

My Dad

Ruth C Hall

My Dad: shearer and storyteller. He is no longer with us, but his legacy lives on in his five children, fourteen grandchildren and twenty-two great-grandchildren.

How often we as children would sit around our large family table after dinner, listening to his stories! He had a way about him; he'd take a tale and make us part of it. As kids we especially loved his shearing yarns, no matter if we had heard them over and over. So many incredible, true anecdotes which, eventually, my sister compiled into a book.

But there's one miraculous story that has had a lasting and, in fact, everlasting effect on my life and the lives of others of his descendants.

It was the late 1950s, and Dad knew little of God. Growing up in Adelaide, he'd had a dysfunctional childhood with many difficult issues, but found a certain peace working in the outback away from the crowds and busy cities. By his early 30s, he'd reached the pinnacle of his career as a sought-after and popular gun-shearer.

It was a tough life. Hard work, good money, and heavy drinking were fine for a few years. But it had evolved into an increasingly destructive pattern. He couldn't work without drinking; he couldn't play without the drink. He'd given up a few times, struggling with the horrendous effects of the DTs, but he always came back to needing the alcohol. He could still manage to work hard most weeks, but the weekends would be hour upon hour of covering up the increasing weight of wretchedness and despair by soaking in his inebriating painkiller.

One typical Sunday afternoon, when the pub had shut for the day, he continued drinking in his hotel room. Almost out of booze, his only option was to stagger down to the corner deli and buy some lemonade to stretch his supply a little longer. Desperate and alone, he would have been a pitiful sight.

With eyes downcast, he came to a small church where a service was finishing but found that, strangely, he just could not move past the entrance. It felt as if there was a solid glass wall and, however he tried, it was impossible to walk beyond that doorway. It seemed there was no option but to go inside. He stood at the back and listened to the pastor talk about Jesus and, when an altar call was given, my dad knew he wanted whatever they were

offering. He walked down that aisle – a smelly, unwashed, unshaven shearer who'd been drinking for the past forty hours.

God met him that day. He was born again. Long story short, his alcoholism and smoking disappeared, he gave up his gambling, and God turned his life abruptly around. Within a year he found himself sitting next to a woman at church who eventually became his wife and my mother. One moment in a man's life determined the spiritual direction of his future generations.

My Dad: shearer, storyteller, beloved man of God.