

Boy from the Bush

Extracts

My parents rented a modest house in Olive Street from Sam Healey, the owner of the prominent *Leura Park* property, part of which later became Mandurama Golf Course. The house was on a half-acre block with a stable up the back. It was a three-bedroom, weatherboard structure with an iron roof. There was a lounge room, kitchen, dining room, open verandah and a toilet 50 yards up the back. For toilet paper, we used *Norm's Almanac* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which didn't seem quite the right thing to do to quality publications of their day, but necessity, borne of meagre means, overcame finer sensibilities in this case. There was no bathroom. A small tub was kept in the kitchen for bathing and it was filled by carting two four-gallon kerosene tins of water from the two large round rainwater tanks at the back of the house, to the open fire in the kitchen. When heated, the water was poured into the tub. Water for use in washing, cooking or cleaning the house, was also carried from outside in the same kerosene tins. There was no electricity and light was provided by lanterns, 'Aladdin' lamps and candles. We used to cook all our meals, including our toast, over the open fire.

The cupboards in the kitchen ...



Introduced into Australia by European settlers in the nineteenth century, rabbits were prolific to the point that they were eventually designated as pests. At times, however, their abundance was a welcome band-aid to country poverty. Rabbit trapping was an industry in its own right in Mandurama and generated vital income for many families. The rabbits were sold for food or for their skins, often at Mandurama railway station, ready for transporting to Sydney. Dad was an exceptionally good rabbitier and I loved going with him. On one occasion we planned a three day trip, my first overnight adventure. We arrived near dark and Dad told me to put the billy on and get dinner ready while he ran a line of traps. When he hadn't returned by 8.00pm, I started to worry. It was pitch black ...



I spent countless hours yarning with Dad by the camp fire when we were rabbiting, or by the fireside after he returned from the late shift at the gold mine. During those chats he invariably left me with an expression, parable or proverb ... Three of my favourites were:

- *Don't piss into the wind; you're sure to get your own back.* My dad was prescient. He obviously had the Australian cricket team's sledging in mind ...
- ...



Mum received no formal education but she was extremely well educated. She read the *Sydney Morning Herald* from cover to cover every day and tackled the crossword. In 1913, William Bairstow, the school teacher at Junction Reefs, had to leave Mandurama for an extended period. He asked Mum if she would look after his set of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He said that he knew that the books would be in good condition when he returned and, if he didn't return, my mother could keep them. Mr Bairstow did not return and my mother never missed a single day reading passages from the 25 volumes. It was the ninth edition and my 88-year-old sister Patty has now given them to her daughter, Margaret.

Mum had an intense and passionate love of poetry and most nights over a 30-year period, excluding Fridays, which were reserved for music, the family would gather in the lounge room and mother would read or recite poetry. When in full flight, Mum had a commanding presence and ability to evoke every emotion intended in any poem. Rarely did a night pass without her rendition of a poem bringing tears to the eyes of at least one of us ...