



My Story.

Anthony Element.

I would love to begin by saying that my joining the RAAF was the result of a childhood dream.

The truth is, it was kinda the least worst option. It happened like this.



Marie, now my better half for nigh on fifty years and I were married in 1966. At the time, I was a high rise steel erector with a Construction firm working on the Aluminium Plant in Gladstone, Qld. Now, what Marie and I between us knew about birth control – and sex in general, if I'm perfectly honest - you could fit on the back of a postage stamp. (I think that was fairly typical back then). After all, there was no internet porn. God, there was no internet, how did we survive?

Anyway, you can see what's coming.

After I, sort of, got over the shock and in a profoundly rare flash of brilliance, it occurred to me that living in a caravan and dragging a wife and child from construction town to construction town, may not provide the best possible upbringing for junior when he or she finally arrived. So what to do? I looked at TAFE, (or whatever iteration of it existed back in those days), but nothing looked back at me, and whatever I did, I needed to maintain an income.

And then I discovered that as an adult trainee, the RAAF would pay me while they trained me. Not, it transpired, a bucket load, but enough to live on... just. YIPbloodyPEE! So off to the recruiting office in Brisbane I went. They asked me what trade I wanted to apply for. I replied, whatever pays the best. And so, in October 1967, I set foot on a path that would eventually lead to a monumentally mediocre career as a Radtech A.

Our eldest son, Mike, was born a few weeks after I joined. (Do the math, we were respectable).



The less said about Rookies the better. I survived... just, and then on to Laverton in, I think, February 1968, to join 22RMT. What helped me keep my sanity at Rookies, was making friends with a Welsh guy named Rhys Owen. We made a deal to pass the time on weekends; he would teach me guitar and I would teach him to drive.

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As an aside, I was never much of a guitar player, but Rhys in later years made a living as a taxi driver and then as a coach driver. It seems he got the best of the deal. As a consequence of being utterly and irreparably confused about some esoteric aspect of tuned circuits, I found myself pushed back to 23 RMT, from which I eventually graduated... again, just.

The daily terror of Radschool was offset by the wonderful people with whom I shared my days. I believe Mick McQuin was the Course Orderly. Pedro Newman, Gary Olsen, Mick Harrington and Rhys Owen were among my fellow sufferers, although as I recall, they all seemed to understand electronics so much better than I. I then spent four years at Williamtown, at 76Sqn, 481Sqn, 4 Flight and back to 481Sqn. In retrospect, I often wonder if my regular local moves were the result of each NCO-in-Charge trying to get rid of me.

It's entirely possible.

During this time, I developed a challenging but uncertain relationship with the pointy end of a Mirage, called the Cyrano Radar. We never exactly became friends, old Cyrano and I, but eventually we tolerated each other.

And then, in 1974, I was posted to 75Sqn, Butterworth.



75 Sqn Radio Section, Circa 1975ish

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By this time Mike had been joined by our twins Jose and Dolores, (named for my Spanish wife's family), so Butterworth meant one thing... an AMAH, which in turn meant a baby sitter, and ... a SOCIAL LIFE.

It was blissful.

Regular trips to Tengah with some money to spend. I have this vivid memory of wrapping the goodies we bought Duty Free in Singapore and stuffing them into a fake long range fuel tank to be shuttled home by returning Mirages. During this time, I was able to use my equally mediocre skill as a musician to be one third of the Monnie Drain Treeo, a kind of comedy band, (at least, we thought we were). The other two thirds were Rusty Joyce, also a RadTech A, who sadly lost a battle with prostate cancer a year or two ago, and Stan Stopinski, an elec fitter, who I believe lives in the Nelson Bay area.



The Monnie Drain Treeo... and friends

I'm fairly sure we were awful, but we had the most terrific fun, especially playing for the Footy club parties. We lived in Chung Lye Hock Rd, Tanjong Tokong on the island, between the Hostie and the huge cemetery on Burma Rd.

To this day, I have a love of Malaysian Hawker Food. I'm sure, it's as much about the memories as it is about the flavours. (Rotis and Curry sauce out of a plastic bag sealed up with

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an elastic band... Pure heaven!). I have strong memories of playing tennis on Saturday mornings at the Hostie with Bruce Margetts. The big difference between Bruce and me was that he really could play tennis. I also remember lunchtime chess games with Barry Wilmot. We never kept a running tally, but I'm pretty sure he would've been in front. In any case, it was a super way to spend the time, in terrific company.

In 1977, I returned to Williamtown (481 Sqn again), where, for reasons that defy explanation, I eventually made sergeant.

In 1980, we snagged another posting to Butterworth, again 75 Sqn. They say that returning to a place the second time can never be as good as the first time. Yes it can.

It was every bit as good. This time, I became one third of another trio, rather unimaginatively named, "2Plus1". Terry Salter, a PTI, was the real talent, a great singer and bassist. I can't remember the drummer's name but he was a great guy and an excellent musician.

The posting was cut short in 1982 when I was diagnosed with somewhat aggressive testicular cancer. After an operation at a hospital on Penang, I was sent back to Australia for several weeks of radiotherapy. It was to become a permanent posting back. My lasting memory of that experience is that the removed testicle had to be sent back to Australia with me for analysis. I suppose to ensure it didn't get lost in the somewhat chaotic Malaysian hospital admin system, the offending body part was left by my bed in a jar of what I assume was a pickling solution. You have no idea how disconcerting I found it to see that bloody thing every day while I was recovering in hospital, bobbing about in this jar of clear fluid. To say nothing of the insensitivity of the hospital nursing staff...

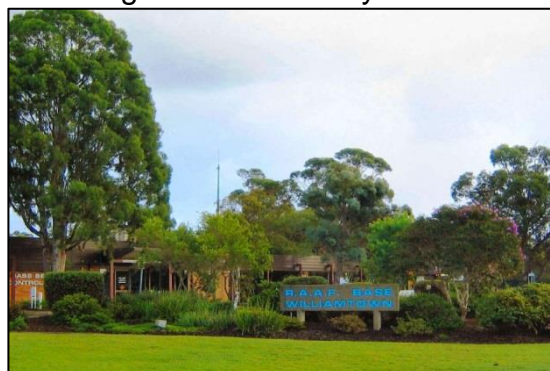
However, out of bad things, sometimes, good things come.

For family reasons, and because Royal Brisbane Hospital had a fantastic cancer unit, (it still does), it was decided that I should be posted to 3AD at Amberley for the duration of treatment and the subsequent follow up. There was no slot for me, but the CO was looking for someone to take on projects.

I got the gig.

This led to setting up a project team to develop a system, which went by the absurd name of the DÉCOR Project, to help manage F111 major servicings. Here's where the good came out of the bad. That experience, which only came about because I'd been repatriated with cancer, eventually enabled me to move fairly easily into a Production Manager role with ABB, a European multinational, when I left the RAAF in January 1988.

Marie and I finally bought a house and settled down.





I was born in the UK, and my parents emigrated here when I was five, so as I prepared to leave the service, I thought I'd better get my citizenship sorted out. In November 1987 I duly applied and soon received a letter telling me that I would receive my citizenship on 26th January 1988. About a week later, I received a letter from the Governor General telling me I would be awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia on... you guessed it, 26th January 1988.

I have no idea what the word 'gobsmacked' actually means, but it pretty much sums up what I totally was when I read that letter. Anyway, as far as I know, I'm the only person to become an Australian citizen and get an OAM on the same day.

Not much of a claim to fame, but there you go.

There used to be a show on TV, "What's my Secret". Pity it wasn't still going, they'd never guess that one.

Over the next six years, I was:

- Production Manager ABB Distribution Transformers in Darra Qld,
- Operations Manager ABB Power Transformer Division in Moorebank NSW,
- WA State Operations Manager in Perth WA.



So much for "settling down".

In early 1994 we moved to Hong Kong where I briefly ran a small division of ABB Asia, while negotiating a joint venture with a state owned company in Shanghai, PRC. In September of that year, we signed the JV and ABB Shanghai Transformer Company came into being with me as the start up General Manager.

Shortly after that, my hair began to turn grey. Coincidence? I think not.

While we were in Hong Kong, I once asked one of the British expats who'd been doing business in China for many years for any tips about operating there. He thought for a while and then said, "Tony, the thing you have to remember is that in China, there's no such thing as right or wrong. There's only the doable."

Well, that filled me with confidence... Not!

It turned out to be like the Wild West without the six shooters strapped to the waist. But anyway, when we left in 1997, the business was turning over US\$90M/annum and was highly profitable.

I, however, was a wreck.

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Official JV Handover Day (Original buildings in the background).

I was headhunted and returned to Sydney to become General Manager of the Australian arm of an American owned electric motor manufacturing company called FASCO Motors. It used to be Brook Crompton Betts in Australia.



The JV as it is today.

FASCO USA was, in turn, owned by the British multinational group INVENSYS Corp. Over the next three years we acquired two Australian competitors and grew the business from



AUD\$30M/annum sales to >AUD\$80M annual sales. The downside to that job was the long haul to head office in St Louis, Missouri every couple of months for global strategy and management meetings.

In early 2001, I was promoted to a dual role of President of INVENSYS (Thailand) and Managing Director of FASCO Motors (Thailand). This meant moving to Bangkok. Now that was an easy decision to make; took an entire microsecond.

What a town.

Life was just about as good as back in Penang, except now I had several hundred employees and a fair bit to worry about. In many ways, it was like China all over again, cosy up to the local politicians and bureaucrats while holding my nose and learning to play by local rules... to the extent that there were any local rules. The company provided us with an apartment just behind the Australian embassy on South Sathorn Rd in Bangkok, along with a car and a driver. My driver was an ex Thai policeman, so basically he drove where he liked and pretty much how he liked, which was sometimes quite, er, exciting. Any time we were pulled over, he just flashed his ex-cop ID and off we went. But even so, I learned to do a lot of work in the back of a car, stuck in Bangkok traffic.



During my time in Thailand, INVENSYS, the British owners, sold FASCO to an American Multinational TECUMSEH, one of the world's largest compressor manufacturers, and so I was introduced to the American top level corporate culture.

I hated it.

The culture was highly centralised decision making, deeply mistrustful and ruthless. The most senior executives spent a good deal of their time between trying to figure out how to screw their employees while simultaneously whining

about the disloyalty of the American worker. By and large, they were MBA grads who could analyse the hell out of a spreadsheet but couldn't get three people pointed in the same direction on the same day. The lack of leadership ability and integrity truly shocked me. It still does.

By 2004, I'd had enough. The Thai businesses were stable and very profitable, but never profitable enough to satisfy the endless greed of the US owners. To make matters worse, several of the parent company board were representatives of major investment fund shareholders, for whom long term planning meant the middle of next week.

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As an aside, I had many opportunities to sound out executives from other US corporations, and an astonishing number of them felt about their employers exactly as I did about mine. I came to dread board meetings, which up until then I had always enjoyed. I was also getting a bit sick of the travel. I think I'd visited 34 countries on business trips since leaving the RAAF.

Anyhow, in February of that year, Marie and I worked out we had enough that I really didn't have to work, at least not so hard, so when my contract was up, I didn't renew. We decided to



do the Sea Change thing and bought a house in a town called Bateau Bay on the Central Coast in NSW, between Sydney and Newcastle. We fairly soon realized we'd made a mistake. After years of living in huge cities, we'd become city people. Bateau Bay was just too damned peaceful and quiet.

In the meantime, our son and his family and then our daughter had moved to Brisbane, so in 2006 we upped stakes yet again and bought a place in Highgate Hill near West End; as close as we could get to Brisbane CBD, (about a kilometre and a half). Somewhat to my astonishment, we're still here after nine years. We're even getting a puppy in a couple of weeks, so I guess we've finally settled down, after more moves than I really want to count.

Since leaving the corporate world, I've written four novels, two of which have been published in the US but mostly sell on Amazon. For much of my career, I've had a fascination with the leadership process and I occasionally run Leadership and Strategic Planning workshops for small business people. I think my interest began when I was first posted to 75 Sqn. The CO then was Wg Cdr Hans Roser. I thought him an outstanding leader and I was intrigued to understand how he did it. But the person who taught me the most was Group Captain Max Brennan, my last CO at 3AD. He made strong, clear leadership look effortless.

Observing how they and some other bosses I was lucky enough to work for in the RAAF gave me a huge advantage in the corporate world as almost all the other executives I worked with had no idea about leadership and seemed never to think about it. I guess they figured that, like motherhood, they'd know how to do it when the need arose.

Mostly, they didn't.

I've also returned to one of my earlier loves, that of being a mediocre guitar player. Only now it's jazz, and I think I've improved a little bit since the wonderful days of the Monnie Drain Treeo.

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I serve on the boards of a number of small companies and am Chairman of the Board of the Brisbane Independent School. I also do a bit of start up and small business mentoring, if I like the people involved or the business interests me. It's a way of giving back, I guess.

To this day, I still love business and although I'm a bit of a Leftie, I strongly believe in the ability of competitive but prudently regulated free markets to lift people out of poverty. As I reflect on my career so far, I think I was a bit of a square peg in a cornerless hole in the RAAF, but I finally found a square hole to insert myself fairly comfortably into in the corporate world.

Having said that, I do think that joining the RAAF all those years ago was one of the better decisions I ever made. To the extent that I've had any success since, most of it came from lessons I learned in uniform.

That and a fair bit of luck, anyway.

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