Chief



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StoryTerrace

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# 1. A VERY HUMBLE BEGINNING

*Farnworth, England*

The blow came so quickly that I barely had time to think. Before I knew it, the wooden clothes brush connected with the side of my head, and I was knocked backward into the wall. My skull was thumping, and my eyes were swimming with pain. I could feel blood slithering down my cheek.

I blinked, stood upright, and balled my fist. I could see that my dad was doing the same and might land a full punch this time. I was sure that he would finally get what was coming to him. Yet, in the background, I heard my mother yell at him not to hit me on the head. She then shouted at me not to hit him back. I was only 14, but that was the day I knew I had to get out.

I would leave the north of England for Australia when I was just 18 years old, desperate to get away from my dysfunctional home life, where my father terrorised my family with his violence, drunkenness, and religious fanaticism. He never seemed to care much about our family. All he cared about was whether or not you went to church.

I think his disappointment in me was because he wanted me to be a priest. I had no interest in that at all. When I said this, I was told by our family parish priest and my dad that

there was no hope for me. I used to push back when I was told things like this. Catholicism was everywhere, in our home and our whole community, and there was a lot of pressure to not eat meat on Fridays and go to confession all the time. I thought the idea of punishing yourself to make your soul stronger was nonsense.

As I got older, I got stronger and wanted to resist my dad. My mother tried to get me not to, as she said he could really hurt me. One time, she even told me not to kill him as I would go to jail. I reassured her that murder wasn't my aim - I just wanted to stand up for myself and for her.

Thankfully, my siblings were on my side. They had started to skip Mass despite Dad trying to hold us to account. If my brothers said they were going to an evening service, Dad would quiz them afterward on which priest was celebrating and which boys were serving on the altar. They would say they hadn't noticed.

I would try to do as my mother asked and just avoid my dad if he came home drunk. Often, I would go for a walk. Sometimes, Dad was just a bit tipsy and happy, but this was rare. There was no form of child protection, and my school teachers wouldn't have taken my side if I told them about my home life. It was also a time when violence against children by their fathers was more normal.

With my mother, his father's cruelty was more mental than physical. When we started rebelling against Catholicism, he would insist it was my mother's job to make sure we all went to Mass, even though he was far more religious than she was. He would have terrible mood swings, often after he had lost a

job. It was normal for him to get sacked after a couple of weeks, and because it was a close-knit community, word would get around, and he would find it very hard to get another job. I blamed him for us being so poor. The older I got, the more I dreamed of escape. I wanted to be a millionaire, and it wasn't going to happen in Lancashire.

In 1955, my uncle moved to Australia. The year after, I wrote to him to ask him what life was like there. He wrote back to tell me that life there was a lot of fun and I would love it. It was a big moment. If he hadn't encouraged me, I probably wouldn't have gone.

It wasn't a straightforward decision. I felt guilty about leaving my mother and siblings unprotected, even though my older brothers could probably look after themselves. I realised later that I didn't have to worry. My leaving gave my mother the courage to get divorced. She understood that she didn't have to stick with an unhappy marriage.

Yet there was more to my childhood than just my dad. There were good times as well as bad times. They formed me, and as painful as it is to revisit them, it's important for me and my family that I do. I need to know that I am not my father.

My upbringing was modest and often crowded, but it was mostly happy - even with my father around. I was born in 1942, one of six children, into an Anglo-Irish household in Farnworth, a small town not far from the industrial giant that was Manchester. My siblings, especially the older ones, had staunchly working-class futures ahead of them.

They were good people, and I often felt looked after. As proud as my brothers were of what they did, they never insisted that my future had to be the same. They even said firmly, 'You're not going down the mine – you won't survive!'

I didn't really know my brother Frank, who had been born to my mother and adopted by my father in 1934. He did OK in life, but he was eight years older than me and was often out working or at the pub when I was growing up.

Bill and Fred – two years older and three years younger than me – were more like friends than siblings. We formed a bit of a gang like the three musketeers, going to the cinema and later the pub together, and I always felt like they looked after me – even if Fred insisted that Bill and I were always fighting.

If we were, then it was probably just play-fighting. I vaguely remember that we got into an argument at primary school because Bill had worn my shirt, and I had worn his coat. It was a mistake, and a few fists were raised, but it was quickly forgotten.

My sister Kathleen, born in 1949 and the only girl, was one of the more promising members of the family. Like me, she was bright and got a scholarship to a good Roman Catholic girls' school.

After her came Stephen, who was born in 1954. Being 12 years younger than me, I never really got close to him, much as had been the case with Frank. The age range between the six of us was big, with people leaving as often as they arrived, but our small house always seemed to be bursting at the seams.

The first house I remember living in consisted of two bedrooms for a family of eight, with a tiny living room on the ground floor. Eventually, we moved to a larger council house, a brand-new two-storey semi-detached home with a front room and a separate bathroom – a major innovation for a family that had been forced to rely on an outhouse and a tin bath on the floor of the lounge, or a shower in the local swimming baths. Still, there was not nearly enough space for so many of us.

The world outside was as bleak as the one inside. Having been born during World War II, I had few memories of it, but the legacy of the conflict was all around us. Half the buildings were in ruins, leading me to fear that they would fall on top of me, and the landscape was dotted by strange bits of debris and rubble. I was often warned not to go nosing around for anything shiny and metallic as it could be an unexploded bomb!

I had a close relationship with my mother, who held the family together. I remember her as loving and supportive, and she worked hard to ensure we were all healthy and happy, even if we were never rich. She was sensible and had a good sense of humour, and was more accepting of us living in poverty. If I complained about us having fewer toys or trips away than the other kids at school, she would soften things by saying it would happen for us next year. It never did, but she would often encourage us not to compare ourselves to other people, which I think was very wise.

My father was a different story. He was controlling and violent about the smallest things, but he was hard-working.

He rarely took a day off and was self-taught when it came to education, something he tried to pass on to his children by sending us to the library so that we could read a book each day. He had similar feelings to my siblings about my future, although not in quite the same way. Catholicism loomed large within our education, and he made it clear that he hoped I would become a priest.

There was nothing I would have hated more. When it came to religion, I had happy memories of singing carols around the Christmas tree, but I resented having to stand up every Monday at school and confirm that I had attended Mass, been to Confession, and taken Holy Communion. I did not understand why all these rituals were so important. When I asked a question, the priest in charge would simply tell me it was a mystery and that I just needed to accept it – even when we were told that children in Africa who had not been baptised would spend eternity in Limbo. I didn't accept it. It seemed too cruel, and I didn't like how my intelligence was underestimated whenever I tried to show it.

Regardless, the teachers at my Catholic school were keen to encourage us to educate ourselves at our own speed. They had noticed that I was ahead of my classmates in maths, especially geometry, and encouraged me to apply for a scholarship to Worsley Technical College, a very academic boys' grammar school. My mum was pleased, but my dad irritated that it was not a religious school and aware that many of his cousins and uncles had gone into the priesthood, was reluctant to let me go. Eventually, he gave in, and I went on to gain a Certificate of Education in six subjects.

I mostly liked my time at the school. In my scholarship exams, I got the top maths grade, beating all the other candidates, and it continued to be my best subject at Worsley. I liked how it felt as if I was solving a puzzle. One teacher made a point of encouraging me with geometry and was keen that I did well. He was an inspiration, and I still think of him fondly.

Even the headmaster noticed my talents and was pleased when I solved a geometry problem more effectively than the textbooks published by Manchester University that we were instructed. He even wrote to the university to point this out, although I am not sure if they ever took it on board.

I couldn't write well, even though I had a good vocabulary, and I struggled in English classes – something my father loved reminding me of. The English teacher didn't like me for this reason and wrote me off pretty quickly as someone who was hopeless.

I always felt this was a terrible approach. I strongly believe that if you tell people that they are hopeless, then they will be, whereas if you encourage people from a young age, they are likely to flourish. To this day, it is a philosophy I try to put into practice with my grandchildren.

My revenge as a schoolboy was to shrug off my teacher's scorn, making it clear that I thought English was a huge waste of time. To this day, I still find spelling difficult. I realise now that it is probably important to people who are good at it. My strengths just happened to lie elsewhere.

I was not popular with the gym teacher either, even though I competed in swimming championships on behalf of the

school. One time, I came first in a cross-country run, but my achievement was ruined when the school accused me of cheating. I am not sure how they thought that was possible, but it made me angry. I felt that it was personal and that the gym teacher was targeting me out of spite.

Another teacher seemed to think I had a career on the stage ahead of me. He was very astute, good at making people laugh, and at seeing things in people that others could not. Still, I never fulfilled his expectations in that regard.

In general, though, I was quite happy during my three years at the school. As it was a scholarship school, there were not many of us, so it was important to get on with the other boys. I had a little gang of friends that I would get into mischief with, laughing and playing a few small tricks on each other. Outside of the gang, I tried to stand up for the younger kids if it seemed like they were being bullied. I was not tough, and deep down, I was very shy, but I often managed to convince people not to cross me. My experiences with my father, as well as my childhood priest, had made me feel helpless, as though I could not fight back. The older I got, the more I felt I would not tolerate bullies and that it was my job to right wrongs. I think this is where my moral compass came from.

We did not have much contact with girls. There was an all-girls school up the road, and sometimes love letters would change hands, but I never knew what to say. If I got one, my first urge would be to run away!

Outside of school, I played the cornet in Kearsley Silver Band, which I joined in 1950, and volunteered with the St.

John Ambulance Cadets. Playing in the youth band meant that I was present for big events, such as the Queen's visit to Bolton in 1953. It felt exciting at the time, not least because it meant I got a day off from school – always a big deal for a young kid!

However, I could not continue with both hobbies and eventually, I was thrown out of the band because I kept prioritising being in the cadets. I was good at it, I liked travelling and I felt I was improving my medical knowledge. At one point, I even considered studying medicine and becoming a doctor.

We used to have local competitions, which were followed by the national championships in London. We would be asked questions from a book, being expected to have memorised the answers. Often, it was things like, "What is the longest bone in the human body?" I was so good at it that I became the captain of my team and got to shake hands with famous people of the day, such as mountaineers John Hunt and Sir Edmund Hillary.

Life could be hard, but I was luckier than my parents had been, as the opportunities I was given within and outside of school prepared me for a different future.

Like many of the working-class people around us at the time, my parents both had manual jobs that were physically and mentally punishing. My mother worked part-time in a bakery and, at one point, in the cotton mills to supplement the family. She also held down a job hand-sewing carpets. It was demanding work, leaving her with arthritis in her fingers

for the rest of her life, while the work at the mill could be dangerous. There were accidents there all the time, and there were many stories about people losing limbs.

My father, in general, worked as a labourer, which meant doing almost anything and everything. He had been down the coal mines from as young as 12, but mostly, he worked in factories and on building sites. I remember at one point, he had a job shifting snow for the local council, which involved working all night. During the war, he had worked on a production line making batteries, which was seen as essential work and meant he avoided military service. He also worked at one point as a workshop assistant to a car mechanic and as a waiter in a pub. He did so many things, but 'labourer' was on the marriage certificate, so that was all he was ever known as. He never aspired to be anything else, including any better-paid, white-collar position.

My father might have had good points, but they were rarely on display to me. He could be fun and lively, but that was less the case with each newborn child. At best, he was harsh and critical, while at worst, he was violent. He was not deliberately cruel, but he had a bad temper that he struggled to control. He justified his actions by saying that he was the head of a big family that needed to be controlled.

Once, when he came home late one night with none of his wages, mumbling a weak excuse about how he had been robbed when he was obviously drunk, I challenged him. He responded by punching me in the face.

It all happened quite fast, so it is hard to remember all the details, but I remember my mother screaming at me not to

fight back. I took her advice, but with hindsight, I am not sure if that was the right idea. Too few people ever stood up to my dad, which inevitably meant he was allowed to carry on being a bully and a thug.

Yet perhaps my mother had a point. It was hard to find any way of escaping from him, so fighting him would probably have made things worse.

His anger probably came from how he never got promoted at work. He used to rage and fume about this, but he never realised that his rage issues were the problem. Whenever he got more work, it would only be a matter of time before he would screw up and fall out with his boss. Word would then get around that he was a nightmare to work with, and he would find it hard to get a new position. Once, he played a cruel practical joke on the other men around him but did not seem to understand why no one else found it funny.

My mother knew what she was talking about when it came to my dad. She used to scold him whenever this happened, but it only ever made things worse. Her words would put him in a foul mood for several days, making him drag his feet when he had to look for more work. In the end, she settled for warning us to stay out of his way while he was 'in a bad mood.'

Dad was a big drinker, but it would be wrong to say he was an alcoholic, and he spent as much time in the library as he did in the pub. I think he did both as a way to escape from our large family. His desire to send us to the library each day to read meant he wanted us to have a life outside the house, too. Although he was obsessed with my English grades, I don't

think he saw reading as a way to educate or better himself. He never touched the classics, preferring to read more modern authors, particularly if they wrote detective stories. It was pure escapism for him.

My dad was at his best when he was involved in politics. We were in a staunchly Labour-voting area, with no other party in competition, and Dad was an active member of the local branch of the Labour Party. He had regularly rubbed shoulders with other activists, including George Tomlinson, a party member who went on to become Minister for Education under Clement Attlee while being the Member of Parliament for Farnworth. His connections helped us move to the bigger council house, having been able to make a strong case when my sister Kathleen was born, as families with a new baby girl had a better chance of getting more space.

Dad never aspired to be a Labour councillor himself, but he still saw it as part of his duty to fight for other working men. Politics was a frequent topic of discussion in the house. I remember the two of us discussing the founding of the NHS, and I would voice some scepticism, querying where the government would get the money from. It was one of the few spaces where my dad would ever listen and debate rather than respond to a challenge with violence.

My brother Bill carried on this legacy. A miner for most of his career, he played an active role in the strikes of the 1980s and campaigned to keep the government from closing down the mines. Even though I felt he was fighting a lost cause, I was proud of his stand against the government.

My mother had little interest in politics and was content to spend any downtime knitting or with her relatives. She got on well with one of my aunts, occasionally heading into Manchester to spend time with her. She always looked happy when she returned.

She was also skilled with wool, making any clothes that she could not source from jumble sales and always checking to see if anyone needed a new scarf or some socks or gloves. She clearly found it relaxing and used to say quite proudly that she could knit without a pattern. Unlike my father, she often seemed content with her lot, happy to make the best of things. If she felt any frustration about her limited education or professional prospects, then she never took it out on anyone else. It was one of the many things I admired about her.

My mother's working life might have been humble, but it provided a way for us to conspire against my father. When she came home with her wages, my father would look at what she had and use it as an excuse to give her less of his pay. I then encouraged her to lie about her earnings. She took my advice. I was only 11, but I already knew he was not being fair.

When I later found out I had got into the grammar school, I told him I was going and that I didn't care if he hit me. As violent as he could be, he also knew when he was beaten, and we all knew it.

Eventually, he backed down. As a compromise, he said I had to have 'instruction' with the priest. This was to make up for how I no longer had a Catholic education. I did not like it,

but I, too, had to accept it when I was beaten. Learning when to compromise is a good life skill.

I went to a few sessions with our priest. I was not very interested, and I don't think the Father was either. He admitted he had only been told to talk to me because my father had explicitly said that I needed help. After a couple of sessions, I decided to stop going, sneaking off to play snooker instead with some local boys. The priest, who was OK really, promised not to tell on me.

It was around this time that I left the church completely. As I became a teenager, my doubts about the Catholic Church grew stronger. Partly to make fun of my father, I would take Communion at Mass without going to Confession first, which I knew was meant to be a mortal sin. When I told him this, Dad said this was sinful behaviour and that I was deliberately excommunicating myself, risking sending myself to hell. I didn't care. The idea that kids could be sent to hell seemed stupid to me, and I did not want to waste any more time fighting with my dad about it. I settled on telling him that he was not being very nice.

I was not the only person in the family with a rebellious streak. My brother Bill had started skipping church, too, telling Dad that he went to an evening Mass in Bolton for shift workers instead of the Sunday morning one when the truth was that he was not going to either service. This was a huge deal in our family, as not attending church could result in being kicked out of the home. There was a general sense that we were against my father and that the best way to undermine him was to conspire behind his back. Eventually,

he gave up on myself and Bill and tried to focus on the rest of the family.

My mother didn't mind too much. She even went so far as to tell my Dad that I had 'got him there' when I said I was happy to be excommunicating myself. My dad was a life-long religious Catholic, but she was originally from a Church of England family, wanting her children to be raised in her husband's faith after she converted, but mostly remaining lukewarm. She did not seem upset when I said I wasn't going to church anymore.

I don't even really remember her going. If she did, it was probably only when she felt like it or when she wanted someone else to have the kids. My dad, whose parents were Irish Catholics, went constantly. Perhaps it was another way for him to escape.

From a young age, my focus was on the here and now. Even though there were other people who probably had it worse than us, and I knew it wasn't my fault, I felt ashamed of being poor. I knew my mother tried her best to keep all of us fed and clothed, but I still felt like I deserved better. Nice clothes were certainly in short supply. I didn't get a new shirt until I was ten years old. When I was older, I came back from a dance in the rain, soaked to the skin but unable to change my shirt or jacket. It was my only suit, so I didn't have any spares, but I was too embarrassed to admit this to the girl I was with.

On television, I remembered watching people who wore coats without rips in them and could buy a packet with at least ten cigarettes in it. I thought they must be rich.

Even when we moved to the new, more modern council house after Kathleen was born, we were cold all the time. I often used to go to bed wearing an army jacket, as the blankets were too thin to keep me warm.

However, I never remember going hungry. Even though I was growing up during the last days of rationing, breakfast was often bacon and eggs, and then we would have dinner at school. In the evening, Mum would make a stew or something like sausage and mash. Our meals tended to be healthy and fresh, as she would trade her sugar coupons for cash to buy potatoes and carrots. We were not fussy. We ate what we got. If we didn't, we would go hungry.

Despite being well-fed, I felt that other people around me were wasting their money. I resented how my dad spent a lot of money on beer, money that could have gone on new and warmer clothes for his kids. One of my uncles donated £700 to have a new stained-glass window installed in the local Catholic Church. I felt that was a waste of money when lots of parishioners could not afford a car or a phone.

We certainly couldn't. We had a radio, but we only got a TV when Bill went out to work. It had one channel that went off the air at 9 p.m., but it seemed like a major new luxury to us.

Christmas was often a hard time. We kids might get an orange or apple or some nuts on Christmas Day, but if we got toys, it would be something simple like a small car. One Christmas, I had nothing at all to show the other boys at school. It felt like they all had impressive toys, and I didn't.

Once again, I felt ashamed of being poor – even though it was not my fault.

# 2. BOUND FOR AUSTRALIA

It wasn't just about me. As I got older, I wanted to improve things for the family, and I often tried to come up with new ways of doing this. I was at a very academic school, but the odd jobs I did after my classes were not enough to change our circumstances. I was keen to get a job, so I left school at 16.

I still wanted an academic challenge, so I began studying maths at night school, but I was also offered a position working in a sweetshop by a man whose car I used to wash after school. We got on well, and I knew that he trusted me.

The shop was an exciting place to work. All of the sweets, like treacle toffee and toffee apples, were generated on-site, and I was soon taught to make them at the little factory-like room at the back. I was a fast learner and quickly realised I was a natural. Before long, I was left alone to oversee everything in the shop, from making the produce to dealing with the customers at the front, when the owner stepped back from the day-to-day running of the shop to go and become a butcher. His mother-in-law was involved in running the shop, too, and whenever she had a day off, I would have to do important things, such as letting in the man whose job it was to paint the shop. However, he ended up painting it a colour known as 'dappled green,' which made the whole shop look like a hedge. Apparently, this was not what my boss had in mind. He was pretty annoyed.

Regardless, I felt that my new responsibilities meant I deserved a pay rise. Yet my boss dithered about it. To add to my frustration, the shop eventually started to sell Cadbury's chocolate and cigarettes, things that we did not make on-site. I felt this was a mistake, as products from elsewhere diluted what made us special. I tried to raise this with the owner, but he didn't listen. I felt confident enough to do that, even though I was young. I knew I had good ideas and that people should have listened to me more.

I regularly got to take sweets home to my siblings after work. This was a huge deal, as rationing had just ended, and most of the produce in the shop was at least 90% sugar. Most of the people around me had never had anything so sweet, especially in our house, where sugar coupons were often traded for fruit and vegetables.

More importantly, back then, it was assumed that you would hand over some of your pay to your mother, and I felt proud to do that. I was not ruled by money, but I liked being able to buy someone a drink or a packet of cigarettes with my leftover wages if they were struggling. Dad never asked what I did with my money. I think by that point, he knew he could not control me or tell me what to do.

It was a big moment. I started to become a different person, one who people didn't understand and who found the world around him too limiting. Every day, I was getting more confident, knowing that I was good at what I did. I was finally able to talk to girls who came into the shop, and it helped that they said they wanted to talk to me. Once or twice, they asked

me if I wanted to go to the pictures with them. It was fun, but I knew it was not enough to keep me there.

There was joy around me when I was growing up, but it was laced with a lot of hardship. I was bright and tough, but knew I couldn't reach my potential if I stayed. I knew I needed to get out of Farnworth and make a life of my own, wherever that might be.

The sweetshop was not a long-term career. While I was at school, I had ambitions to become a pilot, particularly as it would mean I could get out of the north of England, but when I took the required tests, I found out that I was colour blind. It was frustrating news, as I had managed to pass the scholarship test and the medical exam. I had given myself high expectations, which meant I was now disillusioned. There was no escaping it, so that was the end of that.

I was offered another job in aviation by the De Havilland corporation as an aircraft-builder, but I turned it down to work in the sweetshop. Night school ran its course, especially as there was no question of my doing A-Levels or going to university, and after a while, I realised I lacked direction. I had nursed one ambition, to be a pilot, but that was only really because I had seen the film *The Dam Busters*. I was not sure what the future would hold.

My uncle, who lived in Melbourne, suggested that I consider moving overseas to somewhere that might have more opportunities. Australia had a system at the time where people under the age of 21 could travel there for free, as well as an 'Assisted Passage' scheme that allowed people of all

ages to travel there for £10. I was not happy in Farnworth, so I agreed. I wasn't nervous. I was excited.

So in 1960, aged 18, I boarded a boat to Australia. It would be four weeks before I would live on dry land again. I would be met by my aunt and uncle at the other end and would stay with them until I was settled. The trip was free, but if you stayed for less than two years, you had to pay your fare back in full. There would be no return visits in between.

My family was thrilled for me when they heard the news. Lots of our neighbours in the streets around us had never even been as far as London, so it was hugely exciting when someone left to go overseas. I had not planned much beyond my first two years, causing my mother to predict that I would not want to leave everyone behind in the long term.

I enjoyed my time on the boat. There were lots of other people like me making the same journey, and I rarely felt apprehensive or seasick. The closer we got to Australia, the safer and more hopeful I felt.

There wasn't much in terms of entertainment. We stopped off in a few countries, including India and Italy, along the way, but mostly, we were distracted by a band of musicians, dancers, and singers that strolled up and down the main deck belting out tunes. It all feels a bit basic, looking back on it.

When the boat finally docked in Melbourne, my aunt and uncle took me straight to buy a new mattress. That made me feel very grown up! I was also amazed to see that they had a phone in their house as well as a car, which was very luxurious compared to where I had come from.

The city of Melbourne back then was very different from how it is today. It had far fewer multi-storey buildings, with the first apartment block in Melbourne only going up in 1960, so pretty small compared to now - but it was still much bigger and more modern than anything I was used to.

Yet, I did not have much time to process my sense of culture shock. I was not there for a holiday – I was there to work. I had a couple of short-term jobs at the post office and in a factory but soon applied for a job in a bank that was advertised in the local paper, an entry-level position that I was accepted for very quickly. Australia had a big labour shortage; they wanted me more than I wanted them.

It was still an appealing position, though, as it brought with it financial security and various benefits. Home loans at that time were easy to access in Australia, so the chance of buying a home could soon be within my reach.

Starting out was simple. I was given a week's training and then told to go and buy a suit and tie. I began by sorting out cheques before moving on to be a teller on the counter. Most of it just consisted of solving problems, which I was good at, and beyond having to sometimes work on Saturdays, I did not have to work too hard. My colleagues and customers were friendly, and I was rarely made to feel like an outsider.

A big challenge was joining the Citizens Military Forces, which was a requirement for young men in Australia. I mostly joined so I could play in the band, carrying out my passion for music in a paid, tax-free role. It also involved military training.

For the most part it was fun. One annual training session took place in Tasmanian bush, where we learned to shoot rifles, bear stretchers for the wounded, march in formation, and apply first-aid – which made me glad I had spent so many years in the St John Ambulance Cadets.

I was not prepared for the wildlife, however. As a child, my mental image of Australia was a place where friendly kangaroos hopped in the streets. It was a bit of a shock to find out they could be vicious too – and that was before anyone had told me about the spiders, snakes, crocodiles, sharks, or jellyfish that threatened anyone who was careless with a slow and painful death.

One time, while I was away with the army, I got up at night to get some fresh air. Seconds after I left my tent, I heard an ominous hissing noise. Looking down, I realised I had almost stepped on a snake. Thankfully, I turned and fled back into my tent before the creature had time to do any damage.

The next day, the other trainee soldiers found a black snake, which was one of the deadliest species in the country. It was killed quickly, without much mercy. Not doing so could risk one of us being bitten and killed. There were anti-toxin injections available for anyone who was unlucky or stupid, but it was unwise to rely on them if you wanted to live.

I soon learned to be sensible. I rarely came across spiders and snakes in suburban areas, and in the countryside, they were fine while they slept. If disturbed, they could be very dangerous.

More than the wildlife, I struggled with the intense heat, which I was not used to coming from the cold north of

England. Tasmania at least provided some relief, as it was a state with largely green, wet, and cold topography due to its closeness to Antarctica. Sometimes, it was even cold enough to ski in the mountains.

Back in Melbourne, however, the heat could get into the 40s Celcius. The winter season, which was when I arrived, was milder than Farnworth but bearable. There was no air-conditioning once you were inside, so people had to make do with pulling the blinds down to keep the sun out. I found this very strange at first. At work, we were allowed to sometimes take our jackets off, but there was no question of removing our ties! The summers were so hot that my feet burned the moment they touched the sand at Bondi Beach. Once, when I visited Sydney, it was 47 degrees Celcius, and my feet burned when I stepped onto Bondi Beach.

The rare times that people were unpleasant were when they noticed how much I struggled with the heat. Often, they would make fun of it, which meant I stuck out. To this day, I feel like the odd one out in my family, who all seem to think that 35 degrees is not hot. God knows what people in the more remote areas, where the temperature can get up to 50 degrees, must think. I often see people out jogging in the heat. I have been here for over 60 years, and I still think they are insane.

Sport was another area where being a foreigner could be awkward. If I went to the pub for a drink with my colleagues, if England was playing Australia in rugby, I learned to keep quiet. If I cheered for England automatically, then people could be nasty. Once, when England was winning, they even

turned the TV off. When I protested, I was told simply that I was 'a bloody Pom.' It was annoying, but in the end, I ignored those kinds of remarks as they were not very clever.

It wasn't as if I was the only foreigner either. Australia was not as diverse as it is now, but there were plenty of people from the UK, Italy, and Greece, as well as a scattering from Vietnam. There was a labour shortage, so getting a job there was often easier than it was back home. From the first day I arrived, Australia felt like a country of migrants. Perhaps the only thing that is different now is that there are more people from places all over the world.

One element of consistency for me was music. Having first learned to play the cornet as a child, I was keen to keep going as an adult, joining the Heidelberg City Band when I first arrived and then the Australian Artillery Band when I did my military training. Afterward, I was able to make an easy transition back to being a civilian player. The band I became a part of for the longest time was the Box Hill City Band, and I played with them from 1982. I still regularly play in three bands for Box Hill, along with a retiree band called 'Huffers and Puffers.'

This might have been why I didn't often feel homesick. The only time I remember this being the case was during my first Christmas when I strongly felt the absence of my mother and siblings. I had never spent a single Christmas away from my large family before.

It was sad, but I soon got over it, particularly as some pleasant distractions had come into my life – including an

intriguing young woman, also working at the bank, called Anne.

# 3. FATHERHOOD AND FAMILY

I had been in Australia for about three or four years by the time I met the woman who was to become my wife. She worked in the same branch as me in Melbourne but had a very different role. She was a ledger machinist, a highly skilled position that she had honed for many years, having been with the bank since she left school. Like being a clerk, it was a vital role in the running of the bank, and you needed to be good at it.

We began chatting and, realising that we got on well, decided to go out to a few dances together after work. We continued to get on well, even though there were some concerns from our colleagues that we would argue at the bank!

Anne also had English roots, with her grandmother having migrated to Australia from England. We had different interests, with her preferring charity work to playing music, but that rarely seemed to matter. In 1967, three years after we started courting, we got married, holding a big wedding with lots of our friends present. I moved out of my aunt and uncle's house in Balwyn and into a shared rental in Alphington for a short time before moving into a rental flat in Richmond whilst our home was being built in East Doncaster. In 1971, our home was finished, and we moved in. Getting married was a wonderful experience, and our union has been a very happy one.

Anne gave birth to our first child, Tiffany, in 1971. She was followed in 1974 by our first son, Matthew, and in 1978, we had another boy, Nicholas. Our final child, Katyanna, arrived in 1981, a full ten years to the day of her sister.

Looking back, having children was a very different experience from how it is now. When Tiffany was born, the doctor ordered me out of the birthing room, and I was forced to wait outside until I was called in to meet my daughter. When Katyanna finally came along, the doctor wryly asked when I was planning to retire from having babies.

Anne stopped working when the children were born. It made sense to both of us, partly because it was what everyone around us did at that time but also because my career at the bank was progressing, involving more responsibility and longer hours, and someone needed to be at home with our growing family.

By the time I turned 30, I had skipped working in accounts and was promoted straight to the head office, becoming a manager, which was exceptional to reach this position at such a young age. The banking industry was progressing in interesting ways, and my work reflected that. I dealt with imports and exports and with currency trading, with the bank I worked for becoming the first in Australia to embrace currency trading. My department was part of the movement in the industry that made currency trading profitable.

In 1977, my success was rewarded by a stay in Papua New Guinea. I was offered a secondment with the Central Bank of Papua New Guinea, working in their international department – a good position that came with a big increase in

pay. So Anne and I packed our bags and moved with Tiffany and Matthew to this strange new place.

Going to Papua New Guinea felt like going back 100 years in time. People had no shoes, and the women regularly walked around with no tops on. Back then, it was not unusual for indigenous people to be called 'natives' by foreigners, but we soon learned that they preferred the term 'national citizens.'

Inside the bank, it was a different world. My office was equipped with modern communications technology, and my duties often involved dealing with millions of dollars worth of currency – all while outside, the people had nothing.

My working life was very different from how it had been back in Australia. I had far more responsibility, as I was often dealing with some of the country's most influential people, including those who were high up in national political circles. It seemed I was constantly surrounded by people who were giving themselves knighthoods!

I was still very young and not far into my career, so it was exciting for me to get asked about national interest rate policy and trusted to do work that involved using reserves to raise money. At one point, I was responsible for a decision where at least a million dollars was at stake. It was the sort of influence I would not have had outside Papua New Guinea.

It helped that I was working with some very smart people. My boss had been sent over from the Central Bank of Israel to provide advice and support for the financial infrastructure of a developing country. I thought he and the other staff were very astute. It was a great learning curve, and I felt I had

developed a lot professionally by the time I returned to Australia.

I learned another, more general life lesson while I was there. Spending time around smart people rubs off on you, so the more you do it, the better. Spending time around less smart people will have the same effect, in my view. Your choice of company in life is important if you want to get ahead.

Our stint in Papua New Guinea was good for us as a family. The cost of living was low, so we ate out a lot, enjoying an amazing array of fresh fruit and vegetables as part of our diet, as well as delicious fresh seafood such as crayfish and lobsters. There was radio but no TV; our only screen time was a movie at the local expat club once a week.

Tiffany and Matthew only had each other, as Nicholas was yet to be born (he arrived while we were living there), and Kate's birth was a long way off. As there was no television, they were keener to read or do their homework than they would have been at home. Both were smart and enthusiastic and adapted well. We sent them to local schools where they got to mix with children from very different backgrounds, an experience that I think was good for them, and outside of that, we were all involved a lot in sports.

I would take them to watch cricket and rugby, and at one point, I somehow ended up coaching the local rugby team, even though I knew nothing about the sport. I suspect they chose me simply because I was Australian. The national team had recently won the championships, so by extension, I was meant to know something about rugby.

I decided not to let my lack of knowledge get in the way and simply encouraged the players to go harder and faster and not to talk to the opposition. I thought I might get found out, but my strategy seemed to work, so no one realised I was bluffing. Like many things in life, I was confident that I could learn by doing and pick things up quickly.

Scuba diving was another great source of entertainment. We joined the local scuba club and went diving once a week, absorbing all the magnificent flora and fauna that the ocean had to offer. I learned a lot about how to move my body in the water simply by breathing in different ways.

Although Australia saw at least six deaths a year from shark attacks, it never put me off the water, wherever I was. Spearfishing was a popular pursuit among my friends, and although it was too cruel for me to find it fun, I loved the warmth of the water and watching the beautiful, brightly-coloured fish swarm around me. The turtles were my favourite. I adored watching them glide so gracefully, as though they had wings instead of flippers.

I still had a couple of near misses. While diving, I would sometimes see a stingray swimming beneath me, flipping its tail as it went. I learned later this meant it could have killed me.

On another occasion, I looked over my shoulder and saw I was being watched by a shark. Thankfully, I soon gauged it had little interest in me due to the large cloud of fish that glittered nearby. It was a harrowing moment, but all so incredible for someone who had grown up with the bland, grey surroundings of Farnworth.

Besides the outdoors and the cinema, I enjoyed taking the kids to highland festivals in nearby West Papua. We would taste the wonderful fresh produce and explore the incredible topography around us. The tropical rains and the warm, humid air meant that almost anything would grow. Like in the sea, the natural world on land was incredible to behold for all of us.

However, it could not last forever. After three years, Anne and I returned with our brood to the house we had built for ourselves in Melbourne. We came back happy and healthy, with a new addition to our family, and with my confidence in my work at an all-time high. Times had changed, and I was changing with them.

# 4. A SENSE OF IDENTITY

It did not take long for me to feel at home in Australia, but for a while, I was self-conscious about my accent. When I first started out at the bank, customers would sometimes complain that they could not understand me. Some people lose their accents naturally, but I did not want to wait for that. After work, I would secretly record myself and then use it as an aid to speaking differently. Slowly, I taught myself not to sound like someone from Farnworth.

It has been decades since I lost my British accent, but I am still careful about how I use words. To this day, I still avoid the word 'house' if I can, as I feel it hints at my Lancashire accent. Whenever I went drinking with my colleagues after work, my accent was more likely to come back, which contributed to why I eventually went teetotal. I wanted to feel like I was in control.

My change in accent reflected a bigger change that was going on inside me. Australia was my home, but my conversations with people were not the only times when I felt like an outsider. While the kids were at primary school, they would go on swimming trips, and I would often be asked to supervise. The bus going to the pool would be packed with kids from all kinds of backgrounds, but it was a big moment when I realised they were all Australian. I was the only one who was not. One boy corrected me when I described one of his classmates as Indian, pointing out that he did not see him

that way. To him, he was just another Australian. I accepted that he was right, and my thinking changed. I still had a long way to go before I would be as integrated as the children around me.

The prospect of moving back to Britain looked unlikely. I simply didn't want to return. The only time I felt homesick was during that first Christmas at my aunt and uncle's, when I felt sad and depressed about not being around my brothers and sisters. Since then, I had been too focused on work and family to miss anything back in Farnworth. This was difficult for my mother, as when I left, she predicted I would only be gone for a few short years. Even when I was married with a growing family, she still wanted me to come back to Lancashire. Perhaps deep down, it was because she knew I was not coming back. She had probably nursed that fear since the day I left, but deluding herself was a way of coping.

I had tried to keep in touch with my siblings, and at first, I wrote to them regularly. Eventually, the urge to reinvent myself took over, as I wanted to become my own person – one who wasn't just a brother and a son – so the letters stopped.

Yet I did want to visit. In 1973, when Tiffany was two years old, I took her back to Britain so that she could meet the family. Anne was pregnant with Matthew at the time.

It was 13 years since I had boarded the boat to Melbourne. There had been no return visits in between.

I was glad to see people, but now they all felt a bit like strangers to me. As good as it was to catch up with Bill and Fred, I didn't want to get too close to anyone again – partly

because I feared there would be no more return visits and the sense of separation, possibly forever, would be tough.

Furthermore, it had been such an effort to reinvent myself that I was probably worried I would get sucked back into the life I had been so keen to escape from and had worked so hard to leave behind.

They had all pursued very different paths. Kathleen's husband, Les, worked as an engineer, and they had a comfortable life in Liverpool with their two children. She was just as smart as I remembered her to be.

Meanwhile, Bill had become a mining electrician and a union agitator. He would go on to be heavily involved in the miners' strikes during the industrial tensions that flared up across Britain under Margaret Thatcher's leadership. Already something of a firebrand in the 1970s, he would spend much of the 1980s trying to avoid being arrested as he spent most of his time getting into trouble on the picket lines. He still volunteers to this day with ex-mining organisations and miners' welfare groups.

My success in Australia has given me a different perspective on Bill in another way. Rather than see anyone as the enemy, I judge people on who they are rather than what they have.

Fred had pursued a different path, working in the world of hospitality management. At one point, I think he managed a nightclub that was owned by a famous local gangster. He married twice, having two kids with his first wife and three with his second. For the most part, he seemed happy.

Frank had also married, at a very young age, to his wife, Elizabeth. We never formed much of a bond as adults, mostly

due to the big age gap between us. My visit in the early 1970s was the last time I saw him. He died in 1999 at the age of 65.

My younger brother Stephen was the only one to follow in my footsteps. Despite having a child in England, he chose to move first to Melbourne and then to Queensland. He attempted to forge a business career that unfortunately never got off the ground. Now, he mainly sings in a Beatles tribute band. In 2014, I had a reunion with him and Kathleen in Melbourne, which was wonderful.

Something I did not count on was the presence of my dad. I had not kept in touch with him since I left, but I knew that he and my mum were now divorced. She had rightly cited 'mental cruelty' as the reason my siblings were forced to go and give testimony in court. I was glad she was free of him – that was the most important thing.

As a result, I did not expect him to turn up during my return visit. During a gathering of all the relatives at my mother's house, someone tapped me on the shoulder to tell me that Dad was outside and wanted to come in. Surprised and angry, I refused. I made it clear that my Dad was not invited and he was to leave. Otherwise, I would call the police. I knew if I let him in, he would no doubt get drunk and start causing trouble. Thankfully, he left quietly.

Later on, I looked up where he was living and tried to go round to explain, but he was not at home. I didn't try again. I never found out why he wanted to see me in the first place.

That was the last time I heard from him. Six years later, in 1979, while I was stationed in Papua New Guinea with Anne and the kids, I got the news that he had died. I decided to

acknowledge it by going to the local Catholic Church and giving the priest some money to say Mass for my father. He agreed, and that was that.

I didn't go to the service. I had given him what I owed him, which was not much, and I didn't need to dwell on it anymore. He had made my childhood very difficult at times, but now I felt little anger. Standing there on the other side of the world, in a luscious, tropical haven that was so far from the world I grew up in, it might as well have been another planet; I felt more at peace. I saw his death as a quiet end to a sad and troubled life.

So my family had all moved on with their lives, and I soon realised that there was not much left in Farnworth from my childhood. My old home, my old school, and the church had either vanished or changed beyond recognition. There were no memories left I wanted to relive.

I am 81 years old now, and it's been a long time since I last visited Britain. When I made a second trip in 2016, I was there for a month and did not visit Farnworth once. Two of my brothers came to London to see me, so I stayed down there and had a lovely time with them.

I have fond memories of that trip, but I always wanted to come home to Australia. I would love to return again someday, but I know it would be hard. The thought of having to say goodbye is always a difficult one. Even though I wrongly always thought each time would be the last time, I know one day that it will be. That is never an easy thought.

When I think back to how my career might have played out, I realise England held me back. Escaping was one of the

best things I ever did. My 1973 trip back to my childhood home highlighted how differently things worked in each country. In Britain, a head bank teller would need to have died for me to get promoted. In Australia, you got promoted simply if you were good. If I had stayed in the UK, I would have been closer to 45 before I became a bank manager rather than 30.

There was, and still is, a positivity in Australia that Britain did not have. Aussies are friendly and happy people and are far less likely to judge people according to their class background. Every country has its own class system, but in Australia, the class structure was nothing like the English one. I knew there were middle-class jobs in the UK that were not open to people from my deprived background, and the society I grew up in would never have allowed me to get past that barrier. There would always have been things I couldn't do there that I could in Australia.

I did not start out here, but this is where I ended up. It has given me a lot, and it is where I will stay.

# 5. GETTING AHEAD

For me, there is nothing more important in life than family. My children and grandchildren are everything to me, and I try to be as involved in their lives as possible. Yet I learned this the hard way.

Anne and I have had a long life together, and now that I am retired, I can make her and the family my main priority – but it was different when I was working, and we had small children. Rather than follow the pattern I grew up with, where my mother worked out of necessity, my wife and I followed the model she was raised with: Dad worked while Mum stayed at home. Most of the people around us had a similar pattern in their lives. I don't remember us questioning it.

This gave me the space to be good at my job, and by the time I was in my mid-thirties, I had at least 30 people reporting to me. It was a lot of responsibility, and I knew it was my job to make sure not only that the people beneath me did their work properly but also that things were handled well when they went wrong.

The downside was that I couldn't always spend as much time with the kids as I would have liked. It was normal for me to have left for work before they were up for school in the morning. Sometimes, I would see them briefly at dinner, but other times, I went to the pub after work to network with my colleagues, and I wouldn't get home until after 8 p.m. when

the kids were in bed. It might sound odd now, but that was how it was. Banking was a hard-drinking sector, and the after-work socials were a vital way to build relationships by learning how to get on with people and motivate them. If you didn't do that stuff, you didn't get promoted.

I tried to make up for it by coming to watch the kids' basketball games and sitting on school committees, as well as being an extra pair of hands on the school trips, particularly to go swimming if another chaperone was needed.

I have tried to pass my values on to all of my children and, now increasingly, to my grandchildren. I greatly value and respect intelligence, and I think it is very important not to hide it. I have seen people do that far too often, and it seems like a sad waste of potential to me. It can be hard to be around people when you know that you are the smartest one in the room, and there can be pressure to dumb yourself down. I think it is important not to give in to such pressure.

At the same time, I believe you shouldn't treat people with contempt, whatever their level of intelligence. Everyone should be treated equally and never bullied. If there is one thing I cannot stand, it's bullying. I saw too much of it from my father and my school teachers, and I was always determined to stand up to it whenever I saw it.

My career in banking has taught me a lot about how to get the best from people. It is common to think that banking is simply about money, but relationship management was a huge part of it for me. I learned how powerful it was to say things like 'please,' 'thank you,' and 'how are you,' and to smile when you see someone to see if they will smile back. If

they do not, then it is your job to do something that gets them to smile. You can also get people on your side if you take a genuine interest in them. You can bond with someone if you talk to them as if they are the only person in the room, focusing on what they are saying and really reading into it.

Above all, being a manager taught me that everyone makes mistakes. How you deal with a mistake is what really matters, and a truly great manager will know how to fix a situation and make it even better than it was before. It is far better to ask for help when something goes wrong than to cover up a problem by blaming other people. I am convinced that you only make a problem worse if you hide it.

These were all important lessons, and I feel that living and learning made me a better person, inside and outside the bank. However, things were changing around me, and I knew I had to change with them. I would need to try to apply all of these lessons to the next stage in my career.



*A colour touched up portrait of me - c.1944*



*A baby sister arrives. Fred, Bill (holding Kath) and me - 1949*




*Granny Marsh's 70th birthday in the garden in King St Farnworth - 1950*




*The only time 3 of the Kelly boys played in the same band. Frank, Bill and me in the Kearsley Silver Band - c.1956*




*A final photo before leaving for Australia. Father Frank with Kath, Mum, me with Stephen in front, Bill and Fred - 1960*



*Me and Uncle Frank who I lived with when I arrived in Australia before a performance with Heidelberg Band - early 1960s*



*Me and Aunty Nell who I lived with when I arrived in Australia before a performance with Heidelberg Band - early 1960s*



*Me with Anne and Anne's parents Charles and Neryl - c.1968*



*Me and Tiffany on Blackpool Beach, on my first trip back to the UK since moving to Australia - 1973*



*Katyanna, me, Mother, Anne and Tiffany - c. late 1980s*



*Me, Matt having a bath and Tiffany - 1974*



*Tiffany's wedding to Paul with the whole family - January 1999*



*Matthew and Stephanie's wedding - June 2008*





*Safe landing after skydiving for my 70th birthday - April 2012*

*Opposite: I proudly received my Order of Australia medal for services to Music - July 2010*




*New Orleans jazz club - July 2012*



*Me, Matt and Xavier - Seattle January 2014*



*Kath, Tiffany, Paul, Karen and Sam (Nell's granddaughters), Les (Kath's husband), Anne and I in Melbourne - March 2016*




*One of my many awards for leading the Box Hill City Band - June 2014*



*Me with Finn, Ned, Imogen and Zac - April 2016*



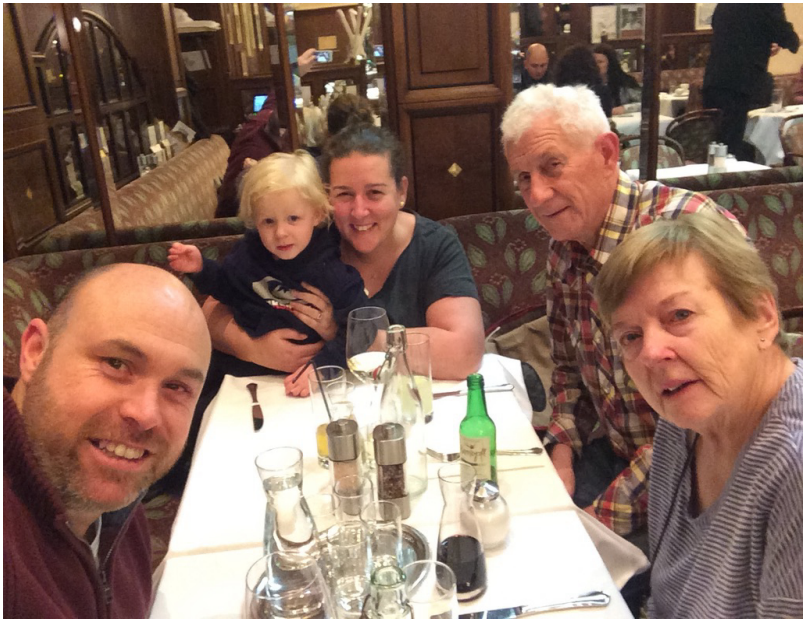
*Tiff, Paul, Zac, Finn, Ned and Imogen - August 2016*



*Matt, Steph, Madeleine and Xavier - August 2016.*



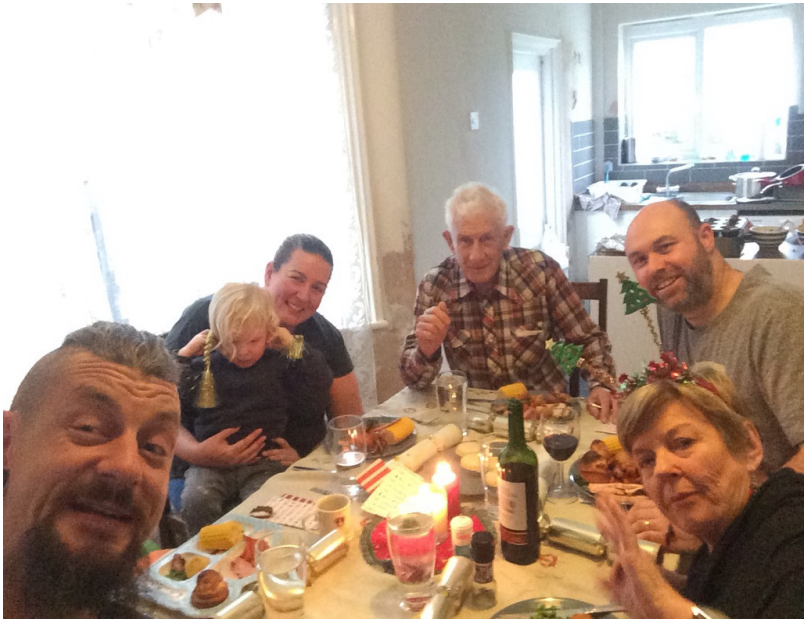
*Me with Anne, Kate, Paul and Xander - August 2016*



*Me, Anne, Kate, Paul and Xander in Vienna - December 2016*



*Fred, me, Bill meeting after more than 40 years in London - December 2016*



*Me, Anne, Kate, Paul, Xander and Nick. Christmas in London - December 2016*



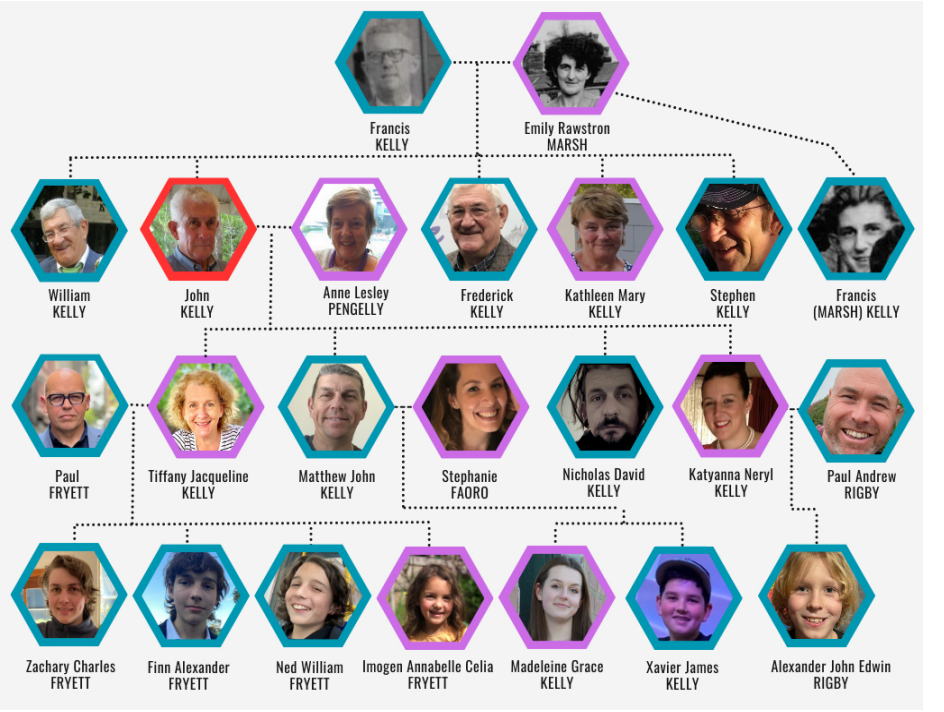
*Football is a shared hobby for us all. Me, Tiff, Zac, Finn, Ned, Imogen and Xander before the footy - April 2022*




*Me, Zac and Finn at the footy - April 2022*



*Footy with Matt, Madeleine, Xavier, Zac, Finn, Ned and Imogen - July 2023*




*My Family Tree - my parents, my siblings, my children and my grandchildren*

# 6. NEW BEGINNINGS

The 1980s is often seen as a great time to have been in banking, especially if all you wanted to do was make money. I rarely found my job difficult; my time spent taking on a lot of responsibility in Papua New Guinea meant I was recognised as being skilled enough to progress, and after another stint abroad, in New York, my place was confirmed in the bank's Australian foreign exchange headquarters.

As the main point was to make money at a time when money was being thrown around like confetti, my job was not hard. Overall, I didn't have a lot to do, and what I did do, I was trusted to get on with. As a result, I enjoyed it.

However, there were unpleasant sides to banking. I was surrounded by people who were intent on climbing the corporate ladder and would often deploy sneaky tactics like undercutting their colleagues whenever they were not there, such as when they had taken time off to go on holiday. I didn't like this, as although I liked the mathematical, problem-solving side of banking, individual relationships were important to me. I didn't want to climb the ladder, so I decided to go back to working in a branch in south Melbourne at a pace that suited me. It meant that my career plateaued, but I was still well-paid. I didn't feel like we, as a family, needed much more.

It was nice at first. I enjoyed being able to have my own local team of people where no one seemed to be trying to be

better than anyone else. I certainly didn't get too involved in attempts to step on anyone else, and I discouraged that behaviour among the staff.

However, it was not completely absent. There was a particularly unpleasant moment when one of my staff made a mistake by ticking the wrong box in a report. I got called into the senior manager's office and told that it was my fault that this had happened because the employee in question claimed I had told him to do it. Not only was my boss furious, convinced that, as a result, we had made a loss rather than a profit, but the person who had made the mistake was promoted ahead of me. Sometimes afterwards, in the pub it was still possible to hear people plotting. Even if branch life was generally more enjoyable, I still found the culture from HQ, where people got promoted above their level of competence, was alive and well in branch life.

It turned out to be the beginning of the end. Eventually, I resigned altogether and moved into real estate. My last day in banking was in 1994, over 30 years after I set foot in Australia for the first time. It was the end of an era, and it felt right.

My timing was fortunate. Property values in the early 1990s were going up, and there was a lot of activity in the real estate market, meaning a lot of work for me in valuations. All my property evaluations were correct, and any mistakes made by other people were meant to be spotted by the insurance companies. On one occasion, I even prevented a scam from taking place. I was pleased that I could do my job well and stop people from losing money. The pay was not as high as it had been in banking, but it was good enough.

Leaving banking also meant leaving behind the heavy-drinking culture of my colleagues. In my day, it was always a place where intense boozing was encouraged by the managers, especially at lunchtime. You would start drinking over lunch at 1 p.m. and not return to the office until 3.30. This was mostly because we had an entertainment budget of $1,000 per month, and if you didn't spend it, you lost it. This was due to a tax deduction that was eventually abolished by the government in 1987. That was probably for the best. I came very close to being an alcoholic.

I was never an angry drinker. I enjoyed myself hugely at the time, even if I might have been more productive if I had been sober. I would tend to get a taxi home at the end of the evening, and when I was back, I didn't feel like I needed to drink more. I never got into fights or caused trouble. Anne was never thrilled about it, but she tolerated it.

That was a long time ago. I gave up drinking in 2012, and I never broke the habit. Even at a celebration or a big event, I'll drink lemonade instead of champagne.

Other aspects of my personal life were changing as I switched careers. Our close-knit family life couldn't last forever. My kids were growing up, and eventually, they would move on. I knew it was my job to support them in their next stage of life – adulthood.

# 7. THE WIDER WORLD

I once asked my children if I was a good father. They said they wouldn't love me if I weren't. My grandchildren also seem to love me, which is a relief. Even my adult grandsons aren't afraid to hug me. It's made me glad we live in such different times to the one I grew up in, where there was less physical affection between men.

The fear of becoming my father still hangs over me. When I was younger, I inherited his quick temper. My road rage used to see me yell and toot at someone if they cut me off. Now, I just wave at them. I also try not to get annoyed when someone pushes in front of me. I want the grandkids to understand why that's important.

I also slapped my five-year-old son once, which made us both cry. Parents hitting kids was normal until recent times, but whenever I saw it, I knew it wasn't the answer. At that moment, when I hit my son, I knew I was my father, which wasn't what I wanted to be. My dad shaped my view on violence against children. Watching him made me realise that it was not right.

All of my kids are smart, and it has been wonderful watching them thrive and flourish in their chosen careers. My eldest, Tiffany, spent eight years travelling between 1994 and 2002 before returning to Australia with her husband, Paul, to train as a nurse and have her first child. Now she has four children (Zachary, Finn, Ned, and Imogen) who she has done

a great job of raising – even if the rate at which the boys are growing sometimes makes me feel like I am shrinking!

Matthew was always great with technology and was offered a job in Ireland before being headhunted for a well-paid position in the USA, where he has lived since 2010 with his wife, Stephanie, and two children (Madeleine and Xavier). Once the children have both headed off to University, Matthew and Stephanie might decide to move back to Australia.

Nicholas had a tougher time in his teenage years. Despite bouts of low self-esteem, Nicholas has often proved himself to be caring and selfless to other people. He mentored someone in a sporting competition, a young man who eventually beat him in the tournament, and on one occasion, he even prevented another young person from taking his own life. He was praised for this by everyone around him, and I know that, fundamentally he has a good personality.

He seems to enjoy the life he has in the UK, where he gets very involved in body-building and sports such as axe-throwing. I always hope that he is doing the best he can.

Kate has followed in my footsteps, having gone into banking but specialising in Human Resources. She works for HSBC in London, close to where she and her partner Paul are raising their son, Alexander. My hope is that they might return to Australia one day.

My grandchildren are all bright and loving, and I love spending time with them all, even with them living all across the globe.

I spend a lot of time with Zac, Finn, Ned, and Imogen as they live quite close; in fact, Zac, my first grandchild, and his parents lived with me for the first six months of his life. I've spent many happy hours watching them play their sports. Basketball, AFL, and soccer, and after I retired, I took Ned and Imogen to their swimming lessons each week. I've volunteered with school events and have even had Zac and Finn march with me and the band for a number of AFL Grand Final Parades. We all share a passion for watching the St Kilda football club, and we spend many hours together watching the games. I bring chocolate to each Saints match, and we predict who will be the first goal kicker for the team. The winner gets the prize.

Zac and Finn are quieter than the other two Fryett children, but as I've taught Zac and Finn how to drive, we've spent some good quality time together discussing football and other world events. I enjoy getting their perspective on things.

Ned was named after me. My nickname in Australia is Ned, after the famous bushranger Ned Kelly, and I was so pleased when I heard that Tiffany had chosen his name for that reason. He, too, loves watching the Saints games, but usually only until the chocolate has been won, then he wanders away.

Imogen regularly sets up Skype calls for the two of us to chat and runs a football tipping competition, which is remarkable given her age. She already knows how to predict and deduct things and is a constant source of joy and

amusement to me. As she has three older brothers, I think it is important to tell her that there is nothing she can't do. I have always been proud that my daughters are so strong and capable, and I want the same for my granddaughters.

Madeleine has just started University at Trinity in Dublin, Ireland. Having gained test scores in the top 5% of students in the USA, she was offered many prestigious university places as well as some scholarships but ultimately decided that studying Law at Trinity was the right thing for her. I'm excited to see what she will do next.

Xavier and I share a passion for music, and he is a very gifted trumpet player. We have Skype classes weekly with him in Seattle and me in Melbourne, which is a wonderful way to stay connected.

Alexander is my only grandchild who was born overseas, in England, like me. Fortunately, I have been able to see him in England and in Australia when they have come to visit. Though he is a staunchly proud Brit, he always enjoys the time he spends in Australia with his extended family, so I hold out hope that one day, they will move back to Melbourne so we can spend more time together.

Thankfully, technologies such as Skype and Messenger apps mean that we can all stay in touch even though we are living all around the world. We have a family Wordle competition that we all join in with, and I regularly talk to them about sports and other things.

Family is the most important thing in the world to me. I love all my children and grandchildren, and I like to think

they feel the same about me. I have a happy life, and they are a huge reason for that.

Yet all these years later, the voice in my head telling me not to be like my father still emerges. It fights with the part of me that I fear is like him.

After my recent surgery, I had a reaction to some of the medication that I was on; I became very confused and frightened. After a small argument with Anne, I became terrified and frightened for my life. Thankfully, I called my daughter Tiffany, who came over and calmed me down. I realised it was me experiencing emotions from the past, but it was still a frightening moment that made me want to curl up in a ball and cry. The past felt closer than ever, and my father seemed alive again.

Thanks to my family, my true self reemerged, but it was a warning sign. I'll never truly leave him behind, but I'm proud of the person I've become. That's what matters.

If people take only one thing away from this book, it should be that.

# 8. CODA

At the time of writing, I have been retired for over 20 years, but my life is still full. Once I left the world of real estate, I took part in other activities, such as being a vote counter during national elections, and spending all day in a polling booth before going to do a recount to check that everything was consistent and accurate. It is still using my numerical skills but in a different way.

One of my favourite jobs is to act as a simulated patient in one of the local hospitals, ensuring I can be a useful teaching aid for the medical students there. It is great work; I get to interact with young people and be useful, all while being paid for it. Some of the people who also do the job are not quite as professional and can be very 'precious,' but I never complain. I really enjoy it.

I like to keep economically active, but if I didn't work, we would not struggle, even though the cost of living in Australia is going up all the time. Anne has been astute with the money she received from her family, ensuring we have savings and our mortgage is paid off. That has given us time to pursue our voluntary interests.

I continue to play the cornet in brass bands, having for many years been a Drum Major in the Box Hill City Band, a group I joined in 1982. I retired from being a band leader when I turned 80, but I still love to play music. I loved mentoring young musicians as part of this, and have received

multiple awards for playing, marching, and teaching. They include the Order of Australia Medal, the Australian Defence Force Medal, and the National Drum Major Award. On many occasions, the band was given the ANZAC Day Award for being the best band on the day.

Anne has continued with her voluntary work, delivering food to vulnerable elderly people every week as part of the Meals on Wheels scheme and being on duty at a nearby school canteen. Our grandchildren adore her, and she, in turn, adores them.

There have been some scary moments. In August 2020, I had a scan and some blood tests that showed a lump on my pancreas and an infection in my lung. Later in the year, I had some more scans, and in 2021, I underwent keyhole surgery to have the lump removed.

In a bizarre and lucky twist of fate, I woke up from the anaesthetic to find the operation cancelled due to an issue the surgeons had spotted with my heart. It would almost certainly not have been discovered if I had not had the lump.

After more scans showed that I had some blocked arteries, I underwent a series of treatments that included double bypass surgery, removal of the pancreatic lump (which turned out to be benign), and treatment for the lung infection. I have made a slow but steady recovery. It was a difficult time, but I am thankful for my narrow escape.

Throughout our marriage, myself and Anne have stayed in the house we built in 1971 and have no plans to downsize or go into a residential care home. The kids certainly want us to keep the place. My recent health scares have made me even

more certain that I want to live to 100, and I am confident that I will so long as I remain healthy and active.

My home may not have changed much, but the world my family has inherited is changing, and the Australia I arrived in soon became a very different place to the one my children grew up in. Social attitudes in the 1960s were nothing like they are now.

I have often known my own worth and been willing to hold my ground. Even as a young man, I was confident enough to know I was smart and had a lot to offer. Yet, in my career, I have learned that it is important to admit when you are wrong, and I want people to know that I am capable of that. Rectifying a mistake is a good life skill, and I have always wanted my children and grandchildren to be aware of that. I went to counselling because I sensed I was not getting things right with my son Nicholas, and I stopped drinking because I knew it was not good for my health, but I have tried to apply this philosophy to the outside world as well.

In my industry, it was common for women to be paid less than men and for women to have to put up with discriminatory practices, such as having to sit in separate areas whenever they went out to the pub (known as 'ladies' lounges'), or some downright horrible stuff, like sexual assault in the workplace. I didn't used to be so aware of these things, and it was my wife who pointed out to me that this should not happen to people. I am glad that my country has introduced more rights and protections for women, and I am thrilled that more women are gaining positions in national politics. I know

Australia has made progress on closing the gender pay gap, but much more needs to be done.

One of the prouder moments in my career as a young man was when I argued as part of the Bank Worker's Union that the women in the bank should receive equal pay rates to the men. It ultimately went through, even if such a change for the best was not popular at the time.

I have always been a supporter of the Labour Party, and at one point, I was even asked to stand as a Labour candidate. Getting promoted at work meant I did not have enough time to do it in the end, and I may well not have been elected due to not being in a 'blue collar' job, but I have always stayed interested in politics.

In particular, I feel strongly about the rights of indigenous people and refugees. Australia used to have a law that the majority of the people who came to live here had to be white. It was a policy I certainly benefited from, but one that I am now very much against. I have found it troubling that those seeking asylum have been forced to live in hotel rooms that act more like detention centres on Christmas Island. While I appreciate that we cannot let everyone into the country, I can never forget that I arrived on a boat once. The thought of being forced to live in such a tiny space is frightening, and I think the treatment of such people should be more humane.

Similarly, I think we as a society need to treat the Aboriginal population better. The recent elections have given them more of a voice, but it still seems as though the rest of the country is telling them what they need and how they

should spend their money rather than letting them decide for themselves.

Same-sex marriage is an area that also seems to be improving. I used to be against it, but I have since come round, and I believe there should be equality for all. A lot of Australians share this view, even though I know there are still too many that do not.

Still, I am confident that better times lie ahead. It often bothered me that the old right-wing government did not take issues such as climate change or equal rights for women seriously, and I am glad that the leadership of the country is now more progressive. It is not enough to just be smart. You have to be smart enough to know when times have changed and when you need to change with them.

When I look back on my time in this country – my country – I have few regrets. In many ways, I was a refugee, running away from a poor and violent home life where I knew that things might only get worse if I stayed. The wages were higher here, and there was more room to progress if you were smart. I could never have become one of the youngest bank managers in history if I had stayed in Britain. It was the right decision for me, even if it meant closing one door to open another and leaving behind people who were special to me.

The buildings are taller, the population is bigger, the people are from all over the place, and life is far more expensive than it was when I got here, but it is still the place where I found refuge and the first and only place I truly thought of as home.

I have had a good life, and I am so very grateful for what my adopted country has given me.

Despite my travels, life has taught me similar lessons everywhere I have gone. It is important to see the best in people and to assume everyone is good until proven otherwise. It pays to know your worth and to stand up to bullying and injustice wherever you see it. Be smart, but be humble. Find strength in admitting your mistakes and learn from them.

It has been an exciting life. Long may it continue.

StoryTerrace