

CHAPTER 9

Inspirations

The thrill of an achievement never satisfied my appetite for long. There was a sense of a letdown within a short space of time. I always believed that if I could achieve my goal, it mustn't have been too difficult and that I hadn't set the bar high enough. Of course this was not how I saw it when I started out. But at the end, the achievement never seemed like a big deal.

I constantly looked for new interests to stimulate my desire to set higher goals and build on a new dream. I came to realise that dreams were a real part of me and were attainable if I wanted them enough, they weren't just the daydreams referred to in throwaway comments by my school teachers. Real dreams were what I had built my life on. I easily become bored and need to be stimulated by a challenge that holds me on a high. I had a need to plot and

plan something that would have a positive effect on my life as well as those around me. Challenges to me are like betting stakes to a gambler, they have to be higher each time to provide the same adrenaline rush.

Every project is a stepping stone in my life's journey. I simply can't help myself; I need to have something to reach for. At the same time it is important for me to be considered a normal person. I didn't want people to view me as a disabled person and treat me differently. I always tried to be a part of, well anything, as long as I was involved. That was the important part to me. I often wonder how different my life might have been had I not married Lise. I certainly couldn't have been as sociable and outgoing as I am. Lise is the wind beneath my wings.

Because of Lise, there are very few restrictions on what I can undertake. Each time I find a new project, I know she will be there to back me up and assist me. Problems with reading, spelling and anything that requires the use of my eyes could restrict me from progressing in life if her support was not available. We often have fun when I introduce her as my 'roady' on the occasions when I deliver my lectures. She sets up the room and the displays, and then packs everything away later. Lise is also my chauffeur, driving me from meeting to meeting. Many long hours have passed on the open highways. Most of all, I am proud to introduce her as my wife.

I found that by making the best of a situation, even on those occasions when I didn't feel like being involved, I was often led to something better. This was the case with my desire to become involved in sport as a participant. I was aware of sports for the blind: cricket, golf, marathon running, tennis, horse riding and tandem cycling - there were plenty for me to consider. However, being categorised didn't sit well with

me. Over the years I had conditioned myself to blend in with the crowd. Lise explained it nicely, pointing out that others could clearly see an object that was under discussion, and that it was only me who was having difficulty. I was starting to realise that when others looked at me, they saw a vision-impaired man. When I looked in the mirror, I saw only a person. Being involved in a sport where everyone has a similar disability, was for me like being viewed as a special case.

In July 2004, we moved our office to Oxley, an outer southwestern suburb of Brisbane. Wanting to become involved in the community, we joined the Oxley Progress Association. One of its functions was to provide assistance to other organisations for special events, and in November that year, the Oxley Bowls Club was such a recipient. The club was having an open day to attract new playing members. The club was only a short walk from our office. Lise thought it would be a good idea for us to attend and learn about the little white ball they called 'Jack', and the big black bowls that tried to hit 'Jack'. It did appeal to me.

The rain poured down on the day and it was a total washout. While I never rolled a bowl, I learnt enough to know it was worth a try and might even become my new-found sport. I played my first game on Australia Day, 2005, and I became hooked. Lawn bowls suits the level of sight I still enjoy. The bowls are large enough for me to see and the white jack mostly shines in the sunlight. Of course the game is not without its difficulties. My position on a team is 'lead', which means I go first, and one of my duties is to place the mat in the correct position for each player to deliver their bowls from. My eyes can't detect the markings, but the problem is easily overcome by my second, or the opposition lead, straightening the mat for me. It does become interesting, when I am required to measure.

Successful people often develop big heads and can be a pain in the arse. I'd like to think I have kept my feet on the ground and don't fit that image, although I am sure there are some people who think that I am full of myself. This is the Australian way of life; chop down anyone who dares to be different and tries to succeed. One thing I do know; my Maker continually sends me messages every now and then to remind me to be humble. The lesson that comes to mind occurred in a club championship singles game. I was heavily beaten. I realise being beaten doesn't constitute a lesson in humility. The score was 31-4, which may be interpreted as an old-fashioned thrashing that could happen to anyone. Okay, I agree. But when the thrashing is delivered by a ten year old child, I am convinced there is a message there! I did improve by doubling my score in the next competition; I was only beaten 31-8. In the 2007 'B' Grade Darra Cementco Club championship I improved to only go down 31-25. I was becoming competitive.

Compensating had become a way of life for me. I found ways to overcome most difficulties that I was confronted with in business, pleasure or now, in sport. Most lawn bowls are black, although this is rapidly changing; coloured bowls are becoming very popular. From a group of eighteen black bowls, it was difficult for me to distinguish my own. My skip often complimented me with, "Great shot, Paul," or "Good bowling." The problem was, I never could see which bowls were mine so I could enjoy the outcome. I purchased bright orange stickers which did help. Later, I overcame the problem more satisfactorily by purchasing a set of sky blue bowls, which are trendy and stand out on the green. My team mates no longer have to sort and separate my bowls for me. This is only a small change but it has given me a higher level of confidence and allows me to appreciate the good shots when I play them. The downside is, it also makes my lousy shots stand out.

Lise joined the Oxley Bowls Club at the same time as me, although it was twelve months before she started to play seriously. We attended our first coaching lesson together, and now she beats me all the time. I find that, due to the greens being flat, the only things I have to watch for are the bowls, which are usually in a cluster around the jack. The greens are a consistent colour and the light level is even, which also suits my situation. I wear my special polarized sunglasses that eliminate glare, although during summer, I have difficulty with uneven shade from surrounding trees. I am pleased that there are only a few adjustments I need to make to enjoy the game. It was interesting that after our first coaching lesson we were asked to complete a form for the club records. One question was, 'Do you have any disabilities that we should be aware of?' I answered it appropriately with 'legally blind'. The next day the coach approached me. He was dumbfounded, and that is exactly how I liked it.

I had managed to overcome minor problems to be treated as a sighted person. I take it as a compliment, when during a game, opposing players and even umpires ask my skip or team mates if it's true that I am vision-impaired. Sooner or later I trip, or roll on a bowl and they realise it is a fact.

Lise maintains that our business improved around the time I took up lawn bowls. She felt my outside interest relaxed me. I do know it was the first time since I owned the powerboat in the eighties that an activity unrelated to work had the ability to get me out of the office. It is a common occurrence to find me on the greens rolling up in the afternoon during the week. There was a time this would never have happened for any reason.

The make-up of my nature motivated me to accept new challenges and I soon became involved in the

administration of lawn bowls. My role as games director led me to recognise an opportunity which I could not let pass. There were major difficulties for a games director which had never been addressed due to complacency within the sport; it was always the next person's responsibility. I considered these problems in the light of my company's ability to design and develop a software program to make the games director's duties more efficient and enjoyable. Games directors generally accept thirty to sixty nominations from players on the day of play, and up to hundreds for a competition. Their job is to place all the players in teams, which could be 'fours', 'triples' or 'pairs'. Sounds easy? Well they also have to be sure that the positions of 'skip', 'second' and 'lead' are filled by the right players. As if this is not enough, they also have to listen to the complaints regarding players who are not happy to play with certain other players, drawing the same players in teams each week, players being drawn for the wrong position, and it goes on and on. The entire process can take up to one and a half hours.

I figured there had to be a better method. I set about designing 'Sports Director - Lawn Bowls'. My Information Technology manager developed the software. The new product can do everything in less than one minute, as well as keeping the players happy.

My love of the game didn't stop there; it should have but it didn't. I wanted to become more involved in the administration. From where I sat, it left a lot to be desired. Most clubs are run by people with no business experience who would rather be rolling up on the green. I felt I would be good at running a club, with the business experience I had acquired over the years. The president and the secretary of Oxley Bowls Club didn't seem to think so. They told me that I would never have the opportunity to run the

club as president, which surprised me. It was difficult to understand why a club with their level of financial and administrative problems would not want to take advantage of a person with experience.

Only three months after joining the club, the secretary announced that the club was within a few months of closing its doors due to financial difficulties. I carried out an analysis of the club for the members, and provided a business plan, cash flow predictions and a brief marketing strategy. Within eight months the position had improved and the club was trading profitably. Even with my contribution, it was a waste of time, the club was being run by narrow-minded, non-progressive pensioners who were never going to change.

By February, 2006, I had a good understanding of the corporate structure of lawn bowls. Bowls Australia is at the top. The State levels are next in the hierarchy, and in my case, it was Bowls Queensland that I needed to keep my eye on. Each State is then divided into districts. Our district was the Cunningham District Lawn Bowls Association. It was at this level I believed I could make a contribution, with the ultimate challenge to become a Director of Bowls Queensland within five years.

I realised I had move to a more progressive club. That February, I joined Darra Cementco Bowls Club, and by September I was the club's delegate to the Cunningham District Bowls Association. After attending only one council meeting in October, I received a visit from Ron Burke, the men's bowls representative on the Management Committee. He explained the District Secretary had resigned on his doctor's orders.

Ron didn't hide the fact that the Cunningham District

Bowls Association was in a mess and he asked if I was interested in helping to straighten it out and rebuild the district. He admitted that I would be walking into a nightmare. He advised me that some members of the Management Committee had heard of my business skills and that they wanted a strong decision maker. He went on to explain the association was in the final stages of a lawsuit for defamation, which it was likely to lose, and they wanted it finalised so the members could move on. Less than a month later the case was lost and it cost the association tens of thousands of dollars; which presented a problem, because it had less than four thousand dollars in the bank account. Fortunately the member's capitation fees were due and the debt was able to be paid.

Hell, it was exactly the type of challenge I craved! Lise and I had our own communication signals and when I called, "What do you think?" She knew I meant, 'I want to take it on.' It was impossible for me to consider such a project without her commitment. Lise agreed. Over the following three months we focused on the District Secretary's job, even at the expense of our own business. Dramatic changes were needed and we tried to implement them with haste. Improved communication between management and the clubs was a priority and we formulated standard methods and procedures for every aspect of the association's activities. The biggest shock for many of the senior members was the proposed introduction of electronic technology, with emails and the opportunity of downloading standard forms from the association's website.

During this period I learnt something very important about my life that has taken forty years to understand. I was the only person alive who thought my eyes may be a limitation in the business world. I now realised people only saw what I could contribute and appreciated the results of my efforts.

Being the District Secretary was a buzz. Unfortunately, it was a short-lived experience. There was one person who made life so difficult for everyone, that it became obvious that I was not going to be allowed to do the job effectively and I really needed to focus on my own business and leave Bowls Queensland to sort him out.

December, being my planning month, was a little different in 2006. I took the time to stop and smell the roses; it was time to reflect on my life. Only weeks earlier, on November 25, my first employer, Vic Eddison, had passed away aged sixty-nine, exactly forty-two years to the day after our first meeting in my father's lounge room in Camden. He was the first person to have a real influence on me. Victor George Eddison shaped my professional career and inspired me to always keep learning. For Vic, there was only one way to do a job, and that was the right way the first time. Through his generosity in giving time to help others, he inspired me to follow in his footsteps, and made me aware there was always someone in greater need and that I may be able to help them.

There was the time when my own father wasn't prepared to support me in purchasing my first motor car and Vic demonstrated his faith in me by becoming my financial guarantor for the purchase of my beloved Datsun 1600. He also unsuccessfully tried to make my father understand that I had a problem. The only thanks Vic received was to be told not to interfere. But most of all, Vic inspired me to greater heights, to be the best at whatever I undertook. Being his first apprentice is something I will always be proud of.

When I recall my trade college studies, I remember there were some losers in my class. I had tunnel vision, but some of my classmates were short-sighted regarding their vision of the future. There is a saying: 'There are none so blind

as those that cannot see'. My classmates were blind to the relationship between knowledge and wealth. The more knowledge a person has, the better the chance of obtaining higher paid employment.

My energies were always focused on successful people and the characteristics which made them winners. I learnt an important business principle, which I did my best to apply: *'The human mind and a parachute have a lot in common, in that they must both be fully opened to work properly'*. I didn't need good eyes to apply that principle. Every day the newspapers had an unlimited supply of life's positive and negative examples of business people, sporting personalities and politicians. There was always someone I could learn from; yes, even in the case of what not to do.

Mr Kerry Packer, the business tycoon, was in my opinion one of the finest examples of a great businessman. I never met him, although I would like to have. He died in late 2005. Observing Mr Packer's life over many years convinced me that 'money can buy happiness'. I have written and delivered a number of speeches based on this belief. I appreciate when referring to health, all the money in the world will not help a person live longer if there is no cure for an illness. However, I also know my own life was happier when I had food on the table, the car payments could be made and the house payments were up to date. Unfortunately, this was not always the case for me.

Christmas 1996 was such a time. It was Monday morning and the start of our last five days of work before we headed off for our holiday. I sat in my office contemplating the twenty-seven thousand dollars I had to find to pay the staff. Our cash reserves had been depleted by the software business. I had a beautiful office; it has been one luxury I have afforded myself. It was seven metres long and four

metres wide. A large American Oak boardroom table dominated the room. For my own comfort during the long hours I spent in the office, there was a colour television, stereo sound system, a coffee station and bar area, and palm trees to provide a tropical ambience.

Lise entered the office around 9.00am and presented me with a legal document claiming we owed a company seven thousand dollars. I quietly and calmly rose from my executive chair and told Lise, "I'm going home."

"Why?" she asked.

"To shoot myself; it's all too much."

Believe me ... money can buy happiness. If I had had the money that day, I would have been much happier.

We discussed the marketing campaign we had carried out over the previous eight weeks. We questioned its effectiveness and whether it should have been done differently. We were satisfied it was a good campaign and reminded ourselves that there still was five days to go before the special offers finished. Lise asked me to sit quietly for a few moments. I knew she meant it was time to pray. She then left the room and returned thirty minutes later. She provided proof that the seven thousand dollars was not owed to the company claiming it. I contacted the solicitor who served the document on me. I was impressed; it was the first and only time I have had a solicitor apologise.

By 2.00pm that day we had fifteen thousand dollars in our bank account and at the close of business on the Friday we had passed our target and achieved thirty-seven thousand dollars in sales. I was able to pay everyone and we also had a very happy Christmas.

I was also inspired by Mr Packer's generosity to needy

people. Being a billionaire six times over allowed him the opportunity to help people in ways that very few can. His generosity to hospitals and the ambulance service is well documented, but I am sure there is much more we don't know. There were also the stories of him flaunting his wealth and sticking it to those who didn't do the right thing by him. One story I read told how Mr Packer visited a golf club with two of his friends. The golf professional assured him he couldn't play as the club was exclusively for members.

"How much to join, son?" Mr Packer asked.

"Two thousand five hundred dollars per member."

"Mmm ..."

Mr Packer left and returned twenty minutes later with his golf clubs and a cheque for three memberships. An impressive price to pay for one round of golf!

On another occasion I recall, a listener phoned the Alan Jones breakfast radio show in Sydney. The caller's car had been stolen and it was not insured. While the caller spoke, a message came through from Mr Packer, telling him to purchase a new car; the cost was being covered by an anonymous caller. This was a typical act of kindness by Mr Packer.

A leading rugby league commentator told a story of how he had lunch with Mr Packer and during the conversation Mr Packer asked about a particular retired footballer and how he was going. It was explained the footballer had fallen on hard times and was destitute. After lunch they returned to Mr Packer's office, where he took a small box from his safe, passed it to the commentator and asked him to deliver it to the footballer. It was never disclosed, but it is understood there were many thousands of dollars in the box.

Mr Packer was also famous for his visits to the Las Vegas

casinos, where he was well known as a high roller. One newspaper report suggested he lost \$32 million in a gambling session. I am not sure if the public will ever know the real amount. But the story I like most is about an incident concerning Mr Packer and a loudmouth Texan gambler. Mr Packer, having grown sick of the man's arrogance, turned and asked, "How much are you worth?" "\$100 million," the Texan replied.

Without the blink of an eye he rejoined, "I'll toss you for it."

The Texan was speechless. Apparently he left the Casino and Mr Packer was smiling all the way back to Australia.

Alan Bond was another business tycoon I admired in the eighties. I did meet him once during one of his visits to Brisbane. It was at the time the then Premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, was suing him for defamation. I was intrigued at the variety of methods used by business people for transferring money between their companies and politicians. I couldn't help thinking that sometimes such court cases were a cover for commissions paid in return for favours. This crossed my mind when the court case was settled on the steps as they were entering the court.

Alan Bond had an aggressive and fearless business style. I learnt from him that when you have a good idea, the project must be followed through and the investment money should be allowed to take care of itself. It is well known that he became a guest of the state when he did a couple of illegal business deals. The lesson I took from his experience was to never become bigger than the system. We are all answerable to others. The true measure of a person's worth is not about how far they fall, but their ability to bounce back and recover. Alan Bond did this quietly and with dignity. He inspired me over the years to carry on from my many setbacks.

I enjoyed my time out, reflecting on the past. There are always things I would change, but I have no regrets. I tell my friends, “When I die, please don’t feel sorry for me. I have lived the life I was meant to live and achieved more than I thought was possible.” Hopefully, there will be those who will consider they have lost a friend, and it is for them you should be sad. I am sure there will be some that are pleased when I am gone, but that is life!

My reflections developed into a session of self challenges. Just who did have the most influence on my life? The answer was easy: the evangelist, Reverend Billy Graham. I am on record as having stated that in my opinion he was the world’s greatest public speaker and an excellent communicator. He inspired me to learn the art of presenting my case in a persuasive manner. From Reverend William Franklin Graham I learnt that a person need not be afraid of anything, if that person is honest in their approach. I found that the most persuasive argument I could ever present was to ‘tell the truth, and tell it as it was’. He had the ability to take an audience of a few or many thousands, guide them to his way of thinking, and then ask them to make a decision based on the content and delivery of the information he presented. This was power at its best; I have never seen another person with the charisma and ability of the Reverend Billy Graham. He is a role model for millions of people and I am just one of them.

I am pleased to say that over the years, I have used the skills I learnt in public speaking to persuade people to my viewpoint and guide meetings in the direction I wanted them to go. I used the skills to close sales and leave my competitors wondering why they lost the deal. In 1985, during a speech at the First World Plumbing Conference, I made the point that the single thing that plumbing contractors most needed to do to improve their businesses,

was to improve their communication skills. I came to realise it applies to all people.

Most days I couldn't wait to get to work. I was excited at the prospect of the events that would unfold and the opportunity to achieve something new. My life was going forward at a rapid pace! Although, these days I have slowed down considerably, even walking into obstacles and bumping into people occurs less frequently. I have developed methods to make using my computer easier, although it does remain the biggest cause of frustration. Since the late nineties I have become totally reliant on a computer for communication. Writing letters and emails is the way I do business; the telephone has lost its appeal for me. I now engage in an enormous amount of typing, which presents the frustration of me hitting the wrong keys on the keyboard and the necessity of enlarging the font before I can read what is written. Of course, this is now being overcome with new software that is available.

There is also the frustration of losing my place, and often I don't read the entire email and find I answer people based on only half the information, which leads to me receiving abusive replies from the recipients.

My new-found love of creative writing takes six or seven times longer than it does for a fully sighted person. Lise and I carried out simple experiment, we both turned away from the computer and without looking, I moved the cursor to a new location on the screen. She said go, and we looked around, observing the difference in time for us both to locate the cursor. Lise saw it instantly, while I took around twenty seconds. That is what I find so difficult; the time it takes to carry out small tasks. It is sufficient to make me question why I bother. However, allowing such difficulties to rule my life is not going to happen.

There are plenty of people who couldn't even see the computer screen. Having such impaired vision may be hard, but I know that total blindness will be much worse. The bottom line is, I am grateful for what I have, and I am inspired to try and do more while time permits.

Motivational speakers often talk about 'The secrets of life'. What they don't say, is that the so-called secrets will vary depending on the person's desires and dreams. There is an assumption by such speakers that everyone wants to accumulate great wealth, which is not so. One of my closest friends is a multi-millionaire, and if his life is an example of what it means to be rich, I don't want it. In the context of life's so-called 'secrets', I suppose without realising it, I too have my own that work for me.

In my mid teens, I built my life within a framework that suited my circumstances. I wanted to be the architect of my life, and I think I can claim I was. I keep my goals achievable, but to set them slightly out of reach. I did this in the belief that I would excel. It kept my mind focused and away from the limitations that were obvious to others, but not so obvious to me. My dreams centred on achieving things I really wanted in life and I was convinced that they were truly possible. This approach kept me motivated. I never allowed myself to feel restricted. My continual dreaming and setting the bar just a little higher each time inspired me to greater heights than I would have otherwise accomplished.

Life taught me not to compare my own achievements with another's, as people's circumstances are very different. In sports, it is reasonable for such comparisons; the competitors set themselves up as equals and compete to see who is the best. I am acutely aware that it is difficult for people to understand the problems I have. One day I can

see something and the next day I can't. My ability to see fluctuates with the circumstances at the particular time.

The unreliability of my vision continually wears me down. If shade or dim light is present, I have no hope. Bright light and glare reduce what I can see. Walking from the bright sunlight into artificial light, such as the foyer of a building, or from the bowling green into the clubhouse, reduces my vision to the perception of a blank space, as if looking at a large black wall. This perception will remain for up to ten or more minutes before my eyes become accustomed to the change in light to a small degree. The same applies in reverse when I walk into extremely bright glare. I see only a wall of white haze and I am unable to distinguish anything around me. I often think, 'What must the person beside me be thinking?' It must be weird from their perspective.

Then there are the days I get lucky. I have, over time, learned to stack the odds in my favour by using the circumstances to suit my needs. My day usually starts when the sun comes up. This allows me to enjoy the maximum amount of daylight hours possible. Early morning light is clearer and more even and there are fewer people for me to bump into. The buses and trains are not as crowded at 6.00am. To my standards, I do okay, and it is easy to appreciate why some people may think I am faking. I often suggest that if people do think I am fully sighted and that I may be faking, it is a compliment, as this means I have perfected my coping skills.

I guess people don't see the effort it takes for me to appear normal. I am told by some people who visit my office, that they didn't detect that I have a sight problem. This is because the office is set up to suit my needs and the visitor's movements are controlled without them realising. After they walk through the front door, they walk down a long

hallway and into my office where there is only one place for me to look for them. To cater for times when extra people arrive and I may only be expecting one or two, there is a buzzer the guests pass through and I am able to count the number of times it goes off.

My purpose and direction in life was built around daring to dream my dreams. I believed in them and worked hard to make them happen. I never asked for a particular script to be written for my life; it has been a journey that led me down a road, which continues to place me in unexpected and exciting situations. On each occasion I revel in the new challenge. There has always been an adventure waiting, and the next is just around the corner. What I might be doing in the future has never concerned me. I have learnt to go with the flow and accept what is placed before me. I have a deep conviction that it is my destiny.

I admired the achievements of my friend John Stuckey. One afternoon we sat in the Brisbane Sofitel Hotel having a quiet drink and catching up on old times. I expressed my admiration for how well he had done in life. I was impressed that his clients were from the top one hundred companies in Australia and that he had also become an important advisor to large Asian companies. I reminded him of the 2000 survey conducted by Business Review Weekly, where he was named in the top fifty most powerful people in Australia, along with the Prime Minister and other very important people. I was proud of my friend.

John has a way of playing down his own importance and making others feel good. He gave me his view of my life. He suggested he had done okay in life; his was a journey of stepping up the ladder, doing well at the new level then moving up another rung. John was one of the few who had taken the time to observe my life and reflect on why

each change in direction was necessary. That afternoon he revealed that he also admired what I had done and why he was so proud to have launched my book, 'Pipe Sizing for Building Services'. He claimed the difference in our lives was due to my eyes; the way he put it, I had to reinvent myself, which in his opinion only a limited number of people had done successfully. It is interesting that the very thing some people had criticised me for, John saw as a valuable asset.

I viewed everything that happened to me as part of my life that was meant to be and had a purpose. The hardest thing in the world has been to accept what I am. Even today I am not sure that I have in fact accepted that I am considered a blind person. I have worked with what I have been given and there was never a time that I dared to ask, "Why me?" I never granted myself that right. I have had to humble myself and learn to ask for help, which is so difficult when I want my image to be that of a businessman. I recall the morning of Lise's fifty-second birthday. My intention was to make it a special day that she would remember and find out just how important she is to me. This was my opportunity to give her a day off, without the need for watching out for me.

I woke to the darkness of the morning and felt my way to the bathroom, which is an everyday occurrence. Fumbling for the light, I always managed to get there; but this particular morning I must have woken Lise, who appeared in the lounge room just as I was walking out the door. Everything seemed to go wrong in the following few minutes. I reached the road at the end of our driveway, turned as I thought I usually did and walked my first thirty paces. However, where the streetlight should have been on my left, it was on my right. I was totally disoriented. I knew where the light should be, but as much as I turned around

and around again, I couldn't get the light on my left and feel like I was able to go to my next landmark.

I tapped my white cane on the road, then the grassed area, but try as I might I couldn't work out where I was and what had gone wrong. Time was ticking away. I had to catch the bus and I needed to adopt desperate measures. I phoned Lise on my mobile and asked her to rescue me. A few minutes passed before she discovered I had walked the wrong way in the dark. She led me to the path that wound through the heavily wooded area and there was still a small bridge crossing the creek that I had to negotiate. Lise left me and headed back to the house to enjoy her coffee. Later in the day, she told me she thought I may have ended up in the creek when she couldn't hear my cane tapping.

In the distance there was a blinking yellow light, which I guessed was the bus. I crossed the four lane road as fast as I could - which would be considered slow by most people - hoping not to be ploughed under by a speeding car. I made it to the back door of the bus and reached out to knock on it to let the driver know I was coming. The problem was, my arm never reached the door and the bus drove off without me. I had to see the funny side of my experience.

Compared to a lot of people, I do consider myself lucky. Only a few weeks earlier a friend relayed a tragic story to me. A totally blind lady was waiting on the train station in the same spot she stood every day for a number of years. The train pulled up, and with her cane outstretched, she swished it from side to side to make sure that the door was open before taking a step to board the train. Within seconds the following sequence of events occurred and changed her life forever. She quickly realised the gap was not the open door but the space between the two carriages, and she fell onto the tracks below. Simultaneously, the train driver

realised he had overshot the mark and put the train in reverse, amputating one of her legs. This incident is typical of the danger that faces blind people every day.

Taking my future into consideration was part of the 2006 review and I wondered where it might lead me. I had to accept that at best, my eyes would continue to deteriorate, but I may be lucky and enjoy some minute level of sight until the end. It is obvious my eyes are gradually fading and the analytical part of me wants to plot a graph to determine the possibilities of how much time is left to achieve my new dreams that are emerging. At worst, I may be scheduled to leave this life and move to the afterlife sooner than I anticipate. As this is always a possibility, I may be running out of time. I do feel a need to make every day count and ensure my remaining dreams are given a chance to materialise.

In September, 2004, my cousin Denzil died, aged sixty-one. We were very close for the last ten years of his life, which was contrary to our younger days. Denzil had developed hemochromatosis; the iron levels in his blood were many thousands of times higher than acceptable levels. Being a relative, I decided to have a series of blood tests to check my own iron levels. The tests revealed I had made a wise decision. I spent the next eighteen months having 400ml of blood removed from my body on a weekly basis.

My youngest brother, Mark, died of cancer in 2005 aged fifty-one. For reasons I can't explain, and don't seem to find important, Mark and I were never close. After his funeral service I was asked, "Did he have a family?" It was the first funeral I had attended without a single reference to the deceased's father, mother, brothers or sisters.

Along my journey, I discovered that the person who I

thought I was, is not necessarily who I am. At school I was considered a failure, a bully and I imagine, the person most unlikely to succeed. I know my school teachers and parents missed a great opportunity to mould my life: I believe they failed miserably. The person I am now has evolved through experiences that can only come with time and through facing difficulties head-on. As I matured, much to my surprise I discovered I enjoyed creative writing and in 2005, I took a step in the direction of my new dream. A dream that, as ridiculous as it may sound to some, is extremely important to me.

Amongst many lessons I have learnt, the most important of them all, is that ***‘Dreams do come true’***.

In the near future, I expect to become an author of children’s books; or possibly a best selling novel. Lise’s grandchildren Ainsleigh and Maddison, who are keen readers, tell me that it is difficult to find good books with interesting storylines. Maybe this is my calling! As I near retirement and desire new challenges, I know my eyes won’t stop my mind from continuing to be creative. I will call on the intellect I have been blessed with and developed over time, and the imagination I took so long to realise I had, as well as the the fantasy world that hides deep within me. I will attempt to harness this creativity into producing books which give pleasure to others. When my dream eventuates, you will know who I really am, a man who once couldn’t write two pages to please his teacher, a man who finds reading his own work extremely difficult and in some cases impossible.

Hopefully you may say, ‘Damn it, if he can do it, so can I’. For I am no one special, I am just an ordinary bloke, who keeps his eyes on the horizon; for to look down is to look back.



*The big guy playing bowls,
Darra Cementco Bowls Club*



Paul, relaxing on the Gold Coast, Christmas 2005

