## 2009 – WILLIAM ELLIS GREEN (WEG) AND GEOFF HOOK

BY GEORGE HADDON\*

IN 1946 WILLIAM ELLIS GREEN - AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN AS WEG - DREW HIS FIRST CARTOON FOR THE *Melbourne Herald*.

AND IN 2002 GEOFF HOOK SCREWED THE LID BACK ONTO HIS INK BOTTLE AND RETIRED FROM EDITORIAL CARTOONING.

IN THOSE YEARS — BETWEEN 1946 AND 2002 — VICTORIANS HAD BEEN TREATED TO 56 YEARS OF THE BEST EXAMPLES OF OUR CRAFT BY TWO OF OUR FINEST AND BEST-LOVED CARTOONISTS.

THEIR UNIQUE TAKE ON THE ISSUES OF THE DAY, WHETHER IN SANDRINGHAM OR SAN JOSE, WAS THE FIRST THING READERS OF THE *SUN* AND *HERALD* LOOKED FOR EACH DAY.

WEG SERVED IN AN INFANTRY BATTALION IN NEW GUINEA DURING WW2 AND HAD HIS FIRST CARTOON PUBLISHED IN 'ARMY NEWS'.

AT THE END OF THE WAR HE ENROLLED IN AN ART REHAB COURSE INSTEAD OF FINISHING THE ARCHITECTURE COURSE HE HAD BEGUN AT RMIT IN 1940.

THE ART COURSE DIDN'T WORK OUT AND HE BEGAN SUBMITTING CARTOONS TO THE HERALD IN MELBOURNE.

THE NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED SOME AND OFFERED HIM A TEMPORARY JOB WHILE THE REGULAR CARTOONIST SAM WELLS WENT ON HOLIDAY FOR SIX WEEKS.

WEG MOVED IN . . . AND STAYED FOR 40 YEARS. THAT'S A LOT OF DEADLINES TO MEET BY 10 AM SIX DAYS A WEEK!

WEG INSPIRED GENERATIONS OF YOUNG CARTOONISTS AND ENTERTAINED HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF *HERALD* READERS WITH HIS SHARP WIT AND VIEWS ON EVERYTHING, FROM MYXOMATOSIS TO MOOMBA.

BACK IN 1947 HE WAS THE FIRST AUSTRALIAN CARTOONIST TO DRAW A POCKET CARTOON WHEN HE INTRODUCED <u>Weg's Day</u>. This single and double COLUMN CARTOON QUICKLY BECAME A REGULAR ON PAGE ONE OF *THE HERALD*.

THEN CAME <u>Weg's Weekend</u>. This was at the top half of page two of Saturday's paper – full width of the broadsheet - 5 or 6 cartoons wrapping up the week's events.

<u>WEG'S DAY</u> AND <u>WEG'S WEEKEND</u> WERE OUTSTANDINGLY POPULAR AND THROUGH THE PAGES OF THE HERALD, WEG BECAME A PART OF OUR LIVES.

HE WASN'T REALLY A POLITICAL CARTOONIST — MORE A SOCIAL COMMENTATOR, AND THE EXQUISITELY FUNNY PEOPLE WHO INHABITED WEG'S WORLD WERE TO BE FOUND AT PLACES LIKE THE LOCAL SUPERMARKET AT HEATHMONT WHERE HE SOMETIMES WENT FOR INSPIRATION.

WEG WAS A PEN AND INK MAN, AND DREW BIG AND BOLD WITH A LONG FLEXIBLE NIB. WHEN REDUCED, HIS LINE WAS CLEAN AND SHARP AND HE KNEW JUST WHERE TO PLACE HIS SOLID BLACKS TO GET THAT 'SNAP' INTO HIS DRAWINGS.

HE HAD MANY PASSIONS AND DRAFTSMANSHIP WAS AT THE TOP OF HIS LIST.

IN 1963 HE TRAVELLED THROUGH THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE FOR THE HERALD, SENDING BACK HIS IMPRESSIONS AS HE WENT. AND IN 1967 HE DREW HIS WAY THROUGH ASIA INCLUDING A 3-WEEK STINT IN VIETNAM DURING THE WAR.

HE HAD A UNIQUE SKILL FOR CARICATURING AND WAS AMAZINGLY FAST. HE COULD KNOCK OFF A CARICATURE IN THREE MINUTES.

A HORSE OWNER WATCHING HIM WORK ONCE, CONSIDERED HIS DRAWING SPEED SUCH A GOOD OMEN, THAT HE NAMED ONE OF HIS HORSES  $\it Weg$ .

THE HORSE NEVER WON A RACE.

WEG HOPED THAT THE HORSE WAS RETIRED TO A GOOD STUD.

WEG DREW HIS FIRST GRAND FINAL POSTER IN 1954 – THE YEAR FOOTSCRAY WON THEIR FIRST FLAG.

AND 54 YEARS LATER, WEG'S 2008 PREMIERSHIP POSTER IS AS MUCH A PART OF THE GRAND FINAL RITUAL AS THE FIRST BOUNCE.

HE WAS SO COMMITTED TO HIS POSTERS THAT HE CHECKED HIMSELF OUT OF HOSPITAL A COUPLE OF TIMES TO GET THEM FINISHED — THE LAST TIME JUST WEEKS BEFORE LAST YEAR'S GRAND FINAL!

WEG HELPED RAISE MORE THAN TWO MILLION DOLLARS FOR THE ROYAL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL THROUGH THE SALE OF THOSE POSTERS.

HE RETIRED FROM *THE HERALD* IN 1986 ON A SOUR NOTE WHEN HE DISCOVERED HIS CARTOONS WERE NO LONGER CONSIDERED ACCEPTABLE BY *THE HERALD* MANAGEMENT.

HOWEVER, WEG PICKED HIMSELF UP AND MOVED ON, AND WAS SOON IN GREAT DEMAND, PARTICULARLY AS A CARICATURIST AND ILLUSTRATOR. AND, O F COURSE, HE CONTINUED TO PRODUCE THOSE AFL PREMIERSHIP POSTERS.

IN 2006 – JUST TWO YEARS BEFORE HE DIED – HE DREW A QUICK CARICATURE FOR THE POLICE OF A BLOKE HE SAW TAKING A BIKE FROM HIS PROPERTY.

HALF AN HOUR LATER, THE POLICE RECOGNISED A MAN WALKING ALONG THE STREET WHO LOOKED EXACTLY LIKE THE CARICATURE WEG HAD DRAWN, AND ARRESTED HIM.

THAT STORY MADE NEWS AROUND THE WORLD.

If anyone asked me today what most Victorians have in common, I'd say they've probably all been drawn by Weg, somewhere at sometime.

HIS WORK IS REPRESENTED IN INTERNATIONAL CARTOON COLLECTIONS AND SEVERAL CORPORATE COLLECTIONS, AS WELL AS THE COLLECTIONS OF POLITICAL CARTOONS AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA IN CANBERRA.

IN 2001WEG WAS AWARDED THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA MEDAL FOR SERVICES TO ART AS A CARTOONIST AND ILLUSTRATOR, AND TO THE COMMUNITY THROUGH THE ROYAL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL GOOD FRIDAY APPEAL.

HE WAS ALSO MADE AN OFFICER OF ST. JOHN FOR HIS CHARITABLE SERVICES TO THE ST. JOHN AMBULANCE ORGANISATION.

IN 2003 THE AUSTRALIAN CARTOONISTS' ASSOCIATION AWARDED HIM THE JIM RUSSELL AWARD FOR HIS OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO AUSTRALIAN BLACK AND WHITE ART OVER 60 YEARS.

BILL GREEN PASSED AWAY ON THE 29<sup>TH</sup> OF DECEMBER LAST YEAR. HE WAS 85.

GEOFF HOOK IS ANOTHER LEGEND IN THE WORLD OF CARTOONING — THE MAN WHO GAVE JOAN KIRNER THE POLKA DOTS.

GEOFF BEGAN HIS NEWSPAPER CAREER AS A CADET PRESS ARTIST AT THE HOBART MERCURY IN 1951.

HIS MATE CHRISTOPHER KOCH, THEN A PRESS ARTIST ON THE PAPER, DECIDED TO BECOME A WRITER AND RESIGNED. GEOFF GOT HIS JOB.

CHRISTOPHER KOCH WENT ON TO LITERARY ACCLAIM, AND GEOFF WENT ON TO DRIVE SEVERAL GENERATIONS OF VICTORIANS TO ABSOLUTE DISTRACTION LOOKING FOR THAT BLOODY HOOK!

HE ALSO WON THE ACCLAIM OF THE PUBLIC, AND OF COURSE HIS PEERS.

HE PICKED UP PRESTIGIOUS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CARTOON AWARDS ALONG THE WAY. GEOFF'S AMBITION WAS TO BE A DAILY CARTOONIST, BUT THE CLOSEST HE GOT IN THE EARLY DAYS WAS DRAWING *JEFF'S JESTS*, ONCE A WEEK FOR THE *SATURDAY EVENING MERCURY*.

THIS IS WHEN GEOFF WITH A 'G' BECAME JEFF WITH A 'J', *JEFF'S JESTS* WORKED BETTER WITH TWO 'JS'

GEOFF JOINED THE MELBOURNE *SUN* IN 1964 AS A CREATIVE ARTIST, LAYING OUT FEATURE PAGES AND DOING THE OCCASIONAL ILLUSTRATION.

HE SOON BEGAN PESTERING FRANK DALY, THE EDITOR, WITH CARTOON IDEAS AND OCCASIONALLY, ONE WAS ACCEPTED.

BUT THE ROAD TO CARTOONING FAME WAS TOUGH AND SO WAS FRANK DALY.

HE TOLD GEOFF O DROP THE LITTLE CHARACTER HE'D BEEN PUTTING IN THE CORNER OF HIS CARTOONS BECAUSE, SAID FRANK, "YOU'RE NOT FAMOUS ENOUGH TO DO THAT!

THOROUGHLY PISSED OFF, GEOFF WENT ACROSS THE ROAD TO THE PHOENIX

HOTEL — AS WE DID IN THOSE DAYS WHEN WE WERE PISSED OFF — AND BUMPED INTO WEG AND LOU RICHARDS, AND TOLD THEM HIS PROBLEM.

" WELL, WITH A NAME LIKE YOURS," SAID WEG," WHY NOT INCLUDE A HOOK?"

HE DID, THE EDITOR DIDN'T SEE IT, THE HOOK STAYED AND SO DID GEOFF.

GEOFF BEGAN GETTING MAIL FROM SCHOOL KIDS WANTING HIM TO MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT TO FIND THE HOOK. SO HE BEGAN TO HIDE IT.

FROM THEN ON, THE MILLION OR MORE READERS OF *THE SUN* WERE HOOKED, AND COULDN'T GET ON WITH THEIR DAY UNTIL THEY'D FOUND IT!

THEN CAME A GENERAL STRIKE, SO GEOFF PUT A SIGN IN HIS CARTOON WHICH READ "CARTOONIST ON STRIKE" AND LEFT THE HOOK OUT.

NEXT DAY, THE SUN SWITCHBOARD WENT INTO MELTDOWN, AND GEOFF WAS IN STRIFE AGAIN WITH FRANK DALY – WHO PROBABLY DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THE HOOK EXISTED UNTIL NOW – WHO ORDERED HIM TO NEVER LEAVE THE HOOK OUT AGAIN.

GEOFF DID FORGET TO INCLUDE THE HOOK IN HIS CARTOONS ONCE AFTER THAT, AND IN A PANIC, RANG THE PROCESS DEPARTMENT TO ALERT THEM.

HE WAS TOLD: "YEAH MATE, WE KNOW, BUT DON'T WORRY, WE PUT IT IN FOR YA"

"Where?" ASKED GEOFF. "I'M NOT TELLING YOU - FIND THE BLOODY THING YOURSELF, "CAME THE REPLY.

OF COURSE, THERE WAS MORE TO GEOFF'S CARTOONS THAN THE GAME OF "FIND THE HOOK". TECHNICALLY, HE WAS THE BEE'S KNEES. HE COULD DRAW. AND HE GAVE THE POLLIES HEAPS WITHOUT BEING MALICIOUS. JOAN KIRNER EVEN SAID SHE CONSIDERED HIM A "KIND MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITION" ON ONE OCCASION....

...BUT THAT WAS BEFORE HE INTRODUCED POLKA DOTS TO HER WARDROBE.

GEOFF WAS ABLE TO FIND SOMETHING AMUSING IN THE NOT- SO —AMUSING STORIES. HIS CARTOON OF AN OIL-SOAKED PENGUIN WADDLING ALONG AN IDENTIFICATION LINE UP OF TERRIFIED SEA CAPTAINS AFTER AN OIL SPILL, WAS A GEM.

THAT WON HIM THE AWARD FOR THE BEST POLITICAL CARTOON AT THE INTERNATIONAL CARTOON FESTIVAL IN BELGIUM IN 1987. HE WON IT AGAIN IN 1991.

GEOFF'S CARTOON WORK TOOK HIM TO VIETNAM DURING THE WAR AND TO

MANY OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD.

GEOFF SAYS THE HIGHLIGHT OF HIS CAREER HAS BEEN HIS COLLABORATION AND CLOSE FRIENDSHIP WITH ANOTHER LEGEND AND THE MELBOURNE PRESS CLUB'S UINAUGURAL LIFETIME ACHIEVER, KEITH DUNSTAN.

LET LOOSE, THESE TWO BLOKES WOULD DO ANYTHING AND GO ANYWHERE ...

THEY BECAME FASCINATED WITH CYCLING, AND ON ONE OCCASION, IN 1976, THEY RODE THEIR BIKES OVER THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS DURING AMERICA'S BICENTENNIAL, FILING GREAT COPY AND WONDERFUL ILLUSTRATIONS.

They went to the Melbourne Cup 12 times, using a different form of transport each time, ranging from CUB's horse and dray to a sedan chair. Geoff suspected Dunstan was trying to get rid of him one year when he suggested parachuting into Flemington.

IN 1987 HE WAS VOTED THE AUSTRALIAN CARTOONISTS' ASSOCIATION "BEST HUMOROUS ILLUSTRATOR" AND RECEIVED THE STANLEY AWARD.

HE WAS HONOURED AGAIN BY HIS PEERS IN 1998 WITH A SILVER STANLEY AWARD FOR HIS CONTRIBUTION TO AUSTRALIAN BLACK AND WHITE ART.

HIS WORK IS REPRESENTED IN INTERNATIONAL CARTOON COLLECTIONS, IN CORPORATE AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS IN THIS COUNTRY, AND IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN CANBERRA.

GEOFF HAS WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED MORE THAN 50 CHILDREN'S BOOKS .

He'S BEEN A BUSY BLOKE ... STILL IS. NOW HE'S PAINTING WATERCOLOURS.

...AND YOU WON'T FIND A HOOK HIDDEN IN ANY OF THEM!

\*GEORGE HADDON, A MULTIPLE WALKLEY AND STANLEY AWARD WINNER, WORKED WITH BILL GREEN AND GEOFF HOOK AT THE HERALD & WEEKLY TIMES FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS.