

# The Raja Bahrin Story

A father's dramatic rescue mission

Raja Bahrin Shah  
&  
Bryan Wickham

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Photographs courtesy of Raja Bahrin Shah  
and Bryan Wickham

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# PART ONE

Told by Raja Bahrin

# 1

'What has she done with my children?'

I was sitting at my desk in Terengganu staring at a notice server.

One minute previously I'd glanced at my watch when Sharifah, my secretary, told me there was someone to see me. It was ten minutes past two. I put down the report we'd just delivered to the State Government and looked up.

'Raja Bahrin?' A man in his early 30s stood before me.

'Yes. Please, sit down,' I said, gesturing towards the single chair. It was covered with papers and books. I stood up. 'I'm sorry, let me clear them.'

'There's no need, please,' he said quietly. There was something firm in his voice that made me stop. We stood and faced each other. 'I have something to deliver to you from the court.' He held out a large envelope. I hadn't noticed he'd been carrying anything.

I reached over the desk and took it from him. 'The court? Which court? What is this?' I asked. I frowned. Something awful was about to happen, I could feel it.

'You'd better read it yourself, Raja Bahrin. Please sign here to confirm you've received it.' He held out a piece of paper and a pen, and pointed to a place.

I sat down, signed the paper, handed it back to him, and slowly started to open the envelope. He was still standing. Sharifah, from the next room, had noticed, and brought him a chair. He remained standing. I took from the envelope a typewritten piece of paper headed with the words 'Family Court Act', and 'Family Court of Australia at Melbourne'. I looked at the words but couldn't understand what was going on. Other words were at the top of the page:

*In the marriage of Raja Kamarul Bahrin Shah Ibnu Raja Ahmad Baharuddin Shah (husband) (shown on marriage certificate as Raja Kamarul Bahrin) and Yasmin Binti Abdullah Raja Bahrin (shown on marriage certificate as Yasmin) before the Honourable Mr Justice Trevaud the 28th day of November 1985.*

For some reason I looked at the calendar. Today was 12 December 1985. Why did this piece of paper say 28 November? I couldn't comprehend what was suddenly occurring in my office. I looked up at the notice server. He was turning to leave.

'Please, one moment,' I said.

I read the next part of the paper.

*This ex-parte Application coming before this Court AND UPON HEARING Mr. Ackman for the wife*

*IT IS ORDERED*

*(1) That until further order the wife have the sole guardianship and custody of the children of the marriage ...*

I didn't read any further.

'What has she done with my children?' I said, astonished. I could hardly breathe. I felt hot hands grip my forehead. My head started to spin and for a moment I thought I was going to be sick.

'I'm sorry. I must go. Goodbye, Raja Bahrin,' I heard.

I couldn't think. I was afraid that any moment I would lose control completely and weep. I desperately wanted to do just that, but I couldn't, I seemed to be locked in place. I just sat there not knowing what to do, with the piece of paper in my hands resting on my lap. I was numb.

I heard Sharifah's voice. 'Raja? Raja? What's wrong?'

I waved her away. I had to sit and try and think. My wife Yasmin, or Jacqueline as she preferred to be called, was in Australia, at an unknown location in Melbourne, with my two kids. I hadn't been able to contact her for days. She'd rung my mother's house on 1 December and left a message she was going to stay in Australia longer than the planned two-week visit. We'd all been waiting for her return in Kuala Lumpur: my mother, myself, my aunts and uncles and cousins. Everyone was very excited that the children would soon be returning, after their holiday to see their sick grandmother.



The first of December? I looked at the piece of paper again. It said '28th day of November'. That meant my wife went to court in Melbourne, Australia, on 28 November to get custody of our children, with no mention of this to me, and rang my family in Malaysia on 1 December and said nothing. Twelve days later the court hands me a piece of paper to tell me she has stolen my children with their blessing! And in those twelve days not a word from her. I had been calling and calling during those twelve days, but no one in Melbourne knew where she was. I'd rung her grandmother, who was supposed to be dying but sounded fine on the telephone, to look for her and the kids.

'Hallo? Irene? It's Bahrin.'

'Bahrin! How are you?'

'I am well, but I need to find Jacqueline. Is she there?'

'Oh no, Bahrin. I don't know where she's staying. She didn't tell. She's staying with friends.'

'You must know,' I insisted.

'She didn't tell. She comes here every day but she won't tell me where she's staying.'

That conversation had made me even more suspicious. Jacqueline had called my mother in Malaysia a few days before 1 December and said she was staying at her grandmother's flat, but the second time she'd rung she hadn't said where she was. And the last call had just been a message taken by a maid at a cousin's place which was strange in itself seeing Jacqueline had my numbers in Kuala Lumpur and my mother's number.

Everyone was starting to get worried then, even those aunts who had supported Jacqueline's trip back to Australia alone with the kids. Jacqueline and I had been having difficulties in our marriage and I was afraid that her taste for high drama, coupled with her Australian background, might lead to her refusing to return to Malaysia from her trip to see her grandmother. It seemed that my worst fears were going to come true.

I tried ringing Richard Waller, a doctor in Melbourne with whom both Jacqueline and I were acquainted.

'Richard?' It's Raja Bahrin,' I said.

'Raja! Hallo! How are you? Long time no hear. What are you up to?' he replied.

'Not too bad, Richard. But I have a bit of a problem you might be able to help me with. I can't seem to locate Jacqueline. She's visiting her grandmother in Melbourne. You haven't seen her, have you?'

'Oh yes. She rang the other day, but only briefly. Sounded well. What's up?'

'Did she say where she was staying, Richard?'

'No, Raja, she didn't. What's the matter?'

'Everything's fine, there's just a bit of a problem with locations. I have to go now.'

'Oh, all right, Raja. Speak to you again.'

'Yes. We must. Goodbye.'

He was my last chance. I couldn't think of anyone else. Why hadn't Jacqueline told anyone where she was staying? Why hadn't she rung? What was she up to? Perhaps she was just playing a game to worry me? Perhaps she just wanted a break, an extra few weeks? But why not tell me where she was staying? I was getting very frightened.

I had waited for two days in Kuala Lumpur, waiting for another call from Jacqueline to tell me the new flight details, waiting for any news at all. What was going on? What was she doing with my kids? It was as if an enormous weight was resting on me, pushing me into the earth. I had trouble breathing. Kuala Lumpur didn't help. The air was thick with traffic fumes and humidity. I longed to be back home in Terengganu.

As I sat in my office with the court papers in my hands I remembered all the details of the last few weeks. Adding to the pressure were the demands of my fledgling business: my architectural firm had just made a major presentation to the State Government of Terengganu, which was why I hadn't been able to accompany Jacqueline to Australia like I had in the past. Our firm had been appointed to draw up a master plan for the Terengganu State Sports Complex. It was an enormous task. The site itself spread over 267 acres. The work had been exhausting. It was the first major project

we were bidding on since starting my own private practice and it meant a commitment, should we be successful, of many years. In the midst of all of this, my wife abducts my children to another country!

My cousins and aunties, when we were waiting in Kuala Lumpur, were trying to be helpful and kind, saying, 'It'll be all right, Bahrin. She'll be back soon. She'll ring.'

But I could tell from the tone of their voices that even they were not so confident of Jacqueline any more. I'd suspected that she might try something like this, but I'd allowed myself to be pressured, by my own family, into permitting Jacqueline to take the kids to Australia without me. My own family had ganged up against me to support her! After all, her 'dying grandmother' story worked like a charm to manipulate all the soft-hearted ladies. And now we were all reaping the benefits.

I'd been in anguish waiting in Kuala Lumpur. I hadn't known what to do. Even if I had gone to Australia to look for her what could have been done? I didn't know where to look. If I did go, and by some lucky chance I should find her and the children, what would I do then? Demand they be arrested by the Australian police? Was that possible? Jacqueline was an Australian, despite applying constantly for permanent residency in Malaysia. Should I take a Malaysian lawyer with me?

I was a quiet and conservative architect with a deep respect for the law, no matter what country did the regulating. I was brought up to respect the State and its institutions and to honour my parents and elders. In Australia, I was educated at Geelong Grammar and the University of Melbourne, and never caused any trouble. Despite being a Muslim, I even willingly attended chapel at grammar school so as not to offend the rules. I thought it broadened my understanding of Christianity and encouraged religious tolerance. After seven years in Australia I felt I had a good understanding of the Australian people. Their fair-mindedness and sense of decency in particular always impressed me so I couldn't really imagine pulling off some wild stunt to get my children back. Thoughts like that would flick through my mind, mixed in with great black clouds of loneliness

and despair. I was helpless to do anything other than wait to hear from Jacqueline. I had waited in Kuala Lumpur for two days and then decided to go to Singapore to see Norilah, my second wife.

From Norilah's flat in Singapore I called back two or three times a day to ask my mother, 'Have you heard from Jacqueline? Any news?'

She would always reply, sadly and quietly, 'No, Bahrin. Nothing. No one has heard anything.'

Even Norilah, my kind and sober wife who had supported me unquestioningly through all my previous difficulties with Jacqueline, couldn't calm me. I'm not an easily agitated sort of person. I don't jump up and down at the first sign of a crisis, I internalise it. So I was very, very quiet. I would sit with Norilah and think of the events that had led to this situation, trying to understand what had gone wrong, trying to make sense of it all.

## 2

I'd first met Jacqueline in early 1980 when I was studying at Melbourne University. The intense and bubbling Jacqueline. She was graceful and bright. I was 25 and she 17. We were both at a function for Malaysian and Indonesian students held at Monash University. She was helping serve the food and drink. I walked over to get something to eat and saw her across the table from me.

'Hallo,' she said. 'What would you like?'

I just looked at her. She was attractive, with large eyes and long, dark hair. I said something and she served me some food. I can't remember what it was; I had suddenly ceased to be at all interested in it. We exchanged a few more words about the weather, the number of people at the party, the food – just small, insignificant things. Another person came to the table and she left me to serve them. I went back to my friends. I didn't see her again for a couple of months. Architecture is a very intensive and demanding course. I bumped into her again at another 'do' and were both very pleased to see each other. From then on we started seeing each other for lunch occasionally. She was quite involved with the Malaysian and Indonesian students and was very interested in people and things Asian. She performed the Balinese classical dance, which had been a hobby for many years. She even worked as a receptionist cum stenographer at the Melbourne office of Malaysian Airline Systems. As I got to know her I found out some of the possible reasons for her interest.

Her father was a Malaysian from the Ipoh area whose family had all moved to Singapore. He had married an Australian girl, in Australia, but when their child, Jacqueline, was only very little, he had returned to Singapore for some reasons that I never quite un-

derstood, and the mother and daughter remained in Australia. Eventually they were divorced. It seemed Jacqueline's mother, Helen, was quite traumatised by the whole situation and became ill. While she was in care she met her next husband, Barry. I understood from Jacqueline that the home wasn't a very happy one for her, and it was something to do with Barry and her mum. I suppose that would make sense. It must have been difficult for Jacqueline to understand why her father had seemingly abandoned her, and if her mum was still very angry, which she certainly was because she had forbidden Jacqueline from having anything to do with him, that would all compound into a resentment of her step-father. She only saw her father once, and that was when he was on his deathbed. Her mother had finally allowed her to go and see him in Singapore where he lay dying. It had been an emotional reunion for her, and her mother who also finally visited him. Gifts she was given then she continued to cherish for years.

I'm not a psychologist, but I've thought about these things over the years as I've tried to understand Jacqueline. I still can't fully understand the depths of her anguish, even now, that would bring forth such hysteria, revengefulness and vindictiveness that I'd been privy to in our married life and in our separation. When she was young anything like that was submerged beneath a *joie de vivre*, an enthusiasm for life. She was quite popular, probably also because she was so pretty, but underneath there was something brewing. I wish I had been wise enough then to see it and been able to circumvent the situations that led to the disasters of our separation. But what is gone is gone, and any love I had for Jacqueline had also disappeared many years ago, the result of her tantrums and public outbursts. All so dramatic, with a dreadful result.

I had looked at Norilah, across the room from me in Singapore. Her mum, who lived with her, had gone to bed and the two of us were alone. Her apartment was carefully decorated, filling the room with a sense of calm and peace. She was reading a book. I had the newspaper on my lap, but wasn't reading it. I had looked at Norilah and felt an enormous sense of relief that she was there, then I was flooded with grief. Where were my children? And then anger

at Jacqueline welled up. How could she take the kids away from their life here?

Things had been difficult between us for some time, but I had never considered divorce, because of the kids. Children need a mother, and they need a father. Why didn't she have the same respect for my role as I had for hers? Just because we weren't getting on wasn't a licence to destroy the children's lives. Surely the children were the most important and their well-being had to be considered above all else? She had ripped them away from their father, their grandmother, and all their aunts and uncles and cousins. Iddin was three and he knew what was going on. Shahirah was only a few months old, but what right did Jacqueline have to take either of them from their home? I couldn't stop asking myself such questions. I couldn't make myself understand what was happening. I had looked at Norilah again and tried to calm my thoughts. She knew what I'd been through with Jacqueline. We had talked and understood each other. Norilah had been married before, and had a son. When I met her she had been divorced for three years, and I was in the midst of rancour and strife with Jacqueline. She had given me an ear when there was no one to turn to.

I had thought of the first time we had met, on the flight from Kuala Lumpur to Kuala Terengganu, as she was struggling up the aisle of the Fokker Friendship with a huge bag. As I had remembered that image I smiled: such a narrow aisle and such a huge bag I'd helped her with it, then sat with her and talked. We were two of only four on the flight and in that emptiness we had begun our friendship. It's interesting how people meet, how they are attracted to each other by commonalities. Norilah and I seemed suited because of the way we dealt with things quietly, within ourselves. Agony can make one realise that such things are more important than other things that might seem, superficially, to be commonalities.

My thoughts, as I sat with Norilah, had returned to Jacqueline. Her interest in things Asian when we were courting obviously extended to me, and it concerned me even then, despite being smitten with her. She was young, with a vivid imagination often expressed in a passion for magazines dealing with Prince Charles and Lady D

Before we married I wanted her to be quite sure she knew what she was getting herself into with me. I may be of royal blood but I certainly don't live in a palace, and Kuala Terengganu is a quiet little place on the east coast, far from the bright lights of Kuala Lumpur and Penang. There are no nightclubs, no bars, no theatres; just commerce, a little bit of tourism, and mosques. It's a conservative State religiously, but not at all fanatical. That conservatism didn't worry her because she claimed she was already a Muslim when we met. I was introduced to her as Yasmin, which was her Muslim name. She refused to answer to Jacqueline at any of the Malaysian student functions.

'Yasmin,' I had said to her one day when she'd been asking me questions about Malaysia - the jungles, the palaces, the customs - and becoming visibly excited at the prospect of living there, 'Yasmin, if you are keen on settling in Malaysia, don't take my word for it. What I say about Malaysia could be misinterpreted by you. It's better if you see it for yourself, especially Terengganu.'

'Oh sure, Bahrin! Let's go! I'd love to go and see Terengganu! I'm sure it'll be lovely.'

Her eyes were brimful of excitement and life. It was hard to try and quench them with the calm reality of my knowledge, and I'm not at all sure I could've, or even really wanted to. I suppose I was charmed and entranced by her energy and life. Why would I have wanted to dampen that vigour, even though it later turned out to be dangerous fantasy? Why not let it live and come to its own conclusions? She was a free person, with a mind of her own. And if she went to Terengganu and decided it wasn't for her? Could I rethink my life? Could I live with her in Australia? Could I leave my family and responsibilities? I was an only child, and my responsibility was to my mother. She and my father had separated many years ago and as the only child I had to look after her. She had cared for me all my life and it was my duty to care for her when I was of age. It was impossible to consider her living in Australia. She is very retiring and hardly leaves her home. She won't fly except under great duress, and has never been to another country, except to Mecca. She won't even go to Indonesia, and Western countries frighten her. But



Jacqueline seemed so keen to move to Malaysia all those worries had seemed unnecessary. Even so, she had to see for herself what it would be like.

'I can't imagine living in Kuala Lumpur, either,' I said to her. 'It's too big, and too busy. My mother couldn't live there. You'd better come and see Terengganu.'

'Bahrin, I know I'll love it. I want to have a homely environment. A quiet life doesn't bother me. It's what I want.'

And who could not fail to believe those words? Isn't it what everybody wants, to have their home confirmed by their wife-to-be as the only place in which to dwell, and their life as the only life? Only it had been all true, and not turned into a grim fairy tale.

### 3

I remembered, as I sat in my office thinking of all this, that I had looked at Norilah again that night in Singapore a week ago, and said, 'I'm going back to Terengganu tomorrow. There is nothing more I can do in Kuala Lumpur. There's still work to complete on the presentation, some tidying up to do. I may as well wait for news at the office.'

She nodded, and came over and put her hand on my arm.

'It's OK, Bahrin. Do what you have to do.'

The next day I returned to Terengganu. It's a short flight, and a lot quicker than driving the eastern highway through Kuantan, which is full of lorries, but I wished I had taken the road: it might have distracted me from my thoughts. All I had to do was rehash everything that had happened, and speculate about the future. But thinking of the future seemed so unrewarding that I usually fell into contemplating the past.

I looked up from my desk and saw that it was 3 pm. I had been sitting thinking of the past, trying to make sense of things, for 45 minutes! I hadn't even noticed the time. It's amazing how quickly time passes. Jacqueline had only lived with me in Terengganu for a few years. That time had passed quickly, but also very painfully as our marriage slowly deteriorated. She first arrived in Malaysia on 24 December 1980.

'Ms Yasmin Ee Lian Ong,' I had said, smiling, as I held out my hand to her.

She had just walked through Customs at Subang Airport. Ong was her father's surname and Ee Lian from her mother. Even though 'Jacqueline' was on her passport she insisted on being called 'Yasmin'.

Our multiplicity of names was a joke between us.

After an overnight stay at a relative's, we had driven back to Terengganu via Kuantan, to show her the countryside. I had thought it would help her to know what Malaysia was like and further dispel any illusions. It took about nine hours because we stopped along the way to eat, and do a bit of sightseeing. It had been thrilling for Jacqueline. She'd loved the thick greens of the jungle lining the road interspersed with people's houses and shops. It's unlike anything in Australia.

She had become very excited, despite her fatigue after the long trip, as we drove into Kuala Terengganu. It was late in the evening so there wasn't much activity. Terengganu's commercial area consists of two- or three-storey shop-houses, just like most other places in Malaysia. It certainly doesn't look a very wealthy place compared to parts of Australia. I suppose it might have seemed romantic to someone from Melbourne: exotic Asia, just like in the travel brochures.

'What's behind there?' Jacqueline asked, pointing to a long wall parallel to the road.

'My uncle's place,' I said. 'The Sultan's palace.'

'Oh! Is that where you live, Bahrin? Really?'

'No. My mum's place is a bit further along, up the other end. I'll take you to see my relatives later on if they're not too busy. It's quite fancy inside the palace, at least the room where the ceremonies take place. There are some nice decorations. Here's my mum's place: down this lane.'

We turned into the little lane and drove the fifty metres to my mum's.

'Oh! What a big house,' she said.

'That's my other uncle's place,' I replied. She was looking at the house on the other side of the lane.

'Where's your place, then? Is this it? Is this your house?' She sounded a little disappointed, as we turned into the yard.

'Yes. This one's where I live. My mum lives next door.' There were two small concrete houses, single-storey, surrounded by some grass, a few little plants, and two medium-sized trees. We drove in

my uncle's place, next door to mum's across the alley. Jacqueline was to stay at his place, which was the proper thing to do as we were not married.

The next day I took her to meet my mum. My mother is a very shy person, and I knew she was wary of meeting Jacqueline. She tried to be cordial that first meeting. She took her inside and made her tea. My mother didn't ask Jacqueline any questions. She didn't need to because Jacqueline did all the talking without any prompting. I could see it was difficult for my mother, who is very conservative. Jacqueline's 'over-anxious' approach made my mother nervous. Jacqueline was trying very hard to make a good impression, but it probably had the opposite effect on my mum. But in the long run it paid off, as they became very supportive of one another. After we were married my mother accepted Jacqueline's behaviour almost completely, even becoming something of an apologist for her at times, mainly because of her great love for the grandchildren.

When Jacqueline ran off with the children, all that my mum had done for her counted for nothing. Even when my mother was unwell from missing her only grandchildren, Jacqueline still refused to allow the kids to speak to her.

The office phone rang and dragged me out of my reverie and back to the present. It was my partner.

'Raja? Ahmad wants a revision of the secondary plan. By Wednesday.'

Ahmad was our liaison at the government.

'OK. Fine. I'll get on to it,' I said.

'You OK? You don't sound too good.'

'Oh no, I'm OK,' I replied. I had no wish to burden anyone else with my problems. I liked my partner but we didn't discuss personal matters, or even socialise. We had developed a tacit agreement to be business partners and only that. In a small town there's not much social life, especially in one as family-oriented as Kuala Terengganu, but we didn't feel the need to be in and out of each other's houses, because we worked together a lot. So we never really developed a relationship based on personal matters. It just wasn't appropriate. I don't have any really close friendships in town. I had spent most of my important high school and university years out of Kuala Terengganu, and most of my friends were working in Kuala Lumpur. I suppose I felt embarrassed to talk to my elder relations. I wasn't really done. That meant there was no one I could talk to in Terengganu about what had happened, about how I felt.

I looked at the papers in front of me. I had better read them through carefully. These were legal documents, the judgements of an ex-parte hearing from the Australian Family Court. I re-read the first paragraph: my wife had sole custody of my two children. Waves of sadness and despair washed through me. And anger. An Australian court had just granted her custody of my two Malaysian born

and-bred, Malaysian passport-holding children! What right had they to do that? But what was number two? I looked down and read:

*(2) That until further order the husband is hereby restrained from removing the said children out of the State of Victoria and out of the Commonwealth of Australia.*

So I couldn't simply go and get them. I read on. What other horrors awaited me? Numbers three and four said I couldn't apply for passports for my children, and had to hand in any I had in my possession. Number five, at the bottom of the page, said:

*That the Manager of the Australian New Zealand Savings Bank Limited [and gave the address of my branch in Melbourne] do all things necessary forthwith ...*

I began to panic. I turned the page.

*... to transfer and pay to the wife all monies standing to the credit of the husband in an account of the said Bank ... That by way of urgent lump sum maintenance the wife apply for the use and benefit for herself and the said children: (a) all interest hereafter earned by the said account; (b) one-half of the monies this day standing in the said account, or the sum of twenty thousand dollars [Australian] (\$AUS20,000), which ever is the greater ... That until further order the wife retain the balance of the monies currently in the said account ...*

I stopped reading and put my head in my hands. That account had \$AUS47,000 (RM94,000) in it, from the sale of my townhouse in Carlton, a gift from my grandfather. I had been advised to leave it in the bank because if I took it out of Australia it would've attracted a lot of tax. Occasionally I would transfer small sums when we needed it, but mainly we used it for trips to Australia to visit Jacqueline's relations. It was nearly all the money I had in the world. It was strictly my personal account, with money in it from well before I met Jacqueline.

It had nothing to do with our marriage. My grandfather had left me money in his will, and I'd bought the townhouse with it when I was a student. The Australian Family Court had ordered half of that money be given to Jacqueline and later gave her the entire balance! Was this right? I couldn't believe it. What sort of country's judiciary would order such a thing without even attempting to con-

tact me? They managed to serve me the judgement, so I wasn't exactly lost in the wilds of darkest Malaysia. Perhaps it was I who was dealing with a backward colonial state? It didn't sound like the Australia I remembered from my student days. That Australia was fair and prepared to fight for justice. So which Australia was this? This must be the Australia of the Family Court. This Australia mustn't be very civilised.

I sat with my head in my hands trying to think what this meant. Jacqueline had fought hard to get the children to Australia without me this trip, and this was why: she'd planned it. Everything started to fall into place. She'd carefully orchestrated the whole thing. This wasn't a spur of the moment decision, the reaction of a spurned woman. This was a methodical plan. Now it made sense, why she'd lobbied all my relatives so cleverly.

The presentation I was just completing had been looming a month and a half ago. I wanted to postpone the trip back to Australia until after the presentation, but Jacqueline wouldn't hear of it.

'I want to go back to Australia now, Bahrin. I miss Australia. I want to see my mother and grandmother,' she had said.

'Why can't we wait a couple more weeks?' I asked. 'I can finish the presentation and come with you. I want to see Australia again, too.'

'No. I don't want to wait.'

She was very insistent. This had been building for some time, even before I met Norilah. She had indulged in awful behaviour over the years, which worsen when she discovered I had married Norilah. But this time she was calmer, though things still weren't good between us. I was afraid of what might happen, even then. I didn't want her to go without me. She went to all my female relatives, who had been very supportive of her, and continued to support her. She went to my mother, and my aunties, and enlisted their aid. I was being cruel. I wouldn't allow her to return. Tut, tut, tut, what a wicked Bahrin.

And then came the story that her grandmother was very ill, that she'd had a serious stroke. My mother and aunties were very sympathetic now. They might be in the same situation themselves,

hoping for a favourite daughter to return to them on their death bed. I became a villain in the eyes of my family, cruelly restraining the doting daughter and grandchild from fulfilling her filial obligations. Jacqueline had learnt quite a bit about what is important in Malaysia and was applying it.

'OK, OK,' I said to my auntie who had come to plead on Jacqueline's behalf. 'Let her go back without me, if you want to. What about she goes first with Shahirah and I follow soon with Iddin?'

I thought that was fair enough. Shahirah was only a few months old. Who would like to travel unescorted with a three-year old child and an infant on an international flight if they could choose something easier? Jacqueline would. Of course she wanted to take both kids, because she was planning to abduct them. She refused my suggestion, threw another tantrum, and went the rounds of the neighbourhood.

'Bahrin's not allowing me to go!' she said to another auntie. 'What sort of man is he, keeping me locked up like this?'

The sort of man who is afraid of his wife abducting his children. But I didn't know how she would do it. I hadn't heard of the Family Court then.

'Bahrin? Can I come and talk with you?' It was my auntie's voice. I was in my room, still on my prayer mat. Afternoon prayer had just finished.

'OK. Come in.'

She gave a very convincing presentation with a thousand and one reasons why I should let Jacqueline go back to Australia with both kids. Jacqueline had promised all the aunties and my mother that she would behave herself and the kids would come back to Malaysia as usual.

'Bahrin, I guarantee you Jacqueline will come back with the kids,' my auntie said.

I was exhausted. Years of Jacqueline's unhappiness had worn me down. I had mountains of work ahead of me. Now my own family was supporting her.

What could I do? I stood up, walked to the bureau, opened the



drawer and took out the kids' passports. Perhaps that was the greatest mistake in my life.

'OK,' I said, handing them to her. 'You guarantee that they come back.'

And so Jacqueline, Iddin and Shah left for Australia on 13 November 1985, with a return ticket. The night before their departure Iddin – he and I were very close – cried most of the night. That further raised my anxiety. Perhaps he sensed something, picked up feelings from his mother? But I am a man of my word and I had to honour my agreement, no matter how reluctantly. Iddin and I were sleeping together. He wouldn't sleep with Jacqueline or by himself. He just wanted to be with me, weeping. It was awful, that weeping. I cuddled him, but that didn't help either. Eventually I took him to the car and we went for a long drive through the night. He finally settled down and we went back home to bed. We were very close to each other, and he was a very keen soccer enthusiast as well!

Three and a half weeks later I am informed that Jacqueline has decided to stay in Australia and has sole custody of my children.

## 5

There was a deluge occurring outside. I stood up, pushing the papers to one side. I needed time to think. I went to the window and looked out for a minute. Then I turned and went downstairs to get some fresh air. I stood on the footpath and looked at the rain pouring down, my stomach in knots, my eyes as wet as the sky. I still couldn't really believe it: my wife had abducted my children! I turned, and climbed the stairs. Bits of paper blew past me, pushed up by the warm wind. The stains on the concrete walls seemed dirtier than usual, and the sound of my footsteps on the stairs echoed up the stairwell, reinforcing my sense of loneliness and despair. By the time I got to the second floor I was even more depressed. I leaned against the door to the office rooms, with my two hands and my head pressed against the wood. I took a few deep breaths and went inside.

Now that my head had cleared a little I realised one important thing: this was now a legal matter. Jacqueline had decided to make our marriage difficulties a matter for the court. I went to the phone and rang my uncle, who also lives in Terengganu – a lawyer – and told him what had just happened to my kids, and my money being removed from the account.

'How can she do such a thing? How is it possible without me even being asked my side? What sort of law is this?' I asked my uncle.

'I'm unfamiliar with Australian Family Law,' he replied, 'but I understand there has been a lot of dissension about its rulings, especially from fathers. Friends have referred to rulings that seemed peculiarly harsh for a non-criminal case. In particular, the law in Australia favours the mother in custody matters, not the father, as is the case in Malaysia. So your absence could be seen as a statement of

the obvious. Also Jacqueline could be seen almost as a refugee, fleeing from a tyrannous situation, if she presented herself in that light. The Australians do not always see our culture favourably, to put it mildly.'

'But what about the kids? How can the court just ignore me?'

'As I said, Bahrin, Family Law is geared towards supporting the mother, as I understand it. Jacqueline is still an Australian citizen, isn't she?' he replied.

'Yes, but the children aren't. They're on Malaysian passports.'

'That's strange. Under the Hague Convention children should be returned to their country of origin,' he replied.

'What's the Hague Convention?' I didn't know what he was talking about.

'An international agreement about how to deal with child abduction from one country to another. Australia is a signatory, but not Malaysia. Under the convention signatory countries are required to return abducted children to their original country's jurisdiction. It should be a matter of course.'

'But why didn't they do that immediately? Why this ex-parte judgement?'

'I'm not sure, Bahrin; I don't know Australian law well enough.'

'And is it normal for a court to take money out just like that, without a hearing?' I asked.

'Bahrin, I've never heard of such a thing. It's not common law,' he replied.

He was educated in England at Lincoln's Inn and is very experienced. He told me to stay calm and he'd make enquiries. He soon rang back and told me that he'd asked a few friends who had associates in Australia.

'It's strange, Bahrin. The news is that even lawyers in Australia say it's odd.'

'What? Not to return the kids immediately?'

'Well, yes, but also to remove your money. They say it must be a special case.'

'What kind of special case? What's going on?' I wasn't feeling comforted by this new information.

'I found out a little more about the Hague Convention rulings. It seems that children are automatically returned to their country of origin unless,' he paused for a few seconds and coughed lightly, 'unless the applicant can prove that the child will be at risk.'

'At risk?' I repeated. I started to feel ill again.

'Yes. It's possible that Jacqueline may have suggested to the court that Iddin and Shah were in danger of some kind of psychological or physical harm. However,' he quickly went on, 'it's probably a case of the judge deciding to err on the side of caution. Is there a further hearing?'

I had read the papers thoroughly while I was waiting for his call. 'There's something here about 29 January, in Melbourne. "... Of the wife's said applications ..."'

'That's when you can put your case, Bahrin.'

I rang off and sat thinking. Again. My life was thinking about the past and the future. There seemed to be no present that wasn't a hell of speculation.

The next six weeks I tried to work, I tried to find Jacqueline and the kids, I tried not to think of what might happen. I was deeply shocked at how easy it had been for her. What could I do about it? Nothing at all. I could only go through the processes available to me to have my children returned. I had some comfort in the thought that under the Hague Convention I was in the right, that once the court was aware of the situation the children would be returned to me and to the country of their birth. Under Malaysian law custody of the children falls to the father unless the mother can prove it should be otherwise. It is the opposite of Australian law. But it wasn't custody or control that I wanted. I just wanted my kids to be back where they belonged. Even if they lived around the corner with their mother, or even in Kuala Lumpur and they lived with me on school holidays. As long as they were back in the country where they grew up, where all their friends and relations were, and in the religion that both their parents followed.

I had no success in finding Jacqueline. She didn't even try to get in touch with me, or let the children talk to their father. I worried about Iddin. He and I were very close and I knew he would be

wondering where Abah was, even though he was only three. But I supposed it would be easy for Jacqueline to keep him entertained, especially with plenty of money! The only thing I could do was prepare my case. I contacted lawyers in Melbourne and briefed them over the phone.

'Look, Raja,' my lawyer Ting Chan said, 'your defence is simple. You go strictly by your local law. You were married to Jacqueline in Malaysia, in Terengganu, as Muslims. It was a Muslim marriage, not a civil marriage. You are governed by Muslim marriage law. Therefore, under the terms of the Hague Convention the children, products of that marriage and raised under Muslim law of Malaysia, must be returned to that jurisdiction. It is a simple matter. We'll just fight on jurisdiction. Don't even go for a full hearing. You don't need to argue whether you're a better father or she's a better mother. You don't need to do that at all. Just fight on jurisdiction and have the case referred to Malaysia. It's not the responsibility of an Australian court to decide on the fate of Malaysian children. Better still, to equip yourself to face the court here, go to your local Muslim court, in Terengganu, and ask for a custody order for the children. I don't doubt you'll be granted it. Your wife took those children on the pretext of a visit to a sick grandmother, promising to return, with a return ticket. She has no legal right to keep two Malaysian children in Australia and claim Australian jurisdiction.'

So I went to the Syariah court as advised and complained, and was granted the order. However, I couldn't serve it because I didn't know where she was in Australia.

## 6

I did a lot of thinking during those six weeks while I waited to go to Australia for the hearing, rehashing our marriage, going over and over the past trying to see where it went wrong and why what happened happened. One day I was in the office and Sharifah was talking to someone on the phone about their wedding plans, and I remembered our weddings. Jacqueline and I had two. The first was the religious ceremony, conducted at home when I was still studying, at the beginning of my final year of architecture. There were only about ten people, and it was held at my mum's. There was a compulsory religious part, conducted by a local *imam*, where we went through the vows, and then a meal in the evening. It wasn't very long, I remember, or a great social occasion. It had meaning as a religious event.

The second wedding, the ceremonial one, was held about a year later when we'd returned, I thought, for good from Australia. I had graduated, sold the townhouse in Carlton that I'd bought with money my granddad had left me, packed everything and come home with Jacqueline. It was quite a big 'do', in a way, though by Malaysian standards it was modest. I'm not a showy person. It was 'big' in so much as VIPs attended, because of my status as a member of the royal family. The Sultan, my uncle, came and so did the Crown Prince, the Chief Minister and local politicians. But it was still held at our own house, not at a big hotel. The ceremony is more traditional than Islamic, a legacy of Malaysia's Hindu past. We dressed up like a prince and princess from the past, sat on a little dais adorned with decorations, and people threw rice. I think of it as a lot of hoo-ha, icing on the cake. Jacqueline's mother and grandmother came over for that

one and stayed for two or three weeks. Perhaps all the novelty of such an affair fired the fantasy of marrying an exotic prince? I was afraid then of what might happen when the novelty started to wear off. The suspicion had been compounded by Jacqueline's passion for anything written about the wedding of Charles and Di which, unfortunately, was about the same time as ours.

'Oh! Here's the latest Lady Di!' she'd say, waving some women's magazine at me.

She was quite excited at being a Malaysian princess, even though I told her many times that 'royalty' in my case wasn't anything like what she read of the British royal family in the women's glossies. Besides, Jacqueline wasn't going to be a 'real' princess anyway, not according to custom or law, and I didn't even have any special duties, let alone privileges. Such things are reserved for the 'first family', the Sultan's own children and siblings. My mother is the Sultan's sister, but she keeps a very low profile. I told Jacqueline that there are nine sultans in Malaysia, taking it in turns to be the 'king' of the entire country and that over the generations these sultans have produced many thousands of princes and princesses. Some occupy high corporate positions, while more than two-thirds lead a very ordinary life. It's not uncommon to find someone with the royal name of 'raja' or 'tengku' sweeping the floors of a restaurant or working as a labourer on a construction site. Being 'royal' in Malaysia isn't a passport to the high life. A good education and qualifications are much more important, which was why my parents and late grandfather were particular about my education.

The first two years of our marriage had been fine. Jacqueline was enthusiastically learning the *adat* from my mother: all the do's and don'ts of Malaysian culture. The *imam* who had instructed me when I was a boy used to come two or three times a week to have regular religious instruction sessions with my mother and Jacqueline, who was very keen to participate. She knew a fair bit about Islam as it was, but before we were married we'd had a proper conversion ceremony, just to make sure that she understood all the basics. It wasn't strictly necessary because she claimed she was already a Muslim, but she wanted to do it anyway. I think it was a form of public

profession of faith for her, to let her new family know that she was serious and committed to Islam.

My mum was very supportive of Jacqueline, always assisting whenever she could, whether it be around the house or answering questions about Malay life or about Islam. She really tried to make Jacqueline feel part of things. She could have just ignored Jacqueline, and let her fumble about on her own, but she chose instead to be kind and helpful. On the surface then, everything seemed smooth.

'Your mum's really good, Bahrin. She's teaching me so much. I'd be lost without her,' she said to me once.

'She's been very good to me all my life. She is a good person,' I replied. No one has a bad word to say about my mother, and she fulfils her role superbly.

It was time for midday prayers, so I said to Sharifah as I left, 'Back soon. I'm off to the mosque.' It was starting to rain again so I drove. I got out of the car and looked about me at the ordinary men and women quietly entering: shopkeepers, taxi-drivers, government officials, labourers. A burst of laughter from the roadway behind made me turn around. I saw a whirl of bright orange and yellow flowers, reds and greens and blues, white teeth, spinning wheels and flailing arms. Two women, squeezed into a tiny *beca*, and dressed in the usual brightly-coloured clothes (one was wearing all pink), were both attempting to open their umbrellas which were covered in huge yellow and orange flower prints. A gust of wind took hold of the brollies and threatened to drag them, and the women, from the cab. Their *jilbahs* were flying up into the midst of the fracas as well. It was all colour and movement. The rider stopped, got off the bike, and looked with amusement at the two of them, who were wrestling with their difficult charges with great gusto and much laughter.

A man on the curb yelled out, 'It's a *beca*, not an aeroplane!'

That comment caused even more laughter from the two women. Another woman stepped out of a shop next to me and shouted to one of the pair – the one in pink – who must have been her friend, 'Emi! Be careful! The flowers will end up in the river!' Everyone within earshot laughed. The road they were on ended a few hundred yards further on at the river ferry jetty.



That even made me laugh, and I went into the mosque slightly cheered. These working women were Muslims, and mothers. Razak, the proprietor of the cafe where I often stopped for lunch, had three kids. Sharifah, my secretary, had two. Islam is very supportive of women, not repressive, as is so often claimed by some people in Western countries.

I came out of the mosque after praying for Allah to look after my children, wherever they were. I thought about the *khutbah* delivered by the *imam* last Friday. He used a story to illustrate a point he was making. I remembered the story well, as I had heard it often from my father and mother when I was growing up.

Muhammad was asked by a man, 'Between my father and my mother, whom should I honour more, or respect more?'

The Prophet replied, 'Your mother.'

The man asked another question. 'After my mother, who is the next person I should respect?'

'Your mother,' said Muhammad.

So the man asked once more. 'And after her?'

'Your mother,' replied Muhammad, making the point that motherhood is held in great esteem.

The true teaching of Islam does not reflect the sensationalist view that women are repressed and nothing but sex slaves. Women are honoured, especially in Malaysian culture. Perhaps in other parts of the Islamic world women are not treated with proper respect, but that is certainly not the case in Malaysia. Motherhood is considered the greatest task that a person can undertake, but that doesn't mean that women are forbidden to take other work, as everyone in Malaysia knows. Preferably a mother is home during the child's first few years, but if she wants to take a part-time job, so be it. Our society would collapse without the essential contribution of women to the economy. Women permeate every strata of work, from the highest to the lowest.

It started raining again, heavily, so I ran, jumping across a gutter and ducking underneath an awning. I stood looking out at the downpour, thinking about motherhood, and the last few years with Jacqueline. Particular scenes played themselves out again in my head.

I remembered John and Susan, expats from Sydney. Jacqueline had become good friends with Sue, who lived close by, and they used to spend a lot of time together. John was an architect working with another firm here, so we had a lot in common, too. They were very good friends. When I'd come home from work or from soccer (I play myself, and manage a youth team) Jacqueline was usually at Sue's. Some days we'd have Australian-style barbecues with them. It was quite nostalgic for me as well.

There were a lot of expat Australians in Kuala Terengganu in the first few years of our marriage, mainly working for petrochemical and helicopter companies, but they all moved south when the oil industry relocated to Kerteh. Unfortunately, John and Sue had to return to Australia as Sue had become quite ill. Suddenly Jacqueline found herself 'alone', at least without Australians nearby. I think the presence of Australians helped her to feel as if she was still connected with Australia, but once they left she started to behave more and more erratically, showing much more aggression. It marked the beginning of the downturn in our relationship. Some of those scenes I remembered only too well.

'Bahrin! What sort of place is this?'

It was Jacqueline's voice. I'd just come in from soccer and was taking off my shoes at the doorstep. The tone in her voice had become increasingly familiar: intense irritation.

'Yes, Jacqueline? What's the matter?'

'This country, Bahrin! I went to the market today to get some decent Australian Parmesan cheese,' she said, her voice coming from the front room. I heard a book or magazine hitting the floor, then, 'And they didn't have any. Not in the whole market. Not a single piece of Parmesan. I wanted it for spaghetti, Bahrin.'

I walked up the steps and straight into the dining/lounge room. She walked out of the room where she'd been reading. Iddin must have been with his grandmother. I couldn't see or hear him.

'If we were in Melbourne now we could just go out to an Italian restaurant. We could eat any sort of food we wanted. I'm sick of rice. I want some pasta, Bahrin. I wish we were back in Melbourne.' Her voice was rising.

'Jacqueline,' I said, and opened my hands. I was very upset by her anger. What could I do about it? I felt ineffectual to make her happy. 'But we're not in Melbourne. We're in Terengganu.'

'I know we're in bloody Terengganu,' she said, staring at me, anger in her eyes. I walked into the kitchen to get a drink of water and to try and diffuse the situation. She followed me, saying, 'I couldn't get the *Woman's Day* either. It's still not in. It's now two and a half weeks late, Bahrin. How come it takes so long to come from Kuala Lumpur? Can't you get it flown in, or something? In Australia I wouldn't have to wait this long!'

'Yes, Jacqueline. I'm sorry, but I can't get it here any sooner. I'll pick up the latest copy next week when I go to KL.'

'That's still too late, Bahrin. I'm sick of it. I'm sick of you,' she yelled, and stormed out of the house.

Scenes like that were becoming more and more frequent. They broke my heart. I'd bring her copies of the Australian women's glossy magazines to pacify her, and Australian cheese when I could find it. What could I do? I kept asking myself that question over and over. What could I do? Jacqueline was unhappy, and angry at being unhappy. She was unhappy with her life, the decisions she'd made. I thought I could make it all right for her. But nothing seemed to satisfy her. And taking out her anger on me wasn't enough. She would extend it to others. I remembered a very painful scene from early in our marriage, in early 1982.

'Lunch'll be ready soon, Bahrin,' said Jacqueline. 'Where's your father?'

My dad, who had divorced from my mother when I was 17, had returned to Terengganu to attend my cousin's wedding. He was staying across the lane at my uncle's. It was about 1 pm and I'd just returned from the office.

'I'll go and get him,' I said, and walked over to uncle's. I'm not a power-walker but it didn't take me any longer than a minute. Dad was just finishing his shower. The wedding had gone on until well past midnight, and Dad had stayed talking to his old friends, many of whom he hadn't seen in years. He'd risen late. So I sat in the lounge room with my cousins, my uncle and my auntie and chatted

while I waited for him to get dressed. About 1.20 pm we heard a commotion coming from the kitchen. I turned and saw Jacqueline coming up the steps from the kitchen into the room.

'Why aren't you coming! What are you two bastards doing?' she yelled. Everyone was startled and turned to look at her. They didn't know what was happening.

'Yasmin. Dad overslept. We're just coming now,' I said.

She ignored what I said and pointed at my father. He'd come out of his room when he heard all the noise, dressed only in his sarong.

'I'm cooking for you and you're lazing about in here! You're as bad as each other! Nobody gives a shit about me! I'm just some sort of slave! Lunch is getting cold! Do you understand! Lunch's getting cold! You turn up and upset everything! Who do you think you are?'

My father was deeply shocked. He is a very patient man. He'd never raised his voice at her. He didn't know where to look as she screamed at him. I was very upset and embarrassed.

'Yasmin! Calm down! It'll be all right,' I said to her.

'Yes. Father will be along soon,' said my auntie.

Jacqueline shouted at her as well. No one could do anything to pacify her. She turned around and marched out of the room. I didn't know what to say to everyone. There was a deathly silence in the room. Dad went back into his room and quickly dressed. He came out and apologised to everyone, and to me! As if it was his fault! I walked out of the house with my dad following. At my house the food was on the table. When we entered, Jacqueline was waiting.

'There it is! I hope you choke!' she screamed again.

Then she went and locked herself in her room. We sat down at the table and ate. My dad didn't say anything about what had happened. It was the most uncomfortable meal I had ever had with my father.

I said, 'I'm sorry, Dad. I don't know what to say.'

'It's alright, Bahrin. I'm alright. Be patient. It was my fault. Give her time to settle in,' he replied.

But he didn't seem very happy. He left quite soon, without

eating much, and went back to my uncle's. Parents are held in great respect in Malaysia. Screaming abuse at a parent is unheard of. My stomach was churning as I sat at the dining table. Jacqueline appeared from her room, walked past me, and went out to the car. She didn't say a thing. She drove off. I had some things to do in town, so I drove in, half-expecting to bump into Jacqueline. I had no idea where she'd gone. She always was free to go where ever she liked. She was good friends with Shirley, who was the wife of the manager of the Primula Hotel, so she might've gone to talk with her, or maybe even around the corner to her friends John and Sue. I spent about an hour doing my errands, then came back. Jacqueline's car was in the driveway and she was in the kitchen supervising the preparation for the evening meal.

My father was returning to Kuala Lumpur the next day. I wanted to see him as much as I could because he visited Terengganu only rarely, and I often wasn't able to catch up with him when I went to Kuala Lumpur because I was too busy with work.

'Yasmin, will you come and see my father before he goes?' I asked her.

She didn't even look at me.

She just said, 'No.'

I thought she might've liked to make use of the opportunity to make amends, or even just to say goodbye. But no, she didn't, she preferred to stay by herself.

'OK, that's fine. But I want to see him. This is the last chance I'll get to see him for a long time.'

'Go, Bahrin,' she said, turning her back on me.

So I went across to my uncle's. Everyone was watching the television news. I sat down next to my dad after greeting everyone.

After about five minutes of the usual television news death and destruction Jacqueline burst into the room with her own brand. Her eyes were filled with fury.

'I can't believe it! You bloody men are all the same! I can't believe the ingratitude of this father of yours, Bahrin! I'm not some sort of slave for you, you know! And you'd rather see him than me! You come over here and spend all your time with him while I'm left

alone in the house! You're a selfish bastard!

She was standing in the doorway screaming. It was hard to catch a lot of what she was saying. It didn't really matter because it was abuse, and directed mainly at my father again. I copped a fair bit of it, but most of it was for him. It was awful. I couldn't believe it was happening again, and even worse this time. She came right into the room and stood over us and kept on screaming at him. She even started poking at us.

My uncle stood up and came over, 'Yasmin! Please! Calm down!'

She didn't pay any attention. Then my auntie came and tried to calm her. I stood up as well because she was starting to get quite punchy. She was out of control and I was very worried she'd really hurt someone. As soon as I was standing she turned on me. I was very angry at this scene, completely unprovoked. Eventually my uncle, whom I call Ayah Chik, put himself between us, while my cousin Diana was holding me, and aunt Zainah had hold of Jacqueline. That sort of behaviour had never been experienced before by anyone in the room. Our family didn't behave that way. I don't think anyone in Malaysia behaved like that, but if they do they confine it to their own house, not to innocent people. I couldn't understand the animosity towards my father. He hardly even knew Jacqueline. He'd only met her once before we were married and hadn't spoken much at all. Maybe it was because she felt jealous because my father was here and her mother and grandmother were back in Australia? Or maybe it was a deep legacy of her father's abandonment? The explanations may be interesting, but the reality was awful. She eventually stormed out of the room and silence fell. The only sound was the television news playing some war scenes. Gunshots were going off in the room. It was a strange coincidence, sadly apt. I felt deeply embarrassed, and very sad for my father.

Two days later, after my father had returned to Kuala Lumpur, I received a phone call at work. My dad had collapsed on the golf course with angina. He'd never had a heart problem before, and hasn't since. He had been a very regular and fit golf captain at the popular Subang Golf Club for quite a few years. I immediately rushed to Kuala Lumpur to see him. He was in the Cardiac Intensive Care

Unit at Assunta Hospital for three days. When I arrived he was very weak and pale, but pleased to see me. I was very upset, and instead of me consoling him, he consoled me.

'Please don't worry about me, Bahrin,' he said, even though he was very weak.

'Dad. It's my fault. I'm sure what Yasmin did has triggered this.'  
'Bahrin, be happy. And be patient. In Islam, we draw strength from being patient. You know that. Remember it. Our belief in God is not complete if we are not patient. Let her settle down. She's young. Give her time to adjust,' he said, still with the oxygen fixtures attached to his nostrils.

Here was my father, after one of the worst experiences of his life, consoling me, telling me everything would be all right. I am his only son. His only daughter-in-law gave him the most disgraceful insult of attacking him in public; twice in one day!

If these outbursts were a sign of homesickness, what could I do? I was already helping her as much as I could. She rang home regularly and talked with her mother and grandmother, but those calls only seemed to make Jacqueline miss Melbourne even more, and run up huge phone bills as well. We returned to Melbourne every year for a couple of weeks so that she could see her family. I thoroughly enjoyed those visits, too. It was nostalgic to return to Parkville and Melbourne University, and just walk and drive around. I grew very fond of Melbourne over the years I lived there, and it was a thrill to return to my 'old stomping ground'.

I suggested to Jacqueline later, 'Well, we go back to Australia every year. If need be, we can go back twice a year, or even three times. But we'll have to wait until business picks up a bit.'

I'd just started my own practice at that time, and it takes a while for a business to stabilise. I spent the first two years working at the Public Works Department after we returned from Australia, in order to fulfil my obligations to the government before I could qualify to practise on my own. We weren't making much money, but we were happy enough, or so I thought. Jacqueline's outbursts were very unsettling, but I just kept waiting, patiently hoping that she would adjust. I was as loving and kind as I could be.

Iddin was born in 1983, in a little clinic just around the corner from my office, the same one in which Shah was born two years later. I wasn't exactly overworked at the Department, so I had plenty of time to spend with Jacqueline. It was a straight 8 to 4 job, and the weekends were free, so we did family things, took little outings and the like. Jacqueline would visit her expat friends during the day, either taking Iddin with her or leaving him with the maid. She was fortunate to have some help around the house. We did have to 'keep up appearances' because of our closeness to the royal family, which was actually more of a burden than an advantage on my Public Works salary of RM1,600 (SAUS800) a month. Jacqueline was free to come and go as she pleased, and had a car which she could drive about wherever she wanted.

She was very fond of dressing up in traditional Malay garb, much more than anyone else did. I don't mean *purdah* with a *chador*, or even a *jilbah*: she never dressed like that at all. She didn't even wear a scarf. She preferred the Malay traditional costume. She was more Malay than the Malays when it came to costume! She would attract a lot of flattering comments whenever she went out. She really was someone who liked the limelight, and she sought it however she could, even in sleepy Kuala Terengganu. It was a very easy life for her, because she had my mum to help her, and the maid, both of whom loved to look after Iddin so Jacqueline could go out, or read a book for an hour or so. She loved reading Australian novels. Despite her outward adjustment (perhaps even 'over-adjustment') to Malay life, she still kept in close contact with her Australian roots. Really she seemed to be living in two fantasy worlds: one in Malay costume and one in Australian novels and magazines. But it wasn't enough, this easy life filled with fantasy. Being a princess wasn't all it was cracked up to be. It was a fairly ordinary life in a fairly ordinary town in Malaysia, very unlike the picture she painted in her sensationalist book of 1995, *Once I Was A Princess*. She was never a princess, but for Jacqueline fantasy has always overcome sensible judgement. Sadly, many Australians who read the book believed her warped tales.



## 7

These thoughts had flashed by while I was standing waiting for the rain to stop. As I waited I remembered another incident that had occurred not far from where I stood.

My mother had made a rare trip to Kuala Lumpur and had returned by air, an even rarer occurrence. I had escorted her, as I had to go to KL on business. I called Jacqueline the night before we flew back to Terengganu to tell her not to meet us at the airport. It would be early in the morning and Iddin was small. I suggested that it would be better for Jacqueline to stay with Iddin, and she'd agreed.

'If we can't get a ride from friends, we'll catch a cab,' I replied.

When we arrived at the Kuala Terengganu airport I met Hamzah, the driver from the Public Works Department who had just dropped off his boss. He knew me from my Public Works days and offered to take my mother and me home. We weren't far from our house, almost in town, when a car behind us honked its horn and flashed its lights. I was in the back with my mum and turned around to see what the commotion was about. It was Jacqueline, in my car.

'You'd better pull over. It's Jacqueline. There must be something wrong,' I said.

I was afraid that something had happened to Iddin. The nanny was sitting in the back but I couldn't see Iddin. It was about 8 am, people were going to work and the road was pretty busy. Eventually my friend parked the car on the side of the road. I jumped out and walked back towards Jacqueline, who'd pulled up behind us. She flung the door open and jumped out.

'What are you doing in this car? I was going to surprise you!' I

was going to pick you up! But you weren't there!' she yelled.

I couldn't believe my ears. The nanny was still sitting in the car looking frightened and holding Iddin, who was crying. I started to think that Jacqueline might truly be crazy. I just couldn't understand what she was screaming about. She'd decided to surprise us by meeting us at the airport even though we'd agreed she wasn't going to come because of Iddin and when she can't find us at the airport she tracks us down and abuses us!

'Jacqueline! Calm down. Get in the car and I'll drive you home. Jacqueline!'

She kept on screaming the same things. A bit of a crowd had gathered on the footpath to watch, and cars were slowing down to listen. I was mortified. It was the busiest time of the day and hundreds of people saw and heard her. Finally she got back into the car and I drove her home. Her behaviour was completely unacceptable. In Malaysia such things just don't happen. That's not because Malaysia is an Islamic state. Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Chinese, Malays; nobody behaves like that. Not even in Western countries is such behaviour condoned. If there are differences to settle they're settled privately, behind closed doors, between the parties concerned. Why invite the neighbourhood to watch? There were other sensational incidents before that: screaming at me and insisting I wore my seat-belt, for example, but that was certainly the most spectacular. Jacqueline has always been good at getting attention.

With all these nerve-wrecking and humiliating public displays of tantrum, I didn't know if I was married to a mature woman or an insecure child. I doubt I could have kept my sanity if I had not met my present wife, Norilah.

By the time I reached the office the rain had stopped. I went back to the drawing board and redrew the section I'd been working on before I left.

About ten days before the 29 January hearing I flew to Melbourne to meet with the lawyers and finalise details. The plane arrived about 6 am, and I went straight to my hotel, The Victoria, in Little Collins Street in the heart of the city. The morning air was cold, the sky cloudless. Even the weather seemed unusual.

The next day was hot and dry, with a blustery north wind whipping dust and papers along the city streets. I'd never been there at that time of the year; I'd always returned to Malaysia for the University break and the Melbourne I knew was wet and cold. That climatic difference highlighted the sense of unreality and disease that was permeating my life. Even familiar Melbourne had donned an opposite guise.

I arrived at the lawyer's office tower for our 9 o'clock meeting and went straight up to their floor. I was shown into Chan's office.

'Pleased to see you, Raja. Please sit down,' he said.

I hadn't met this man before, only spoken on the telephone. He was middle-aged, and dressed in a white shirt with a brightly-coloured tie above his grey trousers. His grey suit jacket hung on a rack at the side of the room. A floor-to-ceiling window behind him revealed a roof-top Melbourne dotted with construction cranes. We talked for a couple of minutes about my flight and the weather, and then about some of the issues likely to be raised in the hearing.

'What I still can't understand is why the children weren't sent straight back to Malaysia by the first judge? Isn't that the law?' I said.

'Raja, I'd been waiting until you arrived to show you these. They might help you to understand.'

He picked up a few papers from the side of his desk and held them out to me. I took the papers from him. His tone suggested they weren't in my favour.

He stood, and said, 'I'll get you a cup of coffee while you read them.'

'Water will be fine, thanks, Chan,' I replied.

I glanced past him out the window. An enormous orange crane was moving a large blue container at eye-level, about one hundred metres from me. Other cranes poked at the sky all around. I counted them. There were thirteen in total. I'm not usually superstitious – Islam forbids such things – but I couldn't help connecting the number of cranes with the date Jacqueline left for Australia: unlucky 13 November.

The heading on the cover page of the document he'd given me read, 'Transcript of Proceedings. Family Court of Australia'. I turned the page.

MR ACKMAN: *If your Honour pleases, I appear on behalf of the applicant wife. This is an ex-parte application, your Honour, and clearly enough there will be no appearance on behalf of the husband.*

HIS HONOUR: *In its own way that was as scandalous an application as the behaviour of the grandparents yesterday.*

MR ACKMAN: *Yes, your Honour. Your Honour is having a good run. This one I do not think will trouble your Honour greatly either.*

HIS HONOUR: *Yes. Getting rid of all my spleen and venom.*

MR ACKMAN: *Your Honour, might I seek leave to file an amended application ...*

HIS HONOUR: *Yes.*

MR ACKMAN: *... a supplementary affidavit in support of that application, and supplementary minutes of proposed orders in accordance with rules, your Honour?*

HIS HONOUR: *What is the name? Bahrin, is it?*

MR ACKMAN: *Yes, Your Honour. I might just indicate ... your Honour might note on the file that although in fact the registry accepted the marriage certificate which is a Muslim marriage certificate without the appropriate document for translation, I would believe there would be a notation on your Honour's file that it does not comply with the*

rules, and my instructing solicitor will give the appropriate undertaking that in due course ...

HIS HONOUR: Well, I have got something here all in English.

MR ACKMAN: Yes, your Honour. We have a translation, your Honour, but it is ... the translation is not in accordance with the rules in that it has not been properly identified by way of affidavit, your Honour.

HIS HONOUR: I see, yes. Yes, all right, OK. They were married in the state of Terengganu, wherever that might be. I do not know.

MR ACKMAN: It is in Malaysia, your Honour.

HIS HONOUR: Malaysia, is it?

MR ACKMAN: Yes, your Honour. If I might ... the original application is out of the wife dated 27 November 1985, and there is an affidavit in support of that application dated the same date, together with the affidavit that I have filed before your Honour today. Does your Honour wish me to take you to those, or ...

HIS HONOUR: I think I can read them. And your client is the attractive young lady sitting next to you, is she?

MR ACKMAN: Two attractive young ladies sitting next to me, your Honour. You would have to distinguish which one of whom you speak.

HIS HONOUR: Well, nearer to you is what I meant.

MR ACKMAN: Yes, your Honour.

HIS HONOUR: Yes, all right. Well, look, I will read the papers.

MR ACKMAN: Mrs Webb does not look Malaysian, I would have to say, your Honour.

HIS HONOUR: I did not think Mrs ... came under the description of being called Yasmin.

MR ACKMAN: As your Honour will see, my client ...

HIS HONOUR: Is that fifteen Christian names?

MR ACKMAN: Yes, your Honour. Your Honour, my client's husband ...

HIS HONOUR: Not Christian names, given names.

MR ACKMAN: Given names, your Honour. My client's husband is a member of the Malaysian Royal Family ...

HIS HONOUR: Is he?

MR ACKMAN: And as your Honour will see, they are presumably ...

HIS HONOUR: Rajas, yes.

MR ACKMAN: Yes. He is a son of ... nephew of a Sultan of Malaysia, and the son is in fact the next in line in the event, and will bequeath the titles and inheritances and titles of the father upon the father's death, your Honour.

HIS HONOUR: I suppose under those circumstances they must have a lot of Christian names.

MR ACKMAN: That is right, your Honour.

HIS HONOUR: Your client would be a member of the Malaysian aristocracy in her own right, I take it, will she?

MR ACKMAN: I am not sure about that, your Honour. I do not believe that to be the case although she no doubt deserves to be, your Honour, but I think it is only by dent of marriage.

HIS HONOUR: Yes. This transcript will be fascinating if it is ever typed up. Should I give your client all the money in the bank account?

MR ACKMAN: Well, yes, your Honour, in my view your Honour should. And if your Honour has any reservations about some portion of it, your Honour might order that ...

HIS HONOUR: I was wondering what the size of the husband's estate is. If he is worth many millions I suppose he would not even miss forty-five, but if he is not worth that and if he is just an architect in private practice it might be different.

MR ACKMAN: I am instructed that he is a man of significant wealth, and that in fact the wife's jewellery alone, which is in fact not in the country, would be worth considerably more than the amount that is within the country, your Honour, but of course she does not hold out too much hope of her husband returning it to her, your Honour. Certainly your Honour might decide that some portion of it should be retained by the wife and not disposed of.

HIS HONOUR: Yes.

MR ACKMAN: As to the capital, whereas the interest could always be used, but certainly I would ask that your Honour allow the great portion of the capital and all of the interest to be used by the wife. The situation ...

HIS HONOUR: Well, I would certainly allow her to use the in-

terest and some part of the capital. How much does she need?

MR ACKMAN: Well, your Honour, the situation is that she has arrived with two suitcases and no funds at all except for, I think, about \$1000, and she is going to be applying for supporting parent's pension subject, of course, to your Honour granting relief that we seek. So it is simply a matter, your Honour, that the position is quite simply that if we do not get the money we will be having to rely upon the government, and your Honour does not need me to tell you ...

HIS HONOUR: Well, if I give you ... if you take twenty thousand plus the interest for yourself, and hold the balance, that does not do any great harm to the system, does it?

MR ACKMAN: No, I do not believe so, your Honour. Perhaps if your Honour order that the wife have transfer of the whole sum with the entitlement to use the ...

I didn't read any more. Surely this was a farce, a comedy script? Why was Chan, my lawyer, showing me this script? Was it to make me lose faith completely in the justice system? This was a so-called learned judge presiding over matters of weight and seriousness: the fate of my two children. And deciding to award nearly all the money I had in the world to an abductor, all the while thinking I was some sort of super-rich prince, not an ordinary Public Works Department architect making RM1,600 (AUS\$800) a month. I was so angry I couldn't speak. I had faith in the legal system of Australia; it is so similar to Malaysia's because of the British influence with its reputation for judicial even-handedness. Even though the Family Court had awarded sole custody to Jacqueline without me even being represented, and the transcript read like a clown play, it didn't cross my mind to do anything other than pursue the matter through the courts. Child abduction was the province of my wife.

'Wait till you see your wife's affidavit,' Chan said. He took another document from his desk and handed it across.

It was the most outrageous document. I was accused of all sorts of ridiculous actions, and Malaysian society especially in Terengganu was portrayed as something out of the Dark Ages: full of exploitation of women and violent repressive acts. I almost laughed, except after reading the transcript of the ex-parte hearing I wasn't.

as confident of the judiciary's ability to see through lies.

Chan and I discussed the affidavit for a while, and then I said, 'Chan, I really want to see my kids. Can we arrange it?'

'That shouldn't be too difficult. I'll get in touch with your wife's lawyers and see what can be arranged,' he replied. 'It'll be a good idea to have a pre-hearing meeting anyway. Maybe it can all be settled out of court. If we can get you and your wife together with a mediator there's a possibility you can resolve things without everyone else being involved.'

The meeting with Chan was over by 10.30 am, and I had nothing left to do except wait to hear if he was able to arrange for me to see Iddin and Shah. I still had no way of getting in touch directly with Jacqueline. All communication had to go through the lawyers. I walked back to the hotel. The day was hotter and windier, adding to my confusion and irritability. In front of one of the big department stores' front windows I stopped, and then went inside. I went up to the toy department and chose some toys for Iddin and Shahirah. Iddin always loved going shopping for new toys when we visited Australia. There wasn't the range in Kuala Terengganu. I went to the cafeteria and had lunch, then walked back to the hotel, only a couple of blocks.

I asked at reception if there were any messages for me. There was a fax from my office, with a few work things, so I dealt with them in my room. About 4 o'clock Chan rang and said he'd contacted Jacqueline's lawyers and passed on my request. That was all he could do for now. I just had to wait. The next few days consisted of walking, talking and waiting. I'd walk up to Chan's office and talk over details, or walk around the city looking in windows, or go to the movies, or watch television in my room. Chan and his assistant, Margaret Beattie, were very sympathetic and were not just doing their job: they were actually trying to console me at times. Meanwhile messages were going back and forth between lawyers about the meeting. At first Jacqueline refused to see me, but obviously her lawyers advised her it would look better if she had made an attempt. Finally it was arranged to take place in the Family Court Counseling Room.



I was very nervous. I wanted to see Iddin and Shah badly. It had been almost two and a half months since I last saw them. I arrived at the Counselling Room and sat in the waiting room until a woman came into the room and looked at me.

'Raja Bahrin?' she asked. I nodded. 'Please come in.'

I followed her into a small room with four armchairs arranged around a coffee table decorated with a small vase fitted with paper flowers, and a sideboard with pamphlets on it near the door.

'Please wait here.'

A few minutes later Iddin and Shahirah were brought in by the same woman. Jacqueline was nowhere to be seen. When Iddin saw me he ran over with his arms out. I grabbed him up in my arms and gave him a great big hug. I missed him so much. I held out my arm to take Shahirah, and then all three of us sat down in a chair. It was so good to have my two kids in my arms again.

Jacqueline didn't turn up. She must have been in another room and decided not to see me. The woman sat there the whole time. She didn't say much, except one strange comment about it being 'a difficult situation for women in Muslim countries where men are permitted to take more than one wife.' I couldn't believe my ears. Was this a counsellor at work? At the end of the session (it only lasted about half an hour), Jacqueline appeared at the door and told the kids they were going. She didn't say anything to me at all. Her lawyer was with her, Ms Lillian Webb.

Iddin started crying when he was told they were leaving, and said, 'Can Abah come home, too?'

She looked at him, then at me, and agreed, very reluctantly. The ridiculousness of the situation must have been starting to affect even her. Her lawyer didn't say anything other than, 'I'll ring you later,' and then left. We walked out of the building and into the carpark. Iddin was very happy, jumping and skipping about and holding my hand. I was relieved and hopeful that Jacqueline and I might be able to talk it through without lawyers and courts. I didn't want to go through all of this. I was hopeful that something could be worked out. Even if she wanted to stay in Australia maybe the kids could come and live with me for the school holidays. Such things

had passed through my mind. If she was so unhappy I wasn't going to force her to return if we could come to an agreement about the kids. We got into her car, a late model Honda Civic, and drove out to her house, which was near Monash University, her old stomping ground. We didn't say much to each other. I just talked to the kids and cuddled them.

At her place Jacqueline relaxed a little and behaved in a much less intimidating fashion.

'Cup of tea, Bahrin?' she asked.

'Yes, thanks, that'd be fine.'

She went off to make it. I couldn't help noticing all the new equipment, bought with the money from my account, all over the house. There were new lounge suites, a dining table and chairs, television and stereo. Iddin took me to his room to show me his toys. They had plenty of new things, and the rest of the house was furnished very adequately. I came back into the living room and played with Iddin and Shah. Jacqueline came back with the tea and sat opposite. She softened a lot, and we began talking about small things: the weather, her mother and grandmother, those intimate details that aren't too confronting. And then the phone rang. I gathered from her conversation that it was her lawyer, Lillian Webb. I noticed that Jacqueline became more and more agitated as she spoke.

She put the phone down and said, 'I want you to go now, Bahrin. I'll ring a taxi.'

She rang a cab, then sat without speaking until it arrived. I kept playing with the kids until it was time to go. I kissed them and left, without another word from Jacqueline.

I was very down-hearted. I went straight back to the hotel, had a shower, then walked around the city for a while, trying to cope with what was happening. The next morning I rang Chan and told him what had happened. We decided that we would try and arrange a counselling session again. We thought it might help. Jacqueline had softened when we were alone, so perhaps a session would promote more of that behaviour. However, she refused. I suppose her lawyer had advised her against it. It took another couple of days to get that refusal.

In the meantime my lawyers had begun to hear of a fantastic affidavit being prepared by Jacqueline and her lawyers. It was purported to contain accounts of princely high living, scandal after scandal, stoning to death in Terengganu for wearing a bikini! It was even more wicked than the first one she had presented to the ex-parte hearing. This time I was really being painted as the Evil Prince. At least we had wind of it and could prepare to fight it. I suppose that was a good thing, in a way.

A few days before the hearing the phone rang. It was about 8.30 am, and I'd just come back from breakfast downstairs. It was Jacqueline. I was very surprised.

'How are you, Bahrin?' she asked in a very soft tone.

'Fine, Jacqueline. And you?'

'Well, thanks. Bahrin, I've been thinking, you know, about all of this, and I wonder whether it might be best if I do go back to Terengganu. I know it sounds a bit strange after all of this, but I think I've changed my mind. We could talk more easily when we got home.' She paused.

I was speechless, once again. Jacqueline never ceased to amaze me. We were about to go to court, she'd been preparing an affidavit full of spectacular lies about me, she'd abducted my kids and allowed me to see them only once in two and a half months, and now she wanted to forgive and forget. And I was still willing to try. That was amazing, too, I suppose. But the tension of the last few days was becoming unbearable.

'Well, Jacqueline, that sounds like a good idea. What do you propose?'

'Oh, Bahrin. We can stop the hearing. We don't have to go through with it. I'm sure we can work something out, aren't you? In Terengganu.' Her voice was like a cat purring.

'Sure. Let's sort this out properly. There's no point fighting in court. The children aren't going to benefit from this. Let's solve it amicably. There's too much tension here. The lawyers are sharpening their knives.'

'You're right, Bahrin. I'm really sorry. I miss you and I miss Terengganu,' she said, almost weeping. She must have been having a big think during the night. 'Let's get together soon and work it out, OK? I'll ring you back later. Bye.'

And she hung up. I sat down on the edge of the bed for about a minute, wondering what to do. I felt elated. Maybe now we really could work things out. I rang Chan and told him what she'd said.

'I'd watch myself if I were you, Raja,' Chan replied. 'I think it might be a ploy. They probably know by now that they've got a shaky case. That's what that scurrilous affidavit's about. They're going to plead possible harm to the children if they're sent back to Malaysia. If Jacqueline can get you off guard, maybe you'll call off the hearing.'

My spirits plummeted. Maybe he was right after all. Still, I would wait until Jacqueline rang again until I made any decision. If she really had changed her mind we could all go home and have a much better chance of sorting things out.

The rest of the day I was in a state of expectation. I started to get very excited about us all being a family again, whilst at the same time feeling hopeless because maybe Chan was right. At 9 o'clock

that night the phone rang. It was Jacqueline.

'It's all off, Bahrin. What I said this morning? Forget it,' she said, almost snarling this time.

'Why, Jacqueline? Why have you changed your mind again? Why can't we work it out without all these lawyers?' I pleaded.

'Just forget it, Bahrin. I'm going to see you in court!'  
I suppose it shouldn't have surprised me as it was just like Jacqueline: utterly impulsive. So we went to court.

## 10

How disheartened I was! And how determined! Jacqueline continued to play her up and down games, never remaining consistent. And now we were about to face the legal consequences: a courtroom battle. I was as prepared as I could be, but I still felt unsure that I could win. Even though everything was in my favour, Jacqueline was so vindictive, so good at bending the truth, and so able to smile sweetly at judges, that I wasn't confident of any easy win. The transcript from the *ex-parte* judgement had shown how the judge was influenced.

On 29 January 1986 we appeared before Mr Justice Treyvaud, in a pre-trial list. I arrived at the Family Court building, about half an hour before the appointed time so that I could talk over the final details with my lawyers. The place felt restrained and anxious, as if all the feelings of the litigants had permeated the walls. Even the air smelt strange. All the anxiety and anger must have made its way into the air-conditioning as well. Chan was there when I arrived, and Bruce Geddes, the barrister who was going to appear on my behalf. They were standing talking in the foyer.

'Raja,' said Chan, without smiling.

Bruce Geddes nodded. It was a sombre occasion. We knew that Jacqueline and her lawyers were likely to be quite scurrilous, so we had to prepare ourselves for the worst. We talked for a while as people came and went in the foyer, and then sat in the courtroom. The hearing began.

After the opening formalities Jacqueline's counsel, John Urodovich, immediately requested applications for custody and guardianship be heard in Melbourne.

My counsel, Mr Geddes, replied in full to her lawyer's application. Part of what he said was, '... that in removing the children from Malaysia permanently, as she clearly intended, upon the subterfuge of a short family visit to Australia, to which the husband had agreed and which he funded, the wife had abducted or "kidnapped" the children, as that term is defined by the relevant authorities.' He also told the judge that I was an architect in Kuala Terengganu and that the children were Malaysian and that the children's futures should be decided in their homeland.

Urodovich argued that it should be determined if the Malaysian court would provide a fair and impartial hearing. He said that the welfare of the children was the paramount issue in the Family Law Act 1975. I had applied for custody of Iddin, in particular, because it was his birthday on 15 February and I wanted him to be home in Malaysia. Given his age, three, it made sense that he would have a closer attachment to Terengganu and his relations and friends than Shahirah, who was only three months old. But Urodovich said that Iddin and Shah would be separated, with adverse effect, if I was successful. The judge later said he found that argument unhelpful.

The judge then had a problem. He didn't know anything about Malaysian law, culture or politics. He was very ignorant for a learned judge, but tried to rectify his deficiency by questioning me. I am not an expert on Malaysian law, which he soon discovered. I was instructed to find an expert on Malaysian law to tell the judge that we were a civilised member of the British Commonwealth! How pathetic. He was the learned judge, a citizen of a Commonwealth nation, and I had to furnish the information, at my expense. My country was guilty until proven innocent. The best we could come up with was someone from the Malaysian Embassy, a counsellor. He came to court and said as much as he knew. However, he wasn't to be taken seriously because he wasn't a lawyer, according to Mr Urodovich. The learned judge agreed. Accordingly, he decided to adjourn the hearing until 5 February so I could find a proper authority, to suit him.

I rang my uncle in Kuala Terengganu, who recommended a Mr Ismail. I contacted him and arranged for him to fly to Melbourne for

the hearing. I only had six days to organise it, and it wasn't easy. I had to pay his air ticket, hotel bill, and fee of RM10,000 (\$AUS5,000) for two days, in order to enlighten the judge. He was suitably impressed by Mr Ismail, who spent a considerable amount of time filling the judge in on Malaysian history, from pre-war through Independence to post-Independence. He explained the political structure of the Malay States, and the jurisdictions of the civil and Islamic courts. All of this in order to satisfy the judge that Jacqueline would get a fair hearing in Malaysia!

Mr Ismail also presented important cases and judgements in Malaysian courts where it was clear the welfare of the children was of first importance. He also explained that even though I was of royal blood I would be treated just like everyone else. Jacqueline's lawyer had tried to argue that the court would defer to my status! The judge seemed fairly satisfied by Mr Ismail, and obviously felt sure that Malaysia is a decent, civilised nation and that I wasn't about to run amok in the street. Jacqueline's lawyer didn't even attempt to cross-examine him because he was obviously very experienced and polished. Then Bruce Geddes quoted all the precedents for returning children to their home: a Jewish family case, Germans, Americans, a world of cases. Nearly all of the cases of international child kidnapping heard in foreign courts result in the children being returned to their home.

As the judge later said, 'It has been inspired by the need to prevent kidnapping and forum shopping. The temptation to remove a child across a border will be great if thereby a new hearing of the custody issue can be obtained.'

In his final judgement the judge had to agree.

He wrote, 'As earlier indicated, one submission made on behalf of the wife was that in deciding the jurisdictional issue, the court must regard the welfare of the children as the paramount consideration and that, applying that consideration, the proper forum of the custodial dispute is this court. Implicit in that submission is the underlying premise that the laws and courts of this country, of this State, are so excellent and so superior to those of any other part of the word, including the Federation of Malaysia, that injustice would



inevitably follow to these parties if forced to litigate the future of their children, bred and born in Malaysia, according to the laws of the husband's homeland, in which country the wife has until recently wished to make her home. Such a presumption and premise is arrant nonsense and an arrogant insult to peoples and courts whose civilisation, culture and tradition are at the very least as old as, and equal to, ours.'

On the final day of submission the judge couldn't turn any other way, though he seemed to be trying hard do so. He had to make the only decision that could be made: that the case be sent back to Malaysia. However, he had to put a whole lot of conditions on me in order for Jacqueline to return, despite agreeing that the conditions presented by Jacqueline's lawyer were 'preposterous' and 'onerous'.

'But,' he said, 'you, Raja Bahrin, must promise the court, and give an undertaking on the Qur'an.'

So they brought out the Qur'an, and I had to swear on it. I'd already told them we don't swear on the Qur'an in Malaysia, but that didn't seem to get through to him. I duly swore upon the Qur'an.

'Yes,' I agreed. 'I will have the Kadi Court remove the order granting custody to me. I will only proceed in the civil court. I will deposit \$AUS10,000 (RM20,000) in an account for Jacqueline's legal fees in Malaysia. I will provide her with a car. I will provide her with a flat in Kuala Lumpur.'

I agreed to all of these conditions because I wanted my kids back. If that was the only way I was going to get them, then so be it. I even had to agree to pay Jacqueline's legal fees, even though she already had all that money from my Australian account. The judge even permitted her to have the rest of it, legally. Even though he granted the other half of the money to her at that hearing, she'd actually taken the whole lot out a few days after she was granted the first half. And she'd spent it on important things for the kids, like three fridges (for herself, her mother and her grandmother. Perhaps they were bought so Shah's baby food would always be properly chilled when she visited her grandma?). The judge had just tidied up the legality of it for her, I suppose.

Supposedly, one week after I notified the court that I had completed all my undertakings Jacqueline was supposed to return to Malaysia with the kids. She didn't. She applied for leave to appeal on 17 February, and it was granted. The hearing was set for June, four months away. In the meantime, the kids were still with Jacqueline and I had to return to Malaysia to work. So Iddin didn't get to have his birthday with his grandma and his friends, but stayed in Melbourne. This was despite the judge making a bit of a song and dance about the importance of returning the kids immediately. I wished the judges who later heard Jacqueline's appeal could have seen it in the same light. Treyvaud even quoted from a judgement of Lord Justice Buckley:

'To take a child from his native land, to remove him to another country where, maybe, his native tongue is not spoken, to divorce him from social customs and contacts to which he has been accustomed, to interrupt his education in his native land and subject him to a foreign system of education, are all acts ... which are likely to be psychologically disturbing to the child, particularly at a time when his family life is also disrupted. ... Anyone who has had experience of the exercise of this delicate jurisdiction knows what complications can result from a child developing roots in new soil, and what conflicts this can occasion in the child's own life. Such roots can grow rapidly. An order that the child should be returned forthwith to the country from which he has been removed in the expectation that any dispute about his custody will be satisfactorily resolved in the courts of that country may well be regarded as being in the best interests of the child.'

I returned to Malaysia, without my kids despite 'winning' the case, and considerably out of pocket. I needed to recover. And I had lots of work to do that had been piling up while I was away. It wasn't a happy time. A lot is made of the attachment a mother has to her kids, but hardly anything is said about a father's. My subsequent actions have probably made it clear how much I care for them, and how wrongly I thought I was treated by the Australian courts. I certainly went through an enormous amount in the court during the appeal.

It was a marathon hearing that lasted for about nine days and moved from Melbourne to Adelaide and then to Canberra – three different cities in three different States thousands of miles apart – because the judges moved as part of a circuit. Because it wasn't able to be completed in Melbourne we either had to move with the judges to Adelaide or wait another few months until they sat in Melbourne again. It was more of a circus than a circuit. I knew that Jacqueline and her lawyers would try every trick at the hearing because they were on the back foot. It was their best chance to have the case stay in Australia. There is no appeal outside the Family Court. Once they make up their minds finally, that's it. It's a court held *in camera*, supposedly to protect the delicate emotions of the litigants, and has no appeal other than to itself. It is a dangerous form of justice that so circumscribes itself. If they won the appeal, I had recourse to another court of five judges, and that was it. I raised as much money as I could. I sold my house in Kuala Lumpur that had also been left to me by my grandfather, and borrowed some more. I had no doubts in the ability of my lawyers, but we decided to engage a Queen's Counsel, Paul Guest, just to make sure.

Chan and Bruce had doubts about the appeal from the start.

'I don't feel good about this, Raja. I really think they're up to something,' Chan said.

He was right. The first judge, Treyvaud, had no way to turn. He had to grant me the case, even though he put a lot of conditions on it, and made it difficult the whole way through. It seems it was those conditions that lost the appeal. He had no right to place them upon me. They weren't enforceable in Malaysia anyway, so there was no assurance that the case would be heard in a civil court. He should have just ordered the return of the children. But he wanted to make sure Jacqueline would be all right. I suppose he had his way later. It didn't help us to have two Jewish judges sitting before us. When Chan and the QC saw the line-up they almost groaned. Two Jews sitting in judgement on a Muslim family case where the wife is alleging all sorts of spectacular things about the wickedness of a Muslim prince. This was during the time when Muslims and Jews in Israel were at each others' throats. We were up against the odds

from the beginning. If the judges were really concerned with international law and protecting the welfare of the children they could easily have varied the conditions that were the cause of contention. Jacqueline's lawyers spent a lot of time ranting about the welfare of the children, and the judges chose to believe them, even though the first judge had made it clear that the children should be returned to Malaysia in the interests of their welfare. Jacqueline was awarded custody, and the children were permitted to stay with her in Australia.

After the appeal I was completely exhausted and demoralised. I was given a copy of the transcript and the judgement, read it once, and put it away. It's a sickening pile of legalese. I don't even have it any more. I think I threw it away.

Before I left Australia I asked Chan, 'What do you think? Can we appeal, go to the five judges?'

'We could,' he said, hesitantly.

I knew him quite well by now. We'd been through a lot. 'So. What do you think? What are my chances?'

'Well, Raja, it's not that I wouldn't want to represent you, so don't get me wrong. I'll fight for you in whatever court in this world you want me to fight, but the point is, I don't think you're going to get anywhere.'

I looked at him, feeling completely lost. He was telling me there was no hope and I should just forget it.

One of the other lawyers on my team butted in, choosing to be quite frank. 'You're not just fighting Jacqueline, you know. You're not even fighting her lawyers. You're fighting the judges, my friend, and the whole Family Court. They're all up against you because you're the husband, the father, a Muslim and a billionaire prince. There's no other way I can explain what has happened and what is likely to happen. The case has been utterly appalling.'

'Speaking to you as a friend: keep your money. Save it, whatever you have left. There's no point. You're not going to have a single cent left if you go on. You wouldn't even be able to afford to come to see your kids by the time you go through another appeal. It will cost you hundreds of thousands more.'

He looked at me and I looked at him. I was grateful for his directness. They all knew I was struggling to pay the costs, which had already amounted to about RM400,000 (\$AUS200,000). I'd be paying off loans for a long time to come. I think I was given the right advice, despite the injustice of the whole situation. The reality of the justice system is very different from justice itself.

'OK. I think you're right,' I said. 'I'm broke. I can't fight any more. If the might of the Australian court decides that my kids are to stay here, so be it. I can't afford to fight them. I've run out of steam and money. I'll just have to get used to visiting my kids as much as possible.'

I ended up owing those guys, who had become my friends within weeks, a lot of money. I was totally broke, emotionally shattered and spiritually drained. Although we 'lost', I owe a lot to Ting Chan, Margaret Beattie, Bruce Geddes and Paul Guest. Without the spirit with which they carried the fight so gallantly I would never have regained my composure. It is true what they say, it is not a matter of winning or losing, it's knowing how well you had prepared and fought. The guys did their best possible but were up against all odds. The telling factor was blind prejudice. I am forever indebted to Ting Chan, Margaret, Bruce and Paul. They were very fair Aussies!

I returned to Terengganu and a life of depression. It was very hard to live normally again. The house was empty of the sound of children. Everything had changed completely. I tried to keep on with my work but it was very difficult. I kept thinking of the kids, wondering if they were all right. I had to continue with the project we had been working on when Jacqueline took the kids, and that wasn't easy. I was gloomy and irritable.

I rang Jacqueline in August and told her I wanted to come and see the kids. She agreed, reluctantly.

'Just talk to my lawyer, Bahrin,' she snapped, and rang off.

I didn't like the sound of it. I was afraid she was going to make it very difficult for me to see them. I wrote to my lawyers, and asked them to send on a letter to Jacqueline's lawyers, telling her that I intended visiting the children in October. That was the agreement: I had to give one month's notice in writing. I wanted everything done properly.

I called her the first week after I sent the letter.

'Jacqueline, your lawyers should receive a letter from my lawyers telling you I want to visit Iddin and Shah in October. Will you be there? Is that OK with you?'

'Fine, fine. Yes, you can come then,' she replied.

Two weeks before I left, I called her again. She didn't answer. I rang again later. Still no answer. I tried again the next day, but with no luck. Finally, I got through at night, but someone else answered, a man.

'Where's Jacqueline? Where are Iddin and Shah?' I asked.

'I don't know, they're no longer here,' he said.

'Who are you?' I asked. Maybe this fellow was Jacqueline's boyfriend? I didn't care what she did with her life as long as it didn't harm the kids.

He told me his name, and said, 'I'm moving in. I'm renting this place now.'

'Oh. Did Jacqueline leave an address?'

'Sorry, mate, I don't even know this Jacqueline person. I got this place through an agent.'

So how was I to look for my kids? Once again they were lost somewhere in Australia. Jacqueline was becoming very good at stealing my children away from me.

'Chan,' I said to my lawyer on the telephone, 'Chan, she's moved house and I don't know where she is. I want you to find out from her lawyers.'

'Of course, Raja. I'll ring you back later today.'

I spent the next few hours at work completely distracted. I was in a meeting with clients and I could hardly pay attention. Eventually I had to excuse myself. I walked around outside for a while, trying to calm myself. Perhaps she'd taken them to another country? She couldn't without their passports. Maybe she'd made new ones? Anything was possible through the Family Court. I began to panic. I rushed back to the office and rang Chan.

'Raja,' he said, 'I was just about to ring you. I've just spoken to Ms Webb. She informs me that she doesn't know the whereabouts of Jacqueline and the children.'

I noticed that a fly was walking along my desk, just beside a pencil. I could hear my breathing. In, out, in, out.

'Yes?' I heard the word come out and go down the phone to Chan. 'Yes? Did she have any idea at all where they might be?'

'She thinks they went off on holiday.'

'Chan, they know that we served them one month's notice. I've booked my tickets and arranged my leave. So I'm coming,' I said.

I decided to go to Melbourne even if no one knew where Jacqueline was or what she'd done with the kids. At least I would be in the same country. If I was lucky I might bump into them in the

street. When I arrived I went to her lawyer's office, with my lawyer, and with no luck.

We sat in Ms Lillian Webb's office. Ms Webb was not warm towards me. Nor was she professionally distant. From the beginning it seemed as if she had a personal motive in her behaviour. She had become Jacqueline's best friend. I was later told that Lillian is Jewish. Maybe I being a Muslim did not help her attitude towards me.

'I don't know where she is,' said Webb, shrugging her shoulders. 'She hasn't come back.'

I pressed her. 'Come on, you must now where she is. Both of you were well aware I was coming. I complied with the court's instructions to inform you one month before. So, where is she and where are the kids?'

'I don't know where she is! She went on a holiday! So what! I don't know! Don't ask me!' she almost shrieked, raising her voice and pushing out her chin.

She was quite shrill. I glanced at Chan. He was sitting calmly, but I could tell by the look in his eyes that he was as surprised as I was by this behaviour. It made me suspicious. Outside, in the lift, I said to Chan, 'What do you think? What game is she playing? Are they up to something?'

'I don't know, Raja, but that behaviour was certainly strange. We could start proceedings through the court. Jacqueline has broken the terms of the agreement.'

'What else can I do? I'm already in Melbourne. I've spent a bit of money getting here. I've got two weeks, so I'll stay as long as I can. I will see my kids sometime. Eventually I'll track them down, or at least try to make sure it doesn't happen again, through the court.'

I was still afraid she might have tried to leave Melbourne and go into hiding, but when I thought more about it, I didn't think it was likely because her mother was here and her old friends. Besides, the Family Court was so helpful to her. We went back to the Family Court, and one of the judges who sat on the appeal, Justice Joske, heard my case. We got an urgent hearing within one or two days, and gave notice that the hearing was supposed to be heard in the afternoon.



Jacqueline's lawyer came, stood up and said, 'Oh, Your Honour, we just learned that Jacqueline may be coming back, either this evening or tomorrow.'

Joske didn't even look at her. He reached out for some papers, stood up, and said, 'OK, this hearing's adjourned until tomorrow or the day after,' the judge said. 'You will be notified of the time.'

My lawyer leapt to his feet. 'Your Honour! Could we have an order that the children be presented to the court to ensure their well-being? My client is anxious to see them.'

'Yes, all right, see the clerk,' he said, and left.

Two days later, after I had tried to get Jacqueline's new phone number and address from her lawyers, without success, and dawdled around Melbourne trying to fill in time, we returned to court.

We all lined up in the waiting room, Chan and I on one side and Jacqueline, Lillian and Shah and Iddin on the other. When Iddin saw me he ran to me and gave me a big hug. I picked him up and kissed him. I was so pleased to see him! Jacqueline kept a tight hold on Shah. But when Shah saw me and Iddin she started yelling out. Iddin wanted to stay with me, but Jacqueline told him to come and sit with her. It was heartbreaking. The hearing began.

'Mrs Bahrin,' said the judge, 'your husband is concerned that you did not honour the agreement, the order of this court, to provide access to the children as arranged in writing with one month's notice.'

'Your Honour, we went away on holiday, to the country. I just forgot to tell Ms Webb where we were going. I'm sorry, Your Honour. And I forgot that Bahrin was coming to visit. It has been quite stressful, Your Honour, and we all needed a holiday. It was the only time available so we just went.'

'Oh well, you're supposed to let the father know,' he replied, smiling politely. 'So next time, Jacqueline, make sure you don't forget. You know the father has to know the whereabouts of the children, and where they go to school. The father needs to know their home address at all times.'

'Yes, your Honour,' she said, batting her eyes. She looked very pretty. The judge liked that.

So I was able to see my kids for three days, the first time for months and months. They seemed very scruffy and not very well looked after. Jacqueline must have been going out and having a 'good time' after her 'suppression' as a mother in Terengganu. It must have been some holiday. After weeks in Australia searching for my kids, all I had was three days! We went shopping, to Luna Park, to the swings in the Gardens, and to the cinema. It was wonderful to be with them, but sad, so sad, as I had so little time, and it was under such strange circumstances. Unfortunately, it seemed to begin a pattern that was to continue for a very long time. Each time I wanted to see the children, I had to run the gauntlet.

The next time I could return to see Iddin and Shahirah was in February the following year, four months later. And it happened again! I served notice, through my lawyers and her lawyers, that I was coming, and confirmed it on the telephone, but she wasn't there when I arrived. I assumed it was just to irritate me. She knew that she was required to turn up with the kids, by law, but she wouldn't, so as to tire me, so I'd just give up. I was in a foreign land, fighting a losing battle, without much support emotionally or financially. But I didn't give up: they were my kids and I wanted to see them, to keep a relationship going with them.

I went back to court again and the judge had to make another order, 'Jacqueline, you make sure, next time you move house you inform the father. The father has a right to know.' There was no severe reprimand or word of warning, just, 'Oh, make sure you tell him next time,' in a half-joking, half-laughing manner. 'Don't do it again. Naughty, naughty.'

That visit I saw them for only three days, again, after waiting around in Melbourne. It was extremely frustrating, to wait for months, to travel thousands of miles, to spend a lot of money doing so, to become increasingly excited at the thought of seeing my kids and planning all sorts of outings with them, only to have to wait on tenterhooks when I arrived, wondering if I would be able to see them at all, and knowing that the delay was designed especially to make me lose heart. These sorts of tactics by Jacqueline became increasingly familiar as the pattern of seeing the kids became established.

After the appeal and my February visit, Jacqueline called my mother a few times in Terengganu and she spoke to me once or twice. One of those times she asked for a divorce.

'Everything is blown to pieces now,' I thought. 'I don't see how we could get back together. There's no point in trying to keep her as my wife seeing she's not really my wife any more. But if I wanted to make things difficult for her, or just to be nasty, I could refuse to grant her a divorce, and just leave it like that. I could make her apply for it, and it would take a long time. It would be a very elaborate and long process because the marriage was in Malaysia and she'd have to apply in Malaysia. There'd be a lot of paperwork. Or even if she wanted to do it the Australian way, it would have to be a long process as well. But why should there be any more animosity, if our marriage is over? It's a matter of trying to get on with life and hoping that the kids are not affected too much.'

I finally said to her, 'OK, I will sort it out.'

I thought I might as well get the divorce over and done with. We couldn't reconcile any more. So I thought if I complied with her wishes she would at least be cordial and cooperative with me so I could see the kids. I was sadly mistaken. I thought by being kind to other people they would try to reciprocate, if not fully, at least partly. One kind deed for another. I had the papers and everything worked out in Terengganu. The divorce was effected about August 1986, before I went to see the kids again.

But she did make it almost conditional, implying, 'You want to come and see the kids you'd better come with the divorce things all sorted out.'

I thought she was going to make it difficult for me to see them. It had already been difficult, and that stayed the general trend for years and years to come, despite my best intentions. It seemed I was going to have to pay heavily because being a princess hadn't turned out the way she'd fantasised. Now she was going to live in the fantasy of the 'bitter, wronged woman', not caring what effect that would have on the kids. Despite my willingness to cooperate with her, or perhaps even because of it, every visit I made to see my children had provisions attached, with threats of further court action or simply refusing access. The kids became a commodity to be bargained over and traded. She knew how to use the kids to get things from me, or to irritate and upset me. That particular trip, in August, and trips to follow, she asked for things to be brought over from Terengganu.

She rang me and said, 'It's a suitcase, Bahrin. It has precious things in it that belong to me. They came from my grandmother. I want them back. The case is in your mother's house.'

'OK, Jacqueline, if that's what you want, I'll bring it with me.'

I went to my mum and asked her, 'Do you know where the suitcase is that Jacqueline left here? She said it has things in it she wants.'

'No, Bahrin, I don't. I haven't seen any case of Yasmin's,' my mother replied. 'But I will look again, Bahrin. Perhaps I have forgotten.'

But she couldn't find it. I searched my house, without success. I rang Jacqueline back.

'I can't find it, Jacqueline, I don't know where it is.'

'Oh come on, Bahrin, you know it's there. I'm sure you just haven't bothered to look. Go and look in your mother's house. It's in the visitor's room, on top of the wardrobe,' she said.

So I went back to my mother's and looked on top of the wardrobe. Nothing. I rang her and told her.

'Bahrin, get your mother, I want to talk to her,' she snapped. I asked my mother if she would mind talking to Jacqueline about her suitcase. It was painful for her, but she did speak to her, and told her that she couldn't find her suitcase. She promised to look again. My mother handed the phone back to me and Jacqueline continued.

'You'd better find it, Bahrin, it is very precious. It is full of things that are very important to me. And when you find it, don't open it, because if you do I'll know if the things have been disturbed. Now go and look again.'

A week later I received a call from Chan, my lawyer.

'Raja, Jacqueline's lawyers have written to me, with complaints that you are refusing to bring her belongings with you on your trips.'

'Chan, I've looked and looked for those belongings. It's a suitcase, but I can't find it, I don't know what she's talking about. If it's in Terengganu it's not in my house or my mother's.'

And I was right. This suitcase she asked me to bring over was not in our place, our former mutual home. After weeks of fruitless searching and letters to and fro between lawyers, I spoke once more with Jacqueline on the telephone.

'Oh, by the way, Bahrin, that suitcase I want is at the Primula,' she said.

'At the Primula? What's it doing there?' I asked. The Primula is the large tourist hotel on the beach a few blocks from my house.

'Shirley was looking after it for me. Just get it from her and bring it with you.'

Shirley was Jacqueline's friend, and the wife of the hotel manager.

'Jacqueline, why didn't you tell me this before? I've been looking high and low.' I was incredulous. There had been a lot of disturbance because of this hidden suitcase.

'I forgot, Bahrin. Just remember to bring it with you, OK?'

I rang Shirley and arranged to pick up the suitcase. I took it with me to Melbourne and gave it to her, via her lawyer.

I later discovered that another suitcase, plus boxes of photo albums, were left at my aunt's place, the Sultan's wife. How ironic that Jacqueline should confide in the wife of the despot Sultan, the man whom she portrayed in court as corrupt, almost demonic. Surely, a sane person would not entrust their precious family heirlooms to the wife of a house ruled over by a wicked Oriental tyrant? Surely, to leave such important objects with someone indicates a high degree of trust and faith in their security? But during the hearing in

front of Justice Treyvaud, Jacqueline portrayed the Sultan as a corrupt villain ruling over a backward and cruel Islamic state, in order to scare the judge and convince him that the children were at risk of being harmed.

Jacqueline had stood up in court, under oath, and said, 'Raja Bahrin's uncle is the Sultan of Terengganu, and by virtue of that he is also the head of the religious department, so he has some influence over the Kadi Court. I won't have much of a chance going back to the Kadi Court.'

Justice Treyvaud looked intently at her. He could sense a good story when he heard one! But she improved; she didn't just stop there.

'When I was in Terengganu I was aware that the Sultan had interfered with court judgements. In particular, Your Honour, in a couple of divorce cases involving his friends, he had overruled the courts and insisted that custody of the children be in favour of his friends. That's one of the reasons I'm worried about going back to Malaysia to determine custody, Your Honour.'

At the same time this very person's wife had been entrusted with cases of precious belongings of Jacqueline's. It's quite incredible how she twisted things around when it suited her. It just didn't make sense, and it still doesn't. It became part of the game – the game called 'Let's irritate and intimidate Bahrin' – to insist I brought things she had left behind in Terengganu. Every time I wanted to go to Australia to see my children there were always conditions pertaining to these objects. And the game worked: I found it very irritating. As half the things she wanted weren't there it was even more effective because I searched fruitlessly.

'Bahrin, I left behind a copy of a favourite magazine of mine. I can't remember what it was called, but it had a blue cover and was in the bedside table drawer. I want you to bring it with you. It has an important article in it that I want to read again.'

'You want me to look for a magazine you left behind, Jacqueline? Why don't you just get a copy from the publisher?'

'Because I can't remember the name of it! Don't be so stupid.'

Jacqueline's memory was surprisingly bad when it suited her.

I rang back. 'Jacqueline, I couldn't find it. I don't know where it is.'

'Bahrin! That magazine is very important. You'd better keep looking. Try asking around at the relatives' places. Maybe someone borrowed it. And I also want you to find that novel I was reading before I left ...'

This happened many times. The wretched thing about it was that I was required to take her trivial requests, which were obviously designed to continue her manipulation of me, very seriously because she would hold over me the threat of refusing access, even though it meant going against the court's orders. She knew that she could easily talk her way out of any courtroom.

When I went to Australia she'd ask her lawyer to pressure me and threaten to bring to court that I was keeping some of her things against her wishes, denying her the rights to her belongings. That was the sort of intimidation and provocation I had to face every time I went to Australia. If it wasn't books it would be clothing, bedsheets, God knows what else; trivial, trivial things which weren't in my house half the time. But that was the pattern which was quite consistently followed throughout the years. Consequently, I had very mixed feelings before I went to see the kids each time. I looked forward very much to seeing them because I'd only be able to visit twice or three times a year at the most. I missed them a lot, but at the same time I dreaded arriving in Melbourne because I had to face Jacqueline first, and her lawyer, that hostile woman who still acted as if she was personally involved in the whole thing.

I'd sit on the plane as it circled Tullamarine, Melbourne's airport, and feel my stomach churning, and it wasn't because of airsickness. It was in anticipation of the meeting that awaited me. From the airport I'd go straight to the Victoria Hotel, settle in, notify my solicitors I was in town, and then my solicitors would inform her solicitors and fix a time. At, say, 11 o'clock in the morning I would go to Jacqueline's lawyers' office. I'd give my name to the receptionist, and even she would almost sneer. I presumed the atmosphere of hate permeated everyone in that office. I would sit and wait, sometimes for half an hour past the agreed time, until I was ushered into

Lillian Webb's rooms. There I would meet Jacqueline and Lillian again. They would be sitting at a table in the middle of the room. Sometimes the kids were kept in a different room because Jacqueline and the lawyer wanted to make sure that I assented to everything first. It was like a trade deal, or prisoner exchange, like crossing the DMZ. Of course, I had to go through the full interrogation first.

Lillian would direct me to sit with a few brief words, and then began the other part of Jacqueline's big game, the part called 'Let's humiliate Bahrin'.

Coldly and with a smile of satisfaction, Ms Webb would say, 'Mr Shah, how much cash have you got on you? How much in travellers' cheques?'

I'd tell them.

'OK, give me the travellers' cheques, give me all of them. And your credit cards, please. That's good. Your plane ticket as well.'

'Mr Shah, have you brought the novel that Jacqueline requested?'

I would bring out the book and put it on the table, or say, 'No, I couldn't find it.' If it was the latter the game would develop into admonitions.

'Well, Mr Shah, that's not very satisfactory. Withholding your wife's belongings is not an action that the court would view with sympathy. How do you feel about that, Jacqueline?'

'Lillian,' Jacqueline would say, with a half-smile, to let me know that it was simply cruelty she was playing at here, 'I loved that book, and if I can't have it I don't see why he should be allowed to see my children.'

'You're right, Jacqueline, I can understand what you're saying. Mr Shah, have you remembered to bring the things for the children that my client requested as necessary for their maintenance and well-being?'

At the time of each visit I would be given a shopping list for the children. Household items and clothing had to be purchased and brought to the meeting, displayed on the table. Each item was ticked off, and a few others invented to show my lack of compliance and to give another chance to play the 'uncaring father' recording to



me. And then I would be given another shopping list of things that had to be bought while I was with the kids.

'OK, now this is the shopping list. You have to get them this pair of socks, these shoes, these toys ...'

The list would be quite long and detailed and I just had to comply. The incredible thing was that I was expected to get all the things while the credit cards and travellers' cheques were kept by the lawyers. Why couldn't she buy these things using the monthly maintenance I paid regularly?

At times it would exasperate me. 'How much cash do you want me to carry in my pocket? It will cost hundreds of dollars to buy all of these things.'

I would be there ten days, with myself and two kids to pay for, with only what cash I could carry available to me. How was I to pay for it? The first few years I had to manage somehow but it was almost impossible. I had to buy the kids things for Jacqueline, then I would want to spoil them a bit for that short period of time, like take them to the cinema, or to Luna Park where we could have fun together, or buy them toys that weren't on the shopping list: toys that I wanted to give them. I needed money to do such things, but I wasn't allowed to hold any money. It was a clever device that Jacqueline and Lillian built in so that even though I was there with the kids I couldn't really spend any money on them, to have a good time, to allow the kids to be happy with me. Dad had to be seen to be under the rule of Jacqueline, and be a tightwad. That was how cruel and scheming Jacqueline and Lillian were.

But I had to comply with these orders, because the Family Court dictated that they had to occur before I could get my children. Year after year I had to go through the same routine. It wasn't until the last year that they agreed I could keep the credit cards. I endured this cruel and humiliating session because I knew there was no way out of it. I wanted to see my children, so I had to persevere. I was impressed by Jacqueline's ability to maintain hatred and bitterness. I couldn't see what good it did the children, though. She consistently used the children to hurt me. I assumed that she must also be poisoning the kids against me as well.

After the Prisoner Exchange meeting, as I thought of it, I would return to the hotel and wait for the prisoners to be dropped off, usually later that day or early the next. The first few days they were with me, the kids would be very boisterous. They would jump on the bed, roll on the floor and run around the corridors in the hotel. It was very difficult to calm them down. We were staying in a hotel, and I was a bit worried that we might upset the other guests, and the hotel might throw us out. They'd shout and play very loudly. They normally needed a couple of days to settle down. This happened every time.

Since the kids have been back in Malaysia, they told me voluntarily, 'You know why we did that? Every time we went to stay with you, mummy told us to be as playful and as naughty as possible, so that maybe you wouldn't come so often to visit us.'

Now they tell me, when they're back in Malaysia! So even the kids were only doing what they were supposed to do, and could only tell me later because they knew there was no chance of their mother doing anything about it. But when I was there they didn't tell me much about what Jacqueline said they were supposed to do, or not to do. If they told me, that was fine. If they didn't tell me about their mother's instructions I didn't question them. I let it come from them naturally. I wasn't going to dig, because maybe some of the things they didn't want to remember and were best left in the past. But I could detect a few things that were disturbing, through signs subtle and not so subtle.

For example, when Jacqueline brought the kids to me at the Victoria Hotel, most of the time she would come with her current boyfriend. At almost every visit over the years there seemed to be a new boyfriend, and I visited two or three times a year. That was her personal life and her business, to an extent, but it seemed that Jacqueline wanted the kids to be very attached to whichever boyfriend was currently with her. Virtually all the boyfriends would be called 'dad' by the kids. I gathered she wasn't married to them. I certainly hadn't been told in passing so why were my kids calling these various men 'dad'? It must have been very confusing for them. It certainly was for me. I didn't think it healthy at all, and it made

me even more suspicious that she was trying very hard to make the children hate me, or better still to have them forget me altogether. It would have suited her if I had just given up, like her father had done with her. But I didn't want to be part of that game, even though I was forced to play a role.

I was also worried that one or more of this string of 'daddies' might harm Iddin and Shahirah. Iddin told me once that one of Jacqueline's boyfriends had hit him. I was quite furious about it, but there was nothing I could do. After all, I was the wicked one. I love my kids, and I always have, and it wasn't my intention that their mother should be behaving in such a manner. This ridiculous behaviour of Jacqueline's constant dwelling in an over-emotional fantasy world created so much difficulty that only the bare semblance of responsible, civilised behaviour was left. And the kids were the real losers, because they were being raised to hate the father who loved them, and to think that every boyfriend of Jacqueline's was their 'dad'.

One year, one of the boyfriends was an American actor called John Savage who had appeared in some movies, including *Godfather III*. He was making a film in Australia called *The Hunting*.

'John, come in here. Look at Bahrin's room. Look at it,' she said, ushering this stranger into my room. 'Oh, this is a substandard room, not fit for my children!'

The Victoria Hotel management wouldn't have liked that remark. I quickly realised John Savage didn't want to get involved. He stood just inside the door and shuffled from one foot to the other and didn't know where to look. She wanted John to get involved, to help intimidate me. But that's the way Jacqueline works: she wants to bring people into her fight. This was the part of the game called 'Making the access visit as difficult as possible'.

The first session of an access visit I would have Iddin and Shahirah for two nights, then after the second night they would have to go home to their mother for a night or two, then I would have them again for another two or three nights. She wouldn't allow me to have them continuously for a week, even though it was part of the access conditions, that I had uninterrupted access for a week.

I didn't even bother going to the court about that. What was the point?

The judge would just do what the judge had always done: look at pretty Jacqueline and say, 'There, there, don't do it again.'

Another part of the conditions was that the kids had to call her twice a day: once around lunch time and once at night before bed. It was a routine, a regulation that had to be observed. I only saw the kids at the most for three times a year and I wanted to have uninterrupted access, rather than having interjections and interruptions from the mother. One day it went like this:

'What will we have for lunch?' I asked.

We were at the Botanic Gardens throwing bread to the ducks, along with hundreds of other parents and kids. It was a beautiful day, one of those rare, crisp Melbourne Sundays in winter when the whole population seemed to be outdoors sunning itself.

'We have to call mum now,' Iddin said.

'Yeh!' Shah shouted, following suit. 'We have to call mum!'

'OK, OK. Let's find a phone, then we'll have lunch.'

We were on the other side of the lake from the kiosk so we started walking back. The kids became quite anxious, that's what annoyed me as well, because it focused them away from the pleasant times we were having right at the moment. So away we went, walking quickly around the lake, dodging other mums, dads and kids strolling idly along. Iddin was walking quickly ahead and Shah was skipping by my side. Every now and then Iddin would turn around and shout out, 'Come on, you two! Hurry up!' I think they also enjoyed the game of it: such an important thing to do, ringing mum. It took about five minutes to get back to the kiosk and then I had to find a phone. The queue at the counter was about a mile long, so I couldn't ask there. I finally asked another parent who replied they thought there was one 'over there' and pointed. Luckily, there was a telephone. Many times we would be a long way from a phone, or in a crowded place, and still the kids would be anxiously demanding that they had to ring Jacqueline. So then I had to find change. I didn't have any. Despite the regularity of the calls, I wasn't always totally prepared. I was on holiday with my kids and I suppose I liked

to pretend, to forget about Jacqueline and her demands altogether, to just try and enjoy some normal time with my kids. I looked around me, at the hundreds of people. Who could I ask for change? I had a \$AUS5 note and no coins. At the third attempt I succeeded and returned to the phone. Someone was using it. The kids were jumping up and down with anxiety.

'If we don't ring mum she'll be angry, Abah,' Iddin said.

'Quick, Abah, get the phone,' Shah said, tugging at my pants and dragging me towards the phone.

'Shah! Wait on, please. That man is still using it. We must wait until he is finished.'

'But Abah! Mum will be angry,' said Iddin again.

Finally the man hung up and walked off. I dialled the number, handed the phone to Iddin and picked up Shah so she could reach when it was her turn.

'Mamma! It's me ... at the park ... with the ducks ... yes ... yes ... OK mum,' said Iddin, and then handed the phone to Shah.

'Hallo mummy. There are ducks here ... Abah bought us ice creams ... yeh .... OK ... yeh mummy.'

Shah hung up the phone and I said to them, 'What will we have for lunch?'

'Mum said we're not allowed to have any more ice cream, Abah,' Iddin said.

'Yes, OK, but ice cream isn't really a lunch food, is it? What sort of thing would you like to eat for lunch?'

'I can't have any milk,' said Shah.

'Oh yes, why not?' I asked. This was the first time I had heard of it.

'Mum just said it was bad for me and I shouldn't have it, no, I shouldn't,' she replied. Jacqueline seemed to invent restrictions so as to assert her control over the kids and to remind them and me that she was their mother and they were to do as she said, even if it was a whim obviously designed to annoy me. The kids weren't to know the difference.

'And we have to make sure we're back at the hotel before it's dark, Abah, in case we catch cold,' Iddin continued.

'Oh yes. OK,' I replied.

I didn't say much when they talked about her. I just nodded, and listened, and paid attention. They didn't cry, just reiterated Jacqueline's demands. Most of the things that she said weren't things they needed to be reminded of every day and every night.

'Well, let's have lunch, and then after that we'll catch a tram to St Kilda and go for a walk on the beach,' I suggested, hoping the idea would take their minds off their mother.

'Oh, mum said not to do that,' Iddin said.

'Really? When?' I asked.

'Just then, on the phone, Abah. She said we shouldn't stay outdoors, and especially not go to the beach, because we will get colds.'

Going to the beach, all rugged up, on a warm winter's day, for a brief walk and a look at the sea, was hardly an act likely to harm their health. Jacqueline's forbidden acts were such small things no sensible person would see any harm in them at all. She just liked to control the children, especially in relation to me. It was heartbreaking to see the kids pushed around like that. In the evening the whole thing started again. They would have to call home and then they'd start talking about home again, and switch off from being with me. I'm not saying that they should've forgotten their mother totally, but I thought access to my children was supposed to be time with me.

In between my visits to Australia I was allowed to speak to the children once a fortnight, on the weekend. At one stage I was supposed to call the kids on Sunday at 9 am. Sometimes that works out to be 6 am in Terengganu, with daylight saving in Melbourne and the different time zones. Sometimes I wasn't even in Kuala Terengganu, but had to go upstation to visit sites and stay overnight. If I missed making my call sometimes I wasn't allowed to have an alternative time. Sunday is a working day in Terengganu and a holiday in Australia. She would make a big fuss out of it.

'You don't care, you don't call your kids,' she'd yell at me over the phone when I rang at another time other than that permitted.

But do I just miss my work here for the phone call? I have to

earn a living too. I needed to earn a living to send money to the kids, I paid regular maintenance. Most of the time she was not willing to be flexible, and she would be quite absurdly, and hurtfully, strict about the timing of the calls. Sometimes, making international calls, the line's busy. Maybe I'd be five minutes late getting through.

At three minutes past nine she would go out with the kids. I'd call the next time and say, 'What happened last Sunday? Where were you? I called to talk to the kids and there was no answer.'

'At 9 am you didn't call. We waited, but we had to go out. We had other things to do.'

She waited. She waited for three minutes. She stuck to whatever regulation the judge made, if she could use it to her advantage. She certainly wasn't that concerned about obeying the court if it inconvenienced her. There was no allowance or compassionate consideration, and she obviously never wanted the children to really know and love their father. Those telephone conversations were very painful because the children were very restrained, as if they were talking to a total stranger.

'Iddin, how are you?' I said.

'Good,' he would reply, non-committally.

'What did you do at school last week?'

'Normal thing. We had classes.'

They seemed as if they were scared to talk to me, as if someone was hovering over them. I don't know if it was physical, or simply emotional, but a sense of restraint was certainly present. It was the same with Shahirah. Even when I said goodbye they hardly wanted to say goodbye to me. They just put the phone down. It was a very cold and very strange type of conversation. Even when I talked to other people's kids who knew me, they would talk in a better manner. They would be more warm to me. I suppose Jacqueline fed the kids rubbish about me abandoning them, which would have been a bizarre twist on what really happened, if only to fit in with her fantastic view of life's patterns. Those telephone conversations were futile, in a sense, for building a real rapport between me and the kids. But I had to keep speaking to them, no matter how painful or how useless the whole process seemed because of the coldness of

the strange barrier that was there. I didn't want them to forget me. I felt that there was a real effort to make them forget me and drop me from their lives. I compared this situation to the access visits. I would bring them Malaysian books about Islam and the Prophet with which we would cuddle up as I read to them. I would bring the same series of books each trip. They would brush their teeth, snug in their pyjamas, and I'd say, 'Hop into bed right away and I'll read you a story.'

'Aren't you going to read the rest of the story you read us before?' Iddin asked.

'Yeh, Abah, about the man with the big boat and all the animals?' said Shahirah.

'What about the last story, Abah, didn't you bring that again?'

'Let's hear it again, Abah. Did you bring it?'

They remembered the book from my last trip, four months before, and looked forward to hearing more. Some of the most meaningful moments of my trips were when they would cuddle up, listen to the story, ask questions, and sometimes remember what I told them on the last trip. The peak of our relationship would be when I was just about to leave. They'd be laughing and asking a lot of questions about their family in Malaysia. I made it a point every year so they knew that Malaysia was the place where they were born to bring photos of my mother and my father, their grandparents. Some of them were photos taken with the kids when Iddin was wearing his traditional Malay costume at Hari Raya with my dad. He's pictured carrying Iddin. And there was one of Iddin sitting on my mother's lap.

If I forgot, or hadn't yet shown them, Iddin or Shahirah would ask, 'Where are the photos?'

I would show them photos of my children with Norilah - their other brothers and sisters - so that they could relate to Malaysia and know they have attachments with other family members.

We would be walking through Myer's or David Jones, and I'd say, 'Do you want to buy something for your brothers and sisters?'

'Oh yes, please, Abah!'

Iddin would pick up some t-shirts or some toys and choose them to bring back to say, Badrul. When I brought them back to



Terengganu and gave them to Badrul, I would take photos of him receiving the present.

The next trip I would show Iddin the pictures and say, 'Look, your brother appreciated very much what you picked up for him. So maybe you'd like to pick something else?'

And when I went to Australia I would take presents from Malaysia that Badrul would pick for Iddin, so they would know their other brothers and sisters cared for them and thought of them. I had to keep that going and it had to be continuous because I felt that if I didn't do that they would just forget Malaysia totally, forget they had anything in Terengganu at all, as if it was a totally foreign land that had nothing to do with them. Sometimes they mentioned to me that they had told Jacqueline that they had bought things for their other brothers and sisters, and that Jacqueline was not happy at all.

So sometimes when we were selecting things they would say, 'Don't tell mum that we're doing this. She said we're not allowed.'

'OK, I won't tell her that you've picked it for him.'

I didn't understand why Jacqueline had to put a barrier between them and the rest of their siblings. I think it was very selfish of her, but nevertheless I thought it best to just let it go without comment. There was no point in getting involved in fights with her. It would've only made my access more difficult, as if it wasn't difficult enough already!

Even the presents I gave to Iddin and Shahirah were sometimes thrown away by Jacqueline. On one of our outings we played football in the park opposite the National Gallery of Victoria, with boots that I'd bought Iddin. He later told me, in tears, that he hadn't been allowed to keep them when he got home to Jacqueline. She knew how he loved to copy my football tricks when he was in Malaysia, even though he was only three years old then. That love had carried through, despite the separation, and it must have been irritating for Jacqueline to witness. So poor Iddin wasn't allowed to share any interests with his own dad, because she was afraid he would stay close to me. For Jacqueline it was a crime that her son should want to take after his dad. Shahirah wasn't allowed to keep toys that

I'd brought her, either. She would often tell me on the telephone, before a visit, to bring her the same toys I'd brought her last time. As well, both Iddin and Shahirah were forbidden to speak Malay, so every trip I had to teach them a few new words. They both told me they received terrible scoldings if they mentioned a word of Malay in front of their mother. Jacqueline could not only play politics with judges, she could play quite cruelly with her own children.

Everything seemed to add up that she was poisoning them against me. When I saw them, when I was physically with them, I could feel the warmth. Emotionally and physically it was coming through. But it was always towards the end of my visit after we'd been together, on and off, for a week or two. Then I would return to Malaysia, ring them as soon as I was home, and they would be back to the cold tone again. I couldn't understand it. How could my children be so warm to me two days before, and when I called them from Malaysia it would be one-word answers again? It just wasn't natural. It was agony for me.

The other part of the 'Let's make access difficult' game was Jacqueline's fondness for spot checks. She would make surprise calls by telephone, or she would drop in at the hotel without prior notice. One particular surprise visit was more offensive than most. There was a live telecast of Wimbledon on television, which started quite late, about 11 pm. I pulled the blankets off my bed and made a nest on the floor in front of the tv.

It was more comfortable for me as I have a sore back and can't sleep on a hotel bed for too long anyway, especially if the springs aren't too good. Sleeping on the floor during my visits had become a habit, and also a bit of fun for the kids. I suppose it was like going camping. They would often want to join me, so I would make up beds for them on the floor as well. This particular time Shahirah cuddled up next to me under the blanket. She dozed off, and as I watched Wimbledon I dozed off. About 2 o'clock in the morning there was a loud bang on the door.

'It must be a fire, or a disaster or something,' I thought, rapidly waking up, throwing back the bedcovers and running to the door.

Jacqueline, the hotel security guard, and her boyfriend at the

time – a Chinese guy from Hong Kong called Wong – stood in front of me.

'Where are the kids! Where are kids!' she said, raising her voice and taking a step into the room, trying to push past me.

The security guard looked threateningly at me as if he was just waiting for a chance to thump me. What had he been told by Jacqueline?

'The kids are here. They're asleep,' I said, still coming out of my doze.

'I insist I must come in and have a look,' she said.

'Yes, fine. Come in,' I replied, 'But please be quiet.'

Iddin was in the bed and Shahirah was on the floor, still asleep.

'You're not supposed to have any children in this room,' the security guard said.

'What do you mean? I've been staying at this hotel for the past two or three years. I come back to this hotel every year, at least twice a year, and each time I stay here for ten days, with my kids,' I said to him.

He must have been brainwashed on the way up. He had probably been told I was some sort of fanatical Muslim child-molester.

He looked a bit perplexed, and said, 'You may have been here all those times, but this isn't the right room for children. You should be in a different type.'

'If you feel so strongly, report it to the management and we'll sort it out with them tomorrow morning,' I suggested.

Nothing came out of it. The management didn't approach me the next morning, nor at any other time. The hotel management were very nice to us all the seven years we stayed there. Most of the hotel staff knew us quite well, at least by sight, if not personally.

Later Jacqueline made an issue of Shahirah sleeping on the floor. I had supposedly forced Shahirah to sleep on the floor because Shahirah was a female and in Islam a female is a third or fourth grade creature only good for the kitchen and for use as a sex slave. Iddin and I slept on the bed because men sleep on the bed. Females sleep on the floor. She twisted it around so much that I couldn't quarrel along those lines; it only leads to madness.

Jacqueline's behaviour with the kids was also a source of concern for me. Obviously she wanted to have a social life of her own as well as work in the daytime, because sometimes Iddin and Shahirah were kept at other people's houses when Jacqueline went out, and sometimes they were left at home. I had no idea who looked after them when she went out. She liked the bright lights and show business, which was why she was attracted to high-profile people like actors. She probably had thought a Malaysian prince liked the high life as well. I presume she met her present husband through the show business circle of friends. Going out and having a high time is fine if it's just her private life, but what about the kids? I was told by one of my lawyer's friends who happened to be living in the same neighbourhood as Jacqueline that one morning Iddin came over to her house to ask for breakfast.

'Where's mummy?' my lawyer's friend asked.

'Don't know. Mummy's not around,' he replied.

How sad to go around begging for breakfast at other people's houses! The kids weren't even getting basic things like breakfast, and being sent to bed at the right time. And they seemed to be getting skinnier and skinnier. Were they getting enough to eat?

At night, after I'd read them their bedtime stories and they'd gone off to sleep, I'd sit and look at them. I'd doze off and wake up in the morning, still sitting up in the chair next to them, and it would be time to send them back. I felt utterly helpless. But those nights gave me enough strength to go on until my next visit. We shared precious moments in that modest Victoria Hotel room.

## 13

Over the years I'd been trying to ask Jacqueline to give Iddin and Shahirah some Islamic classes because I felt it was important they knew something about Islam. At least some form of regular classes. It didn't have to be every day, or every week. Maybe twice a month would have been enough as long as they had some exposure to Islam because in Islam children are taught to know the religion at a very early stage. They become familiar with it so they can adopt it to be their way of life if they choose. But for Iddin and Shahirah, even if they didn't adopt it as their way of life, at least there would be some awareness of Islam if they were given some basic instruction. The few trips I made a year, although I would tell them bedtime stories of the Prophet and some of the basics of religion, the only other thing I could give to them was to take them to the Friday prayers at the Drummond Street mosque in Carlton, where I used to go and pray when I was a student. That meant maybe two prayers, two Fridays, per trip. They met other Muslims and Muslim children at the mosque. Such visits were hardly intensive training, just barely educational. I thought religious classes once a fortnight – it wouldn't have to be too long, maybe one or two hours, that's all – would have helped them to understand their religion, and allowed them to meet other Muslim children and parents and see how they lived.

Jacqueline had impressed the judges over the years that she was a superb mother and very religious. She claimed she knew her Qur'an back to front and observed Islam. That's why she brought the Qur'an into court to swear on it whenever she wanted to give a statement. That was a farce, just part of her showmanship, because it's just not done, even in Muslim countries in a Muslim court.

We just say, 'I say this in the name of Allah'.

We don't have to bring out the Qur'an and put our hand on it. I suppose that sort of performance helped to convince the judges. More seriously though, she gave an undertaking in the affidavit that she would bring up the children as Muslims. That was part and parcel of the consideration of the judge allowing her to keep the children: that she would continue to be a Muslim and that she would bring up the children as Muslims.

I rang her once, in 1987, and said, 'To be consistent with your own words and undertaking before the court, please give them some Islamic exposure. I'm not asking you to send them to a fully-fledged Islamic school where they teach in Arabic and about religion only. No, they go to a normal school just like any other Australian kids. Just take them to one of these weekend things.'

I even gave her some names of teachers in Melbourne. One class was run by a Lebanese guy. The school had a small committee and had weekend classes for about two hours in the morning. Jacqueline turned it down through her lawyers.

'No. The Arabs are rough people. Their culture is not suitable to Iddin and Shahirah or to Australians generally,' was her comment. 'It's not consistent with the Australian way of life.'

I don't know what the hell she meant by 'not consistent with the Australian way of life'. Did it mean that Australia did not want Muslims to exist in its society? How many Lebanese Muslims are there? How many Albanian Muslims? How many Turkish Muslims? The Australian government's policy was, and is, multiculturalism. I was just asking for Iddin and Shahirah to get some Islamic knowledge. They wouldn't have had to dress like some Middle Eastern children who have to wear different attire. I was just asking for knowledge, for the head, not clothes for the body. How would anyone have been able to tell that they were Muslim children?

To try and accommodate Jacqueline's prejudice against teachers from the Middle East I found an alternative, an American convert called Robert Rice. He also conducted a school on weekends, mainly for Australian converts, and some Middle Eastern people. It wasn't an Arab, Lebanese or Malay school, nothing offensive to her

delicate sensibilities. She still refused.

'The children aren't old enough. According to Islam,' she said, 'the children need not have formal religious instruction until they're six or seven.'

That was her individual interpretation, but I waited until the children were that age before I asked again, and she still refused.

I asked my lawyer, 'What can be done about this? It has been said over and over in court that she was going to be a good Muslim and give the kids continuous religious instruction, so what's all this about?'

Bruce just sighed. He well knew that we were up against racial and religious prejudice.

Finally, in 1990, I said to Bruce, 'I want to go back to court soon, early in 1991, before the judge, and make sure the children do get some sort of Islamic background, once a fortnight. Iddin's 8 and Shahirah's 6. They're well and truly old enough now. And since we're going back to court, I'd also like to ask for an order that the children be allowed to come back to Malaysia for school holidays.'

I thought I might as well apply for both. If I didn't get the kids to come back for holidays, I would at least get them to go to Islamic classes once or twice a month. Surely after all those years I should have been entitled to something. I'd got nothing from the Family Court, other than to be treated like a criminal, when it was my ex-wife who had broken the law. Bruce began negotiations with Jacqueline's lawyers.

He rang me one day and said, 'Raja, I've just got the latest from Ms Webb. She says that the children can't really go back to Malaysia because there's the Malaysian court order stating you have custody of the children. They're afraid that if the kids go for a holiday you will nab them and not permit them to return. Ironic, isn't it?'

'Bruce, it would be if it wasn't tragic,' I replied. 'Tell them we can work something out. I really want the kids to visit. Their grandmother misses them terribly and I would love for them to meet their other brothers and sisters. I can always vacate the order. But let's get an agreement in principle, at least.' The negotiations contin-

ued for about nine months. It seemed to be interminable. Finally, exasperated, I said, 'Enough waiting, I'm coming on this next trip, so let's get on with it. I want to go to court.'

Bruce prepared, and I went. That was the fateful Easter 1991. Jacqueline had married Iain Gillespie in 1989. I was quite happy about that, even relieved. Maybe the man would make her more stable and mature? Maybe she would become calmer and less provocative? And to a certain degree there was a slight change. During visits when I was with the children she didn't call as often, and there wasn't as many unscheduled spot checks.

Maybe Iain had said, 'Look, you don't have to check on the kids every two hours. Bahrin hasn't broken any rule of the court's yet. Take it easy.'

I met Iain once or twice when he came with Jacqueline to drop off the kids and I thought he was mature and self-assured. He'd been previously married and I hoped something good would come of his and Jacqueline's marriage. I hoped they would have their own children as well, which would perhaps make it better for her, but that didn't happen.

So we went to court and I was going to demand my rights. Therese Ryan was the solicitor handling my case this time, and as I entered the court lobby I saw her standing in a corner scrutinising some papers. She was chewing her thumbnail and her brow was furrowed. I sensed something unpleasant, once again, was about to unfold. I began to walk towards her and then noticed Jacqueline to my left, with Iain and their solicitors Lillian Webb and John Urodovich. They were chatting amongst themselves, and as I glanced over Jacqueline suddenly laughed at a joke someone had told.

Therese looked up from her papers and saw me. 'I've just found out that they don't want to grant you access over Easter. We'll deal with that first. But there's something else. You'd better take a seat and read these. I'll be in the next room if you want to speak to me.'

I took the papers and looked at her. She avoided making eye contact and walked off quickly. I began to experience that old, familiar feeling of turning cold all over. I looked about the room and saw a bench in a relatively quiet corner. I sat down, mercifully out of



sight of Jacqueline and her supporters, and raced through the paragraphs. Words stood out:

'... Iddin Gillespie ... Shahirah Gillespie ...'

I looked again.

'... Gillespie ...'

That's what was written. What did this mean? I couldn't understand. Why did my kids have Iain's surname? Then I began to get angry. They were my kids and not his! Was this legal? Why wasn't I consulted? What the hell was going on? I turned back to the papers and read on. Other more awful words stood out:

'... Iddin Gillespie ... Shahirah Gillespie ... baptised ... Anglican Church ... godfather E. Waller ... Father John ... 1988 ...'

I read them again and again. It took me a while before I figured out what year it was now. When it registered that it was 1991, I went blank again! What happened between 1988 and 1991? How could my children's names be changed since 1988 and I not know about it? Who the hell was this Gillespie guy who thought he could just attach his name to my son's and daughter's and displace mine altogether? Was this yet another example of Australia's civilised society in action? Iddin and Shahirah baptised? As Anglicans? As Christians? Who was Father John? And E. Waller? No wonder Therese suggested I sit to read the papers: my whole body felt weak. I sat there not thinking of anything in particular, just staring at the papers in my hand. I suppose I sat there for a few minutes. I went through them again, but I still couldn't make sense of what had happened. It couldn't be happening to me, not after all the tragedies and torment of the past six years. What a vicious and cruel deception Jacqueline and Iain had been practising. It was the worst possible thing they could do to me.

Therese had returned and was standing before me. She knelt down a little and said, 'Raja, I'm sorry, I couldn't bear to tell you myself. We'll get everything sorted out but we'd better go into the courtroom as the judge is coming in soon.'

'How could they do this, Therese? How could they? How could the court allow it?' I said, wiping my eyes.

It was getting to be too much. I didn't expect Therese to say

anything because all the others before her – Chan, Margaret, Bruce and Paul – couldn't provide an answer to the farce called Family Court proceedings. I must have been a very special person since I was referred to as 'the prince' and so I deserved very special treatment. I somehow stood up and walked into the courtroom. All I could think was, 'What new circus of torment awaits me through these doors?'

Therese stood before the court and stated that I had come all the way from Malaysia to see my children for the Easter holidays and take them to the mosque on Friday but the Gillespie's were not accommodating my request although I had given one month's notice as required.

'Your Honour,' said their barrister, John Urodovich, 'my clients advise me that since the children are now Christians they want to take them to church for the very special event that is Easter.'

As if to further support Jacqueline, the judge made a separate order that day that my agents or I were not allowed to take the children to the mosque ... ever! This, from a modern and liberal 20th century Australian court.

It went on and on, and the result was much worse than I expected, even after reading about the name change and baptism. Forget the holidays in Malaysia, forget Islamic education, for now I was no longer even permitted to take my children to a mosque at all! Every trip for six years we had visited the mosque. The children enjoyed it and looked forward to it. I am a Muslim, but I went to a Church of England grammar school in Australia, St John's in Kuala Lumpur, and St Theresa's kindergarten in Terengganu. I don't hold great grudges against other religions. It probably makes me more tolerant of other religions, understanding at least one other religion better. So why couldn't my kids have similar things, an exposure to other beliefs, especially those held by their father? Why couldn't my children go with me to the mosque even though they had been baptised as Christians by Jacqueline? Was there no justice left in the world? There certainly was none in the Australian Family Court.

Those few minutes in the lobby of that court and then the subsequent ruling by the judge were the final blow of six years of

misery and struggle. Who could be expected to come back for more after that? I was not going to come back. At least, not here, not to this farcical court. The next time I came back I would come back to get the children and take them home. I walked out of that room completely shattered, barely able to talk, with all my hopes shot. Only that small flame of resistance flickered in the back of my mind: I will get my kids back!

I looked at Therese, who was standing sadly stuffing papers into her briefcase, and said, 'What do I do?'

She stopped and turned to me. 'I don't know, Raja, I just don't know. I suppose you can see the kids over the Easter weekend, somehow.'

She sighed and sat down next to me. I came all the way from Malaysia and still hadn't even seen the kids yet.

'When can the court go back?' I asked her.

'The earliest is Monday. If it comes back then, the earliest you can see your kids is maybe Tuesday.'

She stood up and closed her briefcase. 'Maybe we can work something out. Hang on.'

She walked over to Lillian Webb and talked to her for a while. Lillian spoke to Jacqueline and Iain and then Therese came back.

'You can have limited access to the kids,' she said. 'They've at least agreed to that. But only after 2 pm Friday.'

'To make sure I don't take the kids to Friday prayers at 1 pm,' I said. 'OK, at least I get to see them.'

I spent Thursday evening and half of Friday alone in Melbourne, wandering around the streets like a mad fool, or sitting in the Pancake Parlour scribbling more notes. Scribbling more notes to what? To go back to court. I was that crazy and confused, thinking that I would still have a chance if I went back to court to fight. I had nothing else to do and no one to talk to. My lawyers went off on holiday and I didn't know anybody else in Melbourne well enough to be able to talk about all this. I walked up and down Bourke and Collins Streets on a very quiet, cold and overcast Melbourne Easter weekend, lost and lonely. They were the loneliest days of my life. There was hardly any sunlight, and just drizzling rain, perfectly har-

monising with my feelings. I sat and scribbled notes, partly to pass the time, partly to feel prepared to face Monday.

At 2 pm Friday I saw the kids, until the next day. I wasn't in very good spirits.

I tried to be cheerful, but I'd look at them, and think, 'Are you guys really my kids now? Maybe only by biological evidence? You no longer carry my surname. You no longer are officially of the same religion as me.'

But a small thought did help. I had been thinking the same things over and over, when it suddenly occurred to me that, if they were baptised in 1988, they had still kept coming to the mosque with me after that, so the kids were obviously very good at keeping secrets. I returned the kids on Saturday and then repeated my rites: walking the streets and scribbling in the Pancake Parlour. I look back at that time and wonder that I didn't break in half with the pain I felt.

On the Monday I finally went back to court, only to be told, 'We can't hear your case. There's a backlog.'

Before, they used to accommodate my situation because it was an exceptional situation: I came all the way from Malaysia and could only afford to come at certain times. But not any longer. Perhaps I had ceased to be so special now that I was obviously pulverised into submission. I went home to Terengganu.

I had a lot of thinking to do. I couldn't tell anyone – not my mother, not my wife – that the kids had been converted. It would have destroyed my mother if she knew because the two kids meant so much to her and she was so pious. I had to carry it all within me.

One night I took out all my previous notes. I had two suitcases by then, of all the legal mumbo-jumbo and transcripts. I looked at them and said to myself, 'See all this! After all this: nothing! What makes me think that if I go back there again, lose more money, and go through more heartbreak, I'm going to get anything? The judge is going to come out with some other excuse, "Well, Jacqueline is entitled to change her mind after so many years. If she wants to be a Christian and change the children to Christianity I suppose it's her prerogative. You can't stop her."'

I had no rights to ask anything for the kids. So I said to myself, as that little flame burnt brighter, 'Enough of going to court.' My children's names had been changed without my knowledge or consent. Their religion had been changed without me being informed. And to top it all, the judge now prohibited me from taking my kids to the mosque. Even in the most radical communist country, this wouldn't happen. Yet this was democratic Australia in 1991. I was not taking any more of this.

## 14

So I had to get the kids out through other ways, not legally. I knew it wasn't going to be easy, and the more I thought of it the more difficult it seemed.

During the years of frustration and intimidation it had crossed my mind in flashes, 'How I wish I could whisk these kids away.'

But I never paid any attention to it, until I met Bryan. We met by accident at Changi Airport in 1988 when I was en route to Australia. He was in good spirits, and asked me why I was going to Australia. I told him a bit of my story.

He said, half-jokingly, 'Just get the kids out!'

Afterwards I learned that a comment like that was quite typical of Bryan. He was a very direct person.

I said to him, 'Yes, I've been thinking about it, but never seriously.'

But when he said it I began to think a bit more. Here was someone else who was encouraging these thoughts. But the necessity to act wasn't there in 1988. If Jacqueline had allowed the kids to have some exposure to Islam through fortnightly classes I would've been happy and I wouldn't have had to resort to other means. But in 1991, after her unilateral action changing the children's names and religion, I knew I'd wasted enough time. However, I had to be seen to be still interested in pursuing legal courses of action, because I couldn't arouse anyone's suspicions. If I just said to her I didn't want to go to court any more she would have wondered what I was up to.

So for the next year, as I explored ways of getting the kids out, I still had to make enquiries through my lawyers, and at that time, frankly, I was still keeping a quite open mind. I was planning to get

the kids out physically, by whatever means, but if by some miracle she agreed that the children be allowed some Islamic classes, maybe I wouldn't have had to go through with it. I prayed that I need not have to do it, but at the same time I couldn't waste any more of my time. Iddin was already 9 years old and Shah was 7. If I left them there any longer they might just forget about everything, perhaps even me. The next step may have been to refuse me any contact with my kids at all. Jacqueline and her lawyers had been very bold in the way they manipulated the court, so I didn't think my fears were unfounded.

The problem with Jacqueline was she wasn't willing to have a give-and-take attitude, to accommodate other people's wishes. She had to at least acknowledge and respect that I was the father and had some rights with the children too.

But the problem was she had the attitude of winner-takes-all: 'The court gave me custody. The court gave me this or that. The court is always on my side. I'm the winner, why should I give you anything?'

I think that was the whole problem from the beginning: her attitude. She never wanted to compromise on anything. She would ask for more and more and more. She would have me on the ground, push my nose into the mud, and rub salt into my wounds. She would go to the limit. What choice did I have other than to act the way I did?

I asked a lot of people, a lot of the Australian journalists who came to interview me, 'Tell me, what choice did I have? Can you tell me any other option? I'd tried every possible thing. I had no choice. I had to bring my kids out. Not that I hadn't submitted to your legal system, not that I hadn't tried. A prisoner serving time would be paroled after a period of good behaviour, but what about me? I wasn't a convicted criminal; it was Jacqueline who had abducted my children and who continued to lie and perjure herself so why was I being penalised? Enough was enough.'

After I found out about the kids' name change I started calling Bryan more often.

Initially I just kept in touch with him, saying, 'You think it's possible? Could I take the kids and get back to Malaysia?'

It crossed my mind but I wasn't that serious even then, in mid-1991. It was at the back of my mind that one day I might have to do it. I suppose I also wanted to console myself that if everything else failed I had an alternative.

So slowly I began planning, in discussion with Bryan. Between March 1991 and July 1992, the date of our departure from Australia with the kids, I had to sort out my life and work and make sure there was enough money to fund the operation.

I called it 'Mission Impossible' because there was a very likely possibility I might not even come back. I might be arrested or I might be killed escaping. I had to organise everything and also send money to Bryan so he could buy everything he needed. We agreed there had to be absolute secrecy. It was tough because we had very limited hands working on it and we had to make arrangements carefully.

I told Bryan, 'This is the only chance I'm going to get. If I fail I'm not going to get a second chance. I will be arrested, jailed and then deported and never be able to return to Australia. Even if I served a jail sentence I might not be able to go back to see my kids.'

About a week before I left on 'Mission Impossible' I went to see my mother and told her what I was planning to do. It was quite difficult to tell her as I wasn't sure what her reaction would be. I am her only son. I expected she was going to cry, plead and beg me not to do it because the chances of me getting caught were quite high. She was sitting in a chair reading when I came in to her.

I sat next to her and told her, 'Mum, this time I am going to Australia and I'm going to come back with the kids.' I paused. She didn't say anything. She just looked at me calmly. 'But I'm not going to do it legally. It is going to be dangerous but I feel it is my only choice after everything that has happened. I may not make it back.'

She just said, 'Yes, I think you probably should do it. I'm worried about the children too,' as if she sensed that something was not right with the kids.

I hadn't told her the kids had been baptised. I couldn't tell her that but I had implied that I was worried about the children's religious background.



'They're having very, very limited Islamic instruction,' I said, and I suppose they were – every few months when I read them stories about the Prophet before they went to sleep.

A day or so earlier I had told my wife, Norilah. I was worried what she would say, too. What if I didn't return? What would she do? It's a long way to travel to visit someone in jail. I should know; I'd been visiting the kids in their prison. Ria was one year old. Ari was three. Badrul was quite big, about five. How would she look after them?

Norilah looked at me and said, 'Yes, if you have to fulfil your responsibility as a father then you should. I had a feeling one day you were going to do it.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Because every time you come back you're in a real mess. You come back and for weeks you're depressed and grumpy. Remember that time you came back from Australia and had a headache only at night, for a month, and the doctors decided it was just worry? I couldn't see you going through the rest of your life like that. Every year when you come back from your trips to see your kids you're miserable for weeks. This is after years. I thought it was only a matter of time before you would do something like this.'

'It crossed my mind on and off,' I replied. 'But I didn't really think I had to do it. It was more a bit of a fantasy: oh, one day I can fly my kids out. Something like that.'

'Well, it's not any more and I'm glad you're doing something you feel is right.'

I left Kuala Terengganu on the morning flight and before noon I was in Kuala Lumpur with my father. He had just retired from his service in the government. We had lunch and chatted about this and that. I didn't mention anything about my plans to him.

As I was leaving he said, 'Oh, send my love to Iddin and Shahirah, and this and this and this,' and gave me a pile of presents to take to them.

I opened up my bags and put them in, then stood up to leave again. He was in a fairly expansive sort of mood, newly retired and happy, but what he said next took me completely by surprise.

'Oh, by the way,' he said as I started out the front door to the car, 'recently a friend of mine told me how somebody stowed away in a cargo ship or something from some place. I thought it was pretty clever the way he did it. If things are so difficult, why don't you just kidnap those two kids?'

And then he laughed.

I just looked at him, speechless, and thought, 'How did you know?'

He'd never said it in just that way before; never been so explicit especially at the very moment I was about to go to the airport to begin the process of kidnapping the kids back! Call it a father's sixth sense.

## 15

I went to Melbourne about a week before 'Mission Impossible'. Under such circumstances every action and event took on dramatic, even prophetic, significance. Every nerve and intuitive faculty was strained to breaking point. I had a road map of where we were heading in Australia after we took the kids from Melbourne. On the off-chance I might be stopped for some reason, I split the map into four pieces. I put one piece in my suitcase, two in my other luggage, and one in my wallet. I'd been reading a few spy books before I left to prepare myself, which is another reason why I called it 'Mission Impossible'. I always had the theme from the television show running in my head to keep my adrenaline going, and help me think about this most serious of matters with a light heart. I had the map and a few other documents such as programs for what I was supposed to do each day as I went through Immigration at the Melbourne airport.

I showed my passport and the chap asked the normal thing, 'How many days are you here for, sir?'

I said how many and showed my ticket.

'Here for holidays?'

'Yes, to see my children.'

I went through to baggage to wait for my luggage.

I was standing patiently when a tall man in uniform from Customs or Immigration wearing a hat that made him look like a policeman, beckoned to me from a few metres away and said, 'You there! Come here!'

I'd never been called before in 14 years.

I thought, 'Oh God, what's this?' I went over to him.

'Can I have a look at your passport, sir?'

I gave him my passport.

'You've been here before, haven't you? A couple of times?' he asked.

'Yes.'

Maybe he just remembered my face? That particular year I went back to Melbourne two or three times, to get the maps and sort out a few things with Bryan and other matters like where to rent the car.

But in the previous years I'd been there many times, too, so the number of my visits this year weren't anything unusual. But why had he picked me? As all this was rushing through my mind, and adrenaline through my body, another guy at the back of the counter called him. He turned around and looked at him. Then he looked at me.

'You wait here,' he said, and gave me back my passport.

My blood ran cold. But he had given me back my passport! He went back to the other guy. They chatted, and then disappeared into a room behind the counter.

I said to myself, 'Shall I wait, shall I go, shall I wait, shall I go?' I was there for about a minute, then my bags came out and I thought, 'What the hell? If he wants me he can come and get me.'

I wasn't carrying anything illegal, except for my maps. But, what's a map? It could be for anything. But even if he stopped me and had me searched there was nothing to find that was illegal. I took my bags and went to Customs. I stood in the queue for about ten minutes. I wasn't rushing.

If that guy came for me I would've said, 'Oh I'm tired, I just want to go to my hotel. I didn't think you were coming. But you can search my bag.'

I got to the Customs guy doing the inspections. He opened my bag and looked, as usual. All of that took about ten minutes, but the first guy never returned.

The Customs officer opened the bag and saw all the toys and asked, 'Who are they for?'

'My children.'

'What are your children doing here?'

'My children are with my ex-wife and I only see them three times a year.'

'Oh, it's nice of you to bring toys in for them.'

I closed my bag and caught a cab, so relieved I nearly passed out. What was it all about? Was it just coincidence? I had to treat it like that, otherwise I couldn't have gone through with the plan. If they were on to us, somehow, then we would probably be caught, but not without trying to get away with it!

I went to the hotel and checked in. I did a bit more ground-work, checking a few more maps and revising the plan again and again. I did a bit of shopping to prepare for the trip and because I had to leave a false trail just in case things didn't go exactly as planned; a car breakdown or some unexpected alteration. There were sales at Myer's and David Jones so I bought things for the kids – jumpers, pants, shirts – and a t-shirt and pants for myself, brought them back to the hotel and hung them up in my wardrobe. It was Shah's birthday on 7 July, in two days time. I bought her some more presents and birthday cards, and some streamers and balloons that I hung up in the hotel room. Apart from the genuine wish to create a sense of occasion for my daughter's birthday, all of this was part of the plan. If our room was searched it would give the impression that we intended to return.

Before I saw the kids on Monday I had to surrender my passport, as usual. The lawyer on duty was a young chap and new to the firm, but he was assigned to do the checklist of things surrendered.

He was quite cordial; perhaps he hadn't been briefed about the wickedness of the evil Muslim prince and said, 'Where are you going to take your kids on the weekend?'

'I don't know, probably around town, just the normal places,' I replied. Could he know? Of course not, he was just being polite.

'Hmm,' he said, thoughtfully, trying to help. 'Well, it's school holidays. It'd be good to take the kids out to the Dandenongs.'

'Dandenongs? Dandenongs?' I repeated, an idea rapidly dawning. The Dandenongs were hills out of Melbourne that were a popular holiday destination for day-trippers and people wanting to stay

for a few days. 'Yes, maybe it's a good idea. Do you think it's going to be very full?'

'Oh, if you book early, a couple of days ahead, you should be able to get a room. There're a lot of places you can go out in the Dandenongs and spend a good time with the kids for a couple of days. Yeh, I think you should take your kids up to the Dandenongs.'

I couldn't believe my ears. It was a very good suggestion, especially for a 'couple of days'. Back at the hotel I booked in with a bed-and-breakfast in the Dandenongs for the weekend I was planning to disappear. That young man had given me ideas I wasn't even asking for. So now I had another diversion when they started to look for us. They would know I made the reservation because I called from the hotel room and it would be registered on my phone bill. It would probably buy me one or two more days. They'd think: maybe he didn't go to that particular hotel he booked; maybe he changed his mind at the last minute?

Probably that lawyer, when interviewed by the police or Lillian Webb, would say, 'Oh, I suggested to him to go to the Dandenongs.'

I anticipated a scenario that would fit with Jacqueline's behaviour: her overbearing manner and tantrums. She would go ranting, raving and shouting at the police when our absence was discovered, and the police would soon get fed up with her. The police would probably have their own ideas to investigate and she would come in with hers and shout them at the police, just in case they hadn't heard, or they weren't paying her enough attention. She would hound the police until they got sick of her. When you shout too much you tend to produce a negative impact. Instead of people being convinced by your arguments they become sceptical about what you're saying. My thoughts proved correct. Bryan has since told me that the police told him she drove them crazy and in the end they stopped listening to her.

Monday afternoon, at 2 o'clock, I picked up the children and had them for two days and nights. When I went to the Gillespies' house to pick the kids up, Jacqueline and Iain invited me in while the kids were packing their bags. It was a pleasant enough place. Iain was very friendly and asked me to sit. Jacqueline went to help the

kids pack, leaving Iain and I alone. I sat on the lounge and Iain sat down next to me and behaved in a very unfamiliar way. So many strange things happened to me on this trip! I'd met Iain a couple of times already and we'd been cordial, but certainly not conspiratorial or even chummy.

But this time he sat down, leaned towards me and said in a low voice, 'Can we meet tomorrow? Are you free on Tuesday, around lunch time? Can we meet, just you and me? Just man-to-man talk?'

I was surprised. What was going on? Was Iain 'breaking ranks'? Still, there was only one way to find out. He obviously had something to say that he didn't want Jacqueline to know about, or that he was meeting me at all.

'Yes, why not?' I replied.

Maybe he sensed the problems I was having with Jacqueline, because he'd been through a marriage break-up and a bit of a tussle over the custody of his daughters, who ended up with him.

'Just you and me,' he said again.

'Yes, fine, just you and me. Come to the hotel about noon.' I repeated.

'We'll have a man-to-man talk,' he said one more time, just as Jacqueline came back into the room with the kids, full of noise and bustle. We were quickly swept up by the greetings and farewells and no more was said.

I met him the next day, at the Victoria Hotel restaurant upstairs, at 12.30. Iain came by himself, as promised.

The kids were still with me, so I told them to play quietly in one corner after they had their meal. 'Just play with your toys here, I have to talk with Iain.'

So we had a chat and I still can't, to this day, figure out what it was all about. It was the first time he asked me for a private session.

'I understand how you feel about the children,' he said, watching himself stir his spoon in his cup. 'I'm a father myself. You're a father. I acknowledge that you are the children's father.' He said that about three or four times. 'I want you to know that as far as I'm concerned they are your children. They are your children.'

I didn't know what he meant. Did he mean that the change of name to Gillespie was not really his idea, but more at Jacqueline's insistence? Was he trying to tell me indirectly that it wasn't his idea, and that he fully sympathised with me as a father, that as far as he was concerned the kids were mine? He kept repeating it until I thought it was a malfunctioning tape recorder that kept repeating the same sound over and over again. He even went further.

'One day let's hope we can work something out so that the kids can meet your parents in Malaysia.'

I had to draw upon all my powers of restraint not to burst out, 'It'll be sooner than you think!' But then I thought, 'Oh, why is it only now that you are talking like this? I'm just about to execute my "Mission Impossible" in a few days time. And now you're talking like this! Why couldn't you talk like this a year before? Everything's in place and ready to go the day after tomorrow.' And then I thought, almost panicking, 'How the hell does he know that I'm up to something? Is he trying to tell me he knows, that I don't have to go through with it because he'll work to persuade Jacqueline to give me what I want? Does he think my claims are reasonable but he also knows what Jacqueline is like? But how the hell would he know what I was up to? The only people who know are Bryan, my mother and my wife. None of them even know Iain, so how could they call him? And why would they? Besides, I've been very careful about telephones. I've never used the hotel phone, but always go to the corner public phone and use thousands of coins if I want to call Malaysia. I've only used the hotel phone for normal calls from my room.'

My mind was turning cartwheels as I sat there, seemingly calm and attentive, as Iain spoke.

'I'm a Scot. I know what it's like for the kids to understand that their original roots are in Malaysia.'

I certainly did as well, and I hoped to restore them.

He paused for a moment, probably to let all he had said sink in, and then said, 'I hope you don't mind signing some documents to get the children Australian passports. We're thinking of going on holiday to Fiji with the kids.'



This was brought up on my previous trip, but Jacqueline didn't follow it up with any documents. I'd said last time I'd think about it.

'Yes,' I replied, 'I can consider it if we're willing to cooperate with the kids travelling to see their grandparents. If you don't want the kids to go to Malaysia the first time, why don't we meet in a neutral country like Indonesia or Singapore? My mother's dying to see her grandchildren. She hasn't seen them for years. If we can come to some understanding I wouldn't have much objection to this passport thing. If you won't allow them to go to Malaysia, you come with them to Indonesia or Singapore, where it's easier for my mother to travel.'

Even this talk of goodwill made me sweat.

I thought, 'What's going on? Should I call it off? Is this a warning? Or a ploy? Or what?'

As these thoughts rattled around in my head, and Iain and I smiled pleasantly at one another, Jacqueline turned up!

'Hi, everyone!'

Iain turned and looked at her, with utter astonishment written all over his face. I don't know if he told her that he was going to meet me and have a talk, or she just happened to turn up on one of her spot checks. I was even more confused and nervous. It was a pity she turned up as I thought Iain had more to say, something else important, but hadn't yet been able to find the right words or moment.

She came to our table, then saw Iddin and Shahirah and said, 'Oh, I'll go and talk to the kids.'

After saying hallo to them she joined us and had coffee, and shortly afterwards both Iain and Jacqueline left. I sat there for a few minutes while the kids played in the corner. What was all that about? What was Iain getting at? What should I do? And then Shahirah came over and I turned my thoughts to the immediacy of the children.

The rest of the time that week when I had the kids we did the normal things. For Shah's birthday I took them out for a big dinner. She enjoyed *satay*, so we went to the Golden Orchid in Little Bourke Street. I was very tense, but nevertheless I did my best to be in a party mood. Wednesday afternoon about 4 o'clock, I had to return

the kids to the house. Jacqueline wasn't home, but Iain was. He asked me to come in and have a coffee, which I accepted. He said no more about the topics he had been addressing on Tuesday. We just discussed small matters, and I soon left. I had the next twenty-four hours free, so I put up more streamers in the room and did some last minute preparations. Everything was in place. Thursday evening, about 5.30, I went over to the house to pick up the kids. Iain opened the door again.

'Come in Bahrin, Jacqueline's not here. One of her friends was ill and he's only just died. She's gone to be with his friends and family. She asked me to wait here for you with the kids. She'll call later tonight.'

I sat and chatted for a while, but he didn't continue the conversation from the other day. I hoped he might, because I wanted to listen, even though it was too late anyway. Tomorrow was my D-Day.

We exchanged pleasantries then I said, 'OK kids, let's go.'

When I was alone with the kids back at the hotel, then came the delicate part. How to tell them of our program for the next day and subsequent days?

I wasn't able to tell them much before they went back to the house the first time because they would obviously be interrogated: 'What did your dad say? What has he got planned for the weekend?'

We went out to dinner as usual, to the Pancake Parlour. I thought it would be last time for the kids, and I was feeling a bit nostalgic in anticipation, amongst my feelings of anxiety. A huge unknown was before us that the rest of our lives depended on, because despite our plans there was no way of being sure that all would go well. The waiter brought us our meals and the kids started eating straight away, hungry as always.

When they were finished and starting on desert I said, 'Tomorrow we're going on an outing. Shahirah, it was your birthday a few days ago, wasn't it? Well, we're going to have a bit of fun over this weekend.'

'Oh sure, yeh, Abah,' said Shahirah, 'What are we going to do?'

Iddin looked very interested, as I said, 'We'll probably go out into the country for a long drive.' I'd bought him a toy battery-operated plane that flew on the end of a string and for Shah I'd bought a large water gun. 'Bring all your toys. We'll go out in the country and have a bit of fun. We've been in Melbourne too much. A nice change, do you think?'

'Yeh! That'd be great. Yes, yes!' they both shouted, jumping up and down in their seats.

'OK, we'd better go to bed early tonight because we have to wake up very early in the morning. We have to be out by 8 am.' After dinner I took them to the slot cars and video games at a place nearby so they were completely worn about by 9.30 and went to sleep straight away. I packed their things and made sure the room looked as if we were just away for a few days. My main briefcase and the suit that I wore were still there, along with their new clothes, still with the price tags on. I even left RM300 and some Australian money in the room safe. I might need a few extra days, or even hours, before the whole nation was alerted. I took all precautions possible, drawing on my training in architecture to help in my planning.

Perhaps someone would say, 'So what's the big deal? Fathers sometimes take their kids out longer than they're supposed to.'

I had no previous record of having broken any previous access, not even by an hour so I hoped that would be on my side. Now the good behaviour I'd been serving over the last few years might be worth something. The phone rang as I was engaged in my last preparations. It was Jacqueline. The kids were already asleep and, surprisingly, she wasn't her normally insistent self. Perhaps she felt a bit guilty she wasn't there when I picked up the kids.

'Sorry I wasn't there,' she said. 'I had to visit a friend of mine who just passed away. I was a bit busy arranging things for him. The funeral's going to be tomorrow. I have to read the eulogy.'

'Sure, just go ahead, the kids will be all right with me.'

'OK, Bahrin, thanks. Goodbye.'

Next morning we woke up very early, in very high spirits. Iddin woke first and immediately said, 'OK, I'm ready to go.'

At the sound of his voice Shah sat up in bed and said, 'Can we go now?'

'Quick then, have a shower, get dressed!' I said, pointing to the clothes on the table.

I'd laid out a complete new set of clothes for both of them. Jacqueline might have had some bugging device that could've trailed us. It was very much like 007 James Bond, but I had to take such precautions, expecting the worst. Jacqueline had always been very suspicious of me, obviously reflecting her own nature, for it was she who plotted an abduction in the first place. My fear that the clothes may have been bugged was not completely unfounded. I suspected over the years that we had been followed, and I was later proven right. I knew we were followed because one of the television reports about us showed a still photograph of me walking down the street, wearing a brown jacket, with Iddin and Shah by my side. I didn't take the shot and nobody I knew did. A private eye must have been the photographer. In a newspaper article it was reported that her lawyer, Lillian Webb, had convinced Jacqueline not to have me followed that year, 1991. So for many years I *had* been followed. Maybe Iain partly helped to convince her? Maybe they were convinced that I was a broken man, that they'd broken my will? After I discovered they'd baptised the children and changed their names I didn't run berserk, smash windows, or jump at them; I just sat there meekly and nodded my head. How ironic, that if Jacqueline had been prepared to concede me some rights, decency and respect, none of this would have happened, but instead she created a 'worst-case scenario' by her own paranoia and desire for revenge.

Each step of that fateful day had been carefully planned and I began their execution. We couldn't leave too early even though I would've liked to have left very early because every hour and every minute was going to count or we might possibly have raised suspicions. At about 8 am, when it was already light, we went to the reception desk, full of cheer and goodwill, and greeted the woman, to show we were still there. I also posted a letter at the desk to my lawyer, to make sure that we really were noticed, then we waved goodbye, and stepped out into the wintry Melbourne morning. I

took a deep breath, for we were now on our way. I wasn't hungry, but I thought the kids might be. We walked briskly; the kids were skipping down to McDonald's to buy some burgers.

'Do you want to eat here, or shall we take them with us?' I asked.  
'I'm not hungry, Abah.'

'Me neither. Let's take them with us.'

'OK, take-aways it is.' We collected our little paper bags, and then the first critical task had to be completed: lose our marker. I had to assume we were being followed.

'Iddin. Shahirah. Let's play a bit of a walking game. Let's pretend we're in a jungle and we're trying to get away from a tiger!'

Just after they both yelled excited agreement we turned the street corner and straight ahead of us were two police: a man and a woman! They looked directly at us! Was the game – the big game – up already? Had the cops been tipped off? I kept walking, with the two kids once again skipping and singing, right past the police. They didn't stop us, but the mere sight of them nearly caused my heart to stop. I hoped that was the closest I was ever going to be to Australian police. We turned another corner, then entered the building I'd already chosen because it was one of the very few buildings with lifts that go straight down to the basement carpark. My architecture training was paying off. Coincidentally this was the first building I stepped into when I first came to Melbourne in 1975. Now, seventeen years later, in 1992, it would be the last building I entered. Call it fate!

'Quick! Fearless pair! Into this lift and away from the tigers!' I said, ushering them towards the elevators.

I pressed the UP button. The doors opened to reveal an empty compartment; we went in and shut it quickly so that whoever was tailing us couldn't get into the same lift.

'That tiger will never get us now,' Iddin said.

But the 'tiger' would probably be waiting outside to see us going up, and noting to which floor. We pressed a few floors so the 'tiger' would be uncertain about where we left the lift. We got off finally and went straight into another lift to go down to the basement where our car was waiting, and then drove off to meet Bryan.

We met up with him about 9 am near the Melbourne Zoo in

Parkville. We took one last familiar drive along the streets and had a look at International House, where I used to live. I looked at it and thought, 'Maybe this is my goodbye to you? Even if I make it I don't think I'll be seeing my old Australian home again.'

As we drove along Royal Parade, we passed Schepp's House – another building I used to stay in when attending the University of Melbourne. Funny, I thought to myself, how I seemed to be passing by all the nostalgic buildings and neighbourhoods as we made our way home to Malaysia. It was as though we had deliberately chosen this very route for sentimental reasons. Call it God's will or fate, but I thought perhaps it was a good omen that God wanted me to say goodbye to all these for the last time.

As we headed north out of Parkville, we entered Brunswick and I looked at some of the Pizza Restaurants I used to frequent on cold and wet Melbourne winter nights as a student. If we do make it, I thought, I won't be eating Australian-made pizza ever again! The green and yellow Melbourne trams that I used to hop onto to university or the city rumbled past us. For seventeen years I had enjoyed countless trips on these pleasant trams, which are very much a part of the Melbourne character. This was another thing I would not be experiencing again, another thing I had to get 'un-used' to after this 'little' adventure.

Eventually it turned out to be one big and prolonged adventure and my life has changed tremendously since that day – 10 July 1992 – the four of us made our way out of Melbourne. It took much adjustment but I have had no regrets whatsoever. How could I? I did everything by the book but they forced me to take the only option I had. It was just as well they did; if not, I would probably still be shuttling between Malaysia and Australia, getting bullied by Jacqueline and Lillian Webb with the kind assistance of the Family Court of Australia every time I wanted to see my kids.

As we were travelling through Brunswick it struck me that I had never, in all my time in Australia, driven out of the state of Victoria! Now I would be alternating with Bryan to drive through Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory – some 3,000 kilometres – to reach our boat. We had to do all this

within 40 hours, which left very little room for errors or accidents. We needed all the help we could get and I hoped God would be with us.

With these thoughts running through my mind, Iddin suddenly popped a most interesting request: 'Abah, do you think we could go fishing on this trip?'

'Yeah, Abah, could we, could we ...?' added Shahirah.

I could not believe my ears. God had been very kind in answering my prayers. I had not quite figured out how to tell the children that we were going on our boat. I could not because Jacqueline had trained them to report almost everything to her, especially with regards to planes, ships and long journeys. Now Iddin himself wanted to go fishing!

'Sure,' I replied, 'we'll go to the best fishing spot to make it a special event for Shah's birthday. I hope you kids don't mind if we go to a more distant place for this special fishing area.'

'Yeah, yeah, we don't mind as long as we can all go fishing,' both Iddin and Shah agreed. 'Can you speak to mum?' they continued.

Almost immediately they had qualified their joy by stating their fear of what Jacqueline might do if they didn't call home regularly. They were very willing for the adventure but Jacqueline's shadow hung like a large cloud over them. This was to be the most delicate task I had to deal with for the next few days – how to convince the children that Jacqueline would not be able to do anything to them for failing to report by telephone regularly as instructed.

I had to convince both of them that I would take full responsibility in dealing with Jacqueline on this 'fishing trip'. From Friday, 10 July to Sunday the 13th, when we finally arrived at our boat at Weipa, the children were in high spirits and having fun whenever we stopped for food and drinks. We couldn't stop for very long each time for fear of being noticed should the alarm be raised before we were out of Australia. Several times when we stopped, Iddin, being the older brother and feeling the responsibility placed on him by Jacqueline, asked if he could call mum just to keep her informed. I had to tell him it would spoil our plans if she decided to ask him to

come home instead. I told him again that I would take full responsibility with Jacqueline and that he need not worry. He seemed more fearful about the 'repercussions' than missing Jacqueline, stating only the need for him to 'report to mum' as instructed. After the second day, Iddin appeared less apprehensive.

On Sunday, the third day on the road to the boat, I mentioned to the children that we would be fishing in Indonesian waters off the coast of the Northern Territory. Both Iddin and Shah seemed very excited by the fact that we were heading for a 'different country from Australia'. They asked where this place was in relation to the Australian coast. As I explained the geography to them, I also mentioned how close it was to Malaysia. Then I quickly asked them if they would like to 'drop in' to see their grandparents and other brothers and sisters.

Both of them looked at each other for a while and came back with the inevitable statement of 'Mum does not allow us to do so!' Sensing that deep within their hearts they truly wanted to visit Malaysia, I took the opportunity to convince them I would take care of everything with Jacqueline. I told them their grandparents and siblings in Malaysia also wanted to see them and had the right to do so. From that day on, it was just a matter of reassuring them they would not get into trouble with Jacqueline or Iain.

I knew all along it wouldn't be difficult to convince them because they had always asked about their grandparents, brothers and sisters during every trip I made. The photos I always brought with me all those years on my visits to Melbourne were paying off handsomely. It is only natural to want to meet one's relatives after so many years. Ultimately, Jacqueline's uncompromising stance towards their Malaysian family only served to strengthen the bond between the children and them.





# PART TWO

Told by Bryan Wickham

# 16

*Tuesday, 5 January 1988*

'This is your Captain speaking. We are now beginning our descent into Changi International Airport, Singapore ...'

The voice cut into my hungover brain. We had spent six weeks, including Christmas and New Year, in the Libyan desert drilling for oil, without any alcohol, so the partying which had started at Athens had carried on during the flight to Singapore. My workmates and I were all sitting together in the rear of the plane. I had stopped drinking three hours into the flight and tried to get to sleep, but it was hard, what with the hostess waking me up to complain about the language of one of the crew. I listened to what she had to say, then kneeled on my seat and looked over into the seats behind. I beckoned with my finger to the 'gentleman' who was causing the trouble and told him that if he thought I gave him a hard time on the oil rig, if he caused trouble on this flight, I'd really give him a hard time when I got him on the ground.

'I don't need this crap. We're all going home on leave. Just cool it,' I said. I looked at the three of them sitting there. 'Honestly, some of you guys need a keeper when you're turned loose.'

They stopped the abuse, but they continued drinking. I couldn't stop them from doing that, and that was the end of me trying to sleep. I sat there with my eyes closed and listened to their outrageous claims. Did I carry on like that when I was 20? Well, maybe I did, but after twenty five years in oil drilling I had got past the stage where you had to prove yourself to everyone. I didn't get to be toolpusher and put in charge of \$AUS5,000,000 (RM10,000,000)

worth of drilling rig on bullshit; I had to work hard for it, in every country in Southeast Asia, all over the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and in the North Sea. But at what cost? Two broken marriages because of the time away from home, no permanent roots, living out of a suitcase most of the time, a shot liver from bad booze, and high blood pressure.

'Bryan,' I said to myself, 'you cannot keep this up. You're 49. You have a lovely wife and two sons in Perth. The boys and my wife have missed out on a lot because I'm away six months of the year. Give it away and settle down. Get back into construction with your brother and live a normal life.'

I was giving this serious thought when the jolt of the wheels on touchdown pulled me back to the present. We weren't in Singapore for long so it wasn't worthwhile leaving the airport. I did a bit of gift buying for my family and then thought a nice cold beer would help the healing process on my hangover, so I headed for the cafe and bar next to the shopping area. It was very crowded; people were standing two deep in places.

As I approached, a man got off a stool and I put on a burst of speed to get there before anyone else. In my haste to climb on I gave the man sitting on the stool on the right a bit of a bump with my carry-all.

I turned to him and said, 'Sorry mate, bit of a squeeze here.'

My first impression of the man was that he was an Indian. He had a goatee beard and very full, dark hair. I noticed his eyes right away and thought they reminded me of Bambi; they were so big and deep. His voice was very well modulated, and he spoke as if he chose every word carefully.

'No bother,' was his reply. 'No harm done.'

The service was swift, and before I could take a deep breath I had my beer sitting in front of me on the counter.

I had a long drink and as I put my glass down a voice next to me said, 'Excuse me, are you from Australia?'

I turned and looked at the man I had done my best to knock off his seat. He was wearing a white shirt, a tie with a subdued pattern in dark colours, and a black jacket. He had quite a bit of grey

in his hair, and his beard was shot through with grey as well.

'Yes,' I said. 'From Perth on the west coast.'

'I know it. I have been there; it is a lovely city.'

'I'm just heading back there on leave from my job,' I continued.

'What do you do?' he asked.

'I'm engaged in oil exploration. I've been in Libya for the last six weeks.'

He wanted to know what Libya was like, as he'd read a lot of what was going on there with the American embargo, but really knew very little about the country itself, like most of us. I told him it was in a pretty depressed sort of a state. You couldn't buy anything. Most of the shops were shuttered because of the American embargo: they had nothing to sell. We were working in the south of the country, out of the cities, on the lava flows.

'It sounds nothing like my country,' he commented.

'What, here, Singapore?' I asked.

'No, the Malay peninsula.'

'Where is your home?' I asked.

'At Kuala Terengganu,' he replied, 'on the northeast coast.'

I told him that I knew central Malaysia as I was there with the army from 1957 for two years, stationed in Johor Bahru, then Sungai Siput.

'The Emergency would have been over by then,' he said.

'Yes, it was pretty much. I went back to Australia, and I think I've kept moving ever since. I've never really settled since I left the army.'

He asked if I'd ever been to Melbourne. I had, but only briefly, when I was transferred from Perth to Sydney, and they sent us by train through Melbourne.

'That is where I studied. I am an architect. I studied at Melbourne University. I was there for a number of years. I periodically return.'

I noticed he'd finished his drink, and I was still thirsty, so I ordered myself another beer, and asked him if he would like another.

'Yes, thank you, an orange juice.'

'Bryan's the name, by the way,' I said, holding out my hand.

'Oh, Raja Bahrin,' he said, and we shook hands.

We kept on talking about the various countries I'd worked in. He was very curious about the different places, and what I thought of them. He was a very good listener. He wanted to know what my wife thought of all my time away from home.

'The wife I have now can handle it,' I laughed, 'but the other two couldn't.'

He laughed too, and said, 'Oh, you have many wives?'

'No, not many, but I have been married three times.'

'Do you have many children from your wives?'

'I have two daughters from my first marriage,' I replied, 'and two sons from my third.'

'You're a very fortunate man,' he said. 'Do you have your children living with you?'

'No, not my two daughters; they're living with my first wife. I only have my sons living with me. I don't have anything to do with my ex-wives. I haven't seen my daughters for twenty years.'

'I also have children. I have two with me, here, at home, and I have two children in Australia,' he replied.

'Do you live in Australia part of the time?' I asked.

'Oh no,' he replied. 'My wife took the children to Australia and she would not return home. She kept the two children in Australia.'

'That's tough,' I said. 'How do you handle it?'

'I periodically go to Australia to visit my children. I have been going as well to the courts to try and get my children back.'

'How did she get your children to Australia? Usually you have to give permission for your children to leave a country.'

'I gave permission,' he said, 'for them to go to Australia with their mother. She had told me that her grandmother was very sick and dying and she wanted the children to see her. When they got to Australia I was notified that she was going to remain there and seek custody of the children and separate from me. I've been fighting several years now in the courts to try and recover my children.'

'What are they? Boys or girls?' I asked. 'How often do you see them?'

'One boy and one girl. I'm quite limited because of my work and am only able to see the children during the Australian school holidays.'

'Well, how's it looking? Do you look like getting any joy out of your fight?'

'It's not looking good. I have spent a lot of money but I don't think that the courts in Australia are sympathetic to my cause. Down there I am a foreigner, a man from another country. My wife is an Australian. She is using these facts in the courts.'

'Why don't you just go and take them?' I said.

He grinned. 'Oh, you cannot do that. We must try and prevail upon the legal system. Obviously you are very different in your thinking from me.'

'From what I know of the bloody legal system, I'd just say to hell with them.'

'It would be very difficult to just take them because of the conditions put on my visits. I have to surrender my passport, and the children must call home and check in with her. And she pops up at odd times during the visits,' he said.

'That wouldn't stop me. If I was in the same situation I'd find a way around it. There are always ways. I'd just take them.'

Then we started talking about work and travel again. He asked if I was looking forward to being with my children in Perth on my holidays. I said I was sad to have missed Christmas with them, but that I'd probably take them fishing.

'Trout fishing, in rivers?' he said.

'No. Deep sea fishing. I don't have a boat at the moment, but most of my life I've had one sort or another,' I replied. I mentioned that I was also getting disillusioned with my current work, as I was never at home. I was giving serious thought to returning to construction. 'I've done four years of a carpentry apprenticeship, and my brother's in construction in Perth,' I said. 'He's always asking me to settle down and go into the business with him.'

That opened up a whole new topic. We got onto the different

types of construction in Australia, for different types of buildings. He said he did work all over Malaysia with his architectural firm. We easily managed to fill in the two hours until his flight.

'You will be returning to your work in Libya in six weeks?' he asked.

'Yes,' I replied.

'Well, if I am in Singapore when you come through, then I would like to meet up with you. We have had an interesting time and I have enjoyed talking to you.'

I said that I, too, had enjoyed talking with him. We stood, and I realised that he was quite tall, only fractionally shorter than me. I'm 5' 11", and I was wearing Western-style boots that made me taller.

'If you are ever in Perth, give me a call,' I said, and he gave me his card.

We shook hands, and he left to catch his flight. When he had gone I realised that I didn't even know where he was going. Most of the time it was me doing the talking. After being tied up on a rig for six weeks with the same blokes I had a lot to say, especially with someone who was obviously intelligent. I sat and had one more beer and thought about him. He was a quietly spoken man, very polite, and his English was very good. It was one of the better stopovers I'd had in a long time. It can get very boring sitting around an airport waiting for a plane, and you're lucky if you meet up with a guy like Raja to pass the time. By now my hangover had just about gone, and I was not feeling too bad at all. My flight was called and I got my things together and went to the departure lounge. As soon as we were on board and strapped in we all passed out.



It was good to be home with the family, and over the next six weeks I didn't give a lot of thought to my meeting with Raja Bahrin. I don't remember if I told my wife about him, though I probably didn't, as I never said a lot about my travels to my wife. I had been doing it for so long it was like taking a bus. But at the end of my leave, on my way back to Libya, at Changi, I did call Raja and had about ten minutes on the phone with him. I went to the airport post office and booked my call at the counter.

'Already, Bryan, you are going back to Libya?' he asked as soon as he knew it was me.

'Yeh, time passes real quick when you're doing nothing.'

'How is your family, Bryan? Are they well?'

'Yes, they're fine, thank you.'

'You have enjoyed your holiday in Perth?'

'Yes, very much. I had a nice time over the New Year period. We had a birthday party for my wife.'

'Did you have many people at your party?'

'No, just family and a few friends. We had a barbecue party.'

'I used to like Australian barbecues. They are a great get-together of people. Are you keen to get back to your work?'

'This may be my last time. I'm still thinking of stopping this line of work and going back into construction.'

'You must have been giving it a lot of thought, for to change your occupation after so many years is a major decision.'

'Well, being home this time with my family, the happy times I had made me realise what I'm missing out on. I must spend more time with my family. And how is your family?'

'They're all well.'

'And is there any change in your situation in Australia?'

'No, up to this time nothing has changed. We still have an application to the Family Court. I am still hopeful that justice will prevail.'

I could tell by the sound of his voice that he wasn't very hopeful at all. 'I wish you the best on that, Raj.'

'And will you call me on your way back? I am not sure if I will be here though, as I travel for my work, too.'

'I'll call from Athens, to see if you're at home. And if you are, we can meet up.'

'Yes, I'd like that. You'd have a lot more to tell me after your trip to Libya.'

I flew on to Athens, met up with two of the other guys and continued on to Libya. The next six weeks were a bastard: just after I arrived we had a rig move. Trying to coordinate more than fifty truck-loads of equipment over six hundred miles of desert, and trying to get them to the new site in the right order so as to start assembling the rig, is no joke. What with breakdowns, and drivers going off to visit at some town or other, and a few getting lost, it is an exercise in frustration. But we did get it together only a few days over our spud date. It had been a good hole, with no problems, and now it was a few days from total depth. I handed over to my relief, and headed for Benghazi with the crew going out on leave. You could almost smell the tension at the airport. A plane with Muslims on board had been shot down recently, and there was a lot of ill-feeling. We got out of there quickly, direct to Athens. I checked into a hotel on the tourist strip near the beaches, picked up the old grey Bakelite phone and rang Raja.

'Ah, Bryan, where are you?'

'I'm in Athens. I'm on my way home. I'll be stopping in Singapore tomorrow afternoon.'

'That's good, Bryan. I have some business to do in Singapore which I have been postponing until I heard from you. It is not urgent business. Now I can go to Singapore and meet with you at the same time.'

I gave him my flight details and we arranged to meet. He met me at Changi. I told him I only had about four hours and he asked what I would like to do.

'Perhaps we could go into town and maybe have a meal, then look at the shops and buy a gift for my wife,' I said.

We caught a taxi into the main shopping area in Orchard Road, talking all the way about my time in Libya, and the state of the country because of the embargo. Raja commented, 'Well, those people do bring a lot on themselves.'

'Yeh. I'm just glad to be out of there, and I probably won't go back.'

I asked him how he was getting on with his family problems in Melbourne.

'I have a court hearing coming up. I am applying to have more time with my children, and maybe have them come to visit me in Malaysia,' he said.

His idea was that the court wouldn't agree to having the children live with him for a time, but maybe they could come and visit. We didn't really talk much about his family problems. We talked more about his work. He was building a museum in Terengganu, and it was causing a few problems of its own. He was also designing a holiday resort. After we ate we went off for a stroll around the shops. I bought a scarf for my wife, and by then it was time for me to return to the airport.

'I hope I haven't taken too much of your time from your business,' I said.

'Oh no, I have set aside tomorrow for my business, and today for meeting with you,' he said, smiling.

'I appreciate the time you've spent with me, and coming down to Singapore. I don't want to lose touch.'

'Oh, that is easy. Just pick up the phone if you're coming through again and we'll arrange a meeting,' he replied.

'And don't forget to do the same if you're coming to Perth,' I said.

I hailed a cab, we shook hands, and I left. I didn't think at the time that it would be a few years before I'd see him again.

About a week after I arrived home I received a letter from my company telling me that they didn't have another contract for the rig. The crew now in Libya would stack the rig. The company didn't have a rig I could go to, so they were suspending me for a time. I took the letter in to Sheila, who was in the kitchen making a salad.

'Looks like I don't have a job to go back to,' I said, waving the letter. 'You'll have to put up with me.'

'Oh, I don't think I could stand it,' she said in her Scots accent. Usually after six weeks I'm champing at the bit to get back to work. Inactivity isn't one of my strong points. I'd be off to the shed pulling a car to bits or something. So the thought of me staying home being idle must have seemed pretty funny.

I laughed, and said, 'No, fair dinkum, they've terminated me. They've lost the contract with the rig.'

I went and sat in the lounge room. After a while Sheila came in. She knew I was thinking of giving the whole game away.

'Well, what are you going to do?'

'I'll have a talk with Gordon and see if he can help me out: get me back into construction.'

'It'll be hard,' she said, 'but we'll get over that. I'm glad you're staying home, especially because of Jason. He doesn't need a father halfway around the world when he has problems.'

What she meant by 'hard' was that while I was away she made all the decisions, but when I got back I started to want to have a say in things too. It would take a while to get used to how we would both sort things out together. I certainly agreed it would be good for Jason. Teenage boys always have problems, lots of them, and Jason

was no exception. It would be good to be around to help him with them. So I talked with Gordon, my brother, and he said there was work around, and he'd help me get set up. And it was all go. There was a lot of work about: jobs that were small and one man could handle on his own. If I didn't want to work, or wanted a day off, I could. I was my own boss and could do my own thing, and that was the way I wanted it. So life was good for me during the time leading up to Christmas '88. And it was very good for my family: I was home every night, and we had the weekends together to do things as a family, and as I had always loved the sea it was not long before I had a boat – a little blue Hartley half-cabin cruiser called *The Shiralee* – to go out fishing.

But it wasn't all plain sailing. We had to get used to having less money: from over \$AUS4,000 (RM8,000) a month, to about \$AUS2,500 (RM5,000) on a good month, which isn't much to live on in Australia. And I had to work bloody hard to clear that. We had our ups and downs, but that is all part of life and being a family and we got over them. The hardest part was for my wife and son to adjust to me being there all the time instead of just six months of the year. Christmas '88 came and went, and it was great to plan our Christmas knowing I would be there to share it all with the family. I'd talked to Raja during this time, and told him of my new lifestyle, and he said it would be the best thing to do. His position regarding his children hadn't changed, and as he talked to me I could sense the disappointment and frustration in his voice. He was missing his kids bad. I felt very sorry for him, and I told him to keep trying to think positive and with luck he may yet get his children back.

In July '89 I was working on a job doing handovers on blocks of condominiums that had been built for the Japanese just north of Perth. Our job was to go into each unit and check that they were OK before they were handed over to the owners. It was during this work that I tripped on the top step of a stairwell and landed with the full weight of my body on my right elbow. You can imagine what 225 lbs (108 kg) would do to an elbow! And so began the hard times for myself and my family. It was eighteen months before I got back to full-time work. Trying to live on a weekly compensation

cheque is very hard, after being used to good money. What with the mortgage and car payments, we were getting further behind every week. I did try and do a bit of work, but my arm would not stand up to it for more than a few hours, and then I would be in a lot of pain for days. It was during this time that my mate Alan Batchelor gave me all the help he could, and so did my mother, and brother Gordon.

It was at this time, March 1991, that Raja asked me to try and help him to get his children out of Australia. After the usual pleasantries on the phone, I asked him if he had any joy from the Family Court.

'No, I think it's a hopeless cause,' he said. 'I don't think that the Family Court will ever return my children to me, or even give me more time with them.' He sounded very disappointed indeed.

'Well, Raj,' I said, 'I'm sorry to hear that. What are you going to do? Are you going to continue with your access visits?'

'Yes, I can't lose touch with the children, though I feel that I am because of the time spans between access. I also think my ex-wife is trying to make the children hate me, or at least forget me.'

'Well, there's not a lot you can do about that, Raj,' I replied. 'If your ex-wife has the law on her side, that's it. You'll just have to live with it.'

'Perhaps not, Bryan. Do you remember what you said: that if it was you, you would just go and take them?'

I paused for a moment to think back to what I said. 'Yes,' I answered, 'I remember, in Singapore.'

'Well, Bryan, I just can't see any other option.'

'It would be quite an undertaking, Raj. How would you go about it?' I asked.

'I have no idea. I was going to ask you, and if you knew of anybody who could help me?'

'Really, no, Raj. I don't know of anybody who'd help you with that sort of venture. It's a criminal act, for a start.' All this time I was thinking at the back of my mind: what's he expect of me, what's the point of his questions? I was wondering what they were leading to.

He continued, 'Maybe you could ask around? You know a lot of people.'

'Yes, but they're not criminal types.'

'Well,' he said, persisting, 'perhaps you could ask around?'

'But Raj,' I said, after a quick think, 'that sort of thing you don't go bugling around: that you want to go and kidnap two children.'

'But Bryan, I don't know what to do. I just found out that Jacqueline had changed my children's surname and religion in 1988! And now they are stopping me from taking my kids to the mosque, Bryan, I've been taking them to the mosque every time I visited them, since 1986. The Family Court has facilitated all of this! So what am I going to do?'

I could sense the desperation in his voice. I thought maybe he'd cool down if I gave him a bit of time.

'Maybe I'll make a few enquiries discreetly,' I replied.

'But you said that if it was you, you would just do it,' he went on.

'That's me, Raj, not you. I am here, in this country, and you are over there. You have a lot of conditions on your visits: you have to hand in your passport, for a start.'

'Yes, I know, but is there nothing that can be done? How would you feel if all this happened to you? And all the other absurdities I've told you about? And for seven years? In a year or two my kids will probably be asked to disown me!'

'I'll see what I can find out,' I said, trying to appease him, giving him time to back out of his words. I thought maybe the idea had just come to him in the last hour, but I learnt later that he'd been thinking about it for a long time, and the last blow from the Family Court that stopped him taking them to the mosque had egged him on. I put the phone down and just sat there. I wasn't outraged, or upset, that he'd asked me for help to kidnap his two children. I firmly believed that he'd had a raw deal. There was not then, and never has been, any discussion of payment. I've never received any money for doing what I did. I did it because I thought he needed help, and I'd do it again. But at that moment, thinking about it was one thing, and doing it was another. It was from then that I started to think of the possibilities, even though at that time I hadn't decided to do it. It was just a mental exercise.

It was just a few weeks after talking to Raja that I had a call from a guy I had worked with on the oil rigs over the years. He wanted to go into business with me. I'd spent a bit of time after work telling this guy, John Forrest, about an idea I had to recycle used oil. What I wanted to do was set up a plant, collect used oil and clean it up. Then the oil could be used for lubrication in farm or mining machinery, or used as fuel for oil burners such as ships and factories. I had located a company in the USA that built a mobile plant to do the job, but as I didn't have the money to set it up I had put it at the back of my mind. Now here was John Forrest wanting to go in with me. Sheila and I talked it over and I decided to go ahead, as long as I had a controlling interest. So John Forrest and I both borrowed \$AUS30,000 (RM60,000) from a second mortgage on our homes and went guaranty for each other on the money.

We ordered the plant from the USA, and as it took about two months to get to Perth, John (who was on compo from his company) would look around for industrial companies that used a lot of oil. This meant he had to travel around, incurring travel expenses and drawing a wage. As for me, I had nothing to do on the project until the plant got to Perth. John was the salesman and I was the technician. My brother Gordon had let me set up an office in his factory unit to help us out. He had a lot of work on, and he asked me to supervise a renovation job he had going and do what I could in the way of helping the men with the work. John would drop by now and then to tell me what he'd been doing.

When the plant arrived I spent all my nights working on it, testing the oil and getting the machinery working right. All we had to do was sell the concept of using recycled oil to industry and the general public. I put in \$AUS10,000 (RM20,000) more that I borrowed from my mother.

We had spent a lot setting up and John was spending quite a lot travelling. He would tell me that he was taking cash from the bank to cover expenses: \$AUS2,000 (RM4,000) here, \$AUS1,500 (RM3,000) there, \$AUS900 (RM1,800), \$AUS600 (RM1,200). It went on and on. He was the company secretary and I never saw an expenses claim sheet or receipts.



With all this happening I didn't give a lot of thought to Raja's request until my brother said that he had a job starting on Rottnest Island (a small island off Perth) which he had to fly his men to and from during the week. It was then I remembered that John had a pilot's licence. I said I'd talk to John about flying Gordon's men for him. John was all for it. Not only was it good money, it meant getting hours up in his flight log.

As things settled down, me working and John flying for Gordon, I again put my mind to Raja's problem, and as I knew there are only two ways you can get out of Australia - by sea or by air - I thought of John. Gordon had praised John's ability as a pilot: landing at Rottnest safely in a strong wind; flying very smoothly and carefully. Gordon said he felt comfortable with him, and Gordon is very particular about flying. If John would be in it, he could meet Raja and his kids at a remote airstrip up in the northwest of Western Australia near the coast, fly them to Indonesia and be back without anyone knowing. The flying time was only about five hours. Before I made any plans or told Raja about it I had to see if John would do it. I hadn't seen much of him lately so I rang Gordon.

'Ask John if he'd be interested in a flying holiday around the Northwest with me and a couple of friends, then maybe a bit of a trip around Indonesia.'

'What friends?' Gordon asked.

'A couple of mates in the oil game. One has a bit of a problem with his passport, but don't tell John that. Just tell him they want a bit of a fly-about.'

A few days later I was working on the front lawn at a job in South Perth when John drove up. It was the first time I'd seen him since he got back from a trip he'd made into the bush to try and sell our oil business.

We talked about what he'd done, which didn't amount to much and then I said, 'Have you given any more thought to that flying job up north with those boys?'

'Oh yeh, I'll be in that,' he replied.

'Well,' I said, 'some of the people you take there wouldn't want to come back.'

'That's not a problem. It's up to them if they don't want to come back. Is it going to be illegal? Are they doing drugs or wild-life?'

'No, no. None of that,' I said. To allay his fears, as I thought he might pull out, I told him, 'No, it's a man that wants to take his two children back to Malaysia. He's only got to get over the water to Indonesia.'

John didn't twig right away. 'Why doesn't he take a commercial flight?'

'Well, John,' I said, 'there's a court order on the children. His wife nicked them off of him and he's trying to get them back.'

'Is he Malaysian?'

'Yes, and the children are too.'

'How did you get involved?'

'He's a friend of mine, John.'

'So what sort of plan have you got? How do I fit in?' he asked.

'At some time in the next few months you'd hire a plane for about two weeks and fly up to the Northwest. We'd work out a schedule beforehand as to which town and what hotel you'd be at each day so I could contact you. I'd need to be able to get in touch with you wherever you were because I'd be coming a long way, and anything could go wrong. I'd hire a large camper van in Perth and drive to Melbourne, pick up my friend and his kids and drive back to the Northwest via the Alice and the Top End. I'd contact you when I was a day's drive from Wyndham, you'd give me the location of a remote airstrip nearby. You would've checked that out in your few days of flying around. I'd meet you there, you'd pick us up and fly to an arranged destination in Indonesia, drop my friend and his kids and then fly me back to the airstrip where I'd left the van. I'd then drive to Perth and return the van. After a few more days flying about you'd return to Perth and tell the people you hired the plane from that you had a wonderful time and logged a lot of hours. How's that sound, John?'

'Yeh, fine. OK so far.'

He sounded a bit wary, so I went on, 'All expenses for the plane, fuel, hotels and living would be paid for. You'd get a fee of

\$AUS25,000 (RM50,000) for doing it, paid up front before you left.'

As soon as I told him what he would be paid, his eyes lit up, and I knew I had him.

'Have you got a problem with it?' I asked.

'No, going missing for a few hours up there isn't a problem. There are cow cockies up there flying about all over the place like blue-arsed flies. There are planes in the air everywhere. One more wouldn't make any difference.'

'OK. But not a word to anyone. Not even your wife. Only the two of us are to know about it,' I said, very clearly.

'Fine by me. When's it going to happen?'

'That's up to my friend. He'll tell us when, but we have to be ready,' I said.

So that was that. I left it to him to work out what type of plane and what travel schedule he wanted. I thought it was the money that got him, not the cause. I rang Raja that night.

'Raj, I've got somebody who's willing to help.'

'O, that's wonderful news. I really didn't have much hope,' he said, and the change in his voice was remarkable.

He sounded like a different man: full of joy.

'Raj, in this world all things are possible. When would you want this to happen?'

'I will have to try and arrange a visit with my children,' he said.

'You would have to have a bit of time with them.'

'That might be difficult, but I will see what I can do.'

'I will try and get something together here,' I said. 'A plan. But it can only work once I have dates of your access. Unsupervised access.'

'I am really grateful for your help, Bryan, and I will do my best to find a suitable time.'

'The plan will involve me picking you and the children up in Melbourne and driving them across Australia in a mobile home to the northwest of Western Australia. Then a friend of mine will fly you to Indonesia. What sort of reception are we likely to get there, Raj?'

'It can all be arranged with the help of some of my Indonesian friends. Do not worry about it, Bryan.'

'Taking the kids is the easy part, Raj. Getting them out of the country is the hard bit. But I'll do what I can on this end and get back to you.'

A few days after that conversation with John, he dropped by the office. We argued about the way he'd been conducting our business.

'Because of the money disappearing without any receipts or log of expenses, John, I've changed the procedure at the bank. It will now require both of us to sign to cash a cheque,' I said.

He didn't like it, and we had a heated argument about it, but I told him that I wouldn't change my mind. We were paying out a lot of money each month. John and I paid the interest on the loans out of our own pockets until we got going. His trips and wage weren't helping, especially with no jobs, or even contracts, as a result of his efforts. It was all to get much worse, however. In middle of 1991 John came to see me on the job again. He said he was going to take a trip to Port Hedland up in the northwest to check out the mining companies there. I told him I didn't like it. There were only two mining companies up there, after all. We argued, and he walked out. Several days later John appeared once more. He was insistent that Port Hedland was the place for him, so I thought I might as well let him get on with it. After all, maybe he was right and I was wrong.

'John, just go ahead. I'm sick of fighting with you.'

'Don't worry,' he said, 'I am going ahead. If I get something up that way I'll need the plant up there.' He was getting quite cocky by now. The machine was fully mobile and operational..

'Well, best of luck to you, John. And while you're up there you can look for airstrips for our other business,' I said, still hopeful that he might come good. He just grunted, stood up, and left.

On his return from the Northwest, about a week later, he called in at the office again.

The first thing he said was, 'I'm taking the plant to Port Hedland.'

I was shocked. I didn't really think anything was going to come of his trip up north.

'What for?'

'I've got work for it,' he said.

'Who from?' I asked.

'Never you mind,' he said, standing quite close to me, shoving his face at me. 'I've got work for it.'

'That's not acceptable, John. You've got to tell me where it's going.'

'You've got no say in it,' he said gruffly. I argued with him a bit more, trying to get some sense out of him. Finally he said, 'Look, I've committed myself to the machinery going to Port Hedland. If you don't let me take it I'm going to the police and I'll tell them about the little matter you have planned.'

That really knocked the guts out of me. I was speechless. I'd known the guy for years. He was like Jekyll and Hyde. He said a few other things about wanting me out of the business then turned to leave. As he opened the door he mumbled, 'You'll hear from me.'

I still had not said a word. My brain was trying to cope with the enormity of it all. My body was in shock. I was icy cold as if all the blood had drained out of me. After a few minutes my brain started to function again. It's hard to explain the range of emotions that went through me, but the one that did come out was anger: a white-hot, terrible anger. 'Blackmail!' was screaming around in my head. Blackmail! Of all the shit that had, at different times, been put on me, this topped it all. And to think that it was from a guy I thought to be a mate, someone I had trusted and had known for years and who had been a confidant of mine. If he had been there right then I think I would have killed him.

I stormed back into my office, sat at my desk and thought about what John had said. If I called his bluff and told him to go to hell, and he then went to the police, I would be in a lot of trouble. And then if the police told the kids' mother what was going to happen she could go to court and stop Raja seeing his children alto-

gether. That was a risk I was not prepared to take. So he got what he wanted. He returned a few days later and removed the plant. It was to take four months before it was all settled, through accountants and lawyers. He didn't pay any cash up front. I couldn't even get the \$AUS10,000 (RM20,000) that I'd borrowed from my mother. He eventually agreed to pay me \$AUS3,000 (RM6,000) in June of 1992 and to sign a document to indemnify me against any default on the loans that the company had, which, as later events proved, he had no intention of keeping.

The worst thing was I had to tell Raja that all the plans we had made were down the drain. I wasn't looking forward to it but I had to do it soon. Even so, I waited for two weeks before I called Raja. I was sitting in my office looking at the big map of Perth on the wall above Gordon's desk. There wasn't much else to look at. It was a very spartan room. There were just the two old desks – one for me and one for Gordon – a filing cabinet, an ancient computer and printer, and a fax and phone.

'Hallo Raj, it's Bryan. How are you?'

'Very well, Bryan,' he said, sounding pleased to hear from me. He was probably expecting good news: a firmer plan with details.

'Rest of the family fine, Raj?' I asked.

'Yes. And you?'

'Everything's fine with me. But I have a bit of a disappointment for you, Raj.'

'What is it, Bryan? What's the matter?' he said, worried.

'Well, you know how I said that I had somebody who would help you who was a pilot?'

'Yes, what's the matter?'

'He's pulled out of the deal.'

There was a long pause and when he came back on his voice had changed from pleasant modulation to a voice of depression.

'What has happened?' he asked.

'He just changed his mind,' I said.

What could I tell him? I didn't want to burden him with my problems.

'What are we to do now?' he asked.

It was at this instant that I committed myself. 'Don't worry, Raj. I'll find a way.'

'How, Bryan? How?'

'Just let me think on it for a while. There are only two ways out of here: sea or air. It looks like air's out. So it must be sea. I'm more at home with that, anyway.'

'And how will you handle that,' Raja asked.

'Well, I might take a trip up north and talk to the fishermen up there. They're a fairly wild bunch with large boats, and they might want to make a dollar out of it. Don't worry. Everything will work out. The next time I ring I hope to have better news for you.'

I sat there at my desk and realised that I'd fully committed myself. I'm the sort of person who if he says he's going to do something, he will. I don't make promises I can't keep, and if I take up with somebody I stick by them. I thought about what I'd said to Raj about talking to people up north who had boats and I realised it really wasn't feasible. Those fishermen weren't very reliable: half the time they're sober, and the other half they're completely drunk. I couldn't rely on them keeping their mouths shut even if I could find anyone willing to help.

'Well, Bryan, the only way to do it is to do it yourself and don't tell anybody. That way, if anything goes wrong you can't blame anyone but yourself,' I thought.

I still had no plan of action, but one developed over the next few months. As luck would have it, work dried up in Perth, so my good mate Al - who I'd been working with on most of the jobs and who always stuck by me - and I took a job with Nino Constructions at a goldmine site out of Kalgoorlie. We were setting up all the civil works for the heavy machinery, which involved a lot of concrete work for underground foundations and crushing plants. The country around there was flat as a tack, and covered in Mallee scrub: bleak during the day and very cold at night. We worked from daybreak to dark. It was in that dry inland environment that I worked out the plan, based on a sea route.

My first consideration was the type of boat I would need: something about 30 to .35 ft, a proven sea boat with V berths, forward



toilet, a small galley and powerful engine that had to be trailable, as I'd have to move it by road to the north of Australia, as it'd be impossible to reach Malaysia from the south in the type of boat I had in mind. It'd take weeks, if we made it at all. I didn't know what my destination would be, but it'd have to be as close as possible to Australia. I wanted to spend the shortest time necessary at sea to reduce the risk of anything going wrong. I then had to talk to Raja and get some input from him as to the help we could expect from his Indonesian friends. Before I called him I studied maps of the north coast of Australia in relation to Indonesia. The nearest Indonesian port to Australia was the port of Merauke in Irian Jaya, about forty miles west of the border with Papua New Guinea. I knew I could reach Merauke from either Darwin in the Northern Territory or from somewhere in the Gulf of Carpentaria, like Burketown or Karumba at the bottom of the Gulf, or Weipa about halfway up the West Coast of the Peninsula or Thursday Island at the top end of the Cape York Peninsula. I rang Raja at the end of July 1991 and told him what I had in mind.

'I've been giving it a lot of thought and I've decided to go by sea across to Irian Jaya. Is that any problem for you, Raj?'

'No, Bryan, that's no problem. I'm overjoyed to hear that something is going to happen.'

'I haven't really worked out the finer details yet, but around Cape York is the closest to any Indonesian territory. The port of Merauke is the ideal place to head for. But when do you get access to your children?'

'I've just seen them,' he said. 'Last month.'

'Well, when is the next time you see them for a while, more than just a day or two?'

'Probably not until next June, during the school holidays. I will see them before that, but not for very long.'

'By then I will have something in place,' I said. 'I'll keep you informed. At the same time, you work on arranging things from your end, using Merauke as a landing point.'

'I will, Bryan, even if I have to fly to Merauke myself to investigate it. You don't need to worry about the Indonesians. I will or

ganise everything with some of my friends whom I used to go to school with and who live there now. I hope everything will go all right this time, Bryan.'

'I'm the only one that knows about it, Raj. Not even my wife. Nobody, only you and me.'

'I am so happy, Bryan. This is very good news, indeed.'

He was over the moon that something was being done.

'Raj,' I said, 'it's just a bare bones plan yet, but I will set to and go into more detail. All I need now is money, as I want to be on the lookout for a boat and a four-wheel drive to tow it.'

'How much will you need, Bryan?'

'The boat could cost up to \$AUS40,000 (RM80,000), and a one-tonne, four-wheel-drive truck about \$AUS15,000 (RM30,000). If I have to spend money on the boat like engine and electrical repairs, or installing navigation equipment, radios and safety gear, long-range fuel tanks, and then a trailer to move it with, the cost could run into more than \$AUS10,000 (RM20,000). Then I'll have to get the boat clear across the country to whatever departure point I decide on, which could be 5,000 km, or up to 8,000 km. That alone would be about \$AUS4,000 (RM8,000).

'And with a bit in reserve in case of emergencies, Raja,' I said, 'you will not get a lot of change out of \$AUS100,000 (RM200,000). But if you want this venture to succeed, and you really do want your kids back, it's going to cost a lot. I told you it wouldn't be cheap, and the only way I'll do it is if I don't have to worry about money. I don't want any for myself, just the expenses. Raja, I'm going all the way with you on this. I won't let you down now, but you know the risks: if it goes bad we will both end up in jail, you will never see your kids again, and my family will be in a bad way with me in jail. But we have a very good chance of getting away with it if we have a good plan.'

Raja had not said a word as I told him all of this.

Then he said, 'Bryan, I do not care about the money. If it was to take all the money I had in this lifetime or ten lifetimes, I want my children with me and there is no risk I would not take to achieve that. You, Bryan, are a true friend to help me and put yourself at risk. I will never be able to repay you.'

'That's OK, Raj,' I said, 'but we still have to make it work. I have no wish to end up in jail, so I'll do my homework very well. As to the money, how are you going to get it to me? I don't want it to go into my bank. I couldn't explain that much money away.'

'Leave that to me', he said. 'I will get it to you somehow. I will call you when I have made the arrangements.'

'No,' I said. 'Don't call me. I'll call you in a few weeks. In the meantime see what you can arrange with your Indonesian friends for when we get to Merauke.'

He said he would, and we left it at that for the time.

It was about four weeks before I talked to Raja again and in that time I had a large scale road map of Australia, and marine charts for the north coast of Australia from Darwin to Cape York. In the afternoons, when my brother and the receptionist had gone, I would sit in my office and go over the logistics of getting from point A to B to C (Point A was Perth, B was my departure point and C was my destination, Merauke) by the safest and quickest route. After going over it, time and time again, I came to the conclusion that Darwin was a bit too far by boat, so it had to be one of the Gulf ports, and of the four I had to pick from, Weipa was my first choice, depending on the state of the road. The last time I was up that way had been thirty years ago, when I'd worked at Cooktown, and at that time the road was just a track. Going over the Great Dividing Range, especially coming down the escarpment, was a nightmare, so I decided I'd have to check the road before I committed myself to Weipa. But by now, I thought, the roads would be quite good considering all the development that had gone on at Weipa and the rest of the Cape York Peninsula. I hoped that was the case, as it was only about 220 nautical miles from Weipa to Merauke in Irian Jaya.

I rang Raja in the first week of September 1991 and told him what I had worked out. I said I definitely wanted to do it during winter, as the summer up there was very hot and we had to consider the children. The first four months of the year was the wet season, which also meant there could be cyclones, so it'd have to be in the middle of the year: May, June, July or August. Would that still be OK with his visit to the children?

'I will check on that,' he said, 'and tell you what I can arrange. It is difficult to say what will happen on any given visit, as my ex-wife changes her mind so much, but I will do my best. Bryan, I have made arrangements to get money to you. I have friends in Australia who will help. You will be contacted soon, and the money will be handed to you. I have told them it is for a commercial venture and that I need to get the money to you as soon as possible.'

'OK, that's good,' I said. 'You never know when a suitable boat will come on the market, and that's the biggest single factor of the whole deal. And how did you go with the Indonesian side of it? What help can we get?'

'All the help we want,' he replied. 'I have talked to my friends in Indonesia. They told me that Merauke is quite provincial, but has good communications with the rest of Indonesia. That means we should be able to land quietly, without too many questions being asked, and then the children and I will be able to fly out, back to Malaysia. We can say our passports have been lost, and I can show them the kids' Malaysian birth certificates.'

'Well, Raja,' I said, 'it looks like you have it all under control over there, and if you can get a boat to meet us at sea it would be a big plus for me.'

'I will see if that is possible, Bryan.'

It didn't take long for the money to arrive. I was working on another house in South Perth two weeks later, after I'd returned from setting up the mine near Kalgoorlie, when I had a call on my mobile phone.

'I have something to hand over to you from Raja, and you know what it is,' a man's voice said.

'Yes, I've been expecting it.'

'I need to meet with you quickly, as I have to return to my home as soon as I can. I do not want to stay here too long,' he said.

'Are you in the city now?'

'Yes,' he said. 'I am at my hotel.'

I told him I was at work, and wasn't dressed for visiting hotels, but if he could meet me some place else we'd have it over with in an hour.

'That will be fine with me,' he said. 'Name the time and place and I will be there.'

I told him to take a taxi to McCallum Park, just over the Swan River from Perth City, and to wait on the river walkway. I would be there as soon as I could.

'You'll recognize me by what I'm wearing: black shorts, blue shirt with no sleeves, and boots,' I said.

'I am wearing a grey suit,' he said, 'and carrying a small bag.'

I took it slow driving there as it wasn't far and I didn't want to be too early. I parked my truck and sat in it for a bit, to give him time to arrive. I looked at the Causeway and the traffic, the river and the park. A couple of old guys were fishing. A woman pushed a pram past. I thought, 'It is really happening now.' I wondered if there was going to be any hitch. I was nervous about meeting a

stranger under such circumstances. Maybe I might miss him, or he wouldn't turn up? He could have an accident. But I was relieved, too, that the money was on its way. If a boat came along I could buy it, and then I could get on with the rest of the plan. After about ten minutes I walked into the park and down to the riverside. I turned and walked towards the Causeway, along the path. I spotted him straight away, as he was the only one there on the path. He was standing looking at the river. I stopped next to him. As he turned and held out his hand, I noticed he was of Asian origin.

'Mr Wickham,' he said. 'I am pleased to meet you.'

I said I was pleased to meet him and gave his hand a shake.

He then held out the bag and said, 'This is from Raja. It is not cash, it is gold bullion.'

At the instant he said 'gold bullion' my face dropped.

'I did not have the time to go around cashing it,' he continued, but Raja said you could take care of that.'

I took the bag from him. It was quite heavy.

I thanked him, and as I turned to walk away he said, 'I hope your venture with Raja turns out well.'

I thanked him once more, and as I walked, thought to myself, 'I wonder how much he knows about it? But he must be a very good friend of Raja to do this for him.' I didn't look back at him. I just walked away, already thinking of how to change the gold into cash. Over the next few weeks I gave a lot of thought how and where to cash that gold. I didn't want to cash it in Perth as it was too small a city, and word could've got around. I'd rung Raja and told him that I'd received the gold, and that I'd decided to go interstate to cash it.

'Do what you think is best,' was his reply. 'I will leave it to you.'

During this period I'd signed over control of my company to John Forrest. I went to my accountant, Peter Thomas, to finalise the arrangements.

'What's this guy John Forrest got on you to make you give away what you've worked so hard for?' Peter said when I sat down opposite him in his office. 'You're signing away the company you've had for years and all its assets. Everything for nothing. No money

from him. The cash you and your mother have put in, and everything else, is all down the drain. It's not like you, Bryan, to act this way.'

What could I say to him? I couldn't tell him about Raja and about how Forrest had blackmailed me .

'I'm sick of fighting John Forrest over what direction the company's taking, Peter. I've had just about all I can take of his bitching and moaning, and going on like a kid. I just want to get out of it.'

I don't think Peter believed me. He didn't say it, but I could see by his face that he was thinking it as I signed. He'd been an accountant for years, and in that line of business you see all the dirt humanity can deal up, expressed in all sorts of strange figures, both on the page and in the flesh.

But all I thought to myself was, 'At least this is one thing off my mind. It's over with and I can get on with my life.'

Sheila had said to me, 'Why don't you fight him? Get rid of him and go it alone.'

I told her the same as I had told Peter, that I just wanted out and that was that, and I wanted to forget the whole deal. I was pretty low, and boiling mad through all of this. I suppose I channelled a lot of the anger into helping Raja. At the same time I kept thinking about the plan, and how to get away to cash the gold. I had to think of a good excuse to give my wife. That excuse arrived the next week. I received a call from the company that Al and I had worked for in June near Kalgoorlie: Nino Constructions. They had a job starting in November in the Northern Territory, just fifty miles from Tennant Creek. The job would last about four weeks. That was just what I wanted. I could do the job, and then instead of coming home at the end, duck off to Brisbane for a few days, cash the gold, buy a four-wheel drive, drive up to the Cape and check out the road to Weipa, and then drive back to Perth via the Top End. I knew I'd need about an extra ten days or so to do all of that. The only thing I had to worry about was Al coming back to Perth at the end of the job without me, and my wife wanting to know where I was. I knew that I'd have to think of a good tale to tell Al and Sheila before the end of the job. We were booked out of Perth on a flight to Alice Springs the first

week of November 1991. I didn't want to carry the gold with me, just in case it was discovered during the security checks, so I dug out an old tin tool box from my workshop: the type mechanics use and put just over half the gold in the bottom. I filled the box with tools I thought I'd need on my trip back. I tied it up with tape and put a good padlock on it, and with white paint I printed on the lid: 'Bryan Wickham, c/o Nino Constructions, Alice Springs'. On the morning of our departure I drove out to the Ansett Freight Depot at the Perth airport and consigned the box to myself at the Ansett Freight Depot in Alice. I asked if it'd go on that morning's flight, and I was assured it would. So it'd be going with me, but not on me. All I had to do was pick it up when we arrived in Alice Springs, but I knew I'd worry about it until it was back in my possession.

It was a four-hour flight to the Alice, and we arrived just after lunch, landing amongst miles of spinifex and mulga, with a range of reddish brown low hills off on the horizon. We had to wait around for about an hour for the bus that Nino had arranged to show up, so I went looking for the freight depot. I asked an Ansett guy where the freight depot was and he jerked his thumb towards an exit door.

Around the corner I found a tin shed and in it another guy, half-hidden behind some metal racks dotted with freight waiting for collection, 'Have you got a tool box consigned to a Bryan Wickham? It would've come in on the plane from Perth.'

He came out from behind the racks and said, 'No, mate. All the freight off that flight's gone into the depot in town. Check there.'

When I got back to Nino and the boys, the bus had arrived, so we loaded our gear up and went to the hotel in town. I dropped my bag in my room and went out and jumped in a taxi. We arrived at the depot and I went in and asked if my tool box had arrived. The guy said he'd have a look, and went out the back. After a few minutes he came back and said, 'No, there's nothing here for that name, mate.'

'Shit,' I thought. 'Where the hell is my box?' I said to the guy, 'I was told at the airport that it'd be here.'

'Sorry mate, there's nothing here for that name,' he said again, slowly, stretching out his arms onto the counter.



'Shit, shit, shit,' I said to myself. 'Where the bloody hell has it got to?' That was all I needed, for it to go missing. 'Look,' I said, 'I put the box in at your depot in Perth this morning, and they said it'd be on today's flight.'

'Perth? Not here yet, mate. It's still on the way from the airport. I reckon it won't be here until about half past four, maybe five. The driver delivers on his way into town, see.'

'Is there any way you can check to see if it had arrived on the plane?' I asked.

The bloke still stood in the same position, with his hands outstretched on the counter. His mouth didn't move much, either.

'No, mate. The driver's got the manifest with him, so I won't have a clue what he's got until he turns up here.'

Back to the hotel I went and sat in the Garden Bar, so called because there were big glass doors that opened out onto a paved area with palms and the like in pots. I'd been sitting there for about an hour, watching the other blokes acting like performing seals in the pool outside, when the barman came up to me.

'Sir, reception's asked me to tell you your tool box is with Ansett. Will you pick it up?'

'Too bloody right,' I said. 'Thanks very much. I'm on my way.'

When I arrived, I said to the guy, who was standing in the same position I'd left him, 'I got your message about my tool box: to pick it up.'

'It's not here, mate,' he said, still barely moving his mouth.

'What the bloody hell is going on?' I was just about snarling by this time. 'Did you, or did you not, tell the hotel reception that you had my tool box?'

'Yes, mate,' he said. 'But I didn't say it was here. The driver called in, you see, on the phone. I asked him if he had a tool box for a Mr Wickham and he said he had. So I told him to swing by the hotel and drop it off. He said he would, and that's what I told the receptionist at the hotel. It should be there by now. Shame you ain't.'

I took the cab back to the hotel and went to reception, and asked, a bit abruptly as I was getting fairly agitated by now, 'Has

anything arrived here for me? I'm Bryan Wickham.'

'No, Mr Wickham, not since I've been on,' she said.

I went into the bar and had a few beers. After about half an hour I went back to reception.

'Anything here for me yet?' I asked.

'Not yet, Mr Wickham,' she said.

'Jesus H Christ, what the hell was going on?' I thought to myself. 'What have I got to do to get my box back?' I was just about to ask the receptionist to call Ansett when another woman walked out of an office at the rear of the desk.

'Ah, Mr Wickham,' she said, 'I have something here for you. Ansett dropped it off. It's in my office. Would you please come in and get it as it's too heavy for me.'

I just about ran in, and there it was. I could have kissed it. I thanked them, picked up the box and went to my room. I sat on the bed and looked at the box and thought to myself, 'I'm not going through that again. From now on you don't leave me.'

The next morning we loaded our gear into the bus. I put the tool box with the gold in it under the rear seat, the seat I was going to sit in for the trip to Tennant Creek. I wasn't going to let the box get away from me again.

Just as we were about to leave, Nino called out to me, 'Hey, Bryan, you can ride with me in the four-wheel drive. You're a non-smoker.'

So what could I say? 'No, I don't want to?' He would have thought I was nuts. So once more I had to part with the gold, as I didn't have time to get it out of the bus. And as we travelled a lot faster than the bus in Nino's Toyota, we didn't meet up again until Tennant Creek, six hours later. We stopped at every pub. It was a long, hot trip full of story-telling. I worried about the gold. I thought, 'What if they have an accident in that bus? They'll be stopping at the pubs too, and the whole lot of them will be pissed. What if the box with the gold in it is thrown out and broken open?' And on we went, through a series of low hills, past the Devil's Marbles – a bunch of huge boulders right beside the road – and kept going. There wasn't a pub. I thought, 'What if they have a breakdown, and open the box

to get at the tools to fix the bus?' We'd get to another pub and stop. One of them had the smallest bar in the world: about a yard long. Another had all the walls covered with currency, and another had a wall plastered with photos of travellers from around the world. We'd look, laugh, have a few beers, and get back in the vehicle. I thought, 'What if they start fooling around and just get curious?' I didn't enjoy that trip. But nothing happened, and all of us, including the gold, arrived at the mine site in one piece.

We settled into the work, and everything was going fine until a flash electrical storm hit one night and turned the site into a sea of mud. We took the day off and went into town. I'd been thinking, 'What am I going to tell Al and my wife, so as to get the ten days at the end of the job to do what I want to do?' That morning, 16 November, fate or bad luck, or whatever you want to call it, was to take a hand, almost literally. When we arrived in town, we all went our different ways. We were to meet up at the roughest pub in town at lunch time. I went and had my hair cut, wading through the heat and the stilted houses of Tennant to the strip of shops, and then went to the pub. The Tennant Creek Hotel had no frills, no luxury, no air-conditioning, and a concrete floor. All the crew were there, about twelve, and a few had a head start with the beer, so Al and I joined in, and were having a good time of it, until one of the boys wanted to ride the mechanical bull that was in the bar. The bull was a device designed to shake the hell out of the rider. A solid post rose up out of a heavy base, and a barrel-shaped body sat on it. On the body was a saddle horn, for hanging on.

'Give us a go on the bull! Come on, love! Give us a go! We're tough!' they shouted at the barmaid.

She refused at first, because she didn't know how to work it.

'We'll help you, love.'

'Yeh, we can start it up!' the noise continued.

'All right,' she said. 'But not for long, and you'll have to sign a form so the pub won't get into trouble if you break your heads.'

'No worries, not a problem!' and then they started arguing about who was going first. Finally Alf, a wiry little bloke, decided to give it a go first, and then Mick was next. Someone said, 'Get up



*Left: A uniformed Bryan Wickham in Johor Bahru, October 1957.*



*Raja Bahrin (second from left) with his cousins at a family ceremony, circa 1962. His grandfather, a staunch traditionalist, ensured that the family observed all the important customs.*



*Breakfast was a special time for Raja Bahrin and his first-born Iddin. Iddin would often be very playful, and sometimes Raja Bahrin found it difficult to leave him to go to work. After Iddin was abducted to Australia, the family found the mornings terribly quiet without his voice and laughter.*



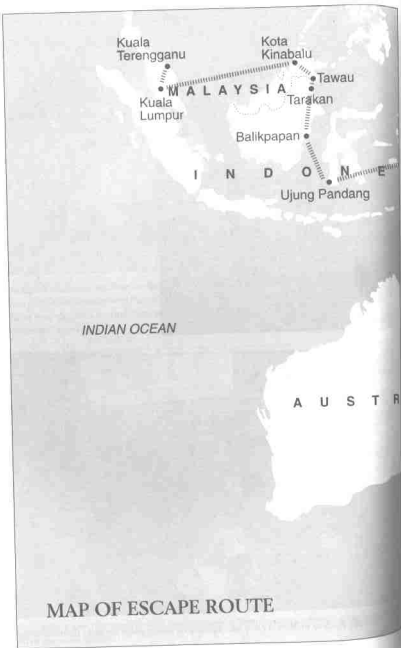
*Raja Bahrin's mother cradles little Shahirah while Iddin looks on, perhaps wanting a little bit of attention himself.*



*Left: Shahirah and Iddin playing outside the Drummond Street mosque in Melbourne after prayers.*



*The Pancake Parlour in Market Lane was a favourite eating place for Raja Bahrin and the children.*



MAP OF ESCAPE ROUTE







*Bryan loved the sea, and his boating experience would prove crucial to their plans to take Iddin and Shah out of Australia.*



*The trusty four-wheel drive that Bryan used to haul the boat across the Australian continent from Perth to Weipa.*



*The aptly-named Intruder that had the vital task of crossing the Torres Strait between northern Australia and Irian Jaya.*



*Both Iddin and Shah were in good spirits most of the time they were adrift in the Intruder.*



*In Irian Jaya, Iddin and Shah became good friends with a local village boy called Musa. As parting gifts, Musa presented Iddin with some deer antlers and Shah with a long-necked tortoise.*



*Upon arrival in Sabah, Iddin and Shah decided to buy a pair of mini Malaysian flags from a bookshop. After some seven years, they were finally back in their country of birth.*



*Raja Bahrin's mother, wife Norilah and other children treat Shah to her first breakfast upon arriving in Kuala Lumpur.*



*Bryan (second from left) in Loddon Prison, Victoria.*



*Bryan and his wife Sheila after his release from prison.*



*Bryan and Sheila made a trip to Kuala Terengganu in 1993 for a reunion with the kids.*



*Left: Iddin 'monkeying' around with a friend in Terengganu.*



*Iddin and Shahirah were now able to cuddle up together in bed with their other brothers and sisters. In Australia, they were forced to sleep in their own separate rooms, even though Shahirah was terrified to be alone after having nightmares.*



*Both Iddin and Shahirah were able to adapt quickly to regular prayers and religious instructions.*



*The children gave Bryan a surprise birthday party during his trip to Terengganu.*

there, Bryan, and show us how you do it.'

I had just enough beer in me to do just that. It bucked, spun, and rocked. I was hanging on for dear life and thinking, 'She'd better stop soon, or everyone will be spray-painted with recycled beer,' when the next thing I knew I was flying. One of the guys said later I looked like a 747 coming in for a landing, but the landing I made was a lot less graceful. I hit that floor hard. As I picked myself up, I felt a bit of a twinge in my left hand. I looked down, and blood was pumping out of the little finger. It was broken at the middle joint and the top half was sticking out at right angles to my hand. I could see the two ends of the bones. That killed the party stone dead.

Al said, 'Quick, let's get you to the hospital.' He and I went out to the bus, and with Al driving we were soon at the emergency room at the hospital. 'I hope it doesn't bugger you for working, mate,' he said.

'I don't know how I can work with a finger like this.'

The sister in charge took one look at my hand and put me in a cubicle. I sat in a chair while she unwrapped the bloody handkerchief I had around the finger.

'How did you do that?' she asked, calmly.

'Riding a bull,' I replied.

She raised her eyebrows, and gave me a look that said, 'The stupid things that men do!'

After the doctor had bandaged me up, Al drove me away from the hospital.

I said, 'Well, that has put paid to the rest of the job for me. I can't work with a finger like this.'

We drove back to the mine and I told Nino. He agreed that I wouldn't be able to keep working and said I might as well go back to Perth. The next morning I drove back into Tennant Creek from the mine to see the doctor again.

'You have a slight infection,' he said. 'You'd better come back tomorrow.'

I went to the Ansett office and found I could get a small plane to Alice Springs, stay the night there, and catch a plane to Perth the day after. I arranged it all with the Ansett office, and was told I could



pick up my tickets the next morning. I then called Sheila and told her what had happened, and that I'd be coming home. I won't write here what she said to me, but it wasn't very complimentary. The next morning I loaded my bag and tool box into Nino's vehicle and we headed for town. I had told Nino that I had to go to the hospital to get my hand checked, so we went there first. By this time my finger was throbbing and to just brush it against something set off the pain.

When we got to the hospital, the doctor took one look at my hand and said, 'I want you in here for a few days. The infection is getting worse.'

My finger did look bad. It was swollen, and a deep red, with a yellow discharge.

'No way, Doc,' I said. 'I'm booked out on a flight to the Alice this morning. I stay there overnight and fly to Perth the next day.'

The flight to Alice Springs was uneventful: a nice change. I checked into a motel not far from the hospital. I had an idea forming that could get me the time I needed for a trip to Brisbane and places north. It involved more deception and lies, but I thought 'in for a penny, in for a pound'. That night I called my wife, and I told her that Tennant Creek had sent me to Alice Springs for treatment on my hand, as they had a big hospital at Alice.

'They're talking surgery, to join the ligaments up, but first they've got to wait for the infection to die down,' I said.

'Are you in the hospital, Bryan?' Sheila asked.

'Not yet. You know how I am about hospitals. I'll only go in when they want to do the surgery. I'm staying at a motel until then. I have to go up to the hospital a couple of times a day for treatment.'

The next morning I went down to 'outpatients' at the hospital. My hand was looking very unpleasant. It was red and swollen all the way to the wrist. The doctor cut a stitch to let the wound drain, and then cleaned it and dressed it. I went back to the motel, swallowed three antibiotics, packed my bag, checked out and took a cab to the airport. I changed my ticket from Perth to Brisbane and landed in Brisbane at 4 pm, 18 November 1991.

At Brisbane I booked into a small motel just a few minutes by

taxi from the city centre, and crashed. I didn't wake until lunch time the next day, Sunday. I bought the paper and looked for cars for sale. I also made a list of gold dealers, as that was the first thing I had to do: change the gold to cash. That night I called my wife and told her that my finger was a bit better. She asked why I hadn't called the night before.

'The pills I took just put me away for the night. But I feel a lot better for it,' I said. 'I'll call you in a few days and let you know how I'm doing.'

On Monday I changed gold to the value of \$AUS16,000 (RM32,000). It was so easy: walk in, give them the gold, pick up the cash in about an hour or so. The next morning I went to three dealers, and cashed gold to the value of \$AUS60,000 (RM120,000), with no bother at all. I then had \$AUS76,000 (RM152,000) in cash. I had it in a small overnight bag, and it was much lighter than the gold! I went to a car yard and bought a second-hand Ford F100 for \$AUS13,000 (RM26,000) cash. The next morning I put a clean dressing on my finger (it was getting better every day) and had the truck serviced. The truck was already fitted with a full fibreglass canopy. I bought a single bed mattress, a pillow, two travelling blankets, and put them in the back so I could have a sleep when I was tired. My plan was to go like hell and get home as soon as I could.

I drove west out of Brisbane at 4 pm, Wednesday, 22 November 1991. My route north took me through Toowoomba, then north-west through Dalby, then on to Miles. From Miles I headed north on the Leichhardt Highway to Biloela, and then to Rockhampton. From there it was north on the Bruce Highway. I didn't stop except to fill up and get some take-aways. MacKay, Townsville, Cairns rolled past, then I headed west from Cairns, up the range to Mareeba on the Atherton Tablelands, then north on the Peninsula Road, over the Great Dividing Range as far as the turn-off to Cooktown. Over the Range it was plains and scrub country and I did not meet a single vehicle. I arrived at the Cooktown turn-off at 7 pm, 22 November, twenty-seven hours after leaving Brisbane, a distance of just on 2,000 km. I hadn't stopped to sleep. Weipa was another 500 km north, so allowing eight more hours for that, I knew that I could get from

Brisbane to Weipa in about thirty-five hours, if I didn't have any trouble. I now also knew that I could get a boat over the Dividing Range. The road wasn't very wide, with a lot of sharp bends, and very steep, but if the road was dry, and I took it slow, I'd make it. I had to see how quickly it could be done, because when it was the real thing we wouldn't have any time to spare.

I lay down on the bed in the back of the truck, slept until daylight, then set off for Perth, just on 6,000 km away. I headed back south to Mareeba, through Atherton, and Ravenshoe, on to the Charters Towers road and then over to the Innisfail to Hughenden road. From there it was west on the Flinders Highway to Mount Isa. The traffic was quite steady, a change after the rest of the trip, and mainly large trucks. The road was a stinking abattoir, with heaps of dead kangaroos every 100 m. I arrived at Mount Isa at 9 pm, and checked into a motel. I cleaned myself up, changed my dressing, had a big meal and called my wife. I told her I was on my way home, and that I'd be there in a few days. I left the next morning at 5.30. So it was west, to Camooweal on the Queensland and Northern Territory border, and then along the Barkly Highway to Tennant Creek, back to my starting point. I went out to the mine to see Al and the boys. I drove up to where they were working and got out of the truck. They downed tools and stared at me.

'What the hell are you doing here?' Al said.

He looked completely perplexed. They didn't think I'd be back.

'I decided to go to Brisbane to check it out,' I replied smugly.

'Where did you get the truck?' Al asked.

'I got it cheap from a guy who went bad and lost all his money at the casino in Alice. It was too good a bargain to pass up,' I said.

I left the mine about 9 pm, 24 November. As I was driving north on the Stuart Highway, heading to Katherine, I thought that now I had told Al about the truck, and that I was driving back to Perth, I had better tell my wife, as I knew that Al would tell his wife the next time he called her, and that Sue may tell Sheila. I called her when I arrived at Katherine the next morning, after stopping to sleep for a few hours. She was one very mad lady, after I had told her what I had done. I got it with both barrels. I didn't know that she knew

such words. She calmed down when I told her I'd be selling my other truck as soon as I got back to Perth. I headed southwest down the Victoria Highway next morning, through Timber Creek, on my way to Kununurra, just over the Western Australian border. At Kununurra I checked into a motel and had a good night's sleep. The next day it was south down the Great Northern Highway to Broome. That's a good day's drive, so I stopped over for the night. Now that Sheila knew what I was doing I didn't have to bust a gut getting home. I made it home by 9 pm, 28 November, 1991. I had been on the road seven days and had travelled just under 8,000 km.

As I still couldn't work because of my hand, I went to the office each day and went over the plan that I'd formed in my mind. It was in the first week of December that I talked to Raja.

'I'm very happy something positive is happening, Bryan. You've been very busy. I hope your hand is better soon.'

'Thanks, Raj. And do you have any more news about your kids?'

'No. It is still hopeless. The courts will not help me. The only way now is what we are doing.'

'Can't you appeal?' I asked.

'No. It is final. They have changed their names and religion and there's no way they are going to undo it. I've wasted the past seven years believing in the Australian Family Court. How naive of me!'

'Well, Raj, we've got a good chance, but we'll only get one shot at it.'

'I still have to surrender my passport, Bryan. It is one of the conditions of seeing my kids.'

'You won't need it, so don't worry about it. All I want you to do now is try and think of a way to get the kids out of Melbourne, to Brisbane. From there on I have it under control. Raja, the best thing for you to do isn't to make waves about the court. Just stay cool, and let your ex-wife think that you have accepted it. Try to get your kids for a weekend. That's what we really want: time to get the kids out of town. So Raj, you work on that, and I'll call you in a few weeks.'

But what happened next was to put all thoughts of Raja right out of my head. Two days after talking to Raja I received a letter from the AGC (Australian Guaranty Corporation) demanding

\$AUS40,000 (RM80,000) in default of non-payment of loans in which I was joint guarantor with John Forrest. I rang AGC and was put on to the person looking after that account. I was told that no payments had been made for months, so they were calling in the loan. I was then told that Forrest had sold his house, and paid AGC \$AUS30,000 (RM60,000), and if I didn't pay up they would take my house and sell it to get the money. I had my lawyer get on to it, and what he found was that John Forrest hadn't had me released as a guarantor, like he said he would at the time of handing over the company. I was stuck with it. I was told that I'd have to pay, and then take Forrest to court to get my money back. I had to go to the bank and take out a loan on my house and a block of land that I had. As all this took until Christmas to sort out, it was after the holidays that I instructed my lawyer to go ahead and take Forrest to court.

It wasn't a very happy Christmas. The threat of losing our house, and then having to borrow \$AUS40,000 (RM80,000) to pay off someone else's debt put a bit of a damper on the holiday. Why didn't I use the money I had from Raja to get out of trouble? My wife and the Taxation Department would want to know how I came by such a large sum. But the main reason for not using it was that it wasn't mine to use; that money had been entrusted to me for a specific job, and that was going to be the only thing it would be used for. One could say that my involvement with Raja was the catalyst of my problem with John Forrest, and that I'd be justified in using the money. I didn't see it that way. It was my decision to involve Forrest in the first place, and it was my decision to give him the company without a fight. If I had called his bluff I wouldn't be in the same position, but I hadn't, and I just had to put up with it. It would not have done any good involving Raja as he had a lot of problems of his own. He only learnt about the difficulties I had with Forrest by reading this book.

Soon after the new year holiday my finger healed. I decided to take a job with Nino Constructions again, but this time in Ghana, in northwest Africa, setting up a gold mine for an international mining company. The money was very good, and tax-free. The job was to take three months, beginning February 1992. But before I commit-

ted myself I called Raja and asked how his plans were progressing.

'I may be able to have the children in July, for a weekend,' he said. 'But it isn't final yet, Bryan.'

'Goodo, Raj, you stick at that. I've got to take a job in Africa for a few months. I'll be back in the first week of May, Raj. That should still give us plenty of time to get all set up if it turns out we have to do our trip in July.'

'Ghana is a long way, Bryan. It must be very wild there. Will you be all right?'

'I have to take the job, Raj. It'd look pretty funny if I knocked it back, considering the amount of money they're offering. And there's not much work around in Perth. So you see, Raj, I've got to take it.'

'Well, Bryan, I hope it all goes well and you are all right there.'

'Look Raj, I'll be fine. All I need to get is the boat, and there are plenty on the market because of the recession. I'm not worried about getting one fast.'

I hid the gold and, in case I contracted some awful disease and died in Africa, I wrote a letter explaining to Sheila to give the money back to Raja, and left it, sealed, with a good friend. I left Perth 4 February 1992 and, after three months of intense work in dysentery-riddled, sweat-box Ghana, we arrived back in Perth on 4 May.

I called Raja two days after I arrived home.

'Raja, I'm not going to look for any work. I'll be taking time off so as to give my full attention to our project.'

'That's good, Bryan,' he said. 'Everything is all set at my end. All I have to do is give the date we hope to arrive to my Indonesian friends that are helping us and all will be ready.'

'OK, Raja, I'll be giving all my time now to getting a boat that will do the job. I'll call you as soon as I find one.'

I went around all the boat yards and marinas. I must have looked at about fifty boats that were close to what I wanted, but they just didn't feel right. I made a short list of the best that I did see. The price went from \$AUS30,000 (RM60,000) to \$AUS65,000 (RM130,000). I decided to wait before I bought anything, until I knew when we were scheduled to leave. I realised that if I had to buy a boat at \$AUS65,000 I wouldn't have the cash, as I hadn't

changed all of the gold, and I might as well do it in Brisbane again as it was so easy last time. It'd just be an overnight trip, so I told my wife that a mining company had called me and wanted me to go and look at a camp they had up in the bush and give them a price to move it and set it up at a different location. I sent the gold air freight on the same plane, and picked it up at the freight depot at the airport. I checked in at a motel near the city, went to the gold dealers and cashed the gold for just over SAUS30,000. I stopped over the night, and I was back in Perth the next afternoon. I kept looking at boats, and planned my trip across to Weipa. It was in the last week of May that I called Raja again.

'I haven't made up my mind yet on a boat, but there are five to choose from, Raj. I'll buy one as soon as I know when we are going to do our thing.'

'I am flying to Melbourne at the end of this month,' he said, 'and I would like to come to Perth and go over things with you. I do think it is time we got together.'

'That's great,' I said. 'After all this time it'll be nice to see you. We have a lot to talk over. Give me a call on my mobile when you get to Melbourne so you can let me know when you're coming to Perth and which hotel you'll be staying at.'

It was 1 June that Raja called. 'I'll be in Perth tomorrow, Bryan. I'll be staying at the Parmelia Hilton. I should be all checked in by 2 pm. Can you come about 2.30? We will have the rest of the day to go over our plans.'

'That'll be fine, Raj. Do you know when we are going to do it?'

'I will by the time we meet,' he said. 'Bryan, I am not using my own name on this trip, so when you come to the hotel, ask for Mr Hassan. I'll stay in my room and wait for you.'

It was just after 2.30 pm, 2 June 1992, that I went to a house phone at the Hilton and called Room 518. Raja's voice answered.

I said, 'It's me, Bryan. Is it OK to come up?'

'Yes,' he said. 'I've been waiting for you.'

He opened the door, his face beaming.

'Bryan,' he said, 'come in, come in, it is so very good to see you after all this time.'



I sat at the window table and for the next half hour we just chatted about our families and work. He was just as I remembered him: very polite, and that soft way he had when talking.

'Well, Raja, we had better get down to it. I'll start first and tell you what I have in mind.'

'Go ahead,' he said. 'But I must tell you that I'll have the children for a weekend from 10 July, so we will have to do it then. Is that going to be a problem for you?'

'No,' I said. 'I'm all set except for the boat, and I can have one in less than a week. No, Raja, the sooner the better. Let's get it over with. Now I'll tell you how my plan is going to go.' I spread the charts and a map of Australia I had brought with me on the table. 'What I propose is that when I have a boat and it's all fixed up, I'll drive, towing the boat to Weipa on the Cape York Peninsula. Here,' I said, showing him on the map. 'The road is good all the way from Perth to Laura on the Peninsula. After Laura the road is unsealed, so I don't know what condition it's in, but I don't think it's too bad. Anyhow, I've set myself twelve days to get there. If I leave Perth on 20 June I'll be in Weipa on or about 1 or 2 July. I'll spend a few days on the boat, going out fishing, staying out all night so the local people will get used to me being at sea overnight so that when we do make the run they won't worry about me not being there and start looking for me. After a few days I'll fly to Brisbane, say 5 or 6 July, and pick up a mobile home that I'll organize from here before I leave. What we have so far is this: the boat on a mooring in Weipa all set to go, and me with a mobile home waiting in Brisbane. What I need is for you to tell me how you're going to get your children out of Melbourne and up to Brisbane.'

'Bryan,' he said, 'I will have with me two friends: a man and a woman. They will help me with the children. On the Friday I will give the children a very good day out. Very active. This will make them very tired, and ready for sleep. I will book on the last flight to Brisbane. I will make two separate bookings: one for the woman and my daughter, and one for myself and my son and my other friend. I will do it this way because when the police start looking for us they will be looking for a man with two children, not two groups with

one child in each. It just may give us that bit of extra time.

'That's good, Raja,' I said, 'if you can pull it off. You don't think that you'll have trouble getting the kids onto the plane?'

'I hope not, but if I do have trouble, it will come from my son. His mother has conditioned him to stay away from airports when he is with me, and he has to call his mother every morning and night. I am not concerned about the phone call. I will let him talk to his mother when we get back to the hotel and I will tell her that we are going out for dinner and to a movie and we will not be in till late. I just hope he is sleepy enough to go along with what I want to do. If he isn't, it won't work.'

'That seems a bit chancy, Raj. Look, what we will do is this. On the Friday night I'll call you, and you should know by then if you're going to try it, or if the kids aren't sleepy and you know that it won't work. What you do is this: go out with the children, give them a big dinner, then get in your car and drive around. Tell your kids that you want to show the city to your friends. Now there isn't anything more boring for kids than sitting in a car just driving around, and if they're sleepy they'll go to sleep. When they do, you keep on driving out of Melbourne, north up through Seymour, Shepparton, Forbes, and Parkes to Dubbo.'

I drew my finger along the red line of the Hume Highway on the map. 'If I leave Brisbane at the same time I should get to Dubbo about the same time as you. I'll give you the name of a motel, and we can meet there. Just pack a change of clothes for you and the children, and leave the rest to make it look like you're coming back. In Dubbo you transfer to the mobile home, and then we head north as fast as we can. With three drivers we'll be able to drive non-stop. I'll have plenty of food and drink in the van, and it'll have a shower and toilet. When we get to Weipa we get on the boat and your friends drive the van back to Brisbane, clean it up, and leave it at night outside the hire place. I'll call the hire company and tell them that I had to return home because of an emergency. They won't say anything. They'll have been paid for three weeks.'

'That seems like a good idea,' Raja said. 'We now have a back-up plan.'

For the rest of the afternoon we talked it over and over. I made sure Raja understood the route on the map that he'd take out of Melbourne to Dubbo, and then the route we would take to get to Weipa.

It was about 6 pm when I said, 'Raj, I'd better go as I had told my wife that I'd be home for dinner.'

'OK, Bryan. We've gone through just about everything. I'll return to Melbourne tomorrow and then on to Malaysia.'

'Fine, Raja. I'll start and look for a boat first thing in the morning, and I'll call when I've got one. Take the road map and the marine chart with you. I've got others. I'll give you longitude and latitude for you to pass on to your Indonesian connection for us to meet at sea. I'll do that as soon as I know what type of boat I'll have and what it is capable of.'

Raj had been talking about the possibility of some of his Indonesian friends meeting us at sea, but still had to finalise it, so at that stage I assumed it mightn't happen.

As I was leaving the room, I shook his hand and said, 'This is it. After all this time we now get to do something about getting your children back. We've just got to think positive and give it our best shot. We both have a lot to lose.'

'I know, Bryan, and I don't know that I'll ever be able to repay you for what you are doing for me. I don't think that there would be a lot of men in this world that would put everything at risk to help me in this way, and I thank you with all my heart for your help. I could never have done this without you.'

Two days later, 4 June 1992, I checked the 'Boats for Sale' ads in the paper and spotted a description I'd been looking for: a 27-ft Star Flybridge Cabin Cruiser of aluminium construction, powered by Mercruiser, on a tri-axle trailer. The asking price was \$AUS23,000 (RM46,000). I drove over and had a look at it. It wasn't in the best of shape, but looks are sometimes deceiving. But I did like the lines of her. It looked like it'd be a good sea boat. I sat on the transom and looked her over.

The cabin had a galley on the port side. On the starboard side was a dining table which converted to a bed. Ahead of it was the lower steering position, and in the forward part of the boat was a double V berth, and a toilet. From what I could see, it was structurally sound and the engine looked clean. It was just the boat I had been looking for. I felt good about it. It's hard to explain how I felt good about that boat. It's just a feeling you get when, after you have been looking hard for a certain thing, you find it and you know it's the one for you.

Unfortunately, however, when the owner arrived he couldn't get it started, so I said I'd come back tomorrow after he'd worked on it for a while. I drove back to the office and made a call to Raja. I told him that I'd found a boat that would do the job, and I was negotiating with the owner.

'I reckon it's going to cost a bit to get it seaworthy, Raj, but it can be done in time.'

'That's great news, Bryan. Just do what you think is best. You know what you want. But I would like you to come up here to Kuala Lumpur. I want you to meet my friend who will be helping me. I

also want to go over our plan once more so he will know everything. It will just be overnight. Could you do this for me?’

‘Well, Raja, I don’t mind, but I can’t get away for a few days. I need to stay here until I get the deal with the boat done, and then get it into the workshop and get the work started. After that I can get away. Give me a few days. I’ll call you when I can come.’

I was going to have to tell my wife more lies. That was the only thing about this whole deal that I didn’t like, having to deceive Sheila, but it was too far gone now to turn back. The story I was going to give her so I could get away for the three weeks I’d need for the big trip was that the company that had offered me the job of moving the camp had asked me to go and supervise the move for them. I could tell Sheila that I had to go up bush in a few days to meet with the contractor who was doing the job. I’d wait until just before I wanted to go to Kuala Lumpur to meet with Raja. I went round to see the boat owner the next day, but he still hadn’t been able to start it and asked me to come back again the following day. The next day, 5 June, I rang him.

‘There’s no joy with it,’ he said. ‘The engine’s bugged, I reckon. What do you want to do?’

‘Can I come and see you, and talk it over?’

‘Sure,’ he said. ‘I’ll be home all day.’

I arrived mid-morning, and he was still trying to get it running without success. At least he got points for trying.

‘Look,’ I said to him, ‘you’re spending a lot of time trying to get the motor going. Let me take the boat to a marine engine repairer. They’ll soon find out what’s wrong and it won’t cost you a thing. I’ll pay for it, and even if I don’t buy the boat you’ll know what the trouble is. But I like the boat, and if it won’t cost a lot of money to fix, we’ll have a deal.’

He agreed and I had it looked at by the mechanic. It was going to cost \$AUS3,000 (RM6,000) to have the engine and leg – the underwater propulsion unit – overhauled.

‘OK,’ I said, ‘Go ahead and strip it down, and let’s see what we’ve got. I’ll check with you on Wednesday. I’ve got to be out of town for a day or so.’

I'd already told my wife on Sunday that I was going to supervise the camp move for the mining company, and that I had to fly up and meet with the contractor who was going to do the job and talk it over with him.

That night, Monday, 8 June, I left for Kuala Lumpur, and my meeting with Raja. I arrived at KL about 10.30 pm, and as I was walking out of the Customs Hall a man standing just outside the door held up a big card with 'Mr Wickham' on it.

He picked up my bag and said, 'Follow me please, the car isn't far away.'

As I checked in at reception I was handed a note from Raja asking me to give him a call no matter what time I got in when I was settled in my room, and he gave a room number. I was surprised that he was staying at the same hotel. When I got to my room I called him and after the usual greetings he asked if I could come to his room right away, if I wasn't too tired. I told him that I was fine, and I'd be there in a few minutes. When I arrived at his room Raja greeted me warmly and introduced me to another man who I was just to call Henry.

'Let's go through our plan from the beginning,' Raja said, 'so that Henry knows everything.'

'Before we do that I'll tell you what to pass on to your Indonesian friends. We might as well get that out of the way now. Tell them that, all going well, I hope to leave Weipa on 12 July about 9 pm. My course will be northwest 165 degrees, and if the Indonesian boat leaves Merauke about the same time and sets a course of 180 degrees due south, we'll meet up at 140° 22' East by 9° 56' South. With the sat-nav I'll be spot on. I just hope they'll be as good. I want them to bring 400 litres of fuel. I'll need it to get back. Tell them that I'll have a 27 meg radio. You, Raja, need to think of a call sign, as it'll be you who'll be talking to them in Indonesian.' Raja had been writing it all down. I continued, 'Let's get the chart out and I'll mark it on it so you won't forget.'

I spread the chart and map on the table, and for the next two hours we went over it. I also told them all about the boat, and the repairs I was having done, and that all would be ready by 20 June, and on that day I'd be leaving for Weipa.

'That's fine,' said Raja. 'But now there is one other thing that you can help me with. Both myself and Henry think we should have more cash money with us. I know you have a lot of money, but we don't know how much of that you'll have to spend. The boat and travel could eat up most of it, so I would like you to take \$AUS50,000 (RM100,000) in travellers' cheques and cash them as you travel across Australia. I would hate to have us fail because we didn't have money for an emergency.'

'If that's what you want, yes, I'll do that for you.'

'Very good, Bryan. I have made arrangements at my bank, and we can go there in the morning. It won't take long.'

For most of our discussion Raj kept stressing that we were only going to have one go at it, and he couldn't afford to fail. He said he couldn't bear the thought of not seeing his two children again should we fail. He was very determined.

'We must succeed, God willing,' he said.

After cheque signing at the bank the next morning, we met up with Henry for lunch. It was then I learned something that I hadn't known before. Toward the end of the meal Raja excused himself, presumably to go to the bathroom, and when he was gone Henry said, 'Have you known the Prince long?'

I looked at him. 'Prince?' I said. 'What prince? Who are you talking about?'

'I am talking about Raja,' he said. 'I can see by the look on your face that he has not told you he is the nephew of the Sultan of Terengganu, his home state. That is just like him.'

'No,' I said. 'He never told me anything like that. All I know is that he's an architect and runs his own business.'

'Well,' Henry said, 'he must have his reasons for not telling you, but I know he won't often tell people. So don't say anything to him; just go on as you are.'

'I won't say a word to him about it. He'll tell me in his own time if he wants to. It won't make any difference to me, or to what I'm doing for him.'

Just then Raja returned, and that put a stop to any more conversation about it. But as it was, Raja never told me he was a prince.

and I never asked. Later that day, after I'd done a bit of sightseeing, we sat and had tea, and talked over our plans again. He told me he'd be staying at the Victoria Hotel in Melbourne from 6 July.

'Bryan, I must thank you for all your help,' Raj said when we'd talked the plans through. 'For the past seven years Jacqueline has subjected me to mental torture. Every time I saw the kids they'd hint about how neglected they were. Iddin told me that Jacqueline was hardly home, Bryan! I don't even know if she's feeding them properly. They are quite skinny. The last time I visited them they were very excited at the prospect of eating. Your help has already proven more than I can ever repay. You are a true friend, Bryan, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.'

I was very touched by Raja's words, but all I could think of to say was, 'Don't worry about it, Raj. We'll pull it off.'

They were the most important words, after all. We shook hands, Raj escorted me to the car, and I left, planning to see him again next in Brisbane.



First thing on Wednesday morning I went to the marine mechanics. They were hard at work on the engine and leg. I also arranged for them to install a lot of new equipment like a radio, compass and stainless steel propeller plus check all the instruments and electrics. It was all to be completed by 20 June. I left the motor with them and towed the boat to my workshop. It was too big to fit through the doors, so I asked Ryan Flint, a motor trimmer in the workshop opposite, if it could go in his place as I wanted him to do some work on it anyway.

We had to put his smaller boat in my workshop. I organised for new carpets and armour glass to be fitted, and a pair of extra fuel tanks to be fabricated. Later that night, at home, I told my wife that the camp job was starting on 22 June, so I would be driving up on 20 June and would be away about three weeks. I didn't get a lot of response from her. As I've said, she was used to my comings and goings.

She just said, 'That's nice. Look after yourself, and keep in touch.'

I said I'd call her every day or so as usual. The next day, Thursday, 11 June, I sorted out some more things for the boat: the type of trim, paint, a satellite navigation system, and registration. As I drove back to the workshop I was thinking about what to tell my brother, Gordon. When I arrived at the office he was already there.

'Gordon been in long, Maria?'

'Just a few minutes.'

'That's good,' I thought, as I walked to his office. 'He'll get the story about the boat from me first.'

He looked up at me from his desk. 'G'day, Bryan. What are you up to?'

I just came out with it. 'I've got another boat, Gordon. It's over at Ryan's. He's doing a bit of work on it.'

'I knew it wouldn't be long before you got yourself another boat. What's this one like?'

'You can have a look in a minute. I've got it cheap because it needed a bit of work done on it. Gordon,' I said. 'I made a bit of money in Ghana, and I've decided to get a boat and go on a fishing trip north. I haven't told Sheila what I'm up to. She'd kill me if she knew.'

Gordon looked at me hard, through his glasses. 'Too bloody right she will. You know what she thinks of you and your boats.'

'Yeh, but she'll be sweet if she doesn't know. I told her I'm going to move a camp for a mining company up the bush, and I'll be away for three weeks. I'd like you not to say anything to her about the boat, or fishing, if you see her. Just tell her I told you I was going to work up in the bush.'

'I won't say anything to Sheila,' he said. 'It's nothing to do with me what you get up to, but I wouldn't like to be you when she hears about it. You'll be mincemeat. Cat tucker.'

'I'll tell her when I get back,' I said. 'I know she'll do her nut, but she'll get over it.'

'That's up to you, if you want to play with fire,' he said. 'I've got a bit of time before I go to town. Let's go and look at your boat.'

So we went over to Ryan's workshop.

'You were right,' he said after he'd climbed around it. 'It'll need a lot of work.'

And that's what I did after he'd gone. All over that weekend I worked long hours on it. By Monday morning you wouldn't have thought it the same boat. I'd painted the hull decks and upperworks, and it looked good, and by Monday night Ryan had done his work. With a new paint job, and new upholstery, it was looking just fine. Gordon was amazed at the change in the boat. The next morning I used the 4x4 to tow the boat to Foothills Marine, then took the vehicle to a four-wheel drive specialist. I told them to go through it

thoroughly. Then I didn't have a lot to do for a few days, except change more money. I went around a lot of banks and cashed travellers' cheques. I didn't get them all changed, only about \$AUS40,000 (RM80,000) worth. On Friday I arranged for a new radio and the satellite navigation equipment to be installed and all the electrics verified, and on Saturday 20 June I picked up the boat and put it in the water. It ran like a dream. The next morning I packed my gear in the truck and said goodbye to my wife and son. I told them I'd see them in a few weeks. I got the boat, then I went to my office and picked up my fishing tackle, and a lot of other gear that I'd need for the trip.

It was at 2.30 pm on Sunday, 21 June 1992, that I drove out of Perth north, not thinking it'd be a very long time before I'd see my family again.

That first day I didn't stop to sleep, just to fuel up and get something to eat. It didn't take me long to work out that I was going to use a lot of fuel. I could only get up to 80 km/h, and it was a hard pull, even for the big V8. When I did stop to get a few hours sleep, it was about 3 am Monday at the Shark Bay turn-off. I calculated the fuel used: 2 km per litre! It was going to be one hell of an expensive trip. I slept until 7.30 am, and then pushed on. I was doing OK all that day, as there wasn't a lot of traffic on the road, until I met up with a road train just south of the Pannawonica turn-off. It threw up a rock and smashed a window in the boat. At the Wickham turn-off I called a marine dealer in Port Hedland and arranged for him to fix it. I ate and slept at Whim Creek, and when I reached Port Hedland I followed the directions I had been given by the guy, and arrived at the marine dealers just as the sun was coming up. After a short nap I spoke to the guy and he told me he couldn't do it, but took me to someone who could. While it was being repaired I bought two new tyres for the trailer. I paid my bill, and put in a bit extra for the boys to have a drink. I was on my way once more.

I picked up a Swedish hitchhiker on the road to Broome, and lost a wheel off the trailer. I was left with just the axle stub. I knew that one wheel off wouldn't matter on a tri-axle, as long as I took it easy, so I just chained up the axle at a roadhouse and kept going. I finally found another wheel at Fitzroy Crossing. We left Fitzroy Crossing about 10.30 on Tuesday morning, 23 June and got into Kununurra at 8.30 that night. I dropped my hitchhiker at the pub, and drove on. I didn't stop until I got to Timber Creek at about 3.30 am on Wednesday. I slept until 8 am, and then drove on to Katherine, ar-

iving there at lunch time. I had something to eat and a shower at a roadhouse just south of the town. I then drove on to the Dunmarra roadhouse. It was about 8.30 at night when I got there. I was done in. I had to get a good night's sleep, so I had a big meal, got in the back of the truck, and slept until 6.30 the next morning, Thursday 23. I had something to eat and left at 7.30. I drove on to Tennant Creek, which was about 25 km past the Barkly Highway turn-off. After having two tyres fitted I had a meal, and then got back on the road. When I turned onto the Barkly Highway, I was driving into a very strong easterly wind, and with the boat on the back acting like a big sail, I didn't seem to be moving. By the time I got to Barkly Homestead roadhouse and fuelled up I was down to 1 litre per kilometre! I had something to eat and headed for Camooweal just over the border in Queensland. I arrived there a touch after midnight Friday 26. I couldn't get fuel as the roadhouse was closed, so I had to wait until the morning. I had a few hours sleep, and when the roadhouse opened I ate, fuelled up and took to the road again. I was feeling refreshed, so I pushed on hard all that day, only stopping for fuel through Mount Isa, Cloncurry, and all the towns on the Flinders Highway on the way to Townsville. It was late at night when I arrived at Townsville so I stopped and slept until morning. I was on the road once more by 8.30 am on Saturday 27, heading north to Cairns. This was to be the slowest part of the trip. There was a lot of traffic on the road; it was the school holidays and as usual a high-priced brain in the Department of Main Roads had decreed that large sections of the highway had to be repaired just then. I didn't get there into Cairns until 10.30 pm, and decided not to stop, to take advantage of the lack of traffic at that time of night. The pull up the escarpment was slow, but the truck handled it well and I arrived at Mareeba just after midnight. I continued on to a place called Carbine, a small hamlet with a pub, a service station and not much more. I slept until daylight, so I wouldn't have to go down the escarpment in the dark.

At daylight I drove on and was soon at the top of the very steep and winding road that makes its way down off the Great Dividing Range. The black top stopped at the top of the range, and it

was gravel and stones all the way down. It's enough just with a four-wheel drive or a car, but with a ton and a half of boat pushing from the back and wanting to pass on the way down it gets scary. I was just about a third of the way down in four-wheel drive, low range, and in low gear, just creeping along, when I came to the first of the sharp turns. On the way down the first one turns to the left, and I couldn't see around it. I didn't know if there was anything coming on its way up. As I went into the turn I had to pull out wide to get the boat around without it catching on the rock face. I was into the turn, committed, and just as I got the truck around, and could see down the road ahead, I saw a big Army truck coming up. And there was another behind that, and another, and another. The Army driver flashed his lights. I was coming out of the turn wide and taking up all of the road. The Army guy hadn't seen the boat. It wasn't in his line of sight, and he just kept coming, thinking that I could and would pull over and let him pass. But as the boat came round the turn, and he saw it and understood why I was so wide, he stopped to let me get around and get over to my side of the road. Then I stopped as close to the bank as I could and let them all pass. There was just enough room.

The black top started again at the bottom, all the way to Lakeland road house. The road wasn't too bad up to Laura, where I stopped for something to eat. After Laura the road had bad corrugations in it and I had to slow down. There were a few bad creek crossings and long stretches of soft deep sand and bull dust. I couldn't get any speed up at all, so by the time I got to my next stop, Coen, it was 2.30 am, Monday. It had taken me thirteen hours to drive about 200 km! I drove on to the Archer River roadhouse and arrived just on daylight. I fuelled up and had something to eat and a shower, and was on my way again by 7.30 am. The first 30 km out of Archer River was very bad, but it got better, and by the time I got to the junction where one road goes on to the top of Cape York, and the other to Weipa the road was good and I could get along at about 80 km/h. I made good time to Weipa, arriving there just after lunch, about 1.30 pm, Monday, 29 June. I was completely exhausted. I hadn't been to sleep for thirty-two hours, but decided nevertheless

to have a long sleep once I had the boat in the water, and on a safe anchorage. I went looking for a boat ramp to launch the boat.

If you want to know anything in a small town, the best place is the pub, so I asked directions to the pub from a man on a bicycle, and I was soon at The Albatross Hotel. I was told the place I wanted was called Evans Landing. On the way I saw a service station first and pulled in to fuel the boat up. It took 360 litres. There were a few boats waiting to get on the ramp at Evans Landing, so I parked to the side and went to a little shop called the Snack Shack just at the top of the ramp. It was run by a man called Ken and his wife, Lorraine. I had a cup of coffee and got talking to Ken. He'd owned the place for about fourteen years, and was a bit of a salt. He and Lorraine loved the sea and even lived on a boat. He knew a lot about the waters and winds around the area. I told him I was going fishing up the coast, and I'd be out all night. Ken had small boats with outboards for hire, so I did a deal with him to hire one while I was there.

'I've got a mooring you can use, if you want, Bryan. It's about a kilometre upstream. I've had my own boat on it for a long time, but we're tied up to the dock now.'

'Great, mate. Can you give me a hand to put the boat in the water?'

I hosed the boat down, to get rid of all the red dust, then tried to start the engine. Dead as a doornail. The glass fitter in Port Hedland had left a strip light on over the instrument panel and the batteries were flat. I went to the electrician and asked him to charge the batteries, then went back to the hotel, took a room, showered, went to bed and died.

The next morning, Tuesday, 30 June, I had a cup of coffee with Ken, who had just opened up. I sat around and talked with him about fishing spots until it was time to go and get the boat at 8.30. As I drove over there I felt the truck engine was missing. It probably needed a tune-up after towing a big boat over 8,000 km in just nine days.

'If I have time,' I thought, 'I'll get it done.'

On arriving at the workshop I found the electrician had already fitted the batteries.

'It's all set to give it a go,' he said.

I hooked up his hose to the earmuffs, and fitted them over the water intake. I also asked him if he would fit a plug for the fridge, and run a plug for the spotlight. I set the water running and climbed up into the boat. It started first go. I just let it run at a fast idle, and sat there to check the gauges like the oil pressure, water temperature, vacuum, and amperage. Everything was working fine. It had been running about three or four minutes, when the electrician called out to me, 'Hey mate, your hose is off.' I shut the motor down quickly. I didn't think at that time that there was any damage done. I thought it'd just dropped off for a few seconds. I climbed back into the boat and checked the water temperature gauge. Then I drove the boat back to Evans Landing and it was about 2.30 pm when, with the help of Ken, I had it in the water. I motored out to a mooring buoy, switched off, glanced at the panel, and discovered the temperature gauge was very high.

'Shit,' I thought, 'What's gone wrong now?'

I went on deck and lifted the engine hatch. The heat that came



out of there just about cooked me. I could have made bread on that motor. I called out to Ken to come aboard.

'I've got a problem,' I said.

We decided to have a mechanic look at it. Ken left to organise it, and I sat on the transom and waited for the motor to cool. I hoped that it was only a small problem. As I sat there I got to thinking about the road in. I wasn't really happy about driving a motorhome over it because it was so rough. It would slow us down just when we needed time the most. I might have to change my plans. A mechanic called Mark finally turned up and had a look at the motor.

'It's your water pump,' he said. 'You'll have to take her out of the water and bring it to the workshop so I can strip the leg.'

'Hell, this is all I need!' I said. 'How long will it take you to fix it?'

'If it is the pump and I'm pretty positive it is and I have a new part in stock, you could be back in the water by tomorrow night. But if I have to get parts from down south, it'll be after the weekend: about Tuesday.'

He left, and Ken gave me a hand to get the boat out. It was just on 6.30 pm when I pulled into the workshop, which wasn't far from Evans Landing. I left the boat with Mark and told him I'd see him in the morning. I went back to the hotel and sat there thinking about all that had happened and hoped my luck would change soon. The next morning, Wednesday, 1 July, I was about to go to Evans Landing to have coffee with Ken, but the truck didn't want to start. When I did get it going it was missing badly.

'Well,' I thought, 'I don't have anything else to do so I may as well get the truck looked at.'

I had seen an auto workshop across the road from the service station and booked it in for a check up. I walked down to Evans Landing and had coffee, but Ken wasn't there so I didn't stay long. I walked up to the marine workshop as Mark was just about to strip the leg. I didn't have anything else to do until I picked up the truck, so I hung around to see what the problem was. About two hours later Mark gave me the bad news: the impeller in the pump was shot, and so was a seal, and he didn't have a part in stock, so he

would have to order them from Cairns and it would be next week before he'd have them.

Then he said, 'Bryan, have you run the motor without water, as the impeller was in a bad way?'

'The only time was yesterday morning at the auto electrician's, and that was just for a few seconds.'

'It takes about thirty seconds to burn the impeller out, so it could have been running longer,' Mark said.

I saw the electrician, who commiserated with me about my bad luck, but was otherwise unhelpful. It didn't really matter. The thing was done, anyway. Next I saw the mechanic who was working on the truck.

He said, 'Do you want the bad news, or do you want the bad news, because there is no good news?'

'What is it?' I asked.

'You have two valves that are shot. That's one lot of bad news. The other is that we can't fix it here. The heads have to go to Cairns, and god knows how long that will take.'

I went back to the pub and sat in the bar with a beer. I thought for a while, quite gloomily, about all my bad luck, and then realised that I wouldn't need the truck until I got back from my trip, and I could get it fixed then. As for the boat, I had plenty of time to get it in the water, as I didn't have to be in Brisbane until the following Wednesday or Thursday. By the time I had thought it all out I was feeling a bit better. I had planned to fly down to Brisbane on 8 July, but I could leave it until 9 July if necessary. I went to a travel agent in the shopping centre and booked a seat for 9 July, to give me extra time with the boat. The next day, Thursday, 2 July, I did a bit of shopping for food for the trip.

On Friday 3, I had the TV on in my hotel room and was watching the news. As I dressed a news item stopped my in my tracks. It was to do with the guys at Tullamarine airport who refuel the planes. They were threatening to go on strike the next week over something or other, and it was going to upset the weekend travel arrangements of thousands of people. 'And my plans too,' I thought. I would have to scrub my original plan. I couldn't take the risk, not with the chance

of a strike. I sat there thinking about what to do. If the plane was out, so was the motorhome. I would just have to go and get them myself, and drive up. After working it over and over in my mind I came up with this: I would drive my truck to Cairns, leave it with an auto workshop to get the valves done; fly on to Melbourne, hire a car and Raja would hire a car; and with two cars and four drivers, leave on the Friday morning and go like hell north to Cairns; there we would change to my truck, part company with Raja's friends, then myself, Raja, and the children would go on to Weipa.

First thing the next morning I went and cancelled my flight to Brisbane. They didn't have the money to give me a refund and said to call in on Monday and they would give it to me. I never did get it. Next I arranged for the truck heads to be reconditioned in Cairns on Monday. If I took it carefully I could drive there.

Then I went to see Mark and said, 'With the boat out of action for a while, I'm going to Brisbane on business. Might as well do some work. I'll be back on Sunday, 12 July. Can you have it in the water and all set to go by the time I get back?'

'No problem,' Mark said.

About 1.30 pm, Saturday, 4 July I left Weipa for Cairns.

I arrived at Cairns at 10.30 am, Sunday after stopping in Mareeba. The next morning I went and handed the truck in. I asked the guy if he could leave my truck at a place where I could pick it up on the following Sunday. He said that he'd leave it in his side yard with the keys to the yard in his mail box, and the truck keys on top of the rear wheel. I paid him for the job as I wouldn't see him on the Sunday. It was \$850, cash.

At the airport I booked on the afternoon flight, arriving in Melbourne about 6.30 pm. I arranged with a car hire to pick up a car in Melbourne that I would be driving back to Cairns. It was a minimum twelve day hire for dropping a car interstate, and the guy wouldn't take cash. I had to use my credit card. I drove into town and checked into a motel just off the end of the freeway that leads to the airport. The next morning I called Raja at the Victoria Hotel.

When I told him that I was in Melbourne he said, 'What are you doing here, Bryan? Has something gone wrong?'

'No, Raja,' I said. 'There's nothing wrong, but we do have to change our plans.'

'But why, Bryan? I thought we had left no room for error.'

'We'll have to forget the plan we made. There's a possibility of an airline strike on Friday, and even if there is the remotest chance of a strike it will be best to change our plans.'

'I'd wondered about that too, Bryan. Strikes always seem to happen during school holidays. What is the alternative, Bryan? What do you propose?'

'The only alternative we have is to go by car. We'll leave on Friday morning if possible and go like hell. I already have a hire car. You'll have to get one. With four drivers we can go nonstop and still be in Weipa by Sunday night.'

'It looks like you have done some thinking on this, Bryan,' he said. 'I'd like to meet with you, but I can't today. If you would meet Henry and his friend tomorrow morning at 10 am at the Pancake Parlour in Market Lane, between Bourke and Little Bourke Streets, they will bring you to a hotel nearby. We can have lunch and go over your new plan. And Bryan, will you bring with you all the cash you have left. Just keep what you will need to get to Weipa. The rest, as we won't need it all now, will have to be repaid.'

'That's fine with me, Raja,' I said. 'It's been a worry to me, carrying all that cash about. I'll see you tomorrow, and don't worry: it'll all be OK.'

I also had a few things I wanted to do so for the rest of that day I went into the city, and cashed the rest of the travellers' cheques while I was there. I went to a shopping centre and bought pillows and blankets, a portable food cooler, and potato chips and sweets for the kids. That night I called my wife. All was OK at home. She told me not to work too hard, and that she loved me. After talking to my wife I just sat on the bed and thought what a bastard I was: not for doing what I was going to do, but for deceiving my wife.

The next day, Wednesday, 8 July, I got a cab into the city and walked into the Pancake House at 10 am. I spotted Henry right away and went over to his table. He greeted me warmly and introduced me to his companion, Sulan, a woman of about 30. She spoke very

good English and was a polite, pleasant sort of person. I had a cup of coffee and told them there was a change of plan.

'But I'll wait until we meet Raja and I can tell you about it when we are all together.'

We then went to a hotel not far away that had a mezzanine restaurant. Raja was already there, and we joined him at his table.

'You are right, Bryan,' Raja said after I'd explained everything. 'We can't take a chance. We have only this one opportunity, and if this fails we won't get another. It's not such a bad thing. I'd always thought flying might pose some problems as too many people would see us, and so the strike has helped, in a way. So Bryan, what do you want us to do?'

'When will you have the children?'

'From tomorrow on,' he said.

'OK, then. We will get away as soon as possible on Friday morning. We'll get Henry to hire a car in his name on the same deal that I have on mine - pick-up here, and drop-off at Cairns - because when we get to Cairns, you and me, Raja, with the children, will change to my 4x4 truck. Henry and Sulan will get out of the country as fast as they can. We'll carry on to Weipa with the kids (and when you see the state of the road you'll understand why I decided not to go with a mobile home or a car). I want you to travel with the children, Henry and Sulan, for the first few hours. After that, and once the kids are settled, we can change around a bit. I'll be in front and I'll keep in contact with you by a CB radio that I've bought. They're small portable sets with a range of only a few kilometres, but will be OK for us because we'll be on the move. When you want to stop for anything you'll call me and tell me, and I'll stop too. When you want to go on you'll call me and tell me that you're on the move. Then I'll move too. That way we won't get separated, and it'll be the same if I want to stop. We'll keep a few kilometres apart, and we'll only come together if the kids want a change, and then we'll do it on a deserted stretch of road. We'll be travelling on the inland road. We'll keep clear of the coast road, because there'll be a lot of traffic on it during the holidays. We'll have a better run inland.'

'Exactly what route are we going by?' Raja asked. 'I've worked out a tentative route, but you know the country better than me.'

'I'll give you a road map on Friday morning with the route marked on it so you'll know just where you are at all times. What do you think of it so far, Raja?'

'It sounds fine to me, Bryan,' Raja said. 'It's just a pity that we will lose the time that the plane trip would have given us. I hope that the children's mother will not raise the alarm when she has no phone call on the Friday night. I will let the children call her on the Friday morning and tell her that we are going out for the day and may be back late. That may hold her for a while, but I don't think for long. Knowing her she'll kick hell even if we're a few minutes late from dinner!'

'That's the risk we have to take. You'd better leave all your, and the children's, clothes in the hotel room. If they look it may give us a bit more time. Just take a change for yourself and the kids. And remember it will be hot up there,' I said.

'Right, Bryan. I've bought two new sets of clothes for them already. They'll leave all their old clothes behind just in case they're bugged. I'm not taking any chances. Do we need to meet before Friday?'

'No, I'll call you tomorrow night and tell you where to meet me on Friday morning. It will be just outside the city somewhere to the north. And now I think we've been sitting here long enough. We don't want people to remember us.' As we made to leave I handed the small hold-all that I had with me to Raja. 'This is what you asked for,' I said, 'and I'm glad to be rid of it. I have kept what I think I'll need for the trip. Do you want a full account of the money I've spent?'

'No, Bryan. That won't be necessary. It was given to you to use as you wanted for this venture, and if there's money left that's a plus for me as Henry and Sulan also need some spare cash in case of complications. All this trip is to be paid for in cash to avoid tracking later on.'

'OK,' I said. 'I'll see you Friday morning.'

The following morning, Thursday, 9 July, I left the motel about

9 am and drove out as far as Coburg on the Hume Highway. I went past the Melbourne Zoo on my way out, and on my way back. It wasn't far from the motel and I thought it would be a good place to meet up with Raja. It was easy to find and it had a very big car park all along the front and around the city end of the Zoo. I drove around the car park and decided on the city end down near the tram tracks. It was a deserted area at this time of the day and I thought it would be the same tomorrow morning. I rang the Cairns engine place and the truck was ready. I rang Mark in Weipa who said that he would put the boat in the water on Saturday morning, give it a run and then put it on the mooring. Just before I went to bed I called Raja and told him we'd meet at the Zoo and that I'd be there from 8.30 am on. He told me that he would be there as soon as he could, about 9 am.

I was up early the next morning, and during my shower I noticed that a lump had appeared on the small of my back around the kidney area. I couldn't see it, but it felt about the size of half a grape and was quite tender. I thought at the time that it was an insect bite, and I didn't worry about it. I packed up and checked out of the motel. I drove to the parking lot at the Zoo, and waited. I filled in a bit of time by fixing up the back of the station wagon I'd hired. I put the back seat down and made up a bed with the pillows and blankets so it would be a place to sleep on the trip. I also hooked up the CB radio, and got the other one ready for Raja. It was just on 9 am by this time, and still no Raja. I sat in the car and tried to read the morning paper, but I couldn't concentrate on it, so I got out of the car and walked about.

It was quite cool, but fine. I stood there all alone, for which I was thankful, thinking that the way things had been going it would have been just my luck to have a tour bus pull up and park next to me as Raja got there with the children. But then I said to myself, 'To hell with that, Bryan. Start thinking positive and give it your best shot.' I had just got the internal pep talk over with when a car came around the corner of the Zoo wall and into the car park. As it came closer I saw Raja. He was sitting in front with Henry, who was driving. As they pulled up beside me I saw that Sulan was in the back with the children. Raja got out of the car and walked around to me.

'Good morning, Bryan,' he said, as he took me by the arm. 'I would like a word with you first before you meet the children.'

We walked around to the other side of my car.

'What is it, Raja?' I said. 'Have you got a problem?'

'No, nothing like that, Bryan,' he said. 'I just need to tell you what I have told the children. I let them talk to their mother this morning, and everything is OK. I am going to tell them that we have a friend with a boat that we can go fishing with. I can't tell them the full plan yet. They have been threatened with dire punishments if they go on a long trip with me. But the children are quite excited. I have also told them that we have quite a drive ahead, and that has not bothered them. And I have told them that your name is John and that they can call you Uncle John.'

'Well, that is fine with me, Raja,' I said. 'As long as the kids are happy.'

'Yes, they seem happy, and Sulan is very good with them. We just have to keep them occupied and not let them get bored. Now, John, come and meet my children.'

We walked back around the car. Raja opened the back door of his car and said to the children, 'Iddin. Shahirah. Come out and meet Uncle John.' The children climbed out of the car and stood looking at me. 'Iddin. Shahirah. This is Uncle John.'

They both said, 'Hello, Uncle John.'

'It is nice to meet you both,' I said. 'I bet you are looking forward to the trip?'

Well, that started them off. The questions came thick and fast.

'Hold it! Hold it!' I said. 'I'll tell you all about it on the way. After a while you can come in my car and we can talk, OK? But until then you can talk to me over this CB radio I'll fit in your car.'

I got the other radio out of my car and let them look at it. The kids were thrilled at the prospect of talking to me over the radio and could hardly contain themselves.

By this time Henry and Sulan had got out of the car, and Raja said, 'John, these are my friends Henry and Sulan.'

This was for the children's benefit, just to make it look like we hadn't met before.



I said, 'It's nice to meet you. I hope you enjoy the trip.' Then I said to Raja, 'I'll hook up the radio and show you how to use it, and then we'll get going.'

Just before we left I said to Raja and Henry, 'Keep close to me on the way out until we get into the country, and then drop back a few miles and keep in touch on the radio. And remember, if you want to stop for anything, get me on the radio and tell me, and I'll stop too. That way we won't get separated. The call sign we will use is 'car one' and 'car two'. I'll be 'car one'. This is just in case we pick up any other CB transmission.'

We had missed the peak hour traffic, but the roads were still very crowded, mostly with trucks heading north. I drove very steadily and observed all the road rules and speed limits, as I didn't want the police to pull me for anything. They were out in force during the school holidays. I had seen several police cars in the short time we had been on the road. Henry sat a few car lengths behind me, and once we left the Hume Highway at Seymour and got on the inland road, I called Raja on the CB and told him to keep well back from now on, which they did. I didn't see them again until we were well up into New South Wales. I was just a few miles from the town of Forbes when I had a call from Raja. He said the children wanted to ride with me for a bit. Would it be OK?

'Yes,' I said. 'I'd love to have them, but let's wait until we get past Forbes. It's just coming up. I was going to stop for fuel anyway, and I recommend you do the same, Raja.' He said they would, and also get something to eat. 'OK, Raja,' I said. 'I'll fuel up and then I'll wait for you just out of town. Give me a call when you are ready to get going once more.'

I drove into Forbes and went on until I was just about out of town, and then stopped at a service station and fuelled up. I was back on the road in a few minutes. I drove out and stopped in a lay-by to wait for Raja. While I was waiting I got out of the car to stretch my legs, and I felt the lump on my back. It was now as big as half a golf ball and was very tender. I knew now that it was a boil or a carbuncle and it'd get very painful. I'd have to try and get something for it soon. I was there about thirty minutes when Raja called on the

CB and told me that they were on the move. I told him to look out for me on the side of the road and the children could come with me for a while. They were soon with me, and as soon as they pulled in and stopped the kids were out and running around.

I asked Raja, 'How are the children taking it?'

'Very well,' he said. 'I am quite surprised. They have been very, very good. Iddin suggested going fishing even before I could propose the idea. He must have read my mind. Or maybe it is some kind of sixth sense. Iddin even requested to go further north to warmer climates like Malaysia! He remembers home well. I think it is a real bonus he's asked for this. Shahirah is in full agreement as well. I just hope it lasts.'

'It will,' I said, 'as long as we keep them happy. Are you coming with me and the kids?'

'Yes,' he said. 'I think I had better, just until they get to know you.'

'OK. Then I'll let you drive for a while, and I'll talk to the children.'

So we set off once more, Raja and myself and the kids in my car and Henry and Sulan following. It was about 3.30 pm, so we were not doing too bad on time. The children were very comfortable in the back. They had pillows and blankets, and they soon found the sweets and chips. I gave them a few each, as they had just had something to eat, and told them they would get more later. They were a delight to talk to. They were very intelligent, and their conversation was well in advance of their years. They asked me all about the boat, and what sort of fish would we catch, and how big would they be? Was I married, did I have children, where did I live? It went on and on, and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. I told them some outrageous stories about my fishing, and we all had a good laugh. They loved talking with Sulan and Henry on the CB. They thought it was adventurous like in the movies. And as it turned out we did have quite an adventure. All this made the time pass quickly.

We stopped for fuel at Narrabri, and then carried on to Moree, where we had something to eat. At least Henry, Sulan, and the children did. Raja and I went looking for the hospital to see if I could get

something done with my back, which by this time was giving me all sorts of hell. We found the hospital and I went into 'outpatients', asked if I could see a doctor, but was told that it'd be tomorrow unless it was a emergency. I went back out to Raja and told him that it was no good, I'd just have to put up with it until we got to Rockhampton in the morning.

We went back into the main street of Moree and found Henry, Sulan, and the kids, who were just finishing off ice-creams. Sulan told Raja that they had a meal of chicken and chips, and had some milk. I kidded the children about not saving some chicken for me, and Shahirah told me I must go and buy my own, and that she would come with me to show me the place to get it. I told her that I wasn't ready to eat just yet, but she could help me get something to eat the next time we stopped. I asked Henry was he OK to keep going? He said he was, so we set off once more. Raja and the children travelled with me. We knew that the children would go to sleep soon, as they had been on the go all day.

We left Moree at 9.30 pm and headed for Rockhampton on the Leichhardt Highway. We were not long on the road before the kids were sound asleep. I was driving, and Raja went to sleep. There wasn't a lot of traffic on the road so it was easy driving. We passed through Goondiwindi, and Moonie. The next town was Miles. We were about 10 km out of Miles, when I came over a hill, and there on the road, about 300 yards from me, was a road block.

There were two police cars with flashing lights blocking the road, and I could see a policeman out in front with a flashlight waving at me. I couldn't stop and turn back; I just had to keep going. I got on the radio and told Henry to stop where he was until he had word from me to go on, and if he didn't hear from me in the next half hour to turn around and go back to Melbourne and fly out. He asked what was the problem. I told him that there was a road block up front and for him to stay back. I didn't have time for more, as I was just about there. Raja and the kids didn't wake up, and I didn't see any point in waking them. If the game was up, well that was that. By now I was up close, and slowing down to a walk. I could see an ambulance and a tow-truck behind the police car. I hadn't seen

them before because of all the flashing lights. And then I saw, in the bush, a car upside down. It is hard to describe the relief I felt when I realised it was an accident that the police were attending and they weren't looking for us.

I had such an adrenaline rush when I first saw them, immediately afterwards I felt like a balloon that had the air let out of it. The policeman on the road just waved us past, and I didn't need any urging to do that. Once past, I drove on until I was out of sight, then stopped. I had to let myself settle down. I sat there for about ten minutes, until I felt normal again, then I called Henry.

'It's OK, Henry, it was just a car accident. They'll just wave you through. The town of Miles is coming up soon, and if there's a service station we'd both better stop and get fuel.'

'Very well, Bryan. I will stop if I see a service station.'

As I pulled away Raja woke.

'What did we stop for, Bryan?' he asked me.

I looked in the back before I answered him, just to check that the kids were still asleep, then I told him what had happened.

'It gave me quite a scare, and when I got past I had to stop to let my heart slow down.'

'Why didn't you wake me up?' Raja said.

'There wouldn't have been much point to that; you couldn't have done anything. Anyhow, I didn't have the time. I came over the hill and there they were.'

'Do you think that the police will set up road blocks looking for us?' Raja asked.

'I don't know, Raja, but if they do, it won't be this soon, and they don't know in what direction we're heading. It's a big country. They can't cover all of it. And we are off the main highways. I wouldn't start to worry yet, Raja. Maybe by tomorrow night they may have something underway, but by that time we should be past Cairns, and once past there we'll have a good chance. There aren't a lot of police up that way.'

'Well, let's hope so,' Raja said, 'but I think it is better for Henry and Sulan to drive ahead of us as a lead vehicle from now on, to warn us of anything ahead.'

By this time we were coming in to Miles. We found an open roadhouse and got fuel. We didn't stay, as we knew that Henry would be right behind us. We stopped out of town and let Henry pass us, and I asked Raja to drive so I could get some sleep, but it was impossible. I couldn't get comfortable. The lump on my back just wouldn't let me. The pain was quite intense, and I knew that I'd have to get it seen to in the morning.

I didn't know how long we'd been driving since Miles, as I'd been dozing. I wasn't really asleep, just drifting in and out. There was a terrific bang, and the car swerved violently. In a split second I was wide awake, and in the same second I knew what had happened: we had hit a kangaroo. I had told Raja to keep his eyes open for them. I had seen a few when I was driving, but not on the road. Raja got the car under control and stopped. The children had woken up and were asking what was wrong. Raja and I got out and had a look at the front of the car. It was a mess. All of the passenger side front was wrecked. I opened the bonnet and checked the radiator, and thankfully it was OK. We only had one headlight but it would have to do.

'I didn't have a chance to miss it,' Raja said. 'If I'd tried to avoid it totally we might have had a more serious accident and been thrown off the road.'

'Don't worry, Raja,' I said. 'I've had plenty do that to me. The damage looks worse than it is. We can still keep going.' By this time Henry had come back for us and I explained what had happened. While I spoke to Henry, Raja had been with the children. 'What did you tell the kids?' I asked.

'I told them that I had hit a kangaroo. They had been quite excited about looking out for 'roos'. They are a little sad, but OK.'

I asked Henry and Sulan how they were getting on. They said that they were fine. They had taken turns driving so as to get plenty of rest.

'OK, then, let's get going.'

Raja and I set off first, with Raja driving. I talked to the children for a while, until they went back to sleep. It was about 3 am, and I thought we would get to the next town Biloela by daylight, so

I tried once more to get to sleep. I was still trying when we got into Biloela about 5.30 am. We fuelled up, and I had two cups of black coffee with six aspirin to try and kill the pain in my back. Raja had a look at my back and he said that it looked like a ripe plum. Shahirah was quite concerned, and she told me (in a very stern voice) that I must go and see a doctor and get it seen to. We set off for Rockhampton, arriving mid-morning. Raja and I looked for the hospital, leaving Henry, Sulan and the kids playing in a park by the water's edge. We found the hospital, only to be told that because it was a weekend there were no doctors on duty, but there was a medical centre elsewhere in town. We found it and I left Raja in the car and walked into the waiting room. I had only a short wait before I was called into the doctor's office. He quickly lanced it, gave me some sedatives to help me sleep it off, and we were on our way again. I was considerably relieved.

We found Henry, Sulan, and the kids, still in the park.

'Uncle John, is your back better?' Shahirah asked.

'I'm fine now. The doctor has fixed it, thank you,' I replied.

We left Rockhampton at 10.30 am. For the rest of that day we drove hard, only stopping for fuel and a bite to eat. The children were very good. For most of the day Shahirah was in with Henry and Sulan, and talked to Iddin over the radio. It kept them occupied for hours. They were very excited and treated the whole trip as an adventure. The car in front was to warn the car behind of 'enemies' ahead. Although they had been instructed to call their mother regularly, the fun on the trip and the sense of adventure made them so relaxed they weren't worried about their mother getting angry. Raja had assured them he would take full responsibility and make sure she didn't punish them.

I wanted to get to Cairns before 10 pm so I could hand in the car, but it wasn't to be. We didn't get there until 11.30 pm, so I decided to leave the car at the workshop where I picked up my truck. I had the car on hire for another week, and all going well I should be back in Cairns by Wednesday of the next week to drop it off in person. I drove to the workshop and, as arranged, my truck was in the yard. I found the key in the mail box and the truck keys

on top of the rear wheel. We soon had all our gear transferred to the truck. I had told the children that afternoon that we would be doing the last part of the trip in my truck as the roads would be bad. They had been looking forward to it all day. Raja had also told them that Henry and Sulan were going to stay in Cairns to have a look around, and would join us later. We were soon ready to go. I put the children in the back of the truck. They had plenty of room, and with a big soft mattress and pillows, they loved it. It had a sliding glass partition from the back to the front so the children could come into the cab with Raja and I if they wanted to. I said my goodbyes to Henry and Sulan, and thanked them for their help. We left them standing in the workshop parking area.

We drove out of Cairns at 1 am, Sunday, 12 July. On the steep climb out of Cairns up to Mareeba, I thought, 'This is the third time in the last two weeks that I've been up and down this hill. The last time up I was towing the boat and it was a slow climb, but this time is a big change: I don't get out of top gear.' Raja was surprised that I had towed the boat up such a steep climb. I told him, 'Just wait until we get to the road down.' By the time we got to Mareeba the children had gone to sleep, so I closed the partition. That way the children, if they did wake, wouldn't hear what we were talking about. This was the first time that I had to talk to Raja since leaving Melbourne. I told him all about the problems that I had with the boat and the truck, and about my trip over. I also told him that the boat was back in the water and ready to go, and the truck was running fine, so we were in good shape. But I'd be glad when it was over, as I had been on the go for over three weeks and I was beginning to feel it. He agreed with me, and said that I had done an excellent job getting the boat across the country to Weipa, and getting us all up here from Melbourne.

'We aren't in the clear yet,' I told him. 'But it's looking good.'

When we got to Carbine I parked in the hotel parking lot, about 3.30 am. Raja got in the back with the kids, and I slept in the cab. I woke about 6.30 am and lay there thinking. I reached through the partition and shook Raja awake. I put my finger to my lips for him to be quiet. We got out and walked away from the truck.

'What's on your mind, Bryan?' he asked.

'It's like this, Raj. Up here there aren't a lot of people, and anyone travelling gets a good look over, especially when you stop for fuel. You and the kids are going to stand out like a sore toe. I'd think by now that they will be looking for the three of you, so we have to keep you all out of sight..'

'Yes,' Raja said. 'I can understand that, but how are you going to do it?'

'I've got an idea. Listen.' I told him, and then asked his opinion.

'I think it is OK, Bryan. But you will have to sound convincing.'

'I will, Raja. I will.'

The children were awake so I opened up the back and told the kids that I'd like to talk to them. They came and sat on the tailgate with me.

'Iddin. Shahirah. I want your help. We don't have far to go now to get to the boat, but I am not supposed to take children on my boat, and there is a fishing inspector up here that will stop me taking you fishing if he knows that you are here with me. The people up here will tell him if they see you, so what I want you to do when we stop for fuel is to hide in the back of the truck and we will trick them. Will you do that for me?'

They both said that they were good at hiding, and no one would find them. I said that I was going to put paper up at the windows so no one could see in, and it would also keep the hot sun out. Both children entered into the spirit of my request without question and helped me tape up paper and showed me how they were going to hide under the blankets when it was time.

When we went down the escarpment both Raja and the children were apprehensive, as they could look over one side and see nothing but a long drop to the bottom. Just before our first fuel stop at Laura I told the children to hide and Raja got into the back with them. They thought it was great fun.

There was a lot of giggling until I called out to them, 'I can still hear you! You are supposed to be hiding.'

By the time I pulled into the roadhouse they were quiet. I



bought fuel, and ice creams for us all. As soon as we were on the road again Raja returned to the front but the kids wanted to stay in the back. We stopped another couple of times and all went well. We finally arrived at Weipa at 7.30 pm, just on dark. I drove down the track and parked right on the beach. I could just make out all the boats at anchor, except mine! I left Raja and the kids in the vehicle and ten minutes later I walked up to the shop. Ken and his wife were there.

'G'day, Ken,' I said.

'Jeez, Bryan. How are you? Did you have a good trip?'

'Yes, Ken. Not too bad at all. How did you go with the boat? Is it in the water?'

'Bryan, I have some bad news, and some good news about that boat.'

As Ken said those words the look on my face must have been something to behold. 'Good news and bad news,' I thought to myself. 'What's gone wrong now?'

Ken quickly said, 'But don't worry, Bryan. The boat's OK. The mooring broke last night and the wind just pushed it up on the beach. But the boat's OK, there's no damage.'

'On the beach,' I thought. 'Jesus H Christ, what else could go wrong? The prince and his two children not half a kilometre from where I'm standing, and probably half the police force in Australia looking for me, and there's the boat, up on the beach.'

'Mark, the mechanic, and a friend are around there now,' he said. 'They're just waiting for high tide, Bryan. We'll get the boat off.'

'When did this happen?' I asked.

'Last night we had a big blow,' he replied, 'and the mooring just couldn't bear it with the weight of the boat and the wind.'

'Look, Ken,' I said, 'whereabouts exactly is it? I've got to get around there and have a look at things.'

'Just around the point in the bay, Bryan. Just past the main jetty; follow it round.'

'OK, Ken. Can I borrow your dinghy, please?'

'Yes,' he said. 'Go for it. Go for it.'

'OK. I'll come back later, Ken, and we'll sort things out here.'

'Don't worry about it, Bryan,' he said. 'I'll catch you tomorrow.'

Ken's dinghy was pulled up on the beach. I pushed it back into the water, jumped in, started her up and had it out around the main jetty, up the estuary and round into the bay. It was only a couple of minutes from the landing and as I rounded the far end of the main jetty I could see the boat. It was laying on its port side at about a 45° degree angle. The weather was very good: no wind. I thought to myself as I motored along, 'Should I go up and tell Raja that I'll be a little bit late? No, no. I'd better leave that, he'll only worry himself to death, and I can do enough worrying for both of us right now.' So I put Raja and the two children to one side and concentrated on what was in front of me: trying to get the boat back into the water. Mark saw me coming and walked down to the water's edge as I put the boat up on to the beach.

'G'day Bryan, G'day. Not a very pretty sight, is it?' he greeted me.

'No, Mark,' I said. 'Is it ... is it alright? Is it alright?'

'Yes,' he said. 'Fine, fine. The boat didn't suffer any damage at all. It just came in on the high tide with the wind and sat there on the beach. But if you look on the aft end there, and around here, round the bow, you're lucky - really - because it just missed rocks sticking up out of the sand.'

There were three nasty-looking jagged rocks sticking out both ends. It had just come right in between them. I thought, 'Luck? I don't know if we could call it luck. After all that has happened, I don't think I'm having much of it.' I could only have a look at the exposed starboard side, as the portside was still laying over on the sand. They had managed to rock it up a little and get a big truck tyre under the chine against the sand to keep that from digging in.

'We just have to wait for high tide and we'll get her off,' Mark said. 'That's about half an hour, Bryan. Give or take a few minutes and we should have enough water around it to rock her up and get her off here.'

While we waited Mark told me about the work he'd done on the motor and the leg and assured me all was well.

'It's running beautifully, Bryan. Purring,' he said.

As we spoke I could see the water coming in rapidly on the flood tide. In about half an hour there was enough water around the boat for us to rock it and get the bow free, push it around and point it out to sea. Mark got into his dinghy and put a tow line back to the bow and started pulling. His friend and I got up on the bow and started jumping and after a couple of minutes the stern lifted clear of the sand.

It was only a very few minutes and we had her into water deep enough to put the leg down. It fired up straight away and sounded lovely. Mark headed off in the dinghy with me chugging along behind and within two to three minutes we made fast to the new mooring. Once we were secure Mark and I went through the whole boat. She seemed tight enough for both of us so we gave her a clean bill of health. Mark apologised again.

'Well, hell. It's not your fault, Mark,' I said. 'You can't control the wind or the weather. Nobody knew the condition of the mooring under the water. It's not your fault it broke. Anyhow, everything sort of ended up OK. It's just one of those things, Mark.'

They motored away and left me to it. By this time it was nearly fully dark. The other dinghy, which I had tied to the back of In-truder, I pulled in close and climbed aboard. I knew I had to get onto the beach quick, and get Raja and the children onto the boat. I motored in and as I came aground on the beach, Raja walked down.

'What has taken you so long, Bryan? We were very worried. The children thought maybe you had sunk your boat, and they were coming up with all sorts of crazy ideas.'

'No, Raja, no. I just had a bit of a problem. It's all solved now. We can get a move on and get aboard. If we get our gear out of the back of the truck and loaded aboard, we'll set off.'

Within a few minutes I had both the children, Raja and their gear aboard. The children were very excited. They were on the boat finally! They were poking around into everything, typical of children. Raja and I got the gear stowed and I explained to Raja the workings of the galley, the stove, and showed him where everything was. I said I had to go back ashore and move the truck.

'Make the children something to eat. There's plenty of food

there, and soft drink and whatever you find. See if you can get them down to sleep in the forward berth.'

'Alright, Bryan,' he said. 'It's nice to be here. We can finally relax a bit.'

'Just keep off the deck. Stay in the cabin and keep the side curtains pulled.'

'Don't worry, Uncle John,' Iddin said. 'We'll hide. The inspector won't see us.'

I got back into the dinghy and headed back to the beach and the truck. I drove the truck round to the landing and parked it adjacent to Ken's little shop, then walked back around the bay to where I left the dinghy and headed out to Intruder in it. I was only gone less than an hour. In that time Raja had fed the children and settled them in the forward berths. They were both asleep. I made myself a pot of coffee and sat at the galley table with Raja.

'When are we leaving Bryan?' he asked, almost immediately.

'Shortly, Raja. Just let me get this coffee in me and have a few minutes and we'll get underway.' I told him about our boat being up on the beach.

'We've been very lucky,' he said.

'Yes, we certainly have,' I replied. 'Our luck is about to change for the better, I think. The weather is settled and we should have a good run up the coast.' I started the engine and let it warm up. After five minutes I said to Raja, 'OK, this is it, mate. Let's take off.'

I cast off the mooring and headed Intruder out towards the bay. My plan was to follow the main channel out to its end and then set a course approximately northwest, to clear the point of the northern end of the bay. We motored out through the channel with a slight breeze. I was on a lee shore, the weather was very good and the sea was calm. When we reached the end of the channel we turned to starboard and set a course northwest. We hadn't gone two nautical miles when the engine suddenly died. 'Jesus H Christ,' I thought. 'What now?' We were drifting. I tried re-starting the engine to no avail. I cranked that damn thing and it wouldn't start. I went out to the bow, opened the anchor hatch and put the anchor over the side, running out plenty of line. The water was shallow at that particular

point and she swung around with her bow pointing back towards the shore, because there was a slight southeasterly breeze.

It didn't take me long to find what I thought was the problem. The fuel bowl glass was nearly full of water. All aluminium boats are like tea kettles. The condensation in them is excellent. The few weeks travelling from Western Australia with the extremes of heat and cold, from day to night and then the boat sitting around in the tropical heat must have created condensation in the fuel and tanks. I knew I'd have to pump the fuel out, get rid of the water in the tanks and replace it with clean fuel before I could attempt to go any further. Raja had no experience at all, so I had to explain it all carefully to him. I think it was the first time he had ever been on a boat.

'Raja,' I said, 'we've got to go back into port. I can't do it out here. I'll have to drain the main tank and then top it up again. I could do it out here but then we wouldn't have enough fuel - enough safety margin - to get where we're going.'

'But will it be alright going back into port?' he asked.

'Raja, I don't know. Anything could happen. I'd be silly to even try to go on at this moment with the water problem in the fuel.'

'When are you going back in?' he asked.

'We'll spend the night out here and go back in at first light. That'll be in keeping with the story I've told to Ken and all the others back there, that I go out fishing at night. Best try and get some sleep. We'll look at it again in the morning.'

I dozed off and woke to the motion of the boat, which had changed dramatically in the two hours I had been asleep. It was 2.30 am and the seas had risen to very short, sharp swells, approximately one metre. It was making a very uncomfortable motion on the boat. I went on deck and checked on everything. I went back into the cabin and Raja was sitting in the helmsman's chair, very sick. I got a bucket and let him sit there with it between his knees.

'You're going to have to beat it yourself, or just live with it,' I said.

The children were still asleep and didn't wake until first light. By this time the wind had died off a little and the sea was running a very slight swell. I cleaned out the fuel bowl and cranked the engine

over and pumped more fuel through the engine. She was missing but it would run and get us back in. I had a problem getting the anchor up and back on board because the breeze was still blowing. I told Raja I needed him to help while I went up on the bow and pulled in the anchor.

'When I wave back at you, put the throttle back and pull the gears back into neutral.' I went through it several times with him. 'We have to work as a team,' I said. 'You are going to have to do this or I'll never get the anchor up.'

I could have done it myself and taken the risk of over-running my line and getting it fouled in the prop. I thought the lesser of the two risks was to use Raja. When I thought he had it firmly in his mind I went up onto the bow and waved back at him to start his manoeuvres. He gave it a little bit too much throttle but we moved ahead and I pulled the anchor over very quickly, not without considerable risk of being dragged overboard. The anchor and line now secure, I went back into the cabin. He seemed a little bit better. I think having something he could concentrate on had taken him out of his seasick mode for a little while.

We were underway again and the boat wasn't pitching and rocking, so he seemed to chirp up a little bit. We motored back into the harbour. The children were up by this time.

'Please now, it's daylight, and you must keep out of sight,' I told them. 'Don't go on deck, and as we pass the main jetty – the landing – just keep down in the cabin out of sight.'

I entered the harbour and motored passed the main jetty. There were a few people fishing there. I could see Ken at the landing as I went past and he gave me a wave. I waved back, went up the bay to the mooring and cut the engine.

I went into the cabin. 'It's OK now, Raj. You and the children can come on out and we'll have some breakfast.'

Raja passed on breakfast and had a cup of tea. The children had Weeties, bread and jam, and more. They had very good appetites. I pumped all the fuel overboard after we'd eaten. It was a hell of a thing to do, polluting the water, but I had no option at the time.

I refilled it from the long-range tanks and once I had that done

said to Raja, 'I'm going to have to get some more fuel, Raja. I'll have to go to shore and organise it.'

'Can I come with you?' he asked. 'I need to make a phone call to Indonesia and relay to them what has happened, what the delay is. They will be waiting, and if I can talk to my friend he will pass a message on to Merauke and they will contact the boat.'

'Well, Raja,' I said, 'it's quite a risk. Do you have to?'

'Well, if I do not, they may think we're not coming and go back to Merauke.'

'I don't like leaving the children on their own and we certainly can't take them with us,' I said.

'Bryan, I must do it. We have put too much planning and effort into it to fail now.'

'OK,' I said. I turned to the children and said, 'Kids, your father and I are going ashore. We have to get some more supplies. Can you trust you to stay in the cabin out of sight? That fisheries inspector will be up and down here today.'

'Yes, Uncle John. We'll stay out of sight. We won't let them see us,' Iddin said.

'You mustn't touch anything, either,' and I pointed to the controls. 'That area there, you're not allowed to go near it.'

'OK,' Shah said.

'We will just play here on the table,' Iddin chimed in.

We left them on board playing with their toys. It worried me that it had to be done. I had to drop Raja at the beach, on the bay. I didn't want to take the risk of taking him to the landing. I motored to the beach to where I had picked him up the night before.

'Raja, you just wait here. I'll go back around to the landing, get my truck and come back to pick you up.'

I motored round to the landing. Ken was up and about, doing work on his boats.

'G'day, Bryan,' he said. 'How's everything? Did you catch anything last night? I saw you coming back in.'

'No, Ken. I had a bit of a problem: water in the fuel. I hung off the pick last night at the end of the leads. I cleaned her out and I'm just going to see about organising some more fuel.'

I drove around the bay and picked Raja up, drove to the shopping area a few kilometres away, and Raja phoned outside the post office. There were quite a few people about by this time and I was concerned because we heard on the truck's radio that the news had broken about Raja and the children. It wouldn't be long before Raja's and the kids' photos would appear on television and the newspapers. I rang the local fuel depot and asked them when they could get their fuel truck down to the jetty. He said he probably couldn't make it until Tuesday afternoon. I thought, 'Oh God, no. Without the fuel I really can't attempt to make the full voyage up to Indonesia.'

'Raja, they can't get any fuel at least until tomorrow afternoon. It's cutting it too fine. I just wouldn't want to do it without the extra fuel.'

'We cannot wait until tomorrow,' he replied. 'I've told our friends in Indonesia that we will be leaving today; that we have had a bit of trouble, but we would be leaving today.'

'All right, Raja,' I said, 'can you get back on the phone to them and ask them to get a message to their boat? Ask them if they can come down the course line and meet us further down? If they'll do that then we will set off and meet up with them somewhere along our course.'

'I'll try.'

'Good. That's the only option we've got right now, otherwise we will have to wait till tomorrow. Your boat will just have to keep stationed there. Let's get away from here and use a phone where there aren't a lot of people.'

We found another public phone and Raja called Indonesia. He was on the phone for a good five minutes. When he came off he said he was going to have to ring them back in a couple of hours.

'I don't like leaving the children for that long. Do you think they will be alright?' I asked.

'I'm sure they will be,' Raj said.

'We'll go back down to the beach,' I said, 'and wait there. We will be out of sight and I can keep an eye on the boat from the beach.'



We sat there and talked. In all that time I never saw any movement on the boat. The kids were obviously not going to let any fishing inspector catch them. At the end of two hours Raja made his phone call to Indonesia.

He came back to the truck and said, 'Yes, Bryan, they will come down the course that you've given them and if we travel up and meet them, we should meet about half-way. Will that be OK?'

'That's fine, Raja. Yes, I'll have enough fuel for that. Then I'll refuel from what they're carrying for me.'

I drove Raja back to the beach, then parked the truck at the landing and handed the keys to Ken. I went back in the dinghy around the bay and picked up Raja and motored back out to Intruder.

'We have been very good, Uncle John,' Iddin said when we'd climbed aboard.

'Yes, Uncle John,' Shah said earnestly, 'we haven't been on deck and no one has seen us.'

'That's great, kids. That's really a big help. The motor is all OK now and we will be going out fishing shortly.'

That got them quite excited. By this time it was 3.30 pm on Monday and the wind was from the southeast, blowing 10 to 15 knots.

'I hope it doesn't get any stronger than this, Raja, otherwise it will get quite lumpy out there.'

Once we got out to the leads, the motion of the boat wasn't violent but more like a corkscrew. By the time we rounded the cape at the top end of the bay the wind had picked up another ten knots and the waves had become confused and lumpy. I knew the further I got away from the shore the worse it was going to get.

'You're in for a rough trip, Raj. If it stays just like it is now: OK. But if it picks up anymore I can't risk it.'

Raja wasn't taking much interest in anything. He was violently ill and the cabin and galley area stunk. He squatted on the floor with the bucket between his legs. The two children weren't taking much interest in him but were sitting at the galley table enjoying the adventure. They were big-eyed, and asked questions about everything. I left them to it and went up onto the flying bridge, mainly to get

away from the smell. We motored on until just after dark when the wind had picked up further. I decided to go back and anchor in the lee shore in the bay. We stayed there the rest of the night. As soon as we were at anchor Raja seemed to throw off a bit of his seasickness and was able to take more of an interest in what was going on.

'That's how it's going to be, Raj. It won't be very pleasant for you.'

'Why have we stopped, Bryan? We must keep going to meet the other boat.'

'Raja, you're not a seaman. The decision is mine. I have just got to think of the safety of all of us. To continue with the wind rising and those seas, it was just foolish. We'll go back into the harbour tomorrow and I'll see if I can get extra fuel because we used up a bit tonight. You'll have to contact Indonesia again and tell them what has happened. By this time, Raj, the police are going to be really looking for us. Not for me, but for you and the two children. If the police are smart they will close northern ports or check them out thoroughly.'

'Do you think they'll come and search the boats?' he asked.

'I don't think so, but they'll probably take an interest in any strange boats around. I'm not exactly strange here. I've been here a couple of weeks – at least the boat has – and the locals know me as I go out fishing, in and out every night. I don't think they will search the boats but the children and yourself must not be seen. We must be super-careful now. I will not take you ashore during the day. It will have to be after dark. Tell your Indonesian friends what has happened. Tell them to contact their boat and go back to the original rendezvous point, to hold there, and wait for news of us. That's the best thing I can come up with now, Raja. Let's hope that the weather is kind and we can get away.'

We rode it out comfortably on the Monday night and sat there until approximately mid-morning. The children finally did a bit of fishing over the side, which greatly excited them. They caught a few small fish which I convinced them were too small to keep. Around about 10.30 am I repeated the manoeuvre with Raja at the controls and we upped anchor and headed back into port. By midday we

were sitting on the mooring again and the two children were playing their games on the galley table. Raja was asleep in the forward berth. I caught up on some sleep on the afterdeck and that afternoon I prepared a meal for myself and the children. Raja was still not eating. At 7 that evening we headed ashore and he contacted his friends in Indonesia. Then I took Raja back to the beach, dropped him there and drove round to the landing. Ken was fiddling around with a dinghy when I came up to him.

'G'day, Ken. Mate, I need some fuel for the boat.'

'The guy with the fuel truck has been out of town today, Bryan. There are a couple of fishing boats here waiting for fuel, too. He won't be available until tomorrow.'

That was Wednesday.

'When do you think he will be down here on the jetty?' I asked.

'Usually he comes down in the afternoons,' he said. 'I can find out in the morning and I'll get you on the radio and let you know.'

I went back round in the dinghy and picked up Raja. The next morning we slipped the mooring and headed out into the bay to spend some time fishing while we waited for the fuel. It was a very pleasant morning we spent out there. Shahirah caught a baby shark, which really got them excited. Iddin was quite upset that he hadn't caught the shark and his little sister had. About mid-morning we were having a cup of coffee in the cabin and the two children were playing at the galley table. I wasn't really listening to what was being said between the children but there was some sort of squabble over a game that Shah was playing.

I heard Raja say, 'Iddin, please leave your sister alone. Iddin! She will play with you when she's finished.'

Iddin jumped down from the table and stood before his father and yelled at him, 'I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!'

His face was all screwed up and his little fists were clenched. He was really putting some feeling into those words. He went into the forward cabin and shut the door. I looked at Raja and he just shook his head, shrugged his shoulders and didn't say anything. I didn't say anything either, just turned back to my coffee and the chart I was studying at the time. It was later that morning when we

were moving from one spot to another and I was up on the flying bridge that Shah came up and sat beside me.

After a little while I said to her, 'Shah. What happened earlier with your brother and your father: you and Iddin don't hate your father, do you?'

'No, no, we don't hate him,' she said. 'But it's just what Mother has told us to say to him.'

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Here was a little girl telling me that her mother had told her to hate her father. I thought, 'God, some people will do anything,' because hate is not a natural trait in children. They are, on the whole, very trusting of adults and hate is something that's got to be taught. I thought it was very sad for a mother to teach her children hate, playing with children's minds in the worst possible way.

Raj later related another incident to me, when Shah got very upset with him for telling her not to do certain things. Shah ran up to him, and kicked him on the shin and said, 'You're not my real father!' Iddin intervened, asking Shah to shut up. The words Shah uttered hurt Raj more than her kick.

Iddin soon got over his tantrum with his father and things got back to normal. We carried on fishing for the rest of the morning until about 11.30 am, then I turned back to port. We were fishing just around Duyfken Point, about twenty nautical miles from Weipa, and were heading back round the point into Albatross Bay when all of a sudden we were going round in circles. I had no steering. I immediately cut the motors and set the anchor. I soon found the problem: three bolts had come off the steering plate.

'It's just as well we're going back to port,' I said. 'If this had happened when we were half-way to our rendezvous point we would have been in very serious trouble.'

I looked through my tool box but didn't have any bolts that would do to get me back to port. I sat on the engine hatch wondering what the hell I was going to do when I noticed the battery terminal bolts were approximately the same size, but they weren't stainless steel or high tensile, just a galvanised-type gutter bolt. I thought, 'Well, they'll do to get me back to port if I don't handle it too rough.'

On the way in I radioed ahead to Ken to have four bolts ready for me. The trouble with the steering had put the thought of re-entering the port under circumstances where the police would be really looking for us by now out of my mind, but as we motored in it all came back. I couldn't help worry that maybe this time the police would be waiting there to check the boat. The children and Raja stayed out of sight down in the cabin as I entered the port but there was no activity or police boat as I motored past to the anchorage.

'I'm taking the dinghy,' I said to Raja, 'and going back to the landing for the parts to repair the steering and I will be straight back. Then we'll fuel up and get underway. This time we will go, and we will not be coming back. We've got to make it tonight or not at all.'

'Let me come ashore with you to make one more phone call to my people in Indonesia to let them know we are definitely leaving tonight,' Raja asked.

'Raj, not during the day. It's too risky now. Your picture will be all over television and newspapers. We'll wait till dark, then I'll take you ashore.'

'Right,' he said. 'That will have to do.'

I went ashore and picked up the bolts.

Ken remarked, 'You're not having much luck with the boat, Bryan, are you?'

'Well, Ken,' I said, 'these things happen. You've been in boats all your life and you know what can go wrong.'

'Yes,' he said. 'I've had a lot of problems with boats at the odd time when I thought everything was going all right.'

I went back out to Intruder and it didn't take long to install the bolts and fix the steering bracket firmly onto the mounting plate. By then it was very close to 3.30 pm and I had arranged the fuel for 4 pm at the jetty belonging to the bauxite mining company, adjacent to the main jetty. I slipped the mooring again and motored to that jetty. The wind had picked up in the period of time we had been in port. It had been a beautiful morning with only a very light breeze but now it was blowing at least fifteen knots and it was quite choppy in the bay. I had a little bit of difficulty tying up onto the jetty and if it hadn't been for the help of an Aboriginal fisherman there, I doubt

I would have got it tied up, because Raja couldn't help me. He had to stay out of sight in the cabin with the two children. After bumping the piles a couple of times and doing a few roundabouts I finally got a rope onto the jetty and moored it fast. I waited twenty minutes before the fuel truck arrived. The boat was quite thirsty: 420 litres.

I cast off and went back to the mooring. I had more trouble securing the mooring because of the wind and the choppy conditions and had to make four passes before I finally hooked up. We sat there and waited till dark. I turned to Raja and spoke what I'd been thinking as the wind blew stronger and stronger.

'If this wind keeps up, Raj, there's no way we can get out of here tonight, and if we don't leave tonight you're going to have to consider the possibility of maybe aborting this plan and taking the children back to Melbourne and saying you had them on a holiday.'

He became very agitated and said, 'No, no! Definitely not! We will leave tonight, we have to.'

'Raja, the decision is mine. If I think it's unsafe I'm not going to do it. I can't control the weather but we'll proceed as if we are going to leave tonight.'

Later that evening I took Raja to the beach in the dinghy and he made his phone call. We went back to Intruder and waited until 9.30 pm.

The sea had dropped so I said to Raja, 'It's going to be now or never. If the wind stays like this we will have a pleasant passage.'

I slipped the mooring and started the motors and we headed out of the harbour again. I hoped it was for the last time. I knew now I was committed and there would be no turning back.

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We made very good time, rounding Duyfken Point at about 11.30 pm, Wednesday night. Once round the point I set course for the rendezvous with the Indonesian boat. The passage was very good for the first three hours but at 2.30 am the wind started to rise again and in the next hour blew up from 5 to 25 knots. The sea rose to a metre and a half of sharp swells.

I had to slow down considerably because with a following sea it's a very dangerous manoeuvre to travel at speed, especially at night, as any seaman will tell you. I just kept enough power on to keep steerage. The sea rose over the next two hours to two and a half metres, very nearly breaking seas. The boat, as it came up on a wave, would surf down the front at an alarming rate until the stern lifted itself and the wave passed underneath. I had to stay up on the fly bridge in such weather. If the wind didn't drop there was no way we'd make the rendezvous point in time.

By daylight on Thursday morning the seas were alarming. I don't know what Raja thought of them. I only knew he was sick because I had called out to him during the night, from the bridge, so he could check my course heading as I didn't have a compass up there. I picked a star and used that as a course check, but then cloud covered the star and I'd lose track, and when the cloud blew away I had to call down for another compass check.

Raja, from the sound of him, was very sick. The boat was behaving quite erratically. The surfing motion down the waves was strange in itself, and sometimes it would very slightly sheer off to port or starboard if I didn't catch it quick enough. A couple of times I did miss it, and she got away from me. Luckily she didn't roll on

the face of the wave, but it gave us some very bad moments.

At daylight the motor suddenly cut out and we were in real trouble. I came down off the fly bridge, opened the engine hatch and checked the glass for water, thinking I had the same problem, but the bowl was full of pure petrol.

'I'm at a loss,' I said to Raja. 'I don't know what's wrong with it. It could be any number of things. With the water we're taking now, because we're beam on to the sea, she is taking quite a bit of slop over the deck. I can't really work on that engine with this lot coming in.'

'What are we going to do, Bryan?' he asked.

'Well, we'll just let it sit for a while and I'll try again.'

'Are we in any danger?'

'She seems to be handling the sea at the moment. She's not likely to break up or anything, Raja. She's a strong boat. We'll just ride her out for a little while and see what happens. We can always call in for help if we can't get it started.'

So we drifted for about two and a half hours. I tried to start that engine several times, but only for short bursts, because I knew if I flattened the batteries we would never get it started. The satellite navigation showed that our rate of drift was about two and a half nautical miles an hour. The wind was still very strong from the south-east at approximately 25 knots. The seas were now bigger than four metres, and every now and again a real 'daddy' up to six metres would come through. The children weren't concerned. I told them we were just resting the motor for a while and we would drift. They didn't seem frightened by the size of the seas or the motion of the boat. I thought, 'The innocence of children. If they really knew the position we were in, it would probably give them a screaming fit.'

After two and half hours I said to Raja, 'It doesn't look like we're going to get the engine started. I think now it's time to make a decision. Do we radio for help and go back?'

'Bryan, if we do that, we've lost everything. We'll both go to prison.'

'I know, Raj. It's not a prospect I'm looking forward to, but it's no good drifting around out here with the weather like it is. We are



handling it right now, but if it gets worse we're in real trouble.'

We finally agreed, and I sent out a mayday that was picked up by a rescue station on the Queensland coast. I gave our position, 11° South by 140° 30' East. Then I lost radio contact and couldn't raise them again. Just after I had talked to the sea rescue I tried the motor again and it started as if nothing had been wrong. The elation on Raja's face when he heard the motor start up was something to behold.

'Right, Raja,' I said. 'Now, don't look so happy about this. We're still in a bad position. This could happen again. The motor could cut out again. What I'm going to do is head back to Weipa.' The look on his face was really something this time.

'No, Bryan, you can't. Let us go on.'

'Raja, I can't go on. It'd be irresponsible now to even attempt to go on. We've given it our best shot and we've failed. The weather has beaten us. If it had been calm weather I might have given it a go, but with weather like this and seas like this, Raja, we're just dicing with death, and I think we've just about used up all the luck we've got.'

He could see that I meant it and he said, 'You must do what you must do.'

He sat there and didn't say any more. I went back up to the flying bridge and got the boat headed into the sea, and I knew after twenty minutes that I wasn't going to make Weipa. I wasn't making any headway at all. The sat-nav showed me that I was in the same position after half an hour. I stamped on the deck and called out to Raja.

He stuck his head up through the hatch and I said, 'Raja, I'm coming about. Just hold on to everything down there, it might get a bit rough. We're going to go with it. I can't make it back to Weipa with this sea. I'll just pound the boat to pieces. We'll go with it and try to get to the rendezvous.'

'Right, Bryan,' he said. 'Let us just hope we have some good luck.'

I waited until I had what I thought was a calmer piece of water. The waves coming at me weren't quite so big and I put the power to her and I got her round. I immediately had to cut power

again because of the following seas. I just ran with it. When I say 'ran with' it, I was more or less pushed. We went like that all that day. On Thursday and into Thursday night, the wind didn't drop and the seas were even a little bit wilder. Once the darkness fell and there was only starlight, intermittent with cloud cover, it was really frightening.

Since this whole epic started I hadn't had much sleep. With battling the wind and the waves, trying to hold the boat and standing on my feet up in the flying bridge because I couldn't sit on the seat (I had to stand and brace myself with my legs against the seat) I was very, very tired. I could hardly keep my eyes open. I went with it as long as I could and twice I virtually went to sleep standing up there. In those split seconds that I was out I nearly put us under because I lost control of the boat. I never thought she would come back from it but she did. After the second time I shouted down to Raja that I would have to stop and get some sleep.

'Is it safe to do that?' he asked.

'No, Raja. But it will be a lot safer than doing what I'm doing. I'll try and keep it going for a little while longer, but I can't really go all night.'

I persevered but around about midnight I started to see big ships. Then something happened that really decided me: I saw a carpark with signs 'Carpark'. Parking and trees either side of the entrance. In my semi-comatose state I turned into the carpark. As soon as I'd done that I snapped out of it, but it was too late. The boat was sheering off down the front of a wave and I knew I couldn't bring her back. I just hung on hoping that it wouldn't roll when the crest of the wave passed us. It came over on its port side and I was actually standing on the side of the bridge gunwale. For those two or three seconds I thought, 'Well, this is it, we're gone.' And then the wave passed under us and the boat violently rocked as it dropped over the back of the wave and nearly threw me off the bridge. I quickly got control of it again and powered round. I had such a rush of fear that it gave me a burst of energy, but I knew it wouldn't last. I stamped on the roof of the cabin and called down to Raja that I was going to cut the motors and I had to get some sleep.

'Be prepared for violent motion!'

I knew that the boat couldn't really survive a broadside drift, so I decided to rig a sea anchor and stream it from the bow. I had been standing up there for so many hours I was stiff. I couldn't get my legs to work properly. The skin on my hands and feet looked like fish belly from the constant wetting with salt water. The backs of my legs were rubbed raw from the front of the seat. I cut the motor and immediately the boat swung broadside. As the first wave passed underneath, I thought, 'My God, we're not going to survive too many of these.' I climbed down and went to the locker on deck to get the sea anchor. It's a heavy canvas tube, one end about two feet in diameter and the other about five inches in diameter, about six feet long. It's strung off the bow, and the force of a large amount of water going in the open end and squeezed out of the small end puts a drag on the boat and keeps it ahead to the weather. It can be used from the stern with a following sea quite effectively to slow a boat down. When I went to the locker there was no sea anchor. I couldn't believe it. I thought I had it on board when I packed the boat up in Perth and had no occasion to use it or look in the locker since, but it wasn't there. I have since later found out that I did leave it in the workshop in Perth.

What could I do? I collected several spare life jackets and some rope and went out onto the bow to make my own sea anchor, which took about half an hour, lying on deck. I couldn't stand on the deck because the motion of the boat was too violent. I lashed the life jackets to the anchor securely with rope, then played it out over the bow and ran out 100 ft of anchor line and made it fast to the samson post. It did help to bring the head around, and we were then riding about 80% better, riding over the waves in a type of corkscrew motion. I sat there on the combing of the hatch into the cabin to see what would develop.

'If it's going to behave itself,' I said, 'we'd best try and get some sleep. What I'll do, Raj, is I'll sleep for a couple of hours and then you wake me up. You stay awake, and if there's anything happening other than what is right now, if we lose the anchor and she swings round again, which could happen wake me immediately.'

He didn't feel much like sleeping anyway; he was too sick. The children were under the table in the galley, all curled up with their life jackets on, tucked away in blankets. They were absolutely sound asleep, totally unaware of any danger they were in. I wedged myself adjacent to the cabin entrance hatch up and immediately went to sleep. It was just cracking daylight when I woke. Raja was still sitting in the lower helmsman's chair and the anchor was still holding. The motion of the boat hadn't changed and neither had the weather abated.

I thought, 'We have ridden this out, maybe things will get better and the weather will drop during the day.' My next problem was I had to get the anchor up before I could continue. With the sort of sea that was running and the wind that was pushing us, trying to get an anchor up by hand is virtually impossible. The drift of the boat and the violent motion of the waves created a lot of drag on the anchor. I simply had to cut the anchor loose though even that 'simple' task was perilous and I nearly went overboard and immediately she swung round broadside again. I went up onto the fly bridge and started the motor and lo and behold! it started straight away. We had drifted so far off course during the night I would have to come back to the northeast course to get anywhere near the rendezvous.

'Raja, we'll just have to go slow and steady like we did yesterday, and when the sea abates we'll come back on our original course,' I said.

We set off again with a following sea and I thought to myself, 'With what this boat's been through it's amazing it's still afloat. Thank you, Star, builders of the Intruder.'

Around about 11.30, Friday morning I thumped the deck and shouted down to Raja, 'You had better pump some fuel!' I had explained to him the first day on the boat that it was his job to pump fuel from the auxiliary tanks on the afterdeck into the main tank. He stuck his head up through the hatch and I shouted to him, 'Pump the fuel, Raj. We're running out! Remember how I showed you?' I have to give that man his due; as sick as he was, and first time on a boat, he started pumping the fuel. I could just see the top of his head and his arm from where I stood on the flying bridge. After

about ten minutes I shouted down, 'That'll be enough, Raj, for a few hours.'

Maybe an hour after that, the motor cut out.

'Raj! We're just going to have to drift, mate. I can't get the motor started. We'll have to just ride it out.'

'OK,' he feebly replied.

He still wasn't taking much interest in anything. He looked like death, a lovely shade of grey. The two children were as happy as two birds, chirping away down in the cabin in the middle of their big adventure. I heated some baked beans for them, and some chocolate, and we talked and played games. That's how we carried on all Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday as we drifted. The wind didn't abate one bit and the seas didn't drop. After the first two or three hours I knew I'd never get the motor started again. In the end I had to stop trying because I would have run the batteries out and I didn't want to do that because they powered the radio. I checked the chart, and over a period of hours I calculated that at the present rate of drift and the direction we were drifting, it would take several days, but we would end up in Indonesia. But where? I couldn't pinpoint it at that stage, but probably somewhere along the Irian Jaya coast, not Papua New Guinea.

'Raj,' I said, looking up from the chart at the poor bloke huddled in the corner, 'we'll just go with it for a while. Maybe the motor will start, maybe it won't, maybe we'll drift, maybe your Indonesian friends will be lucky enough to find us and come and pick us up. Anyway, once we get close to Indonesian waters we can send out a mayday with our position to Merauke and maybe they'll send out a boat to get us.'

'We'll have to try that,' Raja said, 'because I definitely don't want to call the Australian authorities, unless we really have to. You are the better judge of that so I'll leave that up to you.'

I tried to keep the children occupied by telling them stories and playing games with them. Every now and again when a particularly heavy sea would come over and put us on our beam end, which would happen quite regularly, the children would squeal and say that was a big one! I would joke about it and say, 'O, wow! This is all

part of the fun of fishing.'

'When can we really go fishing?' they asked.

'When the sea dies down. It's a little bit rough at the moment,' I said.

'OK, Uncle John,' they replied.

They were very good, as if we were on a day outing on a lake. Periodically I'd go up on to the flying bridge and check all around to see if I could sight anything. During the day it didn't seem so bad, but when night fell on the Friday night and the sea hadn't abated, that was a different story. Drifting at night is particularly dangerous. The children bedded themselves down under the galley table. Raja slept on the galley floor and I sat on the threshold at the entrance to the cabin, so as to be on deck immediately if anything happened. It wasn't the most comfortable spot to spend the night, but I felt that if I was to have any chance of getting the children out if something did go wrong, I had to be very close to them. All I had to do was reach out my right arm and I could grab hold of them.

It was sometime before midnight on that Friday that the wind picked up, even more 40 knots in gusts, sometimes higher, and the seas with it. The waves were about six metres, and they were breaking seas, which made a violent movement on the boat. We took a lot of water over the starboard quarter and I congratulated myself that I had put armoured glass all round because it took one hell of a pounding. If one of those windows caved in it would have been all over. I had been to sea many times in my life and consider myself experienced yet I had never seen a sea like that in such a small boat. I was worried, naturally, but I wasn't terrified. You can beat the sea as long as you keep your head and don't panic. Daybreak on the Saturday awoke Raja and the children and we had a makeshift meal.

'We're in international waters now, Raj,' I announced after breakfast and a glance at the chart. 'We're well out of reach of the Australian authorities. The way the sea has picked up I think it's now time to call for help. I want you to get on the radio and speak in Indonesian. Call for help from Merauke. They may pick up our distress call and come to our aid, or if the boat is still out there that we were supposed to meet, they may hear it and come. It's worth a try.'

don't like the way the sea is running now. It's very, very strong and could put us over at any moment.'

'Very well, Bryan,' Raja agreed. 'But what should I say?'

'You must be convincing. You mustn't be hesitant. You must be very strong and convincing on the radio.'

'I'll do my best, Bryan. But what do I have to say?'

'Whoever answers will want to know the name of the vessel. Don't tell them it's Intruder. That's our Australian registered name. If a sea rescue group is monitoring the mayday, which they probably will be, they'll know where we are. But the people in Merauke that are expecting us are expecting a boat called Intruder. Isn't that so?'

'Yes,' he said. 'I told them the name of the boat and our call sign.'

'You can still use the call sign, but we have to change the name of the boat.' Then I hit on an idea. 'Raja, what's the equivalent in Indonesian of "Intruder"?'

He thought for a little while, then said, 'Penceroboh'.

'OK,' I said. 'That's what we'll put over the air. I doubt that the Australian authorities would speak Indonesian. The people monitoring the airways will probably think you are an Indonesian boat, and that's what we want them to think.'

I handed Raja the handset. 'Mayday, mayday, mayday,' he spoke into it. 'This is fishing vessel Penceroboh. I am in trouble. I have no engine. I have no engine. I am en route to Merauke. Merauke. Can anybody help, please? Can anybody help?'

We waited a few minutes and then he repeated it. It was twenty minutes later that we got a reply from a Darwin sea rescue group. After establishing contact they wanted to know how many persons were on board. I held up one finger to Raja.

'I am by myself. I have been out fishing for one day and I have lost my motor. I was going to Merauke. Could you notify Merauke, please? Could you notify Merauke in Irian Jaya? I would appreciate this, please.'

Darwin sea rescue answered. 'We will try to comply with your request. Are you in any immediate danger? Do you need assistance?'

I shook my head at Raja and we settled down to wait. About

two hours later, near to 8 am, Saturday, Raja got on the radio again.

'Mayday, mayday, mayday. Any stations monitoring this call please notify Merauke. I am adrift approximately 120 nautical miles southwest of Merauke. I need assistance.'

We put this call out several times. We picked up the Maroochydore sea rescue group down on the east coast of Australia. Raja talked to them and gave them the same story. Could they please contact the authorities in Merauke. Could they send a boat to assist? After a couple of hours, with no reply, I got Raja on the radio again and told him to keep calling. He settled himself in the corner of the galley where the radio was, and for hours kept repeating the mayday. Around about midday on Saturday, when he was taking a bit of a break from trying to call Merauke, an Australian voice came over the radio.

'This is a coastal surveillance plane. We have been monitoring your calls. We will be over your position in approximately thirty minutes.'

This had me stunned for a minute, then I said to Raja, 'If they recognise us as Intruder, which they are obviously looking for by now, we could be in a bit of a bother.'

'But they cannot touch us: we are in international waters,' Raja replied.

'Yes, you're right, the plane can't do anything, even if they send a boat,' I said. 'There is no way they can make us get off because it could create a lot of ill feeling with the Indonesians. They don't want any vibes like this, or bad publicity.'

'No, it was supposed to be a very quiet operation, and the less people who know about it the better,' Raja said.

'Well,' I said, 'we are going to have to try and fool them that you're just an Indonesian silly enough to go out fishing in this weather, who has the boat stop under him. I'll have to cover up the name Intruder on the transom.'

I took a doona off one of the bunks in the cabin and hung it over the stern. Luckily, it was white, so I hoped from the air it wouldn't be so noticeable. Then I found a small tin of white paint, leaned over the side – a precarious position – and managed to oblit-



te two numbers of the registration. Some missing were better than none. I knew it wouldn't stand close scrutiny, but from the air you wouldn't get the full number. I'd just finished when I heard the one. I jumped back in the cabin with the two children.

Raja was on deck and I said to him, 'When they fly over, Raj, wave up at them. Wave and make things look normal.'

The fishing rods were sticking in their rod holders, so it just looked as he said: he was out for a day's fishing and had engine trouble. The plane came in very low and circled.

The radio started up again, 'This is Coastwatch calling Penceroboh. Calling Penceroboh. Do you read me?'

I called out to Raja to come back in and answer them. The operator asked the same questions: 'Have you enough food? Are you in any danger of sinking? What assistance do you need?' Raja looked at me.

'Raj, just ask them can they notify the authorities in Merauke?'

Raja thought for a couple of seconds and then he said, 'This is Penceroboh, Penceroboh. Coastwatch, do you read?'

Then she came back on. 'Yes, can we help you?'

'Yes. Could you notify Merauke, Irian Jaya, of my situation? I was supposed to meet a friend, and he is waiting there for me. If you could do this he would then organise someone to come out and help.'

'Very well, Penceroboh. Very well, Penceroboh. We will notify Merauke. We will notify Merauke.'

With that they signed off, did one more circuit, and then headed off in a northwest direction towards Merauke. I thought, 'That's one for the book. I didn't think they would fly off to Indonesia. I thought their radio would have been able to reach.' An hour later the radio came to life again.

'Penceroboh. Penceroboh. This is Coastwatch. We will be over your position in approximately ten minutes.'

They circled once and then, 'We have flown near Merauke and notified the Merauke authorities. We have given your position and told Merauke that you are in need of assistance. This is all we can do for the moment, Penceroboh. I wish you the best of luck and hope everything goes well for you.'

With that they signed off and flew towards the Australian coast. I thought to myself, 'This really takes the cake: the Coastwatch surveillance plane helping a man abduct his children out of Australia. They couldn't have got the news, or it hadn't filtered through to them, or they hadn't been asked to watch for any strange boats or anything unusual regarding boats in their area.' Half an hour after the Coastwatch plane left we had a call from Canberra Air Sea Rescue, the main coordinating body in Australia. Raja said he needed help, but the Indonesian authorities had been notified and they should be sending a vessel out to assist him into Merauke.

The Canberra Air-Sea Rescue guy said, 'The Australian Navy patrol boat Dubbo is in your area and we are diverting her to stand-by in case you need to abandon your boat. The weather forecast for your area is not good. We understand the seas are bad and the winds are high.'

Raja looked at me and said, 'What do we do now Bryan?'

'We're in deep shit now, Raj,' I promptly replied. 'If that boat comes alongside us they are going to know. I mean, we can refuse them entry on board as we are in international waters, but with the situation we are in in seas like this and with a dead motor, if we refused help, even if they wanted to send an engineer aboard, they would know there was something very suspicious going on. And that blanket over the name at the back won't fool those guys, not down at sea level. I'd imagine they'd have had some sort of notification to be on the lookout for vessels on the northern coast. I really think, Raj, that if they get here, the game is up. What they can do, I don't know. They can't board us, and they can't arrest us, but they can stand by. If an Indonesian boat comes to assist us, they could demand we be put in Dubbo's custody because they'd be caught out in an international incident. The Indonesians would have no choice but to say, "You take them. We were just out here to help." And that'd be the end of it. Dubbo'd take us and the children back; the children going back to their mother, and you and I'd land in jail for a few years.'

'How do we stop them coming?' Raja asked, looking desperate after my little speech.

'The best thing we can do is wait an hour. They aren't going to be here for three. Get back on the radio then, and you must sound convincing, Raja, put a little bit of happiness and relief in your voice and tell him your motor started. Under your own power you are now heading for Merauke. Thank Rescue for their assistance. Say, "I shall require no help." Just keep repeating that and they'll pick it up.'

We waited an hour by which time it was midday and we started sending out the call we had rehearsed earlier. It only took a few minutes before we had Canberra Air-Sea Rescue.

They asked Raja to confirm, and he said, 'Yes, my motor is running again. I am under my own power and heading for Merauke. Everything is OK now. Thank you for your help.'

'Best of luck, Penceroboh. We shall redivert Dubbo back to normal patrol. Best of luck,' replied Canberra.

With that they signed off, and we sighed a great sigh of relief. Raja was smiling all over his face. 'We have done it! We have done it! We will not be meeting with the Australian boat!

By mid-afternoon the wind had dropped considerably. We settled down again for another night, approximately ninety nautical miles to the west of our planned rendezvous point with the Indonesian boat, and still drifting northwest at a very rapid rate. According to my reckoning, sometime on the Sunday night or Monday morning we'd come ashore on the south coast of Irian Jaya towards the area known as False Cape. We sat there and weathered it out that Saturday.

'We're not going to use the radio for a while, Raja, because batteries are very low. We'll start calling as soon as we're inside Indonesian waters, and we'll call constantly until we get a response or the batteries die out.'

He seemed a little brighter now the weather had abated, but he still looked like death warmed up. The two children? Marvellous: not a squeak out of them. They were now able to come out from under the table and sit up. I prepared some toast, beans, and cocoa for us. It was the first food I'd had for a while, but I needed sleep even more than I needed food as I was working on sheer will power.

As we came into darkness again on Saturday night the sea dropped considerably.

'If the weather doesn't blow up again we'll be all right,' I said to Raja, 'but we're not out of the watery woods yet. Our next biggest problem is when we come ashore. With no power and no anchor, we'll be at the mercy of the sea. The way our luck's running, it could be on a reef.'

'We'll just have to hope for the best,' Raja replied.

'Hope doesn't do a lot for you when you're in a drifting boat,' I said.

I was getting tired and testy. I couldn't remember when I'd last had a good sleep. Under such circumstances it's not always possible to be as polite as you'd like. It was relatively calm so I spent the night up on the flying bridge with the binoculars, constantly scanning, hoping I'd spot a fishing boat. The next morning, Sunday, the sea had come down to metre high swells and we busied ourselves tidying up the boat. Shah helped me clean the galley section, the sink, and the stove and Iddin helped me on deck. Raja tidied up around the cabin and then sat at the galley table studying the drift of the boat and tracking it on the chart. It was a comparatively pleasant day. I did lift the engine hatch to look at the fuel bowl. There was fuel in it, but it was only about half full. This didn't register in my mind: why it should be half full? The fuel that was there was clear. Why? I thought at the back of my mind somewhere, 'Maybe, with the rough handling of the boat, it's lost it out of the fuel bowl?' I knew I couldn't do anything anyway because the two batteries were as flat as a tack: barely enough to run the radio. I had to wait until we got ashore before I could look at it. Late afternoon on the Sunday, Raja informed me that we were inside Indonesian territorial waters.

'Get on the radio, Raj, and start calling, and keep calling, until the battery goes out,' I said.

He grabbed the handpiece and started: 'Merauke. Merauke. Merauke. This is Penceroboh. Penceroboh. We are drifting.'

He gave our position, which was accurate to a few metres, and repeated the message over and over, with still no reply from Merauke.

wondered what the Australian authorities were thinking while they monitored the transmission? The last they had heard of us we were under power and heading to Merauke. Next we were approximately 50 nautical miles west of Merauke and about to go on the beach at southern Irian Jaya.

It amazed me, and still does to this day, that we got away with what we did: in and out of Weipa harbour many times; Raja walking around Weipa making phone calls. Even Coastwatch's observer couldn't have been very well informed on her types of boats. Anybody with half a brain would've been able to look down at the Intruder and see that she was a cabin cruiser of the more luxurious type. The registration on both sides was obviously in the Australian fashion of boat registration. I would have thought she would've become immediately suspicious when some Indonesian fisherman said that he was just out for a day's fishing in such a vessel. The only boats along that coast from those fishing villages wouldn't be of the calibre of the Intruder. They would have been just wooden canoe-type boats with sails on them. I guess Coastwatch doesn't put much training into their observers as to types of boats and identification, but maybe they will in the future.

On Sunday Raja was on the radio constantly giving the update of our position. I thought, 'No answer. Don't they have a radio? Aren't they listening any more? Have Raj's Indonesian friends assumed we're lost? Or don't they care? Maybe they don't want to answer in case they alert somebody else. Maybe they don't want that "somebody else" to know they're helping us, or are in on the plot?' But at that stage I had a little bit more to worry about. Night fell that Sunday and we were approximately thirty nautical miles off the coast. Our rate of drift had slowed because the sea was slight and the wind had dropped. But by my calculations it'd still be mid-morning to noon the next day before we beached. Once again I spent a sleepless night. That close to the coast I didn't want to miss any opportunity of picking up help from a fishing boat, or any boat that was passing along the coast. I sat up on the flying bridge with a large, handheld lantern. Intermittently during the night I'd stand up to get as much height as I could, and flash the light 360 degrees. I

did that for several minutes, stopped to see if I got any response, then waited another hour to do it again. I repeated that operation all night, without success, but I guess it was a very lonely piece of coast.

By daybreak Monday morning I could hardly keep my eyes open, but at 7 o'clock I could use them to just see the faint haze outline of the shore of Irian Jaya. I told the children we'd soon be on the beach and they'd be able to play. I just hoped there was no reef between us and the beach. The water was dark, muddy brown from the outflow of the Sungai Mariahe. It stretched for many kilometres out to sea and we couldn't see what was below the surface. We pulled all the spare life jackets together and tied them in a bundle to use to get the children ashore if we struck bad ground before we got to the beach. It would work quite well with their life jackets on and that large pad of floatation. I drifted off into a very deep sleep and I don't really know what time it was when I woke. I looked over the gunwale and there it was: a rippled, sandy beach with palm trees and greenery, just like something out of a travel brochure. It took me a few minutes to realise what had happened. I sat there for a while just staring at the trees and the beach. We had drifted in and grounded very gently on a sand bar, about 200 metres off the beach. I continued to sit there savouring the total lack of movement, and the all-pervading quiet.

But the idyllic coast I was staring at was also seemingly uninhabited. There was no settlement whatsoever marked on the charts for this piece of real estate: the Crocodile Coast. I hoped like hell that the residents wouldn't be exclusively reptilian. I was sitting there contemplating what to do – whether to get the children off and wade ashore, or swim ashore first – when I looked up at the beach again, and saw movement. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I rubbed my eyes and sat up. There was definitely movement. I went across the boat and leaned on the portside gunwale. I stared at this movement which, because of the foliage in the background, was a bit hard to define. When it did define itself I was amazed. It was a man. He was walking on the water towards the boat. I couldn't believe it. My brain couldn't absorb what I was seeing. I thought I was tripping out again, hallucinating. He raised his arm and waved.

I waved back and called to the cabin, 'Raj! Come here! Quick! Raj!'

I was still standing looking out towards the man when I heard Raja stumbling down next to me.

'What's wrong, Bryan? What is it? What's the matter? Bryan?' Raja blurted.

'Look! There's a man! There,' I pointed.

Raja came and stood beside me.

He looked, and then rubbed his eyes too, and looked again, and said, 'It is.'

'Raja. Do you see what he's doing? Raj, he's walking on the water! He's walking on top of the water!'

I couldn't believe it. I stood there, clutching the gunwale, squinting, trying to fathom it. And then I saw another little figure behind him! It was the figure of a child.

Raja said, quite calmly, 'It must be a local out fishing.'

I thought, 'You beauty! At least we're not on uninhabited coast.'

Then my brain switched back to the walking on water.

'Raj, mate. How does he do that?' I guess it must have sounded silly. Raja started to laugh.

'Maybe they're gods,' he said, and that had us both laughing, though I wasn't completely sceptical. My brain still couldn't make any other sense of it.

I said, probably sounding a bit desperate, 'There's got to be an explanation for this.'

I kept staring at the man and the child. The child was waving vigorously, and jumping up and down. I thought, 'Walking on water's one thing; jumping up and down is another.' My tired old brain must have finally reached a point where it could do its job. It suddenly realised that with the tide out the water must have been very shallow. It was a very flat beach. Those 'gods' were walking in water maybe an inch deep. They stopped about a hundred yards from the boat and didn't seem to want to come any nearer.

'Come here! We need help!' I shouted. I turned to Raja and said, 'Try talking to them in Indonesian and see if he understands.'

So Raja rattled off something in Indonesian. A big smile broke out on the face of the local and he shouted something back.

Raja translated for me: 'He said that he will help us, but there is a channel that is deep between him and us. He doesn't want to cross this channel. His village is just behind the beach, Bryan. I don't know how big it is, but he said he would go for help.'

'That's a relief, Raj. Even if it's small it may have some form of communications. We might get some help,' I replied, beaming at Raja. We were elated. 'Kids! We'll soon be off the boat!'

They had come out on deck and had seen the man and the child. They were quite excited that they were going to meet the local people. We celebrated with tea and cocoa and generally made everything shipshape. While we were doing this, and just being happy about things which was the first day in quite a while we had anything to be happy about, I noticed the boat give a bit of a lurch. The next thing, we were free and floating again! The tide was on the turn, and heading back in.



We were carried, very swiftly too, across the river mouth, and put up alongside the mangroves on the west. Within half an hour there were twenty canoes and a hundred-odd people. Some had walked from the village and were on the point of land opposite us on the beach, and the rest were in canoes. There were several on the boat, lashing lines together to make them long enough to stretch across to the people on the sand so they could pull as well. Within a few minutes we were around the sandy spit and into the river. It hooked back on the west side and was a sheltered little bay with palm trees.

We passed the two children over the side to the fishermen and, o my, what a fuss was made of them. The local children went mad and the adults wanted to hug and kiss them. The children loved it. All the fishermen wanted to come aboard the boat and have a look. It was a carnival! I indicated to one guy that I needed something to drink, some water. I was having difficulty making him understand, so Raja spoke to him in Indonesian. He immediately left the boat. Raja commented that all of these people must understand Indonesian, and one even spoke a little English. He pointed him out to me: a large, strongly-built guy squatting on the transom. He was dressed in khaki shorts and t-shirt. I approached him and asked him if he spoke English.

'Very, very little,' he said.

'Where did you learn?' I asked

'Seven year on merchant ship. Engine room. Me engineer,' was his reply.

His name was Rahaou. The man who had run off to get me water returned with a fresh coconut. It was the best thing I have ever tasted in my entire life. All the beer in the world was nothing compared to that coconut. Long may coconut trees grow on shipwreck coasts! While I was drinking and recovering a bit, the children were on the beach having a marvellous time. Raja was talking to the headman of the village: a white-haired, dignified man.

'Bryan, the headman tells me that there are communications at the village,' Raja said.

'You'd better go down there, Raj, if he'll take you, and try and

make contact with the authorities. I'll stay with the boat and the children.'

He talked with the headman a little more. 'Yes, he will take me in the canoe to the kampong.'

'OK. Let's hope you get something sorted out. I'll wait here with the kids until you return.'

With that the headman and Raja, with a couple more guys to paddle, jumped in a canoe and headed off up the river. The children played ecstatically on the beach with the other kids for most of the afternoon. They certainly behaved as if they belonged, Iddin and Shahirah. You would have thought they were just two village kids the way they fitted in. It was pretty remarkable, I thought, for two kids brought up in the middle of a big Western city like Melbourne.

Towards late afternoon Rahaou came to me and said, 'The women want to take children back to kampong. Their father already there.'

'How far is it?' I asked. I didn't fancy a 10 mile jog through the bush. I was a little weary.

Rahaou said, 'Short walk through jungle,' and smiled, pointing to the bush.

'Yes, I suppose it's alright if their father is there. They can go with you, yes.'

In a few minutes most of the villagers took the children - everyone was laughing and shouting and carrying on - up around the beach, and disappeared round the point. I was left with Rahaou and a couple of others who stayed to keep me company. The jungle hummed with silence after the women and kids left. I made a pot of coffee and shared it with the guys while we waited, and did a bit of target shooting with my little collapsible .22 rifle, to keep us entertained. About dusk some guys arrived with long poles and ropes to tow the boat upriver. On the way, waving my spotlight around, I was instructed by Seadog, as I had begun to call Rahaou, much to his pleasure, to shoot at crocodiles. Not that I wanted to hit a croc - I didn't think a .22 would make much difference - just to scare them away. The guys wading through the mud didn't seem too concerned either way; they were all laughing and yelling. About half an

our later we arrived at the village, and as soon as I stepped ashore I hadn't gone half a dozen paces my legs buckled under me and I went down on my side. It was going to take a little while to get my head and legs back. I proceeded, with the help of some of the bigger boys, through the village to the headman's house. It had one very large, central room with sleeping beds with mosquito nets. There were several rooms going off this room and as I entered I noticed there were quite a few people at one end sitting around a large table. In one bed the two children were sound asleep, and Raja was in the next bed, also sound asleep. I was shown a bed, lay down, and joined my companions in slumberland.

An instant later, or so it seemed, it was daylight. It didn't seem that the people around the table had moved. Once they noticed I was awake they all started talking excitedly. Tea soon arrived, and after that I sat on the verandah, surrounded by the villagers who were most curious, very kind and generous.

Raja soon joined me, and said, 'They are going to take us to Kimaan, and from there I will go on to Merauke with the children. When we get to Kimaan I will ask them to radio Merauke and have them send two new batteries for your boat. They have fuel in Kimaan. They will bring it back here with you in a few days and you can fix your boat and return to Australia.'

The two children had woken up by this time, and were running around with the headman's children having a fair old game. Shah had a water pistol that held a large amount of water and shot a long stream. The village children thought this was marvellous. They had never seen anything like this before and were running all over the place with Iddin and Shah squirting them. I left them at it and went on board to have a look at the engine. I noticed again that the fuel bowl was half empty. Then it sort of hit me: we'd run out of fuel. But I couldn't work out how. I'd seen Raja pumping the fuel. I got the pump from where it was stowed, put one end into one of the extra fuel tanks alongside the gunwale, and the other into the filler tap of the main tank and started pumping. I hadn't made half a dozen strokes when I realised the problem: the hose had split right in the goose neck and was pumping mostly air, not fuel. Most of the

fuel was spraying onto the deck. Raja, as sick as he was, hadn't noticed this. I just sat back on the tank and couldn't believe it, but there wasn't much I could do about it. I removed the two flat batteries to take them to Kimaan with me to see if I could get them charged, as well as get two new ones. I thought I might need extra batteries at a later date. I still had to get back to Australia. I went back to the house and I told Raja about the fuel.

He didn't say anything for a few seconds, and then, simply, 'But I pumped fuel.'

'Raja, you weren't to know in your condition, and with the weather. The main thing is we are here and safe.'

'I am very sorry, Bryan,' Raja said, looking quite sad. He was obviously thinking the same as me: all that drifting didn't have to happen.

After a brief rest we set about making preparations to leave, which involved a canoe journey upriver. The headman, who was a trapper, had two small crocodiles tied to a pole, very much alive, to take to Kimaan to sell along with bags of other stuff. We were given more tea and more fruit, and then set off to the river bank with all the villagers following us and shouting farewells. They were a very hospitable people. We loaded everything into the big canoe and set off down the village stream to the main Mariahe river: a big, open stretch of water a couple of kilometres wide in some places. Although we were close to the bank we weren't close enough to get any shade from the trees and after a while the children were starting to suffer from the heat. We made them cover up as best they could. We arrived at Kimaan late afternoon. It was a well laid-out town with proper streets and a dock, lying some four kilometres off the river, down a little tributary. It's all swampy jungle around but Kimaan is on a raised piece of ground and covers an area maybe three kilometres square, with a little air strip and cultivated vegetables and rice. A bit of deer shooting goes on in the jungle. It was a neat place with two wharfs, a little dilapidated but serviceable. It has a population of a couple of thousand and is the seat of district government. There's a police post, and a Catholic mission and school run by a Portuguese priest called Father Joe.

When we arrived it turned out that friends of Raja's had already arrived to help, from Merauke, so he stayed with them. I bedded down with Father Joe in the church, and it was good to have a shower and clean up after all those days at sea. The next day, after a good rest and a meal, we met with Raja's friends who said they had been in contact with Merauke to arrange things for us. A plane would arrive the next day. It was a local internal flight that came once a week to Kimaan. Raja and the two children would fly out to Merauke and then make their way home. Spare batteries were arriving on the plane, and the others I had brought with me were charging at Father Joe's. I took the children for a walk that afternoon and explored the town. The streets ran in parallels and they had a big central grassed area which I think they used for football, but I never saw them play any. I bought tinned foods and bottled waters and all that I was going to take back downriver with me to the boat. I got the kids trolleys and different things. Some local children tagged along and they all got sweets. Everybody was quite happy. Prior to Raja and the kids leaving we had a dinner at his friends' house and everything was festive and jolly. The children had a marvellous time playing with the local kids.

After the children had gone to bed Raja and I sat on the verandah and talked. He told me that he had arranged for fuel for my boat in Kimaan and as long as the weather prevailed I could get back to Australia. He urged me to return with him to Malaysia, but I really wanted to get back to Australia, and I thought I may well have a go in the boat. It was my only excuse, after all. If I suddenly turned up in Malaysia it would be a little hard to explain to the Australian police, should they be looking for me as well. My future was a little uncertain at that moment. I went back to the church mission and bedded down. I gave Father Joe a donation of \$AUS100 (RM200) because he wouldn't accept any money for the fuel. He was a good man who had worked hard in that outpost. I also fulfilled his request to me when I got back to Australia: I sent him some classical music tapes. The next day Raja and the kids were flying out. I heard the plane come in just before noon and shortly after that I saw a big group of people coming down the track to go to the airstrip, and

with them was Raja, Iddin and Shahirah. I stepped out into the track and said goodbye to Iddin and Shah and told them to be good and to take care of their father. They said they would and gave me a big kiss and a hug, and thanked me for what I had done. They trotted off with all the little friends they had made, but Raja stopped. The rest of the crowd had moved ahead.

He shook my hand and said, 'Bryan, are you sure you won't come with us?'

'I can't, Raj. What would Sheila say? I've got to get back soon or she'll be furious!'

Raja grinned and said, 'OK, Bryan, but keep in touch. We have been through a lot together.'

'We have, Raja, and it's not over yet. Will you do one thing for me, please?'

'Anything, Bryan. What is it?'

'If I don't make it back to Australia, if something happens on the way will you please look after my family?'

'Of course, Bryan. I promise you I will, but let us hope that all goes well.'

With that he turned and walked away to catch up with the group of people. I sat on the steps, all of a sudden feeling very lonely now that he was gone with the children. After a while I heard the plane start up and take off and it flew overhead and away.

next job was to get home, and some of that had already been arranged for me by Raja before he left. I had to try and return to my pa, but first I had to get back to the boat and get it going! A guy named Malo, a diesel mechanic, one of Raja's friends' friends, came to see me to help with the boat, and assist with navigation downriver. He helped me to pack and packed what few belongings I had - just a t-shirt and a pair of shorts and the stores that I had bought. Just on dark we pulled off from the dock.

All the villagers gave me a rousing farewell. It was really touching and away we went down the little narrow section of water all surrounded by trees, out to the main Mariahe River. We canoed through a very rough river, and part of the night we spent huddled against the reed banks being eaten alive by mosquitos. It was just break-dawn when we came to the final stretch of river, which is comparatively wide near the kampong, and we could open up the mosquitos and travel a bit faster for the last half kilometre. By the time we reached the village I could see Intruder - Penceroboh - was still moored in the centre of the river.

Seadog was sitting on the stern, keeping guard. When he saw us he started a big commotion: waving and shouting. Within minutes, before we had even tied up alongside my boat, the whole village was on the riverbank, cheering and clapping. When I started the motor there was a great cheer and I left with much more commotion. I motored downstream and arrived as the sun rose at the tributary's entrance to the Mariahe. There were two or three hundred people on both sides of the estuary, all waiting for a coastal steamer, the Emprit, which was heading to Merauke.

The man who'd come with me and guided me, Malo, said, 'I must get back, Mr Bryan.'

'OK, Malo. Thank you for your help. You have been very kind. I appreciate it,' I said, and I meant it.

He'd told me the previous day that he came from an island further east, around Ambon, and his wife and children were there. He just worked at the mission because there was no work on the island and wanted to go back as he hadn't seen his family for two years.

Just before he left I gave him a \$AUS100 bill and told him, 'This is for you, Malo, because you have been so kind to me. It will help you get back to see your family. It is a lot of money.'

He had tears coming down his cheeks and was stuck for words. A hundred dollars to me, sitting out in the middle of nowhere, wasn't much help, and it was going to do him a lot of good. I waited until about 10 am, then upped anchor and went out into midstream of the Mariahe. I had a letter in Indonesian from Raja's friends to give to the captain. My plan was to follow the steamer to Merauke and if I got into trouble, which the way my luck had been running, was likely, at least I'd have somebody there. I just drifted, waiting for the steamer. It wasn't hot, and was away from the mosquitoes. About 11 am, way up the river (the view was unobstructed for many kilometres) the Emprit came into sight. Just before noon she came across from her side of the river, the east bank, and dropped anchor opposite the tributary that leads into Kimaan. I passed the letter up to a deckhand and told him it was for the captain. He understood and disappeared. I laid off a couple of hundred metres and after a little while somebody came out on the bridge and waved at me, beckoning me to come in. So I tied up and went on board.

The Chief Engineer met me and I was taken to the bridge and met the captain. I told them all I wanted to do was follow in his wake all the way to Merauke.

'Yes. You can do that. Is your boat ready for the journey?' asked the Engineer.

I assured him it was. They gave me a mobile radio tuned to their frequency. Whenever I needed to contact them I could use it.



'We will be underway in about three hours, as soon as passengers and cargo have been taken on. Will you be ready then?' he asked.

Of course. I went back to *Intruder* and cast off. I motored three hundred metres, cut the engines and drifted for a couple of hours. There was still a lot of activity on the ship when the radio they had given me came to life and they asked me to come aboard.

On board, the Chief Engineer said, 'Mr Bryan, the Captain realises that you must get to Merauke, but we have just had a weather report and it is not good. It will be a very rough crossing from the south of the *Mariahe* to Merauke. Near gale force winds. Your boat will not stand that.'

'Not into it. But if I was to follow in your wake, on your lead, I might make it.'

'No', he said. 'It is too risky. The Captain has decided that you will come with us.'

'Look, no way. I'm not going to leave my boat. I've got to stay with my boat.'

He smiled. 'No, no. We will take your boat too.'

They then set about clearing four hundred people off the midships deck and sticking them all over the place. It wasn't a big hold, only about 10 m long. I went back on board *Intruder* and made ready to lift. They rigged two big slings made of thick nylon, put a spreader bar in between the slings, hooked it up to the jumbo crane and lowered it over the side. Four of the crew swarmed down and worked the sling over the bows and stern. The crane picked *Intruder* out of the water and swung it inboard. She was as snug as a bug in a rug. They covered up the hatches again and as soon as this was done the people staked their claim to their little piece of ship and settled in again as if nothing had happened. The whole procedure took about an hour. It was marvellous. I thought, 'Well, I'm going to travel in style!'

And I did too, because the Chief Engineer insisted I take his cabin. It was a great feeling to know that these seaman were helping another seaman. That's what it boiled down to: no matter what our race or creed, I was a man of the sea and so were they. They under-

stood my plight and were still trying to come to grips with the fact that I'd reached Irian Jaya in such a small boat. It was an uneventful trip downriver, but once we cleared the mouth of the Mariahe and started pushing into those southeasterlies, it was a nightmare! The *Emprit* had a big, blunt bow and took those seas like a hammer hitting an anvil: boom! boom! It vibrated right through the ship and top speed was six knots. I swear sometimes we were going astern. It took twenty-four hours to reach Merauke. We finally arrived about 8.30 in the evening on Saturday. Those boys were very kind to me and were true seamen. I thanked them very much for their help and wished them all the best. The *Intruder* was unloaded, and I cast off, motored downstream and dropped the anchor, a gift from Raja's friends. I decided to wait until the next day before I tried to leave.

I was up with the sun the next morning and bounced so happily out of bed I nearly put myself in the drink. I was leaving! I started the engines as soon as I was dressed, and downed a cup of coffee while they warmed up. When I reached the sea the weather conditions were good: 5 to 10 knot southeasterly breeze and the seas very slight. I started to think my first real thoughts about what waited for me back in Australia. 'I've been away since 14 July and it's now 2 August. That's quite a long time. I guess there would've been a search out for me by now? But how would I know?' I went along nicely for the first hour, sitting on around 15 knots, but over the next forty minutes it developed into a strong blow. I slowed down in the heavy sea and thought, 'If it doesn't get any worse than this I'll keep going.' But of course, it wasn't to be. The wind increased over the next half hour to better than 40 knots. The seas came up to an unbelievable six metre cresting. I took a hell of a battering, coming off the top of some of them and dropping into the trough. I was sure the boat would split in two and I knew if this kept up I'd never get back to Australia; I was barely making headway.

Reluctantly, I made the decision to go back to Merauke. I waited for what I thought was a bigger gap between the waves, and in the trough I fed her some gas, turned round smartly and set course for Merauke. I'd been two hours going out and it took about forty minutes to get back. I was back in Merauke in shallow water about mid-

There was a trawler in port, the Dankov, full of Russians, which had been arrested for not paying entry fees. They were waiting for their company to send them money so they could leave. I suppose they're still there. I went aboard and introduced myself and spent a pleasant afternoon drinking whisky. I've seen some hard drinking in other days, but those guys were really seasoned. They'd been there for a long time and had sold off most of the boat in exchange for drinks and food. But they were good company.

The next day I motored out to the mouth of the river early in the morning. Sure enough, that southeasterly wind was blowing and I ventured out four kilometres from the mouth. It was worse, so I came back and tied up to the Dankov again. While I was out one day I radioed Australia, an air-sea rescue place on the south coast somewhere, and asked them to tell my brother Gordon that I was alright. The operator said they'd pass the message on. Eventually, after a few more attempts to leave over the next few days, never succeeding because of that wind, I decided that I would have to sell the boat and leave by air. After much negotiating I finally sold it for about US\$8,000 (RM16,000) to a Chinese merchant. He drove a hard bargain, but there wasn't much I could do about it. He knew I wanted to leave, and he was the only guy around with any money or interest in the boat. While this deal was underway I rang a friend of mine in Perth and asked him to contact my wife and tell her that I was alright. He told me he'd heard I was in trouble and my brother Gordon was in Weipa organising an air search party for me.

'Can you get in touch with Gordon and tell him to back off?' I said. 'I sent a message over the radio that I am alright. He mustn't have got it.'

'I'll try,' said my friend. 'But he's in Weipa right now.'

I hung up and thought that at least my wife would now definitely get confirmation that I was alright, and maybe she would get in contact with Gordon and stop him looking for me. I was feeling pretty low after speaking with my friend, knowing that Gordon was circling around the countryside searching for me.

Finally I flew out of Merauke, after much bargaining to get tickets, to Jakarta, and met with some people there who suggested

rather strongly I fly to Barcelona rather than go back to Australia, to let things cool off. I changed the money I had left, about SAUS6,000 (RM12,000), into US dollars and flew out to Barcelona, via Schiphol in the Netherlands, but at Schiphol I changed my mind and my ticket and flew to Glasgow, then drove on to Edinburgh. I stayed there for a few weeks, and was in touch with friends in Perth. They said I should come home and face the music, but I was worried about my family. Some of the people I met in Indonesia had suggested I needed to stay away until the dust settled. I thought I should take that seriously. I have relatives in the States, so I went to Florida and worked around the area until the Australian Federal Police caught up with me. I wanted to come home earlier and had even bought a ticket to Perth via Bangkok, but at the last minute I got cold feet and stayed. I was finally nabbed because of going through Immigration at Miami. I'd already been out of the country once, via West Palm Beach, to renew my visa. But Miami has a focus on illegal immigration because of the Caribbean connection, and their computers must have picked me up.

Meanwhile my family had been harassed by the Australian Federal Police. My wife and brother had been arrested, on Christmas eve, on some trumped-up charges that were later dropped, all in an effort to lure me back. I was pretty much relieved when the police did catch up with me, in the middle of March 1993. I wasn't in the run for my own sake, but for my family's. By the time I was caught the heat had cooled, so it was time to return. I didn't contest the extradition proceedings in the States, and after a few weeks in custody in West Palm Beach I was escorted to Australia. My mate Al was there to support me in court, and he said things about me that showed what a true friend he was. I pleaded guilty in Melbourne and was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment, but nine months to serve, and nine months off for good behaviour. I was really in the fast lane. It was unheard of in the State of Victoria's legal history: charged on Sunday night to appear in court that same night, remanded until Wednesday, and in court on Thursday. From there I went to Pentridge Prison, the main jail in Melbourne, for assessment, and then to Loddon Prison, at Castlemaine, a small town out

Melbourne. Pentridge was a very nasty place, and I had a run-in with some of the more notorious inmates, and was very glad to be transferred to Loddon. It was very modern and, as far as prisons go, very comfortable. I lived in a cottage with three other low security prisoners, and we cooked our own meals. We weren't locked up until 8 o'clock at night.

The day I was released my wife and son were there to meet me, and believe me, it was quite a reunion. I am just trying to get on with my life now. My wife has stood by me, which I am thankful for. The whole family has been very supportive. All my friends in Western Australia have been very good, and now it's time to put all this behind me and try and get on with my life. I took Sheila to Terengganu to see Raja and the kids, just so she could see for herself that they were alright, but I'll let Raja tell that part of the story.

I don't make any excuses for what I did. I did what I thought was right. I'd probably do it again, but I'd do it different the next time: I'd make sure I wasn't caught. I believe the Australian government broke the law. I believe the Australian Family Court broke the law. Australia is a signatory to the Hague Convention which stipulates that children in disputed custody, from foreign countries, that are brought to Australia must be returned to their country of origin. Why wasn't that done in this case? Those children were born in Malaysia to a Malaysian father. They were born under the Islamic religion, with both parents embracing that religion. It was wrong to even try to keep them in Australia. They were denied their birthright as members of the royal family because their mother didn't like the restrictive lifestyle. She abducted the children from Malaysia under a pretext, knowing full well she was not going to return. Who was the criminal? Not I, I don't think so. All I did was try to set the record right. That lady did the deed first by removing the children from the family and bringing them to Australia. The Australian authorities should have returned them to the jurisdiction of the Malaysian government. If that had been done none of this would ever have happened.





# PART THREE

Told by Raja Bahrin



and now I take over the story from Bryan. People say a long period of contemplation is good for one's soul. I certainly had plenty of time to contemplate life the four days we were adrift at sea. I could never really sleep at night in the boat, so when everyone had dozed off, I would clamber out onto the deck and observe the dark open sea. I feared that while all of us were asleep, some pirates would climb on board and surprise us.

Occasionally I would flash the hand-held searchlight, hoping a passing vessel would spot us. It was important to think positive and keep hoping help would come our way soon. Sometimes I could swear I heard the sound of engines approaching us and I would stare into the night expecting the welcome sight of some ship or vessel. One's mind certainly plays convincing tricks when one has been adrift for a couple of days.

In the dark lonely nights I often wondered if I would ever see the rest of my family again. The face of my youngest daughter then, Aina, kept appearing in my mind. She was only one year old when I last left her at the airport with my mother, my wife, Badrul and Ari. Perhaps some people might find it hard to understand why I left them to take such a risk to 'save' Iddin and Shahirah. To me, it is all a matter of principle and my sense of responsibility as their father. Even if I didn't make it back, my family in Terengganu would still be in a much better position than Iddin and Shahirah, who were neglected and not receiving proper love and care. I suppose this was when a man just had to say to himself, 'A man has got to do what a man has got to do!', and hope God would be on his side. The fact that Iddin and Shahirah had been taken away from me for seven

years does not diminish my sense of responsibility and love for them.

At the same time I used to wonder during those long nights about what Iddin had said to me when he became angry with me for intervening during his disagreement with Shahirah on the boat. Did Iddin really hate me? Had the seven years of Jacqueline's propaganda and cultural cleansing conditioned Iddin to hate me? That rare outburst by Iddin made me think hard. Shahirah's kick on my shin and uttering of 'You're not my real father!' also haunted me. If I was not her 'real' father, did Jacqueline's act of replacing my name with that of Gillespie's as Shahirah's surname make Iain Gillespie her real father now? The Gillespies certainly had a mind cleansing scheme well worked out to make my children disown me. Would these two children really be mine if we made it back to Malaysia?

But in God I had put my trust so far and I realised I should continue to do so. I had searched deep into my soul before deciding to bring them home and now I placed my trust in God that he would take care of all of us.

When we landed on Irian Jaya and I saw Iddin and Shahirah jumping ashore and playing with the local kids even though they could not understand one another, I was convinced that they both knew they were getting closer to home. Iddin had tears in his eyes when we had to leave his friend of two days, Musa, as we prepared to make our way to Merauke. That he could relate so well to the locals was a very positive sign.

When we left Kimaan for Merauke I urged Bryan to come with us. He and I had been through an enormous amount together, and I wasn't convinced that it was going to be easy for him to return to Australia by boat. I talked to him about it, but he insisted he wanted to get back to Australia by sea. After all, Sheila would be worried about him! He was still more concerned about his wife than the police!

Iddin, Shahirah and I flew to Merauke, jammed into the light plane, and arrived to be greeted by the curious locals, with a reference from the people in Kimaan to assist us to return to Malaysia after our trauma on the high seas. My friends had arranged for people to help us, and they were very kind. We tried to sort out our

programme with the airline ticketing officer who was also very  
to a trio of shipwrecked travellers and I asked him to help us  
the first flight out. There were no direct flights to Malaysia, of  
e, so first we had to go to Jayapura. I told friends in Merauke  
Bryan would probably be coming to Merauke in his boat, and  
expect him. Before we flew out from Merauke I left a message for  
him in a letter, but he never got it. It just said I'd arranged things  
for him, which he knew anyway.

The kind and sympathetic friends we made in Merauke wanted  
us to stay longer but we couldn't. I wasn't going to feel safe until we  
got back in Kuala Terengganu. I was afraid that Australian or even  
Indonesian police might walk up to us at any moment and arrest us.  
I had no idea what kind of news was out about us by then, and the  
more we tarried in one place the more risky it became. Iddin and  
Ibrahim's hair and skin colour were quite light by comparison, so  
they were easily noticed. Fortunately the week at sea had tanned  
my skin, making them less noticeable, and I made sure they wore  
hats to hide their hair. Initially there were problems getting tickets,  
but they managed to squeeze us on a flight the next day. There were  
many people at the airport they were fighting for places. From  
Jayapura we went to Tamiaki, then Serebon and Ambon. We stopped  
overnight at the most at each place, though some were connecting  
flights. The kids thought it was the best trip in the whole world!  
They had never even been allowed near a plane when they were in  
Australia, and now they were flying in every sort imaginable, every  
day. On one leg, as the kids were trying out tongue twisters and  
jokes, we were noticed by an Australian pilot who was on the same  
flight. He later reported to the media what he had seen: relaxed,  
happy kids which was contrary to Jacqueline's claims that they had  
been drugged and kept against their will. The only times I had to  
urge them to do something against their will was in leaving the  
places we visited because they were in such high spirits after their  
adventures on the high seas, in the villages of Irian Jaya and the  
islands of the Indonesian archipelago! At Ambon we stayed over-  
night and from there we went west to Sulawesi, stopping at Ujung  
Kandang. There was no direct connecting flight so we had to wait

here another night until we caught a flight to Balikpapan on Kalimantan and worked our way up north to the northernmost town on the coast of Kalimantan, called Tarakan. The kids particularly liked this leg of the trip because they were fascinated by the local crafts and culture. They constantly wanted to collect souvenirs, and still they keep asking me when they can return to their favourite places in Indonesia. By now they well and truly knew that we were going to Malaysia to see their family. They became more and more excited as we got closer, though in the beginning they were a little frightened of Jacqueline's reaction. It was understandable, as they had been continuously 'brainwashed' for seven years to never think of Malaysia as their home, or of even going there for a holiday. Tarakan is very close to Sabah, the nearest main town. We didn't have passports, so I wanted to avoid going through Jakarta. I expected there was going to be a big hoo-ha and didn't want to be stopped. From Tarakan we went to Tawau in Sabah, by boat, smuggled across with no passports. That locale is shown as only one big island on many maps of the area between Tarakan and Tawau but there are thousands of little islands dotting the place, so it was quite easy to slip by unnoticed. The main island, Sebatik, is disputed territory between Malaysia and Indonesia. The night before we crossed into Malaysian territory, 24 July 1992, we were all so excited we couldn't sleep, and stayed up till well after midnight talking. Iddin especially was planning things he wanted to do in Malaysia, like camping in the jungle, fishing and sighting Malaysian tigers in the wild! At Tawau we caught a domestic flight to Kota Kinabalu and no longer needed passports. We were as good as home.

Sabah was the first chance I'd had to look at the papers. I had one sent up to our room in our hotel. The first thing I saw was a photo of my mother holding Iddin's traditional dress which he'd last worn when he was two and a half years old. I went down into the lobby and looked at all the other backdated papers that were lying around. The story was on the front pages every day. *The New Straits Times*, *Utusan Malaysia*, *Berita Harian*, you name it, it was everywhere. I didn't realise our story was that big. There was a lot of hoo-ha from politicians saying this, and other people saying that, and

ic opinion polls. Of course, Australia was making a lot of noise, about an evil Muslim prince stealing two Australian children. The media in Australia treated my case as if it happened in a vacuum, nothing happened before I decided to bring my kids home. It must have been too much trouble to properly research my story, to discuss the treatment I experienced at the hands of the Family Court, or to even mention it. I was simply portrayed as a fanatical, almost suicidal Muslim who impulsively took the law into his own hands. There was also a big diplomatic row, which came to a head at the ASEAN conference in Manila when the Australian Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, questioned the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Ali Alatas, whether the Indonesian government was sheltering me? It quickly became a diplomatic problem for Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia so I thought it was a bit risky to appear anywhere. If I was going to appear I wanted to wait until I got back to Malaysia.

Throughout the trip, and even in Sabah, I lay low. I shaved the rest of my beard off in Indonesia, though when I left Australia I didn't alter it because Jacqueline probably would have expected me to change it and told the police as much. But in Sabah nobody noticed me. The issue didn't become very big there. Perhaps the residents of Sabah are interested neither in Australian nor western Malaysian dramas? In West Malaysia the story was huge, I discovered upon my return. I rang my mother and wife briefly to tell them we were safe and on our way back, but I couldn't tell them where I was because their phones could have been tapped. I asked them to meet us in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday and Sunday because we would arrive either day. We tried to get a flight from Kota Kinabalu that night we got in, about 6 pm, but the next flight to Kuala Lumpur at 7 pm was booked out. The next available flight was the following afternoon, so we rested at a small hotel. The kids had been thoroughly enjoying the trip though it was hardly a pleasure jaunt for them, especially the flights across the sea and islands, the multitude of different, and very friendly people, and the trip in a small boat. It was a great introduction to the culture of Indonesia. They just wanted to keep on travelling, despite being keen to get home and see their parents and brothers and sisters!

Iddin, as we lay on the beds in the motel, said, in a dreamy sort of way, 'Abah, when we get to Terengganu, can we stay in Malaysia a bit longer than the school holidays?'

Before I had time to answer this most wonderful of questions, Shah said, 'Yeh! Can we stay longer?'

I said, 'Yeh, I suppose so. Yeh,' in a normal voice, though I was very pleased at these unexpected requests. I thought they would take a while to settle in, and possibly pine a bit for their mother. Obviously the excitement of the trip and the thought of seeing their relations was very strong. It was probably a relief for them to be away from Jacqueline's control, as well.

'But school's opening soon,' Iddin said. 'How can we miss it?'

'I'll take care of it,' I said. 'I'll write to Australia or whatever and sort it out. How long do you want to stay?'

'Can we stay until the end of the year?' Shahirah asked.

'The end of the school year? That will be about four months,' I replied.

'Can we? Can we?' they both chanted in unison. There was no talk of mum and no interest in ringing her. Away from her influence they quite happily, and of their own accord, forgot the rules that had been imposed upon them in order to keep them apart from their father. And they hadn't even met their grandmother and brother and sisters yet! It's incredible how things work out for the best. That was the funny part: they were a bit worried about school, not about their mother.

'What happens if we miss a lot of school? Can we go to school in Terengganu?' Iddin said after I'd agreed that they could stay until the end of the year.

'Yes, Abah, can we? What sort of schools do they have in Terengganu?' asked Shahirah.

'That'll be OK. I'll sort it out for you, and the schools are OK, just like normal schools. In the meantime, we'd better get some sleep in case we have to catch an early flight.'

I was still running on nervous energy, and at every opportunity slept. Like all kids, Iddin and Shahirah would try and stay awake forever unless they were prompted. While they were getting their

nas on I made a call and found out there was another flight available immediately because the flight that was supposed to take off at 8 o'clock had a problem with its hydraulics which had to be repaired. The passengers who were supposed to board that flight caught another flight through Kuching. Because that flight was delayed and there were a fair number of cancellations, there were seats available.

'OK, we'll take it, thank you,' I said, and we rushed to the airport.

We left about 11 am and there weren't many people aboard. I didn't want to attract too much attention so we sat in first class with two other people. We touched down at Kuala Lumpur at 4 am, Sunday. I was so happy to see Kuala Lumpur.

I looked down at the city as we landed and thought, 'I've never seen such beautiful lights in my life.'

We arrived in Kuala Lumpur – for me, at that time, the prettiest city in the whole world – 26 July 1992. We left Melbourne on 10 July, Weipa on 12 July, were a week at sea, so arrived Irian Jaya 19 July. Between 19 and 26 July we were in the air on our way to Kuala Lumpur! We went straight to meet my family. Everyone came to see us. They were worried because they hadn't known where we were. My mother was in tears, hugging the children. Iddin and Shahirah, being tired from the flight, were running about meeting everyone, and playing with their brothers, sisters and cousins.

The next morning I looked at the papers and we were still on the front pages. The ASEAN meeting in the Philippines was getting out of hand. There was tension between Australia, Indonesia and Malaysia.

'Where is this fugitive?' Gareth Evans asked the Indonesians and Malaysians.

They didn't know, but I was sure they would have liked this to calm down and go away. So did I. I spoke to my uncle, the lawyer, and he said I had better hold a press conference.

'Today, even though it's Sunday, just to clear the whole thing, because there's just so much speculation. All sorts of people are throwing accusations at one another. Just clear the air, that you're here,' he said.

So I called Bernama news agency and spoke to a guy whose name I'd been given at the switchboard when I rang in.

'I would like to call a press conference this afternoon,' I said, forgetting to introduce myself.

'Who's this on the line?' he asked.

'Raja Bahrin.'

'Raja Bahrin! You're sure you're Raja Bahrin?' he shouted, very excited.

'Yes, I am Raja Bahrin.'

'Oh, Raja Bahrin, we have been looking for you. I am very pleased you rang.'

'It seems a lot of people have been looking for me,' I replied.

'Do you remember me?' he asked. 'I used to work in Terengganu.'

He mentioned a few places and functions where we had been introduced. 'Oh, yes. I think I met you.'

'So, when did you get back?' he said, having established a rapport.

'This morning, very early.'

'And when do you want to hold your press conference?'

'This afternoon would be fine,' I said, wanting to get it over.

'OK! I'll let everyone know. There will be a lot of people there, you know?'

I had my first press conference at the Park Royal Hotel at 3 o'clock that afternoon, and the guy from Bernama was right: half the world was there, including half the Australian High Commission and the Deputy High Commissioner, Tim George.

The doors of the lift opened and I was greeted by a flickering wall of flash bulbs, cameras and half-glimpsed faces.

The questioning was very direct, but I simply said, 'Sufficient for me to say we made it back safely.'

Of course, everybody wanted to see the kids.

'Oh, the kids need a rest, so maybe in a few days time.'

I didn't want them to be too bothered. They were getting too excited meeting their grandmother and grandfather and all the other kids and other cousins. Everybody was swarming the place. They'd



a few days to recover from that excitement, let alone the trip. I stayed in KL for about a week, to sort out things with the authorities. They wanted to know how the hell I got back, and how they got in without passports. I had all those legal things to sort out. Finally we left and went back to Terengganu. There were still some reporters from Australia waiting for us: Channel Nine and Virginia Lee Corbin amongst others. I had to hold another press conference in Terengganu just to satisfy them. I told them the story, explaining the years of deprivation and humiliation that had led up to my deci-

One of the reporters even asked me, 'What took you so long?' 'The law is supposed to protect a decent citizen,' I said. 'I think I was quite decent and deserved some protection from the law, but obviously it was a misplaced hope. I didn't get anything from it.'

After that conference with the Australian media ended about midnight, I went home and at 6 pm I collapsed. It took me a month to recover. I had a carbuncle on my back, which became infected so that I needed alternate daily trips to the clinic for attention, and I got stomach ulcers from the stress, as well as chronic fatigue. But they weren't sick at all, not even a cold. They settled in very quickly, just as if they hadn't left when they were very young and been brought up in Australia. Even in my wildest dreams I couldn't have expected for them to settle in better than they actually did. It still surprises me. I expected some difficulties at first, at least. I assumed they would miss their mother and life in Australia, and their school friends. But I suppose, looking at how they landed in Irian Jaya, how they instantly played with the kids in the village, I should have known they wouldn't have problems settling in. They were very happy. It was as simple as that.

The day after we got back to Terengganu they both went to my mother's house next door, and wanted to see where their old room were! Iddin remembered his tortoise pillow, after all that time. It was a turtle-shaped patchwork pillow with a turtle head that he used to sleep with. Turtles are found here in Terengganu, so he must have remembered a lot about them despite his mother's attempts to make him forget his origins. He also asked for a little play car he remem-

bered. Shah didn't remember anything because she was only a couple of months old when she was taken to Australia, but Iddin remembered a lot. He remembered the swing that used to hang on the tree outside my bedroom window. He used to sit on it a lot in the afternoon and we used to push him. They fitted in quite comfortably at home.

One day they both came to me (I was still ill in bed) and Iddin said, 'What will mum say, Abah? We haven't rung her up for ages.'

'Yeh, Abah. Will mummy be angry with me?' Shahirah asked, sounding very worried.

That surprised me, too. She wasn't missing her mother, other than to fret that she might be punished for not ringing her. Shah wasn't sure how Jacqueline would react because she was so used to reporting twice a day.

'Don't worry,' I said. 'Leave it to me. I'll sort it out. It'll be all right.'

The other amazing thing was the second night in Kuala Lumpur: Shah met my wife Norilah, and developed a loving relationship from the start. I didn't really expect that, either. The best I hoped for was that they both would like Norilah. Shah quickly attached herself to Norilah. One night when we were still in Kuala Lumpur I had to go out with Norilah for a while one evening, so we left them at the house with my mother and a few other aunts and friends of the family. We came back about 10.30 pm and discovered that Shah had refused to go to sleep. She sat on the couch and waited for Norilah to come back and put her to sleep. Shah had seen how Norilah attended to Ria who was only one year old and she became quite attached to Ria because she said she always wanted a baby sister or brother to play with. She would follow Norilah as she looked after Ria. Norilah was always there as she doesn't go out to work. I think that devotion and constant closeness really won Shah to Norilah, who is a very kind and loving person anyway. Shah wouldn't go to bed until Norilah was in bed with her. For the first couple of weeks back in Terengganu she slept with Norilah and Iddin in the same room. Nearly everyone, except me because I was too ill, ended up sleeping in one big room with mattresses everywhere.

Norilah told me that Shah had said to her, 'I like the way kids go to sleep here, with you. I didn't get to have that in Australia. My mum wouldn't tell me stories or sing to me. I really like this. I like to stroke my hair before I go to sleep. I like all the others to go to sleep together. I like that you're always here. My mummy always lets me sleep in a different room. Sometimes when I have nightmares and wake up in the middle of the night and cry, and want to go to sleep with her, she wouldn't let me to sleep with her. She would put me back to sleep in my own room, and leave me again. Most of the time we had to go to sleep ourselves, because mummy wasn't home much.'

She told Norilah a lot more than she did me. It has been very hard for me to tell these things to people, especially women, because I thought they would feel it was a set-up and probably wouldn't believe me. But that is what Shah told us: that she was getting here because she was not getting in Australia. She wasn't talking about good things – fancy, expensive, remote-controlled dolls or video games – but about having people around when she wants to go to sleep.

Iddin brought this up: he said, 'When we were there, sometimes we had to ask for things to eat, but here, at mealtime, there's always enough.'

That made me think I had been right in Melbourne when I noticed how skinny they were and suspected they weren't getting enough to eat. Iddin and Shahirah have formed their own opinions and made their own judgements of where they would rather be, maybe not so much with whom they would rather be. It's not so much a matter of preference – at least not in the beginning – that maybe they liked Norilah more because they liked their own mother, but that the way things are arranged in Terengganu more to meet their needs than what they had in Australia. Shah and Iddin get attention here. Besides their mother, there's my mother, who wants nothing more than to look after the grandkids.

I have heard reports of people in Australia who said I brainwashed the kids. That probably reflects how those people behave. I don't have to try and brainwash my own children even if I'd wanted to do so because they formed their own opinions. When they first

me back they could speak a handful of words in Malay but rapidly learnt the language and became very successful at school. That's hardly the sign of unhappy, troubled children. Before school started in December I sent them for Malay language tuition a couple of times a week. Shah was already in Grade 1 when I brought her back and when she started school in Terengganu she should've been in Grade 2.

But the schoolteacher said, 'She's learning a whole new language, making a new family, and new friends. Let her stay in Grade 1 and repeat the previous year.'

'OK, that's fine,' I said. I was just happy that they wanted to go to school. When we were on our trip I had thought there might be some problem when it came to starting school in Malaysia. But they wanted to go to school, and they could speak Malay fairly well after only two and a half months of tuition. They picked it up very quickly because with the other brothers and sisters it was just yak, yak, yak, all the time.

About seven weeks into the semester the schoolteacher called me and said, 'We think Shah can move up to Grade 2. There's no need for her to stay in Grade 1. She can more than cope. There's no need to keep her one class behind, because by her age she should be in Grade 2, anyway.'

'Fine, if you think she's ready. I'll leave it to your judgement,' I replied.

The school I sent them to and which they still attend is a medium-sized school and the teachers there are excellent. They pay a lot of attention to the kids and get very good results. It's not one of those couldn't-care-less sort of schools. After her first exam at the end of the semester – I thought they might exempt her from taking it – she brought back her report card. She was very proud as she handed it to me. I looked at it. Then I looked again. Documents seemed always to be startling me! I thought there must be something wrong. She came third in class. I wondered how it could be?

I went to see the teacher and said, 'Is it right?'

'Yes,' she said, smiling at my disbelief, 'she came third in the class.'

And her class wasn't the middle class – it was the best class for two. During that first year many journalists, especially Aussies, would ring and want to interview me. They would ask about the kids, occasionally implying that I was not telling them the truth. I said Iddin and Shahirah were settling in very well.

'You go and talk to the schoolteachers,' I said. 'You ask them. If you try to brainwash Shah to like my present wife and forget her mother, there will be some psychological scar there. She will be unhappy somehow. She will be disturbed, or depressed, or something like that. She surely couldn't perform that well in school, no matter how hard she tried. She got third in her first semester in school, in a new language, new environment, new country, new everything. I can't explain it myself, but it's fact. Something must be right here for her to be able to perform like that.'

I was just happy that they wanted to go to school. I didn't expect them to pass with flying colours! The fact that they were going to go to school and mix with other kids was wonderful. I was surprised for them to take two or three years to settle down, but they moved into life in Terengganu with barely a ripple.

Journalists would inevitably ask me, 'Don't they miss their mother? Don't they cry?'

I found it very hard to explain. I think that no matter how I tried to explain it wouldn't have been very convincing, because obviously people are going to expect that I was biased and would hide something.

'You can talk to me all you like about other things,' I said, 'but when it comes to the kids are concerned I think you should see for yourself. Come to my house, have afternoon tea, and form your own opinion. I won't train the kids to perform like circus monkeys. See them in their natural environment. They've got their pets, they play away in the back garden. Just observe them. Speak to them. I don't have to be around. I'll talk to the children one by one, alone, just in case you think I will be covering over them to make them say things. Come, see the kids for yourself.'

Diana Webster, Doctor Margaret Harris and Nick Cater from Hong Kong were some of the journalists who accepted my invita-

tion and saw the kids, and all of them went back and wrote very positive things. I don't know how to explain it without seeming to want to put Jacqueline down. It's not my intention to say that she was not a good mother. What do I get out of saying things like that? It's just that there were certain things lacking in Iddin and Shahirah's life in Australia. They were neglected. I don't try to compare Jacqueline with Norilah, but there must have been something not quite right in Australia and something a lot more right in Malaysia for them to adapt and settle in so fast.

To think that maybe half of Australia is up in arms against me because of what they read in the papers, that I'm a child-snatcher and a cruel father, saddens me. But facts are stranger than fiction. Imagination can only run to a certain level, but facts are created by God.

While the kids were settling in and I was recovering, talking to journalists and attempting to get my life and finances back in order, I was also faced with possibility of a successful extradition order by the Australian government. It had been talked about for a long time before they actually applied to extradite me. The Attorney-General of Australia studied the case, looking for a loophole. I had asked the Malaysian Foreign Ministry and the Law Department if it would be likely to succeed, and they thought not. It would have been a political decision to allow Australia to extradite me, and that wasn't likely. Both countries really just wanted the whole thing to blow over, but that wasn't so easy, thanks to Jacqueline's manipulation of the media.

It was unlikely I would be extradited because it helps if there is a treaty for extradition between the two countries that spells out the legal processes to follow. There doesn't have to be one, but it's easier to get extradition if there is. Malaysia doesn't have an extradition treaty with Australia, but that doesn't stop either government occasionally requesting extradition. There have been instances where Malaysia has surrendered a Malaysian to the Australian authorities for criminal cases. I was confident, though not completely worry-free, it would not be granted because the application for extradition has to satisfy prerequisites. Amongst these prerequisites is one that

that the applying government must prove there is 'dual  
ality' in the other nation. This means that if, say, the crime is  
a murder in Australia, is it called a murder in Malaysia? Does  
crime exist in both places? In the case of murder, of course it  
Criminal breach of trust? Yes, of course. In my case, it was  
y of children.

What I did was not wrong by Malaysian law, but what  
line did was wrong. By Malaysian law I had the right to the  
n and it was Jacqueline who did the wrong thing. It should  
een true in Australia, too, except for the Family Court's preju-  
Under Malaysian law, was it wrong for Raja Bahrin to bring his  
n back? I could argue that I did it to enforce the judgement of  
Malaysian court in an unorthodox fashion, and not as the serv-  
the Muslim court and I did the right thing.

A second prerequisite for extradition was that the Australian  
ment had to satisfy the Malaysian government that if I were  
ent back to Australia I would stand a fair trial. How could I  
a fair trial? I'd been portrayed all over the media as a villain,  
ogue and a prince of thieves (it was just after the film *Robin*  
I'd been in the newspapers God knows how many times, so  
vere my chances of getting a fair trial? These two factors stood  
uch in my favour, but I was still worried. Governments foul  
up sometimes, or there could have been political reasons for  
g the extradition, to improve relations between the two coun-

inally news came that the Australian government was going  
ly for my extradition but they hadn't yet put it officially to  
Malaysian government. I talked to my lawyers and we decided  
d to make a strong case. We went to the Syariah court and  
them to pass judgement on the court ruling that they origi-  
nated about Jacqueline's actions in 1985: taking the children  
Malaysia against my permission; and removing them from the  
s jurisdiction and scope of influence. That original order was  
on her at the Family Court hearing in February 1986. So the  
ilian court, and therefore the government, knew; they just ig-  
it.

Jacqueline didn't respond to that order in any way. She had from 1986 until 1992 – six years – and what was her response? Nothing. The Syariah court passed judgement that she was in contempt of the court order, showed great disrespect for the court by refusing to even acknowledge that it was even served on her, and put out a warrant for her arrest. But we didn't go any further than that. We could have asked the Malaysian government to extradite her. Whether they would have agreed and whether the Australian government would have permitted it was a different matter. We just wanted to make a point that she had been ignoring the Malaysian court order since 1986, so who was the criminal? A lot of Australians didn't even realise that there was a Malaysian court order asking for her to come back. Jacqueline managed to overlook that when she appeared on the media.

Finally the Australian government served an order for my extradition, and it was rejected, as expected. Unfortunately, however, it seems the Australian government has not let the case drop. It seems Interpol is involved and I'm being hunted down like a murderer or a great train robber. I have wondered what it is about me that attracts so much attention, but then I realise it has nothing much to do with me personally. I have become a famous media figure like Ronald Biggs, thanks to Jacqueline. There are many cases of international child abduction each year – about ninety in Australia alone – that go by without any media attention and only the most cursory judicial lance.

I've had many letters from men from all over the world who have been in similar positions as me and took similar actions. They write and offer their moral support and commiserate about all the media and government attention I have received. One father wrote to me and said he took his son out of Australia too because he was not satisfied he had received a fair hearing in the Australian court. In contempt of court, he nevertheless took the child to Poland, leaving Australia by yacht. He sailed all the way to Japan, made his way across Russia, and went back to Poland. He wrote to the judges and said, 'Look, I've got my son here, what do you want to do about that?' He even sent photos poking his tongue out and wiggling his



ers in his ears! Then he left his kid in Poland, returned to Australia and wasn't arrested. He struck a deal with the Family Court, they finally gave him custody. Then he brought his son back and continue to live in Australia. Why? That's just one example. There are so many examples. He wrote to me and thought my story atrocious. That's what a lot of fathers who've been to the Family Court think. So why single me out? I presume I have received such attention, especially from the Australian government and media, because Jacqueline is married to an influential media person, is famous in that field herself, and because I am Asian, a Muslim and a member of a royal family. Alas, I am also an ordinary architect, a football soccer manager, a husband and a father who wants to lead a normal life. I hope that this book will finally put to rest this saga and we will all be able to live normal lives.

Ever since we came back Jacqueline has been requesting access to Iddin and Shahirah.

'I'm not against that,' I told her, 'but it has to be done properly.'

Knowing Jacqueline, she'd be out to sensationalise it, both in the media, and with the kids. The kids were settling in nicely and I didn't want to upset that rhythm, no matter what anyone wanted to do to me: selfish or revengeful. But I had to be careful for the sake of the kids. If they were happy I wanted to keep them that way.

'You start by writing to the kids,' I said. 'You write, OK?'

Writing can be controlled, but if she was on the phone she could start wailing and crying and I didn't know what would happen to the kids. It may disturb them.

So I said, 'You write through your lawyers, sent to my lawyers, that there's proof that the letter's sent, and I'll make sure the kids get all the letters. No problem at all.'

She refused. She insisted that the letters that she write be conveyed by the Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, which is very political and very show biz. The High Commission had a letter written to me and asked to see the children, a request to which I said no, because of the dangerous implication. Jacqueline was arguing that they were Australian children because she regis-

tered them in Australia. I sought legal advice which said that if I let anyone from the Australian High Commission see the children formally, then it amounted to admission that the children were Australians. That might not affect my case materially, but it would go some way towards Jacqueline being able to say, 'See! They are Australian children.' As far as I am concerned they were born in Malaysia, and they were taken out of the country on their Malaysian passports. If they were full-blooded Australian children why did Iain Gillespie and Jacqueline want my signature for their passports to go to Fiji? If they're one hundred percent Australian why did they need a Malaysian man to sign their passports? Why couldn't Jacqueline just sign? She had to come to me. Finally Jacqueline wrote a letter to the kids – almost two years later! – through her lawyer, to my lawyer, and sent to the kids. It was about one and a half pages and said how she missed them, and what was happening in Australia. A second letter arrived in 1993. Two letters. I made the kids respond to the first letter. They were sitting watching television when I arrived home from work.

I took the letter out of my briefcase and said, 'Iddin. Shahirah. There's a letter here from your mum.'

Iddin looked up at me briefly and said, 'Oh?'

Shahirah just kept watching the television.

'Shahirah. It's from your mother in Australia. Don't you want to read it?'

She turned around to me and shrugged her shoulders. 'OK, Abah, later.'

I handed it to Iddin. 'Make sure you read it, OK?' I said.

'OK, Abah,' he said, and put it at his feet.

I waited for a few days and they didn't seem to write back. Neither of them had come to me or Norilah with a letter to post.

One day I said to them when I had them together, 'Why don't you write back to your mum? At least say something. Tell her how you feel here, whatever.'

They still didn't seem very interested but I urged them again and even gave them some paper and pens. They sat down at the dining table and wrote, about four lines each. So I put them in an

ope and sent them to my lawyers, and then to hers, and finally Jacqueline herself. Seven months later another letter arrived from mother, the journalist who missed them so much she obviously couldn't even write! If she had started writing and the children started to correspond even if I had to continue to coax them there were no 'bad vibes' from the kids, then we could have proceeded to a telephone call. But she refused to participate in that way and instead simply demanded phone calls.

I said, 'By all means I would proceed to that. But you start writing.'

It is a great pity for her that she could not let go of her need for drama and simply regularly write to the kids. I did everything I permitted when the kids were in Australia, and had to fight just for that! That I was offering her any access at all after her treatment of me and the kids should be considered a miracle. But the kids were almost afraid of her because they thought they would be forced to go back. The children didn't understand that the threat of extradition applied only to me. Every night on the television news would be a reference to the latest development, followed up in newspapers the next day.

They'd go to school and their friends would say, 'Hey! Your mother's going to be taken back to Australia. You'll have to go too!' They were terrified at the thought of leaving Terengganu and returning to Australia and their mother! They became quite resentful.

I explained, 'No, it's not for you. It's only for me.'

'What happens if you get sent, Abah?' Shah asked.

'I'd be there for a few years on Her Majesty's guest list. I'd go home. But you'll still be here. They can't take you.'

But neither she nor Iddin quite believed it. Kids don't understand extradition. They think if it's for me then it's for them too, and they built their resentment towards Jacqueline. Jacqueline didn't understand the damage she created with her behaviour. She insisted I was the evil one, but when she created situations like that the kids were also irritated.

Iddin came back from school one day and said, 'Why can't I be

like any other kid? Why do people always ask me about this thing? I'm really sick of it, Abah. I wish they'd all just leave me alone.'

Every time Jacqueline created some new media exposure or diplomatic incident, the kids would be upset. I was very careful about media interviews with the kids because I knew they would be affected. I would rather have stayed silent and let it all die down, but because Jacqueline was so intent on spreading her own version of events, I realised it would be harmful not only for me, but for the kids, to have the population of Australia wrongly informed. It was a matter of countering the lies. I was also aware that she might try other means of getting the children back. She was unscrupulous the first time so I imagined she might try again. In October 1994 there were a lot of events occurring around our house that I couldn't treat as merely coincidental. An Australian was found near our house at 3 am by a police patrol car. He couldn't exactly say why he was there. He was a serviceman based in Singapore, alone in the car, equipped with a car phone. After that there were a couple of Western women who came past our house, along the side lane. They stopped in front of our house and took photographs, walked on down to the beach and then returned, got on a bus and left. Were they novelty shots or surveillance photos? Ever since we arrived back we have employed security guards, who are with the kids at all times. Perhaps that will have to continue until Iddin and Shahirah are old enough to apply for their own passports?

what of Bryan during all of this? Thoughts of his whereabouts and well-being haunted me daily. I was very worried about his fate. I tried to find out through some friends in Australia if there had been any news of Bryan, but he was just reported missing by Sheila. Although I wanted to call Sheila it was very awkward for me because I would have had a lot of explaining to do and I imagined that she would be quite upset with me for putting Bryan in danger. I tried to trace back Bryan's stay in Merauke, but was only told he could not go back to Australia by boat due to bad weather. I learned that Bryan had made his way to Jakarta and then to Europe. All these enquiries took place during the hectic period when we were back in Malaysia and the media and governments were asking a lot of questions regarding our adventure.

After my last media conference in Terengganu I fell ill for a while, as I have mentioned, and in the middle of that month I received a call from Bryan who told me he was somewhere in Europe and on the run from the Australian authorities. I wanted to see him but I couldn't as my own resources were so low because of my trip and the previous seven years of trips to Australia and Family Court cases. Just after that call Jacqueline's friends in the media somehow obtained my private telephone number and started making harassing calls. Due to my weak physical condition, and for several reasons as advised by the local police, we had to change our telephone number as the harassing calls continued without abate. So I could not get any more calls from Bryan, though he did call my office once and talked to Sharifah. But I wasn't able to get back to work for two months after my collapse.

Early in 1993 I had news that Bryan had been arrested in America and brought back to Melbourne for trial. Both Iddin and Shah were in tears to learn of 'Uncle John's' fate. They couldn't understand why Bryan was arrested.

'Why are they jailing Uncle John, Abah?' Iddin asked. 'He only helped us come home to Malaysia after many years away from our birthplace.'

'Who's going to look after Uncle John's children if he is in jail?' said Shahirah.

I was just as puzzled by the relentless pursuit of Bryan. If they weren't able to get me then Bryan had to pay for it. They had to make an example to other fathers, to warn them of the dangers of tangling with the 'untouchable' Family Court of Australia. No one seemed to care about the inhuman treatment and great hardship that fathers had to go through at the Court's hands. I would not have done what I did if the Court had at least granted me some rights as the natural father of my two children. Being denied the right to retain my name as their surname was too much for me to take. Bryan was the scapegoat they had to have, and the Gillespies manipulated the Australian media at an extraordinarily perverted level. I was reduced to a subhuman in their descriptions. Bryan had to suffer in my place. I faxed a letter to the judge on the day of Bryan's sentencing, explaining my role in the affair, and my solicitors took it to court personally. I hoped that my letter had some bearing on Bryan's eighteen-month sentence instead of the maximum thirty-six months. Of course, Bryan had a clean record then and I maintain he has one now. After all, he only helped two children come home to their birthplace from which they had been removed by deceitful means.

I received a letter from Sheila when Bryan was on the run. She was understandably very upset and cross with me. I felt extremely bad about it but I could not explain to her the full circumstances. I had tried warning Bryan of the gravity of the risks if things went wrong, but Bryan, being the jovial, soft-hearted person he is, just brushed it aside and often said, 'What's wrong with a bloody man wanting to take his children home?' He often said it was going to be

trip across to Irian Jaya and back but fate had it we were in real high-seas, high-drama, international adventure. I had been prepared for the worst, even if I had to spend three years in prison, but it was Bryan who had to suffer in my place. I wanted to help Sheila financially when Bryan was on the run and in jail, especially as she had great problems with her house mortgage and other things. The media certainly weren't leaving her alone, either. But unfortunately I wasn't able to work for two months after I got back, and even when I recovered business was poor and very slow. I felt obliged to help Sheila as much as I could, although I was struggling myself. It was the least I could do since I had my children back home, and I still feel bad that I was not able to help much more. I did as much as I could given the tight situation my family was in after the traumatic and taxing experience.

Finally, Bryan was released from prison, after only nine months of his sentence, and after a while settling in with his family, made arrangements to bring Sheila to visit us. By the time they arrived it felt such a long time ago that our adventure had occurred. So much struggle, anguish and conflict and then Bryan was with us once more. Both Iddin and Shahirah, as well as my other children, were very eager to see big 'Uncle John', as he was still affectionately called. It was a very emotional reunion for me as Bryan walked up to the kids and hugged them.

'You're both a lot bigger than when we were at sea!' he said, smiling.

For me, the look on Sheila's face as she saw how happy and content Iddin and Shah were in Terengganu, was worth more than all the money in the world. The pair contentedly played with their other brothers and sisters, and both adored the youngest, Nazirah, who was then only one and a half years old. They would constantly pick her up and cuddle her. It was very important for me to know that I was convinced the children really had settled down happily. When Sheila spoke to Norilah, I could see that both of them got on well together. They must have exchanged a lot of motherly love. Sheila later told me that it made her feel a lot better about Bryan's situation when she saw the actual situation. She had

read only the Australian press version, and most of them had never even seen the kids, let alone spent time with them in Terengganu. Although it may not have compensated her for the hardship she had to endure when Bryan was away, at least as a mother she seemed convinced it was the right environment for Iddin and Shahirah. She heard from the children's own mouths what their preferences were, and what their earlier life in Australia was like. Sheila later said to me, after she had seen the kids, that when she had read Jacqueline's accounts in the press, she didn't believe them.

'It didn't sound real, as if she was really concerned for her kids. It was more that she wanted to get in the papers. All the photos were so set up, you didn't have to be an expert to tell there was nothing natural about them.'

The most satisfying thing about the reunion with Bryan was seeing Bryan and Sheila's faces light up when the Malaysian media 'mobbed' them at the Kuala Lumpur airport on their arrival. The media greeted Bryan like a local war hero who had just returned home! And he truly deserved it. I noticed the initial look of apprehension on his face, followed by almost utter disbelief when he realised how kindly the Malaysian media were treating him.

In his typical fashion, Bryan quipped to me, 'It sure is a welcome bloody change from the cruel treatment I was given by the Australian press, Raj!' The night of his arrival at Kuala Lumpur really belonged to him as virtually the entire media corps turned up to eagerly await him. The next day his face was all over the local newspapers and on TV. This very man who was painted as an 'evil villain' by the Australian press, thanks to the Gillespies' intensive media lobbying, was now a national hero in a foreign land, in a country he once served in as a young man with the Australian Army.

More fanfare awaited Bryan the following day when I took him to meet the children in Terengganu. TV3, the country's leading private television station, showed the touching reunion 'live' to Malaysian viewers. It seemed as if everyone was waiting to see big 'Uncle John' hug the two Malaysian kids he helped bring home.

Now Bryan is back with his family, after helping another family become whole again. Bryan was a total stranger to the kids when



agreed to help me. He came from a completely different background and culture. He risked a lot to help another father regain the children who had been slowly cut off from their natural dad. Only another father who had gone through the same pain could truly appreciate the comradeship that developed between Bryan and me. It wasn't about money and it wasn't about believing in the same religion or even culture; it was about what it means to a father to have his children under his care. How did these two strangers, who met by chance, form a team that went across thousands of miles, pursued by the Australian authorities? It was fated that it was all to open.

I don't know what the future holds for my family, but one thing I know for sure is that we are going to try and stay together. There are people who live in poverty but perhaps don't realise that their greatest wealth is their family. It is better to be not so well off than to be so rich that family life is dictated by its influence. We have gone through much together as a family and we hope we will continue to grow strong together. People may recall our ordeal in the future, but only time will tell if there are lessons to be learned from it. I hope the narration of our family's ordeal shall be judged as history, as common law changes from time to time. In essence, most all laws are drawn up with the best of intentions and for a good purpose. It is often prejudice that clouds fair judgement. With computers, satellites, fibre-optic high technology and information superhighways at our disposal, we should be less ignorant of one another's culture, as distance and information should no longer be barriers. The only real barrier to be dismantled is the deep-seated prejudice of the heart, that makes one a person feel that one system is better than another instead of accepting that there are bound to be traditional and religious differences. Just because we are of different background, religion and skin colour, doesn't mean we don't share the same desire to be treated fairly. Just because Australian family law favours the mother, the mother cannot always be right and the father forever be treated shabbily. I feel very sorry for the thousands of Australian fathers who have been suffering a similar fate that I suffered. I used to think they were the more fortunate

since they could at least see their kids conveniently as I lived so far away. As events have turned out, I now think they are the less fortunate because they are trapped in the system.

This book is not meant to be just critical of the existing Australian legal system. What it hopes to convey is the great love fathers are capable of having for their children, experiences both Bryan and I have gone through. No matter how sophisticated or how rich a tradition the Australian legal system has inherited from the British Westminster system, at the end of the day, it is the hands and hearts that administer the system that determine its fairness. Someone once said justice must be administered with compassion. But how can compassion be considered when the minds that administer the law are so clouded and tainted by prejudice about religion and creed. My conscience is clear and I am sure Bryan feels the same way. Hopefully this book will move some hearts in high places to do some deep soul searching. There are many other fathers out there on the brink of tragedy because they care for and love their children. It is not wrong for a father to want to be with his children.



## The Authors

**RAJA BAHRIN SHAH** was born in Kuala Terengganu in 1955. He received his early education in Malaysia before taking up Architecture at the University of Melbourne in 1976. After graduating in 1981, he returned home and joined the Public Works Department.

In 1983, he went into private practice. His major works include Terengganu's 'Floating Mosque' and State Museum Complex, two popular tourist attractions today. After Iddin and Shahirah's safe return, Raja Bahrin decided to build his family's own resort, The Aryani, named after his then youngest daughter.

**BRYAN WICKHAM** was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, in 1937. His family emigrated to Australia in 1952 and settled in Perth, where he began an apprenticeship in carpentry. He later spent six years in the Australian Regular Army, including two years in Malaysia.

After his discharge, he travelled around Australia, working at various jobs until 1964, when he joined the oil industry. He then worked in oil exploration all over the world until 1988, when he decided to return to Perth to spend more time with his wife and family and indulge in his favourite pastimes of boating and fishing.



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Karim Raslan

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Born in Malaysia, Karim Raslan has spent much of his life abroad. In between bouts of legal practice, he has written for numerous newspapers, magazines and journals, including *The Times* of London, *Business Times Singapore*, the *New Straits Times*, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *The Sun* and *Men's Review*.

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— Sidonie Smith, professor of English, comparative literature and women's studies, Binghamton University, SUNY, and author of *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*

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