

Two jacks flagged me down at the airport in Auckland and directed me to accompany them to the nearby customs office, just for a talk. Inside the office, surprisingly there was a photograph of John Andrew Stuart posted on the wall. Stuart had been headline material in Australia ever since his teenage years; known as a violent criminal with a hair-trigger temper. Judging by the photo on the wall, the New Zealand police were notified to watch out for him. Acknowledging that they knew me, one of them got straight to the point by enquiring, "Where are you going, Bill?"

"Wellington."

"What for?"

"I'm working on a Christmas sports program for the Waterside Workers Union."

"But you're not allowed to reside here. Anyone with your past form can be deported. So, to solve that problem, why don't you just grab your suitcases and take the next flight back home."

"Look, I'm going back as soon as the work is finished, that will be next week. My girlfriend, she's from Auckland, has already flown to Brisbane to find a place for us to stay."

"Go and join her then, now, today; otherwise we are going to have to charge you and take you to jail until the deportation paperwork is done and that could take a couple of weeks. You could be in jail over Christmas. You know, there is no such thing as bail on deportation charges."

"Yeah, but if you deport me, then you have to pay for the ticket. Hey, I'm going back home next week anyway so why not let me finish the work here and then I'll pay for the ticket myself."

The New Zealand police had recently learned that I had been living in Auckland for about two years, working as a telemarketer, all legitimate and above board. However, because of my prior juvenile convictions in Australia for theft, the legislation in New Zealand decreed that I could be deported. Everything considered though, the long arm of the law decided to let me go.

The following week after picking up the pay cheque, I was on the first available flight back to Australia. Christmas Day was approaching and the airport terminals on both sides of the ditch were bustling with passengers carrying suitcases, hurrying to and fro.

Upon arrival in Brisbane, under sweltering humidity, the perspiration trickled down. Girlfriend Gaynor, named by her father after the film-star, Mitzi Gaynor, was waiting excitedly at the airport. The neat spectacles she occasional wore added to her glamorous appeal. Quickly we embraced before grabbing a taxi and heading off to the privacy of our holiday unit.

On the next day we visited my grandmother and father at their house at Woody Point on the Redcliffe peninsula. After an absence of two years, it was great to see the folks again.

Soon after, on returning to the city and checking out the old haunts in town, the Lands Office hotel was the first place to visit. The up-market hotel was a popular venue for the racing crowd and was known for its excellent dining room. The publican's son, Brian Ahern, had resided there before shifting out and getting married. Being born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth, through good luck and being clever, Brian Ahern was the youngest bookmaker at the racetrack.

From out of the blue an old face from the past, Billy McCulkin approached and astonishingly wanted to introduce me to a detective.

"I don't want to meet any jacks," I stated.

Ignoring the objection, McCulkin led me over to the detective remarking, "No look, he's sweet; he's on side with us. Believe me this is the man to see if you ever strike a blue; a regular Mr Fixer, aren't you, Pat," McCulkin said making the introduction, "Pat Glancy, meet Billy Stokes."

Glancy smiled and looked at me saying, "Billy Stokes, yeah, er, I know that name. Don't you have some outstanding charges lying around?"

"Me, no; I'm squeaky clean these days."

McCulkin butted in, "Drop off, Pat. If you want to be a copper, why don't you go out and pinch some of those rapists around town. Leave us blokes alone who only want to make a quid."

"No, I just thought ..."

"Who gives a fuck what you think. Piss off if you want to act like a copper," said McCulkin in a jovial manner feigning at throwing a punch at the detective. Glancy likewise feigned at

cowering away. During previous years Billy McCulkin was a casual knockabout around town. Aged in his mid-30s, he had resided in Brisbane for most of his life without making any waves. Common sense suggested that if it ever came to a serious showdown, Detective Glancy would finish on top.

Another familiar face was standing by the bar, namely Les ‘Wimpy’ Dangerfield, so I excused myself and strolled over to converse with him. After a hearty handshake greeting, on the quiet I inquired, “What’s the key to that copper with McCulkin? What’s he all about?”

Wimpy grinned saying, “That’s Glancy. He’s just trying to outdo Hallahan; a shifty jack who pulled a fortune from a politician for beating up a moll at the National Hotel. Glancy’s crooked on missing out on the cash so he’s sniffing around for whatever he can find.”

It sounded like nothing much had really changed; different faces, same rorts.

On a new day on a brighter note, Saturday was the day to escort the New Zealand girlfriend to the races. Ever since being a kid in short pants, I had attended race meetings so the racecourse was bound to be the location to see more old familiar faces.

Alas though, while strolling around the betting ring the first familiar face to happen along was Detective Glancy who approached and said, “Bill, I’ve had a check through records, just to make sure that you’re okay, and there is an unpaid speeding fine dating back a couple of years that must be paid. Do you have enough money on you to pay the fine?”

“Yeah, but does it have to be paid now? Can’t it can be settled at a police station later?”

“No, it should be paid now. You have to clean the slate before you’ll be sweet.”

“But, um, I want to have a bet in the next race. Is it okay to do that?”

“Yes, er, all right.”

Glancy, along with another detective, stuck close by while the bet was placed and we waited for the race. As it turned out, the bet easily won the event. Hallelujah! Then, as soon the winnings were collected, I further asked Glancy. “Is it all right to stay for another race?”

“Er, um, yes, okay.”

Cashed up by the previous winner, I ventured around the betting ring with Gaynor, still flanked by the two detectives. Glancy’s jaw hit the floor when the next selection also romped home.

“Is it sweet to have another bet?” I keenly asked.

“No. You better go and collect and then we’ll go and fix the fine.”

On leaving the racecourse, Glancy directed me to ride in a police car with him while Gaynor was told to travel in a different car with the other detective. At the police station once the fine was paid, the freedom door was opened. Throughout it all, Glancy acted pleased to assist.

Heading back to our motel accommodation, Gaynor said with a bemused pout, “That detective asked me if I had any criminal convictions, and he didn’t seem to believe me when I said no.”

“That’s what they’re like. Let’s hope we don’t hear from them again.”

That evening the Lands Office hotel was the best place to further catch up with the old crowd. Friendly faces were usually by the bar sipping a cold beer. Though a non-drinker, I was happy to have a Coca-Cola and join in with the conversation. Amid the general activity, Billy McCulkin walked over and quietly palmed me an address saying, “Tom Hamilton has heard that you’re back in town and said to give you his address. He’s living at Chermside with a few guys, flashy types. They don’t have the phone on, but they’re home every day. Tom said to call anytime.”

Tom Hamilton was a name from the past, a zany character who enjoyed acting like a clown. Once when arrested he posed for the mug-shot photo by dangling his arms out like a puppet. We casually knocked about together. A few years previously, free as a bird we shared petrol expenses from Melbourne to Brisbane, cruising through Kings Cross along the way.

During the weekend, I hired a car for a sight-seeing tour. Not much had changed during the past two years, Brissy was much the same. On route to again visit Woody Point, recalling McCulkin’s earlier suggestion, I said, “We’ll stop off at Chermside to see a bloke I know.”

“What is he like?” Gaynor asked.

“Outrageous.”

“Why, what does he do?”

“Um, a few years ago he stole an ambulance to do a bust.”

“A bust?”

“Break, enter, steal. He used to break into shops and reckoned that by using an ambulance he’d be able to get away fast without being pulled over by the cops.”

“Ooh-wah.”

On arrival at the Chermside residence, there were Studebakers, one apple red, the other green in colour, parked outside the house. Intrigued, we walked over and knocked on the door.

“Billy!” Hamilton came out and greeted me with a smile.

“Tom, this is Gaynor,” I introduced the girlfriend.

“Hello, how are you? Come on in and meet the boys. Over here sitting on the lounge is Shorty, Gary Dubois. Here’s Peter Hall, we call him The Three, he’s a bit of a devil; and Keith Meredith, but we just call him Jimmy ‘cause he looks like Jimi Hendrix.”

Everyone stepped forward to nod a welcoming hello and to appraise one another. Shorty was aptly nicknamed being around five feet tall with a Genghis Khan beard. The Three wore a kaftan; his long hair was red in colour similar to Hamilton’s. Jimmy stood out with an Afro hairstyle and an olive complexion. Hamilton trotted around keen to show off his favourite attire; complete with a bowler hat and a walking stick; mimicking the Clockwork Orange theme.

Their brick rented house was spacious; a mattress, T.V. and stereo were in the lounge. Both Hamilton and Hall owned the Studebakers with souped up engines that purred. Out in the back yard Shorty introduced his pet dog, a bull terrier named Evil Eye. During the conversation Hall admitted that he owned a pet carpet snake currently boarding at his sister’s house. “I can’t have the snake here with Evil Eye in the house,” he said.

Being from New Zealand where such reptiles never existed, the little lady curiously commented, “I’ve never seen a snake before.”

Hall replied, “I’ll bring him over to show you one day.”

“Eeek!” she squealed at the thought.

For a musical treat throughout the afternoon Hamilton switched on the stereo and played the soundtrack from the Clockwork Orange movie. Spontaneously, Gaynor jumped up and displayed her jazz ballet movements in rhythm to the classical music, much to everyone’s delight.

Eventually we were back on the highway to visit the folks at Woody Point where tea and scones were usually served. Ah such bliss, at times as a loving couple our feet never seemed to touch the ground. Every day we could barely keep our hands off each other for more than a minute.

On Saturday night, we spruced up accordingly for a spot of dining and dancing at the Jet Club, a classy nightclub in Fortitude Valley owned by a self-made millionaire, Jack Meekin, the biggest SP bookie in Queensland and a friendly acquaintance from the past. In a variety of ways, Meekin was a silent achiever extraordinaire who seldom caught the spotlight as he cruised through the high life. By having protection from the highest level of law enforcement, no one ever bothered him.

Early in 1973 we decided to visit the Clockwork Orange gang again. Shorty's schoolgirl partner, Jan Stubbs - who was amusingly dubbed The Pelican, was at the house.

"Jan, this is Bill and Gaynor," Shorty made the introductions.

"Pleased to meet you," the little lady responded.

Following the introductions, the girls got on well together. Regardless of their differences in age, Gaynor being 23 and Jan 16, they quickly began chatting in the usual innocent, girly fashion. Hamilton, on the other hand, definitely preferred to rave on about more outrageous matters.

"Billy, do you want to hear about the time when The Three steal-a the sausage? It's really funny," he recalled. "We were living in a flat and our neighbours were this Italian family. They had a locked cupboard under the house where they used to store food, so one night The Three gets all dressed up to pinch their supplies. He puts on his German helmet and army overcoat, wraps the carpet snake around his waist, and grabs a bayonet to break open the lock."

"Is this fair dinkum?"

"Oh yes, this dead-set happened. Well, no sooner does he get the cupboard door open, when the Italian father comes out and catches him red-handed. 'You steal-a the sausage,' the Italian says and he points to the bulge around The Three's waist, thinking that's the sausage. Like, when he then spots the snake he's terrified, so The Three holds up the bayonet and shouts at him, 'Flee from Satan, you sinner, flee,' and the bloke turns around and runs for his life. You had to laugh."

It was unclear how Peter Hall got his nickname of The Three so I asked, "Where did you get the nickname from?"

"I'm part of the Holy Trinity, Bill. Father, Son and Holy Ghost," he replied smirking.

"No, no, no," Hamilton excitedly interjected. "Once when he was blind drunk, he vomited, pissed and shit himself at the same time. Ha, ha, ha. All three holes kicked in together. That's why we call him The Three." Spontaneously the gang joined in with the laughter.

Later, we went for a drive, checking out what was around. The souped-up Studebakers purred as they travelled along the road. Shorty brought Evil Eye along for the ride. The suburban streets were lined with wide grassy footpaths, new houses, children and their puppy dogs were running around. The bull terrier in Shorty's lap grew agitated by the sight; viciously he growled as he tried to crawl his way through the barely-opened window.

"Give us the death howl, boy," Shorty urged his dog along, not that Evil Eye needed any urging. The moment he got close to the other dogs, Evil Eye howled savagely, frothing at the mouth. "He fucks the male dogs and kills the females," Shorty chuckled.

Back at the Chermside house, Hamilton enjoyed to sit around the lounge and tell stories about some of the zany things that had happened throughout his life. Chatter, chatter, chatter.

Later, on a boys only day, talking rudely about females when none were present, having a smoke and reminiscing just for a laugh, Hamilton said, "Hey; about ten years ago me and Billy had the same girlfriend, not at the same time though."

"Oh yeah, Toni, she liked to tell a lie," I remembered. "A mad case. Her whole family were weird. Her father ran a Real Estate business and acted real posh while Toni ran around like a mad moll. Once I bought her a yellow dress, and then later after she gave me up to the coppers, her mother wore the yellow dress into court and came over to chat me up in the dock."

"Oh yer, like, the whole family were really bonkers. Toni has this twin sister, Sandra, they looked a bit alike, and she was seeing Patty Kramer for a while."

"Patty Kramer, he's got a big jaw."

"Yer, we used to call him The Jaw. Anyway, Patty was married, Sandra knew that, and he told her that he would leave his wife for her."

"What happened?"

"Well, there was me and Toni, Patty and Sandra booked into this motel. And when we ran out of money Sandra said she could forge her father's cheques, and Patty said if she got enough money we could all go and live in Sydney together. Toni didn't want her sister coming with us, so as soon as Sandra cashed \$300 we bought some tequila. What a party. Sandra got blotto; she

knocked herself out with some pills. Then, when she was out like a light, Toni wrote a thank you note, tied it into her sister's hair, and we just packed up and left her there. Patty called at his place, picked up his wife instead, and off we drove to Sydney."

"Far out."

"But then Kramer split, taking his wife and what was left of the money, the greedy bastard. He left me and Toni stranded in Sydney flat broke. Toni didn't care though, she loved cracking it on the streets at Kings Cross and quickly brought in some cash. Man, she loved rooting so much that even if blokes didn't have the money, she'd let them gang-bang her for free."

"Did she really?"

"Yep, I know what I'd like to do with her. I just don't know what to do with the body."

Shorty amusingly interjected, "You could see Vince. He's good at getting rid of people."

"Seriously though, that Toni was a nympho. When we were living together, she used to suck me off while I was asleep."

"Don't they all?"

"Hey, here's a funny story about Patty Kramer. He once told me that he had the green-light for working with Hallahan, a really bent copper who later resigned."

"The newspapers once wrote Hallahan up as a hero cop; on the front page too."

"Goofy reporters, they'll print anything the jacks tell them."

"Yeah, well anyway, Patty said it was the go. Just pay a sling and you'd never get pinched. At the finish Hallahan geed him into running around dressed up with a wig doing armed robs at places where he said were sweet. Later, after a couple of stick-ups, a team of coppers pinched The Jaw outside a TAB where Hallahan had sent him to rob. Jacks, you can't trust them."

"But what if they set something up?"

"Yer, Billy, what do you think?"

"What, and rob a place where they send you? That's how Kramer got pinched. Look, unless you're running a brothel, a card-playing joint, taking SP bets, or selling sly-grog, you shouldn't have to give the coppers a cut of what you earn."

For an afternoon smoko session, Hamilton donned his bowler hat and cane to strut around and listen to the stereo speakers pounding out the Clockwork Orange theme. "Did you see the movie, Billy; ultra-violence, that's where it's at!"

"It's a bigger buzz having a bet at the racetrack."

"Shit man, don't turn chicken. Forget the racehorses, get with us. Shorty's girlfriend, The Pelican, often brings us youngies after school. Just think, Billy, schoolgirls, fresh fish."

"Humgh. Hey, I'd rather mount a bank-counter, while under camera, without a mask, than root an under-age sheila."

Obviously on some escapades, the Clockwork Orange gang were in their own world. Still, there was a lingering connection. On a trip down memory lane Hamilton recalled, "Do you remember when we used to book into motels and pinch their TVs?"

"It was easy back then. But I've dropped off the cops and robbers scene these days."

"Why's that?"

"If ever it comes to the crunch and someone gets arrested, very few can swallow the poison pill and wear the blue alone."

After the ramble down memory-lane it was time to drive back into town. One thing certain, by mingling with like-minded characters, coincidences were bound to crop up on some occasions.

Away from the gang, as it so happened, the holiday unit that Gaynor rented close to the city was the same unit complex where I had resided with Tell-A-Lie Toni a few years earlier. Those fully furnished units, complete with linen, a stove, refrigerator, cutlery, radio and television, were ideal for anyone travelling light. By having a swimming pool alongside the bedroom was an additional treat. On every sunny day the sight of the little lady stepping out by the pool dressed in her bikini caught the attention of some of the guests. Being somewhat of a teaser, her petite figure did reveal a small hour-glass shape that she enjoyed to flaunt around.

During the early hours of morning in the Valley, long after all the pubs were closed, Vince O'Dempsey and Billy McCulkin gathered around a table at the Torino nightclub with a couple of