

A Gentleman and a Rascal



LAURA COLE

Autobiography
by
Brian Buzzard

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CHAPTER 21

Minilya Station

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 21

Minilya Station

In 1978, the year I retired from the executive of Western Livestock, the company had auctioned Minilya Station and it was passed in because the bidding had not reached the reserve price which the owners required. Dick Vincent, whom I knew well when he was farming at Toodyay, we had partnership in a couple of racehorses, (no comments on that costly experience) rang me and said that he was interested in getting together a syndicate to buy Minilya, and could I help. I knew Minilya very well, having conducted their business for many years, so, armed with my superannuation, I decided to join in with him to buy the place. At that time, wool was at its lowest, and goats were worth as much as shorn sheep. I decided that because I had gambled with Dick with the horses, I would have another go with him. Having seen and lived with the highs and lows in the wool market, I guessed, and I was right, that the wool price must lift.

Minilya comprised of eight hundred and sixty eight thousand acres with three rivers running through the property after rain. The Lyndon, the Minilya, and the Barrabiddle all overflowed at times, leaving wonderful feed and freshening up the bush, which was good feed for a few years. It had never known a real drought and the rainfall averaged over ten inches.



Minilya Homestead.

The homestead was situated ninety six miles from Carnarvon, and the Great Northern Highway ran through it for sixty five miles. That had some very good points and also some very bad ones, because we lost quite a few cattle, which were run into by big road-trains and heavy haulage trucks. The west boundary went right to the coast, and took in Lake McLeod. Boologooro Station adjoined the southern boundary, Mia Mia the northern boundary, and Manbury and Wandagee the eastern boundary.

Not long after we bought the place, we were able to shear over thirty thousand sheep, plus one thousand, six hundred stragglers a couple of months later. There was also three thousand head of cattle including calves, and a few hundred wild cattle, most of which we trapped and sold. Dick Vincent was a tireless worker and an excellent horse and cattle man, and he soon mustered up some of the one hundred horses on the property, broke them in himself and used them for droving purposes. Years before, I can remember Minilya Station buying a sire named Just

Peter who had won many races in Perth, including the WA Derby. You could see that he had left his mark on the station horses, as there were some excellent quality among them. The station also gave a yearly trophy to the Carnarvon Race Club for the winner of the Minilya Cup. On a couple of occasions, I had the pleasure of presenting the trophy to the winner.



Brian at the entrance to Minilya Station.

We sold off about two thousand cattle, the culls, and about ten thousand sheep because we had a good lambing of about eight thousand and a good drop of calves. Dick introduced the Simmental bulls to the property and they improved the quality and quantity of the herd, which was a mixture of beef, Short-horn and Hereford Cross. The Simmentals seemed to do well and were good producers of calves. The stock sell-off and wool price that first year, gave us some capital to work with. There were over one hundred and eighty miles of fencing and ninety miles of water pipe reticulation which needed attention. We leased an aeroplane and used to fly the pipelines daily all summer, to search for leakages or breaks in the

line. It was old galvanised piping, and when we found it necessary to repair it, we would put in a whole new length of polythene pipe, five hundred feet long. It cost us plenty for the joins, but we felt that it was the most economical and permanent way to do it, because a lot of the line needed to be replaced. With a dozen windmills and two artesian bores flowing all summer, it was a full time job to attend to the waters. Occasionally, when we did not get a good wind for a few days, we used a half dozen portable engines we had bought, on the wells and bores. All of the watering points had large squatter's tanks which held enough water to keep the sheep going for days. The cattle fed along the rivers and from the pools of water, otherwise they came into a watering point and continually damaged the long troughs, which were filled with water by a ball tap connected to the tank.

I spent about half my time on the station and half in Perth, because I had to attend board meetings at Western Livestock and Western Nelson, and see that the family were all OK. Dudley Hall and his wife Jill managed the place for us. They were very kind and tolerant people with two girls and a boy, who did their schooling by correspondence and The School of the Air, which was a great boon to the outback children.

My friend, Arnie Saggars accompanied me on practically all of my trips up there. I first met him in 1936 and he remained a great mate until he died in 1993 at the age of 92. Arnie was the butcher at Three Springs. He had the first butcher's shop to be opened in the town. I sold him sheep and cattle for meat for his shop when I was Wesfarmer's Livestock representative (rep) at Morawa before the war. I often met him at sheep sales from Carnamah to Geraldton and Perenjori to Mullewa. On most occasions when we met we enjoyed a few middies of the amber fluid together. After I left Morawa I did not see him again until the early 1960's, when I passed through Three Springs on my way to Geraldton as a senior Branch Inspector for Elder Smith. I always tried to make a stopover overnight at the Three Springs Hotel as part of my itinerary. In those days Arnie did most of his business through Elders because they were the only firm to have a representative who lived in the town. The other towns

serviced it from Carnamah. By that time Arnie owned one of the best farms adjoining Three Springs as well as his butcher's shop, and he was the local SP bookmaker.

Bookmaking without a licence was an offence against the law but most country towns had their SP betting shop to bet on the races and trots. The police knew it was going on and raided the shops about once a year, but it was all prearranged and the bookie used to get someone to stand in for them for the day to get the conviction recorded against their name, not the real SP owner of the shop. The fine was only about fifty pounds which was their unofficial licence for the year. The bloke that took the "rap" either owed the bookie money or he got paid twenty pounds for the job. With his three business interests Arnie was making a lot of money and his best business was the betting shop. He would bet on the local football teams and, to use an old saying, "Two flies crawling up a wall". He retired in 1961 and came to live in Applecross not far from our home in Kintail Road. He did not have any children to take over the business in Three Springs so he sold his SP and butcher's shop but leased his farm to Dr Walsh, the local doctor, and that brought him quite a good income.

When a chap named Rossiter bought the butcher's shop and decided to give the place a spring clean, he shifted the counters and a marble slab where Amie served his meat from. He found an inscription on the back of the slab which said, "Here lies the body of.. who passed on in the 1950's. Nobody could get any information out of Amie as to where his marble slab came from. He had built a hut (beach shack) out at Greenhead which is due west from Eneabba. Arnie, myself and my younger boys Brian, Patrick and Philip spent many a holiday up there with him. We had to take our own water or get some up there from a farm in containers, as he only had a one thousand gallon tank and it was invariably full of bullet holes made by vandals, of which there were only a few in those days. Finally vandals wrecked the place and from then on we used a very comfortable beach shack at Hangover Bay, nine miles south of Cervantes which was loaned to us at the time by Jim Milner of Yerecoin. There was a windmill, a boat, a jeep, a fridge and all the mod-cons at Jim's place.

Amie got tired of doing nothing in his retirement. He was not a gardener and did not play bowls, so he started to go to the Midland Saleyards three days a week to help Western Livestock to get started, because he had become a shareholder. After he had worked for us for about twelve months we felt guilty because he had not asked for any money. He always drove his own ute from Applecross to Midland and back so we put him on the payroll and later when we opened up our Wool Stores in Fremantle, he went down there. It was hard work shifting wool around on a trolley, but at least he was under cover and not subject to the heat and rain in the saleyards. When Western Livestock bought a controlling share in Nelson's Meat Market and named it Western Nelsons, he went there to work, lumping carcasses of meat, but he was in his element and was very happy to be handling meat again even after he had turned seventy years of age.

When we went on our fishing trips to Hangover Bay, we always tried to shoot a few parrots or galahs and a kangaroo on the way up. He would pluck the birds that night and he would put them in a pot the next day to make a lovely parrot casserole. Arnie was even known to have eaten crows (well cooked) and snake and we had to be careful that he did not put one in our parrot pie. Those who liked roo would have a steak off it, but kangaroo meat was excellent for fish bait and to put into craypots. We would set the craypots soon after we arrived, but it was quite a job in our small aluminium dinghy to cart them out a few miles to the reef. We always pulled the pots on the last day there, but occasionally the weather would not let us get out to them. We became very friendly with two professional crayfishermen and they would retrieve our pots on their bigger boat. We finally gave away setting the pots as the two cray fishermen kept us in an abundant supply of Cackers (illegal to catch because of their size) and we always returned the compliment and invited them around for a belly full of beer. We would also have one or two ourselves.

One day when we were going up to Hangover Bay, you can guess how it got its name, Arnie asked me to stop the car because he could see a large

flock of birds sitting in a tree in the distance. He got out his shotgun, expecting to get at least a half a dozen in one shot. Just as he got ready to fire, unbeknown to us, my son Patrick had got out the 22 rifle and let fly with it. He missed and the parrots all flew away immediately. Arnie was so annoyed I thought that he was going to shoot Patrick.



**"Brian and friends" Top l-r Allen Marfleet, Anne Phillips,
Robin Campbell, Betty Campbell, Jack Phillips
Bottom l-r Jim Boyd, Brian, Arnie Saggars.**

He had a sad last few years because his wife Elsie was put in a nursing home and is still there. He copped the dreaded Alzheimers disease. He refused to leave his Applecross home and I always took him one day a week to see his wife, but towards the end, it served no purpose because he did not even recognise her. We always adjourned to the Raffles Hotel where he would cash his usual cheque of fifty dollars. He shopped at a delicatessen not far from his home for his meagre wants. They were wonderful to him and saw that he took home some nutritious food. Before he went to hospital he had an unpleasant experience, most of which he was unaware of, because by that time, the Alzheimers had taken hold of his memory. He was conned by two young females who lived near

him, into giving them money for housecleaning they said that they had done for him. The amounts got larger until there was a cheque for one thousand two hundred and fifty dollars. The bank recognised that something was amiss and contacted me because they knew that I always took him to the bank. The police were called in and the girls were warned. The case could not be taken to court because Arnie, who would have been chief witness, would not have understood what was going on and the judge would not have been able to accept his evidence.

Elsie's niece, Rita and her husband Jack Radich from Middle Swan came down regularly to clean his house and tidy up the garden for Arnie. They have a lovely beach and retirement house in Cervantes. There was an open invitation to spend our spare time there and we took advantage of it because our Hangover Bay cottage had been shifted down to Seabird by the Milners. The Dandarragan Shire gave all of the owners of about thirty shacks at Hangover Bay six months to remove them, or they would bulldoze them and they would end up on the rubbish tip. The people who owned them would get an account for the removal.

Arnie copped a nasty cold and pleurisy and was admitted to the Fremantle Hospital. He was a stubborn old chap and as he began to feel better he wanted to go home, so one night he got up from his hospital bed to look for his clothes in his bedside locker. He slipped on the highly polished floor and fractured his wrist. That kept him there a bit longer but as the wrist started to mend he got up again with the idea of nicking off, but fell and hit his head. He never recovered from that fall and passed away soon after. This is the eulogy which was written and read out by my son Brian at his funeral. Brian worked with him over many years in the Midland Saleyards and the Woolstores. He also spent many holidays and fishing trips with Arnie.

***The Eulogy
To Our Friend Arnie Saggars***

If you believe that each person on earth is sent down here by God for a reason, then you may well ask, "What was Arnie here for?"

Arnie never aspired to Public Office, rarely adorned himself in fine clothes nor sought to accumulate great wealth. Arnie kept things simple. From his early days around Tambellup, Katanning, Mingenew and Three Springs, Arnie found happiness in living life to the full, working as a butcher of much repute and farmer. In this era he married Elsie and from that day he remained with her and was faithful to her, This is in direct contrast to today's "Stay-a-while " marriages. Faithfulness and fidelity was a strong virtue to Arnie.

Arnie contributed to the building of two churches in his time. Firstly at Three Springs after he married Elsie, and later here at St Benedicts, Applecross in the seventies, when this building was rebuilt. No one will ever know how much he gave to both projects because; Arnie gave without seeking recognition or counting the cost.

Arnie supported young people by employing them on his farm. For many of those young lads from Bindoon. This was their first taste of independence. They had good teachers in Arnie and Elsie for these first experiences in life. If they learned the above lessons from Arnie, they would no doubt be successful in their lives! I am sure many are.

Then came retirement and Arnie moves to Perth. Three Springs loss is Perth's gain. Arnie retired by working 40-50 hours a week for Western Livestock in the Midland Saleyards (on many days it got to 44c). Arnie retired by working 40-50 hours a week for Western Livestock in the Fremantle Woolstores, lumping around 360 pound bales of wool on an old steel-wheeled hand trolley. Arnie retired again, working for Weston Nelson, heaving carcasses around the meatworks. In between these activities

Arnie retired again by working on friend's farms and stations in the busy season;

*Jim Boyd's place at Bindoon,
David Buzzard's place at Eneabba,
Jim Boyd's station at Tuckanarra,
Brian Buzzard's station at Minilya,
John Bartle's farm at Badgingarra,
Pat Wiseman at Gin Gin,
Just to mention a few of many.*

Arnie also had a fine approach to leisure. I think that working was a form of leisure for Arnie, but he also liked to get away and catch the odd fish. Three Springs farmers would remember some good tales about the "goings on" at the Greenhead shack. Perth and Yerecoin friends would remember the famous Hangover Bay hideout of Jim Milner and how the bay got its name. More recently Arnie joined the company and comforts of John and Rita Radich's Cervantes beach house.

I assure you that at each of the above locations fish were caught, cleaned and consumed by Arnie (usually cooked by Arnie). On most occasions these were washed down by a cold ale or two, and often with a slab of Arnie's homemade brawn, to which we would try to guess what meats he had put in this time. (There are some awful rumours abound about that.) Arnie always acted the perfect gentleman, particularly in the presence of women; no matter if it was the Board Chairman's wife or the barmaid at the Raffle's Hotel. Everyone stood the same height in Arnie's eyes. No one was better than anyone else.

I return to the question, "Why was Arnie sent by God?" He taught us;

Hard work is no obstacle

*Faithfulness and fidelity are good virtues.
Give without seeking recognition or counting the cost.
No one is better than anyone else.*

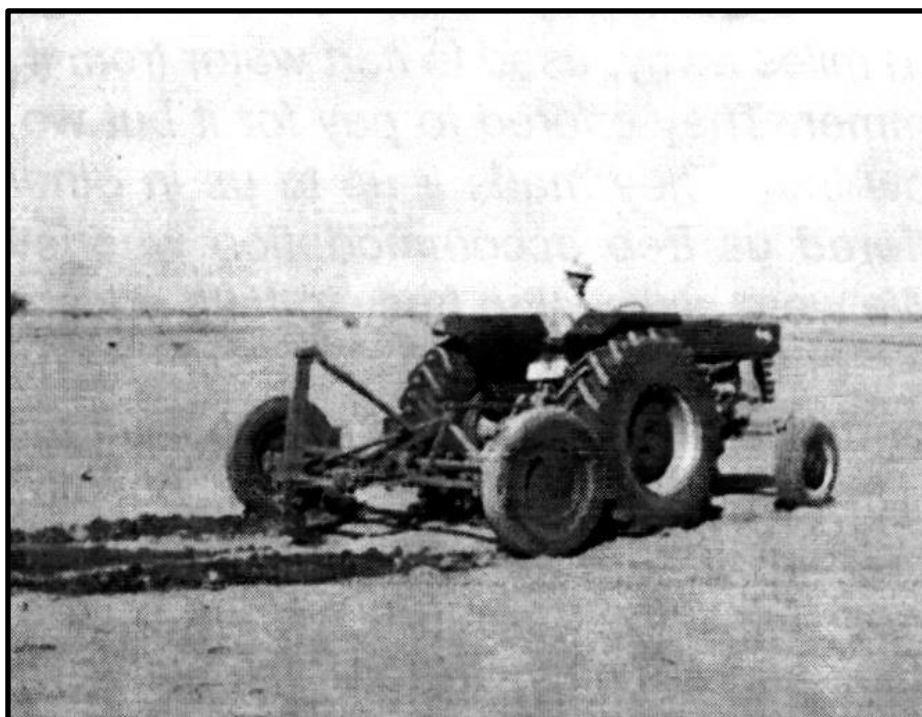
Brian Buzzard Jnr.

Arnie was a tireless worker, and being a butcher, he did all of the slaughtering of sheep required. At shearing time he killed and dressed two a day to feed the large number of shearers, rouseabouts, station hands, and the people from the main homestead. He would not take any wages, so Dick and I decided, as a gesture, to send down ten bales of woo/ to be sold in his name. The cook we had, used to throw the livers, kidneys, and shanks out to the sheep dogs. Arnie soon put a stop to that. He cooked the liver up for breakfast and made an excellent soup out of the shanks. He kept the dogs going by shooting kangaroos. I am sure that he put some of the kangaroo in the soup, but no one ever complained or was aware of it.

On a few occasions, my eldest grandson, Andrew Buzzard, came up for his school holidays. He loved it because our manager, Dudley used to take him up in the plane on the water runs, or when mustering sheep or cattle. We had a well and pumping station just near the Minilya Roadhouse, and it was driven by a large size engine. The belt to the pump was about fifteen feet long, and one day Andrew got caught by the belt. He could have been sucked down the well, but he finished up being thrown twenty feet in the air. He was a bruised and battered boy for a few days. That particular well had first class water during the summer. The Coral Bay Resort, which was over one hundred miles away, used to cart water from it during the summer. They offered to pay for it but we would not allow that. They made it up to us in other ways and offered us free accommodation whenever we liked. We were always too busy to take advantage of the offer, but went over there on a Sunday now and again and I can tell you, it did not cost us much for beer. The management were very hospitable. It would appear that all the underground water over there was too salty. They have since built a much larger tank and are now

OK for fresh water. We also explored the Ningaloo Reef which is beyond me to describe. It is one of nature's gems.

The Agricultural and Land's Department, who inspected the property every year, to see that we were not over-stocking and that we were generally looking after the place, introduced a plan to rejuvenate any eaten-out areas and to endeavour to bring the salt flats back into production. They loaned us a tractor and a ripper similar to a scarifier. It did not plough consistently, but as you went along, it lifted and dropped the tynes, and only made holes every five yards. The idea was, that after a good season, there were good grass seeds which would blow into the hole made, the rain would fill the hole and the seed would germinate. Dudley the manager, was too busy himself to do the work, and he could not spare any of his stockmen to do it, so he asked Arnie and I if we would give it a go. We stuck at it in the heat for a month, until the time came that the Agricultural Department needed the outfit for another station to try. We were very glad when our month was up, it was a bloody hot job.



Brian ploughing clay pans at Minilya

On the last day I was about fifteen miles from the homestead and when I set off for the homestead to bring all of the equipment back, I had to

cross a creek. The tynes were handled hydraulically and I had them up in the travelling position. Unfortunately, the hydraulics were not working 100% and I had to check that the tynes were in the raised position every few minutes. At the bank the sides were rather steep and through my carelessness, the tynes dug into the bank. The tractor tipped up and threw me back into the middle of the creek, then continued to dig itself into the bank. I was able to get up and turn the engine off and I set out for the station homestead on foot. My shoulder started to ache but fortunately someone came out to look for me and took me back to the homestead in the ute. The shoulder started to really play up, and even after drinking nearly a bottle of scotch I could not bear it any longer, so I was taken into Carnarvon to see a doctor. He sent me up to the hospital for an xray and found that I had fractured the shoulder blade in two places. He kept me in hospital for about a week. As I was useless to do anything around the station, I returned to Perth to recuperate. The only real damage it did to me was that I could not hit a golf ball well again because I could never swing properly.

I went back to the station a few years later and saw that the eaten-out areas among timber and scrub had improved remarkably, but it was a waste of time trying to get growth into the salt flats. On one of our trips back to Perth I had Andrew and Arnie with me. At that time, Andrew lived in Geraldton, and I would generally drop him off and stay the night with them.

On one hot day, after we had gone a few miles, Andrew asked me to stop the car because he felt sick. I must say that I felt a bit squeamish myself, but I put it down to the few drinks we had the night before.

When we stopped, Andrew asked for the keys to open the boot. When he opened the boot, he said to me, "Come here and look at this Pa". My grandchildren call me Pa. When I got near the boot I could smell a stink, so I had a further inspection. There under our cases was a sack with half a dozen kangaroo tails in it. They were putrid. Arnie said that he had put them in the boot a few days earlier so that he would not forget them. He

was going to take them home and make a casserole for he and his wife. That is the only "blue" I ever had with Arnie, which started when I tipped them out on the side of the road. He maintained that it was only the skins that smelt a bit, and that the meat would be all right to cook. We got going without the tails and Arnie growled all the way to Geraldton. Without the tails in the car, I started to feel fine and Andrew got over his sickness.

After we had been at Minilya for three years, Dick Vincent with all his other farming interests at Williams, found that he did not have the time to devote to the station, and / certainly did not have the knowledge required to run the place, so we decided to put the place on the market. Because wool prices had picked up, the value of all stations went up considerably. We had an offer of double the price we had paid for it, and as there was no capital gains tax then, we took it. If we had waited another year we would have made a lot more. We did not mind because we did very well out of it financially, and had a lot of enjoyment at the same time. My philosophy all my life has been to leave something in it for the next man. If you do that and sell on those terms, you always get your money.