



Kimberley Society

Book Note

8 Whisky Charlie Victor by Margaret Heseltine. Self-financed and published, Derby, 2003, 175 pages, soft cover, RRP \$29.00.

There would be few in the Kimberley who have not heard of Margaret Heseltine or know her personally. The book version of her life is long overdue; its gestation period prolonged but it has been worth the wait. It is vintage Heseltine: written in honest, straightforward terms – what you see in the author herself is what you get in her story. Here is a woman of the bush truly in keeping with 2003 Year of the Outback sentiment – tough, resilient, resourceful and proudly independent. Margaret displays the spirit one associates with 19th Century pioneering bush women but in this instance set in the 20th Century and the early years of the 21st.

Born Margaret Crosby, on a soldier settlement wheat and sheep farm in NSW's Riverina Region, she was close to the soil and farming activity from infancy. She and her siblings attended a bush school until the family moved to Mansfield – the Kelly country of Victoria – to a dairy property during the early Depression years. The Crosby children later attended private schools in Melbourne through the generosity of their grandfather.

During the early 1950s, Margaret's independent spirit, kindled by Ion Idriess's books about the Kimberley, prompted her to write to the manager of Noonkanbah Station, stating her willingness to take on any job he had on offer, and gave detail of her farming background. That letter was Margaret's passport to her Kimberley future as well as a lifelong friendship with the manager's wife, Ethel Beaton, who met her off the ship at Fremantle. The two women, together with the Beaton family's new babe, flew north with MacRobertson Miller Airlines, 'Mickey Mouse Airlines', at the end of the 1952 'Wet'. Margaret's introduction to air travel.

Noonkanbah was where Margaret Crosby met her future husband Bob Heseltine, an ex-British Indian Army major. The couple married in Melbourne during 1958 and, on return to the Kimberley, for a brief time managed the McLarty station, Nerrima, under quite primitive conditions. Later Margaret's father backed the Heseltines on to their own Udialla property on the lower reaches of the Fitzroy River.

Udialla's development demanded years of sweat, toil and sheer doggedness from which emerged a home, a family of four kids and an income dependent on a market garden. That was as well as the catalogue of experiences from the ridiculous to the life threatening. It was some time before the Heseltine family even had the luxuries of power and radio. The call sign of the latter provided the title to Margaret's book.

A tragic misadventure, which cost Bob his life in 1987, left Margaret more reliant on the support of long term Aboriginal friends and others to maintain her market garden business. It was several more years before she sold Udialla and moved to her present Hamlet Grove block in Derby. Now less mobile than formerly, Margaret has replaced that lack with 'gopher' mobility for garden purposes while being, as ever, community minded and socially active.

Long may her 'Friday fives' remain a feature of her calendar.

This little book is a recommended read.

Jim Anderson