

**Ron McGuigan—A14427—Electrical Fitter**

I can't believe that it has been fifty years since I first arrived at Wagga Wagga, Garden City of the South and labeled A14427. After living my whole life until then in tropical, green Cairns, Wagga in a drought was rather a shock. I can still vividly remember our first meal in the old mess and the welcoming party that night by our old mates the Daffodils and Pansies.

The memory of the beginning of those fifty years can be highlighted by the photo taken at the bottom of the ramp at Central Station, Sydney en route to Wagga. Graham Giffin, John Drinkwater, Noel Gilbert, Ron McGuigan, John Best and Bill Black - the boys from the deep north.

I scanned all of my Wagga photos into my computer recently and details become much clearer on a screen. When I look at the rows of huts (one power point, no partitions or insulation) they remind me of photos of concentration camps. It was, in retrospect, a hard environment even though we reveled in it at the time, and I am convinced that the experience was a very good introduction into adult life.

The downside in hindsight was that I was not very worldly and missed out on adult interaction that may have helped me make more sensible decisions in later years. However, everything worked out well in spite of it and I achieved much more than I ever envisioned.

Going back to 1956, I went to Melbourne under the "Boffin" scheme and completed the electrical engineering course.

My departure from the RAAF in 1966 was not exactly amicable as for a few years I had gotten myself mixed up with a religious group and hence had an irresolvable clash of values regarding how one should apply oneself to life. Still, I always thought that it was rather Dickensian for one's parents to be able to contract me into bondage until I was over thirty years old.

In retrospect, swimming upstream for a change was good for me and gave me a sense of confidence which I applied to my ensuing career.

**Career history**

When I joined the electricity industry in 1966 it was the Southern Electric Authority Qld (SEAQ) and was listed on the Stock Exchange. In the mid seventies when the transmission system was linked on the east coast, the amalgamation was called the Qld Electricity Generating Board (QEGB) with transmission and distribution split off into separate entities. In the early eighties the full shift to government ownership occurred and we re-amalgamated to become the Qld Electricity Commission (QEC). In the early nineties generation was again split off to become Austa Electric, a government owned corporation. In 1997 Austa was split into three corporations to compete in the evolving National Electricity Market.

As you can imagine these changes gave an environment of constant change

I retired in late 1998 as CEO of CS Energy, one of the three government-owned corporations responsible for power generation in Queensland. This corporation was one of the three competing government-owned corporations formed in 1997 when the power industry in Queensland was broken up.

In the previous Queensland Generation Corporation, AUSTA Electric, I was the manager in charge of all of the power stations on the Queensland power grid (except Gladstone which we had sold a few years previously). I was also deputy CEO of AUSTA.

After leaving the RAAF in 1966, I started in the power station industry as assistant electrical engineer for the construction of Swanbank-A power station near Ipswich, commissioning and maintaining plant. In the early seventies, as electrical engineer for the site, the second station, Swanbank-B and a couple of Avon-powered gas turbines were added. It was a great time with the power industry expanding during a national period of growth, one station after the other - right place at the right time.

## Mango Stories

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I found that being an engineer in a power station was extremely interesting and exciting. The complexity of control systems, the metallurgical factors associated with high pressure, high temperature steam, the chemistry and virtually all aspects of technology provided a very stimulating working environment. All of my thirty-three years in the power industry was a learning curve, and most of it was a steep one.

During the mid seventies I completed a three-year post graduate engineering course in automatic control. In 1976 and again in 1982, I was fortunate to do advanced management courses at the Australian Administrative Staff College at Mt Eliza near Melbourne.

In 1978, I was appointed manager of two old power stations on the Brisbane River: Tennyson and Bulimba. The transition from engineering to management was that single step because the Queensland generation practiced full autonomy for power station managers.

In 1982, I was appointed manager at Tarong power station which was being constructed near Kingaroy in the South Burnett. The autonomy factor meant that I had to set up the workforce, the support systems and have the first unit running in twelve months. I stayed there for twelve years and it was one of the benchmark stations in the world in terms of performance and reliability.

I made several trips to Japan because of our links to Hitachi and for the World Energy Conference. I really enjoyed those trips even though they were hard work, but I saw a lot of the country and enjoyed the food. I also did a round the world trip in 1996 seeking attractive insurance premium rates (power stations are expensive repair jobs if there is a major failure). After the final gruelling leg from Boston to Brisbane via Sydney I swore I would never get on another plane.

The power industry was a fantastic place to work - new power stations cost over two billion dollars to build, and are technically complex and exciting. The mix of engineering, sciences, trades and numerous other skilled groups made management a very stimulating and challenging task. The phases of construction, then five years tuning and modifying and then long-term operation provided a constant change process.

### **The home front**

On the personal side, my first marriage lasted nineteen years before fizzling out. I remarried in 1984 after seven years of single life and have lived happily ever after. Our combined family of seven adult children and numerous grandchildren gives Valerie and me a lot of pleasure and enjoyment.

Now I am fully retired and enjoying life. The transition from a high pressure job to a leisurely existence was a bit difficult at first. The last eighteen months of my working life as a CEO was a hectic climax to a really satisfying working life. I had a small management team and set up CS Energy, contracted a partnership with Shell Coal to build a new billion-dollar power station at Callide, set up an energy trading process, and achieved other things as well. I also had a board of directors (mainly from legal and accounting firms) who knew nothing about the industry.

Stopping suddenly at the end of that process was harder than I imagined it could be and I probably drove Valerie to distraction trying to apply my ideas to her domestic realm.

In 1995, Valerie and I had built our home at Brookfield, a suburb of Brisbane for our retirement and we love the Brisbane lifestyle.

We have had various holidays during the past twenty years, UK and Europe plus a cruise of the Baltic a couple of years ago. Our favorite, in 1987, was hiring a canal barge and doing the Oxford canal area in England, and a few years ago we did the Avon River area. One of our sons has an engineering consultancy in Vietnam and we visited in 1996; in March we are having a return visit to see how his business is progressing.

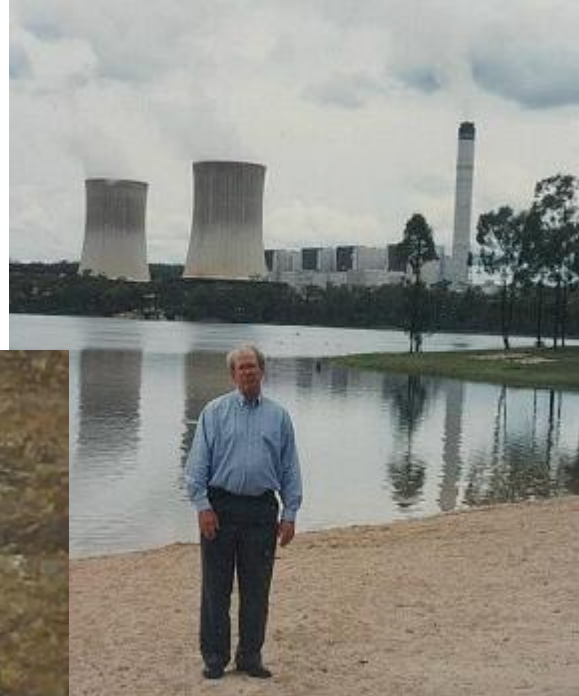
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I like to go to the annual Mango Reunion in Brisbane and it is great catching up with old friends. I went to the Apprentice “40 in 88” reunion in Wagga and one Mango reunion in Melbourne some years before that.

I am looking forward to our fifty year reunion and renewing contacts, many of whom I haven't seen since 1956.

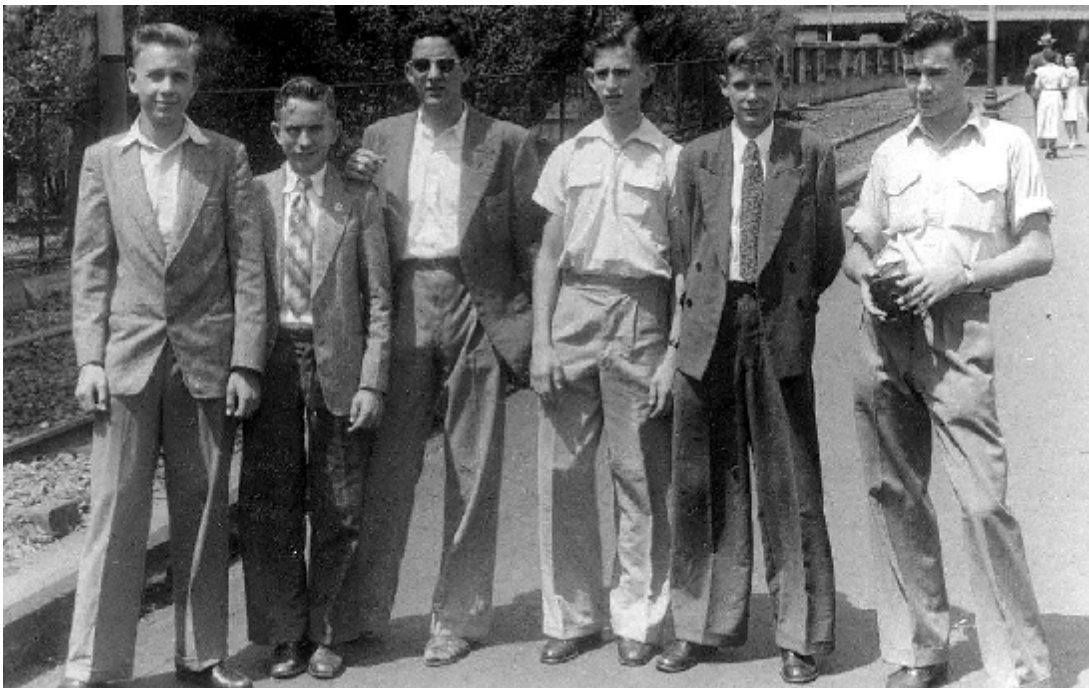
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Valerie and me



Me with Tarong power station in background.



Central railway station 1954. L to R. Giffin, Drinkwater, Gilbert, me, Best and Black.