

## CHAPTER 7

### *ROMANCE AT LAST*

Rachel and I married in 1985. I had known her and her family most of my life

We purchased my fathers home in Hokianga Road – Dad moved further up Hokianga Road to a smaller place that was ideal for him and mum

We wanted to have children – nothing is more essential in self perpetuating institutions as the Exclusive Brethren than an ongoing climbing birth rate. As the months went by Rachel was diagnosed with endometriosis – the career women's disease – successfully treated after several months of stress and discomfort

After years of anti-depressants, I had low fertility – the prospect of having children seemed very low indeed

Rachel already had a 12 year old son – Sean. He had made his home with us and was busy breeding rabbits on the front lawn. He had five or six hutches lined up across the lawn in which he housed his rabbits. Mrs Millar phoned to ask if Sean would take an unwanted male rabbit off her hands – Sean happily obliged Beryl by picking up Goldie and installing him in one of the cages with another male rabbit for company

Surprise, surprise – several weeks later Goldie gave birth to a brood of babies and had to be renamed Goldilocks – dear Beryl was the butt of a number of 'bunny' jokes

The rabbits were having no problems at all producing offspring but Rachel and I were making no progress at all

I had been unwell again and towards the end of 1985 it was decided that I would spend some time in the Ashburn Hall 'psychiatric retreat' in Dunedin

When I arrived at Ashburn hall I was delighted to find that there was a very old pedal organ in the foyer. I walked up to it with some enthusiasm and bent over to read the inscription written on a plaque affixed to the side. It read: 'Presented to the Dunedin Lunatic Assylum in 18\*\*' I was appalled – a cruel encounter with reality: I was in a 'lunatic assylum'. And do not be deceived – life at Ashburn Hall was not a picnic – one night a young man committed suicide – this involved days of therapy for staff and patients. A number of patients had been committed by the justice system

One afternoon I could bear it no longer and phoned my brother Dennis in Christchurch – when he arrived later on in the evening I refused to see him. He told me later of the severe distress this caused him – what a toll religion has taken on all our lives!!

I spent five months at Ashurn Hall – it was the start of a new life. I realised that I had tremendous ability. Became president of the gardening club, learned relaxation techniques, took swimming lessons at the Moana Pool from the man who later

coached Danyon Loader and had free reign of the library where I studied a range of mental illnesses

In the one to one therapy with the psychiatrist appointed to me a complete evaluation was made of my mental condition and, for the first time, there was a definitive diagnosis – I had bipolar disorder. This was a great relief as I often thought I had a much more serious condition – maybe even schizophrenia

After five months I was looking forward to going home – it was the longest time I had ever been away from Dargaville and my family in my entire life. Alas, this was not to be. It had been decided by the EB leader of Dunedin – a certain Phil Stewart, that I was to remain in Dunedin ‘on trial’. Rachel had flown down to be with me and I pleaded with her for us to return home immediately, all to no avail

One of my objectives at Ashburn Hall (probably misguided as it turned out but they went along with it) was to come off all my medication. Once again, I had become quite paranoid and nervous – when Phil Stewart came into my room one morning and berated me for not being up and dressed ( I had slept badly and was over tired and anxious) I slipped quietly out of the house and got an Air NZ flight to Auckland via Wellington and then the bus on home to Dargaville where my parents found me the next morning asleep in my own bed

I was ‘shut up’ immediately. However, I would have paid any price to escape from the clutches of Phil Stewart – an awful man. Over the months in Dunedin he had threatened me that I would be expelled from the Brethren – a man who had no right to be given the responsibility of being anywhere near anybody with a mental illness – just a complete brute

As for being expelled from the church, I realised that the months in Ashburn hall had served me well – I no longer felt any affinity with the Exclusive Brethren movement – the catalyst for change was about to occur