**Cyril Knowles - My Story**

**Chapter 1**

I was born on the 16th July 1923 at number 21 Mill Street. My father was a coal miner at Clipstone Coal Mine and my first memory was of Dad coming home from work black as the ace of spades, sitting in a big tin tub being scrubbed by Mam. The house we lived in had no bathroom and Mam paid 9 shillings per week rent to a miserable landlord named Mr Shaw. Dad had plenty of work until that awful day in 1929 when Wall Street went broke. Dad, like every other miner was sacked and put on the dole, it was an awful shock at 6 yrs of age. I did not understand and I got sick with lack of food, I was sent to a special school called Berry Hill Open Air School and got free milk every day. This built up my strength and allowed me to join Carter Lane School, after that I went to Ravensdale High School. However things were still very bad as Dad only got 29 shillings dole and out of that he had to pay 9 shillings rent.

**Chapter 2**

After starting at Ravensdale I studied hard and finished up as head boy and was given a great reference by the headmaster. As the depression was still going on, I still could not get a job. I will retrace my story to try and describe how it was like to live during this awful time; Dad and I would walk miles to the nearest slag heaps to search for bits of coal to try and keep the house warm. Our family consisted of Mam and Dad, my elder brother Harold, and myself. With only gas light we would sit around the table playing dominoes or tidily winks, Mam would create wonders from all kinds of scraps. Brother Harold got into a top school called High Oakham, he studied shorthand and typing and did very well at it. He got a job with the LMS Railway. Meanwhile I was offered a job as an apprentice dental mechanic as long as my farther paid the dentist 5 shillings a week; this of course was stupid so I missed out then. Jobs then became available thanks to Mr Hitler and the call-up of men to the army. I got a job as shop assistant at Marsden’s shop at the corner of Mill Street and Carter Lane and Dad got a job at the co-op.

**Chapter 3**

In the depression days electric light came, no more gas lamps but a shilling in the meter instead of a penny the street was dug up to lay cables and to look after the holes a night watchman was employed he had a small hut with a coke brazier to keep him and us young ones as he told us all about the great war little did we realise history was going to repeat itself in our day in winter the street became a playground with ice and snow to allow us to slide and toboggan down the street but not liked by the older persons we played cricket on the spare ground at the end of the street on bonfire night we would walk miles to collect old trees to build the bonfire and Mam made ginger bread and treacle toffee ;as the war dragged on Harold was called up for the army Signal Corps but I was too young to go. Uncle Bill dads son, from his first marriage, gave us a battery operated radio to catch up with the news the accumulator had be charged every week like a car battery. Carter Lane School was closed to allow the troops back from Dunkirk to stay there.

**Chapter 4**

At 17 yrs old I became more angry at not being able to help the war effort. Serving food in a shop did not suit me, then one day I saw an add in the paper looking for men who were too old or too young to be trained to enter a training school to learn a trade. I asked my dad if I could go and he said if that’s what you want ok. I had to move to Leicester where I was billeted with an old women and her henpecked senile husband. I spent 6 weeks leaning welding and got full marks at the end. I was then given a job with a small firm who specialised in repairing old steam boilers at coal mines all around the area. It was tough work but I was happy at last and I, like many more red blooded males, looked for females to share our odd spare times with and I met a girl I fell for. The war dragged on and having to hear snide remarks from people who did not know how hard we worked I then decided to join the army. My boss did not like it as I was in a reserved job but I was sure that’s what I wanted (I must have been stupid!) and so in May 1942 I joined the army telling my girlfrend that I had been called up which was wrong of course.

**Chapter 5**

On joining the army I had to travel to north to Inverness in Scotland in a troop train full of all sorts in total darkness. It was a bit scary but I finally got there to join a mob all volunteers like myself, all young. Our training was real hard and it was a huge barracks; the parade ground was as big as 3 football fields. We got very fit running up and down the mountains around the area. One day we were told a very important visitor was coming and the whole parade ground had to be scrubbed and there was hundreds of us issued with brushes to do the job the visitor finely came to inspect us -the King himself. He must have come from Balmoral castle. After we finished our training we were transferred to various units, myself to the 6th Battalion, a member of the 52nd Mountain Warfare Division. It was stationed in Kingussie near Aviemore in the Grampian Mountains. It was clear to us that we were being trained to invade Norway. We had special clothing and were taught to ski, walk in snow shoes, live off the land; it was very tough and in winter we had to use all sorts of ideas to make hot tea, melting snow etc. We used to go on route marches as much as 50 miles a day, with 10 mins every hour lying on the road with our feet up. No traffic only sheep to worry about. We stayed there  until a change in plans in May 1944 when were moved to Perth and began a new phase in training, leaping out of a mock aeroplane. We did not know what was going on but we soon found out when on the 5th June we were told to pack up and board trucks. The whole division stretched for miles and we travelled north to Aberdeen so we all thought the invasion of Norway was on. But then we turned around and got back to Perth - it must have been a ruse to make the Germans think we were coming. Of course D- day was starting in France. So back into Perth we went. It was at this time that I thought that if I got killed my fiance would get no pension, so I thought getting married would be the best idea. Evelyn did all the paper work and I got leave to get married.

**Chapter 6**

It is hard to describe what happened in Bemmal we were in trenches all the time during daylight hours the only time we could move was at night when we got fed, mainly soup and hard biscuits. The enemy snipers kept us down and then some armchair general decided that we had to move forward towards Arnham. The attack there having failed [film A Bridge Too Far ] so off we went. We moved into an apple orchard and then after digging in all hell broke loose one platoon [ 30 men] were surrounded and taken prisoner then the enemy mortars started up it was one of the biggest bombardments ever seen. I had my 5 men in trenches, 2 in 1 trench 2 in another  and the company barber a Jew, who back home used to charge six pence to cut your hair, in with me in the other trench. The enemy used a deadly 6 barrel mortar and it was not long before I heard the cries for help from the trench on my right. I crawled over and saw Wilson dead and Mc-lean badly wounded. I tried to stop the flow of blood coming from a deep gash in his neck. He was still alive and I told him help was on its way but he must have known that he was dying and he said I want to see my mother and then he died in my arms. The mortars eased off and I rejoined Rosy, his nickname for Rosenthall,  by that time he was going crazy with fear and wanted to run away. I kicked him to slow him down and then as night came down the 2nd in charge came up with a little cross and covered the trench with gas capes we had and filled it in. Next day we got more shelling but not as intense and then we were told we were getting relieved. During the night we moved out marched 5 miles to board trucks to a rest area to get clean clothes and a meal served by the Salvation Army. We then got on trucks not knowing were we going.

**Chapter 7**

I am on board a troop carrier heading back from Bemmal to a destination unknown. We travelled back into Belgium to join up with the rest of the 52nd Div who were about to land on the islands in the Schelt Estuary to open up the port of Antwerp. It had been captured by the Canadians but was useless because of the big guns the enemy had on the islands. Our battalion then joined in and captured the island of South Beverland thus allowing ships to use Antwerp to bring supplies in. We then had a well earned rest for about a week then off again into the border of Holland and Germany. We moved into a place called Dorset Wood named after the Dorset regiment who had captured it with big losses. Snow was on the ground and it was very cold and we were able to use dugouts left by the Germans. We did a lot of patrols in the snow all at night time as the advance went on. We then were moved into Germany and were told we are going to attack a small village called Bocket and would have tank support including flame throwers. At first light off we went, it was snowing and as we approached the village we saw a group of Germans standing alongside an anti tank gun. As we followed behind this flame thrower it suddenly belched out a huge flame at the Germans and it was horrible to see all the Germans on fire screaming but we had to push on into the village leaving behind the smell of burning flesh. I led my section into the only street and all the houses were damaged by previous shell fire. Into the first we went and heard voices coming from the cellar. I knew a little German so I yelled out schnell --schnell but got no reply. I then tossed a hand grenade down the steps and we moved on under fire from a machine gun but we soon put an end to him. By this time we had reached the end of the village and the first tank arrived up. No sooner had he come that he was hit by an anti tank shell from the next village.

The crew jumped out and left the engine running - we found out later that the grenade I had tossed down the steps had killed 2 young German soldiers, I still feel it in my memories.

**Chapter 8**

The noisy tank finally ran out of fuel, we never saw the crew. We heard the news that a fresh battalion was moving past us to attack the next village and so it went on up the front. Then a few days rest until we got to the River Rhine, which was the last obstacle into real Germany. A huge force massed, the Yanks and us. The navy brought up special boats and off we went at the same time - a huge armada of planes appeared and out came paratroops hundreds of them. It was amazing to see them coming down as we landed on the other side. At the time little response from the enemy but as we moved through a huge wood it started to get more violent shelling and snipers in the trees. I was walking alongside the platoon commander when I heard the crack of a bullet and I turned around to see the officer falling down. He had a neat hole in his forehead but the back of his head was blown out we all opened fire into the trees ahead and a body fell out. I did not know if he was the one who fired the shot that killed the boss but we had to carry on. We soon moved deeper into Germany, the damage caused by our bombers was terrible. We got to the huge city of Bremen and saw how the people had suffered - no water or sanitation. We then started to advance towards Hamburg but got held up by some. As we prepared to attack Hamburg at a small village outside Bremen the people who lived there were very friendly. A few spoke English and supplied us with the first eggs we had seen since landing in France. We got news that the war was coming to an end we celebrated with local beer (99% water) and thanked our lucky stars we survived and remembering those who we had lost.

**Chapter 9**

With peace upon us we were taken to a old concentration camp to restore order where 2000 displaced persons were running wild. They were killing the German guards who had treated them so badly. A graveyard nearby had a giant statue telling the world in 4 different languages that 68,000 people were buried there (I have a photo in my drawer here with me). It was not a good job as a lot of them were crazy and tried to escape to wander the countryside looting and killing any German man they found. I was lucky to be picked as a sergeant to go back to England as instructor to train the conscripts who were still getting called up. After a very cold train ride to the port of Ostend and a very rough crossing of the channel we were taken to the guards depot at Caterham in surrey to be trained in drill teaching by a young expert. First we got a pass to go home for 3 days so I joined up with my beloved Evelyn, who after all this time was working as a clippie on the buses. Back to the depot I went and after passing out I was posted to the Don barracks in Aberdeen to take charge of a squad of 30 conscripts helped by a corporal and a lance corporal. As a lot of them came from the slums in Glasgow they could not read or write but 6 weeks turned them into men and after a short break another squad would arrive. I was lucky to have 2 good men to help me and we won the award every squad we trained. So it went on and finally the King said you can go back to your loved ones and my army life came to an end. Going back home I had to live with my mother in law but it was not too bad. After a short holiday I went back to my old firm and soon got back into routine life. In 1948 in the country was still very grim, with everything in short supply, but in September 18th we had our first child, Lynda. She was a sick little girl for a while but got better as time rolled on. Evelyn got a cough as the winter came in and I saw the doctor who said she needed warmer weather. Then I saw an advert in the papers for people to go to Australia as migrants, but you had to have a sponsor to take you in. I remembered my mother telling me that she had an aunty living in Brisbane so I wrote to her asking if she would put us up until I found a place to live. She said she would be glad to do it so I applied and after a lot of red tape I was granted a free passage. We packed up what gear we had and prepared to leave dear old England. We set sail in November with Lynda just 14 months old. We got on the liner Austris with about 1500 more. We were not allowed to sleep together, I was in a cabin with 3 more men all going to different places with Evelyn in a cabin with 3 more women who were very good to her, helping her with the baby. Life on board the ship was not bad, the food was ok and we spent our time talking about our experiences. We stopped at Malta to pick up more migrants, all Maltese who had their own quarters, then on to Ceylon to pick supplies up and then to Freemantle in West Australia. It was a Sunday and we were allowed to take a walk into the streets, all the shops were closed and we saw Cadburys chocolates in the windows, a thing we had not seen in England.

**Chapter 10**

Off we go leaving Freemantle heading for Melbourne. One day I saw a man limping around the deck and as he turned around I saw it was Rosy, the barber on his way to Sydney to join his brother who had a barbers shop there! His foot was a bit mangled up after the mine explosion but he had got a pension out of it. This was the only time I saw him as he was in a different part of the ship to us. We arrived in Melbourne and were told that we had all day to have a look around. As a big crowd of us walked up the dockside I was stopped by a man who asked me if we were off the Austris, I said yes and then he said did I know the Knowles family on board. I think he nearly had a heart attack when I told him you are speaking to them now. He had served in the Aussi army with the old woman’s son and she had written to him to see if he could meet us. What an amazing coincidence that was - he had arranged a full weekend for us but was unaware that we only had a few hours before we sailed again. He took us home to meet the family and his 2 teenage daughters were all over Lynda who had started to just walk. On the boat we had lunch with them and answered a lot of questions about England. It was funny to realise how little they knew about the old country but sadly we had to get back to the ship to sail to Sydney. We docked in Sydney and those of us who were going to Queensland were taken to railway station to board a very hot train to endure 24 hrs of very unpleasant travel. On arrival in Brisbane we were checked in by the migrant people then went onto meet our sponsors

**Chapter 11**

When we arrived in Brisbane we were met by the old women who I will refer to in future as Nanna. She did not have a car but a friend had a utility truck so we had to sit in the back tray to travel the six miles to the house in Northgate. We met Nanna’s 2 sons, Stan who was the ex soldier and Fred who was a single man in his 50s who was as miserable as sin. It was then we received our first shock- no sewerage. Every house had a small out house which held a cabinet to sit on under which was a large bucket which was emptied every week by a man who they called the garbo.  As it got dark our next problem came in the form of swarms of mossies which meant having to sleep under nets over the bed as they bit you and brought up very itchy lumps. As our luggage had not arrived Lynda had to sleep with us until the cot I made for her in England arrived. All the luggage arrived very quickly so we started to settle in and Nanna did all she could to help us. The house itself was all wood with a corrugated iron roof and like most houses sitting on wooden stumps – this was to allow the breeze to help to cool things down. One morning Evelyn went to the dunny as we called the toilet and it was guarded by an old cockatoo who let you in but attacked you on the way out. She got bitten on the leg and Nanna poured metho on it. This was very painful and Evelyn got very depressed. To make matters worse I could not start work as all the engineering places were closing down for the Xmas holidays and would not start anybody because they would have to pay them holiday pay. The house was close to the railway station. It was always hot and very humid but we put up with it. We were taken in the ute on Boxing Day to a beach called Margate, named after the English one. To get there we had to cross over a long bridge which connected the outer suburbs of Brisbane to what was known as the Redcliffe peninsular. The beaches were all very nice and being Xmas, very crowded, a lot of people coming down from the city

**Chapter 12**

After Xmas I was able to get a job with no trouble, it was very hot and steamy but I held on and the wife had her hands full looking after Lynda. With a bit of overtime we managed to build up our money and we went to the local cinema to see a movie sitting on canvas deck chairs. Returning home it was late and everybody was in bed. In the dark the wife put Lynda to bed in our room and I went to the kitchen to make a cup of tea. I turned on the light and was amazed at what I saw - a huge mass of cockroaches running all over the place. The walls of the house were lined with tongued and grooved boards and the cockies, as we called them, were running in and out of the grooves. There must have been hundreds of them the walls were shimmering with them. I then went into the big lounge to see what was going on in there, the same again - as soon as you put a light on out they came. They had a big billiard table in there and here I saw a huge mass marching across the green cover on the table. If it was not so serious it looked like trooping of the colour. I shut down all the lights and went to bed to have a sleepless night. The next morning I spoke to Nanna who told me you will get used to it. I said

I was going to do something about it. I went to the little shop across the street who sold just about everything and I bought a pump and 3 bottles of cocky spray. So with hankies over our noses the wife and I got stuck into the job. As I sprayed, the wife swept up dust pan after dust pan. Nobody offered to help us so this made me more determined that we had to get out of there. It was not easy of course as the shortage of houses was terrible, you could not rent a place anywhere. I changed jobs and got onto a firm who did the same work as I did in England with plenty of overtime, so bank balance got a little bigger. Then one day I saw an advert n the paper about land for sale at Clontarf on the Redcliffe peninsula. We went down to see what was going on, travelling by train and bus.

**Chapter 13**

It was a very hot day as we got to our destination. I carried Lynda over my shoulders but could not find the land for sale. After walking miles we stopped at a small shop to get a drink and I told the shopkeeper what we wanted. He said that there was a good block for sale just down the street. He left the shop in his wife’s hands to take us down to see it. It was the biggest block in the street, 36.4 perches and was owned by a deaf and dumb couple. He gave us the address so off we went. I had to write my requests to the woman, who then wrote she wanted £90 for it, a bargain. I had £20 on me so I organised to pay her the £20 there and then and to pay the rest off as quickly as I could. It was only 400 yards from the beach and only 2 houses in the street, all the rest was scrub. It was just a dirt road and no water mains in the street but it was a start for us. I had joined the ex servicemen’s outfit, similar to the British Legion. I think I finally paid off the land debt so I got the deeds to make it legal. At one of meetings at the R S l (ex servicemen) I was told that I could try to get a loan from them to help me build my own little castle. They gave me a loan of £100 so I started to enquire at the Redcliffe Council to see if I could build a small shack and was told it had be part of a house. I drew up the plans and got it passed. We did not tell Nanna about it until later.

**Chapter 14**

On one of our trips to our block of land we were approached by a man who, after hearing our story, said he lived in a house behind our block. He offered to rent us a room and give us the use of the kitchen etc. as long as I gave him a hand to finish his interior. He had a builder put up the outside and was not very good at woodwork so we accepted the idea and said goodbye to Nanna and moved in about mid July 1952. Evelyn helped his wife on all the housework. All was going good at my job in the boiler game so we saw the shopkeeper who had told us about the land to see if he knew of a timber merchant to get good timber, which was in short supply. He put me onto a man who got timber from a small timber mill deep in a rainforest about 60 miles away. We ordered the timber stumps on which to build the house on - 18 of them all around 12 ins diameter. I dug the holes as the plan stated and the man who we were living with had a big crosscut saw so I levelled them all with Evelyn’s help. With the stumps in place I saw the timber man who helped me organise the right sizes to obtain. He then ordered it and after a small delay it arrived, all first class wood called iron bark from the eucalyptus breed. Whilst I was at work Evelyn sorted it all out and looked after Lynda who was getting ready to go to the school, just at the top of the street. I used to do as much work after coming home from my job and when I was not doing overtime and cut out all timber to suit. The wet season held us up and when it rains here it simply pours but we got slowly on the way, finally getting the frame up. Then a man from the RSL who was tile maker (concrete) told me that he would supply the tiles and I could pay him when I got enough money. A local man who was a tiler put the tiles on so we finished up with a little house covered with weatherboards and a roof over our heads but no windows or doors. The shopkeeper gave us some sugar bags to cover the holes where the windows were to go and the electric light people gave us power, just 3 lights and 2 power points. So the great day came and we moved in. The people around were very good to us, one lady loaning Eve a treadle sewing machine so we slowly got settled in.

**Chapter 15**

Work progressed as we spent all our time and money getting things in order. Lynda started school  and Eve used to take her up and bring her back every day. It became much better weather wise and I started to start finish the inside work. Then in early May 1952 I had an accident at work which left me bed ridden. Eve used to go to the local free library to get me some reading material. She called at the newsagents and the women behind the counter tried to sell her a ticket. Not having much money to spare she said I will take one share of four in the full ticket. She came home and forgot all about it but the next day the shop owner came running down the street. He came into the bedroom were I was lying to say he had just received a phone call from the newsagents to see if he knew us. He said yes, they trade here, and was then asked ‘will you go down to tell them they have won a share in the casket (Lotto). It was £1500, which of course put us in a wonderful position. I was able to pay off all my debts, plan to extend the house and to buy things we had not been able to afford; our first fridge, a Hoover washing machine and the timber for the rest of the house. This of course kept me busy and I had to go away as the work expanded. I travelled all over the east coast of Queensland repairing and installing boilers. It is a huge country when you see it first hand as I did. In between jobs I got on with building the rest of the house

**Chapter 16**

Jumping a few years - in 1957 our second child arrived Peter and in 1959 our third one Jennifer. The sixties were full of work and play and I added two more rooms to the house to hold our growing family. We were also able to explore this wonderful state of Queensland the way we wished. We had a car  to allow us to travel from the gold coast in the south, with its wonderful resorts and beaches, to the tropical north right to the tip of Australia stopping at caravan parks and hiring a caravan for as long as we needed. It was an eye opener to see the differences in the climate, allowing people to grow almost anything. Some of the farms growing sugar cane were huge  and on the hillsides pineapples and all sorts of tropical fruit. The wheat farms stretched over miles and to get to the homestead you had to probably travel up a dirt track for a long way to reach the very big property. They were huge places and owing to their isolation had to stock up on supplies for weeks at a time. Most of them were very wealthy and were able to send their children to boarding school to Brisbane or one of the cities along the coast. We are lucky where we are with the climate being sub tropical and we miss most of the cyclones which the north get.

**Chapter 17**

In the 70 s it was all activity with Lynda getting married to the son of a well known solicitor here in Redcliffe and I myself going to Malaysia to control the building of a boiler plant at a huge sawmill in the jungle 150 miles from the capital. It was a big job and I was 5 wks away from home. Then our other daughter got married to a bricklayer and she gave the family away and went her own way leaving just the wife and I with Peter at home. Lynda’s husband became a solicitor and Lynda started a childcare business ( she now has 15 in various places all around the local area so they are a very rich couple) They had 3 children including Jason who is an accountant and Sally who trained as a masseuse and travelled the world on cruise ships massaging the rich and famous. She got married to an American boy who was a top computer expert for the Boeing aircraft co. Peter remained a single man and excelled in golf, playing for the state side alongside Greg Norman and Wayne Grady. Sadly he went down with a nervous  problem for which he had to have injections in his neck of the drug Botox ( very expensive)  but over the years he has got better but of course it finished his golfing

**Chapter 18**

I gave up work when I was 60 and the wife and I were kept busy helping Lynda with her first child care centre. I designed and made all the tables and chairs and wooden toys cupboards and as she started to build other ones the work load increased so, with help of my wonderful wife, who did most of the painting we were kept very busy. Lynda was a very good business women and she worked her heart out but still had time to raise a family, Jason, Sally and Jane. I got the service pension and with a bit of help money wise from Lynda we lived a fairly good life doing a lot of travelling around: a trip to Hayman Island on the great barrier reef for 10 days; a trip to Sydney and a lot of touring by car all over this vast state. It is amazing to see the outback as it is called were you can travel for hundreds of miles and not see anybody but plenty of wildlife –kangaroos, wallabies, emus and millions of bird.

**Chapter 19**

After the turn of the century weddings seem to come with Jason, then Sally who moved to Seattle in America and then Jane who married a building foreman. They all started having kids- as write this I am a great grandfather of 7girls and 1 boy. As life went on things started to take a turn for the worst with me as I started to get a cough which would not go away. I was sent for X-rays and cat scans and I was told I had asbestos on my lungs. Lynda’s husband, Hilton, got me to see a team of solicitors who specialised in compo claims. After 4 years of trial with all sorts of tests from the people I was suing I was finally awarded a lump sum which enabled me to upgrade the cars -  Peter’s old bomb and my own car. I had to visit a specialist with my chest every month for a check up and it seemed to remain dormant.

**Chapter 20**

I will try to describe my place of abode. Bbrisbane (to strangers it is pronounced Brisbun) is now one of the fastest growing places around. It spreads for miles in all directions with new suburbs coming on line all the time. We even have a Mansfield on the southern end with new tunnels and bridges being built at great cost of course. We are now in the city of Redcliffe named by Matthew Flinders because of the red cliffs he saw as he sailed into a bay now known as Mortian Bay. It is a quiet stretch of water most of the time with suburbs all around the coast line starting with Clontarf ,Woody Point , Scots Point, Margate, Redcliffe and Scarborough. It is amazing how it has grown since the first bridge was built in the early 30 s to connect to the outer suburb of Brisbane , we now have 2 bridges with a 3rd one just being started. We are no longer dependent on having to travel to Brisbane like we had to 50 yrs ago. Big supermarkets are all over the place and still new suburbs spreading out as the farms are bought up by developers to build houses on to try to overcome the housing shortage. Most new houses cost from 200000 dollars up to a million and more. Lynda lives on a canal with a boat at the back door.