

A Gentleman and a Rascal



Autobiography
by
Brian Buzzard

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CHAPTER 2

Life at boarding school

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 2

Life at boarding school

I have been asked on many occasions how I liked being at boarding school for ten years. All I can say is that we took the good with the bad. At New Norcia, for two years I found the going tough at times. There were no women at the college so we had to make our own beds and had self-service in the dining room. I had a problem because I used to wet the bed. I always had to make sure that the sheets were pulled up and the bed made well before the Brothers made their inspection. Once a week we used to change the sheets and by then mine had an odour of their own. Sometimes in the wintry or humid days I had to climb into the bed which was still rather damp and smelly. I was lucky because after the first year the habit ceased. That may have been because I was caught out many times by the dormitory Brother and I got a few cuts from his strap. What worried me most was being found out and jeered at by the other boys in the dormitory. I think we also ate plenty of kangaroo meat there, not many fresh vegetables and the only fruit was citrus. There was an orchard which we raided at night. In the watermelon season we did the same, although watermelon was sometimes on the menu. Nearly all of us got pimples at an early age and my mother used to say that it was the diet we were on. However, the two years I was there certainly taught me how to do for myself. Both John and I got good marks in our exams. Mind you it had a lot of good points about it. It was only thirty miles from grandfather's farm and he used to drive the thirty miles in the spring-cart, starting early in the morning with Trixie in the shafts. He used to give the horse a good spell and a feed at New Norcia and then drive back to the farm all in one day. That was when we had mid-term and the Christmas holidays.

Under 11 Championship.

75 Yards' Championship. Be Buzzard, 1; K. Kelly. 2; W. McIntyre. 3.

100 Yards' Championship: B, Buzzard. 1; K. Kelly. 2; W. McIntyre, 3.

High Jump: K. Kelly, 3ft. 5in., 1; B. Buzzard, 2; B. Haynes and McIntyre, 3

Long Jump: K. Kelly, 10ft. 11in., 1; B. Buzzard, 10ft. 5in., 2; B. Haynes. 9ft. 8in., 3.

Kelly 13 points and Buzzard 12.

Sports day results

Ref: St Ildephonsus' College Magazine, New Norcia, 1925. p. 77.

There were some extra good scholars who came out of the school. They held prominent positions in Perth later: Lavans and Haynes, both top class lawyers and others, too numerous to mention. The college had a football team which played in the Moora Association. It included five of the Clune brothers who had left the college to work on their father's and neighbouring properties. Gerry Clune later played for East Perth and the State team. He finished up owning a big property, Newmarracarra which was fourteen miles out of Geraldton.

We had our own chapel at the college but on Sundays, in our best and sometimes only suit, we would march the short distance to the Benedictine Abbey. That was a fabulous place with an old organ with pipes attached to it. There was no shortage of organists, because among them was Dom Mareno, a world famous organist. All of the walls and ceilings had priceless paintings on them. New Norcia was

the oldest Catholic church established outside Perth and today they have a museum which draws many visitors to see the works of art.

When we commenced at Christian Brothers in St Georges Terrace in Perth it was a lot more civilised. They had a matron and women to make the beds, serve at the tables and generally keep the place clean. The food was good and wholesome but like all boarding schools, it was monotonous. You knew without asking what you were going to get each day. I spent eight years there, John spent seven and Millar left the College when it moved out to Aquinas. While I was there I spent many a Sunday afternoon out at Mount Henry, clearing the place with an axe. I was an expert compared to the city boys because I had plenty of experience at using an axe on the farm. The Christian Brothers did a good deal when they swapped the College site in St Georges Terrace for fourteen acres of land behind the WACA. It is now known as Trinity College which is a day school, and the Mount Henry area is known as Aquinas which is a boarding and day school.



C.B.C. Cricket Team 1931. Brian left front and John front right.

While I was there / feel that a bit too much attention was paid to sport, although they did produce many Rhodes Scholars and people who held high positions in the state. There was an abundance of lawyers and doctors who came out of the college. Maybe it was just

me who was more devoted to sport than to study. The college produced some great sporting identities and they had a mortgage on the rowing, athletics, cricket and football between the other colleges: Guildford Grammar, Scotch and Hale and then later, Wesley, Trinity and Christchurch were admitted to the association. In my time I can remember Ernie Bromley, just out of college who was the first West Australian to be selected for the Australian eleven. Barney O'Shannessy who in our WA state team clean bowled Donald Bradman for three, in a game the Australian eleven played in Perth on their way to England. There were many others who played for the state and I think that Bill Alderman was the state captain at that time. They are too numerous to mention in the football league. The year I was with Claremont there were five old CBC boys: George and Sid Maloney, Bill Slater from Goomalling and Keith Repacholi from Kondinin and myself. I do not think that there was a league side which did not have a CBC boy playing for them. Later they produced Herb Elliott in athletics.

At school, the only time that I clashed with authority was a few nights before I left for good. It was our boxing tournament night and it was open to parents and friends to attend. Clem Nulsen, later to become Dr. Nulsen, and one of the Keneally boys had invited a few girls to attend from the Highgate Convent. Keneally's sister attended the Convent and she and her friends were about our age. After the boxing was over, two other lads joined us to escort the girls from the school to where they caught their tram home to Mt Lawley. We did not ask permission and it must have taken longer than we thought it would, or we dallied on the way via the Esplanade to the tram depot at the Barrack St Jetty. When we got back to the school, we had an irate principal, Brother Power waiting for us. He kept ringing the large school bell. We tried to explain and to apologise but he really had his temper up and he lashed out at a couple of us, so we all ran for cover back to the Esplanade. We had a bit of a sleep in the bushes until a constable walked past and spotted us. He wanted to know what we were doing there and we told him of our plight. He was very calm and

told us to either go with him to the police station or back to the school with him. By that time it must have been 2am and there was Brother Power on the balcony, still ringing his bell now and again. He must have been tired because all of his temper seemed to have gone. He and the policeman talked while we waited in the background. Very soon we were told to go to our dormitory and to go to bed.

That was the last we heard of the incident. I think that Brother Power realised that we had him over a barrel, because a couple of nights later there was to be a windup function which all of our parents and friends were asked to attend. There was always a good rollup. A play was put on by the senior classes and it was always held at His Majesty's Theatre. It took a lot of preparation and rehearsals. That year the play was The Merchant of Venice. Clem Nulsen played the part of Shylock and the others including me had minor parts, so the play could not go on without us. The year before we had put on the Mikado and my brother John played the Mikado himself and I had an important part in the chorus. I often quote in Japanese the parts of the songs we used to sing.

"Me asama me asama Pondi charna Nar ye nee,
Ira Pira siri Tonyay, Toko Tonyare, Toko tonyare na."

That was the only real brush with authority I had at the school, because I always held a very high regard and respect, for both the Marist Brothers who taught at New Norcia and the Christian Brothers in Perth.

They instilled into us the basics of decent behaviour at school and for later on during our working days. I

was taught to be strictly honest with myself and with my fellow man, to have high ideals and morals and general behaviour and manners. Several times a year a lady friend of the school used to come and lecture us on table manners and general rules of etiquette. Although

we were not sissies we were also taught ballroom dancing by Marcia Scott, the sister of one of our famous rowers and the winner of many boxing competitions. He and many others of us were also given lessons by Danny Ryan, who at that time was the welter weight boxing champion of WA. We were taught physical fitness, marching and other drills by Major Emmett. He later farmed a big area around Moonijin which his grandchildren still farm today.

At College our sports master was Mr (Boof) Ryan. He was quite an identity himself. He was a selector for both the WA state football and cricket teams, and a great supporter of the Perth Football Club and the East Perth Cricket Team, who had their headquarters at the WACA ground. Everybody had a high regard for him. He was also a qualified teacher who taught in the classroom. He liked his drop of beer and was known to be late on occasion after lunch commencement classes. The Celtic Club was only a short distance down St George's Terrace opposite Government House.

The college was right next door to Government House and is now the site of the Concert Hall and the Taxation Department building. The Tax Department knocked down the old college and replaced it with a huge rabbit warren of offices. The Taxation building was eventually sold and has been converted into a

first class hotel. How things change. The rather large backyard at the college had a turf cricket wicket in the centre and practice nets at the end. Although it was a bit small we used it a lot for practice matches. It was not hard to hit the ball over the fence which separated us from the Government House grounds, so we had a hole in the wall, through which we could climb to retrieve the cricket balls. When a new Governor was appointed, he blocked up the hole and it became a crime to hit the balls over the fence. Because we lost the ball so often we learnt to keep the ball on the ground. We trained for football at Langley Park.

A rort we were involved in at College in the Terrace was going to the dentist to have a tooth extracted. Not much filling of teeth went on unless it was a front tooth and that used to take three or four visits to the dentist to have the tooth drilled and a temporary filling put in and back again a couple of times before the final gold enamel was put in place, and then you could not chew on it for a couple of days to let the filling harden. In Hay Street East near the mint was a chap called Harcourt Ellis. He was reputed to be the son of one of our Kings of England, Edward or George who reigned at the time or earlier in the century and he certainly looked like the King with his goatee beard and short stocky build. He would have been about 60 years of age at the time, the middle 1920's.

He must have had some sort of qualifications as he had his shop window painted with his name and Dentist, Painless Extractions, two shillings and sixpence, other, one shilling. Painless meant he injected something into your gum and you hardly felt what was going on. Cocaine I think. The other consisted of painting the tooth and the gums around it with a feather dipped in a bottle of iodine. Whether he ever changed the feather for another patient I couldn't say, but most of the boys who chose the other and could stand the pain always said it was the same old feather he had for years. When we needed to go to him the Christian Brothers gave us two shillings and sixpence as his work was COD. I guess they charged the two and six to our boarding fees. Most of us chose the other method on our first visit, paid him one shilling and had eighteen pence left over for pocket money. I only tried the other once as I couldn't put up with the pain. The shilling a pop or other method was after painting the gum with the iodine feather he would extract the tooth which hurt like hell, but to make matters worse, out would come the feather again dripping with iodine and he would freely fill the cavity with iodine and give the gums around it another painting. When this happened you didn't know if you were going to faint or jump out of his dental chair.

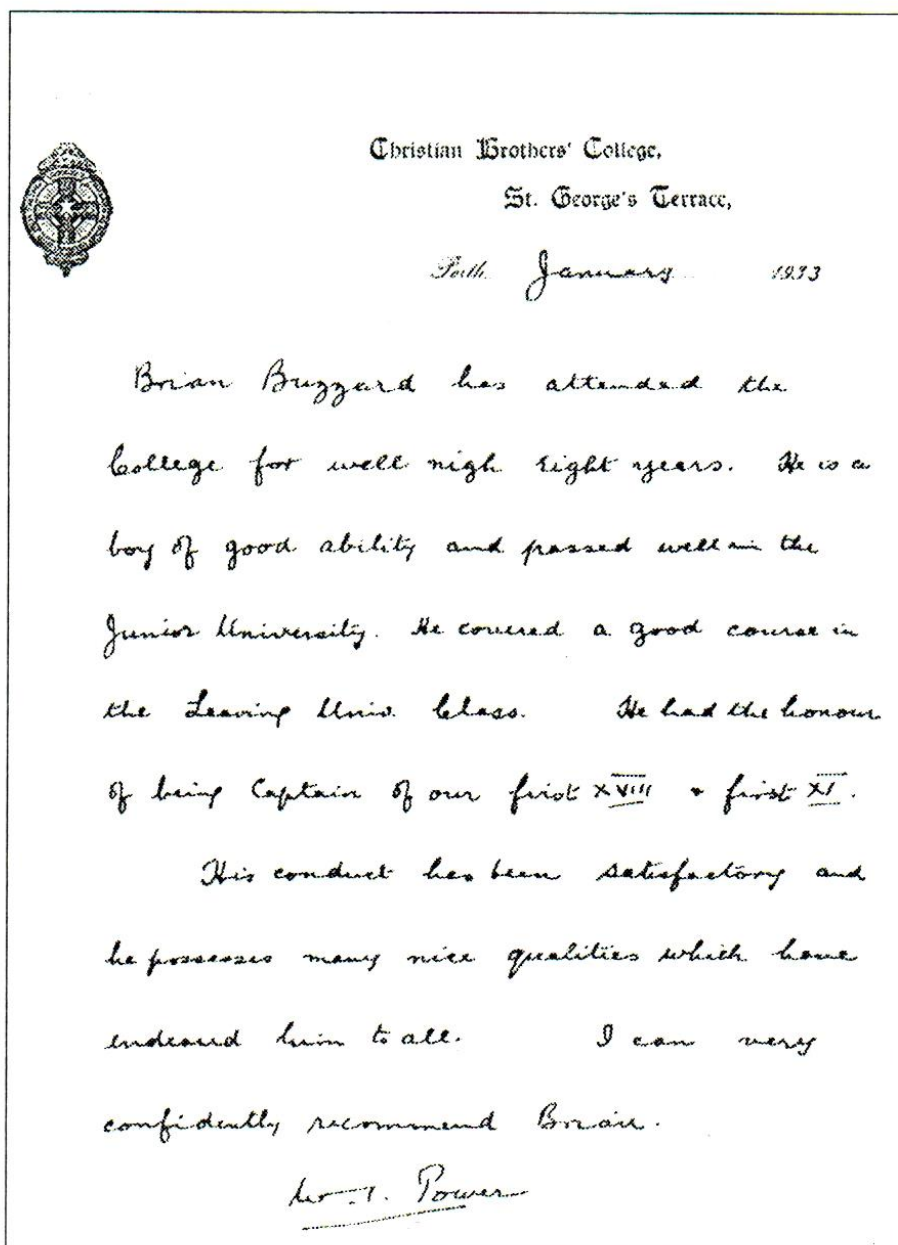
The only antiseptics used at that time, to my knowledge, was iodine and your own urine. My first introduction to the urine method was when as a youngster I worked in the Midland sale yards in among the sheep and cow manure. Occasionally we also auctioned horses who left their droppings as well.

The sheep and cattle yards were all wooden those days and it was easy to take a bit of skin off your hands doing the job. We had an old Scotchman as our boss and one day when I knocked some skin off, the boss said "Well Brian wee on it" I replied, "No, I wasn't going to pee on my hand. " His reply, "Well if you don't, I will" so I obeyed his orders and I can't remember if that antiseptic was a success. Another rule was make sure you wash your hands before handling food otherwise you were likely to get all kind of diseases, including lockjaw.

At college at the age of twelve or so, you were asked if you would like to become an altar boy. Some liked the idea, others didn't. After spending many years boarding at a convent and New Norcia College, you tend to become a devout Catholic. In fact, a lot of us including myself, felt the desire to become priests. We were all taught to place priests on a pedestal. I certainly felt the desire, so when I was asked if I would like to become an altar boy, I accepted the offer willingly. It was not long after I was given the instruction about what to do and had a lot of dummy runs in serving the priest at the altar, that I qualified for the real thing. I soon woke up to why a lot of the boys want to hang on to the job. The wine for the mass was all supplied in bulk to the college by the New Norcia vineyards. It was the altar boy's job to see that the chalice used by the priest was kept refilled. I can only think that it was peer pressure that made me into a wine drinker temporarily. At each refill we all had a good swig of wine before putting the chalice on the altar. Thank goodness there were no drugs around, because I can understand how young people can be easily lead by peer pressure. If I had wanted to resist taking the wine, I do not think that I would have been strong enough, or have had the courage to say no. The priests were not fools and must have had an

idea of what was going on. Maybe that was why my school reference stated "conduct satisfactory" because most of my school mate's conduct was described as very good or excellent.

I think that teenagers will have a try at anything once and thank goodness apart from the altar wine, alcoholic drinks were vet)/ hard to obtain as you had to be twenty one to buy cigarettes or beer. Drugs were unknown.



My school reference from Brother Power.

I have great respect for the priests and nuns who are part of the Catholic institutions. I have been through many difficult times in my life and always, when I have needed help, the brotherhood and sisterhood of the Catholic church has been there for me and my family. I am aware of the accusations which have been made but can truly say that I have never experienced any of those things. For this reason and for the gratitude I feel for those nuns, brothers and priests who were always there to assist my family, I decided to write to the local papers and make known my experiences, at the time when accusations of child molestation and abuse were made.

Letter to the Editor

*Brian Buzzard
Unit 79
No 2 Mailbag
Como 6152*

August 9th 1993

Dear Sir

Having been reading for some considerable time what I consider to be a one-sided account of the accusations against the Christian Brothers, I feel it to be my duty to give the experience of myself and my family who attended their various colleges for a period of over sixty years, commencing in 1925 and finishing in 1985.

My two brothers and myself boarded at CBC College in St Georges Terrace, Perth in the 20's and 30's for twenty years. My four sons and one grandson attended CBC Geraldton, Bindoon Boy's Town, Clontarf and Aquinas College for over sixty years. Never in all this time have anyone of us experienced a semblance of a sexual

approach by any of the brothers, nor do we know of any of our school mates to have been subjected to homosexual advances.

I'm not saying you don't get a bad apple in a case, nor that it did not happen, and does not happen in any community. What I am pointing out is, it must have been on only rare occasions, or surely some of my family or school mates would have known. We did not have our heads in the sand all of the time.

As for corporal punishment; in the 20's and the 30's we received plenty of it, and did not squeal, because it was the order of the day in all colleges and schools. In our opinion we deserved the punishment and it did us the world of good.

In the 70's and the 80's all schools including the Christian Brothers adopted a different approach and corporal punishment was only meted out occasionally. Today there doesn't seem to be any punishment given and many of us ask the question "Why?" We think that punishment for misdemeanours is a necessity for the upbringing of our youth.

I have three more grandsons in primary school and I do hope their parents see fit to send them to the Christian Brother's College wherever they may before their higher education.

Brian Buzzard