

THE BIG PICTURE with Nancy Bates

Farm prayers answered five times over and more for young Ron

The young boy growing up in the little NSW country town of Tarcutta always wanted a farm.

"I used to pray 'God, if you get me a farm and I get it paid for I'll do whatever you want'," says Ron Blyth.

"Now I've got five farms, maybe more. I'm not really sure. And I'm not sure that they are paid for."

"Some are big paddocks. I don't know whether you would class them as farms."

When he was 15 Ron worked with his father and his uncle timber cutting for three years.

"We haven't always been an environmentally friendly family," he says a little apologetically. "We didn't know any better then."

"Dad and my uncle bought a 2500-acre property and we used to clear timber from 100 acres of scrub every year."

At 18 Ron struck out on his own.

'If you're going to do something you've got to put the work into it'

He tried shearing sheep. At eight-and-a-half stone he could shear up to 203 sheep a day with narrow tooth but at \$20.50 per 100 he wasn't making much headway.

"I sat down with dad after I worked it out. I would have to do that 1442 times to pay for the farm and it would kill me. I gave that up."

He ended up buying his farm in 1968.

"I was definitely a high-risk client for the bank. I had \$3000 and I borrowed \$90,000. It wasn't a good idea in retrospect but I survived."

And thrived, he could have added.

"I got a 1000 acres and kept buying the neighbours when they came up for sale."

He now has about 8000 acres near the junction of Hume Highway and Snowy Mountains Highway, two kilometres from Gundagai.

He talks enthusiastically about the select stock lines he has developed. He was in the Murray Grey breeder promotion group, winning impressive awards. He raised pigs until about 12 years ago. His merinos are a special line without the problem neck creases. His cattle are now all Aberdeen Angus.

He enjoys showing photographs of his prize stock, the grass lands where they graze, his horses and his new big six-wheeler New Holland Steiger tractor. It's infectious heart and soul, salt of the earth stuff as he nods: "If you're going to do something you've got to put the work into it."

Plain sailing since first Maryb'h buy

The plane flew past Maryborough when Ron Blyth decided to look for property investments in Queensland in the mid-1980s.

He was rueful over missing out on a subdivision opportunity near Gundagai after he sold a piggery. "I didn't offer the bank enough money."

He had tinkered with some subdivision around his stamping ground as he bought and sold some farms but after missing out on the post-piggery venture he decided to look at Queensland.

He chartered a plane and flew to Gladstone, looking around the central Queensland area and passing up on a few properties. He met Maryborough developer Graeme Barrie and bought the Metway

Bank building in Adelaide Street.

Six months later he started Tinana Greens and the rest is still history in the making.

Apart from farming and development, Ron has dabbled in shares, options trading and the futures market.

He has hair-raising tales of trading, investing \$300,000 that quickly turned into \$750,000, doubled again almost as quickly and then hit \$1.9 million.

"I said I would sell when it hit \$2 million but next thing it fell back to \$800,000. Cheryl wasn't too happy about that."

He shakes his head at the trading memories with a chuckle. "It was a bit of fun. I didn't lose anything but in the end I didn't make a lot."



Ron Blyth perches on a pylon above the Mary River, where luxury apartments he's developing will one day overlook.

Blyths believe fortune favours the faithful

Ron Blyth is a charmer of a farmer, a fit and wiry character who has found faith, fortune and family intertwined in his life.

"I'm very blessed with my lovely wife and my family," he said as he gazed across the Mary River. "But we've had some sadness."

His wife, Cheryl, almost died when daughter Michelle, now 30, was born. Another baby died soon after.

"We thought we would have no more. I nearly died when she came home and said she was having twins."

The twin boys, Stephen and John, are now "about 24, 25" he says with the distracted tone of a father asked the age of his children. Both went to university, John to become an agricultural scientist and Stephen to study agricultural business. Both joined a Christian group at university and are now planning to go to Bible college.

"So I'll end up with two pastors and I'm very happy about that. I think it's more important to get ready for the next life than this one."

"I think the world's forgotten what

God the Father did when Jesus came to Earth. The one prophecy is that Jesus returns to Earth and when that happens the world as we know will end."

Ron says he doesn't belong to any particular church. He goes to a little Baptist Church at home near Gundagai and drops into the Gospel Chapel when he is in Maryborough.

He looks again at the vessels moored in the Mary River and glances upstream to the marina he now owns. He likes boats but they are not a passion.

He likes the edgier stuff. As he springs nimbly up on to a pylon and perches easily on it, he reveals Enduro motor bikes are a big love. Snow skiing has also been a favourite sport, although he takes it easy now that a fall left him with a busted ankle.

As for golf ... he shakes his head. Cheryl bought him golf lessons for a present but he barely lasted the session.

"I couldn't get interested in that even when the bloke offered me more lessons for free."

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