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Life after TPHS

Like many I completed my HSC in 1968 at Telopea Park High School. University beckoned. Remember this was the era of (quite high) fees for Uni, so a scholarship was important. My HSC score wasn't good enough for a Commonwealth Scholarship, but I did receive one from the NSW Department of Education. The plus side was it paid a weekly allowance, and on the minus the Department was involved in subject selection – after all they wanted someone with knowledge appropriate for teaching. I was heading for Economics, Maths and either Statistics or Accounting majors.

I quickly settled into University (and Union! life). I passed first year, but only just. It was suggested by the Faculty that I don't try 2nd year Maths. No Maths meant no Statistics. This brought the dreaded Education people into play. We “agreed” on Economic History.

With many years of hindsight the reality was that I should not have been at University. What I wanted to do, and had done so since Form 4, was to get into the fledgling game known as “computers”. I (and just about everyone else) didn't know how. Certainly vocational counselling didn't.

The outcome was that I frittered away 2 years at Uni, doing anything but studying. When I finally left, I did what lots of Canberra people did, and entered the Public Service. This was after several months delivering telegrams and mail, so I had some income. I started at the Bureau of Statistics in 1971, and was able, early in 1972, to get into their Electronic Data Processing Branch as it was known. I was called a Programming Assistant (exactly the same as a Base Grade Clerk for those with that history), and had “exciting” jobs like delivering and collecting jobs from the Computer Room, hand punching cards, and the like.

By this time the College of Knowledge (CCA) was offering computer related courses and I started there part-time, in 1972. I found the course interesting, and was doing quite well. At work, I was being told all the right things ... “bright future”, “promote on merit”, etc. I was given an 8 week internship as an Operation Shift Supervisor. I also tried to get into the Programmer in Training (PIT) course being run by the Commonwealth Government at the time. This was a real career kicker as you were employed at a high grade, given 12-18 months intensive training, and (almost) guaranteed promotions for several years after. First year I was 20th on the wait list, second year I was 5th. Trouble was things had gone tight economically and everyone accepted!

By now it is 1973. I had got married in late 1972 to a lovely girl I met at ANU – we have just celebrated our 38th Anniversary. Gwen was working at Yarralumla, I was at Lyneham and we were living in Downer. Gwen got the car! I got a lift to CCA, and she would meet me in the Library. Well, I still remember the day she showed me the (venerable?) Canberra Times of that day, and more importantly, an advert for a Computer Operator with a private enterprise employer. This was just after the second round of PIT disappointment, so I decided to find out more. The net outcome was I started as a Computer Operator in December 1973 with IBM.

Very early on I found out 3 things about IBM, that has stood me in great stead over the years. The first two are examples of the same value – trust. I had previously arranged holidays over Christmas that year, and planned to be in Adelaide for a national yachting championship. Not only did IBM allow me to take the time, they insisted on paying me – annual leave in advance. My only regret was that I could never get the two weeks at work, two weeks paid leave model to repeat! The second piece of trust was that they were prepared to trust me to do the job. Very early on my (senior) operator partner was taken ill. We were running two shifts, two operators on each shift. I arrived for afternoon shift (as scheduled) to be told I would be on my own that evening, but “don't worry – not much is happening. Did I remember how to shut it down?” They were going to trust me with a \$2M (1973 remember) computer !! Wow !!

The third thing I learned about IBM was that they never hire with the entry level job in mind. I was employed as a Computer Operator, but was already destined for a System Engineering role. Two other snippets – (1) I started on 20% more than my Public Sector salary and (2) I worked for IBM for nearly 32 years! I did challenge a couple of IBM's "rules" - I grew a beard very early on, and still have it to this day, and I never owned a white business shirt – I did have a blue suit at some stage though!

My IBM career – yes a career not a job – spanned nearly a dozen job roles, three Australian locations, and a total of 18 months in various USA locations – each trip was for 6 to 17 weeks in duration. My roles were technical (mainframe operator, mainframe systems programmer, Product Specialist - I was the Australian and SE Asia specialist for one of IBM's Operating Systems for several years, pre-sales support, PC and LAN specialist (when they hit the world in the 90s), people manager. I never completed the CCAE course as IBM's training, work and travel meant I missed too many lectures. I think I am wiser for the IBM experience than I would have been if I stayed with the Public Service.

My last IBM job was fascinating and frustrating. The title was International Deals Support Manager and the objective was to ensure multi-country opportunities were both bid successfully, and won! No mean task when you may have 50 countries involved – a few with a lot of the opportunity and many with only a small amount. It was my responsibility to ensure that IBM Australia/NZ responded for its part of any global deal initiated elsewhere. If Australia was the Lead, then ensure that all other countries were responding and make sure their responses were incorporated in the overall response. It was fascinating to be part of really big deals, and frustrating to try and get an Australian response for supply and maintenance for 2 PCs in one office, as part of a \$US50M deal. I travelled the world from the safety of my own study – email, Instant Messaging, and teleconferences (often at midnight!) were all part and parcel of my work.

I mentioned IBM employed me in three cities – Canberra (1973 - 1976), Sydney (1977 – 1983) , and Melbourne (1983 – 2005). There are several versions of what the acronym IBM stands for - one of them is **I've Been Moved** – certainly happened to me! Like many, we have lived in several houses – in our case seven (two rented, and five "owned"). We have just clicked over 10 years in our current residence – a warehouse conversion on the edge of Melbourne's CBD. We own a car – now more than 3 years old, and have just turned over 20,000kms! And more than 80% of that would be outside Melbourne!

Family? I've mentioned my wonderful wife – Gwen. We have one son, Bryan, who was born in 1981. He schooled at Ivanhoe Boys Grammar in Melbourne, and completed a double degree in IT and Business at La Trobe. He is a Melbourne boy, and has his own apartment – close by! He works for a small IT business that concentrates on the Small and Medium Business market – they do infrastructure, network, server and desktop design, implementation and maintenance. He loves it.

Work? Since IBM thrust a sack of gold at me in 1995, I have worked part-time – off and on. I was too young to be able to collect super when I left IBM, so did 3 days a week project management until the end of that year, plus a bit more in 2006 and 2007. I have done very little in the last three years, however I am just picking up a bit of work at the beginning of 2011. All my work since IBM has been for the same company Bryan works for. The owners are ex-IBM, which is the initial link – they asked me to take on the initial PM role. They also chased Bryan a couple of years later. Gwen is still also working 3 days as a Library Technician at the ACU University. I suspect that is going to end some time in 2011.

Play? We have had several wonderful trips overseas in recent years. Xmas 2005 we flew to Singapore and joined a cruise that went to several ports in Asia, before hitting Australia at Darwin, and ended up in Sydney. In 2007 we spent 6 weeks on the US West Coast (Los Angeles to Seattle, before joining a Canadian Rockies Coach tour, plus 7 days on a cruise up the Alaskan Inside Passage. In 2008 we had 3 weeks in England (I didn't mention Gwen is English – arrived in

Canberra in 1964 and had never been back) including a week in London, before joining a Tuscany Tour that started in Rome and ended in Venice. We finished that with a 12 day Mediterranean cruise. In 2009 we flew to Prague for a week (just stunning), then 3 days in Paris (too short) before joining a 3 week European river cruise from Amsterdam the Black Sea (See picture below). We had a ball! We are in the middle of planning 8 weeks in the US – mostly in the North East – New England plus Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto. A major objective is to catch the Fall Colours. We hope to be heading North when they are heading South, so we plan to be away early September – early November 2011.

Canberra? We do visit – the people we have stayed in touch with over the years are retired or retiring, and most have moved elsewhere. My parents are no longer with us, likewise for Gwen although they had moved to Melbourne in the late 70s. We have driven to QLD the last few years and have always stayed in Canberra for a couple of nights. Having been discovered by Brett's (and others) detective work we now have many reasons to visit and catch up!

