

Hi Mum

two days of rainy weather has allowed me to put finger, well, two fingers, to keypad.

I know you recall infant Jerry saying: Mummy, where DID we get Robert from? But I kept my cool ..., and am now your oldest living son. It was easy, mostly.

So I planned to have you visit my block and house in Darwin in better circumstances than what happened last year. I recall you saying how hot it was - well, it was just the hottest period we had ever had, I believe.

I tried to persuade everyone to let me out of hospital much earlier so I could adjust the louvres etc in the house to ensure it stayed as cool as possible. When I was allowed out, Peter drove us to Litchfield National park, with you in front seat and a/c on full bore cold, and you strode out to next site, and he said: I never expected to see Mum walk like that again.

Perhaps the experience strained the old heart muscles a bit, but you are keeping on keeping on. Will you make the big 100? Not so sure!

Memories of childhood are many, with you acting as go between and peacemaker. But I remember your visits to the NT especially. First with you and Harry, with your Mum, G'ma Martin, Grace, who had supported me a fair bit to get to UNE to do Rural Science, being flown up beforehand. I must have met her in the govt ute, can't remember, cos the first car I had up there was the Zephyr S/Waggon you arrived in, and when it went back from Alice Springs to Adelaide on the Ghan train it got tipped into a creek. This allowed me to acquire it, with best offer of \$100! Les, and Keith I think, towed it along, in gear, for ages, around Balhannah on dirt roads, when suddenly with a bang the motor unseized and bingo! a viable car resulted. Grace, as an older woman, I got to see a lovely lady, though I always got on well, in early days she was a bit strict. Maybe she was around 67 on this trip??

Then after Cyclone Tracey your hubbie required me to apologise for some suspected slight, he wouldn't tell me exactly what, so I didn't, and so you ventured north a few times by bus usually. Do you remember meeting me half-way north in the NT? I had to drive like crazy to meet the bus, not sure if I made it just before or just after you. Anyway, you climbed in, and we drove to Top Springs, saw a few locals there, on to Wattie Creek, saw more locals there, we must have stayed in a tent, you must have met Vincent Lingiari, 'father' of land rights, and on towards Hall's Creek. We stayed in the tent along the way again. From there we turned north to Kununurra, and stayed with travelling shopkeeper

ladies, I was relegated to the tent down the back, and you had a bed at last. I think you appreciated that, (don't say I didn't look after you), we stayed 2 days, then limped back via Katherine to Darwin. Quite a trip, and I wonder if you blotted it from ready memory, or did you dine out on it for a while?

At the moment I can't remember if you ventured out on my boat, I remember you waiting for us all to return from a 3-day trip to the Peron islands, which we did, if a bit later than planned.

So you have always given me support, as required, so for that I thank you. That was a rare experience, cos it seemed my employer which became the NT Govt did not!! This support later included a loan to buy my property, which I had negotiated with the old man vendor, but his daughter took charge and didn't agree to certain conditions, so I had to pay for it in entirety immediately. Pete chucked in a bit. I hope I repaid that Pete!?! Like all W-S's, money matters are not our strong suite. But lucky for me I bought the block, as houses in Darwin are now \$4-500,000. Having built my house, I feel able to criticise the Federal Intervention into NT, building houses at about \$1m each! (And I told them how to do it even before the Intervention!). Later your support in dribs and drabs mostly, enabled me to survive the 90's and keep working on East Timor issues, which I think helped that cause. I did want to get you to East Timor for a 3 day visit sometime. Maybe yet ... when its cold in Kangaroo Valley and beautiful in Timor - that's when most visit, lets face it!

Meanwhile, you need to be more accepting that you are, no longer, expected - nay allowed - to do the dishes!! You are positively allowed to sit back, or lie back, and enjoy those twilight years, the twitter of boids, the sounds of Martin digging his no-dig garden, the songs of both my younger brothers (wait until I join in, Mother!), and the dream that the next one will be a world beater; and to be served brekker in bed, at least while I am still here in beautiful Kangaroo Valley/Green Valley, and the weetbix is still in the pantry - or Martin's chooks are still laying.

Rob

Sunday Oct 4 2009