



Kimberley Society

Book Note

They even paid me: Raw reflections of a third generation Kimberley cattleman by Janet R Wells. A Touch of Silk, Capel (WA), 2015. Paperback, 500 pages, illustrations, map, ISBN 978-0-9942327-0-0, RRP \$35.

John Wells, whose stories fill this solid but absorbing volume, is the son of Margaret Wells whose life was recalled in [Ready for anything](#). John's wife Janet did an excellent job in compiling and publishing both books. Poignant pieces of her poetry, which is available through her website or from Hesperian Press, introduce each chapter.

John's father George was a manager for Emanuel Brothers in the Kimberley, first on Cherrabun Station and then on Meda. George's father Billy ran Oscar Range Station and then Brooking Springs. Between 1900 and 1988, Billy, George and John put 70 years into station management. John spent the remaining 18 years in other roles. In retrospect he says, "a man resembles the land from which he came".

Many things, not least his 32 years on Meda, qualify John to tell Kimberley stories. His commitment to people, animals and work is evident, both in the text and in the naming of individuals in many photos. Particularly valuable are his comments about people who are mentioned only fleetingly elsewhere, little known characters such as Cecil Roderick. Other better known people include Gerry Ash, Robin Campbell, Tim Emanuel, the Le Lievres, Willie Lennard, Bob and Sheryl McCorry, Merrilee MacDonald, Frank Mugford, Peter Murray and Roderick Wells. The book has no index but the bold subheadings used throughout contain lots of names. In some anecdotes, the use of only a first name or a nickname protects privacy.

The book contains language that is more down-to-earth than one might expect from someone with a strict religious upbringing. Overall, however, it offers a lively stream of stories about people, places and activities. Chapter four, for instance, describes the life of a ringer in a stock camp – 'not for the faint hearted or feeble, but for many young blokes in the first flush of manhood it was a thrilling, adrenalin charged existence'. That chapter also discusses horse and cattle diseases and ailments.

They even paid me opens with John's childhood on Meda Station, schooling in Derby and Perth – where life proved grim until he began to defend himself against bullies – and two years' training at Narrogin Agricultural College. In 1961, when an accident claimed the life of Stumpy Fraser, head stockman on Meda, John went home and worked with George Wells for 18 months. A stint in the city, on much better money, separated that work from a Kimberley Downs job. By the end of Part One, John has married and is about to become a station manager. Part Two covers his time on Napier and Myroodah stations; personal crises that included the end of his marriage; a wet season on Oobagooma; working as studmaster on Meda in 1975; meeting Janet; managing Frazier Downs; and marrying Janet. Part Three discusses a return to Meda in 1978; an overseas trip; the sale of Meda and the other Emanuel stations to EXIM (an arm of the WA Government); the subsequent sale and subdivision of those properties; dashed hopes of becoming a part owner of Meda in 1991; and five years working in Derby before moving south.

The book is candid and can readily be described as "warts and all". It will interest people familiar with station life and the West Kimberley as well as those who want to know what that area was like between the 1940s and the 1980s. Copies can be purchased from the author (www.janetwells.com.au), with \$14 added for postage and handling, or from selected book shops.

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