

Reflection

Lance Austin

In the 'good old days', before counsellors, crisis teams, or armed offenders squads were invented, if there was a severe domestic upset, country people called in the local constable or the rural GP to arbitrate. Which one of us was involved seemed purely due to chance.

At that time also, a number of country hotelkeepers seemed to be alcoholics, and rather volatile.

One evening, I was asked to visit a country hotel, some 60 kilometres away, at the foot of Lake Wakatipu.

After a domestic argument, the licensee had chased his wife and family at gunpoint. Would I go and 'sort him out'?

Stopping on the wide gravel area outside the hotel, I stepped out, and walked across in the searchlight glare of a brilliant full moon. Never have I felt more vulnerable or more afraid, as I waited for the sound, or feel, of a shot.

Mentally pinning on my Victoria Cross, I felt my way down a dark corridor to the bedroom. To my great

relief the licensee was sound asleep on the bed. A rifle and shotgun leaned against the wall. After quietly and carefully moving the weapons, I woke the gentleman, to discuss with him the error of his ways.

Fortunately, this was not a regular event in country practice, but we rural GPs did have our moments!

Fifty years later, I went back to Kingston, this time in broad daylight. Not a trace of the old hotel remained, and the area was as quiet and peaceful as such a pleasant spot deserved to be.