

“Percy Joseph Chute had a wonderful life”

1926 was a big year

Percy was born in Coraki, a riverport village on the Richmond River. Son of Lucy and Pierce into a large Catholic family of Irish descent. He was #7 of nine kids. His dad owned a saddlery in the main street and from all accounts Perce's childhood was a good one. He enjoyed the great outdoors, collecting birds eggs, eating watermelons from the fields, raiding fruit orchards and watching the night lights of the riverboats slowly make their way around the many turns of the river towards Coraki.

Percy's dad provided for the family well – there was always food on the table. Every weekend the children would line up in their best clothes, shoes shined and be inspected. If all looked good they'd receive pocket money to spend at the store next door – undoubtedly on something sweet.

In those days the older children left home as soon as they could to get jobs. One of his elder brothers left the family without warning only to be seen on the back of a boxing truck years later by a very young Perce. His name was Darryl. Perce must have thought highly of his venturing spirit, so much so that he named his son after him. (aside – that's me)

1940 was a huge year

Percy's dad passed away. In those days a 14 year old would attend school taking fruit along for the teacher. As the family needed income Perce's school teacher got wind of a position waiting for him at a place called Glynn's in Woodlark St, Lismore. Thus began a 47 year association.

The Christmas bonus Percy received for the family that year was very generous. We still have the original book of accounts. From that day forward his extreme loyalty to Glynn's would eventually lead him to the general manager's position.

When war came along Percy was too young to serve but did have aspirations to join the airforce. Unfortunately he found out he was colour blind so didn't get in. His colourblindness led to interesting situations when dealing with materials and fabrics which were to become his livelihood.

Percy was stationed in Sydney for some years at the end of the war pouring beer for serviceman at the Rushcutters Bay depot. He had never had a drink until this time. (aside - He made up for it later on.) One infamous night he was caught at Luna Park without a leave pass and was put in the lock up for a night. When the word got out he wouldn't be available to look after the thirsty men phone calls were made to higher levels and he was set free.

During his Sydney days he would frequent the famous Trocodero dance hall. One lass he danced with a lot lived way out at Watson's Bay. It was quite an achievement to take her home on the late tram, see her to her door, run back down the street to catch the same tram back into town, jump off at Oxford street, run down the hill in the dark to Central station and get on the train out to Punchbowl where he was staying. I can't remember ever seeing my dad run so that mind's image is quite amusing.

Doing the post war time Perce got a secretive posting to beautiful Prosperine in Queensland. There he was involved in experimental chemical warfare activities in the

canefields. There are no records in the department of this occurring and details remain a mystery to this day.

1946 was a huge year for Percy.

He returned to Lismore and his job.

His sweet tooth would get the better of him each day and he'd walk to a café a few doors down the street to buy chocolate. One day a pretty young lass began working there and would sell him his sweets on a regular basis. This girl was Laretta June Hale. (aside - there she is).

June didn't like the look of him much. Hair parted in the middle, gap in his teeth, starched clothes, buttoned up vest. ... a bit of a toff.

One evening Percy ended up at a local dance and June was there. At the end of the night he was told by the girl he had been dancing with "why don't you take June home" (aside - interesting glance) Well, what a game changer.

There was a bit of an age gap. He was 23 and June only sweet 16. Anyway June hops on the bar of the bicycle and Perce has been taking her home ever since.

June was from a large Protestant family. Her dad had left the scene early in her childhood leaving her mum Alma Hale to look after the kids. It was tough. Alma along with June ran a boarding house full of hard working and hard drinking men from around the area. Percy would be there every night for years helping out and playing cards into the night. There were many colourful characters at the boarding house. You grew up fast having to deal with them.

Next big year 1950

Perce finally popped the question on seeing his beautiful Laretta June in a yellow dress going to the Lismore show. In those days Catholics and Protestants were in divided camps. When meeting the Catholic priest to discuss their marriage June was told she'd have to bring up her children as Catholics. Hairs on the back of her neck stood up as she told the priest "no way will anyone tell me how to raise my children".

Percy had strong Catholic roots and it was a big thing for him to marry June in the Presbyterian Church, Keen St Lismore in September 1953. "Don't be late" he told her. She wasn't, but the minister forgot about the wedding. There were very few from Percy's family in attendance. That must have been a bitter pill for him and his young bride.

...but Percy had a wonderful life.

1956 saw the first baby come along (aside - me). Things would be different from now on. Two more children in 59 and 62, standing beside me here, my beautiful sisters Ann and Sandra. We were nicely spaced almost exactly three years (aside to mum - was that planned, how did you do that?)

Percy was a family man. He looked after his home in Atlas Street, Lismore. It was perfect. As we grew up if we every wanted to see him he'd be under the house in his work area mending boots, cutting wood, fitting windows, building aviaries, mowing our huge lawn (sometime twice a week), painting the house, etc etc.

In the early sixties he'd ride his pushbike from work, up the Barham St hill only to have a very quick lunch with June and turn around back down the hill into town for the afternoon working hours.

We didn't get a TV until the late sixties, and he and mum built a car port under the house labouring away hand mixing enough cement to pave Sydney airport. All this without a car in sight or even a driver's licence. Build it and it will come indeed.

Once we got a car dad instilled his love of nature into us kids with fantastic country drives most Sundays. We must have driven up every little country road in the area over the years. One memorable drive was when us kids were in the back of the station wagon (no seat belts) rolling around with hundreds of "free" citrus fruits from a farm up near Tuntable Creek. There's a cowbell somewhere in the family from that day.

Perce would be frustrated by the fact many people in our God given countryside had not travelled out of town to see the sights. Some of our favourite spots were Whian Whian Falls, Rocky Creed Dam, Mt Nardi, Peats mountain and Minyon Falls. Spectacularly beautiful places. Swallows follow me on Randwick golf course now and it always reminds of the time he showed them for the first time at Molly's Grass bridge over Marom Creek. Thank you dad.

1971 was another big year for Perce.

We had spent the school holidays the previous two years at a small beachside village called Lennox Head. Ken Poole, our neighbour in Lismore, had a beach cottage at Lennox and suggested Perce buy 1 Stewart St. After much consternation he bit the bullet and bought house and land for \$4,000. It was a fibro box with no bathroom, soft canite lined walls where we kids could easily kick holes in. What about this little exercise? How many people have put fishing line along their house as a horizontal guide, then get under their house with three car jacks to prop it up to be level? Glad the house didn't crack up along the way.

One of Percy's great loves was horse racing. In fact every Saturday all you'd hear would be the bloody races. One day I got his transistor radio and flicked the dial to find something called pop music on the other station. One flick and my life changed – I'm a musician.

Around the mid 70s Perce found a really great mate from Brisbane also in the rag trade – his name was Bill Dean. Perce loved Bill. He was top bloke with similar interests and even offered dad to finance his own business. Perc being a careful family man decided not to take up the opportunity. One that he stated recently he regretted. Bill was also a big punter and together in 1975 they hit the jackpot. Dad won enough to pay off the Lennox house. Hence those photos in the garage of jockey Graeme Cook for all those years! Thanks Graeme, thanks Bill.

Mum and dad moved to Lennox permanently in 1984, and with mum's design built a new house. The old cottage was put on the back of a truck and became the Lennox Scout Hall for many years.

1987 was a big year

June had had enough, Perc had been locked into a life of working for the man (Glynn's and then Macleans) and she wanted "us" time now.

So finally after 47 years of working, saving the shop's stock in massive Lismore floods and making good business decisions for the store he got out ....and went fishing. Boy, did he love his fishing...and he was good at it. For many years he, Byron and Darcy would haul them in off Lennox beach. He got a little Daihatsu four wheel drive and almost lost it when driving in the dark into a deep channel up the beach one night.

Percy had a wonderful life.

In our early Lennox days to get a beer you had to walk all the way over to the bowling club (must be 100 metres or more). Then the first and only pub gets built – the Anglers Arms as it was then called. Where do you think it gets built? That's right – only metres from Perce's amazing vegetable garden in our back yard. A 60 second flat walk at most for a cold beer and a punt. Retirement heaven indeed!

In fact we still have to walk through the bottle shop to go for a swim or walk up the beach.

But really folks, "how good" is Lennox Head – especially in the old days. Far fewer people, fish were plentiful and every trip over to the front was an adventure.

I believe Perce knew how lucky he was. He gave back through through his community spirit with activities such as Lennox Dune Care for many many years. He was also heavily involved in the Lismore Chamber of Commerce, Lismore Turf Club, Scout Association.

As a couple mum and dad were always visiting old friends in nursing homes. Their home has always been an open one. On staying with them reading a book in the back yard is almost impossible as there's a constant stream of visitors, either neighbours, out of towners, lost souls from the pub, retirees on scooters wanting to chat. Love and respect for people and each other shone through every fibre of their being. Sure, they had lots of funny jibes at one another along the way but I never heard them really argue – not once. Not a bad record, maybe because Dad knew he wouldn't win anyway (aside – shrug).

They never judged people and I never heard Perce say anything bad about anyone. He was even chastised on the streets of Lismore for employing an aboriginal man instead a white fella. Even though he had a gruff voice and would scare us kids at times he was a gentle man inside. He was "quietly" amazing. A man of few words to us kids but you knew exactly what you were suppose to do.

Perce's pride in family has always been extremely strong. Even if he didn't say it to our faces he did to others of how proud he was of his kids and their wonderful supportive spouses Patricia, Garry & Brian, grand kids Megan, Daniel, Jacob, Sarah, Richard and great grand kids Archie, Jax and Wesley, not to leave out of course his life partner and our beautiful beautiful mum June.

So there is a little bit about the greatest man I've ever known, our dad.

You've come to the end of this wonderful life mate. I remember asking you very late one night on the back porch "how would you like to be remembered?" ...there was a slight pause then he replied – "he was a good bloke". Well, you were far more than that to many people Perce – your were a magnificent bloke and will be sorely missed around here. You will always live on in our hearts each and every day, every time I drive a nail, clean out the garage, finish a new musical piece or hear another horse race – you will be there.

You told us recently that you can remember most of your life. I'm sure if that 14 year old Percy didn't have to leave school he couldn't gone onto to do anything he wanted. Perce was a smart man and had an incredible memory and could tell the same old stories word for word everytime – ask mum. He and mum have been one for 71 years. I know he's waiting for June to join him one day to place a bet on yet one another winner!

We were lucky. Perce lost his dad at 14, we lost ours when he was the tender age of 94.

Thank you for your wonderful life and for sharing it with us and those around you. May the lights of the Coraki riverboats be forever lighting up your way for your exciting new adventure.

Know that you were well and truly loved - Percy Joseph Chute.