

ROSS

**Project engineer
making a difference**



LIFE AT HOME

Born and raised in small towns in New Zealand I am the middle son of three boys, one 18 months older and the other 5 years younger. The family moved around with Dad's work so we never had roots as more stable families had. When I was 10 years old Dad purchased a shop in rural Southland but due to the recession brought about by the oil crisis of the '70s the business failed and Dad went bankrupt when I was in my last years of high school. The bankruptcy hit the family hard with my older brother heading off-track into drugs and Dad, in frustration and depression at losing everything, sinking into alcoholism and domestic violence until he had a complete breakdown.

Throughout our lives my parents encouraged their boys into sport and education but despite this I was the only son to enter tertiary education. I had always wanted to be a geologist just as my Great Uncle Jack had been. While this did not occur, geology is still a keen interest of mine in the form of palaeontology and the history of the planet. Being from rural New Zealand rugby union was and still is my great sporting passion and I played from age seven until my mid-thirties. When I had finished high school and completed my University Entrance exams I moved from the family home and into full time engineering study at the local polytechnic in Dunedin New Zealand. I had just turned 18.

MOVING OUT AND ON

I left full-time study when it became apparent that I could not afford to live on a standard bursary and got a job with the local council in the engineering department as a cadet engineering officer. Being in a council and in engineering the pay was poor during my early years as a cadet and I lived in some pretty squalid shared accommodation. But life was one

great round of work, rugby, cricket, squash and parties. I never scaled great heights as a sportsman but was always keen to perform and enjoyed the camaraderie of the team events. I took committee roles in the sporting clubs I was a member of and this work produced one of the best honours I received in the form of an award for best club member of my squash club, which was named in memory of a good friend, work colleague and team member of mine who had died of cancer at age 26 the year before. During the eight years of working at the council, most of my friends had done the overseas experience trip that is the rite of passage for so many Kiwis and Aussies. I had no money due to my rather extravagant lifestyle and my poor paying job so I had not participated in this rite and was very envious of all that had travelled. I had itchy feet and I was discontented with work and my life in general so I decided to sell up everything I owned (not much when all was said and done) and start travelling. I was 26 when most had travelled prior to 25 due to the availability of short-term work visas to the United Kingdom. I did not require this as my paternal Grandmother had been born in the United Kingdom and I could get an indefinite leave of stay in the United Kingdom. I did not get far initially as I went to Brisbane, Australia to visit a friend who introduced me to the heady life of Brisbane in the mid-eighties (joke). I took the opportunity to work as a contract draftsman on the development of the present Brisbane International Airport for a year. While in Brisbane my younger brother had moved to Melbourne, Australia and our parents and I visited him for Xmas. It was then that my Father had a massive heart attack, which required a full by-pass operation and kept him invalided to some degree for his remaining 20 years. After a year in Brisbane I decided to travel to the United Kingdom. I returned home to say goodbye to my friends and family, attend a friend's wedding and then travel onwards.

LIFE, WORK AND TRAVEL ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PLANET

I initially worked in pubs in the traditional Antipodean United Kingdom working holiday. While in the pubs for a year I met my future wife, my best man and many other friends that I still keep in touch with despite the distances involved in being on the other side of the planet. I count my time in the United Kingdom as my happiest and most developmental for me as a person despite there being a downside to living in London that a rural boy from New Zealand finds. Two relationships I developed in this time have had a great impact on my life. The first, but not necessarily the most important, was meeting Alan who later became my best man. He was a brewer in a pub around the corner from where I worked and we used to have a beer or two after work. Alan had a wide circle of friends from his childhood and university days and I was invited into the group and accepted as a part of the activities they were involved in. Alan is a straight arrow type of guy and has a tremendous sense of responsibility and drive. This, I may add, was not my style at all.

The second was the meeting of my future wife in the last pub I worked at which was her local. She was very different from me but also similar in many ways. They do say that opposites attract. Julie was from a rural English background, her father was a dairy farm worker, she had not gone to university but was intelligent and very mature and responsible for her age (or so all of our friends kept telling me).

My life had changed even further at this time when I had a near-death experience when I was hit by a car crossing a road. It was not the first time this had happened and unfortunately not the last but it was the worst hit. I was thrown 10-15m through the air forward of the car and rolled to a stop on my back. The car stopped less than 15cm short of my head as I lay on the road. The first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was the tread on the tyre just above my eyes. The car had come to a halt just before crushing my head. My life attitude changed dramatically that day.

From then on my life became one day at a time and damn the future for you may not have one. After I met Julie she encouraged me to go back to engineering, so I got a contract position working for the London Docklands Development Corporation working for the most prestigious project in the UK at the time. I stayed in this role for four years making many great friends and having a great time while working hard. The motto of work hard, play hard was my mantra at this time, sometimes working 70-80 hours a week on the premise that I was earning an hourly rate and I could party hard at the end of it all.

I had moved into a large shared flat with Alan and his Aussie wife-to-be, Kerri and five others from the crowd of Alan's friends. It was a great party house and we had some epic times of 100 or so guests at a time. But all good times must end and as Julie and my relationship developed she moved in with me and as the group in the flat went their separate ways Julie and I moved to a smaller flat together. We continued to see all of our friends but after three years in London I was becoming homesick for my family, even though my younger brother had moved to London too. Julie convinced me not to go home but to assist my parents to travel to England. We extended an invitation, which was accepted a year later and my parents came across to visit for four months. It was to be the trip of their lives for which they had Julie to thank entirely.

After that Julie and I decided to travel. We had been holidaying each year, somewhere in Europe, for four years and visited many countries in this time including Turkey, Bulgaria, France, Holland, Austria and more. But it was now time to leave England and get back to the space and clean environment of New Zealand. Julie had travelled more than me even though she was eight years my junior. She was an adventurous traveller having been on a three month safari up the east side of Africa, had been mugged in Seville, Spain and lived for six months in Athens. She convinced me to save more and to plan a one year trip to New Zealand. It did not take much convincing.

When we were to leave we had a farewell party at my old pub in Chelsea and hit the road. The first stop was to South Africa to attend a friend's wedding. We spent nearly two months in SA being passed around Brian's friends and family. Even though this was at the time of the referendum for black voting and South Africa was tense and dangerous we had a great time on safari in Kruger National park and seeing a lot of what there is to see in South Africa. We travelled back to the United Kingdom for two weeks and then it was on to Europe and the Near East for seven months. We spent time in France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Turkey and Egypt before returning to London

once more.

By this time I had contracted Hepatitis A but I was unaware of it. It was the rounds of visiting family and friends that caused my health to deteriorate rapidly to the point of incapacity after a week in London. This was a blow to our next trip to New Orleans and then onto New Zealand. We had to skip the USA and move straight to home. It was when we arrived in New Zealand that I was diagnosed with Hep A and although Julie and I travelled around New Zealand in the following two months I was still unwell and adhering to a strict diet to alleviate the symptoms of the disease. Julie and I had planned to stay in New Zealand but in the early '90's there was little work in engineering so we moved to Sydney in 1993 and have been here since.

LIFE, WORK AND TRAVEL ON THIS SIDE OF THE PLANET

Since arriving in Sydney Julie and I have started our lives again. You lose the network of friends and family when you move to a different place and have had to develop new friendships and manage your family relationships from afar. We have found that Sydney is an insular society and we found it difficult to make Aussie friends. We did not have the same issue with expats, probably due to the fact we were expats ourselves. We developed friendships with fellow Kiwis and Poms, South Africans, Irish, Welsh and Cornish. Even with expats from the Gold Coast of Queensland. In all of our friendships we have been extremely fortunate. Some friends we do not see or speak to for some years but when we do see them it as if we have not been apart.

After nearly 12 years together, Julie and I married. It was the experience of my life with friends and family coming from across the world. We were married at the Sydney Quarantine Station with the beautiful Sydney harbour as a backdrop. We had to delay our wedding as at the same time we became engaged so did Julie's older brother and my younger brother. Both of these weddings were held in England and so trips were made to attend these events. On the family front we have been unlucky in our attempts to have our own children with Julie having endured miscarriages, leading to strains on our relationship. There have been times when we were extremely close to splitting but we chose to try and work through the tough times.

Despite there being 'the recession Australia had to have' when we arrived we both got work quickly. I had only been in Australia for one week when I was given a contract position in engineering. I was highly computer literate and a good designer so work was not difficult for me to find. I also found the level of competence in Australian engineering to be fairly low and this became a source of constant frustration for me. Eventually this led me to take on a management role to see whether I could put into practice the lessons I had learnt from the observation of all that I thought was wrong in engineering. I must have done well as after three years I was invited to become a shareholder in the burgeoning company I worked for. It was at this time I also decided to go back to school and retrain as a Project Manager and then embark on a new career direction.

After a couple of false starts I am now in my new career with projects under my control in four states in Australia and in New Zealand. The development of my new career came at some personal cost to me. Previously I had prided myself on my honesty and commitment in the workplace. Unfortunately my attitude was perceived to be brutal to egos above and below me and had caused me to gain a reputation for being awkward to work with due to some outbursts of frustration and anger about perceived inadequacies in some around me and in myself. This attitude had to change if I was to move to management. I had to learn a new set of skills and attitudes in order to coax the best from people rather than demanding it with an intimidating manner. Julie and others around me assisted me in changing this public persona but I have not lost the sense of frustration or the anger.

Julie has been fortunate in her work to have developed her skills to a level where she is running a division of the company she works for and shares in the profits of her hard work. Not all companies are this generous but she has proved to be the glue in the company and has raised the company's profitability since joining it eight years ago.

In between these trips to England there were trips to visit my family in New Zealand along with an extremely eventful trip to Hong Kong and China. We have travelled extensively in Australia including a coast-to-coast driving holiday, two weeks in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and boating in the Whitsunday Islands. We have also been to India twice and are planning trips to Vietnam and a tropical paradise somewhere undecided for our 10th wedding anniversary.

What the future holds is always uncertain but it is
always fun getting there.

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