My Autobiography

A Journey Through Life's Adventures

by Your Name

Generated on April 27, 2026

Table of Contents

This dedication does not reopen doors or explain history it acknowledges truth, and then steps aside so the story can speak.

Written on January 10, 2026

- **This book is dedicated to those who walked beside me, whether for a season or for a lifetime.**

- To **Sheila**, who shared the earlier chapters of my life, and whose presence shaped the years when everything was being built.
- To M**y Children**, who shaped the man I became, often without knowing it.

- To **Keren**, my companion in later years, whose steady presence brought light, humour, companionship, love & steadfastness when the road grew quieter.
- **And to all** those who passed briefly through my life — colleagues, friends, strangers — who left behind a word, a lesson, or a moment that mattered more than they could have known.

This story exists because of you.

Introduction

Welcome to My Story

Written on December 19, 2025
I've never been much of a reader, but in recent months, with time on my hands, I found myself wandering into the local library. The shelves seemed endless, filled with books of every kind. Eventually, I drifted toward the autobiographies. I'd never read one before, but I thought, *why not?* They're real stories, after all, and there's always something to learn from a life lived. I picked up a book about someone I admired and was surprised at how much it drew me in. Chapter after chapter, I couldn't put it down. That book lit a spark in me. Yet I noticed something: all the autobiographies were written by celebrities, people whose names were already known to the world. It made me wonder — would anyone be interested in the life of an ordinary man? Now, as I write this in May 2024, at the age of 85 (though I often feel closer to 65), I've come to realise that every life carries its share of stories worth telling. Mine is no different. This book isn't about fame or fortune; it's about the paths I've walked, the people I've met, the lessons I've learned, and the mistakes I've made along the way. So here it is: my journey. You may find it ordinary, or perhaps you'll find echoes of your own story within mine. Either way, I hope it gives you something — a smile, a memory, a moment of thought. Let's begin.

Chapter 1

The Beginning: February 18, 1940 — Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, UK

The "Royal" designation was granted to Sutton Coldfield in 1528 by King Henry VIII. This recognition was due to its historical association with the royal family and its importance as a center of hunting grounds and woodlands used by the monarchy.

Written on December 19, 2025

What time to arrive on this earth!

I arrived in the world on Sunday, 18th February 1940, in the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield, at 20 Antrobus Road. “Royal” Sutton Coldfield had earned its title in 1528 from King Henry VIII, who prized its hunting grounds and woodlands.

The Second World War had erupted just a few months earlier, and Britain was plunged into uncertainty and fear. Families everywhere were facing separation, sacrifice, and the challenge of survival. Amidst all that chaos, a new life began — mine.I joined my father, mother, and three older brothers: Michael, born in 1933; Lionel, in 1934; and David, in 1936. On my birth certificate, my father was listed as a “Businessman,” but he was so much more than a title. Charming, kind-hearted, and full of energy, he could light up any room. Despite the challenges of being Jewish in those times, he faced life with dignity and resilience. Sadly, he passed away in September 1951 when I was only eleven. But in the years I had with him, he taught me integrity, compassion, and hard work — lessons that still guide me today.My mother was younger than my father and came from Dover, Kent. I have few direct memories of my early years with her, but the stories she told paint a vivid picture. She was an extraordinary woman — warm, loving, and endlessly devoted to her family. Her culinary skills were legendary, but her love and care went far beyond the kitchen. She held our family together, navigating life’s hardships with grace and strength.

In 1941, as the war intensified, our family moved from Antrobus Street to Waltham Abbey in London. My brothers were evacuated to Wales for safety, but I was too young to leave my mother’s side, so I stayed in London, separated from them until 1945. The threat of nightly bombings and the absence of my brothers marked my early childhood, but it also taught me resilience. My family’s story, like so many others during the war, is a testament to the courage of ordinary people facing extraordinary times. Looking back, these early years shaped who I am. They instilled in me a sense of resilience, unity, and gratitude — for family, for safety, and for the peace we enjoy today.

This is where my story begins.

Chapter 2

Epping Forest

Waltham Abby Epping The town is named and renowned for its former abbey, the last in England to be dissolved, now the Abbey Church of Waltham Holy Cross and St Lawrence a scheduled ancient monument and the town's parish church.

Written on January 11, 2026

Waltham Abbey

Our family moved to Waltham Abbey, a town famous for its ancient abbey — the last in England to be dissolved — now known as the Abbey Church of Waltham Holy Cross and St Lawrence. The town, steeped in history, lay on the edge of Epping Forest, a vast woodland alive with deer, foxes, and birds. Even during the war, it offered a strange sense of sanctuary, though the presence of army bases, convoys of military trucks, and young Land Girls working the fields served as constant reminders that life was far from normal.

I was only an infant at the time, so most of my memories of Waltham Abbey are vague. One incident, however, has stayed with me all these years. By all accounts, it unfolded very quickly.

A couple of Land Girls, amused by my youth, lifted me onto the back of a bicycle as they strolled along a forest path. It must have been quite a sight — carefree, innocent, and entirely unaware of what was about to happen.

The peace of the forest was suddenly broken by the rumble of an army convoy. The girls waved and smiled at the passing soldiers, unaware of the danger ahead. A hidden iron girder protruding from one of the trucks struck my head.

What followed was chaos — confusion, fear, and urgency. I was fortunate to survive, though a faint scar on my scalp remains to this day, a quiet reminder of how fragile life can be. My father pursued legal action on my behalf, and a compensation award was secured and held in trust until my twenty-first birthday — the beginning of another story, for another time.

After I recovered from this early brush with danger, our next significant move came in 1947, when our family relocated to Dover, opening the door to a new chapter of my life.

Chapter 3

Start of my childhood in Dover

DOVER is a town and major ferry port in Kent, South East England. It faces France across the Strait of Dover, the narrowest part of the English Channel at 33 kilometres (21 mi) from Cap Gris Nez in France.

Written on January 11, 2026
Start of My Childhood in Dover After the war, our family moved to Dover, a busy ferry port in Kent, just across the Channel from France. Mum and Dad were entrepreneurs and became the first in town to obtain a hotelier's license after the war. With that, they opened Claire House, a guesthouse at 138 Folkestone Road. This marked the beginning of my childhood memories, as the war ended and we were finally reunited with my brothers. Rationing was still in place, but the joy of being together filled our home. Dad's new venture allowed him to acquire fuel for a Vauxhall, a spacious car that might have once served the army. The four of us boys and Mum often piled into it for day trips across the countryside. Sometimes Dad would pull over at a pub for drinks — lemonade for us, something stronger for him and Mum. One trip to Eastbourne introduced me to Jewish cuisine for the first time: smoked salmon, rollmops, matzos, anchovies, and potato salad. I was seven, and from that moment, I loved fine food. With the reopening of the Channel, Dover buzzed with visitors, keeping Mum and Dad busy at the guesthouse. About a year later, they moved us to a larger house across the road at 167 Folkestone Road. I grew particularly close to Dad during this time, accompanying him on shopping trips to local stores — butchers, grocers, fruiterers, even farms for fresh chicken. Dad was well-known and respected; shopkeepers greeted him by name, and I followed proudly, a little shadow in awe of my father. We also had a small dog, Rex, who rode in the car with us. Protective and feisty, he barked at anyone who approached — giving Dad some peace of mind while driving.Childhood parties at Claire House left lasting impressions. Mum and Dad entertained friends and colleagues, filling the house with laughter, music, and the aroma of delicious food. Though my brothers and I were tucked into bed as the evenings progressed, the energy of those gatherings lingered long after lights out. Dad's charm extended to everyday life as well. He would answer the door wearing a huge white apron, instantly tuning into the visitor's accent and effortlessly imitating them. People loved him; he could make friends with anyone. I often thought he could sell ice to the Eskimos.My schooling began at three primary schools: Belgrave Primary, St. Mary's in Stembrock, and St. Martin's in Elms Vale. I enjoyed St. Martin's the most, with its modern facilities, but I ran into trouble with an English teacher who accused me of cheating when sunlight made the blackboard unreadable. My father believed me, thankfully. Meanwhile, my brothers joined HMS Mercury, the Royal Navy training school, while I and my younger brother David went to Horam boarding school near Hailsham, Sussex. The Principal, a passionate butterfly collector, sparked my interest in entomology.Life at boarding school wasn't without its challenges. I suffered a severe case of ringworm, requiring months of treatment at Middlesex Hospital. During my recovery, I stayed with relatives who imposed strict rules, making for a difficult experience. Looking back, these early schooling years were a mix of lessons, adventures, and hardships, shaping me in unexpected ways.In December 1950, our family grew with the arrival of my little brother, Phillip. I quickly took on the role of helping care for him, a responsibility I would remember and cherish in the years to come.
found this movie it will give you a good idea what Dover was like just after the war.

Chapter 4

After isolation

Growing Up in Dover Dover in the 1950s remained scarred by the ravages of war, with bomb sites and debris still littering the landscape long after the conflict had ceased...

Written on January 11, 2026
Growing Up Too Soon
Growing up in Dover in the early 1950s, the town still carried the visible scars of war. Bomb sites lay open between rows of houses, and rubble stood as quiet reminders of a conflict that had only recently ended.
After being cleared from the hospital, I returned home to Claire House. My head was still bald from the ringworm treatment, though a faint stubble had begun to appear. Returning to boarding school was no longer an option, and David had already come home — much to his relief. Soon after, I was enrolled at Manor House Day School in Hythe.
The school was set in a grand old mansion, surrounded by beautiful gardens and mature trees. A large ancient mulberry tree stood proudly on the grounds, heavy with fruit at the time of my first visit. The uniform was bright red — a peaked cap, single-breasted blazer, and grey flannel trousers — and I loved it.
The only difficulty was the distance: twenty-five miles from Claire House. Dad solved it cleverly. I took a bus from outside our home to Folkestone, then another on to Hythe. The journey took just under an hour.
Despite my bald head, the boys were friendly, and I soon made a good friend. Lessons were enjoyable, and I even began learning a couple of languages. Wearing my colourful uniform on the bus often sparked conversations. I suppose I have always had a touch of the showman in me.
Weekends were quieter. Life around Claire House could be harsh, with poverty lingering in the nearby streets. Yet friendships forged earlier at Belgrave Primary provided some connection and familiarity.
Then came the unthinkable.
One afternoon, returning home from a football game, a neighbour stopped me with news that shattered everything: my father had died from a massive heart attack. I was only eleven. Baby Phillip had been sitting on Dad’s knee when it happened.
In that instant, childhood felt abruptly over.
The days that followed were confused and painful. During a family discussion about the funeral, Zena — upset by something I had said or done — insisted that I should not attend. The reasoning was never fully explained. Being excluded left me with a deep sense of incompleteness, a quiet wound that lingers even now.
Life without Dad was challenging. Mum carried the heavy responsibility of managing Claire House and its finances. I lost my place at Manor House because we could no longer afford the fees and, by February 1952, I enrolled at Astor Avenue Secondary Modern School. Michael stepped forward to help Mum, supported by Biddy and Irene.
My school days became routine — physically present, but often somewhere else in my thoughts. I would walk home each lunchtime, eat quickly, and return. While classmates laughed and bonded, I often felt apart, observing rather than belonging.
At weekends, I cared for Phillip, taking him out in his pram. One afternoon at Penchester Park, I noticed a white bundle drifting slowly down the river. It was a baby who had fallen from an overturned pram. Without thinking, I jumped in and managed to pull the child to safety, returning the soaking bundle to a distraught mother. I was drenched, but the relief and gratitude in her eyes made the moment unforgettable.
Life around me continued to change. Michael married Irene. Lionel remained in the navy, later participating in King George’s funeral. David joined the Merchant Navy, working aboard cross-channel ferries. With my brothers grown and occupied, much of the responsibility at home fell to me. Helping Mum and caring for Phillip became part of daily life.
As I entered my teens, a small opportunity for independence appeared. Mrs Cotton, who lived a few doors down from Claire House, owned a fruit and vegetable shop on Tower Street. She offered me a part-time job delivering produce, and I eagerly accepted. Saturday mornings — and occasionally Wednesday afternoons — became my own time to earn pocket money and spend as I wished. It was my first taste of responsibility beyond the family, and I relished it.
Dover in those days had four cinemas, each with its own character. The Odeon, perched high above the town, was the most prestigious, with its 1930s décor and an organ that played before each film. I rarely visited — it wasn’t easy to reach — but the experience felt grand. The Gaumont, more centrally located, became my regular haunt. I once took my heavily pregnant mother there; after the film she mistakenly linked arms with a stranger, and I had to jokingly “rescue” her.
The Plaza, known affectionately as “The Flea Pit” because of its low prices, and the ABC Grenada near the market square completed the quartet. At the Grenada, I attended Saturday morning children’s screenings — a habit that lasted for years. Cinema became a passion. I watched nearly every film starring Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney, George Raft, Lon Chaney, Peter Lorre, Clark Gable, John Wayne, and many others. It wasn’t violence that drew me — by modern standards it was mild — but the storytelling, the characters, and the drama.
By my late teens, rock and roll had arrived. Saturday night dances at the Town Hall and the Co-op Hall

were electric, with live performances by Lonnie Donegan and Bill Haley & His Comets. Coffee shops with jukeboxes became gathering places. One evening, dressed in my best, I walked straight into the glass door of a newly opened café, providing instant entertainment for everyone inside. I never returned — though I laughed about it for years.

Youth culture in that era was vivid and, at times, intimidating. Teddy Boys in long jackets and drainpipe trousers, wearing crepe-soled “beetle crushers,” strutted the streets. Mods, sharp in suits and riding Vespas, followed. I steered clear of both, preferring to remain a quiet observer rather than belong to any group.

Through it all, my life remained anchored in responsibility at home. With Michael married, Lionel at sea, and David working away, I became Mum’s primary support, especially for Phillip. Every weekend and school holiday brought duties — but also small adventures and moments that quietly shaped my character.

Looking back, those years were a mixture of loss, growth, and discovery. Grief had forced me to mature quickly, yet joy still found its way in — through cinema, music, work, and unexpected acts of courage. The challenges instilled resilience; the small victories nurtured compassion. Without realising it at the time, I was being shaped for whatever lay ahead.

Chapter 5

Clare House

Life's twists and turns often unfold swiftly, leaving us with little control over the course of events .

Written on January 11, 2026
Life’s twists and turns often unfold swiftly, leaving little control over the course of events. After Michael and Irene were married, they remained at Claire House for a few months before moving out. Biddy continued to be a great help to my mother, providing much-needed support during this challenging time. One day, a new person arrived at Claire House. Introduced as Eddie, the brother of one of my uncles, I didn’t yet realize he would soon become my stepfather, bringing significant changes to our lives. At the time, I lacked the business acumen to help run a hotel, and it was clear my mother was overwhelmed emotionally and financially since Dad’s passing. Eddie’s arrival offered a glimmer of hope and stability. Before long, he and my mother were married. Phillip and I were too young to fully comprehend the implications, while Michael, Lionel, and David were preoccupied with their own lives. Initially, things felt awkward. I stuck to my routine: each morning around 7 o’clock, I’d visit the local bakery on Winchelsea Road. Stepping inside, I’d be greeted by the aroma of freshly baked bread and the sight of large mixers and ovens. I’d collect our order and hurry back home to Clare House, enjoying a crusty roll along the way. This became a three-times-a-week routine, and gradually, Eddie and I grew used to each other. Soon, Mum’s pregnancy brought more children: Tony, Carol, and twins Steven and Paul. While this brought joy, it also introduced new challenges for Phillip, me, and Mum. Tony would accompany us on outings to the beach, riding in the pushchair while Phillip walked beside me. On one particular day by the sea defences, an iron hook from a crane swung out and struck Phillip on the side of his head. The workers rushed him to the hospital, and thankfully, he recovered with no lasting effects. Even now, the memory of that swelling lingers vividly. As Tony grew, it became clear he would require special needs support, while Carol blossomed into a helpful, caring little girl. Managing the twins remained a handful. Occasionally, guests stayed at Clare House, requiring full board. Mum continued to lead in the kitchen, while Eddie, having spent most of his life at sea, lacked culinary skills. Mum began teaching me simple recipes to help in her absences, and Biddy assisted when available. Eddie’s struggle with alcoholism became increasingly apparent. He often asked me to fetch gin, but over time, I began avoiding those requests. My brothers, aware of the situation, tried to intervene, but Mum refused to consider removing Eddie from the household. Life continued with the children growing, each finding their place in the shifting family dynamics. In my final year at school, I shifted from Religious Education to music lessons under Mr. Dickinson. It was there I met Sid King, my best friend and only close companion at that school. We bonded instantly despite our different backgrounds, spending afternoons at the cinema or swimming pool. We even enrolled in The Big Brother Scheme to immigrate to Australia, completing medical checks, though ultimately, Sid backed out, and I chose not to go alone. As my birthday fell in February, I left school at Easter. Job opportunities in Dover were limited: cross-channel ferries for the summer season or local coal mines. The mines were not for me. Instead, I applied for a job on the ferries and was hired, marking the start of my working life and the beginning of a new chapter beyond Clare House.
After being selected to join the ship’s crew, all of us attended the company offices to sign the ship’s articles. This was where men who had served on other vessels presented their discharge books, which recorded every previous voyage and were usually stamped *“Very Good”*, confirming they were experienced and reliable seamen. I signed on as a **pantry boy**. The other boys were deck boys, part of the deck crew, while I was assigned to the catering department. As this was my first ship, I was issued with a discharge book of my own, which the company kept until the voyage was completed. Being a pantry boy meant I was at the very bottom of the ship’s hierarchy, and as you can imagine, I was terrified. I found myself among experienced able seamen, many of whom looked stern and serious. There were also assistant stewards and cooks — men who knew shipboard life inside out. Once all the crew had signed on and been told our starting times, we went aboard and reported to our respective departments. Mine was the restaurant, pantry, and galley. Those early days were very hard for me. I had no knowledge of life at sea and struggled to find a routine, not to mention dealing with constant seasickness. In time, however, I became more efficient at my duties. These included the daily *scrub-outs* — mine were the toilets, which I had to clean several times a day. My superior, the Second Steward, regularly inspected them, and if they were not up to his standards, I had to clean them all over again. It took several weeks to learn his particular dislikes, but once I did, he began to look after me and took the time to show and train me in the ways of shipboard life. This was in **1955**, when the cross-Channel ferries operated only during the summer months, normally from April to October. When the season ended, most of the crew were signed off, and many travelled to ports such as London, Southampton, or Liverpool to find other ships and voyages .I went up to **London’s King George V Docks**, where I was interviewed, passed the medical examination, and was issued with an identity seaman’s card. I was then given a company to report to — the **New Zealand Shipping Company**, whose vessels were known as the *Rangi boats*, as all their names began with *Rangi*: *Rangitiki*, *Rangitoto*, and so on. I was later told that I was the youngest person to secure a contract out of King George V Docks. Sadly, it did not last long. I booked into the seamen’s hostel for the night and rang my mother to tell her the news. She became very upset, and it worried me deeply knowing she was on her own with so many responsibilities. I lay awake that night, unable to sleep,

turning it over in my mind. By morning, my decision was made. I went to the station and bought a train ticket back to Dover. I realised I could not be happy going away to sea and leaving my mother behind.
During this time, I bought my first car — a **1926 Austin Ruby** — and taught myself how to drive. Just across the road from **Clare House**, off **Winchelsea Road**, there was an old dirt track lined with lock-up garages. On weekends and holidays, it was always busy with men working on their cars. Motoring was simple then: petrol was affordable, the roads were quiet, and these men were true enthusiasts, forever tinkering with their engines.
I became friendly with a couple of them, and they showed me how to drive the Austin Ruby. Looking back now, it's astonishing how far motoring has come — everything today is computerized. When you lifted the bonnet on my little Ruby, it looked more like a sewing machine than an engine.
I remember one afternoon when the lads had given me a lesson and then gone home for their tea. Eager to practise, I got into the car and decided to try reversing. I put the gear stick into reverse, pressed the accelerator, and before I knew it I was reversing up a bank. The car flipped over — and somehow landed back on its wheels. That was the last time I ever attempted to drive in reverse.
A few weeks later, I parted with the Ruby and bought a larger car, a **1934 Wolseley 10**. I was immensely proud of it and couldn't wait for **David** to return from his sea trip so I could show him. I kept that car for some time, and when I finally left Clare House, it carried me as far as **Taggs Island, Hampton Court** — a small but meaningful step into independence.

Chapter 6

Finding My Way: Leaving Clare House

The Bull Hotel was no ordinary place to begin a career. Dating back to the 1300s, it had once served as a coaching inn along the Pilgrim's Way and later became a notorious haunt for smuggling gangs. During the Second World War, it was a favourite watering hole for fighter pilots, many of whom left their signatures on the ceiling of the public bar. By the time I arrived in 1958, the Bull carried all that history with it—a place steeped in stories, now bustling with guests, fine dining, and the promise of opportunity for a young waiter like me.

Written on January 11, 2026
When I look back now, I realise I was not yet sixteen years old. I stayed with the family for another two years or so, remaining close at hand in case my mother or Phillip needed me. During that time, I completed a couple more seasons with **Townsend Ferries**.
At the start of my fourth season, I joined a ship sailing out of **Newhaven**, where I finally received an entry in my discharge book as an **Assistant Steward**. With that rating, I was now recognised as an adult seaman and could join any ship in that capacity. But again in Dover in those early years the cross channel ferries ceased to operate in the winter months
Despite this progress, I began to feel increasingly frustrated. I seemed to be getting nowhere — no clear career path, no permanent employment, and little sense of moving forward. Meanwhile, Phillip, Tony, and Carol were growing up and becoming more independent, able to look after themselves.
With that realisation came another difficult truth: it was time for me to cut ties with **Clare House**. My respect for Eddie, once strong, was steadily diminishing, and each passing day made it clearer that I needed to move on and find my own direction.

Taggs Island

It was at the **Casino Hotel on Taggs Island Hampton Court** that I found employment as a **commis barman**. The hotel was said to have once been owned by **Al Capone**, the New York gangster, back in the 1920s. How true that was, I never knew, but looking at the place you could almost believe it — it certainly had the air of a hood's enterprise. The hotel stood on a small island surrounded by houseboats, one of which became my accommodation while I worked there. It was November, and winter was beginning to bite.
From the start, my weeks there felt strange. The hotel was eerily quiet; entire days passed when I barely saw another soul.
Yet on Sundays, at lunchtime, everything changed. The bar would suddenly fill with locals, and the atmosphere came alive.
Many of these "locals" were well-known faces of the time — performers from the stage and screen. Members of the Crazy Gang, including Flanagan & Allen, would appear, along with Charlie Naughton and Jimmy Gold, and others whose names I recognised from posters and programmes.
It felt surreal to see such personalities in what was otherwise such a silent, almost empty hotel.

One particular day, the barman who was meant to be training me gave me a job before heading off for his lunch break. I was to clean all the glassware behind the mirrored shelves — washing the glasses and wiping down the bottles as I went. He assured me no one would come into the bar, as the hotel was virtually empty.
I set to work and was just placing the last of the clean glasses back on the shelves when, to my surprise, **two customers walked into the cocktail bar**. They sat at the bar, discussing at length what they might like to drink. Eventually, they settled on **two Brandy Alexanders** — if memory serves, a mixture of brandy, crème de cacao, and cream.
Nervous but eager to impress, I put all the ingredients into the cocktail shaker with ice, silently hoping the barman would return and see what a good job I was doing. I picked up the shaker and gave it a confident shake — only to see the customers' faces turn from horror to uncontrollable laughter. In my nerves, I had forgotten to put the lid on the shaker. The entire contents sprayed straight over my shoulder, covering the freshly cleaned glassware and shelves behind me.
It was not quite the impression I had hoped to make.

The Bull Hotel

I found myself at a crossroads. Hospitality had always appealed to me, so in July I contacted an agency and soon secured a position at **the Bull Hotel**. From the outset, I was welcomed warmly and began work as a waiter under the maître d', **Alan Baines**.
Off duty, Alan's strong Liverpool accent was unmistakable, but once on the restaurant floor his voice became refined and polished — you would never have guessed his origins. Cheerful and quick-witted, he took me under his wing and taught me the finer points of service: attention to detail, how to put guests at ease, and even the art of cooking at the table. Alan was a natural showman, and the gratuities we received were proof of that.
The Bull itself carried echoes of history. In the public bar, the ceiling still bore the signatures of fighter pilots from the war — a tangible reminder of the hotel's past. Among the guests was **Colonel Whintel**, whose monocle and distinguished bearing made a lasting impression on me.

Life at the Bull was lively and full of character. The staff formed a close-knit group of barmen, housekeepers, kitchen staff, and the owners, **Mr and Mrs Dixon**. Stories circulated constantly, including whispered talk of another Mrs Dixon — the former wife of Mr Dixon — which added to the hotel's quiet intrigue.

Soon after I arrived, renovations began. The restaurant was extended and a new timber bar was installed. With it came **Sheila**, a young Irish girl who joined Alan and me in the restaurant. We quickly formed a solid team, and most evenings the restaurant was busy and full of life. The new bar proved popular too, with background music from *My Fair Lady*, which had just opened in the West End.

Then, one Sunday morning, Alan disappeared — taking all the gratuities with him.

Sheila and I were stunned. In his absence, we naturally grew closer. We shared breaks and days off, taking rides through the countryside on her Lambretta. When the weather turned poor, we stayed indoors, talking for hours or listening to **Radio Luxembourg**, the best station around at the time.

Not all the lessons I learned at the Bull were pleasant. The cocktail barman, older and more worldly, once asked to try on my Italian-style pale blue suit. Naïve and trusting, I agreed. The next morning, he was gone — and so was my suit, never to be seen again. I was devastated.

Eventually, a new head waiter arrived. **Joseph**, a confident young Italian, restored order to the restaurant, though by then the fashion for tableside cooking was beginning to fade.

Sheila and I continued to grow closer. On our days off, we visited my mother in Dover or spent quiet time together at the hotel. Then one day, after I had been away for several days, I returned to learn that Joseph had taken advantage of Sheila during a quiet night.

We were both shocked and deeply upset. Together, we made the decision to leave the Bull Hotel. Sheila's father welcomed me warmly, offering help with our belongings and a place to stay once I was free of my duties. And so, we said our goodbyes, ready to begin a new chapter together.

My time at the Bull taught me far more than service skills. I learned how quickly people could let you down — Alan disappearing, the barman stealing my suit, Joseph betraying trust — but I also discovered friendship, companionship, and the quiet joy of sharing life with someone like Sheila.

Those months were a mixture of hard lessons and fond memories, a reminder that growing up often means facing disappointment and heartbreak, but also finding the courage to keep moving forward.

Chapter 7

Red Lion Cottages with Henry

Stoke Green Cricket Club in Stoke Green has been playing there since 1879 with support of the then landowner, Howard-Vyse of Stoke Place.Stoke Poges Golf Club at Stoke Park used to run a cricket club in the early 20th century, playing home matches in Farnham Royal

Written on January 11, 2026

Red Lion Cottage and New Beginnings

I arrived at Red Lion Cottage after tendering my resignation at the Bull Hotel. The cottages, just outside Slough in the quaint village of Stoke Green, formed a charming row of eight detached homes, each with long, manicured gardens. Sheila's father, Henry Kelly, lived at number six — a cottage with a lawn so perfectly level it looked like a bowling green.
Henry worked as a gardener on the nearby Sir Howard Vyse Estate, tending its oak trees, sycamores, and abundant vegetable gardens. Many of the other residents in the row were also estate employees, giving the cottages a strong sense of community.
Inside, the homes were modern and inviting. Each had a kitchen, living room, upstairs bathroom, and two bedrooms, all cosy and well kept. Small back gardens flourished with forsythia in full bloom. I arrived just after midday and was warmly greeted by Sheila, who had prepared a delightful lunch. Henry soon joined us, and over the meal we shared stories and aspirations.
I felt an immediate connection with Henry; his warmth and positivity were deeply uplifting. And so, another chapter of my life began — alongside someone I cherished, with the hope that our affection was mutual.

Work and New Routines

Before long, it was time to seek employment. Using the same agency as before, we both secured positions at London Airport. At that time, the airport consisted of the newly built Queens Building and London Airport North — a temporary complex of simple, round-roofed huts reminiscent of wartime munitions buildings.
Inside were lounges, restaurants, shops, and a cocktail bar. My role in the cocktail lounge allowed me to serve drinks and exchange light conversation with well-dressed, elite travellers. Sheila worked as a waitress in the Queens Building cafeteria, later accepting a position at Pinewood Studios. I remained at London Airport North until its closure in 1959.

Marriage and Faith

As time passed, my feelings for Sheila deepened, and I took the leap of proposing marriage. She accepted, and on 26 November 1959 we exchanged vows in a humble ceremony attended by just twenty guests from each family.
Because Sheila wished for a Catholic ceremony, I converted to Catholicism. Henry's home in Stoke Green became the place where I undertook six to eight weeks of instruction with a priest, culminating in my baptism and formal entry into the Church.
Having grown up without religion, my father never spoke to me about his Jewish faith, and my brothers rarely mentioned it either. With hindsight, however, I believe there must have been some observance of Jewish tradition with them. Each of my brothers received a signet ring — usually presented on a boy's thirteenth birthday — and they were circumcised. I had neither.
For many years I puzzled over that difference. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that my birth in 1940, at a time when Hitler was threatening to invade Britain, may have shaped my father's decision. Perhaps he feared what might happen if the Germans crossed the Channel. Perhaps, in his own quiet way, he was protecting me — ensuring that, if the worst occurred, I would be regarded as a Gentile rather than Jewish. It was not something he ever explained, but with maturity I came to see it as an act not of neglect, but of precaution — even love.
As I grew older, I dabbled in Sunday School, the Boys' Brigade, and the Scouts, but none of those experiences left a lasting spiritual mark. It was only later that I felt a genuine sense of connection. The priest's guidance — delivered in perfect English with a warm Italian accent — stayed with me long after those early encounters, quietly shaping my understanding of faith, belonging, and identity. Perhaps it even sowed the first seeds of my lifelong affection for Italian culture and cuisine.

My Driving Licence

I thought I would tell the story of my driving test in Slough.
Henry had mentioned that we could use his Morris Minor for our honeymoon, so I decided it was time to finally obtain my driving licence — even though I had been driving my old cars on a provisional licence for

several years.
I duly booked the test and turned up on the appointed day. By the end of it, as we were driving back to the examiner’s office, the instructor suddenly turned to me and asked whether I had completed my conscription into the forces yet.
I remember wondering what he was getting at — I had just finished a driving test, after all. I replied that no, I hadn’t, as I had been in the Merchant Navy. When I asked why he was asking, he said:
“Well, if you had been, they might have taught you your left from your right. When I asked you to turn left, you turned right. When I asked you to turn right, you turned left.”
I must have looked stunned.
He then paused and added, “But I can’t judge your driving on that. You handled the car like an experienced driver — so I’m going to pass you.”
It was an outcome I hadn’t expected, and one that still makes me smile.

A Modest Honeymoon

Our honeymoon, modest but filled with promise, took us to Cornwall, with its rugged coastlines and windswept cliffs. Despite the chilly November weather, we were warmed by the simple joy of being together.
Dreams of far-off destinations danced in our minds, but our modest bank balance kept those plans grounded. What mattered most was that we were together, ready to face life as partners.

Onward to Stratford-upon-Avon

While Sheila continued her work at Pinewood Studios, an opportunity arose for live-in positions at The White Swan Hotel in Stratford-upon-Avon for the summer season. It promised a change of scenery and a chance to expand our skills in hospitality.
With Henry’s help loading our belongings onto the trusty Lambretta, we set off on the road to Stratford-upon-Avon — hearts full of anticipation and excitement for the adventures that lay ahead.

Chapter 8

Swan Hotel

Stratford-upon-Avon — the home of William Shakespeare and a theatre-rich market town — had more than 800 years of history, with buildings that Shakespeare himself might have known. Even then, the town was alive with a thriving community, offering leisure, accommodation, and shopping experiences.

Written on January 11, 2026

A Summer at The White Swan in Stratford-upon-Avon — was the perfect setting for the next chapter of our lives. Its timber-framed buildings, cobblestone streets, and rich cultural heritage offered a blend of charm, history, and modern amenities. In those days, information wasn't at our fingertips as it is now, so our knowledge of The White Swan Hotel rested largely on its reputation as a distinguished four-star establishment. When we arrived, the grandeur of the building exceeded our expectations. Forty lavish bedrooms and a dining room exuding classic elegance awaited guests, and we were warmly welcomed by the owner, the managers, and, most importantly, the maître d' who would guide us through the intricacies of fine dining service. Our training began immediately, with a strong focus on attention to detail, proper protocol, and the art of silver service — precision and grace in every gesture. My attire reflected the formality of the role: a full black tailcoat, winged collar, and a perfectly tied black bow tie. Sheila, too, looked the part in a black dress with a small white apron and a dainty white hat. Each of us was assigned a station of three to four tables, serving eight to twelve guests. Despite the rigour of the work, we embraced it enthusiastically, determined to provide an unforgettable dining experience. Our accommodation, in a nearby private home, provided a cosy retreat after the demands of service. The White Swan became a hub for American tourists travelling on coach tours, bringing energy and variety to our days. We worked alongside a couple of spirited young Irish lads and other local couples, forging friendships that would last well beyond the summer. Sheila's Irish heritage helped bridge gaps, and our camaraderie deepened as we shared evenings out, laughter, and stories. During this time, we sold the Lambretta, opting instead for a more reliable Mini that allowed us to explore farther afield. I still remember the day it arrived: I dashed downstairs wearing shorts and a makeshift cardboard dicky shirt front, causing both our landlady and the dealership representative to laugh heartily.

Those light-hearted moments were a welcome contrast to the discipline of our work. Our daily routine followed a steady rhythm: bustling breakfasts for eager guests, quieter mid-mornings, light lunches for elderly American travellers — whose stage of life added a certain gentle humour to the season — and finally, the busy evening service. Amid all this, Sheila and I made time to explore Stratford, often strolling along the banks of the Avon or enjoying afternoon tea. Unexpected encounters occasionally reminded us of our past. One day, we ran into Alan Baines, the head waiter from the Bull Hotel. Though memories of his sudden disappearance lingered, we greeted him politely, maintaining civility and acknowledging the past without resentment. Our evenings frequently ended at the local fish and chip shop, enjoying simple pleasures with our newfound friends, especially the lively Irish lads. As summer drew to a close, we bid farewell to The White Swan Hotel and its cast of characters. Though parting was bittersweet, we carried with us memories, skills, and experiences that enriched our lives. Stratford had been more than a place to work; it had been a stage for learning, friendship, and our first true taste of independence and adventure. With hearts full of gratitude and anticipation, Sheila and I looked ahead, ready to embrace the next chapter, confident that together we could meet whatever life had in store. Several weeks later, we learned that Sheila was pregnant. After much thought, we spoke with Henry and agreed it would be best for us to stay at Red Lion Cottages for the birth. Around that time, we both found work in Windsor, where we were taken on at The Old House Hotel. It was a place frequented by students from Eton College, who gathered there with their *Mater* and *Pater* for lunch and afternoon tea, all arriving in their distinctive Eton uniforms. Looking back now, it's quite possible we served future Prime Ministers without ever realising it. While working there, I heard of an opening at The Grapes Inn, on the main road opposite Windsor Castle. For their recently renovated restaurant, they were looking for a maître d'. After applying, I was accepted. Just down the street from the Grapes, Sheila found work at The Castle Hotel, where she remained until it became too evident for her to continue. Even so, she occasionally accompanied me to the Grapes to assist in the pantry. The day before Sheila's birthday, on January 27, 1961, Paul was born at Slough Hospital.

Chapter 9

A New Career

From Hospitality to the Post Office

Written on January 11, 2026

Hospitality, I came to realise, could be an unsociable trade, with long hours spent working evenings, weekends, and public holidays. Seeking a more stable and fulfilling career, I began exploring other opportunities. Eventually, I came across an advertisement for a career with the Post Office, focused on telecommunications. After attending several interviews, I was fortunate to secure a position as a trainee in the telephone service of the UK General Post Office.

Leaving my job at the Grapes was bittersweet. Mr and Mrs Boyes had been kind and understanding, fully aware that gaining broader experience often means moving on.

I began my new employment as part of a team of men who travelled together in a well-equipped vehicle loaded with tools and equipment. Our work involved installing telegraph poles and telephone kiosks, as well as repairing lines damaged by storms. Dressed in practical workwear, I relished being outdoors, despite the physical demands. My colleagues were a down-to-earth bunch, very different from the people I had met on ships and in hotels, yet I quickly settled into their camaraderie and was accepted as one of their own.

After six months, I was selected to attend a ten-day course at Bletchley Park, covering the fundamentals of telephony. It was not easy for Sheila to manage without me during that time, but whenever possible, we returned home for weekend visits. One exercise from the course remains vivid in my memory: strapping myself to a telegraph pole to simulate working on wires and insulators. Climbing several metres high in cold winter conditions — including heights of over sixty metres along the seafront at Herne Bay in Kent — was both terrifying and exhilarating.

On completing the course, I joined a smaller team of four men and a foreman, installing wires between poles. Fresh from Bletchley Park, I eagerly volunteered for pole-climbing duties. We often found ourselves working in the countryside, enjoying simple picnics during breaks and sharing hot tea. Six months later, I returned to Bletchley Park for further training, this time delving deeper into telephony and equipment installation.

Soon afterwards, I joined a team responsible for installing lines from poles into buildings. I particularly enjoyed meeting homeowners and business proprietors and took real satisfaction in completing each job well.

After numerous months, I was offered a position as a solo fitter. Armed with a bag of tools, I would be responsible for independently installing telephone extensions at various premises. A vehicle was provided, but first I needed a valid driving licence. I had passed my test the previous year — despite turning left when instructed to turn right, and right when told to turn left. Even so, the instructor praised my overall driving and passed me. That small victory marked my readiness to begin work alone with the GPO.

Life was going well. I enjoyed my new career, while Paul, our youngest, grew up happy and well cared for by Sheila, who also prepared wonderful meals for us all. Although I had started at the bottom of the pay scale and taken a pay cut, we managed well. With no rent to pay, we covered food and utilities ourselves and even managed to save a little.

However, this period of calm was disrupted by a dispute between Sheila and her father, Henry. I found myself caught between two stubborn Irish personalities, though my loyalty was firmly with Sheila. After three or four weeks of tension, it became clear that staying at Red Lion Cottages was no longer an option.

We knew it was time to move on. That decision marked the end of one chapter of our lives and the uneasy beginning of another, shaped as much by circumstance as by choice.

Chapter 10

A New Beginning: Herne Bay and Home ownership

Herne Bay, a seaside town on the north coast of Kent, lies just six miles north of Canterbury. It had risen to prominence as a resort in the early 19th century after the construction of a pleasure pier and promenade and reached its heyday in the late Victorian era. For us, it represented the promise of a fresh start.

Written on January 11, 2026
A Place of Our Own

The situation at Red Lion Cottages had become too volatile. Our small bubble had burst, and we needed to find somewhere else to live. I found myself in an awkward position, trying to keep the peace with Sheila while also securing accommodation we could actually afford. Rents in our previous area were exorbitantly high, leaving us with little choice but to widen our search.

Eventually, we found a rental within our budget in Herne Bay, right on the Kent coast. The next hurdle was arranging a transfer at the Post Office. I had to meet with my superiors and request a move to the depot nearest to Herne Bay. Their initial response was far from enthusiastic. They reminded me of the time and money invested in my training and questioned whether approving the transfer would be worthwhile.

About ten days later, I was summoned to the GPO offices. Reluctantly, they agreed to transfer me to the Canterbury depot, which meant starting over with a completely new gang of men. I admitted my hesitation but explained that our living situation had become untenable for Sheila and Paul. In the end, they understood.

As winter closed in, we moved. With the help of a removal man, we transported our modest belongings to a second-floor flat right on the seafront. The view was magnificent, though the relentless wind and cold meant we spent most of our time in the kitchen and bedroom. The lounge became an improvised food store; without a refrigerator, it was simply too cold to use for much else.

My daily routine now began early. I caught the 5:45 a.m. bus to ensure I reached the Canterbury depot by 7:30. Once again, I had to prove myself to a new team. It took time, but I eventually earned their acceptance — although my pay rate suffered a small reduction.

Despite the challenges, there were comforts. We attended Mass at the local Catholic church and often took Paul out in his pram along the promenade on clear days. Brother Lionel, who lived in Canterbury, visited regularly with his wife June, a schoolteacher. Not long after we had settled in, Sheila shared some wonderful news: she was pregnant, and we were expecting a child in May.

With our lease due to expire and the likelihood of a rent increase looming in the summer, we began thinking seriously about something more permanent. While browsing rental advertisements, I came across a scheme designed to help people buy their own homes. Canterbury City Council was offering approved loans to eligible applicants. For the first time, the idea of homeownership felt possible.

After working out what we could realistically afford, we found a terraced house at 2 Albion Place, just two streets from Canterbury Cathedral, priced at £19,000. Acting on the advice of the council representative, I offered £18,000 — and to our delight, it was accepted. With modest savings and a low-interest mortgage, we were able to buy our first home.

Number 2 Albion Place sat quietly in a small cul-de-sac near the heart of the city. Built in the 1890s, it had three bedrooms and a recently added bathroom. Downstairs there was a generous front room, a large kitchen with an adjoining scullery, and a small back garden with the customary outside toilet. It wasn’t perfect: the front bedroom needed work, and reaching the bathroom meant passing through the third bedroom. But these were small compromises.

At last, we had something we hadn’t known for a long time — stability. A place that was truly ours, and the sense that after years of reacting to circumstances, we were finally beginning to shape our own future.

Chapter 11

Shifting Ground: From Albion Place to Dungeness

Written on January 11, 2026

Balancing Acts and Hard Choices

After settling into our new home over several months, and with a reduction in my wages at the Post Office, it became clear that I would need to supplement our income to meet our growing financial responsibilities. Drawing on my background in catering, I began looking for part-time work in Canterbury's hotels, focusing on restaurant shifts during evenings, weekends, and public holidays. Rejections came first, but eventually I secured a part-time waiter's position at the Slatters Hotel.
Slatters was a busy establishment, particularly during the summer months, and before long my "part-time" role expanded to most evenings, weekends, and holidays. The extra money helped, but it came at a cost. Sheila was left managing Paul largely on her own, with another baby due at any moment.
When the time came, it caught us completely by surprise. During a routine visit from the midwife, Sheila's waters broke right there at the front door. Just hours later, on the 12th of May 1962, Julia was born at home in 2 Albion Place. I returned from work to the wonderful news that I was now the proud father of a beautiful daughter.
Despite the joy, our material circumstances were stark. We had no refrigerator, no washing machine, and no dryer — appliances that would have eased daily life considerably. With two young children now depending on us, the weight of responsibility pressed heavily on my shoulders. Even with the additional income from Slatters, saving for such necessities felt painfully slow.
Around this time, Lionel — now working for West Piling Construction — began urging me to join him. How he had secured the role I never quite understood, given his background in the Navy's catering department, but he was persistent. He claimed the wages were nearly double what I earned at the GPO. When I questioned him further, he admitted the job involved daily travel to construction sites, with his current posting at Dungeness Power Station. He offered to drive me there and back, covering petrol and travel costs.
The offer was tempting. At the GPO I earned £12 a week, supplemented by £1.50 an hour at Slatters. West Piling promised a flat £20 weekly wage, with overtime and travel allowances. The price, of course, was walking away from the steady career I had begun building in telecommunications.
I approached my superiors at the GPO, hoping for a pay rise to help meet my family's needs. My request was dismissed outright. Instead, they suggested I study for the Elementary Telecommunications Practice examination — a process that would take over a year, with no guarantee of success. Faced with immediate financial pressures, the promise of future advancement felt hollow.
Sheila and I talked it through repeatedly. She gently reminded me that one of the reasons I had left hospitality was so we could share evenings, weekends, and holidays together — and now I was back working most nights in a hotel. Her words struck home. With a heavy heart, I resigned from the GPO and joined Lionel at West Piling.
Our new routine began at Dungeness Power Station. The mornings were early, with a drive of over an hour each way. The work was physically demanding — preparing the bases for pylons that would carry electricity into the national grid — but the pay was better, and I was grateful to be home most evenings. Saturday overtime boosted our income further, while Sundays and holidays were reserved for family time.
Julia's baptism took place that Easter. Auntie Kitty and Uncle Bill travelled down from Blackburn to act as her godparents. With limited space at Albion Place, they stayed at the Slatters Hotel, though we welcomed them as warmly as we could. Later, Sheila mentioned that Kitty had not been impressed by our house — a remark that lingered with me longer than I cared to admit.
For several months, work at Dungeness continued. The scale of the project was impressive, and although the labour was tough, it helped stabilise our finances. Eventually, however, we were reassigned to a new site on the outskirts of London, adding another half-hour to the commute. Lionel's reliability began to waver. He arrived late, causing us to be late for signing on, and on one occasion ran out of petrol on the motorway. Frustration grew among the team.
Then, one morning after yet another difficult journey, Lionel announced without warning that he had had enough and was leaving the job.
I was stunned. Without Lionel, the arrangement that made the work possible collapsed. Worse still, I had burned my bridges with the GPO. Returning to Slatters Hotel full-time felt like a dispiriting step backwards, yet the thought of failing my family was unbearable.
At a loss, I turned to Mum at Claire House in Dover for advice. During our conversation, she mentioned that the cross-channel ferry company — my former employer — was launching a new ship and recruiting crew. It felt like an unexpected lifeline. At the same time, she told us about a new housing development in Whitfield, just a couple of miles from her home. When Sheila and I visited, we found a row of newly built semi-detached houses — just within reach, provided we could sell Albion Place.
Once again, life stood at a crossroads — work, home, and family pulling in different directions — and the

choices ahead would shape far more than just the next chapter of our lives.

Life has a way of circling back on itself, and just when I thought my days at sea were long behind me, it came knocking again.

Chapter 12

Whitfield and the Ferries

The History of Whitfield, Kent The village of Whitfield has grown so that it is now physically connected to urban Dover, Kent, yet it has kept its own identity and sense of place. The central core of modern Whitfield was, however, not the original heart of the village; the original settlement was sited at Church Whitfield to the east. Pineham, located to the east of Church Whitfield is a small rural hamlet that is often considered part of the Whitfield community. It contains a small handful of farms and houses..

Written on January 11, 2026

Putting Down Roots

Selling our little house in Albion Place marked the beginning of another new chapter. With the modest profit from the sale, we were able to buy a modern semi-detached house at 42 Allison Crescent in Whitfield, a quiet village just outside Dover. It felt like the right move — away from the damp, cramped rooms of Canterbury and into a home with more light, more space, and the promise of a fresh start.
While the house was being completed, we lived in a caravan parked in the paddock of The Plough Inn. It was far from luxurious, but it gave us a sense of independence. We learned quickly how to make do with very little. One vivid memory from that time is Sheila's knitting machine. I can still picture her wrestling with it, muttering under her breath whenever the stitches caught. In many ways, it mirrored our lives then — often tangled, but patiently put back together.
Once settled in Whitfield, I found work with Townsend Car Ferries, initially as a steward aboard *Free Enterprise I*. The work was steady and, importantly, paid better than the Post Office or the construction sites I had drifted between. For the first time in a long while, life began to find a rhythm.
In 1963, we welcomed our second daughter, Kathryn, who was born at home with the help of a midwife. The house at Allison Crescent, modest though it was, soon filled with the sounds of young children. Paul was thriving, and for the first time, we felt truly rooted.
Not long after, we sold Allison Crescent and moved to 46 Mayfield Road — a more permanent base where our family continued to grow. In 1965, Phillip was born. His arrival was not without drama. The midwife was less than sympathetic, and I remember the fear as Phillip was born with the cord around his neck. Thankfully, both Sheila and Phillip came through safely, though the memory stayed with me long afterwards.
By then, I had been promoted to Second Steward, a role that brought both pride and a sense of security. The work was demanding but honest, and it allowed me to provide for my family with greater certainty than ever before. Paul had started school, Julia & Kathryn were great friends, and baby Phillip lay content in his cot.
For the first time, I could sit at the dinner table, look around at my family, and feel that we had finally laid foundations strong enough to last.
Fatherhood had crept up on me almost unnoticed. Somewhere between early mornings, night feeds, and the simple routines of work and home, I realised I was no longer just reacting to life — I was responsible for shaping it for others.

Chapter 13

The Strike and the Dream of New Zealand

Written on January 11, 2026

When the Ground Shifted

By the mid-1960s, Townsend Ferries were expanding their fleet. Following my promotion to Second Steward on *Free Enterprise I*, I was offered the opportunity to join the crew of their newest ship, *Free Enterprise II*, which was due to open a new route between Dover and Zeebrugge.

It was early days for the service, and passenger and vehicle numbers were modest until the route became established. At that stage, no Chief Steward had been appointed, which meant that, in practice, I assumed much of that role. I was responsible for the crew and the catering department onboard *FE II* — a level of responsibility that extended well beyond my official title.

The work was steady, and life felt manageable. Then, in May 1966, everything changed.

The Seamen's Strike swept through the industry, paralysing ports and bringing shipping to a standstill. Despite the fact that we at Townsend Ferries were paid above standard rates and worked under better conditions than many others, we were still compelled to join the strike.

Weeks turned into months. With no wages coming in, we relied on what little savings we had. There seemed to be no progress and no clear end in sight. As frustration grew, a meeting was called so crews could vote on whether to return to work.

I attended that meeting — and I was afraid. Many of us were. Large men stood among the crowd, openly carrying baseball bats. The message needed no explanation. Anyone who dared raise a hand in favour of returning to work would pay for it. The vote, if it could be called that, was ruled by fear rather than choice.

British ships around the world lay idle. Goods bound for and from the country simply stopped moving. At home, the mortgage on Mayfield Road loomed heavily, and a small loan I had taken out to build a garage added further strain.

Although we were officially forbidden from seeking other work, even without that restriction there was little available. Occasionally, a neighbour allowed me to drive his taxi so he could take some time off. At other times, I joined potato-picking gangs when crops needed harvesting, working quietly and hoping not to draw attention. It was hard, physical labour, far removed from anything I had known before.

Sheila stretched every pound as far as it would go, but it was never quite enough.

As the weeks dragged on, I was forced to confront a question I could no longer avoid: was this really the life I wanted for my children? A life shaped by strikes, insecurity, and a country where opportunity seemed to be narrowing year by year?

Slowly — but unmistakably — the answer became clear.

We had to leave.

New Zealand had crossed our minds before, a distant place spoken of in hopeful tones — sunshine, space, opportunity. Now it shifted from idle conversation to something tangible. We spoke with travel agents, filled out forms, and even discussed paying our own fares if necessary. It was daunting, but compared with the uncertainty we faced, it felt like the only way forward.

Painful as it was, the strike gave me clarity. It showed me that while Britain could no longer offer the stability I wanted for my family, another life — elsewhere — just might.

And so, amid hardship and uncertainty, a new resolve took hold. We were no longer simply trying to get by.

We were preparing to take the greatest step of our lives — to leave everything we knew behind and begin again in New Zealand.

Chapter 14

Setting Sail for a New Life

Leaving the UK: The Journey Begins

Written on January 11, 2026
The decision had been made months before, yet the reality only truly hit as we packed the last of our belongings. I remember standing in the half-empty rooms of Mayfield Road, listening to the echoes of a life we were leaving behind, and feeling a strange mixture of relief, fear, and anticipation. In a few short days, the channel would lie between us and everything familiar. Beyond it, a new life waited — unknown, uncertain, but ours to shape.

The turning point had been when Sitmar Travel Agency had sent the letter in July 1966. We finally had the chance we had been waiting for when the SS Australis, which was leaving Southampton on January 26, 1967, offered berths for our whole family. We accepted unquestionably and got to work making plans right away. After giving notice at Townsend, we started the process of selling our house. We started packing and getting our families ready for the news. Everything was coming together perfectly, and every day increased the excitement for the trip ahead. We stayed with my mother the day before we left. I went down to Dover Priory station in the afternoon to pay for our trip to Southampton and check the train schedule. The deadline for our arrival was 4:30 p.m. To get us all, along with the luggage, to London in time for the morning train, I also reserved a taxi. We were surrounded by family that evening as we spent our last hours in the UK.

The following morning was a day of conflicting feelings. It was more difficult to say goodbye than I had thought. All the commotion and attention seemed to be confusing the kids. Being the oldest, Paul seemed to have a more profound understanding of what was going on, but Julia, Kathryn, and Phillip found it all to be quite unfamiliar and overwhelming. As we got into the taxi and headed to the station, there were hugs, tears, and a lingering sense of closure.

At Dover Priory, the first snag of our immigration journey appeared. Having explained our situation to the porter, he informed me that the train we were boarding was bound for London Cannon Street, not Charing Cross as I had been told. We were meant to make our connection to Southampton at Charing Cross. My heart sank — the very first stage of our journey was already going wrong. I was livid that I had been misinformed, despite paying for the entire route to Southampton. Thankfully, the station master was apologetic and proactive. He arranged for a taxi to meet us at Cannon Street and take us directly to Charing Cross in time for the connection. On the journey up to London, at every station stop, a British Rail employee came to find us, reassuring me that the arrangements were in place and the taxi would be waiting. Thanks to their kindness, we made it to Charing Cross, caught our connection, and arrived in Southampton on time.

Boarding the *Australis* was a moment I will never forget. As we walked up the gangplank, an officer greeted us by name, checked us off his list, and directed us to our cabin. A young crew member led the way, though his English was poor. From his awkwardness, it was clear this was his first day aboard — in fact, we soon learned it was the first day for much of the crew. The reason soon became clear. The Chandris Company had recently re-registered the ship under the Panamanian flag, and the Greek crew had refused to sail under it. They had walked off in protest, leaving the company to scramble for replacements. Our ship was embarking on her voyage with an almost entirely new crew still finding their feet. Despite the chaos, we found our cabin: spacious enough for the six of us, with its bathroom and toilet. Our bags soon arrived, though we left them unpacked, eager instead to join the crowds gathering on the upper deck.

The atmosphere was electric. Coloured streamers floated down from the rails, caught by people on the quay below. A band played — though from where we stood, it was difficult to make out the tune. People shouted messages of farewell across the widening gap between ship and shore. I stood there holding Sheila’s hand, watching as the land of my birth slipped further from view. It was a powerful moment — thrilling, sobering, and heavy with responsibility. I could not help but ask myself whether I had made the right decision, uprooting Sheila and our four children for a life half a world away. Yet, as we explored the decks and settled the children, a wave of reassurance came. I spotted a familiar face: the young woman from Sitmar Travel who had sold us our tickets. She was aboard to Piraeus, sent to gain first-hand experience of the ship. Somehow, seeing her there — a small thread linking our old life to the new — made me feel we were on the right path. I never shared that with Sheila. Instead, I kept it to myself and focused on guiding my family into the unknown, ready to face whatever lay ahead on the long journey to New Zealand.
As the gangway was pulled away and the quay grew distant, I felt a moment of stillness settle over us. The children were laughing now, unaware of the enormity of what lay ahead, and Sheila squeezed my hand with quiet reassurance.

For the first time, I allowed myself to imagine the life waiting for us beyond the horizon: unfamiliar, challenging, but full of possibility. Somewhere in the distance, the sea stretched endlessly, carrying us forward — and for the first time in many months, I felt that we were truly moving toward our future.

Chapter 15

Across the Seas: The Journey to New Zealand

From Tearful Goodbyes to Bright Tomorrows: The Journey South

Written on January 11, 2026
With the children settled and the last goodbyes behind us, the ship itself became our world — a moving bubble where each day brought new sights, sounds, and small adventures. Days blurred into one another: meals in the dining hall, the children chasing each other across the deck, evenings standing at the rail with Sheila, staring out at the endless horizon.
At night, the engines' deep rumble vibrated through our cabin, a reminder of the distance we were covering and the life we were leaving behind. At Piraeus, I stood with the children on deck as the ship slipped into harbour. "Is that Greece?" Paul asked, pointing at the hills. Julia, still too young to understand, simply clapped and laughed at the sight of small fishing boats trailing in our wake. Passing through the Suez Canal was like gliding through another world — desert on either side, dotted with soldiers and machinery.
I knew we were among the last ships to pass before war would close the route. A crewman muttered, "Enjoy it while you can." A few days later came the crossing of the Equator, an event the children would never forget. King Neptune himself, trident in hand, appeared on deck surrounded by his "court." Crew and passengers roared with laughter as newcomers were "initiated" — their faces smeared with flour, drenched with buckets of water, and ordered to kiss a large, wobbly fish. Paul tugged at my sleeve: "Dad, is that the real King Neptune?" I told him with a grin, "For today, it is." The children screamed with delight and Sheila laughed at the antics that going on. In Alexandria, we made a hurried excursion to see the pyramids, their massive stones overwhelming in the midday heat.
In Aden, RAF planes streaked overhead, a reminder of Britain's military reach. Then across the Indian Ocean, the days grew hotter and the sea rougher. Reaching Fremantle, passengers crowded the rails to catch the first glimpse of Australia. The excitement turned to worry in Melbourne when Julia came down with measles. Quarantine was enforced; we were confined and nervous, counting the days until she recovered. Sheila hardly left her side, her concern absolute. At last, clearance came — the relief on her face was unforgettable.In Sydney, the harbour dazzled with its sparkling water and skyline, a world so different from the one we had left. From there, we crossed the Tasman Sea and on to Auckland.
On May 3rd, 1967, we disembarked — weary but triumphant. A local contact greeted us with warmth and the keys to a rented house. For the first time, I felt the weight lift. We had made it. That night, as the children slept soundly in unfamiliar beds, I sat awake. The hum of the ship was gone, replaced by the silence of a New Zealand night. I thought of all we had left behind, and all that lay ahead. It was both daunting and exhilarating — the true beginning of our new life, and a chance to build something lasting for our children.
Sitting there in the stillness of our new home, I felt the full weight of responsibility settle on my shoulders — not as a burden, but as a quiet strength. The children, unaware of the journey we had endured, were sleeping safely and soundly, and Sheila's presence beside me was a steady reassurance. I realised, more clearly than ever, that fatherhood was not just about providing, but about guiding, protecting, and shaping a life in a world of possibilities. Across oceans, through uncertainty and struggle, we had made it together — and now, at last, we could begin to build the life we had dreamed of.

Chapter 16

A Kiwi Home, a Flying Career, and a New Chapter for Our Family

Auckland in the 1960sAuckland, is based around 2 large harbours, is a major city in the north of New Zealand's North Island. In the centre, the iconic Sky Tower has views of Viaduct Harbour, which is full of superyachts and lined with bars and cafes. Auckland Domain, the city's oldest park, is based around an extinct volcano and home to the formal Wintergardens. Near Downtown, Mission Bay Beach has a seaside promenade

Written on January 11, 2026
Arriving in New Zealand, we quickly began exploring the local area and were charmed by the names of our new surroundings: **Takapuna, Mairangi Bay, Milford, Glenfield, Northcote, Birkenhead, Beach Haven, and Devonport**.
The North Shore had a coastline of golden beaches, and with children in tow, it felt like paradise waiting to be discovered. One of the first things that struck me was the **cars**. Back in England, we were used to seeing newer models on the roads, but in Auckland, it felt like stepping back in time. Most cars were 20 to 30 years old, and the one I drove on our first day was a creaky old Ford. Still, I was grateful for the freedom of having transport at all. I also needed to find work quickly.
While at Townsend Ferries in Dover, I had met a New Zealand family holidaying in England. They managed a hotel and restaurant in Takapuna and encouraged me to look them up if ever I came to their country.
I had also written ahead to **Air New Zealand** and received a reply asking me to contact them upon arrival. Both connections proved invaluable.
Within a week, I was working at the **cocktail bar and restaurant of The Mon Desir Hotel**, perched right on Takapuna Beach. It was glamorous, busy, and a perfect first step while I waited to hear from Air New Zealand about cabin crew training.
The children settled quickly. Paul, Julia, and Kathryn were enrolled in the local primary school, while Phillip stayed home with Sheila. He was too young for school but a constant companion for his mother in those first months. We soon developed a rhythm of work, school, and **family outings**: picnics in the parks, long walks on the beach, and the thrill of discovering our new country.
Not all surprises were new ones. Just a few days after arriving, we were walking down **Takapuna High Street** when I spotted a couple coming toward us. "Sheila, don't they look familiar?" I asked. Her gasp confirmed it. They were the postmaster and his wife from **Whitfield**, the very people we had been seeing weekly at the post office in England to collect the children's welfare benefits. It was uncanny — one of those chance meetings that make the world feel much smaller.
Some weeks later, we received a letter from our solicitor in Dover confirming the **sale of our house** had gone through. The funds were safely transferred to our New Zealand bank account. This gave us the chance to apply for an **import licence** for a new vehicle, a scheme that required proof of overseas funds but often created a small profit margin on resale.
It was a practical way to step toward our next goal: buying a section of land and building a house.
In late July, Air New Zealand wrote with the news I had been hoping for: the next **cabin crew intake** would begin in August 1967. After a successful induction, I entered the six-week training school and proudly passed. Suddenly, I was part of Air New Zealand's flying family. Many joked it should be called "**Air England**" because so many of the stewards came from the British Merchant Navy.
The work was exhilarating. I flew around the **South Pacific and beyond** — Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Fiji, Tahiti, and the USA. In Los Angeles, Air New Zealand had a base team handling the Honolulu–LA sector, and passengers continued to London with British Airways. Trips were never too long — usually three or four days — except for Tahiti, which gave us a glorious week in paradise. Being paid to live in tropical sunshine felt like a dream.
Within that first year, our imported car sold well, giving us the funds to purchase a **section** of land and, with the help of a government loan, begin building a home. We even designed it with an extra bedroom and bathroom for **Henry**, Sheila's father, so he could live with us. At first, Henry was withdrawn, carrying troubles from his years alone in England, but over time he warmed again, making friends and even finding work and companionship. Seeing him smile again brought great relief to us all.
The privilege of **discounted airline fares** also allowed us to bring my mother to stay. She arrived just before Sheila gave birth to our New Zealand-born child, **Carolyn**, on **26 November 1970**. I was on a Fiji day flight that morning but made it home just in time to take Sheila to the hospital. In a neighbour's car after our Ford Prefect became stuck in the mud at the bottom of the driveway.
Carolyn arrived within the hour. Holding our Kiwi baby in my arms, surrounded by Sheila, Mum, and the children, was one of the happiest moments of my life. But not all moments were joyful. Just ten days before Carolyn's birth, we took a picnic to the beach.
The children ran to the water, but soon the waves turned dangerous. Suddenly, I saw Phillip's small body washed up on the sand, not breathing. Panic gripped me, but my Air NZ training guided my hands. I

performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, desperately willing him back. At last, he coughed, sputtered, and came to life. The ambulance took him for observation, and though he recovered fully, I never forgot the nurse's stern words about responsibility. She was right. Even now, I sometimes wake with that nightmare.

Life settled again after that. Mum eventually returned to England, and the children grew into their new schools — Paul at Rossmini College, Julia and later Kathryn at Carmel College, and Phillip eventually joining his brother.

I advanced to **Senior Steward**, managing the economy cabin and crew, while Sheila built a new passion at home: her **knitting machine**. What began as a hobby soon took shape into something much larger — the foundation of what would become **Magner Knitwear**.

As the years passed, the North Shore became more than just a place we lived — it became home. The children grew quickly, each finding their rhythm in school and the wider community, while Sheila's quiet hobby of knitting began to blossom into something far bigger. I, too, found my stride at Air New Zealand, balancing long flights with the stability of home life. With every passing day, the routines of work, school, and family intertwined, and the small triumphs — a child's first steps, a house shaping into a true home, a growing business — quietly marked the passage from survival to belonging. It was in these steady, unassuming moments that we began to truly feel the fruits of the life we had fought so hard to build.

Chapter 17

Dreams Woven in Yarn and Sky: The Birth of Magner Knitwear

Starting Magner Knitwear

Written on January 11, 2026
After the first year or so, we completed the retaining walls, a condition of our mortgage requiring a wall along the driveway. The surrounding garden was laid out and tended with the help of Henry, who had once worked as a gardener at a royal estate in Wrexham, Bucks, UK. Anything he planted seemed to thrive. I remember one time he brought home what appeared to be a bundle of dead twigs. Planted in a row, they soon grew into a beautiful hedge of flowering azaleas. With the garden completed, my work with the airline remained steady, giving me the time and motivation to pursue a side project for extra income.
Although I was working part-time as a waiter in an upscale restaurant, where about six flight attendants also worked during their off days, I wanted to create something more. Sheila began experimenting on her Passap 12 knitting machine, a very basic model capable of only a limited number of stitches. Despite its limitations, she produced remarkable work. Through a local newspaper ad for knitters, she began receiving small orders for baby knitwear — booties, mittens, and bonnets. One pivotal day, after finishing a small order, I took her to meet her agent. He handed Sheila a garment and asked if she could reproduce it on her machine. It was what they called a “crawler,” an all-in-one pair of knitted pants for babies. After careful study and many attempts, we finally produced a version that matched the original. This marked the true beginning of Magner Knitwear. Sourcing yarn in New Zealand was tricky, as most raw materials were imported and required a license. The agent, however, offered to supply the yarn and set a price, allowing us to move forward. To improve production efficiency, we upgraded to a Passap Duomatic, a more advanced machine with a motor and various accessories. Learning to use it became a shared project. Over time, we acquired the latest tools, and the finished garments — now all-in-one pieces with shaped toes and heels — could be completed in minutes rather than hours. Our small business gradually grew. Carolyn became our model, and as orders increased, we purchased another machine. We expanded our range to include pram sets, little coats, bootees, mittens, bonnets, and matinée jackets. Buying a shelf company, Mickycliff Pty Ltd, allowed us to sell directly to retailers. We learned the process of indenting — travelling to companies to secure future orders — and applied for our import license for yarn. The first indented orders were overwhelming, forcing a decision: either scale back or invest in more machines, hire outworkers, and train staff. At this time, I maintained my job at Air New Zealand to provide the financial stability we needed. Life at home evolved alongside the business. Henry proposed to Francis, and their wedding was a joyful occasion. Their move to a unit opened the way for us to relocate as well. We sold our house on Gordon Ave and found a larger home at 274 Beach Rd, Cambells Bay, with five bedrooms, an English-style garden, and a spacious deck perfect for outdoor dining. The children thrived, with the beach just across the road, their laughter filling the house and spreading to Sheila, making her content. My work at Air New Zealand progressed as well. Promoted to Senior Steward, I oversaw the economy cabin on the DC-8 and the Lockheed Electra, managing both passengers and crew. Meanwhile, the house on Beach Rd became the backdrop for treasured family memories. We purchased our first caravan and explored the North Island’s rivers, forests, and mountains. Long weekends and holidays became adventures that strengthened our family bonds. Even the kitchen became a hub of creativity. With ample space, I upgraded appliances inspired by my trips to the USA. Afternoon teas, elaborate sponges, cream cakes, and sandwiches — all cut into neat triangles — became a regular tradition. Family and friends, including Henry and Francis, joined us, and every meal felt like a celebration. My experience preparing fine meals for first-class airline passengers had come full circle, reflecting lessons learned back at Clare House, where Mum and Dad had always prepared food with care and attention. It was in these quiet, everyday victories — a thriving garden, the growth of a small business, the joy of children at play, and a welcoming home — that we truly felt we had built something lasting. New Zealand had become more than a new beginning; it had become the life we had worked so hard to create.
Looking back, those years at Beach Rd were as much about family as they were about enterprise. Each crawler knitted, each garden bed planted, each meal shared, felt like a building block in the life we were creating. Magner Knitwear was no longer just a side project — it was a symbol of determination, collaboration, and hope. And amid the rhythm of flights, stitches, and laughter, I realised that fatherhood, marriage, and work were not separate paths but threads woven together, shaping a life that was truly our own.

Chapter 18

Turning the Page: Family, Flight, and Fresh Beginnings

We faced yet another life-changing decision: we could either remain a small cottage industry or take the leap to expand into a larger manufacturing operation. We went from working out of our home base to relocating and getting the machinery and stock out of the home

Written on January 11, 2026

The demands of Air New Zealand had reached a tipping point. Jumbo jets were now a regular part of the fleet, and the long-haul flights stretched across six time zones, leaving little room to recover between trips. I found myself rostered on a gruelling 19-day journey: Auckland – Honolulu – Los Angeles – Tahiti – Los Angeles – Honolulu – Auckland. The work was exhilarating but exhausting, and the brief periods of rest between flights offered only the barest respite. After completing consecutive trips on this roster, my body and mind protested. I visited the company doctor, who confirmed what I already knew: I needed time to recover. Granted three weeks' leave, I returned home with a growing sense that this was a pivotal moment. The choice became clear — for my family, for Sheila, and for myself, it was time to step away. Writing my resignation letter was poignant. Eight years with Air New Zealand had shaped me, carried me across the world, and introduced me to colleagues and friends I would never forget. Yet, I knew the decision was right. Shortly after, a letter arrived from the airline expressing gratitude for my service, a gesture that eased the sting of leaving. The timing, however, was underscored by tragedy. News came of the Mount Erebus disaster in Antarctica, when Air New Zealand Flight 901 collided with the mountain, claiming the lives of 237 passengers and 20 crew. I had known many of those crew members personally, and the grief hit hard. It was a stark reminder of the fragility of life, and reinforced the sense that my family must always come first. Meanwhile, Magner Knitwear was entering a new phase of challenge and opportunity. Our agents were asking for more commercial styles — products beyond the scope of our current machines. A chance arose when a small knitwear company went on the market. The business included three commercial knitting machines and a set of sewing equipment, specialising in children's jumpers and cardigans — exactly what our clients wanted. We acquired the business, learning quickly to operate the larger, more complex machines. The transition required relocating the business out of our home, and over several moves, we eventually settled into a fully equipped factory with ample space and a mezzanine floor. There, we assembled a small team of skilled people who became more than colleagues — they became friends. Sheila continued managing the home and the family, while contributing creatively to the business. But life was never without its hurdles. When New Zealand removed most import licensing, the market flooded with inexpensive products from overseas. Competing with such prices was difficult, especially after leaving the security of Air New Zealand's salary. The strain took a toll on my mental health — periods of anxiety and depression crept in, and Sheila bore much of the weight alongside me. We weathered this storm through persistence, adaptation, and sheer determination. Over time, the business stabilised, allowing us to regain a sense of control and satisfaction. I also sought personal balance, taking up jogging, attending the gym, and joining philosophy classes, habits that continue to this day. Ultimately, a new opportunity arrived. A company approached us with an offer to buy Magner Knitwear. After careful consideration, we accepted. Selling the business was bittersweet — it marked the end of a chapter that had been both rewarding and exhausting. But it was also the start of a new stage in our lives, one where we could carry forward the lessons of resilience, family, and the courage to embrace change. Looking back, those years taught me that life is not only about holding on to what we create, but also knowing when to let go. Closing the chapter on Magner Knitwear was not the end, but a passage into a future where experience, wisdom, and family remained the guiding forces, regardless of what challenges lay ahead.

When I think back on those years, I hear the hum of knitting machines, the laughter and cries of children, and the weight of choices that are both exciting and scary. Family was our steadfast support throughout the process of constructing, losing, adapting, and expanding. Those years were a lifetime in miniature: long flights across oceans, the steady rhythm of knitting machines, the laughter, and cries of children, and the heavy weight of choices that shaped us. We had built and lost, adapted and endured, always anchored by family. Selling Magner Knitwear was not an end, but a quiet turning point — a reminder that life asks us to let go as often as it asks us to hold on. And as I looked ahead, I knew that whatever awaited, we carried forward the lessons of resilience, love, and the courage to step into the unknown. Even as the doors of Magner Knitwear closed behind us, new possibilities quietly stirred on the horizon. The lessons we had learned — of patience, persistence, and trust in one another — were seeds waiting to grow. I didn't yet know what form the next chapter would take, but for the first time in a long while, I felt ready to embrace it, confident that whatever challenges lay ahead, we would face them together.

Chapter 19

The Timeless Joy of New Zealand

The Years We Almost Didn’t Count

Written on January 11, 2026
I never really thought about my age or how old I was — New Zealand had that kind of effect on you. Life here was so laid-back it almost felt timeless. Perhaps it was because we were genuinely happy, immersed in the simple rhythms of everyday life, that age rarely crossed my mind. We were too busy appreciating the freedom to explore, the surrounding beauty, and the sense of belonging we had built.
Looking back, I see that this contentment came from more than lifestyle alone. It grew out of the life we had created — one shaped by hard work, stability, and the quiet pleasure of shared moments. It was a time when worries felt lighter, and for that, I remain deeply grateful. I mention age because of an incident at the gym.
The owner, Harry, was a former naval instructor — strict, good-humoured, and always willing to talk. Every three months he carried out assessments with his clients, and during one of mine he asked, quite casually, how old I was. To my surprise, I hesitated. “Thirty-eight… maybe thirty-nine?” I said.
Harry glanced at my card and laughed. “You’re nearly forty-one! Don’t you know when you were born?” We both laughed, but the moment stayed with me. It struck me how many years had passed without my noticing.
Life had been so full that time itself had slipped quietly into the background. It was a gentle reminder of how deeply settled we had become. By then, after selling the business, we were able to pay off the mortgage and clear our remaining debts. I was in my early forties.
Paul and Kathryn were thinking about university, Julia was exploring career options, Phillip had one year left at college, and Carolyn was attending Carmel College. Life felt orderly and secure. Sheila had little interest in travelling overseas; we had already enjoyed many holidays throughout New Zealand, building memories as a family.
By this point, we had been in the country for twelve years. I had always told my family back in the UK that I would return within ten, and now it felt like the right time. Because of my former employment with Air New Zealand, I was still entitled to reduced fares, so I booked the trip. Sheila chose to stay home, and Paul — newly licensed — took responsibility for keeping the household running. He did so with maturity that made me proud, ensuring everything carried on smoothly in my absence. As I prepared to leave, I felt a mix of gratitude and quiet anticipation. Those twelve years had been filled with effort, happiness, and the steady satisfaction of daily life. Returning to the UK was more than a visit; it was a chance to reconnect with the past and reflect on how far we had come — unaware that the journey would mark the beginning of another turning point in our family’s story.

Chapter 20

A Journey Back to Where It All Began

What I Had Missed Most My Mother and my four brothers—Michael, Lionel, David, and Phillip

Written on January 11, 2026
Returning to the UK after more than a decade in New Zealand was both exhilarating and strangely surreal.
As the plane descended beneath familiar grey skies, the crisp British air felt like a memory I hadn't realised I was missing. Everything was recognisable, yet my years abroad had subtly altered how I saw it. The streets, parks, and shops were the same, and yet not — viewed now through the lens of a life built on the other side of the world. The first days passed in a whirlwind of revisiting old neighbourhoods and landmarks. Walking streets I had known since childhood, I felt a mix of nostalgia and surprise. New houses stood where gardens once had been, trees had grown taller, and familiar shops had closed or given way to cafés and boutiques. Yet, some things remained unchanged: the corner shop where I bought my first sweets, the park where childhood games unfolded, and the steady hum of everyday life that still gave the town its character. It was both comforting and quietly disorienting.
Family gatherings were the heart of the visit. Sitting around tables laden with home-cooked meals, I was reminded of the strength of shared history. As stories were retold and laughter flowed, I became acutely aware of how much life in New Zealand had shaped me — and how different my experiences had been from theirs. Sharing news of our adventures, the children's milestones, and the challenges of starting anew felt like opening a door into a world they had only known through letters and photographs.
Reuniting with my brothers and meeting their children for the first time was equally revealing. It reminded me how bonds endure, even across continents and years. There were moments of joy — a familiar laugh in a crowded room, an old prank recalled — and moments of quiet sadness too, in the knowledge that some family members were no longer with us. Amid the social bustle, I found time for reflection. I wandered through parks I had known as a boy, sat on the steps of my old school, and watched the rhythm of daily life that had once been my own. In those moments, I saw clearly how New Zealand had changed me — teaching patience, resilience, and an appreciation for simplicity — and how far we had come as a family. There were lighter moments as well. One afternoon I ran into a childhood neighbour who failed to recognise me at first, then suddenly exclaimed, "You haven't changed a bit!" I laughed, aware that while years and sun had altered my appearance, something familiar remained. Friends teased me about my "posh Kiwi accent," and children were amused by the small details that stirred my nostalgia — the shape of a lamppost, the style of a shopfront. Despite enjoying every moment, I felt a quiet pull back to New Zealand.
The UK held memories and deep connections, but our lives, routines, and sense of home now lay elsewhere. What I missed most of all during those years away were my mother and my brothers, and seeing them again reminded me how strong those ties remained.
By the time I returned to New Zealand, I carried a renewed sense of gratitude.
The visit had been a gift — a chance to reflect, reconnect, and see clearly what we had built. As the plane lifted through the clouds, I felt content in the knowledge that we had created a life worth cherishing, no matter how far it was from where the journey had begun.

Chapter 21

Looking after The Sussex Restaurant

Written on January 11, 2026
In the mid-seventies, as the children grew older, I developed an interest in taking them to different restaurants. This was partly for my benefit, as I still had a strong inclination to hospitality. In the earlier days, as I believe I've mentioned in a previous chapter, we used to host full-on afternoon teas for family and friends. Taking the children to restaurants was, in part, a way for me to stay connected to the industry and keep up with trends. However, at that time, New Zealand had a limited selection of places to enjoy a good meal out.

That said, a few restaurants were starting to change the scene. One such place was a restaurant called Scoffers Inn, owned and operated by an English couple, Cliff and Zoe, who had fantastic ideas about how to run a restaurant with great menus and elegant décor. This was their second restaurant—the first, Nosh Inn, had equally creative charm, even in its name.

After visiting Scoffers Inn several times, we became friendly with Cliff and Zoe. It was during one of these visits that they mentioned they were planning to sell the restaurant for personal reasons. Despite owning Magner Knitwear and having five children to care for, I seriously considered purchasing the restaurant. However, in their wisdom, they decided not to sell it to me. That's the kind of thoughtful people they were—they cared about my family and recognized the challenges we would face if we took on such a demanding business.

Later, in the early eighties, while we were still operating Magner Knitwear, we reconnected with Cliff and Zoe after they opened another beautifully designed restaurant called The Sussex. Eventually, we agreed to run The Sussex on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays for three months while they went overseas—a truly wonderful experience. Sheila took charge of making the desserts under Zoe's guidance, Julia and Phillip helped in the kitchen, and I managed the front of the house.

Running The Sussex was unlike anything we'd done before. We worked Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights, while other close friends of Cliff and Zoe covered the remaining evenings. We'd arrive through the kitchen entrance around 4:30 or 5:00 PM to prepare for service, and the atmosphere was always electric with anticipation.

About four weeks into our stint, something memorable happened. We came through the kitchen door on a Friday afternoon, greeting the chef and kitchen staff as usual, all of us probably looking a bit too cheerful for our own good. The young chef looked up from his work, slammed his tea towel down on the bench, and shouted at us: "I am just about fed up with you guys coming into my kitchen with all those smiling faces all the time!"

We froze. Then slowly, carefully, we walked past him toward the dining room, unsure what we'd done wrong.

That's when he and all the staff broke out laughing. He'd been setting us up the whole time. It became a running joke after that—apparently, our enthusiasm was both infectious and slightly ridiculous.

The same chef had a wicked sense of humour when it came to difficult customers. One night, we had a table of eight, and among them was one particularly demanding and unpleasant woman. Nothing seemed good enough for her. She ordered a chicken dish, and I went back to the kitchen to warn the chef about her attitude, asking him to make sure it was perfect, wanting to make sure everything went smoothly for that table.
What the young chef did next was absolutely hilarious. Not far away was a Kentucky Fried Chicken store. He'd sent one of his staff to get a KFC box, placed it on a plate, and covered it with a cloche.

You can imagine the uproar when this customer lifted the cover. Her companions immediately broke out in laughter—they all knew exactly what she'd been like. To her credit, she saw the funny side of it. The chef brought out her real meal moments later, and the tension at the table evaporated. It was a masterclass in handling difficult customers with humour rather than confrontation.

Those three months taught us a great deal about running a restaurant at a professional level, and we loved every minute of it.

Chapter 22

Redvale and Beyond

You might think, “This guy has it made—he’s been in New Zealand for just 15 years, owns a six-bedroom home with a swimming pool, and has raised five children. All he has to do now is sit back, find some part-time work, and enjoy life.

Written on January 11, 2026

Well, think again.

Life had other plans for me.

After Magner Knitwear, I found myself on a new path, one that led through three more businesses and three more homes. Each step brought fresh challenges, unexpected turns, and—sometimes—outright chaos.Growing Glasshouse Tomatoes at Redvale

The first step was a property in Redvale, north of Auckland, that came with a glasshouse for growing tomatoes. I had never thought much about tomatoes—certainly not glasshouse tomatoes—until I suddenly found myself responsible for them. My only “experience” came from Henry, who had once helped us plant a few in the garden back at Gordon Avenue. The property had two working glasshouses and a third still under construction. The plan was simple: get the first two running and keep them going ourselves, no staff, no outside help. At the time, they were empty, the previous owner having just finished his season, so we had to clean, fumigate, and start from scratch.
Typically, a grower could manage two crops a year, with the winter crop being the most rewarding. Choosing the right variety mattered, as did reliable water and heating for the colder months.
Looking back, when I first saw the property, I had been focused on the house and its location, not the practical realities of commercial growing. In hindsight, I should have asked far more questions.

A Lesson in Plumbing—The Hard Way
And then came my first “education” in country living.
We relied entirely on rainwater collected from the roof and stored in a huge round tank by the house. One day, I noticed a small leak at the base of the tank. Being the newly proud owner of a shiny red toolbox, I decided I could fix it. I gave the tap one small turn with a spanner—*and boom!* It blew straight out. Within twenty minutes, the entire tank had emptied itself down the paddock.
“Dad! What have you done?” one of the kids shouted from the back door.
“Someone get a plumber!” I yelled, though by then the flood was unstoppable.
For days, we had to ration what little water was left until a tanker delivery arrived. Needless to say, I wasn’t anyone’s favourite person that week.
Life at Redvale
Despite my disasters, life carried on. Paul and Kathryn were at university, Julia was working at a bank, Phillip was finishing at Rossmini, and Carolyn was about to start Carmel College.
We did get the glasshouses planted and managed six or seven crops during our time there. The final crop was the best yet—rated top-quality produce at the Auckland fruit and vegetable market. That small success made all the earlier mishaps worthwhile.
We also extended the house, adding a new farmhouse kitchen with benches and cupboards crafted from beautiful Fijian kauri. It became the heart of the home, a place where meals were prepared and shared, and stories exchanged late into the evening.
The Turkeys, the Pets, and the Chaos
Life in the country came with plenty of surprises. One afternoon, a flock of wild turkeys somehow found their way into the house. By sheer bad luck, they ended up trapped in Julia’s bedroom.
“Dad! Quick—there are turkeys in my room!” Julia screamed.
By the time we got them out, the room was a wreck—scratched furniture, droppings everywhere, feathers stuck in the curtains. Julia was fuming, but years later it became one of those family stories that always

brought laughter.
Before moving to the country, I had told the children, *“If we ever move out of suburbia, you can have whatever pets you like.”*
They never forgot it.
“Dad, you promised,” Carolyn reminded me within days of moving. “You said *any* pets.”
And so it began. Soon enough we had Jake, our loyal dog; four cats, each proudly named by the kids; and two goats to round out the menagerie.
Country life, however, could be harsh. All but one of the cats were eventually lost—some to the road, others to wild dogs. It was heart-breaking, especially for the children, but it was also a lesson in the realities of rural living.
Still, Jake and the goats became part of our daily life at Redvale, adding both companionship and a bit of mischief to the mix.
Moving On, But Not Forgetting
After the water tank disaster, it was gently suggested that I might look for a part-time job before I caused any further calamities. I took work as a knitting machine operator at a clothing company in Auckland.
We stayed at Redvale for three years, working the land and adjusting to country life. It was hard work, but it gave us stories we still tell today. If I ever wrote a book about just one place, it could well be about Redvale.
Eventually, though, it was time to move on. The property lingered on the market until two serious buyers turned up. Our real estate agent played them off in a Dutch auction, and we were lucky to walk away with a good price—helped, I believe, by that beautiful kauri kitchen.
From there, we moved into a new home & new business a new chapter: *The Kitchen*.

Chapter 23

The Kitchen

A Small Premises with Big Flavours: Quiches, Cakes and Muffins Galore

Written on January 11, 2026
After our time at Redvale, the next venture was something quite different: food manufacturing. We called it simply *The* Kitchen. At first glance, it was a modest operation, but it was packed with energy, potential, and a surprising variety of products. We produced quiches, cheesecakes, desserts, cakes, sponges, and even chicken liver pâté. Our star creation turned out to be bran muffins, which were snapped up by hospitals around Auckland.
Our customers were mainly delis, pubs, and restaurants in the city. The workdays began early, preparing and baking through the morning, and by the afternoon I was out on the road, delivering orders across town. It started with just Sheila and me. But as the business grew, we soon brought on a part-time kitchen hand and a part-time driver to keep things moving.
The premises themselves had character. The Kitchen was set up in what had once been an old butcher's shop. The place came fully equipped with walk-in freezers and heavy refrigeration, perfect for food production.The business had been founded only a couple of years earlier by a young man fresh out of university. He had started it partly to fund his degree and had built it up with two others. I admired how efficient he was. The recipes were tried and tested, the costing carefully worked out, and everything ran like clockwork. But by the time we arrived, he was ready to focus on his career, and the opportunity to take over was ours.It was clear to me from the start that The Kitchen had potential for much more. Expansion was not just possible—it was waiting for us.
The Glenfield Home
Redwoods, Watercress, and a Fresh Start Selling Redvale meant we had to find another home, and as it turned out, the search didn't take long at all. Almost as if it had been waiting for us, we found a lovely three-bedroom house in Glenfield, not too far away.
It sat quietly on its third of an acre, tucked back from the road. The lounge was timber-lined and filled with light from the picture windows, perched slightly higher than the rest of the house. From there, the space stepped down into a large dining room that opened onto an outdoor deck. That deck curved itself around two of the tallest sequoias I had ever seen in New Zealand—magnificent redwood trees that gave the whole property a sense of permanence and calm.
"Look at those trees!" one of the children exclaimed, craning their necks as if they might touch the tops. "We could build the best treehouse in there!"
Behind the house, a fresh-water stream ran gently through the garden, its banks full of watercress that seemed to grow endlessly along its length. The children wasted no time splashing along its edge, returning proudly with dripping handfuls of watercress. "We can eat this? From the garden?" they asked, their voices half in disbelief, half in excitement.
The property was practical too. A considerable double garage stood to one side, with a fully concreted driveway and plenty of parking. Inside, the three bedrooms were all on the same level, while a finished and decorated basement rumpus room offered a huge extra space downstairs—perfect for the children to claim as their hideaway.
The kitchen, however, felt small—especially after the roomy farmhouse kitchen we had left behind at Redvale. Sheila took one look around and sighed. "After that big country kitchen, this feels like a cupboard," she said, though with a wry smile. Over time, though, we made it our own. We upgraded the layout and installed a garden window, much like a bay window, which brought in more light and looked out over the greenery.
At the time, Genair ovens were all the rage, and Sheila laughed with satisfaction when ours was finally fitted. "Now we're catching up with the times," she said, already planning what she'd bake first.
It wasn't the farm, but it was a home full of charm, character, and the promise of new memories.

Chapter 24

El Greco Pizza's

El Greco – A Slice of Success From Pizza Tosses to Life-Changing Questions

Written on January 11, 2026
El Greco was a great little business. Our main trade was takeaway pastas and pizzas, with a small dining room that could accommodate a dozen or so patrons. We bought the shop from two Greek fellows who insisted—quite emphatically—that it was the Greeks, not the Italians, who invented pizza. We didn't argue. Their recipes and procedures were already well established, and to be fair, they knew what they were doing. Back then, food delivery services didn't exist. If people wanted a pizza, they had to call in their order and come pick it up. Running the Business, Our workday began around 10 AM, prepping for the night ahead. Sheila and I would be in the back kitchen, while a young man named Ken handled the front. Ken was a great lad—tall, handsome, with a head full of curly hair. At just nineteen or twenty, he was already a true professional. He'd mastered the art of working the dough and taught me everything I know—how to knead it, shape it, and stretch it without tearing. During service, Ken became part of the show. He'd toss the dough high into the air, spinning it above his head as customers watched, wide-eyed. It turned waiting for a pizza into entertainment—and people loved it. Even the New Zealand All Blacks became regulars, dropping by for a good feed of carbohydrates before a game. The menu was simple, but it was loved. (See menu link.) A New Home As the business grew, we moved closer to the shop. Our new home was a modern three-bedroom town house, spread across three levels, with city views, an integrated garage, and a master bedroom with an EnSuite. By this time:

- Paul and Kathryn were at university.
- Julia and Phillip had gone overseas.
- Phillip had just completed his Engineering degree.
  At home, it was just Sheila, Carolyn, and me.

Life felt good. Business was steady, and from where I stood, everything seemed in its right place. A New Question Then, out of the blue, Sheila asked me: "Have *you ever thought about living in Australia?"* I was caught off guard. I'd often talked about taking a holiday overseas, but moving? That was something else entirely. *"Where in Australia are you thinking?"* I asked. *"Brisbane,"* she said. That surprised me even more. *"Brisbane? But you've never been there. "*I knew Brisbane in the early 70s. It was hot, humid, and far from modern. It wasn't Sydney or Melbourne. Not only that, but it was still growing into a city.
But once the idea was spoken aloud, it couldn't be ignored. And to my surprise—Carolyn was on Sheila's side. Looking back, I sometimes wonder: was I searching for success? Or was I simply chasing something unknown? Whatever the answer, that single question became the turning point. From pizzas and late nights in Auckland to a future across the Tasman Sea, the path ahead was about to change forever. Next stop: **Australia.**

Chapter 25

From Britannia to Pizza – My Australian Culinary Adventure

Navigating the World Expo, Running a Traditional English Pub, and Discovering the Complexities of a Pizza Franchise

Written on January 11, 2026
Landing in Brisbane – The 1988 World Expo We arrived in Brisbane in the second week of April 1988, just as the World Expo opened. The Expo was set to run until October, and it was the perfect opportunity to find employment. With my roots in the UK, I applied to work at the English stand and was instantly hired as a chef at the Britannia Inn—a replica of a traditional English pub. The shifts were long and incredibly busy, but it was a lot of fun. The atmosphere was entirely different from anything I had experienced before. Visitors came for enjoyment, and those of us working in the country stands weren't just serving food—we were representing our nations and enhancing their experience. Life **at the Britannia** Inn At the Expo, the Britannia Inn had both an Executive Chef and a Head Chef, each trying to outdo the other with increasingly tall chef hats—a hilarious spectacle for everyone on site. Ironically, neither of them worked in the kitchen with me and the team. By the end of the first week at the newly opened Britannia in Brisbane, both were gone—the Executive Chef was sacked, and the Head Chef managed to chop off his thumb while demonstrating how to cut a chicken to apprentice chefs! Soon after, I was offered the Head Chef position, which I gladly accepted. Later, a Spanish Executive Chef joined, overseeing the restaurant, while I focused on Italian, French, and English cuisine. An Oriental section was added to the kitchen, staffed by a Thai chef—a world I didn't yet know—but I carried on with my expertise and enthusiasm. **Exploring Business** Opportunities Even while working at the Britannia, I was thinking ahead. One business that caught my attention was Silvio's Pizzas, a franchise operated by an Italian family with stores throughout Brisbane. I did my due diligence, reviewing financial records with an accountant who assured me, "Everything seems fine." Confident, I struck a deal with the family to acquire a franchise store. **Running the Stone's Corner** Store The store I acquired was in Stone's Corner, a busy suburb near Brisbane's city centre. To maintain consistency, I kept the previous manager on staff and employed several students as delivery drivers. At first, everything seemed great—the store was busy, especially during dinner time, and appeared profitable. But within a few months, I noticed cracks in the system. The Silvio's franchise model was flawed:

1. **The "Two-for-One" Offer:** Franchisees paid full price for ingredients while customers got half their pizzas free. When we asked how to profit under such a deal, the answer was: "You'll sell more pizzas and make more cash."
2. **The "Free Pizza if Late" Guarantee:** During Brisbane's storm season, deliveries were delayed daily, meaning we gave away free pizzas frequently, hurting revenue.

We proposed solutions—discounting ingredients for promotional nights or suspending the free pizza offer during storms—but Silvio's refused. Every franchise meeting became a battle. Eventually, they locked both me and another franchisee out of our stores. Lessons Learned, didn't fight it. To be honest, I was relieved to walk away. My original deal allowed me to place a small deposit and pay the rest after selling my New Zealand business, so my financial exposure was minimal. Meanwhile, Silvio's model eventually failed, and the company acquired Domino's Pizza, rebranding its stores. Ironically, one of the young store managers from the Silvio's days eventually bought out the company and became the CEO of Domino's Queensland.
The day I walked away from Silvio's, the Brisbane sky was heavy with rain. Fitting, I thought. Storms had plagued our delivery routes for weeks, and now they seemed to mark the end of my franchise experiment. But unlike the weather, I felt clear. Calm. Relieved.

I hadn't lost everything. Thanks to the structure of my deal—just a small deposit upfront with the balance tied to the sale of my New Zealand business—my financial exposure was minimal. It was a clean break. No lawsuits. No lingering debts. Just lessons.
And there were plenty.

I learned that enthusiasm alone doesn't make a business work. That a flawed model, no matter how popular the brand, will eventually collapse under its weight. I learned that franchise meetings can feel more like war rooms than strategy sessions. And I learned that sometimes, the best move is to walk away before the damage becomes permanent.

But I also learned something deeper—about myself.

I had taken a risk. I had stepped out of the kitchen and into the boardroom. Not only that, but I had hired, managed, negotiated, and fought for what, I believed, was fair. That mattered. Even if the outcome wasn't

what I'd hoped, the experience had sharpened me. I wasn't just a chef anymore. I was a businessperson. A strategist. A survivor.

In the weeks that followed, I spent time reflecting. Brisbane was still buzzing from the Expo, but I felt like I was standing at the edge of something new. I wasn't sure what came next, but I knew I wanted to build something of my own—something with my name on it. No more franchises. No more middlemen. Just me, my vision, and the courage to try again.

I started sketching ideas. Concepts for restaurants, menus, branding. I revisited my roots—English cuisine, Mediterranean flavours, the fusion of cultures I'd seen at the Expo. I thought about the kind of place I'd want to walk into as a customer. Warm. Welcoming. Honest.

That seed of an idea would eventually grow into my next venture. But at the time, it was just a whisper. A possibility. A quiet promise to myself that failure wasn't the end—it was the beginning of something better.

Robin's Nest – A New Venture

After the Silvio's episode, I found a small restaurant for sale in Yeronga, a quiet suburb near the Brisbane River. The area had an interesting history—many of the streets and roads were named after P&O shipping line vessels. In the late 1800s, P&O's ships, both steam and sail, would travel up the river to this very location.

The business was originally a Danish cuisine restaurant, but it wasn't doing well and was being sold cheaply. I decided to turn it into a proper restaurant and named it **Robin's Nest**. We were among the first establishments to obtain an outdoor table service license, which set us apart at the time.

We hired a talented chef, and Carolyn and I managed the front of house. Once everything was set up and ready for service, Sheila came to see what we had done. However, she seemed slightly disappointed—she had expected me to open another **El Greco**.

At this point, we were renting an apartment in Indooroopilly, which meant driving to the restaurant every day. This arrangement gave me the opportunity to get back into jogging and regain some fitness. Since moving to Australia, I had been going to the gym sporadically, but never consistently. I had done a little exercise during my time at Silvio's, where I encouraged the younger store and delivery staff to participate in a **fun run**. They wore Silvio's shirts, effectively advertising their pizzas while we ran. It was a fantastic day—10 kilometres followed by a barbecue to celebrate. I even got a great massage afterward at Cleveland Point, right by the seaside.

Thereafter, I let Carolyn drive the car home while I jogged back, which took about an hour. That's when my real training started. I set a goal for myself: **to run the Gold Coast Marathon**.

The marathon itself was gruelling, but finishing it gave me an immense sense of accomplishment. I was hooked. From then on, jogging became a regular part of my life. Brisbane was perfect for running, with plenty of safe and scenic routes to explore.

Moving On

Back at **Robin's Nest**, I gradually lost interest in running the place. When Easter approached, I made a sudden decision—I closed the restaurant for the holidays, posting a sign on the door:

"Closed for family reasons. Will reopen after Easter."
We learnt that Cliff & Zoe were living in Noosa where they have been for over a year it would be god to go visit them Instead of reopening, we headed up to Noosa to visit **Cliff and Zoe**. Before leaving, I placed a short **four- or five-line ad** in the newspaper to sell the restaurant.

When we returned, to my surprise, there was already a couple waiting outside **Robin's Nest**, eager to buy it. They had never owned a restaurant before but had experience running a **football club**. Who was I to argue?

We agreed on a price, shook hands, and just like that—**another chapter closed.**

Chapter 26

Bali Hai: Sunshine and Shadows

Sheila’s Withdrawal and My Quiet Battles Within

Written on January 11, 2026
We owe it all to Cliff and Zoe. It’s a great story that truly shows how some people go out of their way to help others.

I first knew Matt Miller from Air NZ—he was senior to me, and we flew together many times in my early days with the airline. After I left Air NZ, I lost touch with everyone. That was, until one day, Cliff and Zoe came to visit us.

As always, Cliff, with his dry wit, said, “I have an offer you can’t refuse.”

I laughed and thought, where have I heard that before? Oh, yes—when he offered me that Italian restaurant in Weyba Rd, Noosaville. What a lemon that was!

Anyway, I listened. The deal was this: Matt Miller had purchased the management rights to Bali Hai, along with the apartment. He and his wife had run the place for nearly a year when their daughter fell seriously ill in New Zealand. They wanted to be with her. At the time, Cliff and Zoe still owned Scoffers Inn, so they proposed a straight swap with Matt and his wife—giving them Scoffers Inn in exchange for Bali Hai—so they could free themselves to be with their daughter. And that’s precisely what happened.

Then, knowing I was at a loose end, Cliff offered Bali Hai to me. The arrangement was simple: we would move in, run the place, build credibility, and then try to secure financing to buy it outright from Cliff and Zoe.

And that’s precisely what we did. Within a year, it was officially ours—mortgaged, of course—but none of it would have been possible without the generosity of Cliff and Zoe.

At the time, it felt like winning the lottery to have a two-bedroom apartment and a business in Noosa. Noosa Heads, the final resort on the Sunshine Coast where the river meets the ocean, has beautiful beaches and, when the winds are just right, great surfing conditions. On the north shore, ferries provide access for four-wheel drives to Fraser Island, the largest sand island in the Southern Hemisphere. The area is also surrounded by national parks with scenic walkways leading to other stunning beaches like Alexandria Bay—a well-known nudist beach—and Sunshine Beach.

During my time there, I did most of my jogging and training through the national parks. I was one of the first runners to participate in the inaugural Noosa marathon—back then, there were only eight of us!

Being on-site managers during holiday periods was intense. We greeted guests, ensured they were comfortable during their stay, and cleaned up after they left, ready for the next holidaymakers. In those early days, there were defined seasons, with Christmas and Easter being the busiest times. In the winter, many of the apartment owners from the southern states would come to enjoy the warmer Queensland weather.

This seasonal flow gave us a bit of respite, as the owners took care of their units. Our payment structure as on-site managers included a monthly wage from the body corporate, a percentage of the holiday lets, and cleaning fees charged to the owners after each rental. There were 12 apartments in total—six in each tower. We lived in one, and the property developer lived in the penthouse of the left tower, leaving 10 apartments available for holiday rentals.

After a while, I realised it was too much for Sheila to handle all the cleaning on her own. I managed to convince Anna, Cliff, and Zoe’s daughter, to work alongside her. It was challenging, though—Sheila wouldn't speak to the guests or even answer the phone if I was busy.

I couldn't dedicate all my time to cleaning, as I had responsibilities in the office, handling the business side of the management rights. We were audited two to three times a year, so everything had to be in order. It was a lot to manage, but we found a way to make it work.

Around this time, I also became friends with the local bank manager from Metway Bank. He was a keen mountain biker, and we often trained together. Naturally, we both quizzed each other about our professions. After several weeks of conversations and negotiations, he became the key to helping me secure finance. At last, Bali Hai was officially ours—well, partly. The bank had a big say in it, but Cliff and Zoe got their money, and we were all happy. Or so I thought…

It was a good life. As I mentioned before, there were definite seasons—times when we were incredibly busy, followed by periods when Noosa became, very, quiet. The Sunshine Coast Airport hadn't been built yet, so the only way to reach Noosa was by road. The Bruce Highway was the main route, and at the time, the Sunshine Coast Motorway was still under construction.

The body corporate wage, combined with the income we made during the busy periods, provided a comfortable living, and the lifestyle was very pleasant. Cliff and Zoe had built a new home just a few blocks away, and we often enjoyed great coffee mornings together.

Cliff and I also had a regular tradition—we would go out to do the lotto together. Over time, we became a familiar pair at the local newsagent. With our shared sense of humour, we always managed to brighten the day of the shop owner, who would frequently say that seeing us come in made his day.

As time went on, Sheila seemed to withdraw more into herself. It became increasingly difficult for me to say the right thing or to encourage her to go out and enjoy the company of others beyond just the two of us. No matter how much I tried, I couldn't spark her interest in taking a holiday. Perhaps the workload was too much for her, or maybe there was something else weighing on her that I didn't fully understand.

We lived in a beautiful apartment with stunning views across Laguna Bay and were earning a fair living. I made sure we attended Sunday Mass and feast days, but despite all this, Sheila seemed unhappy and reluctant to socialise. Some weekends were particularly busy, especially on the bright, sunny winter days when we had a full house. The steady flow of guests was great for business, helping to keep the cash flow healthy. Occasionally, visitors would ask, "Are you on the market to sell?" My usual response was a firm "No." But some people wouldn't take that for an answer. They would urge me to think about it, name a price, and let them know—often following up persistently.

This happened so many times that, eventually, I knew there would come a moment when it caught me at a low point—when I was feeling worn down, or perhaps when that familiar shadow of doubt, the 'black dog,' was lurking. And sure enough, one day, in a moment of frustration or uncertainty, I threw out a ridiculous price… and to my surprise, it was accepted.

The years at Bali Hai were filled with both intensity and challenge, but in the middle of it all, life offered a lighter thread — a story that didn't quite belong in the main flow, yet still shaped those days. I've set it apart here, as a small interlude, almost like finding an unexpected photograph slipped between the pages of an album

Interlude: Futons, Munich, and a Bicycle Tour

Life at Bali Hai was full on — guests arriving and leaving, cleaning, audits, and the constant hum of responsibility. And then, one ordinary afternoon, the phone rang. It was Carolyn, calling from Austria.

Her voice carried the same spark I remembered. She told me she'd been working with Phillip in Munich. Fresh from his engineering degree in 1986, Phillip had thrown himself into Europe with the same determination he'd shown back home. He had stumbled into an unlikely niche: delivering futon beds for two Australians who were manufacturing them in Germany. What started with a single van quickly grew into a small fleet. Soon he was running a tidy transport business, hauling futons all over Europe.

Carolyn had joined him for a while, but she had a hunger for variety and struck out into hospitality. That's how she ended up in Austria, working a winter season.

We chatted about her travels, her work, and then — almost offhand — she mentioned a plan to do a bicycle tour. My ears pricked up immediately. That was something I had always wanted to try. We agreed then and there: in May, we'd meet and ride together.

In the end, the tour wasn't exactly where we'd first imagined, but it was glorious all the same. I bought myself a Cannondale mountain bike, started training through the winding trails of Noosa's national parks, and rediscovered something I hadn't felt in a long while — that pure, childlike joy of movement, of being outside with no demands but the open road ahead.

That ride with Carolyn reminded me that life could still hold fresh adventure, even in the middle of business stress and personal shadows. For a while, I carried that spark back with me to Bali Hai.
It was a small reminder — but an important one — that the world was larger than my daily worries.

“Detour to the Riviera: A Ride Unplanned”
How a Missed Train Became Three Weeks of Freedom, Fun & Unexpected Discovery

We had planned carefully: Munich to Bologna by train, then onward to Bari with our bikes, and from there to explore southern Italy. But plans rarely survive contact with reality.
The trouble began in Bologna. We rolled our bikes off the German train easily, but when we tried to board the Italian railway southward, we hit a brick wall — bicycles were not allowed on their trains. The first available cargo train to Bari wasn’t for another five days. We didn’t have the time, nor the patience, to sit around waiting.
It was early May, and Bologna was alive with traffic, heat, and the sharp edges of a bustling city. Carolyn and I stood outside the station, unsure what to do. The thought crept in: maybe we should just ride out of the city and begin our adventure from there.
So, with my best attempt at conversational Italian, I stopped a policewoman who had just finished directing traffic. I asked — more than once, in different ways — how to cycle out of Bologna. She listened patiently, then finally raised an eyebrow and said, in perfect English: *“Do you speak English?”*
So much for my Italian lessons back in Noosa.
She explained that regardless of which direction we rode, we’d have to go through the mountains. In early May, the passes would be far too dangerous for us, especially weighed down with gear. That was that.
In the end, we came up with a mad solution: we arranged to have our bikes shipped by cargo train to Genoa, due to arrive in just 48 hours. When they arrived, we set off — not south, as we’d planned, but west.
And that was how we ended up riding from Genoa along the Italian and French Riviera's, winding through sparkling coastal roads into Provence. For just over three weeks, we rode under Mediterranean skies, our carefully laid plans forgotten, our days unfolding one pedal stroke at a time. The road gave us seaside cafés, cobbled villages, and long stretches where the horizon was nothing but blue.
But travel is never only sunshine. By the time we reached Nice, the weather turned. The skies closed in, and the rain lingered — four heavy days of it. Cycling in that was impossible.
Fortunately, I had bought us rail passes. With a shrug and a smile, we packed up the bikes and boarded a train. For those wet days, we traded coastlines for culture: Florence, with its Renaissance splendour; Rome, eternal and chaotic. Cities we hadn’t intended to see opened themselves to us in ways we could never have scripted.
When the skies cleared, we returned to our bicycles as if nothing had changed — though of course, something had. We carried a little of Florence and Rome with us into the days that followed, a reminder that sometimes the best journeys are the ones we never meant to take.

Closing Reflection

Looking back, that ride taught me something I hadn’t expected to learn from a bicycle: that detours aren’t failures, they’re often the real journey. The Riviera, Florence, Rome — none of it was planned, yet it all became part of our story. Life, I’ve come to see, rarely unfolds the way we expect, but if you’re willing to keep pedalling — and sometimes let the train carry you — the road has a way of giving you exactly what you need.

Palm Grove — Another Leap

Everything Is for Sale

Selling Bali Hai meant I suddenly had time on my hands. That has never suited me particularly well.
Around that time, an advertisement appeared in the local paper. A business had been passed in at auction and was now open to offers. The business was Palm Grove Restaurant in Peregian Beach.
It caught my attention immediately. I had sold Bali Hai. I was cashed up. I needed something to do. Why not at least have a look?
The restaurant was situated on David Low Way, directly opposite the road leading down to the ocean. It occupied a generous block with parking space for around twenty cars. A bullnose roof covered a wide decked verandah that wrapped around the front of the building, framed by mature gardens.
The entrance was impressive. A broad timber deck with steps rising from the car park led to double doors. Inside, to the left, was an office and storeroom that also served as a wine cellar. Further along were male and female toilets, and against the clinker brick wall stood a beautiful aquarium.
To the right of the entrance sat a full-sized grand piano beside a small dance floor. The dining room was expansive, with seating for over one hundred patrons. At the far end stood a substantial cocktail bar, crafted from what appeared to be Fijian kauri, complete with matching stools and additional seating for perhaps thirty more guests.
Beyond that, to the right, was a fully equipped pizzeria with its own front entrance for takeaways. To the left, doors opened into a courtyard garden — mature trees and climbing plants draped over a white archway. It was the sort of setting made for wedding photographs.
Just before the bar area was the entrance to a fully equipped commercial kitchen and preparation area, complete with industrial washing facilities and rear access for deliveries. Everything was there — tablecloths, china, silverware, glassware, even a cellar stocked with wine. You could walk in and begin trading immediately.

I describe it in such detail because you cannot appreciate the scale and potential of the place without

seeing it in your mind. And I had always harboured a desire to run a fully fledged restaurant and bar.
At auction it had been passed in at $500,000 and had sat unsold for about six weeks. I only became aware of it through the weekly local paper.
On impulse — though perhaps not entirely — I submitted an offer of $250,000.
Negotiations went back and forth for several days. Eventually, we settled somewhere between those two figures — but considerably closer to mine than theirs.
And then the realisation struck me.
What have I done?
Once again, I had placed myself into another business.
The premises, though impressive, were dated. The décor belonged firmly to the seventies and would need bringing into line with the present day. Modernising it would require capital, energy, and vision.
but I had never been one to shy away from a challenge.
I approached Anna — Cliff and Zoe's daughter — and asked if she would help me get the restaurant ready for the summer season. It was already late November, so time was short.
Together we stripped the place back. We removed everything that felt dated or unnecessary and organised a large garage sale in the car park. Tables, chairs, bric-a-brac — anything that didn't fit the new vision went. It felt cleansing, like wiping a slate clean.

Around that time Carolyn and Alex arrived from Germany. I suggested that if they would run the garage sale, they could keep the proceeds. They happily agreed.
After a few more days, another idea formed. Alex was a chef, and Carolyn had strong experience managing restaurants. It seemed logical. I offered them the opportunity to run the restaurant.
However, they came back with so many conditions and rules that I quietly let the idea drop. It was not going to work.
So I pressed on.
I changed the name and registered it as **Cheers — The Italian Restaurant**. I found a couple of local chefs and a kitchen assistant. A young fellow came on board to run the bar, and a young lady took charge of the pizzeria.
We opened in the second week of December.
The place looked fantastic — crisp white tablecloths, polished silverware, gleaming glassware, and colourful pots of flowers placed throughout the dining room. There was an air of expectation.
Trade built steadily as the holiday season gathered pace. To add atmosphere, I booked Doc Span and his blues band to play every Sunday throughout the holidays. They were excellent, and the restaurant buzzed with energy.
Then, as quickly as it had begun, the holidaymakers left.
Only then did I truly understand why the restaurant had been passed in at auction. It was deeply seasonal. Once the peak period ended, business dropped away sharply.
I kept Doc Span on for one Sunday a month, but attendance gradually thinned. The pizzeria generated some income, but not nearly enough to sustain the operation at the level I had envisioned.
After several months, I began to feel the weight of it. It simply wasn't working.
By then Anna had moved on. She had been a tremendous help, and I remain deeply grateful to her. I could not have prepared the restaurant without her energy and loyalty.

As time passed, I retained the young man who managed the bar and the young woman running the pizzeria. I later discovered they were seeing each other, which gave me an idea.
I offered them the entire business to run as they wished, on the condition that they pay me a fixed weekly rent.
To my relief, they accepted enthusiastically.
I engaged a solicitor to draw up a proper agreement, with terms that suited us all. Once the documents were signed, they took over day-to-day operations, and I stepped back — receiving a steady weekly rent.
For the first time in months, the pressure lifted.
Everyone, it seemed, was satisfied.
This arrangement carried on for several months. Then, quite unexpectedly, I received a phone call from a real estate agent asking if I was the owner of Cheers Restaurant.
I was cautious. At that time, there were plenty of scams circulating on the Sunshine Coast, and I had no intention of being caught out. I answered carefully and did not confirm too much. Instead, I asked him to call me back at a specific day and time. Before that call, I checked who he was and satisfied myself that he was legitimate.
True to his word, he rang again.
He asked if the restaurant was for sale — and, if so, how much.
That caught me off guard. The Coast was still very quiet, and I had not actively considered selling. My reply was half serious, half tongue-in-cheek:
"Everything on the Sunshine Coast is for sale."
However, I made it clear that price would not be discussed over the phone. He said he would get back to me.
A few days later he called again, requesting a meeting at the restaurant with himself and his client. I contacted my tenants and asked if I could have the use of the premises for a couple of hours. That suited them well, as they were closing for a few days during the winter lull.
We met as arranged. The agent introduced his client — a gentleman from Gympie, a pub developer with

interests on the Sunshine Coast.
After several hours of negotiation, we reached an agreement.
They would pay the price I wanted — but not until March of the following year. In the meantime, they would take over the business and pay me a negotiated monthly sum, effectively interest, until the balance was settled in full the following March.
It was an unusual arrangement, but it suited us both.
I took the proposal to my solicitor, who crossed the T’s and dotted the I’s, ensuring everything was properly documented and secure.
And so, once again, something that had begun almost on impulse came to a measured and satisfactory conclusion.
I can say now — it truly did happen.

.

Chapter 27

Quicksand on Caxton Street

The restaurant that pulled me under, and the hard lessons of ambition

Written on January 11, 2026
After the Bali Hai, Cliff was eager to find employment for his son, Gary, and suggested a trip down to Brisbane to explore opportunities. His idea was bold: he would buy a building on Caxton Street, while I would purchase and run a restaurant within it. I would pay him rent and employ Gary. On paper, it sounded like the start of something promising. At the time, I had a registered company, **Mickeycliff Pty Ltd**, which made an offer to buy the restaurant. The offer was accepted, but then Cliff changed his mind about purchasing the freehold. That left me in an impossible position — Mickeycliff Pty Ltd was committed to the deal, and I didn't want a court case hanging over me. So, I pressed on. Caxton Street was busy, situated near Suncorp Stadium. It was known for its nightlife, and plans were underway to turn the old Victoria Barracks at the top of the street into a residential and shopping precinct. The timing seemed perfect. We returned to Brisbane, bought a lovely three-bedroom apartment in Paddington, and I took over **Café Mediterraneo**. But the dream quickly soured. The Brisbane Broncos moved from Suncorp to ANZ Stadium in Mt Gravatt, and with them went the crowds. The promised residential development at the barracks was shelved because of heritage restrictions. Suddenly, foot traffic disappeared. Café Mediterraneo was competing with established names like Gambaro's, the LA Pub, Caxton Street Hotel, Casablanca, seafood takeaways, and nightclubs. Trade was patchy at best — quiet most of the week, with a few bursts of hens' nights and parties in our courtyard on Saturdays. Even those were a struggle; the courtyard leaked badly in storms and was in constant need of repair. Meanwhile, Cliff and Zoe moved to Canada, leaving me with Gary.
Early in the lease, Cliff decided he disliked the building's exterior colour and had Gary repaint it without consulting me or the landlord. The landlord was furious. And further on in the lease, I returned from a short break to find Gary had ripped out the kitchen of the flat above the café without permission, proudly stating "I am improving it". Though a skilled carpenter, he didn't grasp that you can't make major changes to a leased property without approval. I kept quiet — I had already decided to sell and hoped the landlord wouldn't appear before the renovations were complete. On a personal level, things with Sheila were becoming quieter, more distant. She was content with her routines — church, city visits, and her independence — while I was caught up in the daily grind of a business that never found its feet. The gap between our lives grew more noticeable as the stress of the café wore on me. Eventually, the weight of it all — financial losses, Gary's interference, landlord battles, and the strain at home — pushed me to cut my losses. I sold Café Mediterraneo at a loss. The new owner converted it into an Irish pub, which proved far more suited to Caxton Street's nightlife, though it required major investment to thrive. For me, the chapter closed with a lesson: not every opportunity is a step forward — some are just detours that remind us of the value of cutting loose before you sink any deeper.

Chapter 28

When the Tide Turned

Dreams by the sea, promises broken, and the cost of walking away

Written on January 11, 2026

After selling Café Mediterraneo at a loss, I was restless. Against my better judgment, I sold our Paddington apartment — a decision I regret to this day. Sheila was upset, and I wasn't thinking clearly. We had lined up a rental in New Farm, but the day before we were due to move in, the deal fell through. With nowhere else to go, we ended up at Bali Hai in Jindalee, the only place we could find on such short notice.

Around that time, I bought a small catering business called *The Diet Place*. Sheila and I worked on it for nearly a year before selling it to Continental Agencies in 1999. That sale opened the next chapter. Continental had just secured a contract with Woolworths to manufacture fresh pizzas for every store in Queensland, and they asked me to set up their production line.

The first order was 700 pizzas. Soon after, we were producing more than 20,000 a week. I thrived on the challenge, and the staff became a well-trained, capable team. By 2001, when Continental purchased Ronda Foods, I negotiated a better package and stepped into the role of Production Manager. I developed their HACCP manual, earned Halal certification for the factory, and kept operations running smoothly.

But the merry-go-round of ownership took its toll. In 2003, Continental sold Ronda. I was kept on, but I lost my fuel card and felt increasingly unsupported by the new owners. Six months later, Ronda was sold again — this time to a couple who at first seemed promising. We launched new products together, but the constant instability weighed heavily. Meanwhile, Continental sold the Woolworths pizza business — along with the computer program I had designed for production. All those hours, all that effort, and I received nothing.

Amid this upheaval, Sheila had been exploring different parts of Brisbane. One day, she persuaded me to visit Redcliffe, a quiet seaside town about forty kilometres from the city. To my surprise, I loved it — no high-rises, just a few new apartments and a slower pace. We found one on Marine Parade at Baywatch, and I came up with a plan. I would give my daughter and her husband a sum of money as a deposit. They already owned their home, and this would be an investment property for them. We would rent it from them, giving them tax benefits while giving us a home by the sea.

At the time, they were consulting a financial adviser, and I suggested they discuss the arrangement with them. After meetings and consideration, it was agreed, and we moved in just before Christmas 2000.

Redcliffe brought a sense of peace. I became secretary of the body corporate and enjoyed morning coffees with neighbours. For me, it felt like a community. For Sheila, however, it was much the same as always. She avoided neighbours, kept to herself, and retreated into her world. I had seen this before, but here it felt sharper, as if the distance between us was slowly growing.

Then came the blow.

At Easter 2005, my daughter and her husband announced they would be selling the apartment — despite years of assuring me they never would. I offered to pay more rent and begged them to reconsider, but it was no use. I was devastated. Redcliffe had become my anchor, and now it was slipping away.

At the same time, I had booked leave from Ronda Foods — my first proper holiday in years. A visitor from the UK had been staying with us, and when I mentioned my trip, they kindly offered accommodation. Sheila had no interest in joining me; she never did. Her only remark about the sale of Baywatch was blunt:

"We just have to move back to Brisbane."

That was the moment it hit me.

For decades, every move and every compromise had been made for her comfort, her needs. I still loved her dearly and longed for laughter, connection, and companionship — a meal out, a show, a glass of wine together. Instead, I felt alone in my marriage, even when we sat in the same room.

The stress of work, the loss of Redcliffe, and the silence at home pressed down on me. Depression circled like a shadow. After I returned from my holiday, a small confrontation with a colleague at Ronda spiralled into a breaking point. Within days, I had handed in my notice.

And that was it. Years of trying to build, rebuild, and hold everything together came undone.

Reflection

It has been twenty years since, and it still haunts me.

When I left, I was so distraught — overwhelmed by work pressure, the loss of Redcliffe, and the silence at home — that running felt like the only option I could see. In the middle of that despair, I opened up to Karen, Sheila's niece, when she visited us. In her final days in Australia, I told her what was happening to me, how I was feeling, and even about my upcoming leave from Ronda in September.

Looking back now, I see that it wasn't love I was reaching for, but escape. I was blind to Sheila's quiet strength and to the truth that she had stood by me through so many moves and hardships. In trying to ease my pain, I broke the very bond that had held me for so long, leaving her to carry a silence I should have shared.

If there is one truth I’ve learned since, it is this: time doesn’t erase regret, but it can soften it into understanding. I write this now not as an excuse, but as a kind of apology — one she will likely never read, but one I needed to make all the same. If I honour her now, it is by finally naming what I failed to see then — her loyalty, her endurance, and the love I mistook for absence.
This reflection is not meant to reopen old wounds, only to acknowledge them truthfully.
This is where I leave it — not resolved, not forgotten, but understood at last.

Chapter 29

A New Beginning

"Journeys Shared, Challenges Faced, Memories Made"

Written on January 11, 2026
Keren first came into my life as a guest, staying with us during a holiday. At the time, she was simply a bystander, yet we quickly discovered a connection. Despite the years between us, we shared a love of music, films, and long conversations that seemed to bridge the gap. When my relationship with Sheila ended, my family looked for someone to blame. In their eyes, Karen became the cause — or at least part of it. But that was never the truth. The relationship had already reached its end; Karen was not the catalyst. There was nothing planned beyond the fact that I had decided to take some leave. At that time, the obvious place to go was the UK. My mother had passed away, as had my brothers Lionel, David, and Phillip. Michael was still with us, so I planned to visit him and his family. What followed was far more ordinary, and far more human. Karen offered me accommodation in the UK. When I arrived, she was between teaching appointments and had time on her hands, so she decided to join me. Together, we visited Michael and Irene in Dover, and from there it was just a short boat trip across to Europe. Our journey did not begin in Paris or Rome, but in Munich. We spent three wonderful days there, wandering the city and discovering its character before boarding an overnight train to Naples. From there, we took the circular train to Sorrento, the gateway to the Amalfi Coast. Buses carried us along winding coastal roads to towns perched above the sea. We stayed on the Amalfi Coast, moving between its villages and absorbing the quiet magic of the place — the old architecture, small restaurants and cafés, centuries-old churches, and, of course, the warmth of the sun and the beauty of the beaches. It was a slower, more intimate experience, shaped by discovery rather than spectacle, and it left a lasting imprint on us. On that journey, our friendship deepened into something stronger. The companionship we found was not born out of betrayal, but out of shared joy and discovery. Sadly, my family could not accept this. My eldest daughter told me she would never speak to me again, and even now, twenty years later, she has kept that vow. At the time, I wrote letters to all my children — though they were grown and had families of their own — trying to explain my side of the story. None replied. I want to be clear: Karen should never have carried the weight of blame. She did not break up my marriage, nor did she cause the distance between me and my children. What she brought into my life was companionship, joy, and a chance to share in the simple pleasures we both loved.
For that, I remain grateful. Looking back now, I see that this journey was never an escape from what I had left behind, but a pause in which everything I had avoided began to surface. The places were beautiful, the days unhurried, yet beneath it all was the quiet knowledge that I was carrying unresolved truths with me. Travel can soften the edges of grief and confusion, but it cannot erase them — it can only give you the space to finally acknowledge what you did not know how to face at the time. We have now been together for over twenty years. During that time, we embraced new experiences. For a while, we worked as onsite relief managers at a motel resort, giving the owners a chance for a much-needed holiday. It was demanding, but rewarding — we discovered how naturally we could work as a team. Later, we joined a government sensory food panel linked to St Lucia University. For more than three years, we tested and reported on a remarkable variety of foods — coffee, chocolate, tropical fruits, and more. It was fascinating, and we came away with not only sharper taste buds, but a shared sense of fun and curiosity. Alongside these shared adventures, I also kept busy with my own work. For nearly a decade, I was employed as a chef at a newly refurbished seaside seafood restaurant in Redcliffe. It was a bustling place with reception rooms for weddings and conferences, and I thrived on the energy of it. I made many friendships there — connections that remain part of my life even today. In later years, I took up casual work as a chef with the local council at the Redcliffe Entertainment Centre, where I ran the in-house café. The centre hosted everything from musical shows and comedians to well-known performers. There was a period when we were apart for several months. Karen returned to the UK to care for her father, who was growing frail. When plans were made to move him from his long-time home, she made the compassionate decision to purchase the house herself, ensuring he could remain in familiar surroundings. I joined her later, and not long after — just as the world was thrown into the upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic — her father passed away.

Chapter 30

Finding Strength in the Chaos

Phillip’s fight, and the strength of being there

Written on January 11, 2026
Phillip’s Tumour

Life has a way of testing us in unexpected ways.
When Karen returned to the UK to care for her father, the lease on the apartment we had been living in Australia came to an end. I placed our furniture and belongings into storage and, when the time came, returned to Australia to search for a new home. I travelled back and forth between continents, only to encounter rising prices and scarce rentals in the aftermath of the pandemic.
The strain of those journeys eventually took its toll. I developed a hernia, and while recovering from surgery in the UK, I received devastating news: my son Phillip, who was living in Sweden, had collapsed and undergone emergency surgery for a brain tumour.
Phillip’s collapse came like a thunderclap in the middle of my own recovery. Just ten days after my procedure, I set aside my exhaustion and travelled to Sweden to be by his side.
For eight weeks, I stood with his partner, Anne-Sophie, and our family — Emma, Kevin, and Leana — as Phillip endured radiation and chemotherapy. I offered whatever strength and comfort I could. Those weeks were heavy with fear and fatigue, yet they were also marked by quiet courage — his, and my own. By the end, I was utterly exhausted, but deeply grateful to have shared that time with him.
Returning to Karen in July slowly restored my strength. In September 2022, I finally secured a lease on a townhouse in Redbank Plains. It was not the seaside home in Redcliffe we had once hoped for, but it was a place to settle — a place to begin again.
Looking back, I see a journey marked by upheaval, but also by resilience. Karen was never the cause of the distance between my family and me; she was the light that carried me through it. Together, we faced the pandemic, the loss of her father, the uncertainty of housing, and the illness of my son. Through it all, we found joy in small moments, strength in each other’s presence, and the courage to keep moving forward.
I remain saddened that my family could not accept Karen, and that the bridges with my children were never rebuilt. Yet I hold no bitterness. Life gave me a companion who brought peace, laughter, and love into my days. That is what endures.
This is the truth of my story — not one of blame, but of survival, companionship, and gratitude. Whatever storms came, we faced them together, and in that, I found the meaning I had been searching for: **to love and to be loved**.

Chapter 31

“Threads of My Life”

“The Joy, the Love, and the Lessons They Gave Me”

Written on January 11, 2026

My Children

As I look back on my life, I realise that no story of mine would be complete without remembering my children — **Paul, Julia, Kathryn, Phillip, and Carolyn**. They are the threads that run through every chapter, shaping my choices, my joys, and my sorrows. Though distance and circumstance have kept us apart at times, my memories of them remain vivid and precious.
In this chapter, I want to honour who they are, the moments we shared, and the love that has never faded, even when life made it difficult to express.

Paul

Paul has always met life head-on, with quiet determination and courage. As a boy, he approached challenges with focus and curiosity — whether in the classroom or on the rugby field — becoming **Head Boy at Rosmini College** and earning a place in the **First XV**. He later studied at **Christchurch University**, where he obtained a degree in geology, a testament to both his dedication and intellect.
He was a quiet boy and a great reader. I was friendly with the headmaster of Rosmini College, and one day, while we were at the gym together, he said to me, “You are Paul’s father, aren’t you?” When I replied yes, he added, “Do you know, Paul — now that he’s head boy — reminds me of Gary Cooper.” When I asked why, he smiled and said, “Because in the old movies Gary Cooper would answer with ‘Yep’ or ‘Nope’ — and that’s exactly how Paul speaks.” We had a good chuckle about that, and it remains a fond memory.
During my years with **Air New Zealand**, particularly when I travelled frequently to the UK, Paul was someone we could always rely on. He carried responsibility without complaint, steady and dependable beyond his years.
Today, Paul lives in New Zealand with his wife, **Debs**, where together they run one of the largest dairy farms in the South, caring for around **1,500 cows**. Alongside this demanding life, they raised three fine boys — **Todd, Guy, and Kirk** — all of whom played active roles on the farm. They also kept riding horses and, as a family, rode and competed in dressage competitions.
Even now, Paul’s energy is remarkable. He continues to compete in triathlons and cycling races, often joined by Todd and Kirk, while Guy manages much of the heavy machinery on the farm. Watching the man Paul has become — grounded, capable, and committed — fills me with deep pride.

Julia

Julia’s warmth and empathy have always shone brightly. From an early age, there was an ease in the way we talked and laughed together — her laughter infectious, her presence comforting. I have always admired her heart and the quiet gentleness she carries in all that she does.
Julia was playful, always smiling, and carried a happiness that lifted those around her, as I mentioned earlier in *The Sussex*. One memory, however, remains especially vivid and painful. When we arrived in **Melbourne** during our voyage to New Zealand, Julia contracted measles and was taken from us and placed in quarantine for three days. Those days were gruelling beyond words. The helplessness of being separated from our child has never left me.
As she grew older, Julia forged her own path. She went into banking and later worked overseas on cruise ships, where she met **Eugene**. When they returned to New Zealand, they married and built a life together, raising three daughters — **Sarah, Rachel, and Helen**. Through Sarah and Rachel, our family has grown further, and I am now a great-grandfather, a thought that still humbles me.
One memory still makes me smile. Living in **Redvale**, Julia rang to say her car had broken down. I went to collect her, towing the car to the nearest garage. I had just bought a new **Nissan Bluebird estate** — my first automatic. After unhitching the tow rope, I jumped back into the car and instinctively hit the accelerator instead of the brake, sending it straight into a brick wall. The damage was impressive, the fault entirely mine, and of course it happened just before Christmas. Julia showed more concern for me than the car — kindness that has always defined her.

Kathryn

Kathryn followed her own path early. She did not join us at **Redvale**, choosing instead to attend **Dunedin University**, where she studied social economics. She excelled and was offered the opportunity to major in

the subject — a reflection of her ability and commitment.
She also holds a cherished family distinction: Kathryn was the first person to dive into the swimming pool we built at **Becroft**. It was a moment full of laughter and excitement, and one that remains a symbol of her fearless nature.
Kathryn later married her school sweetheart, **Brendan**. Together they established a pottery business, creating beautiful and distinctive ceramics. Through them, my family grew once more with the arrival of a grandson and granddaughter, **Sam and Kim** — gifts that continue to enrich my life.
They now live in the beautiful coastal community of **Matakana**, about fifty kilometres north of Auckland. With a yacht moored in the bay, they have embraced life on the water and become seafarers in their own right — finding the same freedom and rhythm at sea that has long shaped their lives on land.

Phillip

Phillip was still attending **Rosmini College** when we moved to Redvale, and like his brother Paul, he found his place on the rugby field. He earned a spot in the **First XV** and the nickname *"The Animal,"* with his distinctive Afro and fierce determination.
Saturdays were busy then — rugby for the boys, soccer for Julia and Kathryn — a full family rhythm that only later revealed its value.
Phillip went on to **Auckland University**, earning an engineering degree. Afterward, he travelled to the UK to reconnect with family but never returned to New Zealand. Opportunity found him in Europe, where in **Munich** he helped build a transport business delivering futons across the continent. It grew rapidly, then collapsed when the partners went broke — a loss that struck him deeply.
During those years, Phillip met **Angela**, a Swedish woman who became his wife. They settled in Sweden, raising **Emma** and twins **Leanna and Kevin**. Phillip bought a small farm and ran a riding school specialising in **Icelandic horses** — a life that suited him well, until his sudden collapse from a brain tumour, a story I tell later and one that remains etched deeply in my heart.

Carolyn

Carolyn's laughter and curiosity were infectious. From childhood, she turned ordinary days into adventures. At eighteen, she travelled overseas alone, moving through many Asian countries, learning through experience rather than comfort.
Life at **Redvale** gave us freedoms suburbia never could. One day we discovered four kittens under the house. When the vet asked their names, I handed the phone to eight-year-old Carolyn. Without hesitation she said, "Ginger, Patch, Whitey, and Sooty." That quiet confidence still makes me smile.
Carolyn later married **Alex**, a Bavarian, and together they opened and ran restaurants. They have two daughters, **Brooke and Bianca**, both training to become nurses. I am deeply proud of them, and of Carolyn, whose courage and warmth have always defined her.

A Family Effort

I remain deeply grateful for the part each of my children played in the early days of **Magner Knitwear**. Paul operated a knitting machine; Julia and Kathryn cut ribbons to make cords for the crawlers; Phillip made pom-poms and, every Friday after college, came to the factory to clean and sweep the knitting and sewing rooms.
These small contributions mattered, and they remain precious memories of a time when we worked together as a family.
Looking back, I see my children not only as individuals but as reflections of the life I have lived — the joys, the mistakes, the love, and the distance. Though bridges were never fully rebuilt, my affection for them has remained steadfast, untouched by time or circumstance.
In remembering them, I honour what they have given me: laughter, lessons, and love that continues to shape who I am.

Chapter 32

A Christmas That Never Came

When Silence, Misunderstanding, and Conflict Changed Everything

Written on January 11, 2026

Chapter: An Unexpected Coda

After the previous chapter, I believed my story had reached its end. I felt I had said what I needed to say and that the past, however imperfect, had been honestly recorded.

Yet events over the following weeks unsettled me deeply, and I have found that I cannot move forward without acknowledging what occurred and how it affected me.

It began around two years ago, at Christmas time. Keren and I were invited by Carolyn and Alex to a Christmas gathering at their restaurant. The invitation included staff and a small number of selected customers, and was described as an informal occasion for drinks and savouries.

At first, everything appeared to be going well. People were talking easily, enjoying one another's company, and the atmosphere felt relaxed. Karen and I each had only one drink, as I was driving. After a couple of hours, as the gathering began to wind down, Alex stood up from where he had been sitting with a customer and approached me.

Without warning, he began verbally abusing me. In front of customers and staff, he told me that I was no longer welcome and that I should leave, along with several other remarks that left me stunned. Chairs and tables were already being cleared away, and the evening was clearly ending.

Bianca was there, and I attempted to help her, unsure what else to do in the moment. Alex approached me again and said, "You are still here — go." Carolyn had already left before any of this occurred. Karen and I left quietly, confused and shaken, particularly as some of the people present were friends.

The following day, while waiting for a doctor's appointment, I received a long and hostile text message from Alex. In it, he accused me of dishonesty, selfishness, entitlement, laziness, and of being a burden. He acknowledged that he had been intoxicated the night before, but attempted to justify both his behaviour and the content of the message. There were also deeply personal and offensive remarks that were distressing to read.

After that message, I heard nothing further from him.

On 15 December 2025, Phillip and his family arrived from Sweden to visit relatives in Australia and New Zealand. Carolyn and Alex collected them from the airport, as Carolyn had offered her car for their use during the visit. I had offered to help with transport but was told everything was already organised.

Phillip and his family were taken to Carolyn's home, as their Airbnb was not available until later that afternoon. They were able to relax by the pool. While they were there, my grandson Kevin rang me, and we spoke briefly. As they were only about ten minutes away, I said to Karen that I would go over for a short time, check that everyone was settled, and give them a hug.

When I arrived, the family were by the pool and the gate was locked, so we spoke through the gate. Alex's car was in the driveway. He came out briefly, spoke to Phillip, and returned inside without acknowledging me. Kevin assured me that transport and luggage arrangements were already in place. I stayed no more than ten minutes, said my goodbyes, and left. I did not enter the house, and there was no exchange of words between Alex and me.

As I drove home, I received another text message from Alex — even more abusive than the first. It accused me of crossing boundaries, hurting my daughter, and contained language that was cruel, degrading, and threatening. Once again, I did not respond.

By early January 2026, I remained deeply unsettled by what had occurred. These events cast a shadow over what should have been a joyful Christmas spent with Phillip and his family. I felt the need to record them, not to inflame the situation, but to be honest about my experience and the effect it had on me.

In the days that followed, I found myself replaying ordinary moments in my mind — money repaid, help offered but never requested, brief visits made with good intentions. None of it seemed extraordinary or harmful, and yet it had somehow been transformed into accusation. I began to question myself in ways I never had before.

What troubled me most, however, came later.

When I spoke to my eldest son about what had happened, his response was simple:

"That's Alex — that's the way he is."

I understood what he meant. I also understood that this explanation was offered as a way of closing the matter. What I could not understand was why it was expected to be enough.

It was not the hostility alone that caused the deepest hurt, but the quiet acceptance of it — the sense that the behaviour required no challenge, no examination, and no defence of the person on the receiving end. I was left feeling that the accusations, however unfounded, were easier to live with than the discomfort of addressing them.

Christmas 2025 was never really about where the days were spent or who hosted whom. It was about how difficult it became to feel included or at ease after what had occurred. Plans were left uncertain until the last moment, and although time together did eventually happen, the joy of it was diminished by what

remained unresolved.
Karen and I did spend meaningful time with Phillip and his family toward the end of their visit. Having them in our home, sharing meals and conversation, meant a great deal to us. That time reminded me of what family can be at its best — warm, unguarded, and kind.
This chapter is not written in anger, but in sadness — and in the need to tell the truth as I experienced it. Some explanations may never come. What remains is the impact of being hurt, and of being asked, gently but firmly, to accept it as normal.
With my son’s words in mind—“That’s the way he is”—I knew there was nothing more to explain, only something to accept.
For readers who wish to understand the tone of these exchanges more fully, the messages are available here: **Message from Alex**.

Chapter

Epilogue -- Reflections on Life, Love, and What Remains

“I leave behind no riches, only the truth of a life lived fully.”

Written on January 11, 2026
In writing the previous chapter, I needed to set down events exactly as I experienced them — not to dwell on them, but to release them. Some things in life do not resolve neatly, and learning to accept that has been one of my hardest lessons. What matters now is choosing peace, valuing the relationships that remain, and continuing forward with gratitude for the life I still have to live. This next chapter may be my last — who knows. I am still living, but I feel the need to reflect on my feelings and emotions about the life I have been given. I have tried to be a good citizen, a husband, and a father. Yet, perhaps at times, I have allowed the outside world to interfere, and without realising it, acted wrongly — particularly toward Sheila — and in doing so, created a rift between myself and my children.
There are subjects within families that become taboo, never discussed for fear of causing upset. Instead of disappearing, these unspoken matters embed themselves in memory, where they deepen and worsen over time. Perhaps, over the course of my life, I have not thought deeply enough about the feelings of others — Sheila, the children, and even, at times, Keren. Perhaps I have been superficial, or not entirely true to myself. So where do I go from here? I am now in the latter part of life. How do I spend this time meaningfully, when the things I desire most — love and understanding from those closest to me — feel so distant? I may be rambling, but this is me trying to be honest — with you, and above all, with myself.

When I began writing these pages, I did so not intend to explain myself, but of understanding how a life unfolds shaped by choices made, words spoken, and silences kept.
In looking back now, I see a life lived with effort, love, and good intention, though not without missteps and regret. Time has taught me that certainty is rare, forgiveness is fragile, and understanding often comes too late. Yet, I remain grateful — for the journey itself, for those who walked beside me, and for the chance, even now, to reflect, to learn, and to move forward with a quieter heart.
This is not an ending, but a pause — one that leaves room for hope, reconciliation, and whatever chapters may still be written.
P.S. The photo above was taken outside of Clare House, Dover