

This is the synopsis of my life story (yet to be published), which has already attracted some interest as a possible telemovie or film if placed in the hands of the right person. If you - or someone you know - is at all interested in this project, please get in touch (see Contacts):

WE ALL HAVE DREAMS The Story of Colin James

Chapter 1: Sitting in his wheelchair at Parliament House in Canberra, Colin muses over his first 57 years, as he contemplates his autobiography... what would he call it?

Next, we are taken to a day in Colin's early life where, as a toddler on the farm, he goes missing and is feared drowned. We are also introduced to his mother and her family of six sisters and three brothers. Then we are taken to young Colin's escapades as a three-year-old in Hamilton during the war years and the onset of what will put him in bed or a wheelchair for the remainder of his life.

Chapter 2: Rheumatic fever is diagnosed and we learn of the treatments Colin has to suffer, together with the intense pain of his complaint. We meet his doctor who advises Colin's parents that, because of the damage to his heart, he must be kept in a darkened room and not be allowed any visitors. Any intense excitement could be fatal. The friendly doctor is also an artist and draws Colin in an unusual pose. Colin's first inclination towards being a performing artist is revealed and his family is advised of a new 'wonder drug', that may put him back on his feet again, but will his parents be able to afford it?

A 'rich' uncle offers his assistance, as well as his close friendship to the rapidly deteriorating Colin who is placed in hospital. Uncle Keith sits with Colin, encouraging him to eat while he relates stories of his racehorses and the day when Colin will be well enough to become a jockey for him.

Colin is growing weaker each day and reaches the stage where a blood transfusion is necessary to keep him alive... but his blood type is rare. In desperation it is found that Colin's father has the same blood group, but is it too late?

Chapter 3: Colin is returned home, but the strain starts to catch up with Colin's parents and a private nurse is called in to assist them. This only lasts a short time when the nurse – who is pregnant – suffers a miscarriage! By this time Colin's days are filled with intense pain and his parents, in desperation, take him to several doctors and hospitals in the hope of finding an answer, but with little success.

The family decides on a move to the larger town of Bendigo, which they hope will provide better services and more up-to-date medical options. Colin's parents try to improve the increasing stiffness in his joints with exercise, which proves extremely painful for all concerned, yet it appears to be working... until, due to Colin's eagerness to get out of bed, it results in him catching a chill and a recurrence of the high fevers.

By this time, Colin is in his early teens and – on his better days – is keen to play with the many toys he has been given by his relatives. They are all given names and become Colin's closest friends... we are introduced to them all and learn how they ignite Colin's interest in becoming a sportsman... and provide him with his first lesson in sex education!

Then, as Colin's condition slowly improves and he becomes stronger, his vivid imagination comes to life and we are introduced to his completely new life... in his own town, with his own friends and his daily adventures as a sportsman, radio announcer, politician and horse owner! We meet many of the townsfolk and learn of how important they are in Colin's life; in fact, they BECOME his life! The highs and lows of each day revolve around the town, its radio station, its inhabitants and its sporting fixtures.

Chapter 4: Radio becomes Colin's first love; the personalities become his friends, the radio serials his daily adventures, the quiz shows his education. This part of his life was to be the catalyst in Colin's desire to become an entertainer. We learn of the people who were to shape his future as a singer, songwriter, compere and motivational speaker.

Chapter 5: In this chapter we are introduced to Colin's father, who tells - in his own words - of his own interesting background, how he met Colin's mother and his involvement in the early days of what was to become the huge Ansett Empire. We also learn more about the early life of Colin's mother and her large family of sisters and brothers, together with Colin's two wonderful, but wicked, grandmothers... is this where he got his equally wicked sense of humour?

Colin's only brother, Geoff is born. What added pressures would his arrival place on the already stressed lives of their parents? And how would this new member of the family feel towards his brother who was often too ill to play with him? Would it be a 'normal' upbringing or would he grow to resent the added attention his bed-ridden brother was receiving?

In the coming years, the brothers are to share a common interest in music, including a television performance in Melbourne under the name of The Brothers James. We learn how they become a songwriting team and members of the same band.

Chapter 6: Colin tells of how he has never been bored with life... of how the simple things of life have always kept him amused... some of his favourite playthings... the fun he had catching flies, racing snails, collecting insects and playing word games, etc. He also had a large and very much loved collection of pets. We are informed of some of their endearing habits and how each one played a part in developing Colin's real passion for animals.

Chapter 7: With his condition improving, Colin is allowed a few visitors, but what happens when you are confined to bed, with a visitor in your room and you receive an urgent call of nature? Colin tells us how he learns to cope with several embarrassing situations, including the time when, at the age of thirteen, he finds that his first girl-friend is seeing someone else!

We are then told the story of what was the most frightening night of Colin's life... alone in his darkened room with an intruder.

As Colin grows older he begins to learn the feelings of loneliness. We are told of his first wheelchair and how he is allowed out of bed for the first time since he was a toddler, but only on 'perfect' days. He tells us of how he befriends - and entertains - some of the people who pass by his house and of how his weird sense of humour gets him into trouble on more than one occasion! We also learn of how Colin's parents taught him, quite unintentionally, to become a perfectionist.

Chapter 8: Because of the early onset of his illness, Colin has never attended school and he is becoming concerned about his lack of education. He tells us of how, at first, his mother teaches him to read and write and how he used those acquired skills to write letters to his aunts. Then, an acquaintance of the family who is a schoolteacher, gives him some simple writing and numeric lessons and Colin teaches himself the rest!

Then, in his mind, Colin at last becomes a 'jockey', as he 'rides home' some of the horses he bets on... until he gets seriously into debt.

Colin then tells us of how, through a visiting church group, he meets his first really close friend... a boy about his own age, with a similar sense of humour and love of life. Ironically, soon afterwards, his new friend falls victim to the dreaded disease of poliomyelitis and is, himself, confined to bed for some time. All of the events of this period of Colin's life are recorded in his diaries and he tells us of some of the more interesting entries!

Chapter 9: Due to Colin's increasing interest in the church group, his spiritual growth also increases, although perhaps not for all the right reasons! He then commences taking school lessons by correspondence, but only for a short time as he suffers a recurrence of rheumatic fever. While going through this phase of his life he was soon into learning something about natural science... breeding silkworms!

By the age of 15, Colin is ready to try his hand at songwriting. Unable to write music, he devises his own method of keeping the tunes in his head until his father loans him the use of a tape recorder. This is also the year when Colin falls madly in love for the first time, but the girl of his dreams lives too far away for the romance to blossom so, to keep his mind otherwise occupied, Colin becomes involved in other activities, including reading books. He also meets one of his sporting idols!

Chapter 10: Colin is allowed out to witness a visit to Bendigo by the Queen & Duke of Edinburgh and we read his diary entry of this big occasion. We are told of his ever-increasing interest in playing board games and his discreet way of learning about the 'facts of life', also how his bedroom becomes a movie theatre! It is around this time that he makes a new friend, who becomes a little overwhelming.

Chapter 11: 16 years old and Colin is becoming more and more interested in the opposite sex, but his shyness, lack of confidence and vigilant parents keep getting in the way! The introduction of a typewriter gives him a welcome new interest in life and he soon begins to produce his first newsletter and start a 'business' typing letters for his friends. The telephone is also beginning to become more important in his daily life and he becomes an extremely successful radio phone-quiz contestant. The telephone also assists him in making dates - for his friends!

Chapter 12: **Becoming increasingly independent, due, in part, to the arrival of a 'new' self-propelled wheelchair, Colin spends time building up his strength - and his ability to 'chat up' girls on the telephone exchange... he becomes, in his words, "the unseen entertainer". This is fine until the day he goes too far and is labeled "a public nuisance". At this point, his world is changed forever and his pool of friends increases dramatically, many of them telephonists and nurses... and thus, in 1957, the Colin James Social Club is born!**

The Club is an instant success with new members being added almost daily and all meeting in the bedroom of this rather unique individual. With so many members, the club becomes self-supporting and is soon running functions to aid local charities, providing Colin not only with a fresh outlook on life, but with new responsibilities as its leader. He also receives some sad news about an old friend.

Chapter 13: **With the Social Club in full swing, Colin makes a new friend who is to play a large part in his life. "Crumpet" nights are introduced with great success and shortly afterwards Colin lands his first 'gig' as compere/entertainer for one of his club functions... and it isn't long before he makes his first public 'blooper'.**

Colin becomes editor of the Club's newsletter, which is circulated to members in several parts of the world. He uses this as a vehicle to try his hand at short-story writing with some success.

Chapter 14: **The Club continues to flourish with regular functions being arranged by Colin and its members, but Colin is becoming increasingly unhappy with the fact that his disability is preventing him from attending the majority of these occasions. He does, however, get the opportunity of travelling to a country music concert where he meets the stars... many of whom show interest in his songwriting ability and will later record his material.**

Hypnosis as an entertainment medium is introduced to the Club, which is soon rocked with malicious rumours that it is, in reality, a den of iniquity. Colin's health is again affected and a fall out of his chair does little to allay his parents concerns. A brief spell in hospital results and it is here that Colin meets the nurse who, several years later, is to become his first wife.

Colin's 21st birthday is celebrated in fine style with members of the Club, which is becoming widely known as the "in" place in Bendigo. It gains added publicity through several members becoming co-presenters and entertainers on local radio programs. Colin's prowess in playing board games temporarily loses him a few friends when he takes out most of the prizes in a Club run games tournament.

Chapter 15: **It's 1959 and the Club forms its own band, which begins its career in illustrious company. Colin's songs are now being recorded by well-known country music artists, and some big names in the entertainment world are visiting the Club when they are performing in Bendigo. Colin's father begins a short-lived series of film nights in a nearby country town, with Colin performing a bracket of songs at intermission time.**

In love again, Colin struggles with the realization that it is going to be a long and lonely life ahead unless he can do something soon about the ties that bind him to his parents and his bedroom. Then, Colin's world is shattered when he discovers that the girl he is in love with has ended their romance (upon the advice of one of his best friends) and is now engaged to another man! He is, at last, forced to understand that he really is different'... a disabled person.

Putting all of this aside for the time being, Colin throws himself back into Club activities and assists in arranging many new club functions and outings for the increasing number of members who own 'hotted up' cars and motor cycles.

Chapter 16: Colin begins this chapter with a poem he wrote about the club activities and its members and we learn about the time when a 'vigilante' group is formed in an attempt to catch a prowler. It is then revealed how sentimental Colin really is and he gives us his thoughts on how he feels about people who show their emotions in public. We are told of how the many violent arguments between his parents have affected the way he looks at life and how Christmas time is very special to him.

As the lives of Club members change, they marry and progress in their various fields of endeavour, it becomes apparent that the Colin James Social Club could be about to fold. The failing health of Colin's mother and his own fluctuating condition also plays a part, so as the Club holds its final meeting in 1961, four years of fun and character building have come to an end.

Chapter 17: Colin becomes an entertainment booking agent, setting up his own business from home. He meets and works with many of the well-known Australian and International artists of the time, several of who visit him on their way through Bendigo. The agency is soon a thriving business, thanks to the meticulous and ethical way Colin runs it, together with his keen attention-to-detail. He learns a hard lesson one day, however, which lands him in court and costs him dearly... all because he had accepted the word of one of his fellow agents.

Colin employs an excellent secretary to assist him in the business and this results in increased turnover and even longer hours. With his added income Colin invests in several other areas, including the stock market - with disastrous results. He tries his hand at becoming a part-time salesman to recoup some of his losses, but soon realizes this is NOT his forte!

To improve his stage act, Colin attempts to learn an instrument... again, without success. We hear some of the other lessons Colin has learned in running his agency and through performing with a band, some of which have proved quite hilarious... although perhaps not to Colin at the time.

Chapter 18: Once more he falls in love and, for the second time, suffers the agony of being told the love of his life has become engaged to someone else! Convinced he is not meant to be the person who does the 'chasing', he allows himself to be seduced by a very caring young nurse who, in 1965, becomes Colin's first wife. Colin, who by now had developed a thirst for travel, takes his new wife to California, with a few days in Hawaii on the

way home. Following several years of unsuccessfully trying to father a child, Colin and his wife adopt a baby girl.

Around this time, Colin's mother suffers a massive asthma attack, which causes severe brain damage. She is placed in hospital where, not long afterwards, she passes away.

1976 proves to be a year of more 'lows' than 'highs'. First, Colin and "Insight", a band he shares with his brother Geoff, singing partner Olive Bice and three others, go into a recording studio and record what will be the first of Colin's thirteen albums. Titled "Gentle On My Mind", it has limited success, due to the lack of promotion it receives when Colin is again stricken with yet another bout of rheumatic fever just before its release.

Then, after twelve years, Colin's marriage breaks down, largely due to the long hours he is spending on his business. He reluctantly decides to sell up and accepts an offer from a fellow agent of a move to Geelong, where he will manage a ticket-selling agency. With nowhere suitable to stay, Colin moves into a nursing home as a temporary measure, but after five weeks of 10pm curfews, at the same time trying to juggle his entertainment engagements, Colin decides to try living on his own in a flat.

Living on his own for the first time in his life, with the assistance of district nurses to get him out of bed in the mornings, proves a real challenge for Colin. There are a few minor 'accidents', but he manages to combine this new life-style with his work and is soon convinced he has made the right move. Following his divorce, things turn sour when the ticket agency closes due to other similar agencies opening up in the area. On top of this, because of over-exposure, his entertainment bookings begin to dry up in Geelong and he decides to further his education in hope of picking up a better 9-5 job.

Studying and completing 5th form English in less than six months, Colin begins writing articles for a local newspaper on a voluntary basis. At this time he is feeling rather alone and drifts into two hopeless relationships, which leave him feeling worse than ever. Then, following a radio interview about songwriting, he meets an aspiring songwriter named Carol, who collaborates with him in writing several songs. She is obviously gifted in her field and Colin is immediately attracted to her. When her mother goes to England on holidays, Carol visits Colin to work on some more songs... and the romance begins.

Chapter 19: The marriage of the two songwriters takes place in 1980, with Colin's daughter taking the role of flower girl. The honeymoon is spent on the West Coast of the USA, with some time in California, Las Vegas and Hawaii (Colin's favourite spot). In a short time the pair, with Carol as guitarist/vocalist, join forces with another two musicians to form a band, known as "Birds & B's". Amongst the band's many successes are three appearances on the National TV talent show, "New Faces", which include the first performance on TV of Colin's song/poem, "If I Can Do It, So Can You".

This is to become Colin's signature song and is requested wherever he performs. He includes it in his appearance at the Papal Welcome held at Melbourne Cricket Ground in 1986 and records it on two of his albums. He

tells us of another time when he performed it at a service club function and upon ending the song, with the spotlight in his eyes, he steered himself in his wheelchair right off the stage and on to the floor! In typical dry humour he jokes, “the floor wasn’t damaged at all!”

Subsidising his entertainment income with day-time work gives Colin the opportunity to pay off the home that he and Carol live in. At first he is a special school supervisor, then a clerical assistant and an assistant manager with a disability organization (where he spends two hours each day traveling to/from Melbourne by train, sometimes in the smelly and dank compartment used for transporting livestock!). Colin recounts one very eventful day when his wheelchair stalled as he was crossing a railway track on his way to work... luckily he survived to tell the story!

This job in Melbourne appears to offer Colin a very bright future, until he falls out of favour with some of his work colleagues and is asked to resign. Back in Geelong, he picks up a job working with a disability employment project, but leaves a few months later to go back into entertainment on a full-time basis.

The band breaks up, so Carol and Colin form a duo and continue to work for a time, until Carol - who doesn’t like the traveling involved, together with the heavy work of loading and setting up all the necessary equipment - decides she wants to give away being a performing musician. Colin is disappointed, but accepts her decision with regret.

Chapter 20: Deciding to give his wife time to study for her Bible College diploma, Colin decides to make 1988 his big year in music and he continues working as a solo performer with trips to Sydney, around Victoria and culminating with a trip to New Zealand, travelling with Desree-Ilona Crawford and her band.

He then spends four weeks in America, including the realisation of a long-time ambition to visit Nashville where he performs at several songwriting workshops and has a number of ‘adventures’ which Colin relates in his own style. He also spends some time at many of Nashville’s historic country music attractions. All the time he misses Carol and wishes she could be with him... it isn’t the same without her.

On his last day in Nashville, Colin, having spent his money on souvenirs and out of cash at the time, has an encounter with a massive and not-so-fit taxi driver who refuses to accept credit cards. It is a sweltering day and Colin is pleased to find a credit agency just next door to the wine bar he is about to visit. To the dismay of both Colin and his cab driver, the credit machine is out of order and he is asked to wait 15 minutes until the manager returns and repairs it. By this time the cabbie is becoming visibly upset, but at that moment the manager arrives back only to discover Colin’s credit card has insufficient credit... but it has just enough to pay the cab drivers fare!

Leaving Nashville, Colin sings two songs, including one he wrote with Carol, at the Seattle Coliseum in Washington where he and Desree-Ilona entertain more than 8000 people at a service club convention. After a brief stopover at his beloved Hawaii he arrives back home looking forward to a fond reunion with his wife.

It is January 1989 and what is to be his final fling in the entertainment field will be at the annual country music festival in Tamworth. By this time he decides that, regardless of what it means to him, he is prepared to give away his entertainment career in preference to spending more time with Carol... but it is too late.

Chapter 22: Attendant carers in the home are becoming more widely accepted in a new initiative funded by both State and Federal Parliament. Colin has spoken to Carol earlier about this in an attempt to make their lives more 'normal', but Carol was against the idea. Now, with he and Carol living apart, but under the same roof, he decides it has to be given a try and, having been accepted into the scheme, he advertises for applicants. One successful aspirant for the positions is a young part-time naturopath, named Diane who, less than two years later, becomes Colin's third wife.

Unlike Carol, Diane encourages Colin's interest in music and assists him in the recording of his thirteenth album, "Music Man". Their time together includes many highlights, in particular some 'magical moments' in Hawaii at Hanuma Bay when Diane assists Colin out into the warm waters where the couple enjoy some time with tropical fish swimming all around them.

They also spend five months driving around parts of Australia as part of a project to locate and list as many wheelchair accessible accommodation options and tourist attractions for a travel directory which they will eventually self-publish. They also take "Tess", their lovable cocker spaniel with them. Diane is also a keen photographer and one of the most prized photographs of their trip is of "Tess" with Ayres Rock in the background.

Chapter 23: In between his temporary day-time work in customer service with banking and telecommunications companies, Colin continues to make occasional appearances as an entertainer, but certainly not on the scale that he has in the past. In 1998, due to his high profile as a person in a wheelchair, he is invited by a travel company to host a special 28 day tour of Europe, which has been designed for people with limited mobility. When it is confirmed that Diane can also travel at a reduced fee, he readily agrees... sacrificing his day job in the process.

The trip, which takes in parts of Austria, Hungary, Switzerland and the Czech Republic, is memorable in many ways, particularly the scenery, but is very draining on Diane who has to act, not only as Colin's personal assistant and tour guide, but is also called upon to assist many of the other travellers on the tour with their accommodation problems and other requirements.

In the year 2001, Colin is chosen as a torchbearer for a leg of the Olympic Torch Relay around Australia. He tells of the cold and wet day in July when he sets out on his short journey, which is nonetheless memorable for the warming smile of Diane as he passes her on his way to the finish line.

Chapter 24: In the nine years of his marriage to Diane, Colin has never felt more content with his life. Her support of his music interests and wicked sense of humour, combined with the love they share for their little family of pets (two dogs, two cats and an angora goat) has made him happier than he has been for some time. The 25 years difference in their ages has never been

an item and many friends are of the opinion that they were “made for each other”.

But all good things must come to an end, or so it seems to Colin. Six months short of their tenth wedding anniversary and uncertain of the reasons why, he is devastated once again when Diane leaves him. Left alone to face an uncertain future, without work and without a companion, he settles down to the task of completing one of his longest uncompleted projects... the writing and publishing of his autobiography, which he hopes may prove of some inspiration to others, disabled and able-bodied alike.

He still isn't sure of what to call it... perhaps the title of one of his songs, “If I Can Do It, So Can You” or “We All Have Dreams”... or maybe “My Three Wives” or even “Love Me, Love My Wheelchair”?