

## When Hope is Strong - Background ...

Many of the ideas for the plot of my first novel *When Hope is Strong* came from my first two books: local histories of the Gold Coast hinterland area where I live. This novel centres itself in this same area, in a fictitious village named Boolai, in the early days of pioneering settlement.

The first settlers in the Gold Coast hinterland were timber getters, followed by the free settlers. These were often poor men, arriving with their families to take up the Government of the day's offer of cheap land. They planted corn, maize and arrowroot, felled the remaining timber, and began the first attempts at dairying. Eventually villages sprouted where there had only been scrub. Stores and hotels thrived and local produce was carried to city markets via the system of rivers that transverses the area.

The basic theme of *When Hope is Strong* is the acquisition of land. Land was the prized possession and, as one of the characters, Hedley Tarlington, says "*without land, a man has nothing*". And the battle in those early days for the settlers was to keep the land, once it was theirs. Many walked away with nothing to show for their years of struggle except the ache in their hearts, often leaving a few unkempt family graves on the land they had sought to tame.

*When Hope is Strong* is the story of two families. The Tarlingtons had been the first lessees of the land until it had been broken up into smaller blocks and re-leased under the 1868 Land Alienation Act. The Halls are one of the new breed of settlers and grievances soon form between Randolph Tarlington, son of the original land holder, and his new neighbour Ted Hall.

The novel is also the story of three women.

Bridie is the compassionate younger second wife of Hedley Tarlington. She nurses a deep-seated hatred of her stepson, Randolph.

Maddie, Ted's wife, despises the bush and longs to escape. With each passing year she becomes more despondent and discontented with her life.

Kitty, Maddie's young sister, growing into womanhood and experiencing first love, sees what is happening to her sister and is powerless to help.

*When Hope is Strong* is a novel about love and loss, about bitter hatreds and disillusioned dreams. It sets the characters amongst the minutia of early pioneering life, in an untamed land, in an era when men made the decisions and were supported unquestioningly by their womenfolk.

I hope you enjoy reading *When Hope is Strong* as much as I enjoyed writing it!

Cheers ...

Robyn Lee Burrows

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This book is now out of print, but you may be lucky enough to pick one up on e-Bay.