



An Aussie enlightenment

Joe's large spread lay in the rich farmlands of Western Victoria. I joined his team as a low-ranking 'Jackeroo'. Bob, the lead guy, was a short, blonde-haired ball of muscle; happy to teach me the trade. Next in line Tony, a lanky Italian immigrant learning on the job like me, was towards the opposite: competitive and eager to trip me up. Most times the three of us got along pretty well, jointly reveling in humorous on-the-job incidents.



I had wondered why one of the sheepdogs was named *Horny*, then one day, out picking up 'fly-blown' ewes (meaning their backsides were a mass of dung and maggots), I



jumped out to throw an unsightly mess on to the pick-up's tray, then watched as Horny jumped on board and started to accost our latest passenger.

"Donta worry abouta that" quipped Tony in his best Aussie-Italian. *"Horny boy, he a like a pig in a shit!"*

Bob just smiled and drove on.

Farmer Joe, a unique individual, had made a courageous escape from alcoholism, but in so doing formed an uncontrollable affiliation with *Camel*, the strongest of cigarettes. On one cold Spring morning, around sunrise, I was busy peering through the windscreen of his car, trying hard to spot newborn lambs. Inside was a smoke haze with the heater at full blast, the outside shrouded in mist. Seeing anything through the glass was almost impossible.

“Over there, next to that gum tree,” Joe drawled, pointing at some blur in the distance, whilst holding an almost done *Camel* and wiping the screen with a rag. *“They’re newborn twins,”* Then after another drag: *“Nip out and see if they’re OK. Call if you need me.”* I zipped up my jacket, opened the door and plunged into the frosty morning.

Another amusing episode – in hindsight that is - happened when I was not actually with my crew but was fairly sure they set it up. As usual, I was half asleep at the tractor wheel, circulating around one of the many 100-acre paddocks, when suddenly I awoke with a start to one almighty ear-shattering roar.

“Jesus fucking Christ!” I yelled, nearly falling off my seat, trying to fathom whether the tractor had blown up, or World War Three had begun.



What happened in reality, was that the pilot of a light aircraft – there was an airfield on the property – had cut the plane’s throttle, gliding down behind me; then 20 or 30 feet above my head, applied full throttle, powering the plane up and away. The noise was incredible! When we next met, the other two seemed to know all about the incident, so I suspected Bob – in flight-training mode at the time – was the pilot, with maybe Tony on board too ... for the laugh!

The most serious episode came when circulating yet another paddock my tractor ran out of oil, causing enormous damage. I really thought I was up for the chop!

Joe took a long drag on the current *Camel* - as if searching for inspiration – then eyeballed me. It was a withering look.

“Well, you really fucked up this time, didn’t you? This’ll cost us precious time and money. ”For Christ’s sake, next time take more care.” Then he turned and stormed away.

That was it!

What a guy!

Duncan Gregory

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