

IVAN AND PATRICIA SKELLET

Ivan: Ivan's parents met as a result of a long horse and buggy journey made by his Father in 1933 from the Hunter Valley, aiming for Darwin. Dad reached the Darling Downs and that was the end of the journey. He married a farmer's daughter, and they set up married life in Harrisville on their own dairy farm. Ivan was born in 1936, and at eighteen months of age, his natural curiosity almost led to a very short life span. He walked into and sat down in a fire light for the purpose of sterilisation of the dairy cans and implements. Plastic surgery, skin grafts were somewhat more primitive and, to this day, Ivan bears the results of this catastrophe. However, his determined spirit which he still retains to this day, helped him fight off his disabilities and go on through his schooling and University years to a career in Engineering and Commerce.

Patricia was born in Uralla, NSW and the family moved to Queensland at the beginning of World War II. Living in Brisbane, Pat's early memories were of the family's war efforts – air raid shelters in the backyard and school yard, air-raid drill, strange soldiers from Australian and American forces being entertained by the family during their stay in camps around Brisbane. Having completed her matriculation, Pat opted to work at the University of Queensland, having a great time socially and with study a low priority – Botany I and German I being the extent of her tertiary studies. Her love of music meant an involvement in choirs and madrigal groups.

Ivan and Patricia met whilst Ivan worked to earn spare cash as an impoverished Uni student for the Queensland Branch of the Red Cross Society at the Royal National Exhibition (Ekka). In 1957, Pat was a member of the Red Cross Younger Set and worked at the show as a volunteer on the chocolate wheel. Aided and abetted by the Professors of Civil Engineering and Botany who were close friends at the George Street campus of the University of Queensland, their paths continued to cross and they were eventually married in 1961. By this time Ivan had already worked on the construction of Koombooloomba Dam in North Queensland and married life began in on a hydro-electric investigation camp, almost 100 kms inland from Cardwell, North Queensland. Life was wonderful – Pat was the only woman in a camp of up to 40 men in what must be regarded as very basic conditions. Interestingly, they returned to the camp site in November, 2000, and were delighted to see the relics of the camp still standing and survey marks still in place (after all, they were meant to be permanent).

In 1962, they moved to North West Queensland, living in Cloncurry and Richmond whilst Ivan worked on the reconstruction of the Townsville-Mt Isa Railway line. Roderick was born the following year. The family then moved to Southport for the construction of the Gold Coast Bridge and where at Southport in 1966, Kirsten was born. There was an old saying in engineering circles that an engineer and his wife would have a suitcase in one hand and a child in the other and off to the next site. Pat must have thought she had more than two hands – In Brisbane in 1968 for the construction of the wheat silos at Pinkenba, Lachlan was born.

Leaving the Government and joining private enterprise, Ivan must have had a far flung places look in his eye. Whilst the family settled in Brisbane, Ivan supervised construction work such as a bridge over the Adelaide River in the Northern Territory, a timber wharf at Red island Point (tip of Cape York, near Bamaga), and the installation of channel beams into Cairns Harbour. At the same time, he decided to complete his Commerce Degree, begun as an external student whilst in Richmond, but taking a back seat for a while whilst he populated the country!

In 1972, the family was transferred to Port Moresby where Ivan had been appointed Construction Manager for the Pacific of Hornibrook Constructions. The following year he was appointed Manager of the Group and this led to a most interesting period in the family's life. For a start he was invited to join the Rotary Club of Port Moresby, he was a member of a number of professional bodies and organizations and was responsible for the construction of a very large number of projects necessary for the infrastructure of a newly developing nation. Ivan received recognition of his work at the 25th Anniversary of Independence of Papua New Guinea last year. The family saw Self-Government arrive in 1973 and Independence on 16th September, 1975. Problems abounded, safety became an issue, but life went on apiece with family activities such as sailing and travelling being the most important features - we did things together, had a fairly hectic social life and loved the continuous round of meeting new people from so many nations.

Pat, in this time, had returned to the workforce on a full-time basis, working in the Library of the University of Papua New Guinea and friendships made during those salad days of the new University have been retained to this day. The whole family enjoyed their time in that wonderful country and are sad to see so much tragedy in recent years. Fond memories of Papua New Guinea and particularly of the Highlands, were made more so by the arrival of Alexandra in 1977.

A few months later, Ivan was transferred to Sydney, continuing his Rotary membership by accepting an invitation to join the Rotary Club of North Sydney. Pat became a homebody again but the family agreed that she was a much better person when she was working than when she was pushing a vacuum cleaner, so she went off and worked part-time for Philips Industries in Defence and Research Co-ordination before moving to the Telecommunications arm. In 1990 Philips went through a major restructuring of the Australian organization and Pat saw an opportunity to be retrenched, thinking that a nice break of six months or so would be just fine. Two weeks later Pat was enconscd as the Executive Secretary of the Royal New South Wales Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (as it was then) and now feels part of the furniture.

Having seen three Governors as Patgrons, and 2 Presidents, a new name and a new Act of Paarliament, her work is varied, including not only looking after the needs of 12 Directors (all volunteers) but a great deal of public relations exercises and archival work. The Institute is not a place of sadness as some people may think – certainly it stirs the emotions - but it is a place of wonderful achievement, every day bringing forth some small event which serves to benefit the children enrolled in a variety of programs from birth to 18 years. The Institute is one of the oldest charities in Australia, being established in 1960 and today is renowned Australia's major independent special education provider. Postgraduate students attend tertiary level training programs (Masters Degree and Graduate Diplomas) at Renwick College, offered in conjunction with the University of Newcastle, and we have a number of overseas students from New Zealand, Africa and Singapore enrolled in these courses. Our aim is to provide support and assistance to families of children with sensory disabilities and there are currently xxx children enrolled in at least one of our many services. The Institute conducts five preschools, a Homestart and Outreach program for very young children, three schools, and a student support service for children enrolled in mainstream independent schools but who need support to continue their studies. Funding is mostly achieved through fundraising, although Federal and State Governments contribute not quite one-third of our revenue in the form of grants. Fees for our services range from nil to minimal.

Ivzn in the meantime set up his own consultancy, Kooragwin pty Ltd in 1991 and has travelled throughout much of Australia working for a number of projects. Give a busy man a job to do and he gets it done. He was invited to apply for and was successful in being appointed Governor of District 9680 for 1994-95. What a fantastic year and the friends we made, the places we visited and the great fun we had kept us going through a time of physical disability for Ivan who, in that yhear, had a series of 4 operations resulting in two hip replacements. Wheelchair bound at one stage, he only had just over four weeks when he was unable to carry out his duties as Governor. This period was also hectic for the Rotary Club of Ku-ring-gai, which, under the leadership of then President David Forsythe, Past President Ken Simper and Mrs Margaret Cato-Symonds, planned and executed the most marvellous District Conference, held in Canberra in March 1995 – the Classic Conference. Many of our members have since said and we agree, that the Club was never so well bonded as it was in this time, all working towards making that Conference so memorable and successful. Inthis time, Ivan and Pat were grateful for the assistance given by Rodney and June Higgs who had accepted the roles of Personal Advisors to the Governor and his wife. That time awakened in both Ivan and Pat, a real sense of the internationality of Rotary and the true meaning of friendship. In October 1995, Patricia was invited to join the Rotary Club of Ku-ring-gai and has enjoyed ever since the privilege of being a Rotarian in her own right.

Since that time the familyh has gone through a few difficult and challenging times. The children grew up, all attained university degrees and set off to lead their own lives. Suddenly, in 1996, our world was turned upside down with the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer with secondaries in the liver being delivered to Lachlan on his birthday, aged 28. The illness took its toll and Lachlan left us on Australia Day 1998 but not before giving us a delightful Kiwi daughter-in-law, Dianna, whom he had met in Africa in 1993. The family has always been close, but now we are even closer and enjoy each other's company as often as we can. Illness has continued to dog Ivanand Pat but now we are reassessing our

lives and thinking about the future again. Our hobbies are cooking (Ivan), photography (Ivan), embroidery (Pat), music and reading (Pat and Ivan). Ivan is largely retired and enjoys doing voluntary work for the Anglican Church of St John's at Gordon and the Military and Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem into which he was invested in 1999 and in which he was elevated to the rank of Commander in May 2001.