

Bruce Kirk Neilen

1937 - 1974

Bruce was the first of 8 children born to Henry & Nellie (Kirk) Neilen in Brisbane in 1937. Without a doubt Bruce was their favourite child, every child was compared to Bruce. He never crawled or walked, he ran at 7 months, he was so active, he learnt quickly, dived the deepest, swim the furthest, played the hardest - he was an outstanding son. So it was the most devastating tragedy when Bruce died suddenly and unexpectedly at aged 36 from an asthma attack in Adelaide. Henry never recovered from his death, my parents were shattered to the very core.



Nellie with Bruce 3 mths, Gayndah 1937

At the time of his birth, Henry was working for Patrick's Shipping Co in Brisbane, but shortly after Bruce's arrival, they decided to move to Maleny where Henry's uncle was selling his farm. Henry had holidayed at the farm in his childhood, it was his dream to own a dairy farm in Maleny. Nellie's father, William Kirk, a grazier from "Hazelton" Gayndah, had died in 1934 and Nellie was left with a small inheritance, enough to put a deposit on the farm. The farmhouse was constructed of red cedar and called "Highlands".

The family motored to Sydney before their move to Maleny and not long after their arrival, Ian was born in 1939. Bruce was the dominating brother, no matter what truck or toy his younger brother had, Bruce wanted it. Even if it was a stick, he'd tell Ian it could fly, swim underwater or float like a boat, he'd get the stick off Ian. There was a guava tree at the farm and Graeme remembers Henry telling him how Bruce used to eat the guavas, but they were fly blown. Alec (Henry's brother) was visiting one time and he showed Bruce the grubs. Bruce told him that those little things wouldn't hurt him and continued to enjoy them. Bruce & Ian communicated in their own language and enjoyed an idyllic childhood on the farm.

The farm was behind Balmoral Lookout at Balmoral Ridge and the road to Maleny was not fully constructed when they moved from Brisbane. There was no

electricity, the mail was addressed to Montville and Henry took the cream by pack horse to the railway station at Eudlo. The road to Maleny was constructed by the Americans during WW11 as a civilian escape if the coast was invaded by the Japanese. Bruce was often an off sider to the soldiers, sharing their dog biscuits and bully beef. I



"Highlands", farmhouse at Balmoral 1938 - 1942



Bruce, 12 mths at the farm 1938

remember Henry telling the story of how one day the military police came to the farm looking for Alec to sign up to join WW11. He stayed for some time at the farm to avoid being found. Bruce told them that he jumped out the window and ran "that way", pointing in the direction of the Obi. (Alec joined up not long after.) Bruce started school at Montville, he went by horse with the neighbour's kids.

After Desley's arrival in 1942, Henry decided to buy a truck and do some local carrying, so he hired a share farmer for the farm and the family moved to The Knob, or Eagle's Nest as it's known today. While living here, the triplets, Tom, Dick & Harry were born in 1945. Bruce attended the Bald Knob School while living here. There was no electricity, Nellie found herself very busy with 6 youngsters under the age of 8 to care for. Shortly after the triplets were born, a cyclone remained stationary off Caloundra for weeks, it rained and rained. Henry's carrying business flourished and he bought a 7 acre property on the corner of Maleny/Landsborough, Balmoral Rds which became the family home and transport depot for the next 40 years. Pauline was born in 1947 and Graeme in 1950. Shortly after Pauline was born, electricity was connected to the family home and Nellie's workload was lessened considerably. Electric lights throughout the house, no more wood to chop when an electric stove was installed, instant hot water, a washing machine (with a wringer), vacuum cleaner, the kerosene frig was replaced with an electric frig.

Everyone had jobs. There were cows to milk, the milk was separated and the cream was sent into the local butter factory by cream truck. Pigs to feed, chooks to tend. Nellie had a big vegetable and flower garden and there was a variety of fruit trees in the orchard. Figs,



Bruce, a toddler at the Balmoral farm

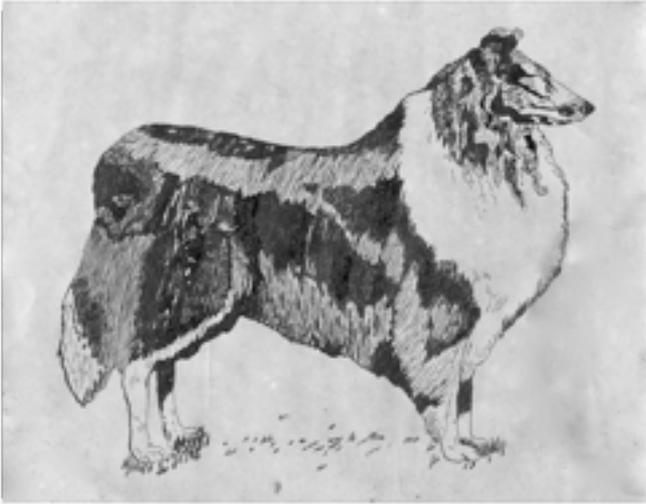
cherry guavas, oranges, persimmons, peaches. Bruce & Ian used to trap parrots and sell them and there was a big wooden and wire cage for an assortment of guinea pigs. There were dogs, Lassie, Pluto, Elvis, and cats. Bruce & Ian were really good at catching snakes and they used to poison dingoes too with the help of a local farmer. The pelts were sold for pocket money. One year during a drought, Bruce & Ian dug a well. It was a really good one, by the time Henry had delivered one load of water, the well had refilled. I remember during this drought, cattle were dying and our wells were a godsend. Bruce & Ian had spears for catching eels in the Obi, when Bruce went to boarding school, the spears became Nellie's curtain rods.



Home, Maleny 1950

Bruce & Ian were members the local Cubs and Boy Scouts for many years and I remember them doing Bob A Jobs around the district.

Bruce attended the local primary school in Maleny with his younger siblings in turn as they became of school age. He did well at school and excelled in all sports. The King Family lived on the farm next door and the King and Neilen kids used to share nuts from the numerous macadamia trees on Balmoral Road, between the two properties. One time Bruce discovered Bernard King in one of "his" trees and I remember him giving Bernard a blood nose. (Bernard went on to become a flamboyant TV chef, actor and talent show judge). There was no secondary education in Maleny at the time, so Bruce was sent to boarding school in Brisbane to Brisbane Boys College. I remember him going, everyone was so excited and we all went to see him off. Big brother leaving home! At the time he would have been 14 and growing at a great rate of knots, always hungry. Nellie cooked him a pile of cakes and biscuits and I remember dropping them as I tripped going up a flight of stairs to the college dorm. He wouldn't have them because they were broken, we took them home. By the end of the first week, he wrote home that he was dying of starvation and wanted the cakes and biscuits. Visitations were limited, but every time we saw him, we



First Prize at Maleny & Nambour Shows 1950 Indian Ink drawing

Bruce became apprenticed to the local plumber, R Allen-Waters & Sons. If I remember rightly it was a 5 year apprenticeship. He studied by correspondence and worked during the day in the work shop in Maple Street (next door to our shop) soldering galvanised products, tanks, pipes, guttering etc and digging drains on the job. There were no plastic products in those days, no pop rivets. He really hated digging drains, there were no diggers or backhoes and as he was the young apprentice, that was his job. He bought a 5 speed Malvern Star bike which he rode to and fro to work in Maleny. He had a dynamo light and tail-light for his bike, it really was some bike and he was so proud of it.

While working for Allen-Waters, Henry was working long and hard establishing his local carrying business. He bought more trucks and employed a couple of local drivers. Every Monday Henry & other drivers picked up pigs and calves around the district, he built stock yards at home (Jack Lorenz built these) where they were kept overnight and they were taken to Cannon Hill for the sale on Tuesday morning. Often there were too many for one load, the truck would be loaded for Bruce to drive to Cannon Hill when he got home from work on the Monday afternoon. On Wednesday, cattle were picked up and taken to the sales in Brisbane for the Thursday sales. Prices were usually better in Brisbane than at the local sales, so Henry's business grew and thrived. As soon as Bruce got his license, he started driving for Henry. Weekend work at first, shifting furniture, delivering molasses and fuel, carting sand and gravel, water, rocks and shifting stock around the district.

Evan Kruck used to go with him to Conondale to get sand. It was shoveled by hand onto the little Chev and taken to the end of Burgum Rd for Tommy Burgum's road. They used to get sand from Westerway's Flat too, this is when they learnt to dynamite fish. Well, they did until Henry found out and put a noisy end to their fishing expeditions. Bruce really enjoyed truck driving, he was keen, reliable and hard working and Henry became to rely on him as his right hand man.

The family had holidays at Pialba at Christmas. Until he married, Bruce joined the family on these holidays. It was good as he'd take up an extra vehicle (often new to run in) which was transport for the younger ones. Nana Kirk had a bathing shed on the beach, it was later removed by the council. Bruce courted Dell Humber for some years, her family had a farm in the district and her younger brother Keith was employed by Henry. That romance

were laden with food to keep him alive. Henry used to ask where all the graves were from the kids who had starved to death, he was always hungry and so graphic with his hunger pains. I can remember him coming home with his backside black and blue from where he'd been whacked for wrong doings. He never told us why, but we all knew that he had to behave or put up with the punishment.

In those days, BBC offered a purely academic curriculum. I remember Bruce loved art and took this as a subject. To his dismay he discovered that it was not a practical subject, but mostly theory of old masters and architectural styles. He excelled at sport - football, cricket, athletics, swimming and he returned back to Maleny after completing his Junior.



Pastel drawing by Bruce about 1950

fizzled out for unknown reasons. Dell worked in Wally Burnett's pharmacy in Maleny.

Bruce still had time to play sport and played rugby in Nambour for the local team. In 1958, he was selected in a Wide Bay team to play an English team at Bundaberg. I discovered many years later that Mal Meninga's father also played on this team.

Bruce became a qualified plumber but never worked as one. He hated the job, hated digging drains. His passion was truck driving. Henry started buying grain, first from the Downs, but gradually he moved



Wide Bay Team V England played at Bundaberg 1958. Bruce, back row, middle



Cliff Leeson, Bruce & Henry at "Eagleton" Dalby with a load of grain

called "Herdie". Bruce started driving this truck, carting grain to start with, then he got loads interstate. Herdie was really slow, it had a top speed of 48 mph and Bruce drove millions of miles in this vehicle all over Australia. He was presented with many million mile plaques from Mercedes. Over the years there was hardly a road where he'd hadn't been and no doubt where there were no roads in many places.

He delivered huts to Port Hedland and the Giles Weather Station, west of Alice Springs. At times he had to go through Kalgoorlie if it was the wet season and the north of the country was flooded. He was in the Meckering District, 130 km east of Perth in 1968 with Wayne Keleher in another truck when the region suffered an earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter Scale. They were driving through a storm with wind and rain, the truck shook violently and the road rose up and down in a wave. Large cracks appeared in the road and they thought that the world was coming to end. The town had a population of 130, it was destroyed, fortunately no one was killed. (This earthquake is one of the biggest ever recorded in the seismic history of Australia today. The Meckering Fault is still visible today.)

Bruce would get back loading where he could, whatever there was. Yellow-cake and tallow from the NT was fairly reliable backloading. The

further afield to central NSW. Henry would scout and buy the grain, Bruce bought it home. It was put through a hammer mill and sold to the local farmers for stock food. This was a profitable business, but at this time the Transport Department started introducing road taxes. Henry decided to register his business interstate and bought land and built grain storage sheds in Woodenbong & Legume to overcome this tax.

Henry bought a Mercedes Benz which was



Bruce, Pialba, Christmas 1958 aged 21



Bruce, Maleny early 1960's



"Herdie", Bruce's Mercedes Benz

yellow-cake was secretive, it had to be delivered to Sydney and used to be transported in 44 gallon drums.

He had a few trips to the west of Alice Springs, I remember seeing photos of aborigines piled on top of his 44 gallon fuel drums at the front of his trailer. They used to go Walkabout with him, they didn't care where they were taken. They wanted tea and tobacco. He liked them travelling with him as he said that within 5 minutes of pulling up for the night, they'd have a fire going. One damp night, they had trouble lighting the fire and he was shocked to see them trying to ignite it with a couple of £50 pound notes. He tried to retrieve the money, they told him not to worry Boss as they were going into town to get

new money tomorrow.

Another time he picked up a hitch hiker as he was travelling north in the middle of nowhere between Winton & Kynuna. He rarely picked up hitchhikers, but it was the middle of Summer and the region was so remote. The young English tourist seemed lost and was distressed from the heat. They never chatted much, the fellow seemed dazed and they drove through the heat of the day. No air-conditioning in those days, the cab was really hot and the seat was over the exhaust pipe. After some time he became very quiet, Bruce thought he was sleeping. When he pulled into Cloncurry, Bruce realised that his passenger was not responding and was shocked to realise that he had died. The Police Station was unattended so he drove into Mt Isa, straight to the Police Station and gave a statement. When they removed him from the cab, his skin had stuck to the seat of the truck. Bruce was shocked, surprisingly he never heard anymore.



Bruce with "Herdie" in the front yard

While Bruce was driving Herdie, Ian was driving a 1418 Mercedes Benz. Bruce & Ian had taken over their trucks. Bruce decided to trade Herdie in on a 1918, with a tri-axle trailer. He had this truck for about 4 years, until his death. He continue to drive interstate, he and Ian seemed to go separate ways at times. I can't recall Bruce having any major accidents, he was a good driver, a professional long before standards for truck drivers became mandatory.

Bruce married Marcia Cork in Maleny in 1964 and they had 2 daughters, Kerrie born in 1965 and Allyson in 1970. Marcia was a dressmaker, she had her



Bruce & Marcia, Graeme, Desley, Dick & Tom at Graeme's wedding 1969

own business in Maple St Maleny, just a few doors from Henry's business. Bruce & Ian bought a farm on the way into Maleny, now 1051-1063 Landsborough Maleny Rd. The property had 2 houses, Ian had the newer home and Bruce & Marcia lived in the older house at 1051 for a while. They later sold and moved to another house on Landsborough Rd. Marcia's mother suffered from osteoarthritis and with Bruce away so much, Marcia & Kerrie decided to move in with Marcia's parents in Tamarind Street. This seemed to work out well and I remember Kerrie being such a help for her Grandmother whose health continued to deteriorate.



Bruce's last truck, Mercedes 1918

Bruce & Ian seemed to get a lot of work, but they realised to get regular reliable backloads, one needed to be based in Adelaide. So Bruce & family decided to move to Adelaide and Ian stayed in Redcliffe. Bruce at this stage was not in good health, he used to get asthma but he seemed to be medicated and his health was controlled. He had put on weight, he had been hospitalised. I remember him telling me that a doctor had advised him to sell up his truck, find an easier job but he never even contemplated this. He could never think of life

without a truck.

Bruce, Marcia & the girls had only been in Adelaide for a few months, when on a Saturday morning on 30 March in 1974, Bruce was home with Marcia and the girls when he felt an asthma attack coming. He went to the Adelaide Hospital, Marcia waited in emergency and waited and waited. The hours ticked by, eventually she asked, "Where is Bruce Neilen?" They told her he had passed away. He suffered a heart attack, doctors worked on him for some time, but they were unable to revive him. He was 36.

His body was flown back to Brisbane, his funeral was held in Maleny and he was buried in the Witta Cemetery.

Tom Malone flew over to Adelaide and bought Marcia, the two girls and Bruce's truck back to Maleny. The truck was later sold.



Kerrie & Allyson, Maleny

Written by Desley in Maleny in April 2009

