

Jack Norton

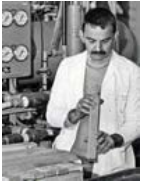
My mum and dad left war-torn Budapest, Hungary in 1947 looking for a better and safer life after the horrors of World War II. I was born in 1949 in Amsterdam and we arrived in Australia in 1950 aboard an Italian migrant ship. Can you imagine what it must have been like to travel to the other side of the planet with nothing more than a kit bag, a 12 month old baby and you can't even speak the language? I certainly can't! Mums didn't work in those days and Dad took any job that came along to keep the family in house and home. Our family had no relatives in Australia so the family was central to our lives. Mum and Dad knew that Australia would be our home so they took Australian citizenship in 1958 and used the opportunity to anglicise their name to Norton. Mum is now 99 and although her short term memory is poor, she still has all her marbles. Despite her short term memory loss, she can clearly remember the events of her youth. She often tells me that coming to Australia was one of the best things she and dad did - you don't argue with your Mum.



Primary school and high school were a blur. I was what might be called a plodder academically. I passed exams but not brilliantly. I remember being involved in everything possible in high school. I played soccer, rugby and basketball for the school. I was on the swim team and I played the piano for the choir. I tried cricket but it was not for me. Mum and dad decided (well more mum really) to send me to the old country for a visit after I sat my final high school exams. While I was in Europe, mum had to enrol me in tertiary studies so that I could start when I got back, "Gap" years hadn't been invented yet (1966). The choice was mechanical engineering or chemistry. The chemistry queue was shorter and that's how it all started. I was enrolled in a Diploma in Chemistry (DIC) at the Queensland Institute of Technology. A couple of years later, this course was granted degree status and the Queensland Institute of Technology became the Queensland University of Technology. Over the years, after a degree in Chemistry, I worked through a postgraduate diploma in Business Administration, a postgraduate diploma in Computing Science, a Masters degree in Technology Management and a Master of Philosophy in Chemical Engineering.



The Vietnam war was blazing away and young Australian men were going into a ballot to determine if they were to fight in this Asian war. Half way through my studies, I joined the Australian Army Reserve not so much as to avoid the ballot, which was an allowable alternative, but because I needed the money. I joined up a couple of years before my ballot date. My time in the Army Reserve was formative. I joined the Signals Corps and then underwent officer training for two years. I distinctly remember on one occasion being tired, cold and wet, sitting on a rock picking the best bits out of a cold army ration pack and feeling sorry for myself. My commanding officer was walking amongst the troops and commented "Any fool can be uncomfortable and have a bad time. You have to be smart when the going gets tough!" This little piece of wisdom has shaped the way I think. After I graduated as a shiny second lieutenant, I wasn't allowed back into Signals because of my heritage – Hungary was now behind the Iron Curtain and the Cold War was raging. We were after all, fighting the "communist hordes" in the North.



I started work with the Queensland Forestry Department in 1970 and stayed with the organisation in its various forms, until I retired in 2012. My first work place was a crusty old laboratory in George Street being led by a WWII veteran about the same age as my dad. The laboratory was on the edge of the Brisbane central business district and I have many vivid memories of the shenanigans we got up to. All of us lab rats were about the same age and we were all deeply influenced by that place.

I first found out about IRG when a wood preservationist called Colin Levy visited from his base in Papua New Guinea. This guy was a wild man! My introduction to him occurred when he walked unannounced into the George Street laboratory, went straight over to the hot water urn, grabbed



a mug, spooned out three tea spoons of instant coffee, pulled a hip flask of whisky from his back pocket and sloshed it into the bottom third followed by hot water. No milk or sugar! Colin told us about IRG, which started a long association with what has become a wonderful group of friends. My first IRG meeting was in 1983 in Surfers Paradise where I was like a

kid in a sweet shop. Before then I just didn't appreciate how far and wide wood protection was across the world. It was a true honour and privilege to be President of IRGWP between 2011 and 2013.



My work in wood protection has taken me all over the world with possibly the most memorable being my trips to southern China. I have a memory/mind picture of standing outside a market place with people teeming all around me and thinking "I should be paying the Chinese for

this rather than the other way around." I had a similar experience on the island of Kalimantan when working on protecting houses for a huge mining project.



In 1968 I met the one person who would have the greatest impact on my life. We met on a blind date, got married in 1972 and she still manages to surprise me after 46 years. Marion is an amazing person and I often wonder "Why am I so lucky??" We have three wonderful children who I am immensely proud of. I was quite involved with their high



school sport. I decided to step in from the side lines when my number one daughter decided she wanted to do high school rowing. This involved five mornings a week at some horrible hour before school started. My daughter was always the spare/backup and despite her enthusiasm was

not getting any water time. In a moment of protective lunacy I told her that if she could get a crew together I would coach them . . . I knew nothing about rowing except that you did it backwards. The first season her crew did OK but in the second season her crew took out the "Head of the River" race for her age group. I carry the glow on her face after the race with me even today. For my sins, I also coached my son's crew for three years even though the boys did not do as well, we had a lot of fun along the way.



When my boy was 10, he joined the Scouting movement. He did very little camping and other Scout stuff for the first six months so one night I asked the Scout leader if I could help out. Two weeks later I was by myself with five young faces looking to me for guidance. My first camping experience a week later saw

me put a tent pole through the windscreen of my car. It was a good start to being a Scout leader for 17 years.

My involvement with Scouting led me into another favourite activity. There is an annual bicycle ride across the Simpson Desert in Central Australia which has been running for 31



years over some of the most amazing countryside on the planet. An ex-scout rang me one evening and asked me if I would be interested in supporting him to ride across the Desert. The race takes place over 4 ½ days, over more than 1000 sand dunes and is a real test of endurance. I

have driven across the desert 12 times and just can't get enough of the scenery. The level of quiet is fantastic and the stars scream at you at night. You camp out under the stars and I remember lying in my swag beside number two daughter counting falling stars. I am planning to cross again in 2018. . . . it is serious boy fun as well!



My wife and I love to travel and if possible do it under our own steam. In 1975, we spent 12 months bussing and hitch-hiking across Europe including behind the iron curtain. Since then we have done shorter trips and when the kids were young we all went together.



Stand outs were Iran (amazing and highly recommended), Patagonia, Galapagos, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon just before Syria went bad and Antarctica. We spent two nights on Antarctica – not up to Ed Suttie's experience but good fun.

In my spare (??) time I am keen on wood work. In my case this involves turning big bits of wood into small bits of wood making a lot of sawdust and noise along the way.



Thinking back over my career, I am incredibly thankful for the friendships I have made, the people I have met and the support of my family. It is not over yet!