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## Manner of Starting at the School

It turned out that I spent much of my working life on the staff of the Victorian School of Forestry, Creswick, as a visitor or a resident. How I came to start there and some later events might be hard to believe.

I did not apply to work at the VSF, nor had anyone in the Department ever mentioned to me the possibility that I might. At the time of our marriage in April, 1954, I assumed my future was in field forestry, with promotions sometime in the future to senior positions. Nobody had ever sounded me out whether I would like the prospect of changing to any other type of work.

I was posted, without warning, from Heyfield to Ballarat in August, 1954. I had no inkling until we had arrived and moved into the departmental quarters out in the paddocks at Invermay that I would work part-time in the Ballarat Forest District and part-time at the School. The instructions to transfer were in the form of a simple field transfer. The fact that I was to teach at Creswick was a double shock, because of the news itself and the way it came to me.

I was bewildered when the District Forester at Heyfield told me one afternoon that he had just received a phone call from head office notifying him that I was being transferred to Ballarat. After postings in Gippsland, it came as a blow to be moved west of Melbourne, more so because I had not been at Heyfield very long, and had married only a few weeks earlier. I was looking forward to at least two more years there, where I enjoyed the work. My boss assured me that he did not know why I was being moved from his large, busy district to a tiny, quiet one. He assured me it was not because I was not doing well as one of his two assistants.

We arrived at Invermay, north of the new cemetery at Ballarat North, on a Thursday afternoon. There were no immediate neighbours. The District Forester, Bill Hevey, was there to greet us, and he had a bright fire going in the one-fire stove in the kitchen, largely to heat water for the bathroom. He pointed out the open fireplace next to the stove and remarked that you might as well be in jail as have an unheated kitchen at Invermay. We gladly took up his kind offer to use the Friday to start settling into this old house standing in a triangle of paddock at a V-junction of two roads. The house, once the headquarters of Forester Ritchie, the first in four generations of Victorian foresters, had recently been moved from its original site in the Glen Park forest where it had stood for about 75 years. The piece of land at Invermay had been bought from a farmer by the Forests Commission for quarters and a store shed not long before. Bill Hevey, formerly from Smythesdale, said he stayed in the house only long enough to find a house of his own in Ballarat North, and to tell the Commission he and his wife would not continue to live in the quarters at Invermay.

The site at Invermay offered views past the volcanic hills to the north, and was a very windy place. Part of the Glen Park State pine plantation and the adjacent native forest up California Gully clothed the easterly skyline. Why were these quarters out in the paddocks? Its original site in the Glen Park forest was quite unsuitable in the 1950s. I was told that the Forests Commission had decided to buy the triangle to allow observation of traffic to and from the forest on either road. The views to the north and north-west over grasslands were extensive. The District and the Divisional general and fire stores were accommodated in large galvanised iron sheds at the rear of the block. This meant there was plenty of rainwater in galvanised iron tanks at the sheds for general use and also by the occupants of the quarters, after they pumped it up to the elevated house tank. The pump was a manual, low-down piston pump, bolted to a raised wooden platform. Ten minutes of steady pumping a day lifted plenty of water for two persons, but nothing for a garden. We had no electricity connected for nearly a year. There was no mail address nor a delivery of any sort. Being exposed, the quarters were blasted by strong winds. In a high wind the cotton carpet square

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would lift above gaps between the softwood boards of the living room floor, where it was not held down by a chair. If washing on the long clothesline was pegged on securely, lighter fabrics could rip. If pegged lightly, items could be scattered. Fortunately we obtained a rotary clothes hoist, which spun in the wind. We were able to develop a productive vegetable garden, thanks to a frequent fill (under gravity through the intake hose) of a Furphy tank with water from the fire tanker. I learnt quickly how many buckets a Furphy held.

I have laboured the domestic detail to record that moving from the excitement of Gippsland to a part-time teaching assignment was not accompanied by domestic ease or the amenities of living in Victoria's largest inland city.

On the Sunday evening after our arrival I phoned a relative in Creswick, whom I knew from my student days at Creswick from 1946 to 1948, to tell her we had just moved in, and would call in some time. I was astonished when she told me she already knew, and I would be in Creswick two days a week working at the School. I told her this must be fanciful gossip. She said no more, but revealed later that her informant was the Principal of the School, chatting to her after a service at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church at Creswick.

There was, too, a third element of set-back, which did not emerge until I found out what I had to teach, at a few hours' notice. I had held on to many university notes but had decided to be ruthless when packing for the westward move and threw out nearly all of them. Had I suspected what was in store, I could have kept a useful selection to give me a start.

On the Monday I reported to the District Office in the public offices in Camp Street, Ballarat, where the Inspector of Forests (later Divisional Forester) also had his office. After a few preliminaries Bill Hevey told me the Inspector wanted to see me. My pleasure at his courteous welcome was overwhelmed by the shock of what he had to tell me: see the Principal at the School to work out which two days a week I would be at the School as an instructor. Bill Hevey had not let on that I would be his part time assistant.

The District Forester reckoned that Monday and Friday at the School would suit my District work quite well, and I reasoned that it would be an advantage to have the week-end to prepare for the Monday, and then a span of four evenings for preparation before Friday. I also thought that three consecutive days in the district would be better than an interrupted week. The Principal accepted Monday and Friday.

I had to use our car to get to and fro, causing some hardship for my wife. Public transport into Ballarat was the tram, from its terminus at the end of Liddiard Street, about 2.5 km from the quarters.

When I say I had to use my car, I was told there was no vehicle for me to use and I was expected to use my car on mileage allowance. Remember, this was 50 years' ago and one's sense of obligation may be hard to believe. Certainly, I was easily bluffed by seniority and the call of duty, and only in very recent times have I wondered what would have been the result had I said of course I wanted to help with transport but my wife, now pregnant, and living far from public transport, required the car.

To this day I remain unconvinced that the Commission was reasonable to buy land cheaply from a farmer, and would not invest in one of the many vacant house blocks in Ballarat North or an existing house, near the tram terminus, where services included electricity, town water, town gas, postal and other deliveries, and a small shop or two within walking distance. The Invermay site provided surveillance of forest traffic and the store sheds, at no cost - to the Forests Commission. It was no pleasure to be wakened at six on a

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Sunday morning by a citizen of Ballarat demanding a licence for a trailer-load of dry firewood from the forest, tendering a bank note for which my wife and I did not have change.

## **Split Duties**

Since those times I have always had sympathy for anyone on split duties, let alone with caretaking duties over a government depot, including hand-pumping petrol for drivers of visiting official cars. I could not serve two masters without working on seven days of the week. Preparing lectures and going through test papers and assignments seemed to be never-ending. The district work required fire standby and firefighting, and, in the winter, supervision of scores of household firewood cutters in the Glen Park forest. Hundreds of residents of Ballarat used to cut green firewood in State forest every winter, and blocks were pegged out in hardwood stands to be thinned, so that each block would yield about 20 measured tons of 5-foot wood. The scene on a Saturday and especially a Sunday had echoes of the gold-rush days. The operations were orderly and well-controlled because of the close supervision provided, largely by the assistant forester, a novel addition to the staff of the District. There was no question in those days of time off in lieu or payment for overtime.

Split duties call for stamina and their acceptance may be a measure of an individual's submission to whatever his employer chooses to impose. Eddy's Law states that the sum of two fractional jobs in the one organisation exceeds the standard hours of one full-time job by many hours.

I became Acting District Forester when Bill Hevey retired. He was an apprentice wheelwright when the Great War broke out in 1914, but his master urged him to find other work after the war, because the days of horse-drawn vehicles were then numbered. In time, he qualified to become a district forester by examination. So, I ran the District when he left and continued at the School.

## **Transfer to Macedon**

Suddenly I was transferred to Macedon, for research duties, living in quarters in the Nursery grounds. This was not my choice. The house at Invermay was required for a District Forester on transfer from Broadford. He was a much older man, and perhaps due for some years in a quieter district. Perhaps the Commission did not want me to remain on the staff where I had been Acting DFO.

The work I had done at the School of Forestry had obviously been satisfactory, for I was required to travel to the School from Macedon; fortnightly for a double dose of lectures to cut down on travelling.

I had no official vehicle and did not relish indefinite use of our car for the trips to Creswick. When I needed to visit the research supervisor in head office I would walk to the Macedon station and take a train to Melbourne. The research projects which I took over from my predecessor required only the occasional use of a vehicle from the Nursery. Most of the work was focused on nursery stock or practices, or the adjacent plantations. I initiated a couple of small investigations in the short time I was there.

## **Another Move - to Maryborough**

Macedon did not last long; in fact the offer of promotion to Maryborough was telephoned from head office some six weeks after we had started to settle into the large comfortable old house in the attractive nursery grounds. That was the afternoon my wife had been invited to a meeting of the Country Women's Association, to get to know some locals. She was incredulous when I told her I had a choice; stay in

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research work or accept a field promotion. Partly unpacked tea-chests of books stood in the living room, reminding us how recent our moving had been. Would it be fair to impose another on my pregnant wife? Who could gauge my prospects in forest research? Was a posting to the Northern Division such a good idea? Maryborough was closer than Macedon to Creswick, so distance would not mean the end of my association there. We had until the next morning to decide. I would be the youngest DFO in the Northern Division by many years: most of the others were at least 25 years' older. Then there was the possible stigma if I said no. To refuse the district offer would have signalled a preference to follow a research road, from which there was no return to district work. To accept the offer could lead to a very beneficial transfer or even promotion within a few years. A phone call to talk it over with my father in Melbourne was very helpful.

I accepted, and we moved from the comforts of Macedon to two rented rooms in Maryborough, where building of quarters was expected to be completed within a few weeks. Progress was slow, and the builder did not try to conceal his neglect of the government job whenever private clients called for his attention. We tried to discount the immediate discomforts of our situation by painting our expectations in bright colours. The imminent birth of our first child spurred me to make some fuss to get the house finished, even in the face of patent lies by the builder to try to explain delays. The forces of the Commission's buildings branch seemed remote and unhelpful. Finally we were able to set a date with the builder to move our furniture from Macedon and occupy the house. What a scene that afternoon: the carriers being hampered somewhat by a plumber, two painters, and a carpenter putting finishing touches to the place. Such was the start of our time at Maryborough, which in the end proved to be interesting and satisfying.

## **Full-time Visiting from Maryborough**

The Commission required me to continue with teaching visits to VSF, which I found I could fit in with district demands quite well. Then in 1957 I was relieved of my duties at Maryborough, and was instructed to travel daily to Creswick to teach full-time, during the absence overseas of the Principal for the year. I was not asked whether I would like that arrangement. Once again I was called on to provide a car, but the mileage allowance enabled us to buy our first new car, a Holden. Again, my wife was without the use of our car, this time five days a week, but friends made in Maryborough were kind and helped her with rides here and there.

## **Planning Ahead**

I continued to enjoy the work, and came to think that perhaps there was a long-term place for me at the School. I enjoyed district work, but the prospect of frequent compulsory transfers had become unattractive: before we had been married two years we lived in five different houses at four locations. My wife and I began to explore what path I might follow to equip me to claim a position on the School staff.

Perhaps I sensed that the Commission or its advisers might have already formed a view about my future. The Commission owned and operated the School with the advice of a board which met annually at the School, the Board of Forestry Education being its later name, and the Commission jealously guarded its grip on staffing of the Department. So, there was no scope for wild cards in forecasting the source of future staff members. After A V Galbraith's long term as Chairman finished in 1948, all three members of the Commission were products of the Creswick school. This cemented the Commission's attitudes to affairs touching its operation and development. Further studies undertaken with the approval of the Commission looked to be expedient.

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To be brief, recognising that it would not be the best course of action to go for a postgraduate research degree then available in Australia, a professional degree from an overseas university seemed worth exploring. I had turned down the alternative of research work when I opted to leave a research assignment based at Macedon to take on the District Forester's post at Maryborough, a plum offer out of the blue for such a young forester. The outcome of my applications for overseas opportunities was shortlisting for scholarships which would take me to California or a nearby State for a year.

I got cold feet when I reflected on what a year's separation would mean to my wife and me, and two children. I happened to hear that the Chairman of the Commission would be in Ballarat at a Country Fire Authority display one afternoon, and I approached him between two of the events, to say I was shortlisted but would not like to disrupt my teaching at the School by applying to go away for a year if the Commission might offer me a position on the staff instead. His reaction was immediate and emphatic: "The Commission helps those who help themselves! Go for it!".

The new Principal (who was Acting during 1957) encouraged me to take up the opportunity for travel and further study. We had got on very well during the year. He was pleased with my teaching and also the office work I managed to fit in. He had no typist or administrative assistant, the previous one having left near the beginning of the year. I was able to make up wages and was familiar with all the stores and accounts procedures with which he and the one resident lecturer were unfamiliar and wanted to remain so.

Within a matter of days after his return from his visiting professorship in Louisiana the Principal had been appointed to a position in head office. I was transferred from Maryborough to occupy the vacated house at the School, in time for the birth of our daughter in June. (The house had stood unoccupied while the Principal and his family were overseas).

Late in 1958 I was on my way by ship to San Francisco, the Seventh Pacific Scholar of the English-Speaking Union, San Francisco Branch, also with a Fulbright scholarship covering travel there and back. I could not have afforded to take up these if the Public Service Board had not approved the Commission's recommendation to grant me leave on full pay.

After satisfying the requirements for Master of Forestry at the University of California, I travelled for six weeks, following an itinerary devised with one of the professors to cover a range of forest types and forest industries. In 2002 I still corresponded with him. His introductions to foresters and academics were invaluable. Being summer, the days were long and typically I would start the day with my host over an early breakfast, before heading off to the woods or industrial plants. An incidental bonus of the tour was the opportunity to take photos which turned out to be useful in some teaching.

## **Return from California**

I began to speculate late in 1959 whether times had changed at the School. The Principal might prefer to stick with the instructor who had stood in for me, a forester, of course, rather than to accept my return just like that. He had not replied to any of my short letters during my absence, although his wife wrote on their behalf. For my part, I felt geared up to take on whatever new opportunity might have arisen in the Department during the year and a bit. I had canvassed these ideas with my wife by letter. As it turned out, arrangements were cut and dried for me to return to Creswick and take up teaching again. I received a letter from the Commission's offices with an application form telling me to apply for the position of Senior Lecturer at the School. I applied, successfully.

## Adversity

The resident forestry staff at the School comprised the Principal, Senior Lecturer and one Lecturer. From 1960 until the end of 1966 the Principal soon made no secret of a dislike of me, and rubbed it into me and others on the scene, resident or visiting. Try as I might I could not work out what had gone wrong, and he refused to discuss it with me or give me a clue. The other teaching staff, including the science teacher seconded from the Education Department, dodged answering my pleas for illumination. This increased my anxiety that somehow I had failed badly in some way they could not discuss. Fortunately, in one respect, I was able to get an assurance from the Principal on one occasion that my work was better than satisfactory. He never signed an adverse report on me, else I would have been called on to explain.

I turned to the former Principal for advice, which turned out to be to accept the situation, because junior public servants always came off second best if they complained about their treatment. For seven years, he told me, he had found the other chap a most difficult fellow to deal with as his subordinate. He urged me to weather the storm, however long it might last.

Two or three times I applied for vacancies in head office, unsuccessfully. Small comfort to be told by the chairman of one interview panel that I was the best applicant for the job, but the Commission wanted me where I was. On two or three occasions I asked the Principal to recommend my removal from his staff, but he refused point-blank.

## Compensations

I must say that I found welcome compensations during the 1960s at the School. The classroom and practical teaching of interested and lively students was always absorbing. Although the working days were long, and duties were spread over seven days during term, there was time and energy left for several other interests. I belonged to the Apex Club of Ballarat, which held dinner meetings at Craig's Hotel, and its continual community projects included renovation of hutments and store sheds at 'Lingbogol', the regional Girl Guide camp at Creswick North, were opportunities for cheery companionship. Being the only Creswick member of the club, and the most proficient at planting trees and shrubs and looking after them, I took on extra chores at the camp from time to time. The Apex Club proposed the development of an open-air exhibit of gold mining equipment near Ballarat, on land near Yarrowee Creek. This idea was taken up with some excitement by its members, but no substantial support could be aroused in the historical society or the chamber of commerce. In retrospect it became clear that the club had nurtured the idea at the right time, for by 1969 the ambitious Sovereign Hill project was well on the way. I was active in the affairs of the Anglican parochial district of Creswick-Clunes-Newlyn, which resulted in friendships with many townsfolk and farmers in one of Victoria's most favoured districts. I attended and enjoyed the evening meetings of the Victorian Division of the Institute of Foresters of Australia in Parkville, even though the homeward trip up the highway of the time meant a late return, especially in winter. No other member of the staff was interested in going, nor was the District Forester stationed at Creswick. The Principal had declared he would never join an institute which did not admit diplomats of his School as corporate members.

## Drivers' Licences

I put a deal of time into helping students prepare for a test by the Creswick policeman for a driver's licence. Roughly half of them did not hold a licence, even well into their final year at Creswick. I thought it was almost imperative for the School to give them practical help to have the licence before they would be asked by their supervisor to drive on the job, wherever that might be. They would be expected to be drivers when

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they were posted to the field, and at most locations they would have scant opportunity to learn. Foresters had a very good record for few vehicle accidents or scrapes, and I felt impelled to do what I could toward that, and the personal safety of young men I respected very much.

They were in a tricky situation for the 1960s. They were forbidden to have a car at the School, and owning one was far beyond the funds of nearly all of them. A couple of students each year, or perhaps up to four of them, kept old cars at friends' places in Creswick. Those members of staff who knew about them kept quiet. It was unrealistic to expect a student to have lessons through a driving school at Ballarat. Apart from the fees, to arrange a time would have been extremely difficult. The Principal would not allow driving practice as a field work activity. The School had two VW microbuses, which were suitable for a learner, with me in the passenger seat, giving instructions and hints on safe driving.

We used to arrange short spells of driving outside class hours; on Saturday afternoon and Sunday, and before breakfast, after the evening meal, and sometimes after the evening study period ended at nine. Short frequent practice was a good way to develop skill and confidence in handling a vehicle. Our runs were on virtually empty roads, in the School forest and back streets of Creswick. I suppose the locals were wary when they spotted a microbus with the bright yellow L plates hung on it. Juggling the available time fairly tended to be sensitive when there were three students at different stages of competence eager for driving practice. Every trip was duly logged in the official book kept in each VW. Rarely was I able to take a learner into Ballarat to broaden his experience.

I would not take a student for his driving test by the Creswick policeman until I was confident of his ability to pass and he had practised driving under varied conditions. Unlike a driving school, which schooled a pupil to pass the test and that was enough, I took each student driving on dry and wet gravel roads, in the rain and at night. The contrast between night and daylight driving, especially in the forest or a pine plantation, surprised some students. The only fright I had was in broad daylight when a student failed to obey my instruction to slow down coming downhill on a straight stretch of forest road gravelled with rounded alluvial quartz. I still wonder how we got around the curve at the bottom without mishap. That particular chap was given a new car by his parents as soon as he left the School, and had been driving on Sirex wood wasp work for all of six months when he was in a collision on a highway in a car funded by the Commonwealth. I was put out one afternoon when visiting head office to be bailed up in a corridor by his supervisor (the chief entomologist) and the Commission's transport officer. They told me of the departmentally embarrassing accident, and asked me why I had not trained the forester better. My retort was, for me, pungent and spirited. There was a sequel in the 1970s when I arranged with the same transport officer to provide four-wheel drive instruction for students in steeper parts of the School forest. He chose to drive a Land Rover up to Creswick on many occasions, for a day or two at a time to do the job himself. He said he was impressed with the response to his instruction, and looked forward to incident-free driving by his pupils on remote roads and tracks. His chagrin when there were a couple of incidents involving two of them as driver was a petty antidote for the sting I had felt another day.

The knowledge test and the practical driving test administered by Senior Constable Jack Overington, nearly always during our lunchtime, were predictable. The hardest part was the start from rest facing uphill on Church Hill. Otherwise the driving was a breeze. The only student to fail the test came to grief on the gravelly slope: three times he stalled the engine when he failed to release the hand brake. In shame we returned to the Police Station to come again another day. That student had a policeman father. Did the uniformed figure in the rear seat of the VW unnerve him? On another occasion Jack put his foot wrong by remarking when we arrived at the Station for the preliminaries that when Alan brought in a student he knew

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he was ready to drive, so often did he see me out with a learner in the VW. That was my concern, that testing might become obviously perfunctory.

Driving practice came to an end in 1965, when one third-year student was well on the way to his practical test, but not quite ready by my standards. For some time the Principal had been grumbling about the miles covered by driving practices, deaf to the case I put for such cheap, timely preparation of his trainees for their future duties. One day he instructed that all driving practice by unlicensed drivers was to cease forthwith: no latitude to finish off the tail-ender for the year. I tossed up whether to offer him practice in my private car, but thought that would be provocative and I could not stand further alienation from the Principal. Also, there was the car insurance to think about.

I like to think that several foresters can still recall my interest in helping them in this way.

## **Relations with Other Staff and Students**

Fortunately my relations with the other staff at the School were cordial, with one exception. There was no row between us; merely his express wish not to be seen by the Principal talking to me. He said it did not suit him to be seen by the boss hobnobbing with me, because he had his own situation to preserve. [Not long after I became Principal, perhaps in 1970, there was a vacancy for a lecturer in forestry subjects, and the Chief of the Division that oversaw the School suggested that this man, then in a field posting, was suitable for the task, being already experienced in teaching. I rejected the suggestion. The Chief urged me to agree, relating that the chap had admitted he had dumped me in a former time, but he would give me unswerving loyalty if made a member of my staff. I was not prepared to take the risk, because to show true colours once was enough. I have never regretted my stance on that.]

The students? They were not only the reason for me being at the School but provided continuous good-humour and challenges to inspire hard work and imagination on my part to support their progress. They knew how many beans made five, and I tried to set an example to them of how one might cope in adversity.

## **An Enquiry by the Commission**

In June 1965 I was summoned to attend an interview with the Commission, and was told by the Principal that he had a similar appointment. He did not invite me to travel to Melbourne with him, so I simply drove down in my own car. It was uncanny to sit in the waiting room with him in silence. I wondered whether he had prompted the interview, or at least knew what was in store. The Principal was called in; then came my turn. The Commission had "heard disturbing reports of dissension" between the Principal and myself, and had decided to enquire into the situation. I answered a few questions as best and briefly as I could, stressing that I had no inkling of why I could not regain his favour, saying I started every day afresh in the hope that relations would improve. A Commissioner said that the Principal had not revealed what was wrong between us, and implied that there was no need for the Commission to take any action. I answered a few specific questions, was dismissed, and sat again in the waiting room. The Principal was recalled by the Commission, and then he came out and left the scene. I was told I could go home. Neither the Principal nor I ever mentioned a word of the interviews to each other. We simply drove home separately and the curious episode was past. One day I might set down what I now think I can identify as the causes of the unhappy years, but not yet.

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## **A Tour of Duty**

In November 1966 I was called to the Principal's office, to be told that he was rid of me, and I was to transfer to head office on a tour of duty for two years. I never heard an explicit reason for the transfer. I did not care to ask. My rough diary for the remainder of the School year included entries about offering my lecturing notes and teaching materials to members of staff to use if they wished. I did that in a spirit of helpfulness, not from vanity about their worth.

## **Postscript**

We were able to store in a back room of Tremearne House the furniture we could not take to a maisonette in Deepdene we moved into on 5 January 1967. Our son and daughter were able to enrol in schools close by. I caught a Latrobe Street tram in Whitehorse Road a few metres from the maisonette to take me close to the office opposite Flagstaff Gardens. It was a relief to put behind the almost daily put-down, to enjoy a little of city living, and to renew and make new working acquaintances. It was a novelty to have evenings free and no weekend work except what one brought home and chose to do.

I was welcomed into the Division of Economics and Marketing and within two days had enough work lined up to last for many weeks. When the allotted six months was nearly up, the Chief requested the Commission to extend my term by six months, because my performance had been creditable and there was still urgent work to be done. He insisted that I read his minute on my personal file recommending the extension. Things were looking up.

Assignments in the divisions of Forest Operations and of Forest Management followed, with fire-emergency calls into the Division of Forest Protection. Drought had well and truly set in by 1967, and it was exciting to be sent to fires in Gippsland and the Dandenongs. A long way from the classroom, the wood technology lab., the School demonstration forest, and the Creswick township.

During those two years I did not visit the School nor try to keep informed about events there. I had decided to focus all my working energies on the interesting tasks in hand instead of expending effort on trying to keep up with events at a place to which I might never return.