

Never Give Up - Graeme's Story

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At the age of eight Graeme contracted polio and was initially put into an iron lung to help him breathe then into isolation, locked away from his family. It was nearly two years before he got his strength back to be allowed home. Hospital stay not only deprived him of his families love during that time, but also all of a critical stage of his schooling. He was then pushed out into society with a withered arm to be shunned by others who thought he was “contagious”

In his teens he learnt the hard way that life can be awfully lonely without understanding friends. As he grew into an adult, he learnt that those that do not have certain “social skills” can be at a major disadvantage. That people with so called “disabilities” can sometimes be faced with very difficult hurdles. Graeme has never been bitter about his situation or given up. He learnt to supresse his emotions at an early age and how to cope and compete with such in life

Now at the age of eighty and living through this latest covid-19 pandemic, he has had time to think about his childhood, both the good and the bad. In looking back Graeme is thankful in the way things did work out for him. He thinks that if he told his “story” it may help others.

“It's hard to beat a person that never gives up”- Babe Ruth



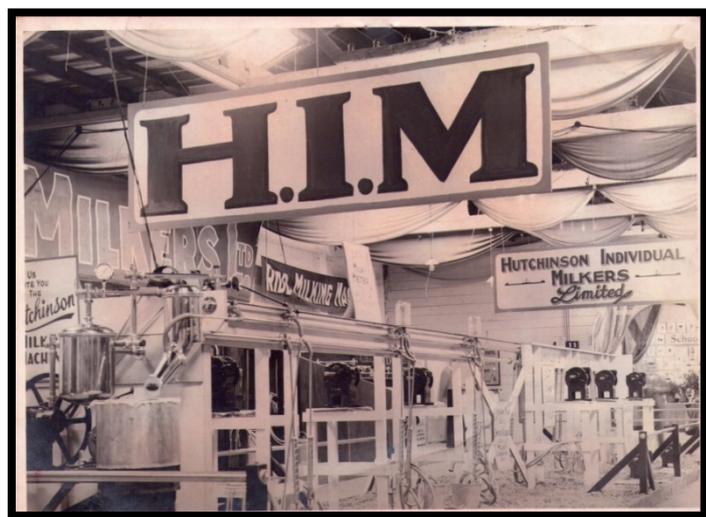
Graeme and Douglas Hutchinson - Stratford Pioneer Village 1993

Chapter 1 - Introduction

I was born in Stratford, Taranaki, New Zealand on the 22 September 1940, the second son of William and Anne Hutchinson. Mum had been a nurse and Dad was an engineer who had his own business in Hawera, manufacturing and selling the “Hutchinson Individual Milker” (HIM). He had developed and then patented this dairy equipment. It was being purchase by Taranaki and Waikato farmers and it was very popular as it was the first “non-stripping” milking equipment of its time.

Our great uncle George (Fell) Hutchinson was also an inventor and he helped Dad with his business he had also patented a milk meter, but In earlier days Uncle George had been the local hero with his inventions of the Hutchinson Water Ram and the Hutchinson Hydro Vacuum Pump. These two pieces of machinery had revolutionised the farming industry in those days. Most farms in Taranaki had a water ram to feed the water troughs and the vacuum pump, that was also water driven, and provided the energy to cowsheds for machine milking.

I was just two months old when Dad was forced to close his business. World War Two had created a high demand for the metals that Dad needed in his business and brass and bronze became almost impossible to get. Then when one of his overseas orders was lost at sea without recompense, the men had no choice but to cease manufacturing in Hawera. Dad decided to relocate to the Thames Valley to be close to the Waikato farmers that would need his HIM gear serviced.



Anne and William Hutchinson married 1936 and their business on show

The men found a house to rent in Paeroa. It was a farm house about a mile out of town under the stop banks of the Ohinemuri River. It had a good sized shed in which they could try and re-establish their business. The move included Mum, Dad, Great Uncle George, Graeme and older brother William. The family quickly grew to include three more brothers being, Douglas, Kenneth and Bruce.

I have very happy memories of growing up in Paeroa with my brothers and caring parents and to me that time was all just fabulous fun. The family did not have much money and nor did anyone else were we lived. You had to ‘make do’ in those days and we had a very large vegetable garden. We all ran to school and all were very healthy and fit. Dad got a job with a local engineering firm machining hot plates for stoves and rode his bike to work week days. After work he made spare parts for his milking machines in his workshop. I remember that Dad and Great Uncle George had to work long hours to support the family while trying to re-establish their business and Mum working extremely hard to care for and feed seven hungry males.



Photos of the “Hutchy Boys” just prior to the 1948 Polio epidemic

Chapter 2 - 1948 Polio Epidemic

Life was good for me and my brothers being outside, playing cowboys and Indians, building huts, playing until we were all rounded up for a bath. Dad and Uncle George would make us toy carts, spud guns and rubber band guns. Mum could run faster than any of us boys, so if you were naughty you were in trouble; we all had chores to do to help the family. Like helping in the veggie garden, mowing the lawns, getting wheelbarrows of cow muck from the cowshed down the road. Mum had beautiful Dahlia and Rose gardens.

I was just a happy kid, one morning I woke up with a fever and was struggling to breathe. Mum found that I had a very high temperature and called the doctor. I remember the doctor telling Mum that he thought that I had Polio. Then *“put a poultice on his chest and keep him warm and I’ll get the ambulance”*. *“He will have to go to Thames Hospital and keep an eye on the other children”*. All I can remember is riding in a rickety wooden ambulance, being sick in a white enamel bowl and a lady in a white telling me *“it’s alright Graeme”*. Then waking up in a box not being able to move but looking at myself in a mirror thinking what am I doing here and being frightened and who’s done this to me.

Looking slightly right I could see other kids also in boxes and these boxes were all making whirring noises. It sounded like I was back in Dads workshop. There was a little girl next to me crying with a nurse trying to comfort her. Next thing I remember a lovely lady appearing all in white. I could not see a face as it was covered in a white mask. She also wore a long white cape from her head cover. She was trying to calm me down by saying, *“You are in this thing to get you better and keep you warm”. “It is making you breathe”*.

While in “the box” I spoke to the little girl and when I got let out of the box and into the ward I was asking about her. A nurse told me that my new friend had gone to “another place” where she would be looked after by Angels. I was very upset and to be honest I cannot remember too much more about that stage. I now realise just how lucky I was making it out and into that ward. Later I was told that my two younger brothers were also somewhere in the hospital with “Polio Flu”.



Physio could be sometime quite painful for Polio survivors

Although my breathing was stronger my weakened muscles in my left arm had caused it to become useless. Doug at his early stages of his illness had been very sick and thinks that he was put into an “oxygen tent” for a while. After about six months both brothers had recovered sufficiently to be able to go back home, however about six months later they were both back as they had contracted TB and had to have their neck glands removed. This suited me as I was able to go and see them this time. Doug would call out to me from a balcony across the way and point out to others saying, *“That’s my brother over there”*.

After about a year, we polio survivors were allowed to go out of the hospital grounds for walks, some in wheelchairs and some on crutches. I got my group to always head down to A&G Price Engineering Workshops at the end of the road as we had made friends with some of the workers there. We were soon invited in and I got to see the foundry work and the building of steam engines that they were making. This was great for me, being the boy from an Engineering family. This in fact was the only education that any of us ever got while in hospital, as most of the time we just played in the corridors and made a nuisance of ourselves.



Foundry and Railway Workshops in Thames

After 2 years I recovered enough to be sent home but had to return now and then for small operations on my left-hand to try and make it more useful. I must have been about 10 or so when I eventually got back to school but was very conscious of how much older (and taller) that I was compared with the others kids in my class and how I was finding it so hard to keep my learning up with them.

Thinking back, it must have been terrifying for Mum and Dad when Polio hit our family. You see Thames Hospital was an hour away from Paeroa and the family did not have a vehicle. We boys were locked away in isolation for weeks and if they could visit it was only on a Sunday and then they were only able to wave to us from behind a window. I learnt later that the rest of the family were locked down at home for a time and when they did get the all clear, many of their friends were too scared to visit.

Children can be pretty blunt with what they say to each other and some of the other kids gave us a hard time. Doug reminded me of the story when one day I was defending him at the public baths. My good right arm had extra strength having to do the work of two and I was lining up the older boy to clock him one when he grabbed my bad left. He immediately let it go in horror and took off in fright shouting from a safe distance that **he was not going to fight a “cripple”**.

However I enjoyed being back at school as it was certainly better than being in hospital. But soon my world started falling apart again big time as my Great Uncle George died then my Dad was diagnosed with a brain tumour and also died. A few months later when I was 14 Mum was diagnosed with cancer and had to go to Auckland for surgery and ongoing treatment for quite a number of months.

We boys were all shipped off to be with different family relations outside of the Thames Valley leaving my older brother at home looking after Mum. He had to leave school and was given work by another family member who owned and ran a printing business. I was sent to Taranaki to be on a farm with an Aunt and three cousins who were a few years older than me. This was Uncle George's farm at Otakeo he was Dads brother though sadly he had also died and not long before Dad.



The Hutchinson Family about 1950 - Graeme just home from hospital

This was the right place for me to get on with my life as I had my Aunt Doris and cousins who showed me plenty of loving care. I worked on the farm with cousin's Robert, Jennifer and George who was a motor mechanic. But I never went back to school. I kept making excuses to Aunt Doris why I should not have to.

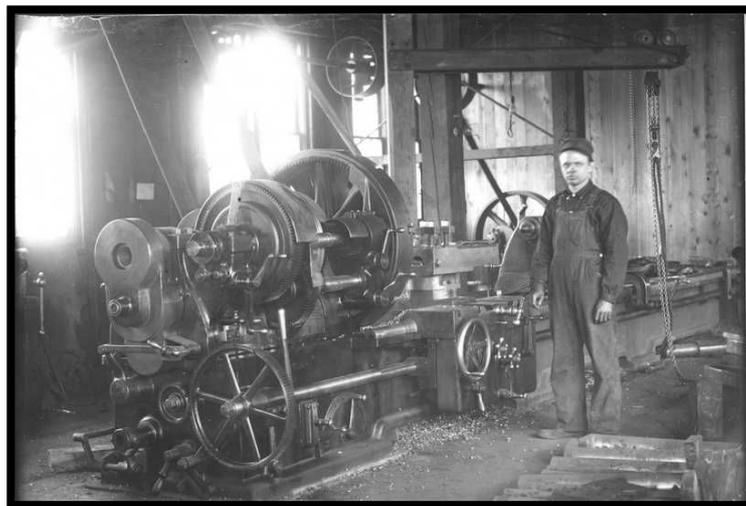
Chapter 3 – Getting a Job

I was now 15 and wanted a job. I said to Aunt Doris that I would like to work in an Engineering shop making things. Aunt Doris said *“you did not complete your secondary schooling Graeme, but I do know someone that might help us”*. This turned out to be another Hutchinson relation, Billy Davy. Billy was retired but still had shares in a couple of Hawera businesses. He had helped Dad establish his Hawera business. It was not long before Aunt Doris was back telling me that we had an appointment to see a Mr Bill Croucher who was on the board of the Crippled Children Society (CCS).

So on Friday we went into town to see him at his Engineering business Croucher and Crowder Engineering Ltd (C&C). I was quite taken aback when Mr Croucher said *“I knew your father and you being the son of clever man like that I would very much like to give you an engineering apprenticeship here, but I will have to talk to the CCS first”*. It was around two weeks later when Aunt Doris turned up in the cow shed where Robert and I were milking the cows. She had a letter from Mr Croucher that she read out. It said that I needed to come back into town and see him to apply to be an apprentice and to bring in my school leaving report. **This was something I definitely did not have.** Aunt Doris quickly sent off a letter to my old school in Paeroa and luckily for me a report turned up just before my appointment day.

Aunt Doris drove me into town to see Mr Croucher. He looked over my school report and said *“I am thinking about offering you an apprenticeship, you have a good report for maths. That is excellent you will need that in this trade. Your reading, grammar and spelling report is **not** good though. That is something that I could get help for you through the CCS”*. Then he stood sharply up and said *“Come with me young Hutch, let’s take a look though the work shop”*.

We stopped by an old belt driven Dean Smith Lathe that I had seen many times at A&G Price Workshops in Thames. He said *“see if you can use that gammy left hand to wind in that cross slide”*. With some difficulty I managed. *“That’s good”* he said. The next thing he did was pick up a broom and said, *“Now can you sweep floors”*. *“No trouble”* I said and with that he replied *“**Even better, come back into the office”***.



Dean Smith Lathe at A&G Price Ltd

Sitting behind his desk he looked at my Aunt and said *“Can you get him in from the farm to be at work by 8.00am sharp next Monday to start work”*. *“I can get George to drop him off”* said my Aunt. *“Good, sign here”* he said thrusting papers at me. He then shook my hand and said *“See you on Monday and don’t be late son”*. I went back to the car with a big smile on my face.

After a big hug we were off to the shops to get the groceries for the week. When Aunty Doris was at the counter, she asked the guy behind the counter if he knew of someone that would board me from Monday to Friday. He looked at me and said “yes we could take him in as we have a big empty house”. Aunty Doris said “Well, he will be there Monday after 5.00 pm with his things thank you” and that was that. When I got home and studied my copy of the apprenticeship contract I could see that it was going to be for 5-years, time served as an Apprentice Fitter and Turner



The all-important C&C crane during my apprentice days

Chapter 4 - Starting Work

With great anticipation I left for my first day at work at 7.00am with Cousin George driving his classic 1937 Morris 8. George worked for a garage in Manaia that serviced mainly Citroen cars, so he had to drop me off at Hawera and scoot back to Manaia to be on time for his own job. I therefore arrived at work early appearing at the front workshop offices with suitcase in my good right hand. The office girl guessed who I was and took me out to meet the Workshop Manager, Bill Green. He greeted me with “good morning Graeme” and saying that being on time was a good start and make sure it stays that way. He then reinforced that by telling me that if I was late I’d be docked $\frac{1}{4}$ hour pay for every 5mins past the start time. That there will be a 10min ‘smoko’ break at 10.00am, an hour for lunch at 12.00 and another 10.00mins smoko at 3.00pm with knock off at 5.00pm.

He then showed me the dreaded “time clock” that he said was to keep everyone honest, then how to clock in and out for each job. It all started to get a bit complicated when he told me about the need to write down job numbers and descriptions of materials, etc. He then passed me on to Keith the next youngest apprentice at work. Keith took me to get work overalls and show me the ropes for the day. Keith was more than pleased to show me “the ropes” as it meant that he was let of the hook for a lot of his sweeping and lockup chores.

So on my first day it was 5.30pm by the time I was able to get away from work after seeing that all the gas and lights were turned off and the doors were securely locked. That night I settled in at my boarding house with Mr and Mrs Rowe a very kind couple who looked after me well. I soon got to know and spend time with Billy Davy as he only lived one street away. Billy, as it turned out was also an engineer and electrician. He lived in a beautiful two storied house right behind the Rowe's. He was getting on a bit in age by then but we had many good games of draughts, something that I had played with my Great Uncle George.



Billy Davy on his Douglas racer around 1920

I help Billy in his garage and he taught me lots about electrical systems and motor bikes of which he had raced in his younger days. Cousin George would collect me from work Friday nights to get me back to the farm for the weekend then back to Hawera on a Monday morning. I always looked forward to being back with my cousins, helping on the farm, milking, hay making, fixing motors with George and those big bacon and egg breakfasts cooked by Jennifer.

Being the new boy at work meant I got all the good jobs like making cups of tea, washing drinking mugs after smoko and yes “cleaning the toilets” – yuck. Spray painting, sand blasting, keeping the forge going, lighting the pot belly heating stoves for central heating and making sure the machine shops overhead belt drive gear was running smoothly. This meant climbing up into the rafters to grease shaft bearings and lacquer the belts. But most importantly, I became an expert with that broom. The one job I did not like was filling in **that job card!** The office girls were always coming out laughing at me and asking about the words that I had written down.

Weeks and weeks had passed and I still hadn't got to use that lathe. Then one morning I got called into the office. Mr Croucher said that I had completed my three months trial period that he was pleased with my work and was I happy being there. *“Oh yes”* I quickly replied *“but I would like to get in the machine shop on that lathe”*. *“My father had a lathe that I learned to use”*. I rambled on telling him about the monster lathes and machines in the A&G Price's Foundry were I used to spend time dreaming about how one day I would be able to use them to “make things”.

Mr Croucher stopped me by agreeing to follow up on getting me trained on the lathes, but then made it clear that I needed to get up to speed with my spelling as I was *“wasting his office girls time”*. He then told me that he had arranged through the CCS for me to see a spelling and speech therapist – *“starting next week after work hours of course!”*

Chapter 5 - Reading and Writing

Luckily the therapist was only 5 minutes from home. She was a young primary school teacher, who was expecting a baby. I was hoping that she had a lot of patience. I talked to her about my life and having missed school. She said that she thought that she could help me and started off by asking me to speak into a tape recorder. She played it back and explained that I was not pronouncing my words correctly. That if I spoke clearer it may help with my spelling.

She then gave me an ABC spelling book and asked me to pick out 6 words that I would use at work I put my head down and went quiet and she asked what the matter was. I looked up at her and said I am not a dummy with tears in my eyes, *“That’s little kid’s stuff”*. *“Yes”* she said, *“you should have been taught this when you were in the primers”*. She put her arms around me gave me a hug and said *“Graeme you must have forgotten it all with the trauma that you have been through”*. *“I think we should try this first. “Ok” but I am not telling anyone”* I replied.

Walking back to Rowe’s I was asking myself, why am I such a dummy when it comes to reading and spelling? Then thinking I must be able to learn as I can do most things and my working life has just started. Then shouting out *“just get on with it, you can do it!”* This is what my Dad would say when I was struggling to do something with my bad hand like holding those little nuts and screws when making things out of my Meccano set. When I got into my bedroom I shut my door, sat down on the bed opened my “homework”. It made no sense and to stop the tears again, I put that damn book under my suitcase hoping that out of sight was out of mind.

Chapter 6 – Damn Homework

Back at work one cold morning I was stoking up the potbelly heater with coke until it glowed red. Mr Croucher appeared saying, *“that vessel is starting to bulge”*. *“I do not want Kere over there getting too hot on that new Mitchel Centre Lathe. He needs to get his own sweat up to earn us money to pay for it”*. He then quizzed about how I got on with the young speech therapist lady. *“Ok”* I said *“no problem”*. *“She said that I will be up to speed in 4 or 5 weeks”*. He then asked Kere to set me up on an old belt driven lathe that was used only to machine cast iron parts. “Kere” was John Kerehoma who was the senior machinist at that time and Mr Croucher has just assigned him to train me on the lathe. *“Hurrah”*

It was Kere who showed me how to clean a lathe properly. How to oil up the cross slides and keep it working as it should do. I was over the moon and soon facing up and drilling out stoker wheels by the dozens. However I was not let off by Kere in stoking up that potbelly heater for him. The days seemed to go quickly and before long it was Thursday evening and Mrs Rowe saying there is a lady on the phone for you. *“Where are you, have you forgotten”* the voice said. Grabbing my homework I ran as quickly as I could for my lessons.

“How did you get on with the work?” was the first question. Still puffing I said *“great, I am working in the work shop on a really good old Lathe”*. There was a pause then she looked at me and said *“oh that’s great, but how did you do with **your homework?**”* Hesitating I said *“ok”*. She picked up my ABC book and my homework folder. *“All right, what are the nouns and can you spell those 6 words”*. I spluttered out *“a e I o u”*. My therapist looked at me and said with a big smile *“you have not even looked at this homework Graeme have you?”* *No”* I said *“but I am on that lathe and learning plenty”*.

She got me started with nouns again but I was having trouble remembering them. She made me write them down time and time again. I started to get frustrated and when my eyes started to well up she called it quits for the night. She asked me just to concentrate on learning the nouns for homework. Over a supper I met her husband Mark who worked a National Dairy Association (NDA). Mark was about 22 and had completed his apprenticeship at NDA. He was a welder making stainless steel cheese vats and we had plenty to talk about. Walking back home I was thinking that I should be able to learn those damn nouns off by heart and maybe I could get my Auntie Doris to help. But when I went to bed I started thinking that my lessons were a waste of time and I could have been playing games of draughts with old Billy.

Chapter 7 - My Spelling Plan

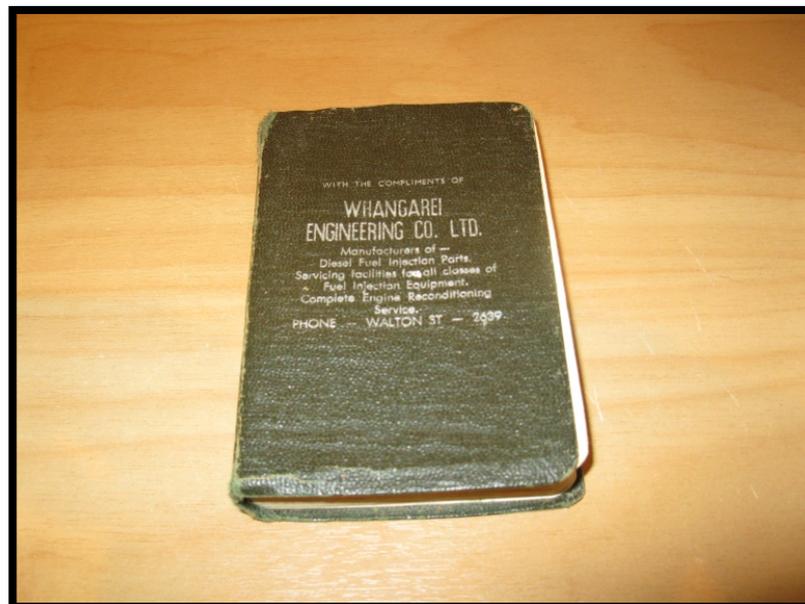
It was now spring time and the cows on the farm were calving. C&C were very busy manufacturing new factory machinery. At work I was learning in leaps and bounds. Kere was an excellent tradesman and now had me working on a new Capstan Lathe. It had a bar feed that allowed me to quickly turn out bearing spindles for the Curd Mixers wheels. I asked Kere when I would be able to use his lathe with the reply. *“Only when I am 6 feet under young Hutchy”*

I was trying hard to get on top of my spelling and had even started to read a book that my teacher had given me. But I was struggling and a spelling test was due. On the Thursday test night we got a call from the teacher to say that she was not feeling well and not to attend class that night. So I walked around to see Billy instead and over a cuppa he said that he had been talking to Auntie Doris about my reading lessons and she told him how I was stressing out about it all. *“Yes”* I said *“I hate it!”* *“Well”* he said *“Your Dad had some problems too with words.”* *“He used to keep a little notebook in his top pocket”*. *“I asked him one day what he kept in that notebook and his response was”* – ***Names of people that ask too many questions”***.

In no time at all the spelling test night was on me again. We were very busy at work and I was doing overtime and so I had only glanced at my 20 learning words. At the start of the test my brain, just seem to go into low gear and after about 25 minutes the therapist who was keeping an eye on my progress called a stop to the test. With only a few words spelt correctly I was quite upset and blurted out that I did not know why I could not spell and that my brain just seems to go blank.

It was then she said that she had been talking things over with the CCS and we are all of the opinion that you have what is called **Dyslexia**. *“It is not an illness just something in your past, has caused you to have difficulty with reading and spelling. It is quite common with a lot of people of normal intelligence”*. **“So does that mean I am not a dummy after all”** I said. *“Far from it”* was the reply. *“I hear from Mr Croucher that you are a very clever young man and that he understands your situation”*.

I then told the Teacher the story about my Dad and his notebook. She said that is a good plan and that could help me with writing out my job cards. She even found a small green note book for me that could fit into my overalls top pocket. She then wrote into the note book the words that I would most commonly use day to day on my time sheet. It seemed at long last we had a solution to a very big problem that had been bugging me ever since I had started work.



My Dads most treasured possession – His small dictionary!

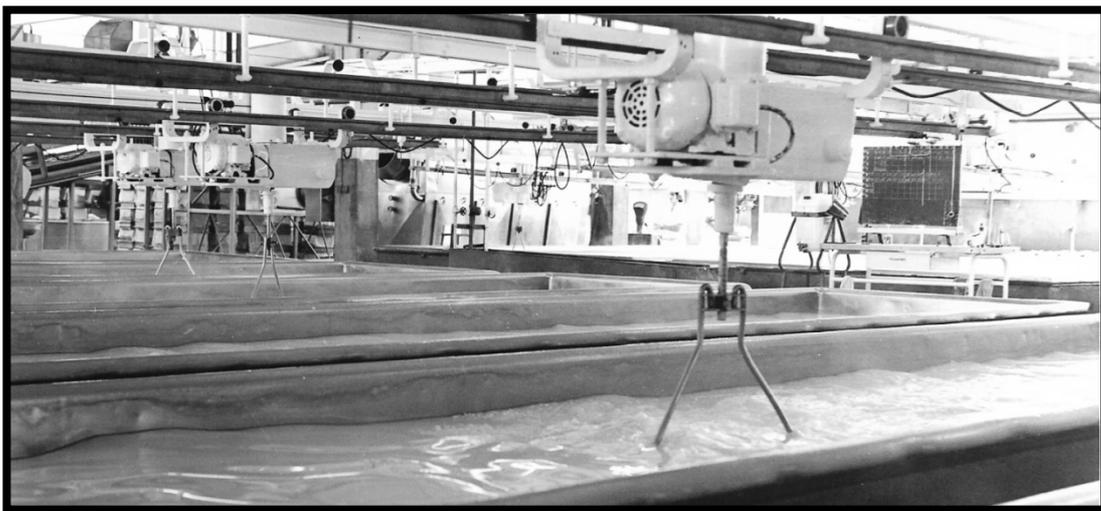
Chapter 8 - Getting on with my trade

My little green notebook was proving to be worthwhile. It kept the office girls at bay and I stopped getting stressed out. When someone asked, what was I writing in that little green note book, I give them my Dads reply and they never asked again.

Work was getting more and more interesting for me as I spent more time working with other tradesmen this time assembling “Coal Stokers”. These machines were used to automatically feed coal into boiler fire boxes. I got to see how the parts that I had machined fitted together in the assembly and how it all operated on completion. “Old Jock” would let me test run the finished unit, checking for vibrations of the powerful blower blades that I would have balanced.

There was a big demand for these Stokers at that time as every Taranaki Dairy Factory seemed to need one or more. Old Jock was very skilled and taught me heaps. He was particularly good in his understanding of my Polio limitations. He asked about the old wrist brace that I was wearing and got his wife to make up a leather one for me. It was much more comfortable and it supported my gammy arm and hand so that my wrist would not flop back. It also meant that I could hold onto nuts and bolts a lot better. I used that wrist support for some years and it was great.

Then my training moved onto learning about the assembly of “Curd Mixers”. Once again these were the latest in mechanization for the cheese making industries and C&C were selling them by the hundreds. This time I was being taught by Bob Green (Bill Greens brother) and Angus and once again seeing how the many parts that I had machined, like worm-wheels for gear-boxes, were being used. About this time two new apprentices were employed so I got to hand over some of my workshop chores but one job I did not to give up on was **using that broom as** I liked a clean tidy work area. Bill Green used to embarrass me a bit by constantly telling others that *“young Hutch knows how to use a broom”*.



C&C Curd Mixers in action at the Kaponga Dairy Factory (Photo taken 1982)

One day Old Billy said to me he had been thinking a lot about my family's situation. He reckoned that we should start looking for a house in Hawera for Mum and my brothers and what did I think. I was taken back a little as I did not know how the family could afford such a thing but just said *"that's a great idea"*. *"I will write to your Mum and see if she would like me to help"* said Billy. It was not long before Billy had me checking out a house for sale a few doors down from his own. We were wandering through the house when he suddenly said *"I hope your Mum will be happy with it when she moves in, as I have bought it!"*

I could hardly contain myself and said ***"do you mean this is going to be my home where I live, - when?"*** It was then that Billy told me my family would be renting the house off him and that we had about 3-weeks to get it all cleaned up and put in order. It was not long before the whole family was back together again with my 3 younger brothers at school in Hawera and older brother, William working for a local newspaper. The family had only a few meagre possessions to move from Paeroa but the most important things that turned up as far as I was concerned were the gardening tools **and Dads little lathe**. I soon had that bolted down to the floor in the car shed. Life it seemed it could not get any better.



My family back together again in Hawera thanks to Billy Davy

(From left - Bruce, Ken, Doug, Mum, Bill and Me)

Chapter 9 - Trades School

By then 2 years had passed and I was now spending time in the structural steel fabrication shop. John Morgan was the tradesman who was training me. He had been teaching me to weld. It was my lunch break and I was behind a welding screen practicing when a loud bang frightened the shit out of me. It was John getting my attention. *“Hey Hutchy, Mr Croucher wants you in his office ASAP. You are in big trouble mate”*. I put down the hand screen and headed off to see the Boss. Mr Croucher was with Bill Green in his office and I was asked to sit down.

Mr Croucher looked at me and saw my red eyes from my welding practice and suggested that I see Bob for some eye drops. He went on to tell me that he had received a letter from the NZ Technical Training Institute and that all apprentices would from now on need to attend Technical Training in their first 3 years of work. Bill Green butted in saying *“what can they bloody-well teach that we can’t do ourselves and I hope it’s not in the businesses time”*. Mr Croucher said, *“No, it’s evening classes at the Hawera High School and as you are already into your third year you only have to attend night school for this year”*.

“Here we go again I will have to sit exams” I was thinking. I looked back at Mr Croucher and said that I did not really want to go back to school. He replied that it was to be only 2 hours a week and that I had no choice. He said that it would be all practical trade training and that part would be a breeze for me. But he then went on to say that there would be 3 exams to sit and to start my first class next Wednesday at 6.00pm. I went out of the office with my head down with Bill Green yelling at me from behind ***“don’t forget to see Bob for those bloody eyes Hutchy”***.

I never slept that night as my eyes were suffering from “arc strike”. They felt like they had sand in them and I could not stop thinking about having go back to school. However it turned out that Mr Croucher was right as the first 3 months of the practical was a breeze. I got top marks for my projects, but when it came to the 2 hour exams I did not do well. I just could not understand the questions and what I did write down could not be understood by anyone else. The tutor got me to stay back from the exam. He was very understanding and asked me some of the questions verbally and of course I was able to answer them verbally. He said I should have talked to him at the start of the course but that he would have to mark my exam paper as seen.

Chapter 10 - Another Apprentice Starts

I was back in my favourite place the machine shop learning to operate a milling machine this time. I had finished the technical training school year. In my opinion Bill Green had been right with his comment, that most of time you learn more from working with a good tradesman. That it is just as important to learn good work ethics and to be accountable and Trades School seemed too casual for me in that respect. For example, at work if I was filing a keyway or fitting a key into drive-wheel at work and I bugged it that could cost big bucks and you would hear about it.

I was now reporting to Ian Allen who was the Machine Shop Foreman and I was assigned to one of the better lathes in the machine shop. This lathe was situated close to the main offices and the customers entrance way. Ian was responsible for dealing with these customers and assigning out the work. He kept a good eye on us all and you could not get away with much. He once caught me as I was machining a part for a motor scooter that I was making at home. He frightened the heck out of me by coming up from behind and loudly saying, ***“What job is that for Hutchy. I hope you have a job number for it.”*** *If not I expect you to make the time up in your lunch break and did you finished that job for Ford Motors while I was out.* I was able to quickly reply yes that I had finished the job and yes it had been delivered to the customer. But that did not get me off the hook as Ian’s just as quick reply was *“That does not mean you can do homers mate!”*

One day Mr Croucher asked me if there were any more Hutchy boys like me who might be interested in an engineering apprenticeship. I told him that my younger brother Doug had nearly finished high school and I would check with him. I was working on the milling machine when a voice called out *“Hutchy, look who’s here”*. It was Brother Doug with Mr Croucher who went on to say *“You should know this young man he is our new apprentice.”* Then to Doug *“Maybe you can get your brother to work on time, he’s starting to get into bad habits”*. Doug grinned and thumped my arm as he walked away. It was not long before we were both biking to work to get there early so that Doug could do his workshop opening up chores. We were good buddies, and it was great to share work experiences and get help with that damn spelling.

Six months later Mr Croucher said he was sending me down to Wellington for an 8 week work experience in the Railway Work Shops. He wanted me to gain heavy machining experience, also to spend time in the drawing office. This experience was needed to complete my engineering apprenticeship. I was to go in two week they had booked accommodation for me at the Trentham Military Barack’s. There would be four other 4th year apprentices. I was taken aback a bit by this and asked if there was to be any exams. Much to my relief I was told that it was all practical and that I would enjoy it. Mr Croucher told me that it would be a great experience as some of the lathes were so big I would be riding on the cross slide as it moved backwards and forward. ***“Trust Me Hutchy, you will love it”***.

It also turned out that he had spoken to them and explained about my Polio and Dyslexia. It was a great experience and exactly as Mr Croucher had explained. I enjoyed commuting on the trains with the guys into and out of Wellington and their comradeship. This was probably the first time I was able to be a normal teenager. Once back at work it only seemed to be a very short time and I had completed my “5000 hours’ (five years) time served” and became a fully-fledged tradesman.

Chapter 11 - Conclusion

Those years for me were difficult yet rewarding. Without the help of family and relations I am not sure where I would have ended up. Certainly without the understanding and help from people like Mr Bill Croucher I would never have been able to complete a trade. I worked for Croucher and Crowder for another 10 years before I ventured further afield into the Petrochemical Industry where I came across people some who were really helpful and understood my issues. But then again there were others who tried their best to undermine me because of my disabilities. With these types I was usually able to put them in their place sooner or later when they would have to come to me to be shown how to do certain procedures so they could understand how things worked. University degrees may have taught theory but some had no practical sense. I went on to be responsible for some very big projects which I thoroughly enjoyed and I even established and ran my own business. Finally, although I have succeeded in my work life, I still struggle with dyslexia and feel awkward in certain situations. The moral:-

“Just tell people if you can’t read and write. Ask for help and don’t be ashamed”.



Foot Note: *Dyslexia’s greatest difficulty is self-esteem. It only becomes a disability if not appropriately addressed. On the flipside, dyslexia can deliver great creative gifts, innovation and entrepreneurship. Dyslexic individuals tend to think in pictures rather than words, receiving and retrieving information in a different part of the brain to neurotypical, word-based thinkers.*

Dyslexia can also affect impacting skills such as auditory and information processing, planning and organising, motor skills, short-term memory and concentration. Successfully addressing dyslexia is based on recognition, understanding and action. For more information go to:- www.dfnz.org.nz