

WEST FAMILY

THE STORY OF BOB WEST AND FAMILY



TOLD BY BOB & JULIE WEST

COMPILED BY KEN GRAY

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This is the complete version of the *West Family* story. An abridged version with the same title (AB13) is included on the Society web page.

MILLA MILLA TO MISSION BEACH

Interviews with Bob and Julie West were conducted by Ken Gray at the West family home in Pioneer Street Bingil Bay, August 2021.

This is a family history looking at our first carpenters to the Mission Beach District, George West and his son Robert, commonly called Bob. There was some building done here of course before the Wests arrived in 1955 yet most of that was by builders or carpenters from Tully or Innisfail and the Wests were perhaps our first career carpenters to live here. The story is told first by Bob West in several interviews with scribe Ken Gray, then Julie West tells her family story and helps jog Bob's memory. Other family members contributed.

Bob starts the story: We came from Millaa Millaa on the Atherton Tablelands. I was eight at the time, but I cannot recall much as I am developing Alzheimer's and have difficulty remembering things, especially names. I will try hard and Julie can help fill in the gaps as she has an excellent memory.

I was born on 15 June 1946. My father, George Ernest West was born around the early 1920s (*Scribe: 17 March 1917, St Patricks Day*) and married Jane Spowart. It was 1955 when the family moved from Millaa Millaa to Mission Beach, mum, dad and their three children, Valerie, Carole and me. Valerie is three years younger than me and lives in Townsville while Carol died at age 65.

My grandfather on dad's side of the family was Arthur West who was in real estate. I do not know my grandmother's name; we all called her Nanna. My father had a brother also named, Arthur and commonly called Artie, a dairy farmer who married Joan and he had a sister named Lorna who married Sid, an ambulance driver.



Uncle Sid, Stepmother Hope, Aunty Lorna and Aunt Joan (girl on right unnamed).

Dad learned carpentry as an apprentice with local builders after the war. He was also the projectionist at the movie theatre at Milla Milla and did a bit of work as a butcher. When we came to Mission Beach he built and renovated houses and obtained his timber locally. There was a big timber mill in El Arish, known as Crisp's Timber. They made house framing and structural timber, while the other mill in the town owned by Charlie Myers was making plywood. There was another mill in Tully at the

time owned by John Day and that closed quite recently. Dad obtained most of his timber from Crisp's Mill and often did work for them on their buildings. While working at El Arish, he did not drive home during the week as the roads were so bad. He only came home on the weekends.

Dad did not go to the war. I do not know why, but he became a little unpopular after the war with the people who enlisted. They may have resented him being safe at home with all the girls. He trained as a boxer and could handle himself and became the lightweight champion of north Queensland.

After the death of his second wife, Hope in 1976, dad started wood turning in earnest and became very skilled at it even making radial drawers and he left many objects to the community (C4). He was clever with his hands and even made his own tools and miniature tools made from sewing needles. He won some awards such as a Festival of Forests Award in Ravenshoe for his wood turning.



George West's NQ Lightweight Champion Trophy.

STEPMUM HOPE

Mum and Dad separated and divorced after mum met Bluey Dean from the Johnstone Boy Camp, which was a bush camp on the foreshore at Boat Bay where several workers from South Johnstone Sugar Mill stayed in the off season. It was a short distance from where we lived and was always a great social gathering and mum loved to go fishing with them. Dad was traveling a lot at the time and was a hard man. I presume he was not very easy to live with, as he was quite stubborn and often cranky.

Mum married Bluey later and dad met Sibella Austin a few houses from ours when he was renovating her old Queenslander. They hooked up soon after and we all moved in with Sibella so she became our stepmother. She was known by everyone as Hope rather than Sibella and I understood that. Not many would like to be named Sibella perhaps.

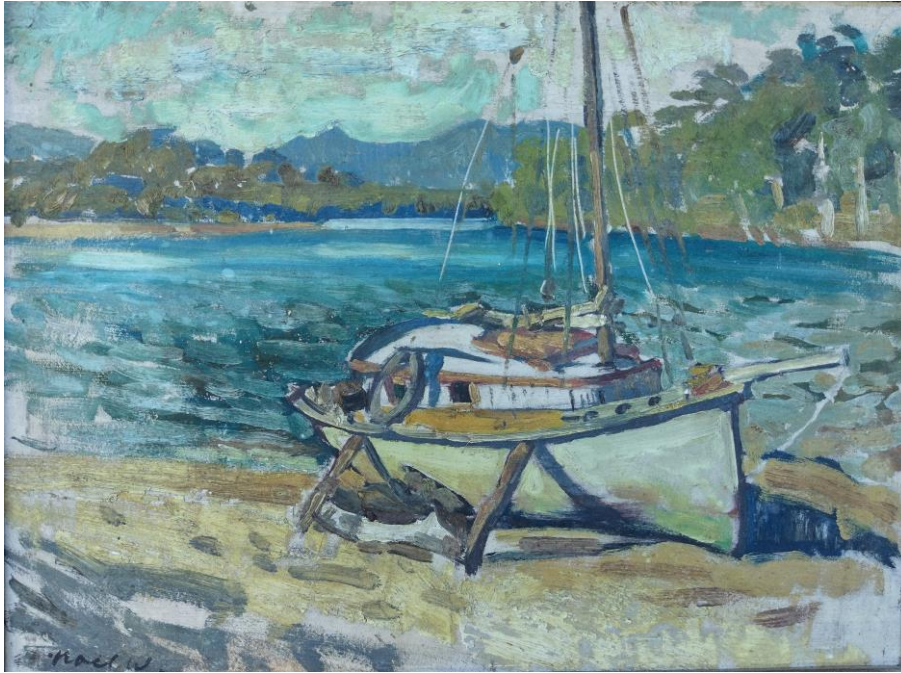
I was at primary school when that all happened, so it was probably still in the 1950s. Sibella was good to me and was three years older than dad. She died of lung cancer at age 68 and went back to Melbourne when she became ill. Dad did not fly down with her and that upset many of their friends, but he said he was too busy to stop working. Sibella was a chain smoker and always coughed a lot. She smoked top-of-the-range imported cigarettes in flash little tins and the rubbish bin was littered with these tin cans.

Sibella was an interesting person and came from a wealthy family in Victoria. They lived on a farm called *Mt Noorat* near Melbourne. She travelled often and liked to paint landscapes; we have a couple of them here and also have one done by Noel Wood who painted it for Hope. He did it in a few moments and was terrific at detail.

Sibella came north from Victoria and loved the tropics. She initially lived on Bedarra Island for some time before buying an old Queenslander at the north end of Mission Beach. That was on the beachfront near Perrier Walk and the building remains there in a reduced state.



Landscape, Hope (Sibella) West.



Painting by Noel Wood, donated to Hope West.

Scribe: Constance Mackness admired Hope's artworks and said: 'Mission Beach has a resident artist though she just paints for art's sake – Mrs. George West, whose landscapes in oils show rare truth and feeling.'

Life was very different living with Hope. She and Dad were married soon after the divorce and my mother had been a typical laid back Aussie mum who gave us considerable freedom; life was not at all formal. Hope was very formal. TV was banned and at mealtimes we had to do things properly and fit in with Hope's rather strict and, to us, alien rules. She insisted on having her chair at the table pulled out by George before she sat and the children could not be seated until this happened.

Valerie West adds: Sibella was 10 years older than Dad I think. I must say, thinking back, that Hope (Sibella) was wonderful to me. She always had a pile of library books on hand in the school holidays for me as there wasn't anyone to keep me company. Now I am an avid reader, mostly reading historical or biographical books. She also taught me to sew, knit, and crochet. She could be a bit intimidating, yet she was so interesting to talk to. I would have turned out to be a different person if it hadn't been for her.

Bob West continues: Hope owned considerable property and purchased a 30 acre forest lot on the hillside split by Boyett Road and going from the Council camping ground back to the bamboos.¹ When she died, she left the forest to the State to be made a National Park. The map (below) from *Queensland Globe* shows this fragment of National Park labelled 115NPW502 which extends from Clump Point back to behind the old primary school in Boyett Road.

The State made the land donated by Sibella part of the Clump Mountain National Park and it provides an attractive forest backdrop for the area and preserves a small part of this rare basalt rainforest found on Clump Point.

¹ The bamboo referred to remains there in 2021 and was planted in the 1880s by Willoughby Smith who was working for the first landowner of the area, W Hyne who selected 1,280 acres at Clump Point in 1882. That was the lot that the Cutten brothers came to see in April 1882 hoping to select it but they were beaten to it by Hyne.

Hope divided off a two acre lot (the battle-axe lot at Perrier Walk on this map) for Dad who built a house on it with a concrete roof to make it cyclone proof. However, it may have been cyclone proof, but the concrete captured and trapped the heat in, so it was impossibly hot inside during summer.



The land donated by Sibella (Hope) West to National Parks. Map from *Queensland Globe*.

Hope had a son and a daughter in Victoria, Neil and Gina. Her husband had died young after a pimple infection turned quickly to septicaemia. There were no antibiotics freely available when that happened. His nick name was Fluff but I have no idea how he acquired that.

Housework was not for Hope. She was interested in the environment and culture and left the housework and cleaning to a professional cleaner, Rosa Perry. Rosa was German and good at the job and did the laundry as well, so Hope was pleased with that arrangement. Rosa was married to Owen Perry and lived in Bingil Bay.

The old Queenslander that we lived in was large and had long verandas. Only half the house still stands today. Valerie had a room out the back and I had one overlooking the verandah. Hope met held dinner parties and we often saw John and Alison Busst at these and Harold Holt with Dame Zara. I worked for them at times and they called me Robbie because Hope used that name for me. Dad extended that house while we were there onto the next lot, but it has been reduced since.

The Holts and Bussts drank wine with Hope, but my father stuck to his beer. I knew them all well as I often did handy man work for them when I was an apprentice.

SCHOOL DAYS

I went to primary school at Boyett Road with Valerie. There were 15 students in the school when I started school in 1955. Perhaps I attended school for a while before that in Milla Milla. I broke my arm when high jumping at one stage and that was a bit frightening, but I got through it and had to go to Tully to fix it. The bone was almost sticking out through the skin, so I was quite alarmed.

I can recall some of the children who were at the Mission Beach school at the same time as we West kids were. The Rick family had four kids, Lachie, Frank, Charlie and Sheena. Frank and Sheena were there with me but the other boys were older and had moved on. There were five Wildsoet children: Dawn, Beryl, Betty, Kayleen and Robert. Dawn was older than the others who were at the school when I was. The Campbells were Doug, Ken, Don and Joan and the latter two were at school when I was. Maureen Harten was also there with us, as were Robert and Tom Donkin.

The father of the Wildsoet boys, Jack Wildsoet, had a couple of dairy cows to make a few bob on the side and I remember we used to take a billy can to him and he milked a cow straight into the can. Dick Verhay lived in Bingil Bay and had chooks in those days and delivered the eggs to the door.

Abby Porter owned the original Porter farm at the time and is now on the Tablelands and has a good memory so will provide useful input to the district history. Bill Pittentree had one eye, a high pitched voice and lived next door. Tom Rungert lived nearby too and grew avocados and soursops.

Ken Campbell had a farm at the end of Boyett Road and Doug Campbell's farm was overlooking the Post Office. Don Campbell lives on the original Campbell lot these days.

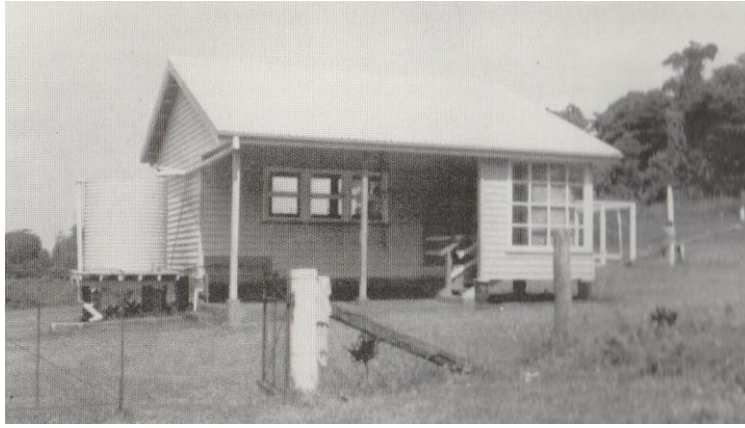
I went to Herberton State High School for two years. Carol went there for two years and Valerie for seven. We stayed at the Herberton Methodist Hostel. The boys section was old and run down, but the girls area was quite new. The boys and girls mixed at mealtimes. I was 15 years old when I left school and became a carpenter's apprentice with dad.

I played rugby league when I was at high school but wasn't outstanding, I'll put it that way.



MBSS Students 1956
Back Row: Jean Olding, Karin Jordana, Kayleen Wildsoet, Michele Jordana, Robert West.
Front Row: Ginette Harten, Miles Jordana, Maureen Harten

Class of 1956, Bob West top row right end. From Mission Beach State School 50th Anniversary 1953-2003.



Our one roomed Mission Beach State School. From Mission Beach State School 50th Anniversary 1953-2003.

In Herberton, we used to go camping on the Walsh River at the army firing range. We found these unexploded 25 pound bombs and piled them in a heap underneath a tree then hid behind rocks and let the bombs go off and blow the tree up. If a spark had hit the bombs they would have gone and we had bombs piled up beside our tents, so it was madness really.

I did not like the Herberton Hostel or the school; it was the grottiest part of the place we were kept in. I just wanted to come home. The old part must have been 50 years old; the boys section. When winter came in, it was really cold. We ate with the girls at mealtimes and were so cold in winter. Nothing was maintained in the boy's accommodation, so it's a wonder we didn't die from something. The girls had the better area which was only 10 to 15 years old.

I was no good at schoolwork, but they must have doctored my Report Card – it came out and was good, but I never learned anything except in the woodworking section.

Greg Shaw from El Arish was my best mate. There were bullies in the hostel; a couple of really bad. One was from New Guinea, but he was white and was a mongrel. I was walking to school one day and he kept standing on the heels in my shoes, pulling them off. I confronted him and he challenged me to a fight. I didn't want to fight or back down, so the whole thing was on in the study at the hostel.

Word got round; even the town boys found out. We had all the desks pulled back with no teachers around luckily. The kids from town were peeping in and everyone gathered inside watching and it was shirts off, bare knuckles and bang, I hit him really hard around the ears. He punished me ferociously and my ears were all bruised and black. He flogged into my head; it was headshots most of the time. And then we got into a corner and he swung a punch and hit the door. He had broken his wrist prior to the fight so it was all over. I laid into him; he couldn't do anything. The odd thing is I was the winner, you know, I ended up being a real hero. The girls heard about it and a female teacher came up to me and thanked me and said, "I hope you really gave it to him because he was such a mongrel of a kid". He never came near me again and I became far more popular after that.

Funny the things you remember as a kid. I got lucky that day.

TEEN ROMANCE

I was keen on girls. It is a family trait I expect as my father was also fond of the girls and my son has followed in our footsteps it seems. The first girl I fancied was at high school in Herberton. That was Margaret Schaffert who was from the Robin Hood Station inland near Georgetown and Mt Surprise west of the Atherton Tablelands. That romance lasted less than two years and ended when Margaret returned home and we did not see each other again.



Margaret Schaffert: school romance.

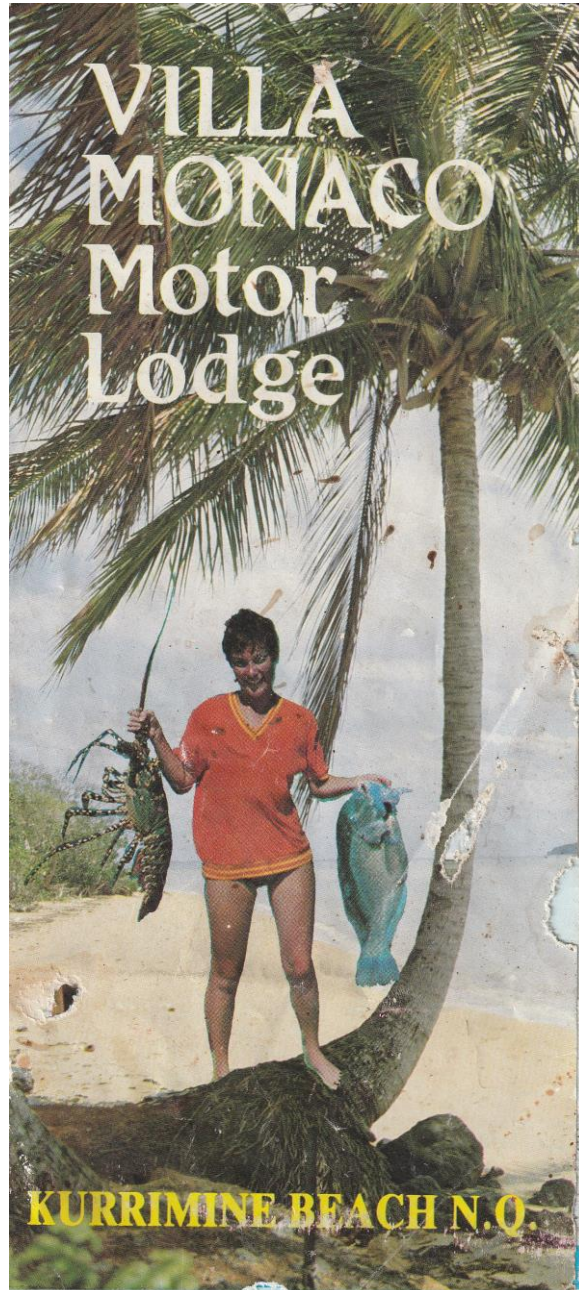
Robin Hood Station or Cobbold Gorge as it is in 2021; now a tourist venture.

When I returned from Herberton, I remember falling overboard for the Tully Hospital Matron's daughter, Barbara Vesaris. I was a bit of a loner, have been all of my life really and was more interested in girlfriends than having a lot of mates. We used to go to dances in Tully and that was a big highlight as a teenager. Only Brian Barnes had a car, so we used to hitch a ride with him and had a wonderful time with the girls. Brian never managed to find a girlfriend.

As soon as I completed my apprenticeship, I headed south to Brisbane for the bright lights and pretty girls; so many girls! Then I went to Auckland on building sites and met many lovely girls there too and some followed me back to Australia. I then went to Melbourne on building sites as a carpenter.

That was a happy time and in Melbourne in 1971 perhaps when I was 25 or 26 years old I met Julie Thomas. I asked her for a dance and that was it. It was the end of the gallivanting for me and we are now 49 years married.

We met at a disco at the Waltzing Matilda Hotel. Soon after, we toured and worked together overseas visiting several countries such as USA, Papua New Guinea, Thailand then South Africa. That was where we tied the knot. And never looked back.



Glamour: Valerie West stars for the *Villa Monaco* brochure.

W O R K

Dad was possibly not the first carpenter or builder in live at Mission Beach in 1955. He may have been though. Jimmy Merrill did a bit of building at one stage. He was a van park owner later, then he sold lawn turf from his small farm at Midgeree Bar. *Scribe: others tell us that Jimmy mainly built for his own projects so was essentially an owner builder.* However, the town's main new-home builders like Geoff (Sudsy) Davy, Ken Fox and Mick Harris did not come to Mission Beach until much later, so our family were carpenters here well before most.



Master and apprentice: Bob and his father, George West.

Scribe: A chat with the area's largest builder in 2021, Geoff Davy of DavyBuilt or Sudsy as most know him as, revealed that there were several early builders but probably none were before George West. Sudsy recalls that he came to Mission Beach in 1982 which was a few years before Ken Fox who built many homes in the area as well. When Sudsy arrived, Mick Harris was a young carpenter just starting out. He was doing some building work and some banana work then started working for Sudsy for a time before setting up his own operation.

Sudsy remembers several early builders who were here before he came such as Alex McNabb who lived in Bingil Bay and Jimmy Merrill did some of his own buildings such as Silvers Aquarium. John Venturato of Tully was building in Mission Beach for a while. John was tragically killed in an accident on the Bruce Highway some years ago, but his two sons worked with Sudsy in 2021. Others Sudsy remembers were Eric Bull and Paul Sabadina, but they were not before George West. Eric Bull arrived in 1966. Paul Sabadina says they arrived at Mission Beach in 1975 and he was the first to build strata title projects.

The first home ever built in the district was the Cuttens home (Bicton) that they built themselves in 1885. The second was in 1888 for W. Hyne (Willoughby and Alice Smith lived on his selection) on the ridge at Clump Point near where the clump of bamboo grows beside Alexander Drive. That was built by the Rooney Company of Townsville and they sent Don and Buchannan to build it.²

Back to Bob. I always found work as a carpenter during my working life and mostly did renovations and rebuilds rather than build new homes yet did build some homes too. I remember the one I built for the Knackens in Bingil Bay Road between the Bingil Bay Café and the beach. It was (and still is)

² Ken Gray, *Bicton: The Cuttens of Clump Point*, Mission Beach Historical Society, 2022, P. 68.

three separate buildings. I started out doing odd jobs as an apprentice with dad and often worked for the Holts on their holiday shack at the south end of Garners Beach. I did similar work for the Bussts on their home. Patchups and small extensions were common. Often I helped out owner-builders and they did the labouring work; I did not employ a team of carpenters or tradesmen.

I built a two storey home at the top end of Cutten Street and built homes for our family including the one we live in here at Bingil Bay. Dad gave me a block of land near our family home at Perrier Walk and I built an 'A line' home there. It is much modified today.

Most of the projects I did I have forgotten. I was talking to John MacKenzie in Cardwell and he reminded me that I built his home there and I also built a home for him on his farm. I was also reminded recently that I rebuilt the home that Will Manton owned at South Mission Beach on the hill. I added a storey and put in the large skylight which made the building very attractive. I also did a lot of construction work for Dan Hatten when he built his EcoVillage at Clump Point.



First home built by Bob: his own A line at Clump Point

A funny story I remember occurred in the early 1990s, when I was involved in a renovation project on Bedarra Island. It was not so funny at the time, but we often talk about it now and have a laugh. I went to Bedarra with a friend of ours who did a bit of building. It was in March as I recall and was hot and humid. We went across to the island in a five metre speed boat this guy had recently purchased and we had a load of tools on board. The sea was like a mill pond on the way over, but as happens at that time of year, strong south-easterly winds suddenly whipped up in the afternoon and the sea became turbulent as the clouds moved in and crossed the islands relentlessly.

We decided to pack up early and head home before it got too rough. The boat driver was inexperienced, as he had not owned the boat long. Unfortunately, when we were clawing our way back from Bedarra, he sailed too close to one of the small islands and hit a submerged rock. It cracked the transom. I told him a few times to steer well clear of any islands because of that danger, but it was too late. We managed to get to Dunk Island to check out the damage and discuss what to do next, knowing it would be risky to take the boat back to the mainland in such heavy seas.

As you do, we stopped for a few beers on Dunk Island's Spit where we chatted about our dilemma. With the beers under the belt and a boost in Dutch courage, my building buddy announced that he would 'chance it' and soldier on in the face of the angry sea. I was less sure but reluctantly agreed and insisted that we wear lifejackets. However, we discovered there was only one adult life vest and a child's one. Being the smaller man, I had to wear the child's jacket which was tight.

We let the crew of the *M. V. Friendship* know that we were going to Mission Beach with a damaged boat and asked them to keep an eye out for us in case we came asunder. The *Friendship* had a load of tourists on board and was about to leave for the mainland.

We set out for the Clump Point jetty and started off quite well heading past Purtaboi Island then in a north-west direction when the transom gave way with the weight of the outboard motor. The small boat heaved upwards and the tools spectacularly spilled out the back into the sea. The seats collapsed in seconds and we quickly found ourselves in the sea when the boat suddenly sank. We both grabbed a ski when we surfaced and located one another in the boiling sea and tried to discuss the best plan. Should we swim towards the mainland or back to Purtaboi? My friend was adamant that we should swim to the island, but I was sure we were better to swim with the waves and tide and head for the mainland. We tossed the skis soon after as they were merely an impediment to swimming and battled our way into the current towards Purtaboi Island.

It was tough going and my friend yelled out above the roar of the wind asking, 'Do you think we will make it?' We were not making much headway so I doubted it but did not want to make him despondent, so I just said 'I don't know' without sounding too negative. At one stage he was splashing around violently and I yelled out, 'Don't splash so much, you will attract undesirables!' He quickly understood, laughed nervously and tried a less radical or more normal swimming stroke.

After what seemed hours, we finally made it to shore on Purtaboi and crawled onto the sandy beach, utterly exhausted. It was now dusk and I saw a prawn trawler pulling out from Dunk Island so quickly held the life jackets in each hand and waved them wildly to indicate a distress signal. Fortunately, the skipper of the trawler was alert and saw me and pulled in to help. He said it was very lucky that he saw us as it was almost dark. We contemplated how we could board the trawler as it was a risk swimming out to it because sharks usually follow in their wake. We braved the sea and soon boarded safely despite the danger so had some share of luck that day. Someone was looking out for us.

Our wives were getting worried by then, as we should have been home hours ago, and by now it was dark and after 7pm. The skipper offered to ring them for us and tell them we were safe without revealing the details of our misadventure. He just said he was towing the boat back as it had broken down. Our families were relieved when we arrived home safe but cold and were surprised to see the empty boat trailer. It took a while for the two forlorn sailors to relate the incredible story of the day.

That was a day to remember, for all time.

CATAMARANS

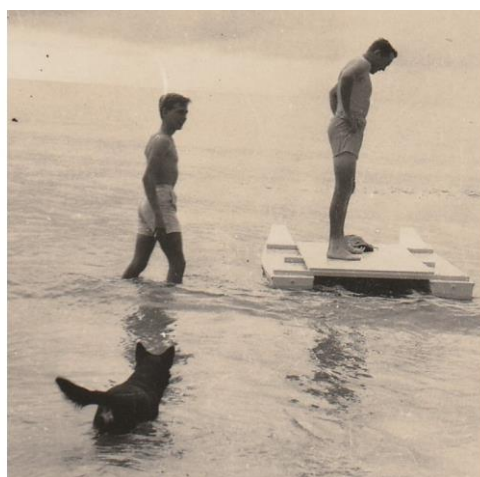
I was always into boats and here we are carrying our dingy across Porter Promenade to the beach. I am this side of the bow. It is probably Tom Donkin at the stern and Dad up front. Notice how narrow Porter Promenade was then - a skinny sealed strip and the old house showing in the top right hand corner of the photo was Hope's home. It is still there.



Dad and I built a catamaran and I was quite proud of the project:



Here is dad inspecting our good work when we floated it without a mast. My dog, Dawson was very interested and wanted to be on the new boat too.



It must have passed muster as Dad has left me and Dawson to get on with the test drive (Dunk Island background):



Later in life, I built a trimaran we named *Destiny*. We lived in Adelaide for nine years and I built it there. It was 24 foot in length with a fold up design so it could be carried on a trailer. We brought that boat back with us when we returned to Mission Beach in 1989 and used it often, sailing around the near shore islands with the whole family at times. It had bunks so we could stay overnight. We sold it about ten years ago when I had stopped sailing it.



The trimaran (*Destiny*) was great fun for the family: 1987 cruise.

I built another boat later on. A small catamaran and raced it occasionally. It was a *Cobra* class cat and was not named. I bought a fibreglass shell and finished it myself. I built ribs to strengthen it then added a polished maple deck, rigged it and added a nylon trampoline.

RETURN TO MISSION BEACH

Julie and I married, in 1973. We were traveling together and were married in Durban in South Africa.



Wedding photo, Julie and Bob West, 1973, Durban.

I was working on construction sites in Durban and Julie was working in an office. We now have a son, Lochlan George West and a daughter, Alison Marie West. Alison is 46 years age, with two children and lives in Cairns working as a wedding photographer. Lachlan is a carpenter and was an apprentice with me which carried on the family tradition. Lochlan married then divorced and lives in Cairns. He has two daughters to his wife and a son to another partner.

We sold our property at Clump Point in 1980 and moved to Adelaide for nine years back to where Julie came from. We returned in 1989 to then live in Bingil Bay where we are now.

Over the years we knew many people here and I can recall a few stories from when I was young at Mission Beach. There was a small service station at Clump Point near our house; the building remains there but the petrol bowser is long gone. It was owned by Jan Balusek and his wife Connie. The spelling I am unsure of, is it Russian or Yugoslav? I don't know. *Scribe: probably Czechoslovakian origin.* They would not have sold much fuel from their servo as most people had their own 44 gallon drum and a pump in the backyard. We did. Everyone seemed to live on the smell of an oily rag in those days. Different to today. We were friends with this family but they left the area.

They had a young cassowary without all of its plumes or colours that lived there and they brought it up with their two long-haired collie dogs. They all went to the beach, including the cassowary, and swam in the water at the north end of the beach behind the large rocks. They would not be allowed to do that today, but they obviously rescued the chick and it became a pet for the family. They crossed the road together but the road was far from busy back then. It was one single lane of bitumen.

JULIE

We met at a disco in a hotel in Melbourne in 1971. Soon after, we realised that we shared a love of travel. I was quite adventurous and Bob was keen to see Africa. We worked hard and saved enough money in the next year to realize our dreams. In August 1972, we booked a berth on the Galilee Galileo, calling at Cape Town then on for Europe. We disembarked at Cape Town as planned and on the journey we met many Australians and New Zealanders with similar plans and ideas.

We explored Cape Town for a few weeks then bought train tickets to Durban as we heard through fellow Aussies that we kept in touch with that it was easier to get work there. Our plan was to earn enough money so that we could continue traveling through Africa.

Bob obtained jobs as a carpenter on a building site and worked with a native South African, referred to as 'boy' and he called Bob, 'Bossey'. They became friends and shared stories about their respective countries. I got a job in the City Treasurer's Office. The system of 'apartheid' was operating in South Africa then and it seemed so very strange to us keeping people separated by the colour of their skin. Despite that, we enjoyed our time there, traveling in our VW Combi in the weekends to see as much of the country as possible and meeting new people. We also joined the Ramblers Club, trekking inland and capturing stories of the country and its history.

By then, I was pregnant and we decided to return to Australia. We had been in Africa for seven months and had been married while there with friends from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa attending the event. We had enjoyed a fabulous trip and were ready for home.

We then lived in Mission Beach for seven years and enjoyed our time there, but I became homesick for family and friends.. So, we moved back to Adelaide for nine years before returning to Mission Beach. When in Adelaide, I became a Christian in 1980 through friends from my school days. This gave me direction and purpose in life. I gave my life to Jesus Christ.

COMMUNITY

I love mixing with people because they energize me. Can I say Bob's the opposite? He finds people drain him. When I was working, I didn't have much time for community work, but sometimes there might be someone in the church or community who needed visits because they were lonely or sick, so I used to visit them. My pastor and his wife found out about it and said there's a role for me to play as a pastoral carer and I have done it ever since. Now that I am retired I do far more of that.

I just go and pray for them or encourage them or chat and sometimes I meet them for coffee somewhere. Often they become friends. I've got a friend, Sue Withers who accompanies me in this work. We both love this calling.

I also started doing religious instruction for the school 15 years ago and continue to do so. There were not enough teachers to do it, so I agreed to help. Elizabeth King from our church was the one who asked me to do this. They allow a half hour session a week for children whose parents have given a consent to go. Surprisingly, some children don't even know what the Bible is or a church is. That's how things are getting and a lot of children don't know what Christmas or Easter is about. To most children today, Easter is all about Easter Bunny and there's no connection with what the true

meaning is anymore. It's quite essential, even if your children don't end up being believers, at least they'll have a choice.

I am also involved in the church group named GLAM, or girls, ladies and mums. That is very popular with local women who flock to the events we run. It was started by Tania Devereaux. She brought the idea over from Western Australia, to support people in a smaller community where women have less to do than in the cities. It provided support for women after cyclone Yasi in 2011, which wreaked havoc through the townships of Tully and Mission Beach.

Tania's purpose for GLAM was to bless the women and make them feel special and valued and to connect the women in the community. The cyclone had left in its wake many people in distress with a feeling of hopelessness. GLAM organizes day trips away on a bus and does an annual Christmas lunch which is usually held at the end of November. Around March, we have another event where the women can dress up and have fun and games and enjoy being served high tea. Everything is decorated beautifully, creating a wonderful atmosphere of excitement and joy, with many women meeting with old friends.

We started with less than 50 participants and now it is up to 120, which is the limit to keep it personal. That is core to Tania's heart, to always retain a friendly ambience. Sue Magarey also plays a big part in this event, cooking much of the food which always looks spectacular. She partners with Tania and they make a good team using their special God given talents.

A charity which supports women and children around the world is also chosen for each event. A21 for example, is the charity chosen for the next event and they rescue women and children from human trafficking. Once a month I organize a stall at the markets, with the help of many volunteers and this is an outreach function of our church. We sell cakes, coffee and tea for \$2 each and have done so since 2005. Margaret Koch and I started it and it has grown in popularity. The idea is to be a blessing to the community by keeping the prices low. All of our cakes are homemade and donated by women in the church and all the funds go to charity. We are also available if anyone needs to just talk or would like a prayer.

W O R K

When we were in South Africa, I worked in finance. That was before computers; I worked on a calculating machine doing wages, and order forms. When we returned to Australia, I was a stay at home mum for 10 years and then, when we moved to Adelaide, I trained as an enrolled nurse in general hospital; that was a one year course. I did that when the kids were young. It enabled me to work in hospitals and nursing homes, and as a carer. When we moved back here, I got a job in the nursing home and stayed there 13 years. It was always hard work and by the time I hit 50 I knew I had to change jobs. I got work in the Tully Hospital and that was a little bit easier on the body.

I stayed there for five years and also worked at the Innisfail hospital at the time. Then, with the night shift, I was too tired to drive home safely in the morning because I just couldn't sleep for long during the day, so I joined a carers group in Innisfail. I did that for five years then retired. I loved the caring work more than the hospital work, as I found there was always a lot of bullying in that environment which made life difficult. I was shocked about that side of things and was very naive.

THOMAS FAMILY

My maiden name was Thomas. I had a stepsister 14 years older from my father's previous marriage and she has passed away. I have a brother and two younger sisters and they are living.

My father was 63 when he died of leukemia and my mother died later after enduring multiple health problems. Both my parents smoked and they started during the war when the military gave them cigarettes. My mother, Mary Madeleine Thomas, was a nurse, and my father, Gordon James Thomas, was a butcher.

I went to Morphettville Park Primary School in SA then to Brighton High School. And after that I went to a business college to learn how to use machines like calculation machines. I just mucked around in school. My favourite subjects were art and science; I love science. I went to work when I was 16 and moved with friends to Melbourne when I was 19, just for the adventure. It was there that I met Bob and, soon after, we decided to travel overseas – in 1972.

We loved the excitement of a new and different country. We were backpackers and both got jobs over there. He was on a building site and I worked in the Durban City Treasurer's office. We loved to travel on weekends around South Africa in a Combivan. We had several Australian and New Zealand friends there and I loved the people and the animals. Bob was quite close to a local South African named Joseph. He loved talking to him and he used to treat him well. The black people were treated disrespectfully in a lot of cases, and Bob was getting a lot more pay than Joseph who was called his 'boy' but Bob saw him as a friend because that's how we are in Australia; we don't have servants, we don't discriminate. Everyone's equal.

We were going to travel throughout Africa but that was probably silly as we had no idea of the dangers it presented. There was a lot of terrorism about then. Once we learned how dangerous it would be to travel though, we gave that idea away. We had seven months over there then came to Queensland to live which was the first time I'd ever been to Queensland. When we came to Queensland in 1973 we stayed with Bob's family. We drove from Melbourne to Adelaide, so I could visit my family before moving to Mission Beach.

I didn't know anyone really, I just knew Bob's father and stepmother, Hope. Some of the local women invited me to their afternoon teas once a month. Around 12 ladies attended these events and they made me feel welcome. The person hosting the tea did the catering and provided cakes and tarts and savories and I thought, 'Oh my goodness this is marvellous'.

There was people I remember like Brenda Harvey. Nancy and Teresa Wheatley, Mata Halladay, Dot Hathaway, Joyce Hodgson and Shirley Campbell. They were all older than me with older children at high school and my children were little at the time. The afternoon teas were held from about half past one till three o'clock when their kids came home.

There was a very small population here, and you kind of got to know everyone that way. Very few tourists came to the area at that time. The *Hideaway* van park was here, but there were no cabins. There was no shop, except for the little corner store at the *Moonglow Motel*.

We knew the Campbell families; Bob knew them all well. The Hodgsons, Richard and Joyce, were at Bingil Bay. They had a banana farm. Almost everyone then lived on farms, but the Hodgsons left the

farm and district after the cyclones repeatedly trashed it. The Verheys had a chook farm nearby. Brian Barnes was living where Eileen and Ken Barnes are now, and we looked after the place for a while when they were on holidays. We were renting Jackie and Marie Watson's house while our house was being built, which was right next door, and they would only come down on holidays or weekends, but eventually they moved to Mission Beach.

I took guitar lessons, just for something to do soon after we came to Mission Beach. I also joined the drama club run by Brenda Harvey. I really needed stimulation. In Adelaide, we had so much to do with friends and people you've grown up with for years and brothers and sisters.

Bob's mother ended up living in the *Hideaway* caravan park permanently. We used to see her and second husband Bluey a fair bit. She went fishing every day and was totally addicted to it. Bob's sister Carol, and Jane his mum with four nephews would come over once a fortnight on a Saturday afternoon for a visit. Then maybe once every three months Bob's sister from Townsville would come up. She had three boys who were close in age to our children. They would come up for a weekend, or we would go down there for a weekend to Townsville to visit, and the kids would all be very excited. We would go to Townsville to do shopping as well.

The roads to Cairns were not that good. You know the old Tully Road; that was the main highway. It was a big day going to Cairns and we never stayed overnight and didn't have air conditioned cars. That was quite hot, and the roads were dusty and gravel. The road was narrow and rutted and you couldn't do Cairns in two hours. When we went to Townsville, we stayed overnight. Occasionally, there would be big parties at the Wheatleys or other homes. That was good fun.

When I was in hospital having Allison, I met a lady and we became good friends and she lived out at Murray Upper. Her name was Nola Bosch. We were the only two in the hospital in the maternity section at the time and became good friends. She would come and visit us and we'd go visit them maybe once a fortnight. When her husband died at only 40 years of age, she went to Brisbane.

In those days you would go to clinic in Tully when you were pregnant, but there were no pre-natal classes and that was back in the days when fathers weren't even there during the delivery. A playgroup started at Mission Beach, so I used to go there just to connect with people. It was a small group at Mission Beach at the time; the population was still small in the 70s.

My parents were both in the Air Force during the war. Dad was based in Gove. Mum (Mary Madeleine Thomas nee Bull) was nursing in Sydney at what I presume was a RAAF military hospital during the war. Dad was a gunner in bomber planes, probably the Lancasters.

Scribe – From the War records,³Gordon James Thomas was a discharged as a Warrant Officer in No. 13 Squadron. This was formed in June 1940 in Darwin and was equipped with Hudson bombers. Gordon enlisted in February 1941 and served until October 1945. No 13 squadron served with distinction against overwhelming odds during the first Japanese bombing raid on Darwin in 1942 and shortly after in raids over Timor. They were awarded the United States Presidential Unit Citation; an honour only bestowed on two RAAF units: 13 Squadron during WW2 and 2 Squadron during the Vietnam War. 13 Squadron continued striking targets in Timor and the East Indies in 1942 and conducted important reconnaissance missions continuously for the Allies. They sunk a Japanese ship and badly

³ WW2 Nominal Roll accessed August 2021 as well as <https://www.airforce.gov.au/sites/default/files/minisite/static/7522/RAAFmuseum/research/units/13sqn.htm>

damaged another. The squadron started the Pacific War with 12 bombers and during the war they lost many aircraft and 87 of their personnel were killed. 11 of their planes crashed, five while Gordon was with the squadron.⁴ At one stage in 1942 they only had one or two bombers operational each day such were their losses. In 1943, they were equipped with new Ventura bombers to replace their old Hudsons. In these, they flew anti-submarine missions and undertook further bombing strikes. After Japan's surrender, they flew deep into enemy held areas to save prisoners of war. The squadron disbanded in early January 1946. Gough Whitlam served in WW2 with Squadron No 13 and was a navigator who joined the squadron in 1942.⁵



Lockheed Hudson, RAAF's American-built light bombers.



Lockheed Venturas replaced the Hudsons in 1943.

My nephew looked them up on the Internet because he was interested in our family tree. He thought that Dad was dishonourably discharged.

Scribe: The war records in the National Archives of Australia⁶ show that Gordon Thomas enlisted in February 1941 and made it to the Reserve Personnel Pool in 1944 and was transferred to 13 Squadron in May 1944. He flew 68 operational hours with 13 Squadron as a 'Wireless Operator Air Gunner'. His role was to send and receive wireless messages during flights, assist with navigation and when needed defend the aircraft using machine guns.

⁴ Accessed August 2021 at www.ozatwar.com/raaf/13sqn.htm

⁵ No 13 Squadron RAAF, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No._13_Squadron_RAAF

⁶ Thomas, Gordon James, records, accessed August 2021 at <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=5541065>
<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=7821232>

He was discharged in October 1945 almost two months after the surrender of Japan and applied for an early release on the grounds that his father's health was failing badly and he was needed to run the butchery business. That was accepted and he was discharged 'on demobilisation,' not dishonourably.

As a Warrant Officer in the RAAF, he was well above the base rank; a private equivalent in the RAAF is called an 'aircraftman or woman', then there is the rank of Leading Aircraftman, Corporal, Sergeant, Flight Sergeant then Warrant Officer. Gordon's family can truly be proud of his service and that of Mary Thomas whose records have yet to be traced. A very good account of 13 Squadron is available on the excellent Oz at War site at <https://www.ozatwar.com/raaf/13sqn.htm>



Julie's mum and dad, Mary and Gordon Thomas, in their RAAF uniforms during WW2.

They never talked about anything after the war. Dad's father had a heart attack and they refused him any leave to go home and see him, so apparently he just went and felt that he had earned the right to do so. He was quite rebellious, and I believed that he was discharged for disobedience but am unsure what really happened. (*Scribe: He was tried for disobedience when he and mates stayed an extra night in Perth without a pass but they were exonerated.*)

Anyway, I know my father never marched on ANZAC Day, though he might have been thoroughly disgusted with the whole system set up by the military and their many rules and regulations. Yet he was close to his Squadron and always met with the guys that he was at war with, which was once a year at Anzac Day. Maybe a couple of days before Anzac Day, they always went to dinner together, but he said it was getting sad because each year towards the end there are less and less of them alive. My mother never marched but we used to go and watch the marches on Anzac Day and reflect.

We all asked them if they would march but Dad said, 'No; burnt the uniform.' They just wanted to forget the war. My father went on many attacks but we don't know if he came across the enemy as he never talked about it except he did say they had to do a belly landing once because the wheels wouldn't come down. It was up in Darwin. That's all I can remember. My brother's got the logbook of all the flights they did.

RETIREMENT

Scribe: What's your bird's name Bob? Tilly, she's a Corella and gets agitated if I go away out. I can't leave; she is upset during the day if I'm not here and knows the sound of the truck when I return.



Bob and Tilly West – inseparable mates in 2021.

Bingil Bay has been a great place for us to retire. We came and went over the years yet always returned to Mission Beach and were rewarded for doing so.

We both keep busy with Julie often out seeing people in her role a pastoral carer, organizing things for the community and reaching out to those in need. I like my shed and have spent much time renovating our home and I built our swimming pool myself. The garden is also an enduring interest and we love to have a BBQ. I am in my shed a lot tinkering around and go on trips in the old troop carrier – I'm going to the Tablelands tomorrow.

Plenty of things to do to keep us happy and interested and Tilly keeps me on the right path if I stray far off!