THE OLD GENTLEMAN

Twenty-five years ago a young man lost his life in a timber cutting accident. He willed his only possession of value – his guitar, to his sister, Cathy Culligan, to help make her dream come true. This is her story…..

"Have you written of love?" She asked, by the fire,
and I didn't know quite what to say.
With her eight year old smile, so free from all guile;
said "I can tell you, I've seen it each day."
"It's the love that lasts a whole lifetime through,
and stays on with the ones left behind.
My mother can tell you, 'twas a love that she knew,
just ask her, I know she won't mind."

Angry rain hammered hard on McCormack's hut;
lustrous bush glimmered green all around,
She laid down her camp oven, and with eyes half shut
sank wearily with us to the ground.
"Yes, he passed away, six months to the day,
as the Old Gentleman he was known".
And she told me a story spanning twenty-four years;
of a girl, and a stockhorse of her own.

"My dreams were so real, so true in the night;
I'd wake up, rush out in the dawn.
My own little pony, bathed by pale morning light
but walk back, my hopes dashed and forelorn.
To be one of eleven, in a bush town like Tolmie,
not much of a chance did I stand,
but when my brother died, his guitar came to me
and his place in my dad's country band."

"Every Friday night in the Merrijig pub,
smokey Saturdays in Mansfield town,
I played that guitar and a fortune saved up,
a thirteen year old's dream for to own.
Then at last, Ron Purcell bought a Palamino in;
he said he hadn't had to look far.
For they swore black and blue that the horse rode to him
while he drank at the Mount Buller bar."

"Then a freedom I found on the old timber tracks
while the wind fanned out through my hair.
For whatever my troubles, on old Pal I'd relax,
without worries, without fear, without care.
And my best friend and I, what adventures we'd share;
rediscovering old tracks in the bush.
In a cool tranquil clearing, for our horses we'd care,
then eat lunch, squashed to sausage-cake mush."

"As I grew up a woman, my workmate he'd be
taking kids out for rides after school.
Sometimes five on his back, tying ribbons with glee,
always trusted, always safe, always cool.
As a wife, I rode him in three of our homes,
he godfathered all of our foals.
As a mother, he taught my three children to ride,
as their best freind, their keeper, their Rolls."

"Then I'd seldom ride my old Pal any more
just at Christmas, as a reindeer dressed.
He was the children's to ride, and they rode him with pride,
over thirty, but to them, still the best.
Three weeks 'fore he died we had one last fling,
took me back to a time without care.
To be just for one moment that thirteen year old girl
with the wind fanning out through her hair."

"Now I'll never see my old Pal stand again,
in the paddock, for his morning feed.
With the frost in his whiskers, sun filtering his mane,
and walk back, all refreshed and relieved.
But I've a lifetime of memories to treasure inside
and my children will tell their children too,
as they visit the place where he peacefully lies
and to the Old Gentlemen, say thankyou."