion has taught the people to be very respectful of one another and people in general and this has been passed down to the children through the parents. Unfortunately, it is only half the lessons necessary as they do need to think more about escaping from the poverty trap that has become the expectation of many. I am proud to say that all my employees have achieved a status of above middle class, a status that none of them would have ever thought possible, in their lifetime.

I have in many cases provided housing for them with modern amenities such as washing machines, western style toilets and tiled flooring. As in Australia the staff in Myanmar, have all been very caring about my health. They look after me. Going to and from Myanmar is something I intend to do until I am physically unable. I intend to keep up with the charity work but I am also now looking at mixing it with a bit of social activity, by doing things like cruises around the region and rewarding staff members with short holidays, adventures they could never have envisaged as part of their life. Outings to restaurants and other social activities that they enjoy

Success is not measured by how much wealth you acquire but by the wisdom of the way you spend it. I feel that what I am doing, both for the improvement in lifestyle for the members of my Myanmar staff and the charitable projects we are undertaking in the orphanages and the happiness it is bringing not only to them but for me also, has all been very rewarding.

Charity

I have always felt that one of my great strengths has been to surround myself with extraordinary people who can do extraordinary things. I have so many of my staff, only too willing to assist me in my philanthropic ventures. As I always say. I am only the financial resource to get things moving but nothing can happen without those who are willing to contribute their time and expertise to make these things happen.

It was about 20 years ago (1993) that I finally became involved with charity work in a significant way. Throughout my life and alongside my business operations, I have helped people out with money if I thought they needed it and if I thought they were deserving of it. I always wanted to get involved with charity in a big way. I waited until I was in a position where I was wealthy enough that, if I retired, I would have more than enough money for myself and my family to live on, plus the surplus funds required. I knew that when I reached that point, I was free to break away from business and get involved in charities. That point arrived about 16 years ago. I'd spent the previous 16 years trying to decide what kind of charity work I would do when the time came.

I really wanted to help the Australian Indigenous community. I have enormous respect for Aboriginal people and their culture and I wondered what I could do to help free them from the injustices they continue to suffer in their own country. I had seen so many ventures and programs fail to make any difference in this area and these were programs run by people who understood the issues, the Aboriginal people and their culture far more than I did. I really didn't think that I could make much of a worthwhile difference by sticking my nose in.

Reluctantly I decided to focus my efforts elsewhere, somewhere that I could really make a difference. I still harbour a desire to make a difference to the needs of the Aboriginal people and if the opportunity ever arises for a worthwhile project, I would still like to become involved if I could see the merit in it.

It was out at E bay at the pearl farm that I realized that I could make a difference to so many lives. We had been employing people from Yangon to do the mundane work on the pearl farm. I recognized that we had 2 villages close by who were subsisting on their fishing culture with no future advancement in what was becoming the "new" Myanmar foreseeable in their lives or for the following generations. I could see that there was no hope for these people to prosper in the "new" climate of change and I realized that by employing the villagers to do the mundane cleaning work on the shells and fostering further training for them in the industry, it would give them a future.

I arranged to build a school on each island for their children so that they would have an education, although it would be a minimal one, by breaking the cycle that had kept them trapped on the islands for generations, due to their lack of finances and education. In these countries and there are a lot more like them in the world, you can make a few dollars go a long way.

By the time you build a school for US\$9,000-US\$10,000, which is basically a huge shed and pay the teachers US\$100 per month, it is a pittance in the scheme of things and what we did on those islands has had a major impact on the future lives of so many. I learned a lot from this project and I realized there were so many areas that I could be instrumental in offering a future and hope to so many.

The more I have become involved with these charitable pursuits, I have begun to notice so many areas where I could contribute and still be able to keep a hands on approach, ensuring that the money I was prepared to offer was being used appropriately. Back in Australia, I had employed Bill Booth in 2009 to look after my Australian property interests and manage various other projects within the organization. When I outlined my vision of how we could make changes to so many lives, he immediately followed up various resources that I had suggested were missing in Myanmar and how we could help.

All the Fremantle office staff threw themselves behind the projects and in the past two years we have achieved so much.

Bill contacted the Lions Club of Perth and over the past year we have purchased and shipped 250 full computer units to Yangon. We have set up training centres at 3 orphanages and provided the training required, at our expense. I see this as paying it forward, as those orphans and children trained will be able to on-train those younger children that follow. I see this as a bright future for these children, as being trained in “Information Technology” and the English language will open doors that would not have previously been achievable for them.

There are other areas where I have seen a need where we can help in these institutions. I have provided generators. I have provided ablution facilities which offer modesty for the girls when showering in these institutions. I have introduced and provided them with washing machines which were completely foreign to these people who were washing their clothes on rocks with stream water.

I’ve had large flat screen televisions placed in the common areas at the orphanages and called on other high profile Burmese business leaders to “get on board” with these projects and supply services or equipment at cost or by donation. It also allows me at the same time be able to keep some control in personally making sure that these things happen. It was never my intention to be “out there” with this philanthropy but Bill built up a rapport with the Lions Club of Perth and made them aware of our pursuits to the point where they named me the “Non-Lion of the Year” at the 50th Annual anniversary dinner. A title of which I am very proud but am also willing to share with those that have helped and contributed so much, both in Australia and Yangon. I was able to buy these computers in Yangon but being able to purchase through the Australian Lions Club, it provided funds for both Australian charities as well as equipment for our Myanmar projects.

Nilar has been of the same opinion as Bill in regard to making these projects more well known in Myanmar and I now agree. The assistance I now get from the various Government Ministers, who are aware of these projects, when importing, has made it a lot easier and their love of ceremony has been most welcome and heartfelt each time we open a new training centre.

It has now given me access to a lot more high profile dignitaries and a platform to express my thoughts on a variety of matters in relation to the emergence of the “new” Myanmar. They are now finding their way back on to the world stage since the western world has lifted the sanctions that have suppressed development in the country for many years. The Director General Department of Human Health in Myanmar is very supportive of these plans and I work closely with the Department and take advice on the priority locations.

Another project that I have become involved in is acquiring blocks of land in the surrounding suburbs of Yangon. They are much smaller blocks than we have by Australian standards but the requirements of the Burmese people compared to those of Australians is a world apart. I am currently involved in the building of sustainable housing for the disadvantaged members of the community. My aim with this endeavour is to provide these homes at either affordable or free rentals. I use my driver in Yangon Aung Lwin (Alwin) as my building manager and in my absence he ensures that the building work is undertaken under my instruction. We have introduced a new style of building which accommodates 16 dwellings within the one building.

I have ensured that they are equipped with quality finishes, modern toilet and bathing facilities, usage of floor tiles instead of bare cement flooring and designed the homes to incorporate their style of communal cooking and eating together. We have already completed three dwellings and a 4th is in progress, which will be fully booked by the time of completion. Alwin is currently overseeing this 4th design concept which is almost half completed. I intend to commence on 2 more larger buildings in the near future, which will be suitable as a guest house for university students. My latest venture is to get involved with the Lions Eye Institute and Bill has been organising for high profile Ophthalmologists from all over the world, who donate their time, for the removal of cataracts and the treatment of other sight related problems that affect the outlying villagers in Myanmar. Due to the political structure that has prevailed there for many years, it has been almost impossible for western aid to be provided.

Due to my 19 years of involvement in the pearling industry in Myanmar and my new found fame from the exposure I have received with our latest projects, I have gained a position of respectability with many people and officials of influence. This has given me the access to help others who have found it hard to navigate their way through the red tape involved in the “new” Myanmar.

I have been involved in researching a number of charitable projects that I would have liked to have started, in Bali, Cambodia and indigenous areas of Australia but have always found it difficult to get past first base with the number of organisations involved in trying to make things happen. There are a lot of people out there trying to do the right thing but red tape and government intervention can make it almost impossible to move. I employed a young man for a year, working out of Denpasar in Indonesia to try and find land to facilitate a distribution centre for donations. The whole project just never got off the ground and we abandoned it, as it all became too difficult and I was concerned for the safety procedures that were non-existent, without continual overseeing of the project.

Myanmar is almost a clean slate, as it has been cut off from most of the world by sanctions for many years and they are now showing a readiness to accept western culture and charitable endeavours such as the projects that I have been offering. I have found now, that it is best to concentrate on an area where I can help a lot, rather than try to save the whole world and the projects I am doing, I feel, are worthwhile and raising the living and educational standards of those that I can reach, which I feel will perpetuate itself, as these people who have benefited, pass on their education and improved quality of life.

A chance meeting with a little known acquaintance, a stranger really, named “Chook” who gave me the money to catch a taxi all those years ago has had a major impact on my life. It is funny how a small incident can have such a bearing on your future but I wouldn’t have it any other way. Some of the greatest joy I have ever felt, has been in the giving. Sometimes, giving something as small as a \$1 ice cream, or cheap costume jewellery through to donating 6 fully furnished houses and 6 apartments, free of charge, so far, to those who have never been given anything in their lives, can be so rewarding emotionally. I have always been lucky and a lot of things have just seemed to fall my way and what I am now achieving in Myanmar, is bringing to reality a dream that was instilled in my being 58 years ago.

Bella (Italian for Beautiful)

My earlier involvement with the orphanages in Myanmar were originally substantial donations of money and small things, such as taking little toys like koala bears and little trinkets of jewellery and such, that I could distribute among the beautiful children that were cared for in the government run orphanages. It was something that the staff in my Myanmar office loved to get involved in, with me and we'd regularly go and visit and provide little treats such as sweets, biscuits and ice creams and little toys and favours that I would bring from Australia. These little things meant so much to them, as they were luxuries that they had never been exposed to.

I often had friends and business associates over from Australia and as tough as some of these men were, you could see their hearts melt at the sight of up to 250 children who were resident in one of these facilities, that I took them to. These places were run fairly well and the government did provide well for the children but there was only so much that they could provide and on the whole, they were doing a good job, considering their third world status.

On one of these visits, I saw a severely retarded young girl, standing by herself, rocking backwards and forwards. I wandered over and touched her on the shoulder and she looked up at me and I could see that glazed look in her eyes. She was only about 4 foot 8 inches tall (140 cms.) and her body was frail and twisted. Her legs were badly disfigured and her feet never met the ground squarely when she walked. She had fresh marks on her body, where she had been continually scratching herself and bleeding. The only contact she shared with the other girls, was at meal times when one or two of the other girls had been allocated to assist with her feeding. For the rest of the time she was alone. I wondered if there was anything I could possibly do for her.

After our visit, as we were driving away, I asked my driver to take me back to the orphanage, as I wanted to see and find out more about the young girl I had seen; I named her Bella. She was actually 27 years old but there was no other facility that could handle her. The normal age for the young orphans to leave was when they were 18 years old but Bella had been kept on due to her circumstances. I made a point of putting a lot of time in to her and I could see a spark developing: I saw a challenge. I did see something!

Over the years I returned and each time I would bring little gifts for her and a number of items such as MP4 players and hand held games to hand out to her friends so that she could share them with the other girls, in order that she wouldn't be left alone. I found it worked and each time I returned I found that she had been more accepted by the others and her affection for me was undeniable. When I appeared her face would light up and she would rush towards me, awkwardly but with purpose. The change was slow and gradual but the glaze in her eyes had lifted, there was a smile and she had almost stopped her continual rocking back and forth.

All I had to do was raise my finger and she would stop and show her understanding and love, which had been a wonderful improvement on our first meeting where there had been no sign of communication. She can now form the word "Joe" when she sees me and it is so uplifting to see how much she has improved. I would often leave something in my top pocket for her to take and it became a bit of a ritual on each of my visits.

My Yangon staff and I organized an "Olympic Games" to be held each year and we had Gold, Silver and Bronze medals, with ribbons, made up. I made sure Bella was included in one of the races so that she felt that she could participate and amazingly she almost won. I always made sure she won a medal. The change in her had been remarkable.

When I say to my Yangon staff "How is the most beautiful girl in Myanmar going", they all know who I mean. When I went to Yangon on my last visit I found that she had been moved on to a disabled centre where she is receiving more appropriate care. She is much happier now, receiving the much more special attention she requires. She is now more accepted by others who are similarly afflicted and I must admit that I miss her dearly. Whenever we are together at an important event, she is allowed to sit next to me and that is something that is usually disallowed.

All it took was a bit of bribery, to lift a person from the depths of despair to a feeling of real love and acceptance. We all need a little bit of love and to me she was very special and so deserving of special attention. Before I leave Yangon now, most times she is the last person that I go and see before heading to the airport. The change in her, to me, has been a miracle and it makes what I am doing and that I intend to keep doing, so worthwhile. There is a photo on the front cover of my story, of Bella and I and she's even having a go at my top pocket!

The Lucky Country

Other than losing my mum early in life, which I think may have given me an insight in to life and how painful it can be to lose one's loved one, especially at such a young age. Apart from that sad time in my life, which I now see as a positive, it made me see how short and fleeting life can be. Why this positive outlook? I don't know. I think my mum has been looking after me all these years.

I have to be grateful that they both came over from Italy in order to create a better life for themselves and the future family. My dad did. He left his sweetheart on the other side of the world to look for a life that was to be better than what was available in the old country. He came over on the basis that things were pretty tough in Italy and with the 'Depression' affecting most of Europe, things weren't likely to get much better.

A lot of Italians came over that year, irrespective of what education they had, they took whatever work was offering and many finished up in industries they were not trained for. Most of those Italians who wound up in Fremantle, hopped in to the fishing industry. There was very little money in it, but he brought mum over from Italy and had a family and we all got through life quite well. What we never had, we never missed. We were running around with patches in our pants and sandals, at best, or nothing on our bare feet.

But! I am so glad they came here to this wonderful country of ours; Australia. I sometimes get angry at how the politicians go on about our country and getting involved in other people's wars etc. The majority of Australians are a peace loving lot. They are generous and most have great laid back personalities. That's how I see Australians in general, anyway.

So I was born in the "Lucky Country". I don't know how long they've been calling it that. But I've convinced myself it is, because I believe it to be true.

So, I was born in the "Lucky Country" and I feel I am a lucky person because of that. Somehow everything to me was lucky. I have learnt a lot in my life. A lot!

I didn't ever get up on any big highs or down to any big lows. I kept on a level. Sure you feel happy. You can be ecstatic when your footy team wins the Grand Final. There are many times when you can get on highs. I have always believed that I am lucky. Plus, I believe that about certain people and I believe it is a hugely mental attitude. They say "Every cloud has a silver lining" or "Don't look for the cloud. Look for the silver lining" and move on.

My good friend Theo Kailis, who I have discussed previously in this story, once saw that I was a bit down or angry about something. He asked me what was wrong. I said "I have missed out on a good deal". Theo always used to come out with some great one liners (In my eyes, he was a great man). These one liners just seemed to make a great deal of sense. He was a man that had so much impact. He wasn't like me, someone who would rant and rave on and carry on a bit. But! Sometimes I do have a bit of impact!

'Joe' he would say. "Wouldn't that be terrible if that was the last good deal left on earth". "What a terrible thing that would be" I'd say "I'd still like to know".

Sometime some things are not meant to be. Sometimes it's for the better. Maybe there's a better deal around the corner. So you lose it. Don't worry about it and move on. That is now my philosophy. I don't get angry at losing a deal, or losing money on a deal any more, or anything like that. It was meant to be and it doesn't matter. What matters in life is your health.

But it was this attitude that I was born in a "Lucky Country" and irrespective of how much, at times, I put down the "pollies" that run the show, I have spent so much time promoting Australia overseas.

Everywhere I have gone in these developing and far flung countries, I am always flying the flag. I have delivered so many toy koalas and T Shirts, bearing the “Flying Kangaroo”. Whether it be Indonesia, Yemen, Iran, Myanmar or wherever, I am always proudly being an Australian. I even cheat a little bit. I get the Burmese manufacturers to make stuff about Fremantle and Perth by getting them to copy stuff that I have brought over with me. I am always praising Australia. There is nothing you can say about this country that is too good. It is the “Lucky Country”.

What makes a country important, is its youth. Sometimes we become disappointed in them. But maybe we’re looking at the cloud and not the silver lining! I have always thought the people of Australia to be fantastic, especially those from my era. I’ve met so many wonderful people, particularly from my home town. My little village of Fremantle; a wonderful place it is!

I have mentioned my friendship with a Fremantle man named Jim Sheridan. A typical Fremantle man. Once I was told by a young Burmese lady “Jimmy wants to marry me but he lied to me”. I said “What was he lying about”? “He’s been married a number of times and he’s never told me”. I said “How can that be a lie. Have you asked him?” She replied no. I said “Look, I come from the village of Fremantle, where the most wonderful people on earth live and we don’t tell lies. So you should ask him tonight or tomorrow if he has been married before and being from the village of Fremantle where people are the greatest people on earth and they don’t tell lies, he will tell you the truth”. Luckily I got to Jimmy on time to warn him. They never got married anyway. So that’s Fremantle.

As I am actually sitting here recording this story, I am looking out the window at the “Four Squares” park just on the outskirts of Fremantle. I’m just looking out at these beautiful gardens and watching the cars and people passing by. It is only reinforcing to me where I was born. I was probably born only 500 metres from where I am sitting now. It’s true; home is where the heart is.

Am I an Italian? I’m an Australian first and foremost and I am proud of my Italian heritage. Especially my father and mother, who were both wonderful people. The only negative about the Italian side of course, is the food. It’s so good that I can’t help putting on weight with all of that spaghetti and macaroni.

But life’s been good to me. I’ve had wonderful friends and as I’ve said a number of times, I’m lucky. I just believe that no matter what happens and when you have a belief that you are not lucky, it’s all in the mind. If something goes wrong. Move on! Don’t dwell on things. Obviously there are things that happen in everyone’s life, such as the passing of loved ones. It takes time for things to heal and sometimes they don’t heal completely and they never go away. But it doesn’t mean you’re unlucky. It doesn’t mean that you’re a negative person. It just means that life is what it is.

Life is full of joys and full of sorrows. It’s full of everything. But life is what you make it. You can take all the religions and all the philosophies and out of all of them I’m sure you’ll pick a lot of good things. So do good things in your life and you will be the most satisfied of people in respect to what you have done.

Epilogue - Beyond the Sea

Where will my life take me now? It has been a stormy ride and there is still a lot left for me to do. It was never my intention to become so deeply involved in my story but once these things get started, it becomes quite addictive and I must admit, I have enjoyed the experience. It is a wonder we have even gotten this far, as every day a new story pops in to my head and those who have been recording these stories and adventures give another sigh of exasperation. But we have finally arrived at our destination and I have been so lucky to relive my life so enjoyably and with the help of so many.

My seafaring days are over, although I will still keep returning to my beloved Myanmar and I will keep my interests in the “golden” pearls as long as my health allows. I suppose there is still so much I want to achieve in relation to my computer training for the orphanages, the eye clinics and my building programmes for the disadvantaged. It is so rewarding to be able to be up there in Yangon and ensuring that the projects are completed. I have spent many years contributing to care organisations that are administratively heavy and very little appears to reach its charitable objective. This way I am on the ground, making sure it all comes to fruition.

I have never wanted to go as public as this with my philanthropy but others have made me aware of the valuable contribution my exposure to the Myanmar government and commercial interests, due to my long association with the pearling operations over 20 years, in Myanmar, has given me. I hope that the readers of this story do not in any way regard my revelations of charity projects as making an heroic portrayal of myself, as that is far from the truth.

The whole exercise has been more rewarding to me personally than any amount of financial expenditure involved. The working with such a great team of people, both here in Australia and in Myanmar could ever match the satisfaction and joy I have received from all those I work with and the infectious gratitude from all those that I have helped.

I say to those in Myanmar, who in most cases survive on a wage per month that we would earn in an hour in Australia. “What is money?” and they say “Money is only paper sir”. If my life and financial backing can save one life before I die, I will have achieved my purpose in life. By providing an education in the field of internet technology and the learning of the English language to one orphan and by that orphan, “paying it forward”, how many lives will be saved from a life of degradation and poverty. It is probably hard to understand for a reader who has not lived in or visited a third world country just how desperate life can become for the uneducated and unskilled and what opportunities young women and young men are reduced to in order to survive.

This biographical relating of my life’s experiences and adventures, has opened my eyes to a very important message. That message being, that I should be proud of what I am doing, rather than ferreting away in the background trying to save the world by myself. I now realize, that to make a real impact, you need the skills and expertise of others and that once that infrastructure is in place, it will perpetuate itself and my goals will have well and truly been served, long after my passing.

I have met many, many, celebrated and famous people along the way and I have met with the poorest of the poor. They are all people and there but for the sake of God, go I. They all have a story and it wasn’t till I started rattling off my tale that I realized that I too have had a very interesting life and am so glad to have had the opportunity to impart it.

I have been so fortunate to have acquired wealth, by both a lot of hard work and a lot of good luck. To also have been smart enough to surround myself with good people who have made my life such a joy. I have loved being part of this and I thank all those who were interested enough to contribute in some way. I hope you have found my life story as interesting and entertaining as I did living it!

The End