

29<sup>th</sup> Nov,2004

My life as the wife of a "Forgotten Australian"

I first met John Looby at the Junee Methodist Youth Club on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1954, it was strangely nearly "love at first sight". John had arrived to work on a farm at Illabo, a very small town some 10 miles north of Junee the day before, on his 17<sup>th</sup> Birthday. I was 16 ½ yrs old at the time living with my parents, brother and sister.

At first my parents were against a relationship, as "how do we know anything about him or his past, he's been in an Orphanage," a common reaction from folk at that time. Eventually we won them over and became engaged on my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday in January, 1958, and married on 13<sup>th</sup> September the same year. We had 3 daughters, Debbie (now deceased from cancer) 8/12/1959, Janet 24/8/1961, then Lynette on my 28<sup>th</sup> birthday, in 1966.

As I got to know John he told me of how his mother had died in 1942, and his father, a Gallipoli Veteran had been admitted to Repatriation Hospitals in Sydney, had died earlier in 1954. They are both buried in the Northern Suburbs Cemetery in Sydney, so the children were admitted to Dalmar Childrens Home in Carlingford Sydney, as even when out of hospital for a while their Father was unable to look after his family.

One of the most devastating feelings I had was when I told John of how I, along with many other children attending Junee Methodist Church, each year had been given 1 or 2 books to sell slices of Christmas Pudding, so the children of Dalmar could have Christmas Pudding, I think the price per slice was 3pence, it was a little square about 2 inches, or 5 cm in todays measurements, square, with a picture of a cut Christmas Pudding on each, I think there were 20 slices per book. We collected a reasonable amount of money in the town, all in good faith that what we were told was true. Well John could only laugh at my story, saying that he had never had Christmas Pudding till after he left Dalmar and was working on a dairy farm near Nowra..

Life for John has not been an easy one, he was very unsettled and "lost", after a year at Illabo he was offered an apprenticeship in Butchery in Junee, altho' he was a bit old to be starting such training. The family were of the church and their eldest daughter was a friend of mine. John boarded with 2 different church families until just before our wedding, when a flat came up for rent, so he and his brother, Peter, who was also in Junee then, working on the railways, went into the flat, mainly John ate at our place during this time, and my parents got to accept him, for who he was, though John found it hard to accept being accepted into a family unit.

At the end of his apprenticeship John again became restless, this was just after Debbie had been born. We moved a lot he changed jobs, couldn't settle at all, eventually we started a driving school in Sydney, then when we moved this went down the drain as we waited for telecom to transfer our phone to the new address, by which time we had no bookings and no contacts. A few driving jobs on trucks followed that then a 4 ½ year stint at Caltex, then more driving jobs followed, then we got into the overnight transport business and had a good business running initially from Sydney to Canberra, and towns in between, then had subbies covering a lot of other areas o the state 5 days per night. It was long, hard work and hours, which we sold as a going concern. We had finally bought our first house, but the country life called him again, so we sold up and bought some land near Orange NSW, by this time I had also returned to the work force, and after 12 mths on the farm, drought and high interest, I went back to work again to help support the farm, John also did some off farm driving out of Orange.

By 1994/5 Johns pain and hard work began to well and truly catch up with him, he spent

time in traction in hospital, where it was first brought up about what had he done as a child, and Drs and Specialists came to the conclusion that he had worked very hard as a child and it was all catching up with him, it was suggested that he go on an invalid pension, but pride would not let him do that so we battled on a bit longer, till we decided that retirement was the only way we could go, the cold of the area was crippling him with his arthritis, and that is how we came to be here on the North Coast, where odd as it may sound , we commented as we went through this area on our honeymoon, that it would be a great place to retire to, and here we are, as happy as can be.

John has never been violent to me, nor to our girls, in fact they would run to him to get what they wanted when I'd said no to something. He wanted to give them what he had not had, but to a point he spoilt them, though he could never cuddle or hug them, would give them a light peck at times. He could never tell any of us that he loved us, and still can't to this day.

When we got called to our eldest Daughter's bedside at the Liverpool Hospital on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2003 John showed more emotion than I had ever seen before. He was so upset that he does not remember what happened after the phone call that day, but blamed himself for her situation, as we had only found out a few months earlier that the cause of his Mothers death was Carcinoma of the Breast, so he figured his genes had passed on to Debbie. He still feels this today, but is more rational about it.

John has told me of many incidents at Dalmar and I have heard others talking about it too, it seems that the children were free labour, and given floggings beyond any reasonable needs. It was a common statement from other boys that after Church on Sundays some would be flogged by whip, for some minor incident at Church. This all in the name of Christianity. The name of a Mr. Bruff, or Brough, Mr and Mrs ( in particular) Ted Hanson, screaming for her husband to hit harder and more, it seems she got great pleasure from the cruelty that could be dished out. Mr Don Stewart often came up too, and at one time he flogged John so severely that he cleared out for several days, and only the intervention of Matron Barnett saved him from more of such treatment. After John left Dalmar, his brother, Peter, rang him to say Mr Stewart was taking it out on him now that John wasn't there, as John would stand up for himself, so on the next train John went, telling Mr Stewart to leave Peter alone, or he'd be back to clear it up.

I must also point out that during the whole time the children were in Dalmar that their Father was paying for them to be there.

One of the friends John had made at Dalmar, Bill, or "Uncle Bill" to the girls, even today, was bestman at our Wedding. He is still a very close friend, who we see quite a bit of. Bill left the home before John, when his father remarried. Many a story I have heard these 2 recall, some were fun times, others were nasty.

I have had a lot of problems getting John to eat some foods, which were served very badly cooked, e.g. Pumpkin, I can well remember the "Bones" that were in Pumpkins, mainly Queensland Blue, in those days, it seems that Matron Helewell walked around the dining room with a ladle in her hand and if the food wasn't eaten they were hit on the head with it till they did so, to be caught talking was also a "hit on head with the ladle" crime. Lumpy Porridge was served daily, tho John often missed this, because he was milking the cows, by hand of course, no milking machines in those days, then carry the 10 gallon Milk Cans back to the kitchen.

I often tell folk today that they need to know some of what John went through, to understand some of his bravado, and actions at times. It has been a hard battle, however 50 yrs since we met we still here, and had our 46<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary in September, and hoipe to have many more.

From Jean Looby



JOHN HAYDEN



JOHN LOOBY

