

## Faces in the Street - Featuring 'Boy' Ercole

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'Boy' Ercole, Ograniser of the Grenfell Centenary, 1966.

### **FACE OF THE GRENFELL CENTENARY 1966**

#### **THE FACE**

Quinto Noel ('Boy') Ercole

#### **THE FAMILY**

Boy Ercole was born into an extraordinary family.

His father, Quinto Ercole, was born in 1870 in Campli, Italy, close to the epicentre of the earthquake this year.

His mother, Adele Veron, was born in 1885.

Quinto, a medical practitioner, came to Grenfell with the family in 1907, moving into the residence and surgery recently vacated by Dr Ismael Bradran.

At this time, there were two children – Velia (who later became a well known international author) and a one year old son who died shortly after the family's arrival in Grenfell.

Boy was born the next year, in 1908.

Dr Quinto later served as a medical officer in the Australian Army at Gallipoli and in Europe in WW1.

On his discharge and return to Grenfell, Dr Quinto contributed greatly to the early development of the Grenfell District Hospital.

#### **MEMORIES OF THE MAIN STREET**

Main Street and the Newsagency always played a role in Boy's life.

As a young boy, with his best mate, John ('Dinny') Lane, whose father owned the Newsagency, Boy spent many hours around the shop and the Main Street.

Boy and Dinny went to school together, where Dinny showed his entrepreneurial skills at an early age, taking pencils from his father's shop, and selling them at school.

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In winter, Boy and Dinny would watch the Sunday evening services of the Salvation Army from the Newsagency verandah.

These services were conducted around the tree in front of the shop in Main Street.

Alas, their interest was not due to any religious inclination, but rather to compete between themselves throwing coins into the fire lit to give warmth to the Salvation Army band players.

Boy finished his primary school in Grenfell and then attended St Stanislaus College, Bathurst, and Hawkesbury Agricultural College to prepare him for farming.

Boy possessed an extreme, individual intelligence which defied classification in the conventional way.

He started farming at 'Cambewarra', a property bought by his father, just before the Great Depression.

Boy's unique abilities quickly rose to the fore. His keen interest in animal health and his natural scientific ability made him a respected amateur veterinarian.

He became a district veterinary adviser with the national stock and station supply firm, Willcox Mofflin, working 'Cambewarra' on weekends.

During this time, he developed an effective anti-worm drench for a friend's pigs.

A rival firm later acquired the formula, giving Boy a huge shock walking down Bent Street, Sydney, to see it advertised in the window under his own name – 'Quinto'.

Alex Boyd, a well known agronomist with the Australian Fertiliser Services Association, heard of Boy's reputation and in later years came to discuss 'toxemia jaundice' with him.

Boy had known for 20 years that using lucerne would alleviate the complaint suffered by the livestock.

'Why didn't you make this known?' asked Alex Boyd.

'No bugger ever asked me,' replied Boy.

Throughout 1932, Boy kept a wonderfully written diary, an account of a young, single man in Grenfell, working hard and playing hard with his two great mates, Nevin Moffitt and Bill Dun.

The trio of friends were labelled 'The Three Graces' – Hope, Faith and Charity.

Throughout his diary, Boy refers affectionately to 'Hope' (Nevin) and 'Faith' (Bill). He himself was 'Charity'.

A few excerpts from the diary, together with colourful pieces of Boy's 'doggerel' (Boy's words), are currently being prepared for wider circulation.

From an early time, Boy managed to combine persistence and purpose with good humour.

His 'Bushfire Happenings' poem, with its play on ridding the town of tins of apple jelly jam, was penned while on active bush fire duty.

Once, when he was called away from the farm for a short time, his parting words to his helper Lou Laundess were, 'Lou, don't forget to fix the downpipe into the woolshed.'

Lou left the job until just before Boy's return – and when he finally climbed to the roof he was surprised to find a note waiting from Boy, 'Now you've done this, you can have the day off'.

Lou regretted leaving the job until early evening!

In WW2, Boy was posted to Port Moresby and later to the battlefields of Buna and Sanananda.

Again, in New Guinea, Boy's energy and interest in medical research took him in a new direction.

Finding some books on malaria in an abandoned doctor's residence, he began reading about the disease.

He was posted to the AIF's Medical Research Unit Cairns where he joined a team of medical scientists undertaking malaria research.

He co-wrote a number of scientific papers with Dr M. J. Mackerras and others, published in professional medical journals.

However, he resisted the urging of his colleagues to undertake a course in tropical medicine at the University of Sydney after the War, and instead, returned home to Grenfell, 'Cambewarra' and his new property, 'Jungara' on the Eualdrie Road. Boy had bought 'Jungara' to provide a home for his war-time bride, May 'Micheale' – known more often as 'Mike' – and their young daughter, Jeanne.

On his return to Grenfell, Boy commenced his life of civic duty to Grenfell.

His life was ruled by projects which stimulated his interest while he worked out answers and learnt the most he could about the subject matter.

matter.

He would not rest until he had completed his research and work.

Friends were used to him passing them by in Main Street, totally captured by his own thoughts and simply not registering their presence.

Just some of his projects he mastered included geology, stamp collecting, propagating geraniums and developing a shell collection, complete with neat, explanatory labels that would have been at home in a museum.

Fortunately for Grenfell, Boy took on two particularly significant projects for the town – helping establish the Grenfell Historical Society, and organising the Grenfell Centenary Celebrations. In Boy's world, nothing was hit or miss.

Everything had to be done carefully, fully and properly.

A young reader at the Grenfell library, then housed in the School of Arts building, remembers her surprise at seeing Boy on his hands and knees alone, scrubbing out the floor of the back room of the library which was to become the Grenfell Historical Society.

The same enthusiasm was shown in 1966, when Boy became the Organiser for Grenfell's Centenary celebrations.

This momentous week at the beginning of October, stands as one of the most memorable times in Grenfell's history.

Sitting up at the Allies Café, a year in advance, Boy would spread out his paperwork planning the week in painstaking detail.

The celebrations were a triumph.

The locals walked up and down Main Street in their period costumes; the men participated in the beard growing competition; a pageant of Grenfell's history unfolded on community floats at the Showground; a Grand Concert was held at Oddfellows' Hall; a ball was held in period dress and an historical train trip took place between Greenthorpe and Grenfell Station.

At the Grenfell Primary School, the 6th class prepared a maypole dance, dressed in period costume, focussing on entwining the complicated ribbon routine it had been practicing.

Little did the class realise that they would be joined by 'older students' – Boy and his friends, dressed in school uniform, taking the ribbons of the maypole and generally creating chaos.

Some of Boy's 'schoolfriends' included Mick Creech, Mary Hunter and Joan Roberts.

It was an event of such merriment, it has never been forgotten by those who witnessed it.

With his love of newspapers and magazines established in his youth, Boy gravitated often to the Newsagency.

The Nicoll family loved his presence, his dry wit and piercing observations.

He became a regular visitor for Sunday lunches and evening meals.

Boy took over the management of the Newsagency when the Nicoll family went on holiday – and they would return to a business beautifully managed, everything in order and up to date, and staff reluctant to let Boy go to return to the usual routine.

## **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Boy was involved in many community activities.

He was an active Rotarian and both he and Mike engaged in the social life of the town and district.

He became chairman of the board of Grenfell District Hospital.

But Boy will best be remembered for his work in helping establish the Grenfell Historical Museum, and for organising the 1966 Grenfell Centenary celebrations.

## **WHERE ARE THEY NOW?**

Boy retired from farming in 1968, and he and Mike left for Sydney to live in Cronulla.

Boy had been asked to manage a bookshop in Napoleon Street.

While managing the bookshop, he continued to focus on his very successful investment portfolio.

Boy's life was cut far too short with a melanoma in 1972. Mike stayed in Sydney, enjoying her life until she passed away in 2005.

Daughter Jeanne, who blazed a trail in academic achievement studying at the University of Sydney, Hawaii and the University of California, Columbia University and the International Management School of Geneva where she was one of the first to undertake an MBA degree, went on to a brilliant career.

She was appointed to International Nickel Australia Limited; PT International Nickel, Jakarta; CIG and the World Bank in Washington.

She was head hunted by the ABC to become its Director of Human Resources and held this position between 1984 -87.

She was nominated by the ABC to become its Director of Human Resources and held this position between 1984 -87.

In the publicity that surrounded her last, high level appointment, Jeanne paid tribute to her life in Grenfell, and growing up in a small country town.

In her newspaper interview, she thoughtfully identified and acknowledged that she had grown up with 'the country child's access to everything'.

Jeanne married too late in life (1990) to have children and tragically died of breast cancer in 1993.

As Mike noted in her contribution to People of the Weddin Shire, although no Ercoles are left in Grenfell, the family has a place in the Weddin Shire's history for its many and varied contributions – and their singular personalities and colourful lives.

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*Thanks to George Small, Geoff Nicoll, Geoff Hogbin and Phillip Diprose for their contribution to 'Faces in the Street'.*

*References also sourced from Michael Ercole's article on the Dr Quinto Ercole Family, 'People of the Weddin Shire', ed. Bruce Robinson and Gaynor England, 2001.*

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*'Faces in the Street' can also be viewed on the Grenfell Record website at [www.grenfellrecord.com.au](http://www.grenfellrecord.com.au) or via the Grenfell Record Facebook page at [https:// www.facebook.com/GrenfellRecord/](https://www.facebook.com/GrenfellRecord/)*

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