

The Lindsay Clan

Saturday, 13 November 2003

A lot has happened since Eva Margaret Nancy Lindsay of Scotland turned into Nancy Payne, resident of New Zealand, mother of Ted and John Payne and, yes, Simon James Lindsay.

We have written to each other. Had a first telephone conversation.

"Hello, can I please speak to Nancy Payne? This is Simon Pryor."

"Simon? You are my son, aren't you?"

"And you are my mother, aren't you?"

We have become friends and more. Imagine an entirely adult relationship with a parent, with none of the lingering effects of family relationships in childhood. We have met. We have traded stories, both keen to get them out and to reassure each other while there may have been loss in a tale of adoption for each of us, even some pain, there is now no question, no bitterness, just understanding and acceptance of a reality that directed our lives. We have both experienced the thrill of recognising something about the other in ourselves. I don't know what that feels like for Nancy, but for me it shakes a lifetime of alternate experience. At times I have been happy, secure, loved and even in tune with a family's dreams. But I have *always* been different and that can weigh on one's mind. Not any more.

But this is not about Nancy and I. We have both talked to family and friends about that a lot over the past few years, so there is not much more to say. Besides, much of it can be imagined. Although it has been an experience unique to us, it is a common enough story.

The surprise for me has been twofold. Firstly, to be confronted by my own selfishness. Secondly, to be overwhelmed by the extraordinary generosity of spirit of the Lindsay clan.

I went looking for a mother. Just a mother. Once I found her, I blithely assumed I might or might not continue a search for a father, depending on what I found there. I did not go looking for brothers and sisters, nor aunts or cousins. I certainly didn't ever once think to step into their shoes and contemplate the impact success in my search may have on such folk. But these people do exist. And I have burst into their lives from nowhere.

Ted Payne is my elder brother. He is himself adopted and became Nancy's son through her marriage to Aubrey Payne. Since I have known him I have watched him battle illness, face his wife's serious illness and see two fine sons leave home and

carve out their own lives. He is a good man. It has taken us a long time to talk, though, about the relationship I unwittingly foisted upon him. But we have. The relationship did threaten and certainly made Ted rethink the fabric of his close relationship with his mother. It really could have had a very upsetting and lasting impact on the Payne family. The fact that it hasn't and that we have both acknowledged each other as brothers is more due to Ted's good grace than forethought on my part. Those from agencies such as Norcap and Jigsaw who had helped in the search had encouraged me to think about the sensitivities of a mother who may not live in circumstances where my existence could be divulged or where she did not want to be found. But I had no such thought about other family members. Reckless thoughtlessness. I owe you one, Ted.

John Payne is Nancy's other son and my younger half brother. We have never met and have talked only briefly. My existence came as a complete surprise to him and we are yet to talk about it. We may never. Reckless thoughtlessness. I think I owe you one, too, John.

Then there are the Lindsays, Mulligans and Blacks of Scotland. This is a story and a half. A very long time ago Nancy Lindsay left her brothers and their wives, Moira, Cathy and Margot in Scotland when she embarked upon life in a far corner of the globe. They kept alive her memory, though, and their children, my cousins, always heard stories about life with Nancy in Wormit. Through the epic Cretan journey of brothers Roy and Eric Lindsay they even knew of Evanthea Themaki, Nancy's mother and their grandmother and her story of life as a child with James Lindsay in Crete, her adoption by him around the turn of the century and her eventual journey to Dundee to claim her inheritance. It was just somewhat puzzling that Nancy never returned to take her place somewhere near the centre of their lives.

Some of Nancy's reticence about returning home was explained when she told them of what had happened in 1954 and 1955. The response of these people who, again, I had not even imagined, was overwhelming. They have collectively welcomed the Cooke-Pryors as family.

First, it was Grace Pryor, my mother (we have all learnt in this time since meeting Nancy to call my adoptive mother, mother and my birth mother, Nancy). Moira Lindsay, Nancy's sister-in-law, welcomed her into her home during a trip to Scotland and cousins Hazel, Eileen, Eric and others showed her around Dundee, Wormit, Pitlochry, St Andrews and Ballmullo. They shared their history, their story and welcomed hers.

Judith and Alice were next to visit. Again, the story was of welcome and celebration. Upon their return to Australia we could all tell that this had been a moving experience, especially for Alice. Kathleen and Alice have always known the Cooke cousins and have revelled in those family links. Now there were people on the other

side of the world and on the other side of the family who shared those ties of kith and kin. Young people who bore a physical resemblance and other, less tangible, similarities. Young people who *related* to each other. Both Judith and Alice urged me make arrangements to visit these cousins as soon as possible. "They need to meet you" was their simple message but the way they delivered it was remarkably forceful – there was an urgency there. But I knew that a trip such as that was at least two or three years away.

Serendipity played a role. On the last day of January 2003, thieves stole a battered and rusting ex-army Fairlane from us and used it in a ram-raid robbery on a sports store. The insurance payout was enough for a bicycle and an airfare to Europe.

Late September 2003. Edinburgh Airport. I disembark from an easyjet flight from London and look for cousin Eric with whom I had established an e-mail relationship. Eric had generously offered to pick me up at Edinburgh and then let me stay at "Suda" in Wormit. Suda is a named after Suda Bay where Nancy's mother was born and was the last family home for George and Eve Lindsay, parents of Nancy and her brothers. Eric and Roy inherited the house from their mother, Margot. Roy lives in Yorkshire, Eric in Aberdeen. Suda is their holiday home. Well, Eric wasn't at the airport. And he wasn't answering his mobile telephone. In fact he NEVER answers his mobile telephone, because he never ever turns it on. But I saw him come into the airport an hour or so later (or, in his version of events; on time) and his first words were, "You don't look or sound like what you are meant to and you are early, you bastard." The reply was "Mate, I can talk Australian if you want and in any case, you were late, you bastard." We bonded immediately, you see.

Eric let me live in his home with him for ten days or so. He drove me everywhere. Cooked for me. Washed for me and even ironed my shirts. And called me bastard all the time. He is a list maker and task focussed. We made lots of lists, all to do with understanding better the Dundee of George and Eve Lindsay. We have photographs of he and I in front of just about everywhere the two of them lived or George worked. We told each other family and personal stories. We lived in each other's pockets. It felt great.

In that wonderful few days I met Moira, Ian, Brian, Fiona, James, Liz, Victoria, and Roy Lindsay, Eileen, Ewan, Lindsay and Darroch Black, Hazel, Stephen, Nick, Angeline and Steve Mulligan. I sat in kitchens and living rooms and felt completely at home. Moira, Eric and I even travelled by train to Scarborough to be part of Roy's formal function celebrating his year as Chairman of the Northern Section of the Institute and Guild of Brewers. Amazing. A blow-in from Australia and I get invited to something as important to Roy as that. There was a joyous family get together where I was made the centre of attention. The experience was exhilarating. The welcome was fantastic and certainly made the visit exciting. Scotland itself is just such a

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wonderful country. But the chief impact was on discovering the genetic and historical links. They swirled around, filling just about every moment.

Apart from my own close family I have never had the experience of sharing life with people who are wired the same way. It is not the experience of discovering that you think the same thing. More, it is the shock that although you don't think the same thing, you both arrive at your conclusion using the same processes. People who construct meaning in the same fashion. Most, I guess, know this throughout their lives, certainly, in their formative years. Although I had a rich family upbringing that was something I hadn't had. I got it in heaps during September/October 2003.

It was an experience that made me think, though. This family was given no choice. I just appeared. I had the privilege of walking in on a functional family that was happy to welcome me and mine as part of that family. But had they been a family of different ilk ... I guess it was Nancy's call – and she knew the family. I feel very relieved, though, that it worked out so well and am acutely aware that it may not have.

Finally, there is young Steve. He is staying here with us in Brunswick. I met him in Hazel's kitchen and casually issued the invitation to this young relative. I was aware that he and Alice had really hit it off and thought maybe they should meet again some time. Besides, he had the same sense of humour as we Cooke-Pryors and his sister, Angie, is so like Kathleen it is uncanny. Bugger me if he hasn't bought his ticket before I'd even left Europe and he arrived in town hot on my heels! His visit has been a joy. Partly because he is such a fine human being and gets on so well with us. Partly because of the stories he has given us; his kilt at the Australia – Ireland International Rules Football game, Cup Day in November and our impending Christmas lunch. But also because of what he represents. Family. Doing what families should always feel free to do. Visit each other. It seems so natural. It seems so complete. I can't wait for the rest of the horde.