

C.1

The Beginning

High Heeled Boots, A Bike Ride, Lost, Heaven

He landed on his back and started to twitch. His face went purple. His eyes started to roll to the back of his head. Dennis yelled, “You’ve killed him! If he dies, you could be up for murder – and they hang people for murder.” I thought about jail and hanging. In just one second my life had turned from a happy jackaroo to a potential murderer. But that’s later. One must start at the beginning.

So, it was a cold, wet August evening with water trickling down the Pioneer bus window. I was on my way at last. An unknown adventure and the start of the rest of my life. The excitement and the unknown lay ahead, as we left the city and passed the neat little brick houses with their manicured gardens and lawns. Blue flickering of the black and white televisions reflecting out of the windows, street lights mirroring the steady drizzling rain on the wet shiny road. I knew I was doing the right thing, leaving behind the suburban life that felt so foreign to me.

I had spent the last four years at a textile importer office listening to the salesmen with their boring talk of families, football, the gardening that was planned for the weekend. But not as pathetic as my own. Being a small lad, 5 foot 5 inches in height and weighing 8 1/2 stone and just past my nineteenth birthday, I was not the most confident or educated, leaving school (which I hated), in grade eight. Everyone kept saying school days were the best of your life. If that was the case, what a miserable existence I was going to cop after leaving school.

As the bus travelled away from the city into the fresh countryside, I stopped looking out the window and noticed the boy sitting next to me. He was tall and lanky, about nineteen, with a ruddy complexion and pimples all over his face. Dressed in jeans and a checked shirt, he was wearing an old leather jacket, but what caught my eye about him were his shoes. No, not shoes, but boots. Not ordinary boots, but high heel riding boots. WOW. He had to be a jackaroo, 'cause that's what I wanted to be, and that's why I was on that bus.

I was leaving Melbourne for Brisbane, Queensland, and if it is called Queensland, there must be room for a king and I would be king of the jackaroos. Not that I knew anything about being a jackaroo, but what the hell, if yer going to be something, you might as well be the best.

Turning to my travelling companion, I asked, "Travelling to Queensland?" He smiled and in a rather ordinary voice told me he was going to work on his uncle's banana farm. Banana farm! Hey, what the...?!

"Oh, I thought you might be a jackaroo, you know with them high heeled riding boots and all."

He exclaimed, "Hell no! I just like wearing them and anyway they make me taller." First on my shopping list was a pair of riding boots, high heel ones.

The bus droned on. Our first major stop was Canberra. This

was to be my first time going out of state. Well, that's not quite right. You see, I was sent to this posh boarding boys grammar school, (how that came about you will hear later on), and all the kids kept skiting that during the holidays they went interstate to Sydney, Perth, Tasmania and all the exciting things they did. So at thirteen years of age, I decided interstate for the Christmas holidays was for me. With the blessing of my mum and grandmother and the skepticism of my sister, I headed off on my pushbike for New South Wales.

Leaving on a very hot December morning just two days before New Year, I started peddling and peddling. No hat, not much water, and a real stinking thirty-eight degrees with heat, flies, cars and trucks whooshing past. I had dust in my eyes going uphill, then downhill, getting tired of all the peddling. Look out New South Wales! I would have something to tell the kids back at school. I went interstate! Euroa was the first night, a heat exhausted, peddle exhausted, I booked in to the pub for the night.

“Yer not running away from home luv, are we? Such a dear little boy on his own. Where is home dear?” enquired the big-busted, big-bottomed aproned lady.

“Melbourne.”

“Goodness gracious me, what's your phone number? I aim to ring yer mum.” The information was relayed quickly as I was tired. So tired. Dragging my bike into the room without her noticing, I shut the door and immediately vomited. Moving the square of carpet over the vomit, I rinsed my mouth out and lay on the saggy bed and promptly fell asleep.

Next morning, I had breakfast in the dining room. Still feeling a bit crook, I managed some cornflakes and peaches, sausages, bacon and tomatoes. I paid the bill out of my savings from sweeping buses last holidays. Back on the Malvern Star bike in the summer heat, I headed for my destination: Yarrawonga. 150 kilometres to the Victorian-New South Wales border.

I am lost. The white marbled road blinding me. The heat is horrific, burning, burning my neck, face, arms and legs, nothing to eat or drink. Where am I? Where are the cars? Just open wheat fields, mile after mile after mile. I must have eaten or drunk somewhere, but where? Miles of nothing, burning, hot white marble road. Push the peddles around, around, so hot, burning. Why don't I have a hat? I need sunglasses as the tears are coming. My little body aches. Will I perish out here, peddling, peddling? What, a mirage? No, it's a sign saying 'Yarrawonga 7 km'. Oh God, I will make it. Can I make it? Hot, tired, slow, mile after mile.

The outskirts of the town appeared. What is this? Was I delirious? Crowds were lining the main street. Colourful streamers, balloons and all. Oh my God, my mum's told 'em I was coming on my bike from Melbourne and they were here to see me. ME! With a newfound energy, I rode past the cheering crowd on both sides of the street, waving like a true hero to them. With renewed strength, I peddled my way to the end of the throng, then my tiredness came back double fold.

Stopping at the first pub in sight, I asked for a room for the night, but there was no room at the inn. It was the annual speedboat carnival and I unwittingly and unknowingly had just ridden a minute ahead of the huge procession. It wasn't for me at all. My mum had not rung and there was nowhere to stay in town. I went back to the first pub and begged for somewhere to lie down. The kindly woman told me, "Sorry sonny, we are all booked out but I will tell you what, there is a tin shed down the back of the beer garden. You can have that. It's got an old bed in it. Hang on and I will get you some linen."

So exhausted after my marathon ride, I just wanted to collapse where I stood. She soon turned up with the bedding and pointed the way to the shed. Turning around as she went back inside, she yelled, "I will be notifying the police if you have run away," and then I heard her mouthing about kids these days. I chucked the

sheets over the holey coconut fibre striped mattress, feeling sick and totally bugged. I pulled the sheet over my body to try and ward off the mosquitoes and soon fell asleep with the echo of celebrations and drink parties in the beer garden.

How long I was sleeping for would be anyone's guess, when I felt a terrific weight on top of me. It was slowly crushing me. Then I smelt and heard a horrible, stale, rasping breath. Something horrible was happening. Was it a nightmare? Being so delirious, why not? My right eye very slowly opened and started to focus, then my left. In the moonlight, only inches from my face, were the hairy features of a wild and ferocious animal. No - my God, it was a huge, ugly German Shepherd dog lying on top of me, a whole chicken carcass between its jaws, presumably pinched from the hotel kitchen.

I tried to move and shoosh it off me. "Go. Get off. Nick off you mongrel." But it growled, wrinkling his snout, laying back its ears with the hackles up. Mine were too, you can bet on that. His lips curled, showing me all his huge fangs illuminated in the night light. With heart thumping, hands sweating, my body throbbing, I somehow nodded off to sleep again, not being brave enough or having the energy to fight the beast. The cracking and crunching of chicken bones, the smell of bad dog breath and the terror of being the next meal were my thoughts as I slipped into oblivion.

Surviving the night, I checked myself to see if all was in place. The dog was gone, and it was going to be another hot day.

Everything was quiet around the town, everyone sleeping off their hangovers and New Year's partying. I got on my bike and rode the few hundred yards across the bridge over the Murray River and stepped on to New South Wales soil, then promptly rode back over the bridge. Happy New Year, we made it interstate for the holidays. The next day, I caught the train home. It was not the plan, but it's a wise fellow that can change his itinerary.

Canberra at last. The bus pulled up at a servo after the two hourly short stops and not much sleep. It was good to relax awhile, have a feed and a decent stretch of the legs. The city of Canberra did not impress; my interest was Queensland and becoming a jackaroo. Anything other than that was irrelevant.

Back on the droning bus and on the way to Sydney town. The Harbour Bridge was great. More impressive than I thought, but Sydney was just another city. People seemed to be rushing everywhere, like people do in all cities. Wish the bus driver would put his foot down. Been on the bus for twenty-four hours and about the same amount of time to go. My travelling companion, like myself, had run out of conversation and with half glazed eyes we watched the passing scenery that appeared not to have changed much since leaving Melbourne.

But hey, the Pacific Highway was changing. It seemed to be getting warmer and the countryside more lush. A new world of storks and pelicans swimming and nesting on the Clarence River. Barges of bananas and pineapples were being moved by tugs, little trains with sugar cane on nearby tracks. Oh, it was warm and the hills we were climbing, alive with produce and the sparkling sea in the distance. This was heaven.

A few hours later, a sign appeared. We were at the Queensland Border. Travelling down the hills towards the sea, the bus came alive with conversation and people were pointing out to strangers to look at this and look at that. We started to travel now near golden beaches, past little seaside towns that looked more like country towns. One town we went through had more of the new accommodation called motels than I had ever seen. There were lots of service stations and the place seemed very Americanised. They said the town was going to be the holiday capital of Australia. What a joke, it didn't impress me. After passing through Surfers Paradise, it was only a few hours to our destination of Brisbane. I booked into the YMCA in Edward Street. It was expensive at \$35.00 for a week and that was only board and breakfast.

C.2

Brisbane

Harold & Gladys, Prim Secretaries, Rejection

Dear Brisbane, a hilly city with houses on stilts. Gee, the tide must come in a long way! Seriously though, I was told they kept houses cooler. Funny silver pointy trams rattling along their tracks as smart conductors wore Foreign Legion type caps, swinging on the running board collecting fares. There were trolley buses and steam trains running down suburban lines. We only saw them in Melbourne at the railway museum. Believe it or not, you could smoke at the pictures. Yep, lean back and me and Cary Grant would pull out a fag and have a good drag. Like all young people, if you wanted to be sophisticated, you had to smoke. I smoked Rothmans filter tip from Pall Mall in a flip-top box.

Brisbane people weren't scurrying or hurrying. Everything was done leisurely and everyone had the time of day. Only that morning, while getting myself orientated, I stopped an elderly couple and asked them where Queen Street was.

“With pleasure, just keep walking two blocks and you will be

at Queen Street,” said the grey-headed, slightly balding man.

“Are you a stranger to Brisbane?” asked his wife, a grandmotherly figure all done up in her Sunday best. Harold, that was the husband’s name, wasn’t too badly dressed himself. “Look, we are just going in to this café for a cup of tea. Would you like to join us?” Of course, I accepted and we settled ourselves in to the booth of the café two doors up.

After ordering a large pot of tea for three and pikelets, the man asked me, “Where you from son? And what are you doing in Brisbane?” I told them I had arrived by Pioneer Bus from Melbourne yesterday and I was looking for work as a jackeroo in Western Queensland on a big sheep or cattle station. “My,” said the wife, “you have got plans. Do you know anyone in Queensland?”

“Only two people that have just shouted me a cup of tea, otherwise no one,” I replied. The man straightened up and looked serious, as people do when they are about to give world-shattering advice. “Could be difficult, you not knowing anyone in Queensland.”

Then, with them both giving me a good once over, the wife said, “I don’t mean to offend, but it’s very tough out there, very hard work and dear, you don’t look that strong.”

“It’s alright Gladys, he has to start somewhere,” the husband continued, “I suggest you go down to Creek Street, that’s where all the stock and station agents are and ask for a position, and don’t be afraid to take a couple of knock backs. Stick to you guns son and you will get what you want.”

It did not seem like earth-shattering advice, but it was the best advice anyone could have given me at that time, I realised later. During this time, I gave them my best manners as they were really a nice couple and I did want to impress my first Queenslanders. The man getting out of the booth behind me didn’t help, however, as he bumped the back of the booth I was

in. Turning around to see what was up, I knocked my cup of tea, not over, but filled some of the saucer with tea. Still trying to be on my best behaviour, the bottom of the cup kept dripping on the plastic tablecloth, which I tried to wipe ever so elusively with my sleeve. Finding later, to my horror, some had dripped on my shirt as well. We parted company after Harold paid for our morning tea promising to keep in touch and “let’s know how you get along boy.” We then went our separate ways.

My financial and asset situation was tight. Leaving Melbourne with \$113.00 from savings, the sale of my bike, and anything else I could flog, was my total cash supply.

The bus fare was paid for previously. Assets included one good, large hiking haversack, a couple of trousers and shirts, two pairs of khaki cotton trousers and shirts for work, underwear, and a jumper that I half knitted myself. Talking about that, one of the reasons to go west young man was to become a man. I had a gut full of women being brought up by three of them. Oh yes, I had the poetry readings, the violin lessons, the one act plays and Christ, even the bloody ballet lessons. What did I know about footy, cricket, pubs and beer? Or other men’s things such as masturbating and rooting? “Can you shoot to the ceiling?” Whatever that meant. Most of the conversations at home were about what my sister was wearing to that party, or whose hair is done what way, fashion and women’s magazines. Being brought up in a feminine household, unfortunately, it rubs off. I was not the maturest of nineteen-year-olds.

Other assets I had besides clothes were a handmade sleeping bag, (compliments of my Gran), a pair of desert boots and leather work boots, a good torch, a sheath knife, a compass, sewing and first aid kit, toiletries, pen and writing paper, the Victorian Weekly Times Farmers Hand book, Man Magazine, and a packet of frangers, also known as condoms. All my worldly possessions were on my back. I did spoil myself and brought from the disposals a pilot’s flying jacket with a fur collar, and yes, a pair

of fine black high heel riding boots Ever tried walking in high heel boots? Ya legs bend in the knees and you seem to walk on the outside of your feet and it's rather difficult to get around.

Creek Street was the key to the outback. Dalgetys, Winchcome & Carson, Primaries, Goldsbrough Mort and other stock and stations agents. They were all there, ruddy faced men in large hats, light checked woolen sports coats, shiny flat heeled tan riding boots, the key to my future.

First stop, the New Zealand Loan Co. I stepped onto the polished floor, practicing to walk properly in the new boots and up to the prim secretary, who looked up from her typewriter and over her glasses. "Yes?"

"Um, I am looking for a job as a jackeroo." Not my most confident of statements.

Miss Prim replied, "Can you ride, milk and kill?"

"Uh no."

"Well, we haven't any jobs here unless you can ride, milk and kill." Then she went back busily to her typewriter. Crestfallen, trying to make a dignified exit, my all-leather soled high-heeled riding boots slipped on the floor and, adding to my knock back, my exit wasn't the way I planned, banging into the entrance doors and tripping back out on to the street. All the wonderful images I had, the practice of going over my interview, the new boots were all a failure. Indeed, a quick one, less than a minute, from my bold entrance to a stumbling exit.

Back to my room at the Y. Boots off. What a relief. I need a better plan; she said I gotta be able to milk ride and kill! I thought, *that can't be too hard*. Cows have tits, you pull them and you get milk, everyone knows that. Ride? Well, you just sit on the back of a horse. They do it in the movies. That can't be difficult, but kill? That's a bit weird. I once killed my sister's cat with my air rifle, thinking it was a wild tomcat that kept me awake at night. Yea, I reckon I can kill. The front entrance

secretary, she is the problem. Gotta get past her, but how?

Putting on my normal shoes, I attacked the next agent with real purpose. No one, especially certain little Miss Prim, was going to stop me. I walked into the next stock agents, fronting up to the next Miss Prim, confidently saying in my best deepest voice, “Can I see one of the men?”

“Which department, sir?” (That was getting better, not often have I been called sir). She rattled off, “Stock, merchandise, real-estate, wool sales, or studs. Whom do you wish to see?”

“Someone from the stock department, please.”

“Would you care to take a seat? I will try and contact our Mr Pearson. Oh, what did you want to see him about?”

“Oh, it’s personal,” I stammered.

“Your name?”

“Jack Alexander.”

Phew, looks like I was going to get an interview. A newspaper called *The Country Life* was on the coffee table. Picking it up, I noticed it was the paper that needed my thorough investigation. Miss Prim came back and I stood up, holding the paper. She answered my enquiring expression, which I didn’t really know I had, as I hadn’t experienced it in the mirror. However, I know I can’t raise an eyebrow.

“I am sorry, but Mr Pearson is out and won’t be back till Monday.” I thanked her and walked out with the paper, feeling proud of myself for handling the situation better than my first stock agent, and leaving with a name and newspaper. I had achieved a small gain.

Walking down to Eagle Street, I went to a café, where I ordered a pie with sauce and a pot of tea for lunch. I excitedly flipped through the just acquired paper with pictures of sheep, cattle, horses, real men, graziers, farmers and stockmen. Oh, it was *The Country Life* newspaper. Near the back were the situations

vacant. The job descriptions fascinated me, titles I had never heard of. Ringers, bore workers, windmill experts, roo shooters, station hands, fencers, jackaroos, jillaroos, head stockman, overseer, cowboys, governess, kitchen boy, cooks, shearers, board boys and experts, wool classers and pressers, gardeners, tractor drivers to name a few. Looking in the jackaroo column wanted, they all required a GPS education, be able to milk, ride and kill and be a Protestant or Catholic. I could be any religion to get a job. I could handle confessions and own a set of beads or be a Protestant and be on my knees for hours. A GPS education. What in the dickens was that? I found out years later it meant Greater Public Schools. But I reckoned a fib here and there should not get in the way of a dream and employment.

After my pie and sauce and new information, my resources were renewed and my battle instruments honed for the kill. I marched into my next stock agent and asked for the manager of the stock department please, and yes, it was a personal matter. That got their Miss Prim moving. Soon enough, down the stairs came a middle-aged chap dressed in the outback uniform of a fine checked shirt with two buttoned pockets on the chest, a fawn woollen tie, brown Fletcher Jones trousers and the inevitable shiny tan riding boots.

“The names Mike, Mike Chudley, what can I do for you?” Shaking my hand with a very firm grip. “Sorry to bother you sir, but I am looking for a job as a jackaroo in Western Queensland and I was told you could help me.”

That was a smart move, I thought. Thank God he didn't ask who.

“What's your name son?”

“Jack Alexander sir.”

“Well Jack, can you milk, kill and ride?”

Fib number one, a big confident, “Yes.”

“And where did you learn this?”

Fib two, “Worked on me uncle’s farm down Victoria way.”

“There is this fellow looking for someone like you,” Mike said. “He has a jackaroo position at his stud near Meandarra, but he wants to do his own interviews. He will be coming down for the Ekka, so if you call at the agent’s office at the grounds, ask for me and I am sure you will get a position.”

Thanking him so much for his help, I assured him I would be at the Ekka to see him. We shook hands and parted company.

What in the heck was the Ekka? I couldn’t ask, it appeared everyone knew what the Ekka was, right? Everyone except me. I strolled back to the Y to congratulate myself on the activities of the day. I lay on my bed, lit a fag and started reading the Country Life from cover to cover, but no mention of the Ekka.

Brainwave. I went down to the reception desk of the Y and asked the man on duty, “Excuse me, but do you know what the Ekka is?”

“Why it’s the Exhibition, you must be from down south?”

“Yes, I am from Melbourne.”

“It’s the big show, like the Sydney show, when the country comes to the city,” said the reception man, expounding the knowledge like a true showman.

I asked, “Could you tell me where it’s held and when?”

“I think it’s about three weeks’ time and it’s held at the showgrounds near the general hospital and the museum.”

I thanked him and slowly walked back up the stairs to my room thinking, “Three weeks?” My money would not last till then. *Three bloody weeks, hell what am I going to do?* I went to the pictures, sat back, and watched a good cowboy and Indian movie and smoked. Watching the smoke curl up to the projector lights to meld with all the other smoke and traveling the lengths

of the light. After the movie, I strolled down Queen Street, working my way to Edward Street, then back to the Y, when I came to the conclusion, I couldn't wait the three weeks for the Ekka. I must go back to the agent Primaries on Monday and see the Mr Pearson that had been "away for the day" and try my luck there. If no luck, there were two more agents and the ads in *The Country Life*. No one was going to stop my ambition to become a jackaroo.

I must have always unconsciously wanted to work in the bush as a young fellow. All I wanted to do was swing an axe, crack a stock whip and ride a horse, but what chance would a bloke have, being brought up by women in the city? Perhaps that is why I was not much good at school. They didn't teach me the things I wanted to learn, like ride a horse, swing an axe, and crack a stock whip, so I became the class clown. I was always kept in after school, getting Saturday morning detentions and the occasional cane on the finger-tips that hurt.

One day, in desperation, the master sent me to the headmaster's office. This was a very rare and dangerous experience. Only the worst boys were sent to the chief of staff's office, never the headmaster's office. Quivering, getting diarrhoea, and feeling very sick, I knocked on the door of the headmaster's office. "Come," was the sound of dread. I opened the doors into a huge office where few had feared to tread. And there, sir sat behind a huge desk littered with papers. He seemed a rather grandfatherly type, bald except for the grey hair around the sides and back. He was rather a small man, with small piercing green eyes. There was an aura about him, as if to say, 'I am okay until you mess about with me, then I can murder.' Anyway, that was my impression.

"What brings you here, boy?"

I stammered, "I really don't know, sir, but it could be something to do with making the class laugh all the time, sir."

"Ah, Mr Knight has told me about you. You're the class clown, is that right?"

“That’s what some say, sir.”

“Sit down, boy. It’s time we had a man to boy talk.”

Sitting down in the huge chair, just keeping my head above the desk, he continued in a surprisingly gentle voice with a hint of a friendly smile.

“Listen son, school is a place of learning, a place to prepare yourself for the rest of your life. You could say life is a big theatre and school is the rehearsal for the big show. Do you understand?”

I nodded an affirmative. Even if I didn’t understand, I still would have nodded an affirmative. He went on and on. The lecture must have lasted half an hour in a monotone, boring voice.

You know how old people go on and on when they are trying to tell you or change your ways, but they say the same things over and over again? They just change the words. He continued, “Yes boy, it’s a rehearsal, school is a rehearsal for what you want to do after you leave school. By the way, what is your career choice for when you leave school?”

“Aha, a comedian, sir.” My answer just came out of nowhere. The friendly face disappeared and went all red.

He stood up, pulled his master’s gown around him and said in a low menacing voice, “Get out, just get out.”

I was out of there like a shot, thanking my lucky stars for no cane, no detentions and just a lecture. I left school for good the following year when I was fourteen, not because I was expelled. More like someone had not paid the school fees for a couple of years. As mentioned before, I was glad to leave school and surprisingly never regretted it.

The next day being a Saturday, I got some washing done at the Y, cleaned my room up and decided to explore this city. Now, the receptionist said the Ekka was near the museum, so I asked him for directions.

“The museum is on the corner of Gregory Terrace and

Brunswick Street,” he said. “Just follow Edward Street all the way to Water Street, then turn left in to Brunswick street. You will see the museum, one of our imposing buildings.”

He then enquired, “Are you walking?” And answering himself he said, “It’s not a long walk for a young fellow like you.” Not a long walk?! Gee, it was nearly three kilometres It was a strange building. Rather gothic and to me, a bit out of place for Brisbane. I paid the entry fee and passed the postcard and souvenir displays to check out the exhibits. It was very disappointing, nothing interesting or educational for me. It’s funny how museums are so quiet and everyone whispers. There are musty sorts of smells. I imagine funeral parlours would be the same.

Leaving the museum, I followed my tracks back to the Y. Looking for somewhere to buy a sandwich, I saw a man have a fit. He was walking a few yards in front of me and started to stagger, went to grab the street light pole, missed and fell down writhing on the ground, doing horrible things with his body and face. A crowd appeared from nowhere like flies to dogs’ poop. One man said, “Grasp his tongue or he will choke on it.”

Another said, “Do that and you will get a finger bitten off.”

So, we all just stood and watched the poor bloke. A woman from the crowd had a brilliant idea. “Someone call the ambulance.” By this time, the man had stopped writhing and started to sit up, not looking very well at all. The ambulance arrived soon after. Two ambulance men opened the back door, pulled out the stretcher and conversed with the victim, then put him on the stretcher into the back of the ambulance and drove away.

Ten minutes later, just as I was coming to Upper Edward Street, a car ran into an electric light pole. Bang! Glass shattering all over the road. Another crowd arrived, different from the last one. We all gathered around, discussing what had happened. Someone said the driver must have been drunk, he was the only person in the car. A patrol policeman on foot came just as the driver

heaved himself out of the car. The policeman told us to move on, which no one did except me. I was getting hungry and thinking all the best excitement was over. I went in search of a café and ordered a vanilla milkshake and egg and lettuce sandwich as well as a sausage roll.

It was starting to get late; I worked my way back to the Y. A small crowd had gathered opposite the People's Palace. Pushing my way through, I saw a small elderly woman poorly dressed. Indeed, she looked as if she hadn't changed her clothes for a week. She had a bible in her hand and she was preaching the good word.

“The Lord is our saviour. To be saved, you must know your Jesus.” She paused, savouring the importance of what she had said. A drunk pushed his way through the crowd of the assorted Saturday evening people and stopped to see what was going on. The old lady continued, “Yes ladies and gentlemen, to get to the kingdom of heaven you must know your Jesus. I say unto you, know your Jesus.”

The man who pushed his way into the crowd earlier said, in a slurred, drunken voice, “Lady, lady, I say unto you, that the only Jesus I know is Kraft cheeses.” Well, we all laughed as we dispersed, leaving the old lady to her own religious beliefs and the happy drunk to his.

I ended up having an interesting day; the walk back from the museum was much more entertaining than the museum itself. Settling back into my room with a packet of bought biscuits and a bottle of coke, I studied my farmer's handbook and called it a night.

A river and bay cruise to Stradbroke Island seemed an excellent suggestion from the breakfast lady, to fill in my Sunday. It was a rainy day and only a few were on the boat that left from Circular Quay. A couple of families with kids running about, two sets of lovers necking and giggling on the whole trip and a smattering

of others. To be honest, I really wasn't interested in the other passengers, except for the kids interrupting my private thoughts and dreams. I wished they would slip overboard or shut up, but no, one had to crack their knee on one of the bench seats and started to howl. *Serve him right*, I thought with a cruel, hidden smile. That *should keep them quiet*. We arrived at Amity Point on the island for a short stop and walked around. I picked up a couple of shells on the deserted beach as it was really a miserable, wet day. The boat only gave us an hour there, and nowhere to buy anything to eat or drink. I think you were supposed to bring your own picnic. My main thoughts were, what did the following week have in store for me? Will I get a job? Where will it be? How am I going to manage? I must have been a picture of a very lonely soul, but who cared?

Back in Brisbane, I had a good feed at my now regular café; I was starving, not having anything since breakfast. Then back to the Y where I took stock of my finances that weren't too bad. I still had \$62.00 left after paying my board, meals, island trip and purchases, but I had better take things a bit easy on the spending for a while. I wondered what tomorrow would bring.