

JUST FAMOUS ENOUGH NOT TO BE NOTICED

As told by
Michael Donovan

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Publishers:

Inspiring Publishers

P.O. Box 159 Calwell ACT 2905, Australia.

Email: inspiringpublishers@gmail.com

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Author: Donovan, Michael Jerome

Title: **Just Famous Enough not to be Noticed**/*Michael Jerome Donovan*.

ISBN: 9781925346008 (pbk)

Subjects: Donovan, Michael Jerome.

Executives--Australia--Biography.

Business consultants--Australia--Biography.

Executive coaching--Australia--Biography.

Dewey Number: 658.40092

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*Character is what you are.
Reputation is what people think you are.*

Around this time Moya had some financial problems. Carol and I paid various bills and offered to finance a sort of reverse mortgage which would also assist her and Terry. She didn't accept the offer but over time got out of the tight spot somehow. I didn't ask. This was all done by letter. Talking directly with one another still posed problems. This might seem childish but Moya always had to win any exchange and I just couldn't be bothered to engage. The perfect solution was just not to talk but write to one another.

I have always been suspicious about the unpaid bills, Moya visited friends interstate. Supposedly she hid her blue-grey diamond ring inside a lettuce in the freezer so the story goes. Again supposedly she forgot it was there and threw the wet green mess

out in the garbage on her return. It was supposedly uninsured but curiously her finances eased. Did she sell it? Hmmm!

In February 1980 the NSW Government sought to apply the Basque worker co-operative model from Mondragon in Spain to a youth employment program. Working with the Co-operative Federation of NSW a fund was established to create a group of small enterprises. These would provide education, skills training and businesses through which long-term unemployed youth could be offered opportunities to re-enter the workforce. I submitted an application to be the Business Advisor to this programme and was appointed to the role in April 1980.

Initially located in the Co-op Federation offices in Sydney, I reported to a panel comprised of Bruce Freeman from the Federation, John Humphreys, Department of Youth and Community Services or YACS which was then under Minister Rex 'Buckets' Jackson who disgraced himself and had to resign some years later and, Alan Gregg of the Department whose knowledge of social enterprise and co-op development has made an outstanding contribution to building collaborative enterprise. There was some small interaction for a time with formidable bureaucrat Sue Vardon. John became a Regional Directors of YACS.

On staff, as training and education advisor, was Malcolm Rodgers who years later was to be the Director of Strategy at the Australian Taxation Office. I put Malcolm into the genius class of 'thinker'. His assistance was invaluable. Between us we developed modules across many business subjects and functional business operations all customised for worker co-op application. Malcolm and I toured the state giving lectures and presentations. Our great courseware was constantly updated and modified based on practical lessons learned and gleaned from application in-the-field. Eventually we had a proven set of techniques and processes which created a minimum standard for use anywhere in a worker driven micro business environment.

Within eighteen months we had been awarded the 1981 NSW Small Business Productivity Improvement Award by creating

over forty-five new micro enterprises across New South Wales, Australia. We had identified business opportunities ranging from new-start options to acquiring established trading enterprises which had unexploited opportunity.

The job roles and skill-sets needed in each enterprise were identified and suitable candidates, chosen from long-term unemployed persons, were trained for specific roles. They would own the business and operate the enterprise under worker co-op principles. The one exception to the mix was the manager who had to have prior experience running a business, preferably in the locale. Desirably, she or he would also be currently unemployed. One such, and my pleasure to work with, was Genya McCaffrey who became Mayor of North Sydney.

All businesses became part of a larger support network where we traded talent and know-how. Advisory panels covering finance, sales and marketing, recruitment and staffing, manufacturing, design and technology, legal, training and education supporting each fledgling business.

The programme was a catalyst for Tranby Aboriginal Cooperative College established in Randwick in 1984. It was through Nungera Co-op I met Joyce and Colin Clague from Maclean, NSW. We were to build a solid friendship. My understanding and appreciation of aboriginal culture was given an overhaul which I greatly value. I worked on a couple of bicentenary indigenous projects with Joyce in the run up to the celebrations in 1988. Joyce and Colin saw participation in our programme as gaining more for the indigenous population than standing outside and criticising what could not be changed in relation to European occupation of Australia.

Joyce was eventually a New South Wales Bicentennial Council member so when her people's programs were under threat she pushed back hard against influential advisers like the Premier's Chief of Staff, Shane Easson. Watching Joyce in action was a delight and a valuable learning experience in political manoeuvring. She directly and fearlessly challenged Premier Barry

Unsworth, eventually resigned from her Council appointment in protest at the treatment of the indigenous components of the overall celebrations, sighting issues over trust with Gerry Gleeson and Peter Arnold specifically. To give him his due, Shane willingly took advice from me to try to manage and to repair the relationship with Joyce but she stood her ground.

Colin Clague became Assistant Director at the Equal Opportunities Commission and Joyce Clague MBE, by then, served in the Ombudsman's Office for a time.

This co-op worker managed programme provided me with huge experience in dealing with all levels of local government, business associations and community leaders. I had access to and learned from good advice around legal structures, legislative conformity and corporate dealings, particularly shareholder structures and shareholder rights. The working environment was incredibly stimulating because it was leading edge thinking, innovative and provided for the application of new ideas in a constantly fluid environment.

We made mistakes but this meant learning how not to do something rather than to blame. We also quickly shared any learning experiences with the many others to save them wasting resources through failure of repetition. The *invent-once-apply-often* rule, for both right and wrong methodologies, was normal and expected. The power of this interaction, sharing and exchange is incredible. News, announcements and social sharing were done through our popular newsletter, *WorkLink*.

The effort to realise the programme was considerable and we all worked hard to achieve the outcome. This group effort established micro-enterprises in some 15 centres, four in suburban Sydney and the rest throughout New South Wales including the alternate lifestyle centres of Nimbin and Bellingen where co-op principles were understood perhaps better than elsewhere.

I don't wish to give the impression establishing this programme didn't have its challenges. It had many. We had to close Gosford, Taree and Armidale Co-ops as failed experiments but the lessons

learned strengthened the remaining operations and new ventures which followed as the programme entered the next phase of consolidation and refinement. With the initial limited success of the programme by early 1981 it moved out from under the aegis of the Co-op Federation into its own offices in a warehouse near Chinatown, Sydney.

To validate the marketing strategy for a few of the Co-op's products with tourism potential, I engaged Paul Shea in early 1982 to independently assess and assist. Paul had previously been Marketing Director of KFC so he had the required brand and product experience. Carol and I are still good friends with Paul and Judy even now. Paul is a Master Orienteer of some note and late in life has qualified as a rigger on tall ships.

All systems, processes and methods of delivery of the programme elements were brought together in a Worker Co-operative Handbook. The businesses or enterprises created or acquired and converted to co-op status included commercial cleaning, metal and wood fabrication, indigenous crafts, sea-worm harvesting, apiary, milling of recycled rare woods, retail seafood, horse equipment repair and manufacture, printing, retail, wholesale, marine electronics and mining barrier supplies.

Each co-op was established with a board of local persons with appropriate business skills to match the needs of the co-op. They were joined by two worker representatives who represented all workers' self-determination and equity at the board level. We had some personality challenges to get the boards and management mix right. We had good people and scallywags. My diplomacy skills were often sorely tested by connivance, stupidity and greed but in the main a majority of centres had good people with the right stuff. A new Act was passed by State Parliament to recognise worker co-operative structures as part of the corporate business management fabric in New South Wales.

If I had had the connection to Ricardo Semler then, instead of two decades hence, we could have tapped his early experiences and learnings from SEMCO first hand. His wildly successful book,

under the title, *Maverick* was published in 1993, being called *Turning the Tables* when first issued in Brazil in 1988. Our programme was aiming to emulate in a small way what Ricardo was doing on a bigger scale in different parts of the world around the same time, yet neither knew of the other.

Despite its successes the programme faced government budget cuts by mid-1981. I was short-listed for consideration for a Churchill Fellowship to study worker co-ops overseas but missed out. The cuts to programme funding happened the next year. The team pushed on with consolidating the wins to date and introducing new opportunities.

Following an annual Co-op Federation Conference at the Australian National University, Canberra the International word-of-mouth about our work spread amazingly. We had enquiries for programme details from the universities of Stockholm, Toronto and York. Locally, Professor Robert Spillane and Ron Cacciope of the Management Studies Centre at Macquarie University took interest and were instrumental in my lecturing there for several semesters.

An independent study by the University of NSW Social Welfare Research Centre ranked the Worker Co-op program's achievements very highly in terms of the number of previously unemployed youth gaining meaningful employment, sticking with it and learning job skills of a high calibre. I am very proud of my contribution in co-ordinating this effort.

Winning the productivity improvement award caught the attention of Denis Davis of Macquarie University who had an embryonic idea for a cluster of employment networks using tourist attractions with historic themes. Together we developed a proposal titled, "*A Bicentenary Celebration Employment Project, A Mini Industrial Plan for Employment Generation in Western Sydney.*"

The potential attraction to government was the creation of over nine thousand jobs drawn from the ranks of the unemployed. Our submission to the bicentenary assessment panel received a positive initial response. Ian McAulay, Deputy Director General

for Youth and Community Service, and I presented the case to the panel made up of Neville Wran, John Mason, John Utz, Ita Buttrose, Dr Michael Joel and Barrie Unsworth. While ultimately funding was not allocated from the bicentennial budget, the imaginative scope of the project was noticed, was remembered and stood me in good stead for a role in developing and delivering another major flagship bicentennial programme under Dr Joel's chairmanship.

At the same time, I was a member of an Advisory Working Committee for the Australian Council for Social Service on Income, Security and Economic Issues with the redoubtable Eva Cox. I would use my understanding of social issues gained from this and the co-op programme exposure in many areas of endeavour, yet to come.

My efforts, over the two years I ran the Worker Co-op program, received formal Ministerial recognition and Director-General endorsement. Both provided much needed credibility for a then unknown and unexpected new career move was just around the corner.

On the home front, Carol setup her own typesetting business with a girlfriend Margaret Kocks and in partnership with a legal services and computer firm LOCUS, owned by DPA. Step Typesetting was a great success especially for Carol whose accuracy and eye for detail was an excellent fit for the business. In fact she was so good proofs were 'finals'. A new client complained they had been given a *final bromide* to check for corrections and refused to pay for the paper until they found only three errors in almost one million key-strokes. Strangely, years later, Carol had to take a typing test to qualify for a job as a temp. She failed the test through nervousness but won the job on references.

I was still keenly interested in self-improvement so starting in May 1982, I undertook and completed the inaugural *NSW Enterprise Workshops in Innovation and Entrepreneurship* offered by the Commonwealth Department of Science and Technology and the then Institute of Directors in Australia. The programme

was managed by Stan Tibbles and Yvor Hingee. The workshops were a combination of residential sessions; lectures by experts, independent team work and plan presentation to an expert panel. A terrific experience over four months which finished in August 1982. My group were the Yellow Team.

Our evaluation invention was an acoustic test to detect blocked diesel pintle injectors. The inventor was Kel Daniel. Kel was an inventor with the normal entrepreneurial ego gratification needs we often read about. The device had won a Geneva Award and had Arab oil interest's recognition. Our inventor entrepreneur hid the schematics and prototype away in a vault only allowing limited access to develop the business plan as part of our course. We had to threaten legal action to get sufficient access to the prototype and schematics to do the plan.

The whole experience was bizarre. Yellow Team graduated based on the process we undertook to produce the plan, not on validation of the device working. We developed in-principal distribution deals in the USA and device manufacturing from China and Korean interests, diesel engine manufacturers and servicing; and investors all based on our credibility but with the actual device locked in a safe and unseen. Stan Tibbles almost tore out the last of his hair in frustration with the inventor.

Our incorporated syndicate called INVOTECH persisted in trying to do a deal with KELDAN, Daniels' company until mid 1986 but as we couldn't produce the invention for demonstrations or analysis to clench pending deals it became an impossible effort. We had media coverage on ABC *Nationwide*, 60 Minutes on Channel 9 and the 6pm News on Channel 10 with Colin Segaloff for a feature all ready to do perspectives on the potential benefits.

The trouble was the damn thing did not work and was proven demonstrably not to some years later by science geek and developer David Bloomfield, one of our team. The financial modelling for our project team effort was provided by Geoff Berry who was then with the newly branded Westpac following the merger of Bank of New South Wales and Commercial Bank of Australia.

Barry Loftus and Douglas McDonald made up the fourth and fifth team members.

I reprised my course attendance in 1983 giving a lecture for participants at the Innovation Centre. I was honoured to be invited to judge the year's entries and then again several years later in 1991 as Chairman of Judges.

Around this time I commenced a relationship with the newly named, Australian Institute of Company Directors which lasted until my retirement. Over the years, I contributed to several revised director courseware modules on board strategy along with a number of case-studies, eventually lecturing part of the Company Director Course (CDC).

The case-studies looked at significant strategic initiatives of ANZ Bank, Australia Post and Cisco Systems as update options in the Company Director's Course. In 2005 I presented modules in a CDC extension course for directors titled *Directors Essentials* dealing with strategic direction and assessing strategy. This exposure resulted in my working with Pauline Green, their events organiser and CEO John Hall on a number of AICD national conferences as a speaker and facilitator – and a high-level business exploratory trip into China with leading Australian company directors.

I now regard the AICD with mild disdain as I see it as allowing a static view of management and governance which is somewhat out-dated, unresponsive, permitting directors to be passive and non-contributory. I shudder at the lack of observance of proper simple governance, performance audits, clear thinking and common-sense. Still I've made good money out of working with many boards to overcome their inertia.

Just as I was starting the Enterprise Workshop course my contract with the Worker Co-op was terminated by the Director-General due to programme changes and budget cuts. This was not unexpected and allowed new doors to be opened.

Fortuitously, Gerald Robinson and Bill Donnelly of Data Processing Associates (DPA), Carol's typesetting business partner, needed assistance with a new venture under their law services

LOCUS brand and put me on to get the service launched. I was able to refresh my programming skills, learn about the latest in computers and engage with the big end of town's law firms. The latter was basically a sales job but thankfully it wasn't going to last long. The improvement to my technical skill-set was greatly appreciated.

In October 1982 I heard John Mostyn wanted to speak to me. This came to me through the Head Engineer of Hoyts, Ron Ferguson as Mostyn wasn't sure of my residual feelings towards him from the Hoyts episode. I called him. We had one of John's usual business lunches at the famous and much respected Beppi's. John Mostyn had a prodigious appetite for good food and very good wine. The discussion was simple and to the point. He wanted me to run the Nimrod Theatre and to take it to become the Nimrod National Theatre based in Sydney's Seymour Theatre Centre. He was Nimrod's chairman.

John buttered me up by saying I came highly recommended for the role. I never found who, however I suspect the Premier's Department. The story as told to me at this meeting was the current GM had resigned to travel. The business faced some unusual challenges and the task of negotiating access and residence within the Seymour Theatre Centre complex while moving Nimrod up a notch into national theatre status required special skills. I initially said, "No" as I just didn't trust the guy. And, rightly so as it turned out.

Under close questioning but expressing little real interest, I got John into a position where he had to explain what issues affecting the company required my so-called special skills?

The company was in debt. Audiences had dropped off. Funding continuity was in question. It had no leader. The aim of national status had not been interpreted well by the media, cultural grant supporters or most of the staff. The Seymour Bequest trustees had not opened their arms to the idea of a new tenant as a theatre-company-in-residence approach. Mostyn's board were

demanding action. I was trusted by someone 'upstairs' and would be backed in efforts to bring order and a new status to Nimrod.

Apart from the cautious approach to the offer I had no residual animosity towards John Mostyn. I agreed to meet the board which contained many good people like Solicitor-General Mary Gaudron, John Menadue, Tony Gilbert, Justice Hope, Larry Eastwood and Vivian Fraser. I had separate follow-up meetings with Gaudron and Menadue. Mary Gaudron became the first female Justice of the Australian High Court. We caught up occasionally over the years following.

I accepted the position of General Manager and Nimrod Licensee commencing 1 November 1982 although I sat in on early Seymour Centre negotiations in late October. Nimrod was bidding to become the manager of the Seymour Centre for three to five years with term roll-overs. The University of Sydney Senate were not convinced Mostyn's plan would work for them. Two weeks later the University offered a contract for the Footbridge Theatre on Parramatta Rd. Not what was wanted! Even so, we asked architect Vivian Fraser to look at thrusting the Footbridge stage. However, with what I was about to uncover all these early efforts were to go nowhere.

Much has already been said, written and reported about Nimrod's history so I won't repeat it. Instead, let me mention some events which may not be commonly known and which might interest you more. I have enormous detail of what went on and the huge effort by so many to overcome challenges. Here is just a little bit of it heavily, no, let's say succinctly summarised. Going back to my diaries opens up a flood of recollection and surprise we actually pulled it off.

Within six weeks I had found the picture of the financial position and forward planning was a disaster. While the previous GM had agreed to stay up to six weeks by arrangement with the board, I asked Bruce Pollack to go early. Alongside him went his brother Norman who was performing the role of accountant. There were

\$430,000 in unpaid bills and a significant tax liability of the same order of magnitude.

Two days later enter William Chen a new arrival from Asia seeking opportunity. I needed a skilled accounting ferret to go over the books properly. Nimrod was William's first job in Australia to support his young family. William went on to influential financial positions with corporations like the developer IPOH Gardens.

Working together we assembled a more accurate picture of the theatre company's real financial position. Media at the time mentions some \$515,000 of trading losses in addition to outstandings. What we reported to the board was the poor financial administration (up to 15 Cabcharge voucher books accessible and usable by anyone at any time), tens of thousands in undiscovered creditor invoices and massive unpaid PAYG tax liabilities plus a long-standing wardrobe and costume sales tax issue pending. The total was closer to one million dollars along with a pending sales tax case which thankfully was won some years later. Mostyn simply refused to believe the report and brought in his own finance man from Osti Fashions. The awful situation was confirmed. The relationship between me as the new GM and Chair went downhill fast when I steadfastly stuck to the awful truth rather than be enticed to guild the lily for politics or media.

Working with William, we planned how the business might be turned around. We appreciated support from the staff who all met and endorsed a number of departmental restructures. I had spent two days talking to all staff about their new arrangements, their roles and the need of their support of the initiatives to save the company. They sent their unanimous endorsement to the chairman. I also had the support of Artistic Directors, John Bell and Aubrey Mellor, to make changes and save this theatre company and building which was much loved by Sydneysiders and which had changed the face of Australian theatre for audiences, actors and directors alike.

Evan Williams was the head of the Department of the Arts for the NSW government in those days. An institution then and for

many years after but as immovable as granite when he wanted to obstruct something. Any plan had to pass by Evan. I was curious as to the level of 'upstairs' support I really had and proposed we go the full hog to that most feared bureaucrat Gerry Gleeson, Head of the Premiers Department, known to most as *The Cardinal* but we gave him the code name *The Mandarin*.

I setup the meeting and sent a briefing paper in advance. I was obliged to let John Mostyn lead the conversation despite him not entirely supporting the proposition being tabled. John Bell supported change, was direct with Gleeson about his commitment to Nimrod and had sent a similar undertaking to the Premier through other channels the day before. I laid out an arrangement for the government to guarantee a bank loan for \$500,000 for three years and pay the interest of some \$75,000 p.a. A scheme of arrangement with the Tax Office was needed but I already had interest in such a scheme by ATO officials if the NSW Government did the loan deal. Staff knew some of them would need to go.

There was some debate around whether Nimrod had run its course a decade after being started by John Bell, Richard Wherrett and Ken Horler. I pointed to the longevity of arts organisations in Europe and even others in Australia to change the mood to one more positive and hopeful.

I expected several days to pass before getting a reply and for a formal submission to be requested at least. Mostyn and Bell had to leave at this point. I remained to close the meeting with Gleeson and was unexpectedly asked by Gerry to wait in the foyer. It seemed we might get an answer now but I feared bad news happens fast. This did not look good.

Shortly after I was summoned before the NSW Premier, Neville Wran. Wran had a formidable presence. There were no pleasantries. I was asked if the plan was truly workable. "I believe so." was my firm and resolute reply. I quickly reiterated what was needed and how it could be done.

Gleeson and the Premier communicated non-verbally, something had already been decided.

My answer to these powerful men was the truth but what we didn't know at the time was the Australia Council Theatre Board was proposing to move all subsidised theatres to annual funding status instead of triennial. A huge shift in programming, financial stability and contracting constraints, not to mention certain death to subscription seasons which ran over calendar and financial year dates. As a group the subsidised theatres were to fight back against Bob Taylor's proposed short-sightedness.

Wran spoke, "We will back you." Pointing at me. "The board has to change. All of them. Drop the National Theatre plan and if possible, he said, do a recovery in two years. Give me your undertaking on this and the loan facility will be formalised as soon as possible." I verbally agreed to these conditions. The Premier extended his hand and we shook in agreement. The meeting was over in less than a few minutes.

I was the general manager but not a director. I didn't have the authority to accept the deal but did so anyway.

Wran was very supportive of Nimrod and John Bell and had only just recently indicated the New South Wales government nominees on the University of Sydney Senate would be supporting the resident management rights application by Nimrod, as Nimrod and not Nimrod National, well not yet! That was of course while no-one appreciated the parlous state of the company. Plainly, the Senate's support could not be relied upon and indeed didn't happen. It took a turn-around in Nimrod fortunes to effect a turn-around of the Senate's position down the track.

I had another strategy if the University Senate were inclined to have Nimrod do so, which was to establish a trading trust that would produce plays at Seymour under the Nimrod banner with profits going to pay off debt. *As You Like It* would be the first in a series rather than a subscription but with subscribers getting special treatment. Ultimately this came about in a different way.

In February 1983 I had met with Mary Gaudron, at her invitation as a mentor, to consider a number of options for survival which included access to larger audiences through an arrangement with

Seymour Centre. I wanted a number of fall-back positions which showed our determination to recover. An option was to get the government to purchase the building and for Nimrod to operate rent free until we traded out of debt. I had not needed to table the idea at the meeting with Gleeson and Wran. Yet, a variation of this option would eventuate in a different form.

I had a miracle deal in hand but I very nearly wet myself. First, with the thrill of the rescue package being agreed. Second, as the cold reality of the conditions sank in. Gleeson and I returned to his office. He called Evan Williams who arrived about 20 minutes later. I walked Evan through the plan and the deal. He objected and was told firmly it was approved and to prepare whatever was needed to create the loan facility and to put the interest in his departmental budget. Needless to say from that day on I was possibly one of Evan William's least favourite people. I was to pip him once more many years later.

It was late in the day. I didn't go back to the Nimrod that afternoon but did return after midnight to walk around the building and think about what more was needed to restore this wonderful organisation. I was terrified with the responsibility. In John Bell's biog he calls me a 'pragmatic numbers man'.

Next morning, I kept the outcome of the private meeting with the Premier to myself and confirmed a board meeting for that evening. All directors were on standby in any case for a report back of the Gleeson, Mostyn, Bell and Donovan sortie.

I am also very thankful to Mary Gaudron for her '*hypothetical*' guidance that day following the meeting with the Premier, in how to roll out the news of the conditions placed on us by the Government, to the Nimrod directors and the chairman. I made some changes which I did not disclose to her until the night so the responsibility for liability was mine alone. This decision concerned my holding onto director's resignations while a new board was appointed.

William Chen could not believe the deal had been accepted. Until the board meeting secrecy was paramount. Without any

prompting William started on the redundancy plan, merging the new cash-flow and adjusting the forward operating budgets. I contacted Pam McGarvin who had just left Actors Equity and asked her to advise on the redundancies and to source other job options for staff who were to leave once the board hurdle was behind us.

The Downstairs Theatre was the venue for that fateful meeting the evening after the deal was struck. Mostyn was negative towards the rescue plan and controlled debate until Mary forced the opportunity for me to speak uninterrupted to outline the plan in detail and reveal the outcome of the surprise meeting with the Premier. I kept back the news they were all to resign.

I had done the deal without board sanction so not surprisingly there were some who saw my overstepping my authority as outweighing the success of the initiative. Ken Horler and Mary Gaudron brought sense back to the meeting when John Mostyn challenged me for proof of deal. It was then I dropped the clanger they all had to resign as a condition of the loan being secured and incidentally for our quarterly grant funding for the period to be paid.

Not surprisingly, John Mostyn went ballistic accusing me of engineering a personal payback. Ignoring the tirade I respectfully asked a director put a motion for the board to offer to all resign. To guarantee this happened they were to all sign resignations to be held by me. I was not a director so I had to rely on others to put the proposal, get a second and nominate two to remain as caretaker directors. Horler and Guadron led the way in the best interests of Nimrod continuing.

Except for Mostyn, all agreed and executed resignations. It took some time for his fellow directors to coax John into stepping aside. He demanded proof again so I went to the entrance of the theatre asking Evan Williams' representative to join us. He carried the company's outstanding quarterly funding cheque and a letter agreeing to the loan facility. The letter also outlined the underwriting of interest conditions of the financial arrangement

and expectation all debt would be cleared within two years. Surprisingly to me, the letter endorsed my ability to manage the situation. An additional letter to me outlined what was expected of me in the service to the new board. It was all very theatrical.

I carried the resignations around for a week until a meeting of the potential new board members could be called and transition was achieved. John Mostyn and I have never spoken since. Not a peep has been heard from him about these events.

Gleeson/Wran tapped Ken Tribe on the shoulder as the new chair stating I was to work with him on the new mix of directors. Ken, who was also then chair of Musica Viva, agreed after meeting me and looking at the recovery plan. He suggested we also look to organise a public and industry fund raising concert and broadcast using a contact of his at Channel Seven.

The transition board meeting was held in April 1983. Mostyn declined to attend. And, for the first time, the GM role was made an equivalent position to Artistic Director to balance creativity with my pragmatism if it became necessary. I only ever had to step in once over the budgets for Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

Pam McGarvin successfully placed 8 of 9 staff made redundant. We did new contracts with the unions for the retained staff and new contracts with Equity for actors. Based on our 'fair dealings' we were able to use Equity to assist in gaining free contributions from many industry notables when we did stage the televised benefit night.

The new board under respected arts doyen Ken Tribe included Tony Berg of Hill Samuel and Jim Thynne of Allen, Allen & Hemsley as the independent directors. John and Aubrey made up the executive directors plus a non-director staff representative. The General Manager was not a director. Ken stood down in late 1984 to be replaced by Tony Berg who brought Michael Magnus and Michael Darling onto a further refreshed board.

During their time on the board Tribe, Berg and Thynne all worked willingly to identify and introduce potential sponsors to Nimrod. They unselfishly brought their commercial contacts

and friends to Nimrod to support our sponsorship needs. One method that worked particularly well was service off-sets where a provider of services would do so free in exchange for staff tickets to shows with spare capacity. We packaged programs for corporates which built better staff relations in exchange for reducing Nimrod overheads.

Managing the accounts and payroll was a challenge. I suggested to William Chen a device called a computer might assist. I did a two-year sponsorship deal initially with WANG for a PC and when it expired we replaced it with one from IBM. William and I taught each other Excel taking the data from handwritten detailed budgets and cash-flows I had developed and he managed. Now these were big sheets covering all operations, production and front-of-house bar etc. When designed, input, validated and balanced the original 'hand-drawn' math was out by one thousand and ten dollars in over one million. We were pretty pleased.

Next challenge was payroll, a complicated mess across departments and shows. It took a month with William directing layout for regulatory consistency and with me writing the program. We'd turn it on, on Wednesday night, at 6pm and it would finish around 9.30am Thursday. However, we had a rounding error in the tax table which annoyed William to distraction. This error was a very small number way to the right.

For his peace of mind and my sanity I called Microsoft and asked for assistance, only to be told it was not possible to configure a payroll in Excel. I said we had, only not to be believed. We pushed our case and eventually two guys from Microsoft showed up at the Nimrod. We displayed our work. They were impressed. Apparently, their denial of an ability to do payroll in XL back then was simply they didn't think anyone would be silly enough to try. Boom! Boom!

John Bell and Aubrey Mellor did a great job of changing the production schedule when we had planned to close the Downstairs Theatre. I believe it was Aubrey who thought of Colin Friels doing a season of Chekov's *The Bear* as a special downstairs. Originally

slated to run three weeks with limited performances the season was extended over and over to many weeks due to the demand. This substantially kept us to budget as we paid off tax and kept paying current liabilities. The new subscription season was thankfully also popular with audiences.

I have two recollections of working with Colin Friels. One evening I dropped into his dressing room during my regular rounds to find him and his partner Judy Davis in a *sotto voce* argument about their agent the formidable Bill Shanahan. They unloaded on me about a current negotiation dilemma between them and Bill. I offered some advice to unlock negotiations and moved on my rounds. After that evening's performance I was asked to join them at the Nimrod Bar. They enquired if I was interested in taking over representation of them both.

Now the issue was really just a minor hiccup between three strong personalities. I was honoured but knew Bill was best for them long-term. I made a case for them re-negotiating with Bill using various points. A week later they again shouted me a drink to celebrate a new contract with Shanahan Management.

The other recall is an incident when a patron kept talking during Colin's performance. Friels stopped the show, rushed into the intimate audience of the Downstairs Theatre and stridently dressed the fellow down with lots of spittle laced expletives. Having vented, Colin returned on-stage, backtracked to the beginning of the scene and without a hint of anything untoward continued the performance. He received a huge response at the end of the play for both performances.

I received no complaints from either the perpetrator or other audience members.

Bill Shanahan was paranoid about possible nude photographs of Simon Burke circulating from the 1984 rehearsals of Aubrey Mellor's '*Salonika*'. The play opens with Simon laying nude face down on the beach set. Every day Bill would call stating he had credible information the supposedly 'closed set' rehearsals were not secure and photos of Simon were about to be circulated.

The rumour mill was running fully charged and by the opening we had strong bookings. Bill's paranoia worked for the production. I never saw any photos. Imagine how poor Simon would fair now with mobile phones!

Alison Summers was the Nimrod dramaturg working with Aubrey. Alison is now married to award winning author Peter Carey of Booker Prize fame. She and I had a testy initial relationship but grew to respect each other's roles and talent.

One of the biggest faux pas early after my appointment was with Kim Carpenter, an extraordinarily talented puppeteer. Tall, painfully thin, beak-nosed and prone to extravagantly expressive hand movements, Kim and I had finished our first meeting and I went straight into another absently expressing a view out aloud "Kim is like a human mantis." To which a woman who I was just about to meet said, "That's my son."

Sitting before me was an older clone in a frock. Ailsa Carpenter was Nimrod's PR Officer. She forgave me and we worked closely together and I was pleased to experience and use Kim's unique talents in a number of successful productions. His work was generously supported by Weiss Fashions.

Nimrod had a tradition of presenting the Christmas Sydney Harbour Clark Island children's production. We were determined to maintain the good profile this brought the company despite the cost. However this required us to obtain better grants to realistically cover costs and this brought me into the spider web of the Sydney Festival and its director the cunning Stephen Hall. I had briefly known Stephen at the Australian Opera some years earlier and had renewed contact reminding him of our conversation in 1978 and assistance I'd rendered him with the *Friends of the Australian Opera*. Stephen Hall was to occupy a seat on the Bicentennial Council board, chaired by Gerry Gleeson, a few years hence and I tell an interesting story about one particular Council meeting in the next chapter.

Generously, Stephen introduced Nimrod to the Royal Academy of Dance who needed a stage for rehearsals. To augment cash-flow

we provided the Upstairs to meet their needs for many weeks. This gave me an idea to offer this larger theatre space to small to mid-size corporates for staff and Annual General Meetings. Woodside Petroleum was the very first for an AGM and John & Merrivale for a staff meeting. We even provided the venue for a party for Gough and Margaret Whitlam among others. We could manage bookings, acknowledge and accept RSVPs, issue event tickets, provide comfortable seating and offer a bar and food plus audio or video record proceedings.

We successfully proposed and applied for grants from the Arts Council Theatre Board and Literature Board to hold free matinees for the unemployed and, for retirees, some literary readings with the support of the Goethe Institute. All were moderately successful, increased our reputation for being alive and kicking and paid a portion of overall operating costs. The performance spaces were being given multi-purpose use in parallel to the subscription season shows of an evening.

We had two robberies at Nimrod, both thankfully non-violent. The first for \$825 was blamed on an over enthusiastic cleaner scooping up a bank bag as waste, so not really a robbery but processed as such for our claim on insurance. The second was the safe, using keys, and seems to have been an inside job. The police investigated and did extensive interviews over the loss of \$9,500, the weekend audience and bar takings. The loss was insured and our broker Howard Williams made sure the insurer paid up. No-one was prosecuted for the larger of the thefts. The cops and I were pretty sure who the culprit was but just couldn't prove it. I quietly managed the individual out of the business some time later.

As the Nimrod Liquor Licensee I had a lot of additional responsibility under the Act on top of my role as company GM. The process for being granted a liquor licence is relatively simple in comparison to transferring obligation to a new holder. Still, back then, a liquor licensee was a far simpler job than now so I am pleased to no longer have this encumbrance.

A robbery also happened at the Australian Opera offices when I was there. Quick to judgment, some staff were suspected of the theft without any evidence of a break-in. This was until I proved the robbers had gained access through a skylight and the evidence of this was their foot prints walking around the old style wide pelmeted office petitions which formed a maze of walkways above everyone's heads. It was an outside job and embarrassed apologies were made to all who had been slighted.

In order to control costs and meet the budget, Nimrod sought and obtained concessions for back stage, front-of-house and ancillary contracts from the Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees Association's Damien Stapleton. Not the easiest person to deal with as I had real trust issues with him over demands and favouritism as payback for what were commercial dealings to keep people employed. Damien feigned slight far too easily during negotiations.

Pam McGarvin had his measure so I left her to front for us once she joined our management team. It takes a unionist to handle another unionist it seems. Sue Beale took over from Pam at Equity. A capable and terrific administrator Pam went on to be the General Manager of the University of Melbourne Union and the South Australian Softball Association. We remained firm friends and would catch-up whenever our travel paths would cross. Pam succumbed to cancer in February 2012 in the US where she and her husband Jeff Del Nin had moved some years before. They had become successful in the Californian wine trade, Jeff as a wine writer and winemaker, Pam running their retail outlet.

My prior background with film contracts, the opera and musician contracts at the Australian Opera provide me with considerable experience with which to negotiate different and better deals including ancillary rights, if they ever presented, for both Nimrod and the artists, much to Damien's frustration. Bill Shanahan of Shanahan Management and Tony Williams of William Morris Agency complimented me on the fairness, balance and inclusiveness of deals on paper. If you can't win / win with talent then how

do you expect them to give their all for the public and make performances great?

My prior time at the opera and changes I tried to make there proved useful when re-organising the Nimrod Scenery and Wardrobe departments at Glebe. While taking in commissioned costumerie and set work wasn't altogether popular, it became a good part of overhead recovery to keep the skilled wardrobe and set staff employed. The work quality output was first rate. An attempt to do similarly at the AO didn't work due to entrenched practices and a lack of willingness to upset convention.

A much greater pleasure and long time friendship through the Sydney Festival connection is with Justin Macdonnell. A stinging wit, unconventional thinker and arts expert, Justin mentored me during this time. Years later, I served a term with him as a director of the Sydney Metropolitan Opera and Music Theatre Sydney. Justin also ran CAPP (Confederation of Australian Professional Performing Arts) after Wayne Maddern and we worked together on the annual Clark Island Children's Theatre sponsored by Sydney Festival and Dick Smith. For a number of years Justin worked in Miami and related to me a story about a major festival contract signing which happened in a helicopter hovering outside the territorial waters of the USA to avoid State contract taxation. He said it was one of the most unusual things he had done. All legal and apparently quite common. What a nice sideline for the helicopter providers!

The planning for the gala TV benefit called *Nimrod Night of the Stars* stretched resources. Despite the professional rivalry with Sydney Theatre Company through the love / hate relationship between John Bell and Richard Wherrett, my counterpart Donald McDonald was supportive as were Graeme Murphy and the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust among many others.

It is no exaggeration to say during the planning for the benefit every theatrical agent, talent scout, actor, performer, theatre company and whatever was contacted and asked to contribute gratis. Even the National Institute of Dramatic Arts under Elizabeth

Butcher and John Clark threw their weight behind the initiative. The response was extraordinary; such was the respect for John, Aubrey and Nimrod team. Through Pam McGarvin's efforts and Sue Beale's support, we had the full backing of Actors Equity.

Even the NSW Art Gallery head Edmund Capon offered gallery space if we needed a more intimate venue depending on our plans for a big gig or not. I later found out James Mitchell, of my Hoyts days, was of interest to the gallery's Jan Meek. Jan was a huge Nimrod supporter and introduced me to notables around town when the need arose. On each institution's Opening Nights I would challenge Edmund's sartorial splendour with one of my bow ties for which we were both justly famous. However, Edmund's habit of wearing odd socks was regarded as more of a trade mark than bow-ties. Whenever he and I talked Jan had already told me what he was wearing so I could comment. It became a standing introduction replacing the weather.

The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust is the Tax Office approved receiver of unconditional donations to the arts. Working with their Financial Director Don Grace we cleverly set up the ticket cost to have a non-directed portion to aid the Nimrod appeal associated with the telecast performances. The process was formally approved by the Australian Tax Office. The event raised just over \$95,000 of which ten percent went to an Actors Equity benevolent fund as a thank you to all the contributing artists.

While Channel Seven was great at the production values of TV they were hopeless at event promotion. To get a real paying audience, Ken Tribe asked me to take over the marketing. Pam had done the performance deals and to keep our part of the arrangement an engaged live audience was the key to a great event and financial success. For Nimrod's reputation, Pam and I made sure every participating organisation and performer was to be recognised, saluted and promoted.

The production went to air to an audience of nearly 2,000 in the Sydney Entertainment Centre on Sunday, November 20 1983. Michael Edgley had graciously changed a bump-in date for his

next production to allow us to proceed. I had originally obtained dates for the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House from Lloyd Martin but for this style of event the Centre was better suited. The broadcast rated well and a couple of years later in 1985, when Sydney Dance Company (SDC) did *Boxes* with Iva Davies and Icehouse at the Sydney Opera House, Graeme Murphy, the SDC Artistic Director asked me to manage the event which broadcast on the *Arts and Entertainment Channel* in the USA.

At the close of the television benefit performance every artist came down a staircase on stage as their name credit scrolled down the TV audience screens at home. When it came to me what the viewer saw was Executive Producer, Michael Donovan and my knees as the programme went to broadcast credits and the station logo. When we all watched the replay of the broadcast tape in the office next day, I spoke the phrase "Just famous enough not to be noticed." with a laugh. Beside me was publisher Brian Nebenzahl, Australian chief of *Playbill* theatrical magazine. He said in reply, "Great title for a book." Brian was to help me with introductions a year later to *Playbill* America for Morris West.

Strong budgetary control, good cash-flow management, Upstairs Theatre subscription popularity and the stunningly successful Downstairs Theatre production of *The Bear* all cut into the deficit and tax obligation. The TV fundraiser eliminated a further chunk of debt in one go. We were ahead of the game in repayments and guarantee obligations but still had several hundred thousand to recover.

The new subscription season took a brave step and included Shakespeare's '*King Lear*' to be staged at the Bankstown RSL Club. It had a very good theatre stage which could be extended into the audience to offer partial in-the-round. John Bell was to play *Lear* and Aubrey to direct. The production and season was a success. It received great reviews as I recall when it opened on 5 September 1984.

Now some of what I am telling here may seem surreal but Nimrod had a history of plots, manoeuvring and power-plays.

I took a call from our bankers ANZ. An audit disclosed a sealed envelope in safety deposit. It turned out to be papers and tape recordings from a previous power-play when Richard Wherrett, Ken and Lillian Horler were on an earlier board. Wherrett separated from Nimrod and became the inaugural Artistic Director of the Sydney Theatre Company.

The old Surry Hills tomato sauce factory converted into two theatres called Nimrod was showing signs of wear and tear. The surrounding site had development approval for townhouses and units. After much soul searching I arranged an engineering inspection of the building and then proceeded to hold a number of deep conversations with John and Aubrey, some of which were very heated and rightly so as we were talking about a possible move of venue and a resultant huge change of profile, operation and style for a much loved theatrical company.

A plan for sale of the premises which had been originally acquired for a single dollar years before was put to the board with a transition plan to move to Seymour. I had reactivated one of the original fall-back strategies. The decision to move was not taken lightly and Tony Berg brought in Ralph Evans of Pappas, Carter, Evans and Coop to advise. Pam McGarvin did a huge job in getting the staff on-side and John, Aubrey and I handled the performer and agent's side of the equation. Given Nimrod's status and reputation the decision had to have wide and strong support and make creative and commercial sense.

It is well reported in the media that when we went public with the news of the move sections of the industry decried the decision and actively worked to stop it. That was until the concept of a new theatre arising Phoenix like on the site was created by Sue Hill and Chris Westwood forming *Belvoir Street Theatre Company B* with the support from hundreds of small investors. What these two did with others was wonderful for the Australian theatre scene.

I had also gone a long way by this point in negotiations with Meriton's Harry Triguboff for his development to incorporate use of the theatre footprint as part of the residential development.

We discussed two options. Build us a new Nimrod or buy the old premises so we could move to Seymour Centre. Harry commissioned a serious 'viability analysis', to use his words, for a new structure. The old sauce factory, which had become the much loved Nimrod, would have been demolished with much hue and cry. What *Company B* provided was a continuance of the historic premises as a theatre, not in competition to Nimrod at Seymour as some thought but as an incubator for new work which might even transition to the new Nimrod stages of which there were three at the Seymour Centre.

I had reported all propositions and options to government. They endorsed the plan as it also paid out the guarantee. Evan Williams wasn't keen on another theatre company being created in our wake which would seek more grants funding from his department.

The girls behind *Company A* and *Company B* played politics. One day I got a call from a party claiming he was a government minister. I was openly threatened if we didn't sell the premises to A and B for less than a realistic price. I was able to inform him A and B, like every other interested party, had been told they could submit a tender by the 1 June 1984 closing date along with the five others who had declared interest including Leon Fink and Carrillo Gantner. Fink had purchased Hoyts some years before.

In the end the A and B consortium of some 600 theatre lovers won the bid and Belvoir Street Theatre had its genesis. Nimrod was out of debt and had a new home.

John Bell had some residual interest in establishing Mostyn's National Theatre creation. This seems to have been successfully achieved with his Bell Shakespeare Company. Aubrey had no interest in the idea of which I was aware. I have the art work from a newspaper caricature of John Mostyn on a wild eyed charger with the Nimrod National Theatre shield held high bursting out of the stalls scattering all and sundry. That had died with the transition of the new board but with the move to the Seymour Theatre complex the corpse was to be revitalised as an option in some minds.

The relatively new GM at Seymour was a friend, Robert Love. We opened negotiations towards the possibility of moving Nimrod into the Seymour Theatre Centre as Theatre-in-Residence. Whether this arrangement would eventually provide access to production support from the Seymour Bequest was left to the developing relationship between the parties once residency was achieved in the new house. A two-year lease was agreed and the company aimed to have a return season of the successful Bankstown RSL Season of Shakespeare's *King Lear* as its first production in September 1984.

I felt emotionally the Nimrod move to the Seymour Centre was completed on 29 August 1984 when I ordered workmen to remove all Nimrod signage from the Belvoir Street address.

Obviously something didn't work out longer term and the Nimrod finally succumbed in 1988. There was an indirect enquiry as to my availability and interest in returning to reprise my earlier restoration but I was occupied elsewhere. The original effort, from so many under my administration to save this terrific theatrical company, was recognised in a complimentary editorial in the Sydney Morning Herald. I suspect the recognition was promoted by a former Nimrod staffer Bob Evans who went on to be a very creditable reviewer for that newspaper.

When the new Ken Tribe board came in I had negotiated for the GM role to be on equal footing with the artistic director in the firm belief both roles had a duty to each other in balancing artistic choice with commercial reality. This was the first time John Bell as Artistic Director had a General Manager with an equal vote on what was best for the business in the current tight circumstances. The arrangement worked well while any threat to continuance existed. I thought John and I had a balanced relationship around artistic creativity and the need to run a viable business supporting the creative effort. Wasn't I naive?

Berg and I had met in April 1984 to look at prospective new board talent. Some considered were ad man Michael Magnus; banker, Michael Darling; Alex Dix and Jacki Kott. I had also put to

Tony Berg I wanted the board to consider a two-year extension of my contract to bed down the transition and to make me a director while maintaining the equality of decision making between Artistic Director and General Manager. It seems John Bell took this as a threat to his supremacy. For my part the request was a sensible commercial move, not a power-play. It offered stability and a better position from which to argue business decisions with others of equal status.

John hadn't learnt much from the crash and hard won recovery and went back to form. He played a 'back me as top-dog' or 'out the door' card. He won. Berg was not caught unaware by Bell's move because he had been given a heads-up about it by Susan Ryan. He had told me so at our meeting. Even so the board caved in despite my advising them the direction of Nimrod was still not clearly defined for Seymour and its internal stability was fragile. They were more afraid of John Bell's resignation.

There has been much written by others about how boards of arts organisations go all tingly and helpless when in the presence of artistic greatness. Normal, commercial, hard-nosed business people feel they must back the talent. Did this mean they saw management as functionally inferior? Little or no heed was taken of immediate past history.

At board direction, Pam was let go. She had clashed with John too many times. Pam had a short-fuse but always put forward a well thought through counter argument with the interest of talent and staff paramount. She was a union negotiator after all. I respected her for her forwardness and honesty but had counselled her about her occasional abrasive style.

As all this unfolded, much to the concern of Robert Love who was to become my replacement in due course, I decided I didn't have the energy or will to put up with the internal politics. Power plays had been building since early in the year when the fortunes of Nimrod started to reverse. I had done the tasks required and in any case I had a powerful incentive to move on knocking at my door.

I advised the board I was taking up the position of CEO in Morris West's new entertainment company. The offer had been on the table for eleven months but I just had to get Nimrod secure. As I stepped out of Nimrod, spending all the time necessary to complete budgets and plans for the first Seymour season with Robert Love, this overlapped with setting up the new venture company. There is nothing like a new challenge to refresh one.

My last negotiation for Nimrod was to settle a dispute between Nimrod's other artistic director Aubrey Mellor and photographer Max Dupain. The company had used Dupain's famous black and white iconic Australian image titled *Sunbather* in a brochure without permission. Originally titled *Sunbaker* the image dates from 1937 and was still in copyright. Some grovelling, sincere apologies and earnest pleading was accepted. Dupain and Mellor both liked each other's work and respected each other. I just got them to talk.

What I can also now reveal is in April 1984 I had been head hunted for the role of CEO of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. I met with the board and was the lead candidate until Kathleen Norris made a run for the role. I had asked any likely appointment of me wait until I had Nimrod securely set up at Seymour by late in the year. Kathleen was available immediately and what a fateful decision her appointment turned out to be. The AETT Chairman Andrew Briger kindly wrote to me personally explaining the board's change of nominee. Years later he was to admit to me he rued the day the decision not to go with me had been made.

In fact on 16 December 1987, Andrew called me to advise he was approving the tour of a commissioned work for the NSW Bicentennial Arts and Entertainment Program. More about me and this programme later. Kathleen had been dispatched the day before. *"Might I be available? Investigating options? Others under consideration, but interested to ask about availability."* I thanked Andrew but said no.

This next revelation is somewhat out of sequence but seems to fit here because of the preceding paragraphs' content. On

Wednesday, 23 September 1984 Kathleen Norris offered me one of five new executive positions in a re-organised AETT structure she wanted to implement to stave off collapse. The conversation was unexpected. However, I had some inkling as to the financial situation and from what I knew of her style. I also knew we were a mismatch for this very reason. Despite her ingratiating compliments about my capabilities and capacity, and fatuous flattering about my baritone voice, I declined the offer.

I agree with Anthony Steele's evaluation of Ms Norris' tenure in that it was about her artistic ambitions at the expense of the venerable reputation of the Trust. I was soon to experience her wiles and ego, full frontal.

I had first met Morris West at a Nimrod season Opening Night drinks soiree in May 1983. He kept in touch. In June 1983, Morris offered to work with Nimrod at Seymour to stage his play *The Heretic* in the York Theatre. John Bell wasn't enamoured with the idea as he didn't much like the work but he did let discussions play out. It took until August 1984 before we could sit down and talk reality. As it turned out, West decided on the Sydney Opera House due to the difficulties in dealing with Nimrod once they substituted his dates for their subscription season in Seymour. In fact, this pleased the play's director Bill Redman who, with David Spode, the designer, was struggling with the York's size and the intimacy required in several scenes in the play.

As a new Berg chaired Nimrod board took over Morris West again pushed the proposition for me to run his company. Coincidentally this happened on the day of the Nimrod board meeting where John Bell got his way as Artistic Director. I feel compelled to say I greatly admire John Bell for his superb craftsmanship as a director and actor. He deserves all honours bestowed. That said, John is Machiavellian clever. I suspect without that will and capability the likes of *The Bell Shakespeare Company* would not exist and it deserves to.

West offered lunch for a chat at a favoured haunt *Kables* in the Regent of Sydney. Eating well was a job requirement with

Morris. West said he wanted to establish an Australian based theatrical and film company using Aussie talent but with global production scope.

I stepped out of Nimrod as *King Lear* opened.

In the next 12 months instead of slowing down I was to drive hard to realise a terrific goal if it could be pulled off. West had sufficient resources of his own, from a list of twenty-seven titles in as many languages which sold some 60 million copies, to put in the required priming capital but lacked the connections and working reputation to carry out the initiative. He had formed Melaleuka Productions as the creative vehicle to bring his books and plays to life.

I met with most of the important talent agents to work out what would be some of the workable options to create West's vision. I was particularly indebted to Anthony Williams of William Morris Agency for sage advice and Jill Hickson (the wife of the NSW Premier Neville Wran) for moral support and encouragement.

Actors Equity head Michael Crosby provided the first letter of endorsement of an Australian producer to this American counterpart organisation. This opened many doors. Rothschild Bank Five Arrows Fund added a six million dollar line-of-credit to augment West's initial capital so we had substance in deal making with the US studios and any Australian production house. Projects rained as soon as West's initiative was announced.

I had reconnected with Greg Coote and his new business partner Matt Carroll who had Roadshow Coote and Carroll during the time at Nimrod. We had discussed filming *King Lear* and perhaps *As You Like It* in the York Theatre in the first season of Nimrod at Seymour. Neither happened due to cost and a perception such a high-brow product may not sell to recover costs. An initiative which was a bit ahead of its time as such productions are now commonly captured on film for the arts channel market. Anyway, Greg and Matt kindly provided some introductions State-side. We also discussed doing one or more films based on West's novels, in particular, Bruce Beresford directing *The World is Made of*

Glass on the life of C. G. Jung the Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist, founder of analytical psychology.

It turned out I was to live in the Beverly Wilshire Hotel LA for weeks and in West's New York apartment and the St James's Club in London during this time. All pretty heady stuff. Carol took some time off from her business and travelled with me. Each week I would change floors in the BW for a change of room style. No matter who you were you paid your account every Friday by 5pm.

Before leaving to do the US and UK roadshows I employed a very capable PA to run the Sydney office in the MLC Centre. Ainsley Cahill would go on to be General Manager at *Ita* Magazine for Ita Buttrose. Carol also worked for Ita for a time, as a secretary. Ainsley was to meet her future husband John Woodland, 'Woodie', working for Melaleuka Productions when we produced and staged West's blank-verse play *The Heretic* about the life and times of Giordano Bruno at the Sydney Opera House.

Some years later I stood before *Ettore Ferrari's* statue of *Bruno* in Rome's *Campo de Fiori* and held West's autographed copy of the playbook in my hand fingering the book cover embossed with an image of the statue before me. This dark and brooding figure is enormously powerful especially when one reads West's words in the play. For so many reasons Bruno's closing monologue before the flames take his life is prescient of many of today's issues around actions of Governments.

Using connections within my old Australian cinema distribution network, direct approaches and referrals from contacts made on the ground in Los Angeles, New York and London I was able to meet with a range of studio heads, peddle our creative assets and talk from a position of strength because we had our own money with which to leverage deals. I'll mention a couple of notable encounters as examples.

Charlie Woolf came recommended as a chauffeur by the concierge of the Beverly Wilshire. I needed a driver who knew all the studios, was trustworthy, confidential (Ahem!) and punctual. Woolf was the man. He also came with a fully restored 1949

Plymouth Woodie known by every studio security and car park attendant. Woolf was gold.

Although I preferred to ride up-front, Woolf always pulled over several blocks from the studios and asked me to take the back seat to maintain protocol. I cannot think of a single instance when we didn't get the top parking space as close to the studio executive building as possible. His inside knowledge of who was who and who was on the move was incredibly useful.

The executive dining stage at Warner Brothers was an experience back then. I say stage because I seem to recall it actually was an elevated rear area at the back of the commissary where the hopeful looked up and the powerful looked down. This puts one on show and the rumour mill goes wild. It is a fascinating and mildly alarming experience.

An interesting reflection on the power and influence of a big hotel concierge comes to mind. Carol had flown to Ottawa, Canada to visit her Aunt Nancy and left me to business. This was a sensible and agreed temporary parting as she was alone all day and many nights with me doing the American thing from dawn to late. After some weeks she had had enough of LA.

One Friday, I wandered downstairs into the hotel lobby at about 9.30pm looking for directions to a local bar for the experience of Friday night in LA. The same concierge who provided Woolf recommended I cross Rodeo Drive and Wilshire Boulevard and visit the Green Baize Bar or something similar. The GBB is now gone due to a redevelopment of that corner diagonally opposite the hotel, a big improvement incidentally. I was told the 'in' people didn't arrive until after 11pm. I never paid for a drink all night and how I got back to my hotel room across the busy boulevard is a miracle.

My 'mate', the concierge, had passed on I was some big shot Australian producer with films and money who had been staying for weeks and who had access to all major studio top guns. That was like fresh poo to flies. While fun for the first hour, fawning and propositions wear thin quickly. I had the best table in the place and a coterie of new 'friends' to last a lifetime.

Two nights later as I was packing to fly to New York, I received a call from Beau Bridges. He was keen to play one of Morris' villain characters. As with all other callers I referred him to Fenton-Feinberg. I had engaged Mike and Jane as one of two casting agencies, the other being Lynn Stalmaster. The night view of Los Angeles from Stalmaster's house is stunning.

Bridges would not be put off and although he lived up the west coast near San Francisco or Big Sur, he said he would drive down overnight to have breakfast. He did and we did. He is a very nice guy and a terrific actor. He particularly liked the lead character role in *The Second Victory*. The film was eventually made with Anthony Andrews, Helmut Griem and Max von Sydow playing the major roles. The reviews were not enthusiastic.

That same day, as Woolf loaded the Woodie for the airport trip, two screen writers introduced themselves and asked me to appraise their efforts towards backing them. The script was for *Quigley, Down Under*. They suggested Tom Selleck as star. I read it on the flight and did a set of constructive notes principally to treat aborigines in a better light and couriered it back to them the next day.

They accepted the revisions and I took the project to Morris when back in Sydney with a business case to co-produce it with one of the studios I had visited in LA. Morris rejected the project based solely on reading the synopsis. The guys produced *Quigley* with Pathe Group. Selleck starred. It broke even. Wikipedia makes an interesting comment, under director Simon Wincer, that the original script was reverted to in order for historical accuracy to be returned to the story. I wonder if my many historical corrections and indigenous notations were in what he referenced.

Two additional very LA stories. I needed a haircut. I knew the brand name Vidal Sassoon so selected their outlet in Rodeo Drive. All very stylish and gay, I was escorted to a booth and asked to change into a robe. Shown to the hairdressing chair, the back was lowered so I was flat on my back with my head in the wash bowl. I half expected to get a blow-job. After the washing the chair was

returned to upright and an extraordinary black dude started to pluck and pull my hair in an extravagant display of inspection.

He then proceeded to give me a haircut using tiny scissors. When finished he announced I needed at least three 'treatments' to get to his desired style for my head shape and face (I wear spectacles). Assistants arrived to remove every trace of cut hair. I redressed and was presented with the bill accompanied by the statement, 'service is not included.' Meaning the tip was extra on top of a US\$150 account for what was a trim. I staggered in shock to the register to pay. The stylist flounced up to me and presented his card. My hair had been cut by none other than Aitch Peters. He went on to become the chief stylist for the Sassoon International business.

The shops in Rodeo Drive are extravagantly expensive, have limited if not unique items and fawn over you if you can get into the door often only 'by appointment'. Porsche had a half day sale. I needed a brief case and a dark blue kidskin saddle bag appealed. It was marked down from US\$3,000 to US\$1,000, still a lot in the 1980s. I still own it and in correspondence with Porsche Museum in Rodeo Drive around 2009 found they believe it is one of only two left in existence of a limited production run of some 20 worldwide. Mine is in almost mint condition.

With my new purchase in a branded Porsche store carry bag, I set out to return to the hotel when I saw a gentleman trip as he came around his car which he had just parked. It was a magnificent open-top Rolls Royce Phantom Drophead Coupe. I stooped to assist him and supported him as he sat down and jiggled his foot and leg with profuse thanks for the assistance. Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and I had a half-hour chat on the sidewalk about nothing in particular.

Carol returned from Ottawa and joined me in New York. We stayed in the Wests' New York apartment on 5th Avenue not far from Bloomingdales on 59th. It was raining heavily and late the first night I heard a crackling noise. Carol said I was hearing things. A search didn't immediately discover the cause until

I looked up in the apartment hallway and saw a glass bowl covering the hallway light was almost full of water. The superintendent isolated the circuit and kept thanking me as did other tenants for days afterwards for detecting the fire risk. Apparently in these old apartments' water leakage and electricity has a high probability of causing a fire within the walls.

Now Morris wasn't initially on the trip with me but joined me for a day in New York on his way to London for what turned out to be a disastrous meeting with Columbia Pictures at their head office in Columbus Circle at the start of Broadway and close to the famous meeting place of the Russian Tea Room. I 'crossed' Morris several times. This was the first.

Our Columbia meeting was scheduled for 4pm. This time came and went with apologies given by a male assistant. Well, 4.30pm came and went also. Shortly after 5.00pm our contact strode across a corridor to his office and we had heightened expectation the delay would be over. That didn't happen and another 15 mins passed. Morris became very agitated and left saying, *"You stay if you wish but only to tell him from me we will not do business with this studio. Ever. I will not tolerate such disrespect."*

Surprisingly I knew our Columbia Pictures contact from a visit he had made to Australia years before. I had been his liaison between Hoyts and the studio at the time. We had got on well and he had taken my appointment call personally, chatted and genuinely seemed to want to talk possibilities. He called me in the evening full of apologies. A major issue had blown up on set in LA and had to be resolved due to cost overrun risks. He was under the impression we were fully informed and patient. I got a message to West at his hotel (Carol and I had the Wests' apartment for an extended period so he took a hotel room) that we had an abject apology from both our intended host and the assistant plus a clear opening for a meeting next morning.

Morris phoned back refusing to accept the apologies or the appointment and ordering me not to attend and to drop Columbia. I thought the latter directive overly punitive and emotion driven,

and understanding how such an insult might damage us in time to come, I confirmed a new time just for me.

A few days after the NY meeting and face to face with Morris in London, I tried to explain the need to work within rather than against the studio system. After all, I had got us into Fox, Universal, Warners, Disney, MGM, United Artists (UA) et al and didn't want us to have a poor reputation for intolerance come out of a misunderstanding with Columbia. Studios need to know they can reasonably work with those they back. He would have none of it. His pride and ego had been dented. He carpeted me. His inflexible approach to negotiation and deal construction was to be a major stumbling block preventing Melaleuka Productions' success down the track.

During the time in NY I also scouted for stage productions which we might get rights for and possibly co-stage with the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Andrew Briger had left the door open for me to approach the Trust any time with opportunities. I had preliminary talks with Jeffrey Kovel and Kathleen Norris as to possibilities. I discussed optioning a couple of 'off-off' Broadway scripts as tests. They were *Cafe Puccini* an ensemble musical piece based on the life and music of Giacomo Puccini and Larry Shue's *The Foreigner*, a language twist comedy. Neither was produced under West's company but I did eventually co-produce *The Foreigner* with the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust with Denis Lenahan as my on the road Producer and with John Woodland as Stage Manager.

The other, a new musical, appealed to my love of opera. Written by Robin Ray *Cafe Puccini's* storyline is Puccini's life sung to his music. The last number after Giacomo has stormed out of the cafe is sung by his daughter to the melody of *O Mio Babbino Caro*. One thinks the performance is over as the lights in the cafe go out and Puccini's daughter leaves. The proprietor is about to lock up when Puccini bursts back in looking for his famous Fedora. It is not to be found and he thinks he has entered the wrong cafe. He says something like, "Isn't this Cafe Puccini?" The proprietor replies, "No Sir,

this is Cafe Verdi." The neon sign relights with the new name much to Puccini's confusion. You get the idea. Every night the production could tell the story of a different famous composer. Clever. I wanted the rights. Unfortunately it was snapped up by Cameron-Mackintosh but I don't believe it ever made it to Australia.

West stated he was keen to put on product which engaged Australian writing and acting talent. He was also open to contributing to the commission of new Australian works for Australian audiences. Except all this turned out to be just blather.

Before starting this initial deal-options trip I further extended our range of connections for introductions by meeting with Peter Neustadt of Communication and Entertainment Ltd who assisted with introductions to MGM and UA. Peter and I were to have ongoing casual dealings up to and including the Bicentenary.

John Murray, Morris's personal adviser in London and a long time deal maker for West's other business interests had brought in the Guarantee Trust Bank of Nassau for possible investment in three productions. The Managing Director had a great name, Robert McLean Bease Esq. Word of what we were up to spread and even *Time-Life's* Ed Barnum called seeking options for Home Box Office UK over a number of works. I connected with Ed in New York. When I got back from the trip Peter Iveney of Hoyts Video also wanted in.

Channel 4 in the UK expressed interest in *Clowns of God* and *Daughter of Silence*. Paris based REVCOM connected seeking finance interest for co-production of a mini-series of *Devil's Advocate* and *Clowns of God*. Brittanis Films using Cunard money wanted a co-production for *Second Victory*.

On the stage side of the company portfolio I connected with Barry Gove of the Manhattan Club in New York, Liz McCann of Shubert Theatres, Arthur Birsch of Playbill and Henry Guettel of the US Theatre Development Fund. Kathleen Norris helped with credentials to open these doors.

Kim Williams ran the Australian Film Commission in those days and his office was a block away from our Sydney Lower North

Shore home. I'd known Kim for some years by then through film, music and theatre. He too provided connections and credentials to me for the trip. I possibly had some of the best references, introductions and networking connections available to any producer from Australia. Unfortunately, Morris was to burn much of this.

As a quick aside. I had met Kathy Lette of *Puberty Blues* fame, Kim's wife, socially. We struck up a friendship as we had many mutual acquaintances. I was to work with Kim's Secretary Rae de Teliga's daughter, Jane, over the textile component of the wider craft exhibition tour co-ordinated by Richard Northcote as part of the Bicentenary in 1988. Anyway, some years later Kathy showed up at our home one night quite distraught. Rae soon arrived to also comfort her. As Kathy tells it, she had gone to Kim's office to, in her words, "To book a fuck!" However, the desperation of what she was doing came home to her and she needed sanctuary.

Some time later Kathy and Kim separated. Kathy is now married to Geoffrey Robertson QC the internationally respected human rights barrister. Kim is a prodigious intellect and writer, boasting in one year he had scribed over one million words in his job. Impressive, but perhaps some more spoken contact was needed.

To cement Melaleuka's reputation as solid and trustworthy producers I engaged Money Penny Services to run accounting for productions and also Film Finances for completion guarantees. Both had excellent reputations.

Ainsley Cahill was the first to point out to me West had very little real warm spontaneous humour in him. A wonderful smile, grandfatherly head pats and head masterly condescension accompanied his most common sobriquet of "Yes, love". Scripts containing anything more than light relief got short shift with situational humour or amusing conversations being rejected in favour of seriousness. I was told I wasn't a writer and didn't understand what was needed to hold attention. My pointed response was I had read many, many scripts and seen and promoted hundreds of films so perhaps knew modern audiences better.

An ironic twist to all this rejection of humour in scripts was Morris knew Gerald Thomas the director of the *Carry On* films and seriously wanted to get him to direct some of Melaleuka's productions and for Bill Conti to compose all music. Thomas did direct *The Second Victory* to West's own screenplay but with music by Stanley Myers. It did not do well.

Another early project was *Summer of the Red Wolf*. Script by Chris Thomson who lived in seclusion in the Scottish Hebridean Islands, Jack Thomson as the lead with a Gaelic voice coach; I stood firm on not wanting Gerald Thomas as director but we opened negotiations with Bill Conti for music and Betty Williams as a possible for cinematography. Chris Griffin was mentioned as Line Producer as we started to assemble creative options. Out of the blue I got a call from American actor Larry Wilcox of CHiPs fame who wanted the lead. The game was afoot.

Even James Baillieu of Rothschild opened a door to UK author David Williams to acquire his successful ten book series based on his detective character *Mark Treasure*. The plan was for a series for television. Baillieu and Ed Silver of Rothschild were our Melbourne-based bankers.

Paul Riomfalvy, founding director of the NSW Film Corporation sent the script for *The World is Made of Glass* to Hungarofilm for set cost estimates. I again spoke to Sir Robert Helpmann to choreograph dream dance and mime scenes for *The World is Made of Glass* for a stage presentation at Seymour Centre, but not with Nimrod; a script by Tony Shaffer and design by Christian Frederickson, directed by Rodney Fisher.

A quick aside for those who may not be familiar with Riomfalvy's influence and contributions to the national cultural scene. It was Paul Riomfalvy who financially backed the hugely successful first Australia-wide tour of the National Institute of Dramatic Arts / Jane Street production of David Williamson's play *Don's Party*.

Tony Buckley expressed interest in filming *The Heretic* and we also had interest in the work for an Australian Broadcasting Corporation teledrama. *War Brides* by Lois Battle was brought

to us by Tom Keneally who was friends with the author. Damien Parer (no, not related) offered a one-hour special titled *Portals of Paradise* based on the life of Australian erotic artist Norman Lindsay with dance sequences through collaboration between Graeme Murphy and Sir Robert.

The list goes on and on but you get the drift of much positive activity towards rolling out new Australian productions. As is common in this industry you get more opportunity than any available financial pool can be expected to cope with. Our own titles were enough but I was keen on creating screenplay material from Australian talent if we could identify the right stuff.

Morris rejected every single screenplay draft idea put forward. Two good scripts were done by clients of Jill Hickson. Jill had introduced two aspiring local talents in Amanda Salomon and Larry Buttrose to get the first scripts off the ground and launch the initiative. Their effort resulted in screenplays for *Harry and Gallows* and, as first drafts; the writing was a credit to them both. Morris crucified the comedy relief scene and rejected the entire scripts completely.

West then declared he would write all the screenplays based on his works himself and let no-one else play a part with competing works or treatments of his works. The proposition that there was breakthrough support and strident encouragement for Australian talent to be developed was a facade. He and I had stern words. I called Jill Hickson who had been enormously supportive of the idea along with most other agents. She very kindly offered me a big hug next time we met for trying to make it work for local talent.

In March 1985, Evan Williams asked me to get Morris to speak at the Premier's Literary Awards in September that year. Morris was up for consideration as an awardee and they wanted him to give an address which was serious and scholarly, high-toned and important around his objectives with the company. I wonder what he said as, by then, I wasn't there.

As mentioned, London accommodation was the St James's Club located between the Mall, Buckingham Palace and Park

Lane. Shoebox size rooms except for a couple of sizable suites, one of which I secured using West's influence as I was to be staying there for an extended time. For interest I will relate just two stories which stand out during our occupancy. Carol was with me again for some of this time.

The following story illustrates just how two people can recall an event and be very different in recollection. Carol's version first.

We were leaving the St James's Club one morning and happened to get into the elevator to find Robert Redford in it. Pleasantries were exchanged and we all left the premises and went our separate ways. My version is next. You decide which you prefer.

One morning I wanted to get a paper and left our rooms to go to the front desk. I was away for some time and Carol was concerned and asked what had taken so long. I matter-of-factly said I was in the lift with Robert Redford and we went up and down twice while we chatted about respective projects. Naturally she asked what he was like to which I replied short and very nice. She kept an eye out for him from then on but to no avail.

According to my wife I either embellish or more frequently understate much to her frustration.

The St James's Club dining room in those days, it has changed since and is Michelin Star rated, was like the dining room of a gentlemen's club, which the original club had been. In the back corner was a huge alabaster bust of a very majestic Polynesian chieftain decorated with cowry finery and I think, feathers. The table for four, immediately in the front of this souvenir of Empire, sat two in the corner on a rich leather bench with two opposing chairs. Carol and I sat side-by-side looking out at the goings on.

During our dinner a large group arrived to sit at a wonderfully laid out long middle table. An extra guest arrived beyond the initial table setting number and as club staff set a place the search for a chair in a fully booked restaurant started. The host spotted our two orphan seats and came over to ask if we minded if his party could use one chair. Naturally, we said, "Of course, please!"

Shortly after, another uncounted guest arrived and the same process ensued including an approach by the host to acquire our remaining spare. My response this time was to acknowledge our, by now habitual, visitor by responding, "With great pleasure your Highness."

Carol froze and kept smiling while bursting with curiosity. As the chair was moved she spoke through clenched teeth, "Why your Highness? Who is he?" Our pleader was HRH Prince Michael of Kent. Five minutes later a bottle of fine champagne was delivered with his compliments.

While staying in London we went to Paris for a few days and made a lunch booking at the *Le Jules Verne* the famous restaurant on the first level of the Eiffel Tower. Unbeknown to us they had a lunch dress code of tie and coat. Despite what some say about the attitude of the French I find them charming when approached the right way. A coat and tie were found for me and we were seated at a large table with views of the amazing mechanics of the tower lift system and beyond to the roof tops of Paris. Our seats allowed us to survey the whole restaurant smartly decorated in black / grey and white with brilliant red carnations on each table.

Both of us chose the same entree and main. *Carpaccio of Scallop* followed by *Rack of Herbed Lamb*. Exquisitely plated paper thin wafers of scallop overlapped as if fish scales covered the plate, spotted with caviar and shavings of white truffle, fine olive oil and the lightest drops of lime.

Now I can eat steak tartar or *Carpaccio of red meat* anytime. However, when the very pink lamb was presented I just knew it was too rare for me. I shuffled my vegies about. My discomfort was noticed by the waiter who removed the plate once I explained my need and ten minutes later represented with a completely refreshed plate of medium lamb. It was divine. So much for French chefs' reputation of not being flexible.

Back in the UK the meetings at studios like Pinewood in Shepparton went well enough. West knew his reputation for being difficult was known in the UK, one presumes following the filming

of the MGM release of West's *Shoes of the Fisherman* directed by English director, Michael Anderson. Morris left me to run the first round of engagements towards dealing over a number of titles. Meanwhile, he met with old cronies. He came back having made firm offers and drafted deal memos which were contrary to the pre-agreed strategy with the studios. He owned the company but, in my opinion for first round negotiations, he was not being commercially and contractually astute. I was ultimately proven correct.

Morris' contractual experience was considerable but not up to scratch with current deals and rights options. His expertise was more related to literary deals. Film and television plus performance were not his bag and I said so. John Murray was an excellent sounding board and mentor to me as he knew Morris's peculiarities very well. Anyway, I took Morris aside and compared his contract dealings with what I proposed using deal parameters which were leading edge and backed by the introductions and advice I had obtained before starting the trip. I reminded him he had sought my expertise so he needed to acknowledge this and support the agreed approach.

Part of working for West required one to like holding meetings in moving stretch limos. I took motion sickness tablets. We did business, met people and held conversations while driving around Hyde Park, Sydney; Hyde Park, London; Central Park New York and Beverly Hills, LA. Morris also used hire cars to deliver pink slips when you reached your expiry date.

Back in Sydney the 1985 production of *The Heretic* at the Drama Theatre in the Sydney Opera House, in partnership with the Sydney Opera House Trust was on schedule. John Woodland was Stage Manager. Bill Redmond, Director with Brian James as Bruno. Set and costume were done by the Sydney Theatre Company. Hocking and Wood offered a national tour with the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust if the reviews and box office pre-sales were good enough.

I had appointed publicist Rae Francis to handle all our media. She remains a friend which will come as a surprise once you read

further. Rae has little good to say about her time with us. The USA and UK exploratory trips were well received by the trade back in Australia as the outcomes released to media and trade journals by Rae were positive.

Based on what we had set in train overseas, Paul Riomfalvy opened up further opportunities in Europe, specifically Hungary with access to Hungarofilm Studios in Budapest and Bavaria Geiseltal, Germany. Paul and another friend Peter Townley were to play a role in a curious connection to the Vatican Bank some years after.

It was through a sponsorship deal for *The Heretic* with 2GB I met Nigel Milan, GM of the station and eventually head of Australia's Special Broadcasting Service SBS, his cook-book author and food personality wife Lyndey, also a friend of Helen and Tony Flanagan our Noosa connection. Radio 2GB's call sign stands for Giordano Bruno. The station was founded in 1926 by the Theosophical Society who much admired this 16th century philosopher apostle of theosophy.

Convergence. At Nimrod I had made the acquaintance of Sir Robert Helpmann. At the time John Bell had discussed him possibly playing *Prospero* in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

At Melaleuka, Bill Redmond, director of *The Heretic*, considered Sir Robert for the role of Taverna, *Papal Nuncio to the Venetian Republic*. To suss out Sir Robert's interest, I arranged to have coffee. Sir Robert was staying temporarily at the boutique Sebel Townhouse Hotel an iconic theatrical celebrity digs in Sydney's Elizabeth Bay area off Kings Cross. Sir Robert's apartment was being renovated. The meeting became lunch when his sister Sheila was delayed in meeting him.

After lunch the restaurant was empty except for us. A tall somewhat bedraggled looking man entered and cast his eye around for a welcoming face. Only finding us and me smiling politely at him, Billy Connelly came over and was invited to sit with Sir Robert and me for what turned out to be a laughter filled hour. The exchanges between the two were wonderful to listen too. Little did I expect

too soon after Walter van Nieuwkuyk and I would be attending Sir Robert's funeral in October 1986. Sir Robert had declined the role I offered.

The Gala Opening of *The Heretic* was held in the presence of the Governor-General of Australia, Sir Ninian Stephen. Sir Ninian preferred less royal pomp. The G-G's office requested only the opening bars of a very short version of *God Save the Queen* be played, if at all. The G-G's preference being no anthem. Morris insisted on the full anthem and would not budge in spite of a further note from Government House. The G-G's aide-de-camp specifically came to me on the night at the pre-drinks reception and secured an undertaking from me only the short version would be played. I agreed and instructed stage management as to which tape to use.

Morris simply didn't care what the Queen's representative wanted. He wanted full pomp and tore me apart afterwards. "It's about commanding leadership and getting what you want over the protests of others who stand in your way," he screamed at me.

It is customary to include in the ads for plays extracts from reviews as third-party references to attract a potential audience. Unfortunately in my opinion, Morris's choice of director guaranteed we'd not get an exceptional production and as Morris had taken a bigger and bigger influence over Bill Redmond during the last weeks of rehearsal, the dead hand of fate was upon the production. Woodie and I had to restrict Morris's access to rehearsals as Bill was near breakdown. Morris didn't like it one bit.

As the papers came out, Morris called me at dawn on the Saturday asking what time was the team meeting to do the review cuttings for the ad booking for the season. Pre-dawn telephone calls from Morris were normal. He rose early and just dialled you up if he wanted to talk something over. I told him we had done it already the night before by pulling strings with the reviewers to get their copy early. He exploded saying I had no right to make such decisions. I was misreading West very badly. Instead of arms-length which we had agreed as a condition of my taking the

role and building Melaleuka into a new artistic force, Morris was wanting more direct centre stage decision-making. Rae Francis was at wits end too.

One reviewer took aim at West personally instead of sticking to the task of what the production had or had not delivered. I saw just what Morris was capable of once his reputation was attacked. The next two days were occupied with lawyers pummelling the reviewer, and the paper. The company spent the best part of \$15,000 but got a retraction, a printed apology and a personal apology. During this distraction Morris paid virtually no attention to the production which relieved Bill Redmond and the stage crew and cast enormously.

Two weeks later there was a board meeting. The tone was tense. Firstly West's wife Joy complained she had no board papers despite our sending them well in advance. It transpired West had intercepted them. "It's my company and you'll vote my way." Joy said nothing. I was put on notice by the Chairman that my contract was under review for repeated refusal to carry out his instructions.

Now at this meeting was a director representing N M Rothschild and Sons, specifically their *Five Arrows* investment in Melaleuka. Hank Tuten had married into the Rothschild family. The bank's line-of-credit was six million dollars to start the ball rolling with another three million dollars from West. What Hank had not been aware of until the previous day was Morris was pushing me to get a Money Dealer's Licence. Both the accountants and I were resisting despite Morris instructing money be drawn from investment accounts and we play the money-market with company funds.

On one of the car-sickness inducing meetings in a limo with his private UK advisor John Murray, Morris was making a range of comments to me until a flash of disapproval from John made him change his tack. Until he cut himself off, West claimed he had privileged international tax status which saw him pay no personal tax and likewise his trusts. His tax arrangements had been challenged by European courts but he had won. Also, he said he had

experience to guide me, when I got the Dealer's Licence, to play in the precious metals and gems markets. Go figure!

The day before the next board meeting a fortnight later, I had consulted with Hank around the principle of not using company funds for other than intended purposes. He agreed it was inappropriate and the bank's line could not be used for speculative side activity. I instructed Rothschild and BDO, our accountants to cancel all trades even though the specific funds which had been used to date were West's share of the investment in his own company. We recovered all funds and a miniscule profit.

I reported the action to the meeting much to West's displeasure especially when Baillieu and Tuten backed my move along with BDO. Hank instructed no bank portion of funds were to be used other than for agreed productions in partnership with other parties. At the same meeting I raised some simple clarification queries over the chair's expenses which were obviously loaded for the end of the financial year. He had just tabled them for approval by the meeting so while other talk circulated, I did a quick read and asked some questions so the motion to approve was an informed one. Not by my intention, the board deferred approval pending explanatory notes to support claims.

Joy West, Morris' wife and a director, completed my deathly trifecta outcome. Without board papers yet again Joy was adrift. A full set of papers had been sent in addition to the Chair's copy but mysteriously her set didn't reach her. I shared mine with her and made discreet explanatory comments to assist her come up to speed with topics being voted upon. Joy asked for further explanation a couple of times and from her expression wasn't happy with the answers. She started to abstain on decisions. West fumed, and then told her she was to vote as directed by him as it was his company. Joy was put in her place and the bankers and accountants saw the real face of the chairman. I was sent to Coventry by West.

John Murray arrived from the UK unannounced. West and Murray started to hold meetings without me with the likes of

Great Union's CEO David Williams, whose son Kim had assisted us with credentials and introductions, to progress co-production arrangements for *Second Victory*. They came back overly optimistic about what they saw as firm offers for co-production of all titles. I told them to be cautious. Advice they didn't want but which subsequently proved correct.

Murray knew full well Morris believed what he wanted to believe. However, this resulted in wild swings in decision-making which gave little or no guidance in moving the company agenda forward. This uncertainty stifled proceeding with many of the substantial number of opportunities we had opened up and which, if they could be properly cultivated, offered success.

The above events coupled with *The Heretic* reviews slip-up rounded off the quantum of my sins and about three days later a stretch limo delivered me my marching orders at home. My desk at MLC Centre was packed for me and I was allowed attendance to remove it under Murray's supervision. Some effort was made to blacken my name but when I demanded proof of the accusations any further attempt evaporated. I was surprised at this fallout because in July 1985 I had attended a meeting with accountants BDO and John Murray to sign off all accounts and to finalise payout of my contract, all quite amicably.

All this seemed like sour grapes to the industry which had backed my efforts to achieve what was originally proposed by West himself. Murray and I had lunch in 1986 at the Consul Club in Suffolk Place, London. It was most amicable. John had learned where to stand in Morris's shadow and survive. A lesson I noted.

Some little time after my departure from Melaleuka, West's son Chris took over as CEO. He and Morris lasted a very, very short time before Chris departed. Ainsley Cahill took on GM status with Morris as Executive Chair and CEO. Ainsley seems to have made a good job of the GM role but in time she too received a pink slip delivered by limo. She and John Woodland eventually married. Ainsley became the CEO of Arthritis Australia based in Brisbane. My brother Terry had retired from an equivalent position with the

Arthritis Foundation of Queensland a decade or more before. Woodie became Artistic Administrator of Belvoir St Theatre in the old Nimrod building in Surry Hills, Sydney.

I believe Rothschild took over West's company a little later including all literary assets plus intellectual ownership of two further proposed novels. I see little evidence of achievement of anything like what might have been.

It had been a tumultuous 12 months.