



Lion Bill

W. R. 'Bill' Tresise M.B.E.

His Journey to Establish
Lions in Australia
His Life's Passion...

by Max Tresise

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Dedications

To my Family

To my parents Bill and Fonnies, who were devoted to their family and children, Wal, Sandra and myself. They cared and shared their love of life, which overflowed to their friends and community.

My wife Sally who has shared and cared with me over a long and happy married life together.

Our three children Paul Kate and Rob and their children Daniel, Jemma, Rebecca and Tim.

I dedicate this Book to them for they are the future.

Acknowledgements

This Book is a legacy from my father Bill, it was not only his deeds but his uncompleted works diaries and memorabilia that provided me with a wealth of material for use as his biographer.

Interestingly the journals I have quoted from were potentially his own autobiography.

Now that I have finished this book I can thank him for the inspirational material he provided and for the wonderful journey we both shared in this labour of love.

There is a great saying 'When the student is ready a teacher appears'. My thanks to those willing teachers and others who made up for my deficiencies particularly in typing computer and editing skills.

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Brunswick: Tony and Noel
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Many more deserve a mention, for those I have missed my apologies and sincere thanks.

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Max Trespise

Foreword

This biography of William R Tresise MBE will enthrall and inspire the reader. Written and compiled by his son, Lion Max Tresise, it traces and tells of a wonderful journey. A journey by Lion Bill Tresise to establish Lions Clubs International within Australia!

In producing this fascinating biography, Lion Max has expertly and lovingly drawn on his own personal memories, records and recollections. He also had at his disposal, a vast collection of memorabilia, diaries and journals left by his Father.

The reader will be privy to information, details and events not known by most. It is a story of a wonderful man. One with a great love for his family and community! The story of the founding of our Association by Lion Bill Tresise is a great one. It tells the early history of what is now known as Lions Australia. The ambition, perseverance and drive of one man to achieve success!

Lion Bill's journey continues today and will do so into the future. He would indeed be proud to see the successful results of his great efforts. Lions Australia now occupies a most significant place in the overall community of our great country. It is respected by all levels of Government and is recognised internationally as an integral part of our International Association.

To write the forward to this remarkable biography, of such a wonderful man, is indeed a great honour and pleasure. I sincerely commend it to you.

John Powell, FCPA
Executive Officer (1973-2001)
Lions Australia
August 2011

Introduction

To contemplate then express thoughts and values about your own beloved father's life has proven to be an interesting and rewarding experience.

I am fortunate to have excellent reference materials at hand: a collection of his journals, diaries and memorabilia, plus press articles from over the years.

Authors have written of his achievements, and I recommend the following publications to you as further reading:-

Apex: The first Twenty five Years by R.S. Love and V.M. Branson

Goodwill Harvest: The History of Lions in Australia
(First 30 years, Editor Lindsay Clinch).

Looking Forward with Pride: 50 years of Lions in Australia
by Brian Stevenson

Bill was a unique character who dedicated his life to his family and his community. His passion was Community Service, which he expressed through Apex, local government and his beloved Lions. Someone once said, 'To know him, is to understand him'.

From my perspective having lived, worked, then to become mates with him for some 42 years, I can say that I have been enriched by researching and writing his story. More importantly, I have been astounded at the collective contribution Lions has made to our community over the past 64 years.

Bill played many roles to achieve many things. He believed in the Supreme Being; his philosophy for life was simply put – 'You make a living by what you get and add a life by what you give'. He always maintained he had a great life and was the luckiest man alive.

Bill was the loving husband of Florence Louise (Fonnie), and they married in Drummoyne, New South Wales on 28 June, 1930. It was during the Great Depression and hearing of a job opportunity, they immediately moved to Lismore NSW, where he secured work as a plasterer. They soon immersed themselves in their community; Bill taught judo and wrestling to earn a little extra income. After a few years, the economy improved sufficiently for him to establish (with \$60 capital) his own fibrous plaster business servicing the local building industry.

As parents to Wal, Sandra and I, they were generous with their love and provided us with encouragement and a good education. In our family Bill was the disciplinarian whilst Fonnie was the peacemaker. She had some adjustments to make in her dual role whilst Bill was away during the war years but found a new ally in the wooden spoon.

Bill was a great advocate of personal development. He subscribed to business magazines, devoured books such as Dale Carnegie's public speaking titles and 'How to win friends and Influence People'. His 'can do' attitude gave him many opportunities to fine tune his skills in

leadership, public speaking and meeting procedures via YMCA, Apex, Masonic Lodge, local government, hospital boards, building societies and his beloved Lions. He connected with life and his community, and he placed a great deal of importance on maintaining his own personal development. Later this was extended predictably to educate his family. He taught by his own example, how to behave with good manners, etiquette and correct speech. He discussed and demonstrated principles of honesty and integrity. For example, if he did not approve of our grammar or pronunciation, he would tell us to repeat it until we had it right. Whatever we were learning had to be repeated until it could be recited word perfectly.

We were given monetary or other incentives. We were encouraged to learn Rudyard Kipling's poem entitled 'If', even though it took months to memorise. We had to be word perfect before Wally and I, aged about 14 and 12 years of age, received our generous reward of 10 shillings each.

In a similar vein, he trained us to contribute; he stressed the importance of the obligations of belonging within the family context. We were given specific jobs with 6 pence a week pocket money attached. As we grew older, we learned the lesson to give without expecting reward. We were taught that altruism becomes a way of living, and this was another part of his philosophy that he not only practised but also preached.

There is no doubt, he was ambitious; he set demanding goals for himself, which were without question motivated by his desire to give rather than take. In 1945, he was elected National President of Apex and later the same year he was appointed as Apex delegate to the newly formed 'World Council of Young Men's Service Clubs'. He wrote in his journal at the time:

'I embraced the opportunity against my better judgement as I was then rebuilding my business after its closure in 1941 to 1945 but the challenge was too great, and I arrived in San Francisco to represent Australia at this Meeting'.

Personal wealth was never a priority. He had the business acumen to gather around him loyal staff, including his family, to run his various business enterprises in three states and that was enough. He used the same principles with Lions employing his leadership skills; it explains how he could devote so much time, money and energy to community service and Lions, in particular.

He paid the price of longevity with heart problems in his 50s, when he was advised to modify his lifestyle. He took up painting, tutored by his daughter Sandra, and writing poetry of which examples are contained in this book. He died of heart failure at St Vincent's Hospital Lismore in 1975 aged 67 years.

Another observation I would like to make in the context of social history is that Bill's story and those of his ilk were not uncommon. They were driven by a sense of urgency to satisfy the community shortcomings, particularly in that post war period. State and Federal Governments were forced to respond to the will of their constituents and Service Clubs were the catalyst in many projects which they initiated by fund raising and then with Government subsidy. Invariably, a large contribution of physical effort by volunteer labour completed some very successful projects in health, aged care and youth welfare.

Often underestimated, were leadership development opportunities provided by service clubs such as Apex, Lions, Rotary, J.Cs and the Scouting organisations. The post war environment, with slogans such as, 'Populate or perish', together with the government policy on immigration, there is little wonder we now refer to the baby boomer period. They were certainly golden years of fellowship and community service. It was hard work, but people enjoyed working in the spirit of mutual benefit combined with the warm sense of fellowship. This ethic was exemplified in the words of Henry Ford, who once said, *'Getting together is a beginning, staying together is progress, working together is success'*.

Sadly, that formula does not exist today to the same extent. We are experiencing a different culture involving less community participation and a by-product which involves less ownership and connection with others in our communities.

Over my 55 years of community service, we can observe a distinction between country and city service clubs that relates to volunteerism. In larger centres of population, we now have an apparent reluctance to volunteer. There is always an exception and in times of crisis, such as the recent fire and flood events that Australia has suffered, our principles of mateship rise to the challenges in ways that are sometimes incredible.

Whilst Bill has been recognised for his role as Founder of Lions in Australia, he would be the first to acknowledge the efforts of those dedicated Lions both past and present who have:-

‘Encouraged service minded people to serve their community without personal financial reward, to encourage efficiency and promote high ethical standards in commerce, industry and profession, public works and private endeavours’.

Extract from Lions Clubs International Objects

Lions in Australia evolved and gained momentum when members became committed and adopted ownership. In biblical terms, ‘They then went forth and multiplied’.

In recognition of the significance of the 50th anniversary of Lions at Lismore multiple district convention, twenty Lismore medals were struck and awarded, it was here we paid tribute to those dedicated Lions who established and developed Lions in Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia.

It is inevitable that history will produce mixed emotions with varied perceptions.

Constructive criticism is the life blood of our democracy. However, it is important we pay more than lip service to our Lion objectives and ethics in particular I refer to our final ethic, 'TO BE CAREFUL with my criticism and liberal with my praise, to build up and not destroy.'

At the time of celebrating the 25th anniversary (1972), of Lions in Australia, Bill wrote these words which are a deep and meaningful summary of his journey to establish Lions in Australia. He certainly did not expect the road to be easy as his journals will testify:-

'July 14 1947, (aged 40) I was free to start on a job that was to become the most frustrating and soul destroying a project a man could ever undertake yet there was the satisfaction of seeing the result, together with meeting and working with kindred spirits: men and women of such a high calibre.'

'When you receive a bouquet now and again it reminds you that twenty five years of loyalty and devotion swamps you with the sheer joy of living. I am convinced that I am the most blessed man on earth'.

Lion Bill Tresise

Bill died in June 1975 at the relatively young age of 67. There is a diminishing number of Lions or ex Lions that I have met over my 30 years as a Lion who have said, 'I knew your father', often with a glint in their eye. Then for one reason or another we can share some interesting stories.

He was a collector of memorabilia and a prolific writer of diaries, journals and poetry. I have endeavoured to augment his interpretation of his life and times with contributions from peers, friends and family.

From my perspective, I have concentrated on the developments of his unique character, which was fine-tuned by the social history of his life and times.

Lion Bill's journals provide the keys to those formative years, 1947-1956. Whilst the Lion's organisation has published two excellent historical accounts celebrating 25 and 50 year anniversaries, the recording of the conception, birth and growing pains are presented here with archival material for posterity.

The original documents of interest are to be lodged at the Richmond River Historical Society Inc., at Lismore in NSW. This is 'Where It All Began', and the material will be lodged with the proviso that it will be accessible to multiple districts and all Lions clubs. As the biographer, I am not attempting to glorify my father, or his exploits. He was the early instigator and driving force in bringing Lions to Australia. He planted the seed that grew and enriches our society. We in turn have been beneficiaries and in biblical terms, 'For as we sow, so shall we reap'.

Over our 42 years association, he played many roles in my life; father, educator and motivator, business partner and friend. I remain proud to be his son. I believe I knew him well, and I am privileged to share his story from my perspective. I trust you too will find it enlightening.

For those Lions, past and present, who are members of this great organisation, you too may glean some inspiration from his words and deeds.

I hope you enjoy reading Bill's journey to establish Lions in Australia. I have endeavoured to encapsulate his love of country and fellow man; his philosophy on life, passion, compassion, vision and initiative.

Yours in Lionism

Max Tresise

Member Heathmont Lions

District V5 Victoria

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The History of Lions

Origin

With the presentation of Charter by Acting District Governor Bill Tresise to the Lions Club of Lismore on 29 September, 1947, Australia became the 18th country to join Lions International.

Lionism began in the United States in 1917 when a group of independent clubs responded to an idea presented to them by a young Chicago insurance agent, Melvin Jones.

The ideal was one of service as a group to their fellow men without regard to politics, religion, race, or in any way the personal interests of the members.

This was heralded as a departure from the trend current at that time of forming clubs basically with a commercial motive.

A conference was called of some 25 independent clubs on June 7, 1917 and from this meeting the organisation was born.

The official name of Lions is; '*The International Association of Lions Clubs*', or more simply it is referred to as Lions Clubs International.

Although the youngest, the International Association of Lions Clubs has grown to be the largest service club organisation in the world, represented by over 33,000 clubs with a membership exceeding 1,350,000 in over 160 countries and geographic areas.

The association's headquarters are in Oak Brook, Illinois, USA.

The Board includes 30 Directors, three Vice-presidents, the Immediate Past President and is headed by the International President.

Proud of the Past



Confident of the Future

The Lion's Emblem

The Lions emblem consists of a gold letter 'L' on a circular purple field. Bordering this is a circular gold area with two conventionalised lion profiles at either side facing away from the centre. The words 'Lions' appear at the top and 'International' at the bottom.

Symbolically, the lions face past and future - proud of the past and confident of the future.

It is the obligation of every Lion to wear and display this emblem with pride.

The initials of the word Lions stand for Liberty, Intelligence, Our Nation's Safety. To Lions, purple stands for loyalty to country, loyalty to friends, loyalty to one's self and to the integrity of mind and heart. It is the traditional colour of strength, courage and tireless dedication to a cause. Gold symbolises sincerity of purpose, liberality in judgement, purity in life and generosity in mind, heart and purse towards his fellow man.