



## Bruce Part 1: P.O.

There are two sides to every story and sometimes every person too. Bruce Keely provides BWD with one side here and the other later on ...

IT HAD GOT TO THE STAGE where my life in the Army wasn't going anywhere, so I decided to apply for a job in the public service. Then one day I thought, "What am I doing this for? I want to get away from the public service". I didn't even like the public service because as far as I was concerned they had too much control in the Army over matters military. I was working in the GPS section and it was a constant battle between us deciding what the Army needed to do and the bean counters saying, "sorry you can't do that this year because we don't have the dough".

Then one day in 1998 when my dad was over from Perth we took him down to Araluen to have a look. On the way back to Canberra we stopped in Braidwood and looked in the real estate agent's window which in those days was in the Altenburg run by Denise McMurtrie. On the display board we saw that the Post Office was for sale and I said to Phyllis, "That looks like something we could do".

After thinking it over for few months and developing a business plan, we bought it. So it wasn't a case of us choosing Braidwood, we just happened to be here and Braidwood chose us.

Running the Post Office is very much like that TV series about the vets 'All Creatures Great and Small'. I reckon I could write a series of books like James Herriott wrote about being a vet. Mine would be about running a country post office and all its interesting characters.

Of course when you're sorting the mail each day you see everybody's letters and it's amazing how agile the human mind can be if you apply it to something on a daily basis.

When we got here we didn't know anybody of course because we were from out of town. Then I'd meet someone and he'd say, "My name is Jones", and I'd say, "Ah yes Jones, you're box 120 aren't you".

Pretty soon people would be coming in

### POST SOMETHING

and saying, "I am ... or I live ..." and I'd say, "I know who you are" or "I know where you live". You get to know people and think you understand them.

An interesting thing about Braidwood I noticed in the first twelve months of being here — and this is not a commentary on Pauline Hanson — but if you live in Sydney Melbourne or Brisbane and you wrote a letter to the paper saying, "I love Pauline Hanson" or "I hate Pauline Hanson" nobody would give a damn. They might think, "what a clown", but nobody would care except perhaps your next door neighbour.

But if you write a letter like that in the paper in Braidwood you immediately nail your colours to the mast. I thought to myself I'm not doing that and I never have. In fact, someone came in here once and asked me if I was a Labor voter and I said, "No I'm not". A little while later they said, "So you vote for the Liberal Party". And I said to them, "No, no, no, no, no". I said to them, "Go a bit to the right of Genghis Khan [laughs]. I only said that to throw them off, but what I'm trying to say is no matter what you think, it's often wise just to shut up. Braidwood is just like anywhere else — it's just distilled into a smaller population.

If you live in an affluent part of Sydney that's all you see, the same if you live in a depressed area. In Braidwood you see the whole lot. Between the newsagency, the doctors and the Post Office I think we get to see the whole cross-section of town life.

I'm not one of those people who has lots of friends, I'm not a guy that wants to go out and make friends. What I like are some people who are good friends because I don't think you can spread yourself too thin. I'm differentiating here between people you call friends and people you call acquaintances — people you treat in a friendly manner but not have a lot to do with.

Friends then, are the sort of people you can go and pour your heart out to, chew their ear, or tell them they're a bunch of clowns — and because they know you they won't take offence. It's only in the last twelve months really, that I've expanded my circle of friendships. The interesting thing is, when you get involved with stuff, like opening the woodwork exhibition at BRAG, people see you in a completely different light.

I had people come up to me at the BRAG exhibition and say, "You're not the bloke who works at the Post Office".

### WHEN YOU NEED A HAND ...

## Braidwood Life Centre

Peter and Helen talk to Kylie Dominick about what the Centre is, what it can do and how it helps

**P**eter: First, the Braidwood Life Centre is a registered charity with Deductible Gift Recipient status and a not-for-profit incorporated association. Its objects as a charity are to help people most in need within the 2622 post code.

There's a lot of people in our region who basically do it tough. When you don't have much to live on it is all too easy to find yourself excluded to some degree from ordinary society. BLC is there to help people connect better and to do that we've divided our work into two areas: one is community support and the other is youth.

**What types of community support services do you offer to people in financial need?**

Peter: First emergency relief, that means we provide \$50 vouchers for food or petrol, people can phone our mobile number or come and visit us in the Anglican Hall once a week and receive those vouchers. Or, some people need emergency accommodation for a day or two. Some people need wood. Or water in summer. So the emergency relief is exactly that, for people who really need some emergency support, people who wouldn't have food on the table for the kids if we weren't able to supply a voucher. With that, when we talk to people we try to find out a bit about them, to help them up, to support them.

Helen: It's to get them back on their feet.

P: To help them get ahead somehow. Because sometimes they just haven't got the wherewithal at the moment, but if they know someone's there to help, they can move forward. Another way we support people is we work in conjunction with St Vincent de Paul to give out Christmas hampers.

**Are your people mainly regulars, or people who have a sudden emergency and need help just one time?**

Peter: Both. I'd say the majority are regulars.

Helen: The hope is that they're regular only for a while, until they get back on their feet. I saw somebody last week that we've been seeing for a long time, and we actually bought water for them. And that person said, when I'm back on my feet I'm going to pay you back for that water.

**Is there a point where you can no longer help someone and you need to refer on?**

Helen: We've built relationships with a lot of people and they're in a place now where we can refer them to appropriate services, or where we can explain what we can't do.

Peter: It's important to know that we are not professionals; we don't have Social Work qualifications. We do refer people when they need professional help, it's not us that give it. We act as a mediator to get them to the right people.

**Where can you send people for further help?**

Peter: That depends on their needs. The professional services provided

through our MPS are vital. For people in need of urgent accommodation outside of Braidwood there are places in Queanbeyan and down at the Bay there's a group house for men and another for emergency accommodation for anyone, run by the Anglican Church.

**In a small town, there can be stigma when people are having problems. How can we deal with that? Do you reach out to them if they won't come to you?**

Peter: You try to develop the relationship of trust, so they know you're not going to be telling anybody what their business is, and that they can just share without being judged.

Helen: All we need to do is built trust with people, so they know we won't be talking about them. But still there are people we know who are in need but they won't come.

Peter: These wonderful people are of course very proud individuals — they don't want that sort of contact. As

PETER MALONE, PRESIDENT AND HELEN GODDARD, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE BRAIDWOOD LIFE CENTRE.

