

JUST FAMOUS ENOUGH NOT TO BE NOTICED

As told by
Michael Donovan

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Table of Contents

1. 1947 – 1968 Becoming Me The Bank Franquin	11
2. 1968 – 1975 Cinema Opera Returning to School Teaching.....	59
3. 1975 – 1980 Marriage New career(s).....	90
4. 1980 – 1985 Worker Co-ops Nimrod Morris West.....	105
5. 1985 – 1988 The Arts Scene NSW Bicentenary In God’s Name.....	156
6. 1989 – 1991 Sabbatical 60 Minutes State Transit	208
7. 1991 – 1998 Tourism Environment Advisory.....	248
8. 1998 – 2000 Best Western Crash and Burn	315
9. 2000 – 2005 Phoenix Rising Mentoring	336
10. 2005 – 2013 Noosa Semi Retirement, the Joke	349
11. 2013 - 2015 New challenges.....	422

6.

1989 - 1991 Sabbatical | 60 Minutes | State Transit

Novus ordo seculorum ~ a new order has begun.

Some non-theatrical work was occupying more of my time but not returning on the invested time and effort. For instance, INFORVision owned by Graham Carruthers was in trouble and owed me fees for services. I saw an opportunity to not only work with Graham as the entrepreneur but to get an equity position. I put the proposition to him to fold my fees into capital, for me to assume the GM role and turn the business around. A number of his senior people supported the move, but although Graham initially agreed, he reneged on the deal.

I offered equity variations and outlined ways I could potentially help him save his business. Graham just refused to give up equity. He believed I would walk away and forfeit what was owed but I was more stubborn than he calculated. I provided my solicitors with a record of questionable actions being executed to strip his main company of assets leaving only debt for a Phoenix Scheme

to be enacted under a new company Mr Microchips. Others like his factoring provider were also taking action. I literally took him to the steps of the court over the debt which he couldn't pay. His barrister pleaded with me not to proceed. The business went under in December. I shed not one tear but dropped a lot of money.

I briefly revisited my association with Bernard King through Dennis Linehan of AETT when Dennis wanted to promote Bernard in *Bernard King's 'Cabaret' Restaurant* in the Lennox Theatre in Sydney's Parramatta. Bernard's cabaret act was very good and did a multi-year run at The Roxy in Sydney's Brighton-le-Sands.

Antonio Vargas surfaced again as well. Robyn Berg, whom I think is half-sister to Tony Berg, was establishing a Flamenco Dance Studio for Vargas in Sydney. Antonio had made a plea for several thousand dollars urgently supposedly to buy a special bed for his father but three days later Antonio had disappeared. To help Robyn, I made a few calls and found out Antonio had suddenly left Australia following a love interest in a woman named Leana. He had used the money for airfares. I advised her of her options.

The whole thing took a serious toll on Robyn and we were very concerned for her mental health. Plus it brought her into conflict with her family just to add more pressure. Antonio was true to the hot-blooded-male reputation of thinking with his dick first and head second. The affair lasted a while but Antonio eventually came back after performing overseas to earn his return airfare.

Robyn continued to support the establishment of the studio which eventually became Dance Central Sydney. I had done much of the initial planning for the studio a couple of years before and worked with theatrical accountant Douglas McLaggan on the financial structure. Robyn had support from former Premier Neville Wran to acquire a building owned by Peter Bock. Jose Blanco successfully manoeuvred to put his investor on the board.

Wilton Morley wasn't alone in struggling in theatre. Well regarded lawyer and theatrical producer Gary Penny also faltered. It was a difficult time to get money, to make deals work

effectively and to have a box-office success to repay investors. However, some did well.

Walter received an offer too good to refuse. Gordon Frost Organisation, supported by Sir Ron Brierly's Essington Investments, asked Walter to join them full time. John Frost needed a second-in-command. Walter wanted SxS as his corporate vehicle and I willingly agreed to sell my interest back to him. Walter sold his Launceston property, purchased in Sydney rather than renting, and went on to a successful new business relationship which continues today, although Walter is now semi-retired. He now lives in Melbourne with life-partner Peter. Walter was one of the advisers to Essington Investments on the Capitol and Regent Theatre refurbishment options. Well done, my friend.

By early to mid 1989 I was pretty knackered and disillusioned with arts and film. So, prompted by Carol also wanting and needing a change, we decided to undertake an extended trip overseas. At the time I was not an easy person to live with. Moody, flash tempered, argumentative and a workaholic. We both needed a break to reconnect. We decided to plan a global trip in May and commenced it in Ireland, County Cork to discover my family roots.

We planned to be away for up to six months so Carol decided to sell her interest in STEP typesetting. Her business had taken in a new typesetting operator about a year prior and the relationship between the three was good. Carol had correctly foreseen traditional typesetting would be challenged more and more by the advent of software on Apple and the PC.

She found a willing purchaser for her share in the new arrival. Surprisingly her DPA partner, represented by Bill Donnelly, objected to her wanting to exit. Bill knew Carol was the business driver. The issue was settled and the business went on successfully for many years adapting to technology until the ability to typeset and print digitally shifted accessibility and functionality into anyone's reach.

By this time, we owned our home outright and purchased a Cairns investment property to add to a growing portfolio,

including some timeshare which Carol was expert in accessing for occasional breaks and holidays.

We did a deal with Carol's mum, Ruth, to move into our home and mind our pampered dog Brig while we travelled. Ruth needed a new refrigerator and the wily old bird made the purchase of a new one a condition for helping us. Given we would be away for an extended time we saw it as an economic alternative to kennelling.

Carol mapped out our trip and, using Michael Rudny's Sydney Business Travel from the choral event experience, I asked SBT to put all arrangements in place. Generously, Rudny did deals which saw us able to stay in some of the best and unusual hotels on our ports of call. Our journey concentrated mainly on Europe via Canada to visit Carol's aunt at her summer cottage.

Carol's UK based sister Wendy and Australia based brother Douglas made occasional visits but Carol went every couple of years on a regular basis. Nancy, a retired Air Force Major, would re-locate from Ottawa to the cottage at Rideau Ferry near Smith Falls some two-hours east of Ottawa in early spring. A gifted gardener, she would plant stunning displays of bulbs and entertain her many friends.

Nancy Galbraith and her mother had acquired the small cottage in the 1960s, adding to it. Nancy and her husband Bob loved the cottage, their speed-boat and entertaining. Unfortunately she lost Bob to cancer a few years prior to our visit. Summer was the favoured time for any family or friends to visit and stay at the cottage. Not possible in winter as it wasn't winterised. Listening to the calling of the loons from the lake deck as they glide across the approaching darkness of sunset is magical; especially so with a long drink in hand.

Nancy had a wonderful group of neighbours who were very generous to Carol and me when we visited. Like an extended Canadian family. Nancy did this journey, semi-move and refresh of gardens, until well into her late 80s. Nancy sold the cottage in 2014 at age 89 years. Carol is blessed with the same stamina and drive as Nancy.

Detailing the extent of our trip would be, in Mark Twain's words, 'chloroform in print', except perhaps for a few very memorable events. So with your indulgence here they are.

Using timeshare we scored a stay in an old abbey in Knocktopher in Cork, Ireland close to my ancestral roots. We had the room at the top of the Abbey Tower. Dawn across the fields was full of bird-song, flying game and wonderful fresh country air. At sunset, drink in hand, the fields were a melange of foxes and badgers as dark settled.

My 42nd birthday occurred during this Ireland stay. The local trout farm provided a fresh catch which I cooked and along with two retired American guests from downstairs in the tower we ate a wonderful meal. Two nights later the establishment chef stormed out about an hour before dinner. Carol encouraged me to substitute and I did so for one night only.

Our trek across Europe was by car. Overall we travelled some 5,800 kms between Ireland and Venice via the UK, France, Spain and Italy.

Our first accommodation in France was a set of cliff-top apartments on the Atlantic Coast, Bay of Biscay, in Royan. So what! Well, when we arrived we could not find the bedroom. The apartment was long and narrow with a fantastic deck overlooking a north-west facing private beach. It took us some time to realise the wall rolled back to reveal a master bed-room and ensuite built into the cliff overhang. Now that's special!

A two-hour drive away close to Bordeaux were the parents of a friend - a retired Qantas pilot who had a five-year lease on an old farmhouse. We were invited to join them for lunch. The wife was a vegetarian and he, as I recall, was a non-drinker. We were offered wine and directed to the old barn and told to select whatever we wanted.

While the farmhouse had been wonderfully restored, the barn was a dilapidated wreck. I swung open the wide door to be greeted with a drinkers dream. Before us was a formidable pile of red wine several metres high and wide and even deeper, all

without labels. The oldest on the lower levels of the stack were crushed. Our hosts explained the capacity of the vineyard contributed annually to the overall regional Medoc harvest. In addition to the tonnage purchased, some unlabelled product from each vintage was given back for personal consumption. Over time thousands of bottles of well reputed, even famous, Bordeaux vintages accumulated into the stack before us. I randomly chose a selection. We wasted many and drank quite a few. Many proved to be mighty fine wine. For days after I dreamt of being locked in the barn with just a corkscrew and glass.

Hotel Saint-Marie, Paris is accommodation built into, and is part of, the buttresses of the Church of Saint-Marie near Le Forum des Halles. Originally a nunnery, but used as a brothel during WWII, the hotel now has some 24 small rooms, a spiral single width stairway with priest-hole alcoves for passing. Each room is decorated with wonderful stained-glass windows. Renovation has seen some rooms combined resulting in the hotel being able to offer more modern additional private conveniences. During our visit it was owned and operated by brothers Crabbe who, true to name, often boiled these crustaceans which permeated the stairwell with an odious smell.

We had the top room; small but with superb views. The point of mentioning Hotel Saint-Marie at all is our room enclosed a massive church buttress coming out of a wall at the ceiling and disappearing into the floor at the foot of the bed. I surmise that such a feature may not be to every guest's liking but we thought it wonderful (well I did anyway), once we got over the shock of these gigantic forms filling the small room space. On each buttress was a polish mark from centuries of wear. But from what? I worked out it was from each guest's crotch as they slid over the cold stone to go to the bathroom and back to bed. Play with the image!

Rudny facilitated an introduction to Monsieur Michel Palmer, the then Director-General of the Belle Époque era designed Hotel Negresco in Nice where we stayed during our travels. A wonderful suite with ermine bed cover, gold plated taps and toilet bowl,

mentioned here just to make you envious. The real purpose of our stay at Hotel Negresco was to ensure Carol and I partook of La Rotonde Restaurant's famous degustation menu. The menu style of this colourful establishment has changed since and is not so grand. Carol wasn't well on the night but the chef kindly still accommodated my single serve experience which was to die for.

You will recall in an earlier chapter I mentioned the Bicentennial Council meeting which threw out the photographic project submission. A member of Council at the time was the media executive, Allan Hoy. One stop on this trip was the Greek island of Mykonos. Our hilltop hotel suite overlooked the bay and as we checked into the room I went out onto the large balcony. Our suite shared the top floor roof balcony with just one other suite. I looked down onto the harbour dotted with ships and turned to scan the hillside towards the township. On the next balcony Alan Hoy was in full passionate embrace with a guy.

He looked up. I nodded a cheerful acknowledgement and went indoors. We found out they had checked out and moved hotels the next day. The day after, Carol and I happened to meet them on a walk in town. We went up to Allan shook hands, acknowledged his companion, chatted briefly and parted. Karen McBrien said he outed himself some time later back in Sydney. Such a small world. I wonder just how Alan felt personally when virtually directed by Gleeson to vote against the photographic project for the outrageous reason given.

Our hotel in Florence was the Brunelleschi. Every access road seemed to run outwards from it and were blocked off. At the point of divorce and with us both nearly in tears, Carol walked to the reception and explained we could get no closer than the adjacent station because all roads were closed due, we discovered, to an international football match. They dispatched a porter who simply ignored the opposing traffic flow directional signage and barricades and drove down a one-way street to the reception. How practical! How illogical! How Italian!

Our journey took us to Asia and I recall one experience in Malaysia. This time we were driving across and around the Malay Peninsula so as to explore and reach places of interest. Now this was some 30 years ago so safety concerns were perhaps somewhat less. Even so one day I accidentally crossed the border into Thailand unchallenged. We were captivated by the scenery and drove on randomly just loving the experience until fuel was low and we realised we were lost.

We happened across some loggers and through sign language were able to head back but with the car fuel gauge almost on empty. As we left the group of helpful men we noticed armed guards looking very concerned with our presence and realised we had come across an illegal logging camp. We sped away and were fortunate to arrive at a border crossing but also suddenly realised we had no papers.

On our side of the border road was a petrol depot. Saved! We pulled to a stop, refuelled, topped up the tyres and generally stuffed about watching the sole border guard. As sunset approached behind the dense jungle the guard simply packed up and left at 6pm. No barrier was erected and no relief border guard took over. We jumped in the car, pulled out of the petrol station driveway swung across the road, re-entered Malaysia at speed and disappeared back to our hotel much less nervous but both desperately needing to pee from all the excitement.

Even the most experienced travellers get caught out sometimes. While in Bangkok, Carol and I visited the Snake Temple and were offered an 'in-room' massage for both of us in our hotel. The following day, the Concierge Desk called and announced two guests had arrived. Overnight the penny dropped all was not as we had naively thought and I went to the foyer to meet and decline their services. A very athletic and handsome couple attended and when I explained our misinterpretation and paid a very nominal amount to cover their costs they took it all well and we parted with smiles. Lesson learned by us.

Our first trip to Phuket was to the Holiday Inn and the only reason to mention it is the manager cheated outrageously at Pictionary. This was easily tolerated as the drinks were free to game participants. However, nude diving for jewellery tossed into the pool at midnight took entertainment a bit too far. I am no prude but I am a terrible diver.

Our last stop on the homeward journey was a private island off the south-east Fijian coast, called Toberua. Two fellow guests were going to a local market for fresh seafood. I had promised Carol a lobster meal. I asked them to get a live specimen if possible. They returned with a huge Pacific lobster which I took to the kitchen to be prepared. Cook had prepared a buffet dinner for staff to serve and had left the island. We were to leave the next day so I set about, with permission, to prepare Lobster Mornay. The meal was a great success. I had a quantity of the sauce left over once the shell had been refilled to overflowing so I left it, with a note, in the refrigerator.

As we boarded our transport to the mainland next day the chef came racing up to me asking for recipe details. I gladly faxed them to him so if you ever stayed on Toberua with that chef on duty and lobster on the menu, chances are you have tasted my Mornay sauce as I am told it became a speciality.

All guests on the island were only ever introduced by first name. The week before a very recognisable face from TV was a guest with a gorgeous partner. Another not famous guest recognised him and repeatedly hovered around, found silly reasons to be within photo range and generally made a nuisance and fool of herself simultaneously. Management had her warned then surprisingly removed.

On the day of the personality's departure, we all went to the dock, as was customary, to wave goodbye. He waved at us all and I returned the gesture using the Vulcan hand greeting while silently mouthing the salutation "*Live long and prosper*" much to his amusement. I had treated Patrick Stewart as just Patrick all week with not a word about my avid dedication to all things imaginary and possible in Star Trek.

We returned to Sydney in July 1989 refreshed and with my having made a decision to change careers by looking for opportunity outside of the arts and film. I had had enough. Carol also wanted a change and suggested if something away from Sydney were to come up we should be open to possibilities. I agreed. We didn't realise then a move would take just a few years to happen.

The week of our return we got tragic news from Walter. One of our bicentennial team was dead. Michael Haeburn-Little had taken his own life. We don't know what demons assailed Michael but we all missed him. Such talent, humour and good companionship. Michael's *Celebration of Life* was opened with a Welcome by John Moulton, an Elegy was presented by Sal Sharah, the Tribute by Bob Ellis, Psalm 23 was led by Stephen Hall and Terry Bader made the Tribute. Piper Colin McPherson piped *The Flowers of the Forest* on the passing of a good friend and colleague.

Walter was to lose another friend and colleague in Ashley Gordon who died in September 1989. Walter himself collapsed that month due to overwork and took some much needed time off to recuperate. I had been wise to take my break when I did.

Ruth moved back to her apartment. We purchased and installed her new refrigerator. Casually one night at dinner Ruth asked if I had contacted the television program, *60 Minutes* who had apparently phoned while we were away. No, she did not have a name and no, she didn't know why the contact had been made. I called Channel Nine and was connected with the *60 Minutes* team.

It turns out my reputation for promoting the W C Fields approach to parenting children – "let them play in the traffic" appealed to the producers. Associate Producer Anita Jacoby had an idea it may make interesting TV for a childless-by-choice couple to take on a couple of children to see what happens. The segment presenter was Jennifer Byrne. She asked if Carol and I would undertake the experiment. I was naturally keen to try but Carol was very reserved until we met the children and parents.

David was a physiologist and his wife Vivian was an interpreter and language tutor, specifically Japanese. They had triplets. Two

boys, Reece and Lincoln and a girl Rebecca. All blond, all gorgeous, all energetic and all very intelligent. All under two and not quite potty trained. We all became comfortable enough to agree to undertake the exchange and experience following familiarisation trips to Taronga Zoo, Sydney Aquarium, backyard meetings and shopping trips. Such fools were we.

The segment creation process required Carol and me to take the three 'angels' for a week into our home 24/7 while their parents were sent to Japan for a holiday. We received no payment and voluntarily undertook the challenge. Apparently, we were the first people to insist on a contract with the program's management to protect us and the other family against exploitation and other risks - my background applying itself for a wise purpose.

The camera crew were present for about 16-18 hrs a day from Saturday, 30 September 1989. Stupid me created a computer day schedule to provide routine. It lasted just a day and featured briefly in the broadcast which was titled *Three's a Crowd*. Of course neither Carol nor I had any clue about what to do apart from some quick reading and calls to friends with kids. I referred to the triplets as 'angels' but became 'devils' almost overnight with the hardest part being catching them for nappy changes. So incompetent were we at this I had to devise a fun way to clean them up when needed. It became a game. It was summer, so any time a nappy needed changing we did so in the back garden using a hose to wash and play. It worked.

Within a few days things did settle down but by mid-week when the grandparents relieved us for an afternoon, we simply crashed into bed for a sleep. The incessant questions from three highly intelligent, curious and pack-attack triplets is exhausting as many parents would attest. While alluded to by Jennifer, sex on our afternoon off wasn't on our minds, due to exhaustion.

At one point the director asked if, while the crew were absent overnight, did the three have temper tantrums. They didn't but I had observed the reaction of one triplet taking away another's toy. To demonstrate I simply bent down and took a toy off

one of them. All hell broke loose with one, then two, then all three screaming. I returned it and the reverse happened as they switched off their joint auditory assault. This could be repeated as often as needed. It was never filmed.

A shopping trip to Woolworths Neutral Bay was arranged through the program's office with Woolworths' Head Office. Woolies initially thought they were being set-up for some expose. Carol and I formed a train of three grocery trolleys with a triplet as driver in each. Product was chosen and I would aeroplane one kid at a time into the shelves of refrigeration holding onto their sturdy Osh Kosh outfits. It was great fun and great entertainment. Unfortunately the film (not video) was scratched and could not be used.

With no prior exposure to children, what took us by surprise was the never-ending curiosity and questions. In one scene in the segment Carol is continually challenged by the same question, "What's that?" The question included a poke at the object if it were near or pointed towards when out of reach. Carol's breasts attracted them for far too long. Obviously their mother wasn't as well endowed and so full breasts were a fascination.

The program had a surprise in store. *60 Minutes* kept David and Vivian away in Japan for a week longer than prescribed and set us up for a real stress test. Lack of sleep, demands for answers to questions, noise and a regime completely foreign to us both produced pimples for Carol and a nervous tick in me. When we met David and Vivian at the airport after some 16 days we exited the building shouting, "We're free!"

The segment as presented is balanced and a lot of fun. It aired on Sunday, 5 November 1989. The segment was voted one of the best of the year and had repeated viewings twice more in subsequent year's schedule. Are we pleased we did it? Yes. We have greater respect for parenting couples. We also have proof our decision not to have kids was the correct decision for us. I had had a vasectomy in the early 80s and Carol had to have an unexpected hysterectomy some short time later. The program gave

us insight and tested our natural feelings. We are true DINKS – Double Income, No Kids.

We kept in touch with the family for some time but eventually lost contact. Similarly with Anita Jacoby and Jennifer Byrne. Occasional contact then nothing for nearly 20 years until Jennifer hosted a literary event as part of the wonderful Noosa Long Weekend annual cultural festival. From across a crowded courtyard we spotted each other and immediately renewed acquaintance.

Wanting to return to work, our respective job hunting paid off. Carol joined BHP Engineering HR in North Sydney. Her acceptance was not without a minor drama. Carol had not applied for a job through an agency for 'soooo' long. This is the aforementioned typing test she had to sit for and failed through nervousness. Despite more efforts she just couldn't do it. She explained for nearly a decade she had been principal of a typesetting business and it was just she had a blockage. Her examiner understood, checked her out, and gave her a pass mark. One former client whom the examiner called laughed at the suggestion Carol could not type, *"She made just three typos in a million keystrokes for a medical book with Latin pharmaceutical names. She can type alright."*

The State Transit Authority of New South Wales (STA) which manages bus and ferry services in metropolitan Sydney and Newcastle wanted to create a Corporate Affairs Department. With encouragement and a reference from Derek Webster at Maritime Services I applied and STA CEO, John Brew, chose me to run it. The STA came under the Transport Portfolio of Minister Bruce Baird whose Chief-of-Staff was Barry O'Farrell, who became Premier of New South Wales only to resign over an ICAC matter concerning an undeclared gift bottle of \$3,000 1959 Penfolds Grange. Barry was replaced as Premier, in April 2014, by Mike Baird, Bruce Baird's son.

We had been negotiating to purchase a house in Noosa. This was put on hold but our, particularly Carol's, desire to leave Sydney was strong and would eventually be realised after a long wait.

The remit for the Corporate Affairs Unit was to manage service communications with staff, passengers, the Minister's office and the media and to provide appropriate draft responses in reply to ministerial correspondence (usually customer complaints to the Minister's office) and manage the brand image of the authority plus the Buspac advertising contract.

The position classification placed me in the new Senior Executive Service ranks on one of the first performance incentive and reward contracts. If I achieved certain performance criteria every six months I would maintain my SES classification and eventually be rewarded with an incentive bonus. It was a nice idea until it came time to claim it.

On my first day I was briefed on a particular issue concerning a dispute between one of the old marketing unit staff and a fellow employee. Len Whittaker was in trouble. The in-house legal eagle, Margaret Standish provided a brief, John Brew provided his assessment and Vince Smith, Head of HR input his perspective. All agreed it would probably be best to let Len go. They handed the axe to me.

You will have already come to the conclusion I love a challenge. I interviewed Len and was not convinced he should shoulder all the incident blame. Besides, the other party was getting off scot-free but was equally culpable. I enquired as to what Len wanted from his job. I found he had seen an opportunity in tourism and was pushing for dedicated depot facilities to accommodate the transit needs of tourists in Sydney with special buses. I challenged him if I found the resources then he had to make it work or very little future lay ahead. He jumped at the opportunity. The new unit he managed was transferred under my control on a make or break basis.

Three years later STA Tourist Services offered a colour coded bus fleet and dedicated transit services between Sydney Airport and the CBD, tour buses servicing key points of interest across the city. A dedicated depot for these services was established in Randwick. Even cantankerous Guy Thurston, the bus division GM Technical Operations, had to admit the market was proven.

While today the mobile phone and iPod are ubiquitous, back then, the Walkman was our new technology. Tests to use the technology for guided tours were undertaken with *Switched-on-Sydney*. Experimental plans were developed to mount information screens in commuter buses as well as tourist service vehicles. There was surprising resistance to the commuter use but the tourist application was better accepted because their information needs could be predicted. Daily commuters either wanted silence, an extra bit of sleep or wildly differing entertainment programs. Also, the technology of the day proved unreliable with high maintenance costs due to travel vibration damage.

This operation, under Len's management, won the top award for Tourism Transport Services in the State in 1993. By then I had moved on to Brisbane but Len and John Brew called me from the awards ceremony to jubilantly declare the success and honour. I love giving people a chance to do extraordinary things. This was also my first deep sortie into tourism and became a career focus change lasting many years.

Taking out the top tourism transport award was a special victory for Len. He had to fight entrenched attitudes and approaches to get his small fleet converted to the special needs of tourists. The new Acting Chief Engineer was John Morant based at Randwick. Brew had brought in Morant to replace the former Chief Engineer named Ryan who, in my opinion, was a 'do-nothing' change blocker. Ryan objected to every modification Len Whittaker needed for this small special purpose fleet. But Morant could see why the modifications were needed to accommodate suitcases and bags; why anti-slip grip rails were a benefit and necessary and why the bold new identifying livery required new all-over repaints. The Explorer and Airport bus units were purposely and distinctively different to the standard commuter bus fleet to stand-out and to catch the attention of tourists. If I had been Len, I would have stuck the award on the roof of the depot with pride. Certainly, attitudes did change, although sometimes reluctantly

and these services have periodically faced various challenges over the years but still operate to this day.

Risk management and accident media damage control fell within my units' purview. Technical division resisted our 'interference' in risk management but when packaged as part of disaster and emergency planning our value was accepted because we demonstrably improved communication, stuck to factual timely reporting; made accurate incident updates and explained what happened simply in *plain speak* for all to understand. Media, staff and then commuter trust in service information improved.

It was one such incident; a diesel spill at Willoughby Depot which breached the safety dam wall and got into a local creek resulting in a fine by the Environment Protection Authority, my team redrafted part of the response manual and had it signed off by the Authority. Dr Neil Shepherd, Director-General of the Ministry for Environment assisted us with the drafting. The new process became the new standard.

My newly named Corporate Affairs and Tourist Services Unit had some extraordinary talented people. I had chosen the team of Jackie Thomson as PR Manager, Cary Budd as Advertising Manager and Merryl McCracken in Ministerial Services. With various support staff and my PA, Maxine Wade these few people did some extraordinary things. John Brew liked to stretch the boundaries and was willing to take sensible calculated risks for greater rewards. He respected his senior executive team's opinions but also expected outstanding results.

In just over two years this new unit took the communication and marketing of public bus and ferry transport services to a new level. We were the first government agency to use mass distribution channels such as telephone books to put service route maps and timetables within easy reach of the community.

BusPac had the fleet bus advertising contract. Cary and I assessed the STA position in this contract to be weak and financially disadvantaged as the fleet owner. We completely changed

how the bus advertising contract operated and raised the revenue base to around six million dollars.

John Brew, in his memoirs, recalls the STA flexing its contractual muscle to direct how alcohol and bus ads were to be restricted on buses servicing schools. This directive, applied through my office and technical services, wasn't deemed to require any advance ministerial approval as it was operational. After all, the authority was supposedly independent of government directives except directives to the board. John was carpeted on the issue and accused of 'moral judgments' by Baird and Premier Greiner. Moral judgments are apparently the purview of politicians according to minders.

The confusion came about around conditions and approvals in the new ad contract. It gave the STA, and not the Minister's office, authority over management of the deal. After all, STA had an independent board and the contract was between STA and BusPac. STA was supposed to be as commercial as possible and to be actively striving to achieve at least five of the seven criteria for corporatisation.

Percy Allen of NSW Treasury had chaired a committee to provide a report called *Structural Reform of the State Transit Authority*. According to John Brew the Minister wasn't in favour of corporatisation probably because he was influenced by the private bus lobby through his close friendship with Roger Graham who sat on the STA board. A truly competitive STA was seen as a real threat to private interests. Meryll McCracken of my unit was the secretary of the committee made up of Allen, Brew and Grimwood.

The government eventually stopped STA corporatisation much to John Brew's and Chairman John Landels' disappointment. Each knew it was achievable and from it real competitiveness across bus and ferry services could be made to happen without government manipulation of the checker-board.

My role had its own government departmental intrigue. I was asked to lunch at the Hilton Hotel Marketplace by Jenny and Dick. I cannot recall Jenny's last name but Dick is Richard

Fleming. Both were executives in the Ministry of Transport, shortened to MoT. MoT felt it important I was aware the minister was very close to the commercial operators and having Roger Graham on the State Transit board was considered a conflict of interest by the MoT and poor business judgment by the Minister. Also, the Minister's media profile was less than desirable for the needs of the portfolio; he vacillated and offered weak argument in defence of MoT and State Transit. I listened intently to these opinions.

MoT liked the new feel of public affairs from State Transit and would support our position over essential services funding and challenges to commercialisation of some routes and further would support the STAs new zonal strategy if the benefits could be shown. It was a fascinating de-brief I was able to provide my boss, John Brew.

A week later Barry O'Farrell called and offered lunch at La Casina along with Alan Hoskins. They delivered their version of what was expected, needed and desirable. It all centred on the image of the minister, their own reputations as minders and in many respects was to the disadvantage of State Transit's competitiveness. I listened and did another de-brief. John was greatly amused.

John Brew came to an accommodation with Baird that the good news content of commercial decisions by STA would be offered to the Minister for release. Of course the opposite was also true; STA would have to handle the bad news directly. We did pretty well at that particularly when deflecting requests for favours like finding a role for a Liberal Party apparatchik at some sixty-thousand dollars a year. We scuttled the suggestion.

Two ministerial minders, Louise Nicholson and Alan Hoskins, were a regular source of mischief to a seemingly gullible Bruce Baird. Remember the Minister and I spoke regularly. Many mornings he called my direct line, often as early as 6.30am if an issue was live, to prepare him about any overnight public transport issues or media opportunities. He therefore had frequent, easy and personal access to check what he was being told by minders.

This nice pair of Louise and Alan concocted one story that during a dinner with leading Australian, New Zealand and European transport executives hosted by State Transit, I had organised and had served expensive French Champagne.

They didn't check with their own man at the event Roger Graham who could have scotched the mistake. No, they blew it into a minor scandal with Baird formally writing and asking for an explanation and targeting the authority with blame. Much to his embarrassment we easily showed only local state-based wines had been served from my sources in the NSW Hunter Valley, all legit and above board. The Minister could also just as easily have asked me. There were lots of backtracking, blaming un-validated sources but no apology or formal withdrawal of the correspondence. Our written rebuff wasn't well received as their foolishness had by then caused formal correspondence to be placed on the record. Meryl made sure of that.

When Bruce Baird wanted to chew you out personally that's when he could pick up the phone. One such was in February 1991 following my authorisation of local media ads informing service diversions around the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras site in Oxford Street, Sydney. The ads were not the government standard timetable and route diversion announcements. These agency prepared display ads recognised and acknowledged the event by name to attract user attention and inform about service changes arising due to the event. Oops!

STA was suggesting commuters and revellers plan to use bus services instead of vehicles to attend. We always did this for other events like those for Opera in the Park, Clark Island Children's events and Art Gallery / Domain mass public events. All such ads had to be vetted by the Minister's office.

Baird exploded *"another example of your staggering political ineptitude. There is no political backing for Mardi Gras. The ad is not to run."* How so much has changed in relation to Mardi Gras since then with intolerance becoming full-on support. We redid the information as a standard notice without any reference to the

event but so it would still meet our statutory 'change to service information' obligations but with no recognition of the specific activity being the cause.

The role of my unit covered media feeds to handle misinformation, correcting wrong assumptions and public opinion, telling the STA story accurately and truthfully to preserve the image of the authority over things like drug busts on ferries, hostage situations, service diversions which strand travellers, accidents, assaults on public transport, sensitivity to advertising words and images, imagined slights from drivers, delays and a myriad of other big and small issues. It is never boring nor does one have a quiet day.

My team did their job well. Strong personalities working inter-dependently across our challenges. One such was to try to get the Transport Information Line 131 500 working better. The service covered bus, rail, ferry and taxi services. Complaints from the public towards the service were legendary. I asked for and received Ministerial permission to undertake an independent assessment of the troubled service. MoT ran the service, not STA. Our review showed the dBase used to track timetables was stuffed, staffs were under trained and the telephone system was archaic along with the management software. Fifty-one percent of all calls seeking service assistance were abandoned.

Of course, as soon as you point out problems, everyone else looks to you for solutions. Our unit was charged with putting the service to tender. We spent two months on the new specification and went out seeking expressions-of-interest in April 1992. We delivered projects to a high standard complete with communication strategy, PR and marketing plan. We were also charged with aspects to setting up and establishing the communication strategy and setting the appropriate ISO standards as part of corporatisation. The unit personnel numbers grew to deliver our extra roles. Staff at other government authorities often applied to join our team. The bar was set high but talent like Adam Jeffrey made it and proved a valuable addition.

There were many times when my staff pushed against established inertia with senior managers and executives. Our biggest protection came from delivering where others couldn't or wouldn't to the CEO's agenda and by these achievements gained endorsement for even more innovation and change. I had more than one blow-up with the GM HR, Vince Smith over moving dead-wood to get important stuff done. I was not always right and I had to pull back my Rottweiler of a PA Maxine Wade a few times to preserve the peace. However, overall this band of professionals did an incredible job and earned respect and recognition for a change agenda which set State Transit and its CEO apart from others in the Minister's portfolio. At least that is what I believe. Brew appears to agree given his comments following his reading this section of the book.

John Brew was keen for the authority to play a role in history as part of its government and public image. State Transit part sponsored the Historic Bus Museum and its Public Day activities. John's personal love was maritime so when Kay Cottee asked him to help with the 50th Anniversary Re-enactment Ceremony on 31 May 1992 in Sydney Harbour there was keen interest. The Navy wanted in as did leading media. My unit helped with the media plan and ferry-based floating bleachers as seating for the ceremony audience along with a re-broadcast of the 1942 radio report of the attack on 2BL, and other event communication and informative content.

The unit also co-ordinated with the protocol office and media for planning of the visits and any harbour cruise itineraries for South African President, Nelson Mandela, HRH Prince Philip and US President George H W Bush.

It was uncommon practice to engage with bus drivers directly over pay and conditions. The union reps were all-powerful and the main conduit to interfere, dump or delay virtually any initiative. So, when we wanted to promote a better public image for bus drivers with commuters, the union route was not acceptable. Instead Jackie and Cary worked with a small group of drivers to

make a video supposedly around revenue protection (RevPro) which was more about image building, respect and courtesy. It worked well in some depots but not in others. Despite the challenges of no universal acceptance, sufficient drivers took the message and our service complaints started to decline. To get our message to the drivers across in the right manner we got input from a psychologist, Amanda Gordon.

Newcastle was hit by an earthquake Christmas 1989. I want to acknowledge the terrific team effort of the drivers from the Newcastle depot. My job of informing the media with public updates and news was made easier by a team who did what they said they would do and on-time. Sydney was shaken but not nearly so severely.

The Minister's minders wanted him to be the only TV media face. I insisted that our unit be the prime source of reliable verified operational services detail. Jackie and I handled radio, print and news distribution services. Meryl handled interdepartmental information distribution and MoT. Together, we all did a really good job which was acknowledged by Bruce Baird who, as things quietened down, was able to be more on-air, in-print and on-camera with the big picture overview knowing the detail was there to inform and back-up statements.

It was a bit of bad news over a justifiable customer complaint which introduced me to Kathryn Greiner. She had a radio program on Sydney 2UE and asked me for an on-air comment about an incident with a pensioner. After her on-air phone-in complainant had spoken Kathryn segwayed to me for STA official response. I simply admitted STA was wrong, apologised and offered the commuter a pass of greater value, then stopped talking. Kathryn went to music and came on-line bemused. She had allocated five minutes to the segment and now had four minutes vacant. Could I expand on the topic? "Not really! We were wrong and I admitted it."

You need to understand this was the early 90s and a government agency admitting a mistake wasn't the norm. I used the

remaining time to explain to listeners the bus and ferry services were complex to run and as a percentage of overall trips taken daily the very few mistakes were regrettable but nevertheless tiny. Kathryn and I set up a weekly segment of updates about what was happening with the STA and formed a good professional friendship. The minister's minders didn't like the personal exposure I was getting but given who Kathryn was, they left well enough alone.

Kathryn Greiner went into local government with the Sydney City Council. We met regularly when I was the Chair of the Transport and Tourist Services Working Party for the Lord Mayor's business economics group and again in my consulting capacity for the Sydney District Business Council re-organisation.

In the middle of my coming to grips with my new STA role and loving it, Michael Rudny (SBT) and Ian Plater of Arthur Andersen, asked me to assist with a briefing document to explain how to convert the historic SS South Steyne ferry into a casino within the Darling Harbour entertainment precinct. In its day the South Steyne was the largest operational ferry ever built. Docked within the entertainment precinct of Darling Harbour the ferry no longer had anything to do with State Transit. Ian and Michael wanted an innovative approach to their idea and wanted me to provide it and the words.

As it was New Year I asked and got approval from Brew to do it in my own time over the break. I no longer have a copy of the proposal but it so impressed Arthur Andersen that in the mid-90s they gave me a few nice pieces of work to do based on this original demonstration of my capabilities when I set-up my consultancy firm.

Anyway, in a subsequent draft Andersens partnered with Sheraton Mirage's Bernie Mulhearn for expertise in casino operations and engaged with State Transit's Owen Eckford, GM Ferries on vessel operations, repair and maintenance. The proposal was submitted to Gary West MP, then Minister for Tourism. But as the Steyne is still in dock operating as a function centre it seems the

idea didn't get the go ahead. At the time there was considerable push-back from the anti-gambling lobby. The operation, as an elite high-rollers Club Casino, was the only way to make it pay from Sheraton Mirage's point-of-view.

Planning and managing the introduction of the JetCat Ferries to Sydney Harbour was exciting. Developed by the General Manager of Ferries, Owen Eckford, these twin hulled water jet propulsion fast ferries were planned to replace the older, less efficient and costly fleet of hydrofoils. The JetCats were modern and fast. The unions hated them because they used less labour, required new rosters and efficiencies did not benefit union members but offered the public a great new speedy alternative across fabulous Sydney harbour.

Operations made us aware the Union planned to embarrass the Minister at the official unveiling and naming ceremony. During my daily briefing to Baird at 6.30am I mentioned he needed to prepare for some union action and that John Brew and I suggested a low profile approach by the Minister. Not only was this advice ignored but the Premier was invited to officiate.

To gain maximum publicity for the arrival and service introduction of the new JetCats, Jackie Thomson and I set about convincing Sydney Ferries an impressive entry into and parade up Sydney Harbour was needed. The vessels were built in Cairns and travelled down the Queensland coast on their shakedown cruise in some very unpleasant weather. I am told by those on board the trip was one to remember.

On the day, we needed to keep the three new JetCats outside the heads until the media helicopter camera crews were ready. Formed into a chevron and at high speed the three sleek new craft emblazoned with the new livery and STA logo entered Sydney Harbour to a waiting fleet of recreational craft, yachts, tugs and fire boats with cascading fire hoses.

The sight was terrific as our new craft shot across the water gaining on Fort Denison and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, our staging area. JetCats can really move. I stood outside during the

run and was exhilarated by the wind and power of the twin jet engines. That night's TV news had aerial shots which were fantastic. The team were very proud and deservedly so.

As forecast, part of the naming ceremony in Darling Harbour did not go well. The pollies were ambushed by unionists as they left the function. Despite our alert, their minders had no contingency plan arrangements. You can see some of us on a JetCat after the ceremony in the photos. Learning from the incident, Jackie and Meryl changed our event protocols to provide better contingency options. The minister's office adopted these recommendations.

A short time after Jackie put a number of authority executives and key operational managers through an excellent media training course. Everyone in the unit participated.

Another STA initiative we media managed was the introduction of the dedicated bus-only lanes across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It was a bun-fight between the likes of car owners, pedestrian groups and the public transport lobby, the roads authority and the media. One could hardly imagine just how hard it was to bring this logical and so obviously efficient operational initiative of the bus division to fruition. It was years in the planning and negotiation. Our team did a fine job of the introduction communication and the new lane usage conditions bedded down quickly.

Our orbit of tasks also encompassed working with Police on media management around cracking a drug ring using harbour ferries as distribution transport. Long suspected the ring had protectors and was apparently hard to crack by the Police but eventually done. Naturally, the minister's office wanted distance so our unit had a clear path to work with the Police and to manage media. This exercise was practice for another even more satisfying outcome.

I was part of a taskforce for the Mosman Mayor, Barry O'Keefe during the hunt for the Mosman Granny Killer. I took the challenge, over what STA might do to assist, back to the team and we developed a concept of 'stop-any-time-anywhere' *Granny*

Express bus service on-demand throughout all the streets within the murderer's hunting zone of the Lower North Shore. We gained support from bus operations and took it to Brew who approved it immediately. I briefed the Minister who made the announcement. Citizens had an extra layer of convenience and security until the killer was caught, which he was. Our efforts were formally acknowledged at the Mayor's *Thank You Dinner* where the team took great comfort in their success.

The Unit costs were shared across the operational divisions so we were often challenged to show we were delivering value for money. Fair enough. Some of the preceding comments demonstrate our internal value. One similar effort which was a challenging safety perception issue was the management and correcting of misinformation concerning CNG (Compressed Natural Gas) powered buses.

CNG tank explosion risk was raised publicly by the union. The matter could be answered by science and testing facts plus container safety specifications but we were not winning the perception war. That was until John Brew and I were looking at a film about a CNG tank being shot through by a bullet followed by a gas-only vapour cloud being expelled. Neither the tank ruptured by exploding nor did the vapour ignite even with tracer bullet fire. The vapour was self extinguishing in this instance by its own force of pressure. The film was released to media and the tide of opinion started to change. CNG powered buses eventually accounted for one-third of the STA fleet.

Another of our notable 'wins' in the eyes of the operational executive team concerned my team's management of communications with drivers during the time of award negotiations. HR and Ops would do the negotiation with the Unions and bring the offers to us for word-smithing as news, public advice and letters to depot staff across one of the biggest bus networks in the world. One particular set of negotiations was sensitive and time limited. We needed to step outside of normal channels. I suggested to HR boss, Vince Smith, and John Brew we write directly

to drivers at their homes purposely hoping spouses or partners would also see the offer thereby opening up the pay conversation at home away from the union direct influence on the drivers.

Oh, dear! All hell broke loose. We had unintentionally revealed employment details many of our employees had evidently not shared with spouses and partners. The initiative had the desired effect of engaging with interested third parties over the new take-home-pay-offer. STA won the battle this time.

Naturally government had computers but our unit was the first to introduce a new database with advanced words-in-document search, unique cross-referencing and tracking capabilities. So effective was this in providing fast, accurate and integrated advice in reply to Ministerial correspondence we became the first government authority to be permitted to respond directly to the enquirer who had written to the Minister. Normally draft replies were researched and prepared for sign off by the minister's office. Merryl McCracken gets the credit for this initiative as she engendered so much trust and confidence in the unit's output around sensitive matters. The minders were not as pleased. It removed the first-obtain-approval protocols used by them to exert some control over the STA. John Brew was thrilled.

The unit worked on early versions of the multi-service Transit Card, a fore-runner of Smart Card. We also offered a vision paper forecasting electronic timetables and waiting time displays on small screens using the authority's own radio frequency and early GPS capability. This was laughed at by the Minister's minders as a fanciful waste of time. Of course such helpful assistance to commuters is now commonly in use and on mobile apps. These ideas were being generated as a vision of the future some twenty five years ago.

We proved our point with a practical demonstration of early smart technology. The NSW Art Gallery was presenting the Guggenheim exhibit at the gallery and we spent months putting public transport into the admission ticket using bar-coding. The gallery does not have great car access or sufficient parking,

so public transport was a natural solution if the offer could be included with admission and one ticket used for both. It worked well. This project refreshed my connection to Jan Meek and Edmund Capon.

Our unit was also the first to formalise cross-functional briefings with our related service organisations – State Rail, Maritime Services Board, Roads and Traffic Authority, Department of Transport and Ministry of Transport, to share and compare. We used the working board room lunch format. There were absentee members depending on interest or involvement in any current agenda. We had to work hard to overcome a silly barrier - being a lack of trust between each organisation or turf-war. In due course, our outcomes started to benefit all participating organisations. Of course, I modestly claim my good chairmanship and effective agenda management was a significant influence on cohesion and results.

I never sat in the CEO chair for John Brew even though I was in the appropriate coterie of SES GMs who were meant to do so when the CEO took leave or travelled overseas. Why didn't I get a go? Well, the Minister and I rubbed for two reasons. Firstly, I applied the *fearless advice* approach a bit too often for Baird's comfort. Ministers like wiggle room to exercise what Sir Humphrey Appleby of *Yes, Minister* called *plausible deniability*.

John Brew expected and appreciated straightforward and honest advice himself but knew, as acting CEO, I would likely conflict with Minister Baird in this respect. Second, and you will smile at this reason, Bruce didn't like my habit, from my theatre days, of wearing bow-ties. I kept several standard ties in my office for when I was called into the Minister's presence and needed to change appearance.

When I left STA the staff had a huge bow-tie shaped card made for me which I greatly value and have kept. It took a lot of farewell notes and signatures to fill it. They also framed a bow-tie award certificate of Minister Baird's reaction to my bow-ties. All in good fun.

Despite the media often seeing STA as an occasional whipping boy when services failed, they were friendly when we launched a new corporate logo. A newspaper cartoonist morphed the new design into a speeding snail much to public glee and the Minister's mirth. I believe John was given the original artwork as a souvenir.

To improve the new logo's front-of-mind recognition by the travelling public Cary Budd proposed STA should sponsor a laser show for New Year's Eve featuring the new logo design. The image to be projected in the Darling Harbour maritime precinct which is a favoured gathering place of New Years Eve revellers for entertainment and fireworks. It was a good idea which would also be picked up by television news and the fireworks broadcaster.

The problem was in finding a neutral surface big enough to project the new logo, graphics and the accompanying laser light show. No screen of the size needed existed at the time. The tech team had an ideal projection platform from the external front staircase of the Darling Harbour shopping and restaurant complex but no screen. I was asked to visit the site to look at portable options at huge cost.

It was soon evident the team were locked into a mindset of a perfectly flat, white surface at least 5m x 5m standing remotely or hung from something sturdy enough. This was the limit of any available hired screen back then. The projection 'throw' was over 200m so the potential minimum image was more likely 40m x 60m. With my entertainment experience with son et lumiere and film background I pointed at the new Four Points hotel being completed on the Sussex St site. "Put butchers paper or tissue papers on the inside of those windows and you have a giant screen." Jackie Thompson said, "No, way."

We got permission and did it. Jackie delivered fabulous media and PR. At 9pm the first show was to be turned on. A number of us were on a boat in Cockle Bay as the official party to launch the event. As our boat slowly emerged from under Pymont Bridge, I raised a torch to flash the 'OK'. As I did this

I was struck by a beer stubby either dropped, thrown or knocked from the bridge. Thankfully it was empty and only a glancing blow although I tumbled into the water. With so many hands present I was quickly hauled out, conscious, dazed and very wet. A very lucky lad indeed.

The Minister's office questioned John Brew as to the return on investment of the laser show using public funds. Jackie Thomson and Cary Budd foresaw such a follow-up and had commissioned an audience survey through the Australia Day Council who oversaw many events leading up to Australia Day still to follow New Years. The ADC researched audiences for effectiveness of government spend and promotion. Our liaison was none other than Karen McBrien who now worked for John Trevillian as it happened.

Public post-awareness of the new State Transit logo following the laser show was fifty percent of audience with longer than three-week recall. The Ministry went quiet but issued a press release claiming our success.

Late in 1990, John Brew briefed me on his interest in bidding for the 50th International Congress of the *Union Internationale des Transports Publics* (UITP) based in Brussels. This is the world's biggest transport talk-fest, exhibition and trade show for rail, bus and other public transport services and equipment. To bid, an organisation has to be a UITP member and represent a national class of public transport services. STA qualified and John was chairman of the national organisation representing all forms of public transport in Australia. Could my unit develop a plan to bid for this event for Sydney?

Interestingly, there were very few established criteria for a bid other than some headings. UITP accepted notice of our intention but I was made aware Hong Kong was the favoured venue in our part of the globe. This preference came about because Hong Kong was about to be handed back to China. Within UITP and Europe there was an expectation China would close the colony to outside engagement. The then UITP World President (from Holland) wanted HK to win. So early on, we had insight

into a formal, established process of favours and nods. John and I decided to challenge this. Even so, we knew that HK and the World President were so confident that they had not sent a voting member to attend.

I conceived a *bid-book* approach covering a range of offers and information based on potential Australian state government infrastructure, rolling stock and systems upgrade or purchase forecasts (we did a survey of the main agencies who were UITP members in Australia). We added hooks such as tourism and special events along with a strong business case for a surplus because UITP ran this event for profit. We packaged emotion, opportunity and discovery, encouraging families to come and holiday as part of the experience. This was a completely new format in budgets, facilities and video support to what was normally done as a bid.

The videos were of the Minister and Premier inviting UITP to Sydney. Baird didn't believe State Transit or our supporting transport brethren had much chance of winning so he didn't want us to engage with the Premier. However, I got a message to David O'Connor in Premier's whom I knew from bicentennial days. I arranged for the expression of interest to make the video invitation originate from Premier's, not STA. As soon as the Premier came on board, so did the Minister. Surprise.

I worked with the respected Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau to meet their industry bid standards along with the Sydney Convention Centre management for a location for this huge event. The bid books were assembled in customised presentation cases and dispatched to Brussels. Our bid was short-listed as one of four. John Brew and I were invited to attend the bid process meeting in Dublin, Ireland. Baird held discretion over all of his portfolio SES level manager's international travel. The Minister said 'no' to my going.

Despite best efforts, from many parties who had invested in the bid process, to change his mind the Minister stood his ground. Brew was OK but not Donovan. Even a request from UITP was denied. I prepared John to present but even with his excellent

confidence as a speaker, he wasn't across the detail as I was. Then, inexplicably, three days before the nominated date of travel Baird gave verbal approval only leaving the formal travel application unanswered. Bruce had an escape route if the bid blew up.

The UITP protocol for voting on Congress locations was like a gentlemen's club application. The UITP board considered the three locations – Hong Kong, Australia and Kuwait as places of interest, best fit for purpose and likelihood of exhibitor and member numbers to achieve income. As I state the event is a big profit maker for UITP. The UITP World President did his 'last opportunity' pitch for HK and called for a round-one elimination vote by hands. HK 22, SYD 4, abstaining 6. The meeting took a break and it was explained to me the observed and expected protocol was for the losers to graciously step aside allowing the clear preferred vote winner to be unchallenged for endorsement and final approval at the next meeting.

But, what I also discovered was none of the board had seen our bid. The expensive bid books were in the room still packed. The agenda was resumed until lunch with the final vote to be taken in the afternoon session. John had the right to be heard on our bid as a paid-up country member representative. Like me, John was disappointed to the point of annoyance so we made a plan.

I skipped the lunch and got to work. At the working luncheon all bidders were offered a non-formal opportunity or chance to say thanks and to step back or stand aside for the preliminary voting round favourite. John diplomatically thanked all voting delegates for their kind consideration of Sydney's bid, knowing full well none had seen it, but didn't stand aside from the accepted voting process. There was a buzz in the crowd. Had Australia forgotten to step aside? Poor protocol.

Meanwhile, I had set out a book in each voting members place, primed the videos and prepared to present. Upon return to the meeting session John called for a point of order asking for our bid to be heard if I could be given a few minutes to speak for Sydney. This was completely unexpected but they couldn't say no without

appearing impolite. Once I had the podium I presented the Sydney bid in full for 45 minutes, walking everyone through the bid-book content. I opened with the Premier's video and closed with the Minister's taped invitation. John then moved for a second vote. A member called for a ballot which had to be granted following a poll in support of a ballot called by John, who just refused to back away. The result of the ballot was SYD 22, HK 4, abstain 6. We had won the biggest transport show in the world for Sydney. It had been 25 years since a previous ballot had been called.

The World President could do nothing as his favourite wasn't represented anyway. The Sec-Gen was almost apoplectic. Hong Kong withdrew.

My agenda margin notes show the notation – 'What have we got ourselves in for?' John Brew called the Minister as soon as the time zone alignment allowed. Naturally, the Minister made the announcement and took all the credit. UITP Congress staff was also delighted. The Sec-Gen got over the upset and the new President Monsieur Ratt was a great Sydney supporter.

During early to mid 1991 I prepared contracts for provision of the myriad of services necessary to support this huge event. Conference organisers, event technicians, logistics providers, a mobile version of the Brussels based Secretariat, partner program planners, exhibitor liaison, and so on.

Helga Severyns is a superbly experienced congress co-ordinator. She came to Sydney in July to inspect preparations and to brief the local ANZTCA UITP Local Host Working Committee which John Brew chaired. I was formally endorsed as the local coordinator. I had gone interstate to all ANZTCA members and briefed them on what was to now happen following the bid success. Every one of them came on board with support and resources including sponsorship from providers and suppliers. Helga was very impressed with the Australian and New Zealand 'can-do' approach. The economic value of the event was calculated at around twenty-five million dollars by Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Helga is a heavy smoker. Our final contract negotiations happened on a Friday and went into the night. As a government non-smoking designated office she had to go down 31 floors to the street at least once an hour for a refresher puff. However, once the building closed at 9pm she was trapped. I did some successful hard dealing after 9pm while she suffered withdrawal. All in fun but advantage Sydney.

The formal endorsement of the decision to come to Sydney by the main UITP board was to be held in Stockholm some months later during the 49th Congress. This time I had no problem with the Minister regarding overseas travel. But Baird refused to allow Brew, my CEO and the host of the winning city to accompany me. Instead he directed we have the Australian Ambassador to Sweden stand in. This silliness was promoted by none other than minder Alan Hoskins.

In due course, as the event took shape and Baird realised the huge planning job and even bigger benefits which would accrue under his watch, he made my national and interstate travel needs, to deliver this early establishment phase for the event, a management decision delegated to John Brew. John was very pleased at this sensible approach.

It is customary once a location is confirmed that the upcoming host holds a cocktail party for some hundreds of delegates at the next congress. I connected with long-time friends in the Hunter Valley wine region and assembled sparkling, white and red samples of some top vintages. This export was shipped to Stockholm under an AusIndustry trade program and put into Swedish Customs bond. Exporting our own wine around the world may seem extravagant but our cost approximated some thirty-two dollars per bottle with a lower tax due to our event being part of the exhibition. One of the same Drayton's, or was it Tyrell's wines, imported by a distributor cost one-hundred and eighty dollars in a local restaurant.

Interestingly, in Sweden all bonding, transfers and even opening of alcohol are controlled by the government or their certified

representatives. Irrespective of how many bottles might actually be consumed they open all of them and levy tax on the lot. The event was a great success. But about six dozen unused but opened wine across all types remained. Then a curious thing started to happen.

As delegates and exhibitors packed up to go home they asked if they could take a sample bottle. An enterprising staffer had saved a bucket of corks so as we handed the Australian wine out each bottle was resealed and on its way to a late dinner appointment across Europe. One German businessman called his wife in my presence to say she should get out the good steak as he had an excellent red to share. Naturally, I just had to give him a second bottle. Naturally!

UITP offered its member delegates some wonderful experiences attached to their conferences. Three such come to mind during the Stockholm congress. One was a dinner or rather a banquet duplicating the Nobel Prize Awards Ceremony in Stockholm City Hall with the exact same menu in the same hall. An experience of a life-time.

Another was a night flight above the Arctic Circle to a giant glacier where the Boeing 747 could land and everyone enjoyed a reindeer BBQ and watched the Northern Lights before returning to Stockholm Arlanda Airport before dawn.

And, a visit to the VASA Museum to see the fully intact ship and the preserved crew which sank under extraordinary circumstances in 1628. Sweden's equivalent to the *Mary Rose*. Wow!

Oh! A fourth comes to mind being a grand dinner for 4,000 delegates under the sparkling glass Louvre pyramid in Paris, at a subsequent congress.

I am told many of the delegates to the 50th Congress in Sydney travelled to the Hunter Valley for more wine sampling based on their memory of our generosity two years before. We had built this tour option into the accompanying guests package of our bid.

Some 20+ years later, the Sydney bid design of the UITP Congress logo is still in use internationally, the bid-book process

is a standard requirement and UITP has its own Australian office in Melbourne. Bruce Baird was also Minister for the Sydney Olympics bid. Staff from the office asked to be briefed in October 1991 on the UITP bid process and my bid-book concept. The office copy was borrowed for study.

Around July 1991, the new Minister for State Development and Tourism, Michael Yabsley asked State Transit Tourist Services to take him on a familiarisation of our services which had just taken out an Award of Distinction for our new 'multi-use multi-service' tourism ticket system Sydney Pass, in the State Tourism Awards. I renewed acquaintance. Around this time, Len Whittaker sought my approval to commence negotiations with Taronga Zoo to create a tourist bus/ferry zoo ticket called Zoo Pass.

I used my new Olympic office contact to promote two ideas to local Olympic management. An Olympic themed TV talk show broadcast to the USA called *'Hello from Tomorrow'*, using the International Dateline time difference. I never heard back from them. And, in partnership with Bridge Climb, a competition for 20 Australians and 20 Internationals to be selected by a lottery to stand on the crest of the Sydney Harbour Bridge at dawn on 1st January 2000 and to be the first people on this continent to have the Millennium Dawn shine on them. This idea did score some interest but couldn't be done as the bridge was closed for the fireworks the night before and security would not allow access. Imagination thwarted.

As to an SES incentive bonus, well it wasn't going to happen. My understanding of the outcome was a number of my fellow SES officers and I exceeded expectation so much so the payments would have been an embarrassment to the government of the day. Certainly an SES level seminar on how the program was progressing with the productivity outcomes achieved was suddenly cancelled. Our performance indicators were ratcheted up significantly for our respective reviews in November 1991. I still achieved all of mine but again the SES conditions were changed so no one qualified. I believe the program was eventually dropped.

I greatly enjoyed working with John Brew and admire his integrity and ethics. I believe he was the first Jim Collins category Level 5 Leader I ever met. No matter what the issue John insisted upon the convention of 'truth to power' from his executives. I got the impression that Baird regarded facts as rather an encumbrance at times, not wanting them to get in the way of a good media moment.

It was a privilege working with John Brew. We stay in touch. He and Sylvia live on Queensland's Gold Coast. John is a very accomplished painter of maritime and rail subject matter as well as a consummate model builder. At Christmas time 2013 John sent a card with a very gracious and complimentary notation about how much he had enjoyed working with me. I feel honoured.

Carol wanted to move out of Sydney. We chose Brisbane, my home town.

I applied for and won the role of CEO of the Brisbane Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) in Queensland. I was surprised and delighted the State Transit board held farewell drinks for me and the unit staff saying many nice things about me and the team.

Brew was very disappointed with my decision and tried to have my SES ranking moved up to compensate for the abandonment of the performance reward system but government austerity directives froze all promotions. I had passed all performance reviews under SES regulations with flying colours.

As I prepared to move on, State Transit legal counsel Margaret Standish initiated a review of various operational codes. She, Meryl and I worked on the *Code of Conduct* for managers. Necessity was prompted by recurring instances of people stepping over the line which was certainly blurred through inherited poor practice and a misunderstanding of the obligations of seniority coupled with a responsibility to act properly in the authority's and employees' best interests. Over the next two decades I was to draft five such codes for various organisations. Thanks for the lessons Margaret.

UITP wanted me to deliver their event. I had built good rapport with Helga Severyns the Congress Director and Finance Director, Etienne de Ganck. As it was Carol and I were invited, all expenses paid, to the Sydney 50th UITP Congress by UITP and were made very welcome. Helga and Etienne came to Brisbane and spent a few days with Carol and me after the Congress. Several years later I was engaged by Brew and UITP to work with Asian transport CEOs on a presentation of a special report for another UITP Congress, this time in Paris.

My Asia-Pacific zone UITP contract for delivery in Paris was to develop a comparative profile across several countries' transport operations. The brief required me to work with each zonal transport CEO to create an integrated picture of public transport services across the Asia-Pacific zone. I researched, wrote and prepared audio visual materials then coached the executives for their respective segment presentations. The work was a joy and the session by the six presenters was ranked very highly by delegates.

Following the session's success the Australian contingent decided to have a celebratory dinner. When Carol and I had revisited Paris in 1989 we had two memorable meals, one at Au Trou Gascon in Rue Taine and a small restaurant Chez Henri in Rue des Fosses, Saint Bernard. Monsieur Henri had passed but Madame ran a fine establishment specialising in Coq au Vin and Boeuf Bourguignon. The group chose Chez Henri. A good choice.

Simple steamed spears of early season white asparagus dipped in Hollandaise Sauce were for starters. Each serving of either chicken or beef contained a litre of fine French wine and was accompanied by oven fresh baguettes but no desert. Instead a voucher for service from the close by hole-in-the-wall Berthillon ice cream parlour. There is something magic about wandering the streets of Paris after a fine simple meal, licking one of the world's best ice creams after a very successful day. Incidentally, Au Trou Gascon is highly regarded for its Truffle Pigeon Breast. The truffle sauce is amazing.

Two nights later, at the conclusion of the Congress, John Brew, Carol and I had another good meal at a restaurant which had historically been a brewery run by dwarves. I cannot recall the name but the walls and ceilings were hand decorated in mythological scenes. The ceilings were low for my 183cm height and everyone had to bend over to use any doorway. A wonderful discovery.

Staying with the foodie theme a bit longer, when I was in Brussels working on the Asia-Pac project UITP generously took me to Brugge for lunch. It was the first day of the 'elver' or baby eel season and quite a special dish in a number of restaurants. But the real delight was a gigantic Atlantic sea scallop. A single huge mollusc in a brilliant Coquille Saint Jacques sauce filled a single serve sized copper chafing dish. The dish was flambeed at the table with Pernod.

On a previous trip to Brussels, the Bang & Olufsen store near my hotel held a vodka and caviar tasting as a promotion for their new TV system. While much desired it was impractical for me to purchase electronics in Europe and carry back to Australia. Anyway, the point to this vignette is to describe Salmon and Caviar Czarina, the sole hors d'oeuvre of the event.

Shot glasses are frozen in liquid nitrogen; the fatty fillet along the upper backbone of fresh salmon is cut out and trimmed into 10cm strips; each strip is rolled around inside of the freezing shot glass in a curl from bottom to top; freezing vodka is then poured into the shot and topped with Beluga caviar. The fat in the salmon doesn't freeze but sufficient flesh does hold the curl in place. It looks wonderful.

This assembly is taken into the mouth in a single gulp and enjoyed. I was a mite unsteady toddling back to my room after an hour of these. The only similar event that comes close is the vodka and caviar tastings on the last night of some *Seabourn* cruises, although, on the night, one of the friends we had made on board choked on a mouthful of chicken.

We were all slow to react initially as in our inebriated state we didn't appreciate the seriousness of his plight. Once we did realise

his predicament an early attempt, by one of the women present to eject the blockage using the Heimlich Manoeuvre failed. With half of the table of ten laughing and the others panicking my extra height and strength finally ejected the food neatly into his wine glass. Without an ounce of concern his wife dismissed the episode with a wave of her hand, saying, "He never chews his food." The victim himself just returned to his meal with nary a "Thank you." to either of his saviours.

I won't bore you with too many travel tales but on this cruise the wonders of *Ephesus* brought back to me the histories of so many civilisations I had read about in my Indooroopilly garage sanctuary.