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Chapter 15

Our Arkley Home (6,354 words)

Gil and Glasson were nudging 50 when they bought their first house early in 1958. I spent my teenage years at 46 Robert Avenue, Broadview Gardens, one of Adelaide's new, post-war suburbs. The house can't have been more than five years old. G. J. Walker had just become Headmaster of North Adelaide Primary School. It was a welcome return to the city for my parents, especially so for my mother. Glasson had grown up in Adelaide and did not have much affinity for country towns. Home ownership and the move to Adelaide may have been good for them, but I found Broadview Gardens a dull and disturbing place. My sister and brother were older and moved in different circles. The nearest yabby was miles away.

Buying a home was a momentous step. My parents knew very little about houses or real estate and were worried about being sold a pup. Real estate agents were known to be sharks and shysters. Gil and Glasson were reassured by the advice of their future son-in-law, who worked in the building industry. Dick knew a thing or two about houses. No defect escaped his scrutiny. He opened and shut doors with the studied care of an art critic about to expose a forgery. He looked for signs of rising damp, borer and tell-tale cracks. He bounced up and down on wooden floors and crawled around foundations. If anything looked awry, out came his spirit level. That rattled estate agents in much the same way that a sign of the cross troubled Dracula. 'You'll never buy a house', one agent told Gil angrily, 'if you keep bringing him along'. In old age Gil would remind Dick of this incident, asking if he could remember what the estate agent had said. He'd been given little chance to forget over the years. Dick not only approved 46 Robert Avenue, he said that its wide eaves were a definite point in its favour. They were the latest fashion. Gil and Glasson moved a little closer to their almost new house, learning to be proud of its fashionable eaves.

Howard Arkley is the great interpreter of the post-war suburban home. If there was ever a painter tailor-made for macular degenerates, it is the brilliant Arkley, dead from an overdose before his time. While his suburbs of choice were in Melbourne, Broadview Gardens would have suited him nicely. 46 Robert Avenue, with its wide eaves, L-shaped design and fifties mannerisms was just right for Arkley's purposes. I went to a retrospective exhibition of his

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work in Melbourne in December 2006. Some of his paintings ran the length of the gallery wall. I could walk along them, allowing my peripheral vision to assemble the key elements of their colour and design. There were reminders of Robert Avenue everywhere I turned. When I stood well back they called to me. 'You lived here David', Arkley's paintings told me.



46 Robert Avenue and an Arkley home

Although Howard Arkley's houses do not disclose nightmare interiors, there is a distinct undertone of menace there nonetheless. The colours are too bright, the outlines too sharp. They are familiar houses yet, for all the affectionate detail, they are terribly still and disquieting. 46 Robert Avenue was such a house. While it seemed entirely ordinary from the street, who could know what was going on behind those closed curtains?

The house was on a corner block. My bedroom faced the unpaved side road, placing me squarely on the frontline of contact with the outside world. This was not a good place to be. I had brought an extensive collection of childhood nightmares to Robert Avenue. I seemed exposed as never before to evil forces lurking in the dark. For night after night I dreamt of enemy planes filling the sky. The epicentre of these battles was in the dark zone of the side street and I could do nothing to prevent them. It was always the same.... the sky is empty. I begin to hope there will be no attack tonight...but I soon hear a distant sound. It seems possible the danger might pass. There are only one or two planes. Perhaps they are ours. The roar grows louder and the sky fills with menace. The enemy is overhead.

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I cannot claim to have been a keen student of the Cold War and the titanic struggle then taking place between our side and the Reds, those sinister Russians and terrifying Chinese. I did know that Biggles had been fighting and winning these battles on my behalf. He had been sent to Australia to intervene. There had been trouble up North. Biggles got to the bottom of it thank goodness. His old foe, Von Stahlein, was working to get hold of our uranium for the Russians. Biggles put a stop to that, but I was convinced the Reds had South Australia in their sights. Read all about it in *Biggles in Australia*, published in 1955.

A new nightmare now joined the old ones. I blame Gil. He was fond of making what he called 'liquid manure'. He would fill a forty four gallon drum with cow manure and water to produce a slimy green concoction that was better for broad beans than small boys. My green nightmare always took the same form. I would be climbing a volcanic mountain. As I climb to the summit I anticipate a beautiful crater full of clear, shimmering water. I look into the crater, full of hope, and all I see is foul, slimy ooze. Each time I ascend the mountain I long for the lake, knowing my climb will end as all previous climbs have done. I never talked to my parents about my nightmares. My world and theirs were moving too far apart.

The pattern of things starting well and ending badly was quite familiar to me. It was the bed-wetting routine. I would be sound asleep. In my dreams nature would call, inviting me to relieve myself: a good offer. For a moment all seemed well. There was pleasant warmth quickly followed by a cold clamminess and the depressing realization that I had wet the bed yet again. It was a poor start to the day for all concerned. My parents were invariably cross and unsympathetic. They were irritated at my lack of control, seeing it as an act of disobedience. I felt betrayed in my sleep.

Any number of things might have been disturbing me, not least all the moving, disruption and broken friendships. I was certainly more troubled by what I heard on my crystal set radio at night, than by what I was reading. At that time I was not much of a reader, but I loved the radio. Radio drama was full of menace. Frightening things were done to people sometimes close to hand, sometimes in distant places. I have no recollection now what *Two Roads to Samara* or *Dossier on Demetrius* were about, but the voices announcing these radio

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serials and the music that set the mood were sinister enough to have me worried. On other nights I listened to the stories of city crimes and dark deeds in Chicago's alleys told by the newspaperman, Randy Stone, in *Night Beat*. My parents made no serious effort to control my listening and since the radio was under my pillow they may not have suspected what I was up to.

When we moved into 46 Robert Avenue there was no garden to speak of. A proper Arkley home needed a garden. My parents elected to have roses around the front fence, a small garden bed of red canna lilies and an immaculate front lawn. While the lilies seemed like a good idea they soon acquired gaudy and ill-disciplined habits. After the rich volcanic soil of Mt Gambier, the stubborn clay of Broadview Gardens was very hard work. Gil toiled all weekend, weeding and digging, resenting the big, gluey clumps of clay that stuck to the shovel and clogged his boots. Glasson remained indoors, bringing out an occasional cup of tea. Gardening was not her thing.

By late afternoon Sunday, Gil was complaining of chest pains. He was packed off to bed. Had he strained his heart? A sudden heart attack was the male way to die in the 1950s. The doctor was called: muted talk, concerned looks. Gil was asked to raise and lower his arms, bend and stretch. Was the pain here or there? The doctor was being very thorough. Then everything brightened. Although more tests would be needed, the doctor said Gil had fibrocystitis, a form of muscle strain, the result of his ferocious battle with the clay soil. This was the only time I ever remember my father needing to see a doctor. Gil gave up playing tennis soon after. Glasson considered it undignified for a man of his age and station to be panting around a tennis court. Besides, it might have caused excessive physical strain. They had both been shaken by Gil's painful fibrocystitis.

Glasson was still teaching in 1958 and each morning my parents drove me in the Vanguard to North Adelaide Primary School. The school was too far away for me to ride my bike as I had done in Mount Gambier. Arriving by car, I was unmistakably a part of the Walker package, the Headmaster's son. We entered a handsome school building dating from the nineteenth century and made from bluestone as were many of the historic buildings in nearby streets. Was it the famous Dry Creek Bluestone quarried from the grounds of the

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Yatala Prison Farm? Gil and Glasson weren't attracted to historic bluestone housing. North Adelaide was too old and too close to the city for their liking and it was filling up with Italian migrants. Gil's grandfather, John Thomas Walker, had once owned a splendid terrace house just a block away from the school. Gil and Glasson much preferred something new and modern. My parents were suburban Australians for whom a new house on a quarter acre block was proof that they were solid and respectable people.



North Adelaide Primary School photographed in 2008

At the age of 12 I was about to leave childhood to become a teenager. Through the 1950s, adults of my parents' generation were growing increasingly concerned at the declining standard of teenage behaviour. The 'teenager' had emerged as a troubling post-war phenomenon. A great deal of attention was paid to juvenile delinquency in the media, primarily a city problem and one that everyone supposed was on the rise. My parents seemed more worried than most other adults about teenage indiscipline, while any sign of turbulent teenage lusts and longings made them very uneasy. My uncles, Alan and Eric, had more relaxed, worldly standards.

Gil and Glasson had always worked with younger children who were so much easier to deal with than adolescents. Primary school children, with their shiny, eager little faces, were generally deferential, prepared to listen to what the teacher had to say. Teenagers were far less compliant. Some had minds of their own. The repercussions for my sister were severe.

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At the age of 14, when my parents were still in Mt Gambier, she was packed off to live in a boarding house in Adelaide while she started an apprenticeship as a hairdresser. She had become too much of a handful. My parents rarely visited her. It was a lonely and perplexing experience, one that was not readily forgiven or understood. When my sister got married, her warm-hearted Dutch mother-in-law Nell, became a companionable mother figure for her in the way that Glasson had never been.

While my parents seemed unduly worried about what others might think, they were in the spotlight. Teachers were guardians of good behaviour. It was both an embarrassment and a potential source of derisive gossip for their children to be other than exemplary. When shopkeepers around North Adelaide Primary School complained that local children were stealing from their shops, G. J. Walker was on the look out for delinquent trouble makers. I was taunted at school for not having the courage to join the small groups of boys who stole from local shops. When finally I did join them, I turned out to be quite a nimble thief, although I did not steal a whole lot that I really wanted. So there was I, the Headmaster's son, on the wrong side of the law by day and heavily engaged in the Cold War most nights. It was a tiring schedule.

Popular music was high on the list of corrupting influences in the 1950s. The discordant noise, gyrating hips and mangled grammar of Rock and Roll had no place in our household. It was 'tripe', about the strongest word in Gil's vocabulary. He was particularly affronted by one of the hit tunes of 1961, sung by Eddie Hodges. The adolescent male in the song struck my father as a summation of all that was wrong with modern youth. Although he rarely switched off the radio, the first sound of that whiny adolescent in hot pursuit of his girl proved too much. This was the language and spirit of modern adolescent presumption:

*I'm gonna knock on your door, ring on your bell,
Tap on your window too.
If you don't come out tonight when the moon is bright
I'm gonna knock and ring and tap until you do.*

*I'm gonna knock on your door, call out your name,
Wake up the town, you'll see.*

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*I'm gonna boot, boot and howl like a love sick owl
Until you say you're gonna come out with me.*

*Hey little girl, this ain't no time to sleep,
Let's count kisses `stead of counting sheep,
How, how can I hold you near,
With you up there and me down here.*

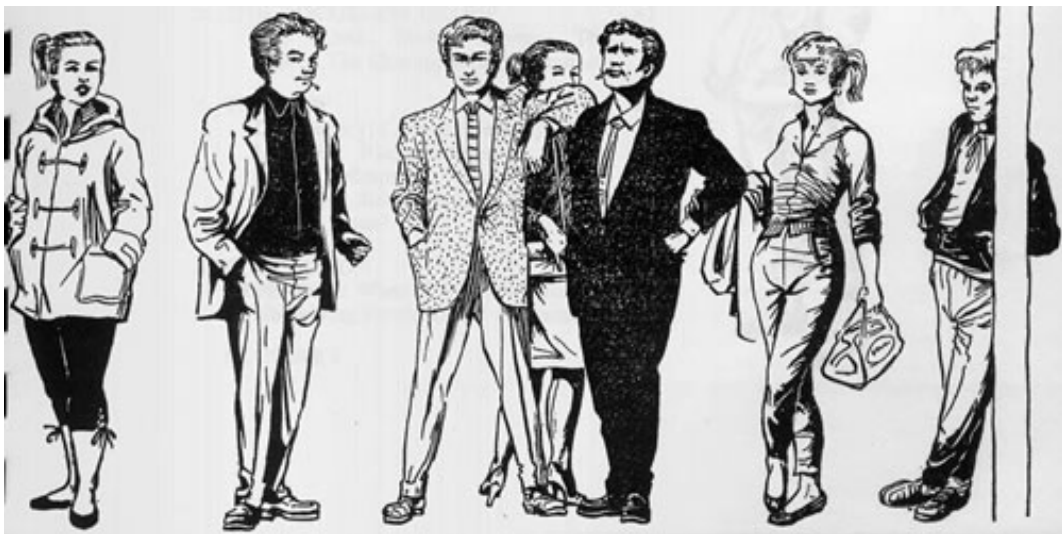
To help combat these influences, in 1958, soon after we arrived in Broadview Gardens, my parents made a big financial commitment. They bought a stereo record player. This was the year that stereo was first introduced. Our stereogram was made of blond wood, stood on spindly legs and had speakers set apart and angled inwards to guarantee the full stereo effect. We Walkers were at the cutting edge of the new technologies. Gil always liked to be up with the latest thing. He'd grown up with it. Through the 1920s, Walker and Sons had added stylish radios and radiograms to their merchandise of boots and shoes. At Broadview Gardens, Gil and Glasson's musical tastes ran to light opera. Franz Lehar's *The Merry Widow* was a particular favorite. They also liked Strauss waltzes, Gilbert and Sullivan and the better known classics like Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* and Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. Classical music, with its references to European sophistication, was more Glasson's world than Gil's. But he recognized that music was something a cultivated person needed to know something about. Although we had the new stereogram, the modern Pye radio and a modest but growing collection of records, there were no books at Robert Avenue. The *Advertiser* and the *Women's Weekly* were the only regular reading matter that came into the home.

When a letter Glasson wrote in 1963 from New York came to light, I had it read to me. Glasson describes how she has just seen colour television for the first time. She is also excited about a very new sound recording technique from RCA known as 'Dyna-groove'. It was as far 'beyond the beauty of stereo', Glasson explains, 'as stereo had been over mono'. She and Gil planned to bring some of these fantastic new records back from America with them. They would choose their favorite classics but not exclusively: 'we will bring one of Latin American or jazz just bristling with synchopation percussion for the musical heathens of the family'. But modern classical music was a step too far: '.... if you require any of that

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caterwauling off key Stravinsky you must pay for it yourself'. My brother had set the cat among the pigeons when he brought Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* into the house around 1960. Glasson's remarks could seem sharp and abrasive, but there was generally humour there too, oiling the wheels.

I began my new life as a student at Enfield High School in 1959. I was just thirteen. I was now an imperiled teenager with a potential for delinquency. The *Bulletin* had carried alarming articles on the scale of the problem, not that these entered the Walker home. I had already done my own research on this question at the local fish and chip shop, a training ground for those experimenting with the delinquent lifestyle. The mushrooming northern suburbs of Adelaide had more than their fair share of delinquents, better known as 'bodgies' and 'widgies'. Further north, the raw new satellite city of Elizabeth, named after the young Queen Elizabeth II, had been dropped into empty paddocks. In New Zealand, the challenge of delinquency gave rise to a 1958 illustrated work: *The Bogie: a study in abnormal psychology*.



Gil and Glasson were particularly sensitive to signs of abnormal psychology in their offspring. Despite parental disapproval, I purchased the full bodgie outfit: black cardigan, black stove pipe trousers, pointy black shoes and a blood red shirt. My sister thought I was showing promising signs of teenage rebellion, but Glasson disapproved of my appearance.

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Her darkest suspicions would have been confirmed had she known I'd paid for my wardrobe with money taken from Gil's wallet.

I was never a convincing bodgie. I could not be delinquent enough and my hair was all wrong. A proper bodgie had straight black hair, loaded with enough Brylcream to oil a locomotive. Combing the hair in a lairy fashion and flicking the surplus grease to the ground was an essential part of the performance. Some of the leading lairs took their Brylcream to school in order not to miss an opportunity for a quick grease and oil between, and sometimes during, lessons. My hair was curly and Brylcream made it curlier still. That was the wrong look altogether. Curly hair was either effeminate or foreign. What that embarrassing fuzz was doing on my head I had no idea.

My High School was a twenty minute bike ride from home. The school was another gathering place for bodgies and widgies. First opened in 1953, it was located directly opposite the Gepps Cross Migrant Hostel, whose growing population had caused the rapid expansion of Northfield Primary School. When I arrived there, Enfield High had well over a thousand students and was already one of the largest and roughest schools in the State. Nevertheless, like all educational institutions worth their salt, it had its Latin motto: *Pactum Serva*. Cicero had come up with that and it meant something like *Keep the faith* or *Be true to your word*. Although Enfield High was a tough school, my parents did not consider private schools as an option. This had more to do with cost and their modest educational aspirations than any principled commitment to the State School system. We knew we were not in the same league as private school people, although our stereogram, non-drinking and respectability meant that we were a cut above our neighbours. Gil and Glasson were conscious that there was some unedifying drinking and rowdiness going on about them in Robert Avenue.

My first day at Enfield High was awful. Whereas most other kids had been managing school for themselves from the age of five or so, my parents had always been on hand. Now I was on my own and as raw an innocent as can be imagined. A teacher roared commands through a loud speaker. 'Form lines alphabetically according to your surname'. Amid all the pushing and shoving my brain and I parted company. I did not know whether 'David' or 'Walker'

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was the operative name. I asked someone: 'It's your last name, idiot'. The idiot pushed to the back of the crowd. We were then marched off to sit an IQ test. A day or so later the herd reassembled and were assigned to their classes. I listened as they read through the names. 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, it seemed to take hours. The idiot ended up in 1E, the bottom class. There must have been some doubt that I had an IQ at all.

What could I tell my parents? I fine tuned my tale as I rode home. I parked the bike beneath our fashionably wide eaves, went inside and waited for the right moment to tell a convincing story of bureaucratic error. Gil and Glasson listened carefully. At the end of my affecting narrative, Glasson turned to Gil and said, 'You'll have to go to the school and get him into another class'. On the next day my father did just that. I was transferred into 1A. I could feel my IQ rising by the minute although, deep down, I knew that I was really an E trying to pass myself off as an A. In later life Gil would occasionally return indignantly to this old injustice. It became one of his stories. Telling it, he would shake his head, bewildered by the sheer enormity of what had taken place.

As far as I knew, the Walkers and the Bournes had been solidly monolingual families. My elevation to 1A meant that I faced Latin and French. I can't recall Gil being much help. Despite the occasional phrase: *veni vidi, vici* or *amo, amas, amat*, he appeared to be in withdrawal from his time as a struggling student of Latin. In our household Latin was a comically dead and difficult language. A futile exercise. My Latin teacher was Miss Lugg. She did what she could with inattentive students, myself included. There were some hefty thugs at Enfield High School and the first lesson I had to learn was not Latin, but how to avoid getting thumped. I had come to Enfield High, saw what was going on and did not want to be conquered. When Miss Lugg announced there was to be a Latin test, I knew I had some catching up to do, not now, not immediately but in due course. I had a busy schedule. When the day of the test arrived with awful suddenness I was unprepared.

I recall the room. A blind had been pulled down over the blackboard, concealing the questions. At the appointed moment, Miss Lugg released the blind. It shot up with a sharp ping. I knew instantly that I was in trouble and abandoned any thought of actually attempting the test. That was out of the question. I felt certain I was not alone. Other great

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minds in the room would also be moving swiftly to Plan B. Best to get out before the rush. I experimented with groaning and stomach clutching. Miss Lugg took no notice although others sniggered. Teenagers can be so cruel. I eventually gained Miss Lugg's attention. She told me, rather insensitively I thought, to sit in the corridor. I noticed a pleasing mix of envy and admiration at what my classmates knew to be a brilliant, swiftly executed exit. The Latin test had barely started and Walker was out of the room.

I continued groaning in the corridor. I felt silly moaning away there on my own, but knew how suspicious it would look to be suddenly cured. This may have persuaded Miss Lugg to take my case seriously. She sent Lynton Bentley, an excellent Latin scholar, to assist me to the Headmaster's office. There is a tide in the affairs of schoolboys which, when taken at the flood can sweep the little blighters right out of their depth. The Headmaster was so concerned, he rang my father. My father was so concerned that he dropped everything and whisked me to the doctor in the Vanguard. The doctor prodded and poked. I stayed with the idea of the pain in the right lower abdomen, adding the convincing detail that I'd been pushed into some stairs at school a week or so earlier. Although not strictly true, that gave my story a more satisfyingly rounded feel. The doctor straightened up and took my father aside. He suspected a ruptured stomach wall. The doctor looked grave. My father looked grave. I looked grave.

A miracle then unfolded, a real medical condition developed. I was rushed to hospital with a swelling in my right lower abdomen. A cyst the size of a golf ball was removed. As the injury had occurred at school, to whit my virtual encounter with the stairs, all medical expenses were covered by school insurance. Many years later I told my parents the true story with appropriate comic fanfare. My operation had become a dinner party special. I then discovered, much to my surprise, that my parents were definitely not amused. 'We are not amused', was one of Glasson's favorite sayings, on permanent loan from Queen Victoria. They were probably troubled that a son of theirs had shown such an aptitude for lying and deceit. Moreover, what might happen if word ever got back to the authorities in the Education Department that G.J. and G.M.W. Walker had made fraudulent claims on school insurance?

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My parents seemed unaware of the much darker undercurrents in that school world. Once, cycling to school, I overheard two older boys describing their involvement in what was clearly a rape. Their tone was conversational. On two occasions, rape identification parades took place at the school. With the victim seated on an elevated stage, we were required to pass by in single file, watched closely by police and teachers. On other occasions I recall girls wearing loose clothes to hide the shame of pregnancy. Beyond the school I was again made aware of the menacing institutions banished long ago to the north of the city, the infectious diseases hospital, Yatala prison and the mental home. There were nervous jokes about these places among my fellow students along with speculation about which of us would end up where.

My mother imagined that as a teenager I was likely to prove dangerously attractive to the opposite sex. I had a keen interest in these delectable exotics and an equally keen awareness, the result of those identity parades, that males who had sex outside of marriage were brutes. This created difficulties with what Lord Baden Powell, writing in the ambiguously titled, *Scouting for Boys*, referred to as the 'racial organ'. Baden Powell was full of sound advice. I learnt that beetroot enriched the blood and invigorated the system. I also learnt that the Japanese were difficult to strangle because they took the trouble to strengthen their neck muscles. Knowing that came in handy. To this day, I have not attempted to strangle anyone I know to be Japanese. When it came to the racial organ, Powell advised that it was of the utmost importance to keep it cool at all times.

This was more easily achieved in the old country than in sunny South Australia. I experienced a lot of difficulty keeping my racial organ cool, particularly on those sultry Adelaide nights when shameless sirens paid their visits. I assumed that Powell did not have to contend with sultry heat. Moreover, he was safely dead and his racial organ decidedly cool well before Bridget Bardot came on the scene. She caused considerable overheating, almost to the point of global warming among males. The truth of the matter is that I was having a pretty torrid affair with Ms Bardot, French actress and goddess, and *Scouting for Boys* was not proving to be much help.

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Glasson Maude Wallace Bourne Walker was no help either. It goes without saying that I did not discuss my relationship with Ms Bardot with my parents. They would have considered her unsuitable. She was clearly an older woman seeking to take advantage of me. Then again, there was no disguising that she was foreign. Indeed, she flaunted the fact that she was French as if that was something in her favor. While that kind of thing cut little ice in Robert Avenue, Glasson was not entirely blameless. She liked the idea of me studying French, although she would certainly have been dismayed to learn that my studies rarely ranged beyond Ms Bardot's exciting cleavage. That was not all Bardot flaunted. She pouted. She had bedroom eyes. She was blonde. She always wore a bikini. She exposed her body. My mother would have said or, more likely thought, that Ms Bardot left nothing to the imagination. I could not agree. When it came to Ms Bardot, my imagination worked wonderfully. Looking back, I find it hard to explain what Bardot saw in me. There must have been more to it than the exotic appeal of Broadview Gardens and my quiet sophistication. I had done a lot of bike riding and my leg muscles were coming on nicely. That was probably it. Cycling is a French thing.

Of course, it ended badly. We drifted apart Bardot and I. Perhaps I should have detected the first signs of her dislike of human company and her reclusive attachment to animals. And what seemed charmingly French has since curdled into a nastier ultra-nationalist credo.

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There she is supporting Jean-Marie Le Pen, perched out there on the far right of French politics, denying the Holocaust, thundering away at immigrants and homosexuals, cultivating discontent and suspicion. It is something I prefer not to think about now. Could I have done more? I believe so. Do I blame myself? Of course, of course, it is hard not to.

All matters relating to maths, bills and banking in our family were handled by Gil, with one remarkable exception. Glasson took me aside one day for an important summit to review what would happen if I got a girl pregnant. I already knew that bringing home a pregnant widge was not going to be a winning move. Glasson held a piece of paper with various calculations on it, a cost benefit analysis. We did not spend a lot of time on the benefits. It was all a question of costs. I would be required to pay maintenance. Glasson had helpfully calculated a fortnightly rate of payment. She then excelled herself by producing a total based on payments stretching over seventeen years calculated at the fortnightly rate. Why seventeen years? Had inflation and on-costs been added in? While I can't recall the precise figure it was stratospheric. I wonder now if Glasson had outsourced the costings to Gil or had she happened upon these useful calculations in a women's magazine? There had to be informative articles in the early 1960s on the high cost of bringing an illegitimate child into the world.

This was the only instruction in the higher mathematics I received from my mother and about the sum total of what could loosely be called my sex education. A little later my father handed me, in an embarrassed way, a book that he said I might find helpful. While the title has disappeared from memory, I can still recall the ugly green cover and some unappetizing representations of the male and female sexual organs with sketchy descriptions of why we had such things. I did not read the book, nor did my parents ask me about it. Evidently they considered their job had been done.

At about this time I developed the first serious signs of psoriasis, a skin complaint with a strong hereditary component. It can be brought on by stress and shows itself as red, scaly blotches. My outbreak was confined to my chest and legs, although that was alarming enough. I leapt briskly to the wrong conclusion, namely that I had a very serious complaint. It is possible, although not certain, that Glasson had alluded to the dreadful effects of

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venereal diseases in her attempt to have me avoid any mismanagement (ie use) of the racial organ. In any event, I was convinced that venereal diseases produced symptoms which corresponded exactly with my own. Most medical experts would now agree that my affair with Ms Bardot was unlikely to have led to this result. My understanding of the causation of these diseases was clearly on the weak side, although not necessarily inconsistent with an E grade IQ. I thought the state of my skin was clear proof that I had caught a dose of VD.

I did not consider my venereal afflictions an ideal topic for the dinner table, nor did I have any access to medical literature. As most of the blotches were on my chest I was able to keep my horrifying condition to myself. My parents did not appear to notice. Nevertheless, I wanted to do something about it. I went out to the garage and, watched only by the Vanguard, rummaged among my father's collection of discoloured sporting trophies, pots of glue and rolls of sandpaper. The sandpaper looked promising. Taking a sheet with just the right abrasive quality, I began sandpapering. I took care not to be seen. Coming back inside, I must have looked quite a sight, but again my parents made no comment. My treatment worked, though it might be best not to try it. The condition soon began to improve and I have rarely been troubled by psoriasis since.

I matriculated in 1962 and, as was the custom, stayed on for a final 'Leaving Honours' year in 1963. I had passed, with no great distinction, English, History, French, Maths 1 and 2, Physics and Chemistry. There seemed no need to work hard in Leaving Honours. My parents began to discuss the type of career that might suit me. I was sent off for an aptitude test. This indicated that I had the makings of a competent wool classer. So Gil and Glasson sent me to weekend wool classing lessons. After a number of false starts (and lagging well behind the others) I just managed to throw the fleece onto the table. When it came to judging the quality of the fleece I was all at sea. The exasperated instructor told me to leave. That finished my career as a wool classer.

There was another possibility. After my arrival at Broadview Gardens I had developed an interest in clocks. I would consult the *Advertiser* to see if there were any auctions of deceased estates within bike riding distance. I was often the only bidder for clocks. I bought several handsome wall clocks made by the American Sessions Company for as little as two shillings

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a piece. I also had two German clocks made by Siemens that I would later recognize as art deco. My clocks became my way into history. Soon I was getting a good collection.

I was lucky to have Gil with me when I bought a rather sullen looking green clock. It refused to budge when I tried to lift it. Gil joked that the 'cursed thing' must have been nailed to the mantelpiece. We attracted a small crowd of amused onlookers. It was a struggle getting that heavy brute into the car. When I removed the green paint, this was no longer an ugly duckling, but a French clock of striking black marble. It became the pride of my collection. But when I returned home in January 1964 after spending several weeks picking apricots on Eric's block, I discovered that all my clocks had gone. Glasson had decided to get rid of them. I was never able to find out why. Those clocks, especially my heavy marble one, had become good friends through my teenage years. I might have had a future in clocks and watches, but my parents considered this a very poor choice as, in their view, working with tiny cogs and flywheels imposed much too severe a strain on the eyes.

Without a future in clocks or wool classing, my prospects did not seem terribly bright. Gil and Glasson had found more important distractions than what might become of me. In 1963 they were going overseas for the first time. Gil was taking long service leave. There was never any suggestion that I might accompany them. I doubt they could have afforded it. In any event, they had their own world and adolescent children were not a large part of it. While my parents were overseas, I committed myself to becoming a primary school teacher by signing a bond with the South Australian Education Department. This gave me a modest fortnightly income. There was still a possibility that I might take some University subjects, although that was not a requirement. My parents accepted the arrangement. They were not encouraging about University, thinking I might find the study too hard. I did not appear to have Gil's steadiness or persistence. Glasson, never one for motherly sentiments, made it clear that she and Gil were looking forward to having me off their hands at long last. While I could see her point, I was in no special hurry to strike out on my own. In 1964, the Australian government had conscripted me for service in Vietnam. The Reds were still coming and it was apparently my job to help stem their advance. Given the choice between University study and the army, I thought University looked far safer and more attractive.