

HOPPY: FROM ASHGROVE TO TOONGABBIE AND TO THE UNKNOWN



MY STORY

-JOHN HOPKINSON, S.M.

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...AND TO THE UNKNOWN

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IN MEMORY

OF

+EDWIN GROVENOR HUNTER HOPKINSON -Father of John
+JEAN GERTRUDE ABERDEEN- Mother of John
+MARGARET PATRICIA HOPKINSON-3rd Sister of John
+BARNEY WARD-Godfather of John
+ARCHIE DAWSON- Family friend
+FR. TOM MC CARTHY, S.M.-Who guided John in his early years
+FR. MARTIN CABOT, S.M.-Family friend who encouraged John
+SR. TARCISIAS DONAVAN, RSC. -John's Prep.1 teacher
+BR. JARLATH COSTELLO, FMS. -John's 4th Grade teacher
+BR. PETER CARRICK, FMS. – A role model for John for his dedication
+FR. WILF RADFORD, S.M. -Rector of Marist Seminary
+FR. JOHN WALLIS -John's Spiritual Director
+FR. ALEJANDRO PARADA, S.M. -John's confrere at San Mateo, México
+FR. BERNIE RYAN, S.M. [Marist Superior General] -Close friend & supporter

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1. IN PURSUIT OF ONE'S PLACE IN LIFE

Life is our great teacher, as many wise ones have told us. As we advance in age we retain countless memories -some pleasant, some neutral and some we would hope to forget. Life is a journey, an adventure; it is something that our Creator wishes that we celebrate every day. Live in the now and celebrate this day to the full is the way to go if we are to grow as an integrated person, an integrated human being.

I have well reached the legal retirement age. In some cases, it is at 65 and others at 70. No one in modern times is expected to keep on working at their job after reaching 75. Some of my dear friends in recent years have asked me: "¿Juanito, when are you going to retire? Now that I am to celebrate my 80th birthday I stammer in trying to respond. More than 60 years have passed since I embarked upon my vocation. As a young man I felt called to the Marist priesthood. And on May 27th I was finally ordained in my home parish of Ashgrove. I had set out into the deep, on a journey – on an adventure without a blueprint map. One where I let myself to be open to and led by the Spirit.

Today I find myself on the other side of the globe, far from my native Australia and trying to come to grips with fully retiring. It is cause for me then to recall from where I started, where I have been and preserve those memories and tell my story.

Following my priestly ordination as a Marist on May 27th, 1971, I was ready for my first assignment. What would it be? In the following months I received from my provincial superior my commission. I had been appointed to St. John's College "Woodlawn" in Lismore, New South Wales where for the next 4 years I would be responsible for the formation and education of some 400 young men between the ages of 13-19. It was a boarding college and for us priests on the staff a 24/7 operation! It was not an appointment that I welcomed at the time, but one fulfilled what was expected of you. Apart from the daily exercise of one's designated ministry, I undertook university studies by correspondence with New England University at Armidale. Hence, I embarked upon courses in Sociology and Politics where my interest lay at the time. For others including my Marist superiors it seemed unusual that I should so choose as other Marist priests traditionally had studied arts and science. However, I resisted the temptation to conform for in the back of my mind I knew that such capacitation would be of great benefit to me in my future ministry once I got the all clear to head off for overseas mission in the developing world that had been my dream from my days in the seminary.

It so happened at that time Australian politics and society were being revolutionized by the now Whitlam Labour Government and in mid-course we witness the illegitimate sacking by the Governor General John Kerr and the subsequent years of the

Fraser Conservative Government. There we experienced in the forthcoming years a watering down of many of the social reforms and welfare of the Whitlam years. All this resulting in increased unemployment, a cap on wages, benefits for the rich, union bashing, to name a few. We lived through those years of conservative capitalistic government, but in the end the everyday Aussie had enough and the Fraser Government was history. Some put down their loss to the famous war-cry of Fraser: "Life was never meant to be easy!". And some of the more vocal Aussies responded: "It's O.K. for you, you bloody gentry from Victoria to say that. We are the ones who have to live from day to day and survive!".

And so that social-political scene that I as a young person had known in my native Australia thrust me into a consciousness that has been part of my way of being as a Marist missionary in Latin America for the past 48 years. Social-political consciousness has become for me the key to social and religious change that leads to an integrated transformation. As a Christian called to live and proclaim the "Good News" of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, one knows that there is no true evangelization without what we in the Latin America Church today call "*conscientización*" – raising the level of consciousness of a people.

The "Good News" is what Jesus was on about: "*I have come that all may have life and life in abundance*"... not just any kind of life or existence, but a life in plenitude where all live with dignity in

a just society -a universe where all are connected to each other and to the whole of creation; not a type of life expressed by the Malcom Frasers of this world who proclaim that life was never meant to be easy.

Looking back now at what were my motivations and dreams when I was still a young man, I believe that I had asked myself two important questions: "What do I want out of life?" and "What's stopping me from getting it?" These questions helped me get in touch with my motivating dreams and desires – as well with fears, doubts and obstacles which often frustrate them. I realized that the power and importance of dreams and desires should never be underestimated. I too realized that some desires represent a possibility of a special, spontaneous and personal gift which I alone can make to God. If there is some gift which I alone can give, then almost certainly God asks that gift from me, and a holy, humble, and sincere desire may be one of the signs that God asks it! Hopes, dreams and desires, I believe, are explicit manifestations of the unconscious and paying attention to them is therefore essential to the discernment process.

We are left to freely shape the gift of life that God has given us in the light of the original Dream for all creation. Through our upbringing, talents, abilities and gifts, God presents each one of us with canvas, paint and brushes. We become the artists of our lives. Discerning God's will is nothing more than responding with my unique gifted contribution to God's Dream for creation. And so the portrait of

my life becomes my gift back to God. It means catching the dream and in catching the Dream, my will comes into communion with the will of God. And in catching the Dream, this triggers a deep transformation that has freed my whole person - my mind, heart, feelings, emotions, desires - from bondage to my false self. This interior transformation has become evident in my actions and I have adopted a life-style that increasingly has given witness to the Kingdom characteristics of peace, justice and love.

Having reached the point of finally embarking upon my missionary endeavours and fulfilling my dream of being at the service of the Latin American people, today I can look back at where I have come from and express my gratitude for the numerous blessings I have received and the influences that have shaped my life to date.

2. SETTING OUT

Aussie boy – priest – missionary -Latino.

As I celebrate my 80th birthday, I know now that I have come a long way and with a life full of adventures.

A portrait of the Hopkinson family is as such:

Father: Edwin Grovenor Hunter Hopkinson, born in Brisbane June 27th 1903

Mother: Jean Gertrude Aberdeen, born in Brisbane June 22nd 1907

1st Child: Mary Patricia, born in Brisbane September 15th 1938

2nd Child: Elizabeth Ann, born in Brisbane December 23rd 1939

3rd Child: Margaret Maria, born in Brisbane July 12th 1941

4th Child: Helen Denise, born in Brisbane April 15th, 1943

5th Child: John Edwin, born in Brisbane June 25th 1945

Our Mum was a traditional housewife and our Dad was a public servant. We were raised in what would be called a working-class suburb, Ashgrove. As World War II came to an end, the locals referred to it as "the Nappy Suburb", given that the backyards saw the mums daily hanging out a stream of nappies on the clotheslines.

Our Dad on Mondays to Fridays went to his government office in the city, leaving home at 8.15 a.m., walking up to the tram stop to take the 8.30 tram and signing-in at 9.00 and then signing-off at 5 p.m. Meanwhile, we 5 children went off to the local convent school. Saturday morning saw our Dad helping our Mum in doing the big wash of the week – with sheets and towels. Our home was a typical Queenslander, as they were called -on stilts. Underneath stood the wood-fired copper and the cement tubs. After lunch, with our Dad we would tend to the garden -vegetables and fruit trees in the backyard and flowers and shrubs in the front. Television had not yet come to Brisbane and so the radio or gramophone provided the entertainment on Saturday nights.

Sunday was Sunday. Having dressed in our Sunday best, in file we left home, went up the laneway across the road and entered the local chapel, taking our place as a family and assisting in the 6.30 a.m. Mass. On Sundays our Dad would normally cook the Sunday dinner, thus giving our Mum a break.

After school, on the days that I did not have training for rugby or swimming I would join the other lads of the neighbourhood for a game of cricket or touch football in the small paddock across the road from our house in Elouera Road. Among my good friends were the likes of Damian Carroll, Peter Swan, Peter Draney, Barry Mewburn, Vince Bourke and Brian Begg.

Every year during holiday-time, we would take the 5.59 a.m. steam train to Southport, the beginning of today's Gold Coast for 2-3 weeks at the beach, spending the days in the ocean or fishing. We 5 children would not leave our dear Dad to a peaceful fish as he would constantly be trying to get us off a snag or changing bait or tackle. This was the highlight of our year as we grew up.

Our Dad was socially and politically conscious. I acknowledge that I inherited that from him. Edwin Hopkinson was the local branch president of the Australian Labor Party [ALP]. In addition, he was on the executive of the Federated Clerks Union. So, there were some nights during the month that he was attending party or union meetings. As a youngster I got to know some of his political colleagues and enjoyed election time when I would sometimes accompany him on the campaign trail and stuff letter-boxes with ALP propaganda and put up signs around the suburb. Dad died at the young age of 51 of a heart condition. The 5 of us were still at school and I was only 9 at the time. His last years saw the split in the Labour Party and the formation of the Queensland Labour Party [QLP] under Vince Gair who had been the ALP Premier and in Victoria with the DLP. However, Dad did not join in the split and stayed loyal to Labour and the ALP.

Here in my story I stop for the moment to recount what transpired in the following years on the political level as I know it contributed to my

political and social awareness and options in my life from that point on.

The ALP had been out of office and never won a national election in post-war Australia. Bob Menzies as Prime Minister dominated the political agenda with his successive Liberal-Country Party Coalition governments. Following the years of the Labour split, Australia eventually saw Arthur Caldwell capture the Labour leadership. Elections were called for the beginning of December in 1963. As the campaign heated up, I found myself preparing for and sitting for the Queensland Senior, the final public exam at the end of High School. Having inherited my Dad's active involvement in politics and affiliation with the ALP, I was revved up as the campaign rolled on. I wanted the ALP to come to power and with Arthur Caldwell as Prime Minister.

My attention was fixed on the elections and gave less attention to the fact that I had to sit at the same time for the Senior Exam. I had a good grasp of the state of the nation under the Liberal-Country Party Coalition government -high unemployment, how the government played up the so-called "*Red Peril Threat from Communist South-East Asia*" and the alliance with the U.S.A. that could effectively take away our sovereignty and independence, both economically and politically. In addition, the working class was seeing the social benefits that had been won and received under Labour prior to World War II threatened and the

unions were being threatened or put in jeopardy. - it was termed "*union bashing*".

For my part, I dared to write a letter to the editor of "*The Truth*" that was published where I put forth my fears for Australia if the Coalition stayed in power and what this especially mean for the new generation of Australians like myself.

In the midst of my Senior Exams, Arthur Caldwell came to Brisbane to close his campaign in the Brisbane City Hall. I was there to enthusiastically hear and applaud him, even though at that time 18-year-old Australians still could not vote.

For me the irony of the election result was how the LCP Coalition got back after days of suspense as the counting of votes continued. Eventually the Coalition was declared the winner with a 1-seat majority. The final count came down to the seat of Morteon in Queensland [incorporating some of the seaside suburbs of Brisbane]. Jim Killian won it for the LCP on preferences. But what was the irony? He won it on 103 preference votes from the Australian Communist Party. The LCP had campaigned heavily on the "*Yellow Peril*" if the ALP won. So finally, the LCP was declared victor, thanks to those preferences that flowed to them from the Communist Party. Their principals went out the door as they claimed victory and formed government.

Now I retake my story from the time following our Dad's death and the ensuing political scene in Australia and how that shaped much of my future direction in life.

At the time of my Dad's death, I was in 3rd Grade at St. Finbarr's Convent School and the following year went on to complete Primary at Marist Brothers. Our dear Mum, as a widow saw us all through to complete high school and each of us to go on to take our place in life. Mum went on as a widow for 40 years, departing this life here on earth among us exactly 40 years to the day that we buried our dear Dad.

Today I can look back on my school days there at Ashgrove. In Prep 1 at St. Finbarr's there were 103 of us all cramped into one classroom. Sister Tartisius was our teacher. One does not know how she coped! We were seated in wooden benches that each took 6 students. I can still remember a good number of my fellow students who started there with me in 1951 and went on after 3rd grade to finish together in Senior Year at Marist Brothers, Ashgrove. There were the likes of Kieran Mc Cormack, Ross Cramer, Dan Lucey, Brian Christ, Colin Robertson, John Costello, Ross Padget, Joey Nolan, Barry Low and the Wilson twins Barry and Bruce. St. Finbarr's was co-ed and the boys and girls were together until 3rd grade. For some reason I can only remember the names of 3 of them -Bernadette Murphy, Maria Mc Govern and Mary Lou Boothby. Perhaps because I had a crash on them or they on me or both!

In my case, in 1963 I finished high school at Marist Brothers, Ashgrove, where I was honoured with the prize for character and leadership. Mum, following our Dad's death kept the family on what was called "the Widow's Pension". During the Christmas holidays, once I turned 14, I worked first behind the counter at Coles Variety Store and later as a postman, delivering the mail on foot from house to house. This provided the household with a little extra money that helped with clothing, school books and the likes.

3. LEAVING BEHIND THAT "FALSE WORLD"

The day came when Jean Gertrude Hopkinson asked her only son what was he now going to do once he had finished high school. She had correctly expected the answer he would give: *"I would like to go to the seminary, if that is o.k. with you."* The follow-up question was: *"Which seminary?"* Mum suspecting again my answer, and when I said *"the Marist"*, she gave a sigh of relief, and responded by saying: *"Then that's fine; I would not like to see you going around in those big heavy habits that the Franciscans, Dominicans or Carmelites wear"*. Mum was a no-frills, no ostentatious person. So subsequently after the New Year, the Marist Vocation Director arrived on the scene, gave me some very simple forms to fill out, a list of things that I need to take and told me to present myself at the Marist Seminary, Toongabbie in Western Sydney on Sunday February 2nd [1964]. The new cloths that we then purchased filled into one standard suitcase. On Thursday January 30th, Mum and I took the overnight train from Brisbane to Sydney -sitting up. It was a slow 16-hour journey.

At that time, my 2 eldest sisters, Mary and Elizabeth, were working in Sydney and shared a small flat in King's Cross, a street behind the then Chevron Hotel. Saturday night would be my last night in that *"False World"*. I so happened that the Beatles had arrived for their Australian Tour and were to stay at the Chevron. The 4 of us went up to Cavill Terrace, outside the Chevron to await the

Beatles motorcade. Afterwards we entered inside and took our seats at the bar. I was still rather “innocent” and not accustomed to great quantities of alcoholic beverages. We first ordered a Gin Squash. It tasted good and quickly others were consumed, and meanwhile I had my last smoke before the doors of the seminary closed on me. After midnight we got back to the flat and off to sleep, but my stomach started to react and I soon found myself throwing up in the bathroom. Poor me! That was my first ever hangover! And the next morning one of our Marist priest friends called in his car to take Mum and myself out to Toongabbie. And so began my priestly and Marist formation.

4. A NEW WORLD UNFOLDS

There are 13 of us; the majority out of high school [18-19-year-olds] and 4 of mature age. Bede and Jack in there 30's, Ron and Tom in their 20's having left their professional lives behind to take up the call. Most of the group are from New South Wales and 1 from Victoria [an Aussie Rules Football fan] and 2 of us from Queensland [from Banana Land].

After the evening meal, we are told to go up to our designated rooms, fold neatly our black soutanes, collect our clerical collars and surplices and then as the bell is rung at 7.30 p.m. to get in line outside of the chapel and process in procession. Taking our seats in the choir stalls, we pull out our thick hymnal in Latin and endeavour to sing in Latin Gregorian Chant the Evening Prayer of the Church, called Vespers. Before the final blessing, we line up before the acting superior of the seminary community with our clerical gear in hand which is then duly blessed with Holy Water. We retreat outside to change from our secular dress and don the official dress of a seminarian. In glory, the 13 of us process anew into the chapel and so our postulant year officially begins. We have left the world behind! In due course, our studies begin. We are called "1St Year Philosophers" and introduced to the school of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas.

On the ground floor of the "Old Wing" there was posted the "Horaryum" for the whole year of

seminary formation: every hour and day were specified and so one knew where one should be and what to do. Nothing was left to chance...and strict observance of the Horarium and Rule was sacrosanct if you were to enjoy good standing with the faculty and to avoid dismissal from the seminary.

The first morning after our investiture, the bell rang at 5.30 a.m. for us to get to chapel for the recitation in Latin of the Office of Readings [Matins]. This was followed by a half-hour meditation. Now in first year of formation we needed to be schooled in the art of meditation. So, we were taken apart, where one of the more senior of the faculty would guide us through the process. We affectionately called him "Ras". He would always walk and speak with his head down, eyes downcast, but surely did not miss a thing. Ras would take up his seated position in front of us, the 1st Year Postulants. We came used to his starting each daily meditation with these words: *Live every day as if it were your last*!"

Live today as if it were our last! Was the intention of Ras to put the fear of God into us and resist whatever temptation and avoid sin, and thus to live each day in holy obedience, chastity and poverty? Little did we think that I might die and therefore have to face eternal judgement -destined to eternal bliss in heaven or for the eternal fires of hell. The majority of our group would have considered ourselves as healthy, sturdy and virile Aussies. For myself, I had played the vigorous game of rugby

football throughout my school years, loved to go surfing at whatever opportunity -thus having kept myself physically fit and with no known health problems. To think I might die this night and not be around for tomorrow, did not seem to preoccupy me.

But having seen "*Live today as if it were your last*" could also be seen in another light, both positive and fulfilling. As we continued to mature in the spiritual life, then if we were to live this and every day as our last, then it meant that we should live should live each new day with joy and live it to the full, and so live each day as a beautiful gift from God, to be fully joyful as we awake to a new day and see that day as productive, and thus pleasing to God our Creator.

5. MY EXPERIENCE OF THE 1ST YEAR OF MARIST FORMATION PRE-VATICAN II

So, 1964 saw me and my group adjust to the discipline and vigour of seminary life in what were pre-Vatican II days. The 2nd Vatican Council, convoked by Pope John XXIII was in process; however, John XXIII died and it was left to Pope Paul VI to carry the Council forward and to bring it to its closure after 4 sessions.

Little had yet changed then in 1964; we were still getting around in black soutane and Latin the official language of all Church-related activities. One came to understand that seminary life mirrored the hierarchical structure of the Universal Church. As 1st Year seminarians and postulants, we were on the bottom rung of the hierarchical ladder and one would progressively climb; even our bedroom number reflected our order on that ladder. I was 4th last on the rung!

At the end of the 1964 Scholastic Year -as it was called – 9 of the 13 of our group were called to novitiate. At the end of the year break, we took the train from Sydney to rural Armidale in the New England Tablelands where on February 2nd we would officially begin our Novitiate Year. The rigid life of Toongabbie Seminary could in today's terms be referred to as "*light*" compared to the severity of the life that we would endure for the next 365 days. In an "ordinary" day we would be permitted to speak among ourselves during the half-hour

recreation after lunch. On special feast days the silence rule was modified. However, we lived a life of silence and thus open to hear the voice of God 24-hours a day.

The normal daily roster saw us rise at 5.30 a.m., be in the chapel at 6 a.m. for our half-hour meditation, followed by Mass and breakfast. Then from 9 a.m. through to 12 p.m. we had classes in spirituality, Marist history and its Constitutions [*The Rule*] that we would live for the rest of our life. The afternoon was given over to manual work. In the Latin American context that I have lived for the past 48 years, we would have been referred to as "*campesinos -peasant farmers*".

The Armidale Noviciate was on a large rural property. In our time, it would have some 90 milking cows, at least some 4000 sheep, some pigs, one horse, along with fruit orchards of apples, peaches, apricots, plums, cherries and cornfields. Unfortunately, 1965 was a drought year and we had an extra task of keeping the farm up with sufficient water and fodder. So, the 9 of us under the direction of the Bursar of the community worked the farm. One could tell many funny stories about our coming expert farmers. We worked the farm in supposed silence and forbidden to eat the fruit as we picked it! One such story would be concerning our picking of the cherries. As this was a tedious task over several afternoons, it was proposed by one of our group that we just shake the trees and gather the cherries as they fell to the ground. Well, our Novice Master happened to see

us doing such, and so we got a dressing down and received a penance whereby we were deprived of our recreation. Another time, we had to plant corn by hand. We were instructed to plant it 6-inches apart. However, when the corn started to sprout after a couple of weeks, it was discovered that it should have been sown 12-inches apart and not 6. The order was then given that we pull up every second plant. This could only be done on our hands and knees! We did not have kind words for our bursar who had told us originally to plant the seeds 6-inches apart. We had to confess the use of bad language!

The Church's Canon Law relating to the fulfillment of the canonical year of novitiate stated that it was a period of 365 days uninterrupted. Solely for very serious health reasons one could be absent from the actual place of the novitiate for a maximum of 9 days, and if it surpassed those 9 days, then the novitiate had to be repeated from the start. Well, in my case, that became a real possibility or more a probability. One afternoon early in our novitiate year while gathering big rocks from one of the paddocks that were needed to fill in a sheep-dip that previously been constructed and was too deep – [if the sheep had entered it, they would have likely drowned as they passed through], I started to get severe pains around the abdomen, but carried on until the work period finished. The bell was rung for us to have showers and then proceed to our study before dinner at 6.30 p.m. However, my pain had not subsided and

I advised the superior of the community who in turn told me to take some pills to settle my stomach. No effect. The doctor was called to the novitiate. Upon examining me, he declared that I had appendicitis and needed to be operated immediately. Consequently, I was rushed to the Armidale District Hospital where before midnight my appendix had been removed and I was then taken to the surgery ward. It was expected that I would be interned for some 3-4 days as the operation had been successful.

But disaster loomed for me. After 2 days of internment, I had a serious relapse. Our Novice Master advised my mother in Brisbane, resulting in her and my sister Elizabeth taking the bus from there to Armidale to be at my side. Elizabeth was a registered nurse. Now the doctor estimated that I would have to stay there in hospital for at least 2 weeks. My hope of being out within the 9-day limit was dashed and I would have to wait now for the following year to start my novitiate anew. Poor me! Elizabeth stayed at my side during the pursuing first nights. I, for my part, was determined that I would gather up all my resources, physical and spiritual, to avoid that outcome. After the 3rd day following my relapse, when the doctor came to check on me, he could hardly believe what he found; the youthful Marist novice, John Hopkinson, had made a remarkable recovery. I told him then that I had to be out of there within the next 4 days and so it came to be. Deo gracias -thanks be to God! Happily, I was back in the novitiate and able

to see out the year and made my 1st Profession as a Marist with 5 others of my group on February 2nd 1966.

6. A NEW DIRECTION: THE NEXT 6 YEARS

– A GRADUAL TRANSITION FROM PRE-VATICAN II DAYS TO POST-VATICAN II

1966 saw me back at the Toongabbie Seminary now as a professed Marist. Daily we were kept abreast of the proceedings of the Council by means of Vatican Radio on shortwave. During eating our lunch in the community dining-room, we listened to the broadcast. Over the next 3 years, little by little changes were taking place at the seminary, both in the daily life of the seminary and in the different studies.

Some of the changes related to discipline. Wearing of the soutane became optional in day-to-day activities, apart from some liturgical celebrations. The silence rule was modified. On certain nights we could watch some approved programmes on television. Our correspondence no longer was subjected to being restricted and censored. The so-called brother rule where you referred to each other as "Brother [Surname]" was suspended and now could call each other by his Christian name. A student council was constituted that met with the faculty on occasions. Permission could be granted to leave the seminary confines for just causes. Alcoholic beverages were served at table on special feast days and occasions. One could seek permission to smoke, after having provided good reasons for smoking –[one was rationed to a packet a week]. We could now play Rugby football as it had been banned because of

the danger of being injured... [it was considered that football soccer was less rough and until now the approved code]. With permission, we could play outside of the seminary for the Rugby team of the new-established Macquarie University where some of our seminarians were doing studies in the years between finishing philosophy and before starting theology – [In my case, although I had started theology and therefore did not undertake uni studies at this stage, I nevertheless got permission to play for the uni as it needed players for its inaugural team].

Changes too occurred in regards to the different studies. To their credit, our lecturers went about revising the materials that they taught. The Council had opened the door especially in its theology and biblical understanding and liturgical and pastoral practices. For all, it was an exciting time as we adapted to these significant changes. Now our lecturers set about designing their own courses and not relying on the classic manuals that been used in all seminaries for generations. We came familiar with the works of such giants of the II Vatican Council: the likes of Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Edward Schillaback, Hans Kung, John L. Mackenzie, Barnabas Ahern, Raymond Brown and Godfred Dickeman. A programme of pastoral experiences was initiated for us. During the week and during the recesses in the academic year, each of us went off to do pastoral work whether it be in parishes or schools or hospitals or social institutions. During this time while the Council was

in process our Marist Bishops of Oceania would have to pass through Sydney on their way to and from each of the 4 sessions. Some of them would take the time to stay at or visit the seminary. On these occasions they were invited to give a talk to us seminarians on their experience of the Council and the latest updates. This proved very fruitful and enthused us to live the spirit of the Council. At the same time, they opened our eyes to their lives as missionaries there in the Church of Oceania. In my case, I believe it confirmed my desire to offer myself for missionary work once I was ordained.

As I moved up the ladder in seniority, I was elected to be a member of the newly-established student council. I was then re-elected for 2 more terms. In my philosophy years I suppose I was rather passive in the sense that I went along with what was expected as "normal" for the group. Now I had the stimulus to express my leadership qualities and the courage to be more innovative. I recalled that during my first years there at Toongabbie we would have an annual Sport's Day with the Sydney Archdiocesan Seminary -Manly Seminary, as it was known. The 2 Rectors stood along the sideline together watching the game and chatting to each other in the meantime. The Manly rector touched our Marist rector on the shoulder and pointed out to him, saying: "*Look, there is Johnnie Hopkinson. His family are dear friends of mine!*". Our rector, knowing that the other was a scripture expert, replied to him in reference to me quoting John 1:47 [Jesus saw Nathanael coming to

him, and said of him, "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile -no duplicity!*". This affirmation by my formator stayed with me throughout the following years. [This incident our family friend related to me after the game!].

As my leadership within the seminary became more expressive, I often became the spokesman for the group. Our Dean, responsible for the smooth running of the day-to-day life of the place and the one who handed out any permissions, was a good man, but rather timid and fearful by nature. Several times I would take to him matters to be considered or new initiatives. Having responded to my gentle knock on his door and seeing that it was me, his face would frown and you could imagine what he was thinking behind that frown: "*Oh no! Hopkinson again...What is he going to ask for this time?*". Sometimes I did not get his immediate answer; instead "*Well, I will have to put it to the faculty. It has never been done before*". To this I had the boldness to say in reply: "*Yes, that may be true, but why can't it be done now?*" And I must say that the upcoming reply was generally positive. Really, they were all good men and up to the challenges that the Council put before them in this new direction for the "Church in the World".

The different responsibilities within the community for its good running were distributed at the start of each year. Each one was designated an area under his charge. One of the more demanding of these was the office of Kitchen Man. It is

common for those in an institution to grumble about the food, but nothing seems to change; our seminary was no exception. We knew what we were going to have each day; pure routine and little imagination or variation. We were all in the same boat, faculty included. In all the years I lived at Toongabbie our Marist Community numbered from a maximum of 60 to a minimum of around 40. Well, one year I got the job of being in-charge of the kitchen. Great innovations came about. No need to go into details here, but even the faculty took delight in the transformation. Another year when it fell to me to be responsible for the interior maintenance of the house, I convinced the faculty that it was time to brighten up the place. So, during the mid-year recess I was commissioned to coordinate the re-painting of the whole interior of the seminary building. A giant task! I had to look for consultants as regards to painting and remodelling and duly order supplies and draw up a work-gang roster for the undertaking. The end result was well received. Instead of intuitional greys and browns, the place looked welcoming. Another project later was the remodelling of our beach house at Bilgola where we would spend our vacations during the year. Instead of looking like an army camp, it was now a welcoming second home for all. Perhaps all this is one reason they let me go on to ordination!

The day came when I officially applied for Marist Priestly Ordination and subsequently was called. In hindsight, comparing my personal

experience to that of candidates to the priesthood in the years that followed, I take delightful stock of the fact that nowhere along the path was I, as may be said, called into question. My acceptance into the seminary was without much formality; it consisted in signing a simple form, having a basic medical exam, a copy of my Baptismal Certificate. During my 8-years of formation never was I called before my formators to tell me I was not up to scratch nor that my academic exam results below standard. In subsequent years, those entering the seminary were subjected to tests of various kinds, including physiological, emotional and sexual maturity. Before entering, they would be accompanied by another Marist to guide them in their vocation and to assess their suitability. Once in the seminary, they are constantly evaluated as regards to their spiritual journey, personal development and their respective studies. I am truly grateful for having received my priestly and Marist formation during those momentous years of the II Vatican Council. They were exciting in one sense, but more so very challenging ones. We saw a number of our fellow seminarians find their true vocation elsewhere. I believe we became more mature and responsible. We understood the mission of the Church in this modern world and its challenges in order to be faithful to living the Gospel and being Good News in its midst...becoming a Church that is prophetic, authentic and above all, joyful. Often, I have shared with others that we are a unique generation

of Church ministers and that today we who remain as such are ever few. But we have a legacy.

The day of my ordination arrived after 8 years of formation. It was May 27th 1971 and it took place in my home Marist parish of Mater Dei, Ashgrove, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. My Eucharist of Thanksgiving...before known as First Mass...was celebrated the following evening on the Main Oval of Marist College, Ashgrove where I was educated by the Marist Brothers and where I played Rugby Football as a student. Indeed, a fitting place! The 2 other members of my ordination class, Ron and Dave, were ordained in Sydney 5 days prior to my ordination. The 3 of us are still living and been graced in our diverse ministries in different places over the past 54 years.

From Ashgrove to Toongabbie...and to the Unknown! Yes, the unknown! Little then could I have known what that unknown would be. Here as I end my story of that phase of my journey I rest my pen. Others have taken up my story and missionary journey in an earlier small booklet entitled **"Hidden and Unknown in the World - Sketches of 40 Years of Missionary Journey in Today's Latin America"**. A 2nd booklet was published by my Marist Community here in Bolivia to commemorate our 30th anniversary as a Marist Team and Community. Its title is: **Misioneros Maristas: 30 Años de Vida y Misión**". Each member of the community has told his/her story.

And the 4th booklet is one that I composed in early 2025: **Palma Flor and Beyond -The Gospel Lived and Proclaimed Today from Below**

SELECTED PHOTOS
HOPPY: FROM ASHGROVE TO TOONGABBIE
AND TO THE UNKNOWN



**JOHN'S FATHER &
MOTHER [EDWIN & JEAN]**



**THE HOPKINSON'S HOME AT
ASHGROVE, BRISBANE WHERE
JOHN WAS RAISED**



**THE 5 HOPKINSON CHILDREN
[MARY, HELEN, MARGARET,
ELIZABETH & JOHN]**



**JOHN WITH PETER SWAN [HIS
NEIGHBOUR & CLASS MATE]
DRESSED FOR CRICKET**



JOHN HONOURED WITH
RECEPTION OF THE
LEADERSHIP & CHARACTER
CUP OF MARIST COLLEGE,
ASHGROVE



JOHN WITH HIS MOTHER AS
HE BEGINS SEMINARY LIFE
AT TOONGABBIE [1964]



JOHN'S FIRST MASS ON MAIN
OVAL OF MARIST COLLEGE,
ASHGROVE -ACCOMPANIED
BYFELLOW BY HIS MARIST
CONFRERES



JOHN GIVING COMMUNION
TO HIS MOTHER AT HIS FIRST
MASS [28TH May 1971]



JOHN WITH FELLOW MARIST,
MIKE AS THEY INAUGURATE
THE HOME THEY
THEMSELVES CONSTRUCTED
AT EL PORVENIR MISSION –
[DIOCESE OF TEHUANTEPEC,
OAXACA, MÉXICO -1983]



JOHN WITH ANIMATORS OF
CEBs AT CHINOTECQUOS
INDIGENOUS VILLAGE OF
ARROYO ENCINO, EL
PORVENIR MISSION



FROM MÉXICO TO IRUPANA,
SUD YUNGAS, BOLIVIA:
GILBERTO & JAVIER JOIN
JOHN IN HIS BOLIVIAN
MISSIONARY JOURNEY



JOHN WITH HIS MOTHER &
PRU [GILBERTO'S BROTHER]
ON HIS FIRST HOME VISIT
FROM BOLIVIA



John With Frs. Ron Nissen & Dave Wilson

**-The 3 Marists of the 1971 Ordination Class
celebrating their Silver Jubilee in May 1996.-**

**[The 3 Marists are still among us after some 54
years of priestly life and Ministry]**

**IN COMMEMORATION OF JOHN'S 80TH BIRTHDAY
25/06/2025**