

FRANS JANSSEN: PROGRAMMER, ANALYST, BIOSECURITY OFFICER

Introduction



My name is Frans Janssen and this is my Life Story. Writing it has been one of the most difficult exercises that I have had to do: I would sit there with claws hovering but get writer's block. However, once I started, memories flooded in and it became hard to decide which to exclude. Some memories were painful to remember, others gave me great joy - LIFE.

I was born in Rotterdam, Holland, and my parents were Cornelis Janssen and Juliana Alida Janssen (nee Ten Have). My siblings were Hans Janssen and Edith Theresia Adriana Janssen. We arrived in 1952 under the Netherlands Australian Assisted Migration program. The ship stopped at Fremantle, Adelaide, and Melbourne and terminated at Sydney. At each port Mum and Dad went ashore and checked the area for possibilities. They liked Melbourne, but continued to Sydney to see what it was like. While on the way Sydney suffered a fierce storm and local flooding, and this convinced them that they should return to Melbourne. We disembarked on 3 March 1952 at Sydney and spent some time in Bathurst NSW in a migrant camp (not sure how long). The name Bonegilla comes to mind. Then we moved to a migrant camp in Maribyrnong Victoria (not sure how long) before moving to St Albans into a small cottage in Alexina Street. Finally we moved to 18 Erica Street.

Immigration



I am unsure of the reason for my parent's migration, though I do remember hearing Mum and Dad talk about family issues. Dad once said he was leaving due to family problems and that they considered America, but he decided to come to Australia. I've only met one member of my parent's family, once, when an Auntie came to stay around the time my brother married. There are no memories of the trip. I did have a birthday on the Red Sea on our way to Australia. This was when I got a stuffed dog for a present. I managed to keep that dog until after my first year of marriage when the real dog we got shredded it when he found it in the cupboard.

Dad was a fully qualified electrician in Holland and he also owned an ice-cream shop which mum ran for him during the week, he worked there on weekends. On arrival in Australia he was told his qualifications were not recognised and he would have to return to school to obtain qualifications. Dad went to school and obtained his B-Grade license, meaning he could not work alone, he would need to be supervised by an A-Grade Electrician. He would need another year to get his A-Grade; he was dis-heartened and didn't want to

waste time as he had to earn a living to support the family. Mum had been the primary support while Dad went to school. Dad was offered a partnership with a friend in an Electrical business but he would need to get his A-Grade License. Dad declined and then commenced work for the SEC at their Yarraville Depot. He stayed with the SEC until retirement.

St Albans

We initially lived in a small cottage in Alexina Street. When we moved in we only had the clothes which were in the luggage for the journey to Australia, all the rest of our belongings were in a large crate which still had to arrive. The cottage consisted of three rooms, a small back room with two bunk beds, a central living room and a small kitchen at the front. When we moved into the cottage we went to a farm somewhere near the Northern end of Arthur Street and got straw. This was used to fill large sacks and was to be our mattresses until the rest of our luggage arrived. There is only one memory burned into my mind from this time. It was the night after our crate arrived and Dad had started to unpack and move items into the cottage. The kids slept in the two bunks, sister on the top bunk and my brother and I shared the lower bunk, Mum and Dad slept in the living room. That night I woke feeling something move across my chest, it was an enormous spider about the size of an adult hand. It crossed over me then across my brother's chest and onto the wall, at which time I woke my brother. We screamed for Dad. He saw the spider and got a hammer and hit the spider. I can still remember hearing the cracking sound. Dad said it was not a local spider as it was too big; it could have entered the crate at any of the ports the ship had stopped at on the journey. To this day, I still have an aversion to spiders.



Dad purchased a block of land in Erica Street with an option to buy the block next door. This option he allowed to lapse, much to his regret years later. Dad commenced building the new family home. I don't have many memories regarding this time. There is one which is more of a memory of what I was told years later. We were always told not to play in the house frame while Dad was building, but as kids do, when no-one was looking we did. One time I was knocked unconscious by a beam that had dropped from the rafters. I was leaning over a floor joist and it hit me on the back of the head and rolled me over the joist onto the ground. Dad raced me to the doctor, where I was revived. Appears it was lucky I was swinging on the beam and was rolled over - least resistance, least damage.

The house was designed and built by Dad. The house was an L shape with a garage offset at the back. The garage also contained the laundry which consisted of a copper boiler and two troughs with a clothes roller between. There was a path next to the garage leading to the outhouse, which was behind the garage. Dad put scoria down this path so that anyone in the outhouse would be warned if the night soil collector came. The back yard contained a chook pen and a vegetable garden. We tried to grow fruit trees for years without much success.

Mum and Dad lived there until circa 1973 when they bought a home in Rosebud. Dad had retired and enjoyed walking his dog along the beach. He loved living there, but got a bit grumpy during summer when the holiday makers occupied the beach camping areas.

Disintegration

I suspect there must be an ancient family predisposition to family disputes as we seem to have continued down the same path. I hope the tradition dies with my generation. It does leave an air of something missing at family gatherings when only one side of the family is present.

My sister and I had not communicated since she got upset over a minor matter when my first son was born. I stubbornly did not try to resolve the matter as we had never got along throughout our childhood. She always had the privileged upbringing. Mum could not see any fault in her daughter. Dad tried to be fair, but in matters concerning my sister, he was overruled by Mum. I realised at a young age that life is not always fair.

After my parents moved to Rosebud troubles started to emerge between Mum and Dad which also seemed to be inflamed by my sister. Dad's health started to deteriorate and Mum was convinced by my sister to put Dad into a home. Dad was not happy about this arrangement and he escaped and returned home. Mum promptly had him returned to the home and he was put under closer watch. You can't stop Dad when he has his mind set and some weeks later he escaped again. He was not returned, which surprised me. Some months later I was informed that Mum was divorcing Dad. I doubt this idea originated from her. None-the-less they divorced and Mum moved into a state-funded granny flat at the back of my sister's home, taking her proceeds of the settlement. Dad moved in with my brother.

My brother's wife and Dad did not get along and as a consequence I received a call from my brother. He suggested that Dad move to Queensland to live with me as I had plenty of room on the acreage for a flat for Dad. My brother said he was happy that I would take Dad and therefore did not want anything from the meagre balance of Dad's estate. Dad only had a few thousand dollars from the settlement to build a flat. I asked about Dad's health and was told he is in good shape. We arranged for Dad's journey to Queensland. When Dad's flight arrived I waited for him to deplane, but he was a no-show, all passengers had left the plane. Then a forklift arrived at the rear of the plane and a wheelchair-bound person was lowered: it was Dad. Dad resided for a few months with us until the flat was finished. He then lived there for a short while before needing a lot more care. He was placed in a nursing home. I had asked my brother for help with his medical costs to no avail. After Dad passed away I got a call from my brother wanting to legally own half the granny flat. This descended into a war of legal letters until I called his bluff regarding court action. He then ceased communication and we have not spoken since.

My sister had married Laurie Mc Asey and they had a son and a daughter.

My brother married Claudia and they had a son Warren, a daughter Angela, and a second daughter. He worked in the Federal Government Metrology Department for many years. Last I heard they had moved to a country town to open a B&B.

Primary School

I started my school years at the St Albans State School in 1955 and was placed in class 1B. Thanks to Joe Ribarow, I now have the class photo again, my copy had disappeared. I am the

little fella with a bloody nose holding the board. I had a few blood noses at school right from the first day. Can't remember why, probably deserved them. Unlike today, we had to walk to school. The walk seemed to take forever and in winter we used to run our fingers along the frost on the fences and arrive at school with blue fingers. We caught frogs in the gutters near the railway crossing. We also caught a Trilobite-like creature, which I had always hoped was a relative of that prehistoric creature, but alas they were only tadpole shrimps. Some kids placed pennies on the rail lines and picked them up after school. There was always some derogatory banter with the Catholic School kids as they passed by, usually good natured, but sometimes it erupted into foul retorts.



The school had a Monday morning assembly when the anthem was sung, after which we marched to class to the beat of a drum. I was lucky when I was made a milk monitor. This meant delivering the government-provided milk to each classroom. When we arrived at each class we counted the students and retained any leftover bottles. When the job was complete we delivered the teaching staff ration (plus a few) and then set about quaffing the remainder.

We lost quite a few friends when the new eastern state school opened and then again when the northern one opened. Some friendships were renewed in High School.

There is one teacher whom I remember; I think his name was Mr Cove. He had a love of the Australian pioneering times. He taught us a fair bit of our early history as well as many of the songs from that era.

Occasionally we would skip the last few classes in summer and swim in a water hole just north of the school and sometimes we would go and explore the scoria formations further north. We called them the Volcanoes. In later years a large water tank was erected on the site. One summer we decided to go for a swim in the tank. Not one of our best ideas: the water was cold as ice and we all were getting a cramp very quickly. It was difficult climbing the rope out with numb hands and leg cramps. We all made it out - and very lucky to survive. Never went back.

On the walk from school I often stopped off at David Dusting's home. David had a bedroom of his own which was detached from the house. What a luxury. I was so impressed and envious as I had to share a bedroom.

When I was in grade six I was on the footy team and we had won all our matches on the west side of Melbourne. A newspaper came and took a photo. The newspaper article was headed "The Internationals" and over each team member's head was a label declaring their nationality. The copy I had disappeared recently - bugger. We then had to play against the top team from the east side of Melbourne for the State Championship. When we walked onto the field, to our horror, the entire team was way taller than any of us. We didn't stand a chance, we lost.

I can vividly remember the unmade streets and the green slime gutters that ran along each side. These gutters were full of little red worms that would duck under the slime when disturbed, re-appearing sometime later. We spent a lot of time amusing ourselves by tossing pebbles into the slime and watching the worms - great fun. Most of the time we played in the streets, we would set up a box with painted stumps and play cricket or kick a footy. We made guns out of pieces of timber and played Cowboys and Indians. It was around this time that the main type of refrigeration was based on a freezer box kept cool by an ice block. We loved it when the Ice Man came past in his horse drawn cart because he kept the small chipped off ice and gave it to the kids. Milk was also delivered by horse and cart. The Dairy was on the corner of Main Road East and View Street. Occasionally a few of us kids would sneak into the dairy's horse holding yard and ride the horses around.

Some of the locals were very "creative" in regards to obtaining materials for building their homes. One such person lived opposite us. The father would come home with two bags he carried from work, these bags would contain bricks. These were gathered on his circuitous route from the station. This circuit took him through a number of building sites, the source of his bricks. He built a garage first and moved in, and then he built a house. He also bought more land and was strangely a lot later home each week night. Last I heard, the family owned half a dozen homes and a block of flats in St Albans. What a cheek, but what an entrepreneur.

When I was about eleven, I got a pair of roller skates. On week days I would skate down Erica Street to Main Road East and climb on the Errington Reserve entrance brickwork and wait for Mum to come from work. Mum worked for the Hamptons in their haberdashery store. She knew most of the early business people in St Albans such as the Self and Goddard families and the Stevens family. She knew all the Stevens family by their first name which was helpful later on in my teen years.

During the last years at primary school we used to explore the stone quarry in McKechnie Street. The quarry was no longer mined and had been used as a dump for metal shavings. There were many deep layers terraced to the bottom of the quarry. We would jump from the rim of the quarry and bounce down the layers of shavings to the bottom. We also used to climb the sheer rock face on the opposite side, but we realised the danger and quit that activity after a mate nearly fell from near the top. The things you do when you are young. The quarry at Green Gully was also a favourite spot for exploring. Before they were covered by rubbish, there were a few caves into the hill. It was in these caves that we once found some army equipment such as gas masks, hats and ammo boxes. What a find for a bunch of youngsters, we used them for quite a while in army games.

Once a fortnight Mum would take the tribe to Melbourne. We would go to the Victoria Market at the top of town for fresh fish and cheese. I still remember the cheese hall with high,

marble-topped counters. Mum went to one cheese seller and the serving ladies always gave me a slice of cheese to taste. Afterwards we would return through town shopping on the way. We always went to the Coles Cafeteria for lunch. What a massive eating hall that was, or was. I just little and over-awed.

I remember the introduction of television. We would go to a shop in East Esplanade where one of the shops had a TV in the window. It would be on all night. We didn't get a TV for a while. I think the cost of the TV and the associated Viewers Licence you had to buy was a bit costly for us. Dad was very aware of the licence inspectors as he had heard of some nasty stories from some work mates.

High School

I attended the St Albans High School from 1961 to 1965 when I obtained St Albans my Leaving Certificate (Year 11). High School was a very enjoyable time for me. I relished the holidays and put up with the school days. I lived for the weekends and holidays when we would run amuck along the Maribyrnong River. We swam at a number of spots from Green Gully down to the "Quarter Mile Bridge" (the Railway Bridge near Sunshine Road). Occasionally we would go to the opposite side of St Albans and play along Kororoit Creek.

We explored the entire Maribyrnong river area and would sneak into the farmer's paddocks to pinch tomatoes for lunch. One lunchtime the farmer nearly caught us. He had been waiting for us with a shotgun containing saltpetre. Luckily we spotted him before he got close and we ran for the river. Nothing stirs the adrenalin like running through a paddock full of Scotch thistle wearing only a pair of swim trunks. He let off one shot but he was far away. I ran like the devil and was mid-air when I saw a black snake curled up just where I was about to land; he had his head curled into the middle. They were the fastest steps ever, one on the snake and then away as fast as possible. It took a while for our heart rate to calm down as we removed thistles from our bodies.

Our favourite swimming spot was at Green Gully where there was a large rock shelf and tall river-side trees. Most summer days we would be there, jumping from the trees and swimming along the river. We had to quit for a few years. One summer I was the first up the tree and jumped into the deep spot. I opened my eyes as I was going down and to my amazement saw tree branches all over the place. I was dropping through them. A tree had fallen into the river and was stuck in the deep hole. The next two summers were spent swimming at the end of Biggs Street.

During one winter we had befriended two recently emigrated Dutch brothers. Their parents were renting a property which had a large shed containing a tin bath. We decided to lash some drums to it and float it down the river. We carried it to the Biggs Street end of the Maribyrnong River and hopped in. The river was running fast and we had a great run until one of the brothers rocked it too much and the drums came free. The tub sank as my brother and I jumped for the bank. One of the brothers got tangled in the ropes and went down with the tub. Luckily he had a knife and cut himself free. We then tossed a coin to see who would dive down to it the next day so we could return the tub to the shed. My brother lost the toss. The next day he swam down to the tub and tied a rope to it. When he got ashore he was blue from the cold. We then hauled it onto the bank and carried it home.

When my brother turned sixteen war games got a bit more interesting after we and a few mates got air rifles. We would separate into two groups and we would shoot at each other from behind the farmers' stone fences. Only below the waist was the rule. This lasted most of

that summer until my brother hid behind a bush and then ducked down. Silly thing to do: I spotted a movement and fired low as usual. Heard a yell and then big brother stood up and fired right back and hit me in the chest. My shot had given him a new part in the hair. We quit that game.

One of our favourite past times was bike rides north of St Albans beyond Sydenham and also around Melton. We would ride all morning then camp and have a campfire lunch and return home early evenings. Melton Weir provided some interesting camping, especially when the eels came down the spillway. We took great delight catching as many as we could, but only kept the big ones.

One summer my brother and I, and a couple of mates, I think it was Peter Szarko and Radenko Jankovic, decided to go fruit picking past Lilydale. Had a great time playing truancy from the work team and swimming in the farmer's dams. Didn't earn much, just enough for food, booze and a return train fare. The next year the school had an excursion to Lilydale. I knew the local bottle shop where we could get some beer. Misha Dejanovic, Paul Krampera and I escaped from the group and got a bottle of beer each. We then went to the local park for a drink. We didn't have an opener, just knocked the neck off on the park gate and drank carefully. The things you do when you're young and stupid.

I forgot to mention that I also got more interested in girls during High School.

School Days

School days were not my favourite time. I didn't study much during the year, swatted like crazy just before exams. I did alright considering my lack of enthusiasm and attention in class.

I didn't have much of a problem with teachers, only when they tried to catch us smoking behind the shelter sheds. Got a good clip under the ear from Mr Smith one time when I tried to warn the others he was racing towards the shed.

Some teachers do stand out. One, I can't remember his name. He had a dislike for me from day one. He became our maths teacher in second or third form. On the first day of the year we called out our names. When I said my name he made some comment like "Not another one of you". I didn't know what this was about, nor did my brother. Later that year I was ill for a long time with Tonsillitis and on return asked him for help to catch up in the maths class. He just said "catch up yourself". Lost my basics in maths and as a result didn't continue into the sciences. Another year when the cross country run was on we were dropped off on the other side of the Maribyrnong river. I knew the river well and also the best place to cross over. As a result a few mates and I were way ahead of the pack. We were at the top of the hill before anyone had even found a crossing. We ran to the first cross roads where a teacher was waiting to give directions, and he sent us to the right. We were way down the road and seeing no one at the next crossing, we looked back to see him sending the rest of the runners to the left. What a mongrel act. We didn't stand a chance of winning after that and just slowly wandered back to school.

It was during third form that I started working for the Stevens family business. Initially I worked in the paint shop when it was on Main Road East between Collins and Erica streets. Later I worked in the Mens Wear shop and helped with furniture deliveries. Work place safety was not a concern in those days as the delivery helper had to stand in the back of the utility ensuring the load did not come adrift - cool in summer, freezing in winter.

At the end of fifth form I wasn't sure what I was going to do, High School meant I could not go into the sciences. Wasn't interested in anything else. After a few talks with my parents, Mum suggested I try an apprenticeship or something else at Footscray Tech. I enrolled at Footscray Tech in a Management and Accounting Diploma course.

Footscray Technical College

I was at the Footscray Institute of Technology in 1966 and 1967 studying for a Diploma of Business Data Processing and completed two years of four-year course. I commenced college at the Nicholson Street campus. My attitude was still the same: I lived for the weekends and holidays. I did put in a bit more effort when there were group assignments. However, much time was spent playing pontoon down in the basement storage rooms, or across the road at the pub. My results were still similar, just managing to pass.

Before I got my license we used to go for trips to the beach in my brother's car. Peter Szarko had joined the Navy and whenever he got back in town we would go for drives down to a beach near Frankston. This was a popular spot for us as there was a footy field adjoining the beach. A few times when one of Melbourne's "cool" changes occurred and it rained, we would drive the cars onto the field and do handbrake skids across the field. One time my brother hopped in with Peter and Barry (Peter's Navy mate) and left me and the girls to watch. I wasn't happy with this so I got into my brother's car and skidded across the field, stopping just short of the goal posts. An unhappy brother took the keys off me and never left them in the car again.

When I got my license in 1967, I couldn't afford a car, so for a while I would borrow Dad's new Corolla. This gave me some independence from my brother. I could now go out with a girl and not rely on my brother. A date usually ended with a few hours "parking". We used to go parking in the roads at the end of Biggs Street. I got nabbed by the local constabulary a few times, so was looking for a new parking spot. I finally settled on Main Road East. I would park in front of Coles, and as long as I didn't touch the brake pedal, it was just another parked car. I was never bothered by the police again.



I was still working in the Stevens' shop after school and on Saturdays. This gave me my spending money. I usually worked in the Mens Wear section and helped with deliveries. When I got my license I started doing deliveries. Most of the time it was a Holden utility, but quite often it was in a three-ton Bedford truck. This was a bit of a nightmare because it had to be backed up the dog-leg alley at the rear of the store, which meant someone had to guide the driver. Once when I was guiding the manager he ran over my foot. Afterwards they asked me if I could wiggle my toes; I could so we continued working. I spent the rest of the morning walking around in a blood-filled shoe – so much for OH&S in the sixties.

Weekends always involved a party at someone's place. It was usually at Peter Szarko's place as his parents both worked late shifts, so we had the place to ourselves. Attending these parties were the usual crowd: Peter Szarko

and his sister Helga, my brother and I, Radenko Jankovic, Corinne Dwyer, Janina (Jena) Chabowski and Irene Ladun. Occasionally a few others attended, but I can't remember most names as Saturday nights were mostly a blur.

I dated Jena Chabowski for about six months and then we split up. Some three months later we met again at the railway station and the romance was rekindled. We became inseparable after that.



During the second year at FooTech a couple of mates and I had decided to take a break for a year and travel around Australia. This was approved by the parents, so long as we passed all subjects that year. None of us did; we each had a subject needing to be repeated, so the trip was off. To top it off, the College then informed us they were changing the courses and could not start the third year in the Computing stream due to lack of students. This is the course I was going to continue with. It was late November 1967 and after some more discussions with Mum and Dad I decided to look for a job. I was very interested in the Computing subjects and as a result had got high marks, so I decided to look for a job in that field.

Computer Programming

I applied for a Computer Operator job with Dunlop Australia, and after a few interviews, an aptitude and a Psych test I commenced work mid December 1967. A few weeks after I started I got a call from my mates. Their parents had given them the go ahead for the trip. I had to decline.

I decided to transfer to RMIT when Footscray Tech weren't going to continue with the third year of the course due to lack of student numbers. I contacted R.M.I.T regarding continuing with the Diploma course and enrolled in a few night classes.

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

In 1968 I started at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in their Diploma of Business Data Processing and was attending part time in the third year of their four-year course. Night classes were hard, finishing work at five and then having to wait a few hours to do an hour or so of learning followed by a commute home. One teacher who had day and night classes decided to amalgamate them into one early morning class. He didn't show up for the first two morning classes and funnily enough nor did any of the day students. Some months later I was getting weary of two greatly varied class times as well as a full time job. The programming teacher had set an assignment to solve a problem in the least number of COBOL instructions. The next week he called for results. Most students had about 10 instructions. The teacher then began to explain his solution of 8 instructions. I kept my hand up. I was already programming and had it in 6 instructions. The teacher finally conceded to allow me to show my solution. I wrote it on the board and he looked at it for a while, and then said it would work. He then continued explaining his solution after erasing mine. I decided that kind of teaching I could

do without. Early morning classes, night classes and dodgy teachers, I had enough of tertiary education and my career was progressing fast enough. Decided I would prefer Commercial training. I terminated the course as my career was progressing well enough, I had started programming, and I also got married. I did not want to spend any more years attending night classes, so I quit R.M.I.T. There was at least one consolation for that year, because in mid 1968 I bought my first car, a 1965 HD Holden two-speed automatic.

Commercial Training

Over the next few years I enrolled in a several commercial training courses. These included COBOL programming (1969), National.Computing.Centre (London) Systems Analyst Certificate - Control Data (1972), and Project Management (1973). Since then and up to 2003 I have acquired various development languages for specialised projects.

Career

1967 – 1976: Dunlop Australia. I commenced as a Computer Operator/Data Control Clerk working on the ICT-1004, loading punched cards containing sales invoice batches, batch balancing and then providing Sales and Ledger Reporting for the End of Month. I then progressed to Programmer and eventually Senior Analyst. I was involved in the development and support of the many and varied Applications, from Sales Recording and Analysis, Debtors, Stock Control, Materials Handling and Production Planning. My last major project was the management, design and implementation of the Payroll System for the Factory and Head Office Staff. The Staff Payroll was implemented, followed by a phased implementation of the Factory payroll System. I left because I wanted more varied experience.



1976 – 1981: Nissan Motor Company Australia. I commenced as a Project Leader for the Vehicle Service Department Systems. My duties involved the control of systems development; staff of control (three Programmers) and project evaluation in preparation for future development. The major project I developed was for the replacement of the vehicle warranty register with a Vehicle Fault Analysis and Management Information System. This system was presented to Nissan's Parent company in Japan and was then adopted by them for conversion to an IBM system and further development for worldwide use. I left Nissan to progress my career - wanted to try EDP Management.

1981 – 1982: Hella Australia, Mentone. I was Project Leader and Assistant EDP Manager. Hella was at the limits of its current configuration and as a result I was initially involved in the purchase of an additional system to service the Sales and Stores Department and have it connected to the Administration unit in a back-to-back configuration. I was in charge of and Analyst and three Programmers. We carried out all the Operational and Development work, even the rotational operation of End of Month processing. I worked on the further design of the Pricing and Cost Revision System and then developed a Sales Forecasting and Planning System which passed production requirements from Motor Manufacturers into the Production Planning System. I left Hella when I had finally convinced my wife to move to Queensland; it had taken seven years to

convince her. I had wanted to move after a number of business trips since working for Dunlop.

1982 – 1984: Capricorn Coal Management, Brisbane. I relocated to Brisbane and commenced with Capcoal as an Analyst/2IC to the Manager. I was initially involved in the evaluation of a Purchasing and Stores System package for the mine site. The Manager left two months after I commenced and I together with the development staff put a proposal to Management for a twelve month exercise to introduce strict housekeeping and equipment maintenance procedures throughout the organization. This exercise was necessary as over the years the housekeeping and equipment maintenance activities had gradually declined and job failures, due to their omission, were a regular occurrence. This was especially so at the mine site. Our proposal was accepted by Capcoal management and I was appointed Acting Manager. We completed the task ahead of schedule, after which I completed the package evaluation that I had commenced a year earlier. I had realised that management was not giving me much joy; I preferred development work. I wanted a position that allowed me to control projects, but also participate in the development work. I left when there was a downturn in coal prices and the industry was cutting back on expenditure and staff.

1984 – 1985 Queensland Independent Wholesalers, Rocklea. My duties as Project Leader involved the analysis and design of a new Costing and Pricing System for the organization. This application involved the analysis of the operation of nearly every department. Some of these systems, due to their complexity, were still manual systems. I was the project leader who in conjunction with a contractor and two Analysts analyzed the requirements and developed a data model for the new System. I left just prior to the presentation of the model to management. There was a take-over bid from a Sydney grocery wholesaler and I decided it was time to leave despite management re-assurances that a take-over was not possible. Three months after I left they were taken over and sixty percent of staff was dismissed.

1985 – 2002: Logan City Council; Strategic Development Coordinator (2IC to the Manager). I commenced work with Logan City Council after they placed advertisements to obtain internal staff to replace the ICL Facilities Management team. As Strategic Development Coordinator, I lead a team of three Systems Analysts, two GIS Analysts and two Contractors. They provided support for the packaged systems, maintained and developed layers for the GIS as well as developing add-on facilities to the Packaged Applications.



During my seventeen years at Logan we undertook two projects to convert the Applications onto different platforms. Each time I was the Council Project Manager. The first one took four years to complete, the second only two years. In 1995 Council decided to install a Windows NT based Network. This Network would connect the Administration Centre and the three Depots. The project involved the installation of a network of servers and the installation of 400 PCs. I was the Project Manager for this Roll Out project. It was completed two months ahead of schedule and the team was highly commended by Management for their excellent achievement.

During the last three years I developed a number of databases using Microsoft Access to carry out information analysis and restructuring. I also learned another three languages to enable development of a pilot workflow application. The industry was moving faster and faster and the new Manager wanted young blokes straight from University, not old dinosaurs like me; he was slowly replacing the older staff. I was his main target, so because of this and the strain of coping with my wife's illness, I decided to leave the job and the industry. I left in late December 2002 for a four week rest prior to looking for a new career.

2003 – 2014: Biosecurity Queensland, Oxley, Queensland. I commenced with Biosecurity Queensland as a Field Officer working on the Fire Ant Eradication Project. This was a hell of a departure from my previous work, but I wanted a no-responsibility position in order to allow me to get my affairs into order. I was initially stationed at a Depot in Northgate which was close to our home at Margate. The workforce was divided into an inspection team, a number of treatment teams and a quad bike treatment team. My team volunteered to be the full time inspection team. The Northgate depot was responsible for the north and east side of Brisbane. After some six years the north side of Brisbane was considered free of Fire Ants and we were redeployed to the main depot at Oxley.

I wanted to handle the chemicals as little as possible so for the next three years I worked on the quad bikes. This was a bit more interesting than inspection or treatment as you had a bit more freedom and the camaraderie amongst the riders was fantastic. I then returned to treatment and inspection after I had a number of close calls whilst riding. I had a star picket shoot up between the bike and my leg - a bit scary, could have lost my manhood. The second incident was an argument with a small incline, ascending the slope the bike hit a small rock, bounced to the side, hit a tree and then stood up on the back wheels and I slid off the back losing some bark. The last near miss was when I was riding along a river in tall grass which was over my head. I stopped when I saw a sudden change in grass density. Just as well, there was a four metre wide by three metre deep gully with a tree lying in it. Had I not stopped I would have been the meat in a tree and bike sandwich. I decided it was time to give up the bikes. I saw my days out doing property inspections west of Brisbane. I then retired. WooHoo.

The Years of Enslavement

In 1968 my brother was in the call up and got a deferment. About this time, when visiting the in-laws, I met Anton Van Ree and we talked about our upcoming call-up. He said that he was told that if you enlist you get your choice of work. He said he was going to enlist and apply to drive trucks. Sometime later I heard he was in the Army driving trucks, but it was in Vietnam. I never heard any more about him. In January 1969 it was my turn. There were four of us in the Dunlop Operations Section in the same call-up. Two of my mates got deferred in early February; two of us didn't get a notice. I was getting worried because word was they would always take at least one male from a family. I decided to delay asking Jena to marry me until I knew if I had to go into the Army. Then in mid March we got our deferment notices.

Jena and I were married in November 1969 and moved into a small flat just off Ballarat Road Sunshine. We lived there for a year and then bought a block of land in Noble Park for \$3,500. We had been told by the salesman of plans for a future shopping centre in the estate, but I thought this was just sales talk. I got an offer of a flat in Elsternwick for half rental in return for some caretaker duties. We moved, but seemed to be in financial difficulties, despite the rental savings.



The Chabowski tribe in the early 1980s: Dad, Stan, Jena, and Helen (far right).

It was in mid 1971 we were travelling to St Albans to visit Jena's parents when we had a head on collision at the corner of Ballarat Road and Geelong Road. The Geelong Road lanes had stopped and I was starting to accelerate past them when a car came speeding out of the third (left) lane and turned straight into us. I had a massive "V" in the front. The weekend before my brother in-law had convinced me of the safety of Seat Belts, and I had installed them that weekend. Jena's seat belt shattered from the impact and she was thrown into the windscreen. She was knocked out and had a broken ankle; I only had a chest bruise. Since then I have sworn the virtues of seat belts.

We moved back to Sunshine for six months but we wanted to build a house at Noble Park and in order to achieve this we decided to move in with my parents for six months and double our savings for that year. We managed to save enough, but when we visited Noble Park in 1972 we were not happy with the development of the neighbourhood. We had started looking for a builder to build our home, and had found a few DMF Star homes we liked. The builder informed us they had some Spec homes at South Springvale.

We saw the house we wanted at Slym Court and purchased it for \$17,050. We move in November 1972 and decided to keep the block of land as an investment. A year later we had to refinance the block and we were having trouble keeping up with both loans, so we decided to sell the block. Did that and got \$3,500. Six months later they built that shopping centre and the blocks near our block were selling for \$13,500. This would have paid out the mortgage – it happens.

While we were paying off the two properties, I decided to earn some extra money to help with the payments. Through a friend in the Police Force I got a job as a security guard at a Hotel somewhere near the Fleming racecourse. This was an easy job, two nights a week sitting in the Lounge and occasionally walking through the bars. At nights end we helped clear the tables and when all was done the barman lined the bar with beers for the workers just prior to flushing the beer lines. I got my brother a job there on the weekends during the day. I had no real trouble during the year or so I worked there, occasionally had to eject a sleeping drunk. Early one Saturday night a bunch of Aussies were having heated discussions with some Italian guys. My partner and I convinced the Aussies that one of the Italians had

gone for re-enforcements and the Aussies left fairly quickly. My brother was not that fortunate. One Saturday a fellow recently released from Pentridge entered the bar with a mate and a few "Ladies". He had been barred from the Pub, so my brother and his partner went to tell them to leave. The fellow's mate was not with him and he was urinating against the Lounge Bar. As they approached, my brother got a tap on the shoulder, silly lad just turned around. He woke up some time later and was told the blokes had made their point and simply left. I quit some six months later.

Like most blokes I started to put on some weight within a few years of settling down. Not happy with the situation I started a morning aerobic exercise program consisting of walking, jogging and running around the nearby school. It was a 4 kilometre circuit.

In July 1974 our first son Clinton Lucas was born. He was a blonde baby with a happy disposition. He was eager to play and always had a ready smile. Sadly eleven months later he passed away, having succumbed to a fever. He was laid to rest in the West Stewart Lawn at Springvale Botanical Cemetery.

Life moved on and in July 1976 our second son Benjamin Marcus was born. He had brown hair and brown eyes. He was always healthy and easily shook off any ailments. He had a big smile every morning. Two years later Samantha April was born. She was healthy until one day she seemed to be choking. After stabilising her we rushed her to hospital. Checks determined that she was prone to febrile fits because her sweat glands were not working. We rejected fit management medicines due to many side effects. We decided to keep a close eye on her especially when sick. This meant cold baths in winter to reduce her temperature and often followed by a visit to hospital.

Both children were suffering from Asthma and our doctor informed us it was affected by ground water in our local area. I had wanted to go to Queensland since the early seventies and this was discussed with the doctor. He agreed it should help.



In late 1982 I found a Queensland mining company wanting an Analyst and was pleasantly surprised when Jena agreed to move. In October we moved to Queensland. Our original plan had two options. First choice was a beachside suburb, if not, then acreage. We couldn't find a suburban seaside suburb with sandy beaches; they all had mangroves and mud flats, so we opted for acreage. We purchased a five acre property in Logan Village. The house had been build a year earlier and the property was a blank canvas. The village itself consisted of a dozen houses, a primary school, a service station/general store and the obligatory old Queensland pub. Counter lunches consisted of a Nuked Pie - real gourmet stuff. The neighbour behind us held the distinction of being the last person allowed to ride her horse into the bar and order a beer.

During the first winter, Sam caught a nasty cold and we went on watch. It was my turn late in the evening and when I checked, she felt cool, uncovering her I found she had started to sweat and the bed was saturated. Two happy parents slept well that night. The asthma was

still present. In Melbourne it was eleven months of illness, whereas in Brisbane it was only a few months of potential problems. Usually asthma appeared during a bout of flu or a cold. Family life was good and the kids went to a local small primary school.

I had to quit my morning running due to a back problem that would not go away. Five years of anti-inflammatory drugs and no improvement. Then one time I was home and needed more medication the local doctor's locum sent me to a physiotherapist. She gave me some stretches to do and the back improved immensely. I still do the stretches to this day. I then decided to restart the morning exercise and walked around the block. I walked as fast as I could and had the five kilometres down to 45 minutes. I had a close call one morning. I was walking along the main access road when I almost tripped on my untied lace. I bent over to tie it up. While bent over I heard a whoosh overhead and looked up. A tradie utility had just past by and his ladder was loose and hanging way over the side, where I was walking. He was doing around 100 kmh, so had I not bent down it would have given me a hell of a whack on the head.

We did the usual acreage things: got some sheep, chickens and a cow. Daisy the cow was a dud as she would not get pregnant even after a couple of inseminations by the vet. She was a skittish and playful cow and this frightened the kids as she got bigger. I finally gave her to a friend's neighbour who wanted a grass muncher. In winter we usually got a piglet and raised it till late November and then took it to a butcher where it was chopped, smoked and bagged. Great for Xmas feasts. In the early years we had met one of the older residents of the Village. Occasionally he would arrange a party for the locals. Upon arrival, the kids would be loaded onto a large horse-drawn wagon and go for a ride through the nearby pine forest. When the kids returned he would dig up the Hungi and we would feast on traditionally cooked pork and vegetables. After the meal the kids were put to bed in the cars and the adults would party on. This tradition was lost after the old fella fell off his horse and had to go into care.

We made a few good friends and one day one asked did I want a foal from his mare that was almost in season - silly question, he knew quite well I did. She was a part Arab and he had a quarter horse stallion. That weekend we helped get the servicing under way. I held the mare in a holding yard while Herb held the stallion in the run-up chute. Jena held the teaser mare (fully in season) next to the chute. She was to back her up to the fence, let the stallion have a quick sniff and then run the mare past the holding yard. She was not quick enough, the in season mare backed up hard against the fence. The stallion was now fully aroused and reared up spraying all over Jena - wrong mare. The next weekend we didn't need the teaser and the mare was serviced.

We got the foal who was a female, we called her Candice. She was a lively horse and loved to gallop towards anyone entering her paddock. She would come to a sliding halt just in front of you - alarmed Jena no end. She was a handful and only I could handle her. When she was old enough we put her in a paddock with a working Palomino - a massive beast who was used out west as a stock horse. She had a male foal called Blaze who was a sandy colour with a white mane and his father's build. He was like his mother, playful. After a few years I swapped him with a farmer for a little grey pony for Sam. Sam tried to get into ponies, but it was not her scene, so we sold it and got no more horses. Ben enjoyed the farm animals but as he grew into his teen years he got a motor bike and enjoyed racing through the bush near home.

Got the place pretty much the way we wanted and settled into enjoying ourselves. I wanted to get the kids into a private school, but they threatened to revolt unless they could go to the High school with their friends. So the kids caught a bus to a nearby High School. They both did well at school. Ben was like me, he spent a lot of time exploring along the Logan River,

while Sam did her girlie things, whatever they are. When Ben was fourteen he got a baby carpet snake. He would breed mice and rats and let her hunt them. He kept her until he was about twenty-eight. She was getting old and not eating well so he let her go in a reserve near the river.

At the end of high school Ben got a Mechanics apprenticeship and moved out into the suburbs with a few mates. After a year or so he was tired of living in the real world on a pittance, so he moved back home into the granny flat. What a life, freedom, a small amount of board and Mum supplemented his meals. We started a ritual of Friday night's drinkies at Ben's. Great times, but quite a few Saturday hangovers. He stayed with us until he finished his apprenticeship. He then moved into a house with his high school mates. In 2007 Ben opened his own mechanical workshop which he still runs to this day. He got married to Bronwyn Giles and they have two daughters, Chelsea and Lacey.

Sam got a job in the nightclub scene and worked behind the bar, but this was only a means of obtaining money while she worked out what career she wanted. She started flatting in inner Brisbane suburbs because the late night drives home were dangerous. She ended up as Bar Manager at the Gig Nightclub. She decided to get into advertising and did a Diploma course at a Brisbane Training Centre. Got a job in a boutique advertising company and worked her way up to management level where she managed the Commercial Property Sales Department. Sam married Jeff Gibson in 2006 and is now a stay-at-home mum for her two daughters, Holly and Madelyn. Jeff is an IT Consultant working in the retail sector.

Sea Change

In late 2001 Jena was tired of the rural life and wanted a change. Earlier that year we happened to get diverted through the Redcliffe Peninsula on our way to see Jena's sister in Noosa. We loved the place, real beaches. We sold up and rented a house on the Peninsula. We looked for a home and finally found one in Margate. It faced south and was just 300 metres from a sandy beach. From 5 acres to 405 sqm, from two weekends of mowing to 20 minutes, now that's downsizing. We still had three months to the end of our rent, so we just planned the renovations we wanted.

At 4 a.m. one morning in January 2002 I found Jena passed out on the bathroom floor. She had suffered a massive brain aneurism. A week in intensive care, then a month or so in a special care ward learning to walk and talk again. After this it was a few months in rehab. She returned home but things would never be the same. Due to the brain injury, her personality had changed and she lived around her routines. I was working and therefore was not a part of her routine. She did not want to go out much, but when we did she would want to go home fairly soon. For the last few years together we only lived in the same home.

In October 2006 things had reached a point where I thought it best to separate, so I moved out and got a flat closer to work. Jena and I agreed that she would stay in the house until such time as I retired. The idea was to let the property value increase until then, thereby maximising our shares.

The Years of Living Dangerously

I settled into the flat and concentrated on work. I had to get used to being a bachelor after so many years of marriage. About a year later when I had saved enough, I got rid of the family car I was still driving and bought the car I always wanted, a silver MX5. Life just rolled along for a few years, amazing looking back, did I really fritter away a few years?

In 2008 I started going to a Singles Group in a bayside suburb. It had been a suggestion from a workmate. Had a few dates, if you thought teenage girls were hard to understand, believe me it is worse when they are in their fifties. But some you can read like a book. I also started with the online Dating sites. No blind dates anymore, or so I thought. To my dismay there were a lot of ladies that put up old photos, some were unrecognisable when I met them. You fairly quickly learn if a lady is a potential "keeper" or just a one night stand. Met a few potentials, but they all were incompatible in some major way, either stubbornness or mental stability. In mentioning that, there were a lot of ladies that must have had a bad breakup because they were very cold and suspicious, not helpful to a lecherous old man.

In March 2010 I was about to leave a nearby shopping centre when I passed the RACQ shop. Something made me go in and ask about the house insurance. I had had a lot of problems, Jena was supposed to pay the insurance, but at least every other month there were problems. I had told RACQ to contact me regarding any problems. They informed me that the insurance had been cancelled in January; they also had no record of my contact details. After some ranting from me I left and went to my Credit Union and arranged insurance through them.



Three months later, in June 2010 around 5 p.m. I got a call from Ben. He had been watching the news. The news helicopter had hovered over a house on fire. Thought it looked like ours, so he enquired with the police, it was. I raced over to Margate and spoke to the police. A friend had been returning from work and saw smoke at the rear of our house. She told her husband who ran over to see the rear of the house on fire. He managed to drag Jena and her friend out of the house, and then tried to put the fire out, but it had to good a foothold. The house always had good cooling breezes blow through in from the back and out of the front. This carried the flames through the

house. The house was gutted. The police forensic investigators decided the fire had been started by a cigarette left burning in an overflowing ashtray on the rear deck. The insurance company hired a special investigator who took three months, but finally decided it was an accidental fire and I was not involved. They decided to rebuild the house.



I spent the next twelve months driving between Annerley and Margate for meetings with the builders. The insurance post fire report had not been very thorough and I had many arguments until I found photos proving pre-fire conditions. The house was stripped down with only the floor, and original cottage VJ board walls remaining. It was totally rebuilt and lined with plaster because the old boards had traces of lead paint. Near the end of construction I was about to start discussions with agents about selling when Sam suggested I buy Jena's half. I decided I would try, beachside life is enjoyable. I applied, and to my amazement they gave a man in his sixties a mortgage. In July 2011 I moved in with the scant furnishings

from my one bed roomer. The kids bought Jena a unit in Redcliffe with the proceeds of the settlement.

The next two years were spent trying to set up the house for retirement while paying a mortgage. Utility reduction was a goal, so I got solar hot water and solar power connected and am still to get water tanks. House furnishings were also required. Weekends involved cleaning up and repairing the yard. The yard was a nightmare after a year of neglect during reconstruction. The house is still only scantily furnished, but it's neat and easy to keep tidy and clean. I have what I need and two spare rooms set up for visitors. Sam and the girls have come to stay for weekends so the girls can spend some time with Pappa at the beach. I now look for shells with granddaughters, as I did with their mom.

The last few years I have been trying to get stuff together for use in retirement. Got two kayaks all kitted out for fishing. I modified a boat trailer to carry the kayaks and gear. After a lot of searching I got a towbar for the MX5. I can now go camping and fishing wherever I want or simply roll a kayak to the end of the street.

Update

In June 2014 I retired. I paid off the mortgage and invested the small sum remaining. It felt great for the first month, enjoyed the absence of morning alarms and ability to do things when I wanted to. After a few months I was getting irritated. I couldn't see why, and then I finally figured it out. After 30 or more years of having a purpose, things that needed to be done, activities needing doing with or for others, I now had no purpose other than my own enjoyment. This was totally alien to me, it seemed selfish. After some reflection I realised that is the way it is now. If I wanted something different, then I would have to change it. I spent a bit of time rewiring my thoughts and have now come to terms with retirement and my situation. I will now find some organisation where I can eventually do some volunteer work, look into some local social groups (Sam's suggestion), and once more get seriously into dating. I will also try Sam's other suggestion and travel some more, but solitary travel may not be as enjoyable.



In 2014 the kids were having some problems with Jena, her health was deteriorating and she was not looking after herself, she was in need of more care. She was getting disoriented at times and occasionally found by neighbours near to home but not sure where she was. The kids had her medically assessed and she was found to be in need of close supervision. On doctor's advice she was admitted to a care facility in Beenleigh. She is visited by the kids weekly and is frequently taken out on picnics and lunches. Her health has improved.

Closing

I hope you enjoyed my life story, because I enjoyed living it. There were some bad times, but oh so many good times.

Cheers, Frans