

Chapter IX

Vocational Education

This will probably be the shortest chapter in my memoir. However it is a vitally important part of my life. I think it is fair to say TAFE 'rescued' me when I was in a very dark space. I had not long before spent 10 days in the North Side Clinic at St Leonards in Sydney at Dr Richard Abbotts' insistence. Thank God for both. Sarah also intervened at the right time. It must have been hugely difficult for her with two small children, the farm and a husband falling apart? The reasons are many and varied but I had been on full fast-forward mode in my life for a long time. I still had many commitments and should have been at the pinnacle of my lifetime attainments. Family and farm were highest on my agenda but it was the practice which provided the income and the means. Few outsiders appreciate how life as a full time practising veterinary surgeon has the capacity to destroy? The statistics bear this out. In addition I was contributing to both community and profession in spades. I overdid it while others were more content to slumber and/or slide. I sometimes felt very strongly others were not pulling their weight? To some extent this was true; most chose an easier approach. I was hypersensitive about malign criticism.

There were many in the thoroughbred cabal who levelled deceitful accusations. The veterinary practice was the butt of dinner party circuit ridicule by the loudmouthed and loquacious who were otherwise condescending to one's face? Duplicity was their rubric. It was extremely hurtful and threatening. They were grossly unfair and equally inaccurate. I learned then that the thoroughbred industry consists largely of meretricious motley at the best of times. Those who speak loudest and longest are the ones who are believed. There are a few exceptions. Sadly substance abuse became part of my diet. I had an appetite for alcohol. I still think that I might have recovered quicker and better if I had been able to take a long break. This was impossible with the multitude of obligations I had.

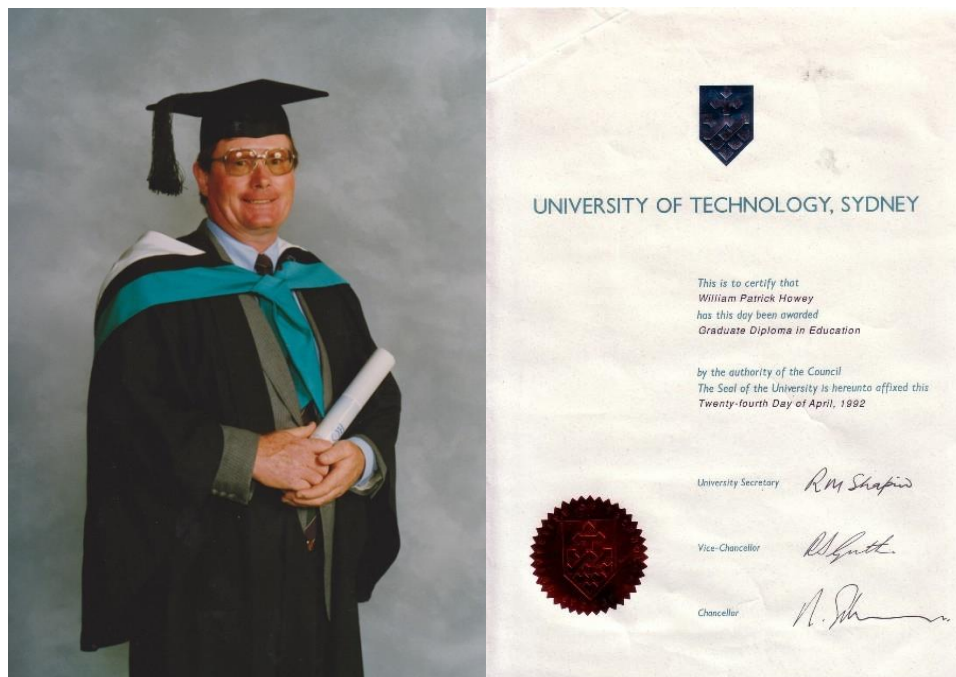
I applied for and was accepted as a Teacher of Agriculture (Horses) with the NSW TAFE Commission. The original job was advertised for Maitland. I was assigned to the inchoate campus in Muffett Street, Scone. I think this was a favour? I should be grateful. The site was basic; it was located in an old machinery shed owned by Scone identity Les Ham and leased by TAFE. Rick Banyard and Ivan Denyer were the resident teachers supported by Mike Thew and Mark Judge. Jenny Lewis was the slightly bucolic administrator.

My first introduction to the site was perhaps the low point of my life at that stage. I was assigned a small table in a dark corner of a very basic teachers' room shared with three others. It was very different to what I had been used to in another very recent life. Humble pie was on the menu but there was no alternative. I had to dig in and dig deep. The transition was anything but easy. Teaching is hard to start with. I vividly recall my first morning when I would not have turned up without Sarah's cajoling. It was touch-and-go. Fortunately I was well supported by my fellow pedagogues. Aggro head teacher Rick Banyard posed a few problems but was regularly away on other business. Gradually I worked into the routine. Sometimes there were 4 hour segments of night classes. These were hard to negotiate at first. However the enrolled students were ready to learn; they were on your side. Occasionally there were some hard cases but mostly it was fairly casual. I managed to survive the first round.

Within two years discussions began about establishing a brand new dedicated campus on the site recently acquired by the Hunter Valley Equine Research Foundation at Satur. I was intimately familiar with this process. Negotiating the trammels of the gargantuan NSW TAFE Commission bureaucracy was another matter. Bubble diagrams were the flavour of the era. Suffice it to say we prevailed. A new subsidiary site of the Hunter Institute of TAFE was mooted.

My journey with and through TAFE had only just begun. A condition of employment was to undertake a course of instruction leading to a Graduate Diploma in Adult Education through the University of Technology in Sydney. It was two years part time. For the first two semesters we were required to travel to Sydney for two days per week on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Air travel return service by light aircraft between Scone and Sydney was available then but on its last legs. We were lucky. Accommodation was provided in a Motel at Harold Park. It was dangerously near to many iconic pubs in the Glebe locality. It was memorable because a reincarnation of 'Manuel' from Fawlty Towers worked there. Instruction took place at the Haymarket Campus of UTS. All fees and expenses were covered in the contract. During the second year we were required to attend on one day only.

One incident in class stands out. We were asked to bring examples of our other lives. Fellow veterinarian Mike Cannon from Wollongong taught Zookeeping at Taronga. He brought a fully mature Diamond Python into Building X safely sequestered in a clothes bag. There was a hurried minor exodus by some over-sensitive class members when Mike unfurled his exemplar. Inevitably we all graduated. Mike Thew was a great help. Bart Trott from Inverell and John Norman from the Central Coast were helpful classmates. Bart could be dangerous with Coopers Brew available on-tap specials at the Forest Lodge Hotel! Collectively we were an eclectic if widely diverse cadre. We were now fully accredited TAFE Teachers of Agriculture.



UTS Graduation 1992

Lesson preparation was by far the biggest hurdle. We had been well instructed at UTS; almost to a fault. TAFE pay on an hourly rate was quite good until you looked under the carapace. We were allocated time on a 4:1 ratio. This effectively meant one hour in preparation for every four hours face-to-face instruction. The reality was actually the reverse at the beginning. Acquiring and assembling teaching and learning resources was simple enough. We had the experience. However arranging all of this in a structured way was problematic. Lesson plans were an Everest. The other major issue was assessment. The 'how, why and when' were initially daunting. TAFE was actually about skills training. The focus was on competency and how well trainees were able to perform identified tasks to industry standard. The reality was that many more hours of unpaid down time were required to establish a firm base from which to launch a career in teaching. I think every embryonic pedagogue identifies with this scenario. Not everyone is comfortable with this arrangement but it is a case of 'like it or lump it'.

Much of the training took place outside the classroom in either the real workplace or simulated conditions. Off-site teaching and learning properties had to be accredited also. Prevailing conditions such as workplace Occupational Health and Safety became the drivers. The bureaucracy was gargantuan. It is still one of the major impediments within the TAFE system which is otherwise admirable. I was to learn more not much later.

My journey through TAFE seems like a blur now but was actually full of vicissitudes and opportunities. My face-to-face teaching component was the first hurdle. It taught me a lot if not erudition for the enrolled students; humility was something I absorbed. Many were tragic discards from the traditional formal education systems. Rural poor and compromised individuals made up a significant component of almost every class. This was a second chance for most. It had been lack of opportunity in many cases. As the detritus of society they did want another perceived failure. It was easy to identify the illiterate and dyslexic. Sometimes these two coalesced. Self-esteem was occasionally at low ebb. However leaders emerged just as in any cohort. It was uplifting to take part in personal reconstruction. I recall a trainee farrier who volunteered the fact that he was illiterate by announcing it in class. He was the emblematic personification of an imagined farrier and known as 'Lurch'. Others quickly followed his lead by 'coming out' before it became fashionable. The admirable and courageous volunteer was actually dyslexic. This fact had never been identified coming from the bush. He was in fact extremely intelligent, graduated with distinction and became an icon in his industry. Within a short space of time he was President of the NSW Farriers and Blacksmiths Association. He is now a specialist in equine podiatry and an esteemed teacher himself.

From class teaching in Scone and interface with the higher echelons of the parent Hunter Institute of Technology I graduated to the bureaucratic step-ladder of Industry Specialist. Colleague Alan Fridley from Tamworth preceded me in this hierarchy. He also identified me as someone who could help him and shore up his portfolio. I think I did both. Alan was an intriguing if controversial character. Originally from California USA he had graduated in veterinary science through the University of Queensland. He never lost his distinctive accent. With considerable assistance of lavish financial resources provided by his first American wife he established and built state-of-the-art South Tamworth Veterinary Hospital on Duri Road. This was and still is a pioneer totemic institution.

One problem to become apparent was that Alan did not necessarily confine his amatory affections to just one person. Commanding considerable if somewhat superficial natural charm he could both captivate and alienate in just one sentence. He won some and lost some. Nonetheless I have to be thankful for his assistance in 'climbing the bureaucratic ladder'. He was both adept and adroit himself.

I became Alan's offsider within the TAFE NSW Commission's Rural & Mining Industry Trading Division. At first I was based at Ryde TAFE and allocated a tiny space in offices there. I was resented to begin with. TAFE teachers are notoriously both proprietorial and territorial. Ryde TAFE specialises in Horticulture and Hospitality. I was regarded as an imposter. However I kept my head down and concentrated on my work. This was mainly in Curriculum Development, Course Design and Accreditation. The push was to re-write everything in Competency Based Training (CBT) format. Learning Outcomes were the talisman. Modules were digestible chunks of learning. I think I did well. Operating in a sequestered remote location I was able to produce a tsunami of written work; so meeting tight deadlines. The TAFE touchstone was to spend more time in ubiquitous meetings. One close colleague told me later: 'You can't hit a moving target'. He was talking about Alan.

One area where I was able to offer informed insider information was the horse industry; especially thoroughbreds. On one occasion while at Ryde I fielded an anxious and anguished telephone call from Tony King. Tony had risen to the pinnacle CEO and General Manager of the Australian Jockey Club at Randwick. He started his career in racing administration at Orange Jockey Club and the Western Racing Association. He needed someone in a hurry to meet with a delegation from the Japan Racing Association (JRA) to discuss employee training in the thoroughbred industry. I was able to extricate him from his dilemma. The JRA very chivalrously presented me with a JRA tie which I still possess. This meeting was the harbinger of things to come. I introduced Alan Fridley to Tony King. Alan's eyes lit up! He had never seen the panelled luxury of the AJC offices in Alison Road. I could see he had set his sights. I was right!

Jockey training had long been the patrician domain of the AJC. It was an archaic, anarchic and antediluvian arrangement. Times were changing; rapidly. Genuine attempts were being made to address the deficiencies. Fellow veterinarian John Crowley had adopted the tantric previously occupied by Major Norman Larkin. John came with a sound credentials; his grandfather Sir Brian Crowley had been Chairman of the AJC. Alan Fridley could not resist the allure of the elevated AJC ambience. Within a very short period of time Alan was entrenched not only in charge of industry training for the racing industry but as second-in-command to Tony King at the AJC! His richly caparisoned office was right next door to Tony's. The fact that Alan knew nothing of the racing industry nor had ever been involved was no impediment. I will never know how he managed to cajole Tony King but Alan had both confidence and persuasive charm in spades; albeit meretricious. He did not succeed and was given 24 hours to vacate his office by one of Tony's successors. His egress from TAFE NSW R & M ITD did however create more space for me. I was able to step into a breach at headquarters in Lords Place, Orange. In this I was helped considerably by close 'curriculum' friend Paul Mascord. He even generously provided accommodation for me at his farm on Iceley Road. Industry Specialist Curriculum Manager Barry Porter was another senior TAFE colleague who I greatly admired.

I maintained this peripatetic existence for many months. The much traversed road between Orange and Scone became very familiar. I was no stranger to Orange. I liked the town. For five years I had represented my profession on the Board of Veterinary Surgeons of NSW. Its headquarters were also based in Orange; although we frequently met in Sydney to make it easier for those travelling by air intra-state.

Overlapping with my time spent in Scone, Ryde and Orange highly significant developments were taking place with the new campus planned for Scone. This was a piece of the jigsaw which evolved as part of the grand plan to relocate the Scone Race Club to a new site at Satur. I have written about this in detail elsewhere. I can honestly claim to be the only original proponent common to all parts of the mosaic.



August 15 1996: Construction of the new Scone TAFE

Bill Howey, Bill Rose, Peter Morris MP, Barry Rose and Mike Thew

There were some common themes and personalities in the new developments

Politics is a manifest component of anything allied to spending of public money. TAFE was such a pivotal organisation. It had every element of the three-tiered structure of governance in Australia: Federal, State and Local. This type of multi-layered bureaucracy takes quite a bit of negotiating. Suffice it to say there was enough local chutzpah investment to see it through to fruition. Some were disappointed with a public works building but functionality take precedence over the form of imaginative architectural vision. The Scone TAFE is in stark contrast to both the adjacent HVERC and Scone Race Club public viewing facility.

Scone TAFE

While the Muffett Street premises were eminently forgettable the new site at Satur indubitably is not. It works well; functionally efficient while visually deficient. Trees help.



TAFE NSW Scone is located in the Upper Hunter Valley. The town proudly boasts the sobriquet Horse Capital of Australia. It is next to the Scone Airport, Racecourse and Equine Research Centre.

Courses of study include:

- Environment, Horticulture and Primary Industries
- Animal and Equine Studies

TAFE at Scone features an Equine Studies Centre that includes stables, a riding arena and farrier's workshop. Equine Veterinary Nursing is a primal specialty which is not available in many other areas of the globe.

Scone TAFE is also recognised for delivering excellent training in chainsaw operations and chemical applications.

Graduates include equine nurses, horse groomers, stable hands, stable foremen, stud hands, thoroughbred horse trainers, farriers, veterinary nurses, wool handlers, farm/station hands, station workers, stud farm workers, farm team leader/supervisors and wool classers.

Hunter Local Land Services is also located on site at Scone, providing local landholders with greater access to services and advice in agricultural production, natural resource management, biosecurity and emergency management.

Scone TAFE offers courses in accordance with TAFE NSW, Australia's leading provider of vocational education and training. There are many other locations; all great support services are available to TAFE students.

Horses & Stables



Library



Animal & Equine Studies Centre

Horses that win the Melbourne Cup are able to achieve great results thanks to a multitude of animal specialists.

Careers vary widely in animal studies. Whether you want to learn about veterinary nursing, training for companionship or performance, horse breeding or farriery, TAFE NSW has hands-on facilities and teachers who are passionate about their subject.

Working with animals is never predictable. TAFE training gives you skills, experience and confidence you can rely on.

Career areas covered are:

- Animal Studies
- Horse Industry

Courses offered include:

Animal Studies	Certificate II
Animal Studies	Certificate III
Captive Animals	Certificate III
Companion Animal Services	Certificate III
Veterinary Nursing	Certificate IV

Foal Care & Nursing

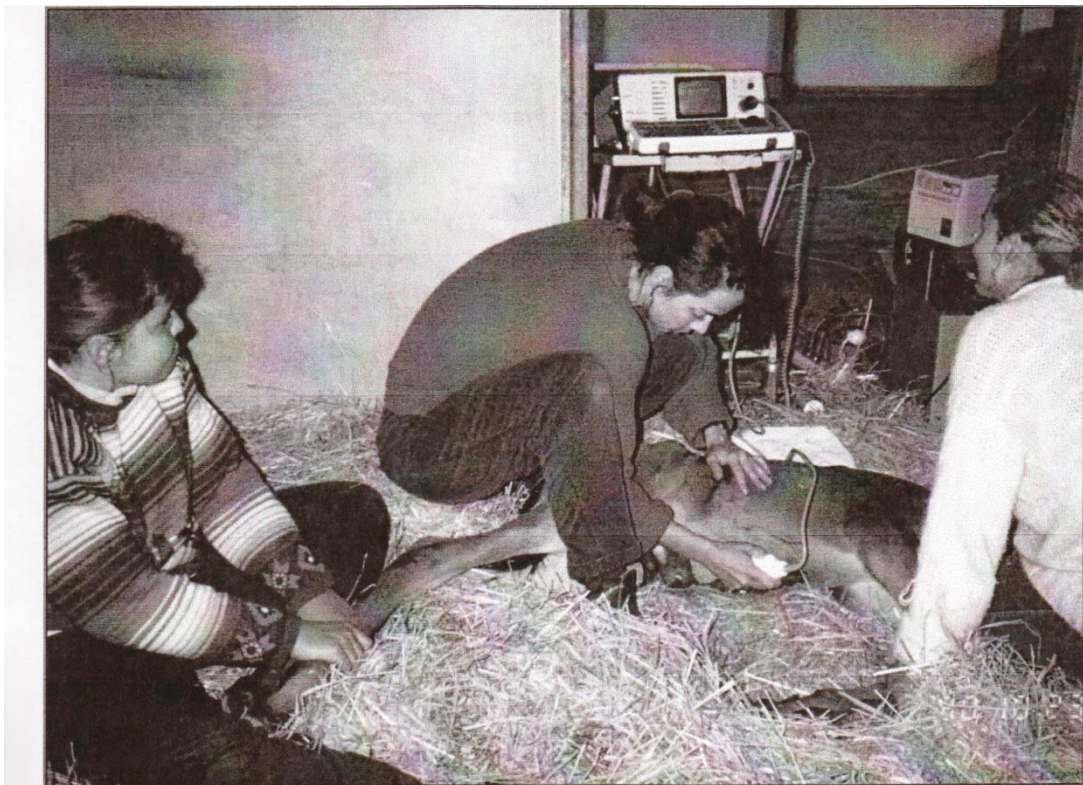
This is worthy of special mention. Scone TAFE was the very first educational establishment to offer Foal Care & Nursing as an elective carrying a post-nominal credential. I think this is global? It could not operate without the outstanding Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for foals at Clovelly Stables; specialist part of Scone Equine Hospital. Fortuitously veterinary nurse Carolind Pike had been sent to North America to further her studies. I asked her to bring back any type of curriculum covering the foal care disciplines. She was able to do this by purloining the program offered at New Bolton Centre, Pennsylvania State University, Philadelphia, PA.

My role was to re-write this in Competency Based Training format and seek CRICOS Accreditation through the TAFE NSW R & M ITD Curriculum Unit. It took some time but we managed it. The program was first offered at Scone and I believe has been a resounding success proving very popular with industry. There was a genuine need. Dr Karon Hoffmann had set up intensive foal care at Clovelly Stables. I also wrote about this elsewhere. Foal Care is now embedded in Veterinary Nursing Certificate IV. TAFE likes restructuring as part of a perennial process. At one time Training Packages were all the rage. It's rather like changes in Senior Executive Service (SES) positions? Names change and are shuffled but not the personnel. Status quo prevails with new monikers. It can be confusing. Negotiating bureaucratic cataracts can be unnerving for the parvenus and arrivistes. It takes experienced acuity to survive and thrive.

Clovelly Stables & Intensive Foal Care



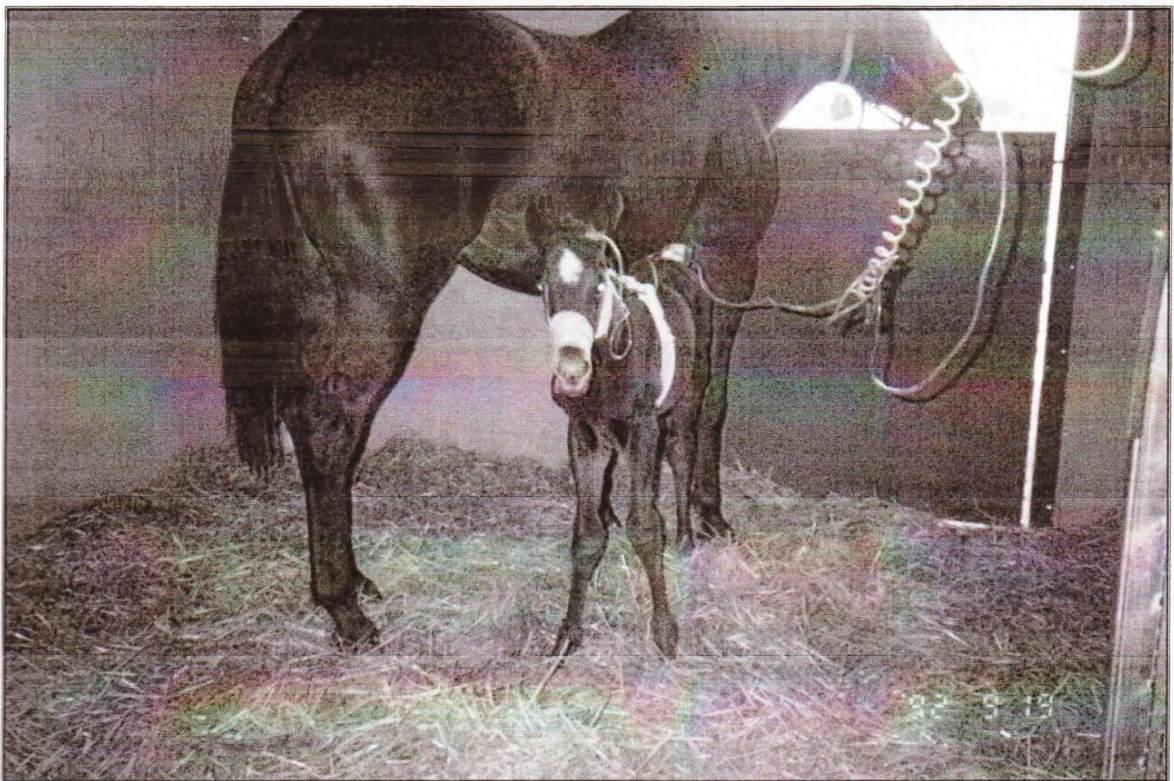
Early construction by multi-skilled maestro John Flaherty



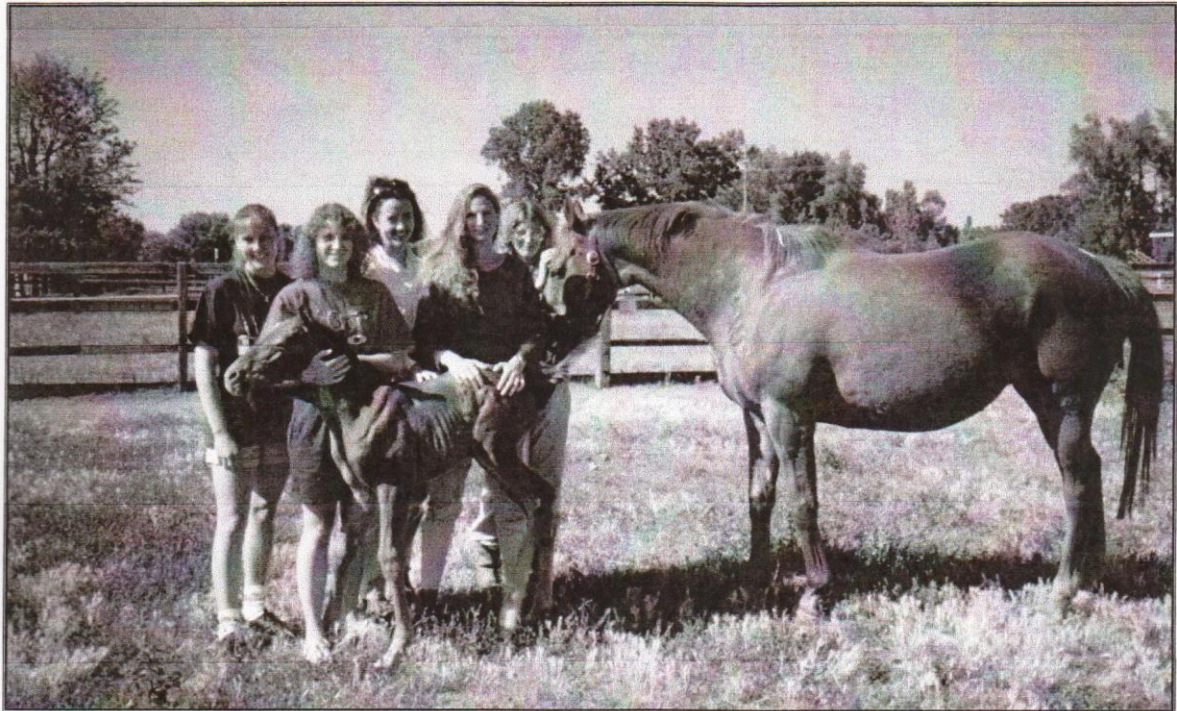
Early sonology application by Dr Karon Hoffman and inaugural trainee acolytes



One of the first patients on a heated bed



Mother and son doing well



Successful therapy team and patient back in the paddock: objective achieved
Dr Karon Hoffmann is rightfully at centre stage. She is the mother of all of this having cajoled me into making provision. We could ill afford the expenditure at the time.

Eventually my time in TAFE concluded. I had much to be thankful for; not least a regular income and favourable superannuation. The latter had not been available in the private sector to the self-employed. My fiscally adroit spouse Sarah was able to turn this to our mutual advantage in later years. It became very much part of my self-funded retirement plan.

My next foray was into the minefield of Tertiary Education at the University of Sydney including Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Continuing Veterinary Education (CVE). The Post Graduate Foundation in Veterinary Science had been co-founded by my great early mentor in veterinary practice Murray Bain. It's as if it was pre-ordained. Perhaps I'm waxing lyrical?

Hunter Valley Equine Research Foundation (HVERF)
Hunter Valley equine Research Centre (HVERC)



The Hunter Valley Equine Research Centre

The five original subscribers were Brian Agnew (Stud Master Wakefield Stud), David Bath (Stud Master Bhima Stud), Tony Bott (Stud Master Segenhoe Stud), Bill Howey (Veterinarian, 'Hepple Farm') and Bill Rose (Stock & Station Agent)