

Along My Way



Harold Hunt OAM

Glass House Books
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Harold Hunt was born in 'The Bush', that is the Corner Country, in far western New South Wales. Horse and buggy were still the main mode of transport and, as a child during the Great Depression, he was fascinated by the mystery of the many swagmen who trod the dirt tracks.

His parents separated when he was young, and his half-caste Aboriginal mother raised eight children on her own. Somehow she kept the family together during a time of government dislocation of Aboriginal people 'for their own protection'.

He left school at the age of 14, working as a stockman with dreams of becoming a boss drover. But the lure of earning a steady income and the itinerant lifestyle of a shearer beckoned and was to be his occupation for the next 20 years.

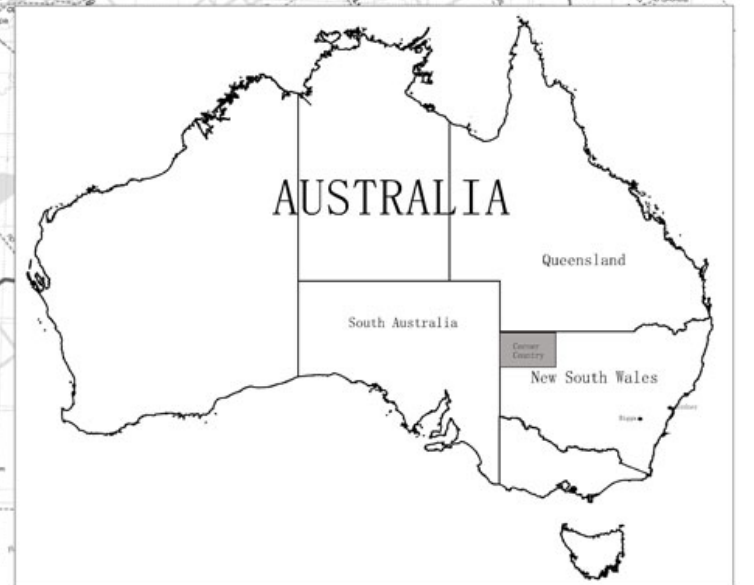
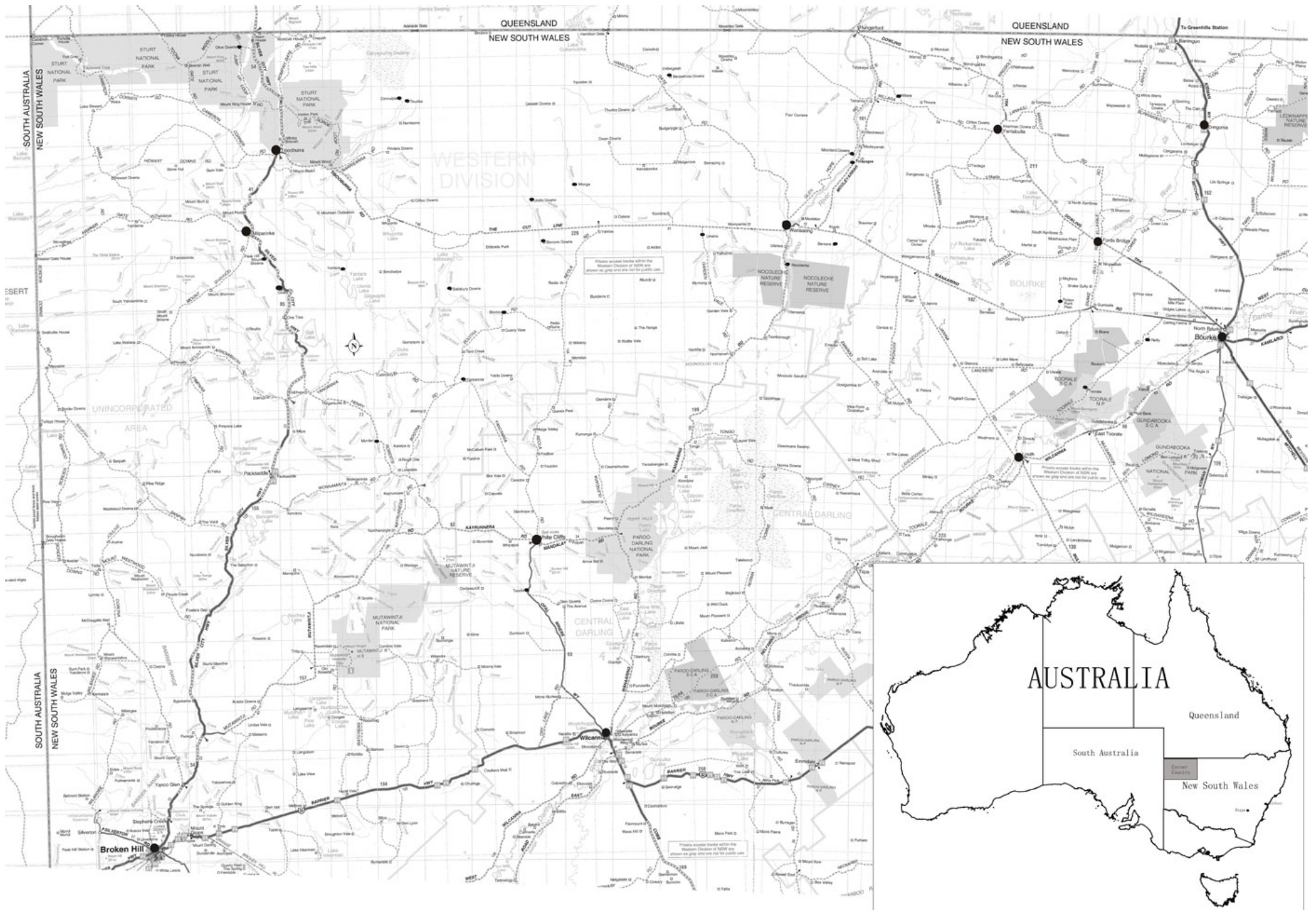
By age 34, he was the father of four and a raging alcoholic, violent and causing suffering to those he loved. Then a chance meeting with some mates set him on the path to recovery through Alcoholics Anonymous, along with a move to Sydney.

Always looking for new opportunities and challenges, he chanced upon a training course as a counsellor to alcoholics and other drug addicts. So began a career in the public service, with his determination to help others who were experiencing the hell he himself had survived.

At 87, Harold was awarded an Order of Australia Medal in recognition of his services to the community. This is an autobiography of an extraordinary life, during a period of dramatic social change in Australia.



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an imprint of IP (Interactive Publications Pty Ltd)
Treetop Studio • 9 Kuhler Court
Carindale, Queensland, Australia 4152
sales@ipoz.biz
ipoz.biz/IP/IP.htm

First published by IP in 2016
© Harold Hunt, 2016

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Printed in 12 Book Antiqua on 14 pt Avenir Book.

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Creator: Hunt, Harold John, 1925- author.

Title: Along my way / Harold Hunt.

ISBN: 9781925231304 (eBook)

Subjects: Hunt, Harold John, 1925- Aboriginal Australians--
Biography. Government consultants--Australia, Biography. Leadership,
Aboriginal Australian. Indigenous peoples--Services for--Australia.

Dewey Number: 305.89915092

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Glass House Books
Brisbane

Acknowledgements

Cover design: Stuart Beakey

'Out of the Shadows', painting of Harold Hunt and sketches:
David Newman-White

Book Design: David P. Reiter

I wish to express my gratitude to friends; John Hill, Liz Gillespie, Helen Swinbourne, Ros Gibson, Linda Burney and Dorothy Kraal who encouraged me to write and the community of Bigga who also provided me with a writing haven.

Thanks to Dr. Patricia Gaut, the late Bryce Courtney and Anne Beverage for their professional support during the process.

I very much appreciate the editing by my daughter Gail, Deb Perry, Irina Dunn, who was determined to see my life story published and finally Dr. David Reiter who has brought this book together. Thanks to Anjie Greve and IP staff for their proofreading assistance.

Many of the old Box Brownie photos are from the collection of my mother, May Hunt, which have now been archived by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

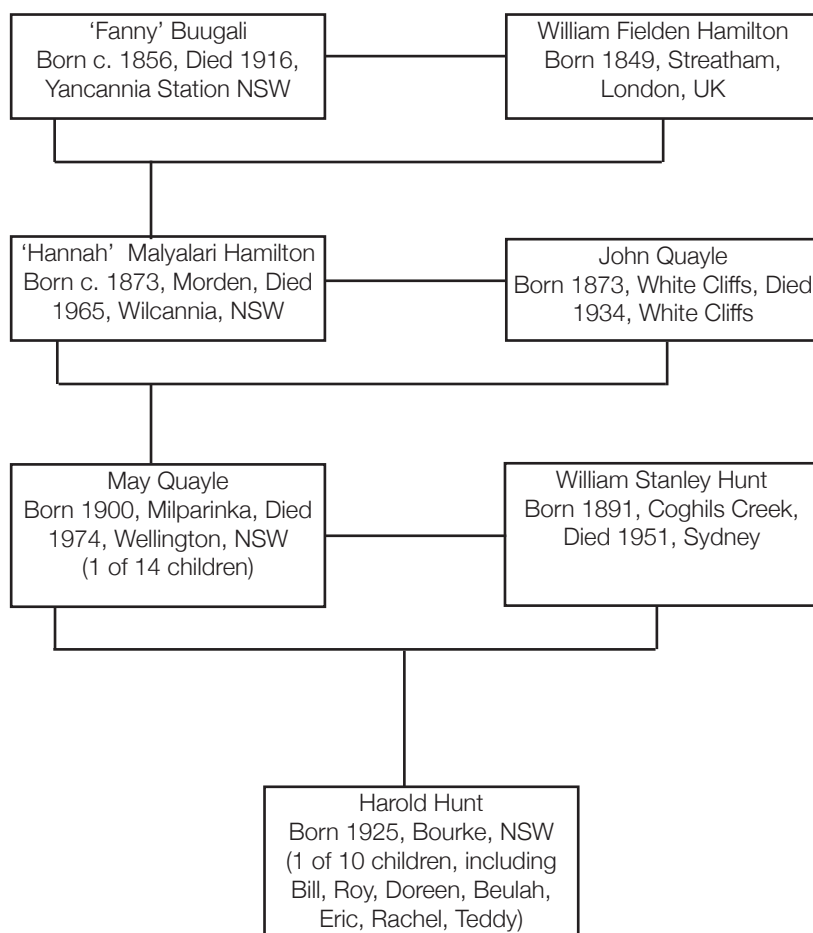
To those many others who have contributed and influenced my life, I am eternally grateful.

– Harold J. Hunt, OAM

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Harold Hunt Family Tree



Chapter 1

The Quayles

I AM THE THIRD ELDEST OF TEN, ONLY EIGHT HAVING SURVIVED INFANCY. I am a son of an Aboriginal woman and an Australian-born Irishman. I never knew my Dad's people. He sometimes spoke of his family but they never kept in contact. He told me they ran a small pig farm near the little town of Coghills Creek, a rich farming area in the goldfields of Victoria. He had one brother, Tom, a schoolteacher. Years later I heard they had a bakery in Broken Hill, but I never knew of that before. Maybe they didn't know about us.

We grew up with my mother's family, with my grandparents, Jack and Hannah Quayle. Hannah - Gran, as we knew her - talked about family a lot.

Gran's own mother was a traditional Maliangaapa tribal woman. I can't recall her tribal name, but she is commemorated as Fanny Williams on the White Cliffs Cemetery register, having died at nearby Yancannia Station in 1916.

My gran was born of her mother's union with a newly arrived Scottish grazier, William Feildon Hamilton. William, or Bill, as he came to be known, came from an elite Scottish background. At the age of seventeen, he was sent to Australia to 'toughen up'. That he did.

He partnered with a man named Gayer, managing a pastoral lease on Morden Station in the far western country of New South Wales. The story goes that they refused a generous offer of purchase before the big drought and rabbit plague in the 1880s. Many landholders in Outback

New South Wales and Queensland were affected. Their pleas to supporters in England for publicity and financial assistance fell on deaf ears. Bill walked away penniless from Morden around 1884 and returned to his family in England. Apparently, though, his taste for pioneering adventure was not sated. A short time later he sailed for another new colony, New Zealand, and made his mark there. But that's another story.

Morden, and the neighbouring Wonnaminta and Yancannia stations, had a good relationship with the Maliangaapa people and other tribes who continued to live on their own land, even when active dislocation of Aboriginals was being enforced by government policy. In 1883 the government had established the Aboriginal Protection Board to control the Indigenous people. Their policy assumed that children would more easily be 'socialized as Whites' and that 'Aboriginal blood could be bred out', with them gradually being biologically assimilated into European society.

This could only be achieved by separating full-bloods from half-castes, so children of mixed descent were being forcibly removed from their families.

Gran's mother Fanny stayed behind when Bill Hamilton left Australia. He, I am told, wanted to take her and their child Hannah with him, and rode the district for over two weeks searching for them. But Fanny had gone back to her tribe and the elders told him to leave her. She returned to 'Cobham' Tommy Williams, a full-blood Aboriginal, and they had two sons, Gilbert and George Williams.

My gran was a half-caste. Having grown up at Morden, she had learnt the ways of the white man's domestic duties and was fairly at ease in both camps. In this time of significant social change for Aborigines, a shy young Hannah met a brash young stockman named Jack

Quayle, who was working on the district properties. Like Hannah, his father was English, from the Isle of Man, and his mother a full-blood from the Corner Country. But Jack's mother had returned to her tribal clan so he and his two brothers were raised by their white father. The three sons were reared in the manners of the English working-class by their father and built an honest reputation as hard workers. Their only education was in the form of tank sinking, fencing and whatever horse work came their way. With the boys barely out of their teens, Jack Quayle senior passed away. He had willed his tank-sinking plant, horses, harness, ploughs, scoops and all camping equipment to his three sons to carry on the business he had built up for them. However, on the station the Quayle boys were working on at the time of their father's death, the owner falsely claimed there was a debt owing to the station. He therefore withheld what was rightfully the property of the young unschooled Aboriginals who could broker no argument, by law, against a white station owner. The three learnt an invaluable lesson. Without the protection of their father, who was schooled in the white system and of good reputation, they had little standing to argue.

Jack, the eldest, decided he must move on and he determined to make a life for himself and earn a living as a horse-breaker. There was a big demand for that type of work and he liked working with horses anyway. From his earnings in horse-breaking he was able to re-establish himself in his father's trade - earthmoving, the work he'd been raised to do. By his early twenties, he was a self-made man. Jack Quayle and Hannah Hamilton married in the Roman Catholic Church at the nearby opal mining town of White Cliffs in 1895. By then, 'Big Jack' Quayle was a successfully established contractor in the Paroo River region with experience in tank sinking, fencing, horse-breaking, shearing and whatever else bush work

was required. He became a man of great independence. He taught me that a person's lot in life depended on what he was prepared to put into life. Having always lived on the land away from conveniences, he was an innovator. He thrived on the challenges of breaking new ground by modifying equipment and trialling various techniques, necessity in a harsh land being the added spur to invention.



John "Jack" Quayle c. 1884.

women and children had been forcibly moved from their homes onto designated reserves, away from their homelands, without notice. Families and clans were dispersed and various tribes were thrown together by government decree. It was a further disintegration of their customs and dialects.

Dad

Billy Hunt travelled alone.

He worked in a livery stable in the mining city of Broken Hill for a time. He must have had at least some schooling, for he was quite literate and very precise as

to how he signed his name, even on the smallest and seemingly most insignificant of documents. He was a drifter in a sense; he had that itinerant, instinctive nature so often characteristic of a person with no strong family ties. He was a good worker who always insisted on paying his way. His word was his bond and he expected the same from everyone else.

Somehow he found himself employed by my grandfather, Jack Quayle, who recognized qualities he admired in this young white man. Billy was a little older than Jack's teenage children but he readily settled into their camp lifestyle, participating in boxing and athletics with the boys after work. In no time Billy was accepted as a family member. They were energetic sports-loving young men, with much more than their fair share of competition from their sisters. There was another attraction about the Quayle mob for Billy - the second eldest girl, May. Just after her twenty-first birthday, May and Billy were married in the Roman Catholic Church at White Cliffs.

Billy Hunt remained in the employ of his father-in-law until he accepted a position on Willangee Station some sixty miles from Broken Hill. It seemed a good opportunity for independence to settle down in a steady regular job, and to raise and support a family in his job as a handyman, maintenance worker and camel driver. There was a camel team on the station that was used to transport wool to the railhead at Tarrawingee, some fifteen miles away, and bring supplies back on the return journey.

May and Billy moved out to the station and set up camp - a small tent pitched in the shade of the tall leafy ghost gum trees encircling the a small stock-watering dam. Such dams were usually nothing more than some hundred waterholes ranging in depth up to fifteen feet depending on how often they were de-silted. The catchment areas of the dams were drains constructed for

several hundred yards across the sloping terrain. In times of quick downpours the water would be channelled into a smaller catchment area known as a silt tank. This is where most of the topsoil, being washed along the drains, would settle, before the water level reached a height when it would then overflow through a galvanized corrugated iron tube into the main dam.

A galley was then rigged. It consisted of two posts across which a rail was suspended from which to hang buckets of water. It was May's role to fuel the fire under them, and so provide the heating for all other domestic purposes.

The tall gum trees provided some shade most of the day. Those on the eastern side provided early morning shade as did the trees on the western side in the late afternoon, but during the hottest time of the day there were gaps of sunlight and shade alternating as the sun passed over those trees on the northern side of the tent. The position of the tent also had to be carefully decided upon to get the most shade. Also, for safety measure, the tent had to be erected away from the tall eucalypts because their limbs often snapped and fell without warning.

Country people knew how to fulfil these requirements of comfort and safety. 'Born to the bush', it is sometimes called. Most bush folk found it hard to understand when city and town folk didn't take such important matters into consideration when setting up camp.

Water was carried from the dam in buckets hooked to a wooden yolk carried across the shoulders. Whilst the dam water was shallow and muddy, it could be cleared by boiling, then adding some ashes from the campfire, and being left to settle. The water was filtered by the ash, and sediments sank to the bottom. Billy would fill the buckets before going to work each day, but on wash days when more water was required, it was up to May to carry

whatever extra she might need.

Fuel stoves and refrigerators were unheard of in camp life in those days. Fresh mutton obtained from the station homestead had to be cooked on the day, and then kept in a hessian-covered cooler called a Coolgardie Safe. The Coolgardie had a wooden base hung by wires from a shallow, water-filled, open-topped container. Curtains of hessian acted as siphons and allowed the water to gradually seep over and down the sides, thereby cooling the safe with any breeze that might rise and drift across the arid plains. The safe was hung from the ridgepole at the front of the tent. Here it would not only catch the breezes but also be shaded by the giant gum trees.



Left: The Hunt's camp at Willangee. Right: Pulling down a newly broken camel for harness.

Billy Hunt adjusted to bush life, Aboriginal cooking and the eating habits of his new family. He and May often supplemented their food supply by going hunting, cooking and eating bush tucker with its endless menu of kangaroo, emu, goanna, witchetty grubs, and the various types of fruit - quandongs, moley apples, wild spinach, pig weed, yams, cullukas. It made for a different and enjoyable change from the usual spuds, onions, cabbage, carrots and the like, which seemed to be the staple diet of Europeans.

The young couple's work and camp life was not interrupted by May's first pregnancy in 1920. Most

women in the bush carried on with their normal duties throughout their pregnancies. When the birth was due, all was taken care of by an experienced mid-wife, not necessarily medically trained, but a woman who had children of her own and had attended many births in the company of older women. That's the way so many people entered the world in that part of the country back in those days. To this young couple, the joyous expectation of their first born, plus a permanent job, made the whole world seem theirs. All was just the way it was meant to be. The availability of a hospital a mere sixty miles away at Broken Hill with modern medicine and maternity facilities gave the young couple the false hope that nothing could go wrong. However, tragedy struck. The little boy survived only a few weeks. He died with the name of his Dad - he was named simply, Bill.

Whilst my parents were living and working on Willangee, two more children were born in Broken Hill, this time in hospital. Roy entered the world eighteen months after the loss of little Bill. Just prior to the birth of each child, May would travel into Broken Hill and stay with friends, often the Zada family. The head of that family was a prominent Afghan, Khan Zada. He followed the Halal bleeding process at the local abattoirs, a religious requirement for the large Muslim community of Broken Hill in those days. Khan Zada, like many of his kin, married an Aboriginal woman. These marriages bonded the Aboriginal and Afghan communities.

Camels were the only means of reliable transport throughout those arid parts of Australia. With the importation of camels came Afghan men, but no women. It was inevitable that Afghan and Aboriginal people married, for both groups were seen as lower class.

About a year later, shortly before the birth of Doreen,

May's elder sister Ruby passed away, leaving her three little girls orphaned. Ada and Mary went to live with Granny Quayle, and the eldest, Myrtle, became a member of the Hunt family.

There was a lot of fencing to be done at Willangee, so Billy decided to do it on contract as a means of financial improvement. They were doing well, and shortly thereafter, the Hunts bought themselves a Model T Ford utility. When it arrived at the station, Billy looked it over and said, "That's not for me. I'll stick to the camels. My wife will be the better one to handle that machine."

May, being the person she was, saw it as a new challenge. She took the vehicle for a short run under the guidance of the salesman who had brought it out from Broken Hill. She then offered to drive him back to Tarrowangee, the nearest town, so he could get the train home. Beside her instructor, with Billy and the kids in the back, May took the controls and completed the round trip to the Tarrowangee railway station and back home without any problems.

Billy was very pleased. May, having been brought up as equal to her brothers, had proved to be up to his expectations in so many ways, and this gladly relieved him of the need to learn to drive. He did eventually learn to reverse the car, but that was as far as he was prepared to go. Of course, May enjoyed it all. It was an extra skill under her belt and she would drive the car out with her husband on the fencing jobs where she would help by running the wire.

That meant setting the one hundredweight coils of wire onto a spinning jenny. She would pull the wire out by hand and thread it through the bored holes in the posts. This was a heavy task, especially for a pregnant woman. Each strain, as they were called, was two hundred yards long, and she was pulling that weight in steel wire. It was

especially heavy going if some of the holes in the posts were not exactly in line with the rest of the fence. For each wire strain this action was repeated, depending on whether the fences were of five or six strains in each of the posts.

The going was tough in those days. Living in tents meant there was not the dusting and polishing chores of a proper house, but there were many chores of a different kind. It wasn't just a matter of washing the dishes, the clothes, and making the beds. May had to sweep the ground clean around the camp to show up the track of snakes or other creatures that might decide to sneak into the quiet camp, hoping to find a small treat at their disposal.

Most women accompanied their husbands, assisting wherever they could in his daily toil whilst looking after the children. May handled it well. With two of her own children and an orphaned niece, she looked after their camp and helped Bill with his work.

With another pregnancy, they decided to join the Quayle family camp again. There was always work with Grandfather Quayle, and Gran would enjoy taking care of her little grandchildren – for a time anyway. Billy took time off work from Willangee and moved to Wilara Station on the Paroo River 160 miles west of Bourke, where he once again worked with his father-in-law on a fencing job.

Camp Life On The Paroo

The birth of a child does not always come at the most convenient time. May was due in the middle of summer. In this part of New South Wales, the 'Corner Country', it is exceptionally hot, with temperatures as high as 120° F (50° C), and an annual rainfall of only eight to ten inches. Dry hot westerly winds blow in off the Simpson Desert



Left: Bill Hunt (foreground) with bullock whip, Bill Gilbey with scoop, sinking a dam for Grandfather Quayle. Right: May and Monica Quayle on camel.

bringing sweltering nights. The climate suits only swarms of flies during the daylight and mosquitoes at night.

People out there had no choice; they had to cope with the conditions and make the necessary adjustments. They worked usually from dawn till dusk, and then there was food to be prepared, served and saved. When fresh meat was available it was mostly grilled on coals beside the open fires, baked or boiled in buckets or, for the "well-to-do", baked in camp ovens, heavy cast iron pots with lids. They would be placed on a bed of live coals in a shallow hole in the ground with more coals placed on the lid. Heat would build up quickly within and the lid did not allow any ash or coals to spoil the ingredients.

What could not be eaten was cooked, wrapped in paper and hessian, kept well covered in a shady area during the day and hung out under trees at night.

The Coolgardie safes were topped up each day with smaller quantities of food for daily use. Other larger amounts of fresh meat would be salted and kept. This was done by rubbing raw coarse salt into the meat, then wrapping and hanging it wherever it would catch the slightest breeze during the day, and unwrapped at night.

Fresh dampers were made daily, along with rice puddings, brownies and dough-boys. Food was plentiful at all times in the Quayle camp, some of it cooked in camp ovens, and some of it on red hot coals. The bulkier meat such as kangaroo and emu were mostly cooked whole in a pit in the ground.

All was fine in the permanent camp, everything in place. The men left at about the same time each morning for work, as soon as it was light enough to see where they were going, so as to get the benefit of the remaining previous night's cool air. They carried their water bags, damper and leg of mutton for their lunch, and of course the old standby, the brownie, to have with a pannikin of tea for smoko. Then it was time for a quick smoke before it was back out into the sun with crowbar and shovel, and brace and bit for boring posts, and walking from tree to tree looking for suitable stock from which to cut posts. Often the men would disturb an emu on a nest. That meant some extra variety of food from their eggs - omelettes, baked custards and richer brownies.

The womenfolk were kept busy cleaning, cooking and washing. Caring for the children also meant keeping an eye on the smaller ones so they didn't stray too far from the camp, get lost, bitten by a snake or, perhaps fall badly from a tree. Most kids seemed to be born to climb and, of course, country kids have more opportunities. There was often a bruised knee, cut arm, or swollen cheekbone to be soothed with loving care, not to mention burrs to be removed from feet, and sand brushed from hair and torn clothes. The kids stubbed toes and tore trousers, found centipedes among the bed clothes and huge carpet snakes, which ventured into the cool shade of the bow shed when all was quiet in the middle of the day.

Camp life was never dull, never boring. Each day was a new start, and whatever came up during the day was dealt

with accordingly. Each day was seen as a lesson in life, and whatever unexpected event took place was an opportunity to learn and do something new, something different. At each day's end, when there was no longer enough daylight to do any more fencing, wood collecting or equipment repairs, they all sat around the camp relaxing.

In most camps there were no tables and chairs, and everyone sat cross-legged on the ground or on logs. The atmosphere was one of communal sharing. Families sat around together, and meal times were special. This was the lead up to another special part of the day - storytelling. Always, there would be stories told of personal experiences whether they were exciting, traumatic, daring, dangerous, or happy. So many were practical, everyday experiences, special as they were related in the particular vocabulary of the storyteller.

Always though, there would be the stories of 'The Dreaming'. Whilst the children loved to hear how it all began, even when the stories made their skin prickle, and sent shudders up their spines, they would move closer to each other and tighten the circle. Then at bedtime, usually with several in each bed, they would recount their own versions, often relating some of the stories to an event in their own lives, or to someone they knew.

The adults had so many experiences to relate, having listened to the stories of the older people. Without the benefit of written texts as such, this was the Aboriginal way. Accuracy in storytelling was a highly regarded tradition. There was a greater range of experiences, connecting the spiritual with the practical and shedding the labour of the day. These sessions often went late into the night, with no regard for the fact that there was to be an early start in the morning. These were not always solemn occasions. They were sometimes light and humorous. Perhaps someone

questioned the authenticity of some stated occurrence. On those occasions, there was always an answer.

The campfire yarns were sometimes accompanied by music, singing and dancing. In every community or camp, there would be people who were outstanding dancers willing to display their skills. Much of the singing and dancing would be traditional, then somebody else would show off a dance they saw the "white fella" doing. Instruments ranged from accordions, to banjos, Jew's Harps, mouth organs, flutes, spoons or carefully shaped bones made from the ribs of bullocks. Of course there was the old favourite, the gum leaf. These were the common and more popular musical instruments in the early nineteenth century. They were light to carry, easy to care for, or commonly found, and not too sensitive to the extremities of the environment.

Alcohol was not a feature of Aboriginal life then. There were some types of mild natural sedatives used by some people, in some communities, but usually for special ceremonies. It was a simple lifestyle. Everyone knew where they came from, where they were at, and believed the future held nothing but promise – promise that there would be experiences, adventures and opportunities, all of which contained some happiness and sadness. It was a time to learn more about life, about one's self, about how one did or did not cope with life.

Every day provided fresh material for the sharing at the end of the day. Aboriginal lore was ingrained in Aboriginal people, who held the belief that life is a journey to take and enjoy. No matter when, or where, we journeyed to, it meant change, change not by human hand, but change by nature, over which mankind had no control, but must adapt to.

But those were changing times.

Bourke

Billy Hunt made the decision to take his pregnant wife and mother-in-law, along with the smaller children, to Bourke for the birth of their next child.

The time had come for their well-organized camp life to be forsaken for the time being. They had to decide which would be the best and safest route to traverse the 160 mile trip to Bourke. This town had not only the nearest hospital, but it had the only medical care of any description for hundreds of miles. These were days prior to the establishment of the Bush Nursing Association and the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which now play such an important role in providing emergency and general medical service and support for the Outback. Their mode of transport was to be a two-horse drawn wagonette, not a motor vehicle. The women were more comfortable about that arrangement anyway. They were not all that sure about the reliability of the car, and Billy had never learned to drive. Billy would need to see to the accommodation for his mother-in-law and the children once they reached Bourke since she, unfamiliar with town life, could not be expected to make such arrangements.

"Good onya' Billy," was the call from his two teenage brothers-in-law, Laurie and Sonny. That suited them fine, him leaving the car at home. It gave them a chance to drive the T Model, which was now affectionately named 'Lizzy'. The boys were both mechanically minded, so what an opportunity!

Grandfather Quayle, now in his fifties, still did a lot of work in the general area; fencing and tank sinking mainly. He had a good idea of what the current overall terrain was like, so he could plan their itinerary carefully. The best and safest way to go would be via Yantabulla and Fords Bridge – two small towns along the road from Bourke –

out through the little border town of Hungerford, on the way to the Channel Country of western Queensland. That was not the most direct route, but they could be certain of the watering places. Then there was the matter of topping up their food supplies for the days on the road. The towns along the way had little general stores, which catered for the basic needs in the bush, as well as having telephone services.

Midsummer was hot and dry, a time when surface water became scarce. The waterholes away from the river, and some of the smaller dams, would not always last out the summer. Care had to be taken when travelling with horse-drawn vehicles to ensure there was water to be had at twenty to thirty mile intervals. Some water was always carried for domestic use, but there had to be water at night and in the morning for the horses in such hot dry conditions. A good covering of dry grass was still nutritious, but the horses would wander at night in search of water. Having to track them in the morning delayed the start and resulted in travelling during the hottest part of the day.

Travelling by horse-drawn carriage, they always sought reliable information about when they needed to move away from the river and travel between the known permanent watering places. They would take advantage of the artesian and sub-artesian bores, as well as the larger government-owned dams, which were usually well managed and provided water to the drovers' commercial stock travelling between rail heads or abattoirs.

Of course, Gran would make the trip as well to take care of the other children, Roy and Doreen, aged four and two, plus Mum's youngest sister Edith, aged four, and orphaned niece Myrtle, now six. That was very important on this occasion, for Mum was in an advanced state of pregnancy. Having the support of her own experienced

mid-wife, Gran, and already having had three births, May did not consider she was taking any great risk in leaving the "trip to town" until this late stage. However, they knew there was always the chance of the unpredictable, so they would take care and caution along the rough route as a part of the slowed, daily routine. They would camp by water each night, but some of the dams were low and muddy, often having a layer of algae across the top. Fine for the horses, but not so nice for humans. Where there were bores, they were usually salty. Again, whilst drinkable, and life-saving, bore water was not ideal and often caused upset stomachs, especially among the children.

The little group was up and ready early on the day of departure. Billy had the horses in at the break of day, packing what could be readied the night before. An earlier breakfast was served to enable the travellers to put some miles behind them and make camp before darkness set in.

The wagonette was loaded with their camping gear, supplies and clothes. Granny Quayle, always the one to organize and see that all would be well, gave for the umpteenth time the same set of instructions to her husband that she had been handing out for days. Then to her son-in-law, she said, "Billy, when you come back, you help that old man of mine too, you know how he gets busy with fixin' up all his work things like harness, and axes and shovels, then he's got to think about tucker for you mob too, so you help him with all that, 'cos we gonna bring another one home for us all to look after, so you help him, won't you my boy. Those older ones, Sonny and Laurie, they good help too, so you make sure they do their bit too."

May was always the quiet, calm type of person, similar to her father, with whom she had spent so much time working alongside in her earlier years. She knew

her mother's reminders to those staying behind was just force of habit, yet to reinforce her mother's confidence, she said, "Mum, they'll be right. You know what Dad is like; he never forgets anything, no matter how busy he is. And you tell us all the time what great blokes those young sons of yours are, so they'll be right too. We just got to look after this little mob when we get to Bourke. They reckon that the Darling River is a lot bigger than this old, slow-moving Paroo River is. They have steamers going up and down that river, carting wool and all sorts of things for the stations along the way. The kids might be a little bit frightened for a while, then you know when they get a little bit game, they'll start looking around for themselves. But we'll be right."

With the three adults and four children on board the wagonette, the little family broke into two groups, with Big Jack Quayle, his three sons and daughter staying behind. Camp life would continue much the same except it would be so much quieter without the children. The separation would be a temporary imbalance of the family wheel. With handkerchiefs and unbuttoned shirtsleeves wiping the tears from their eyes, the travelling party moved away. The horses were fresh from not having been used much; they wanted to be off with a rush.

Billy's experienced hands on the reins kept them to a walk until everyone settled into their seats, in rhythm with the wagonette. After about a half mile of watching and waving from both parties, Billy allowed the horses to break into a trot. As well as making better time, the horses had to be given the opportunity to relax and adjust into the harness.

It was a long day for the children, from daybreak to dark, without cover in the heat. Each day, the mid-day spell was a chance to have a bit of a run around and doze for a short period, which restored their energy. They

made camp early enough to allow time to arrange the bedding and the prepare food before nightfall. Billy saw to the tired horses with water and finding the sweetest grass that he could for them. The youngsters were no trouble; they were always keen to explore the surrounds of the next place where they were to spend the night. The evening meal over, there was a little quiet time around the fire and then into bed. Billy would check to see if there were signs of wear in the harness, which might need repairing, or if the rough road had caused any coming apart of the wagonette. The old grease, impregnated with dust, was wiped from the axles and wheel hubs, to which new grease was applied so all was in order for the next day's journey.

It is always a strange experience to sit around a fire at night in an unfamiliar environment, as that little group were doing each night, just seeing each other in the firelight with a darkened backdrop. The crackling and hissing sounds of the fire burning down, the flames flickering and fading into dull embers to eventually take on a covering of ash, the feel of the fresh night air, the difference in scents of the soil and trees not affected by regular habitation by people and stock, all make the solitude of the bush seem closer, more embracing. The song of the night beetles, curious lizards, a night owl spreading the word that there are visitors accompanied them along the way. Always, the silent snake lay somewhere, lurking from a safe distance, just in case some delicious morsel may come its way from the camp. The power of nature continuously impressed even those who had spent all their lives in the solitude of the bush. What a life, in the days before 'progress'!

The breaking of the dawn with the unseen activities of nature is welcomed in by bird calls as night turns into day. The campfire flickered as Billy stoked it to life to make himself a pannikin of tea, then rolled a cigarette

and prepared to bring the horses back into camp. By the time he arrived back with the horses the women had stirred and were preparing breakfast, and the children were moving about. Life on the move was so exciting to them: they were making the best of the limited time and free space available to them before moving on to the next camp, then the next, and the next again, until they would arrive at Bourke.

It's interesting travelling through new country, identifying tracks of animals indicating the main feeding grounds of the native wildlife and how they keep away as much as possible from the introduced species like sheep and cattle. Their tracks or pads form the shape of a tree. When they are spread out feeding they resemble the foliage, then they begin to come together, like smaller twigs on the tree. Then their tracks change as they head towards the water in single files, distinctive branch lines on the earth, bigger mobs, making wider and deeper markings with bigger limbs. Eventually they all come together, completing the trunk as they reach the watering place. The arid inland is never boring, although the countryside has its commonalities; it has so many differences, and is forever changing. There are so many features to the landscape - sand hills, rolling plains, stony ridges, black soil channels and red eroded gullies. These carry water from the scalded clay pans bordering the sand hills and are edged by rich herb-growing watercourses. The nutritious water plant life is a backup in times of drought.

The little town of Yantabulla slowly emerged from the mirage and mixture of Hopbush scrub. The heat of the day was dancing off the unpainted corrugated iron rooves of the hotel, post office, and general store and the six or so private residences occupied by drovers and road workers. A little away from the rest of the town was the one-room school building.

There was a harshness about the place. On the southern side there was Hopbush and Turpentine scrub covering the sand hills, sitting, keeping watch over a gilgai or small swamp, at the rear of the hotel. The town itself was the only thing separating that swamp from the scalded hard stony ridges stretching for miles north, and the main road leading to the border town of Hungerford.

Yantabulla was a remnant of what was once a supply depot in the days of horse, camel and bullock wagon. There were many roadside inns or pubs along the outback roads situated at distances corresponding with wagon stages, usually eighteen to twenty miles.

Little towns would sometimes be established near permanent water and squatters' homesteads. The Yantabulla bore, a mile from the town itself, provided the hot, tired and dusty travellers from the Paroo with ample water for a good, refreshing wash. A visit to the little general store was always a part of the trip, to buy a couple of packets of biscuits, canned fish, an extra tin or two of jam, a couple of new water bags and of course, lollies for the children. The younger ones might not have known until then what lollies were. Where they lived was so out of the way that the few travelling hawkers didn't even bother to call at their homesteads.

It was another two days to the next township of Ford's Bridge, situated on the Warrego River. Fords Bridge was of a similar size to Yantabulla, but it was a softer looking place, embraced by low scrub on the western side, supported by the slow-flowing muddy waters of the river. The two days from there to Bourke was more comfortable since the countryside had fewer stony ridges. With more permanent watering places it was more closely settled with homesteads than further out west.

A night's camp was made beside Kelly's Camp bore. It was here that Ned Kelly's sister, Kate, was said to

have set up to supply her wayward fugitive brothers with supplies and a place of refuge. It is an artesian bore oozing thousands of gallons of water an hour into a small lake, a haven for swans, egrets, water hens, brolga, many different types of ducks as well as kangaroo and emus. These native animals shared a vital life support with the introduced animals, sheep, cattle and horses. The lake also provided an opportunity for everyone to have a real bogey, or swim, as was customary in their beloved Paroo River back home.

Then came the dullness as they entered the treeless Walkdons Plain. In the distance, they saw what they thought was water overflowing from the river, but it was a dancing mirage, elusive. The walk, trot, walk pace of the horses seemed to make progress so much slower now that they could see further ahead. There was nothing to break the timeless monotony of being able to look for miles and see nothing. The day turned out to be a fizzer, and the children dozed.

Finally, they reached the end of the plain, and a rise in the terrain into scrublands of a different kind. There were patches of turpentine, inviting small mulga trees, joining with the huge eucalypts, the box trees signalling the overflow from the Darling River proper.

That made the day for the children, bringing them out from their uncomfortable agitated slumber. Their interests were keenly aroused by the time Billy guided the horses onto a clean level piece of ground in the shade of the River Box trees, a hundred yards from the main channel of the mighty Darling. To the children's imagination, it would be the keeper of their world's wonders. The weary family climbed down from the wagonette, stretched and yawned. They gazed around, enjoying terra firma beneath their feet after seven days of half lying, half sitting, as the wagonette had jolted its way, mile after mile, over rocks, ruts and gullies.

Because they were camped by the Darling, the night sounds were different from those in the scrublands. Breaking the silence was the slow creaking of the big river gums, those massive, white, majestic, guardians of the riverbanks, with their huge black, bulging wood burls telling their ages to be hundreds of years old. Then there was the scuffling screeching of possums, together with the unmistakable call of the mopoke.

The excitement of the broad, deep river, and knowing they were close to a "great big town" such as the children had never seen before, kept the children's spirits at peak level. All day long on the last leg of their adventure, they kept looking ahead, expecting to see the big town, beside the big river, over the next rise, or beyond the next patch of scrub.

Morning broke with a totally different feeling. Not only were the surrounds different, the day in every aspect was going to be different. There was just the short journey over the bridge, then a mere five miles to town. Billy would find a livery stable to have the horses rested, fed and watered while the rest of the family looked around the town centre, got their bearings and located the doctor's surgery.

Whilst May and Billy visited the doctor, Gran cared for the children in the park as they licked their ice cream before it all melted and ran down their arms. The doctor confirmed that May's pregnancy was in the latter stages, with the birth not far away. He then directed them to a big rambling weatherboard house on a bend of the river. It was run by a registered midwife who was known and respected by the doctors in town. From there they were put in touch with an agent who was able to rent them a house until after the birth of the new arrival.

Billy only stayed in Bourke for a short time to see his family settle in and give the horses a well-earned rest. His

trip home was an uneventful five days. Travelling alone he was able to begin the day's journey by sunrise each day, then he had a long rest during the late morning and early afternoon. He would sometimes keep travelling after sunset as is customary for people familiar with the bush. He would make the travel stages a little longer on the way back to The Paroo. The load would be lighter and he only had to consider his own comfort, along with the condition of the horses.

A few days were spent taking in the sites of Bourke. The wide-eyed children, the youngest leaning into their grandmother's skirt, looked in shop windows, sat in a cafe enjoying lemonade and ice cream, or stood in awe of all the people bustling by. There were lots of horse-drawn sulky's, spring carts, drays and buggies, and every now and then a car would drive along and park in the street. Sure the kids had seen all of these things in the bush, but there were so many of them now. Where were they going? In the bush everyone knew where people were going, and what they were doing, but here? Amazing!

Here was a big town with more than one shop! In one of them you could buy just clothes, then there was another that only sold bread and yet another that sold meats. Then there were other places that had the doors closed, but men going in and out, not sure what they were. One day they went up to the railway station and saw the train arrive, with all its hissing and puffing, clanging and screeching. With all the funny loud noises and steam, and so much smoke blowing out of the engine, the children thought, surely there must be something wrong with it. If Uncle Laurie was here he would fix it for them, because our car, Lizzy, didn't rattle and clang and blow smoke and steam everywhere. After a while it settled down and a lot of people came out and all their relations were there to meet them, kissing and laughing and some crying. They must

have been away somewhere for a long time, since that's what we do when our people are going away or coming home.

The time had come. May knew it was time to admit herself into the nursing home where all was in order for the delivery. Gran and the kids accompanied her on that short walk, and stayed with her until she settled in and it was time for the family to settle down in their new abode. They were all tired from so much excitement, so many new and strange things to see, and the anticipation of not knowing what was next to discover. The children continuously asked Gran, "When will the baby be born?" "How will we know when to go and see it?" "How big will it be?" "Is it going to be a boy or a girl?" "Will it have a lot of hair?"

Gran knew how to deal with those questions. She simply turned them all into debates among the children, so they would keep challenging each other until they exhausted themselves.

Then visiting time came the next day, much to the relief of a very patient but wearied grandmother. "Come on kids - it's time to go and see if the new baby is here yet."

"But what if it's not there yet Gran, what will we do then?"

"Don't worry, if it's not here today, we will just have to wait 'til it gets here won't we?"

They impatiently endured all that last minute combing of hair and brushing the imaginary dust off and smoothing the wrinkles in their cleanly laundered clothes. All of that had to be taken care of before they were ready, presentable. The four little excited kids chattered and giggled around their grandmother as they headed up the road to where there might be a new baby. There was a rush to open the gate at the main entrance, but no one was interested in closing it; that would be for the last one, the slowest one,

whoever that might be. But no one was going to be that one – they all hit the verandah practically at once. The gate? Well, Gran had to close it because she'd been the last one through.

All clustered around Gran, nobody saying it, but thinking, "Gran might be the first one to see the new baby, and whoever was the closest to Gran would get the first, best look, and might be able to get a little nurse of it too." With a shush, and last minute instructions about behaviour in hospitals, the children all tip-toed into the room where Mum was lying back in bed, a big smile on her face and announced, "It's a boy!" There he was, fast asleep, a crinkled little face, a lot of black hair, his eyes tightly closed, sucking on his fist. There was lots of shuffling, pushing and whispered comments about the new baby, about when he would be able to come home so they could all play with him, and look after him. The excitement of being in the 'big town' was, for the time, forgotten. Everything revolved around the little baby in the cot, since at this moment this room was the whole world to this little group of bush kids.

The Good News

Billy, Grandfather Jack Quayle, and the family team were sitting in the shade of a huge coolabah tree having lunch when they looked up and saw a horseman approaching. It was the station manager. As he neared the group he called, 'G'day men, I've got some good news for you! Bill, your wife has had a baby boy and both are doing well. Congratulations!' He handed Dad the telegram and shook his hand.

The telegram read, "May and seven and a half pound baby boy. Both well. Will be ready to come home at the end of the week. Laurie can come in and get us. Love, Mum."

There were slaps on the back and handshakes all round at the joy of the news to hand. It gave Laurie a special feeling of happiness. Yes, he was happy that his sister had had the baby and that they were well, but he was also secretly happy since it gave him the opportunity to get away from the camp for a few days, to be able to take the Model T Ford, Lizzy, for a good long run, and all by himself. Six or seven days on the road in a wagonette would be too much for a week-old baby, so it had been planned weeks before that Mum's twenty-one-year-old brother Laurie would go to Bourke in the car to bring the family home once the new arrival was ready to travel.

Laurie went over the car at every opportunity after work. It was in good order – he saw to that. He was learning something different each time he tinkered with it. He hardly slept at all that night, and was up and away before sunrise the next morning. He knew that he would have no trouble doing the journey from sun to sun, and was going to enjoy every mile and minute of it. Though there was the possibility of some kind of mechanical problem along the way, he was confident he would be able to fix it.

With no one else beside him to consider, young Laurie Quayle could indulge his own impulse. He had a whole day with Lizzy on his own, with many miles ahead, in fact, 160 of them to play with. He mused, "It might be a dream. Well, please don't wake me up." So, for young Laurie Quayle, this was the greatest experience. What a time for the six foot three, keen young bushman from the back blocks, to be allowed and trusted to drive alone in one of these new-fangled machines, as it was to him anyway, then.

There were many graziers still using horse and buggy transport to reach the smaller towns such as Wanaaring, Hungerford, and Yantabulla. They would also travel by

mail coach if they wanted to do a quick trip to Bourke, their nearest railhead and commercial centre. They would send their wool clips to Bourke for shipment to Sydney Wool Stores by railroad, and produce was dispatched from Bourke, too, by either the Afghan camel teams, or the teamsters with their horse or bullock drawn wagons.

Unmade roads, mere tracks really, were used mostly by horse and camel drawn vehicles. Motor vehicles were rarely seen in those parts of the country in the mid 1920s. The trip to Bourke would be slow and hazardous, and here was Laurie, travelling over newly formed roads which wound through the bush, dodging trees, rocks and gullies which were generally considered too steep to be traversed by any type of wheeled vehicle. He experienced the thrill of having to brake sharply on occasions when a fallen tree branch blocked the way, or a gully had been washed out during a storm. Then there was the diversity of wildlife, kangaroo, emus, wild turkey and feral camels and small mobs of brumbies startled by this new contraption. The horses would take to their heels with tails flying, then circle and gallop at a safe distance beside Laurie and Lizzy, then stop with heads held high, necks arched.

They cocked their tails as horses do, just for a few seconds, then with a snort and flaring nostrils and a clattering of hooves, they would be off into the shelter of the timber.

Laurie swerved to miss the sleepy Blue Tongue lizards slowly making their way across the track, or lying in the soft soil of the wheel tracks. Startled goannas would head for the nearest tree, and snakes slither for cover to escape from the monster disturbing their normally peaceful countryside. The slow-moving echidna waddled along, curling up into a little spiky ball at the sound and sight of the vehicle until it considered all danger had passed.

As the sun lowered in the west, the elongated shadow

of the old ford ute lay ahead, as if it was a phantom, especially on the Walkdons Plain, with not a tree as far as he could see.

Laurie had never imagined there could be so much country without something more than a shrub on it, but there it was.

Then in another first for him, he saw the Darling River he'd heard so much about. His excitement was at fever point when he eventually crossed the twelve-mile stretch of black soil and rose up into the wooded sand hills bordering the overflows of the mighty Darling. It was a river deep and wide enough for boats with trailers hooked behind, carrying a hundred bales of wool in a load. This was pretty hard to imagine for someone who might not have even seen the Paroo River in full flood. There appeared before him a few houses scattered alongside the road, a hotel, and towering behind it, the huge bridge with its forty foot windlass, built to lift the middle section of the bridge and allow river traffic to pass underneath. He remembered Bill's instructions. He had to cross the bridge and continue for another four or five miles. Then he had to look out for the beginning of the town proper, and ensure he didn't miss the turn right into the second street, where he would find the nursing home.

What a day! And to think it had taken the family so many days by wagonette to make the same trip into Bourke. A stark contrast. Once Laurie crossed the bridge, there were people riding horses, some in sulkies and small two-horse buggies, and there were cyclists, pedestrians, women pushing prams, children beside them.

There were very few other motor vehicles about, and those few were different shapes and sizes, which caught Laurie's eye. As much as he wanted to have a good look at them, he had to concentrate on his driving. He had never

driven in such an environment. The bit of driving he had done in his short career was always out in the bush where there was usually only one vehicle moving at a time, car or buggy. So his attention had to be focused on the job at hand. As he turned the bend in the road after crossing the main bridge, then two by-wash channels, Laurie could see Bourke proper. He could see houses, backed by more houses, and as he got nearer he could see that they were all laid out in squares with long straight streets and cross streets. His main interest was to find the street with the nursing home to see his sister and her new baby, and of course, get to tell of his exciting journey. Once he found it, there they were! The children were all there waiting too and wanting to show off their new baby. The all round excitement was overwhelming.

There was time for the family to settle down at the boarding house, for mother and baby were ready to leave nursing care, which pleased May no end. She'd had a run in with the matron and reported her to the doctor for not being able to change the baby as often as she thought he needed. She had already cared for two babies, was aware of their needs, and clearly her ideas differed from those of the Matron. Preparations had been made with the Catholic priest to have the little fellow christened the day after his discharge from the nursing home. So, on his first day out in the big wide world, that squirming, hungry little creature became, officially - Harold John Hunt - me!

The child who had just entered into this world was to keep his parents and the others in his life on their toes over the years. This is a statement I am now entitled to make, being 90 years of age and looking back on my life.

This is my story.

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