

MY CUBBY HOUSE AMONG THE FEED BAGS

"I would end my days gladly in a whirlpool,  
If only I had spent my life riding on a friendly wave" Anon.

I guess that to write a story there has to be a beginning of some kind and it is at this point that I am lost for words. Having had little education I have often joked to people that I was so dumb that I had to repeat kindergarten. So there is my start to this story - for my whole life I have hidden my true feelings behind a facade of well-being, always feeling that I was different, but not understanding why and always making light of it.

I was born in a country town in New South Wales in 1933. My parents were not married and it seems that my mother had spells of mental illness and spent some time in institutions. My father was unable to cope and I was admitted to Bidura Children's Home when I was sixteen months old. When I was three I was placed in the care of a married couple who ran a poultry farm on the western outskirts of Sydney. I grew up in a world of work for there was always some sort of job to do even for someone young. Play was non-existent, so were friendships and love.

My life was full of fear and abuse, although I could never understand why such loathing and violence were directed at me. It seems that the government paid people to care for abandoned children - in the hard years of the Depression the extra income would have been welcome in many families. I later found out that the head of the house and his sons were the town drunks and I guess I was used for drinking silver and cheap labour. The only thing they ever gave me was a fanatical ability to work - later in life I was to regret this trait.

My belief has been that big boys (or little ones) don't cry and that there is always someone worse off than yourself. I didn't know why I was treated so badly but I thought, "That's life, so tough luck!"

When I was asked to write my life story I thought to myself, "What good is that - just another bloody sob story to add to the long list. Shouldn't we move forward and leave that garbage behind?" Now aged seventy one I find that I have not advanced one bit away from that physically, emotionally and sexually abused little boy whose only security was a cubby hole I had made among all the wheat, bran and pollard bags in a feed shed. I knew that as soon as I left this safe place the ill-treatment would start again. To this day I love the smell of a produce store but hate what it reminds me of.

I am certainly not writing this story for sympathy as whatever pride I have, misguided or otherwise, will not allow me to accept it. I decided to write about my past in the hope that it will help me to understand myself and to help take away the guilt which has spoilt not only my own life but that of just about everyone else I got close to. As I never did this intentionally guilt and self-condemnation became a large part of my life and still are today.

We talk about the family being a unit. I never sat at the same table as my "Foster father" and always ate before he came home or after he had finished his meal. I always had to address him as "Sir". Once I made the mistake of calling him "Pop" (which I must have heard on the radio). As I raced across the room I

fortunately pulled the door shut behind me and the carving knife he had thrown at me thudded into the door. It may have saved me from harm but it didn't save me from another belting to add to the long list. He always used to say, "I'll make you cry, you little bastard, if I have to tear every bit of skin off you". He accentuated the fact many times that that was all I was. He never ever did make me cry. It might have been better if I had - perhaps I would not have suffered so much.

Once, while climbing a tree, I fell and broke my leg. His response was, "What use are you now?" I copped another thumping, plastered leg and all.

I often suffered from boils and one of his enjoyments was to put a heated bottle over each boil in an attempt to make them burst. It hurt like hell but he continued to do it, even when his wife pleaded with him to stop.

He was very cruel to animals. We lived on a mini-farm where we grew most of our food and produce. One day when he was milking a cow it kicked over the bucket of milk and whilst its head was still in the bail he bashed it to death with a crowbar. He then slaughtered it and made me clean up the mess. He also gave me a hiding because apparently I was responsible for the episode.

I know it is the done thing to dock the tails of puppies, especially fox terriers - he knew I hated it but always made me do it. I thank the mongrel for my lifetime love of animals because of his cruelty to them.

My foster mother became ill and was in bed for some time. I was not allowed to leave the house unless it was to do the shopping (heaven help me if I dared stop at a park to watch the kids playing marbles, and lost track of the time).

A young boy lived across the road. He and his mother used to smile as they walked by while I was gardening or doing some other outside job. One day I ventured across the road and talked to him for a while. When I came back I looked in on my foster mother and thought that she was sleeping. However, it seemed that she had suffered a relapse and when my foster father returned home he blamed me. When his sons found out that I had left the house all hell broke loose and by the time they and their father had finished with me all the previous abuse seemed only a rehearsal by comparison with what I went through from then on. I estimate that I was aged eight or nine at the time.

I was sent to school in old Victorian style clothing and lace-up boots. I had a severe stutter which infuriated my foster father and which made me an object of ridicule at school. None of this was conducive to a normal childhood.

Most people have good memories of some kind about their childhood. I can remember only three - a three wheeler bike, a Meccano set and a painting set. They were Christmas presents given to me by a young woman who also lived with my foster parents. She had been a State Ward and had also spent time in Bidura Children's Home. She was always kind to me and I thought of her as my sister. I will speak more about her later in my story.

Life went on and I didn't resent the work as it kept me away from my foster father and his brutal nature. Most young kids have a dream of being a policeman or a train driver when they grow up. My dream was to kill him (not a very aspiring dream for a ten year old). Apart from the episode of visiting the boy across the road, going to school or doing the shopping I did not leave the property. In some ways I was like an adult as I don't believe that I had a childhood. Fear and hate became my constant companions.

On the farm ploughing was done in the old fashioned way. My job was to sit on the harrow, which was pulled by the horse, and break up the clods of earth that my foster father had ploughed. One day when I was doing the harrowing I saw him lying underneath a tree and it seemed that my chance had come at last. I drove the horse forward and ran over him with the harrow. I spent the next year on the run, forever looking over my shoulder. As I was a hard worker no one seemed to question my age. My experiences made me seem older than my years and I went from farm to farm. I didn't get much money but I was fed and I slept in many varied places.

Inevitably time ran out and "Welfare" caught up with me. I learned that I had not killed my foster father as he had suffered a heart attack and was already dead when I ran over him. I was returned to my foster mother. Shortly afterwards, aged about ten, I had to leave school in order to do extra work on the farm, so my education was cut short - a pity, as I had done well during the short period I had attended school.

Several years later my foster mother died. For a short while I lived with one of her sons and his family but was later sent to a Boys' Home in the western suburbs of Sydney.

Life in the Home was strict and I seemed to be the person who attracted trouble without even looking for it. Abuse once more became part of my everyday existence. If there is a mongrel to find, I'll find him. Every Friday we used to get either a piece of cake or an ice cream - a person who constantly abused me used to take savage delight in knocking it out of my hand and grinding it under his foot - boy, did I hate him!

I found it very much a fact of life that people who were put in charge of the welfare of others were of two kinds - those who had problems themselves and were totally unsuited to their work or those, like my foster father, who just wanted to vent their anger or frustration on someone else. I was to experience this many times in my future life. There were also some well meaning people, but I met very few. Times have changed a lot for the better & thank God for that. Where was the help when I needed it? I will not mention names or places in this story as that would detract from the work of those who really put a lot of time and care into the welfare of others.

The next stage of my life, in the knowledge of hindsight, could have been the turning point and a solid foundation for the years ahead. It should have been so, but I failed to recognize it and I paid for this mistake for the rest of my life. I am now seventy one years of age and while it is many years since I have done anything which would be considered socially unacceptable I have had to live with the consequences of this mistake on a daily basis.

I will return now to my "foster sister". I remember that there was an almighty row between my foster father and her boy friend. It was about 1939 - he was off to war and wanted to marry her before he left. The next few years are a total blank and I learned later that I had been very sick.

When my foster sister's husband returned from the war they took me into their home. No kid could have asked for a more solid family. There were rules, as there should be, but there was care. They clothed and fed me and showed genuine concern for my welfare. However, I still suffered from nerves and nightmares. The stuttering had become even worse and I was totally afraid of life - an inheritance from my past.

For many years I had been going to doctors for so called nerves and was given many and varied medications for that condition and for my stuttering problem. By the time I started high

I was totally drug reliant. Medication used to be packed with my play lunch for the teacher to give to me. How different would things have been if my childhood had been spent in a secure and loving home!

I went to high school and received good marks as I had then, and for most of my life, a thirst for knowledge. As I got older I drifted away from the guidance of my foster sister and her husband and chose to associate with people of my choosing.

I was expelled from school for assaulting a teacher. The reason does not matter now but I had been bullied all my life and I was determined that no bastard was ever going to do that to me again. I had a passion for physical fitness so I did a real job on him.

They got me an apprenticeship as a plasterer. I liked to work with my hands and as I had a creative nature I excelled in my trade. I was once Apprentice of the Year.

After leaving that wonderful family I lived in boarding houses and tried to make a life for myself. I didn't have a clue and just went along with the flow. The family had offered me a wonderful chance but I blew it.

Life from then on seemed to consist of doing something I did not want to do, in a place I didn't want to be, with someone I didn't want to be with. I was easily led but craved for a sense of belonging and finding my place in life. At the same time I wasn't too particular where I found them.

Fears and phobias became worse and more psychiatrists prescribed stronger medication. Stints in psychiatric institutions, at times, seemed like a blessed relief from trying to cope with living.

On my twenty first birthday my boss said to me, "Come and have a beer with us!" I had a middy shandy and if it was possible to live a thousand years I will never forget the effect that it had on me. I had found the answer to all my problems. For the first time in my life my fears and insecurities seemed to drop away. That innocent incident initiated thirty five years of alcoholism which included one hundred and twenty two admissions to various institutions and two charges of manslaughter, one being regarded as justifiable.

As I was drinking in a pub one day, I saw the mongrel from the Boys' Home. Tapping him on the shoulder I said, "Do you remember me?" He said, "Not really, but your face seems familiar." So I said, "Well maybe you will remember this" and I king hit him where he stood. The average person would have been thrown out of the pub for fighting, but not me. Old timers would remember the concrete ashtrays that used to run the length of the bar and were swept clear of cigarette butts at the end of the day. He fell against the bar and fractured his skull - he later died. After learning of our past association the judge gave me a lenient sentence. On the second occasion I knocked a man under a car. I remembered nothing about the incident until I woke up in a police cell. I was told that he had insulted my girlfriend and that I had retaliated.

By then I was totally out of it, one way or the other. Funny how you can operate a business, have a nice home, be a smart dresser and then have a total mental blackout about everything. People used to say, "He seems to be doing OK for himself!" Little did they know that work was the only thing I could do and that I had reached the stage where alcohol and drugs were needed to motivate me even for that. I used alcohol to calm me down each day and drugs to keep me going till I could drink again.

When I was twenty seven my boss said, "You know, what you need, son, is to find a good woman and settle down." So, taking this brilliant piece of advice I started to go steady with one of the girls I was taking out. I had to be doomed from the start for when her father found out about me he was dead against it as he knew I was a bad choice.

I never did anything without a substance of some kind to boost my confidence. I was riddled with panic attacks, anxiety and a constant fear of the unknown. The girl's father wanted to remove me from the property but I said, without even meaning it, "I didn't come to fight you, I came to marry your daughter." So my relationship with my future father-in-law consisted of belting the crap out of him.

Funny thing about me was that I was not frightened of people but was terrified of life itself and by fear of the unknown. I accepted all things, good or bad, without thinking them through, even when I knew I had made a bad choice.

There were many occasions when I wanted to break off our engagement but I delayed time and time again. Things always seemed different after my daily mix of beer and Valium.

Our marriage was not happy. I may not have been a good husband but I was a very good provider for someone who only worked with his hands. My wife always had a nice little car, went to the hairdresser every Saturday morning and wanted for little in the material sense. I worked at three jobs to support our life-style and to enable me to buy the alcohol that I craved.

The more we argued, the more I drank. The more I drank the worse I became. By then I was being admitted to clinics for detoxification. While in those places I could see how silly my behaviour was and I would tell myself that things would be different when I got out. My good intentions never lasted long - I still needed something to help me cope and the problem only worsened.

We were blessed with a lovely son and we also adopted a beautiful baby girl. My thoughts go back to my cubby hole on the farm where, after being flogged, I used to fantasise that one day I would have children and be the best father and husband in the world. One of the cruelest twists of my life was that I became neither. I was never cruel to them but the fact that they did not grow up in a happy, stable family unit caused emotional damage and affected their attitude towards me.

Our marriage broke up and I stopped seeing my children, honestly thinking it was best for them. My ex-wife had a new partner and I believed it was better for them than having a neurotic alcoholic father. They will never know how many times I used to sit in the car and watch them go to school or play at lunch time and all the time I was hurting like hell. I still thought that they were better off without me. I will probably never know if I was right or wrong.

My last detox episode led to me being admitted one more time to a psych centre where I was conned in a way which would equal the movie, "The Sting", with Robert Redford. My ex-wife's partner was a professional person and they had set it up between themselves. In those days the wonderful caring souls who looked after the mentally ill were built like brick dunnies, with hearts to match. They used to wear a type of holster which contained a syringe for use on hard-to-handle patients. One day one of them tripped me while I was carrying my dinner. I immediately retaliated, so they locked me in the kitchen. When I started to demolish that room they came from everywhere and gaffed me with their needles. The whole episode was planned and during my time off the planet it appears that I signed half of everything I had worked for over to my ex-wife's partner. To this day I have no recollection of doing so.

Losing control once more led me back to the very psych centre where I had previously caused all the trouble. I was really starting to build up a great file. They got stuck into me again and once more I retaliated. For some unknown reason I was sent to an institution which housed sex offenders. The treatment given came under the heading of aversion therapy. In other words, shock someone out of the behavioural pattern with real crazies urinating on you, hot and cold immersion, shock treatment, food you wouldn't give to a pig and ill-treatment from the ever present Gestapo with the zap guns. I was never one of them yet it was regarded as helpful therapy for me to be subjected to the same treatment.

One practice often comes to mind. Men and women, young and old, were housed in open dormitories. We were made to strip and stand on a concrete floor with a wall at the back and a roof over. We were all housed down together, even people in wheel chairs, and in winter the water was not warm. For some reason that I can't remember I was put in a room with no windows, just an opening in the door. Somebody would come and ask me something but I was unable to answer properly because I stuttered too much. My resulting frustration would apparently show a bad attitude on my part and the flap would close till the next time. I cannot remember how long I was there but I was eventually transferred back to the centre I had come from.

One of my court appearances included an order to attend alcoholic counselling. It made little sense to me because they advocated no drinking at all. The only peace I experienced was when I was under the influence of alcohol or drugs and I couldn't imagine living without either. However, it was a court order and I had to attend.

A travelling magistrate asked me if I could give him any reason why he shouldn't commit me for life. I came very close to saying, "Go ahead", as I would at least have a roof over my head and three meals a day and I sure as hell could not handle myself on the outside. To this day I don't know what stopped me from throwing my life away. If you think that the movie, "One flew over the cuckoo's nest", with Jack Nicholson, was fiction believe me it true. Knock the system and they will get you and no one would be any the wiser. How close I came!

A lady from the alcohol group came to see me and somehow persuaded them to let me be with her. To this day I have never known what she saw in me but we stayed with each other for several years and I will be eternally grateful to her for I feel sure that I would not have made it without her devoted care. There was no romantic involvement.

There was a place about fifteen kilometres from where she lived where people used to go for picnics and to camp. We stopped there and I was feeling very nervy to say the least. I could not get back into the car and I hid in a cave. For many years I had done nothing without the support of some sort of medication and the idea of following the road that led to civilization filled me with fear that will never be forgotten.

This lady came every day with something to eat and spent many hours talking to me. I was to discover that she had once had an alcohol problem and had been through similar difficulties.

Eventually she coaxed me into town where we lived for two years in a church home. It was two years before I left that place for one minute other than to attend meetings of the alcoholic group. The sicknesses I had experienced before were nothing compared with what I went through during those two years of going cold turkey. Staying off medication just long enough to go through the horrors, DTs, hallucinations and all that went with it, I would then become too sick to drink. Had I been able to crawl to it, I would have. Too frightened to go to bed and too frightened to

wake up, I went through my own private hell. One example will always stand out in my mind. While lying in bed I would see a bloody big spider the size of a football coming up and over the end of the bed. As I felt it slowly crawling up my body I was unable to move, but just as it was about to sink its fangs into my face there would be a blinding flash in my head and it would disappear. I really thought that I was going mad. As time went by I found that this was quite normal for people who were going through withdrawal from chemical abuse.

I was very weak. When I squeezed lemons to treat the flu the exertion would make me sleep for hours. Getting dressed was an exercise in itself.

After several attempts I eventually became sober and totally free from all substance abuse, apart from several kinds of medication needed for physical ailments. My lady friend and I got jobs as housekeepers in a half-way house for alcoholics. Having an overwhelming passion to help others I co-founded an organization which is still going today and funded by the Health Commission. It is based on the simple philosophy that got me sober. I hope that the people who went through it found the happiness that has eluded me.

This lady used to say, "Gary, I have heard you give such wonderful counselling to people and I have seen the results that came from it. Why can't you take the same advice and apply it to yourself? There are people who have been in the programme a quarter of the time you have and they are a mile ahead of you!"

I used to wonder the same thing myself and, yes, it hurt like hell to know it was the case. Today it is still the same - giving advice to others and not being able to apply it to myself. My knowledge for doing the right thing the right way is based on a simple rule. That is, do the opposite to the way I did and you stand a fair chance of getting somewhere near right.

A cruel blow, after getting on top of my alcohol problem, was that I was the most unhappy, sober person you could imagine, still frightened of life and every bastard in it. I have come to the realization that if you start relying on chemicals to help you cope you never grow up emotionally, only in age.

I am now aged seventy one but I believe that I have the emotional maturity of a ten year old. The lack of parental guidance and the bad environment in which I was raised seem to have resulted in a lack of development in some areas. There, I believe, lies the root of my problems and the reason that I made so many mistakes was that I was trying to make adult decisions with a childlike mentality.

There is another area that caused so much hurt then and which continues to this day. I have had relationships in my life but they have all been the same. The wonderful lady who helped me so much used to say, "You show me so much in your actions and will do anything possible to show me you care. Why can't you tell me?" I never could, and still can't, say those words so many people wanted to hear - "I love you!" The reason came to me when I was watching a TV show only recently. It was a programme about unwanted children and a man who had been at the same children's home as me expressed the same feeling when he said, "It is impossible to give to someone what you have never had yourself!"

That hit me like a ton of bricks. For many years I have felt guilt because of my inability to express my love to those close to me and I knew that they would have been hurt by this. I now know that I was too immature to pick the right partner and so I hurt that person. I couldn't be a good husband as I didn't know how. I didn't know how to be a good parent and caused pain to a

lot of people, as well as to myself. To summarise, it would have been better if I had never married, had children, or taken on the responsibility of running a business. I was ill-equipped to deal with the everyday pressures of family and business which other people take for granted.

I am married to a wonderful lady with two beautiful step-daughters who still have not heard those three loving words. I hope that this story will help them to understand why.

Many times over the years I tried to find out about my Mum (never anyone else) but I had no success. I have always felt sad at Christmas and especially on Mothers' Day. Since I was eighteen I have always worn a white chrysanthemum on that day and people often looked at me in a funny way. I wear it for the mother I never knew and will continue to do so until the end of my days. This story is supposed to be about unwanted and abandoned children but I will never condemn her as I do not know the circumstances. I would love her, no matter what, as she had her problems, maybe the same as I did.

Several years ago my "foster sister" sent me a newspaper cutting about people who had been brought up in children's homes and had, in many cases, been badly treated. When I asked her about my early life she remembered that I had been in Bidura before being placed in foster care. This information encouraged me to attempt, once more, to seek information about my mother's life. I felt it unlikely that she would still be living but I wanted at least to be able to visit her grave.

Through a family history society a wonderful lady has been researching several generations of my family in order to build up a picture of my mother's background. The research was based on the information contained on my birth certificate and also from my Ward file, a copy of which was obtained from the Department of Community Services.

It was found that my mother had been married and divorced twice up till 1945. My birth certificate indicated that my parents had married in 1929, but this could not have been correct as my mother was still legally married to her first husband. After my admission to Bidura in 1934 it seems that my father moved to northern New South Wales where he married in 1938. A researcher with special expertise was able to establish that my father's half-brother was still living as were the son and daughter born after my father's marriage. They knew nothing of my existence but after the initial shock were happy to tell me something of my father's life and to give me copies of various certificates.

My birth certificate noted that I had an older sister - it is still to be established whether she was a full or half sister.

Because I had been a State Ward I qualified for assistance with family research from the Salvation Army's Special Search Service. It seemed that my mother had a history of mental illness and there was a possibility that she might have died in an institution. Tracing her whereabouts after 1945 was difficult as we did not know which surname she would have used.

The Salvation Army soon found out that my mother had died in 1963 at the age of fifty three. Two years before her death she had re-married her first husband. Three children were listed on her death certificate but my name did not appear. There was no reference to her second marriage so I do not know if other children were born. The funny thing is that if my brothers and sisters turned up at my front door I would not know what the hell to do with them. That part of my life is dead within me - too much water has flowed under the bridge.



I heard about the CLAN organization late in 2003 when some of their news letters were given to me. The organization is a support group for mostly older people who were brought up "in care". When I read the personal accounts of members it was as though someone had switched on the light. For the first time in my life I realized that other people felt as I did and that difficulties which had persisted for a life time could be attributed to poor care in early years.

So what are we left with? I cannot blame the world for my misfortunes because, after all, I did the crime so I paid the time - whether I was abandoned or unwanted seems to be irrelevant. However, I fervently believe that if the system had taken a different approach I may have been better equipped to handle life.

When a child is sent to a Home, whatever the circumstances, those places should be scrutinised on a regular basis. The people who staff them should be of a caring and compassionate nature and should see that the children's emotional needs are met.

When placing these children under the care of others (eg foster parents) the same rules should apply. Don't leave it till seventy one years later to discover that a painful medical condition I have developed was caused by having polio as a child. X-rays show that I had twenty seven fractures, mostly left unattended. Some injuries are too personal to mention.

I thank the system for the chronic stutter that I developed because of bad treatment.

Despite my stutter I had a good singing voice, as well as a sense of humour, and at one time used to do a Club act. But believe me, I never felt funny.

I thank the system for denying me the feeling of love, for the inability to either give or accept it and for the hurt this has caused to anyone close to me.

Thank you that at seventy one years of age I never lock the front door if I am at home on my own and the embarrassment I feel. I can never take a shower until I hear my wife coming home as I cannot do it when I'm the only one in the house.

More information should have been available to help people trace their family and all assistance should have been given. After all, we were human beings, not discarded objects. Who knows, I may have been able to find my mother and, for better or worse, that should have been my decision and mine alone. Anything would be better than looking at a piece of paper which represents my mother's life - big bloody deal.

I could go on and on but I am finding it hard to get to the point. I believe the overlying factor must be that society, as it was then, did not cause all my problems but helped to give me the character defects which made it difficult for me to cope with them. It would be nice to know that these problems are not as prevalent today as then - even so, a child can only be a product of the environment it is brought up in.

The following statement, made by an Environmentalist, seems to sum it up for me: "Get a child to plant a tree and help him nurture it, and there will be less reason that he will want to destroy that tree when he is older." Maybe that applies to a child - put his feet in a firm foundation while he is growing up and he may value that life forever.

I have not used the names of any people or places as the events happened long ago. It would be nice to know that these circumstances no longer occur or hopefully to a far lesser extent than in my time. No one can expect a holiday camp just a healthy environment for people like myself to grow up in.

While I know little about my birth family, what about my present family - I have a wonderful wife, two lovely step-daughters and five beautiful grand children. My wife and I visit them several times a week but I only stay for a short time or, if we stay for a meal, I leave very shortly after. My step-daughter is very family minded and I have seen the look of disappointment on her face. Rest assured, girls, it doesn't hurt you as much as it does me. This situation is one of my reasons for writing this story. Seeing the grandkids go to their Nanna so readily, yet being distant with me, is a terrible hurt and rubs the raw nerves of emotion that have well and truly had their share. But who can blame them? When those kids grow up and talk about their childhood memories they will probably say that Nanna loved them a lot but Poppy didn't seem to care that much. If they only knew that Poppy would have swapped everything for the ability to show that he cared. What a wonderful legacy of myself I leave to those children. The irony is that people like us are going to pay until the day we die for a set of circumstances which were beyond our control. As the young people say these days, "That bloody well sucks!"

Just recently, while doing a job for a friend, his mate and young daughter came to visit. When they were about to leave the little girl asked if she could stay longer - when her father said, "OK", she put her arms around his neck and, with devotion written all over her face said, "I love you Daddy!" I practically choked on my sandwich and I said to her father, "You know, I'd kill to have what you just had!" I still don't know if he knew what I meant.

Seems pretty childlike for a bloke nudging seventy one, eh, but my emotions have run and ruined my life for as long as I can recall.

My life these days is devoted to voluntary work in the community and especially in nursing homes. When I visit the homes I often see photos of beautiful young women on their wedding day. I say to myself, "Maybe my mum was like that, once;" and then I look at the little old lady and think that this is how she would look now. So even the good things I do are tinged with sadness. I never attend their "thank you" parties and cannot accept praise of any kind, even in the areas in which I know it has been justified. I still do not think I am worthy of it and my satisfaction comes from the good feelings I get from doing the job, not from a pat on the head because I did it.

They say that you come into the world with nothing and that is the way you will leave - how true. The only regret I have is that I was unable to have a fulfilling life.

When I was young I loved music, painting and reading - what you would call the gentler things of life. Yet I lived a life that was entirely different. In the past some of my writings were published and I have won prizes. They just go into the drawer, among the many letters of recognition of my involvement in community service, and hold little meaning.

Today I write poetry on a whim. My poems are always based heavily on emotions. If it is a sad poem it is because I am sad. If it is funny it is because I would like to be funny. Be it romantic or loving it is because I would like to be romantic or loving. They are always based on what I would like to be and the way I would like to behave or feel. I don't know if people realise that my poems are about myself and my unfulfilled life.

Following is one of my poems. The place exists only in my imagination and describes an ideal world of which I would love to have been a part.

STOP AND SMELL THE FLOWERS

A golden moon is shining o'er a mist enshrouded hill,  
 A night so wonderfully silent even birds dare not be still,  
 Hushed by its beauty as morning to us awakens,  
 As dawn in all its splendour from night once more is taken.

Rambling rivulets of a gently flowing stream,  
 Playing hide and seek meandering gently like a dream,  
 Timid animals experience serenity and drink their fill,  
 And gaze in rapturous wonder at the gold enshrouded hill.

This heavenly peaceful haven was also made for us  
 But we do not see it as blindly through life we rush,  
 To linger in solitude even for just an hour  
 That even I like all God's creatures could stop and smell the flowers.

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I don't know if anyone will be interested in this story  
 - I still have difficulty in not thinking that it is a bloody  
 great load of self pity. Remember, I was asked to write it, so  
 warts and all is what you get. If, however, it helps in any way I  
 am glad for that. If you are one of my mob I honestly know how  
 you feel as you have to walk the walk to talk the talk.

This story is dedicated to my son and daughter, my two step-  
 daughters and my dear wife. It was not written as an apology  
 but in the hope that you may all know the reason I could never  
 give to you what I now know you all wanted and needed so much.  
 Writing it may compensate in some way for not being able to say  
 or do those words or actions that must have made you feel that  
 I thought you unworthy of them. It is my gift to you all to  
 ask for your forgiveness, but most of all, to hope that you can love  
 me enough to understand why I am like I am.

In closing, if there is a loving God, and I guess there has  
 to be, in the scheme of things, I ask that he grant me one wish  
 when I leave this world - that is to return to the warmth and  
 safety I experienced in my cubby house among the feed bags,  
 which was the only place where I have ever felt peace.

Special thanks to a dear friend who has found out so much  
 about my life and has gone to great effort to make it readable.

*Y my Hampton  
 Port Maguire*

