



My Story

Ros Curran (Smith)

My story started in March 1954, second daughter to Allan and Audrey Smith. My elder sister Dianne was born 2 years earlier. Gladstone central Queensland was our home, once a small town noted for its famous natural deep water harbour and its meatworks. My father was in the railway and when I was three; our family was moved to Cloncurry for dad's western duty in the railway. Our house was one room, the bedroom being divided from the kitchen living area by cupboards, there was no running water inside so a large tub filled with hot water that was boiled on our wood stove was our bath. Later dad built a shower outside, the pipe was cut and a tin of kero with a wick was lit to heat the water. We thought it was great just not to have a shower but one with hot water.



The floor in our house was polished wood and I remember mum having a large towelling cloth, my sister and I took turns in sitting on the end and mum pulled us over the floor to polish it. Later dad had a veranda built and this became our bedroom.

My Family Back L-R: Youngest daughter Amber, Steve and me. Front L-R: second eldest daughter Allana, Eldest Heather, and Sarah.

One didn't need luxury to have a happy family life. Being young the dust, heat and flies did not really worry my sister and me but now I can imagine how tough it must have been for mum and dad. We made our own fun with the neighbourhood children with many games of cowboys and Indians, dinks (marbles), hopscotch and using a large stick to hit the mulberry trees to get rid of the grasshoppers that plagued the area.

Primary school was heaps of fun, dare I say using slate and slate pencil, and (am I really that old). The church was the main social aspect of the curry with many events planned for the community. The big event of the year was the rodeo; the bulls were mustered past our house to the showgrounds. I remember one day a large bull jumped our fence (of course I was in the yard to get the best view).



The bull chased me and I headed for our outside toilet where I hid until the bull was recaptured. Lucky I was pretty fast in those days. I was an inquisitive kid forever getting into mischief, but seemed to have a way wheedling my way out of it when the need arose. I do remember making many wooden spoons (mum's favourite tool for smacks) disappear in the outside dunny, only when we were much older we confessed to mum what we had done.

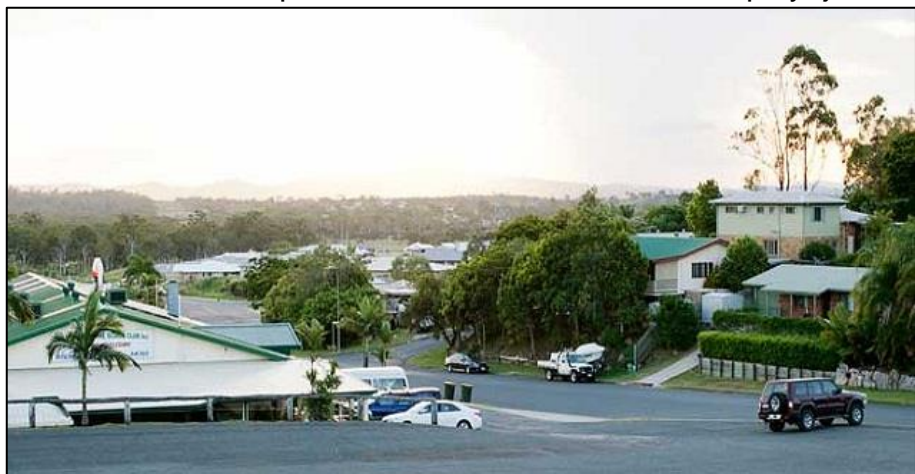
When I was nine we moved back to Gladstone. Our local primary school provided milk for morning tea; we did dancing on the parade ground once a week much to the disgust of most of the boys. Teachers were strict, the boys getting the cane from the teacher or headmaster when being disruptive. There was a great deal of respect for teachers in the sixties, some of the classes were boring and I am sure we covered subjects that we would never use in later life. We all knew our tables, learnt parrot fashion and to this day they stick in my mind. Spelling was another big part of our day and we were tested constantly on words suitable for our ages. Copy book was another must do each day, we used ink wells and pens once we graduated from using lead pencils so lots of smudges on pages appeared. Fancy dress balls and sport were a big part of our time at primary school which I loved.

The next step was high school, teachers were just as strict but I definitely tested the boundaries, passing notes in class, talking when we were supposed to be listening and pulling pranks on teachers caused many giggles, I was not always a party to that though, I was known as quite a good girl most of the time. As a group however putting a three legged chair at the teachers table, a duster that would fall on the teachers head when he opened the door and hiding the chalk were a daily occurrence, anything to get out of school work, this often landed us in the classroom for lunch to pay for our sins.

The national anthem was played every day through speakers in our class rooms and parade was a weekly routine. Religious instruction was part of our week and other religions were able to move outside if they did not wish to partake, a little different from these days. I moved through high school concentrating more on boys than actual school work, loved the sport but not so keen on studies, although I scored top marks in typing and practical subjects.

After leaving school I worked in a furniture store in admin then in a real estate office as a receptionist. I was very involved in tennis and squash and never could seem to play 'just for fun', had a huge 'killer instinct' and was in it to win and would give my all no matter what, not sure if have changed that much.. We used to frequent the

[Calliope](#) dances of a Saturday night and I was lucky enough to win the 'Miss Calliope title' in 1970. Pictures at the drive-in and the local picture theatre in the early 70's and fishing on



week-ends filled our time. Guys were plentiful and puppy love blossomed. Our local youth group saw us go on hay rides to Calliope River and toss the coin directions (we started off at a corner, tossed a coin, tails we went left and heads we went right), and ended up at someone's

family home for drinks and eats.

On the 28th March, 1974, looking for excitement and with a family history of defence service, I enlisted in the WRAAF and at the tender age of 17 (almost 18) I said goodbye to my close-knit family with a mixture of great excitement and sadness. A long trip to Adelaide saw a group of fantastic girls start their rooky course at Edinburgh. Our lives were thrown into hours of; spit polishing shoes, perfectly ironed uniforms, beds without a single bump in them and hours of marching until our steps were in perfect unison. Meals in the mess were excellent adding a few pounds to our young bodies here and there. We made some amazing friendships, explored the beautiful region especially the Barossa valley and tasted many wines. Sadly we said farewell to many of our newfound friends and we headed off to our various training bases. Next stop Laverton for me, the middle of winter. Freezing cold and drizzling rain most days. Our tin huts for training were without heating and our old rooms in the WRAAF quarters were large and cold. This is where I learnt to drink and smoke, although the smoking made me quite ill especially after I ended up in hospital with pleurisy.



Time at Laverton was not the greatest. Threatened with a 99 percent pass mark for our course left little time to get into too much mischief, but we did manage a little. We only had three girls on our course and one of them found out she was pregnant so did not finish her course. There was much celebration after we graduated and ended our three months at Laverton with a party. Once again we parted from our friends and went our separate ways. I was elated to have been given my first preference of Perth and was keen to start a new and exciting phase in my life.



Graduation party – Laverton

Pearce was a beautiful base; I felt at home straight away and quickly made friends with the girls in the “WRAAFery”. Being my first posting it was amazing to me how everything I learnt fell into place and all the training made sense after all. Warrant Officer Ken Kitson was in charge of the Comm centre and what a terrific Warrant Officer he was, a wonderful person gentle by nature but with a world of experience. At Pearce we shared the officer’s mess and the food was awesome. Lucky we were into basketball and other activities to keep the pounds at bay. It was a little unfortunate that the boozer was halfway between the Comm Centre and the WRAAFery, as most afternoons we made a half way stop.

***Greg and Ros.
Laverton 1974***



I guess a few of us were quite young and a little immature and managed to get into some mischief now and again. I remember the late nights we'd all load into cars and head up to 'the patch' with the guys and

their guitars and we'd sit in front of a small fire with a few drinks and sing along to our favourite songs. There were barbeques on weekends, long drives, trips to Rottnest Island, shopping in the city, and all-nighters at the clubs in Perth. My favourite place to dine out was the revolving restaurant at Kings Park, always a worry after a glass or two of wine though if you left your table to go to the rest room, finding it was a little more difficult upon returning.



Pearce basketball team 1974/75

Pearce was the training base for pilots and I never got sick of watching the Macchi jets during my lunch time. The pool was there for the summer months and was a great place to cool off. I loved Pearce and was devastated when I received the news that I had a posting to Darwin in November 1975. I was so sad to leave behind a bond I had formed with someone special, in the end it was the undoing of something that could have grown into something much more, but off to Darwin I went not looking forward to it at all. I was overcome with the heat on arrival but determined to give it a go. Nothing was going to stop me making the best of my z grade posting and I was ready to get involved in all aspects of my new life in the Territory.



Just writing about my time in the WRAAF is like reliving it, and I have to say there are so many wonderful memories that will stay with me for ever.

I settled into Darwin with great ease, and fitted so much in the short time I spent there. First and foremost, the great Darwin Comm Centre and the introduction of 'Fred', the great reels of tape, the typing of messages that for once did not come out of our teleprinters, but occasionally seemed to disappear into cyber space if one forgot to click save after a page or so of typing. Blue was the colour of the air when this happened and 'Fred' was cursed from earhole to breakfast. The shift work was a bit of a problem, the days and evenings were great but the nights were another story. Too much socialising cut short by having to go in to do a doggie.



The Comm Centre staff were terrific to work with and the morale was high. I was not a person to be able to sleep during the day and I started to believe the saying 'everyone goes troppo in Darwin' was in fact true. I experienced some terrific fishing, never mind the crocs though...went to the track for horse and greyhound racing which I found fascinating and enjoyed thoroughly, although never made it rich. We had four girls in our room and I was so

lucky to have terrific girls to share with, we had the best time together and got on like a house on fire, right down to our 'panics'. Regular water fights were on and a relief in the heat.



Panic the body night.

There were quite a few trips to the officer's quarters and they definitely knew how to party hard. Quite a few nights I did not make it back to my quarters.

We formed a great inter-service hockey team (not that I had ever played before) and actually managed to avoid any broken bones. I think some of my time in Darwin passed in a bit of a haze more so from the amount of alcohol I drank I think rather than it being a long time ago. I did love the switchboard in Darwin, as a teleprinter operator we often did some shifts as a switchie, not sure if it was because I loved to talk (and would have been the obvious mustering for me) or it was the conglomeration of the old cords exchange, a few interesting calls at times were put through to the wrong personal and in the middle of the night was not always appreciated.



Darwin inter-service Hockey Team – March 1976.

There was a bed to camp on when it was quiet and probably a great reason to be on night shift at the switch. I have to mention an occasional visit helped with the boredom, not always legal but what can I say.....obviously I was a perfect angel and was not corrupted at all. Well not much anyway.



Once again I had marching orders to move, this time 2SD, Bankstown, Regents Park, (May 1976) this was a move that I found extremely depressing, was a very miserable winter and accommodation was old and freezing cold. The Comm Centre was fairly quiet and somehow I found I could not settle. Before I left

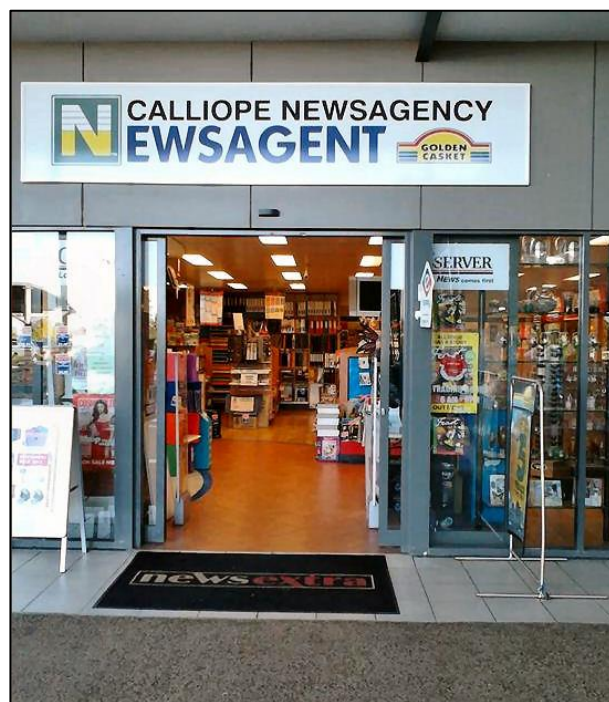
Darwin I became engaged to an ex RAAF guy from home (for the second time), so as to give myself time to work out if I had made the right decision I decided to take the posting, one I have regretted for many years. I was so miserable at Bankstown I decided to apply for discharge. This was granted and I was posted back to Perth to finish my time in the WRAAF.

It was bitter sweet, I was so torn, on one hand I was back where I loved, met up again with the person who I thought the world of, and the other a fiancée waiting to take me to the north west of WA. With tears aplenty I left Pearce and headed to Dampier and Karratha where I enjoyed lots of fishing, skiing, football and made some amazing friends some of whom I am still in touch with today. I returned to Gladstone briefly to be married, back to the west and after three years, headed back again to my home town.

My marriage was in tatters and ended in divorce. I needed to get away so felt the pull of the WRAAF again. After failing a medical I jumped on a plane and headed to Melbourne, I needed to get away and rebuild my life. I once again was in touch with my friend from Pearce, by this time he had moved on and we just remained great friends. I then met someone in Melbourne married and raised four incredible daughters, we moved from Victoria and back to Gladstone where our children had lots of wonderful times with their grandparents and cousins, when our youngest was 5 we moved just outside of Gladstone to Calliope in a huge house with 6 bedrooms set on an acre of land. All the girls had their own horse and enjoyed the pony club. Their school years flew, life was so busy with me working part time, helping out at school and the girls numerous sporting activities which included, soccer, athletics, gymnastics, swimming, tennis and volleyball, the girls love and excelled in several sports.

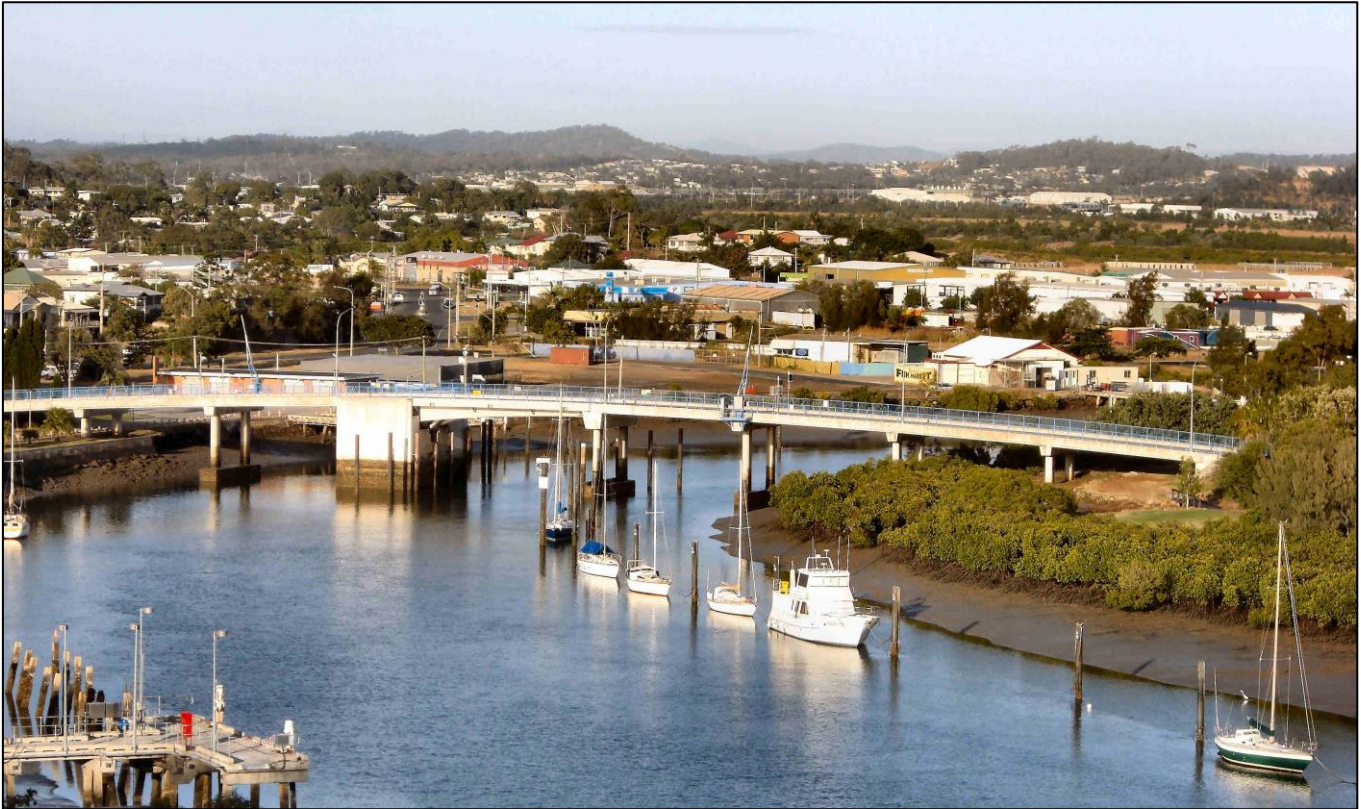


After several years an opportunity arose to buy a newsagency, that was six years ago and time has flown. We are still in the newsagency although it is very rewarding it is also very tiring, would love to travel overseas and explore as much of this wonderful world as I can before age becomes a problem. Not quite sure when the time will come but feel it would be too easy for the newsagency to become my life so need to take stock and plan a little ahead. It's funny that the girls have all travelled extensively overseas several times but here I am still in Calliope working a good 90 hours a week. No time for too much out of work activities as we open at 3.30am daily and do not close until 7pm most nights, with only a couple of hours off each day for lunch and catch up with odds and ends that need doing at home.



Could write another million words but not sure the Radschool community is ready for that. So will leave it as it is and hope you enjoy reading some of what has been some 59 years that have passed in a heartbeat.

Gladstone harbour now has six wharf centres and is the foundation for the prosperity for our region, and enormous potential for expansion. Now a 3rd time boom town Gladstone's first boom was Queensland alumina, the meatworks was demolished in July 1964 and Queensland alumina was born. This brought many people from all over Australia, the cost of living and house prices were on the rise.



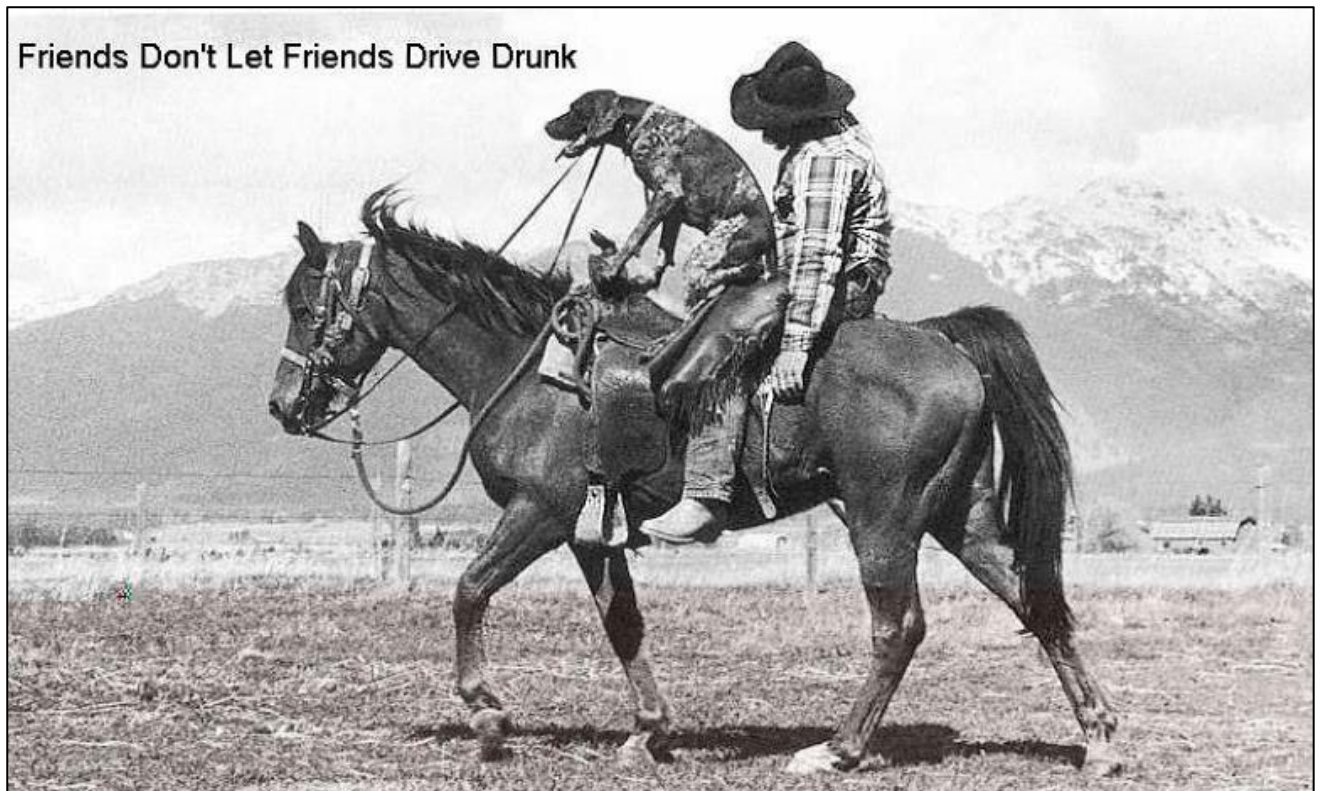
The PowerStation was the next major construction in the area; our man-made Awonga Dam is massive and is a great spot for fishing, skiing and relaxation. After the PowerStation construction continued with Queensland cement and lime, various industries made their way to Gladstone area and the town surged ahead. In the last 18 months the construction of the LNG

(gas pipe line) has turned the town crazy with workers from all over the country and New Zealand and the Philippines flocking to the area causing the latest boom. Although the business side of the area is great,

I feel the cost to our once scenic coastline has been compromised and the area scarred.

My “To do list”

1. Make a vanilla custard, put it in a mayonnaise jar and eat it in public.
2. Hire two private investigators, then get them to follow each other.
3. Wear a T-shirt that says “Life” and hand out lemons on a street corner.
4. Get into a crowded elevator and say “I bet you’re all wondering why I gathered you here today”
5. Run into Myer, ask what year it is, when someone answers, shout, “It worked!” then run out of the shop cheering.
6. Change your name to Simon, then speak in the third person.
7. Buy a parrot and teach it to say “Help! I’ve been turned into a parrot.”



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