

**WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?
AN EXERCISE IN LIFE**

1 April 2008

Archbishop John Bathersby DD

Four years ago I read an interesting book, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, by Bishop Thomas Wright, Anglican Bishop of Durham. The book changed my life for the better. It gave me a grasp of Jesus and His vision that emphasised the energy and excitement of Christianity I had never recognised before. So powerful was its impact that I seriously regretted the fact that in three years time I have to retire as Archbishop, a regret that made several priest friends question my sanity. Nevertheless Thomas Wright's book sent me searching for his other books, one of which, *The Lord and His Prayer*, is focussed on prayer.

The book quotes the famous words of Anglican Archbishop William Temple, former Archbishop of Canterbury, who wrote: 'When I pray coincidences happen; when I stop praying, the coincidences stop happening'. Looking at my own life I found Temple's words absolutely convincing. Tonight however, I wish to indicate not the larger coincidences I have identified but a smaller one that happened more recently.

At the end of 2006 I was present at a small Christmas cocktail party in a high-rise unit overlooking the Brisbane River and Kangaroo Point. Dr Jennifer Harrison, a research historian, was present, and as we looked down on Kangaroo

Point made the comment that many distinguished families, including the McConnell family, lived there in the early days of Brisbane. To her amazement I mentioned that the very same McConnell family had brought to Brisbane and Esk, my great grandfather the Reverend David Watt, the first Presbyterian Minister in Esk.

Jennifer was amazed because at that very moment she was researching the history of the Reverend David Watt at the request of the British Broadcasting Corporation: preparing a program called *Who Do You think You Are?* The program appears regularly on SBS Television and some of you may have seen its episodes. It follows a simple format that selects a high profile person who, under the glare of television cameras, traces back his or her ancestors. The program is often highly emotional as the searcher uncovers information about which he or she was totally ignorant. It is fairly common to see tears shed as the searcher uncovers tragedy or suffering in the family history about which no one was aware.

Dr Harrison had already done significant research on the Reverend David Watt without the slightest realisation he was related to me. In the particular episode under production the BBC had focussed upon a top British radio and television announcer named Nicky Campbell. Nicky had traced his ancestry back to Brisbane where his grandfather Argyll Campbell was born and educated. He wished to pursue it further. At no stage did he have the slightest idea that he, strongly anchored in Presbyterianism, could possibly be related to a Roman Catholic Archbishop. So passionate was Nicky to learn more about his grandfather that he decided

to come to Brisbane, which happened only last year. There to his amazement he was suddenly informed in the glare of the cameras of my existence. Driven then to meet me at *Wynberg* he came bearing a typical Scottish gift, a superb bottle of Oban Whiskey.

However, for the moment I will leave Nicky aside to explore the other line of my family – the Bathersby line, with its own mystery, success and failure. I am sorely tempted to add ‘skeletons’, but what we often refer to as ‘skeletons’ can be an important part of our background in which God is just as much involved as he is with our more acceptable ancestors.

It seems that the original William Battersby, spelt with two t’s, was a Catholic convict from Ireland who arrived in Sydney on 26 March 1829 with 216 other Irish male convicts, on a ship named the *Ferguson*. William had been a groom and porter in Dublin but unfortunately had stolen a horse’s harness. For that crime he was in 1828 transported to Australia for seven years. When I told an Irish Kelly relation in Tipperary about William’s stealing a harness he said with a grin, that the Kelly clan to which he belonged claimed some connection with our famous Ned, ‘For sure the horse was probably still in the harness’.

On arriving in Sydney William Battersby was sent to a Mr John Smith at Newcastle. Fourteen years later on the 22 May 1842, in the Catholic Church at West Maitland he married an Irish girl, Mary Small from Templepatrick, Westmeath. Protestant by religion, she had arrived in Australia on the *Runnymede*, on 30 August 1841, a mere 20 year old. At some time or other she and William travelled north to Summer Hill,

an area about 10 km from Tingha NSW, where William found employment as a shepherd; an occupation that employed thousands of workers in the early days of Australia, before fences were built.

Shepherding was by no means the easiest of occupations. The sheep had to be cared for during the day and corralled at night in bough or herding yards that protected them from dingoes, and – understandably - indigenous people whose land had been taken. One of my distant relations in Tingha told me, only last January, that her grandmother had been a shepherdess and that at night-time, having corralled the sheep beneath a tree, she climbed it to sleep in the branches lest she be confronted by dingoes or indigenous people. How she managed to sleep in trees I just can't imagine. She also told me that her grandmother greeted each dawn with overflowing joy, as one would expect. She seemed, not unlike those biblical sentries standing guard in the darkness of their towers, eagerly awaiting the dawn.

William and Mary had nine children, four boys and five girls. Unusual, but understandable, because of the poverty that existed at that time, the five Battersby girls married five Chinese miners. Only in the last ten years did I become aware of these distant relations about whom we knew nothing. It's quite possible that the Battersby name was changed in my branch of the family from two 't's' to 'th' because of the marriages. My great grandfather's family are now all deceased so the change of name remains a mystery that will probably never be solved. Only last January in Inverell I talked to a hundred-year-old cousin whose original name was 'Loy'. She was able to remember my great-grandfather

William and his wife Jane, and remarked that my great-grandmother Jane was somewhat ‘uppity’. I’m not quite sure what that meant. She may have been hinting that Jane had a role in changing the name. No one really knows.

It seems fairly certain that Jane was Anglican and that her fourteen children were baptised in the same faith. Certainly her first child Alexander - my grandfather – was Anglican, but became a Catholic before he married Mary Clifford, my grandmother. A man of infinite skills: building, mining, shearing, butchering, ring barking and gardening, he travelled to Stanthorpe in 1908 by horse and train to work in the mines.

Mary Clifford my grandmother, was the daughter of Jack Clifford from England and Joanna Kelly from Tipperary, Ireland. Johanna had followed her cousins, the Byrne family, to the flourishing tin mines of Stanthorpe, at that time regarded as the richest alluvial tin mines in the world. When the tin eventually petered out, the Byrne family shifted to Clifton leaving Joanna Clifford, nee Kelly in Stanthorpe, where she brought up her seven children, three boys and four girls, most of who married and stayed there.

Alex and Mary built a house on Quartpot Creek that remains to this day. Originally standing alone beside the creek, it is now surrounded by other houses and occupies some of the most valuable land in Stanthorpe. Sadly it is no longer owned by the Bathersbys. In that house Alex and Mary brought up six children, the eldest being my father, John, called Jack, who in one of those remarkable coincidences mentioned earlier, met at the Stanthorpe Hospital an attractive red-

haired, young woman from Mitchell, Grace Conquest, who was nursing his critically ill uncle, Paul Hilton. It was love at first sight, leading to a marriage that apart from occasional disagreements, was made in heaven. Appropriately named Grace, my mother must have been sent by God to change the life of my father, at that time one of the wilder young men of Stanthorpe. She succeeded admirably, became a Catholic, and an excellent one, gave birth to three girls and two boys, myself being the eldest of the boys. It is impossible not to see the hand of God in those happenings.

My genetic pool, stretching back over the years to the original William and Jane Battersby, David and Jane Watt, is interesting to say the least. It was added to over the years by a cluster of marriages that increased my genetic pool for better or for worse. I thank God always for the grace I have received from my distant relations and their marriages. At the same time, because 'who I am' is based on the mystery of God, I frequently ask myself: 'Who can understand the mind of God?'

Before I finish however, I would like to go back to where I started, to my mother's background and the Reverend David Watt and his wife Jane who arrived in Brisbane at the invitation of David & Mary McConnell in 1876 on the sailing ship *St James*.

David McConnell had already built a wooden church and manse on Sandy Creek, Esk for worship and accommodation. David and Jane arrived there in 1876. My grandmother Grace, the only child of that marriage, was born on 24 August 1876. Attracted to Australia by chronic illness that

he hoped to cure in the drier climate of Australia, David was sadly disappointed. He lived for only a year, and died on the 3 August 1877 at the tender age of 36. He is buried in the second grave of the Esk Cemetery. His death placed enormous pressure on his wife Jane but, helped enormously by the generosity of the McConnell family, she and her daughter Grace shifted to Brisbane seeking a new life.

Equipped with an excellent education in Germany, it was only natural that Jane should establish a finishing school for girls at Harris Terrace, George Street, close to parliament house. A small plaque on that building remembers the school.

While planning to return to Scotland, Jane took her sick daughter Grace to a prominent doctor, James Campbell, who worked at Maxwell Place, Ann Street Brisbane, adjacent to the present St John's Cathedral. Aware that she was a widow Dr Campbell asked Jane what she was planning to do. She told him she intended to return to Scotland. He boldly suggested that she remain in Brisbane and marry him. Attracted by his charm, and because as a widow with a young daughter she lacked security, she easily accepted his proposal. The Campbells then bought on Ann Street, a house *Frascati* built earlier by Dr Izod O'Doherty, an Irish patriot, doctor and parliamentarian, who had fallen on hard times. *Frascati* was situated where the present Anglican office, the former St Martin's Anglican Hospital, now stands. Because of a disagreement with the then Presbyterian Minister the Campbells changed their religion from Presbyterian to Anglican, and worshipped at the nearby All Saints Church. In the meantime, Grace began studies at Brisbane Girls Grammar School.

Although blessed with three children, Florence, Argyll, and Gertrude, the marriage was not a happy one. Dr Campbell had problems with alcohol and drugs and died on the 17 November 1889 at the rather tender age of 42. Challenged once again in losing her second husband, Jane fell back on the profession in which she was most skilled - teaching. To pay her late husband's debts Jane had to sell *Frascati* and begin teaching again, not initially in Harris Terrace where she had established her first school, but in New Farm at *Moray Villa*, and later in another New Farm house *Rostrevor* which stood beside the rather grand house *Uradah*, at 56 Chester Street, Teneriffe, known in more recent times as *Roseville*. After educating both boys and girls there, Jane Watt eventually shifted back to Harris Terrace where she had originally begun, to re-establish the girls school, helped now by her daughter Grace.

However financial troubles remained, especially when she had to close the school because of her increasing deafness. She then had to ask her daughter Grace to seek work in the country as a governess in order to send money back for the education of Grace's step-brother and sisters. Grace generously agreed, working on properties that stretched from *Barfield* near Banana in the north, to *Angledool* near Dirranbandi in the South, and finally to *Abbieglassie* south of Mitchell. She faithfully sent money home for the education of her step-brother Argyll, at that time attending Brisbane Boys Grammar School. Argyll repaid her kindness by graduating with distinction, then moved on to further study in England where he became a famous doctor, and the grandfather of Nicky Campbell, whom we discussed earlier.

Nicky came to Brisbane to solve the mystery of the tension between his own father, and his grandfather Argyll, the son of James and Jane. His visit proved successful in that regard. It also helped him understand the anxiety that his grandfather had suffered at the hands of his own drug-addicted father. Nicky returned to England understanding and loving his own father even more deeply, but understanding also the boyhood pressures that had made his grandfather Argyll the difficult and remote person he seemed to be to his own son, Nicky's father.

Meanwhile as my widowed great-grandmother continued educating her children without the support of a husband, her daughter Grace, still a governess on *Abbieglassie*, in 1907 married in the Anglican Church Toowoomba, Mr Robert Conquest, a station overseer. They then returned to stations Cytherea, Alford, and Bethanga near Mitchell, where they lived frugally suffering greatly from the scourge of dingoes and prickly pear, at the same time struggling to raise and educate their children. My mother Grace, the eldest of their seven children, was educated by her mother on the different stations and later at the Mitchell State School, before she worked as secretary in a lawyer's office, then as nurse in the Mitchell Hospital before travelling to Stanthorpe in 1932 to look after her sister Nance, at that time boarding at St Catherine's Anglican School, Stanthorpe.

Sheer coincidence then, at the bedside of my father's uncle in the Stanthorpe Hospital introduced her to my father with whom she fell in love, became a Catholic, and married. The rest is history.

I carry no regrets about the complexity of my background and have only the very deepest gratitude for the manner in which it has shaped me through my relationship to people from near and far. I would like to finish with a few minutes of the Nicky Campbell DVD entitled *Who Do You Think You Are?* It focuses on Nicky whose desire to know himself and his family was so strong that he travelled across the world to spend two days in Brisbane unravelling his own history. I am certain he does not regret the journey, perhaps even being happy to learn that he was related to a Roman Catholic Archbishop, and an Aussie at that.

Much more detail could be added to my story which time does not allow. I should have talked more about the Clifford side of my family, but there is just not enough time. Nevertheless this plunge into my personal history has been a most exciting adventure. It has given me a great love and admiration for those remarkable people of the past whom, please God, I will meet one day in heaven where there will be no more pain and suffering but only the very deepest peace.

I thank you all for your patience and attention tonight.