

## Best Friends - The Seventies

Dedicated to Ian and Con

It had been a hot night, and I lay in bed covered only by a sheet. The window was open and the birds were singing, although being mostly asleep I didn't hear them. I was woken rudely as I was on almost all Saturday mornings by the 8:00 o'clock news. First came the squawk of some native bird, and then the all too cheery sound of the signal music before the news "da-da-da-da-da-da-da", I can still hear it going round in my head. My bedroom was just off the kitchen, so when Dad had breakfast (Weetbix without fail), he always did it to coincide with the news. For some reason, he always had the news up loud. I think it was a case of "I'm up so everybody should be up". I believe I have inherited a mild form of this condition myself.

Dad's motto was "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." I remember him telling me once when I was about six that a man looked at a big hill and worked out that it was full of gold. Apparently the man put it down to the old early to bed regime. Some years later I realised he was probably a gifted geologist, but for years I thought you could do things like find buried treasure, and be super-smart if you followed the saying. It is amazing the things you internalise when you are a kid, no questions, no critical analysis. I read in a magazine recently a new twist, for executive types, "Early to bed, early to rise, work like hell and advertise." The first one sounds a lot more fun to me; of course it was sexist too. I'm not sure how a woman went about getting healthy, wealthy and wise, but then it didn't seem to matter in the early seventies, especially not to me, trying to go back to sleep, with the drone of the news reader invading the sanctum of my bedroom.

Mercifully the radio would go off after the news, and I suppose Dad read the paper and had a cup of tea, and cleaned his teeth and other things for half an hour. Anyway 8:30 would roll on, and I would be back asleep again, but a combination of "early to rise" and "I'm up, everybody's up" would grip Dad like a vice grip and he would knock on my door.

"Time to get up now."

"Eaarg" (groan feigning complete exhaustion and part-malnutrition).

Dad would then go and wake Con, who would be much more asleep being two doorways removed from the kitchen and therefore the radio. Despite the customary protestations, especially "Ian's allowed to sleep in" (which was true), and Dad's response "You've already slept in, it's quarter to nine", we dragged ourselves up and pulled on some weekend clothes (at least it was Saturday). With shorts and a singlet and bare feet we took our Rice Bubbles and sat on the back door step in the sun. Of course back then you could sit in the sun all day long a just go brown. No-one had heard of sun block. Me and Con didn't say good morning (do any siblings?), we just sat there in the sun enjoying it and letting the sleepiness slide off us. After breakfast we cleaned our teeth. One at a time though, we were not allowed in the bathroom at the same time, there were "too many arguments". Sometimes I washed my face too. For some reason I had this idea that stone cold water was the best thing to wash your face in. It felt sort of Nordic and manly, but later I heard it causes capillary damage in your face, anyway now I use warm water. I think that is why Edmund Hillary has a red face.

Clean and awake and just after nine, we had the awesome prospect of filling up the whole day ahead of us. By this time of course Mum was up and about, having had tea and toast in bed.

Did we sleep well? Yes. Had we cleaned our teeth? Yes. What were we going to do today? Dunno. Don't forget to feed that poor guinea pig. OK.

I made myself a Jungle Juice and went back to the back door step. Con got a car out and raced it up and down the hall. I opened my legs so the sun would brown me on the white skin of my thighs. I picked up a few stones and threw them at a spot on the concrete.

We had a big section, 96 perches, about 1/4 of an acre. It was mostly lawn with a few fruit trees that were at the back of the section (except the cherry tree). From where I sat on the step I could see past the double garage made of concrete block (it had an outdoor toilet and a laundry too), to the big walnut tree. The walnut tree was huge, with a rope ladder dad had made Con for his birthday one year. I reckon about 20% of the time we spent in the garden was in and around that tree. The cherry tree was much closer to the house, almost touched it in fact. The cherries were beginning to ripen up which was good and bad. Good because the cherries were delicious and bad because me and Con had to go up there and pick pounds of them for jam. I reckon it produced 50 pounds some years.

Along the right hand side of the section was a new-looking corrugated iron fence. It was good because the timber posts and supports were on our side of the fence, so we could get up and look over, and get balls when they went over. It was a newer house than ours; in fact it was an after thought. It was on a back section and its number was 113A whereas ours was 113 and much older. The back fence was more in the era of our house, old and wooden, and a bit beaten up where we had used it for soccer or cricket practice. The lawn was getting thick which was typical of summer, this was generally bad because me and Con usually had to mow the lawns. Sometimes I got the back and he got the front and sometimes the other way round. The front was much easier, even though it included the sides. In the front there was much less space. Some of it was flower gardens, and some was under the big weeping elm, and the grass never grew well there. Mind you there were always a lot of twigs under the elm, which was of course a hazard when mowing. Sometimes Mum paid me 10 cents to pick up all the twigs. The money was good but it was back-breaking work.

Like I said the mowing included the sides (which were real easy). But the fact that there were sides was a huge advantage to the property, and probably one the original designer had no inkling of. Whenever I think about it I feel sorry for those people who had a house with no space at the sides. Those sides added a huge dimension to games in the back yard. Probably the main one was the "Round the House Speedway", in which you raced your bike around the house and were timed by the time-keeper. Now it might sound easy, but our house was big. Also, you had to keep off the flower gardens which meant a chicane and hairpin in the front garden, and inevitable obstruction by the willow. Then, at the right hand corner of the house you had a very sharp left hander with dense bushes on the right and the water-tower to crash into if you didn't make the turn. There was also a combination of concrete and grass, and sometimes the rules stated that you had to go outside a particular tree, or round some torturous route. Sometimes the trial was on one lap but mostly it was multiple laps. Sometimes we even had races with me giving Con a head start, or Ian might be there. But it was safer and somehow more fun in the time-trials.

I admit I was the designer of the games, and their competitive element. I always liked competing, for some reason. Biking round the house just for fun would have lasted about five minutes for us, but the Speedway game would go for ages or until an injury was sustained. Even then, after a Maritime sandwich and a drink of orange (sachet) we would be out there again. I can't remember if Con ever won any races. He was two years younger, which was a

20% disadvantage in itself. I probably gave him a number of seconds each lap; it's no fun with no competition. Of course Ian didn't need an advantage, he was fast, and he had a bike with rear-wheel skid brakes which was both cool and good for handling. We had Raleigh 20s, which you couldn't really call a racing model, and the gear shift was slow, but they were pretty reliable and tough. Alan, Andrew and Jeff were good competition too. I reckon Alan was the fastest over all, but he didn't come round that often. Mainly it was me, Con and Ian.

The other good thing about the house having sides was poisonous ball, which we played for hours with a tennis ball. If there was no ball then the game was tag. Poisonous ball on bikes was in for a while but it was too much of a hassle getting off to get the ball.

It was too early to be thinking of games on this Saturday morning, and as I sat on the step I remembered I got a magnifying glass for Christmas. I sloshed the rest of my milk round in my cup, drained it, and went into my bedroom (it had an outside door) to find it.

I collected a range of useful targets for magnification, a few matches, a dried leaf, a dead fly, and the sole of one of my shoes. The sun was strong enough to light the matches within about 20 seconds. I got the leaf smoking nicely, and although it didn't burst into flames, I traced a circle with the hot spot on the leaf and cut out a crinkled section. The fly started smoking after a while, but it was only newly dead, after mum had sprayed yesterday. The sole of my shoe didn't really smoke but I could smell the rubber burning.

The first breeze of the morning began to stir then, another nor-Wester. It wouldn't happen today because we had had the nor-Wester for days now, but just as one was arriving after cloudy weather, there would be an amazing "North-West arch" in the sky, hanging over the Canterbury plains. It was hundreds of miles wide (or seemed to be), and it held the promise of warm, dry weather - great!

Con sat down on the step and said "Can I have a go". I stood up and stretched and said "Yeah, just don't break it". Just then mum called us both to remind us that we had not made our beds. After dragging the chain for a while we dawdled off to our respective bedrooms and made a quick, rough job of them, hiding our haste with a bedspread. I lay down on my newly made bed and looked out the window to the cherry tree. I watched the birds scooting round it, and heard one of the neighbours mowing their lawns. Dad had started into his list of "things to do" for the day. Mum and Dad seemed to have no concept of lazing about doing nothing. Weekends were for working round the house, or on the car or something. Not for us though. The only hard work we did was trying to avoid the jobs we were assigned. It was difficult for Mum and Dad to believe that we could want to laze away the weekend.

After a while I got up and asked Con if he wanted to play tennis. He did, so I made him get the racquets and a ball and we played against the garage wall, quite a good game if you didn't hit the ball too hard. It was also a pain if the garage door was open, more so if the cars were out because there were two huge oil trays to catch the oil drips from the Morrie and the Humber. Tennis balls seemed to get sucked in there like they were black holes. Many a tennis ball had a black squelch mark on it.

Dad interrupted the game before the third set had been completed, and reminded us that it was pocket money day. For some reason we had forgotten that morning. He put a 20 cent piece into each of our hands, always 20 cents; it was like gold to us. I held mine in my hand, enjoying its coolness as it had come out of Dad's wallet. It felt quite big and heavy in my small hand. In summer, on Saturday, with our pocket money, Con and I always did the same thing. It

was almost a ritual, we wouldn't think of varying it. Today Con's bike had a flatty so I dubbed him. We biked on the footpath, with Con on the back carrier holding on hard. My faithful green Raleigh 20 could probably find its own way to the shop every Saturday. I did a few skids and went over a few bumps, and Con had to hang on and bear it. At the shop, I put the bike on its stand and we went in.

As we always did, we peered in to the ice-cream freezer, checking the flavours. It was always 20 cents for a triple cone, and it's what we always got. The cone itself was huge. Two big spaces for the first two spoonfuls of ice-cream, and then the third squashed on the top. Our mouths watered looking in, and then I chose. "One scoop of the banana one, one raspberry ripple and one hokey pokey please." Con got exactly the same, just in case he missed out on my taste sensation. Most likely if he got something different, I would go on about how the flavour he did not get was delicious. This time of course I gave him a derisive glance and said "Copy cat". Clearly he was in a no-win situation, but he took it well, as I guess most little brothers have to do. We walked home, me biking really slowly and Con dawdling along. We decided to go round Vincent Place. There was no traffic that way, and you sometimes saw a train chugging past. We walked past the outpatients' house and stared in but no-one seemed to be about. The whole of Vincent Place was quiet, except for the dog at number 27, and the man doing his front lawns just before the corner on the bit that goes down to St Mark's Church.

The ice creams were great as always. Of course you had to lick fast on such a hot day, and usually in a circular motion. If you were not fast enough you ended up licking your hand, and there isn't much worse than a sticky hand on a hot day.

By the time we got to the end of Vincent Place we were chewing the cones. They were still a bit crunchy at the bottom where the ice-cream had not made them soggy. Opawa Road was busy by then, cars with trailers off to the dump, and boats being towed to Lyttelton or Sumner. We stayed on the footpath while the traffic roared by. We only had to move to the side of the footpath once, for an old lady walking her dog. We pulled into our driveway just in time to miss the Methodist Harriers Club run past in a yellow swarm. I took off round the back of the house on my Bike and Con ran down the drive as soon as I took off. He beat me to the back door because I had to slow down for the bush at the corner of the house. I told him it had not been a race but we both knew it had. After washing my hands I went down and lay on my bed.

Mum called out "What did you buy at the shop boys?"

"A three flavour ice-cream, and Con copied."

"Do you want a drink of milk, either of you?"

We both did, and mum brought mine in to me.

"What have you got on today?" she said.

"I dunno. I might do some reading, or go to Waltham pool."

"I think Dad might want you to do the lawns this afternoon."

"No, they're not long enough. Next weekend will be OK."

"Well we'll see."

She left me to it and I drank my milk lying down flat on the bed, trying not to spill it. I was mostly successful, but a couple of drips escaped down each side of my face. I was looking at the ceiling to maintain my flatness for my second attempt when Mum called out "Ian's here!". I sat up and wiped my face of the milk and walked outside.

“Hi lebe.”

“Hi Obbie.”

“You want a drink of milk.”

“Yep.”

We went inside, and Ian sat at the kitchen table. Con came in soon after and said hi. I poured Ian a milk and we all sat at the table looking out of the kitchen window into the back garden.

“What’ve you been doing today?” I said.

“Just got up, and then went to the shop for mum. She let me have five cents.”

“Still got it”, I said.

“Yeah.”

There was silence for about half a minute then Ian said “Do you want to go down to the shops.”

“Yeah, let’s go.”

We took off on the bikes and left Con in the kitchen. He would have come usually but I wasn’t going to dub him again. Ian and I rode down on the road going fast then slow, doing skids, especially Ian as his bike was designed for skidding. When we got to the shop I put my bike on its stand and Ian leaned his against the window where the sticker said not to lean your bike. We didn’t care about things like that anymore. We were pretty cool by then.

“Can I have one cent?”

“Yeah.”

We spend a couple of minutes examining the rows of lollies under the shop counter. I got five smokers as they were the best value at five a cent. Ian got a good mixture with a base of spearmint leaves, milk bottles, wine gums. We took it slow on the way back and rode all the way up and down Reeves Road. We looked in at the park and decided to come back with a frisbee later on. We zoomed across the road between cars and made a real fast entrance into the driveway. We both did long skids on the loose stones on the drive. Ian’s was longer but only just. We measured them, and then used our feet to “grader” the stones back in place.

Con came round the corner and said “Can I have one.”

Ian offered him his bag of lollies and Con took a milk bottle. We wheeled our bikes round the back and lay them on the concrete. Me and Ian sat on the back step and Con sat on the concrete. I gave him a smoker, and then I had one of Ian’s acid drops.

After a few minutes of basking in the sun and consuming lollies I said “I’ve got an idea. How about we have a skate-boarding competition? One person has a go on the skate-board and the other two have to give him a score out of ten. Then you add them together, and whoever has the highest score wins that round.”

There was a general agreement, so I went and got my blue skateboard from my bedroom cupboard. It had big red fat wheels on wide trucks at the back which I had added, and the standard wheels on the front. I warmed up a bit by trying to do some 360’s, and a bit of tick-tack. The others also wanted a warm-up. We were just discussing the fine points of competition when mum came out with a big tray of sandwiches and lemonade.

She put the tray down on the outside table, and after a chorus of thank-yous we ate and drank the feast. It was hard not taking Mum for granted as food always seemed to turn up when we were hungry. She had the best reputation for providing food of all our friends' mothers.

Competition details received a detailed going-over during lunch. A rating system, duration of ride, trick points, and venue were all discussed with enthusiasm. A few minutes after we finished everything on the tray, Mum came out and took the tray away. We told her we were off to Opawa Court to do some skateboarding. She said that was fine but be careful crossing the road. In retrospect I think Mum probably spent a good proportion of her time doing things for us boys but at the time it seemed pretty normal.

We took turns on the skateboard on the way over. It was frustrating though because the footpaths had tiny stones on them. Not big enough to see at speed but big enough to stop the board and throw all of your weight off the front. It wasn't far to the Court, just past the chemist and before Quinliven motors (where Con and I sheltered from the hail one morning on the way to school). Being Saturday there were no cars in the car park, and no-one visiting old Doctor McGibbon. We had the place to ourselves.

We flipped a stick to see who went first, and it was Con. He was widely regarded as second favourite, mainly because Ian didn't have a skateboard. Still, I didn't let Con use it that much, and Ian had used it quite a bit lately. The first trial was freestyle. Con started in with some rusty tic-tac, then put a foot down during a 180. He finished with a brief skid then came off. A rough start and he scored 4 and 5 out of 10. I was next and did some good tic-tac then tried a 360 while the board was going forwards. A difficult manoeuvre and I fell heavily. I finished with a couple of 180s in reverse directions. I think I got away lightly with two sixes from the judges. Ian took it easy with slow tic-tac, then did a curb-drop (about 4 inches) and stayed on despite the wobbles. I think he knew he hadn't done enough to impress the judges and so attempted a fast turn. His timing was off though and half way through he bailed. His return skid was good though and was the surprise winner of the first round with a 6 and 7. The curb-drop became a stock item from then, and numerous attempts were made at fast turns.

In round three of the freestyle I was trying to build up speed with one foot on the board and the other scooting me along. I lost balance momentarily and my scooting foot had to flick round to the other side of the board to keep me from falling off. That particular manoeuvre was singled out by the judges, and after completing the fast turn and making a 360, I was awarded an eight and an eight and a half. I told them it was only because I was off-balance but apparently it looked spectacular and the scores stood.

The slalom and speed tic-tac were a little one-sided although I did lose a couple of rounds with bad spills. The overall speed category was a different matter though. We scratched a line on the concrete with a stone down by the Doctors surgery. You had to start from the top of the car park, and your speed on crossing the line was all that mattered. My technique was probably the most eloquent but we had left the freestyle event behind. Numerous different techniques were attempted in the warm up and in competition including the highly dangerous give-the-board-a-big-shove-and-try-to-jump-on-just-before-crossing-the-line manoeuvre. It was generally considered that the scooting approach was probably fastest on a percentage basis. Ian's lack of technical ability showed in the early rounds as he left the skateboard behind on numerous occasions. In the tough world of competition that forfeited your go. However, on a couple of runs he timed it right, and as the fastest runner, got a couple of sizzling runs past the line. Con had a good showing but was narrowly beaten to second place.

Hot and tired, with minor cuts and bruises, we ambled home, all by this stage with our T-shirts off. Con had to carry the skateboard home of course. All aspects of the competition were analysed, and new categories were discussed for next time.

When we got to Reeves road we decided to go down to Risingholme Park. I did a bit of tic-tac on the road because it was a no-exit street and there weren't many stones in the middle. We took turns. As soon as you put your foot down your turn was over. We all did a stomach-swing on the big metal bars at the entrance to the park. They were there to stop bikes and motorbikes getting in. The park was pretty big with lots of gravel paths which were the best place to do skids on your bike. We quite often had longest skid competitions, but we all used Ian's bike. We were good citizens even back then. We would scuff our shoes along the gouge in the gravel to repair the skid-mark. This time though we went straight to the swings and play equipment.

I always felt sick on the round-about but we always went on it anyway. We pushed it as fast as we could then jumped on and scooted with one foot. Then as it went round we pulled ourselves into the middle which was hard work against the centrifuge, and the round-about sped up noticeably. I jumped off while it was going fast which was the coolest thing to do. I landed in a heap but it was a daring jump. Ian waited a bit. I could always beat him in adrenaline/fear activities. Even Con nearly beat him off, but Pride intervened. He landed on his feet, and told me that's what mattered. No, I said. It's harder to jump off at speed. We left the disagreement in the air and walked over to the swings. The swing seats were this new type of grey canvas material. They were much more comfortable than wooden ones and you could jump off them more easily. Con and I jumped on but Ian scaled the bars at one end. Unbeknown to the designer, the metal frame at each end was shaped (in a boy's imagination) much like the wings and body of an aeroplane. Ian sat astride it and shot at us every time we swung past his line of fire. We were sitting ducks. I told him to shoot me at a certain time, and then I screamed and jumped out of the swing at quite a height and rolled and then lay on my back dead. Somehow Con had got caught in the crossfire and went down as well.

Ian got down, satisfied that he had shot down the Red Baron and his companion, and we went back to the swings. Soon we were all trying to swing the highest, and then we tried to jump off the swing the longest. Con won but then he was lightest, and he had quite a lot of nerve too. A game of tag was suggested but it was too hot. We went over to the drinking fountain and filled up a number of times. We walked past Risingholme House to the Chomondley Avenue entrance. Just in front of the entrance were two tiered gardens which was the sight of the infamous clod fight at Ian's last birthday. Everyone at his party decided to go down to the park for a while, and someone suggested a clod fight. We split into roughly two teams and after a couple of minutes of collecting clods started pounding each other from about 20 yards. We used park benches, shrubs, trees, anything for cover. We "covered" someone as they made a dash. We picked up enemy clods and threw them back. Sometimes we called a truce to collect more clods and find new positions. At one point we were fighting on different sides of the terraces and Ian was using the terrace as cover. From time to time he put his head up to gauge our position then stood up and fired. I watched him for a while, then took a gamble and fired one at his position while he was out of view. As the clod sliced across to his side of the terrace, he put his head up to take a look and the clod smacked him right in the face. Needless to say that ended the game. Ian cried, so it must have hurt a lot. I apologised time and again but it wasn't until much later in the day that he was nice to me again.

We recounted the incident without much animosity on Ian's part, and then walked across the road to the tennis courts. We sat down on the grass verge and watched a game for a while.

Ian reminded me of how he beat me in the school tennis tournament. I still remember being on the verge of tears while losing. I don't know anyone who hates losing as much as me. So I quickly changed the subject, got up and started walking up Chomondley Ave.

It wasn't yet chestnut season but we walked over to the big chestnut tree halfway up Chomondley Ave. The clumps of chestnuts had begun to form, and the green spiky pods were beginning to fill out. In autumn we would come down here and look on the ground for ripe chestnut pods. When we found one we would step on it until the chestnuts popped out. After we had scoured the ground, we looked into the tree for ripe ones. We threw sticks up to knock them down, and we usually had a pocketful to take home and roast on the range-top. But we were too early. Popping out small green chestnuts was no fun.

Because there was still plenty of the afternoon left, and we didn't have anything else planned, we stopped in at St Mark's school. We didn't have a bat or ball so cricket and four-square were out. We had a few turns on the skateboard but the heat and the days activities had tired us out. We talked about inviting ourselves over to Geoffrey Finch's place for a swim, but there wasn't much enthusiasm for that either, so we wandered off home.

I was pouring Ian and me a drink when Mum came in from the garden and said, "Hi boys, did you have fun? Ian, your mother rang, and wants you to ring her please."

I drank a big glass of cold milk while Ian rang. Con made himself a Jungle Juice. I could see Dad out of the kitchen window working on the Morrie. It must be warrant time, I thought. Mum and Dad had never quite got the grasp of just having fun doing nothing. They always seemed to be working on some project or job. I couldn't understand it.

Ian got off the phone and said he had to go home because they had visitors around for afternoon tea. Of all the pathetic excuses. Before he went Mum said, "We're thinking of going to the beach with the boys after tea Ian. Do you want to ask your Mum if you can come?" We were all pretty happy about that and Ian said he would ask. After he went, I lay on my bed and just rested, thinking of nothing much. A perfect way to spend the rest of the afternoon. Mum reminded me that I had to feed my guinea-pig. "I'll do it just before tea." I didn't want to get up twice.

I checked my tan against the white of the bed sheets and was satisfied I was still nice and brown. I folded my arms behind my head and looked out of my window at the birds on the cherry tree. It was a funny window, out of character with the rest of the house. I had two panes of glass and two frames. The top window sort of pushed out from its bottom by a hinge at the top. There was a wing-nut screw on a curved stave attached to the window, to keep the window in the place you wanted it. The bottom bit of the window was intruding on my view which was annoying. Of course it wasn't so annoying as to need to do anything about it. No, it was the blow fly that did that.

It flew in the door, and after a few loud but lazy circles, clearly decided there was no rotting meat or canine excrement about. Attempting to exit, it flew into the bottom window pane and doubled the volume of its buzzing. It stopped momentarily, did a passable impression of thinking, and took off again at full speed into the unyielding glass. I waited five minutes while it danced and frenzied and got no closer than three inches from the open window. Finally I gave up hope that it would get out on its own. I grabbed one of my old slippers from inside my cupboard and lined it up. It was tired and I had time on my side. It stopped momentarily, the guise of thinking stripped from it now, and I slammed it from three feet. I think maybe it just got

airborne before it was pulped. I hit it pretty flush because I hardly smeared it. A female too, the eggs had spurted somewhat. I scraped the slipper on the outside door step, and chucked it back in the cupboard.

Boredom tugged at me, so I looked around for a book. There were a couple unread on the stool by my bed. I had ordered them from the school book club. I always ordered the ones with the most pages so the girls at school would be impressed. Sometimes they were worth reading, sometimes not. Mum and Dad always let me order any books I wanted. They were pretty careful with money because we didn't have too much, but they always shelled out for important things.

Sometimes you just don't feel like reading, and sometimes you don't know. Today I didn't know. I picked up the top one and was just about to open it up when I realised Con hadn't been around for ages. This had to mean he was doing something fun. I dropped the book and went down to his room. He had the cars out. I stood there watching for a while and it looked quite fun. I walked over and took one of my racing cars out of the car box and said, "I'm going out on the concrete to race my one." Of course he came out with one of his a few seconds later. It was unimaginable that he wouldn't follow me out.

We raced and spun, and then I made up a few games, which mainly revolved around getting the longest distance with one flick. After a while I had to tailor the rules because my car was twice the size of his and he was starting to get bored with always losing. If the rules allowed him to win one of four, it seemed to keep him happy. Perhaps that was the equilibrium point of our games, the point at which we were both happy enough to keep playing. You have to remember I was two years older. Any ratio even approaching 50-50 was pretty unpleasant for me.

We were playing "longest jump off a piece of cardboard" when mum called us in for dinner. Con grabbed his car and took off. I had to run to get mine from after its jump. Consequently he easily beat me to the kitchen table. I stared and screwed up my nose at him.

"Come on boys, you know you can't come to the dinner table without shirts on. And let me look at your hands."

We both took off for the bathroom, but mum called me back.

"There's some peelings and a carrot in the kitchen. I want you to feed your guinea pig before dinner."

I trudged into the kitchen, and then trudged outside to the guinea pig's cage. I fed him the food which he seemed to appreciate, and stroked him a few times. He didn't get much love, he just wasn't much fun as a pet. I checked his water which was pretty clean, and then got ready for dinner. New potatoes, carrots, peas, and corned beef - yum. We had no idea it took any time to make, meals just appeared miraculously about when you got hungry. We had a big glass of milk each too. We talked about our day, and Dad asked us questions, and talked about his. We were all looking forward to going to the beach, and we discussed which one we would go to. Sumner was decided, with a walk through Cave Rock if it wasn't high tide.

After dinner Mum did the dishes while Con and I got changed and ready for the beach. We picked Ian up on the way. He was happy to be coming as the visitors were really boring and he wasn't even allowed to go outside and play with his sister (which was way down the scale at

the best of times). He brought an old tennis ball which was great because we only had Con's "Ring Things" frisbees. Dad drove the big Super Snipe on the dot of 30 miles an hour and us boys sat in the back, peering out over the big door sills.

The beach was heaps of fun as always. We walked through Cave Rock and splashed each other (and Mum once) in the rock pools. We threw the ball and the rings, and played tag (you never saw anybody as fast as my Dad), and looked for shells and driftwood. We paddled up to the bottom of our togs, and then spent ages jumping over the little whitecaps. You weren't allowed to let them get you. At 8:30 the sun started to set and Mum suggested we get going. We begged another ten minutes by which time it was starting to get dark.

We washed ourselves in the sea and tried to keep the sand off our legs on the way to the car. No-one liked sand in the car. Most of the remaining sand came off with a towel. We got in and I sat in the back against the door, feeling tired. On the way back through Sumner I looked out at the sunset over the Alps. The sea was a silvery green, and the whitecaps had a soft white glow. I lost sight of the sea at Redcliffs and then Dad stopped outside a Dairy for ice-creams, much to our great delight. We all had hokey pokey brown derbies except Dad who preferred a plain raspberry ripple.

We told Dad to go fast on the Mt Pleasant causeway, because there were no other cars. The speed limit was 40, but he took it up to 45. Mum looked on disapprovingly, but we felt a kind of manly rebellion in it. Dad had to slow down at the end as the 30 sign came up. The old Humber was really fast on the open road, but we hadn't been out of town for a few weekends.

"When can we drive out into the country?", I asked.

"We might be able to go tomorrow after Church", said Dad.

"We could have a picnic lunch somewhere", Mum said.

"Can we take some Sunday bread?"

"Yes that would be nice."

"Can Ian come?"

"He will have to ask his parents."

"Do you want to come lebe?"

"Yep. I'll bring my cricket bat."

"Yeah", said Con and I together.

We dropped Ian off and said we would see each other tomorrow. He left his tennis ball in the back, so we added it to our collection. Half a minute later we were back at home. We washed the last resistant sand particles off under the garden tap. The cold made us dance and wash quickly.

After drying off again I went to my bedroom, opened the outside door and window, and turned on my transistor, the one Grandad had given me. Radio Avon was sending out some good songs so I kept it tuned there. Mum and Dad came and said goodnight. Dad said not to listen to the radio for too long. Mum asked if I was sure I wanted the door and window left open and I said I did. I loved sleeping with them open on hot nights.

I drifted off during a quiet song and then came to about ten minutes later. While I was dozing some moths had come in the window to check out the light. I turned the light and transistor off, took my clothes off, stripped the bed down to a sheet, and crawled under it. I was asleep in no time, building up a charge of energy for another hot holiday day.