

A Gentleman and a Rascal



Autobiography
by
Brian Buzzard

A Gentleman and a Rascal

**An autobiography
by
Brian Buzzard**

CHAPTER 1

Early days

Front Cover: I wish to thank artist Laura Cole for her kind permission to use the second painting from the triptych **Kimberley Grasses**.

Disclaimer: Every effort has been made to contact the people mentioned in this book, we apologise if any omissions have been made.

**Copyright 01997
Brian Buzzard
All rights reserved**

CHAPTER 1

Early days

I was born on the 26th July, 1915, at my grandparent's farm which was six miles out of Moora, along the Perth Road. It was not until a fortnight later, that I was taken to Moora to be baptised, registered and checked over by the doctor to see if I was fit.

I do not remember much about life on our farm because I was only five when my father died and we left soon after. However, there is one incident I will never forget. My father insisted that we ate our bread crusts or we would get no more food until we did. Occasionally, when he was not there, our mother was not so strict. After toast and home-made jam or honey for breakfast, we would leave some of the crusts so that mother could put them in the scrap bucket for the chooks.

One day, dad came back to the house unexpectedly and saw the scraps in the bucket. He made each of us fish out our contribution to the bucket and told us to eat them. If we could not finish them, then they were to be kept for us to be eaten at lunch. He was never cruel to us but had a hard, disciplinary manner, which I am sure I carried over into my life because I have always been thrifty and tidy. After ten years in boarding school and six years in the airforce I became a bit fanatical about hanging clothes up every night and I tried to instil those tidy habits into my five children. I found that I was fighting a losing battle, particularly with my only girl, Terese. However, she got her punishment later when one of her daughters was nearly as bad as she was.

The first major incident which occurred in my life was the death of my father. Having spent three or four years away from home, in France, in the AIF, my father had been allocated a war service farm of a few hundred acres, located three miles out of Moora on the Perth road. Once a week, it was the custom of my parents, to go to Moora in the

old horse and spring-cart to do the shopping. On the day of his death, mum went into town on her own, leaving my elder brother John, my sister Marjorie and me at the farm with dad. When she got back to the farm, she asked us where dad was. We said that he had gone to shoot one of the wild turkeys, which were abundant in those days, for our Sunday dinner. Because it was getting very late in the afternoon, she went in the cart to look for him. I distinctly remember her coming back and telling us that while climbing through the fence he had a serious accident with the shotgun. She immediately put us all in the cad and drove us the three miles to our grandparents farm called Mungamine. We stayed with our grandmother while mum and grandfather went back to the scene of the accident. My father had died instantly when the gun accidentally discharged while he was climbing through the fence. My mother and grandfather put dad's body in the spring-cart and drove him into Moora, where he was buried a couple of days later. I remember clearly that it was the next day that we were told that he had the accident and had died as the result of it.



My father Millar Buzzard Snr 1914 war

Mum could not run the farm, so we shifted to Moora to live in a rented house and to start school at the Convent. A few years later, we were boarded at the Convent while my mother moved to Perth to do a twelve months course in midwifery. There was no dole or widow's pension in those days and I think that it was my grandparents who found enough money to clothe and feed us and to keep us going while my mother was away. From 1925, I went to the New Norcia College for about two years until mum was able to move us to Perth to be with her. We went to school at the Christian Brother's College on the Terrace. Mum was able to keep us going by working long hours as a midwife. My father's parents "came to the party" and paid for our school fees at the college. While there, I did not excel at my studies, but I was the captain of the school's football and cricket teams.



My mother Margaret Mary Sheridan

I remember my grandparent's farm, where I was to spend a good deal of my time before going to New Norcia College at the age of eight. When we went to the College, we spent our holidays on the farm and loved it.

We had very caring grandparents, Steve and Margaret Sheridan and Uncle Jack who gave us the freedom of the place. We would swim in the dam when we felt like it and sometimes we spent whole days clearing more land with an axe. The country was mainly York Gum, Salmon Gum and Jam. As children we could not handle the York or Salmon Gums but the Jam was easily cut. We kept a lot of it for firewood and cut it into lengths for fence posts.



My grandparents Steve and Margaret Sheridan Moora

An old Yamatji named Frank worked for my grandfather. He had a horse allocated to him. He went to Moora every couple of weeks to be with his large family. He was one of nature's real gentlemen and very kind to us. He drove the team of horses when we were seeding or harvesting. He was very trustworthy and was treated very well by both my grandmother and my grandfather. At that time the country had a system of giving drinking rights to the Indigenous people who were able to prove that they were people of decent standing and habits. To obtain the licence the Indigenous people, had to be nominated by their employer and recommended by a minister of religion of any sect, or a policeman. They were granted the right to go to the hotels to drink if they were given the licence, but they were not allowed to take drink home. Frank and other Yamatjis in Moora had their drinking rights certified. They were very proud of it. Only occasionally did one of them go off the rails and the penalty was a suspension of rights. At that time the same punishment was handed out to the whites if they became a nuisance. They were put on The Dog Act and were not allowed into a hotel again until they were deemed worthy by a magistrate. Sometimes they received a set term of six months or a year of being banned from the pubs which at that time, were the only outlets for hard liquor.

Bushfires were always a worry, because the only way that we could fight them was to beat them out with an old comsack, or with fresh branches off a tree. When the fire got too fierce, not allowing us to get close, we had to let them burn. Back burning was a method used by my grandfather who was an expert at it. It was not feasible to use it all the time, but when it was carried out correctly it was very effective. We were taught from a very early age not to play with matches. There were no cigarette lighters then, and we had to check that the wood burning stove doors were closed and that it was not burning fiercely, allowing sparks to come out of the chimney. The greatest cause of fires in the country was the local train engines. Sparks used to fly out of the train all the time and it was the practice to burn a fire break right along both sides of the railway line.

My Uncle Jack, who worked with his parents on the farm, was very kind to us. He was fond of hunting kangaroos in his spare time and he always took John and myself with him. He always carried a rifle, but used it sparingly because the bullets were very expensive. If he spotted a dingo or a fox he would shoot it, but they were rare around the place. He relied on his two kangaroo dogs to catch and kill the roos. We would walk quietly through the bush and disturb a sleepy roo. They slept most of the day and only came out to feed at sundown. The dogs would immediately give chase and would sometimes catch the roo within our sight, but they would most often have a long chase out of our sight. We used to keep walking in the direction in which they made the chase and it sometimes took ten or fifteen minutes before the dogs would join us again. We would examine their mouth and if there was blood or fur on it we would know that they had made a kill. They had been trained to take us straight to the kill. All my uncle would say was, "Go. Show. " repeatedly to them and after a while they would take us to their conquest. A kangaroo dog makes a clean kill, not like other animals which maul the prey all over. Once a roo dog catches up with a roo the dog springs for the neck, and soon kills it with his long teeth, without touching the rest of its body. A kangaroo will usually stop to

fight its aggressor. Kangaroos have very sharp claws on their hands and feet and it was not uncommon to find one of the dogs ripped badly in a fight. If the dog had not been disembowelled we could usually save him. We would carry him home and stitch him up with an ordinary bag needle and twine, use plenty of iodine regularly and pretty soon he would be ready for action again. If he was too badly hurt Jack would use the rifle to give him a quick end.

We would skin half the roo there and then and throw away the forequarter or top half. If it was a big roo it took two of us to carry it, so we would break a solid but not too thick branch off a tree, and thread it through the tip of the tail and the ear which was still on the skin and carry it home. Jack could carry one on his own, using the same method of joining the tail and the ears, carrying it over his shoulder. We always ate the meat because we could not afford to kill the sheep. We got used to eating roo as our main meat diet. It is an excellent tasting and tender meat when it comes off a young roo. I notice that it is becoming quite fashionable to eat it now and is no longer only being sold as pet food. The skins were worth money if they were handled correctly, if they had no cuts and were pegged out in the sun for a few days. It was necessary to paint them with a solution of Cooper's Sheep Dip to keep the weevils away. They would be bundled up into about twenty skins and taken into Moora to be sent to Wilcox Mofflin in Fremantle. In due course you received a cheque and a report on the quality of the skin. I do not know the reason for it, but in certain seasons, the skins were better quality and demanded a better price. In those days there were not many rabbits about, but sometimes we found a warren and we set traps and snares. We ate the rabbit meat and sold the skins. Rabbit skins also had to be handled correctly. They too had to be hung out on wire and dried before they could be sent away.

Uncle Jack, joined the Police Force when he was old enough. He was a country boy and a good horse rider. Soon after his training he was sent to Broome as a member of the Mounted Police Force. They

patrolled Broome, Derby and all of the Kimberley. He was away for three weeks or more at a time. He was up there for nearly ten years, then he was sent to the opposite end of the state, to Albany. While he was there he married a widow with two daughters. They moved to Perth where they went into business on their own after he resigned from the force. He was known in Albany as the "smiling cop". That was his natural nature. The one time he did lose his smile was when he found myself and other players of the Gnowangerup football team in a hotel after hours. He told us it was time to leave and not to do it again. It was good to see him again even though it was in embarrassing circumstances.

We did not have any cattle except a milking cow or two. Now and again, our neighbours would kill a beast and they always bartered some of it with their neighbours because there were no refrigerators. If they kept the whole carcass for anytime it had to be salted so it was mostly corned beef which we ate. It was the same with mutton. If a sheep broke its leg it was killed and some of it was always salted. When a milking cow got too old and went dry, it would have to be sold. The custom was that the local Moora butcher would come out to the farm and kill it. He would then hang it on an endless chain on the solid limb of a tree. He always left the liver for the owner, but my grandmother refused to cook it. She likened it to eating one of her own pet lambs which were always about in season. She looked after them by feeding them skim milk from a baby's bottle. After they grew to about ten to twelve weeks she would turn them out with the flock.

We made our own butter and kept it as fresh as possible in a Coolgardie Safe, along with a small amount of meat and the day's supply of skim milk. The butter always tasted a bit like ants and you could really tell the difference when you ate the factory butter in Moora.



Ref: St Ildephonsus' College Magazine, New Norcia, 1925. p.47.

John, Marjorie and myself went to school in Moora from the farm. At that stage Millar was too young. It was six miles on a pot-holed, gravel road even though it was the main road from Perth to Geraldton. Bitumen had not been thought of in those days. We would harness the horse up in the spring cart and set sail on the six miles to Moora. If it rained, we folded wheat bags correctly over our heads to keep the rain off. Our first job at lunch break before we could touch our own sandwiches, was to water and feed the horse. We used to bring a bag, chaff and oats and when the bag was folded correctly it was called a nosebag. We would tie the bag of feed around the head of the horse and while the horse ate, so did we. When we and the horse had finished we would untie the nosebag and tie him under a shady tree, where he was left in all weather until we were ready to leave for home again at 3.30pm. Half way home we always stopped and gave

him a spell. We did the journey in about eighty to ninety minutes. It was noticeable that there was a difference between going into town, when you had to urge him along, and coming home when there was no stopping him. He seemed to know his way back to the farm and a couple of miles out we used to tighten the reigns to slow him down. Actually, he was a she and we called her Trixy. We became very fond of her and she of us.