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Louise, Eddie and Colin Walker

ALFRED: A Recent Story from the Sky Pilot's Log

Alfred, a part-Aboriginal boy, was born in the city. By the time he was four years of age he was completely independent and knew his

way about the area in which he lived as well as many an older boy. His mother was often in ill health and Alfred roamed the streets, ate when

he could and slept when he was tired in whatever place he happened to be, for he was seldom at home. The police were concerned about him and on several occasions he was picked up, almost under the wheels of a bus, and taken to the Police Station. However he was as slippery as an eel and always managed to escape and elude any attempts at keeping him in safety. To him the noise of traffic, the tramping of countless feet, the smell of exhaust fumes mixed with that of hot tar was part of his life and being. He knew how to slip through the breaks in the traffic and scuttle across a street a few inches from the bumper bars of an oncoming car or truck; he knew how to stand up for himself amongst many a bigger boy who roamed that area; he was free of restraint, free of control and free of fear; that is apart from two phobias: a great fear of the devil and a fear of being shut up in a closed space — a type of claustrophobia which extended to others too, for he hated to see anyone or anything shut up.

Alfred was brought to Marella in April 1964. To the little four year old boy it was like a new world. In place of tarred streets and concrete pavements were open paddocks and green grass; the lowing of cows, the bleat of sheep and the song of birds took the place of the city noises; fresh, clean air replaced the smell of petrol fumes and city smoke. Everything was new and strange, but Alfred himself was unchanged. If anyone lifted a hand for any purpose whatever in his presence he would duck, as if instinctively fearing a blow, and his remedy for any suspicion of discipline or control was to run for his life. But there was a difference: in the crowded city he could lose himself amongst the pedestrians within a single block but in the open country he could not get away.

On one occasion, when he attempted to run away, he had to be followed by car and was soon overtaken in the open spaces which was so different from the crowded tenements to which he was used. But he soon settled down and won the affection of the other children and the staff. In spite of his mischievous ways and constant pranks and escapades he had a winsome nature and an unselfish way with him. For instance, one of his greatest treasures was a tiny toy car that had been given him; yet when he learned that a small boy who had been badly burned and disfigured in a fire was to come to Marella he immediately offered to give his car to the newcomer.

Alfred was no saint; if anything was wrong or some mischief had been done the staff would cry: "Al-fred, Alfred, where are you, Al-fred," and nine times out of ten Alfred would be the culprit. An indignant mother complained that Alfred had put chewing gum all through her child's hair in the bus and she had to "cut off

most of the hair to get it free". Alfred's ready fists and squirming body managed to find the best place in the crowded school bus; but sometimes he would champion the cause of some ill-treated child as Lawson's Bill did with Arvie Aspinall.

Who tried to put the kitten down the toilet? Alfred. Who locked the fox-terrier pup in the airtight dustbin from where he was rescued just in time? Alfred. Who let all the neighbour's fowls out of their pens? Alfred. Who let all the prize pigeons out of their separate breeding cages causing cold eggs and dead squeakers? Alfred, who could not bear to see anything shut up for long.

A neighbour's wife went out one morning after her husband had gone on a message and found the skinner irrigation in full operation during hours forbidden while water restrictions were in force. She said to herself: "Wait till I see Jim! Leaving that skinner on! We'll be fined," and she turned it off. Half an hour later she went out and the skinner was in full swing as if in challenge to the unreasonable restrictions. She paused for a moment in doubt. "Am I going mad?" she asked, "I could have sworn I turned the skinner off," and she made sure of it. A little later her husband returned and demanded: "Are you looking for trouble, turning on the skinner during restricted hours?" What saved her sanity was finding a few small footprints in the garden near the tap and she muttered, as others had done before her, "Al-fred! It must be Al-fred!"

If his first phobia was hating to see anything shut up his second was fear of the devil. Was this fear of an evil spirit something handed down from animistic ancestors or was it something gleaned from mention of the white man's religion? No one knows, but the fear was very real. He asked about prayer, one day, and how it worked. One of the staff said: "You kneel down, shut your eyes and talk to God just as you would talk to me." "Are you kiddin'?" asked Alfred. "No, indeed, just talk to God as you would to me." Alfred sank to his knees and with screwed up eyes uplifted to heaven said: "Oh, God; 'ow yer goin' up there?" Can we doubt the prayer was heard by the lover of little children?

Alfred was often afraid to go into an empty room, saying: "No, not me. The debil's in there. I don't want to be where the debil is." Given a toy sword at Christmas time Alfred's first words were: "Now I'll be able to fight the debil!" and he lunged under chairs and table exclaiming: "I'll get you Mr. Debil. Take that! and that! You can't get away from me. Sorry, God, you nearly copped that one; I only want to hurt the debil." And there was no intention of irreverence in the little boy's words.

One day, in a serious vein, little Alfred said to the matron "Mum, where does the debil live? Does he belong in heaven with God?" "Oh no",

was the reply, "the devil does not belong to heaven, he is down here on earth." Alfred was thoughtful for a moment, then he said in all seriousness: "Mum, I don't want to live down here with the debil; I'm going up to live with God where there is no debil." It was not till later that we realised the significance of these words.

But with Alfred school was the big problem. A year went by and he was enrolled at school; and Alfred did not like school. The teachers were fond of him and were wonderfully patient, but Alfred was beyond them. When taking him to the school for the first time an oversympathetic staff member mentioned that he should never be punished as he had had such an unfortunate background. The teachers found they had no control over him. They tried love and sympathy, but Alfred hated being shut in a class room. He was seldom there. When school was in Alfred would be found riding round the playground on some other boy's bicycle, or he would be down the street cadging from some of the shop-keepers who let sympathy override wisdom and encouraged him by various kindly gifts.

And Alfred was a fighter. Other bigger boys used deliberately to get him to fight a boy bigger than himself so that they could enjoy the fun; and gradually Alfred became a terror to other children. Finally the school rang up and begged us not to send Alfred to school. The teacher said: "I am afraid of Alfred killing someone. When he gets into a fight he goes mad. He ought to be in a home for uncontrollable children." We tried keeping Alfred home for a few days and reasoning with him but without avail. He was of school age and he had to attend school. Finally the Aborigines Welfare Board took him away from Marella and he was sent to the care of a relative in the city for a trial period.

A few weeks later one of our staff members brought Alfred back to Marella for the day. In the car he boasted: "I can fight any boy in my new school — even boys bigger 'n' me!"

He was gently told: "A Christian doesn't do things like that. That makes God unhappy but it pleases the devil."

Alfred was very silent for a time and he did not mention fighting all the time he was at the farm. When the time came for him to leave again he pleaded to be allowed to remain at Marella; but he was no longer in our care and we could not do anything about it.

But we were deeply concerned about Alfred's future. One said: "There is no future for that boy. He is already in constant trouble with the police and only his youth has saved him. When he grows up he will spend his life in and out of jail."

"What a tragedy," said another. "He so hates anything to be shut up. It will break his heart to be shut up. Isn't there anything we can do?"

"We can pray for him. That's all we can do

now. God understands and maybe a miracle will save him."

Maybe God did understand and He answered our prayer in a way we could never have dreamed. The end of the story came with a radio news broadcast that struck a chill into our hearts. It appears a seven-year-old part Aboriginal boy was playing with matches, when he should have been at school, underneath a wooden annexe to the Teachers' College in Carillon Avenue, Newtown. He started a fire and apparently tried to escape but the way was barred by locked doors. He tried to pull the cover from an air vent but he was overcome by smoke and fumes and his body was found by firemen when they put out the blaze.

Little Alfred never lived to spend his life "in and out of jail". He never knew what it was to be "shut up". He did not live to drift into serious crime but he was taken when he was still too young to be fully responsible for his life and actions. Maybe God in His mercy answered our prayers and took Alfred to be with Him where there is no sin and suffering and no one is "shut-in".

And the final entry in today's Log is taken from the tenth chapter of St. Mark: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."

THE LATE MR. JEFF. MARCANTELLI:

In the January 1967 issue of the Sky Pilot News there appeared a picture of little Robert with a clown holding a number of balloons taken at a recent Sale of Work at Marella. The man taking the part of the clown was Mr. Jeff Marcantelli, a member of the Paulian Society. Mr. Marcantelli later was a student at St. Columbus College, Springwood. He appeared strong and well, but after a game of football he complained of pain in his chest, following which he collapsed and passed away, suddenly and unexpectedly. It was with great distress that we heard of this happening; the more so as Jeff was only 26 years of age. To his parents and brothers and sisters we extend our deepest sympathy, trusting that in this time of sorrow they will be aware that "underneath are the Everlasting Arms."

CHILDREN'S SCHOOLING:

Most of our children are not over bright at school work and some of them do not try as hard as they might; but we realise that they have many difficulties to overcome. Often, left far behind by more gifted scholars, our children lose heart and give up the struggle. There are one or two outstanding examples of our children who really work hard and are consistent with their homework.

Mrs. Round and Miss Pittman, with limited time available, do their best to help the children with their homework, but recently we have had extra help from friends which has been much appreciated. Mrs. Hill takes two of the children at a class at Castle Hill one afternoon a week after school and she has been coaching them

with their reading. There has been a noticeable improvement. Mr. Robertson, who has come to the Mission on a number of occasions, has been helping the children with their reading and writing to their great advantage. However it has been difficult to find a suitable time as after school it is a rush to get all the children bathed and ready for tea; but in the new year it may be possible to work out a suitable time table by which the children could profit by extra instruction. We are most grateful to these friends for their interest and help.

EDDIE WALKER: One of our older boys, Eddie Walker, who is now working on the farm, went to Victoria for a C.M.F. camp for the latter half of this month. It was a novel experience for him and he thoroughly enjoyed it. It was also a good experience for him meeting so many other young men; the army discipline, too, and the care he had to take of his uniform and boots was of benefit to him.

HILDA MURRAY: One of our old girls, Hilda Murray, came to spend a weekend with us during the month. It was very nice to see that she has maintained her bright Christian witness and even several months in Darwin has not had any harmful effect on her. We called to see her in Adelaide two years ago, while on holidays, and were impressed by the quiet dignity with which she carries on with humble domestic work which is her vocation.

OPEN PRAYER MEETING: Our first monthly prayer meeting open to friends and supporters was held on September 19th. Some of our older girls attended and prayed very nicely. Although this meeting was not a large one, about 18 attending, it was a time of great blessing. Many requests for prayer had been sent in from all over N.S.W. and even from other states. After a brief Bible study and an item from the Dark Children we had a period of general prayer following which we took the prayer requests one at a time and called for any one of our number to bring it before the Lord. The children overcame their natural shyness and joined in from time to time with the other friends.

The children enjoyed the fellowship with friends over a cup of tea afterwards, but the main enjoyment of the evening was a sense of the presence of God with us. The children as well as the adults are eagerly looking forward to the next prayer meeting.

THE DARK CHILDREN: At present we have six or seven pre-school children, mostly small boys. But we have about eighteen who are classed amongst the "tiny tots" even though they are actually older than they appear. Some of these children have relatives or friends who occasion-

ally take them for outings, but there are several who would seldom have an outing were it not for the kindness of some of our friends. On a number of Saturdays a friend has taken three or four of these children out for the day to the delight and enjoyment of the children selected. In this way it is possible for all the children to have turns in going out for the day and we are most grateful for the kindly help in this matter.

Our children attend Sunday School at Kellyville every Sunday morning and we do not like anything to upset this regular attendance, and so for this reason they are not able to go other Churches on Sunday mornings; however, occasionally some of the older ones are able to attend services on Sunday afternoon at other Churches. Recently six of the older girls attended Eastwood Presbyterian Church for Tea and a Rally of Young People and this was thoroughly enjoyed. Several of our children have been to camps organised by this Church and it has been a spiritual blessing as well as an enjoyable time.

From now till Christmas the children are very well catered for with parties and other functions almost every Saturday. It is a pity that so many parties come at this time of the year. It is not good for the children to expect one every week and they also fail to appreciate them as much as they should. The time that parties or outings are most appreciated is in the Autumn when, as a rule, there is no form of entertainment available for the children. May we suggest that any friends anxious to give the children a treat should consider the slack months of the year rather than just at Christmas time.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS: We are constantly being asked for a list of gifts, apart from toys, that would be appreciated for the children or for the home. We are always very glad of things such as hair oil, shampoo, deodorants, talc powder, bobby pins, combs, tooth brushes and tooth paste, shoe polish black, tan and white, dettol, band-aids, cotton buds, underwear, handkerchiefs, groceries and tinned foods and fresh fruit. For school they need science exercise books, botany books, thick exercise books, note books and brown paper covers for the exercise books.

CONCLUSION: Throughout this year we have been very conscious of God's blessing. With the commencement of the open prayer meeting we feel that the spiritual ties will be strengthened. From the very commencement of this work it was resolved to make prayer the foundation of all our efforts. As God puts it into our hearts to pray He delights to give us those things we pray for and we only ask that everything we do or think may be to the honour and glory of His name.