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'Jac' in 2017

It's time to tell my story. My time at Longerenong was life changing. It enabled me to move towards a career I aspired to. For me, the mix of academic and practical was perfect. It still is.

The practical bit has sometimes been a little problematic - because I can, I tend to do. This has led to a life of serial house renovations, first a condemned house in Cardross, then a former slaughterer's house in Kensington, Melbourne, followed by a new house in Ferny Creek, then an historic timber house in Auckland, a house in Applecross, Perth, a small farm in GinGin, an air force cottage in St James, a worker's cottage in East Victoria Park - my 'grand designs'; my ideal, and now a railway worker's cottage in historic Woodbridge, also in Perth. I do pretty well all the work myself, carpentry, cabinetry, plastering, plumbing, roofing, re-stumping ... I could and fortunately still can. It has brought me into contact with all kinds of rogues and, great tradesmen. I once purchased timber flooring from a one-legged police sergeant who moonlighted as a timber supplier and drove a truck that needed a brick as a handbrake. And all sorts of blokes, some with serious mental health problems, including a timber moulder who produces traditional mouldings from recycled timber for me but who is bipolar (like me!) and even less reliable than myself. But he's a wonderful craftsman of the old kind. Also, a floor polisher who threatened to burn my house down, blow up my car and throw me off the edge of my deck after I questioned the quality of his work. He eventually came back and asked for help, but I never saw him again. I did my own from then on.

So many moves reveal a peripatetic life driven by career, family circumstances, litigation, and a failed marriage.

As a boy who failed and never completed school, and who hadn't been allowed to do his preferred subjects (and thus slept through lessons - 'sleepy'), Longerenong provided me with a path to academia and to biology and research. Otherwise who knows how life would have unfolded. Even then, I was fortunate to get a place at the very last moment when I think another applicant dropped out.

I am still an active research supervisor and have the good fortune to be able to work with my youngest son. I am proud to say he is a better manager and scientist than I. We publish together and I am able to bring the 'real plant' to him and his team who focus on cell and molecular biology. I have published a winemaking textbook; I had to teach it so writing a text was a good way to learn it. In my retirement, I have moved back to my strengths, grapevine biology and agronomy. My supervision keeps me in contact with young and aspiring plant scientists, which I find rewarding. I have developed some of the numerical skills I missed at school and am also the statistical go-to for the team. I enjoy scripting and R and *LaTeX* are my favourites, both non-commercial packages. The days of Fortran and Basic etc are long gone and I detest Microsoft Office but who can avoid it?

On leaving Longerenong, I was one of the fortunate few who gained a Commonwealth scholarship. I took that to Melbourne University. There, through the grace of a kindly Dean (I didn't meet the entry requirements), I began an Agricultural Science degree. They also were good years, mainly because the scholarship enabled me to live in college - such a privilege for a boy from a poor rural background. Academically, they were hard years, especially first year. From there, having worked for the Ag Dept.

over summer, they and the local industry sponsored me to do an MSc at the Waite Institute in Adelaide.

From there, I returned from time to time to rock climb at Mt Arapiles – interestingly, one of my best mates here was brought up on a farm at Natimuk. At Adelaide, I clashed with the HOD and he had my scholarship withdrawn, without informing me! I still managed to complete my Master's degree and took up a job with the Ag Dept in Mildura. I remained intent on completing a PhD and managed to get a large research grant to fund it and, through my local parliamentary member, to get the Minister for Agriculture to instruct the DG to second me to Melbourne University - I was still a bit 'bolshie' in those days. However, DGs have a long memory and eventually I paid the price. That led to Auckland and a University career - that or CSIRO had long been my goal anyway.

The Auckland years were good years. It is a lovely, friendly city, and I still reflect whether leaving was such a good idea. However, there, in what had become a pattern, I worked too hard, rising early to write, developing new laboratories for the Department, a new teaching program, spending time with the children in the early evening, then major renovations in the evening and weekends. Needless to say, I didn't see much of NZ. After 5 years there I was invited to apply for a Chair in Horticulture at Murdoch University to oversee a joint degree with UWA. A big job and another renovation 'to be near the river' was again demanding - somehow - I never learnt to say 'no!' This character flaw has been pointed out by successive managers - I am still working on it :-). During those early years I become a founding member of the Australian Horticultural R&D Corporation, another privilege.

Those years morphed into a bit of a disaster for me: a vexatious postgraduate student pursued me through every available avenue for 13 years before admitting to a stunned judge that the basis was trivial and that I had been correct in my judgement. Also, I had taken on a supervising agronomist position for the trustee of an agricultural company that eventually failed. I, in sense of fairness to the investors, but very reluctantly, took on the job of doing a financial viability assessment for the receiver. Reluctant because I had made it clear that my expertise lay in agronomy, not finance or business. I did the modelling having been given access to the company's financial records and found that their business model was doomed to fail from the start. It was a job well done and was eventually checked and republished by the Bureau of Ag. Economics. Well, the investors thought I should have known that from the start. I was joined in a \$32 million litigation along with the Trustee and the Accountants. The University found a way to avoid supporting me, so, having recently lost a house due to the failure of my wife's business, I made the remaining family assets over to her and ultimately went my own way to start again. The litigation took six years to resolve and I am of the view that the litigants were provided with fairy tales about me (I was never shown to be at fault and the investors lost more money). That took six years, money and a lot of anxiety; QCs don't come cheaply but I got some pro-bono support. I was stood down as HOD during the period but kept my job, fortunately.

I was fortunate then to meet a little lady, on-line, who was working on a remote aboriginal community. We were both on the 'bones of our bum'. I had raised a few \$s from an IPO my youngest son had urged me to invest in, and together with the few dollars she had, we had just enough for a deposit on a little cottage. Over 3 years we renovated it using my salary. We then sold it making enough for each to make a deposit on a house - it was a good outcome. I've always beaten the market with my renovations. She also re-introduced me to the Kimberley, to bushwalking and camping, and I continue with those activities. Another of the many things I remain grateful to her for. But I am still working to build my asset base with the prospect of subdividing my current property. Woodbridge is a rural-like community at the edge of Perth. It's diverse, as rural communities are, and I am enjoying becoming a part of it.

One of the joys of Perth, apart from the environment and its people, has been the 19 years I spent as a Director of Kings Park and Botanic Gardens. Through my trials and tribulations, self-inflicted, that remained a plus. It was through the years of refurbishment of the Park, so one could see the changes take place as it became the icon it is. Through being a Director, I had the responsibility, from time to time, of hosting potential donors. I will be forever grateful that I met a senior executive from Total, the French oil and gas giant. He and his wife were alpinists and inveterate trekkers and I introduced them to the Kimberley and to WA generally. They in turn invited me to join them in a transit of the Pyrenées via the Haute route. I've been a passionate devotee ever since and through them made a number of great friendships in France - if you like mountains, it doesn't matter who you are: cabinet minister, labourer – they all sit at the same table and talk mountains.

In WA, my favourite walks are those in the Kimberley wilderness - 3 weeks off-track on the Mitchell Plateau and 2 weeks, unsupported, in the Drysdale NP. These have been grand adventures involving light planes, helicopters and float planes to get in and out (The helicopter pilot, once, was 'Princess Leia' from Murtoa - you didn't know she was a local girl, did you?). Expensive but such a privilege. There are amazing art galleries, accessible only to the adventurous. At 70 I was still able to carry a 20 kg pack, off track, so I am fortunate to remain healthy (well relatively) and fit - gym 3x a week, cycle 2 to 3 x a week and daily work on the house and a walk for an hour in the evening along the banks of the Swan river with my 'ratbag' red cloud kelpie. I blame her for everything that goes wrong, tools that are misplaced ... (but she's deaf ;-)) and, annoyingly, won't even bring me a cup of tea and biscuit. Such an ingrate.

I have three children and six grandchildren. The youngest child is a scientist, now a Future Fellow, the 'middle mouse', my daughter, began as a librarian but is now at management level in information management at Woodside Petroleum, and my elder, once a viticulturist/wine expert, is now a back-office software manager for an outdoor company. He struggles with health issues but is a sole father with two boys - hence the career change. My daughter has two delightful girls, both now at Uni. and my youngest, two boys, one about to start school and the other, kindergarten.

So, my years at Longerenong were formative and I recall you all. My life has been too complex, intense, and remote to maintain links, but I would love to catch up some time. It is quite amazing how our years at Longerenong exerted such a strong and positive influence on our lives. Who would have thought at the time?