

Squalls

It was a miserable night for New Year's Eve revellers in Brisbane, thanks to a low-pressure system that had developed off the south-east Queensland coast. On the last evening of 1982, a Friday, heavy rain fell across the capital, and trade was down in the city's discotheques and bars. King George Square, at the foot of the City Hall tower, was deserted, its brass lions drenched.

Up in his old Queenslander at 12 Garfield Drive, in the shadow of the Paddington water tower, Police Commissioner Terence (Terry) Murray Lewis was taking in the first of 28 days official leave, sitting quietly at home as the rain drummed on the tin roof, reading editions of the Queensland Police journal, *Vedette*. (Determined to keep up with current affairs within and beyond the force, he may have taken special interest in reports on the development, since 1980, of the state-wide police computer system, modelled on the state government's network.)

Lewis would soon start packing for his annual pilgrimage to the Gold Coast. But the forecast – and some testify natural occurrences – heralded a gloomy opening to 1983. The *Courier-Mail* reported that a vast plague of bluebottles, aided by a strong northerly, had swept onshore at the Gold Coast, stinging swimmers. Beaches at Burleigh Heads, Nobby's Beach, Miami and Greenmount were temporarily closed after sharks were sighted offshore.

It would not deter Lewis. Despite the poor weather, the Lewises had a booking made for their annual break at Broadbeach South Pacific Plaza – room 1504 was waiting for them. A man ruled by routine, the clock and the calendar, Lewis had friends to catch up with. Belfast Hotel proprietor Barry Maxwell and his wife Sheelagh, Deputy Commissioner Syd ‘Sippy’ Atkinson and wife Norma, Gold Coast City Council alderman Sir Jack Edgerton and former TAB chairman Sir Albert Sakzewski were all pencilled in on his social calendar.

There would also be dinner with developer Eddie Kornhauser, close friend to National Party heavyweight Russell Hinze and the man who claimed, as his monstrous Paradise Centre evolved – a potpourri of hotels, waterslides, shops and restaurants – to have ‘virtually made’ Surfers Paradise single-handedly. Kornhauser, rumoured to be an associate of notorious Sydney businessman Abe Saffron, may have missed out on winning the Gold Coast bid for a casino the previous year, but he had made a firm friend in Commissioner Lewis. (‘Hinze introduced me to Kornhauser,’ Lewis says.)

A few squalls couldn’t put a dampener on Lewis, who had just celebrated his sixth year as Commissioner, having seen off his nemesis Ray Whitrod and taken the top job at only 48. He had purged the force of pro-Whitrod officers (or Whitrod’s ‘curly-headed boys’, as Lewis calls them) including Alec Jeppesen and Basil Hicks, and put in their place his own acolytes. He had survived police ministers that didn’t suit him – most recently the garrulous Hinze, replaced by the affable Bill Glasson. And he had firmly cemented his friendship with Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen. Lewis had powerful allies.

The Commissioner was in regular contact with his old mate Jack Reginald Herbert, master organiser of the corrupt system known for decades within the force as The Joke – an elaborate, multi-million dollar scheme of kickbacks from illegal gambling, SP bookmakers, brothels and escort services. Likewise, Anthony (Tony) Murphy, so-called member of the legendary Rat Pack along with Lewis and

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Glendon (Glen) Patrick Hallahan, who had retired just the previous week at only 55 years of age. Lewis himself was about to turn the same age at the end of February, but retirement couldn't have been further from his mind. He had another decade in him at the very least. He coveted a knighthood, and the Premier had intimated a plush posting in Los Angeles or London after his retirement from the force. Terry Lewis wasn't going anywhere.

Despite his salary – he often bemoaned he was the most poorly remunerated Police Commissioner in Australia – Lewis had, all of a sudden, been making some canny property investments. While he had once toyed with the idea of leaving the force under Whitrod and trying his hand as a real estate agent, and acknowledging his wife Hazel's excellent eye for a property bargain, Lewis had been dabbling in the market. On the advice of his chartered accountant, James Baker, who had an office at 164 Melbourne Street, South Brisbane, the T.M. & H.C. Lewis Family Trust was established in October 1980.

As of 30 June that year, Lewis's asset position consisted of the family home at 12 Garfield Drive, personal effects, furniture and savings to the value of \$53,916. In the financial year to June 1981, Lewis had begun his property splurge, purchasing another house in Garfield Drive – number 29, a stucco and orange roof-tiled bungalow. A hundred metres from the Lewis family home, on the other side of the street, its supreme views took in the CBD and the hills of Paddington sweeping over to Toowong and the University of Queensland campus in St Lucia. 'You thought you were setting up things for the future,' says Lewis. '[It] was on the right hand side [of Garfield Drive] ... a pigsty. Hazel and the kids ... we used to borrow a utility and get rid of the rubbish, cleaned it all up, painted it inside [and] rented it.'

In addition, the Lewises had become aware of two towers of luxury units planned for 24 Dunmore Terrace, Auchenflower, with views of the city and the Brisbane River. It would be known, on construction, as Coronation Towers, replete with tennis courts and a swimming

pool. The developers had an ‘off the plan’ purchase offer in place and Lewis put down deposits on two units in the complex – \$8700 on unit 22B, and \$9900 on unit 37B. The money for the deposits had come from Lewis’s substantial savings. Come December 1981, Coronation Towers was open for business.

Lewis then put a \$20,000 deposit on a block of land in Bardon through lawyers Gilshenan and Luton. (And, according to his diaries, he and Hazel would, in just a few weeks’ time, be inspecting a ‘mansion in Hamilton’.) The property transactions had left the Lewises’ savings reduced to \$12,349, but in mid-1982 he quickly sold unit 22B for a small loss, keeping the more prestigious unit 37B, and ended the year with a growth in savings to \$31,592.

His finances were supplemented, as they had been for some years according to Lewis, with winnings from the racetrack (the bets always supposedly placed by his punting-mad mother, Mona), which accountant Baker later said in a statement ‘averaged somewhere in the order of \$3000 to \$5000 per year’. Not bad, considering the average wage in 1983 for a police officer was \$300 a week.

Curiously, Commissioner Lewis gave an interview to a local newspaper in August 1982 telling the reporter he left nothing to chance when it came to his job, and he applied that attitude to his personal and home life. He had the working conditions and welfare of thousands of police officers in his hands, he claimed. Decisions affecting his staff were only made after the consideration of all available facts and information. ‘I haven’t much interest in punting or lotteries and only rarely can be persuaded to have a fling,’ he said. ‘Luck hasn’t had a part in developing our police force as the most effective and efficient in Australia.’ He didn’t even have a lucky number, he told the reporter.

Nevertheless, Lewis was more than financially secure come the dawn of 1983. And there were other things in the pipeline for the year. Both Lewis and Murphy were suing the Australian Broadcasting Corporation over its controversial *Nationwide* program of March 1982.

From Lewis's point of view, a legal victory over the ABC just might provide a financial windfall.

In the show, reported by journalist Alan Hall, two former police officers – Kingsley Fancourt and Bob Campbell – had gone on the record denouncing Lewis's police administration and alleging corruption. Following the national broadcast, Campbell had fled Queensland in fear for his life and that of his wife and children, while Fancourt had remained outside Anakie, in Queensland's western gemfields, and ridden out the criticism. He, too, had every reason to be worried. He'd had a couple of close calls since outing the Rat Pack – wheel nuts on his vehicle had been loosened on a number of occasions, resulting in accidents, and the brake line on one of his trucks had been severed.

As the rain shook the leaves of the palm trees that grew along the spine of Garfield Drive, Lewis may also have picked up the New Year's Day edition of the *Courier-Mail*. The front page of the Saturday weekend section carried a huge feature on the Queensland Premier. Headlined: LIFE ACCORDING TO JOH, the preface to the question-and-answer style article, written by journalist John Hamilton, stated that Bjelke-Petersen would turn 72 on 16 January, and that the long-term leader of the National Party had been accused of being too old for the job. His enemies believed he was growing senile.

'I found absolutely no evidence to support this in a long interview with the Premier,' wrote Hamilton. 'The man glows with good health, looks about 50, and his mind is so active it continually races ahead of his mouth, leaving sentences half-completed, thoughts half-expressed. He is, simply, a phenomenon.'

In the interview, the Premier bashed trade unions, suggested the Foreign Investment Review Board be abolished, called for all Indigenous land rights decisions to be immediately halted, criticised foreign aid, made some noise about communists and denied he was an autocratic leader. 'I'm one of those people who believe that one is

in God's hands ... I don't believe that life is just a game of chance,' Joh said. 'As a believer, I believe that there is a purpose in life and that things are ordained.'

Lewis had a week in Brisbane before he and Hazel headed down to Broadbeach on the Gold Coast. He attended to some correspondence, no doubt typed on his old manual typewriter in his office nook at home; having used the manual since his first days as a constable in 1949.

As the rain continued to sheet down in Brisbane, Lewis took in a movie – *Who Dares Wins*, a British terrorism thriller starring Lewis Collins, Richard Widmark, Edward Woodward and Australia's own Judy Davis. During the closing credits, the socialist anthem 'The Red Flag' was played. 'So raise the scarlet standard high,' the song went. 'Beneath its shade we'll live and die/Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer/We'll keep the red flag flying here.'

As Lewis walked out of the Hoyts entertainment complex at 167 Queen Street, with that song in his head, he must have believed he was precisely the right man in the right job at the right time for Queensland. Since the demise of Whitrod he had proved a good friend to government. His men had dutifully policed Bjelke-Petersen's arcane street march prohibition laws in the late 1970s, for instance, ignoring calls that Queensland had become a police state. If the boss wanted something, then he got it. Dissent from the government line was quashed.

Joh and Terry were on the same page. The red flag would not be flying any time soon in Queensland, Australia, if Commissioner Lewis could help it.

A Late Call