

My Childhood Memories

Society Committee member and leader of the Oral History Group, June Hall (nee Evans) has taken time out from her busy schedule of oral histories with many of our local identities, to tell us her own story as a young girl growing up in Port Melbourne and later in Greensborough. June's wonderful recollections will stir your own memories and is a reminder that we all should follow June's example and document what we can, while we can.

I have often wondered at what age children really start storing recollections.

I told my parents about a memory I have about a car. I described the car like this: I remember a two tone car, it was beige and brown, the roof and the mudguards were brown, this was when my parents looked absolutely stunned, then my father said "you can't remember that car, I sold it when you were two years old", I then said, what used to fascinate me were the wheels, and I started to describe them, dad was astounded, his reply was, June, we don't even have a photo of that car, in black and white let alone colour.

Mum said "the upholstery".. I finished the sentence for her saying "it felt like velvet". I was told it was velour. I was very surprised to find I was 2 when the car was sold. There is another memory I have from when I was a baby sitting on the floor; I will never be able to confirm, now that mum and dad are no longer with us.

I was born at 82 Alma Terrace, Newport, Victoria. My parents were Clarice and Ernie Evans; before dad enlisted in 1939 we had moved to Port Melbourne, near my grandparents. I was very happy growing up in "Port", I saw a lot of my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, we did so much together, it was fun, it seemed like one big family, not just my actual family but the neighbours too. My grandparent's brothers and sisters also lived in the area. I was a normal kid, just like most kids, a very happy, contented and satisfied child and a tomboy.

These were difficult times for families, with not much money, husbands and sons overseas, food shortages and rationing, unemployment etc.; however our family made the most of "everything". There were birthday parties; fancy dress parties and the Christmas parties were great. We always had someone dressed as Father Christmas, handing out presents and a wonderful variety of food and goodies. There always seemed to be a lot of laughter and happiness around.

One year nana dressed up as mother Christmas, we weren't supposed to know, I remember one of us saying, that's nana, and were asked how we knew, the reply "those are nanas hands". I remember walking to South Melbourne for a New Year's Eve party, to my uncle's mother's house in Clarendon Street, where we danced on the road and stopped the trams, people from the trams joined us.

We had competitions, I think organised by the locals, for the best decorated dolls pram or bike or whatever, the whole family was involved, we used to make paper or material

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flowers, we also used ribbon and lace, anything that we could find to decorated the prams, not forgetting our imagination, it was amazing what was produced.

Another thing was foot running races, I loved running. These I won on many occasions, (my mother's uncle, Lou Marinier, a trainer, wanted to train me, then we moved house). Sack races, egg and spoon etc. were held in Station Street. Small prizes were given to the winners. One of the few things I wanted to do but didn't get the chance to do as a child was play tennis. Sometimes we were given a penny; we would run straight to the corner shop and get a bag of lollies (for a penny!).

We walked everywhere, most of the places we went to and the people we visited were quite close, my mother's sister Rita lived a little further away, and her brother Ron, a little further away again, he lived just off Clarendon Street, South Melbourne, quite a distance but we walked there too. When we were old enough, only in a group, on a Saturday afternoon, we used to go to the pictures at the Eclipse Theatre; we used to look forward to Saturdays. From memory, the Eclipse was close to halfway between Port and South Melbourne.

Being a short walk from the beach we spent a lot of time there, sometimes just mum would take us; other times there would be a group, aunts, uncles and cousins. Dad and an uncle used to dive under station pier and collect mussels off the pylons, usually a sugar bag full, these were taken home and boiled in the copper in the laundry. You will never really know the flavour of a mussel until you have tasted fresh mussels cooked this way, and eaten straight away, dipped in vinegar and with fresh bread and butter. Yum. Station Pier was nearby, and we would go and wave off the soldiers departing, and welcome home those returning.

On a vacant block behind my grandparents' house, there was this huge peppercorn tree which we climbed and collected the most beautifully coloured caterpillars, cocoons and cape moths etc. Also close by in a friend's garden was a very big oak tree, we spent a lot of time climbing that, and in another friend's house there was a fig tree, we used to collect the figs for her mum to make jam, which was delicious.

My grandmother played the piano, and my grandfather played the drums, swain whistle, mouth organ and piano accordion, he also had an old squeeze box. We had many impromptu sing alongs around the piano, it didn't have to be a special event, and it would just happen. Nan and pop had a dance band and played at dances. We were taken to these dances when still in a pram, and started dancing soon after we could walk.

At a very young age we started tap dancing, classes as well as dancing individually, some danced in pairs with a male partners, mine was Alan Brown, who had a very good singing voice, as well as being a good dancer. I won a medal for the most advanced; my sister Shirley won the most improved. I remember ballroom dancing with Alan at the Port

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Melbourne town hall, not 100% sure what it was, I think a ballroom dancing competition for children. We also danced in the wards and entertained the soldiers in the Repatriation Hospitals. We put on concerts and charged one penny entry, there was singing, dancing, etc., these were held in stables behind neighbors' houses, at one we actually had a real "stage curtain" rigged up.

From a very young age I was interested in cars, and was able to identify the make of most cars on the road. My grandfather had a 1926 Morris Cowley, an uncle had a 1928 Dodge; I went on a holiday to Wilsons Promontory in this car with them and their four kids. Can you imagine that car packed with tents and everything that would be needed for the camp packed inside the car, with us kids lying, unable to sit up, on top of all this equipment, for hours? Another uncle had a 1927 Essex; another who was a plumber had a 1939/40 Chevy Ute.

I am seven, and I remember the day my youngest sister Marj was born. Dad must have been home on leave, I remember him walking down "the back lane" towards me; I was riding a scooter in Stokes Street, outside Stacey's house, when, dad walked over to me and said "you have a baby sister", my reply was, "don't tell fibs dad", my sisters responded in the same way, how innocent were we? Marj was a source of great delight to us; we adored her, and spent a lot of time with her.

We started school, which I never liked, at Nott Street State School, not sure but I think the fifth generation on my grandfather's side to attend this school. Even though I was in a junior grade, I was given permission and taken to practice with the school basketball team as wing attack, my sister Betty, who was three and a half years older than me, was the goalie. I remember being "self conscious" being the only little kid there, as a child I was short, a good head shorter than my sister Shirley.

When the allies defeated Germany in WW11, there were great celebrations in the streets of Port Melbourne; everyone was out dancing and singing, celebrating our win, houses had flags and streamers flying on them. We have photos of us, beside my grandfather's 1926 Morris Cowley with a big, about three feet tall, balloon with Hitler's face painted on, above the car. (A photo of this may have been in the newspaper).

We always went to the Anzac Day marches, and were in the newspaper on a couple of occasions, we wore matching grey slacks and jackets, (I think it was called a Battle Dress Jacket) made from the material used to make Australian colour patches, with dad's colour patch on our jacket pocket, these fascinated a lot of people.

I felt my heart had broken when we moved away and I couldn't dance anymore. The feeling of that loss stayed with me for a long, long time. I was never happier than when I was dancing.

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I am ten, and we are now living in Greensborough, in a half built house in Anama Street, with no lining on the interior walls, we were kids, that didn't matter, the move was an adventure to us. I will never forget the day Marj aged three, fell and gashed her head on some concrete stumps, the front of her blonde hair was covered with blood and blood was running down her face. All hell broke loose, I took off, in case I was blamed, I decided I would leave home and go and live with nana and grandpa in Port Melbourne. I had no money etc, so came back home.

New friends were made, Val Rolfs, Diane Taylor and Faye Partington, we are friends to this day. Apart from our "back yard" which was possibly, four times bigger than what we had been used to, as well as our own "front lawn", our playgrounds were the paddocks. I remember making necklaces with small wild flowers (we called the flowers Plum Puddings), not sure what their real name was. We spent a lot of time wandering around the paddocks we saw flowers, grasses and bushes we had never seen before.

We used to go to the old orchards and find quinces, pears and apples. As time went on we made many friends, and settled into our new life at Greensborough. Our house has become a home, now that it is completed. The only organised thing in town for children was Sunday school, which we attended. We sometimes had treats like, on a Friday night dad would bring home a large jar of boiled lollies. After awhile we had a regular booking at the picture theatre on a Saturday night, still with no car, we walked there and home, with Marj being carried on dad's shoulders.

Dad has been promoted and is no longer working shifts; he has been given the use of a Red Ford utility. Betty is working as a dressmaker in the city; dad now drops her off each day. Don't remember when our first car came along, it was an Austin A40; now we go to the football and watch Greensborough play. Dad's next car was an Austin A90 and later a 1949 Bedford Panel Van.

My childhood in Port Melbourne was the happiest time of my life. I will never forget it.

June Hall (nee Evans)

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