

## Mike & Shirley Phillips



The calendar may suggest that 90-odd years is a long innings, but it goes by in a spit.

Nonetheless, Mike and Shirley Phillips have squeezed the marrow out of it. With heart and nerve, they have forged a happy, fortunate life, brimming with warm memories and loving family.

Both were Londoners and survived *The Blitz* when, from September 1940 to May 1941, blood chilling air raid sirens heralded the torrential rain of Hitler's bombs. In the rambling Edwardian house

where Mike lived, two internal walls collapsed and nearly every window was blown out. Neighbouring houses were flattened. There was the stench of gas from fractured lines and through the dust and the smoke and the din, 6-year-old Mike could see the sky lit red from the all the fires.

Mike qualified as a Chartered Accountant in 1956, followed by compulsory national service with the Royal Air Force. This involved square-bashing or marching, more marching and unquestioning obedience, although Mike is not one to play strictly by the rules, as we will discover. After he was discharged back onto civvie street in 1958, Mike re-joined an accountancy firm. It is at the 1958 office Christmas party, amongst the tinselled bonhomie, where he became smitten with the beautiful 19-year-old Shirley Leigh, a secretary in the firm. Shirley was engaged to another, but Mike's finesse won her over. Two years later they were married, then eventually moved to Birmingham.

Shirley kept the home fires burning, while Mike thrived in business. She is a fine piano player and used to give lessons, as well as being an avid knitter, fabulous homemaker and dedicated mum. Eventually, Mike was offered a job of Finance Director for *Leyland* in the nether regions of the world. Australia.

This was a huge decision for a young family with teenage children, but Mike and Shirley weren't ones to shy away from adventure. They arrived in Sydney in 1976 on a 747 first class, with the 3 kids and Austin, the bearded collie; Mike was 42 years old,

Shirley 37. They picked out a 4-bedroom bungalow in St Ives with a pool, rolled up their sleeves and didn't look back.

During this time Mike, as well as being the Finance Director at many blue-chip companies, was a travelling salesman for Shirley's successful import company *Frame Fashions Sydney*, a radio announcer and a sting artist. Think Paul Newman in glasses.

To hook the Moscow Interbank Currency Exchange as a client for his son's fledgling software company, Mike staged a friend's plush, unoccupied office floor for a week, replete with boardroom furniture, car park spaces and phone lines. He had a large company sign made, to cover the actual company's name, then convinced a friend to pose as the receptionist/secretary. Thus a prospering business smokescreen was set!

The meetings were held, contract signed, happy Russians back in the USSR, smoke and mirrors dismantled. The business never looked back.

Both Mike and Shirley say they were born "with a pack of cards in their hands" (Shirley's father claimed to have once played against Omar Sharif!). However, it was only when Shirley was 50 and completed a beginner's bridge course that she found she had the knack. Mike, who was already a bridge director and great player, became her partner and their triumphs speak for themselves.

Mike never lost the art of the finesse.

They are still a devoted couple, content at Coolum where they now live with their daughter Lisa, her partner Mike and Toby the little terror, who is the best watchdog they've ever come across. Connoisseurs of classical music, ballet and opera, ABC Classic FM is invariably on low as Shirley mulls over her words puzzles and Mike writes endless letters to *The Editor*. They have always had a swag of dear friends, but, of their countless achievements, it is their family of which they are most proud and from which they derive much joy. A large, multi-cultural affair, full of love and laughter, including 7 wonderful grandchildren.

In Mike's words, it couldn't be better.