In the space behind his eyes: Donald R. Stuart: a biography

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IN THE SPACE BEHIND HIS EYES

Donald R. Stuart
A Biography

by

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August 2004

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School: International, Community and Cultural Studies
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
The major part of this thesis, *In the Space Behind His Eyes*, is a biography of Western Australian author, Donald Robert Stuart (1913-1983), a colourful life story woven around accepted and persistent myths found in the Australian psyche.

In his childhood, Donald Stuart listened to stories about his Scottish immigrant grandfather finding gold on the Victorian fields and his father's part in the 1891 Queensland Shearers strike. His poverty-stricken, but peaceful, upbringing in suburban Perth, Western Australia, was overtaken by the 1930s Depression and, as a rebellious fourteen-year-old, he left home and took to the road. In the next decade or so, as he adopted the north-west outback life, he was exposed further to Australia's traditional yarns and philosophies. He emerged from this period as the outrageous 'Scorp' Stuart, who drank too much and took advantage of the freedoms on offer. At the start of World War II, Scorp volunteered for the 2nd AIF. He served in the Middle East and somehow survived three-and-a-half years as a Prisoner of the Japanese, including a time on the infamous Burma-Thailand railway.

On his return to Australia, he began to tread the writer's path, supplementing his memories with renewed visits to the outback of his youth and working on yet another railway. Encouraged by his sister and her friends, supported by two of his wives and recognised by the Western Australian writing community, Donald R. Stuart played the role of noted author, a construct only possible because of Scorp Stuart's adventures. Calling on these experiences, in eleven novels and many short stories, he set down his record of a particular Australian life. The varying facets of his complex character come together in his writing, notably through his deep love of the land and in his sympathetic examination of the north-west Aborigines' position since white settlement. This biography of a writer sets out to trace the life of Donald Stuart, examine the disparity between Stuart the bushman and Stuart the noted author, and to shed light on the man behind the writing.

In the essay following *In the Space Behind His Eyes*, I explore the biographical form, consider directions the genre has taken in recent years, discuss aspects of biography generally and support choices made in the writing of this biography.

S.C.
I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

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I also grant permission for the Library at Edith Cowan University to make duplicate copies of my thesis as required.

(Sally Clarke)

Date, 23 August 2004
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Literary endeavours are inspired by the hearts and minds of those who encourage and support the writer's aim and many people helped in this writing of Donald Stuart's story.

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Biographers must find their way through official records of all kinds, the keepers of which offer their resources with extraordinary generosity. I am particularly grateful to staff at the Battye Library of Western Australian History and the State Records Office, who assisted my searches.
through their wide-ranging collections, and to the Library Service of Western Australia, particularly staff at the Kalamunda Shire Library.

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Readily checkable official records have been used for the foundation and framework of this biography, plus newspaper reports, newsletters and papers from the Donald Stuart collection (1945-1972) held in the National Library of Australia. I have also used articles and short stories the author identified as having an autobiographical base. Interviews with Donald Stuart conducted by Bill Bunbury, Hazel de Berg, Brian Dibble, Don Grant, M. Holliday and T.A.G. Hungerford have provided invaluable detail and been used to direct research in confirmation of what has been said. For details of the Yandeyarra period, my thanks go to Max Brown for permission to quote from The Black Eureka (1976). The Prisoner of War years have been greatly assisted by Tim Bowden's interview with Donald Stuart for the ABC radio series, Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon, and Hank Nelson's book of the same name (1985), as well as Patsy Adam-Smith's Prisoners of War (1992) and The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop (1986).

I am everlastingly grateful to my family for their interest and encouragement. Special thanks to my daughter, Jane Hubble, of Zig Zag Graphics, for photographic reproduction and to my husband, Peter, without whose knowledge of official records, patient searching of Legislative Assembly Rolls, willingness to act as sounding board, constant support and encouragement this biography could not have come into being.

S. C.
PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS

• John (Julian) Alexander Salmon Stuart, aged 19 years. 1885. Courtesy Gloria O'Connor.
• Rhoda Florence Stuart. The child is most likely to be Julian Martin, born 1897. Courtesy Gloria O'Connor.
• Florence Lyndall Stuart, Donald’s sister. Courtesy Reg Crabb.
• Yothapina Station, Meekatharra. circa 1934. l. to r. Will Crichton, Reg Oxenburgh and Donald Stuart. Courtesy Rachel Percy.
• Donald Stuart with his sister-in-law, Edie Stuart, wife of his brother, Ken. circa 1940. Courtesy Gloria O'Connor.
• Private Donald R. Stuart with his wife, Joan Stuart. Adelaide, 1940. MS 3156. Folder 5. By permission of the National Library of Australia.
• Donald Stuart, extreme right with hand on hip, and fellow ex-Prisoners of War at Berry Springs, Darwin, N.T. on arrival from Indo-China. 1945. MS3156. Folder 5. By permission of the National Library of Australia.
• The Stuarts: top. Edie, Lyndall Hadlow, Norma, Dessie. bottom. Ralph, Donald, Julian Martin and Ken. circa 1949. Douglas, the younger brother, and his wife, Esther, would have completed the group. Courtesy Gloria O'Connor.
• Donald Stuart, publicity photograph for Yandy. 1959. MS3156. Folder 5. By permission of the National Library of Australia and WA Newspapers.
• Donald Stuart and his six-month old son, Julian Robert. 1960. Courtesy Battye Library.
• Donald R. Stuart. Courtesy Gloria O’Connor.
• Dawn and Donald Stuart at Molloonski launch, Tom Collins House. Donald’s sixty-third birthday, 13 September 1976. Courtesy Reg Crabb
• Donald Stuart and his daughter, Yaralie. 1978. Courtesy Reg Crabb.

CONTENTS

IN THE SPACE BEHIND HIS EYES
A Biography of Donald R. Stuart (1913-1983)

INTRODUCTION 9
MAP 16
I ON THE TRACK 17
II ARDNAMURCHAN TO KALGOORLIE 30
III ROAMING THE SUBURBS 45
IV NORTH-WEST THE CONDAMINE 68
V NORTHAM TO SYRIA 87
VI JAVA AND THE RAILWAY 109
VII COMING HOME 132
VIII YANDY THE WIND 141
IX SHUFFLING THE STORIES 161
X THE KADIJIBUT TREE 187
XI THE CONJUROR’S YEARS 197
XII A ‘SPLENDID REBEL’ 221
EPILOGUE 229
NOTES 232
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 252
DONALD R. STUART—BIBLIOGRAPHY 257
DONALD R. STUART—BRIEF CHRONOLOGY 260

ESSAY

Writing Biography

DONALD ROBERT STUART 262
Oh, they slide and they vanish
as he shuffles the years like a pack of conjuror’s cards.
True or not, it’s all the same; and the frost on the roof
cracks like a whip, and the back-log breaks into ash.
Wake, old man. This is winter, and the yarns are over.
No one is listening.

South of my days’ circle
I know it dark against the stars, the high lean country
full of old stories that still go walking in my sleep.

from *South Of My Days* by Judith Wright ¹
INTRODUCTION

It's very childish to imagine that you can write everything about one person, let alone about everyone you mention in a book. Donald R. Stuart

A young swagman arrives at a government well in the north of Western Australia. He takes off his heavy pack and 'the sweat patch on [his] back turns cold'. It is 1928, just before the worst bitterness of the Great Depression. Recognising that the youngster must be new on the track, two old-timers invite him to join their campfire. They fill his pint with hot sweet tea and give him a good feed. He falls asleep to 'a blur of two voices humbly boasting, as each one denied his own riches of travel and friendship with known men'. In the morning, they fill his tuckerbag, give him tobacco and set him off on the next leg of his journey. No searching questions are asked, no judgements made. At the campfire, the young boy begins to learn about life on the road, he finds the hospitality and comradeship of the outback and meets those who will encourage him on his difficult way. These are his riches of travel.

Western Australian author Donald Stuart claimed his short story, 'Riches of Travel', as 'quite definitely, near enough, autobiographical'. Having left home at the age of fourteen and spent his formative years in the outback, he identified with the fresh youngster trying to come to terms with his chosen new life; it is harder than he expected, but there are compensations. As time went on, Donald Stuart could have been either of the old-timers, the one with the broken-down utility or the one with a horse and two mules. When the story first appeared in 1958, he had already played all three parts and wrote convincingly from any one of these viewpoints.

Among the other roles he played was that of the 2nd AIF soldier fighting in the Middle East and, for three-and-a-half years, somehow enduring the life of a Japanese Prisoner of War, including a stint on the infamous Burma-Thailand Railway. After the war, on his return home to Western Australia, he wrote about these experiences and came to be recognised as an Australian author of note. In the 1970s, as President of the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Western Australia, for two years he successfully represented the interests of writers at State and Federal level. He was a husband (four times) and a mostly absent father of two children.
The word most often used to describe Donald Stuart is ‘complex’. Clearly, the influence of his family, their strong socialist politics and humanist beliefs, together with his life experiences, all contributed to the complexity of his character. He was not someone you could overlook; opinions about him ranged from affectionate acceptance of his unconventional behaviour, as well as deep regard and respect for his writing, politics and championship of the Aboriginal cause, to dismissive accounts of unsociable drinking habits and outspokenness. You sense the tolerance of those, mostly younger members of the Western Australian writing community, who would happily help him out to his car at the end of a literary event and worry about him getting home safely, and the annoyance of those who suffered what they regarded as his ‘outrageous’ behaviour. His novels about the north-west of Australia and the effects of White settlement on Aboriginal traditions earned him the respect of a wide range of literary critics, but the rough ways acquired during his outback days, the ‘Scarp’ Stuart, larrikin persona of the times he spent in the bush and in the Army, did not always sit comfortably with the roles bestowed upon him, later in life, in recognition of his writing. For it was the writing, based on his experiences, that brought him to notice.

He came from a family where writing was regarded as a regular activity and, through them, he could claim a strong connection with Australian literary tradition. His father, Julian (John) Alexander Salmon Stuart, was of the same generation as Henry Lawson, the poet and writer whom many Australians believed had written ‘for the people in their own vernacular’, indeed there was just six months between them in age. Julian had his own aspirations to be a poet, was a raconteur in the Australian bush yarn tradition and regularly sent poems and short pieces to the Bulletin, the magazine which first published Lawson. A staunch unionist, Julian had been imprisoned for his part in the 1891 Queensland Shearers’ strike and was, for a time, editor of The Westralian Worker, a Kalgoorlie goldfields newspaper. Donald’s mother, Florence, who is considered to have been one of Western Australia’s first women journalists, wrote for her husband’s newspaper and supported his involvement in Labor politics. His sister, Lyndall Hadow, was a respected journalist and well-recognised short story writer. After Donald came home from World War II, it was Lyndall who encouraged him to write about his experiences and, as he would later acknowledge, without her his writing would never have reached publication.
INTRODUCTION

In the last part of his life, Donald Stuart talked readily about his family and about his past. Occasionally, the astute interviewer was able to prompt an unrehearsed answer, but at the end of any life the stories are well-practised and Donald had already spun tales around many of his experiences. As each interview progressed, his version of events fell off his tongue with the least amount of effort, especially key happenings known to elicit the most reaction, repetition confirming a story already told. This was how he wanted his life to be understood and, in many ways, that version holds close to his writing.

At the time he gave these interviews, Donald was many years away from the original events and beyond what might have been the more immediate view of a daily diary, which he appears not to have kept. Autobiographical writing and oral versions of any life are, most often, attempts to make 'sense of the self for the self'; in these late interviews and in his writing, Donald's life story had moved into 'the figurative and the fictional' of later interpretation, to arrive at a version which must have made more sense than the actuality could ever have done.

Paul Fussell points out that those who have experienced war at first hand know that 'its images remain in the memory with special vividness'. The same applies to any traumatic experience and many of the events in Donald Stuart's tough teenage years in the outback left deep impressions. In his last four published novels, he leads the reader through a written life which bears a striking resemblance to his own. He builds on recollected images of a childhood spent in suburban Perth and strong remembrances of his outback youth, bringing the story to an end with accounts of those stark war experiences in which he was involved. The novels were published long after the event, but, in Ian Reid's opinion, 'this does not necessarily indicate...they were any less strongly or genuinely influenced; a narrative may be composed long before it happens to appear in print' and, as Donald's publication records reveal, these stories of his life were a long time in the writing.

Just like Donald, his fictional character, Colin Campbell, spends his childhood in Tower Street, Leederville. His adventures are in the surrounding area and other Perth suburbs where the Stuart family lived, Gosnells and Mount Hawthorn. All the streets and places mentioned in the first of these four novels, Drought Foal (1977), can still be traced on local maps. Official records, Electoral and Legislative Assembly Rolls and school reports confirm that the Stuarts did live in the places the author describes in the first part of the novel. Other records and reports confirm family events, and most scenes
in *Drought Foal* reflect the childhood Donald Stuart recalled in later interviews. The last of his novels, *I Think I'll Live* (1981), ends when Colin Campbell returns to Western Australia at the end of World War II.

No biographer should assume a written life is the same as the life lived, but writing in which the author claims some autobiographical input can provide useful clues as to character. George Johnston commented, 'any serious work of creative fiction must be autobiographical in a lesser or greater degree, since the author’s most reliable touchstone and yardstick to experience and emotion must always be himself'.

In his novel, *My Brother Jack* (1964), Johnston, like Donald Stuart, chooses to begin in the suburb of his childhood and write about a family which very much resembles his own, manipulating characters and events to create an ‘autobiographical fiction’. By choosing to place their work ‘within the familiar setting of their own time’, purposely or not, Donald Stuart and George Johnston furnish the reader with accurate social and historical detail. Johnston’s novel has been described as 'one of the best and truest accounts of the 1920-30s period in Australia'. In *Drought Foal* (1977), Donald Stuart describes a readily identifiable 1920s, early 1930s, Western Australian childhood and, like Johnston, goes on to examine the Depression years and World War II, taking another three novels to complete the story.

Both authors develop their father figures, Johnston creating an unlikeable character, said not to bear any resemblance to his own father, while Stuart turns his father into an heroic figure, whose stories of the outback have a strong influence on his son’s life. Johnston bases his World War II soldier, Jack Meredith, on his own brother, who missed being sent overseas because of a knee injury and so avoided becoming a Prisoner of War, while Donald Stuart draws upon his own war experience as a serving 2nd AIF soldier fighting in the Middle East and his time as a Prisoner of the Japanese, to continue the story of his fictional character, Colin Campbell.

Those who had known Donald Stuart were inclined to say, particularly of the last novel, *I Think I’ll Live* (1981), that the written version of events was what 'really happened', though they recognised some exaggeration. What they did know was that the events he described, based upon his own life experiences, included some experiences they had shared. Bearing out Paul Hamilton’s assertion that popular representations of an historical event invite ‘identification and the creation of community’ among people who share a memory, the way an audience may seek ‘to find themselves in the text',
oral versions given by Donald's fellow prisoners coincide remarkably with his written accounts, indicating that his storytelling had influenced their existing memory.

Sometimes, Donald denied any autobiographical intent in his writing and, at other times, he complicated the issue by identifying himself with a character in the story he was telling, often going on to insist that he could only write about situations he knew and understood. He expounded his own writerly view as:

You live and in the very course of living, you get all sorts of material and you don't write down any one particular man's particular story, you chop things about and you change them and you bring men together who didn't really meet or even make up composite characters, and this of course is quite valid, provided it's done with whatever skill you can bring to it.14

His explication indicates a certain move towards fiction, yet still allows an autobiographical viewpoint. In defining his books as 'novels', he gave himself leeway to follow the vagaries of the writer's mind and to use the life as he thought fit, to rearrange the memory as it suited him. He was not the first writer, nor will he be the last, to call upon his own experience to create a fictional/factual account of a life.

Yet Donald Stuart's was not a self-centred view. He had not set out to produce a record of his own life, but wrote from his own experience to show concern for the ordinary Australian, illustrating how some people may be caught in forces beyond their control, to the extent their life is moved in a different direction and with unforeseeable consequences. Against a backdrop of intensely detailed landscapes, in his last four novels, Stuart draws a variety of characters coping with everyday events within the wider framework of the 1930s Depression and World War II. His two war novels show, not only how war affects Australians fighting overseas, but also how people in the country overtaken by war are themselves affected by the event. Essentially, Stuart was an observer, watching the people around him and using his own part in events to furnish insightful comment. 'I have always tried to write about human beings in the human condition,' he said. 'Human beings are the things that a novel is made up of.'15 This comment shows his awareness of the role stories play in helping us to understand ourselves.

Donald Stuart's early itinerant wandering in the outback brought him into contact with north-west Aborigines and, in 1953, his encounter with a group attempting to
create an independent life prompted a deep response. His concern for the individual translated into a desire to tell the Aboriginal story and, in his early novels and many short pieces, to examine the effects of White settlement on Australia’s indigenous people. At the time his work was published, though it may not have been considered anthropologically correct, some white reviewers judged it to be among the best writing of its kind.

Twenty years after a writer’s death, the work may appear in a different light. Time changes the politics and also the focus. Donald Stuart was dubbed a ‘regional writer’ at a time when this appeared to cast a slur on the writing. More recently, the local, national and international success of Western Australian author, Tim Winton, illustrates the error of such a judgement. Winton received the 1994 Booker Prize for his novel *The Riders* and, in 2001, having received the Western Australian Premier’s Book Award for *Dirt Music*, went on to receive the national 2002 Miles Franklin Literary Award for the third time, following *Shallows* in 1984 and *Cloudstreet* in 1992. Geoffrey Dutton, editor of *The Literature of Australia*, saw ‘the sympathetic foreign reader’ as having an interest in the ‘local particularities’ of a national literature, though he qualifies his statement with ‘as long as it is good enough’.

Since his death in 1983, Donald Stuart’s work has received less attention that it seems he deserved. His writing is ‘good enough’ and there can be no denying that his words convey ‘the local particularities’ of his time and the Western Australian landscape, in such a way as to indicate the value of creating a renewed interest in his work. The closure of his publishing house and a series of complications around the time of his death at the age of just 70 years, appear to have sealed the fate of unpublished manuscripts and made it unlikely there would be any reissue of his earlier works.

Donald Stuart lived a particular Australian life and, in using his experiences as a basis for his writing, he involved himself in the telling of cultural stories, tales that help us to understand what it is to be Australian, stories that need to be acknowledged and preserved, for the present generation and for generations to come.

Just after Donald Stuart’s death, columnist Maurice Carr wrote that the author deserved ‘to have a novel written about him’. Carr’s use of the term ‘novel’ poses questions about the veracity of the way in which we tell life stories, but also acknowledges that Donald Stuart’s life was colourful enough for even a factual account to have a fictional quality. Considering the autobiographical content in biography—the
author relating his/her own life, colleagues and friends relating their versions—plus the biographer’s part in assembling and assessing evidence, the genre’s fictional/factual nature becomes apparent to writer and reader alike.

Prominent British biographer, Victoria Glendinning, pointed out that: ‘No one ever knows the whole story.’ What we know may constitute a whole story, what we do not know may have given us another story altogether. As every biographer is aware, no life can be written completely.

Many of Donald Stuart’s papers are lost and, apart from a limited collection lodged in the National Library of Australia, few personal papers are available. I did not know Donald Stuart and, while I have set out to authenticate his story in every way possible, there is an unavoidable level of speculation in this interpretation. The decision to illuminate his life story with passages from the eleven novels, short stories and articles, was made only after researching all available records for the period of his life, from 1913 to 1983. The manner in which Donald Stuart’s papers, records, interviews, reports and fictions have been used is entirely my own.

One good reason for writing a biography may be ‘to rescue and restore a comparatively unknown person to his rightful place.’ This biography has been written with the hope that it will rescue Western Australian author Donald R. Stuart and restore an interest in his work.

S.C.
Western Australia
I

ON THE TRACK

“We were the children of righteous parents.”

Ideas about getting away from home must have been working in young Donald Stuart’s mind for some time, but on the day it was an impetuous leaving. His mother sent him to the corner shop for some butter and he just did not come back. Butter? An older Donald often said he could not remember butter on the Stuarts’ table, his sister-in-law said he had gone to fetch bread and a niece was sure it was tomatoes. The anecdote only provides a hint of what the whole story might be. His life contained other defining moments, but this one sets the pace, typifies the character. ‘You know he left home and went on the track at fifteen?’ somehow, no one could accept that he was only just past his fourteenth birthday. It is the story best-remembered, summing him up as the individualist and offered in explanation of the man he became.

Separated from home and family, he would have missed the Stuart cohesiveness, certainly at first. Whatever romantic imaginings had led him to make the break, he was not prepared for what lay ahead. Years later, when asked what it had been like on the track looking for work at the age of fifteen, Donald Stuart hesitated before replying: ‘Well. It was, er, bitter. Hard. Looking back to what I was at fifteen—it was cruel. ’

‘We were the children of righteous parents,’ he said, quoting from David’s comforting Psalm 37: ‘I have been young but now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.’ He was not a religious man but he had a feel for the biblical language and, as many knew, he had a deep compassion for those in need. When he gave this interview, Donald had long been his own person with a particular set of values and philosophies, the basis of which were those instilled into him as a child. Apart from this Psalm as an expression of religious belief, we can detect in its sentiments an echo of his parents’ humanitarian principles. Certainly youngsters out on the road at this time were in need of the reassurance and hope these words might provide.

When Donald left home in early 1928, the unemployment rate in Western Australia was less than in the Eastern States. The figures were being viewed optimistically and
there was a hope that the West might avoid what was happening in the rest of the country. However, over the next eighteen months, the situation worsened and, by the end of 1929, the rate of unemployment had risen to 11.8 per cent. Three months into 1930, the figure had jumped to 15.1 per cent.3

The very memory of the 1930s 'Great Depression' carries with it an overwhelming sense of despair. For many of the generation who lived through it, the time represented a mental anguish and physical deprivation that would affect them for the rest of their lives. The despair was something they could never forget. Mothers made enormous sacrifices to keep their children from starvation and shame, for it was not just the unemployed adults who were affected, the years of hardship would inevitably leave their mark on the following generation.4

As the numbers of unemployed grew, more and more men went onto the roads to look for work and Donald was caught in the crowds. Not only were there not enough jobs, but also for the ever-hungry youngster there was often no easy way to find a meal. Food had always been high on his list of requirements, now he found himself begging for it, pestering the baker, offering to chop wood for a 'staley'. With so many offers to chop wood, the bakers had no wood left to chop; but they handed out stale loaves anyway. The storekeepers were almost as badly off as those who came past their doors, but they seldom turned anyone away. Donald earned himself a feed by doing some painting for the butcher at Yalgoo,5 but mostly the butchers gave out meat scraps or an occasional sausage and pushed back the boys’ proffered threepences.6 The lads stewed the scrounged meat, potatoes and onions, to make meals much the same as those Donald remembered his mother putting together at home.

Those who were enterprising enough might be able to steal the odd sheep or chicken for a more solid meal, always hoping, of course, not to be caught. In 1931, three men appeared in Yalgoo Court, accused of having 'unlawfully killed a sheep'. Presumably they had eaten it straightaway, were maybe caught in the act of satisfying their hunger, for the magistrate was forced to dismiss the charges 'due to lack of evidence'.7 As Donald gained more confidence, he was not above following the general example. He told how he and a friend raided the Mount Magnet police sergeant’s chicken run and evaded arrest only because of the black-tracker’s sheer goodwill. He saw where Donald and his mate had hidden the stolen chickens, but kept the information to himself.8 In
both of these incidents, we might detect a certain compassion towards the swaggies forced to use their wits in pursuit of a good meal.

Some men may have enjoyed this living off the land, taking advantage of anything that came their way, and others might have been escaping an oppression they could no longer tolerate, but the main reason for 'carrying the swag' or 'humping your bluey' was to find work. Like his father before him, Donald Stuart adopted the travelling ways of the bush, a tradition reaching back to the early days when waves of immigrants had fanned out over the Australian countryside seeking any way to make a living. Those first itinerant workers had been absorbed into the general population and there was some idea that the swagie might disappear, but by the end of the 1920s, the unemployed found a need to revive the tradition. Over-optimistic economic policies adopted after World War I made it impossible for Australia to escape the effects of the Great Depression and, during the years 1929 to 1934, the roads teemed with people seeking work so they could feed themselves and their families.9

Joining the throng, Donald covered enormous distances, moving from one place to another and travelling any way he could. The further away from the crowd the swaggies could get, the more chance they had of happening upon an odd job, perhaps a permanent billet. Donald told how they 'stowed away on ships up and down the coast' and how, like the rest, he came to consider Western Australian Government Railways as a personal transport system, always ready, waiting to take him wherever he wanted to go: Kalgoorlie to Northam, up to Mullewa, Meekatharra and Mount Magnet or out to Wiluna.10 In the Eastern States, 'jumping the rattler' could be dangerous. You had to learn to judge the train's speed just as it was coming out of a station or water stop, then throw your swag into an empty truck and jump, quickly. A moment's hesitation could mean injury, even death.11 In Western Australia the ride was taken in a much more leisurely fashion: 'Here a man climbs aboard as if he's got a gold pass,' says one character in Drought Foal (1977).12

Most of them got away with the free lift, but there was the story of a man caught by the Yalgoo station master for fare evasion and being 'unlawfully in possession of a Railways Department blanket'. In Court, the man pleaded guilty, returned the blanket and paid the train fare, but although he had money in his pocket, enough to pay the 15 shillings fine for stealing the blanket, he chose to do three days of hard labour in default.13 At least, he would get food for three days and a bed to sleep in, the problem
being that now he would have a police record attached to his name. With stories like these bandied along the track, the threat of being caught was a real possibility, enough to deter some travellers from taking the risk and making them stick to the roads. 14

Wherever they landed, it was the official hounding that was most difficult to take. Some places were notably inhospitable, with little or no work and a sour-faced policeman waiting to meet the swaggies as they climbed off the train. Donald knew what it was like to arrive in a town looking for work, only to be told to get out and the sooner the better. When this happened, the swaggies had to leave by the next morning; if they hung around until the next day, they would be charged with vagrancy. ‘Vagging’ they called it, a crime that automatically collected a sentence of three- to six-months jail 15 and a police record they would not be able to shake for the rest of their lives. Donald began to recognise that he and the other youngsters on the road were an outcast generation. He believed some police and politicians thought it would be better if the unemployed all just disappeared. Some of them, he suggested, would have preferred it if they all died, even went so far as to voice their opinions: ‘It’s a pity you bastards don’t die and be done with it.’ 16 As Donald said, it was a cruel time for a youngster to be on the road and there were obvious dangers.

A study of the 1880s suggests that homosexual advances were not uncommon among the swaggies of that time. Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes, who carried his swag in Queensland as a young man, described the possibility of attack by a fellow traveller as being ‘one of his greatest worries’. 17 In his description of the 1930s Depression, the sexual adventures Donald Stuart dwells on are definitely heterosexual. He emphasises the life-saving assistance he received from other men along the track and, while homosexual predation may have occurred, it is not a subject Donald Stuart brings up in this novel. His attitude, if such an approach had been made, may be found in a reference to homosexuality which appears towards the end of his final novel, I Think I’ll Live (1981). Two English, homosexual soldiers approach Colin after he has received a beating from a Korean guard, but Colin absolutely rejects the idea posed by the two that the beatings may have been pleasurable. He is calmed down by his friend, Hector, who advises Colin to accept that it is their concern, so long as they keep their predilection to themselves. 18 We might also recognise that, at the time Drought Fool was published, frank writing about this subject was not common and, given Donald’s preference for women, evident throughout his life, a level of homophobia may have influenced his
account. His emphasis is on the traditional folkloric view of the swaggie as a ‘lone itinerant male’ traversing wide landscapes with his few possessions.19

When men on the road got sick, matrons at the local hospitals could be relied upon to help those who came through their doors. Donald remembered one matron in Southern Cross who had nursed Gallipoli wounded on Lemnos Island. From the misery of that experience she brought an all-embracing practicality and kindliness to destitute men on the track. ‘No man ever went to her with minor injuries or major sickness without her regarding him as a patient of just as much importance as if he had been a bank manager,’ he said.20 These were the Samaritans of the road, the ones who understood more than most what it might be like to be a starving traveller.

Staying around in some towns could be hazardous, but in other places you might receive an unexpected kindness. One miserable night, a Police Sergeant took pity on the young lad. ‘You can’t sleep out on a night like this,’ he said, ‘I’ll give you a go.’ He let Donald sleep in a cell, without charging him, and his wife cooked the boy ‘a good hot tea’. Next morning, they sent him off with a hot breakfast.21 Such a break could save a life.

Wherever men met, they passed on information about places where they had received a good or bad reception, where there might be work, food or a bed for the night. In Drought Fowl, when the train arrives at Cue station, Colin Campbell plays out the inventory in his head: ‘Cue. Quiet copper, good baker, butcher not bad, but no work. Well, where is there any work? Nowhere except, maybe, Wiluna.’ The decision is made without hesitation, stay on the train and try Wiluna.22

He is on the Murchison goldfields, at the terminus of the main north-east line from Perth. Gold has been mined here since 189623 and in recent times, with the development and extension of the Wiluna Gold Mining Company, there was a good chance of getting a job.24 Colin knows that others have found work. All he wants is a job, any job, ‘pick and shovel, horse work...Axe, crowbar, wool hook, wheelbarrow,’ he knows he can do any of these. He’d rather work than have to beg any more.25

When Donald Stuart had left home, his father’s inability to work following a timber-mill accident in the state’s south-west meant there was little money coming in to the family. Donald understood what it was like to live frugally. As he wended his way along the track, he recognised the hardship being felt in the communities he passed through, the far-reaching effects of growing unemployment. Through his fictional character,
Colin Campbell, who acts out events that reflect Donald’s own experiences, he writes about the men he met and how they were dealing with this time.

There are chance meetings with school mates and, around campfires and, among the sometimes old-fashioned philosophising and dated judgements, there is an endless amount of hospitality and goodwill among the procession of characters that files along the road. In writing mostly about men carrying their swag, Donald’s Western Australian scene differs from that drawn by Kylie Tennant in her novel, *The Battlers* (1941). Tennant’s character, Dancy, is a woman alone on the New South Wales track meeting not only men, but also women and families who are accompanying their men.26 This view of the Depression appears more inclusive, even more devastating than Stuart’s picture of men striking out on their own, pitting their individual strength against what life is handing out to them.

The women Donald writes about are met mostly in places along the way, or left behind and talked about around campfires. The prostitute or barmaid, whose generosity provides some fleeting comfort in the harsh reality, makes his women appear to have a purely sexual purpose, usually with no sense of the romantic. Some extraordinary women appear in his novels, but these are not the focus of his work; mainly women are adjuncts to the male characters he writes about or support the masculine domain in which they move. These attitudes, prevalent in the period his writing covers and then common in many areas of society, would have been considered normal in this outback setting.

In *Drought Foal* (1977), Colin Campbell meets up with Helen, the redheaded sister of Ted and Martin Quinlan. He has had an encounter with her before. When he was still at home, one night she had waylaid him in the back garden and kissed him. From being someone who had ‘no time for any girls,’ the supposedly naive Colin had propositioned her, but she turned him down with ‘it wouldn’t be good...believe me...don’t say a word to anyone, will you? Promise?’ Now, here she is in a pub along the way, with a reputation for being generous to young swaggies. She has a livid bruise on her left cheekbone, inflicted by the publican with whom she is living. Colin’s thought that ‘the purple discolouration’ only serves ‘to highlight the beauty of her,’ implies some masculine approval of the abuse. The earlier promise to say nothing extends to this meeting and neither acknowledges the other. She has a brother on the track and the good amount of food she hands to them as they leave becomes a gift of love, to the brother, to
these boys, particularly to Colin. This is a man's world and generous women find their place where they can.

Working his way along the track, Donald met men of all ages, men from every strata of society. Among them were returned soldiers who had been 'at Gallipoli and in France and Flanders'; many of them had served right through World War I and up to the Armistice, others had been wounded in the war and invalided out. They had fought for their country, had survived that war and then come back to this. 'They were all good men,' said Donald. He saw them as individuals and divined their separate stories. He did not lump the men together as a mob, but recognised that each one would meet the challenge of the Depression in his own way:

Men of all ages, kinds, classes, creeds; all willing to work, and many of them highly skilled. Ragged men in broken boots; well dressed men, in suits and shirts that will soon fray and tatter; kids, some of them, and a sprinkling of the white-haired aged. Laughing men and sour sullen men, thieves and men who would go hungry to see others fed. Silent men and Talking Tommies, braggarts and boasters, men soft spoken and hard handed, fighters and those who would rather run than fight. Men from every state of Australia; farmers who have walked off their farms after living for months on boiled wheat and treacle; carpenters, plumbers, brickies, barbers, and counter hands from stores big and small. Men of all trades...Men of all kinds and conditions, all with the same story of poverty and distress.

Donald Stuart believed the men were idle only because the system had let them down. 'There was a great amount of unemployment and no great measures of social security,' he said. Everyone was in danger and the men came to accept that anyone fortunate enough to have a job today could soon find themselves out on the road again looking for work, and those without a job might just be lucky enough to find employment tomorrow. Kylie Tennant was appalled when an English reader of The Battlers (1941) said that all the people she wrote about, though in the end gathering sympathy and interest, 'should be put in a lethal chamber'. Like Donald, she saw her 'battlers' as being caught in something beyond their control, be it lack of opportunity, little education or lack of money, but with a willingness to work if there had been any work available.

In placing blame upon 'the system' Donald Stuart reflected a common theme found in 'almost all' Australian writing about the Depression years. Narratives about the
ON THE TRACK

period deal with the personal and psychological results of unemployment, domestic hardship, bitterness, and public outbursts of anger and despair, with the system coming in for severe criticism. Ian Reid defines ‘the system’ as ‘that whole capitalist structure of commerce, industry and government, almost Heath-Robinson in its precarious complexity, from which the Depression had emerged’. The period turned many Australian writers towards left-wing groups, some moving close to Communism, often accepting ‘some of its tenets without becoming converts to the party’. In works such as Katharine Susannah Prichard’s *Intimate Strangers* (1937); Kylie Tennant’s *The Battlers* (1941) and *Ride On Stranger* (1943); Alan Marshall’s *How Beautiful Are Thy Feet* (1949); and Frank Hardy’s *Power Without Glory* (1950), unemployment and poverty in Australia during the Depression years is placed within its ‘total political and economic context’. Theirs was an emotional reaction to what was happening, to the effects the situation was having on those described as ‘the very, very ordinary people’. 32

When businesses failed, families unable to meet rent or mortgage payments found themselves evicted from their homes. Many lived in tents or shacks built of galvanised iron and hessian, furnished with whatever they had been able to carry from their former life. 33 In May 1932, more than 400 unemployed men in the Kalgoorlie-Boulder area had little chance of finding work and, during that same year, over 700 south-west farms were abandoned. 34 With no system of government unemployment benefit, people had to appeal to local charities for the necessities of life, but the charities could not satisfy the demand. 35 According to one source: ‘It became a fact of life that half the population went hungry half the time.’ 36

Australian Governments began to realise that they must help those who were without even the barest means of support. Work for the Dole schemes were slowly introduced, with each State devising its own aid system. 37 Sustenance camps were set up, tent cities to accommodate the men who were now seen as a labour source for large Public Works constructions. Using only basic equipment, picks, shovels and wheelbarrows, men in Western Australian camps helped build the Canning Reservoir and the Waroona and Wellington Dams. Many of the men were unused to hard physical labour and numbers of them suffered permanent injury.

The camps were despairing places. One country doctor in Harvey said the saddest of these people were the married couples, especially those with children. ‘As a rule,’ he
wrote, 'you would find the women naturally sad and depressed about the end of their financial hopes, with their home gone.'

For Donald Stuart, the sustenance camps were places to stay away from. In order to share the jobs around, men in the camps worked only two days a week and there was a lot of sitting about. No matter how hard it was to be on the track, taking your chances where you could was far preferable to sitting around in the dreary tent cities. For any younger impatient to find work, between the enforced idleness of the camps and the excitement of hopping on and off trains, the choice was simple, especially on wet days. 'Tried that sustenance caper, down near Bunbury,' says one of the characters in *Drought Foal*, 'I couldn't stick it.'

The widespread effects of the Depression were starkly apparent and everyone was forced to seek their own solution. Donald's belief in the individual battler is born out in his story of a family uniting to survive. One man he met on a train, he said, 'looked much older than me...a bloke about twenty-two, twenty-three....He was a bit younger than he looked and I looked much older than I was.' The man's wife and two children were living with his Mum, the father was away on the Goldfields somewhere, and his brother-in-law was out looking for work. To save rent, six women in the family, each with two or three children, all lived in one house. The story finds its way into *Drought Foal*, with thirty people crammed into a 'South Freo' house. 'We all send home whatever we make, and things are tough, but, well, we get by.'

Important to the novel are the chance meetings with old school friends, characters that illustrate Stuart's belief that the Depression touched all levels of society. Some may have been able to work out a future for themselves, but for others, it was a time of lost opportunity. Like Donald Stuart, Jazzer Floyd had gone to the good school, won the scholarship, had the rosy future handed to him. The 'high hopes, hazy hopes' were overtaken by the hardships of the time when, with fathers out of work, money dried up and families went hungry. But Jazzer had a talent, the ability to become a great artist. Their Art teacher, the Welshman, had recognised an extraordinary ability. He even said this lad had been brushed by a feather of the angel's wing, the angel of creativity. And here was Jazzer, jumping trains, begging for food. He should have stayed at school.

There is a sense of loss, perhaps a regret the older Donald was expressing about his own life. Maybe Jazzer's talent could have survived this time. Like Donald Stuart, he could have found inspiration in what was going on around him and discovered in it a
way of expressing his creativity. But there were more difficult times to come. Donald always insisted that men carrying the swag during the Depression years were all training for World War II, a conflict in which some talents may have had a chance to develop, but, undoubtedly, in which many great talents were lost.

Others were able to handle the situation and take advantage of whatever was on offer. At school, Joey Booth had been a year ahead of Colin and Jazzer. ‘Salvo,’ as they called him, was ‘bright, always on top,’ a description that would prove right even in the midst of this Depression. He has a job on the Wiluna mine, he has money in his pocket and buys Colin and Jazzer a meal of steak and eggs, says he can, maybe, get them a job.43

‘All he wants is a job,’ the swaggies’ mantra, is proven with this piece of good fortune. Once they are provided with good food, wages and a place to sleep, all things are possible.44 The mining operation is huge, with ‘scores and hundreds of men’.45 The individual is dwarfed in these surroundings. Away from the physically demanding work, the masculine world turns around escapist activities, too much drink, fighting, gambling and the inevitable visit to a brothel.

This appears as Colin’s first full sexual encounter. Salvo shows the way and Colin tags along behind. The sexual act is a mechanical affair with no hint of anything but release. Lana, the prostitute, shows some admiration and, while Colin asks himself how much of that is also a mechanical response, he emerges with some small pride at his success. Despite his boastfulness, Salvo seems to have had a less satisfactory experience. Colin says nothing.46 Maybe his silence conveys the overwhelming significance of the occasion, but there is no way of knowing. There is always this ambiguity behind Donald Stuart’s writing about women. On the one hand, he appears to assume a basic macho attitude, go along with the male crowd, but there is often this reserve, a sense of appreciation, that the women he comes across are to be respected for their generosity to men, loved, but not often, if ever, in a romantic way.

In the less than thirty pages of Drought Foal in which Donald Stuart deals with the Depression, his emphasis is always on the abject despair of unemployment and its far-reaching effects, evident in his description of men hanging about the sustenance camps, sheltering in soggy tents, waiting for work:
ON THE TRACK

An open space with a few scraggy mulga trees, on one side the slight rise of ground towards the edge of town, and westward and northward the scrub country. Small fires, a score of small fires...Flies, in swarms. No noise except an occasional call of a name, a laugh, a string of curses. Men. Ragged and road-weary, they seem to be hard and self-contained...Wonderful, the awful beauty of the scene. Hunger and hope, in every man’s mind dreams of a job.47

There is nothing to show Donald Stuart was writing any of this during his time on the track. The novel, *Drought Foal* (1977), was published almost fifty years later, when he was sixty-four, by which time he had come to know men of all kinds and had observed how they behaved in difficult situations. He was able to draw upon a deep understanding gleaned from his time on the track and in the outback, as well as from his later war experience of men caught in something over which they could have no control. Because of his socialist principles, Donald always saw such situations as being yet another example of how, through the politics of money and power, the strong exploited those less fortunate.

Swaggies, sustenance camps, streams of men taking to the road in search of work, all came to represent the widespread misery of the Depression years, not only in Australia. Donald refused the despair. He broke away from the crowds and took off into the bush.

In *Drought Foal*, the Wiluna mining job comes to an end and Colin decides to strike out on his own. The job has given him enough money to buy the best equipment a swaggie could ever carry and he had become self-sufficient. ‘Better to be one out,’ is his belief, on your own, away from the crowd. He is sick of jumping trains and being pushed around by the coppers. He decides to go bush. ‘I think I’ll head north. Peak Hill, Nullagine.’48

Donald Stuart often claimed his swag-carrying stories to be ‘quite definitely, near enough autobiographical’,49 a comment which allows us to see him reaching the same conclusion as Colin. He always considered himself apart, different, and throughout his life developed an independence of thought and action. The same brash confidence that made him leave home had helped him through the worst experiences of his early days on the track. Now, he would go out on his own, test his endurance further, push the limits of survival and pit himself against the greater hazards of space and distance.

He struck out into the wider landscape of Western Australia, where he found himself deeply affected by the country. Later, when he had a better understanding of the place and its history, he would describe it as:

27
Salt lake and sapphire, mulga scrub, red and dark-brown ridges swelling up from the dark-grey sea of scrub, with costeen and shaft and pothole to show where men had toiled and sweated after gold.50

Despite its lack of ease and comfort, and a climate described as ‘one of the worst in Australia’,51 Donald made the Pilbara his own place, wrapping the space around himself. He spent the next ten years living here, working at any job he could find and, throughout his life, would often escape back into it. Detailed descriptions of the north-west outback dominate his writing. His first ‘documentary novel’ *Yandy* (1959), begins:

The land was hot. Sunshine hard and brazen poured down from a sky that was almost colourless. The dry creekbed wound across the plain aimlessly and seemingly endlessly. All the miles of space and light were nothing, a void of sand blotched with dead spinifex, sunbleached and skeletal. Nothing moved; no crow winged across the desolation, the lonely hawk swinging in wide sweeps in the upper reaches of silence accentuated the solitude of the sky, and the cicadas had ceased their incessant chirring.52

His last novel, *I Think I’ll Live* (1981), is set mainly in a Japanese prison camp, but even here there is a consciousness of the Australian outback. While working on the Burma-Thailand railway, Colin suffers a severe bout of dysentery and his delirium is overtaken by outback images ‘until there is nothing, nothing and nowhere, and there never will be again such a wideness in any place’. When he regains consciousness, Colin tells his mates that he: ‘Had a great time in the country round Nullagine, good horses, coupler mules, good feed. Just pokin’ about havin’ a look at a bit of country.’53 Through his recollections, his unconscious thoughts, he could still manage to escape from awful reality.
John (Julian) Alexander Salmon Stuart, aged 19 years. 1885.

Courtesy Gloria O'Connor

By permission of the National Library of Australia

Industrial Martyrs of 1891, released 1893.
Julian Alexander Stuart, top right.

Rhoda Florence Stuart.
The child is most likely to be Julian Martin, born 1897.

Courtesy Gloria O'Connor
ARDNAMURCHAN TO KALGOORLIE

His grandfather was from the Inner Hebrides, Ardnamurchan near Tobermory in the County of Argyll.

Donald Robert was the seventh child born to Rhoda Florence and Julian Alexander Stuart. When he arrived, on 13 September 1913, the family was living in Cottesloe, a suburb of Perth, Western Australia. He was the fifth of what would be six surviving Stuart children, five sons and one daughter; two boys had died in infancy. He was named for his paternal grandfather, the Scottish, red-bearded digger who travelled to Australia in search of gold and made a lucky find on the Victorian fields. Family legend has it the name had previously belonged to one of the dead boys.

Grandfather Donald Stuart came from the Inner Hebrides, Ardnamurchan near Tobermory in the County of Argyll, and carried with him a Scottish heritage that would echo forever in the lives of his Australian descendants. Amelia MacPherson held the same lilt in her voice. She was from the village of Dalwhinnie near Fort William in the County of Inverness. Conjecture could lead you to believe they knew each other before they left Scotland, for their places were not far apart across the windswept moors, deer forests and wild rivers of their neighbouring counties, though there is nothing to support the idea. They were married in Sydney, Australia, in 1855.

Some of Amelia and Donald’s offspring claimed that the Stuarts of Ardnamurchan were professional people, and that other MacPhersons from Dalwhinnie were tied up with graziers in New South Wales and industrial concerns Australia-wide. Young Donald Robert’s father did not agree with these efforts to trace an upper class background. He claimed his MacPherson and Stuart grandparents had ‘been crofters, small tenant farmers who, records show, had emigrated to Australia during the days of the goldrushes of the ‘fifties.

Nineteenth-century Scottish crofters were an oppressed group. In the first half of the century, the crofting counties of Inverness and Argyll were caught in the great Scottish Clearances that forced an exodus of Highlanders to America, Canada and Australia. The Californian gold rush of 1849, and the 1851 discovery of gold in Australia, coincided with their need to find another place, providing an incentive for a move to these apparently desirable destinations.
Amelia and Donald settled in New South Wales, on a Hunter River grazing property, north of Sydney. Their son, John Alexander Salmon Stuart, who later preferred to be called Julian, was born at Raymond Terrace, on 18 December 1866. He was also a seventh child. The Salmon in his name was for a captain of one of the boats that plied the New South Wales rivers providing communication and transport for the newly-settled communities.

In his old age, John Alexander would write about a childhood on this place where he could jump the fence and find himself on land he believed was as unspoiled as when Cook had landed in Australia. But, being one of the younger children, he may have heard more of his mother’s stories than did the older ones and could have learned about the Scottish Clearances from the schoolteacher uncle who lived nearby. He was exposed to tales that reflected the Colony’s less idealistic beginnings and, over time, there developed in him an awareness of people less fortunate than himself. His later reminiscences often dwelt on the darker aspects of these early years.

The property’s previous owner, a retired Anglo-British Colonel, had looked after convicts at Botany Bay and, like all early settlers, had relied on convicts and ex-convicts for his labour. Amongst the horse tackle left on the farm were convict chains, leg irons and manacles. An old convict still working on the property told the story of a Lifer, Bill, who ‘went and drowned his self in the crick’, and there were accounts of floggings while the Colonel ate breakfast. In the small boy’s more immediate world, a bandicoot and a brolga rooted out newly-planted maize seed and, late at night, a carpet snake or a native cat raided the hen house, dingoes attacked the pigs and even ate one alive.

Maybe, as an old man, his concentration on these sinister memories was fed by the harshness of his own later life, for the other side of the picture was of a blissful childhood and young manhood.

While John Alexander was still young, the family moved north to the Clarence River, roughly 100 kilometres south of the New South Wales/Queensland border. Woodford Island was one of the most beautiful of the Clarence’s islands, with vegetation growing down to the water’s edge, wildlife for the shooting and fish for trapping. They were neighbours with Scottish crofters brought out to New South Wales under the auspices of the great Scottish Presbyterian, John Dunmore Lang.

A high point in the lad’s life was a meeting with troubled colonial poet, Henry Kendall. His recollections were hazy, but he retained memories of the poet visiting the
Stuart family. The adults were not enamoured of poetry and they found Kendall ‘an uncomfortable sort of fellow to have about the place’. They gave young Julian the rough drafts of a poem written at their fireside and he also had a copy of Shelley’s ‘Ode to a Skylark’ in Kendall’s own writing, ‘each letter being formed as an ordinary print’ and written with the poet’s left hand. The boy ‘treasured the scraps of paper for years, until they were destroyed in a flood’. The family had grieved when they heard of Kendall’s death, the man they regarded as ‘our poet’.\(^5\)

The boy’s three given names began to seem unwieldy, not fitting his aspiration to be a poet and so it was at this time that he chose to be called ‘Julian’, the name by which he would be known for the rest of his life. The poet in him continued to strive after success but, towards the end of his life, he expressed dissatisfaction with his writing: ‘I have never quite approved of anything I have ever written....I could not fashion my own canoe, nor have I succeeded in writing my ideal sonnet or singing my ideal song.’\(^6\)

Julian Alexander Stuart grew into a handsome six-footer weighing twelve stone. His aspirations, however, stretched beyond his family’s comfortable rural existence and he left home at the age of eighteen. Following five of his sisters, Julian tried school teaching, but after two years, having decided he was not suited to the task, he took a job as junior clerk in Sydney’s leading music warehouse. One lunch hour he came upon a group of unemployed men holding a meeting. ‘At that time I had not learnt that men may be foodless and hopeless and workless,’ he wrote. ‘I did not know why hunger and unemployment would exist, either.’ His immediate reaction was a conservative attitude of self-help,\(^7\) but his awareness of another, harsher, side to life had been stirred yet again.

Back home on the Clarence in 1887, Julian met his first striker, a young Irish-American wanted by the police for his part in an ironworkers’ strike in Pittsburg. When Julian again left home, his decision to join the workers appears as a protest against the decidedly middle class mores of his Clarence River family. The skills he gained on the farm had given him the freedom to pick and choose where he went and, as he worked alongside bands of men moving from job to job, he became even more aware of class struggles being waged around the country.

Denied a vote because of their itinerant status and seeking a political voice, the workers had begun to form their own organisations and to fight for improved wages and conditions. The Australian Shearers’ Union, formed in Ballarat, Victoria, by W G
Spence in 1886, had brought together rouseabouts and other labourers in the pastoral industry, and a close bond was effected with the General Laborers' Union. Previously forced to accept only eight shillings per 100 sheep shorn, always depending upon the overseer approving the completed shearing, the Queensland Shearers' Union followed the Australian Shearers' Union lead in its push for £1 per hundred sheep shorn.

When Julian Stuart arrived in Burenda on the Warrego, Queensland, he was on his way 'to join a cattle outfit making for Bourke' and, apparently, had not intended to stay. When shearers demanded the new Union rates, trouble broke out at Burenda and three shearers were arrested for rioting, though were acquitted later. Burenda sheep were shorn outside Union rates that year and Julian Stuart was one of those who determined the next year must be different.

From early childhood it seemed, stirring deep within him, he had held a sympathy for the downtrodden and the exploited. Advantages gained from his parents' well-managed lifestyle seemed only to have heightened his awareness of those less fortunate, to such an extent that he now felt compelled to join their ranks. For the rest of his life he would align himself with the workers, socially and politically, engage himself in their struggles and accept the role of spokesman.

He was at Jondaryn station when a clash between the owner and Unionists involved the Australian Labourers' Federation and the Australian and Queensland Shearers' Unions. Teamsters refused to haul non-Union-shorn wool to the railway, Brisbane city carters refused to handle it and waterside workers refused to load it onto the ship waiting to take it to London. With his wool cheque in jeopardy, the owner was forced to accept Union demands.

Jondaryn was considered a limited strike but Julian would remember it as the beginning of the 'real shearing troubles'. In 1890, he was back at Burenda to ensure that Union rates were met and went on to the Shearers' meeting in Blackall Queensland, where the social idealist and great leader for the Australian Labor cause, William Lane was speaking. Julian noted that many of those who were there carried 'the works of Marx, Nordau, Gronlund, Henry George, Olive Schreiner and the Fabians', writing he described as 'the literary leaven that was beginning to work "outback"'.

'We lived at high tension for the next few months,' Julian wrote, 'almost every day being crowded with incidents more or less exciting.' Unionism was the main topic of discussion and committee meetings were held day and night. He was called upon to
straighten up the affairs of the Central Queensland Laborers' Union and, in February
1891, when Sandy Creek, the main strike camp on Peak Downs, was established three
miles out of Clermont, Julian was elected Chairman.

On 19 March 1891, at Capella, one hundred Unionists tried to stop a trainload of
sixty non-Unionists on their way to Peak Downs. They hooted and called at the free
labourers, exhorting them to join the workers' cause. This was not an isolated event, a
number of other such incidents had led to the forming of the Pastoralists' Association,
its membership committed to overcoming the Unionists by force. The owner of Peak
Downs, George Fairbairn, a member of the Association's executive, decided to bring his
position to bear and he called in police to deal with this latest trouble.

When police arrived at the Capella camp, the bushman's red flag was flying
defiantly. Eleven men were arrested, identified as having been ringleaders; among them
was the Chairman of the Sandy Creek camp, Julian Stuart.

The accused were taken to Clermont railway station. Warrants were issued and the
men were formally charged with 'Conspiracy'. After being remanded for eight days
without bail, they were sent on to Barcaldine in a heavily guarded train. Julian felt the
effects of the manacles and chains that had menaced his childhood. He and five others
were handcuffed together on a 'dog chain' and, for the journey from Barcaldine to
Rockhampton, Julian Stuart, aged twenty-four, the youngest in the group, was yoked to
a fellow prisoner.16

It must be stressed that, evident throughout this whole event, despite the harsh
treatment meted out to them, these were no common criminals. When they were
questioned at Rockhampton jail, not one of the thirty-six Unionists arrested from across
Queensland was found to have had any previous conviction. Most of the supposed
charges against this group, and other 'offenders', appear to have been purposely
exaggerated.17

At the trial, the charge brought against the men was:

That you and each of you did...conspire, combine, confederate and agree together to force
and endeavour to force certain of her majesty's well-beloved subjects to alter the mode or
method of conducting their business, thus imperiling the peace of our sovereign lady the
Queen, her crown and dignity.18
The statute had been repealed in 1886, but the judge overruled any objection. From the very beginning it had been clear this trial would not go in the Unionists' favour. Days dragged on while mainly written evidence was produced, letters from the defendants one to the other and minutes of a meeting at which Julian Stuart was reported as having stirringly stated his view:

"We are going to fight on constitutional methods and we rely in a great measure on public sympathy...we are going to win or die...we can die at any time...a great many innocent people will suffer; but we are not going to wait for time and eternity for the public sympathy to come."²⁰

At the end of the trial, Julian passionately described Judge Harding's seven-hour summing up as 'an ill-informed and sullen discourse'.²¹

The jury was locked up overnight. Next day, they declared two of the defendants not guilty and asked the judge to be lenient with the others. Judge Harding recognised the prisoners as being 'endowed with more than ordinary intelligence' and as men who might have represented their countrymen differently,²² but he was not inclined to leniency. He convicted the twelve men of 'Conspiracy', sentenced them to three years imprisonment with hard labour and sent them to Rockhampton gaol.

In the whole of the Colony's history there had never been so long or important a court battle and the 'Conspiracy Trial' of May 1891 was destined to become a landmark in Australian Unionism. While the verdict appears as a victory for the 'squattocracy', reportage of the proceedings in all newspapers was, at last, a chance for the unionists' struggle to be laid open for public consideration, fulfilling some of Julian Stuart's desire for recognition of the cause. The incident became legendary and was said to have been the impetus behind the forming of the Australian Labor Party, though there are opinions that the Labor Party would have evolved just the same without this political action.²³

The prisoners were sent to St Helena, previously a convict penal depot. Their status within unionist circles can be judged from a photograph, taken at the time of their release in November 1893, headed 'Industrial Martyrs of 1891'. Julian Stuart sits on the back row, his hair is brushed severely off a serious face and he is the only clean-shaven member of the group. He was released on a bond of £100 and two £50 sureties to be of
good behaviour or serve another twelve months. Though he was cautious of reoffending, nothing would prevent him from continuing to work for the Labor cause.

The imprisonment affected his life and, consciously or unconsciously, the lives of those close to him, but the fight had greatly inspired Julian. Later, he would write: ‘Somehow I think there’s not much fun in shearing, nowadays. Tamer than it was 35 years ago.’

Just a year after the unionists were imprisoned, J.F. Archibald, editor of the Sydney Bulletin, gave some money to the writer, Henry Lawson, and sent him to Bourke, a town directly south of Barcaldine over the border in New South Wales. The move was Archibald’s attempt to rescue Lawson from his self-destructive drinking habits and have him report on the active unionism going on in Bourke, regarded as being ‘representative of the friction between the Amalgamated Shearers’ Union and the Pastoralists’ Union’. Publicity was important for union officials in their fight with the squatters and the men in Bourke welcomed the arrival of Lawson, a known Labour supporter and champion of their cause. Enjoying the mateship, and happy to have a cause for which to write, Lawson supported the new Labor Party and those in the town involved in its progress. Bourke was said to be ‘the most important part’ of Lawson’s career and, though his sympathy for the unionists lessened with time, subsequently many of the unionists he met there appeared in poems and short stories that captured the heightened atmosphere, the mateship and the desolation of the period. One such piece is ‘The Delegates’, published by the Bulletin in 1920:

No Union flag was flying
Because it never flew;
The cause was dead or dying
Round Bourke in ‘ninety two.
Through bogs of sodden black soil
We fell back down and done,
Heart-broken from the battle
We’d lost in ninety-one.

Some time after his release from prison, Julian Alexander Stuart met Rhoda Florence Collings, a slim beauty with a wealth of dark hair. Florence, as she was always known, had an oval face with finely-shaped eyebrows, a direct gaze, and a determined jawline.
which somehow contradicted the gentle mouth.\textsuperscript{28} With her magnificent singing voice, it was generally believed that, had her life eventuated differently, she could have made her mark as an opera singer.\textsuperscript{29}

Florence’s father, Joseph Silver Collings, was known as a ‘free-thinker’, a definition pertaining to those who refused to be dictated to in matters of religious thought. His wife, Mary Ann, was a Quaker, a group that similarly developed independently from the Church of England. Quakers stress a belief in the possibility of all human goodness; they aim to live in truth and sincerity, dress and behave as simply as possible and avoid luxury. They believe also in the levelling of social classes and make no gender differentiation.\textsuperscript{30}

The Collings family had come to Australia from Brighton, England, arriving in Brisbane when Florence was ten years old. One of her brothers, also named Joseph Silver and then eighteen, went on to have a long and distinguished political career in the Australian Labor Party.\textsuperscript{31} Young Joseph Silver Collings and Julian Alexander Stuart were much of an age and, without any sign to the contrary, their common interest in Union matters made it inevitable that their paths would cross.

At this stage of his life, Julian Stuart is always described as tall and handsome, and photographs show that he and Florence made a distinguished-looking pair. Once they met, each with their own burning idealism, it was obvious that the delightful singer and the unionists’ hero would be attracted to each other. Despite strong objections from Florence’s mother,\textsuperscript{32} they were married in Brisbane’s General Registry Office on 4 September 1895.\textsuperscript{33}

For a time after the marriage, Julian worked for the Labor Electoral League, but news of gold being found in Western Australia must have stirred memories of his father’s success on the Victorian goldfields. He gave up immediate aspirations to be a successful poet and writer and, in 1896, ‘went gold-hunting instead’.\textsuperscript{34}

He and Florence joined the steady stream of people from every stratum of society who, since news of the first finds in 1892, had set out on this new goldrush. There were ‘t’other-siders’, many of whom had already tried their luck on diggings in Australia’s eastern states or were escaping the effects of the 1890s Depression. There were eager fortune hunters from overseas, ever-hopeful prospectors who undertook the arduous trek to Western Australia’s eastern goldfields, their fantasies surging at every fresh tale of
success. However, no matter what stories are told about the excitement and extravagance following a fortunate find on the goldfields, prospecting for the precious metal was a hazardous venture and there are as many tales of tragic death as of success. In 1893, Coolgardie was ‘a place of intermittent famine, either of water or food’, both of which had to be rationed. The appalling lack of water made for insanitary living conditions and contributed to the very real threat of typhoid endemic to these goldfields.

Also among those who saw the Golden West as offering a bright future were the writer Henry Lawson and his new wife, the nineteen-year old Bertha. They sailed from Sydney in 1896, in the ‘Marloo’, a ‘comfortable, steady ship’. Lawson’s reputation had gone before him and, when the ‘Marloo’ reached Melbourne, reporters were waiting ‘to interview the young and brilliant author of In the Days when the World was Wide’.

After another brief stop in Adelaide, the ship made its way to Fremantle, where the Lawsons took the boat train to Perth, ‘a small town then’ yet to benefit from the wealth that would pour into it from the goldfields. Accommodation was short, and for those who had yet to find their golden hoard, so was money. After a seven-week stay in the Shamrock Hotel, Fremantle, the Lawsons set up two tents in a less than sanitary area ‘below an old cemetery at East Perth’. Henry had travelled to Western Australia before, in 1890, but only stayed for five months. This time he was attracted by the possibility of striking gold. He wanted to get to Coolgardie, but one of his friends, who had been on the fields, told him ‘it would be madness to bring a young woman out there’ and the Lawsons stayed in Perth. In a letter to Angus and Robertson, Lawson drew a bleak picture of life in the west: ‘W.A. is a huge camp of adventurers and failures’, concluding: ‘It is madness for any man to bring his wife here unless he has money.’ After a few months, Bertha, ever mindful of her Harry’s tendency to drink, found it necessary to get him away from Perth newspaper men. She sold their camp and, with the proceeds, bought tickets back to Sydney.

In that same year, Julian and Florence had no such qualms about travelling to the fields and apparently received no such warnings about the conditions. They wended their way to Coolgardie, perhaps going via Perth or maybe getting off the ship in Esperance and travelling north with the crowd. When they arrived in Coolgardie, conditions, though still rough, were somewhat easier and less primitive than they had been. A new railway station, built from locally-cut ashlar stone and opened in March
1896, was a sure sign of progress and, within six months, a double track would allow rail travel through to Kalgoorlie. The town was also linked to Perth by telegraph line, with interstate and overseas news arriving by cable and telegram being reported in the several newspapers that had begun to appear on the fields. Only three years earlier, when the town was first proclaimed, the population had numbered a mere three hundred souls, now some ten thousand inhabitants could demand, and pay for, the trappings of modern life.

Florence and Julian would have found Coolgardie a typical ‘roaring goldmining town’ with large amounts of money changing hands in the many hotels, saloons, bars and a huge variety of shops. The railway line brought all kinds of entertainment to the goldfields; there was a keen interest in music and singing, with the Golden Age excitedly reporting the success of Australian singers, interstate and overseas. Alongside her brother, tenor William Collings, Florence took her place as the leading soprano in a Coolgardie [choral group].

Coolgardie continued to expand until, by 1898, some fifteen thousand souls had made their way to the inland town. With improved travel, an increasing number of women and children came to join husbands and fathers, setting up home in flimsy wood and hessian dwellings. Living conditions were anything but easy and water rationing made wash-days and any attempt at hygiene difficult. Supplies had to come 400 miles from Perth, so miners and their wives were forced to furnish their tents with whatever materials they could find. Discarded kerosene and dynamite boxes, a useful source of wood, were ingeniously fashioned into useful household items, with off-cuts and leftover pieces being used for heating. Lit by candles and kerosene lamps, the hastily built towns were always in danger of going up in flames and several quite large Coolgardie fires would, in time, frighten residents into building more substantial accommodation.

In one of the small tents, in the middle of a regular Coolgardie red dust storm, Florence went into labour with her first child. There was no doctor, but of the women who, like Florence, had accompanied their husbands to this forsaken place, one or more would have been willing to help with the delivery. In those days, little could be done for women who experienced complications during childbirth and, for them, death was a certainty. Fortunately, everything went well for Florence and she was successfully delivered of her first son, Julian Martin, on 6 November 1897. Two years later, no doubt
hoping for more comfortable circumstances, she journeyed to Bunbury for her second confinement, but, sadly, this little one, another boy, was stillborn.47

In 1901, the year of Australian Federation, Julian and Florence moved from Coolgardie and were living just off the Golden Mile in Campbell Street, Kalgoorlie. Julian did some prospecting and found work as a waiter, (cook, kitchen hand), as a sanitary carter ‘tipping for slosh’ and as a journalist.48 Labour conditions on the goldfields bore some resemblance to those endured by the Queensland shearers, with ‘thousands of workers utterly voteless’. In tune with the mood across the country, there was plenty of union activity and the Kalgoorlie area at that time was regarded as ‘a crucible for trade unionism in Western Australia’.49 Julian was able to continue working for the Labor cause and soon became an active member of the Kalgoorlie sub branch of the Australian Workers’ Association.50

In the following year, clearly having made a name for himself, he was elected to the Board of The Westralian Worker, the State’s first Labour [sic] newspaper, one of up to eighty newspapers brought out in Western Australia between 1895 and 1910, mostly in mining communities. Like many of the other papers, the weekly journal ‘preached a liberal democracy’51 and declared itself as being: ‘Devoted to the interests of Trade Unionism’ and as being: ‘Owned And Controlled By Organised Labour [sic].’52 A year later, Julian Stuart was elected as Editor of The Westralian Worker.

Everything seemed to be going well for the Stuarts, especially when, within a few weeks of Julian’s appointment, Florence gave birth to the couple’s only daughter.53 The child was named Florence for her mother, but was also given the name of Lyndall, for the protagonist in Story of an African Farm (1883),54 written by feminist and pacifist, Olive Schreiner, a writer Julian first heard about at the 1890 Shearers’ meeting in Blackall.55

Julian had long been a contributor to the Bulletin, so it comes as no surprise that ‘Taking the Helm’, his first Editorial for The Westralian Worker, echoes the sentiments of that magazine’s influential editor, J. F. Archibald:

I do not believe in the personal element figuring largely in Labor journalism, and shall not obtrude my individuality to any great extent...I am convinced that those papers subject to impersonal influences wield a larger power than do the journals wherein the personality of the individual is prominent.56
True to his avowal, the name of Julian Stuart seldom appears in the paper, but it is difficult to consider an editor having no influence upon the paper he heads. In subsequent editorials, articles and verse, under his initials and several pseudonyms, Julian’s fervent voice unfailingly colours declarations that quite clearly illustrate his personal stance.

Florence’s name is similarly not evident, but it is known that she wrote for *The Westralian Worker* and, in so doing, was one of Western Australia’s first women journalists. Her pen names were ‘Hypatia’ and ‘Adohr’, and she contributed to the *Worker* for some years.

The Stuart family holds to the belief that Florence Stuart was prominent in Western Australian Labor politics, was involved in organising the first Women’s Labor League on the goldfields and had served as Secretary of the first Labor Women’s Conference in Western Australia. She is described as ‘the most socialist-minded woman in the early goldfields Labor movement’, but her name does not appear in other papers or any immediately available records. While this makes it difficult to ascertain her exact role, it does not mean she was absent from the scene. There were other women who preferred to remain anonymous. One contributor to *The Westralian Worker* remains unidentified, having only ever signed herself LSH, but she, with Florence, was among the many women whose firm convictions made their way onto the paper’s women’s pages. Florence reported the time-honoured women’s issues, news from England and local social events, but she clearly supported her husband’s humanitarian ideals, firmly espoused the Labor cause and urged women towards independent thought.

Julian saw *The Westralian Worker*’s role as being ‘to preach Labor doctrine’. But his passionate idealism was to involve him in a battle with the large, independent, Amalgamated Miners’ Association and, for most of 1903 and 1904, he was engaged in a bitter fight with its General Secretary, William Johnson, MLA for Kalgoorlie. The dispute became so severe that the *Worker*’s Board decided they could not re-elect Stuart for a further term as editor.

He was, however, elected as Member of the Legislative Assembly for Mount Leonora and entered State Parliament in November 1906. A member of that same Government was John Scaddan, who went on to be the first Australian to lead a State

Halfway through 1907, while still a member of the Western Australian Legislative Assembly, Julian returned to *The Westralian Worker* for a second editorial term. In his time away, between March and June, he had joined a strike committee seeking better conditions for Kalgoorlie's woodline workers; his main interest had always been to improve the workers' lot. The woodliners' cause was one dear to his heart and he was delighted when their bid for better conditions resulted in formation of the Timberworkers Union and a settlement which gave the men a higher minimum wage. His elation, however, would soon be dashed.

Near the end of his first term in the Legislative Assembly, and recently re-selected for a second term in his seat of Leonora, Julian was called to appear in front of *The Westralian Worker*’s Board. The Board accused him of having appropriated newspaper funds for his own use. They asked him to refund the money and withdraw from the Leonora election or face criminal proceedings. Stuart asserted the matter was a ‘storm in a teacup’ and he accused the Board of having held a long-time animosity towards him. In reply, members of the Board issued a complex statement entitled ‘The “Worker” and Mr. Julian Stuart’, in which they accused Stuart of having ‘stolen money from the workers’. They cited clearly unacceptable bookkeeping practices and revealed an admission by Stuart that he ‘must have had the money’. Julian never defended himself against the accusation; he refunded the money and withdrew from election.

Just before Western Australia’s 1908 State election, Julian Stuart had lost his position as editor of *The Westralian Worker* and did not contest the seat of Mount Leonora. He emerged as someone who stood by his own opinions, who would resist any opposition and obviously considered himself above the judgements made against him, unlike Tom Prichard, the father of Katharine Susannah Prichard, a later contemporary of Julian’s son Donald. As Katharine writes about her father, he was a much-admired editor of several newspapers in Fiji, Tasmania and Melbourne, but when the papers ceased publication or encountered financial difficulties and he lost his position, his anxiety about how he would be able to feed his wife and children, and retain his independence, led to debilitating illness and severe depression. In written accounts of her life at this time, Katharine was loathe to mention the details of his death and avoided saying that he had taken his own life.
Tom Prichard was a dedicated newspaper man, while Julian Stuart, for all his writing ability, was first and foremost a Unionist, caught in the fight for workers' rights. In the face of his dismissal, Julian Stuart appears defiant, but his carelessness over the money leaves questions hanging over his part in the affair. There is the detailed accusation of misappropriated funds, for which he appears to have had no explanation, evident in his admission that he 'must have had the money', followed by the immediate repayment of the amount. The dismissal and the request that he withdraw from re-election to his Mount Leonora seat, could be seen as an understandable objection to what appeared as underhand dealings. But it could also point to an underlying rancour existing between Julian and members of the Western Australian Labor Party, perhaps related to his earlier bitter fight with the party's General Secretary, William Johnson, MLA. Added to which, his direct manner and forthrightness in parliamentary debates were unlikely to have earned him many friends. However we view his dismissal, it is clear that Julian Stuart brought much of the criticism upon himself. The event marked the beginning of a decline in the Stuarts' fortunes, the far-reaching effects of which would be felt, not only by Julian, but also by his family.

In 1906, when Julian was first elected as MLA for Mount Leonora, the Stuarts had moved from Kalgoorlie to the Perth suburb of Cottesloe. They rented one of the Burt Street cottages, thought originally to have housed men working on the nearby railway line. After more than a decade on the arid goldfields, the family found themselves situated midway between Freshwater Bay and the sparkling Indian Ocean, an abundance of water which emphasised their changed lifestyle.

At this time, the suburb of Cottesloe was undergoing an intense period of development. The recently-built railway brought picnickers to within a ten minute walk of the beach, and roads were already being constructed among the coast's dense growth of banksias, golden wattles, brilliant orange Christmas trees and spectacular spring wildflowers.

In photographs taken around the election period, Florence's rose petal hat conveys a somewhat theatrical air befitting her erstwhile operatic intentions, though her face is that of the serious 'Hypatia', social commentator on The Westralian Worker. Julian is his usual clean-shaven, unsmiling self. No longer the full-faced farm boy, he is the lean, handsome Labor politician, the workers' champion. With his loosely-knotted tie and a
carnation in the buttonhole of his dark suit, he appears to have achieved the potential recognised by the judge at the Shearers' Conspiracy trial. 66

But that was before the events of August 1908, after which Julian Stuart was forced to abandon public life and consider other ways of feeding his growing family. It is said that he took a job as a Clerk in the Water Supply, 67 then worked at 'all sorts of things, battling to bring up' his children while he and Florence continued to write. 68

For the Stuart family and those in sympathy with them, Julian’s Queensland imprisonment, his dismissal from the Westralian Worker and the end of his political career, were always seen as injustices meted out to someone who had firmly stood by his principles. For his ‘idealism and powerful personality’, 69 Julian Stuart came to be regarded as some sort of martyr. Such attitudes permeated the opinions of those close to the Stuart family and events in his later life only helped to strengthen a view that his was an unfortunate lot.
We used to roam far and wide. We'd go from Leederville where we lived ... we'd just trot out to Scarborough Beach to spend the day there.¹

During the eight or nine years the Stuart family lived in Burt Street, Cottesloe, Florence bore another four children. When Donald Robert arrived, his eldest brother, Julian Martin, was sixteen years old and a student at Perth Modern School.² His sister, Florence Lyndall, always known as Lyndall, was ten years old, and there were the two brothers, Paul Kendall, known as Ken, aged five-and-a-half years, and Ralph Waldo who had just celebrated his third birthday. Another brother, Douglas Hardie, was born two years later.

Knowing that the Stuarts’ only daughter, Lyndall, was named after the protagonist in Olive Schreiner’s novel, (1883),³ we can also perceive that Julian and Florence named others of their children after writers and exemplary figures of the time. Paul Kendall was named after Henry Kendall, the poet whom Julian had met in his youth, and Ralph Waldo for the inspirational American writer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, though there is an echo of the Waldo in Story of an African Farm. Their last son, Douglas Hardie, was most likely named after Scottish Labour leader, James Keir Hardie, who died the same year Douglas was born. In such a way was the Stuart family inclined to display its idealism and affiliations.

Donald was a toddler and Douglas only a baby when the family moved from the house in Burt Street, Cottesloe, to Tower Street in the suburb of Leederville.⁴ The first of what have come to be regarded as Donald Stuart’s semi-autobiographical novels, Drought Foal (1977), opens in Tower Street, but Stuart’s fictional character, young Colin Campbell, has an early childhood memory of another place:

in the old days, long ago when he used to stand at the side fence, holding the pickets, listening to the whistle of the unseen train, hearing sometimes, from far beyond the train, the hoarse sad long-drawn-out blurred sound, all fuzzy at the edges, of the whistle at the distant foundry. ⁵

The Burt Street cottage was built close to the railway line. When the Stuarts moved, Donald was still quite small, two or three years old, and he could well be the child
hanging on to the side fence, listening to the train and foundry whistles, sounds that would lodge in his memory forever. The description might be one of Donald’s own early memories or be the result of some good research. Perhaps it is a repeated family memory become indistinguishable from his own.

Tower Street, Leederville, is still there, though the two houses the Stuarts lived in have long since disappeared under Perth’s modern road system. The family moved again, to Gosnells and Mount Hawthorn, but, while the addresses remain, the houses are not preserved. The Gosnells house site is now a bitumenised car yard and the Mount Hawthorn cottage was moved to a beach suburb, making way for a new red brick dwelling to be built in its place.

Donald remembered his childhood as a series of adventures tagging along behind his brothers as they roamed the Perth suburbs in which they lived. One summer day, even before he had started school, he found himself perched in a fig tree, caught in the luscious scent and taste of warm figs. Another time there were pomegranates, the thrill of stealing sweetening the questionable taste of this difficult and not wholly satisfactory fruit.6

The delicious memory finds its way into Drought Foal (1977). Like Donald, the young Colin Campbell follows along behind his brothers and their friends and, even though he does not like pomegranates, he eats them to please the older boys, to be one of the crowd:

Downhill towards the Lake, they mooch along, until half-way to Vincent Street they find a pomegranate tree, hanging over a front fence... The seeds, bright red in the web of white flesh, shine glassily, wetly promising all the world of sweetness and delight... because they seem to like the taste, he grins and puts more of the red wetness in his mouth. If pomegranate is good, he will think it is good, he will let them think he likes it.7

As Donald grew older, he followed the boys further afield. From Leederville to Scarborough Beach and back is a fair trek for a seven or eight year old. They would get home ‘hungry and tired and footsore, leg-weary and sunburnt,’ and say they’d ‘had a hell of a good time’.8

The scene is a recognisable early twentieth-century suburban Perth, which in many ways coincides with other accounts of the time. Author T.A.G Hungerford, a contemporary of Donald Stuart, grew up in South Perth at the same time. As
Hungerford recalls his own family, theirs was a more comfortable existence than the Stuarts', but he evokes a similarly carefree childhood, where boys were able to roam at will and take pleasure in the natural world around them. 'We used to play where we were' he writes and goes on to describe the wealth of things to do, climbing trees, going to the zoo, finding birds' nests on the edge of Heirrison Island. Both authors recall the Chinese market gardens with their rich ripe smells, so much part of the Perth suburbs in those days, and each of them desperately desired ownership of a beautiful bantam rooster.9

Donald’s first independent move away from home came when he started school. In this new environment his ‘first love’ was Miss Iles, the infant teacher, fondly remembered as ‘Siles’ in Drought Foul. The novel’s first paragraphs are a poignantly written account of an infant’s love for his first teacher. The adoration and fulfilment are complete when she takes his hand to cross the road and ‘his heart is breaking because he is carrying Siles’ hand in the morning sunshine’.10

For Colin in Drought Foul, the journey from home to school is another adventure. He passes the grocer’s shop and the fish and chip shop each with its own delicious smell. The milkman’s horse stands outside the blacksmith’s yard, patiently waiting to be shod. The blacksmith is ‘big like father’ and he does not mind if the schoolkids stop to watch him.11

So many sights, so many sounds. The lad absorbed them all and every last one would wait until he could get around to writing about them. For his novel, Drought Foul, an older Donald Stuart reached back into this childhood to write his character, Colin Campbell, in such a way as to reflect his own life.

There is the vegetable garden, with his father’s neat rows of radishes and spring onions, some sprawling pumpkins and the brick dunny. The need for economy is ever present and the family makes journeys into the bush to gather wood for the wood pile. There they see wild orchids, banksias, kangaroo paws and so much more. His mother wipes his face with a hanky she has damped in her mouth and readers squirm with him as she ‘screws the damp cloth into his ears’ and combs his tangled hair. He loves his mother, but why does she do that? On the way back to school he wants to break away from all that baby stuff. Pissing on the vacant block alongside his brother seems like a good way to assert his independence.12
In the Stuart family, a great deal of importance was placed on books and writing, so Donald was well-prepared for school. He had already been exposed to books of all sizes and shapes, 'some almost too big for a child's small hands, the contents often years ahead of that child's mind'. He couldn't remember learning to read any more than he could remember how he learned to walk and Miss Iles had no difficulty encouraging this small boy who arrived at school already able to read anything she put in front of him.13

'Books before butter' is a comment Donald Stuart often made about his childhood, meaning that, even if there was no money for the luxury of butter, the family valued the written word so highly as to see it as a substitute for the lack of it and other extras. The early promise of Julian and Florence's life was overtaken by poverty and the family would find itself in a reduced financial state. Often, there was a scarcity of all but basic food requirements, but books could be relied upon to provide regular nourishment. When Donald came across a new word, his father would say to him: 'Go to the dictionary and make that new word your own for the rest of your days.' Looking back, he could recall the light of 'the yellow table lamp glowing in the kitchen' and his mother's warmth as she listened to him read the books he had brought home from school. He knew that his child's 'first love' for his infant teacher was 'inextricably tangled' with his love of books in general, and with one book in particular.14

Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) had a lasting effect upon Donald Stuart. He was in the habit of recommending the book to people he met,15 extolling it as 'one of only a few models of the novel,' saying that he had cut his teeth on it and was in the habit of returning to its pages throughout his life. His parents had introduced him to it at a very early age, most likely through a family reading, and he remembered having told his first teacher about Olive Schreiner's book.16

The apparently simple story has a message to convey and morals to teach, but Schreiner took the Victorian idea much further. Her book is judged to have opened up discussion on important social questions that had begun to trouble certain sections of the community. While subjecting her characters to a series of harrowing events, Schreiner examines matters of religious faith as well as questions of morality and feminist issues. She broaches the subjects in strong terms in writing which is said to have greatly influenced 'the shape and course of the late Victorian novel'.17

For most people, family life in the first part of the twentieth century was simpler and often harder than would have been considered acceptable even fifty years later. Diligent
parents may have seen this story as a way to help their children face and endure life's vicissitudes. Early in the book, the child character, Lyndall, comments 'it is only the made-up stories that end nicely', the true ones are much more likely to have 'a terrible and hateful ending', 18 a difficult pragmatism which surely discouraged any easy expectation of happy endings. For Waldo, there comes a strong message of endurance: 'Nothing lasts forever, not even the night.' 19 With the death of Lyndall, her baby and Waldo, at the story's end an unavoidable truth is made clear: 'All dies, all dies!' 20

The book's many biblical quotations are to make Schreiner's point of there being no God to rely upon and to set out her agnostic concerns. 21 Yet the words carry their own intent and the subtlety may not always have been evident to a young listener. In his later life, while eschewing any religion, Donald Stuart claimed the Bible as one of his essential books and, despite his agnostic upbringing, was known to quote readily from Ecclesiastes. 22

Schreiner's book had a long-lasting and particular significance for the Stuarts. The work had influenced Julian Alexander Stuart's growing social awareness, and beliefs held in the Stuart family echoed Schreiner's agnosticism and her feminist attitudes. When his mother, father and 'Siles' were all gone, Donald Stuart still had The Story of an African Farm, a book which carried for him some intense childhood memories and, he said, provided the model for his own writing. 23

The Stuarts were by no means an affluent family, but through the hardships of their particular lot they always lived by their firm principles of social justice, principles discussed with and instilled into the family. In the same way, the mother and father in Drought Foal (1977) often warn their children about exploitation and man's injustices to man. Colin recalls his father telling them:

"Size and colour, race, mother-tongue, religion; they're all things that divide us, but it is men's minds that unite them. And remember, all the days of your life, the Boss will always try to keep humanity divided. Don't fall for his tricks, he's a cunning one and all he wants is that you be docile and that he gets the profits." Once only he told us that, but always, in every way, he showed us how he stuck to his guns. 24

In interviews given later in his life, Donald made it clear that this was not a fiction, these were his father's views, the views he passed on to his children. Florence supported
her husband’s humanitarian and political viewpoint, but, as the story progresses, it seems clear that the family’s fortunes were sadly affected by their stand.

Prior to the outbreak of World War I, Western Australia was a diverse society ‘displaying tensions generated by class, gender and ideological and economic difference’. The War increased rather than diminished such tensions and the Public Servants Act of 1915 allowed for the dismissal of public servants on a number of counts. An unconfirmed story is that Julian Stuart was dismissed from the public service for his political beliefs.

He found work as a timber feller in the south-west, employed in clearing trees from the heavily-wooded area. The extensive clearing was to make way for a Western Australian dairy industry and so achieve a measure of independence from the eastern states. Florence and the children stayed in Perth and Julian came home for weekend visits every month or six weeks. Just like the father in Donald Stuart’s Drought Foal, he sent money home: ‘Mother gets letters from Father all the time, letters that send love and money,’ though one family memory, handed down, suggests that money was scarce in the family and Julian may not have sent money as regularly as this account suggests.

Timber felling was a difficult and physically demanding occupation. Many of those tempted by the chance of employment found themselves unsuited to the heavy work and accidents were not uncommon. Some timber workers saw their employment as a way of establishing themselves in the south-west. They built huts and humpies near where they were working and later took up residence on the farms they had developed in their spare time. If there ever was such a plan for the Stuart family, it was not realised. In his poem, ‘Clearers’, Julian moves towards the ‘rising sun,’ the ‘final fence’ when the task would be over. For him, the end of his task would come about in an unexpected and almost fatal manner.

Sometime in 1920, Julian got a job at Lyall’s timber mill, seven miles from Collie. In the course of his work, he was injured in two accidents, in the second so seriously that there was little hope of his full recovery, indeed it is difficult to understand how he survived at all.

Young Donald was just seven years old when the main accident happened, too young to realise that his father was involved in two accidents, for he only ever mentioned the one. His version of the event is that Julian was riding a jockey log being brought in on a
train, when the train turned over. Badly hurt and, suffering severe head and back injuries, he was taken straight to Collie hospital. Because the serious nature of his injuries made it impossible to move him, Julian stayed in Collie for the next eight months, then spent a further twelve months in Perth Public Hospital before he was well enough to go home.\textsuperscript{36}

Julian never worked again. At that time, there was no regular government funding for welfare\textsuperscript{37} and, as it was a while before his compensation claim came in, the family was forced to live on charity. They moved house several times and, as was common for the period, united with other family members to cope with the unfortunate circumstances.\textsuperscript{38}

For Donald, later memories of his father always included the accident, the obvious physical effects of which took their toll on Julian’s life and seriously affected the family’s fortunes. Donald’s memory of his father was as ‘a big man, with a hard, hatchet face,’ paralysed on his right hand side, his right arm in a sling and ‘walking with a stick.’\textsuperscript{39} The ‘hard, hatchet face’ may cause us to wonder how closely this description of Julian related to the person he was, but Donald also held to one pleasant memory of his father as ‘quite elderly and physically broken up, but with a clear voice,’ reading to him, ‘not rubbish, good stuff’.\textsuperscript{40}

In his writing, Donald Stuart draws his paternal characters with great sympathy and respect. Despite his disabilities, the father in the short story, ‘Long Day’, is shown as a strong, almost flamboyant figure, urging his children to improve themselves, yet ever-ready to champion them against their critics:

Father with the white stubbled lean jaw, his dead right arm slung limp in the black scarf, his dead right leg loose, his left leg braced, and the heavy cherry-wood walking stick ready to back up to the last ditch what his grey eyes said.\textsuperscript{41}

When Julian was well enough to come out of hospital, the family moved to Gosnells,\textsuperscript{42} a rural area outside the city, where small orchards, dairies and market gardens abounded. While many Perth citizens were moving to Gosnells to escape the city’s increasing population, others, including Florence and Julian Stuart, were attracted by the area’s low rents.\textsuperscript{43}
The move meant a change of school and, on the first Monday morning in September 1922, Donald and Douglas readied themselves to start at Gosnells Primary. When any of the Stuart children started at a new school, sometimes Julian went with them, at other times it was Florence. This morning, it was Florence who accompanied her two youngest sons and provided the full information required for registration. Donald, whose ninth birthday would occur a few days later, had reached Standard III at James Street Primary and Douglas, two months off his seventh birthday, had come from Standard II in James Street Infants. By now, their father was receiving some compensation for the accident and, in answer to the question of 'Occupation', Florence had him recorded as 'Pensioner'.

Whenever Julian registered his children at new schools, his answer to the question of Denomination was usually 'none'. On this day, Florence seemed determined to declare herself. In the detailed school register, under 'Denomination' the abbreviation 'Com' appears. This could possibly be a standard abbreviation for someone without a set denomination, but we cannot rule out the possibility that she was acknowledging her support for the ideals of the emerging Communist party. The difficult-to-read abbreviation may not be so much a matter of fitting the word into the narrow column, as the recorder experiencing some embarrassment at the information being given. Other parents unfailingly stated their religious belief and Florence's was not a usual reply. These newcomers to the district would obviously have difficulty fitting into the established patterns of Gosnells society.

Florence returned to the school the following day, this time with Donald's older brother, Ralph, who was just four days off his twelfth birthday and had completed Standard VI at James Street. Florence had no second thoughts and the information was repeated exactly.

Ideologically, the Stuarts were committed to ensuring their children received a good education. Perth Modern School was the first Western Australian Government High School to offer full secondary education to University level. Prior to the school's opening, in February 1911, such an education had previously unavailable to those who could not afford private schooling. Not surprisingly, the Stuarts were among those taking advantage of this new educational opportunity. Because their parents actively encouraged a love of books and emphasised correct use of the English language, the Stuart children were well ahead of many of their contemporaries. Julian Martin and
Lyndall were awarded Perth Modern scholarships and continued at the school until the ages of seventeen and sixteen respectively.46

But, the full effects of Julian's accident and the lack of a regular income were cruelly felt by Donald's older brothers, Ken and Ralph. At around the age when, like their brother and sister before them, they would have been expected to continue their education, even try for a Perth Modern Scholarship, the brothers were unable to follow the already established path and we might imagine their parents' disappointment when two of their children were forced to miss out on this advantage. 'There was no money and they had to go out to work,' Norma Stuart's husband, Ralph, had told her.47

The prolonged effect of the family's enforced poverty is a pivotal point in the story, not only for Colin Campbell, in Drought Foal, but also in the life of Donald Stuart. The family he writes about is shown as being different from other families, a point he always made about his own family. Concern about the interpretation of religion, the position of women and the role of education, were being voiced by other educated and forward-looking members of the wider community, but the Stuarts' views were more likely to have been considered different and alienating because of the straitened circumstances in which they were forced to live. If they had been able to move in more enlightened circles, their opinions would not have isolated them in the same way.

It must have been in Gosnells that Donald, with the growing awareness of any nine-year old, began to recognise that his family was not like other families, that he and his siblings were 'not superior, but a little bit different from other kids'.48 His very use of the word points to the Stuarts' capacity to consider their difference in a superior light.

Early in the twentieth century, members of the Gosnells community had organised fundraising activities to build and establish district schools, churches, community facilities, halls and sports grounds. Immediate social groups had formed around community endeavours, the dances, celebrations and sporting activities arranged to encourage interaction with groups from the surrounding districts. Many of the district's residents managed on a limited income and were, understandably, proud of their achievements. Not unusual for the time, this was a community clustered around its schools and churches, the facilities so painstakingly achieved. Local history photographs are of the buildings, the children in school gardens, in school groups and on Sunday school picnics.49
The Stuart children did not go to Sunday school. That was one thing Donald remembered as having made him feel 'outgrouped'. Being agnostics, Florence and Julian had brought up their children accordingly, though there appears to have been some understanding that they could make up their own minds about religion later. Donald told one interviewer:

my father said on one occasion, "You know, I don't believe in this reincarnation but if I did believe in reincarnation, I would wish to be reincarnated as a Chinese market gardener's carthorse." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because they're never out of work and they're always fat." That was as much religious instruction as we ever got. We were brought up completely without benefit or assistance of any sort from religion. We didn't need it.

His family's stance on religion was not the only area to cause Donald discomfort; his father's insistence on proper use of the English language isolated him even further. If the Stuart boys used bad language, their father would be only mildly concerned, but if they used bad grammar he would easily flick a stick across their bare calves.

The family's impoverished state only served to emphasise Donald's sense of separation. The Stuarts were considered to be 'among the poor' and were, Donald said, 'miserably poor'. One of his childhood memories was of the Perth charitable organisation, the 'Ugly Men's Association', a group of Perth businessmen who concentrated on providing what they called 'civilian relief'. The Stuarts were not the only family taking advantage of this local charity; in the twelve months to August 1927, the 'Uglies' assisted 3,000 people, providing clothing, blankets, boots and furniture. An older Donald Stuart readily conjured up the youngster's embarrassment as he sat beside his mother, waiting for her to be called into the office, and his abhorrence of the brown paper parcel of second hand clothing they carried home.

In his writing, Donald Stuart shows the boy becoming more and more self-sufficient, developing within himself, establishing his own strategies for pushing away the embarrassment of his family's poverty, his sense of isolation. Yet, while overcoming the limitations of his life, he still clings to his strong family allegiance and maintains his sense of family pride.
and looked his hands around the broken limb. As he squatted he turned his head back, with eyes opened wide, not so good, with the others there above, splashing and storing the water that still worthwhile. Best of all though, when the hoist was still and you could go to the bottom and look up at the light, knowing there was no one for a mile around and no one knew you were there, and the bubbles of your splash-disdrifting and were gone, and the sunlight came weaving down through the water and your ears hunt, and you had the shadeless one. Knowing how dangerous it all was.

He straightened his legs and pushed off from the log, going up, spiralling, breaking the surface with a splash and a splutter. Dog-paddling to the bank, it was easy to swing on the branch that Tom had trimmed with the axe, and heave up until you could throw one leg over, and twist your body up and sit astride on the rough trunk and slowly get your feet in position and stand up, balanced, and walk the four phases along the limb and.
The short story, 'Long Day', belongs to the Gosnells period. Poised, naked, on a rock, the boy contemplates his dive into the pool below, lives in the moment, relishing the challenge of his actions:

Best of all though, when the pool was still and you could go to the bottom and look up at the light, knowing there was no one for a mile around, and no one knew you were there… and you had the shudder of knowing how dangerous it was.  

The boy is sure of his father's support; he would fill in the blue form and the one word 'indisposition' would be enough to explain his absence from school. Father would fend off the headmaster, and Mrs Middleton if she complained about the nakedness. 'Most of them round about knew better than to cross with father.'

More important is the boat they have made from a piece of stolen roofing iron. The craft floats and fulfils the dream. The adventure comes to a surprising end, when, helping to carry the boat home, the boy is knocked over by Old Man Allison's new truck. But this is no disaster. He has had an 'accident' and broken an arm, just like father. He will have to wear a sling and, until the fracture heals, he will sit in the sun with father listening to his yarns about the old days. His great day is complete.

No matter how closely, or not, this story represents an actual event in Donald's life, the sense of freedom and confidence is evident. The boy is testing himself against outside forces, winning and overcoming, whatever the mishap, developing his individuality and strongly identifying with his father. The family is managing its difficult situation and, despite his disability, the father is still a figure to be reckoned with.

A more sinister picture is shown in the, apparently unpublished, short story, 'Time Telescoped'. The setting is still the creek, but the boy is a troubled youngster, angry and caught in his own misery. The family's only income is the father's pension and money is short; 'never a penny to spend, never a moment of fun or excitement, nothing from day to day, from week to week, but his father's sourness and the crabbed nagging of his mother'. This father has a useless body, he is 'a hulk in a wicker chair, his mind a peevishness and a futile senility' and the mother's nagging is about her son's misbehaviour at school. The boy already has an awareness of the world's harshness: 'He knew, even at eight years, something of the evil of the world'; he has heard about the
rouseabout at Greenway’s Dairy who was ‘sly with youngsters’ and of other things going on behind the barn. When a threatening male figure appears on the creek bank opposite, the lad is wary enough to run away. The twist comes with the revelation that the man is the youngster now grown, a slick Sydney crook, come back to visit the scene of his childhood and remember ‘his barefoot days, with a crackpot cripple for a father and a mother who was all rage and tears and futility’. 59

At the end of his life, Donald would remember his father as having been ‘strong, even after the timber mill accident that left him with a right leg that swung half-paralyzed and a totally paralyzed right arm.’ He also saw that his mother had been strong and wrote, ‘in hindsight I marvel at her fortitude’. 60 Nevertheless, in these two stories, the basic situation matches that of the Stuarts’, the actuality of which, for all Donald’s loyalty towards his parents, must have given rise to feelings of anger and frustration on all sides. The second story is the only piece of Donald Stuart’s writing in which he suggests a family seriously affected by their position, with a mother and father thwarted in their ambitions for themselves and their children and giving vent to their feelings.

In the novel, Drought Foal, the boy, Colin, begins to grow away from the family. Still following along behind his bigger brothers and their friends, and with a growing awareness of things outside the family, he begins to break away from his sheltered childhood. Memories of his idolised infant teacher and his mother’s warmth as she read to him in the kitchen are replaced by night-time sorties to spy on country lovers and a growing awareness of illicit sex and his own sexuality. He becomes proud of his prowess at stringing together the ‘GodjesusChrist Sunday School bloody names together for curse words;’ 61

We were good lads, full of mischief...and we were bad little bastards, dirty minded bloody minded tormentors of the weak, liars and peeping Toms, cowardly half-grown jackals. 62

When it came to ‘swinishness of every sort,’ the other boys had the edge on Colin and his brother. But ‘we could not admit them to intellectual parity with us,’ because there were no books in their home.

In this writing, Donald Stuart slips from third to first person viewpoint, heightening the sense of this as the author telling his own story. The boy’s realisation of difference intensifies, but so does his family sense of superiority.
I was different, we were different, and because of our difference we were seen by our small community as inferior. I scorned them and in my secret heart and mind, I held them in contempt.

Those who knew Donald in his later life, would have no difficulty in recognising this attitude. He had assumed his father’s forthright manner. The overall effect of the two accidents, and the Gosnells experience, had forced a defiant pattern upon the youngster’s behaviour.

In February 1924, the Stuarts moved back to Perth, to Egina Street, Mount Hawthorn, an address which would be ‘home’ for one or another of the Stuart family for the next forty years. One family memory, handed down, has the boys in this ‘fiercely intelligent, proud Stuart family’, growing up ‘sleeping in the shed’ in the garden, ‘three to a bed, with no sheets...just rough Army blankets, and no shoes’. The family’s financial situation may not have improved greatly, but there was still the singing. Donald remembered how his mother, ‘sweeping this miserable little cottage with a straw broom,’ would burst into singing, something such as the mad scene from Donizetti’s Lucia Di Lammermoor.

Florence’s brother, Bill Collins, who sang alongside her in their Coolgardie days, had moved to Perth some years earlier and now ran the Western Dairy Company in William Street. Donald described his uncle’s shop as ‘a pie joint’ and held to a lasting memory of passing it one day, leaning on the safety chain at the back of a Perth tram. His uncle was singing ‘this great operatic aria’ and, with mixed pride and embarrassment, Donald listened to favourable comments made by the people on the bus. This uncle, he remembered, had the same interest in English, in communicating with words, as did his mother and father.

Julian continued to write small articles almost until his death in July 1929; his station anecdote, ‘Crooked Mick’s Pastry’, appeared in the Australian Worker as late as October 1928. His right hand was useless, but he set about teaching himself to use his left hand. His grand-daughters remembered an exercise book in which he had practised writing, the words laboriously formed in indelible pencil, effort and determination evident in every letter and gradual improvement, page by page. Writing was what he
could do and he was determined to keep on doing it. Pieces published in the Sydney Bulletin and the Sunday Times brought in the odd half-crown, a meagre contribution to the family income.

Once the written pieces were finished, Donald and Douglas were given the task of copying out Julian’s still rather spidery hand. With no typewriter, the poems and articles had to be reproduced in legible handwriting. No doubt, Julian’s editorial past made him a stern taskmaster. The boys would have had to be most careful with their writing, spelling and punctuation, and to concentrate on absolute reproduction of what Julian had written. We can imagine how they held their breath while he went through each piece carefully, and their relief at his pronouncement: ‘Yes, right, let it go off to the Sydney Bulletin.’

When he was about eleven or twelve years old and at Mount Hawthorn Primary School, Donald began to reap the benefit of his father’s insistence on the proper use of English and careful concentration upon words and their meanings. The other kids noticed his success in the area of essay writing and asked him to write their set compositions for them. They paid him in chewing gum or whatever was going and he might do five or six compositions at a time. Not that he, or his fellow students, could get away with the subterfuge for long. One Monday morning, the Headmaster, remembered as ‘old Tom Lux,’ called for Donald:

He’d read all the little half-page, page-and-a-half, two-page compositions. He looked at me and he said, “By the Lord, Stuart, you’ve had a busy week-end.” And I didn’t feel the least bit put down. I thought well, I’ve got my place.

Such obvious brightness ensured that Donald’s teachers would encourage him to sit for the Perth Modern School entrance examination. The family seems to have recovered sufficiently to accept the possibility that he would follow where his brother and sister had gone before. Five-year Government High Schools had now been established in Kalgoorlie, Northam, Bunbury and Albany, but Perth Modern School was ‘still the only government high school in the Perth metropolitan area offering full secondary education’.

Though he was there for a period of less than two years, Donald Stuart’s biographical details always proudly mention the time he attended Perth Modern School, and not
without reason. Within Western Australia, anyone who attended 'Modern' at any stage in its history is immediately identified as having initially achieved a standard above average and as having been exposed to a superior level of education within the state system.

He must have been among the top fifty place-getters in that year's entrance examination, for, like his brother and sister before him, Donald was awarded one of the competitive Perth Modern scholarships. He started his first term in February 1926 and elected to enter the Teaching Course.

During his first year, he was absent only a few times with minor illnesses. His teachers considered him to have 'average ability' and at least one divined his intelligence, but they were annoyed by his carelessness, untidiness and laziness and, at the end of the year, he had not achieved as high a general result as they would have liked. These remarks would not have been unusual on any school report of the time. Teachers at Modern set high standards for their students, demanded certain levels of behaviour and achievement be met, and lavish praise was not usually forthcoming. However, Donald did shine at the end of the year when he stood on the school stage as one of six boy sopranos singing in the Eighth Annual School Concert. 19

His second year was fraught with difficulty. In March, he had clearly upset Miss Baker who complained about him not doing his homework and went on to remark that she found him: 'Very unsatisfactory, inattentive and annoying.' His language ability was recognised, but he was no mathematician. Before much more of the year had passed he was reported twice for 'unsatisfactory conduct and neglect'. Various family reasons were given as excuses for his mid-year absences and, though one teacher detected a slight improvement in his behaviour at the end of August, this was shortly after he had been 'caught in disorder' by the headmaster. If he was to keep his scholarship the following year, Donald was warned that he needed to show some improvement. 20

Donald's later memories of home around this time always dwell on the poverty which continued to affect the family; 'we knew really grinding, terrible poverty...we grew up with no pretension, no ideas that everything was rosy—because it wasn’t'. 21 A teenage boy’s appetite is notoriously difficult to satisfy and in Donald’s memory there was not too much food, certainly no extras. He told one interviewer:
I have no recollection - I am being quite honest in this — I have no recollection in Leederville or Mt. Hawthorn of knowing butter on the table. I have no recollection of tinned jam, golden syrup or treacle, tomato sauce. Holbrook's sauce, mustard, pickles, never showed at all.  

For Donald, the lack of butter, and all the other spreads that went with it, became the measure of his family's hardship. Butter was an extra, something you could do without; it was a commodity that must be bought and, when there was no money, there was no butter. Dripping, rendered from fat scraps scraped off the meat, was a much more available spread for those who were struggling. Butter on the table was a status symbol which carried some sense of prosperity, a sign of sufficient money in the household purse, and people who ate butter regularly were seen as doing better than those who ate dripping or margarine. As Donald told it, whenever he recalled this period of his life, the lack of butter was a measure of his family's poverty. Meat was also a luxury, just

three penn'orth of beef and mutton pieces—block trimmings as they call them—and three penn'orth of soup vegetables boiled up... a handful of rice or barley, a bit of salt... That was a stew and it had to go a long way.

Most pupils at Perth Modern School came from families that could not afford private schooling and some of Donald's fellow students may well have known similar privations. Some may have had extra money to spend, but none of them, he remembered, was what he would call 'well off'. For most students who gained entrance to Perth Modern, the original intention must always have been to stay at school for as long as possible, with parents emphasising the advantages and pointing out the opportunities. Nevertheless, where there were circumstances working against them, those who had attained the then official school leaving age of fourteen could always opt for another path.

During September 1927, Donald had a 'sore toe' and missed school for three days. Then, abruptly, just ten days after his fourteenth birthday, 23 September is recorded as his last day at Perth Modern. His two brothers had left school at that age and he may well have been waiting for the day when he could do the same.

Family members and those who knew Donald questioned how much his decision to leave school was a necessity or how much came down to his individuality, just 'Donald being Donald'. By all accounts, at the age of fourteen, his individuality was already
firmly in place, but when family and colleagues gave their later judgement, it was based on a memory of the older Donald, the Donald they knew, the man he had become, not the vulnerable lad trying to come to terms with what life was all about.

From an impatient fourteen-year-old’s view, the family situation was not all it might have been. More than six years had passed since Julian’s accident; his health having deteriorated even further with a severe stroke which necessitated his return to hospital. Donald remembered his mother as having been ‘not robust in her middle years’; Florence was ill on several occasions during the following year when she and Lyndall spent time in hospital. In Drought Foal, Colin’s mother suffers heart trouble and he comes ‘to take it for granted that father was in Perth Public Hospital and would stay there indefinitely’.

But there was something more going on.

In November 1927, Donald Stuart was caught making obscene calls from a Mount Hawthorn telephone box. He refused to give his name and address, a charge the arresting Police Constable brought against him two days later when he appeared in the Perth Children’s Court. Donald was fined ten shillings and put on remand for a week. At his next court appearance, the charge was spelled out. He had ‘made use of obscene language in a telephone message’ and was released on probation until he was 18 years old.

In his novel, Drought Foal, Donald Stuart elaborates on a similar incident, relating the event to Colin Cambell’s abrupt departure from school. ‘Sure, like so many more, he left school because of poverty, but it wasn’t as simple as that, not half so straightforward.’ Encouraged by one of his mates, he had begun to make obscene calls from a telephone box. Once he got started ‘it had gone ahead by leaps and bounds’.

‘Encouraged by one of his mates’ might be some protestation of innocence, just as the stealing of figs in Leederville, and the spying on couples in Gosnells, was also supposed to have been entered into as the result of Colin following along behind his brothers and the older boys. This involvement in yet another questionable activity, brought about because of the influence exerted by those around him, is at odds with the boy’s individual will made so much of elsewhere in Donald Stuart’s writing. In effect, he becomes just another rebellious teenager following the crowd and not inclined to consider what he is getting himself into. In the fictional version, we are told: ‘Eric Ardagh had taught him, and he’d learned quickly,’ the details are explicit and the boy is
shown as entering into the activity with enthusiasm: 'Funny, the different ways that different women reacted when he asked them dirty questions.'

Just as Donald Stuart was apprehended, so is Colin Campbell. He had forgotten Eric’s warning to get away quickly, and remembers the policeman leaning his bike against the telephone box and taking him to Leederville police station. Colin spends a night in the Receiving Home and, after he has made an appearance in the Children’s Court, he is sent to work on a farm in Dalwallinu, an imposed isolation meant to give him ‘a clean break’ from his past.

One thing about being on the farm, there is plenty of food, but the work is hard. His ‘Mother writes regularly’ giving news of his brothers, telling him that Father is now in the Claremont Old Men’s Home and still no better, saying how much they all miss him and sending love. Everything seems to go well for a while, but it soon becomes evident that Colin is not up to the demands of the farming job. One day, the angry farmer calls him ‘a weakling’ and tells him he will have to go. Colin travels to Perth on the train and, as he walks from the railway station to Mount Hawthorn, he wonders what will happen next and how he will tell his mother that he has lost his job. The threat of further ill-treatment is in the back of his mind.

Though Donald’s arrest was not until the end of November, two months after he left school, this was unlikely to have been the first obscene phone call he had made. It is a matter for speculation how closely the fictional version is related to the incident in which Donald Stuart was involved. Years later, the author was inclined to drop hints that this was his own story and the Court records confirm the event. We might assume some autobiographical content, no doubt exaggerated by time and the author’s awareness of his audience, but in considering this as an actual incident in the author’s life, a connection might well be made with his premature school leaving and it also provides a possible reason for his leaving home at the age of fourteen-and-a-half years.

The novel, *Drought Foal*, contains no sudden ‘leaving home’ scene, but the moment begged a retelling. From his maturity and a later perspective, Donald Stuart looked back on the day which came to define his life. His stories of a boy leaving home hold some similarity to his own situation and offer an interpretation of the boy’s actions. Sometimes we need to take out our story, hold it in our hands, let it reflect in the present, come up with an explanation, for ourselves and, maybe, for others.
The beginning of the short story, 'Decision', gives some insight into what might have been going on in the boy's mind. A jobless and despondent young man frets over his bleak future; he wants more than this meagre existence, the sandy suburban backyard, the constant hunger. At least one of his friends has gone off to the goldfields, but he knows he is too young, only fifteen, and too small to convince anyone he is older. Then, fate plays into his hands. His mother gives him a ten-shilling note and asks him to go for a 'tin of Golden Syrup from Donovan's...the store on the corner of Melville and Chapman Streets'. The note is the 'last money in the house' till his father's pension comes in, any change is already spoken for and he is warned not to lose it 'for heaven's sake'. The boy sets off, walks past the shop's open door and keeps going, on and out of the city. He jumps his first train and within a week is 'a thousand miles away'. From what little we know, this seems like a fairly accurate account of what happened that day. In its several tellings, the story has become distorted and you may take your pick of butter, bread or treacle, all the extras that other people and, according to Donald, not the Stuarts, spread upon their bread, the lack of which proved for him the family's straitened circumstances.

Another short story, 'The Blue Horse', based on a visit made to the hospital bedside of his dying brother, Ken, also has a distinctly autobiographical flavour. The story gathers together the two lives, that of the brother who didn't go to Perth Modern, but stayed home to build up a successful business, and the wandering brother who left without notice and did not come back for seven years. The sick brother recalls his younger sibling's imaginative tales, what was seen as glib lying and easy misbehaviour, but which the narrator establishes as an early storyteller with a lively imagination. In the small brother's 'light blue horse with dark blue eyes, and the breath from his nostrils...fiery red, red as fire' rattling plates on the kitchen dresser, the boy's nighttime imagination is at work. His older brother provides a rational answer, their father is snoring, but the child clings to his fantasy. Miss Iles is mentioned in this story and a less loving teacher, Miss Ferrier. Absconding with the 'half a pound a' butter' is seen as yet another of the younger brother's misdemeanours. 'Always were a bit of a crank,' the older one remarks. At the end of this life, there is some sense that the sick brother had envied the other's freedom, at least appreciated it as an alternative to his own suburban life. The younger brother would have us believe that he does not understand the other's view, but he is smugly self-satisfied at the way his own life has turned out. The story
ROAMING THE SUBURBS

conveys an easy family acceptance of this younger brother's misbehaviour; after all, he was a Stuwart and his father's stories had encouraged him to make his own way in the world.

The story, 'Case History', is an updated version of the running away episode, in which a young chap in a railway carriage meets up with an older man who questions the boy and finds out that he is leaving home. The man is the observer who, from his now wider understanding, places himself in the youngster's position. He asks the boy what he thinks his parents may be feeling about his disappearance. But this is no sudden decision, for the boy has made many attempts to leave home and been brought back more than once. He has finally convinced his mother and father he is mature enough to be out on his own and determined to get on with his life in the wider world. In this rebellious, deeply thoughtful teenager, the man recognises a kindred spirit. He has done this himself, felt the same urge to leave home. Aware that this is a fragment of his own life being replayed, the man assesses his own earlier actions and has no regrets. Having at first viewed this older man as just another adult trying to stop him following his own path, the youngster realises he has found a sympathetic listener.41

Lyndall Hadow's story, 'Sunday Afternoon', also tells of a boy leaving home, not necessarily her brother; in the Depression years, the scene was being played out in more than one home around the country. This boy is the son of a poverty-stricken, 'dusted' miner trying to farm on the Yilgarn. Unlike Donald's lack of goodbyes, this is a poignantly written farewell scene, where the tired and pregnant mother pleads with the boy not to go and his twin sisters cling to him. He promises he will write and send money when he's got a job and, with a 'bravado born of his shabby youth, he hustles off down the road'.42 Talking about his sister's story, in a radio interview, Donald Stuart identified with the boy and his wish to leave home:

He'd go off as so many of us went off, to carry the swag, to jump trains, to go bush. We all had our dreams of bicycles...a utility, a gramophone. We didn't want a helluva lot...we wanted a job, full-time work.43

Donald had absorbed Julian's stories about his positive youth and hopeful young manhood. The father's passion as he told about the shearers' struggles for improved conditions and his adventurous outback journeying had their own effect on his son. As
Donald considered leaving home and making his way on the road, these romantic pictures must have contributed to the bravado of his final leaving.

For walking out with his mother's last shillings, we can brand him selfish and unthinking; and there is an awareness of this in 'The Blue Horse': 'Nothing to be proud of, even looking back at it.' We might look for the optimistic youngster dreaming that he can bring back more, make the difference, be the one to put everything right, but he had made no fortune 'nothing but a bare living'. Individuality, selfishness, bravado, survival, naivety, we can see all of these in his story. But we must also see that he was a hungry fourteen-and-a-half year old and his family was having a hard time. 'Too many mouths to feed at home,' was Donald's explanation, 'I just shot through.'

Many years later, his younger brother, Douglas, remembered the time. The thirteen-year old had not greatly regretted his brother leaving, probably a not unusual reaction within a family where everyone was fighting for their place at the table.
Florence Lyndall Stuart, Donald’s sister.

Yoothapina Station, Meekatharra. *circa* 1934. *l. to r.* Wally (Crighton?), Reg Oxenburgh and Donald Stuart.
For more than a decade, from the age of fifteen and into manhood, Donald adopted the outback life and only ever went back home ‘once or twice’.1

Norma Stuart, wife of his older brother, Ralph, remembered one time when he did come back, another example of Donald dictating his own terms. His brother Ken, who lived in the then sparsely populated beachside suburb of Scarborough, arranged for Donald to be apprenticed to a butcher.2 Ken is the older brother in Donald’s short story ‘The Blue Horse’, the one who worries about his younger brother wanting ‘nothing more from life than the right to go on’ as he always had.

In those days, home delivery was an accepted way of shopping and Donald was given the job of calling on housewives to take their weekly orders. The butcher was to make up the orders and Donald would collect the money when he delivered the meat on Fridays. To Ken it looked like an opening, an opportunity, but Donald saw things differently and disappeared, much the same as when he had left home. ‘He went around and got all the orders and then thought “I’m going away,” and he just vanished,’ said Norma. There was never any hint that he had stolen the money, but he did not deliver the meat. ‘I don’t think he even took the orders to the shop,’ she said, ‘because all the people started coming to Ken’s place and saying: “We’ve got no meat for the weekend.”’ Ken had to go around, collect the orders again and take them to the butcher before the shop closed.3 Even if Donald had not stolen the customers’ money, it is likely that Ken had given something to the butcher to get him started. The narrator in the short story, ‘The Blue Horse’, admits to having let his brother down: ‘Oh, not for a great amount of money, but maybe a great amount of faith. Well, he’d never made a fuss of it...He grew to accept that I was a bit of a dope, I s’pose.’4

This might well be an older Donald reassessing the event from a viewpoint other than his own, something he had not been noted for in his youth. The Stuart family had a great capacity for forgiveness and, in the stories told, they expressed a particular fondness for him and displayed an easy acceptance of his waywardness.
Ken’s elder daughter, June (Ana), the first Stuart of the next generation, remembered her Uncle Donald staying at their Scarborough house on his infrequent visits back to Perth. She had vivid memories of him as ‘an attractive man, one of the most attractive males...aware of his own vitality’, but for her, an element of danger was attached to his visits. His stories about the north-west indigenous Australians were enthralling, but Donald insisted on challenging her with word puzzles and other conundrums. She was made well aware that, being the eldest niece, she must do well, uphold the Stuart family’s reputation and win a scholarship to Perth Modern School.5

Douglas, the youngest Stuart brother, also remembered when Donald came home. ‘He was like in the Seven Ages of Man, “full of strange oaths”,’ said Douglas, quoting from Jaques’ speech in Shakespeare’s As You Like It: ‘Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard, /Jealous in honour; sudden and quick in quarrel.’6 After his time in the bush, it was a very different Donald who arrived in Perth. ‘He came back mad about horses,’ his brother said. ‘He had found a niche amongst people whose living was horses and he was addicted to horses.’7

Donald was never going to stay around to become a Scarborough delivery boy. He had adjusted to the continual movement and variety, uncertainty and challenge of bush life. For him, there was no comparison with that and life in suburban Perth and he eschewed his family’s expectations of him. The itinerant pattern of his life was established; a settled existence was not in his sights. As far as he was concerned, ‘there was nothing to come back to’ and, in his opinion, the family was only just making out.

From then on, he was away ‘oh, for years at a time’. He preferred the life of no commitments, freedom to move as and when he liked and no one to consider but himself.8

At some time during this period, Donald acquired the nickname, ‘Scorp’. Different stories exist as to how it came about, but this is how he told it. He was on his way from Perth, out at Herne Hill, and he put his swag down on a railway station while he went to find out when the next goods train was due. When he got back, someone had stolen it. He was ‘just a kid’ working on a construction site and he thought he would be able to replace the swag with his next pay. But when pay day came around, instead of receiving cash as he had expected, he was given a ground sheet, a new pair of boots and other ‘odd things’, but no razor. His beard grew and he developed a habit of wetting the index finger of his right hand and ‘on the right side of my chin,’ he said, ‘I would sort of twist
the beard...and it stuck out in a spike...a flat spike it was, four inches long.' One of the
workers said that one day he would come round a corner and poke someone's eye out,
because 'it sticks out like a bloody scorpion'. No matter how Donald tried to discard the
name, it followed him around. To the mates he worked with in his various outback
occupations and to those who were with him in the Army, he was always known as
'Scorp' Stuart, a name which seemed to fit his particular brand of sharpness, his quick
observation and readiness with the incisive remark which twisted the obvious meaning
beyond usual interpretation.

Years later, looking back to the time when he had been a young swaggie, Donald said
that he got by with 'some bush sense and, oh, a bit of guidance from the older men'. He
always acknowledged how much he owed the men who welcomed him to their bushfires
and helped him on his way. 'It's no use growing up in the company of hard, tough,
cy nical old bushmen...the greatest sentimentalists in the world,' he said, 'if you don't
learn something from them.' At another man's campfire you heard news about where
to find work, could swap yarns and share basic rations. You always hoped to have your
own campfire one day and be able to return the hospitality, but for a boy new to the
track there was a lot to learn. As Donald Stuart said: 'At a bushman's campfire, when
there are other men...there is more protocol to be observed than there is at the Court of
St. James's.'

When he managed to get a homestead job, he was surprised at the generous servings
of food. Homemade fig jam and dripping had been his family's mainstays. On stations
such as he described in his short story, 'Shearing Time '28', it was the lavish provision
of extras that he remembered. 'It was nothing uncommon then for me to see...on the
station hands' table...a bottle of tomato sauce, a bottle of Holbrook's sauce, a tin of jam
and some mustard,' and while he does not say so, there was probably butter. The very
presence of these items only served to emphasise what had been a lack of them on the
Stuarts' table. Yet, in some strange way, he thought the privations he experienced at
home had helped him to survive his time on the road. The general difficulties, lack of
food and comfort of that time, he said, 'didn't worry me overmuch, because I'd been
used to it.'

He was on the Murchison, the eastern goldfields and 'round about everywhere', but
fairly early on he got into the Pilbara and once there he felt at home. 'This is it. This is
the good place,' he thought and, for the rest of his life, he knew this was where he felt comfortable. He had some fondness for Broome in the West Kimberley, but was not quite at ease with the Kimberley green. He preferred the Pilbara, drought country, where seasons of abundant rain came from the south or north only by chance. Over the years he would go through this country on foot or riding on a horse and, eventually, in a 'good Landrover'.

He worked as a cattle drover, prospected for gold and got involved in mining projects. He was a camel driver, found jobs on sheep and cattle stations and undertook work 'in all the various bush callings', including horse breaking, fencing, and well-sinking—in the days when wells and post holes were dug by hand. In between, he often 'trudged wearily carrying the swag'. There were some hard times, cold nights on the railway yards, towns without work, hunger and thirst. He learnt 'on the job' and picked up his knowledge along the way.

His was a rough upbringing but, as he sipped hot sweet tea from chipped tin pints, he absorbed the yarns and bush philosophies that permeated this outback life. He had the outsider's knack of watching and, as he absorbed the stories told around camp fires, immersed himself in bushwork and came to know the land, he 'maintained such incredibly detailed memories' of all he had seen and experienced, that he would be able to reproduce the scenes vividly in his novels and short stories. By the time he came to write about them, his memories of the earlier days had been supplemented by repeated visits to the north-west and more work in the bush. He had an endless store of material to call upon and did not need notes:

If you've been forty-five years in the back country, droving and prospecting and all the other work there is, carrying the swag, meeting all sorts of people, you don't need to take notes, it becomes part of you.

Apart from his two war novels, Crank Back on Roller (1979) and I Think I'll Live (1981), the 'back country, droving and prospecting and all the other work' was what he wrote about mostly. Unlike the mannered, carefully-crafted short stories of his sister, Lyndall Hadow, Donald Stuart's short tales of the outback are most often written as yarns. His knowledge supplies an intriguing amount of detail and a sure sense of time and place, but the story is often presented as a portrait and may not come to a neat
conclusion, as if the author is not quite sure of the ending himself. These often slow-moving, considered tales convey the energy of a life where hard physical work is the norm. In the stories and novels, the dramatic country and the human endeavour that Donald Stuart was intent on highlighting lend an insistent quality to his work. Uncertainty comes from not knowing when his characters might meet an unexpected demand, or have a challenge thrown at them across the slow conversation.

In later years, Donald Stuart would trace north-west Aboriginal initiation ceremonies, long journeys, privation, tests of strength and endurance. It is impossible to escape the idea that his white protagonists and, by association, Donald Stuart, are all caught in a continuing initiation. Their elders are the old men sitting around the ritual campfires, talking and passing on their knowledge. In this scene, the fully-initiated and reliable proper men are the older, consummate bushmen, cattle drovers and cameleers who provide solid role models for these youngsters.

What emerges is a vivid picture of life in the Australian bush at a particular time. Donald Stuart’s deeply evocative descriptions of this north-west landscape convey a life-long, deep regard for his ‘Beloved Land’.23

Hard country, spinifex, mulga, dry creeks, rivers of sand and stone, cloudless skies... Soft pearl shell skies on the eastward horizon at the first streak of daylight, and the morning star fading as the pearl shell quickly silvers and turns brazen.24

Donald recollected this time in interviews given later in his life. There are no diaries and few letters to support the period, but he made sure to capture this decade of his youth and young manhood in his writing, recording his participation in a scene he perceived as past or passing. Even though the stories were written by an older Donald Stuart, with hindsight and from another awareness, he maintained an ability to reproduce the growing lad’s uncertainties and enthusiasms, his youthful willingness to try anything and weather the consequences. Donald always said he could only write about what he knew.25 He tried to deny an autobiographical element in his writing, but on several occasions admitted to semi-autobiography and, in some cases, overtly identified with his protagonist. We know that his own experiences fed his work and, even allowing for the writer’s temptation to expand and shape, his writing gives us more than a glimpse of his life during these outback years.
Camels ‘stalk slowly, the chains tighten and slack off,’ the wagon wheels ‘turn ponderously’ and they move forward steadily, day by day. In *Prince of My Country* (1974), the young Davey Redman is on an apprenticeship walk alongside the cameleer Peter Lawson. He is learning about ‘the humps’, but the long slow journey to take salted rawhides to Port Hedland for ‘shipping away’ is set to become a life lesson. Peter Lawson is one of the bush philosophers whose persistent presence in this novel led Thomas Shapcott to suggest that Davey Redman ‘must rank as the most preached at young man since Federation’. Maybe there is a bit too much of it, but the talk is important to the journey, the odd philosophies, life observations and idealistic values are as much for the record as any other part of this tale. As Peter Lawson expresses the worker’s view, the battler’s lot, rails against the bosses, upholds the workers and expounds his ideas about the ownership of land, the author’s lifetime values are openly visible, giving Donald Stuart a forum to express the deeply held socialist principles he had learned from his father. Davey recognises that he is being preached at, but he is sorry for the old men with their sad views on women and tolerant of Peter Lawson’s sometimes unfathomable advice. It is the journey and its gradual unfolding which makes the greatest impression on him. He is mesmerised by the country they pass through:

The hobbled camels feed at night and the deep sound of the Condamine bells at their necks keeps the teamster in touch with them. Night-time talk is set against daytime walking and in the camels’ slow rhythmic shamble, the journey unravels time. Talk is the bushman’s currency and the journey is Donald Stuart’s milieu.

The short story, ‘Shearing Time ’28’, fits into the early period of Donald’s journeys in the bush, not only because of the title, but also because of references to age and experience. In the brash fifteen-year old swinging his way on and off trains, we recognise a character written around the young Donald Stuart’s experiences. The lad has been ‘battling around the bush’ for six months, getting the odd bit of casual station
work, and has gathered enough courage to think about asking for a job at a shearing shed. An old-timer, Mark Brennan, invites the youngster to join him. 'The Billy's nearly ready' and there is standard fare, tea, bread and cold mutton. Thinking to make his own contribution, the boy produces a 'Vesta' to light their rolled cigarettes, but Brennan tells him to put his 'Number Four' away. 'There were fires before there were matches,' he says, pulling a burning stick from the embers. The old bushman starts his own smoke, then hands on the firestick, a gesture which highlights the campfire's ritual nature. The two settle down to yarn and the boy tells how he had 'a few weeks out from Yalgoo, mustering. Scrub so thick the kangaroos can't get room to hop'. It is a tall tale—he is already at home with 'the tradition of bush lying', the storytelling and exaggerated yarns told to entertain and impress the audience. The characters are all in place, the young, inexperienced boy, making his way alone on the track, befriended by the older bushman who likes the lad, helps him along by claiming him as his 'nephew' and steers him through the formalities of getting a job. Chasing sheep in the yards pays 'fifty shillings and tucker'. There is food, plenty of it, and the lad's insatiable appetite is cause for comment. He fills his belly, has money for new clothes and, for the first time, sees a shearing shed in full swing. It is just as his father told him, 'with all the bustle and tear, the hurrying and scurrying, the terrific intensity of the shearers as they peeled off the fleeces with such seeming ease'. Julian Stuart's shearers' tales guided the young Donald through such scenes. The respect he retained for the older bushmen can be found in one of Stuart's less well-known short stories, 'All Wool', appearing as late as 1975 in the short-lived publication, Kimberly Tracks. The narrator says: 'I was younger in those days, over forty years younger, but I think I'd still find the old feller interesting.' Charlie was running an outcamp on a Murchison sheep station. The job was to rebuild fences after recent heavy rains. The younger man admits that the older man's skills and experience exceed his own. Charlie is friendly, can handle the tools, his camp is 'a model of neatness' and he is a good cook. Apart from helping with the fencing, all the young feller has to do is look after the horse, Wellington. But best of all is the old feller's skill as 'a great yarer'. After the evening meal, he spins yarns out of anything to hand and keeps the spindle turning. After forty years in the outback, seven of them spent carting with the 'humps' and some with donkeys, he'd perfected his skill. Trying not to be taken in by the obvious exaggeration, the younger man is filled with admiration.
Underlining the doubtful nature of his stories and lack of veracity in his claims, others describe Charlie as: 'All wool and a yard wide.' But the narrator does not change his mind, 'no matter how far from the truth he roamed, I still think old Charlie would be most interesting if I met him again tomorrow'. The influence of such campfire evenings can be detected in the tenor of Donald Stuart's writing, reflecting the many hours he spent in the old bushmen's company, listening to their yams, absorbing their turn of phrase and observing the way they spun their tales.

In March 1931, Donald's sister, Lyndall Stuart, travelled by sea from Perth to Broome. It is not clear whether this was purposely to see Donald, or even if this was the first family contact with him since he left home, but they were able to meet. Donald was pleased to see his sister. One family story appears to stick to this time, a persistent image of Donald striding the whole length of the famous Ninety-Mile Beach in order to catch up with her in Broome. There was news to pass on and much to talk about.

Their father had died almost two years before, in the Claremont Old Men's Home, and their mother was suffering the effects of what had turned out to be a difficult and sorrowful life.

Ana Stuart retained brief early childhood memories of her grandmother standing at the gate waving goodbye, and seeing her in bed just before her death, a memory fixed by what, as a small child, she saw as a beautiful blue vase on the shelf behind her. Ana also remembered how the family talked about Florence and how her own mother had mixed attitudes towards her, 'a sort of respect for this suffragette woman' but 'a bit scathing...about how she was a hopeless housekeeper', an apparently bad manager who did not cook, and how much she relied on her only daughter, Lyndall, to do all the housework. Ana’s mother held to the impression that Florence considered herself above doing the housework, but taking into account Florence’s habit of continuously rubbing honey and lemon juice into her hands, Ana considered her own daughter’s eczema and thought this also may have been a problem for Florence. Speaking of this time, Douglas, Florence’s youngest son, said he remembered his mother ‘with tears. She was the absolute quintessence of the sorrowing woman,’ he said. ‘She was politically advanced, but never knew a settled life.’ Towards the end of her years, one may not have recognised the potential opera singer, who despite or even because of the family’s
pride and fierce idealism, appears never to have recovered from the hardship imposed by her husband’s disability.

Donald resisted his sister’s urging to go back to Perth with her, a decision he would regret. In August of the following year, when he was on a navvying job at Parry’s Creek, near Wyndham, at ten o’clock one night he received a wire from Lyndall, followed by her letter a couple of days later. Their mother had died in Perth Public Hospital, almost exactly three years after her husband.37 The nineteen year old Donald wrote to Lyndall and his brothers telling how the three ‘blokes on the job have been very decent’. He offered a reasoned acceptance:

Lynnie, perhaps we should be glad in a way that mother died quietly and peacefully and not as Dad died after years of being crippled and bedridden. I wish I had gone down with you from Broome, but what’s the good of wishing?38

Donald took refuge in work. ‘I think I’m better off working solid for a while...I don’t think I’d care to come back home for some time yet.’39 The years away had distanced him, he had made his break, separated himself from the childhood scene and achieved his growing up ahead of time. Now, he was engaged completely in his own life, his growth, mental and physical. A return was not something he cared to think about.

In the novel, Drought Foal (1977), Colin Campbell hears about the deaths of his mother and father differently. Colin is just finishing a job on the wharf and contemplating his chances of getting work with the Road Board, when he meets his school friend, Martin Quinlan. In a passing conversation, Martin mentions Colin’s mother and father and is surprised that Colin does not know they have died, within a year of each other and at least eighteen months before. Martin heard the news from Roy, Colin’s older brother, whom he had met on the road. One brother is married but nothing is known about the other two.40

Now, Colin tells himself, he is an orphan. He ‘feels no immediate overpowering grief’, then ‘his guts feels[sic] hollow’. He contemplates his parents’ passing, stares at the immediate scene and thinks back to the numerous jobs he has held since leaving home. He is proud of the skills he has learned, the way he has stood alongside the best and kept up with them. News of his parents’ deaths, surely a major life event, appears to be overcome with little regret. There is the work, the variety of jobs, and he and Martin
make a great crew. As the letter to his sister shows, in contemplating the deaths of his own mother and father, the attitude of his character, Colin Campbell, bears more than a passing resemblance to Donald's response.

A moving death scene appears in the novel, *Prince of My Country* (1974). Davey Redman is the son of Thomas Redman, one of the ultimate bushmen who appear as major characters in Stuart's novels. Davey's mother is the Aboriginal woman, Karrawolgan and her relationship with Tom Redman, an enduring partnership, is one of the few marriages that appear in Donald Stuart's work. Undoubtedly meant to depict the best of the two races, Karrawolgan and Tom are cast as an outback King and Queen whose son, Davey, is a Prince worthy of their country.

Towards the end of the novel, Davey is called home to sit with the grieving Karrawolgan at his dying father's bedside. Tom is too weak to talk but Davey imagines a last speech worthy of any King:

> You are my son, the flesh of my own flesh, bone of my very bone;...This hand shall wither, this body shall decay, but my flesh lives on in you, my son. I tell you David, my son now, while death watches me, that not Death himself can alter what there is between me and you....Think of Death sometimes, that he take you not unaware.

There is an obvious biblical paraphrase here. The grieving son carries his father's body for burial 'in the shade of the blackheart tree above the pool' and, with 'let king die, and tragic queen grieve for him and son carry him to his grave', a somewhat Hamletesque atmosphere pervades the scene, with reference to the human skull's enduring quality. Written with a sure hand and a mature understanding of the dying process, which hardly fits the character, Davey Redman, it is clear that Donald Stuart's own experience has driven this description. His years spent as a World War II Prisoner of War are reflected here, making this an expression of universal grief. But, unlike Donald, this son was at his dying father's bedside and intimately involved in his burial. Understanding this, in the movingly written scene in which there is a level of homage to a father, we might also be aware of an older Donald's regret for his absence.

Father figures in his novels and short stories always closely resemble Donald's own reminiscences of his father, and reflect what we know of Julian Stuart. Donald's early departure from home had isolated him and his bush wandering must have brought alive
the stories he heard as a child, stories which prominently featured a young, adventurous Julian Stuart, a forceful figure, champion of workers' rights. In contrast to the crippled man he became, Julian's stories of his youth must have made him appear doubly heroic. Separation from his family allowed Donald to develop an idealised view of this distant parent and Davey Redman's admiration for his father may well be an expression of Donald's regard for his own father.

A mother's death is written about in *Walk, Trot, Canter and Die (1977)*. Nineteen-year old John Cole has been away for five years when he arrives back home to find that his mother has died; this is similar to Donald in age and the time he had spent away from home when he heard about his mother's death.

John Cole has fond memories of his mother:

> Quiet and patient she'd been, her eyes following his father, and maybe, for all she did for her children, it was that he was the centre, the hinge of all her narrow world, and her children important only as they were his and important to him.45

Colin Campbell, in *Drought Foal (1977)*, receives news of his mother's death with little outward show of grief and, in *Walk, Trot, Canter and Die (1975)*, John Cole also accepts his mother's death calmly, both characters reflecting Donald's attitude. John Cole retains fond memories of his mother, but his most important role model had been his father, 'in all his thoughts of home it had always been his father's face he'd seen',45 a sentiment Donald Stuart repeats in other novels. Mothers are shown as devoted parents, and mothers and fathers as a united force in matters of discipline and principle, but it is their fathers' words that most often find a way into his characters' thoughts.

Donald Stuart reproduces examples of wifely devotion in several of his novels. The older John Cole has a lasting relationship with the half-white Mercedes and, in *Prince of My Country (1974)*, Davey Redman and his Hannie reflect the long-term partnership between Davey's parents. These relationships are firmly based on devotion between the strong bushmen and their capable, but compliant, wives. Whether or not Donald modelled these partnerships on any particular couple is a matter for speculation. Having left home early, he might have retained childhood memories of an earlier closeness between his mother and father, similar to the relationship he wrote about so warmly in the early part of the novel *Drought Foal (1977)*. However, his younger brother,
Douglas, remembering his parents' lives as being marked by poverty and disappointment, said he felt sure 'they came to hate each other in the end'. Here, the reality does not live up to the remembered model and the writing of ideal relationships turns into the expression of a wish for something more.

The devotion evident in these written partnerships differs from attitudes towards women expressed by many of Donald Stuart's male characters. One might suggest that, in writing about these ideal couples, he showed an ingrained belief in the possibility of such life-long, loving relationships. His own several marriages may then be seen as an ever-hopeful reaching towards the ideal or we might conclude that he had an unrealistic view of women. Away from the time and setting of the period he wrote about, the women he met were unlikely to be the compliant wives he envisaged.

The short story, 'The Old Lady', proves the strength of women who choose to make their lives in the bush. Donald claimed the tale was written around an incident which, he said, 'happened to me when I was a twenty-year old bushman'. The setting is the Murchison: 'Dry red country, scrub country, hot with the heat of an inland summer.'

The 'youngfeller' is doing axe work with Peter Stone, cutting mulga, moving camp as they progress along the road, one either side. The job is hard, but well-paid. He has just spent two months on the track and here might be a chance to get 'a turnout of some sort to get away from carrying the swag'. His abiding desire is to be more independent, to improve his lot, get a horse and gear, even a utility, so he can forsake the swaggie's basic trudge and move more quickly from job to job.

The scene shifts to the small town pub where, outside on the verandah, there is a slow exchange of conversation. One of the men wants someone to take first mount on a partly-broken horse. There is danger inherent in this request. The moment arrests—'in the silence the heat washed down over the land, near at hand a crow jabbed at the stillness with a staccato sound'. As drinks are refilled, the silence extends, then Peter says: 'The youngfeller's a bit of a rider. Been working with stock for years up and down the country. No trouble to him, a young colt.' There is no getting out of it. The black gelding is a 'dark presence' in the stockyard near the railway line. Tension heightens when the old lady, Mrs O'Brien, comes to watch. The youngfeller is reluctant to 'put on a show' in front of her, but she will not move; the test for horse and rider must go ahead.
He takes off on 'the jarring, pounding punishment...insane, raging buckjumping' and finishes at full gallop before coming back to the yard to dismount.

This is a more thoughtful young man, hesitant about what he is being asked to do, but accepting of the challenge, the personal testing, and he masters the strong horse. This is story enough, but Mrs O'Brien provides an unexpected element. She is no ordinary 'old lady', local publican and storekeeper, she is one of the Hyland girls. The lad recognises the name. His father had told him about Hyland's Circus, the skilful Hyland sisters 'who toured the world...amazing large audiences with their feats of horsemanship'. By identifying himself as the 'youngfeller', Donald wants us to know that one of the famous Hyland sisters had admired his horsemanship.

Horse breaking exposes a character to scrutiny. The onlookers watch closely, focusing on horse and rider. A successful result will prove the worth of both. Failure makes for a difficult horse and throws doubt on a man who is unable to bring a tamed animal back into the yard. The isolated bushman’s survival depends upon a good horse and a reliable mate. It is a matter of character, of trust, between man and man, between man and horse.

Dwelling on a dangerous challenge thrown out to anyone who has a point to prove, such scenes bring tension into Stuart's novels. In *Prince of My Country* (1974), Davey Redman breaks the 'dark chestnut gelding, well grown, full of muscle, self-contained, unafraid' and proves himself as his father's son. In *Walk, Trot, Canter and Die* (1975), John Cole breaks 'the roan...all horse, a dark blue roan gelding, hard, well-boned' and tests his wager, 'I'll put forty pounds, forty golden sovereigns, that you haven't a horse here on Paradise that I can't ride.' Success wins John the Manager's position at Paradise Creek and the attention of Mercedes who will become his life partner. But there is no escaping the danger and his reckless riding cannot help but be associated with the blindness which threatened John Cole in his later life.

Being able to break a horse successfully is 'a gift' that not all men have and, not surprisingly in this masculine, largely womanless world, breaking-in a horse is equated to making up to a woman. Donald Stuart uses horse breaking to expose character and horses are an erotic and insistent presence in his writing. 'The man knew horses,' said Donald's son, Julian.
Donald arrived in Broome, the Port of Pearls, ‘broke and workless’. Had he come a few years earlier, he could have called on his Uncle Dugald Stuart, one of his father’s younger brothers. Dugald was Inspector of Pearl Fisheries, an important Government position which he held from April 1913 until the time of his death in 1928. Such a connection would have made Donald’s life much easier, possibly even changed the course of his journey, but by the time the nineteen-year old came into this diverse, multilingual community, with its Asian lugger crews, Japanese divers and white pearlers, he had no such influential family to call upon. When Dugald died, his wife and four daughters had moved to Perth.

Broome was known as Australia’s main pearling centre, but in 1932, the town was feeling the effects of the Depression. Not until 1939, would the Bay return to its previous bustle, with the comings and goings of four hundred pearling luggers, and the town’s streets echoing with the mixed languages of men employed in collecting and processing the precious pearl.

Donald spent a year in Broome, pitching in to anything that was available and working at a variety of jobs. He unloaded general cargo, forced cattle up the ships’ races and loaded crates of cleaned and sorted pearl shell that would go to Singapore and on to America and Europe. He absorbed the town’s culture and history and learned Malay, the common language. The tropical atmosphere, Broome’s diversity, the brilliant poincianas, perfumed frangipani, mango and bauhinia trees, all worked to capture Donald’s imagination. He came to understand the in-built hierarchy and the multicultural business dealings that existed alongside racially-drawn social prejudice. But, in their dungarees and flannel shirts, he and his mate quickly recognised their place as being on the bottom rung of Broome’s social ladder.

Goldmining offered a valid alternative to port and bush work. Intermittently, across the years, Donald Stuart was engaged as a small prospector. His grandfather had succeeded on the Victorian fields and, since earliest childhood, his father’s eastern goldfields stories had edged themselves into his understanding. Prospecting was an accepted Stuart family tradition. It was no accident that the boy in ‘Riches of Travel’ had picked Nullagine and Marble Bar as desirable destinations; the whole area had been a thriving gold mining region since the 1880s, with prospectors working the sites into the 1930s and beyond.
During the Depression years, Australia's sustenance workers were encouraged to fossick for gold and, in the 1930s, the number of Australians describing themselves as 'prospectors' increased eightfold. Prospecting was a complicated and cruel solution to the plight of the despairing unemployed; as one man in Drought Foul (1977) says:

Y' hear about the sulphides an' the tellurides that made the Golden Mile so rich, but y' don't hear much about the dirt that barely paid its way...that paid hardly a penny of the hundreds an' thousands an' millions it cost to get it out...she's a mighty funny ole caper, chasin' gold.

Whatever the hazards, many of the unemployed adopted a goldminer's life in order to escape the dreary tent cities and the round of rationed work. One of Western Australia's great nuggets, the 'Golden Eagle', unearthed in 1931, set off another goldmining revival. The chance of a 'Golden Eagle' held its own attraction and big finds made front page news, but there was always an understanding that to be a hard-working small prospector was still a way of 'making a livelihood'.

Donald Stuart's story, 'Ounce Dirt', tells about the hard physical labour a small-time miner enters into with the possibility of only small gain. Hardly 'gold fever', this is more about false hope and treachery prompted by greed and based on the belief that 'tailings dumps' left behind after previous mining might still contain quantities of gold. The narrator and another man, called Sailor, assess they will get 'ounce dirt' from this dump, an expected gold yield of one ounce per ton of dirt. All they must do is move the tailings thirty miles to the Battery for crushing, a task complicated by the pile's size and inaccessibility. They make a chute out of old oil drums and corrugated iron from some abandoned shacks. The drums must be cut in half, two days' work, at the end of which their hands are torn and bruised. The chute finished, they must get the 'stuff' to slide down it before, at the Battery, their dreams move towards reality. In the manner of any hopeful prospector, the narrator has already 'had an eye on Billy Marriott's utility' available for a 'hundred quid', but Sailor has laid official claim to the crushing and wants to pay only 'wages' to his partner. The narrator stands still. 'I felt the blood rise in my throat, and the familiar tingling in my hands. I'd smash this clown once and for all.' Sailor's greed and the narrator's anger dissipate with the knowledge that this is no 'ounce dirt', the recovered gold will pay little more than cartage and wages, and the one who takes 'wages' will come off best.
In this description we might recognise something of Donald Stuart in the narrator who applies himself wholeheartedly to a task for little gain and is always ready to set himself up for a fight. That this character comes out of the bargain better than he might have done is some vindication for his effort, but the battler’s lot decrees that he will not come out as well as he had anticipated. Most often, the outcome of his wholehearted belief and endeavour is only partial success. In this story, no great nugget is found, just enough to ensure survival, a repetitive theme in Donald Stuart’s writing.

The Depression reached its lowest point in 1932-33. Conditions then improved gradually, but it was not until 1938 that Australia achieved pre-Depression productivity. During this time, Donald was ‘unattached’ and said he had ‘no worries...no commitments...no anything’. This lack of commitment and his aversion to settling down, especially in suburbia, is mirrored in some of his characters.

In Walk, Trot, Canter and Die (1975), John Cole tries to please his young wife by settling in town, but: ‘He knew when he agreed that he was a fool to agree.’ He is haunted by memories of the big pools, the rivers, the far-off lagoons, and resents having to pay a water carter to fill his empty water tanks. He knows more about horses than the men who come to the farrier for whom he works. He will stay for his son’s sake, though they have different ideas for him. Inevitably, a chance to go droving ‘up north’ exerts its own particular pull and he leaves. But he is not as free as he would like to be; there is the boy and, when he hears that things have gone wrong at home, he sets off on the desperate ride that gives the novel its title. He drives the black mare, Moreton Bay, relentlessly ‘mile after mile, hour after hour, until five miles from Melton’s camp she went down in a heap, dead before she hit the ground’. Two more horses are flogged beyond their limits before he reaches home to find that the child has drowned in the railway dam. He sees no reason to stay around; his wife receives no consideration. He goes back with the cattle, not without anguish and in deep mourning for the child, but never back to the town. This stockman, cattleman, horseman will never fit into town life. He buries his grief in the work and country he knows best.

In Prince of My Country (1974), Eugene Molloy says:

Town to a bushman, Tom: I reckon it’s something like port to a sailor, not very important. The only thing that’s sailorly about a sailor is what takes place at sea; same with a
bushman, his life is in the bush and towns and cities are only episodes... And another thing, sailors and bushmen, both womanless, in the main. You just tally up all the blokes you ever knew, Tom, see how many got married, led a normal sane life. 77

This may well be an argument Donald Stuart made for his own choice to settle for life in the bush, though as his writing indicates and his several later marriages prove, his was not a ‘womanless' existence. When it suited him, Donald's was a whole-hearted espousal of the outback life, yet he was aware of the other life he might have chosen. In his later years, he did move back into the city, though everyone who knew him was aware that the north-west was where he felt at home. It was what he knew and what he wrote about. In his novel, *The Driven* (1961), he drew upon that knowledge in such a way that it would become his most successful work.

A five-month long journey, ‘bringing cattle down from the Ninety Mile Beach to Meekatharra' 78 is the whole business of *The Driven* (1961). Donald Stuart identified with the twenty-six year old Tom and saw him ‘rather as myself'. The older man, he said, is ‘a composite of a couple of drovers that I’d worked for' and the three black fellers were ‘three men I’d known'. 79 The slow-moving passage is made on a fine horse: ‘The very feel of the horse he was riding was enough to put a man in a good mood.' 80 Heading the group is John Napier, an experienced, ex-World War I Light Horse sergeant. Tom is his off-sider, competent, but perhaps a little too sure of himself; he objects to being called ‘youngfeller'. Together with three able Aboriginal stockmen, they must get the mob of cattle to the railhead in good time and in good condition. As the journey progresses, the two white men learn to rely on each other. They are both caught in the country’s spell and their prickly relationship turns into one of growing respect. Donald Stuart’s writing gathers the hypnotic effect of the cattle rhythms as men and beasts walk, feed, spread out, come back in and move together for days. There is time for talk and, in the long night watches, time for Tom to reflect:

He’d weathered the Depression better than most of the young men of his age. He’d droved in the Kimberley country, he’d travelled far and wide on the backtracks, he’d turned his hand to casual work on the jetties at each northern port, lining up with scores of others for the pitifully few jobs as the infrequent ships came in... He’d camped a mile out of town, on poor almost non-existent horse feed, living under a tree, with packs and saddle hanging on hooks... never
getting enough work to eat full meals between jobs. Always back to the road, moving on. A man could starve in the towns, but in the bush he could live somehow. 81

This description bears a striking resemblance to the way Donald Stuart's life unfolded after he left home, and reflects the lives of more than one young man who, at the beginning of the Depression years, had gone on the road to look for work.

The men who had weathered those years in the bush, the ones who decided to stay in the outback and make it their way of life, had cut themselves off from the outside world. As shown in Prince of My Country (1974), they applied their time-worn philosophies to any news that filtered into their haven, their refuge, and life continued, as always.

Wars were events that happened elsewhere. Australia's 1903 Defence Act had established the voluntary nature of the country's Defence Forces 82 and the populace continued to reject any idea of conscription. For many, as Stuart shows, there was an attitude of 'wait and see'. When World War I had broken, well, they figured, it was bound to be over before they could get there and, if it went on longer, there was still plenty of time. Those who remembered the Boer War, had seen the consequences of hastily dashing off to fight. Their sense of self-preservation was sufficient reason not to answer the call: ‘I'm happy right here...I'm buggered if I'm goin' off to gallop all over the place gettin' shot and gettin' dysentery the way they were in South Africa.’ 83

In Wedgetail View (1978), to Colin Campbell and his mates gathered around an outback campfire in the late 1930s, the idea of yet another war breaks into their desultory conversation about sheep, cattle and wool. They are forced to realise that, once again, 'it could be a war, just about any time now, that's the way things look'. Colin Campbell and his mates are building fences and, after several pannikins of rum, it seems more important to finish the job before anyone thinks about rushing off to enlist. They remember 1914/18, when few Australian families had escaped the slaughter at Gallipoli and the Western Front. They all knew men who returned home maimed for life, without a leg or an arm, a hand or an eye.

‘There'll be no war,’ they seek to reassure each other. ‘They learned their lesson last time...there's no profit in wars nowadays, an' that's what war's are all about; profit!’

‘Gawdalmighty, it'll never come to open warfare, not after the last time.’ 84
Donald (Scorp) Stuart,
10th Light Horseman. *circa* 1940.

Donald Stuart with his sister-in-law,
Edie Stuart, wife of his brother,
Ken. *circa* 1940.

Private Donald R. Stuart, with
his wife, Joan Stuart.
Adelaide, 1940.

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NORTHAM TO SYRIA

'They didn't know, we didn't know, that we would be the raw material for '39-'45.' Made in hindsight, Donald's comment turned his swag-carrying days into some sort of training march, and the privations endured in the Depression years into a preparation for the testing times he and many others would go through before the war ended. In 1939, he was twenty-six, older than many of those who joined the Army with him. He recognised that the Depression had touched the majority; even the younger ones had fathers, older brothers and uncles who had gone out on the track to look for work. For those who remembered what it was like to be unemployed and hungry, or remembered being in a family affected by unemployment, war and the Army offered a solution. In her Depression novel, The Battlers (1941), Kylie Tennant relates how: 'A good part of the district's unemployed had joined in a body, joyous at the thought of good food, good clothes, self-respect and money to spend.' But, ironically, she goes on to note that the greatcoats they are given are left-overs from World War I, the same coats, dyed black, that had been given to them as clothing relief along with the dole.

Shortly after war was declared, Donald and his brother, Ken, joined the 10th Light Horse. They stabled their horses on Ken's two adjoining blocks in Scarborough. Donald was the only one who could ride Major, a big black 'ratbag of a horse' and 'he could do anything with him', remembered his niece Gloria. No doubt Donald liked the idea of going to war on a beautiful horse and he cut a dashing figure in his 10th Light Horse uniform with its ostrich feather-decorated slouch hat.

Keith Flanagan was in the Light Horse before the war started and in the Headquarters Group at Guildford which Donald joined. They trained with Vickers Machine Guns, the tripod mounted on one side of the packhorse and the gun on the other. 'I led one of those horses,' said Keith. 'Numbers one and two, who fired the guns, would rush up, take the gun off, give me their horses and I'd gallop off with the forehorse to the rear.' The main thing was to keep ammunition up to the guns and teamwork constituted the best part of training. At one stage, the troop spent time at Naval Base on the beach in
Western Australia, swimming the horses over by the old Kwinana wreck in the morning, doing exercises in the afternoon and finishing off with a 'wet canteen'. Keith remembered those summer months as one of the best times of his life.  

Volunteers from the 10th Light Horse had fought in the Boer War and seen service in Gallipoli and World War I Middle Eastern campaigns. The years between the wars had brought name changes and there was a growing awareness that this new conflict would be quite different from the last. Troops were now more likely to be transported in armoured vehicles, rather than on the grand Australian mounts that carried Light Horsemen into World War I. Donald and Keith were caught in a transition period. Keith thought about joining the air force, but the Air Force Training Scheme was not yet in operation.

Nowhere does Donald Stuart write about his time in the 10th Light Horse. Exactly halfway through the novel, Wedgetail View (1978), Colin Campbell moves abruptly from an outback campfire discussing the possibility of war, to being a fully-fledged soldier at Northam camp, an established part of the Army scene and a member of the newly-formed Machine Gun Battalion.  

Having passed his medical, Donald officially enlisted as a member of the 2nd Australian Imperial Forces (2nd AIF) in Perth on 21 May 1940. He recorded his religious denomination as Church of England, a commonly accepted response from those who found themselves needing to make an official statement about their religious status. There is nothing to suggest that he had made any formal religious commitment; perhaps someone else suggested the choice, or maybe he was so keen to be accepted into the Army that he conceded his position. He was placed in the 2/16th Battalion, then taken on strength with the 2/2nd Australian Machine Gun Battalion, formed in June 1940 by Major E.D. Lynham of the 25th Light Horse. On 17 June, Lieutenant Colonel A.S. Blackburn, VC, was appointed to command the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion and Donald joined the Battalion’s ‘D’ Company in July.

Considering his family background, his army enlistment does appear surprising. His mother was said to have marched in the 1916 anti-conscription marches and his older brother, Julian Martin Stuart, apparently lost a job with the Education Department in 1917 because he would not support conscription. Anti-war and anti-conscription attitudes are reflected in Stuart’s novels right up to the middle of Wedgetail View. Once he is in the Army, his fictional character, Colin Campbell, asks himself ‘what his father
would have thought of him, in uniform, doing what he was told, with never a thought of
his own.\textsuperscript{11} Later he would wonder how ‘far he had gone on the road to mindlessness’.\textsuperscript{12} But he does appreciate the good boots and clothes, the regular shave and shower, the
abundance of food and the company.\textsuperscript{13} He remembers the World War I soldiers he’d
known, those who had accepted the inevitability of war and their part in it:

\begin{quote}
Never had he heard any of them speak of the causes of their war; to them war was something
that happened...something to which the ordinary man, miner, stockman, farmer, grocer, clerk
went without any great consideration of right or wrong, There was a war, they went to it; as
simple as that.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Just like Colin, Donald Stuart was one of the many who, when the call came, had
rushed to join up. Among those early volunteers were patriotic idealists, adventure
seekers, the unemployed and men getting out of the domestic round or escaping trouble
of some sort.\textsuperscript{15} Donald had spent his youth chasing after work. He was a risk-taker who
would have recognised the chances in this new experience and appreciated the creature
comforts the Army provided. He honoured his family’s ideals and lived by them, but
was ever inclined to go along with the circumstances at hand.

With the older writer’s consciousness adding to the picture, the last part of the novel,
\textit{Wedgetail View} (1978), is the closest we can get to understanding Donald Stuart’s
attitude to this first part of his army service. Colin Campbell notices how strange it
seems that, after all the years of battling for ‘a feed, a job, a lift to the next town’, now
the authorities see fit to build accommodation for them, feed and clothe them and
provide ‘the bloody lot’. He expresses wonder at how this mixed group of civilians,
from all around the State and as diverse as any he had met on the road,\textsuperscript{16} could be
trained to ‘line up to attention on parade’. But the Army has been doing this for
hundreds of years and the men are transformed into ‘the Army itself’.\textsuperscript{17}

The setting is different, but this is still an all-male cast and there are more than
enough characters for Donald Stuart to continue his yarning, philosophising and
observing. Diversity is apparent in the men he gathers together from his previous
writing. Despite his earlier campfire protestation: ‘Well, they’ll have to get by without
me,’ Hector ‘the Stormaway Man’ is at Northam Army Camp. Martin Quinlan is also
there and, surprisingly, along comes Davey Redman. To these, Stuart adds one of his
Proper Men, Company Sergeant Major (CSM) Meldrum, the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) who easily commands respect\(^\text{18}\) and moulds the ‘motley crowd’ into ‘soldiers, machine gunners, machines’.\(^\text{19}\) With the comment, that CSM Meldrum was ‘all soldier, with a distinct bias towards the men’, Stuart establishes the natural tension that exists between men and officers, with the NCO as mediator.

His father might have criticised his son’s position as one of the mob taking orders and doing as he is told, but behind his grumbling and the Australian soldier’s natural resistance to authority, Colin appears to take pride in his training, the job he is being called upon to do. He accepts each new challenge and masters each task with the same earnestness that he had applied to horse breaking, goldmining and all the other bush callings. Behind all this sometimes misplaced energy and enthusiasm, we might still discern a need to prove the old family superiority.

Contradicting this as a possible Donald Stuart portrait, is the assertion by several of Scarp Stuart’s service mates that he was a terrible soldier. Northam is where the ‘outrageous’ label firmly attached itself to the name Donald Stuart. He had spent the previous ten years proving himself in the company of older bushmen who, like himself, were all inclined to go about things in their own way. There were certain codes of behaviour that had to be followed, but a bushman was judged by his capabilities and, even if wry comments were made around campfires, a man’s individuality was his own business. Donald had learnt to live and survive in isolation and not to bother too much about other people’s opinions. Beyond the necessary rigours of Army training, he was already too old to change his attitudes. He had joined another all-male group, one with its own codes of rigid discipline and its own set of values. Given his individual nature, he was bound to break them and make a name for himself. Before long he was charged with ‘conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline’, having appeared in a Civil Court ‘incorrectly dressed wearing only trousers and singlet’, for which he was fined twenty shillings. Later he was confined to barracks for fourteen days and fined a total of forty-five shillings for being Absent without Leave (AWL).\(^\text{20}\)

Donald would not have been the first Australian soldier to have such comments added to his Service Record. Military Historian, John Laffin, highlights characteristics that led to a widely held view of the Australian Army as a unique fighting force. Unlike the British, who had a ‘professional military class’, he says, Australian fighting forces were made up of volunteers who came into the Army from all backgrounds. The earliest
Diggers had gained a reputation for being ‘good-natured larrikins’. They retained their individuality, would buck authority and go their own way when it suited them, but be a group to reckon with in conflict. The man who was to become Donald’s ultimate hero, E.E. (Weary) Dunlop, also commented upon the Australian soldier’s ‘earthly vernacular’, his ‘far from saintly’ behaviour when on leave, and his ‘propensity to be AWL’. Donald Stuart’s war novels confirm the view. From the ‘straggling line, a lump, a group’ that Colin Campbell observes entering Northam camp, a new group will emerge: ‘Give them a few days and they’d learn to fall in.’ Away from camp, though, away from the discipline required to bring them all into line, ‘good-natured larrikinism’ is tolerated in this group of Australian soldiers.

Stuart wrote his character, Colin Campbell, as an acute observer very much aware of what is going on around him and with a deep consciousness of his own behaviour. There are many instances that show Donald was the same sort of person, aware of what he was doing, even though his actions might have appeared surprising to others. For example, considering his contempt for authority, there was surely some convoluted purpose behind Private D.R. Stuart singing, without music, to entertain Officers in the Northam Mess. His friend, Richard Speir, would recognise it as ‘cocking a snook at the establishment’, and Keith Flanagan saw that Scorp had reversed himself into a position where the officers were listening to him for a change, instead of the other way around.

Behind much of Donald’s ‘outrageous’ behaviour was his liking for red wine, a bottle of cheap red wine being what he called his ‘trip around the World for two bob’. Keith Flanagan maintained that Donald was always ‘a wild and woolly sort of fellow’ who could not drink. As for his fighting:

He had a glass jaw. Donald would go in...and maybe he’d last a round or a second round but they’d hit him on the jaw and down he’d go. But it never stopped him coming up. He stripped like a skinned rabbit...He used to say, “They get knocked up knocking me down.” He sort of hinted he was a great grass fighter.

Instead of the Army’s usual tinned salmon, or ‘goldfish’ as it was commonly called, the cooks at Northam Mess served up filleted schnapper and cod, there was a good roast dinner on Sundays and fillet steak was regularly on the menu, but Donald still
approached food as if he was unlikely to see another meal ever again. Always first in line at mess parade, he would hold out his dixie for first course, then move along and have his sweet course piled on top of the meat and vegetables. After quickly wolfing the lot, he fronted up for the same again.

When ready to go to sleep, at whatever time it suited him, he would strip stark naked and climb under his blankets. Around the camp his 'giggle suits' were filthy, but he always had 'shiny boots'. Some said he was an exhibitionist and all had their favourite story about him. 'There was only one Scorp Stuart,' his mates said, 'and thank God there was one of him.'

Knowing that Donald only wrote about subjects with which he was familiar, the 'pick and shovel' anecdote in *Wedgetail View* (1978) is surely based on an event which occurred at Northam. The lesson in how to use a pick and shovel starts with the order: 'Take up axes-pick, one, one-two. Raise, Strike, Break and Rake.' The men watch intently as Sergeant Tobin demonstrates the actions. But when asked to copy the exercise, Grogger Johnson is disgusted. 'Listen,' he says, 'I've had enough of this fuckin' about.' He had worked underground on the Golden Mile for four years and was three years on the Road Board. Most of his mates, he says, have done the same. He refuses to work to the Army drill and illustrates his enormous ability with the pick and shovel, finishing with a 'clean cut trench' and a 'neatly placed heap of red earth'. While the incident ridicules some aspects of Army training, it does allow Donald Stuart to emphasise his social comment about the capabilities of these volunteers. Those who had trudged the roads looking for work had already survived one conflict and were well-prepared for the next. In turn, the story highlights another Australianism, the officer who can recognise his men's abilities and acknowledge it is futile to continue the lesson: 'You may just have a point, my man,' the Captain concedes and sends the group off to the cookhouse.

In any army, the discipline - the training ground and the Front is set against the times away from them and successful war novels balance these two aspects of the serving soldier's life. In Frederic Manning's *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929), World War I soldiers move away from the Front, the bitter fighting and the ever-present possibility of death, to find relief in the local estaminets. In Don Charlwood's *No Moon Tonight* (1956), the World War II Halifax Bomber's cockpit, an enclosed centre
of remote destruction, contrasts with the Mess at Elsham Wolds in the tranquil English countryside. When Western Australian, Colin Campbell, is granted leave, he goes to Perth where there are parties, where the drink flows and women and girls are attracted to the uniforms. Those men who have failed medicals, or who for some reason have not enlisted, hold open house for anyone who will come. They see this as their way of making a contribution to the war effort. At one party, Colin is described as: 'Well, grown-up, but young. Clean but not too clean. Uniform rough and ready... young, but you're not a kid.' When asked, 'what are you?' he gives the immediate reply 'Machine Gunner' and realises that the 'Army had claimed him at last'.

The women are willing and he takes advantage, but there is no denying his sense of separation. 'What use would it be to tell her of the track?' His mind is still in the bush remembering 'the dark hours past midnight, ringing a mob of restless bullocks on a vast plain' and, well, she could 'make her own picture of his life'; this was just a weekend fling. All he wanted was to go along with things as they happened. Martin could chase promotion if he liked, but Colin was content to 'drift with the tide'. His intentions to repeat the weekend with this girl, go AWL if necessary, are frustrated when, back at camp, the news is that they are leaving Perth for the Eastern States.

At the end of October 1940, D Company 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion 'entrained' in Perth for Fourth Military District. Orders had been received that all members of the Battalion were to 'come together in South Australia'. Until that time, the four Companies had trained separately in their home states, 'A' Company in South Australia, 'B' Company in Victoria, 'C' Company in Tasmania and 'D' Company in Western Australia. This coming together in South Australia would be the first time the whole Battalion had been assembled in one place.

Perth is one of the world's most isolated capitals and, before D Company could get to Adelaide, they had to endure a long train journey. In Wedgetail View, Donald Stuart's own experience allows him to capture this trek across the Nullarbor convincingly. Moving across Western Australia, they pass all the small stations, the names Colin Campbell's father (and also Donald Stuart's father) had so often talked about, 'Kurarawalyee, Karalee, Woolgangie, Boorabbin, Bullabulling...all the lovely names.' At Kalgoorlie, a crowd has turned out to meet them and people on the platform are eagerly looking out for Kalgoorlie men who are in the Company. In contrast to the
seriousness of the war that was taking their men away, everyone is smiling and cheerful. 'You'd think it was just a picnic' is Colin's sour comment, drawing attention to the excitement, the festival atmosphere and flag-waving celebrations.37

Many of the young Australians who had willingly volunteered to 'fight for King and Country' in World War I, and survived, were now watching another generation caught in the excitement, eager for the 'adventure' that awaited them. With their own revived emotions of that earlier time and place,38 the veterans knew this was no time for celebration.

In the thirteen months or so since war was declared, little had touched the Australians training in their home states, but the news from Europe was serious. When Belgium surrendered at the end of May 1940, 360,000 Allied soldiers were stranded on the beaches of Dunkirk. They were rescued in an amazing five-day evacuation exercise which included a flotilla of small ships, yachts and pleasure craft, plying back and forth across the English Channel. This exercise provided an enormous boost for Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who had fired the British people with his determination to resist the enemy at all costs. When France fell in mid-June, horrified cinema audiences watched black-and-white newsreel images of the Germans marching triumphantly into Paris. In August, in the Battle of Britain, the Royal Air Force countered the threat of the German Luftwaffe's all-out air-attack on Britain and, after tense days of fighting in the skies over south-east England, stalled Hitler's planned invasion of Britain. But the Germans continued to advance in Europe and heavy bombing raids would cause enormous damage to British towns and cities.

The Mediterranean region was under threat, particularly the strategic points of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal, and the AIF was already preparing to take up a defensive role in the Western Desert and the Nile Delta area.39 On the 27 September, Japan and Italy signed a pact with Germany and joined their plan to conquer the world.40

Like his character, Colin Campbell, Donald Stuart went across Australia on the train. Behind the 'picnic atmosphere', as everyone waved and cheered, there was no hiding the fact that some of them may not come back and those who returned would be unalterably affected by their experience.

Crossing the 1,200 kilometres of the Nullarbor Plain, so named for its lack of trees, the Western Australians in Wedgeall View are in awe of its space. They feel an affinity with this country that reminds them of their own remote places. Managing the inevitable
NORTHAM TO SYRIA

boredom that also accompanies war, they read, talk, gamble, play cards and get out when the train stops to take on water. Eventually, the plain gives way to mallee scrub and South Australia’s farming lands and, in this leisurely passage, Colin sees the contrast to his train-jumping days in the north-west. Before they know it, they are on a bus going to camp in Adelaide.41

Looking back on this time, Donald Stuart summed up briefly: ‘I enlisted in Western Australia, completed my training in South Australia, got married.’42

Long route marches were an important feature of the Battalion’s training period in South Australia. On one of these marches, the men came to a halt outside a public house at Adelaide’s Glenelg Beach. Scorp had torn his trousers. There was a dressmaker’s shop in the same building as the pub and, ‘stupid and brazen’ as ever, Scorp went in and asked if they could fix the tear in his trousers. They said, ‘Yes. They could do that.’ One of the dressmakers was Joan Bertelsmeir.43

Everyone was affected by the excitement peculiar to war, caught in their need to grasp the present and shrug off any thoughts about what was yet to come. Joan was unlikely to have been the twenty-seven year old Donald Stuart’s first girl, maybe she wasn’t even the one to whom he would have sworn undying love, but in the face of war, there is a need to hang on to life, entertain the future. In such times, hastily romantic marriages are not unusual. On 16 December 1940, just six months after he had enlisted and only about six weeks after he arrived in Adelaide, Western Australian Donald Robert Stuart married Joan Laurence Bertelsmeir, a South Australian natural beauty with good teeth, an enchanting smile and wavy hair.44 He was granted ten days’ leave and returned to duty two days after Christmas.45 For the short time left to them, whenever he could get away, Donald shared Joan’s Glenelg flat.46

There was an immediate transformation in Scorp. He had somewhere to go when he was on leave and his uniform was always immaculate.47 But there was a downside for his friends. He had made such a generous allotment to his new wife and kept only a minimum of pay for himself, that he never had any money. He cadged tobacco, papers and a light off anyone he could, and blithely shrugged off their offer: ‘Want us to smoke it for you?’48
In *Wedgetail View* (1978), Colin Campbell, does not get married. There is Mary, the girl he leaves behind in Perth when the Battalion is sent to South Australia, and in Adelaide there is Grace Purslowe who gets left behind when the Battalion goes to Sydney for overseas embarkation. Grace is one of Donald’s most successfully written female characters and her relationship with Colin is a tender love story worthy of any war novel. A plain, slim girl with a beautiful smile, she is one of the few women he writes about who has something to say and he allows her to give her own view of war. She forces Colin to consider what he has let himself in for and decries ‘the war that should never have started’, a war that made young men, including her brother, feel the urge to enlist and die for their country.49 ‘There’d be no more wars if enough women felt the way I do.’50 If one is tempted to wonder who inspired this character, Donald’s sister, Lyndall, immediately comes to mind.

Two of Colin’s fellow soldiers do get married, but the others agree that to get married at that stage would be ‘about the worst thing a bloke could do...Grace’d be pretty silly to get spliced to a feller goin’ off to a war.’ In this statement, Stuart admits to the rashness of the hasty marriage, though not just from his own point of view; the girl has to accept some responsibility. By the time he wrote this novel, his marriage to Joan had been over for some years.

When the Battalion left Adelaide at the beginning of April, Joan continued in her position as a dress designer. Eventually, though, she confided to Lyndall that she would like to get into a more essential type of war work, perhaps in a munitions factory. A friendship had formed between the two women and Lyndall’s letters to her brother contained news of Joan, among which was the comment, ‘Joan is very good-natured but she’s terribly proud of how she can save money,’51 a comment which supports the belief of Donald’s mates that she had only married him to get an Army allotment.52

With Joan listed as his next of kin, when the Western Australians in ‘D’ Company travelled back across the Nullarbor for pre-embarkation leave,53 Donald stayed in Adelaide and joined the rest of the Battalion as it went through final training exercises in South Australia.54

By the end of March, everyone was impatient to move. Then, they received inoculations, were instructed about how their relatives should address letters to the AIF Abroad and were treated to a free show at the camp picture theatre. Eventually, news
came that they would travel to Sydney by train on Tuesday 8 April 1941. The departure was supposed to be kept quiet, but there was nothing secret about this farewell. A large crowd had gathered and, as the four trains steamed out of the station, a local band played *Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye.*\(^{35}\) The ladies of South Australia's Cheer Up Club provided a welcome midnight feast at Murray Bridge and meals provided by similar groups were eagerly devoured at stations along the way.\(^{36}\)

When they reached Sydney's Darling Harbour, the men were taken by ferry, past the Sydney Harbour Bridge and out to the waiting ship.\(^{37}\) Very few of this group of mostly eighteen- and nineteen-year olds had ever been out of their home State, let alone out of Australia. The idea of overseas travel was a luxury beyond their expectations.\(^{38}\) In Sydney, they boarded the SS *Île de France*, renowned in the 1920s as one of the world's great first-class, ocean-going liners, now designated His Majesty's Transport (HMT) 'M.M'. The rich and famous had strolled along her decks and, in her day, the grand ship had epitomised the very best of French living.\(^{39}\) Now, pressed into service as a troop ship, her every space was crowded with young, khaki-clad Australians agog at making their first 'overseas' trip.

Donald captures their mixed attitudes in *Wedgetail View*. Trying to appear unimpressed at what is happening around them, the soldiers assume a blasé air, but the sense of wonder the others are trying to hide is conveyed in the fresh-faced youngster who stands alongside Colin at the rail. The soldier has lived all his life seventy miles out of Delpoa, a place with 'just the pub, the store and a few goats' and has never been out of it until he joined the Army. 'Never thought I'd see a place like Sydney. Gee, it's big ain't it?'\(^{40}\)

The *Île de France* sailed out of Sydney on Good Friday, 11 April 1941, together with the other liners-turned-troopships, the *Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary, Mauritania*, and the *Nieuw Amsterdam* which carried New Zealand troops.\(^{61}\) Alf Sheppard remembers the grand luxury liners and the convoy accompanying them.\(^{62}\) But for Donald Stuart's Colin Campbell, as they steam out of Sydney Heads, it is night-time and the ship ahead is just a blur. He concentrates on this severing of ties with Australia, particularly his Western part of it, and has lingering thoughts of Grace Purslowe.\(^{63}\)

When the liners arrived in Fremantle, they were too large to berth in the Western port, so they anchored in Gage Roads. Western Australia's D Company 2/3rd Machine Gunners farewelled their loved ones and Keith Flanagan was among those who came
aboard the *Isle de France*.\textsuperscript{64} Part of the excitement, he recalled, was knowing that 'Marlene Dietrich had been on her'. Some of the original tapestries were still on the walls, 'remnants of the former glory,' and the newly-embarked soldiers were all impressed as they went 'down the marble staircase to the dining room'.\textsuperscript{65} At first, the food was not all it might be, but the army cooks soon sorted that out.\textsuperscript{66} As the soldiers battled for a spot on the crowded and ill-ventilated decks, all thoughts about what lay ahead were pushed into the background.

They left Australia on 19 April and, closely following the route taken by their World War I predecessors, they progressed across a particularly calm Indian Ocean. The *Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary* and *Nieuw Amsterdam* peeled off to Singapore, while the *Isle de France* and its accompanying convoy went on to Colombo where they stayed for ten days.

As the ship drew closer to its destination, the sea remained calm and flying fish propelled themselves onto the decks in a strange unknowing suicide.\textsuperscript{67} The Battalion landed at Port Tewfik on the Suez Canal on 14 May, ready to take up duty in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{68}

Like most returned soldiers, Donald Stuart was reluctant to talk about his War Service. 'He never would talk about his experiences,' said his sister-in-law, Norma Stuart. 'When people tried to ask him, he would just change the subject,' she said. His niece, Wendy, remembered that he would just make some flippant remark.\textsuperscript{69}

Author T.A.G. Hungerford, one of Donald's contemporaries, interviewed him for the radio program, *The War Novelist as Historian*, describing Stuart's work as an 'ongoing autobiography' in which the author 'puts himself firmly in his time'. Donald did not contradict the description; his experiences as a serving soldier informed the last two novels, *Crank Back On Roller* (1979) and *I Think I'll Live* (1981), and he had already admitted to being the 'main character' in at least three of his novels.\textsuperscript{70}

Donald recognised that his war had differed from T.A.G. Hungerford's time in Bougainville and said he had been forced to live in his 'own narrow world'. He did not consider his war novels gave an historical interpretation of the war, but merely recorded his own impressions. 'And that's all I can write about,' he said, repeating a phrase he often gave in interview. Tom Hungerford, who had based his novel, *The Ridge and the River* (1952), on his own war experience, saw the value of a personal view, given by
'the man on the spot', providing what he called 'a springboard for future historians'. The comment was very much in accord with Donald Stuart’s wish to chronicle the past for those who would come later and want to know what it had been like to be there.71

Donald Stuart’s decision to label his writing as ‘fiction’, had allowed him to embellish his account of what happened, but he also utilised the idea to protect men who had taken part in his story. He believed some of them would be reluctant to have their names used and, by giving them different names or slightly changing the circumstances, he thought ‘he could tell their stories with them knowing, but with other people not knowing’.72

Little personal material about Donald Stuart’s war years is still available. From this soldier who would later be known as a prolific writer, apparently there are no preserved letters from the Front and if there ever was a war diary with ‘on the spot’ accounts, it appears not to have survived. Perhaps there is a wry allusion to this in his novel, *I Think I’ll Live*, when Colin, wanting some toilet paper, considers it a ‘great pity he hadn’t kept a diary, or carried a Bible, as some of his fellows did’.73

The two war novels were not published until 1979 and 1981, but records of Donald Stuart’s writing career show he was continuously writing this story from the time of his return to Western Australia in 1945, which illustrates the persistence of his memories and the compelling nature of his desire to capture this period of his life.

Australia’s first Anzacs found that their intense World War I experiences were not easily forgotten. British statesman, Oliver Lyttleton, went so far as to say that the impressions of war ‘are fixed like the grooves of a gramophone record, and remain with you as long as your faculties’.74 Donald Stuart’s last two novels carry as much of his war story as might any autobiography written after the event. Official records, and the opinions of others who were there, all support this written version of what happened in his war. Paul Fussell, in his discussion of the processes of memory in relation to war events, comments on the way war’s ‘absurd remove from the usages of the normal world’ almost compels the returned soldier to involve himself in the ‘ready narrative recall’ of the experience and remember what it was like.75

‘Crank back on roller, belt left front’.

The loading sequence for the Vickers Machine Gun is engraved in the machine gunner’s memory and there could have been no more apt title for Donald Stuart’s war
novel, *Crank Back on Roller* (1979). Continuing the story of Colin Campbell’s war service, the novel takes him into the Middle East, a world far-removed from his familiar Western Australia—though sometimes the terrain holds a strange familiarity. ‘Y’know, this bit of country’s like some of the country in the middle of the Hamersley Range; that bit south of Wittenoom Gorge.’

The novel starts with Colin and his mates perched on a hillside overlooking the Mediterranean. The Company is in Lebanon, returning fire in an exercise that had not gone as expected. Immediately, the writer alerts us to the scene beyond the machine gunners’ close boundaries:

> There was a smell of dust, and the acrid stink of goats, and on a faint movement of air the faint smell of the village; olive oil, spilled, cooking fires that had died a week or more ago; and the smell that hangs in the air wherever human beings are in trouble, the smell of smashed houses, dead fowls, decaying foodstuffs.

We are asked to consider another group of people entangled in this war through no fault of their own. A nanny goat steps ‘daintily’ among fallen rocks of the gray terrace wall and the thump of machine guns and moving trucks is heard from the plain below. In recognition of what it might be like to have one’s space so invaded, Colin asks himself, how many times through history have the raging armies crossed this same piece of land, from Alexander the Great to some of the old Diggers he had met on the road.

For Australians, war happens elsewhere, not in their own place, right in their backyard.

After they disembarked at Port Tewfick, the Battalion went on to Palestine—an area which, in 1948, would become the Jewish State of Israel. In *Crank Back on Roller* Donald Stuart takes us into Jerusalem, where there is much to comment upon. This holiest of places is a crowded hustle and bustle, the city’s squalor, dirt and back alley slums in contrast to what Colin and his mates had expected.

Colin had ‘read odd bits of the Bible in slack days on a job in the Ninety Mile Beach country’ and right here in the Holy Land is a chance to ponder the nature of war, the part that religion had played in this place. His observations dwell on the misuse of all
this history and the attempt to cash in on it; the countless bits of wood for sale as remnants of the Cross were ‘enough to build bridges a mile apart over all the rivers of the world’. In the end, the people who live here, including the soldiers, are caught up in their own small concerns, paying little heed to what happened in the past. Once they have done thinking about it, for these down-to-earth Aussies the need to get a good feed is most important, and then to catch up with old nor’westers, blokes they’d known in Marble Bar and Nullagine.

D Company left Palestine early in June 1941, and were moved in to support the 21st Infantry Brigade. Machine Gun Battalions do not stay together, but are split up, with different Platoons being attached to different Infantry Battalions. Donald and Keith Flanagan were in the same Platoon. Their group moved up the eastern edge of the Mediterranean, crossed the Palestinian border without incident and into the Lebanon, which had been under French mandate since the end of World War I.

The Lebanon Mountains stretch from north to south down the length of the country, parallel to the Mediterranean coastal plain; the anti-Lebanon Mountains stretch across what is now the Lebanese/Syrian border and, between the two, is the fertile Bekaa Valley. The Vichy French, troops loyal to Petain’s Vichy government, were not friendly to the allies. They had placed their mortars and machine guns in the rugged hills above the coast road and gained a strategic advantage. Supported by ‘French tanks, artillery and aircraft’, their troops put up a strong opposition, but on 15 June were eventually forced to withdraw from the ancient city of Sidon. The situation remained difficult, however, and Free French and British Emissaries were sent to the Vichy French in an effort to convince them not to oppose the Australians. Assuming they had been successful, and expecting to be immediately recognised if they wore their distinctive slouch hats, the Australians advanced. Their optimism was misplaced and tin helmets quickly became essential headgear.

Donald Stuart’s novel doggedly describes everyday aspects of an army on the move and returning fire in one skirmish after another. Shelled by mortars and machine-gunned by French fighter-bombers, with little chance to shoot back, this group travels hard, up and down hill in a ‘dour’ campaign. Colin survives, but his friends, Sergeant Martin Quinlan and Davey Redman, do not, and a link with the previous novels is broken.

Fighting in the high country was hard going and keeping up supplies became difficult. As the terrain got steeper and the going more rough, the men were hard-
pressed to carry the extraordinary amount of essential equipment required by an army on the move. Suddenly, there came an opportunity for Scorp Stuart to use his skills in a way that would be remembered in all accounts of this battle.

A regiment from Cyprus was also fighting in the region and their strength included a Mule Pack Transport Company. Mules were the obvious answer to carrying supplies in the mountainous terrain and 'six mules were obtained for the Company by 21 Brigade.' For the rest of the campaign, Private D.R. Stuart was put in charge of the mules. 'He did quite a job,' said Keith Flanagan, 'he knew mules, he knew about packing stuff and things like that.' Showing 'outstanding pluck' in 'getting ammunition through to the front,' Scorp made a name for himself during the attack on Damour and 'Don Stuart and his mules became widely known.'

A South Australian journalist in the same Battalion, Private Howard Trotter, saw Donald's endeavour as an obvious war story for the people back home. He wrote a report called 'Syria's Man With Mules' and sent the article off to a Perth newspaper which published it with a debonair photograph of Donald wearing his 10th Light Horse feathered hat. The colourful account has Scorp rolling 'his wild eyes' and shaking his fist at the shells bursting all around him—and still plodding on up the cliff paths with his 'five' mules. People at home who knew Donald are reported to have said that it sounded 'just like him'. They summed him up as 'rugged, adventurous and philosophical' and said they were not at all surprised at the news.

Howard Trotter's article suggested that Scorp Stuart could be the World War II counterpart for Simpson, the World War I hero who took it upon himself to evacuate some of Gallipoli's wounded on a small donkey. In 1915, the image of 'Simpson the Man with the Donkey' was seized upon for recruitment purposes and he went on to become an Australian icon, a figure presented as an ideal Australian at Anzac ceremonies, though, it was discovered later that he had been born in England and displayed some characteristics that went beyond the normal definition of larrikinism.

Showing an understanding of the legend that had grown up around John Kirkpatrick 'Murphy' Simpson, the journalist, Trotter, clearly hoped to have his story of Donald and his mules made into a World War II legend. But apparently there was no one in Army Headquarters looking to promote Donald 'Scorp' Stuart as a national hero and the short newspaper article and mention in the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion history remain the only actual records of this Donald Stuart story. He would write about it in his own way.
In an account fairly accurately based on what is understood to have happened, the story of the mules in Syria is reflected in *Crank Back on Roller*. Sergeant Meldrum asks, "Right, Colin, d'you know anything about mules?" And the novel takes a familiar turn. Donald Stuart is back in his own country again. In contrast to the chaos going on around them, the patient, much-admired mules must be fed and watered regularly, and the animal rhythms evident in other of Donald Stuart's novels are imposed upon the text. Colin and his friend, Frank Tower, are quite obviously delighted with this detail and they love the mules, these 'bloody lovely' small, bright-eyed animals. Just like Frank, Donald would have quickly corrected those who questioned the definition of mules as stubborn and difficult animals: 'Bloody lot o' rot talked about mules, camels, everything. Mule that kicks and bites is a mule badly broken in. Mules are more intelligent than horses.'

While the official record mentions six mules, in *Crank Back on Roller* there are more. Colin and Frank finish up with twenty mules, a veritable mule-train that reflects Donald's outback experience. Sergeant Harry Charalambos, a precise Cypriot, is in charge of the mules and the Cypriot muleteers. There is an awkward moment when Frank and Colin have to admit to him that they are Privates and ask him to call them by their Christian names. A sincere respect builds between the three men whose sole care is for the animals, another reflection of the comradeship evident in other of Donald Stuart's novels, particularly *The Driven*. The mules command their own respect, these 'real frontliners' steadily setting the pace and showing the way.

After five weeks of heavy fighting, news of peace talks began to filter through. An Armistice was signed at Acre on 12 July and, four days later, Generals Wilson, Catroux (Free French), Laverack, Allan and Evetts and their escort, a troop of field guns and twenty-four Bren carriers, ceremoniously entered Beirut to an enthusiastic welcome. When troops of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion had arrived from Australia, although well-trained, they had been untried in battle. Along with other 7th Australian Division troops and men from the 21st and 25th Australian Brigades, the 5th Indian Brigade, the Free French Division and others, they had prevailed despite the difficult terrain, insufficient support and the torrid conditions of a hot Mediterranean summer. General Peter Gratton AC. O.B.E, Chief of the Australian Defence Force, would say:
'The AIF and the people of Australia have much to be proud about this period in the Middle East.'

Now part of the Army of Occupation, for the rest of the year, the Battalion was engaged in reviewing the battle, re-equipping, undertaking further training and going on leave in Lebanon and Syria. In Beirut, the men repeat the rituals undergone by their World War I counterparts and, as newcomers to the Middle East, they take part in the mandatory trying of arak, or absinth. The smell of peppermint—no, aniseed—reminds Colin of ‘some long forgotten, now faintly remembered childhood medicine’ and evokes a recollection of him and his brothers having their chests and back rubbed with camphorated oil. There is some wild drinking—‘round the world for two bob’—fighting, talk of girls, visits to brothels and, next day, the route march with a hangover. He is haunted by the ever-present remembrance of Australia, ‘a red landscape of rock and spinifex, kandji tree and snappy gums’. The question hangs in his head—would he ‘ever put foot to stirrup again’, return to his own land ‘where life was slow, silent, secret’.96

With a deep consciousness of time and place, Colin makes the most of his visit to the Holy Land, Damascus and the brooding Roman ruins of Baalbeck, ‘the age-old countryside, the antique cities…and all the places he’d heard his old mates speak of, those old men from the Light Horse Regiments of the First World War’.97 Now, he has been, has visited those same places, but it was just ‘a Cook’s Tour’. He recognises that, in this brief visit, his knowledge of their past is limited, but he holds a deep awareness of this land, its antiquity and all it stands for.

Donald Stuart hints that here, in the Middle East, in the Syrian town of Aleppo, is where his ‘writing bug hatched’. He found himself puzzled as to how he could possibly know about this foreign place, then suddenly, he made the connection with Shakespeare’s Othello. Surrounded by this obvious antiquity, and through his knowledge of Shakespeare’s text, he experienced an affinity with an unknown place, so different from his own. It was, he said, ‘an extraordinary sensation’ that illustrated the power of the written word.98

As the soldiers march, fight and go on leave in strange places, the talk and the philosophies flow. Here is where Donald Stuart reveals himself most clearly.
The Stuart family's belief that all men could be brothers transfers to Colin Campbell. The brotherhood of man was something Colin (and Donald Stuart) had been brought up to accept. Colour, language and creed were no indication of where to draw lines, but most important was the delineation created when one person or group attained power over another. Colin knew to watch out for the inhumanity caused by those who exerted power for their own gain. In the midst of war there is ample opportunity to wonder about the inhumanity being done to man and by whom.

Colin realises that the international workings of this war, the reason the Australians are here, depend upon the 'cold-hearted infinitely clever men who sought absolute power'. All those years ago, his parents had told him to be wary of these people. Down through history, soldiers had fought bravely and died, pillaged and burned, all at the behest of those in power. He shivers in the night air and knows his place at the end of this long line. 'This was what the War was about.'

In such thoughtful considerations Donald Stuart's humanitarian ideals are evident. Some of his contemporary readers found his writing difficult and he was often criticised for having too much thoughtful self-discussion in his work. As his sister Lyndall said, his work carried 'a well-balanced proportion of social thinking,' but did not cater for popular taste. Yet it is this writing that lifts his novels out of the general run, the popular works that do not last. Readers are faced with the deeper questions of life and it does not matter whether they agree or disagree with the view given on the page, these are questions to be considered. Donald's own experiences influenced the tenor of his work and allowed him to position his characters away from crowded civilisation and its pass-times. Following a mob of cattle or an ox train, persistently shovelling dirt in the hope of a mineral find, cutting wood for fences, sitting around a campfire and being a soldier at war—all are isolated pursuits allowing time for philosophising, observing and yarning. This was the tradition he understood and wanted to pass on.

An irrevocable turning point in World War II was the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour. In an unprecedented attack, on Sunday 7 December 1941, 2,403 American service personnel were killed, more than 1,000 were injured and there were many civilian casualties.

The men of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion already knew their time in the Middle East was coming to an end. When they got the news, they realised the Japanese attack
would change and expand the war, and that another move was imminent. In their efforts to guess what the future might hold, none of them could have foreseen what the next three or more years would bring.

Starting in early October, the Battalion had progressively moved to Fih, a mountain village near Tripoli in northern Lebanon. D Company was happily billeted in an old stone monastery: 

"The embrasures of the windows were so big you could lie down in them," said Keith Flanagan.

Always one to take stock of his surroundings, Donald Stuart retained a memory of the dramatic view from these windows—a downward sweep with terraced plantings wrested from a rocky terrain. Grey-green olives contrasted with dark green pines and, looking further, across the coastal plain and the Mediterranean, was the distant horizon 'a crimson bar of cloud where the sun dipped from sky to sea, sea and sky one, the bar fading'.

Years later, in attempting to define his writing process, he would talk about trying to find the words for that ‘first streak of daylight over the Mediterranean’.

Between fighting, training and travel from one theatre of war to another, in the hiatus between where he had been and where he was going next, the soldier might find himself tasting life at a heightened level, pauses in war equating to Donald Stuart’s campfire respites and remembered as one of his ‘riches of travel’.

As winter drew in, snow enhanced the other-worldliness of this mountain place and, on 24 December, a particularly heavy snowfall gave most of the Australians their first white Christmas. Major E.D. Lyneham was in the monastery Mess for Christmas dinner and Privates D.R. Stuart and K.A Flanagan, of 13 Platoon, also appear on the list of those attending. As tradition demanded, officers and sergeants served roast turkey and plum pudding to the men and on the wine list was something called ‘Dan’s Downfall’, presumably a local red wine.

This idyllic Mediterranean sojourn could not last.

Three weeks later, the Battalion was on its way back to Palestine. Then, at the end of January 1942, reversing the journey they had taken less than nine months before, they were back in Egypt where six hundred and thirty-six officers and other ranks from the Battalion boarded the new liner Orcades at Port Tewfick.

As he writes about this time, Donald Stuart tries to define the place they are leaving; the people, the ancient cities, the contrast between poverty and wealth, the perfumed orange groves. The Middle East, he concludes, would ‘go on as it had always gone on.’ The greatest mark the Australians left behind was a crop of fresh graves keeping...
company with those from the 1914-18 War. Of the 18,000 Australians engaged in the battle for Syria, 416 were killed and 1,130 wounded.⁹⁸

For those who survived to board the Orcades, there was still no certainty about where they were going. At least they were headed in the right direction, towards Australia. For some, the dream of walking down their home-town street was a possibility, but the first of a series of appalling blunders should have warned them that many would have a more difficult road. Two railway trucks containing ‘kitbags and officers’ valises’ were left behind in Port Tewfick and, more seriously, as the fast-moving Orcades hurriedly set off for Colombo, the Battalion’s vehicles, Vickers guns, ammunition and related stores were loaded on to slow-moving small freighters.¹⁰⁹ Should Australia be their final destination there was a possibility they could come together at some stage, until then, the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion was deprived of its reason for being.

They were on the move again. ‘Like bloody world travellers,’ says Frank Tower in Crank Back On Roller and, as soon as the ship is under way, a book is being run as to where they will finish up.¹¹⁰ Burma was a possibility, but a ship’s lecture on the Netherlands East Indies gave them somewhere else to think about.¹¹¹ And just as Donald Stuart ends Wedgetail View with the departure from Sydney, he ends Crank Back on Roller with this departure from Port Tewfick. In each case the break with land is pregnant with the uncertainty of what lies ahead. But then: ‘Crank back on roller, belt left front’—that is all Colin has to remember. For him, leaving the Middle East is ‘full of some significance, dimly understood’.¹¹² As things turned out, this was something of a premonition.

A sense of urgency continued to mark the Orcades’ speedy passage away from the Middle East. When she arrived in Colombo, it was only for a brief overnight stay and no one was allowed ashore. After the ship left Colombo on the morning of 9 February, a sense of purpose began to make itself felt on board. The unarmed Nos. 1 and 2 Machine Gunners were issued with Canadian Springfield and Ross rifles out of the ship’s armoury and were given fifteen rounds of ammunition.¹¹³ Donald described them as ‘long antique rifles’,¹¹⁴ and there was a rumour that some of them were stamped VR, Victoria Regina—though Donald made it quite clear that, on a crowded troopship, it would not be difficult to start, embellish and perpetuate such a rumour. The men had no bayonet frogs on their belts, so some of the gunners thrust the bayonets into their belts
'pirate fashion', others tied them on with string and some were issued with 'stout sticks'. Without their machine guns they would fight as infantry, and with whatever was to hand.

The Orcades continued to make its way south-east and hopes remained that they would see an Australian landfall. But, in contrast to the glassy seas that had marked their progress towards the Middle East, on this trip the Indian Ocean was ominously rough and stormy.
VI

JAVA AND THE RAILWAY

Never glorify War; it is a leprosy of the human spirit, and I hope it may never touch you.¹

Lieutenant General A.E. Percival surrendered Malaya and Singapore to the Japanese on 15 February 1942.² On that same day, the Orcades crossed the equator. Sailing past tropical islands covered in lush vegetation, she slipped down the south-west coast of Sumatra into the Sunda Straits and anchored off-shore at Oosthaven.³ The 2/3rd Australian Machine Gunner's arrival in the tropics gave John Bellair a perfect title for his Battalion history, From Snow To Jungle (1987). Donald Stuart evokes the atmosphere of this tropical landfall at the start of his novel, I Think I'll Live (1981):

The sun had set, the evening air was tepid, sticky with salt, and occasional vague shifting wisps of breeze brought the smell of the land, a smell of wet rich earth, vegetation, fecundity, decay, the stink of heavy oil and the unclassifiable dockside smells of the port.⁴

Shortly after their arrival, a group of 2/3rd Machine Gunners and 2/2nd Pioneers boarded the small tanker Van Spilsbergen and prepared to go ashore in Oosthaven. The group, named Boost Force, was to defend two airfields at Palembang, but they barely made their night-time landing before receiving news that the Japanese had already captured the airfields and were now only twenty kilometres away. There was no point in continuing, so the men loaded back onto the tanker. It was raining, the port was completely blacked out and only by a chance flash of lightning was the harbour master able to get a bearing on the Orcades,⁵ though it might have been someone fearless enough to flicker a torch in the ship's general direction.⁶ Moving towards the dark outline in total silence, 'at last they were alongside, touching and scrambling aboard'.⁷

Next morning, the Orcades made her way to Tandjong Priok, the port for Batavia, capital of the Netherlands East Indies.⁸ The port was crowded with shipping of all kinds, including small boats carrying refugees from Singapore. Also on the wharf were some Australian troops, so called 'escapees' from the island, who would find themselves labelled as deserters and be severely criticised for abandoning their posts.⁹
After the liner tied up, troops on board were left to speculate about what would happen next. Without knowing it, this shipload of Australians teetered on the edge of a precipice. In a series of ‘long conferences’ held on the Orcades, communications were being made at the highest level. British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, wanted Australian troops to stay in the region, but, with the Japanese advancing rapidly, British Commander-in-Chief, General Wavell, considered the risk ‘unjustifiable’ and he advised against a landing. There was a plan to send the men to Burma, but Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin, was convinced that all of 1 Aust. Corps should be returned home. Against Churchill’s wishes, Curtin had already arranged for ‘the convoy carrying the 7th Division to turn back for refuelling in Colombo’ and safely make its way to Australia. Men on the Orcades, however, were caught in the political argument.

Despite strenuous efforts by General Lavernck to prevent any landing, after two days it was agreed that a brigade, which included the 2/3rd Machine Gunners and the 2/2nd Pioneers, was to be formed under the command of Brigadier Arthur Blackburn, VC., promoted from Lieut-Colonel for the purpose. To be known as ‘Blackforce’, the brigade was to play a diplomatic role and stay in Batavia ‘to bolster Dutch resistance’ and help hold back the Japanese for ‘as long as possible’.

If Donald Stuart needed to show how the decisions of those in command could sway the destiny of others, here was the perfect example. As if to emphasise the point, some RAAF personnel, Australian troops and some nurses boarded the Orcades via one gangway at the same time as Blackforce left the ship by another.

Donald was one of those who ‘trooped down the gangways to the docks, half the ship’s load, to stand in ordered ranks’. He recreates the scene in *I Think I’ll Live*; on the ship above them were ‘the others, the units who were to go somewhere else’ and calling down to them: “You’ll be sorry, fellers.”

On that same day, 19 February, the Japanese turned their attentions towards Australia. In the first of several raids, Darwin was caught in a sea and air attack in which eight ships and twenty-three aircraft were lost and 243 people killed.

Unaware of what was happening or of what their own future might hold, the men of Blackforce landed cheerfully enough. Donald and the others had been so close to making it back to Australia and, geographically, were still heartbreakingly near to home. At the moment they stepped off the Orcades, however, members of the 2/3rd Machine
Gunners and the mixed group that made up the 'ad hoc Australian brigade', began a tragic three-and-a-half year journey from which many of them would not return.

Also disembarking from the Orcades at Tandjong Priok was the 2/2nd Casualty Clearing Station (CCS), a 'highly equipped, trained and experienced' unit of eighty-seven members, commanded by Major Edward E. Dunlop, of the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps. 'Weary' Dunlop, as he was always affectionately known, was an impressive figure, six feet four inches in height. He had already seen service in Greece, Crete and Tobruk. This gifted and highly-qualified doctor had a brilliant pre-war career as a surgeon. He was critical of what he scathingly called 'the intricate bungling of "movement control"' and the ship's hasty departure from Port Tewfick, leaving the men without kitbags and unarmed, 'all ranks in winter dress' and his unit with only 'a sole first-aid pannier for medical equipment'. Making the point that the blunder might have had even greater implications for Australia, he commented: 'God help the highly trained I Aust. Corps if Churchill had succeeded in throwing them into collapsing Burma.'

On landing, the CCS Unit went up-country to the city of Bandoeng where, having gathered some medical stores 'from most diverse sources', they turned an empty school into 1 Allied General Hospital. Of all the events that had conspired towards the landing at Tandjong Priok, the chance that placed this dedicated doctor and his medical team in Java—albeit without the specialised equipment they had thought to bring—was one for which the Australians would be forever grateful.

Here, it should be noted that not all members of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion were included in the group that landed in Batavia. Five officers and 257 other ranks were on the convoy that had diverted to Colombo and gone back to Australia. Still in Australia were a number of reinforcement officers who had been prevented from joining the Battalion because of the Java situation. Some men in the Orcades' sick bay also got back to Australia; and there were two who escaped via Colombo. These remnants of the original 2/3rd Machine Gunners regrouped in Australia and reinforcements came into the Battalion to bring it up to strength. The original members were left to grieve for their comrades in Java, the men who were, reluctantly, classed as 'battle casualties'.

Had Donald been among the returned men, he would have been reunited with Joan in Adelaide, spent time in Balcombe, Victoria, and received intensive training at Cowra in New South Wales. In December 1944, he would have gone with the Battalion to New Guinea to face the Japanese in the Aitape-Wewak campaign.
Once ashore at Tandjong Priok, Blackforce located a store of equipment, originally intended for the use of forces in Malaya, which proved to be a welcome source of arms for the stranded group. Having 'acquired' vehicles, guns and ammunition, Blackforce moved to guard civilian and military airports against the landing of Japanese paratroops.

A currency of repeated stories belongs to this time—events that occurred and were talked about, the stories told and retold, held in memory and, eventually, written about. One story which found its way into Battalion history tells of a Dutch airline pilot, just about to take off for Broome, who offered some of the men a lift home. How tempting that must have been, especially for someone like Donald who could so easily have got himself lost in the north-west. But, while AWL might be an acceptable breaking of rules, there would be no sympathy for those who deserted, as was shown in scathing comments made about the AIF escapees from Singapore.

The anecdote finds its way into Donald Stuart's *I Think I'll Live*. The pilot, an Australian, approaches Colin Campbell and Grill Dukas. They refuse his proposal with 'hell, fella, we're AIF, we can't go joy riding'. The pilot's reply quickly informs them of the situation. He has spent the last two weeks flying Dutch officials, their wives and children, out of the country. 'This bloody Java's finished...don't kid yourselves,' he tells them.

Looking back on that time, as Donald Stuart was when he wrote this, it is obvious the Australians had been placed in an impossible situation. It also becomes clear that these soldiers on Java had little knowledge about what was happening all around them and were not fully aware of the rapidity with which the Japanese had mobilised their forces in Asia. Such is the soldier's lot. As Donald Stuart's character, Colin Campbell, noted in *Crank Back On Roller*, it was hopeless to believe that 'the confusion might lift, that they would soon be able to see the whole picture'. For the ordinary soldier in any war situation, 'there would never be a clear picture'.

Curtin had recalled his troops so the position could be assessed and a counter-attack planned, but, in the meantime, the hapless Blackforce was stranded in the middle of where it was all happening. The Battle of the Java Sea, fought in the Sunda Straits on 27 February, resulted in the loss of HMAS *Perth*, USS *Houston* and HMS *Exeter*. Following this, the Japanese began to land in Java and, just as they had so quickly overrun Malaya and Sumatra, they advanced rapidly across the island. In face of the
Japanese incursion, the legendary Brigadier Blackburn, VC, did not consider the guarding of airports a priority and he arranged for his troops to be given a more active role in holding up the Japanese advance. The Japanese engaged the 2/3rd Machine Gunners in a mortar attack at Leuwiliang, with the Western Australian D Company fighting from a rearguard position. Several men were killed and the wounded were taken to 1 Allied General Hospital at Bandoeng. As Colonel Sir Laurens van der Post states in his Foreword to The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop (1986), apart from this 'one gallant action', there was little other opposition to the rapid Japanese overtaking of Java.

At this stage, the Dutch became alarmed and 'withdrew all troops to Bandoeng'. Throughout these weeks, there was a great deal of confusion. The Dutch Army passed messages that 'no Japanese were landing in Java'. Even at this level, it seems there was little real intelligence about the state of affairs.

On 3 March, the Netherlands East Indies government moved to Bandoeng. Following a precedent that had been set in Europe to prevent the Germans from destroying their country, the Dutch declared Batavia and Bandoeng as 'open cities'. On 6 March, Weary Dunlop heard that the 'Dutch were about to capitulate', which they did two days later. Blackforce was 'ordered to capitulate' the following day. In the short period since they had arrived in Java, in answer to the loss of thirty-six of their own men and a number of wounded, the Australians had killed an estimated 500 Japanese.

As the fighting ended, the Australians hoped ships would be waiting off-shore in the nearby port of Tjilatjap, ready to evacuate them, but this was not to happen. The Dutch had believed their surrender would leave them still running the country. This assumption was also shattered when, following their Government's capitulation, the civilian population, men, women and children, found themselves as much Prisoners of War as were British and Australian troops 'rushed from other theatres of war to the defence of the Dutch East Indies'. Also trapped were survivors from HMAS Perth, among them Victorian Ray Parkin, whose path over the next part of his war, similar to that of Donald Stuart's, is written about in three acclaimed personal narratives. Also overtaken by the Japanese were Royal Air Force (RAF) and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) personnel, as well as anyone who had managed to reach Java after the fall of Singapore.
Following the action at Leuwiliang, on 11 March, Brigadier Blackburn withdrew his force to a tea plantation in a place called Arinem. He was not going to give up easily. He prepared to set a perimeter and continue fighting until the navy came into Tjilatjap to evacuate his men, but the War Office in London denied his request to fight on. Next day, the Brigadier and two other Commanders met with the Japanese to sign a formal surrender. The Australians made a point of discussing the Geneva Convention and insisted the surrender document include the phrase 'subject to our rights as prisoners of war vide Geneva Convention of 1929'. As became plain, the Japanese would pay scant heed to the rulings laid down in Geneva and treat their prisoners with a complete disregard of any considerations put in place in 1929.

As Donald Stuart shows in *I Think I'll Live*, rumours were rife. Finding themselves in an unfamiliar position, the soldiers imagine any number of ways in which they might escape their predicament and fight back. Maybe the Yanks would open up a major offensive—perhaps the Navy was just waiting to evacuate them from Tjilatjap—they could go to the north of Australia, mobilise and return to invade Sumatra and Java. But their hopes were dashed when it was finally confirmed that ‘all Australian and British at Arinem, and wherever else in Java, were prisoners of war’.

For Donald Stuart’s character, Colin Campbell, as for all the others, there was utter disbelief. After all the training they had gone through back in Australia, the fighting and more training in Syria and the Lebanon, after the sea journey to get here, how could they have known this was how they would finish up? ‘Jesus, a man’s seen everything ahead: gettin’ killed, gettin’ an arm or leg knocked off, the lot, but Gawdalmighty, never bein’ a prisoner of war.’

The men in Blackforce had to make a huge adjustment. From being the highly-trained fighting force which had arrived in Java ready to take on the enemy, they now had to accept their position as helpless war prisoners. They had spent less than a month in the area and many of them believed they had not had a chance to fight back. Colonel Sir Laurens van der Post considered that many of the soldiers felt ‘needlessly betrayed’ and were ‘disillusioned and suspicious’ about the authorities that had put them in this position. They were from disparate groups and he foresaw that it would take time to establish the cohesion and leadership needed to get them through.

Nevertheless, while admitting that some of them may have been ‘a little bit sour’, forty years later—with perhaps a little bravado—Donald Stuart insisted, there had been
no loss of morale among the Australian troops. Most of them held on to a belief that the situation would not last and, before long, the ‘Yanks, tanks and planes’ would be there to turn the Japanese away. It was always about to happen tomorrow. ‘No one,’ said Donald, ‘told us it would take three-and-a-half years.’

Blackforce went back to a small market town called Leles. Donald Stuart recalled how no one knew what to do and, now that they were prisoners of war, quite what was required of them, ‘whether we were to wander around a little or to stay put’. The Japanese gave them sacks of rice and baskets of vegetables and they were left to fend for themselves. It was, he remembered, a time of ‘total chaos’. There was talk of escape. A number of unsuccessful attempts were made, but the men were forced to accept that it was impossible to get away undetected. The Javanese appeared to be in league with the Japanese and, having developed a hatred of the Dutch colonists, they were unlikely to help any white man.

Food became scarce, but some men still had money to buy local eggs and fruit and so supplement the meagre Japanese rations. When they marched into the concrete-floored market place at Leles, the front gates were closed on them. ‘I’ve a feeling that things are going to be much worse before they are better,’ says Hector, the dour Scottish character in I Think I’ll Live. At Leles, Donald ‘Scorp’ Stuart’s disregard for authority placed him in a situation from which he was fortunate to have escaped alive.

Japanese conditions for surrender included a demand that the Australians abandon all military stores, firearms, ammunition and equipment, and place them under guard. This was to prevent soldiers from gaining access to rifles, pistols or trucks to assist an escape. When ordered to stand guard over the stores, Scorp was one of three men who refused to cooperate with this directive. As far as he and the others, Buck Peters and Alan Middleton, were concerned, if some of their fellow soldiers wanted to get away, they were not going to be the ones to stop them. For this open defiance of orders, the three were put up for a hearing with the Colonel, who immediately sent them to the Brigadier. The three were tried at a Field General Court Martial which ruled them out of order and sentenced them to be held in isolation and under guard.

The main reason for the punishment was to make an obvious example of the three men, giving an outward sign that Army discipline would be maintained even in the
Prisoner of War situation. If the Australians were to get through the difficult times ahead, senior officers saw disciplined behaviour as essential. But the punishment meted out to Donald and his mates developed into a much more serious situation.

In mid-April, the Battalion moved from Leles to Garoet, in the shadow of the threatening volcano, Krakatoa. The Australians had become used to roll calls being made at any time, often three or more times a day; they had learned to bow subserviently and to number off in Japanese. As well as accounting for men on parade, the Japanese accepted that others might be occupied in different areas, some in the cookhouse, some sick and some out on work parties, but Scorp’s isolated group and their four Australian guards began to attract attention. The Japanese asked questions and, when told that these were men who had disobeyed an order, ‘which, after all, had come from the Japanese’, they took the three away and put them in Garoet Civil Prison.

‘Now, that’s pretty dicey stuff,’ said Scorp’s friend, Keith Flanagan.

It was all a ‘horrible misunderstanding’, recalled Bill Haskell, who was also there at the time. It was, he said, ‘a stupid thing’ and Scorp was ‘bitter’ about it.

There was a very real danger that the Japanese would execute the three prisoners. During the event, and long after, there was much discussion about the circumstances that had placed Donald Stuart, Buck Peters and Alan Middleton in danger of losing their lives. Donald quoted Australian Military Rules and Orders as saying that ‘a Prisoner of War who is guilty of misconduct can be punished by his superiors...but no punishment can be inflicted on him that would not be inflicted on him if he were not a Prisoner of War.’ As he interpreted it—and there appears to have been general agreement—the three should never have been handed over to the Japanese and placed in a situation which implied a death sentence.

The men were held in separate cells and only allowed out once a day, to wash and to empty their toilet buckets. The food was meagre; half a cup of red rice in the morning, half a duck egg and a banana for lunch and, in the evening, more rice and, sometimes, a small cup of bean curd soup. ‘Enough to keep a man conscious of the fact that he wasn’t being well-fed. But, of course, we had no work to do,’ said Donald. In *I Think I’ll Live*, Colin considers his father’s imprisonment, but the Union men had known when their time would come to an end, for Colin and his mates there was no such certainty.
Fortunately for the three offenders, RAF Wing Commander Ronald Ramsay Rae was brought into the same prison. The Wing Commander was someone who lived up to Donald Stuart's ideals of a proper man and with him was another 'fine man', RAF Sergeant Pilot Bill Belford, a heavyweight boxing champion. Both were Australians who had been part of an escape group attempting to sail to Australia and apprehended by the Japanese. Ramsay Rae had narrowly avoided a beheading. The Japanese Colonel intent on killing him, had lifted his sword and taken a swing, but was so drunk that his aim went wild and he missed. Fearing even greater loss of face in a second failed attempt, the Colonel walked away and Ramsay Rae lived to hear his story retold.

The two groups established contact, traded stories and the less than satisfactory food. Whatever Wing Commander Ramsay Rae and Sergeant Pilot Bill Belford did not like, they passed on to Donald; it was widely known that he would eat anything, even the 'putrid, hard-boiled eggs' served up by the Japanese.

In Donald Stuart's *I Think I'll Live* version of their encounter, the Wing Commander is not particularly friendly. He is suspicious of the three miscreants, considering them 'malcontents, bad soldiers', but he undertakes to include Colin and his mates in his efforts to secure the release of his own group from this invidious situation.

Wing Commander Ramsay Rae was unable to secure the Machine Gunners' release at the same time as that of his own group, but, once back in camp, he convinced senior Australian officers to make representations to the Japanese on behalf of their men. While he agreed that Donald and his mates had flouted the rules and deserved punishment, Ramsay Rae believed they should be in the 'relative safety of a prison camp, instead of being in a civil jail under sentence of death'. Donald said he had discussed the matter with Weary Dunlop and he was of the same opinion.

There were 'a couple of executions while we were there and we knew damn well it was coming,' said Donald, who vividly describes the execution of an Indonesian nationalist in *I Think I'll Live*. Also in the novel, a sinister intent may be found in the statement: 'Among your own officers there is a feeling that it would be good for the discipline of the camp if you were punished, not by your own people, but by the Japs.' While it is possible to dismiss Donald's emphasis on this as building up his own case, there is no denying that there was a separation between officers and men at this time. Even Weary Dunlop is critical of some officers who made a 'querulous fuss' about their own conditions and held themselves apart from their men.
Donald, Buck Peters and Alan Middleton were, eventually, released and returned to the camp. Their mates welcomed them back, though the officers continued to regard them with suspicion. Not that this would have overly concerned Donald Stuart. Of the officers he said, 'those who were good, we respected them' and a man like Brigadier Arthur Blackburn, who had gained his World War I Victoria Cross in Flanders and fought at Gallipoli, had earned that respect. The Commanding Officer in *Wedgetail View* (1978), *Crank Back On Roller* (1979) and *I Think I'll Live* (1981) closely resembles the Brigadier. Donald described him as a man who could 'out-march any of us and out-think most of us...a leader well-worthy of all the respect we could give him.' Donald also had complete belief in the Sergeants, the men who, in his opinion, held the Army together at all levels. His viewpoint typified that held by many in the Army's lower ranks; a general resistance to authority, yet respect when that authority was delivered in a forthright manner and by someone who had proved himself.

Conditions at Garoet became crowded and difficult and, on 22 June, just over three months after the Dutch capitulation, the 2/3rd Machine Gunners were among a group of 600 Australians and British who moved to Bandoeng. Lieutenant-Colonel Weary Dunlop had arrived at the camp only a week before and he assessed the incoming men with a practised eye. Short hair was the order in the Bandoeng camp and he particularly noted the newcomers' 'long dirty locks, beards etc.', but he judged the Machine Gunners to be 'a well-organised show'. They were already showing signs of malnutrition, but had, apparently, received little ill-treatment from the Japanese. This would change; rules already laid down in this new camp threatened harsh and excessive punishment—should anyone escape or be found communicating with the outside world, the Japanese guards were instructed to kill all camp inmates, though the guards recognised the irony of this headquarters' directive. If such a situation occurred, their own lives were in danger, as much from the prisoners as from their Headquarters.

Through his character, Colin Campbell, in *I Think I'll Live*, Donald Stuart describes the journey from Garoet and the arrival in Bandoeng. The prisoners travelled in crowded trucks, then were forced to march the last mile or two. They are showing signs of physical decline. Colin, who has so easily walked Australia's north-west distances, experiences the debilitating effects of malnutrition and imprisonment and is 'amazed how long, how wearying' it seems. In the new camp, conditions are crowded and the
rice ration 'grossly inadequate'. The men lose 'weight and strength' and there are
'incidents of men being punished for no reason'. Following their arrival, the men line
up for a Tanka, numbering off as the Japanese insisted—'Itsi, Nee, San, See, Go,
Rocko...'. Musing about the Japanese and their ill-treatment of prisoners, Colin misses
his turn and a rifle butt falls on his right shoulder. He tries to pass off the injury, but it is
serious and he is taken to see the Medical Officers:

The taller of the two, a big man in any company...moved to where Colin was seated.
Wordlessly he touched the shoulder, his hands gentle...A dab of some cooling lotion on a swab
of cotton wool brought an easing of the throbbing pain, and a strapping of crepe bandage and a
sling completed the treatment.

In the description of his size and the healing hands of a good doctor inspiring his
patient towards recovery, we recognise the Medical Officer as Weary Dunlop. The
incident could be based on Donald's memory of an encounter with him at some stage;
he does not use actual names in I Think I'll Live and always refers to the Medical
Officer as 'the Big Bloke'.

Just as the Commanding Officer in Donald Stuart's war novels is recognisably based
upon Brigadier Blackburn, so, in 'the Big Bloke', may we find Weary Dunlop, the man
who had Donald's absolute respect. Here, he believed, was a man to look up to, one
who epitomised all the qualities he so admired, a man whose ability was beyond
question and whose compassion for his fellow humans was evident for all to see. Like
all the others in Java who came in contact with Weary Dunlop, Donald Stuart always
spoke highly of him and of the other Medical Officers in his team. He particularly
mentioned Major Ewan Corlett, Major Arthur Moon and Major Jock Clarke, the Dental
Officer, but included all Medical Officers and their assistants in his praise and, like most
soldiers, he had a particularly soft spot for the Sisters and Nurses.

At this time, British Officer, LieutColonel Laurens van der Post, considered it most
important to forge some cohesion amongst the mixed group of men in Bandoeng Camp.
He and Wing Commander W.T.H. Nicholls, RAF, called a meeting of senior officers at
which they identified Weary Dunlop as a potential Camp Commander. As van der Post
saw it, they were fighting 'a war for sanity of mind and body' and a doctor was surely
the most apt person to lead the group. Reluctantly, Weary Dunlop agreed to take the
position. For the next three months, as he organised and fairly adjudicated in all areas of camp life, order reigned. 77

Van der Post took a leading role in organising educational courses that spanned every standard of learning, from helping the illiterate right up to university level. The men came to regard the Bandoeng period as 'a golden age' in their imprisonment: 'A halcyon time,' said Keith Flanagan, 78 when the conditions might still be thought of as reasonably bearable and able to be overcome with a bit of general fortitude. At that stage, the Australians were still estimating their imprisonment would not last longer than six to eighteen months. 79

Weary Dunlop’s concern for the men under his command and his idealistic officer’s attitude, ‘my horse, my men, myself’ 80 in order of importance, would cause him some heartache. His stated aim was to help the men return home, as far as possible ‘without permanent damage to body and mind’. As time went on, this very commendable desire became more and more difficult to achieve. Malaria had been a problem from the first landing in Java, there was also dysentery and, by mid-October, pellagra-type cases of deficiency disease were commonplace. 81 One symptom of this disease, an intense burning of the feet, kept sufferers awake at night and made it extremely painful to walk.

‘Happy feet’ the men in I Think I’ll Live call them. ‘Dozens of blokes’ve got it an’ it’s no joke,’ Colin is told shortly after his arrival. His first meal is a scant helping of rice, ‘topped with a dab of green stuff that looked like watercress’. While some eat quickly, other prisoners savour every mouthful. 82

Officers were receiving pay from the Japanese and Weary Dunlop suggested that everyone should contribute to a common fund, from which food would be purchased and distributed evenly across ranks. Some officers considered the proposal as ‘communism’ and, disgusted with their opposition to a plan intended for the common good, Weary Dunlop resigned from the post of Camp Commander. 83

He had, however, had time to alert everyone to the importance of maintaining health and hygiene and, as best he could with the limited resources available, had devised ways of protecting the men. Though not everyone agreed at first, in time the common fund did become an accepted part of camp life, seen as the only way to provide fairly for everyone. Forays were also made outside the camp to get additional food and medical officers took enormous risks to acquire medical supplies.
Donald Stuart spoke highly of the Chinese who, by assisting the prisoners, consistently placed themselves in danger of a painful death: ‘They were superb—can’t think of any other word,’ he said. Western Australian, John McGregor, a member of the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion, taken prisoner in Singapore, was equally appreciative of the Chinese. In his Blood on the Rising Sun, a bitter and harrowing account of the time, he writes: ‘No British or Australian soldier... will ever forget the debt owing to the Chinese who flaunted Japanese authority consistently in order to bring aid to the men in captivity.’ Contacts made with Chinese merchants ensured extra supplies and regular consignments of duck eggs. Though sometimes they were less than fresh, these eggs, hard-boiled, became an invaluable addition to the prisoners’ monotonous rice diet. To ensure at least a minimum protein intake, the aim was for each man to receive half-an-egg a day. The vital importance of this supplement becomes apparent in Ray Parkin’s statement in his novel, Into the Smother (1963): ‘There is no doubt in my mind that eggs will make the difference to our chances of getting out of the jungle alive.’

Despite outside help and the medical team’s determination, lack of proper food and pitiful conditions resulted in a growing number of sick. Men were beginning to die and, to make matters worse, the Japanese came to regard the prisoners as a captive workforce. Before long, those deemed fit enough were sent out on work parties. It was in Bandoeng, Alf Sheppard realised, that the prisoners began to get ‘a taste of what the treatment would be like when we reached the Burma-Thailand railway area later’.

In the first week of November, the Battalion moved from Bandoeng to Makasura, a staging camp on the outskirts of Batavia. Here the camp population comprised a very mixed group of nationalities and service personnel, and Colonel Lyneham became painfully aware that it was impossible for his men to remain as a cohesive Army unit subject to his command. Their Army association ensured a strong bond between those men who remained together and those able to make contact with others in their units. But, as John Bellair states: ‘From now on, until their liberation in August 1945, this part of the Battalion’s history becomes increasingly the story of the fortunes and misfortunes of individuals.’

Donald Stuart’s individual experience provided the material for I Think I’ll Live, a story set against a background of events readily found in official records. Choosing to write about the men he had gone along with, he saw them as typifying the ordinary
Australian; the same men he had met on the road and sat with around camp fires, men with whom he shared the prospector's dream and love of the Australian outback. Now, they find themselves in another isolating and testing situation. Though the Japanese Prisoner of War experience places them in an infinitely more dangerous position, in many ways their situation has not changed. Stuart tackles the storytelling in his usual way, exposing the Australian character through anecdote and dialogue in another of what his friend, Richard Speir, calls: 'His spare records of men being men in the hardest conditions and being decent about it.'

The move to Makasura allows Colin Campbell to step back and view the scene afresh. He notes the crowded conditions, the men weak and emaciated, food always uppermost in their minds: 'Bugger the scenery, the climate, everything. Just gimme food.' The individual effects of malnutrition are apparent in the South Australian, so skinny that his bones show through shiny skin. They are all 'fined down far too much' and their clothes are rotting off them.

Food in Makasura was, perhaps, a little better. The common fund allowed for additional stores to be purchased, but still it was not enough. 'We're going downhill,' remarks one of Stuart's characters. 'The Nip knows what he's doing. Keep us on short rations, an' we're harmless.'

The Japanese may have thought to control their prisoners by keeping them ill-fed and, as a direct consequence, unhealthy. But, as Doctor Alan Walker states in his Medical History of the 2nd AIF, by neglecting the prisoners' health and nutrition, the Japanese utterly wasted the potential of this captive work force.

Christmas in Makasura! The Dutch smuggled a few extra rations into the camp, but the contrast with the Battalion's previous Christmas in Fih could not have been greater.

Just before New Year, it became clear that another move was imminent. The prisoners were given inoculations and some men were separated from the group because of ill health. At 2.00 am on 4 January 1943, the group, now under the command of Weary Dunlop and known as 'Dunlop Force', was marched eight kilometres to the Meester Cornelius station and loaded onto a train for a short journey to Tandjong Priok. They filed onto the waiting 30 year-old freighter, Waysui Maru.

Another ship, another sea journey and, in I Think I'll Live, Grill Dukas is again taking bets as to where they will finish up. This running-bet underlines the prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty surrounding these men who never know where they are going.
and, when they get there, whether conditions will be better or worse. The only certainty is in their present. Overall uncertainty is in not knowing how long their confinement will last or how long they will be able to endure the privations forced upon them. In this final novel of the *Conjuror’s Years* sequence, Donald Stuart does more than ‘shuffle the stories’, he emphasises his theme, the game of chance being played out in these lives.

Conditions aboard the *Waysui Maru* were appalling. The men were crowded—like sardines, considers Hector in *I Think I’ll Live*, with no room for oil—‘like sheep,’ said Weary Dunlop, having thoughts about the black hole of Calcutta. Had the ship sunk, it is doubtful whether anyone would have survived. Thankfully, theirs was a short journey and, on 6 January, Dunlop Force arrived in Singapore.

When the group of 2/3rd Machine Gunners and 2/2nd Pioneers met up with Australians in Changi, the full effects of the bungled loading at Port Tewfick became pitifully apparent. Their ‘good summer gear’ and changes of clothing were in the kitbags left behind in Egypt. Since leaving the Middle East, they had worn their winter uniforms continuously, supplementing them with odd pieces of clothing acquired from the Dutch. Trousers hacked off at the knees and various make-do alterations had helped them adjust to the tropical climate. Some men were without boots, a lack that would cause them increasing hardship. When viewed beside 8th Division Australians in Changi: ‘We were a pretty unlovely-looking lot,’ said Keith Flanagan. They acquired yet another group name—‘the Java Rabble’—one they wore proudly, believing their Java experience had given them an advantage over the Changi men. Much to his disgust, Weary Dunlop’s determined efforts to acquire boots and extra clothing supplies for his men were unsuccessful, though, ‘unofficially’, some 8th Division members did donate clothing to the men from Java.

On 20 January, Dunlop Force left Singapore by train, another long and difficult, crowded and uncomfortable journey. In *I Think I’ll Live*, Donald Stuart shows the men adjusting to the cramped conditions, moving as a group and assisting each other. To let each one feel the breeze and breathe fresh air at the open door, they shuffle in an *en masse* movement, changing places around the truck, then, while half of them stand, the rest take turns to squat. As always, there is conjecture about where they will finish up. They will be working, that much has become obvious, and they interpret the timbered country into occupations the Western Australians understand, forestry work and tin-
mining. Here, as in Java, they recognise there is little hope of escape. At the end of the train journey they are faced with a gruelling march, made worse by lack of food. During short rest periods, the Big Bloke opens the large valise he has carried all the way and treats their sore and bleeding feet. 

Dunlop Force arrived at Tarsao on the Kwai Noi River, then went further up the river to Konyu, the first of several camps they would occupy during their time on the Burma-Thailand Railway.

Seven years before, an American survey for the proposed railway had confirmed an earlier British report that it could only be built at enormous cost, not only in monetary terms, but in lives that would inevitably be lost in the difficult and infested terrain. But the Japanese were determined to have a land route for their supplies and work had started from both ends of the railway in June 1942. The 61,000 Australian, British, American and Dutch prisoners presented as an obvious work force and, joined by 250,000 Asians, were employed to take the line from its already existing point at Non Pladuk, near Bangkok, to Thanbyuzayat in Burma, a distance of some 415 kilometres. The Japanese considered the prisoners expendable. ‘You all die, we will still build the railway,’ is one of their reported comments.

Konyu was 150 kilometres from the railway’s southern end and, when the Machine Gunners arrived there, on 26 January 1943, they were among the first of the Australians to reach the railway. They were moved six kilometres further up to Hintok on 11 March and, working in wet and dry seasons, moved several times before the railway was finished, nine months later, on 17 October 1943.

Norma Stuart, Donald’s sister-in-law, was not at all surprised when Donald called his final published novel *I Think I’ll Live*. ‘How’re you going?’ she had asked him over the years and always received the same reply: ‘Ah, I think I’ll live’. The statement reveals a certain stoicism, but also implies a positive bent towards survival, attitudes evident throughout Donald’s life story, particularly in relation to his time as a Japanese Prisoner of War.

The conditions were horrendous. Some got through, but others did not.

How did any of them survive?

Almost forty years later, when Tim Bowden interviewed Donald for the ABC program *Prisoners of War, Australians Under Nippon*, the question was uppermost in
their discussion. Displaying his usual stoicism, Donald was inclined to stress the individual will as an essential factor towards survival.\textsuperscript{110} When, in his novel, \textit{The Middle Parts of Fortune} (1929), Frederic Manning wrote about the horrors of World War I on the Western Front, he also emphasised the 'individual will' as an important factor in the endurance of all men, even in the face of death.\textsuperscript{111} While writing about different wars, Manning and Stuart drew upon their own war experiences. They had observed the men around them, watched them live and watched them die. In such situations the big questions demand consideration. Having always maintained the ordinary man's helplessness in the face of decisions made by those in power, now, in this deadly business of being a prisoner of the Japanese, Donald Stuart acknowledges an individual will and hands control back to his ordinary man.

Of course, there were other factors. For the Australians, one all-important determinant towards survival was the tradition of mateship, so much part of the Australian legend Donald Stuart sought to preserve in his writing. Survivors of this time readily acknowledged the part their friends and mates played in getting them through.\textsuperscript{112} Donald Stuart showed how a chance remark, a yarn, any distraction to spark an interest, even an argument, could make the difference between despair and continued hope.

One of his repeated stories was of an RAF pilot, identified in the Tim Bowden interview as Bill Belford, one of the men with whom Donald was in Garoet Civil prison. When the two met, years after the war, Bill said to his wife: 'You know, Scorp saved my life.' Donald denied any act of bravery, but Bill insisted that 'up to our knees in mud, everyone dying of cholera, dysentery, malaria, the bloody lot', he had reached a stage where he was prepared to 'lie down and die'. Donald's response showed another attitude altogether. He agreed with Bill that—yes, it was 'a bastard of a time, a most unhappy time', but his intense awareness of everything going on around him, his acknowledged role as observer, can be found in his continuation: 'But, Jesus, it's interesting isn't it?' The comment helped Bill to consider another way of thinking and awoke him to the possibility of survival: 'I started to take an interest, and here I am,' he said.\textsuperscript{113}

An incident in \textit{I Think I'll Live} illustrates how, in such horrendous conditions, the will to die also might appear as a conscious decision. Just after the group's arrival at Tarsao, Colin notices one young soldier's 'loneliness...his utter isolation from all other men'. He tries to engage the young soldier in conversation, commenting that it looks
like rain. 'If it rains... I'm going to lie down right here and die,' says Doc, so-called because his father and grandfather were doctors. It rains and, when Colin looks down, the young soldier is dead 'curled on his side, both hands a pillow for his head, his knees drawn up'. The story is told gently, but, in this case, Colin's concern for the soldier, his desire to help him in some way, is of no use.

The Prisoner-of-war experience 'taught me a lot about other people,' said Donald. 'It taught me a lot more about myself.'

Then there were the amputees, those whose legs had been eaten away by 'rotten tropical ulcers' and had to be taken off at the knee. Though experts in their field, the surgeons were forced to operate in crude conditions, and post-operative treatment was less than ideal. In coping with this physical trauma on top of all their other difficulties, the amputees showed extraordinary endurance. At first, the medical team had the patients up on bamboo crutches within ten days, but the length of time lessened until, helped by his mates, one on either side of him, one man was up in four days. A doctor told Donald that, even in a normal hospital situation, such an outcome was unheard of.

In his own particular way, dwelling on detail and never sparing the reader, in I Think I'll Live Donald Stuart vividly conveys the despairing conditions:

In a cloudy world of unreality, a damp world of weakness and hunger and pain, with malaria shaking their bodies, dizzying their minds, dysentery tearing at their bowels, ulcers rotting their legs, beriberi bloating their flesh, until no man in either camp was fit for anything but hospital, but still their guards forced them out to work. They had reached the nadir of all their hopes of survival, they thought, but worse was to come.

Somehow, the prisoners had learned to keep going. Then, on top of everything else, there came cholera. The chances of surviving cholera are greatly increased if bodily fluids can be maintained and here Weary Dunlop and his team showed their brilliance. They scrounged materials and devised ways of distilling water to make saline drips. They isolated cholera sufferers, instructed all men to drink only boiled water and made 'safe' water available at the cookhouse. Working within the restricted conditions, they did everything they could to keep the sickness from spreading and to keep cholera victims alive.
When men died, the corpses had to be dealt with and Donald Stuart was one of those who volunteered to burn the bodies of cholera victims. When they told the story, his mates grimmed and mentioned that it had earned him an extra rice ration, but their voices dropped in awe, and his downright selflessness in undertaking this forbidding task is never lost in the telling. Keith Flanagan links this act with Donald’s ‘Man with Mules’ period in the Middle East as demonstrating the ‘element of service or idealism’ that Donald held towards his fellows, and as another example of the ‘extra compassion’ of which he was capable.117

In *I Think I’ll Live*, Donald writes about the body-burning in a matter-of-fact way—the job must be done. Seeking to normalise the work, Colin escapes into his usual philosophical mode, considering the whole business of death and the customs surrounding it. In this telling, Stuart conveys a sense of desolation. For the small group of men engaged in the cremation, their own death looms, if possible, even closer. Yet, in his characters’ enquiry about how to avoid this other scourge that has befallen them, we detect their continuing will to battle through.118

Being out after curfew was a punishable crime, but as the Australians defied rules, going out to dig graves, scavenge for food and obtain medical supplies, there was a great deal of night-time activity going on. If Scorp was caught out at night, he just pretended to be talking to a cockatoo on his shoulder. ‘The Japs used to reckon he was silly, crazy,’ said fellow prisoner W.J.Smith, ‘and he got away with it.’119

‘We saw it through,’ Donald told Tim Bowden. ‘We thieved and—well, we got by’—he hesitated—‘those who didn’t die.’

‘The railway was our Gallipoli,’ said Bill Haskell, one of Donald’s fellow prisoners.120

This arresting statement bears consideration. In both cases, the soldiers were caught in an untenable position, and for a similar period of time; the 2/3rd Machine Gunners were involved in building the Burma-Thailand Railway for a period almost as long as the Gallipoli Campaign lasted. But, on the railway, deaths were caused, not as the result of enemy fire, but by cruelty, neglect and inhumane conditions. Another important difference was that people at home received news about Gallipoli, but from the time the Australian POWs were captured until their release in 1945, hardly anything was known about the fate of these men. During the long three-and-a-half years of imprisonment, most relatives had no idea if their men were dead or alive. The Japanese prevented
communication with the outside world and blocked inward correspondence, including Red Cross messages and parcels. A note in Donald Stuart’s War Record, dated 30 April 1942, shows him as ‘missing in Java’. It took four months to record him as ‘missing, believed POW’, and another ten months to confirm that he was a ‘POW in Java’, by which time he was already on the railway.

After the railway was finished, 2/3rd Machine Gunners were scattered throughout the south-west Pacific and were engaged with other prisoners in building roads, airfields and even, in Sumatra, yet another railway. No matter where they were, the conditions did not improve; ill-treatment, malnutrition and disease still dogged them. Donald was in Singapore for six months, then was taken by ship to Saigon, from Saigon to Long-Tanh, from Long-Tanh back to Saigon and by motor boat to PnomPenh, the capital of Cambodia. He was back in Saigon when the war came to an end.

As he tells it, when the war ended, he weighed about thirty-three kilograms and had probably weighed less while working on the railway. Freed from the Japanese and awaiting Army orders, there was a strange period of no restriction and—finally, the journey home—by Dakota to Bangkok, then to Singapore. From there they went to Labuan. Donald’s group spent eight days at Moratai before flying by Liberator to Darwin where they were able to send telegrams back home.

The day after they arrived in Darwin, a photograph was taken at Berry Springs. The fourteen men had begun their slow recovery, but were still painfully thin. Donald is barefoot, in shorts and shirt with the sleeves rolled up, his Digger’s hat worn at a rakish angle. He has assumed his usual place on the left edge of the group, somewhat apart—much as his father had been in the photograph taken after his release from prison in 1893. Donald had grown up listening to his father’s stories about being imprisoned and perhaps, throughout his ordeal, memories of these yarns had strengthened his resolve to survive. Like his father, Donald had come through and the similarity between this photograph and his father’s release photograph serves to emphasise the parallel nature of their life stories.

Prior to the attacks on Pearl Harbour and Singapore, Allied forces had held a poor opinion of the Japanese and were unprepared for their obvious organisation and the rapidity with which they overran Asia. Years later, commentators sought to explain the
Japanese attitude to their prisoners, the indignities and brutality visited upon these men whose chances of survival depended on complying with the unreasonable demands placed upon them.126 Explanations take into account the ancient Samurai warrior tradition, a culture which emphasises the importance of those in control and the subservience of those under their control. For the Japanese, it was important to win at any cost. They despised the very idea of surrender; in their culture it was dishonourable to be taken prisoner—better to die. Under this regimen, the ordinary Japanese soldier was subjected to severe punishment by those above him, to the point of sadism. It was such treatment meted out to him that he passed on to those prisoners with whom he came in contact. There is recognition that, certainly on the railway, ordinary Japanese soldiers were living in the same difficult conditions as the Allied prisoners, were often frightened and in almost as pitiful a state as the prisoners themselves.127

Donald Stuart does show the Japanese as being fearful of the cholera outbreak, but throughout I Think I'll Live, published forty years after the event, he is scathingly critical of his captors. He could not be otherwise. In an interview with T.A.G. Hungerford, he acknowledged the hatred he had held for the Japanese immediately after the war: ‘I make no secret of it, I loathed the bastards.’ In time, he said, he had come to see the Japanese ‘purely as a people’. Later, when he applied his ability to reason and recovered his usual philosophical view, he found it difficult to believe ‘that all Japanese, little Japanese boys and girls...old grandmothers and grandfathers’ were all ‘bloodthirsty maniacs’.128

After the war, survivors had to find their own way of overcoming their three-and-a-half years in the prison camps and would always be haunted by the question of why they—and not their mates—had survived. Tim Bowden interviewed 150 survivors of Japanese prison camps, many of whom had never told their story before. In all of them Bowden recognised ‘an obligation to themselves and their comrades to set down their part in an extraordinary piece of history’.129 As Donald said, many of them ‘went on like me to become a bloody writer’.130

Hank Nelson’s compilation of Tim Bowden’s interviews, Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon (1985), lists forty-seven books written by and about Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II. In addition, alongside official histories and Battalion histories, he cites twenty-six other Diaries and Reminiscences. As the publication dates show, only a few of these made it into print during the late 1940s and
early 1950s; the majority did not reach fruition until the 60s, 70s and 80s, years after the event, and more have been written since.131 Like Donald Stuart’s story, many of them were likely to have been continuously written and rewritten throughout the period prior to publication. The authors’ persistence in their task is a mark of their belief, as Tim Bowden states, that the story just had to be told, but also emphasises the way war events, because of their starkness, stay in the memory and persist into old age.

Donald acknowledged that his period of imprisonment must have had an effect on him physically. He thought he was ‘still in good nick psychologically’, but conceded that some of his ‘main psychological characteristics may have been accentuated’.132 The time could only have strengthened his tendency to isolation and the forthrightness inherited from his father. He had seen men at their best and at their worst, and the experience would sharpen his judgement of people who, in some way, did not measure up to his exacting standards.

‘He appeared to be saying that his imprisonment had not affected him,’ said his stepson, Reg Crabb, ‘but there is no doubt it had.’133 Certainly, many of those who knew Donald in his later life were ready to cite his time as a Prisoner of the Japanese as a reason for what they considered his tendency to be ‘outrageous’.

One thing was certain, when everyone in the bush was driving Toyotas, Donald Stuart could never bring himself to purchase one of the popular Japanese cars—he always drove a Landrover. Later in life, he drove a Renault.134

Weary Dunlop remained Donald’s ultimate hero, his Proper Man, alongside or perhaps even replacing the heroic figure he had made of his father.

Sir Edward E. Dunlop died on 12 July 1993 and, inscribed on the base of a Memorial erected in his home-town, Benalla, are Donald Stuart’s words:

When despair and death reached for us, Weary Dunlop stood fast, a lighthouse of sanity in a universe of nakedness and suffering.135
Donald Stuart. Sketch by Thomas Lange.
Long-Thanh. 23 April, 1945.

By permission of the National Library of Australia

Donald Stuart, extreme right with hand on hip, and fellow ex-Prisoners of War at Berry Springs, Darwin, N.T. on arrival from Indo-China. 1945.
Early in the morning of 6 October 1945, Scorp Stuart climbed aboard the aptly named Liberator aircraft in Darwin. There were five of them on the ten-hour flight to Perth, moving towards their long-anticipated homecoming. The first batches of repatriated prisoners had arrived at Guildford airport two weeks previously. Since then, by plane, train and ship, a day and night effort had brought home the stretcher cases and walking wounded, as well as those from overseas and interstate whose service had come to an end. Some arrangements were made so hastily there was no time to advise relatives, and Red Cross volunteers were often the only ones to greet the momentous arrivals.²

Donald was expected. His name appeared in a small notice in that morning’s The West Australian and Joan Stuart had been notified that her husband was arriving in Perth. She telephoned his brother, Ken, to let him know when Donald was coming home, asking him to meet the aircraft and to say that she would not be going to the airport.

Three of the brothers, Ken, Ralph and Douglas, went to Guildford that Saturday afternoon. News had begun to filter through about the appalling conditions of the camps and they could not have been without some apprehension about how they might find their brother. After waiting around for a while, they began to think they had missed Donald or that he had not been on the plane. Then they noticed a ‘poor bugger’ still standing in a corner, apparently with no one to meet him. Donald was so emaciated his brothers did not recognise him and he, of course, was expecting Joan and not looking for them. Military ambulances and Red Cross buses were waiting to take the men to Hollywood Military Hospital for ‘rest and routine examinations’.

Donald’s eldest niece, June (Ana) Stuart, then in her mid-teens, was taken to see him. He was skeletal, fragile, and she sensed the family’s concern that he might not live. But his eyes were ‘exactly the same’ as she always remembered them and she saw that ‘his own personal power was still tenaciously holding on’.³ Two months passed before the older Stuarts considered Donald was well enough to receive visits from younger family members.⁴
How strange it must have been, and in such stark contrast to what had gone before. It would have been so easy to consider sinking into the hospital whiteness, but even if he had been the sort of person to give in and take life easily, nothing would go so smoothly for Donald Stuart. He had learned to take the blows life handed out and another was waiting on the sidelines. Three days passed before Joan came to the hospital.

Wars have far-reaching effects. After their men left for overseas service, Australian women quickly learned to fend for themselves. They shouldered the responsibility of bringing up a family without a man in the house and answered the call to take up essential war work. For them, there was a deep satisfaction in mastering unfamiliar tasks and they developed a new self-confidence. Then, at the end of the war, women were expected to surrender their jobs to returning servicemen and go back to the traditional roles of wife, mother and home-maker. Most of them did and, for the rest of their lives, those women would recall their war effort with pleasure and pride. Some of them, wanting to retain their independence, remained in their jobs. More than two decades would pass before Women's Movements gathered enough momentum to change perceptions of the woman's role in society. Independent women had always fought for the change, but the 1939-45 war period brought about a wider awareness of possibilities for women outside the home and greatly influenced moves towards emancipation.6

The story of Joan and Donald Stuart traces this social phenomenon clearly and, as in many other cases, sadly.6

At the time of their marriage, Joan Stuart had described herself as being 'wholly dependent' upon her new husband, a not uncommon situation for a woman of that time, though one has to wonder what happened to her dress-making position. As the wife of a member of the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF), she received an official allotment which increased when Donald went overseas. In November 1941, she was receiving the equivalent of $4.75 cents per week.7 Sixty or more years later this seems a minor amount, even taking into account changed currency values, but in those days, people lived simply and many women fed and clothed families on less.

For the first eighteen months of her married life, Joan had remained in Adelaide and managed on her allowance. Then, in August 1942, she asked for her money to be directed to Victoria, giving her address as that of Donald's sister, Lyndall Hadow. In January 1943, Private Joan Stuart advised that she had joined the Australian Women's
Army Service. In May, Lance Corporal Joan Stuart heard that her husband, Private Donald Stuart, was Missing Believed Prisoner of War (POW). In August she received confirmation that he had been taken as a POW in Java. One year later, Corporal Joan Stuart moved to Western Australia to serve at Guildford, where Donald had first started his Army service.

When Sergeant Joan Stuart eventually came to visit her husband in hospital, the wartime romance was over. Now an independent woman used to making her own decisions, Joan was living an entirely different life from that of the young Adelaide dress designer Donald Stuart had married. There had been so little time before he was sent overseas and almost five years had passed since then. They hardly knew each other and, while he was away, there had been times when Joan had no idea where her husband was, or even if he was still alive. Like the other wives of POWs, with this uncertainty, she had suffered not only the absence of her husband, but also, in accepting the possibility of his death, a state later recognised as 'anticipatory bereavement'. Then, suddenly, here he was back in Western Australia, weak, emaciated and still recovering from the unimaginable abuse. How could she greet him?

Sensing her coolness, but still not understanding the import of her evasiveness, Donald asked where she thought they might live. Perhaps they could go for a holiday. Not wanting to be unkind, or purposefully hurt him, Joan said she would like to wait until he was fit and well again before discussing the matter and she walked away.

She came twice more, still showing reluctance to talk about their future, but eventually saying she would no longer live with him as his wife. Joan had already told his brother, Douglas, that she would break with Donald when he came home. Her decision was irrevocable. She agreed her allotment should be stopped and said she would repay any extra monies he had arranged for her to receive. There was no other man, Joan said, she just wanted her own life, 'free from all encumbrances'. It was a state for which Donald himself had always aimed, but at this time, he found it difficult to empathise with her desire for separation.

In order to cancel Joan's allotment, the Army required a declaration. Donald dictated the official document, detailing the previous few days' events. His disappointment is palpable in these formal words that ended the union. Their marriage had started, as do all marriages, with hope for the future, yet without any knowledge of what that future might hold. The unforeseen circumstances of the following years had proven
overwhelming. Signed by the two most intimately involved, the declaration was then countersigned and witnessed by an Army staff sergeant. Just two weeks after Donald Stuart arrived back in Perth, the hasty wartime marriage was over.\(^{13}\)

For many weeks, Donald was moved from one Military District Hospital to another, each move marking a stage in his recovery. While convalescing, he 'hastily finished' a 65,000 word war novel called *I Guess and Fear*, the story of a young Australian couple whose plans for a bright future are interrupted by World War II. The manuscript was entered in the War Book section of the 1946 *Sydney Morning Herald* Literary Competition, the judges of which commended the writing as 'distinctive and genuinely forceful'. Donald had used the diary form to control a canvas which was probably too wide to be successful and the novel was returned, along with the short stories, 'Swinging Sword', 'Decision' and '1932'.\(^{14}\)

Almost exactly six years after first enlisting in the AIF, Private D.R. Stuart was demobilised in April 1946. Along with all his 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion mates who survived their ordeal and returned to Australia, he was entitled to wear the 1939/45 Star; Pacific Star; Defence Medal; War Medal; and Australian Service Medal.\(^{15}\) Quite apart from the disappointment of his broken marriage, his war experiences had left their mark and getting back into civilian life would require an extraordinary adjustment. Donald was not alone; 7,777 men had died in the camps, more than a third of all those imprisoned by the Japanese; 14,000 men came back to Australia, each with his own stark memories of those years.\(^{16}\) The stories of Australians taken prisoner in World War I, World War II and Korea, collected in Patsy Adam-Smith's *Prisoners of War* (1992), gives an idea of how completely the war prisoner experience lodges in a man's consciousness. At the end of her section, 'Prisoners of the Japanese', Adam-Smith includes a Donald Stuart quotation:

> Sometimes, out of nowhere, you hear the thin silver notes of the bugle. I've heard that phantom bugle crying the “Last Post” through the silky whisper of the she-oaks in the bush and I've stood still, alone, not thinking of men I've seen buried or helped to bury, just standing listening, but I don't know where the music comes from, I don't know who sounds the bugle.\(^{17}\)
COMING HOME

Whatever Donald Stuart did immediately after discharge from the Army, his sister, Lyndall, was bound to be there to help her brother. Following the death of their mother and father, Lyndall had accepted responsibility for her brothers and assumed a parental role, one it seems she never relinquished. She encouraged Donald to use writing as a means of recovering from his war experiences and, more than once, submitted or resubmitted work on his behalf. As a working journalist, she knew that one rejection slip was not the end of a manuscript, and Donald was in need of her expertise and reassurance.

All over the world, literary agents were being flooded with war stories, but no matter how 'powerful' they were, how 'well-written', the public wanted to forget the war and there was a demand for other writing. Literary Agent, Noelle Brennan, regretfully returned the manuscript of I Guess and Fear and the short story, 'Swinging Sword'. 'Perhaps, when the wounds of the world are a little less raw war stories may be more acceptable,' she wrote in her sympathetic letter, going on to suggest: 'With your descriptive power why not record a happier phase of life, and let us see some of your work in this vein?' The letter ended with 'the sincere wish that your grim experiences will fade eventually from your mind, and that you will find brighter ones in their place'. How many other such understanding letters of rejection had she written?

The experiences were too fresh to reach the page successfully. While immediate writing may have been able to convey the close-up impact of the war experience and capture the sharp details that distance might soften; it would take time for the ultimate story to emerge. Many more years would pass and many words be written before Donald's war novels finally reached publication.

There was some success to be had; his story, 'Wild Dog', was read on ABC Radio and, for 'The Karri Tree', published in Sydney's The Sunday Sun colour magazine, Donald received a cheque for ten guineas. The editor of the monthly magazine FOCUS also showed an interest in his work. Lyndall's hand can be seen behind this flurry of submissions and acceptances; she knew her way around the publishers and was able to choose likely outlets for her brother's stories.

In July 1948, the manuscript of I Guess and Fear had been revised and re-typed, and Lyndall declared herself as being involved in marketing Donald's work. She sent a synopsis of the novel to Dymocks for consideration, describing it as:
the story of a young Australian couple whose fight for the making of a home and the rearing of a family in better social conditions than they had previously known, is interrupted by the war. The canvas covers much of outback Australian life, as well as war-time city life; and parts of the Syrian campaign; as well as the abortive Java campaign and its resultant prison-camp-Thailand-Railway sequel.24

Lyndall presented it as ‘a novel with a well-balanced proportion of social thinking’ but ‘not a novel...catering for popular tastes’. Her literary aspirations are evident in the statement, which seems unlikely to have convinced anyone that it was a novel that must be published. Within a month, the Manager of Dymocks Publishing Department asked to see the manuscript, but there is no record of a response.

At the same time, Lyndall offered the novel to Georgian House Press, Melbourne, but they showed no interest. An English publisher also declined to take the novel further.25 In one of his later interviews, Donald described I Guess and Fear as being ‘about the war and the Japanese prison camps’ and, while admitting it had gone no further, he said it had provided him ‘with a bit of material for later works’.26 The title does not appear again, but from his description, it seems certain much of the subject matter was recovered and expanded upon in his last three novels, Wedgetail View (1978), Crank Back on Roller (1979) and I Think I’ll Live (1981).

A number of other short stories were sent off and returned. The quality of Donald’s writing was always acknowledged, but the readers often had difficulty with his chosen theme. At the end of 1948, one short story was returned for the sixth time: ‘I liked the way “Giant With Whip” was written but not the theme. I hope you’ll send us something else,’ wrote recognised editor and well-known journalist, Cyril Pearl.27

With Lyndall’s backing, and an already impressive output, it seems that Donald had accepted the idea of writing about his experiences. He began to follow the writer’s life, but was always ready to take on any job he could find. In a 1974 interview, he told Hazel de Berg that, during this time, he had worked ‘in a Melbourne factory, in a malthouse, at the Sunshine Implement Works and on the railways as a ticket-snapper’.28

While still in Melbourne, Donald met the woman destined to become an enigmatic figure in his life story. Whatever other origins she may have claimed later, or had manufactured for her, Dulcie Eunice Singh, a Victorian Registered General Nurse,
known as 'Des', 'Desi' or 'Dessie', was officially a native of Fiji, born in Suva on 24 March 1920. She had been barely seventeen-years old when the Seventh Day Adventist Church sponsored her travel to Australia and, at the time she met Donald Stuart, she had lived and worked in Melbourne for about ten years.

Donald's version of Dessie's story is poured out in his unpublished manuscript, *Yandy of the Winds*. Much of what is written is checkable and, though a fictional element cannot be discounted, this account does provide an insight into their relationship.

Dessie told Donald how, as a young coloured woman on her own in Melbourne, she had experienced a great deal of prejudice, but nothing had stopped her determination to take up nursing. An Immigration Department Exemption Certificate gave her permission to stay in Australia and, having found a hospital to accept her, she managed to complete her training. During the war years, a shortage of nurses gave her the opportunity to increase her expertise and, during this time, she willingly accepted any nursing position that was offered, working day and night shifts, and long hours.

At the end of the war, given the choice of going back to her own country or completing more training, Dessie agreed to train as a midwife. However, her previous dedication had sapped her strength and, before long, she succumbed to tuberculosis. For the next three years, she was in and out of hospital and too sick to work. After she left hospital, two friends took her in and helped her towards recovery.

Dessie wanted to stay in Australia, but with new immigration policies and the country's bias towards European, and particularly British migrants, she found herself in a difficult position. Australians did not take easily to foreign immigrants and Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell, strongly upheld a White Australia policy. When she met Donald, Dessie was, once again, in danger of being sent back to Fiji.

The twenty-eight year old Dessie was quite beautiful, and in his telling of her story, it is clear that Donald was moved by her untenable position. Here was another person caught in a situation beyond her control. He was without colour prejudice and there was an obvious solution: 'Marry me, become an Australian citizen and they won't send you back,' is Donald's reported response. Dessie agreed and Donald rushed back to Perth to arrange his divorce from Joan. Six months later, they were married in Melbourne.

After the wedding, they travelled by train, across the Nullarbor Plain to Perth, where the Stuarts welcomed Dessie into their family, though it is interesting to note that, in a
group family photograph, Dessie is the one on the edge of the group and Donald is in the front row. For a brief time, the couple lived in Fremantle and, in 1950, another Certificate of Exemption granted Dessie permission to stay in Australia. They next moved to Roleystone, a rural area in the Hills east of Perth and here, in his own smallholding with fruit trees, Donald described himself as a ‘labourer’ who ‘did all sorts of work around Roleystone’.

Donald’s nieces, Wendy and Jill, retained fond memories of a ‘good holiday’ they had spent in the Perth Hills with Dessie and Donald, the twelve or thirteen-year-olds sleeping in an outside hut that was just about the size of a big double bed. Wendy thought of that as a time when her Uncle Donald was ‘settled’. His brother, Douglas, had a similar small property in Kelmscott. ‘It seemed to be the “thing” to have a little smallholding,’ said Wendy, who equated this ownership of rural land with ‘the political air at the time’.

During this period, Western Australian poet, Alec Choate, and his surveying team, were working in the Roleystone area and Donald invited them in for a cup of tea. ‘Donald understood what it was like to be working outside in all weathers,’ said Alec. The team was surveying for roads and the two writers pondered the enormity of the planned changes and the effects they would have on this rural land.

Their war experiences were loosely interwoven. As a member of the 2/7th Field Regiment, Artillery, Ninth Division, AIF, Alec had sailed for the Middle East in 1940 and he carried his own memories of Palestine, Beirut, Damascus and the snow. He also left the Lebanon in 1942, but had followed a different path—to Egypt, then on to El Alamein and, afterwards, to Borneo. Like Donald Stuart, Alec Choate was driven by a strong urge to set down his own thoughts about the war and, in the following years, each of them would apply his own distinctive style to the task, Donald through his novels and Alec in his poetry.

Encounters like this one can only have strengthened Donald’s desire to write. It seemed that he had finally found his place; the writer with a wife and a piece of land, making contact with other writers, secure in his own Walden-like escape—though, just like Thoreau’s idyll, it would prove to be only a temporary refuge.
Donald and Dulcie Eunice (Dessie) Stuart
Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne. 1949.

The Stuarts:
Edie, Lyndall Hadow,
Norma, Dessie, l. to r. back row.
Ralph, Donald, Julian Martin, Ken,
l. to r. front row. circa 1949.
Douglas, the younger brother,
and his wife, Esther would have
completed the group.

Mrs D.E. (Dessie) Stuart at Yandeyarra. 1953.
Shortly after Dessie and Donald Stuart arrived in Western Australia, they entered a longstanding debate about the State’s indigenous population. Three years earlier, at the end of April 1946, asserting their rights to increased wages and better amenities, Aboriginal station workers had walked off Pilbara properties. Department of Native Affairs officials, having dismissed earlier warnings of impending strike action as ‘grossly exaggerated’, had not expected any such definite action and the strike came as a great surprise. In his examination of the time, historian Peter Biskup makes it clear that Government policies had never satisfactorily resolved the position of the State’s Aboriginal people. No solutions had been found to a problem which had been evident from the earliest days of settlement and the station workers’ strike action exposed long-term difficulties between black and white Western Australians. The subject was a matter for open public discussion; an improvement in the conditions of the State’s Aboriginal people was well-overdue and an increasing number of groups were working for the Aboriginal cause.

While prospecting in the Ashburton and the Kimberleys, Don McLeod, a white man, had become increasingly aware of the Aborigines’ dissatisfaction with the way white station owners treated them. North-west landowners relied on Aboriginal labour and many station owners had developed an affinity with their workers, providing well for them and their extended families. But, as a cast back to the early days of settlement, there was still an expectation that Aboriginal stock men and station hands would always work for minimal wages and continue to accept a dependent position. In post-war Australia, it was clear that situation could not continue.

During World War II, half-caste Aborigines had been accepted into the fighting forces, while others gave invaluable assistance towards the war effort. In these positions, they had worked alongside their white colleagues as equals and, with some idea of what it was like to be treated differently, these workers were understandably reluctant to accept their old subordinate positions. Pastoralists and prospectors had long been natural enemies and Don McLeod had no difficulty in taking up the Aboriginal cause. He respected the blackfellows he met and, in time, they began to see him as
someone to whom they could turn. In this period of gathering unrest, Don McLeod became self-appointed spokesman for the Pilbara station Aborigines and was at the forefront of protests on their behalf.6

In his pre-war wanderings, Donald Stuart had also established an affinity with the north-west Aboriginal people. From his very earliest times working in the back-country, he had become aware that ‘all across the north-west of Western Australia...was blackfeller country’. He had got to know the Aboriginal people and recognised that they were the ‘main labour force’ on all the stations and in the droving camps. He had set out to learn from them and to understand their problems. He recognised their lack of any education in the white man’s way of life and, while appreciating the complication of their many languages, he also saw the limitations of using only English as the common means of communication. He perceived them as a gentle, peaceful people who had ‘undeservedly’ been pushed to the lower scale of Australian society. He deplored the fact that white Australians knew so little of the Aborigines’ complex social systems and was scathing about popular stereotypes promoted by artists and others.7

Donald’s wife, Dessie Stuart, was also sympathetic to the plight of the state’s Aborigines. In Perth, she joined groups that furthered the Aboriginal cause and went so far as to assume an Aboriginal identity for herself. She claimed to be a half-caste Aboriginal and to have been born at Wallal Downs Station. Her father, she declared, was a white man and her mother a full-blooded Aboriginal.8 She said she had been taken from her mother as a child, a story that made her arrival in Western Australia a welcome return to her land and to her people.9 It was believed that she belonged to the Mitchell clan, the same clan as Ernie Mitchell, ‘grandson of a former Protector of Aborigines’ and one of Don McLeod’s lieutenants. Some even knew her as Dessie Mitchell and others called her ‘the Eurasian princess’.10

Parts of this story just may have been woven around her, mainly through her association with Donald Stuart and as a flow-on from his proposed acceptance into a tribal group, though this would only have happened after she joined Donald at Yandeyarra Station in 1953. This Aboriginal identity was also seen as an enigma that she deliberately organised around herself.11 Her Fijian British-Indian identity emerges as the most authentic version of Dessie Stuart, but she interchanged the ‘born in Suva’ and ‘born at Wallal Downs Station’ stories, even on official forms,12 an indication that she assumed either with ease and, one may believe, when it suited her. Much of
Dessie’s story shows her as a capable and exemplary character, but there seems also to have been a controlling streak in her make-up that caused some people to question her motives.

Either way and for whatever reason, for as long as she was associated with Western Australia’s Aboriginal people, Dessie Stuart, née Singh, adopted an Aboriginal persona. Maybe she felt she belonged in an intermediary position and that this identity allowed her to relate more closely to the people with whom she was working. Her nursing training gave her particular skills and Donald’s brother, Douglas, had detected that she had a ‘leaning to look after people’. ¹³ Maybe she thought her marriage to Donald Stuart, and her acceptance into the close-knit Stuart family, allowed her to cross boundaries existing between blacks and whites, in both directions. Nevertheless, in 1950s Western Australia, the mixed marriage would not have gone unremarked and, with the mores of the time, was sure to have attracted discriminatory comment similar to that which Dessie had experienced ever since she arrived in Australia. Maybe Dessie just had a desire for acceptance, a need to belong, and it appears that, for a time, she did experience a sense of belonging among the north-west Aborigines.

Author, Max Brown, described Dessie as ‘a handsome, smartly-dressed coloured girl who had rapidly become a force in the native advancement leagues, such as the Coolbaroo League and Original Australians Association.’ ¹⁴ Dessie’s sister-in-law, Lyndall Hadow, editor of the Coolbaroo League’s monthly magazine, *Westralian Aborigine* between 1953 and 1956,¹⁵ was bound to have encouraged Dessie’s part in these activities.

For most of 1952, Dessie held a position as Officer-in-Charge of the Boys’ Home in Carr Street, West Perth and worked for a short time with the Commissioner for Native Affairs, Mr S.G. Middleton.¹⁶ She left the Boys’ Home in October, at about the same time as two highly controversial articles were published in *The West Australian*, Perth’s main newspaper. Entitled ‘Not Slaves—Not Citizens’, they appeared under the by-line: ‘This article was prepared by natives and written by a native.’ The first piece begins: ‘Not Pagans, not Christians; not white, not black; not half-castes but outcasts.’¹⁷ It is an impassioned plea for recognition and understanding of the Aboriginal position, setting out the frustration of a colonised people, especially those reared and educated to the standards of the colonisers, but not accepted into white society.

Prominently published on page two of the State’s daily newspaper on consecutive days, the articles could not be ignored. Once again, public opinion was inflamed. Over
the next few days, letters to the Editor of *The West Australian* overwhelmingly supported sympathies expressed in the articles and were critical of government and opposition Aboriginal welfare policies.

The articles' prominent publication coincided with moves to amend the State's Native Administration Act. The Bill was read for a second time on 30 October and the ensuing Parliamentary debate only served to emphasise flaws in the established legislation. As the Hon. H.C. Strickland said, 'after 123 years of close contact with the original inhabitants' it did not reflect well upon the Government that there were still members of the population 'unable to take their place as citizens in the community'.

To illustrate his point, Strickland cited a Western Australian triple-certificated nurse who had worked in Victoria, a state where Aborigines were granted full citizenship. While working in Melbourne, she had been classed as 'a natural-born citizen, but the same woman, now living in Western Australia, was classed as a 'native'. Dessie Stuart's activities were such as to have attracted political attention and, with Strickland's illustration of the 'triple-certificated nurse', it was accepted that she was the person about whom he was speaking.

It seems quite clear that Western Australian Commissioner of Native Affairs, Stanley Middleton, was implicated in getting the controversial 'Not Slaves—Not Citizens' articles published. Ever since his appointment in September 1948, Middleton had worked at improving Aboriginal policies, but his suggested reforms were considered too radical and not acceptable to Government. He continued to attack the situation enthusiastically on a number of fronts and, while canvassing support for his ideas, had set out to make 'a direct appeal to the public'. The articles appear as part of this campaign. Dessie had taken them, most likely with Middleton's knowledge, to Ernest de Burgh, editor of *The West Australian*. De Burgh was impressed with her sincerity and, convinced that she was the author, he had decided to publish them.

Some readers doubted that Dessie had written the articles and thought they detected something of Donald Stuart's style in the writing. Certainly, Donald would have had no argument with the content. A comment he wrote about 'the present melancholy situation of Western Australia's coloured minority', firmly supports 'the present Commissioner' and the closing paragraph is a passionate plea along similar lines to the published articles:
Until the Parliament and the People of Western Australia come to a realisation of the fact that we are one race, living in one World, that we are brothers and sisters, or less than animals, that black, white, brown and all colours of us are humans, capable of dignity and having common needs, those who know the truth must continue to struggle, with tongue and pen, by word and deed.\(^{21}\)

When the Aboriginal Welfare Bill was read for a second time, in December 1953, Dessie Stuart and the articles were, once more, the subject of Parliamentary discussion. The Public Service Commissioner had held an enquiry into the affair and, in his efforts to decide once and for all who had written the articles, had come to the conclusion that it could well have been Dessie Stuart. During the same debate, Stanley Middleton’s publicity campaign came in for criticism. In a final announcement which might have appeared to discredit Dessie Stuart’s part in the affair, the Hon. C.H. Simpson disclosed that she was not an Aborigine, but was a Fijian-Indian—though there were members of the Legislative Assembly who refused to believe his assertion.\(^{23}\)

Dessie’s determination had pushed the Aboriginal cause into the public arena and fuelled Parliamentary debate. She was pursuing a path that would take her to the centre of the Aboriginal problem and nothing, it seemed, would prevent her from this purpose. When she joined her husband in the north-west, she quickly assumed a leadership role and made herself indispensable to Don McLeod’s operation.

In May 1952, Donald Stuart had applied for, and was issued with, a Department of Native Affairs Permit allowing him ‘to enter and remain upon places where natives are camped in the North-West Land Division’.\(^{24}\) With their obvious interest and involvement in Aboriginal groups, it is not surprising that Dessie and Donald Stuart should become aware of work going on at Yandeyarra Station in the State’s north-west. They heard ‘the station was being run by a man named McLeod as a co-operative venture for the benefit of the natives in the district’. Thinking they might be ‘doing some good’, Dessie and Donald decided to offer their assistance.\(^{25}\)

In 1948, the striking Group had registered a company known as the Northern Development and Mining Company Pty. Ltd., with Don McLeod directing operations.\(^{26}\) By 1951, more than 600 people had joined the group and, with a boom in mineral prices, they anticipated their earnings could be up to $10,000 a month.\(^{27}\) When they acquired the abandoned Yandeyarra Station at a cost of $9,000, they had realised their
dream of owning land, their own pastoral property. The station was in a derelict state and Peter Coppin, one of the strike committee men, was given the task of cleaning up, 'make the water run, fix up the windmill', and would become station overseer. In time, the group used their profits to acquire three other properties, Meentheena, Ailsa Downs and Riverdale Stations. Yandyarra homestead was set up 'as a base for the group’s social service projects, including a school, a hospital and accommodation for old people'.

A number of other white people were at Yandeyarra, volunteers willing to help the Aboriginal cause. The conditions were 'a bit rough', but Donald Stuart had known worse. He would later say he considered the situation to have been 'generally reasonable', but in his *Yandy of the Winds* manuscript, would write about his character, Donchuart, as growing 'skinnier' and eating 'meals of boiled beans and occasional pieces of meat'. Another volunteer, Max Brown remembered that the food was meagre, mostly 'just damper and a bit of 'roo meat'.

Max was a journalist and novelist escaping 'the cynicism of Sydney life,' and his wife, Kathy, had come to teach the children. Don McLeod had accepted Max’s offer to help 'and perhaps write a book' about the 1946 Pilbara strike. Also there were Elsie Lee, a staunch McLeod supporter, artist Sam Fulbrook and actor Ken Warren. Sydneysiders Victor Proudfoot and Jim Ockerby had come to help with transport.

Max Brown arrived at Yandeyarra late one night in mid-1953. Just as the truck drew up in front of the homestead, a gaunt figure emerged from the shadows, wildly demanding if there was any mail from his wife. In the headlights, Max saw ‘a taut slim whiteman with a gunlayer beard...his forehead and jaw were strong, his nose beaked, his lips curled down at the ends and compressed’. This dramatic first meeting with Western Australian writer, Donald Stuart, influenced Max’s lasting opinion of him as having been ‘a bit theatrical’. Donald was living in a cabin near to the kitchen on the homestead’s shady side, a privileged position granted because he was standing in for the doctor and likely to be called out at night. Max was surprised to learn that Donald was also there to write a book about the 1946 Pilbara strike.

White people who came to Yandeyarra were driven by humanitarian aims, because they had ‘some affection for the aborigines’ or because of a compassionate concern for their fellow human beings. Even if they were not members of the Communist Party, most of them had left-wing or Communist sympathies. They were unlikely to have
supported Dr Cyril Bryan's miscegenation policy to 'breed out the black', but the attitudes they brought to Yandeyarra still reflected 1930s assimilation policies.

In *Shades of Darkness* (1988), Sir Paul Hasluck assesses the state of Aboriginal affairs from 1925 to 1965. He recognises that World War II had brought 'shifts in the groupings of aboriginal peoples...[and] a wider separation between the main body of Australians and those persons of aboriginal origin'. As a journalist for *The West Australian* during the 1930s, Hasluck had added an informed voice to debates being conducted within the state. He showed concern for the north-west Aboriginal people, seeing their situation as 'a distinct problem calling for a separate solution'. In 1951, appointed as Minister for Territories in the Menzies Government, at State and Federal level, the policy he promoted was that of assimilation.

The Yandeyarra Aborigines, McLeod's Mob or The Mob as they were called, had achieved some independence and wanted a say in their future. The group now had a stake in the land and, since the very beginning of their strike action, they had been intent on achieving an education for their children. Their mining parties worked in the field to earn a living and the women, children and old people were cared for in the Yandeyarra community.

When north-west Superintendent of Education, Bill Rourke, went to inspect Yandeyarra, he spoke to Peter Coppin and Donald Stuart, and met Dessie, whom he described as 'a half-caste...cultured and well-educated'. Bill was impressed by what he found; he judged the tomatoes, beans and carrots, and flourishing banana plants, to be a sure sign of industry and application. He particularly mentioned Kathy Brown and her work with the children, commented on the number of adults learning to read and write, and reported Yandeyarra as a community of indigenous people more 'happy and confident in themselves' than any he had seen before. Don McLeod had applied for Department of Education facilities and Bill Rourke considered this a 'wonderful opportunity to do something fine for these people'. He had no hesitation in recommending that every assistance be given to help the group establish a school. In his opinion, Yandeyarra was a much more worthy prospect than the mission school at White Springs, 115 miles south of Port Hedland, set up in opposition to McLeod's settlement and now abandoned due to lack of support from the Aborigines. For his positive report, Bill Rourke was accused of being 'a commo bastard, hand in glove with McLeod and disloyal to the Government', but he stood by his decision, emphasising...
that his concern was 'wholly with education and that this applied to native children as well as white'.

McLeod's part in the 1946 Pilbara strike had caused ill-feeling in sections of the white community, particularly among north-west property owners, and his critics were suspicious of Yandeyarra's very existence. But the controversy was not all external. Initially, to outsiders like Bill Rourke and Max Brown, Yandeyarra might have 'combined the intimacy of family and village life', but Brown's version of what happened in the months following his arrival exposes tensions within the group, between blacks and whites, and between Don McLeod and the independent thinkers, like Donald Stuart, who were attracted to his Utopian-style movement.

Donald Stuart's recollections of the time are written in the unpublished section of his manuscript, *Yandy of the Wind*. Much of his text, written from an imagined Aboriginal viewpoint, but from an undeniably educated white consciousness, evaluates the situation, formulates an explanation for the state of affairs and expounds his belief in education as an answer to achieving proper concourse between blacks and whites. He recognises the tensions caused by the whitesellers' intent to change the Aboriginal way of doing things and is aware of the harsh conditions and lack of food affecting everyone in the group. Max Brown's *The Black Eureka* (1976), a more factual account, corroborates much of Donald Stuart's story. Their writing enlarges upon official and historical records of what was happening at Yandeyarra in 1953, with both authors having noted the gradual breakdown occurring within the group, and not just between the white people.

Others may have expected the Aboriginal people to assimilate and adapt to white society, but Donald Stuart adopted a different attitude. His aim was to join the Aborigines, get close to them and attempt to learn their social structures and languages. 'Like the rest of the Stuart family,' his brother Douglas said, 'Donald didn't think the colour of a man's skin mattered.'

While he was at Yandeyarra, Donald 'humped his swag overland' with some of McLeod's Mob, roaming about with them, moving from one mineral camp to the other, often for weeks, lacking food and with only basic supplies. This was obviously in the interests of his research and offered an opportunity for him to get close to his subject, but the long treks also appear as an important part of his bid for acceptance by the Aborigines. We might also perceive his inability to resist yet another long and difficult
journey—a chance to tune in to the walking rhythms that had marked his youth and young manhood. He had survived the Japanese prison camps and would have shaken off the privations of hunger and thirst, the physical ordeal, but there also loomed his desire to understand the Aboriginal Law and be perceived as being at one with the People.

Back at Yandeyarra, apart from his role as medical orderly, Donald helped Aboriginal gardeners to cultivate crops in the riverbed. In his bid to study the men's business of Desert Law, he also held meetings with Yandeyarra and Turkey Creek elders and, in the evenings, applied himself to learning the Nayungamada language. It is unclear whether stories about Donald having been accepted into an Aboriginal group belong to his pre-war days in the north-west, or relate wholly to this time at Yandeyarra.

In *Yandy of the Winds*, the character, 'Donchuart', shows pride in his wife’s abilities and, here, the ‘Dessie’ story in the manuscript parallels what we know about Dessie Stuart. Donchuart builds up an eager expectation about Dessie's arrival at Yandeyarra. He describes her to members of the group as an: 'Indian woman, same colour as a madamada [half-caste] woman, but...from a different country...A place called Fiji.' She was, he said, a 'proper nurse, almost a matron' who could do any kind of hospital work. Clearly, he admires her and anticipates what she might achieve with the Aborigines. Here, he was sure, was a woman the Yandeyarra women could follow and he sees their marriage as providing a model for Aboriginal couples on the station. The tone of this writing relates to the early part of their time at Yandeyarra, creating an idyllic picture of a marriage that would suffer over the following months.

Donald Stuart was in his early forties when he wrote *Yandy of the Winds*. His continued belief in the attainable perfect marriage, reveals him as vulnerable and, in light of what was to follow, even naive, a side of his character perhaps more apparent in his writing than it ever was in his outward demeanour.

As Donchuart had expected, Dessie was well received. She sat at the sewing machine and made dresses for the women and children. She knew how to talk to the sick and elderly and they listened to her stories about 'down south' and 'her own faraway land of Fiji'. Just as they accepted Donchuart as being one with them, so they accepted Dessie. For her part, she worked tirelessly, at any time of the day or night. She went barefoot and seemed happy with the mob and with the way she was accepted, happy that she had found a place where she could belong. But, as with all the others who came from
outside to help, there was always the question of how long she would stay, how long
she could manage to live this hard life, so different from the one to which she was
accustomed.\footnote{YANDY1HEWJND}

Donald continued with his writing, his ‘milly-milly’,\footnote{Donald continued with his writing, his ‘milly-milly’, and Dessie threw herself into the work. Frank Gare remembered her as ‘good looking, bright and energetic’. She set up a classroom in a shearing shed and had the children doing physical exercises each morning. Outsiders, suspicious of what was happening at Yandeyarra, saw this as a sinister move by activists who were training Aboriginal children to attack white property owners, a conclusion Frank Gare dismissed as unfounded.} and Dessie threw herself into the work. Frank Gare remembered her as ‘good looking, bright and energetic’. She set up a classroom in a shearing shed and had the children doing physical exercises each morning. Outsiders, suspicious of what was happening at Yandeyarra, saw this as a sinister move by activists who were training Aboriginal children to attack white property owners, a conclusion Frank Gare dismissed as unfounded.\footnote{Donald continued with his writing, his ‘milly-milly’, and Dessie threw herself into the work. Frank Gare remembered her as ‘good looking, bright and energetic’. She set up a classroom in a shearing shed and had the children doing physical exercises each morning. Outsiders, suspicious of what was happening at Yandeyarra, saw this as a sinister move by activists who were training Aboriginal children to attack white property owners, a conclusion Frank Gare dismissed as unfounded.}

Auntie Dessie, as they called her, went around all the camps identifying those women she thought could be trusted with their camp’s medicine chest. She taught them how to remember each medicine by its colour and smell and by the size of the bottle, but maintained control of the ‘more powerful’ medicines herself.

She began to help Don McLeod with his paperwork and travelled with him when he went to Port Hedland. Donchuart continued to work at Yandeyarra and, as time went on, especially once the telephone was installed, Dessie came to the station less and less often.\footnote{She began to help Don McLeod with his paperwork and travelled with him when he went to Port Hedland. Donchuart continued to work at Yandeyarra and, as time went on, especially once the telephone was installed, Dessie came to the station less and less often.}

By the time Max Brown arrived at Yandeyarra, a level of separation between Donald Stuart and his wife was already apparent. Max and his wife, Kathy, became critical of the somewhat controlling attitude Dessie assumed whenever she came to the station. Certain of her decisions made them think she was out of touch with the practicalities of the situation and Max judged her as being ‘far too proud to be an Aborigine!’\footnote{By the time Max Brown arrived at Yandeyarra, a level of separation between Donald Stuart and his wife was already apparent. Max and his wife, Kathy, became critical of the somewhat controlling attitude Dessie assumed whenever she came to the station. Certain of her decisions made them think she was out of touch with the practicalities of the situation and Max judged her as being ‘far too proud to be an Aborigine!’}

By this time, Dessie had formed a firm allegiance with Don McLeod and was acting, along with Ernie Mitchell, her ‘brother’, as McLeod’s ‘first lieutenant’. Geoffrey Tebbutt, a correspondent for \textit{The Melbourne Herald}, described her as ‘a tall, attractive well-dressed half-caste woman’ whom he judged to be ‘aged about 28’, though she was five years older. He found her to be ‘educated, fluent and embittered either against the white race or its treatment of the natives’. Dessie told him that she thought her parents were dead and she only briefly mentioned that her husband was working at Yandeyarra.\footnote{By this time, Dessie had formed a firm allegiance with Don McLeod and was acting, along with Ernie Mitchell, her ‘brother’, as McLeod’s ‘first lieutenant’. Geoffrey Tebbutt, a correspondent for \textit{The Melbourne Herald}, described her as ‘a tall, attractive well-dressed half-caste woman’ whom he judged to be ‘aged about 28’, though she was five years older. He found her to be ‘educated, fluent and embittered either against the white race or its treatment of the natives’. Dessie told him that she thought her parents were dead and she only briefly mentioned that her husband was working at Yandeyarra.}

Everyone was watching Dessie and Donald and it became obvious things were going wrong between them.
But there were bigger issues at stake, the situation at Yandeyarra station was not all it might be. While still believing that the 1946 strike had been a good thing for the Aborigines, an opportunity for them to make a stand for independence and better conditions, Donald Stuart and Max Brown began to ask questions. In the seven years since the Aborigines had left the stations during the Pilbara Strike, the situation had changed. By using much more mechanised transport and employing energetic young whitesellers for mustering and droving, the squatters had worked out how to manage without Aboriginal station hands. Those Aborigines who had returned to the stations were now receiving higher wages and their living conditions had improved.⁵⁹

Yet, at Yandeyarra, the Mob did not seem to be any better off than they were before. If the mining operations were so successful, why was there so little food, why was everyone still living so hard and why was there no money for essential equipment? Donald and Max believed that mistakes were being made and that the money was being spent unwisely. They were critical of McLeod being the only one who handled money from the supposedly successful mining operations, and were concerned about how much had gone to pay for his numerous court cases. They concluded that McLeod had put himself in a position of ‘Power’. It followed, then, that Dessie was colluding with him and Ernie Mitchell in a bid for leadership and engaged in her own ‘struggle for Power’.⁶⁰

Thus, in his unpublished manuscript, Donald Stuart makes a case against Don McLeod and his lieutenants, Dessie Stuart and Ernie Mitchell. According to him, they were all working against the mob. However, his character, Donchuart, shows an awareness of his own position and the way it might be interpreted. He recognises that his criticism could be equally damaging and, in his efforts to destroy Don McLeod, he might well be seen as working against the mob in a different way.⁶¹

Max Brown would also recognise his own part in what was happening and wonder how much he had to do with placing ‘the snake in this paradise’. He admitted that his own motives for coming to Yandeyarra might have been questionable, but did not regret his part in the enquiry that was taking place.⁶² These outsiders, idealists who had come to Yandeyarra to help what they saw as a just cause, discovered there was no easy solution to the complex situation in which they had placed themselves and they were forced to face their own weaknesses.

Don McLeod, Ernie Mitchell, Dessie and Donald Stuart, Max Brown, Victor Proudfoot and Yandeyarra’s Manager, Peter Coppin, held an intense meeting at which voices were raised, but out of which there came no satisfactory answers. It was left that
any further discussion would take place at The Mob’s planned Christmas meeting, when everyone could be involved in any decision-making. McLeod and Ernie were unhappy about Donald Stuart’s confrontational attitude and they were playing for time. There was some intimation that Stuart could be dangerous and Don McLeod made threats to call the police, but others prevented him from taking this step. The situation had reached crisis point and must be resolved.

Donald had an emotional meeting with Dessie. He had hoped to talk her into leaving the station with him, but there was to be no such simple solution. Dessie was confused and, in the *Yandy of the Winds* manuscript, she is shown as wavering between agreeing to go back ‘down south’ with Donchuart and considering the alternative of staying with The Mob:

She [Dessie] spoke suddenly, her words tumbling from her, fear showing in her and a need to seek his strength. “I’ll stick with you. I’ll go wherever you want to go. I can see now how wrong I’ve been. We should never have come here. This country doesn’t want us, it’s too big for us. It’s hard cruel country. It just wants to stay here under the sun and there’s nothing in it but desolation. We’re not wanted. I’ll go with you, and I’ll work the rest of my life for you...”

In her deeply emotional state, Dessie appeals to Donchuart for help, but his reply is paternal and distant, with no hint of sympathy. The level of their separation is plain. Dessie bows to Donchuart’s stronger will and agrees to leave with him. Then, when the time comes to go, she changes her mind. ‘No,’ she says, ‘that’s impossible. Can’t you see I’m needed here? Here’s where I must stay. It’s no use your talking, I must stop here where I’m needed.’

Donchuart had told her that, if she decided not to come with him, their marriage was over. As the time for their departure looms and knowing her decision will affect her future, Dessie is overwhelmed by the enormity of the choice she must make. Seeking a way out, she goes into the women’s bathroom and swallows an overdose of sleeping tablets. In a dramatic rush, Jim Ockerby helps Donald get Dessie to Port Hedland Hospital and she survives.

While this might appear as a possible fiction, the circumstances and the dramatic nature of these scenes are born out by Max Brown in his record of the Yandeyarra period, written in *The Black Eureka* (1976).
The relationship that had formed between Dessie Stuart and Don McLeod is not mentioned in any official papers and there is some doubt as to the nature of their association. In *Yandy of the Winds*, Donald Stuart, while showing McLeod as the undisputed leader of the group, dwells on the struggle for leadership going on between Don McLeod, Dessie and Ernie Mitchell. As part of her deliberate plan to weaken him and take over the leadership, 'gain the Power for herself', Donald cites Dessie's treatment of McLeod as an invalid and her assertion that he was very sick and likely to die. That McLeod went on to live for another 46 years bears out the error of her diagnosis and adds a sinister element to her leadership ambitions. As for their relationship, Donald is not concerned about anything sexual going on between Dessie and McLeod, 'my wife is not a harlot', he says and, as he writes it, there is general agreement about McLeod's impotence. Don McLeod did not have a reputation as a womaniser and the belief that theirs was unlikely to have been a sexual liaison was borne out by Max Brown and Frank Gare.

There is evidence of Dessie's controlling personality and her apparent desire to take a leading role in Aboriginal affairs; nevertheless, she appears as a vulnerable player in the story. According to the *Yandy of the Winds* manuscript, Dessie and Donald had gone to Yandeyarra as a mutually supportive couple hoping to set an example to the Aborigines. Dessie had come to admire Don McLeod and the work he was doing, and she had seen a place for herself with The Mob. Yet even here, in the Aboriginal community she had so eagerly embraced, she had difficulty finding her position.

Her confusion and the suicide attempt were further signs of her dependency, her need to belong. A contributing factor must have been the obvious ambiguity about her cultural identity. Assuming either her Fijian-British-Indian birth or the white father-Aboriginal mother she claimed, Dessie had inherited a mixed cultural background. Her arrival in Australia from Fiji in 1937 placed her in a community she must have heard about, but which was different from the one in which she had spent the first seventeen years of her life, and she would have experienced the deep level of emotion associated with such displacement.

In his *Enigma of Arrival* (1987), V.S.Naipul explores his own response to arriving in a new place. Like Dessie, he has grown up on a tropical island, with fixed ideas of what England would be like. Yet when he gets there, he writes of still having 'that nervousness in a new place, that rawness of response, still felt myself to be in the other
man’s country, felt my strangeness, my solitude.\textsuperscript{71} Tony Simoes da Silva also hauntingly captures the newcomer’s sense of displacement, writing about being ‘caught between identities at once firmly anchored in the past—distant yet strangely familiar—and, in the dizzying mood of the present, familiarly strange but known.’\textsuperscript{72}

The account of Dessie’s life up to the time of her meeting with Donald Stuart displays the same sense of strangeness and solitude. At the time she arrived in Sydney, Australia was a country determined to retain a largely white population and, despite her obvious intelligence and rapidly acquired skills, Dessie experienced rejection and discrimination. Her nursing training brought her a level of acceptance and her marriage to Donald Stuart would appear to have placed her more firmly within the white community. When she arrived in Perth, however, her situation became even more complicated. Her identification with the Aborigines of Western Australia, surely based on skin colour, and her decision to assume a new persona, are further signs of her uncertainty and her strong desire to make a place for herself.

Yandeyarra, however, was too much. The harsh conditions, disagreement between, and within, the homestead’s black and white groups, as well as animosity between Donald Stuart and Don McLeod, only added to what, at this time, appears as her fragile emotional state. She had survived the suicide attempt, but her marriage would not weather the Yandeyarra period.

Donald Stuart’s continued presence at Yandeyarra was seen as an embarrassment to all parties. His position was to be reviewed at Christmas and it seemed certain he would not be allowed to stay. At one stage, those who were helping Donald to learn the Law had planned this Christmas meeting as the time when he would be taken into the tribe.\textsuperscript{73} Now, there were more serious issues to be discussed. There had been complaints about Donald’s business with the Yandeyarra and Turkey Creek elders and concerns about him having taken notes during the riverbed meetings. He was also said to have received information about a High Law, knowledge to which he was not entitled.\textsuperscript{74}

In the manuscript, \textit{Yandy the Wind}, of particular importance to the interpretation of Donald Stuart’s position at Yandeyarra is his emphasis on the way Don McLeod had introduced him to Ernie Mitchell and other members of The Mob:

Ernie, this is a friend of ours from south. Anything he asks you about the organisation you can tell him; he’s a milly-milly man, and he wants to know all about the striking times and all our
hard times and battling, and he's going to make a milly-milly about it. You can tell the mob to trust him, and let him know everything. 

Stuart emphasises the point by repeating the introduction, thus underlining his belief that McLeod had given permission for him to do what he did. Ernie's reply to McLeod, that Donald had already been 'all round the country, footwalk, Wallal, and up and down the De Gray and out Babbaroonya way, the Nullagine Gold Belt and over Roebourne side,' confirms Max Brown's understanding that Donald had been accompanying the mob on their mining forays. But, along the way, Donald had used the time to record more than just the details of the 1946 strike action.

McLeod could not have understood that Donald would want to enter the Aboriginal experience in a different way. Unlike Max Brown's clear reporting of events at Yandeyarra, Donald had wanted to get to the heart of the people and capture their emotions. McLeod had not told the Aborigines to talk to Donald Stuart about the Desert Law; this was something Donald instigated. Finding himself in an extraordinary position and with, apparently, clear access to material he was unlikely to have obtained any other way, there seems no doubt that he went further than was expected and took advantage of the situation. His need to understand at a deeper level led him into areas beyond the general knowledge and proved to be his undoing. To a certain extent, one might see the situation as reflecting that of Julian Alexander Stuart when he was dismissed from The Westralian Worker. Father and son, having been placed in a position of trust, had overstepped the mark and betrayed the confidence placed in them.

The outcomes are equally ambiguous. Julian offered to pay back the money and Donald offered to return his papers, though, while it seems sure that Julian did make restitution, there is no such certainty about Donald having done so.

The Yandy of the Winds manuscript contains a description of Donchuart and, given the overtly autobiographical nature of this writing, this may well be regarded as a Donald Stuart self-portrait. 'He was lean, skinny, with eyes half-closed against years of sun and wind, his jaws brightly fringed with new beard.' Donchuart, as he is written, is someone who likes to stand back and look at things from the outside. He is aware of himself within the group and knows he is being watched and judged. He wants to capture the impression of himself as seen by the other feller, to justify himself, prove his worth and explain his reasons for being at Yandeyarra. He knows he is not like other men, but he believes that his experiences have given him a depth of understanding that
would allow him to write this story and convey it to a wider audience. He allows the Aboriginal, Jacob, to see this, to recognise that Donchuart saw the world they were in, 'with the eyes of a man returning at last to his own [sic] country', but he also sees him as a 'strange man, this Donchuart'.

On the evening before the meeting at which Donald's fate was to be decided, Yandeyarra's Christmas visitors were entertained with a grand Corroboree. Next morning, two or three hundred adults, about one third of The Mob, got down to the business at hand. Kathy and Max Brown, Victor Proudfoot and Donald Stuart were instructed to sit on the ground facing the Mob. Neither Don McLeod nor Ernie Mitchell came to the meeting; they were reluctant to have another confrontation with Donald Stuart. Dessie sat in the front row opposite Donald and appeared as his main challenger. Max Brown's description of the meeting is critical of the 'court's' procedure and the lack of any definite decision-making processes, from which he divined that the meeting's only purpose was to get rid of Donald Stuart. Donald did not dispute that he had taken notes during his meetings with the elders. When one member of The Mob pointed out that 'to put it [the Law] into a book was to split the unity of life and lose the essence', Donald offered to hand over his notes so they could be burned, but his offer was not immediately accepted. The incident had disturbed the group's equilibrium; not only was there a demand for Donald to leave, but also a demand for Max to go, and even Kathy, who had been teaching the children and wanted to stay.

At a later meeting, this time instigated by the Women's Committee, it became clear that the decision had not been unanimous. The Women's Committee supported Max and Kathy, praised the work they had done with the children and asked them to stay. But, with an indication that the scheme's money was running out, Kathy recognised that she was unlikely to get the materials she wanted to continue her teaching. She and Max decided it was time to leave.

Some members of The Mob came to farewell Donald before he left and Yandeyarra's Manager, Peter Coppin, thanked him warmly for all he had done. 'There was no man on Yandeyarra did harder work than Don,' he said, and members of The Mob crowded around Donald to shake his hand.

Donald told Frank Gare, who had been vice-president of the Native Welfare Council at the time, that Don McLeod 'did not like anyone else dealing with his Aborigines' and that McLeod had used the note-taking incident to turn The Mob against him. He
would also say: 'by the end of 1953 I was becoming convinced that the station was being run not so much for the benefit of the natives as for the benefit of Don McLeod'. A sign that the white people were less than welcome may be found in Kangkushot: The Life of Nyamal Lawman Peter Coppin (1999). Author Jolly Read interviews Peter Coppin, whose version of what was happening in Yandeyarra at that period is given from an Aboriginal perspective. Apart from recording official visits by Stanley Middleton, Bill Rourke and Frank Gare, in his account there is no mention of the white people who were there in 1953.

Dame Mary Durack, who came to know Donald well, considered that 'the two Donalds, both stalwart individuals, ceased to see eye to eye and parted company'. Had this not happened, she thought Donald would have continued to live in the north-west, working with Pilbara Aborigines for the rest of his life.

As it was, Donald Stuart's and Max Brown's observations about mismanagement had been correct. The days of Northern Development and Mining Company Pty. Ltd. were coming to an end well before the meeting at which they were dismissed. Half-way through 1954, despite efforts to save it from collapse, the Company was put into voluntary liquidation and there was 'a mass exodus from the group's camps'. By the end of the year, McLeod had asked the Department to take over the group.

The Department of Native Affairs recognised that, while the formation of this extraordinary group had been the cause of some severe difficulties, one advantage was the level of confidence and self-reliance the group had generated among the Aborigines. The independent strike action had altered Aboriginal perceptions and it was believed that the outcomes would continue to affect 'relationships with the Australian-European as well as with Aboriginal society'. Stanley Middleton, despite his many disagreements with Don McLeod, recognised that McLeod's movement had been instrumental in bringing about higher wages and improved living conditions for station Aborigines.

Despite his questionable management practices and accusations of neglect, about 220 Aborigines continued to work with Don McLeod and, after some severe difficulties, a new company, Pindan Pty. Ltd., was formed. McLeod continued to be involved in litigation with various mining companies and was eventually forced to resign as leader of the Aboriginal group which had formed around him. Nevertheless, until his death, at the age of ninety-one, on 13 April 1999, he still retained a loyal following. He was described as 'legendary self-styled adviser to the Pilbara's traditional
Aborigines' and they came from all over the Pilbara to attend his funeral. McLeod had given the Aboriginal people a vision and, believing that he had 'shown them the way', they said they would 'continue to walk in his footsteps'.

The time at Yandeyarra had a profound and long-lasting effect upon Donald Stuart. Getting close to the Aboriginal people, studying one of their many languages and being allowed to learn part of the Desert Law added to his previous understanding and provided an emphasis for his work. The Yandeyarra project had proved disappointing, but he took refuge in his writing. Here was a story that just had to be written down, the Aboriginal story of a time that was past or passing. Just like his swaggie days and his Prisoner of War days, here was another aspect of Australian life he could help to preserve. A record of the Pilbara Aborigines' strike was an important place to start, but well beyond that period, his writing would continue to hold a strong awareness of the Aboriginal in his north-west landscape.

Donald Stuart wrote about his Yandeyarra experience with a strong consciousness of what was happening to traditional Aboriginal values at that time. Aware of the group's struggle to understand whitefeller Law, he sympathised with Aboriginal Elders in their desire to preserve their own Law. He saw their anxiety about traditional ceremonies slowly being pushed aside and overtaken by the whiteman's concerns for 'riches and plenty', and understood their concern that the youngfellers' initiation ceremonies might be lost.

Named after the shallow oval dish used to separate a mineral from its surrounding materials, Donald Stuart's first published novel, *Yandy* (1959), weaves a story around the 1946 strike by north-west Aboriginal station hands. On one level, this is an historical record of the time, using the names of people who were there and reporting on events that actually took place. But Stuart tells the story from an Aboriginal viewpoint, in an assumed Aboriginal voice, moving within his material at an emotional and imaginary level.

The first three chapters, almost one third of the text, are about the situation as it existed prior to the strike action, and makes a case for those who, over a long period of time, had put up with poor living conditions and abuse of their women and children. An Aboriginal woman gives birth to the station manager's child, a half-caste who will belong neither to black nor to white culture. No matter how hard he tries to learn the
white man's ways, how skilled he becomes at his station hand's job, the boy knows he will never be accepted as a whitefeller. Fear of the white Policeman is found in 'the wide-eyed littlefellers holding fast to their mothers...small hands clinging, the unease of the group heightened to fear in their small minds'. The group is helpless in the face of the white Policeman's unfair payment for their hard-won gold. When he goes further and kills their dogs, the dogs they use to hunt for food, an overwhelming sadness makes itself felt in the women's 'shuddering cries, high pitched wails of sorrow...as the rifle cracked again and again'.

Donald Stuart's concentration veered even more strongly towards telling the traditional Aboriginal story, trying to understand and explain what had happened when the white man came. In the unpublished section of Yandy of the Winds, it becomes evident that the knowledge he absorbed during his time at Yandeyarra informed his novels Ilbarana (1971) and Malloolokin (1976). As far as any white man could, he wrote with an immense awareness of the old ways. In his Literature and the Aborigine in Australia, author J.J. Healy called it: 'His attempt, life-long,...to celebrate and re-create the authentic rhythms of Aboriginal life.' But, rather than Healy's belief that Stuart wrote for 'no audience', his work and the subjects he chose to write about indicate that he always had a future audience in mind. While he may have recognised his limitations as an historian, even as a writer, Donald was always aware of recording the past for an audience yet to be generated.

His intense Yandeyarra experience, the weeks spent trudging along with the northwest Aborigines, was something he called upon again and again. The sense of oral history in this writing makes it certain that the original stories came from the People themselves, from the men and the women, even from the children. Using what came to be recognised as his particular writing style, he used Aboriginal speech patterns and rhythms in a compelling retelling of the Aboriginal story, conveying a sorrow which it seems he had absorbed into himself.

We might ask what right a white man has to tell this story and wonder how Donald Stuart could assume this voice. For him, the Aborigines were an oppressed people whose story needed to be told. Just like his 1930s battlers and his soldiers, this was a people caught in something over which they had little if any control. He chose to enter the Aboriginal experience and undertook to record the personal stories of another group he perceived as having been trapped in the heartless grandeur of history. His father had believed that such stories should be told and this is what he set out to do.
When Donald left Yandeyarra, Dessie refused to go with him. In a later statement about their separation, she said: 'my husband left me in January [1954] over a difference of opinion....We mutually parted'. She stayed with Don McLeod only until the end of the year, when the Department of Native Affairs began to take over McLeod's Aboriginal groups. In January 1955, she was in Darwin working as a telephonist/clerk with the Department of Civil Aviation. Six months later, travelling on a British passport, to which her Fijian connection entitled her, Dessie flew from Darwin to Singapore. From there she is thought to have gone by sea to England, where she was reported to be doing a course in Social Welfare. There is no immediately available record to say that she returned to Australia or information about what happened to her.

Donald went back to the 'small farm' at Roleystone, where, he averred, 'despite my requests my wife would not join me'. Their marriage ended officially in 1957 when Donald was granted a divorce 'on the ground of his wife's desertion'.
Donald Stuart, publicity photograph for *Yandy*. 1959.

By permission of the National Library of Australia

Donald Stuart and his six-month old son, Julian Robert. 1960.

Courtesy Battye Library

Kathy Stuart carrying her daughter, Yaralie, in a yandy. 1963.

Courtesy Battye Library
Back in his rural retreat, Donald Stuart harboured new ambitions to become a 'Fruit Grower'. Hoping to establish a passionfruit-growing business, he applied for a War Service loan, but was refused on the grounds that he was a 'bad risk'. Keith Flanagan, who had supported Donald's application, was incensed at the judgement. 'What price, then,' asked Keith, 'the risk for Donald and all the others who joined the Army and became Prisoners of the Japanese?' He considered the amount Donald had asked for was minor in comparison to the sacrifice he and so many of the AIF made during World War II. The heartless decision, something else for which those in control would have to answer, was just another difficulty to overcome. The fruit-growing venture faded, but there was always the writing.

By October 1955, Donald had completed a first draft of his manuscript, *Yandy of the Winds*, and, still hoping for some Government support, he applied for a Commonwealth Literary Fellowship. Any monies received, his letter said, would allow him to continue the writing and preparation of this 'imaginative work'.

The application purported to come from Donald, but it originated, along with much of the later correspondence, from his sister's Scarborough address. Author Max Brown was one of those who thought that Lyndall spoiled Donald; certainly, her persistence was an important factor in moving her brother's work towards publication. Deciphering his 'scribbling and scrawling', she tirelessly typed his handwritten manuscripts and approached publishers and sponsors on his behalf. There was, Donald said, 'a hell of a lot of proofing' to be done and surviving manuscripts indicate that, while he did not like having changes made to his work, he did take notice of his sister's always tactfully worded suggestions.

Mary Durack Miller, later Dame Mary Durack Miller (DBE 1977, OBE 1966), was known for her generous encouragement of local and visiting writers. Lyndall approached her and asked if she would mind commenting on her brother's manuscript.
Mary Miller had grown up in the Kimberley and, like Donald, held a deep love for the north-west. Her novel, *Keep Him My Country* (1955), movingly tells of a black and white relationship and she went on to write at length about her own north-west pastoralist family in the acclaimed *Kings in Grass Castles* (1959) and its sequel, *Sons In The Saddle* (1983).

In an undated letter, Mary Durack Miller replied that she was 'more than impressed with [the manuscript's] quality of writing and feeling and its penetration into the aboriginal [sic] way of life and thought'. She readily agreed to support Donald's grant application. 8

Going back to the country which inspired *Yandy of the Winds*, Donald added another 50,000 words to the already lengthy piece. This is the only one of his novel manuscripts which has survived. Donald's forward sloping handwriting flows across more than 1,500 pages of thin, pale green paper. Sometimes the writing is hasty, scrawled and larger. Clearly he was caught in the story. At other times, it thoughtfully and neatly fills the page from margin to margin. Where Aboriginal names occur in the body of the text, these are printed again above the line. In one section containing a number of Aboriginal words, (p. 1,319) there is a note for the typist to PTO. Over the page, the same words are printed clearly, the lines sloping upwards across the page. On some pages, additional phrases appear above a line, written in pencil, but there is little, if any, crossing out or adjustment to the words.9

Authors Max Brown and Gavin Casey were invited to Scarborough to have a look at the manuscript. It 'was massive,' said Max Brown, who thought it should be 'chopped up' and suggested Donald submit it to his publisher, Georgian House.10 An English publisher had already suggested it would make three separate novels 'collected as a trilogy in one cover'.11

Donald's applications for a Commonwealth grant became more insistent. The Commonwealth Literary Fund, first established in 1908, stated a desire to be: 'Helping Literature in Australia', an aim which recognised that the country's isolation and small population limited the sales of individual writers' work, making it difficult for authors to live by their 'writing alone'. In 1939, and again in 1940, five £500 Fellowships were awarded to 'writers of proven ability, so that they might have the necessary leisure, for a year, to work on a specified project'. In 1956, the amount of the grant had increased to
$2,000 and, by 1962, would increase further to $4,000. Donald (or Lyndall) wrote the letters carefully, taking into account the Literature Board’s requirements.

The Secretary was told that Donald’s physical condition, as the result of his war service and his years as a Prisoner of War, was ‘catching up’ with him. He was also informed that it was difficult for Donald to work at a physical job all day and ‘write creatively at night’. If he was to produce an ‘imaginative work of the quality demanded by the material’, he needed to devote himself fully to the writing. Copies of the revised manuscript were offered and dispatched at regular intervals, but to no avail.

Irene Greenwood, an old school friend of Lyndall’s and a book reviewer on Perth commercial radio’s Whitford Network, described the full typescript as ‘bulky, being about six inches thick’. Lyndall asked her to read it in ‘strict confidence not to divulge its contents nor mention its existence’. She wanted Donald’s version of the story to be the first, but she was also aware of attitudes towards Aboriginal issues and understood the material’s possibly explosive nature, particularly those sections dealing with Yandeyarra and Don McLeod.

Irene found the manuscript absorbing and positively assured an anxious Donald who called her from a public telephone box every day: ‘How’s it going? What do you think of it? Is it worth publishing?’

But, while Irene Greenwood urged Donald to get the manuscript to a publisher as quickly as possible, there were others who saw that, in its present form, it was unpublishable. Author Florence James wrote to Irene from London. She said the work was ‘a tremendous piece of writing and of great importance’, but the difficulties she and co-author Dymphna Cusack had experienced with their prize-winning novel, Come In Spinner (1951), gave her an insight into the problems Donald Stuart’s manuscript might encounter. Their similarly lengthy work had met serious resistance from publishers and James also immediately recognised that libel suits could be levelled at any publisher who included those sections detailing Stuart’s personal struggles with his second wife and criticising Don McLeod’s administration of Yandeyarra.

The manuscript went through a series of changes and was next described as a ‘projected trilogy’, with parts one and two, Spears of Spinifex and One Stage of the Game, already finished; the latter having been commended in The Sydney Morning Herald Olympic Year Literary Competition. Donald defined the proposed trilogy as ‘an imaginative work based largely on the writer’s observations over many years during
the period 1930-1956.' Once again, though signed by Donald, the letter’s promotional-type wording alerts us to Lyndall’s hand in this application. Each novel, the letter said, was to be complete, but the three would be bound together by certain of the characters,\textsuperscript{19} a design Donald Stuart eventually achieved in his later six novel sequence, \textit{The Conjuror’s Years} (1974-1981).

In the last half of the 1950s, Donald led what he later described as a ‘rather unnerving life’. As a single man with no immediate ties, he immersed himself in a variety of activities, lived in various places with friends and changed home ‘with confusing frequency’. The bills, he said, were only paid when he received the final Final notice.\textsuperscript{20}

In 1956, he was up in Nullagine again, appointed by the Department of Native Affairs as a Protector of Natives, a position not renewed at the end of the year.\textsuperscript{21} He returned to his writing. ‘Keep writing seems to be the only plan, with tons of material to write from,’ he wrote to Florence James in London,\textsuperscript{22} and, with his interest in the Perth Arts scene, he engaged himself in a number of new activities.

Accompanied by her husband, Australian composer James Penberthy, Russian-born ballerina, Madame Kira Bousloff, had arrived in Perth in 1952. Penberthy was resolved to write music of a discernibly Australian nature and his interest led the newly-formed West Australian Ballet Company into an exploration of Aboriginal dance. Western Australia was a totally new experience for Madame Bousloff and, inspired to interpret the life she saw around her, she choreographed and staged ballets that drew on Aboriginal legend and culture. Though her activities could not help but draw her into a recognisably political circle, she said her motive for embracing Aboriginal dance had little, if any, political purpose.\textsuperscript{23}

Donald Stuart was in the group of writers who gathered around James Penberthy. By now, Donald was regarded as having some authority when Aboriginal matters were under discussion\textsuperscript{24} and he advised on stories for the new Australian ballets, \textit{Kooree and the Mists} and \textit{Woodara}; his knowledge of Aboriginal customs would have been invaluable in ‘getting the story right’ and his powers of observation surely helped the dancers to transpose the movements of outback animals and birds into naturalistic dance forms. Donald and prominent Western Australian nature-lover, Vince Serventy, gave ‘technical advice’ for the ballet \textit{Brolga}, designed around a story outlined by another well-known wildlife expert, Harry Butler.\textsuperscript{25} Choreographed by Madam Bousloff to
James Penberthy’s music, the short ballet tells the story of ‘a young Aboriginal woman’s totemic symbol of the brolga’.26 When ballerina Terri Charlesworth took _Brolga_ to the 1957 International Ballet Competition in Moscow, she received the prestigious Ulanova Laureate for her performance of this unusual ballet.27

Around this time, the collaborative novel _Lian_ (1960)28 must also have been taking shape. Donald and Lyndall’s ‘pot-boiler’, not something they liked to acknowledge,29 was another of Lyndall’s efforts to encourage her brother’s writing. The two competent writers set their tale in the pearling town of Port Broughton, evoking the essence of Broome and exploring its intriguing layers of business and society. Reversing Florence Lyndall’s initials, they wrote under the pseudonym, Lesley Farrar. The writing varies; the gentility of one writer often clashing with the downright earthiness of the other, and the sudden deaths of several characters and potential situations that go unresolved indicate that the story had a tendency to develop in a way one or other of them had not expected. Worldly, slick and convincing, this is an absorbing and evocative account of a tropical north-west town which exists only to trade in the coveted pearl. Intended as a quick money-spinner, the novel falls into the category of popular fiction, a genre in which these two Stuarts might well have become a best-selling duo. It seems that their higher literary aspirations, and possibly their social beliefs, did not allow them to take this path.

Lyndall’s connection with the ABC influenced Donald to see the national broadcaster as a suitable outlet for his work. His short stories, articles and dramas lent themselves to broadcasting and he became a regular on local programs.30 In surviving ABC radio scripts,31 Donald’s storylines bring to life his abiding interest in the outback and his desire to tell the Aboriginal story. His _Book of Gold: The Prospector’s Story_ (1958), thirteen episodes about the early gold mining days in Western Australia, is a drama more about the goldminers’ hopelessness than their success. The dream of gold urges the prospector to persevere, but inevitably, ‘the interior of Western Australia was callously indifferent to the welfare of mankind’. Filled with recognisably Australian characters, the series tells about those who found gold and the many who did not. With prospectors buried close to their diggings or lost in the distance, to be picked at by birds, Stuart dwells on the fate of nameless men, many of whom perished for lack of water.32

Some of the talks were rebroadcast in the Eastern States where another Don Stuart was a regular ABC personality. With his dark hair, moustache and black-rimmed
spectacles, this Don Stuart bore little physical resemblance to the Western Australian
Donald Stuart,33 but the coincidence prompted an insistent letter from Donald R. to Mr
Turner of the ABC in Perth. 'Over a period of years,' he wrote, 'I have established the
form Donald R. Stuart, both here and in the Eastern States to avoid confusion with
another writer..."DON STUART".34 The novels were all published under the name
'Donald Stuart', but family and friends often affectionately referred to him as 'Donald
R.', a shortening which became his preferred signature when autographing copies of his
novels and ending personal correspondence.

Meanwhile, the Yandy of the Winds manuscript continued its rounds. Ted Harris,
managing director of Melbourne publisher, Georgian House, chanced to hear of the
unpublished novel. Georgian House was steadfastly dedicated to publishing books by
Australian authors and, in its early years, was known for high quality production and an
'extraordinary variety of titles'. After 1957, the House still produced 'an important
series of monographs on the work of contemporary Australian painters', but earned the
bulk of its income, 'not by publishing books, but by acting as sales representative for
British publishers'.35

Before long, there arrived on Harris's desk a 'formidable parcel, containing nearly
800 pages of thin airmail paper, faintly typed with a worn ribbon'—Lyndall's tireless
typing did not always produce satisfactory results. Only by putting a 'backing sheet
under each page' was Ted Harris able to read the words. He was immediately entranced
and read the first 440 pages 'at one session without stopping'. On the following day, he
read the rest. The effect Donald Stuart's writing had on him, he said, was 'almost
indescribable'.

Ted Harris held to his belief in Donald's work and, in 1963, told reporter John
Hetherington 'nothing since had changed the view I formed then of Stuart's quality as a
writer'. Harris went so far as to say: 'I think Stuart is a genius...We've had no big
success with him yet, but I am sure he will ultimately be regarded as one of the major
Australian novelists.36 From the time Ted Harris decided to publish the first section of
Yandy of the Winds, until the final novel, I Think I'll Live (1981), Georgian House was
Donald Stuart's main publisher and instrumental in securing overseas publication for
several of the titles.

167
Donald’s supporters, Lyndall Hadow, Dame Mary Durack and Irene Greenwood, seized upon Ted Harris’s statement that Donald would ‘ultimately be regarded as one of the major Australian novelists’ and repeated the assertion whenever the opportunity arose. As time went on, there would be others who, while pointing out flaws in Donald Stuart’s writing, also expressed a belief that his work deserved a place in Australian literature. But belief in a writer is not always enough to ensure the work is recognised beyond a small readership. By the end of the twentieth century, the promise for Donald Stuart’s writing had still not been realised. It is difficult to define any one reason why this happened, rather it seems there were a number of reasons contributing to the lack of interest.

Donald Stuart was often, rather glibly, described as a ‘regional writer’ and his chosen Western Australian setting led some to see his work as being of little interest to readers outside the State. The novels were published in Australia’s Eastern States and some even appeared overseas, but while his writing bears an undeniable appeal, and a wider Australian emphasis, the ‘regional’ tag appears to have limited his readership. Bruce Bennett, whose work explores issues of regional writing, particularly in relation to Western Australian writing, suggested, in 1979, that readers often fail to appreciate fully that ‘there is still much of interest and value for Australians in the literature of their own country’. Increased world-wide communication and a growing interest in conventions of the past have largely wiped away such prejudice, as evidenced by the success of Western Australian author Tim Winton, locally, nationally and internationally.

Donald’s political affiliations may have imposed some limitations on the acceptance of his work. Georgian House was a recognised publisher, but its association with the Australasian Book Society, and the publication of some of Donald’s novels under that imprint, placed him as a ‘social realist’, allying him with the Realist Writers, an extreme left-wing literary movement led largely by the Communist Party. The group was particularly active in Australia during the early and mid 1950s, counting among its ranks Australian writers such as Frank Hardy, Eric Lambert and Bill Wannan. There is evidence that Donald’s left wing sympathies hampered his career to a certain extent and possibly blocked his early applications for Commonwealth funding. In time, however, his regular output could not be ignored and the successful first novels, written without Government assistance, strongly supported his later applications for Literary grants.
In choosing to write his material ‘in such a way as to give the reader the illusion of actual experience’, Donald Stuart is best defined as a realist writer, preferring to show the average and everyday events in his mostly working-class, ordinary characters’ lives and choosing to reflect life as it may seem to the ordinary reader. His work is closer to a conservative social realism than to socialist realism, the writing which reflected ‘some aspect of a Marxist view that the struggle between classes is the essential dynamic of society’. Donald retained his family’s belief in the bringing of social equality to the down-trodden and oppressed, and that never changed; his left-wing sympathies were always evident. Nevertheless, while his first novel, Yandy (1959), fits the definition of writing with political purpose, in his other novels, Donald Stuart’s politics most often develop into a philosophical yarning around campfires or are lost in the rhythmical shuffling of men and animals journeying across his evocatively-drawn Western Australian landscape.

Lyndall Hadow, always enthusiastic about her brother’s writing, insisted he was ‘a realist, recognising and never minimising the part played by death’, but ‘nevertheless...sure it is life which is of supreme importance’. In all his writing, particularly in the final novel, I Think I’ll Live (1981), Stuart’s characters survive or die in mostly adverse circumstances. But, rather than conveying an overtly political message, his work may be seen as a celebration, emphasising the triumph of survival, even in death, and showing how ordinary people face the difficulties handed out to them.

Liberal humanism is the most appropriate description of Donald Stuart’s work; the writing prominent literary critic, Harry Heseltine, described as being ‘such an enduring element of Australian literature’. But then, any label that attempts to define Donald Stuart is always going to fall short of the man himself—and he would have shrugged off any such attempt.

Donald was always able to consider the other fellow’s viewpoint and, like many of his contemporaries, his political activities waned with time. His niece, Jill Lucas, remembered the Stuart family’s strong socialist leanings; ‘extreme left-wing’ she called them, ‘all of them’. She remembered visitors coming into the house ‘with the Worker tucked under their arm and slipping it to my parents, who didn’t want to read it’ and she accepted this covert delivery of the Communist paper as part of ‘being a Stuart’, though she did see that Donald had a much wider grasp of politics.
One election day in the early 1970s, Jill had spent hours handing out how-to-vote cards at the local electoral booth. When Donald, her favourite uncle, asked whose cards she had been handing out, she shamefacedly confessed to working for the Liberal candidate. She had expected an angry response, but was greatly relieved when Donald recognised the name and said: 'Thank God for that. We need intelligent, moderate people in all parties. If you're intelligent and moderate you can be in any party, because then everyone can work together.'

Donald's main compulsion was to set down his period of history. 'I may not be the only one who has experienced this,' he said, 'I may not be the only writer, but I am one of the few who has had the experience and is also able to write about it.' By the time he did set it down on the page, the outback life he wrote about was almost gone, but he had captured it so vividly that readers of his novels cannot help but find themselves transported into the place and period. As readers familiarise themselves with Stuart's novels and stories, the spare conditions so much part of Australian heritage, they are visually and rhythmically drawn into his slow landscapes:

Day followed night, and the night watches dragged through to another day, that went on slowly to dark, and the cattle rested while the men took watch. Deep pool mile long, with sandy flat beach where the cattle trooped in belly deep and drank, and fed out, and were put back to top up before going on, and two days later shallow weed-grown pool with high scowling cliff on the far side and scrubby wattle thickets on broken ground opposite, and no way in except through the thickets. From The Driven (1961).

When his novels began to appear regularly on the booksellers' shelves, they were not without their detractors, being often criticised for lack of form and for repetition. But, alongside this criticism, there was always praise for the detailed knowledge which allowed him to create an 'atmosphere of reality' and take his readers into his outback places; his commitment to writing the Australian life had made him a writer worthy of notice.

After all the difficulty with Yandy of the Winds, Mary Durack Miller suggested Donald should write something less controversial, 'not so contentious'. Attacking the project with his usual single-mindedness, Donald produced a completed manuscript in about
six weeks, seven weeks, couple of months', though Mary Durack Miller recognised the 30 to 35 years of experience that proved the story's authenticity. 30

The resulting novel, *The Driven* (1961), is about two white men, three Aborigines and a mob of cattle taking a months-long haul from Port Hedland to Meekatharra. It is set in a time when cattle and sheep drovers lived under the stars for weeks and carried most of their own food. They moved six miles a day with sheep, twelve miles a day with cattle, and were paid according to the number of animals reaching the destination in good condition. The last cattle droving over the route was in the 1950s and, by the time Donald Stuart was writing *The Driven*, sheep and cattle were already being transported in road trains and trucks. The routes fell into disrepair and the experienced drovers were disappearing. 51 In capturing the old drovers' way, Donald maintained his aim to record an Australian past. Lyndall and her friends gave their usual support and the manuscript moved quickly towards publication.

'I have a 60,000 word novel completed. It has no connection with previous work,' stated a letter to Stephen Murray-Smith of the literary magazine, *Overland*. The writer wondered if Stephen might 'have a spare evening in which to read it?' Perhaps he could also advise as to a suitable publisher? 52 This first letter to Murray-Smith is couched in Lyndall's words—Donald would not have seen the need to describe his own work as 'unchallengeably authentic'. The letter goes on to describe how, inspired by the quotation: 'All men are driven, but who of us ever sees the drover?' Mary Durack Miller had suggested the novel's title and her sister, artist Elizabeth Durack, had expressed an interest in doing 'end-papers and line drawings'. Lyndall's part in all this is confirmed in a note which advised Murray-Smith that the manuscript was on its way. The note is signed, 'Donald R. pp L.H.—because he's in bed with 'flu and I don't want to wake him to sign it.' 53

This was an important connection for Lyndall to have made, a sign that she knew her way around the Australian literary scene. Murray-Smith was a prominent member of the Realist Writers Group and, from 1952 to 1954, was editor of the group's Melbourne branch journal, *Realist Writer*. He went on to found the magazine, *Overland*, which boasted among its list of writers such literary luminaries as Frank Hardy, Eric Lambert and Katharine Susannah Prichard. In his friendly reply to the request that he look at *The Driven*, Murray-Smith refers to Donald's kindness to him when he was in Perth, sends 'affectionate salaams to Lyndall' and is enthusiastic about publishing possibilities for
The Driven. A later letter attached a reader’s report which concludes by paying ‘tribute to the fascinating picture of droving life and the north-west country...which constitutes a large part of its appeal’.55

Irene Greenwood was as enthusiastic as ever and, once again, she exhorted Donald to get the manuscript ‘to a publisher to read at once’.56 This time, the publishers agreed with her and, in contrast to the tortuous journeys undergone by the Yandy of the Winds manuscript, The Driven was immediately well-received.

Mary and Elizabeth Durack had grown up in Donald’s north-west, so it is not too surprising that they encouraged him to write about a life they understood. But loyal friends who surrounded Lyndall Hadow believed she had sacrificed her own writing to her brother’s success, though this denies any joy she might have gained from her part in his writing career. Like any brother and sister, especially two such ‘tempestuous’ characters, Donald and and Lyndall were known to have their differences,57 but while everything points to Lyndall as the main spur to her brother’s writing, she was always the consummate big sister, proud of his success.

Throughout her life, Lyndall’s writing career was mostly a journalistic one. As well as bringing credit to Donald’s work, she was also responsible for preserving a large part of their father’s historically significant writings. A competent and recognised journalist, she was also an accomplished and successful short story writer, but apart from the novel Lian, written jointly with her brother, there is little evidence that she set out to make her mark as a novelist. Every talent needs nurturing and ‘getting published’ requires a particular skill which, as all the records show, Lyndall did possess and willingly used to help her brother. Without such support, it is certain that the work of many published writers may never have reached the reading public, and this is particularly so of Donald Stuart.

Lyndall and her friends gave their feminine approval of Donald’s masculine stories. He accepted their advice and took note of their opinions, and there can be no doubt that he took advantage of any help they gave him. It seems there was always someone turning up to rescue Donald Stuart.

Donald Stuart first met Kathleen Anderson at the Nedlands home of E.R. O’Keeffe, a Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Western Australia. A warm friendship had
developed between Hilda O'Keeffe and Kathie, who also got on well with the children. Later, Kathie would say the family 'greatly influenced' her.58

One of four daughters born to farmer Robert Anderson and his wife Belle, Kathie was a bright and lovely young woman. She grew up on the family's Mount Hope property near Northam, coincidentally within sound of the firing range at the camp where Donald had undertaken his initial Army training. Kathie matriculated early from Northam High School and, at the age of sixteen, entered the University of Western Australia on a Commonwealth Scholarship, later gaining a Certificate of Teaching.59 She moved easily in artistic and social circles; there is a photograph of her with an older Norman Lindsay, with whom she says she corresponded, and photographs of her with members of a visiting English cricket team.60

Hilda O'Keeffe remembered this as a time when, unconcerned about security, Perth people left keys in their front door so visitors could let themselves in. Donald, a friend of E.R. O'Keeffe's, would arrive late at night, 'tired, hungry and lonely', probably after one of his stints in the north-west. He would settle himself on the couch and be sleeping there when the family came down in the morning. Hilda remembered him as a kind and loyal friend whom she considered 'knew the north-west thoroughly'. He was 'lovely' with the children and, much to everyone's delight, would sing Aboriginal songs when they went for drives in the car.61

They had to wait until Donald's divorce from his second wife was finalised. Once that was through, Donald Stuart and Kathleen Anderson were married on 3 April 1958, with composer James Penberthy as Best Man.62 Donald was then forty-four years of age and Kathie not quite twenty-two. The considerable difference in their ages attracted some comment, but Hilda O'Keeffe regarded them as having been very happy together.63 After their marriage, the couple lived in Scarborough with Donald's sister, Lyndall Hadow.64

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, married women were not permitted to hold Education Department teaching positions and, with her changed marital status, Kathie soon found herself out of a job. She continued to teach in the private education system, when she could, but her plans to work while her husband got on with his writing were somewhat curtailed. Once again, the Stuart family support structure came into play. The couple became dependent upon Lyndall, employed as a journalist in a local radio station and, after the death of her husband, Group Captain Patrick Hadow, MC., also receiving
Julian Martin Stuart, Donald’s elder brother, also lived at the Scarborough address, but he was mostly away in Queensland and Sydney researching his father’s life and work for a collection Lyndall was putting together.

The first 90,000 words of the *Yandy of the Winds* manuscript became Donald Stuart’s first published novel, *Yandy* (1959). The original of Elizabeth Durack’s hauntingly beautiful painting, ‘Yandy the Winds’, now in Dr Kathleen Stuart Strehlow’s personal collection, is painted in what Dr Strehlow describes as a ‘reddish brown, like the sands in a desert storm’. There is no explanation as to why Georgian House rejected this painting and, instead, used James Wigley’s ‘Don McLeod and His Mob’ for the *Yandy* dust jacket. Wigley’s painting does have a more upright form, perhaps better suited to a book cover than Elizabeth Durack’s painting, though the different emphasis must be noted. Elizabeth Durack depicts an Aboriginal group with their dogs and concentrates on the Aboriginal people’s story, while Wigley’s painting gives most weight to the figure of the white man, McLeod.

Donald expressed a belief that it had been ‘timid’ to leave out his more personal story and his account of altercations with Don McLeod. Almost twenty years later, when The Australasian Book Society published Max Brown’s *The Black Eureka* (1976), his remarks seemed more than justified. Alongside Brown’s version of the 1946 Pilbara strike is a full account of the time he and Stuart spent together at Yandeyarra, including details of the difficulties they both discerned in the station’s administration. The passage of time having dulled possible repercussions from this text, in 1976 there were apparently no libel suits attached to *The Black Eureka*.

Donald’s first novel was received with interest and widely reviewed. A contributor to *The Bulletin* was immediately interested to see Don McLeod’s name in the list of characters and would not have been alone in his desire to sift through events surrounding the Pilbara strike. Writing in the literary magazine, *Meanjin*, W.E.H. Stanner defined *Yandy* as ‘more document than novel’. He considered the work to be ‘structurally weak’ and its arrangement ‘rather rough’, but judged it as ‘a very fine showing indeed’. In the same issue of *Meanjin*, Cecil Holmes recalled his own recent visit to the Pilbara and praised Stuart’s ‘unique’ achievement, his ‘almost uncanny facility for penetrating the minds and feelings of the Aborigines’. Critic Gavin Casey was well aware of Western Australian sensibilities in regard to the Aboriginal situation.
and he knew there were readers who would 'dislike Stuart and his work as much as they dislike McLeod'. But he recognised the significance of this account about 'events destined to be important in our State history' and declared the book 'a moving and powerful interpretation' of what had happened.73 Author Henrietta Drake-Brockman judged Yandy to be 'a vividly imagined projection of the aboriginal ethos' and made a point of defining it as 'a work of imagination founded on fact'. She criticised the way the novel 'fades away' and the 'shadowy' figure of Don McLeod—probably resulting from cuts made in editing, though also reflecting Stuart's animosity towards McLeod—but she did recognise that Donald Stuart had drawn 'unforgettable pictures' of Aboriginal children and referred to the 'invoked sensation of moving on foot across the surface of the land',74 an hypnotic effect repeated in Stuart's other writing of which no sensitive reader could help but be aware.

No doubt about Yandy's political message was to be left in the minds of those who read the Melbourne Guardian. A review titled 'Yandy: A Communist Party Statement,' written by 'a spokesman for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia' urged: 'Every effort should be made to get this book widely read both in the Labor movement and among the Aboriginal people.'75

Having heard that Yandy was the first of a trilogy of novels, several reviewers anticipated two more would follow. If two of Stuart's other novels are to be attached to Yandy, they would be Ilbarana (1972) and Malloonkai (1976), the texts of which closely relate to unpublished sections of the manuscript held in the National Library of Australia. While these two novels have an evident connection to each other, during publication, their connection to Yandy was not stated. The Yandy of the Winds trilogy was never so clearly defined as the six novels in The Conjurer's Years series Donald insisted on calling his 'sextilogy'.

Most critics gave unqualified praise for the way Donald Stuart had written from an Aboriginal viewpoint. He maintained that anything he wrote about the Aboriginal people was gained 'from personal experience or from the people themselves'76 and, amongst his white audience, there was always an understanding that he knew what he was talking about. In Black Words, White Page (1989), Adam Shoemaker writes that Donald Stuart had seen the north-west indigenous people 'with a far more perceptive and empathic eye than did other travelling raconteurs'.77 Donald's level of perception and empathy with his subject related particularly to his desire to convey the Aboriginal
story. In addition, in all his writing, from the long treks associated with Aboriginal initiation, to the suburban roaming of the small boy following his brothers in *Drought Foal*, and on to the appalling marches forced on Australian Prisoners of the Japanese, it is the journey, the travelling rhythms which seem to have been part of his own experience, that he calls upon to provide a framework for his inveterate storytelling.

Donald Stuart knew the north-west and its people, but his critics were white men giving judgement on the writing of another white man about Aboriginal matters. As Henrietta Drake-Brockman points out, through Stuart’s choice to write from an Aboriginal viewpoint, in an imagined Aboriginal voice, the reader comes ‘close to subjective realisation of the native situation’. But this is not an Aborigine telling his own story, from his own viewpoint, and it is argued that the story will never be fully told until the Aboriginal people tell it themselves. In acting as spokesman for the Aborigines involved in the 1946 strike, Donald Stuart played a mediatory role and it must be considered that his writing helped a wider audience of white Western Australians and Australians towards an understanding of the Aboriginal cause. Nevertheless, he was well aware of his anomalous position:

"Whether I’ve succeeded or not I don’t make any claims...I think *Yandy* to a great extent is written from the Aboriginal point of view...But it is not for you, it is not for me, it is not for any white man to say, ‘Yes, that is from the Aboriginal point of view’. I say that I have tried. I say that in some books I have succeeded. But the only one who can give an opinion on that is...what Elkin calls ‘the man of high degree’—an Aboriginal proper man, fully initiated, experienced and of high degree."

Kathleen and Donald Stuart’s first child was born on 17 December 1959. They called him Julian Robert, another Stuart to carry his grandfather’s chosen name. Many years later, Donald told one interviewer: ‘I have got the memory of seeing my first child, my son born.’ It was a memory he counted as being far more important than anything that had happened to him in World War II.

Donald took to fatherhood with apparent enthusiasm. Once he had his own family, it seems he forsook any previous ideas that children should be looked after by the state while their parents went into the work force. A photograph of him bottle feeding his six-month old son was published by *The West Australian* and he took ten-month old
Julian on a 'Woman's World' daytime television program. He told how, while Kathie was out teaching, he organised his day and his writing around his role as househusband. A report appeared in the Weekend News under the heading: 'Writer Invades Woman's World':

Rises early, brings his wife breakfast in bed, feeds the baby and cuts his wife's lunch. Drives his wife to work, puts baby down for a morning nap. Writes for 1-2 hours...does the family washing and makes sure the house is clean, but doesn't worry how untidy it is. Despite his routine, he says: 'I'm not going to be a slave to my house.'

All of which makes him appear as an exemplary husband and father. But, in an era when fathers went out to work and mothers stayed at home to care for neat houses and tidy children, the Donald Stuarts were judged to be leading a rather 'hippie lifestyle'.

When not caring for his baby son, Donald wrote compulsively, in round-the-clock bursts, keeping at the desk with his head on a cushion and waking only to continue from where he had left off. 'When I'm writing a book, any book, I suppose I'm pretty difficult to have around,' Donald admitted. Bolstered by the support of his wife, Kathie, his sister and her friends, Donald confidently stated that he would 'never again do anything but a writing job'. Even more definite was his statement: 'My days in the shearing sheds and on the wharf are finished...I'd rather be down and out than be anything but a full-time writer.' He knew that 'writing might prove a poor prospect financially', but that did not alter his commitment and, he considered, the family could manage well on Kathie's wages. They may not have been exactly 'down and out', but, despite Donald's belief that they were doing all right, Kathie found it difficult to manage on the very little money that was coming in. She was known to comment that her husband was 'not a good provider'.

In mid-1960, another two of Donald Stuart's manuscripts were with London publisher, Michael Joseph. In that same year, at last receiving the recognition he and his sister had craved, Donald was awarded a £500 six-month Commonwealth Literary Fellowship. With one book out, another two on the way and a Commonwealth grant, Donald Stuart's standing in the Western Australian writing community was established. The Driven (1961) was launched simultaneously in London and New York, surprising those who had seen Stuart as merely a regional writer. His Western
Australian cattle droving experience travelled well, into another country where drovers were called cowboys and where they recognised the language of big cattle drives. Reviewers saw *The Driven* (1961) as a 'story that could be told of most cattle drives in the American West'—proof, indeed that, given the right subject, a 'regional' writer may find acceptance beyond his own boundaries. A perceptive review in *The Norfolk Virginian Pilot* noted the author's tendency to philosophise and recognised Donald Stuart's 'prideful recalling of a rapidly vanishing facet of his native folk-lore'.

Another reviewer praised 'the sheer beauty of the language and the gentle but strong rhythm' and declared it as a 'story that will fascinate anyone'.

The novel was also well-received in Australia. One Melbourne reviewer, while recognising the book's limited popular appeal, admitted to its ability to get 'a pleasantly irritating hold upon the reader', an opinion that must have pleased Donald. In *Meanjin*, Harry Heseltine dubbed it: 'Among the best of the outback novels' published that year and saw it as a 'considerable advance on *Yandy*'.

The novel was entered in the 1961 Miles Franklin Literary Award, a national award 'presented annually for a published novel or play portraying Australian life in any of its phase[s]'. That year, the award went to Patrick White for *Riders in the Chariot*, but it was reported in Perth that one of the judges had held out for Stuart's *The Driven*. Commendation indeed!

In terms of publication and acceptance, *The Driven* was Donald Stuart's most successful novel. It was set for Leaving Certificate English in New South Wales and Victoria as well as in Western Australia. More than twenty years after its first publication, an abridged version appeared in a volume of *Readers Digest Condensed Books* (1975). Asked what he thought about the condensation, Donald expressed pleasure. His niece, Jill, was conscious that he 'philosophically didn't approve' of condensed works, but he told her it was 'the most sympathetic condensation I could have had'. More importantly, it netted 'handsome royalty payments'. Here it should be said that similar condensation of his other novels could have made Donald Stuart a more widely read and recognised Australian author.

When he was in Perth, Donald Stuart embraced the literary life, happily playing the part of urbane author. But he was more at ease with the rough and ready ways of the outback and, even in his relatively settled periods, the possibility of a trip to the north-west could
always tempt him away from home. In the winter of 1962, when Kathie was pregnant with their second child and little Julian was about two-and-a-half years old, Donald and his family went on a seven week long trip to the Pilbara. This was Kathie’s first visit to her husband’s outback places.105

Later in the year, Donald gave an ABC radio talk about this experience,106 an evocation of country and landscape, taking his listeners on a journey set in the present, but holding a strong awareness of the past. The narrator, the traveller, is going back to ‘some of my old stamping grounds round Nullagine and Marble Bar’, but as he sets off and progresses along the road, there is tension in his concern that the place may have changed with the years, become unrecognisable. His mind is filled with earlier journeys in this direction, but a realistic understanding overtakes his imaginings. Those days had been far from romantic. ‘Don’t kid yourself’, he thinks, ‘the old glad days were bad days, with long night-watches...hard lying, rough tucker and low pay’.107 For two or three days and nights, they progress ‘up the map, by straight roads’, living out of the back of the four-wheel-drive.108 Almost from the start of the journey, all the signs point to the way things have changed. The country is still the same; miles of sheep country, mulga scrub and salt lakes, but the cattle-carrying road trains mock the slow rhythmical movement of his memories. Just as he thought it might be, Nullagine is dead, with everything closed and no one to remember the youngster who had found his way there in the pre-war years—until there emerges ‘a blackfeller in workworn stockman’s clothes...”G’day,” he said.’

In the following soft-voiced conversation, the narrator eases himself into the way it used to be, admitting his liking for ‘the very savour of the Norwest names’. After offering cigarettes and a lift to Marble Bar, he finds he is not forgotten. ‘You...Don Stuart, ain't it?’ the Aboriginal man asks. The little family is invited to that night’s ‘big singing business’ where there will be others whom he remembers and who remember him. With ‘the butcherbird’s song on the still air’ and the heavy scent of ‘Minnerichi in full bloom’ we can feel him being drawn back into his own place. We know it would not take much for him to cross the edge of this world and settle for the whole of it. ‘Looks like you’re back in your old stamping grounds again, eh?’ says the wife. ‘Yes...almost like coming home,’ he replies. Nullagine has worked its magic and, for a while, they are tempted to stay and take up the outback ways.109 The possibility is left hanging. Listeners are drawn into the tension between suburbia and the outback, a tension of
which Donald Stuart was always aware and which he wrote into many of his characters. In the Australian outback tradition, the bush offers a ready escape into a supposedly comfortable past and tenders a promise of refuge, an idea Donald Stuart’s mostly suburban-dwelling readers would find attractive.

Henrietta Drake-Brockman suggested to Donald that, ‘women being fifty per cent of the human race’, it was time for him to write a book about a woman. So, there emerged *Yaralie* (1962), the story of a young girl born of a white prospector father and a part-Aboriginal mother, the third of his novels and the only one with a woman as the main character. Yaralie’s mother dies and her father is injured in an accident, placing the girl in a vulnerable position and putting her in danger of abuse. There is no conciliatory position here. In the most poignant part of this novel, Yaralie abandons all thoughts of finding a place in the white community and, with another young half-caste, she retreats into the bush—for her the only refuge. In this novel, Donald Stuart tries out stories that would turn up in his later writing. There is a reference to his childhood book, *The Story of an African Farm*, swaggie stories that equate with his own Depression years and, in the father’s accident and long hospital stay, echoes of his own father’s accident in the south-west.

Speaking on ABC Radio, eminent academic, Leonie Kramer, found the main characters in this novel were successfully drawn, but, while recognising his emphasis was meant to provide a certain ‘propaganda for a more humane attitude to the half-caste’, she found his white characters ‘for the most part, weak and vicious’. Like so many other reviewers of Stuart’s work, she recognised the flaws, but was captivated by his ‘talent for powerfully simple, descriptive writing’. She found *Yaralie* worth reading for passages like this:

> Beauty of her country, in searing drought, or lashed by sudden infrequent rains that brought the creeks racing muddily an hour or two; beauty of winter cloud running before the wind across the high reaches of the sky, or of silent noon when the snappy gums dreamed on the skyline in the heat, and the birds were still and only the ants moved in all the world.
Donald and Kathleen's second child, a daughter, was born on 13 August 1962. They named her Yaralie, after the main character in the most recently published novel. 'I liked the name so much,' said Kathie, 'and I was very anxious to have a daughter so that I could call her Yaralie.' What fun, then, to go further with the theme of perpetuating her husband's work and have a yandy in which to carry Yaralie. During their trip to the north-west, the Stuarts had added to their collection of Aboriginal artefacts and, just like the Aboriginal women she had seen, Kathie carried her daughter in a wooden yandy to take her to the Baby Health clinic or out shopping. The idea so intrigued people who saw them that a photograph of Kathie with six month old Yaralie, perfectly happy in her yandy, appeared in *The West Australian*.

Little Julian had his own impressions of the trip to Nullagine, Marble Bar and 'Cape Leveque with the big lighthouse'. Looking out of the window of the family's Cobb Street house one day, Donald saw Julian at the front fence, talking to the two boys from next door. 'You haven't got TV,' they jeered at the little boy, 'and you've only got that beat-up old Landover.' Julian did not dispute any of the observations about his family's lack of possessions. 'You haven't got a boat, either,' the boys continued. 'No,' said Julian, looking at them directly. But he had been to the north-west and there were things up there that you didn't see down here. 'Have you ever been to Fangoo?' he asked, a question for which the boys had no reply. It was a story Donald loved to repeat, pleased that his children had not been spoilt by an excess of worldly goods. It was how he remembered his own childhood.

Looking back to this time, Donald's son, Julian Robert, could not remember the Fangoo story, but he did remember that:

Donald saw his childhood in rather a golden glow. When I was very young, in Perth, we ate bread and dripping. It tasted awful. I think Donald's intention was either that he thought it was so good that he wanted us to share the experience; or that he wanted us to know what it was like to be too poor to afford anything but dripping. There is a third alternative—that we ate bread and dripping because we really were too poor to afford anything else, although I think this unlikely. In Perth we lived, by the standards of Donald's childhood, quite well.

Donald continued writing for the ABC and Kathie took teaching positions when and where she could. Now she described herself as a 'part-time writer of radio scripts and
short stories'.

She had entered upon the same writing life as her husband and sister-in-law, but during a period she spent at Perth College in 1963, it was generally known that Kathie was 'a bit unhappy about things'. All was not well in the Stuart household, and Kathie would later claim that she had been unhappy for much of the marriage. Apart from the lack of a regular income, Donald, she said, 'could be verbally abusive' and Lyndall could be 'a bit sharp'.

Around this time, there is also the suggestion of a rift between Donald and Lyndall, most likely over differences of political opinion occurring within the Fellowship of Australian Writers. In upholding the Fellowship's apolitical stance, Donald followed in the footsteps of previous President, Mary Durack Miller, and made his position clear on several occasions. Unlike his sister, though a staunch socialist in his thinking, he had never been a keen activist; now he appeared to have moved away from her more aggressive political stance.

All of this, no doubt, contributed to the Donald Stuarts' decision to take to the road. They had bought Vince Serventy's old Landrover and, for Donald, there was always one solution to every difficulty; you only had to climb into the Landrover and take off into the bush. 'He always did escape,' remembered his sister-in-law, 'went walkabout.'

In 1964, there was talk of a two-year caravan tour of Australia, during which Donald was to collect material for his writing and find work wherever he could along the way. Young Julian remembered how the family had set off from Perth 'to travel around Australia in a Land Rover, over the Nullarbor and across to New South Wales, before settling in Adelaide'. On the way, they visited the south west towns of Albany and Denmark, and received a warm welcome from local Fellowship of Australian Writers branch members. Later, Donald was reported to be on the edge of the Nullarbor Plain, working on a pyrites mine in Norseman. The family went to the Eastern Goldfields and, at the end of 1964, they acquired a new caravan in Whyalla, South Australia.

In his Army days, Donald's marriage to Joan had made him an honorary South Australian. For a brief time, he had been happy in Adelaide and the journey might well have been a chase after lost happiness.

Donald carried with him a letter from prominent anthropologist Ronald Berndt, an introduction to T.G.H. Strehlow, distinguished teacher of Australian linguistics at
Adelaide University. Donald Stuart's empathy with the Aboriginal people of the northwest, evident in his three published works and in several of his published short stories, had attracted Strehlow's attention. He had already read one of the books and was interested in the author. He invited Kathie and Donald to dinner. Donald must have thought he was the centre of attention and seen the dinner as an opportunity to further his own work and gain employment for himself. But Strehlow was unable to offer any chance of work and, as it eventuated, the visit had more significance for Kathie Stuart than for her husband. The contact appeared as a single encounter and, a short time later, the Stuarts left Adelaide for New South Wales.

Theodor George Henry Strehlow (1908-1978), son of Lutheran Minister, Pastor Carl Friederich Theodor Strehlow, was born at Hermannsburg Mission in the Northern Territory. His childhood friends were the Aboriginal people of the area and he grew up speaking their Aranda language. For much of his life, Strehlow devoted himself to recording Aboriginal culture 'in a way no one else has done'—tape recording songs and stories, filming dance and ceremony, and keeping extensive personal diaries. His work was unique, as was his collection of Aboriginal artefacts and sacred objects, which, during his lifetime and following his death, attracted a great deal of interest, and the ownership of which became the centre of much controversy.

Prior to leaving Perth, Kathie Stuart had corresponded with Strehlow. She greatly admired the man and his work and, having met him, she felt a compulsion to contact him again. Despite the difference in their ages, Strehlow was five years older than Donald, the attraction was mutual and, when the Stuarts returned to Adelaide, an intense relationship formed between Kathie Stuart and Professor Strehlow.

On their return to Adelaide, Kathie taught at Norwood Girls Technical High School and Donald 'was employed as a groundsman at a bowling club'. In July 1965, he was appointed as a 'Temporary Junior Assistant (on probation)', at Goodwood Boys Technical High School, but there is nothing to say the position became permanent. At the end of the year there was talk of him undertaking a Lecture tour but nothing further to indicate that this went ahead.

In Aborigines Artefacts and Anguish (1981), a biography of Professor Strehlow, author Ward McNally states that Strehlow acquired some funding and offered Stuart the possibility of doing field research in Central Australia. The Stuart marriage was all but over. The settled life of an Adelaide academic must have appeared more attractive
than the frugal existence Kathie had been living since she married Donald and infinitely more comfortable than the itinerant turn their life had taken since they left Perth. Kathie must have seen opportunities for herself and for her children. Almost immediately after Donald left Adelaide to spend nine months in Central Australia, she started divorce proceedings.\textsuperscript{138}

Julian Stuart remembered how the family ‘stayed for a time in a caravan park at Norwood... before moving to a house at Prospect’, an Adelaide suburb. Julian’s memory of his father was that he was mostly away, coming home for only ‘very occasional visits’. He wrote occasionally, but visits and letters eventually ceased.\textsuperscript{139}

Kathie Stuart and T.G.H. Strehlow were married in 1972 and their son, Carl, was born the following year. Kathie, who had completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at Adelaide University, became Strehlow’s personal assistant and designated successor. When Professor Strehlow died in 1978, just hours before launching the Strehlow Research Foundation, his wife assumed the Foundation’s Directorship. She dedicated her life to preserving her husband’s work, a dedication that, over the years, entangled her in bitter controversy over ownership of his unique and invaluable collection.

In a 1974 interview with Hazel De Berg, Donald Stuart spoke briefly about his marriages. ‘I think that, after three times, it might be that I’m not the best of matrimonial material.’\textsuperscript{140}

Each of the marriages had been hastily conceived and, in all three, the separation was initiated by the wives. Donald’s rough outback ways may have influenced their ending. Looking at where he had come from, the hardship of his childhood, his years in the outback and his Prisoner of War experience, we might see that he had little regard for what any woman might consider the comforts of life. While he liked good food and to wear good gear, he knew you could get by on nothing. The women he married had other expectations.

All three were intelligent, independent women, capable of holding responsible positions, Joan as an Army sergeant, Dessie as a nursing sister and Kathy as a teacher. After they were married, Dessie and Kathy worked and contributed to the household income while Donald got on with his writing, an unusual arrangement for the time. He also took Dessie and Kathy into the outback with him, creating a situation that many women would find harsh and difficult to contend with, especially, as in Kathy’s case,
where children were involved. As Donald's statement to Hazel de Berg indicates, at a time when men were still supposed to be the breadwinners and provide for the family, he knew he had not been the ideal husband.
Donald (Scorp) Stuart on the Mount Newman Railway. 1968.
After the 1963 Australian release of his third novel, Yaralie, eight years elapsed before Donald Stuart’s name again found its way onto the booklists. ‘I wasn’t in a mood for writing,’ he told one interviewer. Following the break-up of his marriage, he said, he had written ‘hardly a thing’.

Central Australia was not Donald’s place and, whatever length of time he spent there doing field work for Ted Strehlow, it was not long before he drifted back to his own north-west to work. He said he had worked ‘on railway construction, tin mining, percussion drilling, truck driving and earth moving jobs in the Marble Bar-Port Hedland-Nullagine districts’. On later applications for Literary funding, he offered this information to illustrate how his ‘knowledge of the great changes in the area since the start of the iron ore and nickel boom...is not derived from newspaper reports but is sweatily, dustily and at times achingly first hand’.

He moved into a rough routine of going bush, hoping to earn enough in a twelve months period to allow him to sit down and write for the following six months. He was back in the Pilbara at a significant time in its development; there was plenty for him to observe and, whenever he felt moved to write, a wealth of inspirational material. As it turned out, he wrote very little.

Mining had begun in the Pilbara as far back as the early 1870s, and local prospectors knew about a seemingly endless list of minerals to be found under this ground. The region was home to the Aboriginal people, pioneering pastoralists and those prospectors determined and hardy enough to put up with its harsh and isolated conditions. Few others were attracted to the Pilbara and it came to be regarded as one of the State’s last frontiers. From his earliest encounter with it, the very harsh and isolated nature of this place had captured Donald Stuart’s imagination. He had trudged through it with his swag, driven herds of cattle across it and was one of the small prospectors grateful for tiny amounts of gold, ‘tallied in ounces and pennyweights’, left behind by the early miners.
At the end of the 1880s, Government geologist, Harry P. Woodward, described the area as 'essentially an iron country'. There seeped into Western Australian consciousness an awareness that the huge deposits were 'enough for the whole world', but for many years the bounty remained largely untapped.

The Pilbara scene began to change dramatically in the late 1950s. Mount Whaleback was discovered in 1957 and, three years later, when the Federal Government lifted its 30 year embargo on the export of iron ore, the huge overseas financial investment so desperately needed to develop the massive resource, began to enter the State. A specially constructed network of railways was needed to move the vast amounts of ore from isolated inland mines to Port Hedland. Hamersley Iron was the first railway to be built, then came the Mount Newman Railway, followed by those at Goldsworthy Mining and Robe River.

The Mount Newman railway, dubbed the 'biggest private railroad project of the decade', was built by Morrison-Knudsen-Manix-Oman of the US and Canada. The railroad stretched 265 miles (426 kms) from Mt. Whaleback to Port Hedland and linked mines in the eastern and northern Pilbara with ports at Nelson Point and Finucane Island. Men involved in constructing the railroad were accommodated in camps built beside the line and moved along as the railway extended across country.

At the age of 54, and a quarter of a century after his time on the Burma-Thailand Railway, Scorp Stuart found his way on to the Mount Newman Railway. They called it 'the sinew' and he described it as 'curved and sinuous as any python'. Employed as a chainman, a surveyor's assistant, Scorp gave Mrs K. Stuart of South Australia as the person to contact in case of accident. He had often been a lone figure in the Pilbara, now he joined the 'few thousand others', labourers of mixed nationalities, who opened up the region in a way the early prospectors could not have imagined. An obviously posed photograph of the bearded, hard-hatted Scorp Stuart, kneeling on the railway embankment, in work boots, shorts and a clean, tight, white T-shirt, bears out reporter Lloyd Marshall's description of him as 'nine stone of Pilbara parched whipcord and muscle, not an ounce of fat'. Greeks, Italians, a Canadian and a German were in his crew, some with few words of English, but he regaled them all with his stories and was known along the line as 'the king of joke tellers'. Scorp was at home in this environment, taking part in another historically significant event that demanded physical
effort and proved everything he had ever written about. 'On the railway,' he would say. 'I had only four days off in fifteen months.' Had he felt the Japanese still at his back?  

A certain kind of 'Scorp' behaviour is associated with the name he was unable to shake off in his youth and which had dogged him in to the Army. Donald Stuart, Perth author, reverted at will to this other, outback persona, the 'outrageous' Scorp. Among hair-raising stories coming out of his time on the Mount Newman Railway, is one of a 'tequila-skolling contest' which ended with Scorp falling through a plate-glass door.  

A sign of the separation between the two sides of Donald's character appears even more evident when, in his article, 'Beloved Land', there is no hint of this wild aspect of his life on the railway. The piece, first published in 1975, is written in the same reflective tone as his later writing about the north-west town of Broome. Allowing for the passage of time, and perhaps a certain layer of nostalgia, we glimpse Donald's more sober thoughts about this period. As always, he is drawn to the wider picture of human endeavour; the silent ranges of his youth now echo with the 'clamour of bulldozer and scraper, grader and giant truck'. Blasting rocks the land. The 'millions and hundreds of millions of tons' of ore waiting to being taken out of the ground dictate the construction project's immensity. Typically, he looks to the past and considers the early navigators who sailed along this coast, unaware of its potential riches. He thinks about the 'diversity of people who roamed the Pilbara' before the white man came; the Aboriginal people who were 'always and ever at one with the land', but he accepts the inevitability of what is happening. Everyone must advance and nothing can be changed back. We might have expected him to express regret at the way the land is being ripped up and exploited. Instead he looks to a future where 'the Pilbara's wonderful holes in the ground' will stand alongside thousands-of-years old pieces of Aboriginal art as 'great and wonderful monuments to the proud days, years, centuries of steel', as yet another example of man's achievements. Conservationists and traditional owners of this land might find his interpretation hard to accept. Nevertheless, in the article's final sentence, an older Donald Stuart declares his love of the Pilbara and continues to claim it as his place: 'I count myself fortunate to have seen it all, the age-old and the futuristic new, there in my Beloved Land.'  

After the railway, there were other jobs in the north-west. Scottish Geologist Richard Speir was a young field-assistant doing exploration work in the area. He came across
Scorp Stuart in Rippon Hills 'a sort of long dry gully running back into iron stone hills with a corrugated iron shed in it where the temperature reached 140 F degrees in the day'. Scorp was working with Wally, a Yugoslav New Australian with a picturesque turn of the English phrase, whose real name was Vlad. The two of them, Richard said, were 'hard looking, wiry, small blokes covered in manganese dust'.

Richard moved on to Woodie Woodie, 300 kilometres from Port Hedland, the site of manganese and crocidolite blue asbestos deposits that had kept the area's small scale mining operations alive during the 1950s and '60s, before the severe health hazards of asbestos mining were fully realised.

Scorp and Vlad followed along later and Richard found himself sharing a room with Scorp:

Room was a bit of an overstatement: there was just enough space for two beds and a table between. Look I'm not the most fastidious of chap, not the cleanest and tidiest sort of person, give me a homely heap of things any day, but he was awesome. He was 55 then, skinny and gnarled as a twist of salt bush. the only neat thing about him was the Scorp moustache. He was working in a perpetual cloud of manganese dust, and well-annointed with diesel, and it was everywhere, but we got on and I just used to clean the floor half-way across.

Of course, they talked. Scorp would always take advantage of a ready audience, someone to listen to his stories, delivered, as Richard recalled, 'with the art of the troubadour'. Scorp conveyed his admiration and affection for the Aboriginal culture and spirit, and compared it with what he saw as the feebleness of modern society. He also had this endlessly droning song:

"The kadjibut tree, the kadjibut tree, the kadjibut tree, the kadjibut tree" which he sang until you were ready to scream or hit him and then he'd say: "No, I know a better one than that: The BIG Kadjibut tree, the BIG Kadjibut tree, the BIG Kadjibut tree...."

Donald had assumed the role of one of his 'Good poor Old Bastards', the old men he had met in his youth, telling tales around the camp fire, helping a youngster on his way, regaling him with stories of the old days. Richard was perceptive enough to see behind the grimy small prospector's outside image and divine the other side of Scorp Stuart. He was well aware of Scorp's ability to step 'through the mirror', to be 'the participant as
well as the chronicler'. It was this ability to 'see the obvious clearly and unblinkered and savour and treasure it that was so enriching', Richard remembered more than thirty years later, and 'sometimes the awfulness of his jokes was the best bit of working in Australia'.

Bob Leonhardt, an exploration foreman in the area at this time, remembered a bearded and scruffy Scarp, who insisted Bob should find him some work. He would turn up every evening, sit on the Landrover bonnet and threaten to turn up again the next night and every night until he got a job. Eventually, Bob took pity on him and, to get him away from the drink, gave Scarp a lift out of town to help with a pegging job. Bob had no recollection of Scorp Stuart ever having been much of a worker.

A favourite destination on Donald Stuart's north-west map was the three-quarters-of-a-million acre property, Mount Edgar Station. Set on a low ridge off the Nullagine-to-Perth road, the station was a 'straggle of corrugated iron sheds, railway iron cattle yards and the homestead itself, also corrugated'. The station was run by the Edwards family; Marble Bar stockman and horse breaker Jim (Ringer) Edwards, his wife Ann and their children. Ringer Edwards was a local hero, a 'larger-than-life character with a certain magnetism'. He had served with the 2/26th Battalion and was taken prisoner in Singapore. The Japanese edict that any prisoner caught trying to escape should be put to death did not deter this soldier, but because of his defiance, he would suffer terribly at the hands of his captors. When Ringer attempted to get away, he was dragged back and crucified. For two days he endured the torture until, assuming he was dead, the Japanese lost interest in this slow, cruel dying. But Ringer's mates had been watching and waiting, and as soon as they saw an opportunity, they cut him down from the crucifix, resuscitated him and nursed him back to health. The permanent scars on his hands were tangible reminders of the torture. Using Jim as inspiration for the fictional character, Joe Harman, Australian author Neville Shute immortalised the north-west cattleman's story in his novel, A Town Like Alice (1950).

Scorp took Richard Speir up to Mount Edgar Station for Christmas 1969. Temperatures rarely fell below 100 F degrees in that part of the year and living was mostly out of doors. Scorp had told Richard, 'Mount Edgar's the only place where you'll see a donkey, a camel and a sheep all in the kitchen at once'. The kitchen's large corrugated window flaps were always open and there was a hole in the wall where
lambs, calves, small donkeys or camels could drink from a bottle at feed time and, Richard remembered, there was always ‘a fleet of great dogs’. At night, everyone slept on iron bedsteads under the stars and, during the day, the best thing was to prop in a piece of shade with a drink in your hand. Scorp was at several Mount Edgar ‘celebrations’, occasions Richard Speir saw as a chance for Jim and Scorp, fellow Prisoners of the Japanese, ‘to get back together and reaffirm the ties’ and have ‘an occasional bay at the moon in unison’.27

The following December, Donald decided to take his great-nephew, Simon Langoulant, up to the Edwards’s place. ‘Donald probably thought of the trip as a “rite of passage,”’ said Simon, who describes himself as having been ‘a soft and over-sensitive, middle-class kid, with no experience to prepare me for anything as tough as the Edwards and their life’.28 He was fourteen years old, about the same age Donald had been when he left home more than forty years before. Simon’s grandfather, Donald’s elder brother Ken, had suggested the boy needed toughening up and told his mother that she should get him some boxing lessons. In those days, boxing was seen as a way of developing a boy’s coordination, building his self-confidence and teaching him how to defend himself. The two brothers must have shaken their heads and expressed their own particular concerns for a boy whose comfortable life and good schooling were well outside their own experience. They were obviously anxious about how he might fare in a world they knew could be tough.

Donald and Simon were to be away from Perth for two weeks, in the hottest part of the year. The long road journey was an ordeal in itself and, more than thirty years later, Simon was somewhat reluctant to reach back and recall the discomfort of that visit. When they arrived at Mount Edgar, Simon found he had nothing in common with the two Edwards boys, and Donald and Jim seemed intent on confronting him with some mean facts of life. Sitting at the dinner table, the two men reminisced ‘in graphic detail about their [Prisoner of War] experiences and particularly about some of the retribution visited on some of the more unpopular Japanese guards when the tables were turned’. No doubt the most lurid of these accounts were repeated and exaggerated in the style of all good yarn-telling—not that these events did not happen; these two men had lived through the experience and knew only too well the inhumanity of the time they were speaking about. Maybe they egged each other on and perhaps the sessions got out of hand, but had they really believed the youngster would benefit from this knowledge?
Rite of passage, initiation ceremony, the lad was old enough to survive, but despite the supposedly good intentions of exposing him to a broader understanding of life and its vicissitudes, there was something cruelly deliberate about what was being done.

On the way home, in what can only be seen as a further illustration of Donald's lack of practicality, another unforgettable incident lodged itself in the boy's memory. The wheel they had changed on the way north, 'parted from the rest of the vehicle' and Simon considered they had 'a near-death experience'. They were travelling at some speed along the edge of 'an uncomfortably high and steep road embankment' and 'we just barely didn't go flying off', Simon recalled, the horror still vividly apparent in his account. Since then, he had decided the whole adventure would probably 'provide the basis for a good short film' with him in the starring role.

No doubt, all the older men involved in this tale thought they were 'doing the right thing' and, as other members of the Stuart family seemed to have thought, it seemed like a grand opportunity for Simon to have this experience with his great-uncle Donald. But it was a short-term experiment and the lad might have got more out of those two weeks, and had a broader understanding of what was going on, if he had been a few years older, like Richard Speir.

Richard knew the rough side of Donald, but as most of his anecdotes reveal, he had the insight to discern him at a deeper level. The two met up again in Perth, in 1970. The setting had changed dramatically, in more ways than one. The scruffy, manganese-covered miner was hardly recognisable; instead Richard found himself in the company of Western Australian author Donald R. Stuart, whose involvement in the world of ballet made for an unlikely transformation. They went to the theatre to see *The Way of the Whirlwind* performed as a children's ballet. When Donald Stuart and his guest were ushered to their seats by no less a person than Mary Durack Miller, Richard was, understandably, a little overawed, but his recollection of the afternoon shows that the old Scorp was never far from the surface:

Halfway way through the performance, this dancer comes on as a lizard, a Ta-ta Lizard, you know, one of those Left-hand Lizards, that bob their heads in a valedictory way with their left hand off the ground before disappearing into the spinifex, and this booming whisper came from beside me, "I could swear that lizard's yooman!"
Contradicting a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’, the mischievous remark twisted what was happening on stage—a ‘yooman’ giving a convincing interpretation of an outback lizard. Richard Speir insisted on ‘the wonderful clarity’ of Donald’s ‘vision of reality’, but in this case his ability to sift beneath the surface and interpret what he saw in his individual way, emphasises a perception that often took little account of the people around him. We might appreciate Donald’s knack for forcing an alternative view, but this account does illustrate what Richard described as his tendency to skip ‘along the edge of humour between driving the audience to dementia and amusing them’.

During the period from 1968 to 1971, Donald’s children, Julian and Yaralie, spent their Christmas holidays with their maternal grandmother, Belle Anderson, in Northam. Julian’s recollection of this as a ‘wonderful time’, contrasts markedly with Simon Langoulant’s confrontational encounter with the bush. Going from Adelaide across the Nullarbor to Perth by train was, Julian said ‘a fantastic way to see Australia’. The ‘long weeks on the farm were magical, just magical, blazing sunshine, thousands of acres of countryside to roam around, old homesteads to explore’; his was an idyllic memory held across the years, the sort of Australian experience he believed ‘every kid should have’.

Donald came to visit his children only once, for a couple of days early in 1969. Julian remembered how he told them to ‘never, ever forget that he was our father, and that he loved us, and that this new man in the household, Strehlow, could never be our father’. Before he left, Donald gave his children a paperback edition of Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe in which he had written: ‘To Julian and Yaralie, my dear children, with all my love. Daddy. 1969.’

Twelve years passed before Julian saw his father again and, more than thirty years later, Donald’s son was still wondering ‘if there was some message for us, or whether [Robinson Crusoe] was just the best book he could lay his hands on at the time’.

Donald was usually deliberate in his choice of reading matter and the gift was unlikely to have been a random selection. Daniel Defoe’s preference was to write imaginative tales based on the true histories of pirates and thieves. The model for his fictional Crusoe was a British sailor named Alexander Selkirk, but The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719) is not an authentic history. Defoe used Selkirk’s tale to illustrate how a civilised man, alone on a desert island, might
successfully pit his courage and skill against nature, a universal theme that has ensured the author and his story are remembered for almost three hundred years. The message would not have been lost on Donald. Following the separation from his wife and children, it is possible he wanted to hand this on as a reassuring message, that his children might see him as the shipwrecked sailor who could manage on his own or, perhaps, as a strengthening message which promoted his long-held belief in survival, whatever the odds.
Donald R. Stuart.


*Courtesy Gloria O’Connor*

*Courtesy Reg Crabb*
XI

THE CONJUROR’S YEARS

_I regard writing as a solitary craft…_

_It is a thing a man works out from his own mind._

_The story originates behind his eyes and between his ears._

Despite his claim to have ‘written nothing for ten years’, some words must have found their way onto paper. Donald Stuart said he had written his best short stories during that time and Richard Speir remembered seeing ‘sheaves’ of them.

One story about this north-west period broke the eight-year drought in Donald’s publication record. The narrator in ‘Just Poking About, Having a Look at a Bit of Country’ is a lone figure making his way in the Pilbara, this time in a well set-up Landrover. A flat-topped, almost circular hill attracts his attention and he is overtaken by an urge to climb it. The geologically uninteresting outcrop promises nothing of value for this prospector, but while recognising the senselessness of his desire, he cannot ignore the challenge and he sets his ‘Landy’ to the hazardous task. The steep incline tests man and vehicle and, just like the boy in Stuart’s early short story, ‘Long Day’, holding on down at the bottom of the pool with the ‘shudder of knowing how dangerous it was’, he relishes the vulnerability of his position, a feeling he knows so well:

_Something moving in my belly and a tingling in my legs; a heightened awareness of heart and entrails, an added strength, a glad knowing that machine and man were doing what man wished to be doing._

He reaches the top of the hill, boils a billy and contemplates the wide land, ‘the hard unpeopled country’ which takes no notice of ‘the Port, the rail and the Mine’. Neutral country, not caring whether he lives or perishes within it: ‘Not for me, not against me.’

But he experiences some pride in being the first one up here—a pride dented when he finds an ‘old wax-vesta box’. Someone has been here before, probably someone like him, ‘just poking about just having a look at a bit of country’.

The story stands as a further example of man’s endeavour within this harsh landscape, with Stuart’s obvious knowledge and concentration on minute detail bringing the incident to life. The reader is caught in the climb, strives to reach the top, rests with the billy, watches the land and feels the narrator’s affinity with the place. It is a story
which reflects its author, a loner willing to take risks, at ease in this country and aware of its past, a man who is ready to accept a philosophical view that things are not always as they seem.

Members of the Angus and Robertson Editorial Department sent a cheque for $50 and published ‘Just Poking About’ in the literary magazine, *Southerly*.

‘I write them all in my head first,’ Donald told Don Grant, claiming to have spent much of his time in the north-west planning the six novels in *The Conjuror's Years* sequence. The themes that would dominate his later published work were already well-established; his wish was to tell the Aboriginal story and, writing from his own experience, to set down a record of Western Australia's past.

He became a prolific writer, some said obsessive, and, whenever he spoke about his published work, he always mentioned other novels already written or in the process of being written. It was not long before he had a new body of work ready for submission; indeed, three novels, *Ilbarana; Wild Black Swans [Mfoxonkat?] and Prince of My Country*, were entered in the 1970 Captain Cook Bi-Centenary Competition.

When he started to apply for Commonwealth Literary Fellowships again, Mary Durack Miller was the only one of his previous supporters still alive. He added J. Edwards Sen., Pastoralist, of Marble Bar, his friend, Ringer, from Mount Edgar Station. Funding, his letter said, would allow him to continue writing ‘a set of three novels’. He had, at last, made a start on *The Conjuror's Years* novel sequence though, before it was finished, it would expand to double the size he then envisaged. The first novel, *Prince of My Country*, was already written and ready to be sent to the publisher, the second, yet to be finally named, was well on its way. Displaying his usual optimism, Donald anticipated the third novel would be finished at the end of 1971. Repeating much of what he had written in previous applications over the years, he emphasised that this could happen only ‘if I can be freed from having to seek manual work in that year (1971) to support myself’.

The eagerly-awaited telegram arrived in December 1970. Donald Stuart had been awarded a twelve-months Commonwealth Literary Fellowship, one of only 22 granted to that year's 140 applicants. A member of the Literary Fund's Advisory Board said, ‘the idea was not to give grants to the very young or the very old, but to those in full swing’. Despite the eight-year drought in his writing, the 57-year old Donald Stuart's
publication record, and plans for further writing outlined in his application, had convinced the Board that he was indeed in ‘full swing’.

Donald had no difficulty in accepting the Advisory Board’s conditions, particularly the main one, ‘not to undertake any full-time outside employment’. Literary grants, he believed, were subsidies like those given to any other industry, allowing writers time to get on with their work in the hope they might arrive at a stage where they could support themselves by their craft. He had been applying for Commonwealth Funding since 1955 and, apart from the £500 partial Fellowship in 1960, this was the first time he had achieved his desire. Here was the opportunity he had been waiting for, a guaranteed amount of money that allowed him to write full-time, without wondering whether he should go out and find a labouring job to support himself. The $6,000, Donald said, ‘made all the difference... I had no responsibilities hanging over me’.

Telegrams, cards and letters of congratulation flowed in, but a certain unpleasantness did surface. A report in The West Australian wrongly credited Donald with having received Fellowships in 1962, 1964 and 1968, and one woman was heard to complain that ‘Donald Stuart has been living on the taxpayers’ money since 1962’. Lyndall Hadow quickly rushed to her brother’s defence. She sent a letter to the Editor of The West Australian asking for the record to be put straight. It was, she wrote, ‘an erroneous conclusion in his case and most regrettable’. The Editor noted the correction and published Lyndall’s letter. Nevertheless, as the following years brought almost continuous funding for Donald’s writing, the statement did come to have some substance.

Whatever else may have been going on in his life, Donald Stuart was serious about his writing. He was immensely grateful for the Commonwealth funding, giving him $392 a month after taxes: ‘Before this, I had to go bush for six months and do anything to make money.’ But he still believed most people failed to appreciate writers: ‘When I’m introduced to someone as a writer, often I am asked what I do for a living.’ For the first seven months of 1971, he wholeheartedly applied himself to the planned novels, completing three of them, Prince of My Country, Walk, Trot, Canter and Die and Drought Foal. He started the fourth novel, Change of Pace, [later renamed Wedgetail View], but having written one quarter of it, he began to realise that more words were needed to bring his story to a conclusion. If he was to include his World War II and post-war experiences, he now estimated there would be five novels, not three.
He bundled up the three manuscripts and sent them off with a request that his Literary Fellowship be extended for a further twelve months, this time specifically targeting the Department of the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts.20 In support of this new application, Donald included the manuscript of *Ilbarana*, an additional work not included in his earlier request. The novel was already well on its way towards publication and had received equal third place in the Open Section of the Bi-Centenary Competition. Members of the Literary Fund Advisory Board could not help but be impressed with Donald’s output and they unhesitatingly extended his grant for a further year.

When the first proofs for *Ilbarana* arrived, Donald was up in Port Hedland. His sister sent a telegram with the news, assuring him there was ‘no immediate hurry’ and hoping he would continue ‘to have fun’.22 Donald assumed that, by saying ‘no hurry’, Lyndall meant she would ‘box on with the proofing’. He was, he wrote, going on to Mount Edgar where a big party was planned ‘with seven million people (approx)’.23

Most people assumed that Donald’s trips up to the north-west were to get material for his writing, but he openly told a group of students at Mount Lawley Teachers College that he went up north ‘to get drunk’. Drink driving was a crime, he told them, but up in the north there was always someone to drive him around. ‘I can get stinkin’ rotten fall-down drunk,’ he said. ‘Fortunately, I don’t suffer much next day. I’m a believer in the old one, to avoid a hangover, stay drunk.’24

He was up to his old tricks, shocking the audience to gain attention, and it had surely worked. Invited to address a group of students, all around twenty years of age, instead of playing the role of respected writer, he found a need to identify with his young audience. Reverting to his own youthful camp fire bravado, slipping back into the exaggeration of his ‘bush lying’, enhancing the story to impress the listeners, it seemed he was intent on building the legend of himself as another in the fraternity of well-known drunken writers.

We might reason that Donald’s recently renewed outback experience had stripped him of his earlier urbane author veneer, leading him to misread his audience, but there is no escaping the thought that, on occasions, this complex, intelligent and sensitive writer exerted his individuality in a way that broke all the bounds of normal behaviour and, as his friend Richard Speir had noticed, drove the people around him to distraction.
Undoubtedly there was a lot of drinking in the north-west and Donald Stuart did have a problem, which would not improve with time. From the cheap red wine providing his Army trips 'around the world for two bob', to the tequila-skolling contest on the Mount Newman Railway, there was definite evidence of his immoderate indulgence in alcohol. He told the students that he wrote about 'camel teams and prospecting for gold and minerals and getting drunk and working on the wharves and getting drunk and going out on the pearl luggers and getting drunk'. Getting drunk was a common part of working and living hard in the north-west, but he said he did not drink when he was carrying his swag, 'you don't get drunk looking for work, train jumping'.

Later in life, the effects of his indulgence caught up with him and it was generally agreed that 'Donald couldn't drink'. It took only a few glasses for him to lose his inhibitions and revert to his familial outspokenness, what appears as a habit of testing the scene to see how far he could go.

His good friend, Keith Flanagan, told how Kathie Stuart Strehlow would send a bottle of Glen Fiddich for Christmas. When Donald came around to share the bottle, Keith watered down the whisky, hoping to keep his friend awake beyond his usual two drinks, but it never worked. At other times, after only a few glasses, Donald needed help out to his car 'because his knees were wobbly'. But he kept writing, making public appearances and giving radio interviews right up until the last year of his life. And who could say his experiences had not given him every reason to lose himself in what Richard Speir had called 'an occasional bay at the moon'? Some were understanding and willing to make allowances, others were not, and accounts of Donald Stuart behaving badly were bound to outlive him.

To their credit, the Mount Lawley students kept up their serious questioning, forcing the author, Donald Stuart, to talk about his work, making him give advice that would help their own writing. He took the opportunity to rail about critics and publishers but, in the end, he did reveal the seriousness of his writer's life. He told them how he could write only from what he knew and gave them what he said was 'the only piece of advice worth giving a young writer and that's [to] write.' All of them must have retained a memory of this interview with Donald Stuart and would have taken away whatever they wanted from his talk. But a note at the end of the written transcript indicates some uncertainty about their encounter with this Australian author: 'Although this did start as
a literal translation, it is not intended to be a word for word account in its present form.\textsuperscript{31}

The fourth novel was well-received in Australia and Lyndall Hadow started to arrange the *Ilbarana* (1971) celebration launch in Perth. Donald was, again, up in the north-west but she sent him a list of possible guests for comment. He made a few suggestions, but left any decisions to her. He was having a wonderful time, he wrote, and expected to be back before the end of January. In all written exchanges between Lyndall and Donald, of those that survived, their communications are unfailingly polite and always include expressions of concern for each other’s welfare. His letter finished with: ‘Love to you and a pat for Pup.’\textsuperscript{32}

Set in Western Australia’s earliest days of white settlement, *Ilbarana* (1971), tells about a young Aboriginal boy’s initiation into tribal life and ends, shockingly, with his death at the hands of the ‘new men’ the ‘toeless ones’. Just as he had done in *Yandj* (1959), Donald chose to tell the story from an Aboriginal viewpoint. Writing in *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia* (1978), J. J. Healy considered Stuart’s choice to write his novels using an Aboriginal voice was in order to ‘establish a dimension of reality not visible to white interpretations of what was going on’.\textsuperscript{33} Had he succeeded?

Most reviewers unquestioningly accepted that Donald Stuart knew his subject and that his ‘profound knowledge of the Australian Aboriginal’ allowed ‘him to write with authority and authenticity’.\textsuperscript{34} Struck by Stuart’s style and considering it ‘attractive, often poetic’, one reviewer connected *Ilbarana* with the writings of Professor Theodor Strehlow and commended the book as ‘a skilful and quite gripping piece of literature’.\textsuperscript{35} The connection with Strehlow’s work emphasised Stuart’s focus upon traditional Aboriginal values, a concentration that historian Humphrey McQueen deplored. McQueen’s review, published in *The Canberra Times*, was critical of Stuart’s move away from any consideration of inter-racial matters. McQueen wrote that he missed the ‘deeply felt concern for the fate of the Aborigines’ that Donald Stuart had expressed in his earlier novels, *Yandj* and *Yaraljie*, in which McQueen had perceived ‘the hope in a racial mixing’.\textsuperscript{36} In contrast to all other reviewers, he appears not to have engaged with the language in which *Ilbarana* was written and, perhaps as a further sign of his lack of engagement, had mistakenly placed the novel in Strehlow’s central Australia, not in Stuart’s north-west.
Underlying such a review are the differing viewpoints of the critical historian who deals in historical fact and the novelist using the Aboriginal oral tradition to drive his story. Donald Stuart was not an anthropologist, nor was he a qualified historian and he recognised there were others who could write as well as he. But, at that time, he maintained he was 'the only one in Australia' who could write at 'my level with my knowledge of matters Aboriginal'. This, he believed was because he always wrote 'from personal experience or from the people themselves'.

By going back to Aboriginal traditional lore, Stuart hoped to raise the level of understanding within the white community. He clearly stated his belief in one of several articles written during the 1970s: 'To understand the present melancholy situation of Western Australia's coloured minority, it is necessary to know the historical background of this dispossessed people'. He had undertaken a complex task and many would applaud his efforts, but his concentration on the Aboriginal cause could not help but attract mixed criticism.

While recognising the author was not 'an aggressive preacher', Neil Jillett dubbed Ilbarana (1971) as 'essentially an exercise in propaganda' and he interpreted the novel as a plea to respect Aboriginal culture. This aspect of the book was obviously appreciated by local reviewers, friends of Donald Stuart, who held similar viewpoints. Lyndall was, as ever, ready to expound her brother's work, but her approach was different. Donald emerges as the interested observer, keen to probe the depths of the Aboriginal story and pass on his own understanding, but Lyndall was inclined to express herself more fervently. Her own passionate espousal of the Aboriginal cause is evident in an emotional review which urged all Aborigines, part-Aborigines and white Australians to read Ilbarana 'that they might know the worth of the original Australian, now fighting for his Land Rights'.

Donald Stuart had little time for critics and, in considering reviews of Ilbarana (1971), he blithely dismissed most of them with the remark, 'those who are competent to judge, not many are...have praised it highly'. Bearing in mind his need for approbation from an Aboriginal source, the most valuable review must have been the one written by Aboriginal playwright and poet, Jack Davis, member of the Bibbulman tribe, son of part-Aboriginal parents and Director of the Aboriginal Advancement Council in Western Australia. In his review, Jack Davis considered that Ilbarana (1971) could do much to bring about an understanding of the Aborigine: 'Ilbarana is a
must for every school library,' he wrote. 'It is a must for everyone who wants to understand the Aborigine of yesterday and today' and he particularly recommended that it be read by anyone cynical about the Aborigines, past or present. With some help from Irene Greenwood, the novel found its way onto that year's list of recommended school library materials.

On a personal level, Donald Stuart admitted to 'a lot of feeling for the boy in Ilbarana'. Expressing satisfaction with this particular book, he said: 'I wouldn't wish to change it at all. It is, I think, my favourite.'

Around this time, Donald met Barbara Jolly, an attractive and intelligent woman, recently separated from her husband and a supporter of the Aboriginal cause. Barbara was not impressed with Donald and judged him to be a 'rough fellow'. Then she read Ilbarana (1971) and found it a 'most beautiful and gentle' book. She began to think there might be more to Donald than she had first thought and they became friends.

Again, we find the difference between the man on the page and the man as he showed himself outwardly.

Donald and Barbara went to functions and concerts together, but never to anything Lynda might be attending. Donald wanted to keep the friendship from his sister. On the few occasions they met, Barbara was sure Lynda did not like her. She came to think Donald was dominated by his sister and she began to view his trips up to the north-west as an escape. Barbara did not attend any of the book launches and was not allowed to join the Fellowship of Australian Writers, because Donald told her, 'that was Lyndall's place', though during the first half of the 1970s, the Fellowship had increasingly become Donald's place as well.

Barbara was not inexperienced in outback matters and she went on several journeys with Donald. As others before her had done, she found him annoyingly unprepared for emergency situations. There was always plenty of food and water, but when they were bogged between Port Hedland and Mount Edgar Station in the wet season, she questioned Donald's placid acceptance that a passing rescuer would eventually help them out. She did, however, recognise the magical effect of the country and could not deny the utter peacefulness of this place.

This was not the only time when someone who accompanied Donald on one of his journeys queried his preparation and wondered about his bush sense. There was often
something missing, something the fully-prepared townie would not have overlooked. Donald’s familiarity with the bush, his ability to tune into its rhythms and take things as they came, his experience of someone always turning up to lend a hand, found him prepared in a different way. Like Terry, the stranded truck driver in his short story ‘All Weather Road’, he would have waited until help came. But when other people took off into the bush with him, believing they were in the safe hands of an experienced bushman, his lack of forethought often left them pondering about his impracticality. Barbara wondered if Donald’s past had just not prepared him for the technology of modern travel; he belonged to a less hurried era, she reasoned, and was content to let things take their course.

Over the few years she knew Donald, Barbara saw his many sides. He could be charming, gentle and generous and, when he had money, would arrive with presents she knew he could not afford. He had socialistic ideals, though she did not see him as being very political. But he was selfish, had an astonishing ability to isolate himself completely and was, as everyone knew he would be, difficult to live with.

In 1972, Donald and his sister prepared a selection of letters and manuscripts for preservation in the National Library of Australia. It seems likely there was a bonfire. The very idea of a literary bonfire gives rise to speculation about what had gone on to it or up in it! Later, there would be much more serious loss of Donald Stuart’s work, but at this stage of his career, perhaps not too much of importance was fed into the flames.

They chose letters, photographs and manuscripts from the twenty-five years up to 1972, showing the progress of Donald’s early writing and tracing his applications for Commonwealth funding. There are good photographs, some of the first two wives, though the lack of any mention of the third wife indicates the bitterness surrounding that divorce. Among the few preserved manuscripts in the collection, are the controversial, unpublished pages of *Yandy of the Winds*.

We might wonder how much of a writer’s life it is possible to retain. Looked at practically, not every scrap of paper can be saved and some selection must take place. In the Donald Stuart papers, there are few private letters, no diaries or notebooks and it appears obvious that Lyndall’s view prevails, with emphasis on her brother as Donald R. Stuart, Western Australian author. For the anecdotes, the larrikin image, the other
side of Donald Stuart, the way into his story will always be through those interviews conducted in the latter part of his life and through his writing.

Illustrating this is his only published collection of short stories, *Morning Star, Evening Star: Tales of Outback Australia* (1973), launched in Perth to celebrate his sixtieth birthday. Making his usual emphasis, Donald described the collection as 'dealing with an era of the real outback that has gone'.\(^{34}\) A disbelieving John K. Ewers judged Donald's claim to have just strung 'together a long series of lies and half-truths', as 'characteristic understatement',\(^{55}\) but Donald's words also acknowledge the nature of the bush yarning tradition he had absorbed since his youth. If there is one of Donald Stuart's books that most deserves to survive, it is this mix of tales that twist their way around his life story, giving what one critic described as 'a totally credible picture of Stuart's world'.\(^{56}\) Three of the stories, 'All Weather Road', 'My Kind of People' and 'The Condamine Bell' achieved international recognition when they were published in *The Modern Australian Novel* (1980), an anthology of Australian stories translated into Russian. Among others in this collection, were Elizabeth Jolley, Peter Cowan, Peter Carey, Alan Marshall, Judah Waten, T.A.G. Hugertford and Patrick White, all of whom are regarded as luminaries in Australian literary circles.\(^{57}\)

The *Morning Star, Evening Star* collection ushered in a run of Donald Stuart publications, with his next six novels appearing at roughly annual intervals. While his work continued to attract Commonwealth Literary Funding,\(^{58}\) he recognised that he could not 'go on accepting money all the time and not do anything'\(^{59}\) and felt compelled to honour the provision that allowed his compulsive writing.

Sometimes he wrote eighteen or twenty hours a day, then took a few days off. At other times he wrote for periods of six to ten hours, perhaps producing only three or four hundred words at a time. He did not keep notebooks, but did keep running sheets of all his characters, marking a big cross by the side of a name when that person was killed off, 'so I don't have him doing anything after he's dead'. But, even with his apparent ease in turning out a continuous stream of words, he did not escape the dilemmas recognised by all practising writers. There were occasions when he found himself 'getting away from the matter' and times when he said: 'I just fall by the wayside.' However, committed to his task, he claimed to have a very creditable two hundred thousand finished words written at the end of a year.\(^{60}\)
Again praising the system that allowed him his writerly life, Donald described himself as "an Australian author who has been able to "buy time" because of the Whitlam Government's policy of nourishing the arts through the Australia Council".61

In 1973, Donald Stuart's publishing record and his outgoing personality fitted him for a role as President of the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Western Australia. At a Federal Council meeting in Brisbane, representatives from all States had agreed that the next Federal Presidency should go to a Western Australian.62 Donald was appointed to the position during the 1974 Adelaide Festival.

Interviewer Hazel de Berg was also in Adelaide for Writers Week and took the opportunity to speak to the newly-appointed President.63 Over many years, de Berg's extensive sound archive captured the voices of artists, writers and creators, to form a valuable oral history of Australian artistic endeavour. By placing Donald alongside revered writers such as Dame Mary Gilmore, Dorothea Mackellar and Judith Wright, de Berg had allowed him into the very best of company.64

In the wide-ranging interview, Donald tells much the same life story as he reveals in his writing, and would repeat in later interviews. He describes how he could keep a story at the back of his mind for twelve months before finally committing it to paper; then, he says, "it comes out the way I want it, with no reworking...I honestly believe that it's been working away in the back of my mind for twelve months before I write it". The mysterious space "behind the eyes and between the ears, that's where the raw stuff is converted", he told Hazel de Berg.65

Donald's two years as President of the Fellowship coincided with a growing appreciation of, and interest in, Australian writing. Thanks to generous Government funding for his interstate travel, he was able to fulfil the role of Federal President and make connections with writers in other states. At home, he brought his own particular style to Fellowship meetings, arriving early on winter evenings with what he called his "Presidential kindling",66 lending something of a camp fire ritual to the occasions. He was "a surprisingly good President",67 competently filling the role, able to converse with local and visiting writers no matter what their level of expertise and doggedly pursuing any writing issues that arose.

As a member of the Australian Society of Authors,69 he was well aware of concerns about Public Lending Rights and Copy Rights and this became an important issue for
him; after all, with his growing list of publications, he was set to gain once these provisions were in place. Several other countries were already paying their authors royalties for copies of books held in public libraries and the matter had been persistently pursued by the Australian Society of Authors since 1967. Before the realisation of this right was achieved in Australia, many members of the writing community would be involved in making representations to government. After much lobbying over the years, on 13 May 1974, five days before his reelection, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam announced that the 'government had accepted in principle the Literature Board's recommendations'.

In celebration of the landmark decision, the Australian Society of Authors planned 'two victory dinners with Gough Whitlam as guest of honour', one at the Sydney Opera House. In September 1975, Donald attended the Melbourne celebratory dinner; the speeches were impressive and the literati sparkled, leading him to describe the event as 'coruscating'. In his speech, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, unexpectedly extended payment of the right to authors' husbands, wives and children after their death. He also promised his Government's continued support for the Arts and, having received generous assistance for his own writing, Donald Stuart had every reason to applaud the stance. During the evening, he pushed himself forward and managed to have what he called 'a private conversation' with Gough Whitlam. An intriguing meeting this, between the Prime Minister of Australia and Donald Stuart, son of Julian Stuart, whose part in the 1891 Shearers' Strike placed him at the very beginnings of the Australian Labor Party. Politicians are always cognisant of their Party's early history and, if Donald mentioned his father, the Prime Minister would have recognised the connection.

Only a few weeks later, on 11 November 1975, the Governor General, Sir William Kerr, dismissed Gough Whitlam over a Constitutional matter, bursting the bubble of optimism prompted by Whitlam's Labor vision for Australian society. The period prior to the ensuing election was one of heightened emotional tension. There was consternation amongst members of the Western Australian artistic community and, in the week before the election, a full-page protest notice was placed in The West Australian, publishing the names of, among others, most members of the Fellowship in Western Australia, including Donald Stuart and Lyndall Hadow, but to no avail. When Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser took over Government, he announced 'that the administration of Public Lending Rights would be transferred to the Australia Council.'
Whitlam's generous funding policies were curbed and the amount of money available for the Arts dropped considerably.

By this time, Donald had completed his two years as Fellowship President and the *Walk, Trot, Canter and Die* (1975) launch was a perfect opportunity for members to express their appreciation of his hard work. The 'worthy and jolly function' fittingly ensured that Donald did 'not go out with a whimper, but a bang' and the evening was pronounced 'a great success'.

Just before the launch, in a rambling interview with Don Grant, Donald told stories about his childhood and his time in the outback, and talked about his writing. A handwritten list gives a glimpse into his past and, at that time, planned writing showing how, as long as he was receiving literary funding, he was driven to maintain his output. As well as the seven published novels, he listed five more as being already accepted for publication—*Malloonkai* (the sequel to *Ilbarana*) and another four novels, ending with *I Think I'll Live* (1981), last in the *Conjurors' Years* series. He named an additional four 'projected' novels, but these were never published. Donald continued to write until the end of his life and reaped the rewards of his writing history with short stories and articles appearing in collections, but the list indicates that the last of his novels was finished and ready for publication in 1975.

Early in 1976, members of the Fellowship awarded Donald their highest accolade, Honorary Life Membership. Tributes made to him expressed appreciation of 'the valuable writer's time' he had given to the group, 'the quality and dignity of his prose' and referred to the help he had given to younger members. But the occasion could not go without some tension and one contemporary took the opportunity of letting everyone know that 'with good effect' there had been times when he and Donald 'had drawn sparks from each other'.

The event is also worth noting for Donald's reply, in which he not only expressed appreciation of the honour conferred on him, but also paid a particular 'tribute to the persistent support given to him by his sister, Lyndall Hadow...without which', he said, 'he would never have achieved his present position as a writer'. Someone may have prompted him to say this, for Lyndall's friends felt he had never given her enough credit for the part she played in his success, but here it was at last, an outright declaration, to be published later in the magazine, *Artlook*.
Lyndall was surrounded by a group of loyal friends who admired her for the high standards she set, for her courage in defending the ideals that she held so strongly, and for her generosity in helping other writers, not just her brother. She was a long-time and well-respected member of the Fellowship and, at meetings in Tom Collins House, it was accepted that she would always sit in Joseph Furphy’s great chair, from where she quietly and firmly exerted an influence on the proceedings.80

An articulate and gracious woman, Lyndall was described as ‘a short story writer of rare distinction’, 81 with her sole collection, Full Cycle (1969), remaining as an outstanding example of the craft. Her story, Don’t Cry For Me, based on her experience of working in the Moore River Native Settlement, is a particularly moving account of an Aboriginal girl desperate to stay at school, yet having to accept a life that will take her away from the opportunity. In 1975, for her planned second collection of short stories, also titled Don’t Cry for Me, Lyndall received her own Literature Board grant, 82 an award which she was well-qualified to have received years earlier. There could have been no dissent when members of the Fellowship Committee decided Lyndall should also be awarded the signal honour of Life Membership. 83

‘See that you eat regularly, none of that tea and a breath of fresh air nonsense,’ one of Donald’s north-west letters had admonished. 84 In recent years, Lyndall had become noticeably more frail, but there was no diminution in her fiercely independent Stuart spirit. She continued to work, but because of her failing sight and needing help to prepare the short story collection, she dictated her words to long-time friend, Annette Cameron, who typed and retyped the stories until the author’s known exacting high standards were met. 85

When the manuscript was complete, Lyndall happily anticipated the conferring of her Life Membership. Friends and colleagues were invited for the traditional and symbolic presentation of a gold-smelting crucible. But, on that May evening, the guest of honour was in hospital. She had succumbed to a bout of pneumonia and was close to death. When John K. Ewers placed the precious crucible in her hands she was in a coma and died on the 2 June 1976. 86

Donald’s main champion was gone. She had encouraged his writing, helped him to make the right connections and promoted his work. Appointing herself as his agent, she had typed his manuscripts and attended to the correspondence so essential to the processes of publication. She had also gathered together the details of their father’s life,
the stories which were, she said, ‘part of the fabric of my childhood’. In publishing them as *Part of the Glory* (1967), she had honoured his belief in the value of individual stories. In every way, Lyndall had upheld the writing tradition into which she had been

Her friends took the title of her short story, *Don’t Cry For Me*, as an instruction for their own grieving and their tributes came in the manner they knew best, through their writing. Twelve Fellowship members each wrote about Lyndall as they knew and remembered her and, taking the title from her own tribute to her father, they fittingly published it as *She too is ‘part of the glory’* (1976).

The Stuarts were not given to exposing their feelings. Donald staunchly ‘covered his solicitude’ for Lyndall’s failing health with ‘brusque bushman-style jokes’ and on her death he contributed generously towards a fund set up to endow the commemorative Lyndall Hadow Short Story Award.

A few months after Lyndall died, Donald Stuart married for the fourth time. Even at this stage of his life, he had retained a personal magnetism and was still inclined to pursue women he liked the look of—over the years, there had been more than one liaison to incur his sister’s displeasure. The women with whom Donald formed attachments had always had to endure Lyndall’s scrutiny, but now there was no one to question his choice or his actions. Eight years had passed since the breakdown of his previous marriage and, after his sister’s death, Donald must have appeared vulnerable, but there was already someone waiting to rescue him.

On his sixty-third birthday, when friends and colleagues gathered at Tom Collins House to celebrate the launch of the seventh novel, *Malloonkai* (1976), sequel to *Ilbarana* (1971), they were also able to congratulate him on his recent marriage to retired Albany farmer, Dawn Crabb, another of Donald’s good-looking, intelligent, and capable women. Dawn respected Donald’s position as a published writer and, by all accounts, there was a strong physical attraction between the two of them.

Dawn had been married previously to a Canadian, Alfred Crabb, the father of her four sons and three daughters. In the twenty years prior to meeting Donald Stuart, Dawn had worked her 2,000-acre sheep property, ‘Chevyton’ at Kojonup in the state’s south-west, latterly ably assisted by her eldest son, Reg Crabb. When she gave up her active interest in the property, she handed over to her two eldest sons and went to live in
Albany, where she became a keen member of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. It was Dawn who initiated the Fellowship’s Tom Collins Literary Competition and whose generous donations supported it for many years.90

Farming was by no means Dawn’s main interest. She had begun to write poetry at the age of sixteen, and continued to do so with some success for the rest of her life. In 1980, she was the first woman to win the Bronze Swagman Bush Verse Award for her poem ‘The Condamine Bell’.91 As the only daughter of Hubert Egerton-Warburton, and great-granddaughter of south-west pioneer, George Edward Egerton-Warburton, she had carefully researched and published her family history, The Way to St Werburgh’s (1974), basing much of the story on a series of letters George Edward had written to his mother.92

After their marriage, Donald and Dawn moved into his Scarborough house, just around the corner from where Lyndall had lived. Dawn planted a ‘wonderful wildflower garden’ featuring the striking black and red Sturt Desert Pea, the upright form of which is found in the country dear to her husband’s heart, around Nullagine and the Hamersley Ranges.93 Dawn’s love of nature informed all her writing and her art; she was a watercolourist and was also noted for her pictures created from pressed and dried wildflowers. Described as ‘lively generous, energetic and forthright’, she was a skilled cook and a good businesswoman.94 In the continuing pattern of Donald’s attraction to such women, we might see reflected the lovely, intelligent, passionately idealistic woman and accomplished singer who was his mother. Tragically, her life had not realised its early promise,95 but his mother’s warmth as she listened to him read the books he brought home from school was something that remained with him. At this late stage in his life, it seems he was still chasing the ideal, but this time it appears the ideal had found him.

Dawn set about caring for Donald in a way that surpassed even the ministrations of his sister. Like his first wife, she made sure he was always well-dressed for his public appearances and, as the photographs show, though the bushman could still be discerned in his flamboyant shirts and stylish light-coloured suits, from this time on, the larrikin persona increasingly gave way to a more classic author image.

She was proud of Donald’s achievements and of his position as a recognised Australian author. There is an understanding amongst their friends that she was instrumental in organising publication of the last four books,96 the novels that brought

Dawn was as strong-minded as Donald, not the silent and compliant wife he had written into his novels. They were bound to clash and their marriage was later described as ‘loving though volatile’. She tried to curtail Donald’s drinking, but appears to have had little success in persuading him to give up smoking. There were times when he was not drinking, but he was not averse to arranging an escape. Reg Crabb remembered going out for a drink with Donald and being told ‘not to tell your mother’.

There is something captivating about a book set in your own place, allowing a chance to see the familiar through another person’s eyes, especially if, like Donald Stuart, the writer has a talent for bringing detail to life. The first part of *Drought Foal* (1977), about young Colin Campbell’s early years growing up in Perth, contains ready reference points into a particular past and some readers may welcome it as a way into memory. Reviewer Edgar Castle commented on the Australian tendency to write novels from an autobiographical viewpoint, though, beyond outstanding models like George Johnston’s *My Brother Jack* (1964) and Randolph Stow’s *Merry-go-round In the Sea* (1965), he considered, many were unsuccessful. But, Castle was delighted to say, while including all the, by now expected, elements of a traditional Australian childhood account, this third volume in Stuart’s six novel sequence was an ‘education to read and a pleasure to remember’. He recognised how Donald’s outback life connected him to Australian myths and saw that, when completed, *The Conjuror’s Years* would ‘add up to an impressive survey of WA’s immediate past’.

The follow-on, *Wedgetail View* (1978), was published a year later and, for the informal launch, Dawn and Donald welcomed a group of well-wishers into their wildflower garden. Dame Mary Durack gave her usual staunch support for Donald’s writing, saying she had been moved by young Colin’s continuing story and enthusiastically praising Donald’s ‘eye for detail, ear for dialogue, amazing memory and ability to evoke the landscape’. She recognised the lyrical quality of his writing and took the opportunity to voice, once again, her firmly held belief that the significance of his writing would be appreciated more fully in later years.

The two war novels, *Crank Back On Roller* (1979) and *I Think I’ll Live* (1981), brought the planned six novel sequence to a close. The first was appreciated for the way
it conveyed "the less-often remembered aspects" of war, the humdrum, everyday business and the human effects of Army logistics.\textsuperscript{101} In the \textit{Sunday Times}, John Deacon described \textit{I Think I'll Live} as a 'powerful book' and commented on Donald's 'splendid characterisation, his depiction of the captors and the captured'.\textsuperscript{102}

At last, the Donald Stuart story was laid out. He had designed the bones of it way back in 1945, when he was in hospital recovering from his years as a Prisoner of the Japanese. The story just had to be told. At first there was to have been only one book, but in the end it was a life that required more.

Throughout the 1970s and the early '80s, Donald played his part as an elder in the Western Australian writing community.

Most of the women who knew him during this period retained a certain fondness for the writer/bushman. He 'paid them attention, tuned into them' and they admired him for his writing success. They may have had reservations about certain aspects of his behaviour, but the women were aware of a certain respect he paid them—he liked women.\textsuperscript{103}

An incisive review of \textit{Drought Foal} again draws attention to the differing sides of Donald's character. While recognising the mix of autobiography and documentary in this novel based on the author's early life, and showing some appreciation for the way the story is told, Brian Dibble's personal view: 'Stuart is himself like Colin—rough as guts and sensitive as a schoolgirl' highlights the complex and difficult-to-define nature which bothered many of those who knew Donald Stuart.\textsuperscript{104}

He often antagonised the men, some of whom experienced a certain uneasiness when Donald was around. Male colleagues were inclined to emphasise the 'outrageous' side of his character and several persistent Donald Stuart images were repeated: the time when they had seen him swigging red wine from the bottle at a Fellowship dinner; his tendency to draw attention to himself at meetings; and his annoying habit of forcefully correcting anyone he thought had made a grammatical error, even visiting writers. The Scorp persona came to the fore in male company and, in the polite surrounds of the writing group to which he belonged, the clash of Donald R. and Scorp behaviours caused mixed feelings.

We might perceive something of the stereotypical author, the individualist who continues to live as if still on the page, larger than life. Australia's Henry Lawson,
Donald Stuart and Edwin Jaggard. 1976

*Courtesy Battye Library*

Donald Stuart at Tom Collins House with winners of the WA Young Writers Competition. 1976.

*Courtesy The West Australian*
recognised and mourned by many when he died at the early age of 55, was ‘attractive to women’ but unable to hold together his marriage and, because of his drinking, often flouted his time’s conventions of acceptable behaviour. The Scottish poet Robert Burns was similarly held to criticism. Championing the dead Burns against some of his critical biographers, William Wordsworth conceded, ‘there may be some point in investigating the lives of public men’, but he goes on to wonder whether knowing sordid personal details may not ‘sully’ an appreciation of the works’. Are not the works themselves sufficient to assess the writer, he asks.

Eighteen years after his death, various shades of opinion were evident among those prepared to remember and talk about Donald Stuart. Some were unable to divorce their impression of the difficult personality, the apparently outrageous behaviour, from their judgement of the writing, believing it must be similarly difficult and, therefore, of no value. There were even expressions of disbelief that the Donald Stuart they thought they knew had actually lived a life anything like the one he wrote about or could possibly have produced a body of work that merited more than any ordinary acknowledgment; when we are older, it is often difficult to assert the achievements of our youth. As Donald settled into a suburban old age, his early adventures developed their own legendary quality and, for some, appeared less likely to fit the figure who regularly attended Fellowship meetings.

Nevertheless, Donald had his admirers and there is no doubt that he related well to people younger than himself. A photograph, taken at a 1976 conference in Kalgoorlie, shows a relaxed and smiling Donald with Edwin Jaggard, later Professor Jaggard, one of a number of now older and well-respected Western Australian writers and academics, who knew Donald in the early part of their careers, were moved by what he had to say and were grateful for the attention he paid them. The younger men admired Donald for his achievements and appreciated the way he had survived events, the seriousness of which they found difficult to comprehend. There were others who ‘valorised’ him for his writing, for his politics and for his advocacy of the Aborigines. Many young Western Australian writers cherished his generous words and letters of encouragement for their work. Dawn’s eldest son, Reg Crabb, held fond memories of the odd pub crawl and a prospecting trip they went on together, long afternoons spent drinking with Donald while he reminisced about his past. Reg believed that these well-remembered
stories of his youth and the freedom experienced in his north-west days, were what had helped Donald survive his Prisoner of War years.109

Among Western Australian Fellowship members, there was a strong tradition of helping young, new and aspiring writers, a tradition which lasts to the present day. For two semesters in the mid-1970s, Donald ran Creative Writing courses at Midland Technical School. These casual writing classes were a welcome innovation where, though untrained and not particularly competent as teachers, practising writers passed on knowledge of their craft. Donald was noted for making memorable comments that demonstrated his depth of understanding about what it was to be a writer. He helped his students in their struggle with words, urged them to enter competitions, to join writing groups and always to take their writing further.

The classes turned into a gathering of writers, a meeting place where valuable connections were made, leading to the development of other writing groups in the Hills region east of Perth. Most remembered was Donald’s inclusiveness, his encouragement for all writers, no matter their level of ability. 'He believed that every writer was travelling the same strand as the greats.'110

It was a belief he reiterated in a letter written to his first grandson. Anticipating that the child may become a writer, just like his father, grandfather and great-grandfather before him, Donald wrote: ‘remember that you are one with the storytellers of the far distant pre-literate past, you are in the host that marches the Homeric, Shakespearian road’.111 That may appear a bit fanciful, he was inclined towards exaggeration, but how encouraging for new writers to feel those long years of support at their back.

As a recognised realist writer of his time, Donald would also have been aware of himself within a band of contemporaries who supported his position. His early contact with Stephen Murray-Smith, editor of Overlander; the connection his publisher, Georgian House, had with the Australasian Book Society; his own close association with the Fellowship of Australian Writers; his known socialist opinion; and the assistance he received from the Commonwealth Literary Fund and, later, the Literature Board of the Australia Council, place him amongst a group of left-wing authors, who exerted a strong influence on Australian writing during the middle part of the 20th century.112 His name may not be so well-recognised as that of Judah Waten, Frank Hardy and Katharine Susannah Prichard, but his work often appeared alongside theirs and he is not out of place in their company.
Over the years, several of his contemporaries sought to capture Donald Stuart the author. They got him to talk about his novels and took pains to record interviews. His long-time supporter, Dame Mary Durack, was not the only one who sensed the value in his writing, there were others who believed that his body of work would, in time, find its place with a general audience. These interviewers believed Stuart's work would come to be known and judged for itself, as a valuable record of a way of life which, at the end of the twentieth century, had all but passed into memory. In their judgement they are the ones who understood just what Stuart had set out to leave behind.

There was a flurry of such interviews during 1983 and, belonging to the same period, is a rare video-recording of Donald Stuart addressing a group at Churchlands Teachers' College, in Perth. He sits at a small table, in front of about twenty people, smartly dressed in slacks, a patterned white shirt and a sleeveless red pullover with a stylish deep V-neck. His full head of white hair is well-cut. The subject is familiar: 'Donald Stuart Talks about the Significance of Place in his Writing.' By this time, he is used to being the respected author; there is no need of outrageous remarks to attract his audience, he barely glances at them. Behind dark-rimmed glasses, his eyes are mostly downcast, though occasionally he gazes into an unseen distance. Elbows on the table, arms crossed in front of him, he begins with a biblical quotation from his Old Testament favourite, Ecclesiastes, the King James version, of course: 'One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever.' He quotes from memory, repeats the last four words and expounds his belief that no matter what man does, the earth will always return to itself. It is an idea, he says, which stays with him as he moves around the country, particularly the Pilbara.

He chooses to read from Wedgetail View (1973) and there is something hypnotic about the flat, colourless, but unhesitating, Australian voice as it conveys the thoughts of Stuart's character, Colin Campbell. This was his 'own country of spinifex hills dreaming in purple evening after the heat of a long summer day' and 'he was tied to it with chain that could not break, weightless chain that could not chafe'.

As the talk progresses, Donald answers his critics, those who have dubbed him a regional writer and commented on the repetitive nature of his work.

What seldom seems to have been appreciated is the influence of Aboriginal speech patterns and storytelling on his writing. The repetitive nature of the country, the cycle of life in this often pitiless terrain, is reflected in the rhythms evident in so much of his
work. Echoes of the Aboriginal tradition are readily discernible as he evokes his view of the north-west. It is the country, he says, that influences his writing.

Dickens and Priestly wrote about London; that is what they knew. Donald Stuart knew the Pilbara, and that is what he wrote about. The main topic slides, wavers a little, but in the end the focus becomes his deep love of what he always called ‘my country’. It is a country which influences the lives of those who come to it, the lives around which he wove his stories. If anyone in this audience was ignorant of his writing before they came, they left with no doubt about his affinity with this land and well aware that there is no escaping the ‘Significance of Place’ in Donald Stuart’s writing.
Donald Stuart with his daughter, Yaralie. 1978.


From one generation to another. Donald Stuart and his grandson, James Donald. 1983.
A 'Splendid Rebel'

How could the man be hard and still be tender?
To feel for stars yet grasp the break of day?

The birth of a first grandchild is a special happening in anyone's life. When Donald heard about the birth of his grandson, James Donald, Julian's son, the 'generation conscious' grandfather was profoundly affected.

The Stuart family had always upheld a strong belief in heritage and respect for those who had gone before. For Donald, the family belief was heightened by his absorption in Aboriginal tradition, with its emphasis on knowledge being passed from one generation to another.

He had honoured his father's memory with recognisable depictions of the Julian Alexander Stuart story in the novels and short pieces. The father in Drought Foal leads a life like that of Donald's father, most notably in going away from home to fell timber in the south-west and in the horrendous accident that befalls him there. In the short story, 'Long Day', the father is depicted much as Julian might have been after the accident. In Wedgetail View, Colin Campbell wonders, as Donald might have done, what his father would have thought about him joining the Army. As a Prisoner of War, in I Think I'll Live, Colin ponders anew on stories he had heard about his father's imprisonment for taking part in the 1891 Shearers' strike.

Donald was greatly affected by his father's stories. He upheld his parents' socialist ideals and Julian's romantic pictures of outback life surely influenced his son towards adopting such a life for himself. The imprisonment they both served, albeit for widely differing reasons and, one is bound to say, through no fault of their own, emphasises the parallels apparent in their life journeys. More particularly, Donald followed his father into the life of the writer and, like him, believed in the value of setting down the Australian story.

Julian Robert was the only boy in the next Stuart generation, but there were nieces who held treasured memories of Donald as a fond uncle. Gloria, daughter of his brother, Ken, remembered him as 'an interesting, complex and marvellous man' with wonderful flashing brown eyes. Her elder sister, Ana Stuart, absorbed his respect for
indigenous Australians and their culture, and was always grateful for the perspective he had given her. Jill Lucas, daughter of his brother, Ralph, remembered Donald as ‘a lovely, generous-spirited man’, always ready to join in his nieces’ triumphs. ‘Nobody else had an Uncle like that. No one had an Uncle like Donald,’ Jill’s sister, Wendy Rippon, exclaimed proudly. 4

Donald’s early domestic arrangements had proved disappointing, but in the latter part of his life, he said he was ‘now content to live with his wife [Dawn] in a seaside suburb in Perth’. 5 Being present at his son’s birth, he had said, was one of the most important events in his life, but he was out of contact with his children for years. His daughter, Yaralie, renewed her acquaintance with her father when she made an unexpected visit to Perth in May 1978 and, while there is some awkwardness in the photographs, it is apparent that Dawn and Donald gave her a warm welcome. 6 As for Julian, Donald was regularly in Adelaide for the Writers Festival, but not until 1982, it seems, had he attempted to get in touch with his son.

Julian was working as a journalist in Adelaide when one day, ‘out of the blue’, he received a phone call from Yaralie. She told him their father was in town for a visit and asked if Julian wanted to come and meet him. That night, the three of them went for a meal in an Italian restaurant. Julian and Donald ‘got on well’ and spent time together over the next few days. Julian convinced his father to book out of the hotel and come to stay in his flat, where Donald ‘insisted on sleeping on the lounge room floor’. 7

The next time they met was in 1983, a few weeks after Julian’s wife, Denise, had given birth to James Donald. Julian and Denise had moved house a couple of times since Donald’s 1982 visit and he had lost their address. He phoned Dawn, in Perth, to find out where they were, then arrived at their back door and ‘stayed for a couple of weeks’, 8 getting to know his grandson. A photograph of Donald holding the new Stuart baby has the little one and his grandfather locked in appraising stares, a classic pose pregnant with the questions apparent at the start of any new life.

On neither of the occasions when Donald and his son met was there any discussion about the years since they had last been together and no reason offered for the long gap in their relationship.

When he got home to Perth, Donald felt the need to write a letter to his new grandson. ‘So, my lad,’ it begins, ‘you’ve got yourself born.’ It is a ponderous letter, acknowledging the different world this little one will have to meet. The boy is told
about his heritage, the great-grandmother and great-grandfather who had reared their children in a frugal, but sufficient, tradition and in an atmosphere of strong humanist principles. The letter's main purpose is to hand on the writing baton, for this fourth generation Stuart will, surely, like the others in his direct male line, 'grow towards the pen'. Donald promises a copy of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* and, for reference, recommends *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* and *Rogel's Thesaurus*, both fixtures on his own desk. And, whatever religious beliefs the lad comes to hold, or not to hold, he is urged towards the King James Version of the *Holy Bible*, 'for its awesome use of our great English language'.

In the manner of all such epistles, this resumé of Donald's life and beliefs, meant for his new grandson, was surely written with some hope that it would be held in a safe place and read to him, or given to him, at a later date. It is a message stick, a private communication, but circumstances dictated that it would become an open, published letter.9

Donald had been asked to write the text for a photographic book about Broome. During regular visits to the north-west pearling town, Perth photographer, Roger Garwood, had amassed some striking black and white images. The success of his previous book, photographs of Fremantle with a text written by Western Australian author T.A.G. Hungerford,10 suggested a similar publication on Broome. He approached Fremantle Arts Centre Press and they agreed to repeat the format in *Broome, Landscapes and People* (1983). Having chosen senior Western Australian author T.A.G. Hungerford for the Fremantle book, the Press thought it would be appropriate to select another senior author, Donald Stuart, to write the Broome text.11

Apart from the marrying of written and photographic imagery in the published work, there was no collaboration between the author and photographer. They each tell the story in their own way and, through their independent views create a unique record of Broome's past, an important slice of Western Australian social history.

Donald's words introduce Roger Garwood's arresting photographs of the tropical port and some of its inhabitants. Writing fondly of a time and place long held in his memory, his is an evocative description dwelling on the town's tropical balminess, its cultural and social diversity. He looks affectionately at the past, kindly at the present and hopefully to the future. He does not express sorrow for what is gone or criticise
changes that have occurred; acceptance of what is, rather than regret for what might have been, is a mark of his later writing.12

When the task was complete, Donald added his dedication:

I thank Broome's people, all of them, for their kindesses, and in particular I thank my old friend of years gone by, Cass Drummond. My wife, Dawn has my gratitude for her tolerance and forbearance and much more.13

Mention of his wife, Dawn, in this dedication was a departure for Donald. A dedication to his children: 'For Julian Robert Stuart and Yaralie Rebecca Stuart', had appeared in Ilbarana (1971) and every novel after. The only other dedication he made was: 'To Mary and Elizabeth' [Durack], in Yaralie (1962). He had never in this way acknowledged the help and support afforded him by his third wife, Kathie. One glaring omission, noted and commented upon by her many friends, was the lack of any such acknowledgment for his sister Lyndall Hadow.

The implied criticism turns this into a purposeful lack of appreciation, but it seems most likely that Donald viewed dedication of his books not as a thank you, but as an important handing on of his work to the next generation. When his niece, Ana Stuart, asked about his children, Donald averred his love for them: 'Do they know?' she asked, to which he replied: 'They know. I dedicate my books to them.' He was not a person of whom you could easily ask personal questions and she felt unable to query his assumption that this was enough or to pursue the matter further.14

The book launch was to be in Broome on the evening of 25 August 1983 and Donald was to travel from Perth on an early morning flight with Roger Garwood and Ray Coffey, of Fremantle Arts Centre Press. He insisted Dawn should not get up to see him off, but wrote her a short note and placed it next to her morning teacup. When Ray arrived to take Donald to the airport, he found him waiting outside the house.15

That morning was Roger Garwood's first meeting with Donald Stuart.16 Roger immediately judged him to be 'very much his own person, a very independent character who could obviously be a bit feisty'. Ray and Roger were both non-smokers, but Donald insisted on a seat in the plane's smoking section where, continuing to smoke incessantly, he coughed and wheezed all the way to Broome. Roger was to discover
later that Donald had been diagnosed with bronchitis and the smoking was in defiance of his doctor's advice.17

Having arrived in Broome with plenty of time to spare before the launch, Donald felt his way into the familiarity of an old haunt. Seeing this as an opportunity to catch up with a few people, he prevailed upon Roger to take him to see his old friend, Cass Drummond. The two had not seen each other for ‘decades’, said Roger, and they sat in the kitchen of Cass’s small unit talking non-stop, ‘like a couple of kids’.

The launch was a significant local event, the whole town appearing to have turned out to fill the, then new, Civic Centre library. The room was crowded and there was, as usual on such occasions, enough to drink. Roger remembered Donald as having been ‘definitely a little bit drunk, but not too much’. On behalf of the Press, Ray Coffey made a short speech to introduce Roger and Donald. They made their own short speeches and signed books. ‘It was a fairly low-key affair,’ said Roger.

Afterwards, the three of them went for a Chinese meal. Probably, if Roger had known Donald better, he would have been more aware of his condition. Roger could see he was ‘a little bit out of it’, but considered this nothing untoward. On this day, it was good that Donald was with someone who accepted him for what he was and appreciated him on his own terms. ‘Donald was like the real Australians we learnt about at school,’ was Roger’s opinion, ‘fiercely independent, an individualist, very much his own man.’

During the meal, Donald started to get some chest pains and said he had left the pills for his heart condition in the hotel. This was the first Roger knew about the heart condition and he recalled saying: ‘Come on, Donald, you’re not the sort of guy who’s going to drop dead to get out of paying the bill?’ To call what he thought was Donald’s bluff, he raced off to the hotel to get the pills.

After the meal, the group moved on, but, before the evening was over, Roger confided to Ray Coffey that he was concerned about Donald. It was decided Donald should stay in Roger’s room at the hotel, then there would be someone with him if he got up in the night and needed help. Donald resisted, but Roger insisted this was how it would be.

Donald did get up in the night; Roger helped him open the sliding door to the grassed area outside the room, and was aware when he came back.

When Roger awoke at daybreak: ‘There was absolutely no sound,’ he recalled. ‘Everything was very, very still.’ His single bed was at right angles to Donald’s and, in
the early dawn light, when he looked across at the recumbent figure, he knew instinctively that Donald was dead.

Still in the space between sleeping and waking, not wanting to face the reality, Roger dozed for a while, then got up to make sure. There was no doubt. ‘He looked incredibly peaceful. There was the most beautiful expression’ on his face.

Roger tried the hotel’s emergency number, but it seemed difficult and unobtainable. He had to tell someone. Russell Massey, who had been at the book launch the night before, cursed his early morning call, but agreed to ring the police and the hospital. Ray Coffey, who had caught the previous evening’s plane, would have barely arrived back in Perth, but someone had to tell Dawn. Ray was shocked at the news, but decided that he needed some official confirmation before he went to see Donald’s wife. He rang Scarborough police and asked them to get through to Broome.18

Roger returned to sit with Donald. He lost track of time and was somewhat relieved when Father Michael MacMahon arrived. A well-known Broome figure, Father Mac was the one who, with the help of some locals, arranged the town’s burials.19 Dressed in an old T-shirt, shorts and thongs, Father Mac sat down next to Donald and gently talked to him. The police arrived, made a cursory inspection and gave permission for the body to be removed. A body bag was found and the last Roger remembered of Donald was his feet sticking out at the back of Father Mac’s utility.

Roger was particularly concerned about letting Cass Drummond know, before he heard it on the Broome grapevine. Having experienced the recent reunion, Cass was understandably devastated. The old mate took out a dusty violin and, with tears streaming down his face, started to play a tune Roger eventually recognised as ‘Amazing Grace’. The image and that day’s emotions were so strong, the photographer was moved to capture it on film.20

Ray Coffey was with the police when they went to tell Dawn. The note by the teacup assumed significance. ‘He knew this was going to happen,’ Dawn said. ‘He didn’t say goodbye to me. When I went into his study, his last manuscript was sitting on his desk with his father’s reading glasses on top and all the household bills neatly in place.’ The final manuscript was the letter written to the little grandson whom he had met only a short time before.

From then on, stories surrounding the Western Australian author’s death proliferated. It was impossible for Donald ‘Scarp’ Stuart to have died peacefully in his sleep. The
legend had to be sustained, the Stuart individuality spun out. Having cheated death so many times, it seemed more appropriate that he had set his own agenda, exerting the individual will he wrote about so clearly in *I Think I'll Live.*

Looking back on that day in Broome, and in light of what was being said, Roger sensed there might have been a certain purpose in Donald's behaviour; catching up with old friends, defying doctor's orders by smoking incessantly, and drinking after what might have been a period of abstinence. Roger and Ray were sure Donald Stuart had enjoyed his last day, but Roger also saw that Donald was definitely a sick man and may not have been at his best.21

This story to end all Donald Stuart stories was a yarn Donald could have spun out in the telling, emphasising the wry north-west humour. But in his writing it would have turned out differently—death was something he wrote about with compassion, thoughtfully and gently, and he would have noted the significant time and place. Up in his own north-west after the successful launch of a new book, there could have been no more apt ending for this Australian life. That is why the Donald Stuart story will always include a suspicion that he purposely chose to go there and then.

Roger Garwood's version of what happened, and he was the one who was there, does allow another interpretation. Everything points to the fact that Donald was not well—the bronchitis, the heart pills. Back in his beloved north-west, having a drink with friends was normal behaviour and it was not out of character for him to have ignored medical advice about his smoking. But, rather than setting out on a path of purposefully self-destructive behaviour, we might also consider how much of this ending was just the result of Donald miscalculating how far he could go.

He had lived dangerously before and survived—but this time, the boy had held on down at the bottom of the pool for too long—the Landrover had been pushed beyond its limits and did not reach the top of the hill.

One hundred and thirty people were at author Donald Stuart's funeral. Shocked at the suddenness of his demise, literary figures, old soldiers, lifelong friends and family22 gathered at Karrakatta Cemetery to farewell the colourful, somewhat controversial figure who had, nevertheless, commanded their respect. Among them was his son, Julian. He had been working at *The News,* an Adelaide afternoon paper, when a Perth policeman phoned to tell him that his father had died.23
In the hushed talk that day, and adding to the air of mystery surrounding Donald Stuart’s passing, some spoke about a last novel called *I Think I’ll Die*. Dawn let Donald’s son read the finished manuscript and he would regret returning it to her. It was, Julian judged, ‘a very good book, one of his finest’.24

Not surprisingly, Donald’s literary friends25 made reference to his six novel sequence, *The Conjuror’s Years*, recognising that: ‘The Conjuror had played the last card in the pack...the ace of spades.’26 There was no chance Donald would interrupt this occasion with one of his forthright comments, though those who knew him well were aware that in the presence of death he would have made a remark or recited a quotation that tellingly captured the end of this life, the life past. That day there were others who wanted to do the same for Donald Stuart.

In his coffin, Dawn placed Donald’s favourite book, Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), though, from his list of preferred reading, she might equally have chosen to send him off with a copy of the *King James Bible* or *Shakespeare’s Complete Works.*

For this man, who so often slept out under them, the stars of the Southern Cross on the Australian flag draping his coffin assumed a more than usual significance. This time, ‘the thin silver notes of the bugle...that phantom bugle crying the “Last Post” through the silky whisper of the she-oaks in the bush’27 sounded for Donald Stuart.

In his *Daily News* column, ‘This Town’, Maurice Carr reported that Donald Stuart had died ‘just to confuse those who felt he was indestructible’. Carr described the Western Australian author as ‘a splendid rebel and an Aussie battler in the best tradition...a man who was rarely a winner, but never a loser, because he didn’t know when he was beaten’.28

A group of fellow writers, colleagues and friends of Donald Stuart arranged a Wake, a campfire reading at Mount Dale, close to Roleystone where he had lived in the early 1950s. They read from the early novels, *Yandy, Ilbarana* and *Malloonzai*, and from the four semi-autobiographical novels, particularly the last, *I Think I’ll Live*. They remembered how, with a grin on his face, he had said: ‘I’m writing another novel. I am going to call it *I Think I’ll Die.*’29
In addition to the Yandy of the Winds manuscript, Donald Stuart was said to have left seven unpublished novels. Considering the pattern of his writing, and his output over the years, this seems quite possible, but the existence of these manuscripts is difficult to verify. Any details about them are purely anecdotal and, except for an unexpected find, it seems they are doomed to remain invisible on his publication record.

Nevertheless, as the Donald Stuart story unfolded, a tin trunk full of manuscripts began to haunt the search. Eighteen years after Donald Stuart's death, and four years after his wife died, details about these manuscripts were somewhat hazy. The trunk had existed and, at least once, determined attempts had been made to preserve for posterity what was recognised as a significant body of Western Australian writing.

Hearing about how another Western Australian author, F.B. Vickers, had arranged for his manuscripts to be lodged in Curtin University Library, Donald Stuart seemed interested in the idea. This would have been an ideal situation, with the author helping to preserve his own work, granting permission for his papers to be sorted, catalogued and held in a library until researchers came along to evaluate them, but no such arrangements eventuated.

Shortly after his marriage to Dawn Crabb, Donald made a Public Trustee Will, in which he left all his papers and correspondence, manuscripts, published and unpublished, royalties and public lending rights to Dawn, subsequently to his son, Julian Robert, his daughter, Yaralie Rebecca, and any future grandchildren.

After Donald's death, a friend of his, intent on writing a Master of Arts thesis on his work, approached Dawn to ask if he could have access to the papers, but Dawn refused permission. She hoped to choose as her husband's biographer, someone of note who would write a significant study and, at last, generate the acclaim she felt sure he deserved. Averting a biography she thought might be too revealing, she implied that this former friend of her husband's was not such a person.

An MA thesis may not have met Dawn's immediate desire for a state or national accolade, but it would have been better than no biographical interpretation at all. This
old friend was in contact with a number of people who had known Donald well and who were still alive at that time. Access to the papers then might have ensured their survival and allowed a more immediate view of Donald Stuart.

Dawn confided to one family member that Patsy Adam-Smith was someone she would consider as Donald's biographer. Adam-Smith had already recorded Julian Alexander Salmon Stuart's story in *The Shearers* (1982) and the tenor of Donald's life, that of the bushman, the serving soldier and the Prisoner of War, fell well within her subject matter. She could have written a passionate biography, but her interest was in larger histories and comments from Donald Stuart would find a place in her later history, *Prisoners of War: From Gallipoli to Korea* (1992).

For a time, friends stored a box of Stuart papers in their home. It seems likely that the box contained Lyndall's second short story collection and at least two of Donald's unpublished manuscripts. When Dawn went to live in Albany, the box was taken down to her and copies of Donald's novels were given to libraries around Perth and in the south-west. After a long and debilitating illness, Dawn died on 11 August 1997. In her own Last Will and Testament she left instructions for the Donald Stuart papers to be disbursed as he had wished.

The unsold books, manuscripts and family photographs had all been stored in Dawn's garage where time, weather and mildew had wreaked their own destruction. When the boxes were opened, many of the brittle papers disintegrated at a touch and could not be saved. Among the remains was a water-buckled, black-mildew-patched manuscript of Lyndall's short stories. Efforts were made to place some of the salvageable pieces in safe-keeping and the rest were scattered among family members, those who had retained fond memories of a 'an interesting, complex and marvellous man'.

No one had denied the worth of these papers, but the task of promoting the author's work after his death had overwhelmed those left with the trust, a not unusual situation in the administering of literary estates. It takes time, effort and concern to further any literary career, and access to the papers. These papers were shut away for years and we must accept that many of them are lost.

Further complicating issues surrounding Donald Stuart's work were changes occurring at Georgian House, the publishers who had done so much to foster his writing. Georgian House was listed only until 1984 and for the next two years appeared under
Cambridge University Press, for which it had previously been an agent. The House passed from the hands of the Harris family and, though the party who bought them out had hoped to continue publishing, this did not happen. Three years after Donald Stuart's death, Georgian House was no longer listed, a closure which significantly hampered any further editions of Donald Stuart's already published work or the chance of any posthumously published novels.

The interviews remain, and the National Library collection of his papers. In his eleven novels, one short story collection and other written material, Donald Stuart left his own version of events, preserving the stories he wanted to tell of his life and of his Beloved Land. He had his own ideas about what might happen after his death:

Beyond the days and weeks spread the far-reaching years.
In some year there will be a day when you will look,
Clouded eyes age-ringed, to find in sudden loneliness,
That I am no longer imprisoned in this brittle cage,
That I have gone, sideways across the line of years,
Through and beyond the rainbow colours,
Into my young time, to roister and rage past all my limits,
and you shall have this icy cage and all your splintered memories.

from *Escape* by Donald Stuart
NOTES


Introduction

1 Holliday, M. (1972, November). 'A Writer on Writing.' Interview with W.A. Novelist Donald Stuart. Transcript. p. 5


16 Clarke, S. (2002). Interview with Dr Kathleen Stuart Stichlow.


Chapter I On the Track


18 I Think I’ll Live, p. 281.


NOTES

22 Drought Foal. p. 132
25 Drought Foal. p. 119-120.
29 Drought Foal. p. 126.
39 Drought Foal. p. 121.
41 Drought Foal. p. 120.
43 Drought Foal. p. 140.
44 Drought Foal. p. 142.
45 Drought Foal. p. 143.
46 Drought Foal. p. 147.
47 Drought Foal. p. 137.
48 Drought Foal. p. 149/150.
50 Drought Foal. p. 132.

Chapter II Ardasamurchan to Kalgoorlie

233
47 Pioneers' Index. Reg. no. 2347. Battye Library.
53 Commonwealth Electoral Roll, Kalgoorlie, 1901.
58 Williams, Justina. (1976). The First Furrow, p. 34.
61 Gill, Andrew. 'Running the Rag: The Westralian Worker: its Kalgoorlie Years (1900-1912),. In Papers in Labour History, No. 15. p. 81.
63 The 'Worker' and Mr. Julian Stuart. (1908, August 28). The Westralian Worker, p. 2.
67 No available records to confirm this.

Chapter III Roaming the Suburbs
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61. Drought Foal. p. 103.
64. Mount Hawthorn Legislative Assembly Rolls. Bettye.
73. Gregory, Jenny. (1990). *Education and Upward Mobility,* In *Western Australia Between the Wars, 1919-1939,* Perth, WA: Centre for Western Australian History, Department of History, University of Western Australia. p. 84.
74. Lang, Joan. (1986). Biographical notes provided to PMS Historical Society. Copy provided by Ms Carol Stabb.
75. PMS Records. Stuart, Donald Robert. 9 February 1926 to 23 September 1927.
80. PMS records. Stuart, Donald Robert. 9 February 1926 to 23 September 1927.
84. PMS records. Stuart, Douglas Hardie. 7 February 1928 to November 1932.
90. Noted by Glen Phillips.
93. One version claims his mother sent him for butter, but Donald always said he could not remember butter on the

97. Dibble, Brian. (1978, January 19). Interview with Donald Stuart who reads and discusses 'Sunday Afternoon'. In


Chapter IV North-West the Cendamines

236
Chapter V Northam to Syrizia

Wedgeful View. p. 135.


Wedgeful View. pp. 133-133.


Wedgeful View. p. 231.

Wedgeful View. p. 134.


Wedgeful View. p. 229.

Wedgeful View. p. 160.

Wedgeful View. p. 229.


NAA. Army Service Record. D.R. Stuart.


Wedgeful View. p. 133.


Wedgeful View. p. 181.

Wedgeful View. pp. 185-186.

NAA Army Service Record. D.R. Stuart.


Chapter VI: Java and the Railway

7. I Think I'll Live. p. 2.
8. During World War II, the Germans occupied the Netherlands and the Japanese took over the Netherlands East Indies. After the war, nationalist leaders proclaimed independence from the Dutch and declared a republic, the United States of Indonesia. In 1950, this became the Republic of Indonesia and the ancient name Djakarta was restored to the capital city, previously known as Batavia. Java is the largest and most densely populated of Indonesia's many islands.
10. From Snow to Jungle, pp. 91-92.
11. From Snow to Jungle, p. 93.
12. From Snow to Jungle, p. 92.
13. From Snow to Jungle, p. 92.
14. From Snow to Jungle, p. 92.
15. NAA. Army Service Record. D.R. Stuart.
16. I Think I'll Live. p. 5.
19. From Snow to Jungle, p. 93.
25. From Snow to Jungle, p. 94.
26. From Snow to Jungle, p. 94.
27. From Snow to Jungle, pp. 94-98.
28. From Snow to Jungle, p. 94.
29. From Snow to Jungle, p. 104.
30. From Snow to Jungle, p. 104.
31. From Snow to Jungle, p. 104.
32. From Snow to Jungle, p. 2.
Notes

103 From: Snow to Jungle, p. 121.
104 I Think I’ll Live, p. 194.
106 From: Snow to Jungle, p. 123.
109 From: Snow to Jungle, pp. 125-137.
114 I Think I’ll Live, p. 198.
116 I Think I’ll Live, p. 234.
121 NAA. Army Service Record. D.R. Stuart.
123 NAA Army Service Record. D.R. Stuart.
125 Donald Stuart Papers. NLA. MS 3156, Folder 5.
128 Hungerford, TAG. (1983). ‘War Novels as History’. Interview with Donald Stuart and Peter Firkins. *West Australian Writing.*

Chapter VII Coming Home

2 *The West Australian.* (1945, September 24 to October 6).
6 NAA. Stuart D. R. Pay Folder of ex POW (1939/45 war) who enlisted in WA.
7 NAA. Stuart D. R. Pay Folder.
10 NAA. Stuart D. R. Pay Folder.
12 NAA. Stuart D. R. Pay Folder.
13 NAA. Stuart D. R. Pay Folder.
14 Donald Stuart Papers. Correspondence. NLA. MS 3156. Folder 3.
15 NAA. Army Service Record. D.R. Stuart.
18 NAA. Army Service Record. D.R. Stuart.
NOTES


[31] Yandy of the Winds. NLA. MS 3156.


Milly milly—Paper, book, writing; the skill of writing, literacy.


Yandy of the Winds. NLA MS 3156. Folder 12. pp. 1029-1053.


And suggested in telephone interview with Frank Gore.


244
37 Bennett, Bruce, ed. (1979). The Literature of Western Australia. Nedland, WA. University of WA Press. (For the Education Committee of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations 1979). Introduction. p. xii.
40 DRS. File. NAA. A6119 Item 3126.
52 Letter from DRS to Stephen Murray-Smith, 2 June 1958. NLA. MS 3156. Folder 2.
53 Letter from DRS to Stephen Murray-Smith, 2 June 1958. NLA. MS 3156. Folder 2.
54 Letter from Stephen Murray-Smith to DRS. 5 June 1958. NLA. MS 3156. Folder 2.
56 Letter from Irene Greenwood to DRS. 1958. NLA. MS 3156. Folder 4.
64 Wembly Beaches Legislative Assembly Roll. 23/3/1959.
82 Pictorial Collection Index. State Library. Donald Stuart. 20/06/1960, Negative W.A.N. No. 4959.
84 DRS. File. NAA. A6119 Item 3126. Devine, Frank. (1960?) Author of Yandy Did It The Hard Way. Unidentified newspaper article.
86 DRS. File. NAA. A6119 Item 3126. Devine, Frank. (1960?).
87 DRS. File. NAA. A6119 Item 3126. Devine, Frank. (1960?).
91 Letters from DRS to The West Australian, October 1961 and 11 December 1970. NLA. MS 3156. Folder 2.
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   n.p. NLA, MS 3156, Folder 15.
102 Clarke, S. (2001). Interview with Annette and Duncan Cameron.
107 Stuart, Donald. (1962 October 21). *Armchair Chat*. 2 FC. ABC.
112 Yaralte. p. 109 and elsewhere.
113 Yaralte. p. 114.
115 Yaralte. p. 73.
121 Clarke, S. (2002). email contact with David Buchanan.
123 DRS File, NAA. A6119 Item 3126.
126 DRS. NAA, File A6119 Item 3126.
130 DRS. NAA File A6119 Item 3126.
136 Letter to DRS from Ian Hanna, University of Adelaide, 8 December 1965. NLA. MS 3156. Folder 3.

Chapter X The Kadjibut Tree

13 Stuart, Donald Robert, Payroll No. 428. NLA MS 3156. Folder 5.
24 Clarke, S. (2002). *Nor'westers of the Pilbara breed*. p. 165

Chapter XI The Conjuror's Years
9 NAA. DRS A6119 Item 3126. Devine, Frank. (1960?) Author of 'Yandy' Did It The Hard Way. Unidentified newspaper cutting. np.
13 Acceptance letter from DRS to Sec. of Comm. Lit. Fund. 29 December 1970. NLA MS 3156. Folder 2.
15 Only two books this year from Mr Stuart! (1972, February 15) *The West Australian*. np.
22 *Telegram to DRS c/o Madigan Bros*, Port Hedland. 30 August 1971. NLA MS 3156. Folder 4.
23 *Letter from DRS to Lyndall Hadow*. 31 August 1971. NLA MS 3156. Folder 1.
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94 Letter from DRS to Lyndall, Postmark 31 August 1971, NLA. MS 3156, Folder 1.
95 Clarke, S. (2001). Interview with Annette and Duncan Cameron
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116 Clarke, S. Conversation with Glen Phillips.
122 Dibble, Brian and Grant, Don. (1983). West Australian Writing. Discussion on the work of Donald Stuart and how it may be received after his death.

Chapter XII A 'Splendid Rebel'

3 I Think I'll Live. pp. 111-112.
5 From biographical notes appearing in Donald Stuart's later books.
16 Clarke, S. (2002). Interview with Roger Garwood. This information came later from Roger Garwood's partner, whose father was Donald's doctor.

250
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Epilogue
2 Clarke, S. (2001). Interview with Don Grant. F.B.Vickers' papers are lodged at Curtin University and his personal papers in the Battye Library.
8 Clarke, S. (2001). Interview with Annette and Duncan Cameron.
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Biographical Index.

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255
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The Sunday Times,
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West Australian Worker.
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  Women of Character. ABC Broadcast - General talk
  The Driven. New York: St. Martin’s Press.
  Going Back. ABC Broadcast. Armchair Chat.
  Captain Cook Literary Competition. Third prize of $1,000 in the novel section was shared by Donald Stuart of WA for his novel Ilbarana and by Rodney Hall of Queensland for Collocott.
1971 Ilbarana. Melbourne: Georgian House Pty Ltd.
1973 (cont’d).


1975 *Walk, Trot, Canter and Die*. Melbourne: Georgian House Pty Ltd.


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1977 *Drought Foul*. Melbourne: Georgian House Pty Ltd.

1977 (cont’d.)


1978 *Wedgetail View*. Melbourne: Georgian House Pty Ltd.

*Yandy*. Berlin: Putten and Loerning.


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1979 (cont'd.)


1980


1981

*I Think I’ll Live*. Melbourne: Georgian House Pty Ltd.

1982

*The Old Lady*. Short Story. Reading by Donald Stuart. Education Department of WA, Audio-Visual Education Branch, Leederville. Sound cassette. Distance Education Centre lesson.

1983

Bill Bunbury interviews Donald Stuart about the Depression years. OH 568. Starts: ‘What was it like on the track at the age of fifteen?’


Posthumous:

Republished work and quotations in other publications—1983 to 2000

1983


1985


‘Riches of Travel’. Short story. in *Celebrations: bicentennial anthology of fifty years of Western Australian poetry and prose*. pp. 131-137.

1992


1993


1994


1995


1996


2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>September 13 Born at Burt St., Cottesloe, Perth, Western Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Stuart family moves to Leederville.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>His father severely injured in accident at Lyall’s Mill, Collie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Donald attends James Street Primary School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Family moves to Albany Road, Gosnells.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Stuart family living in Mt. Hawthorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924/25</td>
<td>Donald attends Mt. Hawthorn Primary School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>February 9 Starts at Perth Modern School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>September 23 Leaves Perth Modern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Leaves home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>July 3 Father dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>July 28 Mother dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>September 3 Declaration of World War II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Donald joins 10th Light Horse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June 7 Enlists in AIF, 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October 31 Arrives in South Australia for training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 16 Marries Joan Laurence Bertelsmeir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>April 11 Leaves Sydney on <em>Isle de France</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 16 <em>Isle de France</em> leaves Fremantle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May 14 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion disembarks Port Tewfick, Egypt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>January 31 Leaves Middle East on <em>SS Orcades</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February 18 Arrives in Batavia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 8 Dutch surrender in Java. Donald taken Prisoner of the Japanese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>January 4 Dunlop Force leaves Java for the Burma-Thailand Railway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October 17 Burma-Thailand Railway finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>September 2 Japanese surrender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September 20 Donald reported recovered at Singapore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October 6 Arrives back in Perth. Recuperation in Hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>April 24 Demobilised from Army.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Divorced from Joan. Marries Dulcie Eunice Singh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Donald at Yandeyarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Marries Kathleen Anderson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Birth of a son, Julian Robert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Yandie</em> published, described as a ‘documentary novel’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td><em>The Driven</em> published.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td><em>Yaralie</em> is published.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1962 Birth of a daughter, Yaralie Rebecca
1965 Marriage to Kathleen ends.
1968 Donald works on Mount Newman Railway.
1970 Back in Perth applying for Commonwealth Literary Funding.
1971 Ilbarana is published.
1973 October Donald Stuart elected President of FAWWA, for two years.
1974 April Donald Stuart elected Federal President of FAW, for two years.
1975 Walk, Trot Canter and Die published.
1976 June 2 Lyndall Hadow dies.
1976 Donald Stuart marries Dawn Crabb
1976 Malloonaiki published, sequel to Ilbarana.
1977 Drought Foal published.
1978 Wedgetail View published.
1979 Crank Back On Roller published.
1981 I Think I'Il Live published, last in The Conjuro's Years sequence.
1983 Birth of a grandson, James Donald.
1983 August 25 Launch of Broome: Landscapes and People
1993 Donald Stuart dies that night.

COMMONWEALTH LITERARY FUNDING

COMMONWEALTH LITERARY FUND (1908-1972)
1960 £500. 6 months funding for Yaralie.
1971 $6,000 for Ilbarana.
1972 $6,000 for Morning Star Evening Star: Tales of Outback Australia.

LITERATURE BOARD OF THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL (1973+)
1974 onwards Earnings supplemented to $6,000 p.a.*
1975/76 $4,183 for Walk, Trot, Canter and Die.
1976/77 $4,000 for Malloonaiki.
1977/78 $3,720 for Drought Foal.
1978/79 $4,080 for Wedgetail View.
1979/80 $3,600 for Crank Back On Roller.
1980/81 $4,920 for I Think I'll Live.

INTRODUCTION
The biography of Donald Robert Stuart (1913-1983), *In the Space Behind His Eyes*, follows the Western Australian author's life story, traces the development of his writing and considers aspects of his work. Material has been gathered from a wide range of sources, including information of an often ephemeral nature and interviews with the author's increasingly ageing contemporaries. As an initial full-length biography, its main aim is to shed light on the complex character of Donald Stuart and to preserve the life story of an acknowledged Western Australian/Australian writer who, himself, set out to preserve a disappearing way of Australian life. A further aim of this exploration of Donald Stuart's life is to contribute to an understanding of Western Australian/Australian literature and literary history of the post-World War II period.

In the following essay, in relation to the writing of *In the Space behind His Eyes*, I consider examples of the biographical form and some directions biography has taken in the last decade or so. As I examine the availability and reliability of material, I will look at the writing of compassionate biography and support my choice to bring a conventional ordering to Donald Stuart's life and use passages from his writing to illustrate this biography.

In recent years, biography has found a rightful place in the life writing genre, alongside autobiography and memoir and at least fifty-two other forms of life narrative identified in what, it has been suggested, may become 'a distinct scholarly subject'. Biography is a combination of life writing texts: oral history, public record, autobiography, memoir, opinion, review and a range of personal material, the availability, quantity and quality of which exerts its own influence on the way a life story may be told. The biographer's task is to research, gather and organise this material, consider the contribution each piece will make, decide how the biographical subject will be revealed and plan the biographical form, 'chronological and narrative, thematic and analytical, or a blend of the two'. Entrusted with recreating 'as closely as the evidence permits, a life lived in the past' the biographer must take ethical considerations into account, yet also be engaged in the life under consideration at an imaginative and artistic level.
Notable among recent biographies is Brian Matthews’ ‘imaginative reconstruction’ written around the life of Louisa Lawson, pioneer feminist, writer, editor, publisher and mother of Henry Lawson. With his Louisa (1989), Matthews has seized the genre, proposing ‘a new set of methodologies and approaches for biographical writing’ which allow alternative ways of writing biography. Matthews cites ‘a critical shortage of material’ as influencing his decision to find ‘an alternative text’, a method of telling Louisa’s story in a way which might release him from the ‘subtle pressure’ of having to fall back on chronicling the times. Instead, he chooses to reconstruct her life imaginatively. In such a text, the lines between fact and fiction are blurred and the biographer takes a place alongside that of the biographical subject on at least an equal level. Indeed, in Brian Matthews’ Louisa, as we are let into the author’s inner anguish about how he might tell this story, which includes a description of his ‘old Adler typewriter’, one might be forgiven for thinking that the author’s place in this text exceeds that of his subject. Matthews recognises the danger, understanding that, in the absence of reliable material, the writer’s voice might ‘enter the narrative, inflated and indulged behind the fluctuating presence of the subject’. Just as there are a number of texts to be amalgamated within a life story, there are players other than the biographical subject waiting to take their part, not least of whom is the biographer.

In writing about Donald Stuart, I have adopted a more conventional biographer’s approach than that chosen by Brian Matthews, a position in the background, assessing, assembling and evaluating the material and, inevitably, chronicling the times, for Donald Stuart’s story lies firmly within its history. His movement through some of Australia’s historical events, and his awareness of himself within them, has led me to adopt a mainly chronological, narrative form.

Apart from a select number of Donald Stuart papers held in the National Library of Australia, there is little personal material available and, like Brian Matthews, I had to find a way of telling this story. Indisputable and checkable facts verify the framework of Donald Stuart’s life and are well-supported by public records and secondary sources. The decision to illustrate the biography with passages from his writing and a distinct reliance on interviews Donald recorded later in his life, together with the opinions of people who had known him, undoubtedly allows a fictional quality into the text, in as much as stories and anecdotes are unreliable and subject to change every time they are told. Nevertheless, I believe my use of passages from Donald Stuart’s work, and of details gained from interviews, allows me to ‘to illustrate or confirm [his] life story’, to
‘register memories’ of him and shed light on a complex character who was an enigma to many of the people who knew him.

THE SEARCH FOR MATERIAL

Biography and autobiography have been described as ‘branches of history that focus on an individual’s life and career’. Given this undeniably factual basis, the biographer accepts an ethical responsibility to interpret the subject’s life and times as closely as possible. The biographer’s aim is to seek out the subject, to consider events in the life that might have affected character and find an explanation for what may have influenced him/her in certain directions—to discover what it was that ‘made them tick’. A biography interprets a life, and creates a narrative around the life lived.

Realising that this interpretation imposes a unity, and brings order to the life, which may not have been evident at the time it was being lived, either to the subject or those in an immediate circle of family and friends, biographers are made even more aware of their responsibility in creating their version of the life. In all cases, the biographer’s interpretation relies upon the material available for research, the quantity and quality of which affects the way the life is assessed and the manner in which the story is told.

Having decided upon a subject, almost immediately the biographer is involved in collecting material and ‘create[ing] an archive’ in support of the life. On occasions, the discovery of obscure material adds a chance element to the search, but to rely wholly on serendipitous finds is to deny the searcher’s will and ignore skills the biographer brings to the task. The fully cognisant biographer searches with purpose, is willing to follow obscure leads, is prepared to look for material in unexpected places and, most importantly, has the ability to recognise and interpret what is found. Nevertheless, without the luxury of access to a lifetime of papers, the search might constitute a major part of the exercise. Whatever the level of given information, the way the biographer weaves threads and interprets the life requires another skill altogether.

Dr Samuel Johnson believed you could write a biography only if you had conversed, eaten and drunk with your biographical subject. For the period of time his biographer, James Boswell, spent with Johnson, he was in the position to do just that. Boswell even went so far as to enhance his picture of the eminent man by arranging events that placed Johnson in a position where he might respond in an interesting way. That Boswell appears to have gained Johnson’s cooperation in this dramatisation of the life adds an element of uncertainty into the text. Biographers of living subjects may be able to
follow in James Boswell’s footsteps, but biographers of less-available subjects, denied such intimacy, must seek other avenues of enquiry.

When examining the life of a writer, the writer’s estate can prove a valuable source of information and, where a considerable number of papers are made available, the task appears to become one of assessment and selection. Brian Matthews believes that ‘an abundance of evidence’ has the advantage of holding ‘the biographer’s wayward and intruding ego’ in check and some biographers are fortunate enough to have what appears as an almost overwhelming amount of material.

Biographer Michael Holroyd was given access to biographical historian Lytton Strachey’s ‘studio wilderness’. Here was housed ‘much of Lytton’s library and collection of papers’ and Holroyd was able to consult ‘letters, diaries’ and miscellaneous documents, all of which shed light on the character. James Strachey, Lytton’s brother, had, at times, ‘felt like putting everything in the fire’, but had preserved the mass of papers until such times as ‘civilised opinion’ might accept this brilliant, but controversial, life story. Lytton Strachey was himself at the forefront of change in biographical writing when, with his interest in ‘character and human nature’, in his *Eminent Victorians* (1974), he sought to ‘revitalise’ biography, a desire which earned him the reputation of being ‘frivolous’ with history. Michael Holroyd, however, saw Strachey’s preface to the book, with its plea for the humanity of even prominent historical figures, as ‘a manifesto for twentieth-century biographers’.

Another biographer given the luxury of what seems like an unlimited amount of material was Janet Armstrong, biographer of best-selling author Agatha Christie. She was given access not only to the papers, but also to houses in which the author had lived. Armstrong found books Christie had read as a child and was able to walk in the garden she had planted. Admitted in such a way to the inner sanctum of the subject’s life, the biographer is in a privileged position and may be able to unearth little known facts.

But, again, not all biographers are so fortunate. Where there is what Matthews calls ‘a critical shortage of material’ he believes there is some difficulty in formulating the life, gaining ‘the sense of a life being lived’ without resorting to background detail and historical fact. It is surely his perceived lack of reliable material that drives his description of himself, the biographer, as ‘cautious, on occasions timid, by nature conservative, given to worry and with little humour’.
Such anxiety may also be found in Drusilla Modjeska's search for material about her mother when writing her biography, *Poppy* (1990). Modjeska describes how she 'collected every scrap of paper' her mother had left and 'paid good money to have it shipped across the world' from England to Australia. Overtaken by doubts about the quality of the material she has gathered, she questions the opinion she is hearing and describes herself as being 'paralysed by the insufficiency of evidence', yet, on occasion, relieved that the evidence is not there, for, then, there is no need to consider it.

Uncertainty for these biographers lies not just in the amount of material at their disposal, but also in their doubt about the authenticity of the story they are hearing. In order to write the life as closely to 'what really happened' as possible, serious biographers establish as their ethic a duty to undertake careful research. The quality of a biographer's research gives credibility to their work, but there is also an understanding that the audience expects a readable, entertaining story, not just a list of verifiable facts. Biographical writing is surrounded by expectation. Audiences expect to be reading a 'true' story and the factual, non-fictional level of the tale being told about a fellow human being is what fascinates. Mary Besemeres and Maureen Perkins cite Robert Young (1995, 55-89) as saying the elements in life stories that create interest 'clarify where we begin and end', allow us to see ourselves in relation to the other person and help us to 'delineate which aspects of our lives are universal, which are shared, and which are unique to ourselves'. The chance that biographical subjects, or their descendants, might contradict what has been written 'builds a powerful, and often uneasy relationship' not only with the biographer, but also with readers who are lured to the genre because of its 'slice of life' value. The popularity of biography as a genre may be explained as its readers' curiosity about how others have coped with the vicissitudes of living and, perhaps, wanting to use the biographical example as a guide in their own lives, what Brian Roberts recognises as responses to a human story that include 'recognition and feeling'.

When it came to writing Donald Stuart's life, there was no great pile of personal papers to call upon. His later manuscripts and papers had not survived a period of bad storage, there were no diaries or notebooks and few personal letters from which one might gain a close insight into his life. One method of writing a biography is to organise it around houses the subject occupied during his/her life. The search for any of the houses in which Donald Stuart had lived was disappointing. Not one was left standing. This was
not a well-documented life and information about Donald Stuart would have to come from a wide range of sources.

Having started with no knowledge of my biographical subject, a first useful reference was the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (1985). Here appears a short biography of Donald Stuart, of his father, Julian Alexander Stuart, of Donald's older sister, Lyndall Hadow, and mention of their mother, Rhoda Florence Stuart. All were writers. I found Donald Stuart's outspoken comments about what it was like to be a Japanese Prisoner of War, posthumously quoted in Patsy Adam Smith's *Prisoners of War* (1992) and Hank Nelson's *Prisoners of War—Australians under Nippon* (1985). The latter publication is based on Tim Bowden's Australian Broadcasting Corporation series of the same name, an extraordinary oral history collection in which surviving prisoners told their stories. With the help of ABC staff, I was able to obtain an unedited tape of Tim Bowden's interview with Donald Stuart, which proved invaluable when writing the Prisoner of War chapter.

My task was to research the recorded life and to examine not only what the subject had said or written about his own life, but also to discover what others had written or were prepared to say about him. The picture of Donald Stuart was built painstakingly, step by step. It has been said, often enough as now to appear clichéd, but it cannot be denied, that the biographer becomes single-minded in the quest and leads a life resembling that of a specialised private detective. The hunt was absorbing, with apparently obscure details often directing a wider search to enhance the picture being drawn and it was surprising just how much information awaited discovery.

In assembling a detailed chronology of my biographical subject I found myself involved in the process of putting together a large puzzle in which all the pieces always matched. There was a constant need to open up space for new pieces of information that shifted the puzzle onto another level and created fresh scenes, each of which had its own place in the emerging picture. The biographer must search to find out what is to be discovered and search again to find out what has been discovered. As the writer of a writer's biography, I trod a path between the records, the writing, the opinion of those who knew the author and my own developing opinions. I learnt to hold more than one piece of information at a time, picking up the different pieces of the puzzle as the directions dictated, placing them in the developing picture as and when the opportunity occurred. What emerges is a composite narrative created through research, reading, a growing understanding and, necessarily, a level of intuition and informed speculation.
An internet library search gave me the titles of Stuart’s thirteen books and, within a few weeks, I acquired his eleven novels and the short story collection. Though Donald described them as novels, Colin Campbell, the protagonist in the last four titles, follows a life-journey which closely resembles that of the author. At the beginning of my research, this material appeared as a useful guide to exploring the life, but I would come to regard this level of Donald Stuart’s storytelling as more significant to his own story than at first seemed likely.

More than a year after I began my research, I travelled to Canberra to attend ‘The Secret Self’, National Library of Australia Conference on Biography and Autobiography. One of the guest biographers, historian David Day, spoke about the importance of seeking out the biographical subject’s background. In his John Curtin: A Life (1999), David Day had revealed little known facts about Curtin’s family and thrown new light on this important figure in Australian political history. I found myself in sympathy with Day’s opinion that uncovering little known family and early childhood events could yield essential insights into your biographical subject.

Enquiries into the work of Donald Stuart’s sister, Lyndall Hadlow, had led me to a publication named Part of the Glory (1967), a collection of their father’s writing. Here, the Stuart story was laid out in detail; the birth, childhood and young manhood of Julian Alexander Stuart and, in his own words, an account of his involvement in the 1891 Shearers’ Strike. His is a fascinating story and one which attracted my interest. By understanding this parent, I hoped to come to an understanding of the family. I had begun to notice how the father’s story often overtook that of his son and it became impossible to tell Donald Stuart’s story without also including details of his father’s life.

In examining Julian Alexander Stuart’s life, I found myself caught in the history of the great Scottish Clearances, and the American and Australian goldrushes of the 1850s. I read about convict labour in the early Colonial period and considered explanations of how convict labour had given way to immigrant labour, and problems attending the change. Julian Alexander’s personality was shaped by these events and he had involved himself in the workers’ cause. As well as appraising his part in the 1891 Queensland Shearer’s strike, I found myself assessing his period as a newspaper editor of The Westralian Worker, in Western Australia’s eastern goldfields. While examining his demise as that paper’s editor and the end of his career as a member of the Western Australian Legislative Assembly, I pored over newspapers and Parliamentary Debates.
and examined papers on Labor Party history. It was a strong story, but I realised I had made a detour and was on a side road, away from my main subject. At about the same time, I began to notice, and resent, the way many of my interviewees were more keen to tell me Julian Alexander’s story, than to talk about his son, Donald Stuart. I was also assailed by stories about Lyndall Hadow, Donald Stuart’s only sister. The Stuarts were all strong personalities and each one demanded their own part in this biography.

I loosened the father’s hold and turned to concentrate on my main task, but nothing is ever lost. Before long, the advantages of my detailed knowledge became evident. I was able to recognise the influence this strong father had on his family, not always for the best; and could recognise his story when it appeared in Donald Stuart’s novels, as it did many times. Julian Alexander was a central figure in his son’s life. Only by dealing with him at the beginning of my research could he be placed properly in Donald’s story. It is worth noting that Julian Alexander’s story clamours for its own dedicated biography, beyond what has been written already.

Of the people who knew Donald Stuart during the last decade or so of his life, and were willing to talk about him, none had any connection to living members of the Stuart family. They knew some details of the family story, but could not provide much detail. For instance, no one knew exactly how many children had been born into the Stuart family, a vital piece of information if the biography was to proceed.

Records held by the Perth Modern School Historical Society showed that four Stuart children had attended the school, including Donald. The level of prestige associated with attendance at Perth Modern was evident when, more than once, the statement was made: ‘All the children went to Perth Modern.’ Taking into account the informants’ apparent certainty, for a time it seemed likely that Donald Stuart had only three siblings, yet, in his 1974 interview with Hazel de Berg,31 he had said there were six children. Even accounting for the possibility of this as a transcriber’s error, I could not ignore the figure, not to mention my consciousness of Johnson biographer, J.L. Clifford, who insisted that ‘the biographer has a scholarly duty to check even the most peripheral anecdote’.32 There also seemed to be a clue in the recognisably semi-autobiographical novel, Drought Foul (1977), into which Donald Stuart had written five boys (but no sister). The ten year gap between Donald and his sister also demanded explanation; perhaps the father had married twice, though there was nothing either to suggest or confirm this assumption.
Official records offered some surety and the Death Certificates for Donald’s mother and father, Rhoda Florence and Julian Alexander Stuart, listed the two boys born ahead of Donald. The certificates gave all the children’s names and also mentioned two deceased boys. Records confirmed that Florence’s second child was stillborn, but there was no available reference as to exactly when or where the other deceased infant was born. This information confirmed Donald’s place as the seventh child born into the Stuart family, but, because of the two deaths, as fifth in the surviving family of six.

Western Australian Education Department Registration records for the period proved to be a valuable source of family detail. During a search of the Stuart family’s Gosnells years, it became clear what had happened to Donald Stuart’s two older brothers. The father’s severe accident in the south-west had incapacitated him to such a degree that it was impossible for him ever to work again. He wrote the occasional Bulletin article and received a small pension, but there was little money coming into the family. School registrations for Gosnells Primary and Perth Boys Schools showed that these two boys had left school at the basic leaving age of fourteen years. Poverty imposed on the family because of the father’s accident is an important element of the Donald Stuart story. Idealistically, Florence and Julian were committed to giving their children a good education, but these two boys missed the advantage afforded their siblings and the discovery of these records only served to emphasise the family’s distress at this time.

In the early days of my research, not being a family member, and not having, yet, found a Stuart family member who would give permission to access certain records, the number of official records available to me was limited. There was another concern, the sort of information which leads biographers to become distrustful, even of official records. Details on a death certificate, when provided by a parent or spouse, may be reasonably accurate. This is not necessarily so if a member of the following generation provides the information. After a death, and under pressure of needing to provide little-known personal history, information tendered for a Death Certificate may include hearsay evidence gleaned from often-told family stories. This is more likely to happen if a marriage took place away from close family or a young couple settled in another State, as did Donald Stuart’s mother and father.

Confirmation of this appeared in a persistent image of the first Donald Stuart as a ‘red bearded digger from Victoria’. The description originated in 1855, at the time of his marriage, in Sydney, to Amelia MacPherson. In 1896, Amelia and Donald’s son, Julian Alexander Stuart, married Rhoda Florence Collings in Queensland and, after their
wedding, the young couple had settled in Western Australia. Over the following years, we can be sure Julian repeated the description to his twenty-four year old bride and to his growing family. The image being such a strong one and likely to fire any imagination, it is not surprising that it became firmly fixed in family folklore. In 1929, information on Julian Stuart’s Certificate of Death, presumably provided by his surviving wife, stated his father’s occupation as ‘miner’. Yet, most of Grandfather Donald Stuart’s life after his marriage to Amelia was spent not as a prospector, but as a prosperous farmer in NSW.

It took some time to confirm another aspect of Donald Stuart’s life. He had married four times, yet few people who had known him in his later years seemed to be aware of the exact number of his wives. Dawn Stuart, whom he married in 1976, had outlived him and was known in Fellowship of Australian Writers circles. His third wife, mother of his two children, was also known and, unexpectedly, at a Christmas barbecue, I was told part of her story and directed to a book which provided details about the break-up of this marriage. There was less information about the second wife, an enigmatic figure whose story, though taking some time to uncover, would provide a most interesting element in the biography. Few seemed to know about the first wife and details about her were hazy. But the biographer closely searching around the subject is always in a position to find new material.

A search of the National Archives of Australia website showed that Donald Stuart’s Army Pay Folder was held in Perth.35 The folder contained useful information about Donald’s Army Service and, again unexpectedly, provided details of that first marriage. The hasty wartime ceremony had taken place in Adelaide, just before Donald Stuart embarked for AIF duties overseas. He spent three-and-a-half years as a Prisoner of the Japanese and, for much of his time away, his wife had not known where he was or even if he was still alive. When he arrived back in Western Australia in 1945, she had already decided not to continue the marriage. There, on file, in the official statements required to terminate Donald’s Army allotment to his wife, were all the details of what had happened between them. It seemed ironical that, in contrast to the withholding of certain official documents, because of my not being a family member, these intimate, private documents were openly available to any researcher.

The National Library of Australia website revealed that a collection of Donald Stuart papers was held in the Library.36 In communicating with library staff about this
material, it became clear that I must find out who held copyright for Donald Stuart’s work and obtain permission to access and copy any of the papers. The search for living family members became a priority.

Probate documents for Donald and his fourth wife showed that the executor of Dawn Stuart’s Will was her eldest son, Reg Crabb, but the search seemed to end there. He was not known at any past addresses or available at any of the recorded telephone numbers. Taking advantage of one of the biographer’s best and most accessible resources, the local telephone directory, one Saturday afternoon, determined not to be waylaid any further, I worked my way down the list of people named Crabb. After speaking to a number of people, some connected to Dawn Stuart (Crabb), others not, I found someone who could help me. Finally reaching Reg Crabb marked an important step in my research, placing a vital piece in the puzzle.

Reg willingly offered to help, but his news that Donald Stuart’s manuscripts and papers had not survived eighteen years of poor storage was disappointing. He did, however, provide an invaluable collection of book reviews, which saved hours of painstaking newspaper search. He also held copies of family photographs, some of which appear in the biography, and copies of Stuart family Birth Certificates. A rare find was a letter, handwritten by the nineteen-year old Donald to his sister at the time of their mother’s death. Even at the end of the Donald Stuart research, there are few such personal letters. This page of writing gives an insight into the young Donald, a unique view, unavailable from any other source and confirming the value of letters, when they exist.

Through Reg Crabb, I met other family members. Most important was the chance to establish email contact with Donald’s son, Julian Robert Stuart, who lives in Winchester, England, and holds copyright to his father’s papers. A moving experience was the opportunity to talk, by telephone, to Douglas Stuart, Donald’s younger brother. One of his nieces arranged for me to phone him and we spoke for 30 minutes, during which time he provided several useful insights into his brother’s character. When Douglas died only a few months later, this contact gained even more significance. I became conscious of how this family member’s opinion had added another dimension to the character of Donald Stuart and how the biography might have suffered without it.

The importance of speaking to family members is confirmed by biographers, Barbara Brooks and Judith Clark, who wrote *Eleanor Dark: A Writer’s Life* (1998), about the Australian novelist probably best known for an important historical trilogy in which she
'democratically presents convicts, blacks, settlers and governors alike'. Brooks and Clark tell how, as they researched her life, poring over the papers, novels, letters and diaries: 'She seemed a long way away as we read them.' When they met ninety-seven-year-old Eric Dark, Eleanor's husband of more than sixty years, their understanding of her widened: 'He was the medium through which we first met her as a private person,' they write in their Introduction.37

Through interviews with Donald Stuart's relatives, I met people who had been at pains to understand him and who held a particular fondness for him. This gave me another perspective on Donald Stuart, an inner family consciousness of the man. These contacts formed a crucial part of my assessment and proved a balancing factor in the biography. With the interest and help of these family members, I was steered towards a variety of material, some of which would, eventually, solve the Dessie Stuart enigma.

An interview with one niece yielded an obscure, but vital, piece of information. Having agreed with her about photographs I could copy for inclusion in the biography, I switched off my tape recorder and stood up to make my final farewells. A small newspaper cutting fluttered out of the papers I was holding and I stooped to recover it. The ten-line, column-wide cutting was a notice, placed by Donald Stuart's father, in 1921, thanking members of the Australian Timber Workers' Union for money donated at the time of his accident. I knew the accident had happened somewhere in the southwest, but did not know where and had only an approximate date. Here was definite evidence of time and place. These details helped me to find newspaper references that confirm Julian Alexander Stuart's two accidents, though his son had only ever mentioned one. The level of information contained in this eighty-year old scrap of paper, may appear as a minor discovery, a small cutting containing apparently dull information, but the accident had been a turning point in the Stuart family story and actual evidence was more valuable than any anecdotal account.

Following attendance at 'The Secret Self', National Library of Australia Conference, I allowed four days for a preliminary examination of the papers Donald Stuart and his sister, Lyndall Hadow, had lodged in the National Library in 1972.38 During this initial examination of the Donald Stuart papers, I copied documents and took extensive notes on a lap-top computer. These notes were of great assistance in my writing and for later evaluation of the material. By this time, I had read most of Stuart's published novels and short stories, had conducted a number of interviews with people who knew him and
ESSAY

was beginning to form my own opinions, but it became evident that I must advance
further in my understanding of the Donald Stuart story before I could fully assess the
papers in this collection.

Many of the papers deal with Stuart's writing career, acceptance and rejection letters,
and copies of official correspondence detailing his applications for, and receipt of,
Commonwealth Literary funding. For the period 1945 to 1972, the record of Donald
Stuart's writing is preserved intact. What becomes quite clear from this body of papers
is the part Lyndall Hadow played in getting her brother’s work published and
recognised. She appears to have been the author of the typewritten letters, applications
for funding and communications with publishers. Lyndall was always inclined to
promote her brother as Donald R. Stuart, author and the element of selection in these
papers is evident. Nevertheless, alongside this desired, official view of him, anyone who
has any understanding of the Donald Stuart story can still find 'Scorp' Stuart, the
larrakin alter ego of this Western Australian writer.

Two unusual clues attracted my attention; a work ticket for Donald's time on the
Mount Newman Railway and a Scottish address given in a letter from someone called
R.T.C. Speir. My later pursuit of these clues allowed me to fill a worrying gap in the
biography. These unusual inclusions in the National Library collection appeared as
Donald (Scorp) Stuart putting his own spin on the preserved understanding of himself.

The thirty-year old Scottish address offered hope of a different understanding of
Donald Stuart. The correspondent, a Richard Speir, had known Donald at a time about
which there was little other information. The warmth in his letters to Donald, and
Donald's care in preserving them, confirmed that the friendship had been of importance
to them both. Following the breakdown of Donald Stuart's third marriage, he had
abandoned city life and returned to working in the north-west. This was the period
covered in the correspondence with Richard Speir, a period about which there was
hardly any information. After thirty years, there was a certain leap of optimism in the
idea that my letter might reach its addressee and that there would be a reply, but the
possibility of contact with someone who had known Donald Stuart during this period
could not be ignored. Several weeks elapsed before an email message from Ireland
appeared on my screen. The letter had taken a circuitous route, but the message had
eventually reached Richard Speir, the geologist who, as a young field officer, had come
across Donald in the north-west. His well-written emails, appreciative of Donald

275
(Scorp) Stuart, the larrikin and the writer, provided the sort of information for which any biographer would be grateful.

Just prior to meeting this young field officer, Donald had spent a year working on a railway which was being built to transport iron ore in the north-west. Several of my interviewees proffered this piece of information, one even provided a photograph of him kneeling beside the railway line, but no-one could tell me any more. In the National Library papers, I found a newspaper cutting of the same photograph, the accompanying article was missing, but there was a date. Using this reference, I was able to locate an informative newspaper feature about the Mount Newman Railway. The attached article gave a revealing account of 'Scorp' Stuart and his reputation on the railway as 'king of joke tellers' and one might wonder who had removed it from the copy preserved in the National Library papers. It appeared as another of those anomalies, evidence of that side of Donald Stuart which wormed its way into the collection to find its place alongside the dominant 'successful author' image. Armed with this knowledge, it was not then difficult to find someone who had worked on the Pilbara railways who, although he had not known Donald Stuart, was able to provide useful additional references.

The original assessment visit to the National Library proved beneficial. Notes taken during that time directed my second visit to Canberra, six months later and for a period of ten days. The focus of this visit was on the unpublished pages of Donald Stuart's controversial manuscript, Yandy of the Winds. In preparation, I had researched the period Donald Stuart spent at Yandeyarra, in the State's north-west. Again, many of my interviewees had mentioned this period, but most of what they told me was hearsay and lacking in detail. Peter Biskup's not slave not citizens (1973) and Max Brown's The Black Eureka (1976) had confirmed the period, providing new details about Donald Stuart's time at Yandeyarra and about his second wife, Dessie Stuart, an important player in this part of the story. She had proved difficult to find, but with a combination of patient research, constant questioning and follow-up of chance remarks, her story began to unravel.

Of the sixteen folders that make up the collection of Donald Stuart Papers, five contain pages of the Yandy of the Winds manuscript, handwritten on thin, pale green paper. The first 300 pages are missing. Without any proof to the contrary, and taking into account other correspondence surrounding this manuscript, it appears these might be the pages selected for Donald Stuart's first published novel Yandy (1959). Other
pages of the manuscript fall into two parts, those dealing with Dessie and Donald Stuart’s relationship during their time at Yandeyarra, and some detailed writing about Aboriginal life.

The importance of this manuscript, as a record of the period and as an example of Donald Stuart’s earlier writing, makes it an essential part of any study about his life and work. Controversy surrounding the manuscript had related to disagreements erupting between Donald Stuart and Don McLeod, the figure behind the establishment of Yandeyarra. Dessie’s part in the disagreement was difficult to fathom and entailed a later visit to Canberra to examine details Donald had included about her relationship with McLeod. Donald Stuart uses actual names in his account and some of his colleagues and, eventually, his publisher decided this material might be considered libelous and should remain unpublished.

Today, we might view the other material more carefully. Pages of the work draw upon knowledge Donald Stuart gained during time he spent with the Aboriginal people at Yandeyarra. The circumstances under which he gained this knowledge were seen as controversial and were a factor in his dismissal from the Yandeyarra Homestead. From even a brief examination of this material, it is evident that much of Stuart’s writing about the north-west Aboriginal people was influenced by his Yandeyarra experience. Areas of the work bear similarities to some of Donald Stuart’s published writing, particularly pages in the novels *Ilbarana* (1972) and *Mallowkai* (1976), and one section closely resembles his short story, ‘Dingo Pups’. A detailed analysis of this writing was not in my area of study, but this manuscript deserves further examination.

The Donald Stuart Papers also contain handwritten manuscripts of several short stories. I was particularly pleased to find the story, ‘Long Day’, and to be able to include a copied page of this manuscript in the biography, for it is my belief that the boy holding on down at the bottom of the pool and aware of the danger, provides a metaphor for Donald Stuart as someone who was willing to take risks and who revelled in difficult situations.

Staff in the National Library’s Manuscript Reading Room were unfailingly helpful. Nevertheless, while I was most appreciative of the way this aspect of Donald Stuart’s life was so carefully preserved, I could not help questioning why the papers were in the National Library of Australia and not in the Battye Library of Western Australian History. Queries surrounding this situation may go in either direction. If these papers were housed in Donald Stuart’s home State, they would be readily accessible to local
researchers. The argument against this would be the emphasis then placed on his status as a Regional writer, a label he fought for much of his writing career. By having the papers lodged in the National Library of Australia, maybe there is a chance that Donald Stuart will, eventually, take his place as a writer deserving of national recognition. Some commentators, as well as his sister and her friends, were convinced that he deserved such recognition and this collection was, no doubt, lodged in the National Library with that in mind. Had this manuscript been lodged in the Battye Library in Perth, I would have consulted it much more often. Not having this opportunity did, however, make me focus and organise my research.

As well as collecting an assortment of material, from a variety of sources, I set out to verify as much as possible by consulting public records and newspaper reports, always searching for the fact behind the story. Every new piece of evidence assumed importance, especially official reports in support of something already established, and secondary sources providing valuable, historical confirmation. Among other publications, G. C. Bolton's *A Fine Country To Starve In* contained vivid impressions of the 1930s Depression, and the *War Diaries of Weary Dunlop* (1986) and John Bellair's *From Snow to Jungle* (1987) gave insight into Donald Stuart's war years. Peter Biskup's *not slaves not citizens* (1973) greatly assisted writing about the Yandeyarra years as did Max Brown's *The Black Eureka* (1976). While his life was not well-supported by personal papers, there were was sufficient other evidence to illustrate Donald Stuart's place in historically significant times. His awareness of himself within these events was what had prompted him to record his particular view and his association with them added weight to the writing of his biography.

Nevertheless, I was assailed by the biographer's concerns about the quantity and quality of what I had found. Beyond the official facts, there was not sufficient personal detail from which to draw an authentic view of Donald Stuart's life that would give the readers of this biography 'the sense of a life being lived'. Despite the abundance of official records and supporting texts, the lack of personal papers meant I would have to tease out the character of Donald Stuart from other sources. This called for a closer examination of his writing and some reliance on the stories of people who had known him.
UNGUARANTEEABLE RELIABILITY

‘Biography is an unnatural act’ concludes Brian Matthews, as he considers how to tell Louisa Lawson’s life story. His reliance on stories from the past, obviously handed down and distorted over time, brings him to the conclusion that no story is reliable. Each retelling, he avers, is subject to ‘anyone’s natural impulse...to embroider’, 43 leaving the biographer with queries, uncertainty about to what to accept, what to omit and how to tell the story. Matthews maintains his argument throughout Louisa, closely questioning the information on which he has to rely. In revealing his anxieties about the reliability of his sources, he is surely revealing the anxieties to which any biographer is prone, that in writing a life, attempting to place the character on the page, we are, most often, dealing with nothing but stories of a questionable reliability.

Certainly, I recognised Matthew’s dilemma as relating to my collection of material for the Donald Stuart biography. I also had a body of writing to call upon, reviews of Donald Stuart’s work, other people’s opinions about him, and a collection of stored correspondence, reviews and photographs preserved in the National Library, though it seemed there was less from which a Donald Stuart biography might be pulled together than Matthews had to call upon for his Louisa. Time, however, created the difference. Louisa Lawson had died in 1920 and Matthews was writing about her in the 1980s, while Donald Stuart had died only eighteen years before I began writing about him. A number of people who had known him were still alive and willing to be interviewed.

My experience of collecting oral histories had made me aware that relying on other people’s versions of the life would throw me into the somewhat hazardous realms of storytelling. No matter how factual a story may be, it is often enhanced or exaggerated in the retelling and time inevitably adds an element of myth to the equation. In response to outside influences, the story might be tailored to suit an audience to become the story as it should have been, rather than as it was. I had been aware of hesitant seniors editing their stories as they told them 44 and understood that listeners may perceive the oral version through their own filters, put a different spin on the story and pass on an incomplete or exaggerated version. Storytelling is part of our every day and none of this is done with any purposeful intent to deceive, but stories passed down through time seldom reach an audience exactly as they start out. 45 From my studies into the letters and diaries that came out of World War I, and my interest in helping seniors to write their memories, I had gained an insight into the nature of personal stories, was well
aware of the word ‘slippery’ being commonly applied to the practice of using such sources and was wary of drawing false conclusions.

The first people I interviewed had known Donald Stuart through his association, in the latter part of his life, with the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Western Australia. Some of them were elderly, well into their eighties. They remembered an era in Australia when writers were viewed with suspicion. Katharine Susannah Prichard, one of the group’s founder members, had been dubbed The Red Witch of Greenmount for her Communist affiliations. In 1940, when her anti-war sentiments led to police raids on her house, her son had helped her to hide, in her blue plumbago hedge, documents and manuscripts that might have been regarded as incriminating. The following years were no less stormy and, as a result, the Fellowship had formed a close-knit group. As a Past President of the Fellowship in the ACT, I knew the organisation’s history, was conscious of my interviewees’ sensitivities and realised that I might be regarded as an intruder. My path was, I believe, smoothed by one of their members, who had been associated with the Western Australian branch for many years and who vouched for my authenticity. My request for information about Donald Stuart received a range of responses and I conducted a number of valuable interviews.

Interviews were set up in accordance with Oral History of Australia Association guidelines. Everyone was approached first by telephone and, when they agreed to collaborate in a formal interview, were sent a confirmatory letter which included copies of Permission Forms. In this way, prior to interview, the subjects were advised of the interview’s purpose and the use to which it would be put. More detailed discussion of Copyright took place during the interview. (See Appendix I). While most of those who undertook to give a formal, taped interview readily granted permission for use of the information they gave, some were wary of being recorded on tape and others refused to sign anything. In every case, I followed the interview with a letter of thanks and, to cover all eventualities, where the forms had not been signed or the interview formally recorded, I repeated details of my purpose in collecting the material and the use to which it would be put, at the same time giving the subject an opportunity to withdraw if they had second thoughts. In some cases, follow-up telephone contact was made to confirm details gained in interview. These processes of obtaining permission were applied to email interviews. Also, there were additional informal conversations with people who contacted me and wanted to make a contribution to the biography.
I knew that my interviewees were repeating previously told stories, about a time far removed from the new century in which they were now remembering them and that, some time after an event, the circumstances surrounding long-held memories may have been almost completely forgotten. I also understood that interviewees are involved in writing their own text and that, from the time I made an appointment, versions of the story were being rehearsed in readiness for our meeting. The following poems, written after two interviews with older colleagues of Donald's, indicate the level of intensity with which I was dealing:

The Biographer's Visit

I

Their memories rustle
in the dim-lit room
books collected over years
yellowed pages turning

Frail and pale
each prompts the other
consulting indexes
foot-noted comments

Direction avoided
independence pursued
I sift repeated thought
conspiratorial silences

prompt answers backwards
tease out of tattered volumes
flimsy cuttings hoarded against this
remembering day.

II

Reflecting mirrors raised
few windows open in
the glass between us

Sipping green tea
I scratch their surface
biography's cream

curled into ginger sponge
my fingers sticky
an unexpected guest

gathering left-overs
scant crumbs dropped
from a forgotten banquet.

Sally Clarke
Feb/March 2001
In preparation for each interview, I compiled a list of questions relating to the interviewee’s association with Donald Stuart. Following Langlois, the interviews were unstructured and allowed to take a narrative turn with ‘the interviewee permitted to follow thoughts as they occurred’. 49 This way, the questions were pursued within the context of the conversation, in association with other events and as the opportunity occurred, checking off my list as we went and gathering other material surrounding the event. My previous experience in oral history collection, especially with older people, had proved the success of this method.

Memory is influenced by what is absorbed after the event and from a variety of other sources. 50 One of my most treasured memories will always be the day I was invited to Anzac House in Perth to have lunch with surviving members of Donald Stuart’s 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion. These men had shared Donald’s worst experiences and, having heard what I was doing, they willingly provided a raft of anecdotes from the period. These mates had been there when he met his first wife; they knew about the ‘outrageous’ Scorp, but they also insisted on the depth of compassion he carried for his fellow humans. This special lunchtime date added a personal note to the readily checkable facts of their time. But, when talking about the Prisoner of War years, beyond the comment that Donald Stuart had exaggerated events following their release at the end of the war, there was a marked similarity between their memories of what had happened and his written version. These coincidences of memory perhaps confirmed the autobiographical nature of Donald Stuart’s I Think I’ll Live (1981), but, as memory is open to ‘various kinds of influences’, it was also likely that Donald Stuart’s words had entered his Army mates’ understanding of what it had been like to be a Prisoner of the Japanese. 51

I was mindful of the autobiographical content in my interviewees’ accounts as they told me about Donald Stuart and told their own stories at the same time. 52 There was often a temptation to accept the interviewee’s version of what had happened and present it as fact, but I always looked for repetition, more than one account and coinciding versions, before accepting the story as worthy of inclusion. Most often, I found that information given in interview was more useful as inspiration to direct research. Finding that records and histories written around the period, especially the war stories, often confirmed the interviewees’ versions of an event. 53 I became aware that a good story is always repeated and will survive in different forms. Biographer of C.Y. O’Connor, Tony Evans, said he demanded ‘proof’ before he would accept the story being told. 54
But with the variety of information coming my way, there were times when it was impossible for me to be so adamant. An intriguing anecdote can add to the story and, with time, the biographer's growing knowledge allows an intuitive understanding about whether to accept or reject any particular account.

While being aware of the 'various kinds of influences'\textsuperscript{55} to be considered in the collecting of oral history, I also knew the value of remembering, the life-affirming practice of telling your story. This was confirmed in my interviews with older members of the writing community, those who had known Donald Stuart. As a result of these contacts, I gained access to a surprising amount of hoarded information, collected material that supported the stories that were being told.\textsuperscript{56} Everyone, it seemed, had saved something; yellowed newspaper cuttings, photographs and books, all revealing a level of protection and possessiveness of Donald Stuart. He had, after all, been an acknowledged and prolific writer and that brings its own respect. Autographed copies of novels, his writing on scraps of paper, photographs, and the ability to talk about Donald as someone they had known, confirmed his contemporaries' association with this Western Australian writer. That he was seen as important enough to merit a biography only added to their desire to talk about him.

However, a level of enquiry surrounds the collecting of oral histories, illustrating the historian's concern about the story being told. In recent years, after periods of being discredited, oral history collection is now regarded as a valuable method of confirming and personalising historical events. Set against this is an acceptance that the quality of even official records may not always be reliable, a recognition that these previously revered accounts are 'also fallible and subject to bias'.\textsuperscript{57} At a 1994 meeting of historians in Pasadena, the list of topics under discussion included 'the temptation of fiction; professional standards, whether the past can be narrated at all; and the question of the self in the text'. Out of the meeting came an understanding that 'narratives and analyses contain no more than one possible and incomplete account of a past that is never fully recoverable in all its complexity' and that the way an oral historian presents the knowledge cannot help but be subjective.\textsuperscript{58} This understanding gives rise to the biographer's anguish, drives the hunt for detail—another oral history, another version, another opinion, just might clarify the point. The reality is, as Hazel Rowley wrote in the Preface to her biography of Christina Stead, 'lives cannot be recovered'. For this we might substitute 'fully-recovered', for she also quotes Christina Stead as having written: 'The true portrait of a person should be built as a painter builds it, with hints from
everyone, brush-strokes, thousands of little touches.\textsuperscript{59} As the biographer is immersed in the business of collecting information, impressions and other people's memories or accounts of what happened, s/he gains in experience as each view is added and, with time, is able to place 'the evidence in a wider context'. As the picture builds, even when there is nothing else to confirm the particular event, with the growing amount of information to hand, it becomes possible to decide 'whether as a whole it rings true'.\textsuperscript{60}

Oral accounts, gathered from people who had known Donald Stuart at a particular time in his life, added further brush strokes to the emerging picture. These allowed me 'to illustrate or confirm [his] life story' to 'register memories'\textsuperscript{61} of him and to gain an insight into the way he had been perceived by those around him. As well as the oral histories collected from his contemporaries, I was able to access a number of interviews with Donald, recorded during the last ten years of his life, in which he had told his own story. Even allowing for the distortion or suppression of material in these accounts, it was still possible to place these interviews in context, to gain an impression of the man and his philosophies. As Paul Thompson avers, 'such distortion or suppression in a life story is not, it must be emphasised, purely negative'.\textsuperscript{62} Hearing Donald Stuart's voice on these recordings, listening to how he responded to questioning, provided a personal aural impression. In these interviews, there are many coincidences between the life as he told it and as he wrote it.

When placed alongside opinions gathered from interviews conducted with people who had known him some years prior to his death, an unquestionable element of repetition enters the memories. This places them in the 'grooved' category, remembered impressions, usually highlights or indelible images, that become ingrained in memory and often grow with repetition. David James Duncan said of these accounts: 'more often they’re self contained images of shock or of inordinate empathy'.\textsuperscript{63} In light of some stories I was to hear about Donald Stuart, I find this an apt description.

As I gathered information from a wide range of sources, like Brian Matthews, I became very aware of the gaps in my story. I was conscious of this as a first full-length biography which may lay a foundation for later evaluations of Donald Stuart's life and work. I believed that enough myths had been woven around the Stuart family and this led me to concentrate on the factual basis of his life. I was not inclined to put together an outright fiction. Surely, this biography presented an opportunity to search out the man behind the writing, but the stories were there, clamouring to be used and I
sympathised with Matthews' urge towards writing a fictional version of the life. I became even more aware of the autobiographical element in Donald Stuart's writing as an important source of information, and the temptation to blend it with recorded facts was strong.

Donald Stuart usually denied any autobiographical intent in his writing, but he did, often, identify himself with his characters and would admit, on occasions, to writing semi-autobiography. All the novels are set within areas of his own experience, the last four so closely following his life story as to be labelled 'autobiographical' by more than one of the people to whom I spoke.

In writing the biography of a writer, it can be argued that the published writing is a creative use of life experience shaped to tell the story. That this is recognisable in Donald Stuart's work, and in the oral retelling of his story, is a view encouraged when official and historical records support the spoken versions of his life and provide a believable framework for his last four novels. It must be acknowledged that, while novels and short stories may depict a life fairly clearly, they are not reliable sources, not least among the concerns being the amount of time which has elapsed between the life lived and the life as written.

Uncertainty about the available material, and conclusions which might be drawn from it, is of concern to any biographer and it is common to consider the fictional element contained in a finished biography. As he reflects 'on the truth of fiction and the truth of history', Matthews looks at versions of Henry Lawson's life, as written by Henry Lawson. Owen Stevens, Matthews' alternative voice and his biographer's conscience, sheds doubt on 'Lawson's reconstruction of the mood of his childhood home'. The account was written in 1903-1908, the period after Lawson returned from England, a journey he described as 'that wild run to London, that wrecked and ruined me'. At the time, Stevens judges, Lawson was 'prone to self-pity' and the mood he was in when he wrote about his poverty-stricken upbringing must have had an effect on his account of these memories. In effect, Stevens' musings cast doubt on what Lawson scholars have come to accept as an accurate description of the life. Matthews, who it must be acknowledged has a sympathetic view of his subject, works beyond Stevens' insight and sees that the circumstances of Lawson's inaccurate remembering may not be as clear-cut as they appear. Thus is illustrated the complex relationship that exists between the biographer and his conscience, as he is caught in a continual circle of questioning and reasoning about the life.
ESSAY

Some opinions suggest that, as a novel contains the author's imaginatively reproduced experiences and observations, it is entirely possible to use novels as source material for writing the author's life story. In his Biographical Research (2002), Brian Roberts considers the "factuality" within the novel as meshing with what is now considered to be the "fictionality" of research writing and, as he argues it, this allows the use of passages from novels as valid sources of information for the telling of life stories. Roberts also cites an opinion that judges "the debate on the differences between fiction and non-fiction as being "increasingly arid" and acknowledges the combination of 'experience, observation and imagination' necessary to the writing of narrative, including biography.

My research led me to believe that Donald Stuart's novels and short stories contained definite clues about the man, and a wealth of information about the life he had led. His writing evokes an atmosphere, depicts places he moved in and relates to the times in which he lived. Unlike Lawson, Donald Stuart's is a philosophical, at times optimistic view of the life and, in itself, this is something that calls for recognition and interpretation. His early childhood stories, coinciding as they do with those of his Western Australian contemporaries and available oral histories of the time, draw a positive picture, but the mood darkens with the father's accident and the family's move to Gosnells. Illustrating this is Donald Stuart's unpublished short story, 'Time Telescoped', with its more sinister picture of this time, a particularly valuable inclusion in the National Library's collection of Donald Stuart Papers.

In the Drought Foul version of the Gosnells period, Donald's descriptions are of a place similar to that described in valuable oral history records held in the Gosnells Public Library. At a meeting of the Gosnells District Historical Society, long-time residents in the area readily recognised Donald Stuart's depictions of the time and the place. But these shrewd observers also pointed out the errors in his account. The water holes, so much part of the district's life and experience, are incorrectly named, and there is some muddling of time and the names of people involved. Otherwise, so closely did the Society's members relate to the written version that, when told that the Drought Foul family had lived opposite the Animal Pound on Albany Road, there was some discussion about who might have owned the house they rented. The group was discussing the supposedly fictional Drought Foul family, but there seems no doubt they were also discussing the other family which had lived on Albany Road, Gosnells—the Stuarts. Donald Stuart had stuck closely to a recognisable setting, sufficiently enough

286
to support the factual at least as much as the fictional level of his story, hinting strongly at an autobiographical content in the family events about which he wrote.

Donald Stuart’s final two novels, set in World War II, draw upon his experiences as a serving soldier, recreating the circumstances of his time in the Middle East and vividly relating what it was like to be a Prisoner of the Japanese. The World War II period and the quite controversial time which gave rise to the first novel, *Yandy* (1959), are well-supported by official documents and other writing. Through chapters dealing with these periods in his life, after some trial and error, I arrived at a way of putting together his story. Carefully researching around the topics, I resolved to illustrate the established facts with Donald Stuart’s written work and anecdotal material gathered at interview. My decision was to use this material where it illuminated the life, but to indicate my sources, noting where fact ended and a possible fictional element began, and to acknowledge a level of speculation when using this material.

Though questioning the quantity, quality and reliability of the material available to assist his writing about Louisa Lawson’s life, Matthews still gives all the questionable stories a place in his biography, albeit in his alternative text, contributed under the guise of an alternative voice. An example of how Matthews does this can be found in his discussion about circumstances surrounding Henry Lawson’s birth. He presents five stories, questions their validity, selects the three family-held memories, that say the poet was born in a tent in the middle of a storm, and dismisses two stories that deny this. He sifts around, seeking the ‘truth’ until he comes to a realisation that he is searching, not for an account of Henry Lawson’s birth, but for an account of Louisa Lawson giving birth to her first child. No woman, Matthews concludes, would forget the circumstances surrounding the birth of her first child. As the original telling must have come from Louisa, Matthews decides that details of the event must have been accurately and faithfully recounted. Despite Gertrude Lawson’s known extravagance in writing her mother’s story, Matthews accepts her family folklore about the birth of the ‘great writer’. Matthews’ enquiry illustrates the biographer at work—involved with the biographical subject, engaged in the search, influenced by the information at hand and, with his biographer’s conscience, sifting and selecting evidence to arrive at a considered version of the life story.

Donald Stuart tells a story about how his mother, Florence Stuart, gave birth to ‘her first child, Julian Martin, in a tent on the Coolgardie goldfields, in the middle of a
storm, and without the aid of a doctor. One can see the shadows on the tent, hear the woman’s cries of pain, sense the concern of those surrounding her. When I first read about this event, the rendition seemed too dramatic, almost unbelievable, possibly one of Donald’s exaggerated yarns. But my research informed me that Julian was born in Coolgardie in 1897, which at that time was a tent city and subject to regular red dust storms. Further research made it most likely that Florence was assisted by one of the women who, like her, had followed her husband to the fields in search of gold. Sifting around the story as Donald Stuart told it, like Matthews, I found it impossible to dismiss the circumstances of this birth, so firmly entrenched in Stuart family folklore.

Matthews explores his biographical territory in great detail, weighs fact and evidence and, in creating an alternative text and an alternative voice, presents his concerns about getting the story right, but he also admits to a ‘yearning for the truth of fiction’ and talks about ‘using the word story interchangeably with biography’ as a way over his dilemma. Surely, here, he reaches the heart of biography, life-writing, the life story, the narrative, the life as story, revealing the biographer as one who gathers together all the stories that make up a life and involves him/herself in the entirely natural act of storytelling.

COMPASSIONATE BIOGRAPHY

Serious biographers hold an awareness of what Richard Ellman chooses to call ‘biographical decorum’. Among the biographers speaking at the National Library’s 2001 The Secret Self Conference, there was general agreement on the need to write ‘compassionate biography’, to write with sympathy and understanding about the difficult aspects of a life. In his opening address, John Ritchie, at the time General Editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, spoke about the biographer’s need ‘to always respect the autonomy of a subject’s life, and be prepared to allow the people about whom we write to be inconsistent, to fall ill, to tire with age’. Lytton Strachey had made a plea for the humanity of his stiff Victorian figures; in this century, with its emphasis on intimate personal disclosure, John Ritchie’s reminder of the biographer’s ‘immense responsibility, perhaps a moral obligation, to the subject whose life rests in their hands’ is a plea to respect that same humanity.

In this regard, it becomes apparent that the course of any biography depends on the relationship a biographer develops with the subject. Biography should not be seen as an opportunity ‘to dish the dirt’, get stuck on the difficult images and write the life in such
a way that it is designed to shock and enter the lists for a popular Hollywood blockbuster. Such biographies have their place and their readers, but even in this century, when readers are assailed by a plethora of revealed detail, the serious biographer will show respect for the subject. This does not mean the sticky aspects of a life should be ignored, rather that they should be placed in context and be seen to reveal character and add balance to the life under consideration. Matthews, an undeniably sympathetic biographer, is clearly concerned about the need to admit flaws in Louisa Lawson’s character and he has to come to terms with the reality that she ‘might “appear in a less than complimentary light”’. His musings around this difficulty bring him to the conclusion that ‘there is no point’ in denying the times when she had behaved in a less than exemplary manner. 76

Biographer David Day spoke about how his initial interest in writing a biography of John Curtin was to examine his public achievements and write a conventional biography of ‘Australia’s wartime prime minister’. But, when he began to look at Curtin’s childhood and came across previously unknown details about the father, he changed his plan. Day had thought to concentrate on Curtin’s political career and largely ignore ‘the private and emotional side’ of the life, but, armed with the previously unknown personal details, he developed a desire to examine the ‘whole person’ and to write what he called ‘a more balanced life’. Five previous Curtin biographies had concentrated on the political career and dealt only briefly with the early life. The authors had come to, what David Day recognised as, erroneous conclusions about Curtin’s father as an upright figure, when in reality he had been a ‘disgraced police constable’. The father’s character had clearly affected the son and, surely, provided an explanation for difficulties Curtin had later in life. Three of the previous biographers had written ‘uncritical portrayals’ of Curtin, but two, who wanted to examine the matter of his alcoholism, met considerable opposition from the family, especially Curtin’s widow who, to quash the image of Curtin as a drunkard, decided to ‘burn some of the remaining letters between her and her husband’. Day encountered similar opposition when he wrote the biography of Curtin’s successor, Australia’s post-war prime minister, Ben Chifley. Again, he ‘had to confront the concerns of some members of the Chifley family’, yet still believed he had been right, out of respect for his readers, to concentrate on getting the ‘history right’ and sensitively to consider the questionable aspects of his subjects’ lives. 77
When Michael Holroyd was given the opportunity to re-evaluate 'Lytton Strachey's life as a biographical historian', he originally estimated that he would write 70,000 words and complete the task in a year, but the biography took three years and ran to two volumes, published in 1966 and 1967. Revealing as it did previously unaired aspects of the Bloomsbury set, controversy was bound to follow its publication; indeed there were attempts to suppress the biography. Holroyd's picture of Strachey in his position as leader of the Bloomsbury Set and details about homosexuality, not only Strachey's, but also that of those surrounding him, received a mixed reception. James Strachey, who had allowed Holroyd access to his brother's papers, was not particularly pleased with his interpretation and, while some of Holroyd's critics praised his 'candour', others charged him with 'cruelty'.

The experiences of these two biographers, and they are not alone in being criticised for how they have presented a life, illustrate how biographers can be caught in the sticky aspects of a personality. And yet, if the life is of sufficient significance for it to merit a biography, it is unlikely that it will be found without its dark and difficult times. Day comments about previous Curtin biographies as being uncritical of their subject and, as his wider search discovered, incorrect in important detail, which adds a note of dissatisfaction when considering the value of these accounts. Day's decision to 'get the history right' was, surely, the correct one, but his choice was also to deal sensitively with his subjects' lives.

Holroyd was faced with a similar decision. Given the task of writing Lytton Strachey's life, and with an enormous amount of documentation to support what he was writing, he could not have ignored the details of such an important literary figure or left out the scandalous 1920s artistic set of London intellectuals and pacifists, which included Virginia Woolfe, novelist E.M. Forster and influential twentieth-century economist, John Maynard Keynes. The level of controversy surrounding Holroyd's disclosures about his subject may be judged by an article, published in the Spectator, warning biographers about the dangers of following Holroyd's example, and suggesting that anyone who might be the subject of biography should destroy their private letters 'and be very careful what they write in their journals'. When Lytton Strachey's biography was first published, in the 1960s, such intimate detail and revelation about known figures did not usually enter the public arena, making it evident that time is an important factor in the way a life story may be reviewed. Holroyd believed that he would have received 'a much less bumpy ride' if his Lytton Strachey biography had
been published ten years later,\textsuperscript{80} by which time other equally revealing life stories had been published and accepted, though not without the controversy that has come to surround the genre. The biographer's position increasingly appears as one of inherent conflict.

As well as concerns expressed by family, close friends and sympathetic critics about how a life is presented, the biographical subject's anxiety is also to be taken into account. Published writers and public figures cannot help but be aware that their writing and their public record will survive after them, and many are wary of biography. To outwit the biographer, they may attempt to conduct their own scenario, orchestrate the lasting impression and go to great lengths to protect their reputation. Some writers, hoping to circumvent a biography, will write their autobiography, and biographers are likely to be in a constant state of horror when they hear about the quantity of letters and manuscripts that have been destroyed.

Henry James is said to have heaped forty years of correspondence on a huge bonfire and watched as the letters turned to ashes.\textsuperscript{81} James's abhorrence of the biographer is found in his novella, \textit{The Aspern Papers} (1935). In his desire to gain access to some long-lost letters, James shows the biographer in his tale as someone who will go to extraordinary lengths to get close to his poet. James partially exonerates the biographer by pulling him back from the final traitorous step of marrying Miss Tina, the guardian of the letters, in order to attain his goal. In disappointing her expectations, however, James does expose him for the cad he is. The horror in this account of a biographical search is as much in the biographer's duplicity as in Miss Tina's destruction of the precious letters and the thwarting of his desire to own them.\textsuperscript{82} However, as Henry James was also aware, bonfires will not stop the determined researcher. James knew he could not prevent those who had received his letters from handing them on, or selling them, to a biographer or literary researcher.\textsuperscript{83}

Christina Stead is one of several Australian writers who destroyed 'all the drafts of her manuscripts and most of her private papers, diaries and intimate correspondence' and would say that she had already written her autobiography in her fiction.\textsuperscript{84} Western Australian writer, Katharine Susannah Prichard, was another author fiercely careful of her privacy. She insisted that all her unpublished writing be destroyed after her death and, in the latter part of her life, was known to have lit more than one bonfire of her papers. She was horrified to hear that some of the people with whom she had corresponded had given her letters to literary researchers. From then on, she demanded
that her permission be sought before any of her letters were used and, rather reluctantly, she wrote her autobiography, *Child of the Hurricane* (1963). A family view of her is found in *Wild Weeds and Windflowers* (1975), a sensitive compilation of her letters and his memories, written by her son, Ric Throssell.\(^5\)

Bearing all this in mind, as Matthews illustrates in detailing his concerns about how he is to accurately depict Louisa Lawson’s life, the biographer must tread lightly and pick a careful path. As I began to interview people who wanted to tell me about Donald Stuart, those who had a lasting memory of him, several of them wanted to tell me about how he was inclined to break away from the successful author image in which they had cast him and behave in a manner they judged as ‘outrageous’. Some were so insistent on this view of him, there was even a time when I considered my role in reawakening an interest in his work. But I was always sure there was more to this writer than I was being told. My evaluation of him was as an author who deserved more interest than he had been given and I found more than one critic who supported my idea that, when considering the life of a writer, the main value lies in the work, which might be lessened and ‘pay somewhat for the so complete exhibition of the man and the life’.\(^6\)

My first interview was with a member of the Fellowship of Australian Writers executive, who had come to Western Australia from Victoria. Just before the launch of the seventh published novel, *Walk, Trot, Canter and Die* (1975), he had recorded an extensive interview with Donald Stuart. ‘The sheer volume’ of Stuart’s work, this interviewee considered, made the author an interesting subject of study and, ‘possibly, he did merit a biography’.\(^7\) I was to become familiar with this grudging acceptance of Stuart’s work. Before the interview was over, I was regaled with instances of Donald Stuart that revealed his ‘outrageous’ alter ego, ‘Scorp’ Stuart. I was also to become familiar with these accounts of Donald’s bush style sensibilities which appeared to have failed the expectations of those around him.

Initially, I was reluctant to see this as a major characteristic of my biographical subject, but a few days after that first interview, another equally qualified friend of Donald’s confronted me with this side of his personality even more strongly. I began to wonder if I wanted to spend my time writing about someone who appeared to have had little consideration for the people around him. In time, though, my research would show this as only one aspect of his attitude towards some people. The ‘outrageous behaviour’ stories were repeated during several interviews, often with a certain amount of glee. The
men whom I interviewed expressed solicitude for their wives witnessing this behaviour, but apparently had no such reservations about relating the details to me. In time, the discovery of an interview in which Donald Stuart spoke openly about his drinking, allowed me a way of writing about his problems and, when I read the Children's Court records about obscene telephone calls he had made at the age of fourteen, another of his difficult times could be written about with certainty. Like Matthews, I was able verify these situations through the recorded evidence.

Nevertheless, I recognised the repeated images of Donald Stuart behaving badly as grooved memories, lasting impressions ingrained through feelings of embarrassment at his sometimes inappropriate behaviour. In her analysis of biography, Janet Malcolm recognises that a biographer dealing with a deceased subject needs to work out how to write about people who can no longer change their contemporaries' perception of them, who are discovered frozen in certain unnatural or unpleasant attitudes, like characters in tableau vivants or people in snapshots with their mouths open.

Donald Stuart's outspokenness, his bushman's style of repartee, his womanising and irreverence for anything smacking of authority, had, on occasions, upset and embarrassed Fellowship members, most of whom had known him only in the last decade or so of his life. Some of their stories bore a resemblance to anecdotes on the edge of Donald Stuart's novels, making me consider that his autobiography may be partially reflected in his peripheral characters, rather than always in the novels' main protagonist. But a sameness and a discernible repetition dominated the accounts, so that, if all of them were reproduced, they would have created a fog around this biography. This is not to deny the recollections of those who had known him in his later years; they presented a valuable insight and these aspects of Donald Stuart's character had to be taken into account. Nevertheless I questioned the way some interviewees insisted on presenting him always in this less than favourable light. It became important to search beyond these images, to argue for a younger Donald and for the man behind the writing.

I was reading the novels and admired Stuart's descriptions of his north-west and the rhythms enchantingly imposed on his words. In my opinion, his two war novels stand well alongside other examples of Australian war literature. However, my growing awareness of Donald (Scorp) Stuart's larrikinism had provided an insight into his writing, making me more conscious of a writer who, within his own landscape, could manifest himself quite differently.
The women to whom I spoke were more inclined to see a gentler side of Donald Stuart, though I detected a certain reticence in their responses. Rather than be seen to speak ill of the dead, some were inclined to deny knowledge of, or only hint at, any behaviour they thought may reflect ill upon the author. When coupled with little comprehension of the writing, the denial failed to recognise that Donald Stuart’s work could have its own life beyond the ‘outrageous’ image. Some of these, women who had been loyal friends of the author’s sister, Lyndall Hadow, succumbed to their own need. They sought to protect not only Donald, but also his sister, the whole Stuart family, the Stuart legend.

This level of protection was shown to extremes in one particular case. The woman had attended Perth Modern School at the same time as Donald, was a long-time member of the Fellowship of Australian Writers and had known him well. She had written a short, unpublished biography of Donald Stuart and it seemed important for me to contact her. I understood she was frail-aged and, at the time, about ninety years old. She did not answer my letter requesting an interview and ignored several subsequent messages. At least two people whom she knew very well spoke to her on my behalf, but she still refused to see me. Nor was I allowed access to her biography of Donald. From what information I was able to glean, it seemed unlikely I could have gained anything new from pursuing this line of enquiry, but I also realised that even a chance remark from her might have opened an unexpected area of research. Regretfully, I had to accept that this avenue was closed to me.

These attitudes of protection and possession might be interpreted as expressions of loyalty but, in the end, may be construed as a misguided short-sightedness which contributed, in part, to the later neglect of Donald Stuart’s work. Ironically, working against them, were Donald’s own words:

I don’t care what they say about me... so long as they say it at length... I don’t care they say about Donald Stuart his latest novel is punk and then they go on three thousand words to say why it’s punk, that’s good business. If they say that Donald Stuart has just written a wonderful novel, you should read it, I am very disappointed about that because it is not enough."}

He was talking about the reception of his work, but everything I had come to understand about the man led me to believe that he would be equally scathing about
those who wished to protect his reputation and, in so doing, keep his work from reaching a wider audience.

It became evident that he was a person who had elicited a strong response from those around him and just as the 'outrageous' stories had to be admitted into the text, there were also the recollections of those who appreciated other aspects of Donald’s personality and remembered him fondly. Interviews with the Stuart family confirmed the complex nature of my subject. Their view of him, as a much-loved family member, enhanced my understanding and I was grateful to find this balance. Donald Stuart’s nieces openly regarded him as having been an important presence in their early lives. His sister-in-law had a fond remembrance of him as a favourite brother-in-law, though she did acknowledge, as flaws in his character, his ability to isolate himself totally and his disregard for opinions other than his own. She and her two daughters were appalled when I suggested some people might have criticised his behaviour. Another two of his nieces, while also acknowledging his failings, clearly held a deep and lasting regard for this special uncle.

The complexities of Donald Stuart’s character, the result of a varied and unusual life, are confirmed in the records and revealed in the repeated/edited versions he gave of himself when interviewed. He brought all of this into his writing, to tell a story that, for interest and adventure, rivals that of his father. But the influence Donald’s behaviour had on the opinions of his colleagues bears out the way a writer’s reputation may affect assessment of the work. An in-built, lasting impression lies within the collected body of writing, but in the author’s lifetime, often continuing for some years after death, other opinions, other forces may be at work. For some it is difficult to achieve the separation, or merging, of an author on the page and the author in society. Those whose opinions matter will unerringly base judgement upon the written work, but, as Donald Stuart’s story illustrates, the author’s personality and outward behaviour can leave questions hovering over the writing. Especially important, it seems, are the opinions given by a peer group, whose personal stories may well reflect the prejudices of those who tell them, but can also create a schism in the audience.

The balance to be achieved in the writing of biography, between the biographer, the subject, those surrounding him/her and the story which appears on the page, proves yet another area of biographical tension. The question of how to achieve that balance is the focus of Janet Malcolm’s analysis of biography, The Silent Woman (1993). Choosing to
Examine memoirs and biographies that surround the fraught life and death of Sylvia Plath, Malcolm considers one biography in particular, *Bitter Fame* (1989), by Anne Stevenson.

As Malcolm explores Stevenson's story, she arrives at a belief that circumstances surrounding the writing of *Bitter Fame* 'gave the sense of being as much about the problems of biographical writing as about Sylvia Plath'. Stevenson's biography was not well received. The author had attempted to be even-handed in her presentation of the story and, rather than pouring her sympathies towards Sylvia Plath, as other biographers had done, she chose to come out on the side of Ted Hughes. Complications arose with her decision to illustrate her point by including vitally-written excerpts from memoirs by so-called friends of the Hughes's which, in Malcolm's opinion, highlighted the 'mantle of pallid judiciousness [she as biographer] was obliged to wear'.

Malcolm recognises that the main part of the problem was the disbelief of a public already caught up in 'Plath's “perverse legend”'. 'The world,' she writes, 'likes to hold on to its fantasy, rumour, politics and ghoulish gossip, not dispel them, and nobody wanted to hear that it was Hughes who was good and Plath who was bad.' The publication of *Bitter Fame* gave rise to what appears as a free-for-all between those who had anything at all to do with the hapless pair, a further pawing over of the tragically dead Plath's remains.

Surrounding the controversy was an understanding that this biography had been unduly influenced by Ted Hughes's sister, Olwyn Hughes, who in her role as literary agent for the Hughes's estate carried her own weight into a biography of which she appears, at the outset, to have approved. Malcolm's enquiry examines the originally cooperative, but eventually destructive, relationship that had formed between Anne Stevenson and Olwyn Hughes. The extent of Stevenson's anguish over the publication of *Bitter Fame*, may be discerned in what appears as a disclaimer made in her Author's Note. She declares, as any biographer would, that she had 'received a great deal of help from Olwyn Hughes', but goes on to assert: 'Ms Hughes's contributions to the text have made it almost a work of dual authorship.' She appears to be saying that, though she had tried her best to bring the story to a conclusion she was happy about, the forces exerted upon her had prevented her from doing this. The note brings to the biography what Malcolm describes as 'the sound of doubt, the sound of a crack opening in the wall of the biographer's self assurance'.

296
Yet Malcolm describes *Bitter Fame* as 'by far the most intelligent and the only aesthetically satisfying of the five biographies' that had appeared prior to 1993. Her later meetings and correspondence with Anne Stevenson reveal the difficulties Stevenson had in trying to extricate herself from Olwyn Hughes's undue influence, to write her own version of the subject and to tell the story as she saw it. She believed she had failed to do so, to the extent that she regretted ever having allowed *Bitter Fame* to be published. One cannot escape the impression that this author emerged damaged from the four years she spent writing a biography which had not only got out of hand, but which also attracted a great deal of criticism.

Malcolm presents a vivid picture of Anne Stevenson as an author who felt herself powerless to control her own work. Perhaps *The Silent Woman* may be regarded as a biographer's cautionary tale, warning writers to choose carefully between authorised and unauthorised biography. One might be tempted to advise particular care in choosing the life you will write about, but at the beginning of such a project, it is not always possible to see the way ahead or to be aware of obstacles that may occur. Stevenson’s judgement appears to have been clouded by a financial offer she felt unable to refuse. For all her good intentions to bring some reason to the Hughes’s story, it seems she made an unfortunate choice. However, her right to challenge an established view of the Sylvia Plath story should not be in doubt.

Malcolm’s part in bringing Stevenson’s side of the story to light in itself bears some examination. From the beginning, she declares her understanding of Stevenson’s, the biographer’s, position and makes her own connection with Stevenson and Sylvia Plath—the three women were about the same age, middle-class Americans, growing up in what Stevenson describes as the sexually frustrating age of the 1950s—and she maintains a sympathetic recognition of Stevenson’s viewpoint and an understanding of what she had set out to do.

In the early pages of her book, Malcolm also exhibits an attitude of abhorrence for what she calls ‘the voyeurism and busybodyism’ that surround the writing and reading of biography, the ‘listening to backstairs gossip and reading other people’s mail’ that goes on within what is currently regarded as the most popular form of literature. Nevertheless, she thoroughly examines all areas of the Hughes’s lives and, while deploiring the way Sylvia Plath’s mother published her daughter’s letters home, she manages to include excerpts from the letters, as well as many of the, what she regards as scurrilous, stories about Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. In the guise of undertaking a
wider analysis of biography, one cannot escape the idea that Malcolm has written yet another biography about the couple, with a level of ‘voyeurism and busybodyism’ that spills over into the life of Anne Stevenson.

Malcolm turns the spotlight on all the players, Sylvia Plath and Ted and Olwyn Hughes, the biographers and writers of memoirs, even the man who lived in the flat below Sylvia Plath, who was the last person to see her alive on the evening before her suicide. As Malcolm allows us into the interviews and lets us read the letters, we become familiar with the grievances the major and minor players hold towards each other and to the public, and come to an understanding of all the difficult circumstances that surrounded the writing of this particular biography. In inviting the reader to consider the case from every angle, Malcolm skillfully weaves the stories together in such a way as to leave us in sympathy with all of those concerned. That she does so successfully may be divined in the way she appears to have maintained sympathetic relationships and continuing correspondences with all of those involved.

Malcolm’s completed study raises the level of biographical writing above the gossip columns. She allows the reader to see what goes into the writing of biography and how people’s lives may be affected by what is being said. She does not make an outright plea for compassionate consideration of the biographical subject or those surrounding the story, but her concern is implicit in her writing.

In a letter to Malcolm, Stevenson made a remark of which biographers, and readers of biography, might take note: ‘Truth is, in its nature, multiple and contradictory, part of the flux of history, untrappable in language. The only real truth is through doubt and tolerance.’ Through the tolerance and understanding that Malcolm brings to her ‘meditation on the art of biography’ in The Silent Woman, we come to a better understanding of the complexities that surrounded the lives of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes in the years leading up to, and following, Plath’s suicide. Malcolm’s analysis of their difficult story is an example of biography written with compassion and sympathy for all sides.

In writing Donald Stuart’s story, it became necessary for me to balance the ‘outrageous’ tales about him with what I perceived as the other side of the man revealed in the writing, the one who had gathered a certain fondness from family, friends and younger writers, those who respected him for what he was and what he represented. He had the skills to tell his story about his time as a serving soldier and as a Prisoner of the Japanese. Writing about the years he had spent in the outback he recorded for all time.
his version of the Australia he experienced in his youth and young manhood, conveyed his love of the north-west and showed his awareness of the indigenous Australian people within this landscape. I was always conscious of him as a fellow human being and, in endeavouring to uncover the whole story, remained aware of the picture being drawn, the life being interpreted.

ORDERING A LIFE STORY

In Matthews' *Louisa* and Malcolm's *The Silent Woman*, the authors demonstrate difficulties surrounding the writing of life stories, biographers' concerns about getting the story right and uncertainties about how to interpret the material that is left behind, and what other people have said or are saying about the subject. Matthews and Malcolm use their enquiries as a vehicle for writing biography, offering this as an alternative method for ordering a life story, one that exposes readers to details of the search for the subject and alerts them to the biographer's anxieties. Other methods of writing biography have followed, taking the genre away from the conventional narrative starting with the subject's birth and early life and proceeding chronologically towards death. Indeed, with a growing number of alternatives now being accepted as methods for writing life stories, in recent years, the biographer who chooses the conventional narrative finds him/herself needing to defend the decision.

Author Tony Evans explained his decision to write a chronological biography of C.Y. O'Connor, as his own need to tread the same path as the brilliant engineer responsible for the construction of Fremantle Harbour and best known as Chief Engineer of the pipeline project which supplied water to Western Australia's eastern goldfields. Evans wanted to feel the story unfold, to take the journey with his subject and, as he followed the path, attempt to understand O'Connor's anguish as he moved towards that last fatal day of his suicide. Evans believed that by immersing himself in his subject's life, he would be able to write a vital biography that captured O'Connor's mood and bring an understanding to what had driven him towards that fatal act.

Nadia Wheatley's decision to write the life of Charmian Clift chronologically came about because she found it necessary to engage her audience in the life as it was lived, and not allow Clift's highly publicised suicide to overtake the story. Charmian Clift is Australia's Sylvia Plath and her husband, George Johnston, is the Ted Hughes character who was bound to be blamed for her suicide. Details of the 'immensely talented' couple's passionate, but ultimately destructive, life were well-known. Following Clift's
death, opinions had been voiced about how her talents had not been realised and how, if it had been Johnston who died first, she would have gone on to be one of Australia’s great writers.102 Wheatley felt the need to counter the ‘considerable blurring of the boundaries between fact, fiction and myth’103 that surrounded her subject and, given her audience’s prior knowledge, she believed she could do this best by bringing a chronological ordering to the life. She also believed it was her job ‘to try to trick’ her readers ‘into forgetting’ what they knew, ‘to suspend their foresight’ and allow the life to unfold as Charmian Clift had lived it, without knowing ‘the narrative sequence’. Wheatley hoped she could engage her readers, so they would ‘live in the day-to-day moments of Clift’s life’ and see the suicide as the ‘least significant thing she ever did’.104 Wheatley’s concentration is to squash the myths that surround Charmian Clift, to see her, not just as personifying her suicide and as victim of her husband’s manipulation, but as the brilliant writer crushed by the accepted mores of her time—‘acknowledged for her beauty, but not for her brains’ summons up the period and her place in it. Despite the suicide, Wheatley wants readers to carry away the view of Charmian Clift as an ultimately hopeful woman, who was fully-engaged in living.105

Biographers of already deceased subjects start with an awareness of the death, know how it occurred and how the story comes to an end and, particularly in the case of a publicised suicide, are faced with how to handle this final event in the life they are writing. The death placed at the end of a chronological story provides a not unexpected and acceptable finish to a tale, but on occasions the author may feel constrained by the convention and decide to start with the death, get it out of the way and concentrate on the living. Ward MacNally begins his biography of Professor Ted Strehlow, *Aborigines Artefacts and Anguish* (1981), with Professor Strehlow ‘slumped sideways in his chair before falling dead at the feet of his wife’ of six years, Kathie Stuart Strehlow (whose first husband was Donald Stuart).106 This dramatic first image pulls readers into the otherwise chronological story more completely than the subject’s early history might have done. Strehlow’s death occurred just hours before he was to launch The Strehlow Research Foundation, in what should have been a highlight of his achievement, his life work. While C.Y. O’Connor’s and Charmian Clift’s suicides leave worrying question marks at the end of their lives, Ted Strehlow had been ill for some time and his death at the age of 70 years was not unexpected. The end of his life also marked the beginning of a very public wrangle for ownership of Strehlow’s extensive collection of Aboriginal artefacts and gathered aural material. McNally knew that his readers would have heard
about the struggle and, unlike Wheatley, he opted to use their knowledge as an entrée into the biography. His choice to write Strehlow’s death at the beginning was calculated to place his readers in a recognisable spot in the story, to engage their interest and allow the historical unfolding to follow.

In all three of these examples, the death was dramatic and, particularly in the case of the suicides, assumed an importance that had a tendency to overshadow the lives. Donald Stuart’s sudden death in Broome, just before his 70th birthday, also had questions hanging over it. His contemporaries held a belief that he had perpetrated his own death and rumours surrounding his demise fed on his own belief that death, like survival, was something over which you could have some control. That there might have been an alternative explanation, that he was sick and, in continuing to smoke heavily and to drink, had ignored his doctor’s advice, seems to be something none of his colleagues wanted to hear about. If Donald had, in any way, brought about this final event in his life, it could only serve to enhance his story, for it was the life as he had lived it that made Donald Stuart’s story worth telling and his death had come fittingly, in the right place and at the right time. The nineteen-year old Donald had worked in Broome at the height of the 1930s Depression and it was in Broome that his sister told him about their father’s death. Fifty years later, following the launch of a book about Broome, for which he had written the text to Roger Garwood’s striking pictorial representations, Donald Stuart was back in one of the scenes of his youth. His unexpected death at this time and in this place, gives his story a certain circularity, which my later decision about how to begin the biography tended to emphasise.

My original impulse had been to start with the birth and the family, and move chronologically through the life to the end. However, I was always conscious of Donald Stuart’s father wanting to take over the story. Allowing Julian Alexander Stuart’s strong presence into the first chapter might give readers the impression that this was his biography. It was suggested that my, then, Chapter 3, describing a defining moment in Donald Stuart’s life, would make a better beginning and this was sound advice. A recent example of biography starting with a defining moment can be found in Peter F. Alexander’s biography of Australian poet, Les Murray. While using a mainly chronological ordering, Alexander, begins this life story with the poet’s near-death experience in 1996, a dramatic opening which attracts the readers’ attention, forces a view of the subject as someone who may not always be with us, and stresses the tenuous hold we all have on life.
I chose to start Donald Stuart's story on the day when, at the age of fourteen-and-a-half, he left home, making an impetuous teenager's decision which was to shape his life and provide unlimited inspiration for his later writing. This strong opening image leaves no doubt as to whose story is being told, sets the biography's tone and furnishes an early consciousness of the life and character to be dealt with in its pages. The father and the family story find their rightful place as Chapter 2. In the otherwise chronological telling, when it comes to Donald Stuart leaving home, I illustrate the moment with material from his short stories, his several shaped versions of what had occurred that day.

Beyond this, Donald Stuart's life fell into definite sections and, although interlinked and contributing to the whole, each chapter occurred within its own setting and circumstance, and appeared complete in itself. The childhood in suburban Perth, and the boy's growing consciousness of a world outside this sphere, is followed by Stuart's early days in the outback. His Army experiences fall into three distinct periods, training, fighting in the Middle East and the Prisoner of War years. Following his return home after the war, details about the development of his writing and his role as a recognised Australian author provide an insight into his life and, not incidentally, the time in which he was writing. The story's progress through historical times strongly suggested that these separate sections should appear in a chronological sequence.

Biography cannot ignore a perception of the time in which it is set; no life story would be complete without such an appreciation. In his article, 'Biography and Historiography: the case of David Ben Gurion', Michael Keren considers the relationship between historiography, the writing of history, and the writing of biography. He offers a typology as it might apply to different levels of biography and looks at the 'relationship between biographical work and historiographical change'. His main definition is of biographies written about political figures involved in changing history, those whose lives have made an historiographical impact, such as Ben Gurion, Winston Churchill, De Gaulle and others, whose biographies assumed their own significance. He defines biography as an 'important part of any society's self-consciousness about its history', and historiography as part of that same self-consciousness.

Donald Stuart was well aware of history as a defining element in the course of his own life. His grandfather and father had lived in historically significant times historical events and his father's involvement in the 1891 Shearer's Strike, said to have changed the course of Labor Party history, might be seen to bear some relationship to Keren's
main category of people involved in changing history. Having grown up listening to his father's stories, Donald could not help but acquire an early consciousness of an historical past. With this perception, he was bound to be aware of himself within his own time. He recognised that the Australian way of life he had experienced as a young man was fast disappearing and much of his writing became a conscious recording of that period. He also wanted to make a point about the way history affects people, the influence larger historical events exert upon ordinary lives. This was evident in his own life and in the lives of those around him. His time as a Prisoner of the Japanese is only one instance of how people’s lives might be changed by circumstances beyond their control.

While writing this biography, I was constantly immersed in its history. My research took me into the early days of gold mining in Western Australia. I became aware of the proliferation of newspapers on the Western Australian goldfields and, wondering how Julian Stuart and his new wife had travelled from Queensland to Coolgardie in 1897, I stood on the deserted platform of the, then newly built, Coolgardie Railway Station. I read about the 1930s Depression in Western Australia and studied circumstances surrounding the taking of Prisoners by the Japanese in World War II. My interest never flagged and at no stage did I regret the subject I had chosen. I always felt sure this was a biography which needed to be written and was grateful to be involved in the task.

It seemed I was fortunate. In reviewing Roger Lewis’s biography, *Anthony Burgess*, Philip Hensher noted that some biographers do ‘lose their initial interest in their subject,’ but carry on anyway. Writing biography requires total concentration for two or three years, often more: though not fully-engaged in writing it throughout the time, Nadia Wheatley took twenty-one years to complete her biography of Charmian Clift and Colin Roderick took forty years for his Henry Lawson biography. Having made such a commitment, it would be frustrating to find, after reaching a certain level of research and writing, that you were less than interested in your subject.

The decision to illustrate Donald Stuart's life with selected passages from his writing was made only after the limitations of the available papers became apparent. More was needed to bring him to life, otherwise the biography would be a list of facts, what Brian Matthews describes as ‘a slim detached monograph’, based on the confirmed evidence of Donald Stuart's life, freezing him into the basic birth, life, death dates of his existence, that would not do justice to the personality behind them. Allowing his writing
into the text admitted a certain fictional quality into the story, but I wanted to maintain the factual, non-fictional basis of the biography. I was not prepared to rearrange the life, to leap into an outright fictional representation or even engage myself in creative non-fiction.

Creative non-fiction is a manner of biographical writing in which the author, while working within a recorded framework, attempts to enter the subject's understanding and combine known facts with an 'intimate style of reporting' which may be said to resemble journalism. In Adrian Caesar's *The White* (1999), the author recreates the last days of Antarctic journeys made by British explorer, Robert Falcon Scott and his Australian counterpart, Douglas Mawson. Placing his own well-informed surmise against known references and acknowledged conditions, Adrian Caesar's imaginative recreation dwells on the physical conditions of those last days and, insinuating himself into their skins, he considers what it must have been like for the two explorers. He also considers their relationships with the women in their lives and, for this late twentieth-century look at the two men, he would be harshly criticised for having dared to reinterpret them, particularly the iconic figure, Scott of the Antarctic.

Caesar had not seen his involvement in these life stories as an exercise in experimental biography or even as an exploration of biography. But, just as David Day had perceived in earlier writing about John Curtin, Caesar noticed that many of the conventional biographies about Scott were 'laudatory', concentrating on his achievements and heroic qualities, but leaving out the 'private' life. Like Day, Caesar wanted to explore the 'whole man', to get behind the legend, a desire relating to Lytton Strachey's plea for recognition of the human side of his Victorian figures. This made Caesar persevere beyond two sizeable drafts, both of which he discarded, to write more than an assembled collection of facts. In his attempt to get beyond the accepted 'already public fictions about Scott and Mawson', he admits to 'deliberately attempting to question and subvert the idea of authority in biographical narrative'. He recognised the limitations of his method which, he considered, would not be suitable for a living subject or for less iconic figures than those he had chosen. Caesar's remark about 'the authority in biographical narrative' surely refers to biography as it manifested itself in earlier times, as presenting the 'truth' about a life in so-called 'definitive' accounts. Recent debate around the writing of life stories questions any such authority, encouraging biographers to find new and alternative ways of telling life stories and giving rise to such exploratory texts as Brian Matthews' *Louisa* and Caesar's *The White*. 
Nevertheless, the biographer is required to answer for and defend his/her interpretation of the life. Day brought to light previously unknown facts about John Curtin, Stevenson attempted to explore beyond the accepted Sylvia Plath story and Caesar set out to examine Scott’s and Mawson’s characters. All were censured for upsetting preconceived notions of their subjects. Yet, as we have seen, these are biographers willing to back-up their interpretations with a depth of research, and suffer not a little anguish over the decisions they have made. Day and Stevenson wrote mainly conventional biographies, but Adrian Caesar’s choice to interpret the life creatively did not lessen the number of unfavourable reviews he received.

By involving themselves in imaginative recreations of a life, biographers openly acknowledge their concerns about the nature of biography. This doubt spills over into memoir and autobiography, in which the authors tell of a recollected past, recreated emotions removed in time from the original and reinterpreted through a later understanding, an element also present in biography. One perceives how ‘the temptation of fiction’ might get hold of the struggling biographer, seizing him/her with an overwhelming desire to acknowledge the fictional element in the story, eschew the idea of outright biography and define the work as a novel. Brian Matthews describes it as ‘biography’s yearning for the truth of fiction’, which manifests itself in the alternative voices that allow him to accept the material of dubious reliability which, inevitably, surrounds a life, and involve the reader in the uncertainties of biography.

The decision to write a fictional life releases an author from one of the main constraints imposed on biographers, the need to explain his/her interpretation of the story. Wayne Johnstone’s *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (2000), written about the life of Joseph Roberts Smallwood, Newfoundland’s first Premier, is set against the island’s history. All main facts are checkable, but the author makes no claim to biography. His decision to write Smallwood’s life as a ‘novel’ allows him to elaborate on the historical basis and imaginatively enter the lives of those involved. Likewise, Robert Graves wrote the life of Marie Powell, the first wife of seventeenth-century poet John Milton, as the ‘imaginative recreation’, *Wife to Mr Milton* (1943). The factual basis of this life story is more than evident in its historical setting and detailed comment about ‘social and domestic life in Civil War England’, but a lessening of tension in the author’s decision to define it as a fiction may be found in Graves’s comment: ‘Since this is a novel, not a biography, I need not write a learned preface to justify my conjectural reconstruction of the story.’
Should the biographer elect to remain within a more conventional biographical form, there is still opportunity for individual interpretation. Given that biographers are as individual as their subjects, and that there is an indisputable element of selection in the process of writing biography, it is not surprising that different biographers present differing views of the same subject. This becomes quite evident with a subject whose life attracts more than one biographer, such as Henry Lawson, who, despite the tragedy of his later life, came to be recognised by Australians as ‘a poet of the people’.¹²¹

Set against the small volume, *My Henry Lawson* (1943) in which Bertha Lawson wrote what she called ‘the true story of my husband, Henry Lawson, as I knew him’, is Manning Clark’s *In Search of Henry Lawson* (1978), Brian Matthews’ *The Receding Wave* (1972), Colin Roderick’s *Henry Lawson: A Life* (1991), and Robyn Burrow’s and Alan Barton’s *A Stranger on the Darling* (1996), and this is not an exhaustive list.

The same framework of facts supports each telling of Henry Lawson’s story: his goldfields birth in 1867; the eldest of three children in a family that worked a poor selection at Eurunderee; and the brilliant mother who left her husband and published the *Dawn*, Australia’s first newspaper for women. The basic facts do not alter, even if there is argument about detail: Matthews leads us to believe there was a doctor in attendance at Henry Lawson’s birth, while Bertha, obviously repeating what she had heard, said a midwife had attended and, while Matthews supports the understanding that the birth took place in the middle of a storm, Colin Roderick is one of those who disputes this. Where each of these biographers differs most widely is in interpretation, in the way they reveal the character of Henry Lawson and their evaluation of his life and his work.

Bertha Lawson was only eighteen years old when she met Henry and she married him a year later. Her recollections, written twenty-one years after his death, and when she was 66 years old, have been softened by time. She has been influenced by his standing as a writer and her account of their life together is a sympathetic one. She does not hide her concerns about his drinking, but does show admiration for his writing and, expounding her belief in his work, she reproduces letters and favourable comments from reviewers, bringing the biography to a revelatory conclusion with a previously unpublished story. Hers is the picture of the loyal wife who, despite making it clear that their marriage had foundered on her husband’s drinking and that they had chosen to live separate lives, brings evidence about his continuing interest in their children, and writes
that 'at heart he was a good husband and father, except when the temptation to drink got too strong'.

Lawson’s drinking presents his biographers with the problem of how to acknowledge the tragic flaw in his life, without letting it detract from his work. Manning Clark tackles the subject head-on and, while his life of Lawson seeks to write ‘a hymn of praise to a man who was great of heart’, it nevertheless becomes a detailed analysis of Lawson’s decline. This annoyed Brian Matthews, whose involvement with Lawson had begun in the classroom and whose wider analysis of the Lawson family went back to an MA thesis he wrote in the 1960s. His criticism of Clark describes the historian’s interest in Henry Lawson as ‘one of Clark’s more profound and persistent obsessions’. Matthews cites a later exposure to Lawson, Clark’s own problems with alcohol and his relationship with his mother as having influenced his interpretation of Lawson’s life, emphasising the way a biographer’s personality can exert pressure on the way the story is told.

Matthews chose to write a critical analysis of Lawson’s prose, affirming his achievement in the short story form and finding a deeper reason behind Lawson’s decline. Writing of the gradually emerging early brilliance, Matthews considers Lawson’s chosen subject, the Australian landscape and his place in it as interpreter, to have been unsustainable and, in trying to keep the inspiration alive, he emphasises the writer’s decline as being the result of his entrapment in the ‘almost intolerable reality’ of the land and its effect on the human spirit. In this analysis, Matthews gives weight to Lawson’s achievements and, while acknowledging the effects of his alcoholism on his physical health towards the end of his life, sees this problem as having been only a symptom of Henry’s distress at his declining ability to keep his subject alive.

Colin Roderick claims to have spent forty years researching his Henry Lawson: A Life (1991), described as the ‘definitive biography’, in which he examines what he calls the ‘dark side to Lawson’ and sets out to ‘lay bare the truth’ behind the man. Matthews leaves no doubt as to the Lawson family’s streak of insanity, and Roderick produces convincing evidence for his belief that Lawson’s ‘infirmities’ were related to a manic-depressive disorder for which he sought relief in alcohol. In aiming to depict ‘the man in the artist’, he examines Lawson’s work only in relation to his personality and creative method.

In a quite different exposition of the same biographical subject, Robyn Burrows and Alan Barton examine a highly significant period in Lawson’s life, the time between...
September 1892 and June 1983, when the 25 year-old Lawson lived in and around the town of Bourke. This was an isolated period in his life and, at the end of his time in the town, Lawson left for the city with no wish ever to return. Nevertheless, many of his better short stories and ballads reflected his experiences in Bourke and the people he met there, not just while he was in the town, but for many years after. Robyn Burrows sees the need to place this period in context with the rest of the life, but this is a clear view of the younger Lawson’s inspiration.127

As each of these examples illustrates, the biographer’s part in shaping and determining the theme of a biography is the deciding factor of how the life is presented. Guided and influenced by the amount and quality of material at hand, the biographer chooses form and content, decides between fact and fiction, and considers whether to write around selected themes or follow the conventions of chronological narrative. Matthews’ study into the Lawson family gives him an acute insight into the material he is handling and the method of enquiry he proposes particularly fits his examination of Louisa Lawson’s life. For biographers involved in the task of assembling a life, Matthews’ *Louisa* points out the pitfalls and promotes an awareness of the biographical art.

Recognising the fiction in retold stories has had the effect of moving biography away from conventional chronological narrative, and appears to have allowed a fictional approach to the telling of life stories. However, as Adrian Caesar points out, this approach seems more applicable to biographies of historical subjects, where the available material is slight and there is a need for more speculation about the life. There can be no one way to write biography and, while Brian Matthews’ exploration of the art suggests an alternative method for writing life stories, his approach may not suit every subject or even every biographer, and each life will, in some way, dictate its own form.

**TIME AND THE WRITER’S BIOGRAPHY**

Whatever quantity of material may be available for the writing of a life, the resulting interpretation will always be of a past reconstructed in the reality of the biographer’s present. As time passes, the interpretation will alter, depending on the present in which it is being constructed;128 this applies equally to autobiography and memoir. As we have seen from Michael Holroyd’s comment that his Lytton Strachey biography would have received ‘a much less bumpy ride’ if it had been published ten years later,129 the reception of a biography is also subject to differing ‘audience interpretation’ depending
upon the time in which it is published.\textsuperscript{130} While the interpretation of a life is subject to levels of other opinion and the amount of material available at the time a biography is being written, the biographer's place in time in relation to the subject exerts its own influence. Biographers with the luxury of close physical contact with their subject and ready access to their papers are in a privileged position. Others may be increasingly hampered as the passage of time between them and their subject lengthens.

When the author is still alive, there is an opportunity to ask questions and obtain comment, to gather anecdote and illuminate interpretation. There may be ready access to letters and manuscripts, introductions to friends, interviews with living contemporaries, including critics, and family members may play an important part in a biography written with the author's input. 'Authorised' biography, written at the request of the subject or the family, is, however, always in danger of being regarded as purely an ordering of material and as having been written to the living writer's direction.

New Zealander, Michael King, describes his biography of reclusive author Janet Frame as having been 'written in consultation with its subject', which he saw as a necessary arrangement if he was to gain access to her papers and have permission to reproduce her writing while she was still alive. But, in being able to interview her in person, he saw himself as being in an ideal position to ask searching questions and follow an independent line of enquiry. King saw the close collaboration he had with his subject as having allowed him to develop an intuitive sense about the material and gain otherwise unavailable insights into Janet Frame's life. He insists that working with a living author does not prevent the biographer from forming judgements outside the subject's opinion and placing his/her own emphases on the finished biography. King stressed his independent view, saying that he was the one who made decisions about what appeared in the text and telling how there were times when Janet Frame objected to what he wanted to say, but subsequently agreed with him that the details should be included.\textsuperscript{131} In other words, the biographer's autonomous position does not change, but is enhanced by the opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the subject than is possible when working at a distance in time. In working so closely with Janet Frame, King was in a position which might be likened to that of Boswell's. This biographer's insistence on the beneficial effect his unlimited access had on the story being told supports Johnson's belief in the need for physical proximity in order to write a complete biography. It is unlikely that King was tempted to create a fiction of the life around which Frame has already woven many of her own stories.
Australian author, Patrick White, was still alive when David Marr engaged himself in his extensive examination of the writer’s life. This gave Marr the opportunity to include many of Patrick White’s comments and, as the interviews reproduced in the biography show, he asked searching questions and probed deeply into the life. White was a controversial figure who had always attracted a great deal of interest. Marr found that many of White’s inner circle were ready to talk about their friendship with him and this depiction of the writer is littered with prominent names from Australia’s community of the arts: painters, artists and writers. Even at the end of his life, White is shown surrounded by a crowd of admiring friends still ‘entirely as himself: curious, tart, demanding, very funny and alert’.133 Marr’s aim was, he said, to ‘find out what made [White] a writer and where the writing came from’.134 He quotes White’s belief that ‘as far as creative writing is concerned, everything important happens to one before one is born’.135 Marr honours this belief by opening the biography with the marriage of White’s mother and father and tracing their two families in precise detail. This account of White’s life ranges from images of the great writer as ‘a puking child’ born into a rich Hunter River family and living his early life in a now vanished upper class Sydney society, to the frail, tired, but still fully-cognisant old man with a desire to die comfortably in his own bed. Written with a depth of understanding about the man and the time in which he lived, and illustrated with quotations from Patrick White’s work, the biography allows a compassionate view of the revered literary figure, including an insight into Patrick White’s homosexual relationship with Manoly Lascaris, his partner of 47 years.

The noted author did not read the biography until it was complete and ready to go to the publisher. He took nine days to go over the text with Marr, corrected some spelling mistakes and a few details, but did not ask for any major changes.136 Photographer William Yang’s photographic record of White’s later years complements the biography, showing the author at home and chronicling his physical decline. White played a part in the construction of this photographic narrative, posing for portraits, even creating a hospital bed death scene.137 Just as Tony Evans and Nadia Wheatley had to consider how they would handle the deaths of their subjects, so may the biographer of a living subject find themselves in a delicate position at the end of the life. When White died, David Marr was upset by comments that implied the author’s demise was hastened because he had seen his life laid out before him and complete, and there was no more to be said, or written.138
Writing about the famous film actress, Katharine Hepburn, at the end of her life, her biographer, Scott Berg, chose to hold back his conclusion until after her death. Hepburn had chosen Berg as her biographer and allowed him into her life. He could not help but recognise his Boswellian position. His book, *Kate Remembered* (2003), was finished and ready for publication in 2001, except for the last three pages, but he delayed publication. Just one month after the actress died, her biography appeared on the bookstands. One might admire the writer's sensitivity in delaying final publication, but the biography's appearance so soon after her death carries its own Hollywood flavour.

Marr's and Berg's sensitivity to the deaths of their subjects, who had been alive as they wrote about them, highlights the biographer's vulnerable position. For all the advantages of being able to talk to your biographical subject, perhaps there are advantages to be writing about someone who is already deceased; at least the biographer cannot be accused of 'killing off' the subject.

When the writer is long dead and there is no possibility of personal access, except, maybe, at a remote level and generations removed, more reliance must be placed upon the written word, existing papers and already compiled biographies. The biographer's knowledge and interpretation then becomes the controlling, unavoidably subjective, influence. Previous research may suggest new paths of enquiry to discover lost material or information and allow a fresh view of the biographical subject, especially if a significant writer is under consideration.

Margaret Forster, in her biography, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1988), was in the envious position of being able to refer to new material discovered in the previous thirty years. Earlier biographies of Elizabeth Barrett Browning had dwelt on her well-documented twenty months' relationship with Robert Browning, but Forster had access to 'hundreds of letters covering Elizabeth Barrett Browning's childhood'. An American researcher, Phillip Kelly, had doggedly pursued all leads and contacted family members to unearth this wealth of new information about the poet's life, material which allows a new perspective on Elizabeth Barrett Browning and a fresh interpretation of the already well-researched papers. The biographer of the long-dead author will always hope for such an extraordinary find.

The biographer of an author who has died within living memory has a different task. The author is not available, but where people are ready to share their recollections of the subject, there is less remoteness than with the author long-gone. Such a biography can
be written at any time, from the days shortly after death until no one else is left to share a memory.

During the last six months of C.S. Lewis’s life, Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper were already collecting papers for his biography and, after his death, were well-prepared to accept ‘the duty’ and ‘the honour’ of becoming his biographers. This was a case of there being almost too much written material to call upon—letters, diaries and minutiae supplementing their own personal knowledge of the subject. They were faced with ‘a colossal monument of paper’ about the early life, requiring a great deal of reading and sifting before it could be converted ‘into a balanced narrative’. As Brian Matthews recognised, such an ‘abundance of evidence’ might go a long way towards controlling the ‘biographer’s wayward and intruding ego’. Green and Hooper made their own selection. Believing a full biography might follow later, their decision was to select and prune, to write a biography, not the biography of C.S. Lewis.

Donald Stuart falls into the category of the author recently deceased. He had died in 1983 and, in 2001, there was still a chance to interview some people who had known him. Papers held by relatives and friends were slight and fragile, and I was often conscious of gathering materials, the originals of which might be destroyed as their owners passed on. This tentative situation lent a level of anxiety to the search, which on occasions seemed like a rescue mission. I became aware of this as a fast-disappearing opportunity to gather a close view of my subject and, though I was always hopeful of gaining access to a wider collection of Donald Stuart papers, this was not to happen.

The safest keeping of Donald Stuart’s material was in the National Library of Australia and there was a wealth of reference material and some biographical material in the Battye Library of Western Australian History. Some of this material, personal details handwritten on index cards, made me aware of an obvious trail having been laid. Again, there were questions about who had provided this information on Donald Stuart’s life and the edited version’s possible manipulation.

My second interviewee provided a list of people who had been key figures in Donald Stuart’s life, most of whom were already deceased. Weary Dunlop, Donald Stuart’s ultimate hero, died in 1993. Dame Mary Durack, who greatly assisted Donald Stuart’s writing career and, by all accounts, had been someone in whom he confided, had died in 1994. Dawn Stuart, Donald’s fourth wife, died in 1997. Don McLeod, with whom Donald Stuart had clashed during their time at Yandeyarra, had died in 1999. Five years
earlier I would have been able to access some of these key figures in Donald Stuart’s life, but just being aware of them did help to direct my research.

Weary Dunlop’s published diaries provide extraordinary detail about the Prisoner of War years and these were supplemented with other accounts uncovered during research. It was not certain that Dame Mary Durack would have told me any more than I already knew. I had coped with the restrained views of other Fellowship members and she, like them, may have been wary of what she told me. Even if Don McLeod had agreed to be interviewed, years after the event he was unlikely to have been very forthcoming about someone with whom he had disagreed openly and there was sufficient detail about the period in Donald Stuart’s controversial manuscript, *Yandy of the Winds*, Max Brown’s *Black Eureka* and material held in the Battye Library.

My early desire for repeated anecdotes and impressions was more than satisfied. As I worked with the papers, examining records, speaking to others, it became evident that, while many people had known different sides of Donald Stuart, had been close to him at certain periods of his life, few of them had known him during the whole of his life. Most knew other aspects of his story, after all he had written four semi-autobiographical novels, but the writing of this biography appeared as the first time all the strands of his life had been pulled together. Towards the end of the research, and having become familiar with the material surrounding the Donald Stuart story, I readily recognised differences in the remembered versions of him. Throughout his fragmented life, he had moved in many circles and not everyone who knew him had appreciated or fully recognised the different facets of his character.

Earlier access to the papers and a lesser time frame might have assisted what I increasingly perceived was an unavoidably grooved impression of Donald Stuart, gathered from interviews. One regret I could not overcome was the possibility that, had I been able to contact Dawn Stuart before her death, more of the manuscripts might have been rescued and, perhaps, other personal papers. During her lifetime, there was no guarantee Dawn would have given me permission to write the biography; she had blocked access to the papers on more than one occasion, though towards the end of her life, she suffered severe rheumatoid arthritis and may have accepted help at that time. Her eldest son was left to dispose of her estate and it is clear that the family was bewildered by the boxes of material they found stored in her garage. A description of the papers, as mildewed, fragile and unable to be salvaged, gave no hope that they would have rendered anything of value.
Additionally, these were family papers and, as an outsider, even as a biographer, family permission was still needed to access them. In his *The Aspern Papers*, Henry James places his biographer in a position where precious letters, providing an intimate view of the past, are finally burned, ‘one by one in the kitchen’.¹⁴³ In his *Keepers of the Flame* (1992),¹⁴⁴ Ian Hamilton describes the various responses of family members left with the task of dealing with a literary estate. The difficulties are clear, even for someone aware of the material’s possible literary value. How much more difficult it must be for someone without this knowledge to come across a mass of papers and have to make decisions about how to deal with them.

Had a longer period of time elapsed before this biography was written, without access to the living memory of Donald Stuart, a different narrative may have been constructed. More reliance would have to be placed on the novels and short stories and Scorp Stuart may have been lost or appeared less clearly, even as a more mythical character. That there were still people around who had known him and were willing to talk about him, allowed me to capture a living memory of Donald Stuart, a view which, with the advancing age of his contemporaries, is fast disappearing. The National Library’s collection, created in 1972, with Lyndall Hadow’s emphasis on Donald R. Stuart author reflects her personal desire and the mores of her time, and this material could exert a strong influence on the later biographer’s view. Writing about Donald Stuart in the twenty-first century, it was necessary to search beyond Lyndall’s view of him and admit the ‘outrageous’ Scorp Stuart into the picture.

**WHY A BIOGRAPHY OF DONALD STUART?**

Donald Stuart is a Western Australian author whose writing has an acknowledged significance beyond the region. Twenty years after his death, a biographical study of his life and work allows an opportunity to reconsider this author and recognise his contribution to Australian literature.

Between 1959 and 1981, Donald Stuart published eleven novels and one collection of short stories. Four of his novels, *Yandy*, *The Driven*, *Yaralie* and *Ilbarana*, were republished overseas. Several of the novels were studied at Leaving Certificate level in Western Australian and interstate high schools. His short fiction pieces appear alongside significant Western Australian and Australian authors in a number of representative collections and literary magazines. He was a well-known broadcaster and regular speaker on ABC radio; served as President of the Fellowship of Australian Writers at
State and Federal levels; and received Commonwealth and Arts Council funding for much of his writing.

Donald Stuart's first book, *Yandy*, (1959) was 'on the Perth best seller list for months' and was translated into German. Publicity surrounding his second book, *The Driven* (1961)—published in London, New York and Australia and as a *Readers Digest Condensed Book*—extolled him as 'one of Australia's best living authors' and commentators predicted he would be considered an important Australian writer. In *The Literature of Australia* (1976), Harry Heseltine stated that Stuart's first five books would 'in the long term, come to be regarded as one of the most impressive groups of novels published by a single writer during the period'.

Nevertheless, his work was hampered by critics who dubbed his work 'regional writing'. The need for distance being an essential for true evaluation, such criticism may damn the local reviewer more than the writer. Stuart's uncompromising reply was that he wrote about what he knew and of what was familiar to him. He believed that his time and place were worth writing about. Confident in his setting and theme, he brings to bear an intense and descriptive style, extending beyond mere recording to evoke an often haunting picture of the Western Australian bush and the life of the soldier serving in World War II.

In a discussion on the need for more Australians to set down a literature that deeply reflects their known place, Norman Bartlett comments: 'good literature grows naturally from the life and circumstances of the people who make it'. Geoffrey Dutton also considers it necessary for writers to record their 'particular days'. Bruce Bennett, an advocate of Western Australian literature, rightly considers the possibility of Western Australian writing finding a place alongside other regional literatures. In his introduction to a collection entitled *The Literature of Western Australia* (1979), Bennett seeks to explain a past neglect of Australian literature and, more particularly, the literature of Western Australia. He applies the mid-twentieth-century term 'cultural cringe' to the way local writing may have been received in comparison to writing from other places. He also considers the effects of courses that grew up around a literary canon allowing no space for a local voice, and expresses a hope that, with the wide-ranging establishment and development of Australian Studies courses, this neglect is being remedied.

But Donald Stuart is not the only author who, because of earlier prevailing attitudes, has not received continuing recognition of his work. Biographies are still to be written.
about Randolph Stow, whose writing has been well-recognised, Henrietta Drake-Brockman and Mary Durack. We might consider a rescue mission to recapture and reconsider the work of such authors. A recent publication has sought to preserve the neglected work of Kenneth Seaforth Mackenzie (1913-1954), a Stuart contemporary. Another Stuart contemporary, Tom Hungerford, has long held a special place in Perth writing circles, but the significant poetry output of Western Australian, Alec Choate, is only now receiving belated recognition. These two, well-regarded Western Australian writers were born in 1915, only two years after Donald Stuart. Had he lived longer, Donald Stuart’s place on the Western Australian literary stage must, surely, have matched theirs.

Timing seems to be of the utmost importance. It is interesting to consider whether, had Donald Stuart’s first novels been published at an earlier date, his Aboriginal themes might have found him a place alongside Katharine Susannah Prichard’s Coonardu (1929) and Xavier Herbert’s Capricornia (1938). The first was out of print for more than twenty years, the second for more than thirty years, but, for all the criticism they have received, both are now well-recognised and continually in print.

Donald Stuart’s novels about World War II, published in 1978, 1979 and 1981, arrived at a time when Australians were engaged in reliving World War I events. Patsy Adam-Smith’s prize-winning The Anzacs (1979) was reprinted several times during this period and, on film and television, there was a spate of productions around the familiar theme of Australia’s involvement in World War I.

To understand the diminishing interest in Stuart’s work, we must also examine the writing and acknowledge areas that were likely to have been less than favourably received. Problematical is the way he writes about women. He writes some strong and independent women into his texts, and a close reading reveals an important respect and consideration for women, but roles assigned to them in his writing, and attitudes expressed by many of his male characters, are not compatible with feminist notions of the post 1970s period. While recognising that these attitudes relate to his time, and the time about which he was writing, we must also be aware that, beyond his time, such expressed attitudes to women might hamper critical appreciation of his work.

Critical focus may also fall upon his writing about issues relating to north-west indigenous Australians. Since the last part of the twentieth century, difficulties are perceived in the way a white man may write about Aboriginal subjects. Recognising that such work may be viewed as intrusive, patriarchal or condescending, most non-
indigenous writers now avoid detailed writing about Aboriginal issues. It is true that a patriarchal stance is evident in Stuart’s writing, a white male always the dominant partner in white/Aboriginal relationships, but this does not lessen his desire to present an Aboriginal viewpoint or allow an Aboriginal voice in his work. His close examination of the indigenous Australian’s position in relation to white Australian settlement cannot be ignored by anyone undertaking a study of his work.

Criticism of his writing in this area, without allowing appreciation of what he has attempted to convey, may be short-sighted. In time, we might consider that writing on this issue, carefully handled, could provide a valuable bridge towards better relationships and understanding between white and Aboriginal Australians. It must be noted that Stuart attempted to form that bridge in his work, often depicting important liaisons between Aboriginal and white, in work situations and in male/female partnerships that achieve strong and harmonious, mutually supportive alliances. Before any judgement can be made about Donald Stuart’s writing on Aboriginal issues, the unpublished Yandy of the Winds manuscript and his published works, Yandy (1959), Yarralie (1962), Ilbarana (1971), Malloonkai (1976), and the first two novels in The Conjuror’s Years six novel sequence, Prince of My Country (1974), and Walk, Trot, Canter and Die (1971), merit a separate study and analysis, which may prove the value, or otherwise, of his writing.

I had rejected an early suggestion that I concentrate only on the last four novels, Donald Stuart’s depiction of a life which very much resembled his own. I believed such a decision would hamper my picture of his life. While acknowledged as semi-autobiographical, and providing a useful reference for the life, these four novels present only a limited view of Donald Stuart. To ignore the considerable output of his writing which carries an Aboriginal theme would be to deny the man himself. In researching the time he spent at Yandeyarra and by examining the Yandy of the Winds manuscript and stories surrounding his second wife, I found a way of writing about this area of his life. One significant find was a favourable review of Ilbarana (1971) written by Aboriginal playwright Jack Davis. I was able to confirm my understanding of this review as an affirmation of Donald Stuart’s writing in this area.156

Twenty years after his last publication, predictions that Donald Stuart would be recognised as an important Australian writer have not been realised. His family’s determination to preserve the work became a close-guarding of the papers, but did not
advance the writing. Editions of the novels are held in the Battye Library of Western Australian History, yet have been all but discarded from the Public Library system. Copies are available, at a price, from better second-hand book shops as rare and out-of-print books and, no doubt, are held in universities and private collections. There are still people who remember him and wonder what has become of him, but there are many who have never heard of him. It is not fanciful to suggest that his work is in danger of being overlooked.

The demise of his publisher, Georgian House, came shortly after Stuart's death. The closure of this distinctively Australian publishing house, associated with the Australasian Book Society and specialising in the work of realist writers, can be directly related to the advent of post modernist writing which pushed realist writers into the background of Australian Literature. Some might say that Donald Stuart had his day and recognise that, at the time of his death, his realist style of writing had already lost favour, even before his last books were published. His work may have come at the end of an era, but, as this biography aims to show, his is a significant body of writing, which deserves recognition. Australians are now more acutely aware of their past, an interest which might allow an opportunity for republishing some of Donald Stuart’s work. Thirty years after its original publication, his short story collection, *Morning Star, Evening Star* (1973), could prove accessible to a present-day audience, as might also the quintessential Australian novel, *The Driven* (1961).

Donald Stuart’s writing provides a unique view of what it is to be Australian. *In the Space Behind His Eyes* preserves a living memory of him, aims to provide an insight into this Australian life, and acknowledges him as a Western Australian author deserving of recognition.

**CONCLUSION**

Official records can establish the framework of a life, recorded events can be checked and verified, historical events place the story in time, give rise to certain events within the life and influence personal and family attitudes. This level of information gives clues as to the progress of a life, but does not provide a close look at the character, the personality behind them. It is this search for the person behind the recorded facts that drives biography. In order to reach into the personality, it is necessary to rely on material surrounding the subject, personal papers, other people’s accounts and, when the biographical subject is a writer, manuscripts, reviews and opinions of their work.
The very nature of biography demands recognition of the disparate voices that contribute to the story being told, but an element of uncertainty enters the equation when autobiographical writing, oral history interviews and other opinions are relied upon. Set against this is audience expectation that biography will tell a ‘truthful’ version of the life. To this end, the biographer undertakes to search out the life and write as factual a version as is possible. Every piece of evidence needs confirmation and each checkable fact must be used to advantage. There is a need to respect the life being exposed and to show regard for others involved in telling their version of the story.

Against the desire for ‘fact’, the biographer’s part is to interpret and evaluate the life, choose to include or exclude certain aspects of the story and make decisions about how the life is to be presented. A level of speculation cannot be denied; even if we know someone very well, we can never know them completely or every detail of their day-to-day lives. This knowledge complicates the biographer’s position. In deciding how the biography ‘tells its story’ as psychobiography, historiography, fictionalisation, conventional chronological narrative or any other form, the biographer adds another layer of interpretation which cannot help but be selective.158

The passage of time imposes a further complication. The life being written about has been lived in a period removed from that of the biographer’s, yet must be interpreted within the biographer’s present. Added layers of time are involved when versions of the life are related in a context removed from the original.159 Depending upon whether the subject is still alive, recently deceased or long-gone, time also affects the amount and quality of material which surrounds a life story and is available at the time of writing. The subject may be fully-revealed in diaries, letters and hoarded papers, or the biographer is forced to work with a minimal amount of documentation and hearsay evidence.

Brian Matthews cites the ‘critical shortage’ of material when writing his biography of Louisa Lawson, as tempting him towards a fictional representation of the life, or pushing him to ‘fall back on chronicling the times’.160 Matthews’ concern about the reliability of the material surrounding a life and his questioning of the authority in personal accounts that are subject to distortion over time, moved him towards a detailed exploration of the biographical form. Matthews’ work is seen as having suggested new methodologies for writing biography, involving critical examination of the available material and engaging readers in the biographer’s concern about what to believe, and what to accept as credible information. Matthews’ inquiry ties biography to a
meticulous searching for the facts of a life, admits the fiction in retold stories, but also acknowledges their basis in 'truth'. His *Louisa* is an absorbing account of the search for his subject, nevertheless, it is unlikely that all biographers will adopt the same form. Not all readers will want to be involved in the hunt, the biographer’s personal story of how the biography was written, no matter how absorbing it may be to those studying the genre. Most readers of biography are looking for the story of the life lived and want to read about the life as it happened, yet it is to be noted that, within his enquiry, Matthews does follow Louisa Lawson’s life from birth to death. Debates surrounding biography add to the general interest in life writing. Biography, be it mainly chronological or any other form, can only benefit from the discussion.

At the heart of the enquiry is the recognition that no life can be recovered completely. The biographer works with the available clues, building the many separate brush strokes into a composite picture. The task, involving as it does painstaking research and a need to consider all aspects of the subject’s life, is not one to be undertaken lightly. Yet the biographer is vulnerable to censure from all sides, making it evident that any response to a life is individual, and the interpretation of a life, on the page and in review, cannot help but be subjective.

Donald Stuart’s story, as he wants it to be told, is in his writing, in his recorded interviews and in material he made publicly available. Other versions of his life rest in the memories of those who had known him and estimates of his work add further opinion. In writing this biography of Donald Robert Stuart, I have researched widely, followed leads, spoken to many people, read his writing and arrived at a way of telling his story.

He predicted that we would look for him across the ‘far-reaching years’. In gathering together his stories and the ‘splintered memories’ of those who knew him, my hope is that this biography will release him from the ‘brittle cage’, that it will bring to life his ‘young time’, rescue and restore him, and allow him to take his place in the Australian literary scene.161

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NOTES

Essay

1 A short, unpublished, personal biography, written by Jean Lang in 1988, received the Ric Throsell Biographical Research Prize and a Fellowship of Australian Writers Award. Having not been granted access to this biography, I was unable to assess it in relation to In the Space Behind His Eyes.


33 Pioneers Index. Reg. no. 2247. Batthy Library.

34 Geornes Primary School and Perth Boys School Enrolment records, WA State Records Office...

35 NAA, Smart, D. R. Pay Folder.

36 Donald Stuart Papers. NLA. MS 3156.


38 Donald Stuart Papers. NLA. MS 3156


41 Donald Stuart Papers. NLA. MS 3156


In conversation with Graeme Gower of Edith Cowan University's Kurongkurl Kaitjin, School of Indigenous Australian Studies.


I have undertaken to write a biography of Western Australian author Donald Robert Stuart (1913-1983), for a PhD (Writing) study at Edith Cowan University, Mount Lawley Campus. As well as making use of available records, I will examine Stuart's six novel sequence *The Conjuror's Years*, much of which parallels his life experiences to the age of thirty-two. Of vital importance to the biography will be interviews with those who knew Donald Stuart. It is proposed that interviews will be for periods of 30 minutes each, with the option of one or more 30 minute segments being taken at a session. If convenient, there may be more than one interview session. Any questions about this project, should be addressed to Sally Clarke on (08) 9291 4058. If you have any concerns about the project or would like to talk to an independent person, you may contact: Edith Cowan University; Dr Jill Durey, (08) 9370 6308; or Assoc. Prof. Glen Phillips, (08) 9370 6309. Material provided in interview will be used to inform the biography and may be published in the biography. As interviewee, you can decide who retains copyright for information provided in the interview. If you would like to take part in this project, and if you are willing to be interviewed, please complete and sign the attached form. A copy of the completed form will be returned for your records.

Yours sincerely

Sally Clarke
AGREEMENT TO BE INTERVIEWED

Name: .........................................................................................................................................................

Address: .................................................................................................................................................

Post Code: ..............................................................................................................................................

Telephone No: Home: ......................................................................................................................... Bus: ..............................................................................................................................................

Fax No: .................................................................................................................................................

e-mail: ......................................................................................................................................................

Please tick your response.

1. □ I agree to be interviewed in relation to the biography of Donald Stuart.

2. □ I understand that what I say in my interview may be published in the biography.

3. Recording of interview—Please tick one response only
   □ a. I am willing to have my interview recorded.
   □ b. I do not want my interview to be recorded.

4. Identification—Please tick one response only
   □ a. I am willing to be identified in the biography.
   □ b. I do not want to be identified in the biography.

5. After research is complete copies of the interview tapes/transcripts MAY be lodged in the BATTYE Library of Western Australian History for the use of other bona fide researchers. Please tick one response only
   □ a. I give permission for the tape of this interview to be lodged in the Battye Library and made available for other bona fide researchers.
   □ b. I do not give permission for the tape of this interview to be lodged in the Battye Library and made available for other bona fide researchers.

I have read the attached information and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to be interviewed in connection with the biographical study of Donald Stuart on the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.

Signature: (interviewee) .......................................................................................................................... Date: .................................................................................................................................

Signature: ..................................................................................................................................................

(Sally Clarke) Date: .................................................................................................................................
COPYRIGHT PROVISIONS

UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE

I.........................................................................................................................(interviewee)

Hereby release all right, title or interest in and to all material recorded in interview to

SALLY CLARKE for use of this interview, or any part of this interview, for research/publication in the Biography of Donald Robert Stuart (1913 to 1983). The tapes and transcripts may be copied and/or quoted in part or in full in the biography or in any other form that derives from the biography without any restriction whatsoever and may be copyrighted and published by SALLY CLARKE in the Biography of Donald Robert Stuart (1913 to 1983), which may also assign said copyright and publication rights to serious research scholars.

Signature: (interviewee).................................................................................Date:.............................................

Signature: ......................................................................................(Sally Clarke).Date:.............................................
COPYRIGHT PROVISIONS

CONDITIONAL RELEASE

I........................................................................................................(interviewee)

direct that the following conditions be applied during my lifetime to records and tapes
arising from interviews conducted with me by SALLY CLARKE in relation to the
Biography of Donald Robert Stuart (1913 to 1983).

I understand that the tapes and transcripts will be held in the first instance by SALLY
CLARKE and subsequently will be deposited in the BATTYE LIBRARY OF WESTERN
AUSTRALIAN HISTORY subject to the following conditions of use.

A. SALLY CLARKE—Biography of Donald Robert Stuart (1913 to 1983).

The tapes and transcripts may be copied and/or quoted in part or in full in the biography or
in any other form that derives from the biography. These rights are by way of a non-
exclusive licence.

As owner of the copyright in the subject-matter of the tapes and/or transcript, I retain all
other rights over this material, including my right to publish my own work.

B. SALLY CLARKE—Biography of Donald Robert Stuart and other BONA FIDE RESEARCHERS.

The tapes and transcripts may be copied and/or quoted in part or in full in the
biography or in any other form that derives from the biography. At the discretion of the
BATTYE LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY, the tapes and/or
transcripts may be made available to other researchers for the purposes of bona fide
research.

After my death they are to be made available at the discretion of the BATTYE
LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY.

Please Delete A or B

Signature: (interviewee)..................................................................................Date:..........................................

Signature:..........................................................................................(Sally Clarke) Date:...........................................