

Australian Institute of Family Studies: Its origins and early years

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The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) began as the IFS, simply the Institute of Family Studies. It was a late addition to the provisions of the Family Law Act (1975), a controversial initiative of the Whitlam Labor Government, in order to assuage the opposition of conservative members of federal parliament (both Labor and Liberal) to the idea of no-fault divorce. Both the new Family Court of Australia and the Institute of Family Studies proved to be unique at the time and served as exemplars to many other countries across the world.

The idea of the Institute was slipped in to the Family Law Act 1975 at the last minute, because on a conscience vote it may not have got past the more conservative MPs, who feared it would lead to a higher divorce rate and the breakdown of that most basic social institution, marriage. Apparently, the Labor Attorney-General Lionel Murphy and Justice Watson were in the Parliamentary bathroom urinal, thinking ‘we have to have a gimmick’ to get it through. Murphy suggested, ‘Why not have a research body that would monitor the impact of no-fault divorce on marriage, divorce rates and all that?’ So a hastily-drafted amendment to the Act was inserted to fund an IFS – Institute of Family Studies – whose role would be to research ‘factors affecting marriage and family life in Australia’. It was not called then an ‘Australian’ institute. The amendment proved to be a winner and the FLA 75 was passed.

Shortly after, however, the Whitlam Government was dismissed by Governor-General Kerr, and the new Fraser Government took some time to move on implementing the reforms to family law processes and, of course, the proposed Institute. The new Attorney-General was Peter Durack, a conservative but reasonable fellow who finally set up an appointment committee to find a foundation Director. The Committee was chaired by Justice Elizabeth Evatt (daughter of the old left-winger H.V. Evatt) who had chaired the hugely influential Human Relationships Commission for Whitlam which had been instrumental in shifting outmoded views of sexuality, marriage and family relationships. I did not see any advertisements for the position when they first appeared, so did not apply.

They interviewed several people and offered the job to a good Sydney academic, Ross Homel. However, when he looked at the wording of the Act, he found that the Institute and its Director would be under the control of the relevant Minister, the Attorney-General, so would be subject to political influence in regard to the research they might do and its publication. As a good academic, he could not accept any curb on his ability to publish fearlessly any results the government of the day might not like, so he withdrew and rejected the offer. That caused a further delay in establishing the IFS, and it was only then that I heard the position was open and I applied.

First Director – career background – Dr Donald E Edgar

I had started my working life as a secondary school teacher, qualified with BA, Dip Ed, teaching English, History and French. While teaching, I had published my first book, *Australia and Her Northern Neighbours*, written because I felt the existing text books were too academic and boring for most students. It was highly successful and was used widely across Australian schools on the history of Australia and its relationships with Asia.

I had also completed in my spare time a post-graduate B Ed degree by coursework, with a focus on the sociology of education. I was then promoted to become a secondary teacher trainer at the Secondary Teachers' College, Melbourne University, lecturing in educational sociology and the organisation of teaching. While there, I published a book based on my lectures, called *Examination Marks: Their Use and Interpretation*. I soon came to feel I did not know enough to pretend any real expertise but had developed a strong interest in sociological research and theory.

This led to our packing up the family and travelling to California where I completed a PhD in Sociology at Stanford University. In theory, I was bound to return to the Secondary Teachers' College, as I had received a small assistance grant from the Minister of Education, but when I was offered a position as Assistant Professor & Research Associate at the prestigious University of Chicago, we decided to stay in America.

This proved more difficult than we had imagined, since on the visa I had we were paying taxes on my salary in both the USA and in Australia. As well, Chicago in 1968 was torn by gang warfare and the political fallout from the Vietnam War and I wanted our children to be safer in our Australian extended

family environment. The university tried to keep us there, lobbying to change our visa status, offering me a rent-free position as residential Master in one of the university's colleges, and offering my wife Patricia a full scholarship to complete a PhD. She wanted to stay, I wanted to return, and in those days of following the man's career, that is what we did. I had been offered a position as Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Monash University and we came back (on the P & O liner *Canberra*) at the end of 1969. The difference in salary was substantial. At Chicago I was paid US\$ 16,500, for a two-semester teaching contract, the third semester free to do other paid consulting work. The Monash job paid only AU\$6,300, but in those days the Australian dollar was worth more than the US\$ and we returned to our home in Greensborough.

Teaching at Monash was an exciting affair, with over 800 students in the first year Sociology course I ran, along with several other courses and thesis supervision, with the student revolution of the late 1960s raging about us. But Greensborough was an hour's drive each way every day, and when, after two years, I was offered the position of Reader in Sociology at La Trobe University, I accepted. Patricia was already teaching there and it was much more convenient.

My previous research had been in the sociology of education, but I had recently completed a huge study of adolescents and their fathers, focusing on men because so little was known (and much was wrong) about the influence of fathers on their children. That study found they, not just mothers, were highly significant, that many teenagers regretted their 'absence' both emotionally and physically because of their focus on work. It also found an interesting anomaly – that men who were fathers of teenagers, mostly in their 40s, were deeply disillusioned with their lives, their work and marriages, whereas teenagers were overwhelmingly positive. It was a study built round the theory of competence – both intrapersonal competence in the sense of feeling in control of your own life, and external competence through social forces affecting life decisions. I had also studied Sociology of the Family under one of the best US academics, Morris (Buzz) Zelditch at Stanford and had been teaching much of what I had learned in my sociology courses at Monash and La Trobe.

Initially, in 1978, I had been offered a Readership in Sociology by Professor Jean Martin, a prestigious research position which (in theory) meant I would have more time for research and do less teaching. That was attractive, though

not a full Chair. On arrival at La Trobe, however, Jean Martin asked me to take over all her university committee work, because she was exhausted and 'getting nowhere with all those males' who regarded women as inferior.

Founded as a new type of university, on 'The La Trobe Idea', with every student part of a cross-disciplinary 'college' (even though not necessarily residential), and on having cross-disciplinary courses such as sociology/history, psychology/sociology, or economics/politics/sociology run in schools rather than separate departments, it had foundered on the lack of suitable academics with a more flexible approach. Jean Martin and her husband Alan Martin took chairs in sociology and history and did develop some innovative cross-departmental courses in, for example, Latin American studies. And the first Education professor appointed, Ronald Goldman, was a radical who encouraged entirely new 'centres' and had appointed my wife Patricia to teach the first courses in media, film, television and communication theory in a new Centre for the Study of Educational Communication and Media. But other professorial appointees were conservative old-school (often British) males who just wanted to emulate the standard university approach. They resisted research funding for what they sneered at as 'non-disciplines', such as sociology, or education, or (especially) media. And Jean Martin was tired of arguing at a blank wall of male resistance.

So I found myself, not just running the graduate research program (MA Prelims, MA and PhD students, of whom I ended up supervising some 16), but also serving on the Board of Studies in the School of Social Sciences (with troglodytes such as Politics Professor Hugo Wolffsohn and Economics Professor Whitehead), and the university's Academic Board (opposed by those in the 'hard' sciences), plus the PhD Committee. On that committee I had a long-running argument about their policy that a PhD should be examined by two external referees instead of three. Any disagreement between examiners on pass/fail or on first/second class honours meant a third adjudicating examiner had to be appointed and long delays resulted. Two out of three should be enough to get an agreed result. There was opposition, on the basis that two was the 'traditional' way. It came to a head with the PhD thesis of Fiona Mackie, a tutor in sociology whose unusual thesis was titled 'The sociology of non-ordinary reality', an innovative mix of theoretical critique and a fictional section based on drug users' experience. One examiner in Canada gave it a Fail, the second examiner – a famous German sociologist – gave it a first class Honour, calling it one of the best PhD theses he had ever read. So it had to be

sent to a third adjudicator, who gave it a Pass, and that was the final result, not an Honour, but a clear Pass. The PhD Committee finally agreed that every thesis should be examined by three, not two external readers.

But the battle, plus endless other battles about finance across schools and departments, did not endear me to several of the university's senior academics. Nor did my high media profile, based on my involvement in the lead-up to the election that followed Whitlam's dismissal, where I coordinated a survey of the Diamond Valley electorate which showed clearly Labor was unlikely to win, and my work with the Schools Commission's Country Education project, an innovative approach to rural disadvantage. Several top media journalists knew me very well and often called on me to comment on social policy issues and trends.

I had also been appointed a member of the Victorian Government's Status of Women Committee which drafted Australia's first equal opportunity legislation. It had been highly controversial, with Catholic conservatives like Babette Francis (of the group 'Women Who Want to be Women') and her Victorian Parliamentary husband attacking me and others as 'Communists'. The members he singled out were me (an "academic communist sociologist working at La Trobe"); Eve Mahlab ("a radical feminist communist member of WEL"); and Eva Eden ("a communist from Hungary"). In fact, Eve Mahlab was a very wealthy lawyer and an active member of the Liberal Party, and Eva Eden had escaped from the Russian invasion of Hungary by being dragged under barbed wire as a small child by her parents, and was now Principal of Janet Clark Hall, a residential College at the University of Melbourne. It was also laughable to call me a communist, since I had always rejected their notion that the ends justified the means, had protested as a student against the Russian invasion of Hungary, and though always voting Labor because of their more just social policies, had refused to ever be a member of any political party. Babette Francis's organisation WWW was an offshoot of Santamaria's Democratic Labor Party which had split Labor and kept it out of power for many years.

I had also been interviewed by the Human Relationships Commission and knew both Elisabeth Evatt and Anne Devison, with my publications and views well known to both. To the conservative establishment, a media profile and public commentary on key social issues of the time meant I could not be a serious academic. Being a very popular and dynamic lecturer did not enamour me

either with those who were boring their students senseless and not attracting many to their classes. I had published four more books during my time at La Trobe and many papers, and had been closely involved in radically transforming the Australian & New Zealand Sociological Association from an old-fashioned empiricist group dominated by ANU academics into a more dynamic research- and theory-based organisation encouraging research on Australian society and social change. (Ironically, after I had left the university and established another profile as Director of the IFS, La Trobe University invited me to give the address at its main graduation ceremony. I titled it “The university as failed critic.” The old boys did not like that either.)

After 8 years, I felt my time at La Trobe University was up and I wanted to move on. I had been rejected for a Professorship twice, despite my previous position as an Assistant Professor at the University of Chicago and my publication record, largely it seems on the basis that I was ‘too radical’. I was also knocked back (as one favourable Selection Committee member told me) because of a nasty reference from a former colleague whom I trusted at Monash, Professor Bill Scott. I could not work out why he had shafted me, other than that I had rejected a paper he had submitted for my book *‘Social Change in Australia’*, because it was not a proper research-based paper at all, just a sort of interview he had done for the Monash Newsletter on arrival from England, about his focus on the sociology of work. At the time, he seemed to have accepted my reason for not including it, but obviously had been deeply offended. So I knew I would never go further at La Trobe.

Then came the renewed advertisement for the position of Director of the Institute of Family Studies. This time, it was to be an independent statutory authority, reporting to the federal parliament, not to a particular minister of the government of the day.

I applied, was interviewed by Family Court Chief Justice Elisabeth Evatt and others, was offered the job and started a new life early in February 1980.

In the interview, I was asked how I would plan to make the institute’s research relevant to both policy makers and the wider public. I emphasised the key would be an educational approach, publication through simply and clearly written reports rather than academic papers, and active use of the mass media. I insisted that an Institute under my direction would have to establish itself by doing very sound academic research to gain the respect of other university academics and policy makers, but that research would have to be

presented to the wider public in a readily understandable form if it were to influence policy-making and programs of relevance to Australian families. It would have to be cross-disciplinary, covering economics, psychology, demography, sociology and policy-making, not be focused solely on family service delivery, marriage counselling or divorce matters. The wording of the Act said the IFS was to study “matters affecting marital and family stability” and, in my view, that meant broader societal influences, not just intra-family personal relationships.

Asked where I thought the Institute should be based – Canberra, since it was a federal authority, or perhaps Sydney? – I replied, ‘if you want to appoint me, it will be in Melbourne. I'm not disrupting my own family to set up an Institute of Family Studies in Canberra or Sydney!’

The Selection Committee made a unanimous decision and offered me the job within a few days of my interview, and I accepted. I was now in charge of establishing a completely new research body for the Australian Government on my own, an exciting and challenging prospect.

First days of the IFS

The Institute's start in temporary premises in February 1980 did not augur well. I had left the relative luxury of a large office (with a very efficient Secretary attached) at La Trobe University to find myself without any staff, sitting at a desk in a small plywood-panelled room at the Commonwealth Attorney-General's offices in Queen St.

My insistence on establishing the Institute in Melbourne, not Canberra, proved the right move in many ways, not the least keeping us at arm's length from the federal bureaucrats and the hothouse of political influence. But I had thought, rather than give up tenure, that La Trobe might welcome the Institute on its premises. It was not to be. On being offered the IFS job, I was told my appointment could be for a 3-7-year term, with renewal after that time possible. I approached La Trobe's Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Scott, told him about the offer and suggested that the Institute could be housed at La Trobe University. He looked bemused and asked why? I said it was in my power to establish the Institute wherever I wished, and an association with the university would be advantageous to both. There were other academics in the departments of sociology, psychology and politics whose work was relevant to

family studies and, with my limited new staff, that could broaden the Institute's work and influence. The Liberal Government of the day was pushing universities to link more closely with business and seek other sources of funding. But Scott answered, "Don, I don't think we would have room." "Room?", I responded. "I have a large office with a Secretary next door; the Colleges are half empty, and those other academics already have rooms of their own." He clearly was not interested (and probably wanted to see me out of his hair), so I dropped that idea and decided to resign altogether from university life and set off in a new direction.

I left academe, gave up the secure life and superannuation benefits, and started out alone. Because in those days there was no transferability of superannuation, my 'payout' from La Trobe enabled us to build an architect-designed holiday house at Anglesea.

Leaving the university proved to be felicitous, because it meant I could appoint the best people regardless of whether they had a PhD, and whether or not an academic staff selection committee approved. Adam Graycar, just appointed to set up the new Centre for Welfare Policy Studies at the University of NSW, envied me this luxury and lamented his difficulties appointing the staff he really wanted at the University of NSW.

I was the beneficiary of Cathy Moore's input as Liaison Officer from Canberra (plus advice from Jim Carnsew, a senior bureaucrat in the Attorney-General's Department) and we had set in train interviews for staff which soon bore fruit. My decisions were based on having an initial annual budget of round \$176,000 and reflected my own priorities.

Since my old secretary at La Trobe could not afford to give up her permanent job there, I had to have someone who could do shorthand, type and manage the records. My first secretary (Wendy Body) was big and bossy and got things done - stationery ordered, tea and coffee on tap, filing systems set up, phone calls handled politely but firmly. Unfortunately she did not last long because she made three mistakes. First, she left a poor young chap sitting in the corridor waiting to beg me for a job because he was unemployed and had a young family. (He got the first job ever at the Institute (part-time) and helped me with my first official speech, on family policy, published later as Discussion Paper No. 1). Next, she failed to send my questionnaires on what experts considered were the most central issues in family research to overseas academics because (she decided) this was an Australian Institute and they

couldn't have anything relevant to say. And third, she told Zara, the young receptionist we hired on moving into new Elizabeth St. premises, that she couldn't wear slacks 'because Dr. Edgar does not approve of them.' Zara was cold sitting in the foyer and she got to stay, wearing pants; my secretary did not. In her own defence she said I needed a secretary to be 'like an office wife'. I responded that I already had a wife (who was, at the time, a long way away at the University of Iowa) and had no need of another one.

On the research staff side, I knew we needed a 'librarian' to handle information, records and publications, but I refused to have the traditional person who felt a library was a place to whisper, check books out cautiously and behave with bland decorum. Hence, I chose Mari Davis. Not that she lacked decorum, or library expertise, but because she asserted in more detail exactly what I was looking for - an active, hands-on, use-the-stuff-properly approach and she was able to think about future needs. She had an unconventional background, having been President Clark Kerr's assistant during the growth years of Berkeley, California as the new 'multi-university' developed and had then sailed round the world by yacht with her partner. I liked that sort of madam librarian. It was Mari Davis who established the Family data base, at first a fairly primitive collection of articles and papers, gradually becoming one of the most extensive and useful computerized data bases in Australia. Each day in the early years of the IFS, she would bring me a list of articles and reports on family issues for my perusal, I would mark the ones I wanted to read, and she would obtain copies of them for me. She acted as editor of our first newsletters, research reports and media releases and had a shrewd, critical eye for over-statements and unnecessary jargon.

I also knew we would need a computer expert, though I had little idea about what that meant. In those days (1980) there were no laptops, no Internet and only the specially trained could work the big machines. My PhD study data at Stanford had all been hand-assembled, tables structured on a Hewlett-Packard machine and converted to punch cards, then had to be submitted to the university's huge computer centre to be analysed by its experts. No student was even allowed to enter its facilities. And at La Trobe, all academics had to rely on the one central computer centre for advice and data analysis. I could not afford a senior programmer, so appointed someone who had been my computer assistant at La Trobe, Andrew Prolisko. He was very young and had only an Honours degree, but he was bright and due to him the Institute's research data base got off to a good start. He talked me through endlessly

technical descriptions of the pros and cons of Apple Macs and the then new Windows system, wisely deciding that IBM machines and Windows was the way to go. When our computer system was upgraded some years later, I still didn't know my password (it was 'Eagle'), didn't even know I had one or needed one. He'd be pleased to know I now do.

The other areas I felt we should be investigating involved children and their educational and social development, marriage and human relationships, and, inevitably, the fraught area of family law and divorce.

Here again I was lucky in a perverse sort of way. Experienced academics were much more reluctant than I to give up tenure or even to risk a short-term appointment away from the snake-pit of university promotion competition. So I appointed promising young academics Margaret Harrison (later to become Family Court Chief Judge Alisdair Nicholson's adviser), Gay Ochiltree (who later became Professor of Early Childhood at Macquarie and Melbourne Universities) and Ilene Wolcott who had an unusual background in women's health in the United States.

Gay Ochiltree had been a mature age student at La Trobe and went on to do an excellent PhD in Sociology under my guidance. In my view, any research about children and families (and any policy advice) had to be informed by a grasp of educational processes and Gay was an experienced teacher with the skills to convert academic knowledge into sound policy; she was among my first appointments. All these people proved excellent choices and stayed with the Institute for many years. Their skills lay in clear writing (some better than others) as well as sound research methodology, an ability sadly lacking in several later academic appointees whose work demanded painstaking editing. That initial staff stayed with me until my resignation some 14 years later.

Mari Davis found the bland rooms of A-G's more exciting than they looked. Jim Carnsew, seconded from Canberra to help me start up, was a member of the Censorship Board, and Mari appeared one day to announce somewhat shakily that she had found a color poster of 'a huge detumescent penis' hidden beneath her desk blotter. Ah well, we were into family studies after all. I reminded staff of this some time later when our first survey questionnaire on 'Family Formation' went through many drafts before I noticed that sex was not mentioned anywhere. It then was, though very discreetly.

That first survey was traumatic in many ways too. None of the staff had experience with field work, so I had to train them and others recruited for the task. By then we had moved to new premises at the top end of Elizabeth St., near the University of Melbourne. We had a one-way mirror window in the small interview room and they observed me and others go through the interviewing hoops. One woman shocked everyone by telling in graphic detail the story of ten years happily living with her de facto partner, then getting married and divorcing six months later because her husband now thought he 'owned her'. We heard a lot worse in subsequent interviews and studies; the romanticized version of happy family life rarely matched reality.

I had accepted a seven-year appointment, thinking that would give us time to do some solid work and not be too long for me to leave and find another job if necessary. So I decided to map out an overall strategy for that seven years.

My analysis of comments received from external academics and family services people (both Australian and overseas) suggested the main themes of that first 7-Year Plan. Australian family research was virtually non-existent, data collected in the Census and other surveys by the Australian Bureau of Statistics were pretty useless, with assumptions about men as 'head of household', no differentiation between first and second marriages, no mention of divorce, stepfamilies or any way of working out which parent was responsible for children after divorce. Data were inadequate too on family incomes, inter-generational contacts, paid working arrangements, so it was clear the IFS would have to start Australian family research virtually from scratch. The Australian Census has been much improved as a result of Institute input over the years.

There were calls to look at young people's expectations of marriage and child-bearing (our first longitudinal study was on 'Family Formation'); to evaluate the presumed 'disastrous' effects of the Family Law Act (the second was the 'Family Reformation Study'); the asserted negative impacts on children of mothers in the workforce (we did several studies on the emerging issue of work-family balance); father absence and formal non-parental child care (our study on 'The Child's view of family life' was unique and we later looked at huge samples of child care patterns and their outcomes for children).

Governments wanted us to look at the effectiveness of various intervention programs such as marriage guidance, financial counselling, youth allowances, income-transfer policies. We had no picture of extended family contacts or

supports, no idea of which neighbourhoods or regions had high/low frequencies of single-parent households or families in poverty, which policies and programs were working in support of family life or (as the Family Law Act put it) which were the key 'factors affecting marital and family stability'. So the research we did was found to be of great value to every level of government, to welfare and community service agencies across the nation and they fought avidly on our behalf whenever government 'razor gangs' tried to cut our budget or abolish the Institute entirely.

One of my best appointments was of Jean McCaughey, an older woman who had worked for the Henderson Poverty Inquiry and ran (with Des Storer, an expert on migrants, and Peter d'Abbs who had experience in remote mining towns) the 'Family Support Study' in Geelong, Ashfield, NSW and Jabiru, NT. Her husband, Dr Davis McCaughey, later became a very popular Governor of the State of Victoria.

Under strong urging from the Family Court, we ran a study on the costs of children. I chose to replicate David Piachaud's UK study of the cost of children. This avoided all the complications of imputed incomes or equivalence scales and took a simple approach – we costed a 'basket of goods' for 'low income' and 'upper income' families with different numbers and ages of children, including basic food, clothing, but not housing or schooling costs. That gave us 'minimal' costs, were unarguable in terms of possible over-estimates, and it became one of our most effective studies.

But the person I appointed to conduct the study (Kerry Lovering, another older woman) could not write well, got her statistics confused and caused me endless hours of editing (an entire Easter break at Anglesea) before any report could be released. I found \$ totals mentioned in the text did not coincide with numbers in the tables; she confused which group she was writing about; sentences were convoluted and simplicity lost. It took me hours of editing and her rewriting to complete. Nonetheless, the final report caused a sensation (because the total costs of parenting seemed so high), was used to justify child maintenance findings in disputed Family Court cases, even for government payments to foster parents, and each year we did an update, reported breathlessly in the media every time, possibly contributing to the already emerging trend of delaying marriage and childbearing and a reduced birth rate overall.

This study, plus the new modelling program we devised called the Australian Family Income Transfers (AFIT) Project, epitomized the overall thrust of our work – it refused to treat ‘family’ as a unitary concept and differentiated between levels of family income, family types, family sizes, numbers of dependent children. This soon put paid to the old political ploy of Governments (and Oppositions) claiming that their proposals would ‘help the family’ better than their opponents. Eric Risstrom in those years used to estimate the impact of proposed changes in taxation on ‘the family’, but had to desist when we made it obvious that family tax impacts varied widely from the standard Mum and Dad plus two kids family. Each time we published an AFIT bulletin, we would be praised by one political party and attacked by the other whose figures were often exposed as misleading.

It was my policy to show a draft for comment to the relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers before we published. If they could point to any discrepancy, we might alter the draft (in fact, we never did) but I made it clear that we were an independent body and our own quality controls meant we mostly got the interpretations correct and would publish regardless of any political objections. John Howard, Andrew Peacock, other Liberal ministers would phone me saying ‘you can’t publish this’ and I would say, ‘my Board has approved publication and it’s not for you to say’. Labor was no better than Liberal if our figures failed to support their claims. There was only one occasion where I had to ‘censor’ an AFIT report – our economics staff did have pro-Labor tendencies – and I found some of the data were not interpreted objectively. Some Board members had also noticed this on reading the draft and tried to tell me not to publish. I pre-empted this by saying they did not have power to censor, that was my job as Director, and I had already told staff to go back to the drawing board and rewrite the findings. The Leftie staff involved were furious, but my action preserved the integrity of the Institute.

There was suspicion and criticism of an Institute set up to preserve this bourgeois institution anyway, but equally strong criticism that, with me at its head, the AIFS would undermine the sanctity of family life itself. The fanatical Babette Francis, head of the Santamaria front ‘Women Who Want to be Women’, had accused me of being a left-wing communist; Ronald Conway in his book *“The Land of the Long Weekend”* had attacked me and my wife Patricia as being ‘those left-wing, socialist empire-builders from La Trobe’ and the conservatives were constantly asserting that we were undermining family

life through our published research and my numerous speeches and media appearances explaining the complexity of changing family life.

In fact, I had no problem with the notion of marital and family stability. I knew the overseas research which made it clear that a stable two-parent home was conducive to positive child development; there was a growing body of research showing negative impacts for children caught between conflicting parents; it was obvious that family income and poverty were key factors in explaining most child outcome variables; and we knew that young people's attitudes towards family formation were changing and were curious about how this would impact on the nature of Australian society.

More than that, I had grown up in a one-parent family myself (my father having been killed in a timber accident when I was ten, leaving my mother with five children and little choice but to work for an income to keep us together). I had no doubt of the disadvantage which such an event produced or of the effect of father absence on my personal growth and that of my siblings. Because of this experience, it had not seemed odd to me that my wife insisted on working after marriage and after having children, or that as the husband/father I should share the responsibilities of housework and childcare.

So the strident feminism of the time was both understood by me and taken with a grain of salt, for I had seen how patriarchy operated in schools, universities and social situations against the women closest to me but had also seen them rise above that to achieve in their own right. Nor did I romanticise the one-parent family, knowing its limitations first-hand. It was not, I felt, the institution of marriage as such that made for inequality and injustice, but patriarchal religious teaching, the failures of education and the entrenched macho culture of the workplace.

Given that I had studied institutional racism in the United States, I knew of course that marriage as an institution was a major conduit of these values, but could not see that just attacking men, or marriage, would help either couples or their children. So, as my suspicion of welfarism and those I called 'the professional poor' made me enemies in the social policy area, my tempered sympathy with feminism and support for an equitable family life made me enemies on both the Left and Right. In particular, some left-wing feminists regarded me with suspicion because I kept arguing that men as fathers were just as important as mothers and worthy of closer study. That was probably a saving grace in the long run because it raised my antennae against bias in the

interpretation of research results and led to a more balanced public commentary on family issues in Australia than might otherwise have been the case.

The Family Formation Survey was a major investment, designed as a longitudinal study covering many aspects of family change and process. Many outsiders (especially family lawyers) could not understand why my initial 7 Year Research Plan emphasised longitudinal studies and could not grasp that each wave would give them results immediately. We sub-contracted the fieldwork, going through the spiels of several survey companies before selecting one. Quoted costs were all above \$100,000, so we had to be careful. Then they started altering our questionnaire, turning it into a computerised nightmare, with boxes to be blacked in and skip instructions that would challenge any interviewer or interviewee. My level of alarm rose, phone calls were not answered and, a week before field interviews were to start, their principal researcher literally disappeared. The company had gone broke. Disaster was immanent and I could see the headlines - 'Institute's first survey a mess.' But we scrambled, went back to the second-choice contractor, Irving Saulwick, who did an excellent job and saved the day. I swore staff to secrecy until it was all completed. And no money was lost.

That first wave documented several trends happening in Australian family life: the extended education of young people and their staying longer in the parental home; a rise in living together before marriage and thus later age at first marriage and child-bearing; the increasing conflict between work demands and family life, with negotiations over money and housework causing a good deal of marital conflict; the difficulties of re-partnered and step-families; the rising cost of housing and the need for stability in the lives of children; a massive need for child care with more women now in the paid workforce; and new attitudes to getting married on the part of young adults. The media were fascinated by our published research results, and family support agencies found the work invaluable.

I also recall vividly our first big story in the newspapers. A journalist from 'The Age' spent over two hours with me and the initial staff members, discussing what the future of the family might be. We were at pains not to generalize too much, pointing out that bad economic times could cause a delay in marriage and child-bearing for many, but prosperity might combine with the new values of individualism and sexual freedom to delay marriage for many others too.

Next day, the headline read, “Family dead by the year 2000’, says Institute!” My Board members were as dismayed as we were. Babette Francis used the article to continue her attack on me as a ‘communist, pro-feminist sociologist’, and a few strong phone calls from me led to a retraction and an end to the Age journalist’s career in social policy reporting.

I thought I had already had lots of experience in dealing with the media (through chairing the Schools Commission’s Country Education Project) but this taught me how careful we would have to be. We learned to cultivate journalists we knew would report accurately, to avoid sensationalism, to insist on seeing drafts of articles before they got printed. But we also learned to use the media as a vehicle for informing the public about family life – one of our key statutory aims – and for ensuring that hostile politicians (on either side) could never say the Institute was doing little of value.

My rule of thumb was that the researcher(s) who analysed and wrote up the data should be the ones interviewed in the media, but that all policy comment and anything that might have budgetary implications would be handled by me as Director. In this way, I protected staff and nurtured their self-confidence in speaking to the press, but also directed political attacks onto me as Director responsible for the Institute’s implementation of Board directions.

In all the later reviews, public and professional feedback consistently referred to the Institute’s very public profile, to its strong dissemination not only of research findings but also of issues in discussing family policy and family services, and to the value of Institute reports to service-providers who had often not been able to see their work within the wider social context.

In planning every major study, we held *Design Seminars*, seeking the ideas of other academics, service-providers and policy advisers in the relevant area. They were invited to attend the Institute in Melbourne, usually for a one-day discussion, raising ideas and issues they thought would be relevant to a particular study, particularly matters on which there was little research available. For our initial Family Formation Study, I brought out from the UK the husband-wife combination of Rhona and Robert Rapoport, whose work had shown for the first time how families were having difficulty juggling the work-family balance. They were invaluable in helping design the study, set up its longitudinal elements, and the wording of interview questions.

But the actual design and conduct of the studies was ours to control and we often had to avoid special interests pleading for data that suited their personal research agenda rather than ours. In the first few years, we also funded external research studies, calling for tenders and culling them for the most useful topics. I soon decided that most university academics were not worth their salt; they were slow to do the work, it was often sloppy and cajoling a final report out of them was agonizing. So the small grants program was phased out and we used reliable academics instead as members of study steering committees, mentors and critical readers of our own draft reports.

It was the *International Conference on Family Research*, held at the new Victorian Arts Centre in 1983, which put the Institute firmly on the international map. I was Secretary & Treasurer of the International Sociological Association's Committee on Family Research and had close contacts with family researchers around the world. We were able to bring some 300+ of them (with Australian government support, ISA support, and their own institutional support, some even from China who tried to apply for asylum) to Melbourne, delivering a wide range of research papers.

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We also had very good relationships with the Australian media, trusted journalists I had dealt with during my time at Monash and La Trobe. I insisted for the first decade that our quarterly journal *Family Matters* was an in-house

means of getting our work into the public arena, in a readily-digestible form prior to the release of final reports in the form of published books. This prevented it becoming a competitor to already existing academic journals or a dumping ground for papers not accepted elsewhere. (Our early staff group debated what to call it, and my administrative manager David Keane came up with a suitably double-entendre title.) Because the reputation of *Family Matters* grew, this was controversial and since my retirement it has become a refereed academic journal open to outside researchers. But when we began, there were very few academics doing family research and we did not have the staff to do the necessary refereeing work. Each issue of *Family Matters* was a big media event and a constant source of stories and information for journalists and service-providers alike. It was a key political tool in our resistance to any budget cuts.

Often, politicians and senior bureaucrats did not like what they heard us saying. Frequent attempts were made to silence us, especially on matters of social security, income tax and family support services.

In the Family Law arena, our early findings drew the ire of lawyers (and some judges) as clearly the process of divorce was made more difficult because of the litigious nature of legal practitioners, despite the Family Court's ostensible design as a place to mediate and conciliate conflict. I never met one Family Court judge who thought he should not have been chosen as Chief Judge instead of Justice Elizabeth Evatt. And the Court's officials, especially the Registrar and Principal Psychologist, were totally antagonistic to this upstart Institute.

Fortunately, our research often helped the Court withstand political attacks and explained its work more clearly to the wider public. There were those (mostly men) who hated us for the introduction of the Child Support Scheme; and it took years before the Court's hostility to my Discussion Paper 13 suggestion that the terms 'custody' and 'access' be abolished in favour of Child Plans faded into acceptance (in principle if not in practice).

But I'll never forget being restrained physically by my staff at the first Family Research Conference in Canberra (1983) as I raged in reaction to a court official's attack on Margaret Harrison's first paper on the operation of family lawyers. Our research found that the litigious nature of many lawyers was working against the Family Court's conciliatory purpose, a finding they did not want publicized. After a lot of shouting and arm-waving, we both backed off.

At our conference in 1985, the opening session held at the Pharmacy College was fraught with concerns about security. Attacks, deadly bombings and constant threats against Family Court judges (two judges were murdered and Justice Watson's wife was killed in a bomb attack on their apartment) had rubbed off on the Institute. I had to check beneath my car for wires every time I got into it and staff were warned to be careful. On the conference stage were the Minister Brian Howe, Chair of our Board, Justice Fogarty and myself. Fogarty leant over to me and said, 'Don't panic, but that man in the front row is one of our worst litigants, and he is dangerous.' I looked down and saw the man was holding a knife barely concealed by his jacket. The only 'weapons' available to me on stage should he attack were the small table microphone and a jug of water. I decided my aim would be better with the water in his face, but we managed to have security escort him out of the hall without incident.

There were always 'crank letters' coming in, which I had filed under that heading. One writer was especially nasty, with daggers, bombs, drips of red blood drawn over pages of pasted cuttings and articles critical of me, sociologists and psychologists in general, the Institute's research, etc. I never took much notice, until one letter came with very specific threats to me. My secretary was very upset and I asked her to dig out the file. As we checked the postmarks the hair on our necks rose: the letters started from northern Queensland, but he was getting closer to Melbourne and was now in Mildura. We found a stamp on one of his pasted bits with the name of a TPI recipient who (we discovered) had been in the Mont Park Mental Hospital some years before. I rang the hospital's Superintendent and told him the situation. When he heard the name, he was shocked, said he knew the man; he had attacked and shot another patient two years ago and disappeared. 'He's very dangerous!' We called in the Federal Security Police, who tracked the man down to a boarding house in Mildura, but he had left the day before. He was never found, never arrived at our offices and never wrote again, but we were nervous for some time afterwards.

Other letters were more a nuisance than from dangerous cranks. Babette Francis was a persistent critic, commenting on every article or piece of published research, always negatively. At first, I would spend time justifying our position, but then she would reply with yet more comments. So I adopted the policy of answering, "Dear Babette, Thank you for your letter of ... Its contents have been duly noted.' When Justice Michael Kirby (then head of the

Law Reform Commission) visited, I discussed the matter with him and he pompously suggested that it was our duty (as public figures) to respond in detail to every comment and inquiry. I chose to ignore that advice in the interests of sanity and her letters gradually decreased in frequency because she never had the satisfaction of a challenging or defensive reply.

Institute staff members were an interesting bunch, from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and with a wealth of experience in practical policy implementation. This gave the Institute its unique ability to 'second-guess' research that would be relevant to a changing society and express findings in language that was understood by service providers, politicians, media and the wider public.

It was my job as founding Director to outline a research strategy for the first seven years – my first term of appointment. This 'Seven Year Plan' was accepted by the Board, despite some murmurings that longitudinal studies might not meet the urgent political needs of the time. Of course they did, as did other shorter-term studies such as that on the Costs of Children, or Maternity Leave, or Family Support Services.

My Deputy Director for the first years was David Keane, selected because he had an English literature degree as well as management experience with the Canberra bureaucracy. He was young, energetic, pleasant in manner and able to contribute in many ways to discussions of research and policy. It was his idea to call the Institute newsletter '*Family Matters*', a name which has stuck and says it all.

Frank Maas was chosen to head up policy studies after interviewing several humourless and opinionated people from the 'welfare' area whose narrow focus left me unimpressed. Frank was bright, had a way with words (and jokes), had worked in youth policy but soon broadened his understanding into social security and support services.

Ilene Wolcott had a grating New York accent, and a huge head of curly black hair, matched only by her husband's already-unmodish beard (we always suspected he was a CIA spy because he survived in a vague role with the US Embassy through several successive presidencies). She had interests in women's health and sexuality but an urge to spread her wings. I would set her a task (usually on her own or with one other person); she would gather the information assiduously, write a very clear (if at times boring) report; and then

within a few days after it was published and reported widely in the media, come to me with a worried look on her face saying, “Don, I don’t know what I’m to do next.” She was not a self-starter, and though I would say, ‘Ilene, have a bit of a rest, you’ve worked hard and done well’, I would have to reassure her and lead her into a new project.

Helen Glezer had a psychology/sociology background, had been a founder of the Women’s Electoral Lobby, and played a lead role in designing our first studies of marriage and family formation, divorce impacts and maternity leave. She was a mother hen, always chatting, consoling others, knowing all the gossip. She was a nuisance in her habit of appearing at my door unannounced, expecting to chat, regardless of how busy I was. But I had an open door policy for staff and often heard from her first about troubles brewing between staff members or political rumors that might affect the Institute. I was amused to hear one day that she would leave my room then walk round telling staff that ‘Don is in a good space today’, or ‘Don looks tired, I’d leave him be for the moment.’ She had everyone’s best interests at heart but in later years did quite a bit of harm supposedly mediating between competing staff groups. Gossip feeds on itself. But it was useful to learn from her that the reason one senior staff member’s wife had suffered major burns from falling into a hot bath tub was because she was an alcoholic and the marriage was in tatters. It made me more sympathetic and understanding about the stress and irritability being displayed. Unfortunately Helen could not write very well, especially first drafts of big research studies. She was good at designing questionnaires or interviews, and at analysing data, but it was at times impossible to get her to commit the findings to paper. I would have to sit her down with the data tables and ask what conclusions she thought could be drawn from them. She could articulate the findings and research or policy implications with great subtlety and I’d say, ‘Helen, write that!’ But every draft was a painful process, both for her to write and for me and the publication staff to edit. On several studies I paired her with other staff who had better writing skills but inferior data analysis skills; it worked well.

Margaret Harrison was an emotionally withdrawn yet intellectually forthright person, mousy-looking behind her spectacles and short straight hair, yet able to cut through the nonsense and put others right with a few sharp comments. I came to rely on her for most of our research and policy work in family law. Her Legal Studies/Law background gave her some credibility with Family Court personnel, despite their arrogant sexism and macho swagger. She was a loyal

supporter throughout and advised caution on occasion when I could easily have overstepped the mark.

After getting rid of the bossy Wendy, my new secretary was a young and very pretty woman, Rhonda Carrington. She was nervous at the challenge, but had superb shorthand and typing skills and soon became my most trusted assistant. She was married to a policeman, lived far out of the city in the Dandenongs, came in by train, then by tram up to the Elizabeth St office, and would do the same return journey every day, but she was young and seemed never tired. Her husband wanted to be a fireman at the airport, so he too commuted miles to work each day. When he finally wanted to move to Queensland, I was left without a right arm, and it took a year of unsatisfactory temporary appointments to locate my next Executive Assistant (the politically correct jargon had changed) - Narda Sowter - who stayed with me loyally to the end, and survived through the succeeding mess of changing Directors after that. Large, dressed in tatty T-shirts, she was brusque and brutally honest, a shrewd observer of how things were shaping up and ready to sound the warning bell if necessary because I was away interstate so often. She was always urging me, unsuccessfully, to say no to more speaking invitations and clearly thought I was a bit soft on troublesome staff.

Other early staff members included Don Stewart, a New Zealander my wife had met through the East-West Center for the Study of Communication in Honolulu. My ingrained experience was that media played a powerful role in both the changes to and public understanding of family life. There were no Australians with good training in communications research in the 1980s and we conducted under his guidance the Australian end of an international survey of media content on family life run by James Halloran of Leicester University, UK. It showed how television programs reflected, set the pace for and at times lagged behind social change. His wife started an affair with the husband of our assistant librarian, Judy Newbold who, distressed, became an anorexic. The mother hens on staff tried to get her to eat and offered sympathetic but unqualified advice. I rang Professor McMahon Ball at Melbourne University to ask his advice. It was to 'call the women off'; the worst thing to do with an anorexic, he said, was to molly-coddle their problem, they had to stand on their own feet (and die if they could not). He got Judy into rehabilitation, she resigned and went on to bigger and better things. The marital issues later resolved themselves as well and Don Stewart left to start anew at a northern university.

Pat Harper was a welfare groupie, endlessly on the telephone 'networking', rather than producing material she was responsible for, and spreading stories about internal problems that reflected her own thoughts rather than the truth. She had been instrumental in setting up the Lone Parents' Association (meaning Lone Mothers, not men, whom she despised) and was vigilant about defending them from any accusations of disadvantage for their children, though her own daughter was clearly desperate for more attention from her mother.

She was part of the welfare clique that included Andrew Burbidge, a hunchback economist with a real chip on his one shoulder, playing on his handicap for personal advantage, gossiping endlessly, pushing a soft Leftie, pro-Labor line in our economic analyses, and not producing very good work. His hobby was restoring vintage cars, a contradiction, I thought, of his anti-poverty stance. Hypocrites I can't abide, especially when they are dangerous gossips to boot. He was a close friend of Labor politician Brian Howe, another pain in the arse.

When we ran a national conference on Child Poverty (following Bob Hawke's claim to rid the nation of child poverty by the year 1990) I found it amusing to discover none of this policy/economics group was able to articulate a sensible argument against poverty when briefing me for my keynote introductory speech. Frank Maas was the only one who 'got' it, and with help from him and David Keane I worked up a paper which outlined the various anti-poverty rationales available – pragmatic fear of rising crime, the broader social effects of inequality, notions of relative poverty line measures, the cost-benefits of greater equity, the altruistic principle of doing the best we could for all children, etc. My critique was directed at the then popular line that if the economy grew, the benefits would 'trickle down' to the poor, and I adduced overseas evidence to the contrary. This provoked a vicious attack from the Minister, Brian Howe, who had abandoned his former stance on reducing inequality by direct measures in favour of his masters' voice (Keating and Hawke) on neo-rationalist economic reform. Sadly, the same trickle-down economic nonsense has been peddled by successive Coalition and Labor governments, to the detriment of Australian manufacturing, our over-reliance on overseas supply chains and on cheap imported immigrant labour.

I was stuck with these welfare-ites because they were the only ones with an understanding of both economic statistical analysis and the policy labyrinth of

Canberra and the State governments (and they did valuable work, despite my misgivings). In those years, government seemed more concerned about targeting benefits, adjusting marginal tax rates, introducing a new type of family payment, fiddling at the edges of family support rather than thinking through the structural issues properly. The system was becoming infinitely more complicated and despite the evidence of the damage caused by arbitrarily means-testing benefits, they were fascinated with the ongoing convoluted adjustment game. I was impatient with all this and they knew it.

My approach was to insist on new initiatives in positive family support services, reforms in the work-family area, taxation based on equivalence scales (i.e. adjusted to numbers of family dependants, along French lines), and locally-driven coordination of universally-accessible family resources. In this I was supported by two other valuable members of staff, Peter d'Abbs and Jean McCaughey who had worked on the Henderson Poverty Commission and brought a wealth of experience and wisdom to the design of our family support studies.

But 'family policy' was regarded suspiciously as a conservative ploy and Labor never got its act together in this area. Ironically, it was John Howard who, despite his 'white picket fence' view of 'the family', did much more to widen universal supports for family life, alleviate poverty through equalizing benefit payments and improve quality child care for working parents. It was criticized as middle-class welfare, but the data suggest his measures had a beneficial effect on all families during a time of relative affluence. By 2011, the same issues were being debated, with Labor again on the side of means-testing and the Liberals deploring the end of middle-class welfare. Though Australia had survived the global economic crisis, Labor's inept handling of the mining resource tax, the carbon tax and falling revenues from the high Australian dollar gave new impetus to means-testing and reductions in overall government spending. By 2020, all of that was overturned by the COVID-19 pandemic, where suddenly, massive big-government intervention became once again essential to the whole society's wellbeing, indeed survival.

There were several other part-time appointees, the most interesting perhaps being Christine Kilmartin, wife of an earlier colleague of mine at La Trobe. We needed someone to compile 'Fact Sheets', brief summaries of trends in Australian family life, and she was a meticulous data analyst. But she proved to be too meticulous. On divorce rates for example, she would go to three

decimal points, rather than just say it was 7.5 per thousand; on average age at marriage she would prevaricate around males and females, and again say 23.451 or 27.095 instead of just rounding the figures. I would ask her for a graph on marriage or divorce trends across several years and she would make it so complex even a professional could make no sense of it. She had a pathological reluctance to let go of anything, and would spend hours reanalysing material that was already adequate to the purpose. Her husband would complain that she was coming in to the Institute in the very early morning before her children had woken up, and staying until late at night, and I had to instruct her to stop doing that. It was not safe to be in an unoccupied city office late at night. But she had an incredibly funny sense of humour and would write biting apt poems or words to songs for our special occasions, such as birthdays, or a staff member leaving us, and I tolerated her whims, perhaps for too long. She and her husband eventually divorced and he tells me she still works long hours at the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

On the political side, life was interesting indeed. Originally a Whitlam Labor Government's plan (as already noted, Lionel Murphy dreamt up the idea of an Institute while peeing in the toilet at Parliament House with Justice Watson, as a gimmick to get the Family Law Act legislation through), the Institute was not set up until after the Malcolm Fraser coup of 1975, so Liberal politician Peter Durack was our first Minister as Attorney-General.

He was always supportive, and never interfered, boosting our meagre budget each year after establishment until his retirement. Then Gareth Evans became Attorney-General and the Institute was reviewed (along with the Institute of Criminology, HREOC and the Law Reform Commission) as part of the Razor Gang cutbacks. We joked that they wanted to set up an 'Institute for the Reform of Family Criminals Without Rights', but it was a serious threat to all of these independent 'quangos'. In an animated discussion with Senator John Button round this time he expressed scepticism about my arguments for external, objective, independent assessments of the government's policy and program impacts on families. Indeed, in retrospect, we had more grief from Labor governments than from the conservatives; at least the latter purported to support family life whereas old Lefties retained some ill-thought-through antagonism to the 'bourgeois' concept of family and the regressive overtones of 'family policy'. I spent a lot of time lambasting them (often in editorials for *Family Matters*) for leaving 'family issues' to serve conservative ends.

We survived the Review with a clean bill of health, but Gareth Evans wanted us to come more under his personal direction. I recall a long and heated meeting at his Melbourne office, with my Board Chairman, Justice Austin Asche supporting me, arguing for independence as per the wording of the Act, Gareth arguing that he should dictate what sort of research the Institute would do. I, we, won the argument and Gareth finally said, "Alright Don, I understand what you're saying and you're right." We were renamed the '**Australian**' Institute of Family Studies, and both staff numbers and our budget were increased.

Staff increases brought new problems. Our initial group had bonded closely, knew the processes by which the Institute had been established and appreciated my involving them in our overall decision-making. We ate lunch together, laughed together, dealt with problem issues together as a team. They did not behave as individual 'academic' researchers, and were involved in planning every new piece of research, whether its focus was economic, sociological or service evaluation.

New appointments came mostly from university backgrounds and it often showed in their egotism and lack of cooperation.

Paul Amato was appointed specifically to help Gay Ochiltree and I run the big study of children's views of family life. We had designed the interview questionnaires and sampling design, basing it on the theory of competence which I had been using for several years. The data had been collected and we needed someone to help analyse the data and write it up. Paul was a young American academic, then working as a research assistant for our Board member, Professor Jacquie Goodnow at Macquarie University. When asked for a reference, she cast doubts about his work, but it was clear to me (especially from the interview) that he was the best of the applicants, and I appointed him. He was a very appealing, thin, curly-haired, good-looking and personable young man and I felt betrayed by my Board member who had obviously not wanted him to leave her. He proved to be, as we thought, very competent with the data and wrote the study up clearly and efficiently. But then he claimed to be the sole author and failed to acknowledge the massive design work done by Gay Ochiltree or the theoretical underpinnings of the study provided by me. He was, however, apologetic and gracious when I confronted him. He went on after about four years to a distinguished career in family studies back in the United States.

Kate Funder was a very intelligent but opinionated psychologist who had subjugated her own career to that of her husband, a well-known medical researcher running the Baker Institute. I gave her the chance to write her own PhD thesis using data from the Family Re-formation Project, originally designed by us all, led by Margaret Harrison, our family law expert. Kate started calling it 'my study' and I would correct her with 'Whose study? It's an Institute study Kate, not just yours.' She did a good job and was awarded her PhD, but her ambitions got the better of her and, on a trip with her husband to the UK, she wangled an invitation to present a paper on child support at a conference being organised by British researcher xxxxxx . I was confronted in my office one day by a tearful and angry Margaret Harrison, insisting that she was the lead researcher on that study and if anyone was to present a paper at the UK conference it should be her. I agreed, rang xxxx in London and explained that Kate Funder was being underhand and Margaret should be invited instead. She understood and did so. I also rang Kate Funder and told her she had overstepped the mark and I was displeased. On her return to Melbourne, she barged in to my office, furious that I had 'damaged her reputation' with overseas people and she had been totally embarrassed. I replied that the damage was done by her, and she was never to take credit for something she was not responsible for again.

Another new appointment was Maryanne Wolff, from Swinburne University. Her specialty was housing and homelessness and she was very productive. But I recall her coming to me on her first day to complain that, as a Senior fellow, she should have been given an office with a window, not an internal one with glass walls. I explained my policy that, in the new Queen St building, priority was given to our longer-term staff members and when a room became vacant she might then be moved. She accepted that with ill grace, but then got on with her work efficiently.

At one stage, we were to submit a report to the Western Australian Government on '*Families in WA*', and the woman I had asked to collate the data (Christine Kilmartin) had taken herself off to far-North Queensland (without permission) to do some interviews for the Living Standards Study. We could not locate her, so I rang her husband Les (whom I had appointed at La Trobe some years earlier and who was a good friend) and asked "Where the bloody hell is your wife?" He didn't know either, but gave me a phone number. I rang and told her to drop what she was doing in Queensland immediately, leave the car she had hired at the airport, get on a plane and get back to the

Institute immediately. She arrived with piles of computer printout and no draft report on the WA data. I was furious. I then brought together in my office three other staff members, including Maryanne Wolff, and we sat for two days to draft the report. It was sent to the WA government just in time to meet their deadline. Maryanne told me she had never seen such cooperative and productive work done in such a short time and had enjoyed being part of that group experience. She was never a trouble to me again.

Ruth Weston was appointed on a part-time basis at first, but then promoted to full-time because she was such a competent researcher. Unlike Funder, Ruth was self-effacing and timid, and had to be coached to handle media when her research was being discussed. She contributed to several major studies, doing complicated data analysis and writing clearly about it. She was one of the few staff members who stayed on after my leaving the Institute (many of them disliking my replacement Harry McGurk) and retired in 2019 as the longest-serving AIFS staff member.

As various Ministers came and went, I spent a lot of time in Canberra lobbying on behalf of the Institute. From the tiny dogboxes of the old Parliament House to the grand expanses of the new, I combed the corridors of power, explaining our work to both Government and Opposition members. On controversial issues, we gave seminars for parliamentarians organized by the Parliamentary Library people who were very aware of the Institute's work and high public profile. As well, I knew every State Minister (and all the key bureaucrats) for Community Welfare, Human Services, Education, Youth, Employment and so on. Hardly a week went by without some interstate trip, conference presentation or policy meeting. Not so often, I travelled overseas, first to visit comparable research centres in the US, Canada and UK, later as the much-envied Director of what was obviously a unique government-funded research institute on family issues. France tried to emulate our success with its *Centre de Recherche sur la famille et les Enfants*, Canada set up the *Vanier Institute*, Britain had its *Centre for Family Policy Studies* and New Zealand invited me twice to come and advise their government on how to structure a similar institute there.

The International Conference on Family Research, held at the new Victorian Arts Centre in 1982, put the Institute firmly on the international map. I had been elected Secretary & Treasurer of the International Sociological Association's Committee on Family Research and had close contacts with

family researchers around the world. We were able to bring some 300+ of them (with Australian government support, ISA support, and their own institutional support, some even from China who tried to apply for asylum) to Melbourne, delivering a wide range of research papers.

It was the first conference held at the new Arts Centre, in the big conference room at the top under the spire, all looking so lavish and new it blew people's minds when they arrived. Two days before it started, there were no blinds or curtains on the rear (curved) windows, and we were concerned that people's overhead projection slides (there were no laptops or Power Points in those days) would not be clear. The Centre rushed to complete it and we arrived to find plush dark red velvet curtains in place, looking perfect. Lunches were lavishly catered and held on various levels of the foyers of the Arts Centre, all new carpets and glitzy gold. The Conference Dinner was held in the Great Hall of the NGV gallery building, with the Governor-General of Australia (Sir Ninian Stephens) giving the opening welcome speech.

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They were impressed both with Melbourne and the work of our Institute. I was also made a Member of the International Union of Family Associations, based in France but drawing on all family support agencies across Europe. They were conservative, bureaucratic, self-serving and flawed by internal bickering and petty corruption, which I tried to expose, but helped inform me and the Australian Institute staff about comparative research and family policy approaches.

Governments of the time were restrictive on overseas travel but I spoke at conferences and met with fellow family researchers in France, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, Spain, Portugal, the UK, Greece, Ireland, the US, Canada, Israel and the USSR in concentrated tours. I spent several days in

Athens advising the Greek Government on its family law reforms, to be based on Australia's no-fault model, because they were finding traditional attitudes to marriage and divorce there were proving dysfunctional, particularly among Greek migrants returned from Australia who were more 'progressive' than their Greek-based families and peers.

I also spent some time in Singapore advising on family policy matters, amused by the giggling women in their 'Social Development' Department who were trying to devise ways of getting young men to date, marry and have children – they were so focused on work and so socially inept that they 'didn't even know how to hold hands with a woman'. The goal was to increase the Chinese birth rate and President Lee Kuan Yu listened with interest as I sat with him at a major conference dinner.

I was energetic, enthusiastic and a good ambassador for Australia, on one occasion in Leuven having to reassure senior women that right-wing Tasmanian Senator Brian Harradine was not the Australian Government's 'representative' to the European Union, and his views on banning abortion and contraceptive advice were not shared by the majority of Australians. All this travel round Australia and overseas, the endless conference presentations, lectures and meetings with significant policy advisers and family service providers was of course tiring. My secretary would urge me to start saying No, but I felt that was a key part of my job, to keep the Institute's work and profile in frame.

This stood us in good stead when we had to undergo another major review in 1992, ordered by Neil Blewett as Minister for Social Security. I never felt he was sympathetic to the Institute, a cold fish sitting behind his hooded eyelids, making scant verbal responses. Rumour had it that he was a closet gay, his marriage was in tatters and his wife committed suicide by pulling a live electric hair dryer into the bath. Labor power-broker Graham Richardson was a better Minister, very blunt and to the point. After years of arguing for a computer upgrade and being told the Department could not afford it, Richardson simply said, "OK, Don, you say you need it, I believe you, so you've got it." The Secretary of his Department (Derek Volker) did not look pleased. Lionel Bowen (another A-G I had to deal with) had never been so upfront, more often comatose and disinterested in either the Institute or family law.

Senate Estimates Committee hearings were always a battle, conservatives asking why we did so little on marriage guidance, the others suggesting we

were too critical of the Government. Late nights, heady issues, attacks on the Family Court, whiskies drunk in members' rooms to ease the tension. At one inquiry into family law, Andrew Peacock came up to me and challenged our 'bias'. I bridled and denied the charge, pointing out that our analyses of election promises were equally objective and critical of Government and Opposition proposals. He declared, 'I'll fix you when I become Prime Minister; I'll simply change your Board.' I made him repeat this in front of others and said it was a disgrace to threaten a body set up as an independent statutory authority. In the end, that is what happened, though Peacock never became PM.

It was Brian Howe who wanted to drag us into his new mega-department, a move I opposed because I did not want the Institute to deal only with 'welfare' family issues. He won of course, and then our problems came from within the bureaucracy. Policy researchers within that Department could see no reason for our existence; we were too independent in our comment on government policy, we were not doing the research they and their Minister thought most relevant, and the Secretary of the Department did not like my standing up to him on policy matters in front of his senior staff at Executive Planning meetings.

Every government body at the time was subject to the new managerialism of corporate neo-liberalism. The Department to which the Institute was attached required us to develop a 'Corporate Plan', replete with mission statement, KPIs, time schedules and expected outcomes. This did not 'fit' with a research body whose funding now consisted not just of the annual federal allocation (by then close to \$2 million) but also of money for specific studies funded by State governments and other bodies (such as the Defence Department). Planning for some studies would take longer than expected because of bureaucratic procedures beyond the Institute's control, and certainly their completion and report finalisation were often dependent on political considerations or changes of government in the States giving us the funds. Nonetheless, I was faced with having to conform to Canberra's demands.

My trusted long-serving administrative deputy, David Keane, had resigned to start up in private business (on the urgings of his ambitious wife) and I had appointed a new Deputy Director (Management) on the basis of his experience with this sort of corporate double-speak.

Robert Kidston was a freakish-looking bureaucrat – tall, long-necked, bespectacled and wearing a narrow-brimmed Akubra hat like the one John Howard wore on outdoor occasions. My wife took one look at him and said that would be the biggest staffing mistake I had ever made. She was right because he nearly destroyed me and the Institute. He came from Queensland with good references and I had appointed him because he seemed able to follow the new management-speak of Canberra – mission statements, goals, values, KPIs, etc. But he could not write plain English and drove both me and the staff mad with endless management meetings and papers that were not just incomprehensible but also illiterate. I spent hours trying to edit, comment, improve, cajole him into a more sensible approach but he was stubborn. A good Catholic, conservative Queensland, his wife commented once that she did not like driving through ‘the slums’ of Fitzroy from Kew because they were frightening. Not even Kew could compete with St Lucia, Brisbane.

Kidston set about writing the Institute’s corporate plan, and this caused a near riot within the staff. He could not pen a simple sentence, jargon abounded, he held endless meetings with staff from different areas of research until they became so frustrated they would come to me threatening to stop coming to work. I had to sit with his drafts and correct spelling, sentence structure, try to clarify what was meant and simplify it all. He in turn became resentful of me and (as I later learnt) began undermining me with some disgruntled staff members and with my new Board Chairman, Professor Terry Carney.

That period saw the greatest control attempts I had experienced from Canberra, including the ill-considered contract funding of the Australian Living Standards Study, and Minister Howe’s failure to publish any of its major reports.

Indeed, it was this study and its budget blowouts that led to the endless staff strife I experienced in my last years at the Institute and to my resignation once it had all been sorted out. It was too big a study, employed too many short-term contract staff we could not get rid of even when the money had run out, had too many cooks stirring the pot, and (in spite of his interference with the study design to include ‘disadvantaged areas’) produced findings which did not support the Minister’s views on higher density living, housing policy and uniformity of service provision. Our core staff split into two camps, one led by my Deputy Director (Research) Peter Macdonald, in support of contract staff, the other led by me in an attempt to cut costs and restructure the way our

research plans were divided up. I found myself losing touch, losing confidence in my capacity to lead, losing sleep and losing the will to carry on.

“It is easy ... terribly easy ... to shake a man’s faith in himself. To take advantage of that, to break a man’s spirit, is devil’s work.” – George Bernard Shaw.

“So it is more useful to watch a man in times of peril, and in adversity to discern what kind of man he is; for then at last words of truth are drawn from the depths of his heart, and the mask is torn off, reality remains.”

— Titus Lucretius Carus

But I didn’t want to retire as such. As Lauren Bacall said in a TV Parkinson show interview – “I don’t understand people who want to retire. What is the point of stopping? As long as you can walk and talk!” But you had to be able to walk.

Resigning and moving on

Why did I leave the Institute, something I had founded and built into an internationally renowned research body? The reasons were many but immediate causes loomed large.

One day on the drive into work, at the Clifton Hill overpass, I felt sick. I kept driving, but once past the Smith St. turnoff from Heidelberg Rd., I had to stop. My stomach was churning, my head reeling. I pulled over and threw up some of my breakfast into a handkerchief. Facing work was more than I could bear. This, after 13 years as the high profile Foundation Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies. This, at the age of 57, still fit, alert and not ready to retire.

For months now, I had been wrestling with staff rebellion, disloyalty, everyday angst dealing with Canberra-imposed demands for a bullshit corporate plan, feeling that my staff had lost the plot. I too had lost the plot, the public sector union was stupidly supporting temporary contract staff we could no longer afford to pay, my Deputy Director (Research)was on their side not mine, and I felt I had lost the respect I had built up over many years of hard work in the cause of good family research.

The dilemma lay in not knowing whether this was self-pity, paranoia, or sheer bastardry, whether I had reached the end of my use-by-date or whether I was being done over by people who were the beneficiaries of my efforts on their

behalf but wanted me gone. And it was wreaking a toll on my family, my relationship with Patricia, my sanity and belief in self.

I had spent hours every night discussing the issues with my wife, ever patient, ever wise, plotting the next day's moves, what I would say to the unions, to staff meetings, to my Deputy Director, to the Board, how I would handle the External Review, yet another review imposed on us by an unsympathetic government, headed by Professor Fred Gruen, a grim-faced Canberra academic economist who knew nothing of the actual research and policy thrust of the Institute.

This is how the world ends, when you have put work ahead of family life, believed you were doing the best you could, believed in what you were doing, thought you were a good leader because they were following you, and then found that half of them were not, half of them were threatened by what you wanted them to do, preferred to keep on doing what they were comfortable with, not wanting to venture into new directions, new challenges, or even meet (in form if not in substance) the demands of the new economic rationalist managerialism of the Commonwealth Government.

To be honest, I had been facing my demons and looking for a way forward – or out. I had even applied for the position of Professor of Sociology at Monash University and been interviewed, unsuccessfully. The staff there had begged me to apply, wanting someone more activist, more applied in focus, less Eurocentric and theoretical than their current professors. My heart was not fully in it, the thought of returning to university politics not attractive. I presented a challenging paper to the Sociology Department and could sense the hostility of the senior professor. As it happened, the old guard's dislike of my brand of policy-oriented research and activist sociology did not appeal to the selection committee and I was relieved to hear I would not be offered the job. But I had no idea where else I could go and gave up looking at professional job ads to focus on the problems I had at the Institute.

When I was thinking of leaving my position as Director of the AIFS, during my ongoing staff troubles and agonizing about whether to quit, my wife suggested I should go to a confidential counsellor. The idea of disclosing my problems to anyone other than her was anathema, but finally I agreed to see a trusted ex-counsellor from the Family Court, Laurie Moloney. He was shocked when I said I had lost confidence, that I was depressed, commented that he had always seen me as supremely in charge of my own life, full of verve and enthusiasm. I

explained it wasn't any lack of enthusiasm for the job, it was just being worn down by dishonest and traitorous staff, being constantly tired (as it turned out, a tell-tale sign of impending disease), finding it hard to keep up with the demands of the job after 13 years of hard work.

He asked me what I did 'for yourself'. I said I sometimes painted pictures, but they were never good enough to show; that I played tennis occasionally, but not very well; that I used to play violin but had given up because of pressures of time; I cooked and gardened and looked after the grandchildren when I could. 'No', he said, 'I mean, what do you do that's just for you?' I could not answer. Clearly, he was on to my drive for achievement, my other-directedness, my need for success and recognition, and insisted I go away and find some time when I could just do what I enjoyed, in my own time, for myself, not to please anyone else. I tried, but failed, a sad commentary on my total work and achievement focus.

In a quandary, I decided the job itself was a major problem and I would never escape into 'myself' – whatever that was – until I had resigned. When my librarian Mari Davis told me one day, referring to staff battles, "They all hate you", I was shocked to the core. Patricia said, "That's rubbish. That's an awful thing to say. But you don't have to put up with that. We've got plenty of money, I'm still working. Why don't you just leave and tell them 'up 'em?" That too was a shock, because I had actually never truly considered leaving, despite my discontent and vague thought about other jobs. But her comment, not the counsellor's abjuring me to 'be myself', was my saviour. The veil lifted, I could see a way forward and I took it. I told my Board Chair I intended to resign, that I would stay until we had worked out all the staff conflict and budgetary issues, and they could start looking for a replacement. He in turn was shocked, but it cleared the path to decisive action and from then on my depression and self-doubt lifted.

Action was the answer, as always. Instead of agonizing, weaving, changing my mind, equivocating, I planned a staffing restructure which would help an incoming Director, dismissed my absurdly bureaucratic finance manager, told my Deputy Director Research that no more nonsense would be tolerated, confronted the public sector union about untenable casual assistants, and had every Board member on my side. I no longer cared what the problematic staff rump thought about me, rallied the reliable ones to my cause, and within

months had everything sorted out. At last, I thought, 'I can see light at the end of the tunnel.'

Initially, when I tried to restructure the staff and revamp our research program, I had been disappointed at my senior staff members' reactions. Some were reluctant to take on more responsibilities for 'areas' of research I thought they should now drive instead of me. Others claimed not to have the expertise to move into new issues which I saw as increasingly important. When I outlined a new research program on ageing as it affected family life in Australia, clearly likely to be a key policy issue even then in the early 1990s, I was told 'we know nothing about ageing'. My response was a terse, 'We didn't know anything about families when we started up the Institute. We had to learn then and we will learn about ageing now.'

Pressure from Canberra meant we had to have a 'corporate plan', not just the research plan I had always worked from quite successfully. Rob Kidston was also not good with financial statements and the Board became restless as quarterly reports had differing budget starting points, possible grants from state governments and elsewhere were added in with hard dollars in hand already and progressive outlays were unclear. This was a shock after eight years of plain speaking and clear budgets from my initial Deputy on the administration side, David Keane, who had unfortunately resigned under pressure from his wife to leave the public service and earn 'some real money'. (He did, as franchisee of 'Fast Eddies' in Bourke St.)

The final crunch came when I learned that Kidston was having secret meetings with the new Chair of my Board, Professor Terry Carney, suggesting that it was time I was gone as Director, that I was difficult to work for and he knew more about management than I did. Terry Carney was an awkward little academic, succeeding the brusquely affable Justice John Fogarty as Chair. Appointed by Minister Brian Howe, Carney announced at his first Board meeting that 'things are going to be different'. He was going to 'run' the Institute, he intended to be much more directive and ensure that he would be closely involved in all decision-making. Under the Family Law Act the key amendments made for the Institute were precisely to clarify the Board's role as having 'the general direction' of the Institute's work, and the Director's role, responsible to Parliament, for the executive functions and day-to-day management. No previous Board Chair had tried to interfere with or question how I did that, setting very clear research directions (under my active guidance of course),

keeping me and the staff up to the mark in meeting deadlines, and backing me when outside pressures were brought to bear pushing in other directions from that agreed plan.

I had to take a stand, so immediately challenged him on the legal grounds of the wording of the Act. I said I would not accept the Chair interfering in the day-to-day management of the Institute, that if things went wrong of course the Board could query and censure, but my appointment was by the Governor-General in Council, Parliament could remove me if required, it was not a political appointment and I would not tolerate one person's bias (in his case clearly a Labor Party bias, with close connections to the Minister Brian Howe) affecting how we did our work. To their credit, every other Board member agreed with my stance, Carney was humiliated and my relationship with him was damaged beyond repair. To his credit, nonetheless, when I moved to restructure and remove Rob Kidston, Carney understood and supported me. He also supported me against the other Deputy Director, Research, Peter McDonald, who objected to the restructure because he thought we should retain several short-term contract staff who could no longer be afforded.

After long discussion with the Chair and the Public Sector Union, I told Kidston he was to go because the Board agreed having two Deputy Directors was unnecessary and the work he had been doing could be done by a lower-level Finance Manager. He was to pack up that day and leave and would be compensated in the usual way. Kidston went white-faced, argued furiously against my action, threatened to have me removed as Director, then locked himself into his office, refusing to budge. He continued to come in for several days, sitting locked in his office, while he jiggled up support from his union. None of my staff was sorry to see him go, save the few such as the 'Brian Howe spy' Andrew Burbidge who would have preferred my demise and were busy spreading tales in the Minister's office.

Kidston's dismissal became mixed with the overall restructure and removal of contract staff, so I endured several long meetings with stroppy union officials, explaining that we had no money to keep on these contract people and it was up to me and the Board, not the Union, to decide how the Institute's budget would be spent.

In the end, money had to be found in the appropriation to keep some of the staff because they had been there longer than 6 months, and Kidston got a

substantial payout, one he used to build an extension on his Brisbane home which he and his wife dubbed 'The Edgar Wing'.

It was a relief to have him gone, but the problems with short-term contract staff and the Living Standards Study continued. My Deputy Director, Research was a highly competent researcher but a hopeless administrator. Costs exceeded funds, too many short-term contract staff were renewed, one or two senior staff were allowed to get away with extensive travel and failed to get reports written, so I had repeated clashes with him that took a toll. Because of its size, this study divided the staff into two camps, one loyal to him, the other annoyed at the way the study was distorting Institute priorities and thus loyal to me. I began to think having any 'Deputy' Director was unwise because the title carried a sense of entitlement to absolute control and what we needed was a good research 'Manager' instead. The Board agreed, but the few senior staff members I floated this idea with felt I was risking a revolt.

Bertrand Russell once said, "One of the symptoms of the approaching nervous breakdown is the belief that one's work is terribly important, and that to take a break would bring all kinds of disaster." As it happened, I did take a break in the middle of all this conflict and it did bring on disaster. My wife's sister had been widowed and we urged her to come on a holiday with us and another couple of friends to Alaska. This we enjoyed and then I went to the University of Calgary's Centre for Research on Family Law as an invited Fellow while the others toured New Mexico. It was during this stay that I began to hear of my Deputy Director's plotting and widespread staff discontent. Messages proposed differing forms of restructure, not acceptable to me, and I came home to face the music.

The Board was confused and concerned, the strongest members at that time being Professor Bob Gregory, Dame Margaret Guilfoyle and Senator Don Grimes. But they were supportive of my plans, Margaret Guilfoyle expressing her disgust at the way my Deputy had vilified me in front of the Board and insisting he 'has to go'.

I completely rewrote the Institute's Corporate Plan, this time in comprehensible English but still conforming to Canberra's managerial requirements, and I thought through a new structure which would make senior staff more directly responsible for areas of research under a Manager rather than a Deputy Director who thought he could control all the funds.

As a solution neared, that was when I decided to give the Board plenty of time to find a new Director who might reunite the staff and lead the Institute in new directions. I announced I would resign at the end of the year (1993) so they had 8 months to search. The staff meeting where I announced this was dramatic, with me outlining the decisions made, what had been achieved to sort out the financial mess and simply saying I would finish up at the end of the year. I could see both the smug sneers on the faces of the small opposing cabal and the shocked faces of those who had been with me longest, including the entire administrative staff who had hated the short Kidston regime. I knew I had made the right decision and walked out of the room to let them take it all in and speculate as they might.

As it happened, in September I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and had to leave for a major operation, so I walked out the door suddenly. The Board refused to continue working with the Deputy/Acting Director, Peter Macdonald; he was seconded by Brian Howe to work temporarily for the Department and finish the Living Standards Study reports, and a long search led to the appointment of Harry McGurk as Director.

I was now a feather duster.

"Few men of action have been able to make a graceful exit at the appropriate time." -Malcolm Muggeridge

"I shall enjoy my freedom from the tyranny of the In and Out boxes." – S. Dillon Ripley, on his retirement

"Now that it's all over, what did you really do yesterday that was worth mentioning?" – Coleman Cox

McDonald expected to be appointed but was not, the key Board members appalled by his lack of loyalty to me. He ended up back at the ANU where he continued doing excellent work in demography.

When I left, having been given barely a week to prepare for the operation, I issued a staff memo telling them precisely what I had, in order to avoid misleading gossip. My wife and I spent a few days on Double Island off Palm Cove in Queensland. It was Robert Holmes a Court's dream to build a sprawling mansion on one peak of his island but his death put a stop to such plans and Janet had just a caretaker couple and a gardener to staff the few burrees there.

It was idyllic, with calming music piped through the palms as we ate superb meals served outdoors, green lizards and birds part of the scene, trips round the island in the old army duck, having drinks at a table set up in the shallows as the sun set. Given that it may have been the end of a life well lived, we savoured every moment. As it turned out, the cancer was contained in the prostate despite tests showing it was a very aggressive form and would have spread within a couple of months had I not opted for radical surgery in preference to 'watchful waiting' (which one specialist suggested because I was 'very young' and 'it's an old man's disease really'.) My Type A personality would not allow for that, the thought of some years later finding it had indeed spread prompting my question, "And then what?"

Becoming a feather duster

"The trouble with life in the fast lane is that you get to the other end in an awful hurry." — John Jensen

"The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win you're still a rat." — Lily Tomlin

"Now that I'm here, where am I?" — Janis Joplin

"The winner is one who knows when to drop out in order to get in touch."
— Marshall McLuhan

"Any idiot can face a crisis — it's this day-to-day living that wears you out."— Anton Chekhov

"I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with the pain."— James Baldwin

By the time a new Director for the AIFS was found, the Don Edgar rooster had truly become a feather duster. I was not quite up to Montaigne's level of satisfaction with withdrawing from the world, still determined to 'finish the book I was writing' and not at all ready to live the rest of my life 'careless of death'.

I was still engaged with the ongoing success and political impact of the Institute of Family Studies and was concerned at who might replace me. Professor Harry McGurk was a strange appointment in many ways. He did not know the Australian policy scene, he was a UK child psychologist with little interest in broader social issues, and he was determined not to have anything to do with me. An offer of a cup of coffee and a chat to welcome him to Australia and fill him in on a bit of the background was rejected; he attacked me bitterly when newspapers referred to me as Foundation Director of the AIFS (sometimes as Director still); and he ostracized and eventually drove out many of the initial staff I had appointed and worked with so well.

He did not arrive until several months after I had gone (having rejected a suggestion from Dame Margaret Guilfoyle that he withdraw before he had even started), and found career bureaucrat Marie Coleman (appointed as Acting Director in the interim), with help from the Department's Mary Murnane, had systematically destroyed the Institute's academic independence. Staff had been made public servants, whereas my insistence had been that we use ANU academic salary scales and titles to ensure their independence and the possibility of return to academe. Reports were now being vetted by Canberra bureaucrats and the Minister, more government lackeys were placed on the Board to do the government's bidding. McGurk, to his credit, valued academic integrity and fought to defend the Institute's independence but he was no match for the wiles of Canberra apparatchiks. After just a couple of years, McGurk, unhappily, died from a heart bypass renewal operation, and again the Institute went into hiatus.

A long international search angered many good overseas candidates who were encouraged to apply but at the last minute were told it had to be an Australian. The selection committee and Board recommended the appointment of Professor Jan Carter, formerly with the Brotherhood of St Laurence and then head of the Social Work Department at the University of Melbourne. The Minister (Senator Jocelyn Newman) approved and was to take the name to Cabinet, as required by the Act.

Then Prime Minister John Howard intervened; he did not have the name put to Cabinet, overruled the recommendation (for no known reason, rumours about his wife Janet's intervention notwithstanding) and the position languished until an ex-bureaucrat, David Stanton, was appointed for three years as Acting Director and then Director. Such manoeuvres made it unlikely that any future

job advertisement would attract the best of independent academics. Indeed, the position is now appointed, not advertised on the open market (though the Institute was lucky to get its next Director, Professor Alan Hayes, an excellent academic and judicious leader). It seems governments these days do not like or want the objective findings of independent researchers to muddy the waters of ministerial and Prime Ministerial dictate. I would not have survived or tolerated such an attack on the purpose of the Institute, so it was as well I left the place when I did.

“No man can think clearly when his fists are clenched.” – George Jean Nathan

International Year of the Family, 1994

I maintained contact with the Institute and its work through the International Year of the Family, 1994. Though no longer there, I had lobbied hard for Australia to take the Year seriously and fund it properly, and was awarded UN recognition for this effort. The new Minister Rosemary Crowley had been a good supporter of the Institute throughout my later years, and I was made a member of the Executive of the Australian Council for IYF94. Bettina Cass was made Chair, and had been on our Board as well as chairing a major Review of Social Security in Brian Howe’s time.

IYF94 was an eye-opening experience, inspiring for what we heard round Australia in community consultations, souring for what happened in the end. Bettina Cass had her own agenda, one which favoured centralized control, planning and delivery of services. Everything we heard from people ran counter to this, demanding less top-down and more localized, community-responsive programs. Each member of the IYF Council wrote copious sections for the final report, only to find Bettina ignored and omitted them, putting in their place her own views on what should be done. We protested but it was too late. Worse, she changed a significant recommendation on family payments and leaked it to the press the day before the Minister was to launch the report. As a result, Crowley had to virtually disown the Report, and nothing positive came out of all our efforts. Thus are the ways of ideologues.

I have kept away from the Institute physically since my resignation, largely because the next Director Harry McGurk made manifest his lack of welcome, but also to avoid being a reminder of earlier days. I still see individual staff members, especially my later Secretary Narda Sowter who has lived through various successors. I have rarely been invited by the Board to any AIFS event since 1993, such as to give a conference paper in 2005. By 2007 the Act had been amended, the AIFS brought within the relevant federal Department and the Board abolished. It now has no academic independence, a matter of great regret for me.

As acting Director after McGurk's untimely death, David Stanton put the Institute on a more steady footing and did me the courtesy of inviting me to have lunch and to attend seminars from time to time. As well, the next Director, Professor Alan Hayes (appointed personally by Prime Minister Howard, not the Board), kindly invited me to present the opening keynote address at the Institute's 25th Birthday Conference in 2005. I was pleased to accept, but the Minister (Amanda Vanstone) decided she should do the opening and I was shifted to another plenary session on the second day. No matter, it was good to feel welcome again and I spoke about the Institute's long record in the area of families struggling to balance their work and family responsibilities.

I have since had lunch with the Director on a few occasions, and though I disagree strongly with the 2006 administrative changes (following the Uhrig Report) which abolished the Board, made the Director and the Institute's research program directly responsible to the Minister, thus losing its original independent statutory authority status, I felt that, under him, the Institute was in sound hands and continued to produce work of value to both the government and the wider Australian public. They avoid, however, any research on family incomes and government benefits, central issues for all family life. In 2016, Anne Hollands was appointed Director and has welcomed input from me on various policy issues, but the old boy is best held at a distance. In 2018, they published the 100th issue of *Family Matters*, and I was asked to write a piece on the beginnings of the AIFS. I did so in good faith, only to find the editor was asked to censor some 'sensitive' comments I had made about political battles during my tenure. I won't agree to be involved again.

I fear the original purpose and value of the AIFS have been lost, because findings cannot be published without government interference. The research is still valuable and interesting, but the voice of the Institute has been hushed, and the public has little access to a view on family life and the social conditions producing change that might just challenge the status quo.

Chapter 11 : What to do now?

“Perhaps the best thing about the future is that it only comes one day at a time.” –

- (Dean Acheson)

“The winner is one who knows when to drop out in order to get in touch.”

– (Marshall McLuhan)

