

Barry Jacka—A216388—Engine Fitter

After graduation, like all of the graduates, I was posted to an Aircraft Depot. This was intended to be in the state of my enlistment (NSW). However, I was already married to Clare Lotan who was living with her sister in Melbourne so I spent my first year as an airman engine fitter at 1AD, RAAF Laverton.

My first daughter, Christine, was born four days after our graduation so I found life vastly different to my time at Wagga. Depot life alternated between the interesting and the downright boring, highlighted for me by being seconded to the Engine Ancillary Section to prepare maintenance schedules from the instructional manuals of a new fuel pump.

After spending twelve months doing the rounds of all that was expected of an engine fitter at a depot, I made the move to a squadron. I applied for a posting to the Aircraft Research and Development Unit (ARDU), located then across the tarmac from the depot, because it seemed to offer something a little more unusual and I preferred to remain in Melbourne. I completed my trade test for LAC and transferred there in 1958.

Our primary aircraft was the Canberra but our research inventory included Sabres, a Lincoln, Winjeel, Meteor, Dakota, Mustang, Twin Vampire and even a fifth-scale model of an Avro Delta bomber. At the end of this year my second daughter, Wendy, was born. The following year my family moved into married quarters.

For the three years I was at Wagga I played rugby union so I joined the base teams and continued to play while I was at Laverton. I sometimes played A-grade in the Victorian Rugby Union competition (at the stadium that is now the home of the Melbourne Storm) and played inter-service on a number of occasions. I represented the RAAF (Victoria) Rugby Union Football Club as a delegate to the VRU and I even played Australian Rules for the Base Squadron team midweek and for Laverton township, (in the Werribee District League), on the weekend.

1960 was a big year for my family. My third daughter, Susan, was born. We used a small inheritance to build our own home in Laverton and I was temporarily transferred to the unit's workshop to bring it up to establishment. It was here that I discovered a greater interest and aptitude for this work than for engine fitting so I requested a re-muster to general fitter and, because of a drastic shortage of general fitters, this was surprisingly granted.

At this point I would like to pay tribute to the allied trades training we received as apprentices. It allowed me to fulfill the duties of general fitter, pass the trade tests and provided me with a career for the rest of my working life. I supplemented this with on-the-job training and became a fair electric welder and metal machinist. I carried my seniority as an LAC to my new mustering and was promoted to corporal in 1962. I remained at ARDU for another four years, manufacturing research and training aids, maintaining the unit's minor equipment, raising a family and playing football.

In December 1966 I was posted to No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron, then building the airstrip at Tindal in Katherine, NT. My duties there could hardly have been any different. I maintained the underground water pumping system and maintained the engines and structures of their minor equipment. The climate was tropical, the working conditions primitive and the accommodation very basic. I was able to move my family to married quarters when the runway was completed at Tindal and the unit sent advance parties to begin work at Exmouth.

My original posting was for fifteen months but I extended my tenure until my discharge date in January 1969. As my family needed stability and my service career had ground to a screeching halt, I took my discharge and moved into a government home in Katherine. I worked briefly in the town for Neil (Clancy) O'May, a 'Daffy' running a small auto electrical workshop and mixed dealership, before obtaining employment with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation. I joined as a laboratory

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craftsman and assisted the auto specialist to maintain the vehicles and plant while providing maintenance to all the other equipment found at this agricultural research farm.

I joined the Air Force Emergency Force for four years and completed four subjects of the Services General Certificate of Education in this time.

This time in Katherine was to have two major impacts on my family. There was no television and little else to occupy females in what was then hardly more than an outback outpost. Since there was a large softball competition in Darwin, the town began a competition in Katherine where I learned to participate as an umpire/coach, and my family became players. Clare and I also became scorers. The town also began a baseball competition, so I learned another new game and became a pitcher for a team. I subsequently represented Katherine and the NT as a baseball player as well as acting as vice-president for the Katherine Baseball Association and president of the Katherine Softball Association. Clare represented Katherine as a player, Christine and Wendy represented Katherine as juniors.

In later years, Clare, Christine and I all scored for Queensland and Brisbane teams while Clare and I scored for Australia. I became the chairman of the Queensland and Australian Scoring Committees and designed the score book in use for many years Australia-wide. I was awarded an Australian Sports Medal for my services to softball. Wendy and Susan played for Brisbane and Christine still coaches the Brisbane men's team and manages a men's softball club in the Brisbane competition.

I also began to spend my nights with a new theatre group that was also formed at this time. I performed in *Oklahoma*, *My Fair Lady* and *Arsenic and Old Lace* while in Katherine. I have since performed in forty-two amateur plays and was the founding president of the Centenary Theatre Group formed in Brisbane in 1976.

I joined Actors Equity in 1989 and I have worked professionally ever since. This has been minor work in TV commercials, TV series, films, videos, photo shoots and role playing for industrial training. Nevertheless, I have shared a "scene" with the likes of Heath Ledger, Kylie Minogue, Jason Donovan, Hugh Jackman, Bill Hunter, Singrid Thorton and Rebecca Gibney.

We remained in the NT until 1974 when CSIRO transferred me to the Division of Tropical Crops and Pastures in Brisbane. We bought a house at Jindalee, raised the girls and joined the Jindalee Softball Club. I joined a theatre group and later formed another. I later joined the agency and began acting professionally.

My duties at the Cunningham Laboratory consisted of the design, modification and maintenance of agricultural research aids. Much of this work was unique and I had innovations written up in journals for distribution throughout the research community.

I completed a joint RMIT/CSIRO on-line bridging course to expand my trade qualifications into a certificate of engineering technology. This allowed me to eventually become a technical officer grade-two (trades).

Christine and Wendy moved out to live together and Susan left to get married. She has two sons who are now in high school. Clare and I separated and I joined Jasmine in 1989. Clare and I divorced in 1990 and I married Jasmine three months later.

Jasmine first saw me in the play *The Fantasticks* and a mutual friend introduced us. She had this uncontrollable urge to "mother" my pathetic old character and has been doing so ever since. She joined me in one or two productions as she has a good voice and is an accomplished dancer.

We bought a small unit in a northern suburb of Brisbane at which we shared custody of her two children from her first marriage. I assisted her with her children for a few years while she supported them by returning to her profession as a lawyer.

I had my fifty-fifth birthday in 1992 and I was being promoted but had no opportunity to

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supervise and avoid the harder work. CSIRO offered voluntary redundancy so I took the cash and a small ComSuper pension and retired in January 1993. Jasmine was now employed as a lawyer with Legal Aid Queensland, so I became a “househusband”. Jasmine’s children moved on to live their own lives and she returned to private practice as a barrister. I dabbled with my computer and accepted the small but frequent roles I was offered in the Brisbane film and TV industry. In 1999, Jasmine obtained the position of solicitor in charge of family law for Legal Aid Western Australia. We sold our unit and moved to Perth.

In April 2004, we will have been in Perth for five years. I have had some involvement with the local TV industry and Jasmine is making a name for herself as a Legal Aid manager. I had a brush with prostate cancer but, after an uncomfortable six months of radiation treatment in 2001/2002, I seem to have recovered.

Jasmine’s daughter, Harriet, had married and has just had her second daughter. We are both homesick and anxious to return to our families in Brisbane. We have built a house in the western suburbs to be occupied by Harriet and her family until we can return to Queensland.

My fifty years since my enlistment have been spent in the RAAF for fifteen years, in the private sector for one, with CSIRO for twenty-three and retired for eleven. I lived in NSW for three of those years, in Victoria for ten, the NT for seven, Queensland for twenty-five and Western Australia for five.

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ARDU workshop staff including me kneeling at right 1964.



On duty Air Force week 1959



Acting metal machinist ARDU 1965.

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Jacka family daughters L to R : Susan, Christine and Wendy with Susan's children James and Michael Nelson.



Jasmine and me "treading the boards"
Brisbane Centenary Theatre Group 1989.



Barry Jacka "before and after" 1954-2003.

MANGO SCRAPBOOK IMAGES



Machine shop