

# Six Steps & Stumbles

In late 1966, ABC Television launched a program intended primarily for children, its format based closely on a British television series called *Crackerjack*. Close all right, it was a dead ringer, and to make absolutely sure, the original executive producer was brought out from London to set it up. It was a fully scripted weekly show, had popstars and variety acts as guests, as well as comedy sketches, musical numbers and audience participation contests performed and hosted by several regular presenters. The program was an hour long and slotted in at 5.30 on Friday afternoons; though it was specifically aimed at children, the ABC hoped the show's content and appeal would be strong enough to induce the whole family to watch. The diversity of experience I'd had in the theatre, especially and currently at the Phillip in *A Cup of Tea, a Bex, and a Good Lie Down*, exactly suited the wide-ranging scope of the program, and I was contracted to host the show.



With Jenene Watson (left) and Sue Walker (right).



Shirley Cameron.



Ric Hutton; the Older Man.



Sue Walker.



Mary Dushesne.



Ruth Cracknell.



Toni Lamond.

ABC-TV invites you to meet  
 Reg Livermore and the  
 cast of their new series  
**I'M ALRIGHT NOW**  
 at a Champagne Lunch in the  
 Terrace Room of the Australia Hotel  
 on Tuesday, August 1, 1967 at 1p.m.  
 R.S.V.P. Glenn Hamilton 2691 335



I admit I was prone to throwing the occasional major tantrum, but I was not alone in trying to handle what I saw as crap; the ladies had to carry their own pooper-scoopers. Shirley Cameron saw herself as the show's sex object and generally purred along, Toni Lamond was the accomplished allrounder who in the land of show biz could handle anything, and Ruth Cracknell was purely and simply Ruth. When I consider that the one unimaginative man was writing to the abilities of the four of us it's a wonder we came in to work of a morning.

My original idea had been a bright one, and in the right and happier circumstances could have worked very well, so what went wrong? I went wrong. My eyes were bigger than my stomach for the project; I really couldn't sing to save myself then and I had lots of it to do. I had taken on more than I could reliably or expertly handle, and I blew it. Television is not the most discreet way to make a bad move, but perfect if you *want* to publicly humiliate yourself. The show's first airings happened to coincide with a nationwide newspaper strike that had dragged on for close to a month; for better or worse there was no publicity, and unless viewers had already sworn allegiance to the ABC, no matter what, they wouldn't have had a clue we were showing on Saturday nights. When the strike eventually broke and the critics started slamming us, we wished that it had gone on forever. Suddenly there was no shortage of print or exposure; every paper and every magazine was full of it. I had to duck.

The critics hated almost everything about us, as did most of Australia I began to suspect. Reading and reeling, reacting to all the opinionated garbage, definitely knocked me around. How is one supposed to get over these things? Some years later, when I *had* more or less put the wretched adventure behind me, I was driving with a friend from Adelaide to Sydney; somewhere along that ghastly stretch of Sturt Highway we encountered, the petrol gauge on my old Volkswagon indicated 'E' for empty. Turning up a bumpy driveway in the middle of nowhere, I headed towards a house set way back from the main road; I'd noticed a private petrol pump. The woman who answered my door knock was disagreeable, and reluctant to provide us with even enough gas to make it to the next town – about a dollar's worth was all we were after. She looked me over carefully, and then said, 'You're the one from that terrible TV show'. With that, she plunged the hose into the side of my car as aggressively as she might have stuck a knife in my back; I gave her the dollar and skedaddled. I'd like to add that there are many fine and decent people in that remote area of New South Wales: about an hour on from the house with the grumpy woman and the petrol pump, my old Volksy shuddered, seized and died, and some hours later, a couple of jackeroos, driving home from a night in town at the pictures, towed us back to the property they worked on, where the owners kindly offered us beds for the night. We were still there enjoying their hospitality near Hay a week later. Pam and Andrew Mills were the outback rescuers, and I thank them for one of the very special adventures of my life.