ORAL HISTORY FILE 018 – MALCOLM FIELD

Malcolm Field came as a 10 year old from England to Fairbridge with his 14 year old brother Laurie, arriving in Sydney in December 1952. His younger brother Keith, aged 6 and sister Jane, aged 5, were already at Fairbridge having been sent out in 1951. Malcolm was to stay at Fairbridge for 7 years.

This interview was recorded in Malcolm's home in regional New South Wales on February 17, 2006.

HILL: Can you recollect about your early childhood, your early family life, and what were the circumstances that led you to come to Australia, and how did you end up at Fairbridge?

FIELD: Well, in 1937 my Father and Mother married. My Father was a graduate of London University and a Bachelor of Science, and he was a Structural Engineer . . .

HILL: That's a very unusual pedigree for a Fairbridge boy.

FIELD: You're right. And he worked at Hatfield with de Havilland and during the war, 1940, he was moved to Yeovil to work on secret work on the jets. And he was responsible for the stress of the material of the steel or whatever the 'plane was made of when Sir Frank Whittle was designing the jet engine. And he worked for Westons then. So, my older brother, Laurie, was born in Hatfield, and then after we moved to . . .

HILL: When was he born?

FIELD: He was born in 1938.

HILL: When were Keith and Jane born?

FIELD: I was born in 1942, and Keith was born in 1944, and Jane was born in 1945. But between Laurie and I, there was a little girl, and when we were in Yeovil, they bombed, the Germans, bombed Yeovil because of the Weston factory because they knew they were building new design 'planes there. And my Mother was blown down the staircase and lost the daughter. So they carried on producing more children until they got another girl. And then finished.

We lived in Yeovil until after the war and then in 1946, we moved to Dorsett, near Crewkerne and my parents rented an old rectory, which was eighteen rooms, built in 1615, "Treeacre Garden" with a big wall around it, and a little cottage. A thatched cottage on the gatehouse. And they were our best years.

HILL: So, to this point, you were not in any way an underprivileged child?

FIELD: No. My Mother had help in the house – there were eighteen rooms, there were all stone floors in the kitchen and scullery. No electricity. So it was lamps. We each had our own bedroom. There was a main staircase and then there was a servants' staircase. And we used to have a little candle and a little candleholder to go up the stairs to bed. And I can remember being frightened because of the shadows. And you'd get into your bed, because we all had separate bedrooms, I suppose there were about eight bedrooms, and you'd get under the bedclothes to blow the candle out. Put your head under because you were sort of, you know, scared of the dark in those days.

But sadly, my Father developed a brain tumour in 1949 and died on Keith's birthday, 26 March. He was just five, and I was seven on 29th March. Laurie was ten and Jane was three. So my Mother was left a widow with four children and didn't cope very well with that. So things suddenly changed. We were scattered amongst the relatives for six months while my Mother sort of coped. Her Father had died a few months before. So she lost her Father and my Father in the space of about three months. And her Father owned a garage and he had a fleet of coaches and when he died, he left her about ten thousand pounds, back in 1949. Which was quite a lot of money.

So, after she got herself sorted out, we came home and she bought a house in Yeovil, took in a lodger and, after some time, the lodger became a boyfriend and he was married,

so she couldn't marry him, but she changed her name by Deed Poll to his name, and his name was Wriggler. Not a nice person.

I used to have a cheeky look about me in those days and he didn't like that, so I used to get beaten pretty regularly. Laurie was going to school and he was going to grammar school, and we were at primary school.

HILL: Now, your two younger siblings, Keith and Jane, how did they end up going to Fairbridge?

FIELD: Well, in 1951, my Mother was persuaded by this Eric Wriggler, to move to Southampton. I don't know why. And so she bought a detached house in Swaythling Southampton, which is right near the university, in a nice area, and Laurie went to the grammar school, because he passed with eleven plus, and we went to the primary school.

Well, one day – my Mother had a sports car, an MG sports car, a run-around thing, and she never picked us up from school - and I was eight or nine, and I had to bring my brother and sister home from school and, if we were late, I used to get a belting. And I was told one day by Mum, "You go to school, I'm keeping Keith and Jane home."

I said, "Why?"

"Oh, no reason for you to say." So, off I went to school, came home, and there's no Keith and Jane.

"Where's Keith and Jane?"

"They've gone to Australia."

And I really didn't know what to think. I remember going around the garden thinking did they do them in? Because it was beyond reason in a way.

HILL: Did you ever find our why your Mum sent them to Australia?

FIELD: She'd heard about Fairbridge. She wanted to spend more time with the boyfriend, basically. And the children, really, what she said was, in those days . . .

HILL: The children were in the way?

FIELD: Yeah, in a way. She wanted more room for lodgers, this is what she told the Social Services, the Children's Officer. She had to be interviewed by the Children's Officer, and we've got it in our files. We got our files back from the University of Liverpool. And Jane's got in her file that – "Jane doesn't like me much, she's five. And I really need the room to take in lodgers because I don't have much income." And that was the reason. So Keith and Jane were shipped off to Knock Holt and then were sent to Australia. So, by October 1951, they were in Australia.

HILL: And they were what ages?

FIELD: Keith was six and a half and Jane was five, she was one of the younger ones.

HILL: Now how much later did the decision about you occur?

FIELD: Now, well, Mum then decided in the March – they went in September/October to Knock Holt – in March she decided to get rid of Laurie and I.

HILL: This is March?

FIELD: March 1952.

HILL: So they've gone in '51. So, six months later . . .

FIELD: Six months later she decided, "Oh, I'll get rid of the other two." So, Laurie and I end up at Knock Holt but within two days, she came up in her sports car and took us back home. And I thought, this is wonderful, she's had a second thoughts and she wants us back.

HILL: What, you didn't want to go to Australia?

FIELD: No. It wasn't that at all. What is was, Laurie was thirteen and a half and they didn't really want people that old, so they knocked him back.

HILL: Have you ever understood why Fairbridge wanted younger children?

FIELD: Yes, because the Australian Government wanted younger children basically, because they were more malleable. Get to thirteen or fourteen and you are fixed in your ideas.

HILL: Why did they want them malleable?

FIELD: So they could send them anywhere in Australia, basically, in those days. The boys were to be farmhands anywhere, and they were to be domestic servants. So, we went back home. And then in the summer holidays, at the end of the summer holidays, she decided she was going to immigrate to Australia. Not on the ten pounds, she paid her way, first class, on the "SS Strathaird".

Anyway, Eric Wriggler, the boyfriend, and her, were to have one cabin, and Laurie and I had another cabin. And when we got onto the ship, no sign of Eric Wriggler. And he'd dumped her. Had a suitcase put into the cabin, and when she opened it, it was full of newspaper. And he was making quite clear that he'd left her. So she was quite sour for a week or two. And we had this trip, first class, to Australia. All the lovely ports and so on.

HILL: How old were you then?

FIELD: I was ten.

HILL: You might remember some of it?

FIELD: Oh, a lot of it. On the trip out, within about a week, my Mother had forgotten about Eric Wriggler and the guy who was serving us on our table, whose name was Mark Clay. And Mark Clay was twenty-four and Mum was thirty-five and, within a short while, they were an item.

HILL: You get to Australia . . .

FIELD: So, we arrive in Australia, my Mum sent a telegram to Fairbridge to say that she was coming out to Australia and Mr Woods had told Keith and Jane, "Your Mother's coming to visit you." So Jane said to all the girls in Rose Cottage, "My Mother's coming to visit me," because not many children had Mothers coming out to visit. I don't know what Keith said, he's more reticent.

We got to Sydney and we stayed in the Hotel Sydney. In those days, which was near Central Railway, the grand hotel, the best hotel there. And we had a week there. My Mother gave Laurie and I . . .

HILL: This is so different from the typical Fairbridge kid's story.

FIELD: My Mother gave Laurie and I money to go on the trams and so on and run around Sydney while she and Mark were enjoying themselves, and then next thing, after a week, she didn't bother going up to Fairbridge, only 180 miles, forgot about them . . .

HILL: How old were they now?

FIELD: They would have been six and seven, '52.

HILL: And she didn't visit them?

FIELD: No. Next thing, we're on the ship, going back to England because Mark was a steward and had to go back to England, so why shouldn't she go back? First class, all the way back to England. No house. So we went into the New Forest and stayed in a guesthouse for about a week. She decided she was going to marry Mark, or he wanted to marry her, because he thought she had plenty of money. She was spending it pretty well by then. And she then contacted Fairbridge and Fairbridge changed its mind and said that Laurie could come out to Australia, for the sake of keeping the family together.

So, we arrived back in England in November '52 and then, within a week we were at Knockholt waiting for a party to come together, and on the 19th December we sailed on

the "SS Chitral", steerage class, down the bottom of the ship with eight kids to a cabin and sailed out to Australia again.

HILL: Now, the first time, can you recall any features of the voyage, it was first class.

FIELD: The meals were superb, I was very friendly with a little Indian boy and, when we were in Bombay, he was one of the top families, and I went to stay with them overnight. I remember that very well. There were about fifty servants in the house. That was interesting. Colombo – my Mother bought a set of five elephants and Laurie, being the older brother, got the three good ones, and I got the two little babies. We've still got them. I remember that.

HILL: So – you've now been dropped to steerage and . . .

FIELD: Laurie is now fourteen and I'm ten. And we had a Rev Mr & Mrs Parkins who were our escorts. But, we had lessons on the whole trip out. And when we finally got to Fairbridge on Australia Day, we arrived in 1953 on Australia Day, got to Fairbridge, two days later, school started. We felt very aggrieved because we'd had school all the way out. No holiday. The Parkins obviously decided we needed to be kept occupied.

HILL: How did you feel on this second trip?

FIELD: Very vulnerable. I wouldn't say lost, because I had Laurie and we'd been more or less left to our own devices, although we had a comfortable lifestyle, we were left to our own devices really from the time my Father died.

HILL: Can you recall arriving in Sydney?

FIELD: Oh yes. Coming through the Heads.

HILL: And what were your feelings then?

FIELD: I didn't really know what to expect. We hadn't been told anything. The Parkins didn't know. And at Knockholt, you weren't told anything really about what to expect. So there was a lot of trepidation. And then you were met by Mr Woods in the blue truck, because there were only ten of us.

HILL: You went by truck, not by train?

FIELD: No. He met us with the truck, so we drove overnight on the truck. Arriving at six o'clock . . .

HILL: Where did you sleep?

FIELD: In the truck. It was like the Fairbridge bus, it had seats on the side.

HILL: So, with ten of you, did some of you sleep on the floor?

FIELD: Oh yes, it was a mixture and you sort of just dozed, really. Because it was hot and that was another thing. January, in England, it's cold. And trying to get used to the hot in January!

HILL: So, do you remember that trip over the mountains in the back of the truck?

FIELD: Yes, in the back of the truck. Hot, hot. It had a canvas top and benches down the sides and little bags down the middle, we had very few things.

HILL: Did they outfit you?

FIELD: In England. You had a Fairbridge Farm suit, which was a little woollen worsted suit with a blazer, a shirt and the Fairbridge tie. You had two pairs of shorts, two pairs of tee shirts, a couple of singlets and one pair of shoes, a pair of socks. And you had a gaberdine raincoat which was down to my ankles.

HILL: What happened to that stuff? Did it get to the Cottage?

FIELD: It got to the Cottage but you never wore – oh, I've got a picture of Laurie and I wearing the suits.

HILL: Because most of us who were fitted out, we can remember at Selfridges in London . . . where it went . . .

FIELD: Oh, I had my gaberdine raincoat, because I had it when I went to Orange High School. I had it for three years, yes.

HILL: Can you remember the day you arrived at Fairbridge?

FIELD: Yes, we arrived at six o'clock in the morning and Woodsie, or the boss, Mr Woods, then – he was a frightening figure. When we got off the ship, there's this six foot four man, eighteen stone, and you know, you were petrified, because you didn't know what you were going to. You were getting in this truck going somewhere in Australia. Because you had no conception of what Australia was really. It was 180 miles over the Blue Mountains and we got to Fairbridge. He dumped us in the Memorial Garden, by Corinda Cottage, in the little Memorial Garden.

HILL: That's extremely unusual, because everybody else . . .

FIELD: Put there to wait until 7.15 when the bell went for breakfast. So we just sat there. One thing can visualise now is that, there was a little sundial in the middle. And it was neatly kept but there were gum trees with leaves on them, you know, thinking you were in England in the middle of winter, and it was still difficult to get that contrast.

And the next thing, Kookaburras that laughed. And that's the first thing I can remember about Fairbridge. The Kookaburras. And then at 7.15 Woodsie came over and said, "Right, into the dining room. And I'll allocate you to tables and then you'll be taken back to the Cottages." That's what happened. And you ended up sitting on the bench. Laurie and I were put into Orange Cottage because Keith was in Orange Cottage.

HILL: Can you recall meeting up with your brother for the first time?

FIELD: Oh yeah. He didn't know. He went out in October '51 and he arrived in January '53. So it was quite a while. And it was quite strange because, although he was your brother, he didn't seem like it. He was just a stranger, really. And Jane was in Rose Cottage and you rarely saw the girls.

HILL: A lot of people have said this: that brothers and sisters, they really lost contact.

FIELD: Yes. My sister says to me that the only time she saw me was on Sunday at the church, which was in the dining hall in those days before the chapel was built, and she'd say to her friends, "That's my brother, Malcolm, he's the server." That's the only time – you hardly ever spoke. We did in Orange Cottage, because the three of us were there.

HILL: Did you become close again, the three brothers?

FIELD: Not really. No.

HILL: But you and Laurie stayed closer?

FIELD: I think he'd had enough of me because he'd looked after me for four years. He couldn't wait to get rid of me. And he was four years older. So he only did nine months at Orange High and then he became a trainee.

HILL: So, you would have gone initially to primary school?

FIELD: To primary school for two years. Barefoot and the Fairbridge tee shirt and shorts, that was it. That was your uniform.

HILL: Did you enjoy the school?

FIELD: We had Mr Mott. There was Mr Paul – I was put into fourth class initially, because it was very difficult I think the teachers to try and work out where your education was, what standard you were – and I was put into fourth class, but within a fortnight I could read, I could write, I could do maths, so I was immediately put into fifth class. And then sixth class. I came first and second and there was a Sarah Neave, she was the daughter of the Nursing Sister, Sister Neave, and she and I took it in turns to come first.

And then in sixth class, we did the Bursary, sat for the Bursary, and Paul Suret, Derek Moriarty and I, we all ended up going to Orange High School.

HILL: How many kids were going to Orange High School?

FIELD: As far as I can remember, there was Ron Sinclair, Ian Howell – they were a year ahead of me – I can't remember anybody else.

HILL: There were only one or two or three?

FIELD: Oh yes. There were three of us in that particular year. And then the next year, Michael Walker, I think he was the only one who went that year.

HILL: I've never understood, in 1959 when we arrived, suddenly, I think there was intervention by the Education Department, because virtually all the kids of secondary school age in our group went to high school.

FIELD: The one on the main road?

HILL: Orange High School.

FIELD: The old Orange High?

HILL: They'd just moved to the new one.

FIELD: Because I was there for four and a half years in the old Orange High School.

HILL: I think the Education Department was intervening and saying these kids have got to get a decent education and the group after us in '59, the same . . .

FIELD: Well Laurie, he'll probably tell you, he said that he had to leave at fifteen. He couldn't stay on. He wasn't allowed to stay on.

But before I went to Orange High, in August 1953 I was at the Fairbridge Public School, and the Governor-General, Sir William Slim, came up for a weekend. And he drove up the hill in his Rolls Royce and what was interesting was, the chauffeur took kids up and down the hill the whole weekend in the Rolls Royce. and the Governor-General met with the staff on the Saturday, and then on the Sunday, there was this Communion Service on the lawn, on the front lawn in front of Nuffield Hall, and there is an old cinefilm somewhere of that Service, with Roland Bigrigg getting a bit, he can remember some things but I don't think he knows where that is.

HILL: He conducted the Service?

FIELD: Yes, he conducted the Service, an old Fairbridgian. And, afterwards there was a big Reception in the dining hall, and all these people from around were invited, and I happened to pick on this couple, Mr and Mrs Glasson of Gamboola, didn't know who they were. And he had to go back to look at his sheep because it was August, so it was

lambing season, he had Rodney Marsh Stud sheep, so he wanted to save every sheep he could. And so Mrs Glasson came around with me and you showed them around your Cottage . . .

HILL: How old were you?

FIELD: I was just eleven.

Showed her around the Cottage and then Mr Mott said, "Get all your books out at school, in case somebody wants to come and see you." I mean, it was a bit hopeful. Because not many people, I mean, I took this Mrs Glasson who was a nice kind lady. We walked over the hall and down to the school and she looked at my books and then we walked back and said goodbye.

And at Christmas, Mr Woods called me down to his office. "Mr & Mrs Glasson want to invite you for Christmas." So I went for Christmas and they have a beautiful old homestead and I lived there as a member of the family. Stayed there for holidays, stayed there for Christmas the first time.

HILL: So, you were in Fairbridge at term time?

FIELD: And then I'd go there for holidays but, at the same time . . .

HILL: Was that your lucky break?

FIELD: Oh yes, very much. One of my blessings. But also, Mrs Woods had decided that I was Server material but I hadn't been christened . .

HILL: A Server in the Church?

FIELD: Yes, but hadn't been christened and hadn't been confirmed. So, she got me christened sort of one week and confirmed just about the next week, because she was a missionary and did you know that she was a daughter of a Bishop of Oxford? Anyway, through being Christened, I had to have a Godparent and so the Bursar's wife, Anne Hadaway, became my Godmother and I knew her for over fifty years. She just died two years ago and I was here to help her.

HILL: This is very unusual for a school kid to have that level of support of patronage.

FIELD: Oh yes. I was very, very lucky. Very lucky.

HILL: So you went to the primary school for two years, then to Orange High.

FIELD: But I'd already had this network of two people – the Glassons of Gamboola, and the Hadaways who, after he moved from being Bursar at Fairbridge went to Sydney, and so I went to Sydney every May holidays. So I had a wonderful experience.

HILL: Two families?

FIELD: Two families. One experience of Sydney life, and one experience of farm life.

HILL: Meanwhile, you continue, and you matriculate at Orange? Now, you weren't pulled out at fifteen years of age?

FIELD: No. Now, interestingly enough,. things have changed in that four years. And I think it was Ron Sinclair and Ian Howell, they both went on to do the Leaving Certificate. So they were the first, I think, and then we were the next. And Derek went into fourth year, but he wasn't coping very well. He didn't get thrown out, but he ran away from school and wasn't very happy. So he left. Paul Suret and I stayed on and we both matriculated. And we both applied for the New Guinea Education Service and the NSW Education Department. And he, eventually, went to New Guinea, and I went to the Bathurst Teachers' College. And you got like a small amount of pocket money, a living-away-from-home allowance. Four pounds a week.

HILL: Did you feel at Fairbridge that you were never really part of Fairbridge, being an Orange High School kid?

FIELD: Yes, but you were still there and you had to cope with the pressures of being part of a fourteen group Cottage. Now these are the negatives.

First of all, the Cottage Mothers were pretty hopeless, generally speaking. If you think in terms of the fifties being full employment, the only people who came up to Molong were people who had nowhere else to go. So, there was a Mrs Hodgkin son, Brown Cottage, who was an alcoholic basically, and she'd been a Lady Rutledge in her time; there was a number of old Fairbridgians who came back, and I had an Marie Field who was ex-Fairbridge and who had parted from her husband and had two kids, so she came and ran the Cottage for a couple of years. But, by that time, I was thirteen and fourteen, and I was running the Cottage. I did all the rosters, I ended up taking over the kitchen, because you know all the duties you had to do for an hour in the morning, well by the time I was thirteen, I'd sort of sussed things out, to make life simpler, so I did the kitchen. So I used to have to black-lead the Canberra range, then you'd scrub the deal benches, and then you'd scrub the floor and set the fire ready for the evening, and I ended up sort of cooking the meals when I came home from school, so I never went to musters.

When I left Fairbridge, Mr Woods called when I said goodbye the day I finished the Leaving Certificate, Mrs Glasson drove up in her car and picked me up and I went to say goodbye to Mr Woods and he said, "Now Malcolm," he said, "You are one of the few who never did a muster, so I must congratulate you." I worked it out.

HILL: Well, there were a few others who followed in your wake – Paddy O'Brien and Dudley Hill. I don't think they ever did a muster. They were Orange High School students as well.

What are your fondest recollections of Fairbridge, aside form the Glassons and the Hathaways.

FIELD: I think going to Gerroa on a camp. That was fun, because you had free time. You could just go off and do anything.

HILL: Yes, but that's another 'Lord of the Flies' wasn't it? The discipline disappeared. Harry Harrop had us.

FIELD: And he had no discipline at all. You could eat him for breakfast! Woodsie was more relaxed at the camp, wasn't he? The other thing that I enjoyed, I was in the Scouts. Ted Tepper first, who was a real – there's a photograph of him in the Brotherhood Book, and he looks like Hitler – but he was not an easy individual. But when he left, Mr Woods took over the Scouts and I became Patrol Leader, and in 1957, we won all the Cups, Kangaroo Patrol. It's got my name on all the . . .

Well, I was Kangaroo. And I've got all the trophies, because that was one thing Woodsie taught you. When you did something, you did the best you could, better than anybody else.

HILL: Now what happened when you left Fairbridge at seventeen, you matriculated . . .

FIELD: Well, I did an extra nine months at Fairbridge. And that wasn't a trial because I was spending more and more time at Gamboola. I should have left at seventeen, but because I wanted to do the Leaving Certificate, I was seventeen years nine months before I left.

HILL: Quite old for a Fairbridgian. . . .

The day you finished the Leaving Certificate . . .

FIELD: Mrs Glasson came and picked me up to go and live with them.

HILL: Before Christmas? Before you got your Leaving Certificate results?

FIELD: That's right. Oh yes, they took me to live with them in the homestead with them. And I worked on the farm, because I wasn't a bludger, on Gamboola. So I did harvesting, mustering and all those sorts of things, milked the cows and different things. And they paid me, paid me a little bit. But it was wonderful and I would say that I was probably very rare for anybody to do and actually live with a family. Probably almost unique. So I was very, very fortunate.

And then I got my Leaving Certificate results and Florence went into town to pick them up and she came into the driveway, you know that long driveway, tooting the horn and waving. I'd passed! She opened it, and I'd passed.

HILL: I can still remember, I did the Leaving Certificate, I left Fairbridge and did it later . . .

FIELD: Because it was your future. Your life. Oh yes.

Well, I'd already planned to go to Teachers' College. So getting a good result meant that I was automatically in. And so Mrs Glasson and Mr Glasson came to Bathurst, took me to Bathurst, and W R Glasson was an historian who wrote two books. He would have preferred to have been an author . . .

HILL: So you used to go on picnics with the Glassons and he was an historian at Ophir, the gold town?

FIELD: He would tell you all the history. He had a wonderful library. He had a thousand book library. And he had the ten-volume Oxford Dictionary and we'd been having a discussion at the table and I'd say something, "What's that word mean?" And he said, "Get the volume, whichever – ten volume – pick out the volume." And you'd look at the word and you'd understand another word.

HILL: How long after you went to Fairbridge did you come under the protection and the care of the Glassons?

FIELD: By eleven, they were taking an interest in me. But also, her cousin was Wells Hudson, who was the Chairman of the Fairbridge Society. And so, at one stage, Mr Glasson, being twenty-seven years older than his wife, when I was about thirteen, fourteen, he got a bit jealous because she was spending more time with me. And so, when I rang up . . .

HILL: You were her surrogate child?

FIELD: Yes. But when I rang up, he'd say, "Oh no, she's not available." Eventually she came up to Fairbridge to see me and I said, "Well, Mr Glasson keeps on saying you're busy."

She said, "I'll sort him out!"

HILL: Did you have access to a telephone at Fairbridge?

FIELD: The Bursar, Harry Harrop. He was really good like that.

HILL: Most Fairbridge children would never have used a 'phone.

FIELD: When I went to Gamboola with the Godparents in Sydney, I had access. And, also, one of the bad things I think when I was there was Harry Harrop, because that was the time when he was gambling and fleecing of the joint.

HILL: Were you aware of it when you were there?

FIELD: No, because he always had money available for whatever. But it always came out of his pocket.

So, I think that for a time, like I didn't get a new uniform for Orange High and that was one of the things that I used to feel very . . .

HILL: We never got new uniforms . . .

FIELD: I got a second-hand Orange High School blazer.

HILL: We all got second-hand ones, but we had . . .

FIELD: At least I did get a second-hand one. But that was through the Glassons.

HILL: Could we go back to your fond recollections of Fairbridge?

FIELD: The happy times? The Scouts were happy times. Gerroa. There were times not so happy, I don't think. The rest of the time at Fairbridge, because I had this contrast, of lumpy porridge, the food was pretty basic. And you remember sitting on those benches and the Cottage Mother doling out the lumpy porridge into the coups, those tin coups, and they would be passed down and you'd look and hope that you didn't get that one. And then you remember the dough, the bread, which was made by the kids. Now I used to find the food at Fairbridge pretty foul, basically. I mean, the spinach was never clean. You always got the grit in the spinach. There's those things.

And the mutton. And Laurie tells me that he remembers getting the legs of lamb. Now I never remember getting legs of lamb. We used the flaps. But I mean you got the sort of, on a Sunday you might have got a bit of leg. But most of the week it was the flaps and whatever.

And then, I used to make up the soup with the flaps and then you'd leave it on the tank stand for about two hours and you'd scrape this much fat off it and then you'd put in vegetables and that would be your evening meal.

HILL: You'd scrape the fat out? A lot of them didn't.

FIELD: Oh yes. Well, I did do that. And I remember making a hundred apple slices which disappeared in five minutes flat.

HILL: Do you enjoy cooking?

FIELD: I do, yes. And I've given interviews to the "Orange-Central Western Daily" and we talked about that. The fact that I enjoyed cooking and still do.

HILL: They were the good times. What about the bad?

FIELD: Bad I think were the relationships with a lot of the kids. What I had to be very careful of, was not only that I was going to Orange High School, and there were only five of us going at that stage out of two hundred and twenty . . .

HILL: . . . they resented it . . . and you didn't have to do the musters because you got home . . .

FIELD: That's right, because you got home too late because you dawdled up the hill to make sure you didn't do the musters, after you'd got off the bus.

So, I think relationships with the kids were difficult. Also, I was going to Gamboola and I never mentioned to anyone what Gamboola was like because that would have been even worse.

So, basically I sat on my locker reading books. I read a lot of books. But, I was very lucky again, because I used my brains. Tony Dawkins, Rat Dawkins, now Rat Dawkins was a rough diamond, and if he got on with somebody, he respected me for my brains. He was the brawn and I was the brains in the Cottage. And so I controlled the Cottage through the rosters and if there was any problem, Rat would sort it out. So you found a way to survive. You had to. Because otherwise you would have gone under, and a number of kids did. Didn't cope well at all.

HILL: Did you witness kids who had trouble? Kids who were abused?

FIELD: Oh yes. I'm certainly aware of some sexual abuse at Fairbridge.

HILL: Boys or girls?

FIELD: Boys with one or two members of staff, without saying any names.

HILL: It's interesting that a number of people, particularly women . . .

. . . . little children who have been knocked around by bigger kids, but also by those sadistic Cottage Mothers . . .

FIELD: Oh, Mrs Hodginson, the Witch, in Gowrie, oh yes. That's right. Mrs Johnstone, Da Frietas, oh yes. And the jug cord was the main weapon. Around the legs or anywhere, when they got into a temper. I think I might have got that a few times, everybody did.

HILL: So you left and you went to?

FIELD: I went to Bathurst Teachers' College.

HILL: And never looked back?

FIELD: Well no, no I didn't really, fortunately.

HILL: When you look back on it, and I suppose this is the final question . . . what's your assessment of the whole experience?

FIELD: A positive one for me. Because I rose above it, a lot of the time. I got my reference from Mr Woods which is fascinating reading, because he sort of stressed various things, he said that, initially, I was a bit diffident because being a second son in a family as well, and then going to Fairbridge and finding life very difficult because I'm not a physical, not a strong physical person, and I wasn't very good at sport, initially. And then I went into the Scouts and did very well in the Scouts . . .

HILL: And that would have registered well with Woods.

FIELD: Oh, it did.

HILL: What about sport?

FIELD: Sport? Gradually, you were in the football teams, 5-7, (5 stone, 7 pounds), 6-7, 7-7, 8-7, and I ended up on the wing because I was reasonably fast. But I wasn't that brilliant. Later on, I wasn't ever very good at sport at Fairbridge, but I did my whack.

HILL: Fairbridge wasn't very pro-education.

FIELD: No.

HILL: Did you get much support?

FIELD: Woodsie was okay.

HILL: And yet your brother was pulled out of school at thirteen.

FIELD: Yes. But he, generally speaking, he was pretty kind to us Field children because I think he'd know from the reports that he got from England, that we were a little bit different from the normal . . .

HILL: In what way?

FIELD: In that we'd had a different background.

HILL: Better stock?

FIELD: I wouldn't say that, but I think that . . . but I think he favoured us in a way because we were, he always said that we were very polite, always polite. We had very good manners, he stressed that all the way through.

HILL: Well, Woods was a product of Empire, do you think it was that he thought you were from better stock?

FIELD: I think so, yes. I mean, he was pretty good to all the kids but Derek Moriarty used to get beaten regularly, he was a larrikin. Peter Bennett, he hadn't a good word to say for him and he was there twelve years. I was there seven years . . .

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. . . when he moved to Wollongong, and Laurie would come down, Laurie and Terry, and we'd go and visit him, he had a little property at Cordeaux, and we used to go and chat with him and he was really relaxed and informal, he called himself George, George Woods in those days. Because he was Frederick Kynnersley Smithies-Woods. He didn't want, when he got to Illawarra Grammar School – he taught there for a number of years – he called himself George Woods.

HILL: Why did he leave Fairbridge?

FIELD: He could see things were changing.

HILL: You said it was basically a positive experience, because you rose above it. What does this mean for those who didn't rise above it?

FIELD: They suffered. A lot of kids, I think, found Fairbridge a difficult time. Now, because I was fortunate in having my two great stalwarts, the Hadaways and the Glassons, I got away a lot and Woodsie let me go.

HILL: What do you think of the fortunes of the majority?

FIELD: I feel sad for them. I think a lot of them didn't have a very high IQ, so they were struggling at school. They went out into jobs that didn't pay much, and they never paid much, and they've never had the chance – okay, they're probably married – and I mean, a lot of Fairbridge kids that I've talked to married early because they wanted to get a home together because they didn't have a home, or a family. And a lot of those first marriages have failed and a lot are on the second or third marriage until they sort of got it right. And there are quite a number, me included, who never married. And I think that goes right back.

HILL: Do you think that your experience was a contributing factor to your never having married?

FIELD: Yes. In that my Mother never really, was not a good Mother, and I think that's the, because I was lucky . . .

HILL: For what it's worth my twin brother . . .

FIELD: I think seven years there, although I had the Glassons and the Hadaway's, but I wasn't their child.

HILL: But you were never, as a child, part of a family, were you?

FIELD: No, that's right. You were isolated from, I mean I did get some emotional support from the Glassons and Mrs Hadaway, more so than a lot of the kids, but they weren't my family. They were friends, and became good friends, but not family.

HILL: Do you think that you have become just a bit remote in relationship terms?

FIELD: Yes. I've had several close relationships with women, girls, and could never go that final step. But I found always that I enjoy company, I've got a lot of friends, but there's a barrier, and beyond that, you don't go.

HILL: I'm just wondering if you wanted to add any comments about the sort of summing-up of Fairbridge?

FIELD: Well, one of the things I did want to do, I wanted to go back to England to find my Father's family. Because my Mother really had said nothing much and didn't want to have anything to do with my Father's family. And so, I wanted to find out the other side.

And so I went back to England, and I was only going to stay a few months, and I had every intention of coming back, but my Uncle and Aunt made me so welcome, I stayed with them. And they had a son who lived abroad for twenty-five years, only one son, and I became a surrogate son to them. And we became really good friends. They were 65 when I met them and so, after a few years, they started to get older, and I ended up staying much longer than I intended because I wanted to look after them. And so I used to visit them every month and go shopping with them. And as they got older and older and couldn't drive, I did all sorts of things for them and I felt that that was the right thing to do.

Now, interestingly enough, when I went to the two Inquiries – the House of Commons Inquiry, and the Senate Inquiry - at the House of Commons Inquiry, I went to two sessions in London. Then I put in three submissions to that one, and then I appeared in Sydney for the Senate Inquiry, and I put in two or three submissions to that. Now, the Recommendations of both of those groups were that the former child migrants should have the right to visit family in England. And I did this twenty years before.

HILL: Now, just on that, what did you recommend in your submissions?

FIELD: Well, the Senate one, one of the things I did say was, that I felt – and this is something I'm not aggrieved about but I'm not too happy about – is that when I came back in 2002, I've come back as a Temporary Resident. And I'm on a Retiree Visa. The only reason I could get that was I had enough money and income to return to Australia. I had to have an income of $45,000 a year and enough money to live on. And that's the only way I could get back because I'd left Australia and didn't take out citizenship in those twenty years I was here.

Now – who did? As an English-person, nobody did in those years. It wasn't something you ever thought about. And I've spoken to a lot of Fairbridge kids and a lot of them haven't even today.

HILL: Do you know why? They don't know how to fill out the forms.

FIELD: That's right. But John Harris last year, only just.

And I did write, I spoke to Dennis Silver . . .

HILL: What else did you put in the submission?

FIELD: I put in the positives, because I was never interviewed because both the Senate and the House of Commons, really wanted people who were anti their child migration. I put in mostly the things that I feel – there were five blessings that I've had in my life: firstly that I came out to Fairbridge. I felt that it was a positive influence overall; secondly, that I met my Godmother, Florence Glasson; thirdly, I went to Orange High School and that opened up my horizons; and then fourthly, I went teaching all over and I went back to England met my Uncle and Aunt; and then finally, I feel for whatever reason I came back to Australia under whatever circumstance, that I was able to come back.

HILL: Well, that invites the response that when you say these five or six things happened to you, most of them didn't happen to the majority of Fairbridge kids. So that makes you atypical and not representative . . .

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