

My Cyclone Tracy Experience

Darwin.

Having spent 2 years in Alice Springs 1956-1958 I was under the impression that the NT was the greatest place in Australia. September 1958 saw me joining the RAN as a Radio Operator for a period of 12 years. Three of those years I volunteered for service at HMAS Melville Naval Wireless Station "Coonawarra", 1961, 1965 and 1968/69. That spelt the end of the Alice for me, I was going to live in Darwin on completion of my 12 years. Upon my discharge from the RAN I joined the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) in Adelaide on the understanding that I would work in Darwin on completion of a 6 weeks training course in Sydney. I arrived in Darwin December 1970, married in the United Church in Smith Street 13th April 1971. In 1973 I was offered a choice of 2 houses in the northern suburbs by the NTA Staff Section. The first offer was a previous tenanted house in the suburb of Jimgili and my other choice was a brand new house in the suburb of Wanguri. The new house won as my intention was to purchase this home and stay in Darwin, never to return south. The NTA and I agreed for me to purchase this house in October 1974. My biggest mistake then was to insure the house and contents through AMP. They fought me tooth and nail for seven months over settlement after Tracy. Here is my story...

Cyclone Tracy.

(Tuesday 24th) The recent airing of Cyclone Tracy 40 years ago on the ABC reminded me of the events of a night never to be forgotten. In those days I worked as a Communications Officer for the Dept of Civil Aviation at the Darwin Airport. My rostered shift was to finish at 8pm but the Supervisor let me go at 6.30pm. I drove home to my residence at 10 Weedon St, Wanguri parking under the house, I got out of the car, my neighbours called out for me to come over and have a couple and to stay for tea. My wife and our 2 children aged 20 months and 8 months were in Adelaide, having a break from the muggy wet season weather visiting our rellies.

I grabbed a few VB's out of the fridge and hopped over the fence into Dot and Len Browns, their family gathering of Alma the grandmother, son Leon and his family, their daughter Barbara and husband who were visiting from Melbourne with twin babies under 12 months old. The night passed away fairly quickly, everyone happy as the wind slowly started to get stronger as the clocked counted towards midnight. As I had a 6am start Christmas day I returned home around 11.45pm to sober up and get some sleep in my son's room, in his new bed. To me at the time I thought the wind was about 80k's, similar to Cyclone Selma that passed Darwin 2 weeks earlier.

(Wednesday 25th) I was woken very sharply around 1.30-2am when something struck the house and I realised that things were very serious, the house felt like it wanted to take off. The bed was saturated, two inches of water throughout the house and the roof was missing. Staggering out of bed I pulled on a pair of stubbies, slipped an old footy jumper on, thrust my feet into my ever trusty thongs and with my portable

radio headed for the living area. With each flash of lightning I looked out through missing louvres, the vision of debris flying through the air was staggering. The power and the noise of the wind was bloody terrifying. I reached the living room, it was in the process of breaking up, noticing the kitchen was already gone. Struggling to open the aluminium door I eventually made it out to the front porch and looked over at my neighbour's house and I was shocked at what I saw.

Their whole living area, walls and furniture had blown away, down to the floorboards. They were sheltering in the little passage between the toilet and bathroom with a battery powered light. I raced down our stairs and headed for the fence, when suddenly I was hit in the head by something, whatever it was it could not have been very big or I would have ended up with a split personality. It did hurt, leaving a gash in my forehead, picking myself up I continued over the fence and up the back stairs. Once again I struggled to open the door against the wind, upon opening the door I yelled out 'get out, you're gone'. They were shocked at the blood pouring out of my wound and spread all over my face from the wind. Grabbing one of the babies I said 'quick down to the laundry everyone and shelter in the store area'. Struggling against the wind with the baby I eventually made it and as the others arrived I handed it to her parents and went back up to grab Alma, Dots mother who at this stage had lost the plot and was screaming. Dragging her down the stairs and hanging onto the rail at the same time was hard going as Alma had no idea of where she was, eventually we made it, shoved her into the store and told her to sit in the corner and to shut up. Leon and I stood in the doorway watching the sky as each flash of lightning revealed more and more of the houses in our area slowly being torn apart.

We had no respite, the eye of the cyclone never passed over our area, we were on the outer limits of the Darwin urban sprawl. At daylight a figure staggered out of the wind and rain, it turned out to be Andy, our neighbour from behind, asking for help as the house next door to him had people trapped upstairs in the bathroom area and they couldn't get out due to the debris on top of them. Leon and I first had to clear the stairs to reach them and gradually we lifted the debris off them and threw it onto the ground below. There were 8 adults and children in the rubble. One lady had a broken collarbone with a baby zipped up in her jacket. We carried them downstairs, one at a time as they were unable to stand leaving them in the laundry area. Once they were all safe Leon and I returned back to his parents. It was during this time that I stepped on a couple of nails into the right foot, thongs do not help!

Glancing at my residence I noticed my XA Falcon Wagon had been blown out from under the house and the Sun Visor was hanging by one screw down the right hand side mudguard. The left hand side had been wind and rain blasted back to bare metal. The windscreen was so badly pitted it was difficult to see when driving into the sun, eventually I had to replace it. Surprisingly I had no other damage. My poor old EH Holden fishing ute was slammed into one of the house concrete pillars, the left hand side door badly dented. A sheet of roofing iron from somewhere was wrapped underneath and around the right hand side of the vehicle. My ally Dinghy which usually hung under the house above my ute had disappeared, never found it, god knows where that finished up, most likely in the Leanyer swamp where most of Casuarina ended up being dumped.

Our above ground swimming pool was torn in half and one half wrapped around the back neighbours Datsun 180B under his house.

Looking at the Brown's neighbours on the other side we were shocked to see the young couple hanging onto the toilet bowl holding a plastic clothes basket for protection laying on the deck of what was once a house. Clearing the debris off the stairs, climbing up to discover the wife was devoid of upper clothes and 9 months pregnant. She informed us her clothes had blown off during the night and was due to have her baby that day, I cannot remember their names now and I never found out if the baby was delivered safely. Looking at the toilet bowl I couldn't believe just how lucky they had been. Helping her down the stairs they joined us under the Browns place, where a blanket appeared mysteriously to cover the poor woman. We waited for the rain and wind to die down, looking around at the devastation that had resulted from Tracy. Slowly people began emerging from the rubble and the dazed looks on their faces, told a story of its own.

I could see my bar still standing in what was once our lounge area, my 3 foot fish tank still intact on the top, how that never got smashed is beyond me. Staggering through the mess I went upstairs and upon opening the bar cupboard found a bottle of whiskey, eleven packets of flagship tobacco and six packets of cigarette papers. I saw our cheque book laying in the mess on the lounge floor, picked it up, thinking it may come in handy, then glancing out what was once a window saw nothing but complete devastation. Threw the cheque book back on the floor thinking I am not going to be able to use it anyway. Returned to the Browns, the whiskey was demolished quickly, the tobacco was dry, the ciggy papers were slightly damp but could be peeled off and held up to dry, only to discover no one had a match. This was torture after what we had just been through. Around 10am a copper appeared in an old Toyota FJ40 and told us to evacuate to the Wagaman School as the cyclone was coming back. This was disturbing news and sent a shudder through everyone. Loading the pregnant lady into his vehicle, letting us use his cigarette lighter, he drove off into the debris laden street. Thus chain smoking had now become the order of the day.

Slowly trudging through the debris laden streets we headed to the Wagaman School. I can recall an HG/HT Holden station wagon parked in the school driveway with 5 wheels in the back. Thought it was rather odd at the time, but later on realised that somewhere someone's car was probably sitting on blocks. Suddenly my Milkman appeared in front of me and I asked him 'where's my 2 cartons of VB'. I used to get 2 cartons delivered every week and pay him when I paid the milk bill in advance. Don't know where he got them from, I didn't ask, the price was bloody fair at the time. His reply was 'I had 32 cartons upstairs last night, if you want any help yourself, they are all around the yard'. A day or two later thinking back about the wagon with the 5 wheels, it was probably my first sign of looting. The word was now out that the Police were on the lookout for 'Looters' and they would be shot if caught.

My stay at the Wagaman School was not pleasant, probably the same for all the other people who were forced to sleep on wet carpet. The toilets in the building were nailed shut because of health risks, no water for flushing, a large hole was gouged out by

D8 Dozers in the middle of the playing field for people to use in lieu. This of course upset the ladies but it was not a time to worry about modesty. The Army handed out sheets of industrial plastic to lay on, except when the edges of the plastic were depressed, the water seeped from the carpet wetting your clothes. The authorities had issued an instruction that there were to be no animals allowed. Some people disobeyed this instruction and were verbally abused, eventually leaving with their pets. I slept that night under some roofing iron on a school form seat in an outside area on my back praying the wind wouldn't blow and just let the rain fall straight down. Thus ended Christmas Day, it was so different!!!

(Thursday 26th) Cannot remember what I had for brekkie but ended up trudging back to my house to see what I could salvage. The fridge had blown over with the door open, spilling the contents over the floor, broken eggs mixed with VB cans - yuck. The pantry door was missing and all our tin food gone, sucked out by the wind. The upper cupboard doors were open, contents strewn over the floor and around the yard. The stove had fallen over and jammed against the lower cupboard doors, at least I had some cooking utensils left, the 4 drawers of knives, forks spoons etc were still intact. In the lounge area our 11cuft Ingus Freezer which was chocka block had the lid blown open. In those days we bought frozen bulk food from Farmer Jones store in Perth, freighted to Darwin by State Ships. Our last order prior to Christmas had been a 150kg's of meat, veggies, sweets and other goodies. As my family were away I had not used any of it.

The linen press prior to Christmas contained linen, glassware sets, unopened wedding presents. The upper doors were blown open, the pillows, blankets and bed covers sucked out. The lower linen press doors, one was torn off and the other open, contents sucked out except for one shelf with about 18 assorted crystal glasses. I could not believe it. Rubbish or rather some of the contents were spread over the ceiling rafters, the floor and around the yard in the mud. I cannot remember seeing the cheque book again. Looking at the bathroom next I saw that the bath was full of rubbish and dirty water. The Cyclone Warning people used to crap on about filling your bath with drinking water, what a load of bullshit. I considered that area of the house completely unsafe despite what the authorities advised about sheltering in your bath area. The children's beds were covered in gyprock from the ceiling, doors either blown off or open, most of the contents gone. Our bedroom was pretty much the same except the QB was fully covered in gyprock. I had some clothes but my wife had virtually nothing, hers had been sucked out.

Grabbing some garbags from the bottom kitchen drawer, then began salvaging anything I considered worth saving. Loaded eight sodden garbags into the back of the Falcon. Next I went through the store under the house, found my old camping stretcher and some camping gear. Salvaging anything that would come in handy, loaded into the car. Worried about looters knocking off my vehicles I decided to drive the Falcon to the Wagaman School. My poor old EH ute, I thought it would be safe wrapped around the pier. Returning to the school, I picked up Leon and drove to my milkman's house, rescuing some cans of VB from going rusty. This was to be my first ever and only, hot beer drinking episode. Back at the school, Dot and family had moved our stuff, eg, tin

food, eating utensils and plates, also our bits and pieces of bedding into the pre-school so I stayed there that night in my comfy stretcher. The roof was virtually still intact.

(Friday 27th) The streets were still being cleared of debris so I had not bothered going to work. The ABC were broadcasting names of people to be taken to the airport for evacuation. The pre-school was becoming an evacuation centre. Parents started arriving to register wives and children for evacuation, the building filled up rapidly. Dot hung onto her space and managed to feed us with food brought from our houses. A Pauls milk truck turned up and I couldn't believe the action of some of the women, swearing, pushing and shoving to get hold of some milk before the truck had come to a standstill. The bloody truck was full and there was plenty for everyone. This was one example of how people can rapidly change when normality disappears.

As the roads were still being cleared of debris the story got around that the Police were commandeering vehicles, handing you a piece of paper and taking off with your vehicle. I was not keen on this idea so did not venture away from the school but just helped out here and there wherever help was needed. That was to be last night at the pre-school, it had become too crowded. Tomorrow I would have to find myself some new digs.

(Saturday 28th) The school had a mobile generator and mobile freezer moved in during the night. This was my first hot breakfast since the blow, one desert spoon of scrambled eggs, a slice of bread with butter, a packet of Winfield and matches plus a cold can of VB. I thought life was great but after consuming that cold can, it became quite clear to me that I could never look at or drink another hot beer. Leon grabbed me to help get a woman out of a nearby house who had been there since TC started. Hopping into the back of a ute we went to her street, carried this poor woman out on a plank of wood. She had been speared in the stomach by a piece of wood, been forced to lay there until her cries for help were heard. We took her into the RAAF Base hospital as she wished to be taken to Alice Springs. Driving into the RAAF Base the sight of a DC3 sitting in the middle of the road, blown there from the aircraft hard stand area was unreal. The hospital reluctantly admitted the poor old dear and we returned to Wagaman.

Upon my return I said goodbye to Dot, Len and family, telling them I was going out to the airport to report in and find out what was happening. After a teary goodbye and promises to catch up again soon, I headed off. Driving into the airport off the Stuart Highway, crossed over the railway line heading for the Operations Building, I was then stopped by an armed Commonwealth Copper demanding to know where I was going and where was my ID. Told him I was heading to work and that my ID was like the movie 'Gone with the Effin Wind'. He told me to make sure I didn't go anywhere else and to proceed (this was due to those low life scum dressing up as women trying to jump onto the evacuation planes). By now the Southern Coppers were getting a bad name around the place, not much civility offered to Tracy victims, unlike our own NT boys. I disliked the fact that any suitable motel accommodation went to them while the people of Darwin who had suffered a horrible catastrophe were left to shelter under ruined buildings the best they could. In my opinion it was unfair!

I walked into the Annexe and was greeted at work by Gerry Wareham, who then told me to sign the book to register that I was still around, then he told me what had happened to date. To the best of his knowledge all staff were okay, a few serious injuries to some staff and families. Katherine had taken over our airspace. Some staff had relocated themselves to Katherine, one bloke turned up in Tennant Creek before the wind stopped blowing, others had headed south. There was nothing I could do as there was no power to the building which had to be reroofed first. All of the teleprinter equipment had been water damaged and were already showing signs of rust. During this period Barry Hayward turned up, another old navy mate. He had just evacuated his wife and children on a plane south to Sydney. We decided if we could find a suitable dry area, we would camp at work.

Heading back out to the northern suburbs I called in to see Jim Eagles in Wagaman, another close navy mate. Jim and his neighbour were out the front talking to a couple of NT coppers who they had just finished shooting their dogs. Both Jim and Lew had evacuated their families south earlier that morning. They were discussing arrangements to drive south to Brisbane and Sydney. Barry and I then headed to his place in Nakara grabbing whatever he could. Checked my cousin Don's place in Goodman St, Nakara at the same time. I was shocked, no house, no floor just the RSJ beams sitting on piers, the floor landed on his neighbour's house behind. Were Don and his family alive, I had no idea. Returning to the operations building the Radio Tech's then quashed any idea of camping there so we made the decision to head to Adelaide ourselves.

After registering with the appropriate authorities in the city and receiving the necessary paperwork, filled up with petrol, then headed down the Stuart Highway. Whilst driving down the highway through Parap, noticed people had turned on water outlets of the Manton Dam-Darwin pipeline and were showering. The only restriction was your privates had to be covered. At the 17 mile, turned into Kowandi Defence station to catch up with Brian and Marylyn Nichols and family, more navy. They had suffered little damage, a couple of broken louvres, some trees down. After ensuring we had something to eat Marylyn asked me to give them in writing permission to enter my abode to salvage whatever they could. Gave Brian the keys asking him to rescue my EH ute. Said goodbye around 11pm, then Barry and I headed off, stopping somewhere later on the side of the highway for a kip on the front seat.

(Sunday 29th) Driving through the dawn to find the highway was blocked at Pine Creek with a Policeman directing us into their small township. The idea was to make sure everyone had a good feed before heading off to Katherine. Some local station people slaughtered beef to ensure there were no empty bellies leaving Pine Creek. While eating a steak Sergeant Graham Bowning came up and said hullo, I had known him since he joined the Police and was stationed in Alice Springs when I lived there. Graham noticed a 7 ton truck pulling in covered with a tarpaulin, he got up and walked over to the truck, pulling back the tarp we saw beds, washing machines, kids toys, fridges and whatever. Graham arrested the driver and took him over to police Station. When he came back he informed me the bloke would be charged with looting. Bid him goodbye and headed off to Katherine not knowing when we would catch up again.

Pulling into a Katherine Servo, filled up, grabbed some ice, some eats and headed off. No money was needed thanks to the paperwork we carried. A couple of hours later I pulled over for a toilet break, Barry pulling up behind also when low and behold out of the bush staggered two blokes with an esky. They wanted a ride to Tennant Creek, as they were both smashed, we decided it should not be a problem and agreed to take them. Pulling into Dunmara for petrol, food and toilet relief my passenger insisted on buying me a carton VB cans for the ride. When he came back with the carton he also had an expensive leather bound stubbie holder for me. Thanking him for his kind gesture we hit the road again. Arriving in Tennant Creek about 4.15pm, all evacuees were told to line up in a lane behind the main street for petrol. This was pumped out of 44 gallon drums. My passenger was happy, thanked me for the ride and headed off with his mate. They were Jackeroos and had been paid off from some station.

When we both finished filling up, receiving the all clear from the local authorities headed out to the airport. Brian Scherr was on duty, another ex- Darwin boy and Jimmy Ward the OIC, they made us a cuppa and once we were comfortable, they asked about our experiences. Brian invited us to his place for dinner. They allowed us to have a hot shower and set up our beds in the equipment room, showed us where we could make a cuppa in the morning prior to an early departure. The dinner at Brian's was greatly appreciated with a couple of cold VB's, then we left to return to the airport for a good nights sleep.

(Monday 30th) Getting underway at 5am, had an uneventful trip to the Alice arriving around 11.30am. We reported in to the Alice High School as instructed by the road block people, were informed our cars had to be inspected before we could drive the dirt road to Port Augusta. Leaving the cars in the hands of the mechanics we started to walk to the main drag only to be passed by a vehicle which made a sudden u-turn, the driver screaming out 'Kevin'. It was to my surprise a girl I'd known in the navy many years ago and she had been our house sitter for us in Darwin 15 months ago. Veronica leapt out of her car and grabbed me saying 'I was worried about you and your family'. Explaining to Ronnie that I was on my own, Anne and the kids were in Adelaide. Ronnie had returned to the Alice before we accepted the new house in Wanguri and she was unaware of our new residence. She was staying at her brothers, who was a 'truckie' and was away at the time. Once again, repeated our story and our adventure down the Stuart Highway. Ronnie provided lunch which was greatly appreciated.

I had no money on me so I was informed told to head to the CES office and register for a handout. Filled in the paperwork, received \$62 to last me for the journey to Adelaide. Back to the school where the cars had passed inspection, given the all clear hit the road. Filled up at a local garage and the owner was upset when we informed him we did not have to pay being Tracy evacuees. He still refused so I told him to contact the people looking after Tracy Evacuees. After much argument he was instructed to let us go, he would be paid by the Tracy Fund. Stopped at the Gap on the way out for a couple of Hamburgers. Only 7 miles of bitumen left now and then we were on the gravel road. The drive to Kulgera in the dark was no problem arriving around 11pm. The pub was pretty busy and the Police were in attendance. Filled up for the last time on free petrol, bid goodbye to the NT and headed for the SA Border.

(Tuesday 31st) Sometime in the early morning we pulled over at Marla Bore and camped in the vehicles. Dawn broke with a windmill happily pumping water close by, a clear sky for the day. Somewhere near Welbourne Hill we came across a Salvation Army post, set up to help evacuees with tea, coffee, new tyres and puncture repairs. Good old "Salvos". Never expected to see that but they were greatly appreciated. Just out of Coober Pedy I got a flat, changed tyres and on arrival had it repaired. While that was being done we went to the pub and had a counter lunch. No one was interested in us, we were completely ignored. Paid for my puncture repair, filled up and headed out of town. This was where the \$62 came in handy. At Mt Eba Station a sign was posted indicating Tracy victims had clearance through the Woomera Rocket Range. This was a great saving in both mileage and time plus the road was in great condition.

Arriving at Woomera around 4pm, the road block people directed us to one of their Sports Club where volunteer people looked after us. They had tables with clothes spread out, grab anything you may need, toilet gear, choice of a hot meal with sweets and lots of beer. The committee would not take any money from us so what can one do, appreciate all their good work and tuck in. There were a lot of Darwin people there including two blokes we worked with, Phil Harris and Bob Rogers. Around 8pm on the road once again bound for Pt Augusta just after 11pm, no more dirt road. A Police road block checked our arrival, taking some details from us then we were escorted to the Willsden School to rest up. The volunteers wanted to billet us out for the night with local people, we refused and slept in their hall under the tables loaded with clothing.

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(Wednesday 1st) After brekkie Barry and I headed off for Port Pirie where we separated, he continued on to Adelaide and I headed to Kadina where my parents lived. On arrival at the house Anne had just been informed by the local constabulary that I was alive but they did not know of my present whereabouts. I had asked 3 or 4 people evacuated out of Darwin by air to send Anne a telegram telling her 'house gone, all gone but am okay'. She never heard from anyone and when she rang DCA in Adelaide enquiring as to my safety, the standard answer was 'to the best of our knowledge all staff in Darwin are okay'. Anne and mum pulled the 8 garbags out of the car, spreading the contents on the grass to start drying out and then mum started the process of washing the lot.

By this time I was in deep trouble, those nails in my right foot had now sent a red flash up my leg into the groin area and I was having trouble getting around. I had tried to get a Tetanus injection at all the major places on the way south but was told 'we have run out'. Anne located a local Doctor who quickly assessed my condition and gave me an injection and told Anne to take me home and put me to bed, give him these pills and if he throws up don't worry about it, make him rest and continue taking the tablets and fluids. At the time I was shocked to learn that if I had not received attention then, I was in great danger of having my right leg amputated. Never did get any stitches in my forehead either, had a white scar for a long while. After a few day's rest, told my parents I was feeling a lot better and intended to go Adelaide and go back to work.

(Monday 6th) On arrival in Adelaide visited the Royal Adelaide Hospital to check out my leg on arrival, I was given the all clear. My father-in-law had arranged for us to stay with his lady friend while we began the task of what happens next. First up the CES to get some money only to be told as Anne and the children had not gone through TC Tracy they were not entitled to anything. I had had my fortnightly allowance paid in Alice Springs which was to last me for 2 weeks. Next up the Commonwealth Bank for some of cash from our Darwin account. Having no ID, the female enquiry officer was giving me a hard time when a man stopped and looked at me and said 'Kevin', looking at him I said 'G'day Harry'. We had grown up in Port Augusta as kids and his brother John Kernahan had been in my class. Harry asked what my problem was and I explained to him about having no money and wanting some out of my Darwin account. Harry told the teller 'give him what he wants', her face said it all, it's not what you know, it's who you know. The next step was to go to the teller for the cash, low and behold Robert Mullen said to me 'Hi Kev', another Port Augusta bloke whose younger brother Ray had gone to school with me and we had also worked together in the PMG on leaving school. A brief conversation with Bob, then I accepted some cash. The next stop was to the AMP Office to lodge both contents and house claims. The contents would be paid out in 5 weeks but the house was another matter, had to be assessed by an assessment officer which was fair enough.

I visited the DCA offices in Grenfell Street about working back in Adelaide for the time being. First up the pay officer wanted to see me. Sitting in his office I was asked a lot of questions about what had happened in Darwin, why didn't I go out to the Alice Springs Airport as the Manager was holding \$10,000 to assist anyone driving south. Told him that I was unaware of any help being available in the Alice and had used the CES. He was not impressed on hearing how I was treated. He asked did I need any more money and I told him not at the moment but I may in the future. I needed to find a place to rent for now until our future could be planned out. My car had been taken to the smash repairs for a paint job, luckily my father-in-law lent me a motor vehicle.

Looking at the real estate each morning in the Advertiser resulted in placing an application for a two bedroom flat in Unley. There were a lot of applicants, the phone rang around 8pm to be informed that we had been lucky and could rent the 2BR unit. DCA paid the \$600 bond and the first month's rent which was of tremendous help. Once my contents money was paid I would be able to clear this debt. Life started to take some sort of normality except we did not own anything, work was a problem, too many people working in a small area. Caught up with my old school mate Ray Mullen and his family, his brother Bob had told him where we were staying. It was good to talk about our schooldays growing up in Port Augusta.

(Monday 13th) Starting work at Adelaide Airport I was asked if I was interested in going back to Darwin as they needed staff urgently to get the Comm Unit running again. My answer was yes, I was then taken by car to the Dept of Labour, issued a pass for my return to Darwin. Anne was unhappy but understood my desire to get back soon as, try and sort out our problems and to enable them to eventually return. My mate Ron Beaumont and his wife Pat came around to see Anne and I that night. We had joined the navy together in Alice Springs 29 September 1958. On one leave period in Adelaide I

introduced him to my cousin Pat and they ended up getting married. Ron worked on the ABC site for Radio Australia on the Cox Peninsular upon his discharge, purchasing their NTA house in Alawa. They returned to live in Adelaide as we were moving into Weedon St. Anne was to pick up the Falcon when it was repainted and to use it for herself and the kids.

(Tuesday 14th) Prior to boarding the aircraft Don Hodder from Darwin asked me if I would go around to his house in Rothdale Road, Moil and see if his car was still under his house. Boarded the DCA aircraft at 8am for my return with 10 other fellow Darwinites, plus a lot of freight strapped down where seats had been removed. The flight in the F27 took over 8 hours with a brief stopover in the Alice to refuel, lunch loaded, we were on our way again. Experienced a rough ride through an electrical storm between Katherine and Adelaide River, finally arriving over Darwin in clear weather. The pilot flew around Darwin and Casuarina before landing to show us the path of Tracy's destruction, an impressive sight from the air. After landing at the terminal I was met by Brian whom I had arranged to stay with.

First up I went over to the Ops Building to see my boss Eric Bergholtz who was most happy to have me back. He had enough people to commence 24 hour coverage passing traffic to and from Sydney via Telex. Happy with my roster, leaving the Airport I asked Brian if we could head out to Rothdale Road so I could check on Don's Holden Wagon. Low and behold it was still under his house, the right hand window wound down but the interior was dry. I hopped in it and turned the ignition switch on and surprisingly the car started straight away. Told Brian I now had a set of wheels and would follow him back to his place. Sent a telex message to Don Hodder telling him I had wheels. Marylyn and the kids were happy to see me. They had been up our place a few times and salvaged the freezer, lot of bits and pieces and our Church Wedding Certificate, all the amendments I had written on the back were gone. The ink washed away. Never did find my cheque book. My EH was not under the house on their first visit, some mongrel apparently had a greater need, a bit upsetting at the time. The Freezer had a full bottle of Airwick in it trying to erase the smell. Brian and Marylyn were happy for me to stay with them while I returned to work.

Back at work there were two messages for me from close navy mates, one from Tony Miles in Brisbane, another from Tony Sullivan in Derby, offering help and money. When not at work I visited home poking around the ruins, looking under the rubbish, throwing more rubbish out on the verge. It was a very lonely place, no one around, bit spooky at times. A couple of times I was challenged by Security People checking to see if I was a looter. Once I proved who I was they left wishing me all the best. At the end of January I eventually got the Army in and they cleared my block for me at the same time saving anything of value. My garden was looking worse for wear so I began cutting the grass, pulling weeds, trimming the shrubs and trying to straighten trees. The hanging baskets under the house needed some tender loving care. I had called into the AMP office and was waiting for an assessor to assess the damage.

DCA rented the North Australian Haulage Quarters over the other side of the Stuart Highway from the Ops Building and I was allocated a room sharing with another

worker. Gerry Wareham was made Manager of the Hostel and did a great job, they gave him the keys to one of the Falcon Wagons outside the Ops Building. The vehicle wouldn't start, lifting the bonnet to discover that the complete motor had been knocked off. Thanked Marylyn and Brian for letting me stay with them. Occasionally I would visit the Marrara Pub for lunch and again for tea. They were open for two hours each session, no drinks until you ordered a meal. Drinks and smokes were on the house, guess old Gough was covering the bill at this stage. Eventually this had to come to an end, when Woolworths opened in the City. DCA started to charge me full board so I found things were getting tough financially. Still paying for Anne and the kids in Adelaide and me as well was not good. My boss Eric offered me a Departmental house in Rapid Creek. After checking it out, thought it could be cleaned and made habitable, the Navy had temporarily reroofed the dwelling. Dutchie Phillips and his wife were living there in a caravan in the backyard and they were transferring to Ceduna in SA. I agreed to take it.

Came across my old mate Jim who had just returned from Sydney, he worked at the Met Bureau. Told me he was camped in a dormitory at the Rapid Creek School and it was not very good. Made him an offer, if he helped me clean my DCA house he could move in, this he promptly agreed to. It took 8 days of hard work getting rid of the mould everywhere, scrubbing floors, walls, ceiling and cupboard's. When clean I went back to Weedon Street, I pulled all the gyprock off the bed and there was the basket of clothes I had taken of the clothes line before going to work on the 24th. They had been protected from the wet as well as the bed, it truly was unbelievable. The bedspread, sheets, pillows, mattress and base were all totally dry. Good old gyprock came in handy after all. Carted the lot over to 1025 Norcock Place in Rapid Creek, informing Jim that I had a bed. He managed to get a bed from his place. After moving in, we decided to go to the Raid Creek School once a day for a hot meal, \$1 for breakfast and \$2 for dinner or tea, this worked out well. We had an esky containing butter, vegemite, bread, milk and our diet food of VB's. Our only light at night was a little kerosene lamp hanging from a fan. Visited the ice works every day for a bag of ice on the way home from work or Jim would do it.

The southern states Lions, Apex Clubs just to name a couple, donated portable generators for people without power, flown to Darwin by the RAAF on the Hercules transport aircraft. I put my name on the list and waited patiently to be allocated a generator. Checking periodically, there were never any available, try again later. People who had generators were expected to return them when their power was restored. This did not happen in many cases with excuses of it was on the verandah when I went to work, someone must have taken it or it was under the house and when I came home it was missing. Funny the number of fishing camps that had generators in the 'Dry Season'.

Each time the F27 came up from Adelaide, food, fruit and beer would be dropped off for the staff, donated by fellow works at the Adelaide airport. The brew room fridge was always well stocked. I was able to have a hot shower at the start of my shifts. The Supervisor had a phone on his desk which we could use to ring our families in the southern states, keeping in mind to keep the calls reasonably short, not to abuse this

privilege. We were even allowed to have a TV in the office and keep an eye on the test cricket.

Volunteering to help others on my days off kept me occupied. Workers turned up one day and fully rescreened the house and replaced missing louvres which had a habit of falling to the ground when opening them. The window frames were slightly out of whack. Quite often I would visit empty houses, grab a few spare louvres, stow them under the house in the store. Our Wanguri place was starting to look good garden wise now I looked after it, cutting the grass every week, watering when necessary.

Finally an assessor from the Insurance Pool turned up at Weedon St. This bloke was from Sydney and had no idea of Darwin's reliance of building materials brought in from southern states, higher freight costs etc. First up he offered me \$16,000, the stove and clothes line were fixtures and not included in his figures. Pointed this out to him thinking that this bloke was supposed to be a professional. I refused his offer as the place was insured for \$24,600 and I wanted the full insured value. A fellow neighbour from my Smith Street Government Flat days told me that I should consider getting an engineer's report. Followed John's advice and requested an engineer's report. A short time later I received a letter from AMP stating the engineer's assessment was \$17,600. I still refused to sign the release.

Sometime in March I heard a truck pull up in Norcock Place and upon investigating found a crew from Wollongong starting work on the power lines. Asking one bloke how long will it be mate, his reply was about a week. Offered them a VB with the excuse 'it's hot out here, do you blokes want a coldie'. They were only too happy to have a short break and a cold refreshment. A week later when the power was ready to be reconnected, I was the first one in the street to be connected. The old VB trick, it worked again, better than money. Now I had power it was time to arrange for Anne and the kids to return to Darwin.

Not long after the Greek Liner Patris berthed my boss informed that I was wanted at NTA Staff Section. At the end of my shift I went to their office in Mitchell Street and asked 'did you want to see me'. They asked if I was living in the house when TC struck, said no the Dept had placed me in it. The clerk then said 'your'e a squatter, you will have to get out and live on the Patris'. I knew that Ray McHendry the boss of the NTA had issued an instruction about 'Squatters' but considered my Dept knew what they were doing. Telling the clerk to jam the Patris up her backside I stormed back to the airport and told Eric I wanted a transfer to Adelaide, there was no way I was living on a ship with two very young children. My wife and children were due back to Darwin at this stage. Eric said to me, 'slow down, your'e not the only one, there are 6 of you in the same predicament, 2 ATC, 2 FSO and 2 Comm Officers. As luck would have it, the First Assistant Secretary of DCA from Canberra was in Darwin and when he heard about our situation he demanded a meeting with McHendry.

The Secretary told McHendry that he could not operate Darwin Airport without sufficient staff and if we were evicted the airport would be shut down. McHendry told him that he could not do that. The Secretary told him that he could and there would be no more R and R flights in or out of Darwin. McHendry immediately saw the problem he

would have with angry Darwin residents if the R and R flights were cancelled, he backed off giving permission for the six of us to remain in our allocated houses. A short time later I was given permission to stay in writing and immediately arranged to have a few copies photocopied just in case.

Good old TAA arrived from Adelaide on a Saturday at the end of March bringing my family back. As I was considered staff they allowed to walk out to the plane and help Anne and the 2 little ones back to the terminal. Anne told me that she put the car on the train in Adelaide and should be here in about a week. The railways will notify me when I could expect the car. On the day the car arrived, I drove down to the wharf area where shunting was taking place. My car was going backwards and forwards while I waited. The Diesel Engine pulled up where I was standing and a voice from the cab said 'what the bloody hell are you doing Ruwie'. Looking up I saw Bob Green, another navy bloke I had served with 7 years ago on HMAS Derwent. Told Bob that I was waiting for my car, which one Bob said, the brown Falcon I replied. On speaking to the Shunter, the train was split, my car delivered to the unloading area. Told Bob thanks and I'd catch him later on. Checked the car over, signed the paperwork and was given the keys. It was great to have my own wheels back.

On arriving back at Rapid Creek, Don Hodder turned up and wanted his car back, he had a pass to stay for 5 days to salvage anything from his house. Talk about great timing, as there were no keys told him it's all yours and thanked him for the loan, it had come in very handy. He told me if I wanted anything from his house that I could use I was welcome to take it. Calling in on the way to Berry Springs for the day, went into the house and had a look around. His Christmas tree was still intact with his children's presents still wrapped under it. All he wanted was a cap given to him by his grandfather at some pommy football final when he was a kid. Telling him I would take the fridge we headed to Berry. On our return there was nothing left on his block. He had the army clear the place, ropes around the piers, pulled it down, scooped the lot into trucks and dumped at Leanyer. There went his offer of the fridge. Unbelievable, could not understand him, the house could have been fixed for someone to live in.

Life never became normal again, there was always someone contacting me to sign them in to spend 5 days salvaging anything of value plus can I stay at your house. Anne was not happy with the constant visitors but I made it clear that if they stayed they looked after themselves. As each one departed south they kindly left me a fridge or a washing machine, sometimes both saying, 'here Kev you may as well have it rather than throw it out'. It did not take long for my place to start resembling Steptoe & Son out of the ABC comedy. Sometimes at work I'd here someone say they wanted a washing machine or a fridge. My new venture now was I can get you one for a carton of VB! Barry Hayward was one of the early ones and when he was leaving I bought his Datsun half ton ute, Anne and I both now our own wheels.

Now I had a new problem, both the kids liked playing downstairs but there was a problem with louvres falling from above and small debris on the ground still. I'd removed the front fence from Weedon St and it was still in our store, also the 60 concrete slabs and some 16x8 patio cement slabs I'd used around the yard. I gradually

moved the lot to Rapid Creek in the little ute it, took a few trips. My cousin Don called around and gave me a swing for the kids our grandfather had made in the blind school in Perth. I hung that up under the house. He was now working with NTA based in Brisbane. We now had to put up 3 lots of bullshit, Canberra, Brisbane and Darwin. The three of them left a lot to be desired as far as communications went. Don was in the Draftsman Office so I didn't pick on him. After fencing in the back area under the house, laid the concrete and patio slabs to have decent entertaining area. On one of my trips to Leanyer I knocked off a bath, bought it home and set it up for the kids to play in. Every night I would pull the plug and water the plants, had installed some piping to allow me use the waste water on my veggie patch.

AMP sent me letter saying they had a Surveyor survey the house and came up with a new offer of \$19,000. Knocked it back again, back to square one. The Surveyor rang me at work one day asking me why I would not sign the release. Told him I considered the damage to my house to rebuild would cost the full insured amount. He replied okay I will go back and have another look. I asked him when and I would meet him there. The Surveyor was friendly enough and we walked around together, I pointed out things like the breezeway brick wall in the laundry would fall with a slight push. The concrete piers under the house had moved. Another breezeway brick wall at the end of the house was not cemented to the piers, just sitting there waiting for a strong breeze to knock it over. In the end he said ring my office tomorrow at 11am and I will have a favourable reply. Rang his office on the dot and he said I have reconsidered and giving you the full amount plus the 6 months motel rent in lieu of 12 months stated in the contract if the house had to be rebuilt. We accepted his offer.

As I was starting to get a bit jaded by now from helping visiting people in their houses, removing fridges and freezers full of mould, it was starting to get to me, the smell was no longer tolerable. Decided one of the R and R flights being offered would be just the ticket. Requested and was given a flight to Perth return for the four of us. Stayed with Anne's adopted parents in Mosman Park for a week. During our visit Nell babysat the kids while Anne and I looked at homes. Found one in Maddington we liked, decided a transfer to Perth would be ideal. On our return to Darwin we made an appointment at the Commonwealth Bank for a housing loan. Because I did not have a credit rating I was knocked back. Unbelievable, we had \$25,000 in the bank at the time. Decided to change banks but the ANZ advised us not to, just find a better manager. We would need to bank with for 6 months before they would give us a loan. I thanked him for the advice, it made sense.

A trip around Weedon Street shortly after really hurt me. Some bastard had been around and knew about my exotic plants under the front stairs. I couldn't believe it, the whole lot had been dug out and taken, leaving holes where they once stood. This rotten act brought to my knees, I shed some tears and was down on everyone in Darwin who had rebuilt their home and wanted an instant garden. Driving around checking out restored gardens, especially those people that knew I was a keen gardener. I never found where my lovely plants finished up. Now I had no choice but to apply for a builder's pole and rent the block out. Once the pole was installed, a young couple with small children replied to my advert. He was in the building trade so I gave him

permission to demolish the remains of the upstairs area, using any materials to build in underneath. They remained on the block until I sold it back to the Reconstruction Commission.

Not long after Jim asked if Angus, a workmate could board with us he was having accommodation problems. After a short discussion with Anne it was agreed Angus could stay as long as he contributed to our living costs. He was no problem, very quiet, tidy in his habits and fitted in well. Jim and Angus shared a room as the children had the other room. Ralph Franklin who was in Port Hedland requested a 5 day stay to check his house and see if he could rebuild it in Moil. I agreed to his request as Ralph was not only a talker but he was a 'doer' as well, he had given me a lot of help in the past. Ralph thought the house repair would be okay, returning to Hedland to arrange his transfer back to Darwin.

Sometime shortly after this I applied for a Reg 98 airfare for an R and R flight to have another break from Darwin. Telling our next door neighbour Nancy I was thinking of heading south for bit of R and R, she worked at a Travel Agency and advised me to get a warrant to go to Singapore. This was quite a common practice for Darwin people in those days. When I received the warrant, gave it to her and she would arrange our trip for us. I followed Nancy's instructions, handing the warrant over to her on receipt. Nancy arranged for the four of us to fly to Derby (5 days) stay with Tony and Shirley Sullivan, thank them for the offer of money after Tracy. Then onto Perth (for 4 weeks) with a hire car, staying with relatives and visiting Anne's girlfriend Trish and husband Colin for a week in Bunbury. Flew to Adelaide (one week) staying at the Taft Motel in Glenelg, then return to Darwin. I don't know how she wangled it but I did not ask any questions. Having Jim and Angus with us, they looked after the house.

While Nell looked after the kids again while Anne and I started house hunting again eventually finding a 4BR in Beckenham. Asking the agent if he knew of a friendly Commonwealth Bank manager. He said he had one at Cannington and made an appointment for us. The manager was very approachable and approved our loan straight away under the proviso we had to live in it and not buy it or an investment. We assured him that transferring to Perth was not a problem for me. I felt like going back to the Darwin Branch and telling the loans officer there what I thought of him and his credit rating but Anne said let it go.

No sooner did we get out of the car upon our return, Ralph pulled up with a caravan and his family to stay. I only signed for his return, did not expect Denise and his two girls. Anyway they set the caravan up in the back yard. Denise was of Mauritian descent, started to get on Anne's nerves after awhile. Cooking her meals in the kitchen leaving different strange odours, always jumping in early. Anne was frustrated at this because our two children would have to wait until Denise was finished. Her girls teased Peta with spooks and stuff which gave her nightmares. I was told by Anne to help Ralph work on his house as much as possible, the sooner it's repaired, the sooner they are out of here. It took 6 weeks in total.

There was a pile of rubbish in the yard which I kept adding to and tried to burn without success. A D8 Dozer team were working in the area so I asked them if they

could remove it for me and I would them a couple of 6 packs. They agreed and within half an hour I had a clean yard. Then my neighbour Ron who was the manager arranged a tipper with a 5 ton load of good soil to be delivered. Forgot to add that the D8 driver noticed something flashing in the heap, stopping he got down and picked the object up. It was a glass jar full of round 50cent pieces. He was kind enough to open the jar and give Anne half a dozen of them, he took the rest. Someone must have been a keen collector. At least they didn't finish up in the melting pot like a lot of 50cent coins did.

Watching the TV one night, I heard a knock on the door around 8pm. Getting up out of my chair, turning the Porch light on, I opened the door to see a little clerk with a clipboard and a big NT copper behind him. I asked him what was his problem and he replied 'you were not in this house when Cyclone Tracy hit, therefor you are a Squatter and have to vacate the premises'. Told this upstart to stay where he was, went back inside and grabbed a copy of the approval from McHendry, went back outside and handed it to him. He replied 'I know nothing about this', I replied 'that's your Effin problem', turned the light off and shut the door leaving them in the dark. Christ was anyone going to leave us alone!

Jim my mate old mate was not much better, he never told the Met Bureau he was boarding with me. They were under the impression that 1025 Norcock Place was a Met Bureau house. On a Sunday morning I had a visit from another little clerk who asked me 'does Jim Eagles live here'. Told him yes and he came out with 'we need this house for a Meteorologist and we would have to vacate the premises'. Unbelievable, another dickhead who hadn't checked with Jim first. Anyhow after telling him that it was a DCA house, gave him the short shift with two words, the 2nd one ending with the word off.

We still had the occasional visitor but passes for entry were no longer required. My Steptoe collection under the house was still growing. Purchased an ally dinghy and outboard on a special deal in Cavanaugh Street. Now old Ralph came in handy to weld a frame on the ute to carry the dinghy on. Once that was completed I chucked an old tyre in the back to rest the outboard motor on, had room for some crab pots, now I was ready to tackle Buffalo Creek. It was nice to catch a few of mangrove crabs again. Chased barra in the river below Manton Dam wall but I did not have any luck there.

Ronnie my friend from Alice Springs arrived from Indonesia looking for a bed if possible. Told her not it was not a problem stayed for a bit more than a week. Unfortunately she had picked up some kind of flu like virus overseas and then spent the whole week in bed whilst Anne nursed her. Once she was better I showed Ronnie around at what was left of the Darwin that she once knew so well. Ronnie had been a WRAN at Coonawarra in 1965 and was shocked to see her old quarters, the top floor was totally destroyed. Drove her around through the various suburbs so she could asses for herself just how bad Tracy had been.

My transfer to Perth was underway with a departure date at the end of November. Suddenly Malcolm and Gough had a little spat in Canberra and cancelled supply, money was stopped to all government departments. The day of our uplift no one turned up, Anne decided to ring the Airport clerk to find out what was happening, the packers had not turned up. His reply was there is no money for transfers and they

had cancelled ours that morning. Anne was shocked, rang me at work to relay the bad news. Deeply shocked I visited Bruno St Lucia the airport clerk and asked him what the score was. Poor old Bruno, he was copping it from all staff affected by this decision. I mentioned our problem to Ron our next door neighbour about our problem and he said if you want, I can get you a container on an empty truck returning to Perth. Asked him could he let me know how much the damage it would be. Ron told me a day later that it could be done for \$600. He would arrange for one of his trucks to bring the container around and allow me to pack it over a weekend.

Now the big question was 'what do we do'. Bruno advised me that I had a Reg 98 available so Anne and the kids could fly to Perth and when my transfer was approved I could join them. The house in Beckenham was empty, decisions, decisions, decisions. Finally Anne was happy to go to Perth with the kids and I would stay with Brian and Marylyn again. Now we had to work what goes to Perth and what gets disposed of and what goes to Leanyer. I managed to get rid of another washing machine and fridge, someone from work bought the slabs and patio slabs. At this rate I thought I would need another container just for VB cartons, certainly better than having cash laying around. Advertised the ute, boat and outboard in the NT News as a complete deal. A young RAAF gentleman turned up and only wanted the ute, knocked him back telling him I would not separate. He ended up taking the complete deal, unfortunately he paid me in cash not VB's. Over the next couple of weeks we started to pack items for Perth in cardboard cartons. Jim had been accepted by DCA and was required to a course in Melbourne, transferring to Perth on completion. Angus had decided it was time to be reunited with his family down south.

Now it was getting close to the middle of November. The packing was completed, the container had been loaded over the weekend, taken back to NAH Haulage Monday morning, loaded on a truck for Perth departing that night. Anne and the kids left on Ansett that night. We had cleaned the house but the Housing Inspector had not shown up at the set time. I had move d all the stuff under the house to the Stuart Auctions on the highway in Stuart. They would send me a cheque once all items were disposed of. Locking the house up after loading all my gear into the car, turned the power off, locked and departed for the 17 mile.

Drove into the city and parked by the NTA Staff offices shortly after to return the house keys. The clerk asked 'what are these keys for'. I replied 'they are for 1025 Norcock Place' as I was vacating the premises. 'Has it been inspected' she asked nastily. I said 'no'. Then she became really nasty and 'you have to have the house inspected before you leave'. Told her "I don't give a stuff, your Inspector never turned up at the appointed time, I'm off to Perth'. Then she had the audacity to come out with, 'it has to be in the same condition it was when you moved in'. I said, 'give me the bloody keys back, it will take at least 8 buckets of mud to make it look anywhere near what it was when I moved in'. Then I stormed out the door, never heard again from NTA.

The following day I realised I had left my .22 rifle, 2 burner gas stove and a couple of other items in the Linen Press cupboard. Returning to Norcock Place I knocked on Ron's door and asked to borrow a screw driver. He laughed when I told him

why. Breaking in through the louvres was easy, grabbed my gear locking the door and replacing the louvres upon exiting. Gave Ron back his screw driver, had a VB, bid him and his wife goodbye. They had been good neighbours. Life was quiet now, just do my shifts at the airport and sit on my bum at the 17 mile, occasionally stopping at Casey's at Berrimah for a liquid refreshment or two

There was sign of Mal or Gough giving in so just had to wait. At last an election, they had gotten rid of Gough thank Christ, the man who invented the 'Gimme mentality'. Each time I knocked on Bruno's door he'd say not yet Kev. One day Bruno said to me, 'Kev you have 3 and a half months leave up your sleeve, two Reg 98's, take one and go to Perth for Christmas with your family and if your transfer is not approved I will send you a return ticket at the end of your leave'. Great now I had to work out which way was I going to go. Rang my father up and asked him did he want to meet me in Alice Springs and accompany me to Kadina by road. He was only too happy to accompany me. Rang Anne and told her to hop on the Indian Pacific and we would have Christmas in Adelaide and then drive back over the Nullabor. Next I applied for a Reg 98 by road via Port Augusta, which Adelaide approved. Set the date, gave dad the date to meet me in Alice and lo and behold, what does that bloke do in the sky do. Dropped bloody 9 inches on the railway and road south of the Alice, washing both out. Told Bruno right, cancel the trip by road, put the car on State Ships to Fremantle and I will fly to Perth. Dad was extremely upset over this but it was beyond my control. Rang Anne and told her to cancel the train as I was stuck in Darwin.

I was able to get on an Ansett Special departing Darwin at 2.15am. Delivered the car to State Ships, back to work bidding everyone goodbye, some other close friends mustered at Brian's for farewell drinks. About 1 am Brian drove me out to the airport after I said good bye to Marylyn and their children. The flight from Perth still hadn't arrived so it was a case of try and stay awake. Once the flight landed it did not take long to turn around and load, then depart for Broome. I remember seeing lightning flashes at one stage but nothing else. Departing Broome I had a VB and slept again until arriving Perth. Caught a cab to our new house catching Anne and the children still in bed. They were very surprised upon seeing me as I hadn't told them I was coming. I should have stayed in Darwin, now I had a brand new house, no garden and a heap of work in front of me.

Bruno sent me a telegram in the New Year telling me my transfer and had been approved. My commencement date at Perth Airport was 9th April. Life was very different in Perth, they hated anyone from the eastern states and tolerated anyone from up north. Must confess I found them different also even although I had been born at Merredin, 260k's East of Perth. Thus ended a year of more downs than ups, I was not sorry to see it pass although I did miss the Darwin lifestyle.

I visited Darwin in 1979 staying with my cousin Don at Wulagi for a week. Driving around the city, the evidence of Tracy was still very visible. Returned again in 1989 staying at Howard Springs and Darwin was now a really a different City. Another visit in 2000 again staying in Howard Springs. Very surprised at a dual highway just out of Noonamah with a set of Traffic Lights at the Humpty Doo Intersection. Had another 6

weeks at Howard Springs in 2002 but Darwin now was nothing like the old Darwin that I loved. No desire to return anymore, just keep my memories of what was once a 'great life'. Hope to do the Ghan trip upon my next visit to the Top End.