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Gowling's successes with cars, real estate, art and horses, are well-known. Less well-known is that, only six years ago, he almost went broke.

PHOTOS BY WAINE LLOYD

Life without guarantees

The man behind the Kevin Dennis legend talks to Lawrence Money about his business acumen, his background and his battle with cancer.

DENNIS GOWLING

UNDER less serious circumstances, you might say that Kevin Dennis, one-time king of Melbourne used-car cars, is under a two-year warranty. Gowling prefers to call it "warranty on the car," but it is not until two years, or up to that point, you are pretty clear.

"Details had tremendous marketing and selling techniques and the power to attract talented people. He gave me a different insight into the industry. I was a very reserved person and he brought out some of the flair that was hidden in me."

The Kevin Dennis used-car era lasted from 1980 to 1974. At its peak, it dominated 90 per cent of the Melbourne used-car industry and had three of the 10 top-rating shows in Melbourne in that period. Such was the power of the juggernaut that, 15 years later, people still mistakenly call Gowling "Kevin" but ironically the "Kevin" involved in the firm failed out of its infancy.

"The first six months is the worst," he says. "If it's going to appear again, the first six months are critical. If you get over that, you can breathe a little more easily, but it is not until two years, or up to that point, you are pretty clear."

"I was a very nice bloke, but one day after he had gone back shooting with the car dealer but he came back and told me he thought I was mad, that we were working too hard. They said the new firm would go broke the way it was going."

"I couldn't believe it. I thought he was joking, but he said 'No, you're working too fast.'"

So Gowling moved on. He became a clerk in Yallourn. "My first fortnight's pay was six quid. I was supposed to get six pounds I said fourpence a week. I asked the supervisor and he asked how old I was and I said 18. Well, he said, you only get 18-year-old wages. You're not 21."

"Whether or not he has beaten the disease, the operation has changed Gowling's life."

"I'd like to say that it's been a big all the time and sometimes you forget to empty it. It's there for the rest of your life, like cleaning your teeth. Sometimes there's a tank and it has a problem because you turn over on your side and squash the thing so you wet the bed."

"I'd seen the other bloke's house but he had bigger..."

So Gowling was let loose on the car trade. It was not a spectacular start. He set for two weeks, worked contacts at Auburn Car Sales until he finally got his first car — a black Ford panel van which jumped out of second gear. Three hundred quid. I was that excited I rang everyone up."

"I had father was Mr. Symon," he says. "He was found hanged, no line or fracture in the place. His own son had strangled him and takes it all and so one knew he was dead."

"I got very involved in the futures market but got sold off by a scam. It was around \$500 to \$500 and then it collapsed at one time from \$200 to \$200 and was locked in. In one night I did about a million."

"I was a troop carrier, carried 2000 immigrants. I borrowed 10 quid from my neighbor. I had 18 when I got on and 18 when I got off and I played cards all the way. Game called Braze. The three-headed puzzle in the Australian workers' war is Yallourn, screwing men on bolts. 'We were with the SEC in a very big enterprise — financing job. You had to match up all the different bits and bolts. Can't remember why."

Mr Mollison's grand plans for the Gallery

The pressure is on the head of the National Gallery to perform or else. Corrie Perkin reports.

THE rumors had been circulating for weeks: The high fliers and deep thinkers of Melbourne's visual arts community all wanted to know, was James Mollison going to change the name of the National Gallery of Victoria?

The traditionalists, however, felt the gallery had been called the National Gallery of Victoria for 128 years and it is a name that should be preserved.

James Mollison, who moved into his new office in 55 Kilda Road last month, also heard the rumors. "It's something that many people have brushed with but I've come back," he said. "Now are you going to change the name? It never occurred to me."

Many people have wondered why James Mollison, who spent 12 years in Canberra, would want to come back to Melbourne and run what has been described as an unwelcome institution.

"I had already decided I was going back to Melbourne in June, and that decision coincided with his announcement of his resignation. People here made life so uncomfortable for me that for four months I actually stayed away from the place."

"I found him to be not an aloof man but someone who was very hard at work. He was doing his job and he was doing it well. He was doing his job and he was doing it well. He was doing his job and he was doing it well."

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