

The



Story





# **The Twin Pines Story**

**About the Fell family farm**

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To the memory of Christopher Walter Richmond Fell  
(1889 – 1957)

*Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave*

*With never stone or rail to fence my bed*

*Should the sturdy station children pluck the bush flowers on my  
grave*

*I may chance to hear them romping overhead*

Adam Lindsay Gordon

To the memory of Marjorie Lorna Fell (nee Davies)  
(1907 – 1986)

*Life is mostly froth and bubble*

*Two things stand like stone*

*Kindness in another's trouble*

*Courage in your own*

Adam Lindsay Gordon

**For the descendants of the Twin Pines family**

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# Prologue

## The Memory of Trees and Land

Most trees live longer than we humans do. There is a particular tree with mottled-grey bark and dark-shiny leaves that has broad, low branches that a child can easily climb and then sit, curled up, in the fork where the branches meet. Where it stands used to be our back yard when we were children. Patches of green lichen still adorn its smooth bark and also three elkhorns that we helped our mother fix to the lower branches nearly 70 years ago. The heart and soul of this story is still woven around that tree.

Just down the hill from there a narrow road runs beside a wide river. What used to be our farm gate is marked by two very special trees that are quite distinct amongst the surrounding eucalypts because they are Norfolk Island pines. Here was the entrance to the world we called **Twin Pines**. Those trees (some other old trees, two overgrown dams and tracks in the bush) are all that remains of that world today. Everything else that lived here and everything that happened here has disappeared from view.

Our father led the story of what was achieved here, what was created and nurtured here, but is no longer here to see. He and his wife made a very successful dairy farm where there had been only scrub and bush before and produced and raised a family of three children in the process. Then, when the children had grown up and the man had died, the farm was acquired by a timber company and planted all over with trees. That is why

the sounds, sights and smells of a thriving dairy farm, the blood, sweat and tears and the joy and satisfaction of this way of growing up exist now only in our memories.

Perhaps the trees remember too - and the land. Most people feel a connection with the land where they were born and grew up, especially if they work closely with nature. The experience of living leaves its marks in us in the same way that the earth shows wear and tear and the rings in a tree trunk tell its life story. On **Twin Pines** we all struggled at times and triumphed at others; we laughed and cried, shared ups and downs with farm animals and plants, prayed for rain and then wished it would stop; experiencing life together.

There is hardship and sacrifice - and one awful tragedy - but the story is not bleak because it is mostly about overcoming difficulties to achieve something. The details related here are all true, but they are only a cross-section of everything that happened. We've tried to re-create the kind of life and the kind of world it was - physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. We hope the story makes you feel that you lived with us amongst these trees and on this land.

This story shows that what we do each day is far more important than any monuments we leave behind. Life is always a journey; it never becomes a destination. It's true that communities need to build lasting infrastructure, but individuals live a personal journey - shared with a few others, in particular, with family. Everything that happened at **Twin Pines** was worthwhile because it is contained in our lives and it is part of your inheritance. We came to believe the goal in life is to do your best each day.

Lloyd Fell

Bill Fell

Margaret Fell

2015



Chris



Lorna



Lloyd



Bill



Margaret





# ***Chapter 1***

## **His Calling**

A white-haired man limped steadily along the ridge, stopping now and then to scan the lie of the land, the grass and trees and the tangles of scrub and large, dead stumps that showed where the earliest timber cutters had been. He followed their rough track until he reached the edge of the forest itself. There he turned to look back over an expanse of land that, in his mind, had the potential to become a farm.

There was a small section near a house on the next ridge that had been partly cleared for grazing cattle and some flat, swampy land in the valley with a narrow creek running through it, but most of the land was hilly and covered in scrub. White quartz stones by his feet might have warned of the infertile nature of this soil, but he was not inclined to find fault with what he saw.

This block was for sale and his passion was to 'break in' land that was essentially native bush and turn it into a productive agricultural enterprise, something he had done before in another country, until the events of recent months had turned his world upside down. Perhaps he could start again here, he thought, and make a new life doing what he loved.

To the west the horizon was what Australians call the Great Dividing Range, a hazy-blue line of low mountains with a few round 'peaks' here and there. In the opposite direction he could

not quite see the blue line of the Pacific Ocean that he knew was a few miles away.

It was late afternoon and huge banks of cumulo-nimbus cloud heralded a thunderstorm that is common in these parts, especially in summer. This was winter, but it was quite warm and the unaccustomed humidity made his flannel shirt feel clammy. He noticed that his baggy trousers were now covered with those annoying little black and brown seed heads they call 'farmer's friends.' Many of the weeds and bushes here were unfamiliar to him.

To a non-farmer's eye the diversity of the vegetation might have been attractive. As well as grass tussocks there were bracken ferns and small wattle trees in golden bloom. If you looked closely there were also tiny wildflowers - native violets, forget-me-nots and a dandelion species (unlike the English one). There were larger tree ferns, too, some wild raspberry and blackberry vines and the invasive lantana vine crawling all over other things with its pretty red and yellow flowers, very prickly stems and poisonous leaves. To a farmer these are a real problem because they are hard to eradicate.

The dead stumps were impressive, some 20 feet high and 10 feet around the middle with notches cut in them for the feet of the axemen or the two men with a long saw who would have felled the big tree. Certain trees stood out from the others, particularly two Norfolk Island pines by the road from which he had walked and a mighty bloodwood that was larger and taller than anything else. The pine trees were not the same height - perhaps 130 and 150 feet tall - and were planted side by side to mark the entrance to the block. Most of the trees here were eucalypts with that distinctive smell that is most obvious if you rub the leaves together in your hand. This man had an awareness of trees and their value, but what his mind could see now was a nice sward of green pasture having totally replaced all the rest of this 'mess.'

He paused, took a short, straight pipe from his shirt pocket and lit it with several matches, puffing vigorously as he walked back the same way he had come. His clothes were obviously of good quality though not recent fashion, but it was noticeable that his trousers hung unevenly as he walked because he favoured one hip that was causing him pain.

Suddenly a loud scratching sound followed by the sharp crack of some dead branches stopped him in his tracks. He saw a large lizard, at least five feet long, with a thick body that was blotched with brown and green with black bands on its strong legs. For a moment it reared and took a few steps on its hind legs before dropping and running swiftly away. The bush he was used to in New Zealand had few of the reptiles that lived here so he had never seen a goanna before. As his initial shock subsided he felt a familiar jolt of pain in his right hip. He slapped his thigh with his hand as if to put the pain back in its place. He made no sound and his face showed no obvious reaction. He was definitely not one to let his feelings show even when there was nobody around to notice.

He had read about the more unfriendly creatures in the Australian bush and there was one thought that particularly worried him. It was the possibility of treading on a snake. Snakes were entirely foreign to him, because, except for the war, he had spent all his time in New Zealand where they were virtually unknown. He had the idea that snakes might not deliberately attack you, but supposing you trod on one, accidentally? Were not some Australian snakes the most venomous in the world?

The encounter with the goanna had shaken him a little and his thoughts were a bit scattered as he arrived back at the road where the real estate agent was waiting, patiently, but quite expectantly, in his battered, little car. The agent was a man called Herbie Kirkland whose family has been in real estate in this district now for over 100 years. He was ready to take a bit

of extra trouble because he thought this prospective buyer was quite unusual to say the least. He lived on an ocean-going yacht that he had moored in the Bellinger River at Raleigh near a jetty that was used by small cargo ships on their way upstream to Bellingen in those days. He had sailed up from Sydney, where he had arrived just two months earlier from the Bay of Islands in New Zealand. Apart from that Herbie knew nothing about him except that he had a very cultured, Oxford accent, perhaps suggesting some ready wealth. In this last respect he was mistaken.

The car engine started at the second swing of the starting handle and the affable Mr Kirkland climbed back into his seat and set off for his office in the town of Bellingen, 11 miles away by road. He explained some more about the property, but his passenger said nothing and did not really seem to be listening. He puffed on his pipe with a mixture of contradictory feelings swirling in his mind: the anxious uncertainty of starting again in an entirely new place up against the excitement of his strong conviction that this was what he would have to do.

Fear and anxiety were not emotions that he readily acknowledged. As a schoolboy he had cycled all over the south island of New Zealand and the rush of a steep descent down some long mountain pass was just the kind of thrill he enjoyed. The brakes on the bicycles would burn out so the boys would stop at the top of the hill and tie branches on behind to act as brakes. When the branches had worn bare he never doubted that the headlong rush into the unknown would end safely. While sailing to Australia he had encountered a storm that lasted four days and blew them way of course; in fact much of his life had been spent with boats in every kind of weather so the rigours and dangers of the ocean were simply travelling companions to him. He apparently showed a similar bravado during four years of World War I in the Sinai Desert, which he came through without a major injury. But his hip had been



damaged when an unbroken colt rolled on him as a teenager and the arduous life as a mounted machine gunner during the war and years of heavy farm work since then had aggravated that condition and predisposed to the severe rheumatoid arthritis that now affected his movement.

The events of recent weeks came flooding back and with them the very deep sorrow and pain of having left behind everything he loved and had worked to achieve in New Zealand. When he had sailed into Sydney Harbour having set some sailing records on the way he told newspaper reporters that he planned to cruise the Great Barrier Reef and northern Australia. Then in the first few days after he had moored in Rushcutters Bay he met a Sydney family that was the catalyst for a significant change of plans. They were the Davies who lived in Vacluse. Firstly he heard Lloyd Davies playing the violin at two concerts in the city and, being a violinist himself, he went to the Conservatorium to ask for lessons from him. Secondly he had been invited to their home for dinner and had met Lorna Davies. He smiled inside as he thought of the immediate flame of friendship he and Lorna seemed to have ignited and the happy times they had spent together, both on his yacht and around the city, since that day.

“How much did you say that block was?” he asked the agent who was surprised that one with so implacable an expression was still showing interest. Nevertheless, he was happy to reply. The block was 450 acres of which less than a third had been partly cleared and used for grazing although there was little proper fencing. The owner had been old Moses Lacey, the original selector, who had died a few years before. Bob Barnett who owned the adjoining property on the eastern side leased some of it to run his ‘dry’ (non-lactating) cattle and young heifers. There was a solid house on the land, well-built from red mahogany timber by a Urunga carpenter called Cook.

“Well, it's a deceased estate so there isn't much room to negotiate, but we could probably get it for £2 an acre.” That had been the price listed in the local newspaper. The newcomer had already been warned by some locals that it may be too much for such a doubtful piece of land. The ridges around here had a reputation for their shallow topsoil. Bob Barnett next door had advised against buying it, but it was possible he was protecting his own interests because he paid a very nominal rent to run his cattle there.

What had attracted the newcomer to this locality was its apparent potential. It was undeveloped at present, but with such a high rainfall - 60 inches a year - it surely could be made productive. With superphosphate fertiliser, he thought, lush pastures could be grown here. This is what he had done before in New Zealand. Spreading ‘super’ from a bag, ‘one hand to the right and one to the left’ (as the Bible puts it, though he wasn’t big on the Bible) was something he had learned early in his farming career and he had seen for himself the benefits of this kind of pasture improvement.

It was also the memory of the pain of the last few years in New Zealand that provoked the man to push ahead. He had left behind a beautiful farm that was the product of 20 years labour and a family he believed he loved, but with whom he could no longer live. His wife of 16 years, whom he married immediately after returning from the war, was now with another man and living with their only son, Walter, aged 10, on another farm. Leaving virtually everything to them he had sailed to Australia in his yacht with only the vaguest of plans - just wanting to be somewhere else.

Sydney Harbour did not feel like his ultimate destination when he first arrived. His only real possession was a sleek 36-foot yacht he had refitted and fine-tuned in the beautiful Bay of Islands, which is a sailor’s paradise. His great love of sailing was really his principal motivating force as he desperately tried to

escape from what seemed to be an intolerable situation to him at that time. But in Sydney other home comforts began to seep back into his thinking, sparked in an unlikely way by his keen interest in music - and particularly the violin - that had brought him into contact with the Davies family. His friendship with Lorna was undoubtedly a factor in turning his thoughts back towards a life on the land again.

He realised that deep down he had always been a farmer - that was his calling. His father was a prominent surgeon and physician, his mother was the daughter of a very senior judge and his aunts and uncles had mostly chosen the law or teaching for their professions, but he had gone from school to an agricultural college and, apart from the war, had been farming ever since. So he began to enquire about farming land that was relatively undeveloped on the north coast of New South Wales where he thought conditions might be similar to northern New Zealand. This was not actually the case, but it was sufficient reason for him to sail up the coast to Urunga and arrange this visit to a place on the Kalang River about seven miles by road from the town. The river was then called the South Arm (of the Bellinger) and the road was known in those days as the South Arm Road.

Urunga is a seaside town with a population of about 3000 today - probably less than a thousand at this time - and Bellingen is 10 miles inland from the coast with about the same population, though it was then much more of a business centre than Urunga.

This was July, 1936. He was Christopher Walter Richmond Fell, owner-to-be of a fairly rough block out there on the South Arm. He was 46 years of age, but about to start again, to build another farm. On the yacht he had carried a book with him called *The Story of an African Farm* by Olive Shriener that described exactly the kind of work he himself most wanted to be doing.

The original pioneers had come to this district nearly a hundred years earlier, firstly in search of the valuable red cedar timber, then to farm the fertile land on the river flats. The poorer land on the hills had been mostly left untouched except by timber getters and their bullock teams. Now there was another wave of pioneers to break in more land for dairy farming and Chris Fell was amongst them.

The Aboriginal people who had lived here for thousands of years before the white man came had gradually succumbed to the cultural transformation that occurred all over coastal Australia. The love and respect they had for the land was not dead, however. Chris Fell also loved this piece of land, albeit in a different kind of way. His resolve was to work with it, not against it, to build a white man's kind of farm that is also a partnership with the spirit of the land. His need was to tame it from its wild state into a productive meld of soil, pasture, animals and humans that would become his way of life. And then to nurture and preserve it because we are all, in one way or another, custodians of the land.

## ***Chapter 2***

### **Two Different Worlds**

Lloyd Davies was chatting with his sister in the kitchen of their parent's Vacluse home as he prepared a rather spicy and exotic dish for the family Sunday dinner. He bubbled with enthusiasm in everything he did, including cooking, which was also an excuse for trying out quite a lot of the wine he had selected for the occasion. His achievements as a musician and teacher of music had earned him the tag 'brilliant' at a young age and much later in his illustrious career he was to be awarded the OBE for services to music in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

"You know that sailor chap from New Zealand who is coming to me for violin lessons? He turned up again at the concert at David Jones." At a lunchtime recital Lloyd had played the Elgar violin concerto (with harp accompaniment instead of orchestra), the slow movement of which was one of Chris's great favourites. The first concert where Chris heard Lloyd Davies play was advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald to include Alfred Hill's 'Maori' concerto, which would have been an attraction for the New Zealander.

"I think he's rather lonely. What about having him here for dinner next weekend?"

"That's fine with me," his sister Lorna replied, without interrupting the rapid mental unravelling of a cryptic crossword with which she was engaged. She shared her brother's lively intelligence and also enjoyed social arrangements of all kinds.

She was a tall, dark-haired, very handsome, young woman and was then, one might say, in the bloom of a busy and exciting social career in the city she could call her own. During the day, she was the boss's secretary and staff supervisor at Dickson Primer, a prosperous importing firm, and in the evenings and at weekends there were often concerts, dinners or a tennis party.

Their mother, a tall, rather forbidding figure with a stern expression who kept a watchful eye on most things, spoke from the next room. "What's he like, this man you're proposing to invite here?"

"I would describe him, Mother, as one of Nature's gentlemen," said Lloyd with a flourish. His sister smiled over her newspaper during the silence that followed. Being, like her brother, a person of vitality and varied interests, she sometimes found that her friends or activities met with mild disapproval from her rather straight-laced mother. In fact she didn't stray very far from what was considered appropriate behaviour in these circles.

On the weekend when Chris arrived for dinner, however, she was caught unawares in a pair of old trousers, on her knees, scrubbing the kitchen floor. Though temporarily furious with her brother for bringing a male visitor up from her rear unexpectedly, she soon recovered to offer Chris a warm welcome and return his friendly smile. She would not have known it at the time, but showing him her practical, hard-working nature was the best possible way to impress him. The fact is she was enthralled by his charming manner and interesting stories from that very first meeting and he was similarly smitten by her. Together with Lloyd and his girlfriend they made a happy foursome at other social functions on several of the weekends that followed this auspicious evening in early June in 1936.

She was Marjorie Lorna Davies, known as Lorna, 29 years old and now, quite suddenly and totally unexpectedly, in love. Her mother had been Florence Marjorie Kennedy of a pioneering Sydney family and her father was Evan Henry Davies, known as Harry, somewhat bibulous, extremely musical and a senior official in Customs House at Circular Quay. He was in demand as an organist and pianist and his ability to play long classical pieces from memory stayed with him into his very old age.

Their home at 10 Russell Street was quite spacious on a corner block, but modest by Vacluse standards and is almost in Watson's Bay, which was where she and her father caught the ferry to Circular Quay for work every weekday. Fortunately they had both delayed their journeys home on the fateful afternoon in 1927 when their ferry, *Greycliffe*, was cut in two by the Union Steamship liner, *Tabiti*, with the loss of 40 lives and many injuries amongst the regular eastern suburbs commuters.

Lorna and her friends watched the Sydney Harbour Bridge taking shape for years from the deck of their ferry, betting with one another about whether the two arches that were built from either end would eventually meet up exactly enough in the middle. The opening of the bridge in 1932 was definitely on Lorna's social calendar as you might expect. Her name appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald social pages on a few occasions and she was a member of the Rose Bay Red Cross Younger Set that organised fund-raising card parties and concerts. At her work she was secretary to the boss and 'head girl' supervising a staff of 10 in a very busy office where international 'cables' came and went with great regularity.

Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were very popular in those days and Lorna could often be heard singing the well-known arias with great gusto. Her education might have been different because she won a scholarship to attend Sydney University, but had to leave before completing the first year due to her 'domestic circumstances,' the letter said, which meant helping

her mother at home at a time when her health was not good. The family also lived at Eastwood for a time and later at Wentworth Falls in the Blue Mountains, apparently partly due to some side-effects of Harry's predilection for alcohol.

Chris Fell had arrived in Sydney on the 19th of May, 1936, without a definite plan to stay there, but the hospitality of the Davies family had altered his outlook. To meet up so soon with a woman whose smile lit a spark within him was so totally unforeseen that it unnerved him somewhat. Lorna always said that she fell for him completely from the very beginning, which was not at all what she expected either. She had no shortage of casual boyfriends and escorts and had reached the age of 29 without seriously considering being married to any of them. Chris was different, of course - more worldly and considerably older. His hair was already white and he was more than 17 years her senior.

His reserved manner and cultured voice that created a little distance between him and many Australians that he met, particularly in the bush, attracted her greatly and she felt comfortable with him amongst her own friends. Neither was overawed by the other. They fitted together easily as they enjoyed occasional outings such as the thrill of sailing on his yacht on Sydney Harbour which, like the Bay of Islands, is one of the great sheltered waterways of the world.

When Chris was denied membership of the Royal Sydney Yacht Club for some reason he had his own pennant made with the letters MOBYC to signify My Own Bloody Yacht Club. Chris accompanied Lloyd Davies to the Savage Club and gave a talk on sailing across the Tasman, making it sound like a Sunday picnic. It was his way to make light of difficulties in front of others. Of the things they did together, Chris loved the music most. Concerts, recitals and semi-private, chamber music evenings were more available to him now than ever



before and few opportunities were missed in those winter months of 1936.

But there was another side to Chris, of course, that Lorna was certainly aware of, but didn't particularly want to dwell upon in her mind. He had spoken about the dairy farm he left behind in New Zealand and she knew he had sailed up to Urunga to look at land there. On returning he said little about it, but when she hadn't seen him for a week or so she received a letter written from the Federal Hotel in Bellingen.

*"Dear Lorna, I came up on the train to have another look at that block of land and am staying in Bellingen for a few days to find out more about the area."* She could read between the lines that Chris was very interested in a future life as a farmer there. In fact he even mentioned in the letter something that had been on her mind and which they had discussed very briefly once before.

*"If you feel, for any reason, that you don't really want to continue with our relationship I guess I will have to be man enough to accept that."* A surge of feelings and thoughts flooded her mind as she read. They seemed to say: "No! I don't want anything to come between us," but there were many dark clouds of doubt - or at least uncertainty - as well.

It now seemed likely to Chris that his purchase of the land would go through as soon as he had the money for a deposit so he paid a visit to the two men who were living in the house that was the only building on the block. They were the William's boys, Bert and Dommie, the younger members of a slightly notorious local family of bushmen, timber workers and hard drinkers. They owned the rights to the saleable timber in the forest at the back of the block so living there made it easier for them to be out all day with axes and saws in company with the local bullock teams whose power was needed to snig the logs off the steep hillsides onto the tracks where they could be loaded onto a 'timber jinker' or log truck.

“How are yer goin’ mate?” was the Williams’ kind of greeting, but they didn’t have much else to say to strangers. They did talk when you got to know them, though, in speech that was slow and punctuated by long pauses. After observing Chris for a while and listening to his story, Bert volunteered to introduce his brother and himself. “I’m the only bloody worker around here,” he said with characteristic modesty. “Yer know, this Dommie ‘ere, is so fat ‘e can’t lift ‘is arms above ‘is ‘ead in case ‘e has a ‘eart attack.” Dommie wore a perpetual grin and Chris couldn’t tell whether they were serious or not. “Fair dinkum. The Doc told him, if ‘e did, that’s what would ‘appen.” Chris looked at Dommie who was every bit of twenty stone. He didn’t show the slightest desire to lift his arms above his head in any case.

But they were hard workers and one of their associates, Viv Young, who had actually leased this block himself for a time before deciding it was too tough, was kept busy with his old log truck carting the different kinds of gum trees off to the sawmill. The most prized were the tallowwood, which made lovely sawn timber for floorboards and the red and white mahogany, used for many building purposes including the weatherboard walls of so many houses at that time. There were grey or spotted gums and blackbutts from the higher slopes and, from the gullies, flooded gums that were mostly smaller trees used for making fruit cases. Ironbarks were the best hardwoods used for poles and girders; also for railway sleepers which were generally cut to shape with a broad axe in the bush.

Blackbutts are silver at the top with a dark-coloured, fine-stranded bark nearer the ground. Tallowwood bark is much softer and paler on a tall, smooth trunk. Ironbark trees have tough, twisted strands of bark, steely-grey to almost black, on a very straight trunk. Turpentine, with distinctive smelling leaves, are not as good for sawn timber, but with their thick, fibrous bark left in place they make durable piers for wharves.

All of these trees grew on the side of steep hills, which added to the danger and difficulty of getting them out. Without well-trained bullock teams it couldn't have been done. A bullock driver is a special kind of character, famous even in this company for his vocabulary of swear words. A legend in this district for his way with a bullock team was a man called Put Bennett; later on Bill Hodgson took his place. Teety Tyson who owned the nearby sawmill at Raleigh also had a log truck there at that time.

Chris had discovered that, as it was a deceased estate, he could not take possession of the land without some delay. And Bob Barnett's lease on the grazing part did not expire for another 15 months. Bob was dairying on the flat land that adjoined this block, but liked to have some higher ground as well to run his dry stock and heifers. Sometimes they got lost in the bush, but at least they were out of the flood which came up very quickly on this short, wide, coastal river. Bob soon took a real liking to the stranger with the 'posh' accent and was keen to relate to him stories of the local history. These were often embellished by the enthusiastic comments of his son, Jimmy.

When Moses Lacey, the original selector, had been there he ran a little store by the river bank. There was no road then, everything moved by boat, and there were small jetties all along the river. Some of them became little specks of civilisation invading this untamed coastal bush. There might have been even fewer pioneers travelling this river had it not been for the discovery of good building stone in the side of a ridge close to the river. This quarry became a major local industry, the stone being required for building a breakwater at the mouth of the river at Urunga. Eventually, the road was built to get more of the stone out to the sea. Moses Lacey died and his store was pulled down.

"Biggest mozzies in Australia in that old quarry, I can tell yer!" Bob Barnett's son had apparently been trying to get up to

something with his girlfriend (“one of the local sheilas”) in the seclusion of the now-disused quarry, but when he pulled his trousers down the mosquitoes arrived in droves and eventually the entire mission had to be abandoned. This episode was the latest district joke and young Jimmy Barnett gloried in the temporary fame.

Chris went for a walk around the small area of land that was already cleared near the house. The low ridge on which the house was built ran away to the west to meet the road at what was called the ‘little hill’ and then join with the river just beyond that. It was this section that had been felled and partly cleared, but most of the tree stumps remained, some of them very large. It was a very wet year in 1936 and the native *paspalum* grass grew tall and rank, but without the introduced legume species and artificial fertiliser, it was very straggly compared to the pasture on a more established farm. Looking across towards the high ridge where he had been on his first visit Chris noticed the thick rushes and reeds that covered the swampy low-lying ground in between. Few trees grew in this part. That will certainly need to be drained, he thought.

But trees were still the dominant feature of the landscape here. Apart from the more valuable timber growing in the forest part there were quite large trees dotted across the rest of the land. These would probably be left standing when a new paddock was being developed as they provided some shade for livestock. In between there were thickets of smaller scrub including many sally wattles and black wattles and other smaller trees that would need to be cleared away. Looking down towards the river from the front of the house Chris revisited the pair of distinctive Norfolk Island pines he had noticed on his first visit and also the magnificent bloodwood which was surely 200 feet tall. Its main fork was so high above the other trees that it caught your eye as a place for a giant treehouse in some other fantasy world.

Down to the left as you looked out from the house there was an especially thick, almost impenetrable, circle of bush surrounding a large lagoon. This was a haven for all kinds of wildlife such as foxes, bandicoots, native possums, hares, snakes, frogs and a great assortment of birds: parrots, kingfishers, kookaburras, currawongs, black ducks, bower birds, honey eaters and, by the water itself, the beautiful egrets, ibis and spoonbills. If you peeped into the lagoon from the road its great white paperbark trees, knee deep in thick green water, gave it an air of mystery and magic. As Chris stood there, three black cockatoos, presaging rain for three days according to the locals, flew towards the lagoon, leaving their harsh screeching cry hanging in the humid afternoon air.

He became aware again of the all-too-familiar pain in his hip, which he felt had been getting steadily worse with the continual wet weather and high humidity and a lot of physical activity. It was a worry he often tried to put out of his mind. Unfortunately there seemed to be no effective medical treatment for it and it was now showing up in his other hip as well.

He was not a particularly tall man, well under six feet, and his gait had never been long-striding, but now it had become more of a shuffle. His upper body, honed partly by years of sailing, was very strong. He had quite heavy shoulders, powerful arms and a very prominent rib cage that made his chest stick out in relation to his tummy. This gave him a stance that some locals thought was a bit aristocratic, even in dirty grey flannels, but he was actually not the slightest bit 'stuck up' in his attitude towards people. He had seen too much of man's inhumanity to man in the war, where he lost all his best friends, to be too judgmental, which was probably why people seemed to warm to him quite quickly when they met him.

Still, he wondered how much he would have in common with the local people. He had met one chap, Dave Gossip, whose company he thought he would enjoy. A newcomer to the

district whose farm was just across the river from here, Dave certainly had experience of the world outside Urunga. He and his wife, Marge, had moved from Stroud, a bush town further south, and she had worked as a bookkeeper before they became dairy farmers.

The North Coast Mail, which ran three nights a week between Grafton and Sydney, was certainly not a fast train; it was a crowded, cosy train, aboard which people talked the night away or tried to sleep, crammed into the corner of a seat. The carriages were not the kind with corridors; they were 'dog boxes' with just two long seats facing each other and a separate door to the outside for each one. Every few hours the train would stop for half an hour for the passengers to get refreshments at one of the bigger stations along the way. This was a winter's night so heavy metal foot warmers were slid into each compartment at these longer stops.

Chris slept fitfully all the way back to Sydney. He dreamed, firstly, of his farm back in New Zealand, walking with his young son amongst his well-fed cows, their coats steaming in the early morning mist. Then the cows turned into giant waves beating against his yacht and he was struggling to keep the boy with him from being washed overboard. The boy became Bob Barnett's son, Jimmy. Finally, he reeled away from the vision of a twenty-stone Dommie Williams having a heart attack with both arms above his head and about to crash down on top of him.

## ***Chapter 3***

### **From the Harbour to the Scrub**

The morning sun sparkling on the blue water of Sydney Harbour was a delight to Chris's eyes as he came down the hill in the tram from Central railway station to Rushcutters Bay. The sight and the smell of salt water was an irresistible lure to him at any time, but now he was eager to see his precious yacht again and check that she had come to no harm in his absence. She had become his closest companion in recent years. Together they had been through a lot.

Her name was *Ariel*. She was a 34-foot cutter with a 9-foot beam and Chris had her lengthened to 36 feet and converted to a yawl rig with a mizzen mast as well as the main mast to make her a genuine 'blue water' racing yacht as well as his home away from home. She and Chris were members of the Royal Auckland Yacht Club, but her sailing waters were around the Bay of Islands further north. Mostly she was moored in the sheltered waters of Matakau Bay just around the point from the township of Russell.

His farm was on the other side of the bay and for some years they had a two-bedroom cottage at Hobson's Cove near Paihia, which is where the Governor had landed to sign the Treaty of Waitangi in 1906. Chris's small area of land there was resumed later by the government for extensions to the historic site, in particular for housing the Maori war canoes near the beach. After working on the yacht at night Chris was in the habit of rowing himself back to Hobson's Cove - a distance of several

miles across water that was often very choppy - and to guide him into the small beach his wife would put a lantern in the window of their little house.

They should have been happy times with a young son, Walter, starting school in Paihia, but it seems the seeds of discontent in their marriage had already germinated and started to grow. Chris had returned to New Zealand soil after more than four years in the Sinai Desert fighting in World War I, had been discharged on the 17th of September, 1919, and had married his long-time girlfriend, Joyce Raikes, at the local church at Pakaraka just a few months later on the 11th of February. Walter was born five years later. Such a huge re-adjustment in a short space of time must surely have been difficult for both Chris and Joyce.

Chris's way of dealing with it was to make up for lost time with his farming by working very long hours. Before the war he had been managing the farm owned by his father's Tikiponga Pastoral Company, but afterwards he took over part of this land on Hupara Road to develop his own dairy farm into a large and profitable enterprise that is still remembered with respect by locals who've lived there ever since. The love of boats and sailing from his childhood in Wellington provided his other main interest and took up the time he wasn't on the farm. His first yacht in those waters was a 14-footer called *Mahina* (after his father's well-known Wellington racing yacht) and Walter remembers that they always finished last in races on the Bay. After he had purchased and fine-tuned the *Ariel* they generally finished first.

Chris did not come from a farming family. His father, Walter, was a rather high-society doctor in Wellington who was New Zealand-born, but had been educated at Rugby school and at Oxford in England. His mother, formerly Margaret Richmond, was the daughter of the most senior judge in Wellington, whose



family name was notable in New Zealand colonial history. Their stories are told in another book called *The Luck of the Fells*.

When Chris was born on the 30th of November, 1889, his two older sisters were already family stalwarts (for one thing as the crew of *Mahina*, Walter's very successful racing yacht), but he was the first son, which carried an extra weight of family responsibility in those times. At school at Wellington College he may not have quite lived up to the family expectations though he did practice the violin after school most days.

Forsaking the family traditions of medicine and law he then went to an agricultural college at Lincoln, near Christchurch. He was the 'rake' (now known as hooker) in the College Rugby Fifteen and was noted for physical courage and for his literary and musical interests. On leaving school, five friends presented him with a copy of the *Poetical Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson* signed 'to Doc' - his nickname on account of the rhyme about a 'Dr Fell' at Oxford. He worked on other properties and when his mother urged his father to buy farming land up north near the Bay of Islands his farm management career became established in his early twenties.

He was 46 when he sailed into Sydney Harbour. The arrival of the *Ariel* was noted in the Sydney Morning Herald of the 21st of May, 1936, and there was a picture of him in The Land newspaper of the 29th of May where he was described as a New Zealand dairy farmer. The story was about his trans-Tasman crossing: sailing a total of 1800 nautical miles at an average speed of just over six knots; taking 18 days actual sailing time (not including an enforced stoppage at Norfolk and Lord Howe islands) compared to 20 days for the winner of the 1932 trans-Tasman Yacht Race. They actually brought the mail from Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands to Sydney faster than it had ever been brought before. The regular steamer that visited there every six weeks normally took three and a half days to reach Sydney, but Chris and his young companion aboard *Ariel*

with a stiff nor-easterly behind them sailed the 436 miles in two days and 22 hours, travelling 170 miles in one day.

They had not intended to visit Norfolk Island at all, but had been blown a long way north by gale-force winds shortly after rounding the northern tip of New Zealand. Chris had taken with him a 16-year-old lad from Auckland, Dick Wellington, who had quite a bit of sailing experience for his age. The trip turned out to be rather more exciting than either of them had imagined. Four days of their voyage were spent 'hove-to' in a storm unable to hoist sails and get back on course. Radio contact was almost impossible most of the time and then became out of the question after the radio was accidentally dropped over the side at Norfolk Island. From there they got to Lord Howe Island where it took 10 days to effect repairs to the yacht.



*Ariel at Lord Howe Island*

They had left New Zealand on the 15th of April at a time when the lush autumn pasture that resulted from the regular rainfall in the 'land of the long white cloud' was providing the nourishment his dairy cows needed towards the end of their

lactation period. The winter was the quietest period on the farm before calving commenced in the spring, after which the milk production rose to a peak early in the summer. His herd, though it was unusually large with 200 cows to be milked each day, held the record for individual butterfat production in the district.

Now, as he climbed back on board the yacht that was his temporary home in Sydney, he reflected that he had no cows, no horses, pigs or dogs, no farm yet and little to show for either his own hard work or his birth into a family that was quite well off. Anchored here amongst the richer people of Sydney in the eastern suburbs he felt quite at home, but lacking most of the trappings of the wealthy, he had just his own quiet self-assurance strengthened by his love of literature and music.

He checked around the yacht to make sure his most valued possessions were still safely hidden. His violin case was rather battered, but he was thankful to have bought the violin with him because that had led to his meeting with Lloyd and Lorna Davies. He made a cup of tea and set to work on various small repairs to the cabin and the sails. A new wireless receiver he had bought in Sydney broadcast the sweet strains of a piano sonata that he recognised as Beethoven. That evening he ate dinner at a restaurant in Double Bay before strolling back to his bunk. He was looking forward to seeing Lloyd again in a few days and before going to bed he took out the faithful old violin and practised some of the exercises he had been given. Lights twinkled in the water at Rushcutters Bay and the strains of string music floated on the soft night breeze.

On the 18th of July, 1936 - barely two months after Chris had arrived in Sydney - it was reported in New Zealand newspapers that the *Ariel* was 'hailed up at Capell's yard in Rushcutters Bay' to be prepared for sale because 'Mr Fell had bought a farm outside Sydney.' What a wrench this must have been. He

needed the money, of course, but he also knew that the farm meant the end of his sailing life, probably for ever.

He was in two minds about talking with Lorna when he first arrived back in Sydney. Part of him was dying to see her, but another part was worried that she would very likely end their relationship once it was certain he was going ahead with the purchase of the land. Since they had first met she was the one who did most of the talking. Her conversation was often excited and she wasn't afraid to reveal personal details about her life and her family. Chris was much more reserved, by his nature as well as his circumstances, and sometimes she had to accept that he was not ready to talk about some subjects such as his war experiences and more recent family life. He did show Lorna several pictures of his son, Walter, up until his 10th birthday, which was in late December, 1935.

Only with his older sister, Margaret, back in Wellington did Chris share any of his real feelings about what he had left behind. He said in a letter: *"Dear Margar, I am entirely at a loss at present to know what I can do for Walter, or Hoppy, as his Mother calls him. She has always been his confidante, she and Mrs R. . . We don't ever write and, to all intents and purposes, I just don't belong at all. This is so appalling and month succeeds month and I still cannot see what I can do."*

Chris and Lorna had a weekend together at Terrigal, a beach town north of Sydney, where they got to know quite a lot more about one another, while at the same time avoiding serious planning about the future. Lorna knew well that Chris tended to make light of any difficulties and she suspected that his arthritic hip was actually far worse than he admitted, even to himself. She liked to hear his enthusiasm about starting a new farm, but she also wondered if he was glossing over the difficulties involved. She had a keen business sense as part of her nature and she guessed that his expectation of getting at least £500 for his yacht was probably unrealistic.

Chris's hopes for the farm were based on his experience in New Zealand. He thought that the high annual rainfall on the northern coast of New South Wales would be some sort of guarantee against drought, but it is not. He had no idea how different it was here from his native country where the rainfall is so regular and the cooler climate and good soil produce the lush pastures on which the dairy cattle thrive. Still, his optimism would probably have been no less even if he had known these things beforehand.

“You must come up with me some time and see for yourself. It needs a lot of work, but I think the potential is there. I’ll need some good horses. The house is not too bad. It’s out of town, of course, no electricity or things, but . . .” He laughed out loud. “I love it already and I’ve only been there twice.”

Lorna had visited a rural property two or three times in her life. It was a sheep station in the north-west of the state owned by the Fripp family whose daughter, Em (later Em Pilditch) was Lorna’s lifelong and very dear friend. This was a time when Australia ‘rode on the sheep’s back’ because wool was the major export and some sheep farmers were amongst the wealthiest people in the country. The property near Collarenebri was called ‘Beethoven’ and Lorna remembered dressing by candlelight for the formal dance or ‘ball’ that was an important country event during the winter months. There were also weekend tennis parties and polo matches. The graziers of the western slopes and plains tended not to have a very high opinion of the ‘cow cockies’ on the coastal fringe who were not as well off and whose farms were generally smaller.

The social hierarchy of the farming community was of no interest to Chris, nor would he have ever felt inferior to any other farmer who worked hard like himself. He understood his craft, he believed in himself and he knew he had the grit and determination to make his mission succeed.

After a series of frustrating difficulties his beloved yacht was sold for just £300. He was deeply disappointed with the price, but his determination was not weakened in the least. He was all ready to head north again to carry on with his plans when another mishap marred his departure. A suitcase with his only decent evening clothes in it and the large box containing his wireless were stolen at Central railway station. I shall miss the wireless, he thought.

Lorna came to see him off on the train. "I'm planning to move in with the Williams boys so I can get a bit done while the deal is going through." Lorna tried to imagine exactly what this would be like. She knew nothing of timber cutters or lonely farmhouses or good horses or land that had potential.

"You must come up and have a look at it, one day."

"I will," she called back. "I will."

## ***Chapter 4***

### **Uncertain Times**

As soon as the agreement to purchase the land was complete except for the granting of probate on the deceased estate Chris wanted to get something started. He moved into the house with Bert and Dommie Williams and quickly set about learning the ways of the locals. Until the end of Bob Barnett's lease, which was still more than a year away, Chris was only permitted to run a few heifers near the house. Some of these could become part of his dairy herd in a year or so, but others he sold for £7 a head because he needed other sources of income in the meantime.

The Williams boys were sceptical at first, but they were also helpful. "Have yer ever worked timber before?" Bert asked.

"I've cleared land, but not serious logging. And the trees here are different kinds. I'd have a lot to learn," Chris replied.

One of the things the locals admired about Chris was his willingness to learn. The other thing that surprised them was his bravado and the way he threw himself into his work. He seemed to have little fear of danger, perhaps partly through naiveté, but largely because he had faced many threatening situations before in his life and he was not the kind of man to flinch easily. At first he was paid by Dommie Williams for the work he did with them. In this kind of employment there was no such thing as insurance if you were injured; it would have been far too expensive anyway, because felling trees and

snigging them out with wire ropes attached to a bullock team on steep hillsides is extremely dangerous work.

After a while, in partnership with Teety Tyson the sawmill owner, Chris managed to acquire an almost new Reo log truck. They pushed down the side of the ridges to where there was still good timber to get out and, by the way he adapted to his new situation, Chris began to establish himself among the local bushmen.

His limp worried them at first, but they soon found that Chris's legs and stance were very strong when he stood still and he was remarkably agile over short distances and around machinery just as he had been on board his yacht. As an axeman he was not far behind them either. He also had good judgment of space and distance. He could put the truck in exactly the right spot, design and build the rough loading ramp and call the winching and rolling of the logs as accurately as anyone else. Heavy trunks of mahogany and tallowwood would teeter on his ramp and crash precisely into place on the Reo. He took big loads, sometimes foolhardy ones. His knowledge of knots and skill with ropes, including splicing them for joining, was unprecedented amongst the locals. It became well known that he had been a sailor and it soon became accepted that Chris Fell was something of a 'skipper' as well; it came naturally to him to lead and call the shots where that would be advantageous.

Some years later a man called Pat Hennessy who had helped Chris in the Reo for a while joined the long list of timber truck drivers who were 'killed in action.' The wheels of his overloaded truck dropped through the rotten boards of a little wooden bridge on a back road. His cab stopped dead, but the logs behind him did not, so he was crushed.

All the longer hauling of logs was done by the bullock teams. Chris was mainly occupied snigging logs with the winch on his



truck and with loading and carrying. The very wet weather at that time hampered his progress and it seemed he was bogged nearly as often as he was moving.

When the first of many floods that Chris was to experience on this river occurred during the summer he got a chance to demonstrate his boating skills. He and Ned Barnett, Jimmy's brother, managed to navigate the flooded river in Ned's little rowboat to rescue a man who was in trouble on the other side. They entered the river way upstream near the quarry to allow for the swiftly flowing current and managed to dodge the logs and driftwood that came sailing by.

Flooding was very common on these coastal rivers, but the biggest floods in living memory were to occur later in 1950 and 1955. In Bellingen the cemetery was across the river from the town and there was a time when they had great difficulty getting old Mr McFadyen's coffin across the river. It was too heavy for their small boat in this current so eventually they tied a rope to each end and floated him across.

Although Chris did not show much fear he did actually feel very insecure at times from a financial point of view. He had borrowed £150 for the Reo and was worried about meeting the repayments. Many nights he sat on the verandah of the house puffing at his pipe in silence. To the other men Chris remained somewhat aloof. He never talked about his past life and, separated now by several hundred miles from the bright lights of city functions, he saw little need for social graces or the elegant manners for which he had been known in Sydney.

From time to time the locals did get a good laugh out of Chris. On one occasion, working on his own, he came across a huge mottled snake of a type he hadn't seen before. A few hours later, having killed the snake and left it in the sun, he met up with the others and called out: "Come and have a look at this. I think it's a boa constrictor." There being no such snake in

Australia they were intrigued, but by now it had swollen to twice its normal size and did rather resemble its South American relative.

“My oath, it could be a boa constrictor too,” said Dommie Williams. With his grin it was hard to tell if he was teasing you or not. It was some time before they explained to Chris that it was a harmless python or carpet snake that should not be killed. The tale went around about the new bushman and his boa constrictor.

This was not a time for rapid communications or frequent travel for the average person and it was to be more than 12 months before Chris and Lorna saw each other again. During 1937 Chris was able to get the dairy enterprise started. He became totally absorbed in this work, but in the evenings he sat smoking his pipe and thinking of her and of the outside world and from time to time he penned his thoughts in quite long letters.

In February, 1938, he wrote to his sister, Margaret, about his feeling of isolation, his recurrent bouts of depression and how much he missed New Zealand, but also about his progress and his hopes for the future.

*“Dearest Margar, I cannot go to bed without telling you how happy your letter made me, so that I just want to do better so frightfully much . . . the whole place is so untidy that even I am ashamed of it, but there seems no time, there is so much to do . . . I don't know whether I told you, but when that £60 arrived from Wellington, I immediately bought a radio battery set for £26. This has been an extraordinary joy to me. Amidst a multitude of meaningless noise, there sometimes comes a perfect jewel of music that I enjoy.”*

*“I have not seen Lorna Davies for a year, but have succeeded in getting her to come up for her annual holiday . . . in March or April, we don't know yet, and she will stay at a neighbour's just across the river.”*

*"Lorna eats very fast and is quick like most Sydney business people seem to be, is thirty and tall and splendid to look at . . . but I'm afraid I find her mother very difficult and we fight to such an extent and Lorna quarrels with her mother and then feels ashamed - she is very fond of her, but quite unable to refrain from fighting back. The father is quite different - very easy to get on with and pleasant and charming in many ways. Quite untrusted by his wife and daughter, but I think with far more merit than they often credit him. Lloyd, the brother, is very capable at everything he takes on and a very useful person - besides his music, which is only a very brilliant small part of him."*

*"I don't know in the least if Lorna will think the life up here on this farm worthwhile when she has a closer look at it - she has a hard enough job - heading a staff of ten - but gets a very good wage and has had a £50 bonus at the end of each year for the last two years . . . Where she is going to stay, Mrs Gossip was ledger keeping before she married and had only a business and town training yet she seems to be happy with two small children and a very good husband, though they are hard up. Life on a dairy farm is pretty deadly for the woman if you are struggling all the time with no money for anything, but if you get past this and have some comforts as well in the home then it's grand . . . Anyway, it's a year or more before I can be free to marry, so nothing can be in the least definite at this stage."*

Margaret, known by all as Margar, was just 15 months older than Chris and she had always been his most trusted confidante. He wrote to her again with more information: *"The land is an old selection of 450 acres . . . with very little of it fit for dairying . . . and 250 acres of bush. Have been working this timber out as you know and paying off this blessed timber truck which will take a year yet - that is the only real setback. The farm will come out alright, but the truck has been a big mistake which is a handicap."*

*"The house is quite a good cottage of five small but high rooms and two open fireplaces and no furniture. We cook entirely on a primus except in winter and you would have a fit if you saw my room littered with dirty clothes beyond description . . . I am building up a dairy herd alright and I should be on a sufficiently big scale to be moderately well off eventually."*

*At present it is very primitive indeed, milking 24 cows, by hand of course, with a boy - a local lad - quite a good worker, but very slow. Still, he puts up with my growling and bad temper and we are quite happy together."*

Chris also wrote to Lorna and told her of his progress with the timber. She and her brother had moved into a flat at Point Piper and she still enjoyed a busy social life, but she was more than pleased to hear from Chris. At first, she was rather reticent about accepting his invitation to come up to visit. The conditions sounded quite difficult and the night trip on the train was a bit worrying.

In fact it turned out even worse than she expected. When she arrived at the tiny railway siding at Urunga in the morning light her two suitcases had been stolen and she had only the clothes she was wearing and a carry bag with a few bits and pieces. Someone had hopped off at another station with her bags while she was dozing.

Chris met her in the Reo (that 'huge, dirty truck' as she described it) and it was with some trepidation that she clambered up into the cab, which was dented by logs, and rattled off along the road into the scrub. She had never seen a snake or even a cow close up before and Chris was not really one to be very considerate of her qualms.

Nevertheless, she was pleased to stay with Dave Gossip and his wife on a dairy farm across the river and her natural enthusiasm for life was very little daunted by the strangeness of the situations in which she found herself. Lorna learned from Dave Gossip some other things about Chris.

"I like Chris. He's an interesting bloke," Dave told her over breakfast one day. This was the main meal of the day, eaten in a leisurely fashion after the morning milking was finished. "He actually has a reputation round here for doing a few hair-raising things. The way he drives that truck in the bush, for example. I haven't seen him myself, but I've heard about it." Dave was a

very good-natured man and both he and his wife, Marge, enjoyed having someone from the city to talk to, reminding her, particularly, of things that she missed here on the farm.

“Do you know, some mornings Chris goes down and swims across the river and back again. He seems to like the water and he’s quite a good swimmer. It must be the best part of 60 yards each way and there’s always a current flowing, but it isn’t that so much. Everyone here is dead scared of sharks as we’re only a few miles from the mouth and this is still sea water here, very salty.” Dave Gossip frowned, characteristic anxiety reflected in his handsome, but sharply-lined face. His farm was not doing too well and he was quite worried about that.

Lorna enjoyed the company of Dave Gossip and his wife, but she spent as much of her time with Chris as she possibly could. The more she saw of him the more enigmatic he seemed and the more curious she was to know him better. She went into the bush with him, walked around looking at cattle with him, rode in the truck with him on some very steep and rough roads and all the while he talked about the timber and the cattle and the land. Then, at other times, he was completely silent; she could not draw out his thoughts and she felt rather shut out from whatever was closest to his heart. She still knew very little about his most personal feelings or the family he had left behind in New Zealand.

She did know, however, that he intended to get a divorce and that, in New Zealand law, this required a period of three years separation. Therefore any prospect they might have of getting married was still a little way off. The date of his legal separation had been December the 15<sup>th</sup>, 1935.

Chris still had some of the Williams family living with him in the house - including two of Bert’s daughters of whom Lorna was a bit jealous - but he had assumed ownership of the land and was one of several new suppliers of cream to the butter

factory in Bellingen. His dairy herd was small at this stage as there was not sufficient grazing land, but this was only the beginning. As Chris had said to his sister, Margar - and to Lorna - he would be able to build a successful dairy enterprise in time as long as he could keep well.

The problem was that Chris did not 'keep well.' The tough grind of timber-getting with Teety Tyson had taken a heavy toll. Chris was not young enough to shrug off the body strain and successive minor injuries and the arthritis in his hip had now become drastically worse.

He sought medical treatment yet again and the local doctors gave him some prospect of relief and improvement due to various new pills, but it didn't happen. His physical condition continued to deteriorate.

A small milking shed or cowbails had now been built further up the hill from the house with a yard to hold the cows when they were brought in twice a day for milking. By the middle of 1939, Chris was having great difficulty dragging himself up this hill to milk, especially in the morning. Some days he could not get about the rest of the farm at all let alone start any major clearing work. The thought that had now become a serious worry was that this idea of a farm might turn out to be just an empty dream.

He went to Sydney to get further medical advice and there he talked with Lorna and her brother about his fears for the future of the farm. She was quite distressed to see how crippled he had become, but she felt powerless to know how she could help. If only she had more knowledge about farming she would be able to carry the load for a while until his condition started to improve again, which he still believed it would, in time.

When Chris returned to the farm her worrying continued unabated. She did not hear from him for two months and became quite desperate to know whether he was getting better

or, if worse, how he could possibly be coping. She tried unsuccessfully to get a message to him.

Then this letter came. She read: *“Dear Lorna, My doctor has given me some very stern advice - he sees no prospect of the arthritis being cured or going away. In his opinion I have no choice but to sell the farm and find some more sedentary occupation. I know now that I can't continue here much longer. Believe me, I never thought it would come to this - we had such splendid plans. Please forgive me, but I hope you will understand that, under these circumstances, I don't think we should continue with the idea we had for our marriage. I hope you will not be too disappointed with me. I feel that I must now keep to my own devices, having made such a mess of it all.”* The signature was scrawled below.

Lorna said nothing at first, but walked aimlessly about the flat as if dazed. Her brother tried to talk to her; perhaps there had been risks anyway in marrying a divorced man much older than herself and going so far away to a lonely farm. This had definitely been her mother's view as well. And didn't she have a string of other friends? She walked down by the glistening water of the harbour and stood facing directly into the sharp breeze where the combination of salt spray and tears stung her face. There she stood for an hour or more until the seagull's smooth motion as they floated overhead on the breeze and their busyness and chatter had sufficiently soothed her mind.

She thought it was very unfair of Chris to give up their relationship just because they could no longer have a farm and felt angry about that, but she also had some sympathy for him and a sense of his deep depression at having his dreams shattered in this way. But she was not one to give up hope completely.

## ***Chapter 5***

### **The Partnership**

On the other side of the world in 1939 most countries were preparing for war and news of those ominous developments made a big impact here too. Shortly before Hitler invaded Poland and Britain declared war on Germany, Chris had written to Margar: “. . . *every tomorrow brings so much talk of changing plans and fresh world problems - a play upon the emotions till enough get worked up and all go mad again.*” It was an eerie time of great uncertainty and worry and even those like Chris who had known the true horror of war at first hand became caught up in the excitement.

At home, however, the tide had turned in exactly the opposite direction. Chris did not attempt to sell the farm. In fact, soon after the emotional trauma of writing to Lorna, he felt a significant easing of the pain in his hips and loosening of the stiffness in his body. He began to move around the farm with more agility and very much greater purpose. He did not realise it at first, but his condition was undergoing the kind of spontaneous remission that can occur with some forms of arthritis.

It often seems to happen in life that, when you finally give in to something you’ve been fighting against or trying to deny for a long time, it will start to get better or become a bit less of a problem. It seems that when you accept the reality of the situation you obtain some relief from the trouble it causes.



It was three weeks before the full realisation of his partial recovery struck Chris, but when it did he acted on impulse once again. Leaving the lad to look after the milking he went straight to the railway station at Urunga and was surprised that several local dairy farmers he had met before and Herbie Kirkland, who had become a good friend, were also catching the North Coast Mail train to Sydney. Together with the others, who were going to an important cattle sale at the Sydney Showground, Chris booked in to a hotel in King's Cross.

A short while later Lorna was rushing around her Point Piper flat in the process of getting dressed, drinking a cup of milky tea, feeding the cat and writing a note, all at once. She had been just about to leave to pick up a girlfriend to go out for dinner, but a phone call had changed her plans.

"Chris rang me," she explained to Lloyd. "From King's Cross. He's in Sydney. I can't tell you any more. I have to go."

She met Chris outside the hotel and, when they walked into the restaurant together, Herbie Kirkland for one was very surprised. She was so strikingly smart and citified they all began to look at Chris in a different light. He felt very proud to introduce her as his fiancé. That night they dined together in style and talked for several hours about their various plans with a lot of laughter and merrymaking.

Much later, Chris and Lorna saw the dawn break as they stood by the harbour at Rushcutters Bay and marvelled at the morning mist over the water and both felt eternally young and happier than they could ever remember.

During the few days Chris spent in Sydney, Lloyd Davies and some other friends joined in the celebrations.

"So you are definitely going ahead with the farm?" Chris was asked.

"My word I am," he replied. "You don't think I'd give up sailing and this good life for nothing, do you?" His keen eyes and smile belied the regret he still felt, knowing that he would miss those things.

One of Lorna's friends enquired anxiously, "There will be some sort of . . . social life, will there?"

"Good heavens, no!" said Chris in mock seriousness."

"Well, not a lot, I shouldn't think," Lorna told them with a laugh. "It is fairly rough and the house isn't much, but I'm sure we can make a go of it. I've a lot to learn, I know, but it will certainly make a change from dear old Dickson Primer."

There were times when she had a flood of doubts. Other girls seemed to get married without having to give up all the good things in their lives and move away from Sydney. She worried, too, that certain of her friends would want to come and visit before she had time to fix up the house. But her excitement dispelled these fears before they could really take hold.

Over the next few months, as the momentum increased in the Second World War, Lorna was kept busy in the evenings training, as others did, to be an ambulance driver to fill vacancies caused by those who'd already left for the war, but her thoughts were mostly of her impending marriage and future life on the farm. Not everyone shared her enthusiasm. Lorna was disappointed that her mother did not entirely approve. Her father said she should marry whom she pleased and he was very happy for her. Some of her friends were dubious because it was not what they would do themselves.

However, there was quite a swish farewell at the Point Piper flat and a few more goodbyes at Central railway station when she set out from Sydney for a little town she hardly even knew by name where she was to be married. When the train had pulled out of the station she felt suddenly alone, but also very

happily excited. Lorna always had a special love of travelling by train and a wonderful sense of adventure.

In the end no one else made the trip to attend the wedding. Being wartime, it was becoming more difficult to travel. Lorna's mother wanted to go, but she was talked out of it because she might not like the house or the return train journey all alone. Lorna regretted this later. For a while her mother suspected they might not be getting married at all until Lorna agreed to send the marriage certificate down to her as proof. Some others were deterred from attending by the distance and what Lorna had told them about the place and she felt she could not accept the very kind offer of Mrs Carson from the large wool-broking firm of Winchcombe Carson to drive her up in style in their flash car for the start of her new life. She was just a little too ashamed of the house.

The local Church of England in each of the small towns around Chris's farm had politely refused to marry them because Chris had been divorced. It was the minister at the tiny Presbyterian Church in Bellingen who performed the ceremony on August 22nd, 1940, in the office of Herbie Kirkland. The two witnesses were Herbie Kirkland and Horace Johnstone, who was a local dairy farmer and the Shire President. A younger friend of Chris's, Jack Anderson, was also present. Afterwards the five of them adjourned briefly to the Federal Hotel for a celebration drink. Then, it was back to the cows for the afternoon milking.

Not long before the wedding Chris had sold the Reo truck and acquired a little-used, square looking, black Buick sedan that was quite stylish for the time. A few days after the wedding they decided to drive up the winding mountain road to Dorriggo and stay overnight at the rather grand Hotel Dorriggo that still stands proudly, with its wide verandahs, on a street corner in the centre of the town. Young Jimmy Barnett kindly offered to milk the cows for them that evening and the next morning. But

there is one thing about dairy farming: it's hard to get away for very long.

Lorna was actually very excited about the new experience of being out in the paddocks or up close to the cows in the milking bails and generally getting her hands dirty in this new way of life. One thing she noticed is that everything smells different on a farm. There are whiffs of fresh cowdung and disturbed earth and wet grass and other musty smells from the lagoon. Wet cows have a distinctive smell when they first come into the bails and if you happen to be right next to a cow when it belches up the products of its rumen in order to chew its cud the warm pungent breath smells of methane.

After the evening milking when the sun has set and the dusk creeps in there is a sense of the day coming to an end that Lorna was not used to because it is generally missed by people living in the city. There is often a short period of intense activity by the birds - cockatoos screech and magpies squawk, little finches and wrens come out from cover briefly and willy wagtails hop noiselessly around on the ground. With all that had happened in the last few weeks and days, Lorna felt rather exhausted, but she experienced for the first time a special kind of satisfaction that comes to those who are working outside and in touch with nature's cycles when the darkness deepens and the day has come to an end.

Chris and Lorna both felt their new life together had begun. There they were, far from city lights and traffic noise in a nearly-empty farmhouse on a large, bush-covered block of land in an out-of-the-way sort of place, feeling very happy together and brimming with hope. The dream they shared was to work together to turn this place into a farm - a family farm, if all went well.

"Why doesn't our farm have a name?" Lorna asked her husband.

“Because I was waiting for you to come and help me choose it,” he replied.

“Well, you see the two pine trees at the gate. I know we didn't plant them and they are not exactly the same height . . ., but there was a house in Vaucluse I always loved that was called 'Twin Pines.’” She waited to see his reaction.

Chris's eyes flashed and there was an unrestrained laugh in his voice as he said, “I thought you might say that. So there it is, our farm is called 'Twin Pines.’”

## ***Chapter 6***

### **Horses, Pigs and Snakes**

Compared with the city there is an extraordinary liveliness in the atmosphere on a farm and it is most noticeable early in the morning. As the first light spreads the sounds of life begin to multiply. The intermittent hoots and sighs and rattles of the night are replaced by a more persistent chatter leading to a rush of chirping sounds, then another burst, and then the sharp, clear notes of a currawong or whip bird as the soloists in an enormous avian orchestra are called forth by the sun, their conductor, even before he has appeared himself. The principal soloist, the kookaburra, comes on a short time later, usually at a regular time in the proceedings, and leaves no doubt in any listener's mind that the affairs of the day have now begun.

Where there are farm animals in the vicinity of the house there is a stirring of bodies, the shaking of a dog and perhaps some snorting, followed - if you listen carefully - by the quite unmistakable sounds of a dog lapping water and cows tearing grass with their tongues. If there are small calves or other newborn animals about, some very needy and compelling noises will signify the serious communication between a mother and her young. In a farmhouse in the bush there is quite a commotion at the break of day and it is an irresistible call to be out and about, joining in the action.

Chris and Lorna always rose early at Twin Pines and by the time the eastern sky turned bright, announcing that the sun would soon appear, they were already sharing a pot of steaming

hot tea and anticipating the details of their working day. Chris had always been an early riser and was usually at his most talkative at this time of day. His hip usually pained during the night and he welcomed the chance to get up and move about and begin the work that would then occupy his mind entirely. He loved every aspect of the farming work and had the confidence of his considerable experience to bolster his enthusiasm.

For Lorna it was different. She had never been a particularly early riser, but she was also one to adapt quickly to new situations - and enjoy doing that - and she felt every bit as happy as her husband as they sipped their strong, sweet tea. Chris mostly drank black tea, but Lorna had been used to it with milk, poured into the cup before the tea. What she also felt was apprehension and nervous excitement because every experience on the farm was so unfamiliar to her. She was learning fast, but at this stage there was still a fair amount of dread and uncertainty - wondering what would happen next.

"Now, when you bring the cows in this morning, Lorna, leave old *Lilac* out there. She doesn't have to come in because I'm starting to dry her off. And watch out those younger heifers don't hide in the wattles like they did yesterday." The paddock immediately beyond the milking bails was called the Wattles and there was a cleared area on top of the hill for the cows to settle overnight, but small wattle trees and scrub still covered the gully that ran down to the swamp.

"You know what would be a big help," Chris added as he got up from the kitchen table. "When you're bringing the cows up, just give a call to the horses through the fence in Barnett's paddock. Then they'll be easier for you to go and catch. We'll need the four of them again. I want to finish disking that paddock below the house. It's not going to rain today."

"But I've never done the horses. I don't . . ."

Chris was too excited about the day ahead to hear her protests. He was already on the back verandah pulling on his gumboots and reaching for his felt hat which was tattered and stained with dirt and sweat, but nevertheless inseparable from his head throughout the day. He limped up the track to the bails with a steady swinging rhythm which was a good deal faster than when he limped back down at night. At the cowbails on top of the rise the huge golden orb of the sun could be seen on the horizon across several hills towards the sea. Here he prepared the feed for the cows and put out the buckets and cans for the milking to begin.

There was still a chill in the air and Lorna was glad of her thick jacket and trousers as she walked around the milking cows and herded them towards the bails, which was where they wanted to go anyway because they knew they would get feed there. She had grown accustomed to the Wattles paddock already because they had been clearing it since she first arrived and so she felt some ownership of it. She felt that the cows had become quite used to her too.

She smiled as she remembered that her mother had made Chris promise that she would not have to milk any cows - that she would be the one who brought them in from the paddock. But she was already helping with the milking too. She breathed in the smells of fresh earth near tree stumps they had dug around and very fresh, warm cowdung here and there as each cow got up from her overnight rest. The dew-covered grass glistened in the early sunlight and she was actually feeling very happy to be there.

She was not yet too confident about recognising the different cows by name. Some were very distinctive, but the rest, as they say about foreigners, all looked the same. Now which is old *Lilac*, she wondered. One of them seemed to want to stay behind anyway so that appeared to solve the problem. Chris was a bit impatient with her when she didn't know one heifer



from another, but he didn't get too angry about it, even though it might have created some extra work.

Right now she had a more immediate problem. How in the hell did one call the horses and what if they didn't come?

"Come on horseys. Come on. Come on," she tried in her best horse-calling voice, trying to remember how Chris talked to them. It was true she had some experience of riding horses on the sheep property, 'Beethoven,' but these were a very different breed. They were large, solid Clydesdales - the best draught horses in the district according to Chris. One of the horses raised his head in surprise when she called - then went back to grazing. But rather miraculously, she thought, they seemed to know the drill and they gradually moved up towards the yard. The animals on a farm generally become habituated so they know what to do in any given situation.

It was a very new, but wonderfully satisfying experience for Lorna to walk out with a nose-bag and attract the attention of old *Clipper*, the senior horse. Once he saw the nose-bag and smelt the oaten chaff inside it he made straight for her and then the others would follow right into the yard itself. There she put a nose-bag on each one and they enjoyed a quiet munch until Chris had finished the milking and was ready to harness them for the day's work.

Chris and his horses were a bit of a talking point in the district at this time. Not that it was uncommon to clear and plough the land with Clydesdales, but Chris had ways with draught horses that the locals hadn't seen before. They used their horses singly or in pairs whereas he often harnessed a tandem with one pair in front of the other and occasionally there was the grand sight of five horses abreast, marching across a larger paddock on the flats with the heavy disc plough behind.

Years before in New Zealand, straight after he left Lincoln College, Chris had been apprenticed to a ploughman on the

great spread of the Canterbury Plains. The wheat paddocks were so large that each team set out from one end in the morning and reached the other end in time for midday lunch. They didn't linger over lunch either in case they couldn't plough the long row back home before it got too dark. Chris's love of horses, from the faithful New Zealand Light Horse ponies in the war to old *Clipper* on Twin Pines, was very evident to anyone who watched him at work.

Next to *Clipper* in the tandem he put *Tom*, a big chestnut gelding. You must never have a lazy horse in front, he would say. Behind them, where a quiet temperament was needed to cope with the swingle bars and trace chains, he put *Royal Chief* and *Judy* who was a wonderfully placid, dark-brown mare and in many ways his favourite. The other mare who worked well with *Royal Chief* in a pair was *Kate*. On the smaller flats below the house they mostly pulled a mouldboard plough at first to turn the furrow, then the disc harrows which they were using today to break down the clods. They didn't use the mouldboard plough on hills so much because of the scarce topsoil and the risk of soil erosion; it was preferable to use the discs for all the shallow cultivation.

The horses waited patiently while Chris and Lorna had their breakfast. When Chris snapped them into life with a sharp click of his tongue and began the disking, Lorna lingered over another cup of tea and toast and marmalade in the warm sunshine on the verandah from where she could see the team working just down from the house. Then she joined her husband and helped to carry away the sticks and debris that interfered with the cultivation on the recently cleared block of land. She was a city girl perhaps, but this life on a farm seemed to come quite naturally to her also.

At the end of the day when the sweating horses were unharnessed, she liked to watch them have their roll in the grass or dirt, an exercise that seemed so absolutely necessary for their

peace of mind that they rarely missed the opportunity. Each one worked up to it with several practice rolls and then with a final big effort usually managed to get right over at least once. Then they would go off to graze or stand quietly. Each horse was rested for two days a week; that was something Chris believed was absolutely necessary for their wellbeing, though he didn't apply this principle to himself. On the horses' day off, he worked at clearing, fencing or attending to the needs of the cattle.

In one corner of the dairy shed the smell of harness oil was another thing that Lorna was coming to love. The leather bridles, collars and harness required regular protection with linseed oil and she made sure they were not neglected. She discovered new sensations all the time in this outdoor existence and for the most part they seemed to suit her. There were many things that were daunting, but she relished the excitement and adventure of those early days on the farm.

In those first months there was no rain whatsoever. In fact, since the very wet years when Chris first saw the farm and was working the timber, there had been almost continuous drought. This was not unusual here, but it was a severe setback to his expectations of good growth in the all-too-small area of natural pasture that he had at his disposal. Fortunately he was not yet depending on the rain to establish his new pastures. The biggest problem was providing enough drinking water for the stock.

The pigs - one rather cantankerous boar and five, fussy, Large White sows - had to be taken out of their pen across a paddock each day to where they could get a drink. This became another one of Lorna's jobs. Hardly an expert on driving unruly pigs, she viewed the idea with considerable misgiving.

"Just take them steady," Chris said. "Whatever you do, you mustn't rush the pregnant sows." This, Lorna could

understand. "Let them have a bit of a poke around as they go along. They like to think about where they are going. When the boar starts to cause trouble, just tap him on the nose with this stick." He handed her a long, straight, round piece of wood which, though it was not obtained from any shop, was as important as any other tool on the farm. The job was beginning to sound even trickier. "At the bottom of the hill be sure you keep them all together. That's where they could spread out." He turned to let the pigs out of their pen. "Oh, and, if you see that snake down there, you'd better kill it."

"Not on your life," said Lorna indignantly. "You can do that. The pigs are enough." Her protest was shrill and determined, but good natured, and it brought a flush of laughter to both their faces. You have to draw a line somewhere, she thought. Besides, she wasn't too keen on the idea of meeting snakes at all, nor the thought of killing them herself.

Lorna had seen a few snakes in the daylight and knew they always beat a hasty retreat when they heard her footsteps. The snakes here were mostly black snakes with white or pink bellies, but there were also quite a few of the red-bellied variety that are a good deal more venomous. There were also a few of the really deadly brown snakes that are hard to spot at all and when clearing timber Chris had seen the more colourful and more aggressive tiger snake and also a death adder with its characteristic flat, diamond-shaped head.

In the darkness, however, Lorna's fear of snakes was heightened. The toilet at the house was not exactly en-suite! It was a large tin covered by a wooden seat in a little outhouse about 20 yards up the slope from the back verandah. It needed to be outside the netting fence that enclosed a small garden they had built so the tin could be easily picked up and emptied further down the paddock when it became full. She tried to avoid sitting out there after dark because it was not really an option to take with her the only gas lantern from the house.

One reason that the morning light is so welcome on a farm like this and you don't sit around in the evenings is because you only have lamps, lanterns or candles or an open fireplace to see by. Chris and Lorna had several kerosene lamps with wicks that needed to be trimmed regularly and the only strong light they had was a gas lantern that you pumped up to build pressure before lighting.

As often happens, when rain finally came to break the drought, it was a deluge that caused minor flooding in the low lying parts of the farm and turned the dirt to mud around the cowbails. Working amongst animals in wet weather gets very uncomfortable by the end of the day. But there is no nicer feeling than coming into a snug house to change into dry clothes and eat - even a fairly improvised evening meal - before going to bed.

As they lay in bed one night, Lorna remarked on the number of large, green frogs she had seen on the verandah where the wisteria vine was in full leaf and dripping with moisture. "I don't mind frogs so much, as long as they stay outside, but these are starting to invade the house. One hopped out from behind the curtain onto my leg and gave me quite a fright."

"It isn't the frogs you have to worry about," Chris replied. "It's the green tree snakes that are chasing after them!"

Sometime later in the evening, Lorna felt a plop on the bedclothes beside her and realised, as the intruder hopped away, that it had been another frog. Then a horrible thought struck her. She looked across at Chris who was snoring peacefully. Normally, she slept well too, but the rest of that night was an exception.

## ***Chapter 7***

### **The Partnership Expands**

The back verandah of the Twin Pines house faced north and after breakfast Chris usually sat there for a while, easing his hip and resting his body before starting the second phase of the day's work. The kitchen, which Lorna thought primitive to say the least, was no more than a closed-in section of the back verandah, but it was the place where Lorna felt most comfortable after the morning milking was finished; she liked to have a second cup of tea and some thickly-buttered toast. She had always been fond of cats and now had a feline companion who sat in her lap for a while most mornings.



House from the back yard.

Chris was not a very talkative partner as a general rule; often he seemed to be lost in his thoughts. They did chat about outside affairs - politics and the arts - but he was always reticent about

the subject of his own feelings. He had asked Lorna to judge his affection for her by what he did rather than what he said and this she was prepared to accept. It must have been a sacrifice for her to subdue her lively social instincts. When he was silent she wondered about it, but she did not probe. She was beginning to understand his sense of humour though.

Some months after they were married Chris had killed an enormous black snake and, calling to Lorna in the kitchen, he threw the snake's battered body on to the back verandah. "Will you cook this up for tea tonight, please? It should make at least one meal."

"What! Are you serious?" she asked with a worried expression.

"Of course!" he replied. "I thought all Australians ate snake."

She burst into laughter and his lined face creased into that broad smile she had always loved, but which she saw less often here in the bush. They enjoyed life, but it was also very hard work and Chris experienced a lot of pain, which probably accounted for his moodiness at times.

The daily work absorbed them both so completely they didn't think or talk about a need for any social life outside the farm. Lorna missed some Sydney friends especially, but she was not desperately lonely. She was evaluated by the local shopkeepers and met the local doctor and seemed to get on well with the people she met. During the summer she and Chris occasionally rowed across the river to visit the Gossips and sat in their barn husking corn and talking over the problems on their respective farms. Dave Gossip's place had more of the fertile river flat than Chris's and he had been there longer, but he hadn't progressed all that well.

The income from Twin Pines at this stage was quite small, but Chris had done okay selling the Reo log truck and was striving to increase the area of pasture so he could milk more cows. Where there was pasture he knew he could improve it by

putting on fertiliser. On one small cleared area called Foxes Flat, adjoining the lagoon, he had cultivated the land to sow an improved pasture. He was counting on being able to at least double their present production to ensure they made a decent living from the farm.

To this end he was removing large tree stumps, much of the actual felling having been done before. He would dig under the stumps with a narrow post-hole shovel and place a charge of several sticks of gelignite with a detonator in it and a length of fuse about four feet long. After ramming the dirt firmly back on top of the charge he would light the fuse and limp rapidly away to hide behind another stump until the bang went off. The outcome of this operation was rather unpredictable. Sometimes there was a tremendous, dull thud and huge tree roots would fly into the air to land all around him. Sometimes nothing would happen at all. In that case it was always a bit tricky going back to discover the problem in case it did go off after all.

He explained to Lorna that the secret was to ram the dirt down hard enough to stop the charge blowing back out the way it went in, but she was understandably dubious about helping him with this job at all. Nor was she impressed, either, by his blasé attitude to it. She suspected he was putting in far more gelignite than was actually needed. Once he obtained some liquid explosive and he couldn't wait to try it out. Lorna was working in the house at the time about a quarter of a mile away when he blew an entire stump of a long dead bloodwood right over the house and almost into the clothesline where she had just hung out some washing.

"You want to watch out or we'll have one through the roof," she said when he came in. "Dirt came down all over the washing and gave me quite a shock." Chris had a wry smile every time he thought about that bang afterwards. However, he couldn't get any more of the liquid explosive.



Lorna wanted to devote some time to fixing up the house. The wide verandah ran all around it forming the makeshift kitchen on one back corner and a makeshift bathroom on the other. She would have to wait for proper rooms to be built, but at least she could fix up the copper boiler just off the back verandah and get a new hand wringer for the tubs to make it easier for washing clothes. She also made some decent curtains for the two bedrooms at the front. She still hoped that nobody would come to visit just yet. There seemed to be so little time on a farm to get things done in the house and Chris didn't seem inclined to help in this domain.

Fond as she was of his piece of oilskin that adorned the kitchen table, she made a new tablecloth and brightened up the kitchen walls. The wood stove was already very old. It said Metters No 2 and BEGA on the oven door. Sometimes she chopped her own wood from the logs Chris had previously brought in and sawn into suitable lengths. Often he would chop wood for the next day as he came into the house in the evening. The best firewood was forest oak and Chris would bring in medium-sized poles and leave them to dry out in a stack just beyond the big mangrove tree at the top of the back yard.

There may well have been a physiological basis for Lorna's attention to the details of the home because she soon discovered, to their great delight, that she was pregnant. That autumn of 1941 brought with it another medical concern, however, which became a serious worry to many people, especially pregnant women. There was a major epidemic across Sydney and New South Wales of Rubella or German measles. Lorna realised she had almost certainly contracted it as soon as she knew she was pregnant.

She became quite seriously ill and Doctor Elliot came out and told them she needed extra help while she was sick. Despite Lorna's protests, word was sent to her mother who duly arrived on the very next train. Chris met his mother-in-law cheerily at

the station in the distinguished-looking, but not new and shiny, Buick car that had replaced the log truck. He was soon dismayed to find she intended to take Lorna back to Sydney so she could convalesce in greater comfort. The Davies were living at that time in Wentworth Falls in the Blue Mountains, which was a nice place for Lorna to recuperate especially as her brother, Lloyd, was able to visit on a short period of leave from the army in which he now served as a radio officer.

Chris did wonder if the return to city comforts would cause Lorna to reconsider the whole marriage and farming business, but of course, there was never any doubt about this as she was very committed to their plans together and it would now include making a family, which she knew would be an extremely important aspect of their lives.

Luckily the disease had no ill effects on her or the baby. On Sunday, the 24th August, 1941, a son was born to Lorna and Chris Fell in the tiny maternity hospital that was separate from the main hospital in Bellingen. He was named Lloyd Richmond maintaining a family tradition to use Richmond as a middle name and after her much-loved brother, Lloyd.

Chris was delighted of course when he drove in to the hospital after the morning milking to find his son had been born just a few hours before. In the days before there were any telephones on outlying farms like Twin Pines the passing of important news from mouth to mouth was a lively business. Even people who didn't really know the family personally would tell their neighbour that the Fell's on the South Arm had a baby. Together with the nurses and Dr Elliot who delivered Lloyd, Chris was all smiles wherever he went that day. He felt very grateful to have Lorna and a baby in his life when it had looked so bleak just a few years before. Unlike Lorna, however, Chris was still rather preoccupied with what was happening on the farm.

With springtime approaching there was certainly a lot to do. In particular, Chris was anxious to get the superphosphate fertiliser - or 'manure' as he called it - spread onto the new paddock to take advantage of the showers of rain that seemed to be about at this time. Cows were calving, too, which meant there were more cows to milk and new heifer calves to feed from a bucket until they could be weaned.

A few days after the birth Chris arrived at the hospital absolutely beaming. Lorna felt very proud of their baby and enjoyed seeing Chris and his new son together.

"You'll never guess what I've bought," Chris began. His wife thought of booties or a bonnet, but she doubted that Chris would have known where to get them.

"A manure spreader! A brand new manure spreader with steel wheels, a timber box and a ten-foot spread." There was a stunned silence while Lorna tried to bring her thoughts back to the farm situation and Chris waited to hear what she thought about it. It was in fact the first piece of brand new machinery they had bought for their farm so far. She remained lost for words.

"I know we didn't really have the money, but this is going to make such a difference. No more spreading manure by hand. Now we can cover a whole paddock between the morning and the afternoon milking."

"That's good," she said quietly, "and now we have little Lloyd to think about as well."

"I know," Chris replied. "It won't be long before he'll be able to help on the farm too!"

This took a few years to eventuate, of course, but in the meantime the Fell partnership expanded further. When Lorna was pregnant a second time just over two years later she said, "It must be a boy because it kicks like a horse!" On Wednesday,

the 16th August, 1944, their second son was born in Bellingham after a fairly rushed trip in the ambulance to get there only just in time. He was called Noel William - Noel, after Chris's much-loved friend who had been killed in the war and William after Chris's brother - but he was always to be known as Bill.

Looking after two small children now occupied much of Lorna's time, of course, but some additional help on the farm turned up unexpectedly as a consequence of the continuing World War. When Italy entered the War, local Italian nationals were interned, as had happened with Germans earlier, and Chris and Lorna were offered the services of a young Italian man to work on the farm. They found him quite helpful and easy to get along with, the only change in their routine being to take him to Mass in Urunga every Sunday. They were grateful for his help until, after a year, he moved on to another farm.

When she fell pregnant again the next year, Lorna had the feeling it would probably be another boy. How pleased she was to be proved wrong this time! The labour came on so quickly while they were at the cowbails one evening that Lorna had to get straight into the back seat of the Buick and lie there expecting to have the baby as Chris drove frantically to the hospital. As they bumped along the dirt road she was a little alarmed to realise there were several large, iron, plough shares, covered in dirt, bouncing around on the back seat with her.

The nursing sister remarked that they had only just made it this time. In fact while Chris was having a little trouble starting the Buick to return to the farm she came out to tell him that he already had a daughter, which was a great joy to both parents. That was Wednesday the 30th of January, 1946. She was given the names Caroline Margaret, but like her brother and her mother, she was always to be known by her second name - and mostly as Margie or Marg. When getting a passport years later she discovered that her name was spelt Carolyn on the birth certificate.

“With a team like this we’ll soon have the best farm on the river,” Chris liked to say to Lorna. For the time being it was very hard work for them both. Chris did most of the morning and evening work on his own as Lorna could only help during the middle of the day with a toddler and two babies always close beside her. Margaret, the youngest, was also the most independent of the three babies, learning to talk and feed herself at a very young age as if to ease her mother’s burden. By this time Lorna was again feeding the pigs morning and evening, sloshing the skim milk into scooped-out logs that served as troughs in the pig pen, as well as tending to the children. She also managed to make some further improvements to the house. To the occasional visitor like Dave Gossip and his wife, or Bob or Jimmy Barnett, there was the unmistakable appearance of a healthy country family, consolidating, on a new and steadily improving farm.

Many new calves had been born by this time to build up the milking herd and *Judy*, the Clydesdale mare, had produced a foal called *Bonny* who would soon be ready for light work. Chris had built a large, wooden barn to store feed and improved the cowbails also. There were new fences to be seen and another 50 acres of cleared land.

Both Chris and Lorna were totally exhausted when they crawled into their beds at night immediately after the children had been seen to and the chores had been finished, but they had a sense of direction and a sense of achievement that brought much satisfaction to them both.

## ***Chapter 8***

### **Growing Pains**

While the partnership at Twin Pines was expanding the world continued to rage with war. Life on the farm with a small family was like living in another world, but the radio set that Chris had bought earlier allowed them to maintain some connection. By listening to the radio for a short time each evening and sometimes reading a Sydney Morning Herald newspaper that Lorna brought back from occasional trips into town - the previous day's edition - Chris and Lorna followed the war news with a grim fascination.

Chris looked for information particularly about naval events in the North Sea where his younger brother, William, was serving as a submarine commander. Compared to today one found out very little and then only long after it had happened. They did receive several letters from William scrawled on the flimsy lettergrams that were common for overseas mail in those days.

Lloyd was four months old when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour and the Americans entered fully into the war. After that the threats to the Australian coastline dominated everyone's thinking. As a respected bushman and ex-soldier, Chris was one of those engaged in finding an alternative route up the steep Dorrig Mountain so that the only roadway could be mined in preparation for blowing it up in the event of an invasion, which was considered quite likely. The track they chose branched off at a section of the road known locally as 'fernyface.'

By the time of Lloyd's first birthday the Battle of the Coral Sea had been won and the United States naval victories had turned the tide of the war in the Pacific, but there still seemed to be such a long way to go. Many ordinary household goods and clothes had become impossible to get and Lorna, always the enthusiast, would whoop with joy when some knitting wool or a warm suit for the baby would come in to the local shop. Most food was rationed, although one read in the papers that the rationing in England was more drastic. You could get some butter here, for example - for tenpence a pound - although many people had become used to beef 'dripping' as an alternative.

Petrol was severely rationed and Lorna's trips to town in the Buick were less frequent now. If they had no petrol she would get a lift into town with Bob Barnett in his old truck. She felt rather cut off from civilisation and from her family. It was difficult to obtain news of her brother, Lloyd, who was somewhere in New Guinea, a Captain in the army now with responsibilities for radio and telegraphic communication. Later she learned that, while he was on a short home leave, he had been married to Sheila Wyles in Adelaide. Such whirlwind romances and marriages were not uncommon in wartime. Lorna would have liked to have been at the wedding.

Despite all the worrying news it was the farm that still occupied most of their time and attention. The war, though important, was also remote and the problems and challenges of building up the farm were more immediate and pressing. Contrary to some popular opinion, there is rarely time to laze around on a farm. Something is always crying out to be done right away.

Chris's vision of a superior dairy herd, good pastures and a productive farm had not been dimmed by the hard work involved. He was now looking around for a suitable stud bull which would provide the means to improve the genetic quality of his animals. Like most farmers nowadays, but perhaps ahead

of his time then, he was aware of the importance of a breeding program to achieve significant, though gradual, improvements in the milk production of his herd. It was not simply a matter of providing better pastures for their nutrition; herd improvement through breeding was one of his principal farming objectives at that time.

All his cows were Jerseys, this being the preferred breed for most dairy farmers in Australia and New Zealand at that time because they produced milk with the highest percentage of butterfat and it was the cream, not the whole milk, which the farmers supplied to the butter factories. After separating the cream from the skim milk in a centrifugal separator in the cowshed, Chris used the skim milk to feed to his pigs, as most dairy farmers did. His cows were not all purebred at that time with a certified sire and dam as is required to be registered as a stud, but his aim was to purchase a high quality pedigree bull to gradually build up a Jersey stud himself at Twin Pines.

In 1944, shortly after D-Day had come and gone in Europe and shortly before Bill was born, Chris wrote again to Margat in New Zealand: *"I had a trip down to Exeter to purchase a bull about two months ago. The result was a very nice, nine-month old bull calf for 30 guineas - the trip didn't cost much - only about £10 including freight on the bull. He is called Blytheswood's Royal Gallant and he was imported in-utero from the Jersey islands so he should be good."*

*"Found Sydney not what it used to be - so overcrowded, chiefly with American troops, it was impossible to get anywhere to sleep for the night. As my train from the sale at Exeter (the Riverina Express) missed the North Coast Mail connection by half an hour, I was compelled to wander about Sydney looking for a shakedown. Each place, from the swell hotels to the second and third-rate boarding houses, sent me on to another saying they were crowded out, but perhaps I would have better luck there. I finished up sitting in a chair in a smoking room and pretty cold it was too, but I was tired, having had a great day at the sale and been walking for hours, at least from 9:30 pm till 1:30 am, unsuccessfully. There was not*



*even a spare couch in a sitting room or smoking room - just crowded out - and hard to get any sort of a feed at the railway restaurant or cafe."*

*"The next night's trip up in the North Coast train was a trial also as there always seems to be about one and a half times as many people travelling as the train can seat. I walked out from Urunga to the farm and was glad to get out of the train, I can tell you. The seven mile walk seemed like nothing."*

Farm life was physically harder in those days than it is today. Chris's arthritic condition was hampering him less now than it had for some years and he was actually working harder than ever, exploiting every bit of strength he could muster to bring in new paddocks and provide better feed for his stock. There had been persistent rain and the swampy paddocks were often under water. The only way Chris had of draining these was to dig enormous trenches by hand. The shovel he used was nearly two feet wide and at least as long - so large it became a curiosity piece in later years - but he dug with it day after day and gradually the major swamps were drained.

There is an absorbing fascination about clearing and preparing land for grazing and the vision of what it will eventually be like drives the pioneer farmer to work tirelessly, often with little thought for anything else or even for his own future health. Chris respected the land because he loved it. The strongest healthy trees which grew in clumps he always left standing, clearing paddocks in between them by getting rid of the tangled scrub, old logs and young growth. These he intended to replace with a green pasture that would feed the extra animals he had introduced whose production would sustain his family and himself. To this end he had to cultivate and nurture the soil which is, both spiritually and practically, the lifeblood of the farmer.

There have been plenty of cases, such as intensive cropping on the western slopes of New South Wales, where farmers have

appeared to disregard the sustainability of their enterprise and allowed the precious soil to be depleted and eroded until it is no longer capable of growing anything. In fact, large areas of desert have been created in various parts of the world by selfish people seeking short-term financial gain through agriculture. Chris certainly believed that his farming methods could return a reasonable income, but his basic motivation for this work was the intense satisfaction that he derived from growing ample feed for his animals, growing better animals, and producing the milk and cream and bacon that people needed and valued.

The hardships and the hazards were enormous, but there was a spirited determination always there in Chris's heart despite his occasional complaining. He wrote to Margar: *"Our car has been laid up for months without tyres which will not be procurable for a long while yet. Have not been off the farm since the trip for the bull four months ago and Lorna cut my hair today - it needed it!"*

*"Had the misfortune to get a kick just above the knee - from one of my draughts - not really the kick either - it was the recoil as her leg came back - the main blow was very hard, but only grazed me. This gave me a beastly stiff knee which lasted for two months, but is now alright again. Also, I cut my right big toe - axe slipped and went through the boot, but did not cut the toe right off. However, it was bad enough to cause me a lot of inconvenience and pain as I could not put a boot or shoe on for nearly three weeks and the stiff knee made it most difficult to dress the toe. However, I made a good heal-up and all is well again now and have been able to get on with ploughing pretty well."*

It was not Chris, but his wife who kept the farm records as is often the case on family farms, but there was not a great deal of time spent in financial planning - just enough to satisfy the Manager at the Bank of New South Wales with regard to the small mortgage they held on the farm. Their income was still supplemented at times by the sale of timber and occasional small gifts of money from Chris's sisters in New Zealand with whom he discussed his financial affairs by correspondence.

*“We are now feeding - as a supplementary ration to the cows in milk - wheatmeal which we grind up at the dairy shed with two small kerosene engines running a power grinder. This costs approximately 12/6 per bag of wheat, but by getting a 15 ton truckload for £100 I will be able to reduce this to 10/6 per bag. Have 17 young pigs, which will go away as baconers at about £6 per head at six months old, so the pigs will pay for the wheat and eat about half of it themselves leaving the other half for the cows and horses. No great profit in this, but what the cows make will pay for something else.”*

Even in New Zealand where his pastures had been excellent Chris believed in supplementary feeding with grains to increase the milk production from his herd. His neighbours often disagreed with this, saying that the cost of the purchased feed could not be regained in extra income. He was probably the first in this district to feed wheat in the cowbails and his subsequent butterfat production records were such that other farmers followed suit.

The improved pastures at Twin Pines were not becoming established nearly as well as they did in New Zealand. The rye and other grasses were better suited to more temperate climates and even the clovers did not form nodules on their roots to fix the nitrogen from the atmosphere into the soil because the soil was generally too warm for the bacteria that do this job to flourish. Nevertheless, in these wet years, Chris had succeeded in bringing three paddocks into full production - The Wattles and Barnett's (which adjoined the cowbails and dipped steeply down to the swamp at the other end) and Foxes Flat (beyond the lagoon).

It was his usual practice to plant a crop of corn - also known as maize - in a new paddock when it was first cleared. Cow pumpkins would be grown between the rows of corn for the cows to graze after the cobs of corn had been harvested and put in the barn to provide feed during the winter when the pastures had little growth. The corn stalks would be disked into

the ground which was further ploughed and harrowed several times until a fine tilth was obtained. Then the expensive seed mixture was sown together with fertiliser and finally a light roller would be pulled over the soil to compact it slightly. After that all a farmer can do is to pray for rain.

It is no wonder there is great intensity in a farmer's feelings regarding the rain. He knows no sweeter sensation than to hear, see and feel steady, life-giving rain falling on a newly-sown paddock. His greatest heartbreak is to go through day after day without any rain at all while the seed germinates in expectation and soon after withers and dies.

By the time Margaret was born it was not only the grass which was growing in the series of good, wet seasons - the little foal called *Bonny* had become a strong, young working mare and her much-loved, aging, Clydesdale mother, *Judy*, who had been the cause of Chris's knee trouble, had given birth to another foal, a vigorous colt called *Punch*. The farm's company of livestock grew appreciably during the war years in the same period that the three Fell children came into the world to join the Twin Pines family.

More than half the calves born in the spring of 1945 were heifers, which is always a welcome result on a dairy farm because bull calves could not even be sold for meat and generally had to be killed on the farm when they first arrived. Chris even had some surplus heifers to sell as yearlings and he felt proud about getting £7/10/0 each for them at the local sale. What was even more welcome, however, was the long-awaited news that, following the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Second World War had come to an end.

There was tremendous elation everywhere at that time. Captain William Fell, Chris's brother, took shore leave in Sydney and came to visit Twin Pines. He brought Four-Square tobacco and

Players cigarettes from England, also some ship's whiskey and a bottle of Gordon's gin. Lorna temporarily left off being a farmer's wife and had an occasional cigarette and sherry or gin to celebrate. Then, during the VE Day celebrations in Brisbane, she enjoyed the enormous thrill of visiting William on board his ship, *Bonaventure*, which was fresh from its war exploits as the flagship of the British midget submarines.

The food and petrol rationing was expected to continue for some time, but the troops were coming home, the terrible international tension had now been released and it seemed like a much brighter future world in which to raise three children and to build a farm together.

Lorna's elderly parents had become unwell and they came to live at the farm. Extensions to the front corner of the house accommodated them and also their good quality, upright piano, which Harry Davies played for hours, sending sweet music through every room and around the verandahs of the farmhouse. When Harry died in the Bellingen hospital it happened that young Lloyd was in the bed next to him with an ear infection. Harry was buried at nearby Fernmount and his wife then moved to be with her son's family in Adelaide.

## ***Chapter 9***

### ***Mariposa, Maple II and Dot-and-Carry-One***

“Oh hell! One of the cows is down, I think. See, over on the new feed. Oh dear, she looks quite swollen from here, too. We'll have to get over there quickly. Run and tell your father, Lloyd. He's just over the hill past the bails.” Young Lloyd and his mother had just returned from the monthly trip to town in the Buick with the ration book to get their essential provisions when she noticed the cow with bloat in the paddock below the house where the herd was grazing that morning.

Now that Lorna was much more familiar with the ways of cattle and other animals she was very alert to any sign of ill health or trouble in the herd. Working with cows you get to know them intimately like close colleagues or even members of the family. She often noticed subtle changes before Chris did and nothing is more important in caring for animals than to be observant and detect trouble early.

Lloyd was not yet five years old, but he understood the seriousness of reporting a sick cow and his skinny legs conveyed him at a fast pace to find his father. All his life Lloyd loved running, especially around the tracks on the farm. Chris had been worried about his cows coming down with bloat now that there was much lusher, improved pasture for them to graze. Most days either Chris or Lorna kept the herd in sight while they were on the new feed after the morning milking because bloat develops quickly and can be fatal within a few hours.

Chris called in at the house to get the knife, which they hoped wouldn't be needed, while Lorna walked down the hill with Lloyd to where the milking herd was grazing a thick, green sward of rye grass, red clover and white clover. It is an excess of the clover that causes the bloat, which is a sudden swelling of the cow's largest stomach due to gas; it can be irreversible and is horrible to witness. The only way of saving the cow's life in a bad case is to stab a knife - or, preferably, a trocar and cannula that vets use - through the wall of the stomach to let out the gas. Usually the cow would recover after this treatment; otherwise she was certain to die in agony.

"Oh, it's *Maple II*, one we bred and she's the quietest cow in the herd," exclaimed Lorna. She was a big, white cow whose mother, *Maple Leaf* - named after a popular brand of truck - had been one of Chris's original herd seven years earlier. *Maple II*, therefore, had been born and reared on Twin Pines and the family had a special attachment for these cows.

"And one of the best producers," said Chris. "She's very bad already. I'll have to stab her." The cow was stretched out on the ground with her stomach hideously swollen and her head flopping around in pain. The wheezing sound she made was so alarming that Lorna simply wished something would be done quickly. Lloyd held his breath as he watched his father plunge the stock knife into the cow's side. There was a sudden rush of air and froth and, as Chris pushed the wound open, the distended rumen gradually collapsed like a slowly deflating balloon. The cow lay still now and her wheezing gradually subsided.

They took the other cows up to the bails and Chris came back at intervals to check on *Maple II* until well into the night. The cow's condition deteriorated, however, and when he came into the house after midnight he told Lorna that she had died. It was a severe blow to their spirits to lose a cow, but they knew it was not the first time nor would it be the last.

“Our best cow is *Mariposa*, isn't it Dad?” Lloyd remarked next morning when they were talking about the death. Like all young children he listened very closely to everything his parents said and watched intently what they did. *Mariposa* was a pedigree animal they had purchased from Rocky Mount farm, one of the best Jersey stud herds in the district.

“That's right, son. She gives the most milk.” This was before the Government herd testing was introduced, but Chris kept a check on the production of individual cows, often milking them out by hand for this purpose. He had installed a Warren Farmer milking machine, one of the pioneering brands of milking machine in Australia, but it was his practice to strip out about a quarter of a bucket of milk from each cow before and after putting the teatcups onto their teats. He believed that incomplete milking would lessen their subsequent milk production and he didn't entirely trust the machine.

Close personal attention to every cow and feeding them according to their individual production was one of his secrets for getting the best milk production. Many other farmers were still culling and breeding cows according to their looks - how well they matched the classic shape and conformation of that breed - but Chris had already started using actual production records as the criteria for selecting the animals to breed from or cull.

“I like that name, *Mariposa*,” Lloyd went on, slightly showing off.

“Eat up your porridge, now,” his mother said, diverting her attention briefly from the chubby toddler, Bill, who was dropping everything within reach over the side of his high chair and the baby, Margaret, who was almost asleep in the pram near the table.

This pram, although several years old now, was actually one of their proudest possessions. It was quite a fancy cane affair with



a large cane hood and such things had been extremely hard to get during the war. Chris sometimes pushed the babies up and down the wooden verandahs in the pram just as if it was some public promenade. He would also lean over the pram repeating, "Are you awake?" in such a loud whisper that it woke them up from the deepest sleep, causing annoyance to their mother.

"Will *Mariposa* get the bloat?" asked Lloyd, who was generally unimpressed by the antics of his baby brother and sister.

"No, darling. Now, you run down the hill to the road because Mr O'Hearn will be here soon to take you to school." The teacher picked up the younger children in his tiny black car. He was generally known as 'Phut', because of a strange noise which his car seemed to make. Later he had a small motorcycle that made a very similar noise.

Lloyd had started at the local Tarkeeth School at the earnest request of the schoolmaster because the numbers were perilously low after one girl left at the end of the year. Unless they could find 12 pupils the school had to close. At first the experience terrified the four-year-old, but he soon got to feel rather pleased with himself about being able to go to school. His parents were quietly proud of his vocabulary and his reading ability at this age although they were not so pleased with his physical condition because he was so thin. Due to ear infections and some other complaints he had spent some time in the Bellingen hospital where he loved to read aloud to the nurses all day long - Dorothy Wall stories about Blinky Bill and Uncle Remus stories about Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox.

But he was frowned over by adults for his sallow complexion and skinny frame, which was not from a lack of appetite. In fact his being regarded as a sickly child contrasted sharply with his apparent stamina when running or jogging around the farm in the company of his parents or attending to animals. Sometimes, when Chris's hip was playing up, they would move

cattle around with the Buick - Chris driving, Lorna on foot alongside or on the running board and Lloyd sitting in the back. Most of the time, however, there was a lot of footwork for them all. From the age of three Lloyd would be expected to walk for several miles over the hills and gullies of his parent's farm. Like all farm boys he grew up in the company of animals.

By the time he started school he had already spent a lot of time amongst cows. As the herd grew in size it became necessary for Lorna to help with the milking quite often and this meant taking the children with her. At first it was just Lloyd who was confined in a home-made wooden playpen that the cows would sniff suspiciously as they came in to be milked. Soon he was given jobs to do and became used to moving safely around amongst the cows. All three children became part of the milking routine very early in their lives.

They began to learn the cow's names and their personalities. There was old *Lilac* who never ate feed in the bails like the others. She used to eat the poisonous lantana bush outside, but unlike other cows, she seemed quite unaffected by the poison; Lloyd pondered about this because it seemed strange. There was *Pearl I* and now *Pearl II*, a favourite family of distinguished looking, silver-coated cows. They were always the first to come in to the bails. There was *Brownie*, a very good-natured cow, but even more slow-moving than the others, who had a daughter called *Tuppence* with the same distinctive dark brown coat which is an attractive variation of the normal Jersey colour. *Mariposa*, the top producer, was a large-framed, honey-coloured cow with a beautiful Jersey head - that slightly dished face with its distinctive bone structure and attractive, large, brown eyes.

They were now all pure-bred Jersey cows, but at this stage only some of them had a proper pedigree - that is an official record of their sire and dam having been pedigree animals themselves. Chris's aim was to build up a stud herd eventually, but this would have been too expensive at the outset when there were

more immediate demands for developing the farm. Naming cattle for the stud books is a serious business because of the need to indicate the lineage of the animal where possible and the desire of the owners to show good taste and originality as well.

Some of their names were much less serious, though. Lloyd's favourite name amongst the cows was *Dot-and-Carry-One*, but he never quite understood his father's vague explanation that this was something to do with adding up or multiplying. He learned quickly, however, that you had to stand clear of *Dot's* hindquarters when you were bringing her in because she was rather flighty and could kick or come backwards very suddenly. Although Chris and Lorna normally wore gumboots, Lloyd much preferred bare feet even though they did get trodden on occasionally.

Working with his father, Lloyd was often in the presence of the horses too, but his experience of being plonked onto the broad back of old *Judy* or *Clipper* while Chris led the horse around was a rather frightening one for him and he did his best to avoid it. What he loved most was to hop on the wooden 'slide' that was pulled by one of the horses to carry the cream cans down to the road. The solid timber sledge slipped smoothly over the grass, tilting from time to time as it crossed larger bumps, scraping noisily on the gravel near the road. It was a child's delight to hang on to a cream can while his Dad shook the reins and clicked the horses into a fast walk.

There is always something happening around animals. Lorna had acquired two more cats at the house and Lloyd was totally fascinated by the first batch of tiny kittens, with closed eyes, feebly mewling in his hands. Chasing the fowls into their shed to roost for the night, putting a broody hen in a large, wire cage to keep it away from the rooster, or on other occasions, watching the chickens hatch and start running around - these

were every bit as important for Lloyd's education as anything that happened at school.

It is remarkable how quickly and naturally children come to appreciate the reality of their situation, including the kinds of deep paradox that affect our thinking and feelings about life and death. Where there is so much life, of course, there is also a constant awareness of death and an involvement in it. Lloyd watched his father chop the heads off the hens when they were required for eating. It was done quickly and without cruelty and did not arouse much emotion. The bull calves that were not required for breeding and could not be sold to anyone else were also killed soon after birth, but Chris usually did this when there was no one else around. Another necessary job that the children were not too keen about was the dehorning of the heifers, done at a certain age so they wouldn't injure one another in the confined space of the yard later on.

The reality of life is often harsh, but such practical necessities do not lessen a farmer's reverence for life; in fact they enhance it. There was an ever-hopeful, positive spirit evident in Chris and Lorna in their attitude to farming and this was the spirit most eagerly taken up by their children. Without dwelling on its fate or future, Lloyd took enormous delight in seeing the birth of a new calf. He was not yet in awe of this extraordinary event; he simply loved to see the spirit of the young thing that was so physically awkward at first and so determined to honour its birthright and get that necessary first drink of its mother's milk.

Somehow Lloyd came to associate the death from bloat of one of their favourite cows, *Maple II*, with the birth of the next crop of calves and this idea was a comfort to him. He might not have framed it in words at that time, but he came to believe that, whenever something dies, something else is coming along to replace it.

When their next-door neighbour, Bob Barnett, died, Lloyd listened in to the adult's conversation. Jimmy Barnett, now a farmer in his own right, attached himself to Chris to some extent for advice and even emotional support, which Chris provided willingly in his rather pensive, but practical way.

"We were sittin' round the table," Jimmy explained "and Dad stood up and said quietly: 'I'm all of a sweat. I think I'm gunna die - I'm just goin' for a walk.' No one really took any notice. I dunno why. We were talkin', I suppose. Anyway, I went out after a while to see if he was down by the river in his boat and there he was, lyin' in the boat, dead. He seemed very peaceful." After a pause, the young man said, "It makes you feel lonely."

Lloyd thought briefly about *Maple II* whose dead body he had seen. That evening during the milking he seemed to take an extra pleasure in walking in amongst the cows, talking to them and patting them. It was good to be doing these things with his father and mother. After milking he fondled his favourite new calf while Chris fed it from a bucket.

Down at the house again he played with Bill and Margaret for a while before going to bed. They couldn't talk much yet, but they made unexpected chatter and seemed very happy after their evening meal. The baby smiled and the chubby boy sat in his nappy and handed you things that he didn't really want you to take. Amongst their aches and pains and feelings of tiredness, Chris and Lorna were touched for a few moments by the sheer joy of their children.

An occasional, but significant connection with the outside world occurred when Lloyd Davies came to visit them. He now lived in Adelaide, but was still an examiner at the Conservatorium in Sydney so he needed to travel there once a year. A couple of times he extended his journey and stayed at the farm for a few days where, amongst other things, he played his violin to the delight of both Lorna and Chris. For Lloyd,

the only uncle that he knew, Lloyd Davies, had an unusual tingle of energy about him that he had not encountered before. Young Lloyd was quite in awe of it and he thought the best word to describe it would probably be ‘musical.’

## ***Chapter 10***

### **Did the Lion get Roy Hallett?**

The years after the war were far less euphoric than everyone had hoped. There was some prosperity, it was true, but there were also many problems. This was exactly the situation at Twin Pines. By the seventh year of their marriage, Chris and Lorna had developed the farm into a very respectable enterprise with some excellent dairy animals. As well as the new barn there were new engines and milking machines and they were clearing more land, but they still had serious concerns about the future. Though not damaged by the war itself like many others had been, they were now hit by the accumulated strain and physical wear and tear of their hard work.

Lorna's appearance was beginning to reflect the rigours of motherhood and farming combined. Somewhat heavier and less shapely, she had replaced some of her city beauty with a practical strength. Khaki shorts, boots and a working shirt were now her regular attire and you don't need any dress sense or makeup on a farm. In a way her relationship was contributing to this because she felt that Chris showed a subtle resentment if she dressed up too nicely to go into town. The work had given her a back problem that became fibrositis so she was often in quite a bit of pain and she also had early signs of rheumatoid arthritis. Just 41 years of age, she had cause to take stock of the physical price she was paying for this life she had chosen. However, she still regarded her problems as minor compared with those of her husband.

Once again Chris had been struck down by his arthritis. He was quite pleased with progress - all the drains had been dug and some of the land that had been swamp was now providing more pasture for his growing herd - but now, for the second time, he had serious doubts about whether he could continue. This time his worry was worse because it was not just one man but a whole family whose livelihood was in jeopardy. On some days he could barely drag himself to the bails each night and morning and could do nothing in between one milking and the next. Being now 58 years old, he wondered if there was any chance of a remission this time. An added problem was an outbreak of Brucellosis or contagious abortion in the cattle that set back his breeding program severely because so many of the best cows lost their calves just a couple of months before they were due to be born.

As a temporary measure they were able to employ a local man to help with some of the work, but the situation was so distressing they had to consider other alternatives. The one they considered most seriously was to sell their precious farm and go to live in New Zealand. This idea was not a passing whim - it developed over a period of time. It was first discussed when Chris's younger sister from New Zealand, Anna, came to stay with them for a while. She was concerned about their situation, but being a very positive and hardworking individual herself, she mostly tried to jolly them along and took Lorna away on a short holiday to brighten her spirits.

The suggestion to move was fuelled by William, Chris's brother, who was planning to retire from the British Admiralty and establish a fishing and holiday lodge on Queen Charlotte Sound in the South Island of New Zealand. His idea was that Chris could run a farm associated with the lodge to grow their food and provide other activities for their paying guests. Chris admired his brother's naval exploits and his imaginative ideas, but he felt that William came from such a different way of life



that was more glamorous and grandiose and also his children were already grown up whereas the Twin Pines family was still very young. William did retire in New Zealand some years later with a house at Mahina Bay and a shack on Queen Charlotte Sound, but the lodge didn't eventuate.

Being with their children at this age was Chris and Lorna's most sustaining joy. Margaret, at 18 months, was a beautiful, healthy and very advanced toddler and Bill, who was now almost three, had become so attached to his Dad that he refused to leave the farm even to go into town with his mother. In a letter to Margar, Chris described Lloyd, who was almost six, as "*a wonderful little mate . . . with a shocking Australian accent - from imitating Keith.*" This was Keith Trow, the man they employed, who lived in a dilapidated cottage just above the old quarry. The question was: would it be better for the children in the long run to make a fresh start again somewhere else?

So it transpired that Lorna took Lloyd and Margaret to Wellington, New Zealand, in 1947 to investigate the opportunities there, while Chris carried on at the farm with Bill who was to be cared for by a very kindly neighbour, Mrs Rose Prior, who lived further along the South Arm Road. Bill actually refused to live with the Priors because he would not leave his father's side, but they kept an eye on him anyway. This trans-Tasman crossing was not as comfortable as it might have been because the regular liner, *Wanganella*, had been holed on Barrett's Reef at the entrance to Wellington Harbour and was under repair and the replacement vessel, *Wahine*, was much smaller and better known as an inter-island ferry. Lloyd's impression of the voyage was of eating ice-cream with a wafer for the first time and being seasick quite often.

They lived at Mahina Bay with the Margar of Chris's letters who was, incidentally, also Lloyd's Godmother. She was Margaret Bogle who had been widowed very early in the war after marrying Gilbert Bogle, an army doctor who was killed in

action. Their daughter, Belinda, was known as Bindy, about whom the *Bindy Bogle Ballads* were written; she was to become Lorna's good friend and regular correspondent for many years after that. It was indeed a beautiful place, but they all missed the farm terribly almost every day. Lloyd was paler than ever and felt very lonely - especially at the modern Muritai School, which he attended with his cousins - and so they returned to Twin Pines after three months away. It is very doubtful whether Chris would ever have left the farm anyway, even if there had been a stronger attraction in New Zealand.

They had to keep going and somehow they did. For Lorna, the trip had provided a new lease of life and she was charged with enthusiasm once again. She hadn't realised how much the farm meant to her until she had been away from it for a while. It was a wonderful feeling to be back in the bails being recognised by the cows, noting their family resemblances again, looking over the whole herd that had now grown to 45 head. When she went to the bails in the dark and the cows were waiting around she could always recognise one or two by their sounds alone. *Brownie* always mooed a reply when Lorna spoke to them in the dark. A most remarkable thing was the way that certain cows, particularly *Lilac* and her daughter, would occasionally come and lick the back of Lorna's neck with a strong, raspy tongue during the milking.

For Chris it was a matter of not giving up - hanging on to the resources he did have and making allowances for those he lacked. Sometimes there is no choice but to accept things and adapt yourself to make the most of the situation and this is what he did. His hips didn't ever improve very much. For the rest of his life there were some days when he couldn't get about at all, but there were also many days when he could. As a farmer he was not finished yet by any means.

Also he had missed his family and was thrilled to have them home. He might not have admitted it, but he now realised he

was a stronger force against the obstacles of life and the challenge of the farm when they were with him. Bill still never left his father's side and that was a great comfort to him. Chris gritted his teeth and threw himself into his work once again.

After tea at night Chris was usually first to bed and quite often the three children would tuck up alongside him for a while and listen as he read aloud or told them stories. They knew their father as a silent man much of the time, but he could be an animated reader of stories and sometimes he chattered away himself at this time of day.

He loved to read them *The Magic Pudding* by Norman Lindsay and perhaps Chris really found more humour than the children did in those delightful characters. The front of the house and the main bedroom looked out on the mighty bloodwood tree that Chris had noticed when he was first looking around the farm and which all the family admired so much. In the giant fork of this tree they imagined they could build a treehouse just like the one that Bunyip Bluegum has to leave at the beginning of the story. Chris also told his children stories about his earlier life - of breaking-in horses, training dogs, rowing, swimming and sailing in races and of riding through the heat and constant danger of the Sinai Desert in the First World War. He had a way of relating these stories that made them come alive in the children's imagination. Some nights they had trouble sleeping after a vivid tale had been planted in their minds.

Lloyd and Bill were now very used to getting about the farm. There were several big floods at that time and they aroused the ire of their parents by going down to the swamp paddocks below the house that were now completely under water and playing in the current and amongst the flood debris - a foolhardy thing to do. Mostly they had many acres of dry land to run around and explore and they did this together. They went down by the river around by the snake-infested lagoon and also right up into the thickest parts of the bush. This is

hard to imagine today, but children do become much more resourceful, of course, when they have this kind of experience.

At times more timber was being taken out of the bush and, as it was now owned by Chris, he spent some time up there himself. On quite a few occasions Lloyd and Bill, aged seven and four, walked the two or three miles across country to carry out some lunch that Lorna had made for him. Once, at the log dump that was a junction of several tracks, they forgot which track they had entered by and set off on another one that led in a completely different direction. Some time later, but before anyone had started to look for them, they appeared hand-in-hand back at the clearing, talking loudly to maintain their courage. The afternoon was closing in and they weren't sure what kind of creatures came out after dark in the bush - they knew that snakes were more likely during the warmest time of the day - but they weren't taking any chances anyway.

The sight of a snake wriggling away is common enough that most farm children have experienced it from the time they started walking around outside their house. Both Bill and Lloyd had often seen their father kill a snake and they knew how to break its back with a stick so it couldn't progress any further even though it could slither around. Perhaps because he was a New Zealander, Chris was very intolerant of snakes.

Margaret was only two so she cramped the boy's style if she came along. Once they left her down beside the river so they could walk to a neighbour's house to return a toy that Lloyd had borrowed. They told her to stay exactly where she was, but it was several miles they had to go, so the sun had gone down and their parents were out looking for all three of them after the milking. They were horrified to find Margaret standing at the edge of the broad, flowing river. She hadn't moved, but she was calling out very loudly. Lloyd and Bill only really became a bit nervous as they were coming back by the paddock next to the lagoon where they knew there were a lot of foxes (the

paddock called Foxes Flat). Here they were singing a song together that Lloyd said would scare away foxes.

One of their favourite exploring places was around the hill above the quarry where Keith Trow had lived, although the quarry itself was one of those extra scary places that children like to talk about rather than actually visit. This was especially true after the news came around the district that a circus lion had escaped from its truck into the bush somewhere nearby. They didn't know where it was supposed to have escaped, but the boys kept a sharp eye out for it anyway. They had been taught by their father to always carry a 'snake stick,' but they doubted it would be effective against a lion. In fact the whole community was concerned about the missing lion and it was the only time that Chris ever had a gun in the house - a .22 rifle borrowed from a neighbour.

The Trows had left that house and it was now occupied by old Roy Hallett and his wife. Roy was well into his seventies, but he still worked for Chris around the farm from time to time. One Sunday morning Roy went out of the house to get some corn for the pigs and when he didn't return his wife walked out to look for him. Suddenly, the Fell boys some distance away heard the most piercing and sustained scream they had ever heard as Mrs Hallett found her husband fallen in his tracks with a fatal heart attack. Lloyd and Bill raced across the paddock and up the hill to the house, still brandishing their sticks and exclaimed in loud, rather frantic voices: "Mum, Dad, I think the lion's got Roy Hallett."

Lorna and Chris were confused for a while, but soon discovered the true situation, quietened the boys and set about consoling Mrs Hallett on the natural demise of her farmer-husband who had died as he would have wished - with his boots on.

Some other local boys said they found a lion's footprint in the quarry after that and Bill and Lloyd stayed a bit closer to the house for a while. This was where the interest was, as it turned out, because a local carpenter, Jack Keating, had been hired to repair the timber decking on top of the large, underground, concrete well that provided drinking water for the house. He was balancing there one day on a beam above the deep water in the well and Bill was torn between going to town with his mother - which he sometimes deigned to do, nowadays - or staying to watch the carpenter at work. He hit on a plan.

He said politely: "Mr Keating, if you're going to fall into the well would you mind waiting until I come back from town."

It was surely more fun on the farm than anywhere else. Lloyd was very pleased to be back at the tiny Tarkeeth School with only one or two kids in each class. His classmate was an aboriginal boy called Brian Kelly and Lloyd enjoyed helping Brian a bit with his book work, which the teacher did not discourage. Walking the two miles each way in bare feet on a rough gravel road produced many painful stonebruises, but it was much sweeter to him than the life in a town in New Zealand. Neither Lloyd nor Bill wore shoes as a general rule except when they were forced to do so for a trip into town or because work boots were required later when they were using an axe or a brush hook.

Chris and Bill made an odd-looking pair as they worked side by side, but they were quite a formidable team. Bill was not skinny like Lloyd and his shorter legs and body gave him a solidity that seemed ideal for the farm work he so loved to be doing with his white-haired, slower-moving father-mate. Margaret was a particularly strong and vigorous young girl who was already showing her independence. She attended to animals and did some of the chores on her own and even dressed herself - except for her shirt buttons, which Bill was sometimes seen to help her with.

Lorna shivered a little as she coaxed the horses out of the Rough Block on a frosty morning, but she felt that nothing else in her life had brought quite so much happiness as this hard work. She did a lot more on her own now, with the horses as well as well as the cows. Harrowing a paddock with *Clipper* and *Tom* in harness was the kind of thing she remembered much later as amongst the most satisfying times of her whole life.

## ***Chapter 11***

### ***Snappy and Spot and the Death of Friends***

The farming community along the South Arm of the river was steadily growing in size. The Church of England even held a service now, once a month in the Tarkeeth Hall, which Lorna attended. After the service Mr Tillman, the minister, sometimes came to visit Chris and Lorna and occasionally he played chess with Chris. He loved to talk about the glamour of faraway places he had seen like New York, Paris or Rome and Chris feared, quite unnecessarily, that this might lure his wife away one day. When he was feeling his own age most wearily the thought would come in the back of his mind that she was 17 years younger than he was and had loved the city lights so she may eventually want to return there. If she did, she never let it show.

On one occasion when Lorna was entertaining Mr Tillman with tea and scones and Chris was working elsewhere on the farm, young Margaret overheard their conversation and announced that her father was an atheist. Lorna must have been embarrassed by this because she scolded Margaret quite severely, which didn't feel good for Margaret. In fact Chris and the family he was born into called themselves Unitarians, which is an off-shoot of the Anglican Church that did away with the Holy Trinity.

Chris spent a bit more time in the house nowadays and the sitting room where the books were kept was a comfortable place for him to sit. His favourite occupation was playing chess.



Mr Tillman was one of a very few people who were ever there to play against him so he joined the Correspondence Chess League of Australia where he could play multiple opponents by mail. Although each game took several months to play this was a great way for people in remote areas to enjoy the game. He had a few days to ponder his next move before sending it off in the mail so he could do a lot of analysis for which you need books of Openings and Endings and Classic Games. By this stage he had taught Lloyd to play and they would go through the books together.

The Fell family attended the Christmas Dance in the Tarkeeth Hall, mainly for the sake of the children who literally 'had a ball.' Mrs Mackie Sonter, like a few of the farmer's wives, could belt out a tune on the piano and the local men spread sawdust slightly dampened with kerosene to make the floor slippery. All the kids loved this and did crazy slides from one side to the other, but they could be cleared away to make room for a surprising number of couples, considering the sparseness of the population, to enjoy the quick step and the fox trot, the pride of Erin and the barn dance - the joy of ballroom dancing. Then there was Santa Claus, of course, and the magic sight of presents under the tree which was a fairly large river oak, because few conifers grew here. The members of the Country's Women's Association were out in the back room making a supper that could have fed three times that number.

There were the Spilletts and the Willetts, quite large families who lived further up past Tarkeeth and the Cordells who lived between Twin Pines and the school. The Sonters on the island across the river further down, the Christians directly across the river from Twin Pines, the Snells, the Bartletts and the Sharps were other families that Chris and Lorna knew, partly because Lorna had become a community spokesperson arguing the case for improved services along the South Arm Road.

She wrote to the Shire Council and even went to Sydney to see government departments with the result that there was now a party line telephone service installed. Each family had to keep their own poles free of tree branches and foliage and you could listen in to anyone else's phone conversation if you wanted to, but they felt like they were joining the modern world.

In all truth the Fell kids were not very socially inclined, particularly Lloyd, who was extremely shy with strangers. They were so involved with everything that happened on the farm they didn't think a great deal about people in the outside world. Their father contributed to this isolation through his belief that many outside influences would not be good for his children. The reading or possession of comic strips of any kind was strictly forbidden. Lloyd remembers a secret furtive look at a Dick Tracy or Dagwood that one of his school mates had shown him. Listening to pop music, or heaven forbid, cowboy songs, on the radio was also outlawed, although there was a time when a weekly ABC program called The Top Ten was allowed for half an hour. Chris and Lorna listened to the news on the ABC most evenings and occasionally there was classical music to be heard also. The children were not allowed to speak during the news broadcast or they would be roused on quite severely.

Lloyd was a very avid reader from long before he started school although some of the books available in the room they called their sitting room were hardly suitable for his age. Lorna found him sitting on the floor by the book case with *The Works of Chaucer* open in front of him. She admonished him saying, "You don't know those words" and he replied, "They have a nice sound." He loved to read aloud if anyone would listen and he coerced Bill from an early age to stay awake while he read. A bit later when he read one of the *Adventures of Biggles* each night and Bill couldn't keep his eyes open, Lloyd was not as understanding as he should have been and kept waking him up.

Lloyd's imagination was appreciated at times. At the Tarkeeth school he started to tell the other children 'serials' in the lunch break such that the story always finished with suspense and they had to wait until the next day to find out what happened. A girl accused him once of just making it up as he went along, which struck him as a bit mean, even if it was true. Lorna told a friend that Bill would say to Lloyd when they went out to the back yard together: "Lloyd, who are we today?" Lloyd also organised a top secret 'smokers club' at the school, managing to get someone to buy a packet of 10 Craven A cigarettes from a shop in Urunga, but Mr O'Hearn saw the smoke rising from the 'lean to' that was the boys' urinal and made them come inside and each smoke a cigarette so quickly they became sick.

The Fell family's most regular companions in fact were animals and by far the most faithful and attentive of these, of course, is 'man's best friend,' the dog. Already, several dogs had come and gone at Twin Pines because the hazards were many and most dogs did not die of old age. One of those was a three-legged bitch whose name is forgotten though she was a hit with the children. Another time they picked up a puppy in the car and, when Lloyd got out to open the Twin Pines gate, the puppy hopped out too, only to be run over before it had even reached its new home.

Chris was very strict with dogs and trained them quite well having previously entered his Huntaways in the world-renowned sheep dog trials in New Zealand. With an unruly Blue Cattle Dog at Twin Pines he once tied up one front leg with a strap to curb its enthusiastic behaviour, but it didn't really solve the problem.

Around this time there were three dogs on the farm. One was Chris's favourite working dog, *Snappy*, a dark brown, pure-bred Kelpie, who was worth as much as two hired men to a partly crippled farmer. Then there was *Spot*, a lively puppy whose breeding was more doubtful, but mainly Blue Cattle Dog. He

was showing promise as a snake dog, but not as a good worker with the stock. The farm dogs were usually one or the other. The obedient, intelligent workers were the more highly prized, of course, but the unruly snake dogs were also valued and were often very faithful companions.

The three children, when they were eight, five and three - and a bit older - adored the company of a puppy like *Spot* as they went about their business of the farm. They would sometimes take lunch out to the back of the farm to someone who was working there. Visitors like Mr Tillman were appalled at the thought of them going so far away on their own at this age, but they felt quite secure with a snake stick and a puppy and they usually maintained a good sense of direction - except for the afternoon that Lloyd and Bill did get lost near the log loading ramp in the bush.

Although snakes were commonly seen they were always doing their best to keep out of the way. But the children and puppies had other ideas. *Spot* would sniff every log and crevice until he discovered a snake and then bark frantically to try to get it out. If it was wise and secure enough it would stay put, but if it didn't any one of the children was capable of breaking its back with a stick.

Where others might have left the snakes alone, Chris seemed to have a great urge to kill the poisonous ones and rarely did he miss an opportunity. On one occasion he pulled a red-bellied, black snake by hand out of its hiding place in an old log bridge while calling to Lloyd beside him to kill it. Another time he kicked at a black snake repeatedly to keep it from getting into the creek where it was heading while Bill hurried up with the necessary stick. The stories he had heard of people grabbing a snake by the tail and cracking its head off, as you would crack a stockwhip, appealed to him, but he never actually tried it. Perhaps he killed them because the snakes sometimes

caused the deaths of cattle or dogs or perhaps he just relished the risks involved in the sport.

The Fell children took on their father's attitude towards all venomous snakes. They were taught never to harm the non-venomous carpet snake and grass snakes, however. It's a paradox that the love and respect of some living things on a farm goes hand in hand with the killing of others. The dogs also chased after foxes, which were certainly a threat to the fowls on the farm, but the foxes were always too clever to be caught. Some dogs chased wallabies, which were plentiful here, but this was never encouraged and except in the case of one beaglehound, which they only had for a little while, it was never successful, either.

The beaglehound was noted for its terrible howling on the Pine Tree Hill, especially when the moon was full. It sounds like the stuff of fantasy stories or myths, but at Twin Pines there really was a dog that howled at the moon. Otherwise, when howling was heard it would not be dogs, but dingoes, which were plentiful in this part of the bush. In fact, the beaglehound was one of their victims in the end. Another black and tan dog called *Bonny* that Chris had with him earlier had been terribly mauled by dingoes and eventually limped home to die under the front steps of the house.

Very rarely were cattle attacked by dingoes, even by a large pack. On one memorable occasion Chris and Lorna rushed up to the paddock near the bails in the middle of the night after hearing a commotion amongst the cows. They were just in time to see several dingoes fleeing before a solid wall of angry cows formed up like a rugby scrum about to maul their opposition. They also witnessed the spellbinding sight of a large, red dingo, presumably the pack leader, sitting right inside the cowbails with its head raised, howling its defiance to the world. Of course, nature abounds with aggressive instincts such as this and the killing that goes with it. It is a part of life.

The third dog at that time was a black bitch that had wandered onto the farm in a very pregnant state - or what the locals would call 'heavily in pup.' When the pups were born under the house they were spotted yellow and black - unmistakably dingo pups. They were disposed of like other unwanted small animals - put in a bag with heavy rocks and thrown into the river. There always seemed to be more dingo calls in the night during wet weather and this was a very wet period.

In fact the good rain after a long dry spell, combined with Chris's long hours of manure spreading and the improved pasture species he had sown, contributed to tremendous grass growth at this time. Lime was one of the fertilizers required for the swampy, acid soils on the flats and there were contractors with large trucks who came to the farm several times to spray out the heavy white powder from a rotating disc at the truck's rear end, covering a large area much more quickly than could be done with the steel-wheeled manure spreader that Chris had purchased to celebrate Lloyd's birth.

Milk production was up; in fact the butterfat production was now being measured by the government herd testers so the figures could be compared with other farms and the Fells were amongst the best in the district, even close to matching the Beaumont's herd at Dorrigo that was regarded as top-notch. The Beaumonts were one of the first to introduce the Friesian breed of cattle into dairying on the north coast; nowadays that is the predominant breed everywhere.

When there is an abundance of good pasture available to cows in the period before they give birth to their calves another kind of serious metabolic problem can occur that is life-threatening. As the cows were calving that spring quite a few were going down with acute milk fever. Unfortunately it is the highest milk producers that are at the greatest risk. There is a simple treatment for this, nowadays, but then there was none. Believing the disease to be associated with a low calcium level

in the cow's blood (as she suddenly starts making a large quantity of milk), some farmers would pump air into the cow's teats with a bicycle pump to try to force calcium back into the blood. This was not very scientific, did little good and often caused permanent damage to the udder, but in a desperate situation they felt they had to try anything.

Even before she calved, Chris sensed that *Mariposa* would get milk fever. Every member of the family knew as soon as she calved that things were not right. The calf was fine, but their top-producing cow had collapsed with a high fever and laboured breathing and it was a very distressing sight. She went down right by the house, even managing to stagger a few steps into the back yard when Chris coaxed her. Chris pumped up her teats and tied them with string. There was nothing else to do but wait and they took turns to watch her until night fell.

The children were given optimistic assurances when they went to bed, but Chris was not prepared to leave the cow's side. After many hours - he had no idea how long it was - Chris went to ask Lorna if there was some brandy in the house. As it turned out there was, but it was no ordinary bottle of brandy. They didn't keep alcoholic liquor in the house, apart from cooking sherry, but a small bottle of French brandy had been passed on to Lorna by her mother to keep until it was 100 years old. It had tiny, spidery, French writing all over the label and was made in 1859. In another 10 years it would have been a hundred, but she handed it to Chris without any discussion and he poured it down the cow's throat. True stories are indeed often stranger than fiction.

Chris preferred to give the cow the brandy than drink it himself, but he surely knew it was in vain. *Mariposa* died just before daybreak, her classical, dished, Jersey face lying across his legs. When he realised she had gone Chris's hips were so stiff with cold he couldn't get up for some time. He watched

the sunrise bringing warmth back into the world and on this occasion there were a few tears in his eyes.

Shortly after this two of the horses lost their lives in quick succession. *Royal Chief* probably died of old age or it could have been snakebite - they were not really sure. Lorna was horrified when Chris cooked up some of his flesh in a drum, but it was to supplement the pig's diet, not their own, she soon realised. *Punch* was a young horse just approaching his prime and it was a shock to everyone when the children discovered he had been killed by a dead tree falling on him after it was struck by lightning in a storm. They had heard the extra loud thunderclap during the night and guessed that a tree had been struck - this was not uncommon - but it was a bitter blow to find that a valued and much-liked horse had been unfortunate enough to be standing underneath that tree.

This was a bad omen, but it still did not prepare the Fell family for the shock of what was to happen next. Chris was away out in the bush when the news came to Lorna and she had to row herself across the river in a state of alarm to try to help her neighbour - although there was nothing she could do except console a distraught widow.

She had known Dave Gossip since the first time she came up to the farm and she also knew he had been deeply troubled by the prolonged wet weather because his farm was almost entirely flat and low-lying and the waterlogged pastures and washed-out crops were costing him dearly. He thought that his Bank Manager and creditors were losing their patience and the incessant heavy rain tipped his mind over the edge.

Dave didn't own a gun, but a young family friend who had been staying with them had left behind a .22 rifle - not an uncommon item on a farm for putting down sick animals and shooting predators - and the struggling farmer used it to end his own life. Suicide amongst farmers is unfortunately all too common



because it is a constant battle with and against the elements and it's easy to forget that life is a journey, not a destination.

Chris and Lorna were deeply upset at this sudden, unexpected death in their midst; their neighbour had been very close to them in a way that city neighbours might not ever be. Their daily work was subdued for a while and the three children naturally felt it too - the sadness that accompanies the death of someone with whom your spirit has been close.

One of the strengths of a close family, especially living away from town with fewer people about, is that the children's spirits often lead the way. They don't dwell on the past - they live in the present and are always excited about what might happen next. The Fell children helped their parents to get on with life in a positive way. Nothing can be put on hold for very long on a farm. The demands of nature are more often in the 'urgent' tray than in the 'matters pending' or the 'too hard basket.'

The facilities around the cow bails were upgraded including a more efficient water cooling system to cool the milk before it went into the vat and some new machinery. They replaced the old milking machine with an Alfa Laval 3-stand unit that was very reliable and lasted for many years.

There were more improvements made around the house at this time, too. Lorna planted hydrangeas by the side gate and the steps from the verandah. They had a carport built right beside and under the mangrove tree just outside the back yard because they were able to purchase a shiny, black Vauxhall Velox sedan - a British-made car that was popular in Australia in the early 1950's. They did not part with the old Buick, however, even though it now looked like a vintage car.

The carport roof made it even easier for the children to climb in the mangrove tree.

## ***Chapter 12***

### **A Haggie of Herd Testers**

Children raised in the country fall behind those in the city in several ways: they don't know the latest movies or pop sayings and buzz words and they don't learn about train and bus timetables and the way to rendezvous in a certain spot nestled within large buildings in a maze of busy streets. But there is a very different sense of responsibility they develop that is much broader than is available to city kids. It stems from a sense of ownership of their land, animals, waterways, even sky - their whole environment - whereas in town you might have just a room that you call your own or at most a house and a yard and everything else around you is the responsibility of the community or someone other than you.

The family discussion at mealtimes on a farm includes talk about when it will rain and the need to get this paddock ready or those animals relocated and when cows will calve or be ready for breeding. It's a broader, more strategic view where the need for planning and good timing - appreciating the bigger picture - is built in to your way of thinking. The conversation is about the way your own efforts are part of the dynamics of nature rather than the social needs of a large population such as timetables for public transport. The daily routine and the seasonal changes are so obviously dictated by nature that they are less flexible, but also more easily accepted. Whereas the city child has probably heard more about and had more experience

of business and political machinations, the farm kids' naiveté is also a strength, even though they may lack some social skills.

Town kids have much greater access to organised sport, parties and group outings, but they seem to suffer from boredom more often because there is 'nothing to do.' There are probably a few more chores to do on a farm like feeding animals, shutting the fowlshed, bringing in firewood and so on, but there is still spare time for play. Lloyd and Bill built roads in the dirt under the house for their toy trucks and cars. They didn't have a lot of toys so they had to use their imagination.

The work seemed like fun a lot of the time. From an early age the Fell children learned to dart quickly in front of each cow to fill the feedbox with a tin full of feed and get out of the way before getting trapped there. The feed was mainly crushed wheat with a little bran and pollard and some Meggitt's linseed meal that the kids loved to taste for themselves. Another tricky job they did was to tie a legrope around the near back leg of some cows as soon as they came into the bails.

The rush of the children growing up now provided much of the life energy of the Twin Pines family. By the early 1950's Chris was into his sixties and so accustomed to being partly crippled that he had developed special ways of doing most farm jobs. His methods were laborious and slow, but often ingenious, being born out of the difficulties his disability created.

"When you grow up, you won't do things this way," Chris would say to Lloyd and Bill. "You'll be strong and fit enough to throw the milk cans onto the trailer instead of rolling them up this ramp like I do. Jobs that take me hours you'll be able to do in a few minutes, so don't copy this old man's funny ways." But, of course, they did copy his ways to the letter - for quite some time anyway.

A real advantage of Chris's simple methods for handling heavy objects or moving large quantities a little at a time or controlling stock from a distance so you didn't have to move was that they also made it possible for young children to do quite a lot of the work of an adult. Thus it was a fortuitous combination between a partly disabled man and his physically immature helpers. A fully fit father may not have combined with his kids so successfully.

The skills they learned were part of the fun of this farm work. Like most farmers the Fells now supplied whole milk to the dairy factory rather than cream and the milk cans were quite a bit bigger than the cream cans had been. The kids couldn't lift them, but they could roll them with finesse up a wooden ramp onto the trailer for carting down to the road where they were collected. Anyone who has worked with large cans knows that it's something of a sport to show how well you can roll them along.

To the parents there is a sense of time flying as the children make their way through school. All three of the Fell children were now at Tarkeeth School so they made up nearly a quarter of the school's population. Margaret had been railroaded into school at the age of four for the same reason that Lloyd had been - so the school didn't close.

The younger children were now picked up and taken to school by Mackie Sonter in his Morris Oxford ute. Mackie had an incredibly infectious, unmistakeable laugh that complemented his outgoing and generous nature. Every year he brought water melons that he had grown to the school and gave one to each family.

Lloyd and Bill mostly joined other kids straggling along the gravel road on school days, stopping here or there to look at a boat or a crab net by the river, exchanging scary stories about the quarry or a snake they had seen or just dreaming and

throwing a few stones. In the springtime, ducking the dive-bombing magpies was a regular, and quite serious, pre-occupation on the way to school. Those birds' aggressive attacks to protect their nests can inflict damage around your eyes, neck or head if you don't see them coming.

Having children at school not only stimulates their parent's efforts - it also broadens the family's social life and Chris and Lorna were now meeting new families through their kids. Margaret had made friends with Margaret Upton so the Uptons and the Fells became acquainted. Margaret Upton was a year older, but they were very similar otherwise - both rather stocky 'tomboys' from their farm experience and full of vitality and vigour. Bill and Clare Upton were a good deal younger than Chris and Lorna and newer to farming; both families were happy that their daughters were friends.

Family outings to a neighbour like the Uptons were not frequent, however, and the two Margarets had not yet started adventuring on their own. Neither Lloyd nor Bill had such a close friend, because of shyness in the one case and devotion to Dad's farm in the other. The two brothers played together very often in between the regular chores they were required to do. Despite their relative isolation - or perhaps because of it - their games were remarkably rich and diverse.

Sport and adventure were the general themes of their play. They listened to major sporting events such as the Davis Cup tennis, Rugby League test matches and, most of all, the cricket on the big wooden wireless set with its large, wet-cell batteries and then, like most boys, they set out to emulate their various heroes in a make-believe Test Match for two. Imaginatively, they could each represent a dozen different players, changing styles from one to the other as the occasion demanded. Especially in cricket, which they played in the back yard with one leg of the new tankstand for a wicket, they could spin out a test series - England against Australia - with as much suspense

and as many inconclusive endings as the real thing. Bradman had just retired, but Neil Harvey, Ray Lindwall and Keith Miller were in their heyday. Two boys who had never seen a ball bowled or a stroke played 'knew' their hero's every thought from what they had heard on the radio.

Their adventure games could be long drawn-out affairs, too, with as much role playing and simulation as the computer games of today. Often their work was a part of their play. Racing around the cowshed to do certain jobs, balancing on fences while getting cows in, hiding in the bush, were all part of their fun. Chris, who was never happier than with his kids out on the farm, added his own brand of humour to their play. He told them the fog in the valleys during the morning milking was smoke from Aboriginal camp fires and he dared them to go and check.

The Twin Flats down from Tallowood Hill were being cleared and Chris was blowing stumps with gelignite again. He would tell Margaret and the boys they must get away within three seconds of his lighting the fuse, but they would watch with hearts in their mouths as he seemed to be stuck in the hole unable to scramble to safety. He always limped away just in time.

Many of their fears were natural childhood ones, but some were definitely products of his teasing and led to more amusement than distress. One of these which persisted was the threat of being earmarked and tattooed like the calves. The earmarker makes a serrated pattern of small holes in the ear that identifies the animal for life. When the herd tester came with his implements it was the children who could identify the new calves most accurately so they had to be part of the operation. Chris told them that, one day, they would have to be done too in case they ever got lost in the big wide world. The moment the last calf had been caught and while the herd tester and Chris were still busy, the children always vanished

surprisingly quickly and could not be found anywhere until after the herd tester's car had left. Margaret and Bill used to hide in the bathroom and put a large tin full of honey up against the door.

The government herd tester who came every month to record one evening and one morning milking was accorded VIP status by the Fell family. Chris and Lorna were always impatient to know the results. They made bets with each other about which cow would be the top producer this month and always hoped that the herd average would be just a little better than the last time. To the children, this man with his equipment and his stories and his rather official manner was a symbol of the outside world. Few visitors came to the farm and nobody except the herd tester stayed overnight in their house. He always knew the district gossip and what was happening on other people's farms and could often expound on world affairs as well. The children competed with one another to tell him the names of the cows and their details that he needed to write in his book.

Some herd testers continued for years, but at this time there were several different chaps in quick succession. Jack Cleary was a yarn-spinning, large, grinning man who usually let one of the kids turn the handle of his centrifuge once he got it up to the right speed. This was the Babcock testing equipment that he used to determine the butterfat content of the milk from each cow. The man before him, Ian Neville, had been very different - thin and taciturn - and the children simply watched him in awe. Then there were two brothers in turn, Reg and Colin Thompson; the latter would usually play chess with Chris in the evening. Reg Thompson returned to be the regular herd tester for a long stretch after that and even worked for Chris on his weekends sometimes. He would say to the children: "well laddie . . ." with a Scottish accent that intrigued them no end.

When a man called Mr Seymour came as a relieving herd tester he chose to take a nap in his car rather than come in to the house for a rest after the morning milking. Bill and Margaret noticed him and came straight to the kitchen to announce solemnly to their parents that the herd tester was dead; his prostrate body could be seen through the car window.

Learning was the children's major occupation though they didn't realise it at the time. Like children everywhere they were learning from practical experience and there are some learning opportunities on a farm that a formal education could never provide. The children have a direct physical relationship with the world around them and must often improvise. Learning the ways of animals, for example, comes very quickly through necessity. Margaret was lucky not to be killed when *Devil*, a large black cow just separated from her calf, pinned the child underneath the bottom rail of a fence and battered her severely. There were many dangers, but Chris did not believe in protecting the children unnecessarily.

He taught them skills with an axe and a brush hook and also some of his considerable skills with knots. The bowline, especially, he made them practice over and over again. The absolute necessity to tie a reef knot that didn't slip instead of a granny knot that did was something the children learned, but Lorna could never remember, which exasperated Chris at times.

When they were working with the cows or any animals, Chris would tolerate no timidity or nervousness from the children, absolutely insisting that they stand their ground and show the animal who was boss. This way of handling animals minimises stress for both the handler and the animal, but it requires the ability to control one's own fear. On one occasion Margaret was roused on severely for moving slightly to one side instead of standing her ground. Once a cow that is highly motivated to be somewhere else senses that slight movement she will charge



for that weak spot in the defences. Margaret's excuse that a snake had been crawling towards her on the side from which she edged away was perfectly true, but not really acceptable once the cow had got away to the other end of the paddock.

Chris's way of working with draught horses that he would have loved to share with his children was sadly coming to an end. The general trend towards mechanisation plus Chris's failing legs combined to herald in the age of the tractor at Twin Pines. This was to become a big part of the children's lives as well, particularly for Bill and Lloyd.

The arrival of the first tractor at Twin Pines brought great excitement. It was a fairly new Oliver 3 Cletrac (a crawler tractor) and, despite Chris's many years of dedication to the faithful horses, it became his pride and joy. Tractors that run on tracks instead of wheels behave differently and Chris seemed to defy the laws of gravity at times when he drove the Cletrac up the side of a steep drain so that the front half of its track was in mid-air and yet it hadn't toppled backwards. Lloyd and Lorna screamed out together on one occasion when they were watching and they thought the tractor would capsize.



Chris and the Cletrac tractor

Chris built a trailer with steel wheels that was always called the 'bobtail' trailer for some unknown reason. Because he needed to ride on the trailer to put things on and off it he put Lloyd at nine years old in the driver's seat - an arrangement that Lorna and the neighbours thought unwise to say the least. Lloyd had quite long legs, but they could not reach down from the seat to depress the clutch unless he climbed partly out of the seat. To reach the footbrake on the other side he had to climb across the other way.

The problem was that the two turning levers that stop one track or the other depending on whether you want to go to the right or the left are situated between your legs as you sit in the seat. This was why Lloyd managed on one occasion to mow down a length of paling fence near the cowbails while trying to turn the tractor to get through the gate. Chris wasn't too concerned about the damage, putting it down to useful experience.

The tractor and trailer could be used to take the milk cans to the road, but another means of transport had now become far more popular with Chris and the children. It was the old Buick car, the cab stripped down from the top, the seats removed except for the driver's and the doors off so the cans could be loaded from the side.

By that time it had no brakes whatsoever so the trip down the hill to the road was quite a rapid one with no obvious means of stopping at the bottom. One of the children had to ride on the running board and jump off in time to get the gate open before the car went sailing through and then it was left to chance that no vehicle would be coming along the little-used road at that time. After running up the road towards the 'little hill' the car would come to a halt and could be reversed a short distance to unload the cans.

They had erected a new milk stand there of which they were justifiably proud. Its very smart wooden sign read C W R Fell.

Jack Keating had built it with a sloping roof and wooden louver windows and the Fell children believed it was the best-looking milk stand in the district. They had seen quite a few others because they were occasionally given the great treat of travelling down to the factory on a Sunday morning in the milk carter's large covered truck.

What an outing that was! Their farm was one of the furthest away from the factory so the truck gradually filled up with cans as they travelled and the farms and houses became more modern as they approached the town. The milk carters themselves, like the herd testers, were shining lights of civilisation to three children living on an isolated farm. There was Ross Saggus and his brother, Noel, who always drove a Bedford truck, a chap called 'Blinker' White in an Austin for a while and also Errol Cooper, but the Daddy of them all was old Frank Hanley in his big red Ford. He talked so slowly, always complaining about the surface of the roads, that these children thought him one of the wisest men they had ever met. He was always very caring in his attitude towards them.

Down at the milk stand waiting for the truck, Chris sometimes liked to chat with Bill and philosophise about life. They shared an understanding of farming that people are born with rather than taught. Their work finished for that moment, they were in no hurry to go up to the house. After dark Chris taught Bill and Lloyd the names of constellations in the sky and the stars that were most important for navigation. He would say: "the night has a thousand eyes, and the day but one; yet all the light of the stars cannot equal that of the sun," the first line of which is from a 19<sup>th</sup> century British poem.

Margaret and Lorna together in the cowshed were a remarkable combination also. Both vigorous and busy workers, still they didn't seem to hurry and they had an extraordinary rapport with the cows as they moved amongst them. A reasonably large woman and a quite small girl enjoying the complete

cooperation of a herd of ever-hungry, but apparently contented cows. Chris and the boys, too, seemed to treat the milking as a leisurely pastime, chatting about sport or animals or something else and taking in the morning sunshine or the evening breeze with equal satisfaction.

After milking - and at other times - Lloyd was often to be found on his own amongst the branches of the backyard mangrove tree. Where the lower branches forked there were hollows you could sit in with your back supported and your legs wrapped around the branch. He was always happy there, dreaming of something or someone, often humming or singing a vague tune that came into his head - connected, perhaps, with the spirit of this place.

## ***Chapter 13***

### **Kruschen's in Your Tea**

Along the side verandah there was a well-established wisteria vine that had become part of the house. It created a screen from the sun when in leaf and a thick mass of glorious mauve blossom for a short while in the spring. The family used to tie their Christmas presents to it each year instead of setting up a Christmas tree.



Side verandah with wisteria in bloom

There were beds on the verandah that often had large mosquito nets attached. Except in the winter, this was the favourite place for Lloyd and Bill to sleep; in later years, for Margaret too. It was here they were awakened each morning at first light by the sound of their father heating water on the stove to make the day's first cup of tea. Bill reckoned he would stir when he heard

the first kookaburra call and then his Dad would call him to get up straight after the second kookaburra call.

They had black tea early in the morning because the billy of milk had not yet been carried down from the morning milking. Even though they now had a kerosene refrigerator to replace the ice chest, it was still a challenge to keep perishable foods fresh. Anyway, they preferred the milk - unpasteurised, of course - to be straight from the cow that day.

Chris had a ritual that he insisted the children followed too. He added a spoonful of Kruschen's Salts to each cup of tea saying this would make them strong and healthy and keep away arthritis. Kruschen's are still touted today as a treatment for joint and muscle pain and an alkalising tonic and they were sufficiently important in those days that a jar from 1951 is on display at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. They contain magnesium and sodium salts with citric acid and potassium iodate and were probably a useful source of iodine at that time. And most important Chris felt, they were supposed to keep your bowels working regularly - though this did not seem to be the case for any of us.

Chris had some other habits that were practical, but brought disapproval from his wife. He would pour the first of his hot black tea into the saucer where it would cool more quickly and then he would drink it from there. Lorna also deplored the fact that the kids acquired his habit of dunking Arrowroot biscuits in his tea before putting them into his mouth.

It was Lloyd's final year of primary school at Tarkeeth and some mornings he was not up at the cowbails and he listened to the morning news from the ABC on the radio. One morning in February, 1952, he realised that something was terribly wrong. All normal programs were suspended and replaced by church music interspersed by a very solemn announcement. The gravity of the situation overwhelmed him. He ran as fast

as he could up to Chris and Lorna in the cowbails and announced breathlessly: "something terrible has happened. The most terrible thing . . ." He couldn't seem to get it out, so choked up with the importance of what he was going to tell them.

"For God's sake, what is it?" they demanded.

"The King is dead." He spoke slowly and gravely as he had heard it announced on the radio.

At that moment a cow kicked off the teatcups and required immediate attention and Chris turned away to release the cow he was milking through its bail door. They resumed their work in such a matter-of-fact way that Lloyd felt quite awkward. He gave them a few other details and they said that the King had been ill for some time and that young Princess Elizabeth would now become the Queen. And to hurry up and get ready for school.

The Royal family figured quite prominently in Australian life in those days. Before movies were shown or any show in the theatre began everybody stood and sang God Save the King, which was our national anthem. Every formal gathering such as a civic reception or school assembly was preceded by the singing of the anthem. Australians followed the newspaper stories of the much-loved King George the Sixth with as much interest as Test cricket or any local news. He was indeed a hero for the people in a way that would be hard to understand today. Thousands of Australians and New Zealanders had fought on behalf of their 'motherland' and many had died for that cause.

We were very much part of the British Empire. Even though Guy Fawkes Day was at a different time in England, Australians had their big day for fireworks on Empire Day each year. Neighbours would get together with their families and let off 'crackers' as soon as it got dark. The Fell children had attended a few of these events, but none that compared with

the one held in their own front paddock to celebrate the Queen's coronation in 1952.

For weeks beforehand Chris and Jimmy Barnett had been building a giant bonfire and there were more people at Twin Pines that night than on any other occasion, before or since. There were beer bottles, but nothing excessive and so much soft drink and so many cakes that the children were very impressed by the importance of this occasion. There were double bangers, tom thumbs, sky rockets, Roman candles and Mt Vesuvius fire spouts as well. Fireworks were not illegal then, but the more dangerous ones were frowned upon by parents because there were often minor injuries reported in the press after 'cracker night.' When Ned Barnett, Jimmy's rather mischievous brother, set off a surprise gelignite explosion in the ground nearby it capped off a wonderful evening.

This event happened partly due to Lorna's work campaigning for improved services in community. She did handouts for the Country Party and was instrumental in getting facilities for the school and the hall and, eventually, the tar sealing of the road. To raise money she held card evenings at the house where people came and played euchre in the sitting room. It's fair to say that Chris did not like these events at all - there was an argument about it one night. Sometimes he went into Bellingen on that night to play chess with Dr Wolfe, the dentist.

Chris and Lloyd solved the chess problems in the Sydney Morning Herald some weeks and had won a prize once or twice leading Chris to believe that Lloyd had some ability at chess. One night they both went to Bellingen and Lloyd played against Dr Wolfe who had supposedly been the NSW Junior Champion many years before. Lloyd played well enough to gain an advantage, but knew little about endgame strategy so it's likely that Dr Wolfe let him win the game in the end. In any case Chris was very proud.



As Lloyd was almost ready for High School there was a serious discussion about where he would go as a boarder, there being no High School in Bellingen. Lorna investigated some Sydney schools, but they were far too expensive. Reg O'Hearn, the teacher at Tarkeeth, suggested that Lloyd should sit the entrance exam to go to Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School at Nemingha near Tamworth because he thought he could win a bursary to help cover expenses and, to his parents' relief, that did come to pass.

But that wasn't what Lloyd was feeling so excited about. He and Bill had been promised a pushbike - brand new - and they had been talking for a few weeks about which was the best, the Speedwell or the Malvern Star. In the end it was a shiny, blue Speedwell that Lloyd picked out and Bill went for the Speedwell also. They came from Fred Spinks' bicycle shop in Urunga. Even though the road had potholes and was stony the boys clocked up many miles on those bikes.

The children knew the shops much better now. Also in Urunga was the general store run by Stan Morris and the little cafe where Lloyd felt a bit guilty because he had arranged that one illegal purchase of cigarettes some time before. In Bellingen there was Halpins' store and the very impressive Hammond and Wheatleys. It was the biggest shop any of them had ever seen with two floors of merchandise and an amazing catapult thing that flew a small metal cylinder with the sale docket inside along a wire to another place in the shop where they were collected by somebody else. Sometimes another bit of paper came flying back on the wire to the serving counter, much to the delight of customers like the Fell boys.

There was also Bunch's chemist and the boys became quite good friends with young Peter Bunch and Geoff Bunch; in fact the Bunch boys came out to the farm on weekends sometimes and helped with jobs or played games. Lorna had a good friend, Dorothy Spencer, who lived on the main road towards Coff's

Harbour and her son was very nerdy and was always scratching around looking for bugs and beetles when they came to the farm, which didn't impress the Fell kids much.

Occasionally Lloyd and Bill went into Bellingham without their parents. This was achieved by hitching a lift on a very old, T-model Ford truck that took the back road through Brierfield to collect mail and goods for the most outlying farms. It was called the 'red terror' because its driver had little regard for anyone coming in the opposite direction. The road was very narrow, very rough and very windy and Bill and Lloyd rode on the tray at the back with the goods. They usually had a third party with them who spent the day in Bellingham at the Federal Hotel and was much more inebriated on the way back than he had been on the way in to town.

There was another event that year in the outside world that captivated Chris's attention by taking his mind back to blue water sailing. Two of his nephews in New Zealand, Kit and Dooley Wilson, had built an ocean-going yacht called *Leda* and entered it in the Trans-Tasman race from Auckland to Sydney. The most favoured yachts were *Tara* from Auckland and *Solveig* from Sydney, the latter designed and built by the acclaimed Halvorsen brothers who also raced *Peer Gynt* - as their Norwegian pedigree would suggest. There was much press coverage especially when the passenger plane between Sydney and Auckland - a Sunderland flying boat - took the trouble to drop a tin opener (and some newspapers) down to the crew of *Leda* after it was reported they had left theirs at home. The finish was very close with *Leda* just beating the bigger yacht, *Tara*, for line honours and *Solveig* declared the winner on handicap.

Chris was so excited he caught the train to Sydney to meet the sailors the next day. One consequence of this was that two of the best cows ever bred at Twin Pines were called *Leda* and *Solveig*. *Leda* was unusually tall and silver-grey and having

avoided dehorning somehow she was a perfect specimen of a Jersey cow. *Solveig* was dark brown, of a stockier build, and was one of the top milk producers for many years. Those cows were admired and loved as much as you could imagine any animal being appreciated by a human.

Despite the arduous nature of the struggle, Chris and Lorna could see that many of their hopes and dreams were coming to fruition. They had a very respectable Jersey herd that any studmaster would look upon proudly and their butterfat production was consistently one of the highest in the district. Furthermore the three children had become an integral part of the whole farming operation.

Their new tractor - from Ron Huegill's garage in Belling - was a mark of this success. It was a Ferguson TEA 20, the little, grey, wheeled tractor that in recent years had taken the farming world by storm. Harry Ferguson designed the tractor in England after the War and though it was ideal for farming conditions there (TE stood for Tractor England) its Australian model also became the most popular tractor in this country throughout the 1950's. It was light and extremely versatile with a new kind of three-point linkage that enabled its implements to be connected easily and raised and lowered hydraulically. With the 'Fergie' - as it was known everywhere - the age of mechanisation at Twin Pines made giant strides.

Lloyd was ten and Bill was seven when they began driving this tractor on a daily basis. They could now hook up implements with ease - to go from a ploughing job to a mowing job for instance - and their role in paddock work was to increase exponentially over the next few years.

In saying this we should not minimise the serious risks associated with working with farm machinery. Current figures show that more than 1000 people are hospitalised after farm accidents in Australia every year and there are around 50

fatalities. More accidents occur with tractors than with any other activity and there is a disproportionate number of older farmers (over 65) who die this way.



Lloyd Bill and Margaret and the Ferguson tractor

The three Fell children can recall enough narrow escapes to fill a whole Chapter of this book, but that is not required. Riding on the mudguard of the Fergie, both Bill and Marg slipped off in front of the large rear wheels, but due to quick thinking, did not get run over. Bill fell off the flat tray of the manure spreader, landing on his back, and Lloyd watched as he quickly lifted his legs just before the large steel wheel could roll over them. Lloyd accidentally drove forward while Bill was standing on some harrows that were attached and he escaped with only minor leg injuries. Bill started a rotary mower while Lloyd was bending over it and the swing-out blade nicked him just above the eyebrow on the first revolution.

One of the most dramatic involved the old Cletrac tractor and the bobtail trailer, which had steel uprights on each front corner that were nearly as tall as Lloyd. It was hooked onto the Cletrac while still inside the machinery shed alongside the barn. Chris drove the tractor off as Lloyd - a bit dreamy as he often was - leaned his head across the top of one of these posts. There was not enough clearance beneath the framework of the shed for his head to fit through so it jammed on both sides. The Cletrac had a swinging drawbar and when the trailer was attached this was supposed to be fixed in the centre position

by a bolt. On this day that hadn't been done so when Lloyd's head jammed the drawbar swung aside releasing him for a moment and he fell onto the trailer, dazed, but still conscious. If the drawbar had been fixed in position this book may never have been written.

These incidents aside, life at Twin Pines was usually quite peaceful and the five 'farmers' experienced many simple pleasures. The garden at the house had been developed with climbing beans and peas, lettuce and tomatoes at times, and very sweet peaches from the now mature trees. It also grew excellent rhubarb that, in the stewed form, was a favourite dessert, together with the double-whipped ice cream that Lorna used to make quite often. There was even a persimmon tree with fruit that Lorna said was a bit of an acquired taste and several trees producing mandarins that had so many seeds that eating them tried the patience even the hungriest child.

A new woodbox had been built to go with the new stove. You could fill it from the outside and obtain wood for the stove from the inside. Everyone took pride in the firewood at Twin Pines. The forest oak poles were snigged in from the bush by tractor and sawn into the right lengths on a new circular sawbench driven by a belt from the power-take-off on the tractor. They were left to dry out and then they were a joy to split with the axe, throw into the wheelbarrow and tumble into the woodbox.

There is enormous satisfaction in doing a job well. Despite the hard work involved this life it seemed to agree with all the Fells and they each felt, in his or her own way, that they would rather be here, now, than anywhere else in the world.

## ***Chapter 14***

### ***Snowball, Sunshine and the Keyline Plan***

*Snowball* was an ageing, piebald pony that the Fells bought from Max Joseph who lived half way to Bellinghen. He was the first of several horses that Bill and Margaret owned and rode with enormous pleasure and satisfaction over the next few years. The draught horses had gone, entirely replaced by the Ferguson tractor, but the importance of horses to the family had only entered a new phase. Chris's experience and ability to manage the welfare of horses - feed them properly, groom them and shoe them himself - and his knowledge of bridles, saddles and other bits of harness were a boon in the lives of the two younger children.

It was a fairly happy coincidence that Lloyd had gone away to the boarding school near Tamworth (Farrer) because his earlier experience with horses had not been happy, even though he had a good rapport with other farm animals. The only riding he ever did was that required as practical training for his later university studies. From 1953 until 1957, when Bill was to join him at the boarding school, Lloyd's actual presence at Twin Pines was confined to the 10 weeks of school holidays each year. But the truth is his heart remained firmly attached to the farm the whole time; he yearned for the holidays to come around and spent almost every minute of them on the tractor or in the cowbails doing the work that he loved.

Chris took Bill and Margaret to Max Joseph's farm to pick up their first pony, *Snowball*. Bill had to ride him home along the road while Chris drove the car, stopping every mile or so for Bill to catch up, and this became a very frustrating experience for all concerned. A lazy old pony with an inexperienced rider meant that it took more than half the day and Chris lost patience more than once.

"Kick him in the ribs! Make him move," Chris shouted. Just when Bill thought things couldn't get any worse he had a spell from riding and Margaret took a turn. As Chris was heaving his bad leg into the car seat Bill accidentally slammed the car door on his father's hand, jamming several fingers. They were all very pleased to get back to the farm that afternoon and resume their normal duties.

Despite this inauspicious start they had some very fine ponies after that. One of the best, called *Sunshine*, was a lively and quite headstrong, chestnut mare that they both loved to ride. Her foal, called *Colty*, became Bill's principal mount later on, but shortly after the young colt was 'broken in' Bill had one of his worst spills ever from a horse. It was the first time he had worn spurs and he was thrown up out of the saddle, only to come down again with a spur on *Colty's* rump, so the second buck threw him a long way. His neck was so badly twisted he seemed to carry his head on his shoulder for many weeks after that.

Margaret and Bill rode these horses to the Tarkeeth School for several years. They also rode all over the steep bush tracks at the back of the farm, sometimes with friends, sometimes together, sometimes alone. The direct route to Bellingin lay straight over the steep range where the road could not go, but there were tracks for access to the timber. It took about four hours to reach Bellingin, more than an hour of it in the bush itself.

After a while they were going to pony camps on weekends and competing in shows and gymkhanas and when they rode home from Bellingen they aimed to reach Fernmount on the western side of the bush before dark. The moonlight didn't penetrate the bush so they had to trust the horses to know where to go until they came out of the darkness at the right place on the other side. They also rode east across country to Raleigh and Urunga.

A major event at this time was the extended stay of the whole Davies family from Adelaide in the Christmas school holidays one year. Pat Davies was about the same age as Lloyd, her sister Collie was about Bill's age and Clive and Robyn Davies were slightly younger than Margaret.



From L-R: Pat, Bill, Collie, Robyn, Lorna, Clive, Margaret, Sheila, Lloyd

The city kids absolutely delighted in everything they did on the farm. Pat even rode *Sunshine* who was a bit too headstrong for an inexperienced rider. All went well going out across the farm,



but when the horses turned their heads for home they liked to gallop and the combination of Pat pulling on the reins and *Sunshine* wanting to go by the house took them off-course until *Sunshine* stopped abruptly at a barbed wire fence. Pat continued on through the fence and broke her arm. But having her arm in a sling didn't stop her enjoying the rest of their holiday.

There was an enormous amount of fun and laughter at Twin Pines and many peaceful times as well, even though the chores had to be done every day. But there were dark times too, of course, when both Chris and Lorna felt overwhelmed. Within himself, Chris sometimes fell back into that abject depression that lurked behind his undemonstrative facade.

In 1954 he wrote: "*My Very Dear Faithful Margaret, I just don't know how you can go on bothering with me all these years - more like dropping gifts into a bottomless pit (as Mother would have said). Well, I just can't write most of the time as I have so seldom for the last few years been at peace with myself. Strife and stress mostly of my own making. Of course, I'm the worst husband in the world . . . She (Lorna) has great recuperative spirits and her ambition carries her along.*"

*"Lorna and I have quite a few more years yet to battle with until we have these three out on their own way and thank goodness with the help of a few Veganin pills a day I can still do a bit."*

But 'recuperative spirits' were not confined to Lorna alone. After Chris had penned his worst feelings to Margaret he would buck himself up again and then his eager enthusiasm for the next stage in developing the farm was far stronger than any thought of giving up. He took a keen interest in new farming methods and had read about something called The Keyline Plan.

It was pioneered by P. A. Yeomans from North Richmond near Sydney and canvassed by a Sydney University Professor, Hector Geddes - a system of soil cultivation and water management that reduced erosion and improved the

productivity of pastures, particularly on hilly farms. The 'keyline' is essentially the contour of the hill - the most representative of the series of contour lines (the lines of constant altitude) that can be drawn on a map around the side of any hill. By driving the tractor and cultivators in parallel with this line - around the side of the hill instead of up or down - you minimised both soil erosion and the wasteful run-off of rainwater.

Chris was able to get a surveyor from the Department of Soil Conservation to come out and mark the main contour lines on several of their hill paddocks. An adjunct to this plan was the construction of small dams in the valleys where the contour lines converged thus providing a supply of water for stock to drink and for irrigating the pastures using a pump and sprinkler system. One such dam was built later on Twin Pines.

This was around the time when 'minimum tillage' was coming into vogue (as distinct from deep ploughing with a mouldboard plough) and the Fells purchased a Connor-Shea chisel plough in 1955 (for £175) for this more efficient kind of cultivation. Bill (and also Lloyd in school holidays) became skilful tractor operators with the chisel plough and the associated disc harrows and they played a significant part in the establishment of new pastures, especially Bill.

Both Margaret and Bill had mild cases of measles around that time and they stretched their quarantine period for more than the three weeks required so they could stay home from school and do things on the farm.

Chris mentioned in a letter that *"Bill has missed a lot of school this year . . . helping me on the farm when he should have been at school. He is a careful and most effective worker . . . gets through a lot of work, too . . . Good with stock and a good tractor driver who doesn't break things like some do."* He also noted that *"Marg is physically strong for her age and very energetic, she can work very fast. These two little ones are*

*tower of strength to me - Bill's brains and good memory save me a great deal."*

Chris also mentioned Lloyd at Farrer commenting that *"I doubt he is working at his studies any more than I did. He is lanky, has some aptitude for games and is an enthusiast about lots of things and not just lazy."* As a matter of fact Lloyd had a sort of fetish for a famous Australian athlete of the time and his mother made him John Landy running shorts, he purchased John Landy running shoes by mail-order and he ran around the farm trying to imitate John Landy's stride and arm action. He also had a bad habit of trying to hurdle barbed-wire fences and incurred a few deep cuts that should have been stitched except that people living out of town didn't normally worry about that sort of thing.

With the enhanced pasture growth and good seasons came the opportunity to cut and conserve pasture to stockpile it for winter feeding later on. Chris chose silage rather than hay making as his preferred method. A large silage pit was constructed on the Barnett's paddock. There were many days when Bill and Lloyd were in the tractor seat from dawn to dusk, mowing and then scooping up the cut grass with a buckrake to take it to the silage pit where unloading it was quite a tricky backing operation.

This phase of the story is as much about tractors as it is about horses. During at least one school holidays the boys had two Ferguson tractors working side by side to get the work done at the right stage of pasture growth and the right time of day. At Farrer the teachers employed Lloyd to teach tractor driving to other boarders. Bill's daily life included a wide range of tractor work, often cleaning up unwanted grass and weeds with a rotary mower behind the Ferguson.



Lloyd and Bill cutting and carting pasture for silage

A paddock needed mowing further up the South Arm Road in preparation for a sports day at the Tarkeeth Primary School where Bill was in 4th class. The teacher asked Bill who was only too happy to bring the tractor and mower up to do the job on the next weekend. It was extremely rare to see a police car on this back road, but this Saturday was the polling day for the State election so, as Bill was driving back home, he was 'pulled over' by the police who had driven out to check the polling booth. The tractor was unregistered so not legal on public roads, but they seemed more concerned about the age of the driver. They made him park the tractor in Cordell's lane and took him back to Twin Pines where they pulled the police car up beside the shed where Chris was shoeing *Sunshine*. No doubt he was surprised, but with *Sunshine's* front right hoof hooked in his arm, he couldn't immediately spring to their attention.

In the end no charges were laid. Police in country towns were quite used to the ways of farming families although they probably expected the kids to be in High School before they started learning to drive. Getting your license in a country town was notoriously easy if the local police knew you had been driving around for a while on the farm. Knowing the 'road rules' was another matter!

The most demanding tractor work of all came with the building of the two dams - the big dam and the little dam. There was a great need to store water, as is the case on most farms, because the rainfall was so unreliable. Twin Pines had a creek and a swamp so the livestock would never be completely without drinking water, but there was no possibility of irrigating the new pasture unless a dam could be constructed towards the back of the property. Also the Keyline Plan development on the Wattles and Barnett's paddocks culminated in a smaller dam in the gully where those two paddocks met.

The big dam was triangle-shaped in a fairly deep gully at the edge of the bush where there was good run-off from both sides and new paddocks could be developed nearby. A contractor with a bulldozer spent months excavating and building a dam wall only to find there was a deep gravel seam running under the wall through the middle so it could not hold water. By the time he had removed the gravel and replaced it with clay the total time and cost of his contract had been used up so Chris decided they would have to finish the job themselves. He did engage the contractor to construct the little dam over in the Wattles paddock, which he did in a fraction of the time it would have taken the Fells.

So for the next few months the boys and their Dad continued to raise the wall of the big dam to its required height with many hundreds of loads of clay in the tiny Ferguson rear-mounted scoop. As the wall grew higher - about 50 feet at the front - it became more and more perilous to back the scoop over the edge and release the dirt without the tractor following after it. The moment you felt the rear tyres sink a fraction as you reversed you had to brake, unload and drive forward immediately. Both Bill and Lloyd revelled in this kind of work and when they turned the tractor for home at the end of the day, covered in sweat and grime, their feelings of satisfaction were more than ample reward for the time they had spent.

When it was full the dam held six million gallons of water. The depth was about 20 feet near the wall and the children could swim 50 yards from there towards the shallow end, around a tall dead tree that stuck out of the water, and back again. The only problem was, as Margaret discovered once to her horror, there could be a black snake swimming alongside you! Swimming wasn't a major part of the Fell children's lives - Lloyd had to do extra practice to pass his life saving exams after he went to Farrer - although Bill got his Bronze Medallion in surfing at North Beach much later on.

There were water lilies and water hyacinth across the surface of the water in some parts and the area became a haven for wood ducks and many other water birds. At one stage they had a small boat in the big dam. They also swam in the little dam, which was closer to the house. It was smaller, but deeper in the middle and the water became very cold as you swam out from the edge.

A 4-inch pipe through the wall of the big dam led to a pump driven by an Armstrong Siddeley diesel engine that was the hub for strings of irrigation pipes that could be laid out across the newly sown pasture. When there was a flood and they knew the dam spillway would overflow Bill or Margaret had to get out there in time to open the turncock on the pipe and let water flow through to the creek below. There were invariably snakes near that turncock and Marg, especially, was very frightened when doing that job. Bill, too, found it quite nerve-wracking getting across the main creek in full flood to get back to the house.

Bill's last few years at primary school were interspersed with a lot of farm work and the teacher, still Reg O'Hearn, was very lenient regarding his attendance, partly because he knew how much Chris and Lorna depended on him to get things done. Bill ploughed, harrowed and sowed the large, new Tallowwood Hill paddock, which brought him great satisfaction.

A major farm improvement that year was the building of an orchard - mainly citrus - down between the lagoon and the front gate. This area had been covered in lantana and Chris and the boys acquired an implement called a scorpion for the Ferguson tractor to help with removing it. They sank a deep well that Chris lined with red mahogany timber in his inimitably excellent fashion and then used this water to irrigate the trees producing very good navel oranges, mandarins and lemons for many years.

The considerable farm development during 1954 was aided by an inheritance of £2000 from the estate of Lorna's mother who had died in Adelaide. This money was used to purchase irrigation equipment and some of the farm machinery.

Another event that must have been very significant for Chris was a visit from his New Zealand son, Walter, who was an established farmer himself over there. Walter is an extremely gentle, spiritual, family man and for him to see his father and look around the farm meant a lot more to both of them than can be recorded in any words that were spoken.

Chris's physical condition deteriorated quite badly during the orchard project and the building of the dams. He thought the Armstrong Siddeley engine for the irrigation pump would require a sled so it could be dragged about. Using hardwood timber to make the parts and large bolts to tie them together with only a hand saw and a hand drill to make the holes left him with a seriously 'frozen' shoulder. He never recovered the full use of that arm. As it turned out the engine came with a steel sled included.

Bill, too, was quite knocked about. The power-take-off shaft connecting the tractor to the mower broke suddenly while he was making an adjustment, throwing one end of the heavy metal shaft onto his foot with great force. Several bones were

broken and he was laid up completely for about a month during which he listened to cricket on the radio to while away the time.

Bill also sliced his foot open with an axe, cutting right through his boot just between two toes, much like his father had done some years before. This put him in hospital in the time leading up to his tenth birthday. His mother arrived that day with a brown paper parcel and Bill said that opening it was the biggest thrill of his entire life up to that point. It contained a brand new, leather-smelling, bridle.



Bill on *Sunshine* and Margaret on a borrowed pony



## ***Chapter 15***

### **The Twin Pines Jersey Stud**

Maintaining leather harness in good condition is just one of many practical skills that young people on farms learn about inevitably, without having to make any special effort to do so. In the shed alongside the milking bails was a workbench with the wide range of tools that are needed for farm work. If you grow up being used to having a vice on a bench to hold things while you drill or file them it seems so natural that only later you realise how important that tool was. Sharpening blades was a skill the Fell boys had to learn along with the different kinds of files for different jobs, how to use a plane and the easy way to fit screws by drilling just the right sized hole.

But the most valued skills concerned the management of the cows themselves. By now there were sufficient pedigree animals of high quality to be able to establish the Twin Pines Jersey Stud. This was the culmination of the years of gradual herd improvement achieved by breeding from superior animals and feeding so they achieved their full productive potential.

The justifiable pride that farmers take in the quality of their livestock and their produce is nowhere more evident than at the local Agricultural Show held every year in all the larger towns. These are scheduled so the professional horsemen and women and sideshow attendants can move on from one town to the next; they culminate in the greatest show of all - the Sydney Royal Easter Show. City people think of show bags, fairy floss and dodgem cars, but by the time those are

happening all the hard work and important business in the livestock and produce pavilions is almost over. The judging is what brings all farmers to the show. To win a prize here - generally signified by a large coloured ribbon that is draped over the bull or heifer or the best array of vegetables or even cakes - is the highest honour of all.

In 1955 Chris wanted to go to the Sydney Royal and it was arranged that Lloyd would travel by train from his school near Tamworth and Bill would catch the train from Urunga and they would meet at Central Station. Chris would join them later at the Show, which was held in the Showgrounds next to the Sydney Cricket Ground in those days. Whether this was a deliberate ploy on his part to turn the boys loose in the big city without him or whether there was some other reason was not an issue as far as the boys were concerned. They were just very excited to be doing it and also more than a little nervous.

They stayed at a very cheap hotel in Pitt Street called the People's Palace where a helpful lady would dole out cash to them each day so they didn't have to carry too much money around with them. She mostly advised them against going to the places they had in mind - including Luna Park - but that didn't stop them going. Totally unschooled in city ways, but old enough at 13 and 10 to get about quite safely, they met up with Chris at the Show a few days later exactly as arranged.

Chris bought a new pedigree bull that year whose name was *Balmaha Lord Tnylish*. He came from The Hills Jersey stud of Walter Braithwaite at Wyong and he had won Reserve Champion, which is second place overall, at the Sydney Royal. Chris's philosophy had always been to buy the best cow or bull he could get and pay the top price because he said it was worth it in the long run. He did not try to optimise value as some people did by buying something a bit cheaper. This would never have suited his rather uncompromising nature. The pursuit of excellence was always his goal.

There is a lot to know about judging cattle because any tiny deformity in any part of the body is taken to mean an inferior breeding potential. A lot of it is commonsense because a poorly slung udder, for example, will reduce a cow's longevity as a milk producer, badly placed teats will impair the milking operation and a general lack of vigour and vitality will limit a bull's capacity as a sire. But there is also a certain mystique about the 'looks' of a really good animal.

Chris Fell - and Margaret and Bill with him - had an eye for beauty in a dairy animal (or a horse) that is no different from the eye that art gallery owners have for their paintings or sculpture judges for the works of art they select. The two children could see things about a new-born calf that were going to be desirable when she became a heifer and then a milking cow. Chris taught them many of the finer points of judging and how to prepare their own heifers for parading at the Bellinghen Show.

The bobtail trailer had been replaced in 1953 by a very fine steel trailer that cost £165; it had wheels that could be moved to a different position for different loads. Rather than hiring a truck for the purpose Chris built a wooden crate that fitted on the trailer and he drove the tractor into Bellinghen with the two kids in the back taking care of the heifers they had entered in the Show. They would get home long after dark, but they felt well satisfied with the prizes they had won that included Junior Champion Jersey heifer more than once.

Preparation for a Show involved many hours of clipping and grooming, sewing rugs for the calves and training the heifers to lead on a halter. Margaret, particularly, had a sixth sense with most animals - for example when *Ruby* had milk fever she was the first to notice - and she was admired by visitors and family alike for her rapport with the calves. By now she had full control of calf rearing at Twin Pines and the neighbours talked about her skill. She remembers the joy she always felt in

showing off to visitors the best examples amongst the heifers and talking about the performance of the best cows.

Showing a stud bull was a more complicated business especially with *Balmaha Lord Tnylish*. He would charge you every time if you were in a race near him, but he had been trained to lead as is required for parading in a Show. It took two handlers, one on either side; otherwise he would hook the handler with his horns. To do this you need two ropes, one from each horn, running through a ring in the bull's nose.

Chris and Bill made an unequal looking pair leading the big bull, but they were well satisfied because he won Champion Bull (of all breeds) at the Bellinghen Show. He beat a highly rated bull that Jimmy Barnett had recently acquired at the Sydney Royal, because Jimmy had been following Chris's lead with his own breeding program.



Chris and Bill with *Tnylish* at the Bellinghen show

There was always more than one bull in the special bull paddock at Twin Pines. Chris bought a bull from the Cochrane family Jersey stud near Bega who was called *Parabel Pets Batman*. He must be the only bull that ever had a gander for a close companion and a mate.

As well as cows, horses, dogs (and pigs earlier) and Lorna's cats there were always fowls at the farm and for some years also ducks, a rather beautiful goose and a gander who was called *Mahatma*. Geese have a very strong pair-bonding instinct and when *Mahatma* lost his goose (she may have been taken by a fox) he started following Lorna around. When she was bringing in the cows for milking he would walk along beside her as if to help herd them in. But Lorna was not available day and night so *Mahatma* soon paired up with the bull, *Batman*. The gander now lived in the bull paddock hardly leaving the bull's side and would sometimes groom his unlikely mate when the bull was lying down.

There was also a younger, very dark-coloured bull who also came from Braithwaite's stud at Wyong called *The Hills Royal Son*. He was always known as *Sonny* and sometimes he would fight with *Tnylish* in the bull paddock and they would have to be separated before one or the other suffered injury. This was not easy to do and the children's riding expertise was required. Chris would operate the gate while Bill or Margaret rode in on *Sunshine* and drafted one of the bulls away from the other and through the gateway.

Camp drafting - along with buckjump riding - is a serious sport amongst stockmen and regular competitions were held at local showgrounds, including the one in Urunga. The Fell family went in to watch each year on Boxing Day and Marg and Bill became respected competitors in these events. In camp drafting riders take turns at controlling an untamed steer or bullock through a specially laid course of poles and gates and eventually into a yard. Points are awarded according to how well they do this. Margaret loved this sport and received advice from professional riders including the top-rated Gertie Brooks and John Fahey who was later an Olympic equestrian. She and Bill also rode in other show events such as flag racing and bending races, which are a bit like slalom skiing around poles.

Whereas Chris had been working within gradually increasing physical limitations for a long time, it was now Lorna who felt the debilitating blow of severely declining physical health. Her arthritis, which was not osteo-arthritis, but the more severe rheumatoid kind, now caused constant pain and the joints of all her fingers had become horribly swollen and stiff. She was overweight and increasingly irritable, which was attributed later to the onset of Type 2 diabetes for which she would require insulin injections daily and a drastic change of diet.

What worried her most at this point, however, was quite severe depression and fatigue. There were no anti-depressants of the kind that are available today so she was prescribed strong stimulants such as Dexedrine that are known to be quite addictive. They were effective though and Lorna took them for many years before she was able to give them up without adverse consequences, much to her relief.

Chris's reference in an earlier letter to his being a difficult husband was not without foundation, mainly because of his undemonstrative and aloof manner. This, coupled with the physical problems they both endured, contributed to a severe mental strain at certain times. A few noisy rows in the kitchen after the children had gone to bed ended with Lorna storming out, saying she was going to throw herself into the river. Both Lloyd and Margaret remember being very frightened by this and having difficulty getting to sleep.

But, as Chris also said in the letter, she was a remarkably resilient woman. She hardly needed the amphetamines to become as cheerful as anybody could possibly be. We remember her exuberant singing of Gilbert and Sullivan arias in the kitchen and out at the clothesline - the same songs she used to sing back in Vaucluse decades earlier.

Everyone was looking forward with excitement to a visit from Chris's brother, Captain William Fell, as he was preparing to

retire from the British Admiralty and move back to New Zealand to live. Chris and William corresponded quite a bit around this time and in 1956 Chris wrote: *"We now have a girl to help in the house. She is £3 a week and keep which is most moderate of course, well below the award . . . is strong and has been well trained to work and can do quite a lot outside if required to do so. She is perfectly appalling to put up with and shouts and talks so much and is so loud that I just keep out of the road. However, it means Lorna is able to help more in the shed and we get our meals cooked and ready . . . and all manner of cleaning goes on."* Chris didn't entirely approve of either the amount of cleaning being done or the noisy conversation, but he understood their need for help in the house.

One Christmas when Lloyd was home from school the boys were presented with a beautifully made table tennis table - not a flimsy folding one - that they set up in the barn. There were the usual issues of course about the light being better at one end and some 44-gallon drums getting in the way at the other, but they had enormous fun and gradually learned a few of the skills.

The boys loved learning about sport generally though they had limited opportunities to play, especially team sports. Lloyd did play a few games of rugby league at Farrer, but preferred athletics where he tried to emulate John Landy in middle distance running with a modicum of success. Bill was recruited by Reg O'Hearn from the Tarkeeth School to play rugby league with the Urunga Convent where Reg's own children played.

They loved to listen to rugby league, rugby union, cricket and Davis Cup tennis on the radio. Because most sportsmen were amateur in those days it was big news when tennis players began turning professional and the first Australian to do so was Ken Rosewall in 1956. He was the Australian champion several times and won eight grand slam titles. Early in his professional career he came to Bellingen to play exhibition matches with Pancho Gonzales, the American professional who had also

previously played Davis Cup, and Bill and Lloyd got to see the match.

It wasn't sport, but regular, hard work that was the main contributor to physical fitness for the Fell youngsters. The Ronaldson Tippet diesel engine in the milking bails had a large crank handle that was heavy for the children to turn, but they were used to this and also very adept at the tricky operation of slipping the three-inch-wide belt onto its pulley to transfer its circular motion to the vacuum pump of the milking machine. The belt had to be crossed first to reverse the direction that the vacuum pump would spin. It was a routine they all knew well - followed by the milking; twice a day, every day.



The dreamers

Because of Chris's worsening condition they needed help with the milking and a man who lived near the end of the Barnett's paddock called George Styles was employed from time to time. Over time, George became more and more a regular part of the team. Then there were two accidents involving Chris towards the end of that year that shook his resolve severely.

The first became evident when Lorna noticed damage to the tractor - now a later model Ferguson 35 purchased (for £1082) in 1957 - as Chris drove it home past the house after a day's work. She saw there was no exhaust pipe where normally it stuck up in the air beside the engine. In fact Chris had capsized the tractor onto himself while he stood behind it operating a



winch to pull out tree stumps. Miraculously he was only slightly injured and the tractor had only crumpled its exhaust.

The second accident was to have more severe consequences. Chris got the timing all wrong when he was throwing a heavy bag into the river and ended up being propelled head first into the water himself. The river was partly in flood and he was wearing an oilskin raincoat, which added to his problem. No one else was with him, but he did extricate himself from the muddy water and got back to house, very shaken. In the weeks that followed he was in and out of hospital with pneumonia.

The children were all aware that Chris had said to Lorna he thought he was losing his grip because more things were going wrong and his ability to do some jobs seemed to be declining. He was now aged 67. Bill was probably the most sensitive to the fact that his closest mate was not as invincible as he used to be and this would mean that Bill would have to work all the harder.

An important saving grace in Chris's mind was the fact that the children were so capable in all aspects of the farm work. The satisfaction he gained from knowing that they now had a high producing dairy stud and that Bill and Marg were capable of managing it even if he wasn't there outweighed his fears for the future. Chris could feel his dreams being fulfilled and he was immensely proud of his family.

In the words of one local at the pub in Urunga: "There's an old bugger on the South Arm who could get butterfat out of a billygoat." Another replied, "His kids aren't bad farmers either."

## ***Chapter 16***

### **The Little Dam**

A family of wild ducks had made their home on the little dam since some reeds had grown up in the shallow water at one end of its curved wall. It was a smaller expanse of water than the big dam, but also about 20 feet deep at its centre, which meant that the water was colder, especially out in the middle. No decent-sized trees grew nearby so it lacked the ‘atmosphere’ of the big dam. A few small wattles had sprung up along the wall itself, together with the reeds that sheltered the ducks.

Lloyd (now in his fifth and final year at Farrer) and Bill (in his first year) both stayed at school over the Easter break so Margaret was especially thankful when it was arranged that her friend, Margaret Upton, would be staying over at Twin Pines while her parents went away. The two girls liked to spend time together even though Margaret Upton was a year older and had started at the new Bellingen High School that year. The younger girl would be going to the High School the following year and was eager to hear about more grown-up experiences as most girls are, particularly at that age.

On the first day, Good Friday, they rode the two horses, *Sunshine* and *Dot*, into the bush behind Barnett’s place and called by the little dam on their way home for the horses to have a drink. On other occasions, but not on this day, they had been known to ride bareback out into the dam and slip off into the water and swim back the edge, a game that the horses seemed to enjoy too. However, Margaret Fell also remembered

having seen a horse severely shocked by being taken too deep into cold water when it was hot and sweating and they talked about this as they rode over the hill to the house. Their sense of responsibility and their experience with animals and other things on the farm was beyond what would normally be expected of 11- and 12-year-olds.

Another school friend of the same age, Milton Bartlett, joined the two Margaret's for the day on Easter Monday, which was the 22nd of April in 1957. What happened on that day was the greatest shock the Fell family had ever experienced.

Chris had been taken to the doctor in Bellingham that morning to check on the pneumonia that had followed his dive into the river. He returned home, but took to his bed, weak and feverish, annoyed that he probably wouldn't be much help at the afternoon milking. Lorna was rushing around to catch up with her chores when the three children came in asking about lunch and if they could go for a swim.

They had started early and ridden about 10 miles up to the trig station at the top of the range in the bush so they were quite hungry and also hot. Lorna replied that they could not go swimming immediately after having lunch - this was generally frowned upon because of the danger of getting a cramp - but perhaps they could have a swim first.

"Are Margaret and Milton good swimmers?" she asked. "Are they allowed to swim without adult supervision?" Margaret Fell was safe enough in the water, but not a strong swimmer herself; they all said that Milton and Margaret Upton were much better swimmers than she was and were used to swimming on their own.

They found an old pair of swimmers for Margaret Upton and Milton was wearing shorts anyway so they were soon back on their horses going over the hill past the cowshed towards the

little dam. It was a bright sunny day and some ducks on the water flew off at the noise of the children arriving.

They let the horses have a drink first of all and then tied them up to the fence. The two Margarets were first into the water. Margaret Upton said she wanted to swim out to the middle, but Margaret Fell persuaded her to swim around the side first where the water was warmer. They swam and dog paddled along one side, then turned to go across by the dam wall itself where the water was deeper. Margaret Fell stayed a bit closer to the wall.

Suddenly, without warning, some part of Margaret Upton's body (probably her legs) hit Margaret Fell across the head pushing her under water for a moment. She panicked and turned to see if she was close enough to the wall of the dam for safety. When she turned back there was no sign of Margaret Upton whatsoever - hardly a ripple on the water where she had been just a few moments earlier.

Dumbfounded, Margaret Fell could not believe her eyes. She thrashed around treading water near where her friend had been. She was told later that Margaret Upton must have doubled up completely with a severe muscular spasm - the kind of cramp that cold water can bring on - and gone straight to the bottom.

Milton was the first to shout: "where is she?" They instinctively called out her name. Milton jumped on his horse and headed for the house. Margaret paddled around some more and then pulled herself onto the bank feeling dazed and shaking all over, trying to figure out what had happened.

Back at the house, on his bed, Chris folded his arms across his painful chest and breathed more slowly to try to rest. Lorna had taken out some Easter buns that she had bought in town for the children to have after lunch.

They heard Milton's shrill voice even before he had arrived. "Margaret's gone to the bottom and she hasn't come up again!"

Both Lorna and Chris heard the words clearly, but they had already been repeated in frantic, high-pitched tones before either adult could fully register what was happening.

Lorna started to run as fast as her bulky frame and overworked legs could carry her up the hill towards the dam with the distressed boy leading his horse alongside her. After 50 yards she was already gasping for breath, but her pace hardly slackened. The vision of her daughter - whom she knew to be the weaker swimmer - having drowned drove her body forward. At one point she vaguely thought she heard Milton say that it was Margaret Upton not Margaret Fell.

"Take the car," Chris yelled after her as he clambered down the verandah steps in his pyjamas and swung his legs with ferocious determination across the yard to the car shed. With incapacitated limbs responding slowly, he pulled himself into the car and got it started. By the time he reached the cowbails at the top of the hill Lorna had rushed through the two gates leaving them open for Chris to drive through. He stopped briefly for her to climb into the car, then roared down the rough, grassy Wattles paddock to the edge of the dam.

Lorna saw her Margaret across by the wall of the dam and ran around to see how she was. As she did so the full realisation came to her that Margaret Upton had almost certainly been drowned.

Chris had always been a good swimmer and though not dressed for it he eased himself into the water and started across the deeper part, but after a few strokes he realised the futility of this and swam back to the edge. There was nothing to be seen except the brown water.

Milton had now attracted the attention of a man, Pat Barnett, who was working on repairs to the boundary fence about half a mile away. When he arrived Lorna and Chris were slumped

on the bank, bewildered, and Margaret was sobbing her heart out.

Pat Barnett ran to get a small rowing boat from their house by the river. Chris went back into the water for a while, but knew it was hopeless. A few other people arrived, mysteriously, from somewhere nearby. Lorna had already returned to the house in the car and telephoned the police who were on their way from Bellingham.

Someone dived in from the boat and searched again, to no avail. The police arrived and said they would have to organise divers with some equipment for the next day. Those divers eventually recovered the girl's body from the muddy bottom.

Chris was shivering audibly when Lorna returned with the car to get him back to his bed. She also grabbed hold of the two children like a bossy hen gathering her chickens. They were all back at the house when the police called in to take further statements. They advised against trying to ring Bill and Clare Upton immediately as they were due back from Woodenbong (150 miles away) that afternoon anyway. Before leaving they said there would be a coroner's inquest in Bellingham sometime in the future.

Then the telephone rang. Lorna answered and it was the cheery voice of Bill Upton saying they had decided to stay on another two days if that would be okay. Lorna could hardly speak. The telephone earpiece shook in her hand as she strained her mouth into the little black funnel on the wall. "Arh. . .er . . . Oh Bill, there's been a terrible, terrible accident. I don't know exactly . . . Margaret was swimming in the dam and she sank to the bottom. She didn't come up." There was a pause.

"What are you saying?"

"I'm so sorry," she sobbed. "She didn't come up again. I'm so sorry. You must come back . . ."

The caller hung up. Lorna remained standing with the earpiece in her hand. She sobbed uncontrollably. Chris had been listening in the hall. He called out sharply, “You didn’t say that she was dead. You should have told them exactly.”

“I tried to . . .”

He turned back into the bedroom leaving her slumped in a chair by the telephone where she stayed for the next half an hour, utterly desolate and alone.

Down by the little dam it was desolate also. A few people stayed there for another hour, shaking their heads, remarking on the tragedy of a young girl's drowning and repeating the trite saying that ‘only the good die young.’ As the shadows lengthened across the dam they started to talk about other things that needed their attention.

Only when the last onlooker had departed did the family of wild ducks return to their home in the reeds. Mother and father and four ducklings, nestled peacefully on the still water of the dam, they made the quintessential image of the beauty and tranquillity of nature that is inseparable from its harsh and sometimes tragic reality.

It’s a fact that five children, on average, are drowned each year in Australia, specifically, in farm dams. Many of these are toddlers who wandered away from their house. Despite their benign, even serene, appearance, farm dams can be treacherous swimming holes for people of any age.



The little dam

## ***Chapter 17***

### **The Hollow in the Hill**

It's not easy to describe the aftermath of this tragedy for the Fell family. They felt, of course, the bereavement of the Uptons who carried the marks of their grief at the loss of their only daughter for the rest of their lives. Lloyd and Bill at their boarding school heard about it first on the ABC radio news without realising it had happened in their own dam. They were shielded by being at a distance, but for Margaret, Easter Monday would never be the same again. Every year it brings back for her the kind of ache that you know will never go away. Both she and Lorna were blessed by birth with enormous resilience and strength of character and they threw themselves into the work that was waiting to be done each day.

There must be some spiritual force called forgiveness whereby we can accept and come to terms with terrible things that happen in our lives - forgiving God, whatever we think that is, and feeling forgiven ourselves for our deepest regrets and what seem to be our most hideous failures. This force was most needed and perhaps hardest to reach for Chris himself.

His physical pain and laboured breathing were insignificant compared to his mental anguish. He was returned to the Bellingham hospital for a week and then allowed to come back to the house when the boys came home from school for the May holidays. The autumn weather turned unusually cold that year and Chris spent a lot of the time wrapped in rugs in front of the slow combustion stove, which was a new addition to match the fine woodbox that he had built earlier.



The fact that he knew his own life would soon come to an end tempered and shaped his reflections and fitted the recent tragedy into a broader perspective for him. When your thinking is consumed by what you feel you should have done for someone else you only become more self-centred. Once the situation had arisen neither he nor Lorna could have done anything even if they had been close by.

Chris needed to come to terms with his life as a whole - to reflect on all the things that had happened that he could not control and those things he had been able to do that made a difference. There were decisions he regretted and there had been a lot of struggle, it was true, yet his clearest thoughts were that he had never been a quitter and he had overcome many obstacles that at times had seemed insurmountable. He had felt like giving up and had languished at times in depression and melancholy, but then a way ahead had always appeared for him and he had found the strength to take it.

Towards the end of a person's life a sense of gratitude is also not uncommon. He thought of Lorna and what her life had been like when they first met - about the changes in her, physically and mentally - and the indispensable contribution she had made to the farm and their family. He had come there half crippled 21 years earlier, she had joined him 17 years ago, and together they had turned a doubtful piece of land into one of the most productive dairy farms in the district.

Even that took second place, however, when he thought about the lives of their three children. He was so proud of who they were and what he could imagine they would achieve. On the farm his hopes and dreams were still being realised by them even though his race was run. And in the wider world he felt they would be well equipped to meet whatever challenges came along and - this was the most important thing - to get satisfaction and enjoyment from doing it. That summed up his

story at Twin Pines. It seemed heartbreaking at times, but they actually thrived on it, mostly with very happy hearts.

Just before Easter he had begun preparing some heifers for the Bellingham show, which would be during the May school holidays. Although Chris could not attend the show he was pleased that Bill and Margaret took the heifers and their horses and won several prizes at the show that year at a time when the town was still in mourning. Margaret actually missed the riding events because she was at a school memorial service, but John Fahey rode *Sunshine* in her place.

During their break from school Chris was especially eager to talk with the boys and his obvious interest in what they had been doing was stimulating and enriching for them both. To Lloyd he talked about the exciting future of science in the world, how interesting it would be to live in the decades ahead and what good prospects he saw for Lloyd's pursuit of agricultural science if he worked steadily at it. He was proud of the fact that Lloyd had just won a science book prize. With Bill he talked much about the lad's first term at Farrer, his impressions of the boarding school farm and the state of things on the farm at Twin Pines. He knew that Bill would not lose his dedication to carry on with the farm and with farming generally and he took considerable pride in this.

Bill and Lloyd were both outside making the most of the last day of their holidays so Lorna had to insist that they came in to spend time with their father before they caught the train that evening for the long journey back to school. Bill and Margaret had to put their horses out on the Rough Block during school terms so they didn't eat the best grass that was needed for the milking herd. Chris was in bed in the sitting room with a cosy fire burning in the grate and his face looked sad, but with that certain inner smile which battered, sad-looking faces often have if you look closely. There were tears in his eyes when the boys departed, which was unusual and both boys felt moved,

but in the manner of children generally, they didn't dwell on the thought for very long.

Margaret, who was principally an action person too, also spent time with her father that day, relating her exploits with the horses rather than talking about school. He appreciated better than anyone the value of the work she was doing on the farm before and after school and on weekends; not just routine chores, but many jobs of her own initiative also. To him she epitomised the fact that the farm was still being developed - was still very much a 'work in progress.'

The autumn is the least busy time around the milking herd because the cows are drying off and there are no calves to feed. George Styles held the fort there every day while Margaret and Lorna made sure that everything was done according to the high standards the family believed in and maintained. They were now the captains of the ship that Chris had launched back in 1936.

At Farrer High School it was a crisp autumn morning - the kind the boys enjoyed as they bustled about their dormitories before breakfast and then strolled in the sunshine in their ordered, boarding school routine. Shreds of mist still hung in the panoramic Peel River valley down below the school, but few boys noticed such a broad view as they prepared in various ways, some jostling, some standing and dreaming, for the morning assembly. This was Wednesday, the 30th of May in 1957, the day after Chris Fell had died.

The Headmaster, Mr Edgar Smiles, walked solemnly (as usual) up to Lloyd and then Bill and asked them to accompany him over to the Sick Bay to see Mrs Crosby, who was the School Nurse. As they walked he told them that the news had just arrived that their Dad had passed away on the previous evening in Bellingen hospital and they were to be going home that afternoon to spend some time with the rest of their family.

"I wonder if he got my letter," Bill said to Lloyd as soon as they were left alone. "I only posted it yesterday."

"I'm sure he did," Lloyd replied in a reflex manner, vaguely realising that this was a stupid thing to say and that being honest would be more important than ever at a time like this.

There were tears and questions, mostly unanswerable ones, and more tears until the day somehow passed and they were on the train called the Flyer travelling to Armidale. It was well after dark when they met their mother in the company of Lloyd Davies from Adelaide and set off in the blue Ford Zephyr that was now Lorna's car along the very rough road to the coast. It was a nightmarish trip with the older Lloyd driving, though overtired from travelling, and young Lloyd vomiting at frequent intervals. In the lonely bush around Point Lookout they had a puncture and then couldn't get the jack to fit under the edge of the car to raise it up so several hours passed before another motorist came and helped them. It was early the next morning when they reached home.

Margaret was pleased to see her brothers, but they all felt rather helpless as arrangements were being made that they didn't understand very well. To the children the funeral seemed long and drawn out - the singing of *Abide with Me* the saddest part - although there was a kind of beauty to it also. To them it seemed a surprisingly large number of well-wishers who shook their hands or kissed them. Bill Upton insisted on being one of the pallbearers.

A truly remarkable thing happened as the funeral cortege made its way to the cemetery. The beautiful, silver-grey Jersey cow that Chris had named *Leda* after the yacht race in 1952 now belonged to Edgar Braithwaite whose farm adjoined the cemetery. Lorna and the Fell children in the car following the hearse were astonished to see *Leda* standing, away from the

herd, with her head over the fence watching them go by. It was as if she was attending Chris's funeral!

The children soon found solace in the farm and all three became occupied and absorbed in some kind of work - and also play - in a way that was mostly not mournful at all. Sometimes they felt a little guilty for laughing at something funny or deriving pleasure from their activity, but Lorna assured them that Chris would not want them to be crippled by sadness. Their lives were continuing and surely contained something of his indomitable spirit. He would want them to remember the happiest times and continue in the same vein because his death was certainly not the end of their story.

The hollow in the hill towards one side of the little cemetery at Bellingham where Chris was buried has no headstone, no plaque or post, absolutely no marking. There are trees close by and native grass growing there - and, occasionally, bush flowers - so the grave is not distinguishable from any other little hollow in the hill.

Thus his wish was granted. He had wanted to be buried on Twin Pines, but this would have caused some difficulties so the Bellingham cemetery was the next best thing because it is almost in the bush anyway. He wanted the words of Adam Lindsay Gordon as his epitaph: to 'slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave, with never stone or rail to fence my bed.'

It could not be said that Chris was a spiritual man in the religious or church sense, but who could fail to see the spirit in his deep love of music, poetry and story, of animals - especially horses - and the land; his love of everything that grew and lived around him - and died; and of the people with whom he shared his life. He identified himself with Adam Lindsay Gordon to some extent - the classically educated, somewhat reckless adventurer with his heart both in the bush and in some genteel memories as well.

We remember his true spirit as the satisfaction of getting things done - achievements that you could see before your eyes as you completed them. What happened after that was less important. To see things as they happen is to engage with the natural world in the present moment and to feel part of it - to see your life and everything else as intertwined. And to appreciate the cyclic nature of everything, the patterns of birth, growth, death and decay that then gives rise to new growth once again. With the sunrise every day a new day begins and we think Chris would say: 'let's give it our best shot.'

Lorna acknowledged the condolences in the same way she suffered the bereavement - with an open, honest heart - an authenticity that had enabled her to become connected to nature, too. And so she recovered in time and her life thrived again. Driving home in the dark after Chris had died she was always comforted by the sight of the same bandicoot in a post near the gate. She had become friends with all the life on the land.

An unlikely, but very close companion at this time was her old gander, *Mahatma* - the one who had previously helped to bring in the cows. He seemed to have given up his bull companion and now became irresistibly ensconced as Lorna's mate. He would come flying in from way out of sight when she called his name and, whenever he was by her side, he would put his foot on top of her foot, asking to be taken up in her arms and stroked. Towards anyone else he was decidedly unfriendly. Whenever Lorna was away from the farm he would watch the front gate and go to meet her when she arrived home, but if any strangers came to the gate, the good gander drove them away with flapping wings and shrieking tongue. No farmer ever had a better watchdog, nor would many farmer's widows have had a more trustworthy mate.

## ***Chapter 18***

### **Junior Farmers**

The fact that Chris was no longer there was not interpreted by any member of the family as the end of the Twin Pines farm. Lloyd and Bill had returned to their boarding school after the funeral, but Bill's mind was never far from what was happening at home, even though it would be another two and a half years before he was legally allowed to leave school and could go back there full time. To Lorna's great credit she knew they could carry on and she also knew that Bill and Margaret lived for the farm.

But now there was only Margaret on hand to share Lorna's burden of responsibility. Margaret knew so much about the cows and calves, the horses and the availability of pasture and feedstuffs for the animals that it would have been impossible to continue without her, even though the ever-faithful George Styles was still there every day to do the milking and much other routine work. George did not have the natural rapport with animals that the Fell kids had, but he was steady and reliable and that was what was needed most at that time.

Margaret was to start at the brand new High School in Bellingham the following year, but in the meantime her work was not getting any easier. The younger bull, *Sonny*, who used to fight with *Tnylish* went down with pneumonia not long after Chris had died. There had been an outbreak of 'three day sickness' across the herd a few weeks before. This is a viral

disease known as Bovine Ephemeral Fever that is a bit like a mild influenza in humans, but it can affect bulls more severely.

In *Sonny's* case his breathing got worse and worse and Margaret kept a close eye on him for several days and then nursed him when he went down in the crush. Lorna had declined an offer of £100 for him just before this - against Margaret's advice - but they weren't to know he would get sick. So it was that *The Hills Royal Son* - so fierce and proud in his life - died with Margaret's arm resting on his head. She had the idea that things happen in threes: the drowning, her Dad's death and now this.

Margaret's introduction to secondary school was not an easy time for her. She went to Bellingen High School from 1958 until the end of 1960. After a while she travelled by the new school bus that Lorna had been instrumental in getting started through her friend in the NSW Parliament, Pat Morton. Marg didn't enjoy schoolwork, was deemed to be dyslexic, and felt humiliated by criticism of her left-handedness and the fact that she had borrowed no books from the library one year. The only compliment she can remember from a schoolteacher was: "Margaret knows exactly what she wants to do after school - to work with animals on a farm."

Many of the girls were already good at sewing, but Margaret had to start from scratch. Her early experience of school sport was very disheartening because she had never had a tennis racquet or seen a hockey stick in her life. She did play some hockey later and also won prizes for sewing at the Bellingen show. But she recalls that the only place she really felt comfortable was on the farm. The day she left school at age 14 years and 10 months was a happy day indeed.

There were several other farming families and businessmen who were very supportive and helpful during this time. Jack Sanger at Raleigh and his brother, Andy, who was Herbie Kirkland's son-in-law, were amongst the first to offer help.



Matt Singleton and his family were successful dairy farmers and banana growers at Crossmaglen, which is off the highway about half way to Coffs Harbour. The three sons, Bill, Matt and Peter became good friends of Bill and Margaret over the next few years, particularly Peter who was Margaret's escort to local dances later on. They had a Jersey stud and the same standards of excellence that Chris believed in and they helped to get the Twin Pines Jersey Stud established.

As Chris had been a returned soldier there was also support from the organisation known as Legacy which was much appreciated. Legacy began after the First World War and 100 years later it still provides help for the families of servicemen and women after that person has died. Lorna had a legatee assigned to her - 'Dardy' Behan from Urunga - who told her that every concern of the Fell children and family was also his concern and he was there to help. What was most welcomed by the children was the huge Christmas hamper that Legacy brought out to the farm at that time of year.

But the greatest boost for morale and source of satisfaction for Margaret and Bill came from the Junior Farmer Movement. All over Australia there was a government-supported initiative known as Junior Farmers designed to encourage young people to learn quite advanced agricultural skills. Many of its members had learned on their own family farms, of course, but to broaden this they needed to mix with people from other kinds of farms.

Bill and Margaret thrived on the social links they made through Junior Farmers and they enjoyed the regular competitions where they could test their knowledge and skill against others, many of whom were at least five years older than they were. They became members of the Raleigh Junior Farmers and were soon representing their local club at competitions as far away as the Sydney Royal Easter Show and the Brisbane Royal.

In 1960 when they were 14- and 15-years old, they scooped the pool in Brisbane against much older teams winning every judging event they entered including dairy cattle, horses, pigs, poultry, hay and silage. Bill had just finished High School at the end of 1959 so, at last, he could begin to see himself as a farmer.

This was Chris's own legacy fulfilled. Over the next few years Bill and Margaret were amongst the most celebrated Junior Farmers in NSW with feature articles in local papers, in a magazine called Country and the leading weekly publication for farmers known as The Land.



They were in effect managing a herd of 53 milkers along with 23 calves and heifers that were being reared. Their best cows were producing over 500 pounds of butterfat per year and one cow produced 612 pounds of butterfat in one year. They felt proud to see their pictures in the local paper, often in company with the government supervisor of the Raleigh Junior Farmers, Murray Walker.

Roly Paxton, a notable local farmer who was also Shire President and the Chairman of directors of the dairy factory - now at Raleigh - took the new generation of farmers at Twin Pines under his wing around this time and was to play an important part in their lives over the next few years. As a precaution against her own deteriorating health Lorna arranged for Roly to become a legal guardian of her children.

There was still some timber being taken out of the bush - smaller trees for telegraph poles and some bigger logs now going to Saunder's mill. The new generation of timber getters included Max and Tookey Williams whose father, Dommie, had befriended Chris when he first arrived there.

A major milestone was the erection of electricity poles and wires; the electricity supply was finally connected in 1959. Bill and Margaret were 15 and 14 years old, respectively, before they had an electric light of their own to switch on. They felt that civilization had arrived.

The party line telephone, however, continued for some years after this. The Fell's number was 175-R so the ring pattern that told you the call was for you was short-long-short, the Morse code for R. It was customary for neighbours to answer and take a message if they heard repeated calls for someone that were not answered. You could listen in to anyone's calls, of course, but this had never caused a problem for the Fells - in fact it had been a help quite often.

Lorna, Bill and Margaret were aware, as they had always been, of especially beautiful or unusual birds and at that time there was a jabiru that came out of the swamp paddocks quite regularly, always accompanied by a slim white egret that appeared to be its mate. The jabiru is a large black and white stork with long reddish-coloured legs - an impressive sight standing at the water's edge in the early morning light.

## ***Chapter 19***

### **A Barn Full of Corn**

From 1960 to 1966 Bill Fell became the recognised proprietor of the Twin Pines dairy enterprise and stud. He was enormously pleased about this and wanted nothing more than to continue his Dad's work. Of course, Lorna was the legal owner of the property and head of the family, but it is to her great credit that she was able to entrust most farm management decisions to her son. Margaret was still at the farm for the first few years, too, and there was a transition period during which she handed over her involvement with the cows, calves and horses, particularly.



The management team

Roly Paxton took a close interest in everything that Bill and Margaret were doing. He actually bought Margaret a very classy horse, *Comet*, although he did not want Lorna to know that he had paid for it. He also organised for Marg to ride the champion camp drafting horse, *Eclipse*, that belonged to Jack Hollis on Newry Island and was normally ridden by Gertie Brooks. Margaret won junior camp drafts and finished in the top ten in open camp drafts with both *Comet* and *Eclipse*.

She won a Junior Farmer trip to Queensland that took her away from the farm for a while and soon after that she accepted a short-term job as a governess at Giralambone north-west of Dubbo in far western NSW. She returned home briefly to get her wonderful horse, *Comet*, who was to accompany her to a position as a jillaroo on a property near Walcha. She and *Comet* soon established their reputation because on the day she arrived a bullock escaped from a pen just as the agent was inspecting the cattle that were to be sold. Marg jumped on *Comet* bareback and rounded up the bullock and brought it back so quickly that the agent said: "that's the best bit of bareback stock work I've ever seen!"

Lloyd had little to do with the farm although he came to visit quite regularly. Completing his Bachelor of Rural Science degree at the end of 1962 he gained employment with the NSW Department of Agriculture at Richmond on the outskirts of Sydney. There he joined the Richmond Players, an amateur theatrical group, and also played basketball with a club at Auburn. At the University of New England he had captained the basketball team, set some local point-scoring records and represented the district in that sport.

The conversation at Twin Pines throughout Lloyd's earlier life had always been that he would not stay on the farm because he was better suited to some academic pursuit. Though he always agreed with this in principle, there were parts of him that felt a

great loss at leaving behind what he felt was also in his blood, but wasn't meant to be for him.

For his first year back Bill had a mate from Farrer, Harry Johnson, living and working with him on the farm. The Twin Pines sign they erected at the front gate, which is shown on the front cover of this book, was built by the two of them during a welding course they did in the evenings in Bellingen.

Lorna purchased a new Massey-Ferguson tractor during this time. Jimmy Barnett was the best neighbour that any young farmer could have, lending machinery, taking calves to sale in his ute and offering advice whenever Bill seemed unsure. Just as Jimmy had accepted Chris as a mentor many years before, Bill now felt the special brand of caring friendship that only an older, more experienced ally can provide.

Bill had no intention that the farm should rest on its laurels and he continued to clear and bring in new paddocks every year. There were more stumps to blow up, but now the explosive of choice was Nitropril, which is 99% ammonium nitrate. Even the Rough Block was brought into production for the first time, which would have seemed a very distant goal to Chris only a few years before.

It was planted with the latest varieties of tropical legumes and new species of ryegrass. Annual crops were also grown there including turnips and golden vetches. Bill's appetite for learning about new farming techniques became even stronger than before. He got to know the Department of Agriculture Agronomist, Keith Hart, and Livestock Officer Dave Heptonstall, travelled regularly to meetings of the Agricultural Bureau in Bellingen and became a member of the North Coast Pasture Research Committee.

In this respect Roly Paxton was his chief mentor and ally and his advice, knowledge and encouragement were invaluable. Agronomy was Roly's great interest although he was also an

influential dairy industry leader who fought for the admission of milk from North Coast dairy farms into the Sydney market and eventually became the first producer representative when the state-wide Dairy Industry Authority was formed.

Through the North Coast Pasture Research Committee any new pasture species that showed promise on the research stations at Grafton or Wollongbar would then be tried out by Roly or by Bill on their farms. This included the Ladino white clover and new species of Lotus and Setaria.

To irrigate the new pasture Bill constructed small weirs at intervals along the creek that carried the outflow from the big dam. Here the water level would build up sufficiently, a few hours after he had opened the pipe from the dam, for him to pump out of the weirs with the irrigation pump and the Armstrong Siddeley engine. This was heavy work, relocating the pump and engine each time and assembling the irrigation pipes, then carrying them one by one to a new place in the paddock every day. But it was extremely satisfying to see the water raining down on otherwise dry paddocks and to watch the immediacy of the response in the green growth of the pasture.

Bill introduced a new feeding regime for the dairy herd. Hammer-milled corn replaced the wheat, bran and pollard that had been used for years because they were now able to grow bigger crops of corn on their own property. Every year a different paddock was used because corn depletes the soil of nutrients quite rapidly and Bill had the crop management down to a fine art. The corn was harvested and stored in the barn next to where a belt-driven hammer mill was used to turn the whole cobs into a palatable feed mix for the cows. To see the barn full to the brim with corn cobs was a sure sign that the dairy herd would be well fed for the months ahead.

Lorna took a keen interest in all these matters. Sometimes her rather anxious nature and inability to sleep at night through worry made their relationship tense, but mostly she appreciated the help Bill received from Roly and others and admired what he was doing. That was pleasing for Bill, but what was difficult for him was that she also, quite naturally, took a keen interest in his own social life and development. He was not only a farmer - he was a teenage boy exploring the world of movies, dances and alcohol, not too regularly, but whenever the opportunity arose.

Bill said later that he envied Lloyd in particular who did his growing up well away from the watchful eye of his mother. Bill was granted a special driver's licence a year early when he turned 15 because of his circumstances on the farm, but it did not allow him to drive after dark. Lorna had traded in the Ford Zephyr for a Standard Vanguard station wagon and Bill would drive it in to where the South Arm Road met the Pacific Highway before evening fell and then walk the remaining miles into Urunga to go to the movies - or 'pictures' as they were called then. He could drive home later in the evening without much likelihood of being caught on the back road that led to the farm.

When Harry Johnson was there at the beginning their social life included playing under 18's rugby league for Urunga and travelling to and from the games with John Sonter, Mackie's eldest son, in his Austin A40. Bill also played in the grade teams later, usually on the wing and he also played tennis in a team in Urunga.

With good mates, Doc Shepherd and Barney McFadyen, Bill attended the local dances and it was after one of these that he went to sleep at the wheel coming home and drove the Vanguard over a stump at the side of the road causing some damage to the car. The good thing was that Lorna was away visiting her brother in Adelaide at the time, but the bad thing



was she was returning on the train the next day. Bill borrowed Jimmy Barnett's ute to meet her at the station and she was not at all pleased to hear about what had happened.

Lorna's health only worsened during these years. Her diabetes had been confirmed and she began daily insulin injections and changed her diet. The fact that she could get away to Adelaide was a boon for her. She had a free rail pass to travel via Sydney and Melbourne once a year and could stay with her brother for several weeks at a time.

On one of these visits, however, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Lloyd Davies organised for her to remain with his family while she had a mastectomy and then recovered sufficiently to return home. For subsequent radiotherapy she was admitted to the Jean Colvin Hospital at Darling Point in Sydney, which caters especially for the rehabilitation needs of cancer sufferers from country NSW. During the weeks she was there Lloyd, from nearby Richmond, took her out around the suburbs of Vacluse and Watsons Bay to visit her old haunts, many of which had changed beyond recognition.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January, 1965, Bill married Anne Gatenby from a well-known Dorrigo family so the situation in the old farm house at Twin Pines naturally began to change. The three of them started to talk about Lorna's future and how they could all move on with their lives.

Succession planning is often a problem with family farms especially if only one of several siblings is prepared to continue with the farm and it is the only real asset. Here there were two mitigating factors. Changes in the dairy industry had reduced the value of this kind of farm for milk production. There were now fewer farms as the industry became more concentrated so in future dairying would be confined to more fertile areas of land. This meant that, much as Bill loved this farm, his long term future as a dairy farmer probably lay elsewhere. Secondly,

Lorna was only 58 years of age and needed somewhere suitable to live for many years ahead. So there was really no choice. The farm must be sold.

In the district there were farms like this being sold to commercial forestry interests, but Lorna, Bill and his wife, Anne, were not keen on this idea at all. In January, 1966, they were pleased to complete the sale of Twin Pines - livestock and machinery included, otherwise known as 'walk-in, walk-out' - to dairy farmers, Fred and Marge Errington.

In the spring and summer of 1965-6 Bill planted a last crop of corn to make sure the barn was full by the time he drove out the gate for the last time.

## ***Chapter 20***

### **Life Goes On**

By the time of her 59<sup>th</sup> birthday in April, 1966, Lorna had moved into her small, but comfortable unit that was part of a block built by Legacy in Coffs Harbour for people like her. Thus began the third phase of her amazing life - another 20 years as a town dweller and social livewire interspersed with regular trips to Adelaide to be with the Davies.

What a relief it must have been for her with the responsibility for the farm finally lifted from her shoulders. She had left the city when she was just 33 and spent nearly 26 years of her life at Twin Pines, 17 of them in partnership with Chris, creating a successful farm and producing and raising three children.

The improvement in her health and wellbeing was very obvious. There was a photo in the Coffs Harbour newspaper of her sitting behind the counter at a street stall during Legacy week and its caption read: 'Who could resist a smile like that?'

Over time Lorna's diabetes caused gangrene and she had three toes amputated, but she remained very active right through to 1985 when she suffered a stroke in Adelaide. She rehabilitated herself enough to return home for a year and died in 1986 just before her 79<sup>th</sup> birthday was due.

Margaret had to part with her much-loved horse, *Comet*, after she left the jillaroo position at Walcha. He was sold to a neighbour and she pined for him every day for more than a year afterwards. She got a job grooming the polo ponies of

Australia's most famous polo player, Sinclair Hill, at Willow Tree in north-western NSW where she also had the care of Lord Vestey's horses while Sinclair was overseas. The Olympic equestrian bronze medallist, Brian Cobcroft, called in and complimented her on her work. She was about to go to a new job in New Zealand and he asked her to keep a lookout for exceptional horses over there that he might buy.

Soon after Twin Pines had been sold Margaret went to work in New Zealand at the Ruakura Agricultural Research Station where Lloyd was a research scientist from 1965 to 1968. After 18 months she travelled to England to work with a special breed of horses called Hunters that are very tall (over 17 hands) and magnificent to watch in the cross-country and steeplechase races that were so popular then. When she returned to Sydney she married and established a small farm near Muswellbrook where she had two daughters.

Bill and Anne took up dairying as share farmers, first in Dorrigo, briefly at Jamberoo, and then very successfully at Bellingen and Raleigh where they made the farm their own and also had two daughters. Then they owned and operated Lyndema Park near Muswellbrook as a very successful dairy farm for many years.

Between Lloyd's research at Richmond and at Ruakura he was married, took up a job with the Victorian Department of Agriculture, completed a PhD at Melbourne University, had three sons and then re-joined the NSW government in agricultural research for a long spell.

They all knew, of course, that the Erringtons had not stayed at Twin Pines for very long. They sold it to the Australian Paper Mills company; the manufacture of paper and pulp from Australian gum trees had become quite a boom industry at that time.

Their practice was to remove fences and unwanted buildings with a bulldozer and plant trees in rows for easier harvesting where there had been grazing paddocks before. The farm house remained for many years until it was destroyed by fire.

The mangrove tree and the two pines are showing their age, but still there today, along with a TWIN PINES RD sign leading into the bush.



The present owner is the Forestry Department of the NSW government.

## ***Epilogue***

Whatever the trees remember - and the land - it's not written in our language so you have to use your own imagination to create pictures in your mind and feelings in your heart about the story of Twin Pines.

Lloyd, Bill and Margaret Fell remember it with enormous satisfaction and feel we owe a great deal to our young lives there because it was the best platform for life we could have had. Not only did we enjoy it (most of it anyway!), but we have drawn upon those experiences many times since then in trying to do our best each day.

Margaret has travelled the world working with animals, particularly horses, then had her own farm after which she became an adventurer travelling every outback road and stock route in Australia, mostly by motor cycle, the same kind of vehicle that also took her across large parts of Africa and South America.

With the late Paul Thompson she had two daughters, Fiona and Karen, and she has three grandchildren, Jack, Flynn and Phoebe. She married fellow adventurer, Tiger Bath, more than 20 years ago.

Bill has been a successful dairy farmer, mainly in the Hunter Valley of NSW, and in retirement still operates hay-making machinery at all hours of the night and day. With Anne Gatenby, his wife of over 50 years, he had two daughters, Jenny and Christine, and they have three grandchildren, Nicholas, Alex and Sebastian.

Lloyd has been a successful agricultural scientist and in retirement a writer. With Anne Gough he had three sons,

Chris, Nick and John and they have six grandchildren, Emily, Will, Emily, Jessica, Charlotte and Jee Hwan. In 1989 he married Penelope Frith (nee Williams) who has a son, Andrew, and three grandsons, Jai, Kade and Ajay.

Some other family stories, about previous generations, are told in another book, *The Luck of the Fells*, and on the website [www.biosong.org](http://www.biosong.org).

Lloyd Fell on behalf of Lloyd, Bill and Margaret Fell

Faulconbridge, NSW

June 2015