Bits of a Boyhood

Bruce Goodman's

Growing up in rural New Zealand

Bits of a Boyhood

Beginnings

Springhill

Waikanae

Silverstream

Beginnings

1
CONTINGENCY

There was a war on. Doreen Peers was the nurse for a doctor in Upper Hutt. Doreen Peers was my mother. Frank Goodman was a plumber at Trentham Military Camp. He was my father.

Anyway, that day it rained. It need not have rained at all. But it did. Because it rained, the doctor's surgery leaked and Doreen phoned the plumber. The rest is history - and ultimately me. Thank goodness for war and rain, and for nurses who hold ladders for plumbers in storms.

My existence, in fact, is as perilous as a ladder. Most people don't like to admit to that. There's a shaky contingency in all our ancestry - which makes everything progressively fluky. We've more chance of winning lotto every week for a millennium than of ever having being conceived. Of course, if you don't know what contingency is, you haven't got my drift.

Dad

When Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves in America it had a profound effect on my probability. The whole American slavery thing affected cotton prices in far away Lancashire. Ultimately a frustrated cotton-mill owner, Frederick Lightoller, had an affair with a maid, Joyce Gladwin, and they immigrated to New Zealand to become my great-grandparents. Thank goodness for slavery and Abraham Lincoln.

Mum and her sister Margaet

The Boulcott Farm Massacre in the Hutt Valley also paved the way for my possibility. Great-great-grandfather George Scrimshaw was in the 65th Regiment and guarding convicts on a ship bound for Tasmania. Eventually he was sent to the Hutt Valley instead of returning to England - to help quell the uprising at Taita. Thank goodness for uprisings and protests and murder and convicts, and for the squandering and plundering of native land by oppressive regimes.

The Irish Potato Famine was another contributing cause to my existence. Great-grandmother Mary Jane Kerr ended up in New Zealand after seeing her parents die of starvation. Thank goodness for famines and English Imperialism.

If grandfather Albert Goodman's wife had not left him, he would never have fled to Trentham and met my grandmother, Minnie. Thank goodness for infidelity and broken families and loneliness.

Me

And so it goes on. I am the object of contingencies; the culmination of ifs; the fruit of chaos; the product of chance - born Wanganui, New Zealand, 6 December 1949; baptised as Bruce Bernard Goodman a little later by a priest who was the first person in history to photograph Halley's Comet.

I'm number five of six. My parents by then ran a pub - The Provincial Hotel. It had red concrete front door steps. A Maori girl with plaits tripped on them and Mum said "Whoopsie-Daisy!" That's my first memory. Not long after I was looked after by Miss Spoon.

2
FROM MISS SPOON'S TO ROSSKEEN

At least I thought it was Miss Spoon. Mum said later it was Miss Boon, but she'll always be Miss Spoon to me. A pub was no place for a little kid. Miss Spoon had a red telephone and a sand pit. Andrew from next door ate the sand in the sand pit - which I thought was stupid. She also had a paddling pool. Miss Spoon was a bit hoity-toity. I never liked her. In those days any one with a red phone was not my mother.

Queen Elizabeth II of England came to Wanganui and all my brothers and sisters went to see her. I didn't. I screamed instead. And screamed and SCREAMED. It's not that I wanted to see the queen, it's just that I was homesick at Miss Spoon's. It was the time of my birthday because I was given a cake. It had a blue aeroplane on it. I also got a blue pedal car. I bet the Queen doesn't realise how much her visit cost my family.

Mum and Me

Us kids moved with Mum to a house in Wanganui. In Nixon Street. It had two kitchens. My sister Francie and I played in one of them. Then we shifted to a farm at Matarawa, near Fordell. Dad came too. He would milk the cow and carry the bucket of milk to the front door each morning and call out "Doreen!" Mum would appear with a large metal pan, and Dad would tip the milk into it.

Each morning Dad called "Doreen!" But one morning, Mum came to the cow shed and called for Dad.

"Frank! Frank! Your sister Rene died in the night". And Dad went back to the house and I helped Mum milk the cow. It's like what my sister Suzanne said. Mum sat on the edge of the bath and cried. Sue had plaits and would have been three. It was before my time. She said Mum sat on the edge of the bath and cried. What does a little girl do when her mother sits on the edge of the bath and cries because her mother's only brother is killed in a war? 1944.

Mum had special places around the house for doing things. The edge of the bath was for crying on, although sometimes she cried at the ironing board no doubt. In her bedroom was a sort of Miss Muffet cushion chair where she would take you. You would sit on her knee. When you sat on her knee on that chair it was always very important. Once I said that Mrs Robottom next door was "FAT! FAT! FAT! You

should see her!" Mum sat me on her knee in that chair and said "Mrs Robottom is going to have a baby". It was a very important chair.

Me on tricycle

The other important place was the back of the kitchen door. It was where we kept our hot water bottles. But Dad's belt hung there too. Mum had only to put out her hand towards that door and we'd behave. Sometimes we were smacked, but usually Mum would say, "You naughty, naughty, NAUGHTY boy". Sometimes, if it was really serious, Mum would say, "We will wait till Dad gets in".
When I was about three years old we shifted from Matarawa to Springhill, Hawke's Bay, way in the wop-wops. At Springhill we had a farm next to Pendle Hill where Mum's ancestors had lived. Every second neighbour was a relative. Our farm was called *Rosskeen*, after the place in Scotland where Mum's brother who was killed in the war was buried.

One day, when I was four, Mum went away. My oldest brother, Tony, was at boarding school. Dad was making the school lunches for Sue, Rick and Francie. Dad always asked, "What do you want in your sandwiches today?" He always asked, even though the answer was the same every day. This day Dad called out to me from the kitchen: "Do you want to go to school today?" That was my first day at school. The teacher was Mr Allen. I drew a wobbly line from a dog to a kennel. Two weeks later, Dad took me in the car to Waipawa and we picked up Mum. On the way home we saw a train.

"THERE'S A TRAIN!" I shouted.

"Shh!" said Dad. "You'll wake the baby!"

So here we all were: Mum, Dad and the Humber Super Snipe, and Tony, Sue, Rick, Francie, me and Leo. Up the road on another farm at Wakarara was Mum's sister, Aunty Margaret and Uncle Bert, and cousins Bear, Jane, Rachel and later Naomi and Ray.

It was going to be great.

Springhill

3
THE COLOUR OF SUMMER

Springhill School was the best school, and Mr Calvin Allen was the best and only teacher. The school had been there since 1918. In 1955 there were about twenty-five pupils. That year saw the introduction of the school bus, but the horse paddock stayed.

Mr Calvin Allen

Springhill School

The horse paddock was where Michael Satchwell, Bill Leach, Paul Satchwell and I played with Mr Allen's golf clubs while the girls played netball on the tennis court. Michael was the only boy my age. Bill and Paul were a year younger, and Michael was in the same class as me along with Annette Cheer and Decima Alder.

First day at school
Annette Cheer, Me, Michael Satchwell

The horse paddock was lined with pine trees and scattered with oaks and elms. Under the pines grew stinging nettles and if you found a rolled up leaf it would be a Red Admiral Butterfly's cocoon. Michael and I would roll in the stinging nettles to impress Annette and Decima. We'd check for Red Admiral cocoons and caterpillars first because we didn't want to squash them. The ragwort had Magpie Moth caterpillars, and these were black and hairy. One year great flocks of Puriri Moths came down from the mountains and these bright green giants were the best of all.

But I jump ahead. Mr Allen would pick us up at the gate in the school bus after doing Blackburn and Hinerua, then down to Pendle Hill before coming back for us. The school was a single classroom with four great liftup windows and a fireplace and a porch and a single room to the side where Mr Allen lived. He didn't even have a toilet.

Our house had a toilet, and later when Dad built a new house, we had two toilets. In fact, in our new house our toilet was blue. As was the basin and bath. Dad's brother, Uncle Roy, was now the plumber at Trentham, and when the Queen came to the races he imported a blue toilet, basin and bath from England - in case the Queen wanted to have a quick bath during the races. Anyway, he ordered a spare set for Dad, and apart from the Queen, we were the only ones in the country with a blue dunny.

“Don’t call it a dunny, dear. It’s a toilet”.

Dad put up the first wall frames of our new house on my seventh birthday.

"It's your bedroom," said Dad. "Happy Birthday!"

It was a really good present, but not half as good as what Hoppy done.

"Did, dear. Not done."

It was not half as good as what Hoppy done. Hoppy was a chook with only one leg, and on my birthday (how did she know I wonder?) she hatched out twelve chickens. All grew into roosters, so we ate them and a few months later shifted into our new house.

The new drive then

The drive now

The new house was amazing, with a long, long drive that Mum planted in oaks and firs. We had to walk the long drive to pick up the loaves of bread delivered by the mail truck. By the time we got back, the corners of the crusts were nibbled and sometimes, if a loaf accidentally broke in half, the birds would swoop down and pick holes in the soft white flesh of the bread. Mum had designed our new house herself, and the plans were published by an architect in *The Auckland Weekly* as "The Plan of the Month". It had a double garage and was on the edge of a terrace that went down to a flat that went down another terrace to the Waipawa River. We built for the view - across the paddocks, down a huge river valley to the Ruahine Ranges standing like giants. To look out the window was to look at a great wing of a Puriri Moth, all green and brown. When she won a prize in the Golden Kiwi Lottery, Aunty Margaret got Mum some curtains, and the house was finished.

And so the time passed - marked by chicken pox, measles and mumps, and measured by the school terms and the comings and goings of older brothers and sisters at boarding schools. Tony had boarded at Silverstream and Suzanne at Napier. Then Tony was at varsity and studying to be a vet, and Rick was at Silverstream.

School seemed always summer. Sometimes in the afternoons Mr Allen would bus us to Onga Onga where we'd learn water skills in the baths and get a certificate. And on some afternoons we'd go for nature study walks, or paper chases through farmers' farms, and catch cockabullies and water nymphs and boatmen, and geckos that had babies. Mr Allen would whistle like a farmer when it was time to come inside. The school never had a bell, only Mr Allen's whistling.

On noisy days Mr Allen would say, "You can't go outside till you hear a pin drop," and the room would go into a huge hush, because we knew he had a pin in his hand to

drop on the fire place once all was quiet. Or he'd say about 2.30 that we couldn't go until someone spelt "Wednesday" or “February” - knowing that it would take until three o'clock to get it right.

Then into the school bus, on a lazy day with the First Aid Kit on the accelerator least we get home too early, for more play with France and Leo and jobs from the list Mum had made.

Leo, Francie, Me

We had a phone which I could reach if I stood on a chair. You'd pick up the receiver and say "Working?" There were fourteen on our party line and our number was Double-One-M. You always knew who was ringing who, and when they’d finished talking they’d ring one Short to let everyone know the line was free. The other houses were known as Long-Long-Short or Short-Short-Long, and to get an outside number you'd ring a single Long and Margaret at Waipawa would answer with "Number please?" When we were very small we'd ring one Long and say, "I want to talk to Mummy," and Margaret who knew everything, would put us through to where ever Mummy was.

Once a month, on a Friday night, we'd go into Waipukurau to get groceries. We got dressed up to go shopping, and were always given a penny. In those days you could get an ice-cream for half a penny - a wee one in a special cone - or you could get a gob-stopper for a whole penny. Gob-stoppers were best because they'd last and change colour like the seasons from green to red to blue to white. And when the colour of summer came, you could wrap it up carefully in your hanky, and hold it forever in your pocket.

4
NO FLIES ON GRANDMA

Cousin Bear and I went to stay with Bear's Grandmother. We called her Rah. I never had a grandparent myself, although I think I remember sitting on my grandfather's knee. Both grandmothers had died before I was born, and the grandfathers not long after. So Bear's grandmother was a sort of grandmother by proxy.

In her young days Grandma Rah was the first teacher at Springhill School - Margaret Cooper was her name. In those days women stopped teaching the moment they married - in this case to Edgar Worsnop.

Rah would sit the small Goodman and Worsnop cousins under a tree on a blanket and tell us stories. I remember the best one. It was about wolves, and how they were getting closer and closer to someone, somewhere, sometime. She was a really good story teller. The best stories don't come out of books.

And closer the wolves got. You could hear them howling now in the distance.

We would sit tighter on the blanket under the sycamore tree. Soon the wolves would be here. How awful to be called inside for dinner.

Anyway, I went with Bear to stay with Rah. I can't remember where it was - probably Hastings or Waipawa. Over the old garage wall, convolvulus grew wild. Deep deep

blue convolvulus. Rah called it "Morning Glory". My father called it convolvulus and a noxious weed. "It's beautiful, children," said Rah, "the Morning Glory!"

She painted - flowers and things. They were beautiful. All my Worsnop cousins could paint flowers and leaves. Rah had taught them. I was a bit envious of that. I could never paint. Rah also painted on large river stones in bright colours with scenes of cottages and country gardens, and gave them away or sold them at galas as door stoppers. My mother has one to this day.

This time, Rah said to Bear and me, "There are a lot of awful flies about this summer". So Bear and I made it our job to rid Rah's house of flies. For several days Bear and I stalked the house with rolled up newspapers, swotting every fly that dared to enter the house. At first a fly had to land before we could strike it, but soon we learnt to lash out in midflight.

Rah carefully stored her ornaments.

One morning, Rah produced two modern fly swots which she'd bought at the local shop. Our fly pursuit went berserk. Whack! Whack! Whack!

Then we discovered where the flies were coming from. They were coming through the open windows and through the open doors. There was only one thing for it. The windows and doors had to be shut.
"Don't you think, children," said Rah sweltering in the kitchen, "Don't you think the windows could be opened?"

But no. The house was rid of flies, and not even a loving grandmother could persuade her charges that she needed air. Yet it was strange, for once, after Bear and I had returned from playing outside, we noticed flies in the house. Had Rah perhaps opened a window in our absence? The new flies were dispatched.

Then we hit on another plan. It was a permanent way to rid the house of flies. Long after we'd gone home Rah would not be bothered by flies. We discovered that praying mantises eat flies. So getting an old glass preserving jar with lid, Bear and I went out to capture praying mantises.

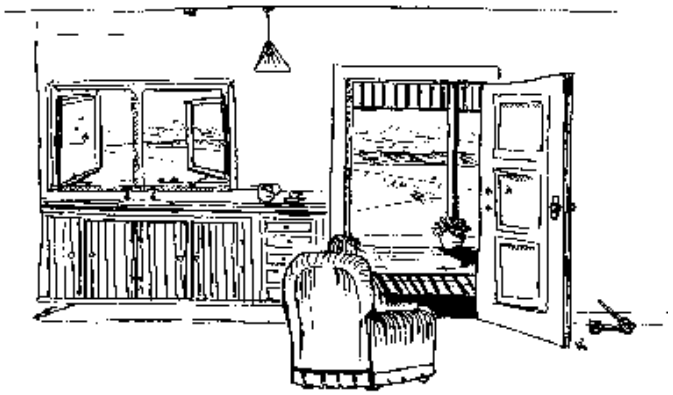
I've always been a bit scared of praying mantises. These bright green little insects seem to say grace before eating, and we'd heard that the mothers ate the fathers. It was dangerous. However, over the next few days we got a fair collection of praying mantises and released them in Rah's closed house.

There were praying mantises on the backs of chairs and on curtains. They'd fly through the air and stick on your shirt. Then it struck us! They were looking for flies! They were hungry! Doors and windows were flung open, so that the mantises might eat. But it seemed like no fly would dare enter. There was only one thing for it: we would have to go outside and catch the food ourselves.

Rah

And that's what we did. Flies galore were released into the house to feed the hungry mantises. The house was abuzz. Once again doors and windows were shut, least the flies escape.

The holiday came to an end. "Thank you for having me, Rah," we no doubt said. That's what children always say when told by their parents to thank their hosts: "Thank you for having me." There was a twinkle in Rah's eye as we left. No doubt we took it to mean the kindliness of a grandmother. But perhaps she was dreaming of the last days of summer with wide open doors and windows. And lots of flies.



5
SPORTS DAY

The inter-school sports day was held every year. The day before, Mr Allen had cut out an "S" for "Springhill" in red material. We were to get our mothers to sew it onto a white singlet.

The next morning the bus arrived at home to pick us up. Mum had sewn the S on from the inside. It was back to front on the outside.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed the bus. We had to rush inside for Mum to do a quick change over.

When we arrived at Waipawa School, everyone from the other schools shouted "Hey! What's the S stand for? Sausage?" In those days such things mattered. It was not going to be a good day.

The thing was, I wanted to go to the toilet - "Front Ways". I asked someone where the toilet was and they said, "Down there". So I went "Down there" and couldn't find it any where. In fact I spent the entire morning going "Down there". Back and forth, back and forth.
Race time came and we were made to sit in rows according to age. The wait was forever. I was desperate, desperate, desperate. I briefly thought about getting it out and weeing as we sat cross-legged on the grass.

Desperate! The lines moved forward. Only three races to go.

"On your marks! Ready! Set! Go!"

Desperate! Desperate! Only two races to go.

"On your marks! Ready! Set! Go!"

Desperate! Desperate! Desperate! Only one race to go.

"On your marks! Ready! Set! Go!"

My race. "On your marks!"

Hurry! Hurry!

"Ready! Set!"

Hurry! Please! Hurry!

"Go!"

I took off at the speed of light. In slow motion an onlooker would've noticed a dark patch appearing on the front of my little grey trousers. But it wasn't slow motion, it was gigantically fast. It was a run, a race, a river. The whole world watched my world crash. If only I had black trousers! But no! They were light grey - once all over.

I do not know if I won the race for I did not stop. I ran all the way to the macrocarpa tree where I had left my things. All afternoon I sat there - far far away from the madding crowd - frantically fanning dry the patch with my sun hat.

One person stopped to talk - a girl from another school. I put the hat over my front. "What does S mean?" she asked kindly.

"Springhill" I said.

"Oh," she said. "I thought it was Sausage".

Somehow, being called a Sausage no longer mattered. She went away.

On the bus on the way home they whispered: "Bruce Goodman wet his pants! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Now you know why I'm not that keen on sport. Much.

6
A TOOTH FAIRY CALLED WONDER

Mr Allen would say "Hell's Bells and Buggy-Wheels" when something really bad happened, like the film broke or the projector stopped in the middle of a film about lions or giraffes or cheetahs. One film was about two children in Australia whose mother was killed by a snake while she was hanging out the washing. The two children wandered the desert on their own after that, like Hansel and Gretal. I can see the mother lying dead under the clothes line. And the music played because it was serious, and the snake slithered off. I never knew that parents died, and for a few days checked our clothes line after school just in case.

The first real film I saw was *The Dam Busters* and Douglas Badar got muddled with Gibson and bombed a dam with no legs. It was at the Onga Picture Theatre. Uncle Bert took us with the cousins to see *The Lady and the Tramp*. That was at Waipawa. You'd stand for *God Save the Queen* at the start of the pictures and the Queen and Prince Phillip and Prince Charles and Princess Anne would wave against a red backdrop. I thought that was *The Lady and the Tramp* at first, but it wasn't. We don't stand anymore at the start of pictures.

Earlier than going to see a film, we went to Waipawa to see a pantomime and the horrible lady was really funny and a man, and I laughed and laughed. And we went to see a ballet because Francie learnt ballet but I couldn't even sit properly on the floor with having too chunky knees. And at the ballet the ballerinas were made of porcelain, and one of them broke.

Francie and Sue

Dad took us kids to Onga Onga to see a magician. We had planned this for weeks. The man at the door said "One pound please" and Dad said he wasn't going to pay one pound just to see a magician. Besides, he didn't have that much on him.

"Please, Dad, please!" we pleaded.

"You could borrow it from the hotel," suggested Sue who was older and had more authority.

"Yes, Dad!" we chimed. But no, Dad would not budge. The next day at school, they could not stop talking about the magician and the dove from the sleeve and the knotted hanky that undid itself.

It was natural that Sue's thoughts had turned to the hotel at Onga Onga, for the whole family was very familiar with it. If there is a building in the whole world that could be described from the outside, it would be the Onga Onga Pub. I'm not going to describe it because I've already spent half my life sitting in the car looking at it, waiting for Dad. Mrs Polly - she ran the pub and had a parrot - would appear at half time with a tray of glasses filled with raspberry drink.

I make it sound as if it happened every day, but it didn't. It was the price we paid for going with Dad to the Yard Sales or the A & P Show. Once, after the Onga Pub stop, Sue said:

"Dad, you're driving too fast." But Dad was busy singing.

"Slow down a bit on the corners, Dad," said Sue and we all went quiet in the back. But Dad went on singing, and as we neared home the corners and Dad's confidence got bigger. Swish! went the car around the corner of the gravel road. Swish! Swish! the car went across the one way bridge. And Dad sang until Clunk! the car went off the road and into the fence. Dad was suddenly sober and stopped singing.

Sue walked home in the dark. An hour later Mum appeared with the tractor loaded down with ropes.

Tony

There were a few other close calls too - especially in our old farm house. Dad was giving us rides on his back in front of the fireplace when an earthquake struck. He suddenly rolled and we stood under the door. Mum had been in the Napier earthquake and knew the dangers of falling chimneys.

That chimney could be dangerous in other ways. Sometimes it caught on fire.
"Mum! Mum! The chimney's on fire!" and Mum would get a blanket off the bed and run it wet in the bath and hold it over the fireplace to stop all air while Ricky climbed the roof with a hose.

Rick

In front of the fire was THE mat. Under it, in the still of night, the Tooth Fairy would come for a tooth. In the morning the tooth was gone, and a shiny sixpence took its place. Once Francie left a tooth under the corner of the mat and in the morning there was a sixpence in another corner and her tooth remained in the other.

"The Tooth Fairy mustn't have been able to find it," said Mum. So Francie tried again that night and got two sixpences for the price of one.

Who needs to pay a pound to see a silly magician at Onga Onga when such wonder happens in your own home?

7
A BAD DAY

Between the bus shed and the bike shed was a path. There was some sort of old letter box there - a big box on a post with a lid. A starling nested in it. Bill Leach, Michael Satchwell and I would remove one of the two starling's eggs each day to see how many we could get it to lay. It laid fifteen, then gave up.

We were standing there once - the whole school - because some pine trees were getting cut down on the neighbouring farm. The chainsaw roared in the distance.

Timber! everyone cried.

The pine tree fell.

The chainsaw roared. Timber!

But instead of shouting "Timber!" I shouted "Shit!"

My older brother, Rick, was standing behind me. "Come on," he said to everyone. "Let's get in the bus."

So they all climbed into the school bus, and just as I was to enter, the bus door shut tight.

"Let me in! Let me in!" I cried. But the door was fast.

The window slid open. It was Rick.

"We don't play with little boys who swear," he said. "You only swear when it's very, very bad." And the window closed.

I was alone for the entire play time, while everyone in the bus had a good time.

That evening I was scared that Rick would tell Mum and Dad that I had said "Shit!" instead of "Timber!" But nothing happened.

Mind you, I had other things on my mind. My pet lamb was ill. We always had pet lambs every year. They were the ones that lost their mothers. Mine was a couple of weeks old.

Me on the left

I warmed the milk in a beer bottle with a teat and went out after school to feed it. It was lying on the ground and didn't run to me.

I gathered it and lay it at the corner of the garage in the sun. Perhaps it was hungry. But the milk that spilt from the teat wet the little white whiskers around its mouth and it did not drink.

Its tummy breathed in and out and I stroked its short, wiry, baby wool.

"Don't die, little lamb," I said. "Don't die."

And it kept breathing.

"Mum," I said, "My lamb's dying."

"Well there's nothing you can do, dear," said Mum. "These things happen." And she went on washing, or ironing, or cooking.

I went back. "You're going to die, little lamb," I said. And I lay on the ground with my head against the lamb's, so it wouldn't feel so bad about dying. All the long, late afternoon I stroked its little breathing tummy.

And as the shadows of the fence batons stretched to a hundred yards, and the setting sun sent fiery rays through crimson clouds from one mountain peak to another, the lamb stopped breathing. It was dead.

"Shit," I said.

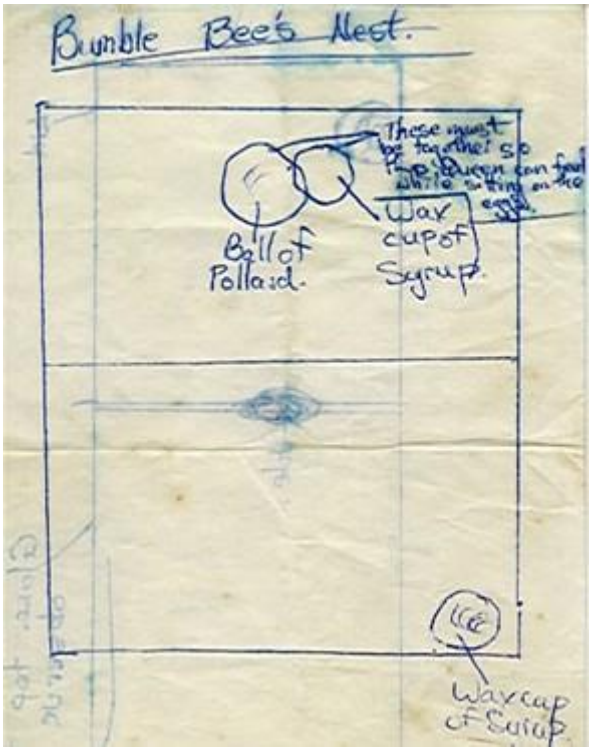
It was tea time.

8
THE BEE PADDOCK

Dad decided to get some bee hives. Not that I minded because I had an insect collection kept on pieces of plywood boards covered with wallpaper. The insects were stuck with pins and the big ones such as wetas stuffed with cotton wool.

You'd catch the insect in a jar, then throw in a piece of cotton wool saturated with carbon tetrachloride used for getting stains off clothes. While the insect was still soft you'd set it out on a special tray with a groove that Dad made.

I also kept a live ant nest between two sheets of glass and fed them on bread soaked in honey and water, and tried to set up a bumble bee's nest. There was a story on it in a book, so I made it but never found a bumble bee.



Yes, I thought, the bee hives were a good idea. Yet still I avoided "The Bee Paddock".

The creek flowed into "The Bee Paddock" and formed a large, still pond by the corner in the shade of some trees. Tony and Rick caught twenty-three eels in that pond. They'd gaff them. I never gaffed eels. It was cruel. I caught them with a piece of string with a hunk of meat knotted at one end. The eel would swallow the meat whole and you could pull the eel up with the string. Then you'd hit the eel with a spade.

I never told you, but of all the animals on the farm I didn't like geese much, especially in the nesting season. Chooks would peck at you on the nest, and ducks would huff, but the geese would go berserk and attack.

One day, Tony and Rick were standing completely still in the creek and I couldn't work out what they were doing. So I went over to look, and just as I neared, Tony flicked a huge eel into the air with his hands and the eel landed on me. I ran straight into a goose's nest. The goose attacked. The gander joined in and chased me all the way home. Now you know why I never went into "The Bee Paddock". I suppose you thought it was because of the bees.

I've gone on about the eels and the geese to give Dad's bees a bit of time to get some honey. Now it was time to harvest the hives. Dad had all the gears. He had overalls and gloves and a hat with gauze to cover his face. He looked like an astronaut. And he had a thing that made smoke and huffed like a duck to make the bees placid and pleased. So we all sat in the Humber Super Snipe with Mum and the windows wound up and the car doors locked for extra safety, to watch Dad collect the honey.

He huffed the smoke into the hive and took off the lid. Out came the first tray of honey crawling a bit with a few pleased bees, and Dad huffed more smoke. Then he pulled out a second tray and must've got stung because he dropped the tray on the hive and bees swarmed everywhere. Now Dad had a temper so he kicked the hive which didn't help one bit.

Then somehow he bent over and the gauze that covered his face came away from his neck, and a good ten thousand bees flew up under the gauze. Dad stood up and the gauze returned to his neck entrapping the bees inside his headpiece.

By now Mum's thoughts of fresh honey had turned to uncontrollable laughter and Dad was shouting things he didn't even say to the dogs. He ran to the car, leaving his smoke huffer behind never to be found. But the car was locked and Mum was too helpless to open it immediately, and she probably didn't want bees in the car any way.

Eventually Dad got in and we drove off at a fair rate, with the headgear being tossed out the window on the way with a reasonable swipe. Dad was still swearing and starting to look quite puffy, with swollen lips and eyebrows.

And then he laughed.

And we all laughed, and Mum became reasonably sympathetic, but mainly not.

After that, each year the honey was collected by Joe Fletcher, Mum's old, distant cousin. And I always avoided "The Bee Paddock" - because of the geese.

9
ACROSS THE RIVER

The thing about mountain rivers is that they can rise very suddenly. Mountains collect the rain and the rain fills the creeks and the creeks fill the tributaries and the tributaries fill the river and before you know it, even if it's sunny on the river bed, the river floods.

This day, Cousin Bear and I went exploring up the Makarora River. The Makarora wound down from the Wakarara Ranges and somewhere downstream joined the Waipawa River. The Wakararas were bare topped and, except in mid-summer, snow-capped and riddled with shingle slides. The river had gorged deep ravines, and up the old track you would find sideless bridges made of old planks where years before the timber millers had crossed. Sometimes on a still day you could hear a roar coming from the mountains, and you knew within the hour there would blow a hot nor-westerly gale.

At Wakarara

The summer afternoon was fine. We went down this steep hill and over this small flat with the derelict mill town where only the Martins lived. The old mill town of Makarora had only about half a dozen houses, and except for the Martins, were all rotten and fallen down with ferns growing out of the timber. Even the mill itself had collapsed, and the great boiler had rusted.

So we crossed the Makarora and climbed over this small spur to another river. This new river didn't have a name, so we named it after ourselves because we had discovered it on an earlier day. We called it the Bearruce River.

Today we were on a peripatus hunt. A peripatus is a couple of inches of a caterpillar-looking thing that isn't a caterpillar and lives in damp logs and is a hang-over from dinosaur days. When you hold it in your hand it spits blue milk up your arm.

Today schools teach all about Tyrannosaurus rex and Brachiosaurus and not about the dinosaur in our own back yard. Bear and I, at the age of eight, didn't read about

dinosaurs, we hunted them. It would be a pity if, after 160 million years, Bear and I were the ones responsible for the extinction of the peripatus. It could well be a bit like our common grandfather, George Peers, who as a kid in the area, trapped huia birds to sell the tail feathers to local Maori. Anyway, armed with an old shoe box we crossed the Bearruce River in search of dinosaurs.

Peripatus

A peripatus is fairly easy to find. You just kick a damp log to bits and there it is! So we got one each, as pets, put them in the shoe box with bits of wood, and set off home. We crossed the Bearruce, crossed the spur, and reached the Makarora.

Of course, eight year old boys don't simply go home with a peripatus in a shoe box. The Makarora River could well have a new eel, or a new rock, or a new route. So we followed it some way up stream.

I forgot to mention that the spur we climbed was slippery, grey papa rock, and this grew into a high cliff upstream that banked the river. The papa cliff went straight into the clouds hundreds of feet high. So one side of the river was the small flat with the derelict mill town where only the Martins lived, and the other side of the river was the sheer papa cliff. Sometimes at night in bed, when the river flooded, you'd hear great pieces of the papa rock crashing into the raging river.

Bear found an eel in a nook at the base of the cliff.

Suddenly, we looked up to discover that the river was in flood and rising. We were trapped on a small piece of river bed between the raging river and the sheer papa cliff. Our piece of land was getting smaller and smaller.

Smaller and smaller our piece of land got and higher the river. The water was a roaring dirty brown. A log swept past. The peripati set sail in the shoe box and headed for South America.

We found a stick on our island, so we grabbed one end each, and faced with no choice, plunged into the torrent. Within seconds, our feet could no longer touch the bottom. We bounced along, with only our heads appearing, clutching the stick for grim death. The river bank opposite shot past at a hundred miles an hour.

Then we were on the other side, emerging muddy and wet and safe. By now it was raining, and the tops of the Wakararas were shrouded in cloud. We set off home, crossing the small flat with the derelict mill town where only the Martins lived.

Me, Jane, Bear, Francie

Now the Martins didn't have a proper toilet. They had an outhouse, and this dunny didn't have a door. Mr Martin was sitting on it. It's all right to have a dunny without a door facing the road if you're the last house.

We never knew the Martins. Rumour had it that they had fourteen children. We never saw them. To see Mr Martin sitting on the dunny was rare. When we were climbing the hill to get home we were above Mr Martin's outhouse, and were seized by a sudden desire to chuck rocks on his dunny roof.

Clunk!

Clunk! Mr Martin appeared, doing up his pants, and shouting "Whatthexyoicurmtx cuziquedoyouthinkyoureklminztoff!" It was great fun. He couldn't catch us.

Then a gun sounded. Pellets splattered around us. It was Mr Martin firing his shot-gun and still shouting "Whatthexyoicurmtxcuziquedoyouthinkyouarek lminztoff!" We took off up hill.

Bear slipped on the wet ground and rolled into me. We both fell, and rolled clutching each other. We rolled, and rolled, and rolled down the hill - all the way to Mr Martin's feet.

"Whatthexyoicurmtxcuziquedoyouthinkyoureklminztoff!"

We ran like hell.

Back home, once warm and dry, we planned tomorrow. It's funny how parents never ask how come you got so muddy.

10
COLLIE AND LOLLIES

We went to Mass once a month. We were Catholics. Onga Onga had Mass once a month. Father Phillips was the parish priest. He died.

The Onga Onga church was tiny. Before Mass started there were confessions down the back, then the hymn would start with this lady singing *Hail Queen of Heaven* or *O Sacred Heart* in a great warbly voice that made us giggle and get smacked.

For confession I always kept to the same sin, which was all I could think of: "I pinched a biscuit from my mother's tin". Because, you see, we'd always say "Mum? Can I have a biscuit?" and she'd say "Please?" and we'd say "Please" and then we'd get a biscuit. But of course one biscuit is never enough, and after eating the first I'd creep into the kitchen where Mum was cutting the cabbage for tea, open the cupboard door very, very quietly - just wide enough for a hand and an arm - open the biscuit tin and take another biscuit.

To say in confession, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I pinched a biscuit from my mother's tin" was a slight untruth, for during the month more than one biscuit had gone. But it was hard enough remembering the Act of Contrition without having to worry about such details.

First Communion was at Takapau and we got jelly and ice cream afterwards. Confirmation was the following year, and I was sure I felt a stinging on my forehead - where Archbishop McKeefry put the oil - which I was convinced was where the Holy Spirit had gone in.

First Communion
Michael Satchwell, Francie, Me

Now someone had told Francie that if you said 70,000 Hail Marys you'd get whatever you asked for. We wanted a dog, and after several weeks of discussion decided that a collie dog was best. So each day after school, when we were sent to check the sheep at lambing time, France would say the Hail Mary flatout and I would count.

Our farm

Hailmaryfullofgracethelordiswiththeeblessedartthouamongstwoemnandblessedisthe fruitofthywombjesusholymarymotherofgodprayforussinnersnowandatthehourofour deathamen.

One!

Hailmaryfullofgracethelordiswiththeeblessedartthouamongstwoemnandblessedisthe fruitofthywombjesusholymarymotherofgodprayforussinnersnowandatthehourofour deathamen.

Two!

And so it went on, day after day, until the lambing season was over and we'd only got to a thousand.

Christmas came. We got a goldfish. We figured that if a collie was worth 70,000 *Hail Marys* a goldfish must be worth about a thousand.

Lent was the best season of the Church's Year. We were each given an Agee Preserving Jar because we'd given up lollies for Lent. When we went to town on the Friday night, we'd buy as many lollies as possible with the penny, and put them in the jar. They were moments of greatest pleasure to take the jar out and look at the colours through the glass. Francie, Leo and I would spend Lent swapping and trading lollies. "I'll give you that one, if you give me that one". Leo would trade almost anything for a

Licorice All Sort. And the jars would slowly, wondrously fill until Easter Sunday came and the lid came off the tomb and the tomb was empty.

Every morning when we got up we had to say:

> *O Jesus, through the most pure heart of Mary, I offer you all my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of Thy Divine Heart.*

At night we'd kneel by the bed in our pyjamas and say:

> *Angel of God, my guardian dear,*
> *To whom God's love commits me here,*
> *Ever this day be at my side,*
> *To light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.*

And then we'd go to sleep, for we knew Mary the Mother of God could come in the night for a look.

"Because, children," Mum would say, "You never know when Our Blessed Mother might come to this house. And it would be terrible if she found your rooms in a mess or my laundry cupboard untidy."

I'm sure she did come. I know she did, for once in the dead of night I felt her sit at the end of my bed for a moment.

And it wasn't the cat.

11
CHOOKS AND STUFF

This bit is about birds. You see, I collected birds' eggs. I also collected sea shells - which, come to think of it, is a strange hobby for someone who lived sixty miles from the sea.

One day while I was helping Dad dip the sheep, the grader driver came over with a hawk's egg for me. He'd disturbed the nest while grading the road. It was very kind of him. I didn't have a hawk's egg. You'd then make a hole each end of the egg with a spike on the barbed wire fence and blow the yoke out.

Our Springhill Farm

I also never had a magpie's egg. Magpies attack from behind, and even while going to feed the chooks in the magpie nesting season I would wave a stick around and around my head to stop the magpies from killing me.

There was this magpie's nest right at the top of a huge kanuka tree, and my sister Francie and I worked out a plan to capture an egg. We would get every sun hat in the house and climb the tree. I remember we wore seven hats each.

It's very hard to climb a tree wearing seven hats, but eventually we managed to reach the nest only to discover it was empty.

I liked birds and chooks and stuff. Dad had bought me an incubator for four pounds from Takapau. It held 144 eggs and ran on kerosene. Dad was as keen on it as myself. He hatched out some turkey eggs first. Later when we had about 144 proper chickens, we put them under the infra-red lamp and reared them that way.

There was only one thing I didn't like about chooks and that was the way the roosters were always hurting the hens. They would jump on top of them and pull the hens' combs. Judging by the way the hens ran away from the roosters, they didn't like it much either. So I would spend half the day chasing the roosters off the hens. It was jolly annoying.

"Why do we need roosters anyway?" I asked Dad. We were standing by the gate.
"Because," said Dad, "if you don't have roosters you don't get chickens."

He then explained to me, using words like "fertilize" and "inject". It was all very important.

Now, at the same time, our district had a wasp plague. There were wasps everywhere. No one could find the wasps' nest. So our teacher devised a plan. You put honey at the bottom of a beer bottle and loosely tied a small loop of cotton around the top of the bottle mouth. The wasp would go in and eat the honey. As it came out - first its feelers, then its head - you would gently pull the cotton noose round its waist. Distressed, it would fly straight off to the nest. Because of the weight of the piece of cotton, it couldn't fly very fast, and you'd have plenty of time to climb over a fence as you followed it.

So I found the nest. It was huge! It was at the top of a tall poplar.

Everyone was very pleased with me. I didn't have to be a nobody at school and hide around corners.

Later at school we had to look up the encyclopedia and read an article. I read an article about "Salmon". It said that the female laid her eggs and the male fertilized them. Now I knew what the word "fertilize" meant because Dad had told me. No one else would know because they hadn't been told, and they probably didn't have chooks.

So I strode up to the teacher, and with a finger on the word, said to the teacher in a voice loud enough to be heard by everybody: "Excuse me. What does the word fertilize mean?"

The whole room went deathly quiet. The teacher lent back on his chair.

"What does the word fertilize mean?" I repeated. Stupid teacher. He probably didn't have chooks either.

"Um," he said. "Um".

"Well?"

"Um".
"I know what it means!" I cried. "It means to inject!"

Never had such a hubbub occurred in class. The dumb spoke and the tone-deaf sang. I had to creep around school for several days after that. They were probably all talking about me. "That's the one! That's the one who used the word fertilize in class!"

Our Springhill Farm

In the long run however, it didn't lessen my interest - in chooks at least. At the school gala, six bantams in a crate were on the back of the raffle truck. I waited all day for them to be raffled. I would spend all my money on the bantam raffle tickets. I wouldn't leave the truck, because I didn't want to miss it. Dad was in charge of the raffle. Mum was running the white elephant stall.

When it came time for the bantams to be raffled, Dad picked them up and began to auction them. There was no raffle at all! Dad was auctioning them!

"Ten shillings to this lady over here!" he said. "Twelve and sixpence to that man there!"

I ran up the steps to tell mum. "Dad's auctioning the bantams! Dad's auctioning the bloody bantams!"

"One pound to the boy running up the steps!" cried Dad.

I stopped in my tracks. That was me!

That night I took the bantams home.

12
SONGS, POEMS AND MAGIC

Aunty Phyllis Connolly wasn't our real aunty. She was a friend of Mum's from Wellington, and would sometimes come to stay. Aunty Phyllis was a brilliant pianist. She could play anything. It was like magic that anyone could play the piano like that. When she came to stay she would accompany Mum's singing. Mum was a very good singer. She sang Schubert and stuff. In fact she could've become famous at Covent Garden.

Mum gave Francie and me piano lessons. Sue was boarding at Sacred Heart College in Napier, and as preparation for her home-coming we had to learn some special pieces on the piano. We could both play *Where Oh Where Has my Little Dog Gone* and *The Highland Lad*. When Sue arrived we both wanted to play *The Highland Lad.* Since Francie was older she went first and played MY piece, so I had to settle for the other.

Francie always won. When we were doing the dishes Francie ALWAYS started the argument, and Dad would call out from the dining room, "Francie come in here and leave Bruce to finish the dishes on his own". Dad had a way with words. His other threat was, "If you don't stop arguing I'll do the dishes myself".

Francie as Little-Bo-Peep, Me as an Elf!

Dad couldn't sing for nuts. He'd sing in the car.

Oh my Lord! Henry Ford!
How he rattled and he roared
Along the road to Gundy-Guy.
With the radiator hissing
And half the engine missing
And water in the petrol
And sand in the gears
And it hasn't seen a garage
For over fifty years.

And at other times it would be

If it ain't gonna rain no more no more
If it ain't gonna rain no more
How in the heck can I wash my neck
If it ain't gonna rain no more.

France could sing and I didn't. She'd go to her friends' houses and they'd stand around the piano - Christine Rumbal, Stephanie Martin, Pamela Leach and France - and sing:

Ta-a-ammy Ta-a-ammy Tammy's in love.

Mum didn't like it much.

Me as Noddy, France as Fairy!

I had enough problem singing at school without joining a group. We learnt songs off the music programme on the wireless in preparation for the Central Hawkes Bay Music Festival. We learnt:

I like them all, the pretty girls,
I like them all whether dark or fair,
But yet above the rest I like
The best the girl with the golden hair.

Fa la la la-a
Fa la la la-a
Fa la la la la-la la la la.
Ah yes! Above the rest I like
The best the girl with the golden hair.

You foolish boy, don't say so,
Your mother will punish you.
Oh no indeed she will not
For telling what is so true.

Then off we'd go again on another string of Fa-la-las all the way to Waipukurau where every school under the sun joined to sing about the girl with the golden hair.

Leo as Bumblebee, Me as Noddy!

I became very good at mouthing the words. Not only that, but on the high notes I learnt to raise my eye brows to make it look like I was a skylark. So convincing was my lip-sync performance in those pre-lip-sync days, that the crabby old bag waving her hand in front of us wearing a red ribbon selected me for the special group to sing *The Skye Boat Song.*

Speed bonnie boat like a bird on the wing
Onward the sailors cry
Carry the lad that's born to be king
Over the sea to Skye.

It became my favourite tune of all time, but not a sound did I utter. But I'd sing on my own as a child, far far across the paddocks.

Speed bonnie boat like a bird on the wing
Onward the sailors cry
Carry the lad that's born to be king
Over the sea to Skye.

And I'd recite poems to myself that we'd been made to learn at school. We learnt the entire *Ballad of Dick Turpin* by Alfred Noyes.

The daylight moon looked quietly down
On the gathering dusk of London town...

We learnt *The Kingfisher* by W.H. Davies:

It was the rainbow gave thee birth.

And in the end, whether down in the willows at the river, or bird-nesting in the totaras, or checking the lambing ewes for my father, or feeding the chooks, I'd say the poems over and over, listening to each word as if it was from a magic spell.

It was the rainbow gave thee birth
And left thee all her mother's hues.
And as thy mother's name was Tears
So runs it in thy blood
To choose for haunts the lonely pools,
And keep in company with trees that weep.

Other contributions to the Arts at Springhill School was to hit two bars of a glockenspiel when all performed together on percussion, and to play the part of a grandfather clock in the end of year school play. This tall cardboard grandfather clock twice rocked back and forth on a pencil, and twice I had to say "Tick-tock, tick-tock". Everyone else had decent parts.

One day I wrote a play. It had two hundred and forty-seven characters and eighty-seven scene changes on half a page. When we came to read it, everything went wrong. The dialogue went something like this:

Annette: Let us go to town.

Everyone: Yes!

Michael: We will walk there.

Everyone: Yes!

They walk along the road and arrive in town.

Everyone: Hurrah!

But when it came to shout "Hurrah!" everyone shouted "Hurry!"

"But!" I said. "It's Hurrah!"

"You've got Hurry here," said Annette Cheer.

"But it's meant to be Hurrah," I said.

"Well you've got Hurry written down," said Decima Alder.

"But it's meant to be Hurrah," I said almost in tears. The "Hurrah!" was the climax of the play and it was ruined - forever. That was the end of the performance. I'd never write a play again. I would be a biologist because I liked Nature Study best.

13
RAINCOAT AT BOYS' CAMP

With so few playmates my own age, Mum and Dad decided to send me off to a Boys' Camp for a couple of weeks over summer. It was at a beach near Gisborne or somewhere.

Richard Bradley was more my brother Rick's age, and I was about nine. He was the other one going to the camp - from up the road - and was to look after me on the train journey. Somehow we arrived at the camp, and to my dismay, we were put into different tents. I was a bit younger than most on the camp, but they had made an exception for me. I think the oldest was about eighteen.

At the station
Me and Richard Bradley

There were about six in my tent. They were all a lot older than me. The ages were mixed, but on the first night the older ones in the tent, following some time-honoured tradition, grabbed the youngest one (excluding me), ripped off his trousers and "nuggeted his balls". It was "initiation". I lay awake all night in terror.

At the beach

The next day I can't remember, nor any of the other days. I don't know what we ate, or where we ate, or when we ate. I don't know if I swam in the sea or not - but there's a photo of me at the beach. At night we assembled in the hall and everyone in the camp roared at the top of their voices:

It isn't any trouble just to S-M-I-L-E
S-M-I-L-E S-M-I-L-E
It isn't any trouble just to S-M-I-L-E

I was terrified. It was so loud. I'd never heard anything so loud in my whole life.

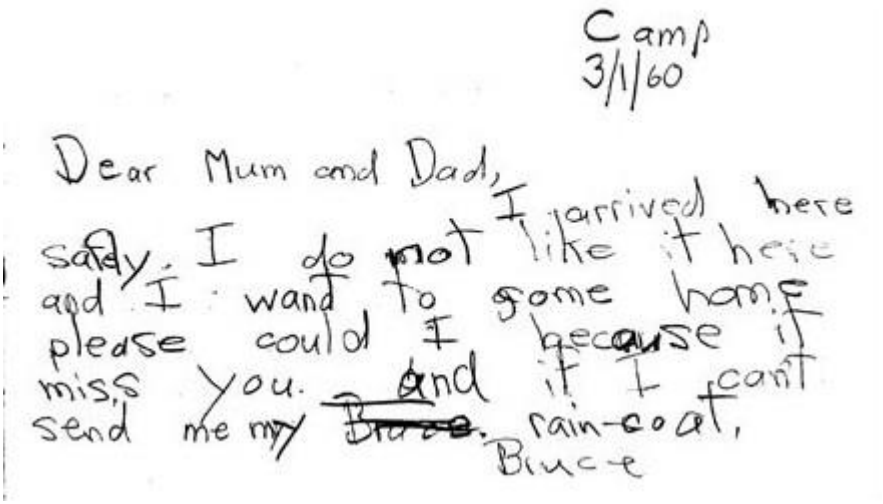
Building castles

Each group had to decorate the area around their tent - with shells, and wooden fences, and paths, and so on. Word spread that a group was being sent home. They must have been drinking or something. I crept through the trees to look at their tent. They were there dismantling it; destroying their fences and paths. They were old. They were criminals. They looked to be angry. They were swearing. I'd never heard swearing like that before. Not even Dad at the bees. Dad only ever said "bloody". This was different. I was terrified.

That night I wrote home on paper blotched with tears.

Dear Mum and Dad,

I arrived here safely. I do not like it here and I want to come home please could I because I miss you and if I can't send me my rain-coat.



Camp
3/1/60

Dear Mum and Dad,
I arrived here safely. I do not like it here and I want to come home please could I because I miss you. and if I can't send me my ~~Bruce~~ rain-coat,
Bruce

You see, it had started to rain, and that added to my misery.

I went to the Superintendent to get my Brownie Box Camera. When we arrived at camp we had to hand our cameras in.

"Come in!" he called as I knocked.

I entered.

"Yes?"

"Can I get my camera?"

"It's under the table".

I went under the table. There were a thousand cameras there. He had his feet amongst them.

"Hurry up!" he snapped.

"I can't find it".

There, under the table surround by the thousand cameras and the Superintendent's feet, I burst into tears.

"Hurry up, boy!" he repeated. Silence.

"Hurry up".

"I haven't got my raincoat," I gasped.

"Hurry up then," he said. His feet shuffled. I found it! I found the camera! I emerged.

"Your parents rang," he said.

"They haven't sent my raincoat."

"You'll be right in a couple of days".

Camp Kitchen/Dining Room

So I left the room and went to the beach. Nothing else I remember. There's a vague taste of summer somewhere.

But most of all I remember the train station and the arrival home, and Mum and Dad, and Tony, Sue, Rick, France and Leo. And the long trail of string through the rooms of the house that I followed to find at the end a welcome home present of something Dad had made for me and Mum had wrapped. And I remember the raincoat I found, all rolled up, at the bottom of my suitcase when I unpacked.

14
WISHING WELL AND FAREWELL

Mum wished for a wishing well. Our new house on the farm had a large garden, and Mum had seen a picture of a wishing well in *The Auckland Weekly*. It was the traditional English wishing well with rope, bucket and all.

Dad seemed reluctant to make it, but with the school gala coming up Mum planned a plot. Why shouldn't Dad make a wishing well for the school gala? You could then toss a coin into the well, haul the bucket up on the rope and find a present in the bucket. "And, Frank," she said, "I have a picture of it here in the Auckland Weekly".

When it was all done, of course, and the gala was over, the well could simply be shifted back home from school and stored in our garden.

"Wouldn't that be lovely, dear?"

The Well

So Dad made the well, and there it was at the school gala! The gala was a festive occasion. The whole district was there. There were raffles from the back of the truck, white elephant stalls, bring and buy stalls, throw a ball at skittles stalls. And there was the well.

Music boomed out on the old windup 78 record player. Mum bought a red and white checked table cloth, embroidered with white criss-crosses, made by Mrs Crystall's mother. For years that table cloth covered our dining table.

And at the end, after the great clean up, with the stalls gone, and the truck gone, and the rubbish cleared, there sat Mum's wishing well in the middle of the school grounds.

The teacher, Mr Allen, was a keen gardener, and before long petunias sprouted from the well. Pansies grew ablaze from its bucket. Now that he knew how to make it, suggested a disappointed Mum, perhaps Dad could make another well for our own garden? But the well was not to surrender another wish.

Perhaps it was because we didn't have a well, or perhaps it was for other reasons, but soon our farm was on the market and sold. We were shifting away. Dad had been Chairman of the School Committee and Mum had been President of the Country Women's Institute. The district's farewell in the woolshed was huge.

Now Mum, who knew more things than us kids, said to us: "If anyone at school makes a speech or gives a farewell gift to Francie, Bruce and Leo, you must make a speech in reply."

She wrote the speech out for Francie and me, and we learnt it off by heart. It was vague enough not to give the secret away.

"Thank you for your kindness. We have enjoyed our time at Springhill and are sad to be going. We will miss you all."

So Francie and I went around saying "thankyouforyourkindnesswehaveenjoyed ourtimeatSpringhillandaresadtobegoingwewillmissyouall" over and over until we knew it well. We knew we wouldn't have to use it because we couldn't think when.

Even when Francie and I were sent out to the shelter shed to take the primers for reading - "And take your little brother," said Mr Allen - we didn't realize that the others were planning something.

Even when Mr Allen said, "Today in class we are going to make colourful party hats," we didn't realize that the others were planning something.

Even when the photographer arrived and lined up the whole school for a photograph, we didn't realize the plan. Nor when Francie and I went with some others down to the stream to catch some cockabullies for the class fish tank. "And why not have an extended lunch hour?" said Mr Allen. "Come back at two o'clock".

So we did that. And there was the table set up in the classroom with cakes and party hats. Francie, Leo and I sat in the most important chairs, and we were farewelled in grand style. Pam Leach stood and made a speech. She said, "We have enjoyed having you at Springhill and are sad to see you going. We will miss you all. And on behalf of the school we would like to present you with this". And she handed over a large framed photograph of everyone.

Everyone clapped, and waited. I nudged France.

"Make the speech," I whispered.

"No! You do it!" she whispered back.

"No!" I said. "You do it!"

"You do it!"

"No!"

We went home in great excitement. "Mum! Mum! Mum!" we shouted. "Guess what? They had a surprise party for us and we were given this picture and had cakes!"

"Oh! How lovely, dear," said Mum. "And did you make the speech?"

"Yes," said France.

"She did it very well," I added, determined that Francie's reluctant reply would appear to come from a sense of modesty. She said "thankyouforyourkindnesswehave enjoyedourtimeatSpringhillandaresadtobegoingwewillmissyouall".

"That's lovely, dear," said Mum.

"At first," said me, warming to the occasion, "Francie was a bit scared. But then she stood up and said it".

"That's lovely, dear," said Mum. And we went out to play while Mum continued to wrap the crockery in old *Auckland Weeklies* and pack them into large wooden crates.

"Children! Come here!" called Mum, several hours later. "Mrs Leach just phoned and said that Pam said that Francie was too overcome to make a speech. You naughty, naughty, NAUGHTY children."

Well, that kind of put a damper on the festivity. And several days later, all loaded up in the car, we still felt the sting. The cat, at the moment of departure, ran under the house and wouldn't come out. In the end, we drove off, down the long, long drive lined with oak and fir saplings that Mum had planted for a future time, and left the cat behind for Miss Swinburn on the farm next door to find and feed. It was a naughty, naughty, NAUGHTY cat.

The Gate

Today, Springhill School has gone. The single classroom was shifted somewhere else or pulled down. The school was a victim of government cuts, and too few children, and improved roads and transport. The paddock's empty now. There's the same trees with the same stinging nettles with Red Admirable Butterfly cocoons. But there's no school anymore. Mum's wishing well remains.

It’s lonely in a paddock.

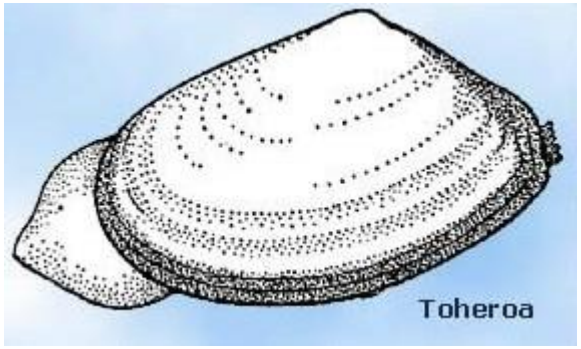
Farewell

Waikanae

15
WAITARERE'S BULLY

We left Springhill somewhere near the start of the August school holidays and couldn't move into our new farm at Waikanae for several weeks. So Mum and Dad rented a house at Waitarere Beach north of Levin. At least I think they rented it. I dimly recall Dad quickly coming to some arrangement with the landlord to pay for our stay by fixing the sewerage system.

The house was on the beach front, and at least the beach was as big as a farm. We did things we'd never done before, like catching toheroa. If the toheroa season wasn't in the August holidays, then I've got my dates wrong. You would quietly walk along the beach at sort of low tide mark and look for a little indentation in the sand. It was like a finger print. Quickly you'd dig with your hands for about a foot, and if fast enough, you could grab the great four or five inch bivalve and pluck it out. If you stomped along the beach the toheroa would feel you coming and burrow down too deep to find. Once you had touched the toheroa, its tongue would hold itself in the sand so that you would have to pull with enormous force, and with a squelch at last it would surrender itself to your bucket.



You were not allowed to dig with a spade but had to give the toheroa a fighting chance. Quickly your finger nails were shredded and hands cut on shells. But the excitement of the hunt made us unaware of pain.

Mum made toheroa soup which was so beautiful that King George V or someone in nineteen hundred and something had asked for another plateful.

"Until then, children," said Mother, "it was very rude to ask for a second helping of soup. Toheroa soup is very beautiful stuff, whether you like it or not - because the King said so".

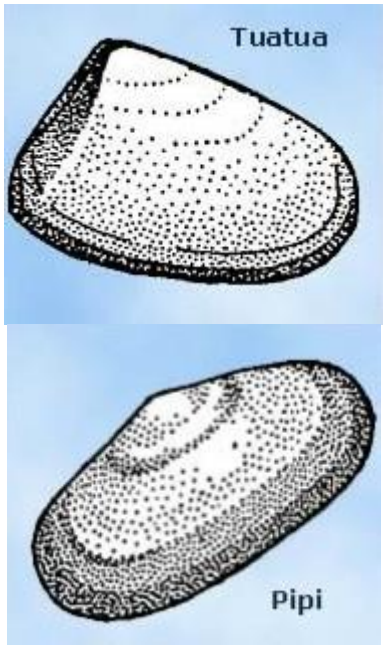
To be very clever and confuse the whole toheroa hunt, you could go on ahead and make tiny finger imprints in the sand. "There's one here, Mum," you would say. And Mum would excitedly dig to find nothing.

"You made the mark with your finger!" declared Mum, looking tricked. And later when Mum went on ahead herself, you'd call out "Mum, I found one you missed!" and dig only to find you'd been tricked yourself.

It was like eating a boiled egg as a child. After finishing you'd turn the eggshell over in the egg cup and call out, "Mum, you've forgotten to open my egg!"

"Goodness!" laughed every mother since Eve, breaking off the top of the empty eggshell with the spoon, "You've tricked me!"

But I digress. A toheroa, for the sake of any foreign reader, is like a big pipi or a big tuatua.



Another thing about Waitarere Beach was the shipwreck - the *Hydrabad*. About an hour's walk along the beach you'd come to this great, rusty hull of a ship. For the first time we were introduced to the world of the sea and sailing ships and storms. New chapters opened for us in encyclopedias. I wrote a story then about

> *a silent stretch of sand, a twitching sponge, a shell, an abstract log with sand-worn spars projecting into the rising breeze. This is the beach.*

No longer was I going to be a simple biologist; I was going to be a marine biologist.

A few years later at the Hydabad wreck
With cousins Bear and Ray

But the newest experience of all was being sent down to the corner dairy.

"Go and get a paper, dear" - or milk or bread or bananas. Never before had I being able to go to a corner shop without having to clean my face and get dressed up, with clean underwear and clean hanky, and travel for an hour in a car. On my first trip to the shop I saw a girl with no eyes. Her eyelids were sealed like clouds across suns, and I wanted to cut them open so she could see.

"Why don't they just cut them open, with a razor blade? In a hospital?" For surely under every closed eyelid is an eye that can see. Yet she ran along the path to the shop as if she had eyes and I thought she knew I stared.

But the path to the shop harboured something more sinister - something quite different. The path to the shop was the territory of a boy who would hide ready to leap out and bash you up. Back in Springhill there were no territories. Not even a farmer's fence was a boundary for children. Children were like flocks of turkeys who could cross boundary fences without a care and come under some sort of shared proprietorship. But here, at Waitarere, was a boy bigger than me who'd bash me up if I walked on the path to the shop.

"Just ignore him," said Mum. I quickly learned to take the long way, and the joy of going to the shop soon lost its innocence.

It was 1960. I was ten. It was my first venture into growing up. My world, for the first time, was divided into big people and little people. And the big people could do what they like. And often did.

16
THE FARM

Our new farm at Waikanae was a dairy farm. It was a couple of hundred acres or something and lots of cows, mainly black and white Friesians with a few Jerseys to keep the cream quota up. It was Town Supply - which meant you never got a holiday.

The house was near where the Peka Peka Road now is and looked at the tall Waikanae hills topped with a bush that was different from the Ruahines. It had nikau palms. The house had fleas and a lounge painted shocking pink and a gate with the words:

THIS GATE SWINGS SO OPEN IT.

Soon the fleas were destroyed, the lounge painted a pale lemon and the sign on the gate covered. Dad added a new lounge and extended the kitchen and put in a new bathroom. But that was later. I jump ahead.

Our House

Milking the cows was new. We learnt how to use the machines and test for mastitis and clean the yard. "Can I get up and milk?" turned into "Do I have to?" at 4.30 in the morning.

As each new heifer calved for the first time, it would be named. We took turns. Tony was inclined to name them after his old teachers at school, so we had "Mousie" for example. Mousie always had twin calves.

Mousie and Twins

Rick named one cow "Oo-ee-oo-ah-ah-jing-jang-walla-walla-boom-bang-oo-ee-oo-ah-ah-jing-jang-walla-walla-boom" which was affectionately known as "Jimmy". Jimmy always kicked. I was working my way through the orchard with "Quince" and "Plum". My brothers called Plum "Plumb-bob" after what she usually did while being milked.

Rick Milking

And the truck would come and take away the milk, and 3.30 p.m. would come and we'd milk, and 4.30 a.m. would come and we'd milk, and the truck would come again. Of course, I didn't milk every morning because I went to school. But in the mornings when I did milk the bedroom light would flick on at 4.15 and Dad would say "Milking Time!" and bring in a cup of tea. Tony and Rick had more trouble getting up because they were busy courting. Tony had left varsity now, because he got sick and almost died. They had a room out the back, and had rigged up a system whereby the alarm clock winder wound a string that switched the light on. Then it turned another alarm on in a kerosene tin that turned a fire alarm bell on. And sometimes you'd hear that fire alarm bell going whoo-whoo-whoo until Dad would get up and go out and wake them himself. But I jump ahead.

Our house was next to the railway line, and at two in the morning a diesel goods train would roar by. On the first night I woke to a thunderous sound, and jumped from my bed into Sue's.

"IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD!" I screamed.

"It's a train!" she cried.

"IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD!"

I soon got used to the trains. In fact, when away from home I'd wake up at the times they should be passing.

The previous owners of the farm must have fed the wild ducks because I counted seventy-two mallards once on our lawn. And there were grey teals too - which were different from mallards because they had different colours under the wing. And the yard became littered with ducklings and chickens and bantam mothers that hatched duck eggs and would go crazy when their children jumped in the water.

We made silage as well as hay. In the mornings after milking you'd feed out, and cut the stinking silage with a great slicer into blocks. Then you'd come home smelling of twenty thousand rotting raisin-packets and have breakfast.

The cows knew when it was milking time. They'd walk down the race in the same order each morning and night, and they'd get milked in the same order. And always, always, there was one that did not come to the shed on its own accord, so you'd walk to the back of the farm just to collect that single, solitary, stubborn cow.

Milking Time

Our farm had another house on it, which we called "The Cabin". It was my museum. I kept all my collections there - sea shells, sponges, birds eggs, birds nests, insects, pressed flowers and weeds and leaves, rocks, fossils, and even an old Maori canoe and carved figure that were found in the peat on the farm. A man from Wellington came and took away the carved figure to the real museum. Later he returned with bits: ancient fossils trapped in rock, chunks of kauri gum, and pieces of moa egg. He showed me how to distinguish fragments of moa egg from fragments of sea shell.

"Mum, I'm going to the museum," I would say. And the museum grew until Sue and her husband and children came to live there. For Sue married Allan. But I jump ahead.

Dad loved to build. He'd put up a hay shed in a weekend, and the Building Inspector would call and say, "You never got a permit".

"For what?" Dad would ask.

"For the hay shed," the man would say.

"Why would I need a permit?" asked Dad.

"Because you need a permit to build," said the man.

"But the hay shed's been there for years," said Dad. And the Building Inspector would leave all perplexed and bothered, convinced that his map was wrong and his records were wrong and his plans were wrong, and that the man who had the job before him must have been a complete idiot. And later, like magic, over a weekend an extension would appear on the implement shed.
Once Dad decided to build a glass house. The frame was up, and the Building Inspector roared in.

"I've caught you! I've caught you in the act!"

But it was a glass house, and a glass house, at least in those days, didn't need a permit. Mum gave the man a cup of tea.

"Hypocrite!" said Dad to Mum.

So we settled in to our new farm in our new place, with or without a permit. In the evenings, after milking, Rick would take us down on the tractor to the beach where we'd swim in the sunset, with sky red and silver and water dark as blood. And Kapiti Island would wade in the sea like a wise, wise giant who had seen a million things in a million years pass by, and was now watching us in this new place.

Kapiti Island from Waikanae Beach

17
THE DEAD ALBATROSS

Waikanae School was big, with lots of teachers. My teacher was Mr X. I was in the same room as Francie.

Mr X was not Mr Allen. We had a spelling test out of 25. "Who got 25 out of 25?" asked Mr X. "24? 23? 22?" And down he went, all the way to 10. I got 11. By 10 everyone had put their hand up, except for one.

"Who got 9?" he asked. "8? 7? 6? 5? 4? 3? 2? 1?"

"Who got... NONE?"

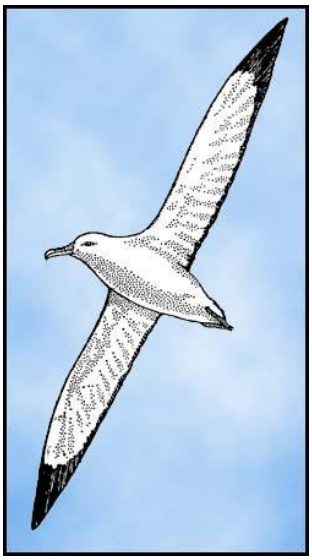
Francie put her hand in the air.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed the class. And later in Home Cooking Class, when Francie made some fudge balls, Mr X told the class that they looked like sheep droppings. I didn't like Mr Kaye.

Oops!

I didn't like Waikanae School. It was not Springhill. When the Church of England minister came, we were sent outside because we were Catholics. That never happened at Springhill. The minister never came in the first place.

For one term I wandered the school grounds, in a place where territories and friendships had been established since the age of five, and the life cycles and habitats of the gecko and peripatus were neither known nor cared about. A boy called Wayne spoke to me, but he was not my friend because I did not know how to make new ones.



Now one day, while walking the beach -

> *a silent stretch of sand, a twitching sponge, a shell, an abstract log with sand-worn spars projecting into the rising breeze*

- I found a dead albatross. It was not long dead. Its great wings were tipped with black; its huge beak was hooked; its silver feathers perfect. A single wing stretched taller than my height. After years of wandering oceans there and back, I'd found it in its stormless, final place. I lay it down and left it. Somehow it would be wrong to cut off its wing and dry it or pluck a feather as a trophy.

"I found an albatross today," was all I said at tea.

(How I would like to fly, far, far, like a bird on the wing, over the sea, away from school where nothing was wondrous any more and the hardest things were not nine times seven but who would bully me at playtime).
And then it happened. There, on the teacher's desk in the morning, wrapped in paper, was the dead albatross.

"Look what Andrea found!" exclaimed the teacher.

"Andrea!" gasped the class. "Andrea found an albatross!"

"I've measured its wings and it's eight foot six," cried Andrea. "I found it on the beach! It's mine, mine, mine!"

And Andrea's friends clucked like mothering hens and the boys strutted like cocks and the teacher crowed.

"Andrea!"

(But I found it first. I left it on the beach).

And they plucked its wings, for each was a feather in Andrea's cap, and they plucked its tail and heart and dumped it.

"I saw it on the beach, sir," I said. "Yesterday".

The class stared.

"Then why didn't you bring it to school?" said Mr X. "Liar!"

And I wasn't given a feather because I could have got all the feathers I wanted myself, yesterday, on the beach yesterday in that stormless place.

Later, everyone had to give a talk on something. We were on a roster. I chose to speak on sea shells, so brought my shell collection to school in boxes in the boot of the car.

"Today I'm going to talk about only the shells on Waikanae beach. This is a tuatua. Everyone calls it a pipi, but *this* is a pipi".

And I went into scallops and mactras and slipper shells and top shells and tiger shells and limpets and cockles and mussels alive-alive-o.

"AND," said I, "I know the names of them all off by heart".

Andrea could eat humble pie after that. My tiny periwinkle shells had made her albatross look like a sparrow. And Wayne, who wasn't my friend because I didn't know how to find one, offered to carry the boxes of sea shells out to the car.

"No", I said in my fear. For I trusted no one, and did not realize that such kindness was a request for friendship.

Soon my time finished at that school, and summer began. Next year I would go to another school.

18
A LAST BIT ABOUT CHOOKS

Leo, when he was small, had an inseparable friend. It was his bantam, called Bantie. Bantie would follow him everywhere, and would perch herself on the handle bars of his tricycle and they'd go off riding. Now and again she'd go on her own to lay an egg, but usually she'd be looking for Leo. Even when Leo got the measles, she found her way through the window and perched on the end of the bed. No kidding. I never had a chook like that. Mum didn't mind Bantie on the end of the bed because Leo was miserable.

Leo and calf

At night, Bantie would roost in the fowl-house with the others, but I'm sure she wondered what she was doing there when the other humans stayed in the house.

Now one night there was a terrible commotion in the fowl-house and a stoat got in and killed Leo's Bantie. So that was the end of that. But a few days later Mum heard a fight going on and it was the bantam rooster fighting the stoat. Bantam roosters are really good fighters because they're so small and agile, and can dart between the legs of a big rooster and make the heavy-weight fighter look like a fool. So the bantam rooster and the stoat were rolling in a great galaxy of fur and feathers.

Tony got his gun and Rick held the torch, and we all thought we might as well get the stoat now even if it also meant the end of the rooster. So Tony pulled the trigger at the great frenzy of fighting and the stoat dropped dead and the bantam rooster shook himself and strutted off.

Now Tony was a good shot, and he rather fancied that a hole in the head of a tumbling stoat was the result of his talent, but we all knew it was a fluke. All in all though, we were pretty pleased with the result, and Leo felt that the bantam rooster and Tony had both done a good job in avenging Bantie's untimely death.

The bantam rooster wasn't going to be lucky forever however, because pretty soon it went missing. We kept the grain in an old twenty gallon milk can, and would tip a

huge bag of wheat into the can when it was getting low. A few months later, as we scrapped the bottom of the barrel, there lay the body of the bantam rooster. Obviously he'd been stealing wheat when the bag was emptied on top of him. It was a bit like dying in a car accident on the way home from fighting a war.

Now some of you might not like this next bit, but it's not meant to be cruel. It's just that it happened that way and that's tough.

Mum sent Leo and me out to kill a rooster for tea and to pluck it. So we caught it, and Leo had his tomahawk. When Dad cut up a sheep he'd cut the chops up with a chopper - chop! chop! chop! flat out - while we held the piece of meat on the block with our little fingers about an inch away from the chopper. But Dad was accurate, and he wasn't going to cut our fingers off on purpose. Leo, however, was only small, and his flying tomahawk couldn't guarantee the safety of my fingers.
So I lay the rooster on the chopping block, and just as Leo standing on a box swept down with the tomahawk, I pulled the rooster away. Off came the rooster's comb.

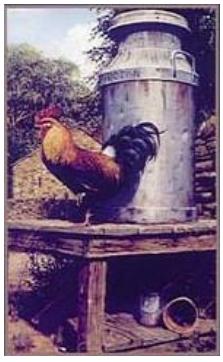
Mum could hear the great to-do from the kitchen and opened the window.

"What's wrong?" she called.

"Nothing, Mum," we answered. "Everything's under control".

So the rooster was quickly laid back down on the block and the tomahawk made another swoop. I did the same thing as before, only this time the rooster lost its beak.

Mum still couldn't see a thing from the kitchen but knew something was up.



"Leave it, children, till Dad gets home," she called.

"We can't!" we cried.

And with a third and final swoop the rooster was dead.

You've probably heard enough about chooks now, so this is the end of the chook stories - except for a bit later when I tell you about the fowl-house episode in my adolescence. But I haven't hit that yet so can't completely rid you of chook stories just yet.

Don't get me wrong. I didn't tell you about the rooster as a joke. It was a tragedy. Tragedies happen, and when they do we wish they hadn't. But we can't be too precious all the time or else we'd forget to get on with life. So I hope you don't complain too loudly about a rooster that's been dead now for forty years.

19
THE CONVENT SCHOOL

People seem to be fascinated by nuns, and until I was eleven, I'd never seen a nun in my life. I've nothing much new to say about nuns, except perhaps we believed that nuns didn't go to the toilet until after the Second Vatican Council.

At the start of 1961, Leo and I began at St Patrick's School, Paraparaumu. France had gone to secondary school. Sister Columbiere was the Principal and my teacher.

St Patrick's, Paraparaumu

Now all the Sisters were Irish, and not just Irish, but Irish Irish. After the first half day of Sister Columbiere, I hadn't understood a word she'd said. And then in sailed Mother Vianney just back from overseas.

Now tis like this you see. I was in one of those funny ships that swim under water at Disneyland, and you know, I couldn't figure out how she didn't drown. And I see, Sister Columbiere, there are some fine lookin' strappin' fellas here and I could picture them out in the field playin' ball with the Almighty God. And I'm after comin' back on the submarine like seein' daylight again was walkin' up the staircase...

And then I noticed that Mother Vianney's veil was on crooked, and I could see her at Disneyland in a submarine with a crooked veil, and I got the giggles. I giggled and giggled until I felt quite sore from giggling, and the more I giggled the sillier I felt at my new school on my first day.

Well Johnny Jackman, his sister's brother-in-law, Sister, you know that fella, a wee Protestant lad, was converted to the Jehovah Witnesses. Now what in the name of the Mother of Mary is this round world coming too? That's what happens, children, when you don't say your prayers.

And then I burst. The rest of the class didn't think it was funny at all because the accent and the order of words was bread and butter to them. And Sister Columbiere and Mother Vianney pretended that the new boy wasn't making any noise at all, but I was laughing and snorting at least as loud as a turkey.

Well I tell you somethin' Sister. It rained and it rained, well sha', I never tort I'd see the day the clouds would head to Spain.

Then other Sisters sailed in and out -

why tis Sister Celine!

- until the whole harbour was in full wind with black and white sails jostling for their starting positions.

Sister Columbiere was a most wonderful teacher. I have no crabby nun's stories to tell of Sister Columbiere. She taught us with a relish, and told us off with a relish -

come here now

- and she blew the sport's whistle as well as she taught science and maths and put out booklets with our poems and stories published.

One day, Sister announced that the famous New Zealand author, Miss Nelle Scanlon, was coming to talk. Nelle Scanlon had written novels that we had to read in preparation - about early New Zealand families and a man who got a knighthood. And then the visitor arrived.

Now Sister Columbiere's desk and chair was on a rostrum, about a foot above the ground, and when Miss Scanlon arrived Sister relinquished her chair and handed it over to the famous author. Miss Scanlon was wearing a little yellow hat, and spoke enthusiastically in response to our questions.

And then...

...the back legs of Miss Scanlon's chair went over the edge of the rostrum. There were these little old lady's legs and shoes sticking up over the desk. Chaos followed, with Sister Columbiere patting Miss Scanlon and expressing profound regret -

to be sure, to be sure

- and seeing her to her car

to be sure, to be sure, to be sure.

"Who laughed?" said Sister Columbiere on returning to the classroom.

"It was the girls, Sister," said Bevan Smith, who later was to hold several New Zealand sprints records and was pretty quick even then.

"Which girls?" said Sister Columbiere.

"Kathryn Trask!" they chorused. For Kathryn was the head girl and destined to become a nun herself, and it seemed safest in times of such crises to have an extremely reliable scapegoat.

"Well it's very rude," said Sister Columbiere. "She could have broken her neck!" By this time, all I could see in my mind were Miss Scanlon's legs and shoes over the top of the desk, and I snorted.

At last Sister Columbiere had found a scapegoat she considered culpable.

"And as for you, young Goodman," she said. And there the matter rested.

Us boys were sent up the hill to weed the gardens around the big statue of Mary at Paraparaumu. Religion became more important than it had before. We were sent over to the church for confessions regularly, and Father Dunn would hear them. We could tell who had done what sin because those who argued with their brothers and sisters got to kneel for prayers afterwards, but those who had told lies made the Stations of the Cross. And the nuns and priests became a familiar facet of our family life. Our house was next to the main road, and priests would call for a cup of tea on their way from somewhere to somewhere, and some would stay a day or two to milk the cows and work on the farm. Dad bought the Sisters their first TV set, and later on, their first car.

I won the Rotary Essay Competition while at St Pat's Convent. It was an essay about Sir Edmund Hillary. Sister Columbiere and I were invited to dinner, but Dad went with me instead because nuns didn’t eat. And I was given a book and had to read my essay.

I stood up.

"In 1919 many baby boys were born. There was nothing to indicate that one would become so famous that... he was knighted by the Queen for his wonderful feat".

Of course, "feat" when read out loud is "feet". Sir Edmund's "wonderful feet" were heartily laughed at and I came to believe that I'd meant both of them.

Years later, I caught the train from Dublin to Thurles to stay a few days with a not much aged Sister Columbiere. For she'd returned to Ireland. She was waiting at the convent gate, with the same bright eyes behind those glasses, and greeted me with the same gracious enthusiasm.

"Sha'! Young Goodman!" she said.

I was not the first from the Kapiti Coast to have made the long journey to see her.

Years later…

20
HOME CONCERTS

When Sue came home from Dental Nurse Training School for the holidays it was always great fun. Often, she would organise Francie, Leo and me into doing a home concert. Sue had her Letters in speech. Years ago, at a talent quest at the beach, she'd recited my favourite thing, which was a monologue about a circus trainer and his fleas.

"Ma-maa! Ma-maa! You've got my Itch!" was the bit I always waited for. Anyway, she won the talent quest, and buoyed on with success, entered the Beauty Pageant. We all waited for Sue to appear on stage in her swimming togs, and when she did, the audience still abuzz with the talent quest, cried out "Fleas! Fleas!"

Sue

So we'd give these concerts at home and sing songs.

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do;
I'm half crazy all for the love of you.
It won't be a stylish marriage, we can't afford a carriage,
But you'll look sweet, upon the seat
Of a bicycle built for two.

And we'd ride in tandem through the lounge and hide behind the couch as if it was the wing of a great theatre. Then I'd perform and Francie would perform and Leo would perform and Mum and Dad would applaud.

France

Then it would grow into a sing-a-long, with Tony and France on the piano accordions, and Sue and Rick singing their heads off.

Fare thee well! Fare thee well!
Farewell my fairy fay!
For I'm off to Louisiana for to see my Susy Anna,
Singing "Polly Wolly Doodle" all the day!

We'd often have sing-a-longs, and at parties the Goodmans were always the loudest and the last to leave. Rick, who was even more extroverted than Sue, would have a towel to mop the sweat - for the whole room would become the arena of performance.

Then Rick would play *The Nikau Waltz* and Tony would play Leybach's *5th Nocturne* and France would play *Judy, Judy, Judy* and then back to -

Ha! Ha! Ha! Hee! Hee! Hee!
Little Brown Jug do I love thee!

- till someone said "It's time for bed" for tomorrow it was milking and milking can't wait or be put off or cancelled like the dental nurse.

Me at back
France, Leo, Tony, Rick

I always sat feeling pleased and enjoying the party, because you didn't have to be a raging extrovert to enjoy it. For Tony, Rick and France were in the local operettas and I wasn't, and they became handsome princes and a princess.

Now I had been to Wellington and seen the Kelburn Fountain at night. The water played, and its colours changed. It was red then blue then purple then green then yellow and white. I didn't like the yellow and white bit much, but the rest was like a spell. And when the fountain had finished its cycle it was time to go.

"But, Mum, can't we just watch it a bit more?"

And the fountain would go round again and play like it was heaven; each droplet a star, each movement a spin of a galaxy. I could watch it forever.

Back home, in the old macrocarpa by the gate that once said "This Gate Swings So Open It," I hung a procession of watering cans and hoses, and covered torches with coloured cellophane, for a solo performance one night with parents sitting in chairs in the paddock. But the contraption didn't work, for the hoses couldn't reach the taps, and the boy couldn't climb the tree with buckets of water to fill the watering cans and hold the coloured torches all at once.

A long, long time after, in Los Angeles, I found a fountain that hurled a billion tonnes of water all at once, and a million ranks of lights danced, and sound systems hurtled a thousand decibels of "Glory Alleluia". It was exactly what I meant.

21
ROWING ROUND ROTORUA

Staying with Cousin Bear was always an adventure. By now, the Worsnop Cousins had shifted from Wakarara to Ngongotaha near Rotorua. And Ray had joined their family, and become a real cousin too. He was a bit younger than Bear and me.

So in the May holidays we went to stay at Ngongotaha. It was a brilliant day. You could see Lake Rotorua from the Worsnop farm. It was the first sapphire I had seen, other than in coloured encyclopedias.

Now at tea time Cousin Jane and Francie announced that tomorrow they were going to bike around the lake. So Bear, Ray and I decided that we were going to row around the lake in a little boat. It quickly turned into a challenge. We would row around the lake keeping to the shoreline not further than a hundred yards and arrive home before Francie and Jane on the bicycles.

Early next day Uncle Bert took us down to the lake in the car with the boat on the roof. France and Jane set off on their bikes, and Leo and Cousin Rachel stayed home and played on the horse. They were having enough trouble climbing the fence to get on the horse without galloping around the lake on it.

Off we rowed, taking turns with the rowing. So confident were we, that we took Uncle Bert's expensive fishing rod for a spot of fishing on the way. We had a packed lunch and some fruit, and after about half an hour of rowing it was about nine o'clock and time to eat. In the distance we could not see Jane and France, but we could see a bit of road winding up a steep hill. We laughed because we could imagine them pushing their bikes up the hills in a silly attempt to beat us.

Setting out

Lake Rotorua is shallow and was almost as flat as a pancake, so we drifted a bit while we ate our sandwiches, then took up rowing again. Very soon we got stuck on an island of weed. The boat sat solid about an inch above water on top of this green growth, and no matter how we prodded and poked with the oars, the weed simply floated the boat two feet in any direction. It was impossible. For as far as we could see on every side there was weed and it looked like we were marooned forever.

"Ha ha my Hearties!" roared Bear, who could turn any situation into something different. Instantly we were turned into Pirate Kings. It was decided that I would get out of the boat into the weed and push, and if I sank forever into the weed, Bear and Ray would hold me up and cry "Help!" The whole world would hear in the stillness of the lake morning.

I crept over the side of the boat very carefully, prepared to be eaten up by the trifid weed, only to discover that the lake was no deeper than my knees. Bear and Ray jumped out and we carried the boat for about fifty yards until it got deeper and we were free. From a distance it would have looked like three boys carrying their boat on water. So we set off again, this time a bit further out in the lake to escape the entanglement of the weed.

A little while later we passed a bay, and then another and another. It was the May school holidays, as I said, and therefore the duck shooting season, but it was alright because each bay had a sign that said NO SHOOTING. So we stopped in the middle of a bay because it was time for a spot of fishing. And besides, we needed a rest from rowing.

We put down the anchor, which was some rocks in an old paint tin on a string that Bear had made. We got out Uncle Bert's expensive fishing rod and waited for the trout to bite. And the lake was as blue as a crystal, and the air was clear, and the occasional distant duck went quack, quack, quack as it flew from this place to another. Was that a bite? Nothing. So we ate our biscuits while we waited. Still no bite.

Suddenly there was the crack of gunshot and a million shotgun pellets pelted the boat. Quack, quack, quack went the distant duck. The anchor was hauled and we rowed at eighty million miles an hour to the next safe bay. Then we noticed that in the rush to safety, Uncle Bert's expensive fishing rod had gone. We would have to search for it. We rowed back and began dredging - pulling the paint tin of rocks behind the boat in the hope of hooking the line.

For half an hour we rowed back and forth across the bay, pulling the tin as meticulously as a farmer ploughs a field. But no luck. The rod was gone. We set off again, towards Ohau Channel which we reckoned was about half way.

We were now entering the dangerous part because there were rocks, and some were submerged just below the surface. So Ray was posted as look out, and Bear and I rowed. There was no beach, for the shore line had changed to rocky cliffs.

That was when the squall hit. A gale came from no where, and the flat, flat lake changed from a mill pond to a milk churn. Shallow lakes do that. Up we'd go on a gigantic wave, and plunge down into the trough.

"A rock!" cried Ray. And the little boat would sweep down the valley of the wave, missing the rock by inches. Up we'd go again, and down between two more rocks. We'd be smashed to bits and drown. Row! Row!

"Ha ha my Hearties!" roared Bear. It was great fun! It was better than before! Another rock! Missed! And we rowed and rowed, and escaped to where the cliff face ended, and another flat shoreline showed.

We beached our boat, hauling it up from the waves and leaving it upside down in sight of the road so that Uncle Bert could see it if he came driving. Then we climbed a tree and waited.

We didn't have to wait long, for soon Uncle Bert came driving with Mum and Leo and Rachel. And when they saw the upturned boat Mum cried "They've drowned! They've drowned!"
But we weren't. We were waiting up the tree. France and Jane had been home for hours and hours and gloated at our late return.

"Girls are better than boys," announced Jane. The next day Bear, Ray and I biked around the lake to prove that boys were just as good.

22
FOR THE RECORD

Now an important bit of my life that I haven't forgotten about, but which I simply haven't had time to tell you, is my piano lessons.

Sister Consilio at the Convent taught me the piano. I started in February and did my Initial Exam half way through the year, then did Grade II and then Grade III and then Grade IV. I shot ahead on it like there was no tomorrow - apart from the fact that having to practise was a good way of getting out of milking the cows in the mornings. Sister Consilio was a good teacher and wasted no time in pushing me ahead.

I'd practise my scales each three times - one for the Father, one for the Son, and one for the Holy Ghost - and had to get all three perfect in a row, otherwise I would start again - one for the Father, one for the Son, and one for the Holy Ghost. It didn't matter how slow I went, as long as it was perfect.

Mum and Dad's friends, Mr and Mrs Peez from Otaki called in, but everyone except me was out. They asked me to play the piano. I played Morel's *Norwegian Cradle Song* and they were so tickled that they gave me a complete edition of Mozart's *Piano Sonatas.*

Then Aunty Phyllis came to stay. I've told you about her already. She gave me extra lessons over the holidays. She would take the copy of Mozart and say, "You learn this piece to play for your father when he gets in from milking". So I'd practice the Mozart while she sat on the veranda with a cup of tea and listened.

"Use the baby finger on that note," she'd call out, "and not the fourth finger". And I used to wonder how she knew because she could hear but not see me. Then Dad would come in, and I'd play the piece.

One day a group of youths came to the farm. They were in a Youth Group that Rick and France belonged to, and afterwards, they came to the house. I played the piano. Then they left. But one girl wouldn't go because she wanted to stay and hear "the boy play the piano". I was a bit disgusted at being called "the boy" because I was eleven, almost twelve, but she stayed anyway and sat and waited for her monkey to perform. But I would have none of it. If she wanted to hear the piano played she could learn it herself. So instead I played her some records on the record player - which no doubt displeased her no end.

The record player was one of the features of our family life. At first we only had a wireless and would listen to *Life With Dexter* with Deaf Adder and Compost, and *The Money or the Bag* with Selwyn Toogood. And then we got a record player.

Our first record came with a picture book called *The Enchanted Forest*. The record would say "Turn the page" when the story got to a new picture in the book. "Turn the page. Turn the page" and then came "Turn the page AND the record".

Later we got a record which everyone played to death. It was Peter Sellers and Sophia Loren.

> *O Doctor I'm in trouble*
> *Well goodness gracious me.*

On the other side was a song that we played only when Dad was out of the house because he didn't like it.

> *We're removing grandpa's grave to build the sewer*
> *To satisfy the local residents.*

Then there were the records on the lives of Mozart and Chopin, from The World Record Club. The Mozart record started:

> *Once in a while, every hundred years or so, there is born to the world a child who is called a genius. He may write books, he may paint pictures, he may compose music. Music such as you hear now.*

And off the music would go. The Chopin record was equally good:

> *It is the year 1830. A hot July sun is climbing into the sky above the German city of Munich. At the piano sits a pale, fair-headed young man of twenty. On the keyboard is a letter he has just received from Warsaw...*

For my twelfth birthday Mum and Dad gave me a collection of twelve records of famous composers. I wore them out. But most of all I played Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* - boom boom boom boom - till Mum would say "Turn that awful music down!"

But of all the records in the world, the best one was Paul Gallico's *The Snow Goose.* It was about a man at a lighthouse and a girl called Frith. The man went to Dunkirk and never returned. And the snow goose flew back

> *to Frith, standing on the sea wall, waiting. Waiting, yes, waiting. And I knew that he was never coming back.*

And each time I played the record, at the "Waiting, yes, waiting" bit, my eyes would fill with tears.

> *Waiting, yes, waiting. And I knew that he was never coming back. I had found the picture that Rhayader had painted of me as a child...*

And it was clear that Frith had grown up, and was never going to be the same, and would live a sad, sad life because of the man dead and the snow goose gone forever and her childhood over.

And I knew something was happening (turn the page) because my voice was changing up and down up and down (turn the page AND the record) till one day I walked in the house and said something to Mum and she mistook my voice for Dad's.

23
THE ONSLAUGHT OF ADOLESCENCE

Now I make it sound like my adolescence all happened very early and very quickly - like walking into the house and it was all over. I don't know if you've gone through puberty. If you haven't, you should try it someday and see how you get on. Back in the old days, adolescence wasn't necessarily the best days of your life.

I might tell you about my adolescence later, or I might not. It depends on what side of the bed I get out of when I get round to telling you. I might not tell you everything anyway because some of it is none of your business. Anyway, whatever I tell you is in confidence. So I'd be obliged if you didn't go spreading it all over the place.

By now, Rick had left St Patrick's College, Silverstream, and was working on the farm with Tony. Dad had got a job with the Ministry of Works as a Plumbing and Drainage Inspector. Sue was a Dental Nurse in Christchurch, and was getting married to Allan Archer. France was soon to leave school to become a Hair Dresser. Leo was still at primary school.

There was something going on because every night we'd have arguments during tea. And Dad would argue with Tony, and Tony would argue with Rick, and Mum and Dad would argue, and Dad would tell us to sit up straight at the table. All in all, it was becoming pretty miserable, I can tell you.

Dad and Mum

Then one evening, out of the blue, I picked up my plate of food and slapped it face down on the table and said I'd had enough and walked out.

"Tony, catch the boy!" I heard Dad say. And I ran and ran and ran in the night to the back of the farm. I hid in some manuka scrub we had. And when I'd run forty million miles I wasn't even puffed, and I reckon I broke every Olympic record there was.

I stayed there till it was late. Then I crept back home and climbed in through my bedroom window and went to bed.

Well the next day I complained that I had no decent clothes to wear except for hand-me-downs, so Dad made me go to work with him instead of going to school. And he took me from clothes shop to clothes shop. And we spent all day buying shirts and stuff. And by the end of the day I'd learnt my lesson because the problem wasn't clothes any way.

Then a bit while later, Dad started coming home from work having gone to the pub on the way home, which wasn't nice at all because you couldn't have a decent conversation with him. Everything was in a mess, I can tell you.

One day Dad came home from work having had two or three drinks for the road, as they used to say. He decided it was time to kill a sheep for the freezer, so he sharpened the knife and told Francie, me and Leo to go out and catch a sheep in the sheep paddock. Mum told us only to pretend to catch one. So we ran all over the paddock with Dad holding the knife. And we dived at the sheep all the time but never caught one.

Now in the same paddock was our pet sheep and where ever we ran in the paddock the pet sheep followed us. So we must've looked a bit silly, because the pet sheep kept running up to us for a biscuit and we had to pretend we couldn't catch anything. Then Dad pointed to the pet sheep.

"What's wrong with that one there?" he said.

"It's the pet sheep, Dad!" we chorused.

"Oh," said Dad, and we thought it was safe. But a few minutes later he pointed at the pet sheep again.

"What's wrong with that one there?"

And after we'd run all over the paddock for ten minutes, Mum appeared and said tea was ready. So we all went inside.

Things then went from bad to worse, because one night Mum got out the ironing which she always did in moments of great crisis. And when Tony came in from the milking I heard him say, "What's wrong, Mum?" and she said Dad had left.

"Dad's left and he's taken the car, and he says the children can go to the State School".

Well, I went to my room and looked in the mirror, because what else was I meant to do? And I kept looking in the mirror and saying "Please! Please!" like it was a magic mirror or something. And all evening I kept padding from the ironing board to my room and looking in the mirror like I was checking to see if I was still there.

Then we went to bed, and Mum said that everything would be all right.

About one o'clock or something there was a great noise and it was Father Dunn, the Parish Priest, with Dad. And they were both as roaring drunk as you could ever

imagine. I heard Mum get up and they all went out to the kitchen and when I crept up to look the kitchen door was shut tight. You cannot open it. I went back to bed.

The next morning I said to Mum that it was disgusting that Father Dunn got drunk, and she said I didn't know what I was talking about. "Father Dunn is a wonderful, wonderful priest. He's a great friend of the family". After that I noticed where ever I went, people used to say, "Do you know Jack Dunn? He's a wonderful, wonderful priest. He's a great friend of the family." And I could only conclude that somehow he must've travelled the whole country working miracles.

Because things got better after that. And although we were still told to "sit up straight" at the table, it was never as bad as it was.

24
THE END OF THE FOWL-HOUSE

When the girl from the farm next door used to come to help with the milking, Sue (who was home at the time) used to have me on about doing my hair before going to milk the cows. And that's about all you're going to hear. Actually, it's all there is to hear.

This bit is about the trouble Tony would get me into. When a cow kicked him, Tony would get mad. When I was kicked, I said nothing. What's the use of yelling at the cow when it doesn't understand English - or even French? So Tony would get fiery and I was pretty well perfect.

Tony

One milking, Tony got mad at me because I was cheeky, and even though I said I was perfect I had occasional lapses. So Tony grabbed me and threatened to dump me in the water trough. I kicked and shouted my way to freedom, and ran outside the cow shed into the paddock. Tony chased and tackled and grabbed my legs to drag me back to the milking. But I held on to some rushes. Rushes you know don't give way even if a great giant pulled at them. So even though Tony was ten when I was born, he still couldn't drag me into the shed.

I have a weak spot, which brothers and sisters know about, but very few strangers have ever discovered. And that is, I'm ticklish. I'm out-of-control ticklish. Now that you know, you'll only have to look at me in the street with an I'm-going-to-tickle-you grin and I'm yours for the taking. So as I kicked and clutched the rushes, Tony released my feet and tickled me under the arms.

Instantly I let go of everything in an uncontrollable heap, and Tony carried me kicking again back to the shed. This time he threatened to put my head in a bucket of mixed-up milk that was sitting there ready to be fed to the calves. But my torso was strong, and no matter how hard he pushed my head down towards the bucket I wouldn't bend.

Somehow I managed to wiggle my feet underneath the bottom of the bucket, and with a might leap, the bucket flew up and Tony was covered in milk.

I shot outside across the paddock on the track that led to home. Tony followed me, shouting, as he always did, "You wait till you get to Silverstream! That'll sort you out!"

Now I've never mentioned it but the cow shed faced the house and was about quarter of a mile away. The shape of the cow shed acted like a sound shell, so Mum heard every word. And as we sped in chase along the track home, Mum appeared from the house heading for the cow shed with business-like stride.

I stopped. Tony stopped. And even though I was twelve and Tony was ten when I was born, we both ran back to the cow shed faster than ever. Well for the rest of the milking we were great friends, and that evening we went shooting rabbits at the back of the farm.
Arguments usually get sorted out one way or another. When Leo and I were squabbling it could get worse and worse. One day Leo chased me with his pocket knife, so I had to jump out the high kitchen window to escape. But he followed me out. And when we both landed miles down below we saw a man on the drive. His hair was wild, his eyes were wild, his clothes were scruffy. He had an Alsatian dog with red eyes and yellow fangs. Leo and I crept inside as fast as possible, and hid under the bed until danger had passed.

For the last holidays of my primary school I was working on the farm: milking, and making silage, and putting in fence posts and whatever. Mum complained that no one was helping around the house. So I was assigned for the week to mow the lawns and weed the gardens and all that. And one of the things I had to do in the course of the week was to dismantle the old fowl-house because we were going to build a better one. We'd spend our holidays working. Dad believed in work. One of the days I remember was not only a Sunday (a day of rest), but was New Year's Day (a public holiday) and a Holy Day of Obligation (a Church holiday). Three holidays were rolled into one, and yet I had to help Dad dig a hole for a new water tank. Wasn't that the pits?

So when the opportunity came for a week's work "around the house" I seized it. After a couple of days of mooching round and mowing half a lawn, Tony complained after tea that I was lazy, lazy, lazy. I'd been there all week and done nothing.

"You wait till you get to Silverstream! That'll sort you out!"

With that I saw red, and got the sledge hammer and went out in the dark. In a dozen swoops of the hammer the fowl-house was knocked into smithereens. No matter that the chooks were inside. They could fend for themselves, and the shock of losing their house in the middle of the night would simply put them off laying for a couple of days.

"I've done it," I announced on my return. "The chook-house is dismantled".

"You wait till you get to Silverstream," muttered Tony, like a stuck record.

And, you know, I couldn't wait. For soon the summer holidays would be over and the new school year would start. And I'd be at secondary school - at Silverstream which for years I'd heard about from my brothers.

Perhaps the knocking over of the fowl-house was the best possible way to end my childhood - for unbeknown to me, the childhood bit was done.

And I was waiting, yes, waiting, for Silverstream.

Silverstream

25
ARRIVAL

5th of February 1963. My older brothers had said to arrive early in the day. That way you'd get a good bed. I had no idea what made up "a good bed" but was determined to get one any way. So when Mum and Dad said "What time do you want to go there?" I said "As early as possible".

We arrived at St Patrick's College, Silverstream, at 10.30 in the morning, with a suitcase loaded with the dozen or so variants of the school uniform and the sun shining. I wore my first pair of longs - the pants of the dark, navy suit. France had said "You look quite grown-up in longs". To wear longs in those days was a sign you'd grown up.

Father Ward showed us around. No doubt my parents had seen it all before, but it was all new to me: the gothic brick buildings with virginia creeper, the smell of polish in the long corked corridors, the smell of rotting fruit in the alley, the grey and bricked quadrangle, the new Redwood House where only Seniors went.

"And Rick," said Father Ward, "would've been a prefect if he hadn't left school so early". It seemed like it was important to be a prefect, and I was already famous because he knew my brother.

In we went to the Assembly Hall with its polished wood and brick and high vaulted ceiling, and the bronze plaque of the War Dead with Mum's brother:

PEERS, R.G. Lieut, (A), RNZNVR

"And Rick was a natural leader and it was a pity he'd left school so early". And Rick was named after Mum's brother on the plaque.

Then "a good bed" in the dormitory was selected and Father Blake was the dormitory master and let me save beds for Terry Banner from Raumati on one side and Michael Satchwell from Springhill on the other.

Mum and Dad went home, and I was alone. Not many had arrived so early, so I went for a wander on my own. Two boys were playing handball in one of the courts in the quad. I stood and watched.

"Piss off, turd," sneered one. I did that. Suddenly the confident third former in his first pair of longs, was reduced to a blubbering heap around the corner. I wanted to go home.

It was one of many things I was to experience as a little fish in a big pond. Seniors would walk past, lift you high by the collar of your grey shirt, and say "What's ya handle?" They were reading your name on the collar of your shirt. Even if they didn't lift you in the air, "What's ya handle?" was for the next five years a way of asking a name.
Another ritual was for Seniors to grab the front of your shirt as you wandered by and rip it open with buttons exploding in all directions. Then they'd twist your nipples like there was no tomorrow. I suppose it was a bit like lion kings piddling along boundaries to delineate a territory. You learnt where and where not to go, and your place in the queue.

Michael Satchwell, Terry Banner, me

The other ritual was "deknobbing". This wasn't performed by Seniors; it was performed by the “Opposition". A trip to Wellington College would hopefully mean your school cap would be temporarily stolen. They would rip off the knob on top of the cap, and scornfully return the deknobbed cap. Most, including myself, didn't dare come to so close an encounter, so we deknobbed our own caps.

Quickly we learnt the routines and customs of our new school. We were to line up in classes not alphabetically, but from shortest to tallest. I was on the end of my row, being bigger than most. Over the year, places would shift, as some grew faster than others, only to be reassigned new positions in a few weeks. For we grew unpredictably and erratically and awkwardly.

The next morning we were to have intelligence tests, to see what class to be put into. The classes were 3P (for Professional), 3G (for General), 3M (for Modern) and 3S (for Agriculture). I've never been too hot at intelligence tests. They ask where five people are standing in a circle. Officially I have an IQ of 40. I must have fared better in the third form however, for I was placed into 3G.

One of the questions asked the height of Mount Everest and gave four options. Now I had, after all, won an essay competition writing about Sir Edmund Hillary. I knew how tall Everest was. None of the options given were correct, so I put "None are right”. Back came the paper with a cross for wrong. And so I learnt Geography in 3G

instead of French in 3P. If Mount Everest was the height it should have been, I may have worked in Foreign Affairs and become a diplomat to Somalia. I may have become the leader of the United Nations and married a woman from Turkey and had seventeen children. But none of this happened. I took Geography instead.

On the second night I was caught talking in the dorm. You were not allowed to talk in the dorm; the dorm was a place of silence. I was sent to Father Blake. "Bend over!" A light tap with a cane hit my bottom.

"I caned Goodman because he's bigger," announced Father Blake. "Let that be a warning. For I will cane any one who talks, be they big, middle or little". And the dorm went into a reverential hush.

"Give us a look," whispered someone. And they crowded around as I proudly showed off my bum.

Lights out. And I slept the sweetest dream. In the whole third form, I was the only one with such a trophy. It didn't hurt. It didn't hurt a bit.

I was at secondary school. And surviving.

26
ORGANIC CHEMISTRY

It's funny how we sort of sorted ourselves out into gangs. There was me and Dan Myers, John Kavanagh, Harvey O'Sullivan, Michael McKay, John Wasson, Bernard Cuttance, James Northcote-Bade, Kevin Gain. It was sort of like...

"I wish you'd stop staying sort of", said the teacher.

John Kavanagh and me

It was sort of like organic chemistry with methane and stuff where there were sort of four hydrogen atoms to one carbon atom. And suddenly a hydrogen got up and joined a different carbon that was passing by. And our carbon atom would attract a new hydrogen or something. If you don't understand organic chemistry then you'll not see how our gang worked. They weren't gangs like motorbike gangs, they were more like groups - but saying groups sounds like we were having a discussion or something. Anyway, I'll tell you about our gang in a moment. First of all I want to tell you about organic chemistry. Organic chemistry was my favourite subject. Father Brogan taught us Science.

We called Father Brogan Spike. He'd been high up in the D.S.I.R. before becoming a priest. He was taught by Marsden who was taught by Ernest Rutherford who split the atom and created the twentieth century. Not only that, but we heard Father Brogan had pressed the button that set the bomb off over Hiroshima. We got proof of this one day when he was teaching us about the properties of sulphur. He said "Any questions?" and someone asked him straight.

"How does an atom bomb work?"

Father Brogan went all red in the face and said he didn't want to talk about that at the moment. So the bit about Hiroshima was true.

We had other teachers who did amazing things. Father Forsyth became a priest after killing a man in the boxing ring. It was very hard to believe because he wasn't very big and muscley. One day, two fourth formers were fighting and he walked up and said "Do you want a fight, Sonny?" Well they both stopped fighting and went as white as

sheets. Father Forsyth looked after the tuck shop and had it open for us every spare minute of the day when he wasn't teaching Geography. He'd sell a bag of broken biscuits for sixpence which he got from the factory. He'd sort the biscuits out into bags himself, and always made sure every bag had a couple of chocolate macaroons.

Then there was Father Hill, who taught Maths. He was the most brilliant teacher I've ever had. He was so good a teacher that no one ever messed about in his classes. He never had to tell us to shut up or anything. When he shifted to another school, Father Silverwood came. We called him Bottles. He limped, and someone said that it was an old war injury he got when he led his entire flying squadron into the side of a bridge and he escaped with a bit of a limp.

All my teachers were priests. Father Blake taught us Latin. I did really well at it until we got into ablative absolutes and that. Then I had more trouble with the English than with the Latin and gave up on it a bit.

Dan Myers (highest), me, John Kavanagh

The most exciting class was Father Moore's. We used to plan his classes. He taught us Christian Doctrine. Whenever he turned to write on the blackboard, the air would fill with paper darts. Sometimes he'd turn around and see a dart still flying and say, "Who threw that dart?" The aim was to have no dart still flying when he turned around, so it was your own fault if you got caught. One day he turned around and there were two darts still hanging in the air. "Who threw that dart?" he said, seeing only one of them. And then, like it was in slow motion, the other dart glided stealthily towards him and lodged itself between the back of his neck and his priest's collar. He didn't even notice that he had a dart sticking out of his neck. He only noticed that the whole class had gone berserk.

Anyway, I was telling you about our gang. It would change all the time. People would come and go. Someone new would come along and someone else wouldn't like them

and leave. That's the way it worked. We didn't plan it.

Once though, we did plan it. Our gang had a meeting to decide if someone should be kicked out. I said that if he was kicked out I'd go too. So I did. I was quite lonely for a while, and took several months to work my way back into the gang.

So life passed quickly, and nearly every day I'd write in my diary: "Fine day. Full day's classes". In the summer evenings after tea we'd descend onto the bottom field in the hundreds to play Bull Rush. The Juniors would team up against the Seniors. There was safety in numbers. On a rainy evening we'd go to the library and read books, while the librarian played the Beatles on a record player. We'd hear *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* and *She's Got a Ticket to Ride*. The Beatles had a new one nearly every week.

On weekends, we'd go down to the Hutt River. There among the gorse and broom, generations had built huts. You'd curry favour with Seniors so that when they left school you'd inherit a hut. And there we'd cook up sausages, and swim in the river and smoke and get sunburnt. And we'd tell jokes because we wanted to find out more. One day in the third form, I bought a packet of smokes. They were North Pole. I smoked the whole packet all in one day and didn't even feel sick. Then we'd go back to school for the Saturday night film.

Down at the river – me back right

These were the early days, the sort of summer days, before winter. And I cannot smell the smell of gorse flower, or hear the sound of broom pods popping in the heat, without thinking of organic chemistry and a sort of youthful innocence.

27
THE BLACK FANTAIL

I suppose with the Second World War just twenty years done, it was natural that the school was still in war mode. For a never-ending week in the first term, and then on various days throughout the year, we had Barracks. Trentham Military Camp was up the road. It all came as a bit of a shock.

One fine Friday afternoon we were sent to claim our camphor-smelling army uniforms from the back of a truck. "Sandpaper Suits" they were called. If you don't know why they're called that, try walking with a bit of sandpaper between your legs. We had sandpaper shorts, sandpaper jackets, and sandpaper army caps. Each had brass buttons, which had to be highly polished each night. The dormitories reeked of camphor and stinking socks and Brasso.

We were trained by senior students who had been promoted for their love of discipline. They had gone away on special camps during the holidays to learn how to yell at people. They learned to laugh at cruelty. They learned to swim out of their depth and save themselves in a blaze of "DO WHAT I SAY, NOT WHAT I DO". They learned to be despicable, wizened-up, screaming arseholes. They'd be happiest doing their duty in a firing squad. I hated, hated, hated Barracks.

We were taught to march, and march, and march. We were taught to stand at attention - for hours. We were taught how to right dress - which means get in a straight line or I'll shout at you. We were taught to eyes right, and eyes left, and left turn, and right turn, and change step. For hours each day we marched up and down. An "Eyes right!" command often meant our platoon was heading for a ditch. We knew it, and like the toy soldiers that we were, we'd tumble into the drain to the hoots of corporals and colonels.

As a special treat we'd cover our heads with foliage and crawl through muddy creeks, firing blanks from our guns like there was no tomorrow - which there wasn't. Then you'd learn to present arms to the self-satisfied chief from Trentham.

I almost got promoted. It happened on an afternoon by the tennis courts.

"Squad!" roared Lance Corporal Parry. "Attention! Right Dress! Eyes Front!" Then he gave the strangest command.

"By the left, right turn!" This was not a command that I'd been taught. Everyone, except for Duignan and myself, turned right.

We stood in silence. The pressure of being one of only two facing the wrong direction became over-bearing. Slowly, imperceptibly, I turned to face the right. Only Duignan remained the wrong way. My life was to change, or rather not to change, in those few seconds of turning. For Duignan's name was written down, and he was promoted in a flurry of adulation.

"Duignan's the only one who understands when a command is not a command". And Duignan was sent off to join the N.O.C.T.U., and learn to become authoritative, while I stayed a Private for five more years.

If only I had not turned! It could have changed my life!

On the rainiest week of the year, we were issued with rations and a waterproof army sheet, and taken by army truck into the Akatarawa bush. There we'd set up camp, and at night stand guard and fire blanks from our guns. All night we fired guns. And in the morning we'd march across forest clearings and farmers' paddocks to somewhere else. It was while marching like this that I saw a black fantail. It was pitch black, with a tiny bit of white, and twittered in the branches. Fantails aren’t usually black. But I could not stop to look, for I was marching, marching, marching.

Suddenly, a farmer on horseback, with gun and wild red hair, rode into view. I knew him. From Waikanae. He was...

"My cattle are scattered throughout the bush!" he shouted. "Your guns have frightened them in every direction, and I'm going to shoot everyone of you from the smallest up!" He wasn't smiling.

Father Cudby was in charge of our group. He was a Captain. He stood in front of the farmer's gun.

"You'll shoot me first", he said.

Silence.

Twitter, twitter, twitter went the black fantail. Slowly, the farmer's gun lowered away from Captain Cudby's chest. We were saved. I prayed that we would not have to shoot guns ever again. But we did.

The climax of the army season was the grand parade. Someone from the army, with bits of scarlet on his uniform, would stand at a podium and watch our parade. For hours we marched around and saluted and marched again. For hours we stood in the hot, hot sun, with sandflies eating our knees. And then we'd march again.

From where I stood on the battlefield I could see an old house in the hills. In my head I would go to live there, high in the gorse and bush, with no one screaming, and no futile standing at attention. And I would watch the pitch black fantail skip along the cold bush creek catching insects and nesting in the overhanging kowhai with golden flowers and lacy leaves. And then we'd march again.

And in the evenings, battle weary and tired, we'd go to bed. The Last Post on the bugle would echo through the bricks and vines. It was lights out and time to remember the fallen dead. And time to snuggle in the warmth and seclusion of the bed, with no one yelling FUTILITY FUTILITY FUTILITY down the centuries of some bloody

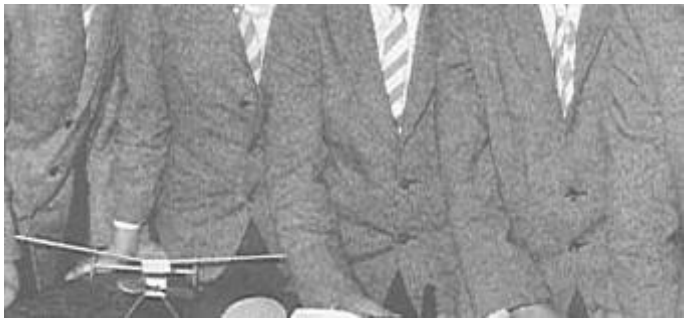
history.

Don't get me wrong. The Yanks did a great job at Pearl Harbour and Hiroshima. It was great that Churchill and his men stopped Hitler in his tracks. And now Vietnam raged. But what we learned in Barracks was warfare without justice, and discipline without mercy.

What I learned best of all, was to hate myself.

28
A TEAR IN MY DONEGAL TWEED

On Sundays we wore a Donegal Tweed jacket. It was a rough woollen coat with black and grey flecks. Mine had a small rip in the front bottom corner. I would walk around with my hand over the tear, like it was a wound or something. No one could see it. I was scared they might. It became an obsession, a fetish, a constant mode of hold on Sundays.



Donegal Tweeds

Now caning was as common as pollen in spring. One teacher brought the cane to class and would administer it there and then. Usually however it was a more organised affair. I got fifty canes in the first term of my third form, but never once did anything bad. I simply could not shut up.

"Talking Goodman? Go up!" said the study prefect. "Going up" meant going up the stairs and knocking on Father Durning's door. I'd knock.

"Come in, Goodman", he'd call. He'd sit at his desk with his back to the door. How did he know it was me?

"Stand in the usual place". The "usual place" was a particular crack in the wooden floor.

"The usual?"

"Yes, Father". The "usual" in this case was the choice of cane. He had two - Henry and Arsenic. Only the inexperienced would choose Arsenic. Arsenic was the skinny one.

"Bend over".

Whack! Whack!

"Thank you, Father", you'd say, turning and nodding politely, as if to say it didn't hurt. You'd leave hastily, because cane-pain takes a few seconds to sink in. You wanted to be well out of the room before that. Then you'd leap along the corridor yelping like a puppy for ten seconds and the pain was gone. It was over and done with, and time to

return to study and enter two marks in the back of your Maths book, where we third formers kept our tally. For we were having a race to a hundred.

Usually you would get two canes at the same time, so a hundred meant getting sent up fifty times. Father Durning was for study, Father Blake was for dorm, Father Chaney was for class, and Father Cudby was for dining room. The thing to avoid was getting sent up for misbehaviour in the dining room. You'd usually get two as always, but these ones hurt. They really hurt.

The dining room was a long room with long tables stretching from one end to the other. There were eight or ten boys per section. This included the table prefect. We would stand behind our chair while grace was said. Then we would sit and a bell would ring. The "runner" from the table would go to the servery and collect the food. The small piece of butter would carefully be divided equally, with the person doing the dividing taking the last bit to ensure that he made each part the exact same size. We'd stuff ourselves with as much bread as possible. Then the bell would ring and we'd stand to go.

It was not common to be sent up for dining room misbehaviour. Usually it was for flicking butter with a knife or something serious like that. I guess life wasn't working out too well for me, because once when we were filing out of the dining room, the Head Prefect said, "Goodman! Go up!"

"Why?" I asked.

"For answering back", he said.

"But I wasn't", I protested.

"You are", he said.

"I wasn't doing a thing", I said, holding on to the hole in my Donegal Tweed. With that, the Head Prefect spat a yellow gooby on the floor.

"Lick that up", he said.

"No", I said.

"Lick it up, or go up", he said.

"No", I said.

"That's your option. Lick it up or go up".

So I knelt on the floor at his feet and pretended to lick it.

"Lick it!", he cried, pushing my mouth into it. "Lick it!"

"Since you didn't lick it up, go up", he said.

So I did, and got two of the best on the bum for insubordination as they called it.

"You don't answer back", said Father Cudby, oblivious no doubt to the Head Prefect's gooby.

And I left his room, holding the hole in my Donegal Tweed so no one would see it was torn. It would never seem to heal. Never, never, never.

I was not too keen to get the cane after that, and in the course of the year made it only to ninety-eight.

I could have got to one hundred, for once, in the dorm, I was sent up for making a noise.

"Bend over", said Father Blake.

"I had a bed dropped on my toe", I explained.

"Doesn't matter. Bend over".

"I'm not", I said. "I had a bed dropped on my toe. I couldn't help making a noise".

"Get to bed then", said Father Blake. He was usually fair. And in the morning, standing at the basins in the bathroom, word was passed along that President Kennedy had been shot.

In the fourth form, our dorm master was Father Arbuckle. He had been to Cambridge University and was always typing. The dorm was divided into two rooms. Once, while one room distracted him after lights out, the other room set off fire crackers. Suddenly all lights were on and all hell broke loose. The typewriter tapped for hours that night, and many nights after; for the crackers became a saga, and the saga became a battle.

I got the feeling that Father Arbuckle didn't like boarding life much. Sometimes I came back late at night from an extra piano lesson before an exam - holding my music case and the tear in my Donegal Tweed. And there would be a bottle of coke outside his door for me, and a biscuit.

29
RUGBY

My two older brothers had been pretty good at rugby. The arrival of another Goodman on the scene possibly meant that certain coaches buzzed with anticipation. But the reality was that rugby had never before crossed my path. At Springhill, Dad sometimes listened to something on the wireless and told us to keep quiet or go outside. That was rugby.

Twice, Mr Allen at Springhill School had taken us to play rugby at Onga Onga, but it was not something that registered as important. At Paraparaumu, I guess some played. I have no memory of it - except for Sister Mary of Grace in full habit and rugby boots refereeing a match.

And so at Silverstream the weigh-in started. Team grades were arranged according to weight and not according to age. It seemed really important to get into the right weight grade, so some starved themselves while others hid shot-puts down their trousers. I was in the Third Grade. The trialists for 3A were posted. I was in the trial for the top Third Grade team!

The summer was still hot, the ground was hard, the grass was brown and dry. I remember diving in a tackle at someone, for I saw that's what you did, and grazing the elbow of my right arm. The scar's still there. At half time both sides changed direction. I suppose you knew that. I didn't. It was all a great puzzle to me as to what you were meant to do.

The trials for 3B were posted. My name was there! Then the trials for 3C. Then 3D. Then 3E. Then 3F. There were no trials for 3G because you couldn't sink any lower. 3G collected the useless, the effeminate and the paralyzed. We would practise four times a week, with a game on Saturday. Boys could become men in a single season.

Rugby was compulsory. We were a rugby school. It wasn't that I hated it; it was just that I didn't know what it was. I asked our coach.

"What are the rules?" I asked, trying desperately to make the rehearsal intelligible.

"Rules?" he sneered. "Rules are for breaking". I knew that, it's just that I didn't know what to break.

"Just get out there and play your guts out". So sometimes I played lock and sometimes I played winger. And sometimes I played both positions at the same time. Week after

week, we lost 80-0, at a time when a try was worth only three points.

One week we lost 86-3. We were ecstatic. They were our three and only points for the season. We were short a player, so someone from the opposition made up the numbers and scored us a try. It was heaven sent.

The following year I was in 3E, still the bottom team. I was beginning to despise this sport, and prayed for rain and cancellations. In the fifth form it was 2D, the bottom Second Grade team, and again in the sixth form. If only they'd thought to show me how to play. By the fifth form I knew what a "knock-on" was, but it took many more years to find out what "off-side" meant. Well you may scoff. But in those days knowledge of rugby was something babies were born with, and to ask was to admit to some gross genetic deformity.

Now I was quite fit, for I'd go for runs around Pinehaven and the Blue Mountains, and in the seventh form I devised a plan. I could be an assistant coach with someone and take the team for fitness runs. I suggested this cautiously to Father McDonald, the Sports Master.

"Coach?" laughed Father McDonald. "You wouldn't know one end of a whistle from another".

"Then if I don't know, how am I expected to play?" I replied. But with that the interview was over, and I prepared for First Grade trials. I asked my father to visit school and request a dispensation. He got a "No", and I suspect got into an argument. After that my name was pits. Father Blake took pity on me, and for the season of my final year, I line-umpired for the Second XV instead.

Now some won't like this next bit, and some won't remember it the way I do. But this is my story. They can tell their own.

The First XV were gods. They had their own special Mass on a Saturday in a side chapel because God loved them more. Sometimes they sat at a special table at the top of the dining room and had steak and eggs and bacon, while we chewed dry red saveloys and mashed potatoes. Samoan maids in white pinnies waited at their table, and Matron stood with a wet dishcloth to slap the face of the maids should they do wrong.

After a game, on the Saturday night, the First XV would go into hiding, least they be mauled by adulating adolescents. The Boarders would spontaneously assemble in the quadrangle, and chant

WE WANT THE COACH! WE WANT THE COACH! WE WANT THE COACH!

Word spread that someone had seen the half-back in the car park, and the crowd would rush to look. Then back to the quadrangle

WE WANT THE COACH! WE WANT THE COACH! WE WANT THE COACH!

until a slightly, and sometimes more, inebriated coach would burst in and give a "run down" on the match.

HIP HIP HURRAH! HIP HIP HURRAH! HIP HIP HURRAH!

Three cheers for the First XV.
I used to go and hide in the toilet.

It's not that I wasn't pleased. It's just that I was scared.

30
ADONIS WITH ACNE

Mrs Mona Walls was my piano teacher. Before exams she'd put in hours. Often I'd go to the Walls' home for extra lessons and for the exam itself. I had to sit Grade VIII twice because I missed it the first time.

Me on piano

Going to the Walls' place was a sort of haven, a bit of normal family life. They were always hospitable and interested. Apart from Mr and Mrs Walls, there was Michael, Peter and Christopher. The boys were all pretty good musicians. When violinist Peter auditioned for the Lindsay Orchestra, I was asked to accompany him but couldn't learn the music in time. That's as near as I ever got to fame. If I don't go on about the piano, it doesn't mean to say I wasn't practising.

Father Mills was in charge of music and a sort of literary buff as well. Father Delaney was also a musician, but was only there for a while. Father Mills put on a musical every year.

The first musical I went to was in the fourth form. I went with my friend, Harvey O'Sullivan, and his mother. It was *Salad Days*. I thought it was magical. Everyone talked about how great this and that was about it. But the thing I liked best was the lighting. It started in a green light and instantly I was swallowed up into another world.

Salad Days

It's fantastical to see once-were-humans moving in coloured lights and singing

We said we wouldn't look back.

In my early years, it never occurred to me to audition for a part. I suppose the ones without acne did. In my last year I did audition, and got a part. I had to say "Look what the cat brought in". Then I had to sing in the chorus.

Every morning, every evening,
Ain't we got fun.
So much money, O but Honey,
Ain't we got fun.

The show was called *As the Tree Falls*. For two of the three performances I was so busy playing cards out the back that I missed the call. No one seemed to notice.

Then I wrote a play called *Muff Muff and Zap Zap*. It was performed at a Rector's Concert, which was a sort of soiree with eight students playing *Oranges and Lemons* on the piano one after another, and another six playing *Hiawatha's Dance*. One student played something on the violin, and when he'd finished everyone thought he was still warming up and getting in tune. Once they realized though, the audience gave him a good clap, so I presume he would've felt pretty good about it. I don't remember anything about this Muff Muff play, except for the line "Muff Muff! I love you!" Kevin Gain and I performed Campton's *Out of the Flying Pan*. We put it on ourselves.

Two famous people came to speak. The first was playwright, Bruce Mason. Mason performed a one-man play for us. He said, "I'm going to perform this play in French because I need to brush up on it". Then he started, and it was clear that he'd brushed up on it pretty well before he got there. I watched slightly turned off, because it looked like he was showing off how good he was at languages. He did do one good thing though, which was to say, "I haven't got any stage furniture, so I want you to imagine a bookcase here". And he gestured to the side of the stage. I thought he created the bookcase fairly well. Other than that, he got no marks.

The other famous visitor was James K. Baxter, when he was a postie in Wellington.

He said, "If you want to write a poem, spend twenty-five years practising poetic forms. Then write your poem".

I wrote poems. Most people did, I suspect. I quote one in English, rather than in French.

When sun bursts, semi-bold,
Upon the pantsless night,
Who knows what inconsequential conversations
We could hold sipping Bacardi and
Waiting for winter.

I might read my diary for Boredom's sake,
Or mope my secrets out from Auden's Abject Willow.
But, lonely in a heap of introspection,
I, tongue-tied in the sun,
Let quietness pass for character till
Darkness comes.

I showed it to Father John Weir, who was himself a poet, when he visited. He said it was very nice.

We had public speaking classes on Sunday mornings. I was always terrified about having to speak because I thought my voice sounded like a bout of the flu. Once, however, I entered a speech competition in the fourth form. I went so fast that I hid in the piano rooms afterwards. For about three years.

Then there were dancing lessons with Miss Kathleen O'Connor in the Hall. Nearly everyone took dancing. We danced in our socks.

"Shh! Shh! Boys! Boys! Shh! Shh!" she'd say. Boys had to practise - dancing - with boys, and when I got a certificate for the Latin American, I never once had ever done the man's part.

That covers most things arty. I still sang in the college choir, because some of my friends did. But nothing had changed. I opened and closed my mouth and raised my eyebrows. I couldn't even hear a part that wasn't the tune at the top. We gave a concert and sang Bach's *Peasant Cantata* with the Lindsay Strings; with Ruth Pearl playing the violin and Dobbs Franks conducting. It was good. They played Douglas Lilburn's *Diversions* afterwards.

In my fourth form, I went to Wellington to hear Artur Rubinstein play the piano at a concert. As an encore, he played de Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance*. It looked like he had his hands in the air above his head most of the time. Afterwards, I rushed out the back of the Town Hall and shook his hand. He said, "How do you do?" It blew me away. Of all the people in the world, I was the one that Artur Rubinstein said "How do you do?" to.

Rubinstein

After that I practised the piano frantically. I would become as good as Rubinstein.

31
HOME

Once every three Sundays we had a Free Sunday. This meant we were allowed out from ten in the morning until about six in the evening. They were strict about it. If you got back late you were gated for the following Free Sunday. My older brother Rick used to get back really late on purpose, and only have every second Free Sunday off. He'd go to Uncle Stan and Aunty Dorrie's farm. Dorrie Maher was Dad's sister. I only went to Dorrie and Stan's once, because Uncle Stan didn't pick me up till late, and then he went to church at St John's in Trentham. By that time it was almost time to go back to school.

Besides, parents from the Kapiti Coast had organised a pick-up roster for Free Sundays. So I went home. School authorities were so fussy about the Free Sundays, that I was allowed home for Mum and Dad's 25th Wedding Anniversary only if I missed the following Free Sunday. Even then, I wasn't allowed to stay for the party. I had to be back at school at the usual time. But they had a good party because I've seen the photos. In the morning Mum and Dad had a Mass. Mum's Bridesmaid, Aunty Margaret Worsnop, was there. So was Dad's Best Man, Buster Foster from Trentham. Us kids gave Mum and Dad a dinner set for their anniversary.

Naturally, the first thing I'd check when I got home was the chooks. On the Free Sundays before the August holidays I'd put eggs under the clucky chooks to make sure there were a lot of chickens hatching in the holidays.
One Free Sunday I was down the back of the farm doing a job, and the neighbour's sheep had got through the fence. I found an old piece of wood, about three yards long, and hurled it at the sheep like a javelin. As it whizzed passed, a nail in the end of the wood went straight through my finger and I couldn't pull it out. So I carried the three-yard hunk of wood attached to my finger all the way back to the house, only to find there was no one home. Then Rick turned up on the tractor.

"Shut your eyes", he said. Out came the nail. I felt a bit queasy after that.

One Free Sunday, when it was Dad's turn on the driving roster, he never said a word about it, but when we pulled up our drive he said "What do you think of that?"

There, on the roof of our house, was a TV aerial. It was 1964. You might think that it's no big deal having a TV aerial on your roof. In those days it was. TV was new. During the family rosary in the holidays we'd push the mute button and put a chair in front of it so you couldn't see the screen. There was always a great scramble to kneel at the chair in front of the TV, so you could watch the picture round the back of the chair during the rosary.

In the holidays on Sunday afternoons, we'd watch the movie on TV. The milking was always done late that day. They'd be movies like Bing Crosby in *The Bells of St Mary's*. During the sad bits, France and Mum would dab their eyes with their hankies. Us men would sit in the armchairs with our hands behind our heads so that our elbows

hid the moisture in our eyes.

I used to watch *Bonanza*. Once, there was a great episode on, in which Little Joe made his friend throw away a toy tin soldier he had, so that he could grow up and become a man. It was like throwing away his childhood. I was really impressed. Tony said he thought it was a load of bull, which kind of shocked me. TV was a very important way to find out how you were meant to grow up.

The Bottomley's up the road had a TV before we did. Sometimes, before we got our TV, we'd go up there for a swim in their pool. I saw my first TV there ever. It was a ride on a roller coaster. After that, we used to say "Dad? Can we get a TV?"

One holidays, in my fourth form, we went to the Bottomley's for a party. They had dancing and stuff. Wayne was there from my primary school. Do you remember him? He offered to carry the boxes of shells for me back to the car. Now he was all grown up, and really confident on the dance floor. I was all awkward and gangly. He didn't recognize me. Anyway, while I was dancing I stood on his toe.

"Sorry!" I said.

"I'm sorry too, mate", he sneered. That put me off dancing for life. I decided I'd be permanently uncoordinated. That's why it was very important to watch Little Joe on Bonanza to see how you were meant to grow up. Everyone else in my family had grown up, except for me and Leo. France had her own Hair Salon at Waikanae called Jennifer Jean Beauty Salon.

Dad always made us work during the holidays. One summer holidays he got me a job with the Ministry of Works. I was helping a surveyor, Tony Sarniak-Thomson. We were surveying land for subdivision at Cannons Creek in Porirua. That was when Porirua was sprouting like a mushroom. Mr Sarniak-Thomson was a good boss, but it was really hard work driving pegs into rock in the summer heat. Once I forgot my drink, and spent all day out in the paddocks thirsting to death. When eventually we got to some shops, I bought a Fanta. I've never tasted anything so good. The other thing was that I was just useless with money, and the pay packets from the Ministry of Works used to lie all over my room unopened. Mum would gather them up and bank

it.

On another summer holiday I had jobs driving a bulldozer. One was at a new housing subdivision at Ngaio. The other was making the new Hutt Motorway. It was the bit where the Kennedy-Good Bridge now is. Next time you drive on it, just remember who made it.

When I got home from work I'd go over to the shed to feed the calves. It was while sitting in the paddock waiting for the calves to finish, that I found seven four-leaf clovers! This was a sign of good luck, for when I went back home my School Certificate results were sitting on our billiard table waiting to be opened.

I passed.

32
THE END OF A WORLD

We had classes on Saturday mornings, with Wednesday afternoons off. This was to enable boarders to go to the dentist and the like without missing school. My dentist was Mr de Berry of Wellington. I stole a pile of his appointment cards, which I would fill in whenever I wanted to go to town. At school, they must've thought I had terrible teeth.

Once in 1963 I was sitting in the train wearing my school suit, after a Wednesday in Wellington, when an old man came up to me.

"I'm not a Catholic", he said. "You from Silverstream?"

I nodded suspiciously.

"I just want to say I've only ever cried once when a public figure died. And that was when Pope John XXIII died". With that, he wandered back to his seat.

It was a strange thing to say to a boy of thirteen. Now we had Pope Paul VI. We'd been told that Pope John was the one who said we must open a window and let in some air. By the fourth form, the fresh air had started to hit our world. Until then we had Mass every morning in silence and in Latin, with the priest with his back to the people. One evening, the Rector, Father Jack Parker, appeared with an announcement. From next Sunday on, the priest would turn to the people and in a loud voice say "Dominus vobiscum". And we were to answer in an equally loud voice, "Et cum spiritu tuo". We practised it.

A year later there was another change. The priest would turn to the people and in a loud voice say in English, "The Lord be with you". And we were to answer in an equally loud voice, "And with your spirit". We practised it. Bit by bit, changes were made. And slowly the old ways began to crumble.

It wasn't just the church. The Beatles were in full flight, and came to Wellington. Winkle-picker shoes and stove-pipe pants were in. Any pointed shoes had their toes cut off at ranks. Trousers had to be a minimum of eighteen inches at the cuff, and tape measures were used at ranks. Hair began to grow longer, and the barber was sent for. Side burns began to descend, and the razor was used. Then came the Caesar haircut, which was a sort of square fringe. Again the barber was sent for. Life was becoming a

hidden battle between staff and students. Lockers were searched for "foreigns" - which were any clothes not the regulation uniform. And still the hair grew, and still it was cut.

Then we had a sinker strike in the dining room. Sinker was the local name for steam pudding. No one was to touch it. The plates of sinker sat on the tables, and the dining room staff looked stunned. No one moved. Not a hand touched a spoon. The whole boarding school sat in the dining room motionless, and in silence. There was nothing they could do.

At another time at ranks, Father Chaney the Discipline Master, was berating students for having "foreigns" at school.

"And I saw a pair of foreign socks under Michael Harvey's bed", he said. "I asked him about it and he denied it. When I went back to look, the foreign socks were gone. He's hidden them somewhere else. I saw them with my own eyes, but he denies they exist. You're a liar, Michael Harvey. You're a liar".

Suddenly, from the back of the quadrangle, Michael Harvey called out.

DON'T DISTORT THE TRUTH.

We didn't know it then, but that was the moment the old world died, and the new world was ushered in. There was nothing they could do. Nothing.

One evening, a rugby rally in the quadrangle degenerated from the call of "We want the coach!" to "We want food!" The whole boarding school began to chant.

WE WANT FOOD! WE WANT FOOD!

We ran to underneath the balcony where the priests lived, and began to chant again.

WE WANT FOOD! WE WANT FOOD!

A huge crocodile formed and slithered its way around the buildings.

WE WANT FOOD! WE WANT FOOD!

Someone set some rubbish tins on fire. The crocodile slithered across the fields to the Home of Compassion hospital next door.

WE WANT FOOD! WE WANT FOOD!

We returned to the college grounds. Somehow the mass rally was ignored, as if by ignoring it, it would go away. But we knew deep down somewhere that the power had shifted and it would never be the same.

It's not that the priests were ogres. It's just that they were moving into the new world too. Some were liberal, some were not. Father Bernard Ryan, the Spiritual Director -

we called him Doc - was an ear to all. And even though we continued to try to grow our hair long, it still got cut. And the toes of the shoes were chopped off, and the foreigns confiscated.

Slowly the food changed a bit. Slowly daily Mass became less obligatory. Slowly Barracks was phased down. Slowly hair got longer. Some didn't even play rugby. Discussions broke out about Vietnam.

It was bigger than us in our little world. The musical *Hair* had arrived - this is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius - and they sang songs in public using words we never mentioned except in the confessional. Chairman Mao's *Little Red School Book* was passed under the desk. Someone read Teilhard de Chardin. Christian Doctrine classes were renamed Christian Living classes. Christian Living was crap.

We were part of a huge movement, a great world-wide crocodile. There was no stopping it. We could justify it, for the Pope himself had opened the window to let the gale blow. And even a little old man in a train would cry when the Pope died, for he knew that the Pope had done good.

33
JACKIE PARKER'S WHISKERS

Father Parker was the Rector. That's the Headmaster. He was really strict. There was nothing Jackie Parker could not do. He played cricket and rugby, he played the piano, he spoke a heap of foreign languages. He was really, really bright.

Father Parker

He bounced his glasses on the end of his nose when he talked, and when he told you off he could look over the top of them at the same time. When you went to his office to ask permission for something, you made sure that your socks were pulled up, your shirt was tucked in, and your buttons done up.

"Come in!" he'd call when you knocked.

"Good morning, Father", you'd say, standing at attention in front of his desk.

"Yes?"

"Please could I have permission to go to town, Father?"

"No!" he snapped. And his glasses would bounce and his eyes would glare.

"But, Father..." and you'd unthinkingly move a hand.

"Put your hand behind your back, Goodman". You stood upright again.

"Well?" he'd say. "Is that all?"

"Yes, Father. Thank you, Father. Good morning, Father", and you turned and went.

Father Parker insisted that everyone said goodbye to him before each holiday. He'd stand in the corridor, and a queue would form. You'd shake his hand.

"Have a good holiday, Father", each would say. And then the next would shake his hand.

"Have a good holiday, Father".

"I don't shake hands with a wet paper bag", he'd snarl. "Come back and say goodbye when you've learnt to shake hands properly".

"Have a good holiday, Father", said the next.

"I don't shake hands with a wet fish. Come back later". The handshake at the end of each term became a monumental trial. It was like in *Lord of the Rings* with Frodo coming to Mount Doom in the Land of Mordor.

The other thing Jackie Parker used to do was read the Weekly Notes. Now the Weekly Notes will be a mystery to most. The priests belonged to the Marist Order, which was founded in France. Somehow, long ago, French ways of doing things had crept into the school. The Weekly Notes was one of them. In every subject you got a mark out of five for the week. To get a 5 was excellent; 4½ was very good; 4 was average; 3½ was bad; 3 was very bad; 2½ was wicked; and a 2 automatically cancelled every other subject mark out and you were "Off the Board". So Jackie Parker would come to class and read your Weekly Notes.

"Stand up", said the teacher. And you stood at attention for the rectorial entrance.

"Sit", said Jackie Parker. And you'd sit upright in your desk, with arms folded, and not flinch. When your name was called, you stood.

"Smith!"

"Yes, Father".

"English 4½, Maths 4½, Science 5, Geography 3½", and he'd stop and twitch his nose and peer over his bouncing glasses. And Smith would shrink into nothing, like he could walk under a door with his umbrella up, because he'd got a bad note for Geography.

"Christian Doctrine 4½, Diligence 5, Conduct 5".

"Thank you, Father". And Smith would sit.

One day Jackie Parker was reading someones notes, when he suddenly stopped. He glared at me.

"Anything wrong, Goodman?" he asked.

"No, Father", I said. What was that about? I wondered. Jackie Parker continued. He stopped. He glared again.

"Goodman, anything wrong?" This time the question was louder and more vehement.

"No, Father", I said. What on earth was I doing wrong? It was getting dangerous. Jackie Parker continued. He stopped.

"GOODMAN! GET OUT!" he shouted. I dazed my way from the room and waited outside. My heart was pounding. My hands were sweaty. What had I done? What had I done? Help!

Help!

Jackie Parker had finished in the room. I heard the class stand. The door opened. Out he came. The door closed.

"I'm sorry for disturbing the class", I said, hoping that such a general statement would cover whatever it was I'd done.

He came really close to my face and whispered. A whisper is more threatening than a shout. A whisper is what a volcano does before it bursts. A whisper is like the stillness before an earthquake when people say, "This is earthquake weather".

I could see on Jackie Parker's chin, three little whiskers that he'd missed while shaving that morning.

"You should know better", he whispered. I was not listening. I was watching the whiskers, and his glasses bobbing up and down. And the Three Little Pigs went wee-wee-wee away from the Big Bad Wolf, and Little Red Riding Hood thought it was Grandma. What big eyes you have! What a big nose you have! What big whiskers you have! All the better to eat you, eat you, eat you with. He'd finished.

"Yes, Father. Thank you, Father", said I. And he sauntered off to the next room for another round of Weekly Notes. That was in my fourth form.

In the sixth form, Jackie Parker taught me Maths. There were ten of us. It was the only class he taught. We saw that he was the funniest man, the wittiest man you could meet. We loved his classes and learnt a lot. But underneath there always lurked a deep respect (or was it fear?) for the rumblings of a mountain that could explode.

In the August holidays my brother Tony said, "Do you know Father Parker's got cancer and is in hospital?" I didn't know. He was teaching me last week. He was only forty-six.

"He'll be dead by the time you get back to school", said Tony. But he wasn't. He was still dying.

Every day Father Ryan would give reports on Father Parker's health. He's in bed. He's

on oxygen. He's very low. He's in fine spirits. He said this morning that today would be the best day of his life.

And when we woke in the dorm the next day, it was announced that Father Parker died at six o'clock that morning.

They brought the body back to school. The coffin lay in the chapel with the lid off. I touched his hands, which were wrapped in rosary beads. They were cold. "Come back and say goodbye when you've learnt to shake hands properly", I thought. Mount Doom of Mordor lay quiet and still.

He was buried at Karori. I've always thought of his body lying there in the dark, dark earth - ashes to ashes, dust to dust - with three whiskers on its chin.

34
THE STILL

Father Head took over as Rector after Father Parker died. We called him Slinky George. He was a very kind man, but of the "old school" where politeness and courtesy took precedence over everything else. At the end of the year it was announced that the Rector for 1967 would be Father Kevin O'Connor.

Father O'Connor was the Science teacher. He was called Krark, because he had a voice that rumbled in the depths. He'd been to primary school at Waipawa with Mum.

It was my Seventh Form. In fact, in those days it was called Upper Sixth. Father O'Connor's first job was to announce the prefects. He did it alphabetically.

Ashenden
Bryant
Cox
Cuttance
Du Fresne
Duncan
Egan

G for Goodman was nearly there!

Hare
Hickling
Kavanagh

I was not a prefect. I tried to sound nonchalant. “Dear Mum and Dad”, I wrote. “I’m not a prefect”.

Those that I'd grown up with for four years were prefects. There was even one sixth former, a fourth year, who'd been made a prefect. He was a dick. It's funny, but no matter how much you say you don't give a stuff, deep down you ask, "What's wrong with me? What's wrong with me?"

The new prefects went off into their Prefects' Room, with its radio and toaster, and windows papered over so we couldn't see in. Somehow, friendships had sort of ended. We didn't hang around much any more. It doesn't boost the self-esteem to be told how important prefects are, and then not be made one. “What's wrong with me? What's wrong with me?”

If they didn't want me as a prefect I could take a new direction. Since we didn't have a Prefects' Room, Peter Noon, Tim Ongley and I made our own. Underneath a piano in a practice room was a trap door. Down the trap door was a cellar. Peter Noon tapped the power mains and we had electric lighting and a heater and a toaster.

And we had a still.

We reckoned that the still made as pure alcohol as you could get. We kept our produce in little medicine bottles with eyedroppers as lids. You only had to put a couple of drops in a bottle of coke and you'd have a potent mix.

Father O'Connor

So the year went on. Krark O'Connor was a good Rector. He built a new dining room extension. He was fair and hearty. We filled in rainy Sunday afternoons by making radio programmes on a reel-to-reel tape recorder. We made Goon-type comedy programmes. One we made had the theme of Krark O'Connor's funeral.

Rejoice! Rejoice!
Dear Krark has passed away!

Thus went the hymn at the funeral as the pedal organ rattled on.

Towards the end of the year, Krark appeared at ranks.

"Prefects have raided a den of iniquity beneath the piano rooms. Some students have tapped the mains, and have a heater and a toaster and electric lighting. We have confiscated these, along with pipes used for smoking and a still that made alcohol. Those who have done this have forty-eight hours to report to my office. I intend to deal with it seriously. Alcohol is an offence that means expulsion. I know the names of those concerned. They have forty-eight hours".

What was I meant to do? What was I meant to do?

Once I tried knocking at the Rector's open door to confess all. But he wasn't in. He was away at a meeting in Rotorua. Through the crack in the door I could see the still on the filing cabinet behind his desk.

The forty-eight hours dragged on. Tomorrow morning I would have to face the music. This could be my last day at school.

The final day dawned. It was half past eight. Father O'Connor came out of the priests' dining room holding a cup of tea. David Egan was in the corridor.

"Morning, Father".

"Morning, David. I've got a lot of work to do today", he said.

He went into his office and fell down dead, cutting his head on the corner of the filing cabinet. It was a heart attack. He was only forty-seven.

The school didn't know and went to classes. The roll boy said there would be ranks after first period. We assembled. Father Head, the Deputy Rector, appeared. He took the microphone.

"My dear boys", he said. "Our beloved Rector is dead".
In an eerie shock the whole school whispered in unison: "Shhhhit". We were to go to chapel and pray the rosary. And while the school filed away in a state of shock, I crept to the Rector's room and took back my stuff. It was callous but necessary. I guess it changed my life.

35
ON THE STAIRCASE

Back in 1967 you could become what ever you wanted. You rarely worried about the future. You could dream what ever dreams you wished. I was going to become a marine biologist.

Studies would begin at Victoria University. I had pre-enrolled. Board with a family was arranged at Miramar. Everything was fine, except...

I was bothered inside. I was restless. There was a gnawing dissatisfaction in the heart.

One day I was going up the stairs, or it may have been down, of Redwood House. Redwood House was a dormitory-classroom block used by Seniors. The staircase floor is covered with lino; the walls are pink-and-black flecked concrete. There's a window half way up the stairs on a landing that looks out over the dining room extension, across the swimming baths onto the clothesline lawn. I stopped at the window. Grey shirts on the line flapped in the early summer wind.

"This is pissing round", I thought.

That was my moment of truth; a flicker of insight; the end of a gnawing heart.

"This is pissing round".

So I went up the stairs and knocked on Father Mills' door.

"Come in", he said.

"Yes", I said. "I've decided to go to Greenmeadows Seminary next year. To study for the priesthood".

Father Mills looked unexcited. "Have you told your parents?" he asked.

"No", I said.

"Well do that", he said.

So that was it. If there was a call it came to me with the words "This is pissing round". It came with a conviction and with a peace of mind.

I wrote home. Mum wrote back.

Dearest Bruce,

I'm sure you have made a good decision, dear. Dad is really pleased. Francie is thrilled. The boys and Sue are proud of you. As for me, I will be praying harder than ever that you will be given the grace from God and all the help possible from Our Lady to persevere. I do not want to be happier than on the day you will be ordained. However, Bruce, if you have a change of heart, do not hesitate to say.

Love for now
Mum

It could be eight years study. A real decision need not be made just yet. But it was a road taken, as in Robert Frost's poem:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood...
And I, I took the one less travelled by
And that has made all the difference.

It was the end of my school years.

A staircase to somewhere else.