

Senior LIVING

Taking care of the future

A wonderful marriage

Flying high after love at first sight on first day of work

By Bryan Hughes

AFTER I graduated as a pilot officer (engineer) in the RAAF my first posting was to RAAF Base Amberley in 1967 as Assistant Base Radio Officer. On my first morning at work, I reported to my boss in his full glass-fronted office. It was a bit crowded and as I waited a beautiful blonde WRAAF corporal walked past the glass front looking in (checking out this new “young boss”, she said later).

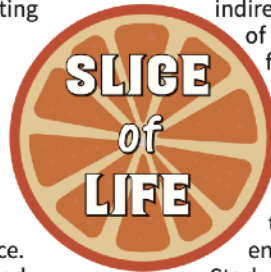
Our eyes locked. Two evenings later a few friends and I visited the nearby Walloon pub when three young WRAAFs walked in. One was that same beautiful blonde: Val.

A friend indicated he was going to chat her up. “No, you aren’t,” I said “she’s mine”.

And she was: love at first sight. We married in 1969!

Back then, it was not

quite the done thing for an officer to “fraternise” with a junior member especially when the corporal was indirectly in my line of command. Our friends kept it quiet until, one morning, I stunned my boss when I announced that I was now engaged to Val Stark.



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After two beats: “Ah,” he said, jaw dropped “you mean Corporal Stark”.

Val and I enjoyed 20 great years in the RAAF.

One highlight was my posting on a two-year officer

exchange with the RAF, my posting being to RAF Stanbridge in Bedfordshire, UK.

Travelled first class with family (Val and two beautiful very young daughters) on a Qantas 747, including a three-day stopover in Athens, courtesy of the Air Force.

While working away at Stanbridge I received an official letter, stamped with the Buckingham Palace logo. In it was an Invitation: “The Lord Chamberlain is commanded by Her Majesty to invite Squadron Leader and Mrs B L Hughes to an Afternoon Party in the Garden of Buckingham Palace”. WOW!!!

On the day, while walking fairly aimlessly in the Gardens, a voice said hello from behind.

We turned and found ourselves facing an Air Chief Marshall of the RAF, rings on his sleeve up to his elbows. I was being addressed by a “living god”! We chatted pleasantly for several minutes when “God”

asked if we would care to be presented. “Sorry sir,” I asked “What do you mean?” The reply: “why, to be presented to Her Majesty”.

Overawed, we politely said yes.

When the party goes over we were divided to allow HM to proceed down the now open pathway, we were instructed to stand several yards in from the crowd.

A little later, HM arrived at our spot. A pleasant chat, she moved on, I saluted.

There were many other happy events in our life together, including a one-year house exchange in very rural France, 100km north of Bordeaux. That’s another story.

Dedicated to my wonderful wife, Valmai, passed away from cancer, 27 May 2023



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