



... a colourful phrase said it all!

“Yeah, I remember you. You’re the fucking friend of that prick who filled the batmobile with junk the other day! So if you think I’m going to fix your car, you can just piss off!” These were the endearing sentiments that came floating from the pit to kick-start a close friendship, which for me held a long list of indelible memories and lasted more than twenty-five years.

Harold ran a home-grown business from his backyard shed. He was in *the pit*, hard at work on the underbelly of some clapped-out vehicle when I announced myself. I guess he must have been watching as I approached, and now with my lower legs in full view, rather than embark on any normal chit-chat routine, chose a more combatant stance, yelling out this introductory line - in his somewhat infectious Australian manner - just to make sure I was fully aware of the rather shaky ground I now stood on.

I first met this man with the gift for a memorable phrase or two, a week before, at an uproarious party thrown by my future business partner, Tom. The revelry that night had continued into the morning hours, which was when Tom had chosen to fill one of the guest’s cars with a truckload of rubbish from house and garden. In all honesty this was not a nice thing to do, and Harold, the guest in question, was certainly not impressed at the time of discovery as he left the drink-fest, and even more so after managing to drive home and then almost sober the next day, discover his car a stinking mess!

But back to today and the pit. Not to be deterred by the opening pleasantries that had come floating my way, I hung around and after a while the man with a vocabulary that could turn a chicken blue, emerged from his underground lair, mopping the sweat from his balding scalp. He wore overalls which looked like they once were orange; a small man with an impish grin that could still be detected from under a day's layer of oil and grease. It was like meeting someone who had forgotten to grow up: a seven-year-old boy in fifty-year-old camouflage. I liked him instinctively. He had this devil-may-care attitude that was hard to resist.

“Jesus Christ, it’s like the Black Hole of Calcutta down there today. You see this ‘bag o’ fruit’? It was tight when I went down. Now look at it; I think I’ve lost 20 pounds!” He held the spare material out from his waste, with a sideways smirk in my direction as if to say: “if you believe that mate, you must be even dumber than I thought you were”.

Then, to no one in particular: *“Must be time for a stubby!”* Followed by a shout towards the back door of his house, a white-painted affair, with a lean-to section that adjoined the concreted expanse connecting house to shed.

“Joyce ... JOYCE!” he yelled over his shoulder, “Bring us a couple of coldies from the fridge: one for me and one for the rubbish man here!”

“Hey, Harold,” I began. “You know I had nothing to do with ...”

But by then he had his back to me, busy cleaning his hands at an improvised sink. He cut across my attempted protests:

“Ahh, forget it. We were all pissed as newts and your mate Tom was off his head. But I’ll get even with the bastard, you just wait and see! His ‘cheese and kisses’ has been bringing her car here to be fixed for years. I’ll fix her brakes next time; then we’ll see who has the last laugh!” He turned and grinned, obviously pleased with this thought.

The metal fly-wire door to the house banged shut as girlfriend Joyce arrived on cue with two cold beers; a short lady, many years younger, with long blonde hair, in a knee-length flowery dress. Harold by now was seated and reached out to take one of the

squat brown bottles – forever nicknamed a *stubby* in Australia – smiling to himself as he twisted open the metal top, obviously thinking of the mayhem he could cause in retaliation for his car being used as a rubbish tip.

“Today’s another day. Pull up a chair my friend.” He gestured towards a slightly rusty folding chair, leaning against the shed door. *“I was ‘up at sparrow’s fart’ this morning, but I’ve knocked off now. Then he pointed to my car. ”Where’ja get that heap of junk; sounds like it’s been to Birdsville and back. I’ll have a ‘butchers’ later, after we’ve had a drink. Hope you realise parts for it are ‘as rare as rocking horse shit’.”*

After the initial salvo from the pit, things had mellowed remarkably quickly; one drink turned into three or four of the same, and from then on, the gregarious Harold and I became best mates. Like Tom, he was a quarter of a century older than me and an ex-wartime pilot; but unlike Tom, he was a much more earthy character: working class, with a bent for fast cars and even faster motorbikes. We were totally unsuited; his other friends were bikers and youngsters who flouted the law; drop-outs in leathers with questionable habits. Yet for some strange reason we jelled ... right from the start.

Over time, I came to know that corroded chair next to the shed quite well, and even came to identify with some of his young friends - more my age than his - especially when we all got together on a Friday evening to play table-tennis, in what was known as the *brush-house*, at the back of the yard. Harold was a master of the art of bluff, and after copious quantities of beer or similarly intoxicating fluids, would stand there: bow-legged, belly over belt, with bat held high and swaying from side to side; like an out-of-shape goalkeeper waiting on his line for a penalty shot.

“Come on you miserable bastards,” he would yell: the usual combative call to all and sundry. *“You can’t beat me with your cunning stunts,”* which of course I could tell was a *deliberate play on words*.

And quite often he was right. Partly because the *all and sundry* (including myself) were consuming as much alcohol as he was, he usually managed to stay ahead of the pack, with artful spin, and smashes that sent the ball rocketing over the brush wall, into next door's back yard. Next door collected the stray balls and complained about the noise, but nothing ever ensued to stop the weekly bouts of raucous revelry.

I would have to say that booze, - usually the amber lager liquid, but also at times his favourite *Prince's Port* wine - was a contributing factor to our relationship, which lasted until I exited the sunny shores of Australia. When we first met, he had just turned fifty; by the time we parted company I was doing the same. It was a liaison which I felt he enjoyed as much as me, whether at his place (he hardly ever came to mine) or on various excursions to far-flung outposts in the Australian *bush*. Above all, it was those distinctive *Haroldisms* that stayed in my memory – those (sometimes) cringe-worthy sayings aired at the most unexpected times - leaving me smiling for the rest of the week.

.....

The Flinders: by day and by night

"It looks like a cross between a monkey and a turtle." Harold swayed a bit as he said this, catching on to the statuette - which I think was meant to depict the ascension of Jesus – to stop himself falling. I looked around, thinking our host might be offended,

"Jesus Harold, have you no bloody respect." This, from Rolly, swaying in unison behind us, as he finished off a can of beer and tossed the empty container into the dark. *"Can't you see, the man here is a fuckin' artist."*

We were stumbling around the back garden of *Afghan Pete's* place, late in the evening, somewhere in the middle of nowhere, on our expedition through the Flinders Ranges. For this particular venture, Harold and I had been joined by Rolland Hassel (or Rolly as we both knew him), a comrade in arms from their wartime days, and now a prominent lawyer and much-respected, white-wigged law court judge, in Melbourne.

The three of us stood peering with the aid of a small torch, at various soapstone statues, which apparently our newfound friend, *Afghan Pete*, (standing alongside us) had dedicated himself to creating, over the past two or three decades.

I'm not quite sure how we got there, but I do remember not long before, making a hasty retreat from this tin shed that masqueraded as the only outback pub within a radius of a million miles. It was a Saturday night, and the place was packed to the rafters with a mix of hard drinking males: both whites and Aborigines. Harold, who by that stage was just about legless, had managed to knock a full glass of beer over, and the liquid ran along the bench we were sitting on, to surround the backside of this giant black man stationed nearby (who up until that point in time was the owner of the beer).

"For Christ's sake Harold, look what you've done now! I think it's time for us to leave."

This was the best I could muster, whilst taking in the big guy's stare, as the beer ran around and under his voluminous rear end.

"Fair crack of the whip," Harold retorted, *"It was an accident! Anyway, can't you see, the guy 'has a few roos loose in the top paddock',"* thus inferring that the large man was in some way mentally unstable. The jet-black aboriginal man-mountain appeared to hear this and stared even harder, flexing his muscles.

And so there we were, not long after our rapid exit, swaying decidedly from side to side in the moonlight, enthralled by the wonders of soapstone carving, and the fact that Jesus rose to heaven in the form of a monkey-headed turtle.

Earlier in the day, we had found ourselves being chased at speed on a long straight stretch of tarmac, somewhere to the north of Quorn – gateway to the Flinders - by the local constabulary. They had spied us relieving ourselves in jovial fashion on a backyard fence, after finishing a lengthy beer-drenched lunch at the Quorn pub. Seated in the back, I was suitably astonished at just how fast the police four-wheel drive Toyota could travel (we were doing about 140 kph at the time) as they drew alongside us with what

looked like consummate ease. At this point Harold was the driver; his right (accelerator) leg encased in a full plaster cast after a recent motorbike accident.

“Sorry Ociffer,” Harold said, (the mistake in pronunciation I knew was intentional) as he wound his way out of the seat, whilst hanging on to the driver’s door. “Me old leg ‘ere jammed down on the accelerator by accident and I couldn’t slow down.”

The two policemen adjusted their checkered caps and massaged their truncheons.

“Bullshit!” the lead cop said. “You’re pissed, and we both know it!”

“Fair ‘nough, I’m pissed. So, whacha gonna do ‘bout it? Clap me in irons?” The testing questions speared back at the policeman were noticeably slurred, as my friend leaned back nonchalantly on the front bonnet.

“You were way over the speed limit, and the three of youz was seen back there exposing yourselves.” The uniformed gentleman continued, not responding to Harold’s marauding taunts.

“Jesus ociffer,” Harold continued with what seemed to be some sort of death wish. ‘Fair shake of the sauce bottle’, we were just having a piss. Can’t we even ‘syphon the python’ nowadays, without it becoming a criminal case?”

“Oh my God,” I thought to myself. “Shut the fuck up Harold, or the three of us will all end up in a police cell.”

The senior policeman looked somewhat astounded. “Jesus Christ, if ever I’ve seen a drunken rabble, then you three are it! I should breathalise the lot of youz,” he continued, in a broad Aussie drawl, “But the kit is back in Augusta, and by the time we get it up here you’ll all be sober as judges.” He said this while appearing to fix his gaze on one Roland Hassel - our in-house judge and bastion of law and order, whose large head suddenly emerged from the front passenger door, cloaked in a grey beanie, appearing like a Norman soldier above the parapet of the vehicle’s roof line - causing me to wonder if there was more to their mission than first met the eye.

But no. He glared at Harold, then with a final few words removed his peaked cap and turned back to the police vehicle: *“Just drive on carefully and no more speeding.”* As he climbed into the passenger seat, I could see him trying desperately not to smile.

“Yeah, and no more pissing on backyard fences,” his young sidekick called out of the driver’s window as they wheeled around to return to base.

“Fuck them!” said Harold, raising a two-fingered salute to the fast-disappearing police car. *“Even the older guy looked like he was just out of high school”.* Then turning to me: *“Take over the wheel young Jeeves, us oldies need to get some ‘shut-eye’. “And ‘don’t spare the horses’, we need to get to the next waterhole before dark!”* This last salvo indicating that somewhere behind the well-honed façade, the man with the plaster cast was in many ways a well-read individual, with a sense of culture; not the foul-mouthed ‘Bassa Mackenzie’ type he pretended to be.

Later that day, around midnight, we pulled up outside the Marree Hotel. After the skirmish with the big man in the outback pub, and then our time with Afghan Pete, I had once again been given the driving honours, meaning that Harold and Rolly had been able to sleep, and were now rested and revived by the time we reached Marree, just south of Lake Eyre, in South Australia’s far north. Both were raring to join the commotion that was coming from the front bar, but I’d had enough and decided to retire gracefully to a single room, situated directly above the downstairs saloon.

It was about two or three in the morning when I woke to a terrible din from the bar below, and hearing Harold’s loud rasping voice, amongst all the others, I decided it might be time to investigate. In the bar, I was horrified to find the man of the moment at the epicentre of what was rapidly turning into an all-out brawl. The locals – a posse of big, burly, Aborigines, wearing cowboy hats and sleeveless vests - felt they had been insulted by the offensive white man from the city, and were now seeking (in no uncertain terms) an apology; or failing that, some sort of retribution! Luckily, by that time I was the

only one who could claim to be anywhere near sober and managed to calm the pack down, enough to drag Harold away ... and to bed.

Early the next morning I was woken by an unfamiliar sound: *Toooooot - Toooooot! Toooooot - Toooooot!* Bleary eyed and still half asleep, I could detect vague train noises - shunting and tooting - floating in through the window.

“What the hell?” I asked myself. *“I didn’t know there were any trains around here.”* Then I heard another, more familiar noise: the sound of Harold’s grating voice:

“Hey George! George! Come on down baby; come for a ride.”

I stumbled out of bed and threw open the sash window; upwards, so I was able to lean out, over the windowsill. There to my amazement I saw Harold’s head poking out from a large burgundy-coloured locomotive. The tracks ran on the other side of the road, across from the pub. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes and there he was, at the controls of a steam train, and in full regalia: drivers overalls, peaked cap and all! *“God help me!”* I found myself murmuring. *“What in Hell’s name will the guy do next?”*

And then when Harold saw me at the window: *“Ah there you are my good man,”* in his best ‘Jeeves and Wooster’ brogue, *“Snap to it and Bring us a coldie will you? ‘I’m as dry as a dead dingo’s donga’ out here!”*

At times, words failed me.

Up a creek without a paddle

One day later that same year, we decided to take off in the afore-mentioned *Batmobile*, for a boating weekend, based at a mate’s place on the River Murray. The car certainly had features which resembled the *Caped Crusader’s* famous vehicle - a long, low, *Plymouth* soft top, purple in colour with impressively high rear wings, lots of mirror-shiny chrome, big double headlights and massive red tail-lights – and thus had been christened as such by Harold’s disciples: his biker mates.

It was before drink-driving laws had become very serious and anyway we were far out of reach of urban police, so with a large *esky* (the colloquial term for cooler box) full of *stubbies* in the back, and Harold at the wheel, there we were, burbling along, bend after hairpin bend, until we reached the plains on the far side of the Adelaide Hills ... and a straight run down to the river. By that stage, the number of full *stubbies* was beginning to dwindle, and Harold had started to tell me stories from his past.

“Did I tell you about the time I was flying with Rolly, on patrol out from Darwin, towards Moresby?” He asked.

“No, I don’t think so; but I’m interested to hear it,” I replied. Though I had a feeling I had heard it before. It didn’t matter; his stories were always engaging, and I could listen to them time and time again. So he began to tell me a story which I can never forget:

“I was just twenty-one: a pretty raw flight lieutenant. We were a task force of Avro Ansons. Seven planes, in a wide V-shape. I was piloting the lead plane, heading on a low-flying reconnaissance mission over Papua New Guinea, looking for nips. Suddenly as we approached the PNG coast, we received orders from base to turn back. So, I gave the necessary instructions for us all to come round in a wide 180-degree, anti-clockwise turn, which everyone started to follow. But you know what? I had forgotten to account for the width of our formation and the height of the cliffs on that part of the coastline. We lost contact with the pilot flying on the far right of the Vee and never heard from him, or his crew, from that day on.” He paused, then finished with: *“I’ve always regretted that.”*

I looked over at my friend sitting back in the plush beige seats of his soft-top *limousine* - hand on the wheel, the other clasped around a cool stubby - as we sped towards the Murray; and despite the lapse of time (it was about thirty years after the event), plus today’s consumption of beer, I could tell he was still upset by the thought that his own negligence may have - in all likelihood - caused the death of his colleagues who were in

that starboard Anson. He was like a chocolate éclair this friend of mine: hard exterior, but soft centre. At heart, a man with principles which I recognized and admired.

Quite a few hours later, in the dark of evening, we found ourselves at his friend's shack, on the banks of the river. Rob the owner, tall and fair-haired with a slow-speaking Aussie drawl, was not much older than me. He had already scared Harold into believing there was a snake ensconced under the wooden decking of the jetty, and now our older friend - with booze-fueled bravado once more to the fore - had jumped into Rob's speedboat moored alongside the platform, and was about to head out into the river. But then with the engine already going, Rob (unseen by Harold) reached in to snatch the key from the ignition, just as Harold pushed forward on the throttle and took off with a roar into the darkness, leaving foaming water in his wake.

We both watched as the craft thundered around and around, this way and that, out in the deep near the centre of the river. In reality we heard more than we saw, because of the dark, but all of a sudden there was a cough and a splutter, then no more engine noise. Rob was overcome with ecstasy and rolling around on the deck of the jetty; he was holding the key and he thought the boat could not be restarted, thus leaving Harold marooned on the water. (On reflection, I am not quite sure why Rob was so happy, because it was *his* property that was adrift out there in the middle of nowhere!).

We both waited and listened for a minute or two. Then from the dark Harold screamed:

"You bastards! Where's the fucking key?" causing more uncontrollable mirth from Rob.

We waited a few more minutes, before there was a series of bright sparks to illuminate the dark, accompanied by a few more profanities from our man out there in the middle, followed closely by the sound of the engine coming back to life. Amazingly, using his skills as a mechanic, Harold had managed to short-wire the motor in the dark, and get it going again. A minute or two later he glided back to the side of the jetty, all smiles.

"You owe me another beer I think Rob," was the line, as he looked up at the two of us, grinning from ear to ear ... his face a picture of satisfaction.

A brush with the law

Harold had a mixed relationship with the law. Some of his young mates lived on the edge, with Chris, one especially cherubic-looking youngster still in his teens, wheeling and dealing in stolen goods. The young guy was caught and spent time in jail, but the aftermath continued to lay heavy on the shoulders of Harold, mainly because he was still holding some of the *hot* merchandise, and was terrified that one particularly notorious policeman – a *Detective Inspector Grubber* - would come knocking at his door, in search of the stuff. This wake-up call duly arrived, in the form of the repeated pressing of the front doorbell (which gave out a pleasant rendition of Beethoven's *Fur ELise*), but by then the goods had all been squirrelled away, with one TV – I'm ashamed now to admit – residing for months in my own house.

At this point we should refer to one of Harold's best-known sayings: '*Three Weeks on Ice*,' which first saw the light of day during this visit of the infamous D.I. Grubber. Peeping through the net curtains, Harold spotted Grubber and his sidekick D.C. Crapper, standing outside his front door. Momentarily petrified - he had had a few minor, but nevertheless quite scary meetings with these two in the past - he busied himself by doing one last inspection of the house, to make sure no stolen goods were on show, before opening the door, just as Beethoven started into his third jingle.

Grubber of course had a fair idea that Harold was a receiver, but he was an old school cop and recognized the infringement, even if it could be proven, was not all that serious. They were of the same vintage and the policeman just wanted to make Harold squirm a bit, so that he might be convinced to stay on the straight and narrow.

Faced with Grubber and Crapper together (their names were fact, not fiction), Harold tried to stand his ground and make light of the whole thing. Grubber was a short thick-set man, wearing a trilby, while Crapper was tall and thin, in a cream-coloured trench coat. As they came through the door Harold could not help himself, and threw out a line comparing them to the famous comedy duo, Peter Cooke and Dudley Moore:

“Hey, I should have laid out the red carpet; I didn’t know Pete and Dud were coming.”

This went down like a skydiver with a faulty ‘chute; only helping to heighten the tension.

“Harold, as you well know, your young friend Chris, is now in Yatala,” said Grubber, spitting out the name *Yatala* (Adelaide’s main prison), in its shortened nasal (Aussie) form: *Yat’la!* *“And you may or may not know he has just done ‘Three Weeks on Ice’. That’s solitary confinement in the cooler my friend, for your information.”*

“Yeah Harold, ‘Three weeks on Ice’,” reiterated Crapper, wanting to be seen by the boss, to get his word in.

“And Harold,” went on Grubber, ignoring his assistant, *“If you’re too bloody clever with me old man, you’ll end up in Yat’la too! And ... and then I’ll make sure, personally, that you do ‘Three Weeks on Ice’ a couple of times over, if you get my drift.”* He emphasized the word *personally* to convey the message that if necessary, he could bring his influence to bear in the notorious jail.

“That’s a whole ‘Six Weeks on Ice’ Harold. You realise that?” chipped in Crapper.

A little while later they turned and left. They knew beforehand that no stolen goods would be found, but Grubber had accomplished the job he came there for: to make Harold shake in his boots. After the meeting Harold was much more subdued; he had a habit of flouting the law here and there, but getting on the wrong side of the law to the extent that he might face time in a jail cell, was a long way further down that track than he ever intended to go.

Back on the home front

Harold, I forgot to mention, went by the glorious name of *Harold Percival Rosenhain*, and after a few drinks he once told me his parents were inspired by a bottle of HP sauce: probably yet another throwaway line.

"I didn't know HP sauce existed that far back in time," I quipped, just to stir him up.

He told me his mother had had a fling with a man called Percy (unbeknown to her husband Harold!) and that Rosenhain in German, meant *Hill of Roses*. I was not sure I believed any of it, but his European ancestry did show through in the shape of his head, with wispy greyish-blond hair stretched across his balding scalp, and a noticeably bulbous nose. Early photos from the late 1940s portrayed him with a small black *Hitler* moustache, and I can recall him presenting a fair John Cleese-style impression of Adolf Hitler, when drunk (Harold that is, not Hitler!).

"Ya vol, mein fuhrer," was delivered with a rigid Nazi salute and robust click of the heels.

One Sunday evening I stopped off at Harold's to watch a Formula One race, from Italy. We would often meet to watch these grand prix races with names like Nicki Lauda and Alain Prost normally in pole position, broadcast then – and even now – on alternate Sundays. Another mutual friend, *Michael Corp*, always referred to simply as *Corp*, was also there. He was a tall, hefty fellow, with receding red hair and a Wing-Commander moustache, stained brown in parts from constant cigar smoke. He worked for a mainstream car service centre and a peculiar quirk was that he always seemed to be wearing faded, grubby green overalls, whether daytime or night. Harold (who never smoked) would refer to this guy as *Corpus Disgusticus*, or *Corpus Dispicabus*, which of course, the big man did not like at all.

"It smells like camel's shit!" Harold would say, feigning offence. *"Can't you continue your obnoxious fucking habits somewhere else Corp. There's a dunny down the back which would suit you!"* But to no avail; the cigar aroma continued, unabated.

On this particular night, the three of us were arranged in *easy* chairs around the TV. I had come with a *flagon* – the colloquial term for a five-litre bottle of wine – containing the much-revered *Prince's Port*, which we sat quaffing from glass tumblers, while voraciously consuming pickled onions from an enormous glass jar, which our host had generously provided. Corp, much to HP's disgust – and I had to admit that the stink was a bit overbearing - continued to puff away on a long *Panetela*, as he popped the pickles. Halfway through the race, as the wine was rapidly decreasing, Harold suddenly caught on to the fact that Corp and I liked pickled onions as much as he did, and so took steps to spirit the jar - by now half-empty - away to another location.

We realized the jar was missing a minute or two after Harold had left the room, and quickly followed his trail to the utilities area at the back of the house, just in time to catch our culprit red-handed, in the act of hiding the jar in his top-opening washing machine, positioned just inside the laundry door. He was so taken by surprise when we opened the door that his head jerked upwards, striking a bakelite light switch which gouged a deep long cut into his forehead, above the left eye. It could have been a useful still from a horror film: HP standing there, blood streaming down his face, with comrades in arms peering around the door, mouths open and aghast!

Luckily there was a small hospital within a five-minute drive, where - with some degree of embarrassment - Corp and I took our friend and waited for him to be patched up. That night I learnt a lesson I will never forget: there's no quicker way to sober up than spending the early hours of the morning-after in the A&E section of a hospital.

Party, party, party

The front room of HP's house was dominated by a pool table with a green playing field and one of those veneered five-foot-long furniture pieces, which in those days masqueraded as a record player. Alongside this fake wood stereo system, sat a wide-ranging and formidable collection of vinyl records – several hundred in total - including those old (breakable) 78s, small 45 rpm discs and larger 33 rpm albums with their

glamorous covers. Thus, depending on the mood (and listeners present) the music could oscillate between scratchy big band renditions from as far back as the 1930s - Lionel Hampton and Glenn Miller, bought in their day by Harold, were still firm favourites - on to 50s rock of Chuck Berry and Elvis, right through to the classics of Mozart and Mendelssohn. The stereo had a facility known as an auto-player, which enabled several records to be loaded at once, allowing each in turn to drop down with a resounding clunk, to be played: technological heaven of the 1970s!

This entire set-up meant that the house (including grounds) was equipped to be a great party venue, so quite frequently the weekly brush-shed events would extend to whole house parties, with raucous table-tennis at the rear, more subdued pool table games in the front room, a convivial barbeque outside the back door (which ran throughout the evening) and speakers rigged up to blast music into the neighbour's place; retribution for not returning the table-tennis balls, one could argue!

"I think we'll throw a few snags on the barbie, next week," Harold might say.

Then, on the appointed night, his disciples would turn up with their loud cars and even louder bikes, boxes of meat, crates of beer and beautiful girlfriends ... who always gravitated to Harold of course, like worker bees to an irresistible honeycomb. He was their queen bee, or king in this case. And indeed, he was a father figure to nearly all the young men and women who gathered there. For some of them from troubled backgrounds, he was perhaps the only person they could respect and trust.

These parties raged on well into the morning hours, with partygoers ending up sleeping where they were last seen drinking or dancing. This of course was the 1970s, when *Flower-Power* and the good times lingered on from previous decade.

A man for all seasons

In many ways, and despite regular transgressions, Harold was to some degree, a man of culture. Even his voice, when directed, could resonate with an upper-class tone to it ... though at the other end of the scale (as already noted) it could also be steered towards the broadest, most down-to-earth and crude form of Aussie-speak.

Many people would take one look at Harold, then turn away, dismissing him as a *rough diamond*: the uncut, ill-refined article. But in doing so they were missing the point, that beneath the rugged exterior there lay a character with a more meaningful core. An innocent bystander may never guess that here was an avid lover of music, whether classical (he loved *Wagner, which perhaps betrayed his German heritage*), or jazz (*Pee Wee Hunt's 12th Street Rag* was a particular favourite), or even opera (at times we argued who was greatest, *Mario Lanza* or *Pavarotti*), and both he and I would sit transfixed by *The Three Tenors in concert*, broadcast worldwide in the 90s.

After a year or two, I came to discover that Harold was fascinated by film - Standard and Super 8 brands of colour film on three-inch spools – which he sometimes projected on his dining room wall. Occasionally, instead of television, or music, he would delve into a battered cardboard box, packed to the brim with ten-minute reels. Some were a bit scratchy, but in general – considering the film had been shot decades before - I was amazed at the colour and quality. One from the late 1950s showed him boating down the Murray, with a multitude of *Omo-white* nappies hanging out to dry on the rigging of the boat. He had entered what was destined to become a somewhat torturous marriage with a small blonde lady named *Beryl*, whom he would often imitate in a high-pitched nasal voice when he was tipsy, such as: “*Harold, Harold! Can you bring those nappies in?*” To which he would reply in hen-pecked mode: “*Yes dear; coming dear.*” The nappies in fact heralded the arrival of their son *Mark*, who re-appeared on the scene and took up residence for a while, a few years after I first met his father. By then his son was a long-haired, twenty-something bank teller, and also (as one might have guessed) a bit of a *petrol-head*, addicted to building and driving fast machines.

I came to discover that Harold had a brilliantly inventive mind, which apart from mechanical fixes and movie making in miniature, was sorely under-utilized. One day he showed me an old pre-WW2 newspaper cutting which reported on an electric car built by a young South Australian engineer named Rosenhain. Then, putting his *stubby* aside for a moment, he dived into a bottom drawer to ferret out the original drawings - musty and faded with age – that showed his plans for the electric car. It was all very true, and apparently it worked: the car could travel some distance on electrical power. Now the better part of a century later, we are finally entering the electric vehicle age.

Reflecting on all this, I tend to view my old friend as perhaps the embodiment of what it *was* to be Australian: born in the 1920s, living through the depression of the 30s and then fighting for queen and country during the 40s. He had that work-ethic about him, plus a marriage and a baby boy, all packed together in a 60s-style, cream brick, suburban bungalow. But at the same time, he was on the wild side of the Australian dream, with a charisma and daring which attracted the ladies and was a drawcard for youthful macho Aussie males too; those who liked mechanics and fast mobiles.

He remembered his mother with adoration. She had come from England to settle in Australia, and thus he had a leaning towards all things British. The Last Night of the Proms, broadcast by the BBC from The Royal Albert Hall, at the end of each year, was one event that he would never miss; while British racing drivers, such as Moss and Mansell, were revered above better known, serial winners of the late 20th Century.

So perhaps some of these things were aspects that drew us together. I had come from Britain some years before and liked to immerse myself in classical music, or jazz, or the supreme voice of Pavarotti; but then like Harold, I could just as easily be carried away by a good night of Rock and Roll. Though in many other ways we were miles apart. I liked smart cars but detested anything to do with that greasy mechanical stuff under the bonnet. Motorbikes were a small part of my teenage days, but since then had seldom featured in my life; I even regarded them as a bit below my station. While anyone who tended towards hard drugs or the underworld was definitely not for me.

In contrast, the biker fraternity revered Harold: a *Rajneesh*-style guru (even down to the orange-coloured overalls!) with devotees gathered around him; one who had *been there, done that*, and even in his fifties was still competing in grueling, cross-country style, *Motorbike competitions*. For these *trials*, as they were called, he would ride the bike and his side-kick would bounce around, hanging this way and that, in the attached side-car. That's how he came to know Chris - the guy who suffered *Three Weeks on Ice* in Yatala – perhaps the most skillful and talented of all his cross-country outriders. It was at one of these demanding two-day events, when already well into his fifties, Harold came to grief, breaking his right leg in three places. From then on, he walked as if astride a pot-bellied horse and could only assume the surgeon got things a bit out of line on the operating table. Harold brushed it aside in customary, self-deprecating fashion:

“It’s true your honour ... The guy didn’t know his arse from his tit, but at least he made it easier for me to sit on the fucking bike!”

Forever the joker, my old and dear friend Harold was a wonderful Aussie character – a stereotype of the age perhaps, but much more than that - a unique and formidable personality, whose colourful ways with words so often summed up a situation and said all there was to say on a subject; though at times he may have offended a few more sober minds (often intentionally) during the process.

“Fuck him,” he would say. *“He walks like he’s got a carrot stuck up his arse!”*

Then perhaps to underscore the fact that he was not your stereotypical Aussie, he might be inspired to add:

“George, you know, after they made me, they threw away the fucking mold!”

Which indeed could have been inscribed on his tombstone: his last and perhaps most accurate line of all.

.....

