

No LONGER DOWN UNDER

AUSTRALIANS CREATING CHANGE

MIKE BROWN

AN HONEST COP

ex-police commissioner Ray Whitrod
The key of integrity

GROSVENOR BOOKS

'When supercop Ray Whitrod came to town in April 1970, it should have been a trouble-free era for the Queensland police force. Nothing could have been further from the truth,' wrote the police reporter in Brisbane's *Sunday Sun*, reviewing Whitrod's seven-year battle to expose corruption. 'From the moment Mr Whitrod became police commissioner he was under siege from within. He never had a chance.'

The journalist's style may be somewhat colourful; but the facts were essentially accurate. Whitrod had come to Queensland's top police job with excellent credentials.

He had been the first Commissioner of Australia's Commonwealth Police. At the time of his appointment he was head of the 3,000 police of pre-independent Papua New Guinea. He had served in intelligence and with the Royal Australian Air Force and had more academic qualifications than any other policeman in the country. Even then he was known as an 'honest cop', the sort that the Queensland cabinet were looking for, it could be cynically said, to give their force a clean image.

Two major obstacles presented themselves on Whitrod's first day as Queensland Commissioner. The old brigade of the police union publicly poured scorn on Whitrod's plans to change promotion procedures. Known as 'the Green Mafia' because of their Irish background, the union's executive had powerful political friends including State Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen, a former police minister. Whitrod suffered their 'implacable hostility' to every reform he tried to introduce. He was regarded as a 'Mexican', an import from 'south of the border'.

The second obstacle became evident when a senior officer took Whitrod aside and warned him of serious corruption in the detective branch of the force. The allegations were repeated the next day by another senior constable. The two officers claimed Whitrod's predecessor had recruited three detectives to act as 'bagmen' and they were collecting bribes in excess of half a million dollars each year through an extensive police protection racket. Known as 'the rat-pack' they operated under the cover of the Vice Squad, collecting from illegal bookmakers and the prostitution industry.

Whitrod now says that his main mistake in Queensland was to try to move too fast. But it took him 18 months before he could find officers trustworthy and courageous enough to form a Crime Investigation Unit (CIU), in order to break through the 'blue curtain' of police solidarity and uncover the 'bent coppers'. His driver on that first day was one of Whitrod's recruits. The union, of course, staunchly opposed the CIU's work, branding anyone who cooperated with them as 'police spies'.

Two more years passed before the CIU could land any solid evidence. A prostitute who had fled to Sydney agreed to come back to Queensland to give evidence, though she believed she would be killed if she did. Her information led to one of the 'rat pack' being charged. Despite tight security, tragically, she was found dead only days before the hearing - from what was

said to be a suicide by drug overdose. Another key witness died in a car accident; others backed out. One policeman ready to testify cracked under the pressure and had to be invalidated out of the force as a neurotic. Though Whitrod's team brought 23 cases against serving policemen to court, not one reached a successful conviction.

Whitrod had the backing of the Police Minister but a series of critical decisions he had made were countermanded by State Cabinet. Maintaining that his oath of office had been to uphold the law of the land, not to the government of the day, he tried to go direct to Premier Bjelke-Petersen. He was refused an interview.

The issue came to a head when Cabinet ignored the Commissioner's recommendation for his deputy and appointed instead an unknown grade 2 inspector, Terence Lewis. Some years earlier Whitrod, suspecting that Lewis was one of the 'rat-pack', had banished him to the country town of Charleville. But Lewis had a 'charmed life' with the Queensland Cabinet, it seemed, and they promoted him past 112 of his colleagues and 16 officers in spite of the unresolved allegation of corruption against him.

It was the last straw: Whitrod resigned, at great personal financial cost. Terry Lewis (later *Sir* Terence) went up one more notch and took Whitrod's place at the top of the force – until he was sacked by the Cabinet during the Fitzgerald Inquiry 12 years later.

Whitrod has sometimes been criticised for resigning on high moral principle rather than sticking it out. But he believed he had no option – he could not compromise the independence of the police force in the face of political interference. Had he stayed on, his deputy Lewis, with the Premier's backing, would have been effectively in control while Whitrod would have been seen an honest frontman at the top of a force riddled with corruption.

A failure? Not in the eyes of Neil Doorley, police reporter

on the *Brisbane Courier Mail*. 'Despite an over-riding shadow of corruption and union sniping, Mr Whitrod modernised the force in his seven years,' concluded Doorley. Besides far-reaching administrative restructuring, Whitrod started a police academy, introduced 320 women into the force, dramatically cut response time to emergency calls, and established an outside auditor to stop manipulation of statistics. Of the 41 reforms that Whitrod recommended, only one was not accepted – promotions by merit.

Clearly Whitrod's investigations and subsequent resignation triggered the media probes and public consciousness which made the Fitzgerald Inquiry a political necessity. As *The Australian* commented years later, 'Whitrod was one of the first crusaders who fought the corruption seen by many as endemic in Queensland's power structure... His resignation sparked a fierce debate over corruption in the police force and government.'

During the Inquiry Whitrod was called back to Brisbane, 12 years after he left, to give evidence. As the *Melbourne Herald* put it, 'to testify to a people grateful to him now for the sacrifices and enemies made in speaking out against the corruption he knew existed in the Queensland police force.' In the event Whitrod's evidence really only confirmed the depressing facts that already had come to light: evidence so damaging that, long before its findings were presented, the once-unrivalled state Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was forced to resign and his National Party was soundly defeated after 32 years in power. Police chief Lewis was found guilty on 15 counts and sentenced to 14 years' jail, stripped of his knighthood. Among the policemen convicted was one inspector who personally collected \$180,000 in bribes.

One part of Whitrod's testimony typified the man. He told how during his first Christmas in Brisbane two truck loads of gifts were delivered to his home. Some of the gifts he returned to the senders; on others he switched the labels and sent them

to third parties. 'The problem did not occur again,' he admitted with a grin.

Whitrod's appearance at the Inquiry could have been a self-righteous vindication of his role. There was none of it. Under cross examination by his former deputy, Terence Lewis, the 73 year-old Whitrod missed one of Lewis's quietly spoken questions. 'What was that, Terry?' said Whitrod, leaning forward to hear.

An ABC radio interviewer asked him if he still had any old enmity, any scores to settle. 'There are some people you may never be friends with, but at least you feel yourself that you've done your share in either standing up for a principle or apologising if you've been too hasty in your judgement,' replied Whitrod. 'I can't think of anybody that I feel I need to take the olive branch to...'

As Ray Whitrod concluded his testimony before the Fitzgerald Inquiry and stepped down from the stand, a voice in the crowded public gallery called, 'Aren't we going to clap?'

♦ ♦ ♦

♦ ♦ ♦

After 42 years of police work, the abrupt end of his police career in Queensland was a blow. Moving back to his family

home in Adelaide, he told *The Advertiser* he felt frustrated – not broken, defeated or even disillusioned, just 'frustrated'. He wanted to go fishing. Or to study Siberian migratory birds in the South Australian salt marshes, a hobby developed while accompanying Prince Philip on dawn bird-watching expeditions around Canberra.

When he hung up his uniform for the last time, Ray possibly smarted that a newspaper described him as an 'overweight top cop'. So at 68 he took up early-morning jogging and lost 28 kilos – in preparation for the Adelaide marathon. For the record, he came first in his age class in the 42 kilometre race and later ran the Canberra marathon with his grand-daughter. Twenty years later he has paid for this adventure with arthritis and hip replacement operations.

But then Whitrod was faced with another call to duty which he couldn't refuse. It came from the parents of the victims of 'the Truro murders'. The skeletons of several teenage girls had been found in a field outside Adelaide. They were victims of two men, both out on parole, who had picked girls off the streets then violently raped and murdered them. The trauma suffered by the parents, brothers and sisters was horrendous. 'We're so grateful that you are doing something to help the victims of crime,' said one of the mothers during a phone call to Whitrod. At that point, Whitrod *had not* intended to *do* anything. A newspaper had quoted his comment, made in a public meeting some days earlier, on the \$750,000 being spent to counsel prisoners. Whitrod had asked, what was being done to compensate the members of the public who were victims of crime?

When confronted in that phone call by one such victim Whitrod could not turn a blind eye. He and Mavis invited the woman, with several other parents of those murdered, to their home 'for a cup of tea and scones'. As the Whitrods listened to their suffering two things happened. First, Ray's eyes were opened: 'Like all policemen I'd seen plenty of victims. We

would run into their homes, get details of the crime and then go off to chase the criminals. I suddenly realised that I had never considered the effects, particularly the psychological effects, on the victim.'

Secondly, Ray noticed that the victims seemed to get a lot of help from each other. There was an empathy between them which they complained was lacking with some social workers. They decided to start 'a little self-help group' that Sunday afternoon.

From the start Ray knew it was squarely in his lap. 'Except for my first application to join the police cadets, I never applied for any job. They had always been offered to me, presented as a challenge. This one came with all the hallmarks of a similar call to duty.' The fishing rod and binoculars stayed in the cupboard.



The 'little self-help group' grew to an organisation with a paying membership of 1700 families, as well as influential political, legal and social-work figures. Called Victims of Crime Service (VOCS), its backbone was volunteers who have suffered from violent crime themselves. There was Judy who was confronted by the mutilated body of her murdered 18 year-old son; Marion, mother of two, sexually assaulted in her own home; John, stabbed seven times by an intruder. These volunteers provided support and counselling to other victims, and offered themselves as 'court companions' during stressful trials.

When VOCS was first formed in 1979, some professional counsellors were full of dire warnings about victims assisting victims. Now there is considerable clinical evidence to support the benefits of that approach. Ray noticed another process in operation: 'Pain tends to make you centred on your own suffering. When your attention is diverted to someone with

more recent injury, it helps you overcome your own feelings and become part of the healing process.'

Whitrod was not satisfied to stop there. Structural change was needed. VOCS became active in lobbying for legislative reform of the criminal justice system in order to give justice to all. It was a process of 'restoring the balance to the scales of justice', as one member put it.

An unrelenting detective Whitrod researched international developments, and in 1979 attended a conference in Germany where he became a founding member of the World Society of Victimology. During the six years he served on its executive, the Society defined a set of principles safeguarding the rights of victims and had them successfully placed on the agenda of a United Nations Congress in Milan. This was the first time victims had been recognised in a UN forum. Whitrod was part of the Australian delegation to this Congress in which Chris Sumner, former Attorney General in South Australia, proposed the resolution. Whitrod was one of the drafters of the 'Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice Relating to Victims of Crime and the Abuse of Power', ultimately passed by the UN General Assembly in 1985.

Sumner returned to his state Parliament and introduced a similar set of 17 principles which addressed victims' rights and their treatment. 'There is a whole new move starting in South Australia, new to Australia and new to the world, about where the victim has a role in the criminal justice system,' claimed Whitrod in *The Advertiser*. The SA Police Force may have been the first in the world to have a special branch dedicated to pursuing the rights of victims of violent crime and to review the way police treat them. Every state in Australia now has legislation giving compensation to victims. Some, like South Australia, raise the needed revenue through a five per cent surcharge on fines.

For its first 10 years VOCS was supported almost entirely by membership fees. The Whitrod home phone was the

after-hours emergency number for victims desperately needing help, sometimes in the middle of the night. But now government grants and levies have enabled the agency to grow into a fully professional 'Victim Support Service', the only one operating on this basis in Australia. Volunteers still play a role in the organisation, complementing the work of professional counsellors.

The image of the tough super-cop who cracked down on rowdy student demonstrations in Brisbane somehow does not match with that of a grandfatherly figure quietly counselling a teenage rape victim. Yet that is Ray, a man whose pursuit of justice has brought him many enemies, including some in power structures, and yet whose humanity and compassion have won him a whole tribe of genuine friends. But that doesn't make him soft. He is tough on himself and those under him in his pursuit of ethical principles; and yet generous to a fault in seeing the other person's point of view or respecting their beliefs.

◇ ◇ ◇