



Toby's parents, Matthew and Ruby Kells

Matthew "Toby" Kells (hereafter referred to as "Toby") was born on February 16, 1932 in Gatton, Queensland, the second-born child of parents Matthew and Ruby (née Hardgrave) Kells.

Toby's father, Matthew, grew up in Cairns where his family, originally from Ireland, worked in cane farming. During the Great Depression, times became extremely tough and Matthew headed south to seek work. It was in Kilcoy, near the Glasshouse Mountains, that Matthew met Ruby, and they soon married and had four children – Daphne, Toby, James and Marjorie.

"I've been known as Toby my whole life," Toby explains. "Supposedly, this was given to me by an uncle who saw me a few days after I was born. He shook my hand and said, 'G'day, Toby.' And it has been that way ever since."

Some of Toby's earliest memories involved his father working as a teamster (a bullock cart driver). He'd be away for most of the week felling trees and then loading them onto the log truck for transport to the sawmill. "Mum would round up the kids and we'd sit on the front verandah to listen for the cracking of Dad's bullock whip, which indicated how far away he was," Toby recalls.

The sawmill was located on the banks of the Lockyer Creek. Toby and his siblings would go there to catch shrimp using a pot made out of an old sugar bag and wire with a bone in the bottom. "We'd lower it into the creek, and after a while we'd retrieve the pot. It always had enough shrimp for a meal," he says. Sadly, it was around this time that Toby lost his youngest sister, Marjorie, to pneumonia. She was three years old.

The family moved around a lot, and Toby attended many schools. When Matthew and Ruby found work on a dairy farm in the Dayboro area north of Brisbane, Daphne, Toby and Jim were enrolled in Mount Samson State School. It was quite a walk from their house, but they soon realised they could cut down the time by going cross-country. "We didn't have shoes, so it was interesting on a frosty morning – and there were plenty of them," Toby recalls. "As we got used to the area, we'd learn where the red belly black snakes were living, and which paddocks had bulls."

At 10, Toby and family moved to Brisbane to stay with his Aunt Alice, and he attended St Pauls Terrace School in Fortitude Valley. They then moved to 19 Wolseley Street, Paddington where he went to Ithaca Creek State School in Bardonia. Around this time, he got a part-time job working for the local chemist, Mr Louttit. "Each day after school and on Saturday mornings I would wash medicine bottles, sweep and dust the store, and do medicine deliveries on a bike," Toby says.

Ever since leaving Mount Samson, Toby had a hard time staying interested in school; his mind was always elsewhere. Soon enough he decided to leave and begin working full-time for Mr Louttit, reorganising the dispensary and collecting prescription medicines from a warehouse in the city. From there he got a job working as a junior in one of the warehouses, unpacking and sorting stock for delivery to chemists in Queensland and NSW.

Marie Teresa Longmore was born on October 29, 1934 in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales. She was the third-born child of parents David and Veronica (Vera, née McLeod) Longmore.

The Longmore family was a big one. Marie had two older brothers, Neil and Ronald, and two younger brothers, David and Brian. Her only sister, Shirley, was David and Vera's sixth and last-born child. They lived at 24 Jackson Street, Wagga Wagga, where Marie stayed from birth until after she was married. She attended St Joseph's Primary School and Mount Erin High School, the latter of which amalgamated with two other schools to become Kildare Catholic College in 2004.

Marie was a very accomplished dancer. She was a student of Miss Madge Wallace's dance studio, where she learned tap dancing, ballet, Irish dancing and Highland dancing. Miss Madge was highly renowned in the world of dance – in 2012, she was inducted onto the Wagga Walk of Honour – and Marie was one of her best students. Throughout her school life, Marie participated in eisteddfods and competitions, such as the City of Wagga Eisteddfod and the now defunct St Andrews Junior Eisteddfod.

She was also fond of sports, particularly netball, and learned to play the piano. For fun, Marie would often swim at the Wagga Wagga Beach of the Murrumbidgee River with her friends and younger sister, Shirley. When the river flooded, they could sometimes even swim and paddle in the main streets of Wagga.

When Marie left school, she found work on the assembly line at Wagga's Dunlop Weatherproof Factory, cutting waterproof material for garments (Dunlop was a major employer in the Wagga region, particularly for females). Her love of sport endured; she continued to play tennis and netball after school. She also remained a key member of Miss Madge Wallace's dance studio, and eventually became a teacher there, mentoring young dancers just as she'd once been mentored by Madge.

Pipes are calling

As the calendar flicked over into the 1950s, Toby was getting bored with work. He had become close friends with his future brother-in-law, Keith – they spent time manning the beaches as lifeguards for the Kirra Surf Club at Coolangatta – and, by extension, Keith's brother Doug, who had mentioned that he was thinking about joining the Air Force. Soon, Toby also began to seriously consider joining the Air Force. "I rode to the recruiting office one lunchtime and got some brochures and information. When I took the papers home, it caused a small uproar," Toby laughs. "But in the end Dad just said, 'It's your life.'"

Toby submitted the papers, and shortly after received a letter telling him to report to the recruiting centre on July 17, 1950 for transportation to the Amberley Air Force Base, outside of Ipswich, for recruit training. "We were all ready for training, except for one minor detail: there weren't enough numbers to run the training course," he says.

While Toby and the three other recruits waited for others to arrive, they were given various jobs. Toby was a runner for the orderly room, carrying paperwork around to the various sections of the base. He also worked in the Officers', Sergeants' and Air Men's messes doing "dixie bashing" or "pearl diving" – military slang for washing pots and pans – as well as sweeping, mopping and peeling potatoes.

Finally, more recruits arrived and the training course began. "It consisted of marching, learning the ranks for the three services and how to recognise them and who to salute, marching, learning how to salute with and without a rifle, marching, learning about your rifle and how to look after it, marching, learning about small arms and ammunition, marching, learning how to make a bed roll – and marching," Toby grins.



Marie with one of her dance awards, 1949

When the course came to an end, Toby had to decide on a trade. His mate John White – aka "Whitey" – chose armament, which had a wider range of equipment such as small arms, aircraft guns, gun turrets, bombs, bomb carriers, rockets, launchers, explosives and demolition. Toby followed Whitey's lead, and they headed south of the Queensland border to Rathmines, on the shore of Lake Macquarie in NSW, for further training. This phase involved learning about hand tools, their usage and care, and their usage in the making of parts.

In the New Year of 1951, Toby was sent to the RAAF School of Technical Training (STT) at Forest Hill, Wagga Wagga for the first phase of his trade training. Over the year that followed, the trainees split their time between Wagga and Amberley, so they got to know the NSW country town quite well. As it happened, Whitey was a skilled bagpipe player, and he picked up a job playing bagpipes for a local Wagga dance studio.

Its owner went by the name of Miss Madge Wallace.

2,500 kilometres

While stationed at the STT for phase two of the armament fitters' course, Toby often tagged along with Whitey when he played bagpipes at the dance school on Saturdays. After dancing, the young men would have lunch with Madge and her husband, Charles, before Toby played baseball with the base team in the afternoon. Soon, that Saturday ritual was extended to include Saturday night movies before catching the last bus back to the base.

"It was during that time that we got to know some of the older girls, and a young lady that I had become friends with was one of the top dancers at the school," Toby smiles. "Her name was Marie Teresa Longmore, aged 17."

The young pair became quite fond of each other, but soon Toby had to return to Queensland. Not to be deterred, during one of Marie's annual holidays, she travelled up to Brisbane to meet Toby's family. She stayed with Matthew and Ruby while Toby went back to Amberley during the week, and he travelled back to Brisbane on the weekends to see her. Then, when Marie's holidays came to an end, Toby took some time off himself. "We had a nice, slow flight back to Sydney aboard a Catalina flying boat, then by DC-3 to Wagga Wagga," Toby recalls. "I spent a week there and then flew back to Brisbane and Amberley."

Clearly, the young pair were determined to spend as much time around each other as possible. Unfortunately, Toby was finished at the STT, so his time in Wagga Wagga was coming to an end. In fact, he was moved to bases even further afield; he had a posting on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, and upon returning home was immediately told to pack his bags for a flight to Singapore in 11 days' time.

Toby knew exactly how he wanted to spend those 11 days.

He sent Marie a telegram telling her that he'd be in Wagga Wagga in a few days. "I got clearance from Amberley, got my movement order and rail warrants, and I went to Brisbane for the weekend. On Monday, I was on the train to Sydney, and then to Wagga Wagga," Toby says.

When he arrived in Wagga, Marie was at work, but that was okay as Toby had a couple of stops to make before meeting her. First, he visited David and Vera to ask for permission to marry their daughter. After obtaining their blessing, he went straight out to buy an engagement ring. When Marie got home from work, he proposed, and she said yes. Hurriedly, they arranged a party, and after a couple more days together Toby was back on the train to Melbourne, and then to Adelaide to catch his flight to Singapore.

By the time his plane left Adelaide Airport, Toby had travelled some 2,500km in less than a fortnight. It was all for Marie.

Back to Wagga

On November 20, 1954, Toby and Marie were married at St Michael's Cathedral in Wagga Wagga. It was a rainy day, but the sun broke through towards the end of the service. Upon exiting the cathedral, a group of Marie's dance students dressed in full Highland outfits formed a guard of honour for the newlyweds. The rain returned heavier for the reception, but nothing could dampen the young couple's spirits.

After the wedding, Toby and Marie flew to Brisbane and then drove to Coolangatta, where they had booked a two-week stay in a guesthouse for their honeymoon. It was just a short walk to the surf, and to Toby's old surf club. "We swam, took drives into the hinterland, and visited all the places I had known in previous times," Toby says.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Toby and Marie's kids each share a memory of growing up with their parents.



Rod

"An early memory of mine was being picked up after school, on a Friday afternoon, and going to the supermarket with Mum. We would get a small tin of flavoured milk that we would take to the drive-in movies, as Friday night was always drive-in night. I also remember going with Dad to pick up a new car, and the surprised look on Mum's face when we got home – she didn't know about it until we drove in the driveway. Later memories were of Mum and Dad coming on numerous holidays with us and our children."



Brian

"I remember the yearly road trip with Mum to the wool mills in Wangaratta and the regular supply of winter woollens she produced on her knitting machine for all the family. Mum loved having us return home, and as our families grew with the addition of grandkids Mum could be found on the floor helping the grandkids with jigsaw puzzles and Lego construction. Dad would always provide technical support and help with many of my projects – turning a garden shed into a dog house for a litter of pups, or turning a bassinet into a secure car capsule when Megan was born. Dad also supported us in sport as a committeeman and goal umpire."



This is the story of a boy from country Queensland and a girl from country NSW whose paths converged to become one.

Kindergarten, St Maria Goretti Primary School, and then Bishop Henschke Boys Primary School. They would often go around barefoot playing Cowboys & Indians and riding their bikes with the other neighbourhood children.

Marie went back to work at Dunlop, and also got her driver's licence. "A couple of Marie's workmates got their heads together and she learned how to drive a car. She surprised me one night when she coyly asked if I would take her to the motor registry for her test," Toby says. "She passed first time."

Toby, meanwhile, was selected to do an instructional technique course for six weeks. Upon finishing, he went back to his trade section teaching all subjects – including small arms, aircraft guns, bomb carriers, rockets and rocket launchers – to young recruits, just as he had once been. He also continued to rise in the Air Force ranks, being promoted to sergeant.

The family was very happy in Wagga Wagga. When Marie went to work, Rod and Brian would stay with their grandparents at 24 Jackson Street. There was a big garden with fruit trees and veggie patches, and the boys would pick peaches, nectarines and apricots from the trees and strawberries from the garden. Christmas was always a big occasion; Vera would cook roast chicken and baked veggies on her wood stove.

Three years in Malaysia

Soon enough, however, the transient nature of life in the Air Force re-emerged. In early December 1965, Toby was again posted overseas, this time to Butterworth, Malaysia, located on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula – taking the family with him.

Toby was with the 77 Fighter Squadron, a part of No. 78 Fighter Wing, which flew Sabre aircraft. Armed with 30mm cannons and Sidewinder air to air missiles, the Sabres were responsible for regional air defence during the Konfrontasi between Indonesia and Malaysia, though no combat took place. As an armament fitter, Toby's job was to maintain the armament system and weaponry. He inspected, serviced and repaired the guns and the systems that launched both the bombs and the rockets. He also prepared and loaded ammunition, rockets and bombs onto the planes.

And so, for three years, Toby, Marie and the boys lived on Penang Island. Rod and Brian went to the RAAF School on Penang, and were members of the Boy Scouts. They spent a lot of time at the RAAF Hostel, on Penang, which was a centre for medical and social activity for RAAF personnel and their families. In addition to Scouts, the boys participated in badminton, table tennis, boxing, and social nights with bands and dancing. For fun, they would go fishing and swimming in amongst the locals' fishing boats, which were moored at the beach, occasionally spotting cobras along the way. "Marie and I also took part in many social activities, including darts and other indoor sports," Toby says. "Marie was very good at most sport that she tried and was always very competitive. She played and won a number of trophies for tennis, badminton, indoor bowls, table tennis and mini-golf, to name just a few."

While they were in Malaysia, the couple also welcomed their third and last son, Mark Keith Kells. He was born on December 2, 1966. Soon, the No.78 Wing was disbanded, and after three years on Penang Island, Toby was posted to Laverton, just east of Melbourne. Now a family of five, the Kellses lived at 31 Deborah Street, Werribee, and Rod and Brian attended Werribee High School.

After two years in Victoria, Toby was promoted to flight sergeant and once again received a posting back to Wagga Wagga. The family was allocated a house at 6 Buna Street, Ashmont, and the older boys were enrolled at St Michael's Regional High School (which was one of the schools that amalgamated with Mount Erin in 2004). Mark was enrolled at Holy Trinity Primary School, also in Ashmont.

Sport remained a big part of Toby and Marie's life. Rod and Brian both started playing Australian rules football for the Marian Dons Football Club (where Toby was on the committee), and cricket for the Marian Cricket Club. Marie played social tennis on Thursdays, and she also took up golf and tenpin bowling. "And I played golf in the usual Saturday competitions," Toby says. "I was fortunate to score a hole-in-one – the first male to have done so on the RAAF course."

After the Force

On August 3, 1975, Toby left the Air Force. He took his discharge and reported for training as an inspector with the Wagga City Council gas department. "The position was inspecting the gas fittings and safety by contractors and builders of new housing. I spent time on installation of appliances and rectification of faults," Toby says.

They purchased a home at 2 Tucker Street, Turvey Park, in Wagga Wagga's inner south. It was a dead-end street that ended at the playground of Bishop Henschke Primary School, where Mark was now enrolled. "There was always something happening in the backyard, be it a game of table tennis or backyard cricket," Toby recalls. "Marie always enjoyed joining in with the boys and their mates."



Mark

"Mum and Dad would play tennis at Ashmont on Friday nights with the Abigails and Walkers; they'd go tenpin bowling on Sunday nights; and we'd do trivia nights with the Walkers, and Barry would continually call Mum 'Mrs Kells' – much to her frustration. One of my best early memories of Dad was receiving a letter when he was sent to RAAF Base Kingswood, and it stated, 'Make sure you look after Mummy.' I also remember going with Mum to pick up Nanna Longmore on Fridays and go shopping. Nan would always buy me a treat and the butcher would always say, 'I threw in a sausage just for you.'"

A little over a year later, Toby saw an advertisement for the position of general assistant at the Wagga Wagga TAFE College. He applied, and was successful. Over the years, he worked in the electrical trades store, the main store, the panel beating store, the fitting and machine store, the hydraulics training section, and in security.

Rod graduated from high school in 1973 and received a scholarship to the Riverina College of Advanced Education (RCAE) to study primary school teaching. In 1977, he had finished his training at the RCAE and moved to Western Sydney to take up his first teaching position at Colyton Public School. A year later he transferred to Marayong Public School, and met his future wife, Heather, whose mother ran the school canteen. Brian followed in Rod's footsteps, also studying teaching at the RCAE and graduating as a high school teacher. He accepted a position at Griffith High School in 1978.

Now well into their 40s, and with their two eldest boys fully grown and beginning their careers in other cities, Toby and Marie decided it was time to travel. In 1979, they excused Mark from school, and the three of them went on a camping loop of Australia – first to Sydney, then to Darwin, and then straight down the middle of the country to Port Augusta before heading back home to Wagga. "We saw the Parkes telescopes, the School of the Air, the Mitta Mitta Caves, the Mataranka Hot Springs, Alice Springs, Kings Canyon, Ayers Rock, and even stayed overnight underground in Coober Pedy," Toby says.

In 1981, wedding bells rang once again as the two eldest boys were married – Brian to Maree Anderson in Singleton, and Rod to Heather McCrory in Blacktown. In 1983, the couple's first grandchild, Megan Louise, was born to Brian and Maree in Griffith. Rod and Heather then gave them their second grandchild, Grant, born in Windsor in 1985, and then their second granddaughter, Danielle, in 1987. Brian and Maree had two more children, Nicholas Robert, also in 1987, and Dana Maree in 1989, both born in Cowra.

In 1988, over 15 million people visited Brisbane for World Expo 88, and the Kellses were among them. They all drove up to Boondall, in Brisbane, where Daphne now lived. Sadly, Toby's youngest brother James passed away shortly after they arrived, and they attended his funeral while they were there.

There were many more wonderful family trips over the years. "Christmas holidays were spent at Ulladulla; Rod and Brian and their families would be there. These were always enjoyable, especially with the grandchildren," Toby says. "And in 1991, we were invited to join Rod and his family on a tour of New Zealand. We flew to Auckland, on the North Island, where we picked up a Toyota HiAce and worked our way down to Wellington, where we caught the ferry to South Island."

It was soon after this that Toby hit his second hole-in-one on the golf course, this time while playing with Mark in the Saturday competition. Two holes-in-one – not bad for a life's work!

"Life is good"

In 1994, Mark married Kathryn Spain in Wagga Wagga. They had their first child, Tahlia Maree, in 1995, and their second, Jordan Lee, in 1997.

Around this time, Marie's dancing friends suggested they take up dancing again. Marie was on board, and after working out some routines and making their own costumes, they were on their way. "They called themselves 'The Timeless Tappers'," Toby says. "They were a success and well-received, performing at old people's homes and various events around the Riverina. They performed for a number of years."

The Timeless Tappers kept Marie nice and busy. Not only did they perform at events regularly, but they also got together every Wednesday to make their costumes and practise their routines. However, she still managed to find time for other activities. She played tennis on Thursdays, golf on Tuesdays and Fridays, and went bowling one or two evenings per week. She also resumed playing music and spent many an hour on the keyboard. No one could accuse Marie of being an idler.

Nor did the couple lose their passion for travel. In 1999, an armoures' reunion was held in Perth, so Toby and Marie took the Indian-Pacific across, attending the week-long reunion and touring around Western Australia while they were there before taking the train back home. In 2000, they crossed Bass Strait from Melbourne to Tasmania on a ferry and took a bus tour around the island state. They then headed up to Windsor to stay with Rod and his family during the Sydney Olympics, attending the rowing, hockey, softball, baseball and handball.

Also in 2000, Mark and Kathy had their third daughter, Phoebe Elise, giving Toby and Marie a total of eight grandchildren.

In 2003, it was time for another bus tour, this time along the Great Ocean Road from Melbourne to Adelaide. After 10 days of touring, they headed home via Renmark and Mildura, where a dinner cruise on the Murray River proved a fitting end. By the time they'd celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at Mark's place in Wagga Wagga in 2004, there was barely a corner of Australia that the couple hadn't visited together.

Toby and Marie reached another milestone with the arrival of their first great grandchild, Zachery William, born to Megan and her husband Blake in 2008. Seven more great grandchildren had followed at time of print: Grayson James, Alexia Marlee, Nathaniel Desmond, Mackenzie Rose, Jensen Michael, Hartley June and Kaitlyn Therese.

In 2012, as Marie began to have problems with her health, the couple moved into a villa at the Riverina Gums Retirement Village. They celebrated their 60th

wedding anniversary in 2014. Marie passed away on May 30, 2018, and her service was held at the Lawn Cemetery Chapel in Lake Albert. She no doubt continues to dance with the angels – and perhaps take them on in a game of tennis, too, if they fancy.

Marie is survived by Toby, who sold the villa and moved into a serviced apartment at Riverina Gums, where he lives at time of writing. He's incredibly happy with the varied and fulfilling life he has led – although he still sometimes thinks about heading to the golf course up the road for a crack at that third hole-in-one. "Life is good. It's just what you make of it," Toby reflects. "Marie is still with me. While reading the paper or watching TV, I will turn to make a comment only to realise she is not there. At night, should I feel the need to get up, I remove the bed clothes with care, then realise again! Should I not be able to sleep at night, my thoughts drift back through our 60 years together. Memories."



Toby and Marie celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary with their original marriage certificate