

## My Story, by Robert Barnes, 2014

Ted and I hit the jackpot of life's lottery, being born at the right time in the right country to the right parents. Mum and Dad had to wait 7 years, until 1941, for their first baby, Ted. I followed five years later, so I was born into the post-war world of returned soldiers and improving living conditions. Although our parents were not demonstrative – we cannot remember them ever *saying* that they loved us - we were able to take this for granted and we both had an idyllic childhood.

My earliest memory is of my third birthday. We'd returned from Apiti (see [Ted's story](#)) and were living with Granny, Grandpa, and Uncle at Aramoho where the family had a poultry farm. Ted and I were on our boundary fence when the wind caught my balloon and took it across the paddock, where it burst on the fence by the cowshed on the other side. I don't remember being upset, rather "Oh that's interesting", but this is a vivid memory for some reason, even down to the colour of the balloon (blue). Another early memory from this time at Aramoho: I found a couple of long thin boards, and shuffled up and down the path on them. "Look Dad, I'm skiing".

I don't ever remember calling them "Mummy" or "Daddy", it was always "Mum" and "Dad". Mum's brother was always simply "Uncle", it was years before I realised that this wasn't his name, and that I had other uncles.

Some time between my 3rd and 5th birthday we moved back into the same rental property, [28 Keith St](#), that we'd lived in before Apiti. This was unusual in being a two story double unit, we lived on the right, the landlady lived on the left. Our landlady was Miss Knuckey, a relative somehow through our OLD ancestry.

When I was 5 I started school, Primer 1 at Queens Park School. Actually I started the day before, my 5th birthday was a Tuesday and the term started the day before. Not strictly kosher but who was going to argue with the headmaster? In those days we didn't have a car, so Dad used to take me to school and bring me home on his pushbike: [he had a child seat over the front handlebars](#), and I'd sit facing forward. Sometimes I'd have to wait around, playing on my own, if there was an after-school staff meeting. Later I remember walking home, a little less than 1km.

My first teacher was Mrs Bell, a large motherly woman. I remember sitting cross-legged, and getting a crinkly pattern on my knees from the mat. I also remember that we littlies use to have "Nap time" in the afternoon. Mum had crocheted my name in multi-coloured wool on an army-surplus blanket. I remember our "Janet and John" readers, like everything at that time very English. I loved school. I think that I was starting to read before I started school, certainly I never found it difficult and I've always enjoyed reading and learning.

In 1951 [Dad bought his first car](#) (he only ever had one other), a 1949 Ford Prefect. With this we became much more mobile, and I remember two holidays from Wanganui, one where we went to Napier and stayed in a campground, and another where we swapped houses with somebody in Gisborne. If a disadvantage of school teaching was that it wasn't particularly well paid, an advantage was the holidays. People, mainly other teachers, would advertise house swaps in the School Gazette so

this was a way of having a cheap holiday. I remember these trips as long and chunderous. The Prefect had transverse suspension which reduced its cost, but made it sway from side, and I was often car-sick.

1953 was the year of the Royal Tour. New Zealand was a staunchly loyal member of the British Empire (on which the sun never set), and we all turned out to cheer the Queen at Cook's Gardens. We all thought that she was wonderful. Crowds turned out everywhere to cheer her train as it passed through the station. Little flying in those days, she sailed to New Zealand on the Gothic, and she travelled everywhere by train or car.

I remember from this year a week when Mum was my teacher, relieving for a week. I amused her by seriously addressing her as "Mrs Barnes", not "Mum". She reciprocated by solemnly replying "Yes Robert", not "Robbie".

1953 was our last year in Wanganui as Dad had been appointed as Headmaster of West End School in New Plymouth, so in the Christmas Holidays we packed up and moved north, into [our house at 64 Bayly Rd](#). Almost like a Wellington house, this was on a ridge, with the car being parked in a garage at road level and access to the house up a path with many steps. But it made for a great view: we could see all the way up the coast to White Cliffs, and years later when my parents' house was cleared one of only two pictures that I retained was one painted by Dad of this view.

I was 7 ½ and in 1954 started Moturoa School in Standard 2, Ted was 12 ½ and started High School. Dad would have liked me to go to West End but there was school zoning and Moturoa was our local school. This meant that I had to walk to school, about 1km, no great hardship. I became friendly with the boys next door, Paul and John Reeve. Paul was slightly older, John was a bit younger, and I spend a lot of time playing with them. At school my best friend was probably Noel Harris, a cheerful little Maori boy. I've lost touch with all of these people unfortunately.

When I started at Moturoa it went to Std 6 (Year 8), but with the opening of Devon Intermediate Stds 5 and 6 became Form 1 and 2 at Devon Intermediate, so my last year at Moturoa was Std 5. For this year my cousin, Ian Barnes, was the headmaster and my teacher. I continued to enjoy school and to do well. A few things that I remember from this period:

- Swimming lessons down the road at the beach. Moturoa didn't then have a swimming pool. I never did learn to swim properly.
- The oil well just over the fence from the playing field. A well was drilled in my first or second year, from then on there was a pump nodding away.
- Playing bullrush. Somebody would stand in the middle of the field, the rest of us would line up at the end, and then we'd try to run from one end to the other without being tackled. Easy at first, but as those tackled joined the tackler it became harder and harder. I never lasted very long.
- Bringing some models that I'd made to school for what must have been a kind of "show and tell". The teacher was very interested in a little "surface tension boat" I'd made: this had a pool of methylated spirits with a wick that dipped into the water at the rear: the meths flowed down the wick into the water, so the surface tension at the rear was less than at the front and the boat moved along. I think that I would have been in Std 3 or 4 at the time.

My parents were regular churchgoers, so Sunday School was part of my weekly routine. When I was 9 I joined the Life Boys, the junior boys club run by the church, where we had a great time playing games. Later (aged 12) I joined the Boys' Brigade, (pretty much like the Scouts, but church-based) where I was a keen member until I left High School. With the Boys' Brigade we still played games, but we also learnt skills like First Aid, Map Reading, Signals (Semaphore and Morse) etc. Our company was led by Judy's father, Bill Liley. He'd come back from the war with an MC: all I knew about this was that he had been the captain of a machine gun company in the desert, but we little boys all thought that he was wonderful. Our padre, Rev. Michael Jackson, was also very charismatic. During the war he'd commanded a corvette in the Navy.

Mr Liley was a keen tramper, and we often went on day and occasionally overnight tramps up the mountain and ranges. He had a sure touch with us boys, and we all worked hard at the skills that he was teaching us. Like the scouts, the Boys' Brigade awarded badges. I remember one year we had to plot our route from a map and then walk it: I plotted my route up the wrong side of a stream and spent most of a day trying to get through a blackberry patch. I had to go back the next day to finish the walk: this time I went up the other side of the stream and the walk only took me a couple of hours. For most years we won some of the inter-company competitions, for two years we won all of them, so we were pretty proud of ourselves. In [this photo of us](#) when we won the drill competition there were several of my friends: David Booten and Brian Busing were school friends from Intermediate to the end of High School, Peter Liley (Mr Liley's son) at the other end of the front row was in a different class, but he and I used to get around a lot together when we were about 15, often going spear-fishing off the rocks around the port.

From Moturoa the senior classes had gone into "the Tech" (technical college) in town for (boys) Woodwork, Metalwork, and Tech. Drawing, so in Std5 we all took the bus into town once a week. No thought of training boys in Cooking or Sewing, nor of girls in our subjects, in those days! Next year I was at the newly opened Devon Intermediate, and this had its own technical teachers and classes. I loved both Woodwork and Metalwork. Also Science: it was at intermediate that this became an actual subject, and it appealed to me immediately, although at that stage I had no thought of a career as a scientist. Kids are often asked "What are you going to be when you grow up?" I remember my intermediate teacher (Mr Johns) asking this of me after I'd done particularly badly in a test: I replied that I was going to be a poultry farmer, to which he responded scornfully that no doubt I'd be a paltry farmer, writing "PALTRY" on the board. Another thing that I remember from intermediate: taking Dad's chisels into school to sharpen them on the grindstone in the Woodwork room. Much to the amusement of the teacher, because one of them was a screwdriver.

Like Ted 5 years earlier, in 1959 I started New Plymouth Boys' High School (NPBHS) in Form 3P1. In the "P" stream we learnt a foreign language (the choices were French or Latin: Dad would have like me to have taken Latin but I didn't like the idea of learning a dead language) and were expected to take up a professional career of some kind. I was a middling student: doing OK, but certainly no star. Comments from my 3rd-form master "Results anything but consistent! Will possibly do better as he matures, but at present could do with some good overall revision".

Comments from many teachers “Must try to improve neatness”. Nothing’s changed! Subject for the first three years were English, Maths, General Science, French, and (History and Geography). I generally did better in Maths and Science, I liked the fact that in these subjects there was a “right answer”, whereas English was vague.

In the fourth form our teacher for History and Geography was Bruce Beetham, later to enter Parliament as the leader of the Social Credit party. Unlike primary school, at High School we moved from class to class and teacher to teacher as we changed subject, so on the first day we all walked into his class, chattering away as we found a desk to sit at next to our friends. He was sitting at his desk at the left front, with his head down apparently working away. We kept chattering away, he kept working. Gradually the chattering died away, until after about 5 or 10 minutes it was quiet, and you could have heard the proverbial pin drop. Then he looked up. “Right 4P1, this is what I expect of you” and he then spent the next 5 minutes laying down the law. By the end of this we were quaking in fear. What had we struck? By the end of the year we were friends sharing jokes, and I don’t actually remember him caning or even strapping anybody, but I’ll always remember the dramatic way in which he set the tone at the start of the year.

In one of the school holidays, when I was in the 3rd form I think, I went to a Boys’ Brigade camp at Foxton for about 10 days. We slept in war surplus Bell tents (each sleeping about a dozen boys) which we’d put up on the first day, we ate in the mess at one end of the camp, and the latrine was a 6-holer at the other end. All a bit military, but a lot of fun. I got a bit homesick the first year, but I hadn’t been home long before I couldn’t wait for next year when I could go again. I’m not sure whether I went 2 or 3 times.

This was not long after WW2, and like most boys-only schools NPBHS had a cadet corps. We spent the first week of the year and sundry days throughout the year in military uniform marching up and down and being yelled at, although there were also some fun things like firing .22 rifles on the school’s rifle range. Actually I quite enjoyed military drill, and in later years (5th and 6th form I think) I went to some Cadet Corp camps at Linton, near Palmerston North. This was again a lot of being yelled at and marching around, but there were fun things like firing a bren gun.

The fifth form (year 11) was our first external exam, School Certificate. I would have done OK in this, probably with a result of about 280 out of 400, but when I had 1 ½ subject still to sit – Maths paper B, and General Science – I cut my thumb rather badly (I still have the scar) and couldn’t write. I had a note from the doctor and they should have calculated my marks for the papers I didn’t sit (Maths and Science were my best subjects), but I passed anyway with 245 marks.

By the end of the 5th Form I was starting to be a bit independent, and Pete Liley and I used to roam over much of western New Plymouth on our bicycles. I was old enough to be allowed to go to the beach on my own, and had made a spear gun, so Pete and I often used to go down to Ngamotu and swim off the rocks trying to spear fish. Occasionally we were successful: I remember a particularly dumb John Dory that obligingly swam right in front of me, I didn’t even have to point my gun, just pull the trigger. Actually the first John Dory that we caught was even dumber: it was flapping about in the shallows at the port so we threw rocks at it until it expired.

Because I only got 245 marks in School C and had failed maths (37/50, but they treated it as 37/100) I was streamed into the lower science class, 6Sc2, instead of the upper one with all my friends. In the science streams General Science became Physics, Chemistry, and Biology, and I was able to drop the fuzzier subjects of History/Geography and French. Because of the streaming mistake, for the first and only time in my life I came first in class, and in Maths I was 20% ahead of the second boy. The mistake was rectified and I spent the 2nd half of the year in 6Sc1 with my friends from the first 3 yrs. At the end of the year I was accredited with University Entrance like most of my class, so I didn't have to sit the UE exams.

Accreditation creates a problem for the school. Most of the class had effectively finished for the year and it would have been very difficult to motivate us to do more study, but we were still legally required to be at school. What to do with us? In my year the problem was solved by our all going off to Lake Waikaremoana for a couple of weeks, where we spent about half our time working for the Park Board cutting tracks, (the Urewera National Park had just been created), and half our time doing fun things like trout fishing, deer hunting, etc under the guidance of various locals. We camped at a little lake called Kiriopukae, and we cut the track from Sandy Bay up the Panekiri bluff, probably to about where the Panekiri hut is. That was a fun time.

My final year at school, called "Form 6A" instead of "Form 7" for some inexplicable reason, was focussed on the end-of-year scholarship exams. I was bright enough to sit the scholarship exam, but not bright enough to get one. I ended up with 501/1000 marks, nowhere near enough for one of the 60 or so national scholarships on offer, and 4 marks short of the cut-off for a credit pass and a Taranaki Scholarship. Anyway, off to University next year. Even without a scholarship there was generous support: all our university fees were paid (possibly including repeating failed units – fortunately I never had to find out), and we received a bursary that paid our board and a little bit over. So with a bit of help from holiday jobs I was able to get through university without much \$\$ support from Mum and Dad.

Like Ted 5 years earlier, for the first couple of years at university I lived at the Trinity Theological College, the training college for Methodist ministers. This is an imposing brick building on the corner of Grafton Rd and Carlton Gore Rd, later the Whitecliff Art Academy. There was space in the hostel for about 60 students, but there were only about 30 divinity students ("Divs"), so they filled the rest of the hostel with ordinary university students like me. Through High School I'd thought that I was going to become a teacher like Dad and I nearly applied for a teaching bursary, a scheme that paid a generous allowance but meant that you were bonded to teach for a number of years after graduation. My life would have taken a completely different turn had I done so, but in the 7th form I'd decided that I wanted to be a scientist. I enrolled in a BSc, my first year subjects were Chemistry, Zoology, and Maths, and I did reasonably well. I particularly liked Chemistry, which was just as well since this was my planned major. I ended up after 3 years with a BSc majoring in Chemistry, with Maths (stage 2), Zoology, and Physics. Again, a middling result, only one A (for Stage 1 Chemistry), the rest B's and C's.

The Christmas holidays, which went from November to the end of March, were an opportunity to make some money to support ourselves through the year. I was lucky

enough to have a really fun job which also paid quite well (6/3d an hour – 62.5 cents in today's money) and I kept going back to for each year I was at University. This was at Swanson's Engineering, which did a lot of the engineering work around NP. It was a complete change from my university work: I learnt to weld steel, use a blow torch to cut steel, drive a truck, and a whole host of skills that were fun to acquire, but which I've never used since. A lot of the work was erecting steel: I used to be able to walk over a roof truss 40 feet above the ground with no safety gear (OSH – what's OSH?) I remember once working on a platform about 30 feet up with a blowtorch and welder, making a new handrail. The gas lines for the blowtorch were heavy so I secured them by separating the oxy and acetylene lines between ties and hanging the lines off a protruding pipe. Later I found that I'd gone on to weld the rest of the handrail to the pipe: I had to cut it to free with the blowtorch, and then weld it up again.

In my 2nd year at university I got my first girlfriend. Christine was about my age, the daughter of Bernie and Gladys Wood from Cambridge. They were friends of my parents and one Xmas holidays they stayed with us at NP, and we started hanging out. However with her living in Cambridge and me at university we only rarely saw each other, usually when I called in on my way to/from NP for one of the holidays, so after a year or so the relationship petered out. All pretty innocent, we didn't have any opportunity for more than the occasional snog, and wouldn't have known what to do if we did. We were both earnest young Christians in those days (Oh how times have changed!) and I was socially retarded. Sex education in the Barnes household consisted of leaving some Health Department pamphlets where I might find them: it was not a subject that could *ever* be discussed. Ted and I used to wonder how we were conceived: clearly there must have been sex at least twice if the pamphlets were to be believed, but we thought that it must have been a very rare event.

After a couple of years at Trinity I was ready for a change, and with a couple of friends from Trinity (Lindsay Rosser from Morrinsville and Jeff Williamson from Taumaranui, and one of Lindsay's friends who had been living at O'Rorke hostel), we went flatting in our third year. We found a flat in Mt Eden, just to the south of the shopping centre, and next to the service station. (The flat no longer exists, the service station has expanded northwards). Contrary to myth this was not a time of bacchanalian revelry, I think that we had only one student party at our place and only a few at our friends' places, but it was great to get out of the hostel and begin to have a social life. Not that I was much good at it. A common Saturday night was go to the Crystal Palace Ballroom which was almost opposite us on Mt Eden Rd, where a row of young ladies would be seated along the wall while a bunch of lads stood nervously in the corner. When the music started for the next dance, you'd pluck up courage and head across the dance floor towards somebody that you thought looked attractive and you'd ask her if she wanted to dance. If you arrived too late you'd pretend that you'd been aiming for her friend all along. Mostly you'd get "Yes" for the first dance, but the trick was getting a second one (or wanting it). If it was going really well you might get several dances and end up taking your partner to supper, and arranging to meet up again. Mostly dances were foxtrot, waltz, or rock. I wasn't at all good at dancing. This scene has disappeared as the market for alcohol-free events like this dried up, to be replaced by singles bars.

I returned after my BSc to study for a MSc in Chemistry as I was still set on being a scientist. I was a year too early for the new science centre being built at the Wellesley

St end of the campus, so at that time the Chemistry Department was in the Choral Hall, on the corner of Alfred St and Symonds St, and the radio-chemistry lab was in a pokey little add-on on the top floor. Living accommodation was a bit unsettled in this year, the Mt Eden flat had broken up and I moved around a bit with private board and staying with Don and Antonia until I ended up meeting an American called Wendell Bernard who had a vacancy in his flat, in Princes St just across the road from the university. This was super convenient: I remember one morning sleeping in to 8:50, and still making a 9:00 lecture on time! Wendell was a gregarious soul, and people were always dropping in, plus we mixed a bit with the girls upstairs. I flirted half-heartedly with one of these who was a secretary in the Chemistry Department, but she had her heart set on one of the PhD students, and I fancied another girl who I'd met while tutoring in one of the Chem. labs. One night I remember a knock on the door: the police had come to issue me a ticket because my motorcycle had been speeding and the rider had run off. However I was just back from the police station where I'd gone to report it stolen. It was normally parked outside, but you'd only have needed a screwdriver to turn it on and ride it away.

By 1968 I'd finished my MSc except for tidying up the thesis, so it was time to look for a job. There was an interesting-looking job on the notice board for a research technologist at the "Post Graduate School of Obstetrics and Gyneaeology" – part of the University of Auckland, located at National Womens' Hospital. I applied for the job, was interviewed by Dr Howie, and started work in February. Getting a job was easy in those days!

I worked there for a couple of years. By far the best thing to come out of this period: on the first day on the job I was introduced to Dr Howie's special duty sister, a rather cute little nurse slightly older than me. I managed to persuade her to go out with me, [six months later we were engaged](#), and a year later [married](#).

My job was taking blood samples and analysing various things for Dr Howie's research into various regimes for treating premature babies. I found that working as a scientific technician was actually pretty boring, but I was still set on a career as a scientist. To do this I needed to get a PhD, but my MSc results weren't good enough to get me admitted to the program at Auckland University, so we started looking at Canadian and U.S. universities which were offering good scholarships and would admit me. We were also keen on having a family – Mary is one of the world's great mothers – so we thought that we'd have a baby before we went to Canada because we'd read that the medical expenses of having children in North America were horrendous. Talk about naïve – the other expenses and difficulties of having a baby in another country weren't even considered. We proved to be very fertile, and within a few months of our wedding we were pregnant with Rachel. A year after our wedding Rachel was born, attended by the Professor of Obstetrics as our obstetrician, and the Senior Paediatric Consultant as our paediatrician. Perhaps just as well: she had the cord wrapped around her neck four times and was very blue: in less skilled hands she mightn't have fared so well.

Towards the end of my time at National Womens' I found that I was spending a lot of time drawing graphs of our accumulated results to see if there were any interesting trends or correlations, and I thought that it would be interesting to see if I could get the university's computer to do this analysis for me. Computers were rare and

expensive machines: the university's computer was hidden in the bowels of the Chemistry department where it was mainly used for X-Ray crystallography calculations, and I'd had no contact with it during my university years. Computer Science was not yet a subject being taught. I found that programming the computer was a lot of fun, much more interesting than the actual work that I was using it for, so I looked around for a job with computers. I was offered a job at \$4000 per year with Databank, at that time New Zealand's largest users of computers. This was 1.5 times my current salary! Just as well as we'd found that I wasn't earning enough to support us all, especially as we wanted Mary to be a full time mum like our mothers. The only drawback was that we had to move to Wellington, so we had to sell the Pakuranga house that we'd just bought. \$15,750 was a \$50 profit, so at least we were ahead.

At first we lived in a small basement flat at the top end of Karori Rd. This was very cramped, the bedroom was so small that we could only get in and out of the bed on its left side, and the lounge was filled with a cot, drying nappies, and other baby stuff. We only had one car, Mary's Fiat Bambina, which I drove to work every day so it must have been very hard on Mary being stuck there all day. The landlords lived upstairs: they bred corgis and you had to watch where you walked outside or you'd step in a dog poo. We started looking for somewhere better almost immediately, and ended up buying [a nearly-completed house in Johnsonville](#), where we moved when the house was ready. At least we now had a bit of room – three bedrooms plus a rumpus room – and somewhere outside for Rachel once I'd levelled a small area with a pickaxe. We lived there for about three years, adding Hannah to our family, and also buying our first Toyota. This made us a two car family as we retained the Fiat, so that Mary was no longer house-bound.

We never really liked Wellington. Ironically, although I'd gone to Wellington to take a job with Databank, the company had me working on a development for the BNZ Share Registry, located in Auckland and using their main computer in Auckland. I used to take trips up to Auckland for a few days over a weekend so that I could test my programs. I discovered that, being under 3, Rachel could travel in my arms for free so I used to bring her up too and we'd be met at the airport by Mary's mum. I'd leave Rachel with her while I worked through the weekend, staying in a hotel in town, then Rachel and I would fly back to Wellington on Monday. However developing a system from Wellington for an Auckland customer proved increasingly untenable, especially as got closer to the time when we were going to implement the system, and I persuaded Gordon Hogg, the CEO of Databank, that I should be relocated back to Auckland. When I told Mary she went out on to our little balcony and yelled to a neighbour across the road "We're going home". "You lucky pig" came a reply. So once again we were on the move: the house that we'd bought 3 years ago for a horrendous \$18,500 was sold for more than double that, a bit over \$39,000.

Of course we spent it all buying a house in Auckland: 3 Gretel Place on the North Shore cost us \$40,000. I learnt that the house that we'd sold in Pakuranga was on the market, also for \$40K, so we hadn't really improved anything. Some time later Emily joined our family: she was born at St Helens Maternity Hospital where Mary's great friend Cath Hanley was the midwife in charge of delivery suite. Rachel started at Willow Park Primary School, close enough that she could safely walk there with Robert Hallows who started at about the same time and lived over the road. It was a



quiet area, in a valley safely away from the main roads with friendly neighbours, and we didn't feel the need to drive Rachel (and later Hannah) to/from school.

After a couple of years working for Databank in Auckland it became clear that my job was going nowhere, and I took a job with Air New Zealand. At Databank I'd developed some expertise in IBM's programming language PL/I, and I started writing a book about it because I found that, while there were plenty of introductory texts there was nothing aimed at people like me and my colleagues who needed more. This turned out to be a saga: I remember sending off an early draft to 5 or 6 publishers fondly expecting that I'd shortly be choosing which of them to go with. Some months later the responses all came back: one I particularly remember included a review from somebody who described my book as "A hodgepodge of pointless anecdote, neither fish nor fowl, this book covers a few subjects of which Barnes seems particularly fond, leaping from topic to topic with little reason or coherence". Ouch! But he was right. Being a bit stubborn I rewrote the book and sent it off again, to a different round of publishers. There were a few more cycles of this, but eventually it was accepted and published by Elsevier North Holland, in New York. It was well reviewed, but only ever achieved a few \$000's in royalties. Its main value was to my CV.

With three children our house was getting a bit small, and also we wanted somewhere that Mary's mum could live at some future time. Ella's sister Dora ("Dordie") had build the dream home that she and her husband had planned before his death, on a section that they owned on the cliff top in Campbell's Bay – 239 Beach Rd – so Ella and Dora lived there. We looked at building a room or two on to our Gretel Place house but this wouldn't really have worked and so we looked around for somewhere larger. The first house that we saw was exactly what we wanted, and for the \$14,000 extra that a couple of rooms would have cost to build at Gretel Place we were able to move into [Eban Avenue](#) where we had 4 bedrooms, plus rumpus room, plus a self-contained one bedroom granny flat. This was a great family house, and we were very happy there. It was even closer to Willow Park School so all of our girls could walk to/from school. Below the house was a playing field and in the summer this was a popular place for all the neighbourhood children to play. We used to blow a whistle when we wanted the children to come home for their dinner: I remember one evening blowing it, hearing one of the other children yell "You've got to go, the whistle's gone!" and seeing three little bodies take off at a run from different parts of the park.

I was enjoying my work at Air New Zealand, which was much more interesting and varied than it had been at Databank. One of my assignments changed the direction of my life. With a couple of others I was tasked to investigate report writers – programs that would produce reports from computer files with a fraction of the code that would have been required for a PL/I or COBOL program. With Easytrieve I could write a 2 line program that was equivalent to 2 or 3 pages in PL/I. Two of us recommended that we purchase Easytrieve, but our manager had used one of the other contenders, Mark IV, at his previous company so that was what Air New Zealand acquired. This started me thinking: what Air NZ really wanted was something like Easytrieve but that could be extended with the full power of PL/I when necessary. There didn't seem to be any such software – could I create it? I started playing around in the evenings when the TV was boring, and I realised that it wouldn't even be too difficult. I got excited, seeing myself as the producer of software selling around the world and imagining the \$millions that would be pouring in. I didn't want to create ownership

ambiguity by working on this at Air New Zealand so for a year I would get up early and drive to AHI (Alex Harvey Industries) in Penrose where I'd found a friendly IT manager who let me use their computer for only \$5 an hour. I'd work there for about an hour, and then work my normal day at Air New Zealand. Soon I had something that could be demonstrated, and I started wondering how I could take the next step, forming a company and selling the product. Sometime in this year we saw a program on TV about the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) who were funding entrepreneurial ideas. I went to see them, applied, and ended up with \$10,000 of loan funding. An interesting deal: I had to pay them 10% of the product revenue until they'd been repaid \$20,000, but if the product failed they could end up with nothing: the interest rate would be determined by how quickly the product sold. These were large figures to me: our house had only cost \$55K, and my annual Air NZ salary was about \$15K I think. I left Air NZ and set up MANA Systems Ltd. Mary and I started dreaming about spending our wealth: we were going to start with a new Rover 2000 car.

At first it seemed easy. I set up our granny flat as my office and arranged a link to Computer Services Ltd, Denis Trotman's company in Takapuna. I employed Paul Nash, a colleague from Air New Zealand, and we set to work completing MANASYS. By January we had our first sale, to the Auckland Regional Authority, and when their \$12K arrived it seemed the sky was the limit. From there however it was down hill. Prospects loved the idea, but want a different operating system. Or with COBOL instead of PL/I. Or something for CICS transactions, not just batch programming. There was more and more to do, and as we did it the product became more and more complex so the development got harder and harder (= slower and slower). I was able to borrow money with the help of a loan guarantee from the DFC, and this kept us going. I'd market the product by flying off to Australia periodically: a typical trip would be three weeks: a week in Sydney, a week in Melbourne, and a couple of days in Canberra and Adelaide. Mostly I'd be on the phone, but if I got lucky I'd score an appointment, this might lead to a trial agreement, which might lead to an actual sale. We weren't getting enough sales income to cover costs. To increase sales I needed an Australian agent, and more time and money spent on marketing. Now I needed even more sales to break even! Of course an obvious thing was to expand our market beyond Australia and New Zealand, so I made a couple of trips to the U.S., reaching agreement with a company in Atlanta to distribute MANASYS, but unfortunately the company failed while I was there, leaving me with substantial travel bills and no US sales channel. I returned to NZ to pick up the pieces, and we got on with trying to increase our Australian sales. Then a cheque bounced, the bank wouldn't give us more money to cover it, and my business education really started.

Computer software has little value to a receiver, so the company's only significant asset was a tax refund of \$39,000. Against this were liabilities of over \$90K. We were in deep trouble. If the bank chose to sell up our house to pay the bills then we'd have net worth of about \$2K, not a lot for half a lifetime. And it was the house that was backing the company loans. I was a mess. My accountant (Peter Eastwood) introduced me to a financial consultant (Michael Kearney), a funny old guy who lived at Matakana, and he took over the company check book, acting as if he'd been appointed receiver. I continued working to try to make sales, Paul Nash's employment ended, and James was hired out to Watties as a contract programmer. Mary went back to work as a nurse so that we'd at least have some living money,

because the company didn't have any money to pay me. Money was very tight, and we all made each other Christmas presents that year, we couldn't afford to buy any. One I particularly remember: with Mary working the girls and I had extra housework tasks, and one was doing the dishes for which we had a roster. Rachel's Christmas present to me was 28 bits of paper, on which was written "One dishes voucher, redeemable from Rachel". The idea was that if it was my turn for dishes I could give her a voucher and she'd do it for me. Later when things improved we got a dishwasher and so there were a few of these that never got used. Years later I found one so I presented it to her at the end of my speech at her wedding, telling her to go and see the caterers.

We were able to restructure the company, bringing in some external shareholders (some for money, others were debt-to-equity swaps). A vote of confidence was that one of these was new shareholders was a manager from LD Nathans, making a personal investment because he believed in me and the product. Other shareholders included our friend Ross Welch. With this help the company was able to continue and repay our creditors. I kept a graph of what the company owed vs what it owned: when the lines crossed I took Mary and the family out for the most expensive meal we could find to celebrate. Of all the things in my professional life, the thing I'm proudest of is going to see our creditors in the depths of our problems, with a message "I don't know when or how I'll be able to pay you, but I promise you that even if I end up back in employment and I pay you with a few dollars from each pay packet, you will eventually get paid". We eventually paid them all off within 12 months.

The company continued to limp on. It was clear that MANASYS was becoming obsolete and needed a complete rewrite to address the new world of relational databases, but this needed a backer. I put together a proposal and did the rounds of the computer companies: IBM, DEC, NCR, ICL, Burroughs. The very last on my list was Fujitsu, at that stage widely regarded as the only company that was a real threat to IBM. As it happened, I walked into Fujitsu at exactly the right time: they were hurting because they had no answer except independent software to the development of 4GL's. These are languages like Easytrieve that offer massive productivity gains compared to COBOL, and for companies seeking these products Fujitsu's answer was to sell a third party product. If they did, then customer could just as easily purchase an IBM computer when the time came for them to upgrade, so they were desperate to find their own solution to encourage customers to stay with Fujitsu hardware and software. Unknowingly, I offered just this. Within a month we'd concluded an agreement that provided \$100,000 for a complete rewrite, and I was on a plane to Perth to make a presentation to one of their prospects, Bond Corporation.

I thought that they were backing me because it was a profitable business opportunity: as marketing partner they would get 50% of the MANASYS revenue. But this wasn't really the game at all. By selling \$50K of MANASYS they'd also be selling \$200-500K of their own software on a Fujitsu computer costing \$2M-\$5M, and have a customer in a five year contract using their proprietary environment who would find it very difficult to move to IBM. I learned much later that they credited MANASYS with giving them another 3 years in the mainframe market, worth about \$9M per year in profit to them. No wonder that when I had one of my periodic conversations with Neville Roach (the CEO of Fujitsu Australia) along the lines of "I'm sorry Neville, we're running out of money, can we have some more?" instead of being castigated for

poor project management the response seemed to be “Certainly Robert, how much do you need?” Years later I’d use this example in my project courses: “My most successful project ever was late, and went 2 ½ times over budget. So how was this success? Well who cares about this when \$250K cost is returning \$9M a year increased profit to the sponsor?”

This was a really fun time. For the first time since leaving Air New Zealand we actually had some money. In our troubles one of our saving graces was that we had a negligible mortgage: our monthly payments were \$89! Now we borrowed some money for home improvements, putting in a new kitchen and bathroom. I remember one evening we all sat on the kitchen floor listening to the dishwasher –gone were the days of manual dishwashing. And the girls and I were mightily relieved that it was Mary, not one of us, that broke our new oven in finding out how to take the door off for cleaning.

The girls were starting to turn into lovely teenagers, and there were many things that made us very proud of them. By the time Rachel reached High School she had decided that she wanted to be a doctor, and she realised that to achieve this she had to have a scholarship, so she worked towards this from the 3rd form. The school prize-giving of her final year seemed almost a Rachel benefit: she was dux, head girl, soloist singer with the Jazz Band, and top in all her subjects. Poor Hannah, this was a hard act to follow and I suspect that she beat herself up trying too hard. But she too was a lovely girl, and when at intermediate she and her friend Hayley McCullough had the lead roles in the school production of “Star Blaze” it was the best school concert that we’d been to before or since, and we went every night that it was on. Emily, a few years behind Rachel didn’t try as hard to compete. She was not as academic as the others but quite artistic, like them she was (and is) a lovely girl. Mary and I have been blessed with a lovely family, there are things we especially love about each of them, and they all have something that they are best at.

MANASYS was doing well in Australasia and we started selling it in Japan through a company that Fujitsu introduced us to. Mary came with me on the first trip to Japan and we combined the business trip with a week’s holiday. Sales didn’t reach satisfactory levels, but for us the agreement, which offered a guaranteed royalty level, brought in some extra money and we expanded with more staff, some of whom were Japanese. A major breakthrough came a few years later when we signed an agreement with Fujitsu to develop a Unix product. This made us one of NZ’s major software exporters with annual income that peaked at just under \$4.5M, and visiting Japan became a regular occurrence. Financially this project was a great success, but for a variety of reasons the project was never released. Once again I had totally misunderstood what Fujitsu’s strategy had been, but this time there were no synergies that I could work with and the project was really just an R&D experiment for them costing about 2 minutes of their annual income.

This was the most affluent period of our lives, and we decided to upgrade our house, moving from Eban Avenue to Chelsea View Drive. We were excited by our new house but we made a mistake in not telling Rachel, who was travelling in Africa with Simon at the time. We thought it would be a lovely surprise for her when she returned, but when we picked her up from the airport and took her home to this

strange house she burst into tears. Her home had gone! We should have thought about how it would feel to her, and told her what we were doing in our letters.

Our girls were growing up. Shortly after their return from Africa Rachel and Simon were married (1994), a few years later Emily married Sam (1999), and Hannah married Paul (2002). Rachel and Emily were married at our home, and by coincidence the marriage celebrant chosen by Rachel and again by Emily was Roger Hay, somebody I knew from Trinity. I was enormously proud and happy to see my girls making life's biggest decision so well. Today (2014) they are all happily married and we have seven lovely grandchildren. Rachel and Emily also live on the North Shore, about 5 minutes drive, while Hannah is 3 hours away in Kerikeri, and we see a lot of them all. But all that's their story: back to mine.

With the Fujitsu project clearly going nowhere I diversified the company into services and health software, purchasing one of the vendors of GP software which we grew to be NZ's #1 supplier and developing new software for health centres and hospital pharmacies, but the health-software market was very competitive and nowhere near as profitable as developing software for Fujitsu so after a stressful few years I accepted a management buyout and took a few months off. After six months I re-entered the market, confident that with my skills and experience I'd soon be making a choice from several interesting offers. What a shock that turned out to be! Far from choosing the best offer, I didn't get any offers at all. Too qualified, wrong qualifications, too experienced, not experienced enough, the list went on. It was a rare victory when I passed an agency's initial screening and actually got a job interview. It seemed that the only option was to be a free-lance IT consultant even if, as somebody told me, "a consultant is what every middle-aged unemployed white male calls himself". I joined a consulting cooperative (IE3) and about a year later I got my first decent assignment as "Systems Coach" with an insurance company. This lasted about a year. One day a consultant is earning big money in a lucrative assignment, the next he's out of work wondering where the next \$ is coming from. With our history we were very risk averse, so our house was mortgage free. As the assignments came in we spent some of the cash on the Royal and Sun Kitchen, the Agriquality Bathroom, and then the Lifestock Improvement Audi. Actually I was doing quite well, in some years earning almost as much as I had at the best years of MANA Systems, and I enjoyed the freedom. I had a series of good long-term projects at Fletcher Building, and I could see this life going on indefinitely. But then, for reasons that I don't fully understand, the work dried up. Other IE3 colleagues were finding the same, and eventually IE3 wound up.

In semi-retirement, meaning that I was half-heartedly looking for work, I decided that I wanted to learn about programming in the modern environment, and I started developing a web system with Microsoft technology. I got hooked on programming again, and ended up developing FamNet, an advanced system for recording family history. I had hoped that this would get a little support from the NZ Society of Genealogists, but instead FamNet was seen as a threat and they did their best to destroy it. However my motivation in developing it was really to acquire skills, and its value was proven when I was approached in January 2013 by somebody who remembered MANASYS fondly, and wanted an updated version for IBM mainframes. I have been working on that ever since: although the project has yet to bring any income it is creating interest, and once more we dream of wealth and new

cars – a new Audi this time, not a Rover. The next revision of this story can tell you how this works out.

That's it for now. So far I've had a great life, mostly a lot of fun, and I'm looking forward to the next chapter. I've been very lucky to marry the right person, and to find work that I've loved.

Robert Barnes, September 2014.