

Bloodbath

A Memoir of
Australian Television

Patricia Edgar



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To Don



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*'For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit
from the old order, and only luke warm defenders in
all those who would profit by the new order ...'*

—Niccolò Machiavelli¹

Abbreviations

AANA	Australian Association of National Advertisers
ABA	Australian Broadcasting Authority
ABCB	Australian Broadcasting Control Board
ABT	Australian Broadcasting Tribunal
ACCFT	Australian Council for Children's Films and Television
ACTAC	Australian Children's Television Action Committee
ACTF	Australian Children's Television Foundation
AEC	Australian Education Council
AFC	Australian Film Commission
AFI	Australian Film Institute
CPC	Children's Program Committee
CTW	Children's Television Workshop (United States)
FACTS	Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations
FARB	Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters
FCC	Federal Communications Commission (United States)
FFC	Film Finance Corporation Australia
PBAA	Public Broadcasting Association of Australia
SACCFT	South Australian Council for Children's Films and Television
SAFC	South Australian Film Corporation
SPAA	Screen Producers Association of Australia
VCCFT	Victorian Children's Council for Film and Television

Preface

THIS IS A PERSONAL MEMOIR about my role in Australian television: a career that spanned thirty years, in an industry that is savage when its commercial interests are challenged. I began in an era when women found it difficult to have a say in educational institutions, government and the media without being ridiculed. Yet it was also a time when it was possible to implement social change, when politicians and leaders would respond to ideas for social change and I believed I could help build a better future. My roles in the development of television policy, regulation and children's production were part of a broad movement aimed at developing Australian culture—its film, literature and arts generally—to showcase our country, its people and its place in the world. The success of Australian content policy—despite strong and vitriolic opposition—led to the building of an Australian film and television production industry of world standing.

This year 2006 marks fifty years of broadcast TV in Australia. Bruce Gyngell, the presenter who welcomed Australians to television in Channel 9's inaugural broadcast, played a pivotal role in my life. As chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT), he gave me an opportunity that opened up ideas, friendships and possibilities that fuelled me for the next twenty-five years. I once promised Bruce, in the midst of yet another controversial moment in his own career,

that I would one day write the history of children's programming in Australia.

But the main reason this book was written was the persistent and gentle persuasion by my husband Don Edgar. I was full of reasons why not: it would take too much time; I didn't want to revisit painful periods in my life; and didn't want any self-justification for events that were contentious. There were practical problems: I am a hoarder of papers, and they would need to be sifted and put in order; I couldn't write with psoriatic arthritis in my hands.

And so it went until we decided to clean out the accumulation of forty-five years of our working lives. I rediscovered many boxes of files in the roof of our home, including five years of papers covering all the meetings of the Children's Program Committee (CPC) of the ABT held in Gyngell's time there. The tribunal had gone, along with official records; my papers were the only surviving record. As I began to read details I had long forgotten, I was surprised by the passion and conflict that emerged from the pages. I relived the struggle to establish official Standards that would promote quality Australian content and children's television programming.

It was my experience as chairman of the CPC that led me to the most significant role of my career, as founding director of the Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF). Reading through my papers I started to think of reasons to write the whole story down. I remembered my promise to Bruce Gyngell. And I reflected that the quality of Australian children's television is now taken for granted. Those who had had to fight for it and knew the history were dead or growing older and no longer in the public eye. I wanted to pay tribute to the creative pioneers of the industry who were very close to me and are no longer with us—Frank Meaney, Garth Boomer and John Morris, in particular.

As often in my life, I was also provoked: this time by gossip about events in my career that was misleading and inaccurate. I started writing and I didn't stop. The more I wrote the more I saw the point of writing. That I was at the centre of controversial events over a thirty-year history of the development of Australian television gave me a rough ride but it was an extraordinary adventure. Don was right: it is a story worth relating about an experiment that was unique in television history, and it has not been documented before.

Although this book is written in large part about children and programming, it is also a story about the broader world of television in Australia and globally.

Acknowledgements

WHEN A BOOK CONCERNS a life that spans seventy years, there are innumerable debts of gratitude. I hope that within the pages of this book I have adequately expressed my sense of gratitude and obligation to friends, allies, colleagues and supporters for their support and affection.

The major contributors to my life have been my family: my parents Reg and Eva Etherington, my husband Don, my daughters Sue and Lesley and my grandchildren Adrian, Luke, Emily and Ace. Their sustaining support has given my life purpose.

My son-in-law Greg Buck took charge of my technical needs and traumas, installed voice software and taught me what I needed to know with great patience and tact. Santo Amoddio found me the ideal mouse and took the family photo.

The members of the Advisory Committee on Program Standards, Geoff Evans, Ursula Callus, Rob Liersch, Bob Axam, the members of the CPC, Anne Gorman, the members of the Steering Committee of the ACTF, its board and its staff over two decades are important contributors to this story. I thank them all. I cannot list all the creative writers, directors, cast and crew who have supported me and the ACTF productions, but I thank them for their creative contribution to children, the reputation of the ACTF and Australian production.

I would like to thank Glenda Wilson, my personal assistant, for her incredible hard work for nearly thirty years—and for her record-keeping which has assisted and indeed enabled much of the research

for this book. Norman Lacy's relevant files when Minister for the Arts and Minister for Educational Services in Victoria, have provided valuable source material. I thank him for his support and tenacity.

At short notice, several colleagues helped clarify or confirm details of this story. They include Chris Neal, Nick Collis-George, Barbara Biggins, Paul Nichola and Stephen Johnson. Chris Lovell (Holding Redlich) has been an important friend for nearly two decades; he is an unnamed presence as a sound adviser behind many situations I found myself in.

I chose MUP for this project knowing publisher Louise Adler and her team would give me the support to tell my story. I thank Cinzia Cavallaro and Sally Moss for their professionalism and congeniality. Editor Sybil Nolan's wide experience, her knowledge of politics and media history helped give my story context and structure; she saw the big picture when I saw the detail. She curbed my excesses and encouraged me to overcome my reticence; she and Don were my invaluable editors and advisers. Don assisted at every stage of the manuscript.

I thank the ACTF, the *Age* and the AFI for permission to publish photographs. Jean Boomer gave permission for Garth Boomer's poem to be reproduced.

Most of the records on which this book is based are in my personal files that I have retained over the years and which will be archived.



Part I

Getting Started

'All great deeds and all great thoughts have a ridiculous beginning.'

—Albert Camus



Looking for Trouble

'Trouble is only opportunity in work clothes.'

—Henry Kaiser

MY FATHER, REG ETHERINGTON, used to say, 'If you want to know how much impact you make on life, plunge your fist into a bucket of water, pull it out, and look at the result'. But he always had a go. He was the most persistent man I've ever known, but with a great sense of the ridiculous in life and with an infectious laugh. His friends called him 'Mr Fix-it' and 'Mr Right'; he was always the centre of attention. I must have got my drive for determined self-assertion from him—my genes were not contaminated by any desire to compromise. I learned strategic thinking in order to get my way.

My father desperately wanted a son, and I was his third daughter. My mother appeared content with her three girls. But I grew up knowing I was the final disappointment for Reg. Not that this was ever expressed. I was loved, but I have wondered whether, deep down, this knowledge drove me to prove I could do what any son could do, and better. I am my father's daughter. He always said that

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of his three girls, Lesley, the eldest, would stand up to trouble; Joan, in the middle, would run away; and Patricia, the youngest, would go out looking for it. It was true that trouble and I often seemed to find each other.

There are defining events in our lives that shape what we become but I was different from my sisters and my friends: I demanded more from life, although I had no idea what that might be. My father taught us to swim and the incentive to learn was the gift of a wristwatch. Lesley and Joan passed their swimming tests and earned their watches. I learnt to swim too but my father deemed me too young to own a watch. So he offered me a choice. Would I like a watch or a Twin-choc (a double-barrelled chocolate-covered ice-cream)? I chose the Twin-choc. Perhaps that is why I rarely eat ice-cream today.

Reg was a pioneer in an outback town—a builder, a man of action. The son of working-class English immigrants, he travelled to Mildura to become a jeweller's apprentice at the age of nineteen. He stayed to create his own optical business and, through hard work, could afford to dedicate his life to the community and public work from the age of forty. His considerable energy was directed towards transforming this small, isolated town in the Mallee desert into a self-sustaining oasis with all the facilities a community needed for a good life.

I lived in a household where politics were as familiar to me as the values of the Methodist Church where I went to Sunday School. Reg was chairman of finance on the Mildura City Council over three decades and guided the building of roads, the sewerage system, the sporting fields and the art gallery. When he moved his focus to the arts and supported, as chairman of the Mildura Art Gallery, the first triennial Sculpture-scape exhibition in the town, he was tossed off council, resoundingly rejected by an electorate that did not want their rates spent on public performance art. But he stood again and was re-elected.

Nothing of any import happened in Mildura that my father was not involved in and there was no dirty business: he was straight and open. He gained support for his ventures by the sheer force of argument. I heard much of what went on over the phone without even listening and I watched as men came to the house to seek

my dad's advice. Mildura was a community where everyone knew everyone and Reg's working-class roots gave him an understanding and easy connection with men who laboured with their hands and minds. Everyone knew Reg Etherington and everyone knew his daughters.

Women in Mildura stayed home and cleaned the house, looked after their men and did their community work. My mother Eva's interests centred around the church, the Red Cross, the Auxiliary for the Deaf and the Country Women's Association. Mum was a great cook and seemed to be forever baking cakes and running stalls. She was also a supreme homemaker. Her laundry and ironing were of an impeccable standard and the house was always clean and ordered. Every Sunday for more than twenty years she paid for and arranged the flowers in our church.

Mum was a very hard worker; the habits she learned as a child never left her. Growing up in north-eastern Victoria, she walked a mile to school each morning after she had hand-milked six cows. She worked in a shoe shop and attended the Methodist Church. The church was a social focus for the family. It was there she met Dad.

Reg Etherington had started his apprenticeship on £5 a week and a promise of a share of the profits. When he wanted to marry Eva Ellis he asked for the promise to be written down. Hammerton the jeweller refused, so Reg gave a week's notice and went out on his own. Hammerton said he would break him. He underestimated Reg, who developed a successful business of his own. Materially, as well as in all other ways, my dad and mum had a strong partnership. However, it seemed to me as a child that the men had it made: they had the fun, they shaped the action. I wished I were a boy.

When I was eighteen months old I had a hernia in the groin. I was hospitalised for surgery and the wound became infected. I remained in hospital for three months, and in his wisdom the doctor insisted Mum should not visit me; he thought it would be too upsetting and unsettling for me. So I saw only my dad, who came each day. Perhaps that is why I formed a very close bond with my dad—a bond I felt from as early as I can remember. In many ways I became a substitute son for my father. He took me camping and fishing.

In the 1940s Mildura was an irrigation settlement on the edge of the outback, sustained by the Murray River, growing vines and

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citrus fruit. I had freedom to roam. Dad owned a small property a few miles out of town where he had some orange groves, and, later, chooks and cattle. He would work the land with his shovel and I would go with him, crawling around the Mallee red dirt, exploring the irrigation channels and playing all kinds of games among the spiders and snakes.

I lived much of my life in my head, in a fantasy world I created. I loved books and comics. I loved the radio serials and on the rare occasions when I was allowed to see a film I was in heaven. My favourite time was when the lights went out at night and I could dream before I went to sleep about a life I could never have. I persuaded my sisters to play film stars as we lay in bed in the sleep-out. I was Betty Grable, Joan was Carmen Miranda and Lesley was Diana Durban. Together we became the World War II pin-up whose legs were insured for a million dollars, the Latin American singing bombshell and the operatic diva as we lay in bed playing our roles, enjoying ourselves in fantasy land.

Dad liked films too. And when I started High School, he began to take me to the pictures every Friday evening to see the double feature at the Ozone or the Astor—the two picture theatres in town. It didn't matter what film was on, we had our regular date. Mum wasn't interested in films and my older sisters had other things they preferred to do. But nothing was more important for me than Friday night at the pictures. I could be Betty Grable and sing and dance; I could be a femme fatale like Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck, Ingrid Bergman or Susan Haywood. I could be a career girl, a lawyer, an aircraft pilot, a surgeon, a siren, sultry, glamorous, dangerous, anything that took my fancy. When I wanted, I could be a man who could fight battles and ride a horse, save lives, glory in the applause and above all take charge of my life. I used to ride around our backyard on a broom, as Roy Rogers on his horse Trigger. I strode the lawn as an Amazon and leapt around my mother's fernery as Tarzan, not Jane. My ambition in life then was to become a theatre usherette.

Three doors down from our house in Sarnia Avenue lived my friend George. He had a comic-book collection to rival mine, and we swapped comics and played for hours. George was a year younger than I and inches shorter but we were friends and equals

in all respects. He told me to stop picking my nose and eating it—good advice which did nothing to weaken the bond between us. We shared a common resentment of the local butcher and his wife. Each morning before we went to school George and I were sent to the butcher's shop to pick up the meat. It was about two hundred yards from home, which seemed a long way for our young legs, and we both hated this mission. No matter how long we stood peering up over the counter clutching our notes from our mothers, if there was an adult in the shop they were served first; we had to wait. We loathed the butcher and his wife for this injustice.

One day we decided to take revenge. The butcher lived in a rambling house that stood in a large lucerne paddock just across from our back gate and over the lane. It was Friday evening, George and I, armed with shanghais, slung stones on the roof. Then we raced into the outdoor laundry and put the plug in the trough and turned on the taps. Next we parcelled up some cow-dung and dropped it at the back door, knocking and then scurrying away to lie in the lucerne and watch for the result. The butcher and his wife came looking for us with hurricane lanterns. They got closer and I wanted to run, but George prevailed on me to lie low and wait. He was right: they gave up the hunt. The next day, fired with confidence, we enlisted some friends and continued the quest. And like most young offenders we got caught. The butcher, who was a fat man, came after us on his delivery bike. I was the one he caught and when he wanted to know the names of my partners in crime, I spilled the beans and named the lot. I was ashamed about that confession for many years.

I headed home to bed: in the middle of the afternoon on a Saturday, the safest spot I could think of. My father came out to the sleep-out to talk to me and I tearfully told him the story. When I got to the part about the butcher chasing me on his bike my father began to laugh. He could not help himself and I was immensely relieved. George was thrashed by his father. We weren't allowed to play together for some time. I was given a talking-to and that episode ended my life as a vandal. But my father's understanding validated my sense of injustice and I would continue to stand up for myself.

When I was thirteen, I fell in love. His name was Graeme. At school recess we would go to opposite sides of the quadrangle and stare at each other. Sometimes we would manage to time our exit

from school so we could ride our bikes home together. We rarely spoke; there didn't seem to be anything to say. One day he didn't show up in the quadrangle. I was so upset I couldn't concentrate in class. After school, I plucked up all my courage and telephoned Graeme, to learn that he now fancied someone else. Her name was Barbara. My heart was broken. I wanted to die. And I thought I must be careful that I didn't get hurt like that again. These boys were creatures to be wary of and I needed to choose carefully in future.

At High School I was attracted to debating. There were four school houses—Chaffey, Hopetoun, Deakin and Sturt—and each year there was an inter-house debating competition. On Friday afternoons the school would assemble to watch the debates in the Assembly Hall. When I was fourteen, I was given a chance to be in the house team with the big kids. I was final speaker. Dad wrote most of the words I was to deliver but I rehearsed them and knew every word off by heart. There was an invited adjudicator for these competitions and this day it was Alan Lind, a local state politician. I was very nervous but delivered my speech in forceful style. When Alan Lind gave his comments on each speaker, with a mark for performance and delivery, he singled me out for attack. He was scathing about every aspect of my speech and marked me down so low that our team lost the debate. I bit my lip, hard.

I could not understand why I had deserved such a public humiliation. When the judgement was over Mr Murphy, the head of school debating, came up to me and said he wanted me in the school team. I was to be one of a select four students who would travel to Renmark, Swan Hill and Broken Hill—each town an all-day trip away in those days—to represent the school in inter-school debates. How could that happen? Why was the adjudicator so critical and the teacher so full of praise? It was later suggested that Alan Lind had a problem with my father at the time. Perhaps he did; Dad upset a number of people in Mildura over the years for the stands he would take on public issues. He also earned a lot of respect. I went on to debate in school teams for the next three years and to lead the debating team to many victories. I began to write my own words with more confidence and I never modified my debating style.

Despite my academic success at school I thought there wasn't much point in staying on and that I might as well leave, as some of

my girl friends were doing. The only options for ambitious girls who lived in the country in those days were teaching and nursing. Reg had other ideas and with his manoeuvring behind the scenes I was persuaded to stay on at school by Jack Bishop, my geography teacher.

Jack was a friend of the family. His wife Win, who was also a teacher, was the only woman I had met who dealt with men as equals. I found her intriguing. The mother of four boys, she taught at school, ran the small property they owned, and ran her husband. Jack went out of his way to help me and encourage me. When I failed geography in the two term exams in my final Matriculation year, largely because I didn't enjoy the subject and wouldn't study, he invited me home and I would follow him while he did his chores, sitting beside him as he milked the cow, all the time talking to me about geography and the excitement of life at university. He wrote a précis of the Matric geography course that came to just a few pages, and I studied this for the final exam. I came third in the Victorian Matriculation examination, with a first class honour which earned me a place as a resident in University Women's College at Melbourne University. Jack Bishop had helped determine my future. We were friends until his death, and Win remains one of the few female role models I ever had. And Women's College was one of the happiest experiences I had—I still retain my friends from those days.

My years at Mildura High School, which were very happy, did not end without trauma. I had a close friend Eversley, and the two of us openly enjoyed life. Win Bishop warned me that Maude Nettleton, the acting senior mistress, was out to get us. Maude was a bully and the sight of two outgoing girls enjoying themselves would provoke her to rant on in the staffroom. There was not a child in the school who was not terrified when Maude looked their way but she victimised the girls more than the boys.

Maude struck on the final day of school, a day that should have been one of celebration. She called all eight prefects to her office, Eversley and I among them. Maude's purpose, she said, was to thank the prefects for their contribution during the year. But her agenda was to humiliate Eversley and me in front of them: we were 'a disgrace'. She ordered us out of the room so she could thank the others. Our crime was that we had not stayed behind to clean up after the

school social. It was a shattering experience and a sad way to end our school years. I implored Eversley, who was living with our family at the time, not to tell Dad, because I knew Maude would be in very serious trouble.

Twenty-five years later, I was invited back to Mildura to speak at a High School reunion dinner. I regaled the audience with story after story about an unnamed teacher with a foul mouth. 'It's Maude, it's Maude,' was the Chinese whisper around the room. As I sat down to much laughter and applause Eversley and I locked eyes and had a grin, for Maude was present at the dinner.

The four years I spent at the University of Melbourne ended my life as a country kid. They proved as exciting as Jack Bishop had promised, and I would not return to Mildura to live. But I still felt my future options were limited as a girl. When I completed my BA and DipEd, as a student teacher bonded to the Education Department, I was sent to Geelong to teach. And that was where I met Don.

MY SISTERS AND MY FRIENDS were getting married and I had to face up to my future. I wanted to have children. In 1960, marriage seemed the only way forward for me, but I was horrified at the thought of settling down to the life I had seen Mildura women live. If I had been born twenty years later I doubt that I would have made the decision to marry at twenty-three, but now I'm glad my life worked out that way. I had a number of expressions of interest, as well as huge pressure from my dad, who, although he had ensured my pursuit of tertiary education, still believed a woman's place was in the home. Don Edgar was the stand-out pick of the bunch on offer. Apart from his conviction that I was the one for him, Don, the son of a widow, was accustomed to women working and to men helping in the house. In fact he had done a large share of the cooking for his mother and four siblings. I knew life with Don as my husband would not be the life I feared so much.

He was an unusual man for his time and I was fortunate to find him. I still had no idea what I wanted to do but I knew I would not be doing it in the home; Don was happy about that and very persuasive. We were married on 7 May 1960, and forty-six years later we are still together. My decision to marry Don was the best I ever

took, although at the time I thought it meant the highlights of my life were behind me.

When I told my dad, apprehensively, that I would be a working wife he gave me the speech I expected about motherhood and family. It was the natural order of things that women did not work after marriage. Mum surprised me with her advice: 'You do what you want to do, Patricia,' was all she said. It was her advice I took.

A few months after our wedding, I developed a noise in my head: a shushing, regular sound like the wind rushing around. Other people could hear it if they put their head to my ear. I was diagnosed as having a suspected aneurism; a bubble on a vein or artery in my brain. My GP, who seemed quite enthusiastic about his diagnosis, told me he thought it was deep in my head. I was referred to the care of a neurologist at the Alfred Hospital and entered hospital for a series of angiograms. This procedure, in the early 1960s, when there were no CT scans or MRI machines, was like being placed in Dr Frankenstein's laboratory and injected through the neck and the groin with what felt like boiling oil. It was the most painful process imaginable, well up there with childbirth but without the reward that makes childbirth all worthwhile.

The doctors couldn't diagnose the problem. So I was sent home for three months and then invited back for more. I used to sit in social groups and think: none of you knows this but I am going to die any minute. I didn't, and no aneurism was located. The neurologist told me I had to forget about the symptoms and get on with my life. I did, but I lived with those unnerving symptoms for many years, and from that time I have believed life to be fragile and uncertain. Yet more happily Don and I were able to announce that I was pregnant. 'What have you been doing to my daughter?' Reg asked Don.

Don and I lived a life unlike our peers. We shared all tasks. I made the curtains and he dug the garden, but we both painted the walls and scraped the old wax polish from the kitchen linoleum as we set up house. We made decisions together, had a joint bank account, discussed our work and for the first two years taught in the same school, Macleod High School. When we married, 4D—the class no one could manage except me—put in money to buy us a gift of a garish red and white pottery set, labelled 'Olives', 'Drinks', 'Picks' and 'Smokes'. It was a favourite gift.

I was never a bra-less, unshaven feminist—Doris Day was more my model, and lipstick something I wanted to wear. Unbelievably, to put colour on one's lips was an act of defiance in Methodist Mildura—today's equivalent of a ring through the nose. My mother began to use lipstick only when her daughters did, persuading our father that we were not loose women. I learned to sew, buying Vogue dress patterns and inexpensive, carefully chosen materials so that I could dress with flair. I made my own wedding dress, just because the idea of mastering and shaping reams of heavy satin was a challenge.

By the time I became a mother, my insight into my role as a woman had already been changed by reading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.² No other single book had such a profound influence on my life. I discovered it reading an article about de Beauvoir, when I was twenty-three years old, just after we were married. I had always been interested in the roles of women and why I was so different from my contemporaries. Simone de Beauvoir was writing to understand herself and her 'astonishing revelation' that she was different from Jean-Paul Sartre because he was a man and she was a woman. A woman, she said, 'is struggling for the right to be as important, as relevant as any man'.³ As one insight followed another, I would turn on Don and berate him on behalf of all his sex for the injustices perpetrated on women that de Beauvoir explained so brilliantly. Don and I discussed de Beauvoir thoroughly and her arguments enlightened him as well as me. She was the perfect role model for us both. She enjoyed the company of men, who were her best friends, and while she did not marry, she sustained a close intellectual and intimate relationship with Sartre throughout her long life—something most feminists did not manage to achieve. I understood for the first time there was nothing wrong with me and my ideas—there was a lot wrong with the way women were brought up socially and culturally.

Our children Susan and Lesley, born twenty-two months apart, were our greatest source of purpose and pleasure, but I wanted to return to the workforce and Don had no problem with that decision. I took up teaching for the Council of Adult Education and persuaded the director of classes to allow me to run a ten-week course on the changing role of women. He was rather bemused and

expected few enrolments, but he let me go ahead. The year was 1965. Betty Friedan had just published *The Feminine Mystique*, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* was still to come, and I had tapped into a wellspring. When the course had to be scheduled in the CAE's biggest venue I found I was not such an odd one out. Women were searching for answers and an escape from entrapped domesticity. We were paid less than a man to do the same job and, as a woman teacher, when I married I could not pay into a superannuation fund. Working was never a choice for me; I simply had to find a way to work.

Along with teaching at the CAE, I became the first secretary of the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English. I co-ordinated the professional group, produced its first magazine and ran the annual conference.⁴ The chairman of VATE was Henry Schoenheimer, an educationist, innovator and newspaper columnist whom I admired. When I asked him one day to chair a meeting he told me to do it. I thought, why not?

At Macleod High School, Don taught Australian history and as there was no textbook suitable for High School students of that age, he decided to write one of his own. *Australia and Her Northern Neighbours* (1962) would become our ticket to the United States and a career outside school teaching. Seconded to the new Secondary Teachers' College at the University of Melbourne, Don found he was required to teach Sociology of Education. Reading only a chapter or two ahead of the students was unsatisfying and he decided he wanted to study sociology. He applied to the United States to do a PhD and was accepted at Harvard, Berkeley, Chicago and Stanford, four of the top universities in the country. As he worked to finish a Master's thesis, I updated the history book for a second edition and the renewed royalties paid our airfares. We opted for Stanford University in California, where the scholarship offered seemed the most viable, and headed off with two children, aged four and two, for three years in the United States.

I felt some trepidation about the horror stories I had heard about US medical expenses. Overnight, Lesley's left eye had developed a squint. She was seeing double and needed skilled ophthalmic care in Australia. First the doctor tried to correct the strabismus with glasses, which Lesley would take off and hide all over the house until her sister Susan co-operated by wearing identical spectacle frames

to persuade Lesley to keep hers on. Time was not on our side, however, so the doctor decided to operate, achieving a perfect result in straightening the eye just weeks before we were due to leave for Stanford. The surgeon told me proudly he had done a better job than God. Under the circumstances, as I was grateful, I avoided a philosophical dispute. As it turned out, medical care for students at Stanford was free as our income was well below the poverty line.

Within a week of our arrival in California I felt at home. I relaxed. Women were expected to have opinions. This was a new experience. The fomenting campus life of the middle and late 1960s was exciting, an extraordinary contrast to our old life in suburban Greensborough, Melbourne. We lived with the turmoil of race riots and Vietnam War protests; Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were murdered when we were there; and there was passionate debate about the future of the United States. We were deeply involved.

Money was a problem, though, and Don told the dean we would have to return to Australia unless he could get a job. Since his first quarter results were straight As, the dean gave him a job as research assistant in the Education Research & Development Center, and the income also covered his fees. I was able to use Don's initial Fellowship to enrol for a Masters degree in Communication to study film and television and learn to make movies, simply for the joy of learning about film. The challenge was to gain entry. I failed the Miller Analogies Test, a multiple-choice test used as a selection criterion. I persisted and they wanted me to sit the Graduate Record Examination, which I knew would also not be my forte. So we paid for me to enrol in Summer courses—open to all—and, on the basis of my straight A results, I gained entry to the Masters in Communication program. Stanford students were the cream of the crop. The teaching and course content—while the best on offer—inspired me less than the experience of working with an eclectic group of young Americans from all over the country. It was the height of the Vietnam War and young people believed the older generation was destroying America's good name. A popular slogan at the time was 'Don't trust anyone over 30'. I was a 29-year-old mother of two and was accepted completely into their midst.

Those years when Don and I were students at Stanford with our two young children were the best time of my life. At the end

of my degree I was offered a job at KQED, the public television channel in San Francisco where I had done an internship as part of the Masters degree. People were queuing up to volunteer at KQED and I was offered paid work which I could not accept. I did not want to return to Australia and Don, who completed his PhD in record time, was offered a teaching appointment for one year at the University of Chicago, another prestigious institution. I had to give up my television career before it started.

But Chicago was exciting (we drove across the continent during the famous Democratic Convention riots there, wondering what we were getting ourselves into), and I found a job working alongside black militants on a Ford Foundation project, placing teams of teachers with support staff in inner-city ghetto schools. Chicago was a wild and dangerous place in the late 1960s. I shared an office with Yolande Wilson, a black researcher, and we became friends. She told me how difficult it was to explain to her son why he never saw himself on television. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* was showing in the cinemas—the story of the perfect black man, Sydney Poitier, who wants to marry the daughter of a progressive liberal middle-class couple (played by Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn) and their coming to terms with their latent prejudice. On television blacks were comedians or musicians but not serious actors, and black kids did not appear in *The Brady Bunch* or *I Dream of Jeannie*.

I saw parallels in the exclusion of blacks and the exclusion of women, and working within a program about social change galvanised me. I became very emotionally involved. I also gained more confidence and stood up for myself. The university project leader assigned me to write the re-funding proposal to the Ford Foundation for a one-million-dollar contribution—a considerable sum of money in the 1960s. I was working for a pittance, but when I submitted my first draft, which was received with enthusiasm by the management committee, I told them I would continue working only if paid as I should be and as a man would be paid. I got no argument.

I wanted to stay working on the project. The University of Chicago wanted Don to stay on and offered me as a bribe a grant to do a PhD, but Don was adamant we should return to Australia, partly for the sake of the children—Sue's school, the famous University of Chicago Laboratory School started by John Dewey, had a bullet

through the window one day—and so he could apply back home the knowledge he had gained. It was 1969.

BACK WE CAME to find that nothing had changed in the land of desperate housewives. Now I became deeply unhappy. I looked around for something I could do and read about a new School of Education at La Trobe University with a proposed Centre for the Study of Media and Communication. I phoned its dean and talked my way into an interview.

When I arrived I was greeted by Professor Ronald Goldman walking around his office in red socks and sandals, playing with a large Alsatian dog. The interview went well and the professor offered me a job on the spot but provoked my anger. I was to be half-time, on trial for a year and I ‘would understand’ that half-time workers did not get half-time pay. He made me a meagre offer, knowing I wanted the job. I went home and wrote the professor a long letter. I told him what he could do with his job and with his Centre. To my surprise, I received a phone call asking me to return. Ronald Goldman offered me the job as chair of the Media Centre for a year on my own terms.

Goldman was an academic eccentric and I appealed to him. He was used to a fight. He had been born into the poverty of a Manchester slum, with an absentee father and a deaf mother, and did not learn to read until a pair of pawnshop spectacles opened up the world with new vision. He left school at thirteen but matriculated by correspondence at age nineteen—working as an errand boy, in a bicycle shop, on a milk-delivery round and as a trainee buyer for a department store. He had a voracious appetite for new ideas. At La Trobe he set up six Centres which cut across fields of study and broke with the tradition of formal disciplines such as History and Philosophy of Education, raising the hackles of the educational establishment. He appointed a significant number of women to his school staff, although not at senior levels. His ideas were as provocative as his presentation. He wore a deerstalker hat and drove an old Daimler car, transported from England, a typically over-the-top statement from a slum boy made good. He was open to what I had to offer and we became good friends.

So began my baptism of fire into university politics as I attempted to introduce film theory and practice into a conservative institution based on the English university model. I was a young woman, thirty-three years of age, heading a department. I was introducing a subject—film—that was not a recognised discipline. I had an American postgraduate degree, which it was suggested I must have purchased. I had to hone my political skills as I fought the academic bullies every step of the way.

Ronald's desire to innovate and to reform the system led him to appoint some of the more radical de-schooling advocates of the era, those who agreed with Ivan Illich that schools were repressive institutions and children should learn from the wider range of resources in the community.⁵ Over time, most of them proved to be chauvinistic, conservative and smelly. One would teach classes with his shoes off, feet on the desk displaying dirty, holey socks. His tactics in the debate of ideas were just as offensive as his dirty feet.

My old hero Henry Schoenheimer was the senior lecturer in charge of the courses for the Diploma of Education. Henry refused to allow me to teach a course. I couldn't understand why the famous progressive educator objected to the teaching of film. Opposite Henry's door I pasted an article he had written some years before on the merits of teaching media in schools. He scribbled on the bottom of the article: 'I am older and wiser now'. I continued to make a nuisance of myself until finally I was given a single one-hour lecture spot. I put work into that lecture: it was showy and persuasive. A group of students took up a petition demanding that I be allowed to offer a course. So I taught the first course on film to be offered in an Australian university. Media studies courses were beginning to develop in teachers' colleges, and in the outside world the revival of the Australian film industry was underway. It was 1970. But the stuffy old university system response was slow to come and difficult to achieve.

My idea of an academic who should be teaching film in a university was John Flaus. I first met John at a film conference and was impressed with his encyclopaedic knowledge of film and his ability to analyse film, literature and society. He was an anarchist who wore a scruffy dark beard with grey ends and possessed a beautifully modulated Australian voice which would in time become the iconic

voice-over in Australian television and radio advertising. When I met him he was living in a single room in Sydney, lined with silver paper, shelves and piles of books, his furniture little more than a camp bed. He worked for the WEA (Workers' Educational Association) and for years had been studying for a BA Honours degree which he couldn't complete because there was always more he wanted to know and say.

Ronald Goldman gave me a full-time lectureship at the end of my first year and I set about identifying staff with a reputation in Film Studies to join the Media Centre. I wanted to appoint John Flaus, but knew he would be controversial, even for Goldman. I invited John to give a guest lecture and then be interviewed for a lectureship. I instructed John to reveal little of himself but to talk about his knowledge of film. Ronald's opening words were, 'John, tell us about yourself'. And John obliged, not drawing breath for the next hour as he poured out his unusual life story and details of his personal relationships, with the interviewers sitting transfixed.

John did not get his lectureship that year but I was promoted to senior lecturer, provoking much animosity from my male colleagues. While I pursued my goals for the Media Centre I did everything else expected of me. I undertook a PhD primarily because I knew I did not have a future ahead of me in a university as *Mrs* Edgar. I had to be Doctor Edgar. My PhD thesis was a study of the impact of self-esteem on children's perceptions of film and television violence, a subject that interested me greatly. I worked hard and completed it in record time. That formality out of the way, I turned my attention to strengthening the Centre's profile and to more popular writing. John Flaus won his appointment at the end of my second year. By then I had more clout and Ronald Goldman was more amenable—he had left his wife and was living with another woman, a cause for gossip in the early 1970s, which also made John Flaus seem less marginal in his lifestyle.

I entered the debate about children's television in 1971, during a dispute within the ABC over the educational merits of *Sesame Street* versus *Play School*. The conflict was sparked by the BBC's long-time children's program director Monica Sims' claim that *Sesame Street* 'threatened indoctrination of its tiny viewers'. She was worried by the program's 'authoritarian aims'. *Sesame Street*'s executive

producer, Joan Cooney, replied: 'Miss Sims is caught up in the old-fashioned permissive nursery-school complex. In a society where home life is often too relaxed, serious educators must be interested in structured education ... If their children's programming people don't think the social situations that *Sesame Street* touches on, like race and class problems, are relevant in England then I think they are burying their heads in the sand'.⁶ The London *Sunday Times* sided with the US producers, denouncing *Play School*, the BBC's answer to *Sesame Street*, as 'genteel middle-class pap compared with the vigour of the American show'.

The introduction of *Sesame Street* into Australia mirrored this dispute, as the ABC modelled itself very closely on the BBC and the content of the Australian version of *Play School* was controlled by the BBC. The evangelistic proponents of *Play School* were well entrenched within the ABC children's department and antagonistic to the American program, but the programming department, operating independently, bought *Sesame Street* and it went to air. *Sesame Street* quickly established a following, but early in 1972 the BBC executive producer Cynthia Felgate visited Sydney and described *Sesame Street* as 'unimaginative and over-rated'. She announced she did not want to see *Sesame Street* on the ABC in competition with *Play School*. It was 'an anomaly for the ABC to show both programs'. She thought *Sesame Street* 'dishonest and confusing fantasy with reality, saying she was 'not convinced children have to be thrown learning items at the pace of commercials'.⁷

I thought the resistance to diversity by the *Play School* producers and their claim to the Holy Grail was absurd. I weighed in on the side of *Sesame Street*, arguing that 'the potential of educational television as an effective medium for teaching certain skills to very young children had been demonstrated by *Sesame Street*'.⁸ What we should be doing, I said, was backing Australians to make 'a *Strine Street* where the Aussie kids can allcumungit abita therite kindaculcha'.⁹ The media played up the conflict and the attention led to an ABC research study which purported to demonstrate the superiority of *Play School* as 'the most effective educational program', but which in fact, when analysed, exaggerated the benefits of *Play School* while denigrating *Sesame Street*.¹⁰ I analysed the data and published a critique which led to a retraction by the ABC. My main point was that:

These programs must be evaluated in terms of their own stated goals. Both are successful; both are necessary and many children will benefit differently from both. The research staff of the ABC should be working to determine what other kinds of programs are needed for the different sub-cultural groups of children in our society. No one program can be best for all children.¹¹

I would encounter very similar dogged, destructive opposition from the old *Play School* mafia, who were still entrenched and protecting their turf with arguments from the backwaters of outmoded educational theory, fifteen years later. My visibility on this issue led publisher Hilary McPhee, then an editor at Heinemann, to invite me to write *Under Five in Australia*. At this time there were not many books around for Australian readers on the subject of early childhood development. And so it was that one step after another led to my career in children's television production, but it was an accidental career.

BARRY JONES AND PHILLIP ADAMS had been actively lobbying government for the establishment of an Australian Film and Television School and other supporting financing structures for a fledgling film industry. It was an exciting time, but in mid-1971 the government decided to shelve plans to build such a school. Professor Jerzy Toeplitz, the head of the Polish Film School which had nurtured the talents of Wajda, Polanski, Ziarek and Rozewicz, had been identified by Jones and Adams as the most desirable person to head a new Australian film school. Toeplitz had visited Australia and expressed interest in the challenge of its establishment but as a citizen of a communist country he was not free to leave Poland without an official invitation. The Australian Government was not prepared to offer it at that time. He was also approached by UCLA in the United States and the London Film School to join them as an eminent scholar, and Jones and Adams feared that Toeplitz would be lost to Australia.

They fed the story to the *Age* newspaper. Reading the story one Saturday morning, I thought here was a chance for my Centre at La Trobe to make a mark. I rang Ronald Goldman and he agreed. That same morning we went to see Barry Jones with the suggestion that, if the Centre for the Study of Media and Communication appointed

Jerzy Toeplitz to the position of visiting professor, we could warehouse him while he waited for the government to progress the film and television school. The businessman and philanthropist Ken Myer generously agreed to cover half the costs involved in a professorial salary. And so it was that I had the pleasure of the company of Jerzy, who worked in an office opposite mine, writing his film history for more than a year.¹²

Each morning, accompanied by his adopted stray dog, he would walk to his office from the residential college where he lived with his wife Isabel, and we would converse for fifteen or twenty minutes before he started work. I told him my political problems and he counselled me in his quiet way. We became good friends and when he took up his appointment in Sydney he nominated me for the board of the Film School. However, I had upset Phillip Adams with an outspoken public comment and he crossed me off the list of nominated board members before the recommendations went to government for approval. Jerzy bided his time and nominated me the next year, at which time I became a member of the school's council for a six-year period.

This board experience widened my involvement in the politics of the film industry and introduced me to a number of people who became lifelong friends and allies. Among them was John Morris, who would become head of the South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC) and who would play a major role in helping me establish the Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) ten years later. He became a close friend.

The decade I spent at La Trobe University exposed me to some very tough politics. University life in the 1970s, when there had been a sudden growth in teachers' colleges, meant many people entered the ranks of tertiary educators with limited experience or qualifications. Many of them were never going to be researchers and their light teaching loads permitted them much idle time. They filled it by sitting on committees. From my perspective these professional committee men (and they were all men) would dedicate their time to putting obstacles in the way of those who worked with a purpose. Opposition to the Media Centre within a School of Education became a cause for some in this group. When Ronald Goldman stepped down as dean of the school after four years, he

made way for Brian Crittenden, a former Jesuit with an interest in moral philosophy, and the new dean made it his mission to separate the Media Centre from the School of Education.

This intemperate ex-priest could not stand me and my entourage in the Media Centre, particularly John Flaus who had an unflagging energy for writing questioning memos to Crittenden, which drove the dean crazy. (John claims I taught him to write memos.) My archive file reveals in Crittenden's correspondence a consistent and systematic effort to undermine the financing and staffing of the Media Centre. It also documents his outbursts—usually made in phone conversations with me, which I then noted and sent to him for correction. (I wanted to annoy him but also to let him know that I was keeping a record of our exchanges.) Typically he would tell me he did not think much of my work, including the research proposals I managed to get funded, and my publications which he described as mediocre. He refused invitations to visit the Media Centre to see the work that we were doing and when my PhD was submitted for examination he told staff that examiners had raised valid criticisms. This was untrue and each time he criticised me I challenged his assertions in writing—on one occasion to the vice-chancellor and another to the chair of the PhD committee.

Don and I applied jointly and successfully for a federal grant to train teachers in the field—the classroom—with practical rather than theoretical methods.¹³ The project involved the production of provocative audio-visual materials for teacher education, and resulted in five 16 mm films to be used for discussion on topics including sex role socialisation, progressive education, first-year-out teaching in a country school, different teaching approaches, and community schooling. Now I had a resource that was in demand. There were no other such films available on contemporary education issues and schools, universities and teachers' colleges wanted to borrow them for their courses. With the approval of the federal funding body, I set up a borrowing system with an account managed within the university under my control. This gave me a lucrative business fund from which I could produce other films, finance student research projects and travel—among these projects I took a team to Mexico City to make a film on the International Women's Year Conference in 1975; John Flaus was the gofer.¹⁴

Dean Crittenden tried unsuccessfully to remove this fund from my control—it made him apoplectic, largely because it put me in a unique position, with independence from the bureaucratic university structure to pursue whatever interests I wished. None of my endeavours endeared me to most of my colleagues outside the Media Centre.

I was fighting the same battles within the School of Education over and over again. I would think I had resolved one problem and it would come around again the next week, the next month, the next year. As the only woman who chaired a Centre, I came up against barriers that men at that time did not have to contend with. Because I argued back, I was labelled aggressive, a gender freak; I was excluded from the informal networks that my male peers enjoyed—with a few exceptions—and faced an antagonistic culture in the school at large. On one occasion a male colleague told me everything I did and wrote was ‘shit’. But I kept on pushing forward and I kept writing that same shit. Moreover, I had support, particularly from students and from Don. And there were always words of wisdom from my dad, who would advise: ‘Be patient, Patricia’. Irritating though I found that advice, I learned gradually the value of patience when under pressure. Often the best course of action when provoked was to do nothing.

But I became increasingly fed up with the back-stabbing and destructive mood at La Trobe and became an outspoken critic of university culture as the money for unlimited growth began to dry up. Students were not clamouring for admission and graduates were beginning to have difficulty in getting jobs. Questions were being asked about the kinds of courses being offered. One observer described universities as ‘an enormous island of privilege, populated in considerable measure by drones and parasites’.¹⁵ I shared this view.

While Dean Crittenden and his followers condemned the Media Centre courses for their irrelevance to teaching, the Centre continued to attract students and had high enrolment in courses. This support gave strength to my argument of relevance. I focused on writing as well as administration and spoke out publicly as I understood that a public profile would protect me and strengthen the Centre, both within the university and without. I published a book on my PhD research, *Children and Screen Violence*, and co-wrote

a provocative book with Hilary McPhee called *Media She* on the blatant sexual depiction of women in the media, attacking sexist media and advertising.¹⁶ This book included a section where two young men posed naked or semi-naked with captions usually reserved for women. *Media She* led to an appearance on *Monday Conference*, the ABC's pre-eminent public affairs program hosted by Robert Moore.

I took every opportunity that came my way to speak at conferences and on radio and television programs. Although no one in the university at that time would have considered me an intellectual—I was seen as an advocate—I was entrepreneurial and articulate; I appeared on radio, television and in newspapers and magazines. My students worked on research projects as part of their course work, resulting in reports on sexual stereotyping in situation comedies, on families without television and analysis of news content. All these reports attracted media attention and notice by critics both within and outside the university. Ronald Conway, in his book *Land of the Long Weekend*, referred to Don and me as 'those indefatigable empire-building socialists'.¹⁷ We were simply doing our jobs as effectively as we could.

One positive for me that came out of La Trobe was meeting Glenda Wilson, who became secretary to the Media Centre in 1974. She came for an interview and I said I needed someone who took shorthand. She replied, 'There goes the job!' and with that line (and respectable shorthand) she had the job. She made me laugh. Glenda became part of my world—my eyes, ears, memory, means of communication. She did so much for me for many years.

I thought the only way to get the critics off my back and to consolidate the work of the Media Centre was to progress up the academic ladder. On the basis of my published works, I applied for a readership. Although I was a prolific writer, there were no academically reputable media journals to publish in, except overseas, and I was interested in research and writing about Australian issues. My application divided the selection committee. Ronald Goldman, the inaugural dean, gave me his unqualified backing. Brian Crittenden was equally unqualified in his opposition to my promotion. My work was described as populist and lacking in intellectual rigour. What was my discipline? What was the body of knowledge? Where

did Communication Studies, or the study of film and television, fit in the university, where at that time it was near impossible to undertake interdisciplinary research? In the end the committee decided to make no appointment.

I was invited to tea with the vice-chancellor, John Scott, where he broke the news that my work was not up to scratch. As I had no plans to change what I was doing in order to jump through more academic hoops, I concluded I had no future in the university. It was time to focus outside and to leave the running of universities to those who had little interest in contemporary Australian media politics. I relinquished my position as chair of the Media Centre and got off all associated university committees. That decision was a good one all round as I had not been happy in the poisonous atmosphere of university politics. I was soon to pay a physical price for those years of conflict: they were not easy years.

I WAS IN THE UNITED STATES attending a research conference at Iowa University in 1976 when suddenly my voice broke up. That was odd, I thought, but soon it happened again. By the end of a week I could speak only in strangled, broken sounds. There was an epidemic of Swine flu in the US at that time and I did have mild flu symptoms, so Swine flu was the diagnosis. When my voice did not return after my flu symptoms disappeared, I was sent to a throat specialist who diagnosed nodules on my vocal chords. I was not to speak for six weeks.

After six weeks, I was pronounced cured. But my voice had not returned and the doctor at the La Trobe University Health Service decided my problem had to be psychological. I was sent to a psychiatrist, an irresponsible lunatic who decided my problem was that I didn't express my anger sufficiently and the cure would be to swallow as many pills as I could tolerate as an experiment in managing my emotional distress, which was by that stage considerable. This psychiatrist, who had a high public profile (and whom I was to investigate later and find had been responsible for manipulation of medical rebates and misdiagnosis of many other unfortunate patients) still enjoys a reputation of sorts. I struggled for two more years with prescribed medications to which I became addicted, gained weight

and felt thoroughly miserable. I knew my problem was not psychological but there were no obvious physical causes from a doctor's perspective. I retreated into writing, producing the manuscript for *The Politics of the Press*—an analysis of press reporting of politics, with a focus on their treatment of the 1975 election campaign and the sacking of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam—and editing another book, *The News in Focus*.¹⁸

Eventually a friend, a doctor whom I had known since we were students, intervened and sent me to Dr Gavin Andrews, a psychiatrist in Sydney. He took me through my story, escorted me outside, put me in a taxi and sent me directly to St Vincent's Hospital where I saw an ear, nose and throat specialist. This specialist told me I had had a vocal paralysis and that I must stop taking every drug I had been prescribed. He referred me to the speech clinic at St Vincent's and to an excellent speech therapist, Pam Davis, who introduced me to a series of exercises for this unnamed disorder. I saw her in Sydney each month when I went to council meetings at the Film School and during that time she told me of the research by Dr Hans Von Leden in Los Angeles who had a clientele of notable Hollywood personalities.

When I got the opportunity I travelled to LA to see Dr Von Leden, who was able, some two years after the symptoms appeared, to give me a name for my condition: spasmodic dysphonia. Katharine Hepburn suffered from the same disorder. While that did not make me feel happier, at least I could see that she could still function, even if she had a tremor. Dr Von Leden advised me that no matter how difficult it might be, I should not stop what I was doing. To help me, he referred me to a Los Angeles speech pathologist, Michael d'Asaro.

It was evident that one or two visits to a speech pathologist would not solve my speech problem. As I knew the communication research network from my days at Stanford, I was able to arrange a teaching position for a semester at the University of Iowa in 1980, where there was a large and prestigious speech department on the Iowa City campus. Mike d'Asaro made enquiries on my behalf and referred me to Dr Hughlett Morris, a professor of speech pathology and specialist in speech disorders. He was to give me regular speech therapy during my months at Iowa. I took off from Australia on sabbatical leave for

four months with my sixteen-year-old daughter Lesley, leaving Don and Sue at home. Lesley attended High School in Iowa City and was great company for me as I fought with Dr Hughlett Morris and his gloomy prognosis.

Hughlett Morris himself turned out to be a severe stutterer. It would take him ten minutes in a one-hour consultation to get out the words 'Good morning, how are you?'. His assessment of my condition was that I had neurological inco-ordination of the vocal chords and there was nothing I could do about it other than accept that I had a permanent disability; I should ease back on my commitments to reduce the stress in my life. I found this diagnosis unacceptable. Getting the voice started each day was the biggest problem; it was like cranking up a car. I taught my 8 a.m. classes by swigging an ounce of whisky beforehand. This wasn't easy to do, and it was very demoralising so early in the morning, but therapeutically it was the only effective medication I had. One day when I arrived for my regular, useless consultation, I was beckoned to follow Hughlett Morris—who didn't attempt to speak—down long corridors, until I found myself in front of a class, being introduced as a case study. I was enraged, lectured all present on the deplorable ethics of the medical profession, and stormed out.

I struggled through the semester until Don arrived with Sue in November. He met with Hughlett Morris and came from the meeting to tell me I probably had to accept my condition. I turned on him in emotional fury. I tried to reach Mike d'Asaro in Los Angeles and left him a tortured message on his answering machine, asking for help. When he returned my call, he said that if I could get to LA he would see me every day. Off I flew, leaving Don to pack up in Iowa with Sue and Lesley.

Mike d'Asaro worked with me every day I could be in Los Angeles, and we stay in contact to this day. Mike saved my sanity, teaching me techniques to use my voice and manage an incurable condition. For a week I walked to his clinic and returned to my room in the Holiday Inn in Westwood and practised, practised, practised. It was the week John Lennon was shot and everywhere I went the radio was playing his music. Gradually I learned to speak—not as I wished, but it would have to do. No conversation, certainly no public speech, would ever be easy.

I was the first person in Australia to be diagnosed with spasmodic dysphonia, a rare but highly debilitating vocal handicap. St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney became a centre for the treatment of this neurological disorder because, following my diagnosis, a distinguished doctor at the hospital fell victim. A support group was established and I became patron.

Some years later, I dealt out a small measure of pay-back to the incompetent psychiatrist responsible for stuffing me full of drugs. One day I was having lunch in a campus restaurant with Malcolm Lovegrove—acting dean at the La Trobe School of Education and someone with whom I had a great deal of affinity. I spotted Dr X lunching with the head of the School of Behavioural Sciences, Professor George Singer. I said, 'Malcolm, see that man, I am going to tell him what I think of him'. With a grin all over his face Malcolm seized the bottle of wine from our table. We advanced and sat down uninvited. I proceeded to tell the psychiatrist, with George looking stunned, what I thought of his medical incompetence, poor ethics and the trauma he had put me through by his dogmatic assertion of 'correct' diagnosis over two years. Malcolm knew how important this encounter was to me. His support—and being able to express, to this man's face, my opinion of my treatment at his hands, on public ground—gave me much satisfaction. George Singer and I remained on good terms, and I never asked him what he thought of that altercation. The psychiatrist just went red in the face and sat there.

The effect of this disease on my life has been profound. It is difficult to explain how loss of speech can transform your personality as completely as this did. I could no longer be the same person. The ways by which I had learned to interact with people, to present myself and to fight for what I believed were changed forever. Every word was a struggle. There is an exhausting mental and physical process that goes on in the brain and in the body as you search for the words that will convey what you want to say in the most easy and economical way and you fight your body to get them out. It is difficult to control volume and pitch and this is disconcerting for a listener. Because of the effort involved you can't convey the subtleties everyone takes for granted in speech and communication—the friendly or the assertive tone. On the telephone I would not pursue

the usual pleasantries, so I would appear unfriendly. My personality changed. I appeared to be, and was, a much more serious person.

Of course I spoke much less. The articulate, confident young woman was gone, replaced by a more stolid, severe individual. I was forced to sit in meetings just looking at people and speaking minimally. Socially my husband Don did the talking and, while I struggled to come to grips with managing the disability, he gave the public presentations I was asked to do. I didn't explain to people as I didn't know what I was explaining. It was simply said that I had laryngitis. As this continued with no recovery, some people thought I must have throat cancer or that I had suffered a nervous breakdown. I just kept plugging on. My genes, despite their flaws, provided me with determination and resilience from somewhere.

While I worried that I would appear nervous and incompetent, I discovered that people were unnerved by my silence, which gave an opposite impression to the insecurity and distress I felt. I spoke with a flat, slow, concise vocal style. As years went by and I continued the struggle to function, I began to get a reputation as formidable. My height, at 172 centimetres, my demeanour and my continued outspoken comments earned me the description 'tough'. Phillip Adams, in an interview on Channel 9's *Sunday* program, once described me as a tank. He was being complimentary. He also wrote in the *Australian* that I had 'a voice like a buzz-saw cutting through iron bark', a comment that, while colourful, upset me.

My battle with spasmodic dysphonia (SD) has been a continuing part of my life. Nothing I have ever encountered since the onset of SD—no abuse, conflict, disappointment, disease—has equalled the effort it took to come to terms with my vocal disability, and only the evidence of the neurological defect in both my daughters has upset me more. It is a rare disorder about which the public at large knows nothing and hears nothing.¹⁹

Its relevance to this story is that its effects took away a number of options I might have pursued at the time I was afflicted; I opted for what I thought would be a quieter life with a lower public profile. I had no career ambitions, no plan for my future. The trouble was: I could never contain the drive. I had to try to bring about change in whatever area I was working in. I enjoyed all aspects of the media—production, research, policy, and advocacy. Handicapped I may

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have been, but trouble continued to find me and I met it head-on. By the time I began my career in children's television I had been toughened by university politics and shaken by two traumatic and rare physical disorders. I had withstood aggressive personal attack and found strong support from good friends along the way. Most importantly, for me, I had a stable, loving family and I had a belief in the ability of an individual to make change.

2

Getting into Television

'The medium is the message.'

—Marshall McLuhan

AS A CHILD I LOVED bedtime stories and my father was a good storyteller. Most nights he would tuck his three girls in with a story he made up. Those stories lived on in my imagination. As I learnt to read I became an avid fan of fiction, and Enid Blyton was my favourite writer. When I was a little older I was given a small weekly allowance and bought comics, *True Confession* magazines and vinyl 78 RPM records; I was allowed to listen to *The Top Ten*, a weekly radio program on popular music. I was a consumer of popular culture. Through my passion for films, I had an occasional exciting glimpse on screen of American television. By the time the new medium was introduced in Australia, I was studying at the University of Melbourne and preoccupied with student life, so I saw television rarely—in shop windows in passing—although I would still go to ‘the pictures’ whenever I could.

Don and I acquired a television set after we married but, with teaching, studying and renovating our house, we watched little more

than the news. When I became pregnant and was required by the Education Department to stop teaching at three months—in case my stomach might show—I had more time at home and watched daytime television and enjoyed it. Most people we knew felt guilty about watching television and would not confess to the hours they viewed or what they were watching—teachers in particular would only admit to watching programs on the ABC. I had no such guilt and I could see no harm in our children watching TV when the time came.

But it was not a priority for them. In bushy Greensborough where we lived, we were surrounded by young families and there were always friends to play with. When we moved to California, the children were aged four and two, and we lived in a student housing complex with twenty-four families in units that backed onto a rectangular closed-in yard. After breakfast each morning, they always wanted to go outside to play. The weather was good for most of the year in Palo Alto, and it was an ideal place to rear children. When we shifted to Chicago in 1968 we lived in an apartment block and the weather meant more indoor living but television was never a big feature of the children's lives; again, there were other children to play with.

My only rules about television for Sue and Lesley were that they could watch whatever they wanted but they had to go to bed at a set time and when the news came on Don and I took over the set. My year in the Masters program at Stanford studying communication research convinced me there was no evidence available to justify concern about the harmful effect of the television children were watching, certainly not at the time of day and for the number of hours my children were in front of the set. As Marshall McLuhan wrote, the medium was the message. In my opinion he correctly saw the changes that television was bringing but social science researchers, with their focus on asking questions that demanded simple responses, focused too narrowly on content, not lifestyle, where the real social revolution was taking place.

When we returned to Australia at the end of 1969, Sue and Lesley developed a pattern of viewing: they would come home from school and when their favourite sitcoms were coming on they would prepare their favourite snacks and sit down to watch. They remember as much about what they ate as what they viewed. Sue packed a glass of milk with Milo. Lesley would get the Kraft cheese

and potato peeler, to slice off thin slices which she would arrange and eat steadily.

Their attitudes to television fed into my research at La Trobe University and into my PhD thesis on television violence. Lesley could not stand to see an animal hurt. I simply cautioned the girls to turn off programs they did not enjoy. Now she says her most traumatic memory of the television she watched as a young child was seeing a mother cutting off all her daughter's long hair as punishment because she had been naughty—Lesley had long blonde hair. Sue remembers seeing Injun Joe in *Huck Finn* and was frightened he would come into her bedroom to get her. There was one occasion on a wet Sunday afternoon when Sue came to me to say she had turned off the television because she did not want to upset Lesley. They had been watching a medieval-style feature film and a character had forced his thumbs into the eyes of a victim and pulled out his eyeballs. She has never forgotten that image, although her sister has no memory of it. Her response was just what it should have been—she turned off the set and came and told me about it.

I never saw television as a threat but as a wonderful medium with much to offer. I turned my attention to television as a medium for analysis only when I began to set up the Centre for the Study of Media and Communication. My academic interests were much wider than children's programming. I believed television could be used as a resource in education and that Australia was lagging behind the rest of the Western world in its use: the UK and Europe had solid, well-financed public broadcasting systems and the US was alive with debate about the use of television for children with the emergence of *Sesame Street*. At La Trobe, as the first chair of the Centre for the Study of Educational Media and Communication, I had found a job that interested me and I was on notice from the dean that I had to demonstrate quickly what I had to offer. I was interested in media and its impact on society, in film as cultural expression and in the production process. The expectation in a School of Education was that I would be introducing courses on instructional media, in which I had no interest. From an academic perspective, I began to look at television with a more discerning eye.

Children's television in Australia began with promise. Programming was driven by the industry's need to sell television sets. One of

the ploys used by the marketeers was to present television as entertainment; not only for the family to enjoy together but as entertainment for adults when the kids had gone to bed and a treat for children with their own programs to view. Some fine, live, studio-based children's programs were produced: *The Magic Circle Club*, *Adventure Island*, *Mr Squiggle*. Yet once television services penetrated most households—with Australians adopting television with relish—the stations understood they did not need to produce children's programs to get a viewing audience. Children watched anything. So the after-school schedule played reruns of imported American shows: *Gilligan's Island*, *The Flying Nun*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *The Brady Bunch*, *My Three Sons*, *Mr Ed*, *McHale's Navy*, *Hogan's Heroes*, *Bachelor Father*, *Nanny and the Professor*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *The Partridge Family*. These were the shows my children watched. Produced in the United States as popular family entertainment, they became fodder for the Australian networks for the afternoon slot, with some rerun as many as fifteen times. Station management in Australia thought this a great arrangement: they had an unlimited supply of cheap programs they could recycle with no thought or effort and no one called them to account for their complacency. Australian children were enjoying none of their own stories, and television was offering them little that would inform their development—for all the time they spent in front of the set—other than a dated view of American stereotypes. Australian television was not about Australia and for children it had become a cultural wasteland.

There was, of course, a history of public concern expressed by parents, activists and educationists in Australia about children's television programs—the harm they might do to children and the potential wasted if television did not provide positive programs. The Royal Commission on Television in 1953, before television's introduction, expressed a need for firm regulation of licensees. Between 1953 and 1975, three major committees set up to advise the Australian Broadcasting Control Board (ABCB) recommended regulation. In 1971, the ABCB introduced a minimum children's program quota of four hours per station every twenty-eight days—a very modest requirement—and set up a further committee to develop guidelines for these programs.²⁰

The incentive schemes and quotas devised had little positive

effect. Quota programs were unimaginative, produced on low budgets and not specifically designed for children. The ABCB was slow to act, tentative in its judgements and aligned with the commercial television industry. There were few public interest bodies in existence to rock the boat and Board staff had contact with broadcasting industry employees on a daily basis. The ABCB was a reluctant regulator, faithfully fulfilling the function of commercial radio and television's de-facto protector for nearly two decades.²¹

The Board did not use licensing sanctions against commercial stations, although it had that power, and it failed to stimulate Australian production generally, with children's television seen as the major area of neglect. Bruce Gyngell, in evidence to a Senate Standing Committee 1972 Inquiry into Broadcasting and Television, described the Board as the industry typically viewed it during the first fifteen years: 'I was never really concerned about the Control Board. It was like God and religion. It was there and you had to put up with it'.²²

IN DECEMBER 1972, Gough Whitlam's Labor government was elected and Australia experienced radical change. Many public interest groups suddenly discovered responsive ears in Canberra; for the first time they enjoyed the opportunity to influence developments. Public broadcasting was on the agenda and the Film and Television Board of the Australia Council gave a grant to enable the establishment of the Public Broadcasting Association of Australia (PBAA). A Department of the Media was created to do the detailed planning for a major shift in broadcasting policy direction to allow for a range of public broadcasters—education, music, ethnic and community radio. For two years, Doug McClelland, Whitlam's first Minister for the Media, made little progress. The Minister formally exercised station licensing power, but on advice from the ABCB. Only that Board—the reluctant regulator—could make new regulations. The relations between the reformist Minister and his department and the conservative ABCB, sympathetic to the commercial status quo, became hostile and few initiatives were implemented.

In a Cabinet reshuffle on 6 June 1975, Dr Moss Cass became the Minister for the Media and the commercial television and radio

stations were very unhappy. Before his election to parliament, Dr Cass was a medical practitioner and research fellow in experimental surgery at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne; he first served Whitlam as Minister for the Environment and Conservation, a new and difficult portfolio to administer, but Cass was a reformer who set about his agenda with conviction and energy. Dr Geoff Evans, Secretary to the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Science and the Arts, became principal private secretary to Cass in 1974 and moved with him across to the media portfolio. Evans had written a paper demonstrating how the FM band could be used to license experimental stations, circumventing the role of the ABCB. Cass was very keen to reform broadcasting quickly and instructed Evans, 'Let's get on with it'. As a result, two music broadcasting societies in New South Wales and Victoria were licensed. Cass also asked Evans to give him a list of twelve educational stations to license. They chose educational licences first as the least provocative to the commercial industry—'they couldn't be seen to be giving a licence to every radical group of bomb-throwers around the country', but from the perspective of the commercial broadcasting industry that is exactly what they were doing.²³

The broadcast media lashed out at the government, claiming that its moves to change the broadcasting structure in Australia were 'frightening ... directed against the principle of press freedom in both radio and television'. And the introduction of community radio was 'amateurish, ill-considered and unplanned tinkering'.²⁴ Cass threatened the media establishment on every level. He made no secret of his view that the ABCB had grown to think more like the industry it was required to regulate than the public whose interest it was required to protect. The Minister planned to change the membership of the Board and its culture so it would be more open to broadcasting reform. Appointments to the Board were his to make and two positions were coming up.

Geoff Evans had originally worked as a CSIRO scientist, and he was an innovative thinker and an astute and forceful advocate. Cass decided Evans should be appointed a full-time member of the ABCB. The Minister and Evans looked around for someone else likely to support a reform agenda to fill the second, part-time position. It was 1975, International Women's Year, so they wanted a woman but

someone who would not look like a token appointment, who had experience with the media; they identified me. I had no affiliation with the ALP and had no interest in membership of any political party. I had joined the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) in 1974 but was not an active participant. I was an academic with a public profile and I had recently been appointed by the ABCB itself, to chair its Advisory Committee on Program Standards.²⁵

The chairman, Myles Wright, had a year to run with his appointment and if the Minister had his way Geoff Evans would take over that role. Two new appointments to a five-member board—one known as a fiery ministerial adviser, the other as outspoken commentator on media issues and a woman at that, and both regarded as from the Left—was something the ABCB and the broadcasting industry had not had to contend with before.

The industry bodies were almost hysterical. Des Foster, federal director of FARB, the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters, told the Melbourne Rotary Club:

The ABCB, the Department of the Media, and the Australian Broadcasting Commission have all been stacked by people whose political sympathies or affiliations were obvious, even to the casual observer. The cronyism and the cynicism in some of these appointments has made a mockery of the notion of independence and must be embarrassing to the bodies concerned.²⁶

Certainly Geoff Evans and I were not welcomed at the ABCB. At our first board meeting, the chairman said that in his experience the best way to proceed was to behave as if nothing had happened when new members appeared: we should ask questions if we didn't understand any matter. That was our entire briefing. It was general practice that at each meeting a group of licences were renewed. When we reached this item we witnessed the Board's rubber-stamp renewal procedure. I asked several questions, astonished at the cursory glance each station was given at licence renewal time. In essence, economic viability was the only issue. If they were doing badly, the argument was, 'We can't deprive the viewers of a service'; if they were doing well, 'We haven't got the power to require different or better programming'.

MY APPOINTMENT to the ABCB in late October 1975 was part of a broader pattern. Officially, Australia was beginning to recognise the changes in the status of women occurring in the Western world as a result of the Women's Liberation movement. On 26 August 1970, tens of thousands of women had marched down New York's Fifth Avenue on the fiftieth anniversary of women's suffrage in the US. They demanded equal protection under the law, admission to the top schools, an end to discrimination in the workplace. The event was a media sensation, and a far-reaching grassroots movement gathered momentum.²⁷

I had been catapulted into the midst of the protest movement when we went to the United States to study at Stanford University. Stanford was south of San Francisco's Haight Ashbury, where flower power was at its height. Vietnam War protesters, black power radicals and feminists mixed and vocal campus radicals had an impact on government policy. Women were swelling the ranks of government-appointed bodies and affirmative action became accepted policy. In Australia, WEL was putting political candidates on the spot and challenging their attitudes to women.

In this environment the Whitlam Government became a major force for change. Women were appointed to posts they had not occupied before and to committees where they had not been represented. The Prime Minister appointed his own adviser on Women's Affairs, such a novel idea to the news media that competition for the post was treated as a pageant, with scores of women vying for the position (which went to Elizabeth Reid).

During International Women's Year I was frequently invited to speak about women in the media. And that was how the conservative ABCB first came to offer me a role. I had been asked to address FACTS, the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations, about daytime television programs. I put a lot of time and thought into the presentation; there were lots of ideas and laughs in the talk, and it was a great success. Jack Quaine, the ABCB's director of program services, was in the audience. Soon after, FACTS held a private conference, closed to the press, to which they invited chosen critics—Professor Henry Mayer, Phillip Adams, ACTAC (Australian Children's Television Action Committee) and me. During a presentation on the effects of violence, there was a discussion between

Henry, ACTAC and me on the research evidence, and I argued that ACTAC was overstating its case. They condemned every aggressive action equally, whether the Road Runner was being squashed or an act of murder was being portrayed in a realistic way. The FACTS' representatives seemed to assume that I was on the industry's side. Later that day, I was approached by Jack Quaine, who told me that the ABCB was considering forming a committee to revise the program standards for radio and TV. 'We have been considering you as a member, but feel perhaps you are too closely identified with the women's movement to be objective.' I replied simply, 'You'll have to work that out for yourself, won't you?'

A short time later I received an invitation to become a member of the Board's Advisory Committee on Program Standards. I accepted, and was formally appointed on 2 September 1975. At its first meeting, the members elected me to chair the committee. During lunch the first day, Jack Quaine whispered in my ear: he didn't know how I managed to do it, but I seemed to have a foot in both camps; FACTS approved of the appointment and so did some of the media critics. He offered me advice on how such a committee normally functioned and suggested I place the members in small groups to work on points and have them report back. In that way, he said, the job could be done quickly and efficiently. I thought, if I am to be responsible for this report, I intend to take charge and I determined the committee would work as a united group.

Dr Cass was openly contemptuous of the Board's archaic program standards and made headlines denouncing them. Having had years to take some action, the Board suddenly wanted a quick report on the matter; Quaine had suggested a deadline within two months of our appointment. When it became clear that there would be no quick report, and that when it came it might be controversial, Quaine made sure he didn't miss a meeting. The committee was advisory to the Board and as such it should have been free to offer independent advice, but the director of program services argued points repeatedly during our meetings.

The committee's terms of reference were to undertake a general review of the objectives towards which programming standards should be directed, having regard to community standards, to the social influence of the broadcast media, and to the Board's responsibilities

as set out in the legislation. I had scant idea of the controversy I was getting into.

This was to be the first thorough review of Australian television standards generally, and even the meaning of the terms of reference was disputed. Quaine regarded matters related to advertising, children's quota, Australian content and the economics of the industry—just about everything of importance—as unrelated. He considered that program standards related to specific instances of program content like swearing and other matters of social taste. The committee disagreed and proceeded to discuss all issues. But we were given no information to assist us. Only when I was appointed to the ABCB itself did I become aware of the extent of the useful information that had been withheld by the Board.

But less than two weeks after my appointment to the full Board of the ABCB, the nation's political course was changed dramatically. On 11 November 1975, the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, sacked Gough Whitlam's government, and Malcolm Fraser's Coalition government was confirmed in office in general elections in December. Like many others, I found my own future cast into doubt by these events. By 20 January 1976, the Festival of Light was calling for my disqualification as chairperson of the 'Standards Revision Committee' in a telex to Canberra. 'Respectfully request urgent suspension Federal radio/television Standards Revision Committee appointed under Dr. Cass STOP Public statements Dr Patricia Edgar disqualify her as impartial chairperson.—Rev. Fred Nile, Festival of Light.' I pasted a copy of Nile's telex (addressed to the new Minister, Hon. RV Garland) on my study wall, with some pride that I had deserved such attention at that turbulent time.

With the election of a conservative government, the Board didn't seem nearly so interested in a quick report on program Standards—they didn't seem interested in a report at all, and the advisory committee to the Board was named specifically by the Fraser Government as one of the many committees to be terminated by the end of February 1976. The advisory committee had scarcely put pen to paper and we had three weeks to meet the deadline; but write the report in three weeks we did. The project officer assigned to the committee was a thoughtful and tenacious public servant, Ursula Callus, who had a particular interest in children's programming and

had been collecting a library of good-quality children's programs from overseas, predominantly from the United Kingdom.²⁸ We also had a strong team on the committee, notably in Frank Meaney, Inspector of Schools in New South Wales.²⁹

Frank and I forged a strong friendship and partnership. He was a balding, solidly built and softly spoken man, an enthusiastic reformer who believed we could bring about change. He loved to debate ideas and argue them through, and he could be as blunt and direct as I was. He would listen to an argument but he was not easily moved from his beliefs, which were always well reasoned. He was highly principled, with a philosophical view based on Catholicism, a belief in hard work and due process. He came from the bush, as I did, and had grown up in a large, poor family at Wardell near Lismore. With the help of bursaries he became a teacher, starting out in one-teacher schools. He worked his way up to the level of inspector and became a public servant in the true sense of the term. He understood the bureaucracy and how to work within it. I always understood where Frank would be coming from in any debate and we shared a common set of values about many issues, including children and education.

At the committee's final meeting when we went through the final draft, Quaine argued that such a report would make fools of us all, that we had gone outside our terms of reference, and that in giving this advice he was only attempting to protect the members from ridicule. But the report was sent, intact, to the next ABCB meeting. Chairman Myles Wright was not happy. It was released publicly, after much debate, with a letter from him stating the Board had considered not releasing it at all. When the report hit the press it was front page news throughout the country.³⁰

The political events of the previous three years had been momentous. I believed children's television was the area where the industry was most vulnerable and might be one fight that could be won. I still thought politicians and administrators were meant to work for justice and the betterment of all. It was an attitude of mine that was hard to shake.

The recommendations called for the revocation of one television licence each in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide; public licence renewal hearings every three years; a permanent program standards advisory committee, and an investigation into the

structure of radio and television in Australia. In relation to children, the report called for specified hours for classified children's programs which were specifically designed for them; government subsidy of production; a restriction on repeats of programs; no advertisements to be shown during children's viewing. An advisory committee should be given the power to assess programs before their going to air and have the power to withdraw quota approval. Each station's performance in this area was to be examined at the time of licence renewal. This set of recommendations was to become a blueprint for the reform of broadcasting standards and the origin of my reputation as a dangerous rabble-rousing stirrer who was an enemy of the broadcasting industry.

The leading recommendation to abolish one network, a station in each of the capital cities, was the most provocative. It was a logical conclusion to reach given the industry's own complaints, even though it would be politically impossible to achieve. The US, with a population of two hundred million people, had three networks. Australia had seventeen million people only, and the same number of television networks. The industry networks complained that they could not afford to pay for the Australian programming required under Australian content regulations because advertising revenue in a country the size of Australia was too low. The industry had also been arguing, on the eve of the introduction of colour to Australian television, that they should be relieved of their Australian content quotas because, with the cost of the technology upgrade from black and white transmission, there was not enough money in the advertising kitty to pay for the programming required.

The industry was always crying wolf. Two years earlier it had argued that a ban on cigarette advertising would have a disastrous effect on broadcasting revenue and cause severe unemployment. They were happy to be bag-men, buying cheap programs from overseas and transmitting them for profit, and they wanted no change in this arrangement. They lobbied hard. Of course, colour television proved to be a bonanza for the industry—the audience could not get enough of it. The committee argued for fewer television hours, but of a higher quality, with more Australian production. If the industry couldn't afford Australian production we should shrink the demand

on the advertising pie by revoking a licence in each capital city and abolishing one network.

The industry—except in Perth which had only two stations and feared the introduction of a third licence—reacted with outrage. Such contentious recommendations were coming from an advisory committee only, sent to a regulatory body that the new Fraser Government had indicated would be reformed, yet the report received much coverage from a press relishing a good fight, especially when its electronic competitors were targeted. Channel 0 (now Network Ten) felt the most pressure from the report. It was the latest entrant to the market and had never met the promises made when its licences were granted. Reg Ansett, the managing director, appeared on television to condemn the advisory committee and its chairperson as incompetent. Quaine was correct in his predictions: I was ridiculed, mocked and abused. Hal Todd, a former television personality who had slumped in the ratings following a scandal about his personal affairs and who had been assigned to fill a programming black hole in the middle of the night on Channel 0, spoke at length about our proposals to his viewers, describing me on air as ‘a Doctor of clothes pegs who didn’t know which end she was talking out of’.

Unfortunately for Hal Todd, one of the La Trobe Sociology staff couldn’t sleep that night and reported the comments to my husband next day. I was fired up and decided to have some fun as a result of this verbal abuse. I visited Channel 0 Melbourne with our friend from the Legal Studies Department, Jeff Fitzgerald, to confront my accuser. We met with Hal Todd, along with station management, and the offending tape was played. Todd leapt to his feet, apologising to me profusely. Jeff and I, poker-faced, left the room to consider our response. Jeff said the comment was defamatory but I wasn’t interested in achieving any more than an apology (and a laugh when we left), so we returned to the office and, to the relief of management and Hal Todd, I accepted the apology. I was a member of the industry’s regulatory body and this was a report they had released for consideration, however grudgingly, and I was ready for a fight, not yet aware how serious and sustained such attacks could become and how they damaged serious debate. I had no idea I would continue to be involved in the broadcasting industry and thought that turning in the report was the end of a chapter. As well, because of my exposure

to university politics, which I found exceedingly destructive and dirty, this attack came as no surprise to me: I was more amused than offended.

The committee had achieved its purpose, leaving a well-reasoned report that addressed the major issues in broadcasting of the day and a blueprint for the reform of children's television services. Philosophically we had taken the view, as licensees of a limited public resource, that stations have the ultimate responsibility for providing adequate programs for all sections of the community. The statutory body regulating broadcasting, the ABCB, had the responsibility of ensuring that stations did their job. The ABCB, unlike England's Independent Broadcasting Authority, did not own transmitters or contract out for programs and this structure limited its power. However, in the children's program arena, the Board could pressure stations and determine children's standards as a condition of a licence. But with their rubber-stamp approach to licence renewal, such action had never been considered.

The report also proposed a change of process for the issue of a licence and the evaluation of station performance—which, instead of operating behind closed doors, would be public, with public involvement in the process.

The Board had always defended its inaction by arguing that the legislation was not clear but it made no attempt to redefine its standards with clarity or to test the legislation in court to ensure that stations adhered to the spirit of the requirements. Alongside an indifferent statutory body, successive governments had failed to strengthen the legislation or insert new legislation directly applicable to children's programs; faced with this inertia administratively, individual stations made no effort for children. The advisory committee's report was the first attempt anywhere in the world to design a system of regulation to improve the production of children's programs. I expected our design to remain on the shelf gathering dust but felt satisfaction at its completion. All the members did—there was no dissent.

THERE MAY HAVE been a new government in Canberra, but life at the ABCB had to go on. The culture I encountered as a member of the Board was as I imagined the Melbourne Club to be. Each morning

members would gather at an appointed time for tea, which was served in a silver pot by the chairman. It was civilised and quaint, unlike university life. Conversation was stilted, partly because of the presence of Geoff and myself and the ABCB's uncertain future. The staff member who brought in the tea seemed more like a footman than a bureaucrat. Meanwhile the broadcasting industry lobbyists were camped in Canberra working hard to get rid of the ABCB.

It was a full year, however, before the ABCB was abolished. The twelve public broadcasting licences that Dr Cass had recommended would not be issued. There were minor ripples in the morals debate about which material it was appropriate for the public to see and hear. In 1974, broadcaster Mary Hardy had been suspended by the ABCB for accidentally using the word *fuck* on live television and in early 1975 she was forced by the ABCB to apologise before she was reinstated at Channel 7.³¹ Graham Kennedy tested the ABCB further with his famous crow call 'faaark' and he was banned from performing live.

Claudia Wright, an outspoken radio personality at 3AW, decided to test the views of the new Board members by quoting—from Anne Summers' book *Damned Whores and God's Police*—the infamous word.³² Jack Quaine swept into a Board meeting with the recorded segment. We argued, but decided not to penalise the station—it was just a provocation.

For the first time, the ABCB approved the promotion of women's sanitary products in television advertising, but the ads allowed were euphemistic and confusing, prompting jokes—'I have been using your product for some months but I still cannot swim or ride a horse'.

My main role as an ABCB member was to attend monthly meetings. When Jim Kellam—a Fraser Government part-time appointee—joined the Board in early 1976, I discovered (through the official welcome given to Mr Kellam) that there were certain perks associated with the job. My phone rental could be paid; I was entitled to a television set; and I had access to a filing cabinet, later an office. I hadn't been important enough to be told. For me, a more pressing matter was solving the question of how to get items on the agenda.

I had a major interest in the program services division—the research the Board did, its library services, the nature of complaints.

I wanted to put together a paper to argue a case for some type of broadcast information office. I was told by the chairman that I should go through ‘the proper channels’—the Board’s officers. A paper could not reach the Board table without going through the head of a division—in this case, Jack Quaine. Despite a number of attempts, I never did succeed in getting such a paper to the Board. I learnt that junior ABCB staff got no feedback from Board meetings—staff who wrote agenda items never knew their fate. There was competition between divisions, one section did not know what another section was doing and the chairman held the reins very firmly. The staff had been trained over a long period to react with caution, to initiate nothing and to respond only to the government of the day. As the Coalition government didn’t want to know this Board, we were ignored. FACTS and FARB had done their lobbying well and the whole Board knew it was just a matter of time before we were to be abolished.

During that year, 1976, Geoff Evans (not the staff) did the thinking and the writing of policy. As director of program services, Jack Quaine was unhappy about this but, experienced bureaucrat that he was, he bided his time. Previously, under the chairmanship of Myles Wright, there had been no dispute; amiable consensus had been his style, but Geoff introduced ideas and debate. He was an articulate, forceful personality with a command of argument and he produced documents that would become a useful reference for public advocates over the next decade. After long discussion and pressure, they were released in the dying days of the ABCB.

On 23 December, I received a Christmas present—a telegram from Eric Robinson, Minister for Post and Telecommunications, dispensing with my services as an ABCB member. One hour later, Bruce Gyngeell was announced as the chairman of a new Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT) to replace the ABCB. With that telegram, my short career in broadcasting policy was over. The Board was abolished without making any decision on the form new standards would take.

ALL IN ALL, 1976 was a difficult year. The ABCB spluttered on to its inevitable extinction. My voice fell apart. And at La Trobe, the Media

Centre was fragmenting as egos clashed, with Cinema Studies going into the Humanities Department. Dean Crittenden was so pleased. John Flaus had left to teach at the New South Wales Film and Television School, where he had aspirations to become the resident guru, and I missed him. I continued teaching my courses and working with mature-age students, experienced journalists who were admitted to the postgraduate degree program in the Media Centre on the basis of their work experience rather than an undergraduate degree. These very bright students helped keep up my spirit.

I had received three research grants which enabled me to extend my interests, two of which resulted in the publications *The Politics of the Press* and *The News in Focus*. I also secured funds from Channel 9, Perth, to undertake a study of children's program viewing preferences with Ursula Callus (formerly of the ABCB) to test children's responses to her library of hand-picked quality programs from around the world; and I obtained a large grant from the Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra, to undertake a study of children's visual learning with Winston Thomas. Winston, a mature-age student, was a teacher of art and design at a tertiary college. We were both interested in visual language. In child development, the teaching of language and numbers was always regarded as essential and a means for teachers to measure progress; art was regarded as ornamental and inessential, intuitive and unsystematic. Teachers and parents had no idea how to value anything visual, and the concept of visual language was new. Winston and I were trying to develop children's cognitive growth through a structured visual learning project and to investigate the possible effect of a systematic approach to visual perceptual learning on a child's performance in all other areas. It was pioneering work. We had not then heard of Howard Gardner and the theory of multiple intelligences.³³

These years, 1976–79, were productive, although painful and frustrating for me personally as I struggled without success to find my voice. They gave me a short time away from the political lime-light; I was able to exercise my mind, immerse myself in new areas of learning and spend more time at home while writing. Don had become chairman of the Country Education Project in Victoria, a project funded by the Schools Commission, aimed at using community resources to remove the disadvantages of isolation suffered

by many rural students. On top of his normal teaching and research load as Reader in Sociology, this involved setting up area committees, fighting the bureaucracy and bringing together schools from different systems and parents from small towns. He travelled widely throughout the state as he threw himself into a project of reform that continued long after its funding ran out.

We were both incurable idealists and work machines who believed if we worked hard enough we could change the world; we never stopped. Don always woke first. As soon as his eyes opened he was alert. I was slower to get started and he would always make a cup of tea in the morning so I could wake up properly and get out of bed. Sue and Lesley were at High School by this stage, and they were both responsible girls who gave us little trouble. We had someone to clean the house and I used the crock-pot a lot—not our daughters' favourite meal. People would often remark that Don and I must rarely see one another, and the girls would regularly hear the comment, 'Your parents must never be home', but that was not the case. We were both well organised; planned our diaries to make sure the children were looked after; and, outside work, the family was our focus. We worked on school committees, Don enjoyed gardening as a mental break, we took the kids with us when we travelled overseas on most occasions, returning to the US often and spending two months in Paris when Don attended an OECD conference connected with the Country Education Project. Once, in 1976, we left the children with my sister and her family for four weeks while we travelled to China when that country first opened its doors. We were part of a group of Australian educators on a mission that Ronald Goldman had organised.

Don and I talked incessantly to one another about what we were doing, sharing ideas, critiquing one another's work and management strategies, and supporting one another. We would sit in the evening, taking turns as we went through the events of the day and the problems we were having. Invariably, we found a way forward. Don was an excellent father and husband, very involved with his children and very supportive of everything they did and I did, though both girls vowed as they grew older that they would never be involved in university politics.

3

Enter Bruce Gyngell

'Television did not begin on the 16th of September 1956, much as though I'd professed and claimed it. The first broadcast of a 30-line Baird system was conducted between engineers on Radio 3DB and Radio 3UZ in 1928. The first face on television was the studio cat.'

—Bruce Gyngell³⁴

THE BROADCASTING INDUSTRY thought all its Christmases had come at once when the Fraser Government announced that the ABCB would be abolished and Bruce Gyngell, an industry hero, would be appointed to chair the new Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. Gyngell, it was rumoured, had been hand-picked for the job by the Prime Minister and Kerry Packer.³⁵

There was nobody else in Australia quite like Bruce Gyngell. He was the first face to appear on Australian network television, when Channel 9 launched on 16 September 1956 and, throughout his colourful career after that, everywhere he went he attracted attention. He wore pink shirts, jogged sixteen kilometres a day, promoted

a macrobiotic diet and liked people. He was uninhibited and would make off-the-cuff comments that would often provoke and raise eyebrows. Yet he counted Margaret Thatcher among his friends and earned support from the UK moral crusader Mary Whitehouse for his stand against sexually explicit material on television. As head of Yorkshire Tyne Tees Television in the late 1990s, he took the late-night show *The Good Sex Guide* off air, declaring: 'I do not want to be sitting there with my children and my mother suddenly watching penile implants or vaginal reconstruction surgery'.³⁶

The first time Gyngell saw television, he was standing in Frank Packer's New York office and flicking through the channels. 'This is me,' he said, knowing straight away. It was the early 1950s and the Australian press baron had sent Gyngell overseas to study television in the United States and the UK. Back in Australia, Gyngell read every television magazine flown in from round the world, studying the schedules and analysing what programs worked and didn't work. He believed the secret of success was to develop a relationship with viewers based on common courtesy. 'Look people in the eye ... do good close-ups. Be warm, friendly, understanding.' Part of this friendship with the audience was based on the recognition that there were standards of behaviour that were expected. You did not exploit your audience, you did not offend. As head of programming for Packer's Nine network he led the network to number one, where it remained until after Gyngell had a temporary falling-out with Sir Frank. He then led the Seven network to the top of the ratings for the first time in its history.

Bruce Gyngell loved television and he lived and breathed its culture. He understood the medium but he did not understand the bureaucracy. When the government appointed Gyngell to run the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal they did not understand his personality, nor the particular dynamics involved in the position at a time when public expectations about involvement in broadcasting had been raised. It was a short-sighted decision which both they and the industry would come to regret.

His first task as chairman was to undertake an inquiry into the concept of self-regulation for broadcasters and the formulation and administration of program and advertising standards—precisely the task that the ABCB had abdicated. The industry was confident of

the outcome. Among other things, they expected my 1976 advisory committee report to be ignored. But due to media coverage of the industry's outraged response, awareness of the report was high among public activists in broadcasting who might appear before the tribunal. It is always easier to endorse a plan already thought through and on paper than to come up with a new one, and the advisory committee's report was mentioned frequently at the inquiry. Bruce Gyngell kept hearing my name as witnesses drew on recommendations from the Edgar Report to suggest a path forward for children's programming and Australian content on television.

Gyngell had already commented on the report before his appointment to the tribunal: 'One has to applaud the energy and enthusiasm of the committee, but it really does smell of rank amateurism ... lack of awareness of the realities of life ... naïve idealistic intellectualism'. He was also on the record as a great believer in self-regulation, the system under which the industry makes up its own rules and administers them—'I don't believe in a local content quota or points system or anything like that, I'd rather have handshake agreements than a long list of clauses and sub-sections ... You can't have so many hours of compulsory drama. If you turn out things like a sausage factory, all you get is sausages'.³⁷

Despite the media interest in the question of programming standards and children's television, and opening up the regulatory system to allow for public intervention, the bigger issue for the inquiry was opening up the commercially dominated broadcasting spectrum to public broadcasting. Moss Cass had put this matter on the public agenda by flagging new public broadcasting licences but had failed to achieve much in his brief term as Minister for Media. This inquiry would settle the issue and balance the political interests involved. Public interest groups came out in force, including PBAA and a newly formed group called Justice in Broadcasting. They feared a return to the 'stability' of the years under the ABCB and they put up a very good fight.

The first setback for Gyngell was a call for his disqualification as chairman. A number of witnesses, led by Senator John Button, challenged his appointment on grounds of bias.³⁸ Gyngell had to halt proceedings to take legal advice but soon resumed presiding over the hearings. The inquiry received more than 539 written submissions;

and 292 people gave evidence between March and June 1977. I was not one of them. As a sacked member of the old ABCB I did not think I would be viewed with much credibility. And I was avoiding speaking in public forums because of the problems I was experiencing with my voice.

The questions of children's programming and violence on television were raised repeatedly in evidence, particularly by public interest groups. Two that had been working for some years arguing the case for children's programs were the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television (ACCFT) and ACTAC. The industry had officially called on their advice on violence during the Whitlam Government's term in office. ACTAC was modelled on a US lobby formed by five politically savvy Boston mothers, all with preschool children, who had gone to Washington in February 1970 to talk to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) about the sorry state of children's television. They had been so successful and persuasive that the *New York Times* covered their story and within eighteen months there were 80 000 letters written in support of their proposal to the FCC demanding reform to improve children's programming in the United States. Their organisation, ACT, went on to change the climate of opinion in the US and provoke a thunderous response from the networks that it was 'opening a wedge in splitting asunder the greatest free enterprise communication systems in the world'.³⁹

Inspired by ACT's achievements, the founders of ACTAC were trying to follow suit. The group, which was based in Melbourne, relied on membership contributions and it was difficult to know how many people it represented as it kept its membership quiet.

The other group, ACCFT, which had an office and supporters in each Australian state, was a distributor of the British Council's films in Australia and promoted their cause through the distribution of what were seen in the UK as quality programs for children. Partly government funded, in its public comments it condemned both violence and advertising, with arguments drawn loosely from available research. The news media loved to cover the violence debate as it attracted readers, playing on their fears and guilt about their children's television viewing, and these two organisations raised their profiles through such debate, meaning their voices had to be listened to in the inquiry. No simple cause-effect relationship

was demonstrated by the research. Watching *The Road Runner* on television did not mean a child would become violent, and punching a bo-bo doll—which was designed for punching—in a laboratory, did not mean a child would then punch his playmate. The issue was far more complex.

While I also wanted more regulation of children's programming, I understood the research thoroughly, and I knew the holes in the arguments of ACTAC and ACCFT. I had tackled the issue when I wrote my dissertation on the interpretation and perception of violence through children's eyes. While many people believed that watching violence on television would cause children and adults to be violent, the literature did not bear them out. The research was extensive and much of it, conducted in the US, had been financed by governments. Quick and expedient solutions were being sought for a complex issue in the face of multiple assassinations of public figures and a nervous industry equally willing to provide research funds to fuel confusion about solutions and direct attention away from them. Funds for research on violence represented a trough for communication researchers happy to earn grants to keep them in business. The results differed according to the type of study undertaken.

Clinical studies by psychologists demonstrated that children in laboratory experiments would copy aggressive behaviour; but sociologists out in the real world found behaviour was not so easily influenced. The conclusions drawn by British researchers were different from the views demonstrated in behavioural laboratory studies by developmental psychologists in the United States.⁴⁰ It has taken four decades for communication researchers in the US to abandon simplistic 'effects' studies that had become a self-perpetuating industry. One had to look at work done outside the US to learn more about the uses children made of television and other social causes of violence.

There is no doubt that violence has become more graphic and pervasive in both film and television nor that it has potent, though complex, effects; but the research itself did not demonstrate causal effects, always difficult to separate out from other social conditions. Simplistic arguments to eliminate 'violence' in programs designed for children led to demands to sanitise programs, ignoring the context, style, satirical purpose or intent.

Gyngell instinctively understood that ACTAC's claims about the effects of programs on children were spurious, but his role demanded he hear them out. During the public inquiry for the renewal of licence for commercial television station ATV0 Melbourne, Bruce Gyngell gently teased Max Hall from ACTAC as he led him through his evidence to the tribunal. ACTAC alleged that the popular program *Rat Patrol*, an American action series about Allied soldiers in North Africa during World War II, had contravened several program standards:

The Chairman: *Rat Patrol* is contravening standards 6A ---?

Mr Hall: 6A, sections 3, 4 and 5.

The Chairman: You are saying it is likely to encourage crime, likely to be injurious to community well-being or morality and otherwise undesirable in the public interest.

Mr Hall: That is correct, Mr Chairman. Also 6B.

The Chairman: Programs which contain matter which is not generally suitable for viewing by children but must not be televised at times when large numbers of children are likely to have access to television receivers.

Mr Hall: 7B.

The Chairman: Techniques of crime demonstrated in such a way as to invite imitation.

Mr. Hall: 13B.

The Chairman: The following in particular should be avoided: torture or suggestion of torture, horror for undue suspense; the use of supernatural or superstition so as to arouse anxiety and fear.

Mr. Hall: 13B, 1 and 5.

The Chairman: Excessive violence; so it is torture or suggestion of torture and excessive violence?

Mr Hall: Yes.

The Chairman: This is all regarding *Rat Patrol*. Is that correct?

Mr Hall: That is correct, Mr Chairman, yes; and we will produce evidence to show the direct effects on a child in this community ...

The Chairman: You wish to produce evidence showing the effects on a child of *Rat Patrol*. Is that correct?

Mr Hall: Yes.

The Chairman: Are you going to actually bring the child in?⁴¹

It was an effective exchange in undermining ACTAC's credibility, and produced smirks from those present. ACCFT was much smarter in the way it presented evidence, with one of the best-known advocates for reform, Barbara Biggins from South Australia, as its main spokesperson. Biggins was assiduous in mounting a case, although she too was selective in her preferred research studies to support her points. She ran a well-organised operation, with a team of interested women who would churn out press releases and undertake small studies. They were a vigilant group who lobbied hard for restrictions on advertising to children (which would become a major issue in the television debate for children) and they developed very good political connections. Barbara was the most effective operator the council had among its state representatives and she struck some terror into the hearts of industry members who came up against her.

Years later, when I began to develop programs that I believed were relevant to children, some members of these groups attacked programs produced by me for the Australian Children's Television Foundation as unsuitable for children. But in the reform of broadcasting standards we were on the same side. The groups played an essential role in keeping the issue of children's television on the public agenda, in supporting the introduction of program standards and, later, in supporting the formation of the Australian Children's Television Foundation. I was not a member of any group, preferring to maintain an independent voice. I was a researcher, a teacher, a policy analyst and I was becoming more and more knowledgeable about television and children. I did not agree with the use of research, poorly conducted, for political ends. There were more convincing

ways to win the argument, and that was through meeting the real needs of children with programs designed specifically for them.

Early in 1977, I met Bruce Gyngell for the first time, when I attended the Self Regulation Inquiry public hearing in Melbourne. He was very friendly. He told me he'd been listening with interest to the submissions based on the Edgar Report and was sympathetic to the arguments for children's programming—he seemed to have forgotten his earlier dismissal of the report. I thought he was quite a charmer. It would become clear that Gyngell had already decided on the course he planned to take. He saw the regulation of children's programs as a pragmatic trade-off that the industry should be obliged to accept in return for more freedom in the more important areas of broadcasting operation. He thought one hour a day of children's programming was a small price for the industry to pay to keep the activists quiet and to bury the demands for a more open structure and increased Australian content generally. But FACTS was unyielding. So FACTS allowed what might have been a small regulatory issue—if carried through, as Bruce planned—to develop as a challenge to their inalienable right to control all program areas.

Janet Strickland, a member of the tribunal, who also sat on the inquiry, encouraged public representatives to put their views forward on potential changes to the regulation of broadcasting. A former chief censor, she was an experienced and capable bureaucrat and manager who gave attention to detail and would challenge argument, seeking logic and justification. She was not a radical, or even a progressive, but she had a strong sense of justice and protocol. She also had a consumer's perspective and was viewed as an ally of the public-interest cause. Behind the scenes she had an important influence on Gyngell, although they fell out over the direction the inquiry was taking; her advantage was that she was willing to put time into writing the report and in this role she played an influential part.

When it was released in July 1977, the Self Regulation Report made sweeping recommendations for change in the way television and radio licences would be awarded and condemned children's programming as some of 'the poorest quality and most commercialised programming on television'.⁴² Referring to the quota experiment, which had been set up to help improve programming for children, it found that:

inadequate budgets, lack of time, and lack of personnel or management interest seem to have left the producers ... in an unhappy ghetto in which good ideas cannot be translated into screen terms and there is no opportunity to build coherence or enthusiasm ... the few quota programs designed for children are indicative of the pessimism felt by station management about the appeal of children's programs to children and an attitude of minimal compliance with the requirements.

The report was a win for my side. It recommended that:

A new classification C for children, be instituted;

Only material classified C may be televised between the hours of 4 to 5 p.m. on weekdays. These programs should be suitable for school-aged children between the ages six and twelve (inclusive);

Stations be required to televise at least 30 minutes per week-day of programs designed for preschool children;

Stations be required under the Promise of Performance to make a firm commitment to abide by the children's program requirements and to undertake commitments concerning quality budgets, qualifications of personnel, on the air presentation and research in this area.⁴³

The tribunal also recommended the setting up of a Children's Program Committee (CPC) to formulate guidelines and criteria for C time and to classify programs, with conflicts between the industry and the committee to be resolved by the tribunal.

The language of the Self Regulation Report and the solutions proposed echoed those in the Edgar Report. An important recommendation in both was that the tribunal should evaluate the performance of broadcasters at public licence renewal hearings open to public and press scrutiny: this was a dramatic change in broadcasting policy as it would break the process open, end the rubber-stamping of renewals and allow public concerns about the performance of broadcasters to be considered.

The chairman dissented from a proposal that half the content transmitted between 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. each evening should be

Australian, saying: 'previous quotas had tried and failed ... This dissent should not be interpreted as an endorsement of self regulation. I am advocating public regulation and I would like to stress that to me, the chapters dealing with public accountability and the needs of children are the cornerstone of the Report'.⁴⁴

From the industry's perspective Gyngell had failed them. FACTS, dominated by Packer's Nine network, had hoped for resounding affirmation for the concept of self-regulation with no compromise and were infuriated that their champion had not delivered for them; in writing up the report, Janet Strickland had ensured that the public interest would prevail. This was an unexpected result when for twenty years the industry had enjoyed the comfort given by an undemanding regulator in the ABCB; the Labor Government had threatened their comfort zone in appointing potentially troublesome members; these members had been dispensed with; and the industry had succeeded in having the man they wanted from commercial television appointed to chair the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal.

Gyngell, who was not a man to lose face, defied FACTS, arguing that his position on children's programming was unchanged; in 1972, before a Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts hearing on Children and Television, he had advocated for a special children's hour on television, suggesting the requirement be incorporated in legislation.⁴⁵

In reminding an audience of advertisers of his earlier views in a speech at the Annual Seminar of the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) on 4 March 1980, Gyngell said: 'This should indicate that rather than growing in zeal I have moderated my fanaticism over the years'.⁴⁶ The industry didn't think so. A stand-off began, with some members 'unkind enough to suggest there has been a metamorphosis from a staunch free-enterprise man to a pathological regulator'.⁴⁷

In fact, Bruce Gyngell was acting very much in character. He told me in an interview: 'I like to think of myself as an entrepreneur ... from Frank Packer to Lew Grade, to the Chairman of CBS ... the great people whom I happen to admire in life are people who, no matter how firmly they held convictions, right until their being 70 years of age, were capable of being persuaded to change their point of view'.⁴⁸

My view, formed as I got to know Gyngell, was that he was persuaded by the evidence he heard during the inquiry that the industry could and should do something positive for children's television, but he also thought he could persuade the industry to compromise on this issue for advantage in Australian content regulation generally. He did not bargain on the intransigence of FACTS—even though he was a creature of the industry—and he didn't bargain on the tenacity of Janet Strickland, who was not one to compromise.

The government was unsure how they should proceed and industry lobbying against the views in the report was vigorous. It took more than a year for the government to respond, but then something serendipitous happened to strengthen the tribunal's hand. On 15 September 1978, a new Minister for Post and Telecommunications, Tony Staley, was appointed and confirmed his support for the ABT's recommendations. Staley was an intelligent and energetic young minister who was very keen to make his mark. He was quick to state his philosophical position and seemed to be the first minister in nearly two decades to present a moderately clear statement of what broadcasting policy was all about. Barely four months after he assumed office, he made a statement in the House in which he stressed that no government could afford to ignore the public interest in the development of public broadcasting: his emphasis was on diversity, freedom of expression, logical and systematic planning.

Staley listened to the public-interest groups and attended their functions. He released guidelines for the planning of public broadcasting and went to great lengths to ensure that his recommendations would be accepted by government. He attended the annual meeting of ACCFT and was sympathetic to their arguments for the reform of children's programming. He turned out to be an unexpected ally of public broadcasting and was all for the recommendations in the Self Regulation Inquiry report which would change the landscape of television regulation in Australia.

The licence renewal hearings, the first staged in Australian broadcasting history, became a platform for public calls for action, and a stick that the lobby groups could use to beat the stations and extract promises of performance. They put pressure on the tribunal and its chairman to achieve results in improving children's programming. Bruce Gyngell was in the hot seat as he would preside over

licence renewal hearings that exposed his friends and colleagues from the industry to a process they were not at all comfortable with. But Gyngell believed he could make this work. After one year of inaction, the government and the ABT were eager to move quickly. The first public licence renewal hearings got underway in Adelaide in October 1978, and the members of the CPC set up to advise on program standards were announced a month later.

I was surprised when I received an invitation to join the CPC, especially because I had recently been telephoned by Fred Green, the Secretary of the Post and Telecommunications Department in the Commonwealth Government, who was following up a complaint that had been received from James Malone (federal director of FACTS). Malone had alleged that I had been passing on to my students confidential information that I had received as a member of the ABCB. I was informed that one of my students had attempted to interview a member of FACTS and when they declined to cooperate had threatened them by saying, 'Dr Edgar has filing cabinets of confidential documents in her office anyway'. I was so astonished by the accusation that I burst out laughing. By the end of the conversation Fred Green seemed persuaded that I had not been divulging information as alleged and appeared somewhat embarrassed by the need to make such a call. Bruce Gyngell knew about the allegation and that I had been investigated by the Commonwealth Police. If I had been guilty, Section 106B of the Broadcasting Act required the penalty of \$1000 or three months' imprisonment.

Despite the accusation, and perhaps even because of my reputation as a maverick, Bruce Gyngell proceeded to invite me to join the committee and the Minister did not object. I accepted—I just couldn't help myself; this sounded pretty interesting. I had concluded that Gyngell was very much his own man. He did not become the tallest poppy in the television field in Australia and then go overseas and repeat his success by sitting around and saying yes to his buddies. He was highly motivated, energetic, bored by inactivity; he liked a challenge and was young enough to still have a varied and interesting future ahead of him. My bet was that his instincts would lead him to want to make his own mark, a contribution to broadcasting—despite his best friends (whoever they might be), who were not treating him well.

That Gyngell in his short time as chair of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal had already managed to upset his friends in the industry seemed to me a good sign. He got more publicity for the ABT after he took office than the old Board received in its entire existence. People now knew that the tribunal existed and they knew who Bruce Gyngell was. I was yet to find out the extent to which he was willing to put principle before mateship.

I had a few scars by now, and the phone call from Fred Green alerted me to the lengths FACTS might be prepared to go to discredit a critic. No longer the naïve academic who had spoken entertainingly about daytime television to FACTS two years earlier, I was learning the politics. My good friend from the ABCB advisory committee, Frank Meaney, was also invited to join the CPC, along with Sarah Guest from the ACCFT; Joan Brennan, a project officer at the Australian Film and Television School; Rex Heading, managing director, NWS9 Adelaide; Bruce Harris, chairman and managing director, SSC&B Lintas (a leading advertising company); and David Morgan from FACTS.

The committee comprised such a mix of interests and personalities that the media promptly predicted it would fail: 'There is every possibility that the Children's Programme Committee, the industry and the Tribunal will bog down in a stalemate of endless debate on whether or not programs conform to standards,' wrote Jefferson Penberthy of the *Australian Financial Review*.⁴⁹

On the day of our first meeting, just as had occurred with the ABCB's advisory committee, the committee was asked to elect a chair. I was nominated by Rex Heading and elected unanimously by members of the CPC as chairman of the committee, with Frank elected as deputy chairman. The media sniffed controversy. Jefferson Penberthy reported that

the former Labor appointee to the now-defunct Australian Broadcasting Control Board has been one of the most outspoken and active critics of television standards in Australia. It was thought that the Committee, which includes three TV and advertising industry representatives and four public representatives, would elect a 'neutral candidate' as it will be dealing with some of the most emotionally charged areas of the TV debate.

The article went on to catalogue my record of activism and publications.⁵⁰

The same month as I was appointed to the CPC, my book *The Politics of the Press* was released. I had interviewed all the editors of the major newspapers and, with journalist Ian Baker, had interviewed all press gallery journalists in Canberra willing to co-operate. Ian gave me access and credibility as these journalists were his colleagues, so every one approached (with one exception—Michelle Grattan) agreed to be interviewed. They were bruised and reflective following the Whitlam Dismissal and the December 1975 election campaign, and were willing to talk about their experiences during the crisis.

The book was launched by Max Walsh in the same week Rupert Murdoch made a takeover bid for the Herald and Weekly Times, which would have given him 75 per cent of Australia's press. The timing was coincidental but meant the book received wide coverage. I argued in the press: 'It doesn't matter how enlightened the person or organisation might be, no one should have such widespread control'.⁵¹

My book had a very mixed reception, with the press defending its election coverage and Rod Tiffen and Professor Henry Mayer—two of the few media researchers who had written on the press at the time—criticising the research methodology of content analysis. The *Age* ran an editorial rejecting the book's claims of bias and extolling its own virtue.⁵² The executive editor of the *Herald*, John Morgan, published a letter suggesting I didn't know what I was talking about, quoting from a Charlie Brown comic strip about flawed expertise which he had on his office wall. I responded that I too had a Peanuts cartoon on my office wall, where Charlie Brown was explaining at length to Lucy how to fly a kite. She says: 'You know a lot about kites, don't you Charlie Brown?' Charlie replies: 'Yes, I think I can say I do'. Lucy comments: 'Then why is your kite down the sewer?'⁵³ Donald Horne came to my defence in a lengthy review, as did a number of other academics.⁵⁴

Michelle Grattan wrote a feature article covering the book and the issues it raised.⁵⁵ She thought the book drew 'attention to the problems and limitations in election reporting'. It was successful in generating discussion at a significant time in the history of debate

about the monopoly ownership of the press in Australia. It certainly added to my reputation as a troublemaker.

So from the outset of my role as chair of the CPC, I was at the centre of another storm. I had no idea whether I would be able to get the committee to work effectively, given the diverse range of views represented by the seven members, but I was certainly going to try. Clearly, Bruce Gyngell considered that if this group he had appointed could unanimously agree on anything then the results could not be too contentious for the ABT. He thought he was back in control.

4

A Vision for Children's Television

'When you talk about regulation, the knives come out.'

—Bruce Gyngell⁵⁶

AUSTRALIA WAS SET TO EMBARK on an experiment in regulation unlike anything that had been tried anywhere else in the world. Our broadcasting system was a hybrid of the free-market commercial system in the United States and the dual system of broadcasting in Europe and the United Kingdom where public and commercial television interests were balanced and the public system well funded to compete with the commercial sector. We had neither the advantages of a well-funded public sector nor a population base capable of supporting a well-resourced commercial sector.

In the US, in the face of poor children's programming and public complaint, the Federal Communications Commission had adopted a wait-and-see approach, threatening regulation but not enacting it. Now the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal had decided to force the broadcasting sector to mend its ways: the networks could either meet the need for better children's programs or face losing their operating licences.

The Australian networks had always claimed they did not have the resources to fulfil their charter of providing adequate and comprehensive programming. But they also said they did not know what a good program for children older than five was and on this score, I thought, perhaps they had a point. The preschool programs *Sesame Street* and *Play School* were established icons and, following in the tradition of Mickey Mouse and the Disney characters, most preschool programs around the world relied on the established convention of dressing adults in big animal suits to identify the genre. Yet once the target audience reached school age, the definition of a children's program 'made for them' lost clarity.

We certainly had no tradition of quality children's programs in Australia like the prestigious BBC's, and no established independent production sector able to supply them, although there was no shortage of people willing to try. The ABT's Children's Program Committee was required to oversee the assessment of children's programs, so we needed to understand what children enjoyed and what also added value to their lives. As its new chair, I set out to define good-quality programming.

I recalled that, when I was a kid, my routine was to come home from school, open the fridge, drink milk straight from the bottle, grab a fistful of home-made biscuits from the cupboard, sit in my father's armchair and read until I was forced to set the table or do some other household chore. Every week I would visit the Mildura City Library and borrow as many books as I could. They were always fiction. The librarian, a dowdy but interesting and conscientious woman, Miss Golding, would try to persuade me to read non-fiction, but in those early years the real world didn't interest me. It was fantasy I wanted; stories about children who lived a life very different from mine, who had exciting adventures, belonged to secret clubs, had midnight feasts and lived in a world where adults didn't tell them what to do.

My own childhood, my experience of teaching at High Schools in Geelong and Melbourne, and later my postgraduate studies and research, confirmed the importance of storytelling in the development of children. As far as I was concerned the most important element needed in the regulation of children's television was a drama quota.

Drama can be comic or tragic, can be in any genre—crime, contemporary, adventure, Western, fantasy, science fiction, period or historical drama—but it will weave a series of events into a story that illuminates the human condition. Stories are for entertainment as well as enlightenment. When done well, dramas are the most popular form of programming on television and certainly, as research has demonstrated repeatedly, the favourite form of programs for children.

Hundreds of years ago, when children were not seen as separate from adults and the wider community, group entertainment came from storytelling, where childish and grown-up elements were mixed freely. Fairy stories used to be for everyone, and they included the grotesque, the fantastic and lots of nonsense along with the message. The oral tradition was shared. This changed once printing was invented and children were sent to school. Print separated adult secrets from the child's world, and you had to be able to read to participate fully in the adult world of literature.⁵⁷ With the advent of universal schooling, children's literature was cleaned up and long-accepted and important traditional elements were squeezed out of the official culture. Stories acquired taste—they began to taste childish. Fairytales were sanitised and no longer reflected the needs of children in a common community—they reflected the needs and values of middle-class parents and teachers. Children from the age of six or seven were kept apart from adult society in a sheltered world.

Television, I believed, had much to offer children and parents in retrieving the shared experience of previous years. Those who had sanitised the reading literature for school children became active in demanding special, cleaned-up programs for children. Moralists felt they had to protect children from adult reality, adult fantasies.⁵⁸

I took a different view. I believed that, in creating programs for children, we should recognise that the needs of grown-ups and children are much the same—both groups enjoy a good story that entertains and engages them; both enjoy the stimulation of ideas and the reassurance they gain from situations with which they can identify. Children in stories can be as interesting to adults as adults are to children. Yet confusion prevailed about what was appropriate and inappropriate for children in television storytelling. Yes, we want to protect children but over-protection can leave them exposed.

Working with troubled children, the famous psychologist Bruno Bettelheim became convinced the bowdlerisers of fairytales had deprived children of much-needed hope—the hope that the gremlins under their beds and the monsters in their cupboards have forms and faces and there is a champion who can best them, if not by thoughtfulness and reason, then by the sword.⁵⁹ This is not an argument for excess. Children are vulnerable, but they are also resilient and very smart and they need to learn to cope with a troubled world. Television could tell stories with words and pictures that explain the experiences and frustrations children meet.⁶⁰

It was also my strong belief—and still is—that Australian children's drama had to *be* Australian. Many critics argue that a good story works regardless of its setting and that, as long as Australians make good programs, we don't need to protect Australian culture *per se*. This is a fallacy. A story must first be an authentic, powerful Australian story before it will be of interest in an international marketplace. Good stories are universal, in that they deal with the journey all human beings travel, from birth, through the meeting of challenges, truth, victory and defeat, to the last great challenge of death itself. But they are also particular, in that they let us hear universal stories in the accents of our own country, town or village. They are necessary to our understanding and to the health of our society.⁶¹

Felicitously for my view of children's television, the Australian film industry, which had been revived in the 1970s, was driven by people who shared my belief in Australian storytelling. By 1980, film had become *the* great storytelling medium—whether in the cinema, on television or on the VCR.

Yet there was still much confusion in the minds of producers and network management about what constituted a children's film. For the networks, if a program was classified G that was sufficient—old Westerns, adventures, and old sci-fi with low-quality production values seemed quite acceptable for young viewers. The equation seemed to be that if it cost little it was suitable for children. Those who adopted protective attitudes to child viewing wanted to see idealised family relationships and children who were innocent. In my view, a good program would explore the complexities of life. The best television would inspire rather than stupefy. And children needed to see some measure of violence in context if they were to

understand life. Fairytales always contained such elements. There is a line to be drawn and expertise is essential in making judgements, but showing children with good manners, respecting their parents and teachers, and keeping their noses clean was not the essence of good children's storytelling.

Shortly before I took up my appointment to the CPC, Ursula Callus and I had completed a study of viewing preferences among Australian children aged from nine to fifteen.⁶² This study examined the TV program choices of a group of 106 randomly selected subjects and also tested their responses to ten programs (produced specifically for children in Canada, Britain and the US) which had not been shown on Australian television. It was not a surprise to find that none of the Australian children's quota programs achieved a high approval rating with this group. *Zoom* (US) and *Blue Peter* (BBC)—the iconic examples of the type of magazine programming that lobbyists suggested should be produced in Australia—were the programs the sample least enjoyed. They were not particularly interested in watching American children having fun in a studio.

The favourite program with twelve to fifteen year olds concerned a teenage boy with quite serious family and personal problems. Many of the students were enthusiastic about the possibility of seeing programs about teenagers' problems. One boy summed up the view this way: 'If you've got a problem like that you know it shows there are a few others'. This was a simple and seemingly obvious point that children wanted to see what others their age were going through and how they were dealing with life. Generally, the tastes of children—younger and older—were similar. Both groups preferred shows with humour and adventure and had a mixed reaction to magazine programs. Drama appealed most, to all children.

THE CPC MET FOR the first time in November 1978 and was briefed by the ABT members, Bruce Gyngell, his deputy James Oswin and Janet Strickland. The federal director of FACTS, James Malone, sat in as an observer. The chairman stressed that the committee should make recommendations to the tribunal that were based on unanimous decisions; the ABT would then decide whether to accept them. It seemed a foolproof approach, with safeguards built in. A quorum

should maintain the ratio of three members of the public to two industry members and differences should be resolved within the committee. Finally, the tribunal wanted to be seen to be acting quickly, so there was pressure to move forward as quickly as we could.

The task before us was gargantuan. First, we had to develop a philosophy upon which to build a C-classification system for children's programming; second, we had to formulate the guidelines for the C classification in relation to both programs and advertising; and third, we had to put the guidelines into action by classifying any children's programs and ads submitted to the committee.⁶³

We had no tribunal staff to assist us, and the ABT staff in Melbourne were the remnants of the old ABCB staff, including Jack Quaine, who was hostile towards the CPC. All the committee members, bar Sarah Guest, had full-time jobs. But as an academic who taught postgraduate students after 5 p.m., I thought I could see my way clear to carrying the job through. CPC business was a high priority for me, and I was determined to make this work.

Bruce Gynnell, who seemed to view the CPC as an answer to the political and public pressures thrown up by the Self Regulation Inquiry, had low expectations about implementing change. In one of his typical off-the-cuff comments, he said, 'While new Children's Standards were to be drafted, and he hoped they would improve the quality of children's broadcasting, unfortunately, the Tribunal would not have the power to enforce them and in view of past experience the TV Channels would probably ignore them'.⁶⁴ The CPC members were not deterred by the chairman's comments. We knew by now what a mercurial character he was.

The sheer scale of the job, the high profile of the issue, the controversy it provoked in the media, worked to unite the committee. Rex Heading was managing director of NWS9 in Adelaide, a station recognised as one of the best contributors to children's programming in Australia. He was an affable, charming man with a great laugh and a good sense of humour. Bruce Harris, Rolf's elder brother, was fiercely protective of advertising but very interested in and supportive of efforts to define what constituted good programming. He too was a likeable personality. Sarah Guest was prepared to spend time classifying programs and was assiduous at the task. Joan Brennan was a direct, practical, friendly person. Frank was always

enthusiastic, committed and talkative. As a great raconteur he struck up close friendships with both Bruce and Rex, thoroughly enjoying the challenge and the camaraderie. Even David Morgan, who participated with some wariness because of his position as deputy director of FACTS, couldn't help enjoying himself in the company of the other members. So the raw material I had to work with from the chair potentially made for a good team.

I had been able to guide the advisory committee of the ABCB to agree unanimously on a report; they held together and backed me when under strong attack in troubled times and I wanted to achieve the same results with the CPC. This time the task would be more difficult because there were opposing interests to reconcile. I knew we could not influence one another's views unless we became friends. Frank was a great ally in this process and as an experienced bureaucrat he could draw out different views and suggest compromises. He was a very effective broker in helping merge the values of the industry and the consumers. In order to meet with stations right around Australia, two-day meetings each month became essential. On those occasions we chose to stay overnight, and to eat and drink together. Dining and storytelling became a very important ritual and soon we got to know each other well. We laughed a great deal. As Adam Gopnick wrote in the *New Yorker*:

It is an awkward truth that social life ... drains intellectual differences of their drama. The cure for the acrimony of intellectuals is dinner. Had Jesus invited a few Pharisees over for the Supper—and the Pharisees, let us remember, had been revolutionaries only a little while before—it might not have been his last. Dining with disciples is a perilous business.⁶⁵

YET BY MARCH 1979, the committee was having difficulty completing the work expected. There were delays with receiving minutes; information the committee needed was not forthcoming from the tribunal; there was confusion within the industry about who to contact for the committee's view; administratively we were in a mess. The tribunal expected guidelines to be produced, programs to be assessed and station representatives to be met around the country, with no dedicated, full-time support staff.

When Rob Liersch from the Melbourne office—a casual minute-taker—took on the task of committee co-ordinator, he proved to be exactly what we needed.⁶⁶ He understood the public service but was a rebel who stood up to the hierarchy and found ways to make things happen. He had become disillusioned with the ABCB, both with the system in place to administer broadcasting and the people who ran it; the CPC was a breath of fresh air and he was determined to help. Rob was a character, a very big man who rode a Harley Davidson bike and had a vast repertoire of the crudest jokes I have ever heard. He engaged with CPC members and became our life force, organising itineraries and meetings with the industry, co-ordinating papers and screening programs. He was also a great addition to the CPC dining club.

The committee's main task was to devise guidelines for programming and for advertising. At the February meeting we divided into two sub-committees. Joan Brennan, Rex Heading, David Morgan and I formed the Programs Sub-committee, with Bruce Harris, Frank Meaney and Sarah Guest comprising the Advertising Sub-committee. I took on the task of drafting the programming guidelines for the CPC. As yet, there were no programs; programming itself was an area where change could succeed. It was not that I saw advertising as unimportant, but we were talking only of advertising directed towards children within children's programs and I knew Sarah would be attentive to that.

Children were considered too small a market to be profitable; indeed the lack of advertising directed towards children was seen by some network players as a major reason that there should be no children's programs. It would be another decade or so before the Disney marketing phenomenon would blast onto the scene, with *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) signalling a changed view of the profits to be made in the children's market and inspiring other marketing-driven programs such as *Barney* in the United States, *Teletubbies* in the United Kingdom and *Bananas in Pyjamas* in Australia. In 1979, child-oriented advertising seemed to be much less of a problem than just getting programs produced. I also knew that no matter how many CPC dinners our members ate together, we were not going to agree on the advertising guidelines; the industry members would not compromise their revenue base; and Bruce Harris was like a

hawk waiting to pounce if we intruded too much on advertising issues.

Program content was in fact a more difficult issue to tackle and the interests involved proved to be just as contentious. It soon emerged that I had made the right decision in opting for a unified reform approach to better program content because the committee members came together solidly in the impending dispute with FACTS. That consensus then enabled us to get a better result with the advertising guidelines than if we had taken on the advertising battle first.

As our work progressed, we held meetings with independent producers to see how we could help them produce worthwhile programs. It was clear from these early discussions that firm regulations were essential. New Australian C programs would need protection. If one network ran its quota program and another scheduled cartoons or imported family material up against quota, they would be beaten in the ratings simply by appealing to a wider audience. So although the term *moratorium* was repugnant to many in the industry, there was widespread agreement that C programs would need to be scheduled in the same hour on all networks, competing only with one another. I wrote this into the draft programming guidelines.

In May, the whole committee met to discuss the finished draft. There was no significant disagreement among committee members, except in one regard. David Morgan made it clear that FACTS would oppose the limiting of C material to the 4 to 5 p.m. slot Monday to Friday—the concept of the moratorium. He was almost apologetic about the position he would have to take, but he said his job was to represent FACTS' official line. Members agreed that David Morgan's dissent should be recorded in a covering letter to the tribunal to accompany the program guidelines. So on the first important decision from the CPC, we could not offer the tribunal a unanimous view. There would be no easy ride for the chairman.

The CPC delivered its recommendations to the tribunal on 14 May, and the tribunal issued them without delay to the industry, which had been on notice since the beginning of February that the new classification would apply from 1 July. The committee's preface to the guidelines stated: 'programs should include a diversity of types such as drama, documentaries, informational and magazine formats,

all designed specifically for children'. To the argument that we were pursuing 'castor-oil television' we countered:

A myth that persists which we wish to lay to rest is that high quality children's programming must be didactic, instructional and overtly educational. In our view, quality children's programs must first be entertaining television. Children's programs should fulfil some special need of childhood. They should be about subjects which interest children and should be designed and presented in such a way that they can be readily understood and appreciated by children. As quality children's literature contributes to the social, emotional and intellectual development of children, so also should quality children's television contribute to development in these areas.⁶⁷

The committee's major recommendations were that:

- programs produced for the six-to-thirteen years age group should be shown between 4 and 5 p.m.
- programs produced for the general audience would not qualify for C classification. A 'C' rating would be given only to programs produced specifically for children within the six-to-thirteen age group
- where a program did not fully meet the high standards required for a C classification, a provisional C would be given and the program reviewed three months later.

We also recommended that:

- the committee wished to see a diversity of children's program types produced (children's drama was regarded as a high priority)
- Australian children should be able to enjoy high-quality Australian programs, so it was desirable that stations produce a high proportion of Australian programs
- the committee regarded local production as an important part of a station's community involvement
- stations should employ full-time co-ordinators for all station activities involving children
- producers of children's programs should have a demonstrable knowledge of children's needs and interests. In recognition that

there were few qualified children's producers in Australia, the committee recommended that stations send their producers overseas to gain experience.⁶⁸

The industry received these guidelines quietly at first. Then our fellow committeeman David Morgan shed his friendly guise and turned into the industry mouthpiece. Privately he had agreed to the guidelines—apart from the moratorium—but publicly, as FACTS' deputy director, he asserted: 'No amount of government intervention will produce quality children's shows. Parents have the prime responsibility for determining control over children's viewing. The Federation was also opposed to any ban on any form of advertising at any time, day or night'.⁶⁹

FACTS was pre-empting any statement on advertising before the CPC had even discussed the advertising guidelines, but the fight was on. Depending on where one stood in the argument, the ABT and the CPC were either too weak (the public and the media view) or too censorious (the commercial industry view) or had no idea what they were doing (FACTS). The *Age* newspaper editorialised that our recommendations were a tentative move in the right direction. 'The new Guidelines provide an opportunity at least partially to satisfy children's needs and curiosities, instead of using television as an unpaid, unchecked babysitter. The chance to give them better television should not be wasted.'⁷⁰ But the *Age* television critic, Brian Courtis, described them as 'a disappointingly timid and poorly planned answer to the problem that the Tribunal knows from its many hearings is of greatest concern to Australia's TV watchers—the need for more quality local children's programs'.⁷¹ In the *Australian Financial Review*, Valerie Lawson said dismissively that the tribunal had 'attacked commercial television stations with a cream puff'.⁷²

The CPC could only recommend to the ABT. We had taken a first step but even if the cream puff had been a sledgehammer FACTS could not have reacted with more outrage than it did. Most media fell in behind FACTS' arguments, condemning the tribunal and the CPC as ineffective or intrusive. Only Phillip McCarthy in the *National Times* correctly identified the real cause of their outrage.⁷³

When the guidelines were presented to the ABT, the only question Bruce Gyngell had raised concerned the recommendation

that C-classified programs would be made 'specifically' for children. The issue of whether the programs should be specifically for children or merely suitable for them was at the heart of David Morgan's dissent. It was the same question Kerry Packer had raised during the licence renewal hearings for TCN9 earlier in the year. Packer believed a separate C category was unnecessary because the existing G category (suitable for general viewing) adequately safeguarded the interests of children. His reasoning was obvious. Telecasts of cricket in the afternoon might be suitable for children but they were certainly not specifically designed for them. The concept of specific programs for children at 4 p.m. could disrupt his reputed \$1.5-million investment in cricket.

As the deadline for commencement of the C standards was only six weeks away, the CPC needed to classify all submitted programs and release its list as quickly as possible. We decided to meet twice in June to clear the programs submitted in time for a 1 July on-air start of C time. We met on 1 June and classified twenty-two programs over two days. All members, including David Morgan, were present and all decisions were unanimous. *Shirl's Neighbourhood* (Jeni Hooks' program for the Seven network) and Simon Townsend's as-yet-unnamed pilot for the Ten network (later named *Simon Townsend's Wonderland*) were both given a C at this meeting. Both Jeni and Simon would become significant players in the debate about children's programs, but on opposing sides.

Both programs were seen as sincere and very promising attempts to meet the new guidelines. *Shirl's Neighbourhood* was hosted by former lead singer of the Sky Hooks, Shirley Strachan, a friendly and frenetic television performer, along with well-devised animal characters. It was an entertaining and exuberant show based on segments examining children's particular neighbourhoods—the program aimed at genuine community involvement.⁷⁴ It was exactly the type of program the guidelines envisaged. Simon Townsend's pilot followed the format of the well-established adult current affairs programs, encapsulating interesting segments in an entertaining way for children, and such a program on local news events for children was novel in 1979.

Carrots, an ATN7 program, and *Razzle Dazzle*, from TCN9, were denied a C. *Carrots'* rejection became a focus for vitriolic attacks

on the CPC's and the ABT's competence. The original concept was for a program within a program—a series about a group of program-makers producing a television show for Channel 7. The main story was a sitcom soap opera that was not especially relevant to children. Within the soap opera there were inserts of educational material which was being researched by the characters in the show for the program they were making. These excerpts, about such things as making surfboards, horse riding, children's orchestras, involved children but were not in themselves sufficient to make the program a children's program. Channel 7 regarded *Carrots* as a breakthrough in programming, but the committee found its structure confusing and questioned its relevance to children.

Ted Thomas, the general manager of ATN7, had given the go-ahead for the program and a commitment of \$250 000 over the phone when he heard about the concept. He announced this and his enthusiastic response at the ATN7 public licence renewal hearing in Sydney, so any rejection or criticism of the program was seen as a direct criticism of Ted Thomas' judgement. Personal credibility was at stake and the CPC had approached the classification of this program cautiously, fully aware of its importance. There was no dispute about the assessment; all members, including David Morgan, thought the program a failure as a C program.

We expected an appeal against the decision and it materialised. For the members of the CPC, this decision would make clear to all—the public, the industry, the media—whether we were there to rubber-stamp decisions by the regulatory body when it was put under pressure or whether we were there to present an independent view based on the principles of the Self Regulation Report. If we lost this appeal we could all go home.

Frank Meaney and I attended the ABT hearing in Sydney with the chairman, Bruce Gyngell, who put up a spirited argument to give *Carrots* a C. In the middle of the appeal, I was called to the phone and Bruce told me to use his phone in the adjoining office. As I sat at his desk talking, I realised I was looking at a press release which announced the result of the appeal for *Carrots* which was still under-way in the next room. The release said the appeal was successful! This was evidence to me of the pressure Bruce Gyngell was under; he did not want this confrontation with Ted Thomas. But naturally I felt

affronted that he had made a decision in advance and was intending to manipulate the meeting to get the result he wanted.

Pondering what to do, I returned to hear Frank Meaney going through the points against the program. No one could present a logical argument more effectively than Frank, who was speaking in his soft, measured tone. I listened to Gyngell continue to argue for C, for expedient reasons. Bruce was clearly losing the argument on any rational grounds. I did not want to let on that I had been reading the news release on his desk—anyone else would not have sent me to that phone in the first place—so I sat quietly. I knew Bruce had good judgement when it came to programs, so finally I said, 'Bruce, what do you think of the program?' Without hesitation he said, 'I think it's a terrible program'. 'Well?' I asked, my gaze fixed on him. He hesitated, shook his head and said, 'Well, I guess we have to bite the bullet'. He knew the CPC's judgement was correct.

Greg Sheridan, writing in the *Bulletin*, revealed that Gyngell had, in advance of the appeal, told the producer of *Carrots*, Julian Jover, that he was sure the program would get a C, but Sheridan also claimed that Bruce and I were 'loath to discuss the conflict that apparently existed between [us] on the program *Carrots*'.⁷⁵ That was wishful thinking from inside the Packer camp. Gyngell accepted that the program was not what it should have been and he and I had no dispute once the decision was made. Bruce was an extraordinary man and, true to his nature, he put the incident behind him, and he and I and the other committee members became the best of friends. In all the time I worked with Bruce, we had no cross words; when we disagreed it was without animosity. He was prepared to listen to argument and take the sometimes difficult decisions involved within the children's programming debate. Channel 7's response to rejection of the appeal for a C for *Carrots* was to defy the tribunal and put the program to air in the 4–5 p.m. timeslot, without a C.

Kerry Packer's approach to C programming was confrontational from the start. The format of *Razzle Dazzle* was an adult game show; it merely used children in every sense of the word. The quiz was a device for a frenetic points-gathering exercise based largely on luck. Children were not really participating in the program but were herded about the set in a breathless rush, their opinions, thoughts and personalities sacrificed to the frantic pace of the show and the

compere Rory O'Donoghue's incessant monologue. The CPC was unanimous in its rejection of the program. Even Packer's *Bulletin* reported with apparent reservations:

One could hardly cite *Razzle Dazzle* as television's finest hour ... perhaps it is of little educational value, but how can the Committee possibly determine that it is of little entertainment value when it is so popular? What other criterion is there for judging entertainment value than whether children watch a programme?⁷⁶

There were other criteria and the CPC was spelling them out despite the furore.

Kerry Packer's company Publishing and Broadcasting (PBL) owned the Nine network, Australian Consolidated Press, numerous magazines (sixty-three by 2006) including the *Australian Women's Weekly*, *Cleo*, *TV Week*, and the *Bulletin*. Together they made for formidable media opposition to the ABT and the CPC. The print interests could be used to attack the CPC on behalf of the television interests and the public, by and large, were unaware that the arguments came from the one mouthpiece. FACTS was chaired by Len Maugher, an employee of the Nine network, and I knew from Bruce Gyngell that Kerry Packer took a personal interest in the regulations and was incensed by them. He was not a man who would be told what to do—by a tribunal, by his friend, its chairman, or by a government that had given him a protected licence that carried conditions requiring him as a licensee to meet certain programming obligations.

With such a force operating to undermine the CPC it was difficult to get into the media a clear picture of the committee's plans and views. Suggesting that the popularity of a program was the main criterion and that the CPC just wanted to take the fun out of television for kids made good copy. *Razzle Dazzle's* executive producer was Penny Spence, who had been an on-air presenter for Nine—a stylish, attractive woman who made an excellent foil for aggressive station management. She became an outspoken critic of the CPC as several programs submitted by Channel 9 failed to qualify.

FACTS also continued to do everything it could to undermine the committee, most famously asserting that we were engaging in

censorship. 'Not even the Prime Minister demands or expects to be able to tell stations the time of day his addresses to the nation must go to air,' said federal director James Malone, 'yet the Tribunal has not hesitated to do so between 4 pm and 5 pm ... The rejection of programs for C was ... some of the most monstrous and undemocratic examples of government intervention'.⁷⁷

The tabloids loved the censorship argument. There were many programs quite suitable for children to watch and even beneficial for them to watch that did not fit the classification of being designed specifically for them. We were not censoring these programs. We were not forcing any station to present any program during C time. We were classifying programs for a particular timeslot and the stations could choose from a range of programs and types of programs. In principle the system was no different from any other classification system operating in Australia, as all programs required a classification by the Chief Censor. We could not get this message through to the tabloids, with many of the journalists working for print interests linked to television interests. Historically, this has been one of the problems resulting from limited media ownership in Australia.

AT THE 2 JUNE MEETING, Bruce Harris and Rex Heading advised they would miss the 20 June meeting as they were travelling overseas. This was our last chance to assess programs before the on-air start of C-classified programs. There were seventeen programs needing assessment. Rex and Bruce supported the meeting going ahead without them as we were not deciding new policy. The system of classification was working well and members' views were remarkably consistent, never contentious. Programs genuinely designed and made to reach the child audience stood out from those where it was clear that producers were pushing the boundaries for commercial purposes. However, David Morgan insisted the meeting should be cancelled because technically there would be no quorum with two industry members absent. All other members saw this as a ruse, an attempt to sabotage the start date for the Standards. Frank, Joan, Sarah and I—the four public members—were determined to proceed, with the tribunal's concurrence. We met and fifteen more programs were approved for C, with two further rejections (one for a dated,

twelve-year-old family program *Woobinda*; and one for an informational US program, which was clearly not made for children, let alone Australian children). These were straightforward decisions.

The day before the 20 June meeting a telegram arrived:

I understand that neither Rex Heading nor Bruce Harris are available to attend proposed June 20 meeting CPC. Have already advised my inability to attend. Quorum of Committee comprises three public members, two industry members. Obvious there will not be quorum so meeting cannot be conducted. Do not agree with proposition that I separately discuss with you opinions of available members on programs previewed June 20th. Believe full Committee, i.e. quorum must fully participate in debate about all programs.

—David Morgan Deputy Federal Director FACTS,
19 June 1979⁷⁸

FACTS had thrown down the gauntlet. The tribunal refused to be compromised. Gyngell was fed up with industry tactics and decided that the classifications would be accepted by the ABT and new quorum rules would apply from 2 July. The ABT approved a new quorum consisting of any four members; the CPC chairman would have the power to call meetings at any time and as often as was deemed necessary with adequate notice; the decisions should be taken by a simple majority vote. There should be provision for dissenting members to have their dissent recorded as part of the committee's papers. The tribunal would publish a list of rejected programs once stations had been notified and the time for the appeal had elapsed.⁷⁹ All members agreed that if trust was breached the committee would be unworkable. We agreed that Mr Morgan, as a member of the committee, was entitled to express his personal view but we would not deal with him as a member of FACTS.

Both Rex Heading and Bruce Harris remained loyal, committed CPC members. Rex's station was part of the Nine network but it was not owned by Kerry Packer, and he was tired of FACTS' domination of the industry view. An increasing number of regional industry members did not share the aggressive stance of the Sydney-based FACTS. They wanted to get on with the job and cease the

public brawling. Bruce, as a representative of the advertising industry, considered FACTS' views irrelevant to him.

On 18 July, David Morgan issued a statement: 'FACTS believes that in altering the composition for a quorum whereby it is possible to conduct a meeting of the Children's Programme Committee without any representation from the industry, the basis and purpose of the creation of the Committee has been lost'.⁸⁰ The war with FACTS was just warming up, and the federation found allies in the stations with programs denied a C. The media loved the conflict. Typical headlines included 'TV egg-heads must be kidding', which appeared over a story by Mike Gibson, who wrote, 'most kids want to take a break with tripe and relax. The last thing they want's to cop being beaten over the head by ANOTHER hour of education on television. The do-gooders though ... they won't have any of that'.⁸¹

Children's television was the subject of a *4 Corners* report and a cover story in the *Bulletin*. Greg Sheridan, the journalist who wrote the *Bulletin's* expose, told me I was the last person he would be speaking to in his research for the story. Yet his first question to me in the so-called last interview was, 'Who are the members of the Tribunal?' I was unimpressed with his research.⁸²

Gyngell told me the conflict had extended to a stoush between his thirteen-year-old son David and his friend James Packer. The boys had argued about the Standards and James had allegedly sooled his dog onto David. Young David Gyngell was brought into the argument publicly when Bruce claimed he had shown his son the program *Carrots* before it became the centre of controversy. 'David was unimpressed,' reporter Phillip McCarthy wrote. 'Gyngell took the precaution of seeking his child's views—as have network executives—since the essence of the new Guidelines is that programs be directed at children not adults. *Carrots*, rejected by the Children's Programme Committee, lost on appeal to Gyngell this month.'⁸³

This was a curtain raiser to the acrimonious dispute that would consume the industry as a bitter conflict intensified between CPC and the tribunal on the one hand and FACTS on the other.

5

Showdown in Canberra

'The prospect of placing the industry group in control of TV advertising and children's program standards is akin to putting Dracula in charge of a blood bank.'

—An ABT official⁸⁴

IN LATE AUGUST, LEN MAUGHER, the chairman of FACTS (and an employee of the Nine network), wrote to Bruce Gyngell to advise him that the industry body was withdrawing its members from the Children's Program Committee. David Morgan, Rex Heading, and Bruce Harris were required to act for the commercial industry, his letter argued; they would be compromised if they were to act as private individuals.

David Morgan issued a statement: 'recent rule changes had made it impossible for him to continue'.⁸⁵ Bruce Harris said he was not representing FACTS, so he would not resign. Rex Heading resigned to clarify his position and accepted reappointment by the ABT as an individual. John Stapp, group general manager of Associated Broadcasting Services, based in Ballarat, Victoria, readily

accepted nomination to replace David Morgan. The CPC was a tight-knit team and John Stapp became a strong ally. The assault on our credibility drew us closer. The regional members of the committee clearly relished standing up to their big-city colleagues dominated by FACTS. The admirable independence of the CPC's industry representatives from FACTS would not be possible today, as the aggregation of television services has reduced the role of regional operators to transmission outposts.

The same day they withdrew from the CPC, FACTS presented a legal opinion to the tribunal claiming that the guidelines were unenforceable and would be declared invalid by a court.⁸⁶ Several FACTS regional members objected and scotched the idea of such a legal challenge. But the legal opinion put pressure on the tribunal and on the government to clarify the regulatory powers for children's programming.

The media, on the whole, continued to convey the message that the tribunal and the committee members were incompetent, authoritarian, censorious people, attempting to impose hours of boring, educational programming on children to deprive them of their fun and relaxation. But the issue remained sensitive for the government. When federal Minister for Post and Telecommunications Tony Staley was put on the spot at a conference run by the ACCFT, he praised the work of the Children's Program Committee in devising guidelines for the new C classification. He said he would be 'putting redrafted legislation before the government with the object of removing any ambiguities and inconsistencies'.⁸⁷

Bruce Gyngell advised me that the tribunal had received an opinion from the Attorney-General's Department in response to the FACTS' legal challenge. It invited the tribunal to formulate a standard for children's programs, in legal form, for approval by the Department.⁸⁸ The committee was asked 'to define the criteria for a quality program expected to contribute significantly to the development of children in an intellectual, emotional or social sense'. FACTS' strategy had backfired: all it had achieved was a tightening of the regulatory noose around its own neck.

A new standard was formulated as requested. It also advised stations that the minimum amount of required programming would increase from 1 July 1980 to five hours a week. For the first time

the requirements for submission of written material were laid down. For a series proposal, three full scripts and a treatment for a series should be submitted. The new standard would make it easier for the tribunal to reject programs, so FACTS screamed censorship even more loudly. In an attempt to quieten FACTS, the tribunal agreed to FACTS' request *not* to publish reasons why programs were rejected, a decision FACTS later used as another stick to beat the CPC.

In this test of the CPC's credibility, Bruce Gyngell stood by the committee. It was ironic that the industry's chosen one, Kerry Packer's best friend, the man who had made the Nine network the leader in the television ratings, should be at the centre of this media storm. A shrewd bureaucrat would have slowed the process and taken fewer risks. A lawyer would have averted the public circus that surrounded the licence renewal hearings. (Gyngell himself spoke of the hearings as 'a circus' and referred to those who followed the hearings as 'Tribunal groupies'.)⁸⁹ But Gyngell had the sort of personality that did not yield to pressure. He had enjoyed considerable success in his life and that did not come his way through easy acceptance of the opinions of others. This characteristic was one that he and I recognised in each other. FACTS, however, was quite prepared to sacrifice one of its own, and now Gyngell found himself attacked mercilessly in Packer's flagship, the *Bulletin*.⁹⁰

Meanwhile the committee worked hard to assess the stream of programs that continued to flow through the tribunal's mailbox. They came from independent producers hoping to sell to the networks, from the networks themselves trying to get a C for old programs in their libraries and from overseas distributors hoping to sell into the Australian market. I noted that new local drama was still not forthcoming.

Lobbying was intense. I was frequently approached with invitations to visit productions and all the CPC public members were subjected to special pleading. I made it a rule not to accept or listen to approaches outside meetings. The only time I made an exception to this rule, the results were rather amusing. The producers of *Johnny Young's Talent Time* had applied for a C. It was a good example of the issue—a popular program made for a general audience, suitable for but not specifically made for children. My seventy-year-old mother was a big fan, so I accepted an invitation to attend a taping with my

mother, my father and my husband Don. I seated Mum in the best seat, and throughout the taping the camera kept returning to her, showing her centre-screen, white-headed and happy, enjoying the show. When we were invited backstage after the telecast to meet the star of the show, my mother led the way. Johnny Young leapt forward to greet her and shake hands. He thought she chaired the CPC; that's how well briefed he was. *Young Talent Time* did not get a C.

We held our ground, rejecting for C preschool programs, family programs, recycled out-dated quota programs. Many stations simply cleared their shelves of documentaries and anything else they might pass off as a children's program. We classified them all. It continued to be evident from the material submitted that a number of stations had no intention of investing the care, resources, imagination and talent needed for the development of programs designed specifically for the child audience.⁹¹

No longer a committee member, David Morgan now condemned the CPC as he pleased. He described the rejection of eighty programs as 'a stunning setback', failing to note not only that ninety-five programs had been accepted by the CPC within the same period but that he had been party to the approval and rejection process for most of those recommendations.⁹² Penny Spence earned a further rejection for her next show *Nine Will Fix It*, a ruling she fought in the press.

The Tribunal probably turned it down for a C classification because we gave children who appeared on the show a medal with the words, 'Nine fixed it.' They possibly didn't like us giving ourselves a pat on the back ... but now the Tribunal has rejected the program, it is unlikely the station will go ahead with another series. That is a pity.⁹³

Just before the December break, Channel 9 submitted a further program, *Harlequin*, and demanded an immediate classification. Spence wanted a decision made outside the normal process. When this was not forthcoming, she claimed in a letter to the chairman that she was 'completely disillusioned with the performance of the Tribunal's Children's Programme Committee' and that she regarded the process 'as unethical and elitist ... and one in which I have lost all confidence'.⁹⁴

Despite all the media and industry flak, Gyngell did not lose his sense of humour or energy. There was gossip that the only reason he remained committed to the CPC was to save himself in Canberra when the licence renewal hearings were an apparent shambles and he was undergoing criticism for his personal conduct. But I saw no indication, in his regular interaction with me and other members of the CPC, that he was acting so cynically. Throughout the following decades, long after the brouhaha over his chairmanship of the tribunal, I always found Bruce available and willing to help the cause of children's programming.

By the time Gyngell came up for reappointment, he had the most powerful groups in media politics and policy against him. He left the government and the tribunal with many issues to sort out—the most important of which was the public licence renewal process. This innovation had an unnerving effect on an industry that had to answer questions in public about stations' performance and publicly justify their programming. Some managers were made physically ill by the strain and anxiety induced by the hearings or felt hurt or ridiculed. FACTS was determined to have renewal hearings restricted as much as possible. Gyngell, it claimed, was the culprit and children's television the topic that left them most exposed. Gyngell would have to go.

The introduction of the C classification had been meant to encourage the televising of new programs for children both from Australia and overseas. Yet very few of the approved drama programs made overseas were bought by the stations and no Australian drama was being produced. The cheapest options were pursued. Pilots that had been approved were not taken up; they would have made better programs but cost more money. By the end of its second year of operation the CPC had classified 257 programs, accepting 131 and not recommending 126. There was nothing wrong with the system. We were separating the dross from the better programming. We were highlighting with the approval of pilots the types of programs that should be made. We lacked the support of the big network stations, where most of the production budget had to come from in any network series, and we were in conflict with the industry body—FACTS—which would make no move to help the creation of quality programs for Australian kids.

MEANWHILE, THE ADVERTISING guidelines had been making comparatively slow progress through the system, prompting several letters of complaint from lobbyist Barbara Biggins of the ACCFT.⁹⁵ Pressures to prioritise the task of classification of programs had been such that it was not until October 1979 that the CPC first sat down to consider the Advertising Sub-Committee's draft guidelines. Gyngell, anticipating further conflict, had requested that he be informed of the full range of opinion in the committee on the subject of time allowed for advertising, and of any other areas of disagreement.⁹⁶ The most contentious issue was the amount of time to be allowed for advertising during the 4–5 p.m. timeslot. John Stapp voted for thirteen minutes of advertising, Rex Heading and Bruce Harris opted for eleven minutes, Frank Meaney wanted a maximum of nine minutes, while Joan Brennan, Sarah Guest and I thought six minutes sufficient. We all agreed that a single product could be promoted once only in any hour and there was little disagreement about other issues.

Today, the advertising guidelines proposed (apart from the question of time allowed) are still progressive compared with the US market, where the advertising tail wags the programming dog. Back in 1979 there was ample evidence, from the tribunal's own hearings, of public concern about advertising to children. There was no evidence that there would be a severe effect on stations' finances with a small reduction in advertising during the C timeslot. The guidelines proposed a limitation on repetition of individual advertisements; no exploitation of the special relationship between a children's program compere, or character, with the child audience—there had to be recognition that this was a position of trust. (Such a concept would disappear in the 1990s.) The encouragement of pro-social advertising was recommended—the committee felt that the techniques of advertising could be used to teach children that there was more to life than buying products.

The committee shied away from the nutrition debate surrounding food advertising, primarily because compelling information about harmfulness was not yet available. The fast food outlets, with their aggressive marketing campaigns—to eat fast and sweet—were yet to be seen in Australia and the dramatic health problems that would emerge two decades later were not in evidence. The research

branch within the tribunal and another official committee were examining the issue of food advertising. The Commonwealth Health Department was sounding warnings about the effect on public health of advertising high-sugar foods but its working group was yet to report its findings, so the CPC agreed that it should wait for more information and address this issue separately. There was nothing the CPC could have done to hasten or ultimately change any decision. And the community would have to wait more than twenty-five years to get any government action to address the threat posed by one-third of Australians being overweight or obese.

There were no surprises in the advertising guidelines for FACTS or anyone in the industry. The committee agreed that suggesting a total ban on advertising in the 4–5 p.m. timeslot could be counterproductive to its major aims for programming and that it would be unrealistic to believe such a ban for one hour a day would quarantine children in a society saturated by advertising in all media. So the CPC got through these discussions without disturbing the co-operative relationship that existed between the industry and public members. We asked the industry to provide figures to prove their claim that a reduction of advertisements, of the order recommended, would cause sufficient economic hardship to affect their performance in programming. We knew they could not mount such an argument, given the performance by most stations and the way they managed their advertising accounts. Rex and John, who advised on that point, became targets for more hostility with the release of the advertising guidelines, but John was amused by it all.

When the tribunal passed on the advertising guidelines to FACTS it got a response which was typically aggressive. The industry body asked the tribunal ‘to supply them, in relation to each of the proposed guidelines, with a detailed statement as to the reason for the proposed guidelines and to express where the industry had failed to properly adhere to existing standards or codes’.⁹⁷ The committee declined to do so, as industry compliance with existing codes was not the issue. The tribunal, with enough to worry about, was reluctant to push the matter, so the advertising guidelines sat with FACTS for some months with no action being taken as they fumed about the committee’s role in regulating what they saw as their industry.

In response to FACTS’ objection to limiting C-program

screenings to between 4 and 5 p.m., the tribunal undertook research which demonstrated clearly that adult viewing was at a very low level between 4 and 5 p.m. and that adults were not being disenfranchised at that time. McNair Anderson survey data, along with the tribunal's research, confirmed that this was the most appropriate time of the day to screen programs for children. Eighty-five per cent of people surveyed approved and supported having only children's programs shown at this time.⁹⁸

The frustration within FACTS grew. The federal director, James Malone, had told me with great confidence during the earlier inquiry that FACTS' submission for self-regulation was 'stamped Malcolm Fraser'. Events had not turned out the way Malone, and many others, had expected. The industry now intended to set things right, using as evidence the perceived mess the tribunal was in and the ongoing public outcry that was not being managed. It was all a matter of timing. The government was tiring of the issue. Gyngell's appointment as chair of the tribunal was coming up for renewal. And it was a federal election year.

Behind the scenes, FACTS had been negotiating with the tribunal and the minister to achieve the self-regulation of their industry and the right to develop all broadcasting codes, including children's television, that they had been seeking since Malcolm Fraser came to power in November 1975.

On 5 March 1980, Jefferson Penberthy blew FACTS' plans apart with a front-page report in the *Australian Financial Review* that won him a Walkley Award. Headed 'Sambo's Chopper Squad Invades Canberra' (Sam Chisholm, then chairman of FACTS, and a Packer employee, was the Sambo in question), his piece began:

Australia's commercial television industry has demanded that the Federal government scrap its draft amendments Bill on advertising and program controls and grant the industry full self-regulation in the current session of Parliament.

The industry has told the government that it does not accept proposed amendments to the Broadcasting and Television Act, which would leave key areas—advertising, children's programs and Australian content—in the hands of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal.

It has demanded the right to set its own standards in all areas, and to administer them under a cloak of confidentiality through the new Code Board of the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS), which was at that time chaired by Sam Chisholm.

Remarkably, FACTS claims to have won Tribunal support for its plans. This follows a one step two step operation on Monday and Tuesday last week, in which a five-man FACTS delegation:

- Presented a copy of its self-regulation strategy to Tribunal Chairman Mr Bruce Gyngell and vice-chairman Mr James Oswin in Sydney, asking them to agree that it seemed ‘workable’.
- Then flew to Canberra in Mr Kerry Packer’s Channel 9 helicopter the following morning and presented the submission to the Minister for Post and Telecommunications, Mr Tony Staley, stating that it had Tribunal support.

Members of the industry chopper squad descended on Canberra like a scene from *Apocalypse Now* and demanded immediate control in areas almost as politically explosive ...

The most controversial point in the FACTS proposal was that the records and files of the new group would be confidential and not available to the ABT. A tribunal official was quoted by Penberthy as saying ‘the prospect of placing the industry group in control of TV advertising and children’s program standards [was akin] to putting Dracula in charge of a blood bank’.

There was an outcry as a result of this revelation—based on a sound source who seemed to have access to Sam Chisholm’s office, where the plotting had taken place—with all the public lobby groups and their members deluging the Minister for Post and Telecommunications and their federal parliamentary representatives with letters and telegrams asking them to retain control of children’s programming, advertising and Australian content on TV. Norman Lacy, as Minister for the Arts in Victoria, sent a telegram to Tony Staley expressing his concern and seeking an urgent meeting ‘before you or I take further action’.

Tony Staley decided to table the controversial legislation and make it available for public comment. The controversy influenced the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts to reopen its inquiry into the impact of television on the development and learning behaviour of children.⁹⁹ The committee chairman, Senator Gordon Davidson, made it clear that the move was being taken in the light of recent developments. 'Senator Davidson said that the reconvened inquiry should provide a forum for discussion while an Amendments Bill granting the industry qualified self-regulation lay on the Parliamentary table during the winter recess'.¹⁰⁰ The bipartisan standing committee was able to exert significant counter-pressure on those senior members of the government who supported the industry's demands for self-regulation. The industry's efforts to achieve self-regulation were thwarted yet again.

On 31 May 1980, Bruce Gyngell resigned as chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. He had offered himself for reappointment and been called to Canberra to account to Minister Staley for his 'excesses and peccadillos', including his expenses and his forced resignation from the tribunal inquiry into Radio 3CR after allegations of bias. During an inquiry into public broadcasting licences in Sydney, Gyngell, with typical candour, had reportedly said:

I would be no party to awarding a licence to people who I believe were designing to overthrow the basic philosophic way of life that exists in Australia ... I would not be party to licensing another 3CR and if people do not like that, then I have declared openly what my bias is.¹⁰¹

His wife's consultancy as an interior decorator for the Nine network and his agreement to do an advertisement for American Express were issues Gyngell discussed with Staley. The two talked of rumours that Gyngell was living 'in a style beyond his means'. He had a \$40 000 overdraft which he could only repay by selling his house and buying a cheaper one. This prompted him to accept an advertising offer by Amex which Staley did not consider compatible with the role of chairman of a statutory body that regulated broadcasting. He was told that the Attorney-General, Senator Durack, was opposed to his reappointment and wanted a judge in the position; so did Staley. His reappointment would be very difficult to get

through Cabinet and Staley would not put him up unless his wife relinquished her consultancy with Mr Packer's Consolidated Press. He was asked if he was interested in the top job at the Australian Film Commission (AFC). Bruce replied he was 'not interested in a government career' and assured Staley 'he would carry on until the end with propriety'. He was upset that the minister had said nothing of his achievements.¹⁰² In April, Gyngell was appointed as interim managing director of the new Independent & Multicultural Broadcasting Corporation (IMBC, later SBS). He left on an over-seas trip.

The members of the CPC were not pleased to see him go, but FACTS and the government wanted swift change, and no loose cannon this time. David Jones was appointed to take up the position of chairman from 1 July. A partner in the legal firm of Ellison, Hewison and Whitehead at the time of the announcement, David Jones was chairman of the Legal Aid Commission of Victoria. He had made a particular study of the law in relation to broadcasting and had visited a number of countries to monitor broadcasting developments. Catie Weigall, another lawyer, was appointed to fill the vacancy left by Janet Strickland, who had resigned.¹⁰³ These appointments signalled a change in the processes of the tribunal and the CPC towards one of containment.

In my capacity as an academic, I wrote a case study of Gyngell's handling of the licence hearings that did not present him in a favourable light—an assessment he accepted with characteristic good grace.¹⁰⁴ The study was part of a project on decision-making in communication organisations undertaken by the East–West Centre at the University of Hawaii. My paper looked at the unpredictable nature of policy outcomes when bureaucracies, political parties, commercial interests, consumer groups, the media, academics and an unpredictable individual like Bruce Gyngell all interact in the public arena. I concluded that, although open policy processes like the ABT licence hearings are more exposed to conflicting special interests, the public ultimately becomes better informed, more politicised and more experienced, and then creates waves. Bruce Gyngell contributed to an era of change in broadcasting policy that was unexpected by both industry and government. He was a man with no consistent philosophy, subject to extreme shifts in opinion, who attracted attention

from the media.¹⁰⁵ He considered himself his own man, and he was. Throughout the rest of his career in television, he would provoke critics and admirers. He was described variously as a TV maverick, the most distinguished television executive Australia had ever known, and a TV terrorist.¹⁰⁶

ON 15 NOVEMBER 1979, I presented the second annual John Grierson Lecture at the State Film Centre in Melbourne. My subject was 'Children's television—the past, the present and the future'. I chose this occasion to tell the story of the regulation of children's television. I outlined the saga of events surrounding the CPC, showed examples of excellent programming and described what needed to happen if quality children's programming was to be produced in Australia. We needed to develop a pool of talented people in children's production and undertake research to provide them with insights relevant to new ideas and production techniques. If I were a station manager, I said, I would assemble all the talent in one city in one production unit. We needed new insights into children's responses to potential program themes, formats, content and treatment—as well as new ideas for ongoing programs.

In my lecture I acknowledged those individuals who had helped us get to this point: the creative people who were working in children's television and the challenge they were taking on; the ABT and its chairman, Bruce Gyngell, who would go down in history as the man responsible for increasing children's program time on television in the face of scathing attack from his peers; the industry members on the Children's Program Committee—Bruce Harris, Rex Heading and John Stapp—who had taught me that within the television industry those wearing the black hats and the white hats were not always on opposing sides; the individuals and members of consumer groups (including ACTAC and the ACCFT), plus the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts, who had kept the issue of children's television alive over many years; the station managers throughout Australia who had bitten the bullet (and despite FACTS, there were a number); and those journalists (particularly Penberthy), who ensured deals involving important public issues were not done behind closed doors.

Norman Lacy, the Minister for the Arts and Minister for Educational Services in Victoria, read my lecture and phoned to speak to me. He had been thinking about the issues involved in children's television and decided he wanted to make this a priority of his ministry. That phone call changed the direction of my life.

We would work together through the next phase of the unique experiment in children's programming in Australia: the development of plans to establish an Australian Children's Television Foundation.

6

Towards a Children's Television Foundation

'To create a sense of national identity that can sustain a nation in times of crisis takes a long time and much effort; the best place to start is with our children.'

—John Morris¹⁰⁷

MY FIRST STORMY YEAR as chairman of the Children's Program Committee convinced me that regulation by itself would never achieve the type of programming that I believed Australian children deserved and needed.

Although broadcasters were required as a condition of licence to meet the standards set down by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, the combination of a minority audience (which children are), advertising restrictions and the relatively high cost of quality programs meant that broadcasters—particularly a network as aggressive as Nine—would minimise their costs and stretch their audience focus as widely as they could. There was always going to be tension between the networks and the regulator as the tribunal sought to impose a policy for children's television requiring the development

of programs that entertained but had a serious, well-developed cultural purpose.

Cultural benefit is a difficult concept to define. According to Alan Fels, former chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, culture is 'derived from our historical, artistic and traditional heritage' and has 'significance for society as a whole'. 'A cohesive national culture and identity would not be possible without shared cultural experiences', and film and television programs enable us to share those experiences. Yet, as Fels points out, such programs are not necessarily profitable productions, so commercial enterprises resist this role. It therefore becomes the responsibility of government to ensure the provision of cultural experiences which are the glue that binds us together as a nation.¹⁰⁸

It was a recognition that regulation, although essential, would fail without subsidy and without example that led me to canvass the need for an Australian Children's Television Foundation. I had a devout belief in telling Australian children their stories and I understood that television was an unrealised resource for stimulating children's intellectual and emotional development. I believed Australia could produce children's television programs of quality, imbued with a unique Australian flavour in order to justify the expenditure that would be required, programs that they would not only watch and learn from but enjoy. There was no point in replicating UK or US productions.

The challenge facing me was not simply the networks opposed to any regulation that might reduce their profit margins. In addition, there was no funding base to encourage the creation of quality children's programs and no institutional base to recruit writers, directors and producers to work in the field.

Although many people later claimed credit, the concept of an independent children's authority originated with the Children's Television Advisory Committee to the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, when in June 1972 the committee suggested that the Commonwealth Government should consider encouraging production of children's programs by offering grants, subsidies or tax concessions and 'ways to support the establishment of an independent foundation to produce film and television programs especially designed for children'. Another proposal put forward by the ABCB

before its abolition was for the use of licence fees paid by stations to found a children's programming unit. In 1978, a report by the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts recommended that the government establish an independent children's television program production unit funded by receipts from commercial broadcasters' licence fees.¹⁰⁹

Unlike the battle to achieve and implement the children's television standards, which was fought mainly through the media, the campaign to establish a children's television foundation was conducted in the corridors of power, away from media scrutiny—at least in its early phases. While I was head of the CPC I found an external ally in Anne Gorman who was the executive director, Family and Children's Services Agency, Department of Youth and Community Services, New South Wales, and director of the International Year of the Child in New South Wales. She contacted me to sound out the idea of setting up a foundation to produce children's programming. Anne had five children and felt strongly about the content of children's television programming. She was vocal about quality and determined to get kids on the political agenda. Anne was a neighbour of Paul Landa, the New South Wales Minister for Education, and her kids babysat his children. She had done him a favour in changing the boundary of her backyard when he wanted to extend his tennis court, and so she could readily pick up the phone to talk with him.

I suggested a number of people for an initial meeting to talk about a foundation: Anne, Geoff Evans (my former colleague from the ABCB), Ian Fairweather (a children's television producer from South Australia), Julie James Bailey and Georgina Carnegie (from the Australian Film and Television School), Ursula Callus (the former project officer to the Advisory Committee on Program Standards, ABCB), Sarah Guest and me. This small group met in Sydney in March 1979 and we discussed the possibility of using the International Year of the Child as a platform to build a children's television foundation which would produce model programs.

There was uncertainty about how to start. One supporter suggested that we launch with a wine and cheese tasting, a modest proposal unlikely to elicit the level of support required. I understood by now that if there was to be any hope of success we needed a strong case and solid backing from people who had clout in the community.

Chairing the CPC had taught me the strength of the forces we were up against.

The first formal meeting of a steering committee was held in Melbourne on 23 April. A document spelling out the objectives was refined at a second meeting in Sydney a fortnight later. At the beginning of June, a proposal was circulated to all relevant bodies in Australia with an interest in children's television. Only one body, the Perth Institute of Film and Television, expressed any doubts.

We needed sound advice. Anne Gorman and I consulted Sir Archibald Glenn, former chairman of ICI, whose son Gordon had worked with me on some documentary films at La Trobe. Sir Archibald suggested we talk to a professional fundraiser. We also met John Elliott, CEO of IXL, and he agreed to be involved. Both men thought that the concept was highly marketable and that the steering committee should proceed towards incorporation and seek the support of several prominent business people to form the board of a foundation.

Some months were spent in refining a document to approach the Victorian and New South Wales governments for establishment grants. The New South Wales Minister for the International Year of the Child, Rex Jackson, responded with a grant of \$2500 to cover designing a logo and printing paper with foundation letterhead and to meet the legal costs of incorporating the foundation as a Company Limited by Guarantee registered in all states. His Victorian counterpart, Walter Jona, referred the matter to the Minister for Arts and Educational Services, Norman Lacy, who had set aside \$100 000 for a children's television program and was planning to set up an advisory group to select a script for funding.

Now we were getting somewhere: Norman Lacy's interest gave momentum to the proposal for a children's television foundation. The Minister was preparing for an international study trip, and he asked me to meet and advise him on whom he should visit in the United States and the United Kingdom to learn more about recent initiatives in children's programming. I suggested Susan Green, the director of the Federal Communications Commission's Children's Task Force in the United States. The half-hearted approach to regulation that the FCC had taken was not working in the States, and I knew Susan's frustration with the lack of regulation. She impressed Lacy, and by the

time he returned to Australia he had drafted a discussion paper which he intended to put before the Australian Education Council (AEC)—the Council of Commonwealth and state ministers of education.¹¹⁰

The Minister called me into his office for a meeting with Betty McDowell, manager of the Victorian Children's Council for Film and Television (VCCFT), to ask if his paper would be supported by her organisation. Betty assured him that it would be and did not express any reservations. The education ministers' meeting was to be held in Sydney in early June. I checked into the Wentworth Hotel, where the politicians were staying, to be on hand as a go-between for the Victorian Minister; Anne Gorman was the go-between for the New South Wales Minister, Paul Landa. We played tic-tac between the two politicians, and both ministers went into the meeting next morning knowing the line the other would be taking.

On 6 June 1980, Norman Lacy outlined to the AEC the role that Commonwealth and state governments should play in working together to establish a subsidised Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) which would carry out the following functions:

- raise the finance required from governments, sponsors and other funding sources for investment in the purchase and production of high-quality children's television programs
- establish agency relationships with overseas organisations producing suitable material so that the best material could be introduced into Australian networks on a subsidised basis
- enter into joint investment arrangements with the government Film Corporations for local program production
- encourage local writers, directors and producers to become involved in children's television production
- establish a research facility to, among other projects, provide a means of evaluating programs produced locally as well as those purchased from overseas
- provide an information service to governments, TV and production companies, researchers, writers and the public generally on all facets of TV for children.

Lacy's recommendations were supported unanimously, largely because of the bipartisan backing of New South Wales. The AEC

not only supported in principle the concepts in the discussion paper; they also agreed to establish a children's television working group to examine the feasibility of creating a foundation, and to prepare a comprehensive proposal for implementation after thorough consultation. The working group would include various representatives of government, the television networks, the regulator and the children's television lobby. As Paul Landa was chairman of the AEC, New South Wales had carriage of the proposal. Frank Meaney, as head of the Community Relations Unit in the State Education Department, would convene the working group, to be set up as soon as possible.

Frank and I discussed the membership. He issued the invitations and stacked the working group with members we knew would be sympathetic. FACTS was not invited because of their clear opposition to any form of threat to their programming decisions. Frank would represent New South Wales, I would represent the CPC, Dr Graeme Whitehead from the Special Services Division of the Education Department represented Victoria, and Anne Gorman was to represent the Steering Committee for the Establishment of a Children's TV Foundation. Rex Heading, our CPC ally, was asked to represent commercial television and John Morris, the managing director of the South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC), represented South Australia. The committee also included Paddy Conroy, head of children's programming at the ABC and already an active supporter. The Australian Film and Television School had two representatives—its director, Storry Walton, and staff member Georgina Carnegie, seconded to help us work out a staffing structure. We ended up with a large committee—seventeen members in all.¹¹¹ The working group was directed to report within three months, with the first meeting to be held on 7 July 1980. I began work on a draft report and Georgina Carnegie began work on a staffing structure.

The only representative on the working group that we thought might have a special interest to pursue was the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television (ACCFT). They had two representatives on the group. Patricia Braithwaite, their national president, represented the state of Tasmania, and Barbara Biggins, from South Australia, represented the council itself. Publicly, they supported the establishment of the Foundation.¹¹²

But the ACCTF was a national umbrella group; each of its state entities operated differently and autonomously. It was a voluntary organisation which received a modest annual grant from the Australian Film Commission, most of which went to pay for a Melbourne-based manager responsible for the distribution of British Film Foundation films in Australia. The council's constitution was broad-ranging: 'to stimulate and maintain public interest in the provision of suitable entertainment and cultural film and television programs for children and young people and to sponsor and/or itself undertake the production, distribution and exhibition of such programs'.¹¹³

In the early 1970s, nearly ten years before, the ACCFT had had exploratory discussions with the ABCB about some form of foundation, but the idea had gone nowhere. The organisation was limited by its funding, its expertise and its culture, primarily a product of the 'twin-set and pearls' culture of the Victorian Liberal Party establishment. Until Barbara Biggins entered the scene in the mid-1970s and persuaded the organisation to take an interest in television, they were genteel lobbyists. Barbara became the council's TV officer, campaigning against advertising and violence directed at children, and developed an effective platform for lobbying government.

The working group elected John Morris as chairman. I had known John for about eight years: we were both members of the board of the Australian Film and Television School and had become good friends. John was a prolific film maker, who had joined the Commonwealth Film Unit as a writer and producer in 1956 and gone on to produce more than fifty documentary films there. In 1973 he joined Gil Brealey at the SAFC. By 1975 the commission was in crisis and John put his hand up for the challenging job of managing director. Under his leadership, a steady stream of memorable productions emerged, including *The Last Wave*, *Blue Fin*, *Dawn*, *Breaker Morant*, *The Club* and *The Plumber*.

John and I had some similarities in style. He was very forthright and already a controversial figure in the industry. He would not tolerate fools, and had a wicked sense of humour. Deeply committed to the film industry, he sought every opportunity to develop talent. Along with Frank, John knew more about me and my objectives than most people. He was an important mentor for me: I found him

a wise and useful sounding board for ideas, and I trusted him and knew he would manage the disparate working group because of his knowledge of the industry and his strong personality. I also knew he would recommend what he believed was best for the industry.

I attended the first two meetings of the working group before I headed off on sabbatical leave to take up a teaching position at the University of Iowa for four months while I pursued treatment in the United States for my voice condition. The Australian Institute of Family Studies had just been established and my husband Don had been appointed as the founding director. He stayed in Melbourne with our elder daughter Sue, who was attending her first year at university, while I took Lesley with me.

At this point, I did not see the work on the development of an ACTF as a stepping stone to my future career. But I was tired of university life and the bitter, destructive battles involved in maintaining film courses in a hostile education environment, and I was having discussions with two friends about starting up a small business. I was working some Saturday mornings behind the counter in their delicatessen shop in Burke Road, Camberwell, where I enjoyed the contact with people who were not from the academic world. They even suggested we go into joint ownership of a pub or a wine bar and the thought sounded attractive as a complete change of lifestyle.

By the time Lesley and I returned home in January 1981 two significant things had happened. The main one was that I had a proper name for my voice disorder. The diagnosis of spasmodic dysphonia put paid to earlier suggestions that my condition was imagined, or caused by stress, and gave me new speech therapy techniques that might help me regain some control over my rasping and patchy voice.

Second, the working group was ready to launch its report recommending that an Australian Children's Television Foundation be established. John Morris had personally written the final draft and envisaged that first there would be another interim committee, 'to develop a comprehensive proposal for the implementation of the Australian Children's Television Foundation'. I argued to Norman Lacy that what we needed was an interim board for the Foundation to take the next step, and the minister agreed. It was a tactical move that would strengthen our prospects by bringing the Foundation

closer to formal existence. Lacy would present the report first to a meeting of the Arts ministers and then to the AEC. John Morris wrote an introduction to his report, outlining the philosophy behind the idea for the Foundation.¹¹⁴

The main arguments that would be mounted *against* the Foundation were identified in advance, including: Why set up yet another government bureaucracy when state and federal film funding bodies already exist? And why don't television stations take advantage of the new tax incentives and do it themselves? The experience of twenty years of television showed that the television networks would avoid making programs that would succeed with children—they claimed they didn't know how—and the existing film bodies did not have the expertise or the interest.

The report also outlined the functions of a children's television foundation, including encouraging production and transmission of quality programs; training personnel; establishing agency relationships both within Australia and overseas; conducting and sponsoring research into all areas relevant to children's television; and providing information at all levels of the community as an authoritative body on children's television, including promoting mass media education.

The group's recommendation on structure and status was that the Foundation be set up in all states and territories as a Company Limited by Guarantee, funded by government and private sources, but independent and able to act on a commercial basis.¹¹⁵

On 13 February 1981, Norman Lacy presented the recommendations to the Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers with Responsibilities in the Arts and Cultural Matters. Frank Meaney, Storry Walton and Georgina Carnegie were present and worked the room, lobbying effectively. Paul Landa told the assembled ministers: 'We have a completely bipartisan approach ... we are talking about eight million dollars. I know arts budgets are not that great—in New South Wales alone we have an education budget running close to \$1.5 billion ...' He asked the Council of the Arts Ministers to get right behind the proposal and agree to set up an interim board. Norman Lacy argued for an immediate financial commitment. The support from the Arts ministers was unanimous.

Once again the two ministers had worked together to persuade the Commonwealth and the other states to endorse the proposal for

a foundation. Six days later, on 19 February 1981, the AEC agreed to set up a steering committee to create the Foundation. John Morris, Frank Meaney, Anne Gorman and I were very satisfied with our work so far. But the processes of government work slowly and as time went on they became more problematic.

NORMAN LACY PHONED me. 'What do we do now?' he asked, suggesting I come and work for him part-time to assist in establishing the Foundation. It did not take me long to decide. I took leave from La Trobe University to become the task force director in Victoria for Lacy. Frank Meaney, as part of his role for the New South Wales Education Department, became the task force director reporting to Paul Landa. Frank and I were officially in partnership again, this time reporting to the ministers and to a steering committee on a budget and plan to implement the AEC's proposals. As colleagues, Frank and I were made for each other. We had worked closely for five years through stormy times, from the setting up of the advisory committee to the ABCB in 1975, through the early years of the CPC.¹¹⁶ We knew each other's strengths and complemented each other: Frank was articulate, while I struggled with my voice.

I began work in March 1981, housed in an office in the Ministry of the Arts. I was told the rules of engagement by Bernie Stewart (number two in the hierarchy of the Arts Ministry in Victoria), who was hostile because the minister had engaged me directly, usurping the department's role. Stewart found me a small office, a typewriter and a telephone, and lectured me about the ways of the bureaucracy. He insisted I should not bypass him and speak directly with anyone about financial issues. I listened without comment, deciding that I would not rely on him. I had no typing skills and rang an agency to employ a temporary assistant, Joan Faroe. I wasn't sure what to do next, so I telephoned everyone I could think of who had been involved in the idea of the Foundation up to this point to tell them we were in business. When I finished that round of discussions, I telephoned them all again, searching for any intelligence that might be useful.

Frank and I got down to work. Over the next year, together we endured countless meetings explaining the concept of the Foundation

to ministers, government MPs, bureaucrats, people of influence and anyone who would listen. Usually I would open up and then Frank would do most of the talking, an interesting double act. Frank loved to argue the case and he was very good at it. Sometimes we would get a very sympathetic and supportive hearing, other times we would be sent quickly out the door. But we were enthusiastic, the numbers built and we developed a support base. Australia's geographical size, as every lobbyist who has had to deal with state governments around Australia knows, is a huge challenge for any national project. We had been given an extraordinarily difficult brief, as the viability of the Foundation would depend upon support from each of the states as well as the Commonwealth.

My most important meeting was with John Morris, to canvass ideas for membership of the steering committee. Norman Lacy wanted Hugh Morgan, the executive director of Western Mining Corporation Ltd, to become the chairman of the Foundation, but Morgan declined because of his corporate commitments.¹¹⁷

I have sometimes wondered what the history of the Foundation would have been had Hugh Morgan accepted—very different, to be sure. I asked John if he would do it. His response was, 'You've already got me; you need Ken Watts'. Watts had been the first chair of the Australian Film Commission and was the most important film bureaucrat in Australia at that time. He would bring further credibility to the organisation for a children's television foundation but he would be unlikely to accept any role less than that of chairman. Phillip Adams, who had played an important role in the regeneration of the Australian film industry a decade earlier, was also a very important player to have on side. Sir James Cruthers (managing director of television station TW7 for many years) would bring the prestige we needed from Western Australia. All three accepted Lacy's invitation to join the steering committee, with Ken Watts as chair. Anne Gorman was to represent the original steering group and keep them informed, and Patricia Braithwaite was appointed to keep the ACCFT involved. Norman Lacy was eager to involve John Elliott, who was close to the Prime Minister, once the board was established.

The first meeting of the Steering Committee for the Establishment of a Children's TV Foundation was held on 24 April 1981. Norman Lacy opened the meeting. Phillip Adams presented a logo,

designed by Alex Stitt, which Phillip and Alex jointly donated to the ACTF. The design represented a yellow television set like a full sun, with the outline of a smiling child's pink face in the corner. It was cheerful, clever and classy and remains the ACTF logo today—well known and admired around the world.

Price Waterhouse consultants had been retained to prepare a budget and staffing plan. The budget for the first year was estimated at \$1.3 million, with a staff of twenty-four people. To undertake the proposed functions of production, research and development, plus management, Price Waterhouse envisaged a total staff of thirty-eight people for the ACTF.

The budget was expected to grow to ten million dollars over a four-year period, with costs shared equally between the state and Commonwealth governments: state governments were to contribute on a population basis, but gaining financial support from all governments was going to be problematic. Queensland indicated early that children's television was a Commonwealth Government responsibility. Tasmania, although seeing value in the Foundation, said its money should be allocated to the Tasmanian Film Corporation.

At this meeting, a location was also discussed for the first time. There was agreement that the foundation should be based in one city only, for cost reasons. It was also agreed that the location should be Melbourne, because most media-related organisations were concentrated in Sydney and that was not in the best interests of a national film and television industry. This would later prove to be an issue for New South Wales.

But the main challenge looming was the position of the ACCFT, particularly the Victorian division led by Sarah Guest and Rosemary Farrow (the council's state president), who saw a threat and began a campaign claiming that the Foundation was empire-building and would duplicate its own work and the work of other film research and educational organisations, wasting public money. In fact, the intention for each of the Foundation's roles was clear from the outset. The wording in all official documents, from Norman Lacy's initial paper (endorsed by Elizabeth McDowell on behalf of the VCCFT) and the AEC working group's report, had never been changed, but now the VCCFT and its national umbrella body had a different view.

Norman Lacy had been well aware of the historical sensitivities and had consulted assiduously with the council's Victorian contingent from the beginning. The organisation had been represented on the AEC working group and agreed in principle with the idea of a foundation. Patricia Braithwaite had been invited to join the steering committee of the ACTE. Sarah Guest (member of the CPC and of VCCFT) was invited to lead the supporters' group for the Foundation in Victoria (a role that she declined and Peter White from La Trobe University accepted). Now the Council argued that the British model of the Film Foundation was the most appropriate, and that there was too much overlap between the ACCFT's role and the proposed new Foundation.¹¹⁸ But nobody outside the Council believed the ACCFT should form the basis of the new body.

Norman Lacy ploughed on in a determined way. In March, he gave an address to the reconvened Senate Standing Committee on Arts and Education, which proved a further turning point in securing the Foundation's future. Outlining the failure of the commercial industry to recognise that children had special needs as television viewers, he said:

The failure to achieve satisfactory results has been due partly to the absence of concentrated and continued action by networks and advertisers and partly to there being insufficient action to result in leadership on this issue by governments ... No one has acknowledged that a substantial improvement in the quality and availability of children's programs requires the spending of large amounts of money. Public inquiries ... have demonstrated there is a growing public concern about children's television. Demands for regulatory action have resulted in the establishment of the ABT's Children's Programme Committee ... one of our main concerns must be in the area of children's drama ... The most cost-effective way of tackling the problem, and the only way likely to achieve the required breakthrough is to set up a new organisation.

This should be an independent body with a national identity, owing allegiance to no commercial interest yet capable of earning the respect of all parties because of its constructive approach.

A central authority with a single aim of promoting the production and transmission of quality children's television would have advantages over existing State and Commonwealth bodies ... This organisation should not be a production house. It should work exclusively through existing production houses and producers, including the appropriate State bodies and the television stations, supplying finance for worthwhile projects that are brought to it *as well as commissioning the making of projects it has initiated itself*.¹¹⁹

The Foundation was to become not a studio facility but the initiator and broker of production with the independent industry. The senate committee endorsed the missing elements from the government policy on children's television—subsidy and the creation of a foundation. They recommended that the federal government support the Australian Children's Television Foundation financially; that films commissioned by the Foundation for local production qualify for tax concessions under the provisions of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1936*; and that financial support to the Foundation from the private sector qualify as a tax deduction. The support for the eligibility of children's productions for tax deductibility was crucial. As it stood, the film tax incentive disadvantaged children's television, in that the most likely format for children would be less than an hour in length and such a program length was ineligible. As well, continuing drama series were not eligible. Lacy and the steering committee lobbied the Treasurer, John Howard, and Ian Wilson, the Minister for Home Affairs, to seek the inclusion of children's television as a specific category eligible to receive tax concessions.

Lacy worked diligently for the Foundation, consulting all interests and lobbying other state and Commonwealth ministers and explaining his objectives. I travelled with him to Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane and Canberra. In every meeting in each state the arguments were spelled out, but our campaign was seriously undermined by the people Lacy should have been entitled to expect to back him and the idea of a foundation most strongly—fellow Victorian Liberal Party children's television advocates Sarah Guest and her husband James.

7

Dirty Politics

*'Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls;
Who steals my purse steals trash; ...
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.'*

—*Othello*, Act 3, 155

JAMES GUEST WAS A SCION of the Melbourne establishment. His father, Chester Guest, was a barrister and a director of several of Australia's largest companies. His mother, Patricia, was described as the city's leading *grande dame* of the old school and became a foundation member of the Liberal Party. Patricia Guest gained a reputation as a social hostess of rare distinction, and it was said that Robert Menzies held early talks concerning the formation of a post-war conservative party in her Toorak drawing room.¹²⁰ James had enjoyed a privileged upbringing. A lawyer by training, he became a Liberal member of the Victorian Legislative Council, with a reputation for writing letters to the newspapers.

I had got to know his wife Sarah quite well over the years, mainly through our involvement in the ABT's Children's Program Committee. She had joined the Victorian Children's Council for Film and Television (VCCFT) and became an outspoken lobbyist for the cause of children's programs. Like her mother-in-law she had the manner and the bearing of one born to rule, and she was ambitious. In the mid-1970s, I would pass on speaking engagements to her when I couldn't keep up with requests to address public groups. She represented the VCCFT at the Self Regulation Inquiry public licence hearings and spoke at many community meetings. She had developed a media profile, attracted Bruce Gyngell's attention and been invited to become a member of the CPC. James supported his wife's interests and gave legal advice to help her with her submissions and representations on broadcasting matters. Sarah first introduced me to Norman Lacy, but when she heard Lacy had invited me to meet him to discuss the problems of children's television and the idea for a foundation, I sensed her unease.

The focus of Lacy and the steering committee was on winning funding support from Canberra where, once again, ministerial portfolios had changed. There were now three relevant ministers—Ian Wilson, Minister for Home Affairs; Wal Fife, Minister for Education; and Ian Sinclair, Minister for Communications. In June 1981, Lacy and I travelled to Canberra to meet each of them separately. All said they supported the Foundation in principle but expressed doubt about whether the government would supply the requested funding. They said they were aware of opposition to the Foundation, and that arguments about duplication and waste were being expressed. At the second meeting of the steering committee on 8 July 1981, Lacy reported on his meetings in Canberra and pointed out that his lobbying was more difficult because the ACTF was not a public issue; no one was talking about the Foundation in the media. Yet the hearings of the Senate Standing Committee were receiving coverage and the general issue of children's television was very much alive. We decided to launch a campaign to promote the ACTF, with invitations coming from the Supporters' Group, on 16 July 1981, at the State Film Centre in Melbourne. I was to make the arrangements with the help of a publicist.

The ACCFT had held its annual general meeting in June 1981,

with Ken Watts as the speaker. Following his presentation, a vote of support for the Foundation was carried on a two-thirds majority, due largely to the efforts of Barbara Biggins from South Australia in countering the opposition from Victoria. The Guests were so upset by this result that James phoned Lacy on 1 July 1981 to say this was not correct:

in fact four of the votes in favour were invalid and the motion was lost. (The Councils against the motion were Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania. Included in the votes in favour were the Teachers' Federation and the Australian School of Film and Television. Queensland abstained from voting altogether and South Australia was the only State Council which gave a valid vote in favour.)

Guest objected to the proposed structure of the Foundation, and the fact that the smaller states were involved and 'may not appoint suitable people to the Board which would be disastrous'. The Minister 'could not guarantee that he could appoint or control the Board'.¹²¹

On 13 July, Lacy wrote to the Victorian Premier, Lindsay Thompson, who was also treasurer, giving him the opportunity to issue a press release announcing Victorian funding of \$160 000 towards the budget for the ACTF. The Premier decided not to act on the invitation from one of his ministers without first passing the release to James Guest to see if, as an advocate for the cause of children's television and member of the Liberal Party, he had any objection. Guest certainly did and the release was withheld. James Guest claimed he had not been adequately informed of the plans. His phone call twelve days earlier had not had the effect he sought, so he sent a lengthy letter to Lacy outlining his objections.

The proposed commitment of finance had not been referred to a Liberal Party policy committee for approval—and, said Guest, 'whether or not you or Dr Edgar were actually contriving by devious means to effect objectionable ends was not ultimately the point. Too little was known about what was being done'. While questioning some of Lacy's ministerial decisions, Guest's focus was actually me: he had learned from friends at La Trobe University, 'through casual trivia he had picked up ... that [I] had made a bad reputation for [my]self for playing dirty politics within the University and had

come to a dead end there'. He claimed that I had been 'very offensive' to his wife Sarah and caused her distress; one of my colleagues at La Trobe had rung Sarah to 'threaten her that if she did not cooperate it would do her harm' and that:

Nothing in the little information which emerged about the proposals for the Foundation from time to time did anything but encourage the suspicion that empire-building rather than children's interests might be the name of the game. Specifically, any perception of a threat to the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television and its constituent State bodies had to be taken seriously.

His letter continued: 'Dr Edgar had been in Sydney denigrating the ACCFT and attempting to persuade Channel 0/28 (SBS) not to provide the films to it ... casual or deliberate deceit was being practised'. His informant was 'a friendly and reliable Channel 0/28 executive,' he confided, then concluded: 'If you want me to argue not just for \$160 000 but for \$1.6 million or \$5 million I should be delighted to. That would show a proper ordering of priorities, provided the money was spent on production'. And PS: 'this letter is intended to be seen only by members of the Party. I may show it to some if you have no objection and I have no objection to your doing so'.¹²²

Six days later, a further letter from Guest, this time handwritten and personal, was sent to Norman Lacy. It said that their mutual friend the lawyer Peter Block had told Guest his earlier letter 'was unwise and would be taken as offensive.'

As I told him [Block] I have too high a regard for your intelligence and capacity for objectivity to think you would misinterpret even those passages which might have been better left out or expressed with more felicity. Believe it or not I thought the letter would clear the air.

He suggested that Lacy's 'erroneous ministerial decisions had been made in good faith', asked for understanding and suggested that his first letter 'should not be further distributed unnecessarily'. But by this time I had already seen a copy. Despite Guest's 'principled' outrage about what he saw as ministerial secrecy, it was quite acceptable,

apparently, within his rules, to defame me provided the slander was confined to members of ‘the family’—the Liberal Party.

His accusations did not make sense to me, particularly the perplexing innuendo about SBS, which apparently related to ACCFT’s efforts to license films to SBS for screening. The national president of the ACCFT, Patricia Braithwaite, wrote to me in August to say that she was satisfied I was ‘not involved in undermining negotiations with SBS’. Her letter acknowledged that at the time of the phone call I was alleged to have made to SBS management, I had in fact been in a meeting of the CPC with Sarah Guest present. She also dissociated the council from Sarah and James’ position on the Foundation but not before Lacy was required to give an account of himself to the Party.

Guest circulated two papers to Liberal Party members, one by him and one written by Sarah, representing the views of the ACCFT. A Party member’s wife, it seemed, had the right to represent her views and question the responsible minister’s work and motives within the Party structure. Sarah’s paper suggested that the proposed foundation ‘contained little for children but plenty of jobs for adults’. She described it as ‘an exercise in empire-building’ which sought to duplicate existing organisations which were engaged in research, training and marketing. James Guest objected to what he considered the unnecessary secrecy surrounding the proposal and the nature of the structure proposed which he said would lead to lack of accountability and unsuitable Board membership.¹²³

Guest had gone through the Foundation proposal, criticising most recommendations with little apparent understanding of the issues or the objectives. He claimed there was no need to provide marketing services as ‘children’s programs simply sell themselves if they are any good at all’—a very naïve statement if it were not so blatantly contrived.

The Minister provided a detailed response to the Victorian Liberal parliamentary party refuting the accusation of secrecy and addressing all charges. He outlined the history leading to this juncture, pointing out that it was publicly well documented, and that many prominent Australians had thought the proposal worth supporting. On the charge that consultation had been limited, Lacy responded:

If talks with the AEC, the Ministers, the arts and TV industry experts, the ABT's Children's Programme Committee, the States' Supporters' Groups do not represent consultation but represent secrecy, Mr Guest's ideas of open consultation are very peculiar indeed. As well, Mr Watts as Chairman of the Steering Committee had spoken at the National Conference of the ACCFT and the Minister had personally met with the representatives of the ACCFT.

Lacy justified the need for appropriate program research, the need for industry training and for promoting mass media education, pointing out that all of these functions would be channelled towards the purpose of producing quality children's programs. He argued that a wide range of experienced, qualified people had concluded that there was a need for a national body which could integrate what is of value from education, research and the creative fields and combine the functions so as to encourage the development, production and transmission of children's television programs of quality. All other functions, he said, were subordinate, but essential, to the major task of production. He concluded his presentation to the Party:

Much has been said about party consultation and public accountability. What of ministerial responsibility? ... I, as Minister, have committed Victoria to the Foundation on the basis of Australia-wide ministerial support. I have sought the most competent advice available. I have responded to all enquiries put to me. It is a big idea, one which I understood the party believes is worth undertaking, and which could bring great credit to Victoria and Australia.¹²⁴

The Party was satisfied with the Minister's detailed response. Meanwhile Patricia Braithwaite sought assurances that the Foundation would not be duplicating the work of her organisation. Ken Watts, as chairman of the steering committee, was always careful to say that the committee recommended that clashes of function should be avoided, but it was not in a position to provide guarantees.

Peter Block, as Party chairman, wrote to Norman Lacy on 4 August, saying the Party's Education and Arts Committees had authorised him to report to the next Party meeting that:

the Committees are unanimous that the initiatives of the Australian Children's TV Foundation be supported fully by the Victorian Liberal Parliamentary party and that you be congratulated for the initiatives taken by you to sponsor this Foundation ... That the Victorian Council for Children's Television and Film continued to be supported, at least at its current level, for the three-year period of the Foundation's trial. Further, that recognition be given for its pioneering role in establishing heightened public awareness of the special needs of children where TV and film is concerned, and that the Foundation be requested to support and sponsor the Australian and Victorian Council for Children's TV and Film.

James Guest seconded the motion. Peter Block reported to Norman Lacy that he was very confident the Foundation would go ahead with or without federal funding.¹²⁵ Although Victoria had now approved the Foundation, the federal government would decide the future, and the Guests apparently focused their attention on Canberra.

Sarah Guest came to visit me at my office on 3 August to repeat the accusation that I had personally been undermining her organisation, the ACCFT. I asked for the basis of her accusation. Her answer was that I was 'personally hostile' to her, and she was 'going off to have lunch with someone important'. She was 'lobbying against the Foundation in Canberra, and [her] views were solicited'. She left me in no doubt that her crusade against the Foundation, which had become very personal, would continue. (I wrote a note for the file on this conversation.¹²⁶ I also wrote to Patricia Braithwaite, asking for the basis of the allegations against me, and sent all correspondence to Norman Lacy on 26 August.)

Those in support of the Foundation, notably the producers who were aware of the internal politics, were anxious to avoid further disruption to plans. Jenifer Hooks, the producer of *Shirl's Neighbourhood* and the convener of the Supporters' Group in Victoria, went to see Rosemary Farrow of the VCCFT to explain, as a producer, why the Foundation was so important to the production industry.¹²⁷

Most children's program producers at the time anticipated the Foundation's assisting their own attempts to achieve better funding and to make better quality programs. They were getting little support

from the networks and it was impossible to fund children's drama. Jenifer's notes of the meeting (put on record for the minister) added her concern about 'the false and bitter accusations surrounding this debate over the Foundation':

I indicated again and again [to Rosemary Farrow] that they should support the Foundation ... the way they were going at the moment was threatening the existence of the Foundation, the existence of the children's television industry and their own existence as well ... I had the strong feeling that none of the reasoning was to any avail ... I indicated that this opposition had done an enormous amount of damage so far and what did she think we could do to fix it. She didn't seem to have any ideas about that.

In an effort to calm the dispute, Lacy wrote to Ken Watts on 4 August: 'I am anxious that there should be no misconception arising from the distribution of what was intended only to be a strong stimulus to discussion amongst Party members'. But Guest's letter had been circulated to all members of the Foundation's Steering Committee. John Morris responded: 'I must say that my reading of Mr Guest's paper makes it difficult for me to accept Mr Lacy's explanation of the motives behind its writing. All I can say is this—if that is what Mr Guest wanted to do he went about it in a funny way. With support of this sort, who needs enemies?'¹²⁸

The horse had bolted. As the Victorian task force director, I had not only seen all documents, but played the major role in co-ordinating a written response. I had to engage John Morris, Anne Gorman and Frank Meaney, drawing on their knowledge of the history and reasons for decisions that had been taken. The only means I had to counter the lies and gossip circulating inside the Liberal Party was openness. I was astonished by the force of the personal attack and I wanted my name cleared.

Sarah's hostility towards me was overt as we continued to have contact each month at meetings of the CPC. She bided her time.

ON 16 JULY, the Supporters' Group launched a campaign for the Foundation.¹²⁹ Lacy had planned to finance this launch from the

budget, but intervention by the Guests meant delay. To keep on track, the Supporters met the bill, and were to be reimbursed later. This launch drew the media and public attention that was needed to assist the lobbying for funding that was underway with the federal government. Norman Lacy, Ken Watts, Bruce Gyngell, Jacki Weaver, Phillip Adams, Patricia Lovell and I all spoke at the launch. A booklet explaining the history and proposed functions of the Foundation, based on the AEC working paper, was prepared and 15 000 copies were mailed to groups and individuals. Letters were sent to FACTS, all television managers throughout the country, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, the ABC, SBS, the Teachers' Federations and a number of other community groups over the signatures of Norman Lacy and Paul Landa, informing them about the aims and functions of the Foundation. I co-ordinated this work on behalf of the Minister, with Frank Meaney and John Morris as my advisers.

In order to enlist her support in obtaining Commonwealth funding, I visited Dame Beryl Beaurepaire at her East Melbourne home. Dame Beryl was the doyenne of the Liberal Party of Australia, a pioneering feminist, influential and admired on both sides of politics; she had clout and she knew how to use it. She was delightful; as a grandmother she was enthusiastic about the Foundation and willing to help in any way she could. The Guests were of no concern to her. She suggested we hold a function, which she would assist in organising and Norman Lacy might host, to invite certain wealthy women she knew who might be potential contributors to the Foundation. Most importantly, she was willing to speak with Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser about financial support.

The Foundation had another influential ally in the struggle to win the PM's support in John Stapp, a member of the CPC who was group general manager of Associated Broadcasters Ltd, which ran the Ballarat regional television station in Malcolm Fraser's electoral district. John and I were stranded in Adelaide after the August CPC meeting, as the result of an air strike. Our Sydney colleagues had managed to catch a flight out, so John and I had dinner in a Chinese restaurant with our CPC colleague Rex Heading. Together we composed a letter for John to send to Malcolm Fraser about the Foundation in which the three of us requested a meeting with the Prime Minister.

John Stapp enjoyed intrigue. He was a very big man and did not sleep well, so he rang me at 3 a.m. suggesting that we should hire a car to drive back to Ballarat and Melbourne, sharing the driving. That was the end of my sleep. He drove the first hour and then turned the task over to me. We stopped only once, for a meat pie—a Stapp family tradition when travelling—until we reached Ballarat. There I fell into a guest bed at his home, exhausted. But it had been a useful day of plotting and John undertook to make sure we would get an appointment to see the Prime Minister. I felt confident that, with John Stapp and Dame Beryl Beaufort lobbying for a meeting, something useful would happen.

WE WAITED ... and we waited. The PM's wife, Tammy Fraser, dropped in to BTV6 in Ballarat and John reminded her of our request. The Prime Minister was ill and recovering on his Western District property. I decided to send him flowers from the Supporters of the Foundation. He was appreciative and Anne Gorman kept his response on her fridge door for some time. Finally, a date was set for 16 October. Then it was cancelled.

The steering committee of the Foundation met on 6 October to decide whether it was possible to proceed on a limited basis during the financial year 1981–82. Financially nothing was secure. The Northern Territory, Tasmania and South Australia were committed along with Victoria, but not for the long term. Queensland was emphatic that it would not be involved, despite my pleas to Mrs Flo Bjelke-Petersen; now the Foundation would be based in Victoria, New South Wales was reserving its position and the extent of its financial contribution, until it knew whether the Commonwealth would contribute; and Western Australia was doing the same. The cause would be lost if we did not continue to build momentum. But Frank Meaney was about to head overseas for six months on study leave. The committee agreed that I should continue as task force director throughout the next twelve months and appoint a program development manager to identify suitable projects to invest in, to the extent that available funds would allow. There could be no long-term plan without Commonwealth funding.

On 2 December 1981, John Stapp, Rex Heading and I finally

met with Malcolm Fraser. I found it an intimidating experience. We were ushered into the Prime Minister's office in Treasury Place, Melbourne, and I was offered a seat on a low couch. The PM appeared to be on a pedestal. He is a big man, but I am not small. As he sat, his trousers slipped up his leg revealing the flesh above his sock. I was looking directly at his very pale leg and was transfixed by the sight of it throughout the meeting. Unfortunately it was my job to put the argument. I had to convince this impassive man, so I rattled on as best I could, along the following lines.

Children's television is an area where very little has been achieved in the way of better programming. It is a political winner. Every time the Tribunal has a public hearing, children's television will be an issue of public concern. The Foundation is the catalyst which is needed to improve children's programming. Within three years the Foundation should be able to achieve something significant in the way that the film industry has done. The AFC [Australian Film Commission] is the model. Without the AFC there would be no *Gallipoli* and no *My Brilliant Career*; the AFC was the catalyst which caused these things to happen. The SAFC had developed in South Australia with government support and now the SAFC is close to being self-supporting. An Australian Children's Television Foundation is needed because the AFC is not the appropriate body to act as a catalyst for children's television. The AFC is not concerned about specialisation in one field.

The PM appeared unmoved. He said: 'We should throw a brick through the television set'. He gave no indication of whether he would support the Foundation with funding but said he would discuss the matter with his colleagues. The three of us left unsure of the outcome. John Stapp shortly had reason to visit the PM again and he took along a brick, which he presented to the PM. We waited for a response.

As work slowly proceeded on incorporation, and I stayed on secondment from La Trobe to make staff appointments, the relationship with the Supporters' Group began to unravel. We had built enthusiasm but nothing appeared to be happening. The process of incorporation was slow. Lacy continued lobbying for tax deduction. Staff were appointed.¹³⁰ A \$10 000 grant was made to the

Supporters to enable them to continue. But after the 6 July launch, they began to fragment. Some people expected autonomy for the Supporters' Group, others wanted representation on the board. Lacy insisted (at a 7 December briefing meeting with the Supporters) that the Foundation's steering committee was running the show, not an independent group now attempting to flex their muscles. Ken Watts pointed to audit problems if Supporters were funded but not controlled.¹³¹

In New South Wales, Paul Landa left the Education portfolio, and Anne Gorman reported that the new Minister Ron Mulock, had expressed interest in the Foundation but no more ongoing support at this stage. She announced she was withdrawing as national convener of the Supporters' Group. Ursula Callus wanted ACT representation on the steering committee. Ultimately the structural dilemmas were resolved by agreement that the convener of Supporters should be a member of staff at the ACTF—Jon Stephens—and that in his travels around the states to locate suitable production material he should hold meetings to inform all interested parties of progress. This compromise satisfied all parties and everyone settled down.

By mid-February, however, we were all very anxious that there was no word from Canberra. The worry was that a positive decision on funding had been overtaken by an economic recession in Australia which had led to the government imposing a financial freeze on any new developments; the 'Razor Gang' was operating in Canberra at this time. I telexed the Prime Minister:

If you are to change your mind, this will be a death blow to the Foundation, and a great disappointment to all involved. But if your positive decision has been thwarted by the failure of the bureaucratic process to respond, then this is a tragic situation. Present State support may be withdrawn if the Commonwealth is not involved and we cannot hope to win further State support without your backing.

I would be grateful for clarification of the Commonwealth's position and request the earliest public announcement of Commonwealth commitment and financial support for the Foundation.¹³²

The steering committee also telexed the Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Finance, Prime Minister, and Norman Lacy's office: 'Deeply concerned by Commonwealth delay in announcing support for the Australian Children's Television Foundation ... considerable achievements to date now in jeopardy. Urge immediate Commonwealth decision to enable the Foundation to proceed'.¹³³

Only Dame Beryl Beaurepaire, with her status and influence, could have persuaded the PM at that time. She persisted. And finally Malcolm Fraser not only agreed to fund the Foundation but also to present a cheque for the Commonwealth's contribution on 26 March, in Melbourne's Treasury Gardens. Norman Lacy was to present another cheque at the same occasion for Victoria's contribution. In Adelaide a similar presentation was to be held where the Hon. Murray Hill, Minister for the Arts, would present South Australia's contribution to John Morris. Ken Watts was to receive the cheques in Melbourne.

I decided to stage a birthday party with children under sixteen years of age, representing the 4 202 046 children in Australia. Fat Cat, Norm the Kangaroo, and Humphrey B Bear (all costumed television characters) were to attend. The Commonwealth cheque for \$250 000 was to be a contribution for the current financial year, up to 30 June 1982, along with an agreement to commit to \$1.5 million for the following three-year period.¹³⁴

THE PRIME MINISTER, Norman Lacy, the invited children, television characters, dignitaries and a large number of media journalists assembled in the Kennedy Gardens within the Treasury Gardens for the simple cheque handover. I had arranged for a long trestle table with a large birthday cake sporting the Foundation's smiling logo placed in the middle. The Prime Minister was invited to sit with the children to cut the cake for the media photographers. As he did so, the seat collapsed and he fell to the ground surrounded by laughing children, while I buried my head in my hands. It was all captured on film.

I could not have arranged for wider publicity, but it was not the kind I wanted. Malcolm Fraser was under challenge within the Liberal Party from Andrew Peacock at that time and the photograph became the front page news under the headline 'PM loses his seat'.¹³⁵

The PM had a back injury which was exacerbated by the fall and, I understand from Dame Beryl, has never been quite the same since. What a beginning for the ACTF! But we were front-page news. The Commonwealth funding was conditional on performance in the initial two years of operation. Eight days later, in the Victorian state election, the Liberal Government was defeated, John Cain became Premier, Race Mathews became Minister for the Arts and Norman Lacy lost his seat; his political career was over.

With Norman Lacy's departure from politics, the Foundation had lost its sustaining political patronage and support: this was an entirely new ball game. We were underway and incorporated by the skin of our teeth. The bureaucrats in the Ministry for the Arts began to make my life difficult in retaliation for the way Lacy had worked directly with me, bypassing them; and I, in turn, had avoided the official channels of communication, always going direct to the minister, from whom I could get a prompt and clear response. Without a doubt we would not have succeeded any other way. A proposed rent subsidy for the ACTF, which Norman Lacy had directed would be covered by the Victorian Government, was withdrawn after the election. I was called to a meeting with Race Matthews, the new Labor Arts Minister, and there was Sarah Guest—she had wasted no time. I was mildly admonished by the Minister and reminded of the good work the VCCFT had done for children's television.

The Foundation had secured funding from the Commonwealth on the basis that it would be self-supporting after three years—a target I did not believe would be possible but the steering committee saw as an expedient way to buy time. We had no ongoing commitment from any state government and, with the loss of both Norman Lacy and Paul Landa, no political champion. On the record, from the Victorian Treasurer Lindsay Thompson, was a letter to Norman Lacy (dated 23 March 1982) stating that as New South Wales and Western Australia had not indicated their willingness to participate in a matching arrangement with the Commonwealth, he was concerned about future years and did 'not feel Victoria could make a commitment to fund the Foundation in 1982 and future years other than on a pro-rata population basis of all states excepting Queensland'. The matter was to be taken up later 'when the attitude of the other two state governments was known'.

Ron Mulock, the new Minister for Education in New South Wales, agreed to take up Landa's role as joint convener of the steering committee, but this sort of rotation of ministers would continue to be a time-consuming issue. (By the time I had finished two decades as director of the ACTF, I had dealt with more than eighty ministers.) Yet despite the political and creative challenge, I was excited by the opportunity the Foundation presented.

I am not sure when exactly I decided I would like to be executive director of the Foundation; the commitment had grown as I worked persistently to overcome the problems confronted day by day. I was untried as a producer and as a manager of any enterprise outside the university structure. When my position as director of the ACTF looked like becoming a reality, I received two phone calls—one from Georgina Carnegie, the other from Julie James Bailey. Both were staff members of the Australian Film and Television School who were also members of the Foundation's first Supporters' Group. Both women told me I should step aside in favour of John Morris. They said I could not possibly make a success of the Foundation and a man was needed in the role. It was true that in the early 1980s there were very few women in senior positions in government or business, and John Morris obviously had the necessary experience. Yet, despite all the changes the previous decades had brought, here I was being asked to step aside by two female colleagues because I was a woman. Years later I learned from Anne Gorman that Georgina Carnegie had warned her to be wary of me; I was 'a control freak'.

I rang John Morris to ask him what was going on. He did not seem aware of the women's phone calls. Without hesitation he said I should take on the job; he would back me and assist me in whatever way he could. But he also surprised me by warning that the job would destroy me. John had years behind him heading a film production organisation, had faced implacable enemies in the industry, and he knew much better than I what I would face in dealing with the politics of the independent producers. I had only a rudimentary knowledge of the film-making process acquired at Stanford University in the United States and in guiding low-budget student film-making at La Trobe: my main experience was in teaching, research and policy development and I had viewed and classified some four hundred children's programs as a member of the CPC.

However, I had a clear vision of what such a Foundation might achieve and despite my inexperience as a film maker, the board of the Foundation appointed me unanimously. The acceptance that I would do the job had grown over time with the steering committee; it seemed to be taken for granted. Ken Watts, Dame Beryl and Frank Meaney, with John Morris, believed I could do it. No advertisement was placed; the board had the right to make an appointment as they wished, and I was appointed director of the ACTF on 30 April 1982, on a three-year contract. I resigned from my tenured senior lectureship at La Trobe University immediately.

There are many who can claim a role in the establishment of the ACTF. There was undoubted value in the role played by the early lobbyists in getting children's television on the public agenda in the first place and by the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts in keeping up the political pressure. But it would not have happened without Norman Lacy's dogged persistence and time-consuming work; without John Morris steering the idea through the AEC Working Group; without Anne Gorman and her Supporters; without Dame Beryl Beaurepaire and John Stapp persuading Malcolm Fraser to put in three years' funding; without Frank Meaney and the strategic role he played inside the New South Wales Education Department; or without my own work in developing ideas and strategies, linking networks and being a hub for the interaction of all players. We worked together extremely well. It was a complex process of lobbying and strategic planning and guiding a plan through to reality.

I doubt that such a venture would be achievable today. The political processes are managed more carefully, and ministers more effectively quarantined by staff. This was a freewheeling era and a time of hope and social reform.

8

Bad Blood

'Tell them "Up 'em", Pat. Tell them "Up 'em".'

—ABT member Keith Moreman¹³⁶

MY INVOLVEMENT IN PLANS to establish an Australian Children's Television Foundation had not been my only preoccupation from 1979 to 1981. I was still teaching at La Trobe University and chairing the Children's Program Committee, which now faced a challenge of a different kind from that posed by the charismatic and unpredictable Bruce Gyngell. The new chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, David Jones, was an impassive, solid mountain of a man who gave the strong impression that he would not be easily moved. I did not hear him laughing his way around the office as Bruce had.

Gyngell's administrative style was informal, some might say chaotic. Tribunal administrative staff resented the level of independence enjoyed by the CPC, but Gyngell never got around to formalising the working arrangements for the committee. Jones, on the other hand, was a lawyer and bent on clarifying the ABT's systems and standards. He set out to bring order to the tribunal house.

The Melbourne staff, who had been seething under Gyngell, regrouped. They had made a number of complaints about the inefficiency of the CPC, objecting to Rob Liersch's style of operation which, by necessity, involved handwritten letters and oral telephone advice. The CPC minutes written by Rob were being changed by staff before submission to the tribunal; correspondence was being kept from the committee, and the secretary was rebuked for bringing matters to the attention of the committee.

Jones kept us at arm's length, so we demanded a meeting to air our grievances. My correspondence was always thunderously to the point and I informed the chairman that the CPC would not meet again until a meeting with him took place. The complaints we had were trivial if looked at separately, but together they revealed a pattern aimed at frustrating the CPC's work. The chairman agreed to meet Rex Heading, John Stapp and me one Sunday afternoon in August 1980. David Jones lived close to me in Eaglemont and I could have dropped around alone, but Rex and John accompanied me in a show of support so that the chairman understood that the industry representatives of the CPC considered the matter to be significant.¹³⁷

It was a fruitful discussion, which led to increased clerical assistance and, ultimately, to the appointment of Bob Axam as our secretary. Bob was the consummate bureaucrat. He wore a suit. He knew how to write a memo and document a phone call. He was tenacious and committed—exactly what the CPC required in such times. But importantly he retained the trust of the tribunal chairman and members.¹³⁸

Understanding the politics of regulation of the broadcasting system teaches you to look for all sorts of motives from the players, usually out to serve their own interests. Axam had good instincts about the machinations of such people. This was fortunate, because the CPC now faced a new challenge.

During the 'settling-down' period after C classification began, stations tended to televise a wide variety of programs. Then a strong pattern began to emerge. An Australian-produced magazine program would be screened on most, if not all, afternoons for the first half hour. The remainder of the time slot would be filled with other material, usually drama produced overseas.

Three things became obvious. There was a ready market for metropolitan-based magazine programs, produced for one half hour on a continuing basis. Second, all of the available drama series classified C were in use, often repeatedly. The turnaround time for the venerable Australian children's series *Skippy* was less than six months. Third, no new Australian children's drama had been produced. There was no diversity of content and no high-quality Australian production.

The committee decided to tune up the system by proposing three new requirements:

- that a quota for C-classified Australian drama be imposed (As we recognised this would take time to develop, the level of quota recommended was six hours per station in the first year and ten hours in the second year.)
- that programs could not be repeated within the C period more than once within a two-year period except for the new children's drama
- that all programs currently classified C would be re-examined to see if they still met the original criteria.

The tribunal released our report containing these recommendations for public comment and, as the committee's chair, I began a campaign through the press. On 27 March 1981, I appeared before the Senate Standing Committee for Education and the Arts which was meeting to follow up its 1978 report on children's television. I expressed the CPC's disappointment with the networks' patterns of programming, acknowledging that the concept of children's programming the committee had set out to introduce had not been achieved. FACTS appeared before the Senate Committee on the same day. Their submission committed the industry to using 'its creative talents to produce the highest standard of children's television which both it and the community sought'.¹³⁹ I was not about to hold my breath while I waited for this to happen—words and promises of performance meant little to FACTS.

I felt unsure about David Jones' support. He was hard to read, and I was deeply suspicious about his long-term agenda and whether the children's standards would survive in viable form.

Jones worked hard. He was chairing an important inquiry into the future of cable television in Australia and ensuring the public

licence renewal process was not front-page media news as it had been during Gyngell's term. I would see him coming into his office from the gymnasium, with hair dripping wet, after his lunchtime break. He was attempting to balance the pressures he was under and seemed to be managing well. But under his chairmanship, the wheels of bureaucracy ground slowly.

Before Bruce Gyngell left, the federal government had announced its intention to enshrine the new children's program rules in legislation. Yet it would take more than a year before Standards on Children's Programs, Children's Advertising and an Australian-produced Children's Drama Quota would be released for public comment by the tribunal in May 1982.¹⁴⁰ During that time, in response to unrelieved pressure from FACTS, the tribunal also reviewed the committee's terms of reference and determined a constitution for the committee to describe its advisory policy role to the tribunal. Under the provisions of this constitution, the committee's terms of reference were:

To provide advice, including formulating draft standards, to the Tribunal in relation to the Tribunal's functions of—

- determining standards to be observed by licensees in respect of the televising of children's programs, and
- the televising of advertisements/promotions during children's programs.

To assess and make recommendations to the Tribunal with respect to the following in terms of standards and guidelines determined by the Tribunal: programs proposed for C, provisional C, and Station of Origin C classifications.

To provide information, advice and assistance to television licensees, producers of children's programs and the public on the Tribunal's standards in relation to children's programs and advertising directed to children.¹⁴¹

Significantly, the committee's new constitution also clarified the appointment and tenure of committee members, the appointment of officeholders, procedures for the conduct of committee meetings and other administrative matters. The indefinite length of CPC

members' appointments and the process for determining the election of the chair and deputy chair had long preoccupied FACTS. They wanted change, but that was not what they got. David Jones wanted order and proper process; his approach was to steady the course, not create another upheaval. On 24 November 1981, the tribunal formally reappointed, for varying periods, all the members of the committee. Frank Meaney and I were reappointed for three years as vice-chair and chair respectively; Bruce Harris and John Stapp were appointed for two years; Rex Heading, Sarah Guest and Joan Brennan were appointed for one further year.

The tribunal also announced a complete review of all its television program and advertising standards and the CPC was asked to provide policy advice on the children's television standards as part of this review. The committee's major task during those months would be to draft the Standards in legal form, with background papers for public comment.

Mark Armstrong, senior lecturer in law at the University of New South Wales, was appointed to the CPC to fill a short-term vacancy. His role was to redraft the committee's guidelines into standards that would hold up in a court of law and give no room for misunderstanding the tribunal's power. I was uncertain about this process, given FACTS' record and determination to find any way it could to avoid meeting the children's guidelines. I phoned Judge Peter Kirby, informally, to seek his opinion on the need to define reasons for a decision when we classified programs. He assured me that we had that responsibility. I was from the Bruce Gyngell school of thought when it came to the judgement of a program: the parts together equalled the whole. No programming executive in the country would break down the elements of a program in order to make a judgement on its ratings appeal. But that was where we were now headed. The entrenched positions taken by FACTS, the tribunal and CPC over the previous three years led inexorably to this outcome. The industry as a whole could not be persuaded to comply with the broad intention of the guidelines; they had to be made specific in law.

Mark worked valiantly to translate the CPC's philosophical intentions into legally written standards. Bob Axam churned out discussion papers outlining arguments for specific, quality, diverse

Australian programming content along with the best programs from overseas. Meanwhile the networks kept on submitting inappropriate material for C classification. Channel 7 Sydney put in *The Flying Nun*, on the basis that the show involved the running of a convent with orphans and that many of the regular cast were young children.¹⁴²

HSV7 submitted more than 500 episodes of *The Wonderful World of Disney* (26 March 1981); SAS Channel 10 Television submitted 591 episodes of *Lassie* (5 March 1981). The timing of these requests seemed designed to make the CPC unworkable.

The chairman managed to keep things on course but we feared where all this was heading. On the day the tribunal issued the legal draft guidelines, David Jones issued a statement which depressed the CPC:

it is important that the status of the draft recommendations with the Tribunal is clearly understood. They have not been endorsed or approved by the Tribunal in any way ... Although the Tribunal will give maximum priority to this review ... it is likely it will not be concluded until early 1983 ... In accordance with its obligations under s.16 (2) of the Act the Tribunal will, as part of the review, continue to consult with representatives of the commercial television industry.¹⁴³

I thought I would be in my grave by the time this process concluded. I remembered Bob Dylan's line about the constant state of becoming—how one was always travelling and never arriving.¹⁴⁴ That seemed to be the path we were on. The government in Canberra was much happier with the attenuated and bureaucratic pace of the tribunal under David Jones. So was FACTS. Public debate and response would be critical to the eventual successful implementation of the legal standards. So while the tribunal was inching along I talked up the importance of the Standards.

Increasingly, I was becoming the target of the industry's hostility towards the CPC. One of my most vocal critics was Simon Townsend, whose magazine program *Simon Townsend's Wonderland* had already received a C rating from us. Townsend first came to public attention as a young conscientious objector to the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. He spent some time in Long Bay jail, was court-martialled but won exemption. Simon went into TV journalism

when Mike Willessee gave him his break. He developed the idea for *Wonderworld*, and it was eventually picked up by the Ten network. By the end of 1980 the program was being broadcast through twenty-nine stations and Simon was well on the way to becoming a wealthy man.

Within months of its premiere, Simon was exploring opportunities for licensing *Wonderworld*. He engaged the services of Darren Brahe as his business manager and Brahe's report reassured Simon that 'he should not be unduly worried about any accusation of exploitation':

I can't see from where such groundless accusations would come. It is possible that some of your competitors, envious of your prestige and success in the children's TV area, will try to stir some malicious gossip. But as we have seen in the past, these lesser lights prefer to label your business sense, organisational flair and drive as commercialism and greed, but the high esteem in which the program is held, always drives such maliciousness back underground ...

I understand that you have never had any intention of allowing licensing rights to ice-cream, confectionery, cakes and biscuits, soft drink, fast food or low sugar based cereals. As your business manager I must comment that this seems financially unwise. Manufacturers of these items would be first in line for the licensing rights, and income from items would be far in excess of anything else. However I now understand the political considerations ... I therefore recommend that you allow what's called limited licence rights.¹⁴⁵

Simon saw no problems with Brahe's suggestions, nor his more ambitious plan to establish a fourteen-hour-a-day children's channel for Australian cable TV called Entertainer-TV12. The CPC was bemused.

Wonderworld had not been on air long before it began to attract the hostile attention of lobbyists who had fought hard to put C-classified programming in place. This was not the type of programming they had had in mind. Over a period of a few months complaints about *Wonderworld* became frequent and led to a systematic monitoring report being prepared for the CPC. The

monitoring report concluded: 'The overwhelming impression is that the program has been forged into an efficient and formidable selling machine which is poised to come into full operation'.¹⁴⁶

The CPC called on Simon Townsend and Harvey Shore, his producer, to attend a meeting to discuss all the matters contained in the report. Two tribunal members were present. The next day Simon attended another meeting with the chairman and vice-chair of the tribunal. He was given detailed comments on the problems demonstrated by his program and told by the chairman that his program would be monitored over the next two months and that the responsibility for decisions in the context of the Standards remained with the producers and the stations which televised his program. Simon panicked and wrote to David Jones requesting that the tribunal not monitor his program for four weeks. It appeared he was not confident that his program was meeting the standards. The monitoring continued and soon the committee received correspondence from Simon with a survey that he claimed 'puts the lie to the ludicrous and defamatory allegation that we are somehow "inching up" the show for those older than thirteen'.

Yet ratings received by the tribunal indicated that the gains made by Channel 10 for *Wonderworld* were indeed strongest among older viewers. A submission came to the tribunal from the South Australian Council for Children's Films and Television (SACCFT) that documented, with the date and approximate time, twelve examples of apparent contraventions of the guidelines by the program.¹⁴⁷ One segment entitled 'A load of suds' had Jonathan Coleman climbing into a laundromat clothes drier.

Other children's producers who were complying with the guidelines, and working hard to achieve excellence on more limited resources, found that their networks were complaining that they didn't have the same audience reach. Jeni Hooks, the producer of *Shirl's Neighbourhood*, wrote raising the issue of the target age group. '*Wonderworld* now advertises itself in the television press as a program for young people yet still retains its C classification. Members of *Wonderworld* publicly talk about their majority adult audience in a way which indicates a lack of regard for the most specific and clear guideline of the C classification. The situation is now untenable for *Shirl's Neighbourhood* ... Either we cease production of the program

or we change the program to gain the older audience apparently countenanced by the Committee ...'¹⁴⁸

The tribunal called the general manager of Channel 10 in Sydney, along with Simon Townsend, to discuss the controversy. The general manager undertook to ensure that all episodes of *Wonderworld* would comply with the guidelines and that a responsible member of the station would preview any segments considered sensitive. But complaints continued and the committee recommended that the tribunal ascertain the station's future plans for C programs at the station's licence renewal in Sydney. The committee also wanted to know if Ten had any plans for children's drama. The scheduling of a full hour of *Simon Townsend's Wonderworld* (with one new and one repeat episode) did not provide for a 'diversity of program formats' as called for in the C-classification guidelines, it warned.

The public process of licence renewal hearings provided unwelcome public exposure, and the Ten network was aggravated by Simon's ongoing conflict with the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. But Simon was not going to lose his lucrative program: he joined with the critics in the industry to attack the credibility of the CPC, saying 'it offered producers few guidelines, no reasons for rejecting programs, and never contacted them to tell them what they rejected and why'.¹⁴⁹ In the case of *Wonderworld* this could not have been further from the facts. Yet Simon appeared to believe that he could say what he pleased, that his large audience following would sustain him and that the CPC would be undermined.

FIVE MONTHS AFTER my reappointment as chair of the CPC, on 30 April 1982, I became the inaugural director of the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

I spoke with David Jones first, to ask if the tribunal saw any conflict in my holding both the position of chair of the CPC and director of the ACTF. The tribunal advised me they could see no reason why I should not remain as chairman of the CPC—they saw no conflict of interest which differed in any way from the conflicts of any other member of the CPC who was involved in production or related business. With the exception of Sarah Guest, the CPC's members were comfortable with my dual roles and supported the

Foundation. Most of us saw it as a means to demonstrate to the commercial networks that programs could be made for children which fulfilled the C objectives.

Within days of the announcement of my new role, I was interviewed by Glenys Bell, a journalist with the *Bulletin*. Her article began a concerted attempt by the Packer camp to discredit me through its media interests and unseat me from the CPC.¹⁵⁰ The *Bulletin*'s editor, Trevor Sykes, told media journalist Jefferson Penberthy that the *Bulletin* article would be 'seminal', apparently meaning likely to lead to my resignation.

In my dual roles at the CPC and the ACTF, my critics now found a focus for their attacks. They were hoping to finish me off. Bell described me as 'one of the most powerful and influential forces in children's television in Australia. Through the two jobs she holds, she can initiate the sorts of programs she wants children to watch on television, and also decide what programs they can watch'. The 4–5 p.m. timeslot was the period when the television stations were 'forced' to show classified material. Bell's article described the conflict between the CPC and the television industry over the guidelines and

the arbitrary way it had applied them. Despite a pledge by the Tribunal to publish, on a quarterly basis, a list of programs accepted or rejected by the CPC, and the reasons why, the lists published so far have been brutally brief. Few descriptions of the programs submitted, or reasons for acceptance or rejection for the C classification, have been published.

A journalist of Bell's standing should have ascertained FACTS' position on publication of reasons for rejection: it had been at the industry body's own insistence that reasons for rejection of programs be kept confidential.¹⁵¹

Her article also discussed the committee's rejection of the British Children's Film Foundation production *Avalanche*, which had been submitted by ACCFT, along with three other films, for C classification at the December meeting in 1981, more than four months earlier. Rex Heading had viewed these four films for report to the committee, in the normal process. Sarah Guest did not declare a conflict of interest as a member of the ACCFT when

these films were discussed, so was present when Rex gave his report. He thought the films were slow, boring and pedestrian productions, not particularly suitable for television and certainly not the kind of material we were hoping to promote through the Standards. The committee decided to recommend C classification for three of the films and to reject the film *Avalanche*.

The ACCFT appealed our decision. Affronted by what they saw as a reflection on their ability to select films, the council now claimed that children should be assessing films for children. Bell wrote in the *Bulletin* that ‘the CPC does not allow children’s responses to films to influence its assessment’. She described the case of a program that NBN Newcastle rejected for C—called *Sally’s in the Big Time*, it was a US dramatised documentary about a thirteen-year-old girl picked up for shoplifting, in which children were confronted by the reality of prison life. This film had already gone to air outside the 4–5 p.m. time slot and could have been repeated as the channel wished, but they wanted a C classification. Lowen Partridge, the children’s television co-ordinator at NBN, claimed that ‘the CPC did not have the nerve to say what it believed’—another distortion of the position the CPC was in.

Bell’s article also quoted Simon Townsend’s producer, Harvey Shore, as saying ‘they never tell us what they want’. He was also critical of my appointment as director of the ACTF, claiming ‘many producers were dubious’. None of the producers who supported the C classification, and who were attempting to achieve the best they could for the audience with the resources available to them, were interviewed. The tenor of Bell’s article was that the CPC members were irrational, incompetent bureaucrats—censors denying stations their freedom to screen what they wished, as they did for every other hour of the day. The power of the networks was not up for discussion. That they were licensees holding a licence to broadcast under an Act of Parliament that bound them to act in the public interest was not mentioned.

The *Bulletin* published its story on 18 May, and followed up three weeks later by printing a letter from Penny Spence, vice-president of Children’s Programs for the Nine network, arguing that the ACTF had done itself a disservice by my appointment. She predicted that I would have ‘a paralysing conflict of interest in [my] two roles’.¹⁵²

On 16 June, the ABT rejected the ACCFT's appeal over the classification of *Avalanche* and Sarah Guest rang David Jones threatening to resign. He told her she should seriously consider whether she should remain on the committee. That same week I was approached by Channel 9 to do an interview for their *Sunday* program. The interviewer was Jennifer Byrne, a newcomer to television at that time. A crew arrived at our house on a Sunday afternoon with two cameramen and I was interviewed over a three-hour period with both cameras running. I did my own audio-tape recording of the interview and later had it transcribed.

I was used to media interviews, but had never encountered anything of this intensity before. Phillip Adams, who had already been interviewed for the program and who had very good connections to the Packer empire, warned me what to expect. I queried whether I should participate, but Phillip's advice was I had little choice and we could handle it between us. The segment, entitled 'Conflict of Interests', went to air on 27 June 1982. In a seven-page transcript of the program, Phillip Adams and I scored eighteen lines each. The rest of the twenty-minute program was given over to Simon Townsend, Penny Spence and Lowen Partridge, the three interviewees for the earlier *Bulletin* article. Their comments were woven together in a florid narrative delivered by Jennifer Byrne. The arguments that had been published earlier in the *Bulletin* were repeated, with no new material and no producers supportive of the C guidelines interviewed.

Byrne introduced the segment: 'Children's television has always been a special case needing special treatment ... It's an area with more than its fair share of backbiting, rumour-mongering, and plain bad blood. Lately it's got worse. Largely as a result of Dr Patricia Edgar now holding two prominent and some would say conflicting positions'. Simon Townsend followed: 'It's not right. It's not a democratic system ... She controls the money, she controls the C rating'. He claimed to be 'scared and confused' by the committee. Penny Spence said it would now be 'impossible to imagine a situation' where a Foundation program would be rejected. Byrne continued, 'the rise and rise of Dr Edgar has followed a classic pattern. The long-standing activist who gets in early and, four committees later, ends up in charge'.

The program went through the saga of *Avalanche* and its rejection for a C. ‘Not that children were ever asked,’ said Byrne. ‘The Committee comprises seven adults, they don’t consult their audience, and when it comes to making decisions, children are neither seen nor heard ... surely one should take them seriously enough to consult them about what they’d like to hear.’ Cut to Penny Spence from Channel 9: ‘I think children are getting bored stiff. Why should a network invest a great deal of time and expertise in a new program idea when there is every chance it will get knocked back?’

Phillip Adams countered in his inimitable style:

Children’s television is like an elephant’s graveyard, it’s a place where people are sent to die, a cultural Siberia, with low budgets, not much management interest, very little prestige ... I would regard Patricia Edgar as a sort of human tank. Patricia is a sort of Centurion in her abilities to kick down doors and push walls over. She is annoying, irritating, relentless, drives people mad, but she gets things done ... There are lots of reasons for the aggro. First of all, people regard it as their territory and they don’t want to be interfered with, and that relates both to television station people, and also to the freelance self-appointed committees. There is also the difficulty that Patricia Edgar does not conduct herself like an Avon lady. I don’t think she’s read *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. She is relentless, she is a missionary, she’s a zealot, she’s also trodden on toes that belong to people at television stations and toes that belong to people on self-appointed committees. So clearly it is going to be drama.

I was allowed some brief points from my lengthy Sunday afternoon interrogation.

Jennifer Byrne: ... such swift and apparently inexorable progress has prompted some talk but Dr Edgar is not worried.

PE: When you’ve got any process of change of course you have tension and some conflict is generated.

JB: Do you feel you’ve been unfairly attacked?

PE: No.

JB: Would you recognise you have been attacked or criticised at all?

PE: Yes. It's a normal process of change, but what I have to weigh up in evaluating whether I'm doing something wrong is the degree of support I've got ... The people who can understand the guidelines are the people who get Cs and who get on with the business of doing a serious job for children ... If you gave a hundred children a choice between a packet of Cheezels and a can of Coke for lunch or a balanced meal, and 90 per cent of those children decided they'd have the Coke and the Cheezels, would you therefore decide that that's what they should be fed?

The program closed with the announcement: '*Sunday* has also learned that one member of the Children's Programme Committee resigned this week because she believed there was conflict of interest over Dr Edgar's dual roles'. Sarah Guest had timed her departure to coincide with the program going to air and the press carried the story next day, reporting the complaints she had against me.¹⁵³

Jennifer Byrne then quoted David Jones as saying that I had his full confidence and that any conflict by any member was dealt with in the proper way: 'Any time a member has an interest they must leave the room'. Although the chairman of the ABT, a lawyer, was interviewed for the program, the footage of his interview was left on the cutting room floor and he was not seen on the program.

My family and I were infuriated by such a blatant misuse of the media. It seemed to me that it was simply another example of special pleading by the Packer camp. The report's tone was pre-emptive, and the editing of the interview materials a failure of objectivity, balance and fair discussion. I had come to expect nothing better from the Packer interests, the *Bulletin* and Nine network, and FACTS, still chaired by Sam Chisholm from Channel 9.

But they did not get their way. If anything, I was galvanised to action by these attacks. I would prove them wrong. The CPC had been doing a good job in applying the Standards to ensure quality programming for Australian children, but the networks subverted regulation. I was determined I would make programs that would disprove their claims that children wouldn't watch, that no one in Australia could make good children's programs, that Australian

children could not act. Both regulation and program subsidy were required—the twin-handed approach of a CPC and an ACTF—and I was not about to resign from the committee. I was determined to see a children's drama quota in place first.

The day after the *Sunday* program aired, Harvey Shore sent a telex to Canberra urging the Minister for Communications, Neil Moore, to receive a deputation of children's program producers to discuss the 'growing crisis'. David Jones wrote to the *Age* to clarify the tribunal's attitude to my dual roles. His letter pointed out that each decision to give a C classification was the tribunal's, after considering a recommendation from the CPC; and that the policy of the ACTF was determined by a board of which I was not a member. Every member of the CPC was involved in production.

The CPC has not differentiated between voluntary groups, such as that which Mrs Guest represents, or business groups. There can be no question that Dr Edgar's appointment to the ACTF can do anything but add to her already considerable contribution to Australian children's television. The more people actively involved the better for the CPC and, I would have thought, the better for children.¹⁵⁴

Other producers joined the debate and, for the first time, a different view was published. Jenifer Hooks wrote to the *Age Green Guide* as producer of *Shirl's Neighbourhood*.

It should be made clear that there are a number of children's television producers, the majority in fact, who manage to get along with the job of making programs within the guidelines of the Children's Program Committee. Simon Townsend claims he is not the only producer with a gripe about the Committee, but he is one of the few, not one of the many.¹⁵⁵

Kate White and Pete Vaughton, children's producers from Adelaide, wrote to Malcolm Fraser to express their 'dismay' at the *Sunday* program, saying 'the views expressed were not representative of children's producers in general in Australia. There is much enthusiasm at the creation of the ACTF, along with the federal government's involvement, and a great deal of personal and professional support for Dr Patricia Edgar'.¹⁵⁶

I would have had more respect for Townsend's full frontal assault but for the Machiavellian antics of his friend and producer who, at the height of this concerted attack, two days after the *Sunday* program aired, wrote a personal note of encouragement to me:

There's a lot of flak buzzing around at the moment. When that happens, it is so easy for a few thoughtless people to go overboard and confuse the issues, and drag in personalities. That is rude and hurtful and very destructive. So at this time, I wanted to write you a personal note of encouragement. There is so much to do, and so many challenges in children's television. It's very exciting ... In that spirit I send to you my respects and offer you a warm hand in friendship. Do not be discouraged! Kind regards. Harvey Shore.¹⁵⁷

I wondered whether his 'warm hand of friendship' had anything to do with the fact that he had submitted that same day an application for a new C program called *Newsreel*. Townsend had written to David Jones the day before, asking the tribunal to bypass the CPC and classify the program directly. David Jones, not surprisingly, refused and suggested Townsend talk to the committee. By 21 July, I had received a letter from Townsend saying that now he had found I 'enjoyed the fullest support of the Minister, the Chairman of the Tribunal and of your own Committee', he wanted me to know that

Harvey Shore and I want to adopt a totally positive attitude and support you also. As you know we have both always admired the work and dedication you give to children's television. We now want to work together with you and your Committee towards what all of us really want, better television programs for children.

On 20 August, Simon wrote to David Jones saying he wished 'to unreservedly withdraw the remarks [he] made in a previous letter' to Jones.

In that letter I had said I did not trust the Children's Program Committee to make an unbiased judgment on *Newsreel*. At your request Harvey Shore and I attended a meeting of the Committee in Canberra yesterday and found the entire Committee to be very helpful and very positive.

And that was that.¹⁵⁸

On 7 October 1982, Sarah Guest received a letter from David Jones thanking her for her service to the CPC but reiterating his confidence in the committee's integrity. Throughout these months of media attacks many people had stood by me, not least of them the tribunal's chairman. But the battle for the most important programming I wanted to see, children's drama, had hardly started and while David Jones had given me his backing throughout this public conflict, he would not make the CPC's task any easier in achieving new standards quickly.

BARBARA BIGGINS WAS APPOINTED to fill Sarah Guest's vacant position on the CPC and subsequently was reappointed for a further three-year term. The appointments of Rex Heading and Joan Brennan expired on 30 November 1982 and these committee members were replaced by Hugh Cornish, general manager, Queensland Television Ltd, and Patricia Lovell, a prominent film producer.

In May 1982, the CPC released a progress report on its review of the Children's Television Standards. Its major recommendations were virtually identical to those of the CPC's report two years earlier. Sixty-six submissions were received from industry bodies, public and consumer groups, and producers. They strongly endorsed the work of the CPC and in particular the proposed drama quota.

After receiving public input, the committee's final recommendations were submitted to the tribunal on 1 December 1982, fundamentally unchanged: they included the introduction of a quota of Australian-produced children's drama of six hours per year for 1983, rising to ten hours per year thereafter; a limitation of five years' duration for a C program (to discourage repeats and encourage new program-making); and a restriction on the number of repeats of such programs.¹⁵⁹ The committee reiterated its disappointment with the programs being broadcast by stations. By 30 June 1983 the CPC had assessed more than 523 programs for C classification—273 had been classified C, the rest rejected; seventy-eight of those accepted were Australian and 195 imported. Thirty per cent of the titles had never been broadcast and a significant number of the Australian programs which had been classified C, on the basis of the pilot, had

never gone into production. The resources that children's television required to satisfy public demand were not being made available by the stations. For nearly three years the CPC had been reiterating the same problems. Bruce Gyngell had been gone three years: FACTS was like a broken record repeating the same arguments over and over and over. We wanted action. I did not intend to leave the CPC until the Standards were secure, including the drama quota. This had been a demanding five years in my life; I was eager to close it down and move on to the challenge of the ACTF, but I knew nothing could be taken for granted.¹⁶⁰

Towards the end of 1982, David Jones moved to distance himself from the CPC and its decisions, as the tribunal adopted a 'show-cause' procedure for C-classified programs. This meant that, when the committee made a recommendation, it was to draw up a list of reasons for rejecting a program which were to be given to the applicant for response before the tribunal made its final decision. The committee objected to this move to make us the Aunt Sally for the tribunal and place us in an adversarial role against the applicant. It had been clear to us, and was made clear to all by the constitution the tribunal had implemented in December 1981, that we gave advice to the tribunal and they made the final decision. We now had a tribunal member viewing programs and sitting in with the committee to check our decision-making processes. Yet the chairman wanted to implement this further step before the tribunal would commit itself to a decision. He claimed this was appropriate process.

Experience showed that any statement of reasons released to an applicant was likely to be released to the press in selected form. In this new plan, the CPC would be distanced from the tribunal and held up to ridicule and contempt while the producers, with network support, did battle through the media to influence the tribunal's view. We were thus reverting to the worst problems of the committee's early days. This new procedure would also mean the process of assessment would become far more time-consuming, bureaucratic and drawn out. To justify his approach, Jones said: 'it was becoming accepted that administrative decisions were taking longer to make if they were to be made properly and in accordance with due process'.¹⁶¹ He insisted this was necessary in view of a complaint that been lodged with the Ombudsman by the Australian Council for Children's Films

and Television in respect of the program *Avalanche*. The ACCFT were still pursuing this insult to their credibility. But this organisation was undergoing change as video distribution encroached on their film distribution business. Barbara Biggins had rejuvenated the council in South Australia and she was interested in television advocacy, not British film distribution. Her council played no role in the dispute over *Avalanche*. She and her team would maintain the pressure on the tribunal not to neglect the C regulations.

By May 1983, the CPC's relationship with the tribunal and its chairman was at an all-time low over the tribunal's handling of CPC recommendations. Ironically the program that brought things to a head was submitted by a production company in which Bruce Gyngell was now an owner and partner. *On Your Marks* was a game-show designed for sale to the Nine network. The CPC, including its new members Patricia Lovell and Hugh Cornish, unanimously rejected the program, which they saw as having no merit—a hyper-active host encouraged children to play mindless games before an audience of screaming children.

John Collins, Bruce Gyngell's production partner, took the committee to task in a twelve-page submission to the tribunal. Collins confessed to 'a feeling of grave anxiety that the Committee had been less than objective in its consideration of the program and pre-disposed to putting a quite undeserved negative interpretation on very many elements of the production'. He expressed his 'disappointment that [his] time spent in meeting the CPC was clearly time wasted', and 'how deeply disheartened [he] was to conclude the CPC regards [the production company's] motives with total suspicion'. Those comments, however, were 'not intended to reflect in any way on [the producers'] appreciation for the tribunal's very fair and reasonable conduct'. The producers lobbied vigorously, with Bruce Gyngell writing eloquently to David Jones, condemning the monster he had created:

In initiating the establishment of the Children's Programme Committee I thought that I was creating a garden in which new ideas might be encouraged to flourish. I now believe that what has actually been created is a ghetto, hedged by negativism and overseen by theorists committed to a philosophy far removed from the mainstream of Australian social attitudes and

remote from the realities of Australian broadcast television ... I believe the Committee's recommendation places the Tribunal dangerously in the position of unduly interfering with the freedom of programming of the individual stations ... I am going to be so presumptuous to suggest that the Tribunal gives *On Your Marks* a Provisional C classification for 26 weeks, and in that time the Tribunal, the station and the audience will have ample opportunity to sample the program and to either accept it or reject it.¹⁶²

Bruce was at his eloquent best arguing the case for the position he held at the moment.

The tribunal conceded and did what Gyngell asked: thus Bruce Gyngell changed the rules he had created and the tribunal overturned the committee's decision, granting what they called 'limited C classification' for the program *On Your Marks* subject to certain conditions. This decision allowed for 130 half-hour episodes—twenty-six weeks of programming—to be produced. The CPC was asked to monitor the program. A new rule was introduced overnight by a chairman who had moved at snail's pace to review CPC procedures but, when faced with the kind of controversy Bruce Gyngell had the power to generate, he quickly found a solution.

Patricia Lovell, who had just been announced as Business Woman of the Year, decided to submit her resignation, saying she could not give her time to an organisation not interested in using her expertise.

I was not aware that the Tribunal would overturn the unanimous decision of an expert group, who had spent long hours in serious discussion, to favour a poor program. With such an approach to C programming, I feel that children's programs are being relegated once more to the bottom of the pile.

The struggles to improve the quality of Australian film and television production have been long and difficult. Progress has been made but only when those in a position to contribute do not compromise over standards. There is no reason why children's television should not compare with the best Australian programs. By allowing poor programming to qualify for C classification, the Tribunal is ensuring that programming for

children will remain a deprived area. I feel very strongly indeed about this matter and am now convinced that my time can be better spent elsewhere.¹⁶³

The chairman was unmoved.

The tribunal was now considering delaying any review of the Children's Standards until it completed a review of Australian content in general. CPC members were fed up with being the tribunal's whipping post and we informed the chairman that we would continue to classify programs but would limit our comments and decide simply whether a program met the criteria or it did not meet the criteria.¹⁶⁴

Jones responded:

The Tribunal cannot accept a situation where its advisory body limits its advice to whether or not the program meets the criteria ... it is essential that the Tribunal have details of the reasoning behind the Committee's conclusion as well as the conclusion itself.¹⁶⁵

I asked for a meeting. The committee members were of one mind. Bruce Harris lent his advertising expertise to a strongly worded letter that I signed.¹⁶⁶

The government changed on 5 March 1983, Bob Hawke and the ALP replacing Malcolm Fraser and the Coalition. On 21 April, we met with the chairman once more and he agreed to ask the staff to consider the implications of separating the Children's Standards Review from the Australian Content Review but expressed concern about the possible relationship between the children's area and other areas of Australian content. Two months later we were still awaiting a response. No one had been appointed to fill Patricia Lovell's position; FACTS continued to delay its response to the children's proposals; and our staff support was withdrawn and assigned to other positions. CPC staff were told that the committee's work was a low priority. Once again I wrote to the chairman and threatened that unless the tribunal was 'prepared to act with some urgency on these matters we believe that you give us little option but to take our case elsewhere'. The committee had in mind the new Labor Government Minister for Communications, Michael Duffy.¹⁶⁷

It was an extraordinary situation. The CPC had been working for more than four years as an advisory committee to the tribunal. Its recommendations for reform of the children's Standards were now three years old. We were contributing an enormous amount of our time to keep the system of classification, which was required under the Broadcasting Act, in operation. We were being rudely ignored. The correspondence flowed backwards and forwards. David Jones reminded us that we were an advisory committee only, and claimed that he did support the committee, noting as an example his response to the attacks on my position as chairman of the CPC. Finally the tribunal agreed to delegate its decision-making powers to one representative member who would attend our meetings, effective immediately. This was progress.¹⁶⁸

With Bob Hawke as Prime Minister and Michael Duffy as minister, two lawyers, Mark Armstrong and Ray Watterson, both viewed as left wing, were appointed to the tribunal. The CPC began to get a different message from the tribunal. On 10 October 1983, the tribunal announced its intention to reappoint Bruce Harris and John Stapp as members of the CPC for a further three years. They would continue to be the industry representatives who would oversee children's programming: this was reassuring to me given their understanding of all that was involved. I began for the first time to think seriously about my future post-CPC, having given an inordinate amount of my time to the committee.

Towards the end of 1983, with the changed political environment, I was confident the drama quota would be introduced and the changes to the C classification recommended by the committee back in 1980 would become a reality. On 22 November, I wrote to David Jones advising him of my intention to resign from the CPC so I could give the Foundation my full attention. I needed to be free to lobby, to criticise a reluctant and defiant television industry and, if necessary, to argue with the CPC about what constituted children's drama. Although as members of the CPC we had worked together to establish the Standards, we were not necessarily fighting for the same types of programs. I was particularly concerned about Barbara Biggins' and the SACCFT's attitudes to children's programs. The classification of the first series that the ACTF produced confirmed my concern, as Barbara did not consider the scripts should qualify for

C-drama quota. It would be easier to fight for the ACTF from outside the committee than as its chair. Frank Meaney would become CPC chairman and he remained a member of the board of the ACTF.

Like Patricia Lovell, I wanted to concentrate my energy within the production industry, where I was needed. I offered to stay on the CPC until February to allow for a transition, but I now felt free to openly progress the case for the children's television producers who were facing serious difficulty because the tribunal's Drama Standards had not been formally promulgated. The tax concessions for Australian productions dictated a very tight schedule for the producer. Money became available from investors at the end of the financial year, so a prospectus would have to be on the market by April. It took a minimum of eight weeks to get a prospectus through Corporate Affairs. To attract investors, a pre-sale was essential because each prospectus competed with others on the market. The stations were taking the position that they would not buy children's programs until the Standards were in place. The Australian Film Commission had a policy not to invest in a project unless there was a pre-sale, and AFC money was essential to make the selling package attractive to investors.

Further delay by the tribunal in promulgating Standards would mean that drama projects would not get off the ground that year and there would be no programs to fill a drama quota. The production industry had been anticipating the Standards for many months and had planned accordingly. The television stations, as usual, were playing for time. I asked David Jones for an 'assurance that their implementation is the top priority for the Tribunal', adding: 'I want the Tribunal members to be aware that there will be a bitter crisis for children's producers if the Program Standards are delayed for even a very short time'.¹⁶⁹

It was my final endeavour as chairman of the CPC to get the tribunal chairman to understand that his timetable for change would not work this time. I was not yet out the door and I was arguing with the tribunal about the drama quota from the producer's perspective.

On 1 April 1984, just in time for the financing schedule, the tribunal released its Children's Television Standards. Although this debate had gone on for three years the Standards came as a shock to the networks, with provisions covering permitted advertising time, the level of local content, the frequency with which programs could be

repeated and the introduction of a quota of eight hours of first-release children's drama in each year for each station. David Jones, finally, seemed pushed to his limit with the industry's prevarication and spoke on their release in a way I had never before heard him speak.

The industry performance has been poor, its attitude negative and its outlook irresponsible. The industry does not appear to accept its responsibility. The public interest requires that children be supplied with quality TV productions. We felt we had to regulate because of the failure of the industry and we were relying on the industry's own submissions to reach our decision.

He pointed out that FACTS' submission gave no indication or acceptance that children have particular television needs, nor any recognition that they are entitled to age-specific programs. The submission accepted no responsibility for providing such programs. There was no suggestion that the industry had any children's program policy nor any alternative but to make regulations.¹⁷⁰ David Jones had given the industry every possible opportunity to co-operate. Now it was going to be forced to meet the Children's Television Standards.¹⁷¹

THE C-CLASSIFICATION EXPERIMENT initiated by the Gyngell tribunal was an exciting and daring enterprise for a regulatory authority. There was nothing like it anywhere else in the world. It aimed at producing a diversity of entertaining, quality programs for young children with the emphasis on local Australian product, and drama or stories. In 1984 it was still a work in progress. It had taken five years to get the Standards in place under a tribunal with the power to implement them. Over that time, FACTS had not moved in its view one iota.

I left the CPC with a mixture of excitement about the future and a sense of frustration over the long, hard slog to introduce these Standards. There were people on the committee and at the tribunal whom I would genuinely miss and hoped to work with again. Bruce Harris wrote this farewell note, which I particularly valued:

I've remained in a kind of awe over the way you handled the complicated, and sometimes stormy affairs of the Committee.

I admired the efficient way you chaired the meetings, and the tough but fair way you control the members, and kept us from bogging down in the useless and pointless. We also know that you conducted the politicking when it had to be done with skill, and to the Committee's advantage. I am privileged to have been part of it all.¹⁷²

He enclosed a copy of a book entitled *You Can Negotiate Anything*.

Today, despite several sweeping government reforms to television regulation, the classification system for children's television still operates in this country. Commercial networks must now air 260 hours of C programming annually—half of it first-release Australian shows.¹⁷³



Part II

The Producer

'I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.'

—Bill Cosby



9

Winners Indeed

'If that bloody woman would stop defaming the commercial television people and get some fucking films made then she'd be better off.'

—Neville Wran¹⁷⁴

B EING THE FOUNDING DIRECTOR of anything is a particular challenge—a privilege and a nightmare. I had learnt this at La Trobe as founding chair of the Centre for the Study of Educational Media and Communication. The privilege is the lasting influence a founder exerts—and the relative freedom they exercise—in shaping a useful role for the new organisation and determining its institutional settings. This is the creative part, the exciting bit. The nightmare is producing something out of nothing. A new organisation has no track record with investors and governments, no bank of public goodwill to draw on, no brand cachet to lure in potential partners, and no well-oiled systems to make the running of day-to-day business easier.

This was very much the case when I started at the Australian Children's Television Foundation in March 1982. I knew well what

the purpose of the ACTF was but was unsure how to achieve its aims. One thing I knew for certain: I had a lot to learn!

Late in 1981, I sat down with John Morris for a crash course in financing film productions.¹⁷⁵ We were very clear on the aim and purpose of the Foundation. Our objective was to produce top-quality Australian children's television, not just to provide work opportunities and create jobs for the industry. We were not to be like the Australian Film Commission, which provided opportunities for film makers. We were child- and program-oriented. Our purpose was to contribute towards a sense of national identity for young viewers. We asked ourselves many questions, including: Were we in the ratings game? How commercial were we? We were not producing grand opera—the quality would have to be commercial. We needed to brief the unions and get the crews on side. We didn't expect they would work for less than their going rates but they couldn't expect to receive top dollar. We would sell to the highest bidder within the networks. We knew that the ACTF would be involved in raising the funds because producers were inexperienced in deal-making, and loyal investors would want to back programs they liked with an organisation they trusted. The ACTF could be attractive to some who wouldn't go for one-off investments. We needed proper legal advice on every contract.

We were not bent on improving television around the world, just at home. But until Australia became known overseas as a regular and reliable source of children's drama, pre-sales that covered production costs would not be achievable, so full deficit funding was required from investors. The ACTF would invest only as much as it had to, to make the funds go as far as possible. The federal legislation covering film investment offered generous tax incentives, and while these opportunities lasted we would tailor our projects to take advantage of the legislation.

The Foundation should call itself executive producer, we should initiate production and find funding for script development, production and marketing. We would seek experienced writers. We would reject out of hand the idea of not holding marketing rights. We would actively contact producers and we would not have the ACTF name on anything over which we did not have creative control. The only way to get a reputation was to wear the failures

as well as the successes. We had to operate on a commercial basis with all budgets, factoring in Foundation overheads in the script and production preparation. We would not advertise, we would not accept unsolicited submissions, and we would find a way to deal with those submissions that came through politicians, as they always do. As a company we could hire and fire without putting jobs out to commercial tender. The Foundation's board of directors would ratify recommendations on what should be funded but would not choose projects. When a project was completed, the ACTF would arrange marketing, be involved in and organise publicity for a program when it went to air. These were the principles under which we operated from the outset.

The board was structured so that those members representing the funding states could appoint others they identified as being helpful to the cause. This structure would allow for a strong board throughout my twenty years as director. Staff numbers were expanding and Graham Morris, a lawyer from the United Kingdom, was appointed on 19 October 1982 to be in charge of administration, legal affairs and accounting. He would become essential to the operation of the Foundation while I was out and about, as I often needed to be.

The ACTF's program manager, Jon Stephens, travelled to all states to search out story ideas for funding. I spoke at meetings and conferences all over the country, talking about the Foundation's plans. By June 1983, the ACTF had considered 132 applications for investment in script development. The board had approved thirty-two projects for funding and committed \$313 102 to these independent projects. As well, the ACTF had made a \$100 000 investment in the feature film *The Fire in the Stone*, based on the children's novel by Colin Thiele, and a \$50 000 investment in the telemovie *Scrap Iron Kid*.

But I was keen to move on to a seminal project, one that would be identified with the Foundation in the public eye. At the December meeting, conscious of the need to succeed quickly in developing quality programming, the board agreed unanimously to finance the development of an anthology, to raise the profile of the Foundation and Australian children's production.¹⁷⁶

The series was initially dubbed Masterpiece Theatre, an ironic salute to Phillip Adams' comment at the very first board meeting that we must use popular formats and not look like Masterpiece Theatre.

It would eventually air under the title *Winners*, a title that I selected from a list of ideas during scripting.

I approached a number of experienced producers around the country to induce them to work on a children's program. With guidance from John Morris, I identified twenty of Australia's top writers—including John Duigan, Tom Hegarty, Sonia Borg, Anne Brooksbank, Tony Morphett, Morris Gleitzman, Bob Ellis and Cliff Green—and invited them to a briefing at the Sebel Townhouse in Sydney in February 1983. The way to get their involvement was to make the project high profile and competitive; the media would be involved throughout the process.

Writing is a solitary experience. These selected writers had never been together for a briefing before. The proposal was for each writer to develop two ideas for the sum of \$500. If their idea was selected they would go on to the next stage and write a treatment and draft, otherwise we would give their idea back to them. Without exception, the challenge appealed. The writers were not instructed on specific program ideas but I made it clear I did not want bland adventures or syrupy formulaic family shows. I wanted the kind of drama that children had not seen before—contemporary, challenging, dealing with important, relevant issues. I wanted stories that would add some meaning to children's lives. If these writers—the cream of the crop—could not deliver, nobody else in Australia could.

During his time at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Don and his research team had been building an empirical picture of the Australian family. It bore little resemblance to the model that would later be epitomised in John Howard's ideal of the nuclear couple with two children in the neat little house behind the white picket fence. On the other hand, too many people in the arts seemed to hold the opposite and equally incorrect idea that families were riddled with conflict, oppression and disadvantage. I asked Don to provide a briefing to the writers on what was going on inside the Australian family—how many children lived with a single parent, how many parents were divorced, what were the economic circumstances of most families, how children were coping with family break-up. I did not want stereotypes—of either extreme.

The only other speaker invited to the writers' briefing was a censor from the Film Censorship Board. The writers needed to know the limits in programming classified for children, where to draw the line. I wanted to see a balance of girl and boy characters and a diversity of genres, from comedy to fantasy, science fiction to social realism, contemporary to traditional and period stories focusing on the young adolescent audience. The target age was eight to fifteen years. As far as I know, nothing like this approach to programming for children had been attempted elsewhere in the world.

David Williamson, Australia's best-known playwright and president of the Australian Writers Guild, agreed to announce the creation of the series at a press conference in Sydney. The writers would also be present, along with producers and directors. I approached Patricia Lovell, Phillip Noyce, Sandra Levy, Stephen Wallace, David Stevens, Joan Long, Paul Cox—everyone who had achieved recognition in the film industry was on my list. The press liked the idea: the announcement received extensive coverage in all papers and on radio in all states, and was picked up by *Variety* in New York.¹⁷⁷ 'Masterpiece Theatre' was described as the biggest Australian children's television series ever.¹⁷⁸ There was only one outstanding question: how to raise the investment funds to make it.

SIR JAMES CRUTHERS received a call from Rupert Murdoch inviting him to come to New York to advise on his television operations. He rang me to say he would be stepping down from the board of the ACTF and he had a replacement in mind, a colleague called Syd Donovan who worked for TVW7. I had other ideas. TVW7 was now owned by Robert Holmes à Court. I had met his wife Janet Holmes à Court and liked her. I wanted Sir James to nominate her to the Western Australian Minister as the state's representative on the board, but Sir James did not like the idea at all. He thought Janet was a lovely woman but told me that if I ever let 'that man' (Robert Holmes à Court) near the Foundation, I 'would regret it'.

I hadn't met 'that man' yet, but Janet was friendly and I thought a wife should know how to handle her husband, even if he was the most prominent and controversial businessman in Australia. I tracked Janet down at the hotel where she was staying in Sydney. We had

not spoken since our first meeting. When I invited her to join the Foundation board her reply was immediate and enthusiastic: 'I'd love to'. I reported my conversation back to Sir James and he had little choice but to recommend Mrs Holmes à Court for appointment, but I never forgot his advice.

Janet became a member of the ACTF board on 1 December 1983. (Hazel Hawke was appointed the same day.) She had only attended two meetings at the Foundation when I asked her if she would place the drama series project, now entitled *Winners*, before Robert to see if he would agree to meet with me. By this stage we had scripts. Janet looked decidedly uneasy but agreed to find the best opportunity she could. She did well, because Robert read the project proposal and agreed to see me. Anticipating that meeting was a nerve-wracking experience. Robert travelled constantly and his movements were unpredictable; no one knew when he would see me—some time in the next few days, I was told. There were no mobiles then, so I could not stray far from a phone. I waited and waited, as the days passed. The summons came on 16 March. Robert would see me in twenty minutes. Graham Morris and I made a dash for the twenty-first floor of Collins Tower in Melbourne, where the Bell Group office was located. The future of the Foundation depended on the outcome.

Red tape and bureaucratic nit-picking had put our investment prospects in jeopardy. Without a pre-sale to a television network, *Winners* was an unattractive investment proposition, as were all potential children's drama series. But without a drama quota in place that required commercial stations to screen a certain amount of Australian children's drama each week, no network would commit to a pre-sale. The tribunal had flagged its intentions to introduce the quota but was dragging its feet. Meanwhile, the AFC and the state funding bodies were not being helpful to our investment prospects. The *Winners* scripts had been criticised by Film Victoria and the AFC as not yet ready for production. To interested observers, the likelihood of the Foundation financing its ambitious experiment was looking decidedly shaky.

As Graham Morris and I were ushered in to meet the great man I babbled nervously about the fuchsia in the pot in the corner. As it happened, it was an artificial flower; I hadn't noticed in my anxiety.

Robert stopped walking, looked long and hard at the fuchsia, then long and hard me, then said, 'I don't do the flowers'. That was the end of my chit-chat. I had read about 'the silence'—a feature of meetings with Robert—so Graham Morris and I sat and waited, and we waited. Robert remained silent. Eventually his quiet voice was heard: 'It's a very nice project'. It was one of those moments in life when you know that everything is about to change. The relief was profound.

Robert sat and conversed for two hours as though *Winners* were the only business deal he had on his mind. He told anecdotes and asked questions, each one a test of my competence, my character, my intelligence and style. Robert was amusing, charming, interesting, fascinating. He was terrifying, but I began to relax, toe by toe, limb by limb. Yes, he would support *Winners*; quality had always attracted him. He agreed to provide a minimum distribution guaranteed return for investors through his UK company ITC Entertainment Pty Ltd. The fees for the guarantee were high but in keeping with those of other major international film distribution companies—45 per cent plus distribution expenses for television sales outside Australia and 25 per cent within Australia. ITC was not going to be at any risk with this deal but Robert also agreed to subscribe 10 per cent of the budget and issue a statement for the prospectus as chairman and chief executive of ITC Entertainment Pty Ltd to encourage investment.¹⁷⁹ When it was printed, the prospectus said:

To bring together a group of the country's leading and proven talent for the purpose of producing high quality children's television is clearly a worthwhile endeavour. In addition, one can reasonably expect this project to achieve a standard equal to the best that has or can be produced in Australia by Australians.

—Robert Holmes à Court.¹⁸⁰

Robert's support was a coup: his decision to back us turned the tide of opinion about the *Winners* project among government film bodies. However, not even his name was sufficient to attract all the necessary investors. With less than a week to go before the end of the financial year I had to go back to Robert as the Foundation was \$1 800 000 short of our target—a significant sum. He agreed to

underwrite the balance of funds required at no fee. On 25 June 1984 he wrote to me: 'The Bell Group is very committed to this project and I believe it is important that the Foundation and all the talent it has assembled have an opportunity to show what can be done in this field in Australia'. By 30 June 1984 the budget shortfall for our \$3 820 000 target was reduced to \$748 000. Robert contributed this sum through his Australian television company, South Australian Telecasters Limited. The Foundation was in business.

When the prospectus was issued the deal lined up as follows. The total budget was \$3 820 000; the total investment applied for as at 30 June 1984 was \$2 976 000, with underwriting for the balance from the Bell Group of \$844 000; \$1 220 000 was invested by government film funding bodies not seeking to take advantage of a tax deduction under division 10 BA. The ACTF invested \$700 000; the AFC, \$320 000; Film Victoria, \$80 000; the New South Wales Film Corporation, \$120 000. The total of non tax-deductible budget items (which included overheads, legal, financing and marketing costs) were covered by the joint contribution of Film Victoria and the New South Wales Film Corporation, which meant the investment by the Foundation and the AFC was used for production expenses but no tax concession was sought. The investors would therefore receive a full 133 per cent tax deduction and, at the time of investment, knew that there was a one-million-dollar guarantee from ITC Entertainment Pty Ltd.

Robert Holmes à Court's timely investment in the ACTF's future gave the Foundation the opportunity it was seeking to establish its reputation for quality children's production. His confidence in me and my judgement helped me gain status in a business where I had little experience. I had never financed a major project, nor had I produced drama. I don't know what the future of the ACTF would have been without Janet's support and Robert's generosity at that time, but the task I had would have been much more difficult than it proved to be. If Janet had done nothing more for the Foundation, my decision to go against the wishes and advice of Sir James was vindicated by the financing of *Winners*.

I had hoped that, through Sir James, Rupert Murdoch might become an investor. When Sir James went to New York, I imposed on him for an introduction to Murdoch so that I could ask for his

support. Whether he discussed it with Rupert I don't know, but a meeting did not eventuate. Dame Beryl Beaurepaire set up a meeting for me with Rupert's mother, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, to ask her to help with the financing of *Winners*. Dame Elisabeth—a lovely lady who does a great deal for many organisations—could not get out of my office fast enough.

While I was struggling to finance *Winners*, other independent producers were encountering formidable problems, with ten other children's television producers still waiting to get started. The Foundation had been right to proceed with its own financing and production agenda. Kim Williams, CEO of the AFC, invited me to share my views and advice on 'the direct experience and specific difficulties' I had in fundraising. I had learnt that the government groups set up to assist production in fact put obstacles in the way. With the exception of the New South Wales Film Corporation in this case, I had little sense that they were there to help. I encountered one bureaucratic setback after another. Kim Williams had told me I was trying to make Rolls-Royce television for Holden prices.¹⁸¹

By June 1985—three years after we began—only three of the productions to which the Foundation had contributed script development funds had begun production. It was clear to the board that the Foundation needed to play a very strong role as executive producer if children's programs were to be financed. This policy was controversial within the industry from the beginning: some independent producers saw the Foundation as setting up as a competitor. But initiating its own productions was always the intention. Without the Foundation's creative initiatives in production, the children's industry in Australia would not have achieved what it did. The Foundation set expectations of quality, opened doors to distribution companies internationally, raised the profile of our productions at home and overseas and paved the way for independent drama producers over the next two decades. No independent producer would have worked with the budgets we did, attracted the talent we did, innovated as we did: they would have cut corners, not been able to capture media attention and FACTS would have trumpeted any failure as evidence that the audience did not want this genre of television and the money was being wasted.

INFLAMED BY ALL THE positive media coverage about children's production under the proposed drama quota, FACTS informed the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal of its intention to challenge the new Standards in the Federal Court as soon as they were implemented. I knew from my CPC experience that there was unlimited capacity within the tribunal to extend the process of consultation and redrafting. I organised a telex, signed by the key producers and agencies in the industry (including Phillip Adams as chairman of the AFC), demanding action and flagging a request for a meeting if the Standards did not meet the public expectations set up by the draft Standards released the previous year. The telex had the desired effect. Finally, on 27 March 1984, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal made a determination specifying the new Children's Television Standards and new Pre-school Children's Television Standards. They included a drama quota requiring eight hours of first-release programming each year. The quota would be effective from 1 July, which meant networks would need new Australian drama urgently. There were three months before the end of the financial year to put in place financing for drama productions including *Winners*.

Fifteen commercial television licensees challenged the validity in law of some of the provisions in the new Standards—in particular, the tribunal's power to classify children's programs before broadcast. Without this crucial stipulation, the industry could screen whatever it wished and argue later about its suitability for children. The Federal Court dismissed the FACTS appeal in July and the industry pursued its argument in the High Court.¹⁸²

The legal battle rolled on slowly. The Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts continued to meet and to keep children's programming on the public agenda. And I continued to lobby government ministers directly. Hazel Hawke—as an ACTF board member—set up, and attended with me, an important meeting with Michael Duffy, the Minister for Communications, where we were given a very good hearing, reporting on the Foundation's production plans and the problems presented by industry threats to the tribunal's program Standards.

On 21 May 1985, the High Court handed down its decision in the *Herald Sun TV Pty Ltd* case, as the licensees' appeal was known. It held that those Children's Television Standards relating to the

classification of children's programs before broadcast, including Australian children's drama programs were invalid. FACTS had won this round. The responsibility for judging compliance of a program before it went to air rested with the licensee of the station concerned. The government moved quickly. The Minister, Michael Duffy, introduced an Amendment Bill strengthening the Broadcasting Television Act and affirming the tribunal's powers in the budget session:

Mr Speaker, the justification for pre-classification of children's 'C' programs is overwhelming. Independent inquiries have consistently concluded that children's programs need special treatment ... The Bill will affirm the Tribunal's power to make program standards for children's television programs ... I would also like to emphasise that pre-classification is not a form of censorship. Programs which are rejected as unsuitable for 'C' classification can be broadcast at other times.

The Bill gave the tribunal power to award a provisional C at script stage for drama.¹⁸³

With its powers to determine Standards now enshrined in legislation, the tribunal then announced its long-awaited Australian Content Inquiry which would also cover the drama quota—still set at only eight hours a year.¹⁸⁴ The Foundation urged parents and teachers to send the tribunal letters of support for the increase of the children's drama quota.

The assessment process required by the C classification was not very different, in principle, from that operating in Canberra through the FFC, whereby film and television projects had to be assessed for Australian content. Provisional certificates were awarded and finished films checked to ensure that Australian content provisions had been complied with. This meant checking a list of credits and reading contracts and budgets. But only professionals who understood how to read a script could make a script assessment, and most researchers and academics were not qualified to do this. I therefore began to question the credentials of some members of the CPC. Bizarrely, I now found myself opposing the program committee that for many years I had chaired and staunchly defended.

At the first discussion of the *Winners* scripts on 18 November 1983, Frank Meaney and I, both still members of the CPC, sat outside

the room where the committee was meeting, disqualified from participating in the discussion under standard conflict-of-interest procedures because of our association with the Foundation. Frank and I looked at one another somewhat ruefully as we considered the history of all we had built together. I knew, instinctively, that the *Winners* scripts would cause division within the committee and I told Frank this was the end of the line for me with the CPC; I had to be able to speak my mind independently and argue for what I believed. Frank understood. We spent a reflective hour or so together as we waited for our colleagues to pass their verdict.

As we anticipated, the discussion about the scripts had proven a difficult one, with the committee agreeing to grant a provisional C classification for twelve months, while expressing some reservations. Barbara Biggins dissented from the decision, rejecting all scripts and recording reservations about stereotyping. She considered a number of the scripts not relevant to the age group and believed that children would not understand the issues. The process of review to achieve a full C approval went on for months.

Winners clearly was not *Skippy*. The eight one-hour stories were contemporary social drama which dealt with questions children had to face in their daily lives without romanticising or avoiding the difficult issues the dramas posed. The scripts did not depict unrealistic role models to hold up to children who knew better. The stories did not preach and they did not talk down to their audience. They dealt with relationships within the family and among peers—the stuff of life that kids needed to understand.

At the CPC, the show entitled *The Other Facts of Life* was regarded as too confronting for children—the father has a heart attack when his son publicly challenges his father's values. *On Loan* was too emotionally moving—the lead girl, from a Vietnamese family, was forced to choose between her adoptive Australian parents and her real father. *Just Friends* was too realistic—set in and around a roller-skating rink where children smoked and behaved like teenagers. *Paper Boy* was considered too politically subversive—a young boy challenges his father's political beliefs. *Room to Move* undermined parental authority—the young Nicole Kidman, in the lead role, refused to do athletics training and fulfil her father's dream. *Top Kid* was thought to endorse cheating—a quiz kid had to decide what he

would do when fed the answers to questions by the powers that be.

Eventually all the scripts were approved, but the dissenting view held by Barbara Biggins did not change. All *Winners* scripts failed to meet her standard for children's television. I had thought this day would come. Throughout all the years we had both worked very hard to achieve children's program standards, but we had very different programs for children in mind. *Winners* exemplified our philosophical difference. Barbara aimed to protect children from the excesses of television, while I wanted to see television open up experiences for children.

At one point in the saga with the CPC, I withdrew *Just Friends* from consideration. The CPC's deliberations were widely known: some members obviously delighted in the irony that the former CPC chair's programs were now being debated and deferred. I wrote to Shelley Phillips, who had succeeded Frank Meaney as chair, to let her know the sale of the series had been put under threat by members leaking information while the Foundation's negotiation with Network Ten and Robert Holmes à Court was occurring. This took some of the hot air out of the CPC's discussions. I was happy to report later that Ten had purchased the *Winners* series and all financing was in place by that time.¹⁸⁵

THE WRITERS OF the *Winners* series had risen to the challenge, in my opinion. While I had no experience as a script editor, I had books and articles to my credit and I read every draft and all of the script editor's comments as the drafts proceeded. I was learning. The process of script editing, once a good idea was agreed, meant ensuring that all the elements of good storytelling were in place, with strong, convincing, well-motivated characters. I believed I knew a good story and I had no other judgement I was prepared to rely on when it came to a final decision.

The first two episodes in the series were to be produced by Jane Scott of Scott Productions. *Top Kid*, written by Bob Ellis and directed by Carl Schultz, and *On Loan*, written by Anne Brooksbank and directed by the young and inexperienced director Geoff Bennett, were to begin production at the end of July 1984. To chaperone me through the productions, John Morris suggested I employ Damien

Parer as production supervisor. Inexperienced I was, but I soon learnt that when something goes wrong you should take action immediately; when the money flows quickly with a large crew on the payroll, time is critical.

Trouble started as soon as production began. Brooksbank and Ellis were married; it was coincidental that their two films were being produced by one producer. Jane Scott was developing Geoff Bennett for another project and assured me she would surround him with an experienced crew for support. I believed in giving people opportunities; I was being given the opportunity of my life, and I was happy to support Geoff.

I received a phone call telling me that *On Loan*'s director was rewriting the script without the writer's knowledge and the writer had learnt what was happening. I had given guarantees to the writers that their scripts would not be changed without their input. *On Loan*'s script had been issued to the crew, one of whom was a friend of Anne Brooksbank and told her about the changes. Anne was upset and very emotional. Bob Ellis announced they were withdrawing the script and 'the cheque was in the mail'. Jane Scott had worked with Ellis before, it turned out, and found him 'very difficult', so she decided she wouldn't consult the Ellis/Brooksbank team about reworking the script. I flew to Sydney and spent the most astonishing day I had experienced in the film industry attempting—with the invaluable assistance of Jane Cameron, the Ellis/Brooksbank agent who had seen all this before with her clients—to talk sense into everyone involved. Anne kept leaping to her feet saying she was going to lose her baby, Bob insisted the film would not be made, Jane Scott was unmoved and unapologetic. At the end of a long and harrowing day Anne agreed to work with the director and consider the changes he wanted to the script. Jane Cameron was a model for me that day: I was a nervous executive producer and did not know if these people meant what they threatened or were simply playing out a drama.

The next trauma with Scott Productions occurred when, in my ignorance of film protocol, I went into the editing room on the production of *Top Kid* and looked at film rushes the director had not yet seen. The editor called Jane Scott, who came down and ticked me off. Director Carl Schultz was very understanding.

The productions of the two Jane Scott films could not have been more different. Carl Schultz, with John Seale as director of photography, would direct a take (or two or three), then the creative team would check with one another and move on quickly. It was a beautifully shot and beautifully directed production. Geoff Bennett, by contrast, would do ten to twelve takes with little apparent difference, and the film ratio was exceptionally high.¹⁸⁶ But Jane did as she said she would and shepherded Geoff Bennett through to complete a powerful story about a Vietnamese girl, Lindy, who is forced to decide her future when the father she thought dead comes to Australia and shatters the lives of her adoptive parents when he says he wants her back.

I was really upset when I went to view the director's cut of *Top Kid*, which was my favourite script in the series. It was the story of a very bright boy from a working-class background, who goes on a quiz show and suddenly finds fame and fortune within his reach. The sponsors start to rig the show and the young protagonist, Gary Doyle, has to make a very difficult decision. He seeks advice from his teacher and from Brother Kennedy, the school principal, who tells him, 'The inside track's worth having boy'. 'Would you do it, Father?' asks Gary. 'We-ell' is the reply as the headmaster shakes his head. Bob Ellis had written an ending that was ambiguous but which explored the enormous pressures on the boy. I had submitted the script to Father Gerry Briglia at the Catholic Education Office for his advice on such a story for young people. He endorsed it strongly and reinforced my confidence that we should be doing provocative productions of this kind.

But Carl Schultz and Jane Scott didn't like the ending and had shot an alternative, unscripted version in which Gary stood up and said, 'I will not tell a lie'. I was horrified; the film had lost its point and been turned into the kind of moralistic, sermonising story for children I detested. I felt very sure of Ellis' likely response. The shoot was well over, so we had to work with the footage we had. But as the director had not believed in the film as written, when it was assembled the scripted ending did not work. There was a prolonged stand-off between me and Jane Scott. I insisted we invite Ellis to view the ending—without the moral line (and without telling him of the producer's attempt to create an alternative ending to his story)—and

ask his advice. Bob came up with a very simple but clever solution to extend the line of dialogue from the boy over a freeze-frame and throw the question of judgement back to the audience to ask them what they would have done. The film showed that Gary Doyle, while given the answer by the quizmaster, had known much more on the question's subject than he had been told. This film still remains one of my favourites. It won many awards and was better for the new ending. After Hazel Hawke viewed *Top Kid*, she took it home to the Lodge, and Prime Minister Bob Hawke invited Barry Jones—a former star quiz kid and now a Labor minister—around to watch the show, with a positive response.

Just Friends, written by Jan Sardi, created a different kind of discussion.¹⁸⁷ It tells the story of Susan who has moved to a new suburb. It is school holidays and at the local roller rink Buzz moves in on her. She joins Buzz and his gang, and works her way through the painful life of a thirteen year old—boyfriends, girlfriends, going steady and breaking up—revealing the world of peer pressure, standing up for yourself against the group, resisting demands to conform to behaviour you are uncomfortable with.

Jan wanted to speak to the audience with an authentic voice, using the language of the western suburbs where the film was set. This time I was not on the writer's side. I believed the language would draw attention away from the content of the story and ultimately prevent the film being seen by the children it was intended for. While I agreed in principle with Sardi's view, I felt it would not work in practice. I insisted that swearing was not acceptable.

The script had only a provisional C classification from the tribunal, where all final drafts were being scrutinised carefully. Smoking had to be kept to a level essential to the plot. (Too much smoking could also jeopardise an overseas sale.) Violence had to be kept in context, within acceptable limits. The party punchbowl scene, which was essential, should have only one character, Maggs, showing any signs of intoxication. The shoplifting scene should be directed to show that the film was not condoning stealing. The 'lip twister kiss', so described in the script, should be directed carefully. The film should promote a sense of children being responsible for one another. The characters must look like twelve to fourteen year olds. All these issues required sensitive direction.

Tarflowers was a fairy story written by Terry Larson about Kev, a retarded boy who is understood and protected within his neighbourhood, and a canine companion Big Dog. Garbage night is magic and so is Kev's work. He paints 'tar flowers'—colourful graffiti—around the neighbourhood. The film was to be shot on videotape as the special effects would have been expensive to produce on film. Tom Jeffrey, the producer, was on the board of the Foundation. When I came to Sydney to check on the production, Tom was worried about the coverage the director was achieving. Every scene was filmed in a long take, with no close-ups; the director said it was a personal style, but it meant that, when the scenes came together, the film was about thirty minutes longer than it should have been. The only way to shorten it was to cut out scenes completely, and then the film didn't make sense. I had to sack the director and try to make sense of the footage we had. Anne Brooksbank was brought in to write a narration to unify the film. Geoff Bennett, who had done well with *On Loan* and was available at very short notice, became a consultant director, and Chris Neal, the composer who wrote the music for *Top Kid* and *Quest Beyond Time*, wrote a beautiful sound track which tied the film together. *Tarflowers* became a charming film.

The Other Facts of Life, produced by Sandra Levy and Julia Overton, was my introduction to director Esben Storm, who interpreted writer Morris Gleitzman's comedy script with great panache. Sandra was learning production well and went on to head ABC Television—no problems there.

When *Quest Beyond Time*—the science fiction story of Australia in the post-nuclear dark-age—was shot (written by Tony Morphett, and produced by the delightful Richard Mason) Sydney was deluged, the location was swamped, and the shoot went five days over the two-week schedule. There were anxious times, but Richard taught me what the producer/executive producer relationship should really be about. He respected my role and what I was trying to achieve for the Foundation. As a mature producer, he didn't think he had to lift his leg on his turf, as some of the others did. *Room to Move*, also produced by Richard Mason, directed by John Duigan and starring the young Nicole Kidman, was a trouble-free production.

Winners had been a baptism of fire—introducing me to a diverse range of producers, directors, styles of production and problems—as

well as a wonderfully exciting introduction to the creation of drama, from an idea on paper to a powerful experience to be shared on screen. The series delivered exactly what the Foundation had been hoping and the kind of television for children I had been dreaming of for the last eight years. Production was almost as exciting as giving birth to a child—nothing can equal that experience. Film-making becomes an obsession for those who love the process. Individuals expend years developing an idea, mortgage their houses and fight tenaciously to realise a dream. At its best it is a collaborative medium, organised within a strict hierarchy, where everyone pulls together and contributes to the vision. A remarkable euphoria grips the crew, feeling they are not only earning a pay cheque doing something they enjoy but also making an important social contribution. It was this synergy that made the ACTF's infancy so exciting.

The first film to be completed was the Esben Storm-directed comedy *The Other Facts of Life*. I was anxious to show it off and get some audience feedback, so I arranged a screening for invited guests at the State Film Centre.¹⁸⁸ Robert Holmes à Court decided to attend, to check out his investment. When he arrived, Glenda, my personal assistant, asked him wryly if he would like a name tag. Robert declined. He was a towering, rather shy figure, not relaxed in such company. I was equally nervous, and positioned my husband Don—who has a very infectious laugh—beside other supporters, to laugh loudly at the bits that were supposed to be funny. They did an excellent job breeding laughter in the ranks. Robert really didn't know what to make of the film and the only comment I heard back, via Janet, was that he thought the accents were very broad Australian; and they certainly were. Twenty years ago we were not yet used to hearing the sound of our own voices.

Winners began screening on Australian television in September 1985, to wide critical acclaim. The media and the reviewers loved it, calling it: 'Everything children's television should be' (*West Australian*, Perth, 28 November 1985); 'truly a series not to be missed by young and old' (*Bulletin*, 15 October 1985); 'a TV triumph. It has redefined the standards of children's TV' (*Sunday Times*, Perth, 19 January 1986); 'superb family drama ... moving, uplifting and admirably restrained. Try not to miss it' (*Age Green Guide*, 10 October 1985). '*Winners* definitely lives up to the ACTF's aim for Australian Television',

wrote one Tasmanian critic.¹⁸⁹ It was seen as ‘well crafted’, ‘top quality’, ‘very watchable’, ‘ambitious’, ‘money very well spent’; and the *Canberra Times* enthused: ‘finally ... Australian television has come up with an intelligent, witty and very watchable program for children of all ages’.¹⁹⁰

When the series was shown in the United States on PBS as part of the *Wonderworks* series, the reviews in *Daily Variety*, the New York industry news magazine bible, described *On Loan* as ‘worth watching, a lovely hour’ (17 March 1986) and *Top Kid* as ‘engaging, excellent’ (19 October 1985).

The series won awards for children’s programming in Australia and around the world. At the Chicago International Festival of Children’s Films held in October 1986, *Winners* scooped the pool, winning five awards and astonishing the festival director and jury. Out of the 180 entries seen from twenty countries, *Winners* took out a first prize for live action with *Top Kid*; *The Paper Boy* won an honourable mention; *The Other Facts of Life* won a special jury prize for cinematic impact; and *Just Friends* won first prize, voted by the children’s audience as the most popular video. As a result of the festival’s response to the *Winners* series, the jury created a special one-off award recognising the Australian Children’s Television Foundation’s outstanding achievement in developing quality films for children. The director of the festival said, ‘The Festival was incredibly impressed by the work being done by the Foundation. The Foundation has a great deal to be proud of. The Festival was attended by many from the industry who would learn a lot from the films shown’.

The promotional support given to the series varied markedly in different states but the biggest disappointment for the Foundation was that, for its initial run on the Ten network, *Winners* was not screened as a series or in a regular timeslot on the same night of the week. This meant its impact as an anthology series was lost and the audience had trouble finding out when it was on. Robert Holmes à Court’s Perth station TVW7 ran the full series at 6.30 p.m. on Sunday evenings throughout December and January, to pleasing results, and from 21 June 1986 Network Ten stations in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane, and regional stations in Hobart and Launceston, ran *Winners* programs at 5 p.m. on Saturday evenings over consecutive weeks.

ITC Entertainment would sell *Winners* into ninety countries—in part because it was able to package the series with its other high-profile projects, including feature films. Because the distribution fees and expenses were so high it did not return a profit for investors—who all got their money back—but it did draw attention to the Australian Children's Television Foundation in the international marketplace and to Australia's capability as an outstanding producer of children's programs. ITC reported an extraordinary response from teachers and students from the educational distributor, Trumedia, based in Oxford. ITC informed the Australian High Commission in London that they planned to launch the series to 35 000 schools in Britain.

THE EDUCATIONAL FOCUS of the *Winners* series made it unique. Right from the outset, I had had it in mind to find a publishing house willing to turn the series into children's books. My hope was to introduce the child audience to reading through television, rather than the conventional wisdom of the other way around. I also wanted all the films available on video for schools, accompanied by the books and teachers' discussion notes.

To coincide with screenings in each state, the Foundation provided study kits to all schools throughout Australia, which I had written with the help of a friend, a primary school teacher, Marlene Johnson. As well, the McPhee Gribble/Penguin novels of the episodes, written by the scriptwriters, were in bookstores and we developed video kits with CBS/Fox, each with a program, book and teaching notes for sale to schools. This was the first time books based on an Australian children's television series had been made available in Australia. They sold exceptionally well and created a publishing precedent by bringing children to reading through television.

Hilary McPhee and Di Gribble were publishing pioneers in Australia. I had visited all the major publishing houses with the idea of publishing eight children's books simultaneously alongside the release of a children's television series. I was laughed out of most doors but Hilary and Di liked the bold idea. Hilary, with whom I had worked before, wanted the scriptwriters as the novelists.¹⁹¹

The negotiation with the writers was difficult and prolonged.

I believed the Foundation was entitled to a percentage of the book royalty, given that we had conceived the idea, acted as an agent to persuade the publisher, and would be promoting *Winners* throughout the school system to further sales. I wanted the Foundation to receive some benefit to offset the costs of the study guide it was publishing and the significant amount of money we were putting into promotion of the project, from which the writers would benefit with increased book sales. But Roger Simpson, representing the writers, insisted they should receive the full 10 per cent royalty. As the project was an experiment and none of us could be sure of the outcome, I eventually agreed that the Foundation would take no royalty in this publishing project. As it turned out, the writers became significant beneficiaries from *Winners*. A respectable sale for a children's book in Australia is 3000 to 4000 copies. By 30 June 1985 the first print run of 40 000 copies was sold out and a second print run underway. The books remained in print for more than a decade, with sales reaching beyond 200 000 copies. *Winners* demonstrated there was a market in children's books based on original television series in Australia.

There were, however, problems with *Just Friends*. Hilary had gone along with Jan Sardi's wish to use western suburbs' language in the novelisation. By today's standards, it was tame, not extending beyond terms such as 'really pissed off', 'bitch', 'shut up, will you?', yet the book was described in the Victorian Parliament by Ian Smith, the Member for Polworth, as containing 'the worst form of gutter language'. Apart from the language, he drew attention to a description of kissing. He asked the Minister for Education 'to intervene to ensure that this literature is not made available, at least in primary schools'.¹⁹²

By 7 October 1985 the Director-General of Education in Victoria, Norman Curry (who was also an Anglican minister), had sent a memorandum to principals of all primary schools requesting them to 'bring to the attention of their school community the opinion of the Education Department that the book is not suitable for younger readers as the language is inappropriate'. Foundation staff tracked down the history of this memo which I sent to McPhee Gribble publishers, who were deciding what to do. Norman Curry had taken a personal interest, read the book and annotated it himself, then asked a curriculum officer, Robert McGregor, for an opinion.

McGregor drafted for the Education Minister's signature a letter to Ian Smith with the same content as the memo sent to principals. No copy of the Curry memo could be found in the Department, and the English Curriculum section knew nothing of McGregor's memo and advice. It was an unusual step for such advice to be given; normally the Department keeps out of such things and leaves decisions to the discretion of the school community. Norman Curry was not a fan of mine. Although invited, he did not attend the party in Treasury Gardens when Malcolm Fraser handed over the Foundation's first cheque from the Commonwealth. When the event was over, I called a taxi, packed up the leftover logo cake—which was rather sorry looking as it had been well eaten by the kids who were present—and asked the driver to deliver it to Norman Curry.

I advised Hilary to do nothing. Hilary agreed. But there would be no more swearing in Foundation publications; there were much bigger issues to be concerned about.

The Foundation also decided that we should do our own direct marketing to schools, through our newsletter. I wanted a direct relationship with our audience, and teachers were an important part of that audience. I also resolved that the Foundation should share in the royalty return on book publishing associated with the next project we initiated, a decision that drew me into conflict with the Writers Guild, but I thought the Foundation's position was fair.

THROUGHOUT MY YEARS at the Foundation, I always enjoyed sitting and watching children view the final tapes of programs we had made. With *Winners* this was a very important process as I was still learning to understand what children wanted to see and how they responded to ideas that were often quite sophisticated. Research confirmed again and again that a common tendency of producers was to underestimate the abilities of the child audience. We did screenings and conducted interviews with eight to thirteen year olds in four schools. In one group of fifty-two ten year olds—twenty-nine boys and twenty-three girls—we took ratings after they viewed all films. All of the *Winners* films, with the exception of *Paper Boy*, were rated number one (their favourite film) by at least one child. The most popular films with the girls were *Room to Move*, *Quest Beyond Time*

and *Just Friends*; the least liked were *The Paper Boy* and *Tarflowers*. For the boys the most popular films were *Quest Beyond Time*, *Top Kid* and *Tarflowers*, with the least liked *On Loan* and *Just Friends*. Together the two groups' standout favourite was *Quest Beyond Time*. The reasons were simple to understand: the boys liked films with boys in the leading role, the girls liked films with girls in the leading role: *Quest Beyond Time* had a boy and a girl together as leads. The interviews confirmed that it was possible to target different age groups within the one program and that challenging ideas can be developed that are relevant to adults but can be presented from a kid's point of view. It was essential that characters be true to the age group but the audience preferred children to be older than themselves. They liked contemporary stories and being able to identify with events that could happen to them.

Based on this experience, I developed an overarching approach for all Foundation projects: there would be a boy and a girl around age thirteen to fourteen who were the lead characters: there would be a younger child—girl or boy—around age eight to ten to attract the younger viewers. Dialogue and plots would be crafted that were relevant to both age groups, and they would be based within a family with issues relevant to all family members, always from the child's point of view. This became the model for *Round the Twist*, *Sky Trackers*, *Genie from Down Under*, *Crash Zone*, *Legacy of the Silver Shadow* and *Noah & Saskia*. These series all attracted an audience that ranged in age from four years to fourteen, with spill-over beyond those years.

Three more Foundation-initiated projects got underway in the 1984–85 financial year. *Kaboodle*, a series specifically designed for the under ten year olds, was an attractive concept developed by Jenifer Hooks. Jeff Peck, then program manager at ACTF, was to produce *Kaboodle*, which included a diverse selection of animation, puppetry and live action, created by Australia's up-and-coming film makers. Thirty separate self-contained dramas of differing lengths were to be packaged into half-hour episodes. The project was designed to showcase new, creative talent in the television industry. Competitions were run at the Australian Film and Television School and Swinburne Institute of Technology for the best concepts suitable for inclusion in the *Kaboodle* package, with prizes of \$1000 awarded. The Foundation sought promising but inexperienced writers, would-be producers,

directors and even accountants who wanted to earn their first credit to enable them to find a future in the industry.

Although industry development was not the Foundation's objective, I saw this project as an opportunity to develop talented people who might work in children's television in the future. It was also an idea that would balance our efforts at the top end of production through *Winners*. The budget was just under a million dollars, but financing was still difficult to achieve because such a production was not eligible under the legislation for tax investment. So once again I had to go, cap in hand, to all the state film investment bodies. Nearly five hundred people were given production opportunities through *Kaboodle* and many of them went on to make important contributions.

We were off to a good start with our own productions and I had learned much about both the creative and the production side of making quality programs for children. It was a struggle, but immensely rewarding. I was learning and enjoyed finding ways around the problems. The politics of the film industry were just as challenging as were those of the university, but the big difference was this: at the end of the struggle there was a tangible product that could endure, and I felt I was doing something useful and important.

10

Fraud and Recovery

'It is fraud to conceal fraud.'

(Legal maxim)

GRAHAM MORRIS, THE LEGAL and finance manager of the Australian Children's Television Foundation, relieved me of all financial and legal concerns about the running of the Foundation. He worked long hours, was the first to arrive in the mornings and the last to leave in the evenings. When I expressed my concerns about the hours he worked, he insisted this was the way he liked it: he was, he said, a workaholic and it gave him great satisfaction.

I was grateful I had found someone prepared to work so hard for such a struggling organisation. I would extol his virtues to the board and they in turn praised his financial record-keeping and the documentation he prepared that came before them. I trusted him completely and was reassured by the strong association he developed with the auditors; he involved them in everything he was doing. I didn't warm to him as a person (nor did most of the staff)—he could be very moody and bad tempered—but I put up with those moods,

regarding them as the price to be paid for an obsessive, conscientious employee looking after the interests of the Foundation.

In late 1985 I was overseas for three weeks. When I returned, Morris gave me the annual report to check the final page proofs. He had inserted a credit saying, 'Written and designed by Graham Morris'. I told him his name should be removed and he became extremely annoyed. Two days later he argued with Jeff Peck, our program manager, about the funding decisions Jeff was taking on script development. Jeff wrote a memorandum about the meeting so that I was aware of the conflict. Then Graham argued with his secretary and came to me and said that she should be dismissed. He claimed that both she and my own secretary, Glenda Wilson, were unreliable and that he had to check everything they did. Glenda had worked with me for more than ten years, first at La Trobe University, then at the Foundation at my request. She was a brilliant PA and I knew that Morris was talking nonsense: there had to be more behind his accusations. His behaviour had developed a pattern. It seemed that if I became close to any staff member he would find fault with them, until they decided to leave. This had happened twice before: I did not want the same thing happening with Jeff or Glenda.

Investors had been phoning the Foundation complaining that they had not received their first cheque from the sale of *Winners* and Graham had become very agitated. I contacted the trustee for the *Winners* account and asked them to move along with the cheques and send their report to investors as soon as possible. On 26 November, Graham told me he had received a letter of complaint from an investor who had put \$57 000 into *Winners*. The problem, he said, stemmed from inefficiency by the trustee company. I asked for a copy of the letter as I was going to Perth and wanted to show it to Janet Holmes à Court who, because of the involvement of ITC Entertainment Ltd, should know if the Foundation was being criticised by investors. Graham gave me a photocopy, but I did not have the opportunity to speak with Janet in Perth so I brought the letter back with me.

The next day Glenda mentioned that it was interesting that an investor had commented in the letter that Graham had not taken his calls and that Maureen Kane, his secretary, had done so. No such statement was in the letter Graham had given me. I gave Glenda the

copy and she showed it to Maureen, who believed a paragraph had been removed. We checked the incoming mail file and there was no letter in the file, but the receptionist on duty that day, Carmel Abela—who was also the part-time bookkeeper—had read the letter and placed it in the incoming mail filing tray. Maureen found the original letter in Graham's office and gave me a copy. This letter contained a paragraph outlining the number of times the investor had rung the Foundation and been told that Mr Morris could not take his calls—'the switch girl' had assured him the messages had been passed on and his secretary had spoken 'with courtesy and courage' but the investor wanted to know when his cheque would arrive. I made several copies of the letter, put one in my desk drawer, took a copy home and gave copies to both Maureen and Glenda. The copy in my desk drawer disappeared. I had no inkling of any serious dishonesty on Graham's part and thought this was another example of the behaviour I had seen before when he faced personal criticism. I spoke with the auditors on 3 December and told them that I intended to ask Graham to resign. They were uncomfortable with my decision. I advised my chairman, Ken Watts, and showed him the letter concerned.

I met with Graham Morris first thing on Friday 13 December, told him I knew about the letter and asked him to resign. He said he thought it was 'perfectly reasonable' that he should remove criticism of himself that was not justified when I intended to pass the letter on to others. He then asked that an audit be arranged before he left as there would be criticism and he wanted everything to be cleared for a departure. Graham had told me that, before migrating to Australia from Britain, he had sold his share in a successful travel agency and that was how he could afford a Porsche and a holiday house at Portsea. At this point, I suspected nothing other than a personality disorder.

I arranged for a meeting between Morris, me and the auditors. We agreed that Graham should leave in January after he had completed work on a new trust deed for the next series the Foundation was producing. But after the weekend, Morris returned to work and told me that he had been seeing a psychiatrist for some months and thought he was on the verge of a breakdown. The psychiatrist had told him he was creating situations in order that I would sack him.

He agreed that altering the letter had been very silly and he knew he was not normal; he was extremely distressed. I was concerned about his state of mind. I told the auditors of this discussion and they suggested that I should not cut Morris off from his work but give him contract work that he could do outside the office. Following this meeting I returned to the office and Morris' PA, Maureen, came to see me with copies of two invoices and cheque requisitions which she had found in files on Morris' desk—an order for T-shirts and camera stock from twelve months previously—with dates that had been altered. For the first time I understood that Morris had stolen from the Foundation. My thought was he was using the money to pay his psychiatrist's bills.

On the Wednesday morning, I called Carmel Abela to my office, showed her the two requisitions and asked her to go back over the past few months and see if there was anything else at all suspicious. She returned within an hour with several requisitions which I knew immediately were false. I phoned the auditor who said he would need to see who the cheques were made out to. I gave the details over the phone to the head of the Ledger Department at the National Australia Bank and he arranged to pull out the cheques for inspection. Morris had been working in his office all morning, observing me, and left the building at noon saying he was going to the dry cleaners. He left his briefcase and papers spread over the desk. He did not return and I would never see or speak to him again. The bank verified that the cheques had been made out to GF Morris, American Express, and other Morris payees. Another, for \$40 000, happened to be made out to the ABC. I was aghast. Graham Morris and I were in serious trouble and the Foundation's reputation was at stake.

The events that then unfolded were horrendous to live through. Graham Morris did not return home that evening; his wife rang the police at 4 a.m. I spent the night on the telephone getting advice and John Morris (no relation to Graham) kept me calm with his support. I spoke with John's head of administration at the SAFC past midnight and I lined up legal representation. I had a family connection, a partner with Russell Kennedy and Cook, and by 7 a.m. next day he was arranging for a solicitor to be present at my meeting with the auditors and Ken Watts at noon. By then the Fraud Squad was

involved. They advised me to change the locks on the Foundation's doors, hire a security guard and take care with my own safety. I spent the morning notifying board members and the Department of Arts, Heritage and Environment.

Morris was found next day. He had checked in to the Geelong Hospital after taking an overdose. The Fraud Squad interviewed him and he confessed to fraud going back more than two years, starting just months after his appointment. So many cheques were involved that he could not recall the details. The money had gone into two houses and a Porsche car. He agreed to co-operate with police. There had been two audits during the time he had been misappropriating Foundation funds. The police asked Morris whether I had been involved in his fraud.

It was five days before Christmas when Morris was charged with seven counts of theft from the Australian Children's Television Foundation for amounts totalling \$60 000, released on bail of \$25 000 and arraigned to appear in court on 25 June 1986. The journalists who might have picked up on the charges were already on leave and I was thankful. Among my board members was the Prime Minister's wife; Janet Holmes à Court; and Dame Beryl Beaufort. I did not want them humiliated. I feared a parading in the media of my incompetence and the theft of public money. I had driven home from the office late on the first evening, burying my head in my hands at each traffic light. I believed the Foundation was finished.

Graham Morris committed suicide on New Year's Eve. The Foundation sued the estate. His death and the timing of the events meant there was very little media coverage of what occurred. Peter Blazey of the *Bulletin*—which had pursued me throughout the controversy with the Children's Program Committee—was first to phone me. After I gave him the factual details he said, 'How does it feel to sack someone and then have them commit suicide?' Derryn Hinch announced the fraud and suicide on 3AW on 13 January, suggesting the money involved 'could be as high as \$200 000'. He was close; the stolen funds were eventually found to total more than a quarter of a million dollars.

Funds that I had been squirrelling away for the next production, which I thought were safely resting in the Foundation's bank accounts, Morris had been spending. Whenever Jeff Peck approved

funds for script development for independent producers, Morris argued he was not being consulted: behind his conflict with the program manager lay a state of panic. The auditors were conned completely: Morris had them convinced that I was an irresponsible manager who changed her mind like the wind, and he sought their understanding and help in covering up my irrational decision-making processes as he shifted money around to cover his tracks. I knew nothing of this spin. Morris was extremely clever and the means by which he extorted funds were many. His long hours alone in the office were well spent. He took \$85 000 from the *Winners* investors' account by forging documents and then double charged the Foundation. He also carefully altered and forged documentation.

But I was also at fault. I had been naïve. I believed incorrectly that an audit meant the accounts were sound. I did not understand that it is not an auditor's responsibility to detect fraud, as they were quick to tell me once fraud was discovered. I assumed that, as the auditors were in the office frequently, looking over Graham's shoulder, things were in order. I often signed requisitions with no documentary back-up and on occasions signed blank cheques for staff salaries which Morris would count out carefully, putting them in front of me just as I had to leave the office urgently. He timed things to perfection and was a consummate actor. He became so confident in his activities that he began to forge my signature—there simply weren't sufficient blank cheques signed to meet his needs. At first he tested the process by forging my signature on legitimate payments. When they were approved without question he forged my signature for his personal expenditure. It was an addiction and it must have been terrifying for him as his world began to fall apart.

The ACTF retained barrister Frank Costigan to argue the case in court. When he questioned me about why I had signed blank cheques, I could only say, 'I trusted him'. But the case was never heard—the estate, the bank and the auditors settled it out of court. Morris had convinced his young wife—who the Fraud Squad believed was an innocent bystander—that he was paid handsomely because I was so pleased with his work. She co-operated with police and with the claim against the estate, and all the missing money was recovered over the next twelve months.

It was a tragic and traumatic time, but the events surrounding the fraud in fact strengthened the bonds between those involved with the Foundation. The board members were wonderful. I was fortunate to have such an experienced bureaucrat as Ken Watts as chair; he was unfazed and his support was unstinting. Governments too were understanding—in part I am sure because all money was recovered. Frank Meaney wrote a briefing note to his minister informing him of the circumstances, which he copied to me with a personal note: ‘Be of good cheer; your friends are not of the fair weather kind’.¹⁹³ Robert Holmes à Court told Janet this sort of thing went on everywhere all the time. I carried scars from the experience for many years: I was certainly toughened. And I had difficulty finding and trusting a finance manager again.

THE FOUNDATION’S BUSINESS had to move on. Undaunted by the *Winners* experience, indeed encouraged by it, I sought the board’s approval to develop an even more ambitious series: a package of telemovies, for release in 1988 to coincide with the Australian Bicentennial celebrations. With the working title *Survivors*, the national series was to involve one telemovie produced in each state. *Winners* had told stories about the struggle by young children to grow up and learn to make their own decisions through their resilience and resourcefulness; it had also asked parents to consider the pressures on children as well as on themselves. *Survivors* would provide adventure based on a national tapestry, telling stories of children of different ages and cultures, and depicting the spirit of survival against physical, emotional and social difficulties.

The ACTF was gaining a reputation as a producer to work with and other producers were already seeing the Foundation as a competitor. Hector Crawford wrote to me objecting that Crawford’s were not involved in the production of *Winners*. I said that I looked forward to working with Crawford’s in the future, but we wanted control over the highly ambitious plan we had instituted to reinforce the future of children’s programming in Australia.¹⁹⁴ Gene Scott, managing director of Independent Productions Pty Ltd—a company with an interest in children’s and family programming—had written to the ACTF chairman, Ken Watts, proposing that his

company produce the anthology series with creative input from the Foundation.¹⁹⁵ The ACTF board resolved to continue with the production of *Winners* as proposed and I replied to Gene Scott, saying: 'It was the Foundation's responsibility to act as Executive Producer on this highly innovative venture'.¹⁹⁶ The Foundation was already financing a project with Independent Productions (a mini-series, *Chase Through the Night*).

The argument that the Foundation was taking work from the independent industry did not stack up. Rather, the Foundation was expanding industry opportunities. Every person who worked on the eight productions of *Winners* was from the freelance industry. Although it was not our primary purpose, the Foundation was creating opportunities and many line-producers got their first production credit under the umbrella of the Foundation—a step they were not able to take on their own. To be able to call yourself a producer was a big jump in status.

The ACTF invested all it could in script development, but it did not rely on the freelance industry to prove the case for children's production. We were working with a million dollars per year, not the twelve million originally envisaged, against a sunset clause. *Fire in the Stone*, produced by the SAFC, was well received, as was *The Henderson Kids*, produced by Crawford's; *Five Times Dizzy*, produced by Tom Jeffrey for SBS, and *Saturdee*, *Bushfire Moon*, *Chase Through the Night*, *Scrap Iron Kid* and a range of other productions were in development and in the production pipeline. But the majority of scripts in which the Foundation had invested were sitting in filing cabinets: the industry simply could not sell them or finance production.

WINNERS HAD NOW collected twelve major awards. It was hoped *Survivors*, which was eventually re-titled *Touch the Sun*, would equal that achievement. I began work on its financing in 1986, with production scheduled for 1987, and the series to be screened in 1988. The budget was in excess of \$7.5 million.

I commissioned twelve scripts from the best people I could attract, and chose six to develop. I engaged a talented young writer, Sue Smith, as script editor for the series. *Princess Kate* was the New South Wales production, written by Kristin and David Williamson,

produced by Antonia Barnard and directed by George Ogilvie. *Peter and Pompey*, written by John Misto, produced by Margot McDonald and directed by Michael Carson, represented Queensland but, as the state government was still not funding the Foundation, the film was shot in New South Wales. *Top Enders*, written by Michael Aitkens, produced by Jill Robb, directed by Jackie McKimmie and starring John Jarratt, was filmed in and around Darwin. *Devil's Hill*, written by David Phillips, produced by Jill Robb and directed by Esben Storm, was shot in Tasmania. *The Gift*, written by Paul Cox and Jeff Peck and produced by Tony Llewellyn-Jones, was shot in Victoria and Western Australia. *Captain Johnno*, written by Rob George, produced by Jane Ballantyne and directed by Mario Andreacchio, was filmed in South Australia.

As executive producer, I would control the creative, financial and administrative aspects of the production, without a supervising producer. This time I had a much better idea of what I was doing. Everything fell into place more easily than with *Winners*, although good fortune played a part.

A new director of television at the ABC, Graham Reynolds, picked up the *Touch the Sun* brochure from his office floor where it had been discarded in the office clean-up for his arrival and thought this project might be worth supporting. Working with the ABC held a great attraction for the Foundation, because it meant we didn't have to get a C classification from the tribunal—as a public broadcaster, the ABC was exempt—and we didn't have to deal with the commercial industry. The ABC was expected to produce quality children's programs as part of its charter, although its record at the time was well short of its charter obligations.

Janet Holmes à Court became chairman of the board of the ACTF in December 1986, when Ken Watts stepped down after five years. Dame Beryl Beaurepaire, who had been a strong supporter since I first called on her to talk to Malcolm Fraser, was deputy chair.¹⁹⁷ I wanted Janet as chairman but the decision was contentious. Quentin Bryce warned me that if Janet became chairman, Hazel Hawke would resign.¹⁹⁸ I certainly did not want that to happen: it would mean gaining one woman of influence only to lose another. I spoke with Hazel and she agreed to stay. In twenty years I never heard Hazel speak critically of anyone, so I didn't ever discover

the cause of her alleged unease. Hazel knew that Janet could bring a lot of attention to the cause of children's television: she had an extraordinary appeal, and people were fascinated by her.

The ACTF chairmanship was Janet's first national role. When she asked Robert's advice about chairing meetings, he simply told her she was in charge and she could run the meeting as she wished. When we travelled together to Canberra to lobby ministers she took to the role with ease. There was no minister or bureaucrat who did not want to fraternise with Janet Holmes à Court, so we had no problems getting meetings. Would we like lunch?

It was not entirely because she was married to Robert—although that gave her the entrée and the confidence—she was also charming and a good performer who took a brief well. I would give Janet her talking points and she'd be off, like Meryl Streep, using words to seduce men of influence to our cause. She would exaggerate shamelessly and did not concern herself very much with the detail. She would embellish a point to her heart's content, and I would shrug my shoulders and nod a lot. I saw many so-called influential men practically drooling over their conversations with Janet. It was quite something to watch. She got the attention of people who would probably be yawning with boredom if talking to me. If politicians remembered two things—Janet Holmes à Court and the Australian Children's Television Foundation—I was happy. She could have the attention; I wanted the opportunity to do the best work that could be achieved.

In the first twelve months Janet was a conscientious chairman. I did not see her often, for during this year Robert was very much involved with his takeover plans for BHP and Janet made herself available to him as a matter of priority. But she lived with a telephone by her side and she was always accessible. Generally I just kept her up to date with what I was doing. She would appear for meetings and public functions and I would set dates around her commitments.

Janet's first big event was a joint announcement with David Hill, the managing director of the ABC, of a partnership between the two organisations to produce *Touch the Sun*.¹⁹⁹

The ABC paid two million dollars for the Australian rights to *Touch the Sun*, the most the ABC had ever spent to acquire the rights to an independent program. At the same time the ACTF acquired

a prestigious international distributor in the form of the French distribution company Revcom Television, which had offices around the world. The company had taken note of the success of *Winners* and was seeking co-productions for international release, planning to specialise in children's and family drama. They wanted to work in Australia to take advantage of our tax concessions and of the Australian children's drama quota. Revcom became the international distributor for *Touch the Sun*, investing a \$2.5-million guarantee and \$30 000 in script development—a remarkable deal in 1986.

At the event held to commit their worldwide media distribution guarantee, Revcom was represented by Michel Noll, a flamboyant Frenchman with a background in sociology, a big cheque book and a love for the production industry. He was accompanied by Geoff Daniels, formerly of the ABC but now a Revcom employee, who would be associate producer for the series. Barclays was to underwrite. The South Australian Film and Television Financing Fund, the Australian Film Commission, Film Victoria and the New South Wales Film Corporation all backed the series, along with the Australian Bicentennial Authority, which named *Touch the Sun* as the Bicentenary's official children's series for 1988.

The financial package presented to investors was competitive. The combined pre-sale and distribution advance represented 60 per cent of the budgeted cost of the films which would be returned to investors as the first priority for disbursement of gross proceeds. The government film funding bodies had paid for all the non-deductible items in the budget, which meant the other investors would receive the maximum tax benefit of 120 per cent for their investments. The prospectus, a handsome document, was successful. Production was to take place between May 1987 and March 1988, with the programs screening on the ABC throughout 1988, the bicentennial year.

Kaboodle was already in production and the ABC decided to buy that series as well; the *Winners* video packs had been released around Australia; and the ACTF was producing a teenage drama discussion program, *Seen But Not Heard*, in Perth for TVW7, with Huw Evans as compere and an enthusiastic newcomer, Suzie Campbell, as co-producer with Jeff Peck.

I had a good team around me at the Foundation and we had recovered from the trauma of the fraud. Bob Axam from the ABT

had joined us to replace Graham Morris in charge of administration. The Foundation's profile kept growing and I was confident the programs we were producing met the very high standards I had set for everybody involved.

THE LATE 1980S brought some of the highest and lowest points of my life. On the low side, my sister Lesley's husband was diagnosed with motor neurone disease—a ghastly condition—and steadily declined over a two-year period. Don and I wanted to be with him and Lesley as much as we could through that time, so we travelled frequently to Geelong, where they lived, and to our beach house at Anglesea. Then the stock market crashed on 19 October 1987, and I saw little of Janet Holmes à Court over the next year; she would not leave Robert's side as he worked to preserve the family fortune. Five weeks later, my close friend and support Frank Meaney died of lung cancer. And to top it all off, I was diagnosed with breast cancer.

I first learned that Frank was ill while I was in Darwin during production of *Top Enders*. Producer Jill Robb had begun shooting the film early, before the safety report had been accepted by the union, and the union official in Sydney was threatening to go to the media saying that the Foundation was flouting the rules and risking the lives of young children with crocodiles. I was trying to mediate. I rang Frank to get the home phone number for the New South Wales Minister for Education, Rodney Cavalier, to tell him of the problems before they hit the press, and Frank told me he had been diagnosed with secondary lung cancer, nothing could be done, and he had only months to live. His voice was flat, but he spoke to me matter-of-factly, as always, gave me the number I wanted and insisted I get on with my business. I was devastated.

Over the twelve years since I first met Frank as a member of the advisory committee to the Australian Broadcasting Control Board we had been in frequent contact through the CPC, where he had been my deputy chair. He had convened the AEC working party to advise on the ACTE. He had been my co-task force director when we were establishing the Foundation and he had represented New South Wales on the board of the Foundation from the time it was established in March 1982 until his death in 1987. He came to his final

meeting of the board as a very sick man, expressly for the purpose of ensuring that the Foundation would establish a superannuation fund for me, as he knew I had no cover.

His greatest compliment to me was when he said, 'I could not have done what you have done'. He regarded the setting up of the Children's Television Standards and the ACTF as the greatest achievements of his life. I had needed Frank through those years; he was a rock in my life and a friend with whom I can never recall having a difference of opinion. The last time I saw him was when I visited him in Westmead Hospital, Sydney. I had never seen anybody whose body had been ravaged by cancer. He didn't have long to live and every breath was an effort. I held his hand and told him the gossip. When I told him that Shelley Phillips had got the flick as chair of the CPC it brought a gentle smile to his lips. Frank was a genuinely good man and I miss him still.

My bout with cancer came a year later, but I got off lightly. I had gone to Anglesea on my own for a few days' rest because I was exhausted. I showered and, as I was drying myself, I put the tip of my finger directly on a lump in my left breast that I knew I had not felt before. I was prone to lumps but this one was different. I rang my doctor in Ivanhoe and begged him not to leave the surgery until I could get there. I broke the speed limit on the Geelong Road and arrived soon after noon. He ordered a mammogram. When that was done I talked the radiologist into giving me an opinion (something I know I shouldn't have done and she shouldn't have agreed to). She told me she could see nothing there, so I didn't bother to go back to my doctor for a review; I was too busy. Three months later my mother was staying with me and needed medical attention. I took her to see my doctor, who asked me how my lump was. He examined me and said he was referring me to a surgeon for an opinion. The surgeon said he was sure there was nothing to worry about but we should remove the lump anyway.

In three weeks I was due to attend the Emmy Award ceremony in New York, because Revcom had inside information that we were the likely winners with *Captain Johnno*. My French colleague H el ene Fatou, who had overseen the six *Touch the Sun* telemovies with me, could not attend either. I underwent surgery to remove the lump and when I came out of the anaesthetic I immediately asked for my

doctor. He came to my bedside in the recovery room and said there were some cells that they had to look at but he thought it was going to be all right. That evening I learnt it was not: I had the option of going back into surgery the next day for a partial mastectomy, or a trip to New York. I had an image of cancer cells at the starting gate ready to rush around my body. Time, I thought, was of the essence. 'Let's get this thing over,' I said.

David Hill collected the Emmy in my place. From my hospital bed, I watched as ABC TV covered the presentation. Hill made no mention of the Foundation's role in its production, nor of the creative team. Later he lost the Emmy trophy, in the party aftermath, and returned home to Australia without it.

I was seething with shock and anger and feared the anger would send the cancer raging through my body. But the malignancy had been found early and I was told I had a 90 per cent chance of survival. I did not have chemotherapy or radiology and there has been no recurrence. I was lucky, particularly compared with some of the women I would later meet through the Breast Cancer Network of Australia.

But it was an unpleasant little interlude and when I look at the photograph of me holding up the Emmy, looking so excited and joyful, I also remember the photo was taken three weeks after my surgery and I had difficulty holding up my arm. How deceptive images can be.

IN LIGHT OF the circumstances, to make sure that the ACTF drew due public and political advantage from the Emmy award, Suzie Howie recommended that the Foundation take out a full-page advertisement in *The Australian* with a photograph of me holding the Emmy. The Foundation also hosted a celebration lunch for the creative team and the media to recognise the achievements of all involved. One irony was that the original writer of *Captain Johnno*, Rob George, had not actually produced the final script. That work was done by script editor Sue Smith, but she was never identified because of the politics involved. Once Rob George had done his two drafts he declined to work further on the script unless he was paid an additional sum of money, which we did not have in the budget. So Sue

Smith undertook the final draft for the production without the writer's knowledge.

Touch the Sun was officially launched by Hazel Hawke on a sunset cruise of Sydney Harbour on 15 March 1988. The series screened nationally at 6.30 p.m. Sunday on the ABC for six consecutive weeks from 27 March 1988. It was critically acclaimed, with the Melbourne *Sun News Pictorial*, the nation's largest-circulation newspaper reporting, 'Superlatives abound for the ABC's successful foray into adult television for discerning youngsters, the *Touch the Sun* series'. The series was variously referred to in the national press as 'excellent', 'relevant', 'real life drama', 'make sure you're watching it', 'the kids will love it', 'enchanting', 'a gem', 'charming', 'fascinating'.²⁰⁰

A few months earlier, in October 1987, *Kaboodle* had been launched by the federal Minister for the Environment and the Arts, Senator the Hon. Graham Richardson. When it went to air the reviews described the series as 'a wonderful concept', 'a unique blend of styles', 'special television', 'innovative', 'thrilling', 'fresh', 'colourful palette' and 'a veritable melting pot of issues', 'just when I thought children's TV had reached rock bottom, along comes *Kaboodle* ... it's fun, it's stimulating and refreshingly different'.²⁰¹

The Australian Children's Television Foundation had become synonymous with outstanding, quality children's programming and I was making sure that the government in Canberra knew all about it.

There were also awards galore.²⁰² *Devil's Hill* from *Touch the Sun* collected first prize for live action in the feature-length video section of the Chicago International Film Festival, which had previously presented four awards to *Winners*. Damien Walters, the young star from *Captain Johnno*, won the best performance by a juvenile actor. Roger Dowling won a Gold Camera Award for his work as cinematographer on *Captain Johnno*.

The Foundation was invited to enter the First International Film Festival for Children and Young People in Sofia, Bulgaria. We entered three films from *Touch the Sun* and, as a result, we were invited, with the directors of *Captain Johnno* and *Devil's Hill* and their child stars, to attend the festival. Esben Storm and Mario Andreacchio represented the ACTF with Alex Jacobs and Emma Pugh, who co-starred in *Devil's Hill*, and Damien Walters. Damien,

who played a deaf boy in *Captain Johnno*, was himself hearing-impaired. For the three children, attending the international film festival was an extraordinary experience. Esben said Alex became a champion at working the festival, introducing himself to everyone. It had become such a habit that, when they were coming home, he was introducing himself to the janitors at Bangkok airport. Damien, who was reluctant to approach people at first, saw a group of Bulgarians using sign language. He was able to communicate through the use of simple signing and was revelling in the excitement of finding people halfway across the world with the same impairment as his own.

Devil's Hill was a hit; the audience reaction was fantastic and Mario described Esben's face, as the audience applauded at length, as a picture of joy. Mario could not sleep the night before the *Captain Johnno* screening. All films he had seen at the festival were stories of adventure, comedy or fantasy. *Captain Johnno* was a very serious film about a deaf boy's isolation from his family and his community and his relationship with a young Italian fisherman who understood the boy's feelings. Mario had made a powerful film. Throughout the screening, the audience responded to the emotional high points with clapping and cheering. At the end Dutch, French-Canadian and Danish seasoned film makers told Mario they had cried their eyes out; meanwhile Damien signed autographs. The *Touch the Sun* films held their ground against some of the best and most expensive productions in the world.²⁰³

Mario was overwhelmed, but not everyone was so happy with me. I received a very angry letter from Paul Cox because of my criticisms of his film *The Gift*, which was included in the series, and his objection to my role—in particular my credit as executive producer up-front on the films. He had spent twenty hours reshaping *The Gift*, following my viewing of his edit of the film. I found the film unstructured and lacking in the narrative core that most children need to understand a film. This had been a problem throughout the entire production of *The Gift*. *Touch the Sun's* distributor, Revcom, was very unhappy too, as it was worried about sales. I had introduced Jeff Peck to Paul Cox to give help with the script, but every time Jeff added to the script Paul took his revisions out. By the time Paul shot the film, he did what he had wanted in the first place. When I saw the film in its final form I insisted on changes and Paul was incensed.

He ended his letter to me saying, darkly, that he ‘was not the only one who felt deeply humiliated by my attitude’.²⁰⁴ I had done what needed to be done to help make the film accessible to a young audience; I was simply doing my job. But I respected Paul and he had been a great supporter of the Foundation, so I regretted the conflict and did think very seriously about what he had to say to me.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT had produced a white paper on tax reform foreshadowing the discontinuance of the Division 10BA tax concessions which allowed private investors a 120 per cent tax deduction. The government wanted to be able to determine accurately the cost to revenue of the tax concessions for film investment, with Paul Keating arguing for reform. The Foundation urged the government to take account of the impact on children’s drama production of any proposed changes to the Tax Act.

Now the federal government was planning to abolish taxation concessions for film financing and to establish a film bank. In May 1988, Gary Punch, as Arts Minister, released details of new assistance measures for the industry, the main feature being the government’s agreement on budget funding for a new Film Finance Corporation to be established with a nine-member board of directors—an initiative of Treasurer Paul Keating. Kim Williams, former AFC chief executive was to be the chairman; I was asked to be the deputy chairman. William Gurry, managing director of the National Mutual Royal Bank; Anthony Hartnell, a corporate lawyer; and actor Jack Thompson were announced as members in the first press release, which stated, in part: ‘Children’s television will receive special attention from the Corporation’. I had met with the Minister in Canberra, following the launch of *Touch the Sun*, about the financial future of children’s programs and said to him, ‘If you want to help children’s production, put me on the board of the Film Finance Corporation’.

By 1988 I was satisfied that the ACTF had demonstrated a new direction and depth for children’s television. All programs told stories with three-dimensional characters; they showed the diversity of social groups in Australia. We created new heroes and allowed them to make mistakes, like real people we know, not like Hollywood stars. We told stories about characters who grew through the resolution

of conflict and experience. Boys and girls were character leads in stories; adults were seen to change and be imperfect at times. We raised ethical questions, giving a sense that there is not always a clear right or wrong answer, that anger in itself is not always bad, and that violence has consequences. We showed that women had as much moral and social responsibility as men, and men had as much emotional responsibility as women, showed feelings, loved and nurtured children.

All programs had a curriculum. They educated while they entertained, and they encouraged children to engage in activities other than television, particularly reading. Characters were models who encouraged children to try things for themselves, participate without needing to win. We presented Australia to Australian children and showed them that their own lives were worthy of close examination and that they could help shape the future.

Round the Twist

'You know what it's like. You stand on the end of the diving board and look down—and you're too scared to jump. The kids are jostling up the ladder behind you. You can't get back. "What am I doing here?" you say to yourself. "You idiot."

'You jump. Now it's too late. Nothing can get you back up. You hurtle down towards the water. That's what I felt like when I said I was going to write the scripts for a television show based on my short stories. That's what I felt like as I sat and waited for him to come. A man called Esben Storm.'

—Paul Jennings²⁰⁵

LIKE PAUL JENNINGS, I KNEW that feeling of going out on the diving board. So far I had hit the water and come up smiling. *Winners* and *Touch the Sun* had established Australia's credentials. We could produce groundbreaking productions that were attracting attention round the world. The objectives of the C classification could be met—quality programming could be made, young children could

act, children would watch them, I had not been talking through my hat for a decade as some in the networks had claimed.

The ACTF's productions had spanned every genre imaginable. Now I wanted to try something even more adventurous, to push the boat out into territory that would open up a world children had not seen or imagined before. I wanted to meet the commercial imperative and attract a large viewing audience, with a program made for children that parents would want to watch with them. The networks were averse to anthology series, I had discovered, because, without ongoing characters and storylines, anthologies required special promotion for each episode. As well, their budgets were higher, as costs could not be amortised. It had to be a comedy: children love to laugh and I wanted to make them laugh.

I kept a close eye on the script applications that came in to the Foundation, in the hope that a sparkling new idea would arrive, but all submissions had a remarkable sameness about them. I looked at children's books, but they were conventional, message-driven stories. Towards the end of 1987, I set up a new position in the Foundation—publishing and marketing manager—and appointed Lisa Berryman. Lisa would leave books on my desk. One day I was travelling to New Zealand to speak at a conference and I took a pile of them to read en route. One of these was a recently published book of short stories called *Unreal*, by Paul Jennings. I started to read on the plane and very soon I was laughing out loud. This was good stuff, I thought. I read on and knew this was what I had been looking for. I wanted to meet this Paul Jennings.

I invited Paul to lunch at a small restaurant in the city to ask him if we could option his stories as the basis of a series. He was a shy, introverted, cautious man and his response surprised me. Yes we could, but he wanted to write the whole series. Paul was a teacher at Warrnambool. He had never seen a script, much less written one. He knew nothing about television production. I knew he had no idea what he was letting himself in for, but I had nothing to lose. If Paul could not measure up and I had the option, I would call in other writers. My instinct was to try to make this work. Paul's stories were very short, simple, linear and plot-driven; there were no well developed characters around which to build a series and no concept that could be adapted for a series. Paul had magical mixes of manure,

musical ghosts, underpants with special powers, a machine that can make people older or younger, a skeleton on an outside toilet, lipstick that attracts kisses, a gum leaf that passes on illnesses from one person to another, and a green baby in a cabbage patch: weird and wonderful ingredients in funny and highly original stories. It would not be easy to find a writer capable of translating these ideas, so if Paul could be the writer I might have what I was looking for.

If anyone could make this work it would be Esben Storm. Esben was an experienced writer, director, actor, funny man and perfectionist. In personality he was everything Paul was not. If I could persuade him to take on the role of script editor and director, I could see a potential series. I would worry about how to finance and produce this series once I had something tangible to work with.

Esben was willing to have a go, and I had confidence in him, having seen him work on *Winners* and *Touch the Sun*, but I was not at all sure how the two men would get along together. Nevertheless, they both were eager to collaborate. So began the months of arduous work necessary for the creation of thirteen episodes of original television. Together they gave birth to *Round the Twist*.

Paul and Esben were exactly right together for the challenge they faced. Esben was the hard task master. He taught Paul what a script looked like and how to write one. He would not accept a draft if he thought there was something more to be gained or wrung out of an idea, a funny scene, a plot. And Paul was willing to learn and exhaust himself in the process, taking punishment to meet Esben's, and his own, high expectations. Paul had a well-developed philosophy and knew exactly what he was trying to achieve in writing for children. Esben understood character and structure and what would work on screen. Paul understood children and had lost none of the awareness of childhood most of us leave behind as we grow up. Esben was still a boy at heart. They spent hours, days, weeks together tossing around ideas, creating characters, developing idiosyncrasies for them and coming up with a context for their lives.

They hit upon the idea that the family lived in a lighthouse. This had practical implications. People don't live in the lighthouses we see on the Australian coast. But the idea was a good one. We would need to build a set for the interior which would be expensive, but getting the scripts right was the first issue. Paul's existing stories

had to be applied to a set of characters living together in this unusual setting where strange things could happen. The Twist family was born, with Tony, a single parent who is a sculptor, somewhat vague, socially inept but lovable. He has thirteen-year-old twins, Pete and Linda, and a younger son, Bronson, an essential character, responsible for much of the humour in the series. So that meant finding a very good nine/ten-year-old actor who could play an eight year old and carry as many of the stories as his older siblings. A real estate agent called Mr Gribble and his wife Matron Gribble are the villains: they enabled the writers to lampoon the greedy and the selfish.

The Gribbles have a son, James, who, with his friends Rabbit and Tiger, become the bane of Pete Twist's life. Fiona, Linda's friend, is Pete's love interest, and Hugh Townsend the heart throb, Linda's love interest. Tony develops an interest in Miss James, Bronson's teacher. She returns Dad's affection and waits patiently for him to overcome his shyness. Another teacher, Mr Snapper, played by Esben, is a rival for Miss James' affection. And then there's Nell, the former lighthouse keeper, a sage and mysterious old character, the font of all knowledge in the village. She opposes the rampant commercialism supported by the Gribbles in the name of development. These characters were the backbone of the series and they did not exist in Paul Jennings' short stories: they were created by Esben and Paul working together under Esben's direction as he knew what was required to make a television series work. In the spirit of Alfred Hitchcock, Paul would play a minor role in one episode.

Throughout this development I reminded the men not to forget the girl characters in a male-dominated set of stories. Originally they proposed that the part of Nell would be Tom, but to help the character balance, Nell was created instead. The episode stories in the series had to be evenly divided between Pete, Linda and Bronson. Paul and Esben trawled through Paul's existing short stories to see which ones would work, which could be linked together and what new endings needed writing. Additionally there had to be a story arc across the thirteen-part series. This was a requirement of government funding. Only mini-series which have a beginning, middle and end could qualify.²⁰⁶

After weeks of work we had a thirteen-part series in a form I could begin to market. Dad Twist, a sculptor, and his three children

move to an old lighthouse on the rugged Australian coast. They soon discover that the lighthouse and the out-house are haunted. Strange things happen to the Twists. Bronson finds a green baby in the cabbage patch, Pete dries his underpants in the microwave and imbues them with magic powers, Linda discovers an old cloning machine which produces another Linda. Pete is afflicted with a bizarre speech defect: he adds the words ‘without my pants’ to the end of every sentence. Pete is given a magic lipstick which makes him irresistible to women. Chaos reigns after a bolt of lightning hits the video remote control, making it work on people! Pause, rewind and fast forward give rise to hilarious consequences, particularly at the spaghetti-eating competition.

At its core, *Round the Twist* deals with the universal themes of family and home. There’s young Bronson, innocent, ever hungry for food, and not quite as brave as he would have you believe. Linda and Pete, at thirteen, are in the throes of puberty, preoccupied with identity, belonging, meaning, sex and all that stuff. Their father is a good bloke but a rather incompetent parent and somewhat rusty in the romance department.

A broad range of themes and elements combine to create the Twist magic. The kids are always in the foreground, dealing with unpredictable ghosts, monsters or gizmos, teenage embarrassment, first love and heartbreak. There is a love of nature and concern for the environment. The show is bent, eccentric and often quite low-brow. There’s always a bit of yuk involved and a fair amount of slapstick. And there’s greed, envy, selfishness, vanity, insecurity, dishonesty, opportunism and exploitation to keep it all on the boil. *Round the Twist* was written to be located on one of Australia’s most spectacular coastlines, with wild oceans, enormous cliffs, endless beaches, huge skies and forests. It was to be a splendid visual world where children are free to roam and enjoy the adventure of childhood. The best location was found at Airey’s Inlet (the Split Point Lighthouse) on Victoria’s Great Ocean Road.

Paul Jennings’ genius was that, along with the bizarre, funny and surprising elements, he knew how to tap into the humour kids love and exploit the yuk factor with dunny jokes, excrement, vomiting, embarrassment, where babies come from—the topics children’s television normally shied away from and model parents would not allow

discussed. In Episode 1: *Skeleton on the Dunny*, scenes were shot with characters sitting on the toilet, needing to go to the toilet urgently, Pete dropping his false tooth down the toilet and eventually finding it at the sewerage farm. In Episode 2, Nell's cottage was buried in birds' poo and Linda was covered in it. In *Spaghetti Pig-out*, Rabbit vomited all over the audience the twenty-seven helpings of spaghetti he had eaten. Anything was possible in a Paul Jennings story, particularly when he was encouraged by Esben Storm. My problem was that I had to convince an international broadcaster to help me finance a television series with these ingredients.

I HAD AN excellent relationship with Revcom, following *Touch the Sun*'s considerable success, and H  l  ne Fatou, their script assessor and production supervisor, had become a friend. So I first put *Round the Twist* to her to see if Revcom would co-produce the series. H  l  ne loved the stories but didn't believe it possible to translate what was on the written page into television. She thought it would be disgusting, gross and offensive, so declined to be involved. New ideas don't come easily on television. Fifteen years earlier the comedy script editor for Light Entertainment at the BBC rejected a program idea in the following memo, which has since become infamous:

I'm afraid I thought this one as dire as its title.

It's a kind of 'Prince of Denmark' of the hotel world. A collection of cliches and stock characters which I can't see being anything but a disaster.

When eventually produced, it was the hit series *Fawlty Towers*, by John Cleese and Connie Booth.

Funding for Australian programming now came through the Australian Film Finance Corporation (FFC). Taxation concessions for Australian film-making, which had been exploited indiscriminately since their introduction in the 1970s, had been scaled back by the Hawke Government. Treasurer Paul Keating had introduced a system whereby the Commonwealth Government invested a fixed sum in production and the FFC invested according to its market assessment of a project. For Australian television, a project had to have a pre-sale in place with an Australian television network and

there had to be demonstrated overseas interest through a pre-sale to a broadcaster or a distributor: the FFC would then invest against the returns from the unsold territories. Keating put in a significant plug for the work of the Foundation when he launched the FFC on 3 February 1989.

I have been interested in the work of Patricia Edgar and others in the Australian Children's Film and Television Foundation ... I'd like to see the film scheme run in such a way that we do take some account of quality for children if it may not necessarily be so commercially good by all other commercial criteria [*sic*].²⁰⁷

Kim Williams was appointed inaugural chairman of the FFC in 1988 and I was its deputy chair from 1988 to 1996. Williams subsequently raised the idea that there should be a fixed percentage of FFC funds—he suggested 10 per cent—made available for children's programming. I argued against this proposition because I feared it might limit the funding that could be applied to children's production. But equally, there were no concessions made for children's programming: the same investment rules applied because ironically I was able to achieve a better deal than most adult television programs achieved, thus setting a high benchmark for the pre-sale of a children's program.

I knew that no distribution company was going to accept this idea on paper if it was submitted on spec. My approach had to be personal and persuasive: a co-producer would have to be someone who trusted me and who was also an innovator. An ideal partner would bring status and respectability to the series so that other broadcasters around the world would look twice and take *Round the Twist* seriously. The only person in the world I knew who had the standing to help me make this series a reality was Anna Home, head of children's programming at the BBC. Anna was the doyenne of programming for kids, commanding the biggest production budget in the world. She worked for a broadcaster that had a proud tradition of providing the best-quality programming and a production repertoire comprising the best of the classics but also sought diversity in programming.

I had first met Anna at Prix Jeunesse, the European Children's Television Festival held annually in Munich. At first sight, she was

a somewhat severe and formal lady, but people would say the same thing about me. We were the same age, and we both enjoyed a drink and a good laugh. As an Aussie I was louder and much more direct than Anna, but under the skin we were much the same. Most importantly, we both had a commitment to children's programming, to the audience and to the jobs we were doing. We both believed in producing child-centred programs which were part of children's own culture and which may sometimes offend some adults and regulators. Anna had worked her way up the ladder of the British television system in both commercial and public broadcasting and she held what was regarded, in the UK and throughout Europe, as the best possible job in children's television: she was at the peak. I had invited Anna to Australia to speak at the Challenge of Kids' TV conference in 1985 and we had dinner together when we met at Prix Jeunesse each year. She would be my target for an international pre-sale for *Round the Twist*.

Changes were afoot within the BBC, as they were in public broadcasting throughout the world. Budgets were dropping and, in order to produce the same number of programs for the schedule, public broadcasters needed to find partners who could produce programs they could acquire for a minimal fee which would suit and help them diversify their schedules.

I went to London to see Anna Home and to present her with the storylines for *Round the Twist*. I invited her to Australia where she could meet Esben, whom I knew would apply his considerable charm. She decided to visit and Esben and I took her to lunch for the big sell. She agreed to pre-buy the series and appointed one of her producers, Jeremy Swan, to provide script comments. As far as Anna was concerned, the decision was made and she would not intervene again. She was confident in her position and her judgement and she trusted those in charge of the program: Jeremy, Esben and me. Swan, an Irishman and experienced BBC comedy director, proved an absolutely delightful colleague. A very entertaining character with a stock of amusing anecdotes, he loved Australia, loved *Round the Twist*, and was the right person at the right time to ensure we could make the production just as we wished with the BBC's endorsement.

In Australia, we sold *Round the Twist* to Network Seven, through the Holmes à Court connection. In the mid-1980s, when the

entrepreneurs who were engaged in making their billions were seen as heroic cowboys by Australia's financial press, Christopher Skase paid an unseemly amount for the Australian Television Network—the Seven network—and Alan Bond did likewise for the Nine network. They could spend up to a billion dollars for a television network, then argue they couldn't afford children's programs—such was Australian television. A friendship of sorts developed between the Skases and the Holmes à Courts which suited their respective business interests. Janet would drop comments in conversations: they had had a business dinner; Pixie had sent her a bunch of Kevin O'Neill's signature flowers—she expressed disdain for the extravagance; Christopher lent his plane to Robert; they attended Christopher's slap-up fortieth birthday party at the newly built Mirage Resort in Port Douglas—one of the most publicised parties in Australian history, where Derryn Hinch held Janet's hand for some considerable time and Robert didn't seem to mind; Robert proposed the birthday toast.

I wondered out loud to Janet whether this friendly working alliance might lead to an unprecedented opportunity for the Australian Children's Television Foundation: it did. We persuaded Christopher Skase to purchase the Australian rights to a \$4.25-million package of three programs produced by the Foundation which would include thirteen episodes of *Round the Twist*, six half-hours of *Kaboodle 2*—this time a fully animated series—and four half-hours of *The Greatest Tune on Earth*—the animated story of a music drought which is solved by the enterprising Professor Eric, his wife Doreen, daughter Allegra and dog JS Bach.²⁰⁸

Each one of these series was a very difficult production idea to sell. The two animated series were aimed at stimulating the Australian independent animation production industry, and *Round the Twist* would have suffered from any interference by an enthusiastic program executive who wanted to put their stamp on the show or, more likely, censor the show. With the boss buying, nobody within the Seven network was going to look at a children's program before it was delivered. The senior executives of the commercial networks, in general, were still not taking much interest in the content of their children's programs so long as they were given a C classification and fulfilled the quota requirements. Nevertheless, it was an unusual

event for a licensee to make a program purchasing decision independently of their network executives. Part of the anger directed towards Skase after the purchase was because he paid \$75 000 per episode for *Round the Twist*, thus setting a benchmark for the FFC as the price other networks should pay to secure FFC funding for their children's drama. The other networks continued to resist meeting that price.

The Foundation held a launch to make the announcement to the media and public and invited Christopher Skase to attend. Suzie Howie and Paul Taylor, our publicists, designed an invitation featuring Janet and me playing with toys with Christopher Skase in a clever cartoon which still hangs on my study wall as a relic of Australian history. The Skase/Holmes à Court relationship provided the crucial piece in the financing jigsaw which meant the Foundation would be able to produce, for Australian children, the most popular program in more than a decade of regulation, without any interference.

Esben excelled as director. He inspired the creative team and got wonderful performances from the cast: it seemed the great time the kids had was conveyed on the celluloid. Esben chose the composers and worked with them closely to ensure excellent music throughout the series and an infectious, compelling opening song. As producer, Antonia Barnard kept Esben in harness sufficiently to ensure the budget went as far as it could while staying on track. *Round the Twist* succeeded beyond my wildest dreams, developing a cult following. Children around the world saw a program that became a benchmark for all programming that followed. Jennings' books broke into the UK market and he became a millionaire.

Esben, on the other hand, became a disappointed man, for as director he was more important than the author to the realisation of the television series, yet he reaped fewer rewards. Comedy on the screen is different from comedy on the page. The director must bring it all together on screen. He must know what shot will serve the story and the comedy, he has to have a keen sense of what is actually funny to watch. He has to work with the actors and direct them to give a performance that will serve the comedy. It's not easy to make people laugh; it is very risky business and can often go wrong. A line can be delivered which will send the audience into gales of laughter or it can fall flat.²⁰⁹

Esben was able to inspire the cast and crew of *Round the Twist* to produce exceptionally funny comedy, but for his inspired efforts Esben got only a fee for service. On the other hand, Paul became famous. Penguin Books used their formidable marketing prowess to turn Paul Jennings into a national icon. Paul, at his editor's suggestion, put together a small paperback on the making of *Round the Twist* which comprised three stories based on episodes, plus anecdotes about different aspects of the production. Penguin financed a competition called 'Why I would like to meet Paul Jennings'. The entry form was sent to all primary schools in Australia and the winner flown to Sydney to have an 'Unreal' lunch with Paul (*Unreal* being the title of his highly successful first book). The Foundation sent a promotional package, including a full-colour poster, featuring all of Paul's books, to every primary school in Australia. Paul wrote an article for *Magpie* magazine with a double-page feature on the book and the series. A letter was sent to all language consultants at primary and secondary schools and to 250 educational booksellers. The Foundation made a video copy of six episodes available to key booksellers to spark interest and enthusiasm. Every promotional idea we could think of to draw attention to the series was followed up and Paul Jennings' fame spread. Ultimately his books sold tens of thousands of copies, with the book based on *Round the Twist* the biggest seller of all.

Right at the point when the program was complete and due to be delivered to the Seven network, Christopher Skase and his Qintex group went bust. I ordered the delivery of the tapes to the network on the basis that money had been invested and cash flowed into the series, and I believed the network would have to be kept in operation to remain a viable asset even if the company was in receivership. Informally, I sought advice from the Broadcasting Tribunal. I was very concerned that the program would not be screened if caught up in a financial wrangle. On Saturday afternoon, 18 November 1989, obviously on Robert's advice, Janet rang expressing her grave concern about the delivery of the tapes to the network and advising that we should get the tapes back. It was most unusual for her to intervene in the operation of the Foundation. I spoke with Bob Campbell who was the general manager of the network, who said he would make the tapes available but liquidation was not on the

agenda, the banks had advised in writing that they would continue to support the network and that we would be in breach of contract: the network would have no value if all producers withdrew their product. I advised I had been instructed to obtain the tapes and that as soon as the position was clear regarding the financial structure of Qintex and the way it was to be managed, we would re-deliver the tapes, with an assurance that the Foundation would never be attacked as a preference. The tribunal ordered the television stations to stay on air: it was an unprecedented situation and the Broadcasting and Television Act had not envisaged this predicament. To sell a licence it had to be operational, so Network Seven maintained the business and the *Round the Twist* tapes were returned.

The broadcast of the series was a phenomenal success. The Foundation had been disappointed with the 8.30 a.m. time slot the Seven network gave the program, as I was convinced this was a program that adults would enjoy with their children. People meters had just been introduced in Australia to measure ratings and their results were confidential, but the Seven network sent me a note saying *Round the Twist* had peaked at 17 over the thirty-minute slot. At the same time Nine rated 2, Network Ten rated 1, and the ABC rated 4. Television critics called the program ‘superbly appealing’, ‘seductive’, ‘a children’s show fit for adults’, ‘pure twisted joy’ and ‘innovative’—one even going so far as to say that ‘shows like *Round the Twist* prove we can still do it’.²¹⁰ Debi Enker wrote:

Twist is distinctive ... there is a pervasive and thoroughly engaging sense of wonder and delight about *Round the Twist*. Firmly rooted in the curiosity of childhood, its frame of reference is a time when the unknown wasn’t necessarily threatening and the mind could embrace concepts that defied rational realities ... *Round the Twist* is destined to be one of those viewing experiences that adults recall from their childhoods with clarity and affection.²¹¹

When the series went to air in Australia it had already broken records in the United Kingdom, going to number one in the top children’s show category. It was ranked seven in the top ten sitcoms by women in the UK—above *Rosanne* and *M*A*S*H*—and came in at sixty-three within the top hundred British programs, unheard-of

for a foreign-produced children's program. Anna Home's decision was vindicated.

Paul Jennings won the AWGIE Award for his writing, and the series was given the top children's drama AFI (Australian Film Institute) award. Esben was nominated as best director in the television series category, but did not receive the main award. I hired Antonia Barnard and had given her a full producer (rather than line producer) credit to produce *Round the Twist*, on John Morris' recommendation. He regarded her as a competent line producer who was ready to make the jump to producing. She did a very good job in managing Esben and the production, for which she secured the AFI Award, but I considered the award should have its home within the Foundation. Antonia did not agree and she accepted it alone and took it home. From that time I would take a joint production credit which would mean that any awards won were duplicated and one made its home within the Foundation rather than on someone else's lounge-room shelf. The role of a producer is multi-faceted, involving the creation, development and financing of an idea; overseeing the production, including pulling together and managing crew and the budget within a creative vision for the entire project; then marketing the production when complete. A line producer has no creative control over production. Because producer roles are numerous and few people combine all attributes, you often see many names listed as executive producer, producer and line producer credits. The best teams know where the boundaries lie and work together in collaboration. Once the idea for *Round the Twist* was generated, Esben, the director and script editor, was the main creative force behind the project. And the major reason why *Round the Twist* was such a great success was the very effective collaboration between Esben Storm and Paul Jennings.

THE PROGRAM WAS a breakthrough in innovative comedy for children which crossed cultures as diverse as those of Japan, Zimbabwe, the Netherlands and the Slovak Republic. It was irreverent, affectionate and very funny. We had not compromised on the Australian sense of humour, our idiom or our accent. Those who had shaken their heads at the thought of episodes that hinged on bird droppings, regurgitated

spaghetti, magic underpants and ghosts in the dunny were applauding the performances, the imagination, the pure good humour and the high standards of production in *Round the Twist*. The Foundation had a sack of mail from all around the world begging us to continue the series. We did not need any persuasion because it was obvious quickly that buyers everywhere wanted the series and wherever it screened it was a winner. We began work on a second series.

This time the ingredients included goat's droppings, smelly feet, mysterious yuckles which exploded with yellow, slimy goo, and a peeing competition. In Series 2, as the relationship between Dad and Miss James develops, the young Twists are a little apprehensive about the prospect of a stepmother in the family and Mr Gribble is running for state parliament. This time, Esben Storm would share a writing credit with Paul Jennings ... and this time the partnership that had given birth to a brilliant series became strained. Paul Jennings' fame and fortune had grown exponentially and *Round the Twist* had been the biggest contributing factor. Paul had a brand, and every child in Australia knew that brand. Children who had never been readers wanted to read the *Round the Twist* books. Paul Jennings' books would have succeeded without the series but to nowhere near the same extent, and he had Esben to thank for the huge public profile the series gave him.

Esben was understandably miffed that Paul was getting all the credit when in fact Esben had done much of the work that achieved the result. With a second series he wanted more recognition: he wanted a shared scriptwriting credit, which I agreed reflected the real picture; it should have been that way from the beginning as Esben had given much more to the team than a script editor would normally be called on to do. Paul seemed happy to agree but apparently thought, underneath, that the gesture he had made was too generous. Paul was tired but, given the demonstrable success of the first series, ready to go again. The storyline and script process continued over many months: it was hard work getting the scripts right. This time there were expectations to meet, having been so successful first time around; we did not want to disappoint the audience or the broadcasters.

When I read the story lines I felt we were missing a very important ingredient: a strong Bronson story. I sent Esben and Paul back

and encouraged them to be more extreme in their thinking. They did not disappoint and came up with the exceptional story *Little Squirt*, which won most of the subsequent awards.²¹²

When the production process began, we couldn't find an effective Bronson who could carry the role. None of us was happy with the provisional choice we had made and the producer and director continued to search for another Bronson. Just over a week away from the first day of principal photography, Esben rang me in great excitement. He had found Bronson and had cast him immediately: good ten-year-old actors are hard to come by. The wardrobe department had to dress him and Esben had to work with him. I had final casting approval but had confidence in Esben's judgement. Paul could have chosen to accept Esben's judgement in the same way; instead, he was deeply offended that he had not been consulted before Jeffrey Walker was cast as Bronson. Paul had no contractual right to approve casting—it would have been a courtesy only—but considered this such a betrayal that he did not come near the production as he had done throughout the first series.

This tension between writer and director did not help the writing of final drafts. On the first series, Paul had most difficulty in writing Episode 13 where the plot lines that had run through the series had to be pulled together into a dramatic conclusion. The final episode, *Lighthouse Blues*, revealed the ghosts we had heard throughout the series as musicians attempting to help the Twists win a battle to save their home, the lighthouse, from the avaricious Gribble. As Paul was in trouble writing the script, Esben wrote a draft independently. Either script would have worked, but in the interest of harmony and in keeping with the established plan, I went with Paul's, pronouncing it the better script. Esben accepted that decision. In Series 2 a similar situation occurred, exacerbated this time by Paul's distress: he had serious problems writing the final script. The production needed Episode 13, and production stops for no writer. Esben was directing long days—he too was tired—but he drove himself to write a draft of the episode in the evenings. Once again I found myself with two versions of the final episode and this time I thought Esben's the superior script. This did not help the Jennings/Storm relationship and the pair became further estranged.

The second time round, the ABC would show *Round the Twist* at 6.30 on Saturday evenings, an ideal family timeslot. The Foundation had developed a very good working relationship with the ABC under Paddy Conroy, then head of television. As a former head of children's programming Paddy had put Nick Collis-George, who had no background in children's TV, in charge of the department to shake it up and get a profile for the ABC. They saw value in working with the Foundation for this purpose. The Seven network's three-year licence on the first series of *Round the Twist* had expired, and they weren't knocking on the Foundation's door to renew it. The ABC saw its value to them and acquired the first series to repeat, alongside the new series, for a 26-week run on Saturday evenings.

Round the Twist 2 screened from 20 March 1993. To coincide with its airing, Penguin Books Australia released two 'graphic novels' (comic books) by Paul Jennings and the Foundation released the video tapes to schools. We had another phenomenal success both in Australia and in the United Kingdom. The ABC had purchased five runs and on its fifth repeat it was still winning its timeslot; the series consistently attracted audiences of five to seven million in the UK where it screened four times in the top ten children's programs; it won its timeslot in Sweden with a 25 per cent audience share. The second series had been pre-sold to thirty countries, including Germany, Spain, Portugal, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, USSR, Africa, Ireland, Greece, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Iceland and South Korea. Japan purchased the twenty-six episodes and broadcast them nationally at prime time. When Brazil showed the program, hits on our website from that part of the world skyrocketed.

The two series together won Paul Jennings two AWGIE awards for the best children's drama and the Foundation two AFI awards for the best children's drama. Jeffrey Walker (Bronson) accepted the AFI award on my behalf, with Antonia Barnard. *Little Squirt* won the Prix Jeunesse award in Europe and was nominated for an Emmy, the third Emmy nomination for the Foundation.²¹³

The books kept selling in their tens of thousands and Paul Jennings was even more famous. *Round the Twist* became the first FFC-funded television production to go into profit. The Foundation had met the commercial imperative and had produced not only

award-winning series but a popular production for the international market. Behind the scenes, Esben was licking his wounds.

Emotional wounds heal slowly, but the creative urge is a powerful force. Esben wanted to direct a feature film based on *Round the Twist*: that was the reward he wanted. As it happened, Paul wanted to write, and the Foundation wanted to produce, a great Australian children's feature film. The best work evolves when people trust one another. Creative teams must be moving in the same direction as the production of a brilliant film or television program can only happen when there is synergy between the key protagonists. Esben and Paul had originally sparked off one another and had each been open to each other's ideas; they had been on a mission to create something exceptional that they both believed in deeply. When trust breaks down a relationship is not easily repaired. But I was prepared to do what I could to help heal the rift.

I suggested the three of us go out to dinner and talk. It proved to be a memorable night. We barely got seated, with a few niceties exchanged, when writer and director opened up and the pent-up anger they both felt came pouring out. I tried to calm things down, but I was irrelevant, as were the other diners in the restaurant. So I sat back and watched events unfold; I could do nothing else.

Writer and director leaned across the table towards one another and spoke intensely and loudly. I was surprised by Paul; it was a side of him I had not seen before. I knew how passionate Esben was about everything he did and in this dispute my sympathies were on his side. I thought Paul simply did not understand the pressures of film-making. The purpose of the dinner was to try to explain that Esben had not let Paul down in casting Bronson without consultation, he had not betrayed him; he had acted in the production's best interests and made a decision that he believed we would all be equally excited about. Paul could not see things that way; it was about betrayal and trust.

When they had both run out of steam, with nothing left to say, we had eaten, the spectator sport had finished and we left the restaurant, Paul went on his way and Esben and I stood by the roadside curb digesting what had occurred. For Esben the experience had been cathartic. He thought they had both got their pent-up anger off their chest and now they could get on with the job of writing the film script, which was the only thing that was important to him.

I knew that every word that had been said by Esben would be seared onto Paul's soul and he would not forget.

But for both men the desire to make a film persisted, and Paul came up with the bizarre idea that we work through Bob Sessions, then publisher at Penguin Books, as an intermediary. Sessions would send us Paul's story idea with no input from Esben. We could send back our comments. I thought this was a naïve idea that could never work but Paul wanted to try. When we saw the proposed storyline, Esben and I agreed it was not the basis of a feature film and the development process laid down was unworkable. So the collaboration between Esben Storm and Paul Jennings ended there. The partnership would never be restored. Paul Jennings continued to trade off the success of *Round the Twist* for many years. When he spoke to school groups they all wanted to hear about the series and invariably he would be asked the question: 'When will there be more *Round the Twist*?' He told his groups there would be no more *Round the Twist*; the series was finished.

I had no argument with Paul Jennings. He did brilliantly with a tough task; it was much bigger than he had bargained for and it wore him down. He did not have to take on the heavy burden he inflicted on himself; other writers could have been brought in to help. Esben was much more the realist than Paul. He knew that the concept, the characters and the vision of *Round the Twist* were strong and that, in the right production hands, the series could survive without Paul and without him. That was Esben Storm's legacy. He was the driving force behind *Round the Twist*, he created the television series, and his vision enabled Series 3 and Series 4 to be written and produced by different teams of writers and directors. *Round the Twist* continued.

The Foundation owned copyright in the name 'Round the Twist', the concept, the characters and the setting. It would be several years before the Foundation would contemplate producing a third and a fourth series as I was preoccupied with another series—*Lift-Off*—that I saw as more important for the future of children's television. But the Foundation was now synonymous with *Round the Twist*. The first two series continued to win high praise internationally and fans kept writing letters from all round the world. Each time we attended the international markets, buyers asked for more *Round the Twist*. So I began to contemplate the idea.

I was confident we had the talent capable of pulling together further series but with Esben as a guarantee. The new writing team for Series 3 and 4 included Esben Storm, Ray Boseley and Chris Anastassiades, and the workshop included Jeremy Swan from the BBC, and Mark Mitchell who had played Mr Gribble in the second series. Esben ran the workshop and the group brainstormed ideas for bizarre happenings, ghosts, yuk, Pete, Linda, Bronson, Dad and Miss James, Mr Gribble's ambitions and we finished up with enough material to fuel two more series and a feature film script.

Some 800 children from Victoria and interstate answered a casting call for roles in *Round the Twist 3*: they all knew the series and this was the opportunity of a lifetime. Ray Boseley was to be series director while Esben moved back to Sydney to pursue adult film direction. He proved the series did not need Paul Jennings or Esben Storm and it did not need the same cast—every actor changed, some roles changed three times. We had three line producers—Antonia Barnard, Bernadette O'Mahony and Helen Watts. I was the only person common to all four series.

WHEN *ROUND THE TWIST 3 AND 4* were in development, the position of head of ABC children's programming changed and Claire Henderson took over the role. From that point the Foundation experienced a degree of interference in script development that we had never had before. The politically correct thought police gave comments which included the following: In an episode about the Vikings appearing out of the fog off the coast of Port Niranda, care would have to be taken not to trivialise raping and looting. We were told the ABC would be unable to take *Whirling Willie*, the episode where Bronson swallows a whirling 'derfish' and whenever his willie gets wet it spins like a propeller, making him the fastest swimmer in Port Niranda: 'Whereas the famous peeing competition of Series 2 was based on reality, and was very much part of the world of the characters and any child's life, the *Whirling Willie* is for television not clever or worthwhile enough to justify publication'.²¹⁴ I responded that we were strongly committed to this story and thought it very funny and asked the ABC to reconsider.²¹⁵ I checked with the BBC's Anna Home for her reaction. She responded: 'as far as *Whirling Willie* is concerned,

I personally have no problems with this story line provided it is shot sensibly and that the effect is funny rather than prurient'.²¹⁶

But the ABC's answer came back from Claire Henderson as commissioning editor: 'We are not able to support *Whirling Willie*. The numerous complaints concerning *Little Squirt* [the multi award-winning episode from Series 2] are easily dealt with in terms of the events being a natural and real part of a young kid's life. Similarly the surrounding story is rich and varied and clever. None of the above applies to *Whirling Willie*. As the publishers, we must feel confident in responding to and supporting the material we publish'.²¹⁷

I persisted; so did Claire Henderson. 'The comments from the ABC, as publisher of the material, should be respected. It is after all the ABC which will be the front-line for comment and criticism of content and we need to be convinced that this is always defensible'.²¹⁸ Fortunately Claire Henderson was moved upstairs temporarily, to be replaced as commissioning editor by Virginia Lumsden, who was very much more reasonable to deal with. The Foundation prevailed. *Whirling Willie* became *Whirling Derfish*, and the most successful episode in the series—but not before further attempts to sanitise the series by another investment partner.

Disney Television International wanted to buy *Round the Twist* for their new UK children's channel because they had seen the high ratings achieved by the BBC for Series 1 and 2. By now the television market had fragmented and it was possible to make sales to cable and free-to-air television in the same market, so the BBC and Disney were both licensees in the United Kingdom. But for Disney, with its US family values, the culture shock was hard to tolerate. They requested that we not show the 'arc of pee' on camera as we had done in the Emmy-nominated episode in Series 2—the highlight of the episode for the viewers—they wanted 'no skin shown at any point and lingering crotch shots avoided'.²¹⁹

The interesting thing was that they wanted to buy the series because of its reputation, yet they wanted to take the edge off it and sanitise the very elements that helped make it successful. I always forwarded the comments from overseas buyers to the production team and simply noted 'as we do not plan to linger on the crotch unnecessarily or show off a penis, I don't think we have a problem with this one'. Disney was concerned that, in the episode *Brainless*,

we would treat the ‘brainless people as stupid’, and they wanted to ensure that there would be no possibility of kids at home imitating the action on screen of children trying to blow their brains out through a straw up their nose.

I warned Disney that there may be ‘an arc’ of boy’s pee in Episode 1, *The Big Burp*, and pointed out that this very thing was a highlight in *Little Squirt*. As development progressed we went backwards and forwards with forceful argument as I fought to keep control of the series without compromise. When we reached the point of viewing the director’s cut, Claire Henderson insisted that unless we cut the *Brainless* episode according to ABC direction, they would vary the licence and adjust the licence fee accordingly. ‘I reiterate the ABC does not approve the retention of the hotplate sequence in the rough cut.’²²⁰

Her objection was to a scene where Pete and Linda’s brains, having been sucked out of their noses by a Bronson science machine, have taken on a life of their own, and for a few seconds hop up and down on a barbecue hotplate before bouncing on their way. The BBC supported the series, fully understanding the bizarre and fantasy elements. I cut the episode to conform with Claire Henderson’s ultimatum; I had no choice.

Series 3 and Series 4 continued the great success of the first two series. *Whirling Derfish* was nominated for an AFI award, it was the winner of the Banff 2000 Rocky Awards, the winner of the Gold World Medal and Grand Jury Prize for the New York Festival 2000, and the series was the winner of the 2001 Logie for the most outstanding children’s program. The brand was established, the tone and style were set and, while I have since heard it argued that there is a distinction between the first two series and the subsequent series, most children do not see that difference.

The writing team returned to the same themes. Tony Twist and his three children lived in on old lighthouse on the rugged Australian coast. The lighthouse was haunted and strange things happened. The Twist kids discovered a human ice-cream machine who could fill up a cone with his nose. Linda’s old doll came back to haunt her and Pete spent a terrifying night as Mr Gribble. While Bronson had the whole town talking about his whirling willie, there was something strange happening to Pete—he was having a baby. Truth microphones,

buckets of brains, Moondoggie Throgmorton, the Magic Mali-boo surfboard, the big burp and the Nirandathal Beast with a six-foot beard were all part of the weird and wonderful adventures in the third series of *Round the Twist*. We moved right onto the fourth series, in order to use the same child cast before they became too old. Dad and Miss James had been recast for Series 3, to keep the youthful image. The audience did not care.

Figures supplied by the BBC broadcast strategy channel development group indicated that the BBC audience share, when *Round the Twist 3* went to air, jumped by an average 13 to 18 per cent over the period. In Finland the audience share achieved was never less than 55 per cent and peaked at 75 per cent in the ten- to fourteen-year-old age group. The third series was the highest rating program for five to twelve year olds in the 5 p.m. timeslot on the ABC in Australia. The launch of *Round the Twist 3* led to re-licences and new sales of the first and second series to the Disney Channels of France, Italy, Spain and Germany. New sales of *Round the Twist 1* and *2* followed and by 1999, *Round the Twist* had sold to more than a hundred countries. The awards kept coming too.

WE HAD TWO important visits to the production set during the production of Series 3 and 4. The first was by Peter McGauran, the Howard Government's Arts Minister, who had responsibility for financing the ACTF. McGauran is a conservative man and, of all the ministers I dealt with during two decades at the Foundation, the least impressive; he was rather like a glove puppet bouncing around with a happy smile on his face as his advisers did the talking and pulled the strings. On his visit to the location, he was affable enough, he scraped his own lunch plate into the bin in a queue with the crew, eager to create a good impression, although he could barely conceal his shock and surprise when I told him the story of the episode we were filming: Pete wees on a tree and becomes pregnant to the residential tree-sprite, a beautiful young girl, and life turns upside-down for Pete. He accepts his fate and the gang help him give birth to the tree sprite's baby through his mouth.

The name of the episode—'The Big Burp'—is based on the appearance of the green afterbirth. It is a confronting and very funny

episode. The day of the Minister's visit Pete was in costume and fully pregnant. Pete's double for the close-ups was a woman in the advanced stages of pregnancy. The Minister asked me whether people wouldn't object to the nature of the episode and I replied that the audience seemed to find *Round the Twist* very amusing. A journalist asked the Minister if he could pose on his knees, in front of pregnant Pete, with his hand over his ear, cupped towards the pregnant belly. It was clearly excruciatingly difficult for Peter McGauran to do this, but he wanted to oblige. He knelt and cupped his hand over the ear that was furthest away from Pete's belly; it looked very funny indeed. The paper did not use the picture and I'm sure the Minister was very relieved about that. Whether this visit was a catalyst for what happened soon after I am not sure, but the next time I saw Peter McGauran he told me he wanted to have an inquiry into the Foundation: one that I thought was unjustified and, with the help of some of the members of my board, one I would resist until McGauran was no longer Minister for the Arts.

Queen Elizabeth II also visited the set, during her Australian tour in March 2000. It was soon after Princess Diana's death and the Royal family's popularity was on the wane in Britain. The Australian Government had proposed an itinerary to the Queen for her visit, much of which had been rejected, particularly the grand events. The Queen's wish at the time—when the Republican movement in Australia was strong and when she was working to restore the status of the monarchy—was to visit small, successful businesses and community groups representing popular causes. Jenifer Hooks, who was then head of Cinemedia, proposed that the Foundation should be one of those groups. We were a respectable choice. The standing of the Foundation was high. By 2000 the ACTF had produced over 160 hours and \$85 million worth of top-quality children's television drama programs notable for their innovation, excellence and high production values. Employing over seven thousand personnel on its productions, the Foundation had developed writers, directors, producers and performers as a talent base for the children's television industry. Australian children's programming was recognised internationally as equal to the best in the world. The ACTF had exported its programs into more than a hundred countries and won more than sixty national and international awards, including the 1998 and 1999

Victorian Export Award in the Arts and Entertainment category and the 1998 National Export Award. We had the credentials to host a visit by Her Majesty.

Representatives from the Victorian Government covering protocol, along with Scotland Yard and the Australian Federal Police, came to check out the venue for the Queen's visit and to hear what we would like the Queen to do before final approval was given. *Round the Twist 4* would be filming at Crawford's Studios and I proposed that the Queen should walk around the location looking at the sets, meeting the young cast, the director and crew. This idea was greeted with some enthusiasm, so we planned the tour which would evolve, something like an episode of *Round the Twist*, with unexpected turnings.

The Queen would arrive, be greeted by Janet Holmes à Court (chairman of the board), Dame Margaret Guilfoyle (deputy chair of the board), the proprietor of Crawford's, Bruce Gordon, and me. Although nothing was said explicitly, it was clear that the representatives would prefer that I led the Queen around the studio, not Janet. My guess was they did not want the press, all forty of them, given the opportunity to photograph Janet and the Queen together while the republican debate was high on the Australian agenda. Janet was an outspoken Republican.

The Queen drove up in her Rolls-Royce, looking splendid in a bright yellow dotted suit and hat; Dame Margaret Guilfoyle was wearing exactly the same colour. The three of us stepped up to greet her. The Queen made a point of acknowledging Dame Margaret Guilfoyle and saying, 'We have met before'. Although Janet had met the Queen before she was given no acknowledgement. Our greeting was polite but impersonal. We moved inside the studio. The tour was scheduled for an hour.

I ushered the Queen towards the set where the director Arnie Custo was waiting to call 'Action' on the brief scene we had planned he would direct at that point. When I escorted the Queen into position, nothing happened. I waited, the crew waited, the actors waited. Arnie had frozen with fear. The Queen broke the silence with 'What are we looking at here?' There was general confusion and it seemed suddenly that we were all introducing one another. Ebonnie Masini, Rian McLean and Mathew Waters, who played Pete, Linda

and Bronson, were presented and the three children, who were the most poised and at ease, led the Queen on a tour of their bedroom sets. That went exceptionally well; the kids chatted on, very brightly and informally, and the Queen relaxed.

The next stop on the studio tour was to meet John Wrigglesworth—who had created Tony Twist's sculptures for the show—with a display of his works that had been used in the production. I had checked with those who knew John well as to whether he was a talker, and whether he would be able to keep the Queen engaged for about three minutes. They assured me John was a great talker. The Queen approached, John said 'Hello', indicated his models and ran out of words in ten seconds. The Queen didn't help. She blinked briefly at the models, said nothing, and looked to move on. I started to panic, wondering what we were going to do with Her Majesty next on this highly structured walk: we were going to have her round this studio in ten minutes. Then Bronson (Mathew) came to the rescue. The plan had been that, after the kids had shown off their bedrooms, they would stand back, but Bronson (Mathew) rushed up beside the Queen and said to me 'I want to introduce her to my tutor'. 'Where is he?' I asked. And Bronson took over. He chattered on, the Queen met the tutor and indeed seemed more comfortable interacting with Bronson, Pete and Linda than anyone else. The kids were more interesting and enthusiastic, enjoying the experience offered them and she didn't have to make an effort. The Queen looked tired. She was like a figure from Madame Tussaud's Waxworks: not particularly animated, nor particularly interested. Yet in every photograph she looks engaged. She knows exactly where to place herself, and how to look, so the hordes of photographers, behind their barricades, get their best shots. She was indeed a polished performer.

When Mathew/Bronson had run out of things to say and we had completed the tour, I presented the Queen with a set of *Round the Twist* tapes which she told me she would watch with her grandchildren. I would like to have been present if she actually did to see her reaction to *The Big Burp* and *The Whirling Derfish*. Janet, Margaret and I walked her to the car to say thank you and goodbye. Dame Margaret and I stepped back to allow the car to move away and Janet chose that moment to strike up a very public, personal conversation. The Queen stood politely to discuss a mutual friend of Janet's—the

Queen's horse trainer. We had stepped outside the studio away from the cameras, so the media did not get their picture of the Queen and the Republican aspirant. The Queen slipped into the Rolls, pulled a rug over her knees, lifted her hand in her familiar wave and was driven off. My six-year-old grandson, standing at the entrance to the studio, was convinced she waved to him.

Round the Twist remains one of Australia's iconic productions. Most Australian children have seen the series and loved it. There have been producers and writers who have attempted to emulate its style. I know of writing workshops where writers have viewed episodes of *Round the Twist* as their inspiration for writing a new series. I know of producers who have instructed their teams to come up with ideas like *Round the Twist*. They all failed. Even when Paul Jennings attempted to venture into the development of a new series based on his short stories, *Driven Crazy*, it was barely noticed by its audience and certainly forgotten.

I tried valiantly to finance a feature film based on *Round the Twist*, written by Esben Storm and Ray Boseley, but distributors are generally reluctant to invest in a feature film which is based on television. There are also many reasons why it is difficult to produce an Australian children's feature film. First, it must be launched in the school holidays and it must compete with big-budget features from overseas, making it a challenge to market. A feature film is a vehicle for the director and the director must be the major marketing force behind any film, particularly a children's film where there is no star with box office appeal. When financing a feature film the first question asked is 'Who will the director be?' Esben expected that I would finance the film while he was in Sydney pursuing other projects. It proved an impossible task. I told him so and gave up on the idea of Esben directing a film. I looked at other directing options.

Having exhausted all possibilities for financing, I tried to get a known actor attached to the project, but the limitations of the budget, and the constraints actors work within, mean a children's feature does not have a high priority. I found an international co-producer in Christian Davin—my French co-producer on *L'il Elvis Jones and the Truckstoppers*—and I spent a depressing week in Los Angeles with him trying to interest American distributors in the film without success. We both had other important things to attend

to so we had to give up on the project. This would be the end of *Round the Twist*. Esben felt I had let him down, but a feature film could not be the Foundation's priority when there were so many other pressures to deal with.

It would be impossible to produce the original *Round the Twist* today. There is so much interference and compromise imposed by distributors and broadcasters on co-produced series television, too many thought police in control, too many producers who don't want to make mistakes, driven by the money they make rather than the audience they serve. Commercial decisions drive production decisions. Producers don't take risks; they draw on existing models. That is why most Australian children's television series today are so pedestrian, and forgettable.

Round the Twist is uncompromisingly Australian and child-like. All the grandchildren in my extended family love it. Not one of them was born when the first series was produced and yet it is their favourite program. It taps into the folklore and humour of childhood and, not surprisingly, that childhood is the same all over the world.

I confess: I was picking my nose one day, driving along in my car, and I put the window down to flick off what I had collected. I looked up and saw someone waving to me: it was Paul Jennings and he thought I had seen him. I waved, properly this time. How funny, I thought, to be flicking snot off my finger and it becomes a wave to Paul Jennings. Of all people, Paul, with his insights into the yuk factor in life, would have been amused by that.



Patricia Edgar's graduation, BA, University of Melbourne, 1958.



Patricia's father, Reg Etherington, standing before his portrait by Archibald Prize winner Des Walters, now in the collection of the Mildura Arts Centre, which Reg established, 1978.



Patricia's mother Eva Etherington, Mildura, c. 1985.



Patricia and Don Edgar's wedding, Grand Hotel, Mildura, 7 May 1960.



Patricia and Don with their first dog on the Anglesea beach, 1961.



The Edgar family—Patricia, Lesley, Sue and Don—returning from the US on board the P&O liner *Canberra*, October 1969.



Patricia with some of her film class students, making educational films at La Trobe University, c.1972.

Frank Meaney, deputy chair of the Children's Program Committee (and later member of ACTF board), 1988.



Suzie Howie (publicist) and Norman Lacy (Victorian Minister for the Arts and for Educational Services) at the launch of the Supporters' Campaign for an Australian Children's Television Foundation, July 1981.



John Morris, head of the South Australian Film Corporation and deputy chair of the ACTF board, and Patricia Edgar, at the Challenge of Kids' TV conference, May 1985.





At the party to celebrate the presentation of the first federal government cheque to the ACTF, on 27 March 1982, Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser 'loses his seat' while Patricia Edgar, head in hands, is aghast and the invited children laugh.²²¹



ACTF board member and wife of the Prime Minister, Hazel Hawke, with Patricia, opening the Challenge of Kids' TV Conference, Melbourne, May 1985.



Patricia with Prime Minister Bob Hawke at the launch of *More Winners* where Hawke announced Robert Holmes à Court's \$2-million investment in *Lift-Off*, June 1990.



Patricia with Janet and Robert Holmes à Court at the Montsalvat launch of *More Winners* and the announcement of Robert's investment in *Lift-Off*, June 1990.



Patricia Edgar and Janet Holmes à Court at the announcement by Christopher Skase of Network Seven's purchase of *Round the Twist*, *Kaboodle 2* and *The Greatest Tune on Earth*, September 1988.



Prime Minister Paul Keating cuts the ACTF's tenth anniversary cake at the launch of *Lift-Off*, Parliament House, Canberra, March 1992. Looking on are Patricia Edgar and Janet Holmes à Court, with *Lift-Off* child actors Luke Carroll and Aku Bielicki.



Patricia with her daughters Lesley and Sue, Melbourne, 1989.

The three Etherington sisters—Patricia Edgar, Joan Ramsay and Lesley Grant—Mildura, 1984.



Patricia and Don on holiday in Hawaii, 1987.





The creative team behind *Captain Johnno*, the Emmy award-winning film from the series *Touch the Sun*, November 1988: director Mario Andreacchio, producer Jane Ballantyne, writer Rob George, actor Damien Walters, script editor Sue Smith, actor Michele Fawdon, executive producer Patricia Edgar, director of photography Roger Dowling.



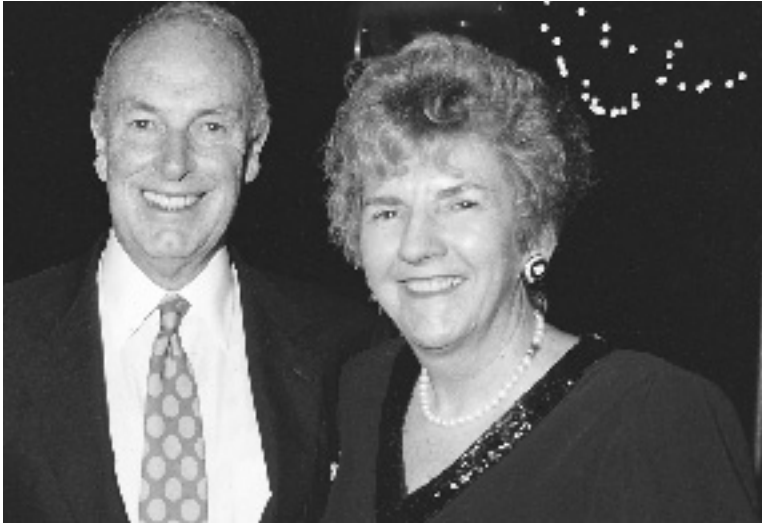
Patricia with the ACTF's Emmy award, presented for *Captain Johnno* from the *Touch the Sun* series, November 1988, three weeks after her surgery for breast cancer. It hurt to hold up the Emmy.

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Patricia Edgar with Garth Boomer, deputy chair of the ACTF board and renowned educator, at the launch of *Kaboodle*, June 1990.



Barbara Bush, wife of the US President, visits the *Lift-Off* Wakadoo puppets at the ACTF, Melbourne, January 1992.



Bruce Gyngell, head of Channel 9 and former chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, with Patricia Edgar at the First World Summit on Television for Children, Melbourne, March 1995.



The ACTF's fifteenth anniversary, when Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett presented awards recognising a major and sustained contribution to ACTF productions: director Esben Storm, ACTF chairman Janet Holmes à Court, Jeff Kennett, composer Chris Neal, Patricia Edgar, editor Ralph Strasser and actor Mark Mitchell.



Lead cast of feature film *Yolngu Boy*, Darwin, September 1999: Sean Mununggurr (Botj), Nathan Daniels (Milika), Sebastian Pilakui (Lorrpu).

Patricia with Gulumbu Yunupingu, hunting for crabs and oysters in crocodile waters, Arnhem Land, April 1996.





Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II visits the set of *Round the Twist 4* at Crawford Studios, Melbourne, March 2000, with sculptor John Wrigglesworth, producer Patricia Edgar and actor Mathew Waters (Bronson).



Dr Patricia Edgar, AM, recipient of the Raymond Longford Lifetime Achievement Award, AFI Awards ceremony, December 2002.



Patricia Edgar (chair of the Breast Cancer Network of Australia); Lyn Swinburne (CEO of the BCNA) and Terry Bracks (BCNA board member and wife of the Victorian Premier Steve Bracks) at the 2005 Live Field of Women, held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground before the start of an AFL football game in May.



The extended Edgar family, Mother's Day, May 2006. Front: Luke Amoddio, Santo Amoddio, Adrian Amoddio, Don Edgar, Oliver Ace Buck, Greg Buck, Emily Patricia Buck. Rear: Sue (Edgar) Amoddio, Patricia Edgar, Lesley Edgar.

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A Program for Life

'Very occasionally something comes along which, even in its early and most unformed stages, causes the hairs on the back of the neck to prickle with excitement: suddenly you realise you're witnessing something Very Special Indeed ... there is a lot more to Lift-Off than mere fun and education ... this one should run and run.'

—Diane Simmonds²²²

ON TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 1987, life changed dramatically for Robert and Janet Holmes à Court. Australia woke to learn that the US stock market had closed down 508 points—more than 22 per cent. The crash hit Australia harder than any other industrialised market, and billions of dollars vanished that day. Robert Holmes à Court lost more than any other investor internationally. Earlier in the year *Business Review Weekly* had estimated Robert's worth at \$1.4 billion. Initially he thought he was secure: he had anticipated the crash and had a long line of credit in place with

the major US institution Merrill Lynch. The transaction was consummated, in that the deals were in process. But any investment bank has trigger points in its contracts so that, if there is a war or a major world occurrence in the stock market, they are entitled to cancel a transaction. That is what they did. Robert had anticipated the crash but, distracted by his takeover bid for BHP, he had waited too long.

I didn't see Janet for some months; she would not leave Robert's side. She returned my calls but sounded distracted; it was clear Robert had major problems to contend with. As it emerged, Robert could not have handled the major issues confronting him and the family without Janet's help. She supported him, every minute of every day, as they concealed from the world, except a few very close to them in business, how seriously ill Robert was and how close he came to a nervous breakdown. Together they coped and Robert came up with a scheme for a financial rescue package, one which seriously tarnished his reputation and left some mystery regarding the origin of the family fortunes.

Robert did a personal deal with Alan Bond without consulting the board members of his publicly listed companies, the Bell Group and Bell Resources; they were left to read about it in the newspapers. The deal gave the Holmes à Court family company, Heytesbury Holdings, a cash injection of \$340 million. In two major transactions, Robert sold out most of his controlling interest in the Bell Group; 19.9 per cent to the Bond Corporation at \$2.70 a share and 19.9 per cent to the Western Australian State Government Insurance Commission (SGIC) at \$2.50 a share. The transactions took place within hours on the same day, 29 April 1988. The market price was \$1.70. Robert retained a 6 per cent holding and stayed on as chairman to tidy up the transfer of assets. The prominent financial journalist Trevor Sykes described the deal as 'tawdry'.²²³

The two sales of 19.9 per cent each of Bell Group Limited shares skirted the law, which required that anyone buying 20 per cent or more of a company must make an equivalent offer to the existing shareholders. Robert protected himself but not his shareholders. He managed to retain his London mansion, Grove House, and his Boeing jet. Ownership of Stoll Moss Theatres in the West End of London found its way back to Robert's Heytesbury Holdings from Bell Group Ltd via Christopher Skase.²²⁴

After the crash and the resurrection of Heytesbury, Robert decided he wanted to set up a philanthropic foundation. Robert had commented to Janet that it was regrettable that I had had to behave like a supplicant for the ACTF. Through Janet, Robert made an offer to fund the ACTF through his foundation. By this time, I knew the ACTF's funding was on a secure footing. The processes were tedious and time-consuming and while we had gone through years of insecurity and there was always one state or another threatening to drop out, we had settled into a relationship with the Commonwealth Department of the Arts which understood and supported the work we were achieving. As well, I had not forgotten the words of Sir James Cruthers regarding Robert and I was wary of being placed in a situation under his financial control. So I countered with a suggestion to Robert that, if he wished to endow the ACTF's work, he should help fund a special ACTF project. I had in mind a proposal for an early childhood program I had dreamt of producing but thought way beyond the reach of the ACTF's level of funding. Nothing of any significance had been developed on television for young children anywhere in the world since the introduction of *Sesame Street* in the late 1960s. I saw Robert's potential offer as an opportunity for the ACTF to undertake a program of real social benefit.

The Robert Holmes à Court Foundation was launched a year after the 1987 crash, with a dinner in Perth that featured Donald Horne as speaker. Robert had invited me to become one of the new Foundation's trustees, an offer I accepted.²²⁵ At its second meeting, I presented a nine-year plan for the project which eventually became known as *Lift-Off*.

Two-thirds of a person's intellectual development occurs in the early childhood years. Two million Australians were aged seven years and under; they were avid viewers of television, yet television offered them little. The proposal I put forward to the Robert Holmes à Court Foundation argued that for \$5 a year per child, an influential education program could be developed with a television series at its core.

Robert asked me how much money I wanted from his foundation. I had absolutely no idea of the level of funding he had in mind. It could be \$100 000 or \$1 million and I did not want to risk losing a dollar, so I declined to name a figure: I wanted him to

make an offer. More experienced people than I would have tried that tactic on him and failed, but I decided to play Robert at his own game—with silence.

All the trustees sat uncomfortably while Robert persistently asked me very gently to give him a figure. Each time I declined, and there was more silence. I looked at him steadily, ever so politely, and he looked at me. Finally Sir Michael Clapham—an experienced and cultured man who was not intimidated by Robert's games—broke the silence and said, 'I think we should give Patricia two million dollars. That should be sufficient to test further funding'.²²⁶ My eyes were fixed on Robert's face: we were both motionless, without expression. I waited. Then he inclined his head, nodded slightly and said, 'That seems the right amount'. I could have kissed Sir Michael right there but I retained the nonchalant demeanour of a woman of the world, as we went on to the next item of business!

But as the months progressed, I wondered if we would ever see the money. Robert was interested in achieving tax deductibility for his foundation and he wanted to ensure that any money he gave would be eligible as a tax deduction. The ACTF was eligible for tax deductibility for a donation submitted to and approved by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, but Robert did not like this third-party involvement. I put the case to government once again. This led to an exchange of correspondence between myself; the Minister for the Environment and Arts, Graham Richardson; the Minister for Employment Education and Training, John Dawkins; and Senator Susan Ryan, who was supporting the case for ACTF eligibility on behalf of the AEC.²²⁷ Treasurer Paul Keating responded that he could see no immediate prospect of the ACTF being granted access to the gift deduction concession.²²⁸

The third meeting of Robert's foundation was held at Grove House in London on 16 May 1989, with the tax matter unresolved. Overtures from the Robert Holmes à Court Foundation to the government for tax relief had been equally unsuccessful; I suspected that Paul Keating saw Robert's foundation as a tax avoidance scheme.

I spent a week at Grove House with Janet and Robert which gave me the opportunity to observe Robert at close range. Janet warned me not to be surprised or offended if he did not join us for dinner or if he walked out of the room. Instead Robert proved

to be very good company: charming, sociable and intellectually engaging. I enjoyed sparring and debating with him; there were no sudden exits, no silences. Yet at his Foundation meeting that week he led the trustees to the conclusion that Westrek, a project for disadvantaged youth that Janet chaired in Western Australia, 'had not generated as much momentum of its own within the community as could be expected' and 'had misunderstood the basis on which funds had been provided' by the Foundation for the 1988–89 year. He halved the funding for the next year from \$500 000 to \$250 000. I could not understand this husband-wife relationship. Had this been my husband, humiliating me as Robert did Janet, the relationship would have been very stormy indeed. But Janet, upset as she was, maintained a happy, exuberant façade. It was a very strange business and an insight into the complex relationship between the Holmes à Courts.

I felt a sense of foreboding. I also felt conflicted as a trustee. I defended the Westrek project but I feared upsetting Robert and the consequences this may have for *Lift-Off*. I was right to be concerned. I began to press for a public announcement of the two-million-dollar commitment to *Lift-Off*. Janet suggested I draft some options for Robert. He wrote to me on 12 July 1989, a brief letter: 'I really wouldn't feel comfortable making the announcement personally. Thanks for the suggestion'. I continued to send regular reports on the developing series to Robert's foundation (and to the ACTF board), so he knew the financial commitments being made by the ACTF. I did not want to embarrass Janet by flagging to the ACTF board, which she now chaired, that there was any likelihood the money would not be forthcoming. I simply assumed that Robert was playing a psychological game with me and his wife, and that eventually things would fall into place.

I committed the ACTF to a costly development plan—nearly \$650 000 over eighteen months—for concept and script development—which chairman Janet and the board endorsed in the belief that two million dollars were forthcoming. All the directors of curriculum in state education departments around Australia endorsed the program and agreed to work in close co-operation with the Foundation to ensure its maximum effect in the schools. An ambitious Outreach program had been designed to link young children

watching the program with older children, carers, parents, local recreation workers, teachers and elderly people formally retired from the workplace, to explore together the educational opportunities that the program would present.

Despite knowing all this, Robert would make no announcement. Finally, he played his hand: if the Prime Minister Bob Hawke would make the announcement at a public event, he would attend. I sought Hazel Hawke's help. It took some engineering but eventually the Prime Minister would launch *More Winners* (a third anthology of children's television programs). Robert would be present, and his contribution to *Lift-Off* would also be announced.

At the launch on 14 June 1990, Bob Hawke spoke of Robert's generosity and of his own personal support for the Australian Children's Television Foundation, saying:

Thank you for what you've done, Robert, and what you'll do in the future ... I commend you Patricia, the Board and all members of the Foundation for their commitment and their enthusiasm in utilising this great television medium for a better and more caring society ... I get so much excitement both directly and residually through Hazel's comments to me and my knowledge of what the Foundation does ... and I'm confident that the production of *Lift-Off* in 1991 will certainly be another feather in the very considerable cap of the Foundation.

The Foundation's stakes could not have been higher politically: no Minister was going to cut our funding. And now, finally, I thought I was in business with the program I had dreamed of making. Robert had thoroughly enjoyed himself in the Great Hall of Montsalvat, Melbourne, where the function was held: he was the centre of an admiring group of journalists who could not believe their luck to be face to face with Robert Holmes à Court and the Prime Minister together. Robert stayed on and had to be encouraged to leave by Suzie Howie. It was his last public appearance in Australia before his death.

But the game was not over. The next day, I met Robert and Janet to discuss progress on *Lift-Off* and when I might expect to receive funds. The ACTF was financially extended by the development of the project. To the surprise and distress of both Janet and me,

Robert wanted to 'think further'. He told Janet after the meeting, 'No wonder Phillip Adams called Patricia a Centurion tank'. I pushed him hard and he did not like it.

Janet was worried. I was extremely worried. We both knew Robert was capable of a complete change of heart. I did not know whether he was punishing Janet or me; either way these were troubling times. I had come to the conclusion that Robert wasn't interested in his foundation; he was not philanthropic, and he merely enjoyed the deal and playing games with his supplicant. I had become to him exactly what he suggested I was to government. His next move was to direct Janet and me to speak with Jon Elbery, his senior executive, regarding the two-million-dollar grant, which had been redefined as an investment. Elbery told us that Robert was now proposing to lend the ACTF the money. The ACTF could not possibly consider a loan as we had no means of repaying such a debt: both Janet and I were wide-eyed with horror at the proposal. I wondered what the next move would be.

Then, strangely and unexpectedly, a letter signed by Jon Elbery arrived on 29 August 1990. In it, Robert agreed, with no further argument, to the investment of two million dollars in *Lift-Off*. Three days later, Robert died of a heart attack. His game was finally over. This was a man who had built a reputation for himself as a champion of entrepreneurs, with a unique approach to the art of business, an enigma who had been much feared and little understood. I had been fascinated by Robert and enjoyed his company. He was a man who lived to work and I wondered what drove him. It seemed to be the pleasure of engaging in strategy and winning the challenges he set himself, but in the end it was a lonely enterprise.

IN 1989 *PLAY SCHOOL* and *Sesame Street* were still the ABC's staple pre-school programs. The first was based on a concept developed more than twenty years before and discarded by the BBC; the second developed in the early 1970s. On the commercial channels there was *Here's Humphrey* (Channel 9), *Fat Cat and Friends* (Channel 7), both tired, low-budget concepts, and *Mulligrubs* (Channel 10), the only new concept made in the previous decade, which got high marks for enthusiasm but was woefully under-resourced.

Of the five, *Sesame Street* was the only program that had been developed from a thoroughly researched base with specific educational goals. Its major goal was to ease the transition from preschool to primary school by teaching children skills that would decrease the learning gap between privileged and underprivileged children. The underprivileged were poor in language development, poor in concept development and ill-equipped for school. The instructional goals of the producers of *Sesame Street*—the Children’s Television Workshop (CTW)—were highly focused and easily measured. *Sesame Street* had been developed at a time when there was a spirit of hope and idealism in the United States—man walked on the moon, the civil rights movement led to government policies to assist black Americans—and *Sesame Street* was very much part of its time. *Sesame Street* was popular and it did target underprivileged children but the high hopes that the program would bring about significant educational change did not materialise.

Much had been learnt by developmental psychologists since Jean Piaget had begun to observe his own children seventy years previously. From his observations, Piaget had laid down rigid age-specific patterns showing the stages of cognitive and moral development he believed all young children went through, growing up in their first decade. His ideas were still regarded as gospel in 1990 by children’s program producers and school systems around the world.²²⁹

Piaget assumed that there was one kind of human intelligence (cognitive intelligence, indicated by literacy and numeracy skills), yet the research of recent decades had documented that human beings were capable of numerous ways of thinking. Far from there being a single intelligence, there were distinct intelligences for dealing with language, with numbers, with music, spatial information, use of one’s body, interaction with other individuals, and self-reflection. Each of them involves the use of discrete cognitive power and all interact in the development of a child’s brain. All normal children possess this range of intelligences, so I argued that any new educational program ought to take advantage of this amazing fact.

Howard Gardner’s work on ‘multiple intelligences’ argued that even young children had powerful minds, strong views and theories about the world of physical objects, of living things, of other human beings, of themselves.²³⁰ Gardner believed they were filled with ideas

which they enjoyed playing with and sharing with others. They were able to reflect about their own minds, to notice the language they were using, to engage in serious debate about issues, indeed to participate in discussions of topics which engaged the philosophers in classical times and thoughtful individuals ever since. There was ample evidence that children enjoy thinking, using their minds, engaging in controversy, being miniature theoreticians. They sense no division between thinking and feeling.

Gardner's book *Frames of Mind—A theory of multiple intelligences* provided the overall framework for the research and consultation that we conducted for the *Lift-Off* program. I visited Professor Gardner at Harvard and told him I wanted to develop a program based around his theories. He was comfortable with that: many people had approached him to ask the same question. When he later discovered my program was becoming a reality, he visited Australia to see the work being done and has remained in contact over the years.²³¹

The goal of the series was to develop in children the capacity to understand, contribute to and improve the world in which they live. The program would be a celebration of childhood covering four main areas: living in an international family of man; nature in balance with humanity; personal development through language and communication; and personal development through the creative arts.

The aim would be to reach all children in the three-to-eight age group, by mobilising a community outreach team to work with children, using support materials to enhance their learning from the program. At the same time, adults and young people involved in the community outreach team would have a focus for their own lives and an opportunity to learn as they helped develop the potential of young children.²³²

Starting with fifty-two half-hour programs, the project would expand each year as the program gained national and international support. The creative team would include educators and program makers working with specialists from any and every form of human activity, who would be channelling their talents, for a time, into the early childhood area. As a new audience of children grew into the target age group the strategy would be to produce a significant number of quality hours to start with and, from then on, as necessary, to complement these hours with some new product each year

to maintain the freshness and the contemporary relevance of the mainstream program. The initial requirements in terms of creative and financial investment would be large but the ongoing requirement to build a viable program would become less and less financially demanding. The potential of the project was limitless—it was grand in design and scope but achievable with the right kind of commitment. I prepared a budget estimating that around nine to ten million dollars was needed for the first series.

I was incredibly excited by this opportunity. Throughout my professional life I had been astounded by the lack of co-operation between the education and television systems around the world. The two most significant communication enterprises of our time barely communicate with each other. Children go to television willingly and spend more hours in its presence than they do engaged in any other act except sleeping, yet most television is allowed to be controlled by merchandisers. Storytelling is the seductive carrot used to bring new audiences to the spruikers, but mass audience demands usually control content, so the quality of the storytelling is often poor. As a result many parents and teachers confuse the message and the messenger. Television is viewed with considerable suspicion for its banality and its crassness while its educational potential is under-used by formal educational institutions. I wanted to change that.

In a modest way, the ACTF had already attempted to bring the schools and broadcasters together. But this early childhood program would be the Foundation's most ambitious attempt to date to use television in a major developmental experiment in partnership with parents and schools. I envisaged the program being broadcast in multiple timeslots nationally, with a full learning program developed to operate through community outreach in each state and territory. Once again I found the support I needed at the right time, but it came through a development that at first seemed a setback. In January 1990 John Morris was appointed as CEO of the Film Finance Corporation and to avoid any conflict of interest with ACTF applications for funding he resigned from the ACTF. We discussed who might replace him as the South Australian representative on the board. John suggested Garth Boomer, a visionary educator, and I jumped at the idea.

Garth was an agent for change and a radical thinker. If I had to lose John, as I did, from the board, there was no one better in Australia I could think of to replace him. The South Australian Minister for Education endorsed the appointment.

A prolific writer, thinker and speaker in educational forums, Garth challenged the complacency of teachers. A practitioner as well as a theorist, he was the Associate Director General of Education (Curriculum) in South Australia and also chair of the Australasian Curriculum and Assessment Project. He was instrumental in the development of the draft National Statement on Educational Practices and Standards, which had led to the development of the Curriculum Statements and Profiles current at the time.

Garth was unwavering in his enthusiasm for *Lift-Off*. He had become disillusioned by the education system, by the curriculum which was taught in schools and by the system of measurement of student success. He was disappointed with the performance of many teachers within classrooms, but he was not cynical and he had not given up. He championed what he called the ‘negotiated curriculum’, one actively involving students in their own learning plans and techniques. Garth was prepared to use his influence with the Curriculum Corporation of Australia to persuade all directors of curriculum to endorse the *Lift-Off* project, and it was a measure of their regard for him that they agreed to back it financially with a strong publishing program. They also signed a letter of support drafted by Garth which I could use to gather further political endorsement.

Garth Boomer went around the country talking up the project; it was an act of faith in me, but he felt as I felt: that if we brought together the brightest minds in a genuinely collaborative process, it would be the best Australia could offer its children. One day, as Garth and I sat together during the third workshop for the outreach program, he suddenly asked, ‘What if we are wrong about all this?’ We both started to giggle, uncontrollably: it was something we could not contemplate.

I had already met Ed Palmer, who was the vice-president and head of research for the CTW in New York. He had been in this position from the beginning of the development of *Sesame Street* and we had become friends. I invited him to Australia to meet a small group to outline the way in which *Sesame Street* had been

developed. It was exactly the model I did not want to follow, where a group of informed people sit down to decide what they want to achieve, make segments, trial them, test the audience for learning, and at the end of the day develop a program which can be tested very easily by conventional methods. You know at the end of the process that the kids have learnt the alphabet, learnt their numbers, learnt to be nice to a friend or whatever it may be. It was a top-down model with adults instructing formally and the children responding accordingly. It was controlling, predictable. I wanted to do something very different—to explore the broad range of intelligence—Howard Gardner’s infinitely more challenging and exciting research ideas—with experts from all fields of endeavour. Ed Palmer was excited and curious about the way I would approach the development and eager to be involved.

I had to find the people in Australia who were doing the most interesting work with young children in a variety of diverse fields. Don and I talked daily about strategy: he was a great ally and contributor in many ways and his Institute was in the middle of a massive study of the effects of different types of child care on Australian children. During one of these discussions we came up with the idea of approaching Peter Clarke, who was the on-air host of the radio program *Offspring* on the ABC. He knew the network of those doing interesting work with children. Peter’s contract had just been terminated by the ABC; the timing was fortuitous. He and his partner Vicki Volkoff became rigorous researchers for the program.

I employed Peter and Vicki to search Australia for the top thinkers in their field. They gradually built a list of sixty very interesting people to attend the first workshop. The group included specialists in children’s literature, kinetics, mathematics, music, consumer affairs, health and pathology; they were storytellers, writers, philosophers, artists, researchers on human development, kindergarten teachers, actors, all of whom worked with or for children.

We met for several days at Erskine House, Lorne, in a residential workshop to determine the philosophy and objectives for the program, which did not yet have a name. We were not designing a program; we were writing a modern curriculum as a basis for the program. We spent the first evening on games and activities. All participants were confronted with a large hall filled with art materials

and junk and asked to make things. There were individuals cringing against the walls in fear that someone was going to ask them to get involved; others got straight into the task, which broke down the self-consciousness of people when they are forced together for the first time. Next morning most of the shyness had gone and small groups with a leader and a reporter were nominated. The groups were led by Ed Palmer, Garth Boomer, Peter Clarke and Don Edgar.

Linus Pauling, the only person ever to win two Nobel prizes, said, 'The best way to have good ideas is to have lots of ideas and to discard the bad ones. Think tanks are good at that'. And that is the way we proceeded.²³³ Each group comprised people working in starkly different fields; they were given a challenge to meet within a limited period of time (one hour) and they had to report back to the full gathering on their conclusions. The reporter, who had to give a public performance at the end of each workshop describing the group's ideas, maintained the pressure to focus attention on the subject before them. After the group reports, participants were mixed up, allocated to a different group and given a different task: they had to work quickly and achieve a tangible result. After each small group session, when we came together as a whole, every one would hear the ideas from all groups and these would spark fresh thoughts as they moved on. My role was to move from group to group identifying the exciting thinkers who were coming up with interesting ideas and anyone who was bogging a group down. Groups were re-mixed on the basis that those stimulating ideas were brought together and the people putting up the roadblocks were culled out into one group on their own. No participant knew the basis on which they were being moved, and as every one was being moved, no one identified what I was up to in my choices.

The system worked, very effectively. I put all the roadblockers into Garth's group—some of them were pontificating, old-fashioned know-it-alls who had slipped through our selection net and I called them 'The Wombats'. Only Don knew what I was doing. Interestingly, with Garth in charge, most of them became very productive as well. People were not used to the idea of a genuinely collaborative process without a hierarchy of knowledge at the core. Most professionals deal with others in their own profession in a comfort zone. They are not used to pressure to reveal their best and be challenged to give

more. I had an open mind on the subject matter for the program, but I knew stale ideas when I heard them and they would be rejected out of hand or ignored. During one reporting session, Garth chose to wear two hats, which he put on and took off as he reported on the different views within his group. His manner so enraged one member in his group that he slammed his fist on the table, smashing a glass and slashing his hand.

The end result of this demanding brain search was a groundbreaking philosophical document to be used as the fundamental reference of the future program. The participants were proud of what they had achieved together. Ed Palmer of the CTW (who had attended the workshop and led a group) afterwards wrote to me: 'I can't say when I have had such a stimulating and rewarding time as I had attending the Lorne conference ... you have a winning combination in the marriage of television's capacity to provide powerful role models with the aim of empowering young children'.

The central principles driving *Lift-Off* were as follows:

- Children are inherently curious, playful and active in seeking knowledge and making sense of all aspects of their lives, including their emotional and social lives. They are not empty vessels to be filled up with knowledge or skills.
- The young child's potential is typically underestimated. His or her capacity to understand and deal with his or her emotional life and social life is especially underestimated.
- Childhood is not a preparation for life—it *is* life. Each child is to be valued, living and experiencing life as a child.
- For children, being effective and making a successful impact on their surroundings is a most pleasing, satisfying and motivating experience.
- Young children are relatively powerless. They need access to ideas, information and resources to help empower them.

The emphasis was to be on enquiry; it was not about teaching facts and a body of predetermined information, as *Sesame Street* does. It was about developing a process of questioning, problem-solving and imagining. Children on screen would be inquiring, exploring and discovering. Stories would be the primary form of presentation, engaging, enlightening, absorbing, twisting and turning, full of

surprises because of their revelations about the world and the child's place within it.²³⁴

FROM THIS SOLID base, the ACTF moved to story-time. Peter and Vicki came to work for me full-time, their next task to identify creative practitioners to develop a set of characters for a program that fulfilled the objectives. This group also assembled at Lorne. Garth later wrote:

The philosophical baton was handed to a band of Australia's leading children's story writers, artists, animators, puppeteers, filmmakers, directors and designers who were given a mandate to think creatively and laterally within the bounds of the philosophical frame. Once again the Lorne retreat was used as the metaphorical wilderness from which it was hoped the dreamers would emerge full of wisdom and possibility.

It was not a peaceful week. As Garth put it, 'Good ideas need to survive the uncomfortable cauldron of personal particularities, critique and white hot scrutiny. Minds were stretched to exhaustion. Emotions bubbled and sometimes overflowed'.²³⁵ But Lorne 2 yielded the characters for the program, after supreme effort, along with a title—*Lift-Off*.

Workshop 2 used the same techniques. We went straight into games. The practitioners accepted the process more quickly than had the theoreticians. The puppeteers brought their puppets; we had a camera on hand to film any segment that might be devised on the spot. Chris Neal—a composer who had contributed to three *Winners* music scores and *Touch the Sun*—came with his music gear and groups started designing ideas immediately. Some participants stayed up all night creating characters and ideas. The mood was volatile, with groups competing with one another to produce clever ideas within a short time-frame. It was a discomfort zone for everybody. I ate my way through the Erskine House steamed puddings and gained half a stone in weight at each workshop. That was the means by which I dealt with a creatively driven, traumatic maelstrom.

Egos were clashing like elements in a thunderstorm. Don raised one group's outrage with some inadvertent comments on their ideas

and decided to leave Lorne to avoid damaging the process; Nancy Cato persuaded him to return and the wounds were healed. A core group stayed three days after the others had gone, to record and co-ordinate all the ideas. Nobody was allowed to leave with their allocated notebook, and copyright on all recorded ideas was held by the ACTE. We trawled through what had been written and by the time the week was over we had a set of characters, families and fantasy ideas to work with.

13

From Dream to Reality

'The more I want to get something done, the less I call it work.'

—Richard Bach

LIFT-OFF DID NOT LOOK like any program we had seen before. There was no presenter to direct proceedings as in *Play School*. It was not a structured linear story with a beginning, middle and end; nor was it a magazine program with clearly defined segments. It was a world of fantasy and reality: real children lived in a world of imagination interacting both with their families and with fantasy characters. Yet while it used puppetry, like *Sesame Street*, it was not overtly didactic and educational in the way the American program was. All its diverse elements were woven together around family stories in an engaging mix. *Lift-Off* was a world that would make sense to a child, just as *Round the Twist* did, but it couldn't be described easily in words and it broke all the rules.

For the purposes of funding and classification, the program didn't fit comfortably anywhere. It failed to meet the Film Finance Corporation's definition of a mini-series, with an overarching story

which had a beginning, a middle and an end. It did not qualify for the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal's C classification because it crossed the age range from preschool to the early primary school years and under the tribunal rules it had to be one or the other. No commercial broadcaster was going to license the program. I understood these problems when the *Lift-Off* concept was being developed but I did not want to limit the thinking with bureaucratic definitions. I would worry about them later.

This was the way I approached everything I did. If I thought about all the obstacles in the way of an audacious idea, it could not be contemplated, so I took them one at a time. It was not denial or avoidance, more like my own philosophy of project management. I had the view that, as one problem was solved, momentum gathered and the next one would be easier.

The time had come to worry about Canberra. I set up an appointment with Tony Blunn and Cathy Santamaria, the secretary and deputy secretary of the Department of the Arts, responsible for funding the Foundation and the FFC. These were the good old days when bureaucrats saw themselves as facilitators for the organisations within their portfolios—they were not negative gate-keepers working at the behest of politicians. They wanted to help me find a way through the red tape. The Commonwealth Government had been very supportive of the Foundation's work for nearly a decade. Tony Blunn did not believe it would be feasible to change the definition for a qualifying film to receive funds from the FFC in time to be of any use to *Lift-Off*. He advised me to look very carefully at the definitions for a qualifying film and see whether I could find a way through. We looked together and the answer leapt out. The definition of a 'documentary' allowed for a program of any length, with no rules about its structure. So I called *Lift-Off* a documentary. There was a rationale for such a definition. Each episode was constructed around a theme—such as 'rubbish', 'lost', 'the wheel turns', 'destroy'. There were dramatic segments, but also documentary segments—on animals, the natural world, physical skills, variety—and under the definitions, describing *Lift-Off* as a documentary made as much sense as describing it as drama.

Then the need for a C classification became irrelevant, because the ABC decided to buy *Lift-Off*. Paddy Conroy, head of television at

the ABC, had been a member of the original working group on the establishment of the ACTF. He was interested in the development of a sustainable Australian program for three to eight year olds, which would fill a gap in the market and balance imported programming.

Paddy wanted to go beyond *Play School* and he was interested to put in place an output deal between the ACTF and the ABC, to allow the Foundation security in developing a new drama series each year with a guaranteed market. The ABC board's policy at the time was to reduce in-house production and work with the independent sector to reduce ABC overheads. The Foundation was the obvious choice for the ABC to become the leading producer of children's programs but ABC management's underlying thinking meant the proposal was contentious at ABC staff level.

The traditional conflict in public broadcasting between the roles of education and entertainment had been rife in the ABC for years. Paddy Conroy, while head of children's programming, had purchased *Sesame Street* against strong protest from the *Play School* education team. More recently, as head of television, he had axed funding for the Schools' Service, and that was when he appointed Nick Collis-George to reform the department. Collis-George was a tough-minded union man, who believed strongly in the principles of the ABC's charter but had no experience in children's production. He was briefed to sack those resisting change, encourage independent production, look into merchandising *Play School*, and generally change the profile of children's television on the ABC.²³⁶

In February 1991, when the ABC board was considering buying *Lift-Off*, the schools faction began to agitate. Alan Kendall, for seventeen years an executive producer in the Early Childhood Unit which oversaw the production of *Play School*, wrote a thirty-page report which he sent to the deputy chair of the ABC board, Wendy McCarthy. It passionately defended *Play School* and condemned the principles expressed in the *Lift-Off* document on philosophy and objectives.

Kendall claimed that the Foundation had no idea what it was doing by targeting the three- to eight-year-old audience within one program; many Third World countries, he said, did this only because they didn't have enough money to do otherwise. He claimed that the *Lift-Off* approach would threaten the security of three-to-four year

olds and create ‘jagged attention patterns like *Sesame Street*’; that the *Lift-Off* proposal was ‘doctrinaire’; that its success would rely on an outreach program and yet it was the responsibility of broadcasters to define a program by what could be achieved on air. His overriding purpose was to extol the virtues of *Play School* as ‘the only program in the world which understood how to reach young children directly through its on-air presenter’. ‘More than anything else,’ he said, ‘the *Lift-Off* proposal is an attack on the medium of television ... *Lift-Off* misses the point of television’. But at base he was concerned about the outsourcing of children’s programs:

there is already some evidence that the *Lift-Off* point of view is being accepted as valid and is beginning to change the ecology of early childhood television programs in this country ... I am alarmed at the possibility that the same corrosion of television values in the children’s field could begin to happen within the ABC itself. Already there is a proposal to move *Play School* production to Adelaide ... facilities to *Play School* have been cut ... could that mean that some people feel that if *Lift-Off* is right, *Play School*, despite its extraordinary success must be wrong, so that we might as well begin saving on *Play School* to pay for *Lift-Off*? I pray not. In my view *Play School* is irreplaceable because it is the best that television can do for young children ... To assume television can’t do better in this country and involve children deeply is a broadcasting cop-out. Television can do better. *Play School* in Australia has been doing a great deal better for these 20 years. And I for one would have more faith in generations of children who had grown up with the humanity of John Hamblin and Noni Hazelhurst than with the potentially cold challenges of *Lift-Off*.

It was a reprise of the attack the *Play School* team had made on *Sesame Street* twenty years earlier. Collis-George wrote to me seeking urgent comments on the paper. I declined this invitation because the central issue Kendall was addressing was not in contention. *Lift-Off* was not an attempt to compete with *Play School*. Three year olds would be as marginal to our interests as would be eight year olds, but we recognised they would be in the audience in some numbers, just as some older children would watch *Play School*. It was a fruitless

exercise to compare the two programs. Kendall's fine work over the years, and his spirited defence of *Play School*, had the unfortunate effect of trying to prevent any other program being made. There was no need to denigrate one program to preserve the other. To me it was shocking that twenty years had gone by with no thought given to the development of a new major program for the early childhood group, to be screened alongside *Play School* and *Sesame Street* on the ABC. If Australian children had two worthwhile programs to choose from, made in their own country with their interests at heart, they could only be beneficiaries.

Kendall also missed the point that it was time the schools, the community and the broadcasters worked together in a concerted way for children. The argument that a program should not reach beyond the screen was extremely short-sighted. Technology was evolving. The distinctions between film, television, video, audio tapes and publishing were breaking down and programming needed to use the potential offered to educate children. What a child could understand at a certain point was the launching point for learning, not the place to run on the spot. Kendall reflected the difference between the old Jean Piaget and Howard Gardner. Gardner's evaluation of the program was, by contrast with Kendall's, very positive:

The really crucial decision involved in *Lift-Off* is the decision to treat youngsters as thinking, feeling human beings, and to encourage them to use their minds and to express and realise their feelings to the fullest. And so, to be informed rather than irrelevant, opposition to *Lift-Off* ... needs to argue 'children are either too young to use their minds' or, 'It is injurious to be reflective or to discuss serious issues', or 'Let's focus on the ABCs and leave play with language and play with serious ideas to high school'. Let these critics send their children to schools which honour that narrow philosophy; I know where I will choose to send mine.²³⁷

It was clear that the Foundation was facing a backlash, so I asked those who had participated in the *Lift-Off* workshops to put their views in writing for submission to government and the ABC in order to ensure the program was funded. Garth Boomer also wrote a definitive opinion, saying the program would lead the way for

educators developing new curriculum models for the twenty-first century.

Given the documented endorsement from the top creative minds in Australian early childhood, the ABC board chose to approve the funding of *Lift-Off*. The FFC came to the funding party as well, accepting the certification of *Lift-Off* as a documentary. Prime Minister Bob Hawke, announcing *Lift-Off*, said: ‘Clearly my friends, this is no ordinary TV series’. The program was financed. Now I looked at the next problem: to make the program a reality rather than a philosophy.

I EXPANDED *LIFT-OFF*’S full-time development team to include Jim Howes, a primary teacher, editor, and author of magazines and books for children; Terry Denton, an award-winning children’s book illustrator; and, for a short period, Nancy Cato, formerly the star of *The Magic Circle Club*. Nancy had been a peacemaker at the workshop and had a strong interest in storytelling. But Peter, Vicki and Jim had a less structured approach to narrative, which led to conflict, and Nancy dropped out. Terry sat drawing and characters emerged as they were discussed: EC, Every Child, a faceless rag doll, a puppet, a friend; Lotis the elevator, the intelligent explorer which could take the children anywhere; Beverley the plant with an eye into the natural world, and the Patches who lived on Beverley’s pot—a blend of the natural environment and free-wheeling fantasy; Mr Fish, the controller out of control, the authority figure who banned everything; the Backsaks, who were the unacknowledged workers of the puppet world whose ‘stuffers’ took them for granted; Rocky, a world-famous anthropologist, a frill-neck lizard who lectured his frill-seeker companions on human rituals; the Munch Kids, the voices of real children probing real issues and a showcase for every kind of animation style imaginable; and the Wakadoo Café, a realm within the program where human feelings and relationships in all their complexity were explored, through the Boss, Lonely, Nearly, Zelda, the Wolf and the Three Pigs with their foibles and anxieties.

Lift-Off’s heart was its characters: kids, adults, puppets, performers and animation were mixed. Some characters were real, others were

fantastic; some criss-crossed between the two worlds. Puppets talked with real children. Dolls fantasised. Animation flowed from children talking to one another. A real-life situation was echoed in a story. Throughout the warp and weft of the show, the characters provided its stability—strong, recognisable and understandable, they created the realm the *Lift-Off* audience came to know and understand.

The lead characters who lived in *Lift-Off* land were families with children—the Bourkes, Jenny and Ted Bourke with five-year-old Nipper and seven-year-old Poss; the Stinsons, Stella and Harry, with an adopted Asian daughter Kim; the Garcias, Theresa and Ricardo, with two boys Turbo and Max—an Hispanic family; Snap, an African-American single mum with a daughter Aku and son Paul. Snap employed Turbo as her apprentice in a fix-it business; they had tools of every shape and description aboard her Toolmobile. The main location was an apartment building, which housed Lotis the Lift and Beverly the Plant Pot and whose foyer was guarded by its concierge/security officer, Mr Fish.

MY ROLE IN *LIFT-OFF* was to oversee, to encourage, to direct, to say go this way not that way, to keep a perspective on all elements, to see people were working together constructively, to anticipate the road-blocks, to pay the bills and to ensure we would have a program in the end, on air, that met the very high standards I had set, met the budget and returned investment. I did not want to let down the hundreds of people who had swung in behind this concept.

When we began to translate the episode ideas into scripts for production, the process began to fall apart. Peter Clarke has a brilliant mind and led the concept development stage effectively. I agreed initially with his choice of writers, with some reservations, as he wanted to work with inexperienced people, thinking they might be able to deliver a fresh, innovative approach. He briefed his chosen writers and one by one they came back with appalling scripts; they could not understand the structure of the proposed idea and, with no example to show them, they floundered. I added more experienced writers to the team, but their attempts were not much better. I expanded the team to bring in production advice, appointing Ewan Burnett from Crawford Productions as an assistant production

supervisor and associate producer. He drew up the budget for *Lift-Off* and advised the scriptwriters on production issues.

As the scripts were not reflecting the promise of the series, Peter and Vicki began to lose confidence and decided there was nobody in Australia who could translate their ambitious ideas into a real program. They seemed to spend as much time in the coffee shop as on the job. The office staff generally became unsettled as the message went out that the program was a pipe dream and people should abandon *Lift-Off*. I had to take some difficult decisions. I called on Jeff Peck, the former ACTF program manager, who had stepped down to concentrate on writing and script editing a new series for the ACTF, *Sky Trackers*, to help me diagnose the problems.

Jeff reported that there were problems with the concept, the structure, the process, and the people: writers were having difficulty getting a grasp on the characters; the unusual format unsettled writers who had experience in drama only. *Lift-Off* was complex and there was a need to incorporate a curriculum; few writers had experience writing from a child's point of view; the level of politicking and game-playing going on in the office was undermining morale and commitment.

The process needed to be reorganised radically. The writers were overwhelmed with paperwork written in an academic style they were not used to, and in writing sessions were lectured to a point of confusion. The script department had grown in an ad hoc way, with too many people involved and no one accepting responsibility and accountability. Although Peter and Vicki retained de facto control, when the scripts weren't good enough everybody could deny responsibility. The process was slow and alienating. Jeff concluded: 'The effect is to imply to the writers that the concept is so sophisticated and complex that only the high priests (the team) of *Lift-Off* will ever know its secrets ...'²³⁸

I concurred with Jeff's diagnosis. The structure of each episode was too loose and needed a strong narrative strand binding each episode together as the theme was explored. The writers needed such a core, and the audience would too. Jeff's proposals became the blueprint. All staff were to report directly to me; every role was redefined. Vicki was to provide research and no script comments, Peter was to have no further role in the scripting; he was to focus

on ‘The Munch Kids’, which was a brilliant concept on children’s philosophical thinking and this segment was his forte. I did my best to restore morale and control the damage. It was important to give Peter and Vicki prestige and responsibility while holding off their intrusions into the rest of the system. Documents were rewritten, diplomacy maintained and new procedures established in the office. I was away during part of that year, but Jeff was in charge of the scripting process and scripts began to flow.

ALTHOUGH THE BUDGET was in excess of ten million dollars, the scale of what we were attempting was larger than the budget would allow. There were multiple aspects to *Lift-Off* that required teams of skilled people and many were given opportunities to develop their talents and experience. Peter Viska, who animated the *Lift-Off* titles, was ready for a bigger challenge.²³⁹

The twenty-six animated feature stories for *Lift-Off*, one of which appeared in each episode, were to be completed by animators right around Australia; the Munch Kids also were to be animations in a variety of different styles reflecting philosophical discussions by children in the playground. All the animations in *Lift-Off* were produced by Suzie Campbell, the creative young woman who had worked with Jeff Peck on *Seen But Not Heard*, a Foundation discussion program. She too was ready for a big leap forward. Terry Denton designed the puppet characters for the Wakadoo Café and the fantasy characters EC, Lotis, Beverly and Backsaks for *Lift-Off*. He had trained as an architect before dabbling in animation then concentrating on illustration. He worked with Ron Mueck who had created the famous Muppets in his workshop in London and has since become a world-renowned sculptor. I brought Ron Mueck to Australia to audition puppeteers and actors to manipulate his puppets.²⁴⁰

The Wakadoo Café, the puppet story segment, was to be directed by Paul Nichola, a young film maker and creative director of visual effects, who came from Sydney for the project and stayed to work with the Foundation over the next fifteen years. His job was to produce the complex visual effects throughout the show involving EC, Lotis, Patches and Beverly, designing the opening song

backgrounds for each episode. A volatile character, as talented people can be, Paul took some managing, but he delivered magnificently for the program. Chris Neal, a Sydney composer who had worked with the Foundation since *Winners* and attended the development workshops, was music co-ordinator, composing the opening *Lift-Off* theme and the Wakadoo Café songs, and overseeing the overall music process, which reflected a wide variety of styles. David Cheshire, Paul Grabowsky and numerous others contributed original compositions. Documentary footage of children in Arnhem Land was shot by a talented young director, Stephen Johnson. Mark Mitchell (famous as Con the fruiterer in *The Comedy Company*) agreed to play the role of Mr Fish, in multiple guises, using his impersonation talents to the full; this would be the first of several roles Mark would play for the Foundation. Mark became an important ambassador for the ACTF. In fact, the production of *Lift-Off* consolidated several creative partnerships between the ACTF and talented actors and film makers.

Production, however, proved onerous. Ewan Burnett asked to be designated producer, rather than associate producer (who is an assistant to the producer). But that was my role and I wanted no confusion about who was in charge, given the multitude of people involved. I asked Margot McDonald to fill the management role of line producer, alongside me, and moved my office to the ABC's Elsternwick studio in Melbourne for the duration of the production to oversee what was a very complex process.

Steve Jodrell bravely agreed to take on the job of series director. The members of our lead cast, who were to carry the drama, ranged in age from four to twelve years and we purposely cast a deaf boy with a clearly pronounced speech defect in one role. We unwittingly chose a hyper-active boy who slept about three or four hours a night, would throw tantrums and pinch the other children. He had to be monitored all the time or he would run around the studios screaming. The crew were very caring people and worked well with the children, but it was a demanding experience for all involved. The directors did an outstanding job with the young cast, who by the end of twenty-six hours of production were little stars—they knew their lines and met their marks—professionals in every respect.

Garth Boomer loved the program and contributed as a writer; he wrote lyrics for many of the songs and all the dialogue for the

Backsaks. These puppet characters, though linguistically advanced, were a metaphor for infancy: powerless, dragged around and unable to communicate with their owners, the *Lift-Off* children. Their words came from a rich tradition of Backsak lore. They had their own vocabulary, talking constantly; their sentences were inverted. They saw where they had been, not where they were going. They were creatively grumpy and preoccupied with their surroundings, their destinations, the places they would be dumped, what was inside them and how they were treated. Gabblesak talked very fast and was never lost for words; Rapsak was cool and worried about his looks; Snapsak was paranoid, always fearing the worst—‘I told you so’ was his favourite expression; Tweesak was less worldly, more naïve than the others; Scruffsak was untidy, smelly, given to using coarse language and often containing mucky stuff; Grumblesak was a tired old character who was resigned to life and given to perpetual warnings; Dippisak was a feather-brain with a sunny, light-hearted view of life. Garth had fun writing this dialogue. At the time he was Acting Director General of Education in South Australia, having to restructure the department, and retrenching a number of staff. It was a very difficult period for him, but when I phoned with deadlines for script revisions he delivered, and he was always available to give me moral support.

Lift-Off was the most difficult project I had attempted to date, at every level. I was making enormous demands on everybody. Those in key creative roles were set challenges they had not experienced before. Most responded well but many were stretched to their limits, tensions would explode, there were confrontations arising from creative conflict, personality conflicts and emotional conflicts. I did my best to keep up confidence, to keep things moving along, to bring out the best in people and to be even-handed in my treatment of all concerned. At home Don had to deal with me as best he could; his challenge was no less strong.

It became evident fairly early on in the shoot that the schedule that had been designed to fit the budget was unworkable. We had two crews working concurrently—one on location and one in the studio—but the young actors couldn’t keep up the pace; the problems of working with very young children had not been allowed for within the schedule. I was aware that we would go over budget. Film

Finances—the completion guarantor with whom the Foundation had worked from its inception—was keeping a close eye on this project. Sue Milliken, the head of Film Finances in Australia, came on her regular visit to the production and I broke the news. Sue is a very experienced producer who can be intimidating and savage, but I had a high regard for her. She viewed me in a similar way; this would be a tough negotiation. The attitude I took was that the Foundation had brought everything it had produced to date in on budget; now it was time for Film Finances to back the Foundation. This was fair in principle but it was Sue's job to limit the damage. I did not want an outside producer imposed, someone who would have no sympathy for the concept of *Lift-Off*.

Sue had respect for Margot McDonald, who had been managing a budget she had not been responsible for designing. But Sue insisted that Ewan Burnett, who had prepared the budget, was to be taken off the payroll that day. I said I would not sack Ewan and would pay him through the Foundation payroll and not through the production budget. He would stay, right through to the end of the production of *Lift-Off* as associate producer, with Margot McDonald as line producer, both reporting directly to me. Sue couldn't disagree with that. I had the unenviable job of going on location that day to tell the crew that there would be no work for five weeks in the lead-up to Christmas as we refined the schedule. I spoke with Ewan to tell him the outcome: that I would protect his job until the end of the series but his role with ACTF would end at that point. Ewan was upset. I thought I had done the right thing by him, but it turned out that I had made an implacable, unforgiving enemy. It was quite a day at the office.

In the end, *Lift-Off* came in around \$250 000 over budget. Margot McDonald did a magnificent job designing a strategy to contain the budget without compromising the ideals of the show, and Film Finances showed admirable restraint.

LIFT-OFF HAD BEEN premised on the idea of a complete educational package, a program for life. The television series was to be supported by a community program, Outreach, and a publishing program. Outreach was to build on the stimulus of the television program and,

by involving members of the community with the target age group, use their experience and raise awareness of the issues *Lift-Off* was tackling: living in a global community, protecting the environment, helping one another and getting along together.

To this end, Outreach would ensure the program reached as many children as possible, not just those whose parents were alert to the new opportunity; it would extend the impact of viewing through the use of toys, games, books, puzzles, cassettes, compact discs and, importantly, further activities to reinforce the ideas and skills being introduced by the program; it would stimulate those involved in child care, family day care, infant health and welfare, community planning and other family support services to think more broadly about the potential of childhood and see themselves as partners with parents; it would provide opportunities, venues and resources beyond the home, in which children could explore further the learning opportunities offered in the TV program; it would help parents see the task of child rearing as an exciting one; it would draw on the experience and practical resources of youth, other adults and the aged to expand the horizons of childhood.

Outreach was not intended to become an organisation with its own administrative structure, or to have a long-term life, but it became the biggest national movement ever created in the cause of child development in Australia. Its goal was to contact and draw into the *Lift-Off* Outreach net the many hundreds of groups and organisations already involved in activities aimed at three to eight year olds. The structure involved a national committee with representatives from youth organisations as well as recreation, government, university, family, education and health organisations. Don Edgar—as director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies and because of his contacts in early childhood and family services throughout Australia—became the chair of National Outreach. He put in hundreds of hours of his time on a volunteer basis for this project; it certainly kept conversation going in the family home.

During 1991 and 1992, meetings involving parent groups, early childhood educators, child carers, youth workers and other children's service organisations were held in each state and territory. The state premiers and the directors of education helped publicise the *Lift-Off* cause. The Curriculum Corporation of Australia announced a major

publishing program involving a *Teacher's Guide to Lift-Off*, and nine video and book packages: *Lift-Off to wondering and thinking*; *Lift-Off to language*; ... *to music*; ... *to science and technology*; ... *to social learning and living*; ... *to the environment*; ... *to personal growth*; ... *to play*; and *Lift-Off to language and culture*.²⁴¹

THE PRIME MINISTER of Australia, Bob Hawke, announced that the President of the United States, George H Bush, would visit Australia. Hazel Hawke was consulted about a program for the President's wife Barbara. She would have time to visit only one organisation, so Hazel suggested that this should be the ACTF. The White House liked the idea. The visit was to take place in January 1992, which meant rather frantic efforts to develop a program to entertain the First Lady.²⁴²

The White House security team meticulously checked the Foundation's headquarters in Grattan Street, Carlton, and all our staff, but the advance planning team were eager to ensure that the First Lady would have a good time. We were encouraged to put her on the spot and engage her with the puppets; we did not want to disappoint.

Suddenly, just before Christmas, Paul Keating challenged Bob Hawke's leadership and became Prime Minister. Protocol would not allow Hazel to attend with Barbara Bush, although I pressed the case to no avail. Barbara Bush's visit would be Annita Keating's first public role. Mrs Keating seemed very uncomfortable. Grattan Street was closed down for the arrival and security men swarmed all over the roof. Barbara Bush was greeted at reception by the puppet characters, along with Janet Holmes à Court, Garth Boomer as deputy director, board members Dame Margaret Guilfoyle and Steve Vizard, and me. We escorted Mrs Bush through the Foundation, where she was accosted by the pigs—Morris, Boris and Doris (from the Wakadoo Café)—who asked the First Lady did she know what came after 'by the dawn's early light' in *The Star Spangled Banner*? Mrs Bush responded happily to their antics. Both Janet and Garth spoke about the *Lift-Off* series and we screened a twenty-minute video presentation which Mrs Bush clearly enjoyed. After the preview she described *Lift-Off* as 'just wonderful', adding: 'I'm really interested in children's television. It's a wonderful medium that should be used for teaching not only children but also adults. You are using it in a superb way'.

Mrs Bush then had a lively discussion with the puppets and was introduced to the six young stars, who presented her with a videotape of the preview she had seen and an autographed photograph.

There were scores of journalists and photographers packed into a cordoned-off section of the room. This was publicity on a scale I could not have imagined. The visit was reported in the *Washington Times* and other US media—‘America’s First Lady ... was clearly smitten’—giving international publicity and kudos to the program.²⁴³

Paul Keating agreed to launch *Lift-Off* officially with a screening for critics and journalists at Parliament House.²⁴⁴ I was nervous about this moment of truth, but I was not going to miss the opportunity to celebrate the Foundation’s tenth birthday, photographing the new Prime Minister with a huge cake decorated with the ACTF logo and in the company of the young *Lift-Off* cast. Keating described the project as ‘a truly great Australian venture’: ‘*Lift-Off* suggests what television is capable of—which is to say much more than we and our children are generally given’.²⁴⁵

Paddy Conroy, head of television at the ABC, described *Lift-Off* as ‘the most outstanding children’s programme broadcast by the ABC in 35 years of television’. So much for the *Play School* mafia’s criticism. The television critics agreed. The highly ambitious—some had said crazy—concept won them. The program was described as ‘the most exciting project in the history of children’s television’; ‘one of the most adventurous uses of television of the 90s’; and ‘the most important piece of television made in Australia’.²⁴⁶ Other critics said: ‘it will revolutionise children’s viewing’; ‘it is the most ambitious and satisfying children’s series ever produced in Australia’; ‘A new era in children’s television is about to begin’; ‘It is difficult to do justice to these programs, so much talent and energy have gone into them’; and ‘brilliant new series ... its success is assured’.²⁴⁷

But amid all the celebrations, there was one disturbing note. Garth Boomer arrived for the launch and mentioned that he had noticed some strange behaviour in himself. He was forgetting things—walking out and not closing doors, leaving his wallet on the shop counter—small lapses, but mistakes he would not normally make. I tried to reassure him but I too was concerned. I felt guilty; had I added to the pressures on him by my demands for the program?

Within a few weeks Garth was diagnosed with a brain tumour. He had to undergo surgery which revealed an aggressive malignancy. I was devastated. Garth faced his disease with great courage and spirit. He insisted that the experience he had most enjoyed over the past few years was the creation of *Lift-Off* and he was extremely proud of the results.

Our faith in the product was fulfilled as *Lift-Off* won awards and was sold into a receptive worldwide market. *Lift-Off* won the AFI award for the best children's television program and provoked hundreds of letters from parents and children writing to say they loved the program. It won the United Nations Association of Australia Media Peace Award in 1992.

THE MOST THOROUGH marketing campaign ever devised for an Australian television project for children accompanied *Lift-Off*, but its purpose was curriculum-based, with teaching materials and parent support materials promoted for distribution.²⁴⁸

Sadly, the BBC declined to buy *Lift-Off*. As Anna Home explained, it would overwhelm their own locally produced early childhood programming and, although she predicted that *Lift-Off* would be the next *Sesame Street*, the BBC could not allow that to happen. So the series went to air in the United Kingdom on Channel 4, which committed to buy the second series sight unseen. In France, Eve Baron, the head of the children's channel Canal J, loved the series and called me 'the Pope of children's television'. She bought the series to dub into French under the name *Zig Zag*. It was an unprecedented financial commitment for Canal J as it was an expensive and difficult series to dub, requiring the voices of very young children and with many songs to be sung in French. Portugal, Canada, Greece, Hong Kong, Nigeria, Kuwait and Jordan bought the series. In April 1993 the ACTF won the TV World Marketing Award for the best marketing campaign from an independent producer at MIP TV in Cannes, the biggest television market in the world. Peter Orton, the head of HIT Entertainment, offered me US\$500 000 on the spot at the MIP TV Market in Cannes to break up the series so he could sell segments.²⁴⁹ I declined, in the belief that *Lift-Off* would find a secure market in its entirety.

The Foundation was playing a pioneering role, shaking up the international marketplace, and the distributors did not like it. At MIP TV, I was paid two quite threatening visits to the ACTF exhibition stand by distributors wanting to say the Foundation was taking away their livelihood. I had learned to live with unpopularity; we were saving investors money by cutting out the high overheads distributors charged.

Back in Melbourne I received a visit from J Baxter Uris, the senior vice-president at the Children's Television Workshop in the United States. The CTW were very nervous about *Lift-Off* as competition for *Sesame Street* and proposed they might buy it for the US market and keep it on the shelf. Not likely. WGBH, the Boston Public Television Children's Department, had shown interest. The Foundation was assisting them to make a major programming submission to CPB Television Fund—the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in the US—which had announced a Children's Pre-School Series Solicitation. We worked together to make a submission to produce an American version of *Lift-Off* for a US\$12-million project. Howard Gardner watched this activity with great interest; children's television producers in the United States had been slow to pick up on his theories. *Lift-Off* came very close to receiving a substantial funding grant, but the final decision went to *Barney*, a project which had originated in the United States. Although the funding panel found the *Lift-Off* concept superior, the United States was not going to choose its programming ideas from offshore. That was a major disappointment for WGBH and the ACTF. *Lift-Off* was not seen in the United States.

GARTH BOOMER BRAVELY faced up to the challenge of brain surgery, his enthusiasm for *Lift-Off* never waning. We decided to involve him in a project to give him enjoyment and a challenge in what proved to be his final year of life, by creating *Lift-Off Live*, the musical, with Chris Neal who had done such an accomplished job with the Wakadoo songs. Garth, Chris and I came up with a concept.

The musical would be based around the Wakadoo Café—a story of friendship and betrayal, unity and division. That bullying busybody Mr Fish (Mark Mitchell) blunders into Lotis, the highly intelligent

talking lift, and stumbles into the Wakadoo Café. Right away, Mr Fish confronts the Wakadoo regulars—Wolf, that old smoothie, and the smarty-pants pigs, Boris, Morris and Doris; Boss the manager; Zelda the wacky waitress on roller-blades; Lonely, the simple soul always waiting for a friend; and EC, the doll that brings out the best in everyone. Mr Fish is out to cause trouble and it seems only EC and children in the audience can stop him. Nine new songs were created for the show.

Initially, we worked from the Edgar family home in Melbourne where Garth could rest when he needed. He would sit on our couch, coming up with words, and Chris would play around with the music on his Porta-studio. He created music so quickly it was an amazing and emotional experience to watch them at work. It quickly became impossible for Garth to travel, so Chris and I went to Adelaide, where Garth lived, to work with him there. Garth insisted he and I visit the Arts Minister responsible for funding the Foundation from South Australia while I was in town; Garth was still the South Australian representative on the board. His head was shaved and he bore considerable scars from his surgery; he shuffled as he walked, and movement was an effort as we entered the office of the Minister, Di Laidlaw. I was left alone with the Minister while Garth went to the toilet; she expressed shock and said, ‘He can’t possibly remain representing South Australia on the Board of the Foundation’. I insisted she should not change his appointment.

It was less than a year since the *Lift-Off* launch and the association with the Foundation was one thing Garth could still take pride in. Chris developed the songs with astonishing speed, so Garth was able to hear the music composed for his lyrics, which brought him enormous pleasure. He died on 16 July 1993, a loss I still can’t recall without distress. Another friend who had given so much to the Foundation was gone. He died as deputy chairman of the board of the Australian Children’s Television Foundation.

Garth was only fifty-two, at the peak of his creativity, with so much still to give to education in Australia. No one has taken his place. It is difficult to find in any line of business that combination of management skills and creativity. I felt his loss keenly because of the void in educational thinking and because Garth understood what drove me and the way I thought. I was hard-headed about deals and their

associated negotiations—I would not yield—but creatively I worked to no blueprint, no set of rules, my responses were intuitive. I judged quickly what I believed was right and I backed my own judgement. If I was unsure I waited or I talked to those whose judgements I trusted, not to borrow their judgement but to test my own. I couldn't teach anyone this process and Garth had the same approach.

I enlisted the production advice of Helena Harris, who would later produce *Bananas in Pyjamas* for Nick Collis-George. I invited Helena to co-produce *Lift-Off Live*. Chris Neal had completed the songs begun with Garth—helped by Chris Anastassiades, Sue Amoddio and Robert Greenberg—and Wayne Harrison from the Sydney Theatre Company was engaged as director for the Foundation's first venture in live theatre. I was satisfied we had the best talent available. The voices of Phillip Quast, Toni Lamond, Tony Sheldon, Monica Trapaga, Bob Baines, David Whitney, Linda Nagle and Sandy Gore gave life to the giant-sized puppets while Mark Mitchell as Mr Fish was the dominant presence on stage.

IN JUNE 1995, Janet Holmes à Court's son Peter married New York lawyer Divonne Jarecki at a Heytesbury cattle property in Queensland. Don and I attended the celebrations. On the evening before the wedding, at a barbecue, I was lobbied by Liz Koops, Peter's partner in Back Row Productions, his New York theatrical production company, and Peter himself, to agree to Back Row co-producing, marketing and distributing *Lift-Off Live* in Australia and possibly internationally. I was uncertain about this business partnership with one of Janet's children and I had some reservations about Peter. He was new to the theatrical business himself and had learnt some tough lessons the previous year when his first off-Broadway show closed after three weeks and its backers (including Peter) lost most of their available capital.

Janet seemed unconcerned, although she kept out of the discussions and left the decision to me. I was conscious of the Foundation's lack of experience in theatrical distribution, so I decided to go with Back Row, and learned very quickly that, like father like son in the Holmes à Court family, a signed contract could be the beginning, not the conclusion, of a negotiation.

Lift-Off Live! The Musical opened on 4 January 1995 to a packed house at the Sydney Opera House, presented by the Australian Children's Television Foundation in association with Back Row Productions Australia Pty Ltd and the Fox Kids Network. The audience and the critics loved it. 'It's a hit!' was the verdict of the critic for *The Sunday Telegraph*. Others agreed, with: 'A perfect piece of kids' theatre. Theatrically imaginative, colourful, fast moving and intelligent' and '*Lift-Off Live* is a classy and riotously funny piece of kids theatre ... this show has moments of real theatrical magic between the thigh-slapping comedy and the audience interaction'; 'This children's musical was a hit from start to finish'; '*Lift-Off Live!* rips merrily along: song, dance, big-hearted silliness, a production whole-heartedly focused on its pint-sized audience'.²⁵⁰ Garth Boomer would have been thrilled.²⁵¹

The ABC and Pay School

*'Soon the whole calendar will be filled up with brand names.
There won't be saints' days any more, just 365 different logos!'*

—Frederic Beigbeder²⁵²

THE AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S TELEVISION Foundation marked its tenth anniversary in 1992 with a party to recognise the successes of the past decade. There was much to celebrate. We were acknowledged around the world as being in the forefront of innovative, high-quality production for children; our programs were seen widely in more than fifty countries. We had brought together many hundreds of independent film makers to produce children's programs. We had won television's most prestigious prize for excellence in production—an International Emmy—and many other awards.

On the business front, we had established our own marketing department, providing better returns to investors and giving us a direct relationship with broadcasters who were buying and screening our programs in other countries. This meant the financing of new

projects was simpler and ensured the Foundation had more control to make decisions about future projects. But meanwhile, both the national and international climate for film finance was changing and growing even tougher.

Treasurer Paul Keating had altered the rules, establishing a new Film Finance Corporation to make the industry more accountable and control rogue investors. The FFC had been given a brief to assist children's programming, and I had argued successfully against a cap on FFC funds that could be invested in children's programming. I was also able to negotiate deals for the ACTF with terms as good as any in adult television. Even so, funding once again became an issue. The Queensland Arts Department, the South Australian Department of the Arts and Cultural Heritage and the Western Australian Department of the Arts all decided not to continue to fund the Foundation on the grounds that they needed to give priority to film projects being produced in their own states.²⁵³

From the Foundation's point of view, it became important to shift funding decisions about the Foundation out of Arts departments into Education departments, where they were originally situated when the Australian Education Council decided to support a foundation. Education budgets were significantly bigger than Arts budgets and less vulnerable to the lobbying of the independents; as well, it was easier to demonstrate the educational value of our work to the Education bureaucrats.

Alongside these local battles over funding, the international market was undergoing a revolutionary upheaval. A series could not be financed without overseas market interest. There was a burgeoning children's television cable market in the US, and the area of production that had been ignored by the commercial networks in the United States over the past decade was suddenly a growth area. However, the US market was interested in animation, not Australian live action. Animation had less cultural bias, it was recognisable around the world as children's programming, it was easy to dub into a foreign language and character merchandising could pay for the program.

It was not difficult to read the future and see plans by the big players to dominate production worldwide with their brands. It seemed to me that, if the production world (outside the United

States) did not form production alliances based on shared values, we were going to become the transmission vehicles for American programming via Nickelodeon, the Fox Network, Disney and Turner's Cartoon Network. The US controlled 85 per cent of the world trade in audio-visual media, already importing only 4 per cent of its programs from overseas. American children had few opportunities to watch programs from other cultures and learn about the perspectives and experiences of children in other parts of the world. For them, television was contributing to a very narrow and insular view of their place in the world. This trade imbalance was the basis of the battle I had fought from the beginning of my career, looming once more in a rampant form. Australian kids deserved their own programs, as did all children. The greatest danger to children's culture was the pollution of television with homogenised commercial, exploitative programming.

The form and content of children's programs was changing worldwide to yield profits. The question for aspiring producers would become how to exploit the children's market to make money, rather than how to serve the needs of a special audience. Regulators, educators and researchers needed to be applying their minds to these questions along with producers. A model of regulation was the basis of the system working in Australia and our regulators deserved to be acknowledged as well as educated about the future. Despite the technological changes, terrestrial broadcasting systems would remain in place for a very long time to come. It was therefore necessary to continue to maintain and improve the regulatory environment under which terrestrial broadcasters operated, and vital that governments understood the fragility of their own television cultures and the vulnerability of local production in an industry which was dominated by such a massive trade imbalance. Regulators needed to be talking to other regulators around the world to learn and discuss what needed to be done on a global scale.

Communication and social science researchers had rarely engaged in meaningful debate on issues of production, yet there was much to be learned from the best people in the field; researchers on television violence and its effects, in the United States and the United Kingdom, came up with different research methodologies and conclusions. I knew many of the important players in research,

regulation, education and production and most of them operated within enclosed professional worlds.

DON AND I loved walking along the beautiful, long beaches near Anglesea. It was great for creating mental space and getting things clear. One day we were taking our regular walk when I suddenly had the idea: Why couldn't all these professionals come together at a summit to address the important questions governing children and media in one forum? The issues were particularly pressing for me in Australia: the ABC seemed to be losing its way and was flogging the brand *Bananas in Pyjamas*; the Australian commercial broadcasters were still resentful about Standards and quota requirements; the FFC needed larger overseas contributions to budgets with demand on its funds increasing as new producers saw opportunity in children's programming staring them in the face. With a drama quota in place and an FFC to subsidise production, suddenly Australia had a surfeit of children's producers ready to accept any sale price offered for their programs. The networks were stirring the pot as they played one producer off against another.

Both the international broadcasting scene and the domestic were volatile. The communication revolution—with its promise of multiple channel systems, 'information highways' and interactive technology that would enable programming to be customised for individual homes—meant that the philosophical assumptions that had driven the broadcasting debate were being questioned. There were strongly opposing views about whether Alvin Toffler's law of raspberry jam—'the wider any culture is spread the thinner it gets'—would prevail, or whether technological breakthroughs would lead to program diversity and enriching viewing options. Public broadcasters around the world were facing funding cut-backs, while commercial television broadcasters were facing competition from other services and having to cut their cloth to fit less prosperous times in the fragmented television marketplace. Bruce Gyngell referred to pay TV as a Frankenstein's Lab.²⁵⁴

While more programming hours for children were being provided than ever before, the funding of original programming had actually decreased. The emphasis was more on acquisitions, particularly

animation. The cable and satellite channels relied heavily on reruns and repeats. The children's market faced the best of times and the worst of times, as the solution devised by the big players moving into children's cable channels was to buy off-the-shelf programming and create new projects with strong merchandising and ancillary spin-offs to offset funding. A world summit on television for children was therefore timely and even, I believed, necessary to discuss all of these issues.²⁵⁵

I had the opportunity to present the idea for a summit at a Prix Jeunesse round-table held in Munich between 23 and 26 May 1993—a think tank for Prix Jeunesse to decide its future directions. The idea was received with enthusiasm and endorsed by those attending from the Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union, the Philippine Children's Television Foundation, the BBC, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the American Center for Children's Television, Nickelodeon and UNICEF. I immediately set about approaching the Australian Broadcasting Authority, broadcasting networks and film bodies throughout Australia for endorsement. The US researchers I knew from my days studying at Stanford University and my research contacts in the United Kingdom, consolidated through my years teaching at La Trobe University, were on my list. Professor Ellen Wartella, one of the best-regarded and most prolific communication researchers in the United States, had become a good friend and supported the plan. I had jumped around in my career from one role to another and they had all given me relevant experience. I could for the first time see a pattern in all that I had done and was very fired up and prepared to devote my time to bring this off. *Sky Trackers* was being guided by Jeff Peck, *Lift-Off 2* was in production under the creative production control of Suzie Campbell who understood the philosophy of the program. So I began planning a successful summit and pondering how I could raise close to the million dollars needed to fund it.

I SET UP A national and an international advisory committee. Anna Home, my *Round the Twist* BBC co-production partner, was also chair of the EBU Working Party for Children and Young People and an important ally from the outset; she introduced the concept of a

Children's Television Charter to be endorsed at the summit. My old friend Bruce Gyngell had returned to Australia as chairman of the Nine network; he readily gave backing to my plans, committing the Nine network to sponsor the final dinner. Geraldine Laybourne, the head of Nickelodeon US, agreed to be involved after Anna Home approached her. Although deeply suspicious about Nickelodeon's potential impact on the market—I had seen no willingness on their part to work with independent producers—I hoped that, as a relative newcomer in the US television industry, they might be more open to discussion. I hoped that the summit would reveal the intentions of the new breed of American children's cable champions and see whether collaboration with foreigners was on their agenda; the leaders would be invited to speak about their plans.

In April 1994, Anna Home, Bruce Gyngell and Geraldine Laybourne joined me on stage, along with Emily Booker from UNICEF and Paddy Conroy, to launch the World Summit on Television and Children at an international press conference at the MIP TV market in France. Television broadcasters, producers and journalists from around the globe attended.

Australia was a curiosity to the rest of the world, with our policies of regulation and subsidy for the provision of children's programming. Although we had started later than the advocates in the United States, we had achieved concrete results with regulation, subsidy and an Australian Children's Television Foundation. Foreign producers viewed with awe and envy our legislation for age-specific programming. I knew this and I hoped their curiosity would drive them to attend a summit in Australia.

Prime Minister Paul Keating and federal Minister for the Arts Michael Lee had endorsed the world summit as an Australian initiative. The Australian Broadcasting Authority, the successor to the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, agreed to assist in the planning and promotion of the event, which was scheduled for March 1995.

In addition, I eventually won the support of all broadcast networks in Australia, the Victorian Government, the Australian Film Finance Corporation, the Australian Film Commission, Tourism Victoria, Film Victoria and major sponsorship backing from Telstra, then known as Telecom Australia. That company's endorsement was the crucial breakthrough. They would contribute \$320 000 in cash

and significant benefits in kind, through printing, publicity and influence. Telecom was beginning to position itself as an international player. The timing was right for Telecom as they were in the process of launching a new brand and the convergence of communication technologies was taking their business across the great divide—from a simple carriage of telephony to a new role and a wider responsibility for the creation, storage and distribution of information.

It did not hurt that Frank Blount, CEO of Telecom, seemed to enjoy Janet Holmes à Court's company. He was willing to host a lunch for key journalists at a Sydney background briefing on Summit plans and he was willing to attend the Summit. The day I secured Telecom's determining support I met the organisation's deputy head of corporate sponsorship, Jim Madigan, who was to tell me the outcome of our submission for funding. He had a big smile all over his face, which soon was transplanted onto mine. I left the building and decided to make the trip back to the Foundation, in Carlton, on foot. I was bouncing along the footpath when a stranger stopped me. 'You look like a million dollars,' he said; my excitement was clearly on display.

But it was important to succeed not just with Australian interests. I travelled to every major television event and to as many countries around the world as I could, including the Asian Broadcasting Union Program Exchange in Kuala Lumpur, where I met representatives from public broadcasting in the Asian region, including NHK, the Japanese national broadcaster. In May 1994, after prolonged negotiation, the ACTF hosted a 'Children's View Co-production Workshop' in Melbourne, an initiative of NHK as it began to seek outside production partners. It was the first time the workshop had been held outside Japan, and an opportunity to promote the summit. With the assistance of Sachiko Kodaira, a young woman I had met at Prix Jeunesse who worked in educational television for NHK, we persuaded a Japanese philanthropic foundation to support Asian producers to meet the cost of travelling to the summit.²⁵⁶

I worked hard to identify relevant participants from the developing world generally, as the Asian region, Africa and Latin America did not normally attend markets and conferences run by the dominant Western media. But I was determined this would be a truly global summit. Wherever I went I searched for potential speakers and

panellists and for much of 1994 I worked on a program to ensure that it covered the full range of relevant topics and would reach those who were willing to become active in the cause of children's production around the world.

The summit's objectives were easily defined—and commonly shared by those with ideals rather than vested interests—in those political times. We were meeting to achieve a greater understanding of developments in children's television around the world; raise the status of children's programming; draw to the attention of key players in broadcasting the importance of issues relating to children; agree on a charter of guiding principles; ensure that the provision of programs for children would be guaranteed as the communications revolution proceeded; and assist the developing world to provide opportunities for children's programming.

Topics for discussion would include the rights of children in relation to television; the communications revolution; the educational opportunities that convergence would provide; the responsibilities of broadcasters to children; children's television in the new technological age; the role of regulation—different models; the future of independent production; cultural protection versus free-market philosophies; trans-national TV—who gains, who loses; how children's programs are financed; existing international models in co-production and program exchange; sponsorship and merchandising—children as consumers; children as a special audience—what research can tell us; the violence debate; and finally the role of festivals and awards in developing children's television. It was to be the most comprehensive meeting to address the global issues of children's programming held anywhere in the world.

For me the most important issue was the protection of cultural identity in the face of multi-channel television, where cable and satellite services would span the world, competing with local public and commercial broadcasters. We had overcome the cultural cringe in Australia, much had been achieved, yet a new threat was looming. Nations all over the world were beginning to express the same concerns, but there was also opportunity: theoretically, global television could play a very significant role in developing respect and tolerance for other cultures.

The multi-channel era had the capacity to offer the best of

both worlds and with the proliferation of niche services, such as special children's channels, programs could be made of particular benefit to children. The greatest danger of global television was that of homogenisation and consumerism. If the multi-channel world of the future was dominated by a small number of providers, the window on the world might actually look out on a very narrow and monotonous landscape where programs everywhere would look similar, follow the same formats, originate in the same place. In practice, global television would be no more than a euphemism for US television. Locally produced children's programs were particularly vulnerable in countries where there was no established infrastructure or regulatory framework to support local production. Australia had a head-start and I did not want to see that lost.²⁵⁷

More than seventy nations were represented at the summit and 637 delegates took part. They arrived from all over the globe—several unannounced, from countries which required entry visas, but the Immigration Department moved quickly to facilitate their entry into Australia.

THE ABC'S HEAD of television, Paddy Conroy, had been extraordinarily helpful to me in preparations for the summit. The ABC would host a grand opening-night dinner with a spectacular Australian setting which had a glass billabong as its centrepiece. The national broadcaster would also broadcast a debate on violence hosted by Geraldine Doogue and would host a golf day. Paddy had sent Claire Henderson to liaise with Foundation staff during the week of preparations. Suzie Campbell told me in passing that the organising staff had nicknamed Claire 'Vinegar Tits' because they found her acerbic and difficult. I registered that this could only mean trouble in the future.

Three weeks before the summit I discovered I had been conned: as part of the ABC's new commercially oriented agenda, the summit was to be used as a launching pad for Australian Information Media (AIM), a joint venture between the ABC, Fairfax Holdings and Cox Entertainment, a US cable company which included the Nickelodeon Children's Channel. Nickelodeon's president, Geraldine Laybourne, was attending the summit as an invited speaker but her visit would coincide with promotion for the new ABC channel which would

carry the Nickelodeon brand. I was angry. Neither the ABC nor Laybourne—with whom I was in regular contact—had given any hint that the summit would be used as a platform to promote their commercial partnership.

Kim Williams, my former colleague on the board of the FFC, had been appointed by David Hill to head the ABC's new pay television venture and this partnership was his brainchild. He presented me with a *fait accompli*. I asked to see him, but he was 'very busy'. He thought it better that I meet with Nickelodeon's Karen Flischel, who had been recruited to run the new channel in Australia. Nickelodeon US had a distinct house style and brand, and their own press release confirmed that this deal with the ABC would involve a plethora of merchandising spin-offs. The proposed partnership had serious implications for Australian children's television production and our national broadcaster. This proposed partnership threatened the ABC's strategic independence in the media marketplace. How could the ABC claim any independence when it was planning to get into bed with some of the biggest players in the media landscape?

The future of children's programming was part of a much bigger problem. Everything I had feared about the future of children's television in Australia was about to happen, but much more quickly than I expected. I had spent five years attempting to sell Australian programs to Nickelodeon without success; our shows were not deemed acceptable for the US but their shows were now to be the staple for our kids on our public broadcaster. There was an unanswered question about how the pay TV deal would affect free-to-air programming. Why had the ABC not offered the ACTF an opportunity to joint venture in program development with them? The ABC's purpose was meant to be to guard the quality and service that preserved and celebrated the best of Australian culture, not to be a vehicle for a US brand. But the ABC had lost its way.

I rang Janet Holmes à Court, ready to explode. I was going public to condemn the venture and I wanted her beside me. She wanted to talk to another board member, Steve Vizard, to ask his advice. I predicted that his response would be to say nothing, so I said I would go this issue alone. Janet talked to Steve (he wanted to lie low) but nevertheless she agreed to speak with the media.

I branded the venture as ‘TV McDonald’s’. I had a copy of Nickelodeon’s press release—intended for distribution in the US only—which announced proudly that their ‘mission was to deliver our products, our brand and our franchises to new audiences’. The ABC–Nickelodeon plan was that, for nine hours a day within a twelve-hour schedule—three-quarters of the time—on ABC pay television, the channel would swamp our children with US programs. The ABC board’s planned undercover sale of the channel was a commercially driven scandal. Ms Laybourne was reported to be ‘shocked that Australia had not welcomed the deal ... Our intentions are pure ... Dr Edgar has high-minded ideas’. She attempted to occupy the high ground, writing to me saying that she ‘found it extraordinarily discouraging given all we [Nickelodeon] had done to support your event’.²⁵⁸

Geraldine Laybourne hadn’t even registered until now that there might be an issue. She apparently expected Australia to welcome Nickelodeon’s cultural imperialism with gratitude; not understanding the local politics of the situation, she believed the announcement would be a highlight of the summit. In fact, the announcement was a political hot potato. As Phillip Adams wrote:

The Summit is clearly a tribute to the esteem in which the ACTF is held around the world. It’s a pity that esteem didn’t extend to involving the ACTF in the planning of Australia’s first Channel for kids. Joan Ganz Cooney, boss of the Children’s Television Workshop, which produces *Sesame Street*, told me, ‘Australia absorbs US culture like blotting paper’. She was perfectly right. Now, 25 years later, Geraldine Laybourne, President of Nickelodeon, says ‘Australia is an attractive market for Nickelodeon because the attitudes and sensibilities of Australian kids are in tune with Nickelodeon. We believe Australia would love Nickelodeon and we know Nickelodeon will love Australia.’ In the multi-media bedroom, the ACTF must feel like a chamber pot.²⁵⁹

John Morris, chair of the FFC and former deputy chair of the ACTF board, also bought into the debate, saying the ABC–Nickelodeon deal was ‘curious’ and expressing concern that Australian children would be force-fed a Nickelodeon format.²⁶⁰ Kim

Williams was furious. Paddy Conroy said that my concerns were ‘without basis’. The issue fuelled the debate about branding, financing children’s programs and the role of merchandising in programming at the summit. Claire Henderson said it was too simplistic to blame American animation and merchandising for the reduction in program variety.²⁶¹

The link, however, was indisputable. Throughout the world, children’s television producers faced considerable difficulty in financing high-quality children’s programs. Children’s producers had traditionally had to contend with lower budgets than those in other areas of programming and had to look for ways to supplement their funding. In Australia these methods included government subsidy and the stimulation of broadcaster demand through regulatory requirements. The other option was co-production, but increasingly an emphasis was being placed on merchandising revenue. This was the easiest option, and particularly suited to the US commercial, competitive system.

THERE IS NOTHING wrong with making money from secondary exploitation of programs—the *Lift-Off* television series was at the heart of a broad educational and Outreach package—but certain principles needed to be observed. The program should be central, based on the special developmental needs of children; any attached merchandising should serve the same principles, and music, videos and books were desirable by-products of quality children’s television. There were other considerations. Live-action children’s drama—the heart of storytelling—was not a genre primarily dependent on merchandising; there had been no live action drama in Australia produced specifically for children before the regulations were enacted. With the growing dependence on merchandising for financing and the Australian Film Finance Corporation being driven by market attachment to products, this genre was under threat. The public broadcaster was the most effective means to guarantee a diverse, non-commercially oriented range of programming for children, including live-action drama, news and current affairs, and magazine formats. Merchandise-driven formats should have no place on a public broadcaster.

The United Kingdom had long enjoyed the tradition of quality children's programming, which did not come about by chance but was due to the commitment of public resources to fund children's programs with an annual children's programming budget for the BBC of approximately sixty million pounds a year. Commercial broadcasters in the UK were also required, as a condition of their licence, to provide children's educational programming among their public service responsibilities. The message was clear: if governments were serious about wanting to provide quality programs to a nation's children they must be prepared to commit substantial resources to children's production and to legislate requiring such programs to be broadcast. The commercial sector would not do this on its own. And if the public broadcaster chose to abnegate its role, the ability to regulate the commercial sector would be seriously undermined.

At the time of the summit, children were already defined as among the biggest consumers in the United States, with children aged six to thirteen buying almost nine billion dollars' worth of merchandise each year and influencing other buyers to spend an estimated fourteen billion. Given these figures, it was not surprising that some commercial operators were approaching children not as an audience with special needs but as a market, and increasingly one of global proportions. The summit exposed concerns about the type of merchandise promoted by some of these programs—toy weapons to be used in violent play, superhero costumes, products directed towards boys which were violent and sexist in their themes. Character-driven series, which were flooding the market, were an advertisement for the sale of items emblazoned with the character. Trans-national capitalism in the culture industries was aggressively selling to toddlers toys that promoted gender, class and ethnic stereotypes. Children were being treated as a commodity market and the opportunity to reach them with programming that would develop their own sense of being within a social group, and develop their public consciences, was being lost. Australia's place in the regulatory sunshine was under serious threat.

THERE WAS FALL-OUT from the summit, for me and others. Although the debate at the summit itself was only part of the problem, Kim

Williams never spoke to me again. The deal between Fairfax, Cox Communication and the ABC to develop a cable business collapsed, so we did not see the partnership between Nickelodeon and the ABC flourish.²⁶² Geraldine Laybourne told Margaret Loesch, president of Fox Children's Network, that she (Geraldine) 'had blown it', and once she left the summit she never spoke to me again either.

The ABC was generally acknowledged to be in a mess; within a year, the federal government would make it the subject of a public inquiry, headed by the businessman Bob Mansfield.²⁶³ Soon after the summit, Paddy Conroy resigned from the corporation under pressure—there were more issues at stake for him than the Nickelodeon deal, all related to commercial sponsorship.

PADDY CONROY AND Nick Collis-George had been caught up in a dispute about sponsorship of ABC infotainment programs. The ABC's guidelines insisted that the ABC retain editorial control of all its programs to ensure that its public credibility was not compromised by commercial interests. Concerns were being expressed in the media in the early 1990s that external funding sources, including the Law Foundation, the Food Foundation and the Business Council of Australia, were influencing program content.²⁶⁴

Professor Mark Armstrong, who was now chairman of the ABC board, engaged George Palmer QC to enquire into whether the ABC's guidelines on sponsorship had been breached. Although his report was not made public, Conroy resigned. Penny Chapman, the ABC's head of drama, was promoted to head of television, over Nick Collis-George (then head of production). They had been in conflict and Collis-George saw the writing on the wall. He accepted a pay-out and left the organisation. Claire Henderson was appointed head of children's television, and the ABC's relationship with the ACTF deteriorated sharply.

Claire Henderson was no fan of mine. I knew from Nick Collis-George and others that she did not like *Lift-Off*. She had been an executive producer of *Play School* and her commitment was to that program. Over two years from July 1994, I would fight a losing battle to keep *Lift-Off* on air. Personal antipathy to me was only part of the problem. David Hill and Paddy Conroy had been driving the

ABC in the direction of commercial partnerships, reducing in-house production to work with the independent industry, and building ABC Enterprises to increase revenue from ancillary products. It was the extent of this commercial push that brought them into conflict with the board.

Collis-George (at Paddy Conroy's direction) had attempted to sit down with the *Play School* producers to examine the merchandising potential of *Play School*. He met with implacable resistance. He and Claire had visited preschools to check on their use of ABC programming and found that while *Play School* was not viewed, the *Bananas in Pyjamas* song, featured on *Play School*, was popular. He instructed Claire to come up with a program based around the song which would become the focus of a suite of merchandising. He wanted suited characters that could copy the success of *Johnson and Friends*—a preschool series from Film Australia shown on the ABC. Character merchandising was the driving force; the underlying philosophy, consumerism. Nick went to MIP TV with Fred Gaffney (who licensed character-based merchandising in Australia) to check out the market response and work out how to sell such a project as *Bananas in Pyjamas*.²⁶⁵

Collis-George was successful on every front. He got rid of the 'wombats' in the Children's Department; the deals with independent producers increased (the ACTF output deal a part of this); and ABC production was wound back. With the help of Helena Harris, Claire Henderson produced *Bananas in Pyjamas*, which accomplished exactly what Collis-George wanted. The program would have had no legs without the merchandising. The children's buyers at the MIP market judged *Bananas in Pyjamas* a poor-quality program, but the suite of merchandise appealed.²⁶⁶

This was a time of radical change for children's television worldwide. It was led by the extraordinary turnaround in animation produced by Disney. Walt Disney's brother Roy had struggled to keep animation alive in the company throughout the 1970s and 1980s; it was regarded as archaic and too expensive, suited only to kids' matinees. Yet Disney's new formula—high-concept, low-budget, live-action movies—was not working at the box office. Then, in the late 1980s, new software which allowed more flexibility in the production of animation resulted in *The Little Mermaid* (1989). It was the best

animated Disney film seen for more than thirty years and grossed an astonishing US\$110 million at the US box office and US\$222 million worldwide. Disney had found the way to make up for its failures in live action. It moved straight on to produce *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*. *Beauty and the Beast* earned \$145 million, making it the third-highest grossing film of the year, and sold twenty-two million video cassettes, more than doubling the sales of *Little Mermaid*.²⁶⁷

In large part due to its innovative animation, the Walt Disney Company reported a record profit of US\$1.4 billion in 1992.²⁶⁸ The Disney corporation moved into theatrical productions based on these films with equal success and demonstrated the revenue-raising potential of licensing with publishing, music, videos, games and any children's product that could carry the logo. The impacts of this success story were felt globally.

From then on, success with a children's program was based on character merchandising as the starting point. In programs like *Barney*, *Postman Pat*, *Bob the Builder*, *Thomas the Tank Engine*, as well as the BBC's *Teletubbies* and Channel 9's *Hi-5*, merchandising, rather than education or quality ideas, was the *raison d'être*. Enterprising producers scoured the classic children's literature looking for characters who could become television stars.

IN JULY 1994, Claire Henderson had been present as acting head of children's and education television when I discussed difficulties with *Lift-Off*'s scheduling with Julie Steiner, head of ABC Enterprises. Steiner was concerned about the *Lift-Off* publishing program as the TV program had been taken off air in September 1993 and book sales were falling. I pointed out that if *Bananas in Pyjamas* were off air for six months those sales would fall as well. It did not matter whether the program was *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Power Rangers*, *The Smurfs*, *The Muppets*, or *Bananas*; if a show was not on air, sales dropped. I asked the ABC for a regular weekly slot for *Lift-Off*—as Paddy Conroy had discussed with me—in order to support all the elements involved and maintain momentum; the future of the Outreach program and the educational objectives were absolutely dependent on this kind of scheduling support. I wanted to know the ABC's plans for future screening of *Lift-Off*.²⁶⁹

I was given the run-around, ever so politely. The ABC was very committed to *Lift-Off*, but there would be a gap of some months before *Lift-Off 2* would air, once a week on Sunday mornings, to coincide with the World Summit on Television for Children that I was organising for March 1995.²⁷⁰ It was an answer with a respectable rationale but it did not address the main question of regular weekly scheduling, and there were no plans to repeat the first series of fifty-two episodes.

Early in December 1994, I had received a letter from Howard Gardner with an article from the *New York Times* describing important changes in the program content of *Sesame Street*. The program's new initiative was based on Gardner's research into multiple intelligences. New segments would promote learning experiences related to the different intelligences in a fresh approach, without the kinetic tricks of the trade used by *Sesame Street* which had been criticised for years as truncating children's attention through heavy-handed rote learning. *Sesame Street* producers were concerned about the dated nature of their well travelled program. I was not surprised to see them attempt to change their philosophical approach, given their concerns about the impact *Lift-Off* might make on their market.²⁷¹

Sesame Street was in its twenty-seventh season, with more than a hundred million preschoolers in 120 countries as viewers. Many of those countries designed their own studio content to give the program a familiar cultural context; Australia's national broadcaster, the ABC, simply took the American version and replayed it. Although the American market remained impenetrable from Australia, our program *Lift-Off*'s objectives were well in advance of anything else being done around the world for the early childhood cohort.

Some months after *Lift-Off 2* had gone to air, I wrote to the ABC again. I pointed out that ten hours a week were devoted to episodes of *Sesame Street* and requested that one of those hours be devoted to *Lift-Off*. 'Alongside what the ABC does for *Sesame Street*,' I said, '*Lift-Off* is very much underused'. Claire responded that she would speak to me when she returned to work mid-January, wished me a great Christmas and good luck for *Lift-Off Live*.²⁷²

In January, she wrote to me reiterating the number of times *Lift-Off* had been on air to date. She said there was 'a great deal of material competing for limited air time' and that they 'had to retain an

independent view in matters of scheduling'. There was no mention of ten hours of *Sesame Street* being shown every week on the ABC.²⁷³

So Janet and I sought a meeting with ABC managing director Brian Johns and Penny Chapman, head of television, to discuss the future of *Lift-Off*. The negotiation over *Lift-Off* was part of a bigger picture. An output agreement with the Foundation had been put in place, with a handshake and a public announcement by David Hill, amounting to a million dollars a year until the year 2000. *The Genie from Down Under* and *L'il Elvis Jones and the Truckstoppers* were the programs the Foundation had locked in on its production agenda as future agreed purchases by the ABC, but *Lift-Off* was part of this deal. I sent the article from the *New York Times* to Penny Chapman, pointing out that *Sesame Street* was now attempting to do something that we had already done in Australia. I asked for any proposal which would give the program a continuous on-air presence in order to keep the educational materials, publications and other *Lift-Off* activities in the public eye.²⁷⁴

Time went by. On 12 June, following a meeting of the Foundation's board, Janet wrote to Brian Johns expressing the board's dismay:

There is clearly an unwillingness from the present administration and the ABC to support *Lift-Off* with a regular timeslot ... Quite apart from the cultural concerns, it also makes no economic sense to us why the ABC paid \$520 000 for unlimited runs to the series over two years yet has only screened the series once during that time. We would have thought that the ABC would want to get value for money out of the Australian programming that it buys ...

Johns did not reply, but a month later Penny Chapman wrote, claiming that *Lift-Off* had been overexposed, it was displacing other programs; *Sesame Street* was not 'dated'; they had 130 episodes in their inventory, with 390 new programs coming to them in the next three years. There were no new series of *Lift-Off* in production to replace the old programs, while new episodes of *Sesame Street* were delivered to the ABC each year. Chapman used the argument of the ABC's public credibility and editorial independence from commercial pressures as expressed in its guidelines. Her letter continued:

There is another matter which causes me not a little concern. As I am sure you know, ABC Children's TV comes under constant pressure from producers, suppliers, licensees and licensors to schedule programs in ways beneficial to them ... As you know the ABC has an obligation to independence and integrity as outlined in Section 13 of the ABC editorial guidelines. These guidelines state that, 'It is crucial to the public credibility of the ABC that it is not influenced by or perceived to be influenced by or dependent upon commercial or other interests'. The guidelines go on to direct program makers to ask themselves, 'Will the scheduling or content of the program be influenced by the external funding source, could there reasonably be a perception of influence?' Answering these questions in the affirmative can lead to a program being deemed unsuitable for broadcast on the ABC. None of this is to say that we are not committed to *Lift-Off* or indeed to the valuable work of the ACTF.²⁷⁵

The ABC lawyers had taken a good look at this correspondence, but the high ground the ABC was taking, given its development of *Bananas in Pyjamas*, was galling. I replied, correcting errors Penny Chapman had made in her interpretation of the ratings and her list of video sales, and re-sending the article from the *New York Times* on the outdated nature of *Sesame Street*.²⁷⁶ Why did the ABC prefer *Sesame Street* over a daring home-grown early-childhood program which has been so commended for its educational approach, I asked? And why did they persist with their own productions (*Bananas in Pyjamas* and *Play School*) only, when they could add a new Australian product seen as groundbreaking by the early childhood experts and already in their library?²⁷⁷

I knew part of the answer. The ABC had no interest in a project with the broad-ranging educational philosophy of *Lift-Off* because they did not own it; it was owned by the investors and the ACTF. Therefore the returns from all merchandising in *Lift-Off* did not go to the ABC except for the commission taken by ABC Enterprises. With *Sesame Street* they had high-volume, cheap programming, filling many hours of the schedule, leaving them to spend the resources they had on their own in-house productions. With *Bananas in Pyjamas*,

and indeed with *Play School*, the ABC was the sole beneficiary. There was no breaching of their editorial guidelines for their own products, apparently.

It was four months before I got this response from Penny Chapman, on 12 December 1996: 'I am sure you understand the decisions regarding the scheduling of all programs broadcast by ABC television need to be made with total impartiality'. The ABC would not commit to a renewal of the *Lift-Off 1* series and would continue to run *Lift-Off 2* and *Lift-Off Game Show* sporadically for the duration of the rights period for those series. That was my Christmas present.

I found the decision shocking. Claire Henderson and Penny Chapman reflected the new ABC order. It was nonsense to quote commercial guidelines in defence of their stone-walling tactics. The Foundation was not a commercial producer; it was an arm of government policy and support for children's television. It was not owned by shareholders; it was a not-for-profit company whose directors were paid no fee. The extensive work and effort contributed by the community, and the educational backing for *Lift-Off* had been largely voluntary. The same argument of editorial independence and integrity would later be used to censor *Round the Twist*.

It is possible there was pay back for the Nickelodeon affair involved in the ABC's handling of *Lift-Off* but I believe the main opposition came from the *Play School* team. Whatever the cause, the ABC's handling of *Lift-Off* was a national tragedy. The Outreach program and publishing program with Curriculum Corporation died. Seventy-eight episodes of *Lift-Off* sit unaired since their initial ABC screenings, a wasted educational resource which is still ahead of its time. With continued ABC support, *Lift-Off* could have become a leading program in the world for the education of children. It was an experiment no other country had attempted. The program could not survive without support from its home base. Claire Henderson lives on at the ABC. And B1 and B2 are our Australian television icons, stamped on everything from bed linen to baby bottles and advertised twice daily on weekdays by the public broadcaster.

The ABC continues to acquire packages of programs to merchandise. On 12 December 2005, the ABC announced its 'Children's Special Television Project 2'. The corporation was looking for a program suitable for a preschool audience of two to four year olds

with 'broad international potential in respect of both television program sales and ancillary rights exploitation'. In 2007 they are due to release *Five Minutes More*—'65 x 5 minutes of programming following the adventures of five lovable toy friends'. New ABC children's production will be character-driven programming where budgets are raised and profits are determined by merchandise. And no one seems to notice any more that the public broadcaster's programs of choice are designed to foster children's consumerism.

When the board of the ABC took the tough decision late in 1994 to remove David Hill and Paddy Conroy, Phillip Adams used his column in the *Weekend Australian* to publish a passionate open letter to ABC chairman Mark Armstrong. It concluded:

I beseech you in the bowels of Christ to look for vision, for enthusiasm, for courage.

Let the masses of managers you have already got do the managing and let the accountants do the adding up.

But give the ABC, and Australia, someone capable of exciting and inspiring us all.²⁷⁸

Australia has been waiting for more than a decade for leadership from the ABC. To say that more kids watch the ABC than watch commercial television simply means there is a vacuum at channels 7, 9 and 10. The ABC is the public broadcaster with an important role. Television remains an influential teacher that could profoundly enrich or diminish the quality of children's lives. Children are being taught through television programs made specifically for them to demand, spend and consume before they understand the concept of earning, or paying for their toys and the things they want. Children are no longer treated as a special audience with needs that television has great potential to develop; they are a market. There is no ethical basis to the consumerism we are now teaching young children, and the ABC is a leader in the game with its licensing.

Meanwhile, forty years after it first aired, *Play School* retains its unique status and was admitted to the Hall of Fame at the Logies in 2006. *Play School* producers still maintain that it is the only program to achieve a one-on-one relationship with the child. The ABC is advancing backwards into the future with the application of knowledge about the development of young children stalled, on

the one hand, while we educate them as consumers on the other. No one or two programs can do the important job required for the effective development of children in their early years.²⁷⁹

IN A *LIFT-OFF* workshop at Lorne in the early 1990s, Garth Boomer had scrawled the following verse. It aptly described our dilemma:

Our Country?

I love a boring country,
A land of dull grey minds
Of mediocre media
Of windows blocked by blinds
I love her toneless voices
I love her certainty
Her lack of speculation
The tired, bland land for me!

I love a laughing country
A land of Wakadoos
A land of searching brainpower
Of exponential views
I love her far horizons
I love her novelty
Her artistry and energy
The *Lift-Off* land for me!

Chris Neal, the music co-ordinator on *Lift-Off*, sent me a Christmas message in 2005. He had been talking to two young men who were helping regenerate the bush near his home in Avalon. Chris told me:

Scott mentioned he used to love watching kids' TV, even when he was way too old to do so. I naturally mentioned *Lift-Off*, and away he went ... hummed and whistled the ENTIRE theme. He then went on to say ... 'it was really out there ... great concepts and characters ... loved the little doll with no face ... loved the way it was used ... etc. etc. It blew me away.' I pointed out that he is in his thirties and he said, 'I know. I know ... it's a bit of a guilty pleasure, but I really enjoyed it!'

How many Scotts are out there?

15

The Independent Producers

'Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to, only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer.'

—Adam Smith, 1723–1790

WHILE THE ABC WAS busy taking the public broadcaster down the path of the commercialisation of children's program content and planning to use the World Summit on Television for Children to publicise its cause, the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) was planning to announce an increased drama quota. In a blow to the Australian commercial networks, the ABA made a dramatic announcement at the summit: over the next three years the amount of children's television that networks must broadcast would be doubled from sixteen to thirty-two hours per annum, with eight hours of repeat drama required. The quota would increase in the following years: to twenty-four hours of first release children's drama in 1996, twenty-eight hours in 1997 and thirty-two in 1998. This was the final stage of the ABA's long-running review of Australian content.

The acting chairman, Peter Webb, said the proposed changes would allow the local production industry more scope to achieve the critical mass of talent necessary to be a player in new media development and to play its part in challenging Australian children. The ABA's review had confirmed that 'Australian parents want their children to have access to quality programming. They understand the need for their children to be given a window into Australia and its Aboriginal origins, its cultural diversity and mores, its natural features and its place in the world'.²⁸⁰

The ABA also announced that it would co-ordinate an international research forum which would exchange information world-wide on children and television. The forum was to be a co-operative initiative involving regulators, broadcasters, producers and academics. The ABA would set up a database and proposed a structure for research to be undertaken through regulators in Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom and United States. I was encouraged by these initiatives. However, I was well seasoned by now to the smell of trouble, and I could see the problems that a doubling of the quota would provoke.

Since 1988, the FFC had funded thirty-six children's drama productions, representing 312 hours of television. In the previous financial year they had invested a quarter of their budget in children's television drama which amounted to twenty million dollars within a total children's production budget of nearly thirty million dollars. As a member of its board I knew the FFC was stretched to its limit and, without additional funds, would not be able to finance these new children's quota requirements; funding was becoming more and more competitive, with new producers entering the field. Inevitably some of these people would be denied funds for their programs, and with some of them looking no further than the cash in their pockets and willing to do a deal at any price, I became a target, though I was always pushing for better funding across the board, not just for ACTF programs.

The options for the networks were to either call the government's bluff on regulation or to force down the quality of children's programming by buying any program with the lowest possible price as the only condition to fulfil their quota requirements. Such programming would not be saleable on the international market. There

was pressure on the FFC to approve cheap programming and pressure on the ABA to classify it C. The problem of financing children's programs was high on the summit agenda.

Debate at the world summit was lively on all issues—children's rights, regulation, the effects of violence, merchandising, indigenous programming—with concern and confusion expressed about the impact of the growing 'super-information highway'. New technologies were seen as producing fundamental transformations in patterns of thought, in social interactions and in the relationships between social groups and between nations. Chris Vonwiller, director of interactive multimedia services at Telstra, predicted accurately: 'Kids will take the technologies of the communications revolution for granted. They will use them with unselfconscious ease, and with a level of skill that derives from early and prolonged exposure to what is to us at best a second and laboriously acquired language. They will also take for granted a richer communications world'. Bruce Gyngell warned of 'the highly dubious, if not downright repellent, values of the virtual world'.²⁸¹

On the final evening of the summit, at a dinner hosted by the Nine network—they had contributed \$45 000—we staged a circus as the floor show. I was sitting next to Bruce Gyngell and he asked me how much the full evening would cost. It was \$75 000. 'Send me the bill before the end of the week,' he said. He was leaving Nine to return to the United Kingdom. The account was in the mail the next day, and Bruce cleared the payment before he left. This was the only money the Foundation ever got past Kerry Packer. Try as Bruce did, Channel 9 executives never approved an ACTF program. Even Bruce was surprised at the strength of the internal opposition to me. I remained *persona non grata* for two decades because I had fought for the children's Standards, and the regulatory requirements got up Kerry Packer's nose. The man who sought to minimise his tax would minimise payments for programs to meet the children's quota requirements. The Nine network was the most aggressive in holding out against paying prices that the FFC regarded as the minimum acceptable pre-sale for a children's program.

I RECEIVED A STANDING ovation at the final session of the summit and the ABA initiatives were front page news next day. I was well satisfied with the outcomes of the summit but utterly exhausted. I thought that maybe now I could get some rest and stop shaking, a symptom of my dysphonia which was worse with excitement and lack of sleep. The advocates of children's programming worldwide had begun to work together, to speak out collectively to try to ensure that children's programming would survive the advent of new technology and trans-national telecasting, and Australia was on the mind of everyone with an interest in production of children's television programs: every independent producer in Australia could benefit from the exposure. But that benefit was not all they were seeking.

Three further summits were initiated at the Melbourne summit. The BBC and Channel 4 agreed to host jointly a second summit in the United Kingdom in 1998. An Asian summit on child rights and the media was to be held in 1996; and a summit of the Americas was slated for the year 2000.²⁸²

Meanwhile the European Children's Television Centre agreed to host a meeting in Greece in August 1995 to discuss a strategic alliance between international groups, and those initiating the proposed summits would attend.

The Melbourne summit made significant progress towards an agreement on an international charter. Anna Home asked the conference to endorse the principle of a children's television charter intended as a guideline of minimum requirements which all organisations should be prepared to support. The charter could not be an enforceable document; rather, it was intended as an inspirational statement of principles which might serve as support in future discussions with broadcasters, regulators and governments. After lively debate it was endorsed in principle by delegates from more than sixty countries to be taken to a further meeting in Europe two months later to devise the final version.

A number of training commitments were made: John Willis, Channel 4's director of programs, announced a bursary scheme for two producers from developing countries to visit the United Kingdom for production and programming experience; Margaret Loesch, Fox Children's president, announced that Fox would sponsor individuals from around the world as summer interns for production

experience at Fox Children's network; the Australian Children's Television Foundation offered to provide an attachment from the Asian region to each of its future productions.

Many new collaborations were born in Melbourne between broadcasters and production companies. The ACTF announced that we would be producing, with European partners, France Animation and Ravensburger (a German company), a 26-part animation series *L'il Elvis Jones and the Truckstoppers*, and a working party to scope the possibilities for collaborating in the future was formed between the Foundation and Telstra.²⁸³ The Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union expanded the membership of its program item-exchange meeting and Wharf Cable in Hong Kong began an item exchange with China Central Television. Film Australia's preschool series *Johnson and Friends*, produced by Ron Saunders, was bought by Margaret Loesch for the US Fox network, a coup for Film Australia and one of the first Australian programs to break into the US market.

The objectives of the first world summit had clearly been met. Children's television was on the international agenda. There was a realisation that we must work together, talk together and speak out collectively if children's television was to survive the era of new technologies and trans-national telecasting. Participants began the process of alerting politicians, opinion leaders and parents to the urgent need to protect the integrity and independence of children's television in every country. And it set in train a series of summits that would make sure the debate about what our children watch—and how it will influence them in the future—would continue.

I WAS DETERMINED. I was unrelenting. I knew what I wanted to achieve and I went after it as hard as I could. I demanded much of the people around me and I demanded more of myself. I learnt early in my life that I divided people: there were those who were attracted to me and inspired, and those who clearly despised and feared me. I learnt not to try to accommodate the latter: they were a waste of my time and they dragged me down as they put obstacle after obstacle in the way. It was impossible to appease the ambitious, the self-interested, the insecure, the lazy, the mediocrities who thought success came about for reasons other than tough, logging hard work, and who thought

the system owed them a privileged career. Ten years of university politics had taught me all I needed to know about personal rivalries, jealousies, back-stabbing and destructive behaviour.

During the years I spent arguing for proper children's standards and quotas, the opponents of these measures spared no effort to bring me down. When I moved to the Foundation and saw the seemingly insurmountable problems I was facing, I knew I would have no chance of bringing about significant change if I held armchair chats to convince everyone around me of my objectives. I sorted out who would help and who would undermine and I wasted no time on the road blockers. I listened to those I respected, who held differing, but principled opinions, and learnt from them just as I trust they learned from me. That was why the Children's Program Committee had worked so well, and why the members, who came from very different philosophical persuasions, were able to agree and develop a strategy to set in place standards that laid the basis of an independent children's production industry.

From the outset there had been objections to the Foundation's role in production but there was never any doubt in my mind, and the minds of those who established the Foundation, that production was its purpose. If we had had to rely solely on the work of independent producers to achieve success, Australian children's programming would never have made the impact necessary to achieve ongoing financial commitment nationally and a reputation and market internationally. Serving the child audience was our purpose, industry support was a by-product. Independent production is a very tough game indeed; producers face a constant struggle to get their programs produced. The strength of their commitment to their projects is usually the decisive factor in determining which programs are eventually made; by absolute necessity they had to be driven and in Australia, if they were to succeed, they needed to be visionary. The most successful film makers to come out of Australia have been great advocates for the industry, and those advocates include producers, directors, writers and actors. Advocacy is a necessary role for Australians in the film and television industry and we who advocate carry along on our coat tails the wannabes who never make an important cultural mark.

The introduction of tax incentives to help film makers get their films financed introduced a number of rogues and opportunists to

the industry, who cared less about the product than the financial return. This was a major reason why Paul Keating established the Film Finance Corporation but, even with the FFC, if a producer could get a deal together, regardless of the merits of the project, the project would be financed. So we saw a new breed of dealmakers enter the production field in Australia—some with a background in law, who understood the intricacies of putting a deal together better than the creative talents for whom the deal was far less important than the idea—seeking funds for any project they could get up. It had been necessary to put the industry on a business footing, but with that discipline came a pollution of the cultural values that had driven the revival of the industry in the 1970s.

The ACTF supported independent producers through its script development and production investment program, but the purpose of this program was to provide incentives for good ideas and ultimately diverse programming for the child audience—it was not about creating jobs. By the time of the World Summit, the Foundation had provided script development or production investment to seventy-five independent projects, eleven of which had been produced. The Foundation required writers who applied for funding to have an independent producer attached to their project; we also required applicants to obtain interest in the project from a network as soon as possible. Most producers were unable to meet this requirement: a drama quota of sixteen hours per network a year provided an opportunity for a pool of about eight producers maximum, but all felt they were entitled to draw on government funds. The networks played on this competition and inexperienced players desperate to be film makers were willing to accept any price offered.

The Foundation's success in the international marketplace had opened doors for other Australian producers and we were frequently told so by producers at international markets. The ACTF was the first Australian children's producer to make sales to the BBC and by the time of the summit the BBC was buying a wide range of Australian children's drama from the independent producers. The ACTF was one of the first Australian companies to work with two important European-based companies—Ravensburger Film and TV, and Daro Film Distribution. Our programs had been very successful for these distributors so they now worked with a wide range of Australian

producers of children's programs. Overseas broadcasters had been buying ACTF programs for ten years and now had a marked preference for Australian children's material. Production by the ACTF, at one series a year, was certainly not enough to meet demand, so independent producers benefited from our work. I resolutely held to the Foundation's purpose but insisted that every project we undertook should break new ground. This emphasis was lost on those hungry for a bigger piece of the action as they attempted to redefine the Foundation's role or distort and undermine its real achievements. None of these people had been around to help create the industry but they expected to ride the crest and reap the benefits.

The World Summit created an unprecedented opportunity for independent producers to meet broadcasters, distributors and other producers from all over the world. It highlighted the range and quality of children's drama produced in Australia. Independent producers who attended were able to include their work in the video library so that it could be viewed by international delegates. There was a panel session in the program devoted to the subject of Australian independent production, with producers David Field, Jonathan Shiff, Posie Graeme-Evans and John Tatoulis as speakers.

In its own productions the Foundation had worked with many independent producers, including Sandra Alexandra, Jane Ballantyne, Antonia Barnard, Tom Jeffrey, Sandra Levy, Tony Llewellyn-Jones, Richard Mason, Margot McDonald, Julia Overton, Jill Robb and Jane Scott. The Foundation supported aspiring producers, giving opportunities to a number of production managers to achieve their first production credit, and provided opportunities for first-time directors and writers—the directors we had worked with were numerous. Hundreds of individuals had been employed on our productions over the years—from the *Winners* series employing 160 cast and 400 crew, to the first series of *Lift-Off* employing 680 cast and 880 crew, through to *Sky Trackers* which employed forty cast and 100 crew—so any suggestion we did not work with the independent industry was patent nonsense. The facts were: through pursuing our primary purpose—the creation of quality programs for children—the Foundation was a major supporter of the industry as a whole.

Nevertheless, a handful of independent producers considered, for their own reasons, that the Foundation's success meant they were

missing out on money that should rightly be providing them with career opportunities. And I was their target; if they could discredit me then they could discredit the Foundation. These individuals conspired over the next seven years.

ON 8 AUGUST 1995, the ACTF received a courtesy call from Michael Lee's department in Canberra advising our legal officer Paul Walsh that a journalist, Paula Benson, was asking questions about the Foundation's multimedia funding under the Labor Government's Creative Nation initiative. She requested details about the department's performance agreement with the Foundation and information on the history of the ACTF and its objectives. She said she was investigating some concerns that had been raised in relation to the Foundation but did not elaborate.

The next day I learnt that the Nine network's *Sunday* program was intending to produce a segment on the Australian Children's Television Foundation. I wrote to Stephen Rice, the executive producer of *Sunday*, to advise him that I would be leaving for overseas that week and if they wished to speak to anyone on behalf of the Foundation to contact the chairman, Janet Holmes à Court, in my absence. Ross Coulthart, a reporter for the program, subsequently wrote to Janet—with a list of 128 questions.

By that time, I was on the other side of the world, attending a workshop hosted by the European Children's Television Centre on the island of Andros. When Jenny Buckland, general manager of the ACTF, conveyed to me the gist of these questions, darkly alleging corrupt and illegal behaviour on my part, I wept. I was still exhausted by the energy expended in mounting the summit and part of this trip was meant to provide rest, a long way from home. I was happy that Don and one of our daughters were with me. They helped me put this latest attack in perspective.

Janet responded to Coulthart that all questions were quite easily answered but it would naturally take a few days to do so. 'When you have received all the answers to your questions, I would be surprised if you wish to go ahead with the story on the ACTF. However, if you do, the foundation's Deputy Chairman, Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, Steve Vizard and I would be happy to appear on your program.'²⁸⁴

Jenny Buckland responded to all questions asked in writing—except where questions involved commercial-in-confidence information. The questions concerned every aspect of the Foundation's operations and the extent to which the Foundation gave assistance to non-ACTF productions; who were the recipients of funding; how much money the Foundation received from the federal government for the World Summit and from other governments; how much money was spent on administration costs of the Foundation; what was the staff turnover; whether I interviewed all staff; why accountants had left the Foundation; whether we had had a wrongful dismissal claim; what were the terms of the output agreement with the ABC; how the cost of ACTF productions compared with other children's series; what *Lift-Off* had cost per episode; what the total salaries bill for the ACTF was; the total marketing and promotion costs for the ACTF; who determined salary rates; the length of my tenure; my salary; whether I had received remuneration from other sources; whether I was paid as an executive producer through FFC-funded budgets; the number of board meetings held; the names of those who attended; the performance agreement with the federal government; details of funding applications to the FFC; how I avoided conflict of interest between my role as FFC deputy chairman and ACTF director; the link between any other FFC directors and the Foundation; whether any members of my family were employed by the ACTF or related companies; whether my children had ever been employed by the ACTF; whether my husband had ever been employed by the ACTF; whether he had been paid for his work on the Outreach project for *Lift-Off*; the purpose of the Outreach program, what it cost and who paid for it; what systems of accountability the ACTF had for the money received from government; whether I ever flew first class on domestic flights or international flights; what overseas trips had I taken in the last three years; the purpose of those trips; if members of my family accompanied me, whether the ACTF had paid; what was the monthly retainer paid to Howie and Taylor Publicity; the extent to which the ACTF supported independent production; the cost of the Sydney launch of *Lift-Off* and who paid; whether the merchandising of *Lift-Off* was a commercial disaster; whether any of the money provided for *L'il Elvis Jones and the Truckstoppers* was going offshore; etc, etc.

The search for scandal was thorough. A little group had spent a lot of time and brainpower working up their list of comprehensive questions. Janet sent Jenny's long list of responses to Ross Coulthart on 24 August 1995 with the written comment: 'It seems to me that you have already been put to a great deal of trouble by a number of misinformed individuals. If we can assist you any further please let me know'.²⁸⁵ Janet handled the enquiry well and I appreciated her method of response. There was no obligation on the Foundation to answer any such questions from Channel 9.

On 7 September, the receptionist at the Foundation received a call from Fia Cumming of the *Sunday Herald Sun*. She wanted a copy of the Foundation's annual report but had some other questions that she should perhaps ask Ms Edgar herself. She was put through to Glenda Wilson, my PA, who asked what questions were involved in case I needed to get background information. She was told by 'someone', Cumming replied, that Patricia's husband and two daughters were employed by the Foundation. 'Pardon?' said Glenda. 'Is that not correct?' Cumming asked. Glenda replied that Don had worked as a consultant on a couple of occasions and my daughters 'had done the occasional bit of routine stuffing envelopes type work'. Cumming continued with questions about the *Lift-Off* launch, about who was the accountant at the Foundation then and now. At this point Glenda suggested she would send Cumming the annual report and Cumming could speak with me the next day. From that exchange I became aware that the same questions that had been placed in Coulthart's hands were doing the rounds of other journalists in the Canberra press gallery.

The next call was from Trevor Blainey, the ACTF's former financial manager.²⁸⁶ He told Glenda he had received a message via Jonathan Shiff's office (one of the independent producers) asking him to ring Erin Broderick from the *Times*.

Broderick told Trevor that she had been sent questions, anonymously, about the Foundation; that the questions had gone to a number of places and Trevor was one of the ex-employees listed whom journalists could contact. She asked Trevor if he would speak to them about the Foundation and he responded that he had nothing to say. She said it could be 'off the record'. He replied that he assumed that they would only want him to comment if he had

something adverse to say, and he had nothing adverse to say about the Foundation.

On 20 September, Coulthart replied to Janet's letter of a month earlier:

I appreciate it is a confronting and worrying experience to have to respond to journalistic enquiries. You have addressed the bulk of our concerns. In the absence of any substantive evidence from any of the many people who think there's something sus' with ACTF, I felt we owe it to you and the Board to let you know that we're not doing a story. Quite frankly I don't think that it would be fair to air grievances that are, we suspect, the product more of an aggressive management style at ACTF than any impropriety.

He said the questions had been sent to them 'by an anonymous complainant' and commented on 'the resentment' and 'ill-feeling' he had encountered in investigating the story. Coulthart saw the issue as one of unfair competition: the Foundation was funded by the government to compete with independent producers for government funds from the FFC, and was then able to sell its product to the government-funded ABC. But he did not have the dirt for a *Sunday* story, and it never went to air.

It was not at all difficult for me to work out who was involved in this campaign. It was a measure of those people that, when presented with the opportunity to argue their case, they were unprepared to reveal themselves on the *Sunday* program in support of their allegations against me and the Foundation. When the government in Canberra finally changed in 1996, this core of dissidents would gather courage and enlist support from a growing number of independent producers concerned about their future, with cutbacks in funds occurring with all arts and film bodies, notably the FFC—to attack the Foundation and its function. But at this point in 1995, the battle to discredit me personally stalled.

My daughters had assisted me at the Foundation, serving canapés at functions—Sue's specialty was sliced hard-boiled eggs on Savoy biscuits, made to look (with a dab of caviar) like the Foundation's logo. Both daughters had stuffed envelopes and helped out, for short periods in a casual capacity, when there was a clerical overload, as

had other staff members' children and friends. That's the way a small business needs to work. And one daughter had joined a workshop to help compose lyrics for songs at short notice to even up gender balance. The script co-ordinator for the series controlled the process and she was engaged short-term at his insistence. My husband Don's advice and his work for the Foundation had been invaluable to me over the years. His experience in family studies, in which he was the nation's most prominent expert, served the Foundation's ideas frequently. He put in many hours—unpaid—to chair the Outreach Committee for *Lift-Off*, drawing on his experience and contacts. He was paid, once only, a standard fee of \$3000 for a specially written booklet to enable sales of a video documentary *Songs of Innocence*. I felt my family's involvement in ACTF matters was appropriate and completely defensible.

As to the suggestion that there was something wrong with the way the ACTF had been managed: there had been staff turnover in the role of finance manager, a position I was always very uneasy about after Graham Morris' fraud. I was slow to adopt the changes required to upgrade technical accounting systems, seeing them as making fraud easier. I remained very loyal to the woman who had been in the book-keeping role and compromised by the fraud, probably for too long, and that had led to Trevor Blainey's departure, but Trevor was a decent man and did not use the opportunity afforded him to take any revenge on me or the organisation.

Every move I made in the accounting side of the Foundation's business was taken in consultation with the auditors. I had one other unhappy staffing experience when I was trying to find a senior administration manager to help make my life easier in a growing organisation, becoming more complex in the lead-up to the summit. I employed Kim Dalton as general manager. He was in the Foundation one week before other staff, whose work I trusted and relied on, came to me complaining about his management style. We did not part on the best of terms. Nevertheless, the ABC press release in early 2006 announcing his employment as head of ABC Television touted his employment at the ACTF as background experience for his current job. Other staff at the time of the allegations had been working with me for three to nine years—and Glenda Wilson had been willing to leave La Trobe to follow me into a job with an uncertain future: she

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had been with me more than twenty years. As a manager, I had a good record for any organisation of the Foundation's size.

Undoubtedly disappointed, the dissidents had to be patient and wait for their next opportunity to attack.

Part III

New Challenges

'Only the mediocre are always at their best.'

—Jean Giraudoux



16

The Keating Years

'He spoke with a gleam of pleasure in his eye. Creative Nation, he said, did not seek "to impose a cultural landscape on Australia but to respond to one which is already in bloom".'

—Don Watson²⁸⁷

DURING 1992, DON WAS having a difficult time at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. It was facing funding cutbacks as well as a staff restructure. He was also working hard in preparation for the International Year of the Family in 1994 and was very active with the *Lift-Off* Outreach program. We needed a break and decided to go to Alaska. Mount Spurr, near Anchorage, erupted just before we arrived. After a spectacular trip, I went on to Santa Fe with my sister, met my daughter Lesley coming from a fashion show in New York, and the three of us hired a car and drove around Monument Valley, the canyons and the Painted Desert, among the dramatic landscapes of the Westerns I had loved as a child. On the way home we stopped off in Hawaii just as a cyclone headed for the islands. We remained in a shelter for thirty-six hours, narrowly

missing the worst of the storm that wiped out much of the island of Kauai. Don flew from Alaska (in less spectacular circumstances) to Calgary, Toronto and then Helsinki on business for the Institute.

Don's problems continued, with staff at the Institute very distressed and directing their ire at him rather than Canberra. Each night he would come home and we would sit and work out the war plan for the next day. When he told me some of the comments of staff—one friend had taken him to lunch and told him the staff hated him—I responded with anger. 'You do not have to put up with this,' I said. 'Get out, resign.' He had not thought of that before but, on consideration, decided he had had enough. After several discussions, he rang the Minister to advise of his decision, then called the staff together. It was April 1993: 'The task of restructuring the Institute of Family Studies is now complete and I have tendered my resignation as its director effective from the end of this year'. The staff sat there in stunned disbelief, much of the animosity now defused, replaced by concerns about the future of the Institute.

Don did not make it to the end of the year: in September he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Five years after my surgery for breast cancer, when I was coming into a comfort zone as I went for my regular checkups, Don found himself facing cancer. The medical advice was confusing and conflicting. 'You are a young man, wait and see what happens'; 'It's not aggressive, most men get prostate cancer eventually and die of something else'. In the end he opted for surgery; we did not want to live with the threat. His ordeal at the Institute and the effect of his radical surgery meant months of recovery time. He had to reinvent his career in a form that reduced the stress and enabled more satisfaction, something he achieved successfully. That was the domestic background to some turbulent events going on in my career.

One Monday morning, a few months after Don had left the AIFS, my PA Glenda put a call through to me from a man who convinced her that I should speak to him.²⁸⁸ He said he had some very personal information he needed to convey about a production house he had been working with. He told me the people concerned were despicable, that he had turned a blind eye to a lot of things while working with them, but he could no longer continue to do so. He gave me the producers' names and said he'd been working with them

for the last two years on a part-time unpaid basis, an opportunity to learn while trying to get a job in the film industry. He had had a falling out with them the previous week, which had clearly distressed him greatly, and wanted to warn me that they were out to get to me.

He said they kept a file full of clippings from newspapers about me. One of them regularly scoured the papers. They held me responsible for their financial difficulties because I was making programs and they were not. They spent a great deal of time discussing me; claimed I had stolen ideas then sacked people; I had the FFC stitched up, so I got money and prevented other people from getting money. I would not believe what they were capable of, he warned; they had bikie friends and 'one of them might do the job ... they want you in the ground'. They had a number of people 'in the gun' but I was 'on top of the list'. He gave me his name and his agent's name but begged me not to involve him. He had just secured a short acting job in *Neighbours* and did not want trouble. I suggested he put his experience behind him, thanked him for his call and he warned me again to be careful.

I reported the call to my lawyer and to the FFC. I knew the people involved; they were in debt to the FFC which was pursuing them for defaulting on their contractual agreement to return income from sales of a production to the FFC. This situation had nothing to do with me. However, I had been engaged in a continuing discussion at board meetings about the level of pre-sale that should be acceptable from the networks for any children's program, arguing that the FFC should hold out and force the networks, who legally had to meet their quota obligations, to pay realistic prices to trigger subsidy investment for children's programs. This was an argument about quality that had direct consequences for the independent producers.

In 1990, I had analysed the previous twelve months' figures for adult and children's programs funded by the FFC. They included 34 hours of adult mini-series for television and 34.5 hours of children's mini-series. I looked at total cost per hour to produce and total cost paid per hour by the networks. For children's drama, the networks paid only a third of the price they paid for adult mini-series. The Seven and Ten networks were paying acceptable prices but the Nine network was pushing down the price of children's product to levels that made it an impossible situation for independent producers struggling to

achieve their program budgets. In such a contest, a producer, pleased to have any offer and powerless to bargain with the network, expected the FFC to come up with the shortfall. Rather than turn their anger on the networks, they turned on the FFC and in the case of children's programs they turned on me. I wrote to the FFC's chair, John Morris, saying that it was time the FFC developed a policy regarding children's programming to reverse this trend. If it continued to accept the levels of payment Nine was proposing 'it would be responsible for the demise of children's production' in Australia.²⁸⁹

I was confident this was the source of the grievance against me. When I received the phone warning, there was a proposal before the FFC to allow the first run of a drama series on a commercial network and subsequent runs on the ABC. Such an arrangement would mean the network could meet its quota obligation but then relinquish subsequent runs to the ABC. Both networks would be able to supplement their programming schedule and effectively split the costs of purchasing children's drama. The end result would be to shrink the networks' and the ABC's outlays on children's drama, and to reduce the diversity of programming available to the audience.

I thought it highly possible that the network executive behind this idea was leaking word of my opposition to such a deal to the producers who were caught in a very tough situation. They were out of work, worrying only about their next deal; he was inflaming them, pointing the finger at me, and absolving the network of responsibility for knocking back a program. The producers were being used for the political purpose of reducing the price for children's programs. This seemed to be the problem at the core of the phone call and a measure of the desperation individuals could feel.

This little drama did not become public knowledge. The problems of the producers involved were sorted out by the FFC, and one of the producers in question was later employed in a small role on an ACTF production. When I arrived on the set we greeted one another cordially; he knew nothing of the phone call I had received and I was pleased to see him with some work, however short-term. Nevertheless, the episode was a stark reminder of the tough competitive environment now facing independent producers.

Treasurer Paul Keating's economic reforms had had significant consequences for film and television. New rules would sort out the

industry players. They had to evolve from creative, dependent grant recipients who were fully subsidised in their cultural activities into business people marketing products that would sell in the international marketplace. It was a shock for those accustomed to the indulgence of producing whatever the spirit moved them to make, with no concern about who would pay or who would care to watch, those who worried only about where the next grant was coming from.

The role of a producer became more complex, integrating creative and business skills, and a new breed entered film and television production. But producers needed to be multi-skilled. They may have known the business and been good at putting a deal together but have little creative insight. Often those who had creative ideas had no idea how to market them. Most film makers with fire in the belly were not aiming at the child audience; they wanted to make feature films and had their eye on the mainstream, maybe even Hollywood. Children's television drama became an attractive proposition for some of those who lacked passion for the big time but wanted regular employment. It also attracted some dedicated people who were not very competent in the new, highly competitive marketing environment. There was an assured demand for children's programs, because of the television drama quota, but stations were not too fussy about the product. The main determinant was price. The FFC was there as an investment bank with a brief to assist children's programming, so the ingredients that many of us had worked to put in place to benefit children provided an opportunity for ongoing production cash flow.

In the production business there is always tomorrow to worry about. One success does not automatically lead to another. Creative partnerships often don't survive the extreme demands of the production process, so you can't rely on a successful creative team to succeed with a future project. People may get very upset if they are not credited in the way they expect, and in the creative business it is sometimes difficult to know whose decisions create the end result. Sometimes it is necessary to persuade different people at the same time that you think a program's success was all due to them.

A constant juggling act must go on to manage creative people, form a team and keep them together working constructively, with motivation to create a special program out of the mould.

With government- and FFC-driven demands for market attachment to programs there was the added problem of finding an international co-production partner who was compatible, shared the same ideals and had access to significant funding.

The Foundation's budget challenged me to deliver a loaves-and-fishes miracle each year as I turned our allocation into viable projects. I was never short of ideas—but putting the pieces together on a large scale to produce a program meant a commitment of years of my life and there was only time in a career span to make a limited number of such major decisions. There was never enough money to achieve what our founders had hoped for without grinding effort to find partners and raise the necessary funds for the few projects we were able to undertake.

The real value of the Foundation's income had fallen dramatically since 1982. In recognition of our plight, the Commonwealth had increased our funding by \$500 000 in 1990–91 and maintained this level over the next two years; state funding had varied little. Over a decade I had managed to push up the total budget to two million dollars each year, but spent an inordinate amount of my time talking—pleading—with politicians, seeking funds and production investment partners. Although the ACTF had an excellent board, including Hazel Hawke, Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, Steve Vizard and Janet Holmes à Court, the Foundation's reputation ultimately rested on the success of each project.

By now the philosophy I had developed about the essential ingredients to create a children's program had been well tested and shown to work with the audience, the critics and the marketplace. Other producers were attempting to emulate the Foundation's success, but they could not work out why the Foundation programs were consistently successful. When *Winners* was produced it was described as a fluke; when *Captain Johnno* from *Touch the Sun* won an Emmy, there was silence. With the success of *Round the Twist*, talk began—if we had the money she had, we could do this. With *Lift-Off* there was resentment that a children's program should be funded on such a scale, and there was rebellion from those who saw themselves as competitors.

The success of the World Summit seemed to fuel the discontent, and a small number of producers began to intrigue about how to stop

the funding for the Foundation, as well as to ponder the techniques applied in production that led to the success of the individual programs the Foundation produced. They screened tapes of *Round the Twist* in workshops, searching for inspiration and new ideas; they hired writers who had worked on our productions, believing they would provide the answer. The writers could explain our unique workshop process, but not the basis on which program directions were decided. The producers continued to feel they were in the shadow of the Foundation and the only thing between them and success was money—and me.

I BEGAN EVERY PRODUCTION with a concept driven by a curriculum. It was embedded, never overt, but it gave depth to a program and writers didn't easily run out of material; once well established a series can continue for a very long time. *The Sopranos*, *Six Feet Under*, *Desperate Housewives* and *West Wing* all work on this principle. With Foundation programs—which aimed to educate while they entertained, to attract children across the age group five to fourteen (and if possible to engage a parent), to be identifiably Australian and convey our cultural values—other precise elements needed to be present. The genius who best understood these elements was Esben Storm, and I called on him whenever he was available. Writer Chris Anastasiades came in a close second. Another writer Ray Boseley had an inventive, unconventional mind; Jeff Peck was an excellent analyst of scripts, and there were other writers who, once given the right elements, could create effective episodes.

Development of the concept began with a workshop process to stimulate ideas. The gap we have in Australian television is not in writing talent but in creative producing. Too many writers end up creating formulaic material for long-running series, writing episodes adapted from numerous other episodes we have all seen before. This style of production ultimately destroys innovation and creativity. Too often a network gets a program going and doesn't know when to stop; they run the creative process dry, burning out all those involved.

Few people other than children (and Chris Neal's acquaintance Scott) watch children's television programs and often critics watch the first episode only to do a routine review for their papers, so

they often don't understand the program concept fully. I would rely on astute television critics I respected to get objective feedback on programs. Debi Enker was one I would read as a barometer. She understood exactly what I was doing. On release of *The Genie from Down Under*, a thirteen-part co-production with the BBC which I had developed as a satire on the republic debate, Enker analysed the elements of my programming approach, concluding:

The ACTF has made an art form out of producing high-spirited and imaginative family entertainments. And it has also forged a model for the independent Australian production company operating successfully, and with integrity, in the international marketplace, creating work that has universal appeal without fatally compromising its local identity.²⁹⁰

I was very happy with such an assessment and even more excited to see academics begin to analyse Foundation programs as serious cultural product. Leonie Rutherford argued for cultural research studies of Australian children's television, using *The Genie from Down Under* to demonstrate the complexity and the layers that had been written into the classic battle of master against servant, adult against child, and the humour in the cultural differences generated by national stereotypes. Reading her article was an intensely satisfying moment.²⁹¹

I intended to protect this reputation for quality but the Foundation could not help everybody and this created jealousies. Every new idea had to be developed thoroughly, a process a small independent producer could not afford but the reason the Foundation existed. Getting the idea right was essential to success.

THEN PAUL KEATING became Prime Minister and introduced two initiatives that would transform the Australian television production industry and the role of the Australian Children's Television Foundation even further—the Distinctly Australian Program and Creative Nation. Keating was an enthusiast for the arts, even a passionate one for music, painting, architecture and design. Before he got the top job Keating had made it clear he was interested in doing something for the arts; in classic Keating style this interest was intertwined with

his agenda for economic reform. Australia had relied on commodities for thirty years; goods and services had passed us by and we took no interest in high technology. This was a strategic opportunity. Keating envisaged Australia as a mature nation, our industrial, cultural and economic future all tied in together in our interactions with the world.

The political strategy of his advisers was to move 'the arts' into the mainstream of government thinking and decision-making and into the Cabinet. 'The arts' became the 'creative industries', inclusive of communications and the new media, liberated from a reputation for elitism and given a context where they could be seen to be more useful and even profitable.²⁹²

Keating had style. He was tall and lean and groomed from head to finger, tip to toe. The public perception was one of an aggressive man, and his command over words was astonishing. He could conjure up visual images that destroyed their targets with wicked, incisive wit. Keating's power over language was such that it divided the electorate into admiring fans and strong critics. I was a Keating fan. I like his creativity and verbal acuity. Janet too admired the new PM. Robert had invited Paul and Annita to stay with them at the Holmes à Courts' horse stud south of Perth and Janet thought they were very sympatico. This may have been the reason the PM agreed to see us in Canberra to talk about children's television in late April 1992.

Keating was not an easy man to get to see, but he sat down with Janet and me, and wanted to talk about violence on television. His youngest daughter had been frightened by something she had seen and he had been horrified that such content was shown in a timeslot when she was viewing. He did not like violence in film, and he intended to prohibit the screening of certain violent material before 9.30 p.m. Keating sat leaning forward, there was no ceremonial pomp; he was unassuming, softly spoken, thoughtful, and reflective. He appeared genuinely interested; he was courteous and we were treated as honoured guests. His manner could not have compared more strongly with what I had expected and he was completely different from his television image.

ACTF meetings with ministers were usually timed and staged events granted to keep up appearances, but this meeting was with the Prime Minister alone and we were given as much time as we

needed. Keating later spoke at the Canberra press launch of *Lift-Off* in Parliament House, sat through the screening of the full episode, then posed with the *Lift-Off* children for a photo with the Foundation's tenth birthday cake. Matters of government waited.

IN THIS ENVIRONMENT, the Commonwealth Government increased its funding to the Foundation to two million dollars in 1993–94.²⁹³ The funds included an extra \$750 000 for the Foundation to consolidate its role as a national institute of excellence. A quarter of a million dollars was specifically allocated for projects to be produced jointly with independent producers, as part of the government's Distinctly Australian Program. The Foundation was asked to apply the expertise it had demonstrated to help chosen independent producers realise their ideas. I challenged the Arts Minister, Bob McMullan, on the way this money was required to be spent, and even suggested that we should not be given the money if it meant the Foundation were to become another film development agency.

Janette Paramour was the minister's personal adviser. She had previously administered the Writers' Guild which had blacklisted the Foundation over the dispute with writers on book royalty payments during the production of *Winners*. She had clearly influenced this decision. The minister insisted we take this on, but the choice of projects and creative control would remain in the Foundation's hands, with copyright and returns shared with an independent producer.

If the Foundation was to remain at the forefront of children's production under the direction set by Paul Keating's government—pursuing cultural objectives in an international, competitive production environment—I had to find partnerships for co-productions in keeping with the Foundation's aims and develop a new media department to experiment with new forms of production.

Financing production is a strange business. If a program is purchased as a pre-production, more money is paid than if it is purchased by a broadcaster when the same production is complete. When finished, it is purchased from a broadcaster's acquisition budget and the amount you receive in dollars can be quite small. It is assumed with a pre-production that the broadcaster has much more control over the content of the program. The difference to a budget is significant; the

BBC paid fifteen thousand pounds per episode for *Round the Twist* (thirteen episodes) as an acquisition but put \$2 000 000 into *The Genie from Down Under* as a co-production—half the budget. The challenge this arrangement posed was to satisfy the joint-venture partner's legal requirements for genuine creative input without compromising the central objectives of the Foundation. The Department of the Arts in Canberra was required to issue a qualifying certificate to authenticate the Australian components of a production: nevertheless, some producers became very adept at manipulating the system, putting their names to overseas productions so that overseas companies could access the generous Australian subsidy from the FFC to in fact produce their own projects.

The Foundation's obligation was to break new ground with financial structures and overseas investment deals as well as content. An idea had to originate in Australia; the story must involve Australians in an Australian landscape—there would be no mid-Pacific adventures or futuristic science fiction produced to make the rules easier. The most obvious partner for the Foundation was the BBC because we shared cultural values, we aimed to produce quality, and the BBC had access to significant funds. Based on the ratings success of *Round the Twist* for the BBC, I persuaded Anna Home to put up half the budget on *The Genie from Down Under*, which was released in 1998. While the whole series was shot in Australia half the story was set in the United Kingdom and half in Australia—one of the lead cast and one of the three directors would be British.

The FFC had not seen such a level of finance—half the budget—from an overseas co-production partner before. The program met the BBC requirements for a UK production but did not compromise the objectives for programming produced by the Foundation. This first experience of international co-production was a success. But the BBC required diversity in its programs, as did the Foundation, and other production partners were needed.²⁹⁴

FOR THE FOUNDATION'S first joint venture under the Distinctly Australian Program, I had to find a marketable idea. We advertised widely through film organisations and in the trade press and received twenty-six applications—most of which were derivative, ordinary

ideas. They were narrowed down to four and, as is often the case when funds for film makers are distributed, those who missed out became critics. I decided to go with Peter Viska and his company Mickey Duck Animation, to produce the Foundation's first long-form 26-episode series animation, a production process I knew nothing about, so it would be a learning experience for me and the whole team.

Animation was the program genre now dominating the children's market internationally, and I wondered if the Foundation could stamp the market with a new type of product and succeed here as we had done with live-action children's drama. Peter was a producer and director who had come into animation from a background as a political cartoonist and illustrator of well known children's books—*Far Out Brussel Sprout*, *Let 'er Rip Potato Chip* and *You Beaut Juicy Fruit!*—so he had a genuine interest in the child audience. Through the numerous animated commercials and the various short animation works he had produced for the Foundation, his capabilities had developed significantly, and I saw him as an emerging talent with potential to develop an expanding animation business in Melbourne where none existed. Peter understood the Foundation, he worked well with Suzie Campbell, who would be his co-producer—another untried talent for an animation production on this scale—and he had developed an appealing character called L'il Elvis. I was an Elvis Presley fan and Suzie Campbell thought I might be susceptible to the idea.

But Peter's ideas were not viable. He thought we could acquire the rights to Elvis Presley's songs and animate each episode of the series around a song. I explained that the Graceland Estate—Elvis Presley Enterprises—would be unlikely to respond to an offer and such an idea was hardly relevant to our objectives. We brought together writers for a workshop (Esben Storm and Chris Anastasiades were key participants) and came up with a story about a ten-year-old boy with the weight of the world upon his shoulders.²⁹⁵

As an original concept, not commissioned from overseas or based on an adaptation of a classic story, production of the series on this scale—twenty-six episodes to be based in Melbourne—was a massive undertaking for the Australian animation industry. But in most respects it was a textbook example of what Keating's film and

cultural policy set out to do. We opened up a new overseas market, trained new people for the industry, brought investment to Australia and developed emerging talent. An international partnership evolved more easily than expected, largely because of the Foundation's growing international reputation.

Peter Viska completed a one-minute pilot demonstrating the character of *L'il Elvis*. In May 1994, I went to see Eve Baron, head of the French children's channel Canal J, for advice. I needed to find a partner with substantial animation production experience, access to significant dollars and willing to take a risk on an untried animation production team in Australia. France was an important producer of animation series on the world market while Eve was a great supporter and admirer of the Foundation's programs and had purchased most of our series for her channel. She was possibly the biggest fan of *Lift-Off* outside Australia and was producing the French version *Zig Zag* (if she had been head of Children's Television at the ABC we would have done great things together). She suggested I go and see Christian Davin, head of France Animation. He gave me a very friendly welcome. Davin is a most charming man and a very experienced producer, with a high reputation in France. He was building the France Animation Company, working in partnership with German and Canadian companies, and the idea of working in Australia interested him. He was receptive to *L'il Elvis* as an idea and to working together to raise the substantial budget involved—working in Europe was far more expensive than working in Australia and, as the workload must be shared in a co-production, the budget went to \$11.5 million.

There was a shortage of production personnel for *L'il Elvis*, so we engaged thirty-nine trainees under the multimedia assistance trainee scheme through the Department of Education, Employment and Training. (Rove McManus, a young hopeful from Perth, was one of them.)²⁹⁶

L'il Elvis' production difficulties did not equal those of *Lift-Off* but came close. Christian Davin secured almost half the budget from French broadcasters and a German distribution company, Ravensburger. He sent a talented designer, Jan Van Rijsselberge, and a script editor, Christophe Izard, to Melbourne to help us modernise the design and write scripts that suited the animation process. Our

writers did not understand the process and everything needed to be rewritten. We also had to negotiate cultural differences as some ideas that we found funny were offensive to the Europeans. Christian Davin was wonderfully understanding throughout a tedious negotiation and production process. But—as I learnt repeatedly in working with a large international company—nothing stays the same. France Animation was taken over by another French company and Davin was not happy with the limitations placed on his plans. He resigned to set up a new company and I lost a partner whom I had grown to trust and rely on.

L'il Elvis ran \$250 000 dollars over budget; Suzie Campbell and I worked very hard to keep it in check but I lost a lot of sleep and began to wonder whether I was making a cultural contribution with this program or simply working in a business. When Suzie told me she wanted to spend the rest of her career producing animation, I knew she would not be doing it under me. We both lobbied hard to see the animation studio retained in Victoria with government support; but no financial support was forthcoming, so the team, by now well experienced, dispersed. Peter Viska refocused on Mickey Duck Productions, and Suzie took on a job for another producer, leaving a significant contribution to the Foundation behind her.

When *L'il Elvis* was released it earned praise from another critic I respected, Dennis Prior, which eased the fatigue I felt:

The most remarkable quality in the series is the way international rock and personal nostalgia have now Australianised. The voices are Australian, and belong to some of our most enterprising actors.

Wonderful Australian details unobtrusively creep in. It is morning and you can hear the burble of the magpies. The Paragon Café is run by a couple of Greeks. An old hippie wears a peace symbol on his belt buckle. A man wearing a footy jumper is always seen carrying a keg. Bowling ladies arrive to hear Li'l Elvis sing.

This is a landmark in Australian television, another triumph for the Children's Television Foundation. It is funny, thoughtful and ingenious.²⁹⁷

The series continues to air regularly on the ABC.²⁹⁸

However, I reached the conclusion that it was not the Foundation's role to continue to develop animation series for a child audience that already saw little else on their screens. Production companies around the world were doing animation and live action drama remained the important gap to be filled. Even with the proliferation of media and channels for children, the diversity and variety of programs for children was becoming more limited. The children's market had been transformed.

I WOULD NEVER have thought a partnership with Disney and the ACTF was possible, but changed circumstances often produce unexpected results. The entire industry had been challenged to change its ways and compete in the global marketplace. Under Keating's program I was searching for new ways to integrate new technology into children's production.

Convergence of technology interested me. En route to Munich and the Prix Jeunesse festival to collect the top award for *Round the Twist*, I diverted to an academic conference on new media in Cologne, where I heard an address by a representative from the games maker SEGA. The company was concerned that girls were not buying their games and wanted to address this failure. They had set up a committee to research girls' interests and find out what kind of computer games they liked. Listening to the speaker, I could see the potential for a series in which a group of kids worked for a company which road-tested computer games for software development. In the series we would explore the question being posed: how did girls' interests differ from boys' interests; what were the broader issues involved in the development of computer games—for parents, educators and regulators? Helping to rectify the process whereby girls lost confidence in 'their voices' at around eleven to twelve years was always a mission of mine. I also wanted to investigate the concept of cyberspace, which was deeply mysterious to me.

With the additional money available to the Foundation from the increase in funds under Distinctly Australian, I pieced together a group of writers and computer buffs to attend a residential workshop at Lorne on a concept for a 26-part television series, eventually entitled *Crash Zone*, featuring five smart, creative and radically

different kids with a common love of computers, gaming and the Internet. They are hired by Alexandra Davis, who runs a computer games software company, to help design and test computer games after school. Alexandra finds she has got more than she bargained for as her young employees confront the issues thrown up by use of the new technology, along with all the conflicts of teenage development.

The series was to be structured as five telemovies following each character in turn, made unique by the extensive use of special effects and the creation of fantasy characters who would live in cyberspace and interact with the kids. It was developed well before the advent of Lara Croft and the spate of movies produced about creatures living in the computer, when the Internet was little understood, as a direct response to Keating's Creative Nation initiative. By the end of the workshop we had produced what, by my standards, was a very impressive concept which writers then developed further into an excellent presentation document.

The proposal was submitted to the ABC via my *bête noire* Claire Henderson. It should have been the next series produced under the output deal between the Foundation and the ABC, but Henderson rejected the project. I started to look elsewhere.

By the early 1990s, Disney had undergone a major resurgence, with revenues in excess of three billion dollars. Its ambitions included domination of the European market through children's channels. But the Europeans had their own cultural traditions which had been nurtured by public broadcasters, and they did not take so readily to the Disney library. Disney realised quickly through their failure in the ratings that they would have to produce new programs with a European flavour. They established a production arm in London, Buena Vista International Productions. Its new head of production, Elaine Sperber, was scouting the world looking for new concepts.

As *Round the Twist* had been a resounding success throughout Europe, Sperber earmarked the ACTF for attention. I had strong reservations about working with Disney after my experience in the late 1980s with the *Sky Trackers* telemovie. Its US producer had overruled me on cast and the choice of director, to the detriment of the film, I thought. She imposed an actor to play the mother—a star from a US soap—who they believed would give the telemovie a promotable

name when it went to air in the United States. On completion of the film, the US producers expressed disappointment in the female lead and in the director, as though their selection had been mine; that was part of the Disney culture: shift responsibility and move on.

I expressed my reservations to the Disney Channel Australia representatives, but they were enthusiastic about the opportunity to produce a series in Australia, as it would raise the profile of the Australian business. The managing director, Bill McKenzie, was someone I had known since he worked in Perth for Robert Holmes à Court and he was one of television's gentlemen.

Submitted through the Disney Channel Australia, *Crash Zone* caught Elaine Sperber's eye. She decided to proceed with two projects only as her first production ventures and her choice of production partners was the ACTF and the BBC. She would produce *Crash Zone* with the Foundation and *MicroSoap* with the BBC. Disney would put up the entire budget on an Australian concept, fully produced in Australia and, because of its links with the Seven network, which ran *The Wonderful World of Disney*, arrange the Australian pre-sale. What could be easier than that? It was an unheard-of arrangement ... but it had a cost, of course.

First we had to agree the deal, as although Buena Vista were paying the bills, this was an Australian production and under our regulations creative control must be in the Australian producer's hands. This affected quota eligibility for the Seven network and the rates crew would be paid—they expected more on an overseas production. I insisted on a share in profits for the Foundation—as well as its production fee—which they eventually agreed to, but under Disney's accounting practices the distribution and overhead charges for the entire company became part of the recoupment structure, so profits came to nothing. It was an aggressive negotiation conducted through our lawyers.

Elaine and I were an interesting pair: she was a short American ball of energy who spoke at a million miles an hour; very quick to make a judgement and immovable once she had made up her mind. With this series, her future in the company was on the line: this would be the basis of her reputation as a producer of children's programs. She had much more at stake than I did and she controlled every aspect as much as she could from the other side of the globe.

She knew my reputation and was undeterred, believing we would get on well together. Ultimately she proved correct. We became friends, but not before we had gone through a number of slanging matches; I have not fought with any other producer the way I fought with Elaine Sperber.

The culture of Disney was as unpleasant as I had expected. During pre-production Elaine's boss came to Melbourne, *sans* Elaine, and overturned many of the decisions she and I had made. He approached the director Esben Storm to ask if the scriptwriter was up to the job; he then talked to the scriptwriter Phillip Dalkin about the director. Dalkin and Storm were already sparring with one another about script alterations and when I learnt the Disney executive was gathering opinion in this fashion I informed him very bluntly that this was not the way we did business in Australia and that if he wanted to speak to anyone he would go through me. He never forgave me and never spoke well of the program, but Elaine handled him and got her way.

However, the biggest problem was that Elaine wanted a complete revamp of the concept. She did not like the structure of five telemovies, so that went. Much more significantly from my point of view, she did not want to include the characters in cyberspace: she thought them confusing and saw *Crash Zone* as a straight teen drama. I insisted on retaining the character Virgil, an artificial intelligence who lived in cyberspace—who proved to be the hit of the series, and the element Elaine, in the end, enjoyed most. When scripting went from draft to draft and I saw scripts changing endlessly, I backed off because it became a confusing tussle. Elaine had a strong sense of story structure and was a good script editor, but these scripts were not getting better; they were changing because the producer was nervous.

I wanted to reserve my energy for bigger fights. In Dalkin, we had a scriptwriter who was willing to write tirelessly to please Elaine—he was being paid for it and there was the carrot of further work for Disney. I brought in a producer, Bernadette O'Mahony, to work with me. I knew she could deliver a quality show and deal with the hassles guaranteed to come, while I concentrated some of my efforts elsewhere.

Elaine and I learnt that when we both dug in our toes neither would win and we had to come up with a new solution. *Crash Zone*

was a very good show but not a great one. It was a much more conventional series than we had conceived at the Lorne workshop. Nevertheless, both *Crash Zone* and *MicroSoap* helped Elaine establish herself in the United Kingdom. Because of her contribution to *MicroSoap* she was headhunted to become head of Children's Drama at the BBC. We decided we would work together in the future when the opportunity arose, and we remained in contact as friends. We had much in common in many ways: both feisty and direct in dealing with others, both with aging parents and future career choices to make. She was one of the few peers I had in television I could talk to—and she really knew how to make a martini.

Local producers benefited when Elaine discovered Australia. But although *Crash Zone* went into a second series with Disney UK, I lost interest. Once the second contract was negotiated—another unpleasant experience—I left production in the hands of Bernadette. I was more at ease with the production culture of the BBC than Buena Vista UK.

While I was writing this chapter my eleven-year-old grandson Adrian rediscovered *Crash Zone* in the cupboard (he was only six years old when it was released). He is well into his second viewing of all twenty-six episodes. The youngest member of the cast—the character Ram, a thirteen-year-old technology wiz—fascinates him. Adrian is beginning to construct animation and write programs on his own computer; he is precisely the target audience I had in mind for *Crash Zone*. He said to me, 'Tricia why don't you still make programs? Your programs are the best!' That is the reward I seek. What praise could be more potent than that from my own grandson?

PRIME MINISTER KEATING had become convinced of the need to transform information technology in Australia. There had been dispute among ministers and advisers about where the portfolio responsibility for new media should be positioned: within the Department of Industry, Science and Technology; or in the Department of Communications and the Arts, which had been created for the purpose of bringing the arts into the mainstream of industry and commercial life. Keating resolved that it should remain with Arts. He wanted to refashion the arts industries, including the ABC, and invest them

with new strength and creativity. He wanted an industry and cultural policy that was nation-building—and in October 1994, he announced Creative Nation, a \$260-million program.

Under the program \$60 million was pledged for a television production fund to be based in Melbourne; a further \$10 million for the SBS to make Australian programs; \$7 million for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra; an extra \$25 million and an expanded role for the Australia Council; and \$84 million to seed an Australian multimedia content industry. The National Academy of Music in Melbourne was established; Fox Studios in Sydney was to be set up; and a Major Organisations Board for the major performing arts organisations was to be created. All of this, like the Australia Council, would in future be funded triennially. Don Watson, Keating's speechwriter, described Creative Nation as 'a good policy, good for the country'. 'It was a moment,' he observed, 'when Australian creative achievement meant as much as sport or war'.²⁹⁹ Yet the vision behind it was criticised as elitist.

Under Creative Nation, the Foundation was to receive \$250 000 to initiate multimedia content—a small amount but sufficient to prompt a rethink in direction. Quite separately, Alan Ruby, a bureaucrat in the federal Department of Education, had allocated \$250 000 to the Foundation, to be used to honour Garth Boomer's contribution. Ruby knew how much Garth's contact with the Foundation had meant to him, so I recommended the Foundation set up an annual scholarship in Garth's name, to build communication links between the Foundation and peak educational bodies and enhance the implementation of national approaches to curriculum development in terms of materials and links with schools.³⁰⁰

In September 1993, Paul Nichola, a film director with a background in visual effects, who had been a director on *Lift-Off*, was selected from twenty applicants as the first recipient of the Garth Boomer Scholarship. I saw the opportunity to link the Creative Nation allocation with the scholarship and build an online educational database of teaching strategies for Foundation productions to support use of our series in schools. We began the construction of a website; all government organisations were encouraged to do so.

In February 1996, Paul Nichola and I attended the international multimedia market MILIA in Cannes to identify what was happening

around the world in multimedia and to explore international finance and distribution possibilities for projects in new media. I asked Paul to walk around the exhibition and to tell me what the gap was, what nobody else was doing. By the time he had completed the circuit, Paul described to me an idea—which had been on his mind—he named *Kids Online*: a protected online club for kids which allowed its members to create and communicate with one another with specially provided tools, like an electronic drawing kit. It would be self-perpetuating in that it would rely on the audience's imagination and creative input—a commodity in limitless supply with children if properly harnessed. Although I had some difficulty in understanding how this concept would work, I could see significant educational value. (To put this time in context, two young men had recently dropped out of Stanford University to develop their idea that later brought about the Google search engine.)

In the creative business you have to be willing to take risks, otherwise nothing innovative happens. Surely risk was an aim of Creative Nation. I did not have to understand, as long as others did—the *L'il Elvis* series confirmed that; careful management of the project was the priority. So I decided this was the project the Foundation should take on with its Creative Nation funds. But the funds, although ongoing, would be insufficient for a project of this dimension. I would have to cost and finance it—not easy when there was no multimedia production funding in place to access without excessive bureaucracy and the project was difficult to explain. Paul didn't fully understand it either, as it turned out, and developing a budget was like measuring the proverbial piece of string.

In June 1996 the Foundation's site was launched by the Victorian Minister for Multimedia, Alan Stockdale; it featured *Teachers Online: The Garth Boomer Online Curriculum Resource for Teachers*. It was an extensive database containing teaching notes, activities and strategies based on the Foundation's programs linked to outcome statements from the viewing profiles published by the Curriculum Corporation. We trialled the resources and established a New Media Advisory Panel to test projects in schools and give feedback. The plan was to update the resource as new programs developed on an educational site that would be a memorial to Garth and his contribution to education and the Foundation. But Paul was critical of this concept as too

static. He wanted networking and connectivity in real time, which became the underlying concept for the new project *KidsOnline*.

In a complex negotiation, the Foundation secured the involvement of Telstra in the production of *KidsOnline*. The relationship grew out of the success of the World Summit and an interest by Telstra—which was searching for a clear role—in providing content. Telstra coerced Hewlett-Packard as a third partner into the relationship with the Foundation and a multi-million-dollar development was underway, now entitled *Kahootz*.

Hewlett-Packard was a reluctant partner because content creation was not their business; they wanted to sell hardware. But Telstra was their biggest customer and HP could not say no to this project. I never saw a complete budget but, given the high overheads of two huge companies and the contractor fees software developers could command at the height of the technology boom, it was the biggest project the Foundation had entered into and we were working in a business culture that was alien to me.

Within the film and television industry, there was usually a commitment to the final product, especially when working for children. Crews liked to go home each day feeling they had achieved something together. Even within universities, disputes were couched in philosophical terms or with a sense that student interests were at the core of any discussion. With software development, there were rows of contractors tapping away on their computers building code, but I had no idea what they were doing, how they were progressing, or what would result. Communication was through a team leader who reported progress each week and the content of his report was highly technical. It was impossible to know what *Kahootz* would look like.

Kahootz was to be an exclusive online club for children aged between six and sixteen, combining Internet and CD-ROM technology to create an environment where members could explore, communicate and create in real time using state-of-the-art software tools. The CD-ROM would carry a library of animated fonts, textures, animated clip art, drawing tools, background images, sound bytes, music bytes, and an audio editor, along with motion and sequencing controls and a hyperlink editor. These tools would provide the building blocks for the creation of 'Xpressions'. Members would

publish their Xpressions which could then become the focus of live chat sessions within the *Kahootz* online world.

This project was designed to open up a new world to children. Members could develop a creative and cultural exchange with other children around the world and improve their communication skills using cutting-edge software; *Kahootz* could provide active learning with technology that was revolutionary, and the educational benefits of the new technology were potentially profound. But teachers and parents were intimidated by the technology and we needed to prepare the market with great care. Safety on the Net was a major issue. *Kahootz* had a number of safety features to assist children to enjoy the benefits of the Internet while avoiding its pitfalls. The members were able to filter out, or zap, communications from other children that annoyed them or upset them. They could also use an online complaints procedure to contact the *Kahootz* administration and report any offensive material which conflicted with the *Kahootz* 'house rules'. It was a closed system: members could not access the World Wide Web from *Kahootz* and only registered members could enter the *Kahootz* environment.

Hewlett-Packard contractors moved in to the Foundation to work. More than a hundred people were employed on the project in technical, interface design, content development and management roles, making it one of the largest multimedia projects undertaken in Australia. Telstra controlled the project and set deadlines which Paul Nichola and Darryl Foy from HP said were unrealistic. They both kept warning of the pitfalls at our regular review meetings and of the need to test the software rigorously. With production near completion, we began a trial in schools to develop curriculum-based materials for teachers and students supporting the use of *Kahootz* in the classroom. We were also scoping an international version with strong interest expressed from France (through Christian Davin, our original partner with *L'il Elvis*), Taiwan, Singapore and Spain. We could find nothing to match *Kahootz* under production anywhere in the world.

But I could see the project was running right off the rails. I argued incessantly, but was ultimately ineffective, with a determined behemoth to deal with. Money seemed to be no object: Melbourne trams carried the *Kahootz* promotion, television advertisements were

prepared without consulting us. The marketing was designed to represent *Kahootz* as a computer game, which would be misleading to buyers. It was more like buying a Lego construction set: you had to create the content yourself with the tools given. With warnings ignored, the product was launched to great fanfare.

The Second World Summit on Media for Children was scheduled to be held in London in March 1998. Telstra decided this summit would be a good place to launch *Kahootz* internationally even though it was not intended to be a marketplace and was largely not attended by new-media buyers. As the product was clearly unreliable, our presentation was essentially a mock-up and the cocktail party we threw was deceptively impressive. I still believed *Kahootz* would be tested and fixed—whatever needed to be done would be done—and I thought it should not take long.

A month later, in April 1998, we launched in Melbourne. The product crashed at the launch and needed to be rebooted but Paul kept talking from the podium, introducing *Kahootz* while the technicians sweated in the back room. Those present, including the media, had no idea what had happened.

Paul believed, and so I believed, that we were building a product that was flexible and could be used both within a classroom school system and by an individual at home. Telstra didn't seem to see the classroom as a priority and HP took instruction from them. The contractors working on the project day by day, separately at their computers, never sat down as a community to discuss the project and seemed to care little about it beyond whether they were achieving their weekly targets. HP was building proprietorial software to be housed on an HP machine within their system. The machine could handle 200 000 users simultaneously through twenty ports but it was not mobile; the system did not suit schools. I had always believed *Kahootz* would be primarily for the school market but I learnt, finally (having dragged information out bit by bit) that for *Kahootz* to suit the school systems it had to be rebuilt completely ... and then there was the problem of the Apple Macintosh computer versus an IBM platform—they were not compatible.

Despite all these issues, the misleading *Kahootz* advertising campaign—promising an exciting world that looked like a night-club in the ad on television—went into full flight. It was a disaster. Those

who bought the product could not work out what to do with it. The system crashed repeatedly. The young woman in charge of the campaign for Telstra, whom I dubbed 'Miss Marketing 101', followed her textbook and kept spending money although the campaign was making no sense. It was an immensely frustrating experience to see so much money spent on promotion doomed to failure.

I invited Frank Blount, the Telstra CEO, to a meeting at the Foundation with the *Kahootz* management team. Frank Blount had a cold the day he came and, immaculately clad and impressively stern, he snorted his way through the meeting, verbally berating those in the room. 'You e-mail me if you have any problems,' he said to me. I was treated with care, but the situation was impossible to retrieve and when *Kahootz* unravelled and both Telstra and HP wanted out of the contract they had no idea what to do with this troublesome woman in their midst. Throughout the whole fiasco, HP managers were gentlemen next to their Telstra brethren and I used this situation to get financial advantage for the Foundation so that we could rebuild *Kahootz* to our specifications. It was a project I still believed in.

I had negotiated a deal with Telstra under which the Foundation had to be paid until we reached a certain level of subscriptions. We were never going to reach that level with the product that had been released. With a change of administration at Telstra and a decision that content development was not the new direction for the company, the *Kahootz* manager got his marching orders, and eventually Telstra and the ACTF parted company in a deal that was confidential. The Foundation managed to complete much work in multimedia in the meantime, but too late for *Kahootz* to secure the recognition and market position it should have had. The original plan was to place *Kahootz* in schools around Australia and, with the revenue, update the software regularly, to enable *Kahootz* to become an international, protected site for children. It was a grand vision that did not quite make it. *Kahootz* was bought by Victorian and ACT schools but by the time the decision had been made to purchase, it was already old technology.

To keep pace with technical innovations *Kahootz* should have been updated as an open platform to allow users to import other software. It was a starter kit, for primary schools, smart and appropriate

in its conception. I had witnessed at close range the failure of a good idea through an aggressive, competitive and territorial male business culture; and seen waste on a scale that was distressing, given how hard it was for me to raise every dollar I had previously had to work with. Telstra had a lot to learn about team work. I feared for the development of telecommunications in this country.

I had led an experimental production in Australia. Triggered by Creative Nation funding and backed by two of the strongest partners any technology project could hope to bring together, collectively we failed to realise the potential of a good idea at the right time. Nevertheless, we had learned valuable lessons. My initiation into new media as a middle-aged neophyte was an adventure that left me with a glimpse of what could be possible. I was eager to complete the project and take it to market.

In the 1980s, as federal Treasurer, Paul Keating had remade the Australian economy. In the 1990s he attempted to remake Australian society. The electorate did not allow him to complete his work but before his defeat in March 1996 he had transformed the film industry. There would be no going back to the former days of cultural protection, although the industry to this day is still reluctant to take on the challenges of the new technology; it remains a mystery to many producers, who feel safer with the old technologies. But if Australia is to retrieve its role as a leader in the field of innovation in children's programs, the answers lie with the new technologies. We do not have to convince the children; they will try new things without qualm.

Vulnerable People

'What does it take to teach you to be men? Because if you don't learn the law, there's only one place you're going. To Berrima—to jail. Is that what you want?'

—*Yolngu Boy*

ANOTHER OF PAUL KEATING'S 'big picture' items was Aboriginal land rights and reconciliation. I was conscious that the Foundation had not produced a major production for and with indigenous Australia. The film *Yolngu Boy* would be that project; and I would have to draw on all the experience that my fifteen years at the Foundation had given me, to develop, finance and guide me, the crew and all involved through this production.

This was one project where the process itself was at least as important as the final product; it was unique. I already had a film maker in mind. Stephen Johnson, briefed by telephone to provide documentary footage of indigenous Australians in Arnhem Land for the *Lift-Off* series, had come up with spectacular footage. It was beautifully filmed and conveyed the exuberance of the young people and their lifestyle. I had seen nothing like it before.

Stephen's childhood was spent in Alice Springs and Darwin growing up with Aboriginal children, as his father taught at Aboriginal colleges. He knew the Northern Territory and had a developed cultural understanding of the indigenous people and a respect for their traditions. Many of the Yolngu people had become his friends and he regarded Mandawuy Yunupingu, the lead singer of the Yothu Yindi band and former Australian of the Year, as a brother.

When the Foundation was producing *First Day*, a documentary about young children starting school, co-producer Gordon Glenn and I decided to include a child from Yirrkala in Arnhem Land. With Stephen Johnson's contacts and his skills as director of photography, we were well placed to get co-operation from the community. I had not yet met Stephen and decided to travel to the Northern Territory for that purpose. He proved to be an exuberant, personable young man, with a shock of curly long auburn hair that stood up on end.

When Gordon Glenn and I arrived, Stephen drove us around the community, waving and calling out to everybody in sight to let the people know he was around. His enthusiasm was infectious. The local people's faces lit up as they greeted him; as an old friend, they were pleased to see him again. Suddenly there was a large thump on the car and Stephen got out to embrace a man he described to me as 'the clan payback man'. I overheard a stream of friendly abuse before Stephen explained to him that I was a 'Queen of the South', a very important person he should respect. He greeted me rather abashed. Later, when we were filming a scene where Mandawuy was sitting with a group of children singing on the beach, the same man appeared, showered and neatly dressed, holding a tiny baby, weeks old, dressed in white fluffy organza. He asked me if she could be in the film. Looking into his eyes I thought, 'What do I say?' and he immediately understood my hesitation. 'She might cry,' he said. 'Yes, she might cry.' He sat down quietly under a tree, with the baby in his arms, and watched the filming. We later bumped into him outside the yacht club where we were going to get a sandwich for lunch. 'Would you like to join us?' I asked. 'No, I have just eaten a goanna.'

I observed Stephen closely and watched him work; he was at home with the people. They knew him and clearly liked and trusted him. They were used to his camera. I followed the crew around

as they shot scenes of women gathering food in the bush and on the reef in the midst of deadly stingers. The children picked up the stingers with their fingertips and tossed them away from Stephen's bare legs as he stood in the water filming with his eyes staring down the camera lens.

I was fascinated by the people and the insight I was being given into a culture I knew little about, as a white Australian of almost sixty years. I thought about the possibility of making a film with the people of Arnhem Land, a story for them and other children around Australia: perhaps Stephen's access could allow this to happen. Stephen was thrilled by the idea of directing a feature film about a culture he had grown up with since a young boy and for which he had passionate feelings. He was well known in Darwin but not elsewhere and pulsing with ambition to become a feature film director. It was then November 1994 and it would be five years before the cameras would roll.

I was venturing into a political landscape where I had no knowledge or experience; I did not understand the people and I would have to win their confidence and respect. The location was difficult, remote, and accessible only with the permission of the Aboriginal owners, so it was a costly proposition to import a feature film crew. This would be the Foundation's first feature film, a very different process from television: writing a feature film script is a demanding job, the director's role is pivotal and Stephen was untried.

We planned to work with inexperienced Aboriginal people in the cast who understood nothing about the craft, the discipline required to meet a film schedule and the physical and creative demands of film-making; there would be no name stars to carry the film and persuade distributors they should invest. These were the initial issues, without dwelling on cultural differences and the problems that could be generated over necessary money and contracts. It was undoubtedly a foolhardy idea.

I was yet to encounter the rivalries that exist between some of the whites who worked with the community, who began any discussion with the assumption that you were there to exploit the people and to trample what they considered to be their turf. Stephen was close friends with Alan James—AJ—a lean, almost gaunt, steely-blue-eyed young man who was the manager of the Yothu Yindi

band. AJ had worked for the Northern Territory Arts Council, met Mandawuy and heard his music, when he got the idea for the Yothu Yindi band. He saw the potential at a time in Australia's history when there was an interest in and awareness of Aboriginal culture and worked hard to achieve prominence for the band—a considerable achievement indeed. Through a mutual friend, he met Stephen, saw his capabilities, and asked him to direct a music clip to promote the Yothu Yindi trademark song, *Treaty*.

Stephen and AJ, who both had young families and shared outings together, produced further documentary and music clips to promote the band. Although they knew one another well, there were ambivalent feelings and rivalries which were exacerbated by the potential of a feature film to be shot on Yothu Yindi territory. As the man behind the development of music for the community, generating funds from an important cultural public relations business, AJ informally controlled our access to the man who made all the decisions for the Gumatj people, Galarrwuy Yunupingu—Mandawuy's elder brother, also a former Australian of the Year and the Northern Territory's most powerful black leader.

I needed permission from Galarrwuy Yunupingu to be assured of co-operation at every level for the production of a feature film. Stephen said he could arrange the meeting with 'the King' as he referred to Galarrwuy. But repeated efforts to contact 'the King' informally and through his office failed. Mandawuy was enthusiastic about the film and, as Stephen's closest ally in the community, we engaged him to assist us. But again we met with no response. In fact, nothing happened the way I would normally expect. We flew up anyway, without an appointment, on 24 April 1996, expecting to make more headway on the spot and with a synopsis in hand.

On arrival we learnt that AJ and Galarrwuy were out sailing on Galarrwuy's fishing yacht, hosting John Wiley, a successful producer of IMAX films who was scouting Arnhem Land for locations. With the budget Wiley commanded he was in a position to offer location fees that *Yolngu Boy* would never be able to match in my wildest dreams. Money, I learned, was to become a feature of the game plan. On visits to the community, nothing was structured. You went looking for people and collected information as you went. Each person knew something different and would add information as we tried to work

out what to do next. John Wiley was staying, as we were, at the only motel in the town of Nhulunbuy, so on our first night he brought us up to speed on his plans. AJ was also in the motel bar that evening but was very aloof; we were not going to learn much from him.

We went to see Ngalawurr Mununggurr, an artist, who was Galarrwuy Yunupingu's niece, to have our script synopsis translated for presentation to the community. We visited Wittiyana Marika, whom Stephen knew well; he used to dance for the Yothu Yindi band. He had set up a meeting for us to speak with the Dhanbul Council about the project, but Wittiyana was confused and distracted—very upset about news of the theft of a painting of old man Marika from the museum and damage done to the frame. At first he thought we were speaking of a dance project, not a feature film. He then told Stephen about a family meeting where Galarrwuy had insisted AJ represented the community and that AJ should not work on the film, as that would be a conflict of interest. But AJ wanted to work on the film. I never clearly understood AJ's expectations, but it seemed he did not want us making this film unless he was in charge, and my experience of him so far—his moods and his threats that we could make no film without him—made me far from eager to have him in any driving seat. AJ was not supporting our proposed meeting with Galarrwuy and if he had his way we were not going to get near him. I still had not sighted Galarrwuy two years into our plan.

Two days after we arrived, the Dhanbul Council meeting was held in Yirrkala. AJ appeared, saying he had been invited as an observer. I was introduced and spoke about plans for the film—the synopsis was still in the process of translation; Mandawuy spoke in language, as all community people in attendance did. I spoke of the financial deal; Mandawuy asked AJ to speak, and he said the lawyers would be asked to check the contracts, which must contain a right of veto for the community. I responded that I needed time with Mandawuy—not a lot of time—but everything needed to move on promptly. AJ insisted that I didn't need Mandawuy and could work with the head of the council who, Stephen knew, would not be able to assist us to reach Galarrwuy. One step forward and one step back; we were not making great progress.

The next day we went searching with Ngalawurr for her mother Gulumbu Yunupingu, who was Galarrwuy's and Mandawuy's

older sister. I was told, given AJ's resistance, that Gulumbu was our only hope to achieve a meeting with Galarrwuy. Ngalawurr located her mother who was taking part in a funeral ceremony. We walked towards the large assembly moving around under the trees. It was extremely hot and the ceremony was taking place around a hut which was refrigerated and housed the body of a 41-year-old woman. The women and men danced in groups separately, dancing the life of the dead woman. One of the elders, a very handsome man, invited us to come closer to watch. The scene was striking, impressive in the red earth under the trees, with everyone taking part decorated and dressed for the ceremony. Ngalawurr brought Gulumbu to meet me: her body was painted all over with grey clay.

Stephen and Ngalawurr had agreed that the best way for me to have time to connect with Gulumbu was to ask her to take us camping at Birany Birany, a three-hour drive into Arnhem Land, on a remote bay. Gulumbu agreed. We stocked up on flour, steaks and sleeping bags. In the four-wheel drive, I sat with Gulumbu as we travelled so I could get to know her. We were both shy so spoke little. When we arrived we settled on the beach, lit a fire, barbecued the meat and talked about the film we wanted to make until late in the evening. We talked of the benefits we could see for the community involved in the film.

The film would tell the story of young people caught between two worlds, the choices they were facing and the threats from the addiction to petrol sniffing. Gulumbu had grown up in a mission school in Yirrkala. She was one of those who had translated the Bible into the Gumatj language and had worked on this project over twenty-six years. The mission had forbidden the use of her language in any other mission context. An artist of note, with works in several Australian museums, she was very concerned about what was happening to the young people and the lack of cultural education in the community. We told her of the problems AJ was putting in our path and she responded that she and her elder sister, who joined us on the beach at Birany Birany, were uncomfortable about AJ's role in the community and the impact of the Yothu Yindi band.

Gulumbu and I slept side by side on the beach that night. When she got up to squat I went with her—it was a black night and I did not know what was out there. The next morning she went to the

edge of water about eight metres from where we had been sleeping and beckoned me. There she showed me the imprint from a very large crocodile which had sat on the edge of the water close by as we slept. She decided she wanted to take me hunting for crabs and oysters. Carrying a hessian bag and a stick, she beckoned me to follow her into the water—a river inlet close to where we had seen the crocodile imprint. Mindful that I should stay with her, but terrified of an encounter with a crocodile, I stood by the water's edge exclaiming 'Crocodiles, what about the crocodiles?' She smiled and shook her head; I took a deep breath and went into the water up to my thighs. Visible on the sand below were dozens of crabs. She collected enough to feed us all and then invited me to follow her. The stalks of the mangroves we stepped through were covered in oysters. She broke off enough shells for a feast as she wandered further into the vegetation. I balked, anxious about what might lie in wait, but I did have confidence that she knew what she was doing.

Young children were following us. Stephen had spread the idea that I was the 'Queen from the South' and one little girl came up to me stretching out her hand; she was carrying a gift of red berries which she had gathered for 'The Queen'; I looked down into her beautiful black face, with its large brown eyes and mucus streaming from her nose. I accepted her offering of friendship, ate some berries and suggested Gordon my co-producer might wish to share them with me. Gulumbu then prepared the tastiest meal. We sat on the ground beside a large midden under the shade of the mangroves. The heat was intense; I was filthy, covered in salt, sun-screen, mosquito repellent and sweat and I enjoyed the meal of my life—damper, crab and oysters.

We returned to Yirrkala and the next day were called to a meeting with Galarrwuy Yunupingu. Galarrwuy took me by surprise: he was big, glowing, magnificent-looking in a stark white T-shirt—very impressive. As I spoke to him he appeared distracted—didn't look me in the eye—which Stephen later explained was the Yolngu way. I told him about AJ saying the film wouldn't happen. Galarrwuy said it would, 'with or without AJ'—'he will not get in the way'. I told him about the crocodile imprint in the sand and he responded: 'They watch you, then the second night they come and get you'.

Mandawuy was very deferential in the meeting—he and his brother did not address each other.

The contract was to be concluded with the Yothu Yindi Foundation Aboriginal Corporation and all money paid to the Foundation. Galarrwuy and Mandawuy Yunupingu would be associate producers, paid by separate contracts. The Yothu Yindi Foundation would obtain all rights for access to the lands where we wanted to film and undertake all discussions with Aboriginal land owners who would be paid from the fee that went in full to the Yothu Yindi Foundation; we were not to deal with any one else. Galarrwuy would approve and direct the ceremonies, supervise the art to be drawn for the film and the ceremonial body painting. The brothers would ensure the authenticity of all elements, including every detail of the script and the art department. He gave me an undertaking that if there were deaths in the community or of any relatives during the filming, production would not have to stop. This was a crucial commitment. I undertook to offer them the best financial deal possible within the budget parameters.

With the meeting formality concluded, we sat down on the ground and began discussions about the script with a group of women, including Gulumbu. Stephen told the story, which they thought had little to say about girls. They laughed a great deal through a two-hour discussion and when we finished Gulumbu pulled me towards her to kiss me; she trusted me. We visited the school to film head-shots of each of the children, scouting for potential cast; the children were very excited and very shy. We met those teachers who were enthusiastic and willing to help us in this complex journey, as well as some who clearly distrusted our motives. None of the Yolngu expressed any concerns, and as I intended to honour all commitments we made, I didn't worry about the nay-sayers. Two months later, Maggie Miles (Stephen's partner) conducted an acting workshop at the Yirrkala School to begin the process of producing a feature film in genuine collaboration with the people of Arnhem Land, showcasing their land and depicting their culture.³⁰¹

Acting to direction is not a traditional role for the Yolngu people and the purpose of the workshop was not only to give insight into acting skills and an understanding of the process of film-making but to break down their understandable shyness and try to impart a

feeling of ownership and pride in a finished product. Sixty children attended, aged from five to fifteen; they were very excited. During the first week, mini-workshops included movement, acting and vocal classes: then they concentrated on character development, working towards short dramatic presentations. Test scenes were written which were shot during the second week. These workshops introduced us to the people and the people to us through the meaning of making a film. Maggie was familiar to them as she had worked previously in the community with Stephen and was friends with a number of the women. Writer Chris Anastassiades attended the workshop as the scriptwriter.

Over the next twelve months, Stephen and I, as executive producers of this joint venture between the ACTF and Stephen's company Burrundi Pictures, set about securing finance. SBS Independent committed funds from its Creative Nation budget. Stephen identified a private investor in Darwin. Palace Films became the Australian distributor, enabling us to secure FFC funding. Film Victoria invested along with the ACTF. The finance came together more easily than I had expected given the nature of the project. Chris Anastassiades revisited Arnhem Land to absorb the culture—he was small, dark-skinned and comfortable among the youth—they told him their stories and showed him their haunts as they hung around at night as teenagers always do. American black culture was their model and Michael Jordan their hero. Chris adapted their insights cleverly into script dialogue, which had to be minimal as English was not their language.

In *Yolngu Boy*, Lorrpu, Botj and Milika are three Yolngu teenagers who grew up as close friends sharing a dream of one day becoming great hunters together. Their paths diverge as they respond to different influences as teenagers. Botj, once the leader of the friends, has succumbed to petrol sniffing and is in trouble with both white and black law. He can no longer prepare for the traditional rites of passage into manhood ceremony, and has been banned from seeing his mother. While his friends will soon become men in the traditional sense, he will remain a boy, compounding his anger and frustration. Milika is more interested in girls and football than the traditional knowledge he is being taught. Only Lorrpu is single-minded in his determination to realise their childhood dream. But

he is torn between his own desire to complete the traditional ceremony and concern for his friend Botj, who he sees as being on an inevitable path through addiction to degradation. After further trouble with the police, Lorrpu persuades Milika and Botj to set out on a journey through the wilderness of north-east Arnhem Land to Darwin in order to seek help from a tribal elder, Dawu.

Yolngu Boy is a story about the collision of the oldest living culture on earth with the temptations of the West. It explores the transition into adulthood of young Aboriginal people and is a character-driven tale depicting struggles with identity, petrol addiction and two different systems of law. The film would provide a dramatic insight into problems faced in remote communities. But it would also showcase the spectacular scenery of the north and give privileged insights into the ceremonies and culture of present-day Yolngu communities. Structured as an entertainment, it was set to provide a unique anthropological record of Yolngu culture.

To find the three boys, Stephen and Gordon screen tested more than a thousand youths—untrained actors who had much in common with the characters they were to play. They had never acted in their lives and they brought raw energy to the screen. The director had gone to each remote community, sometimes using a loud-hailer to call boys out from the bush, to stand in front of the camera as there was no requirement for them to be in school. Eventually we found around ten prospects to bring to Darwin to workshop and hopefully find our cast. The three boys chosen—Sebastian Pilakui as Lorrpu, Nathan Daniels as Milika and Sean Mununggurr as Botj—genuinely represented the dilemmas they faced within their communities. This casting solution was not surprising as that was the way we cast all Foundation productions; we chose the actor who *was* the child in the story.

If only the rest had been so simple: the money and the legals proved much harder. AJ hung around but I could not get him to discuss the agreements. Gordon Glenn thought he had negotiated the deal with Galarrwuy and the Yothu Yindi Foundation with a handshake, but a handshake was no use in the context of the FFC, Palace, Film Finances, SBS, Film Victoria and ACTF agreements. Throughout the production, we were viewed by some in the community as a cargo cult; they met us with ongoing demands for

payment of money. Stephen was happy to spread largesse; I would give him \$200 and it would be gone in a flash with hand-outs. I objected; I could understand, but ultimately I had responsibility for the bill and had to contain the budget.

The brothers Yunupingu had established the Garma Festival in Arnhem Land, which would become an annual celebration of Aboriginal culture. It was at the first of these festivals, in late 1998, that I finally resolved the contractual problems. AJ had continued to refuse to meet with me and I followed him around until I shamed him into sitting at a bench; he was hostile and said he was too busy to speak with me. Galarrwuy saw us and came and sat down at the end of the bench. He said nothing but remained a supporting presence as I continued to argue with AJ.

The next day Gulumbu sent a message that she wanted Gordon, Stephen and me to take part in a cleansing ceremony with AJ where together we breathed in eucalyptus and other smells steaming from a pit in the ground. As we leaned over the leaves our heads were covered so the fumes would not escape. There was no explanation given, but I took away the feeling that this was meant to bring us together and rid us of animosities. AJ did not turn up.

The Gumatj clan, led by Galarrwuy Yunupingu, live in and around the coastal communities of Yirrkala and Gunyangara, 600 kilometres east of Darwin on Melville Bay, surrounded by stringybark scrub. The sky line is dominated by a bauxite processing plant and its wharves, which return millions of dollars in royalties to the community but are also at the centre of deep family rifts over the way the royalties are distributed. Galarrwuy Yunupingu lives well with the use of a helicopter, four houses, a fleet of motor vehicles and a fishing yacht. Born in 1948, near Melville Bay, Galarrwuy was educated for two years at a Methodist college in Brisbane before he returned to his community in the late 1960s to become involved in his father's campaign for land rights. Chairman of the Northern Land Council for twenty-five years, he has dominated Aboriginal politics in the Northern Territory, battling successive governments, demanding more opportunities for Aboriginal people.

Kim Beazley and his family were guests at Garma and Beazley was feted at a ceremony. I stood beside Galarrwuy Yunupingu and told Beazley about the film: Galarrwuy said that he had written the script.

I was never surprised by Galarrwuy—a contradictory character, he epitomised the *Yolngu Boy* story, straddling the two worlds depicted in the film with success. A family dispute about which I knew little simmered around us as we proceeded to prepare for the film.

EVENTUALLY THE PAPERWORK was completed and filming began on 17 September 1999. The key creative decisions in a production are taken before the cameras roll; the choice of writer and director determine the outcome. The script had been developed over more than two years, with Chris absorbing the culture and working with Gordon Glenn, the principal script editor. Stephen was initially resistant to the naturalistic style of the script and wanted more action and adventure, but I insisted that we were not making a boy's own adventure, nor were we romanticising the problems young indigenous boys were facing. This was a film for young people, but we had to address the issues the Yolngu people were experiencing as honestly as we could.

As Stephen was an inexperienced feature film director, he needed a strong team around him who could work under demanding conditions; to take on the hardships involved, they had to be working for the love of the job and for the idea. The director of photography, Brad Shield, relinquished working as the Steadicam operator with Tom Cruise on *Mission Impossible* so that he could shoot *Yolngu Boy*; he was Stephen's choice and he brought with him experienced crew that he knew and trusted. The choice of the boys to play the lead characters would make or break the film, and weeks were spent identifying them, then workshopping the boys to help them understand the characters they were playing. I was involved in all discussions. But once the cameras roll, a producer's task is to support the director, making sure they have everything at their disposal to do the job as effectively as they can while staying within the budget. Judgement and understanding of the people involved are necessary skills, and in the case of *Yolngu Boy*, a very tough mindset was required.

When the big trucks of film equipment finally rolled into Yirrkala—they had travelled overland or been shipped from Sydney—there was great excitement. The film, which had been

talked about for five years, was going to happen. But the Yothu Yindi Foundation had done nothing to clear with other land owners the right to film on their land, and no money had been shared by our associate producers to assist our access. It was also apparent very quickly that no money would be forthcoming from the Yothu Yindi Foundation: there was community disquiet. The ACTF's lawyer, Chris Lovell, pointed out to me that I didn't have a legal problem so much as a political problem. There was no room in the budget for financial manoeuvre. Within a week of commencement of principal photography Elisa Argenzio, our line producer, made clear that the budget would be overspent at the rate we were going.

Stephen's enthusiasm and his inability to rein in his crew meant he was not keeping to the schedule, setups were taking too long, going into overtime, and he was shooting in excess of his film ratio. The dynamics between the director, the producers and heads of department were volatile. Elisa was a tough budget manager and no detail escaped her attention. Gordon Glenn saw his role as that of creative counsel to Stephen, but Stephen with his crew around him saw Gordon as standing in his way. Gordon was fascinated by the Yolngu and committed to the cultural objectives but unable to make tough decisions concerning budget issues. There was friction, overlaid by my anxiety that we were working in remote territory and there were no fixed rules to fall back on. I remained on location for the duration of the shoot, returning to Melbourne for only one weekend when the Field of Women was planted at the MCG; as chair of the Breast Cancer Network of Australia I wanted to be there. Don came with me to Yirrkala, bringing his laptop to finish writing a book he was in the middle of.

Every day there was a drama off-camera as well as on it. Actors would disappear or not show up; the three boys could not be disciplined as discipline was something they were not used to. Sean ran off three times, fed up with his minders, so we had to supervise day and night with tutors who understood the boys; one day Sebbie (Sebastian), when told to put his shoes on, ran off and dived into a river where there were crocodiles. Stephen had to drive off to find him and persuade him back. The Maralitza man—the crocodile man in the script—who needed two hours' preparation to complete his body painting, had gone fishing when his call came and couldn't be

found. Galarrwuy, supervising the painting, wanted to look for him but we were afraid we would lose him too. When the day to shoot the ceremony came—a big day for the production, which Galarrwuy was organising—we sent a bus to collect the men for filming and it returned empty. Maggie Miles, the casting director, did a wonderful job getting people together, locating them, replacing them, and the performers in front of the cameras strived to give good performances. Jack Thompson, the veteran Australian actor, appeared in one scene as a Northern Territory police officer. He accepted a dollar as payment, stayed around and was a source of great support to me.

It was sometimes heart-rending to watch production. In the film Galarrwuy's son Makuma played a correctional services officer who was the uncle of the petrol-sniffing Botj. Makuma was the leader-in-waiting of the clan. Educated in Sydney and Alice Springs he had played yidaki (didgeridoo) with the Yothu Yindi band, touring from the age of sixteen for eight years. He had been a wild boy who had settled down and was working for his community in a number of constructive ways. In the film he played a man of such a character and he had to deliver a pivotal speech. 'What does it take to teach you to be men? Because if you don't learn the law, there's only one place you're going. To Berrima—to jail. Is that what you want?' He tried unsuccessfully to get the lines out in take after take, and then finally got it right. I just fell into his arms; we stood hugging with mutual relief. He was drenched with the effort and I felt equally exhausted and exhilarated by his accomplishment.

There were also serious accidents. A crew member hit and critically injured a woman staggering on the edge of the road in the township where people gathered to drink. There were discarded bottles and cans at the town limits as Yirrkala was dry and crew had been warned to drive slowly. The same crew member cut his foot on corrugated iron while catching turtles and got septicaemia. The grip split his head open diving into the motel swimming pool at 2 a.m., requiring forty stitches from the front to the back of his skull, and was saved from more serious injury only by his muscle strength. Cuts, burns and serious infections were standard, and we kept shooters on location checking for crocodiles.

Stephen needed a goanna for a scene early in the film and the only one Leroy Plummer, from Standby Props, could catch had a

stumpy tail. Stephen would not use the reptile so Leroy stayed up all night making a latex tail which he glued on the goanna for it to walk appropriately across the road at the right moment. A later scene required a dead goanna which Stephen had assumed Mandawuy could catch and kill, but there was protest from the crew: no animal may be harmed for the production of a film. On the morning of the proposed shoot, Stumpy the goanna was found dead in his cage—but with his tail glued back on he played the role where Lorrpu brings his catch back to camp when the boys are on the run. There was a death from cancer, in an Adelaide hospital, of an important woman in the community. Galarrwuy, true to his word, said the mourning would not begin until the filming in Yirrkala was completed.

The boys thrived on the healthy food and regular meals; you could see their skins begin to glow. They had fun and enjoyed their relationships with the crew, who responded to Stephen's enthusiastic leadership. The goodwill kept us all going. There was a willingness to go along on this extraordinary adventure. When the Maralitz man was to dance around the set, jumping blazing fires with a stick in his mouth that was burning at both ends, Leroy commented, 'What is this, the Moscow Circus?' The crew did an extraordinary job, working hard in extreme heat in very demanding conditions; drugs, alcohol and sex provided relief and sometimes fuelled aggression. I kept a close watch but was sometimes the last to know what was going on.

I managed to secure an additional \$200 000 for the film after Bridgit Ikin from SBS visited location and was impressed with the results that Stephen was achieving. All government bodies agreed to top up their contributions. Galarrwuy wanted more money. Bakamumu, the traditional land owner on the other side of town, wanted some money, and he was entitled.

One emotional issue concerned spears that the art department had commissioned for the ceremony in the film. An old man was paid a thousand dollars for twenty spears. He laboured over the task, refusing to cut corners when his son-in-law insisted that no one would know the difference. He took pride in doing a proper job, using the right wood, trimming the spears so they were straight, and sharpening the metal supplied by the art department. The son-in-law wanted them back after the film was complete; he did not want Galarrwuy to get them. But Bakamumu wanted them for a

ceremony. Bakamumu came to find me one evening to ask me to come next day to sit with him. 'Things are not good, Patricia.' I sat with him and he shook his head. His concerns were about the spears and money to film on his land. I promised to do what I could, but there was such a complicated history to the community relationships and people did not speak directly to one another, so I could never be sure I had the full story.

The art pieces painted for the film by Gaymala Yunupingu and Dhuwarrwarr Marikawere were prized works. Mandawuy Yunupingu wanted them for the Music Centre, but Galarrwuy Yunupingu wanted them to remain where they were, in a set we had constructed. I was always under pressure. I returned all but four of the spears to the community but took the four back to the Foundation to be preserved as they were museum pieces. (The art went to the Melbourne Museum and to the ACTF to form a display for the promotion of the film.)

I held to the terms of the agreement with the Yothu Yindi Foundation and kept referring the discontented community members back to Galarrwuy—sometimes they were deserving, sometimes not, but I learnt to expect anything and I would often meet with an impassive response. I told Galarrwuy he could be paid only for the hours of work he did. Galarrwuy seemed to think there was always more money available and contracts were irrelevant to his requests to pay the new helpers that he recruited. He was fascinated by the process of production and would sit and watch. Sometimes he did his job with spectacular results, at other times we could get no action.

We were about to change locations. Before we did, Stephen was getting his helicopter shots of the beach near Yirrkala. An important scene required aerial shots of a manta ray, but rays were nowhere to be found. The helicopter was almost out of fuel and coming in to land on the oval when Brad Shield, director of photography, said to Stephen, 'What's that?' It was a school of manta ray; the women had sung them in.

WE MOVED LOCATION from Arnhem Land to Kakadu where Stephen planned to place the three boys on top of Lightning Dreaming, the magnificent escarpment bordering Kakadu. It was to be the hero

shot of the film and it was a place no one was usually allowed to go. We negotiated an agreement on the use of the location with the Northern Land Council and the Kakadu indigenous owners and had written permission to go there. But the wet season had begun early and an owner involved believed 'the spirits were moving'. The day before we were due to shoot, he said we could not go to the escarpment. The Park Ranger therefore said he could not keep the agreement; it was not worth the paper it was written on. Stephen was up very early the next day to try and find another owner, a woman, who had said she might give permission; but she could not be found. The experience of producing *Yolngu Boy* had become a steady sequence of ongoing arguments and negotiations. So, with a cast, crew and two helicopters standing by, I said 'Fly now, argue later'. But the helicopter pilot would not fly and land on Lightning Dreaming with a dispute happening. Stephen made phone call after phone call and finally got an owner on the phone who agreed to allow the boys to land on a different part of the escarpment. No one else could have organised that permission in those circumstances. I listened to Stephen's passionate words, standing beside him, and marvelled at his persuasive powers. But the delay meant a late start to filming that day.

The three boys were flown to the top of Lightning Dreaming along with three crew: Chris Anderson, the stunt and safety officer; John Martin, first assistant director; and Kier Beck, the assistant stunt co-ordinator, who was a survival expert and rock climber. Stephen was in a helicopter with Brad, and the first assistant director—whose responsibility is to keep the director to the schedule—placed on top of the escarpment, in radio contact only. The helicopter swept around the rocks for take after take, with Stephen pushing to the limit, and it began to get dark. I went in the second helicopter to collect the three boys from the escarpment. The pilot had done duty picking up soldiers behind the lines in Cambodia and he seemed very confident as I asked about his experience. It was a spectacular sight, flying close to the escarpment, and it took several attempts to land the helicopter as the rocks were jagged and cracked with deep precipices running between them. The boys climbed in—the three men would wait for the next run—and it would take less than ten minutes to return.

As the helicopter rose and turned around to fly back to the airport a massive, dark storm cloud loomed towards us. I anxiously asked the pilot if he thought he could get back to collect the three crew we had left behind. He was subdued but assured me 'it will be okay'. A few minutes later he was not so sure. He would not take a passenger, so I got out and he flew alone in the rain. Within a few minutes it was so wet and so dark that the pilot couldn't see where the men were and had no chance to land. So the three crew were left on the escarpment on a small rock ledge (just big enough for a helicopter to land and with a very uneven surface). The pilot radioed, 'Sorry can't get you. I will pick you up at first light tomorrow'. Fortunately John Martin, the urban boy, had a safety officer and a survival expert to look after him but when the helicopter returned to base with no passengers I was appalled. I did not sleep as I thought of those men on top of Lightning Dreaming; the spirits had indeed been stirred.

It stormed six times during the night, then, when the moon came out, Kier instructed the others on what to do. A narrow rocky ledge offered part shelter, low to their heads; he collected some long grass and made a rough shelter but they got wet several times and were cold. They had no food, no matches, not even a torch because they had lightened their gear for a daytime job; they wore only T-shirts and shorts. The grass stank of urine from dingoes; Chris was worried about snakes in the rock crevices, with the warmth of their bodies likely to attract them; mosquitoes were thick. It was dangerous to move around.

At first light we were at the airport to retrieve them and I have never been more relieved to see people I was responsible for. They were in good spirits considering the circumstances. Stephen had got the shots he wanted and three crew had a night to remember; they put in for overtime. Chris Anderson arranged for three maroon polo shirts with white print on the front saying, *Yolngu Boy 1999*; on the back was a picture of the escarpment and the words, 'Some nights you just can't get home'. He gave one each to John and Kier in memory of the night they spent together in a special but frightening place; it is unlikely anyone else will repeat that camping trip. When Chris Anderson—who had prepared and supervised the stunts that Sean (who had played Botj) had undertaken for the film—was leaving

and saying goodbye, Sean kissed Chris' artificial leg, the result of an injury from a film stunt gone wrong some years before. The leg had been the chalice used to collect water for drinking when the crew were stranded on top of Lightning Dreaming.

With shooting close to completion, the Kakadu people made a demand for a percentage share of the profits from the film. They had been paid a separate fee, and we had pre-paid a daily fee for a tribal elder to be on location every day that we filmed in Kakadu but he never appeared. However, it was impossible to renegotiate contracts at that late stage. I held back payments to Galarrwuy and Mandawuy against their associate producer fees until all the outstanding financial and contractual matters were finalised. That was the only leverage I had, and eventually all paperwork was in place. But the ongoing financial hassle was difficult. We completed filming on time and within the extended budget. Stephen got all his shots and it was 'a blast' for everyone. I was glad to get all the crew out alive, although one was left in hospital. We had captured a country and a culture most Australians have never seen. The boys—innocent, open, trusting, loving, vulnerable—had gone through an experience that they had clearly enjoyed, and the community would soon see the product of their achievement. Most crew left Arnhem Land by 6 November; the film was completed by June 2000, for release in March 2001.

I COULD NOT watch *Yolngu Boy* without weeping; it is an immensely moving film and a remarkable achievement for all involved. The first screening was held on the Yirrkala football ground on 31 January 2001. As dusk turned into night, the people of Yirrkala—some three hundred people who had been involved directly or indirectly with the film—emerged from the shadows of the surrounding trees and sat on the ground; everyone came, and the children ran around playing. The film was projected onto a large screen and the sound system spread the haunting sounds of the yidaki and Mark Ovendon's moving composition for the theme. The audience began to hoot and laugh, point and scream out with recognition and delight as each actor they knew came up on screen. They loved seeing themselves and seeing their home. It was a new experience that sent tingles up

the spine of some of our strongest detractors. We had done what we promised to do and the community saw themselves as they never had before.

I remembered the girl from Mildura who thought all good things came from the United States, because that was what I saw in the movies. I thought of my Afro-American friend Yolanda in Chicago and her son who asked her why he never saw himself on television. And I saw the power of affirmation that the *Yolngu Boy* film gave to the Yirrkala people: they felt recognised. If that were to be the film's only achievement, it was a powerful one. The young people loved it not only because they saw themselves but because its messages spoke to them. Galarrwuy Yunupingu and others began to speak of the film as the first of more to come. But without more responsibility taken by the people themselves this could not happen.

The film was well received by those who bothered to go and see it but films with Aboriginal themes do not easily find an audience in Australia. Peter Thompson, film critic on Channel 9's *Sunday* program, described *Yolngu Boy* as 'probably the most important Australian film of the year', adding 'I wish I could compel every Australian to see it'. The co-chair of Australians for Reconciliation, Michael Gordon, called it 'a terrific contribution to the reconciliation process'; Michael Long the Essendon football player said he 'could personally relate to it'. And even Peter McGauran, the federal Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation, understood. He said: '*Yolngu Boy* is a movie with heart and integrity, but is also insightful, original and intensely compelling'.³⁰²

Launched in Darwin by Northern Territory Chief Minister Dennis Bourke on 1 February 2001, *Yolngu Boy* also struck a chord with audiences in the wider context of the Territory. McGauran hosted a parliamentary screening in Canberra on 7 February and Premier Steve Bracks attended the Melbourne launch a few days later. Gulumbu and three other artists came to the Melbourne launch and to participate in workshops at the Melbourne Museum, where the largest artwork from the film was being presented to the museum by Janet Holmes à Court. Galarrwuy spoke at the opening of the film and confessed that he never thought the film would happen.

When Gulumbu was leaving at the end of the Melbourne screening she hugged me and she sobbed. Things had gone badly

wrong at home in Yirrkala. On the evening of Tuesday 16 August 2000, just after *Yolngu Boy* had been completed and its release was in the planning, Makuma Yunapingu, Galarrwuy's son—who had played the correction officer in the film and worked so hard to deliver a performance—had been drinking. His forty-year-old sister-in-law Betsey, Gulumbu's daughter-in-law, went to Makuma's home uninvited. Betsey was Makuma's poison cousin; they should not look at each other or sit in the same camp. When asked to leave she refused and Makuma crossed the veranda and kicked her, breaking her jaw on both sides of her face and tearing an artery at the base of her brain. Efforts to revive her failed and she died later that day. Makuma was distraught.

He was charged with murder and faced mandatory life imprisonment. On 18 April 2002 he was acquitted of murder and manslaughter and found guilty by a Supreme Court jury of committing a dangerous act causing death, and sentenced to three years' jail to be suspended after fifteen months. On release he was to be banished to the desert until his victim's family permitted his return to his coastal homelands.³⁰³ Makuma was bailed on the proviso that he lived in the care of relatives in central Australia. It was a tragic episode that split the community, which demanded to exercise the traditional law of payback. It also exacerbated community dissatisfaction about royalty payments from the bauxite mine. Galarrwuy Yunapingu's authority as leader of the clan was seriously undermined. Yet this sort of tragedy, magnified in this case because of the high-profile participants, was not an uncommon one in indigenous communities.

Sebastian Pilakui (playing Lorrpu) won the AFI award for best young actor of the year. Gulumbu returned to her art. In 2004 she won the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award with three memorial poles. She was also one of seven indigenous Australian artists selected to create site-specific works in the Musée du Quai Branly, which opened in Paris in June 2006.³⁰⁴

A Northern Territory Government inquiry cleared Galarrwuy Yunapingu of misusing millions of dollars in mining royalties. The Department of Justice notified the leader on 11 January 2006 that the police and the Commissioner of Consumer and Business Affairs had found no grounds to pursue investigations into his family's Gumatj Association. But days later Galarrwuy received notice that the federal

government had ordered an audit of the 600-member association's finances dating back to 1998. Galarrwuy, in retaliation, demanded the return of the symbolically important Barunga statement of indigenous rights and aims which hangs in the Federal Parliament's Great Hall—for burial at Burunga, a Northern Territory settlement where in 1998 he presented it to Prime Minister Bob Hawke in the company of other Aboriginal leaders. More happily, the Garma Festival, which Galarrwuy and his brothers started, has grown into a significant annual cultural event.³⁰⁵

I EMERGED FROM the production of *Yolngu Boy* both exhilarated and debilitated. I was despairing for the future of Aboriginal communities because the culture I saw was fractured and dysfunctional. Many of the women struggled to hold their lives and those of their children together while they were subjected to extraordinary abuse and violence. Too many of the men who should have been role models for the young boys and men—and were capable of fulfilling this role—instead offered negative models of an indulged and dissipated lifestyle. It was difficult to see hope for the future.

Our three heroes in the movie were wonderful, intelligent, beautiful young men; my tearful reaction to the film is because I know what they face. I don't know how we can address these issues but Australia has failed to solve them and too many Aboriginal people, who should have done better than they have for their people, have failed; it is a joint responsibility before us. I agree with John Howard and Noel Pearson about the need to break the cycle of welfare dependency. *Yolngu Boy*, dramatising the risks faced by indigenous young people around Australia, was a small contribution to reconciliation; it should be available, with educational back-up material, to assist understanding and debate about the problems involved with youth, including petrol sniffing—still a major problem in Aboriginal communities seven years on. I proposed to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs when the film was released that it should be distributed by them widely into all communities; the idea met with some enthusiasm initially but then there was no response.

The filming of *Yolngu Boy* was turbulent and spanned a turbulent time in my life. Planning had begun in November 1994 and the film

was released in early 2001. The creative partnerships formed with *Yolngu Boy* were tested. Elisa Argenzio was the best line producer I had worked with who, in the face of pressure, kept the budget on track; I would work with both her and Chris Anastasiades again on the mini-series *Noah & Saskia*. Stephen did not break into the big time with his direction of *Yolngu Boy*, but the film will be acknowledged as a classic. It is a contribution to anthropological understanding made possible by Stephen's connection with the Yolngu people and the unique collaboration and dedication of all involved. It could not have happened without Stephen Johnson's vision, personal influence and connection with the Yolngu community, and it was one of the most extraordinary partnerships of my career.

PERSONALLY, HOWEVER, I was beginning to feel like Granny among the kids with some people, and losing patience. There were a number of influences at work. In March 1998, my mother had a stroke and was critically ill. That weekend I was with my two sisters at Anglesea; we were together to celebrate my sixtieth birthday. My mother was in the Mildura Hospital, so I returned with my sister Joan and her husband to be with my father in Mildura. My mother regained consciousness but died within two weeks. She was eighty-nine. The past couple of years, as our parents suffered the inevitable decline of old age, had been gruelling for us all. My mother had retained her faculties but not her mobility; my father had retained his mobility but his mind was increasingly affected by memory loss and encroaching dementia. Yet, as always, he remained in charge.

While my mother was alive, our parents operated as a team. Eva could tell Reg where everything was and remind him what he was trying to do. He tried to conceal the extent of his problems but our mother wanted to move into an aged care facility instead of remaining in the old family home. My father began to fear that his daughters would disrupt his life at my mother's urging. 'You are the only one who can deal with your father,' she would say to me. But I could not; he would turn hostile and would never leave me alone with my mother long enough for us to have a conversation. Eva could not and would not stand up to him once I was out of the house; nor would she leave him. They were interdependent.

The doctor had insisted they were managing. Our father was still extraordinarily strong-willed and had lost none of his psychological strength despite failing in other ways. We brought in an assessment team to make changes to the physical environment; they had meals-on-wheels and a housekeeper to clean and wash; my sister Joan looked after their bills. After my mother's death I wished for a long time that I had been able to do more.

Now that she was gone, the family dynamics changed. My father became a gentle, amenable person who still insisted on living alone, with meals-on-wheels and a housekeeper to clean and wash, but liked to be with his family. My sister Joan was on hand in Mildura, he would visit Melbourne, Geelong and Anglesea and we would visit him but he was failing, and needed the security and familiarity of his own environment.

During one of our visits, my sister Lesley and I decided we would take him on a trip to Broken Hill. He was happy in the car, but once we arrived in the motel he did not know where he was, who we were or how he would get home. When we returned him home and I was back in Melbourne I phoned to ask him how he'd enjoyed his trip to Broken Hill. He replied that he had, but 'Who were those two women who had taken me there?' He resisted any attempt to move into facilities where he would have company and care. One night he put himself to bed fully clothed and left the heater on. It was a forty-degree heatwave in Mildura and my sister did not discover him for two days, and by then he was severely dehydrated. He was hospitalised and we were unsure he would recover.

From hospital he was placed in nursing home care but at ninety-four he was still tough and gradually he did recover. He was content, actually enjoying the life of the home where people had gone to die. The matron wanted him moved: the more a person was disabled, the higher the rate paid for the bed. She also asserted that my father was a troublemaker. He was in a two-bed room with a man with no legs who used to turn the television up very loud. My father had macular disease, didn't like the noise and would get out of bed and pull the plug out of the wall socket. There were solutions to the problem—giving the television viewer earphones or separating them—but that seemed to be beyond the wit of the administration. I made it very clear that my father would not be moved out of the

nursing home without a public argument, the matron backed off and my father settled down again.

I talked to Dad regularly by phone and we always had the same conversation. Then he got shingles; he slipped and fell and broke his hip; it mended, but he could not relearn how to move his legs so that he could walk again. He was ninety-five years old, but had no heart disease, cancer or identified terminal illness. One day I received a call from my sister Joan telling me the nursing home believed our father was fading fast. I flew to Mildura with my daughter Sue, asked for a wheelchair and told my father we were going to buy fish and chips and eat them in the park. When we had the fish in hand, he insisted he be taken back to the toilet. But he didn't need to go to the toilet; he wanted the security of his room. We sat outside on a balcony, he sucked on a chip and I asked him what he was thinking about.

'I'm thinking about the good time I'd be having if I were having a good time' was his reply. There was my dad, giving a response he would have given in his prime. He asked to be taken to his bed and Sue and I struggled to put him there. He did not get up again and died within a week. When I saw him once more three days later, he had to be told who I was. 'Patricia?' he queried, lifting his head with a brief look of recognition; that was the only word he spoke. Physically he disappeared before my eyes, and when I saw him in his coffin only days later he was barely recognisable.

My father had often spoken to Don and me about the farewell he wanted: a funeral at the historic Mildura Homestead which he had been responsible for recreating, where he wanted Don to speak about his civic achievements in Mildura. Because of Mildura family politics, it did not work out that way. Even though the man he had once been had been gone for some time, his death led me to more self-examination.

A Partnership Unravels

'There seems a gap between what others need to hear from us in order to trust that we like them, and the extent of the negative thoughts we know we can feel towards them and still like them. ... But the susceptibility of others means that the negative part of the equation can rarely be expressed without jeopardising the union.'

—Alain de Botton³⁰⁶

IT WAS MARCH 1997, the Foundation's fifteenth birthday. The Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett, attended our official celebration. I had never met him before and had absorbed much of the negative vibe about him, but by the end of the evening I found I had been charmed by his charisma and style, and not simply by the words 'It is a great source of pride for all Victorians that the Foundation has its home in this State'.

It was a somewhat surreal evening. I fell off the wobbly stage step, injuring my leg, as I rose to reply to his speech; Kennett reached me first in two long strides to pick me up. Lorraine Elliott, Parliamentary

Secretary for the Arts in Victoria, spent much of the evening stuck in a lift that had broken down. Every now and again Kennett would call out, 'Are you there Lorraine?' The audience loved it; even cynical members of the industry allowed themselves to surrender to the Premier's wacky appeal.

Kennett presented awards to four people who had made an exceptional contribution to the Foundation's productions over the years: Esben Storm, Chris Neal, Ralph Strasser and Mark Mitchell. In fifteen years the Foundation had produced more than seventy million dollars' worth of drama, notable for its innovation and excellence. We had won sixty-two awards nationally and internationally, including one Emmy. We had sold programs into ninety-four countries and sold nearly a million books. We had hosted the First World Summit on Television for Children, attended by seventy-one nations. We had employed more than five thousand people on ACTF productions. Now the Foundation was involved in animation and doing pioneering work in multimedia. These achievements were all the results of collaboration by a depth of talent in the Australian industry.

On this anniversary, Hazel Hawke issued a statement about her fourteen years as a board member with the ACTF. 'The work ethic, enthusiasm and the extraordinary talents of its staff, its creativity and the exuberance with which the work is tackled never ceases to make one feel privileged to have an association with this remarkable foundation'.

The government had changed in Canberra with John Howard's election in March 1996, yet I felt comfortable with both sides of politics and with the Foundation's record of achievement, and I was looking to the future with optimism and enthusiasm. I had always been careful to ensure that membership of the Foundation's board was bipartisan and kept in balance with high-profile, respected public figures regardless of political persuasion. There was no political point to prove: our work was about improving television for all Australian children. Dame Beryl Beaurepaire's relationship with Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser in 1982, when the Foundation was established, was critical in persuading him to give the ACTF an initial government grant to become established. Hazel Hawke's membership gave balance and over the years Hazel was helpful in facilitating meetings, at launches and in giving profile to the organisation.

When Dame Beryl wished to retire, Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, a former minister in the Fraser Government, became her replacement, and after Garth Boomer's death she became deputy chair, with Janet Holmes à Court continuing as chair. During Labor's long term in national office, from March 1983 to March 1996, I always found support in Canberra. This did not manifest itself in significant financial terms but the grants we got were assured even though the financing culture for film and television producers changed dramatically over those years. The bureaucrats, too, were supportive.

Janet Holmes à Court was outspoken in her political opinions, derived from her delightful, left-wing, free-thinking parents. Robert was an outsider in political terms and seemed indifferent to his wife's views, which she had little time to pursue with any vigour while he was alive. After her husband's sudden death in September 1990, Keating telephoned Janet to give her sympathy and advice. He also helped give her credibility in the business world by appointing her as a member of the Reserve Bank of Australia in August 1992. Two days before the Keating–Howard election campaign began in 1996 Keating appointed Janet to chair the Centenary of Federation Council; John Howard as Leader of the Opposition was not consulted.

When John Howard became PM he made it clear that Janet was not his appointment and he expected her to resign. Janet requested a meeting, which Howard agreed to, but he indicated he would not change his mind. Janet did not care about chairing the Federation Council but she wanted to remain on the Reserve Bank Board and she intended to offer John Howard her resignation on condition that he reappoint her to the Reserve Bank. This plan had been suggested to her by the CEO of the family company Heytesbury, Darrel Jarvis. She ran the idea past me and I told her I thought that kind of tactic was unlikely to work. The meeting with Howard took place and despite representations from the Bank on her behalf, Janet lost both positions.

The 1996 federal election proved a turning point for Janet. In many ways, it signalled the start of her *annus horribilis* and the end of her dream run with the Australian media. She was out in the cold with John Howard; Heytesbury was performing badly, and financial journalists were beginning to sniff business failure. Despite Janet and Jarvis' repeated denials that ongoing asset sales by Heytesbury were

a reflection of trouble with the banks, the reporting of Heytesbury's achievements turned from unbridled admiration for Janet to a more cynical and suspicious tone. Probing journalists were asking 'What will be left?' So were Janet's children.

BACK IN SEPTEMBER 1990, my mother and father had been staying with Don and me in Melbourne. My mother had become very ill with bronchitis and was recuperating after emergency treatment in hospital. One of my sisters rang with the news that Robert Holmes à Court had died; she had just heard it on the radio. I rang Janet, who was in shock. My father and Don insisted that I should go to Perth to be with Janet to do anything I could to assist her. My sister Lesley came from Geelong to help care for Mum.

When I arrived in Perth, preparations for the funeral were well underway but what would happen next was unclear. Only then did I realise how isolated Janet was; surrounded by people at a large funeral, there was no one there who was close and able to give her advice except her lawyer. Robert's employees were trained to do his bidding. Both merchant banker Mark Burrows, head of Baring Brothers, Burrows and Co., and Alan Newman, Robert's former CEO—but no longer with Heytesbury Holdings and starting up his own business—told me at the funeral that Janet was going to need help, hinting darkly that it would need to be expert help, and Newman said it could not come from him.

The strong implication was that all was not right with the transactions that had occurred with the sale to Bond of Bell Resources, the public company which had been chaired by Robert Holmes à Court. I passed this information on to Janet and she wanted nothing to do with either man. Janet had taken the decision, surprising everyone, to assume Robert's role. She had first to manage the immediate requirements of employees of a private company who were traumatised by their leader's (and in some cases their idol's) death. I gave Janet some advice about handling difficult circumstances, based on my own experience, and I took care of the media for her.

While Robert was alive, acting the role of his wife and handmaiden had been a full-time job for Janet. Her first priority had always been Robert, over and above her children and her parents

and everyone else; she had neither the time nor the opportunity to develop strong friendships of her own. Every contact I had with her was on her terms, necessarily so, and while I liked Janet and enjoyed her company, I had no illusions about where I stood.

Whenever Janet phoned, I dropped everything else. Meetings and functions were scheduled at her convenience. I would wait for her call to share information I thought she needed to know in her role as ACTF chair; I never imposed on her time. If I had problems I needed to discuss or to solve, I turned to Frank Meaney and John Morris, both of whom had a better understanding of the issues and greater depth of experience from which to draw on in helping me solve them. The arrangement suited me. Janet could come in and lend her profile to events; her name could be used when I wanted to set up appointments with politicians, and if Janet wanted to see them they would often rearrange their diaries to accommodate her.

In those early Foundation years Janet had a charm and a naïveté about her. The life she led was a source of wonder to me. Robert didn't seem to find it necessary to conform to the protocols of the establishment; he did as he wished as he made his way in the business world and Janet also seemed free to do as she wished, provided she was there when he wanted her and she did not interfere with his plans.

I saw her decision to take over the running of his empire as foolhardy, yet also an act of great courage. I was impressed and wanted to help if I could. I thought that Janet was someone with little experience of management and how to run a complex business; she had seemed to ask Robert's views on everything. That was also the way Robert's employees saw her, but that apparent lack of knowledge contained a hidden strength: she was able to take everyone by surprise. The important thing right then was to convey a clear sense that she knew what she was doing.

The night after the funeral I shared Janet's king-size bed as there was no other bed in the house, with everyone at home. I woke to find her wide-eyed, thinking about her first day at the office. We discussed what she would wear—a bright tangerine-coloured jacket. She rang Robert's secretary to instruct her to clean out his office promptly so she could move straight in that day; she would see the interior decorator to change the décor from leather couches to

a style more suited to her taste and image: she would address senior management to tell them it was business as usual—she was in charge; she would meet with each one individually to ask for a two-page summary—on the issues they were facing at that time, the financial situation and the direction planned—to be in her hands within two days.

The media were salivating as they tried to get the first interview with the widow about her plans for Heytesbury. Did she have the fire in the belly, the killer instinct? Was she tough enough, ruthless enough, cunning enough to run the second-biggest private company in Australia? Janet was not ready for such scrutiny, so I arranged for others to speak on her behalf. Will Bailey, the chief executive of the ANZ Bank, Bruce Vaughan, the Sydney-based chairman of Dalgety Farmers Ltd and Fay Gale, the vice-chancellor of the University of Western Australia, said they believed she could do the job: she had the skills necessary to run businesses after they had been acquired.

Two days after the funeral, Janet issued a press release announcing she would remain as chairman of the Australian Children's Television Foundation. I was pleased with that decision. The ACTF had a high profile at this stage and with journalists enquiring about her management ability, I credited Janet with the Foundation's success. The circumstances of Robert's death, the youth and inexperience of her four children and Janet's resulting determination to take charge changed our relationship, and for a time I became a close confidante.

The story that was about to unfold was unique and I suggested it should be recorded. She agreed that someone would eventually write about her life and career, and she would prefer that it was me. I saw it as a long-term project, a book I might write in my retirement from production—it would be a book about the adventures of someone with the courage to have a go in a man's business culture. That was the extent of my discussion with Janet regarding a biography, but the book would come to dominate my life in ways I could never have predicted.

Over the next few years, particularly early on, Janet spoke to me frequently about the problems she was facing with her family, her work, and within Heytesbury. Robert had always solicited opinion from those he met and Janet did the same. There was no shortage of

advice for the attractive widow. But our relationship developed into what I believed was a strong friendship. Janet usually came to dinner at our home and, when in Melbourne, sometimes stayed over. She attended my daughters' weddings. I stayed with her in Perth, London and New York. Don and I contributed ideas for her speeches, and I wrote her speeches for Foundation functions.

Janet met my friends and I met hers. Don and I attended three of her children's weddings. It was a great joy sharing stories about grandchildren. As I worked intermittently on Janet's biography, we talked about her life, her upbringing, her husband, her children, her interests and I interviewed scores of relatives, friends from the past, employees and business associates. Janet gave me access to Robert's files and the media clippings covering their lives from when they first met—all kept with care. I knew as much about Janet as anyone could know ... and with that kind of scrutiny skeletons inevitably emerge from the closet.

I observed a pattern in her life where she moved on from conflict and did not look back. She found it very difficult to analyse or reflect on her own behaviour, and when I asked why something had happened or was left in a certain way, she didn't know or wouldn't say. Unlike Janet, I analyse endlessly, ask questions and want to dig around. So I uncovered stories where people were uncomfortable. They did not want to talk on the record. A few times I was told: 'Turn off the tape recorder'. Word travelled, and though Janet had placed no restrictions on my access to people I should cover, she requested that I stop asking any more questions about certain business transactions.

AT THE SAME TIME as Janet's problems with Heytesbury were growing, Peter Holmes à Court was in trouble with his company Back Row Productions. As executive producer and distributor of *Lift-Off Live*, Peter had planned a schedule for a tour which had opened successfully in Sydney. Now his company wanted to close the show down but contractually he was committed and we had a tour booked. As I was in negotiation with the ABC regarding the future of the *Lift-Off* television series that had been taken off the air, I did not want the live show closed. Now more than ever, it required promotional support

and that was Back Row's job. A distributor/executive producer is expected to get behind a show and help work for its success, not run when profits aren't such easy takings, but Back Row Productions had serious financial difficulties itself.

As Heytesbury was an investor in *Lift-Off*, with an interest in income from ancillary rights, Janet was entitled to all information and I briefed her regularly. Her first response was that I should pursue Peter firmly to meet his obligations. I phoned Peter, with Janet sitting listening to the phone call, to tell him we intended to continue with the contractually agreed performance schedule. The Foundation promoted the show as best we could in Melbourne, then in Adelaide, but the audience numbers were not high enough to sustain profits. An option would have been a creative solution, to scale back the show and reduce overheads, but that would have required co-operation with Back Row and they had no such interest.

After taking legal advice from the Foundation's lawyers, and a meeting with Janet and Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, I cancelled *Lift-Off Live*. It was a heart-breaking decision for me and for all involved with the production and the television venture. I had to concede failure to sustain what to my mind was the Foundation's most important production.

The events leading to the decision to cancel the tour were muddied by Janet's role.

The returns from *Lift-Off Live* were in a bank account and under dispute. Back Row Productions claimed this money but the Foundation was considering a damages claim; our legal advice was that we had a good case. I met with Janet and Dame Margaret to report on the situation. Janet by now had changed her position towards Peter. She thought that the Foundation should give the funds in the returns bank account to Back Row, and cut any further loss that might be caused through a legal dispute. It was a very awkward situation. The chairman of the ACTF board was the mother of the chairman of Back Row Productions, a company we were discussing suing for breach of contract. I was concerned to ensure that the Foundation did the correct thing with public money, whatever the consequences.

Janet suggested that she assume Back Row's debt with the Foundation and pay out of her own pocket. She knew Peter was

in financial difficulties and this was a way to avert further damage. I thought Janet had a conflict of interest and had no right to tell me what action the Foundation should take in such a situation, so I tabled the legal advice. It was a tense meeting. There was no resolution and, as she walked out my office door, Janet turned to me and said, 'Stick to your knitting'.

Margaret and I were left to discuss the situation. I saw Back Row Productions as at the heart of the problem, not the Foundation's live show—the production we had accomplished very successfully. Margaret argued there would be no commercial benefit to the Foundation to go through a court case involving the chairman and her son; no doubt about that.

Soon after, two letters arrived from Janet on my desk on the same day, dated 24 and 25 September 1996 respectively. The first was addressed to both Margaret and me, and dealt with Janet's thoughts about our meeting a few days before. Janet wrote: 'I came away from the meeting thinking this is not right; I feel a heel; I have suggested dipping into my own bank account; something is wrong here'. She believed the fundamentals were: *Lift-Off Live* was going to make a loss; part of that loss was caused by underestimating the complexities of transferring from television to the live stage. 'A contract doesn't establish anything,' she wrote, 'it forms a framework for dispute, not resolution. The forces of resolution lie in disentangling the forces of pride'. She had had to learn at John Holland, she said, 'how expensive it is to move into new areas'. While the Foundation had been advised it had a good case, she assured us Back Row Productions had advice that they had a good case weighted in their favour and that 'we need to be mature and rather than continuing to frustrate the resolution, we cut our losses and get on with our lives'. Her suggestion was that 'the \$72 000 in the account be split \$50 000 to Back Row Productions and \$22 000 to the ACTF'. She did not know whether Back Row Productions would agree but she would work hard at convincing them to do so.

The second letter outlined my terms of remuneration and suggested a 5 per cent retrospective increase in my salary, which had not been reviewed for two years. It concluded: 'I am also aware that your current contract expires on 30 June 1997 and it is important that we sit down and review succession plans and your role post-1997.'

I'm sure the foundation will continue to need your valuable input and wisdom'. No question about my succession and retirement had ever been raised before, by Janet or the board. It seemed to me there was a threat implied in these two letters, arriving as they did together. I did not think my employment was a matter to raise nine months before my contract was due and at that time.

I met with Dame Margaret to discuss the correspondence. She responded that I should write to Janet and tell her 'I had every intention of renewing my contract'. I wrote a letter to Janet and Margaret expressing my intention to renew for another five-year term.³⁰⁷ The Foundation settled with Back Row Productions on the terms Janet outlined, and we never discussed the matter again, but from that point on our relationship was changed. Janet was clearly hurt that I had put her on the spot; I was concerned the Foundation conduct itself as advised legally, and that Janet had had no right to intervene in the way she had. I was also hurt by an implied threat to the job that I loved, and that, after a partnership of ten years and a long friendship, Janet could write as she did.

BY THE TIME my biography of Janet was published in 1999, nearly a decade had passed since I began to research her life and Janet had transformed over that time. Inevitably, she was no longer the eager, adventurous, open, enthusiastic woman who had accepted the challenge to run her husband's business empire. She had been toughened. Media myths had been created around her, to which I had contributed in full measure. Darrel Jarvis had gained Janet's confidence, becoming the deputy managing director and driving force behind Heytesbury within a year of Robert's death. They were very close. He taught Janet to express a vision for Heytesbury that matched her philosophy, while he became the architect of change within the corporation. Janet had much less need to talk through her problems with me by then.

Not long after the settlement with Back Row, I received a phone call from Peter Holmes à Court asking if I would be willing to attend a family meeting in London where all four children wished to confront their mother about the future of Heytesbury and her relationship with Darrel Jarvis. Because of all the interviews I had

done for the biography, I knew much about the family politics and the Heytesbury business and was seen by the family as close to Janet. I did not want to get involved.

Peter had also informed Richard Johnston, CEO of Stoll Moss (Heytesbury's theatre business in the UK) about the family's challenge to Janet. Richard was concerned, and contacted me, requesting that I meet him next time I was in London.³⁰⁸ Richard told me the children were determined to remove Darrel Jarvis from the business and, while he agreed that Darrel should go, Richard was very concerned about what would happen to Janet in the process. He asked me if I would agree to be present when this show-down occurred. I feared that such close involvement would inevitably bring me grief and resentment. I spoke with Catherine, Janet's only daughter, because I knew she would be the most understanding towards her mother. Catherine was ambivalent about how far she wanted to take the dispute and she did not want to argue with her mother about Heytesbury voting rights, which she thought were the boys' main objective, but she had no doubt that Darrel Jarvis should go.³⁰⁹

The confrontation with Janet was inevitable, then; only the timing remained to be resolved and that could be arranged to fit in with my travel. So I agreed to attend. Janet and I were still working together; we had moved on from the *Lift-Off Live* problems and still met socially. I knew she was very stressed and suggested she join Don and me for a weekend in Warburton. It was the weekend of Princess Diana's funeral. Among discussions that weekend Janet mused on why she could not inspire her own children. 'I can walk into a room, speak and inspire those present, why can't I do this with my kids?' 'Because you are their mother,' I replied.

The family meeting took place in April 1997 at Tylney Hall, a privately owned English country house in Rotherwick, Hampshire. Present were Janet, her sons Peter, Simon and Paul, her daughter Catherine, Peter's wife Divonne, Simon's fiancée Katrina, Catherine's boyfriend Rob Mather and me. The boys pulled no punches, nor did Divonne, who told her mother-in-law exactly what she thought of her. Janet was distraught, but decided to return to London, waking me in the middle of the night to travel back with her for discussions with Darrel Jarvis. Over the next few days I watched as together Janet and Darrel planned the next moves. Darrel's control

over her was extraordinary. 'You've failed to reach your dream. It's all over. You have failed, Janet,' he told her. I could see that she felt guilty and responsible for the problems in Heytesbury but she decided to dig in; she would fight her children and Darrel would remain CEO.

But the boys were adamant. Janet remained loyal to Darrel long after her family had given her notice and he did not leave Heytesbury until 20 March 1998; by which time he had negotiated a departure settlement. David Karpin was appointed as deputy chairman of the Heytesbury board on 18 August 1997 as an independent shareholder; a tough role to take on. I was asked by Janet to brief him on the family situation and did as requested; it was by now simply too difficult to do otherwise.

I had to finish an authorised biography on a subject who had changed in my eyes and I was not sure what to do about it. Writing the biography had been a hobby, a refuge where I could be by myself in my own mind. I toyed with the idea of abandoning the book, but that would have had more repercussions than finishing it. I wrote a final chapter, sketching in the bare details of the meeting at Tylney Hall. I had been writing the book over a nine-year period; and although my views had altered I did not reshape what I had written; I wanted it finished. Janet and I got through the release and the promotion of the book; she took it well; most readers responded to the book as a sympathetic portrait, which it was; Darrel got off lightly. Janet asked me to change only one thing before the book was published: it was a quote from Darrel Jarvis.

At the launch of the biography a journalist asked me, in trying to establish how close the friendship had been, 'If you fell out of bed in the middle of the night, would you call Janet?' The answer was no, I did not rely on Janet for my emotional and physical needs; I had a devoted husband, close family and friends who fulfilled such needs; but yes, we had been close.

I was very sad about Janet in many ways. I had great affection for her and always enjoyed her company. I had expected too much of her. In her search for the vision she spoke of with such emotional rhetoric, many of her employees bought into her dream. They wanted to believe, as I did, in the idealism she expressed. But Janet had lived with Robert Holmes à Court for twenty-four years and

history has a way of shaping us. We never discussed these issues as we continued to run the Foundation. We had a veneer of friendship but our perceptions of each other had shifted. I have never been good at hiding my feelings and Janet did not spend time dwelling on the past. She moved on.

A board member who had served for ten years said to me one day, 'I never understood the tension that was there between you'. My experience with Janet and her family also had a corrosive effect on my enthusiasm for my work. My attitude to Janet continued to be influenced by my sense of appreciation for her assistance in the financing of *Winners* (which gave the Foundation its first chance) and *Lift-Off*, my dream. We continued to work together amicably but the chairman of the board and the CEO were no longer the strong, cohesive team we had been. John Howard's attitude to Janet also weakened her public profile. No longer in favour in Canberra, she feared her voice would harm Heytesbury. 'I cannot speak out,' she would say. I saw less of her. She had other demands on her time—'and they pay me', she said. Dame Margaret Guilfoyle and Shane Stone would be my lifeline to Canberra.

WHILE ONE PARTNERSHIP was unravelling, another was born. In 1998 Lyn Swinburne, a breast cancer survivor, came to see me. She was indignant about the way doctors had treated her during her diagnosis and later treatment. Because of her experiences, she wanted to establish an advocacy group to be run by women with breast cancer to improve their service, treatment and care.

It was ten years since I had been diagnosed with breast cancer, and I was still going for regular checkups. When my case was diagnosed, people did not speak of cancer. I knew no one with breast cancer to whom I could turn to for advice in the search for answers. Had I brought this on myself? Was it something I had drunk or eaten? Was this punishment for taking on battles in life? The result of stress from my voice? I feared that if people knew about my condition, I would be seen as a marked woman and that this might affect the ACTF's funding prospects. I sought advice on the USA Cancer Help line and scoured bookshops overseas seeking information. I had never heard of an oncologist.

When Lyn came to see me, she was working from a desk at BreastScreen Australia with a small grant from the National Breast Cancer Centre. A former primary school teacher, she was looking for a breast cancer survivor with a public profile who could chair the Breast Cancer Network of Australia, the national network for Australians personally affected by breast cancer. John Funder, the chairman of VicHealth, recommended me but warned Lyn that I might not be easy to work with.

What John could not have known at that time was that my own niece had recently been diagnosed with the disease at the age of just thirty-four; I had two daughters; and I had been thinking that I should be doing more to promote awareness of this insidious disease. Lyn won me over in a single meeting. She was passionate and persuasive, there was no nonsense, she had a determination I recognised immediately and she was prepared to take on anyone and everyone. So I agreed to become the chair and was elected in August 1999.

I wanted a back-room role, primarily as mentor to Lyn, helping chart a course and alerting her to the pitfalls. I advised on the most suitable structure, the politics she would encounter and strategy for the brand.³¹⁰ There was no guaranteed funding, so establishing a profile was the first major task. BCNA now represents 16 000 individuals and 150 groups across Australia recognised by consumers, the medical profession, government and the community as the national voice of breast cancer.

Lyn had devised the idea of planting a field of deep-pink corflute silhouettes, each in the shape of a woman, to represent the 11 800 women diagnosed each year with breast cancer. The large field was edged with 2700 white silhouettes—representing those who had died that year—with 100 blue figures symbolising men diagnosed.³¹¹ The first ‘Field of Women’ was planted on the lawns outside Parliament House in Canberra in November 1998. It was a breathtaking sight which dramatised the scale of the disease in the community. The deep-pink figure became the BCNA logo and the image we would promote.

The Field of Women travelled across Australia to a different state each year, culminating in the Live Field of Women on the Melbourne Cricket Ground in May 2005, when 11 500 women

took to the ground wearing pink ponchos (and 100 men in blue) in a moving display and image which was relayed around Australia.³¹²

The logistics and organisation required to stage such an event would challenge a major corporation, much less a small organisation. My partnership with Lyn in BCNA has been one of the most rewarding of my career. I have been able to help Lyn create an effective organisation and grow an idea successfully through a very similar approach to the one I took with the ACTF: keep your eye on the main purpose; don't allow the competitors and the nay-sayers to take you off course; don't get embroiled in bureaucracy; work with the media—they are essential allies in getting the message out—but don't be seduced by their promise of fleeting fame. As I kept telling Lyn, success will breed success and once an organisation achieves recognition all sorts of people come out of the woodwork, some to try to take advantage: it's important to find the genuine allies.

Lyn is a creative, inspired advocate and a very quick learner in every way. She has taught me much about courage and commitment. My gratitude to BCNA is for introducing me to many outstanding women, whose spirit is inspirational, breathtakingly so. Breast cancer selects its victims at random; they are a cross-section of remarkable people who create joy and strength for one another in dark times. So long as some women are misdiagnosed and poorly managed, breast cancer will increase and women will die. Meanwhile Lyn will keep working; partnerships in enterprise can yield rewards all round.

19

Time to Go

'It's the hardest thing in the world to accept a little success and leave it that way.'

—Marlon Brando

MY FATHER, REG ETHERINGTON, had died on 1 September 2000. Six weeks later, Bruce Gyngell died in the United Kingdom of a brain tumour. Bruce had been awarded the Order of Australia in January, and I wrote congratulating him. His note of acknowledgement was the last word I had from Bruce. 'I value tremendously all the friends, such as yourself, that I have made during all my years in television.'³¹³

At the Foundation, *Crash Zone 2* was in production; *Round the Twist 3* won the Banff (Canadian) top children's television award; *Kahootz* was going into schools; the *L'il Elvis* animation exhibition was touring Victoria; planning for the third World Summit was underway for the following March in Greece; we were working on a plan to run advance screenings of *Yolngu Boy* around the country before the end of the year; and I was thinking about the good time I'd be having if I were having a good time.

I had always worked because I enjoyed it; I no longer wanted to run the Foundation. It was not that I had lost my love of production and the process of creating new ideas for television and film stories, but I was fed up with the politics and so many of the people I had to deal with.

I began to think about what I needed to do to extricate myself in a way that would satisfy me, leave open as many options as possible and leave the organisation with every chance to continue. I would put in place a new, daring concept to advance production for children (eventually achieved in the mini-series *Noah & Saskia*); I would complete production of *Legacy of the Silver Shadow* so it had potential to go into a second series after I left; I would ensure *Kahootz* was finally ready for mass distribution, with a new media department in place to take on future production; I would keep the lid on Canberra with future funding guaranteed; and I would help identify a potential successor. It was a busy eighteen-month agenda, timed to coincide with the end of my current contract in June, 2002. No one except Don knew my thinking.

The industry as a whole was feeling the pinch with the Howard Government's cutbacks to the ABC and no increase in funding forthcoming for the FFC. Economic and philosophical changes were taking place in Australia, principally led by John Howard. No longer was cultural benefit the ideal driving the Australian production industry. Economic rationalism, the free market and competition policy were driving change. Moreover, the small group of independent producers who had been working to undermine the ACTF and discredit me for more than a decade had finally found a sympathetic ear in Canberra, in the Arts Minister, Peter McGauran.

Although McGauran had personally launched *Yolngu Boy* in Canberra in February 2001 with words of praise, six months later he was asking what had I been thinking of making a feature film with the Foundation's money. He sent me a letter demanding to know, among other things, why we had produced a film 'banned from being viewed by children'. The Foundation's constitution had been revised on 15 June 1994 to broaden the objects for which it was established, allowing it to develop, produce and disseminate television films and other audiovisual media, recognising the technological changes taking place and the Keating Government's policy to promote the

cultural industries generally and digital media through Creative Nation. The Foundation's development activities in film had been noted in reports to Canberra since 1996.³¹⁴

The film had an M rating because it dealt with petrol sniffing and the rating did not ban children from seeing the film; it indicated that the film had an 'adult' theme—in this case an important issue affecting many Aboriginal children. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as a person under eighteen years of age for most legal benchmarks. This was not the real issue. McGauran was responding to lobbying pressure suggesting unfair competition, part of his government's mantra.

Lobbying against the Foundation by a few critics in the industry was nothing new. In the early days it was strongest in South Australia where an advisory committee attached to NWS9 made a submission to Premier John Bannon claiming that the Foundation's funds 'were misdirected' to productions which attracted 'a minority of children' and were merely 'providing subsidy for other government broadcasting organisations' (meaning the ABC and the SBS). They asked that the government withdraw its annual grant to the Foundation and give the money to the South Australian Film and Television Financing Fund—to benefit Channel 9 ultimately.³¹⁵

The submission fell off the back of a truck into John Morris' hands—he was head of the South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC) and deputy chair of the ACTF. John managed to secure an invitation to address the committee on the work of the Foundation and outlined our investments in South Australia, which at that time included script investment totalling \$194 000 as well as \$1.4 million in production. He wrote to the Premier expressing his surprise to hear of any dissatisfaction with the performance of the Foundation and to express his opinion that the document sent to the Premier 'was politically motivated and mischievous'.³¹⁶ The issue died with John Bannon writing to me of 'the impressive achievements' of the Children's Television Foundation and how '*Captain Johnno* provided a wonderful opportunity for local filmmakers'.³¹⁷

John Morris had presided over the SAFC at its most seminal moment in the Australian film industry's renaissance. As the first state film agency, it was involved in many significant films, including *The Last Wave*, *Breaker Morant* and *The Club*. Its flagship success, when the

organisation was struggling to find its feet, was largely due to the unflinching support of the Premier of the time, Don Dunstan. These films put the Australian film industry on the map. But the local South Australian independent producers turned on the SAFC in the mid-1980s, demanding a bigger share of the funding pie, and relationships between the South Australian independents and John Morris became acrimonious. He left the state in 1989 to return to Sydney, where he was head of the New South Wales Film and Television Office until he became CEO of the Film Finance Commission in 1990. It was his experience in South Australia that had led John to warn me that the job as director of the ACTF would destroy me.

The Foundation's industry critics were relatively quiet until after the success of the First World Summit on Television for Children and the anonymous attack on me that followed. When the media failed to take the bait that time, it would be another two years until the dissidents called for an investigation into the Foundation in 1998. The focus of their animosity this time around was the Foundation's output deal with the ABC, and the independents had an ally in Claire Henderson, the ABC's head of children's television. An article in the industry magazine *Encore*, entitled 'Producers call for an ACTF investigation', outlined their claims. It quoted Henderson saying that the television community should be listened to. 'We are looking at an era of level playing fields and with severe budgetary cuts everything is being looked at closely ... the ABC's ongoing arrangement with the ACTF was the biggest single contribution they made to any independent production company.'³¹⁸

Picking up on the government's ideological language about fair competition, the producers claimed the output deal was unfair competition requiring a review of the Foundation. Those involved tried unsuccessfully to engage the Screen Producers Association of Australia (SPAA) on their side but the SPAA would not be drawn publicly. The Foundation was reviewed annually; we were subject to a performance agreement with the Department of the Arts, re-negotiated each financial year. We reported to all governments annually and the David Gonski Review of Commonwealth funding of the film and television industries had taken place in the previous year, 1997, with the Foundation part of that review.

The Foundation's agreement with the ABC, at the current

licence fees paid to children's drama, meant the ABC purchased from us an average of nine hours of programming each year. The ABC screened 1700 hours of children's programs each year, making the Foundation's contribution .005% (of new programming) to their overall program schedule. The ABC was free to purchase other children's productions from independent producers. Ewan Burnett, Paul Barron and Ron Saunders, three of the five producers calling for a review of the Foundation, had recent programs screening on the ABC.³¹⁹ If, as Claire Henderson suggested, the ABC's single biggest contribution to the independent sector was the nine hours per year that it purchased from the ACTF, then the extent to which the ABC refused to outsource its own productions, as recommended by the government's Mansfield Report in 1996, was the issue that should be of concern to the independent industry.³²⁰ The ABC paid the ACTF the minimum licence fee accepted by the FFC, and it had the right to choose from program concepts submitted by the Foundation. There was nothing excessive, irregular or anti-competitive about the output deal in place with the ABC; it simply allowed sensible long-term planning in an industry that required long-term planning. The protest went no further than the *Encore* magazine article.

In 2000, the gang of five re-emerged with reinforcements and a new plan of action. I had little tolerance for them. Jonathan Shiff, a Melbourne-based children's producer whose credits included *Ocean Girl*, *Horace and Tina*, and *Cybergirl*, and who was now a member of the board of the FFC, came to see me. He wanted the Foundation's logo; he proposed that a distribution company be set up between his company and the Foundation to distribute all children's television product made in Australia. I said the logo represented quality and should only market quality. We had an amicable discussion in which he defined the role I could have developing program ideas for others to produce. He made it clear he was offering me a choice and that the independent producers were gathering ready to strike. As he was leaving he said, 'You are very confident, aren't you?' I replied, 'No, but if the day ever came when I was required to work for you and those people I would be straight out that door'. And I meant it.

John Morris had completed his contract with the FFC in 1997. The industry was hurting, funding was well down on levels of five years earlier and with annual so-called 'efficiency cuts' it was a very

difficult financing environment. Children's drama, which had been one of the great success stories of the previous decade, was under serious threat. The increase in quota which had been announced at the First World Summit had not been matched by an increase in the subsidy for its production. Networks had attempted to produce cheap, long-running studio-based drama, but those series failed to attract any interest on the international market and lowered the reputation Australia had gained as a producer of high-quality product. I had solved this problem by attracting co-production deals for the Foundation based on the reputation of our programs and ideas, but the other producers, struggling in an environment that was extreme, were angered by the Foundation's evident success and took a short-sighted approach.

IN NOVEMBER 2000 I was notified by the FFC that the Foundation's application for funding for a joint venture, *The Legacy of the Silver Shadow*, could not proceed because the FFC had no more money.³²¹ Our licence sale to Network Ten was conditional upon meeting a 2002 delivery deadline for their drama quota requirement; we therefore had to finance the series by the end of the financial year. When the chairman of the FFC confirmed they would be unlikely to consider any project before March 2001, on 18 January 2001 I wrote to the federal Arts Minister to explain the situation.³²² Publicly, McGauran was making speeches saying that it was 'critical to our industry's future that Australia's profile be raised and relationships developed with international broadcasters'. The Foundation had been doing that very successfully; we had won the Governor of Victoria Export Awards in the Arts and Entertainment category in 1998 and 1999 and the Australian Exporter of the Year Award in the arts and entertainment category in 1999; we were bringing to this new production the Discovery Channel US and UK which had never invested in Australian production before, but we were in danger of losing this relationship if the FFC had no funds to commit. I sought an urgent meeting with the minister before the screening of *Yolngu Boy*.

Two days before the *Yolngu Boy* premiere, an independent producer, Ron Saunders, sent a letter to the chief executive of the FFC

and Senator Richard Alston, the senior minister for Communication and the Arts, with the names of sixteen people now willing to join the battle.³²³ The letter to the FFC asked for ‘a policy decision not to allow double dipping of government finance and not to finance any further productions of the ACTF’. The letter to the minister made several claims: that the Foundation had originally been set up to assist the independent sector; that there was no meaningful support of co-production with the independent sector; that the output deal had never been ratified by the board of the ABC; that they were ‘horrified’ to read about a new initiative planned by the new managing director of the ABC, Jonathan Shier, ‘Enriching Children’s Lives’, where he was asking Canberra to support, with additional funds, a joint development and co-production venture between the ACTF and the ABC. I had met Jonathan Shier: it was my customary practice to meet anybody new in the industry after they were appointed, to see what opportunities there might be for the Foundation.

In a letter to the Minister of 20 February, I refuted the incorrect assertions. The FFC wrote to the ACTF acknowledging that we were an eligible applicant according to government policy and it would not discriminate against us, although they asked for confirmation of that advice from the government, which they were given.

Ewan Burnett, the former ACTF *Lift-Off* associate producer, who had now produced children’s series such as *Eugenie Sandler, PI, The Wayne Manifesto* and *Short Cuts*, attempted to take the discussion to the media, claiming the Australian Children’s Television Foundation was ‘itself to blame’ for poor programming for children. ‘Australian kids aren’t getting what they deserve on TV at the moment because the playing field just isn’t level—independent producers can’t compete with the Foundation and its government subsidies so the choice is narrowed,’ he said.³²⁴

Yolngu Boy was screened in Canberra and for two months there was quiet. Then I attended the MIP TV market in Cannes, the main international market of the television production industry. The Foundation was the talk of the children’s production industry. I was told in four separate meetings—with the BBC, Disney UK, ITV UK and ZDF Germany, all buyers of our programs—that they had been informed by an independent producer from Australia that the Foundation would no longer be eligible for FFC finance and would

be out of business in a couple of years. The source of these rumours was named.

‘What is going on, Patricia?’ asked Suzanne Mueller, head of ZDF children’s programs; ‘This will have to be clarified before we can work together,’ said Jed Leventhall from Buena Vista (Disney). ‘Patricia, this gossip is very damaging,’ said Janie Grace from ITV. Elaine Sperber offered a glass of wine and friendship. All acted in character. I was dumbfounded that the attack on the Foundation should have been taken to the international arena as inaccurate, malicious gossip; it was one thing to squabble in our own backyard, another to undermine the Foundation and its international funding support with dirty linen paraded for the world to see. While I reassured the international buyers about the Foundation’s future, it was time for the board to get involved—the motives of the independents concerned were so blatantly those of self-interest or revenge and their methods contemptible.³²⁵

Then SPAA got involved in the argument, saying they ‘were reviewing the competitive neutrality of the ACTF’. Whatever that meant, the professional association was taking sides without discussion with the Foundation, which had been a member of SPAA for more than fifteen years. A flurry of correspondence between SPAA, the minister and the board ensued. Nick Murray, the chairman of SPAA, said ‘competitive neutrality’ was ‘a specific government term’ and it was ‘a principle underlying all Commonwealth government grants that a grant couldn’t be used as a subsidy to lower the price of the goods and services offered’.³²⁶

The argument was nonsensical: the Foundation didn’t use the subsidy to sell goods and services more cheaply; if anything, we were the one organisation constantly pressing broadcasters to pay a higher price for programs and it was the independent producers who kept driving the prices down. Our agreement with the government contained no reference to the term ‘competitive neutrality’ and there were no limitations on the use of our grant money consistent with such a definition. Indeed we were obliged to use the grant money ‘to carry out our functions to the highest standards commensurate with our film making and financial abilities’. We were actually *required* to use our grant money for the purpose for which we used it.

The prominent Australian producer Sue Milliken wrote to Nick

Murray pointing out that SPAA had made no effort to speak to the Foundation before approaching the minister and that the dispute was playing into the hands of government, providing evidence that the industry did not speak with one voice. She said that the outcome—if there were any action at all—would be that the government would cease to fund the Foundation and pocket the \$2.3 million and the producers were naïve to expect those funds to be applied anywhere else.³²⁷ The SPAA backed off with an apology to the Foundation.³²⁸

A smaller contingent of producers turned once more to the media, trying to up the ante by using stronger language: they had ‘banded together to lobby against the ACTF for what they considered to be a misappropriation of government funds’.³²⁹ Their ‘polite lobbying’ hadn’t swayed the ‘publicly funded foundation to stop producing TV shows in direct competition ... but now the gloves were off. The producers had decided to go public because nothing was being done about their grievances.’³³⁰

It was at this point that the Foundation received its ‘please explain’ letter from McGauran. It contained a long list of questions to answer about our relationship with the private production sector: How did we make decisions on film development? What were our views on outsourcing? Where did we sell our productions? Should we refocus on development rather than production? What proportion of our role was educational? Should we be making feature films that were rated M as *Yolngu Boy* was?³³¹

We responded by recording our achievements, retracing policy decisions for the department in Canberra to analyse their own record of decisions. Everything the Foundation did was relevant to education; we remained the only producer in Australia working with the education sector and were still convinced that our current manner of operation was the most effective way to ensure that high-quality Australian children’s programming reached the nation’s screens and schools. This was a tiresome, time-consuming, distracting, destructive exercise, spanning more than six months. Janet and Dame Margaret, chair and deputy chair of the board, met with McGauran, who sat inarticulately while his adviser did the talking. Shane Stone, the federal director of the Liberal Party and an ACTF board member, spoke to the Prime Minister about the ongoing attack and the minister’s correspondence.

Ultimately, McGauran was moved from the Arts portfolio and replaced by Rod Kemp in the ministerial shuffle following the election on 10 November 2001. That ended the ministerial inquiry into the Foundation.

When the winds of change began to subside once more, Jonathan Shiff wrote to me with a new approach suggesting I might be interested in joining his company in developing a submission within SPAA to address issues affecting funding of children's programs.³³² He believed 'across-industry relationships such as this would benefit all players'. The Foundation was willing to assist any industry group working for the benefit of the industry as a whole and I was happy to be part of any group he initiated if it were truly representative of all major children's television production interests. I pointed out that the government's perception of the children's production industry could only be a perception of an industry divided and fighting within its ranks, that the activities he and his colleagues had engaged in for the last six months had done damage in Canberra.³³³ And that was that.

THE WHOLE EXERCISE convinced me that my private plan to step down as director of the Australian Children's Television Foundation was the right one. The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal was poised to review the Standards which were the basis of our television drama children's quota. The industry needed to lift its game and speak with one voice if it was to survive and strengthen. The disunity in the ranks came from those crying the loudest for more welfare for themselves.

They were not of age when the lobbying for quotas and subsidy took place; these milestones in government policy had been hard won by industry pioneers who had been united and motivated with a vision of a cultural purpose. Successive governments had responded with bipartisan policy initiatives which transformed the landscape for Australian production for adults and for children and became the envy of producers in the developed world.

The argument for government support of the industry was cultural, not economic. Sure, Hector Crawford wanted to make money with his cop shows but he wanted them to be Australian programs, speaking with Australian voices and showing Australian landscapes—

things we can now take for granted. Paul Keating had changed the ground rules to make the industry competitive but still its objectives were cultural. In the Howard era, producers who had been beneficiaries of a system they had done nothing to create in the first place were now trying to co-opt the rhetoric of free-market ideology and competition policy to argue that the industry's support mechanisms were there to support them—not the audience, not the children.

If you followed their argument to its logical conclusion, it should mean the removal of all protection policy for cultural production; but they didn't want that, they wanted to keep subsidies, keep regulation and quotas, but rip funds away from other subsidised bodies for their own productions.

The real problem was much bigger than just redistributing the funding pool. The ABA required the three networks to broadcast quota of ninety-six hours' first-release children's drama each year. The ABC was supposed to at least match a network's output. So in total there were 128 hours of production each year for which Australian children's producers could compete. To produce that volume of television at a quality that would sell on the international market would cost \$80 million. Between them the networks paid \$14 million. The FFC had \$12 million to \$15 million to invest in children's programs each year. So it did not take Einstein to figure out that there was a \$50-million shortfall that had to be found from the marketplace and that the \$2.9 million going to the ACTF each year, if redistributed, was not going to go very far.³³⁴

Over a five-year period the FFC's investment in children's programs had dropped from \$19.6 million to \$9.3 million—from 23 per cent of their investment funds when I left the FFC to 12.9 per cent of their funds. In 1999–2000 three producers had secured funding for children's programs from the FFC: the Foundation, Jonathan Shiff and Ewan Burnett. These two men were not doing badly in a very competitive environment. Burnett's project was with the ABC for twenty-six episodes. The ABC's investment in children's drama had declined over the same five-year period from 32.5 hours to 13 hours and all of those hours in 1999 were provided by one producer, Burnett.

A study by the ABA revealed the extent of the decline in children's television production. The ABA report, '20 Years of

C-children's television programs and regulation 1979–1999', noted that when the C classification and the Standards were introduced, the quality, diversity and quantity of children's television on commercial television had increased. 'Internationally, the Standards have become a benchmark for regulating children's television in the public interest. The regulation has helped to facilitate the development of an Australian children's television production industry with a worldwide reputation.'³³⁵

The ABA was coy about recent developments but the data showed in terms of quality: C drama programs had won thirty-eight international awards and ninety-seven Australian awards for excellence; however, there had been a decline in the number of international awards since 1996. In terms of scheduling: from 1984 to 1989, 46 per cent of C-classified Australian drama programs were scheduled during the early evening time slots. The number declined after 1990. From 1996 to 1998 there were no evening broadcasts of C Australian drama in the market studied. With independent production the recent production trend to longer drama series had reduced the number of independent producers making C Australian drama, decreasing diversity and lowering quality. In an attempt to secure a minimum licence fee, on 1 March 1999 the ABA had named \$45 000 as being the necessary fee to obtain a C drama classification. This meant the commercial industry saw the minimum as the maximum. A licence fee of \$55 000 per half hour had been set by the FFC to secure their investment, so these different positions taken by the funding and the regulatory bodies made it a confusing environment for producers to do business. The cultural relevance of some of the programs, financed principally by foreign interests, had become more of a concern. Increasing pressure on budgets was driving the demand for high-volume programs of low production value and these programs were not securing overseas sales and certainly not winning awards.

The ABA overview of twenty years of C classification demonstrated that, after a courageous beginning and a record demonstrating significant improvement in children's programming as the result of regulation to ensure that the ABA and the government did not allow the system to fade away, a concerted lobbying effort from the children's production industry and from a public who needed to

be educated about the issues was necessary once again or children were going to lose the Australian production culture which had been hard won.

Inevitably, undermining the Foundation would mean loss to the industry. With the curtailing of the Foundation's production identity, opportunities would be lost for the independent crews; fewer doors would be opened, fewer co-production partners introduced. The Foundation was achieving the objectives set in 1982 on the smell of an oily rag and we were being accused of triple dipping as though we were corrupt. The fact was that the Foundation dipped everywhere. Every state and territory government contributed to the Foundation and reported that they got value for money; we sold our programs where we could, including to the ABC and the SBS. We needed FFC funds for our projects; this was the way successive governments had seen fit to structure the ACTF and this was the way the industry worked as a whole.

Australia could sustain a children's production industry only with subsidy, and without quotas the networks would not produce such programming; they concurred only to meet their condition of licence. It was for the government to decide through its funding policies and through the ABA how important a film and television industry was to the Australian community and the level of funds they were prepared to give. Historically, the public had shown through pressure on government that they wanted Australian content and the regulation of children's programs; the public had no voice in the current dispute.

The independent producers needed to understand that they were not supported by right. They were exceptionally privileged to be able to work in the field they enjoyed with support. The place to debate the problems producers were facing in financing programs to meet the quotas set down by government was in the submissions to the ABA. Not before time, SPAA had planned to pull together a sub-committee to discuss the problem and co-ordinate a submission, and the ACTF would be part of that group. The independents had spent more than six months fighting publicly about the expenditure of \$2.9 million when they needed to find fifty million, demonstrating lack of unity and providing the government with the ammunition it needed to continue to squeeze the industry with lack of financial

support, whereas, with united effort, public support could have been enlisted for the children's cause. I thought they were short-sighted amateurs in the political game.

I invited members of the industry to the Foundation for a discussion. Ewan Burnett, red in the face, was still demanding that the ACTF stop producing; others were distressed by the futility of ongoing dispute. The media were bored as there was nowhere to take the story: no corruption, no murder yet and the general public weren't interested.

ON 5 OCTOBER 2001, at the eighteenth Image and Science Conference in Paris, the ACTF was honoured by an international jury comprising members of the International Council for Film, Television and Audio-Visual Communication under the auspices of UNESCO and the Council of Europe. A few days later, on 9 October, the Committee for Melbourne presented me with an Achiever Award for an outstanding contribution to children's education through the medium of television. On the one hand, there were accolades and recognition; on the other, debilitating criticism. I was not going to lead the charge this time. I had no more tolerance for the ministerial and bureaucratic nonsense, the backbiting that undermined national funding policy and the reputation of Australia internationally. 'What am I doing?' I asked Don repeatedly.

I searched my mind and my contacts, to come up with someone to lead the ACTF through its next phase. My opinion was that the Foundation needed a major revamp. Series production had become formulaic; the financing problems were insoluble with current government policy; the Foundation needed to go low-budget and digital; this was the direction in which the market would head and the only direction Australian children's production could take if we were to continue to innovate and lead the world rather than exploit our funding structure for overseas producers. The Foundation needed to work in future in all media on all platforms, enter the games market and turn its attention to the ways by which children themselves could be involved in the production process as they took an increasingly important role in charge of the technology. The independent production industry was not thinking about innovation

and flexibility; producers were clinging to the inherited vestiges they understood. The production industry needed a new breed for the future.

In December, a couple of months before I announced my decision to leave the ACTF, Hazel Hawke officially retired from the board of the ACTF. For seventeen years, she had used her public profile selflessly to promote the cause of children's television and the work of the Foundation. She had opened the Challenge of Kids' TV Conference in 1980 as the wife of the Prime Minister, she had introduced the *Winners* series to the King and Queen of Jordan and to Nancy Reagan as First Lady. She launched *Touch the Sun* in Sydney and introduced our programs to Prince Charles and Princess Diana. She set up a critically important meeting, and came with me, to see Michael Duffy when he was Minister for Communications in the Hawke Government and reviewing the legislation to strengthen the Children's Standards. In 1990, she played piano with the young Suzuki violinists at the launch of *The Greatest Time on Earth* and in January 1992 arranged for Barbara Bush to visit the Foundation.

I found Hazel a wonderful woman who never complained about the cards dealt her in life: not when her husband walked out on her for another woman; not when she became the victim of Alzheimer's. Her memory had been troubling her, and she had tried to resign before. I talked her out of it the first time, but by 2001 she could not travel alone. At her farewell board dinner she made a speech that was lucid and very moving for all those present. Hazel was always gracious, but this speech was more poignant because we knew it would be her last with us. Her loss was another change in the fabric of the Foundation. Bob Hawke had been a fortunate man to have her by his side when he ran for the Prime Minister of Australia. She was a vote winner.

The saga of kids' TV and the cautionary tale of the little red hen

Once upon a time there was a little red hen who scratched around and found some grains of wheat. She called upon the other animals to help her to plant the wheat.

'Too busy,' said the cow.

'Wrong union,' said the horse.

'Not me,' said the goose.

'Where is the environmental impact study?' asked the duck.

So the hen planted the grain, tended it and reaped the wheat.

Then she called for assistance to bake some bread.

'I'll lose my unemployment relief,' said the duck.

'I'll get more from the CEP scheme,' said the sheep.

'Out of my classification, and I have already explained the union problem,' said the horse.

'I'm preparing a submission,' said the cow.

So the little red hen baked five lovely loaves of bread and held them up for everyone to see.

'I want some,' said the duck and sheep together.

'I demand my share,' said the horse.

'No,' said the little red hen. 'I have done all the work. I will keep the bread and rest a while.'

'Excess profit,' snorted the cow.

'Capitalist pig,' screamed the duck.

'Foreign multi-national,' yelled the horse.

'Where's the workers' share?' demanded the pig.

So they hurriedly painted picket signs and paraded around the hen yelling, 'We shall overcome'.

And they did, for the farmer came to see what all the commotion was about.

'You must be greedy, little red hen,' he admonished. 'Look at the disadvantaged goose, the underprivileged pig, the less fortunate horse, the out-of-work duck. You are guilty of making second-class citizens out of them. You must learn to share.'

'But I have worked to produce my own bread,' said the little red hen.

‘Exactly,’ said the farmer, ‘that is what free enterprise is all about these days. You are free to work as hard as you like. If you were on a Communist farm you would have to give up all the bread. Here you can share it with your needy companions’.

So they lived happily ever after. But the university research team, having obtained a large government grant to study this odd happening, wondered why the little red hen never baked any more bread.

—*Anon*

20

Exit Left

*'All of us fail to match our dreams of perfection ... So I rate us
on our splendid failure to do the impossible.'*

—William Faulkner

I WANTED TO CLOSE MY twenty years at the Foundation by holding an international symposium with those who had helped bring change to children's programming and those who would determine its future. It was to be an acknowledgement of the achievements of the previous two decades and an opportunity to provide some clarity about future directions.

I had begun work for the Foundation in 1981 with a desk, a phone and a typewriter in a room tucked away in the office of the Victorian Minister for the Arts, Norman Lacy. Then, children's television was derided by the commercial networks, no children's drama was produced in Australia, and no broadcaster internationally would think of buying an Australian program. Any children's programs shown were confined to a few hours before the evening news. By March 2002, when my farewell symposium was held, the new

media—digital television, the World Wide Web, interactive computer programs—were occupying the time and interest of Australian children.

We had sixteen sponsors for the event, not a single commercial broadcaster among them—regretfully they said, they were strapped for cash. I suggested to the gathering that we should have a moment's silence and pass around the collection plate for them. I invited Malcolm Fraser, who as Prime Minister had given the Foundation an initial funding grant for three years, to open the symposium. He was persuaded to attend by Dame Beryl Beaufort who had got the money out of him in the first place (she had never let me down in more than twenty years). Norman Lacy, who had initiated the idea for a foundation, closed the forum.

Nigel Pickard, controller of BBC Children's, the world's largest dedicated children's television producer, with a budget of more than a hundred million pounds and producing 860 hours of programs a month, addressed us on the future of broadcasting. BBC investment in programming was US\$44 000 per hour compared with a UK pay channel investment of US\$570 per hour, a measure of the BBC's pre-eminence in production; they were the one to work with on any co-production, because of their resources and their commitment to quality.

Nigel emphasised that the production landscape had changed beyond recognition; names like Nickelodeon and Disney resonated for the children's audience with the power of a Nike or a Sony. Audiences would continue to fragment and channel choice would expand, so building brand loyalty had to be taken every bit as seriously by the BBC as it was by commercial colleagues and must extend across all activities—TV, the Web, magazines, books and videos. We were working in a period of extraordinary and exciting change and could ignore the basics at our peril. The old-fashioned art of narrative storytelling was as important today as it had always been. 'The movie studios haven't forgotten that and neither should we as broadcasters and program makers,' said Nigel; the BBC would continue to invest large sums in children's drama. But here, he said, 'we must aim high, for the competition has upped their game also—think of *Shrek*, *Harry Potter*, *Ice Age* and *Lord of the Rings*. Children demand the same high standards of emotional involvement, sophistication and levels of

complexity from small screen fiction'. Nigel announced that 'he was delighted the BBC was working with Patricia in development of a new series, *Noah & Saskia*'.³³⁶

The presentation that gave me most satisfaction was from Professor Alan Fels, the dogged chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, entitled 'Cultural protection and competition policy—the case of children's television'. In the neo-liberal economic climate of the times, I was most curious to know whether he would come down on the side of industry regulation and subsidy, particularly given the hostile debate that had taken place with the networks and then with the independent producers. Fels was seen widely as the champion of the consumer against big business, but how would his support for competition policy, which he believed generally benefited the consumer, line up with the views of the independent producers? He argued this careful case in support of regulation:

The combination of minority audiences, advertising restrictions and relatively high cost make children's programming commercially doubtful for the free-to-air broadcasters. Consequently it is no surprise that these broadcasters will try to minimise programming costs and this is likely to be reflected in the quality of the programs.

There has been general agreement in Australia that the needs of children with regard to television programming may have to be addressed by mechanisms other than relying on market forces.

Fels concluded that in circumstances such as children's programs where assistance was appropriate 'it is essential to ensure that the regulatory regime is not captured by particular interest groups for their own personal benefit and that it is efficient and as non-distorting as possible'.³³⁷

Anyone who was aware of recent history might have thought I had written his speech. I hoped the independent producers, the commercial industry and the ABA were listening. Regulation policy was a fragile beast: no set of rules could remain in place without ongoing adaptation to changing circumstances. I had learnt this lesson early as the commercial industry quickly learned to bend

or circumvent the Children's Program Standards' rules and those who could gain commercial advantage exploited the system. Alan Fels believed subsidy—the carrot—was perhaps a more effective way than regulation—the stick—to ensure quality in production. The Australian system had both but required ongoing monitoring: the system of subsidy could be exploited for advantage as well. It was difficult to administer regulations and subsidy for children's programming but the objective was too important to let go—that of benefit to society as a whole, from a shared, cohesive national culture and identity for children through programs—not exactly a commercially saleable commodity.

On a personal note, I was glad that John Morris came from Sydney for the day. We had brought the Foundation a long way together. It was his day too. John was not looking well or feeling well; he had been to Paris and lived there for a time, polishing up his French. I was concerned about him. Within a few weeks he was diagnosed with kidney and liver cancer. He rang me. 'I've found the answer,' he said, 'to weight gain'. We had often talked about eating a healthy diet in stress-filled lives. His response to his own death sentence, black humour, was so typical of John. I still miss his voice on the end of the phone and his brutally frank advice. He died within the year, another tragic and sudden loss from my life.

John was an under-recognised hero of the Australian film industry with a passion for film that dominated his life. Although he had directed and produced more than fifty films, when he was kicked upstairs into administration he considered the careers of others more important than his own. It was a pattern that repeated itself throughout his life. He had given the industry far more than the industry had given him credit for; he pushed projects on their merits, made clear his views, and valued a good story. By the time he left his job at the FFC in July 1997, the direct subsidy program, driven by marketplace attachments, had generated a billion dollars' worth of production from a direct investment of \$600 000. He had been a controversial figure in the industry; as passionate and articulate about Peter Brooks' *Mahabharata* as he was about the extravagant vulgarity of the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall in New York.³³⁸ He did so much for me.

OVER THREE DECADES I had taken the policy issues as far as I could. Now it was for others to keep children's media on the public, government and industry agendas. To find a new leader for the Foundation was not easy because I had shaped the job from my wide-ranging experience in education, research, policy development, management and production. If the Foundation were to survive in the political environment, the CEO had to be able to deal with Canberra and understand the politics of broadcasting before they could handle the job of production: without those skills the staff would not keep their jobs. I worried about them, most particularly the long-serving members. I was not on the selection committee but I influenced the process and worked with the headhunter. Jenny Buckland, the ACTF general manager, became my candidate.

Jenny was a competent lawyer who had begun with the Foundation one year after completion of her Articles. She had an excellent academic record and proved to be efficient and capable of mastering policy and new initiatives. She once observed when examining program licensing agreements that the same buyers kept acquiring Foundation programs, so I suggested she have a go at developing the marketing side of the Foundation's operation. This meant the development of a systematic database, researching fees paid for product in different countries around the world, negotiating contracts and building ongoing relationships through attendance at markets. I negotiated deals for new programs where contacts and experience were essential, while Jenny sold completed programs into new markets.

She was a rather reserved young woman, good at the bureaucratic paperwork I detested, and she oversaw the reports defining vision and mission statements, target objectives and outcomes. Government reporting now seemed completely incoherent to me—the bureaucracy had lost any ability to talk to its agencies in language that could be understood. We needed almost full-time staff to keep track of the quarterly reporting and different accounting processes each government required. Jenny supervised as general manager. We were work colleagues, never friends; she seemed to see me as one of her parents' generation, which I was. Still, I decided that she probably would hold the Foundation together for its staff more effectively than anyone else identified. I knew she could manage and thought

she should be given the chance to demonstrate if she could lead; leaders take people places no one else can and where people don't know they can go.

I wanted to step down on 30 June 2002. I told Janet and Dame Margaret of my intention six months before the date I had settled on. In that time I could put in place the work that would give at least two years' breathing space to the new director and, importantly, give Jenny time to settle after the birth of her second child. I was planning a copybook exit. Janet said very little, Margaret suggested I should take a long holiday, which was good advice had I wanted to stay in the job, but I truly did not. I told them Jenny Buckland was the one I thought should take over. The selection committee wanted to know if Jenny could move out from under my shadow; she assured them she could.

The groundwork was in place: Series 1 of *Legacy of the Silver Shadow* was completed; it could go to a second series. I had started development of a new series with the BBC. The multimedia department was set up with unique expertise; *Kahootz* was ready for distribution. There was a joint venture concept in place with writer Chris Milne that had good potential for a new series. The staff was stable, with long-term employees in the important roles. Jenny Buckland was selected as my future replacement and Don and I went off to Turkey for a break. I was relieved because now I could do what I wanted to do, unencumbered by the politics.

I WANTED ONE MORE crack at producing the type of television I had always believed in; not a formulaic soap-style series; not a co-produced mid-Pacific blancmange, but something that really spoke to adolescents about the issues that were on their minds. In the context of the financing criteria that existed for all programs now, Elaine Sperber, now working for Nigel Pickard at the BBC, was my obvious partner; we had been looking for a new opportunity to work together since we completed the first series of *Crash Zone* with Disney. The idea had to be equally valid for the UK and Australia; we had to be able to tap into substantial funding on both sides of the world and avoid the heavy costs involved with travelling cast and crew. I wanted to integrate new technologies with television,

use the *Kahootz* software in the series and explore the potential of digital production.

I had come up with a concept for a project entitled *Noah & Saskia* which would achieve all these aims, and Elaine liked the idea. It would be a series about young people's search for understanding: who they want to be, how they see their world and how they relate to those they care about. We are all unique and we are socially predictable at the same time. Our true identity is a mix of these two extremes. In his book *Frames of Mind*, Howard Gardner quotes the American philosopher and psychologist William James: 'A man has as many selves as there are individuals who recognise him and carry an image around of him in their mind'. And understanding one another and ourselves is not a simple matter. Both Noah and Saskia search harder than most to understand who they are. Introversion and introspection are their constant companions. They both fantasise about the lives they live and the way they deal with their lives.

At one level it is a simple boy-meets-girl story: a boy in the United Kingdom meets a girl in Australia online and they change each other's lives. The story is an emotional roller-coaster ride for two adolescents who resist the admonitions of their friends and parents as they explore their feelings—the stirrings of love and what that means; their insecurities and uncertainties; their jealousy and disappointments. As they mature they begin to understand the give and take of a relationship, how easily they can hurt and confuse one another, and the enjoyment and confidence that can grow from a close personal relationship. These are the complex issues most of us have to teach ourselves when growing up; we all have to learn as best we can because most schools do little to help and good television can be a wonderful teacher.

The show that came to my mind when I first thought of *Noah & Saskia* was *The Singing Detective* where Dennis Potter, the creator, follows the meanderings of a man suffering from a deforming disease who lies in a hospital bed thinking about his life and what is happening to him. He responds in bizarre ways, including song and dance; time jumps about as it does in our minds; there is no logical structure as the audience has to gradually piece the information together. I thought *The Singing Detective* brilliant and wanted to do something equally challenging for kids. Noah creates a comic strip whose hero

Max is a confident young man in chat rooms on the Internet. Saskia creates Indy, a smart beauty who meets Max and takes him on. The series straddles three worlds—England, Australia and cyberspace—as well as the fantasy space inside Noah’s and Saskia’s minds where their alter egos live. The program asks: ‘Who do you want to be? How do you want to present yourself? How much do you want others to know about you?’

To take such an abstract philosophical concept and create involving stories with appealing characters was a difficult task for any writer. Elaine and I needed smart observers of people and situations who understood the world Noah and Saskia inhabit, who had a flair for sharp, witty dialogue for a modern, pacy story. With the different components in the United Kingdom, Australia and cyberspace, it could be structurally confusing. Chris Anastassiades, who had written the *Yolngu Boy* script and worked for several other ACTF projects, was the answer, along with Sam Carroll, a young woman who had not yet been spoiled by the demands of writing formulaic drama. She brought her youth and vitality to Saskia; Chris would write Noah.

Noah & Saskia had stalled in development, while I was so busy extracting myself from the Foundation. Nigel Pickard, who controlled the money and would make the final decision whether to commit the BBC, was not confident we could get the scripts together. When he was in Melbourne at the symposium, I persuaded him, with Elaine’s support, to agree to an arrangement whereby I could set up the full funding structure for the series with FFC finance secured on the basis of a BBC commitment, but with a letter of agreement between us that said if I could not deliver scripts to Nigel’s approval, he could withdraw BBC funding. That was the situation when I stepped down in June. I had a funding agreement in principle with the BBC, but no scripts and no project. Development costs up to that point would have to be written off.

Now that I could commit my time, Paul Nichola too became part of the development team to devise the Web world for the series and the visual effects to integrate the story ideas. In August 2002, with two scripts in hand and Chris, Paul and Elisa Argenzio (my favourite line producer) in tow, I went to the United Kingdom to prove to Nigel Pickard that such a complicated idea could be realised effectively. Nigel was finally convinced about the project during this

visit. Paul, working with David Nelson from Unreal Pictures, would create the fantasy worlds of cyberspace and the imaginative worlds of our two lead characters. The *Kahootz* software would be applied and further developed in the process. The results would look like the expensive high-end projects, except these effects would be achieved at comparatively low cost. Through their ingenuity David and Paul delivered the promise of digital production. Pino Amenta was the live action director of my choice as he was fast and effective and very congenial with cast and crew.

I wanted to make an outstanding program as my parting gift to the Foundation. Through the program, by reminding Australians what could be achieved, I wanted to rouse the public debate about quality children's programming which had faded away because people thought the job was done. While the program was under the banner of the ACTF, I had creative control over the production and a right to be involved in its future, a necessary condition as every decision made about the marketing of a program can affect the ability to mount a future series. That was the agreement I thought I had when I stepped down from the Foundation. I expected to keep Jenny Buckland fully informed.

Ironically, given that *Noah & Saskia* was a story about human understanding, I found what happened next incomprehensible. I didn't ask for a contract for some weeks and when it came it was not as I expected. Although I was executive producer and producer, creative control was vested in Jenny Buckland as CEO. I suggested there had been a mistake, but there was no mistake. Jenny did not ask to see me; she made no contact. From my perspective, it looked like an unnecessary assertion of authority. I would not work on that basis. If I walked away, there would be no series. I did not want to do that, so I insisted on a legal negotiation. An agreement was reached that brought us to where I believed we had agreed to be in the first place. I would get on with *Noah & Saskia*, with creative control, reporting to Jenny on the budget and keeping her informed on all she needed to know as an investor and distributor.

I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED the production and the excitement of seeing all the elements of an engaging series come together. Don and I

spent three glorious summer months in London while I supervised the UK shoot and Don wrote a new book. It was a joy to be free of administration, bureaucracy and industry politics.

Jenny and I kept a distance but were cordial except for one incident. I arrived at the ACTF to find on the footpath outside the Foundation a sawn-up wooden canoe, a prop from *Yolngu Boy*, waiting for rubbish removal. Lying with it were the spears—which had been made with such dedication—broken into pieces for removal. I raced upstairs and into Jenny’s office to ask why. Jenny looked up at me and said curtly, ‘Bernadette is dealing with that’. I walked out and thought of the old man at Yirrkala. I was very upset. I had not catalogued the Foundation’s artefacts before I stepped down as director; a job I viewed as important had been left undone.

In February 2004, I began to discuss a launch of *Noah & Saskia* with Suzie Howie: how could we launch an important kids’ series and put children’s production on the public agenda again; how could we best promote the unique qualities of the program? Suzie was unsure: these days launches were very tricky. Unless you had a celebrity in tow the media weren’t interested, especially in a children’s program—exactly the problem we were trying to address. She also wanted clarification that the ABC agreed to her working alongside their publicity department—she had nearly walked off the job on her last experience.

I undertook to ring Sandra Levy, head of ABC Television—who had overruled Claire Henderson so that the ABC was the Australian partner with *Noah & Saskia*—to make sure she approved; I would also check out Sandra’s availability and see if the ABC thought Mark Latham, the aspiring PM, would be an acceptable option to launch *Noah & Saskia*. I spoke to Sandra: she was happy for Suzie Howie to be involved; Mark Latham wasn’t an option, and yes, she would be available. When we next spoke, by phone, Suzie suggested an intimate launch with media leaders to get their support as the best way to go. Would it be feasible to get a time for Janet, Sandra and me to be together with a select group for a lunch or even a breakfast? Janet’s availability could be a constraint. I rang Janet to check out her diary; she was friendly. An hour later she ran back and her tone had changed. She was not going to be available on any day, Sandra Levy didn’t deserve any publicity, and what was Jenny Buckland’s role?

It was Thursday 4 March 2004. I had a meeting set up with Jenny for the following Tuesday to discuss ideas for the launch and publicity plans. I phoned her first thing next morning to ask what was going on. I found I had lanced a boil. The board was disappointed in me. I had hurt so many people. It wasn't clear what my sins were but they had been committed ten months earlier and involved my appearance on Jon Faine's ABC Radio program in Victoria. The issue seemed to be that I had not obtained Jenny's approval for a press release, not given sufficient acknowledgement to the ACTF and was promoting myself.

That phone call was the end of an era for me. There was no launch for *Noah & Saskia*. Suzie Howie declined to be involved in publicity. *Noah & Saskia* got no special media attention, was well reviewed, rated well but did not make the mark it was designed to make in Australia. In the United Kingdom, the program went to number one in the ratings. It was a missed opportunity but a production with which I was proud to end my production career. A month later I sat with Elaine Sperber over a long lunch in Rio de Janeiro, on the side of a mountain overlooking one of the world's most beautiful cities. We were attending the Fourth World Summit on Media for Children, born as a result of the Melbourne Summit in 1995. I had begun to develop ideas for a second series but Elaine and I agreed there would be no more *Noah & Saskia*. 'Let's do something else,' she suggested. But I thought I should step away from children's programming: I would write a book.

I WAS TROUBLED by the abrupt and unpleasant end of my association with an organisation that had been such an important part of my life and thought that a book might put events in perspective. As I began to dip into my copious files, records, correspondence, notes, I balked. Did I really want to do this, to return to events where I had been bruised and battered by people long gone from my mind? What was the point? Don kept insisting it was a story that should be told.

Writing this book has been a remarkable adventure. I didn't know what I thought about many things until I wrote them down; then they made sense. I have had an extraordinary career supported

by some extraordinary people. I embraced and was intrigued by those with ideas, with an enthusiasm for life and a commitment to doing. I searched for such people all my life and when I found them they stuck—they saw in me the same qualities I saw in them. We enjoyed our commitment.

In researching this book I discovered that history can be bunk. The official records of the Foundation say the Australian Education Council established the Australian Children's Television Foundation. The council of education ministers was indeed the vehicle, but the AEC did not even want to be bothered with our annual reporting. Together Norman Lacy, Anne Gorman, Frank Meaney, John Morris, Beryl Beaurepaire, I and others established the Foundation. Similarly, it is recorded that the ABT devised the Children's Television Standards. But all the members of the CPC, Barbara Biggins and her SACCFM members, Merle James, Max Hall and their ACTAC members, and I drove those reforms, supported by producers and hundreds of members of the public. Collectively, we brought about change. These names disappear from the public record and others rewrite those records to suit themselves.³³⁹

In shaping the book's chapters, I have been forced to reflect on my life and times through the prism of my work. The programming that I developed and oversaw at the ACTF was of a type, and the type said as much about me as about Australian children. My passionate interest in stories, which fuelled my dedication to children's drama, derived in part from my own search for identity, social understanding and knowledge of how to play the role in life we were meant to play. My own early role models in the days before television were adults from Hollywood films, and that certainly had its limitations. Nevertheless, they were role models who did not live their lives as lesser beings than the men I saw around me in the 1940s and 1950s.

The programs the Foundation made took forms that were not available to me as a child. They were a product of their times: the television era. TV is a wonderful medium for conveying understanding about others and insights about those like you. Books do this, of course, but many children don't read as much as they should and television is easily and endlessly accessible. The power of film and television over books for young people today can be seen by those who come to reading as a result of seeing the visual story.

Round the Twist made Paul Jennings a wealthy man through the royalties for book sales following the television series. The huge resurgence of interest in the works of Jane Austen is due entirely to audiences seeing the contemporary film adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

The Foundation's best programs were also a product of the political times, of an era before globalism and aggressive competition policy, when the Commonwealth and state governments were ideologically and economically more comfortable with positive intervention to invest in, develop and protect Australian culture.

The programs I chose to produce all involved helping children to understand themselves and make sense of their lives. Howard Gardner called the ability to understand oneself and others intra- and inter-personal intelligence. (Daniel Goleman later came along and called it emotional intelligence.)³⁴⁰ By the time the ACTF made *Lift-Off*, I was familiar with Gardner's work and the evidence for developing empathy and self-insight in children. The professor put a name to what I had instinctively known and understood throughout my life. I had always been a keen observer of people. I often made adults uncomfortable and they would comment on my staring. I learned to read people as I studied their behaviour, and I became good at it although I didn't know that until much later. I was forced to do a lot of self-examination when I was young. I was a girl, not a boy, but I was given access to life experience more like a boy and differently from my elder sisters because I was the final option for a father without a son.

I think of my father and his analogy of the impact we make on life. I plunged my fist into the bucket and while the water inevitably settled into stillness, there was the opportunity to make waves for a while. I took on what interested me. Sometimes I succeeded and sometimes I failed. When I was knocked down I got up. I made some friends—my comrades in arms—and I made some enemies. Many people helped me, others got in the way. I learnt endurance. With my friends, I built an idea that was unique in the world—an effective policy for children's television—which for a time has given Australian children an image of themselves, in their place, with their voice.

Meanwhile, my family has survived and stuck together, sometimes under amazing pressure. Don and I have now been married

for forty-six years and we are looking forward to our next project together. Our daughters, Sue and Lesley, have grown up, married, had families of their own, forged successful careers for themselves. Sue did her Bachelor's degree in Commerce and developed her career through the hospitality industry, working in hotels and catering, and then in publishing, holding several senior positions in children's and educational book marketing. Lesley followed her degree in textile design by establishing her own knitwear business, selling across Australia, the United States and Japan, and developed Ozscape, a licensed tourism range. She won sections of the Gown of the Year with her knitwear two years in a row. Both our daughters are very creative people.

Typical of their generation, they have had their children ten years later than we did. We are very pleased they have them now—four grandchildren in all. They are proud of our achievements, seeing us as somewhat crazy workaholics who nevertheless try always to be there for them. For my parents, the family was the focus of their lives. This is also true for Don and me. Work and family will remain our life. There is still much to do.

'No victory is ever won ... They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair; victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools.'

—William Faulkner

Afterword: Children— The Miner’s Canaries

‘If you don’t know where you’re going any road will take you there.’

—Lewis Carroll

IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, fewer and fewer adults seem to understand what a child is. Only four in ten families now include children. Of all households, 26 per cent have no children present at all. Moreover, family life itself has changed: children have fewer siblings, and 57 per cent of kids have parents who both work. There is a higher degree of family instability through divorce and re-partnering. The business of parenting has changed and this is affecting the realm of childhood.³⁴¹ Childhood is a twentieth-century construct, with children being treated as a separate category, with special needs, in a protected environment.³⁴² We may now be moving away from that idea, as parents struggle to cope, as the media blur the age divide, and as singles resent the ‘special treatment’ they assert is given to families with children. How often now do we hear the words ‘I don’t plan to have children’? The inconvenience, the cost, the responsibility are too much to contemplate.³⁴³

We need to understand today's children better than we do for there is a good deal of nonsense spoken about the young, while the media love to focus on the problems children generate as they get older. In contrast, the latest research on brain development shows the importance of the contexts in which children are nurtured and the cost benefits of investing in the early years to reduce later, more costly social problems.³⁴⁴

There are still parents who think of the child as a passive receptacle waiting to be filled with their good intentions, a helpless innocent in need of protection, little adults in training. They deny a child gumption, wickedness and natural curiosity about adult life and behaviour. They have an ally in the official censor whose job is to give advice through a classification system about anything 'likely to harm or disturb young viewers' under fifteen years and who takes a very cautious position.³⁴⁵

As a program producer trying for over twenty years to reach kids, I experienced an encroaching move to political correctness during the 1990s largely based on selling to a broad, conservative international program market. The edge is being taken out of publishing as well, to make books international and inevitably less interesting to children.³⁴⁶ Terry Denton reports increasing restrictions on educational books for children as the publishing market expands globally; he was told not to draw a baby's bare bottom. Another illustrator Craig Smith reported that udders were banned in a book on cows, large lips on blacks are out and Asians can't look Asian.³⁴⁷

But the same community values that have led to such decisions from a film censor and book publishers have also promoted a raunch culture where children are shown in advertisements in varying degrees of undress with come-hither looks and bedroom eyes. It is difficult to move around any city without seeing billboards displaying young people posing decadently, with their hormones raging, looking like sluts and studs. You get the impression that these young people think about nothing but sex, unless of course they are thinking about drugs. We deny that they have a lively interest in things sexual—and all grown-up business—in their pre-teens, then we turn them into a sexual commodity for adult amusement. Teens are increasingly depicted as troubled, out-of-control rebels whom many adults fear and can't understand. What we often fear about children

comes from the mistrust we have for one another: that dark stranger out there who may corrupt our child may be one of us.

There is a big difference between raunchy exploitative images and stories in context which explore real social issues. Children's media producers should understand the difference and be in the forefront of the debate about children and their future. *Round the Twist* was so successful because it tapped into the real world of children where they are vibrant, vulgar, funny, engaging individuals who get up to mischief and do very well without adult interference. They are neither too innocent nor too wise; they are resourceful and make things happen. Dad needs them as much as they need Dad, but the world belongs to them. *Home Alone* had the same appeal; so did the kids in *E. T.* who find a way to send E.T. home despite the adults. They are kids who take matters in hand; they are successful, are compassionate and understand what they are doing. They exclude adults on principle because they know more than we think they know. They are the sort of children we need to develop.³⁴⁸ We have changed the world for children but they still have the same needs; our job as producers, educators and parents, and as a community, is to help them develop within it, not to conceal it.

I grew up in an isolated rural community where the outside world did not impinge very much at all. A close network of family and community relationships defined my world—my values, my beliefs and my identity. I knew little about what lay outside that world. When I went to the pictures the hero drew his gun only when he was provoked and always in the service of good.³⁴⁹ My four grandchildren face a different future, through the technical advances in communication. These changes mean they must be involved—like it or not—in a global community in ways that could not have been comprehended a lifetime ago. Unless significant reform occurs in the creation of media for children and the integration of media policy into education, health and social support services, they will face a very uncertain future.

When the ABCB advisory committee laid out a blueprint for children's television more than thirty years ago, I saw TV as part of the solution for child development. Media today is a large part of the problem. Who could have guessed that Tom and Jerry, who amused my father and me when we returned to the pictures after interval

with our ice-creams in the 1940s and 1950s, were the advance party for a form of programming that would dominate the debate about children's television in the 1990s, drive out live action drama and turn children into a consumption market of global proportions, exploited at the expense of their health, education and development for profit? Today children spend more time with machines than with their parents. From infancy they are branded from head to toe as walking advertisements for global corporations. From the clothing store to the supermarket, from Bananas in Pyjamas to Billabong, we promote a culture of materialism. Bec and Lleyton Hewitt exhibit their five-month-old daughter at the Logies, decked out in a designer gown to match Mum's, while they present an award.

Brands are ubiquitous and the fight to resist is overwhelming for parents. We feed kids toxic food. We have squandered television's capability to teach, inform and inspire. We are systematically destroying children's bodies along with their minds. The life-affirming stories that could help develop them into socially integrated human beings have gone because the system prefers and knows how to make money from children's television. The ideals we pursued to achieve regulation, subsidy and institutional support have given way to a false philosophy which holds that an unrestrained market should be the arbiter of what the media may sell to young people.

The debate about children and media is much broader than it was when I began my career in the 1960s. The media are now the engine that drives our society, a business that demonstrates little respect for children. If young people are to grow up to be constructive rather than destructive, with respect for their teachers, parents and the community they live in, they need to have hope, opportunity, something to live for, to believe in, to value. And Western media—with its pressure to buy, buy and buy, its violence and sensationalism, its promotion of raunch where very young children are sex objects, where models of behaviour in films, television and video games are frequently anti-social and where gangsters, drug dealers and psychopaths are often glamorised—contributes nothing constructive for children.

We know the importance of a child's early years. If children are not given the stimulation and support they need in those years, they will grow up to become marginalised adults. Their health, nutrition,

literacy, numeracy and social and physical skills are all important. Just as crucial for their social well-being is the development of their emotional and moral intelligences. Children require healthy bodies, educated minds, and an ethical base to their lives. The importance of early development is as a predictor of everything that follows. Children need to belong—to a family, a community, a country, a culture—and then they can better understand their own identity, their place within a global community and the need to all get along together. But the media have refused to accept any responsibility for the education and welfare of children and they are aided and abetted in this attitude by our political leaders.

The commercial networks have fought, in every way they could devise, to resist regulations that meant their obligations to children would be acknowledged with minimal impact on their profits. The ABC, our public broadcaster, should have been the bastion of educational and social values in programs for the development of children, but it opted out early to chase ratings and profits. The independent producers fought the Australian Children's Television Foundation to get more money for themselves when the bigger, relevant targets were the media corporations and the government.

Decent core values are hard to find within our institutions generally but the media we are steeped in too often represent, aggressively and stridently, the worst of our culture. And children have little hope of resisting these prevailing values. Consumerism reflects our priorities. Big business in the United States spends more than US\$1000 billion a year on marketing—about twice what they spend annually on education, private and public, from kindergarten through to graduate school.³⁵⁰ Consumerism, it is argued, is a unique formula for driving economic growth, which makes us all better off, including those in the developing world.³⁵¹

Others suggest that the global consumer American standard will destroy us. As China craves its hamburgers, the jungles (the lungs of the earth) are being destroyed for beef grazing land. Abundance is coming at a cost to the environment and a cost to our health. Humans the world over are becoming obese; excess fat claims hundreds of thousands of lives each year. Yet the food industry, one of the biggest advertisers of products to children on television, is doing its best to fight the facts, just as the tobacco industry did before it.³⁵² The

number of overweight people on the planet—more than a billion—exceeds the number of malnourished and in every Western country the news is the same. The prevalence of overweight children has tripled in Australia and the United States in the past twenty years.³⁵³ Other nations follow this pattern. One million children aged two to fifteen in Britain are now either overweight or obese. Doctors there are saying this generation of British children will be the first since World War II to live shorter lives than their parents.³⁵⁴ Obese young people will battle illness for most of their lives.³⁵⁵

Despite this wealth of evidence, advertising to children continues to carry the message that it is a comfortable world; eating is fun; bigger is better.³⁵⁶ The advertising industry repeats and repeats that they are informing the public.³⁵⁷ Advertising and programming blur, as the industry is no longer required to separate the two. We are unsure where a program ends and the advertising begins; the same voice-over is used, additional text ads run over program segments, and brand products are embedded in the programs—once a prohibited practice in Australia. We inhabit a borderless advertising environment that instructs us to consume, the shopping centre being the major entertainment venue.

Western consumer values are largely irrelevant to the needs of most children in the world today. Yet 6 per cent of the world's population is attempting to impose its will, its values—through its media power and technological superiority—on the other 94 per cent of humankind.³⁵⁸ A child in the industrialised world adds more to consumption and pollution than thirty to fifty children born in developing countries.³⁵⁹ As an indication of Western values, in 2005 American pet owners spent \$35.9 billion on everything from electric toothbrushes for dogs to bird pedicures and self-flushing litter boxes for cats, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association. Meanwhile, in Malawi twelve million people earned less than a dollar a day.³⁶⁰ This is the global world we have set up for our children and they will have to deal with this imbalance. The one resource they have to do this is their brainpower. The proponents of infinite growth rely on the truth that humankind is smart and they extend this to argue that the free flow of information and markets makes us even smarter. Our youth, it is assumed, will solve the problems of the future.³⁶¹

But can obese, dumbed-down, uneducated, marginalised, medicated kids make the smart decisions that will lead us to the technical wonderland? And will our smart kids need to apply their brainpower to solve the problems of an increasingly stressed planet rather than further material development? Either way, they will need to be in excellent physical and mental condition.

We need a government policy for children that integrates their health, education and social development. At present, policies and programs affecting children are scattered between federal, state and local governments and divided piecemeal across different functional departments. Despite a so-called National Strategy for Children, the quality of child care is not seen as integral to early learning and readiness for school; preschool education is not uniform and free for all four year olds; some states have good maternal and child health care after birth, others do not; parents have to work their way through a complex system of enrolments, costly fees, geographically separate locations for child care, medical advice, preschool and early primary education. When gaps occur the buck is passed from one level of government to another, and privatisation of child care reduces quality, raises costs and fails to meet diverse community needs. The most disturbing aspect of child policies and programs is that they fail to pay attention to the all-pervasive influence of media in its many forms.

A national strategy for children must include the media. Neither government advisers nor early childhood experts mention television, advertising, the Internet; nor do they see the potential of good-quality early childhood programs that employ drama, music and information to enrich the lives of children as playing a positive role in the development of that brainpower every child will need to survive and thrive in the information age. We seem to have lost sight (yet again) of the positive potential of the media for helping children learn to understand, and have some control over, the world they live in.

BEFORE I LEFT the Australian Children's Television Foundation, I had spent a lot of time thinking about its future directions. In a world increasingly dominated by multimedia, multi-platform, highly

individualised technological developments, the old twentieth-century-style corporate television—which assumed viewers were passive except in terms of which channel they tuned in to—was being left behind. I had set up a multimedia department within the ACTF and the *Kahootz* platform was showing real promise. My last television series for the ACTF, *Noah & Saskia*, showed the power of the Internet in enabling teenagers to explore their identity, present multiple images of themselves to others around the world and form new relationships through digital communication. The World Summit movement, which I still chair, was already focusing more on new media, changing its name from the World Summit Foundation on Children & Television to the World Summit on Media for Children Foundation. There were, and are, however, certain constants in my view of the way media should be used on behalf of children.

First and foremost, all media platforms aimed at children should have the one mission: ‘a depth and focus of educational commitment’.³⁶² For every target audience, all program content proposals should be required to defend formal educational objectives; outline a multi-platform development strategy and place educational necessity before merchandising potential. This does not mean an overtly educational purpose or style; rather, it means that the goal of enhancing the social, emotional and cognitive development of children, not how many soft toys or designer clothes can be sold, must be the starting point. Foundation programs looked nothing like an educational curriculum, yet embedded in them all are the lessons of life and human relationships.

Second, all media aimed at children must be trustworthy, putting the interests of the child as citizen, and outcomes worthy of the good society, above the interests of profit. Today, children are not just citizens of the Australian community; they are citizens of the world, and there is a requirement for media to enlighten them about the nature of cultures and social problems worldwide. To achieve this, children must be seen and treated as active partners in the production and consumption of media content. I part company, however, with those who believe control of media content and production should simply pass into the hands of children: kids will always need guidance. Skilled as they may be at using mobile phones, MP3 players, computers, SMS, pagers, etc., they are not always thoughtful or

critical about what they are doing. They need proper training to express and structure what is touted as their ‘own voice’; otherwise it is just a yowl that is uninformed, messy and ineffective in getting their own legitimate message across to others. As educators we would not relinquish control or direction of a reading program to a gifted reader, whereas some teachers seem quite happy to transfer our educative role over to some digitally savvy kid. In the same way, program producers should not relinquish control and we adults have an obligation to take charge of their upbringing. Smart as they are, kids know little about the wider social picture.

Third, the new media context for children requires risk-taking, both on the part of producers who should test new boundaries and on the part of educators guiding the young. Media for children should not be sanitised, bland, middle of the road; rather, all content and every media platform should push the boundaries, explore new genres, topics and formats, raise new questions, challenge children to think about and act effectively in their own (rapidly changing) cultural environment. We need to teach and put more trust in children. Banning is a poor option and ‘forbidden fruit’ will always be more appealing to kids.

But fourth, and crucially, risk-taking and exploration of ideas should centre on storytelling, the most powerful means by which every culture understands itself and represents itself to the world outside. Storytelling is a key to effective education—learning cultural mores, traditions, history; learning the basics of literacy, the way words convey meaning and emotion; and acquiring social competence. An extensive research literature shows the power of storytelling in acquiring basic communication skills, structuring the language, transmitting important cultural values, learning how to solve problems.

In the United Kingdom, for example, recent research by Oxford Professor Kathy Silva on the implementation of the Blair Government’s Sure Start program of early education in disadvantaged areas highlights the efficacy of storytelling. She has concluded that lessons in good behaviour, imposing family rules such as being tidy, having meals together and being well disciplined make less difference to children’s social development than reading stories to them.³⁶³

Children who are read to, and encouraged to read, are more cooperative and less anti-social (as well as more cognitively advanced),

because stories help them think about what it is like to be in other people's shoes, what it feels like inside another human being's skin. In other words, fictional stories (and, of course, good-quality television programs showing children and family life) can teach children emotional empathy, values, communication and conflict-management skills. It follows that children telling their own stories (and shown how to do that most effectively) will gain in self-insight and efficacy and will offer a new voice to the world beyond that of a commercially driven media conglomerate.

Fifth, it should be obvious that the issue we must deal with is no longer just that of children's television, though it remains a significant arena for new and exciting development. There are many technology platforms today, and children are both familiar with them and keen to explore every new possibility. Children today still use books, magazines and audio-tapes, but they also use video streams, animation, computer games, pagers and mobile phones, and they are adept at multi-tasking, not just using one device at a time. The coming phase is wireless technology, which means borderless communication, open-source file sharing, instant messaging, blogging and social networking services which, as one observer put it, 'transcend point-to-point and two-way media like telephone and e-mail and one-way outbound models of traditional broadcasting such as television and radio'.³⁶⁴

We have already seen the phenomenon of Smart Mobs and 'swarming' to bring people together quickly, and the shift to what has been called the 'Pro-Am Revolution', where amateurs have enough leisure time to make professional media products they exchange for free and which draw on a rich array of creative resources.³⁶⁵ Children and young adults are at the forefront of a new movement, and they have both knowledge production power, where they are in control of making their own media products, and knowledge distribution power, where they can distribute to any social network or Internet contact they choose.³⁶⁶ They are the new communication nomads, always on the move, using media and its tools adaptively to suit their own purposes.³⁶⁷ Users are being empowered to create and control their own virtual space. The Internet is a magnificent way to distribute culture, serving this generation as the library did previous generations.³⁶⁸

The dilemma in all this is that too many teachers and parents are left behind, they don't know what is going on and see such developments (as they once saw comics, radio and television) as threatening to education, good community values and social solidarity. When teachers restrict children's classroom use of the technology that they are fluent with outside the classroom, many children are bored in school, recalcitrant and labelled as 'geeks' (a term which apparently deters girls from becoming IT literate).³⁶⁹ It is the teacher's job to facilitate integration but too many do not understand what computers can do in terms of data storage and retrieval, communications, animation, word-processing, number crunching, graphics and sorting. Education bureaucracies need to ask whether we are *controlling* the technology or simply responding to it. We have an obligation to get on top of the new media, in school and out, if we are to help this generation of kids to maximise their options in society.³⁷⁰

Producers of children's programs, too, are failing to embrace the technology. Their programs are tired, lacking ideas, innovation and excitement for the audience, based around characters for their merchandise potential, not their developmental and educational value. Educators and children's producers need to take stock of themselves and demonstrate competence because the kids are a jump ahead of them. As the ACTF has stated, 'The changing landscape means Australia is now slipping behind other countries in the service that it provides for Australian children'.³⁷¹ If young people do not see themselves, their real lives, reflected in the media, they will not engage with programs. If they cannot participate and make their own media programs, in their own ways, they will be excluded from the opportunity to influence political and social decision-making.

With new technology today there is an opportunity to create a digital sandpit or cultural commons for children to express themselves creatively and culturally and in their own voice. With the structures we have in place for children's production Australia could lead once again in a project to develop a world youth digital storytelling exchange.³⁷² Such an exchange would create an archive that would give young people a powerful voice in expressing their own perspectives, develop new information skills and use digital technology to promote cultural understanding and international youth partnerships.

My production career has been based on the belief that one powerful way of engaging children in their education and in social issues is to help them tell their own stories. It is now possible to use accessible new digital technology in the process and to share with other young people around the world. The digital media content industry is growing rapidly; it is becoming cheaper and easier to use than conventional film and television; and it will be the basis of the future communication industry worldwide. The industry will be seeking digital content and this could become a large resource.

Children can and should be active producers and distributors in a global marketplace, a market of cultural exchange. They would need training, both technically and in structuring and constructing their stories—the role of educators. Distribution platforms for the exchange of these resources would need to be built.

Government will not take such action by itself. Government did not initiate the program Standards for children's television or the Australian Children's Television Foundation; individuals came up with the ideas and persuaded others—and together all these people persuaded government of their value. That is the way in which social change, political change and change in media production for children is brought about. For the technical revolution to benefit children, leadership and the enterprise of motivated individuals is required. Ideally, such an enterprise should be financed by business and government. Such partnerships are not easy alliances, as the history of the development of children's television in Australia has shown, but that is the way ahead.

We are social beings: the pursuit of consumerism and personal satisfaction over the collective good will ultimately bring about our undoing if unchecked. Media offer wonderful opportunities to educate and to inspire. We cannot give up on the idea of shaping the communication technology, of continuing to lead—in the production of media for children as we did for two decades in Australia—to bring the world's children to an understanding of one another through their stories.

Appendix: ACTF Program Awards

As ACTF director, Patricia Edgar was responsible for the creation, development, financing, production and marketing of all the following productions. She was a producer and/or executive producer.

Winners

The Other Facts of Life and *Quest Beyond Time*, Chosen out of fifteen films selected for final screening at the 11th International Kinderfilm Festival, Frankfurt, 1985

The Other Facts of Life and *Top Kid*, Selected as award finalists in the Children's Program category at the Banff Television Festival, Canada, 1986

The Other Facts of Life, Children—Original Work Award at AWGIE Awards, Sydney, 1985

Top Kid, General Award—Narrative; *On Loan*, Children's Award—Social Issues; Special Commendation, General Award—Social Issues; Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 1986

On Loan, Certificate of Merit for Acting (Quang Chinh Dinh), St Kilda Film Festival, Melbourne, 1986

On Loan, Citation at the United Nations Association Media Peace Awards, Sydney, 1986

Top Kid, First Prize for Live Action; *The Paper Boy*, Honourable Mention for Live Action; *The Other Facts of Life*, Special Jury Prize for Cinematic Impact; *Just Friends*, First Prize voted by the children's audience for the Most Popular Video; Chicago International Festival of Children's Films, United States, 1986. As a result of the Festival's response to the *Winners* series, the Jury gave a Special

Award recognising the ACTF's outstanding achievements in developing high-quality films for children's audiences.

Top Kid, Best Children's Drama, Penguin Awards, Melbourne, 1986

Kaboodle

The Huge Adventures of Trevor a Cat, Children's Award—Best Animation, and Best Film—Tertiary Student; *The Fogbrook Thing*, Children's Award—Best Narrative; *Joshua Cooks*, Award for Best Animation; Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 1987

Molly Makes Music, Second Prize, Television Production, Part of a Series—Animation, Chicago International Festival of Children's Films, United States, 1987

Double Take, Children's Award—Best Narrative; *The Wheelie Wonder*, Children's Award—Animation; *Molly Makes Music*, *Lock Up Your Toys* and *The Cure*, Award finalists; Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 1988

Kaboodle, One of three finalists, 9th Banff Television Festival, Canada, 1988

Kaboodle, International Children's Variety Program—Series Award, 1988 Bicentennial Pater Awards, 1988

Kaboodle, Award for Excellence—Children's Program, Television Society of Australia Awards, Melbourne, 1988

Kaboodle 2

The Hedge & Mr Snip, *The Great Hedge Race*, Highly Commended Children's Award—Animation, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 1990

Kaboodle 2, Certificate of Merit—Children's Program, Television Society of Australia Awards, Melbourne, 1990

The Great Detective, Award for Cinema Photography, Australian Cinematographers Society (ACS) Awards, New South Wales, 1990

Touch the Sun

Captain Johnno, *Princess Kate* and *Devil's Hill*, Finalists at the First International Film Festival for Children and Young People, Sofia '88, Bulgaria, 1988

Peter & Pompey, Selected for screening at festival, 8th International Film Festival for Children, Adelaide, 1988

Touch the Sun, Australasian Children's Drama Program—Series Award, 1988 Bicentennial Pater Awards, 1988

Devil's Hill, First Prize for Live Action Feature-length Videotape, Chicago International Festival of Children's Films, United States, 1988

Princess Kate, George Ogilvie received a nomination for his work as director, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 1988

Captain Johnno, Roger Dowling received the Gold Camera Award for his work as cinematographer, Australian Cinematographers Society (ACS) Awards, New South Wales, 1988

Peter & Pompey, John Misto received the Award for Excellence—Scriptwriting—One-Off Drama or Mini-Series; *Peter & Pompey*, Award for Excellence—Children's Drama; *Captain Johnno*, Damien Walters received the Award for Excellence—Performance by a Juvenile Actor; Television Society of Australia Awards, Melbourne, 1988

Captain Johnno, Winner—Children's and Young People's Section, International Emmy Awards, New York, 1988

Captain Johnno, High Distinction—Grand Jury Prize Section, 7th International Festival for Youth, Paris, France, 1989

Captain Johnno, Finalist—Children's Section; *Princess Kate*, Finalist—Telefeatures Section; Banff Television Festival, Canada, 1989

Touch The Sun, Best Television Series, The Grenfell Henry Lawson Festival of Arts, New South Wales, 1989

Touch the Sun, Film and Television Award, New South Wales Children's Week Awards, Sydney, 1989

Captain Johnno, Children's Television Program Award, CCTV, China, 1990

Captain Johnno, First Prize—Regional Guild of Film Writers, Cinemagic Northern Ireland International Film Festival for Young People, Belfast, 1990

More Winners

Boy Soldiers, Children's Award to Cliff Green, AWGIE Awards, Melbourne, 1990

Boy Soldiers, Liv Ullmann Peace Prize, Chicago International Children's Films Awards, United States, 1990

The Big Wish, Festival Award for Outstanding Humour, Chicago International Children's Films Awards, United States, 1990

The Big Wish, Highly Commended, Children's Award—Narrative Section; *Boy Soldiers*, Highly Commended,

General Award—Narrative Section; Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, 1991

The Big Wish, Selected for screening in Children's Program category, Banff Television Festival, Canada, 1991

The Big Wish, Nominated, Best Children's Television Drama; *Mr Edmund*, Nominated, Best Children's Television Drama; *The Big Wish*, Cameron Nugent, Nominated, Top Television Actor Award; *The Big Wish*, Steve J Spears, Nominated, Best Screenplay in a Television Drama; *The Big Wish*, Esben Storm, Nominated for The Cameraquip Award for Best Achievement in Direction in a Television Drama; AFI Awards, Melbourne, 1991

Boy Soldiers, Finalist—Children's and Young People's Section, International Emmy Awards, New York, 1991

More Winners, Nominated, Best International Children's Series, CableAce Awards, Los Angeles, United States, 1993

Boy Soldiers, Finalist, Moscow International Festival of Film and Television for Children and Youth, Russia, 1994

Round the Twist

Wunderpants, Highly Commended Children's Narrative Award, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 1990

Cabbage Patch Fib, Merit to Jan Kenny for her work as cinematographer, Australian Cinematographers Society (ACS) Awards, New South Wales, 1990

Round the Twist, Children's (TV) Award to Paul Jennings, AWGIE Awards, 1990

Without My Pants and *Lucky Lips*, Winners, Children's Award—Narrative Section; *Lucky Lips*, Winner, General Award—Narrative Section; Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, 1991

Cabbage Patch Fib and *Spaghetti Pig Out*, Selected for screening in the Children's Program category, Banff Television Festival, Canada, 1991

Cabbage Patch Fib, Nominated, Best Children's Television Drama, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 1991

Wunderpants, Winner, Best Children's Television Drama, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 1991

- The Greatest Tune On Earth*** *The Greatest Tune On Earth*, Certificate of Merit—Children’s Program, Television Society Awards of Australia, 1990
- Lift-Off*** *Something Tells Me*, Nominated, Best Children’s Television Drama, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 1992
A Load of Old Rubbish, Winner, Best Children’s Television Drama, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 1992
Lift-Off, Winner of the Major Award in the Children’s category, United Nations Association of Australia Media Peace Awards, Canberra, 1992
Lift-Off, Winner, TV World Marketing Award for Best Marketing by an Independent sponsored by BBC Enterprises, TV World Marketing Awards, Cannes, France, 1993
- Round the Twist 2*** *Little Squirt*, Winner, Best Children’s Television Drama, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 1993
Nails, Winner, Children’s Adaptation (TV) awarded to Paul Jennings and Esben Storm; *Copy Cat*, Nominated, Children’s Adaptation (TV), AWGIE Awards, Sydney, 1993
Round the Twist 2, Finalist—Children’s and Young People’s Section, International Emmy Awards, New York, 1993
Little Squirt, Winner, Primary Student Judging Panel Award; *Little Black Balls*, Winner, Children’s TV Award; Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 1994
Little Squirt, Winner, Age 7–12 Fiction category, Prix Jeunesse, Munich, 1994
Round the Twist 2, Screened in Australian Children’s Panorama, Cairo International Film Festival for Children, Egypt, 1996
- Sky Trackers*** *Skating the Dish*, Winner, Best Children’s Drama Series category; Zbych Trofimiuk, Winner of Young Actor’s Award; AFI Awards, Melbourne, 1994
Sky Trackers, Winner, Golden Cairo for TV Programmes, Cairo International Film Festival for Children, Egypt, 1994
Sky Trackers, Winner, Best Children’s Television Series Award, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 1995

- Sky Trackers*, Selected for the International Competition of the MediaNet Awards, presented by the Bavarian State Ministry for Education, Culture, Science and Art, Munich, 1995
- Skating the Dish*, Nominated, Banff Rockie Award for Best Children's Program, Banff Television Festival, Canada, 1994
- Sky Trackers*, Finalist in Children's Program, Age 7–12 category, Prix Jeunesse, Munich, 1996
- Lift-Off 2** *Smelly the Clown*, Selected in competition, Annecy Animation Festival, France, 1995
- Heroes* episode, *Lift-Off to Fire Safety*, Hosokawa Foundation Award for Excellence in Pre-School Programming; selected as one of seven programs included in the 1996 Japan Prize circulating library, The Japan Prize Contest, Tokyo, 1995
- Lift-Off 2*, Bronze World Medal in Youth Programming, Series, Age 7–12 category, 38th New York Festival Television Programming Awards, 1995
- Lift-Off 2*, Golden Cairo Award for Television Programmes, 6th Cairo International Film Festival for Children, Egypt, 1996
- Lift-Off to Fire Safety* package, Finalist, Education Resource category, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 1996
- Lift-Off to Fire Safety* package, Honourable Mention in Education & Instruction: Safety category, The Chris Awards, 44th Columbus International Film & Video Festival, United States, 1996
- Lift-Off to Fire Safety* package, Honourable Mention, Video Fuego Festival, Spain, 1997
- Lift-Off 2*, Finalist, Prix Jeunesse, Munich, 1998
- I Think*, Winner for Primary Student Education Resource, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 2000
- I Can*, Selected for entry into festival with twenty other programs from around the world (program rating the third highest on the day), China Central TV, 24 hr Children's Festival, 2000
- The Genie from Down Under** *Wishing and Hoping*, Children's Drama Series, Nomination, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 1996

The Genie from Down Under, Finalist—Children's Series; and Finalist—Primary Student Judging Panel, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 1996

The Genie from Down Under, Finalist, Cairo International Film Festival for Children, Egypt, 1996

Wishing and Hoping, Finalist, Banff Television Festival, Canada, 1996

The Genie from Down Under, Finalist, Prix Jeunesse, Munich, 1998

First Day

First Day, Television Documentary, Nomination, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 1996

First Day, Finalist Documentary—Social Issues; and Special Award, Hearthealth Award for Human Development, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 1996

First Day, Documentary Finalist, Cairo International Film Festival for Children, Egypt, 1996

First Day, Chris Award in Social Issues—Documentary category—The Chris Awards, 44th Columbus International Film & Video Festival, United States, 1996

First Day, Finalist Certificate in the Human Relations category, 1996 New York Festival Television Programming & Promotion Competition, 1997

First Day, The Silver Apple Award, United States National Educational Media Network Award, New York, 1997

**Li'l Elvis Jones
and the
Truckstoppers**

Caught in a Trap, Selected for Panorama (French version) Annecy International Animation Festival, France, 1998

Li'l Elvis Jones and the Truckstoppers, Finalist, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, 1998

Caught in a Trap, Third Place, Children's Programming Category, Certificate for Creative Excellence, US International Film and Video Festival Awards, 1998

Caught in a Trap, One of three winners for Best Children's Program—international section, Chiarrà D'Assisi Children's Television Prize, Milan, Italy, 1998

Li'l Elvis Jones and the Truckstoppers, Winner, Best Animation Program broadcast on cable and satellite television, Itheme 99, France, 1999

Song *Don't Hide Your Teddy* nominated for Best original song composed for a feature film, telemovie, TV series or miniseries (David Cheshire for *Li'l Elvis*), Australian Guild of Screen Composers Screen Music Awards, 1999

Crash Zone

Dream Team and *The Shadow*, Selected for screening in Drama for Children and Adolescents category; Awarded Special Prize in category two—TV Drama for Children and Adolescents; Awarded The Children's Jury Prize, Golden Chest International Festival, Bulgaria, 1999

Dream Team, Nominated for Best Direction in a Television Drama (Esben Storm) and Nominated for Best Children's Television Drama, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 1999

Dream Team and *The Shadow*, Finalists, New York Festival, United States, 1999

Dream Team, Finalist, Age 11–15 Fiction category, Prix Jeunesse, Munich, 2000

Dream Team, Honorable Mention, The Film Council of Greater Columbus (also known as The Chris Awards), 2000

Round the Twist 3

Whirling Derfish, Finalist in Children's Program category (selected from 1028 entries), Banff Rockie Awards, Canada, 2000

Episodes 3, 6, 9 and 10, Nominated for Best Children's Television Series, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 2000

The Nirandathal Beast, Selected for screening for the Ninth International Children's Television Festival, Museum of Television & Radio, New York and California, 2000

Whirling Derfish, Winner, Children's Program category (Writer and Director Ray Boseley), Banff Rockie Awards, Canada, 2000

Whirling Derfish, Accepted for entry into judging, BAFTA Awards, London, 2000

Tears of Innocence and *Whirling Derfish*, Honourable Mentions; and *Whirling Derfish*, Certificate of Recognition—Media of Print, The Film Council of Greater Columbus (also known as The Chris Awards), 2000

Whirling Derfish, Nominated, Best Children's Drama, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 2000

Whirling Derfish and *Tears of Innocence*, Winners, Gold Medals—Youth Category 7–12 Section, New York Festival 2000 Awards, United States

Whirling Derfish and *Tears of Innocence*, Winners, Grand Jury Prize for Best Show—Youth Category 7–12 Section, New York Festival 2000 Awards, United States

Round the Twist 3, Winner, Logie Award—Most Outstanding Children's Program, *TV Week* Logie Awards, Melbourne, 2001

Round the Twist 4 *The Princess and Pete*, Nominated, Children's Screen and Radio category, AWGIE Awards, 2001

Skunkman, Winner, Children's Screen and Radio category, AWGIE Awards, 2001

Welcome Back, Qualified in top four, membership vote, BAFTA Awards, London, 2001

Round the Twist 4, Winner, Logie Award—Most Outstanding Children's Program on Australian Television for 2001, *TV Week* Logie Awards, Melbourne, 2002

Round the Twist 4, Finalist, Best Children's TV Series, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 2002

Round the Twist Website

Selected as finalist; Won Intermedia-globe Silver category: Website: Design: Non-Profit-Organisation Website, World Media Festival, 2000

Chosen as one of the best sites in Australia, Sofcom Pick of the Net Awards, 2000

Kahootz

Winner, Best Primary Student Education Resource, multimedia category, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards, Melbourne, 2000

Winner, two Silver Awards, AXIEM (Absolute excellence in electronic media) Awards, United States, 2003

Yolngu Boy

Selected for screening, 27th Telluride Film Festival, United States, 2000

Silver Award received by Brad Shield for his cinematography, Australian Cinematographers Society (ACS) Awards, Sydney, 2000

Awarded Bronze, Gryphon Prize—Free to Fly section, Giffoni Film Festival (entered by Cowboy International), Italy, 2001

Selected for three screenings, non-competitive section; Winner, People's Choice Award; Zanzibar International Film Festival, 2001

Selected for screening, The Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Down Under Festival, New York, United States, 2001

Selected for screening, Cinemagic Film Festival, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2001

Selected for participation in The Other Childhood category, Barcelona International Television Festival, Spain, 2001

Yothu Yindi and composer Mark Ovenden, winners in the Excellence in Film or Theatrical Score category, Deadly Awards, Sydney, 2001

Selected for screening in competition, Cape Town World Cinema Festival, Cape Town, South Africa, 2001

Nominations for Ken Sallows for Best Editing, Chris Anastasiades for Best Original Screenplay, Brad Shield for Best Cinematography; John Sebastian Pilakui won Best Young Actor Award; AFI Awards, Melbourne, 2001

Accepted for competition, The Beauvais International Film Festival, France, 2002 (This festival is for the young audience in France and is judged by a jury of children.)

Accepted for screening, winner of Best Music category (judged by a panel of children), Cannes Junior de Ille Maurice Festival (section of forum in the Cinéma des Antipodes), France, 2002 (entered by Bernard Bories)

Selected: Telluride Film Festival; The Brooklyn Academy of Music; Beauvais International Film Festival; Cinemagic Film Festival in Northern Ireland; Barcelona International Television Festival; 2002

Crash Zone 2

Selected for screening, Tenth International Children's Television Festival at The Museum of Television and Radio, New York and California, 2001

Skin Deep, Selected for competition, Prix Danube 2001, 16th International Television Festival of Programmes for Children and Youth, Slovak Republic

Sabretooth accepted into the Chicago International Children's Film Festival, United States, 2001 (selected from 600 children's productions from around the world)

Skin Deep nominated for Best Children's Television Drama, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 2001

Sabretooth nominated as a finalist, 11–15 year-old fiction category, Prix Jeunesse, Munich, 2002

Crash Zone 2 nominated as finalist for 2002 *TV Week* Logie Awards (entered by the Seven network), Melbourne

Noah & Saskia

Nominated, 29th Gold Chest Awards, Bulgaria, 2004
Honourable mention, The Chris Awards, Columbus, United States, 2004

Paul Nichola nominated for Animation and Digital Effects, AFI Awards, Melbourne, 2004

Nominated, Best Children's Drama (Australia), AFI Awards, Melbourne, 2004

Finalist, Banff Rockie Awards—Children's Program category, Canada, 2004

Finalist, Logie Award, Most Outstanding Children's Program Australia, 2005

Extra Spicy episode, Sam Carroll, co-writer of *Noah & Saskia*, Winner, AWGIE Award, 2004

Selected for screening, Chicago International Children's Film Festival—Live Action Television category, 2004

**Australian
Children's
Television
Foundation**

1998 Governor of Victoria Export Award in the Arts and Entertainment category, Melbourne, 1998

1998 Austrade Arts and Entertainment Award, National Export Awards, Sydney, 1998

1999 Governor of Victoria Export Award in the Arts and Entertainment category, Melbourne, 1999

Youth TV Prize, 18th Image and Science Conference, Paris, 2001

Notes

- 1 Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Mentor, New American Library, New York, 1952, p. 55.

Chapter 1

- 2 Originally published in French in 1949.
- 3 Deidre Bain, *Simone de Beauvoir: A biography*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1990, p. 544.
- 4 With the help of a friend who could type, Barbara O'Connor.
- 5 Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, Calder & Boyars, London, 1971.
- 6 'Is Sesame Authoritarian?', *Newsweek*, 20 September 1971.
- 7 Jane Perlez, 'Sesame Street dishonest, says rival producer', *Australian*, 12 January 1972.
- 8 Patricia Edgar, 'Scandal of the pre-school set', *Australian*, 15 February 1972.
- 9 'A Strine Street where the Aussie kids can allcumungit abita therite kindaculcha', *Idiom, Journal of the VATE*, April 1971.
- 10 'Play School Best—ABC, Sesame Street loses in survey', *Australian*, 23 March 1973.
- 11 Patricia Edgar, 'Sesame Detour', Mass Media Review, *Journal of the Australian Society for Education in Film and Television*, 1972.
- 12 The official history of the film and television school—*The Edge of the Known World*—omits any mention of this crucial stage in its origins. See Meredith Quinn and Andrew L Urban eds, (interviews by Andrew L Urban), *The Edge of the Known World: The Australian Film, Television and Radio School—Impressions of the first twenty-five years*, AFTRS, North Ryde, NSW, 1998.
- 13 DE and PM Edgar, *Educational Technology and the Improvement of Role Performance, Final Report*, Centre for the Study of Educational Communication and Media, La Trobe University, 1973 (funded by the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Advanced Education).
- 14 This film was screened at the thirty-year reunion in Canberra in 2005, the only record of what was a significant historic event for women.
- 15 Peter Samuel, 'The Scandal of Our Universities', *Bulletin*, 12 March 1977, p. 14.
- 16 Patricia Edgar, *Children and Screen Violence*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1977; Patricia Edgar and Hilary McPhee, *Media She*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1974.
- 17 Ronald Conway, *Land of the Long Weekend*, Sun Books, South Melbourne, 1980.
- 18 Patricia Edgar, *The Politics of the Press*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1979; Patricia Edgar (ed.), *The News in Focus: The journalism of exception*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1979.
- 19 Years later, after the Sydney Spasmodic Dysphonia Support Group was established, Cynthia Turner urged us to do a research study into the few hundred Australian patients

who had now been correctly diagnosed and were being treated. This study was published as Don and Patricia Edgar, *What's Wrong With Your Voice? The story of spasmodic dysphonia in Australia*, Spasmodic Dysphonia Support Group, Sydney, 1998.

Chapter 2

- 20 Patricia Edgar, *Children's Television: The case for regulation*, Information Paper No. 5, Australian Children's Television Foundation, 1984.
- 21 Barry Cole and Mal Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators: The FFC and the broadcast audience*, Addison Wesley, Reading, Massachusetts, 1978.
- 22 *Hansard*, Sydney, 19 July 1972.
- 23 Based on conversations with Dr Geoff Evans, Secretary of the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Science and the Arts when Whitlam was elected in 1972. He became principal private secretary to Dr Moss Cass as Minister for the Environment in 1974. Evans was then appointed by Cass to become a full-time member of the Australian Broadcasting Control Board in 1975; 'Labor and the Electronic Media—a repeat of "Dizzy in Dougie Land"', in my files.
- 24 Des Foster, federal director, FARB, speaking at the Rotary Club of Melbourne, 17 March 1976.
- 25 A year earlier I had written, with Hilary McPhee, *Media She*, a book about sexist advertising. I had featured in a profile in *Cleo* magazine (Issue 16, 1974, pp. 46–52, 'Tricia Edgar and the words of change') and been featured in *Monday Conference* on the ABC at the centre of a media debate hosted by Robert Moore.
- 26 7 March 1976.
- 27 Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the rise of raunch culture*, Schwartz Publishing, Melbourne, 2005, pp. 82–8.
- 28 This collection was the focus of a research study we conducted together on the viewing preferences of eight to fifteen year olds which later became a valuable resource for arguments supporting a children's drama quota. Patricia Edgar and Ursula Callus, *The Unknown Audience*, Centre for the Study of Educational Communication and Media, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1979.
- 29 The members were Frank Meaney, inspector of schools, New South Wales; Rev. Dr Alex Kenworthy, radio counsellor and director of the Baptist Counselling Centre, Melbourne; Jan Shallless, freelance television producer, Adelaide; John Maizels, computer operator involved in student broadcasting; Jonathan Rothfield, solicitor; and Joy Thomas, house-mother of Wards of the State.
- 30 *The Report of the Committee on Program Standards*, Australian Broadcasting Control Board, April 1976.
- 31 Jenny Hocking, *Frank Hardy: Politics, literature, life*, Lothian Books, South Melbourne, 2005, p. 224.
- 32 Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1975.
- 33 Patricia Edgar and Winston Thomas, *The Design of Teaching and Learning Materials for Visual Learning at the Primary Level*, Centre for the Study of Educational Communication and Media, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1976; Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*, Basic Books, New York, 1983; Howard Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple intelligences for the 21st century*, Basic Books, New York, 1999.

Chapter 3

- 34 Inaugural Eugene Goossens Lecture, 1993.
- 35 *The Broadcasting and Television Amendment Act (No. 2) 1976* abolished the Australian Broadcasting Control Board and created the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. All powers and responsibilities under the *Broadcasting and Television Act 1942* were transferred from the Board to the tribunal, with the exception of the planning and engineering functions associated with broadcasting services, which became the responsibility of the Postal and

- Telecommunications Department. The *Broadcasting and Television Amendment Act (No. 2) 1976* provided for the appointment of a chairman, a vice-chairman and three members for periods of up to five years. On 23 December 1976, the minister announced the appointments for three years of Mr Bruce Gyngell as chairman, Mr James H Oswin as vice-chairman, and Mrs Janet Strickland as member, to become effective from 1 January 1977.
- 36 This and the following two quotations: David O'Reilly, 'Hostile reception', *Sunday Age*, 14 September 1997.
- 37 Greg Sheridan, 'Tribunal gets kids' TV out of focus', *Bulletin*, 17 July 1979, pp. 54–60.
- 38 'Self regulation for broadcasters? A report on the public inquiry into the concept of self regulation for broadcasters', Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, July 1977, p. 5.
- 39 Cole and Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators*, p. 262.
- 40 Patricia Edgar, 'Self-esteem and attitudes to film and television programs in a sample of junior high school students', PhD thesis, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1973; see also Inquiry into Strategies to Deal with the Issue of Community Violence, First Report 1988, Second Report December 1988, Third and Final Report, with particular reference to mass media and entertainment industries, May 1989, Victorian Parliament archives.
- 41 Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, *Transcript of Proceedings at Melbourne on Tuesday 5 June 1979, at 10.00 a.m.*, Federal Government archive.
- 42 'Self regulation for broadcasters? A report on the public inquiry into the concept of self regulation for broadcasters', Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, July 1977.
- 43 *ibid.*, p. 68.
- 44 *ibid.*, p. 11.
- 45 Transcript Hansard Hearings for the First Progress Report issued 1972.
- 46 Bruce Gyngell, chairman, ABT, 'Government regulation of television', speech to the Annual Seminar, AANA, Melbourne, 4 March 1980.
- 47 Greg Sheridan, *loc. cit.*, pp. 54–60.
- 48 Patricia Edgar, *Television Hearings Go Public: A case study*, Media Centre Papers, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1981, p. 10.
- 49 Jefferson Penberthy, 'Children's TV body faces split before it even starts', *AFR*, 30 November 1978.
- 50 Jefferson Penberthy, 'Dr Edgar surprise election as Children's TV Chairwoman', *AFR*, 1 December 1978.
- 51 Patricia Edgar, *Sun*, 22 November 1979.
- 52 Editorial, *Age*, 23 November 1979.
- 53 Letter to the Editor, *Sun*, 22 November 1979.
- 54 Donald Horne, 'Politics of the Press, Review', *Media Information Australia*, September 1980.
- 55 Michelle Grattan, *Age*, 22 November 1979.

Chapter 4

- 56 Bruce Gyngell, chairman, ABT, speaking to the Annual Seminar, AANA, Melbourne, 4 March 1980.
- 57 Neil Postman argued that television broke the adult–child barrier created by print and exposed children in unprecedented ways to adult secrets; but this was not unprecedented—television became a unifying storytelling medium. Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, Delacorte Press, New York, 1982.
- 58 Geoff Mulgan, 'Renewal', *Australian Fabian News*, vol. 46, no. 1, January–March 2006.
- 59 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, Penguin Books, London, 1976.
- 60 Patricia Edgar, 'Television: What kids want and what kids get', *Australian Children's Television Foundation Annual Report 1986–87*.

- 61 Tony Morphet, in the ACTF's *Annual Report 1988–89*, wrote: 'All cultures must retell these universal stories for themselves, they must explain them in their own terms ... or cease to be cultures. If you do not tell your own tribal stories, you become de-tribalised. The tribe does not own its dreams and dies as a tribe'. These words became part of the ACTF's mission statement when government forced the Foundation to adopt such bureaucratise to describe its function.
- 62 Ursula Callus was the former project officer for the ABCB advisory committee.
- 63 Recommendations to the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal on children's programs, 14 May 1979, Circular Letter no. T.20, published in the *Australian Broadcasting Tribunal Annual Report 1978–79*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1979: 'The terms of reference for the Children's Program Committee will be:
To assess public opinion and research with a view to developing a consistent philosophy upon which guidelines and classifications for children's programs may be based.
To formulate guidelines for:
(a) programs to be televised during periods, as determined by the Tribunal, when only material specifically designed for children may be presented (C classified time zone);
(b) advertising and program promotions to be televised during the C classified time zone and;
(c) pro-social messages to be televised during kindergarten programs.
3. To classify, in terms of such guidelines:
(a) programs proposed for (C) classification (suitable for children);
(b) advertisements proposed for C classification; and
(c) pro-social messages proposed for kindergarten programs.'
- 64 3XY News, 30 April 1979.
- 65 Adam Gopnik, 'The porcupine; a pilgrimage to Popper', *New Yorker*, 1 April 2002, p. 93.
- 66 This appointment would not be confirmed officially until August 1979.
- 67 Recommendations to the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal on Children's Programs, 14 May 1979, Circular Letter no. T.20, published in the *Australian Broadcasting Tribunal Annual Report 1978–79*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1979.
- 68 The committee also advised the tribunal that it would be publishing a paper on production guidelines by Ian Fairweather, executive producer of Children's Programming, NWS9 Adelaide, and a paper on child development based on the WNET/13 New York research publication I had brought back to Australia, which had been revised by Dr Millicent Poole to include available Australian research. Dr Poole was then associate professor of Educational Psychology at Macquarie University.
- 69 Lee-Leng Whong, 'More Children's TV Stations told to boost time on weekdays', *Australian*, 21 April 1979.
- 70 Editorial, *Age*, 22 April 1979.
- 71 Brian Courtis, *Age*, 22 April 1979.
- 72 Valerie Lawson, *AFR*, 21 April 1979.
- 73 Phillip McCarthy, *National Times*, 26 April 1979.
- 74 CPC Minutes.
- 75 Greg Sheridan, 'Tribunal gets kids' TV out of focus', cover story, *Bulletin*, 17 July 1979, pp. 54–60.
- 76 *ibid.*
- 77 *The News*, Adelaide, 11 July 1979.
- 78 All quotes are from the complete Minutes of the CPC contained in my files, to be archived.
- 79 Letter to me as chairman of the CPC from the secretary, ABT, 2 July 1979.
- 80 Minutes of the Children's Program Committee, 17–18 July, Melbourne.
- 81 Mike Gibson, *Sun*, Sydney, 21 June 1979. Other reports included: 'TV boss blasts the kid's rules', *TV Week*, 7 July 1979; Alan Goodall, '7 to defy ban on Carrots: It's bedlam on children's hour', *Australian*, 15 June 1979.

- 82 Greg Sheridan, 'The issue that's out of focus, Kids TV', *Bulletin*, 17 July 1979.
 83 Phillip McCarthy, 'Channels scramble to meet children's new television guidelines', *National Times*, 14 July 1979.

Chapter 5

- 84 Jefferson Penberthy, 'Sambo's Chopper Squad Invades Canberra', *AFR*, 5 March 1980.
 85 *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 21 August 1979; FACTS media release, 'FACTS withdraws from Broadcasting Tribunal's Children's Committee', 20 August 1979.
 86 Summary of Opinion by Learned Counsel for FACTS on aspects of the tribunal's requirements concerning children's programming, 20 August 1979.
 87 Press release, ACCFT, 24 June 1979.
 88 Bruce Gyngell, letter to Patricia Edgar, 20 September 1979.
 89 Before the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, 'An inquiry into an application from Austarama Television Proprietary Limited for the renewal of the licence for commercial television station ATV0 Melbourne'. Transcript of Proceedings at Melbourne on 7 June 1979, p. 242.
 90 Greg Sheridan, loc. cit., pp. 54–60.
 91 We encouraged local production with a C for Station of Origin classification, meaning it got full recognition where it was produced but could not be snapped up by stations who would not seriously attempt their own productions. Introducing this classification was a symptom of the distrust the CPC and ABT felt towards the city stations. Some stations were pleased with the new classification, others were outraged, as Bruce Gyngell had predicted, suggesting they were being cast as second-class citizens.
 92 Editorial, *Herald*, Melbourne, 16 October 1979.
 93 'Censor hits the school quiz shows. Tribunal brands 80 TV programs "no good" for children', *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, 13 October 1979—a front-page, full-page article.
 94 Penny Spence to Bruce Gyngell, 6 March 1980.
 95 Letter to Bruce Gyngell from Barbara Biggins on behalf of the ACCFT, 12 October 1979.
 96 CPC Minutes of meeting held in Melbourne on 24 October 1979.
 97 Letter from Bruce Gyngell to Patricia Edgar on ABT letterhead, 4 December 1979.
 98 *ABT Annual Report 1979–80*.
 99 In June 1980.
 100 Jefferson Penberthy, 'Move for TV self-regulation rouses MP's concern', *AFR*, 1 May 1980.
 101 'Sack Gyngell call from CR Board', *Age Green Guide*, 5 October 1978.
 102 Based on my phone conversation with Bruce Gyngell, 13 September 1979.
 103 Strickland resigned on 6 April 1979.
 104 Patricia Edgar, *Television Licence Hearings Go Public: A case study*, Media Centre Papers, No. 15, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1981, prepared for the East–West Communication Institute, University of Hawaii, as part of a series of international case studies, *Decision-Making in Communication Organisations*.
 105 John O'Hara, 'Profile of Bruce Gyngell', *Variations*, ABC Radio, 5 April 1980.
 106 Paul Ham, 'Bruce Gyngell, TV terrorist', *Australian*, 29 September 1995.

Chapter 6

- 107 Introduction to report of Children's Television Working Group for the AEC.
 108 Professor Alan Fels (chairman, Australian Competition and Consumer Commission), 'Cultural Protection and Competition Policy—the case of children's television', ACTF 20th Anniversary Symposium, Melbourne, 20 March 2000.
 109 The 1975 Advisory Committee on Program Standards to the ABCB, which I chaired, recommended government subsidy through the Australian Film Commission and state film authorities.
 110 Lacy's paper was entitled 'Children's Television: An educational responsibility'. I assisted him with details for the paper.

- 111 The other state representatives were Mr J Kitt, Queensland; Mr T Dean, Western Australia; and Mr M Forster, Northern Territory; with Mr E Charles representing the Commonwealth.
- 112 As Elizabeth McDowell, the Victorian manager, had done privately in the meeting with Norman Lacy earlier.
- 113 Briefing paper prepared by VCCFT for Hon. N Lacy, Minister for the Arts, 12 May 1981.
- 114 Conference of the Commonwealth/state ministers with responsibilities in the arts and cultural matters. Agenda items 3, iii, 5 February 1981.
- 115 Report to the Australian Education Council by the members of the AEC Children's Television Working Group, December 1980.
- 116 While I was on sabbatical leave at the University of Iowa, Frank also took over from me as chairman of the CPC, which was conducting its controversial business as usual. Rob Liersch, as the CP co-ordinator, would keep me up to date in Iowa, with newsy, very entertaining letters about the business of the CPC.
- 117 Hugh Morgan letter to Norman Lacy, 8 April 1981.
- 118 ACCFT meeting with Lacy, 12 May 1981.
- 119 My emphasis.

Chapter 7

- 120 Phillip Jones, 'Grande dame a dazzling host to Melbourne's elite', Obituary Patricia Marion Guest, *Australian*, 21 February 2001.
- 121 Memo on file recorded by secretarial assistant (Phyllis), 1 July 1981.
- 122 James Guest to Norman Lacy, dated 16 July.
- 123 It was in fact the same structure as the ACCFT and a standard type of company used by state and Commonwealth governments for the disbursement of discretionary funds. It was also the structure recommended by the AEC Working Party and approved by the AEC.
- 124 The Parliamentary Arts and Education Committees, Response to papers by the Hon. James Guest, MLC, and Mrs Sarah Guest on the subject of the Australian Children's Television Foundation; From: The Hon. Norman Lacy, MP, Minister for the Arts and Educational Services, July 1981.
- 125 Memo to Norman Lacy from Maria Baker, personal staff ministerial adviser, 27 August 1981.
- 126 5 August, with a follow-up letter, 14 August 1981.
- 127 Jenifer Hooks to Patricia Edgar as task force director, 5 August 1981.
- 128 John Morris to Ken Watts, 24 August 1981.
- 129 The Supporters had agreed to give up the name 'Steering Committee for the Establishment of a Children's TV Foundation' and become Friends of the Foundation, and to allow us to use the Articles of Association prepared by them. They now had an organisation within each state.
- 130 Jon Stephens, who had been a children's program producer within the ABC, was appointed program development manager; a finance development manager, Rebecca Matlon, was appointed part-time for six months; and Ken Egan, who had worked as executive officer of the Country Education Project, was appointed as community relations manager for a twelve-month period.
- 131 Letter from Ken Watts to Patricia Edgar, 18 November 1981.
- 132 Patricia Edgar to Prime Minister Fraser, 16 February 1982.
- 133 This was signed by Ken Watts (chairman), Phillip Adams, John Morris, Anne Gorman, Sir James Cruthers, Patricia Braithwaite and Jean Ridge (Northern Territory).
- 134 Ten days earlier, the Victorian Attorney-General agreed to the incorporation of the Australian Children's Television Foundation as a Company Limited by Guarantee under Section 24 of the Companies Act. The Foundation had been set up 'to encourage the development, production and transmission of Australian children's television of quality'. It was expected that 'such television would reflect the diversity of interests, lifestyles,

expectations, special needs, and multicultural heritage of Australian children, and thus contribute to a sense of national identity’.

135 See photograph, p. 227 (top) and n. 221.

Chapter 8

- 136 Keith Moreman—for eleven years group managing director, Greater Union Group of Companies, member of the ABT from 1 November 1977 to 31 October 1982 and in 1986–1989, and member of the ACTF board—regularly gave me this advice.
- 137 A letter from David Jones to me dated 5 August 1980 outlined the points of agreement reached at that Sunday meeting.
- 138 Robert Axam served as the CPC’s executive officer until July 1982 when he was seconded to a teaching position at the University of New South Wales.
- 139 There was constant public discussion of the issue: e.g. ‘TV shows for children are “disappointing”’, *Courier-Mail*, 28/3/81; ‘Boost for children’s TV urged’ (*SMH*, 7/4/81); ‘Exciting time in television for children’ (*Hobart Mercury*, 23/4/81); ‘Tribunal may act on children’s TV drama’ (Ken Haley, *Age*, 7/4/81); ‘Committee seeks local TV drama quota for children’ (Rosanne Robertson, *SMH*, 18/4/81).
- 140 The precise date was 7 May 1982, our twenty-second wedding anniversary. Significant dates often coincided with personal events. The first of December 1981, the day the CPC’s new constitution was implemented, was also Don’s forty-fifth birthday.
- 141 *Australian Broadcasting Tribunal Annual Report 1981–82*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1982, p. 76.
- 142 Glen Kinging, Channel 7, Sydney, to the Acting Secretary, Children’s Program Committee, 18 June 1981.
- 143 Public statement issued by David Jones when draft legal standards were released for public comment, 7 May 1982.
- 144 Brian Appleyard, ‘Eternal drifter escapes his fame’, *Weekend Australian*, 1–2 October 2005.
- 145 Report to Simon Townsend from business manager Darren Brahe ‘RE: Licensing Recommendations’, 20 September 1980.
- 146 A significant number of the stories were sourced from PR releases and many featured items were offered for sale. A story set in a Twisties factory was little more than a series of packaging shots. The segment, introduced by Simon Townsend, recommended: ‘one of Australia’s favourite snack foods ... cheesy and crunchy ... the in-between-meals snack that gourmets really love ... once you start a pack you can’t stop’. Jonathon Coleman, the show’s comedian, consumed large quantities of vitamin pills from a bottle (29/10/80). The segment was done with a warning, but Coleman was shown as clearly enjoying himself. There were safety concerns, with the thirteen-year-old son of a stunt man shown falling from heights onto boxes and gym mats (13/10/80); use of a CIG oxy/propane outfit in a segment on hobbies (11/11/80) with no warnings; a boy rode his BMX bicycle over another boy lying on a footpath (14/1/81); a segment on cooking with flowers used, as one of the ingredients the plant belladonna, with no distinction between the poisonous and non-poisonous varieties (22/2/80). There was blatant compere endorsement of prizes, a practice outside tribunal rules accepted by the industry in adult programming at the time. In the thirteen programs monitored, which included fifty-two film reports, plus compere segments, 50 per cent were devoted to selling something. The segment on a leather worker’s shop spent almost the full time discussing the items on sale, with prices mentioned orally and reinforced with supers over the image (24/10/80). In an item on carnivorous plants (29/10/80) Simon offered to pass on mail orders sent to him. *Wonderworld* cars were shown going through a car wash, the name of which was constantly in the picture (11/11/80); the item was almost certainly a payoff for a contra deal. Music and film clips from overseas, which were not registered or classified by the Film Censorship Board, were screened: during one overseas film clip of the English pop group M, two uniformed men placed a plastic bag over the head of a woman (30/9/80).

- Movie clips for *Superman the Movie* and *Superman 2*, classified A and AO, were shown (4/12/80) and approval for their use was not obtained from the Film Censorship Board. Source: ABT Monitoring Report of *Simon Townsend's Wonderworld* for the CPC.
- 147 Dated 24 September 1981.
- 148 Jeni Hooks to CPC, 12 February 1981.
- 149 *Age Green Guide*, August 1981.
- 150 Glenys Bell, 'A Struggle for Quality Children's Programs', *Bulletin*, 18 May 1981.
- 151 See Minutes, ABT/FACTS meeting, December 1979.
- 152 Penny Spence's letter was published in the *Bulletin*, 8 June 1982.
- 153 Geoff Strong, 'Woman resigns from children's TV control committee', *Age*, 28 June 1982. Sarah Guest's resignation was effective from 5 July 1982.
- 154 His letter was published on 2 July.
- 155 Jeni Hooks, letter to the *Age Green* guide, 22 July 1982. Hooks also wrote to Neil Brown, Minister for Communications, supporting the CPC, 29 October 1982.
- 156 Kate White and Pete Vaughton to Prime Minister Fraser, 13 July 1982.
- 157 Harvey Shore to Patricia Edgar, 30 June 1982.
- 158 In August 2005, I turned on the television in a Tamworth motel and there was Simon Townsend being interviewed. He said, 'I've been rich. I've been poor. Tomorrow I just hope to wake up and be alive. In those days of *Wonderworld* when I had lots of money and fame and lots of show-business friends, I didn't stop and savour the world enough'. Simon Townsend interviewed by Peter Thompson, 'Talking Heads', ABC TV, 8 August 2005.
- 159 Again, 1 December was Don's birthday—this time his forty-seventh.
- 160 The press battle raged over many months, with FACTS adamantly defending its position. See, for example: Pam Mawbey, 'Children's cuts—FACTS now under attack', *AFR*, 2 June 1981; 'Commercials get in first on children's TV code', *AFR*, 1 June 1981; Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations, media release, 'High Australian content in children's television programs—FACTS sets the record straight', 11 October 1982; John Kavanagh, 'Advertisers champ at Broadcasting Tribunal's bit', *BRW*, 30 June–6 July 1984.
- 161 Minutes of discussion of CPC procedures for classifying C programs, 11 January 1983.
- 162 Bruce Gyngell to David Jones, 29 December 1982.
- 163 Patricia Lovell to David Jones, 23 February 1983.
- 164 Patricia Edgar to David Jones, 21 February 1983.
- 165 David Jones to Patricia Edgar, 18 March 1983.
- 166 Patricia Edgar to David Jones, 28 March 1983.
- 167 Patricia Edgar to the chairman, 25 July 1983.
- 168 David Jones to Patricia Edgar, 3 August 1983. The agreement was outlined in correspondence between the chairman and me on 4 and 5 August.
- 169 Patricia Edgar to David Jones, 2 February 1984.
- 170 John Kavanagh, 'Advertisers champ at Broadcasting Tribunal's bit', *BRW*, 30 June–6 July 1984.
- 171 Frank Meaney and Rex Heading would complete their terms with the CPC at the end of November 1984. Rex had returned to fill a vacancy. Dr Shelley Phillips, Director of the Unit for Child Studies at the University of New South Wales, succeeded Frank Meaney as chairman of the CPC.
- 172 Bruce Harris to Patricia Edgar, 14 January 1984.
- 173 The CPC continued to operate the classification system until March 1992. The tribunal reviewed the operation of the committee in June 1991, introducing measures to streamline the assessment and classification process. In March 1992 the CPC was disbanded and assessment done by the tribunal staff with specialist consultants on a case-by-case basis. The tribunal was abolished on 4 October 1992 when the *Broadcasting Act 1942* was repealed and the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* was introduced under new legislation by the Keating Government. The Australian Broadcasting Authority was established, with responsibility to continue to enforce children's program standards.

In its seventeen-year history the tribunal forced a change in the content of children's programming in Australia. The Self Regulation Inquiry enabled the expression of public concern about the content of television and the development of Standards for children's programming. At the same time, during its tenure the tribunal had acted as a bulwark for the commercial industry against consumer pressures. Stations have had to comply with quota requirements for children for the past twenty-six years—including, currently (each year): 260 hours of C programs in total; 130 hours of first-release Australian C programs; 32 hours of first-release Australian children's C drama; and 130 hours of P (preschool) programs. In 2006 these Standards were undergoing a complete review conducted by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, which took over the functions of the ABA on 1 July 2005.

Chapter 9

- 174 Arts Ministers Conference, 1984.
- 175 Jon Stephens also sat in on this discussion.
- 176 The motion was moved by John Morris, seconded by Sir James Cruthers and carried unanimously. Minutes, ACTF first board meeting, 30 March 1982.
- 177 *Variety* magazine, New York, 6 April 1983.
- 178 'Breakthrough in kids' television' (Gary Shelley, *TVWeek*, Melbourne, 26/3/83), 'A break for the kids' (*Daily Sun*, Brisbane, 4/3/83), 'Major drama series for children' (*Sunday Observer*, Melbourne, 6/3/83); 'New \$4m kids program', (*Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, 10/3/83); 'A good diet for the kids' (*Western Australian*, Perth, 18/3/83); 'Kids TV: A new challenge' (Kristin Williamson, *National Times*, 19/3/1983).
- 179 ACTF *Newsletter*, issue no. 9, August 1984.
- 180 ACTF Productions Ltd, *Winners* prospectus, 1984.
- 181 Kim Williams to Patricia Edgar, 2 July 1984.
- 182 Judge Wilcox of the Federal Court handed down a judgment on 19 July 1984. He dismissed the application on the basis that: 'the whole scheme [the Standards] is directed to the public interest in receiving a service adequate in both quantity and quality. Licensees' property interests, although important, are subordinate to that public interest'.
- 183 The tribunal's policy of granting only a provisional C classification at the script stage and then a full C to the completed product made financing of children's drama programs difficult. The networks generally would not make firm pre-sale commitments for children's programs awarded only a provisional C. After intensive lobbying, the tribunal proposed a temporary standard which, for an experimental period that would end on 30 June 1987, would grant a full C classification to a script at pre-production—subject to monitoring by the CPC. The Foundation welcomed the decision but objected to an experimental period and was concerned about how the assessment of scripts would be made, given its experience with the *Winners* scripts (described below). The tribunal therefore decided to extend the experimental period until 30 June 1988.
- 184 Submissions were called for, by 31 October, on the amount of Australian programming the audience wanted to see on commercial television. The Foundation published this response to the tribunal in its newsletter:
- 'Australian children's drama programs are valued and enjoyed by children and parents alike. The current amount of 8 hours per year is insufficient to properly provide children and their parents with quality programming of substance. The quota should be increased to 16 hours per year, which is still a minimal amount compared with the volume of television fare for adults. Variety of content is the essence of good television viewing for any age group, but it is particularly important as a means of introducing children to a wide range of imaginative and constructive television programming ... The quality of Australian children's drama should be equivalent to the high standards of adult drama. There is no good reason why children's drama should be discounted simply because of the economic circumstances of the audience'.

440 Notes

- 185 Patricia Edgar to Dr Shelley Phillips, 16 July 1984.
- 186 The term *film ratio* refers to the amount of film shot in relation to the length of the film script. The budget specifies an agreed ratio which allows for technical and performance issues, etc. A beginner usually spills a lot of film to get what they want but Bennett seemed to do the same thing over and over again.
- 187 *Just Friends* was produced by Jane Ballantyne and directed by Michael Pattinson who had successfully directed the teenage films *Moving Out* and *Street Hero*. Jane also produced Paul Cox (a director then making a name for himself with his highly individualistic films) who directed the second Bob Ellis script, *The Paper Boy*.
- 188 To launch the *Winners* series for the Foundation, Suzie Howie was publicist. This was the beginning of an important professional relationship, for me and the Foundation, with Suzie.
- 189 For the *Sunday Examiner*, Launceston, 1 June 1986.
- 190 These reviews are detailed in *The Australian Children's Television Foundation Annual Report 1985–86*, pp. 32–3. The final quote was reported in the *Canberra Times* TV Guide, 3 February 1986.
- 191 Morris Gleitzman got his start in his book publishing career with *The Other Facts of Life*.
- 192 50th Parliament—second session, Legislative Assembly of Victoria, pp. 73–4, 79, Tuesday 17 September 1985.

Chapter 10

- 193 Note from Frank Meaney to Patricia Edgar, 31 December 1985.
- 194 Patricia Edgar to Hector Crawford, 28 March 1983.
- 195 Gene Scott to Ken Watts, 4 November 1983.
- 196 Patricia Edgar to Gene Scott, 2 December 1983.
- 197 Dame Beryl remained willing to help in whatever way she could throughout my career with the ACTE, even after she was no longer on the board.
- 198 Quentin Bryce was then Queensland director of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and convener of the National Women's Advisory Council. She is now governor of Queensland.
- 199 Sydney, 18 December 1986.
- 200 For *Touch the Sun* reviews see *The Australian Children's Television Foundation Annual Report 1987–88*.
- 201 The reviews are detailed in *The Australian Children's Television Foundation Annual Report 1987–88*, pp. 42–3. Final quote from *Sunday Observer*, Melbourne, 25 October 1987.
- 202 *Touch the Sun* won four awards for excellence in drama at the Australian Television Society Awards in November 1988. *Kaboodle* won the award for excellence for a children's program.
- 203 Based on a report from Mario Andreacchio about the First International Film Festival for Children and Young People in Bulgaria, *Care for Kids Television News*, newsletter of the Australian Children's Television Foundation, issue no. 25, September 1988.
- 204 Paul Cox to Patricia Edgar, undated, envelope postmarked 8 February 1988.

Chapter 11

- 205 Paul Jennings, *Round the Twist*, Puffin Books, Ringwood, 1990.
- 206 This definition was to exclude long-running series with self-contained episodes, which were the bread and butter of television networks in fulfilling their Australian drama quota requirements.
- 207 Speech by Treasurer Paul Keating at the launch of the Film Finance Corporation, 3 February 1989.
- 208 Fully animated by Peter Viska, with music by Peter Best.
- 209 The concepts outlined in this paragraph are discussed by Esben Storm in the teachers' resource book *Comedy and How It Works: A television study guide*, ACTE, Melbourne, 1996.

- 210 Robin Oliver, *SMH*, 26 August 1990; Dennis Prior, *Age*, 9 September 1990; Geoff Slattery, *Age*, 19 March 1993; *SMH*, 22 September 1990.
- 211 Debi Enker, 'Yarns for the memory', *Sunday Age*, 19 August 1990.
- 212 Synopsis of *Little Squirt*: The boys at school have a pissing competition and Bronson is the humiliated loser, earning the nickname Little Squirt. Mr Gribble plans to build an aquatic wonderland on the beautiful stretch of coastline. A water spirit is affronted when construction of the dam begins and she mistakenly believes Bronson is building the dam. Whenever Bronson goes anywhere near anything liquid there are disastrous consequences. Eventually, Bronson convinces the water spirit that she should concentrate her efforts on Mr Gribble. The water spirit and Bronson team up—they defeat Mr Gribble and the boys at school. Bronson proves he is no longer a little squirt with an exhibition of peeing that every boy would be proud of.
- 213 The second nomination had been two years earlier for *Boy Soldiers* from the *More Winners* series.
- 214 Tammy Burnstock, as ABC program co-ordinator, to Patricia Edgar, 11 June 1997.
- 215 Patricia Edgar to Tammy Burnstock, 12 June 1997.
- 216 Anna Home to Patricia Edgar, 10 July 1997.
- 217 Claire Henderson to Patricia Edgar, 20 June 1977.
- 218 Claire Henderson to Patricia Edgar, 19 November 1997.
- 219 Mary Bredin to Patricia Edgar, 21 December 1998.
- 220 Claire Henderson to Patricia Edgar, 3 May 1999.
- 221 This photograph from the *Age* was captioned 'Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser loses his seat but comes up smiling, assisted at his right elbow by Jim Bonner, one of his Press officers, and at his left by Peter Bowers, *Sydney Morning Herald* political commentator. Other reactions: the chairwoman of the Broadcasting Tribunal's children's programmes committee, Dr Patricia Edgar (behind Mr Bonner) throws up her hands; Dan Webb of Channel 7 (right of the picture) restrains his emotions; and the children laugh'.

Chapter 12

- 222 Diane Simmonds, *Bulletin*, 5 May 1992.
- 223 The deal is detailed in Trevor Sykes, *The Bold Riders*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994, pp. 413–17; 'Memories of the biggest share raid ever', *AFR*, 6 June 1977.
- 224 Information based on interviews with staff close to Robert and Janet by Patricia Edgar for the biography *Janet Holmes à Court*, Harper Collins, Sydney, 1999.
- 225 The other trustees were Janet Holmes à Court, writer and lateral thinker Edward de Bono, Sir Michael Clapham, a Zambian lawyer Dr Rodger Chongwe who had studied law with Robert in Perth, former High Court Judge Sir Ronald Wilson and the deputy vice chancellor of the University of Western Australia, Dr Robert Parfitt.
- 226 Sir Michael Clapham was deputy chairman of ICI until retirement at sixty-two, and deputy chairman of Lloyd's Bank. He was also president of the Confederation of British Industry, who had been appointed by the City of London Takeover Panel to examine the propriety of Robert's takeover of Associated Communications Corporation, ACC.
- 227 23 December 1987.
- 228 Paul Keating to the Hon. John Dawkins, 13 November 1987.
- 229 Jean Piaget, *Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child*, Longman, London, 1970; Patricia Edgar et al., *Under 5 in Australia*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1973.
- 230 Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*, Basic Books, New York, 1983.
- 231 Peter Clarke, at the time producer of the ABC radio program *Offspring*, introduced me to Howard Gardner's work as professor of Education at Harvard University and co-director of Harvard's Project Zero, a research program investigating the development of knowledge, artistic ability and symbol-making processes in children. Dr Gardner is also a research psychologist at Boston University Medical Center and adjunct professor of

Neurology at Boston University of Medicine. His published books include *The Quest for Mind*, 1972; *The Arts and Human Development*, 1973; *The Shattered Mind*, 1974; *Art, Mind and Brain*, 1982; *Developmental Psychology*, 1982; *Frames of Mind*, 1983; *The Mind's New Science*, 1985; *To Open Minds*, 1989. By 1989 he had published more than 250 journal articles. Dr Gardner had gained international recognition for his theory that people have multiple intelligences. This view challenges the use of IQ tests as measures of general intelligence and gives support for non-verbal forms of intelligence used by artists who think and work in visual, aural and kinaesthetic modes.

- 232 The outreach program was in part based on the experience Don had had with the Country Education Project, which insisted that wider community resources outside the schools needed to be brought to bear on the task of overcoming educational disadvantage. He chaired *Lift-Off's* central outreach committee, regarding it as highly relevant to his work as director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies. It was also a major extension in concept from the American attempts to link *Sesame Street* with the US early childhood program Headstart and its parent-community involvement thrust. In the late 1960s to early 1970s a lot of effort and government funding were being put into Headstart, a program designed to help disadvantaged black families in the United States.
- 233 *Australian Fabian News*, vol. 46, no. 1, January–March 2006.
- 234 *Early Childhood Program, Philosophy and Objectives*, Australian Children's Television Foundation, 1989.
- 235 Garth Boomer, 'On Thinking and Acting', *The Australian Children's Television Foundation Annual Report 1991–92*.

Chapter 13

- 236 The ABC board supported this move.
- 237 Letter of support from Professor Howard Gardner, Melbourne, 17 July 1991.
- 238 Jeff Peck report to Patricia Edgar (not dated).
- 239 Peter completed his first very short animation for *Kaboodle* Series 1, then went on to *Kaboodle 2*, producing thirty minutes of animation for a story called *The Hedge and Mr Snip*, followed by the four-part series *The Greatest Tune on Earth*, which Christopher Skase had bought for the Seven network and which Hazel Hawke had launched with a piano recital at the Windsor Hotel in Melbourne.
- 240 Ron Mueck had been a performer with puppets on the Australian children's television series *Shirl's Neighbourhood* and has since become a world-renowned sculptor. The National Gallery in Canberra purchased his hyper-realist sculpture 'Pregnant Woman' for \$817 000 in December 2002.
- 241 This project was guided by David Francis, the director of Curriculum Corporation, and Carol White who had played a part in workshops and was released from the South Australian Education Department for the project.
- 242 Paul Nichola, the director of the *Wakadoo Café* segments, came up with a plan.
- 243 Frank J Murray, *Washington Times*, 4 January 1992.
- 244 29 April 1992.
- 245 Paul Keating, Prime Minister, at the launch of the *Lift-Off* series, Parliament House, Canberra, 29 April 1992.
- 246 *West Australian* West Magazine, 2/5/92; James Cockington, *SMH*, 30/12/91; *Herald Sun* TV Guide, 8/5/92.
- 247 Mary Maxwell, *Weekly Times*, 29/4/92; *Sunday Telegraph*, 3/5/92; Mirjana Jovetic, *Herald Sun* TV Guide, 6/5/92; Dennis Prior, *Age*, 30/5/92; Mark Wallace, *Canberra Times*, 4/5/92.
- 248 *Lift-Off* posters were mailed out to all schools, sponsored by Telecom. The 100 000 copies of *A Guide to Lift-Off* were published and disseminated through Outreach. A bi-monthly publication, *Lift-Off Magazine*, was developed by Text Media. Annemaree O'Brian led a team to develop Distance Education Materials for *Lift-Off*. Octopus Publishing Group produced an extensive publishing program for the *Lift-Off* Outreach program; Budget

Books produced five activity books and EC the faceless doll was created. Hazel Hawke and Mark Mitchell did book readings in stores. Octopus Books became Reed books and they published sixteen titles, selling 50 000 story books within the first year and extending their list with the publication of a further fifteen titles with the second series. Some 150 000 activity books were sold; 30 000 tapes were bought by schools. By 1992, more than 600 000 books associated with ACTF programs had been sold.

- 249 HIT was a UK company wanting to sell into the US.
 250 *SMH*; *Weekly Southern Courier*; *Sun Herald*.
 251 *Lift-Off 2*—a further twenty-six episodes and \$7.4 million of live drama, animation, puppetry and documentary in thematic episodes—went to air at 4.30 p.m. weekdays from 17 February 1995. There were some refinements to the program on the basis of feedback we received from an October 1992 market research program carried out in thirty schools to ascertain acceptance levels for different sections of the program and the popularity of characters in the first series. The program had a television viewing audience of more than two million children each week. A new group of young child characters were introduced, as the main cast were two years older, to maintain the young age focus of the program. To build *Lift-Off* into a regular on-air program to balance *Sesame Street*—which was our long-term objective—required program volume and associated formats. *Sesame Street* had more than twenty years of programming to build on. I suggested that we produce a *Lift-Off Game Show* at a much lower budget, which would incorporate the philosophy of *Lift-Off*, the educational principles and the fantasy characters which the audience now understood, to assist the on-air presence of *Lift-Off* and support Outreach.

Chapter 14

- 252 Frederic Beigbeder, *£9.99: A novel*, Picador, London, 2002.
 253 Queensland Arts Department, 1992–93; South Australian Department of the Arts and Cultural Heritage and the Western Australian Department of the Arts, 1993–94.
 254 McKenzie Wark, 'Guinea pigs in the Pay TV experiment', *Australian*, 6 April 1994.
 255 *Final Report, World Summit on Television for Children*, World Congress Centre, Melbourne, Australia, 12–17 March 1995, ACTF, Melbourne, 1995.
 256 This foundation is called the Hoso-Bunka.
 257 The Foundation had to organise an event worthy of such an historic first meeting which would inspire an ongoing movement and attract delegates from around the world. A few weeks before our opening, the summit co-ordinator collapsed, pregnant, and I discovered an organisational mess—enquiries and correspondence were unanswered and pre-summit organisation was out of control. With six weeks to go I enlisted the help of Suzie Campbell. From then on, the summit was magnificently organised. I used the opportunity to promote other Foundation staff in the program, including Jenny Buckland, head of marketing at the ACTF. She spoke alongside David Britt, the president and CEO of the Children's Television Workshop, and Loes Wormmeester from Bos Bros Film, an outstanding children's producer in the Netherlands.
 258 Cathy Gowdie, 'ABC denies US TV role is "sell-out" of children', *Age*, 14 March 1995; Jennifer Sexton, 'Child's pay TV's motives pure: chief', *Australian*, 14 March 1995.
 259 Phillip Adams, 'A bedroom farce unsuitable for kiddies', *Weekend Australian*, 11–12 March 1995.
 260 Catherine Armitage, 'Pay School', *Weekend Australian*, 11–12 March 1995.
 261 *ibid.*
 262 The pay TV venture collapsed when it failed to negotiate a cable or satellite partner.
 263 For fifteen years since the Dix Report initiated by Malcolm Fraser's government, the ABC had been seeking clear definition of its fundamental role and whether it should accept corporate sponsorship. See *The ABC in Review: National Broadcasting in the 1980s*, Australian Government Publishing Service, May 1981. See also Don Watson, *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart: A portrait of Paul Keating PM*, Knopf, Sydney, 2002, pp. 514–15;

- The Mansfield Report: The Challenge of a Better ABC*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1997.
- 264 See Ross Fitzgerald, 'ABC's integrity a matter of balance', *Australian*, 17 April, 2006.
- 265 The *Herald Sun* reported, on 31 October 1997: "Bananas in Pyjamas are just about our most successful merchandise," said Gaffney, who will tomorrow, with Channel Two, host the 4th Annual Bananas in Pyjamas International Conference in Melbourne for delegates from 20 countries. Gaffney acquired the licence for the Bananas six years after they were launched on Channel Two's *Play School*. "They came from a song written by Carey Blyton, nephew of Enid, in the early 1970s." The song found its way onto *Play School* and was such a hit the ABC decided to make a series of five-minute TV programs'.
- 266 Based on discussions I had with our regular program buyers at MIP TV.
- 267 James Stewart, *Disney War: The battle for the Magic Kingdom*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2005, p. 122.
- 268 *ibid.*, p. 124.
- 269 Patricia Edgar to Claire Henderson re: *Lift-Off* on air in 1995, 20 July 1994.
- 270 Claire Henderson to Patricia Edgar, 26 July 1994.
- 271 Patricia Edgar to Howard Gardner, 5 December 1995.
- 272 Patricia Edgar to Claire Henderson, 11 December 1995; Claire Henderson to Patricia Edgar, 15 December 1995.
- 273 Claire Henderson to Patricia Edgar, 19 January 1996.
- 274 Patricia Edgar to Penny Chapman, 10 May 1996.
- 275 Penny Chapman to ACTF, 8 July 1996.
- 276 Patricia Edgar to Penny Chapman, 8 August 1996.
- 277 *Childhood Matters: The report of the inquiry into early childhood education*, Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee, Canberra, July 1996, p. 127.
- 278 Phillip Adams, *Weekend Australian*, 21–22 January 1995, p.10.
- 279 See Alexa Moses, 'Entertaining the generations anything but child's play', *Age*, 21 April 2006.

Chapter 15

- 280 *Media Australia Magazine*, 17 March 1995.
- 281 'How TV continues to fail our children', *Age Good Weekend*, 11 March 1995.
- 282 The organising committee included the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, the Philippine Children's Television Foundation, UNICEF East Asia Pacific Regional Office and the Asian Mass Communications Information and Research Centre (AMIC). The Americas Summit was instigated by the Alliance for Children and Television of Canada and the American Center for Children's Television.
- 283 *L'il Elvis Jones and the Truckstoppers* was to be a co-production with Peter Viska's Company, Viskatoons—see Chapter 10.
- 284 Janet Holmes à Court to Ross Coulthart, 17 August 1995.
- 285 Response from ACTF to Channel 9, accompanying letter from Janet Holmes à Court, 24 August 1995.
- 286 On 19 September 1995.

Chapter 16

- 287 Don Watson, *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart: A portrait of Paul Keating PM*, Knopf, Sydney, 2002.
- 288 23 August 1993.
- 289 Confidential letter from Patricia Edgar to John Morris, chief executive, FFC, 26 February 1990.
- 290 Debi Enker, *Sunday Age View Magazine*, 22 June 1996.
- 291 Leonie Rutherford, 'The cognitive paradigm and its discontents: A plea for new directions in Australian children's television', *Research Papers*, vol. 10, April 2000, Explorations into Children's Literature.

- 292 Asked, a year before he became Prime Minister, how a Keating Government would differ from Bob Hawke's, Paul Keating told ABC Radio's Doug Aiton: 'We have a common set of values. We probably have divergent interests. I'd try to do more with the arts whereas Bob's done more for sport'. Paul Keating interview, *Conversations with Doug Aiton*, ABC Enterprises, Sydney, 1991. As Don Watson, loc. cit., p. 333, put it: 'creativity was a priceless national resource'.
- 293 In 1992–93 the Queensland Arts Department, the South Australian Department of the Arts and Western Australia's Department of the Arts withdrew funding from the Foundation.
- 294 *The Genie from Down Under* was a \$4.1-million co-production with the BBC that satirised the stereotypes that the United Kingdom and Australia see in each other in the context of the Republic debate. Steve Spears had come up with the germ of an idea that had nothing to do with the debate but it was adapted to inject the elements I wanted under Esben Storm's direction. The original idea, written for the ACTF by Steve Spears, was reshaped to meet the cast and story requirements. Jeremy Swan (the BBC script editor from *Round the Twist*) represented the BBC to work with Esben Storm, Steve and a team of writers to create *The Genie from Down Under* and was also a director on the series.
- Alexandra Millman from London played the Hon. Penelope Townes, a thirteen year old who lived with her lovely widowed mother, Lady Diana (Anna Galvin), and their faithful housekeeper Miss Mossop (Monica Maughan) in the family's decaying ancestral estate in England—set in the Werribee mansion. Reduced circumstances have forced the Towneses to take in obnoxious guests and Lady Diana even contemplates marriage to a rich Pommie toff, Lord Accrington 'Bubbles' Smythe (Ian McFadgen) in order to save the family from ruin. This mismatch is averted by Penelope's discovery of a magic black opal in the attic. The keeper of the opal automatically becomes the master of an odd couple of genies, Bruce (Rhys Muldoon) and his young son Baz (Glenn Meldrum). The lucky opal owner need only make a wish, and Bruce, with a hand movement resembling the great Australian fly-swatting wave, must grant it. So now Penelope has a lot of power but not quite enough maturity to use it wisely and the scene is set for a succession of antics that ricochet around the globe taking in comedy, fantasy and adventure. Mark Mitchell, the Foundation's regular villain in its shows because of his versatility played Otto, the outback tour guide from hell—a character role he loved and did not want to relinquish for many years.
- 295 L'il Elvis has a gift for music, a talent for trouble and a desire for only one thing—to find out who he really is and be a normal kid again. The story begins on a fateful night, ten years ago, when a mysterious gold Cadillac drives through the tiny outback town of Wannapoo. It makes one stop at Grace and Len's roadhouse, where it deposits a package—a battered old guitar case. Inside the case, wrapped in rhinestone-studded swaddling, is a baby. Grace and Len call the baby L'il Elvis. By the time he is ten years old, when the series begins, L'il Elvis is a local legend: truck drivers stop at the roadhouse just to hear L'il Elvis playing Elvis Presley songs. But he is not happy. He is sick of the music and sick of his mum's insistence that he is the King reborn. With his friend Lionel on didgeridoo, Janet on drums, and L'il Elvis on guitar, they create their own sound—a sound so hot that nothing else compares. They call it did Digibilli and it is their music. That is, until millionaire WC Moore hears them and things change forever.
- 296 Eighteen people were fully trained as assistant animators, performing a task called 'in-betweening'—the senior animators create the key poses needed for the movement of a character and the in-betweeners add the poses in between to create the illusion of movement. Five people were trained as background artists. Their role was to draw and paint the scenery which was placed behind the animated characters. The locations in an animated series must be designed, drawn and then painted, in all their detail—if a kitchen shelf was being designed every detail on that shelf was drawn. Four people were trained as animation checkers, a process where many thousands of drawings are checked each

day to ensure that the animation is technically correct and ready for filming. There were ten trainees in the digital department where hand-drawn animation was scanned into computers, coloured electronically, placed on the correct background, rendered and then transferred to videotape. The digital system was new technology not in use five years before. The studio also employed an arts administration trainee within the production department. The trainees attended a four-week intensive course before the start of the series which was run by TEAME (Training and Employment for the Arts, Media and Entertainment) in conjunction with staff from the *L'il Elvis* animation studio—the trainees would attend two weeks further training in multimedia during the twelve-month scheme. Fifteen of the trainees were previously unemployed and the ages of the trainees varied from seventeen to thirty-eight years.

- 297 Dennis Prior, *Age*, 28 February 1998.
- 298 As part of this project, we mounted an exhibition of some of the sets and a collection of animation cells and clips from the series at the George Adams Gallery of the Victorian Arts Centre to allow children and their parents to see how animation is created. This exhibition travelled continuously around Australia for the next six years due to the efforts of Robin Astley, a valued member of the Foundation staff who raised money and lobbied for its preservation.
- 299 Don Watson, *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart: A portrait of Paul Keating PM*, Knopf, Sydney, 2002, p. 520.
- 300 The South Australian Government and some individuals contributed to the scholarship fund, which was in excess of \$350 000.

Chapter 17

- 301 The workshop was sponsored by the ACTF Northern Territory Health Services, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board and the Theatre Fund of the Australia Council.
- 302 *The Australian Children's Television Foundation Annual Report 2000–2001*, p. 25.
- 303 Andrew McMillan, 'Poison cousin's death tears a clan apart', *Age*, 29 June 2002.
- 304 In his article, 'Life and the spirit in which it is lived' (*Age*, 14 January 2006), Patrick Hutchings described Gulumbu's exhibition in January 2006 in Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, as 'astoundingly beautiful'.
- 305 Lindsay Murdoch, 'NT enquiry clears Aboriginal leader', *Age*, 26 January 2006; Jennifer Sexton, 'Mining royalties dividing Yunupingu family', *Weekend Australian*, 11–12 June 2005; Lindsay Murdoch, 'Aboriginal leader demands return of symbolic painting', *Age*, 21 January 2006.

Chapter 18

- 306 Alain de Botton, *How Proust Can Change Your Life*, Picador, London, 1997, pp. 137–8.
- 307 Dated 2 October 1996.
- 308 We arranged to meet on 7 February 1997 at the Copthorne Tara Hotel.
- 309 At the time of Robert's death the shareholding structure in Heytesbury had been re-organised. A private company, Trebor Investments, was established and issued with new A-class shares which held all the voting rights and were controlled by Janet. All of the existing ordinary shares had then been converted to B-class shares which were non-voting shares. The voting structure within Heytesbury could only be altered with the consent of 75 per cent of the votes of the B-class shareholders. The children together owned 66 per cent of Heytesbury only, so Janet had full voting control under this structure. Janet referred to her children as 'the shareholders'.
- 310 BCNA became a Company Limited by Guarantee, like the ACTF.
- 311 2005 statistics.
- 312 The Live Field of Women was to be staged in Sydney in 2007.

Chapter 19

- 313 Letter dated 29 February. Date of death: 20 October. In March, I sent Bruce the report on twenty years of C programs, acknowledging his contribution.
- 314 Peter McGauran to Patricia Edgar, 7 August 2001.
- 315 Submission to the South Australian Government from the NWS9 advisory committee, 1987.
- 316 John Morris to John Bannon, 17 July 1987.
- 317 John Bannon as Minister for the Arts and Premier to Patricia Edgar, 29 July 1988.
- 318 Adriana Mauric, 'Producers call for an ACTF investigation, *Encore*, 25 February–10 March 1998.
- 319 The other two producers were John Tatoulis and Posie Graeme-Evans.
- 320 *Review of the Role and Functions of the ABC*. The committee's chairman was Bob Mansfield. The committee was established by the Minister for Communications Senator Alston, and reported in December 1996.
- 321 *The Legacy of the Silver Shadow* was a thirteen-part series, our third joint venture with two independent companies, Darestar Pty Ltd and Ponderosa Productions Pty Ltd.
- 322 Correspondence with the FFC, 4, 11 and 20 December.
- 323 The letters to Senator Richard Alston, Minister for Communication and the Arts, 5 February 2001, and to the Film Finance Corporation, 5 February 2001, both coordinated by Ron Saunders, listed the names of Kay Ben M'Rad (Jonathan M Shiff productions), Paul Barron (Barron Entertainment), Ewan Burnett (Burberry Productions), Posie Graeme-Evans and Andrew Blaxland (Millennium Pictures), Margot McDonald (Moonlight Cinata), Daniel Scharf (Daniel Scharf Productions), Sue Taylor (RT Films), Yoram Gross (Yoram Gross—EM.TV), Jane Ballantyne (J'Elly Ballantyne Pictures), Ann Darouzet (Westside Films), Stuart Menzies (December Films), Noel Price (Southern Star), John Tatoulis (Media World) and Tony Wright (December Films). The letter was copied to Cinemedia, SAFC, Screen West, Pacific Film and Television Commission, New South Wales Film and Television Office, and Screen Tasmania.
- 324 Eleanor Sprawson, 'Just kidding', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 February 2001.
- 325 See legal correspondence, Levy to Holding Redlich, 9 May 2001; 4 April letter from Janet to Peter McGauran; letter from Holding Redlich to chairman FFC, 24 April; Levy to Holding Redlich, April 24; Janet to Peter McGauran, 11 May.
- 326 Lucas Testro, ACTF lawyer, notes of SPAA meeting, 31 May 2001.
- 327 Sue Milliken to Nick Murray, 8 June 2001.
- 328 Nick Herd, executive director SPAA, to Patricia Edgar, 29 June 2001.
- 329 Simon Palin, 'TV producers protest over subsidy confusion', *Media Week*, August 2001.
- 330 Andrew Dodd, 'Bitter children's TV drama', *Australian*, 9–15 August 2001.
- 331 Peter McGauran to Patricia Edgar, 7 August 2001.
- 332 On 26 July 2001.
- 333 Patricia Edgar to Jonathan Shiff, 31 July.

334 **Table 1: FFC investment in children's drama as percentage of total investments since 1995–96**

	95–96	96–97	97–98	98–99	99–2000
Total FFC investment (\$)	88.4m	55.9m	68.3m	61.5m	72.0m
FFC invest. in children's drama (\$)	19.6m	8.1m	18.6m	8.9m	9.3m
Investment in children's drama as percentage of total investments	23.2	14.5	27.2	14.6	12.9

Table 2: Network acquisitions of children's programs with FFC investment since 1995–96

	95–96	96–97	97–98	98–99	99–2000
ABC	32.5 hrs	13.0 hrs	6.5 hrs	6.5 hrs	13.0hrs
Nine	13.0	0	19.5	0	0
Seven	0	0	6.0	7.0	6.5
Ten	6.5	26.0	26.0	13.0	13.0
Total	52.0 hrs	39.0 hrs	58.0 hrs	26.5 hrs	32.5hrs

Source: Australian Broadcasting Authority, news release, 28 June 2000. Report of the investigation into the minimum licence fee requirement for Australian children's drama. ABA ref: 1999/0697, 20 June 2000.

- 335 Prepared by Kate Aisbett, Entertainment Rights, for the Australian Broadcasting Authority, the Australian Children's Television Foundation and the Australian Film Finance Corporation, Sydney, March 2000.

Chapter 20

- 336 Dr Ellen Wartella, a prominent US communication researcher and long-time friend of mine, spoke of the directions media and communication research had taken over three decades and the mistaken and limited assumptions of the research on media effects on children that had looked for simple answers to complex problems. Dr Terry Cutler from the Australia Council and Alice Cahn from the Markle Foundation in New York spoke about the future of new technology. At the conclusion of the seminar the Premier Steve Bracks launched the newly rebuilt *Kahootz* at the Victorian Arts Centre. I hosted the day.
- 337 Professor Alan Fels, 'Cultural protection and competition policy—the case of children's television', ACTF 20th Anniversary Symposium, Melbourne, 20 March 2002.
- 338 *AFR*, 11 July 1997.
- 339 The members of the original Children's Program Committee whose work should be acknowledged were Frank Meaney, Bruce Harris, John Stapp, Rex Heading, Joan Brennan and Sarah Guest, with administrative support from Rob Liersch and Bob Axam.
- 340 Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*, Bloomsbury, London, 1995; Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Bantam Books, London, 1998.

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- 341 See David de Vaus, *Diversity and Change in Australian Families, Statistical Profiles*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 2004.
- 342 Phillipe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, Vintage Books, New York, 1962.
- 343 Sherill Nixon and Lisa Pryor, 'At last, the cheated childless plot their own revenge', *SMH*, 30 September 2002; Elinor Burkett, *Baby Boon: How family-friendly America cheats the childless*, National Seminars Group, Padgett-Thompson, New York, 2000; T Pothausen et al., 'Family-friendly backlash—fact or fiction?', *Personnel Psychology*, 51 (3), 1998, pp. 685–706.
- 344 JP Shonkoff and DA Phillips (eds), *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*, National Academy Press, Washington DC, 2000; F Mustard and M McCain, *Reversing the Real Brain Drain: The early years study*, Publications Ontario, 1999.
- 345 With Foundation programs the audience understood and enjoyed content that did not treat them as ignorant babies. With *Sky Trackers*, back in 1994, a PG rating was given to an

- episode where a son is thrown (gently) to the ground by a drunken father; the point of the episode was the way the son and his friends dealt with a situation that is not rare. *Noah & Saskia*, 2004, was given a PG video release because there were 'mild sexual references'—the word *cyber-lover* was used—and Clive, a character who frequently gets his words mixed up, declares there has been 'a transvestite of justice'; a young nine-year-old bully boy has another boy on the ground briefly, with his arm around his neck. This is deemed 'mild violence'. Boys and girls aged five to twelve years were the main regular viewers; 400 000 watched the program on the ABC at 5 p.m. once a week. The latest Harry Potter film, *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, was given a PG classification which was overturned on appeal. (Patricia Edgar, 'Censorship in the nanny state', *Age*, 6 July 2004.)
- 346 The number of children's books published now, however, make up 20 per cent of the Australian book market worth \$194 million in 2005. (Hannah Edwards, 'Censorship of kids' books on the rise', *Age*, 30 April 2006.)
- 347 Chee Chee Leung, 'The bottom line in kids' books is utterly unreal', *Age*, 1 April 2006.
- 348 Walter Kendrick, 'From Huck Finn to Calvin Kline's Billboard Nymphets', *New York Times Magazine*, 8 October 1995, Section 6, pp. 84–7.
- 349 David Denby, 'Teen movies', *New Yorker*, 31 May 1999.
- 350 Richard Eckersley, *VicHealth Letter*, issue no. 26, Summer 2006.
- 351 Johan Norberg, *The Wealth of Generation: Capitalism and the belief in the future*, Centre for Independent Studies, occasional paper 98, 2005.
- 352 Greg Critser, *Fat Land: How Americans came to be the fattest people in the world*, Allen Lane, New York, 2003.
- 353 'American expansionism: waist of time from 1980', *Newsday Report*, *Age*, 6 April 2006.
- 354 Roya Nikkhan, 'Children growing fat in our time', *Age*, 10 April 2006. Nearly 250 000 school-age children are overweight or obese in New Zealand. (Ainsley Thompson, 'Fat attack launched on obese children', *New Zealand Herald*, 17 February 2006). In Victoria the state government is banning sugary drinks in schools as the evidence shows that 35 per cent of children are drinking two cans of drink a day. (Paul Austin, 'Sugary drink ban in schools "not enough"', *Age*, 24 April 2006.)
- 355 Type 2 diabetes, which used to be called late onset diabetes, has now been renamed to cater for the young, bone disease, and respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.
- 356 Jo Chandler, 'Will TV ads turn our kids into the biggest losers?', *Age*, 26 April 2006.
- 357 ABC 7.30 Report, 4 May 2006.
- 358 The former president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, has spoken about the fundamental cause of conflict, terror and disequilibrium in the world as poverty (ABC 7.30 Report, 10 February 2004, Kerry O'Brien interview with James Wolfensohn). Five out of six people live in the developing world yet we are spending \$1000 billion a year on military expenditure and only \$50 billion on development. We are spending \$300 billion in agricultural subsidies, while people starve. Our world has half its people, out of six billion, living on less than \$2 a day, and about 1.2 billion living on less than \$1 a day. Half the world's population is under twenty-four years of age. A quarter—1.5 billion—are under fourteen years of age.
- 359 'Aid to Asia', *Sunday Age*, 14 May 2006.
- 360 Both statistics from Diniti Smith, 'Jumpy enough to chew a chair? Try DogCat Radio', *New York Times International*, 1 November 2005.
- 361 Johan Norberg, *The Wealth of Generations: Capitalism and the belief in the future*, Centre for Independent Studies, occasional paper 98, 2005, p. 21.
- 362 *One mission, many screens* (17 April 2002), a PBS Markle Foundation study on the distinctive roles for children's public service media in the digital age, David W Kleeman, President, American Center for Children and Media.
- 363 Kathy Silva et al., *The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the preschool period*, Institute of Early Education, London, 2003; also National Evaluation

- of Sure Start, *The Impact of Sure Start Local Programmes on Child Development and Family Functioning: A report on preliminary findings*, Birbeck University, London, 2004.
- 364 Clay Shirky, 'A group is its own worst enemy', O'Reilly Emerging Technologies Conference Keynote, Santa Clara, California, 24 April 2003, as quoted in Trevor Barr, Alex Burns and Darren Sharp, *Smart Internet 2010*, Smart Internet Technology CRC Pty Ltd, Everleigh, NSW, 2005, p. 78.
- 365 Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The next social revolution*, Basic Books, Cambridge, 2002; Charles Leadbetter and Paul Miller, *The Pro-Am Revolution: How enthusiasts are changing our economy and society*, DEMOS, London, November 2004; see Barr et al., *ibid.*, p. 114.
- 366 Colin Steele, quoted in Alan Fels, 'How to bring knowledge to the entire planet', *Age*, 7 August 2004; see Barr et al., *ibid.*, p. 116.
- 367 See Andrew Simpson, 'Mobility', in Barr et al., *ibid.*, pp. 142–9.
- 368 Thomas Crampton, 'Pop idol: French teen unites music pirates', *Age*, 16 May 2006.
- 369 Lisa Mitchell, 'Getting girls to go geek', *Age*, 15 May 2006.
- 370 In this chapter I have drawn on discussions with Des McKenzie, principal, Anderson's Creek Primary School, Victoria, winner of the *Herald Sun* Teacher Team Award for 'Best Use of New Technology' in 1997 and 2000.
- 371 ACTF submission to Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts in respect of meeting the digital challenge, *Reforming Australia's Media in the Digital Age*, Discussion Paper, 18 April 2006.
- 372 These concepts are outlined in WYDSTEP, a proposal to UNESCO for World Youth Digital Storytelling Education Project, Patricia Edgar, 2004.

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