

Bruce and Jackie Farrands  
Rabbit Flat Roadhouse  
PO Box 1096  
Alice Springs, NT, 0871  
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Dear **MANAGEMENT & STAFF, TOURIST INFO. CENTRE,**

Sadly, like a broken record, I apologise for our long overdue response to the scores of Christmas greetings for 2011, which still remain unopened as I write this letter in June 2012. When I get this draft away to a friend in Alice who types it up and prints the copies, I will read the letters and respond.

Speaking for myself and as the author of the yearly Rabbit Flat letter, I have, since my teenage years, always felt 'down' at Christmas time and gradually 'pick-up' when the general populous returns to work.

Having said that, we wish each and every one a happy and healthy year and please don't stop writing to us, because we do like to hear how you all are getting on.

Strangely enough, even with no public to serve, there is still more than enough to do. At least we can get on with the gardening (Jackie's domain) and weather reporting (mine) and the multitude of repairs and maintenance jobs without too much interruption. There is however, a few 'big ticket' jobs which will be difficult for us.

Over the years many have conjectured as to how and why Rabbit Flat evolved the way it did and with many "why don't cha's" chucked in along the way.

To be very frank, it has been a very stressful and unpleasant journey, for most of the time, for both of us.

There has never been enough electricity or water or amenities or security etc. to satisfy the wide range of traveler's needs. As I have stated on many occasions over the years, the travelling public ranged from Myalls to Millionaires and every socio-economic group and race in between.

We are compelled by our own personal standards and by law to keep our premises clean and orderly and must not discriminate against anyone's race, religion or gender. A very tall order when you are always short of the financial wherewithal to establish all that was needed early in the piece.

However, we are the first to acknowledge that no one forced us into this venture as it was our own dream of being self employed in a remote area, where the soil had not been tilled before.

As I write (this is draft No. 4), it has slowly dawned on me that there are numerous people over the years who have been of immense help to us and I feel they need to be acknowledged.

As a result, this is going to be my longest letter, but I hope it will not be a valedictory one.

As time is catching up on the both of us (now into our early 70's) I want to say thanks for the memories to so many of you, past and present. Unfortunately some names will be overlooked, but it will be unintentional.

I think my idea of perhaps writing a book one day is slowly receding into the distance.

If we could have an extra 10 years of good health, we would have to consider ourselves fortunate.

I have worked out that the only way I can try and remember people's names and events is to work in chronological order. Some stories I may have told before, but we'll see how we go.

We were married in Perth in January, 1968.

Friends from my pre-station life days organised the wedding and reception for us and for this we were very grateful.

My mate from schools days, Ray Hansen, was our Best Man and his wife, Lorraine, was Matron of Honour.

Together with Ray's folks and the Dodds and Sullivan families, we were made very welcome and treated to some good and relaxing times.

A mate of Ray and Lorraine shouted us a 44 gallon drum of petrol for the Bedford truck and both Ray and Lorraine and my brother John helped us financially.

Jackie's sister, Micheline, who lived in Paris, made Jackie's wedding dress and only for the decency of a Customs Official, the dress would have been delayed until after our wedding.

We drove back to the Alice that January, via Kalgoorlie, Docker River, the Olgas and Ayers Rock.

We lived in a tent in Greenleaves Caravan Park for several months and in May, drove out to Tanami to erect the "Tent Motel" for Ansett Pioneer.

The lead up to this venture and our eventual starting Rabbit Flat in 1969 I described in last year's letter and is on our website.

It was at Greenleaves that we became friends with Mildred and John McCarthy, Cyb and Iris Anderson and John Whitehead. Cyb and Iris passed through Rabbit Flat on two occasions over the years and were very helpful. On their last trip Cyb helped me install the bowser on the un-leaded fuel tank. Iris has kept in contact throughout the years and has always been very supportive.

We already knew the truckies Frank and Oriel Fidler and Bob and Oriel Clarke, who, over the next decade, carted every conceivable thing to Rabbit Flat and beyond.

On our 2<sup>nd</sup> trip to Tanami in '68 to work for Anaconda, the Works Dept. grader crew came back for another go at the border track and a maintenance grade back to Alice. The operators were Burke Kleeman and Bob Hampton.

Towards August, while Anaconda and ourselves were packing up to leave, the Main Roads Inspector, Harold Jolliffe dropped in on an inspection trip. Harold (we called him Mr Jolliffe) was close to retiring and was very well respected by all who knew him.

One day Jackie was doing our washing by hand, which entailed a large galvanised tub and a corrugated glass scrub board. I had rigged a rope clothes line strung between 2 posts.

Just as she finished pegging all of the washing on the line, a gust of wind came through, broke the rope and all of her laboriously hand scrubbed wet washing dropped onto the red dirt. She was distraught.

After I had repaired the line (and seriously considered heading for the hills at a fast lope) I helped with the clean-up.

Quietly, old Harold remarked to me: "You know, she is a little Britain". This would have been the highest compliment that the old fellow could bestow on anyone.

When I passed this compliment onto Jackie sometime later, thinking she would be chuffed, I was startled by her vehement response.

"I am not zee British, I am zee French."

"For Christ's sake Jackie, it's a compliment!"

"I don't care, I am zee French."

"Bloody sorry I mentioned it."

I never told the old fellow her reaction because it would have hurt his feelings but I was fully aware of where he was coming from.

Burke Kleeman confided in me at a later date that Harold had also remarked:

“I wonder if Bruce knows how lucky he is?”

I never told Jackie about that comment, until now, as life is bloody hard enough as it is.

To be brutally honest, Bruce didn't, but does now.

When our “Tent Motel” venture at Tanami was washed out in mid '68, an old fellow from Qld, Jack Green, wrote to us & offered morale support. We corresponded for a few years until Jack passed away. His daughter, Mrs. Betty Lowe, continued the correspondence & when Mrs. Lowe became too ill, her husband Ted continued the contact, which he still does to this day. Thank you Ted.

After living and working in Alice for the next 10 months and negotiating widely, we commenced our Rabbit Flat venture in June 1969, on 5 acres of land, beneath a mulga tree and on the edge of the rapidly drying waterhole.

Bill & Mrs. Wilson (our financial backers) soon had small truck loads of sundry stores and equipment ferrying in from their farm in Balaklava, S.A. Their son Alec and Robbie Robinson were the first arrivals.

Geo Peko, a mining company from Tennant Creek, set up their base camp 100m away. Geologists Gary Jones and the head sherrang (whose name escapes me) and Camp Boss Cec Dempsey were the first arrivals. Just prior to Jackie and I arriving on site in '69, Burke Kleeman and Bobby Blight (Works Dept. Grader Operators) graded an airstrip 3 miles to the north of our campsite, on a laterite ridge, for Geo Peko. Peko had surveyed the strip in '68 after we had shown them our site.

In '72 or '73 the Dept. of Civil Aviation (DCA) surveyed the site for a new airstrip for us, half a mile south of our buildings. Malcolm Holt bulldozed the airstrip and the taxi-way and Works Dept. did the grading.

Queensland Mines, from Mt Isa, began to look for 'rare earths' in the Killi Killi Range, which straddles the NT/WA border.

Joe and Marie Mahood, from Mongrel Downs, Gerry Adamson from Billiluna and Les Roche from Lake Gregory Stations, all dropped in and helped in numerous ways.

Ferdie Bergman drilled our 1<sup>st</sup> water bore and erected the windmill. He also drilled a bore for Geo Peko. Over a period of many years in the '70's, Ferdie did a lot of infrastructure work for us. A very hard living and hard working bloke.

Bureau of Meteorology Darwin installed the 1<sup>st</sup> Weather Station in August '69. Employees were Ray Casey and Alec Williams. They also helped us with a multitude of tasks.

John Whitehead drove up from Alice and gave us a hand. John was very helpful on several occasions as he passed through while prospecting. We lost contact for awhile when he went back down south to get married.

Colonel Rose and his old 2<sup>nd</sup> World War Navy Commander mate, Dudley Barley, dropped in and had a good yarn. The Colonel was very instrumental in helping us get the lease. A terrible larrikin.

Norm Gurr, a 1<sup>st</sup> World War veteran who was caretaking a mining lease at Tanami for a shady character named Livingstone, drove down most Saturday nights for a yarn and a drink. Norm had told his long suffering wife that he came down to attend a service presided over by the “Reverend Stumpy Southwark”. Southwark is a South Australian beer.

Grader driver Burke Kleeman appeared once more, this time his offsider was Bobby Blight. They graded the 1<sup>st</sup> access track into our lease from the Tanami Track, a mile to the south. Colourful characters, they called each other Petal and Petunia, but they were far from 'limp-wristed'.

Frank & Oriel Fidler and Bob & Oriel Clarke began their multiple loads over 10 plus years, supplying us and numerous Stations with 'you-name-it' and back loading with cattle.

Balgo Hills Mission staff now used this access to Alice in preference to the previous Mongrel Downs route.

In November, the 1<sup>st</sup> vehicle load of Aboriginals dropped in to suss us out and then the grog runs from Hooker Creek, Balgo and Yuendumu began.

Only one coach came through while we were under the mulga tree and that was an Ansett Pioneer, chartered by the Australian Inland Mission from Melbourne. The driver was Graham Phillips.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) in Alice were always very efficient and helpful. Dave Bartlett took over from George Brown as Base OIC and his 2IC was Peter Robinson. Peter figures later in this letter as the coordinator between myself and the RFDS and the hospital regarding Jackie's medivac when she dropped the 2 Joeys in August '75.

Peter, during WW2, worked at the top secret Bletchley Park communication intercept establishment (in the town of Bletchley, in Buckinghamshire, England) for Allied Intelligence.

The years of '71, '72 & '73 were very busy, until the 3 very wet years of '73, '74 & '75 retarded a lot of traffic.

Mil McCarthy & Jack Ransome were our 1<sup>st</sup> off-siders. Ansett Pioneer coaches began to overnight in our tents. Coach Drivers (Captains) Max Burgess & Farouk were the trail blazers. Farouk, so nick-named because he looked like the Egyptian King.

King Ranch (of Texas, USA), owners of Brunette Downs Station on the Barkly Tablelands, began to de-stock the British Breed cattle from their Mount House Station in the Kimberlies and re-stocked with Santa Gertrudis.

As a consequence, thousands of cattle came through here, en-route to Alice, as other Kimberley stations also took advantage of the outlet.

The Truckies were a rough and ready breed of blokes, extremely hard working and always operating under tiring and adverse conditions. No whinging, but decent to a man (and woman).

Frank and Oriel Fidler (especially Oriel), who were no 'spring-chickens, were continually amongst the fray. Oriel's courageous efforts over the years were nothing short of awe inspiring.

Characters like Wally Spears, who drove a 'cab-over' Mercedes truck. He named it "Hitler's Revenge".

Another Truckie drove a Hino and he called it "He No Good".

Uncle Penis, Dick Rogers, tough as nails, a very hard man, but deep down, very intelligent. As he remarked once that when you are sitting behind the wheel for endless miles, you let your thoughts wander. Dick loaned me his bulldozer to do work on our airstrip and taxi-way. I clocked up 30 hours and all he said was "refuel and look after it".

The names of the Truckies are too numerous to name and many I have forgotten or didn't know, but a breed unto themselves. Like the cameleers in bygone years, these men and a few women, carted every conceivable item imaginable to build and supply the outback. They still do it to this day. "I doffs me 'at".

In these first few years, National Mapping camped here with their Aero Disc parties. They were 'tying in' on the map of Australia the 'Trig Points' and 'Bench Marks' that the Dept. of the Interior had installed in '67.

Canberra's Bureau of Mineral Resources did extensive drilling and mapping over a several year period. Unbeknown to us, they named a small range of hills to the north after us. Unbelievably, the name persists, even after 'Land Rights' consumed most of the Tanami. Perhaps it sounds Aboriginal.

Mining companies began to proliferate. Seems that Uranium and Gold were on top of the agenda.

Geo Peko drilled and explored in the Granites area extensively for gold.

**BROTHER**

My ~~brother~~ Ted (not long back from Vietnam) and his wife Jeannie, together with Gerry Adamson (from Billiluna) helped construct the 1<sup>st</sup> septic tank at the new fibreglass ablution blocks.

Wilson's trucks continued to deliver building material and stores.

Ferdie drilled bore No.2 and erected the overhead diesel tanks.

First Police Patrol was Sergeant John (Black Rat) Lincoln and TaTaTaffy Williams. These patrols emanated from Alice and did the Settlements circuit until stations were built on the Settlements. Settlements were eventually called Communities.

First Settlement Police Station north west of Alice was Yuendumu, in about '73/74. Gary O'Donohue was the 1<sup>st</sup> Officer.

As the early '70's began to roll, the tourist coaches began to proliferate. Most memorable were Ansett Pioneer, Bill & Doreen Hand's "Sundowner" and Bill King's 4x4 20 seaters.

Ansett Pioneer's Drivers/Coach Captains in those early days preceding "Political Correctness" took no prisoners and the adventurous tourists lapped it up.

Bill and Doreen Hand, arguably ran one of the best shows on the road, in that their passengers were encouraged to engage with each other and with the outback and its inhabitants as the tour progressed. All were the richer for it. Jackie had done an 80 day "Around Australia" tour with them in '66.

Who could forget Don (NayBob) Nayler and his 'mate for life' Vivienne. Don was a Queenslander, who in a previous life had been a drover. He spoke with a soft, but deep, slow outback Queensland drawl.

King's would pick up their passengers in Alice (as did Ansett Pioneer), some of them only hours out of southern suburbia and within a day they were at Rabbit Flat.

Don confided that it took a couple of days to "get 'em road broken". His affectionate way of comparing a mob of fresh cattle to a fresh group of tourists with minimal outback experience.

Don and Viv loved the Tanami Track and desert so much that they named their daughter Tanami – correctly pronounced "Tan-a-mee".

In the early years we employed 2 wonderful very hard working women. The 1<sup>st</sup> was a Station lass, Julie Mercer (now Mrs. Kevin Wyatt) and after her, a young Canadian woman, Laurie Gamblin. Both women took all of the trials and tribulations of outback life in their stride, with never a whinge or complaint.

Tommy (the slave) Anderson, an old American prospector, stayed awhile with his 2<sup>nd</sup> WW Blitz truck.

Jackie's father André gave us a hand in 1971 for few months. Poor old bugger arrived 'jet and road train lagged', in that it took him just about the same time from Paris to Alice as from Alice to Rabbit Flat.

He could never comprehend how his Parisienne daughter could exist happily in such a remote locality. Jackie and I both wonder ourselves. Such is life.

The Mahoods left Mongrel Downs in 1971 and eventually Fred and Pam Colson managed it for about 5 years. They were both of immense help.

Gerry and Nola Adamson left Billiluna about this same time and incoming managers Les and Jan Verdon were also very helpful in numerous ways, as were Alan and Rae Walters from Carranya.

In 1970 the Grader Operators were Dave (Woody) Woodford and Billy Hargreaves.

### **Before I continue, a bush vignette**

When I went to work on Billiluna Station in '64, Father John McGuire (respectfully known as Father Mac or Old Mac) was the Parish Priest on Balgo Hills Mission next door.

He had taken over that infrastructure poor but spiritually strong outback mission sometime in the '50's. He was a strong willed and dedicated clergyman.

When the Billiluna stock camp would be mustering close to the Balgo boundary, Father Mac would come across with a vehicle load of young Aboriginals to pick up a 'killer'. A 'killer' is a freshly slaughtered bullock. He would camp overnight and leave at Piccanniny daylight.

On 2 occasions, once in '64 and another time in '65, when everyone had crashed in their swags, Mac and I sat around the campfire and discussed religion. On both occasions the result was inconclusive. On the last occasion, Mac got upset with me and declared that he would never discuss religion with me again.

I felt disappointed and hurt, because I respected the old fellow. As I am a 'Calathumpian', I think he thought I was trying to be smart, but that was far from the truth.

Fast forward 4 years to August '69, beneath the mulga tree at Rabbit Flat. Father Mac and Johnny Porky (a Ukrainian lay worker) and a few Aboriginal lads, enjoyed a meal and a yarn at our campfire.

Unfortunately, the conversation turned to the French lack of conviction to Catholicism, which stirred Jackie up and the end result was Mac leaving in a huff.

Porky said to me in his mangled English, "I sink vee mite be goink."

We knew that the church was giving him a break from the desert in the next year and shouted him an extended holiday overseas. He was then posted from the hottest to the coldest part of Australia, Nhill in Victoria.

Not a nice way to depart, certainly from my point of view, considering that, like a handful of others, we shared the rigors of the outback.

I need not have fretted. In February the next year, 1970, at Piccanniny daylight, I was up on the ridge above our campsite, putting my boots on and preparing to kick the concrete mixer into gear, to pour another floor slab in our 1<sup>st</sup> shed.

A small truck appeared out of the gloom from the west. Occasionally in life, certain people and events are impregnated into the hard wiring of the brain box. This was one of them for me.

Out stepped a wiry, smallish bloke, dressed in a 'Jacky Howe' singlet and black shorts. He appeared to be all legs, in that his shorts were pulled nearly up to his armpits. He looked like a walking clothes peg. As he walked across to me he was obviously so bandy legged that he would have absolutely no success in the greasy pig chase.

"Are you Bruce Farrands?" he bellowed.

I answered, a bit warily, in the affirmative.

With that, he approached me and threw out his arm in a wide horizontal baseball pitcher-like sweep and shook hands. Very firm shake.

"Harry Abotomelly is me name. I work at Balgo and have a message for you from Father Mac."

Holy hell, I thought, here we go. But I need not have worried. "What's the message?" I asked.

"Tell that Protestant bastard at Rabbit Flat that there are no hard feelings."

The sense of relief and the ridiculousness of the situation hit me and I began to laugh and was soon joined by Harry.

Outback humour and camaraderie was still alive and well.

A few years later Mac came through with a coach load of parishioners from Nhill and they camped overnight. Nearly everyone wore an Eureka insignia, which at the time didn't mean much to me. Some years later, when I twigged, I thought, "You cheeky old bastard!"

Some time ago, Mac joined his maker and with a bit of luck we might meet again and sit around a campfire and continue our conversations. No doubt he'll be very perplexed if we end up in the same camp.

Also in this period, early to mid '70's. the Dept. of Transport and Works in Alice, began to home in on the numerous problem areas of the track. The crews were predominantly Govt. employees, but also with an involvement of private sub-contractors. The efficiency and discipline was top rate and I put this down to no nonsense' men such as Ian Lake, Bryan Carige, Bruce Stanes, Kevin Wyatt, David Jones, Warren Wegert and Tom Brown, just to mention a few.

In '75 and '77 large Works Dept teams and contractors began to clear and form the new alignment for the Tanami Track. As the years have progressed, some bitumen has been laid and with continual up-grading, it is fair enough to now call the track' a 'road' or flasher still, a 'Highway'.

Some names of the road crews that come to mind are: Dave Woodford, Lynton Espie, John Foss, Mick Lake, Pat Lake, Ian Lake, Crowbar Lake, Snowy Knowels, Fred Willis, Alby Maher, Peter Franey, Bill Curly, David Jones, Bruce Stanes, Bryan Carige, Brian & Ruth Sliep, Kevin Wyatt, Warren Wegert and the King brothers, et al.

Special mention to Bruce Stanes of the Works Dept. and contractors Bryan Carige and David Jones, who all did an immense amount of work for us. Bert Joiner helped me construct a large section of the main building.

At the end of '74, Laurie Gamblin returned to Canada, big rains knocked the trucking and tourist industries temporarily on their heads and the Human Rights Commission was quietly coercing us to resume alcohol sales to aboriginals. Cyclone Tracey devastated Darwin, Brisbane was flooded and Rabbit Flat began its own mini drama.

In January '75 Jackie suspected that she was pregnant. As she had been bleeding for several weeks she became worried and luckily was able to get a lift into Alice with a Stock and Station Agent.

It was a very uncomfortable and painful trip.

On the Saturday morning she went straight around to the hospital and spoke to a 'Sari clad' female Doctor Mari (or Mary). Jackie explained to her, her condition and where she was from. The doctor's immediate response was "Do wee wee in bottle and come back Monday."

"But I'm in some discomfort, have travelled 600km's and the test for pregnancy is not paramount, but I need to be checked for what I suspect is an infection."

The non-negotiable and adamant reply was: "Do wee wee in bottle and come back Monday."

Somewhat taken aback and worried, Jackie went back to Bob and Oriel Clarke's house in Alice, where she was staying and returned to the hospital at "sparrow fart" Monday morning.

Luckily she saw a different doctor, who confirmed that she was pregnant and prescribed medication for an infection. He asked her to come back for a check-up in one month's time but she asked could it be two months, because of logistical reasons. He agreed.

In two month's time the 'wet' had set in and all roads and airstrips were unserviceable. Over the RFDS transceiver a further month was asked for and agreed, for the next consult.

In that next month the 'wet' had not abated and that consult was also cancelled.

In May the road traffic started to flow and we once again became vey busy. Jackie gave up the idea of the consult and she became obviously very pregnant.

One evening she hemorrhaged fairly badly and we consulted the Aerial Medical Doctor over the transceiver the next morning.

She was told that she was not to travel under any circumstances but gave her special dispensation to drive the 50km's across to Mongrel Downs to see the Air Med Doctor on one of their routine clinical flights.

Air Med were prohibited from landing on unlicensed airstrips. Our airstrip was in excellent condition, but was unlicensed.

As we had no off-siders, Jackie drove herself to Mongrel Downs.

The doctor prodded and poked for a considerable time and obviously seemed to have some concerns. When Jackie asked him "was there a problem?", he was non committal. He put the birth date as late August or early September.

Pam Colson (Fred's wife), being the mother of twins herself, told Jackie that by her size, it was a fair chance of a multiple birth.

With road construction crews, tourist coaches, road trains, self-propelled tourists, mining exploration companies and Aboriginals, it had become a very busy time for the 2 of us.

Jackie received no more check-ups.

After sundown on 5<sup>th</sup> August, while we were talking to Alan Walters (Carranya Station) in our kitchen, Jackie lifted a shoulder of beef out of the large fridge and unbeknown to Alan or myself, her water had broken.

Jackie went to the toilet and padded herself up and re-joined the conversation. When Alan left at 8pm, I closed the premises and so began a long effort to raise the RFDS base in Alice, on the transceiver.

In those early days, you tuned your transceiver to the appropriate frequency, relative to the time of day, blew a measured amount of time on the 'twin whistle' and hoped that the pitch would trigger the alarm in Alice.

As a back-up, I repeatedly gave a voice message:

"This is 8 Sierra India Yankee (8SIY) Rabbit Flat with a medical emergency. If anyone can hear this message, would you please contact the Royal Flying Doctor Base in Alice Springs and ask them to come on frequency. Thank you."

At approx. 10pm, Peter Robinson, the base 2IC, came on frequency and he arranged for a RFDS Urgent Medivac at daylight next morning.

When we were about to sign-off, Jackie called from the bedroom:

"Better find out what to do, as birth is imminent."

Luckily, Peter was still there, but his knowledge of child birthing was as informed as mine – zilch!

He patched me through to Sister Rae Jones, who gave me instructions, which I furiously wrote down. She wished us well and we signed-off.

At 1:30 on a bitterly cold August 6<sup>th</sup> 1975 morning, Jackie gave birth to twin boys in our bedroom. We now know that Dan was 1<sup>st</sup> and while attending to him, Glen appeared and was a 'breach' delivery.

We found out what the catheter in the medical chest was for and luckily had butcher's twine and cotton wool on hand.

As I was all 'fingers and thumbs', Jackie sat up to help me attend to the boys. They were 7 weeks premature.

When the fuss had died down, I tried to raise the RFDS again to appraise them of the situation, but I was unsuccessful.

The Medivac arrived at 8am and I walked the 200m over to the taxi-way to meet them. The pilot was Graham Winterflood and the sister was Maureen Eason.

They were unaware that Jackie had given birth (let alone twins), but were equipped with a humidity crib.



After Jackie and the boys and the placenta were checked, the boys were put 'head-to-toe' in the crib and all took off for Alice.

Jackie told me later that there was an honour guard of sorts on the tarmac at the airport in Alice, made up of pilots and others who knew us and had been advised of the incoming cargo.

Jackie and the boys were rushed to the hospital and the lengthy battle to save them began. We cannot speak highly enough of the dedicated 24/7 emergency care that the whole hospital staff gave to them.

The boys were in Intensive Care for some many weeks and Dan for longer because he had an operation on one hand.

Jackie said her hospital room became 'chock-a-block' full of flowers and well wishing cards and messages. The only omission, it appears, was from me.

She was castigated by the same doctor who had examined her at Mongrel Downs some months prior, as to why she hadn't come in earlier. He also acknowledged that he suspected a multiple birth, but didn't tell her "in case she panicked". As she pointed out to him, in no uncertain manner: 1. She understood the birth-date was several weeks hence (& she was exceptionally busy) and 2. Did he think that she would be prone to panic living in such a remote locality as Rabbit Flat.

Wooden spoons for some Doctors, but silver ones with bells and whistles to all of the other medical staff.

The media had been advised of the unusual event and the headlines invariably read:

**"The Remote Township of Rabbit Flat in the Northern Territory Doubled Its Population Overnight"**

We received 300 responses from all over Australia and even some from overseas.

We often wondered how the media got hold of the story and a few years ago we found out. Graham Winterflood and his wife Chris, turned up at Rabbit Flat and stayed overnight. Graham informed us that he was the 'whistleblower'. It appears that I had made a comment in our bedroom that we would get a lot of publicity out of this event. I don't remember it, but Graham wouldn't have made it up.

As a result, en-route to Alice, Graham advised the Control Tower at the airport of the situation and when on the ground, he contacted the media and the rest is history.

After some many days it became obvious that there was nothing Jackie could contribute, so she came home to help me.

After some time, both boys came home and over the years, with a few hiccups, developed into very healthy and productive citizens of our country.

Several years later I was medivac'd myself to Alice and after jabbing a needle into my 'derriere' the Sister identified herself as Rae Jones. In my painful haze I think I thanked her for the midwifery lesson, but not for the needlework. Good onya Rae.

While Jackie was in Alice with the boys, I was flat out like the proverbial 'lizard'. I had people of all shapes and sizes running out of my ears, needing all types of service and I still had to do the 6 daily weather reports, maintain the water and electricity supplies etc. etc.

Mentally and physically, I was 'down'.

Out of nowhere, 2 Samaritan couples appeared and helped me out of the mess. I can remember the surname of one couple, it was Ellers. They had a young child with them and they owned a Holden franchise in Adelaide. The other couple were also from Adelaide and were friends.

For 2 solid days the ladies cooked and cleaned, did my washing and helped serve the public. The blokes helped refuel vehicles, served and did running repairs on my electrical generators.

They then continued their journey, having asked for nothing in return. I doubt, given my condition at the time, that I was able to convey to them adequately, how thankful I was for their thoughtful assistance. I have never forgotten them.

In the big 'wets' of '73 & '74 & into early '75, the road was so bad that we went practically 18 months without any trade.

Frank & Oriel Fidler and Bob & Oriel Clarke could, on occasion, with a lot of difficulty, get their semi-trailers to Chilla Well, south of the marsh country. Ourselves and others north of the marshes would 'skull drag' our 4x4's in and around the marshes and ferry much needed supplies to their various destinations.

Our acute worry was not only the shortage of cash for the stores, but more importantly our debt to the Wilsons. We cashed our Life Assurance Policy (with much resistance from the company) and lost plenty, but were able to pay for our stores.

Traffic started to flow in about April/May '75.

In the meantime, the Wilsons went broke, due to not only the road conditions (no trucks, no cattle out to market), but the whole cattle industry went into a sharp decline.

In 1976 the pressure from the grog runners ramped up. We closed for a full month to try & stabilise the situation. I attended a 'Land Rights' meeting at Amoonguna (an Aboriginal community near Alice) with 15 Traditional Elders and was guaranteed that all outstanding debts would be paid, all harassment to cease & there would be no more claims on our 8 acre block.

Several weeks after re-opening, we had a major disturbance. Luckily, I was on my own, as Jackie & the boys were over-nighting at the Yuendumu Police Station, en-route to Alice for medical checks.

Thirteen Police Officers attended the aftermath of the riot next morning, 11 by aircraft & 2 with paddy wagons from Yuendumu. The officers that I can remember are Kieran McCarthy, Lofty Moffat, Ben Gollige, John Lincoln, Taffy Williams, Bob O'Keefe and Phil Clapin.

For the 1<sup>st</sup> & only time in our 41½ years of operation, I attempted to lay charges, because the whole situation was spirally out of control. The Police apparently were pressured into not laying charges. We were gutted.

From an early age our boys were of immense help to us in numerous ways, including serving the public. The Aboriginal women delighted in being served by the little Jumbajimbis (their skin name) & because they were born at Rabbit Flat, they also had personal Aboriginal names bestowed upon them.

Peter & Bev Seidel took over the management of Mongrel Downs from the Colsons & over their 10 year stint were also of immense help to us, as had been the Colsons. Peter & Bev instigated the name change to Tanami Downs & also negotiated with the authorities for a once fortnightly mail run. Some years later the mail service became weekly.

Tom Hansen (a Danish brickie) & wife Pat & kids, sussed us out on a trip up from Yuendumu in '75/76 & over the next 30 odd years he built ½ of Rabbit Flat. Tom was (& is) a 'Jack-of-all-Trades' and 'Master-of-Many'. A very intelligent & resourceful bloke. Tom & Pat were wiped out in '74 in Darwin with Cyclone Tracey & then spent 5 years at Yuendumu with the Housing Association. When Tom & Pat lived in Alice later, Pat did our shopping for a long time.

In '79 Telecom installed the 'Radio Telephone' network & 10 years later Telecom morphed into Telstra & installed the traditional phone system that we still enjoy to this day. We still correspond with some of the 'old timers'. Telephonists Noelene Brophy, Margaret 'Red' Davey & Helen 'Jedda' Brown and technicians Fred Twohig, Bruce Brophy & Mal Haskard, to name a few.

Around '80/81, the boys were ready for school & by mid 1<sup>st</sup> year, after several disappointing Governesses, Jackie had to take over their Primary School education with 'School of the Air'. Not easy, as French was (& still is) her 1<sup>st</sup> language (unkind) & outback Australianisms her 2<sup>nd</sup>. She battled it out for 7 long, stressful years, while still helping to run the business & putting up with the never ending pressures from the public.

From approx. '77 to '87, before the large mining companies got a go-on, there was a decade of gold prospectors using detectors. Hundreds of ounces were recovered from Tanami & little to nothing from the Granites. Ironically, when the 'big boys' came on site (Granites '83 & Tanami '87) Granites went 'gang-busters' with 'open cuts' & underground, but Tanami battled with a multitude of small 'open cuts'. Prospectors Tony Campbell, John 'the Pom' Barnes & Chris Brown come to mind.

A 'mixed bag' the miners, but generally very good. Before the companies set up their own 'wet canteens', we had an enormous amount of trade from both. It is this trade that helped repay our debt to the Wilsons & put our boys through college.

In a multitude of ways they have been excellent neighbours. They have assisted us & the travelling public in so many situations that they are in fact the 'desert's' SES.

To name a few - Gerry Waugh (Admin), Trevor 'Taipan' Porter (Bulkhaul), Gooky & 'Sexy Remy' Matthews (Roche Bros.), Peter 'Crazy Horse' Krahnbuhl, Shane 'Dunka' Nayda, Walter Rogers, David 'Fannese' Nees, Chris 'Boof' Lee, 'Dirty Berty' Clayton and Daimo Honner (Exploration) & Stan Padgett & Fred Murray from the Tanami Mine.

Virtually every Granites dept. in one form or other has given us assistance, Admin, Security, Medics, Caterers, Stores, Mine Rescue, Exploration, The Mill and contractors Bulkhaul, Roche Bros. and Eltin.

I must pay tribute to a memorable lady, who was with Granites Security for many years, Heather Anderson. Heather was very conscientious & relished the 'cat & mouse' game of outwitting the 'baddies'. For a period of time when she 1<sup>st</sup> came on site, we circled each other warily. Eventually we became firm friends & correspond to this day.

In a predominantly male world, Heather ruffled a few feathers & was awarded a few endearing nick names, such as 'Leather Tits' and 'The Rottweiler'. I'm sure she quietly basked in her notoriety.

I can't overlook my old 'verbal sparring partner', Gold Squad Police Officer, Gert Johnsson. Gert always took the frustratingly opposite view, regardless of the topic.

For a few years in the '70's, Baptist Ministers from several Aboriginal communities held a yearly 'Study Camp' at Rabbit Flat, with several of their Aboriginal parishioners. The Ministers would join us for an evening meal (for which they insisted on paying for) & a pleasurable time was had by all.

One evening, Jackie, without thinking, made a trifle dessert with a generous helping of 'plonk'. After their 'seconds', she came clean and apologised for the oversight. It was unanimously agreed no harm done and it was delicious. Phew! We still correspond with Ivan & Verle Jordan.

In 1988, Dan & Glen commenced their secondary education in Rockhampton, Qld. Because both boys wanted to go through Army Cadets at College, preparatory to enlisting in the Military and as there was no educational facility in the Territory to cater for this request, the Territory Government funded their airfares to & from Rocky, 4 times a year, for 5 years. A very generous and appreciated grant.

Dan is still a serving Officer. He is a Major & is overseas with his family, with a unit in South-East Asia. Dan & Sara have 2 kiddies – Ellie & Marcus.

Glen attained the rank of Corporal with a Commando Unit and left the Military a few years ago & is now an Engine Driver, hauling coal trains into Gladstone, Qld. His wife Nicole works for Bechtel & they have a son, Justin.

Both Dan & Glen did a tour of duty in Timor with the UN & Nicole was with the first insertion in Sept. '99 as an MP. Dan did another deployment with the UN in the Sudan and Glen did a tour in Iraq. Glen also did a short return trip to Timor at a later date when the proverbial, once again, hit the fan.

After the boys completed High School in '92, Jackie's sister Micheline & her husband boarded them in Paris for most of '93. They eventually became ½ literate in 'Frog Lingo'.

**Norforce** - During the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War when the Japanese began to threaten Northern Australia the army established a primarily horse mounted unit called the 'The Nackaroos'. They patrolled from the Kimberlies in WA to Cape York Peninsula in QLD, looking for evidence of Japanese incursions. They were heavily reliant on the local aboriginal populations for information and sustenance. The unit was disbanded at the cessation of hostilities.

In the early to mid 80's the unit was reformed and called Norforce. It is a 'Reserve Army' Unit commanded by regular soldiers and the ranks are overwhelmingly civilians. The civilians are mainly 'Top End' aboriginals, whose knowledge of local terrain is invaluable.

In early '94 Dan and Glen enlisted in Norforce 'Centre Squadron' in Alice Springs. By midyear Dan was accepted into the Royal Military College (RMC), Duntroon. Many years later, after attaining the rank of Major he was Commanding Officer at Centre Squadron for 18 months. After his 6 month stint with the UN in Sudan he then spent the next year 3 years as 2IC Norforce Darwin. In the 'Australia Day Honours' list this year he received a 'Gong'.

Glen stayed in Centre Squadron for the next 4 years and then enlisted into the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion RAR (1RAR) in Townsville. In those 4 years that he was helping us, he was able to do the maximum of 100 days per year as a civilian.

As the 80's rolled into the 90's the pressure from so many disparate groups of travellers became so worrying that we began a 'partial closure' in 1989 (closed 3 days a week). This lasted for 18 years but was obviously fraught with numerous problems. We ceased all sales of wine and spirits and sold beer only until our full closure on 31/12/2010.

Other Safari Tours which were well run and obliging and paid their way were Rex and Patti Ellis of Bush Safari and Peter 'Ned' Kelly and Janet 'Mrs. Ned' Morris of North West Safaris. Both couples ran 'information loaded' tours. Rex is a cameleer 'par excellence'.

Other Police Officers who have been very helpful over the years, Doc Dunbar, Peter Lacey, Murray La Couta, Chantal Fischer (née Parsons), Mick Schumacher, Libby Andrew, Brad Warburton and Sergeant Hunt, just to mention a few as the memory fades.

Chartair were the mail contractors until last year and provided an excellent service. A special mention to Tim Rose who was most helpful on numerous occasions. Old Rosey would be proud of him. The new contractors, NT Air Services, are carrying on the good work. I still refuel the mail plane when required. NTAS have fitted auxiliary wing tip fuel tanks which enables them to do the 700 odd km round trip without refueling here.

Australia Post employees in Alice have always been very helpful. Tom Day in years past and Rachel Price, Postie Joe, Stephen Paterson and Mel Buenviaje to name a few.

The Bushfire Council over a period of many years funded the grading of our firebreaks and provided fire carts.

Many years ago the Dept. of Civil Aviation provided access to a heavy roller for the airstrip. Wally Braiting from Mt Doreen snaffled it from us, the rat.

After the Fidlers and the Clarkes gave the trucking game away, the Parkinson Brothers filled the gap for a few years, then 'Able Freight' run by Bryan and Mary Carige and Greg and Margaret Carige then followed by Kevin and Julie Wyatt, ably assisted by Kevin's sister Pam Carter and offsider Dave Gorey. All gave us an excellent and personal service.

There were a few 'roughies' in amongst it all but by and large we have been very fortunate.

After some 'too-ing and fro-ing' Toll Express eventually took on the contract to supply the Mines and us, amongst others. The Toll manager in Alice, Mark Andresen, is very efficient and cooperative (even for a KIWI). His stock reply to any request is "We'll make it happen" and he does.

The transport subbies are G&S Transport and their main drivers out here are Lance Thomsen and Yogi Lankin. Like truckies of yesteryear and now, they drive day and night on all sorts of roads, in all types of weather and seldom complain. Not within others earshot at least.

Our electrical generating sets in the last 20 years have been assembled, installed and serviced by Con and David Perry. The workmanship is 'Top Notch'. Obviously, I do the refueling and oil changes and routine maintenance, but the testicle work is done by Perry's.

I've said for years that I have 2 marriages, one to Jackie and the other to the Gen. Sets, both 24/7. The financial killer for us is the diesel & oil & spare parts for the Gen. Sets. Sadly with a '**stand-alone system**' (not having access to a Power Grid) alternative energy systems can't provide the 24/7 power that we need. Believe me, I've looked into it deeply on several occasions and if I was convinced that if it was viable I would be "in like Flynn".

Thank you to Dallas Spears & Andy 'Cap' Smith, Wally & Alvena Spears and Barry & Nathan Spears, who separately and conjointly over the many years, have provided excellent service & workmanship regarding transport & fabrication work.

Coles, and later Woolworths, Bush Order departments have over the years provided an excellent service with getting our perishables to the mail plane or trucking company. I only became aware last year that for the many years that Coles delivered our perishables to the airport in Alice (15kms) it was a 'one-off' for us. I always thought it was standard service for all 'Bush Orders'. Thank you.

A special thank you to ex-Health Inspector Albert Lamb & wife Mary. For many years Albert has offered morale support and constantly jiggs me to write a book. I think this is it Albert. Your photography is A1.

Also, thank you to Betty Huntly who was very supportive of Jackie on one of her hospital visits.

Ross Henwood, the Roads inspector, helped us on numerous occasions over several years. Ex-mechanic (though they never are), ex-Copper (was). We had many a hearty laugh about outback characters and events. Was good for the soul, ain't it.

George Sabadin, the Mobil Depot agent in Alice who supplied us with fuel & oils and a swap bowser when Shell wiped us (after 30 years) because our business was too small. George has still allowed us access to an 8200lt tanker for our diesel, which we now use 4 times a year for our own consumption. As one of George's employees told me years ago, if left to Mobil itself, we would have received the same 'bum's rush' as we got from Shell.

Grader operators in recent years who assisted with firebreaks, airstrips and access road - Warren Wegert and sons Garin and Brian, Mick Lake, Kenny Kimlin and Grant Petrick, all good blokes and a job well done. In the past, much appreciated grading work done by Brian and Ruth Sliiep, Bill Curly, Pat Lake, Bryan Carige, Peter Franey, Granites Mine and Jim Napier (Manager of Tanami Downs).

Thank you to John Fidler who helped us for a couple of days a few years ago and visited me in the Adelaide Hospital in '09. John, a long time Territorian, was like a tonic as we reminisced for awhile in that foreign environment. Also thank you to Lindsay Gilmour whose son, Ben (Chartair) flew me to Adelaide and Lindsay drove me to the hospital.

Jim and Stacey Napier took over the management of Tanami Downs in the early 2000's and like the Mahoods, Colsons and Seidels before them, they were both of immense help to us for the 6 years they were there. Their boys chipped in as well. Stacey & the boys helped Jackie on numerous occasions and likewise Jim and the boys to help me.

Before the desert became civilized with proper 'dog & bones' and mail services, the stock and station agents, namely Elders and Bennetts, always dropped in with a loaf of bread and the mail. A time honoured outback tradition, much appreciated, especially by the women folk.

A special thank you to the staff of that much maligned Territory Govt. Agency - Liquor and Licensing. You would have to be 'Solomon' to work your way through this 'Mine Field'. Damned if you do and damned if you don't. We found the officers firm but fair. You cannot ask for more than that. The 'do-gooders' should hang their heads in shame, but sadly 'do-gooders' are generally not intelligent enough to absorb the deep underlying details of many controversial subjects.

Towards the end of last year and early this year, the desert was on fire again for many weeks at a time. Last year Gerry Waugh (Granites Admin) arranged on two occasions for a grader & Mine Rescue to assist us. Tanami Mine and Bill & Lettie Cook from Suplejack Downs also offered assistance. At that time our fire breaks were inadequate. Peter Glover did an excellent grading job.

Early this year when Kenny Kimlin put in extensive breaks, we were confident enough to 'burn back' on our own without assistance. Tanami Mine and Suplejack again offered help on both occasions.

### **Bozo 'the Tanami Track Waif' & Jacky Scott, the Alice Springs 'Dog Lover/Dog Rescuer'**

Around about Easter 2010 (our last year of trading) several travellers over a period of several days made mention of a dog, sitting on the road verge, several k's west of the Tanami Mine. There was no vehicle or people in his vicinity and he had the appearance of a dejected animal who had fallen overboard and was waiting for his owner's return.

He was approx. 670km's from Alice. When approached he would slowly trot away into the scrub.

As business became very brisk, this scenario slipped my mind.

Sometime later (I'm hazy on the time-line) travellers were mentioning a wandering dog, with no 'fixed abode' in the vicinity of a road construction crew, between the Yuendumu Aboriginal Community and Tilmouth Roadhouse, approx. 250km's from Alice. Apparently he didn't belong to any of the construction workers.

The 'time-line' now firms because of Jacky Scott's involvement. Jacky's son, George, was working at a facility 50km's from Alice and some of his work mates had spotted this dog about 60km's west of his work place in mid-May.

Two weeks after being seen by George's workmates, the 'wandering waif' appeared in the bushes near the facility. For several days George tried to entice him into his vehicle so he could give the poor bugger some sustenance.

George eventually succeeded with a food bribe and found him well mannered and affectionate. George rang his mother in town and told her that he had the 'waif' and was bringing him in for her. Jacky had been aware for several days of the situation.

Jacky is well known in Alice as a dog lover and repeatedly rescues strays and endeavours to find them a home. Her diary shows the 'waif' being delivered to her home at 7pm, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2010.

Immediately upon sighting the 'waif', Jacky was positive that she had seen him in Alice in January the previous year, being led on a leash (or vicky versa) by a young bloke. She was fascinated by his white 'wolf-like' appearance. Apparently, 'the wolf' belonged to the young fellow's girlfriend and had to be kept inside because he would run away.

The girlfriend was leaving town shortly and Jacky never saw him again, until what she was certain was now a re-appearance.

Jacky is positive the 'waif' is the 'white wolf'.

Apart from not having enough room for a large & active animal and because he was technically found at a 'work place', he had to be taken to the RSPCA pound. Jacky developed a very strong rapport with the 'waif/wolf' and visited him 4 to 5 time a week with 'chicken necks' to supplement the pound's cuisine.

She plastered posters around town, trying to find a home for him. Finally someone was found who was willing to give him a home and off he went to ¼ acre blocks in suburbia.

Four families later, in as many months and being continually tied up in small yards (because he could jump 6' fences) and repeat returns to the pound, his welcome was wearing thin. His last escape was within 4 hours of being shown his new abode and 2 days later he was scratching at the door of the Vet clinic at 7.30am. Perhaps he thought the Vet might return his 'stones'.

The RSPCA Pound supervisor's patience was running out and she wanted to put him 'down'. This horrified Jacky who had developed a very close affinity with 'Yella' (as she called him). She continuously visited him at the pound with treats and continued to advertise for a new owner.

In desperation she struck a deal with the supervisor. "Give me two weeks and I will find him a decent home". Assuming that 'Yella' came from somewhere out on the Tanami Track, she began to phone Station people, Aboriginal communities and Mines personnel. Several suggested Bruce & Jackie at Flabbit Rat. We were the last phone call, but still not plain sailing. I was interested, as our young dog was becoming too boisterous for our pensioner and needed a younger mate. Jackie not keen, as it meant more work for her.

The trade-off was: "OK, if I agree, you do the vacuuming at least twice a week in the main building". Me and my big mouth! Not only months of civilising a rambunctious hound, but house chores as well, were to follow.

The quandary now was to get Yella out of max. confinement before he was conveyed to 'San Quentin'. Aircraft and roadtrains were obviously out and with a 'eureka moment', I thought of a long time friend of ours, Jack Adamson.

Jack lives in Alice and subbies to earth moving contractors with his own trucks. I knew Jack when he 8 years old on Billiluna Station, when I was working for his parents, Gerry & Nola.

Jack is the quintessential outbacker, with a dry western NSW humour, no doubt learnt from his uncle, Wally Huntly.

"No worries" said Jack and with Yella chained in the back of his Tojo, away he went. Jack pulled up on numerous occasions to check Yella, who was not enjoying the journey at all. To show his displeasure for the inconsiderate treatment he was receiving, Yella managed to spew all over Jack's gear – 3 times!

Both arrived safely, late in the afternoon and I guess neither more pleased than the other. After a good meal, many rums and a lot of reminiscing, Jack headed back to town.

The amount we paid Jack would have covered his time and fuel, but I'm glad we couldn't hear the antics at 'cleanup' time.

It was several months before we could get Bozo back into a vehicle, now he can't wait. We renamed him Bozo and it did take months for him to settle in. He had to be firmly disciplined in many aspects, but bit by bit, Rabbit Flat became his home.

Like all dogs, the filthier the smell, the more like 'eau de cologne' it is for pooches. We now have a problem with 'bush cattle and to steady the lead, for awhile, I was 'blowing out' the bulls to minimise the off-spring. Unfortunately, rotting carcasses are a 'honey pot' for hounds and the daily shampoo became a drag. The scent must be shared with humans of course.

As I didn't appear to be making any inroads into the bovine numbers, I have resorted to firing warning shots when they are close to our fenced off vegetation area or airstrip. Bozo goes to ground when shots are fired, not unlike a retriever.

A final description of this hound. Head – Labrador, Rear end – Retriever and in between, the white woolly Italian sheep protector breed which live with the sheep and protect against predators. We own 4 square mile of unfenced country which backs onto untold square miles of Tanami Desert and it is only just big enough for Bozo. What chance a ¼ acre block!?

As I wrote earlier, the Bureau of Meteorology installed the 1<sup>st</sup> weather station here in August '69. Since then we have done 6 observations each day, which calculates as 43 years x 365 days x 6 = 94,170 obs. Knock off 1 missed each month, the mind boggles.

In 1996, the Bureau installed an Automatic Weather Station (AWS) which produces 1 minute data, which is beamed the 350m across to the computer in our office and every 3<sup>rd</sup> hour the data is condensed and transmitted up the phone line to Darwin.

Six times a day, every 3<sup>rd</sup> hour from 6am to 9pm, we add the 'manual readings' and add them to the AWS data and send the message ourselves to Darwin.

The payment for observations are now our only outside source of income. We are hoping that our 'website' will also make an addition.

Some years ago Rabbit Flat was declared a "Reference Station", which means that the data which emanates from here is valued, hence the Darwin & Alice Met. Staff continually ensure that everything works efficiently.

The staff are a 'Motley Crew' at the best of times, but all 'good value'. There has been many staff and 'Field Inspectors' over the years, but the present crop in Darwin are OIC Rob Chapman, Gary Sullivan, Mark Austin and, believe it or not, a 'Remittance' man from the 'Old Dart Aristocracy', 'the Right Honourable Gavin Heatherington-Tait Esquire'. In Alice is technician Craig Kaesler from Salt Lake City, Utah.

In May '09, when I unilaterally 'spat the dummy' and finally decided that 'enough was enough', Jackie was alarmed. Being 'Chancellor of the Exchequer' she was fully aware of our financial status. All I knew was that I couldn't take the crap from some Govt. Agencies and grog runners any longer. I was worried that I might 'lose it' and do something stupid and irretrievable.

Jackie immediately set to work with our son Dan to set up a website so that when we closed in 19 months time, we could have some extra income, apart from the weather reporting.

The initial idea and agreed to by Westpac at the time, was that a prospective customer could phone, fax or write to us with an order, to be paid for by CC (credit card) and we would process the CC through our EFTPOS machine by a transaction called MOTO (Mail Order Telephone Order).

Westpac 'initialed' our terminal to accept MOTO.

Jackie and I are not willing to get involved with email for several reasons and as we are seldom in our office, we have our phone permanently on 'answering mode'. The fax in on 24/7.

For several reasons, the original 'website' was unsuccessful.

In May last year I approached Brad Bellette of 'Bellette Media' in Alice Springs and we began a lengthy process to get a functional 'website' up & running, which was totally secure for holders of CC's.

Being a small player in the Mail Order business we didn't have the same clout as large operators, in that they can work 'large volume' deals with Australia Post at a 'discounted rate'.

As 'fax mode' was our only practical method of doing business, Westpac re-entered the fray and their Security gurus put a total kibosh on MOTO transactions, deeming them not secure enough when CC numbers are transmitted by fax.

Brad devised a system for CC transactions in which an order 'on-line' automatically goes through his system and is redirected (within 30 seconds) to our fax machine at Rabbit Flat.

The fax transmission shows date & time of order, name, address & phone number of customer, produce or items required and amount plus postage. An 'order No.' and an 'ID No.' are also provided. Most importantly, *no* CC No. is printed. The security status for our site is classified as 'High'.



All of our items (both souvenirs and preserves) show their weights, therefore clarifying AP's postage. Non-CC transactions can be done by post with 'Bank Cheques', 'Postal Orders' or 'Travellers Cheques'.

Out of chronological order, but not forgotten, our long-time accountant, Kevin Higginson from Albury, NSW. In 1970 a plane load of businessmen from Melbourne & Albury, dropped in and stayed overnight, en-route to their newly acquired El Questro Station, out of Wyndham in the Kimberlies. This was the 1<sup>st</sup> of several 'stop-overs'. One of the men was a retired accountant from Albury, Jim Russell. Jim gave Jackie a lot of book keeping advice and eventually took over our account. Jim was a very decent and obliging bloke. When his health was declining, he recommended that his ex-partner, Kevin Higginson, take over our account. As Jim was very well respected by us, that was fair enough by us.

Kevin managed our account for the next 30 years and was very efficient and punctual. His advice to Jackie on countless occasions was invaluable. He gave some very 'sage advice' when we finalised our partnership with the Wilson's and in his early involvement with us, he spent a full week at Rabbit Flat guiding Jackie through the 'labyrinth' of sound accounting.

After his retirement, Kevin & Judith (his 'trouble & strife') spent two weeks here in our last months before our final closure in 2010, trying to sort out the mess being made by his successor (you win some, you lose some). Judith slaved away like a 'navvy' and her help was greatly appreciated. We now have an accountant in Alice who is in the caliber of KH – Michael Trull of Trezona Accounting.

Nearly last, but by no means the least, 'Territory Hirex'. When Kevin & Julie Wyatt and John & Pam Carter (Carter & Wyatt Crane Hire) sold their business to an Adelaide trucking company, we had to find someone else to do our 'pick-ups' and general shopping in Alice, which Pam had been doing very efficiently for some years.

Paddy & Barb O'Dwyer (Hirex Services) had for years been servicing many of the mines and they took on our business. Their service was excellent. Good Irish humour 'the Paddy'.

When Paddy & Barb retired down south, they sold Hirex to Mugsy & Annie Boyce of 'Boyce Foundations', which I thought for some time was a 'charitable organisation' but turned out to be a 'concreting business'. Annie however does have a bit of the Missionary in her.

Sometime later Hirex joined at the hip with Tony & Jenny Pickett of 'Territory Cleaning Supplies' and the new company was named 'Territory Hirex'.

The service they provide is also excellent, not only for general shopping (plus their own products), but much to their disgust, they, on occasion, 'surf the web' for us. Tony, with his Western Australian Government Printing Office background, casts an 'eagle eye' over my letter writing, with special emphasis on 'correct English', but we manage to stumble through this yearly Christmas letter. My timing is apparently not unlike some urban train schedules.

In early 2010, Jackie had to fly down to Royal Adelaide Hospital for a short procedure, which then had to be reassessed a few days later.

In theory, Alice Hospital facilitate travel for 'bush patients' to Adelaide airport and then into the city. We found the service disorganised and basically uncaring in her case.

The professionalism of the physicians at the Royal Adelaide was excellent, but the reception staff were most unhelpful in that there was no help offered to find decent accommodation in the city considering that Jackie was unwell and didn't know her way around.

Annie Boyce, from Alice, rang her daughter Jeana, who was holidaying on Kangaroo Island at the time, who then 'surfed the net' and found very satisfactory lodgings for Jackie, not far from the hospital. Jeana paid for the lodgings with her CC.

To avoid a repeat performance on her return to Alice, Jackie rang Tim Rose at Chartair, who organised and paid for her return journey.

Heavy rains delayed her return to Rabbit Flat, so Mugsy & Annie looked after her for many days in their 'Granny Flat'. A very heartfelt thank you to Annie, Jeana, Mugsy & Tim.

Lastly, I want to thank by name, all the people, who over the last plus 40 years have not only exchanged Christmas greetings with us, but have sent books, extracts from books, historical documents, photos, personal experiences, short stories, poems and generally reminisced.

After the list went past 50 and I was only up to alphabetical 'M', I thought "bugger this, I'll run out of ink", so thank you one and all, because individually you all know who I mean.

Well that's it for now. As I said at the beginning of this letter, I don't intend, or hope, that this will be a valedictory letter, but the years are catching up obviously to us all and I feel much better for making the effort.

Jackie and I wish everyone all the very best of health and here's hopefully to the next time.

Kindest regards

*Bruce & Jackie*

HOWDY FOLKS. GIVEN THAT WE ARE NOW OUT OF THE TOURIST BUSINESS, I THOUGHT THAT A COURTESY COPY OF THIS LETTER MIGHT BE APPRECIATED AS WE TAKE A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE. IT MAY ANSWER SOME QUERIES THAT SOME TRAVELLERS MAY HAVE.

KEEP WELL.

REGARDS,

*Bruce & Jackie*