

CHAPTER 1

Posted – But Where?

‘Where on earth is Tutye?’ I gasped.

‘I don’t know. I couldn’t find it on my road map. But it’s somewhere in the Mallee, and you start there tomorrow.’

It was a Sunday morning in early October, and my school principal in Mildura had met me on the church steps after morning service to deliver this devastating news.

My sudden posting had resulted because the thirty-two children of the one-teacher school at Tutye had completely over-run their teacher. He was apparently unable to make them obey any instruction. No learning was taking place. Incidents of both a violent and sexual nature had become commonplace in the playground.

What was this? A blackboard jungle in a tiny country primary school?

I hoped that the inspector who was sending me to straighten out the school might speak with me, and give me first-hand information on the problems that I faced. Maybe the situation was being exaggerated.

He was not available.

As matters eventuated, it was Wednesday night before I was able to leave.

During these intervening three days I had met the teacher whom I was replacing. He was older and more mature than me, well over six feet tall and strongly built. What sort of monsters were these Tutye kids? Having just celebrated my nineteenth birthday, I had three months teaching experience, was 5ft 7inches tall and weighed in at 9 stone wringing wet. Talk about being tossed into the lions’ den. They’d probably have me for entree` and look around for the next course.

My one consolation was that my predecessor did not appear to me to be entirely suited to teaching. We were to swap positions, so he spent one day with me in my classroom before I left. I noted that he moved slowly, and spoke slowly and with little expression and enthusiasm, hardly a recipe for relating to children.

Eventually I purchased a new detailed Shell Road Map of Victoria and managed to discover the whereabouts of Tutye (pronounced ‘Tuttee’). It was in the far northwest of the state, fifty miles west of Ouyen and thirty

miles before the South Australian border. That was one hundred and twenty miles away.

Mildura was 370 miles from Melbourne, so was regarded as a remote place for teachers to be posted. It was, however, situated on the Murray River and was a most attractive smaller city of around 10,000 people, nestling in a beautiful thriving irrigation district boasting highly productive vineyards and citrus orchards.

When I had been at teachers' college, the direst threat for misdemeanors was that you would be posted to Murrayville, one of the most remote schools in the state. Murrayville was also 350 miles from Melbourne, but that is where the similarity to Mildura ended. Murrayville was a town of less than five hundred people situated in a narrow belt of sparsely populated wheat and sheep country and nestled between the Big Desert to the south and the Sunset Desert, locally referred to as the Sunset Country to the north. Its nearest decent sized town was Mildura, 140 miles away. At least Murrayville had a consolidated school of nearly 200 pupils, most of whom were bussed in from surrounding farms. Tutye was a one-teacher rural school, 18 miles east of Murrayville - just a mere dot on a detailed road map.

What had I done to deserve this? Perhaps I had not got away with all those shenanigans in teachers' college after all.

At 9.30 on Wednesday night, after three days of hectic farewells, I wearily boarded the *Vinlander*, the train that commutes between Mildura and Melbourne. What was ahead of me? I could only wonder.

Wrestling my heavy case along the narrow corridor that ran alongside the 8-person compartments of the 2nd class carriages, I found one with some empty seats. Many compartments had already filled, despite the train beginning its journey at Mildura. Rail travel was popular at that time and many passengers travelled on this line. After hoisting my luggage up to the overhead luggage rack, I collapsed onto my seat, grateful that no-one was in the next seat as four large adults made it a bit of a squeeze.

The hour and a half trip from Mildura to Ouyen fortunately passed quickly and pleasantly in conversation with fellow passengers.

I soon found myself standing on the Ouyen station, case by my side and tennis racquet in hand, and watched till the train drew out of sight. Turning, I found myself standing on a totally deserted platform. The station staff member on duty had lost no time in making himself scarce. I wondered where the party was. Not even a station cat to keep me company.

A six-hour wait lay ahead of me until the small diesel rail car headed the fifty miles west to Tutye. As I had very little money to my name, let