

“My times are in Thy hand....”.

Psalm 31: 15.

Chapter One

‘THE MEETING’ – or ‘GOD’S APPOINTMENT’

When Peggy was very young, like all children her age, she went to Sunday school where she learned about the Lord Jesus. In her home Jesus was unknown. She had four brothers and one sister, all older. She was only six weeks old when her father died as the result of being trampled by his own horse. He had used a horse and cart to make deliveries of the beautiful pottery he made and one day he slipped between the cart and his horse, causing the horse to panic with fright. So Peggy was raised without knowing her dad. Her eldest brother, some 16 years older, promised his dad he would look after his wee sister. Wally did that proudly, with gusto, even taking Peggy with him everywhere when he was courting his wife. He was not worried if people thought she was his daughter. The day Peggy got married it was Wally who escorted her down the long church aisle.

One day at the youthful age of nine, Peggy announced that she had found a new friend, the Lord Jesus, who she had asked to be her saviour. All her young days she carried a Bible, talked to her new friend and learned to trust Him.

Peggy did not have an easy young life, with sickness taking her several times a week to a hospital clinic and a mother who often told her she wished she, Peggy, had been a



Walter's wedding with a not so shy Peggy as flower girl.
She was eight years old.

boy. She did not understand her 'Jesus talk' and tried to stamp it out. Many years later she too found the Lord, the Lord then making her apologise to Peggy for the way she had shamefully treated her.

Peggy turned to her new friend for help. They became inseparable. Jesus taught her to trust Him in every circumstance of her young life. When she found no one else to read her Bible to, she read to the two little dogs which had been given to her. Those two doggies must have been the best Bible educated dogs in Australia.

Prayer to Peggy always meant talking to her friend Jesus. She learned at an early age to trust Him implicitly, and her faith never left her. So it was natural for her to want to share her prayer life with me. I did not know the wonderful caring friend Jesus had become to her. I will explain how we met in this chapter.

Peggy came from a sport loving family. In her early teens she became adept at high board diving.

One day after a dive she was resurfacing when someone diving from a lower board landed on top of her, resulting in a visit to hospital and a family demand she find another sport. So Peggy took up ice skating, becoming skilful at figure skating and dance routines. Years later she introduced me to ice skating, but when after several attempts and my still being unable to remain on my feet for more than thirty seconds at a time the requests to "let us go ice skating" ceased. Peggy had worked out that I was unlikely to become an ice skating partner for her. By then I could fly aeroplanes but I was a useless ice skater.

Peggy had other well developed skills. Her father's family were very musical. Uncle Graham was a world recognised orchestra conductor, often entertaining celebrities like Dame

Nellie Melba in the huge ballroom of his home. He and Auntie Ethel, also a top singer and pianist, both had two Grand pianos in their ball rooms. Auntie Ethel taught singing and piano at the Melbourne Conservatorium of music. She wanted to take Peggy as a singing student, but her mother refused to allow it. She would allow Alan to have his good Baritone voice trained. Alan said no, he would sooner play football.

I often sought to have Peggy sing to me. She had a sweet angelic voice which found an outlet in the highly rated W.A.A.F. choir, where she had a solo part.

Peggy won debating contests at school. She taught herself to play the piano successfully, including difficult classical pieces. She enjoyed swimming and we spent many happy days together at the beaches with our children and later when we were able to acquire our own swimming pool we swam a lot together. (More about Peggy in Chapter 4).



Stay with me while I describe how patiently the Lord cared for me, a care free Airman, answering prayers for me and all the time seeking to have me realize He had plans for me to live for Him and with Peggy.

Life, to my mind really commenced when, in June 1941, as a young 18 year old, after a day spent in the R.A.A.F. Recruiting Office in Melbourne, Australia, I arrived back home wearing an Aircrew Reserve badge. I was on 'cloud nine'.

I was working at the time at Australian National Airways – later to become Ansett Airways – at Essendon Airport in Melbourne. The thought of being associated with aircraft held no fears for me. Besides a good friend and

associate at ANA had joined the R.A.A.F. and been selected for pilot training. I dreamed of becoming a pilot too.

It seemed a life time of waiting when six months later the call came to report again to the R.A.A.F. Recruiting office in Melbourne.

On December 6th 1941, a good number of us entered ITS (Initial Training School) – we called it *rookies* – at Somers, on Western Port Bay in Victoria.

THE AGE, Tuesday 2 April 1991



Almost 50 years ago, these young men in Melbourne went marching off to war. Gosh, how neat they were. Joining the Royal Australian Air Force was a ceremonial commitment. Most wore suits. All wore ties. Even as raw recruits, they kept in step.

Older people will recognise this spot as the corner of Collins and Elizabeth Streets; the cliche is Alston's the tobacconist, which stood there for years. The Burns Philp building on the opposite corner has also gone. At ground level now, you would be looking at Henry Ducks, clothiers to the gentry, set back from the street.

The tram looks familiar, as it should. It is a W class. More than 250 of them – almost half Melbourne's fleet – are still running, and the National Trust has classified them. What an amazing action this would have seemed to the people in the picture. What – they would have asked – did classify mean? Really? Pull the other leg.

Marchers invited to lunch



LAHEY AT LARGE

Notice that the suits were double-breasted, a style that has made a comeback. This cannot be said yet for hats. The elegant street lamps did better; they came back as Melbourne icons.

These 90 men marched to Spencer Street station on 28 or 29 March 1941 to travel to the RAAF's No 1 Initial Training School at Bradfield Park, Sydney, where they became members of 13 course. Milton Whiting, the former MP from Mildura, was among them, and is trying to trace other survivors to attend a lunch tomorrow.

"As losses during the war for aircrew were about 88 per cent, it is not possible to find many more than the 12 names I have, but it is worth a try," he says. Mr Whiting thinks the regimental numbers of these men would have ranged from 481000 to 481700. Two names he is chasing are Gavin Walker and Glyn Sags. Somebody may know their whereabouts. The contact is Don Maguire (02) 762 1824.

Young R.A.A.F. Aircrew going off to War.

After lots of drill, marches, other fitness and military type training, along with others in my 'Intake', we were allocated our Aircrew Classification. I would be trained to be a pilot. Imagine my joy, I could hardly wait. Soon we found we would have to wait three months to get to flying school.

Japan came into the war on 7th December 1941 with their blitz on Pearl Harbour. The C.O. (Commanding Officer) at Somers – we called him 'Robin Red Breast', because of all the ribbons on his chest – called for a full camp parade. He announced "Australia has declared war on Japan".

We found it hard waiting the 3 months to get to flying school. We guessed the Japanese entry into our war had to be taken into consideration. Time would be needed to think out the most effective ways to quickly grow our war effort.

There was a need to keep us occupied, so all sorts of extra duties were scheduled. A group of us volunteered to repair some theatre seats the unit had acquired, with the plan of setting up a facility for films to be screened. We became very good at inventing excuses for our work taking so long for us to complete. Some of the seats, thanks to our inexpert labour, did not take the shape desired readily. However we had great fun.

How happy I became that my impatience to get cracking and have a go at those Japs was put on hold for a while, for in the interim I met someone beautiful and wonderful.

One day a group of us were taken to the clothing supply store. I was told to go around to the office at the back of the counter where I would find a W.A.A.A.F. (Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force) – later shortened to W.A.A.F. (Women's Australian Air Force). She would tell me what to do. She did – "sweep the floor" and with such a sweet smile

I was hooked. Her name was Peggy and she had been placed in charge of the supply store at Somers until her job at Headquarters was established.

The R.A.A.F. had quickly assessed Peggy as having a well organised mind and a photographically enhanced memory. She was earmarked for the job to head up the



Peggy in W.A.A.F. uniform

important role of organising Aircrew postings. She proved so invaluable and dedicated in this function, no other posting was permitted her until after the war finished, although other units sought to get her services.

Although we were forbidden to fraternize with W.A.A.F's inside the camp area I soon found ways to do it. It was costly though when caught at it, which happened to me a few times. Each time the punishment got worse. First time it was "go around the parade ground (size of a football field) 100 times". The next time it was "do the same running all the time". The third time "do it again carrying your rifle" – those '303 World War two' rifles were not a light weight.

The punishments did not achieve their objective to keep us apart. The W.O. (Warrant Officer in charge of camp discipline) did not stand a chance to stop us from seeing each other.

Peggy was destined to play a pivotal role in my life.