

## CHAPTER 6

I suppose the first time I fell ill with my kidney complaint was when I was living in a ramshackle old building in Adelaide with my cousin Gordon Briscoe, Lesley Nader and two white blokes—a Yank called Shortie and an English boy called Terry Marriot.

I woke up one morning and felt very cold and shivery. So instead of going to work I put another pair of pyjamas on, a couple of pairs of socks, a blazing red track suit with a white stripe down the side and a scarf on my head. I was still cold!

After three days of incredible chill I drove myself in a crazy fashion to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I went into casualty and spoke to the duty sister: 'Look, nurse, I need a doctor. I'm dyin'!

She said, 'You are?'

'Yeah,' I said. 'If you talk to me any longer I'll be dead. Where's the doctor?'

So the doctor came in and then put me to bed. 'What's wrong?' he asked.

I said, 'Look, doc, I'm history. I'm dyin'. You've got to do something for me. I'm shiverin', I'm shakin' and I'm seein' two of you for a start!'

He checked me over and said I had to stay in hospital. 'You've got slight nephritis. That's a little bit of a cold on the kidney.' This was the beginning.

I was lying in bed in the Kidney Ward of the hospital one night and I looked across to the other side of the ward. In the corner was a young lad who was crying his eyes out. He was only a young bloke.

I went across and said, 'Can I help you?'

He said, 'It's all right. I've lost my kidneys. I'm a goner.'

'What do you mean, you've lost your kidneys?' I asked.

'Well, my kidneys have collapsed. I'm on the machine.'

I asked, 'What do you mean, a machine?'

He said, 'The machine that pumps the blood out of you, cleans it and puts it back into you again.' I could not appreciate his problem.

'Oh well,' I thought, 'that doesn't affect me. But I will try to help him as much as I can.' So I gave him all the cigarettes people kept giving me, as I do not smoke.

Apparently he was going through agony, this young lad. He had been a wonderful sportsman and his kidneys flopped, just like that. No warning whatsoever. And he was dragged in and put on one of these machines.

At that time the machines were really huge. The process that you have to go through to be put on them is horrible. People presume that being on a kidney machine is like having a cigarette or just going to the toilet or something. But it is a traumatic experience on every occasion. Blood seems to be everywhere and they stick big needles in your veins. The machines are more sophisticated now but the experience is still the same.

I did not understand. I just blocked it off from my mind. I thought, 'That has nothing to do with me. That will never happen to me.' And yet I knew deep down that it would.

I was really worried that night. I sat up all night just watching him. He would get up and cry and then lie down again. He was not able to walk around very much. His bones had turned to chalk because of the process he was undergoing. He would slip and so on and hurt himself very easily. I was so frightened by all of this and I really wanted to get out of the hospital.

The attack had worn off by this time and the doctor warned me: 'You have had an attack of nephritis, a mild complaint, but it could develop. So be careful.' It was Doctor Lawrence, the renal physician. He was really good and one of the top men in his field in the world. I tried not to believe him.

They never got the message home to me completely enough. I ignored it. I suppose they should have grabbed me, and shook me, and impressed upon me the need to be careful. But maybe they

could not have done much about it anyway. It is an inevitable sort of thing. It occurs when it occurs and that is it. Drugs can sometimes stave off the final process for a time but once it reaches a certain stage it is inevitable.

Eileen and I had already arranged our wedding. They told me, 'You can't leave officially and if you do go you will be taking a risk. You can sign yourself out if you like.'

'Look,' I said, 'I'll sign anything. Just let me go!'

They made me stay there two more weeks to recuperate from the attack. Then they would not let me go because I had no money to pay.

I said, 'What are you holding me for now?'

They said, 'Well, who's going to pay the bill?'

'I can't, I'm broke!' I said.

'Well,' they told me, 'you'll probably have to stay here until someone can arrange finance.'

I said, 'Oh, don't be like that! I'll pay it sooner or later!'

But there I was, stuck in hospital with no money to get out.

I said to Eileen, 'Look, you'll have to pay my bill. If you don't, I can't marry you!'

'Oh, this is great!' she said. 'Haven't you any money at all?'

'Nothing—I don't even own the car.'

'What happened to all your money from the football?'

'I squandered it, gambling and giving it away to people as soon as it came to me. If you want me to be able to marry you, then you'll have to pay my way out.' So Eileen paid my bill.

After getting out of hospital I was a bit of a maniac with my driving. We were driving up to see the minister about the wedding when this bloke tried to overtake me.

'He won't get past me!' I said. 'Typical.'

I drove wide and swung him out in the traffic. Then he tried to pass on the inside. As he passed me I leant out of the window and yelled, 'You bloody mug driver!' Plus other words. Suddenly, he turned down to the left into a yard and next minute we were turning into the same yard!

Eileen said, 'It looks as if that was the minister you were swearing at.'

'We can't go in now!' I said.

'It's too late. He's seen us now.'

'But what are we going to do?' I said.

'Well, you'll have to apologize for a start!'

I was really petrified and did not know what to do, so we sat there for about five minutes and the minister was inside looking through the window. He eventually came to the door and asked us to come in.

I stammered, 'Oh, look, Father, I didn't know it was you. I did not know you were a minister. I thought you were just a bloke drivin' along the road!'

'Oh, that's all right,' he said. 'Don't worry about that.'

I had called him the most horrible names.

So Eileen and I married in the Malvern Lutheran Church in Adelaide on 23 September 1961 and all our friends came along. She invited a certain number and I invited some of my Aboriginal friends and relatives as well as my friends from soccer. Most of the blokes from soccer turned up but three-quarters of the Aborigines that I invited did not even come. I had their places set for them. Well, at least I did invite them and they knew they were welcome if they wanted to come.

They would have thought, 'Oh, I won't bother going along. I might see Charlie tomorrow and congratulate him then.' My friends were typical Aborigines in their casualness.

An accident to my car a few days before the wedding stopped any thought of a long journey to the inland. I was sitting in Eileen's lounge-room and I heard *crash!* Somebody came and knocked on the door: 'Hey, do you own a car outside?'

'Yeah,' I said.

'Well, it's now halfway up the telegraph pole. It was hit from the back by a drunken driver.'

Sure enough, the car was just rolling back off the telegraph pole with a bang.

This caused all sorts of financial problems which Eileen once again had to meet.

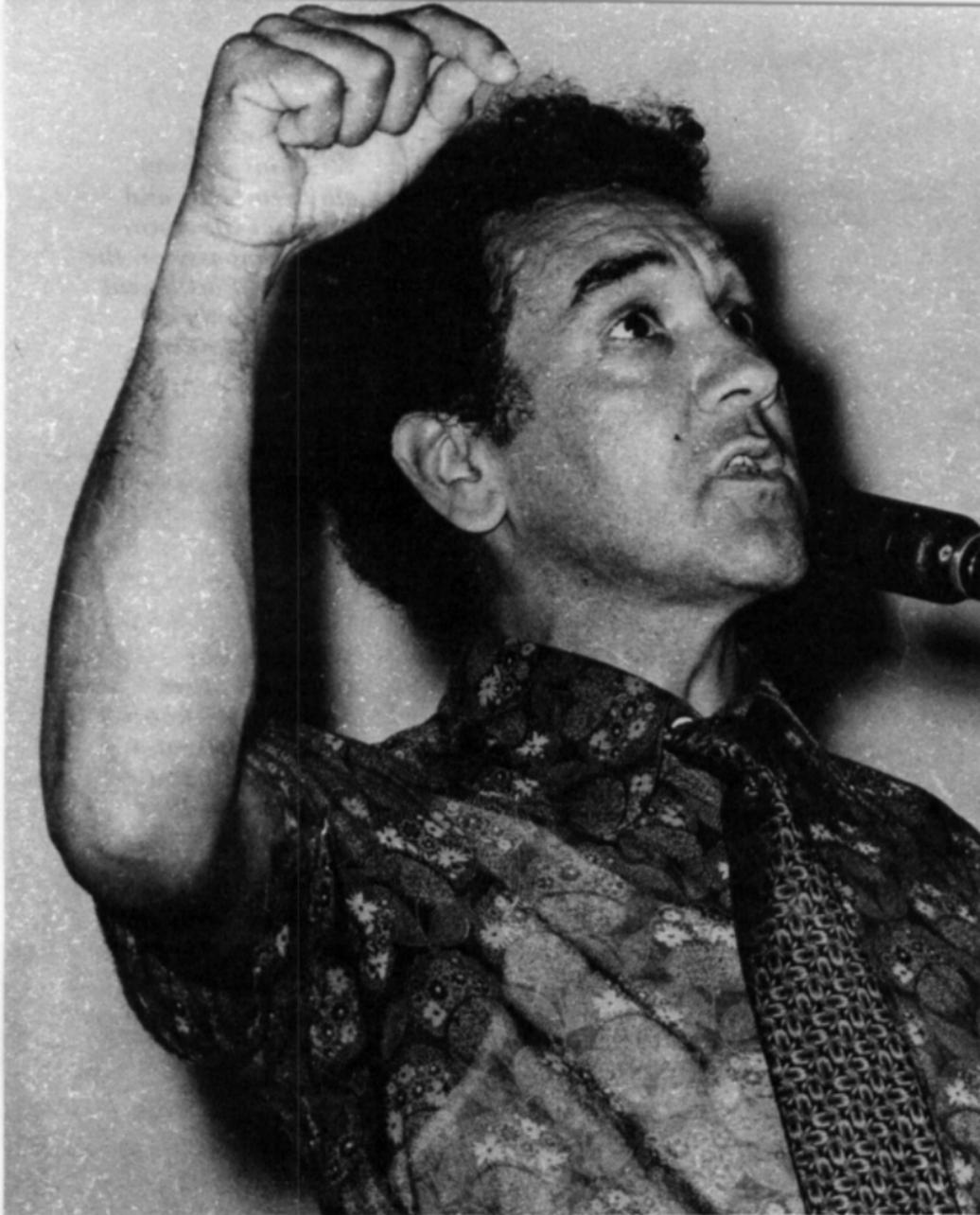
Finally, when we were married we took off for Sydney. Really we were going nowhere in particular. I had been offered a job by

Harry Giese who was head of the Welfare Department in the Northern Territory. You know what as? An assistant motor mechanic on a reserve, two hundred miles north-west of Alice Springs in the remote desert.

He said, 'There's the possibility of a better job coming up there in the future maybe. If you'd like to make your way to Darwin we'll consider your situation.'

My real intention was to study in Sydney for my matriculation. But how? I thought I might try going to a professional soccer club to see if they wanted players. I did not know anybody. It was a leap in the dark.





*With Bill Ford and Ted Noffs  
(right) at Mascot Airport,  
Sydney, 1965 (Sydney Morning  
Herald)*

*Addressing students at the  
University of New South Wales  
(Sydney Morning Herald)*



*With Vincent Williams and my children Hetti and Adam at the Aboriginal Embassy on the lawns of Parliament House, Canberra (Sydney Morning Herald)*

*With Senator Cavanagh, then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, at a Parliament House reception in 1974 (Sydney Morning Herald)*

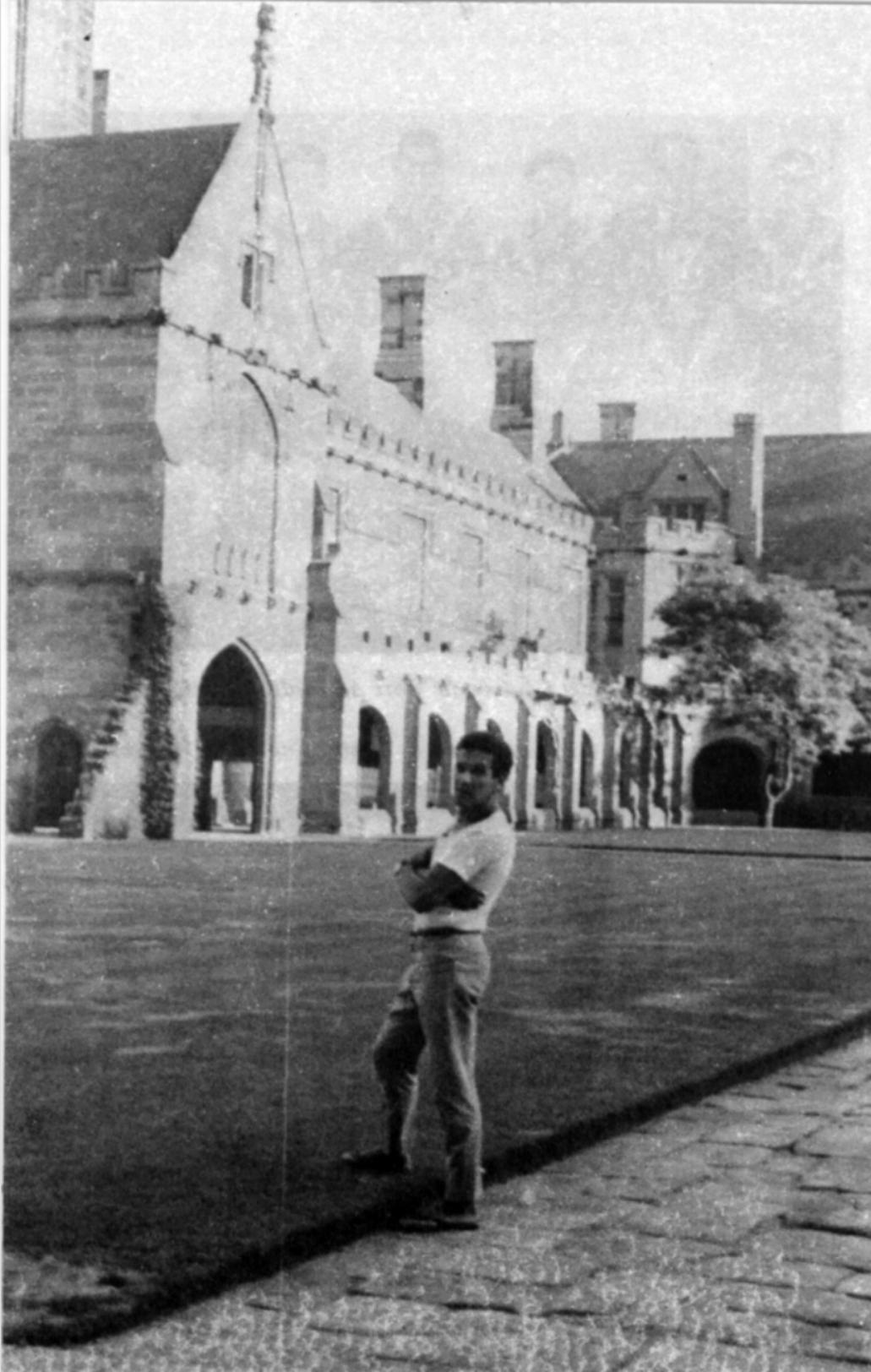




*The Port Thistle Soccer Club (now Port Adelaide) Under 16 Team*

*The Bishop Auckland Amateur Soccer Team (England), 1959-60*

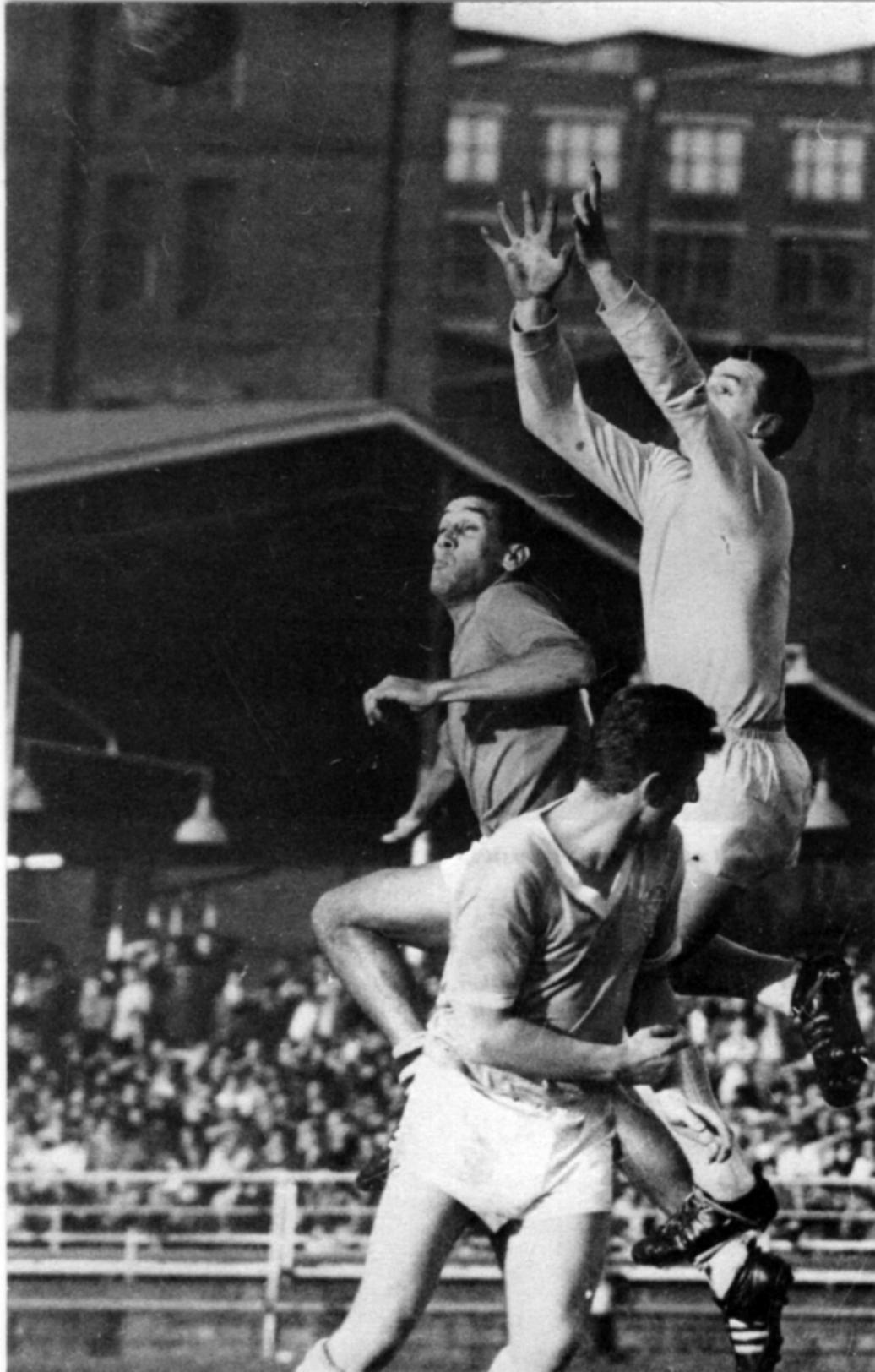






*As a student at Sydney University,  
1965*

*An early deputation to Canberra,  
mid-1960s. From left, Eric Jard,  
myself, Chicka Dixon, Kath Walker,  
Alan Duncan, Jack Horner, Faith  
Bandler, Jack Hassen*





*Playing as centre-forward for Pan Hellenic in Sydney against the Jewish-sponsored team Hakoah (Australian Consolidated Press)*

*The Freedom Riders' survey of Aboriginal living conditions at Moree (Sydney Morning Herald)*



*With placards at the Moree pool during the Freedom Ride (Sydney Morning Herald)*



*On my Graduation Day, with my mother, my wife Eileen, and my daughter Hetti (Sydney Morning Herald)*





*The Nancy Prasad  
kidnap (Sydney  
Morning Herald)*

*My wife Eileen and  
children Hetti, Rachel  
and Adam, at our  
home in Canberra*

*Hetti, Adam and  
Rachel at Standley  
Chasm near Alice  
Springs*

