

Memories of a Geezer



ANOTHER GLASS? WINE NOT!

A great thing about becoming an old Geezer is when your old Geezer of a *father* is still around to hang out with. By now he's ceased scolding you.

The other day I was driving with my Geezer Dad, and I owned up to a long protected secret.

You see, in 1969 he and Mum absolutely forbade me to sail to Rangitoto Island to hunt possums and wallabies with an old reprobate mate of mine called Bruce. I'd lied through my teeth and told them, yes, I was going to Rangī, but not on Bruce's leaky *Silver Fern* yacht ... instead I would take the ferry, like a good little boy.

Well, of course, we sailed over on

Bruce's yacht and camped, and killed and skinned about 20 possums and countless wallabies ... all vermin you understand. A great career in fur-trading loomed large in our imagination.

Trouble is ... among our haul of wallabies was a pet called 'Spotty'. His two elderly spinster carers, who lived part-time on Rangitoto, stumbled into our charnel house of skinned and yet-to-be-skinned marsupials and shrieked that they were off to report us to the ranger.

Labour Day, 1969. Four 15 year old boys frantically jammed skins and dead wallabies into the gunnels of the *Silver Fern* and headed for 'A Buoy'. In the rush,

Illustration: Tim Tripp

I left my cassette of the *Lemon Pipers* in the makeshift ponga-frond-tent at McKenzie's Beach. Such is life.

Half way across the Rangitoto Channel, the squall hit.

"Under!" screamed young Jimmy, every time the *Silver Fern's* bow thrust its way into a trough at the hand of a following sea. I think a bit of wee ran down my leg. By the fourth "under" we did the only thing we could think off. We started off-loading wallabies, including, tragically, Spotty, last seen heading for Motutapu. By the time the *Silver Fern* grounded at Narrow Neck, and we'd skinned the last

behind us, a man we never saw would've lugged impossibly heavy, metal canisters of film into what they called 'the box', and threaded up the film with the same care an engineer would employ to build a bridge.

That was the projection room. It was a dark art that took years to learn, practiced by men who prided themselves to exactly align in the lamp-houses the hellishly bright carbon arcs that burned brighter than the sun, allowing the magic of Hollywood to stream like an anti-aircraft searchlight over our heads and take us on our adventures.

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bedraggled possum under a tarp, we were fair bugged.

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When I finally fessed up to Dad the other day we laughed like banshees.

Back in the Day, when you and I were wide-eyed little kids, we would go to the movies – the 'flicks'; the 'pictures'.

Somewhere, in the mysterious darkness

Today, I took my 88 year old Dad, New Zealand's finest projectionist (now retired), into a booth at the *Victoria Theatre* in Devonport (now all digital, data and a new kind of dark art). I watched a tear roll down his weathered cheek as he thought back to the era of 1958-63, when he worked his genius and professionalism into what genuinely was a 'magic lantern show'. He misses Mum terribly, but my dear bro and I are determined to make his twilight years as magic as we can. Thanks Dad. 

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