

# A Gentleman and a Rascal



LAURA COLE

Autobiography  
by  
**Brian Buzzard**

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## **CHAPTER 14**

### **Life after the RAAF**

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

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## CHAPTER 14

### Life after the RAAF

After two weeks in Yarrawonga, I had to report to the Melbourne personnel depot to arrange to get the three of us back to Perth. The airforce could send me back, but there was no chance of Don and young David returning with me because all transpon priority was for servicemen only, or for those private citizens who were engaged in important business. While we waited in Melbourne for transport, I felt very despondent because I could not see how we could get back to WA. The crisis of travel was compounded by the fact that in 1945 there had been a severe drought in NSW and Victoria and all forms of transport was being used to cart either feed, wheat supplies, or men. Even the ship, the John Deere, on which we travelled back from America, was carrying a full load of wheat from Portland, USA to Williamtown, Victoria. It only stopped briefly in Sydney to get rid of the twenty five Australian and the twenty Dutch army chaps which they had on board.

Fortunately, I ran into a friend named Nuggett Hagley who had been employed by Wesfarmers before the war. He had been seconded to the Australian Wheat Board and was in charge of their shipping schedules. When I explained my dilemma to him he thought that he could help us, because the Wheat Board had ships which moved between Fremantle and Williamtown, the grain port of Victoria. He asked the captain of one of the ships, going back to Fremantle to get a load of grain, if he could give us a berth. West Australia had a good season and had a surplus of wheat. A couple of days later, the Norwegian captain had arranged a berth for the three of us on the ship Anatina, which was to leave for Fremantle in one week's time. That was wonderful news. I sped back to Yarrawonga to collect Don and David and we caught the train to Melbourne. On the 20th October, 1945 we sailed to Fremantle.

Don and David enjoyed the trip, but I was sea sick because the ship was empty of cargo and it tossed and rolled around in the Bight like a cork. None of the family knew that we were arriving because I had gone AWL from the Melbourne depot. I rang my sister Marjorie from Fremantle and told her that we were on the way to her place in Belmont, where she lived with her young family and my mother. Marjorie had lost her husband Jack (Skip) Bailey. He had been shot down on the Beaufort Bombers and had been beheaded by the Japanese. They were delighted to see us and asked us to stay, even though it was a bit of a squeeze. Mother, Don and Marjorie got on very well together. Having been a maternity nurse, mother soon had Don temporarily fit again. A week later I reported in at the Perth personnel depot and told them that I had hitched a ride home on an aircraft. They did not ask too many questions but they had difficulty in finding my airforce records. It was not until Christmas Eve, 1945 that I was discharged.

Returning to civilian life after nearly six years away was not easy. I found it hard to make friends. We seemed to talk a different language. Everyone welcomed us back but when they started to ask us questions about incidents in the conflict and to tell us about relatives who had been POW's, wounded or killed we did not want to discuss it. We did not want to talk about our life in the services or hear what had happened to anyone else, we just wanted to get on with picking up the pieces of our lives. It was hard enough trying to adapt to the complete change in our life style and to pick up where we had left off in civilian life. The only real enjoyment I experienced at the time was at the RSL and RAAF Association meetings, where the war was not discussed, but where we concentrated on helping each other and giving assistance to Legacy, the organisation which looked after war widows and children in any way that they could. They were great nights where we always finished up having a few glasses of the amber fluid. While I was at Toodyay, Ted Hayes and myself were appointed legatees. I had been a legacy ward after my father had died and I felt that it was the least I could do to repay the help I had received as a child.

It was very difficult to get supplies because all food, clothing, sheets, towels, motor vehicles, farm machinery, petrol and many other items were rationed and we were all issued coupons to use as needed. The civilian population had been under restrictions for years, but it was quite new to ex- service men and women. It was possible to buy only specific amounts of items such as tea, sugar and meat in exchange for specified numbers of coupons. I was not too badly off because I had brought back, on the ship from America, towels, sheets, ladies stockings, two piece bathers and many other items which were scarce in Australia. In the country areas, the meat coupons were a farce, because any farmer would sell you a side of lamb or mutton when you had run out of coupons and could not get meat from the local butcher. It was a different story in Perth, although a black market existed for those who could afford it. After twelve months or more, things seemed to get back to normal but most of the servicemen I knew still refused to talk about the war. Time has changed all that. After fifty years those exservicemen still living don't seem to mind discussing events and a lot of books have been written over the last few years. Certain war events are now taught in the schools and the younger generation seem to be more conscious of the hardships which the POW's suffered and more aware of the contribution to this country, of so many men and women in World War 2 and others such as Korea and Vietnam.

I had been in touch with Wesfarmers and they appointed me as their representative at Dowerin. The Australian government had passed an act of parliament which ensured that all of the men and women who had enlisted should get their old jobs back on their discharge. At the time of my enlistment I was a country representative for Wesfarmers at Bruce Rock. That position had been filled by an old friend of mine who had a wife and two children and a house at Bruce Rock. The company asked me if I would be satisfied if I was sent to Dowerin instead of Bruce Rock. I readily agreed because the jobs were similar and I did not want to upset my mate who had been discharged long before me and had settled into the area. While I was waiting in Perth to go to Dowerin, Wesfarmers put me on their staff and paid me to go in to the office to familiarise myself with their operations. I was still being paid by the airforce so life was

good. On Saturdays I donned my uniform to get into the Belmont or Ascot races free. I did not have any civilian clothes when I arrived back in Perth, but the airforce issued all of us with a civilian suit so all I needed was some khaki pants and a sports coat, because I had plenty of shirts and underclothes which had been issued by the airforce. They let us keep all of our uniforms, including an overcoat, which was made of beautiful material. I took the epaulets off the shoulders and wore it for years. When we moved to Dowerin we had to live at the hotel for a few weeks until we found a house to rent.

Don began to really like life in the country and the people. It was a big change for her, after life in Sydney and living in quarters on a RAAF base. As each member of the family grew up in the country towns we lived in, they too seemed happy with the free and easy lifestyle. I think that we were all sorry when, eventually, we had to move back to Perth. While we were at Northam, Brian was born on Christmas Day, 1946. After only twelve months, Wesfarmers made me manager of their Northam branch, which controlled a large area including Dowerin.

While we were there we became good friends with Jack Phillips and his wife. Jack was a farmer at Dowerin and his wife Laura, who had been a school teacher in the district, married him when he was a lonely, single, farmer's son. They had four children and Laura and Jack used to come to Dowerin with them all, once a week to do her shopping, and every second Sunday to mass at the Catholic Church which was next door to where we lived. Laura became very friendly with my wife Don and helped her tremendously to assimilate into country life. After they retired they sold out and bought a house in Applecross not far from where we were living. It was sad because Laura died at a comparatively early age. Their children had all grown up and Jack and I became friendly again and we would often meet at the Raffles for a few beers. Jack is quite well today despite having a gammy leg. He lives in a hostel, Camellia Court, in Bayswater. We see each other now and again when his daughter Anne brings him over to see me at the TPI Hostel at Como. I stayed at Northam

for almost two years and then I resigned from Wesfarmers because I had the opportunity to buy out the Elders agent at Toodyay.

My good Freemason friend, Jack Weaver from Goomalling helped me financially and I paid him back within two years, after which I started to make a quid for myself and my family.