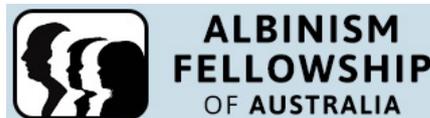


# “Life is Great”

By Ted Thomas, 2019.



I'm the youngest of three and the only boy – born in May 1942. I was my mother's "little white-haired boy" in more ways than one. Mum & Dad were concerned as I did not smile till after nine weeks and I would cry if put out in sunlight. At eleven weeks old, I was diagnosed with Albinism and was in glasses at fourteen weeks. From then I was treated as a normal little boy.



My wife Lyn and I have been married for forty-nine years. We met at the Waratah Festival square dancing in Hyde Park Sydney in October 1966 and married on October 14 1967. We have two sons and 6 grandchildren, 5 boys and one girl. Not being able to drive, Lyn has always been there to drive the boys, when they were younger, to sport, both doing different sports, (some at the same time in different places). Then me, to run a dance maybe 50k away.

**Childhood:** Growing up in Carlingford, which was rural area in those days, we had a house cow, chooks and a horse. In 1947 Dad built a weekender in the Blue Mountains and I was always there to help (or hinder). I would drink the condensed milk tin dry! Dad did all the repairs on the car and I was there too, so I learnt from him. We had a

1937 Ford V8 with alloy heads. When I was thirteen the heads corroded - *on the motor, not mine* – and mum had the car towed home. Dad was sick with pneumonia at the time so I removed the heads so they could be rebuilt.

**Education:** I started school in 1947 and handled Infants OK, with my mate, Roger. In Third Grade I had problems seeing the small writing on the blackboard. Although I was in the front desk I still could not see the board. Near the end of Term One we got a new teacher, an older one, and I was told "Do not leave your seat and go closer - as you are in the front, you should be able to see the board". I was asked, "Why can't you see the board?" I replied, "The trouble is you write too small". I got three cuts of the cane and was made to stand in the corner for being cheeky!

In May 1951 it was decided to send me to The NSW School for Blind at Wahroonga. This was run jointly by the Education Department and The Royal Institute for Deaf Dumb and Blind, as it was called then. Classes were composite, called lower primary: we had about fifteen in the class, some learning Braille and some printed work. There were also children with multiple disabilities and it meant that more time was spent on the slower ones. We only had the one teacher for our group, who I did not like.

Lack of large print material was the biggest problem. Prison inmates would re- write books by hand, which was not as easy to read as type-printed. The school then obtained a label typewriter from Royal with a typeface of 36pt. The P&C Mums would type on stencil then they would print on a duplicator. When I was older I would run the duplicator.

Life at school was pretty good: in summer we went swimming every week, in winter we had sports: we would walk to Waitara Oval where we would join St Edmond's and St Lucy's Blind schools for combined sport and at the end of Term Two, in August, we would have our Sports Carnival. As in most schools, even today, folk dancing was an important part of PE and music. In 1953 Square Dancing was introduced when a real caller, Allan Blackwell, came to teach us. This made me interested in calling.

I did not have a high education but it was broad. I ran the movie projector (I think I saw A Tale of Two Cities about ten times!!). I would also run the duplicator. I was taught to touch-type. Spelling was my biggest problem; the old typewriters did not have spell-check but I got by. I left school at the end of 1956.

**Employment:** This has been most difficult - I could not get an apprenticeship to any trade or be employed by any Government Department because I couldn't pass the medical. So it was back to private enterprise.

My first job was on an assembly line making sewing machine motors. I left after four years and got a job in the stockfeed plant of a flour mill, as a millwright assistant and oiler. When the four-year itch hit I left. My next job was at in the press room at Cumberland Newspapers in Parramatta as Fly Hand: that is taking the papers off the press and stacking them on to a pallet. Within three months I graduated to reel hand, preparing the reels of paper for printing. After almost fifteen years manhandling reels of paper weighing up to 1000 Kgs it was starting tell on my shoulders and back.

I did a Tech course on small offset printing, which I passed (the highest out of 20). I got a job with the CBC Bank in their print shop but I had to leave as I had trouble setting the ink quick enough.

I then applied and got a job as a cleaner at the Boots Pharmaceutical Co: within three months I was Leading Hand: after one year I became Assistant Site Maintenance Supervisor and within five years Site Manager, looking after ten cleaners, a gardener, handyman, painter, security and fire protection. I took redundancy after working with them for fourteen years, as the company was stopping Australian production. After a break, a colleague I had worked with at Boots, needed a casual cleaner to help out over the Christmas break at Carlingford Court Shopping Centre. I worked there for different contractors for thirteen years. I went for a security licence and I was probably the only blind security guard in Sydney: I could turn a blind eye! I retired 5 years ago.



**Social activities:** Square Dancing has been a large part of my life. After I left school I went square dancing in Parramatta and started calling in 1959, dancing in Square Dance Teams and training competition dancers. At present I am one of the Vice Presidents NSW Square and Round Association. I joined the Masonic Lodge when I was 19 and became Master of my lodge in 1987. That was a great experience, as it helped me with public speaking and also with my work with staff training. In 2006 I was introduced to the Albinism Fellowship Of Australia and became a board member in 2008, President in 2009, Treasurer in 2011 and still hold that position.

**There isn't much I have not had a go at:** Water skiing and surfing (lots of lost glasses), fun rides with my sons, and recently tackling the flying fox on a cruise ship this year. I'm the family handyman, mechanic, plumber, painter and gardener. Ted will fix it! We are lucky today to be a PWA with electronic equipment - I'm able to read the newspaper every day on my iPad.

**Life is great – Regards, Ted.**