

The Kerry William Bradford Life Story - Born Brisbane 1947

Categories

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The Kerry William Bradford Life Story - Born Brisbane 1947

The early years

I was born in a small timber hospital in Shafston Avenue, Kangaroo Point, Brisbane and when I came home we lived for a few years in a stucco cement single car garage with dirt floor Dad had built for us. We lived in the garage while Dad was building the main structure of our house on the same, previously vacant, lot at a great location, at 16 MacDonald Street Kangaroo Point in front of a narrow park overlooking the Brisbane river directly opposite the city river-end buildings with the towering structure of the Story Bridge a few streets behind us.

The first memory I have of my childhood was around seven years old. I attended *St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School* located at the other end of Kangaroo Point about ten minutes away till grade five. I had a Scottish collie, named Sally that followed me everywhere. I remember my dad always working as a builder during the week and on weekends, and any spare time, on our house.

I also recall Mum and Dad receiving a letter, when I was about nine, from the bank closing his working overdraft loan during a depression period. They were very worried and he was forced to close his one-man carpentering business, and he applied and became a Brisbane City Council full-time carpenter and this

made life a lot easier for mum and dad, with a regular weekly wage income until dad's retirement.

I remember that every second Saturday a representative from Walton's department store would call to collect the store loan-payment and when this was close to being paid out the salesman had new special furniture on sale, so the same fellow called every second Saturday for my entire youth.

Even though my parents got on very well together, lived a great week-to-week life, and were very friendly with the salesman, it was probably my biggest incentive that I did not want to end up with a week-to-week lifestyle. I also remember helping Dad on weekend contract work and helped to finish our house till I was in my twenties, which meant he was working on our house for over twenty years.

I used to play, with other children in our area, in the two local shipyards, *Evans Deakin and Peters Slip* as well as an engineering firm that was located on the river end of Main Street. It is amazing none of us were hurt climbing on the cranes and structure. At Grade 5, I was sent from *St Joseph's Primary School* to boys-only *Villanova Catholic College Coorparoo*. It had very disciplinary priests as teachers, who could cane you for a spelling mistake and the like.

At about 12 years old I met a local fellow who was self-taught in radio and TV construction and repair and had a workshop at

Kangaroo Point where he used to do contract repair work, mainly for *Direct Disposals* in Fortitude Valley. They sold non-lethal ex-military equipment to the public. I quickly became interested in very early electronics and electrical equipment, and also started doing sub-contract work for him, on the basis of payment for each item I refurbished for sale, after school and on weekends for a few years. This was my initial introduction to having my own business and building up a cash account in work I enjoyed. I remember refurbishing numerous large liquid filled aircraft compasses. I built my first crystal set (a very crude radio with extremely low volume only accessible from headphones) then a one-valve radio and so on, during those early years.

My family always had six weeks Christmas holidays in a large ex-army tent at a camping area at the, now Eventide property, on the ocean front at the Brisbane-Sandgate side of the Hornibrook Highway to Redcliffe.

I met a family who owned a prawn trawler, so while on my family holidays during the next three years, I would work on the trawler at Christmas as a deckhand sorting prawns every three hours, through the day and night, for about three days till the trawler freezers were full, then back to port for a few days, then out again. I really learnt what hard work was about as you were either prawn sorting, or having a quick meal and then a couple of hours sleep till the next sort. I enjoyed the experience but realised this type of labouring was definitely not a career path for me.

My parents never flew in a plane during their lifetime and only drove once across the NSW border for a short distance to observe travelling out of Queensland. This was the time when black-and-white television was being first introduced into Brisbane and very few people owned them. I remember our family would go across to the neighbour to watch the test pattern and then one-channel TV shows started. We eventually purchased our own TV a year later. This was the very beginning of a communication revolution everyone takes for granted today.

My family discussed my possible electrical or radio/TV work career, and after my previous youth experience, I wanted to do electrical. My mother was worried about the dangers involved, but agreed to my wishes. My existing *Villanova School* was an academic criteria syllabus, so I moved to *Cavendish Road State High School*, for the last two years that provided an industrial course with Woodwork, Metalwork and Trade Drawing, as well as academic subjects. This also helped my parent's weekly expenses. I took up skin-diving, squash, played social tennis, and one year made the Queensland junior tennis championship competition.

Work

When I finished school at sixteen, my first job application that I was accepted for was with *Electrolux* vacuum cleaners as a trainee-repairer that apparently did not include an

apprenticeship, but my mother insisted (thank goodness) that I only accept an apprenticeship job.

After a couple of job interviews I was employed as a first year apprentice with a small four person electrical family business at Wilston. I was only working there for a couple of months when the boss started leaving me on jobs by myself and then checking my work a few hours later, so I worked very fast to be sitting on a roll of cable waiting when he returned. This made me feel very important and a good worker.

As I had been working part time since I was thirteen, I had savings and bought a car two months before I had my licence. Once I received my driver's licence my boss let me drive a van so I could go out on jobs by myself.

I felt pretty important and had not finished my first year apprenticeship when I was doing my own weekend electrical work for friends and relatives - definitely not allowable under today's standards. I was also repairing and selling equipment, by advertising it in the newspaper. They were items that I bought at an auction house that our firm did the weekly electrical testing for, so this, and my weekend electrical work, allowed me to gain experience and build a good income.

In the third year of my apprenticeship, my boss, who played competitive tennis, just below the top grade, put the other two tradesman off so he could fulfil a dream of playing tennis

overseas for 12 months and transferred me to a larger electrical firm of about six staff, *Doug Edington* at Annerley who became *Halmac Edington*, and this was where I learned industrial, workshop and motor repair. Doug liked me and he was a good business man, but a workaholic, so it was expected you would work every Saturday as well, mainly in industrial premises that were closed for the weekend.

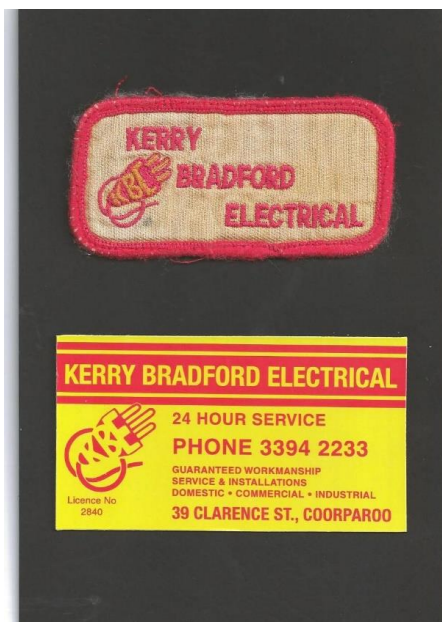
A year later when my original boss finished his year of overseas tennis I returned to my initial firm and finished my five-year apprenticeship as his only employee, but still rewinding motors at night for *Edington* while also attending Night College. As his first love was tennis, Brendon left me to carry out the work in the business by myself.

On completion of my night college I was offered a free multi-year study scholarship, as long as I kept studying in electronics and industry automation, as it was in its infancy and the Government realised they had a skill shortage in this new technology. I completed several Electronics and Industrial Electronics night courses in the next couple of years and these qualifications guaranteed you a job in the automation section of the electrical industry.

However, by now my own private weekend and night electrical work was blossoming, so I told my boss I was starting my own business at age twenty-two. I thought I would see how things developed as, with my qualifications, jobs were also almost

guaranteed with the major companies who were automating. On receiving this news he offered me to buy his business with repayments over the following twelve months as he was doing very little work in it now and had not been running the business well.

I knew all his customers and had been doing most of the work for the last four years. The day I finished work with Brendon I was flat out with his and my own customers, working from my parents Kangaroo Point house so able to easily cover all areas of Brisbane. A few months later I took on my own first year apprentice.



As I started to diversify the business into Domestic, Commercial and Industrial, especially shops, restaurants and snack bars, as I reasoned there were good financial returns and a better diversity of work than just housing. We did work for *Mack Trucks*, *ACL Gaskets* that controlled all the gaskets for Australian cars, and we converted their manual production to automatic, set up and serviced multiple restaurants, snack bars and bakehouses in the many Queensland new shopping centres being constructed in our State, and becoming their equipment service electricians with a one hour-or-less call-out arrival time.

We maintained about fifty percent of our business with regular domestic customers. We had great diversity and were always busy. We also did a lot of installation and service work at Brisbane's *Expo88* at Southbank. I had a staff of up to twelve workers in my forty working business years but in the last few years before retirement, I wound it back to about four or five where I could easily manage and be choosy who I did work for. A number of staff did their long service leave with me.

Family and community life

My wife Janet and I dated for a couple of years and we married in 1972. We rented a flat next to my parents' house at Kangaroo Point as I was still running my business from my parents' house. Twelve months after we were married we bought a residence at Ellis Street, Kangaroo Point overlooking the river and above the newly finished Freeway Bridge across the river at the other end of Kangaroo Point from our flat. We continued to run our business from the new house and Jan did a lot of the business office duties while still working for the Public Service.

A year later we bought a property with two registered flats at Bell Street Kangaroo Point that I wanted to pay off in three years. The bank manager told me that was ridiculous as everyone had twenty year loans but I did it with a lot of extra work and cutting costs. I knew this would protect us financially if a major business job went bad as a lot of Electrical Contractors went bankrupt due to bad debts from customers.

Our three children also attended *St Joseph's Primary school*, so I was on the school council for many years and became president of the *P & F*. We owned a caravan for holidaying for twenty years so enjoyed a lot of National and Forest parks plus many normal caravan parks.

We purchased and moved our business into an industrial building at Clarence Street, Coorparoo in 1982 and rented the back-half to a motor mechanic. It was at this time I joined *Toastmasters International* so I could improve my speaking skills as I knew this would set me apart if I wanted to succeed in business. I won a couple of Queensland speaking competitions over the next ten years. I was also invited to join *Stones Corner Rotary* where I held several Board positions as well as President in 1991/92. I still hold membership.

I accompanied seven other Rotarians on volunteer construction work for the *World Health Organisation* in 2004 to the Solomon Islands for several weeks refurbishing four huts at Munda Village used for malaria treatment. I did the electrical work on the huts then would have normally helped on the building work but was asked to do electrical work in the major hospital about thirty minutes' driving in a four-wheel-drive vehicle. It was large, and built by the USA military during the Second World War. The hospital had access to almost no electrical service repairers so staff treated me like a celebrity.

One job I was asked to restore was their two-way radio that had been out for nearly twelve months and I managed to get it working again. The radio system was supposed to enable them to keep in contact with the many local islands and villages.

Apart from lights and power repairs, I repaired ceiling fans in a



number of areas, including the doctor's accommodation rooms in their very hot climate, so we really don't know how lucky we are. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd presented the seven of us with a *Developing Countries Award* a

few months after our return.

I was elected to the *Board of the Electrical Contractors Association of Queensland* known as ECA, then held the position of State treasurer for about nine years. I was involved in setting up our electrical industry superannuation scheme after the Federal Government introduced compulsory Super. I became an employer representative board member of the employer-and-union superannuation fund known as *SPEC* that is now *Energy Super*, one of the major superannuation funds in Australia. After I resigned from the *ECA* board I was asked to take on Chairman of the *ECA's* Brisbane Branch that I held for about ten years till I stepped down towards the end of my business life. I was made a Life Member of the Association and also was made an Alumni

member of *Master Electricians Australia Association*. Those Alumni members meet yearly to celebrate.

I sold my business and retired in 2008 after I contracted cancer and later had a heart attack. I had a very fortunate life as we had built up considerable assets, was able to do a job I loved, help and be associated with a lot of Contractors throughout Queensland and continue to assist the community through *Rotary* and other organisations.

Post retirement

The retirement was a big change but it gave me a major direction as I tended to be a workaholic and after I recouped medically made me set a new purpose in life for my wife and myself that we both enjoy. We accumulated other investment properties and I invested in share trading over forty years. We moved in 1991 to our large Henzell Terrace Greenslopes house that we presently enjoy. We now are involved in five grandchildren so still have a very busy, enjoyable but less pressured life.

Activities I did since leaving school:

- Board member and President of the *St Joseph's Primary School P & F*.
- Joined *Main Toastmasters Speaking Club* and competed in District competitions for over ten years achieved a Competent Toastmaster qualification.
- Took up water skiing, skindiving for a couple of years and qualified for Scuba-diving.

- Achieved a green belt in Judo and a yellow belt in Jujitsu.
- Played weekly social squash at the *Annerley Sports club* for a number of years.
- Played social and competitive tennis for many years and competed in the Queensland Junior Championships.
- Board member and Treasurer of the *Queensland Electrical Contractors Association* for over 10 years and was made a Life Member. When I stood down from the State Council was elected Brisbane Branch Chairman for over 10 years.
- Received a *Master Electricians of Australia Alumni* award.
- Member of Stones Corner *Rotary* since 1984, was president and was awarded a *Paul Harris Fellowship* award.
- Went with a Rotary team volunteering to the Solomon Islands and received a *Developing Countries Award* from then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.
- Was involved in share trading groups for over forty years.
- Joined and am involved in the *Mount Gravatt Men's Shed* and *Coorparoo Probus* groups.
- Kept my *Electrical workers and Electrical Contractors* licences still in my seventy plus years.
- I became involved in the World wide *Saturday Parkrun* Stones Corner group at age 69. I enjoy Park Running weekly and also at the various locations when on holidays out of Brisbane and wearing my *100-participations* shirt.
- I push bike ride generally for a couple of hours each week on bike tracks to help control my weight and be able to see the many not normally noticeable sites of Brisbane.

2869 words – Kerry Bradford (MGMS member)

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