



Dan Mannix

Born in Melbourne in 1937, Dan studied architecture at Melbourne Tech for two years after leaving school. Finding that not to his liking, his next major job, after a stint in the Fleet Air Arm, was as a Patrol Officer in New Guinea, where he was posted to various places, working mainly with the co-operative movement there. After ten years in New Guinea he returned to Brisbane, where he began studying architecture again, but for various reasons again decided against it after a couple of years. From Brisbane he went to Sydney, where he worked for the last twenty years of his working life as a mail sorter at Australia Post. There he worked the night shift, out of preference, because it left him with his days free to pursue his interest in painting. Throughout his working life Dan continued to develop his artistic talents, and has had several successful exhibitions, including one at the Northern Territory Art Gallery and Museum and others in Queensland and NSW.. Now retired, he continues to paint, and lives at Lewisham.

I was born in Melbourne in 1937. While I was in high school I worked during the vacation a couple of times at a department store as a Christmas casual, and once I had a job briefly as a cleaner, but they were my only working experience as a kid.

The high school was sound, but not posh. There was one master there, K.P. Kent, he was the art master, and I rather regret not having taken more advantage of the input that he gave, but he was just about the only *simpatico* soul that I can remember from school days. I was playing up doing something one day and he gave me six of the best with those thick leather straps they used to use. At the end of that class he asked me to stay behind, and thought "Oh shit, not more!" He was at his desk with his head down, and he apologised to me for losing his

temper! - which in my experience was a most unusual thing for a teacher. He was a very competent technician, a very sound watercolourist himself, and he taught very basic things like what a graded wash was, and what colour was all about... line, and how to apply it... a respect for materials. All this was done in a rather old-fashioned sense, but, you know, there was a lot of information to be got from it. He was thoroughly honest and straightforward, and almost incapable of deception. So much so, that when he told us about an uncanny experience he had where his palette lifted bodily into the air and went crashing to the floor without any human agency, I believed him. I'm not into matters supernatural generally, but it made me perhaps a little bit less sceptical about reports of such matters. (Now I'm only 99.97% sceptical!)

After I left school I started to do architecture at Melbourne Tech. I did that full time for a couple of years, and then I got a job with Bates, Smart and McCutcheon as a draftsman. They were one of the biggest firms in Melbourne. I was there about a year and then I decided that, bugger it, I wasn't going to do architecture. I'm not sure now, looking back, what it was about architecture that I didn't like. I didn't mind the work as a draftsman - I did some interesting things there. (I'm probably one of the few people left alive who've done detailing for a Gothic cathedral - Sacred Heart at Bendigo. I was doing stonemason's detailing - you know, various fluted columns, and the rose window and that sort of thing. It was good fun.) And there were some very interesting people working in the office. There was one man there who did all the presentation drawings - a bloke called Alex Smith - who was a very keen watercolourist - his work was in the galleries up and down Collins Street. I wouldn't have wanted to paint the way he did, but I appreciated the craftsmanship of it. He had a deft touch and a bloody good feel for colour - like the green-black pines on the Mornington Peninsula - that sort of stuff. There was another guy there who was a character out of Dickens - rather straightlaced and with a great sense of what was proper and correct. He encouraged me in my little sprees of drawing and painting that I used to do. At one stage he said it would be interesting to see what I would do if he took me up to play around, without any musical education, on the organ at the independent church in Collins Street. I never took him up on the offer, and looking back I wish I had.

I was always interested in making marks on paper or some sort of surface. One of the things I used to delight in when I was a youngster was what every kid did - drawing pictures in the wet sand with a sharp stick, and watching the tide wash over them.

When I left the drafting job, I think it was probably tied up with the need to get out of the family house and set up a place of my own - to have my own place to live. I did a stint in an insurance office - that was dreadful. It was a clerical job and it was terrible. I only lasted six months or so.

Then I thought I'd do something adventurous, so I joined the Fleet Air Arm at Flinders Naval Base. For the first three months or so I found it a trifle monastic and regimented, but you learn to live with things like that. I was the fittest then that I've ever been - getting out of bed and running for a few miles before breakfast. I can remember being in a class room there one time and the teacher - well he was a lieutenant-commander but he was in fact the teacher - was enormously impressed by seeing a copy of Ogden Nash that I had. I suppose RAN types were not expected to be literate. In one class he rolled down the wall a drawing of a cross-section of a Fairy Gannet engine. The sheet was about six feet by four, and full of parts, some of them as small as a flea, and I thought, "That's it!" It brought home to me the fact that Mannix and mechanics were two

things that didn't go together, and I thought I should give up my flying aspirations. Had they been nasty, they could have insisted that I stay till the end of the period I signed on for, and they offered me alternative employment in the Navy because they seemed to think I was a good chap. But I realised that machinery didn't interest me in the slightest. (Mark you, that was probably mainly because I knew nothing about it.) Anyway they let me go.

After that I saw an advertisement in a newspaper for Patrol Officers in New Guinea. I applied, and had to go and have an interview with a bloke called Max Orken. We talked about all sorts of things. I can remember him making a distinction between Protestant Jesuits and Jesuitical Methodists. We discussed music, and just about anything other than what might have had a practical application in New Guinea. I had a fine time at the interview. We hardly touched on any of the subjects that you might expect him to want to talk about like whether I'd been a boy scout and could rub a couple of sticks together to make fire, or whether I'd done any bushwalking - none of that bullshit, so I was rather surprised to get selected.

The initial training was a short course at The Australian School of Pacific Affairs (ASOPA) at Middle Head. One of the teachers there complimented me on my pidgin accent and said that I wouldn't have any trouble learning pidgin, and as it turned out I didn't. He was James Maccauley, the poet. I had a bit to do with him, but in retrospect not nearly as much as I would like to have had. (Also, in retrospect, he might have tried to persuade me back into the arms of Mother fucking Church! - because he was a convert himself.) The Principal of ASOPA at that time was Charles Rowley, the historian.

You ask if I was interested in things as broadly then as I am now. Well, I was always interested in words, but never seriously so - not enough to put them on paper, anyway. I can remember while I was at Melbourne Tech, the Tech was right opposite the Melbourne Library and I used to browse the shelves and I'd come up with books simply because they looked interesting and which later turned out to be slightly prophetic - the early translations of Pasternak's poetry, for instance - long before Omar Sharif! Did that make me different to my peers? Well, I suppose I read more than most, but not nearly as much as some, of course.

I don't think I had any clear idea about a career, or what I might do with my life. You described me once as a perpetual existentialist, and I think that probably applied even back then. I can remember at the time being very perplexed by the problem of what I was going to do in the long term - what shape was my life going to take. I was thinking in terms of a career path, and thought that unless I pulled my finger out and got into a channel of some kind, then progress in a career wasn't going to occur. And that's precisely what happened - progress didn't occur. Well not down a long-term career path, anyway. Did this worry my parents? I don't think they worried about it too much. If they worried about it at all I suspect it was in terms of what people might think, as opposed to what might have been good for their little boy. So while I was in New Guinea I seemed to develop what you might call something of a careless attitude - a sort of "wait and see what happens" approach to life. In other words, I was totally devoid of capital A Ambition. Mind you, ego always intrudes, because somehow or other I was quite certain of the fact that I would develop into a "serious" person somewhere along the line.

After the introductory training at ASOPA they shipped us up to New Guinea and

that was, predictably, quite a culture shock. The bus trip from the airport - I think there were about 30 of us in the bus - and we all had our eyes glued to the bloody bus window because for most of us outside were the first bloody adult nipples we'd ever seen! Then we went to another short course in Port Moresby, but I've forgotten the details of that. I think they called it an orientation course. They were very sensible about the grounding that they gave us before we were chucked in at the deep end, because at the end of a term or two you were sent back to Australia to do another course at ASOPA that lasted a year. In that course you looked at public administration, the ABCs of economics, the sub-ABC of anthropology and so on, but I never got to that stage because after one year as a Cadet Patrol Officer I thought fuck this! these other people are having a lot more fun, and I got involved in the Co-Operative movement.

There was a government department in New Guinea that established, administered and trained people in running a series of co-operative societies. The co-operative movement was in New Guinea all the time I was there, but I think it's faded since. It was an idea before its time that not only came rather quickly but went rather quickly too. Which is unfortunate because basically it was fairly sound, but it does require a level of commitment and a fairly basic sophistication about how to organise business, as well as an integrity that wasn't always there. But that was understandable, because with small-scale stuff you'd get a store owner who'd feel it was perfectly legitimate for him to feed his family from cans of food off the shelves - (just the way many Australian store owners still do), so as a result their balance sheets went up and down like a yo-yo. Similarly, if someone was the captain of a small ship that traded, say between Kukipi and Port Moresby and which carried quite a few passengers and generated a fair bit of income, well, for christ's sake, if Aunt Susie was going to Port Moresby for the week there's no way he was going to ask her for her fare, was there? In many ways it's quite a reasonable outlook, but the administration were bloody bureaucratic puritans in those days, and we were all expected to be the same. All that sort of laxity had to be controlled - all that sort of shit.

So, after doing the initial course at Port Moresby I went up to Manus for two years. After Manus I took a three months break and spent it in England, and it was then I came back and swapped jobs into the co-operative movement.

When I was in Manus, initially I lived in the district capital, Lorengau, which was a tavern, a general store and a wharf. I was sharing a *donga*, which is an old converted Quonset hut, with a guy called Athol Graham and another cadet patrol officer. Athol used to show us the ropes. We spent a few weeks there learning to call the District Commissioner "Sir". (The District Commissioner, incidentally, was Jim O'Malley of the O'Malley/Hyde expedition which went from north to south over the mountains.)

The first thing we had to do was to learn pidgin, and the best way to do that was to be the boss of the labour line. This has overtones of the American deep south because I think in those days the labour line were prisoners, though I can't really remember. Anyway, they already had a guy from the Solomon Islands in charge, and I was supposed to go around and tell them what to do for the day and keep a general eye out to see that it was done. But the whole point of the exercise was not to tell them what to do, because they already had this Bougainvillean guy who was running things as smoothly as they could possibly be run - the main point of the exercise was to learn pidgin. The Bougainvillean was an old guy who'd been around for a long time, and when he saw me coming he sort of shrugged his shoulders as much as to say, "Oh shit. Here comes another one." But by god it

was the way to learn pidgin! Not that pidgin is a difficult language, but inside a couple of months I was moderately fluent, and inside six months to a year I was very fluent. After a month or so there I went down to Baluan Island as lord and master - "Officer in Charge - Baluan". I was 22.

Baluan is a beautiful cone-shaped volcano. I was sitting on the verandah there one night and I'd just had the *Archiv* series of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* sent to me in the mail, and I was looking forward to hearing it. I came home from the office, had a shower and changed and had some nosh. I was rubbing my hands together as I got myself set up with a bottle of scotch and some ice and the record player. By this time the sun was just about setting. There are three or maybe four disks in the *Archiv* series, I just can't remember (you know, in the linen bound boxes) and I had an old portable record player whose sound qualities perhaps left something to be desired. And so, there I was, sucking scotch, with my feet up on the verandah rail, looking at the sunset and listening to Bach. Just after the sun set there was an electrical storm, and there was thunder and lightning. I just turned the volume up, and I had thunder, lightning, Bach and scotch! Wow! About three quarters of the way through I looked over to the horizon and there's Tulin, which is an island which in 1952 wasn't even in the sea. In 1952 it just erupted out of the sea. It must have been a sight.

Baluan was a blissfully picturesque island, and the people were just great. If I were ever to go back, though, it would only be if I could do so in 'lordly choice' fashion where I could go wherever I wanted to. But as an ordinary tourist, no.

There was one schoolteacher there - a devout Catholic, Polish chappie that I couldn't get along with. We were thrown together quite a lot, and I was a selfish shit so a lot of the friction was probably as much my fault as his.

When I was posted to Baluan, the President of the Local Government Council was Paliau Maluat - the leader of the Paliau cult. I had a Patrol box full of his papers at one stage of the game, but I'm fucked if I'd know where they are now - lost in the shuffling, I suppose. I got to know his son John, later in Port Moresby. When I was there, everyone was sitting on their hands waiting for a resurgence of the Paleo cult, but Paliau had grown up in the meantime, and he saw that the road to ascendancy for himself and his people lay somewhere following the rule of law, and that's the path that he chose. He was pretty good for his folk.

In those days, of course, it was very much the "white man's burden" sort of approach to things. There was really quite a commitment to doing a decent job, though. We all thought that what we were doing was worthwhile, and that we were helping people. In retrospect of course, that was monumentally presumptuous. When I was there I never did anything that any reasonably intelligent person from Manus couldn't have done.

My first two years in New Guinea as a Cadet Patrol Officer was pure government administration. This involved tax collection, census taking, entertaining bloody naval captains when they came down on their nice shiny boats, organising boats to and from the mainland - the mainland of Manus, that is. There were a lot of people there who'd read Somerset Maugham and lot of them attempted to conduct their lives a little bit like that. They were plantation owners, and they were the aristocracy of the area. But lots of them were very interesting characters. At one stage I was sent to investigate a murder, and the local plantation owner was happy to sit back and let me try to find out what had happened, even though he knew all about it all along. He delighted in the fact that I screwed it up. It was

part of the plantation owners' game to heap shit and derision on public servants and they made great capital out of it.

There was a club with a white sort of social set, but they didn't drink gin as in other colonial settings - most people drank beer at the club. The Manus Club was a converted Quonset hut. Most of Lorengau was. The setting was fairly pleasant but the place was built over a gully. During the time that I was there they had enormous storms and the heaviest rain they'd had for ages - which is saying something because Manus has got one of the highest annual rainfalls on the planet. The gully under the club became a stream. I didn't actually see it, but I heard about it. The gully was where all the empties were put, and this enormous raft of empty bottles was washed out to sea!

Booze was part of the way of life, but there wasn't a lot of alcoholism. They were heavy drinkers though.

After Baluan I came back down to Melbourne and said hello to the family and caught the old *Strathmore* to England. I was about a month getting there, and had about a month in England.

While I was in London I was with an anthropologist friend of mine and my mate Gavin McCormack. We went to a pub there somewhere near Russell Square. I remember that because McCormack was with the School of Oriental and African Studies, which was just across the road. We went in, and there was Margaret Mead, I thought somewhat pretentiously, in the middle of London with her six foot high wooden staff. I was introduced to her: "Dr Mead, this is Dan Mannix, he's been working in Manus for the last two years." (Manus, of course, being the site of some of her most famous fieldwork.) "Oh, really? How do you do?" she said, and turned away to start another conversation. In conversation later with noted anthropologist Dawn Ryan, she thought this was most strange, expecting her to be keenly curious about what had been happening on Manus. But not a thing. About this time Margaret Mead's early work was being very much questioned, and Dawn and I could only put it down to fears on her part that I might raise the subject.

When I came back to New Guinea from London I was posted to the Sepik district. I was there for two years, and it was really very interesting because I travelled about the place a lot - mostly in small boats and planes, but sometimes on foot. One of the patrols I did there was from Wewak to Angoram. There were a lot of small villages on the way where there were government stores. The District Commissioner had done the trip many years before, and he said all I had to do was go along the coast to the mouth of the river, and then go up for about twelve miles. I got to the river, and I was looking for a path, but he meant what he said: Walk up the river! It wasn't too bad though, because it was a smooth gravel bottom for the most part. At the end of that stretch there was a bit of a waterfall, and you climbed up beside that, and then you were in kunai country. Kunai is long grass as high as this ceiling. I walked through that to a place called Tring, where there was a rest house. Walking through the kunai was just bloody awful. There was a road cum track about ten foot wide, I suppose, and within that canyon through the tall grass there was absolutely no wind, and the bloody sun belting down. I was bugged by the time I got to Tring. Anyway I camped there and went on to Angoram the next day. When I got to Tring I remember looking up and realising that I was still the best part of a day's walk from Angoram, and that a plane would be there in five minutes. Consequently, I did the trip back by plane! Most of the planes there then were Cessnas, and there was one old Norseman. The rich old mission had a Pilatus Porter.

When I finally got to Angoram I went into the pub there and ordered a much-anticipated beer. "A beer it is," said the barman, "and a pink gin for Cedric." I raised my eyebrows at this, since I hadn't intended to buy anyone else a drink at that stage. It turned out that old Cedric was one of the last of the Remittance Men. His remittance would have been several hundred pounds a year in 1945 or 46, or whenever it was he'd been sent out - it could have even been from pre-war, because he was as old as Methuselah - but over the years its value had shrunk till it was barely enough for him to live on. He lived in an old shack down by the river. His clothes were always perfectly clean, but they were never ironed, and because they were washed in the Sepik River they were always a fashionable shade of buff instead of white. He used to occupy a corner in the pub and it had become a tradition that any newcomer to the pub would buy Cedric a pink gin. It was just bitters and gin, with no ice, in the English fashion, and a dreadful bloody thing to drink in Angoram.

How would I describe an average day while I was in New Guinea? Well, that's just about impossible to do because no day was what you'd call average. There were times when I was in the bush on patrol, times when I had a day's office work to do - which would have been the closest to some sort of routine day - but that wouldn't tell you very much because days like that didn't account for very much of my time, and was very much the same as office days anywhere. I'd wake up at sunrise, shower, change and have breakfast, and the office was just two minutes down the track (there were no roads on the bloody place). At the office I dealt with the correspondence and whatever business was floating around. Telephone calls were interesting because you didn't pick up a handset - you had to go down to the radio. My office was directly above the radio shack, and I'd go down there if I had something to say to the people in Port Moresby, or in other parts of the country - reports, anything they might want to know about business dealings of the co-operative societies in the area, shipping movements, sawmill throughputs, monthly returns, accounting - the usual.

Although it was very Public Service as a job, there was enormous leeway in what you did, and when. But it was very strange and old-fashioned in many ways, in that everybody who was involved in government work on the outstations was very conscientious and committed to the work. A lot of the conversation around the dinner table was about work. There was almost a missionary kind of attitude, you know. We were all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, and doing good things for the country. Mind you, I'm not quite sure how valid that attitude was, but it was certainly perceived that way.

Yes, there was a fair bit of trouble with randy young blokes getting involved with New Guinean women. When I say a fair bit, there wasn't all that much, I suppose, but the instances that did occur very soon became bar gossip. In the early days, such gentlemen were quietly shipped off south, but towards the latter end of my time there, there were some people who didn't choose to be shipped off south and married their local brides and lived happily ever after. Overall, I'd say such matters were handled reasonably sensitively by the authorities.

You ask what I felt about the role played by the missions. Well, I can only talk about the influence of the missions from my own experience. There was a kind of accepted wisdom that the Seventh Day Adventists ran the cleanest posts around the place. I went to a Baptist place in the Highlands once and they were very puritanical. I was glad to be leaving the place so I could have a fag. I was walking out along the road with one of the fellows who was seeing me off and I we'd got a

good half a mile from the house when I took out a fag. He politely asked me to refrain from smoking till I got right off the property! I had a bit to do with a couple of Catholic missions on Manus, and later on in the gulf country. They were far more educated and more broadminded than any of the Protestant missionaries I met, possibly because most of them had had a university education of some kind, whereas most of the Protestants were graduates of places like the Baptist Training College at Homebush. (That's an assumption on my part, but that's how it seemed.) I've heard lots of terrible stories about the missions ripping off New Guinea art and selling it to galleries in New York and Chicago, as a by-product of their evangelistic zeal to remove idols from primitive societies, but what documentation you could find for that I'm buggered if I know. I suspect it did happen, but it could be excused, perhaps, by the ignorance of that period. The latter day johnnies were much more broadminded than that.

Almost all of these people had hospitals or aid posts of some kind, so that their provision of health services was invaluable to the people of New Guinea. Similarly with education, but just the three Rs were taught by almost all the missionaries. Some of the missions, notably the Catholics, and in Papua the Anglicans, had high schools of a pretty reasonable standard, and I think you would find that most of the people who made it to the top in New Guinea had their beginnings in a mission education.

In the Sepik, especially, it was very obvious that our Australian administrative and missionary involvement in the country, however well-meaning, was destroying local culture and customs. I thought then, and I still think that Sepik art was amongst the most powerful and energetic on the face of the bloody globe. They're masters of evocative forms...masters! Their attitude to carving a piece of wood isn't the same as ours. They don't set out to create a work of art, but whatever their motivation, they finish up doing so. I mean, you've only got to look at that Wogeo mask up there to see what I mean. (*Points to a mask on the sideboard, then gets up to bring down some other pieces*). This is a dish from the Madang side of the Sepik River. It's the sort of thing that would have been used on more formal occasions. These, on the other hand, are everyday items - they're used for putting the betel nut in. But just look at them! These were probably all made with steel implements, but before there was steel up there, in Manus for instance, they used obsidian glass.

When my leave fell due while I was on the Sepik I booked a Grand Tour of the Orient. I got as far as Hong Kong and said bugger the rest of it. I converted my aeroplane ticket to a Hong Kong return, extended my leave, rented an apartment and lived there for the best part of five months. It was wonderful. There were quite a few Chinese artists there, like Chung Yee of the Circle Art Group. I lived the life of a rather self-indulgent wide-eyed and wondering ex-pat. I was drawing and painting while I was there. I did all the time I was in New Guinea, too, but I only dabbled. I knew that painting was going to be pretty bloody important to me, even though I was pretty much a part-timer - very much a dabbler, but approaching the stage of regarding myself as an "Artist". I suppose I saw myself as having a broader interest in the artefacts of New Guinea than most public servants did. I was certainly influenced by them - you can see it in lots of my forms, and the heads that I do. It was strange, come to think of it, because at no time did I ever sit down and draw any of the New Guinea pieces. Looking back on it that was a very strange thing to have occurred since I liked them so much.

When I came back from Hong Kong I went to the gulf district at Kukipi, roughly half way between Moresby and the Fly River. I then went to Port Moresby after

Kerema. I was still doing basically the same sort of job with the co-operative movement, though I'd advanced a few rungs up the promotional ladder. When I was at Kukipi the Department Director came down to have a look at the place and we got on well together, and he had a job created for me in Port Moresby as Project Officer with the Department of Trade and Industry. I did that for about two years, I think. But before I started that job, after my time in Kerema I took another leave break and went and lived in Paris for six months.

On one occasion while I was there... we'd established a co-operative sawmill, and one of the tricks of economy is to load ships well. Mannix has got a good sense of space, and I went around and here's all this sawn timber, and I looked at the hold and managed to use the available space very efficiently. When I'd finished the ship was bloody near loaded to the gunwales! When it got into Port Moresby I got a call from the boss, and he said, "I've just seen the ship tie up at the dock. Did you load that?" "Yes" I said, expecting a pat on the back. "Well, if you do that again I'll have your guts for garters!" he said, "With even a mild blow on the way up it would have gone down!"

I was being paid enough to be able to take these overseas trips, but I couldn't live lavishly. In fact, I ran out of money when I was in Paris. I'd neglected to buy a return ticket, and with very little money left I was trying to find the cheapest way to get back. I even considered travelling in the lowest class of the Messageries Maritimes ships travelling to the Pacific, but I couldn't get a ticket. The bloke at the office looked at me in horror when I tried, and said, "No, No. We don't sell those tickets to white men." I had a very old friend, Gavin McCormack, that I'd known since my Melbourne days - the same McCormack who was with me when I met Margaret Mead in London. We'd gone to England together with a group of schoolboys when we were fifteen years old. He was living in Tokyo at the time and I contacted him and told him I was stuck in Paris without my fare home, and could he lend it to me, which he did.

So I came back to the job with the Department of Trade and Industry in Port Moresby, where I stayed for a couple of more years. I met Bob Hawke when he was in Moresby. He was the ACTU pundit at the time. The first time I met him we chatted about all sorts of things - we chatted for several minutes, I suppose. What surprised me was that he was back about six months later and I met him again at a similar sort of gathering. He came up and addressed me by name and remembered what we'd been talking about on the previous occasion. I reckon that this is the mark of a good politician. He was impressive. At that time he was the great white hope - the Rhodes scholar, head of the ACTU, and anyone with half a brain could see that he had a future before him. And in those days he was a man with ideals, which was something that he shared with Whitlam.

All up I was in New Guinea for ten years. For all sorts of reasons that needn't concern us here I decided to get out of New Guinea, and I went down to Brisbane and started architecture again at the university there. I thought, "Oh great. This'll be alright. I'll work my arse off for a year and get a Commonwealth Scholarship." I thought I could just scrape it in. (I was in my early thirties by this.) Unfortunately, I didn't do my homework carefully enough, because although they did give Commonwealth Scholarships to mature age students - I can't remember exactly, but I think it was ten - they all went to people who'd finished second, third and fourth year in their various degrees.

I studied architecture there for another year, but when I didn't get the Scholarship I simply couldn't afford to stay on, so I got a job in a drafting office again, with Elsie Kruberg, a lady who used to do drawings for developers of small blocks of

flats and what-have-you, and went to the Tech at night. But after Queensland Uni that was a very despairing experience, so I didn't see that year out.

There were some very decent and competent people in the architecture department at the university, but the head of the department was a detestable old fart. The only time we ever saw him was in the history lectures. He had a copy of Bannister Fletcher, which was the Bible for architectural history, and a series of cards which he read from. He was reading from these cards, and I had the temerity to interject and make a point. He looked up and said, "Could you wait until I've finished speaking? If you have anything to say, see me after the lecture." I thought, "Oh shit. This sounds good." Then he started to talk about a building in "Bullogna", and I realised that as a historian he was... yerkl!

I can take criticism as well as most people, I would expect, but in a Design class there, the lecturer looked at a submission of mine and really started to belittle it. Things like, "It's a nice presentation, but you've used people we've never bloody well heard of." I'd used people like Brancusi and Noguchi from the field of art - mostly sculptors. And I'd also used quotations from a beaut two-volume collection on alienation, and illustrations from people that he'd never heard of. ("Who the fuck's Giacometti?) and the hair on the back of my neck is going up and down! I even spoke about the Mies Van der Rohe pavilion at the '36 Barcelona to that same guy. It was a small building, very Cherman, but quite lovely. You know what he said? "What's that? A kind of wine?" To find such monumental ignorance in a labourer would be excusable, but to find it in somebody pretending to be a lecturer in a design class is *not* excusable. It was the beginning of the end for me at the Tech.

There was a guy there talking about modular presentation in struct+ural drawings, and I found it enormously difficult. He was talking a great deal of commonsense, and he really knew what he was talking about, but I just couldn't easily get into stride with it. And that more or less finished me with architecture. I threw up my hands in horror - and despair, I think, and came down to Sydney.

But back in Queensland for a moment: While I was working for Elsie Kruberg, we worked on a big drawing board, and you'd take a roll of backing paper and fold it a couple of times to make a bit of a cushion for your T-square, to raise the T-square marginally from the surface. This was in the days before drawing machines. Initially you worked in pencil on the backing paper, and they'd come and mull over it and make corrections here and there. Usually there'd be a floor plan, foundation layout, a typical cross section and you'd also have a perspective drawing in the top right hand corner. When everything was agreed upon, you'd get a nice new crisp sheet of tracing paper and tape that over the surface, and go to work on the final drawing with a Rapido pen. The trouble with Rapidos was that they were forever clogging up, and you had to gently tap them to get the ink flowing again. I used to do this on the side margin, which, after a complicated drawing was finished, was festooned with lots of little dots. In idle moments I'd join all these up and make little sketches of them - and there'd be heads, and figures, and trees, and all kinds of things, and by the time the professional drawing was completed, the left hand side would be just a crazy montage of all these tiny drawings. You usually prepared your own board at the start, and I didn't take too much notice of the fact, but every time I'd finished a work I'd come back and find my work board all set up and ready to go. Finally I did notice this, and the fact that those cushion margins seemed to be getting increasingly wider. Months and months later, Elsie and her husband (who was a Wagnerian enthusiast) invited me out to their place for dinner, and bugger me! there were

about six or seven of these things, quite elaborately framed, hanging around their living room! I'd done them in her time, so I suppose she felt she was entitled to them.

When the architecture courses at the uni and the tech turned out so badly, I left Brisbane and came to Sydney. This was a critical period for me. I'd made the mistake of getting out of New Guinea when I did, and the mistake of thinking that I could practise as an architect. I was treading water to stay afloat, and anything to do with my art activities was on the back burner - it was put aside and survival became the first priority. I didn't have any money to speak of, and two friends, Mary and John Kinney, took me under their wing and I stayed with them in their house in Paddington. They had a terrace house with the outbuildings out the back, and they said I could stay there till I got on my feet, which was tremendously generous of them. I got a job at some place down in The Rocks as a storeman, loading trucks for dispatch - one of those parcel dispatch companies, an old Sydney firm. I was there for a few months, but that was pretty uninspiring, and I saw an ad in the paper for Christmas casuals in the Post Office.

I went along and applied for that, and they had a bit of a test for the job - memorising a few names - and so I got through that and they put me on a six week training course. I remember the first couple of days there, and I said to the guy sitting next to me, "There's no way in the bloody world that I'm going to remember all these." There were pages upon pages upon pages of place names - country towns across Australia and the suburbs of all the cities. But it ended up I finished the six weeks course in three, which was nothing other than a facility for rote learning, I expect.

So my job there was as a mail sorter before they had anything like the automation that they've got today. They had *some* automation, but not much, and most of the sorting was done manually. After I'd done the training period they asked me if I was interested in staying on, so I did. Then I looked around and I saw that some people came in and worked nights, and I thought, "Hullo. That sounds good. You work at night and go down to the beach and surf in the daytime and snooze in the afternoon." Which is what I did.

I was still living with the Kinneys at that stage, and had graduated to their upstairs front room and was paying them some rent. As a sort of thankyou for their previous generosity I renovated the front room for them. What I did was pretty basic. I painted the whole place white and ripped all the crap off the floor and polished it and it was beautiful! I wanted to go through and do out the whole house, but John wasn't enthusiastic, so nothing came of that. Not long afterwards they sold the house, and I moved to a flat down on The Esplanade at Elizabeth Bay. It had a big swimming pool in the backyard. After a while I was given the option of buying the place or pissing off, but I didn't have enough money for the deposit. (\$18,000 was the full price of the apartment!) So I moved from there to an apartment in Wylde Street, at Potts Point. I was shown it by Hookers, at The Cross. The day I went to look at it was one of those cold, sunny Sydney days with winds all over the place, and I was feeling pretty fucking miserable, and when I walked in the sun was just streaming in, and I thought "This'll do me." It had royal blue walls, and the first thing I did was paint it all white.

So there I was at the Mail Exchange at Redfern, on the night shift. There was a loading for working nights, but that wasn't the reason I chose it. I would have still done it had it been the other way round - I would have dropped a bit to work on the night shift, because it put work in its proper nasty nocturnal perspective -

work being described as something that you wouldn't ordinarily do, but that you did if they paid you money for it.

Round about the time I started on the night shift I began to do more with my art activities - mainly because I had the daylight hours to myself. It started to become more than just a hobby, and I was pleased with some of the stuff that I was turning out. I suppose it was around this time that I began to think that I actually might have something to offer in this area, and I began to see myself primarily as an artist, and the paid work at the Post Office was a just a necessary evil that I did for subsistence purposes. But I didn't see my art as my "work" in the world. It was play, in the sense that children play yet are very serious about their play. I think Paul Klee said something about art and play - how it's got to be play. And this is so. Some of my stuff, when it's laboured, looks like it. I didn't see it as something I could make money out of. I've got nothing against selling paintings, in fact I'd love to sell enough to be able to live off it, but if I did I'd prefer to be able to do it anonymously because I'm not after fame. I find fame something that is pretty offputting. Yet I feel a sense of achievement if I do a painting that I think works.

I think I did the job at the Mail Exchange fairly conscientiously. If you came across an address that was difficult to work out you'd chase it up in the telephone book or do whatever you could. As an example, there was a silly bloody woman from the North Shore - well, actually, she turned out to be a charmer. She'd addressed a letter to "Dr Cohen, Tel Aviv". Fortunately she'd put the sender's name and address on the back of the envelope. I looked up the name in the phone book and rang her up, told her where I was from, and pointed out that Tel Aviv was a big city, and that Cohen wasn't exactly an uncommon name for that part of the world. "Did I do that?" she said, "Would you send it back to me so I can put the proper address on it?" "Well, I could do that," I replied, "but it would be much easier if you could read me the address over the telephone and I could put it on for you." Which of course I did. And she said, "And they say such nasty things about Post Office People!" (*Laughs*). Of course those sort of things made a welcome break from the routine of sorting the mail.

I stayed at the Mail Exchange for twenty years - till they came up with a golden handshake offer that I couldn't refuse. They had to do this to shed staff because of the introduction of automated sorting. Over the years the nature of the job was changed considerably by that. When the Mail Exchange was at Redfern it was very much an institution. It was a collection of characters, of slackers, of rigid unionists, of conscientious and caring unionists. The management ranged from the serious, committed and intelligent, to the absolutely bloody-minded and moronic.

There were all sorts of lurks and perks. On one occasion I was reported to the management for drinking beer at the Journo's Club during working hours. The reason I was down there was we'd run out of work, but the iniquitous part about it was that I'd been reported because one of the Management had seen me at the bar - the question being, of course, what the fuck was *he* doing there? (*Laughs*.)

In human terms, the introduction of new technology made it worse as a workplace, but to give the Post Office people their due, their function is to process mail, and not to run a social club. In the early days, the social aspects of the job were quite a lot of fun, but it got to the stage where the fun aspect became something that seriously had to be addressed. It started to get out of hand. There was an enormous amount of booze consumed on the job. We'd

have a tea break and go out to the locker room for a couple of slugs. We'd go out there with our coffee cups, and after the break we'd come back to our work positions with our cups filled with a dark and aromatic substance that was *not* coffee! That was a fun thing to do, and I'm not so sure that it interfered too much with the sorting process. In those days you could smoke and drink coffee while you were working. The sorting process can be very fast and very efficient, and is made much more pleasant if you can do it while you're having a ball rather than sit there and do it in a dour and po-faced fashion. But they've got machines now that can process mail at a rate of knots, such that it's only a matter of time before all the hand sorting is a quaint historical memory.

There was a satisfaction in being a good sorter. We'd have a few little games we'd play to pass the time, like someone would call out, "A cup of coffee for Cessnock?" and the first person to find a letter from there would yell out "Cessnock!" and the other bloke would have to piss off and get him a cup of coffee. In terms of competition, always the people who were deferred to were the ones who knew where the unusual or difficult places were. "Where does?.... go?" It was usually the same old hands who knew the difficult answers.

Although I think they were probably a bit lax in some way, at Redfern the union was generally a very positive thing. You had people like Sue Wyatt, who was one of the outstanding unionists there - she was a very intelligent, able, and very canny negotiator. But at the other end of the spectrum you had self-serving opportunists who took the union job because it gave them leeway to walk around and do nothing. And you had one or two red-raggers who took an almost Trotskyite view of the industrial situation and who'd try to take the workforce out on strike at the drop of a hat.

At Redfern there was some turnover of staff, but most of them were long-termers. The Mail Exchange was moved from Redfern to Rushcutter Bay eventually, and that was a political decision. It was broken up solely to break the power of the union, which it did very effectively. When that happened the union officials who were in power became sort of institutionalised and the only time you'd see them was when there'd be an election in the offing. This didn't really matter much, anyway, because there was no longer any way in the world that the dispersed rank and file could get together to bring about any kind of change.

Politics was talked about a fair bit on the job, but pretty much as interested outsiders without any real party involvement. You hear tales of rank and file coercion of other members in union voting and political matters. Well that may happen in other workplaces, but throughout all the bloody years I was at Redfern there was never a shortage of people who would vote against issues, or who would be, say, staunch Liberal voters. There might have been a certain amount of lampooning and even ridicule of people like that, but there was never any strongarm tactics.

While it was at Redfern it wasn't a bad place to work in human terms, and I made some very good friends there. There was some carry-over of this aspect after the move to Rushcutter Bay, but by the time they'd closed that down and moved out to Alexandria... well, at Alexandria I found myself in the coffee break taking a cup of coffee and going outside to have a cigarette by myself. There were only half a dozen people in that place that I'd regard as acquaintances, let alone friends. The whole order had very much changed by then. Mind you, so had the throughput volume. The number of letters that were sorted was really quite enormous. Despite a lot of the crap that is spoken about Australia Post, its

management has certainly improved in an industrial sense. You might want to question their sensitivity to the workforce (which is fairly minimal) but again, the aim of the organisation is to sort letters and not to run a social club. I suppose the happy medium would be somewhere between those two extremes. Also, I could walk to Rushcutter Bay in 15 minutes, and the changeover to Alexandria cut that out. To get to Alexandria I had to leave an hour and a half earlier, often to go up on a cold, rainy night and catch a bus from Elizabeth Bay into the Quay and a bus from there out to Alexandria - that wasn't fun. And of course by that stage, age and failing limbs were starting to make it a bit of a trek, and sitting in draughty bus shelters on cold rainy nights was, shall we say, less than pleasant. But as the bus went through the city, various people that you knew who were going to work there too would get on and there'd be a Rosary of "G'day Jack, how ya goin' Fred, miss your train Charlie?..." you know, that sort of thing. Invariably we'd get there before the starting time of ten pm, so you'd put your gear in the locker room and go upstairs maybe for a cup of coffee and (if there were no wallopers around the place) a cigarette, because smoking was *verboden* in the whole building. At ten o'clock you came down and bundied on. There was a job roster there with twenty to thirty different jobs that had to be done, and this was always known the week before, so if there was a job that you didn't particularly like you could swap it with somebody who did like it.

At Alexandria I sought out work on the loading dock rather than sit on my arse and sort letters - I preferred to go and do something physical - throw a few bags in the back of a truck - and that had it's own peculiar kind of elitism, a sort of reverse elitism among those of us that quite liked to work there. But of course then there were the other group who thought that Manual Labour was the name of a Spanish immigrant, and it doesn't take too much imagination to see that that kind of milieu generates a group of people who think that it's really wonderful to be able to wear a tie, carry a clipboard, and work with a pen. I've long had the theory that people who wanted supervisory positions in Australia Post at the lower level of management did so because some strange part of them enjoyed telling people what to do.

You say that it's not uncommon to hear stories about people in industry bundying on for mates who were late for some reason. That sort of thing has been done in the past, but of recent years - say the last five to ten - nobody ever did it simply because of the fact that if you were caught doing it you were sacked. Mind you, before I worked there, in the alleged 'good old days' there were some spivs who worked deals with somebody who'd bundy on for them, both coming in and going out of work, and they just didn't turn up at all. But that was a long time ago and certainly wasn't the practice for the last 25 years or so in the place.

Every now and then, on Saturday night they had a "ghost shift" - or some appropriate name like that. You'd have half a dozen people for the entire building who performed the function of caretakers. First you'd go through the entire building and make sure that all the external windows were locked, then you'd go through the entire building again and make sure that all the dunny doors were open. (There's a good reason for this last one, because many years ago when they didn't do this they found a corpse in one of them on the Monday morning.) That work took an hour at the outside, so you were there from eleven till six as caretakers. The first one of those I did, at about eleven o'clock I went along to the boss and asked him what we did next. He said just to sit around, try to keep my eyes open, and that we finished at quarter to six. That was the time when quite a few of the fellows went down to the Journo's Club and got pie-eyed. I didn't know the people too well when I first started, and didn't particularly like them anyway.

Someone had to turn the time clock or something, so I volunteered to stay behind and do this while they went off, and they were very grateful. I was grateful, too, to get them out of my hair. I swiped a handtowel and passed the time covering it in little ink drawings.

After I'd been at Redfern for a while it became a regular thing to call in at the Journo's Club for a few beers on the way home. It was just like any job where you had a few beers when you'd finished. I was going to say it helped cement social relations, but "lubricate" might be more apt. It was that sort of worker/booze bonding thing.

If the mail flow was particularly slow on a particular evening - the industrial term for it is 'down time' - there'd be nothing to do, so folks'd go off and have a smoke or play cards or what-have-you. Needless to say there wasn't a lot of down time. Normally it was an eight hour shift with not a lot of let-up. Not that there was any great pressure, because if you worked at a moderate, normal pace, you were probably in the upper echelons of the productivity per capita anyway. They used to measure the productivity, but never as an identifiable per capita, which is something that the new union movement objected to for many years. Oddly enough, the workers - the working workers, that is - thought that this was a bit of a bum rap because some people were getting away with sitting on their arses doing nothing while somebody sitting next to them was going like a steam engine - well, a steam engine, but perhaps of gentle power. If anyone didn't pull their weight, it meant that somebody else had to do it for them, and that used to meet with a lot of resistance, but there were no institutionalised methods of dealing with that sort of thing outside of some verbal trashing of the bludgers concerned.

But to get back to describing an average shift: After starting at ten, there was a tea break after two hours. It was supposed to be ten minutes but by agreement that was stretched to fifteen because in ten minutes you couldn't get there and back and have your tea as well. Then there was a meal break after another couple of hours. When I was Redfern the cafeteria was run by a lady called Margaret Charlesworth, who was a charming, German-born woman with heaps of personality who was very much concerned to provide good food - which she did. But after we moved from Redfern it just went downhill, to people who were only there because it was a job, and the food went from as close as dammit to a home-cooked meal at a very high standard (Margaret was an excellent cook) to the very worst of Army food. The meals at Redfern were subsidised, and were really quite reasonable, but as it got worse the prices increased, so that there were times at Alexandria, where hundreds of people were employed, when they wouldn't sell a dozen meals because they were so crook and people were taking their own from home. Then there'd be another tea break in the middle of the morning and we'd knock off a little bit before six a.m.

You could do overtime when it was on offer. That was determined by work flow. There was a move at foot at one stage to make the working of overtime mandatory but it never got off the ground.

I'd have to say that my work in New Guinea was undoubtedly more satisfying than my work in the post office. There was a feeling that you were part of a group doing an important job, and you were contributing to it. You did things from time to time that had an effect. There was commitment. There was respect - both for the job that you had, and, for the most part, for the people senior to you. (Though

not always, of course.) Mind you, the work of contributing towards getting the mail through was also worthwhile, and most of the people working there were conscious of this and therefore quite conscientious about seeing that things went as quickly as they could to the right destination. People who had been in the position where the receipt of mail was important, or had lived in remote places (like myself in New Guinea, for instance) tended to reflect this attitude most. Of course there were some people who, if they got a letter and didn't know where it should go, just slammed it in Sydney City box, on the assumption that somebody there'd know - but that was the exception rather than the rule.

How would I describe my ideal job? If I could decide it myself? If we're going to be ideal about it, I'd like somebody to say to me, "Here's X hundred dollars a week and here's your studio and equipment. Paint some pictures for me." I wouldn't say that the jobs I've had were *only* a means to a crust, but they were *primarily* that.

Adjusting to retirement hasn't been that difficult, though I have had some problems. The solitude is something that I have a bit of a problem with from time to time. I no longer have the daily social contact that the job provided. I don't have the equivalent of the drinks at the Journo's Club now. As a matter of fact, one of the blokes up at the corner pub asked me the other day if it was my "local", and I replied that no, it was just the nearest pub. Your nearest pub and your "local" ain't the same thing. I don't particularly want a local, either, I suppose. That sort of sociability must occur organically rather than be sought or created. And of course, the cut-off of your income to as near as dammit to zero makes the sheer survival thing something that worries me - like finding a bloody telephone bill today for \$273 that I thought I'd already paid.

Would I do it all again the same way, if I had my time over? Oh Christ, no. Who would? Looking back over my working life my feelings are rather mixed. There are certain aspects of the New Guinea experience that were really quite wonderful. I went up there looking to find a place in something out of a Boy's Own adventure yarn, and in many senses I did just that. Given my druthers, and a great deal of hindsight, I think I ought to have treated painting much more seriously than I did, and perhaps could have devoted more of those years to it. That's a sort of retrospective possibility devoutly to be wished, but it's not the case. I think I could've... it's solely a function of time, you know. The time that you devote to it...the problems of thinking things through... the fact that I've avoided oils all of these years because of the time element - the time for drying and stuff. You know, you can work in gouache, acrylic and watercolour - media that are direct and immediate... but if you're going to do an oil of any size then quite obviously you're going to need weeks, if not months, to get anywhere near completion of it.

When I was working at the post office on the night shift, I painted during the day more often than not. Probably not every day, but most of the time. It certainly gave me more satisfaction than working as a mail sorter, which meant that I had less time to spend at it. And of course, if you were doing a double-ender overtime, which is overtime both before the shift and after, well, that didn't leave too much time to fit in a bit of sleep, and the odd bit of roistering, too I suppose. But mind you, with overtime you could take home a reasonable pay packet. That sort of thing generally happened towards the end of year around Christmas build-up, when people would be doing double-ended overtime for fourteen days at a

stretch. I don't think that sort of things occurs as much these days, since the advent of more automated sorting procedures, though probably at Christmas time it still does.

One of the things that I didn't say about working life is the friendships and the respect you have for many of the people that you come across that are really quite lasting. I've had friendships as a result of both jobs that have endured for thirty or forty years. The opposite side of that coin is where you come across individuals that you either don't respect, or detest, and they just vanish. I suppose this is a sort of selective memory, where the tendency is to remember things that are positive rather than negative. I remember things like the marvellous sunsets and sunrises in New Guinea, the Bach experience, going down fast rivers, looking at things that were exquisitely beautiful, and the good kind of bonding that occurred - all remembered fondly and spoken of with some ease, yet I comfortably forget the few bouts of illness that I had there (I had a couple of doses of malaria, and a bout of dengue) - the mosquitoes... you know, the terror of living on Baluwan - that bloody volcano...I was constantly aware of the possibility that it might erupt. You could take pills to guard against malaria, and in the army in those days it was generally considered that if you got malaria it was a self-inflicted disease, because you hadn't been taking your pills. (It's only in relatively recent times that they found out that malaria covered a variety of bugs. If you were taking, say, Paludrin, they found that there was a little anopheles mosquito marked XY that didn't give a shit about that, and that gave you malaria anyway.)

But there were times of extreme depression - times when I was near-suicidal - almost like something out of J.D. Salinger. I can remember driving along a road towards a cliff, just about bawling, you know the sort of thing: "Why me? Why me? Will I do it? Will I?" But of course I didn't. When I first got there everything was so new and interesting that you didn't have time for homesickness or the blues - that sort of thing settled in later when you were in situations of isolation.

The isolation was quite a problem at times - the lack of any kind of interaction with people at all in some parts, and, in retrospect, a kind of guilt. What I was saying earlier about the conscientiousness and sincerity of public servants in New Guinea, particularly people in the field, was very real, but nonetheless, sometimes I feel a profound sense of guilt at having taken a salary for ten years while living there when I ask myself, "What did you ever do for these people?" The answer usually is, "Precious fucking little." To say that one can only realise this with hindsight viewed through the values of today is a nice kind of ointment - a soothing balm - but it doesn't alter the reality that my contribution in New Guinea was, to put it politely, less than significant - even though I did my job conscientiously. It was partly my own fault, and partly systemic.

While I was there, of course, quite a few people were beginning to question the Australian presence. There was one fellow there called Tony Voutas who got into quite a lot of trouble for doing just that. He finished up as one of the founding fathers of *Pangu Pati*. He was an Australian patrol officer - an extremely intelligent and able person.

There was another Australian fellow who was asked by a New Guinean, "If we did decide to try to take over the country, how would we go about it." He replied along the lines of: "Oh, the standard way. You'd need to seize the organs of force and

the organs of communications, so you'd be looking at post offices, telephone exchanges, the police and the army." He was the only individual I'd ever known or heard of who was charged with sedition.

I can remember a dinner party at my place and we were sitting around - all of us pissed out of our minds. I said to the assembled company, which was about four to one black to white - most of the faces were black - that they really ought to do something about learning French. "You're mad, Mannix," was the response, "what the fuck do we want to learn French for?" "Well," I said, "there's about eight of us here, and at a rough guess I'd say that at least half of the bloody party are going to finish up in the diplomatic service as ambassadors, if not heads of state." That was greeted with hoots of derision, but of that bloody party, Somare became Prime Minister, three of them became ambassadors, and old Tori, who was sitting in the corner and holding out his glass, was knighted and became Governor-General. Another was knighted and became Governor of the Reserve Bank, while yet another was knighted and became Director of Finance. At the time, Somare and Voutas were pissing in each other's pockets and forming Pangu out at the university campus. I knew that was going on, but I never dreamed at that stage that it would so quickly become the party of government.

Well what else can I say about my working life? That's about it, I suppose, except that I often think that it would have been quite different if I'd chosen my ancestors differently.

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