

Saturday 7th February 2009 as narrated by BILL.

**Today was to be a record day for Robyn and Bill.
A forecast temperature of 46 degrees.
46 degrees? You must be joking?**

Got up early, the usual 2 cups of tea, checked out the estate, without Raz, *"Crikey I miss her, hope she's happy and her 11 puppies are too"*. Filled all our static water containers and prepared ourselves for the worst, **TOTAL FIRE BAN DAY IN WARRANDYTE.**

It was a beautiful morning in Warrandyte. The pool was looking great. Switched off the filter, had my second cup of tea and let the chooks out. Picked all the ripe tomatoes, made sure everything was ready for a bloody hot day. Robyn surfaced and we both agreed we would go nowhere and look after our property and ensure we were ready for the worst.

Robyn swept the paths with the blower. We both agreed it was a waste of time because the trees were dropping so many leaves that it was impossible to keep up with them. Had a swim in the pool, lovely. *"Crikey, look at the temperature 44 degrees? Wind is up, not happy Jan."*

I said to Rob *"I'll go and pull the motor apart of the Motor Mower, in the workshop, it's cool in there, 28 degrees, heaven"*.

I'm listening to the radio on ABC, no dramas a few fires here and there, about to lift the head off the old mower and Robyn calls out

"JUST SPOKE TO ANNE TO SEE HOW THEY WERE - AND SHE SAID IT WOULD BE GOOD IF YOU COULD PICK UP RAZ AND THE PUPPIES AND TAKE THEM HOME AS WE ARE ALL WORRIED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF FIRES"

A wink was as good as a nod and we jumped in Robyn's car and literally thrashed up there. I await mail from the Coppers. Arrived, put 11 puppies and the magnificent "Raz" in the car and proceeded to hurry out of there.

Got half way down the steepest part of Olives Lane. Robyn says *"What's that?"* I say *"Smoke on our left."*

All of a sudden it becomes flame, not just flame, a fully blown bloody fireball, Billy's brain thinks, *"should I go or should I stay?"* I feel vibes from my lovely wife.

I engage reverse in the faithful Pug (our car). I hear 11 puppies and Raz cheer. Olives Lane is at its steepest, where we are. The Pug objects, I slip the clutch, there was no option of a U turn, the 306 Pug struggles, the slope gradually becomes less we accelerate in reverse we get to the top of the hill where it becomes possible to do a U turn.

We drove back to the house into a horror scene. In the time it took us to get back to Anne and Ron the fire was fully developed at the house, *"Holy Mackerel"*

Rob and I were dressed in "jock straps and spurs" when we arrived, but having lived in Warrandyte for 38 years, had the foresight to put in overalls and wool gear just in case. Ron was very impressed when I donned my virgin white beekeeper's heavy cotton overalls.

From then on it was full on. We did our best to defend the house. It was obvious that the best thing to do was to stay indoors and wait till the fire front passed over and then put out the spot fires after. That's what the fire authority advised.

Folks, I can't possibly tell you how bad it got. But I can tell you how proud I am to say that not one of us had to change our undies.

We had 10 Airedale adult dogs to look after, and arguably the best Airedale mother and her 11, four and a half week old puppies with us.

GUESS WHAT THE PRIORITY WAS TO SAVE?

The fire raged, we defended, we all cooperated, and there was little panic. We kept our calm.

Until, Ron said *"BILL, the bloody roof is on fire above the mezzanine, can you pass me up a back pack?"*, which I did. Then bloody someone said *"BILL, the bloody eave is on fire outside the main bedroom"*.

So BILL then opened the front door with his back pack on his back, after instructions from Anne on how to use it and proceeded to fight the eaves fire. After about 2 minutes outside with fire flying ash and about a 50 knot wind Billy decided *"this is not for me"*.

BILL then turned into the wind and nearly collapsed, but managed to get back inside. Ron was as exhausted as BILL, BILL was really worried about Ron and I'm sure the feeling was mutual.

Anne was yelling orders and we all obeyed, Robyn was calmly going about her business putting out fires inside the house, from hot ashes getting under the doors. BILL was enjoying the water he was pumping from the backpack onto the ceiling as it came back over him.

BILL decided he would have one more attempt at putting out the fire under the eaves, outside. He grabbed a full bucket of water opened the front door, ashes flew in, Robyn swore. BILL threw the bucket of water and the flames just laughed. BILL turned to go back inside and it was all he could do to keep standing against the wind and the heat to make it back inside before collapsing in a heap.

By this stage the house from the main bedroom end was fully in flames. Ron and I (BILLY) were totally exhausted. Anne and Robyn, as well as looking after the dogs and puppies were keeping fires inside under control by using mops and water (gold).

By this stage we all knew the house was gone, Anne was calm and suggested that *"it will be OK; just keep moving away from the smoke"*. That's what we did; we moved us and all the dogs towards the lowest floor level, the family room. When the smoke got too bad to breathe and stung our eyes we moved to the lower level.

The dogs were amazing, they did whatever Anne and Ron said. When the smoke was so bad in the kitchen that we all had to move down to the lower level, I said to Ron, *"How are we going to shift all the older dogs down when they are all in a cage together?"*

He said to me *"Its OK BILL we will just slide the cage and they just follow"*; I said something like *"You must be f/ing joking"*.

But guess what? 9 adult dogs in a cage without a floor did a dance and cooperated. 36 legs went down 3 steps and all did a waltz or spin and not a dog missed a beat Old Iron Training and Education take a bow, or a woof. During the whole episode the dogs and puppies were calm and never panicked. A credit to their breeders.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

By now the smoke in the lowest level was unbearable. Anne said *"OK the dog kennels look safe let's go."*

So **WE** did. We had by this stage got used to counting dogs and puppies; to make sure that we had them all. There had been some times when we thought there was one missing, Anne then noticed one appear from the dense smoke, phew.

How do you quickly transport 11 puppies from the blazing house to the relative safety of the kennels? Robyn's stroke of genius, *"in a wheelbarrow"*. Duly and efficiently done. Here we all now stand watching a beautiful house burn to the ground,

"CRIKEY" CRIED THE KING

Here we are watching the house burn and I thought *"F6666k, the cars!"* Raced over to the fence to open the gates to the cars, "Ouch" burnt my fingers on the lock, grabbed some gloves, opened the gate, drove our car out away from the heat Ron did the same with the VW, then went back for the Jag, but too late could not get near it "Bugger".

We were now on the kennel side of the house, the heat was intense. We transferred all the dogs to the 2 cars, all the puppies, Raz and Opra to Robyn's Car. Anne and Ron loaded the remaining 8 dogs into the VW Caddy. We ran our motors and sat in AIC comfort and watched the action.

During this Robyn transferred the World's best Airedale mother to the rear of the car so she could feeds her puppies. **COULD THIS BE THE MOST HEROIC AIREDALE OWNER AND MOTHER COMBINATION IN AUSTRALIA IF NOT THE WORLD?**

By this stage Bill suggested maybe we should attempt to leave. Anne said *"NO BILLY, don't be silly, (gee I hate that), "we should wait until things settle down"*; so we all bowed to her great wisdom and cooled our heels.

The wind calmed and after a time Bill and the beautiful Robyn started to clear the road for our escape. Robyn had tried to get help by mobile phone but without any success. The advice was *"We can't advise, we don't know!"*

Basically, in the end we decided to give it a go, **Billy** needed an icy cold beer. There were many trees over the road but amazingly by applying basic engineering lever principles all trees were removed. We rounded a corner; every bit that could be burnt was burnt. Anne and Ron were directly behind. Robyn said *"Oh look there is a poor dead kangaroo on the road"*.

Sadly, as we got closely it was not a kanga. It was a male body a metre onto the road. I checked for pulse, there was none. He was dressed in shorts and a tee shirt. He was wearing sneakers and socks, and gloves. It was obvious that he had been wearing a helmet, the helmet was melted, and his head was just blackened remains. As his body was on the road, I moved it to the side of the road to ensure that he would not be hit by traffic. I also covered his body with a sheet, I then noted that his wallet and other personal documents had fallen from his pockets. Ron then phoned 000 and reported all this

We moved on and soon saw a crashed motorcycle. It is my opinion that the deceased person was traveling at high speed, hit a fallen tree and was thrown off the cycle and maybe broke his neck and was then burnt by the fire. We met a police car on its way to the incident, the male and female officers were very kind and told me to take it easy.

Oh what a day it was.

THE END

A very frightened **Billy** (owner of Raz)